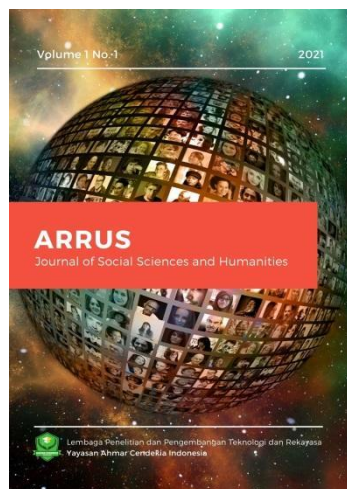




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## RESEARCH / REVIEW ARTICLE

# Lithuania's Securitization Process of Drug Issues Through the National Agenda 2035 in 2018-2023

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**Abstract:** In May 2023, Lithuania adopted a new national plan on drugs, tobacco, and alcohol. Many saw this as a shift from health to national security. This article tests that view using securitisation theory from the Copenhagen School, which holds that an issue becomes securitised only when presented as an existential threat requiring emergency measures beyond normal politics. The method is qualitative content analysis of official Lithuanian documents. The analysis examines how drug policy is framed and what procedures were followed. This research found: (1) treating drugs as both a health and security issue is not new. This dual approach has been law since 1996, so the 2023 plan continues an existing system rather than creating a new one; (2) applying Copenhagen criteria, the plan does not qualify as securitisation. It was passed through normal procedures under the 2020 Strategic Management Law. No emergency was declared, no rules were bypassed, and no extra powers were granted; (3) strong security language appears only in the supply-reduction chapter, targeting dealers for law enforcement. The section on users focuses on health and harm reduction. These two parts were treated differently: tougher measures were carried out, while lenient measures were adopted on paper but later dropped from implementation. The research concludes that Lithuania's case is better understood as intensified politicisation within a stable system, rather than true securitisation. This case is analytically valuable because it helps define the limits of securitisation theory in a small European Union country.

**Keywords:** Securitization, Lithuania, National Agenda 2035

## 1. Introduction

The Lithuanian government's public expressions of concern about narcotic and other psychoactive substances did not begin with the National Agenda adopted in May 2023. For approximately the past decade, and indeed for considerably longer, Lithuanian institutions, along with a wide range of professional, non-governmental and international actors, have actively considered, and at times publicly disagreed about, how a small state on the external border of the European Union should distribute responsibility for drugs between its health system and its law-enforcement apparatus. The National Programme for Drug, Tobacco and Alcohol Control and Consumption Prevention 2018–2028, approved by Seimas Resolution No. XIII-1765 of 13 December 2018, is generally treated as the high-water mark of a health-centred approach in that debate (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2018), while the National Agenda on Drug, Tobacco and Alcohol Control, Prevention of Consumption and Harm Reduction to 2035, approved by Seimas Resolution No. XIV-1982 of 23 May 2023, has been



read as the moment at which a security frame returned to the centre of the field (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2023a). The responsible department, for its part, presents the Agenda as aligning national policy with the outcome document of the 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session and with the European Union drug strategy for 2021 to 2025 (Narkotikų, tabako ir alkoholio kontrolės departamentas [NTAKD], n.d.-b). Not only that, Lithuania's position also as both a transit corridor and a destination market in regional trafficking lends the security reading an obvious plausibility (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2025).

This research began from it, however, it does not survive contact with the documents, and two obstacles emerge almost at once. The first is that the 2018–2028 Programme was never a purely health instrument, alongside evidence-based prevention and the strengthening of rehabilitation services, it named the curbing of illicit supply as one of its three areas of focus, and the state's own auditor later found that addiction treatment had not in fact been among the priority areas of the Ministry of Health across the years of the Programme's operation (Valstybės kontrolė, 2023). The second, and more fundamental, is that the legal dualism supposedly introduced in 2023 is some twenty-seven years older than the Agenda. As Section 4 demonstrates in detail, the Law on the Fundamentals of National Security No. VIII-49 of 19 December 1996 classifies narkomanija twice, in two separate chapters of a single annex, once as an object of public-security policy alongside organised crime and corruption, and once as an object of health policy alongside epidemics and other addiction diseases (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 1996). Whatever the 2035 Agenda accomplishes, and it accomplishes a good deal, it does not invent that division.

Indeed, a substantial literature has grown up around the proposition that drugs are constructed instead of discovered as a security threat (see e.g. Crick, 2012; Utama, 2021). Crick (2012) depicts the way successive international instruments framed narcotics as endangering humanity, sovereignty and international peace, and how the resulting discourse has sustained the global prohibition regime despite accumulating evidence of its harms. Meanwhile, national-level work has largely followed that template by examining cases in which threat framing was intense and its consequences severe, as in Utama's (2021) case of the way Duterte's securitising discourse in the Philippines mobilised middle-class support and licensed extraordinary violence against the urban poor. Therefore, the field's centre of gravity rests with maximal cases, and its analytical yield is correspondingly asymmetric. Hence, securitisation is examined where it plainly occurred, which reveals comparatively little about where it stops. Cases in which threat language intensifies without producing the procedural exceptionalism that the Copenhagen framework treats as definitive remain largely unexamined, and small consolidated democracies inside the European Union are almost absent from this literature altogether (Buzan et al., 1998; Floyd, 2016; Roe, 2012).

Three empirical developments make the Lithuanian case worth examining within that gap. The first is a change in the composition of the drug market rather than in the level of consumption. Lifetime prevalence of illicit drug use among the population aged 15 to 64 rose from 11.5 % in 2016 to 14.1 % in 2021, while past-twelve-month use stood at 4.5 % (NTAKD, n.d.-a). Nevertheless, these figures remain roughly half the European Union average of 28.9 % on the same measure, a comparison the Agenda itself draws at point 7 of its situation analysis (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2023a). Against that relatively stable background, drug-induced deaths rose from 47 in 2020 to 62 in 2021 and 87 in 2022 before falling again to 74 in 2023, with the synthetic opioid carfentanil implicated in 31 of the 2022 deaths and 29 of those in 2023 (Higienos institutas, as reported in NTAKD, 2024a; Narkotikapolitiskti Center, 2025). Thus, the mortality spike is, on the state's own data, a supply-composition phenomenon rather than an epidemic of use.

The second development is discursive, and it forms part of the evidence rather than merely its background. The figure of 14.1 % circulated in Lithuanian public debate as a statistic about adolescents, prompting the national broadcaster to publish a corrective article clarifying that it in fact describes the general adult population (Bakaitė, 2023). Adolescent indicators over

the same years were, if anything, flat or falling: the ESPAD survey recorded 19 % of 15 to 16 year olds having used an illicit drug in 2019, the HBSC study recorded lifetime cannabis use among ninth-graders falling from 18.0 % in 2018 to 16.3 % in 2022, and the 2024 wave of ESPAD, conducted after the Agenda had been adopted, put lifetime use of any illicit drug in that age group at 13.3 per cent, the lowest figure recorded since 2003 (European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs [ESPAD], 2020; Narkotikapolitiskt Center, 2025; NTAKD, 2026). A widespread public perception of youth crisis therefore rested, at least in part, on a misreading of a general-population statistic, which matters a good deal for any account of how threat perception was assembled in this period.

The third development is contextual, and it connects the Lithuanian case to a much wider pattern. Lithuania spent 2021 and 2022 managing an externally instrumentalised migration crisis on its border with Belarus, an episode widely analysed as a hybrid threat and one that arguably made a vocabulary of border penetration, external malign actors and cross-border criminal infrastructure politically available at precisely the moment the Agenda was being drafted (Kazharski, 2021; Pūraitė & Seniutienė, 2025). Buzan et al. (1998) would describe such a circumstance as a facilitating condition: not a cause of threat framing, but a context that raises the probability of its acceptance. Of course, states elsewhere have coupled drug control to organised crime, trafficking and terrorism in comparable ways, and the chaining of narcotics to other recognised security threats is a well-documented feature of the international regime (Crick, 2012). What distinguishes the Lithuanian instance is that this chaining proceeds inside a consolidated European Union member state whose legal order already assigns drugs simultaneously to security and to health, and whose strategic-planning law supplies a standing instrument for revising priorities without any recourse whatsoever to exception.

The question here, then, is not whether Lithuania securitised drugs, but to what extent and along which dimensions the political status of drugs changed between 2018 and 2023, and whether that change satisfies the criteria of securitisation as specified by the Copenhagen School. This is important to understand because the securitisation framework suggests that when government rhetoric is successful it can convince audiences, spur on responses and shape outcomes, where it does not do these things, or does them for only part of what it addresses, the framework's own scope is at issue. We therefore pursue three objectives: (1) to establish the legal and institutional baseline against which any claim of change must be measured; (2) to apply the three-stage securitisation test of speech act, audience acceptance and extraordinary measures to the 2035 Agenda and to report the result, including and especially where the test fails; and (3) to account for what did change, using the concept of the splitting speech act developed by Austin and Beaulieu-Brossard (2018) to explain how a single policy instrument can securitise and desecuritise different components of one policy object at the same moment.

The contribution is modest in its empirical claim and rather more specific in its theoretical one. Empirically, the article documents continuity rather than transformation and reports a negative result on the securitisation test. Theoretically, it uses that negative result to specify a scope condition: in a consolidated European Union member state with a stable statutory dualism and a mature strategic-planning apparatus, the vocabulary of threat can intensify considerably without any of the procedural exceptionalism that the Copenhagen framework treats as the defining marker of securitisation. Cases of this kind are not failures of the framework so much as the boundary at which it ceases to apply, and identifying that boundary is, we would argue, worth doing.

## 2. Literature Review

For every state, safeguarding national security by warding off existential threats to its integrity is a primary concern. In the pursuit of comprehensive security, a state will construct a narrative that frames a particular issue as a security threat capable of endangering it, a process known as securitisation. Securitisation, as developed by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de

Wilde (1998), is defined as a political process whereby existing issues are framed as security threats, thereby transforming them into security concerns that require attention because they relate to a state's very existence. According to Wæver (1995), the central argument of securitisation theory is that security is an illocutionary act of speech, referring to the intention, purpose, or function within a statement. Thus, a statement creates a state of 'security', and by labelling an issue as a security concern, that issue becomes a security concern. By declaring that a particular referent is under an existential threat, the actor carrying out securitisation claims the right to take extraordinary measures to ensure the survival of that referent. The issue in question is then shifted from the realm of normal politics to that of emergency politics, where it can be addressed swiftly and without being bound by the rules and regulations that typically govern policymaking, including due democratic processes (Taureck, 2006). In the context of security, it means that security no longer has a fixed or pre-determined meaning but can point to whatever is declared by the actors engaged in securitisation. Thus, security is a social and intersubjective construct. A securitisation process can be said to be successful when it fulfils three interrelated stages:

- (1). The speech act in the context of securitization, as introduced by Wæver (1995) is defined as a performative action undertaken by a securitizing actor to declare that an issue constitutes a security issue, indicated by the way the actor invokes "security" in the statement. It is the point of departure for the entire securitization process. Buzan et al. (1998) points out that securitization is fundamentally an act of speaking, in which an actor holding institutional authority declares that an entity is existentially threatened and that the response can no longer be confined to ordinary political procedure. This stage comprises three variables: (1) the securitizing actor, which is the party that performs the speech act in order to lift an issue out of the non-political domain and into the domain of urgent security. Buzan et al. (1998) hold that a securitizing actor may be a politician, a bureaucracy, a government, a lobby group, or a pressure group; (2) the existential threat, which is the construction of an issue narrated as a threat to security. An issue can be classified as an existential threat only when it is constructed in such a way as to demand a response exceeding the capacity of normal political procedure; (3) and the referent object, which is the entity claimed to be threatened and regarded as entitled to protection and to its own survival. In securitization theory, the referent object may be the state or the society deemed to hold values that must be preserved.
- (2). Audience acceptance is the second stage of securitization, where the public accepts the threat claim conveyed by the political actor (Wæver, 1995). With the audience as the sole operational variable, the threat claim (speech act) cannot become a legitimate securitization without the consent of the relevant audience. This is because securitization is essentially an intersubjective process that relies on the shared recognition of the threat's existence (Taureck, 2006). Balzacq (2005) argues that securitisation is a strategic practice embedded in audience dispositions and external context rather than a self-executing utterance, so that the audience must be treated as an empirically variable object rather than as a theoretical placeholder. Roe (2008) refines the point further by distinguishing a stage of identification, at which an audience accepts that a threat exists, from a stage of mobilisation, at which it accepts the measures proposed in response, the two can come apart, and an audience may grant the first while refusing the second.
- (3). The final stage of securitization is characterized by extraordinary measures, namely the implementation of emergency policies outside of standard legal/political frameworks and procedures. Success at this stage is measured by the extent to which political actors are able to justify the use of these extraordinary measures on the basis of an urgent existential threat (Wæver, 1995). The key operational variable in this stage is emergency measures. Roe (2012) questions whether securitisation must be understood as a departure from normal politics at all, arguing that the normative objection to securitisation weakens considerably once emergency measures are found to be enacted through ordinary legislative channels. Floyd (2016) goes further and proposes that the exceptionality

criterion be abandoned altogether: securitisation succeeds, on her account, when a threat identification is followed by a change in the behaviour of relevant actors that is justified by reference to that threat, whether the measures adopted are exceptional or entirely routine.

This study analyzes the securitization of narcotics in Lithuania by operationalizing securitization theory into three sequential stages. Each stage is equipped with its own operational variables that serve as the main analytical instruments (see Table 1).

**Table 1:** Operationalisation of Securitization Theory

| Theory                | Stage                      | Variable           | Indicator                                                                                                                                                   | Operationalisation                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Securitization Theory | Speech Act                 | Securitizing Actor | 1. Statements by legislative actors of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania: its committees and members speaking in plenary when the draft is presented. | 1. Statements by the Seimas and by individual members presenting the draft, concerning narcotics and the division of responsibility between health and law enforcement. |
|                       |                            |                    | 2. Statements by the bureaucratic actor, the Drug, Tobacco and Alcohol Control Department (NTAKD).                                                          | 2. Statements by the Drug, Tobacco and Alcohol Control Department regarding the narcotics threat in Lithuania.                                                          |
|                       |                            |                    | 3. Statements by the governmental actor, the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Lithuania.                                                               | 3. Statements by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Lithuania regarding the narcotics threat in Lithuania.                                                       |
|                       |                            |                    | 4. Statements by the lobby-group actor, the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA).                                                                             | 4. Statements by the EUDA exerting international pressure in respect of the narcotics threat in Lithuania.                                                              |
|                       |                            |                    | 5. Statements by the pressure-group actor, the Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (EHRA).                                                                  | 5. Statements by the EHRA on the surge in the overdose crisis, reinforcing the narrative of a narcotics threat in Lithuania.                                            |
|                       |                            | Existential Threat | 1. The construction of an issue narrated as a security threat.                                                                                              | 1. The construction of narcotics narrated as a threat to the security of Lithuania.                                                                                     |
|                       |                            |                    | 2. The linkage of that issue to other recognised security threats.                                                                                          | 2. The linkage of narcotics to organised crime, trafficking, corruption, and terrorism in the policy text.                                                              |
|                       |                            |                    | 3. The distribution of threat vocabulary across the chapters of the instrument.                                                                             | 3. Lexical counts by chapter and by point in the Lithuanian original.                                                                                                   |
|                       |                            | Referent Object    | 1. The entity claimed to be threatened.                                                                                                                     | 1. Lithuanian society, and within it the younger generation.                                                                                                            |
|                       |                            |                    | 2. Any secondary entity extended protection in the same text.                                                                                               | 2. Communities, the legitimate economy and the environment.                                                                                                             |
|                       | Acceptance by the Audience | Audience           | 1. Public acceptance of the threat framing that has been constructed.                                                                                       | 1. Acceptance by Lithuanian society, observed through representative survey data.                                                                                       |
|                       |                            |                    | 2. Acceptance by the legislature, observed in the recorded vote.                                                                                            | 2. Acceptance by the Seimas, observed through the division on the resolution.                                                                                           |

| Theory | Stage                 | Variable                                                 | Indicator                                                                                                     | Operationalisation                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|--------|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|        | Extraordinary Measure | Emergency measure (strict criterion: Buzan et al., 1998) | 1. Action exceeding the bounds that ordinarily constrain the policy field, whether procedural or substantive. | 1. Adoption of the National Agenda 2035 and its implementation plan, tested against whether adoption occurred outside ordinary procedure, whether an emergency was declared, and whether exceptional authority was conferred. |
|        |                       | Emergency measure (behavioural criterion: Floyd, 2016)   | 2. Involvement of security institutions beyond those ordinarily responsible for narcotics.                    | 2. Participation of the Ministry of National Defence and accession to EU security cooperation.                                                                                                                                |
|        |                       |                                                          | 3. Conferral of extraordinary authority on officials.                                                         | 3. Expansion of the supervisory powers of the NTAKD.                                                                                                                                                                          |

Source: Processed by the authors (2026).

However, securitization is always paired with the concept of de-securitization, namely the shift of an issue from emergency mode back to the mechanism of normal political negotiations (Wæver, 1995). In this case, it places the status of the issue on a continuous continuum, ranging from non-politicization, politicization, to securitization. For Wæver (1995), the security condition is not a positive thing but an indication that an issue has moved away from the scope of normal politics. Therefore, de-securitization becomes an ideal long-term goal so that the issue can be debated and compromised openly again. This normative view is emphasized by Taureck (2006), who notes that the framing of emergency status in securitization risks harming democratic deliberation because it legitimizes actions outside the standard legal rules. In post-Wæver literature, de-securitization can be achieved through three modalities, including: (1) avoidant, which is rejecting the use of security narratives from the outset; (2) management, which is handling issues that have been securitized carefully so as not to cause an escalation of the security dilemma; (3) reversal, which is the most complex stage because it requires a shift in political vocabulary and the dismantling of all the extraordinary instruments and steps that have been formed by the security framing.

Subsequently, Hansen (2012) offers a more detailed typology of four ideal forms: stabilisation, replacement, rearticulation and silencing. Of these, rearticulation is the one that applies here. The Lithuanian approach towards users is an attempted rearticulation. This means it redefines the relationship between the state and the drug user. It is not simply a reduction in strong language or a careful handling of an existing security frame. According to Hansen (2012), rearticulation is the most challenging of the four forms.

However, Austin and Beaulieu-Brossard (2018) present a different view through their concept of splitting speech acts. In standard securitisation theory, securitisation and desecuritisation are seen as mutually exclusive and sequential, one happening after the other. Austin and Beaulieu-Brossard (2018) argue that this view has overlooked cases where both happen at the same time. A splitting speech act divides a referent subject into threatening and non-threatening parts at the moment of securitisation. It then offers the non-threatening part a conditional way out of the security domain. The authors are mainly concerned with the coercive nature of the conditions they impose. For our purposes, what matters is the descriptive point: one single statement, or even one single document, can securitise one part of a policy object while desecuritisising another. We argue below that this is exactly what the 2035 Agenda does, and this article sets out to document that mechanism.

Moving from theory to practice, Crick's (2012) analysis of the international securitisation of drugs remains the key reference. Crick (2012) shows how successive international agreements constructed drugs as a threat to humanity, to sovereignty and to international peace. This discourse has sustained the global prohibition regime, even as evidence of its harmful effects

has grown. National-level studies have mostly followed this pattern. They examine cases where threat language was strong and its effects severe. Utama (2021), for example, analyses the Philippine drug war and traces how Duterte's securitising discourse gained middle-class support and enabled extreme violence against the urban poor. In that case, every stage of the Copenhagen framework is clearly met. As a result, the field has focused on maximal cases. This has an unfortunate outcome: securitisation is studied where it clearly happened, which tells us little about where it stops. Cases where threat language intensifies but the emergency threshold is not crossed are largely unexamined. Small, stable democracies within the European Union are almost completely absent from the literature.

Three gaps follow from this. First, the securitisation of drugs has been studied mainly at the international level and in states with weak legal constraints. The Baltic states are mostly missing from this research. Lithuanian work on drugs is concentrated in social work and public health, as seen in Butvilas, Petuškaitė, Žibėnienė and Bubnys (2022) on harm-reduction practice. That work has not addressed the security dimension of national drug policy at all. Second, the literature contains few negative or limit cases. By this we mean cases that are analysed rigorously enough to show that securitisation did not occur, and to explain why. Third, the possibility of simultaneous securitisation and desecuritisation within a single policy instrument, as theorised by Austin and Beaulieu-Brossard (2018), has received little empirical testing. There is no such testing at all in the drug-policy field. This article addresses all three gaps.

### 3. Research Method and Materials

This article uses a qualitative document-analysis design, as described by Bowen (2009). The approach combines three elements: a close interpretive reading of policy and legal texts, a comparative reading of successive instruments, and a limited count of lexical distribution. In this case, descriptive qualitative research would understate what is undertaken here. The analysis is interpretive and comparative. Its central empirical claim depends on where specific vocabulary appears within a document, not on description alone. A discourse-analytic sensibility informs the reading of the policy texts throughout. The focus is on how threat, health and responsibility are articulated by state actors, and how those articulations are in turn contested, softened or simply left unexecuted as an instrument move from draft to adoption and from adoption to implementation.

The primary corpus consists of the following documents: the National Programme 2018–2028 (Resolution No. XIII-1765); the National Agenda 2035 (Resolution No. XIV-1982) together with its 2022 draft (No. XIVP-1690(2)); the Law on the Fundamentals of National Security No. VIII-49 (1996, consolidated version); the Law on Strategic Management No. XIII-3096 (2020); Law No. XIV-2149 amending Article 70(1) of the Law on the Health System (2023); Law No. XIV-2573 amending the Criminal Code (2024); Government Resolution No. 336 (2024) establishing the 2024–2026 implementation plan; the departmental monitoring reports on that plan for 2024 and 2025; the report of the Seimas Committee on Health Affairs for the spring session of 2023; the Seimas Press Office release of 23 May 2023; and the opinion of the Legal Department of the Seimas Chancellery of 7 December 2017. Secondary and statistical materials comprise publications of the Drug, Tobacco and Alcohol Control Department, reports of the police and customs services, the public audit report of the National Audit Office, the LRT and Baltijos tyrimai opinion survey of July 2022, EMCDDA and ESPAD reports, contemporaneous news reporting of the parliamentary process, a national case study of treatment quality standards prepared for the FENIQS-EU project, and peer-reviewed research on harm-reduction practice in Lithuania.

The analysis centres on the period from 2018 to 2023, bounded by the adoption of the two instruments being compared. Evidence from 2024 to 2026, comprising the implementation plan, the two monitoring reports, customs and police statistics and the status of the decriminalisation bills, is used in a strictly delimited way. This later evidence is used solely to establish whether the commitments made in 2023 were subsequently carried out.

The entire primary corpus is in Lithuanian. All translations presented in this article are by the authors. The researchers used DeepL software to produce initial translations of the primary texts, which were then checked, revised and finalised by the authors. These translations are presented alongside the original wording wherever the formulation is analytically load-bearing. Counts of lexical distribution reported in Section 4.1 were performed on the official Lithuanian text of Resolution No. XIV-1982 as published in the Register of Legal Acts. Because Lithuanian is a heavily inflected language, counts were compiled by lemma instead of by string. For example, the lemma *grėsmė* aggregates *grėsmė, grėsmės, grėsmei, grėsmę, grėsmių* and *grėsmėms*. Each occurrence was located by paragraph number so that distribution across chapters, and not merely aggregate frequency, could be established.

Interviews were not conducted in this study. This choice was shaped by three limitations: (1) a lack of Lithuanian language skills among the researchers, which would have undermined the quality of any dialogue; (2) the geographic remoteness of the field setting, which excluded direct contact with informants; and (3) the constraints of the research timetable, which did not allow for the systematic preparation, execution and transcription of interviews to the standard demanded by rigorous qualitative enquiry.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The General Provisions of the 2035 Agenda list eight legal foundations, of which the eighth, point 5.8, invokes the Law on the Fundamentals of National Security No. VIII-49 of 19 December 1996, paraphrasing it as establishing that resolute and effective combat against crime (especially organised crime, shadow business, corruption and drug addiction) is an important direction of public security policy, while the prevention of addiction diseases is an important direction of health policy (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2023a). Verification against the consolidated text of Law No. VIII-49 confirms the paraphrase and, at the same time, reveals something the Agenda does not state explicitly, in that the term *narkomanija* appears twice in the annex to that law, in two separate chapters. The chapter on public security policy reads:

*“Kova su nusikalstamumu, viešosios tvarkos bei asmens saugumo valstybėje užtikrinimas yra vienas didžiausių prioritetų užtikrinant šalies nacionalinį saugumą. Valstybė privalo sutelkti jėgas ryžtingai ir veiksmingai kovai su nusikalstamumu, ypač su organizuotu nusikalstamumu, šešėliniu verslu, korupcija bei narkomanija, ir tuo užtikrinti tinkamą šalies vidaus saugumą.”*

Translation: “The fight against crime and the assurance of public order and personal security within the state is one of the greatest priorities in securing the country's national security. The State must concentrate its forces on a resolute and effective fight against crime, especially organised crime, shadow business, corruption and drug addiction, and thereby ensure the proper internal security of the country.”

The Health Policy chapter of the same law reads:

*“Svarbi sveikatos politikos kryptis – užtikrinti ligų prevenciją, ypatingą dėmesį skiriant epidemijų, priklausomybės ligų (narkomanijos, alkoholizmo, toksikomanijos ir kitų) profilaktikai...”*

Translation: “An important direction of health policy is to ensure disease prevention, paying particular attention to the prophylaxis of epidemics and addiction diseases (drug addiction, alcoholism, toxicomania and others)...”

One phenomenon is classified within two frameworks in a single statute: as an internal-security matter alongside organised crime and corruption, and as a health matter to be addressed through the health system. The important point is that this classification was not created in 2023 and was not created by the Agenda. It has been part of Lithuanian law since 1996 and remained in force unaltered throughout the period examined here.

Moreover, the institutional expression of the same dualism is equally old. Article 70(1)(1) of the Law on the Health System requires that the strategic plan of NTAKD be approved jointly by four ministers: the ministers for social security and labour, health, education and science,

and the interior. This provision was established by Law No. XI-1129 of 16 November 2010 and has been in force since 1 April 2011 (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2023b). Lithuania's drug policy coordination body has therefore been structurally answerable to both the health and the interior portfolios for more than a decade before the Agenda appeared. The architecture coupling health and security in Lithuanian drug governance is therefore not an outcome of the period under study. It is a precondition for that period.

The health half of the same dualism, it should be added, has an institutional history of comparable length. Specialised treatment for substance use disorders in Lithuania was built by a professional community during the 1990s, largely outside political priority. A Minnesota-model inpatient programme was introduced in three specialised centres in 1992. Opioid agonist therapy with methadone began in 1995. The Ministry of Health approved its first quality standard for that therapy as a legal act in October 1995 (Subata, 2023). Subata (2023) records that treatment for substance use disorders “was rather low on the list of political priorities” in that period and remained so for years afterwards, with development driven by professional associations, medical universities and international donors instead of by government. Neither half of the dualism, then, was created by the 2035 Agenda. Both predate it by decades, and the Agenda inherits them.

That marginality, moreover persisted well into the period under study. The National Audit Office, reporting three weeks before the Agenda was adopted, found that addiction treatment services had not been included among the priority areas of the Ministry of Health. The consequence was that the State Health Care Accreditation Agency carried out no planned inspections of those services at all between 2019 and 2022 (Valstybės kontrolė, 2023). The health track was therefore not only older than the Agenda. Through the very years of the supposedly health-centred 2018–2028 Programme, it was also unsupervised and administratively secondary. What separates the two periods, on this evidence, is declaratory emphasis instead of two different operating regimes.

#### 4.1. *The Speech Act*

##### 4.1.1. *Securitizing Actors*

The formal body involved in the securitisation process was the Seimas, or the Lithuanian Parliament, which approved the Agenda by Resolution No. XIV-1982 on 23 May 2023. The resolution was subsequently published in the Register of Legal Acts on 25 May 2023 under No. 2023-09953 and officially came into force on 26 May 2023 (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2023a). In accordance with point 117 of the Agenda and Article 14 of the Law on Strategic Management (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2020), the drafting of the Agenda was coordinated by the Department for the Control of Drugs, Tobacco and Alcohol, with the support of the Ministry of Health as the co-responsible body in the process.

The most revealing individual utterance was delivered by Member of the Seimas Linas Slušnys when presenting the draft on the day of adoption (Trembo, 2023):

*“Sveikata ir reabilitacija rūpintis sveikatos sistema. Norint sumažinti psichoaktyviųjų medžiagų prieinamumą, turės daug darbo idėti teisėsauga. Darbotvarkė numato ir galimybę peržiūrėti esamą baudžiamąją politiką, taikomą narkotikų vartotojams.”*

Translation: “Health and rehabilitation will be the concern of the health system. In order to reduce the availability of psychoactive substances, law enforcement will have to do a great deal of work. The Agenda also provides for the possibility of reviewing the existing criminal policy applied to drug users.”

The utterance performs two movements at once. It assigns users to the health system and holds out the prospect of relaxed criminal policy, which is a desecuritisising move. At the same time, it assigns availability, which is to say supply, to law enforcement, and this is a securitisising one. The two are articulated in consecutive sentences by the same speaker on the same occasion. This is precisely the pattern Austin and Beaulieu-Brossard (2018) describe as a

splitting speech act, in which the referent subject is divided, at the moment of utterance, into a threatening element retained within the security domain and a non-threatening element offered a route out of it.

Two candidate actors identified in Table 1 do not behave as expected, and these negative results are worth recording. The Seimas Committee on Health Affairs, which might reasonably have been expected to carry the securitising narrative given the Agenda's scope, does not do so. Its working report for the spring 2023 session discusses the Agenda entirely in health terms, mentioning healthier and safer societies, reduced harms from substance use, expanded access to treatment and substitution therapy, and reduced mortality. The report does not address organised crime, smuggling, threats to security, or the national security law (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimo Sveikatos reikalų komitetas, 2023). The official Seimas press release likewise presents the Agenda as implementing a health-based approach to psychoactive substance use (Trembo, 2023). Similarly, the European Union Drugs Agency and the Eurasian Harm Reduction Association operate as functional actors instead of securitising ones. They supply the epidemiological material on which threat claims can be built, but neither asserts that the situation constitutes an existential threat (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction [EMCDDA], 2019; Eurasian Harm Reduction Association, n.d.).

The securitising narrative, in other words, is not carried by the institutional communications that accompanied the Agenda. It is located in the Agenda text itself. This is a meaningful finding, although it is also a limited one. The plenary stenographic record was not examined, and the possibility that securitising language featured more prominently in floor debate than in the surrounding documents cannot be excluded on the present evidence.

#### 4.1.2. *Existential Threat*

A lexical analysis of the Agenda 2035 text shows that the language of threat does not dominate the entire document, but is concentrated in certain sections (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2023a). Judging by the frequency of terminology, the document remains more health-policy oriented. Terms such as “health” appear 144 times, “prevention” 125 times, and “harm reduction” 68 times. In contrast, security-related terms have a much lower frequency: “crime” 57 times, “borders” 29 times, “organized crime” 22 times, “smuggling” 18 times, “security” 14 times, and “threat” only 8 times (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2023a). Therefore, based on the distribution of these terms, Agenda 2035 essentially reflects public health policy rather than security-oriented policy.

The distribution pattern of words in the document is far more meaningful than the mere total. The eight occurrences of the root word “threat” are concentrated exclusively in Chapter III, Section 2, on supply reduction (points 75–78). On the other hand, the sections discussing prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and reduction of negative impacts are completely devoid of this term. In this case, it depicts that the language of threat is used selectively and is fully aligned with the pillars of supply management. This framing construction is most eloquently expressed through the document's fourth objective (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2023a):

*“Sužlugdyti ir išardyti su narkotikais susijusias organizuotas nusikalstamas grupes, kurios veikia Lietuvoje arba kurių veikla yra nukreipta į Lietuvą, užkirsti kelią narkotikų prekursorių naudojimui ne pagal paskirtį ir jų prekybai neteisėtos narkotikų gamybos tikslais, spręsti sąsają su kitomis grėsmėmis saugumui klausimą ir tobulinti nusikalstamumo prevenciją.”*

Translation: “To disrupt and dismantle drug-related organised criminal groups operating in Lithuania or whose activity is directed at Lithuania, to prevent the misuse of drug precursors and their trade for the purposes of illegal drug production, to address the question of links with other threats to security, and to improve crime prevention.”

The construction proceeds in two moves. The source of the threat is externalised, referring to groups operating in Lithuania or whose activity is directed at Lithuania. Drug trafficking is then chained to other recognised serious crimes, including corruption, human trafficking and terrorism, in points 76.1.1 to 76.1.8. The chaining move is the one Crick (2012) identifies as characteristic of drug securitisation at the international level, and it is reproduced here in miniature.

The construction is further reinforced by a narrative of prior failure. Points 6 and 7 emphasise the limited results of the preceding health-oriented approach. That assessment functions discursively to license the restoration of a security emphasis. It is worth noting, however, the tension between this narrative and the Agenda's own acknowledgement that prevalence stands at half the European Union average. A policy field in which the country performs twice as well as the European mean is, on the face of it, an unusual candidate for a failure narrative. The gap between the epidemiological record and the rhetoric of failure is itself evidence that the framing is constructed instead of data-driven.

Indeed, the disproportion was noticed outside the document as well. Reporting from a stakeholder discussion held in Vilnius on 20 May 2022, a year before adoption, the news agency ELTA quoted the life sciences law specialist Andrej Rudanov. He estimated that roughly 80 % of the government's text was devoted to drugs, about 15 % to alcohol and about 5 % to tobacco (Bieliavska, 2022). That figure is one expert's estimate instead of a measurement. The discussion was convened around tobacco harm, so the estimate is reported here as a claim and not as data. What gives it weight is that the member of the Seimas who would present the Agenda to the chamber the following year accepted the underlying point at the same event. That member justified the priority in health terms that do not in fact match the document's distribution of threat language.

*“Aišku, skausmingesnė problema yra alkoholio vartojimas. Akivaizdu, kad mes žiūrime į tą dalį, kur yra didžiausia našta sveikatos sistemai.”* (Bieliavska, 2022)

Translation: “Clearly, the more painful problem is alcohol use. Obviously we look at the part where the burden on the health system is greatest.” (Bieliavska, 2022)

The securitising actor therefore identified alcohol as the substance carrying the heaviest burden on the health system. At the same time, the instrument he presented reserved its threat vocabulary, its externalised source and its chain of links to organised crime and terrorism for drugs alone. Threat language in the Agenda does not, in short, track the epidemiological burden the Agenda claims to address. The presenting actor said as much a year in advance.

#### 4.1.3. The Evidentiary Basis of the Threat Claim

Securitization measures in public policy typically utilize statistical data to emphasize the urgency of a threat. An overview of epidemiological data for this period is presented in Table 2:

**Table 2:** Prevalence and Drug-Induced Mortality in Lithuania

| Indicator                                          | Figure                     | Year | Source                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Lifetime prevalence, general population aged 15–64 | 14.1% (from 11.5% in 2016) | 2021 | NTAKD (n.d.-a)                                          |
| European Union average, same measure               | 28.9%                      | 2021 | EMCDDA (2019)                                           |
| Lifetime prevalence, men vs women                  | 21.2% vs 7.0%              | 2021 | NTAKD (n.d.-a)                                          |
| Use in the past 12 months                          | 4.5%                       | 2021 | NTAKD (n.d.-a)                                          |
| Students aged 15–16 having used any illicit drug   | 19% (cannabis 18.1%)       | 2019 | ESPAD (2020), in Narkotikapolitiskt Center [NPC] (2025) |
| Ninth-grade students, lifetime cannabis use        | 16.3% (from 18.0% in 2018) | 2022 | HBSC, in Narkotikapolitiskt Center [NPC] (2025)         |



| Indicator           | Figure                | Year | Source                                |
|---------------------|-----------------------|------|---------------------------------------|
| Drug-induced deaths | 47                    | 2020 | Institute of Hygiene, in NTAKD (2024) |
| Drug-induced deaths | 62                    | 2021 | Institute of Hygiene, in NTAKD (2024) |
| Drug-induced deaths | 87 (+40.3%)           | 2022 | Institute of Hygiene, in NTAKD (2024) |
| Drug-induced deaths | 74 (2.58 per 100,000) | 2023 | Institute of Hygiene, in NTAKD (2024) |

Source: NTAKD (n.d.-a); NTAKD (2024); EMCDDA (2019); ESPAD (2020) and HBSC figures as reported in Narkotikapolitiskt Center (2025); compiled by the authors.

Prevalence is low by European standards and is acknowledged as such in the Agenda's own situation analysis. Adolescent indicators are flat or declining, notwithstanding the public perception described in previous section. Mortality rose steeply to 2022 before falling in 2023, with the dominant proximate cause being carfentanil. This means the change is in what is being sold instead of in how many people are buying. The evidence therefore supports a supply-side threat construction and does not support an epidemic narrative. The government framed the threat as one of supply, when an epidemic framing was rhetorically available and would arguably have been more emotionally potent. This is entirely consistent with the bifurcated structure documented throughout this article: threat language was applied where the state intended to act coercively and withheld where it did not.

The monitoring annexes tell much the same story, and the movement between the draft and the adopted version is instructive. In the 2022 draft, the indicator for use in the previous twelve months took 3.1% (2016) as its baseline and set 3.1% as the target value for 2025, for 2030 and for 2035. This means no reduction at all across thirteen years (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2022). The adopted text updates the baseline to 4.5% (2021) and sets declining targets of 4.0%, 3.8% and 3.6%. Even the 2035 objective therefore sits above the 2016 level (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2023a). The movement on drug-induced mortality, however, runs the other way and is sharper. The draft set that indicator at zero deaths per hundred thousand by 2025. The adopted text sets 2.74 against a 2019 baseline of 2.9, a reduction of roughly 5%, and 2.55 for 2035. Between registration and adoption, in other words, the state abandoned the elimination of overdose death as an objective and replaced it with near-stasis. Ambition on the harm side was revised downward at precisely the moment the instrument acquired legal force.

To sum up this stage, the speech-act criterion is satisfied, but selectively and in a very particular shape. An actor with institutional standing named an existential threat, chained it to organised crime and terrorism, externalised its source and widened its referent object. Yet this actor did so for one component of the policy object only, and in the same breath offered the other component a route out of the security domain. Whether the relevant audiences accepted that split, and whether they accepted both of its halves, is the question to which the analysis now turns.

#### 4.1.4. Referent Object

In the 2035 Agenda, protected parties or reference objects are structured at two levels. The primary level focuses on Lithuanian society, particularly the younger generation, whose vulnerability is demonstrated through prevalence and mortality data. The secondary level, as outlined in Point 76.2.1, expands the scope of protection to include the legitimate economic order, society, and the environment from the dangers of violence, intimidation, corruption, and money laundering (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2023a). This expansion of the scope from individual health to the socio-economic order is a strong sign of securitization, because it shifts ordinary health issues into collective national survival issues.



## 4.2. *Acceptance by the Audience*

The findings related to audience reception demonstrate the most complex changes in this study. Therefore, the discussion needs to be conducted separately for each audience group to more accurately analyze differences in reception patterns.

### 4.2.1. *The Public Audience*

A nationally representative survey conducted by Baltijos tyrimai for LRT between 12 and 28 July 2022, using personal interviews with 1,021 adults, asked respondents whether they agreed with the bill then before the Seimas removing criminal liability for possession of small quantities without intent to distribute (LRT & Baltijos tyrimai, 2022). The results are set out in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Small-Quantity Possession, July 2022

| Group            | Support | Oppose | Note                                                                                       |
|------------------|---------|--------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| All respondents  | 18%     | 74%    | Strongly disagree 45%, rather disagree 29%; fully agree 4%, rather agree 14%; 8% no answer |
| Women            | 16%     | 77%    |                                                                                            |
| Men              | 22%     | 70%    |                                                                                            |
| Aged 18–29       | 35%     | 55%    | Highest support                                                                            |
| Aged 30–49       | 25%     | 69%    |                                                                                            |
| Aged 50 and over | 10%     | 82%    | Highest opposition                                                                         |

Source: LRT and Baltijos tyrimai (2022); processed by the authors.

Three in four adults rejected any softening of criminal liability, with opposition rising to 82% among respondents aged fifty and over. The punitive construction of drugs was thus already well established in public opinion some ten months before the Agenda was adopted, and the state did not need to persuade the public of it. Nor, indeed, was that disposition new. Subata (2023) records recurrent political attacks on opioid agonist therapy over the preceding decades, on the argument that it merely substitutes legal drugs for illegal ones. Subata (2023) also notes that professional bodies and non-governmental organisations repeatedly had to defend the treatment as legitimate. In Roe's (2008) terms, identification was never in question here. What the survey measures is refusal at the stage of mobilisation, and specifically refusal of the desecuritisising half of the package.

### 4.2.2. *The Parliamentary Audience*

Resolution No. XIV-1982 was adopted with 64 votes in favour, 12 against and 41 abstentions (Trembo, 2023). The Seimas has 141 seats, so that affirmative votes amounted to roughly 45 per cent of the chamber, short of an absolute majority, with abstentions numbering almost two-thirds of the affirmative total. Two readings of this distribution are possible. On the first, acceptance was weak and the securitisising move correspondingly unsuccessful. On the second, the abstentions register objection to the desecuritisising provisions rather than to the security provisions. The second reading is better supported by the surrounding record, although it should be stated plainly that it is an inference and not a finding, since the motives of abstaining members were not directly established. Three pieces of circumstantial evidence support it, each with a stated limitation:

- (1). The decriminalisation bills introduced in 2022 passed first reading on 14 December 2022 but were returned to committee and had still not received a final decision by 2025 (Narkotikapolitiskt Center, 2025; Bikelis & Lankauskas, 2024). These bills, Nos. XIVP-1766 and XIVP-1767, concerned cannabis specifically rather than controlled substances generally, a narrower object than the survey question, and the two sources should not be treated as measuring the same thing.

(2). The Legal Department of the Seimas Chancellery, in an opinion of 7 December 2017 on draft amendments to Articles 199, 259 and 260 of the Criminal Code (No. XIIIIP-437(2)), objected that the draft focused solely on decriminalisation and reduction of liability, and that a tenfold reduction of fines raised proportionality concerns (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimo kanceliarijos Teisės departamentas, 2017). This opinion concerns a different bill from a different parliamentary term and predates the vote by five and a half years; it evidences an institutional disposition within the Chancellery's legal service rather than the reasoning of members in 2023.

(3). Survey evidence shows sustained majority public opposition to relaxing sanctions.

At this point, these indicate that resistance in and around the Seimas was directed at leniency towards users rather than at supply-side enforcement. They do not establish it, and we do not claim otherwise; confirming the inference would require the plenary stenographic record and the Legal Department's opinion on Nos. XIVP-1766/1767. Thus, the version of the Agenda registered in 2022 allows the filtering described above to be observed textually instead of merely inferred (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2022). The draft's sixth objective, at point 107, commits the state to develop a humanistic criminal policy oriented towards the health of the person and towards assistance for drug users. Point 108.3.1 states the operative commitment without qualification.

*“decriminalizuoti veikas, susijusias su disponavimu nedideliu kiekiu narkotikų be tikslo platinti (asmeniniam vartojimui), už jas numatant administracinę atsakomybę...”*

Translation: “to decriminalise acts related to the possession of a small quantity of drugs without intent to distribute (for personal use), providing administrative liability for them...”

The draft supports that commitment with an extended evidentiary passage at points 83 to 106. It records that the entry into force of the Code of Administrative Offences in 2017 moved small-quantity possession out of administrative and into criminal liability. Recorded misdemeanours of this type rose from 617 in 2015 to 1,310 in 2019. Persons under 29 accounted for 63% of those registered for drug offences in 2019 and 65% in 2020. Stricter liability did not reduce the number of such acts. The draft states, moreover, that the arrangement does not conform to the human-rights-based drug policy principles of the United Nations and the European Union. It cites the 2017 joint statement of the United Nations and the World Health Organization calling for repeal of criminal laws penalising possession for personal use. The draft even anticipates the change it proposes. Point 34 observes that the links between the criminal, health and social service systems are fragmentary and inconsistent, and that the health system must be prepared for the moment when decisions in the field of criminal policy are taken.

The adopted text settles the question, and it settles it against the expectation that the commitment had been cut before the vote. Point 114.3.1 of Resolution No. XIV-1982 carries the draft's wording forward intact and, if anything, adds to it.

*“decriminalizuoti veikas, susijusias su disponavimu nedideliu kiekiu narkotikų be tikslo juos platinti (asmeniniam vartojimui), už jas numatant administracinę atsakomybę ir užtikrinant individualaus vertinimo pagrindu taikomas švietimo, socialines, sveikatos priežiūros sistemų intervencijos priemones”* (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2023a)

Translation: “to decriminalise acts related to the possession of a small quantity of drugs without intent to distribute (for personal use), providing administrative liability for them and ensuring intervention measures of the education, social and health care systems applied on the basis of individual assessment” (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2023a)

The desecuritising commitment therefore survived the passage from draft to adopted text, and survived the division of 23 May 2023. The legislature did not strike it out. What did not survive was its execution. Articles 259 and 260 of the Criminal Code remain unamended, although the Code was amended in April 2024 to add an alternative penal measure under the

same Agenda. The cannabis decriminalisation bills went no further than first reading. By April 2025 the responsible committee had postponed further debate pending the position of an incoming government (Bikelis & Lankauskas, 2024; Narkotikapolitiskt Center, 2025).

This sharpens the asymmetry instead of weakening it. In a single instrument and by a single vote, the Seimas adopted both a supply-side programme built on threat language and European security cooperation, and a user-side commitment to decriminalise possession for personal use. The first was carried into implementation through the 2024–2026 plan, accession to EMPACT and the expansion of administrative supervision. The second was adopted and then left unexecuted for at least two years. The audience, on this evidence, did not filter the text. It filtered what followed from the text. That distinction matters a good deal for securitisation theory, because it locates the failure neither at Roe's stage of identification nor at the moment of formal acceptance, but after both, in the ordinary legislative work that acceptance was supposed to set in motion. Section 4.3 identifies the precise point at which that work stopped.

One divergence between text and presentation is worth recording here. Point 114.3 is headed as a review of the criminal policy applied to drug users, and its first operative sub-point commits the state to decriminalise. What the presenting member told the chamber and the press, however, was that the Agenda provides for the possibility of reviewing the existing criminal policy applied to drug users (Trembo, 2023). The umbrella task was described. The operative commitment beneath it was not. Whether this reflects caution before an audience known to oppose leniency, or simply a summary chosen for brevity, cannot be settled without the plenary record. The gap between what the instrument commits to and how it was presented at the moment of adoption is nonetheless part of the phenomenon described here.

Two features of the draft should be recorded independently of that question. First, the draft describes itself, at point 1, as a commitment to apply a health-based approach to the use of psychoactive substances. It states at point 4 that such use must first be assessed as a matter of physical health, mental health and social well-being. Second, point 5.8 of the draft already invokes the 1996 Law on the Fundamentals of National Security in the same terms as the adopted text. Both halves of the split were thus present from the drafting stage, and both are retained at the same points in the adopted text. The instrument was designed to be health-based in self-description and security-founded in legal basis at the same time. This is exactly what the concept of a splitting speech act would lead one to expect.

Hence, the audience accepted the threat framing readily, because it had already accepted it. The audience refused the desecuritisng provision not by voting it down but by declining to act on it afterwards. Whether the measures that did follow amount to extraordinary measures in the sense the framework requires is the question taken up next.

#### *4.3. The Extraordinary Measure*

Based on the criteria set by Buzan et al. (1998), the Agenda clearly does not qualify as a securitized issue. It was created through completely normal procedures. The Law on Strategic Management (No. XIII-3096, June 2020) lists the national agenda as a regular planning tool, and Resolution No. XIV-1982 simply follows Article 15(2) of that law to approve it (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2020, 2023a). That is exactly what happened. The same law required the Government to submit a national anti-corruption agenda by June 1, 2021, which shows that this type of document is part of routine governance, not emergency action. No state of emergency was declared, no legal steps were skipped, and no institution was given special powers. Procedurally, the Agenda was just an ordinary strategic plan. The timeline also supports this view. The National Audit Office noted that the resolution approving the Agenda was supposed to be adopted by the end of 2022, and its action plan by early 2023, but neither deadline was met (Valstybės kontrolė, 2023). A document that falls two quarters behind its own schedule, with the delay recorded as a normal compliance issue, is not a product of emergency politics.

In fact, the government itself described the Agenda in the same ordinary way. About a year before it was adopted, the Prime Minister's health adviser, Živilė Gudlevičienė, called it a strategic document that sets general directions, said it was not set in stone like the Ten Commandments and could be added to, and mentioned that specific action plans would follow (Bieliavska, 2022). She expected it to be approved during that spring session of parliament; it was actually approved in the spring session the next year. A document that its own supporters describe as flexible, directional, and waiting for future implementation plans, and that is delayed by a full parliamentary year, is not an emergency measure.

The Agenda also had no special funding. A departmental monitoring report for 2025 states that no extra state budget money was given to achieve the Agenda's goals, so institutions had to carry out activities using their existing budgets (NTAKD, 2025). If the government truly saw an issue as an existential threat requiring extraordinary action, it would likely not fund the response from the same unchanged budgets of the agencies already handling it.

The same pattern applies to the health-related efforts, even before the Agenda. The Ministry of Health approved an action plan to improve addiction treatment and harm reduction for 2021–2024 through a ministerial order (No. V-1855) on August 13, 2021 almost two years before the Seimas adopted the Agenda. Also, between 2015 and 2021, new quality standards for opioid therapy, day care, psychosocial rehabilitation, and inpatient treatment were introduced as regular legal acts tied to National Health Insurance Fund reimbursement (Subata, 2023). So, policy development on both sides of the issue continued through normal administrative tools throughout this period.

This is not a small gap that can be explained away. According to the original framework, using exceptional measures is what separates securitisation from politicisation, and that is simply missing here. On the Copenhagen School's spectrum, the evidence shows a move toward the intense end of politicisation: more government attention, a larger implementation system, more legislative activity, and stronger rhetoric, but all within ordinary rules. That is a fundamentally different process from securitisation, and accurately describing it matters more than keeping a more dramatic label.

In this case, because the exceptionality criterion is itself contested, the case is also assessed against Floyd's (2016) alternative, on which securitisation succeeds where threat identification is followed by behavioural change justified by reference to the threat, whether or not the measures are exceptional. Three developments qualify as candidate behavioural changes, and each requires qualification.

- (1). The Ministry of National Defence is also involved. Point 119 names the Ministry of National Defence as one of the agencies responsible for carrying out the Agenda, alongside other ministries like health, education, social security, interior, finance, transport, justice, foreign affairs, and agriculture (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2023a). It is unusual for a defence ministry to be involved in managing issues like drugs, tobacco, and alcohol in public health. This shows that security institutions are moving into this area, and their role is not just symbolic; it is active. Under the 2024–2026 plan, the Lithuanian Armed Forces have their own specific tasks. These include prevention and information activities for soldiers and civilian staff, as well as expanding drug testing within the military. In 2024, the Military Medical Service held 46 sessions for 2,035 personnel and tested 1,394 soldiers and employees. The rate of positive tests was 4.08 %, which was higher than the target of 1.6 % and above the 2022 baseline of 1.82 % (NTAKD, 2024b). The fact that the military is conducting substance testing as part of a national drug strategy is a much clearer example of security institutions expanding into this field than just seeing the Ministry of Defence listed among many other implementing agencies.
- (2). The Agenda also includes a commitment to join EMPACT, which stands for the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats. This is stated in point

76.1.3 (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2023a). By making this commitment, Lithuania is placing its national drug policy within a broader European framework for security cooperation. This represents a real change in how Lithuania works with other countries on this issue.

- (3). The Agenda also expanded the supervisory powers of NTAKD, the national health watchdog. Law No. XIV-2149 was passed on 29 June 2023 and took effect on 1 August 2023. It added a new rule to Article 70(1) of the Law on the Health System. This rule allows NTAKD to carry out test purchases without showing a copy of the inspection order to the business being checked. It also allows the agency to collect and test samples for free (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2023b). Undercover test buying is normally a tool used by law enforcement. Giving this power to a health agency is a notable step. However, three important points reduce the significance of this change: (1) this new power only applies to the supervisory duties listed in Article 70(1)(2)(7). These duties cover compliance monitoring for drug precursors, tobacco, alcohol, and hemp fibre. It does not cover illicit drugs themselves. Enforcement for illegal drugs remains with the police and customs under the Criminal Code. So the connection to narcotics is indirect and comes through the supervision of precursors; (2) in practice, NTAKD's activity report for 2024 shows that this power has been used mostly on hemp products, not on controlled substances. The department continues to act as a consultative and cooperation-focused regulator (NTAKD, 2024b). Hence, this provision is best seen as a modest administrative expansion that fits with the supply-side focus of the Agenda. It is not strong evidence that the agency has been given exceptional or emergency powers.

Despite the earlier limitations, implementation did move forward. Government Resolution No. 336, adopted on 8 May 2024, created the 2024-2026 implementation plan and assigned tasks to the responsible ministries (Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė, 2024). The content of this plan is worth examining closely because it is where broad commitments turn into concrete actions with assigned institutions and deadlines. On the supply side, the plan is quite specific. It includes measures to strengthen police capacities for investigating organised drug crime and its links to other security threats (point 16). It also provides for monitoring the entire Lithuanian section of the EU external border with modern surveillance technology, along with a new version of the Integrated Customs Information System. This is expected to increase drug seizures both at customs posts and in postal and courier shipments (point 17). The plan also includes cooperation agreements between law enforcement and postal and express delivery services (point 18). The plan is formally linked to four national development programmes. One of these is the Public Security Strengthening and Development Programme, which was approved by the Seimas on 22 June 2023, just a month after the Agenda itself (point 6.4). The plan's list of legal foundations also repeats, at point 4.10, the same passage from the 1996 Law on the Fundamentals of National Security that appears in the Agenda at point 5.8. So the legal foundation identified at the start of Section 4 runs continuously through three documents: the 1996 law, the 2023 Agenda, and the 2024 plan.

The demand side, or the user side, is where the plan becomes most revealing. Harm reduction measures are certainly included. The plan aims to increase the coverage and accessibility of substitution treatment and low-threshold services, referring to UNODC standards for optimal coverage (point 14). It also aims to improve treatment and rehabilitation for prisoners and people on probation (point 13). However, what is missing is decriminalisation. Point 15 of the plan, which covers criminal policy, lists only two measures. The first is to introduce a new tool in the Criminal Code that allows a court to delay a sentence if the person agrees to undergo addiction treatment. The second is to conduct a systematic review of the rules for determining the net weight of narcotic and psychotropic substances in criminal cases. Both of these match points 114.3.2 and 114.3.3 of the Agenda, which deal with adjusting sanctions and providing alternatives to punishment. But point 114.3.1 is absent. The commitment to decriminalise possession for personal use, which the Seimas adopted in May 2023, does not

appear among the criminal policy measures that the government agreed to carry out in May 2024 (Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė, 2024). So, the desecuritising part of the Agenda was not just left unimplemented. It was carried through the adoption process and then removed at the stage where adoption turns into action. Meanwhile, the two other, less demanding commitments that stood next to it in the same sub-paragraph were carried forward. This is a much more specific mechanism than simply saying the audience rejected the idea. It is visible only because the Lithuanian planning system requires the government to clearly state what it intends to do next.

The behavioural test gives a divided outcome. On the supply side, there is clear behavioural change justified by reference to a threat. According to Floyd's (2016) criterion, the supply track would count as a weak form of securitisation. On the user side, however, the picture is much more specific than simply a lack of change. Articles 259 and 260 of the Criminal Code, which deal with possession and distribution, were not amended. In addition, the bills proposing decriminalisation stalled after their first reading (Bikelis & Lankauskas, 2024). Nevertheless, the Criminal Code was amended in this policy area and within this time period. Law No. XIV-2573, passed on 25 April 2024 and in effect from 1 February 2025, introduced a new criminal impact measure. This allows a court to require a person to take part in prevention, early intervention, or resocialisation programmes if the offence was committed under the influence of, or in withdrawal from, psychoactive substances and that condition affected the act (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2024; NTAKD, 2025). This amendment implements point 114.3.3 of the Agenda, which deals with alternatives to punishment. As a result, the state had both the legislative ability and the political opportunity to amend the Criminal Code in service of the Agenda. However, it used these for the third of the three criminal policy commitments, but not for the first.

The second commitment had a different outcome. Point 114.3.2, on recalibrating sanctions, led to a measure requiring a systematic review of the rules for determining the net weight of controlled substances in criminal proceedings. This review was carried out and recorded as fully completed. Its outcome, at an interinstitutional meeting on 14 November 2024, was that no amendment to the Criminal Code was needed. The representative of the Supreme Court stated that case law was settled and that any change in practice would need a legislative trigger. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health held that any revision of the quantity thresholds would require detailed justification. The follow-up agreed was a survey of foreign practice and preliminary proposals for amending a ministerial recommendation, rather than the Code itself (NTAKD, 2025). In other words, a commitment that is fulfilled by a review that concludes against change is a particular kind of implementation, and it is worth distinguishing from both success and neglect. By contrast, point 114.3.1 produced nothing at all. The departmental monitoring report for 2024 sets out the measures under the Agenda's sixth objective and describes each of them. These include two on low-threshold services and substitution treatment, one on the ESPAD school survey, and the two criminal policy measures just described. None of these correspond to decriminalisation (NTAKD, 2025). Therefore, the commitment adopted by the Seimas in May 2023 has produced no planned measure, no responsible institution, and no indicator.

The 2025 monitoring cycle removes any remaining doubt. In that year, the Agenda's sixth objective carried two measures. One was on low-threshold services and the other was on the new criminal impact measure. The report records under the criminal policy task that the latter had already been completed in 2024 (NTAKD, 2025). Across the whole 2024-2026 plan, therefore, the task that operationalises point 114.3 consists of exactly two measures. These are the alternative penal measure and the net mass review. Both were delivered and both are now closed. Decriminalisation was not postponed within the task. Instead, the task was completed without it. The contrast in operational volume is stark. From the entry into force of the new penal measure on 1 February 2025, courts imposed it in 855 cases against a planned 850. Moreover, participation in the associated programme run by the Probation Service rose from 187 persons in 2024 to 878 in 2025 (NTAKD, 2025). As a result, the

commitment that was implemented now processes several hundred people a year. By contrast, the commitment that was not has produced no measure, no responsible institution, and no indicator against which anything could be counted.

Nor, it should be said, is the supply track uniformly well resourced. For example, the measure providing for advanced analytical tools to monitor online drug distribution received no funding in 2025 and was not implemented. The department's recommendations ask the Government and the Ministry of Finance to revisit the Police Department's appropriations in the 2027 to 2029 budget (NTAKD, 2025). On the health side, coverage of substitution treatment reached 26.57% against a target of 40%. Furthermore, the department proposes revising the indicator itself on the ground that opioid substitution no longer reflects a market now characterised by polydrug use and novel substances. So neither track is a story of smooth delivery. What separates them is that one produced measures capable of failing, while the other produced no measure at all.

The user side track is likewise not uniformly stagnant, and this article should not be read as claiming that it is. Visits to low-threshold service points rose from 61,074 in 2023 to 79,826 in 2024, exceeding the plan's target of 67,000. Similarly, coverage of people who inject drugs reached 67.78% against a target of 68%. The revised treatment and rehabilitation standards adopted in February 2025 state expressly that they implement a recommendation of the National Audit Office. However, coverage of substitution treatment, at 16.37% against a target of 20%, was missed (NTAKD, 2025). The 2025 figures run in much the same direction. There were 83,777 visits against a target of 71,000. Coverage of people who inject drugs was at 82.6% against a target of 73%. New HIV diagnoses linked to injecting drug use dropped to 12 against a target of 20 and a baseline of 28 (NTAKD, 2025). So what is frozen is not the provision of services but the legal status of the person who uses drugs. That is the precise shape of the asymmetry. In other words, the health pathway expands administratively while the criminal law position of its intended beneficiaries remains where the 2017 recodification left it.

Evidence from service delivery points the same way. Butvilas et al. (2022) interviewed four social workers and four peer counsellors providing harm reduction services in Lithuania in January 2022. This was after the health turn of the 2018-2028 Programme and while the Agenda was being drafted. They report that state employed social workers remained oriented towards client abstinence. They exercised control functions such as supervised urine testing alongside their supportive role, which the authors call the “double mandate” of social work. They also displayed moral judgement of clients that the authors themselves characterise as closer to a positivist model of illness than to a harm reduction perspective. Meanwhile, collaboration with communities of people who use drugs, which is the participatory element promoted by the EU Drugs Strategy 2021-2025 and recommended in the Agenda, was practised only by peer counsellors. Their activity was at that time unregulated in Lithuanian law. With only eight participants, the study is illustrative rather than representative, and it makes no claim about securitisation. The inference drawn here is this article's own. Nonetheless, it indicates that the ambivalence documented above at the level of statute and legislative record was also present in front line practice at the moment the Agenda was adopted. The desecuritisng track was therefore not simply unlegislated, but within the state's own services it was also incompletely internalised.

Audit evidence points to the same conclusion and carries greater weight, as it comes from the state's own supreme audit institution. Reporting on 2 May 2023, three weeks before adoption, the National Audit Office found that 43% of 294 licensed health care institutions did not provide the primary outpatient mental health or specialised addiction services for which they held licences. Four municipalities had no institution providing any mental health service at all. Furthermore, 45% of those seeking help for addiction faced difficulties with territorial access. In 2021 and 2022, none of the 185 licensed institutions delivered the adult Minnesota psychosocial rehabilitation programme, which remained confined to the Republican Centre for Addictive Disorders. Only three other institutions provided inpatient

addiction treatment for children and young people across 2019 to 2022. Additionally, five of the six existing treatment methodologies were more than ten years old and had not been updated (Valstybės kontrolė, 2023). Delivery of the 2021-2024 action plan was correspondingly weak. Thirty-nine percent of its 44 measures were completed on time in 2021 and 2022, and 7 of its 13 indicators were met in 2022. The shortfall, importantly, was not budgetary. Funding for the treatment of addictive diseases rose from 10 million to 14.7 million euros between 2019 and 2022. Moreover, 18.1 thousand people received treatment funded by the Compulsory Health Insurance Fund in 2022. International estimates cited by the auditor put the share of those needing addiction treatment who actually seek it at about 8% (Alonso et al., 2004, as cited in Valstybės kontrolė, 2023). What the user side track lacked was organisation, supervision, and reach, not money.

The Agenda, indeed, says as much about itself. Its situation analysis, at points 11.2 and 11.3, assesses the supply reduction field of the preceding programme favourably. At the same time, it records that harm reduction is not yet treated as an equal part of drug policy and that one of the programme's most important stated priorities, the review of criminal policy, had received no proper attention across three years of implementation (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2023a). The asymmetry documented in this article is therefore not only visible in the record. In fact, it is stated by the instrument itself, in the very section in which the state assesses its own performance.

Delivery on the supply side can be read from the same reports. The share of drug distribution and smuggling offences investigated over a three year window reached 84.9% against a target of 75% and a 2022 baseline of 69%. Similarly, the proportion of the Lithuanian section of the European Union external border monitored by modern surveillance technology reached 100%. Four contracts for upgrading border surveillance systems at the Purvėnai, Tribonai, Druskininkai and Bardinai frontier stations were signed during 2024 for a combined 13.45 million euros. All newly recruited customs officers were trained in the detection of narcotics and precursors. In November 2024, the Criminal Police Bureau convened Lietuvos paštas and the courier firms DPD, DHL, Venipak and Omniva to prepare the cooperation agreements foreseen in the plan (NTAKD, 2025). The contrast with the 14.7 million euros that funded the whole of addiction treatment in 2022 should not be pressed too far, since border infrastructure is capital expenditure serving several purposes at once. Nevertheless, the orders of magnitude are worth stating. Therefore, under the strict criterion, the case is not securitisation at all. However, under the behavioural criterion, it is a partial and one-sided one. The asymmetry between the two tracks remains the same under both readings. This article's argument rests on that consistency.

Therefore, we also need to look at the enforcement record. This means examining what institutions actually did, not just what the documents said. When we look at how the rules were put into practice, the picture becomes more complicated. These complications are important and deserve to be explained fully.

**Table 4:** Registered Drug-Related Offences and Customs Drug Investigations, 2018–2023

| Year | Police: registered offences (Arts 259–268) | Police: cleared | Cleared (%) | Customs: drug cases | Customs: share of caseload | Customs: drugs seized (kg) |
|------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------|---------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 2018 | 2,472                                      | 2,341           | 94.7%       | 342                 | 76.7%                      | 1,000 (+5,000 precursor)   |
| 2019 | 2,548                                      | 2,322           | 91.1%       | 173                 | 56.5%                      | ≈500                       |
| 2020 | 2,311                                      | 2,076           | 89.8%       | 161                 | 48.2%                      | 107                        |
| 2021 | 2,527                                      | 2,491           | 98.6%       | 202                 | 51.7%                      | 453                        |
| 2022 | 2,616                                      | 2,381           | 90.8%       | 136                 | 46.7%                      | 11.3                       |
| 2023 | 3,318                                      | 2,797           | 84.2%       | 96                  | 34.8%                      | 569                        |

Source: Policijos departamentas prie Lietuvos Respublikos vidaus reikalų ministerijos (2024); Muitinės kriminalinė tarnyba (2025). Clearance rates and caseload shares calculated by the authors.



Therefore, domestic and border enforcement show very different trends over this period. Registered police offences rose 34.2% between 2018 and 2023, while customs drug investigations fell 71.9%. The spike in recorded offences in 2023, together with a drop in the clearance rate, suggests that police activity intensified. There is no indication of a sudden increase in actual offending.

However, this divergence does fit with the idea that the Agenda's threat narrative was constructed through discourse, not driven by a real escalation of the threat. But it does not prove that claim, because there is a simpler explanation that is documented in the sources themselves. Customs Criminal Service reports show that smuggling has shifted to postal and logistics channels. The Agenda addresses this shift in its fifth objective through cooperation with private carriers (Muitinės kriminalinė tarnyba, 2025; Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2023a). This shift would move cases out of customs jurisdiction and into police jurisdiction, which would produce exactly the pattern seen, even if the total volume of trafficking had not changed. Furthermore, seizure quantities are highly volatile. For example, there were 1,000 kg seized in 2018, 107 kg in 2020, 11.3 kg in 2022, and 569 kg in 2023. With only six data points and such large swings, it is not possible to infer a clear trend. What can be said is narrower but still worth noting. The intensified threat language in the 2035 Agenda is not matched by a corresponding escalation in border interdiction records. Moreover, the administrative behaviour of the implementing agency remained consultative, not coercive, throughout (NTAKD, 2025). In short, the security emphasis is much more pronounced in policy text than in actual administrative practice.

The 2025 customs data make this point even clearer. The Customs Department opened 110 pre-trial investigations into drug smuggling and unlawful possession during 2025, which is 18% more than in 2024. Of these, 102 cases, or about 93%, involved drugs sent by post or courier. The substances came mostly from Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States, and consisted mainly of cannabis, amphetamine, and psilocybin mushrooms (NTAKD, 2025). Over the same period, the state completed the modernisation of border surveillance systems at four frontier stations on the eastern land border. Therefore, the infrastructure that supports the Agenda's supply-side objectives sits on the border with Belarus, while the traffic that customs actually detects arrives in parcels from western European member states. This does not mean that the border investment is useless, as it clearly also serves migration control. However, it does show that the geography of the threat as constructed and the geography of the flow as recorded are not the same. This is exactly what an argument about discursive construction would lead one to expect.

## 5. Conclusion

This study examined whether drugs' political status in Lithuania shifted from 2018 to 2023 and if this meets securitisation criteria. The change is real but narrower than a paradigm shift, and it does not meet those criteria. The dual security-health framing was established in the 1996 National Security Law and institutionalised in 2010. The 2018-2028 Programme prioritised health, but the 2035 Agenda restored security as foundational. Hence, this was a reweighting within a stable framework, not first-time securitisation. The Agenda followed ordinary procedure under the 2020 Strategic Management Law, with no emergency or exceptional powers. The case sits at intense politicisation, not securitised.

The Agenda performs a distinctive split. Threat language appears only in the supply-reduction chapter, targeting suppliers for enforcement, while users are directed to harm reduction and potential decriminalisation. The punitive side gained public acceptance and advanced via the 2024-2026 plan. The permissive side was abandoned: decriminalisation stalled, Articles 259-260 remain unamended, services kept an abstinence focus, and the 2024-2026 plan omitted decriminalisation while retaining lesser commitments (Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė, 2024; NTAKD, 2025). Hence, one instrument can hold contradictory movements, and an audience can ratify one while rejecting the other.



Lithuania exhibits securitisation features: a threat narrative linked to organised crime and terrorism, externalised source, widened referent object, Belarus border crisis as facilitating condition, and receptive public. Yet it produces no procedural exceptionalism. The explanation is structural: statutory dualism and a mature planning law allow reweighting without claiming exception. Hence, the exceptionality criterion is bypassed because the institutional architecture supplies the authority securitisation would otherwise seize. This condition likely applies across consolidated EU states. This dualism appears at three levels: in statute (the 1996 law assigns drugs to both security and health), in clinical regulation (opioid therapy balances control and individual approach, Subata, 2023), and in front-line practice (social workers combine support and control, Butvilas et al., 2022). Asymmetry extends to infrastructure. Police and customs produce continuous data, but the treatment apparatus is dysfunctional: 17% kept no records, 64% did not enter data into the national system, and since July 2022 results were aggregated only on request (Valstybės kontrolė, 2023). Hence, measurement capacity distributes as threat language does.

Two measures show how drug policy chains to other threats. The police measure creates preconditions for terrorism reduction, and the border measure strengthens EU border and migration control, with drug prevention as a further consequence (NTAKD, 2025). Hence, drug policy is delivered through counter-terrorism and migration instruments. By 2024, the facilitating condition became the administrative vehicle for supply-side objectives.

This case gives empirical content to the splitting speech act (Austin & Beaulieu-Brossard, 2018). The Agenda performs this division, but Lithuania adds that release was blocked not by unmeetable conditions, but by an audience that accepted the punitive half and refused the permissive half. Hence, splitting exposes the desecuritising component to independent veto. The case supports Roe (2008) on separating identification from mobilisation. The public already identified drugs as a threat before the Agenda. What they refused was mobilisation in the opposite direction. Buzan et al. (1998) do not anticipate an audience filtering a single instrument provision by provision, yet Lithuanian evidence shows they do.

Two policy implications follow: (1) Where enforcement and liberalisation are coupled, enforcement proceeds administratively, while liberalisation relies on criminal law amendment and is exposed to veto; (2) Where a health regulator is granted enforcement powers, the enabling provision determines substantive effect. Lithuania's test purchase power reaches precursors and hemp but not controlled substances, and practice has followed that boundary. Therefore, the researcher could not examine the plenary record of 23 May 2023 due to data constraints, so findings on securitising language remain provisional. No interviews were conducted, so abstainers' reasoning is inferred. Enforcement data are short and volatile, limiting trend analysis. Future research should review the 14 December 2022 and 23 May 2023 records, interview Committee members, and compare with Latvia and Estonia. Whether the 2023 desecuritising commitment is ever executed remains open

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