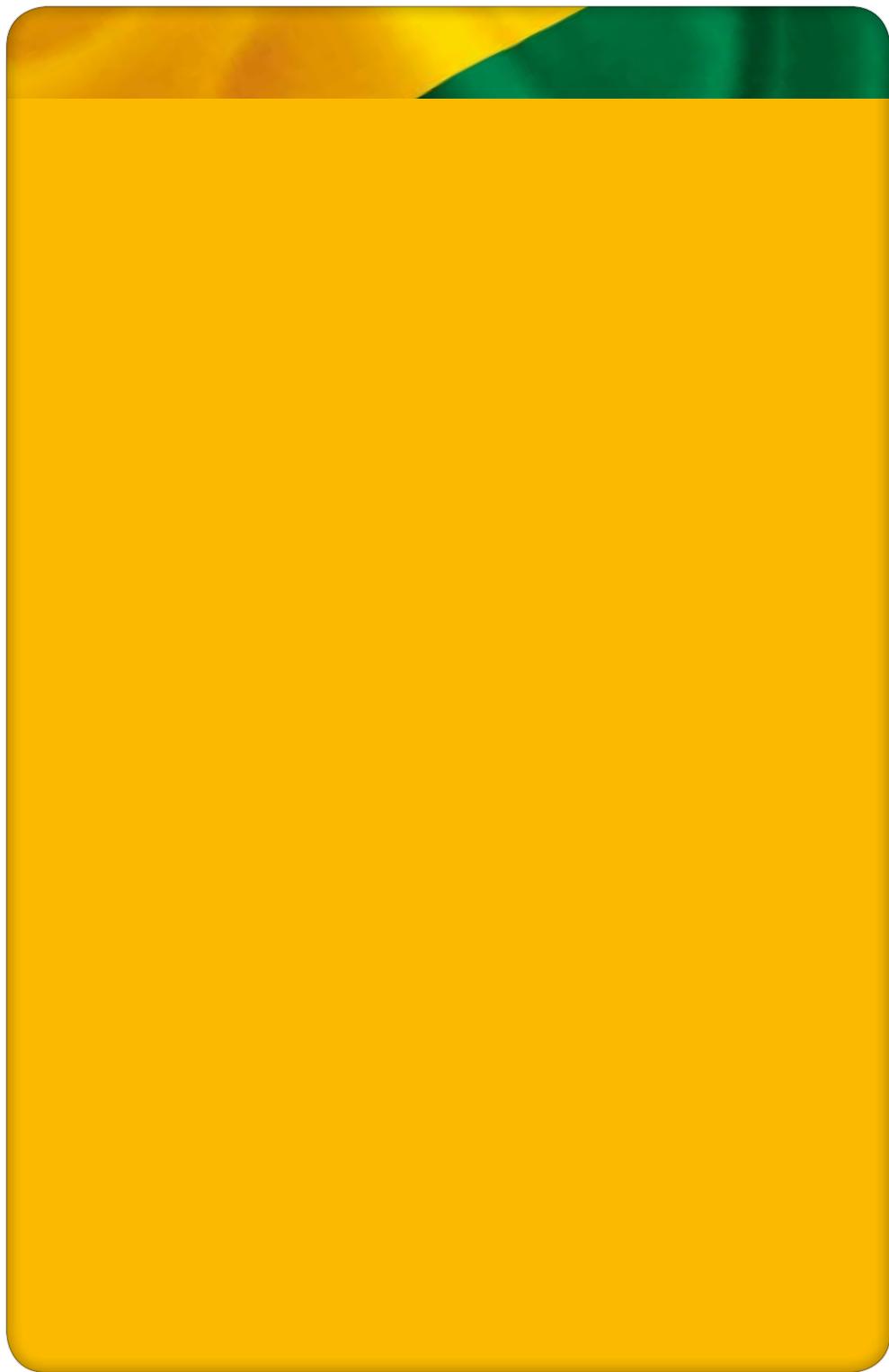


The image features a stylized, wavy representation of the Lithuanian flag, which consists of three horizontal stripes of yellow, green, and red. The flag is set against a solid yellow background that occupies the bottom half of the page. The text is centered in the yellow area.

EESC priorities during the Lithuanian presidency



European Economic and Social Committee



Note from the President

Europe can only move forward with the support of Europeans. This is especially true given the difficult period we are currently going through. This is the view that we share at the European Economic and Social Committee. And it is the reason why we are at Lithuania's side as it takes up the presidency of the European Union. Our aim to act as a mouthpiece for citizens in the European institutions, to voice their expectations, their needs, but also their ideas and their commitment. Faced with the crisis, commitment to a Europe which serves the public is a priority.



*Henri Malosse
EESC President*

EESC priorities during the Lithuanian presidency

Given the ongoing crisis, Europe is faced with a major challenge which it must address successfully: to restore public trust in its ability to act in their interest and in the general European interest. In the run-up to the European Parliament elections in May 2014, the overall direction provided by the Lithuanian presidency will be essential in renewing ties with the public.

In this connection, the European Economic and Social Committee is convinced that the only possible solution is to strengthen ties with civil society, whose role must be recognised and enhanced before, during and after the decision-making process. More than ever before, the door should be open to debate, consultation and dialogue.

Genuine participatory democracy at European level with full and comprehensive public involvement is based on three pillars:

- Public information linked to a transparent debate which gives everyone a say
- Public consultation on the strategic choices which the countries of Europe must make
- Respect for public opinion to avoid widening the gap with citizens even further.

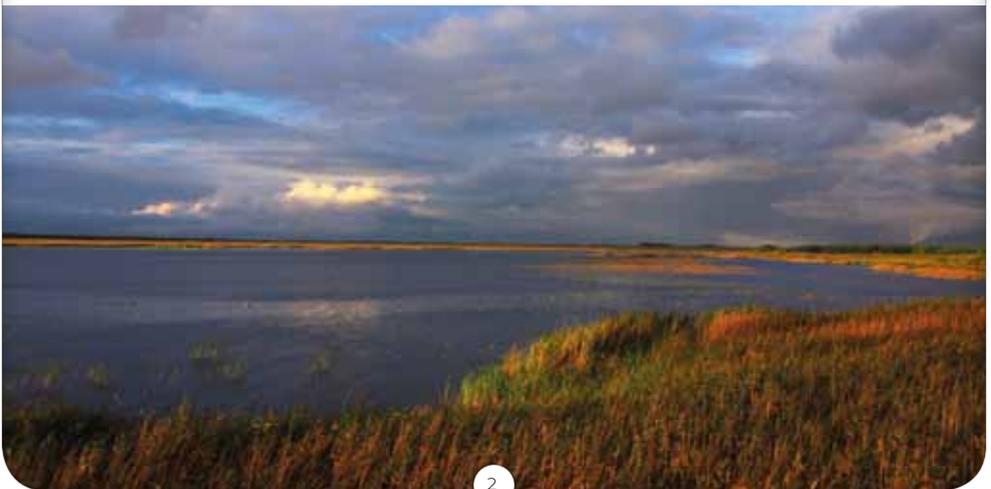
This is the only way Europe will be able to meet the challenges it is facing. The EESC endorses the three priorities of the Lithuanian presidency:

- a credible Europe, not only vis-à-vis the markets, but above all vis-à-vis European citizens; this is the only way they will be able to reclaim ownership of Europe. Credibility requires transparency and respect for democratic principles, in contrast to the way in which the Cypriot crisis has been managed, for example;
- a Europe which restores growth and jobs: priority must be given to the real economy, which creates the wealth and jobs that we all need. This economy must be served by a financial system which has finally been regulated;
- an open Europe: this is at the very heart of our values; having said that, the public will not accept any concessions by Europe when it comes to respect for its acquis and its model. The countries of Europe must act in solidarity, speak with one voice and remain united in forthcoming negotiations.

With its 353 members (including 9 Lithuanians) from 28 Member States and with a mixture of backgrounds, the EESC wishes to act as a mouthpiece for the public and to work to ensure that Europe is once again perceived as the solution to the crisis.

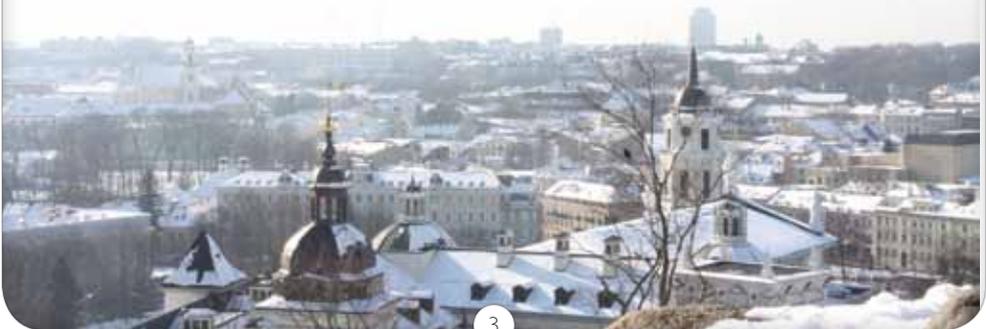
Together, let us act to ensure that voting in the European elections becomes relevant once again.

Euroscepticism does not offer a solution. Neither does fatalism.



Some basic facts about Lithuania

Official name	Republic of Lithuania
Capital	Vilnius
Surface area	65 300 km ²
Other major cities	Kaunas, Klaipėda, Šiauliai, Panevėžys, Alytus
Official languages	Lithuanian
Currency	Litas (Lt)
Population, total in May 2013	2 962 837
GDP per capita in Purchasing Power Standards (EU-27 = 100) in 2011	66%
GDP at market prices in millions of euro, 2012	32 864
GDP at market prices per capita in 2012	EUR 11 000
Unemployment rate in April 2013	12,5%
Religion	Roman Catholic (79% of population)
Life expectancy estimated in 2011	Total: 73.8 Males: 68.1 Females: 79.3
Main exports	Mineral fuels (24.5%), machinery and mechanical appliances (7.2%), vehicles (6%), plastics (5.6%), furniture (5.4%), fertilizers (4.3%)
Main imports	Mineral fuels (33.8%), vehicles (7.5%), machinery and mechanical appliances (7.2%), electrical machinery and equipment (5.1%), plastics (3.6%)



Governance

President: H.E. Dalia Grybauskaitė

Prime minister: Algirdas Butkevičius

Minister for Foreign Affairs: Linas Linkevičius

Deputy minister for European Affairs: Vytautas Leškevičius (responsible for shaping and implementing EU policy)

Government: the Government of the Republic of Lithuania (Lithuanian: Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė) is the cabinet of Lithuania. It consists of the prime minister, who is head of government, and 14 government ministers.

The prime minister is nominated by the president and confirmed by the Seimas (Lithuania's parliament). The current prime minister is Algirdas Butkevičius (appointed 7 December 2012), who is the leader of the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party. After the last election, the Social Democratic Party, the Labour Party, the "Order and Justice" Party and Lithuanian Poles' Electoral Action announced a coalition agreement aimed at working together on behalf of Lithuania.

Opposition (in order of number of representatives)

- Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats (33 seats),
- Liberals Movement of the Republic of Lithuania (10 seats),
- Political Party "The Way of Courage" (7 seats),
- Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (1 seat),
- Self-nominated candidates (3 seats).



The state

Form: Parliamentary republic

Since Lithuania declared the restoration of its independence on 11 March 1990, it has maintained strong democratic traditions. In the first general elections after independence on 25 October 1992, 56.75% of the total number of voters supported the new constitution. There were intense debates concerning the constitution, especially the role of the president. A separate referendum was held on 23 May 1992 to gauge public opinion on the matter and 41% of all eligible voters supported the restoration of the president of Lithuania.

Lithuania is a member of the European Union, the Council of Europe, a full member of the Schengen Agreement and NATO. Lithuania is also a member of the Nordic Investment Bank, and part of Nordic-Baltic cooperation of Northern European countries. The United Nations Human Development Index lists Lithuania as a “very high human development” country. Lithuania holds the presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2013.

The president:

The current Lithuanian head of state, Dalia Grybauskaitė, was elected on 17 May 2009. She previously held the posts of deputy minister for foreign affairs and minister for finance, as well as being European Commissioner for Financial Programming and the Budget from 2004 to 2009.

The president is elected directly for a five-year term and serves a maximum of two consecutive terms. The post of president is largely ceremonial; the main policy functions, however, include foreign affairs and national security. The president is also commander-in-chief of the military. The president, with the approval of the parliamentary body, the Seimas, also appoints the prime minister and, on the latter’s nomination, the rest of the cabinet, as well as a number of other top civil servants and the judges for all courts.



The House of Representatives (Parliament)

The unicameral Lithuanian parliament, the Seimas, has 141 members who are elected for a four-year term. 71 of the members of this legislative body are elected in single member constituencies, and the other 70 are elected in a nationwide vote by proportional representation. A party must receive at least 5% of the national vote to be eligible for any of the 70 national seats in the Seimas.

Since Lithuania acceded to the European Union on 1 May 2004, the Seimas has chosen a model of active parliamentary involvement in debating EU issues, and under the Lithuanian Constitution has the right to participate in deliberating on EU matters and to receive all information related thereto. In line with the model established in the Seimas for the coordination of EU matters, all of its committees (referred to as “specialised committees” in the Statute of the Seimas) participate in considering EU matters. However, two of the committees, the Committee on European Affairs and the Committee on Foreign Affairs in particular, have exceptional powers under the Constitutional Act of the Republic of Lithuania on Membership of the Republic of Lithuania in the European Union, adopted on 13 July 2004. The Committees may, according to the procedure established by the Statute of the Seimas, submit to the Government the opinion of the Seimas concerning legislative proposals of the European Union.



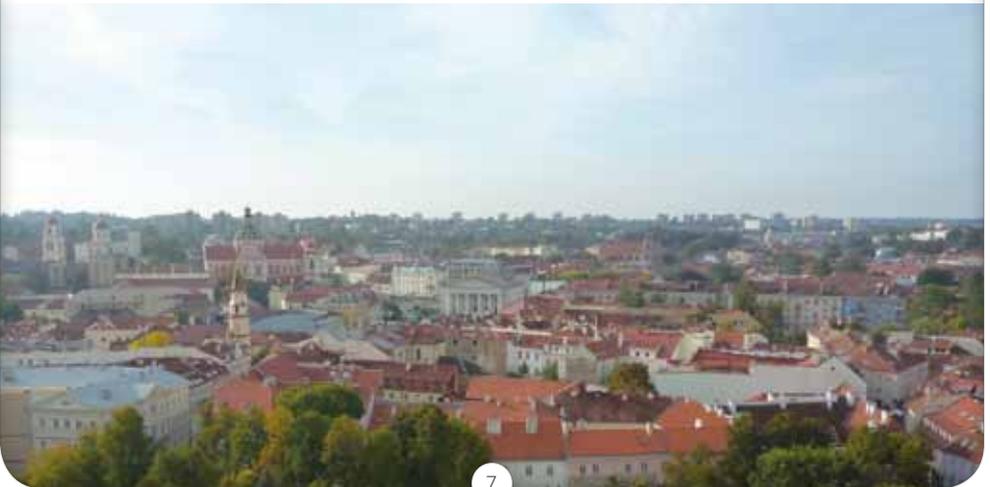
The Courts

Under the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, the principle is enshrined that justice in Lithuania is administered only by the courts. A court is an institution administering justice and established by law. In pursuance of fair and impartial court decisions and to prevent any interference in court activities, the Constitution and the Law on Courts of the Republic of Lithuania stipulate that in the administration of justice courts shall be independent from other government institutions, officials, political parties, organisations and other persons. Court decisions may be reviewed only by courts of higher instance and only in accordance with the procedure prescribed by law. The system of courts, their competence and the system of court organisation, activity, and administration, as well as the system of self-governance of courts, and the status of judges, their appointment, career, liability and other issues related to judicial activities are regulated by the Constitution, the Law on Courts of the Republic of Lithuania and other legal acts.

Lithuania has 67 courts. This uniform court system of the Republic of Lithuania is made up of the courts of general jurisdiction and administrative courts.

The Lithuanian judicial system consists of:

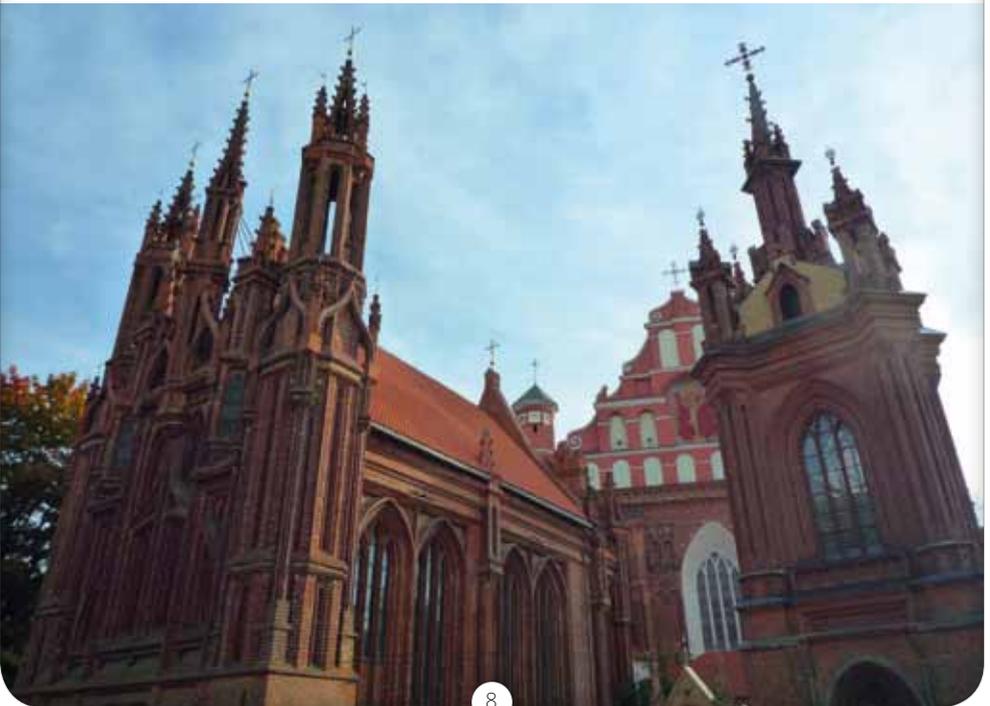
- the Supreme Court of Lithuania,
- the Court of Appeal,
- regional courts,
- district courts,
- regional administrative courts
- the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania.



Administrative divisions

The current administrative divisions were established in 1994 and modified in 2000 to meet the requirements of the European Union. Lithuania has a three-tier administrative division: the country is divided into 10 counties that are further subdivided into 60 municipalities which consist of over 500 sub-districts.

The institution of county governors and county administrations were dissolved in 2010. Municipalities are the most important administrative units. Some municipalities are historically called “district municipalities”, and are thus often shortened to “district”; others are called “city municipalities”, sometimes shortened to “city”. Each municipality has its own elected government. In the past, municipality council elections occurred once every three years, but they now take place every four years. The council elects the mayor and appoints the head of the sub-district. There is currently a proposal for the direct election of mayors and sub-district heads, however that would require an amendment to the Constitution.





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Internet sites

Presidency:

<http://www.president.lt>

The House of Representatives / Parliament:

<http://www.seimas.lt>

Tourism, i.e.:

<http://www.tourism.lt>

Site of the Council presidency:

<http://www.eu2013.lt>



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