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The Representation of Lithuania's National Minorities in the European Parliament: Just Poles?

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Abstract

There are two channels for achieving the representation of national minorities in representative bodies. One of them is the inclusion of minority representatives on mainstream party lists, while the other is their self-organization via ethnic parties. The arrangements pertinent to the organization of European Parliament elections hypothetically provide citizens with equal opportunities to be elected, regardless of their belonging to national minorities. However, some EU Member States are characterized by a relatively ethnically homogeneous population combined with a small number of allocated MEP mandates. Based on the empirical evidence from Lithuania, this article assesses the feasibility of the use of the two channels by politicians with a minority background in relation to their being elected MEPs, and shows that the latter methods represent two different types of representation according to Pitkin's concept. The article concludes that being elected via the mainstream party lists requires a politician to have a high profile in the public life of Lithuania, whereas the success of use of the monopolized ethnic channel is contingent on the general electoral condition of the ethnic party and its capacity to sustain its constituency among the country's national minorities. The text's findings provide a country-specific illustration that may also be applicable in the wider context of East Central Europe in relation to studies focused on the electoral performances of ethnic parties and the inclusion of minority representatives in the activities of mainstream parties.

Keywords: Lithuania, elections, European Parliament, national minorities, minority representation, Poles in Lithuania

1 Introduction

The European Parliament (EP) is a representative body of the European Union. This implies that citizens of each EU Member State can seek representation in it based on domestic arrangements that regulate European Parliament elections. In each Member State, representation in the European Parliament is hypothetically equally open to persons belonging to the ethnic majority and national minorities, provided they meet all the requirements

and receive sufficient electoral support. There are two channels available for national minorities to achieve representation in the European Parliament. The first is the inclusion of persons with an ethnic minority background on the electoral lists of the mainstream parties. The second one is the election of minority representatives on ethnic party lists. This configuration, however, raises the problem of the practical feasibility of each of these two channels in terms of national minorities from smaller EU Member States gaining representation in the European Parliament, taking into account the relatively small number of the MEP seats allocated to these countries.

This analysis of the cases of MEPs elected from Lithuania provides substantial empirical evidence about the feasibility of the use of these two channels, which may be applicable in a broader European perspective. In Lithuania, ethnic Lithuanians constitute 84.2 per cent of the country's population, followed by Poles (6.6 per cent), Russians (5.8 per cent), and Belarusians (1.2 per cent).¹ In contrast to the other Baltic States, Lithuania has applied the principle of inclusivity by granting citizenship to all of its residents who wish it (Barrington, 2000: 262; Popovski, 2000: 14). This implicitly suggests that the outcomes of EP elections embody the will of all segments of Lithuania's society. Additionally, the country's national minorities are numerical enough to effectively seek MEP representation on ethnic party lists.

The feasibility of these two channels in relation to national minorities being represented in the European Parliament must also be distinguished from effective representation, which starts when the elected MEPs commence their duties. This article focuses only on the perspective of politicians with a minority background from Lithuania, regarding their becoming elected as MEPs via either of the two designated channels. Accordingly, the following sections of this paper examine these options, taking into account the country's political system and electoral rules. The article addresses empirical evidence based on the profiles of the MEPs with a minority background that have been elected via both channels. Due to the monopolization of the ethnic party channel by one political group, the text also focuses on the general electoral situation of the latter to reveal the relevant constraints to maintaining its constituency and obtaining representation at the EP level. The article concludes that both channels are viable ways for politicians with a minority background to become elected as MEPs from Lithuania. While being elected through mainstream party lists requires a high profile in Lithuanian politics and support from an overwhelmingly majoritarian electorate, the monopolization of the ethnic channel by one political group makes election contingent on the latter entity's general electoral condition, and its ability to sustain its constituency among Lithuania's national minorities.

2 Conceptual framework and its application to the empirical evidence from Lithuania

The need for the interpretation of the empirical evidence about European Parliament elections in Lithuania raises several questions about the key concepts which should be applied in this case study. This evidence suggests that the analysis should accommodate the fact that 'how a community chooses its representatives may be just as important as who the

¹ Ethnicity, mother tongue and religion (2013). *Statistics Lithuania*, March 15. <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/en/web/guest/informaciniai-pranesimai?articleId=223122>

representatives are' (Bowler et al., 2003: 6). This presupposes the specification of the concepts of 'political representation' and 'minority background.'

A classical approach to political representation provided by Hanna Pitkin (1972) endorses the notion of 'descriptive representation,' which concerns the fit between the ethnic composition of the population of a certain territory with its proportion of elected representatives. An analysis of contemporary European minority-related legal frameworks and supervisory practices reveals that the concept of descriptive representation is offered as the primary tool for ensuring the representation of national minorities in various decision-making bodies (Henrard, 2008: 128). While construing Pitkin's model, Iris Young (2002: 129) maintains that political representation is a dynamic phenomenon which 'moves between moments of authorization and accountability.' Young also notes (2002: 126) that a diversity of interests, backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs within an ethnic group might significantly affect the ability of its members to vocalize their shared will, although an ethnic group might demonstrate greater coherence than a group whose members share other distinctive characteristics. For candidates with a minority background that are elected through one of two designated channels, this implies different outcomes.

An ethnic party can be defined as

[...] an organization authorized to compete in elections, the majority of whose leaders and members identify themselves as belonging to a nondominant ethnic group, and whose electoral platform includes among its central demands programs of an ethnic or cultural nature. (Van Cott, 2005: 3)

Thus, a classic ethnic party typically does not strive to appeal to the voters outside the ethnic group it represents (Gunther & Diamond, 2003; Horowitz, 1985). However, an ethnic party can claim representation of more than one ethnic category provided it is capable of designating who the common significant other is (Chandra, 2005). In proportional electoral systems, ethnic mobilization is the key concept that explains the ability of ethnic parties and their representatives to obtain electoral success. In other words, an ethnic party 'relies primarily upon coethnic voters for electoral victory' (Moser, 2008: 276). Logically, the scope of successful ethnic mobilization at any election largely depends on the number of persons belonging to a minority community. Within the context of the approach offered by Young, MEPs elected on ethnic party lists are *per se* self-declared representatives of the specific ethnic group authorized predominantly by their co-ethnics and possibly other affiliated ethnic groups. This situation fits the concept of descriptive representation, but poses the further question of how deep the grassroots support of the elected MEP is in the relevant community(-ies) – which is addressed in the following parts of this paper.

For MEPs elected on mainstream party lists, it is important not to ignore the fact that 'a person's participation in large-scale politics can somehow be individualized' (Young, 2002: 143). This individualization of politicians might also imply that the level of articulation of their ethnic affiliation may vary depending on various objective and subjective factors, including their family background, personal values, institutional frameworks, or political practicability. These observations apply to the ethnic majority and national minorities, and emphasize both the diversity within different ethnic groups and the frequently blurred boundaries between them.

Young's conceptualization raises three issues. The first one is the status of potential MEPs within their political group and the latter's impact on their political 'individualiza-

tion.' The second is the apparent contribution of the respective minority in the election of these politicians. However, the most important factor is the third one, which addresses the issue of the individual's ethnic identification, which could also be multiple or inexplicitly articulated. The last factor raises the logical question whether those potential MEPs who do not always identify themselves with a specific minority group may be regarded as examples of minority representation.

To answer this question, it is equally important to define who those persons are with a minority background within the mainstream political landscape of Lithuania. Lithuania's Constitution guarantees individual equality before the law, and ensures citizens' right to freely form political parties and associations provided that their activities and goals are consistent with the country's legislation.² This suggests that Lithuania's citizens can equally take part in political processes in the country irrespective of their ethnicity, and that persons belonging to national minorities are active both within mainstream and ethnic parties. Lithuanian legislation lacks an established definition of a 'national minority.' Thus, the common understanding is that national minorities are numerically inferior groups of citizens whose ethnic affiliation is other than Lithuanian.³ As the Constitutional Court of Lithuania underlines, the issue of belonging to a specific ethnic group is a private matter for each individual.⁴ However, the information about the ethnicity of each politician may become public. At various elections in Lithuania, the country's Central Electoral Commission provides standardized candidate profiles with basic information about them. Item 11 of these profiles indicates the candidate's ethnicity (Lithuanian: *tautybė*).⁵ Although this item is not subject to compulsory completion, candidates can self-identify themselves as representatives of a specific ethnic group. The empirical evidence from Lithuania suggests that this formalized approach is not sufficient for grasping the complexity of the issue of the ethnic belonging of potential MEPs elected via the mainstream channel. If candidates decide to self-identify themselves, they are not able to specify more than one ethnic affiliation. Thus, candidates with multiple or complex ethnic identities have two options: they can either declare their belonging to just one ethnic group, or not indicate any belonging. Their identification with another ethnic group or refraining from indicating any such group on their candidate profiles does not preclude these politicians from being actively engaged in the community life of their respective national minorities – thus being a part thereof. Since Lithuania has adopted a proportional electoral system and its entire territory forms a single electoral district at European elections, MEPs from Lithuania are not attached to any specific region of the country, including those with a significant presence of national minorities. Due to the above-described qualitative characteristics of the representatives and those they represent, they cannot be formally considered examples of

² An English translation of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania is available at <http://www3.lrs.lt/home/Konstitucija/Constitution.htm>.

³ National Minorities (2018) *Department of National Minorities under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania*, February 20. <https://tmde.lrv.lt/en/national-minorities>

⁴ Case No. 14/98: On the spelling of names and family names in the passports of citizens of the Republic of Lithuania (21 October 1999). *Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania*, <https://www.lrkt.lt/en/court-acts/search/170/ta1147/content>

⁵ See, for instance, Valdemar Tomaševski's candidate profile at the 2019 European Parliament election, available at the website of the Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania: https://www.vrk.lt/2019-europos-parlamento/rezultatai?srcUrl=/rinkimai/904/rnk1186/kandidatai/epKandidatasAnketa_rkndId-2415249.html

descriptive minority representation, although their roles are consistent with the notion of minority representation as such. In line with Pitkin's concept, the latter could be attributed to the substantive type of representation which implies that '[...] representatives have to be responsive to the represented and not the contrary' (Garboni, 2015: 86). As a result, the presence of politicians with a minority background among the MEPs from Lithuania elected via the mainstream channel neither provides a guarantee of minority interest representation, nor implies a full mirror resemblance between them and their minority electorates which could address the needs of the later (ibid.: 87). Still, the presence of MEPs with a minority background is *per se* a phenomenon that contributes to the accomplishment of substantive minority representation. The empirical evidence from Lithuania also suggests that MEPs with a minority background elected via the mainstream channel fail to claim their connection with their relevant communities to the extent they symbolize these minority constituencies, and thus comply with Pitkin's concept of symbolic representation (Stokke & Selboe, 2009: 59). As voting outcomes reveal, the election of MEPs from Lithuania via the mainstream channel is characterized by two features. On the one hand, the respective minority electorates are aware of candidates' belonging to these groups, although on their official candidate profiles candidates may refrain from self-identifying themselves as persons belonging to a specific community. On the other hand, the former demonstrate the relative 'irrelevance of the ethnic dimension in Lithuanian politics' (Lauristin et al., 2011: 135) to the mainstream parties' majoritarian voters, who are also aware of the minority background of these MEPs.

Therefore, the identification of persons with a minority background among the MEPs elected from Lithuania is not limited to a simple check of their EP election candidate profiles on the Lithuanian Central Electoral Commission website. When applicable, it also involves an examination of their profiles in other elections in Lithuania, as well as publicly available information about their memberships in and collaborations with organizations of national minorities. Public information about the selected MEPs' command of minority languages is, however, disregarded. According to 2011 national census data, 63 per cent of Lithuania's population speak Russian and 8.5 per cent Polish.⁶ This implies that the mother tongues of the two largest Lithuania's national minorities are distributed beyond these ethnic groups, signifying no direct linkage between the command of a minority language by the MEPs elected from Lithuania and their attachment to a specific national minority.

Based on the above, the related research model is designed as follows. The identified profiles of the MEPs with a minority background are allocated among the two designated channels. For those elected via mainstream party lists, the analysis involves an examination of the MEPs' electoral candidate profiles for EP elections in Lithuania, their self-identification, their roles in the relevant parties, the electoral performances of the latter political groups, and an analysis of their electorates and other information about their potential support among the co-ethnics of MEPs identified as having a minority background. The same framework applies to the MEPs elected from ethnic parties. However, in addition, the general electoral situation of this representation channel will be assessed, since

⁶ Gyventojai pagal išsilavinimą ir kalbų mokėjimą: Lietuvos Respublikos 2011 metų visuotinio gyventojų ir būstų surašymo rezultatai (Population by education and language knowledge: Results of the 2011 population and housing census of the Republic of Lithuania) (2013). *Lithuanian Department of Statistics*, March 29. https://osp.stat.gov.lt/documents/10180/217110/Gyv+pagal+i%C5%A1silavinima_ir_kalbu_mokejima.pdf

the ethnic party niche in Lithuania is monopolized by single forms of political collaboration. The research model also requires making reference to public statements of the selected politicians and the retrieval of data on the electoral performances of the relevant political groups and relevant candidate profiles for the municipal and parliamentary elections in Lithuania. The lack of focus on the specific activities of the selected mainstream politicians as MEPs in this analysis is explained by the nature of substantive minority representation discussed above, and based on the premise that the main criterion for the assessment of politicians is their ability to get re-elected.

3 The Lithuanian political system and prospects for minority candidates at EP elections

There is a consensus in the academic literature that European Parliament elections should be designated second-order ones because they do not result in the filling of the major political offices of the entire political system at the national level (Reif & Schmitt, 1980; Reif, 1985; Norris & Reif, 1997; Willermain, 2014). Nevertheless, the European elections cannot be viewed separately from the political systems of specific EU Member States because the outcomes of each election are significantly affected by the political situation in the countries in question at the moment of the electoral campaign (Reif, 1985). The results of each European election are substantially predetermined by domestic political agendas and discourses in Member States. Specifically, electoral campaigns could be focused on the issues which are neglected or ignored by governments, which makes the European Parliament elections essentially not only about Europe (Hix & Marsh, 2011). Lithuania is not an exception to this rule since domestic political processes in Lithuania significantly affected the results of the 2004 and 2009 European Parliament elections (Matonytė, 2016: 547). This observation can also be extended to the 2014 and 2019 EP elections.

Lithuania's legislation treats all political groups equally. The MEP mandates assigned to Lithuania are divided among the political groups that reach a five per cent electoral threshold and no concessions are made for ethnic parties or coalitions.⁷ Voters of each political group are also entitled to rank candidates on the relevant list, thereby determining the distribution of the allocated mandates. Lithuania's political party system is characterized by its extreme plurality (Cabada et al., 2014: 81). Since 2008, at all Seimas and European Parliament elections the winning political party was capable of attracting around 20 per cent of all votes, and the 26.16 per cent received by the Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats (Lithuanian: *Tėvynės sąjunga – Lietuvos krikščionys demokratai*) at the 2009 European Parliament election is rather an exceptional result.⁸ The total number of MEP seats allocated to Lithuania dropped from 13 in 2004 to 11 in 2019. As a result, due to the strong competition, it is typical for a Lithuanian political party to be able to claim just one or two MEP mandates.⁹

⁷ Law on Elections to the European Parliament, 20 November 2003, No. IX-183, as amended. <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.226195>

⁸ 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. https://www.vrk.lt/statiniai/puslapiai/2009_ep_rinkimai/output_lt/rezultatai_daugiamand_apygardose/rezultatai_daugiamand_apygardose1turas.html

⁹ Only in four cases were political parties able to secure more than two MEP seats: the Labour Party

This configuration has two implications for the candidates with a minority background, depending on the channel. If an MEP is elected to the mainstream party list, it implies that this politician should enjoy sufficient backing by the party to be ranked somewhere among the top of the party list, and supported by the party's electorate at election time. This situation might create a serious constraint for a candidate with a minority background, since their place on the electoral list may not be high enough to ensure their success among the elected candidates (Janušauskienė, 2016: 582) and the preferential voting system does not always contribute to this either. Breaking with this trend requires the 'individualization' of candidates, who should thus possess the characteristic of being high-profile individuals in Lithuania's political or public life.

The empirical evidence from Lithuania suggests that the notion 'ethnic party' within the context of this article can be equated with the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families Alliance (Polish: *Akcja Wyborcza Polaków na Litwie – Związek Chrześcijańskich Rodzin*, Lithuanian: *Lietuvos lenkų rinkimų akcija – Krikščioniškų šeimų sąjunga*, EAPL-CFA), since the latter was the only political group of this kind at the EP elections in Lithuania.¹⁰ Its electoral lists are always dominated by the representatives of the Polish and other national minorities. The presence of an EAPL-CFA representative in the European Parliament has two effects. The first one is truly symbolic and qualitative. The ethnic Polish party from Lithuania has a representative in the European Parliament and this very fact distinguishes it from many other minorities throughout the European Union. The second one implies the fully fledged engagement of the EAPL-CFA in the domestic policy-making processes, which involves participation in government coalitions and goes beyond minority issues (Bobryk, 2013: 357–358).

The election of an MEP with a minority background to the ethnic party list seems to involve a combination of opportunities and constraints. At the four EP elections in Lithuania, the EAPL-CFA managed to reach the votes-to-seats ratio only once, in 2009, when the high mobilization of the EAPL-CFA electorate coincided with weak national polling.¹¹ As a result, ethnic political groups have never been able to claim more than one MEP mandate, even when the votes-to-seats ratio was achieved. This can be perceived as an opportunity, because the election results thus prove this channel to be feasible. Some Lithuanian scholars define the EAPL-CFA as 'an ethnic-based "niche" political party' (Janušauskienė, 2016: 582), which refers to its limited electoral capacities. One of the biggest challenges for the EAPL-CFA under the existing electoral rules is demography, as the Polish minority in Lithuania constitutes only 6.6 per cent of the country's population.

The party consistently lacks the ethnic Polish votes it would need to comfortably reach the five per cent electoral threshold, which has created the precondition of a Polish-Russian minority political alliance (Csörgő & Regelmann, 2017: 305; Kazėnas, 2014: 283). At every

(Lithuanian: *Darbo Partija*) received five MEP mandates in 2004, the Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats got four MEP mandates in 2009 and three in 2019, and the Social Democratic Party of Lithuania (Lithuanian: *Lietuvos socialdemokratų partija*) obtained three MEP mandates in 2009.

¹⁰ The regionalist Samogitian Party (Lithuanian: *Žemaičių partija*) which advocates the promotion of Samogitian identity and culture (Matonytė, 2016: 537) participated in the 2009 EP election. However, its marginal result (1.23 per cent) only confirms that it never had any significant impact on Lithuania's politics.

¹¹ Turnout in areas with a Polish majority was highest in the country: 41.41 per cent of voters cast their ballots in the Šalčininkai district, and 34.81 per cent in the Vilnius district, while in no other region of Lithuania did turnout reach even 30 per cent.

European election, the EAPL-CFA has formed a coalition with ethnic Russian parties. This strategy proved to be effective in the 2009, 2014, and 2019 elections, when the Polish-Russian electoral collaboration between the EAPL-CFA and the Russian Alliance (Lithuanian: *Rusų aljansas*) resulted in one MEP seat.¹² This suggests that the EAPL-CFA and its allies have to collect a sufficient number of votes that will qualify them to take part in the distribution of MEP seats. In other words, the main issue at stake for them is getting into the European Parliament. Another problem with their qualification comes from the composite character of this electoral collaboration. Being the major collaboration partner, the EAPL-CFA needs to fill the gap in ethnic Polish votes with the votes of Lithuania's Russians, and, as far as possible, members of other smaller minorities. Hence, members of these groups should authorize the ethnic Polish party to represent their interests, taking into account that the highest level achievement of the Polish-Russian electoral collaboration is a single MEP seat.

4 What does a politician with a minority background need to become an MEP from Lithuania?

The results of the European elections in Lithuania prove the feasibility of both these channels for politicians with a minority background in terms of being elected an MEP. The scheme with the mainstream party list was viable in the case of two MEPs – Viktor Uspaskich from the Labour Party in 2009, 2014 and 2019, and the late Leonidas Donskis, representing the Liberals Movement of Lithuania (Lithuanian: *Lietuvos Respublikos Liberalų Sąjūdis*) in 2009. However, neither of the two declared their belonging to any national minority in their EP candidate profiles. The ethnic party channel worked for one politician – Valdemar Tomaševski (Polish: *Waldemar Tomaszewski*) from the EAPL-CFA who received an MEP mandate in 2009, 2014, and 2019. An ethnic Pole, Tomaševski, remains the only MEP from Lithuania who clearly self-identified as a member of a national minority in his candidate profile at the EP elections.

4.1 Representation through mainstream parties

The late Leonidas Donskis was one of the most prominent intellectuals in contemporary Lithuania never to hide his Jewish roots (Matonytė, 2016: 540), and who served as deputy chairman of the Lithuanian Jewish community.¹³ However, in his candidate profile for the 2009 European election, Donskis declared his Lithuanian ethnicity.¹⁴ However, during the electoral campaign Donskis explicitly addressed the multiplicity of his self-identification. He stressed that his Jewishness had a moral dimension. Renouncing his Jewish identity would mean dishonoring the memory of his father, who was a Holocaust survivor. Donskis

¹² In 2004, EAPL and the Lithuanian Russian Union formed a coalition called 'Together we are strong!' This was supported by 68,937 voters (5.71 per cent) but failed to obtain any MEP seats due to the electoral formula which required a political group to obtain approximately seven per cent of the votes to take part in the distribution of the MEP mandates (Bobryk, 2013: 343).

¹³ Leonidas Donskis Dead at Age 54 (2016), *Jewish Community of Lithuania* September 27. <https://www.lzb.lt/en/2016/09/27/leonidas-donskis-dead-at-age-54>

¹⁴ 2009 m. birželio 7 d. rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą. Leonidas Donskis (European Parliament election of 7 June 2009. Leonidas Donskis). *Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania*. https://www.vrk.lt/statiniai/puslapiai/rinkimai/404_lt/Kandidatai/Kandidatas25250/Kandidato25250Anketa.html

also expressed sorrow for those who believe that a person cannot be a Lithuanian and a Jew at the same time.¹⁵ Considering Donskis' embeddedness in Lithuania's intellectual life, as well as his professional background¹⁶ and political views, this choice of ethnicity in his candidate profile could probably be best explained by a quotation of his in which he called himself 'a citizen [and] a person who has chosen Lithuania for his entire life as his primary and essential political and moral space' (Donskis, 2010).

Donskis appeared on the electoral list of the Liberals Movement of Lithuania without being a party's member. He was invited to join the Liberals' electoral campaign by the party leadership¹⁷ and his first place on the electoral list was decided by a secret ballot at the meeting of the party's council.¹⁸ In other words, Donskis's first place on the electoral list was duly authorized by a democratic procedure within the party. His position *vis-à-vis* the party was characterized by both trust and considerable autonomy. The former was implied by his nomination procedure, while the latter derived from his non-partisan status.

At the 2009 election, the Liberals Movement was supported by 7.17 per cent of voters (40,502 persons)¹⁹ and its only MEP seat was claimed by Donskis. He received 20.89 per cent of the ranking points after preferential voting, substantially more than the 13.72 per cent collected by the runner-up candidate on the electoral list.²⁰ One can suppose that Donskis's personality might have led to an increase in support for the Liberals Movement among the Lithuanian Jewish community at this election. However, the 2001 population census established that self-declared Jews comprised only 0.12 per cent of Lithuania's population (4,007 persons).²¹ This implies that even the very large-scale support of Donskis by Lithuania's Jewish community would not have been the decisive factor in the successful electoral performance of the Liberals Movement and Donskis's first place on the list after preferential voting.

At the electoral campaign, Donskis called the Liberals Movement a 'niche party' which did not enjoy the greatest popularity in Lithuania and which should compete for voters' attention.²² Based on the above, it is possible to conclude that Donskis's MEP seat was supported by the majoritarian electorate which shared the party's liberal views and values. Donskis's minority background was not an obstacle to his election. On the contrary,

¹⁵ Donskis: svarbu būti skaidriam prieš rinkėjus (Donskis: it is important to be transparent to the voters) (2009). *Alfa.lt*, June 5. https://www.alfa.lt/straipsnis/10275870/?Alfa.lt.vaizdo.konferencijoje..Donskis=2009-06-05_16-13

¹⁶ About L. Donskis. *Leonidas Donskis Foundation*. <http://www.donskis.lt/en/2/169/leonido-donskiobiografija>

¹⁷ Samoškaitė, E. (2009). Su Liberalų sąjūdžiu į EP rinkimus eis L.Donskis (L. Donskis will go to the EP election with the Liberals Movement). *Delfi.lt*, February 23. <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/su-liberalu-sajudziu-i-ep-rinkimus-eis-ldonskis.d?id=20705589>

¹⁸ Pirmasis Liberalų sąjūdžio sąrašas - Leonidas Donskis (The first on the list of the Liberals Movement is Leonidas Donskis). (2009) *TV3.lt*, April 18. <https://www.tv3.lt/naujiena/lietuva/248509/pirmasis-liberalu-sajudzio-sarase-leonidas-donskis>

¹⁹ 2009 m. birželio 7 d. rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą. Balsavimo rezultatai Lietuvoje (n. 8).

²⁰ 2009 m. birželio 7 d. rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą. Lietuvos Respublikos liberalų sąjūdis (European Parliament election of 7 June 2009. Liberals Movement of Lithuania). *Ibid.* June 14. https://www.vrk.lt/statiniai/puslapiai/2009_ep_rinkimai/output_lt/rezultatai_daugiamand_apygardose/partijos_pirmumo_balsai3572.html

²¹ Population by Sex, Age, Nationality and Religion. (2002). *Statistics Lithuania*. <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/services-portlet/pub-edition-file?id=3037>.

²² Donskis: svarbu būti skaidriam prieš rinkėjus (n. 15).

it was the strategy of the Liberals Movement to rely on his reputation and publicity to successfully perform at the election.

Donskis decided not to participate at the 2014 EP election and withdrew from active politics. However, two mandates obtained by the Liberals Movement at this election may have implicitly signified the positive assessment of his activities as an MEP by the party's electorate.

The case of Viktor Uspaskich is even more remarkable since he was elected as an MEP on three occasions – in 2009, 2014, and 2019. This Russian-born Lithuanian politician never indicated his ethnic belonging in his candidate profile at the European elections.²³ Further analysis of his electoral profile at the parliamentary elections reveals that he self-identified as ethnic Russian on one occasion in 2004,²⁴ while he did not specify his ethnicity in 2000,²⁵ 2008,²⁶ and 2012.²⁷ Despite this, Uspaskich actively contributed to the organization of Russian cultural events in Lithuania.²⁸

All three successful EP elections brought quite similar results for Uspaskich and the Labour Party. On each occasion, he was number one on the electoral list, retained this position after preferential voting, and subsequently received the only mandate obtained by his party. In 2009, he received 22.09 per cent of all ranking-related points cast by Labour Party voters, while 21.07 per cent in 2014, and 21.36 per cent in 2019.²⁹ On every occasion, these figures were substantially higher than those of the runners-up.

²³ 2009 m. birželio 7 d. rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą. Viktor Uspaskich (European Parliament election of 7 June 2009. Viktor Uspaskich). *Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania*. https://www.vrk.lt/statiniai/puslapiai/rinkimai/404_lt/Kandidatai/Kandidatas25574/Kandidato25574Anketa.html; 2014 m. gegužės 25 d. rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą. Viktor Uspaskich (European Parliament election of 25 May 2014. Viktor Uspaskich). *Ibid.* https://www.vrk.lt/statiniai/puslapiai/rinkimai/426_lt/Kandidatai/Kandidatas70828/Kandidato70828Anketa.html; Rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą 2019 m. gegužės 26 d. Viktor Uspaskich (European Parliament election of 26 May 2019. Viktor Uspaskich). *Ibid.* https://www.vrk.lt/2019-europos-parlamento/rezultatai?srcUrl=/rinkimai/904/rnk1186/kandidatai/epKandidatasAnketa_rkndId-2415195.html

²⁴ 2004 m. Lietuvos Respublikos Seimo rinkimai. Viktor Uspaskich (2004 Lithuanian Seimas election. Viktor Uspaskich) (2004). *Ibid.*, November 8. https://www.vrk.lt/statiniai/puslapiai/rinkimai/2004/seimas/kandidatai/kand_anketa_1_294844.htm

²⁵ 2000 m. spalio 8 d. Lietuvos Respublikos Seimo rinkimai Viktor Uspaskich (Lithuanian Seimas election of 8 October 2000. Viktor Uspaskich). *Ibid.* <https://www.vrk.lt/statiniai/puslapiai/n/rinkimai/20001008/kandvl.htm-133960.htm>

²⁶ Lietuvos Respublikos Seimo rinkimai Viktor Uspaskich (Lithuanian Seimas election. Viktor Uspaskich). *Ibid.* https://www.vrk.lt/statiniai/puslapiai/rinkimai/400_lt/Kandidatai/Kandidatas21259/Kandidato21259Anketa.html

²⁷ 2012 m. spalio 14 d. Lietuvos Respublikos Seimo rinkimai. Viktor Uspaskich (Lithuanian Seimas election of 14 October 2012. Viktor Uspaskich). *Ibid.* https://www.vrk.lt/statiniai/puslapiai/rinkimai/416_lt/Kandidatai/Kandidatas67880/Kandidato67880Anketa.html

²⁸ Gaučaitė. M. (2018). Rusų šventė Vilniuje sutraukė didžiulę minią: „Neturime gėdytis savo kultūros“ (Russian festival in Vilnius gathered a big crowd: 'We must not be ashamed of our culture'). *Lietuvos Rytas*, June 9. <https://www.lrytas.lt/lietuvsdiena/aktualijos/2018/06/09/news/rusu-svente-vilniuje-sutrauke-didziule-minia-neturime-gedytis-savo-kulturos-6576802/>

²⁹ 2009 m. birželio 7 d. rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą. Darbo partija (European Parliament election of 7 June 2009. Labour Party) (2009). *Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania*, June 14. https://www.vrk.lt/statiniai/puslapiai/2009_ep_rinkimai/output_lt/rezultatai_daugiamand_apygardose/partijos_pirmumo_balsai3566.html; 2014 m. gegužės 25 d. rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą. Darbo Partija. (European Parliament election of 25 May 2014. Labour Party) (2014). *Ibid.*, June 1. https://www.vrk.lt/statiniai/puslapiai/2014_ep_rinkimai/output_lt/rezultatai_daugiamand_apygardose/partijos_pirmumo_balsai4947.html; Rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą 2019 m. gegužės 26 d. Darbo

Founder of the Labour Party, Uspaskich, at each election acted in the capacity of its chairman or honorary chairman. The role of the party's leader suggests that Uspaskich was authorized by this political group to have a direct impact on and be responsible for defining its strategies. Within Lithuania's political landscape, the Labour Party is seen as 'a model example of left-wing [...] populism' (Aleknonis & Matkevičienė, 2016: 37). The party's typical voter's profile can be described as 'younger, less educated, blue-collar or unemployed [persons] living predominantly in provincial towns and the countryside' (Jurkynas 2014: 336). The electoral successes of this political group have been driven by the personal charisma and popularity of Uspaskich (Kavaliauskaitė, 2014: 126). At the 2019 EP election, the party's electoral slogan 'I take responsibility for my words!' (Lithuanian: *Atsakau už savo žodžius!*)³⁰ was directly related to the personality of Uspaskich. It was the only personified electoral slogan employed at this election, during which the leader addressed his electoral message to potential voters on behalf of the entire party and thereby took responsibility for its electoral performance.

The Labour Party has a stable connection with Lithuania's Russian minority. It is one of the most popular political parties among the members of this ethnic group, as a considerable part thereof tends to vote for leftist mainstream parties (Csergő & Regelman, 2017: 304–305; Duvold & Jurkynas, 2013: 148–149; Lauristin et al., 2011: 135; Ramonaitė, 2018: 84). At the 2012 and 2016 parliamentary elections, the Labour Party electoral list incorporated candidates from the Lithuanian Russian Union (Lithuanian: *Lietuvos Rusų Sąjunga*),³¹ an ethnic party claiming to represent Lithuania's Russian minority. At the 2019 EP election, the Labour Party presented its electoral list as multi-ethnic.³² For example, it included a former member of the Lithuanian Russian Union, Larisa Dmitrijeva, who was initially placed in sixth position.³³

Back in 2011, Uspaskich clearly indicated that he was a leader of a mainstream Lithuanian party and not of a party of a national minority.³⁴ Although the Labour Party enjoys the substantial support of Lithuania's Russians, their votes are important but not decisive in

Partija (European Parliament election of 26 May 2019. Labour Party). (2019). *Ibid.*, June 3. https://www.vrk.lt/2019-europos-parlamento/rezultatai?srcUrl=/rinkimai/904/2/1548/rezultatai/lt/rezultataiEpDaugmPartPirmVrt_rorgId-28032.html

³⁰ Rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą 2019 m. gegužės 26 d. (European Parliament election of 26 May 2019). (2019) *Ibid.* <https://www.vrk.lt/documents/10180/676652/EP+bendras+leidinys++A5+2019.pdf/>

³¹ 2012 m. spalio 14 d. Lietuvos Respublikos Seimo rinkimai. Darbo partija (Lithuanian Seimas election of 14 October 2012. Labour Party). *Ibid.* https://www.vrk.lt/statiniai/puslapiai/rinkimai/416_lt/KandidatuSarasai/RinkimuOrganizacija4132_1.html; Kandidatų sąrašas. Darbo partija (Candidates list. Labour Party). *Ibid.* https://www.vrk.lt/2016-seimo/kandidatai?srcUrl=/rinkimai/102/rnk426/kandidatai/lrsKandidataiVienasSarasas_rorgId-26092.html

³² Darbo partiją Europos Parlamento rinkimuose ves V. Uspaskich, sąraše pusė vietų teko moterims (V. Uspaskich will lead the Labour Party at the European election, half of the list is represented by women). (2019) *Labour Party*, March 12. <https://www.darbopartija.lt/naujienos/partijos-naujienos/darbo-partija-europos-parlamento-rinkimuose-ves-v.-uspaskich-sarase-puse-vietu-20921/>

³³ Rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą 2019 m. gegužės 26 d. Larisa Dmitrijeva (European Parliament election of 26 May 2019. Larisa Dmitrijeva). *Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania*. https://www.vrk.lt/2019-europos-parlamento/rezultatai?srcUrl=/rinkimai/904/rnk1186/kandidatai/epKandidatasAnketa_rkndId-2415208.html

³⁴ Davydova, L. (2011). Viktor Uspassikh: v Litve - diktatura vlastnogo bolshinstva (Viktor Uspaskich: there is a dictatorship of the ruling majority in Lithuania). *Ekspress nedelia*, December 28. <https://www.nedelia.lt/news-lt/aktual/20523-viktor-uspaskih-v-litve-diktatura-vlastnogo-bolshinstva.html>

relation to the party's ability to reach the electoral threshold. In other words, Uspaskich's electoral successes at three EP elections were predetermined and authorized by the majoritarian electorate, with a substantial number of minority votes coming from Lithuania's Russians and other smaller minorities.

The cases of Donskis and Uspaskich are examples of substantive representation. They demonstrate the relative irrelevance of the ethnic factor for the mainstream type of minority representation. However, the success of these politicians has been predetermined by their high profiles in Lithuania's domestic politics or public life, since the mainstream parties' electorates are predominantly or overwhelmingly majoritarian. This also confirms the importance of the placement of these candidates in top position(s) due to the tough competition among political groups at the EP elections and the small number of allocated mandates.

4.2 Representation through ethnic parties

Valdemar Tomaševski has led the EAPL-CFA since June 1999. The EAPL-CFA was created in 1994 to comply with a novel element of Lithuanian legislation which differentiated the activities of civil and political organizations (Kazėnas, 2014: 270). Hence, the EAPL-CFA is an entity which took up the political functions of the Union of Poles in Lithuania, one of the main tasks of which is to maintain the active civic engagement of the members of the Polish minority and to mobilize it in support of the political activities of the EAPL-CFA (Bobryk, 2013: 109, 121).

Tomaševski is the most domestically and internationally recognizable politician in Lithuania's Polish-Russian minority electoral alliance (Bobryk, 2013: 357; Csergő & Regelman, 2017: 304). As mentioned above, he was elected as an MEP at the 2009, 2014, and 2019 EP elections. On each occasion, Tomaševski was placed first on the electoral list of the Polish-Russian electoral collaboration and retained this position after preferential voting, which enabled him to claim an MEP mandate. Specifically, in 2009 the ethnic Polish-Russian alliance received 46,293 votes (8.20 per cent),³⁵ in 2014 it attracted 92,108 votes (7.60 per cent),³⁶ while in 2019 it narrowly crossed the electoral threshold with 69,347 votes (5.21 per cent).³⁷ In 2009, Tomaševski received 20.99 per cent of the ranking points after preferential voting;³⁸ while in 2014 this figure was 20.68 per cent³⁹ and in 2019 20.10 per

³⁵ 2009 m. birželio 7 d. rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą. Balsavimo rezultatai Lietuvoje (n. 8).

³⁶ 2014 m. gegužės 25 d. rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą. Balsavimo rezultatai Lietuvoje (European Parliament election of 25 May 2014. Voting results in Lithuania) (2014) *Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania*, June 1. https://www.vrk.lt/statiniai/puslapiai/2014_ep_rinkimai/output_lt/rezultatai_daugiamand_apygardose/rezultatai_daugiamand_apygardose1turas.html

³⁷ Rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą 2019 m. gegužės 26 d. Balsavimo rezultatai Lietuvoje (European Parliament election of 26 May 2019. Voting results in Lithuania). (2019) *Ibid.*, June 3. <https://www.vrk.lt/2019-europos-parlamento/rezultatai?srcUrl=/rinkimai/904/2/1548/rezultatai/lt/rezultataiEpDaugmVrt.html>

³⁸ 2009 m. birželio 7 d. rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą. Lietuvos lenkų rinkimų akcija (European Parliament election of 7 June 2009. Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania). (2009) *Ibid.*, June 14. https://www.vrk.lt/statiniai/puslapiai/2009_ep_rinkimai/output_lt/rezultatai_daugiamand_apygardose/partijos_pirmumo_balsai3585.html

³⁹ 2014 m. gegužės 25 d. rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą. Lenkų rinkimų akcijos ir Rusų aljanso koalicija „Valdemaro Tomaševskio blokas“ (European Parliament election of 25 May 2014. Coalition of the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania and the Russian Alliance 'Block of Valde-

cent.⁴⁰ In each instance, these figures were approximately twice as high as those achieved by the runners-up. This implies Tomaševski's unquestionable authority among the party's electorate and the lack of equably influential politicians both within the EAPL-CFA and its collaboration partner party that represent the Russian minority.

After the successful electoral performance in 2009 as the EAPL, with representatives of the Russian Alliance on the list, the ethnic Polish-Russian collaboration shifted towards the personalization of Tomaševski's role as its leader. In 2014, it was called the 'Coalition of the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania and the Russian Alliance "Block of Valdemar Tomaševski"' (Lithuanian: *Lenkų rinkimų akcijos ir Rusų aljanso koalicija „Valdemaro Tomaševskio blokas“*). In 2019, its full name was "Block of Valdemar Tomaševski" – Coalition of the Christian Families Alliance and the Russian Alliance' (Lithuanian: *„Valdemaro Tomaševskio blokas“ – Krikščioniškų šeimų sąjungos ir Rusų aljanso koalicija*). Since Polish-Russian electoral collaboration is not capable of claiming more than one MEP seat, the electoral list called 'Block of Valdemar Tomaševski' transmits a clear message to its potential voters. They are implicitly prompted with the name of the future MEP from the Polish-Russian minority electoral alliance. To put it succinctly, the voter is indirectly invited to vote for Tomaševski. Hence, European Parliament elections can rather be seen as a vote of confidence in the EAPL-CFA chairman and a means of authorizing him to become an MEP. The other members of the coalition's electoral list merely perform the role of the crowd.

In practical terms, this also proves that the EAPL-CFA has always been the leading partner in the minority coalition. This is confirmed by the statistics related to preferential voting. At all three elections, the total number of ranking points cast for the Russian Alliance candidates on the minority collaboration's list ranged between 17 and 18 per cent. Likewise, the ethnic Russian candidates on its electoral lists dropped down the list after preferential voting. These figures most notably signify the inability of Russian Alliance politicians to challenge the primacy of the EAPL-CFA within the collaboration. Additionally, the Russian Alliance is not capable of attracting the majority of ethnic Russian votes in Lithuania. According to the available data, less than 20 per cent of the members of Lithuania's Russian minority voted for the ethnic collaboration lead by the EAPL-CFA at the 2016 parliamentary election (Ramonaitė, 2018: 84), when this political group claimed 5.48 per cent. Calculations based on the 2011 census results suggest that 20 per cent of all ethnic Russians with the right to vote comprise approximately 1.3 per cent of the total electorate. This suggests that ethnic Russians currently constitute approximately 20 per cent of the voters in the Polish-Russian electoral collaboration.

The composite character of the Polish-Russian electoral collaboration and the consistent lack of ethnic Polish votes made the electoral success of Tomaševski dependent on obtaining sufficient electoral authorization beyond Lithuania's Polish minority. In other words, inter-ethnic coalition between Lithuania's Poles and Russians is a prerequisite for

mar Tomaševski'). (2014). *Ibid.*, June 1. https://www.vrk.lt/statiniai/puslapiai/2014_ep_rinkimai/output_lt/rezultatai_daugiamand_apygardose/partijos_pirmumo_balsai5087.html

⁴⁰ Rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą 2019 m. gegužės 26 d. „Valdemaro Tomaševskio blokas“ – Krikščioniškų šeimų sąjungos ir Rusų aljanso koalicija (European Parliament election of 26 May 2019. 'Block of Valdemar Tomaševski' – Coalition of the Christian Families Alliance and the Russian Alliance). (2019) *Ibid.*, June 3. https://www.vrk.lt/2019-europos-parlamento/rezultatai?srcUrl=/rinkimai/904/2/1548/rezultatai/lt/rezultataiEpDaugmPartPirmVrt_rorgId-30084.html

their electoral collaboration and sustaining their constituency. The systemic constraints on an MEP from Lithuania in relation to their being elected to the ethnic party list can be illustrated by the retrieval of data about EAPL electoral performances at the recent municipal and parliamentary elections.

The 2019 EP election in Lithuania was held on 26 May, soon after the municipal election that took place throughout Lithuania on 3 March 2019. At this municipal election, the EAPL-CFA formed an electoral coalition with the Russian Alliance in six municipalities, including the city of Vilnius.⁴¹ In four other municipalities, the EAPL-CFA had its electoral lists, whereas in the country's third-largest city of Klaipėda the Russian Alliance competed independently.⁴² The EAPL-CFA and the Russian Alliance collected 61,657 votes, including 58,981 as a coalition.⁴³ This number was less than at the 2014 European Parliament election (92,108 votes), the 2015 municipal election (87,152 votes, both independently and in the coalition with the Russian Alliance),⁴⁴ the 2016 parliamentary election (69,810 votes received at the national multi-member constituency),⁴⁵ and at the subsequent 2019 European Parliament election (69,347 votes).

A more detailed analysis of these data reveals the direct relationship between the electoral success of the Polish-Russian minority coalition and its support by the minority urban electorate in the cities of Vilnius and Klaipėda. The 2014 municipal election in the city of Vilnius was successful for the minority coalition. Its list collected 38,138 votes and was ranked second.⁴⁶ In 2019, the Polish-Russian coalition managed to attract 19,907 votes and finished fourth.⁴⁷ In Klaipėda, the Polish-Russian minority coalition came third in 2014 with 5,905 votes.⁴⁸ In 2019, the Russian Alliance finished seventh with only 1,941 votes

⁴¹ Partijų koalicijų kandidatų sąrašai (Lists of candidates from party coalitions). *Ibid.* <https://www.vrk.lt/2019-savivaldybiu-tarybu-kandidatai?srcUrl=/rinkimai/864/rnk1144/kandidatai/savKandidataiKoalicijos.html>

⁴² Partijų kandidatų sąrašai (Lists of candidates from parties). *Ibid.* <https://www.vrk.lt/2019-savivaldybiu-tarybu-kandidatai?srcUrl=/rinkimai/864/rnk1144/kandidatai/savKandidataiPartijos.html>

⁴³ 2019 m. kovo 3 d. savivaldybių tarybų rinkimai (I turas). Partijų, komitetų gautų balsų ir mandatų skaičius Lietuvoje. (Municipal councils' election of 3 March 2019 (Round I). Number of votes and mandates received by parties, committees in Lithuania) (2019). *Ibid.*, April 24. <https://www.vrk.lt/2019-savivaldybiu-tarybu/rezultatai?srcUrl=/rinkimai/864/1/1506/rezultatai/lt/rezultataiSavPartKoalBalsuIrMandSk.html>

⁴⁴ 2015 m. Lietuvos Respublikos savivaldybių tarybų rinkimai. Partijų, komitetų gautų balsų ir mandatų skaičius Lietuvoje (2015 municipal councils' election in the Republic of Lithuania. Number of votes and mandates received by parties, committees in Lithuania) (2015). *Ibid.*, April 15. https://www.vrk.lt/statiniai/puslapiai/2015_savivaldybiu_tarybu_rinkimai/output_lt/rinkimu_diena/stat1.html

⁴⁵ 2016 m. spalio 9 d. Lietuvos Respublikos Seimo rinkimai. Balsavimo rezultatai daugiamandatėje apygardoje (Lithuanian Seimas election of 9 October. Voting results in a multi-member constituency). (2016). *Ibid.*, October 31. <https://www.vrk.lt/2016-seimo/rezultatai?srcUrl=/rinkimai/102/1/1304/rezultatai/lt/rezultataiDaugmVrt.html>

⁴⁶ 2015 m. Lietuvos Respublikos savivaldybių tarybų rinkimai. Vilniaus miesto (Nr.57) savivaldybė (2015 municipal councils' election in the Republic of Lithuania. Vilnius city (No. 57) municipality) (2015). *Ibid.*, June 4. https://www.vrk.lt/statiniai/puslapiai/2015_savivaldybiu_tarybu_rinkimai/output_lt/rezultatai_daugiamand_apygardose/apygardos_rezultatai7817.html

⁴⁷ 2019 m. kovo 3 d. savivaldybių tarybų rinkimai (I turas). Vilniaus miesto (Nr.57) savivaldybė. (Municipal councils' election of 3 March 2019 (Round I). Vilnius city (No. 57) municipality) (2019). *Ibid.*, March 26. https://www.vrk.lt/2019-savivaldybiu-tarybu/rezultatai?srcUrl=/rinkimai/864/1/1506/rezultatai/lt/rezultataiTarNariaiMeraiSavivaldybeje_rpgId-19966.html

⁴⁸ 2015 m. Lietuvos Respublikos savivaldybių tarybų rinkimai. Klaipėdos miesto (Nr.20) savivaldybė (2015 municipal councils' election in the Republic of Lithuania. Klaipėda city (No. 20) municipality)

and did not reach the electoral threshold.⁴⁹ The lists of parties, coalitions, and committees in the municipal elections in Lithuania can significantly differ from those at the Seimas or the European Parliament elections. However, the discrepancy in the results achieved by the EAPL-CFA and the Russian Alliance at the 2014 and 2019 municipal elections in Vilnius and Klaipėda demonstrates that the stable core electorate of the minority coalition lives in the small towns and rural areas. At the same time, the political competition in big cities is much higher and the votes of the urban Poles, Russians, and representatives of other national minorities are more likely to be attracted by other political groups. Without the substantial number of votes provided by the minority electorate in the cities of Vilnius and Klaipėda, the Polish-Russian electoral collaboration led by the EAPL-CFA fails to meet the five per cent electoral threshold.

This observation is also confirmed by the results of the 2019 election to the European Parliament. In-depth analysis of the latter focused on regional statistics and comparison with the 2019 municipal election reveals two important features.⁵⁰ First, the result of the Polish-Russian minority coalition at the 2019 European election was just 2,746 votes above the electoral threshold. Thus, the number of ethnic Polish votes was insufficient to reach the threshold. This conclusion can be backed by the fact that the coalition was supported by 4,942 voters in the city of Klaipėda, with its sizeable Russian minority.⁵¹ Second, in the city of Vilnius, the minority coalition led by Tomaševski received 23,972 votes⁵² – i.e. about 4,000 votes more than at the municipal election in March 2019. Thus, the narrow success of the Polish-Russian coalition led by the EAPL-CFA at the 2019 European election and Tomaševski's re-election as an MEP was predetermined by the votes of urban Poles, Russians, and representatives of other minority communities. A substantial drop in the EAPL-CFA's electoral support from 92,108 votes (47.35 per cent of voter turnout) in 2014 to 69,347 votes (53.48 per cent of voter turnout) in 2019 indicates other barriers to sustaining the constituency of this political group for representation in the European Parliament. These challenges are predominantly personality driven and attributed to the self-organization of Lithuania's Polish minority.

(2015). *Ibid.*, June 4. https://www.vrk.lt/statiniai/puslapiai/2015_savivaldybiu_tarybu_rinkimai/output_lt/rezultatai_daugiamand_apygardose/apygardos_rezultatai7780.html

⁴⁹ 2019 m. kovo 3 d. savivaldybių tarybų rinkimai (I turas). Klaipėdos miesto (Nr.20) savivaldybė ((Municipal councils' election of 3 March 2019 (Round I). Klaipėda city (No. 20) municipality) (2015). *Ibid.*, March 26. https://www.vrk.lt/2019-savivaldybiu-tarybu/rezultatai?srcUrl=/rinkimai/864/1/1506/rezultatai/lt/rezultataiTarNariaiMeraiSavivaldybeje_rpgId-19974.html

⁵⁰ Voter turnout at both the elections was quite commensurable. The 2019 EP election attracted 53.48 per cent of voters, while at the 2019 municipal election the proportion was 47.90 per cent.

⁵¹ 2019 m. gegužės 26 d. rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą. „Valdemaro Tomaševskio blokas“ – Krikščioniškų šeimų sąjungos ir Rusų aljanso koalicija (European Parliament election of 26 May 2019. 'Block of Valdemar Tomaševski' – Coalition of the Christian Families Alliance and the Russian Alliance). (2019) *Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania*, June 3. https://www.vrk.lt/2019-europos-parlamento/rezultatai?srcUrl=/rinkimai/904/2/1548/rezultatai/lt/rezultataiEpDaugmPartVrt_rorgId-30084.html

⁵² *Ibid.*

An in-depth analysis of the personalities on the candidate lists of the Polish-Russian minority coalition at the 2009,⁵³ 2014,⁵⁴ and 2019⁵⁵ European Parliament election shows that six of them participated in all three electoral campaigns and nine candidates were involved in two elections. On the one hand, this implies that the EAPL-CFA and the Russian Alliance have a rather stable pool of experienced politicians. On the other hand, the top five of the 'Block of Valdemar Tomaševski' after preferential voting at the 2019 European election included four personalities who ran for election for the third time since 2009, when the current minority electoral alliance was formed. This raises the question of leadership within the Polish minority in Lithuania.

As mentioned above, the EAPL-CFA is closely affiliated with the Union of Poles in Lithuania. Since May 2002, this umbrella organization of the Polish minority has been chaired by Michał Mackevič (Polish: *Michał Mackiewicz*), an MP representing the EAPL-CFA. In other words, the leaders of the main political and civil organizations of the Polish minority in Lithuania have kept their positions for nearly two decades. In addition to the long periods in office of the two leading personalities of the Polish community, a series of internal conflicts within Lithuania's Polish minority in 2018 signified a crisis in its leadership (Knutowicz, 2018). In early 2018, Mackevič was at the center of accusations concerning the use of financial assistance from Poland that evolved through a conflict with Urszula Doroszewska, Poland's ambassador to Lithuania. In May 2018, Mackevič was re-elected as the chairman of the Union of Poles in Lithuania, actively backed by Tomaševski.⁵⁶ Subsequent developments in the situation resulted, *inter alia*, in a 'double' celebration of the centenary of the re-establishment of Poland's independence in Vilnius at the Rasos (Polish: *Rossa*) cemetery in Vilnius on 11 November 2018, as the leadership of the Union of Poles in Lithuania preferred not to engage in the activities organized by the Embassy of Poland (*ibid.*).

The public debate about these series of conflicts ranges from accusations of alleged attempts to split the unity of Lithuania's Polish community to the chance for a 'revolution of dignity' that could significantly change the situation within the community (Radczenko, 2018). In any case, it signifies that the current leadership of the political and civil organizations of Lithuania's Polish minority lack a clear public mandate as representatives of the entire community. This situation resulted in partial fragmentation of the ethnic Polish electorate of the EAPL-CFA in both municipal and EP elections in 2019, and proved the public demand for change (Radczenko, 2019).

The ethnic channel for the election of MEPs with a minority background from Lithuania is an example of descriptive representation. It has proved its feasibility on three occasions. Based on the self-organization of ethnic political groups, this channel is monopolized by the electoral Polish-Russian collaboration led by the EAPL-CFA. It is also currently personalized by Valdemar Tomaševski, who has unquestionable authority among the electorate that tends to vote 'ethnically.' This channel provides Lithuania's national

⁵³ 2009 m. birželio 7 d. rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą. Lietuvos lenkų rinkimų akcija (n. 37).

⁵⁴ 2014 m. gegužės 25 d. rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą. Lenkų rinkimų akcijos ir Rusų aljanso koalicija „Valdemaro Tomaševskio blokas“ (n. 38).

⁵⁵ Rinkimai į Europos Parlamentą 2019 m. gegužės 26 d. „Valdemaro Tomaševskio blokas“ – Krikščioniškų šeimų sąjungos ir Rusų aljanso koalicija (n. 39).

⁵⁶ Rok afery Mackiewiczza (Year since Mackiewicz's fraud). (2019). *ZW.lt*, May 24. <https://zw.lt/wilno-wilenszczyzna/rok-afery-mackiewiczza/>

minorities with a chance to elect one MEP who is authorized by minority voters who has a slim-to-none chance of attracting a majoritarian electorate (Ramonaitė, 2018: 84). Potential constraints associated with this channel include the general electoral situation of the EAPL-CFA and composite character of its electoral collaboration with the Russian Alliance. To a large extent, the former are personality driven and linked to the self-organization of Lithuania's Polish minority. The later constraints suggest that any potential MEP elected from this collaboration-based list will always be an ethnic Pole, taking into account the coalition's capacity to receive no more than one MEP seat. Therefore, Lithuania's Russian and other smaller minorities can be represented in the European Parliament only by an ethnic Polish MEP if they choose to become a part of the multi-ethnic electoral minority coalition led by the EAPL-CFA.

5 Conclusion

Based on the empirical evidence from the European Parliament elections in Lithuania, the article revealed the feasibility of politicians with a minority background being elected MEPs both through mainstream party lists and as representatives of ethnic parties. In any case, all electoral lists for the European Parliament elections in Lithuania involve a high level of competition due to the extreme plurality of the country's party system, meaning that each political group typically secures just one or two MEP mandates. Similarly, this candidate requires top placement on the electoral list of the party.

The findings showed that MEPs elected via the ethnic channel are examples of the process of descriptive representation, whereas electing MEPs via the mainstream channel signifies substantive representation. This configuration results in an essential contrast between the context of the election of MEPs through mainstream channels and ethnic party lists. The paper has revealed that MEPs with a minority background that are elected on mainstream party lists should have a high profile in Lithuanian public life and politics, which makes the ethnic factor significantly irrelevant. It also implies the 'authorization' of such politicians by the respective political group in terms of the former's scope to define the strategies of the latter entity or to act on behalf of it. Moreover, the electoral success of these politicians is predetermined by the predominant or overwhelming support of the majoritarian electorate, which might also involve the substantial support of the party and its top candidate by the electorate from a relevant minority. In nominal terms, the number of MEPs of a minority background elected through this channel could potentially be limited only by the total number of MEPs allocated for the country, the electoral capacity of the relevant political group, and the high profile of candidates. Empirical evidence from Lithuania suggests that this number ranged from zero MEPs in 2004 through one representative in 2014 and 2019 to two elected candidates in 2009.

The case of Valdemar Tomaševski exemplifies the ethnic channel of minority representation. *Sensu stricto*, Tomaševski remains the only self-identified minority MEP from Lithuania. His three consecutive MEP mandates can be seen as the electoral success of the Polish-Russian minority coalition led by the EAPL-CFA. Due to objective socio-demographic reasons, this channel is limited to one prospective MEP seat. It also requires electoral cooperation between the Polish and Russian ethnic parties, as neither have the support of a sufficient number of ethnic electorate to comfortably reach the electoral threshold,

set at five per cent. The evidence also demonstrates that this channel is monopolized by the Polish-Russian collaboration led by the EAPL-CFA, and personalized by Tomaševski. The leading role of the EAPL-CFA implies that any MEP elected through this channel will always be an ethnic Pole. Due to this monopolization, the constraints of this channel are directly linked to the general electoral situation of the Polish-Russian collaboration and personality-driven factors related to the self-organization of the Polish minority in Lithuania. This situation signifies a situation of crisis and apparent demand for change within Lithuania's Polish community. It also provides Lithuanian mainstream parties with an additional opportunity to gain the support of a new electorate among the country's minorities, particularly among urban Poles, Russians, and representatives of other communities. For the EAPL-CFA, this scenario could lead to its prospective relegation to a purely regional political party with no representation in the European Parliament and with few mandates in the Seimas, obtained only in the single-mandate districts with a Polish ethnic majority. The findings presented in this text are based on the case of Lithuania. However, they are more broadly applicable in a wider East Central European context, and are not limited by the context of the European Parliament elections. These findings will obviously be of service in comparative studies that focus on ethnic parties' electoral performances and the inclusion of the representatives of national minorities in the electoral strategies of mainstream parties. They can also encourage further case-based and comparative research that focuses on the subjective and objective constraints to ethnic parties which might substantially affect their electoral performance.

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