



**SEIMAS OF THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA  
COMMITTEE ON EUROPEAN AFFAIRS**

**SEIMAS OF THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**OPINION  
ON THE PROPOSALS ON THE EVALUATION OF THE FUTURE OF THE  
EUROPEAN UNION AND ON THE INTERESTS OF THE REPUBLIC OF  
LITHUANIA**

18 September 2020 No 100-P-78/105-P-59

Vilnius

The Committee on European Affairs of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania (hereinafter referred to as the Committee) and the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania,

*continuing* the debate on the future of the European Union (hereinafter referred to as the Union or the Community) in the context of the Conference on the Future of the European Union,

*having looked over* the material from the meetings of the Working Group for Drafting the Opinion of the Committee on European Affairs of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania on the Vision of the Future of the European Union (hereinafter referred to as the Working Group), set up by the Committee at its meeting on 8 May 2020,

*further consistently adhering to* the opinion and positions set out in the Committee Opinion of 2 April 2014 on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations; Committee Opinion No 100-S-8 of 20 April 2016 on the Proposal for a Council Decision adopting the provisions amending the Act concerning the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage (hereinafter referred to as the Committee Opinion of 20 April 2016); Committee Decision No 100-S-19 of 8 November

2017 on the Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation No 1141/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2014 on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations; Protocol Resolution No 100-P-6 of 26 January 2018; and other decisions of the Committee on the future of Europe,

*noting that* this Opinion constitutes today's European policy guidelines for Lithuania to adhere while taking the position that changes in, and brought about by the functioning of, the Union will be driven by real necessity,

hereby take the view that geopolitics based on common values is a fundamental principle of Lithuania's foreign policy. As a member of democratic organisations (the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (hereinafter referred to as NATO)), the Republic of Lithuania should act with a view to maintaining and strengthening the democratic principles and policies of the internal and external action of the Union and NATO;

underline that the future of the Community, the union of all the Member States, must be built jointly by all of us as equal partners. Lithuania's position on the future of the Community must rest on national interests. We must support the integration of the Union, particularly in those areas where Lithuania is vulnerable to external pressure and integration can strengthen its security;

note that the overarching and undisputed common goal of the Member States for the future is to consolidate and further develop the European project for the benefit of future generations. Our Union must be democratic, united, strong and prosperous. Its development must ensure security and well-being for all of us, that is the Member States of the Union and their citizens;

firmly believe that the unity of the Union must be preserved. Member States can avail themselves of the opportunities for closer cooperation provided for in the Treaties of the Union, but ensuring transparency and openness in this process is essential to avoid any insurmountable criteria for other Member States to subsequently join this cooperation. Some Members States of the Union currently still remain outside certain areas of integration (e.g. euro area, Schengen area). The acceleration of the multi-speed Europe would only increase

the exclusion of Member States and make it more difficult to achieve convergence. Therefore, the priority should be given to the involvement of all the Member States of the Union in common processes and instruments;

advocate for more effective joint action within the limits of the Treaties of the European Union. The Treaties provide the Union with the foundation, which is agreed upon by all the Member States of their own free will and which enables a balance not only between the institutions of the Union but also between the Member States, so that each Member State of the Community and its people are equal with others, so that the voice of each Member State is heard, and so that the Union does not deny the sovereignty of its Member States. Unjustified proposals to amend the Treaties of the European Union may increase the distrust of the Union's citizens in the Union because these proposals may be seen as manifestations of volatility and fragility of the Union and as testimony to the instability of the Union's legal framework;

strongly adhere to the position that the inter-institutional framework for the functioning of the Union set out in the Treaties in force is appropriate for the achievement of the objectives formulated in the Union's Strategic Agenda for 2019–2024. Proposals for institutional changes should also be based on a real need;

approve of preserving the existing balance between the institutions of the Union and the Member States and of strengthening of the democratic scrutiny exercised by the Member States in respect of the institutions of the Community;

take the view that the present-day European Commission has an optimal number of members;

consider that the merger of the posts of the President of the European Commission and the President of the European Council is unjustified by the very nature of these institutions. Notably, the European Commission safeguards the general interests of the Union and must have independence, while the European Council is the principal body representing all the Member States of the Union and coordinating their national interests;

doubt the usefulness of the post of the Union's Minister for Finance and point out that the establishment of this post would not have a decisive impact on the completion of the

economic and monetary union, but would have a negative impact on the interinstitutional balance;

remind that the European Council, composed of representatives of all the Member States of the Union, rejected the principle of *Spitzenkandidaten* in 2018 as a restriction on opinions of the Member States and on the discretion of the European Council. Adherence to this principle would undermine the current inter-institutional balance enshrined in the Treaties. The Committees consider that the European Council must remain independent when deciding on a candidate for President of the European Commission and that no automaticity related to election results must be acceptable; and consistently take the same view and highlight that no new circumstances or arguments justifying the need for this institutional change have arisen;

reiterate the doubts expressed in the Committee's Opinion of 20 April 2016 about the idea of transnational lists, since failure to ensure a specific number of MEPs from each Member State under the Treaties and Council Decision 2013/312/EU would jeopardise the accountability and the proper representation of citizens of small Member States at the European Parliament. The Committees consider that a single pan-European constituency and transnational lists of candidates for the European Parliament would practically fail to ensure an equal playing field for candidates from small Member States to participate in the elections, since these candidates would end up at the bottom of the list when voting for transnational lists throughout the Union;

support the efforts to improve the decision-making process in the Union, but consider that the extension of qualified majority voting instead of unanimity to the Union's sensitive policies would fail to strengthen its unity and solidarity. Abandoning of solidarity for more effective decision-making would undermine the legitimacy of decisions within the Union. The role of national parliaments in decision-making on issues of particular relevance to the state would be made weaker because actually national parliaments grant veto rights to accountable governments of the Member States, thus ensuring the legitimacy of unanimous decisions. The Committees are convinced that unanimity in certain areas of particular relevance to national sovereignty helps to preserve the significant contribution of large and small Member States to addressing common issues, particularly in crisis situations;

reiterate that the principle of subsidiarity ensures that the Union acts where necessary and only in areas where it can bring greater benefits than national or local measures. This is particularly relevant when considering shifts in competences between the Union and the Member States. The competences of the Union and of the Member States enshrined in the Treaties of the Union have been established in accordance with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality in order to ensure that decisions are taken as close to citizens as possible and limited to what is necessary to achieve the objectives. The Committees remind that all competences not conferred on the Union by the Treaties remain with the Member States;

note that many existing agreements that are of benefit to the Union and its citizens have not been fully implemented so far. Prior to the introduction of new rules, compliance with previously agreed rules must be ensured. In addition, existing instruments or tools must be fully exploited before new ones are designed;

remind that, in accordance with Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities;

underline that the rule of law based on the supremacy of law is a cornerstone of any modern constitutional democracy and one of the fundamental principles stemming from the constitutional traditions common to all the Member States of the Union, with the responsibility of ensuring the adherence to this principle resting primarily with each Member State;

note that the Union will function properly only when the rights and freedoms of its citizens are guaranteed and only when we create and strengthen a culture of the rule of law. The Committees welcome the efforts of the European Commission in this area and look forward to the annual Rule of Law Report. We believe that this tool will not only promote the rule of law culture in the Union, but will also contribute to a positive outcome of serious discussions and hearings that take place at the Council. Therefore, we place constant emphasis on the principles of objectivity, proportionality, impartiality and effective cooperation on these matters;

recognise that the Union faces ever new, sometimes unprecedented challenges while having limited resources to counter them and support the target set by the European

Council on 12 December 2019 as regards the achieving of a climate-neutral Union by 2050 in view of the objectives of the Paris Agreement. In future, the Union's budgets must reflect the needs arising from new challenges (climate change, migration, security, etc.) while maintaining the focus on the Union's long-term priorities enshrined in the Treaties (e.g. cohesion and agriculture). In this context, the Committees take the view that the Union needs a bigger budget and advocate an open debate on the financing of the Union's budget, including the Union's new own resources and revenue, and, at the same time, underline that each proposal must be assessed individually and based not only on a cost-benefit analysis but also on maintaining a specific role of national parliaments in budgetary matters;

note that, although we currently discuss alternative taxation systems, the application of the Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base would benefit only some Member States while substantially reducing competitiveness within the Union;

underline that the proposal for substantially changing the Union's procedure of tax decision-making by introducing qualified majority voting would mean less democratic representation of the Member States and would hinder the convergence needed to ensure effective functioning of the single market, growth and fair tax competition;

take the view that the Union's financial policy should continue to focus on the economic, social and territorial cohesion of the Member States; rest on the principles of efficiency of the Union budget, simplification of rules and procedures, transparency and accountability, strategic sustainability, and complementarity and consistency of measures; promote economic convergence and resilience and macroeconomic stability; safeguard growth potential; and respond to emerging new challenges;

note that, for the Union's financial policy to be effective, agreed rules must not be ignored. The Member States need to make every progress towards sustainable finance and the stronger Union as a whole, i.e. to show solidarity, if not by contributing resources, then by making efforts to achieve overall stability;

welcome the new economic recovery instrument Next Generation EU, presented by the European Commission along with the adjusted long-term budget of the Union, which is aimed not only at the recovery of the Member States from the crisis caused by COVID-19, but also at structural reforms, including green and digital transformation and resilience of the

Member States' economies, and hope that those funds borrowed from future generations of Europeans will contribute to the recovery of the Union's economy. A modern, strong and competitive European economy is a guarantee for the prosperity of the Union's citizens. Furthermore, the Committees emphasize that, in discussions on fiscal capacity, the appropriate balance between solidarity and responsibility of the Member States has crucial importance;

welcome the initiatives to combat tax fraud, tax evasion and tax havens;

take the view that, in order to strengthen the economic and monetary union, the banking union must be a priority, i.e. a Single Resolution Mechanism (SRM) must be completed and a European Deposit Insurance Scheme (EDIS) must be set up. A completed capital markets union would provide businesses with better opportunities for making use of alternative sources of finance and would facilitate the free movement of capital within the Union;

are cautious about the moves towards distinguishing the euro area in the context of the common financial policy of the Union. The discussions on issues of interest to all the Member States (e.g. completion of the banking union) must continue within the Euro Group in an inclusive format, i.e. with participation of all the Member States of the Community;

remind that, in accordance with Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union, the Union's aim is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples. This provision applies not only to the domestic policy, but also to the foreign policy of the Union;

point out that foreign policy instruments agreed by the Union should focus primarily on strengthening and developing the zones of democratisation and stability in the Union's neighbourhood and worldwide. To this end, the Community needs a clear strategy and coordinated compliance with it;

note that, by strengthening its role in the world, the Union aims to consolidate democracy and sustainable development of countries worldwide. However, it is only in unity that the Union can play a significant role on a global scale. The worldwide role of the Union should get stronger by consolidating a common approach on foreign and security policies of the Member States, rather than simplifying decision-making;

state that the United States of America (hereinafter referred to as the US) is an indispensable partner of the Union. The Union's objective is to strengthen cooperation with the US in all areas, including those where it is currently difficult to find common solutions. We must strive for a unified geopolitical approach between the Union and the US towards the challenges of today's world. Understanding of the importance of close cooperation between the Union and the US is a vital interest of Lithuania and its guarantee of a safe future in the Euro-Atlantic area;

underline that NATO, which is a strategic partner of the Union in the field of security and defence, plays a unique role in the Euro-Atlantic collective defence and security system. The US and NATO are the guarantors of Lithuania's security. Committees are convinced that, in order to ensure a safer Europe and a safer world, the measures taken by the Union and NATO must complement each other, consolidate both organisations, and ensure synergies and cooperation, particularly in such areas as military mobility, combating hybrid threats and disinformation, improvement of cyber security, strengthening of resilience, development of military capabilities; and recognise that the nature of transatlantic relations calls for a more equal sharing of transatlantic obligations in the area of security and defence;

note that the United Kingdom (hereinafter referred to as the UK) remains a particularly important neighbour and partner of the Union even after leaving it. Mutually beneficial economic and political relations between the UK and the Union need to be developed. The Committees are in favour of a particularly close relationship between the Union and the UK in the areas of trade and services, mobility of persons and coordination of social security; and are convinced that the UK is and will remain a strategic partner of the Union in the area of security and defence;

take the view that the European Neighbourhood Policy is indivisible and must safeguard the security and economic interests of the Union both in the east and south of the Union; and note that European neighbouring countries cannot be treated equally and the scope of cooperation between the Union and its neighbouring countries must therefore be differentiated on the basis of mutual interest and obligations. The Committees affirm that the Eastern Partnership, as well as the Southern Neighbourhood, must remain a strategic geopolitical direction for the Union. We need to agree on an ambitious and motivating agenda of the Eastern Partnership concurrently keeping the balance between inclusion and differentiation. The Committees doubt whether stability in the continental Europe can be



maintained without the enlargement of the Union, however, underline that enlargement must take place in accordance with the accession criteria set out in the Treaties of the Union, consider that the Western Balkans are a successful example of the enlargement process of the Union, which should further promote euro-integration reforms, trust and reconciliation in this region, and recognise that the Western Balkan countries' choice of values should be confirmed by their joining to the common foreign and security policy of the Union. The aspiration for and realistic prospect of accession to the Community without being blocked by the Member States will lead to changes in line with the interests of the Union and, in the long term, to security and stability in other neighbouring regions of the Union as well;

consider that the Union's ambitious trade policy, as an important element of recovery from the economic crises in the Union, should become a common goal to achieve economic recovery, diversify supply chains, and enhance Europe's economic resilience. We must continue our efforts to expand the Union's network of free trade agreements, as well as resume and successfully conclude negotiations with the US on a comprehensive free trade agreement, thereby creating the world's largest free trade and investment area. We must also pay particular attention to strengthening the trade instruments of the World Trade Organisation and the Union in order to protect the Community from unfair competition from third countries;

note that the People's Republic of China is gaining ever greater political, economic and military power, thus increasing its geopolitical influence and often jeopardising the unity and essential interests of the Union. The Union should properly assess the changing geopolitical situation and work out a common position of the Community on its relations with the People's Republic of China in order to ensure the highest democratic, environmental, social, fair business practice and, above all, human rights standards promoted by the Union, as well as to safeguard strategic economic independence enabling stronger export controls and protection of strategic infrastructure facilities in Europe;

draw attention to the Russian Federation's aggressive and unfriendly policies that violate international commitments, place constant geopolitical strain on Lithuania, the Union and third countries, and receive insufficient consideration as regards their negative impact, and remind that the Russian Federation has repeatedly violated the rules of international law by making attempts on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Union's neighbours. The Committees state their firm support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of

Ukraine and Georgia with internationally recognized borders and also take the view that the Union must continue a consistent policy of non-recognition of the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol. The Committees note that, for eliminating the threats posed by the policies of the Russian Federation, the Union needs a coordinated policy with a long-term perspective to enable not only a proper response to the unfriendly moves by the Russian Federation, but also democratic changes in this country. The five guiding principles agreed by the Union in 2016 as regards its common policy towards Russia are relevant and should be reaffirmed and consolidated in a sustainable way;

agree that the strengthening of international relations based on international law must remain one of the Union's top priorities. Violations of international law must be responded to in a principled manner, including through an effective policy of restrictive measures and a regime of appropriate sanctions. Committees support the determination of the Union to establish the global human rights sanctions regime affecting all global players, both decision-makers and executors, who are directly responsible for gross violations of human rights worldwide. The Union has been and remains firm and united in its response to the international law violations committed by the Russian Federation through aggressive action;

underline that it is of particular importance for the security of the Union that all nuclear power plants operating or under construction in the neighbouring countries comply with the highest standards of nuclear safety and environmental protection. The implementation of nuclear safety and environmental requirements must be an integral part of the Union's foreign policy. The whole Union should adhere to Lithuania's position of principle regarding the prevention of access of electricity, to the markets of the Member States of the Union, from neighbouring countries that operate unsafe nuclear power plants, which do not meet the Union's requirements of stress tests on nuclear safety or violate international nuclear safety and environmental conventions. This should be reflected in all strategic documents of the Union;

support the opinion that the Union must strengthen its role and take action in multilateral formats in coordination with the Member States;

remind that the security of the Member States and of their citizens depends on an effectively functioning common area of freedom, security and justice of the Union. Strengthening Union's influence in the world, developing its internal security policies, and

ensuring its greater ability to meet global challenges and threats, such as terrorism and organised crime, directly contribute to our security. Coordinated action by, and solidarity between, the Member States in crisis situations are also essential for the security of the Union as a whole;

note that one of the main pillars of the Union's social and economic model is the free movement of people and goods within the Union and the safe and efficient movement of people and goods across the Union's external borders;

underline that the Schengen area is one of the Union's greatest achievements that needs to be taken further. However, the safety aspect is important to be kept in mind because the Union's internal borders will be secure and open only as long as the Union's external borders are secure and efficiently protected. Therefore, the measures for enhancing the protection of the external border must remain our top priority;

take the view that, aiming at effective functioning and maximum advantage, the Schengen area must be flexible and able to adapt to a changing situation without concurrently creating unjustified barriers to the free movement of people. Temporary reintroduction of internal border controls must be justified and proportionate, and the applied procedures must be clear, balanced and as transparent as possible. We must ensure that internal border controls are reintroduced to no greater extent and for no longer period than necessary in the current circumstances. This must only be used as a last resort when all alternative measures are insufficient for containing the existing threat;

agree that the Union's asylum and immigration policy, which must be effective, humane and safe, is also crucial for building trust in the Schengen area. The experience has proved the need for a holistic approach. We need not only to know who enters our area of free movement, but also to ensure that these are people who really need international help or who, by virtue of their high qualifications, can contribute to the growth of the Union. People illegally staying in the Union must be returned to the countries of origin or transit. This requires not only proper procedures for border crossing but also security checks carried out by the Member States and an effective return policy. Cooperation with countries of origin and transit of migrants must become one of the most important measures to prevent irregular migration, while readmission agreements with countries of origin of migrants must be a cornerstone of return policies. Preventive measures are an effective way of averting crises in

the area of migration. Immigration and asylum policies should rest on a clear scheme for the integration of people;

are convinced that, when implementing asylum and immigration policies, the Member States should be guided by transparent criteria based on the principle of solidarity and made comprehensible to all the Member States. The Committees consistently support voluntary, resolute and comprehensive contribution of the Member States to addressing the influx of third-country nationals into the territories of the Member States of the Union;

note that the social situation and labour relations in Europe are changing significantly as a result of increased labour mobility, new business models, development of the digital market, changes in the concept of sharing of family responsibilities, and other circumstances. The Committees are concerned that the demographic situation in the Union as a whole is changing in an unfavourable direction, draw attention to particularly low birth rates, underline that demographic challenges pose a threat to the national security of the Member States, and note that decisions addressing the consequences of the demographic changes in the Union are needed as urgently as today;

point out that demographic trends, including a rapidly ageing population and likely longer life expectancy, will increase the need to promote health and long-term care in Europe. This challenge should be seen as one of the opportunities to create new services, new jobs, and new forms of cooperation, as well as promote social development. Access to well-being technologies and digitalisation can help to address these challenges;

support the commitment made by the EU27 leaders, when marking the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome on 25 March 2017, to work jointly towards a social Europe, which facilitates economic and social progress, cohesion and convergence, takes into account the diversity of national systems, guarantees equal rights and equal opportunities for all, combats discrimination, exclusion and poverty, guarantees quality education and studies, protects cultural heritage, and promotes cultural diversity;

remind that we have agreed on the European Pillar of Social Rights, which makes it possible to reconcile economic policies with the social environment while addressing key issues related to equal opportunities and changes in the working environment and society;

understand that the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights is the responsibility of the Member States and take the view that, in order to reduce poverty and inequalities in income, the Member States should use the Pillar as a tool for improving the structure of the tax and social benefits systems. The effective utilisation of the advantages offered by the European Pillar of Social Rights and the European Semester would contribute to addressing the challenges related to equal opportunities, social inclusion, decent working conditions and, as a result, the demographic situation in Europe;

welcome the European Commission's contribution to the monitoring and analysis of demographic processes in the Union and the Commission's productive and continuous efforts to coordinate the Member States' policies in the area of social inclusion and social protection. The Committees note that family policy falls within the competence of the Member States, but, in view of the complex demographic challenge, call for further attention to this important policy at the Union level;

consider that the Union, in cooperation with the Member States, should pursue a demographic policy that includes the analysis and dissemination of good practices in the Member States and the development of a family-friendly policy for families living in the Union by ensuring family-friendly conditions for having and raising children;

take the view that the issues concerning the future of the Union are extremely important and complex and, having regard to the interinstitutional agreement on the Conference on the Future of Europe, look forward to continuing active involvement in this debate and contributing, through direct representation of the interests of the citizens of the Union, to seeking solutions that would promote the well-being of citizens, ensure greater security, and offer new prospects.

Chair of the Committee

Gediminas Kirkilas

Chair of the Committee

Juozas Bernatoniš