

Country Report

Lithuania

Egdūnas Račius

October 2019

This Country Report offers a detailed assessment of religious diversity and violent religious radicalisation in the above-named state. It is part of a series covering 23 countries (listed below) on four continents. More basic information about religious affiliation and state-religion relations in these states is available in our Country Profiles series. This report was produced by GREASE, an EU-funded research project investigating religious diversity, secularism and religiously inspired radicalisation.

Countries covered in this series:

Albania, Australia, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Malaysia, Morocco, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

<http://grease.eu.eu>



The GREASE project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement number 770640

The EU-Funded GREASE project looks to Asia for insights on governing religious diversity and preventing radicalisation.

Involving researchers from Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Oceania, GREASE is investigating how religious diversity is governed in over 20 countries. Our work focuses on comparing norms, laws and practices that may (or may not) prove useful in preventing religious radicalisation. Our research also sheds light on how different societies cope with the challenge of integrating religious minorities and migrants. The aim is to deepen our understanding of how religious diversity can be governed successfully, with an emphasis on countering radicalisation trends.

While exploring religious governance models in other parts of the world, GREASE also attempts to unravel the European paradox of religious radicalisation despite growing secularisation. We consider the claim that migrant integration in Europe has failed because second generation youth have become marginalised and radicalised, with some turning to jihadist terrorism networks. The researchers aim to deliver innovative academic thinking on secularisation and radicalisation while offering insights for governance of religious diversity.

The project is being coordinated by Professor Anna Triandafyllidou from The European University Institute (EUI) in Italy. Other consortium members include Professor Tariq Modood from The University of Bristol (UK); Dr. H. A. Hellyer from the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) (UK); Dr. Mila Mancheva from The Centre for the Study of Democracy (Bulgaria); Dr. Egdunas Raciunas from Vytautas Magnus University (Lithuania); Mr. Terry Martin from the research communications agency SPIA (Germany); Professor Mehdi Lahlou from Mohammed V University of Rabat (Morocco); Professor Haldun Gulalp of The Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (Turkey); Professor Pradana Boy of Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang (Indonesia); Professor Zawawi Ibrahim of The Strategic Information and Research Development Centre (Malaysia); Professor Gurpreet Mahajan of Jawaharlal Nehru University (India); and Professor Michele Grossman of Deakin University (Melbourne, Australia). GREASE is scheduled for completion in 2022.

For further information about the GREASE project please contact: Professor Anna Triandafyllidou, anna.triandafyllidou@eui.eu

<http://grease.eui.eu/>

GREASE - Radicalisation, Secularism and the Governance of Religion: Bringing Together European and Asian Perspectives

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION..... 5

2. CURRENT COMPOSITION OF THE POPULATION AND CHALLENGES ARISING FROM IT .. 4

3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF STATE-ORGANISED RELIGION RELATIONS..... 6

4. CURRENT INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE FOR GOVERNING RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY..... 8

5. VIOLENT RELIGIOUS RADICALISATION CHALLENGES: A BRIEF OVERVIEW10

6. POLICIES AND PRACTICES ADDRESSING / PREVENTING VIOLENT RELIGIOUS RADICALISATION.....11

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS.....13

REFERENCES.....15

1. Introduction

Though the period of the current independence of Lithuania is comparatively short – it became independent at the breakup of the USSR in 1991, it was rather a restoration of its statehood than the beginning, as Lithuania had been an independent state between 1918 and 1940. Soon after regaining its independence, Lithuania embarked upon the course toward Euro-Atlantic integration, which culminated in its accession to both the EU and NATO in 2004. Lithuania’s legal system, including governance of religion, is, thus, permeated by the EU standards, which it had to adhere to in order to join the Bloc.

The peculiarity, at least in the broader European context, of the Lithuanian regime of the governance of religious diversity lies particularly in the formal distinction between three or even four levels of recognition of religious collectivities and their organizations operating in the country. Lithuania has a special category, that of “traditional” religious communities and Churches, which inter alia includes Sunni Muslims in it (all other branches of Islam fall under other categories). Other two non-Christian “traditional” religious communities are Judaist and Karaite. As such, “traditional” religious communities, through their organizations, have exceptional rights to build temples and own property, expect tax exemptions, teach their religion to children in public schools, seek assistance from the state for their projects. Furthermore, individual religious rights (dietary, clothing, feast days and similar) of members of “traditional” religious communities are not only formally guaranteed but are to be secured in practice.

In the following sections, first, ethno-confessional and other social characteristics of the Lithuanian population are provided, followed by the overview of the regime of the governance of religious diversity and the legal measures to preclude and counter possible religious radicalisation.

2. Current composition of the population and challenges arising from it

Ethnic Lithuanians make the overwhelming majority of the country’s inhabitants: according to the latest population census, they make over 84 per cent of three million strong nation (Department of Statistics, 2013, p. 7), while the second largest ethnic community, Poles, made 6.6 per cent with a third ethnic group, Russians, making another 5.8 per cent. Belarusians and Ukrainians make 1.2 and 0.5 per cent respectively. People of all other ethnicities found in Lithuania made less than two per cent.

Table 1. Main ethnic groups in Lithuania

Lithuanians	84.2
Poles	6.6
Russians	5.8
Belarusians	1.2

There has been little immigration to independent Lithuania – as of January 1, 2019, there were just 58,000 foreigners residing in Lithuania making just little over two per cent of all the inhabitants. The biggest national group of immigrants currently are Ukrainian nationals – around 17,000 (Ukrainians become, 2019). Nationals of other neighboring countries make other biggest groups of immigrants: some 12,500 Russian citizens and over 12,000 Belarusian citizens. Citizens of these three Slavic Orthodox countries comprise some 85 per cent of all foreigners living in Lithuania. The largest group of EU member state citizens are from Latvia (1,100), Germany and Poland (over 700 from each). However, almost 60 per cent of foreigners reside in the country on a temporary basis, mainly through employment contracts.

Immigrants from outside of Europe make a negligent share in the population. Those hailing from Muslim majority regions in Asia and Africa may amount to a thousand but they come from a plethora of countries with none dominating. Lithuania has been a transit country for both the economic migrants and political refugees with few requesting asylum. For instance, in 2018, only 279 asylum requests were filed: 74 by Tajik, 39 by Russian, 34 by Iraqi and 30 by Syrian nationals. The rate of asylum granting has been traditionally low with only a handful receiving conventional refugee status. But even those granted asylum tend to leave Lithuania for another (Western) European country.

According to the latest census figures, nominally, some 83 per cent of Lithuania's population are of Christian cultural background, with Roman Catholics (chiefly ethnic Lithuanians and Poles) making over 77 and Russian Orthodox (primarily Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians) over four per cent. Around six per cent of the population self-identify as 'non-religious'. Members of non-Christian (chiefly, Muslim, Buddhist, Judaist, Karaite, Krishna consciousness) religious communities make less than half per cent. According to the population census figures, there were 2,727 Sunni Muslims in the country in 2011, who made a mere 0.1 per cent of the population. The number of Shi'i Muslims (chiefly Azeris, who came to Lithuania in the Soviet period) is less than three hundred. The share of people of Muslim background in Lithuania is one of the lowest in all of Europe (Račius, 2018, pp. 3-4).

Irrespective of religious identity, many of Lithuanians do not hold religious beliefs (like belief in life after death, Hell or Heaven) or hold non-Christian beliefs (like evil eye, reincarnation) (Two-thirds of Greeks, 2017) and most of Lithuanians, as numerous surveys reveal, do not attend religious services (Manchin, 2004).

In view of this ethno-confessional composition of the Lithuanian population, Lithuania may be seen as one of the most culturally homogenous nations in Europe and described as a rather secular post-socialist society of Western Christian cultural heritage. Therefore, culturally, there are hardly any tensions or cleavages that could threaten the socio-political stability of the country. Nonetheless, as a recent survey revealed, almost 36 per cent of Lithuanians would not want to have a Muslim as neighbor (Lithuanian public, 2019), though most of them have never met a person of Muslim cultural background. Such high percentage of those who dislike or are distrustful of Muslims is

caused primarily by media (national, Western and Russian) reports, which routinely give Islam and Muslims a bad name. With reports on every new terrorist attack in Europe, percentage of such respondents temporarily increases.

Presence of the ethnic Polish minority, who concentrate in the south-east of the country, along the border with Belarus, though generally not viewed as problematic, is nonetheless perceived by some nationalistically inclined ethnic Lithuanians as a potential danger to the integrity of the Lithuanian state. With the Polish governments' expressed concern for the wellbeing and the rights of ethnic Poles in Lithuania (something that has in the past made bilateral relations between the two countries sour (Burant and Zubek, 1993, p. 370; Bad blood, 2012; also, Current disputes, 2011), ethnic Polish citizens of Lithuania are sometimes suspected by ethnic Lithuanians of if not harboring irredentist feelings then collective unwillingness to fully identify with the Lithuanian state.

3. Historical background of state-organised religion relations

Lithuania, or rather what then was the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which in its prime time (that is in the 15-16th centuries) stretched from the Baltic Sea all the way to the Black Sea shores, had been multi-confessional since its founding in the 13th century. While until the end of the 14th century its leaders and ethnic Lithuanians remained pagan, Lithuania already then hosted both Roman Catholic (mainly merchants and other settlers from Western Europe) and Orthodox (local Slavs) populations. By the 16th century, its confessional composition had diversified further to include, besides various Christian confessional groups, such non-Christian religious communities as Judaists, Karaites and Muslims.

Appearance of first Muslims on the territory of Lithuania dates back to the 14th century when the first migrants – political refugees – from the Golden Horde (and later, the Crimean Khanate) came to the then Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Soon they were joined by new arrivals, consisting chiefly of mercenaries hired by Lithuanian grand dukes, more refugees and prisoners of war who, once freed, chose to stay. The immigrants, the majority of whom were recently Islamized Turkic speakers (Tatars), but also Karaites, settled mainly in the north-western parts of the Duchy, usually in village communities around the capital Vilnius.

The Grand Dukes granted the Muslim and Karaite elite the nobility rank and gave tracts of land to be used as fief that later went into their personal possession. Neither Muslims nor Karaites of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were ever forced to abandon their faith either through coerced conversion or because of artificially created obstacles in practicing their religion (such as bans, prohibitions, segregationist decrees, etc.). It is believed that mosques on the then territory of the Grand Duchy were being built as early as the late 14th or beginning of the 15th century (Kričinskis, 1993, p. 158). In the times of the Republic of Two Nations (that is until the final partition of it in 1795) there might

have been up to two dozen mosques (Kričinskis, 1993, p. 161), as a rule with adjacent cemeteries.

Albeit by then the dominant confession of the country became Roman Catholic, the Statutes (aka the Constitutions of the time) of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and particular the Second (1566) and the Third (1588) established equality among Christian confessions of the Duchy and also confirmed the de facto existing wide-ranging civic rights for nobility of minority ethno-confessional groups (such as Muslims and Karaites), though admittedly, short of full citizens' rights. This allowed minority religious groups to continue practicing their faith publicly, own and build temples and other religious-purposes buildings, have their own cemeteries, educational establishments and the like.

For more than a century (between 1795 and 1916), when Lithuania was under the Russian imperial rule, the tsarist regime pursued the policy of russification of the local population, which was endorsed by the Russian Orthodox Church. Both the imperial regime and the Russian Orthodox Church saw the Roman Catholic Church as an enemy and its Catholic flock (Lithuanians, Polish and some Latvians were the only Catholic subjects of the empire) as disloyal population. Though practicing Catholicism was never banned in Lithuania during the tsarist rule, clergy and other Catholic Church personnel had hard time under the tsars and Catholic Church's property was frequently confiscated by the authorities and either turned into Orthodox churches or altogether raised to the ground. Minority religious groups, including Muslims, Karaites and Judaists, fared better than Catholics.

During its brief twenty-year stint of independence between the world wars (1918-1940), Lithuania sought to grant religious rights to all major religious groups. Though the Roman Catholic Church, as the religious organization representing the overwhelming majority of the population, held clearly a privileged position, inter alia, granted to it by the Concordat of 1927, other religious groups, including such non-Christian ones like Judaists (who made some seven per cent of the country's population) and miniscule Karaite and Muslim communities, exercised their religious rights unhindered. Curiously enough, the Muslim community, which in inter-war Lithuania comprised just a thousand souls (most of Muslims of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania at the time lived in Polish-controlled territories, including Vilnius) even managed to get the state pay for the building of its mosque in the interim capital Kaunas and the state provided also modest salaries for Muslim imams.

The Soviet period (1944-1990) in Lithuania, as elsewhere in the USSR, was marked by the regime's atheistic stance, which was debilitating and detrimental to all religious groups in the country. But once again, it was the Catholics and their Church that were singled out as the biggest enemies of the Communist state. In result, in the first decade of the Soviet rule, numerous churches were closed with many pulled down, their priests deported to Siberia, imprisoned and often killed. Though during the later decades the persecution of Catholic activists was eased, official atheistic anti-religious position and rhetoric persisted and religious people continued to feel discrimination on religious

grounds. The Catholic Church at that time took upon itself the role of the preserver and protector of the double identity of Lithuanian-Catholics and some of the clergy, clandestine monks and nuns participated in peaceful resistance to the Communist regime, for which they often paid with their freedom. Apart from the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches, no other religious group managed to preserve its integrity or organizational structure during the Soviet period.

Though Lithuania became truly sovereign only in 1991, however, even before declaring its independence a year earlier, the lot of believers significantly already improved in the last years of the Soviet rule, when the central administration in Moscow practically abandoned all restrictions on religious freedom. Already in 1989, numerous Christian and non-Christian religious organizations were revived or were established for the first time in the still Soviet Lithuania. The process of restoration of full religious freedoms and rights was then carried on into the country's independence.

4. Current institutional structure for governing religion and religious diversity

The current institutional structure for governing religious diversity in Lithuania is to be found and is based on two legal acts – the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania (adopted in 1992) and the Law on Religious Communities and Associations (passed in 1995). Though there have been numerous amendments to both pieces of legislation, they have not profoundly changed the original foundation of the institutional structure for governing religious diversity in the country. There have also been, so far unsuccessful, attempts to profoundly change the Law on Religious Communities and Associations – the draft law prepared by the Ministry of Justice has been shelved by the Parliament.

The foundational law of the country, the Constitution, besides guaranteeing in a number of its articles religious freedom to the country's inhabitants, makes an explicit distinction in Article 43 between what it refers to as “traditional” and merely “registered” “churches” and religious organizations, though, admittedly, it remains silent on which ones fall under which category (Seimas, 1992). The ambivalence left in the Constitution regarding which religions/faith communities are to be recognized as “traditional” was rectified by a *lex specialis*, namely, the Law on Religious Communities and Associations. Article 5 of the Law states: “The State shall recognise nine traditional religious communities and associations existing in Lithuania, which comprise a part of Lithuania's historical, spiritual and social heritage: Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran, Evangelical Reformed, Russian Orthodox, Old Believer, Judaist, Sunni Muslim and Karaite” (Seimas, 1995).

Though the Law on Religious Communities and Associations also talks about “state-recognized” religious communities and associations, it refers to them in generic terms, without naming a single one. A third category of religious communities and associations, not referred to in the Constitution, is also discernable in the Law: religious communities

and associations, which are neither “traditional” nor “state-recognized.” In the Law on Religious Communities and Associations, they are referred to in the context of application for the status of “state-recognized” and none are mentioned by name (Seimas, 1995).

Article 43 of the Constitution declares that there is no state religion in Lithuania; thus, all of the traditional religious communities named in the Law on Religious Communities and Associations are formally equal, both vis-à-vis the state and among themselves. Non-Christian religious communities such as Karaites, Judaists, and Sunni Muslims, with their share in the country’s population hovering around or less than 0.1 per cent, formally have the same rights as the Roman Catholic community, which stood at over 77 per cent at the time of the last population census in 2011! (Department of Statistics, 2013, p. 5). In practice, however, the numerically dominant Roman Catholic Church gets preferential treatment from the state and public institutions. For instance, the Roman Catholic Church has its representative on the Council of the national TV and radio broadcaster (LRT), and Roman Catholic priests serve in state institutions (Armed Forces, Border Police) as salaried chaplains and are otherwise routinely invited to consecrate and bless state property (newly opening premises, police cars) and perform rituals at military events (by blessing unit flags).

On the other hand, the very separation of “traditional” religious communities from others raises the question of equality between the former and the latter. Article 3 of the Law on Religious Communities and Associations assures that “All individuals, regardless of religion they profess, their religious convictions or their relationship with religion, shall be equal before the law. It shall be prohibited to, directly or indirectly, restrict their rights and freedoms, or to apply privileges.” (Seimas, 1995). Nonetheless, building on the constitutional distinction between religious communities in Article 43 of the Constitution, Articles 10 and 11 of the Law on Religious Communities and Associations establish a clear distinction between the two categories of religious communities and associations, not least in respect to the status and rights of their legal persons (Seimas, 1995). So, for instance, Article 14 of the Law on Religious Communities and Associations clearly prioritizes “traditional” religious communities over “non-traditional” ones by stipulating that:

“Educational and training establishments of traditional religious communities and associations providing general education of the national standard shall be funded and maintained in accordance with the procedure established by the Government or an institution authorised by it, allocating the same amount of the budget funds as allocated to state or municipal educational establishments of the corresponding type (level).” (Seimas, 1995)

The inequality between religious communities has become evident in the practical application of the Law on Religious Communities and Associations in various fields. As an example, for the past two decades the traditional religious communities have received, through their legal persons, annual payments from the state. The amount of these payments are divided proportionally, based on the number of believers recorded

by the Department of Statistics. The Roman Catholic Church receives the largest payment, with the Orthodox Church being a distant second and the remaining seven traditional religious communities receiving peanuts. It is not the size of the amount that matters here but the fact that the state, in the person of successive governments, has since 1997 distributed such payments exclusively to traditional religious communities though there is no legal basis for that – no law requires the government to financially support any religious community in this manner. The “traditional” religious communities may use the received funds at their own discretion and are not required to report back to the state on how the funds were spent. This way, a plethora of Christian and non-Christian (among them non-Sunni Muslims like Shi’is and Ahmadis) religious communities, though they may be registered, received no financial assignments from the state, no matter how numerous they might be.

The legally de facto unequal status of religious communities of different categories discernable in both the Constitution and the Law on Religious Communities and Associations, as well as a plethora of subsequent laws that follow it, was challenged at the turn of the century by a group of MPs who approached the Constitutional Court for an explanation. The Court, on two occasions in 2000 and 2007, endorsed the status quo promulgated in the Constitution (Constitutional Court, 2000; 2007).

The Law on Religious Communities and Associations foresees that religious communities may operate without formal registration. However, if they want to become “state-recognized” religious communities, i.e. to be recognized as “being a part of Lithuania’s historical, spiritual and social heritage,” they must first formally register with the Ministry of Justice and become “state-registered” legal persons. Twenty-five years after their first registration, they may apply for the status of “state recognized religious community.” (Seimas, 1995) But the Law on Religious Communities and Associations also stipulates that such applicant community needs to have a “back[ing] by society” and the “instruction and rites thereof are not contrary to laws and morality.” (Seimas, 1995). In the case of rejection, they may reapply after a period of another ten years (Seimas, 1995). On the other hand, “state recognition (...) may be withdrawn, if a respective church or religious organisation recognised by the state loses its support in society or its teaching and practices become contradictory to laws or public morals.” (Ruškytė, 2008, p. 175). Such legal stipulations have several repercussions – first, they rank religious collectivities operating (or wishing to operate) in the country in a rather discriminatory manner and, secondly, make it difficult for some of them to advance up the ranking ladder as the legal condition to “have a backing by society” is too fluid and may be manipulated by interested parties, foremost politicians, who make decisions on who from among religious communities is to be promoted to a higher rank.

[5. Violent religious radicalisation challenges: a brief overview](#)

Lithuania has so far experienced few challenges stemming from violent religious radicalisation. There have been no attempts of acts of such violence on either its territory

or against its citizens, infrastructure or interests abroad by any group or individual of any religious persuasion. The intelligence community in its annual reports (Threats for the National, n.d.) constantly reassures the society that terrorism threat in and to Lithuania and Lithuanians is very low.

No known individuals left Lithuania for the ISIS or to fight for any other armed group in the Middle East or beyond. Thus, Lithuania is not faced with concerns many European countries have regarding the so-called ISIS 'foreign fighters'. Nonetheless, there have been reports of individual Muslims (both Lithuanian citizens and foreigners resident in the country) or even nascent groups of them who may be on the path of religious radicalisation (E. Račius, 2017). Furthermore, intelligence agencies have reported (Threats for the National, n.d.) on instances when foreign nationals residing in the country were suspected of links to religious radical groups ("some suspected foreign radicals and extremists used the schemes of 'grey migration' to arrive to Lithuania. They obtained visas on false grounds at the invitation of companies or individuals." (National Threat, 2019)) and were subsequently deported.

There has been also one case of an alleged Lithuanian religious radical, who was supposedly planning to commit a terrorist act in Russia. The person accused of planning it was a young female Lithuanian convert to Islam, whom the police apprehended in 2009, when she was about to board a flight to Russia. She was charged with planning to blow herself up somewhere in Russia (presumably in Chechnya) with the intention to damage a Russian military facility and kill Russian soldiers. After a prolonged trial, in 2013, she was sentenced to ten months (Scharbrodt et al., 2015, pp. 370-376). After she appealed the sentence, however, both the court of appeals and the Lithuanian Supreme Court (cassation court) acquitted her (Lithuania acquits, 2016; Lithuanian SC, 2016). Ultimately, though this was the first and so far the only trial where a Lithuanian national was charged with terrorism-related offences, since the defendant was acquitted, the whole affair did not enhance the anti-terrorist efforts of the state but rather damaged its intelligence services' reputation.

6. Policies and practices addressing / preventing violent religious radicalisation

There are no legal definitions of either 'religious radicalisation' or 'extremism' in the legal acts of Lithuania as there is no legislation that would specifically target either religious radicalisation or extremism. As may be seen from the annual reports of the intelligence agencies, due to absence of the feeling of urgency, both terms are being used in a common sense manner.

There is, however, the National Security Strategy (adopted in 2002, last updated in 2017 (National Security, 2017), which recognizes (Chapter IV. Threats, Dangers and Risk Factors) terrorism, extremism and radicalisation as "threats, dangers and risk factors which must be given particular attention by the national security institutions". It notes that "social and regional exclusion, poverty – growth of social exclusion among the

regions and the high level of poverty of certain social groups decrease the society's resilience to a negative external influence and propaganda, lead to distrust of state institutions and the political system of the Republic of Lithuania. Such trends may create a basis for the development of radical, extremist movements within the State and potentially destabilize the political system". In setting "Priorities of the national security policy of the Republic of Lithuania and long-term and medium-term objectives" (Chapter V. Priorities and Objectives of National Security Policy), the Strategy emphasizes "strengthening of national capabilities to combat terrorism, violent extremism and radicalisation. The Republic of Lithuania will strengthen its national capabilities to identify manifestations of radicalisation, which could encourage terrorist or extremist activities, and implement measures to prevent radicalisation, improve the exchange of information among the institutions about threats of terrorism and violent extremism and for co-operation in reducing these threats."

The closest legislation that is, even if indirectly, related to religious radicalisation may be found in the Criminal Code, where Article 170 (on incitement against any national, racial, ethnic, religious or other group of persons) criminalizes incitement of hatred on various grounds, including person's religion (Criminal Code, n.d.). Even more importantly, Article 170-1 of the same Code criminalizes creation and activities of groups and organizations, which discriminates a group of persons or incites against it (Criminal Code, n.d.). As noted by Glodenis, "[t]he provisions regarding registration of religious communities in the Law on religious communities and associations, dating back to 1995, predate any current concerns over extremism and are related mainly to the concern over the activities of sects, but they can also be seen as indirectly related to prevention of extremism and radicalism." (Glodenis, 2017). Terrorism, though, is defined in the Criminal Code (Article 252) and is criminalized (Article 250). However, in the Criminal Code it is not directly related to religion, religious radicalisation or religious extremism.

Though Lithuania did not experience any increase in the number of irregular migrants during the so-called 'European refugee crisis' of 2015, the Lithuanian authorities took note of the processes, particularly terrorist acts, taking place in Western Europe at the time and undertook some preparatory, if not preemptive, measures. As noted by Glodenis, "there is some concern related primarily to immigration. Therefore the action plan of the National internal security foundation program for the years 2014–2020 was amended on 2 May 2017 by a decree of the Minister of Interior to include, among other priorities, a project for raising qualification of the policemen in the criminal investigation divisions that have to investigate 'crimes in cases of terrorism and violent extremism'." (Vidaus reikalų, 2015).

Lithuanian intelligence agencies in charge of prevention and combating violent religious radicalisation routinely (on an annual basis) release reports where the issue of religious radicalisation is addressed and, as a rule, is tied to Islam and Muslims. In the most recent report, it is stated that though "[t]errorism threat level in Lithuania remains low" and "[i]n 2018, no activity of lone extremists or organized groups adverse to Lithuania has

been identified. No indications of individual ‘jihad’ terrorism propagated by ISIL online and topical in Europe have been observed in Lithuania. No trends of radicalisation in the Lithuanian Muslim Community (LMC) have been identified”, it is also admitted that “[r]adicalization of the LMC could be externally induced by representatives of foreign controversial Islamic organizations and movements exploiting its division and eager to alter local traditions, promote radical interpretation of Islam, attempt to seize the leadership of the Muslim communities and create isolated groups.” (Threats for the National, n.d.).

A year earlier, it was likewise reported that “[n]o radicalisation trends were observed in the Lithuanian Muslim community. No active groups or individuals systematically propagating radical Islamist ideology were identified. No cases were identified of radicalised Lithuanian citizens departed as foreign fighters to the conflict region.” At the same time noting that “[n]evertheless, several cases were reported in Lithuania in 2017 when foreign state citizens made attempts to radicalise members of the Lithuanian Muslim community, mostly the youth. These activities were prevented as potentially increasing the risk of radicalisation of Lithuanian citizens.” (National Threat, 2018).

Similarly, in the previous year, it was reported that “[t]he level of Lithuanian Muslim community’s radicalisation has remained low. In 2016, there were observed unsuccessful attempts of foreign Muslims to make influence on Lithuanian Muslim community and change Islam traditions of Tartars residing in Lithuania. The Tatars’ domination in Lithuanian Muslim community and guidance of its religious life have restricted possibilities of spreading radicalisation in Lithuania.” (National Security, 2017).

Intelligence agencies, in cooperation with relevant institutions (Migration Department, Police), facilitated neutralization of suspected foreign religious radicals by detaining and/or deporting them or denying them entry visas.

It may also be noted that Lithuania has so far not encountered far-right extremism as there are no groupings of such nature, let alone political parties. Though there have been individuals and small groups of far-right leaning youth, they have not evolved into any formidable force to raise concern for the state.

7. Concluding Remarks

Though the Lithuanian society is, on the one hand, rather secular and, on the other hand, composed of people professing numerous faiths, the regime of governance of religious diversity in the country favors those religious communities that had been historically institutionalized by treating them as ‘traditional’. Besides a number of Christian denominations, Judaist, Karaite and Sunni Muslim communities have been assigned to this category. The Roman Catholic Church, representing the overwhelming majority of the country’s believers, though formally not ‘more equal among equals’, in practice receives even more favorable treatment by the state than any other ‘traditional’ faith

community. Moreover, the legislation inadvertently puts any newly emergent religious collectivities at a disadvantage. Though there have been attempts to change the legal status quo by overhauling the Law on Religious Communities and Associations, these attempts so far have been inconclusive.

There has so far been no case of religious radicalisation, let alone violent one, amounting to extremism or terrorism, in Lithuania, and there are no groups of religious radicals of any persuasion. The hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church in Lithuania has been of a peaceful and accommodating position and no radical ideas have been floating among the Church's flock. Likewise, none of the non-Christian religious communities have shown signs of religious radicalisation, though, as has been noted by intelligence agencies, individual Muslims with leanings toward religious conservatism have been observed. All in all, the relevant state bodies have not had any real chances to engage in prevention or combating (violent) religious radicalisation. On the other hand, Lithuania duly follows pan-European trends in its legislation related to prevention and combating of violent religious radicalisation and its Criminal Code and some laws, as well as the National Security Strategy, foresee and deal with it.

Religious radicalisation, let alone violent, of Lithuanian inhabitants for the foreseeable future is more of a hypothetical nature as there is no critical mass of religious people to embark upon the path of religious radicalisation. This, however, does not mean that there may be no individuals who get radicalised. Some of the most vulnerable to religious radicalisation may be Lithuanian citizens abroad, particularly converts to Islam, where they get exposed to a plethora of Islamic revivalist ideas and movements, among them of radical or even extremist nature. There is also a possibility of online radicalisation of individuals resident in Lithuania. The botched case of the alleged terrorist and her trial, referred to above, suggest that Lithuania and Lithuanians are not immune to (violent) religious radicalisation.

References

“Bad blood: Polish-Lithuanian ties are ancient but increasingly acrimonious”, Print edition, Europe, *The Economist*, Mar 10, 2012, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2012/03/10/bad-blood> [2019-09-27].

“Current disputes must not spoil bilateral relations, says Komorowski,” *The News.pl*, March 2, 2011, <https://www.polskieradio.pl/395/8112/Search?q=Current%20disputes%20must%20not%20spoil%20bilateral%20relations,%20says%20Komorowski> [2019-09-27].

“E. Račius: Radical Islamists thundering into Lithuania”, *Delfi.lt*, April 19, 2017, <https://en.delfi.lt/archive/e-racius-radical-islamists-thundering-into-lithuania.d?id=74403180> [2019-09-27].

“Lithuania acquits alleged terrorist Egle Kusaite”, *New Europe*, January 18, 2016, <https://www.neweurope.eu/article/lithuania-acquits-alleged-terrorist-egle-kusaite/> [2019-09-27]

“Lithuanian public opinion survey shows negative attitudes toward refugees, Muslims”, *Institute for ethnic Studies*, May 30, 2019, http://www.ces.lt/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/Visuomen%C4%97s-nuostatos-apklauso-rezultatai_20191.pdf [2019-09-27].

“Lithuanian SC finally finds Egle Kusaite not guilty of plotting terror act in Chechnya”, *Caucasian Knot*, January 15, 2016, <https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/34285/> [2019-09-27].

“Two-thirds of Greeks, Latvians say they believe in the evil eye”, *Pew Research Forum*, May 8, 2017, <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-beliefs/pf-05-10-2017-ce-europe-03-00/> [2019-09-27].

“Ukrainians become the largest foreign community in Lithuania”, *Media Briefing, Delfi.lt*, January 18, 2019, <https://en.delfi.lt/politics/ukrainians-become-the-largest-foreign-community-in-lithuania.d?id=80145005> [2019-09-27].

Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania, *Decision on construing the provisions of a Constitutional Court ruling related with the status of the churches and religious organisations that are traditional in Lithuania*. December 6, 2007, 21. Available at <http://www.lrkt.lt/en/court-acts/search/170/ta1375/content> [2019-09-27].

Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania, *Ruling on the compliance of Item 5 of Article 1, Paragraphs 3 and 4 of Article 10, Paragraph 1 of Article 15, Article 20, Item 2 of Article 21, Paragraph 2 of Article 32, Paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 of Article 34, Items 2 and 5 of Article 35, Item 2 of Article 37 and Items 2 and 3 of Article 38 of the Republic of Lithuania’s Law on Education with the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania*. June 13, 2000, 22. Available at <http://www.lrkt.lt/en/court-acts/search/170/ta1161/content> [2019-09-27]

Criminal Code of the Republic of Lithuania
https://www.unodc.org/cld/document/ltu/2000/criminal_code_of_lithuania.html [2019-09-27].

Department of Statistics, *Gyventojai pagal tautybę, gimtąją kalbą ir tikybą (Inhabitants by ethnicity, mother tongue and faith, in Lithuanian)* (Vilnius: Statistics Lithuania, 2013), https://osp.stat.gov.lt/documents/10180/217110/Gyv_kalba_tikyba.pdf/1d9dac9a-3d45-4798-93f5-941fed00503f [2019-09-27].

Glodenis, Donatas. "Securitization of Religious Freedom: Case of Lithuania", paper presented at the conference *State. Religion. Society. Securitization of Religious Freedom - Religion and Scope of State Control*, Tallinn, 2017.

National Security Strategy, Ministry of Defence, 2017, [https://kam.lt > download > 2017-nacsaugstrategijaen](https://kam.lt/download/2017-nacsaugstrategijaen) [2019-09-27].

National Security Threat Assessment, State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania, 2017, https://www.vsd.lt/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/AKATSKT_DRAFT-3-31-EN-HQ.pdf [2019-09-27].

National Threat Assessment 2018, State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania, 2018, [2019-09-27].

National Threat Assessment 2019, State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania, 2019, <https://www.vsd.lt/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2019-Gresmes-internetui-EN.pdf> [2019-09-27].

O. Scharbrodt, S. Akgönül, A. Alibašić, J. Nielsen and E. Raciųs (eds). *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe, Volume 7* (Brill, 2015).

Raciųs, E. (2018) *Muslims in Eastern Europe*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Ramutė Ruškytė, "Legal aspects of religious freedom," in *Legal Aspects of Religious Freedom: International Conference*, ed. Drago Čepar and Blaž Ivanc (Ljubljana: Office of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Religious Communities, 2008), 149–198.

Robert Manchin, "Religion in Europe: Trust Not Filling the Pews", Gallup, September 21, 2004, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/13117/religion-europe-trust-filling-pews.aspx> [2019-09-27].

Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, *Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania*, 1992. Available at <http://www3.lrs.lt/home/Konstitucija/Constitution.htm>. [2019-09-27].

Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, *Law on Religious Communities and Associations of the Republic of Lithuania*, 1995. Available at <https://e->

seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.385299?jfwid=16j6tpgu6w [2019-09-27].

Stanislovas Kričinskis, *Lietuvos totoriai* (Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidykla, 1993).

Stephen R. Burant and Voytek Zubek, *Eastern Europe's Old Memories and New Realities: Resurrecting the Polish-lithuanian Union*, East European Politics and Societies 1993; 7.

Threats for the National Security in Lithuania, State Security Department, <https://www.vsd.lt/en/threats/threats-national-security-lithuania/>. [2019-09-27].

Project name: Radicalisation, Secularism and the Governance of Religion: Bringing Together European and Asian Perspectives

Project Acronym: GREASE

Project Coordinator: Professor Anna Triandafyllidou

Contact: anna.triandafyllidou@eui.eu

October 2019

Document series reference: D2.1 Country Reports



This document can be downloaded from the publications section of the GREASE website at <http://grease.eui.eu/>

The sole responsibility of this publication lies with the authors. The European Union is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained herein.



The GREASE project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement number 770640