

Report Part Title: Lithuania:

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Report Subtitle: ASSESSING THE STATE OF EU COHESION

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Lithuania: Searching for security

Lithuania has strongly increased both its individual and structural cohesion scores on the EU Cohesion Monitor from 2007 to 2014, and it remains one of the member states most supportive of deeper European Union integration. This is not surprising, given Lithuania's border location within the EU, its economic interdependence with Europe, and the Lithuanian public's perception of their country's security situation.

In Russia's shadow

In recent years, Lithuania has been trying to become less dependent on Russia in economic and energy terms. The most obvious way to do that was through closer integration with the EU. For this reason, Lithuania has been and remains a strong supporter of a strengthened European internal (including energy) market. The country's main focus of engagement is the Baltic Sea region and attempted partnership with the Nordic countries. This trend indicates Lithuania's regional priorities within the EU, but in no way negates the country's positive attitude towards other member states, with Germany the main point of reference in regard to Lithuania's perception of the direction in which the EU is moving. The position of Nordic countries and of Germany are key factors in shaping Lithuania's perception of the amount of cohesion to which the country should commit.

Nevertheless, not all Lithuania's attitudes and perceptions of the EU are positive. There has been dissatisfaction and astonishment with the reaction of some European countries and high-level officials from EU institutions to Russian aggression in Ukraine. Since security issues (both soft and hard) have been a major driving force of Lithuania's policies in recent years, it is not surprising that Lithuania reacts poorly to any step or statement on the European level that looks like evidence of a positive attitude towards

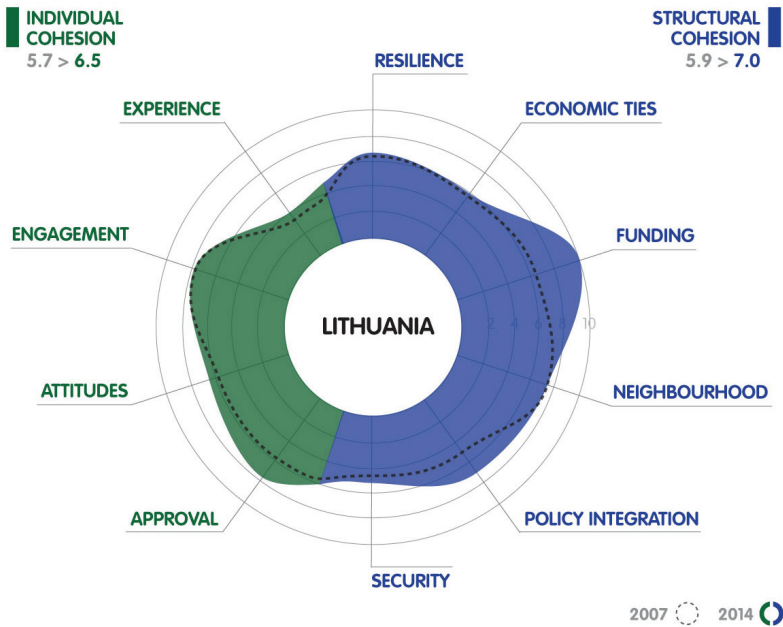
Russia (rebuilding cooperation, abolishing sanctions, etc.). This is especially pronounced within the ruling elites but also extends to society at large. Therefore, the shadow of Russia is a factor that affects (although not always or necessarily directly) Lithuania's perception of cohesion within the EU.

Security is key to Lithuania's behaviour towards the EU. The EU is still not seen as a hard security actor in Lithuania, and this affects the country's general behaviour on European issues. Lithuania is still more a Euro-Atlantic rather than solely European country. The EU is seen as a soft power, an example, and a source of economic and social development – very important, very influential, but soft. Naturally, in the face of military aggression, increased militarisation on European borders, and a perceived direct threat, Lithuania is looking for security guarantees from whoever is capable of providing them. Since the EU cannot offer a lot in terms of hard security, Lithuania is focusing on cooperation with the United States and NATO. Russia and transatlantic relations are very important factors in Lithuania's European behaviour, so the country is much more willing to promote and support common initiatives and policies that have an anti-Russian or pro-Euroatlantic direction. Lithuania's support for the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) negotiations may be the best illustration of that. Cooperation on security could contribute to an improved image of Europe or of specific European countries, as evidenced by the participation of German troops in the multinational military exercise in Lithuania, "Iron Wolf 2016".

Scepticism and realism

Perhaps the best way of describing Lithuanians' general attitudes towards the EU is "integrated but not necessarily coherent". Lithuanians have successfully and widely made use of the benefits of European integration: the open market and the possibility of free travel. Open borders even became a challenge for the country, because Lithuania experienced one of the highest emigration rates in the EU. Since 2004, 525,000 people – around 15 percent of the population – have left Lithuania. However, the increase in the numbers of relatives and friends living in other EU countries has not produced a significant increase in cohesion with the EU.

Although Lithuanians generally perceive the EU quite positively, they do not agree with EU trends on some specific issues that represent practical indicators of real cohesion. The most recent example is the country's attitude towards the migration crisis and EU immigration policies. Even though they themselves are



able to travel freely to any EU country, Lithuanians remain quite sceptical about accepting big numbers of immigrants from war-torn countries. The current wave of anti-immigrant and nationalistic rhetoric within the EU has had some resonance in Lithuania, with the public being suspicious about commitments to accept a number of people from the Middle East under common EU policies. This negative attitude has found an echo within political authorities, to some extent: the Lithuanian leadership took a cautious position on the proposal to distribute more immigrants to the member states. However, Lithuanian scepticism has been diluted with a big dose of realism. The Lithuanian political leadership is well aware that any strong objection to the proposals of the main European players – be it Germany or the European Commission – could reduce the chances of achieving European solidarity on other issues that are of much bigger importance to the country, such as the extension of sanctions against Russia or increased attention to the Eastern Partnership.

To conclude, Lithuania is a country with a coherent European policy – but that coherence does not necessary always translate into full cohesion. Peculiarities of mentality, historical experience, self-perception, and geographical location within the EU contribute to Lithuania’s push-and-pull European policy.

Though some cultural and psychological traits sometimes push Lithuania to be sceptical about supranational European politics, there is a strong awareness that the country would not have been able to perform as well as it has without the EU. Consequently, the European pull is outperforming the Euroscepticism push in Lithuania. However, it is difficult to accurately predict future developments. Continuous tensions on Eastern border, the ongoing conflict in Syria, the future relationship between the United Kingdom and the EU – all these factors will affect Lithuania's attitudes of what the EU is and how the country should interact with it.