

**Lithuanian Polish Political Party in Parliamentary  
Election 2016 in Lithuania**

**Gediminas Kazėnas**

Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania

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**Abstract:**

The purpose of this article is to present the analysis of the election results of *Lietuvos lenkų rinkimų akcija-Kriščioniškų šeimų sąjunga* (LLRA-KŠS, Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania-Christian Families Alliance) in Lithuania's Parliamentary election 2016. The article presents a short review of the development of Lithuanian-Polish relationship. Several new events took place before Parliamentary election 2016 and had a certain impact on it. First of all, constituency borders were changed in Lithuania, what in general was very advantageous for LLRA-KŠS. Secondly, geopolitical and security situation in Russia changed dramatically because of its aggression in Ukraine and it also revealed prokremlin's orientation of LLRA-KŠS that in turn had a very negative impact on the party's image. Probably due to this LLRA-KŠS received about 10,000 votes less. This drop was most significant in Vilnius city but had an immaterial effect in the constituencies controlled by LLRA-KŠS. Nevertheless, the election reveals another important fact that voters in Vilnius district value not only candidates' nationalities (as it might be expected) but also their origin and bonds with local communities.

**Key words:**

Lithuania, election 2016, Lithuanian Poles, Lithuanian Polish party, Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania-Christian Families Alliance

**Introduction**

Lithuanian-Polish political activity was born along with the wave of restructuring and softening of the regime in the former Soviet Union. In 1988 the Public-Cultural Society of Poles in Lithuania (*Stowarzyszenie Społeczno-Kulturalne Polaków na Litwie*) was established. Next

year, in 1989, the organization changed name to the Union of Poles in Lithuania (Związek Polaków na Litwie) (Szostakowski 2001). Seven members of the Union of Poles in Lithuania were elected to the Supreme Council of Lithuania-Reconstituent Seimas (Parliament) (1990-1992).

In 1994 Lithuania passed a law on public organizations that separated governmental organizations and political parties and henceforth only political parties could participate in elections. As a result, the Union of Poles in Lithuania urgently convened a general congress during which it was decided to set up a political party. After collecting 739 signatures of the founders on 28<sup>th</sup> of August, 1994 the founding congress was organized and on 23<sup>rd</sup> of October, 1994 *Lietuvos lenkų rinkimų akcija* (LLRA, Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania) was registered with Jan Sienkiewicz being elected as a Chairperson. In 2016 *Lietuvos lenkų rinkimų akcija* (LLRA, Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania) changed its name and attribution to *Lietuvos lenkų rinkimų akcija-Krikščioniškų šeimų sąjungos* (LLRA-KŠS, Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families Alliance).

Lithuania has 141 members of the Seimas (Parliament) who are elected by a mixed system of election – 70 members are elected by a proportional system according to the party list and the other 71 members of the Parliament are elected by single-member constituency.

Until 2008 LLRA-KŠS in the Parliament was represented only by members elected in single-member constituencies. In 2012 LLRA-KŠS for the first time managed to crossover a 5 percent electoral barrier and thus formed their own parliamentary group. Since then LLRA-KŠS always exceeds the 5 percent barrier.

Since 1990 Lithuanian-Polish relations can be currently dichotomized into 4 stages. Phase I (1990-1994) – when Lithuanian-Polish relations have been quite artificial until signing a Lithuania-Poland agreement (Traktat Polsko-Litewski) in 1994. Phase II (1995-2005) could be described as period of normalization when the two states actively cooperated on their way towards Euro-Atlantic integration. Phase III (2007-2014) is a period of deterioration of relations mainly due to the Polish Card emergence and the matter of spelling personal and place names in Lithuania. Phase IV (2014 to present) is a period when an open confrontation ended and relations became rational due to changes in the security situation in the region and other international political threats. It is interesting to note that the turnout of Lithuanian Polish voters during this

period was not stable and greatly depended on the political mood in the public sphere of Lithuania.

Parliamentary election in 2016 for LLRA-KŠS differed from previous elections in several aspects: 1) the changes of the single-member constituency boundaries allowed LLRA-KŠS to concentrate its supporters in 3 new single-member constituencies; 2) geopolitical and security situation, after the Russian aggression against Ukraine, changed; 3) the worsening of internal socio-economic situation in Lithuania was a big hit to traditional parties.

The author of this article has already analyzed election results of LLRA-KŠS from 1990 until 2012 and presented them in the article “Akcja Wyborcza Polaków na Litwie: jak udało się przekroczyć 5-procentowy próg wyborczy?” (Kazėnas 2014: 269-295). The purpose of this article is to make an analysis of the election results of LLRA-KŠS in Lithuania’s Parliamentary election 2016.

### ***The new single-member constituency boundaries***

The changes of domestic demographic situation in Lithuania, in particular massive internal and international migration, created the situation when the new redraw of constituency boundaries was inevitable. The need to equalize the number of voters in constituencies was ripe. On 20<sup>th</sup> of October, 2015 Lithuanian Constitutional Court decided that the number of voters in single-member constituencies may not differ by more than 10 percent in average (*LR Konstitucinis Teismas* 2015). Although the Constitutional Court decision was made about one year before the scheduled parliamentary election the need to organize a redraw of constituency boundaries was clear. If there were no changes of constituencies, anybody could have doubts about the legality of the vote and 2016 election could have been declared unconstitutional. Nevertheless, after the decision of the Constitutional Court, the unconstitutional act can no longer be applied according to Lithuanian constitutional law. The new constituency boundaries map was approved by the Central Electoral Commission on 16<sup>th</sup> of December, 2015 (*Vyriausioji Rinkimų Komisija* 2015).

The changes of constituency boundaries were basically favorable for LLRA-KŠS as the adjustments guaranteed three representatives from single-member constituencies. Such a situation has arisen because of the Vilnius district, one of few in Lithuania that has a population growth. This is due to the fact that a lot of newcomers settle around Vilnius while in other

municipalities the population is rapidly declining. As a result, some municipalities were merged into a single constituency (eg. Širvintai-Molėtai or Švenčionys-Ignalina municipalities) or generally eliminated (in Kaunas case one constituency was abolished). On the other hand, within the city of Vilnius one additional constituency was distinguished. Under the new constituencies plan Vilnius and Šalčininkai districts were divided into 3 single-member constituencies: Šalčininkai district and a small part of the Vilnius district forms Šalčininkų-Vilnius constituency. The rest of the Vilnius district is divided into 2 constituencies: Nemenčinė and Medininkai constituencies. In these three constituencies Polish national minority constitutes a majority of the population, ranging from 55 to 80 percent of the total population there. Those two municipalities, within which the new three constituencies are formed, were managed by LLRA-KŠS at their own discretion since Lithuania regained its independence in 1990.

***Changes in the geopolitical security situation and its influence on elections***

If we look into Parliamentary election of 2016 in the context of Lithuanian-Polish relations, we should note great changes in political environment that were unfavorable for LLRA-KŠS. This is primarily related to the international situation and the events in Ukraine that finally forced public opinion to pay attention and acknowledge the influence of Russian propaganda in the former Soviet republics. Russian information policy disclosed the lack of alternative information sources and revealed propaganda attempts to disorganize the society, to discredit the national state and to justify Russia's policy. In all former Soviet republics the main target of that propaganda policy are ethnic minorities that are a significant part of the population. The events in Ukraine clearly presented the effectiveness of such Moscow policy. Lithuania started to pay even more attention to ethnic minorities after public statements of some Polish and Russian political leaders, justifying or supporting Russia's policy and actions in Eastern Ukraine and at the same time criticizing the Lithuanian position. As a result, ethnic minorities became an important topic of the information war: open and direct discussions began; even the questions of minority loyalty to the state were raised. A large part of the population began to critically assess LLRA-KŠS and its leaders' activities. We can notice open criticism of the Polish party policy. Even representatives of Polish minority were criticizing LLRA-KŠS. During their preparation for 2016 Parliamentary election the main Lithuanian systemic parliamentary parties in their electoral programs included a section for ethnic minorities.

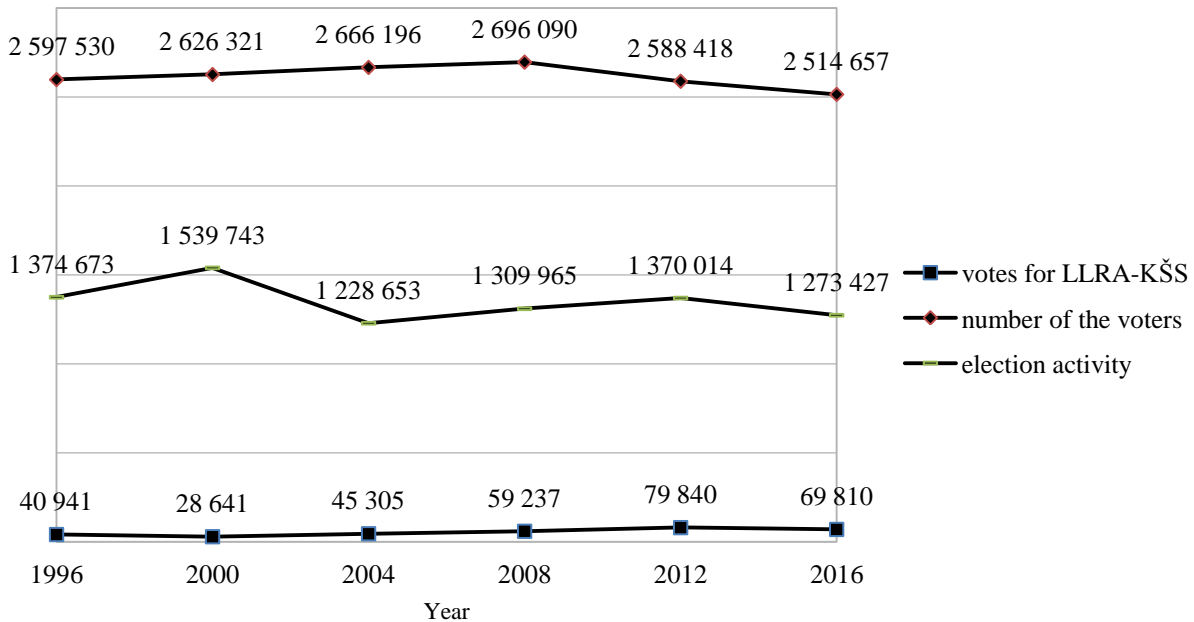
This situation has also affected the Poland's policy towards Lithuania. First of all, there was a sharp decrease of public speeches and criticism towards Lithuania from the Polish side and the situation calmed down. On the other hand, this does not mean that both sides were retreating from their positions. However, due to geopolitical tensions mutual Lithuanian and Polish disagreements were postponed for the sake of regional cooperation.

### *LLRA-KŠS analysis of the election results*

As it has been already mentioned, the analysis of the LLRA-KŠS in the elections in Lithuania from 1990 until 2012 had been made and results are presented in the article “Akcja Wyborcza Polaków na Litwie: jak udało się przekroczyć 5-procentowy próg wyborczy” (Kazėnas 2014: 269-295). The study shows that LLRA-KŠS cooperated with Lithuanian Russian organizations in elections from the very beginning of Lithuania's independence in order to get more votes. Initially, the collaboration was concealed, later formal coalitions were created. As Lithuanian electoral law creates a higher electoral barrier (7 percent) for coalitions, Polish and Russian politicians eventually decided to form an informal coalition where the representatives from Russian organizations are simply added to LLRA-KŠS electoral lists thus attracting Lithuanian Russians votes and avoiding electoral barrier required for coalitions.

In 2016 election, the multi-constituency LLRA-KŠS has collected 69,810 votes in total and it is about 10,000 less votes than in the previous 2012 election (79,840 votes). The drop is substantial and accounts for about 12.5 percent, but taken as a whole this result is not the worst, because from 2000 the results of LLRA-KŠS has been steadily growing. On the other hand, it suggests that the maximum number of votes that LLRA-KŠS can collect in Lithuania is about 80,000 votes. Such an assumption comes from the fact that in 2012 election political context in Lithuania was very favorable for LLRA-KŠS since extremely liberal social attitudes prevailed. The fact that in 2015 during the municipal council elections LLRA-KŠS candidates collected 85,937 votes across Lithuania could be explained by the fact that the level of trust in individual candidates was greater than in the party in general.

**Figure 1.** LLRA-KŠS in the Parliamentary elections in Lithuania



Source: own construction

Vilnius plays a vital role for LLRA-KŠS electoral results as about 17 percent of Lithuanian Poles live there and it is about 90,000 persons. As a result, any support that LLRA-KŠS receives in Vilnius greatly influences the final outcome of the party in the multi-member constituency. As can be seen from the calculations, there is a clearly identifiable correlation between Vilnius and final results of the votes received by this party (Kazėnas 2014: 269-295). Continuing the analysis in Vilnius, these 2016 election, namely the number of received votes in Vilnius, decrease hugely from about 30,000 down to 20,000 votes, what makes about 1/3 of the votes compared to the 2012 election. This leads to the conclusion that the decreased support in Vilnius contributed to the overall decreased results of about 10,000 votes. The difference of results is minimal in 2012 and 2016 Parliamentary Elections in other municipalities where LLRA-KŠS is dominating. In Vilnius district municipality number of received votes decreased from 23,000 to 21,000 votes. In Šalčininkai district municipality number of received votes remained almost unchanged (from 11,084 to 11,061 votes). These data also show very clearly that the general public opinion about LLRA-KŠS between Lithuanian Poles work in different ways and depends on inhabited areas. There is a political monolith being formed in municipalities that are already managed by LLRA-KŠS for many years (Vilnius and Šalčininkai

districts) and the changes in electoral support are minimal there while in Vilnius – substantial. There is a “center-periphery” effect quite clearly visible in those areas. In the “periphery” people are more isolated, less educated and depend more on the local authorities in various forms and therefore are more influenced. In the "center" people are more integrated into the overall informational and cultural life, better educated and economically independent from local authorities. As a result, the local government is not able to influence them in any way, thus it has no effects on election results.

The analysis of individual vicinities in Vilnius district shows a tendency that the votes are being distributed to the other parties in the places with the increasing number of Lithuanians and areas close to the capital city – Vilnius. In this case we could note the impact of new Lithuanian voters. Lithuanian voters here are usually working-age people, who work in Vilnius, so they are integrated into general Lithuanian political life. They are influenced by the prevailing mood in the state and it is reflected in the election results. As mentioned above, during 2016 election to the Parliament *Lietuvos valstiečių ir žaliųjų sąjunga* (LVŽS, Lithuanian Peasants and Greens Union) swept over Lithuania. In Vilnius district this wave was very weak and was more notable in vicinities inhabited mostly by Lithuanians. As it can be seen from the results, votes of Lithuanian voters increasingly polarize and split. Respectively this fact is useful for LLRA-KŠS. But generally it can be stated that the Lithuanian electorate in this “Polish region” remains fairly faithful to the traditional parties. This can be explained by existing opposition between Lithuanians and Poles and unconditional focus on the “starting positions”.

Bigger polarization and LVŽS wave effect is notable in Nemenčinė constituency, where the number of Lithuanians is already big enough. The second round of election was held in this constituency as the representative of LLRA-KŠS failed to get more than half of the votes in the first round. This constituency already includes 5 vicinities (54) that are situated around Vilnius and LLRA-KŠS representatives no longer get the majority of votes there. It is inhabited mainly by settlers who work in Vilnius and are economically independent.

In Medininkai constituency, that is located on the Southeastern side of Vilnius, LVŽS wave effect is practically imperceptible. Traditional parties, such as LLRA-KŠS, *Tėvynės sąjunga-Lietuvos krikščionys demokratai* (TS-LKD, Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats), *Lietuvos socialdemokratų partija* (LSDP, Lithuanian Social Democratic Party), received the majority of votes in almost all vicinities, and only in a couple of them the more

significant number of votes was collected by LVŽS only. Those vicinities are bigger villages close to Vilnius and grow because of the new settlers there. This once again confirms the fact that in the places with larger share of new voters, who are mostly Lithuanians in origin, we can notice increased integration into mainstream Lithuanian politics and voters' polarization increases at the same time.

In the Šalčininkų-Vilnius constituency, LVŽS wave was pretty weak and just much more present in the larger settlements located near Vilnius (Pagiriai vicinity).

**Table 1.** Percent of votes received by party

	Nemenčinė constituency	Medininkai constituency	Šalčininkai-Vilnius constituency
LVŽS	8.09	5.17	3.66
TS-LKD	17.71	7.36	4.42
LLRA-KŠS	42.97	59.28	66.53

Source: Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania, 2016

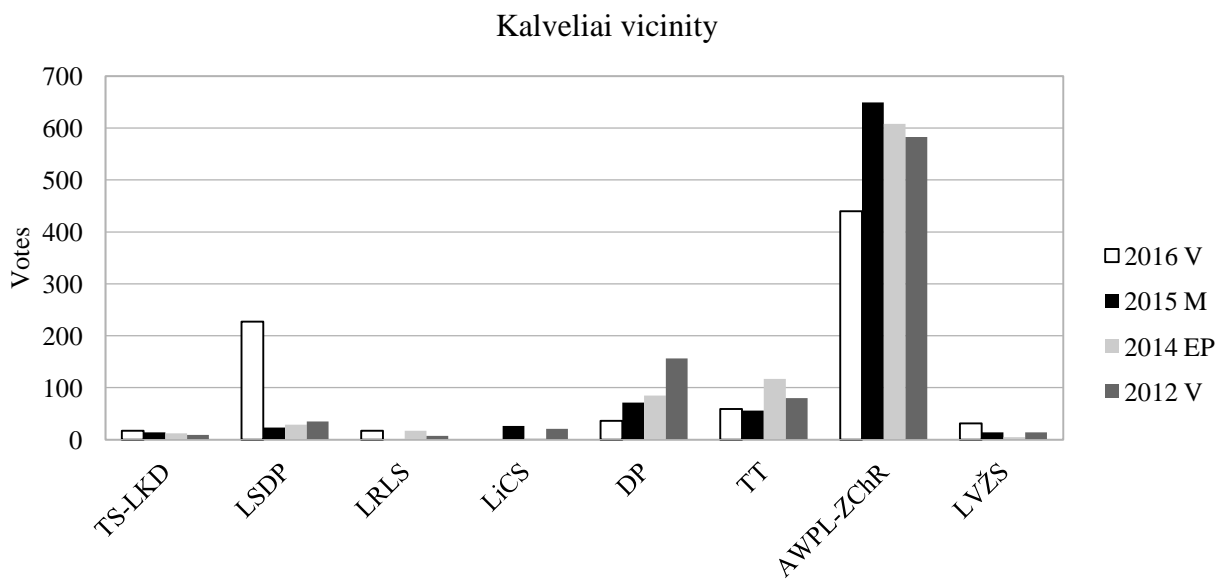
There is a strong phenomenon of voting "for your own" in the South East Lithuania, where LLRA-KŠS dominates the elections at municipal level for many years and where the Polish and Lithuanian political opposition exists. This "for your own" („za swoich”) voting phenomenon is particularly strong among Lithuanian Poles. As all previous election results show, all attempts to create an alternative for LLRA-KŠS and its candidates failed. The aforementioned situation happened in 2000 parliament election, when a former Lithuanian Polish union member and an active politician Artur Plokšto tried to compete in Šalčininkai-Vilnius constituency with LLRA-KŠS leader Valdemar Tomaševski. A. Plokšto got only 11 percent of votes compared with 51 percent received by V.Tomaševski. Similarly, in 2004 election in the former Širvintos-Vilnius constituency a candidate – Leokadija Počikovska, a former Mayor of Vilnius district municipality, collected the majority of votes, but in the next legislative election in 2008 after a conflict with LLRA when she tried to go with LVŽS she got only 3.8 percent of votes and remained on the 7<sup>th</sup> place. It's also possible to remember Ryšard Maceikianec's, a former Lithuanian Poles' active political leader, attempt in 2002 municipal elections to go with the newly founded Lithuanian Poles People's Party when he was last, at the 6<sup>th</sup> place. Lithuanian parties trying to win in South East Lithuania often put candidates with Polish nationality on their

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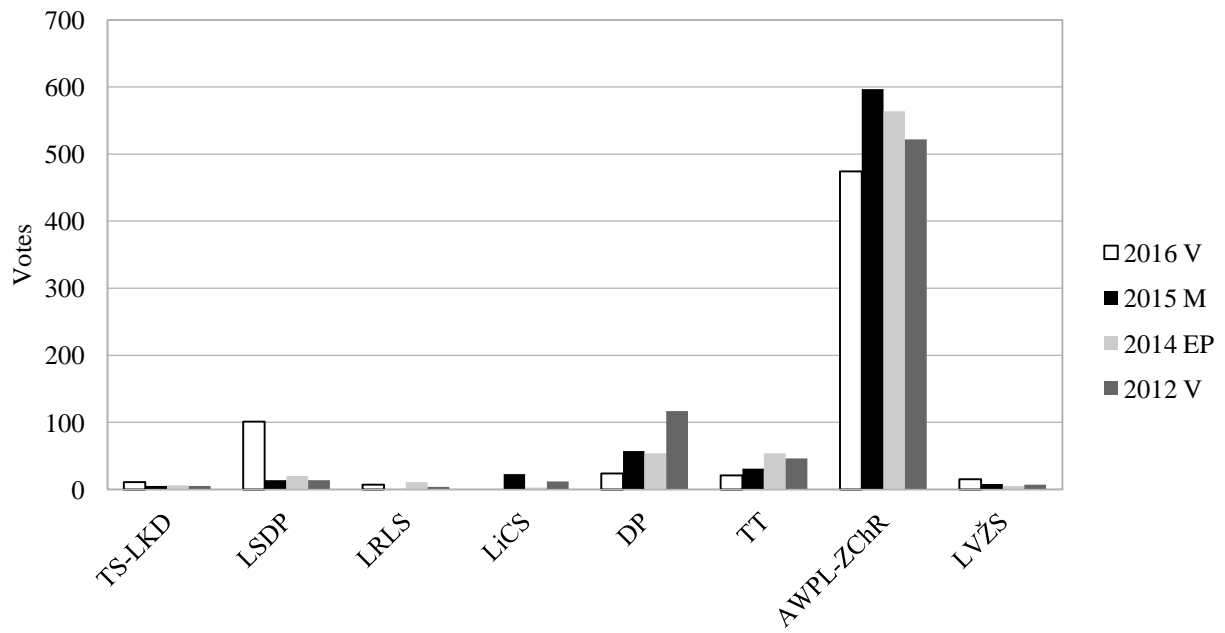


lists during every election but none of the attempts was successful. All this shows that LLRA-KŠS's experience in this region is very high and sustainable enough.

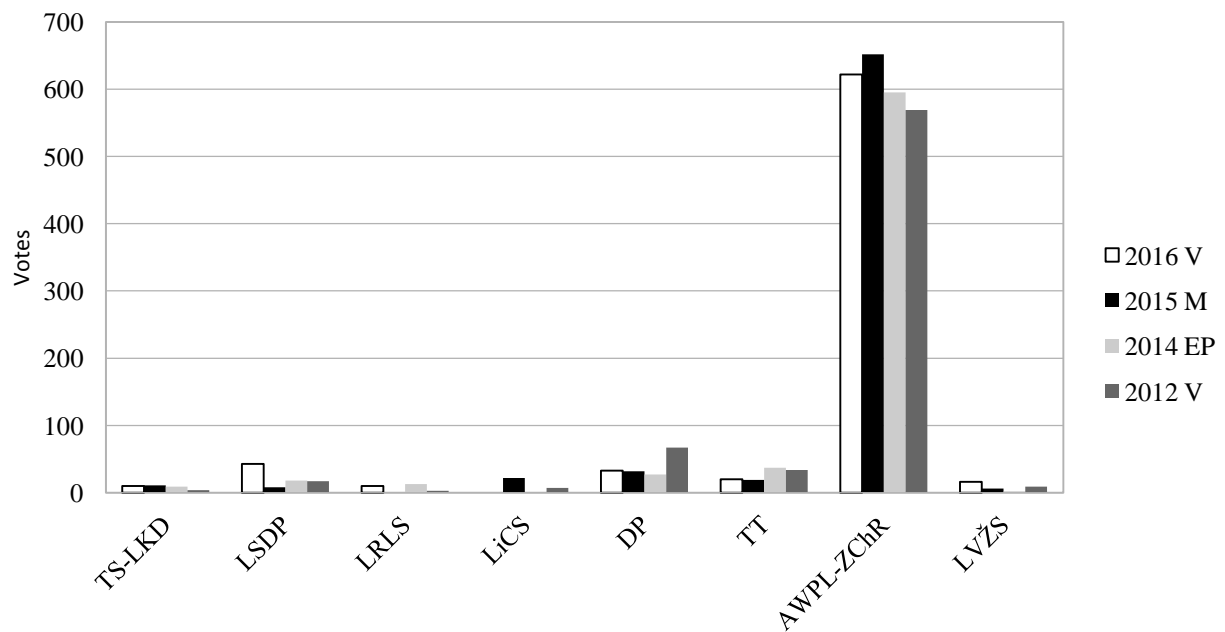
However, electoral results in 2016 in some vicinities of Medininkai constituency suggest that support for LLRA-KŠS is not absolute. This conclusion comes after analysis of voting results in several individual vicinities of this constituency. Below are very distinguished results in Šumskas, Lavoriškės and Kalveliai vicinities. What is most noticeable from the results in these vicinities is a quite striking drop of votes for LLRA-KŠS representative and the corresponding increase of votes for LSDP representative. In the single-member constituency of Medininkai LLRA-KŠS and the LSDP nominated candidates who are originally from this constituency, i.e. Česlav Olševski (LLRA-KŠS) and Algimantas Vaitkevičius (LSDP). The evaluation of these candidates' results in general terms does not differ from the general trends and shows expected numbers. However, a bright deviation from previous elections and certain correlation of the results in those 3 vicinities can be seen. Meanwhile, the results of other parties are consistent with general trends in that constituency and in Lithuania.



Šumskas vicinity



Lavoriškės vicinity



The results in these three vicinities can be explained by the fact that the LSDP candidate Algis Vaitkevičius was born and raised in Kalveliai and was well-known to people in the surrounding areas. As a result, he received a sufficient number of votes that most likely were "cut off" from LLRA-KŠS representative, who also came from this area, but already worked in local government for many years and held high positions. It is a common approach that voters blame government for everything, thus in this case LLRA-KŠS's candidate Česlav Olševski became the target of their dissatisfaction and voters chose another "for your own" ("za swoich") option. This case indicates that a link with the local area plays an important part for some Lithuanian Polish voters and it might be even more important than nationality of a candidate. Many scientific researches indicate that there is a very strong regional identity, which builds strong communal and social connections. In that case, it is important to be part of the community, but not necessarily of Polish nationality. It also indicates that some LLRA-KŠS voters are not truly loyal to the party and in certain circumstances can vote for other parties.

### *Conclusions*

1. In 2016 Parliamentary election LLRA-KŠS collected about 10,000 votes less than in previous election. However, this did not affect the number of seats obtained in the Parliament. Both in 2012 as well as in 2016 Parliamentary election LLRA-KŠS had 8 members: 3 elected in single-member constituencies and 5 entering from a list.
2. The total number of votes received is primarily related to the lower number of votes in Vilnius, where there is no direct LLRA-KŠS administrative influence. The changed geopolitical and security situation revealed LLRA-KŠS prokremlin provisions, that in turn greatly influenced public opinion against it.
3. LLRA-KŠS has a great experience in municipalities controlled by LLRA-KŠS, where their candidates easily win the elections. However, the trend shows that in areas where there is an increasing number of Lithuanians, the support for other parties is growing. Voting in these municipalities is quite conservative and traditional parties are supported there. This can be interpreted as the trace of long existing Lithuanian-Polish opposition.
4. LLRA-KŠS voters' loyalty is largely associated with "for your own" (za swoich) provision. However, a more detailed analysis of the voting results in 2016 in Medininkai constituency

suggests that this is not an absolute provision. It is assumed that voters value membership of local community more.

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