

# Euroscepticism in the Baltic States: Much Ado about Nothing?

**ALDIS AUSTERS**

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- In the Baltic states, the public perception of Europe, e.g. Eurooptimism and Euroscepticism, goes beyond the attitudes regarding European integration or the European Union. It covers a much wider range of topics and, in fact, is equivalent to the term 'the West' with all its regional governmental or non-governmental bodies.
- Despite the relatively low level of support of EU membership, none of the three Baltic countries represent a case of unbridled Euroscepticism today. The observed manifestations of Euroscepticism are of a sporadic nature, based on specific issues and centred on particular personalities, and have not yet developed into a systemic institutional phenomenon.
- Estonia today is the country that most consistently demonstrates pro-European attitudes. Among Lithuanians there is a relatively large number of Europragmatists, while Latvia, for its part, has the highest number of radical Eurosceptics, people who oppose EU membership and believe that the EU is a bad thing. Latvia's public opinion on EU membership seems to be more sensitive to the increasing geopolitical tensions between Russia and the West. In contrast, Lithuania and Estonia seem more responsive to changes in the phases of the economic cycle and developments at the EU level.
- Notwithstanding marginal Eurosceptical parties, radical Euroscepticism in the Baltic countries resides mostly at the level of social movements. At the same time, however, only very few mainstream political parties show consistently strong support for the EU.
- Euroscepticism about the EU in the Baltic states is not so much driven by radical opposition to the EU as by a critical appraisal of its negative side effects. Besides, much of the controversy about Euroscepticism in Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania is rooted in the people's frustration with national political institutions and has less to do with EU institutions in Brussels.

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## Introduction

Back in 2003, nationwide referenda were held in the three Baltic countries on the terms of accession to the EU. The results were positive in all three countries, and accession was supported with a landslide majority. However, the results revealed significant differences. In Latvia, EU membership was supported by 67.5 per cent of referendum participants. In Estonia, the level of support was even lower at 66.8 per cent (the second-lowest level after Malta's 53.6 per cent). At the same time, the referendum in Lithuania returned 91.1 per cent support, which was the second-best result after Slovakia's 93.7 per cent.

Taking into account their history, economic backwardness and the contested nature of their nationhood, the three Baltic countries stood to gain the most from EU membership of all other prospective candidate states from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), and, like Lithuania and Slovakia, should have been very enthusiastic about European integration. Why was there such a difference between the seemingly similar Baltic peer countries? What could explain the relatively low level of support for EU membership in Latvia and Estonia? Is this an indication of a high level of Euroscepticism in the two countries? How persistent have these attitudes been over time? Who are the main proponents of Eurosceptical views?

Fourteen years later, in February 2017, 27 per cent of Latvia's respondents agreed with the claim that their country would have a better future outside the EU, while in Lithuania 22 per cent agreed with this statement and in Estonia 19 per cent.<sup>1</sup> Compared to the share of "no" votes in the EU accession referenda in these countries (32.5 per cent in Latvia, 9.1 per cent in Lithuania and 33.5 per cent in Estonia), a decrease in opposition to EU membership in Latvia and Estonia has become evident, while in Lithuania, on the contrary, scepticism has increased considerably. To complicate things further, while only a few people object to the principle of the free move-

ment of people within the EU in the Baltic countries, considerable opposition can be observed towards the euro in all three countries, but especially in Lithuania, which seems at odds with the high esteem in which the EU is held in that country. Moreover, people in the three Baltic countries, but in particular in Lithuania, tend to be more suspicious of domestic institutions compared to EU institutions. For example, in May 2017, 59 per cent of Lithuanians had a distaste for the national government, while only 21.5 per cent tended not to trust the EU.

Yet, despite the relatively low societal appetite for European integration, there is a noticeable absence of popular Eurosceptic political parties and movements in the three Baltic states. How can this underdevelopment of institutionalised Euroscepticism be explained? Is it possible to fit all these seemingly conflicting observations into a single explanatory framework illuminating the dynamics of Euroscepticism in the Baltic states? Is it perhaps the case that the overall methodological approach is erroneous and that development in these countries cannot be understood from the perspective of a common understanding of the term Euroscepticism?

Before discussing the situation in each of the three Baltic countries, three aspects merit some attention. First, on the sociology of Euroscepticism, support for EU membership may not automatically translate into a positive image of the EU and vice versa. By comparing responses of people showing their attitude towards EU membership, on the one hand, and their perception of the EU, on the other, one can distinguish between four subcategories of positions: Eurooptimists (favour membership and like the EU), moderate Eurosceptics or Europragmatists (favour membership despite their dislike of the EU), alienated people (oppose membership but like the EU) and radical Eurosceptics (oppose membership and dislike the EU).

Second, on the transmission of Eurosceptical ideas to political agendas, studies on the CEE countries reveal that the Eurosceptical sentiment may not automatically translate into policy action, and popular levels of Euroscepticism may coexist with low levels of support for parties expressing Euro-

1. Eurobarometer Interactive, "Support for Key European Policies: (OUR COUNTRY) could better face the future outside the EU", <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Chart/getChart/themeKy/25/groupKy/294>

scepticism. For Euroscepticism to become part of a political ideology, it has to work in four dimensions: it requires (1) significant levels of public support; (2) the existence of political parties expressing Euroscepticism; (3) the salience of Eurosceptical issues for voters, meaning that they are prepared to vote for Eurosceptical parties; and (4) the salience of Eurosceptical issues as a dimension of competition for political parties.<sup>2</sup>

Third, on gathering data on people's attitudes, different opinion polls return different results, depending on how a particular public opinion poll is structured, that is, how the survey questions are formulated, how nuanced the possible answers are (e.g. three, four or five response options), and who the respondents are. For this reason, it is more reasonable to speak about a comparison of tendencies detected from polls instead of numbered proportions of, for example, EU optimists and pessimists.<sup>3</sup>

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2. Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak, „The Party Politics of Euroscepticism in EU Member and Candidate States”, *SEI Working Paper No. 51, Opposing Europe Research Network Working Paper*, No. 6 (2002), 33

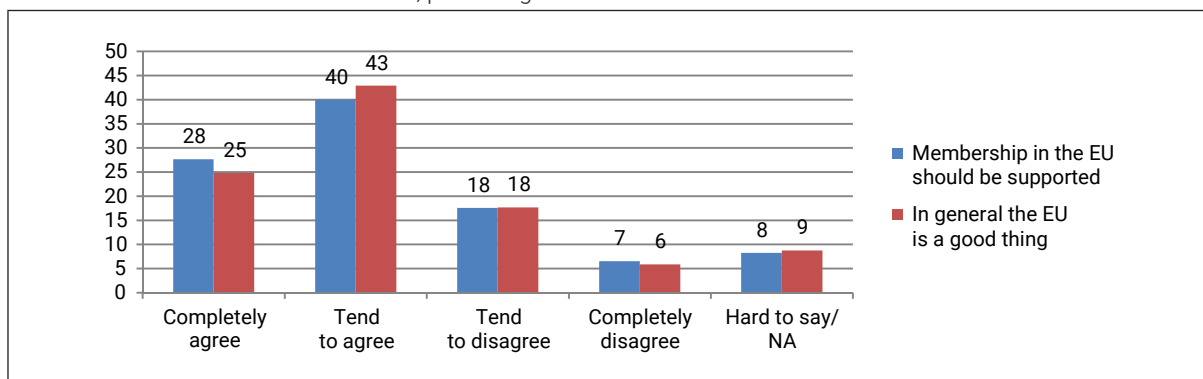
3. The Eurobarometer naturally presents the most trusted data for comparison between EU member states; however, there are two particular problems linked to Eurobarometer surveys. First, Eurobarometer results depict exclusively the attitude of the citizens of member states, which is problematic in the case of Latvia and Estonia, as these countries are home to a large community of citizens of the former USSR, who for different reasons have not applied for Latvian or Estonian citizenship. These people are referred to as non-citizens, and due to their plurality, their opinion has a significant impact on the general stance of the population. Second, since 2012, the Eurobarometer has changed the way it asks Europeans about their attitude towards their state's EU membership. Thus, the Eurobarometer has stopped asking for people's opinions on their country's membership in the EU, instead asking people if their country could better face the future outside the EU. The idea is similar, but the results are no longer comparable over time

## Latvia

The results of the SKDS opinion poll of May 2017 (see Table LV.1) reveal that at that time 68 per cent of respondents supported Latvia's membership in the EU while 25 per cent were opposed. At the same time, 68 per cent of respondents completely agreed or tended to agree that the EU is a good thing, while 24 per cent disagreed. Compared to the other Baltic countries, Latvia has a tendency to be less supportive of the EU. This tendency is confirmed by other opinion polls, independent of their design.

Figure LV.1.

Public attitude towards the EU in Latvia, percentages



Source: SKDS opinion poll of May 2017.

From a longitudinal perspective, the regular public surveys by SKDS reveal that between 2004 and 2017, after a phase of considerable intermittent fluctuations, positive attitudes started to gain momentum in 2011 (see Table LV.2). At the same time, the proportions of those holding neutral views or having no opinion at all have been remarkably stable (around or slightly above 40 per cent and below 10 per cent respectively).

In fact, the developments observed since 2004, and in particular since 2011, attest to the impact of major domestic and international events on public opinion. In 2004, the positive attitude towards the EU could be attributed to general euphoria stemming from accession. The Russia-Georgia war of August 2008 also delivered a boost to the supporters' side, although this effect was short-lived and quickly faded in the face of the looming financial and economic difficulties at the end of 2008. The attraction of the EU began to increase again in 2012, and since then has been continually

improving. The initial momentum was provided by improving economic conditions after the crisis of 2009-2010, which was later reinforced by Latvia's accession to the eurozone in 2014 and Latvia's presidency of the EU in 2015. Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which began in 2014, has also had a major effect on people's positive regard of the EU, which was perceived as a shelter against the spillover of that conflict in the direction of the Baltic region. The highest level of support in favour of EU membership (42 per cent) was actually reached in March 2015, at the height of Latvia's

EU presidency. Since then, the level of support has slightly declined, most likely because of the EU's persistent internal problems (e.g. the Greek bailout, the refugee crisis and Brexit).

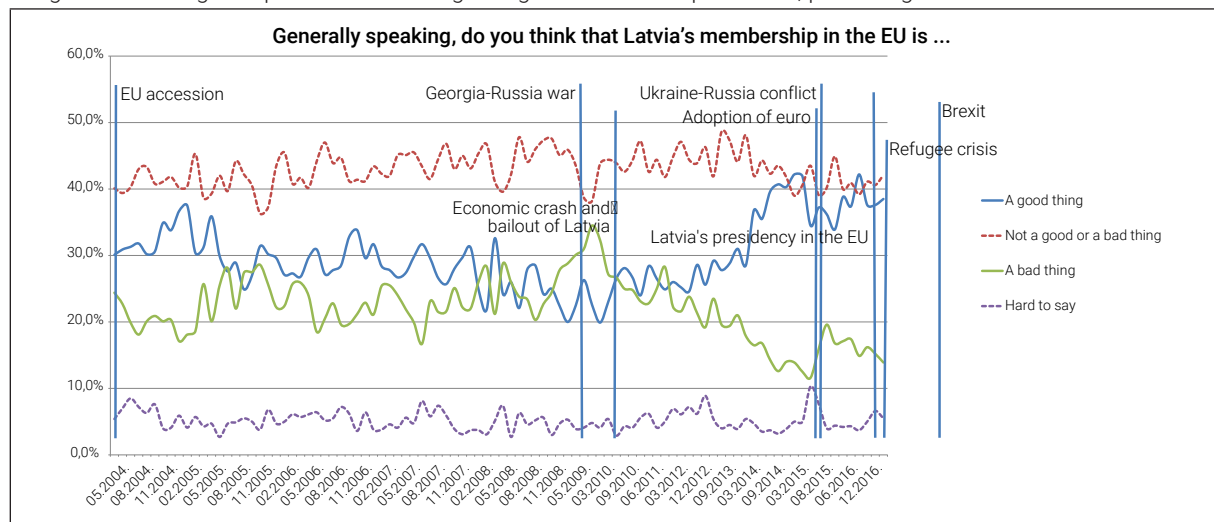
## People

The SKDS opinion polls provide detailed data on the sociodemographic profiles of respondents. A combined dataset from three consecutive SKDS opinion polls (December 2016, January 2017 and April 2017) reveals the following sociodemographic profile of people according to their stance on Latvia's EU membership (see Table A.2 in the annex):

- 1) Gender effect:** Males tend to have more polarised views than females with respect to EU membership (41 per cent of males see it as a good thing while 16 per cent see it as a bad thing; for females, the corresponding results were 37 per cent and 14 per cent);

Figure LV.2.

Longitudinal changes in public attitudes regarding EU membership in Latvia, percentages

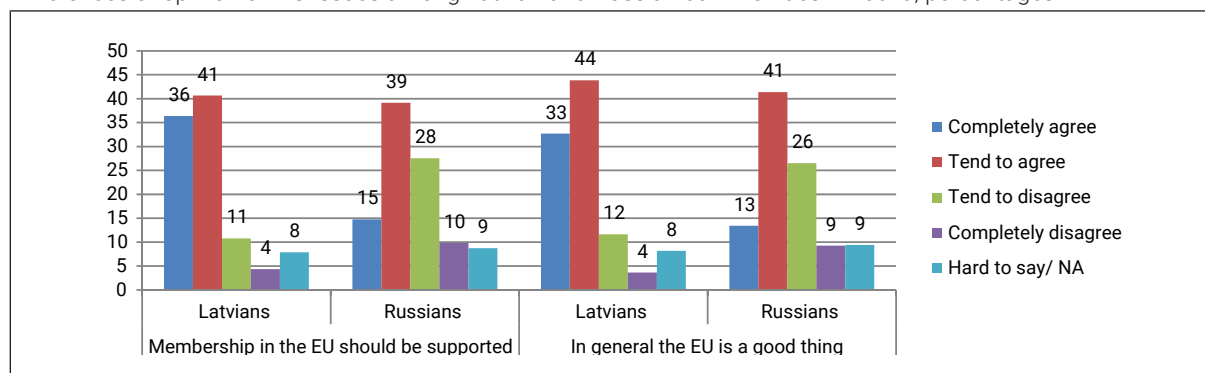


Source: SKDS opinion poll data from 2004 to 2017.

- 2) **Age effect:** The older the person, the more sceptical he or she is about the merits of EU membership; only 10 per cent of young people (15-24 years of age) find membership to be a bad thing, while among the eldest cohort (65-74 years of age), twice as many (19 per cent) held such a sceptical view;
- 3) **Ethnicity effect:** There is a considerable difference between the two largest ethnic groups in Latvia; Latvians are much less sceptical about EU membership (11 per cent) than Latvian Russians (21 per cent), while people of other ethnicities show more moderate attitudes;
- 4) **Education effect:** A clear correlation can be observed between educational attainment and the level of scepticism towards EU membership; people with higher education exhibit less scepticism (11 per cent), while people with lower levels of education exhibit a considerably higher degree of scepticism (18 per cent);
- 5) **Employment effect:** Unemployed people in Latvia tend to exhibit a slightly higher level of scepticism (16 per cent) than employed people (14 per cent); among those who are employed, those working in the public sector are more optimistic (41 per cent) and less sceptical (9 per cent) about the EU than those in the private sector (40 per cent and 16 per cent, respectively). At the same time, the status of employment matters too. Managers tend to be less pessimistic about EU membership than blue-collar workers (11 versus 17 per cent, respectively), while self-employed people have a more moderate attitude;
- 6) **Income effect:** There seems to exist a strong correlation between level of income and level of scepticism: the higher the level of income, the more positivity towards EU membership. In the lowest income stratum, the share of EU oppositionists is 20 per cent, while in the highest stratum, only 13 per cent show discontent with EU membership;
- 7) **Family effect:** Families with children tend to show less scepticism towards the EU than families with no children (13 and 16 per cent of negative responses, respectively). Interestingly, and somewhat in contradiction to the income effect, the larger the size of the family, the more positive and less sceptical a particular household is about the EU. Among families with one member, 18 per cent believe that EU membership is a bad thing. However, among families with four or more members, only 11 per cent share the view that EU membership is a bad thing;

Figure LV.3.

Differences of opinion on EU issues among Latvian and Russian communities in Latvia, percentages



Source: SKDS opinion poll of May 2017.

8) **Settlement effect:** The level of support for the EU among people living in the capital, Riga, has been the highest (43 per cent), yet the share of those with an inclination towards scepticism has also been higher among those living in the capital (15 per cent). There is a much higher level of scepticism among people living in cities and towns (17 per cent) than among rural people (12 per cent). This phenomenon is linked to the higher concentration of Russian-speaking people in urban areas, among whom the level of scepticism is much higher than among native Latvians. Examining specific regions, the highest level of scepticism is observed in Kurzeme (18 per cent) and Latgale (17 per cent). Kurzeme is a stronghold of conservative nationalism in Latvia, while Latgale has a high population of Russian speakers, who tilt the public attitude in the region towards scepticism. The unemployment rate is also the highest in Latgale, followed by Kurzeme.

In Latvia, people with a positive disposition towards the EU also tend to rebuff claims of negative consequences or side effects stemming from membership, while those who think negatively

about the EU call attention to the negative aspects of membership. A combination of responses to the question of the perception of EU membership and the image of the EU reveals that the Eurooptimists are the dominant group in Latvia (72 per cent of those who have a firm opinion; see Table A.3 in the annex). The second-largest group, radical Eurosceptics, is considerably smaller (22 per cent), although this group of radical Eurosceptics in Latvia is twice as large as in Estonia or Lithuania. Interestingly, a study of associations between Eurooptimists and selected popular stereotypes linked to the EU reveals that the level of unhappiness among Eurooptimists about specific aspects of the EU's impact is very high. In Latvia, an overwhelming majority of Eurooptimists believe that only a small group of people benefit from EU membership and that the EU's management has little regard for local people.<sup>4</sup>

The relatively greater inclination of Latvian people to Euroscepticism is linked with the presence of a sizeable Russian-speaking community living in Latvia (37.2 per cent of the total population in 2011; see Table A.1 in the annex).<sup>5</sup> The good news is that a majority of Russian speakers are supportive of the EU, and since 2011 the attitude has considerably improved. However, a noticeable level of antagonism against the EU is still observed in this community. The ample anti-EU attitude among Russian speakers is not so much linked with the unfulfilled expectations from the EU as with dissatisfaction with their status in the country, lack of knowledge of the vernacular, and strong ideological, cultural and linguistic links with Russia. This

4. Aldis Austers and Juris Nikišins, "The Sociology of Euroscepticism in the Baltic States: Uncovering the Diverse Expression of Euroscepticism", in *Euroscepticism in the Baltic States: Uncovering Issues, People and Stereotypes*, ed. Aldis Austers and Kārlis Bukovskis (Latvian Institute of International Affairs/ Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, forthcoming)

5. Ethnic Russians are a majority; however, these communities also include many other ethnicities, such as Belarusians, Ukrainians, Moldovans, Armenians and Jews. Russian is their lingua franca as it was in the Soviet period when Russian was widely used in Latvia for official and interpersonal communication. A large part of these Russian speakers are non-citizens



dissatisfaction, however, makes local Russians easy prey for the Kremlin's anti-EU propaganda.

### Processes and issues

In Latvia and the other Baltic states, the public perception of Europe is a much broader topic than attitudes regarding European integration or the European Union. Namely, "the notion of Europe is generally understood as a synonym of the West or, more concretely, a web of international structures that includes the EU and many other governmental or non-governmental organisations".<sup>6</sup> Hence, the origins of Latvian Euroscepticism date back to the early 1990s, when the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) began its operations in Latvia – long before Latvia was invited to join the EU – and should be analysed in the context of Latvia's relations with the totality of European structures.

In the 1990s, at the initial stage of the construction of the nation state, a major task for the Latvian political elite was to "bring together the idea of European integration with the concept of an independent nation state centred on the ethnic identity".<sup>7</sup> Political elites persuaded people to think of independent nationhood, democratisation and the "return to Europe" as inseparably linked ideas.<sup>8</sup> The elites declared the preservation of national identity as the main policy goal and presented European integration as a necessary solution to the problem.<sup>9</sup> It was stressed intermittently that Latvia's historical development has involved close relations with Western Europe and that Latvia had the right to reclaim its status in Europe. However, mainstream nationalist parties and organisations

resented European intervention in domestic affairs, and European scepticism during the second half of the 1990s was associated mostly with these individuals. The Russian-speaking population had a more positive perception of Europe's role at that time due to the attention paid by the OSCE and the Council of Europe to the human rights situation.

Latvia's accession to the EU changed the order of things. The EU accession negotiations and the approximation of legislation were politically neutral from the point of view of ordinary citizens, while in the perception of moderate nationalist circles, "accession to the EU promised Latvia an equal status among other European nations and autonomy in domestic affairs that contrasted with the realities of the Soviet occupation period and the highly asymmetrical relationship with European structures prevailing in the late 1990s". At the same time, from the perspective of Russian-speaking Eurosceptics, "the EU was nothing but an entity competing against Russia and seeking to ruin their usual way of life, inter alia, uncomfortable recognition of Latvia as a mature European democracy".

The economic crisis of 2008-2010 changed the perception of the EU as a source of uninterrupted growth and ever-increasing prosperity, however. Despite people's general commitment to the EU, intellectual Euroscepticism has been on the rise in Latvia since the beginning of the financial and economic crisis in 2008, and critical evaluation of the course of European integration has focused on such major topics as the economic and social consequences of austerity policies, the adoption of the euro, security and defence, and migration and multiculturalism.

In addition, concerns over national security have never receded in Latvia; in fact, security concerns among Latvia's population have been on the rise since the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the crisis in Eastern Ukraine. Although it resulted in a more positive perception of the EU as a major source of stability, the fact that in the coming decade the EU would not be in a position to provide security either against a conventional military attack or against hybrid warfare has not sufficed to reassure Lat-

6. Hereafter, if not specifically indicated, quotes are from Gints Apals, "Euroscepticism in Latvian Politics: Twenty-Five Years of Change", in *Euroscepticism in the Baltic States*

7. Ilze Ostrovska, "Integrācija ES un politiskās leģitimitātes problēma Latvijas demokrātiskās konsolidācijas kontekstā", in *Latvijā par Eiropas Savienību: Skats no mazā uz lielo*, ed. Raita Karnīte (LZA EI, 2006), 127

8. Vineta Kleinberga, "Neoliberālisma politika un tās sekas Latvijā no 1990. līdz 2001. gadam", in *Latvijas integrācijas Eiropas Savienībā – Latvija un lēmumu pieņemšana. Neoliberālisms un sociālais kapitāls*, Latvijas Zinātņu akadēmijas Ekonomikas institūts (2003), 96

9. Marija Golubeva, "Divi modeļi eiroskepticisma pētīšanai Latvijā", in *Latvijas integrācijas ES: Jaunās Eiropas aprises, tautsaimniecības pielāgošana*, ed. Raita Karnīte (LZA EI, 2003), 46



via's population, and the Atlanticist orientation will continue to prevail. It should be stressed that "the prevalent Latvian thinking on Europe is not an entirely pragmatic peacetime calculation of political or economic costs and benefits. The sense of being vulnerable (or directly threatened) stems from the inability of Western democracies to support the Baltic countries during WWII and from the unalterable geographical proximity to Russia."

However, the combination of security concerns related to the continuous influx of migrants and reduced European financial input may diminish the centrality of Europe and undermine the pro-European consensus in Latvia. Issues such as discrimination of Latvian farmers because of diminished financial support, unfair treatment of Latvian businesses in the markets of more mature EU economies, collapse of Latvian industrial enterprises, and a deeply seated general sentiment of economic inferiority, often linked to distrust in the capacity of national institutions to promote national interests, occasionally catch public attention.

## Parties

Institutional Euroscepticism exists only on the fringes of Latvia's political spectrum. Most of the Eurosceptic commotion takes moderate forms though, as only a few marginal advocates adhere to anti-systemic or radical Euroscepticism in Latvia.

Radical Euroscepticism in Latvia revolves around a few personalities, none of whom has ever held an elected post. The most notable radicals are Juris Paiders, a columnist for the daily newspaper *Neatkarīgā Avīze* [Independent Newspaper], and Normunds Grostiņš, the leader of *Rīcības partija* [Action Party]. The latter party was established shortly before the 2003 referendum. Initially, it formed an alliance with the radical left Socialist Party of Latvia (a reincarnation of the former Communist Party of Latvia). However, since 2011, the party has moved to the right and is now part of the pan-European radical right European Alliance for Freedom (other members include the Austrian Freedom Party and the National Front of France)

and is linked to the Europe of Nations and Freedom, a political group in the European Parliament.

The platforms of political parties before the latest parliamentary elections of 2014 did not reveal any substantial criticism of the EU, and the results of those elections displayed a significant decline in the popular appeal and number of Eurosceptic organisations. The only political force that invited people to reconsider the utility of Latvia's membership in the EU (the Sovereignty electoral coalition) received just 0.11 per cent of votes cast. In comparison, six parties and coalitions ran on openly Eurosceptic platforms in the parliamentary elections of 2002, and the aggregate vote for those forces was 2.6 per cent back then. Additionally, in 2002 some of the larger pro-EU or neutral parties allowed Eurosceptic individuals to run on their lists. After failure in the 2014 elections, Eurosceptic organisations tried to use the municipal elections of 2017 to reposition themselves, but to little avail. The Eurosceptic Action Party attracted some votes in several municipalities, but was far short of passing the threshold.

While radical Euroscepticism is a non-starter in Latvia's political milieu, the governing political forces exhibit a wide variety of attachment to the ideals of European integration. The most pro-European position is held by the *Vienotība* [Unity] party, an alliance of liberal and moderate right-wing conservative political forces that has had the most consistent and open approach to EU issues since 2003. However, even Unity has had some issues with the EU: it has repeatedly insisted on the necessity to correct existing discrimination against Latvia and its citizens in the EU, thus implying that Latvia has an inferior status in the EU. Today, Unity is part of the coalition government together with the more conservative and nationalist *Zaļo un zemnieku savienība* [Union of Greens and Farmers] and *Nacionālā apvienība* [National Alliance], the two bigwigs of the right. These two parties support Latvia's membership in the EU and other key European organisations; however, their preferred mode of integration is a loose union of nation states. To their mind, Latvia has been too lenient towards the EU and should demonstrate greater self-esteem and independence in decision-making on domestic issues.

The largest opposition force, the social democratic party *Saskaņa* [Harmony], also has a pro-European stance; however, the path of the party's development, its focus on the Russian-speaking population of Latvia and its close links to Russia's governing party, United Russia, suggest that the true interests of the party lie in a different direction. The same can be said about the opposition party *No sirds Latvijai* [From the Heart for Latvia]: on the one hand, the party stands for Latvia's membership in the EU; on the other hand, it opposes the influx of "foreign ideologies" and resents the "moral decline" of consumer society.<sup>10</sup>

Notwithstanding the absence of Euroscepticism in mainstream party programmes, expressions of individual political leaders have at times been rather aggressive towards Western organisations. Aivars Lembergs, the influential chairman of the *Latvijai un Ventspilij* [For Latvia and Ventspils] party, which has an alliance with the governing Union of Greens and Farmers, has openly criticised the presence of foreign NATO troops on Latvian territory. Likewise, a popular politician from Harmony, Jānis Ādamsons, has also expressed resentment at the presence of NATO troops, as, in his mind, this could lead to the occupation of Latvia. Another example includes Edgars Tavares, the chairman of the board of the Latvian Green Party (an affiliate of the Union of Greens and Farmers), who recently congratulated the British people for their courage to move away from the "liberal-global course of destruction" represented by the EU.

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) represent another group of politicians whose views on European issues are not determined by party allegiances and rivalries. On certain issues related to deeper European integration, some MEPs occasionally express (sceptical) opinions that are not in line with the pronouncements of government ministers representing their own parties. For example, MEP Iveta Grigule, before she was expelled from the Union of Greens and Farmers, took part in the

Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Group (radical Eurosceptics) in the European Parliament and voted against the resolution on the need to step up action against Russia's propaganda. The two native Russian MEPs from Latvia, Andrejs Mamikins from Harmony and Tatjana Ždanoka from the Union of Latvia's Russians, are the main EU-related opinion leaders for the Russian-language audience in Latvia. The two are also frequent guests on Russian TV shows, where they "represent" Europe. Ždanoka's pro-Kremlin activities and ties have been well documented by investigative journalists. At the same time, Mamikins acts as an online opinion leader and his suggested news resources include not only his own interviews with Kremlin platforms but also sites flagged by Latvian Security Service reports as spreading propaganda in the interests of the Kremlin.<sup>11</sup>

At the present juncture, the combination of weak institutional Euroscepticism and rising intellectual criticism of Europe cannot substantially change the overall consensus in Latvia that membership in the EU is indispensable for Latvia's independence and development. Nevertheless, prevailing attitudes may evolve should the paradigm shift from the current pro-European consensus, based on an understanding that Latvia should be able to maintain its autonomy, sovereignty and identity even within the ever-closer Union, in favour of deeper integration and marginalisation of those member states not willing or able to join the advanced core group of nations. Unfortunately, domestic political priorities and public discourse do not necessarily reflect the agenda of EU institutions, and, consequently, a gap between the expectations of the electorate and actual priorities of the European policymaking process remains open. In the future, right-wing Eurosceptics may try to exploit existing doubts about the European commitment to Baltic security by questioning EU asylum policies and their impact on stability in individual member states, especially in the absence of a broad public debate on strategic issues.

In response to a lack of public support, Eurosceptical parties and activists have begun to reorganise themselves. First, they have begun to forge close ties with Eurosceptical forces at the European

10. From the Heart for Latvia party programme, <http://nosirdslatvijai.lv/lv/partija/programma>

11. Security Police of Latvia, Publiskais pārskats par Drošības policijas darbību 2016. gadā (April 2017), <http://www.dp.gov.lv/lv/noderigi/gada-parskati>

level to win moral support and additional funding. Second, they have merged with more moderate political forces and shifted focus on conservative populist ideas of the Visegrad countries. In Latvia, Eurosceptical Grostiņš has joined the in-parliament opposition party From the Heart for Latvia (7 seats out of 100), which has recently become increasingly vocal against the federalisation of the EU and in favour of the Visegrad model of politics.

### **Economic actors**

In Latvia, business and trade union representatives speak favourably of the EU and the benefits accruing from EU membership. As far as businesspeople are concerned, Euroscepticism may not be the appropriate term to use. Instead, it makes more sense to shift the emphasis from *Euroscepticism* as a lack of faith in effective common policies and practices to *Eurocriticism* as a means to correct inefficiencies and to *Eurorealism* as a way to interpret common but still nationally centred economic relations between member states.

The existing criticism is targeted at some EU policies and inconsistencies between certain EU ideals and reality. More precisely, economic Eurocriticism in Latvia has two main points of focus. The first is linked to the presumed inefficient use of EU structural funds. In the view of many businesses, the distribution of money involves too much bureaucracy and the result is too “just”, ignoring economic logic, which requires not horizontal dispersion of funds but vertical concentration of payouts to benefit, first and foremost, the business champions, which, if successful, would lift all other local businesses. In addition, the predefined nature of policy objectives attached to EU funding allegedly ignores local specificities and impedes local policymakers from developing genuine national economic interests.

The second focus of criticism concerns the allegations that EU regulations have been used for protectionist purposes at the cost of businesses from Latvia and other member states from Central and Eastern Europe. In fact, protectionist tendencies are viewed as the biggest current threat to Latvian

businesses in Europe, as in several real-life situations the principles of the single European market are only paid lip service. Specific examples refer to the construction industry and road haulage services. At the same time, complaints from traditional industries with markets in the East are muted, as gains from the single European market are considerable too.

## Estonia

In May 2017, 80 per cent of Estonians agreed that Estonia's EU membership should be supported. Only 12 per cent disagreed. A positive image of the EU was held by a somewhat smaller number of people, 78 per cent, and opposed by a larger number, 15 per cent. This result indicates stronger support for the EU than in Latvia, where the proportions of opposition to the EU are double that in Estonia in relative terms (See Figure EE.1.).

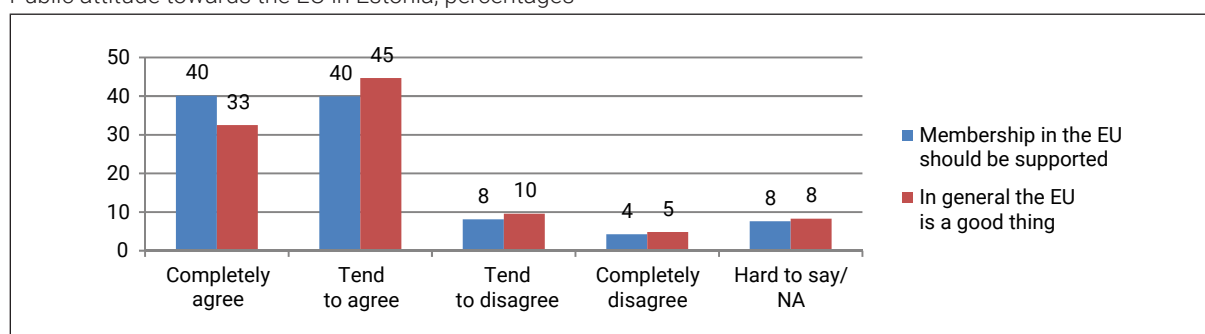
be felt (Estonia holds the presidency in the second part of 2017).

## People

In Estonia, the signature of Eurosceptical people is rather similar to the signature of those in Latvia. The data available on Estonia from the SKDS opinion poll of May 2017 (see Table A.3 in the annex) show that gender does not seem to be a factor

Figure EE.1.

Public attitude towards the EU in Estonia, percentages



Source: SKDS opinion poll of May 2017.

The longitudinal data (see Figure EE.2; beware of design differences between these opinion polls and Latvia's) reveal that support for EU membership has been persistently high and has fluctuated in the range of 65 to 83 per cent over the period from 2004 to 2017. Support markedly improved between 2005 and 2007, years of economic boom. The ensuing economic recession and slump between 2007 and 2011 were marked by falling support for EU membership. The period of recovery improved the esteem of EU membership again, only to see a new phase of decline from the end 2014 until the beginning of 2017, a period of repeated economic hardship in the EU, immigration crises and Brexit. This indicates that in the case of Estonia, public opinion about the EU has been more influenced by economic factors than geopolitical events, which puts Estonia at odds with Latvia. The effect of adopting the euro in 2011 seems of little relevance, while a positive boost from the EU presidency is yet to

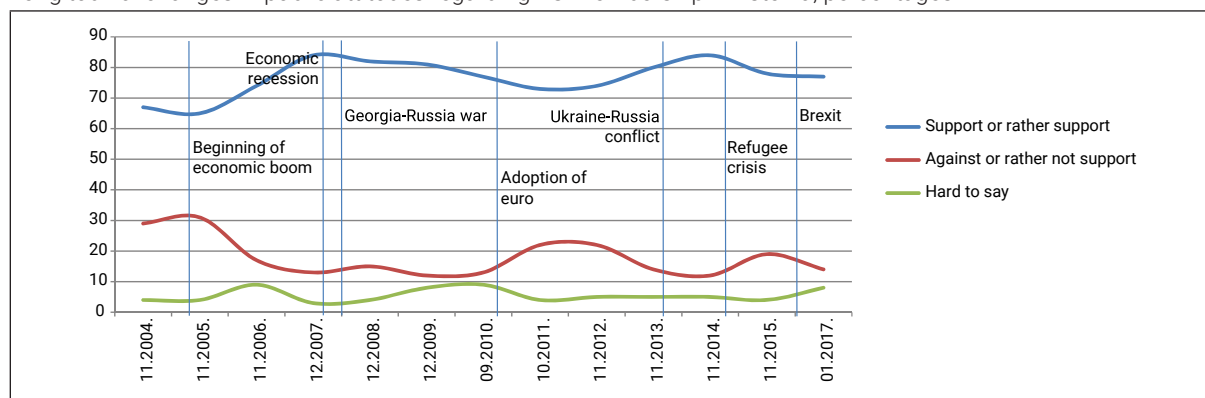
in determining a person's faith in EU membership. At the same time, divorced or single people tend to be more sceptical about membership (19 and 14 per cent). Age also matters – in Estonia, where middle-aged people are most likely to oppose EU membership. Education is another important factor: the better educated the person, the less she or he is inclined to oppose the EU. However, in Estonia, a high level of scepticism is observed among people with vocational or secondary education compared to primary education (15 versus 10 per cent). A low level of income is clearly feeding scepticism in Estonia: people with low incomes show a tendency to be more opposed to the EU (16 per cent). Finally, data from *Riigikantselei* reveal that people living in small towns and rural areas are most sceptical about the EU, though the proportion of pessimists in Tallinn is also relatively high.<sup>12</sup>

Analysis of specific opinion groups reveals that Eurooptimists in Estonia are in the great majority (83 per cent) over the other three groups: radical Eurosceptics, Europragmatists and alienated

12. Riigikantselei, "Elanikkonna teadlikkus ja suhtumine Euroopa Liidu küsimustes", Public opinion survey, January 2017

Figure EE.2.

Longitudinal changes in public attitudes regarding EU membership in Estonia, percentages



Source: Riigikantselei.

people (see Table A.4 in the annex). Radical Eurosceptics come in second (11.5 per cent). Interestingly, associations between Eurooptimists and popular positive and negative stereotypes about the EU reveal that Eurooptimists in Estonia have the most consistently positive outlook towards the EU among Eurooptimists in the Baltic states – they are more united in their belief that the EU brings positive things and in their disbelief that the EU might cause harm.<sup>13</sup>

Like in Latvia, the factor of one's mother tongue is at play: Russian speakers are considerably more sceptical of the EU than native Estonian speakers (19 versus 10 per cent; see Figure EE.3). In 2011, Russian speakers made up 30.3 per cent of Estonia's population. However, compared to Latvia, Russian speakers in Estonia tend to show a considerably more positive attitude towards EU membership and the EU as such: there is only half the opposition towards the EU in Estonia that there is in Latvia.

### Processes and issues

In Estonia, the path of historical development of Euroscepticism is very similar to that in Latvia, the only difference being the sharper contrasts in Estonia. Estonians showed greater resolve to-

wards political and economic transformations and European integration in the 1990s. However, the majority's striving for liberal reforms opened a divide with a minority who opposed the prevailing mood. Like in Latvia, the recent calamities in the EU have seriously challenged the EU's reputation in Estonia. In particular, during both the Greek debt crisis in 2012 and the recent European refugee crisis since 2015, public support for EU membership in Estonia has declined. Estonian people have resented the fact that some EU member states, like Greece, were not willing to take responsibility for their actions and problems, preferring to delegate responsibility to the EU. People's unfulfilled expectations that living standards would quickly converge between EU member states also fed scepticism. Finally, people's criticism of EU institutions may also speak about the country's own limited ability to promote its interests at the EU level.

However, it is unreasonable to expect that a massive wave of Euroscepticism will sweep through Estonia in the coming years. As Estonian experts note, "If there exists visible active criticism, then it is connected with certain specific EU related projects (like Rail Baltica) or the ability of the Estonian government to represent societal interests at the EU level (refugee crisis)", thus underlining the prevalence of issues-based Euroscepticism in Estonia in addition to manifestations of personality-centred Euroscepticism.<sup>14</sup>

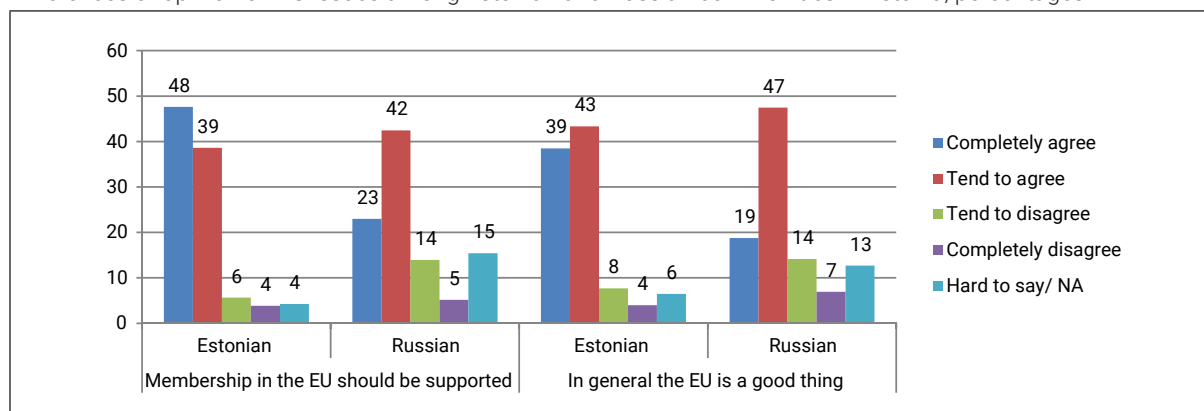
The bulk of Estonian Euroscepticism has strong right-wing connotations, which can be summed up in a relatively simple attitude: Estonia needs

13. Aldis Austers and Jurijs Ņikišins, "The Sociology of Euroscepticism in the Baltic States: Uncovering the Diverse Expression of Euroscepticism", in *Euroscepticism in the Baltic States*

14. Illimar Ploom and Viljar Veebel, "Emulated Euroscepticism in Estonian Politics", in *Euroscepticism in the Baltic States*

Figure EE.3.

Differences of opinion on EU issues among Estonian and Russian communities in Estonia, percentages



Source: SKDS opinion poll of May 2017.

to keep the prerogatives of the nation state while taking advantage of EU support schemes as much as possible. According to this viewpoint, the EU retains its value as long as it is kept to the very minimal role of safeguarding free trade and does not restrict the sovereignty of member states. Underlying this pragmatic weighing of benefits and costs of EU membership is a deeply and widely felt need to remain a member of the EU for the sake of security; at the same time, identity politics has made its way into the mainstream political arena in Estonia and, especially in the context of the refugee crisis, at a certain point a sort of Visegrad-type nationalism may nevertheless arise, as attested by a recent attempt on the part of Estonia's Eurosceptical parties to side with the populist and anti-democratic leadership of Hungary and Poland.

## Parties

Estonia has a personality-based Euroscepticism. Although the Estonian political elite has made efforts to preserve the image of Estonia as an open, innovative and pro-European country, the expressions of relatively radical Eurosceptical views by some individual members of the government parties have been tolerated. The most colourful sceptics from the long-governing pro-European *Eesti Reformierakond* [Estonian Reform Party] are Igor Gräzin and former Foreign Minister Kristiina Ojuland. Both can be called Euro-populists because of their tactic of juxtaposing national interests with the interests of alleged EU elites. The

position of the Reform Party has itself evolved from a kind of soft Euroscepticism targeting the EU's over-bureaucratization and support schemes suffocating free enterprise and trade in the 1990s to a staunch supporter, allegedly because of the rise in prominence of neoliberal ideology within the EU. In the early 2000s, Gräzin formed a research centre called *Vaba Euroopa* [Free Europe]. Ojuland, after having been expelled from the Reform Party in 2013, established her own political force, *Rahva Ühtsuse Erakond* [People's Unity Party], eventually adopting a populist Eurosceptical stance mostly targeting the EU's immigration policies.

As with the Reform Party, a few individual members of the current leading coalition *Eesti Keskerakond* [Estonian Centre Party] have expressed Euro-pessimistic views. For example, Jaanus Karilaid has argued that Estonia's exit from the EU could be under serious discussion in four to five years, while Oudekki Loone has stressed that the failure to unite European countries and the intransigence of the European Commission could cause a domino effect in many EU member states after Brexit. Moreover, with regard to the somewhat pro-Russian background of the Estonian Centre Party, some opposition to EU policies and initiatives was seen already in the past and, thus, could reasonably be expected in future. However, the most radical opinions towards European integration are expressed by the members of *Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond* [Estonian Conservative People's Party]. This par-



ty made it to the parliament in the 2015 elections with seven seats, and its leader, Mart Helme, has been known for his controversial statements, insisting on the one hand on close economic, cultural and security ties with Europe, while on the other hand calling for a new referendum on Estonia's EU membership.

In Estonia, the relatively low level of trust in domestic political institutions does not imply that people would subscribe to more federal European structures and accept marginalisation of the domestic political system. On the contrary, it may signify that, in people's minds, national institutions cannot easily be replaced and, beyond the relatively low level of trust in specific actions and particular office holders, the criticism of domestic institutions might be indicative of high expectations for these same national institutions. However, the harsh treatment by political elites of those who speak against official positions and allow Eurosceptical opinions is deplorable. By decrying opponents as "confused, narrow-minded people under Russian influence", pro-EU forces fail to engage the public in debate and thus leave the public mindset receptive to anti-EU sentiments.

Lastly, an overview of Eurosceptical manifestations in Estonia would not be complete without considering the activities of one member of the European Parliament from Estonia, Jana Toom. Toom was elected from the list of the currently governing Estonia's Centre Party. In the European Parliament, she works within the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) and is currently the most popular EU-related, Russian-speaking Estonian politician. She is active both on local social media and in Kremlin-related media and, despite her political affiliations, has been vocal on the unconditional allocation of citizenship to non-citizens, and has used such epithets as "failed Estonia" and "schizophrenia" with regard to the governing political elites.

### Economic actors

In Estonia, as in Latvia, Eurosceptic views and arguments are based on pure economic logic, and therefore can in principle refer to a sort of Europragmatism.<sup>15</sup> Euroscepticism in Estonia is mostly associated with specific EU-related projects and the government's ability to implement these projects or safeguard national interests at the EU level. The principle of fair and equal treatment of all member states in the EU's single market has also been questioned in Estonia. First, this concerned the member states', including Estonia's, contributions to the bailout of Greece in the face of Estonia's own experience of drastic austerity measures implemented during the financial crisis. Second, the refusal by the European Commission to allow public assistance for the Estonian national flag carrier Estonian Air, which ultimately went bankrupt, initiated a discussion in Estonia about whether strict EU state aid regulations are rational and flexible enough to meet the specific needs of small peripheral EU member states.

The recent debates in Estonia have mostly concentrated on the role of EU funding in supporting or harming the country's development and the implementation of infrastructure projects by the Trans-European Transport Network, including the EU North Sea–Baltic corridor and the Trans-Baltic railway project, Rail Baltic. Although EU funds represent significant financial resources from Estonia's perspective, questions have been raised whether the funds have been allocated to projects that adequately facilitate the country's economic development and exhibit high socio-economic returns and whether there exists a risk of aid dependence for Estonia. The need to remove obstacles by EU member states in the application of the EU directive regulating movement of workers across the EU has also been debated in Estonia in the framework of the Fair Transport Europe initiative. Estonian farmers, in the meantime, have staged two massive public demonstrations in Estonia (in 2015 and 2016) to draw attention to the overproduction of agricultural products in the EU and to the lack of local supportive measures for Estonian farmers to overcome the unfavourable market situation. Farmers' criticism is foremost

15. Viljar Veebel, "Pragmatic Economic Euroscepticism in Estonia", in *Euroscepticism in the Baltic States*



targeted at the unfair EU practice of maintaining direct agricultural support for CEE member states at significantly lower levels than for the EU15, yet, once again, the most vocal criticism has been targeted at the Estonian government for not sufficiently representing the interests of Estonian farmers at the EU level.

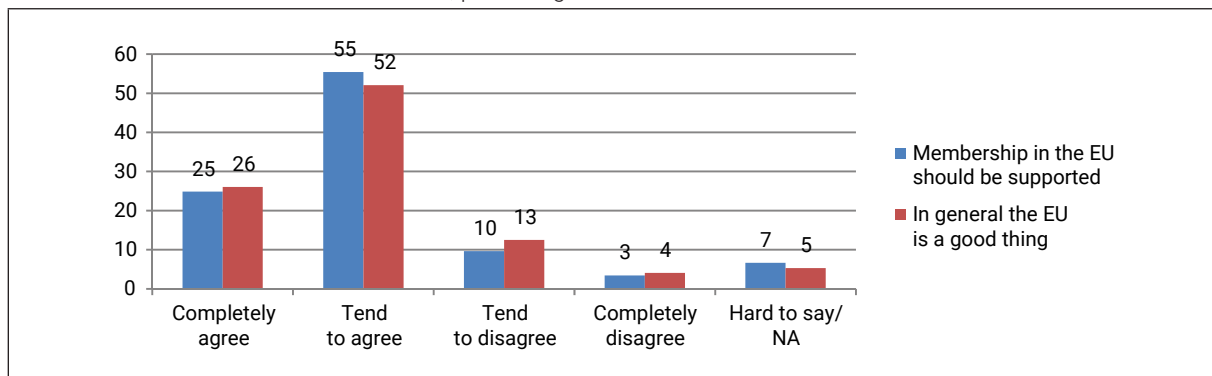
Lastly, although it has not attracted much public attention, the Estonian government is at odds with plans to establish new financing facilities and the transfer of additional powers and competencies to the institutions of the Economic and Monetary Union. The “neo-mercantilist trade policy” implemented by some member states, leading to excessively expanded exports within the EU and the eurozone, is a concern too, as it challenges the competitiveness of Estonia’s partners, creating asymmetric economic interdependence.

## Lithuania

In May 2017, public support in Lithuania for EU membership was equal to that in Estonia, with 80 per cent in favour and 13 per cent against. Lithuanians also supported the idea that the EU enjoyed a good image in the country, with 78 percent agreeing and 17 percent disagreeing (see Figure LT.1).

Figure LT.1.

Public attitude towards the EU in Lithuania, percentages



Source: SKDS opinion poll of May 2017.

Longitudinal data (see Table LT.2) show that support for EU membership in Lithuania has been consistently around 70 per cent. The spike around 2004 can be explained by initial enthusiasm about EU membership, while the decline between 2008 and 2013 is, to a great extent, a result of economic hardship. The recent return of optimism, however, seems to have been sparked by Lithuania's EU presidency in 2013 and events in Ukraine in 2014. In contrast to Latvia and Estonia, the introduction of the euro in 2015 did not have a marked impact on public opinion in Lithuania because of euro-related controversies.

## People

In Lithuania, gender does not seem to be a factor in a person's attitude to EU membership. At the same time, divorced or widowed people tend to be more sceptical about membership (18 and 19 per cent, respectively; see Table A.2 in the annex). As far as age is concerned, except for the most elderly demographic included in the survey (65-74), the level of scepticism tends to increase with

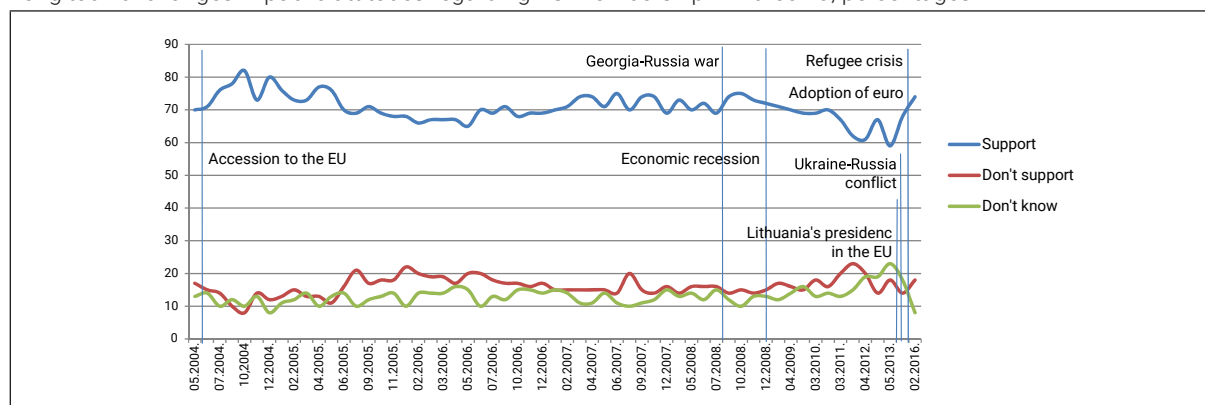
age. Educational attainment matters too: people with basic and secondary levels of education are more sceptical than those with tertiary education (14 per cent, 15 per cent and 9 per cent, respectively). Income level has a mixed impact on people's stance towards the EU in Lithuania: people with medium-low and high incomes tend to be more sceptical (18 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively) than those with low and medium-high

incomes (13 per cent and 10 per cent, respectively). Finally, unemployed people tended to show greater antipathy towards EU membership than employed people (15 per cent and 12 per cent, respectively).

The correlations between specific issues linked to the EU show that Lithuanians hold more diverse attitudes towards the EU than do Latvians or Estonians. That is, among those Lithuanians who are supportive of EU membership, a higher percentage are also critical of the consequences of EU membership such as the uneven distribution of rewards from EU membership and the arrogance of EU leaders. At the same time, despite the perceived high degree of geopolitical salience of EU membership, Lithuanians seem more relaxed, for example, concerning benefits stemming from hypothetical membership in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) – many supporters of membership in the EU admit that Lithuania would currently do better in the CIS than in the EU. This conclusion correlates with the fact that in Lithuania the group of Europragmatists – people who

Figure LT.2.

Longitudinal changes in public attitudes regarding EU membership in Lithuania, percentages



Source: "Lithuanian Public Opinion and the EU Membership", www.euro.lt.

support EU membership but have a low regard for the EU – is twice as large as in the other two countries in relative terms (8 per cent against  $\pm 3.5$  per cent in Estonia and Latvia; see Table A.3 in the annex). Among Lithuania's Europragmatists, more than two-thirds believe that Lithuania would do better today in the CIS. The small size of the Russian community and the absence of the sort of ethnic tensions observed in Latvia and Estonia provides the most probable explanation for this phenomenon of heightened pragmatism in Lithuania.

### Processes and issues

The weakness of Euroscepticism in Lithuania can be explained by a number of factors, including history, economics and geopolitics. Nevertheless, Lithuania's commitments to the EU have been challenged twice in recent years. One of the most striking events was the referendum on the prohibition of selling land to foreigners and legal entities on 29 June 2014. This referendum was a great and unexpected success for all Eurosceptical forces: the referendum was initiated by Eurosceptics but attracted support from a significant economic actor and interest group in Lithuania, the Farmers Union. The latter supported the referendum on the pretext of perceived unequal opportunities in the EU among farmers from different member states; namely, as farmers receive unequal subsidies in different countries, they have unequal conditions for competition in

the market and for buying land. The referendum ultimately failed due to low voter turnout; however, it was indicative of the true social base for Euroscepticism in Lithuania, as those who voted in favour were in fact genuine Eurosceptics, as they knew that their vote jeopardised Lithuania's membership in the EU.

The second attempt to jeopardise Lithuania's integration in the EU happened in 2013 and involved an initiative for another referendum, this time on the introduction of the euro. The referendum initiative was declared illegal by the authorities and did not even pass the signature phase. Notwithstanding this development, the introduction of the euro was another salient issue for Euroscepticism in Lithuania. Many people in Lithuania were opposed to the euro prior to its introduction in 2015. It has been argued that high levels of support for EU membership in combination with little respect for the euro is to be perceived as an indication of satisfaction with the status quo and rejection of deeper integration in Lithuania. However, it cannot be ruled out that sympathies towards the EU in Lithuania are associated with a vision of the EU as an opportunity, and the euro – as a symbol of diminished independence and national sovereignty – with bringing worse living conditions. Indeed, Lithuanians had many expectations from the EU, and when those expectations were not fulfilled, they began to show signs of general dissatisfaction with deeper integration, particularly with regard to the euro.

## Parties

Party support for Euroscepticism, as in the other Baltic states, remains marginalised in Lithuania, as support for Eurosceptical ideas is in decline, and only small populist nationalist parties on the extreme right dare to take an openly Eurosceptical stance. However, the established political parties in Lithuania are definitely not populated by European federalists, and they have opted for inclusion of solid Eurosceptical proposals in their electoral programmes. In addition, as in Estonia's case, Euroscepticism on the part of individual party members has been tolerated.<sup>16</sup>

In the 2014 European Parliament elections, a number of openly Eurosceptical parties participated, including *Tautininkų sąjunga* [Nationalist Union]. Some other parties such as The Bloc of Valdemar Tomaševski also put forward some Eurosceptical ideas such as postponement of the introduction of the euro. However, in these elections only Tomaševski himself made it to the European Parliament. He chose to join the European Conservatives and Reformists Group (moderate Eurosceptics), and another newly elected MEP, Rolandas Paksas, from the governing party *Tvarka ir Teisingumas* [Order and Justice], joined the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Group (radical Eurosceptics). In fact, Paksas is currently the only MEP from the Baltic states participating in this group of radical Eurosceptics, whose chairman is the former leader of the United Kingdom's Independence Party, Nigel Farage. However, the influence of both politicians in Lithuanian politics is limited.

The elections to the national parliament in 2016 were even less successful for traditionally Eurosceptical parties: neither *Lietuvos liaudies partija* [Lithuanian People's Party] nor *Tautininkų koalicija* [Nationalist Coalition] exceeded the qualifying 5 per cent barrier. The more established and popular *Darbo Partija* [Labour Party], in spite of its Eurosceptical turn under the new leadership of Valentinus Mazuronis, also did not make it into the parlia-

ment. Paradoxically, Mazuronis is also a member of the European Parliament (elected from the list of the Order and Justice party) and participates in the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe. Under his leadership, however, the Labour Party has adopted an openly hostile stance towards the European reallocation scheme for asylum seekers.

In Lithuania, Euroscepticism is not a separate political trend or ideology but a constituent part of the broader political outlook, and can be seen more in the world of social movements than in the world of Lithuanian political parties. Eurosceptical social movements such as the Žalgiris National Resistance Movement in Lithuania actually do not specialise in exceptionally Eurosceptical topics, and have no defined objectives, strategy or agenda in this area. In January 2016, a new public political movement, Vilnius Forum, was rallied. The forum's founding declaration, which boasted several hundred signatories, including several public figures, states that Lithuania is facing existential challenges caused by, among other factors, growing confusion in the international arena. Responsibility is attributed, first of all, to the Lithuanian government's policies, although a significant part of the declaration still falls on the EU, which, according to the declaration, engages in "unnatural Europeanisation", i.e. forced secularisation, denationalisation and the abolishment of statehood.

At the social level, however, the fact that Eurosceptical attitudes are presented not by separate individuals but by a public body like the Vilnius Forum makes it possible to state that, in Lithuania, Euroscepticism has become institutionalised to a certain extent. For the time being, however, there is no reason to claim that, in its second year of activity, the Vilnius Forum has noticeably expanded its influence or considerably increased the ranks of its supporters.

Finally, it is important to mention Romualdas Ozolas and *Lietuvos centro partija* [Lithuanian Centre Party]. Ozolas stood for the restoration of Lithuania's independence in the 1990s; he was one of the leaders of the *Sąjūdis* national movement and later founded the Lithuanian Centre Party. Being a well-known personality, he was simultaneously

16. More on Lithuania in Gediminas Vitkus, "Small is small: Euroscepticism in Lithuanian Politics", in *Euroscepticism in the Baltic States*

a consistent and tough Eurosceptic who openly declared that for him the EU was, in essence, unacceptable. In fact, the group initiating the referendum on the sale of land was led by journalist Pranciškus Šliužas of the Lithuanian Centre Party. Otherwise, the party's influence on the public has been very limited, as was that of Ozolas – upon his retirement in 2015, he had never held an important public position.

### **Economic actors**

In Lithuania, economic Euroscepticism represents mostly a critique of specific developments, integration processes and policies, as well as a home-grown variety of Euroscepticism, that is, that the inefficiency of the national government in dealing with EU funds or other EU policies causes frustration with respect to the EU. This concerns both the massive outmigration from Lithuania and the introduction of the euro, which initially was not very liked by Lithuanians. In general, companies with a high level of internationalisation (in the industrial sector, transport sector and others), transnational corporations and other large companies seem more supportive of the national market's integration into a single market and, for this reason, have less sceptical views. The companies and economic sectors (e.g. farmers) that are oriented towards the national market and use local raw materials, as well as small businesses, would like to have more protection and are against integration. For instance, small businesses selling fruits and vegetables are not likely to support the integration and opening of markets.<sup>17</sup>

One of the most powerful lobbies with an ambivalent position on the EU are Lithuanian farmers. As a group, farmers receive more benefits from the EU than other group, but they also are the most visible critics of EU policies. Lithuanian farmers organised a referendum on selling land to foreigners and have consistently expressed dissatisfaction with unequal payouts from EU funds. They have argued that it is necessary to smooth out direct

payments to farmers in all EU member states immediately, as only then will there be a possibility to talk about equal competition in the market. Their pessimistic assessments of the EU are also related to the free movement of capital for buying agricultural land. Farmers favour less integration and more protectionism in the case of land sales, but at the same time favour more integration in the case of direct payments.

The second business group that is highly integrated into the EU market but criticises some EU policies are transport companies. Lithuanian transport companies operating in EU markets have a generally positive assessment of the EU but have some complaints about national protectionism in some older EU member states, especially after the closure of the Russian market.

Representatives of other sectors of the Lithuanian economy have no clearly expressed complaints about the EU. Trade unions, although not very popular among workers, treat the EU as an opportunity to solve various problems and set higher labour standards. They are sceptical about the possibility of implementing the European social model due to existing inequalities in various member states; however, EU funding provided to them as social partners and prospects of higher social standards implemented through EU regulations ensure trade union support for the EU.

17. Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė, "The Invisible Economic Dimension of Euroscepticism in Lithuania", in *Euroscepticism in the Baltic States*

## Summary

None of the three Baltic countries represents a case of unbridled Euroscepticism today. The observed manifestations of Euroscepticism have been of a sporadic nature, based on specific issues and centred around particular personalities, and have not yet developed into a systemic institutional phenomenon.

Notwithstanding marginal Eurosceptical parties, radical Euroscepticism in the Baltic countries resides mostly at the level of social movements. At the moment, the most radical party with Eurosceptical views in any of the national parliaments is the Estonian Conservative People's Party. In Latvia, the party From the Heart to Latvia, which holds seven seats in the parliament, has begun to position itself as a moderate Eurosceptical force. In Lithuania, none of the Eurosceptical forces have made it into the parliament. At the same time, however, very few mainstream political parties show consistently strong support for the EU. On both the right and the left, one can find a great variety of Eurosceptical ideas, and occasionally parties have tolerated radical Eurosceptical views from their members, thus endeavouring to profit from shifts in the public mood. This hijacking of the Eurosceptical agenda has resulted in a situation where a considerable proportion of members of the European Parliament from these countries venture out to Eurosceptical or even anti-European ideas.

The public perception of Europe is a much broader topic than attitudes regarding European integration or the European Union; namely, the notion of Europe is generally understood as a synonym for the West or, more concretely, a web of international structures that includes the European Union and many other governmental and non-governmental organisations.

The analysis of sociodemographic parameters of respondents reveals that among the factors with the most influence over people's perception of EU membership in the Baltic countries are their age, educational attainment, level of income, employment status and belonging to a particular lan-

guage group. For example, a typical Eurosceptical person is middle-aged or retired, has Russian as his or her native language, has basic education, is unemployed, has a low level of income and is living either in the capital or in remote regions. Except for the high concentration of sceptics in the Latvian capital, the sociodemographic profile of Eurosceptical people is very similar to that in other EU member states. A particular observation in the case of Latvia is that large families tend to be less sceptical about EU membership than small families.

A cross-country comparison reveals that Latvia tends to be the most sceptical of all three Baltic states, though even there, as shown by longitudinal studies, the level of opposition towards the EU has considerably diminished since 2011 as a consequence of a series of events, e.g. economic recovery, the introduction of the euro and Latvia's EU presidency. More notably, however, public opinion in Latvia on EU membership seems to be more sensitive than the other Baltic countries to the increasing geopolitical tensions between Russia and the West. In contrast to Latvia, the longitudinal trends in Lithuania and Estonia suggest that these countries are more responsive to changes in the phases of the economic cycle and developments at the EU level, e.g. disagreements over the European macroeconomic framework, the influx of immigrants and lately over the United Kingdom's decision to leave the EU.

At the same time, Estonia today holds the most consistently pro-European attitudes: there are a lot of Eurooptimists, and they are unified in endorsing the positive manifestations of EU membership and in discounting the alleged negative aspects. Among Lithuanians, there are a relatively large number of Europragmatists, and many people who are positively inclined towards EU membership accept the idea that Lithuania would do better today, for example, in the Commonwealth of Independent States. Latvia, for its part, has the highest number of radical Eurosceptics, i.e. people who oppose EU membership and believe the EU is a bad thing. Somewhat worryingly, many Eurooptimists in Latvia, and to a lesser extent also in Lithuania and Estonia, reveal concerns over such

alleged negative aspects of the EU as working only to the benefit of a small group of people while the EU's institutions lack interest in the opinion of local people. In fact, all three countries, but in particular Latvia and Estonia, are among the most unequal EU member states in terms of the distribution of national wealth. It is very possible that the concerns of Eurooptimists are a reflection of domestic problems with privatisation and arrogance on the part of political elites.

Indeed, Euroscepticism in the Baltic states is not driven so much by radical opposition to the EU as by a critical appraisal of its negative side effects. Even the harshest Eurosceptics in the Baltic countries admit that, if properly organised, the EU would bring a lot of benefits. At the same time, it is also evident that much of the ado about Euroscepticism in Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania has its roots in people's frustrations with national political institutions and has less to do with EU institutions in Brussels, although greater respect for local circumstances is warranted from the EU institutions as well. Likewise, the occasional unfair treatment of businesses from the Baltic region in the European single market is also a major concern. Hence, from a methodological point of view, it makes more sense in the case of the Baltic countries to shift the emphasis away from Euroscepticism as a lack of faith in effective common policies and practices, towards Eurocriticism as a means to correct inefficiencies and to Eurorealism as a way to interpret common but still nationally centred economic relations between EU member states.

At the moment, there is no reason to panic. However, the traffic lights have turned from green to yellow in some aspects, signalling approaching danger. Hence, here are several suggestions for future policy action:

- Political parties have to step up efforts to clarify their positions on essential elements of the future of the EU. People need to know who is who well in advance of elections – the fortunes of politicians may well depend on their ability to convince the electorate that EU integration is compatible with a vision of Europe as a union of equal nation states.

- Political elites need to put aside their arrogance and engage in frank discussions with people of different opinions. This is of paramount importance to reduce the gap between the mundane concerns of people and Brussels' agenda.
- Governments have to make their countries more equal, as this would increase people's trust in domestic institutions and make them feel more relaxed about EU membership.
- At the EU level, the local circumstances of peripheral member states must be taken seriously, and more policy flexibility is warranted.

People in the Baltic states take security issues seriously. Unless hesitation to deliver meaningful solutions to concerns about security and development is overcome, a great number of people in the Baltic countries will remain in a state of confusion about what to expect from the EU and, ultimately, about where their loyalties lie. This particularly concerns the Russian-speaking segment of local populations, whose hearts and minds the Kremlin is so keen on winning.



## Annex

Figure A.1.

Opposition to key European policies in the Baltic states

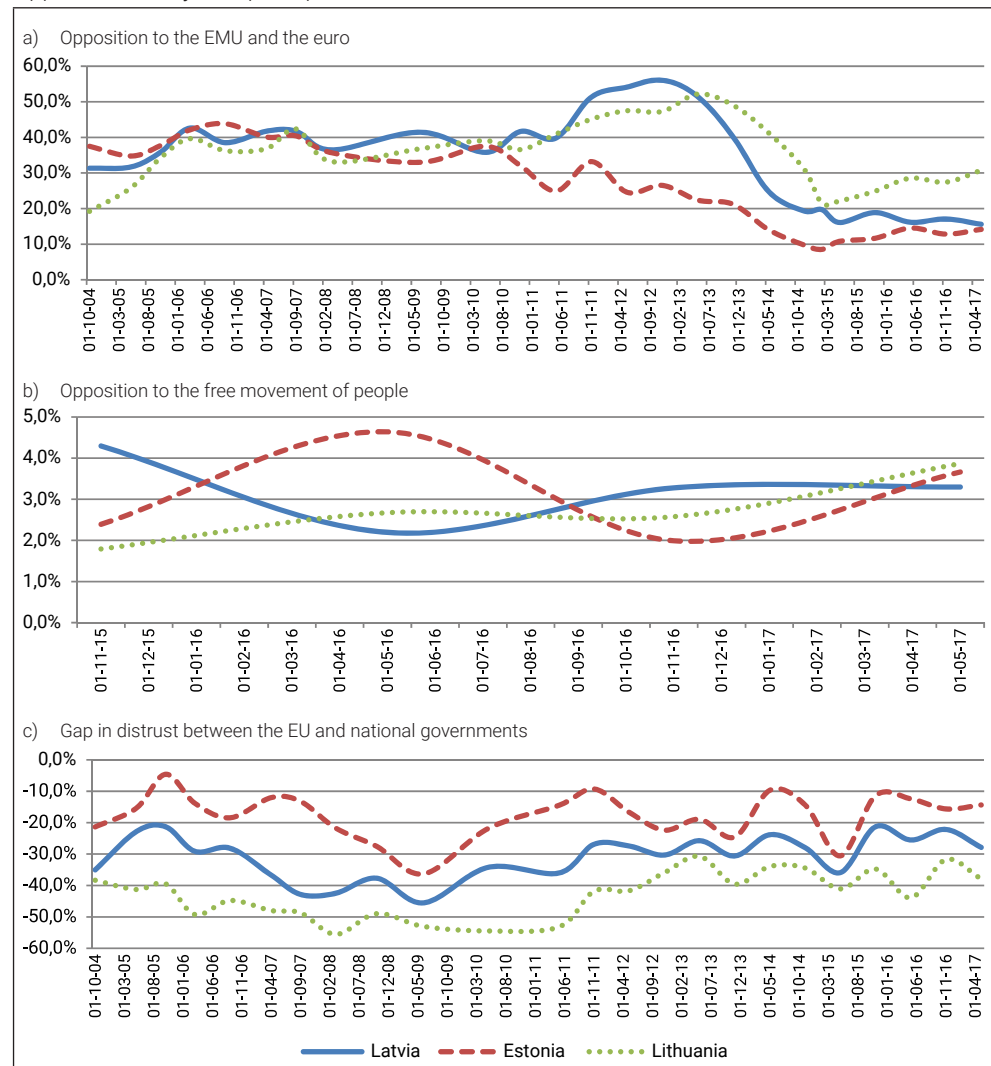
Source: Eurobarometer Interactive series, <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Chart/index>.

Table A.1.

The proportional size of Russian-speaking communities in Latvia and Estonia, percentage of total population

	Latvia	Estonia	Lithuania
Census 2000	37.5	30.9	8.3
Census 2011	37.2	30.3	7.5

Source: National statistical offices of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania.

Table A.2.

Public attitude toward Latvia's EU membership in different social demographic cohorts in Latvia, combined data, percentages

"Latvian membership in the European Union is..."		A good thing	A bad thing	Not a good or a bad thing	Hard to say
ALL RESPONDENTS (n=3122)		39	15	41	6
GENDER	Male	41	16	38	5
	Female	37	14	43	6
AGE	15-24	59	10	26	5
	25-34	48	11	36	5
	35-44	37	16	41	5
	45-54	31	17	47	5
	55-64	32	17	46	6
	65-74	27	19	46	9
ETHNICITY	Latvian	46	11	39	4
	Russian	29	21	42	8
	Other	30	18	45	8
EDUCATION	Basic	38	18	37	7
	Secondary, professional secondary	35	16	43	6
	Higher	48	11	37	4
SECTOR OF WORK	Public sector	41	9	46	4
	Private sector	40	16	39	5
MAIN OCCUPATION	Manager	56	11	31	3
	Clerk, specialist (not physical labour)	45	11	39	5
	Worker	33	17	45	5
	Self-employed, has own enterprise	37	13	45	5
	Retired	29	18	44	9
	Pupil, student	66	8	21	5
	Homemaker	47	12	37	3
EMPLOYMENT STATUS	Employed	40	14	41	5
	Unemployed	37	16	39	7
AVERAGE MONTHLY NET INCOME PER FAMILY MEMBER	Low	30	20	46	4
	Medium-low	37	15	42	7
	Medium	34	13	47	7
	Medium-high	41	14	39	6
	High	49	13	35	4
CHILDREN UP TO THE AGE OF 18 LIVING IN THE HOUSEHOLD	Yes	45	13	37	5
	No	35	16	43	6
NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS	1	30	18	42	9
	2	36	16	43	5
	3	40	14	40	6
	4 or more	47	11	37	4
REGION	Riga	43	15	36	7
	Vidzeme	37	15	44	5
	Kurzeme	37	18	38	7
	Zemgale	37	11	49	2
	Latgale	36	17	41	7
SETTLEMENT TYPE	Riga, capital	43	15	36	7
	Other city, town	35	17	42	6
	Rural areas	38	12	45	5

Source: National statistical offices of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania.

Table A.3.

Proportions of Eurosceptical respondents by sociodemographic categories in Estonia and Lithuania, percentages

		Estonia	Lithuania
ALL RESPONDENTS		12	13
GENDER	Male	11	14
	Female	13	13
AGE	15-24	7	8
	25-34	16	11
	35-44	15	5
	45-54	14	15
	55-64	11	21
	65-74	14	18
MARITAL STATUS	Married/cohabiting	10	13
	Divorced/separated	19	18
	Widowed	13	19
	Single	14	12
EDUCATION	Basic	10	14
	Secondary, professional secondary	15	15
	Higher	8	9
MONTHLY HOUSEHOLD INCOME	Low	16	13
	Medium-low	10	18
	Medium-high	11	10
	High	10	15
LANGUAGE SPOKEN IN THE FAMILY	Estonian/Lithuanian	9	.
	Russian	19	.
EMPLOYMENT STATUS	Employed	13	12
	Unemployed	11	15

Source: SKDS opinion poll from May 2017.

Table A.4.

Actual weight of each dominant opinion group on the EU in Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, cross-tabulated data, percentages\*

Latvia (n=922)		Estonia (n=893)		Lithuania (n=911)	
Eurooptimists	Alienated	Eurooptimists	Alienated	Eurooptimists	Alienated
71.48	3.25	83.43	1.57	76.73	4.5
Europragmatists	Radical Eurosceptics	Europragmatists	Radical Eurosceptics	Europragmatists	Radical Eurosceptics
3.69	21.58	3.47	11.53	7.90	10.87

Note: (\*) Only meaningful responses (i.e. excluding the "hard to say/no answer" option) were included in processed data.

Source: SKDS opinion poll from May 2017, author's own calculations.

## About the author

**Aldis Austers** is a research fellow at the Latvian Institute of International Affairs. He studied economics at Riga Technical University and international relations at Vienna Diplomatic Academy. He worked for an extended period of time at the Foreign Affairs Ministry of Latvia and the Bank of Latvia. Along with work in the Latvian Institute of International Affairs, he is a part-time lecturer at Riga Stradins University and Riga Graduate School of Law. His fields of interest include monetary economics, political economics, the migration of people and European integration.

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Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung | Riga Office  
37-64 Dzirnavu street | Riga, LV-1010

Responsible:  
Dr. Tobias Mörschel | Director of the FES in the Baltic States  
Tel.: +371 6783 05 39 | Fax: +371 6783 03 26  
<http://fes-baltic.lv/lv/>

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- supporting the European integration process
- contributing to the development of a common European foreign and security policy
- promoting a fair and sustainable development of economic and social policies in the Baltic States and in the EU

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