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How do Lithuanian Citizens Perceive the European Parliament? EU Legitimacy Issue and Trust in the European Parliament*

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Abstract

This article examines the problem of legitimacy within the EU political system and focuses on the political power and recognition of the only one directly elected EU institution – the European Parliament. Historically, being the weaker house of the EU legislative system, throughout the last decades, the European Parliament has increased the political authority dramatically. These political changes should have risen the participation of the EU citizens in the elections and the legitimacy of this EU institution. Analysing the Lithuanian case, based on the qualitative interviewing of politicians and quantitative survey of citizens, the authors claim that while most of Lithuanians recognise the significance of the European Parliament and the turnout in the European elections has increased, the European Parliamentary elections remain, however, of secondary importance.

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Introduction

The legitimacy issue of the EU political system has attracted much of academic attention (Kulahci 2003; Martensson 2007; Bolleyer and Reh 2012; Voermans; Hartmann and Kaeding 2014; Nedergaard 2019). The researchers mostly link it to the EU's 'democracy deficit' problem. The said problem comes from both the input and output stages: the input stage is related to the lack of electorate active participation in European politics and elections, and the output stage – to the EU political decisions, which dissatisfy the citizens, especially in relation with recent economic and migrant crisis (Lindgren and Persson 2010; Nedergaard 2019).

Research studies (Reiff and Schmitt 1980; Schmitt 2005; Marinescu et. al. 2017; Šimunjak and Milanovic 2017; Charvar 2017; Unikaite-Jakuntaviciene 2017; Koller 2017; Cichosz 2017) show that EU citizens used not to pay much attention to the European elections. In many Member States, those elections were considered secondary to national elections. On the other hand, in recent years, in 2019, voter turnout in the EP elections has finally exceeded 50% turnout. Does this correlate with the growing role and political authority of the European Parliament in the EU political system? Is the same tendency evident in the case of Lithuania as well? How much significant and legitimate does the European Parliament seem to the Members of the European Parliament elected in Lithuania and the Lithuanian people? Do the citizens appreciate the strengthened political and legal competence of the European Parliament?

The authors argue that the development of the European Parliament's political and legal competences, especially following the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty, has strengthened the political authority of this EU institution and its legitimacy on the legal basis. However, despite the trust in the European Parliament and support for the strengthening of this institution, the European Parliamentary elections remain secondary in Lithuania.

First, the article reviews the problem of the legitimacy of the EU political system from an academic perspective. Second, it analyses the role of the European Parliament from a historical perspective focusing on the growing legal and political competences of this institution. The article further analyses

the case of Lithuania based on methodological triangulation, by using the data of the public opinion poll, media analysis and semi-structured interviews (the public opinion poll of Lithuanian citizens was conducted in spring 2020 and qualitative materials were collected at the European Parliament in Brussels in December 2019). Thus, the article focuses on two dimensions of the legitimacy concept: a) legal legitimacy and b) democratic legitimacy.

The problem of legitimacy of the EU political system: a literature review

While the definition of legitimacy used to be most adapted to national political system research, the European integration project put the legitimacy issues into the field of international relations field, predominately in terms of the impact of international political order and recognition on national level (Meine 2016). As Edward Stoddard argues (2015: 557): “When states decide to join the EU, they resolve potential legitimacy tensions (at least superficially and legally) by agreeing to adhere to, and thus recognise as pre-eminent, European norms embodied in EU law”. Not just the political elites but also the people have to search for the balance of the main acceptable values and norms, existing in their different structures (Bolleyer and Reh 2012). One of the key elements for ensuring the legitimacy is the involvement of the people. That has been the European problem as the EU system is lacking a direct involvement of the citizens (Voermans, Hartmann and Kaeding 2014).

The other element of the legitimacy specifically tied to European integration is the EU policy output process. It reflects if and how the Union is capable of delivering the expected results (Lindgren and Persson 2010). After several recent crises (economic, migrant crisis), EU decisions rather dissatisfied the people than made it more legitimate and even undermined the legitimacy of the EU decisions (Nedergaard 2019). As a possible solution to this legitimacy crisis, instead of always searching for the balance between the two systems – intergovernmental or federal – scientists suggest selecting one of these systems (Beetz 2015). The others believe that legitimacy might be increased by the establishment of various accountability mechanisms (Lindgren and Persson 2010).

Therefore, for quite some time, the researchers have tended to claim that “<...> the EU is suffering from a legitimacy deficit” (Kulahci 2003:118). One of the arguments is that the EU representatives are facing the lack of political power in comparison with national or subnational representatives (Mårtensson 2007). From the very beginning of the European integration process, the European Parliament used to be just a consultative body and the most significant decisions were made by the Commission or the Member States governments. Therefore, the system had been more linked to “undirect legitimacy”.

According to Nicole Bolleyer and Christine Reh (2012: 472), “Legitimacy is defined as one possible motivation for accepting political rule; it roots in citizens’ affiliation with a balanced set of core values and their structural realisation”. Therefore, the concept of legitimacy links the political authority with the people focusing on how they accept it. For the analysis of the legitimacy problem of the European Parliament, we can focus on at least two important elements:

- a) Legal legitimacy - the political authority and competences given to the European Parliament by law, EU treaties.
- b) Democratic legitimacy – the legitimacy of the European Parliament in the eyes of the citizens, the recognitions of this institution and turnout in the European elections.

Data from various studies show that parties and candidates as well as the media and voters, tend to treat the European elections as national secondary elections (Marsh 1998; Reif and Schmitt 1980; Norris 1997). Thus, researchers refer to them as both national and European elections (Strömbäck, Maier and Kaid 2011). The European Parliament campaigns are dominated by party debates on domestic rather than European issues that allow them to be classified as national (Jalali and Tiago 2011).

The secondary importance of the European elections lies in the fact that, compared to national elections, 1) their campaigns are weaker (fewer resources and less attention paid to their preparation) and political parties are reluctant to pay much attention to European issues during the campaign (Norris

1997; Maier and Tenschler 2006). Instead of being European, most European Parliament campaigns continue to focus on national domestic political issues (Charvat 2017); 2) there is a lack of media coverage of these election campaigns and European issues due to a greater focus on domestic politics; 3) voter turnout in the national elections is generally slightly higher than in the European elections; 4) small parties are more successful in the European elections than big ones; 5) the ruling parties in the European elections tend to lose their votes, especially if the elections take place in the middle of the national election term (Marsh 1998).

As Sarah B. Hobolt argues (2014: 1530), “This second-order nature of European elections has been attributed to the fact that citizens generally have little knowledge of policies implemented or promised at the European level by parties, and parties themselves often use these elections as opportunities to test their standing with the public in terms of their domestic political agendas”.

When did the European Parliament become important? Increasing powers of the EP from retrospective (legal legitimacy)

This short analysis based on the EU treaties, documents and literature review reflects the main focal points for the changing role of the European Parliament from the European integration historical perspective. The authors claim that the most important step for the emerging role of this institution was linked to direct elections. Meanwhile, recent historical steps included the enlarged co-decision legislative procedure after the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty (2009) and the rejection of the EU-USA international agreement, made by the European Parliament in 2010. These legal and political changes strengthened the political authority and legitimacy of this EU institution.

After a detailed study of the political system of the European Union, Simon Hix (2006) pointed out that we can compare it with the federal political system since the legislative powers are shared by two chambers of legislators - the Council of Ministers (Council of the EU) and the European Parliament. The European

Parliament has always played a part in the weaker house, as in many policy areas, the Member States only took decisions in the Council of Ministers (Rakutiene 2016). The European integration research has also focused much more on coalition formation, chairmanship and other decision-making processes in the Intergovernmental Council of Ministers, which brings together the interests of all EU Member States (Tallberg 2006; Vitkus and Novagrockiene 2008). Nevertheless, over time, the competences of the European Parliament have continuously been expanded and strengthened (Raunio and Wiberg 2002). In this way, the European Union has sought to give an increasing voice to EU citizens and to address the 'democratic deficit' (Weiß 2018). The European Parliament is the only directly elected institution of the European Union, thus gaining the direct legitimacy of its citizens (Grau i Segu 2019). It is the democratic legitimacy in the speeches of many politicians that has become the main argument for strengthening and extending the legislative and political powers of the European Parliament (the Debates of the European Parliament Sitting in 1979). After the European Parliament acquired the status of a directly elected body, the Single European Act in 1987 gave this body, for the first time, *de jure* limited powers in the legislative process of the European Community (the EU's predecessor). Under the cooperation procedure with the Council of Ministers, the European Parliament took part in the first and second legislative readings. It was able to propose amendments to the legislation, but the Member States still took the final decision in the Council of Ministers.

The historic moment in expanding and strengthening the European Parliament's powers came with the introduction of the co-decision procedure, which gives the European Parliament symmetrical legislative powers in the same way as the Council of Ministers, albeit in limited areas. "This procedure has introduced the rule that, in the event of disagreement between the European Parliament and the Council on a given act, a Conciliation Committee, composed of an equal number of the Members of the European Parliament and of the Council, shall be convened" (Hix 2006: 107). However, the Maastricht Treaty has given the European Parliament such powers in only a few areas — internal market, consumer protection (European Parliament 2019). Meanwhile, the recent Treaty of Lisbon has extended these powers to as many as 85 areas of EU legislation.

This procedure is now considered the normal legislative framework in the European Union, under which most EU legislation is adopted. In their research, researchers Nathalie Brack and Olivier Costa (2018) highlighted that it was this institution that had become the biggest winner in the EU for the political changes introduced by the Lisbon Treaty in 2009.

It has therefore taken at least three decades to consolidate the European Parliament's political powers in the EU political system since the first direct European Parliament elections. Researchers point out that the role of the European Parliament has grown significantly over the last decade. This institution expanded the authority not just through the extension of the ordinary legislative (co-decision) procedure to more and more policy areas, but also in international affairs, whereas traditionally, the legal competences of the European Parliament have been considered limited. Especially so by the EP's position when the European Parliament makes consent to international agreements.

In 2010, one year after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the European Parliament rejected, for the first time in its history, the international agreement SWIFT between the European Union and the United States (europarl.europa.eu 2010). That came as a big surprise for the European partners. This showed the European Parliament's growing ambitions in international affairs and signalled a clear message to foreign countries that it is not enough to agree with the Member States alone (Rakutiene 2019). The agreement was approved only after both the US (hosting MEPs and the visit of US Vice-President Joe Biden to the European Parliament) and the EU Member States paid sufficient attention to the negotiations with the European Parliament and its proposed amendments on human rights and personal data protection (Servent 2014). According to Adriana Ripol Servent (2014), the European Parliament has thus given much greater prominence to its role, both in the consent procedure, as well as regarding its involvement in the negotiations with third countries and not only in the final stage of the agreement. In this way, the European Parliament has, in the long run, legitimised, strengthened, and consolidated its political and legal powers during European integration, often on its own initiative. But do the citizens appreciate this political authority of the European Parliament?

Methodology

The triangulation methodology was used to find out the opinion of Lithuanians on the legitimacy of the European Parliament and it includes the mixture of qualitative methods and the public opinion poll.

The authors of this article prepared a questionnaire for the public opinion survey which included 13 closed type questions. A public opinion and market research company "Spinter tyrimai" conducted a public opinion survey commissioned by Vytautas Magnus University from 20-30 April 2020 in Lithuania. The survey involved residents aged from 18 to 75. A combined survey method was applied: 50% - were interviewed by a telephone survey, 50% by an online survey. The survey was conducted by a professional interviewer conducting interviews with respondent according to the prepared questions and recording their answers in the questionnaire. The survey involved 1011 respondents. The distribution of participants by gender, age and the place of residence was proportional to the distribution of the population in Lithuania. The error of the survey data was 3.1 percentages.

The qualitative methods included the analyses of documents and Lithuanian media texts' as well as interviewing. From 2-7 December 2019, a research internship was conducted at the European Parliament Research Centre - Library and Archives (European Parliamentary Research Service) in Brussels by one of this article authors.¹ During this research visit, empirical data from the EP archives were collected. Semi-structured interviews with the Members of the European Parliament were conducted, too. Inquiries were sent to all Members of the European Parliament elected in Lithuania. Six out of 11 Lithuanian representatives currently working at the European Parliament (Auštrevičius, P., Blinkevičūtė, V., Juknevičienė, R., Mažylis, L, Ropė, B. and Olekas, J.) were interviewed. Additional interviews with the Members of the European Parliament were conducted via phone from June to July 2020 (with Maldeikienė, A., Gentvilas, E. and Paleckis, J.). The duration of the interviews ranged from 20 to 45 minutes. One part of the obtained survey results, those linked to the issue of legitimacy, is published within this article.

1 Sima Rakutienė made a research visit to the European Parliamentary Research Service in Brussels and collected the materials from the archives and also interviewed the Members of the European Parliament.

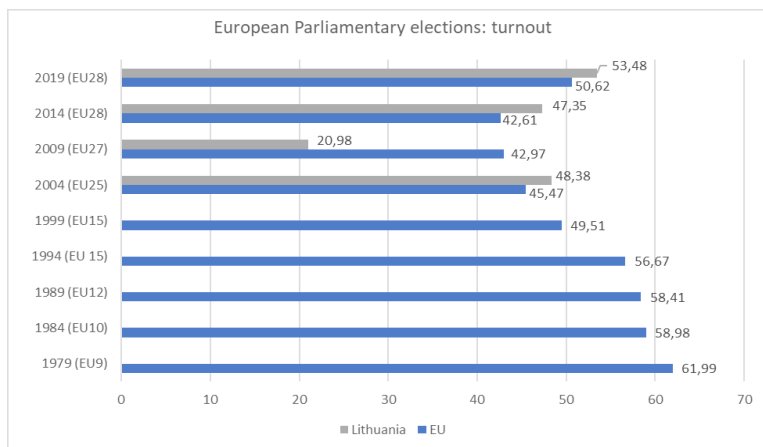
The case of Lithuania (the EP's democratic legitimacy): research results

a) Are the European elections in Lithuania still of secondary importance?

Both *de facto* and *de jure*, the European Parliament is gaining more and more symmetrical political and legal power in the European Union's bicameral system. Although much has changed since the first direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979, their relative importance remains constant. Citizens perceive them as less important because the electorate does not impact the potential result – the formation of the government (Schmitt 2005).

Can the European Parliament elections in Lithuania be classified as national secondary elections? First, if we assess the turnout in the European Parliament elections, we will notice that the turnout of Lithuanian citizens is slightly higher than the EU average even in three out of four last elections and reaches more than 42 per cent (see Figure 1).

Figure No. 1
Turnout in
the European
Parliamentary
elections: 1979
— 2019



Source: Prepared by authors

The data indicate that these elections are rather important for the Lithuanian population and allow not to confirm one of the features of second-order elections. However, knowing that these elections were held three times together with the second round of Presidential elections in the Republic

of Lithuania, the above-mentioned indicators will not rule out the allegations of the second-order elections because the voters treat the presidential elections as the most important. This was confirmed by the 2009 elections when the second round of the Presidential elections did not take place together with the European Parliament elections. Only 20.98 per cent of voters came to vote that year. Notwithstanding, it should be noted that the last 2019 EP elections, both in the whole EU and in Lithuania, reactivated citizens and exceeded 50% voter turnout. MEP Bronis Ropé tends to relate this voting activity to an increase in the powers of the EP Parliament: "At the same time, of course, <...> in the past, those weak powers had little influence. The Parliament has already gained importance and power" (Interview with Ropé, B., 4 December 2019, Brussels).

He is also echoed by MEP Juozas Olekas (3 December 2019): "More people have come, and perhaps there has been a turning point in the way people see and realise that we are part of the European Union, that it is not just some superstructure that is not important to us. I am glad that it is so because after working for half a year, it is possible to understand very clearly that the decisions that are made here are very important for Lithuania and respond to people's lives". Of course, the increased power of the EP and the increased role of the EP during the campaign may have had a small effect. Still, in Lithuania, the most relevant argument would be the highly competitive last Presidential elections and a more visible campaign in these elections than in the previous ones. Despite a slightly more active European election campaign when compared to the first three elections, the Presidential election campaign still dominated. Some political parties had their candidates in the Presidential elections and traditionally used this campaign to increase their visibility to achieve better European election results.

Secondly, the number of participants in the EP election campaign indicates that the interest of politicians themselves in the elections has increased. In 2019, even 22 lists of candidates participated (previously the number of participants varied from 11 to 12 lists). One of the possible explanations for such an increase of participants could be a change in the rules, allowing not only political parties but also election committees to participate in the EP elections. The above-mentioned activity of politicians shows the growing importance of the elections

under analysis. However, the number of winning lists has not increased, and the number of winning seats has changed slightly. Just one elected MEP has appeared on the electoral committee list. Accordingly, we cannot say that the last EP elections were more important for citizens than the previous ones. In addition, a post-electoral European barometer study (2019) showed that only 45% of Lithuanian respondents voted for the same party they always vote for in the elections and only 23 per cent decided a few months before the election. Even 30 per cent decided whom to vote for only a few weeks before or on the election day. This late decision suggests that voter decision is not likely to be driven by long-term beliefs, the knowledge of the institution's importance, or the analysis of party proposals, but rather by random factors and even likely by a lot of random voting.

Thirdly, an analysis of the content of the election campaign and the issues discussed during the campaign shows that national issues and problems are still common in the European election debate and that European issues, while becoming more dominant, do not imply all parties can present their integrated approach to European integration. Among the European issues, the campaign was dominated by European prosperity, solidarity (equal benefits, common social policy standards), the equality of EU citizens, a strong Europe, the preservation of European values, the preservation of green energy and nature, and respect for human rights. Issues relevant to Lithuania were discussed as national problems, such as strategic projects of Lithuania and their financing, statements that Lithuania's interests are the most important ones, that problems relevant to the Lithuanian people need to be addressed — poverty, social exclusion, unemployment; that EU funds are required in order to modernise schools further, etc.

It is interesting to note that in the previous elections, the slogans were not necessarily directly related to Europe or the EU. In the 2019 elections, almost every list tried to use the European name (for example, Lithuania in Europe: Let's not stop growing; For a Europe based on Christian values! For a Europe of the Nations). Thus, although formally the name of Europe was heard more often, the desire to talk about problems relevant to Lithuania and its domestic policy as well as the urge-intimidation of the ruling party chairman Ramūnas Karbauskis to show voters' support for the government policy in the 2019 European elections demonstrates that some Lithuanian political parties

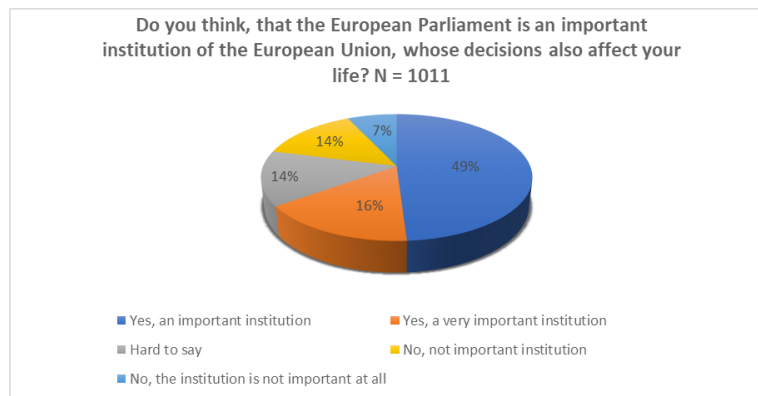
are still inclined to make the European elections national.

All these observations suggest that, for the time being, the European elections remain of secondary importance for Lithuanians, despite the growing powers of this Parliament. Many MEPs interviewed also agreed that voters still lack the knowledge and understanding of what individual MEPs can do for them in Europe. Research shows that, despite minor changes and differences, these elections remain of secondary importance to Lithuanian citizens (Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė 2017).

b) Do Lithuanians recognise the significance of the European Parliament?

According to the public opinion survey conducted from 20-30 April 2020, most respondents (65%) recognise the European Parliament as an important institution whose decisions affect their lives. More often, the European Parliament is considered a very important institution by men with higher education and the highest income living in the metropolitan area. Women of age 36 and older respondents with higher education residing in larger cities are more likely to agree that the EP is an important institution. These survey data show that the significance of the European Parliament is mostly admitted by the educated residents of Lithuania's major cities. The institution is seen as unimportant by 23% of the Lithuanian population (not important— 16% and not important at all — by 7% of respondents).

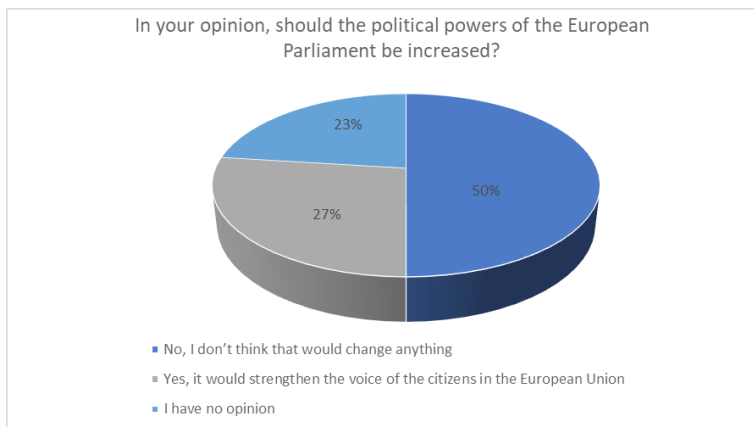
Figure No. 2
The significance
of the EP to
Lithuanian
citizens



Source: Spinter Survey in Lithuania, April 2020

Should Europeans continue to strengthen the powers of this institution, and what would that change? According to the survey data, 50 per cent of Lithuanian respondents believe that this would not change anything in the EU governance system. Meanwhile, 27 per cent of the respondents agree that strengthening the EP's powers would also strengthen the voice of Europeans in the European Union. Men and younger people aged 18-35 are more likely to believe that the EP's political power should be strengthened.

Figure No. 3
The attitudes
of Lithuanians
towards the
political powers
of the EP



Source: Spinter Survey in Lithuania, April 2020

Meanwhile, the Members of the European Parliament elected in Lithuania noted the importance of this institution in making useful decisions for all citizens of the European Union and in pursuing a far-sighted and long-term Union policy. One member of Socialists and Democrats' political group in the EU, already elected for a third term, highlighted that the European Parliament sometimes has to harshly stand for its position even if facing opposition from the Member States' governments:

«... we are the institution that is directly elected by the people, and I want to say that we are right to demand, although to some Member States it seems that we are demanding more than can be achieved, but if we do not demand it, we will not express our political positions, then nothing will move forward. <...> we often hear from the Member States - we do not have the money, there are no funds, but it's always like that - in good times and in bad ones - depending on which priority you have. I will

give an example of — a five-day leave for family care, for example, old parents, disabled family members, who mainly takes care of them — of course, a woman. And our position, like that of the European Parliament, was such that there should be at least the five-day leave plus that it should be paid. <...> failed to reach a full agreement with the Council, < Member States> agreed with the leave, but payment must be negotiated within each country to be something adequate. The way I say, we make seemingly higher demands, please agree that this is, because if you do not fight, if you do not do anything, we will get nothing. It is therefore natural that we politicians, here in the European Parliament, say that we need to invest in people and that is moving little by little.” (Interview with one Member of the European Parliament, Socialist and Democrats’ political group, 4 December 2019, Brussels).

Other Members of the European Parliament have also noted the usefulness of the European Parliament as a political institution in the European Union decision-making, although before becoming a Member of the European Parliament, those opportunities to influence EU decisions did not seem significant: “The European Parliament has already acquired powers, especially the eighth term. <...> Lithuanian citizens have more confidence in the European prism. And now that we are preparing a new common agricultural policy here - we often hear from the citizens - do not pass it on just to the Member States governmental level in any way. It shows, in fact, that the European project is alive, necessary.» (Interview with a Member of the European Parliament, Greens political group, 4 December 2019, Brussels).

One other MEP, working in its second term in the EP, explains the importance of the EP: «The European Parliament will have even more powers because we must properly reflect not only the national but also the European political level. We are not only national but also the citizens of the European Union, and that element cannot be ignored. Those who resist and think it has become more expensive in terms of time and the like - they live in the past. <...> It will be completely different in the future, and there will be even more dialogue, even more joint decisions, called co-decisions and that is inevitable. The European Union is a unique political structure” (Interview with a Member of

the European Parliament, "Renew Europe"- Alliance of Liberals political group, MEP, 5 December 2019, Brussels).

As data indicate, Lithuanians acknowledge the importance of the EP. Nonetheless, is this opinion related to the information the voters have about the EP activities and decision?

c) Does the electorate have enough information about the European Parliament?

Although the level of awareness of the significance of the European Parliament is relatively high, only less than a half of the respondents (41%) indicate that they have sufficient information and knowledge about the European Parliament. Usually, respondents between 26-55 years of age with higher education and higher income have enough information.

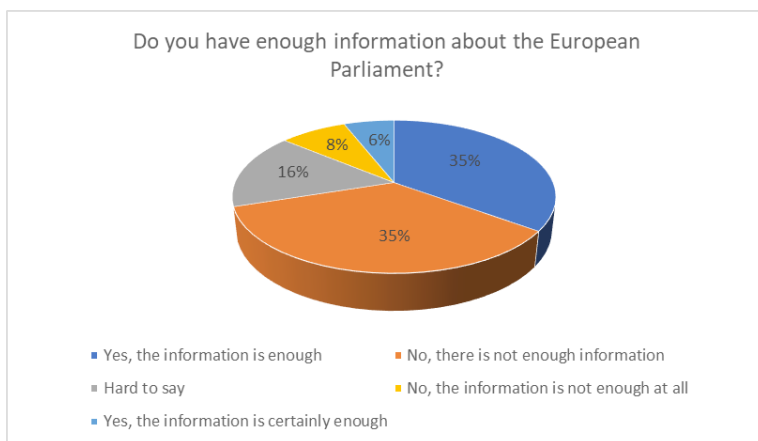


Figure No. 4
Dissemination
of information
about the EP

Source: Spinter Survey in Lithuania, April 2020.

This is likely due to the fact that younger respondents may not yet be very interested not only in the European Parliament but also in politics in general, and older respondents may not have enough access to information because usually, they use traditional sources of information on EP activities. Currently, most institutions and politicians focus on communication through various internet channels, and older people are still not active participants in and the users of social media.

Not surprisingly, respondents do not have enough information

about the European Parliament and the decisions it takes. As the survey shows, the majority of them does not explicitly look for information on the activities of MEPs and is satisfied with the information heard or read in the news. There are very few respondents who regularly follow the activities of MEPs - about 4%. Occasionally, only 18 per cent of them with a particular interest. Among them are more men and respondents aged 26-45. All others are either not particularly interested in and find information by chance — 49%, or not interested at all — 29%. Seeing these results, the major question is how to find the best way for attracting voters' attention to European issues and finding the best channels to provide the information.

Several Members of the European Parliament elected in Lithuania mentioned the problem concerning the lack of Lithuanian interest to search for the information (Interview No. 3 2019) and related it to the secondary nature of the European elections. They noted that the media is important for informing about the activities of the European Parliament and its Members. However, the Lithuanian media is not very inclined to stimulate public interest in the EP activities and does not pay much attention to European issues: "Although it does, it puts information, but perhaps it does not reflect as much as it reflects the activities of the Seimas or the activities of the Government" (Interview No. 3 2019).

Conclusions

The European Parliament has increased the political authority and legitimacy provided by European law since the first European elections quite impressively. Despite that fact, the democratic legitimacy of this institution remains not very high.

The EU citizens, including Lithuanians, still do not consider the European Parliament elections as important. In the many Member States, these elections have long been considered as national secondary elections. Nevertheless, the institution of the European Parliament itself has been strengthening its role over the last decade, both in the extension of the ordinary legislative (co-decision) procedure to more and more political areas and in international affairs. The development of the European Parliament's political and legal competences,

especially following the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty, has strengthened the EU's bicameral political system and legitimised the EP role on a legal basis. The growing competences of the European Parliament are recognised by both the electorate and politicians, who have made significant efforts to mobilise the EU voters and increase their turnout in many EU countries in the last 2019 elections. However, in the case of Lithuania, the increased voter turnout correlates not so much with the growing role of the EP, but more with the simultaneous holding of the Lithuanian Presidential elections.

As survey results indicate, one year after the European elections (2019), the EP institution remains important for the respondents. Still, there are no clear signs that voters' habits have changed and their interest in their elected European Parliament has increased. Respondents talk about the lack of information, but at the same time indicate that most of them are not specifically looking for information. Most seem to rely on randomly found information. As information is obtained without a specific search and many expressed having the lack of information, such results may be compounded by poor media coverage of European issues and the ineffectiveness of MEPs' own dissemination of information about the European Parliament and its activities. Thus, it is not yet easy to activate the interest of the Lithuanian population in the activities and decisions of the EP.

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