European Elections monitor

Who will succeed Dalia Grybauskaite as the head of Lithuania?

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Analysis

2.4 million Lithuanians, including 29,796 living outside of the Baltic Republic, are being called to ballot on 12th May next in the first round of the Presidential election.
The country's electorate is diminishing, with Lithuania having lost around 84,000 voters since 2015, and despite the 55% increase in the number of people living abroad who have registered since the last elections on 9th and 23rd October 2016.

The election will appoint the successor to the present President of the Republic, Dalia Grybauskaite, in office since 2009, who is completing her second term as head of Lithuana and who cannot stand again, since the Constitution forbids someone running for more than two successive mandates.

Nine people are running in this election. If none of them wins more than half of the votes cast a second round will be organised on 26th May next, on the same day as the European elections.

On 12th May Lithuanians will also have to vote on two issues via referendum. The first concerns the possibility of a Lithuanian citizen, who obtains another nationality, to keep his or her Lithuanian nationality (impossible at present), the second concerns the reduction of the number of MPs from 141 to 121.

The candidates in this election are:

– Saulius Skvernelis, the present Prime Minister. He is standing as an independent, but has the support of the Farmers and Greens Union (LVZS);
– Ingrida Simonyte, MP, former Finance Minister (2009-2012). She is standing as an independent, but is supported by the Homeland Union-Christian Democrats (TS-LKD), a party whose primary election she won which led to the appointment of the party's candidate in the presidential election - she won against former Lithuanian Ambassador to Russia, Vygaudas Usackas;
– Vytenis Povilas Andriukaitis (Social Democratic Party, LSP), European Commissioner for Healthcare and Food Safety since 2014, former Healthcare Minister (2012-2014), unfortunate candidate in the run for the Presidency in 1997 and 2002;
– Valentinas Mazuronis, MEP (ALDE), former Environment Minister (2012-2014). He is running as an independent;
– Naglis Puteikis, Chairman of the Centre Party (LCP), MP who sits as a non-attached MP; he stood in the presidential election of 2014 and won 9.32%;
– Valdemar Tomasevski, Chairman of the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania (LLRA), MEP (ECR). He ran already in 2014 and won 8.22%;
– Mindaugas Puidokas, MP, elected under the label of the Farmers and Green Party (LVZS) but now sits as a non-attached;
– Gitanas Nauseda, economist, independent candidate;
– Arvydas Juozaitis, former swimmer, philospher, independent candidate.

The most recent poll by Vilmorus, published by the daily Lietuvos Rytas forecasts Gitanas Nauseda as the leader in the first round with 23.5% of the vote ahead of Ingrida Simonyte who is due to win 22% of the vote. Far behind these two comes Vytenis Povilas Andriukaitis with 4.7% of the vote.

Prime Minister, Saulius Skvernelis, is campaigning on five themes : transparency of the system, a budget focused on the population's well-being, economic growth, a clear identification of Lithuania's foreign partners and the guarantee of the country's national security.

He maintains that if he wins the presidential election,

transparency will comprise his first priority. The head of government wants to create a Court of Justice responsible for fighting corruption, the strengthening of anti-corruption agencies and the establishment of a plan to reduce the black economy. He also wants to focus on demographic issues by strengthening support to families and by stimulating the birth rate and by promoting the return of Lithuanians who have left the country.

He hopes to improve his country's relations with the USA and NATO. He says he plans to move Lithuania's embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. He is against the building of the gas pipeline Nord Stream 2 and he supports the distribution of military equipment to Ukraine. Saulius Skverelis likes to highlight the fact that he would be the only one able to work with the government.

The opinion poll favourite, Gitanas Nauseda avoids all critcism of Russia and deems the annexation of Crimea as a fait accompli. In his opinion relations with the EU are important but Lithuania must remain open. He wants his country to maintain dialogue with its eastern neighbours, Belarus and Russia; he wants to develop economic cooperation with China. Gitanas Nauseda indicated that he would travel to Poland for his first visit abroad if he were to be elected.

Vytenis Povilas Andriukaitis also favours a change in the policy undertaken by Vilnius in regard to Moscow. "*The isolationist policy adopted against Russia and the excessively aggressive rhetoric must end. Lithuania's position regarding Vladimir Putin is one thing, the position of Lithuania regarding Russian trade, culture, the people etc. is another,*" declared the European Commissioner who did say however, "*dialogue with Russia can only exist if Moscow respects international laws and democratic values.*"

His presidential programme is called *"Lithuania can"*. "*Lithuania must involve its citizens in political life. We must give power back to the people,*" he declared, challenging the economic model in force in the country.

Ingrida Simonyte hopes to strengthen Lithuania's relations with the West. She maintains that if she wins the election she will find it easy to work with a government led by Saulius Skvernelis. "*When Saulis Skvernelis was General Police Commissioner, I was minister of Finance and we worked together. I think that our cooperation worked well but I do not know he thought about it,*" she stressed. Ingrida Simonyte is supported by MEP, Petras Austrevicius, Liberal Movement (LRLS), which sits with the ALDE group.

2019 is a major electoral year for Lithuanians, who were already been called ballot on 3rd March last to renew their local representatives (1,502 town councillors and 60 mayors). In this election the Social Democratic Party won 15 town halls, the Homeland Union-Christian Democrats (TS-LKD) 11, and the Farmers and Greens Union (LVZS) 6.

The presidential function

The President of the Republic is elected in Lithuania every five years by direct universal suffrage. His powers are limited: he is the supreme leader of the armies and of the State's security: he appoints the diplomatic representatives abroad and those working for international organisations; he puts forward the names of the candidates for the presidency and magistrates of the Supreme Court, the Court of Appeal and the Courts of Justice of the country's other administrative divisions, since appointments are ultimately the responsibility of the Seimas, the only house of Parliament.

Anyone who wishes to stand in the presidential election must imperatively be at least 40 years of age; he or she must have a minimum of 20,000 voters' signatures who support him/her and pay a deposit of around 3,500€ which is paid back if he/she wins at least 7% of the votes cast.

For the election on 12th and 26th May next, Ingrida Simonyte collated 68,000 signatures, Gitanas Nauseda 43,000 and Saulius Skvernelis 37,000.

Reminder of the presidential election results on 11th and 25th May 2014 in Lithuania

Turnout : 52.23% (1st round) and 47.37% (2nd round)

Candidates	Number of votes won (1st round)	% of votes cast (1st round)	Number of votes won (2nd round)	% of votes cast (2nd round)
Dalia Grybauskaite (independent)	612 485	45.92	701 999	57.90
Zigmantas Balcytis, Social Democratic Party (LSP)	181 659	13.62	486 214	40.10
Arturas Paulauskas, Labour Party (DP)	160 139	12.01		
Naglis Puteikis	124 333	9.32		
Valdemar Tomasevski, Electoral Action for the Pôles of Lithuania (LLRA)	109 659	8.22		
Arturas Zuokas, Civic movement for the renewal of the homeland and the future (TAIP)	69 677	5.22		
Bronis Rope, People's Farmers' Union (LVLS)	55 263	4.14		

Source : Electoral Commission https://www.vrk.lt/statiniai/puslapiai/2014_prezidento_rinkimai/output_lt/rinkimu_diena/rezultatai_isankstiniai.html et https://www.vrk.lt/statiniai/puslapiai/2014_prezidento_rinkimai/output_lt/rinkimu_diena/rezultatai_isankstiniai2.html

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