

New government in Lithuania: the third Social Democratic cabinet

Joanna Hyndle-Hussein

On 14 July, the Lithuanian parliament (Seimas) approved the programme and composition of the new government led by Social Democrat Mindaugas Sinkevičius by a narrow majority of 72 votes in the 141-seat parliament. The Social Democratic Party (LSDP) formed a coalition with the centre-left Union of Democrats 'For Lithuania' (DSVL) and a parliamentary group comprising the agrarian Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (LVŽS) and the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families Alliance (AWPL–ZChR). The coalition will command a majority of 75 seats. The government has two years to implement its programme, with the next elections scheduled for October 2028.

This is the third government led by a Social Democratic prime minister during the current Seimas term, which began in October 2024. The previous cabinet, headed by Inga Ruginienė, collapsed after the populist Dawn of Nemunas party had been expelled from the governing coalition for obstructing its work.

Successive Social Democratic governments have pursued a centre-left agenda focused primarily on providing social support and strengthening national defence. The new cabinet is likely to face challenges from the outset, as the Seimas's decision to appoint it may be legally contested. The opposition Conservatives and Liberals argue that the government's programme was submitted to parliament before the president approved the composition of the new cabinet. They consider this procedure unconstitutional and intend to refer the matter to the Constitutional Court.

Commentary

- **The composition of the new government suggests that it will include more politicians loyal to the prime minister than experts.** Sinkevičius has made significant personnel changes, replacing eight of the fourteen ministers. However, the government's programme was agreed through negotiations within the LSDP-dominated coalition and took shape without the involvement of the incoming ministers. Some of the ministers nominated by the Social Democrats have faced criticism for lacking the necessary qualifications. For example, the finance minister, who has drawn the most criticism, served as deputy foreign minister before his appointment. The LSDP has struggled to recruit highly qualified politicians and many party members have instead chosen to focus on preparations for next year's local elections. No changes were made at the defence ministry, where Robertas Kaunas remains in office, or at the foreign ministry, where

Kęstutis Budrys has retained his post. Budrys, a close associate of the president, is likely to face continued scrutiny, as the Social Democrats have criticised him for aligning too closely with the Conservatives and for focusing on positioning himself for the presidential race after President Gitanas Nausėda's term ends in the summer of 2029. Rita Tamašunienė, who represents the AWPL–ZChR and has been actively involved in advancing the rights of national minorities, will remain justice minister.

- **The government has presented an ambitious programme, but it has only two years to deliver it and Prime Minister Sinkevičius has failed to identify its sources of funding.** He outlined several key priorities, including strengthening national security, increasing defence spending to more than 5% of GDP, enhancing air defence, establishing an army division headquarters by 2030 and completing the deployment of a German brigade by 2027. The government intends to pursue a socially oriented agenda, particularly by supporting families, in response to the country's deteriorating demographic outlook. Other objectives include raising the quality of public services and education, tackling poverty and improving the living standards of pensioners. The government also aims to promote entrepreneurship, support regional development, improve transport infrastructure and enhance the competitiveness of the Port of Klaipėda. The prime minister has pledged to complete the land restitution process in Vilnius and other cities and to support national minorities by ensuring that their rights are upheld, including the right to education in minority-language schools. As part of this effort, the government plans to review the minimum class size requirement, a crucial issue for minority communities. Despite offering a sound diagnosis of the country's social challenges and needs, the government's failure to identify sources of funding for its policy commitments undermines the credibility of both the prime minister and his programme.
- **The key objectives of Lithuania's foreign policy – preserving EU unity, fostering strong transatlantic relations and supporting Ukraine – remain unchanged.** The government continues to call for faster decision-making in the EU, including greater use of qualified majority voting, supports further enlargement of the EU, and seeks to strengthen the country's strategic partnerships with the United States, Germany, Poland and the Nordic and Baltic states. It remains committed to supporting Ukraine in its defence against Russia and in its efforts to join the EU and NATO. Lithuanian diplomacy will once again focus on normalising relations with China, aiming to restore diplomatic representation to the level maintained by other EU member states. The government has also pledged to work to further isolate Belarus as long as it continues to support Russia's aggression and fails to comply with nuclear safety standards at the Astravyets Nuclear Power Plant. The new cabinet's intentions will be tested by its position on extending EU sanctions against Belarus next spring, including those targeting potash fertiliser exports. Another key indicator will be whether the government decides to scale back cooperation with Taiwan – which is not mentioned in its programme – as part of efforts to normalise relations with China

APPENDIX

Profile of Prime Minister Mindaugas Sinkevičius

Mindaugas Sinkevičius is 42 years old and comes from Jonava. An economist by training, he holds a doctorate in the social sciences. On 1 May 2026, he was elected chair of the Social Democratic Party (LSDP), having served as its acting leader since July 2025.

Sinkevičius began his political career in 2004, when he joined the LSDP, following in the footsteps of his father, a member of the Seimas. He initially led the party's local structures and became its deputy chair in 2015. At the same time, he developed a career in local government, the public administration and the private sector. From 2011 to 2016, he served as mayor of the Jonava municipality. Subsequently, from 2016 to 2017, he served as minister of agriculture in the coalition government (formed by the LVŽS and the Social Democrats) headed by Saulius Skvernelis. Between 2017 and 2019, he was the director of *Jonavos vandenys*, the municipal water supply and wastewater company. In 2019, he returned as mayor of Jonava and remained in office until accepting his appointment as prime minister of Lithuania. However, his term was interrupted in 2023, when criminal proceedings were launched against him over allegations of financial misconduct. The case concerned claims that he had used municipal funds to pay for private services, purchased property for personal use with city funds and falsified invoices and other documents. In 2024, a court found him guilty, imposed a fine and barred him from standing for election or holding positions in state or local government institutions for three years. He appealed the verdict and ultimately secured an acquittal in the Supreme Court in 2025. The ruling allowed him to return to his previous post, restore his party membership and assume the role of acting chair of the LSDP in July 2025.

Composition of the government of Mindaugas Sinkevičius

- Minister of Foreign Affairs: Kęstutis Budrys (LSDP)
- Minister of National Defence: Robertas Kaunas (LSDP)
- Minister of Finance: Taurimas Valys (LSDP)
- Minister of the Interior: Martynas Katelinas (LSDP)
- Minister of Transport and Communications: Juras Taminskas (LSDP)
- Minister of Energy: Lukas Savickas (Union of Democrats 'For Lithuania')
- Minister of Education, Science and Sport: Raminta Popovienė (LSDP)
- Minister of Culture: Lukas Alsus (LSDP)
- Minister of Justice: Rita Tamašunienė (AWPL–ZChR)
- Minister of Economy and Innovation: Edvinas Grišas (Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union)
- Minister of Social Security and Labour: Inga Ruginienė (LSDP)
- Minister of the Environment: Ieva Andriulaitytė (LSDP)
- Minister of Health: Linas Kukuraitis (Union of Democrats 'For Lithuania')
- Minister of Agriculture: Kęstutis Mažeika (Union of Democrats 'For Lithuania')