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Patterns of Emotional Displays in Campaign Messages during the 2019 European Parliamentary Election in Lithuania

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Abstract

The 2019 European Parliament (EP) election in Lithuania was a second-order event significantly affected by domestic political developments and agendas. As with all previous EP elections, it attracted a minimal level of public attention in Lithuania, creating challenges and opportunities for Lithuanian political groups to effectively reach their electorates. This article focuses on the emotional display patterns of the campaign messages of political parties during the 2019 European Parliamentary campaign in Lithuania. To this end, it applies Lasswell's model of communication to assess printed media- and social-network-based campaign materials. Findings confirm that emotional messages dominated the communication of the political groups to their voters, and show the extremely broad spectrum of political messages that were used to arouse emotions. The study indicates that the concept of Europe remains distant and abstract to voters in Lithuania. Politicians' messages to voters overwhelmingly appealed to the European context when addressing domestic agendas, thereby exploiting the emotional aspects of domestic political discourses in Lithuania and the perception of the EU in the country. Finally, the study demonstrates that the personification of political strategies involving politicians' charisma, public image, and expressivity were key elements in terms of the election outcome.

1. Introduction

This article analyses the emotional display patterns of the campaign messages and general strategies used by political groups in their campaigns during the election to the 2019 European Parliament in Lithuania and, to this end, explores three hypotheses. First, that emotional messages significantly prevailed over reasoned statements in the political communication used by the parties, electoral committees, and coalitions during this election. Second, it adds evidence that the European Parliament elections are not only about Europe, since domestic political agendas dominated the former. Specifically, the electoral messages of the political groups used 'European' issues to address domestic topics by exploiting the electorate's emotions, such as fear, hope, and anxiety. Third, it seeks to prove that the emotional patterns associated with personalization strategies involving politicians' charisma and expressivity substantially decided the outcomes of the election and composition of the MEPs representing Lithuania.

Lithuania is a post-Soviet state with the advanced implementation of Western democratic standards and a high level of integration into Euro-Atlantic political alliances. In 2004, the country joined NATO and the European Union. Lithuania's spell as a democracy has thus been much shorter than that of the states of Western Europe, which makes its political system per se more vulnerable to different types of emotional manipulation, taking into account the extreme plurality of the country's political party system (Cabada et al., 2014: 81). Lithuanian voters 'are more likely to trust leaders and personalities instead of parties' (Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė, 2019: 65), a fact that underscores the importance of the nature of the communication between politicians and their potential electorate.

The 2019 European Parliament election was the fourth of its kind in Lithuania since the country's accession to the EU in 2004. The process of the European Parliament elections in Lithuania is governed by the country's Law on Elections to the European Parliament (2003).[1] For the election, the entire territory of Lithuania constitutes one multiple mandate constituency. Moreover, Article 86 of the law establishes that a party or an electoral bloc is entitled to take part in the distribution of MEP mandates only if it receives at least five percent of the votes cast at the election.

On 26 May 2019, Lithuanians elected 11 MEPs to represent them in the 2019–2024 European Parliament legislature. At the 2014 election, the country's political parties also had 11 MEP seats at stake, while in 2004 and 2009 Lithuanians elected 13 and 12 MEPs, respectively. In all four European elections in Lithuania, political parties were able to obtain three or more seats only on four occasions.

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[1] The official English translation of Law No. IX-183 on Elections to the European Parliament adopted on 20 November 2003, as amended, is available at
https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.226195. Accessed: 29-03-2020.

The Labour Party collected five MEP mandates in 2004.[2] In 2009, the Social Democratic Party of Lithuania got three MEP mandates.[3] The Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats received four MEP mandates in 2009[4] and three in 2019.[5] In other words, no political party in Lithuania is usually capable of securing more than one or two MEP mandates.

The 2019 European Parliament electoral campaign in Lithuania involved 301 candidates representing 16 different political groups, including ten political parties, five electoral committees, and one coalition.[6] Only seven political groups were able to reach the electoral threshold and receive MEP mandates. The following table provides an overview of the 2019 European election results in Lithuania:

Table 1: Result of the 2019 European Parliament election in Lithuania[7]

Political group	Type	Number of votes	Percentage	Number of mandates
Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats	Political party	248,736	18.67	3
Social Democratic Party of Lithuania	Political party	200,105	15.02	2
Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union	Political party	158,190	11.88	2
Labour Party	Political party	113,243	8.50	1

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[2] 2004 m. birželio 13 d. rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą: Balsavimo rezultatai Lietuvoje (European Parliament election of 13 June 2004: Voting results in Lithuania). (2004) *Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania.* June 18. Available at
https://www.vrk.lt/statiniai/puslapiai/rinkimai/2004/euro/rezultatai/rez_l_18.htm.   Accessed: 29-03-2020.
[3] 2009 m. birželio 7 d. rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą. Galutiniai rinkimų rezultatai: Išrinktų Europos Parlamento narių sąrašas (European Parliament election of 7 June 2009. Final election results: List of the elected MEPs) (2009) *Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania.* June 14. Available at https://www.vrk.lt/statiniai/puslapiai/2009_ep_rinkimai/output_lt/rezultatai/index.html. Accessed: 29-03-2020.
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] 2019 m. gegužės 26 d. rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą: Išrinkti Europos Parlamento nariai (European Parliament election of 26 May 2019: Elected MEPs) (2019) *Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania.* June 3. Available at
https://www.vrk.lt/2019-europos-
parlamento/rezultatai?srcUrl=/rinkimai/904/2/1548/rezultatai/lt/rezultataiEpIsrinktiNariai.html. Accessed: 29-03-2020.
[6] 2019 m. gegužės 26 d. rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą: Kandidatų į Europos Parlamento narius sąrašai (European Parliament election of 26 May 2019: Lists of the MEP candidates). (2019) *Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania.* Available at https://www.vrk.lt/kandidatai-kandidatu-sarasai-2019-ep. Accessed: 29-03-2020.
[7] Source: 2019 m. gegužės 26 d. rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą: Balsavimo rezultatai Lietuvoje (European Parliament election of 26 May 2019: Voting results in Lithuania). (2019) *Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania.* June 3. Available at https://www.vrk.lt/2019-europos-parlamento/rezultatai?srcUrl=/rinkimai/904/2/1548/rezultatai/lt/rezultataiEpDaugmVrt.html. Accessed: 29-03-2020.

Political group	Type	Number of votes	Percentage	Number of mandates
Liberals Movement of Lithuania	Political party	83,083	6.24	1
Train of Aušra Maldeikienė	Civil electoral committee	82,005	6.16	1
Block of Valdemar Tomaševski – Coalition of the Christian Families Alliance and the Russian Alliance	Coalition	69,347	5.21	1
Other parties and electoral committees	–	305,245	22.91	0
Invalid ballots	–	72,066	5.41	–
Total	–	1,332,020	100	11

2. *Data selection and research model*

Data selection was determined by the factors of time and content. The time factor limited the analyses of data to the period 6 April to 24 May 2019. This covers the 50-day period before the election when the most active electoral campaigning occurred. While the electoral campaign started earlier, the initial five days of the designated period signified the last week for political groups to collect voters' signatures and return the filled-in forms to the Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania by 11 April, a date that marked the intensification of communication between the politicians and their electorates. The content factor consists of two elements. First, it involves an analysis of sponsored articles and political advertising in the main daily printed media in the Lithuanian (Kauno diena, *Lietuvos rytas*, *Vakaro žinios* and *Verslo žinios*), Russian (*Ekspress nedelia*, *Litovskij kurjer* and *Obzor*) and Polish (*Kurier Wileński*) languages. This combination represents an inclusive approach involving the main ethnic and linguistic groups that comprise Lithuania's population. The focus on printed media extends the analysis to all age groups within the country, since the older generation tends to use digital technologies to a limited extent. Second, the analysis included the electoral materials of the political groups and their representatives posted on Facebook, the most popular social network in Lithuania. This shows how political groups appeal to citizens active on social networks.

The information thus collected was processed according to Lasswell's 5W communication model, and seeks to cover the interaction between the communicators (the political group seeking MEP mandates at the 2019 European Parliament election in Lithuania) and their target audience (i.e. the electorate) through the formula 'Who (says) What (to) Whom (in) Which Channel (with) What Effect' (Wenxiu, 2015). All of the aforementioned materials and texts contain specific messages aimed at the electorate which are treated as units. These messages are embodied in electoral slogans or promises which stimulated

emotions among the potential electorate. The focus on electoral slogans, promises, and statements is also justified by the visibility of these messages to potential voters. Slogans, promises, and statements are typically an integral part of the advertising materials of political groups as key political figures are included on the electoral lists of the participating political parties, coalitions and civil electoral committees visible to the wider public. For the purposes of this research, we disregard quantitative factors such as the number of publications/posts or affective words, as there is no direct link between these figures and the electoral performance of specified political groups. Instead, qualitative content analysis was used to assess the emotional context of the selected messages. Since an election involves communication between a political group and its potential voters, the analysis of the selected electoral content had two purposes, in line with Lasswell's 5W model. First, the agendas addressed by the political groups were analyzed to show the emotional patterns of the messages transmitted from the political group to its electorate. This clarifies the linkage between *what* is said and its *effect* on the target audience. Second, the personal factors, charisma, and expressivity of the representatives of the political groups were analyzed. This revealed the impact patterns of the emotional content of the messages to assess the connection between their *effect* on the audience and the personalities *who* delivered these messages.

Before this analysis, an alignment of some remarks pertinent to the emotional patterns of the electoral campaigns and the context of the 2019 European Parliament election in Lithuania is necessary.

3. Emotional displays in campaign messages

Emotions 'provide a sense of meaning for life and aid humans in interpreting their surroundings and navigate the environment' (Yates, 2019: 4–5). Casting ballots at an election is natural behavior for many people since participation in a voting process is a matter of habits absorbed in a similar way as other rules of social conduct (Marcus, 2002: 91). Elections are always linked to emotional aspects. Being 'affective states that are more precisely labeled, such as anger, hatred, fear, love, and respect' (Cottam et al., 2016: 63), emotions *per se* are complex. They are also integral elements of the reasoning process (Bandes, 2013: 192). They include a spectrum of emotions, including ones that help people to 'recruit reason and disable habit' (Marcus, 2002: 116). Thus, emotions trigger political changes in general and thereby form a crucial element of the electoral process.

Some authors identify political campaigns as 'the marketplace of emotions' (Yates, 2019: 3), the latter which range from anxiety to complacence (Marcus, 2002: 106). Emotions are 'an antecedent to involvement, and in the context of voting and politics, voters' emotional state will influence their overall involvement in politics' (O'cass, 2002: 65). As Castells (2011: 148) demonstrates, this process runs in two ways, ranging from loyalty to political groups 'based on an attachment to leaders,' to their critical assessment 'based on rational calculations influenced by heightened anxiety.' This framework implies a reciprocal connection between

political groups and their electorate. The electorate's stance vis-à-vis its electoral choices involves factors such as rationality and available information. The crucial role of information suggests that the more people are informed, the 'more emotional about politics and more swayed by those emotions in their behavior' they are (Miller, 2011: 576). Emotions determine electoral choices because they make them rational (Marcus, 2002: 7). Success in any political campaign is determined by a series of factors that include 'voters' involvement in politics, their corresponding level of satisfaction with politics, and their emotional state' (O'cass, 2002: 65). As Weber (2013) demonstrates, the role of emotions is also crucial in the interpretation of electoral performances, as campaign messages invoke emotions among their recipients (i.e. the electorate) and these emotions trigger important political consequences depending on their specifics.

Each electoral campaign differs from its predecessors and successors in terms of some short-term factors which can involve the reputation and popularity of candidates, as well as other relevant domestic and foreign policy issues. Moreover, these factors may significantly distort the electorate's typical preferences for specific political groups compared to previous electoral campaigns (Yates, 2019: 2). Lithuania is no exception to this trend, though it has its specifics. The results of the 2019 election confirm the plurality of the country's political system, as in the last decade the winners of Seimas[8] or European Parliament elections typically claimed around 20 percent of the votes. Indeed, the 26.16 percent received by the Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats at the 2009 European Parliament election is rather an exceptional result in the Lithuanian context.[9] Taking into account the relatively small number of MEP seats reserved for Lithuania, four issues should be emphasized.

First, electoral campaign theorists define the elections for the European Parliament as second-order ones (Reif and Schmitt, 1980; Norris and Reif, 1997; Willermain, 2014). The European Parliament elections do not result in the filling of positions at major political offices by the representatives of the political groups who win the elections. The European elections are usually subject to the least level of political emotions and media attention in Lithuania. They are essentially not about Europe, but domestic political discourses and agendas in EU Member States (Hix and Marsh, 2011). Therefore, domestic political processes in Lithuania played an essential role in influencing the outcomes of the 2004 and 2009 European Parliament elections in Lithuania (Matonytė, 2016: 547). This observation also applies to the 2014 and 2019 European elections.

Second, the 2019 European Parliament election took place on 26 May 2016, on the same day as the second round of the 2019 presidential election in Lithuania. The 2019 European election was thus overshadowed by the presidential campaign

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[8] Seimas is the name of the national parliament of Lithuania.
[9] 2009 m. birželio 7 d. rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą. Balsavimo rezultatai Lietuvoje (European Parliament election of 7 June 2009. Voting results in Lithuania) (2009) *Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania.* June 14. Available at https://www.vrk.lt/statiniai/puslapiai/2009_ep_rinkimai/output_lt/rezultatai_daugiamand_apygardos e/rezultatai_daugiamand_apygardose1turas.html. Accessed: 29-03-2020.

in Lithuania. Despite this, the presidential election substantially increased voter turnout at the European election to 53.48 per cent.[10] Taking into account the generally tough competition among the political groups at the European elections in Lithuania, this means that the ability of the main political actors in Lithuania to use their personal charisma and emotions was one of the decisive factors in attracting voters and mobilizing the electorate.

Third, the electoral system of Lithuania could be described as personalistic (Pettai, 2005: 467; Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė, 2019: 73). The naming of a substantial number of civil electoral committees and coalitions after their political leaders is common practice in elections at various levels in Lithuania. At the 2019 European Parliament election, four competing political groups were named after their leaders, including three civil electoral committees and one coalition. In the 2019 European election, Aušra Maldeikienė and Valdemar Tomaševski secured the only MEP seats their political groups were able to claim. This means that the European Parliament election can also be regarded as a vote of confidence in the leaders of these 'personalistic' political groups.

Fourth, Lithuania has its specifics when it comes to the notion of populism and its use in political campaigns. In contrast to Western Europe, populism in Lithuania is 'a style of political communication seeking to raise interest in some political issues, to increase political participation, especially participation in political elections' (Aleknonis and Matkevičienė, 2016: 44). Some 'political actors can be more or less populist at certain times,' while their style of political communication 'can generate, affect and interact with content in quite complex ways, particularly when it comes to the mobilization of passions' (Moffitt, 2019). Thus, populism in Lithuania is not rooted in the ideas of specific political groups, but is merely based on the contexts and emotions of political communication within Lithuanian society.

Mobilization of the electorate can be achieved through communication with people when politicians appeal to voters' emotions, which make individuals think and decide.

4. Agendas addressed by political groups

The first part of the analysis based on the selected data focuses on the link between *what* is transmitted to the Lithuanian electorate and the *effect* of this. The patterns embodied in these messages are illustrated through the electoral slogans and promises that stimulated emotions among the potential electorate. The 2019 European election in Lithuania was quite characteristic in this regard.

Most of the political groups used slogans during the pre-election period. This approach was chosen by 12 out of 17 political groups. Analysis of these

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[10] 2019 m. gegužės 26 d. rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą: Balsavimo rezultatai Lietuvoje (European Parliament election of 26 May 2019: Voting results in Lithuania). (2019) *Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania.* June 3. Available at https://www.vrk.lt/2019-europos-parlamento/rezultatai?srcUrl=/rinkimai/904/2/1548/rezultatai/lt/rezultataiEpDaugmVrt.html. Accessed: 29-03-2020.

slogans suggests focusing on the specific narratives used by political parties, coalitions, and electoral committees to attract potential voters, which merely resembled a market place. All slogans are presented in the following table:

Table 2: Slogans of the political groups at the 2019 European Parliament election in Lithuania[11]

Political group	Slogan
Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats	We believe in Europe (*Tikime Europa*)
Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union	Lithuania in Europe: Let's not stop growing! (*Lietuva Europoje: nesustokime augti!*)
Labour Party	I take responsibility for my words! (*Atsakau už savo žodžius!*)
Train of Aušra Maldeikienė	More Europe in a Western-like Lithuania (*Daugiau Europos vakarietiškoje Lietuvoje*)
Block of Valdemar Tomaševski – Coalition of the Christian Families Alliance and the Russian Alliance	For a Europe based on the Christian values! For a Europe of Nations! (*Už Europą, grindžiamą krikščioniškomis vertybėmis! Už Tautų Europą!*)
Social Democratic Labour Party of Lithuania	We are going to represent Lithuania! (*Einame atstovauti Lietuvai*)
Lithuanian Green Party	Let's restore the European dream! (*Atkurkime europietiškąją svajonę!*)
Crucial Jump	When others offer a crawl, we offer a jump! *(Kol kiti siūlo šliaužti, mes siūlome šuolį!)*
Lithuanian Centre Party	Together with the EU in the name of a prospering Lithuania! *(Kartu su ES vardan klestinčios Lietuvos!)*
Order and Justice	A strong family – a secure community – in the Europe of Nations (*Stipri šeima – saugi bendruomenė – Tautų Europoje*)
Lithuanian Freedom Union (Liberals)	Stronger, Lithuania – Stronger European Union! Go Forward, Lithuania! (*Stipryn, Lietuva – stipryn, Europos Sąjunga! Go Forward, Lithuania!*)
Vytautas Radžvilas: Let's reclaim the state!	Let's defend Europe! Let's reclaim the state! (*Apginkime Europą! Susigrąžinkime valstybę!*)

The slogans demonstrate various types of agendas offered to the Lithuanian electorate. An appeal only to the 'European' agenda was rather an exception at this election, as this was observed only in the slogan 'We believe in Europe' (Lithuanian: *Tikime Europa*) used by the Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats, the party which came first in the election. Being itself pro-European, this party delivered an emotionally understandable slogan to its loyal electorate.

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[11] Source: Rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą 2019 m. gegužės 26 d. (European Parliament election of 26 May 2019). (2019) *Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania.* Available at https://www.vrk.lt/documents/10180/676652/EP+bendras+leidinys++A5+2019.pdf/36efb36d-7f88-479e-855a-666c4060b322. Accessed: 29-03-2020.

The main trend among the agendas offered by the political parties involved mention of both domestic and European agendas, as this was connected with a vision of Lithuania within the European Union and its policies. In all cases, the EU was presented positively as a guarantor of Lithuania's brighter future. EU membership was presented as a crucial element of Lithuania's prosperity, strength, and growth.

Some slogans represented a palette of mostly so-called 'traditional' values. Thus, the Order and Justice party appealed a desire for 'strong families.' This same party, as well as the Block of Valdemar Tomaševski – Coalition of the Christian Families Alliance, and the Russian Alliance, were the only two political groups that eloquently supported the concept of a 'Europe of Nations' by incorporating this concept into their political slogans. This approach corresponded to the fear of political groups and their electorates of Europe as a tool for geopolitical homogenization. In their slogans, the former tried to find a balance by not denying the idea of a united Europe. Their appeal was directly focused on the emotions of those who support the idea of a strong nation-state, and so-called 'traditional values.' These two parties demonstrated their opposition to the mainstream idea of Europe that they largely equated with domination of the development path of the country (Bechter, 2019: 4). Instead, the party campaigns focused on the important role of Member States and demanded more sovereignty for them at all political levels within a united Europe, thereby appealing to a soft version of Euroscepticism (Taggart and Szcerbiak, 2008: 8). These agendas were anything but new for these political groups. In the 2014–2019 European Parliament, MEPs from these two parties belonged to the two different Eurosceptic political groups. In 2014–15, Rolandas Paksas and Valentinas Mazuronis (elected from the Order and Justice list) were members of the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy political group, while Valdemar Tomaševski was a part of the club of the European Conservatives and Reformists for the entire eighth EP legislative period.

Another Eurosceptic political group competing at the 2019 European Parliament election in Lithuania was the civil electoral committee 'Vytautas Radžvilas: Let's reclaim the state!' The committee's name and electoral slogan remind one of the motto of Brexit supporters who emphasized the need to take back control over the major functions of the state from Brussels. This appeal corresponded to patterns of reactionary politics which seek to return a country to some point in the past by 'adopt[ing] a back-route outlook for the present' (Capelos and Katsanidou, 2018: 1273). Radžvilas and his supporters argued that major functions should be brought back from the European to the national level, and promoted their vision as a way to 'defend Europe.' The emotional content of the slogan 'reclaim the state!' is linked with the political myth of a Golden Age (Girardet, 2007) that this political group promised to bring back. In the eyes of voters, it portrayed Lithuania's EU membership as a case of loss of control by the state, and denounced the advantages the country and its citizens had gained from it.

Some slogans appealed to more abstract or universal discourse. For instance, the civil electoral committee Crucial Jump tried to emphasize its difference from

other political groups by using the slogan 'When others offer a crawl, we offer a jump!' The most distinctive characteristic of this political group was its attempt to appeal to the electorate's negative emotions about other (predominantly mainstream) political parties. Crucial Jump tried to position itself as a dashing political power. Its slogan was designed to attract voters with the promise of immediate results, referring to the words 'jump' and 'crawl' which qualitatively distinguished the tempo of progress or movement. However, this appeal to its unique nature among other political groups was not enough to win MEP seats.

The slogans cannot *per se* represent the full spectrum of pre-electoral narratives used in the 2019 European election in Lithuania. However, the main ideas and promises presented in the slogans reveal the positions of these political groups on the electoral map of Lithuania. To get an in-depth picture of the positions of the major political actors in Lithuania at this election, one should review the slogans in conjunction with the promises and statements the political groups used in their campaigns.

The posters of the Labour Party included three interconnected promises: 'For an equal minimum wage in the EU of at least at 700 EUR!', 'For investments and well-paid workplaces in Lithuania's regions!' and 'For equal social guarantees for all the people in the EU!'[12] These promises can be interpreted as focusing on the domestic audience. The appeal to the EU signifies the focus on the feelings of inequality of Lithuania's citizens vis-à-vis the common European context. These messages are also directly connected with the emotional perception of Lithuania's political reality. For Lithuanians, the European Union is first of all a symbol of social and financial welfare. Freedom of movement and financial support for various EU-funded projects are the most appreciated advantages of the country's membership in the Union. Social inequality between Lithuania and the 'old' EU Member States is also a popular topic of public discussion, as is broader discourse about social (in)equality in Lithuania. The Labour Party promises of social wealth and equality appealed to voters' emotions and tried to match their expectations about the EU.

The rhetoric used by the Block of Valdemar Tomaševski – Coalition of the Christian Families Alliance and the Russian Alliance in its advertising campaign also clearly demonstrated the pre-electoral position of this political group. It promised to 'strengthen the foundations of Europe's Christian civilization' through 'respect for human life from birth until death.' This political group emphasized its readiness to 'defend the principles of freedom, solidarity, and equality of all people before the law.' An important part of its rhetoric was an appeal to conservative values that coincide with an emotionally strong fear of a very secular and liberal Europe. Specifically, Tomaševski's electoral block promised to respect traditions, sovereignty, and the national identity of Europe's nations and seek recognition of the family (understood as union between a man and a woman) as the 'core of

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[12] Už vienodą minimalų atlyginimą Europos Sąjungoje – jis turi siekti mažiausiai 700 eurų! (For an equal minimum wage in the European Union - it must be at least 700 euros!) (2019) *Labour Party YouTube channel.* May 13. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7kB9_Tbb8k. Accessed: 29-03-2020.

society.' An essential element of the coalition's rhetoric was the appeal to the rights of Lithuania's national minorities, which is quite logical. First, the coalition represents a political alliance between two parties, the *Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families Alliance (EAPL-CFA),* and the *Russian Alliance,* thereby claiming to represent Lithuania's two biggest national minorities. Second, its electorate almost entirely consists of Lithuania's Polish, Russian, Belarusian, and other national minorities. Thus, the coalition declared its intention to combat all forms of discrimination against national minorities in various domains (including education) that arise from differences on the grounds of language, culture, and religion. The coalition declared the need to maintain good relations with all Lithuania's neighbors, including Russia and Belarus. The entire frame of the coalition's rhetoric was portrayed as the party being the core of 'a new reformed European Union.'[13] The emotional aspect of Tomaševski's electoral campaign was two-fold. First, minority issues and specifically the situation of the Polish minority are emotional topics in Lithuanian political discourse. The *EAPL-CFA* has for a long time been *a* niche political party (Janušauskienė, 2016: 582) that has effectively appealed to the fears and anxieties of a minority electorate in a situation in which Lithuanian mainstream parties have largely ignored the needs and demands of the country's national minorities (Denisenko, 2018). Second, following a series of internal scandals associated with Lithuania's Polish minority in 2018, and the relative setback of EAPL-CFA and the Russian Alliance at the municipal election in March 2019, the minority coalition's main goal was to convince its potential electorate to come to the ballot box and cast their votes for them.

However, the most doubtful messages could be found on the billboards of the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union, Lithuania's ruling party. This political group wanted to remind people that it was them who had 'started paying "child money" – 50 EUR for every kid.'[14] This was a clear appeal to domestic policies without any connection to European agendas whatsoever. Similarly, it is hard to specify how the slogan 'Culture is the face of the nation' printed on the posters of a candidate, Jolanta Šmidtienė, was linked to the EU context.[15] Culture forms an important domain of EU policies. However, any attempt to justify the connection of these policies to the said slogan would merely be speculative.

One of the most interesting examples was the electoral messages of the Movement of President Rolandas Paksas. One of the campaign slogans this group used was 'There will be no negotiations with globalists!'[16] Use of this approach is a

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[13] Rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą 2019 m. gegužės 26 d. (European Parliament election of 26 May 2019). (2019) *Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania.* Available at https://www.vrk.lt/documents/10180/676652/EP+bendras+leidinys++A5+2019.pdf/36efb36d-7f88-479e-855a-666c4060b322. Accessed: 29-03-2020.

[14] See Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union Facebook page (post of 21 May 2019), available at https://www.facebook.com/gandrai/photos/a.194532843979866/1815378095228658/. Accessed: 29-03-2020.

[15] See Facebook post of 14 May 2019, available at https://www.facebook.com/vaida.pranarauskaite/posts/2316629158383445. Accessed: 29-03-2020.

[16] See Rolandas Paksas's Facebook page (post of 8 May 2019), available at

populist technique that appeals to the emotions of those parts of the electorate who do not back the intensive integration processes within the EU which lean towards a more federalized Europe. Paksas attempted to address fears about Lithuania's allegedly disadvantaged position in a global world, believing that this would be a strong emotional argument attractive to the population of a small state.

The majority of the electoral messages were dominated by domestic agendas, even if they were located in the European context. This strategy allowed politicians to appeal to the electorate's emotions in a more focused way, as domestic issues are closely linked with people's fears, anxieties, and insecurity. Put in the European context, these strategies attempted to trigger voters to assess the contrast, embrace the electoral message, and vote for this political group.

5. Personal factors, charisma, and emotional display

The second dimension of the analysis of the selected data involved the personal factors, charisma, and expressivity of the key figures in the political groups involved in the 2019 European Parliament election. This part of the analysis highlights the emotional patterns of the electoral messages to identify the linkage between the individuals *who* (political figures) delivered (or were used to deliver) them and their *effect.* These patterns proved to be an important element of the campaign in terms of triggering the electorate's emotions.

As mentioned above, Lithuania has only 11 MEP seats. This shows that even the strongest and most popular political powers are typically capable of obtaining just one or two MEP mandates. Any European Parliament election in Lithuania is thus merely a struggle between personalities, rather than between political groups. This not only confirms observations about Lithuania's political system as quite personalized and extremely fragmented, but also shows the strategies used to select the top candidates.

Within the context of this election, some political groups could be called one-person movements. The list of these groups includes the Train of Aušra Maldeikienė, the Block of Valdemar Tomaševski – Coalition of the Christian Families Alliance combined with the Russian Alliance, Vytautas Radžvilas: Let's reclaim the state! and the Movement of President Rolandas Paksas. Because of the relatively small number of MEP seats allocated to Lithuania, this situation had two effects. On the one hand, it put these politicians in a more advantageous position compared to other persons on the political list, as potential voters implicitly tended to support the leader of the respective political groups in preferential voting. On the other hand, if the political groups met the electoral threshold, it is highly likely that their leaders would have received an MEP mandate.

Vytautas Radžvilas is a well-known former professor of Vilnius University. He advocates national-centrist views in the public sphere. Although he could not be described as an openly anti-European politician, his views quite comfortably fit

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https://www.facebook.com/rolandas.paksas/photos/a.191726567666578/1199673956871829/. Accessed: 29-03-2020.

within the framework of soft Euroscepticism, as he advocates a strong national identity within the EU and a lower level of integration of states. Radžvilas has a circle of supporters, but not enough to gain popularity at the national level. Lithuanian society is the most Eurooptimistic within the entire Union,[17] and hard Eurosceptic views have remained on the margins of Lithuania's politics since the country obtained EU membership (Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė, 2014: 2). Neither the political discourse he offered nor his personal charisma were sufficiently attractive to voters to help him to get an MEP mandate.

In contrast to Radžvilas, Aušra Maldeikienė managed to win benefits from her personal charisma and political position to claim the only MEP seat in her electoral committee. A professor of economics, Maldeikienė has been well known for her very critical and sometimes even unexpected views on political and economic developments in the country. Since 2015, she has been active in political life and the media space. Maldeikienė was a member of Vilnius municipal council, and in 2016 was elected to the Seimas as an independent candidate. In 2018, she announced her intention to become a candidate at the 2019 presidential election, but in February 2019 withdrew from the campaign. During the 2019 European Parliament campaign, Maldeikienė and her electoral committee made an appeal based on the advantages of Lithuania's EU membership, seeing it as a guarantee of the country's prosperity. Moreover, this political group argued for a stronger focus on fundamental values, including freedom, equality, and justice.[18] It seems that the content of Maldeikienė's electoral message were secondary because her electoral committee did not receive more than one MEP mandate, and other members on its electoral list acted as the crowd. In any case, Maldeikienė's active participation in Lithuania's domestic politics allowed her to be visible in the public sphere and attract a sufficient number of votes to be elected as an MEP.

The case of Valdemar Tomaševski is rather special among all the MEPs that have been elected in Lithuania. He remains the only MEP from Lithuania to represent a national minority coalition (consisting in this case of the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families Alliance, and its minor partner, the Russian Alliance). Tomaševski's rhetoric has always been significantly focused on the specifics of his electorate, which almost entirely consists of representatives of Lithuania's Polish, Russian, Belarusian, and other national minorities. Moreover, he advocated good relations with Belarus and Russia. In the context of this electoral campaign, it is not possible to talk about the effectiveness of the rhetoric of the coalition led by Tomaševski, but rather about his personal success. Because of the country's ethnic composition, Lithuania's Polish-Russian minority electoral alliance could hardly claim more than one MEP seat, and it was Tomaševski who

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[17]   Lithuanians most optimistic about EU. (2019) *Delfi.en.* August 8. Available at https://en.delfi.lt/politics/lithuanians-most-optimistic-about-eu.d?id=81937125. Accessed: 29-03-2020.
[18] Viskas apie Europos Parlamento rinkimus ir Aušros Maldeikienės traukinį vienoje vietoje (Everything about the European Parliament election and the Train of Aušra Maldeikienė in one place). (2019) *Aušra Maldeikienė's website.* May 19. Available at http://www.maldeikiene.lt/viskas-apie-europos-parlamento-rinkimus-ir-ausros-maldeikienes-traukini-vienoje-vietoje/. Accessed: 29-03-2020.

was the most recognizable political figure among the representatives of this coalition (Bobryk, 2013: 357; Csergő and Regelmann, 2017: 304). The 2018 internal conflicts within Lithuania's Polish minority in 2018 (Knutowicz, 2018) and the relatively weak performance of the Polish-Russian minority coalition at the municipal election in March 2019 in Lithuania (Kascian, 2019) put the contents of Tomaševski's campaign into a somewhat different light. Having a stable electorate in the minority-populated small towns and rural areas of the Šalčininkai and Vilnius districts, the Polish-Russian electoral coalition is heavily dependent on the votes of urban Poles, Russians, and representatives of other minorities living in the cities of Vilnius and Klaipėda (ibid.). The narrow success of Tomaševski's electoral coalition revealed the structural problems with this political group. It also showed its capacity to effectively mobilize the electorate, which proved to be sufficient to meet the five-percent electoral threshold. In any case, the 2019 European Parliament election appeared as merely a vote of confidence in Tomaševski, which he barely passed. In other words, the main emotional message of the coalition led by Tomaševski extended beyond the party's electoral promises, as it concerned whether the Lithuanian Poles (and other minorities) would again have their own MEP.

Personal charisma was used also by Viktor Uspaskich and Rolandas Paksas, the two politicians typically mentioned as being among the most prominent populist- (Aleknonis and Matkevičienė, 2016: 29, 37) and charismatic (Kavaliauskaitė, 2014a: 149) politicians in Lithuania.

Viktor Uspaskich is a Russian-born[19] leader of the Labour Party, which is seen as a 'model example of left-winged [sic] populism' (Aleknonis and Matkevičienė, 2016: 37) in Lithuania. Its successful performances at various elections have been substantially connected with the personal charisma and popularity of Uspaskich as a political leader (Kavaliauskaitė, 2014b: 126). The party is predominantly supported by 'younger, less educated, blue-collar or unemployed [people] living predominantly in provincial towns and the countryside' (Jurkynas 2014: 336). Moreover, a significant part of Lithuania's Russian minority votes for the Labour Party, as leftist national parties enjoy considerable popularity among the representatives of this national minority (Csergő and Regelmann, 2017: 304–305; Duvold and Jurkynas, 2013: 148–149; Lauristin et al., 2011: 135). At the 2019 EP election, the personality of Uspaskich was embodied in the Labour Party's electoral slogan 'I take responsibility for my words!' (Lithuanian: *Atsakau už savo žodžius!*). The distinctiveness of this slogan among those of other political groups involves two factors. First, it resembles a phrase used in the Russian-speaking semi-criminal argot, whereby the phrase 'take responsibility for your own words' literally means 'keep your promises.' This could hardly be viewed as a linguistic coincidence, since the party's leader Viktor Uspaskich established his business in Lithuania in the 1990s when the success of commercial projects was significantly linked with criminal or semi-criminal activities. Second, it was the only slogan at

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[19] Interestingly, Uspaskich never specified his ethnic belonging (Lithuanian: *tautybė*) in his candidate profile at the 2009, 2014, and 2019 European Parliament elections.

the 2019 European election in Lithuania which used a personalized grammatical construct, meaning its leader 'spoke' directly to the potential electorate on behalf of the entire party. Consequently, Viktor Uspaskich was re-elected to his third MEP term, being the only Labour Party representative who received a mandate.

Rolandas Paksas failed to be re-elected after two consecutive terms as an MEP. This politician has a controversial image in Lithuania, and for a long time has been seen as the most prominent example of a right-wing populist within the country's political landscape (Aleknonis and Matkevičienė, 2016: 38). Paksas is the former leader of the Order and Justice party, and was the country's president in 2003–2004. However, one year after obtaining the highest political post in Lithuania he had to step down as a result of impeachment. Following this, Paksas was barred from the opportunity of taking up any elected or appointed political position in Lithuania. Work in the European Parliament became the only way for him to remain in the top flight of Lithuania's politics. Like all other former presidents of Lithuania, Paksas retained the privilege of being officially permitted to use the word 'president' in conjunction with his name and surname. At the 2019 European Parliament election, he used this opportunity and called his civil electoral committee the Movement of President Rolandas Paksas. Before the election, Paksas was very optimistic about his prospects of being re-elected for another term as MEP.[20] However, the results of the election were a fiasco for former Lithuania's president. The lack of any MEP mandates for his electoral committee also meant that Paksas would no longer have any significant political weight in the country's public life. The reasons for Paksas's failure are twofold. First, his decision to leave the Order and Justice party and run for the European Parliament election independently did not bring him any political benefits. Second, it is possible to agree with the assessment made by a Lithuanian political scientist, Ainė Ramonaitė, who argued that if the results of the Order and Justice and Movement of President Rolandas Paksas parties were combined, they would still not receive an MEP mandate.[21]

Personification is nothing new in the tactics of different political groups involved in the European Parliament elections in Lithuania. For example, during the 2009 European Parliament election, the Liberals Movement of Lithuania invited a well-known professor, Leonidas Donskis (1962–2016),[22] to lead its electoral list. Donskis was elected without even being a member of this political party, and worked as an MEP from 2009 to 2014.

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[20] Rolandas Paksas neabejoja: jis bus trečiąkart išrinktas į Europos Parlamentą (Rolandas Paksas has no doubts that he will be elected to the European Parliament for the third time). (2019) *Lietuvos Rytas*. May 26. Available at https://www.lrytas.lt/lietuvosdiena/aktualijos/2019/05/26/news/rolandas-paksas-neabejoja-jis-bus-treciakart-isrinktas-i-europos-parlamenta-10501634/. Accessed: 29-03.2020.

[21] Paskelbti LR Prezidento ir Europos Parlamento rinkimų rezultatai (Results of the Lithuanian presidential election and the European Parliament election have been announced). 2019. *Bernardinai.lt.* May 27. Available at http://www.bernardinai.lt/straipsnis/2019-05-26-paskelbti-prezidento-ir-europos-parlamento-rinkimu-rezultatai/175982. Accessed: 29-03-2020.

[22] Leonidas Donskis Dead at Age 54. (2016) *Jewish Community of Lithuania*. September 27. Available at https://www.lzb.lt/en/2016/09/27/leonidas-donskis-dead-at-age-54/. Accessed: 29-03-2020.

Other political groups also turned to well-known public figures to attract voters, appealing to the positive image of these persons among the Lithuanian electorate. At the 2019 EP election, the ruling party Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union invited Šarūnas Marčiulionis, one of the most prominent Lithuanian basketball players of all time, to join its electoral list. Basketball is extremely popular in Lithuania, and is considered a 'national sport,' thus famous basketball players are real celebrities. Marčiulionis placed second just after MEP Bronis Ropė, and obtained a seat in the European Parliament. Subsequently, Marčiulionis refused to take up an MEP position, being replaced by Stasys Jakeliūnas who came third in preferential voting.[23]

Similar tactics were used by the Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats party, who placed professor Liudas Mažylis at the top of their electoral list.[24] He became famous in 2017 when he found the original of the 1918 Act of Independence of Lithuania while working at the German Federal Foreign Office Political Archive in Berlin.[25] The original document had been lost after Lithuania was occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940. After this finding, Mažylis was often invited to be a guest by various Lithuanian media.

All this demonstrates that the 2019 European Parliament electoral campaign in Lithuania was not about specific policies, but merely about publicity and appeals to voters' emotions through electoral messages and the involvement of well-known people who sometimes lacked any political experience whatsoever. The appeals to voters' emotions, linked to the public image of the personalities contained on the electoral lists of the political groups, as well as their charisma and expressivity, were often decisive factors that predetermined the outcome of the 2019 EP election in Lithuania.

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[23] 2019 m. gegužės 26 d. rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą Puslapis atnaujintas: Lietuvos valstiečių ir žaliųjų sąjunga (European Parliament election of 26 May 2019: Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union). (2019) *Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania.* June 3. Available at https://www.vrk.lt/2019-europos-parlamento/rezultatai?srcUrl=/rinkimai/904/2/1548/rezultatai/lt/rezultataiEpDaugmPartPirmVrt_rorgId-28038.html. Accessed: 29-03-2020.

[24] 2019 m. gegužės 26 d. rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą Puslapis atnaujintas: Tėvynės sąjunga - Lietuvos krikščionys demokratai (European Parliament election of 26 May 2019: Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats). (2019) *Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania.* June 3. Available at https://www.vrk.lt/2019-europos-parlamento/rezultatai?srcUrl=/rinkimai/904/2/1548/rezultatai/lt/rezultataiEpDaugmPartPirmVrt_rorgId-28086.html. Accessed: 29-03'2020.

[25] Istorinį dokumentą suradęs Liudas Mažylis: „Apėmė pergalės jausmas" (Liudas Mažylis, finder of the historical document: 'the feeling of victory') (2017) *Lietuvos Rytas.* March 29. Available at https://www.lrytas.lt/lietuvosdiena/aktualijos/2017/03/29/news/istorini-dokumenta-surades-liudas-mazylis-apeme-pergales-jausmas--564061/. Accessed: 29-03-2020.

6. Conclusions

The 2019 European Parliament election in Lithuania can be viewed as a specific type of political campaign. This election was not very attractive to voters and the media, if compared to the presidential election, elections to the Seimas, or to the municipal councils. Lithuania has only 11 seats in the European Parliament, while the country's political system is extremely pluralistic.

The article has demonstrated the crucial role of political communication in this situation. As with any other election, the 2019 European Parliament election was closely linked with emotional factors that had an impact on the behavior of politicians and political groups during the campaign, as they demonstrated strategies typically used to attract the attention of potential voters and gain their support.

The findings reveal that the concept of Europe remains distant and abstract for voters in Lithuania, although Lithuanian society demonstrates one of the highest levels of Eurooptimism among all the EU Member States. This contradiction explains why most political groups avoided focusing on purely European discourse in their electoral messages during the 2019 European Parliament electoral campaign. Their main messages were either mixed (predominantly appealing to the European context when addressing domestic topics) or focused only on domestic issues. Promoting strong domestic agendas in European Parliamentary elections has been a political tradition in Lithuania since the very first election that took place in 2004.

The specificity of the European elections is embodied in the relatively small number of MEP seats allocated to Lithuania, and the ability of the main political groups to obtain one or two mandates resulted in competition not between political parties but merely between personalities. As this text has demonstrated, there is an ongoing trend towards the use of the names of political leaders in the names of electoral committees and coalitions. In other words, electoral committees and coalitions are becoming personalized electoral platforms for different political leaders. In the context of the European Parliament election in Lithuania, this could be equated to one-person movements.

Another typical strategy, as shown in the article, was the decision of the leadership of the mainstream parties to invite prominent personalities to join their electoral lists. Such figures included well-known intellectuals such as Liudas Mažylis on the electoral list of the Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats, and sports celebrities like Šarūnas Marčiulionis on the list of the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union.

The 2019 European Parliament election in Lithuania was also associated with emotional messages. Some of the politicians tried to play with so-called 'traditional values.' For instance, Valdemar Tomaševski focused on the concept of the 'traditional family,' while Vytautas Radžvylas appealed to voters looking for a stronger national identity in Europe. The cases of Viktor Uspaskich and Aušra Maldeikienė showed that the use of personal charisma was quite an effective tool for obtaining sufficient electoral support to receive an MEP mandate. The example

of the country's former president Rolandas Paksas demonstrated that such sentiments are not always enough, since voter support for him and his civil electoral committee was too weak for his re-election as an MEP.

The analysis of the 2019 European Parliament election in Lithuania showed the limitations of such research. It is impossible to separate the impact of political messages involving emotions from other important factors, such as reputation of specific politicians or political groups, or the number of constantly loyal supporters and their mobilization capacities. The analysis of the European Parliament election in Lithuania has demonstrated some natural limitations that stem from the low level of public enthusiasm for this type of election, as voters continue to demonstrate quite a high level of indifference towards them. However, the study results suggest at least two possible channels for additional research. There is significant room for comparative research on the role of emotions in the European Parliament elections in the smaller EU Member States, as this involves the role of personalities. Moreover, the text demonstrates the value of additional research on the role of emotions in the domestic elections in Lithuania and opens up new angles of understanding the politics of this Baltic State, thereby providing additional insight for comparative political research.

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