

Lithuania – Reshuffle of deputy ministers as President Grybauskaite is sworn in for second term in office

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Please cite as:

Köker, Philipp (2014) Lithuania – Reshuffle of deputy ministers as President Grybauskaite is sworn in for second term in office. *Presidential Power*, 17 July 2014. Available at: <http://presidential-power.com/?p=1648>

After her successful [reelection in May 2014](#), president Dalia Grybauskaite was sworn in for her second term in office this Sunday, 12 July. As I have previously remarked in [other posts](#), the Lithuanian president belongs to the most powerful presidents in Central and Eastern Europe. This powerful position stems not only from the popular mandate and the constitutionally defined leading role in foreign policy, but also finds expression in an interesting stipulation about the government's mandate after presidential elections which has now allowed Grybauskaite to force changes in a number of government ministries.

[Art 92 of the Lithuanian Constitution](#) states that *The Government shall return its powers to the President of the Republic after the Seimas elections or after the elections of the President of the Republic*. The president then has 15 days to present a (new) candidate for Prime Minister to parliament who has to pass a vote of confidence. Although the president's potential courses of actions are naturally restricted by parliamentary arithmetic, the stipulation theoretically allows her/him to try and install a government which is closer to her own policy preferences or at least to extract some concessions from an incumbent Prime Minister and their cabinet.

Dalia Grybauskaite had already [played a very active role in the appointment of the current centre-left government](#) led by Algirdas Butkevicius in 2012 and had even refused to nominate him before conceding that he was the only candidate capable of mustering a majority in parliament. While she remained critical of the government as a whole as well as individual cabinet members, she has not been successful in effecting any changes to the cabinet composition since – also because there is no alternative to the current government coalition. As her inauguration approached it was thus clear that she would re-appoint Prime Minister Butkevicius. Nevertheless, two weeks ago Grybauskaite announced that she would not reappoint [cabinet ministers on the Prime Minister's request if they failed to sack deputy ministers](#) (MPs with the rank of secretary of state) that appeared on a 'blacklist' of people with suspicious financial activities. [Representatives of the government protested against the move](#) as the president formally has no authority to influence appointments below cabinet level. However, coalition parties soon agreed to ask all deputy ministers to resign – a call which was eventually followed by all involved.

The resignation of all deputy ministers can be seen as a great success for Grybauskaite, particularly over the Electoral Action of Poles whose only deputy minister refused to resign until last night and was also not fired by the respective cabinet minister from the same party. The fact that she has been able to force changes below cabinet level cannot only be attributed to the stipulations of Art 92. Grybauskaite also certainly benefited from her 'fresher' legitimacy and her popular mandate which let her act independently of the government. While her actions are partly a way of fulfilling the promises of her electoral campaign and improving her public image (the topic of corruption remains very salient in Lithuanian politics), her activism can also be

explained by the fact that she will not want to become a lame duck towards the end of her term. By referring to the precedent she has just set, it will be easier for her to influence political decision-making even after the parliamentary elections next year have brought a new and freshly legitimised government into office.