

The outgoing President Dalia Grybauskaite well positioned to be re-elected in Lithuania

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Analysis

2.6 million Lithuanians are being called to ballot for the first round of the presidential election on 11th May next. On 3rd March, outgoing head of State, Dalia Grybauskaite announced that she would be running for office again. She is the main favourite in the election. She won in the first round of the presidential election on 17th May 2009 and she became the first woman to occupy this post. She was designated the "best elected president" in the country's history. She may win a second mandate in the first round this time also.

If none of the candidates is appointed in the first round, a second one will take place on the same day as the European elections, i.e. 25th May.

A 2nd Mandate for Dalia Grybauskaite?

Aged 58, Dalia Grybauskaite is an economist, former Finance Minister (2001-2004) in the government led by Algirdas Brazauskas (Social Democratic Party, LSP), whom the head of state considers as one of her mentors. After having led negotiations for Lithuania's accession to the European Union she became European Commissioner for the Budget and Financial Programming. "Her role is important for the public opinion because many people think she is competent given her experience as Finance Minister and Commissioner for the Budget of the European Union," maintains the director of the Institute for International Relations and Political Science in Vilnius, Ramunas Vilpisauskas.

During her mandate Dalia Grybauskaite has supported the measures taken by the government led by Andrius Kubilius (Homeland Union, TS-LK) 2008-2012: a reduction in civil servants' retirement pensions to support State finances and to protect the pegging of the national currency, the litas, with the euro. The low budgetary deficit and inflation rate at present is helping Vilnius to stay on course for the adoption of the single currency in 2015. The Lithuanians are however concerned about this change in currency, notably because of the effect it might have on prices, the rise of which they are anticipating.

The outgoing President, who is standing as an inde-

pendent candidate, has the support of the opposition Homeland Union-Conservatives (TS-LK), the Christian Party (KP) and the Liberal Movement (LRLS). Romas Svedas is her campaign director.

Recent events in Ukraine notably in Crimea (qualified in Lithuania as "Russian aggression") have raised questions about national security. "Europe is facing an attack. War and occupation are not words of a distant past which we simply find in history books; at present there is a real danger of war in Europe. In fact we are practically on the verge of a new Cold War," declared Ms Grybauskaite. According to public opinion, nearly 9 Lithuanians in 10 (87%) think that Russia may try to occupy their country or part of it.

The outgoing president has banned the leaders of the Labour Party (DP) from attending meetings involving defence issues at present since she believes that the Labour leaders are under Russia's influence. She also declared that she supported the project of the government led by Prime Minister Algirdas Butkevicius (Social Democratic Party, LSP) which rallies the Social Democratic Party, the Labour Party (DP), For Order and Justice (TT) and Electoral Action of Poles (LLRA), to increase the defence budget for this to achieve 2% of the GDP by 2026. Vilnius spends an annual 0.8% of its GDP on defence (ie the lowest percentage of the NATO countries). It is due to rise to 1% by 2016.

The other candidates

Six other people are running in the presidential election alongside Dalia Grybauskaitė:

- Zigmantas Balcytis (Social Democratic Party, LSP), MEP and Finance and Transport Minister;
- Arturas Zuokas (Civic Movement for the Revival of the Homeland and the Future –TAIP), Mayor of Vilnius since 2011;
- Bronis Rope (Lithuanian Peasant and Greens Union, LVLS), Mayor of Ignalina, a town in the north west of the country known for its nuclear power station (which lies in the neighbouring town in of Visaginas);
- Naglis Puteikis, MP and former member of the Homeland Union-Conservatives (TS-LK);
- Arturas Paulauskas (Labour Party, DP), MP and former leader of Parliament (2000-2006);
- Valdemar Tomasevski (Electoral Action of Poles, LLRA), MEP.

The former president of the Republic Rolandas Paksas (For Order and Justice, TT), impeached as Head of State by the Seimas (parliament) on 6th April 2004, was prevented from running in the election by the Central Electoral Commission (VRK) which with 10 votes against 4 (Vyngantas Kastanauskas (DP), Irena Malinauskienė, (Voice of Courage, NK) Danute Markeliuniene (TT) and Valdemar Urban (LLRA)), deemed that a person (head of State, judge in the Constitutional Court, Supreme Court or Appeal Court) who has been tried in court during his time in office, who has infringed the Constitution, who has broken his oath or been dismissed from his parliamentary mandate cannot be elected head of State or be appointed to a post which

requires he or she take oath. Rolandas Paksas maintained that 47% of Lithuanians wanted him to stand and accused the commission of having "spat in their face".

Arturas Paulauskas declared "I decided to take part in the presidential election because in my opinion the present head of State is not doing a good job and that a president should not act as she is acting. What she does is chaotic, incoherent and without any clear perspective; autocratic law does not lead to anything positive and shows that democracy is weak. The result is that the electorate is divided."

The Presidential Post

The President of the Republic is elected every five years by direct universal suffrage. His powers are limited: he is the supreme leader of the armies and State security; he appoints the diplomatic representatives abroad in international organisations; he proposes the candidates for the post of president and magistrates in the Supreme Court of Justice, the Appeal Court and the Courts of Justice of other administrative divisions in the country, since the appointments are the responsibility of the Seimas, the only chamber in Parliament. Finally the head of State is not allowed by the Constitution to govern for more than two consecutive mandates.

Any person who wants to run in the presidential election must be at least 40 years old, put forward a minimum of 20,000 voter signatures who support him and pay a deposit of around 11,525 litas (3,340 €) which is paid back if he wins at least 7% of the votes cast.

Reminder of the results of the presidential election of 17th May 2009 in Lithuania

Turnout: 51.8%

Candidates	No of votes won	% of votes cast
Dalia Grybauskaitė (independent)	950 407	69,1
Algirdas Butkevicius (Social Democratic Party, LSP)	162 665	11,8
Valentinas Mazuronis (For Order and Justice, TT)	84 656	6,2
Valdemar Tomasevski (Electoral Action of Poles, LLRA)	65 255	4,7
Kazimira Prunskienė (Lithuanian Peasants and Green Union, LVLS)	53 778	3,9
Loreta Grauziniene (Labour Party, DP)	49 686	3,6
Ceslovas Jezerkas (independent)	9 191	0,7

Source : Central Electoral Commission <http://www.vrk.lt/balsavimo-rezultatai-2009-prezidento>

According to a poll by Vilmorus in March Dalia Grybauskaitė is due to win 40.9% of the vote on 11th May (she is credited with 50.6% of the vote if we take into account the choice of those interviewed who say they are certain to vote in the first round of the election).

Zigmantas Balcytis is due to come 2nd position with 10.3% of the vote ahead of Arturas Paulauskas who is due to win 9.6% of their vote and Bronis Rope (4.1%). Valdemar Tomasevski is due to win 3.4% of the vote and Arturas Zuokas 2.3%.

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