

PARLIAMENTARISM VERSUS SEMI-PRESIDENTIALISM IN THE BALTIC STATES: THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF DIFFERENCES IN THE CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS¹

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ABSTRACT

Restoring their statehood in the early 1990s, Estonia and Latvia established parliamentary republics, while Lithuania opted for semi-presidentialism. The paper is a case-oriented comparative study explaining this difference with the Lithuanian “exceptionality” in focus. Part of the answer is differences of interwar constitutional history: while Lithuania and Estonia had to cope with the legacy of three constitutions each, Latvia inherited only the parliamentary Constitution of 1922, because its dictator Karlis Ulmanis did not bother to constitutionalize his rule. Another part is differences in the balance of power during the time of extraordinary politics when constitutions were made. The alternation between the presidential and parliamentary phases of semi-presidentialism and the “perils of presidentialism” did manifest repeatedly in the Lithuanian post-communist politics, while Estonia and Latvia did know next to nothing about them, except for the “Zatlers episode” in Latvia in 2009–2011. The infamous Rolandas Paksas’ impeachment in 2003–2004 and controversial features in the performance style of the Lithuanian president Dalia Grybauskaitė are important illustrations of the shortcomings of semi-presidentialism, which could be cured by Lithuania’s switch to the Baltic pattern of parliamentary presidency. However, as time goes on, the probability of a constitutional reform decreases in all Baltic States, mainly due to increasing acquis constitutionnel and habituation.

The key element in the democratic state-making is constitution-making including the choice between the parliamentary and the presidential forms of government. This choice was different in post-communist Estonia and Latvia on the one side and in Lithuania on the other. While the former countries opted for a parliamentary republic, Lithuania has a form of government classified as semi-presidentialism.² Importantly, in the interwar time, the constitutional

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² Semi-presidentialism is a constitutional framework adopted by 15 of the 29 former communist bloc countries. They include Armenia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Mongolia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovenia, and Ukraine. Six states adopted presidentialism in their first post-communist constitutions (Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), and eight adopted parliamentary constitutions at the start of transition (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Latvia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, and Slovakia).

reform involving the establishment of the directly elected powerful president became the key topic on the political agenda of Estonia and Latvia by early 1930s, with disagreements about the powers of the president and struggles between the pretenders leading to the breakdown of democracy.

In the post-communist times, the form of government in Lithuania was lively discussed in the country in the late 1990s, with the interest gradually weakening in the second postcommunist decade. This discussion left a rather broad local literature produced by political scientists (Hollstein, 1999; Lukošaitis, 1998; Matsuzato and Gudžinskas, 2006; Pugačiauskas, 1999a, 1999b; Talat-Kelpša, 1997, 1998; Urbanavičius, 1999) and legal scholars (Kūris, 1998; Ragauskas, 2002; Arlauskas, 2010). Curiously, while international contributions on post-communist parliamentarism vs. semi-presidentialism are all comparative in their approach (see, e.g., Beichelt and Keudel, 2011; Elgie, 1999; Elgie, Moestrup, and Yu-Shan Wu, 2011; Pradetto and Weckmüller, 2004; Protsyk, 2006; Rüb, 2001; Sedelius, 2006; Taras, 1997), I was not able to find a single paper with the special focus on the Baltic States: why only Lithuania is a semi-presidential democracy, while Estonia and Latvia represent its parliamentary variety? The present paper tries to answer this question.

It is a case-oriented contribution that is placed on the middle ground between a variable-oriented work, which usually encompasses all cases of post-communist transition, and single-case studies about Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania. The comparison is asymmetric (cf. Kocka, 1999) as far as my paper focuses on the Lithuanian case due to its quasi-exceptional character in the Baltic context. This means that while the paper provides a near to continuous “process tracing” (cf. Bennett, 2010) of how Lithuanian post-communist presidents did perform in the conditions of semi-presidentialism (using the Duverger–Lijphart model of the semi-presidentialism’s alternation between the parliamentary and presidential phases as a guideline), the performance of the parliamentary Estonian and Latvian presidencies is highlighted only selectively to make major points. The elaboration of these points would need the use of sources in native languages (see, e.g., Toomla, 2002) and a broader space than the size of a single journal contribution allows.

The main part of the answer is presented in the second section. Then I proceed to the question of the impact of these differences on the performance of democracy in the Baltic States. This is the subject matter of the third section where Juan Linz’s famous list of the perils of presidentialism and the Duverger–Lijphart model of the semi-presidentialism’s alternation between parliamentary and presidential phases are used for a comparative description of the performance of semi-presidentialism in post-communist Lithuania. The fourth section provides a survey of the proposals of the constitutional reform in Lithuania, supplemented with the available information about the reform proposals of the parliamentary presidencies in the other Baltic states. Conclusions, forecasts, and final observations follow. However, at the very start (in the first section), relevant historical facts about the interwar history of the Baltic States are presented, because they contain an important part of the answer to the main question: why post-communist Lithuania deviates from the Baltic pattern of the parliamentary presidency?

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The explanation of the inter-Baltic differences in the post-communist state-building must start not from Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika but from the interwar time, because the primary goal of the Baltic national movements was the restitution of the independent states and the rectification of historical injustices by the Soviet occupation in 1940. So, "Baltic revolutions" were restitutive or restorative revolutions (see Norkus 2012a: 66–75; Pettai 2004). The Citizen Committees Movements in Estonia and Latvia stressed that the interwar republics of Latvia and Estonia continued to exist after 1940 as legal subjects because of the policy of non-recognition of the incorporation of Baltic States into the USSR. This principle of legal continuity was the basis of the controversial citizenship legislation in Estonia and Latvia, granting citizenship rights only to those who were their citizens in 1940 and their descendants. If strictly applied, the principle of legal continuity entailed that no new constitution-making is needed. The restitution of independence would mean simply to put interwar constitutions to work.

However, only in Latvia the continuity principle was applied in such an uncompromising way. On May 4 1990, the Supreme Council (Soviet) of Latvian SSR, elected according to the Soviet electoral law, set into force four articles of the Latvian Constitution (*Satversme*) of 1922. On July 6 1993, the newly elected fifth. Latvian *Saeima* did the same with the remaining part of the Latvian constitution. Since this time, Latvia lives under its old good *Satversme* amended in later years by the bill of rights (in 1998) and other modifications. The strict application of the principle of legal continuity explains why Latvia is now a parliamentary democracy and why the present Latvian top state office holder has actual and not different formal powers.

The principle of legal continuity was applied while restoring the independence of Lithuania, too. On March 11, 1990, immediately after the proclamation of the independence, restoration act by the last Supreme Council (Soviet) of Lithuanian SSR, the Constitution of 1938 was restituted. However, it remained in power for less than an hour. This time was enough to adopt the Provisional Constitution. One of the last actions of the last Supreme Soviet (now called Restitution *Seimas* in official documents) was to approve the new constitution of Lithuania, which acquired the legal power after a referendum on October 28, 1992. The same day, the first *Seimas* of the Second Republic of Lithuania was elected.

Differently from Lithuania, in Estonia the constitutional referendum on June 28, 1992 was separated from the first parliamentary elections according to the new constitution, taking place on September 20, 1992, but, unlike Lithuania, Estonia did not restore its prewar constitution. Its new constitution was the creation not of its last Supreme Soviet but of special Constitutional Assembly. It was composed in equal parts of representatives delegated by the Supreme Soviet and by the Congress of Estonia – a kind of a parallel or shadow parliament elected by persons who were registered by Citizen Committees as citizens of the interwar Republic of Estonia or their descendants.

Why Latvians were most consistent as regards the application of the principle of legal continuity of the pre-Soviet state, while Estonians applied it more selectively, and Lithuanians did this rather casually? The most important part of the answer is that the Latvian interwar strongman Karlis Ulmanis did not bother to legitimate his dictatorial power by writing a

new constitution after the coup on May 15, 1934 (see Anton, 2009; Dauchert, 2004; Reetz, 2012). This was an *autogolpe* type of the coup, with Prime Minister Ulmanis appointed by the democratically elected *Saeima* taking extraordinary powers not granted under normal circumstances. The Constitution of 1922 was never formally abolished in Latvia. The only means to legalise his power, used by Ulmanis, was the proclamation of the emergency state that continued until the very end of the independent Latvia. This was the legal reason do not to convene *Saeima* sessions and to concentrate all power in Minister Cabinet. After the term of Latvia's President Alberts Kviesis ended in the April 1936, the Minister Cabinet appointed Ulmanis acting president until such a time when the reform of the *Satversme* will be accomplished. However, this reform never came.³

So, curiously, among the authoritarian regimes in the interwar time, Ulmanis' dictatorship was maybe the only in Europe that had no formal elected representation whatsoever. This was not the case even in Hitler's Germany where after 1933 the *Reichstag* convened to ratify by acclamation the actions of the dictatorship, and in Stalin's Soviet Union with its fake elections to Soviets providing window dressing for the totalitarian dictatorship. This peculiarity of the interwar Latvian authoritarianism turned out to be a big asset after the demise of communism: there was no conflict between the restoration of the Latvian state and the restitution of democracy, because the democratic credentials of the *Satversme* 1992 were beyond all doubt. Thus, Karlis Ulmanis saved Latvian statesmen and stateswomen from many legal problems confronted by their colleagues in Estonia and Lithuania in 1990–1992.

Differently from Latvia, these countries were involved in the constitutional change during the interbellum time. After the military coup on December 17, 1926, which brought him to presidency in violation of the first Constitution from the year 1922, the dictator of Lithuania Antanas Smetona promulgated the provisional Constitution of May 15, 1928, which was replaced by the standing Constitution of May 12^h, 1938. Similarly, interwar Estonia had three Constitutions. The first came into force in 1920, adopted by the Constituent Assembly. The second was adopted in the 1933 referendum and came into force in January 1934. After the coup d'état by Konstantin Päts who was the provisional head of the state under the new constitution, the third Constitution was prepared and enacted since January 1, 1938. In Estonia, many politicians who were influential in the Citizen Committee movement considered the restitution of the Constitution of 1938 as a necessary part of the restoration of the independent Estonian state. In Lithuania, this was the position of small parties which claimed the legacy of the nationalist (*Tautininkai*) party, the ruling party during Smetona's dictatorship.

If the lawmakers in the post-communist Estonia and Lithuania would have consequently applied the principle of legal continuity, they would have re-enacted the Constitutions of 1938. In this case, both countries would have to live now under a form of government that may be called super-presidentialism. If Estonia would have opted to re-enact its constitution of 1920, it would have the form of government called super-parliamentarism. If Lithuania would

³ For more details on the inter-war political history of Baltic states, see, e.g., Kasekamp, 2010; Plakans, 2011; Smith, Pabriks, Purs and Lane, 2002.

have re-enacted its constitution of 1922, it would have a less radical form of parliamentary government than in Estonia in 1920–1933, but very similar to that in the contemporary and interwar Latvia. Instead, the constitution-makers in Estonia and Lithuania sought after some middle ground between the super-parliamentarism of the early 1920s and the super-presidentialism of the late 1930s. The outcomes were parliamentarism in Estonia and semi-presidentialism in Lithuania. Let me explain in brief their alternatives and choices.

2. ALTERNATIVES AND CHOICES IN THE POSTCOMMUNIST CONSTITUTION-MAKING IN ESTONIA AND LITHUANIA

There were influential political forces in Estonia, which favoured the restitution of the constitution of 1938. They were weaker in Lithuania, with some advocates of the principle of legal continuity proposing its partial restitution that would involve the suspension of its most undemocratic articles (see Ozolas, 1998: 52). However, this remained the minority standpoint. In Estonia, the restitution opponents pointed to the role of Päts in legalizing the Soviet occupation of Estonia in 1940. For a month, Soviets left him in the office, forcing to sign their orders as presidential decrees. Under the parliamentary rule, such procedure would be probably much more difficult. There were more obstacles for the comeback of the constitution of 1938. The president election involved the upper chamber of the legislative assembly. However, some members of this chamber were appointed by the president. With most of the members of the chamber in 1940 already dead, there was no way to elect the new president, and without president, there was no way to have legislature to play its part in the election. However, the most important obstacle for the restitution of the constitutions of 1938 was their undemocratic features and association with authoritarian regimes in the historical memory.

Why Estonia and Lithuania then did not follow the “Latvian way”, restoring their constitutions of the early 1920s which were free of any suspicions to provide the legal framework for the restoration of authoritarianism? The problem was their reputation of being ultra-democratic. The references to the real or alleged deficiencies of these constitutions were the main argument in the self-apologies for the authoritarian coups.⁴ In the official rhetorics of authoritarian regimes, the time before the coups was contemptuously described as that of “seimocracy” (in Lithuania), as that of the “rule by 100 petty kings”⁵ (in Latvia) or just that of “anarchy” (in all three countries). The battle-cry of the pro-fascist movements was replacement of the parliamentary system with a presidential form of government. They had mass support in Latvia and especially in Estonia (see Kasekamp, 2000) since the early 1930s. And so, the reputation of the constitutions of 1938 was low, but also the negative image of the early parliamentary constitutions may have survived in the social imaginary Estonians and Lithuanians.

⁴ In the Estonian case, the criticism of the constitution of 1920 may have some real ground. This cannot be said about the Lithuanian constitution of 1922, because it is very similar to the Latvian *Satversme* which proved its suitability for the post-communist conditions.

⁵ This is the number of members in the Latvian Saeima established by *Satversme*.

However, these obstacles to the restitution of the early parliamenatarism could have their effect only jointly with an even more important causal condition. One can identify a full set of causal conditions following Max Weber's advice: "Not ideas, but material and ideal interests directly govern men's conduct. Yet very frequently the 'world images' that have been created by 'ideas' have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamics of interest" (Weber 1946 (1920): 280). The interwar experiences set the limits on what was thinkable and what was not during the post-communist constitution-making. The actual choices were determined by the individual, group, and institutional interests at the time when constitutional choices were made.

In 1991–1993, in Latvia there were two politicians – parliament speaker Anatolijs Gorbunovs and Prime Minister Ivars Godmanis – who probably would be the strongest presidential candidates in direct election. However, they happened to be politically too close at this time of "extraordinary politics" to champion a constitutional reform in favour of popular presidential election and then to challenge each other. The situation was very different in the other two Baltic States where in each country there was one candidate with the best perceived chances to become the first post-communist president. However, in Estonia this was ex-communist Arnold Rüütel who as the Chairman of the interim Supreme Council played the quasi-presidential role during Estonia's struggle for independence in 1988–1991. He was supported by part of the national communist elite that had to worry about their fate if the radical nationalists would win. Quite oppositely, in Lithuania there was the anti-communist Right majority of the Lithuanian Reform Movement (*Sąjūdis*) who were in favour of the presidential constitution not much different from that of 1938. Until the summer 1992, there was a common conviction that their leader Vytautas Landsbergis, who was elected Chairman of the Lithuanian Supreme Council in 1990, would win presidential elections. His most determined opponents were Lithuanian ex-communists around the last Prime Secretary of the Central Committee Algirdas Brazauskas who feared the broad-scale lustration by the victorites.

For this reason, the choice between the parliamentary and the presidential forms of government became the central question of political struggle in Estonia and Lithuania after the re-establishment of real independence in the aftermath of the failed 1991 August coup in Moscow. In Lithuania, its culmination was the referendum on May 23, 1992. The Landsbergis faction in the Supreme Council (Soviet) proposed the amendment to the Provisional Constitution that would provide the directly elected president with powers to dissolve the government and the Supreme Council, as well as to stop any government decree deemed unconstitutional. The calculation was that the victory in the referendum would decide also about strong presidency in the standing constitution.

The majority of those who voted (69.33%) supported the proposal, but the majority of the constituency was needed for the proposal to win. Thus, the support of 40.88% of the constituency was not sufficient for the proposal to win. Importantly, the voting revealed that Landsbergis did not enjoy any more an overwhelming support among the population as had been assumed when pushing for the referendum. The increasing uncertainty of Landsbergis'

faction about the outcome of the first presidential election helped to find the compromise solution that was semi-presidentialism of the premier-presidential type. The new constitution was approved on October 27, 1992. The same day the first election to the Lithuanian *Seimas* was held, won by the ex-communist Lithuanian Democratic Labour Party. In February 1993, this victory was completed by the election of Algirdas Brazauskas to Lithuania's president's office.

In Estonia, the struggle over a parliamentary versus a semi-presidential constitution also ended in a compromise.⁶ However, here supporters of the parliamentary constitution had the upper hand. According to Estonian Constitution, president is elected by the *Riigikogu*. The compromise was about the exception for the first presidential election. At this election, the first post-communist president could be elected by direct vote. However, the winner had to win at least 50 per cent plus one vote in order to be elected. Otherwise, the final choice from among the top two performers would go to the *Riigikogu*.

Although the plurality of voters (42%) were in favour of Rütel, he was not able to get the majority of votes, and his adversary Lennart Meri was elected by the *Riigikogu* which was dominated by the rightist Pro Patria Alliance on October 2, 1992. Rütel was left to wait for his chance until 2001 when he was elected president at the third presidential election. Like the second election in 1996 when Meri was reelected, and the fourth in 2006 which brought the victory to the present president of Estonia Toomas Hendrik Ilves, the election was decided by the electoral body including members of the *Riigikogu* and representatives of the local government councils.

The electoral law allows in all three countries for an incumbent president to run for the second term (but not for more). However, only Lennart Meri and Toomas Hendrik Ilves in Estonia, Guntis Ulmanis and Vaira Vīķe-Freiberge in Latvia managed to use this possibility successfully. In Lithuania, Brazauskas refused to run for the second term, Adamkus did this but lost to Paksas in 2003, to win the next election after Paksas' impeachment and removal in 2004.

3. DOES (SEMI-)PRESIDENTIALISM VERSUS PARLIAMENTARISM MATTER IN THE BALTIC STATES?

Did the difference between the semi-presidentialism in Lithuania, on one side, and parliamentarism in the other Baltic States matter during two decades of restored independence? Up to this point, I have discussed upstream questions about government forms in the Baltic States. These were questions about the causes of their differences. Now I turn to the downstream questions about the impact of differences in constitutional frameworks on the performance of democracy.

By the end of the first decade of the interwar independence, many contemporary observers in Estonia and Latvia considered the choice of parliamentarism as the major mistake

⁶ For a participant observer's account of the Estonian constitution-making, see Taagepera (1994). For comparison of the four Estonian constitutions (1920, 1933, 1938, 1992), see Metcalf (1998). On the early post-communist politics, see Pettai (2004; 2009).

in the early constitution-making, and Lithuania had already abolished parliamentarism jointly with democracy by this time. The political struggle over a constitutional reform to rectify this real or alleged shortcoming by introduction of a popularly elected president ended in the authoritarian super-presidential regimes in all three Baltic States by the end of independence (see, e.g., Kasekamp, 2010; Smith, Pabriks et al., 2002). As a matter of common knowledge, history did not repeat itself during the two decades of post-communist transformation. But does it mean that the downstream topics of comparative (dis)advantages of parliamentarism and semi-presidentialism are no more relevant in the post-communist conditions? I will argue that this is not the case, at the very least in Lithuania.

On the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the authoritarian coup in Lithuania in 1926, the distinguished Lithuanian historian Zenonas Butkus published an important article in which the authoritarian coups in the interwar Baltic States are compared (Butkus, 2007). Against the established views explaining the breakdown of democracy in the interwar Baltic States by their social-economic backwardness or the precarious state of their political culture, Butkus argued that the most important and even single cause of the breakdown was faults in the constitutional design in the early 1920s. If the Baltic States would have the presidents legitimated by the direct popular vote, democracy in all Baltic countries would have survived until 1940.

Then the world would have witnessed not the single democratic Finland's Winter War, but perhaps four Winter Wars or one Great Baltic Winter War 1939–1940, because democratic Baltic States would not have yielded to the USSR. According to Butkus, democracies broke in the Baltics down, because they were parliamentary (Latvia and Lithuania) or super-parliamentarian (Estonia). Differently, Finland was semi-presidential, having a president legitimated by the direct vote. The incumbent in this office Pehr Evind Svinhufvud played a critical role in defeating the coup d'état known as the Mäntsälä Rebellion in late February – early March 1932, attempted by the anti-communist Lapua movement.⁷

Z. Butkus' views contradict the prevailing wisdom in the contemporary political science associated with the famous "failure of presidentialism" thesis associated with the names of Juan Linz: "a careful comparison of presidentialism as such with parliamentarism as such leads to the conclusion that, on balance, the former is more conducive to stable democracy than the latter" (Linz, 1990: 52). Juan Linz (1990; 1994) famously identifies five perils of presidentialism:

- 1) the executive and legislature have competing claims to the democratic legitimacy;
- 2) the fixed terms of office make presidential regimes more rigid than parliamentary systems, because the president's tenure in office is independent of the legislature, and the survival of the legislature is independent of the president;

⁷ Although Butkus' explanation of the breakdown of democracy in the Baltic states seems credible, one can find even more credible explanations. Alan Siaroff (1999) explains why democracy was more resilient in Finland than in Estonia by Finland's longer experiences with democracy that left its mark in its political culture. Finland was better prepared for its life as an independent state due to its rather broad autonomy as part of Tsarist Russia. From 1863 onwards, the Diet of Finland convened regularly. In 1906, universal suffrage was adopted and the modern Parliament of Finland was established. Finland was one of the first regions in the world to implement universal suffrage and eligibility, including for women.

- 3) presidentialism encourages a winner-takes-all, loser-loses-all outcome in the political competition (zero-sum game);
- 4) the style of presidential politics encourages presidents to be intolerant of political opposition;
- 5) presidentialism personalizes presidential election, favouring populist candidates, and giving chance for outsiders and newcomers.

Can Linz's diagnosis of the failure of presidentialism be extended to semi-presidentialism? If yes, so does the 20 years of experience of the Baltic countries, with semi-presidentialism on one side and parliamentarism on the other, provide the evidence in favour or against Linz's thesis?

On the first question, opinions are divided between Giovanni Sartori and Linz himself. According to Sartori (1994: 107), if presidentialism is bad, semi-presidentialism is not necessarily also bad. In his opinion (Sartori 1994: 110), semi-presidentialism is an improved version of presidentialism. According to Maurice Duverger and Arend Lijphart, semi-presidentialism, because of its mixed or intermediate nature, can work either as a presidential or as a parliamentary system of government, sometimes alternating between them as different phases during the term of the same incumbent.⁸ Semi-presidentialism works as presidentialism when the president has support of a party or a solid coalition with the majority in parliament. Semi-presidentialism works as parliamentarism during periods of cohabitation when the legislative is firmly controlled by a party or coalition that is in opposition to the presidential party. In the two-parties system, semi-presidentialism may help avoid the deadlocks that may happen under pure presidentialism with its strict separation of executive and legislative power when they are divided among different parties.

However, Linz himself is very pessimistic about the virtues of semi-presidentialism in a highly fragmented party system or a polarized multiparty system. This is the situation in most of the post-communist countries. In such conditions, a divided executive does not increase the stability of government in comparison with the parliamentary system, because "the responsibility becomes diffuse, and additional conflicts are possible and even likely, creating situations in which a fixed term of office compounds the problem" (Linz, 1994: 52). Because of these additional conflicts, presidency with an independent source of legitimacy under semi-presidentialism is a risk factor for the democratic consolidation.

Along with the potential for conflicts arising with the division of the executive into two branches with independent sources of legitimacy, an additional risk source is the dependency of the dual executive on the personal character and abilities of the president. "The personalized character of a presidential election makes possible, especially in the absence of a strong party system, the access to power of 'outsiders'. We mean by this candidates not identified with or supported by any political party, sometimes without any governmental or even political experience, on the basis of a populist appeal often based on hostility to parties

⁸ See Duverger, 1980; Lijphart, 1999: 121–122. For this formulation, Duverger gives credit to his French colleague Georges Vedel, approvingly citing his formulation in the article published in "Le Monde", 19–20 February 1978 (Duverger, 1980: 8).

and 'politicians'. The candidacy of such leaders might appear suddenly and capitalize on the frustrations of voters and their hopes for a 'savior'" (Linz 1994: 26).

Does Linz's thesis help illuminate the Baltic experiences? Do they provide important evidence as test cases? I will argue that the experience of Lithuania with semi-presidentialism has confirmed the worries of Linz about semi-presidentialism. The presidency of the first Lithuanian post-communist president Algirdas Brazauskas in 1993–1998 may serve as an illustration of Linz's description of the necessary conditions for a good performance of semi-presidentialism. During the first post-communist decade, Lithuania had a well-structured party system with the ex-communist Lithuanian Democratic Labour Party (LDLP) on the one side and the Homeland Union (Conservatives of Lithuania) on the other. The presidency of the Brazauskas can be neatly divided into two periods: 1993–1996 and 1996–1998.

In the first period, the Lithuanian *Seimas* was dominated by the LDLP majority. This was the presidential phase of the Lithuanian semi-presidentialism, with the prime minister and government under president's control. Although Brazauskas did not intervene into the day-to-day operation of government, earning the reputation of a passive president, his central role in the LDLP government was demonstrated impressively early in 1996 when he replaced the ex-communist prime minister Adolfas Šleževičius by another ex-communist Mindaugas Stankevičius against the former's will. The main reason was the scandal caused by Šleževičius' withdrawing his deposit from his bank account on the day the bank crashed, in December 1995. However, after the end of parliamentary elections of 1996, Brazauskas was confronted by a *Seimas* dominated by the right-wing coalition led by the Homeland Union. During this phase, Brazauskas acquiesced to a ceremonial role and chose not to run for the second term, giving as reasons his record as a former Communist and the lack of effective power of the presidency.

Brazauskas' second reason was belied by the performance of the next Lithuanian president, Lithuanian-American Valdas Adamkus whose term started in 1998. Shortly after Adamkus' victory, the Lithuanian Constitutional Court proclaimed its already quoted interpretation of Lithuania as a parliamentary system. However, neither this ruling nor the heterogeneity of his electorate stopped Adamkus to interpret and use his presidential powers in his own ways. They were congenial to the idea of presidency in the American political culture that provided the background for Adamkus' political socialization during the years of his work as a public official in the U.S. federal administration. From the very beginning of his incumbency, Adamkus worked to drive Lithuanian semi-presidentialism back to its presidential phase.

He managed to use the split in the Homeland Union to undermine the position of Prime Minister Gediminas Vagnorius, and to get appointed as the new Prime Minister the Vilnius Mayor, another member of this party Rolandas Paksas in June 1996 by the ruling coalition. Adamkus continued to patronize over Paksas even after he defected the Homeland Union, resigning from the premiership in a populist protest against the sale of *Mažeikių nafta* (Mažeikiai Oil), the Lithuanian oil processing company, to the American oil company "Williams". Because this privatization deal was very unpopular among the Lithuanian population, Paksas won a political capital overnight, which made him a useful tool of the presidency after the *Seimas* election 2000.

Adamkus correctly calculated that this election would be disastrous for the Homeland Union and its coalition partners Christian Democrats, opening the opportunity space for what he described as “new politics”. This would be a system of governance under presidential supremacy. The plurality of votes (31.08% in the multi-member constituency) at the *Seimas* election in 2000 was won by the coalition led by Algirdas Brazauskas who stopped worrying about his record of the former leader of the Communist Party and struggled now to become Prime Minister. However, Adamkus’ choice was Paksas who just before *Seimas* election had been elected the leader of the formerly languishing Liberal Union in expectation that he would bring the votes as his dowry. With 17.25% votes won by the Liberal Union, Paksas justified the hopes. For his part, Adamkus helped to persuade the populist newcomer Social Liberal Union (19.64% votes) under his former rival in the presidential election 1997 Artūras Paulauskas to build a coalition with Paksas.

Thus, under Adamkus’ sponsorship, Paksas became for the second time Prime Minister. However, the dream about presidential “new politics” did not last for a long time after becoming reality. Brazauskas, who after the *Seimas* election became the leader of the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (established in 2001 by fusion of the ex-communist LDLP and the “historical” Social Democratic Party), destroyed the new policy coalition by luring social liberals into coalition with social democrats. Adamkus had no alternative for Brazauskas’ appointment as Prime Minister and for cohabitation with the Social Democratic government according to the French pattern.

After the collapse of the “new politics”, the Lithuanian semi-presidentialism reverted to its parliamentary phase until it was interrupted by the (in)famous Paksasgate story in 2003–2004. V. Adamkus run for the second term in the third Lithuanian president election in 2002. Among the challengers was his former protégé Paksas who, after losing his position of prime minister, was no more considered as a useful asset by the old guard of the Liberal Union and was challenged by its former leader Eugenijus Gentvilas. The Liberal Union and its fraction in *Seimas* split, with Paksas and his supporters grounding the Liberal Democratic Party in March 2002. With this party Paksas went to the presidential election in the late 2002, winning 19.7% of votes in the first round on December 22, 2002 and beating his former promoter and protector Adamkus in the second round on January 5, 2003 with 54.9% votes.

The analysis of Paksas’ impeachment in 2003–2004 would take too much space for this contribution and would involve the repetition of already published work (see Norkus 2008, 2012a: 296–333, Norkus, 2012b). For the goals of the present contribution, three points are of importance: (1) the success of impeachment was open until some two weeks before the final *Seimas* voting on April 6, 2004; (2) Paksas’s re-election was possible until the ruling of the Lithuanian Constitutional Court on 25 May 2004, which stated that an individual who had been removed from office through the process of impeachment for breaking his oath of office may never seek office requiring an oath; (3) in the case of the failure of Paksas’ impeachment or his comeback, there was a danger of a slippery slope towards populist delegative democracy in Lithuania under the guise of semi-presidentialism; (4) most importantly, Paksas or his like would never had a chance to be elected parliamentary president.

Paksas' removal opened the door for the comeback of Adamkus who was elected for his second term in June 2004, winning with 51.89% against his closest rival Kazimiera Prunskienė in the second round. During Adamkus' second term, the Lithuanian semi-presidentialism run the parliamentary phase course again, with President acquiesced to the subordinate role with respect to Prime Minister. This did not change even under the minority government of Gediminas Kirkilas in 2006–2008, despite the prevailing wisdom that the minority government provides most opportunity for the active role of president, no matter whether he has an independent source of legitimacy or is elected by the parliament.

The Lithuanian semi-presidentialism entered its next presidential phase after the election of Dalia Grybauskaitė on May 17, 2009. This presidential election was unique in being decided already in the first round, with Grybauskaitė winning 68.21% of votes. Grybauskaitė continues the line of “outsider” presidents started by Adamkus. She is an “outsider” in the sense that before the election she did not participate in the party politics and never had unambiguously disclosed her party preferences or sympathies. With the Soviet-time education in economics, she had been employed in the Foreign Ministry as Director of the Economic Relations Department. In 1999, she was appointed Deputy Minister of Finance. In 2000, Grybauskaitė became Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs and in 2001 was appointed Minister of Finance in the Algirdas Brazauskas government. After the accession of Lithuania to EU on 1 May 2004, Grybauskaitė was delegated by the government of Algirdas Brazauskas to work in the European Commission, serving as the European Commissioner for Education and Culture and later named the European Commissioner for Financial Programming and the Budget. The incumbency in the high all-European offices provided Grybauskaitė with the clout to emerge as one of the highest-rated persons in the Lithuanian public opinion, opening the way into presidential office.

Given the background of Grybauskaitė, one could expect that she belongs to the mainly ex-communist Lithuanian social-democrats' milieu. However, while in office, she abstained from any steps that could undermine the rather fragile Right-to-Center coalition supporting the government pressed by the outbreak of the economic crisis late in 2008 to pursue its unpopular policy. The exorbitantly strong performance at the election and the weakness of the governing coalition under the Homeland Union leader Andrius Kubilius (in power since late 2008) provided a good background for the presidentialization of the Lithuanian semi-presidentialism. Using the weakness of Kubilius' government, Grybauskaitė took steps to take under her personal control the Lithuanian foreign policy and made new appointments in the secret services and law enforcement agencies. Thus, she succeeded meeting the challenges where Paksas miserably failed. She managed to establish herself as “the first among equals” or even “the first among unequals” in her relations with Prime Minister (Sartori 1994: 109).

The presidential phase continued until *Seimas* election in October 2012, which brought to power the Center-Left coalition of Social Democrat Algirdas Butkevičius, including also *Akcja Wyborcza Polaków na Litwie* (Polish minority party), Liberal Democratic Party, and Labour Party which is reputed as pro-Russian and populist. One can describe Lithuania's politics since late 2012 until mid-summer 2013 as a transition from the presidential to the parliamentary

phase of Lithuanian semi-presidentialism, marked by an uneasy cohabitation of the president with the government built by the opposition.

However, there is an important difference between the present Lithuanian situation and the Duverger–Lijphart ideal-typical model of alternating presidential and parliamentary phases. This model assumes that the president has a political basis in one of the competing parties.⁹ While one can speak about mutual sympathies between Grybauskaitė and some leaders of the Homeland Union, her partnership with the Center–Right coalition was instrumental on both sides as far as the present Lithuanian President pursues her personal political agenda, possibly calculating the comeback to big European Union politics as the EU commissioner or even President. At the same time, she works to secure her re-election for the second term as the second-best option, doing her best to eliminate possible challengers at the coming presidential election in May 2014.

Her behaviour during the building of the new government in late 2012 was a series of strategic manipulations in pursuit of this goal. She prevented the appointment as members of new government of some experienced politicians (Virginija Baltraitienė and Loreta Graužinienė from the Labour party), using their allegedly weak knowledge of Western languages as formal pretext for disqualification. As a result, the present Lithuanian government is one of the weakest in all post-communist time, with most members of the Minister Cabinet representing the bleak “second echelon” of the governing parties.

Many Lithuanian observers point to the authoritarian streak in her “Iron Lady” speech and self-presentation style which are reminiscent not as much of Margaret Thatcher as of presidents of the Lithuanian Eastern neighbours (see Bielinis 2011, 2013). Indeed, the democratic Lithuania, with her harsh “mother President” beloved by the majority of the electorate, is strangely not dissimilar to the authoritarian Belarus where the main bulwark of Aliaksander Lukashenko power is not sheer force and repression (*pace* his critics from opposition), but a skilful self-inscenization in the “father President” (*bat’ka*) role.

The indirect presidential election by parliament in Estonia and Latvia makes less probable, if does not exclude, the political crises and problems caused by the newcomer outsiders’ taking president’s office. Although Paksas was not an outsider in the sense of being a newcomer in the Lithuanian politics, he was an outsider in the sense of his unacceptability and marginalization in the Lithuanian political class. Grybauskaitė is an outsider, because before the presidential election in 2009 she has never run election for a public office, doing her career as a bureaucrat. Under indirect elections, newcomers like Vaira Vyke-Freiberga can be elected presidents, but it is not possible to become a president without the support of the political elite. This is of special importance in the Baltic States which are described by Anton Steen (1997: 335) as “elite network states”.

Because there is no direct presidential election in Estonia and Latvia, citizens of these countries cannot consider their presidents as “saviours” who can initiate (if they want) radical

⁹ With two presidents (Valdas Adamkus and Dalia Grybauskaitė) with no political basis in major political parties during the total 15 years after the restoration of independence, Lithuania is a deviant case, if not an anomaly, when it is considered in the framework of the recent research on how separation of powers under presidentialism and semi-presidentialism affect party organization and behaviour (see Samuels and Shugart 2010).

changes in the economy and politics. Therefore the discrepancy between the visibility and popularity of presidents and their circumscribed constitutional power is much less. Because of this discrepancy, the Lithuanian semi-presidency harbours the potential of the tug-of-war between the prime minister and presidents and the deadlocks between executive and legislative powers, while parliamentary presidency in Estonia and especially in Latvia repeatedly proved its usefulness by helping to build stable government majorities despite even the greater party system fragmentation.¹⁰

At the same time, Estonian and Lithuanian presidents have been able to translate their public visibility into actual influence, if they have sought to do so. This was the case with the first Estonian president Lennart Meri. “In 1992, the nation got in Lennart Meri a fairly brazen office holder eager to set precedents and determine the full scope of his powers” (Pettai 2001: 131). Among other things, Meri actively used his veto power to move *Riigikogu* reconsider and make important modifications required by the EU as an accession conditionality related to the status of the Russian-speaking immigrant population in 1995–1999. Perhaps most famous among his independent actions was his meeting with Russian President Boris Yeltsin on July 26, 1995 in Moscow. He achieved the breakthrough in the negotiation over the withdrawal of Russian troops from Estonia, even if he risked to go beyond his constitutional powers (Meri had no authorization of the Estonian government for the deals that he stroke with the Russian President).

As it is usual with freshly made constitutions, they incompletely institutionalize the relations between separate state powers. The fine-tuning of the constitution follows, as the text of the constitution is supplemented by the *acquis constitutionnel*: informal practices derived from the precedents that acquire the force of a tradition, new legislation, and interpretations of the Constitutional Court or other institutes of judicial power with the right of a constitutional review. In Estonia, the precedents of Lennart Meri time have greatly expanded the presidential power due to his creative reading of the Estonian Constitution and use of its legal loopholes.¹¹ Meri’s achievement appears even more impressive if one remembers that his performance during the first and only direct election of Estonia’s president in 1992 was not so much impressive (Arnold Rüütel 42%, Lennart Meri 29%, the world-famous political scientist Estonian-American Rein Taagepera 23%, and the former dissident Lagle Parek 4% of vote).

In Latvia, ample opportunities for expanding the influence of presidency beyond its institutional powers are provided by the fragility of its governmental coalitions. For some of them, the president’s support was critical for survival. These opportunities were amply used by Guntis Ulmanis. “In addition to his role in persuading parliamentary forces to cooperate, he used his authority to force the *Saeima* to liberalize the citizenship law it passed in June

¹⁰ But the last parliamentary election in Estonia (on March 6, 2011) seems to provide evidence that Estonia already has a relatively stable party system after all (there were no successful populist newcomer parties).

¹¹ E.g., the Estonian Constitution of 1992 is unspecific about how long the president may delay the appointment of ministers as proposed by the prime minister. The Imminent foot-dragging is the leverage for the president over the prime minister.

1994, which the international community had criticized" (Sprudz 2001: 155). Such de facto expansion of presidential power continued under Vaira Vyke-Freiberga (1999–2007) who did play the central role in the coordination of Latvian foreign policy and in the resolution of several political crises.

Generally, presidents elected by parliaments are more aggressive ("presidential") in their actions during their second term – provided they cannot run for the third one as in Estonia and Latvia. Vyke-Freiberga's behaviour most closely corresponds to this pattern. Just on the eve of her second term in 2007, she risked to use her constitutional right to launch the referendum which would have obliged her to resignation in the case of failure. Characteristically, the referendum (which actually failed) was scheduled for the time when her term was already ended. Meri's first presidency also does not seem a deviant case. There are no very marked differences in his behaviour pattern during the first and second terms. However, Meri had to pay for all-too-presidential (for a parliamentary president) behaviour during his first term: he was re-elected in 1996 only after three inconclusive votes in the *Riigikogu* in a second-round run-off by electoral college.¹²

The deviation from this pattern explains why Valdis Zatlers remains the only parliamentaril elected president in the Baltic States, who was not re-elected for the second term. Elected in May 2007 as the 7th President of Latvian Republic, initially he had the reputation of a placeman of the governing party coalition. Of course, this is what should be expected about the election of parliamentary presidents. In this sense, Zatlers was an "insider" president. However, at this time, most Latvian right-wing political parties were reputed to be under control of powerful "oligarchs", with Aivars Lembergs, Andris Šķēle, and Ainārs Šlesers usually included into the informal "oligarch list". So, there were rumours that the election of relatively obscure Zatlers had been decided by an informal meeting of influential politicians and oligarchs in a zoo (Reetz 2012: 106–107). No matter how much truth there was in the story, after the election Zatlers started to "emancipate", playing an increasingly independent role in the Latvian politics. This "emancipation" was complete by late 2008 when Latvia was severely hit by the world economic crisis.

The Latvian economic crisis was complicated by the political crisis, culminating in violent protests in Riga on January 13, 2009. In this critical situation, Zatlers took the initiative, maybe even stretching over the limits of his constitutional powers (see Reetz 2012: 134–138) – acting as if he was a "presidential president". The Constitution of Latvia rules that the President can only propose the dissolution of the *Saeima*, after which there must be a referendum. If more than one-half of voters vote against the dissolution of the *Saeima*, then the President loses his job, and the *Saeima* elects a new president. Zatlers took the risks, under the threat of dissolution, addressing *Saeima* with the lists of ultimative demands to be satisfied by the March 31, 2009. Most important of them were demands to pass constitutional amendments to allow the people to dissolve the parliament and to build a government of national unity,

¹² However, Meri had to pay the price: he was re-elected in 1996 only after three inconclusive votes in the *Riigikogu* in a second-round run-off by electoral college.

including “new faces” competent to cope with the crisis. This task was satisfied by March 12, 2009 when a new minister cabinet under Valdis Dombrovskis was built.

With most of his demands satisfied, Zatlers did not dissolve the parliament. However, two years later he became the first President of Latvia who used his power to initiate the referendum on the dissolution of the parliament. This happened on May 28, 2011, just before the end of his first presidential term, facing already the newly elected (in October 2010) *Saeima*. After the parliament refused to suspend the immunity from legal prosecution of Šlesers, a *Saeima* member, former minister and a reputed oligarch, Zatlers announced a referendum on the dissolution of the *Saeima*. No wonder that in June 2, 2011 presidential election he was defeated.

Thus, the semi-presidentialist phase in the history of Latvia’s parliamentarism came to the end, the election of Zatlers’ competitor from the Greens and Farmers’ Union Andris Bērziņš signifying the comeback of an ordinary parliamentary presidency. Importantly, in the long-time perspective Zatlers’s episode only helped to consolidate the frail Latvian parliamentary democracy, while the “Paksagate” had a long-time negative impact on the development of Lithuanian politics (see 2012b).

4. PROPOSALS AND PROSPECTS FOR CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM IN THE BALTIC STATES

After adoption of the Estonian and Lithuanian constitutions in 1992 and after a full reinstatement of the *Satversme* in Latvia since 1993, there was no lack of proposals to revise their rulings related to the presidency – both of its powers and how the president should be elected. In Latvia and Estonia, the proposals prevailed to introduce the direct election of the president and to expand his powers. In the first post-communist decade, this was one of the watchwords of the left-to-center Harmony for Latvia party which collected the votes of the Russian-speaking part of the electorate opposing state-building according to legal continuity and restitution principles. In 2002, just before the third presidential election that left Vaira Vyke-Freiberga in the president’s office, Latvia’s Social Democrats under the leadership of Juris Bojars launched a campaign for a change of the constitution, including popular election of the president (see Ikstens 2002: 1012–1013).

No wonder that Zatlers, who was most presidential among all Latvias’s parliamentary presidents, made repeated attempts to expand also the formal powers of presidency. On June 3, 2008, Zatlers proposed constitutional amendments to allow the President to dissolve the *Saeima* without a national referendum and without the risk of losing his own job (see Latvijas Valsts Presidents 2009). In his last traditional address to the *Saeima* before the summer recess on June 18, 2010, he repeated this proposal, supplemented by another one: to allow the president to appoint and dismiss the Auditor General and the Central Bank president. These powers are currently relegated to the Latvian *Saeima*. Zatlers argued that this would help to avoid the politicization of the appointees and to ensure the appointment of competent and politically neutral professionals. He also announced his support for a reform of the president election, allowing direct popular elections with a direct reference to the example of Lithuania

(see Baltic Reports 2010). However, up to this time, only one significant change in the status of the Latvian president was made in the *Satversme* 1922/1993. In 1997, the term of the office of both the president and the parliament was extended from 3 to 4 years. The threshold for entering the parliament was raised from 1% to 4% in 1993 and then to 5%.

There was no lack of similar proposals in Estonia where the indirect election of the president won over direct election only with a narrow margin in 1992. Shortly before the end of his second term in the Estonia's President office, Meri initiated amendments to the Estonian constitution, aiming at the establishment of a separate Constitutional Court and direct presidential election. This was also the aim of the amendment initiated in October 2002 which together with calling the direct election of the President, foresaw a reduction of the President's powers. The President would no longer be the supreme commander of the armed forces and would transfer some of his duties related to national defence to the government. The introduction of the direct presidential election was part of the governing coalition agreement between the Centre and the Reform parties after the election in March 2003. However, for various causes and reasons, none of these reform proposals has materialized up to this time (see Council of the Baltic Sea States. Commissioner on Democratic Development. 2003: 33).

Lithuanian public discussion of the possibilities of a constitutional reform is fueled by the perception of the obvious disparity between the elevated position of the president provided by the direct election and his/her circumscribed powers. Before Paksas' impeachment, the proposals prevailed to reduce this discrepancy by the expansion of the presidential authority. The reference to the lack of the "real power" was a usual way for the incumbents and their advisors to explain why they do not deliver according to their election promises. This reference was used by Algirdas Brazauskas both to explain his refusal to run for the second term and his political comeback in 2001 as the prime minister. However, while in office, neither Adamkus nor Brazauskas took any initiatives to change the constitution.

The tone of the public discussion changed during Paksas' impeachment. In January, the renowned political commentator Kęstutis Girnius published the paper (2004) arguing that presidency is really a "5th wheel" in the Lithuanian state machinery. Thus, this institution could be abolished, the only difference being the economy of the state funds (some 18 million Litas each year). His main argument was that the paralysis of the president's office upon launching the impeachment proceedings, which lasted from October 2003 until early April 2004, had no detrimental effects on the work of other parts of the state apparatus.

Girnius' paper was broadly heeded and commented on. Interestingly, he was supported even by the former president Adamkus. In his opinion, the abolishment of presidency would be a better choice than the indirect election (Laučius 2004). Most of the discussion participants supported the replacement of popular election by the election in *Seimas*. This was the time when the outcome of Paksas' impeachment was still not sure, and a constitutional reform including the reduction or even abolishment of presidential authority seemed attractive to anti-Paksians as the reserve strategy of how to cope with the incumbent if the impeachment would not succeed.

However, all these discussions were forgotten after the removal of Paksas, with the only exception of the editor of the newspaper “Respublika” Vitas Tomkus who mocked to pretend to run in the post-impeachment election with the program including just one point: the abolishment of presidency! (Gudavičius 2004). Curiously, Valdas Adamkus also forgot his position on the proposal to abolish presidency and ran again. However, during the second term of Adamkus, again there were pleas for providing the president with more power (Tilindis 2007).

However, the trend changed again shortly before the election in May 2009 when Dalia Grybauskaitė proclaimed that she would run for the presidency. With the polls showing that she had no real competitors, the political forces that had its stake not to allow her to win, reanimated the idea of abolishing the president’s institution or of strongly reducing the president’s powers. It was most probably under their inspiration that another renowned Lithuanian political commentator and member of the Europarlament, Leonidas Donskis, published an article (2008) pleading the abolitionist constitutional reform. During the election, there was again a marginal candidate for presidency – Loreta Graužinienė, supported by the reputedly populist Labour party whose main and only program point was the abolishment of presidency (BNS 2009).

CONCLUSIONS AND FORECASTS

1. Post-communist Latvia is a parliamentary democracy because Karlis Ulmanis did not attempt to legalize his regime by a constitutional reform and because at the time of making the post-communist constitution there were no political forces with strong presidential candidates to win the first direct presidential election in Latvia. The government form in post-communist Estonia and Lithuania was decided by a different constitutional legacy (three constitutions “competing” for re-enactment) from the interwar time, the availability of perceived sure winners of the first presidential election, and different balances of political forces at the time when post-communist constitutions were made.
2. As the time goes on, due to the increasing *acquis constitutionnel*, the habituation and gradual stabilization of the party systems¹³ decrease the probability that the direct election of president will be introduced in Latvia or Estonia, despite the recurrence of the pleas for constitutional reforms.
3. No real improvement in the quality of democracy and governance can be expected from this change, except that citizens will receive the opportunity to go to ballot-boxes more often.
4. The disappointment by the real effects of such reform will be even greater, if the introduction of the popular election will go together with the reduction of the president’s powers.

¹³ The main evidence for such stabilization is provided by the re-election of governing parties or coalitions. Curiously, while in the notoriously unstable Latvia this happened already thrice (in 2006, 2010 and – with some reservations – in 2011), and in Estonia once (2011), up to this time this has never happened in the reputedly stable Lithuania.

5. In Lithuania, the discrepancy between the high visibility of the popularly elected presidency and the circumscribed authority of the president is the main risk factor of political instability (first of all, because of imminent conflicts between the president and the prime minister).
6. This risk factor may be reduced by the transition to parliamentarism.
7. Although the constitutional reform involving the switch from the popularly elected presidency to the president elected by *Seimas* may be an improvement of the constitutional framework for Lithuanian democracy, such reform cannot be expected in the visible future.

The main obstacle for such a reform is the strong authoritarian cast in the Lithuanian political culture. The percentage of respondents approving the “strongman’s” rule in Lithuania exceeds that in other Baltic countries and many other post-communist countries.¹⁴ Importantly, it did not change much since the start of the post-communist transformation (see Matsuzato and Gudžinskas 2006: 152–155). For the early 1990s, one can explain this peculiarity of the Lithuanian political culture by positive memories about the interwar times in Lithuania as the “golden age” by a significant part of the population. Democracy in the interwar Lithuania endured for a shorter time than in the Northern Baltic, so the independence remained more firmly associated with the strong presidency. Importantly, the Lithuanian dictator Smetona escaped from Soviets, not allowing to use him as the tool of Sovietization as was the case with Ulmanis and Pāts in Latvia and Estonia, tainting the president’s institution.¹⁵

However, this is not enough to explain the persistence of the authoritarian cast in the Lithuanian political culture, which was revealed by the performance of Dalia Grybauskaitė (to remind, she has won in May 2009 with 68.21 % of votes in the first round). It is not much less than the official record by Putin, Medvedev or Lukashenko. The exorbitantly high percentage of votes collected by these politicians is the main reason to be suspicious about the fairness of the presidential election in Russia and Belarus, to say nothing of the Central Asian states. However, there are no doubts as to the democratic fairness of the last presidential elections in Lithuania.

For the present contributor, the most credible explanation of this Lithuanian phenomenon is the important role of the memories about the imperial past of medieval Lithuania (see Norkus 2009) for the contemporary Lithuanian identity. As long as the most popular names of Lithuanian boys will remain to be Vytautas, Kęstutis, Algirdas, Mindaugas to honour Lithuanian medieval rulers, the state power will preserve its association with the person of a strong ruler in the collective imaginary. If the national Lithuanian dynasty of Gedimainaičiai would not be extinct, maybe the form of government best suiting the Lithuanian democracy would be constitutional monarchy with the hereditary king instead of the popularly elected president.

¹⁴ According to New Europe Barometer Surveys, in 2000, 58% of Lithuanians endorsed a strongman’s rule (with the mean 27% for countries rated by the Freedom House as free). See Rose 2001: 99.

¹⁵ Legally, Ulmanis may be considered acting president only in 1940.

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