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Green Europeanization through the EU Green Deal in a Baltic state: navigating political and societal consensus in Lithuania

Sima Rakutiene✉
Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania

Abstract: This article aims to trace the implementation of the EU Green Deal in Lithuania by analyzing the attitudes of the political elite, the governance process and public opinion polls. To what extent are the Lithuanian political elite and public willing to accept specific provisions of the EU Green Deal? The paper argues that the policy is perceived as 'green Europeanisation' coming from the top (EU level) - but that, given the financial incentives in certain sectors in Lithuania, it is seen as a potential catalyst for the economy, i.e. more positively than negatively, which can also contribute to security policy objectives by achieving energy independence through investment in renewable energy resources. A political consensus is emerging among Lithuania's mainstream political parties in this area. However, in other areas - particularly agriculture and transport - there is more criticism and disapproval from the population.

Keywords: EU, climate change policy, political parties, Lithuania, climate governance, green Europeanization

Introduction

Since 2019, when the European Commission launched the European Green Deal (EGD) with short- and long-term targets, EU Member States have started to intensify the national level debate on the process of Europeanizing this policy. In order to achieve a climate neutral economic consumption pattern by 2050, the EU Climate Change Act was adopted at the EU level in 2021. Research assessing the adaptation and 'mitigation' strategies of the EU climate change strategy at national level (Lesnikowski et al., 2021; Rembling, 2018; Singh et al., 2022) identifies a number of different strands - such as the importance of public opinion, EU 'centrism', sectoral governance in different countries assessing the impact of specific sectors on climate change and the adaptation of EU policies. It highlights the importance of governance studies in assessing progress in the implementation of these climate policies, focusing on the transformation process (Ulibarri et al., 2022).

✉ Associate Professor, Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy; Senior Researcher, V. Kavolis Institute, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania; e-mail: sima.rakutiene@vdu.lt.

This article examines the readiness to adopt certain provisions of the EU Green Deal among the Lithuanian political elite and the general public.
Lithuania's climate change awareness has been relatively moderate, with surveys consistently ranking the country at an average level of public knowledge compared to other EU Member States (BNS, 2024). Prior to the implementation of EU climate legislation, discussions about climate change and mitigation strategies at the highest levels of national politics and in public discourse were infrequent and often limited. However, the adoption of binding EU regulations and the conditionality of EU funding for climate-related measures have prompted Lithuanian political parties to take a more active approach to these issues. This shift is reflected in the increasing inclusion of the EU Green Deal issues in political programmes (Carter, 2013) and imposition of EU laws. As a result, Lithuania illustrates a classic case of top-down Europeanization, where national policy is largely shaped in response to external EU directives rather than driven by domestic, proactive initiatives.

Research on the Lithuanian political discourse and attitudes of political parties towards climate policy is scarce, with a focus on sectoral analyses, mostly, (Sabūnas, 2024; Šatienė, 2023; Streimikiene, 2021) and this study aims to fill this gap. Like other countries in the region, such as Poland (Tomaszewski, 2020) and Latvia (Sabūnas, 2024) Lithuania considers energy and renewable resources the most important sector. However, in the neighbouring countries, the targets set by the European Commission are considered a major challenge (Tomaszewski, 2020). In neighbouring Estonia, adaptation to the requirements of the EU's Green Deal is described as "reluctant" Europeanisation (Vilson, 2020). Meanwhile, Latvia's "climate mitigation goals are <…> among the lowest in the EU" (Sabūnas, 2024, p.772).

This study employs the process tracing method to examine the EGD policy implementation in Lithuania by analyzing the main causal mechanism: the governance process, the attitudes of the political elite, and public opinion polls. The paper argues that people are most motivated to change their habits by financial incentives and perceived added value. The paper highlights that the main factors influencing successful climate change policies implementation are (a) political consensus, (b) sustainable governance and financial incentives, and (c) favourable public opinion.

This article begins by examining academic literature and EU policy documents to outline the main areas, stages, and goals of the EGD governance framework. It then focuses on Lithuania as a case study, analyzing the governance of EGD in Lithuania, identifying the main coordinating institutions, sectoral governance structures and sector-specific challenges. Chapter 4 delves deeper into examining the positions of Lithuanian parliamentary parties on EGD. Finally, it provides an overview of public opinion in Lithuania based on the results of representative surveys.

1. Literature review: governance of the European Green Deal and *Green Europeanisation*

Since 2019 the EGD programme has become the cornerstone of the European Commission's term between 2019-2024 (Becker, 2024). This political programme has also highlighted the unique role of the EU in achieving international climate change policy goals, even constructing a certain political myth - a narrative of exceptionalism with the aim of increasing political legitimacy among citizens (Moulton, 2023). As Moulton argues, "the EGD may be a 'grand project' which could renew enthusiasm for the EU and integration" (Moulton, 2023, p.764). Moulton stresses that this political agenda creates a recognizable 'Green Europe myth', which is capable of replacing the outdated and tired concepts of 'prosperity' and 'well-being' (Moulton, 2023, p.766).

While many researchers acknowledge the EGD's ambition to establish the EU as a global leader in climate action, some critique its framework as reflecting a Eurocentric approach to international climate governance (Almeida et al., 2023). The EGD's implementation relies on a multi-level governance structure (Baute, 2024), where policy decisions made at the EU level must be carried out effectively through national and regional cooperation. Nils Stockmann refers to the EGD as a model of sectoral governance architecture (Stockmann, 2024). As such, the concept of governance plays a key role in analyzing the EGD and its connection to Europeanisation.

Europeanisation is defined as the EU's characteristic of influencing EU member states and other countries through socialization, imitation and conditionality (Schimmelfennig, 2015). The concept of 'green Europeanisation' can be delineated as a process of Europeanisation that aims to effect transformative changes in the socio-economic model through the implementation of the EU's *green requirements*, including EU legal norms and standards, and through the utilization of EU green finances.

Following the adoption of the EU Climate Law in 2021, all 27 EU Member States made a legal commitment to transition to a low-carbon economy by 2050. This milestone initiated what Moulton (2023) describes as a top-down process of 'green Europeanisation', starting at the EU institutional level and mandating action by Member States to implement environmentally sustainable policies. The overarching climate goal was divided into three phases - short term (2030), medium term (2040) and long term (2050) - each with its own specific targets and indicators. In the long term, the EU aims to become the first climate-neutral continent by transforming both economic activity and consumption patterns. In the short term, the goal is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels (Regulation (EU) 2021/1119). According to the European Commission (2020), the climate law sets binding targets and measurable indicators and requires Member States to implement the necessary measures at both national and EU level,

with an emphasis on equity, solidarity and cross-sectoral contribution to the green transition (European Commission, 2020).

It is important to recognize that the European Green Deal (EGD) goes beyond environmental concerns; it represents a comprehensive effort to transform the entire economy. This transformation involves the implementation of green technologies to achieve the EGD goals, particularly in sectors with high pollution levels such as energy, transport, waste management, agriculture and industry. This approach is consistent with what Oberthür and Von Homeyer (2023) describe as procedural governance - a methodical and sector-specific transformation process.

Official documents from the European Commission (2020; 2024a) emphasize that the transition to a greener economy must become an irreversible process. At the same time, they stress that this governance framework must remain transparent and predictable for all economic stakeholders - employers and consumers alike - to ensure the fairness and inclusiveness of the transition to a low-carbon economy. Sharon Baute (2024) also emphasizes that public support is a critical factor in the political feasibility of implementing the EGD.

To support these ambitions, the EU has committed substantial financial resources and developed the concept of *green finance*. According to European Commission (2024a) documents, the EU aims to mobilize at least €1 trillion in sustainable investments over the next decade. Additionally, 30% of the EU's 2021–2028 multiannual budget, along with a comparable portion of the NextGenerationEU (NGEU) recovery instrument, has been earmarked for green investments. The Commission also plans to finance 30% of NGEU expenditures through the issuance of green bonds (European Commission, 2024a).

Green finance is closely linked to the EU Cohesion Policy, which supports less-developed regions. The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) is required to allocate at least 30% of its funding, and the Cohesion Fund must commit 37% toward climate-related measures and green transition efforts. To further address regional disparities, a Just Transition Mechanism and Fund has been created to assist the sectors and communities most affected by environmental policy reforms and the broader green transformation (European Commission, 2024b).

Moreover, the Commission is actively working to attract private sector investment, mobilize public funds, and roll out long-term financing initiatives such as the InvestEU programme. However, as the economic model has evolved and the *'polluter pays'* principle (Baute, 2024) has gained momentum, the debate on how and where to introduce taxes and financial responsibility to support this transition has intensified.

2. Methodology: a case study of Lithuania

The present study employs the process-tracing method to elucidate the causal mechanism of the European Green Deal's implementation in Lithuania. As explained

by Derek Beach (p.700): "The strength of process tracing is that detailed knowledge is gained through the collection of within-case, 'mechanistic' evidence about how causal processes work in real-world cases". This article uses the case study of Lithuania to examine how different actors in society, including political parties, institutions and the general public, are reacting to the process of *green Europeanisation*, of which the main driver (root cause) is the EU level.

Lithuania's political system is characterized by a rather strong political polarization (see Table 1), and the formation of a government is inevitable without a coalition agreement. Three or four political parties are usually involved in government formation. Thus, coordination and consensus among political parties is a common political practice for the formation of a government and for the establishment of a common governmental programme.

Table 1. Lithuanian parliamentary political parties (2020-2024)

Political party	**Year of establishment**	**Self-positioning**	**Number of seats at the parliament 2020-2024**
The Homeland Union- Lithuanian Christian democrats	1993	Right-wing/conservatives	49
The Liberals' Movement	2006	Right-wing/liberals	12
The Freedom party	2019	Right-wing/liberals	10
The Union of Democrats "For Lithuania"[1]	2022	Centre-left/Democrats	16
The Social Democratic Party of Lithuania	1989/2001 (merge of parties)	Centre-Left/social-democrats	14
The Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union	2001	Centre-Left	17
The Lithuanian Regions party	2018	Left/ social democratic	9

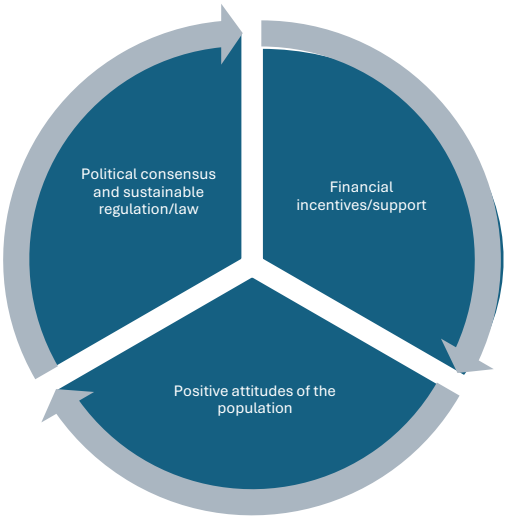
Source: data retrieved from the Lithuanian parliament (2024) website

Following the parliamentary elections in October 2024, a new center-left ruling majority and government was formed. However, this article analyses the preceding period, namely the 2020-2024 time-frame, when the parliamentary majority was constituted by right-wing political parties.

[1] This political force was formed when a big part of the elected MPs as representatives of the Lithuanian Peasants' and Greens' Union broke away to form a new political party.

The implementation of EGD necessitates economic transformation across various sectors, constituting a protracted process. A consensus among the main political parties is therefore essential to achieve lasting change in the area of economic transformation, the introduction of green technologies and the search for financial support for them. The present study posits that the efficacy of the EGD governance process is contingent upon a number of pivotal, mutually reinforcing factors and causes which includes a) the establishment of a political consensus and the concomitant sustainable and long-term, predictable legislation and governance, b) the provision of financial incentives and support to businesses and citizens, and c) the attitudes, willingness and commitment of citizens to green governance at the local level (see Figure 1). The study also explores the perceived added value of these changes.

Figure 1. Driving factors of the European Green Deal and climate policy implementation



Source: author's representation

The academic literature reviewed also identifies similar reasons, focusing on the role of the political and societal perspective. Baute's in-depth study of public opinion in Germany on the European Green Deal (EGD) shows a clear inclination of citizens towards EU initiatives that prioritize renewable energy, investment and policy reforms aimed at increasing social investment (Baute, 2024). The study also shows general public support for progressive taxation measures, especially higher tax rates for wealthy individuals, as a means of financing climate change mitigation efforts (Baute, 2024).

The Lithuanian case study is particularly compelling because Lithuania is a small EU Member State whose society remains among the most Euro-optimistic in the Union, with a population that generally trusts EU institutions and their decisions. Approximately "91% of Lithuanians believe that their country has benefited from EU membership" (Lithuania Co-create, 2024). The Lithuanian case study focuses on the period from 2019 to 2024, encompassing one complete political cycle, including parliamentary elections and subsequent government formation. It specifically evaluates the preferences and positions of parliamentary political parties during the 2020–2024 legislative period. Using Lithuania as a case study, this research investigates whether and to what extent there is a political consensus among parliamentary parties regarding the implementation of the European Green Deal (EGD). It aims to explore how national progress in implementing the EGD is influenced by factors such as political consensus, sectoral governance structures, financial incentives, and public support (see Table 2). The central research question addressed is: To what extent are Lithuania's political elite and the broader public willing to accept specific provisions of the EU Green Deal?

Table 2. Case study of Lithuania: operationalization and methods

Research question/object	**Method**	**Empirical dataset**
How do national institutions adapt to provisions of EGD? / Governance of EGD	Documents' analysis	National strategies, law linked to EGD, Climate change implementation agendas
To what extent and how do the political parties reflect EGD in their manifestos? / Political consensus	Documents' analysis Contents analysis (manual and WordCloud)	Manifestos, political programmes of all parliamentary political parties
What are the attitudes of the public and to what extent do they accept the EGD? /Societal attitudes	Secondary analysis of quantitative data (surveys) The survey data selected and used were those that reflect the public's views on the implementation of policies and measures related to the Green Deal in specific sectors (energy, waste management, transport)	Collected representative public opinion polls/surveys (Association Nature's Future, 2024; Baltic Research, 2023; BNS, 2024; ELTA, 2024; Ignitis Renewables, 2024)

Source: author's representation

The research methodology comprises the following primary approaches: an analysis of relevant documentation, encompassing EU legal acts pertaining to EGD, climate change management, and programmatic provisions. A review of documents relating to Lithuanian national climate change and mitigation strategies, as well as

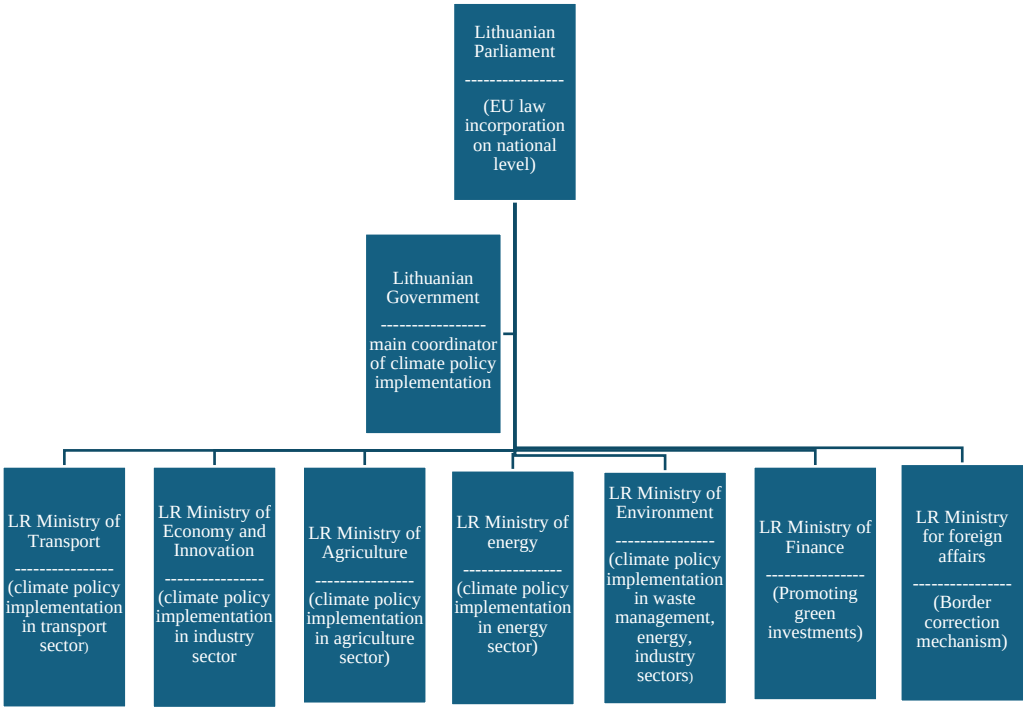
the management agendas of Lithuanian climate change. An examination of the manifestos of political parties, annual reports, and other relevant documents of national institutions and NGOs involved in climate change governance. A secondary statistical data analysis method was also employed, whereby the results of public opinion polls were selected, analyzed and collated, and surveys were conducted by various international and national institutions, NGOs and private organizations (see Table 2).

3. Green Europeanisation and governance: Lithuania's adaptation and climate mitigation strategies

Following the launch of the European Green Deal in 2019, Lithuania revised its National Climate change management policy strategy, originally approved in 2012 (Lithuanian Parliament, 2019). This revision aligned national policies with the objectives of the EGD and facilitated the establishment of a coordinated network of governmental and non-governmental actors. The purpose of this network is to assist national institutions in formulating and articulating Lithuania's interests, particularly in representing its positions within the EU decision-making processes in Brussels. A key focus of this strategy has been the identification of the sectors and industries most affected by climate policies (see Figure 2 and Table 3). Therefore, Lithuania—like other EU Member States—has initiated a national-level Europeanisation process aimed at mitigating the impacts of climate change, in accordance with EU legislation, decarbonization requirements, and access to green investment funding.

The national parliament and the Government Cabinet are the primary national institutions involved in this governance process, with the former playing a pivotal role in coordinating policy implementation when European law is transposed into national law. Concurrently, specific ministries bear responsibility for the governance process within their respective sectors (see Figure 2). The National Strategy sets out a requirement for Lithuania in the short term to "achieve a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions of at least 9% in 2030 compared to 2005" (Lithuanian Parliament, 2019; 2021). Consequently, the utilization of EU-wide funding should be contingent upon investment in green technologies. For example, Lithuania's National Climate Change Management Strategy highlights the European Commission's proposals for a re-evaluation of the new Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 to increase the budget for climate objectives by up to 25%, which would involve around €114 billion extra (Lithuanian Parliament, 2019).

Figure 2. EU climate change policy and EGD governance in Lithuania



Source: author's representation, compiled from Lithuania's National Policy Agenda for Climate Change Management, 2021

In 2021, the Seimas approved the National Agenda for Climate Change Management, which set short (2030), medium (2040) and long (2050) decarbonization targets (Lithuanian Government, 2023). These targets are clearly linked to those of the EU and include concrete indicators. The overarching objective is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by up to 70% by 2040 and 80% by 2050 compared to 1990 levels. The remaining 20% is planned and expected to be absorbed by natural sinks in land and forests (Lithuanian Ministry for Environment, 2024a). The seeking of the Lithuanian national climate change policy governance strategy is to develop a long-term vision to achieve climate change neutralization objectives (Lithuanian Ministry for Environment, 2024a).

The National Strategy has also emphasized key sectors (see Table 3) associated with peak pollution and climate change, with the objective of progressively reducing climate impacts. According to the Lithuanian National GHG Inventory Report, in 2022, the transport (31%) and energy (30%) sectors will account for the largest share of greenhouse gas emissions in Lithuania. Agriculture (21%) was the third largest sector, followed by industry (12%) and waste (4%). The Lithuanian Environmental Protection Agency stated that in 2022, 60% of GHG

emissions will originate from fuel combustion (Agency of Lithuanian Environmental Protection, 2024). In these sectors, which are the largest emitters in Lithuania, there has been a marked improvement in the situation compared to 1990 (GHG emissions have been reduced in all sectors except transport, which has seen an increase in GHG emissions).

Table 3 Lithuanian most polluting and affected sectors of the EGD politics

Sector	**Transport**	**Energy**	**Agriculture**	**Industry**	**Waste management**
Pollution / GHG (2022)	31.7%	30.3%	21.5%	12.3%	4.3%
GHG emissions (2022) compared to 1990	3%	-79%	-55%	-47%	-50%
GHG emissions (2022) compared to 2005	43%	-36%	-35%	-0,4%	-48%
Target (2030)	50% of the population contributes to preserving the environment, - 40% of GHG emissions compared to 1990				
Target (2040)	70 % of electric cars and low-emission vehicles	Energy from RES (renewable energy source) - 85%	increasing the area of permanent grassland, non-agricultural technologies, reducing pesticides	Promoting sustainable business, investing in Green Technology	Circular economy, Waste sorting
Target (2050)	Counteracting GHG impacts				

Source: author's representation from national reports (Lithuanian Ministry for Environment, 2024 b)

However, a comparison of the trends observed over the last two decades (2005-2022) reveals a contrasting picture. During this period, transport sector emissions have increased by as much as 43%, while emissions from the agricultural sector have decreased by only 0.4% (Environmental Protection Agency of the Republic of Lithuania, 2024). These two sectors are identified as the most problematic for further meeting the EU's climate change and greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction targets.

Lithuanian institutions in the energy sector are actively promoting investment in renewable energy sources, which the national strategy identifies as a key strength and opportunity for achieving climate goals and transitioning to alternative energy sources (Lithuanian Parliament, 2019). In this area, Lithuania has been relatively successful in achieving its climate change policy goals, as investments in renewable energy - especially solar and wind energy - have steadily increased. This area has been prioritized through the integration of security policy with the European Green Deal (EGD), which recognizes that investment in renewable energy is essential to achieve energy independence in a context of geopolitical instability, increased risk of hybrid threats and fluctuating global energy prices (Barkauskaitė, 2024). Lithuania is projected to become an exporter of green energy in the future. Investment is encouraged by a range of incentives for companies and individuals, as well as a significant increase in bank financing for green innovations. Lithuanian banks have reported that investments in green technologies and renewable energy sources have tripled between 2021 and 2023 (Barkauskaitė, 2024).

According to the Agency of Environmental Project Management, individual investments in alternative energy sources have also increased significantly. For instance, "by July 2024, the number of generating consumers in Lithuania had almost doubled, reaching nearly 112,000, with a combined capacity of power plants operated by these consumers totaling 1.3 GW" (Agency of Environmental Project Management, 2024). Government economic incentives, providing EUR 254.93 per 1 kW of installed capacity, further encouraged households to install solar power systems. In 2024, "the funds allocated for the initial call for applications were fully reserved on the first day, prompting additional funding to be released" (Agency of Environmental Project Management, 2024).

The National Energy Independence Strategy envisages that, by 2050, Lithuania's energy consumption will be predominantly sourced from solar power plants and wind turbines (Lithuanian Government, 2024). By 2030, renewable energy sources are expected to meet 55% of national energy demand, and by 2050, the expansion of renewable energy is projected to create a significant number of additional jobs (Lithuanian Government, 2024, p. 5). Driven by combined public and private investments, positive public discourse, and political consensus, Lithuania's energy transition is accelerating and moving closer toward meeting specific EGD objectives.

However, in other sectors—such as transport, which is the second-largest source of GHG emissions, the transformation has been less positive. As the Ministry for the Environment explains, "While the country's population is declining, the number of cars and the amount of fuel they use continues to grow. The car fleet remains old, with many people driving vehicles that are not in good working order, thereby polluting the environment with CO_2 emissions" (LR Ministry for the Environment, 2020). The development of electric vehicle infrastructure is progressing very slowly (LR Ministry of Transport and Communications, 2024), which discourages individuals from switching to electric cars due to both financial

costs and inconvenience. Although there is a plan to have 60,000 charging points for electric vehicles by 2030—6,000 of which should be public or semi-public—there were only 1,792 public and semi-public charging points in Lithuania by 2024 (LR Ministry of Transport and Communications, 2024). Consequently, Lithuanian transport is seen as a sector at risk of not meeting its GHG reduction targets (Lithuanian Parliament, 2019, p.15).

Similarly, the agricultural sector faces governance challenges in meeting the EGD objectives. Five key measures have been identified to achieve the sector's transformation and the EGD's goals: promoting non-agricultural technology, reducing mineral fertilizer use, producing biogas, reducing fuel consumption, and developing organic farming (Lithuanian Ministry for the Environment, 2024a). However, the Government (2020–2024) has struggled to deliver on these commitments. In 2024, mass protests by Lithuanian farmers—both in the capital and on major roads—echoed demonstrations across Europe, heightening disagreements between farmers and the government over regulatory and funding issues (LRT.lt, 2024). A pledge to reduce chemical pesticides by 50% by 2030 and increase organic farming is failing. Recent data show that the trend is moving in the opposite direction, with the number of organic farms declining. According to the Lithuanian Organic Farms Association, this is the first time such a drastic drop has occurred, and its chairman, Mindaugas Petkevičius, attributes it to unfavorable policies by the Ministry of Agriculture (Delfi, 2023). Although the EGD calls for at least 25% of agricultural land in EU Member States to be organically managed by 2030, Lithuania has set its own target at 13% by 2027. Instead of rising, however, organic farmland decreased in 2023 compared to 2022, dropping to about 8% of Lithuania's total cultivated land (Delfi, 2023), and the number of organic farms has declined by 10% (Lithuanian Association of Organic Farms, 2024). Thus, in the agricultural sector, the growing divergence between public interest groups and government policy has led to non-compliance, unsustainable management and a lack of consensus among different political forces.

4. In search of political consensus: reflection of the EU's Green Deal issues in Lithuanian political parties' manifestos

The 2024 elections have given climate change a boost and many political parties have included the objectives of the European Green Deal (EGD) in their election campaign platforms. In addition, the war in Ukraine and the ensuing energy crisis across Europe have increased the focus on renewable energy, a sector that is now seen not only as central to the implementation of the EGD, but also as crucial to national and regional security. This raises an important question: can the current geopolitical context in Europe lead to a political consensus on climate-related energy policy goals, and how is this reflected in the positions of Lithuania's main political parties?

When comparing the positions of Lithuanian parliamentary political parties as expressed in their manifestos, it is evident that there is a generally positive attitude toward the European Green Deal (EGD) and the broader green transformation, with the EGD often portrayed as an opportunity rather than a burden. As shown in Table 4 and Figure 3, both right-wing and center-left parties' express optimism about the EGD. Some—such as the Homeland Union–Lithuanian Christian Democrats, the Liberals' Movement, and Democrats for Lithuania—even present Lithuania as a potential leader in accelerating the achievement of EGD targets beyond the 2050 deadline.

Most parliamentary parties have integrated and *Europeanized* the EGD objectives into their manifestos, with the notable exception of the Lithuanian Regions Party. Meanwhile, the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union, currently in opposition and closely linked to the agricultural sector, tends to take a more critical stance. Their skepticism focuses on the perceived burden of green policy implementation on farmers, especially in agriculture.

The ruling centre-right coalition (2020-2024), consisting of the Homeland Union–Lithuanian Christian Democrats and two liberal parties, sees the EGD as a strategic opportunity for Lithuania's economic and technological modernization. The 'Liberals' Movement' in particular emphasizes Lithuania's potential role as a driver of the green transition, portraying the country as one of the frontrunners in the pursuit of climate neutrality. Its 2024 political programme places a strong emphasis on the transformation of the energy sector, emphasizing its importance for both national security and economic competitiveness. This political party proposes that Lithuania should produce all its electricity from renewable sources by 2028, transitioning into an energy exporter. The party presents this goal as vital for ensuring national security, enhancing the competitiveness of local industries and attracting foreign investment. The 'Liberals' movement' party further emphasises that clean electricity represents, and will continue to represent, a growing competitive advantage in global markets where CO_2 taxation is increasing (The Liberals' Movement, 2024).

A similar outlook is shared by the 'Homeland Union'- the largest party in the governing coalition. Their programme combines climate objectives with national energy policy, stating that the pace of energy sector transformation has accelerated (The Homeland Union–Lithuanian Christian Democrats, 2024, p. 21).

Although the 'Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union' (2024) is more critical of the European Green Deal (EGD), it still acknowledges the importance of developing renewable energy sources (RES) in its 2024 political programme. Similarly, other Lithuanian political parties—including opposition center-left forces—emphasize investments in green technologies and the expansion of renewable energy as both necessary and positive. Within political discourse, renewable energy development is framed not only as a tool to achieve EGD and climate mitigation goals by reducing reliance on fossil fuels, but also as a strategic

measure to enhance energy independence and meet national security objectives. For example, the Lithuanian 'Social Democratic Party' (2024) argues that such a path will "reduce the country's dependence on imported resources, reduce environmental degradation and contribute to climate change mitigation".

Table 4. EGD reflection in Lithuanian party programmes

Parliamentary political parties	**EU green deal issues, reflected in political party programmes Transcripts**
Right wing: governing parties coalition (2020-2024)	
The Homeland Union- Lithuanian Christian democrats	"The EU's climate change leadership creates opportunities for Lithuania; We are committed to being at the forefront of Europe's green course and supporting the EU's most ambitious climate change management goals".
The Liberals' Movement	"Lithuania as the leader of the Green Course. The Green Course is a unique opportunity for Lithuania to become a country of sustainable resource use, to use EU funding opportunities and to help Lithuanian cleantech business, to become the engine of this EU transformation".
The Freedom Party	Lithuania as a center for green innovation; "The Green Deal opens up opportunities for new jobs and sources of economic growth". We will implement and accelerate Lithuania's climate change and Green Deal agenda.
Center-Left wing/other: opposition parties (2020-2024)	
The Social Democratic Party of Lithuania	"Make-save-use-recycle"; recycling, transition to waste-free production, constantly reducing the amount of generated waste, using the least energy-demanding advanced technologies. "All this will enable the creation of thousands of new jobs, promote the growth of small businesses in the service and service sectors".
The Union of Democrats "For Lithuania"	"We will strive for the Lithuanian economy to become a climate-neutral economy by 2045. These changes are inseparable from the pursuit of social justice, "green" transformation must not deepen inequality". "Strengthening Lithuania's leadership, we will implement the Green Deal measures to tackle the climate crisis and restore and conserve biodiversity faster than EU requirements. Lithuania must be a developer and exporter of technologies that enable the green transformation".
The Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union	"Sustainable farming - in the social sense - so that those involved in agriculture can earn a decent living, make long-term plans for farm operation and development, and plan investments." Ensure that public bodies represent the interests of Lithuanian agriculture to the EU institutions and are not just unconditional enforcers of European requirements ".
The Lithuanian Regions Party	Not reflected

Source: author's representation based on the political parties' programmes on their websites, 2024

This shows that a political consensus is emerging in Lithuania on the benefits of investing in renewable energy for the country's future.

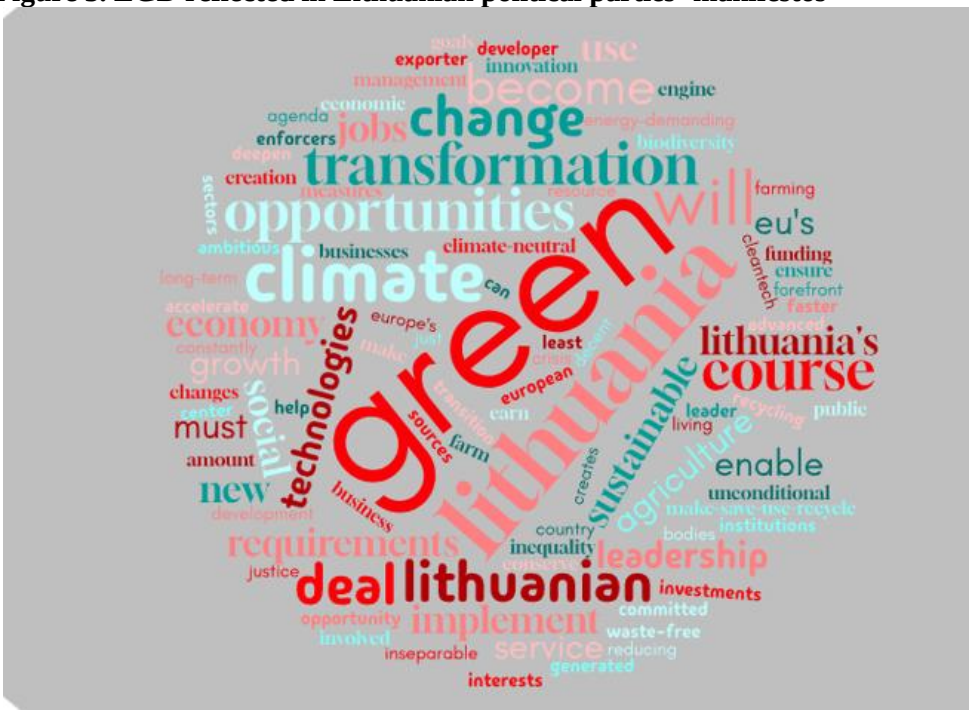
Another area gaining cross-party attention is the circular economy, viewed as a key opportunity to advance climate goals. Both governing right-wing and opposition center-left parties have highlighted the importance of this sector in their political programmes. For example, the 'Freedom Party', a coalition partner in the 2020–2024 government, emphasized the untapped potential of the circular economy: "The resource efficiency of our industry is still relatively low, and material reuse is about three times lower than the EU average (4% compared to 11.5% in 2022). [...] Developing the capacity to reuse accumulated secondary raw materials would not only benefit the environment but also boost competitiveness by lowering production costs and reducing dependence on volatile raw material markets." (The Freedom Party, 2024, p. 27*)*. The 'Social Democratic Party' also recognizes the circular economy's potential to generate employment, promoting the slogan "make–save–use–recycle" in its 2024 political programme.

While the 'Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union' supports specific green initiatives, it remains skeptical of the EGD as a whole. In its 2024 programme, the party states it will strive to "ensure that state institutions defend the interests of Lithuanian agriculture in EU institutions, rather than merely act as unconditional implementers of EU requirements." Rejecting the notion of automatic Europeanisation, the party calls for stronger representation of national and regional interests—particularly those of farmers—in Brussels. It also criticizes the lack of strict control over agricultural imports from third countries that do not meet EU environmental or animal welfare standards. Interestingly, this concern is echoed in the 'Liberals' Movement' programme, which states the party will seek to apply EGD requirements to both domestic production and imported goods (The Liberals' Movement, 2024, Part 4). This reflects a shared aspiration for a level playing field in trade and environmental standards.

However, the 'Liberals' Movement' also acknowledges that implementing EU standards in sectors like transport and agriculture will be especially challenging for Lithuania. Indeed, these two sectors—transport and agriculture—are the most debated among political parties, particularly regarding tax obligations and the integration of EU standards. The 'Freedom Party', for instance, has criticized the current state of Lithuanian agricultural policy, stating that agriculture ranks as the third largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Lithuania; however, the existing agricultural policy remains misaligned with the essential objectives of the European Green Deal (The Freedom Party, 2024, p. 80). Agriculture remains a particularly divisive area, with varying positions and proposed solutions. Centre-left parties tend to support a more conciliatory approach that includes financial incentives for farmers and consideration of regional interests. The Social Democratic Party and the Democrats 'For Lithuania' stress the importance of social justice and argue that the ecological transition must not deepen social inequalities. However, they offer few

concrete measures to implement this principle. As the Social Democrats state: "The transition to a green economy must be socially just and fair to those who earn less". (The Social Democratic Party of Lithuania, 2024, p. 25).

Figure 3. EGD reflected in Lithuanian political parties' manifestos



Source: author's representation based on WordCloud

Therefore, in areas such as renewable energy, there is a strong political consensus and cross-party coherence, which can lead to more effective and long-term governance. Meanwhile, in sectors such as agriculture and transport, where consensus is weaker and political disagreements stronger, progress can be hampered by constant debate, stakeholder and public opposition and political indecision.

5. Attitudes of the Lithuanian society towards climate change and its mitigation

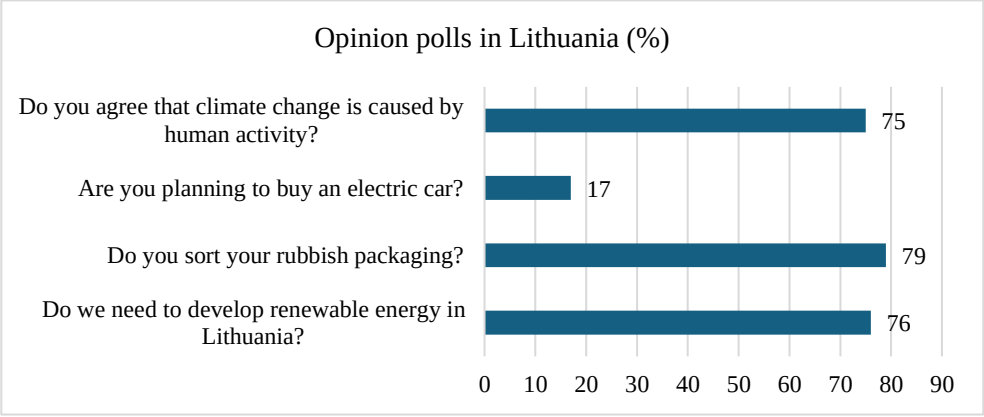
In democratic systems, public participation and involvement of NGOs are crucial to climate change governance (Šatienė, 2023) because politicians are dependent on their constituents. Consultation with representatives from different regions, considering their views and involving local communities is particularly important when local decisions affect climate-related issues. Positive public attitudes

and participation are among the most important causes for effective climate governance.

In Europe, especially in Nordic societies (Hoff, 2017), large-scale social movements, including those inspired by Greta Thunberg, have increased pressure on politicians to act on climate change. In contrast, there have been no large-scale climate protests in Lithuania, and those that have taken place have been relatively small and mainly driven by international demonstrations (Kisielius & Miškinytė, 2019). Nevertheless, survey data show that the majority of the Lithuanian population is aware of the risks of climate change (see Figure 4).

A 2022 poll found that 62% of Lithuanians believe transitioning to a green economy would enhance their quality of life by increasing comfort, improving food quality, or boosting health. However, 56% felt such a transition could slow economic growth, and more than half thought it would reduce jobs (BNS, 2022). These views conflict with political party claims that a green transformation would create more jobs. 2024 representative survey indicated that 76% of Lithuanians favor expanding renewable energy sources (RES), believing such development would strengthen the country's energy independence (Ignitis Renewables, 2024). In this survey, solar and wind emerged as the most popular forms of energy—an opinion that aligns with the consensus among political parties.

Figure 4. Public opinion polls in Lithuania



Source: author's representation from representative opinion polls (Ignitis Renewables, 2024; Association "Nature's Future", 2024; ELTA, 2024; BNS, 2024)

A representative public survey conducted by Baltic Research in 2023 showed that 79% of the population sorts waste packaging, which is an increase of three percentage points compared to the previous year (Association Nature's Future, 2024). In the survey, the respondents emphasize that in this way, they are contributing to climate change goals and saving nature. However, other surveys show that a much

smaller proportion of the population (around 60%) separates all of their waste and packaging, rather than just some of it.

Meanwhile, in the transport sector, interest in electric cars is declining. According to a survey (2024), only 17% of the Lithuanian population plan to buy an electric car, which is a decreasing percentage compared to the previous year (ELTA, 2024). In the surveys, people said that this situation was due to financial motives, lack of support, dissatisfaction with charging stations and the fact that the distance covered per charge is insufficient.

A recent comparative study by the European Investment Bank on the views and knowledge of people in all EU Member States on climate change showed that most Lithuanians understand that climate change is caused by human activities but lack in-depth knowledge on how to tackle the specific problems (BNS, 2024).

As part of the circular economy, Lithuania has implemented a successful project for the collection of used plastic bottles**.** Under this system, used bottles, mostly plastic (and some glass), are collected at a collection point (an automated system) and paid for (ten-euro cents per bottle). This deposit-return system works well because people rationally understand that money is paid for returned plastic bottles, thus circulating plastic in the circular economy. When buying drinks in plastic bottles, the price includes a plastic bottle charge of 10-euro cents, which the buyer recovers by returning the used bottle to the deposit-return machine (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Lithuanian deposit-return system

Source: author (2024)

According to data provided by the administrator of the scheme, more than 600 million disposable beverage containers are collected each year, and 95% of the

population surveyed consider the scheme to be working reasonably well Administrator of the Deposit System, 2024).

Data shows that 9 out of 10 people participate in the scheme (TV3 News, 2024). The public education programme (2024-2026) of the administrator of the deposit-return scheme states that in the six years of its existence, a total of more than 4 billion packaging items has already been collected and that more than 685 million items were collected in 2023 alone (Administrator of the Deposit System, 2024, p.4). According to the administrator of this system, the success of this project has received international recognition, with delegations coming from European countries, Japan, Australia and South Korea to Lithuania for advice (Platūkytė, 2020). However, in other areas, where there are no financial incentives, waste sorting in Lithuania is rather slow. In 2022, data showed that only 60% of the population sorted their garbage into different containers (LR Ministry for Environment, 2024). So, when it comes to recycling and the development and management of the circular economy, systems that provide some incentives for residents work best.

Conclusions

This article aimed to determine the extent to which Lithuania's political elite and society, as those of a small EU member state, embrace the goals of the EU Green Deal. This case is new and original in that it seeks to identify correlations between public support, political party consensus, and the governance process of Green Europeanization. As the Lithuanian case has shown, the policy tends to be more effective in areas and sectors where financial incentives are offered.

The Lithuanian case study suggests that the implementation of the EU's Green Deal in Lithuania can be categorized as an example of green Europeanization from above driven by sectoral, procedural governance at the EU level. An analysis of parliamentary political parties' programmes shows that all but one party generally reflect EU Green Deal policy objectives. Right-wing parties (The Freedom Party, 2024; The Homeland Union–Lithuanian Christian Democrats, 2024; the Liberal Movement, 2024) have taken the most positive view of the EU Green Deal between 2020 and 2024, seeing it as a catalyst for economic growth and national transformation. Center-left parties also emphasize key benefits of the EGD—particularly developing renewable energy sources (RES) and investing in a circular economy. In contrast, the left-wing Lithuanian Farmers and Green Union remain more skeptical, especially regarding the EU Green Deal's agricultural policies, arguing that Lithuania needs stronger advocacy for national interests in Brussels.

Nonetheless, there is growing political consensus among all parties in favor of RES development to cut costs and dependence on fossil fuels and imported energy. This position is further linked to national security goals, notably reducing reliance on external energy suppliers. It is expected that by 2030, renewable energy sources will

meet 55% of national energy demand and that Lithuania will become an exporter of green energy in the future.

In Lithuania, the development of renewable energy sources (RES) stands out as the sector in which the European Green Deal (EGD) has been most successfully implemented, mirroring trends observed in other countries (Baute, 2024). This green shift in the energy sector, underpinned by investments in RES, enjoys broad public support (76 %) and has driven both public and private investment. The number of households adopting alternative energy and producing their own power is rising rapidly, partially thanks to financial incentives. This sector thus exemplifies how political consensus, targeted funding, and strong public backing can result in successful policy outcomes.

By contrast, other areas, particularly those requiring additional tax obligations, lack a similar degree of political accord on EGD objectives. In the transport sector emissions have increased by as much as 43% over the last two decades, but just 17% of the population is planning to buy electric cars. In these instances, disagreements often revolve around the needs and interests of vulnerable groups, including rural communities, farmers, lower-income households, and individuals unable to afford newer vehicles.

Based on the adapted process-tracing method applied to the Lithuanian case, a causal mechanism can be identified showing that areas with stronger political consensus, public support, and certain financial incentives experience more successful implementation of, and adaptation to EGD norms.

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