

## Lithuania after Politics?

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Political Preferences  
2017, vol. 14: 99-114.  
DOI: 10.6084/m9.figshare.5216197  
journals.us.edu.pl/index.php/PP  
Submitted: 14/04/2017  
Accepted: 16/05/2017



### Abstract:

The results of the Seimas elections in 2016 have revealed one of the greatest transformations in Lithuanian party system since its formation in 1992. Though there are similarities between the political processes in Lithuania, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, it is important to stress important differences, which enable us to speak about the unique “Lithuanian way”.

First of all, the new political group, which dominates in Lithuanian political system after the elections – Lithuanian Peasants and Green Union (LPGU), not only rejected the tradition political continuum of “right-left” politics, but also does not fit into the main political cleavage in post-communist political system of Lithuania - between ex-communists and anti-communists.

Secondly, the elections revealed a huge crisis of democracy based on political parties in Lithuania. The dissatisfaction with parties, as the main actors in modern liberal democracy, constantly increases.

Thirdly, we can speak about the decisive victory of anti-politics in Lithuania, the marginalization of political deliberations and political competence in the governance of the state. This triumph of anti-politics in Lithuania is not the outcome of cultural tradition of anti-politics which was strong in Poland and Czechoslovakia during the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Havelka 2016), but rather a price which we have to pay for the invasion of consumptive mentality in political sphere.

The main hypothesis of this article is that the triumph of anti-politics in Lithuania means the victory of “consumer” over “citizen” and it will cause the growing turmoil in political system of Lithuania.

### Key words:

elections, anti-politics, consumer, citizen, parties

***Liquid party system in Lithuania***

Democratization process in Lithuania started in 1988, when the monopoly of *Communist party* was broken by a national movement *Sąjūdis*, which eventually became the main political force to ensure the restoration of Independence. *De jure* the first multiparty system in the USSR was created, then Article 6 of the Constitution of Lithuanian SSR which guaranteed the *Communist Party* the leading role in the political life of the republic was eliminated.

New political parties started to emerge in 1989, but they were still unimportant political players in the first free elections to the Supreme Soviet of Lithuania in 1990 (Ramonaitė 2007: 92). The real starting point of the democratic multiparty system in Lithuania was year 1992 when 17 political parties took part in the national elections (Krupavicius 1996: 16). On the other hand, if we compare the list of the parties, which exist now and the list of the parties before the national election in 1992, only one party is still in existence – the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (*Lietuvos socialdemokratų partija*, LSDP). However, the contemporary LSDP is more a creation of ex-communist Lithuanian Democratic Labour Party (*Lietuvos Demokratinė Darbo partija*, LDDP), than, in general, an anti-communistic LSDP of 1992. Those two, in many aspects different political organizations, merged in 2001. One of the main reasons of this political wedding was the necessity for LDDP to hide its communistic legacy and claim being the representative of more than hundred years old social democratic tradition in Lithuania.

In the national election in 1992 ex-communistic LDDP was surprisingly victorious and gained absolute majority in Seimas (new name of Parliament, which replaced Supreme Soviet)<sup>1</sup>. The reasons of such unexpected results were the widespread dissatisfaction with the economic changes during the early post-communist period and the ex-communists' promise to restore social justice. LDDP, which did not have enough names on its electoral list, was also surprised by such political victory. In Lithuania, as well as in many post-communist countries, there is a tendency for every new national election to brush off the former ruling coalition and give power to the former opposition, the voters turn their back on the political forces that had been in power. This tendency was very strong in Lithuania until the election of 2000.

In national election of 1996 a decisive winner was a right wing political party which was formed on the basis of *Sąjūdis* – the Homeland Union – Lithuanian Conservatives (*Tėvynės Sąjunga-Lietuvos konservatoriai*, TS-LK). It gained 70 seats out of 141 in Seimas. Right wing

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<sup>1</sup> Data of elections in Lithuania during the post-communist period can be found in [www.vrk.lt](http://www.vrk.lt).

politicians benefited from widespread dissatisfaction with the ruling LDDP which had failed to reignite the economy and was plagued by financial scandals.

TS-LK formed the coalition with the Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party (*Lietuvos krikščionių demokratų partija*, LKDP) which was the first coalition of political parties in post-communist Lithuania.

Despite the political pendulum, it seemed that the Lithuanian party system gained stability after two national elections with clear “right-wing” continuum and the dominant ex-communist and anti-communist cleavage (see Ramonaite 2007).

In the first period of the development of Lithuanian party system, it seemed to bear a striking resemblance, at least in appearance, to the multiparty systems of Western Europe, including the familiar Christian, social democratic, liberal and conservative party types. Therefore, this resemblance is strictly superficial, as from the very beginning Lithuanian parties were the creation of scanty political elites and failed to gain the firm ground in the society. They had no internal ideological or policy coherence and interpreted political life not as deliberation or negotiation but rather as fiercely ideological battle, confrontation.

We can only speculate about the prospect of natural evolution of political parties in Lithuania without the questionable initiative of president Valdas Adamkus to form the centrist coalition of *New Politics* in order to create a strong alternative for LSDP and TS-LK ideological confrontation (Novagrockiene 2001: 142). On the one hand, we can interpret the initiative of the President as the promotion of politics founded on the acceptance of differences and a belief in conciliation, as an attempt to overcome the deep political polarization in the society. It was evident that in the early political system there was no place for political dialogue not only between different parties but even inside the political organizations. Only between 1999-2000 five new parties were established. All of them were created as a result of the split of already existing parties.

On the other hand, Adamkus promoted *New Politics* which real novelty was not the higher political culture, but rather the lack of long-term vision, it was based on short-term interests rather than political values, on the creation of image rather than comprehensive political program. The main aim of all new parties constituting New Politics was to overcome the “dictate” of “traditional parties”, such as TS-LK and LSDP. The political slogan of the New Union (*Naujoji Sąjunga*, NS) in the election – *We deserved to live better* – became the motif for political organizations aiming to win “the protest votes.” for a long time. It was not a surprise

that in the national elections of 2000 the Lithuanian party system experienced a real shake-up. The main result was the emergence of two new parties in Seimas – NS and the Liberal Union (*Liberalų Sąjunga, LS*). These parties pushed out Christian Democrats and the Centre Union. Even though these two parties had different origins – LS had roots in Sąjūdis and the NS was a newly created political formation – both could be labeled as charismatic rather than programmatic parties.

The ruling coalition of the *New Politics* was fragile and was replaced by the centrist-left coalition of NS and LSDP next year. However, the Pandora's box was opened and the new political projects essentially changed the party system. In the parliamentary election of 2004, the Lithuanian party system experienced a second transformation, as three new parties – the Labor Party (*Darbo Partija, DP*), the Liberal Democratic Party (*Liberalų Demokratų partija, LDP*) and the Union of Peasants and New Democracy (*Valstiečių ir Naujosios demokratijos sąjunga, VNDS*) – entered the political arena, dramatically increasing political fragmentation.

DP was established by a businessman of Russian origin Viktor Uspashich several months before the election. The party leadership was dominated by businessmen while the party voters were concentrated in the lower social stratum. DP was not an advocate of socialist ideology as its name suggests. It was rather a populist party gaining popularity from its charismatic leader. This party was marginalized after the Seimas election in 2016.

LDP was established to support Rolandas Paksas<sup>2</sup> in the successful presidential election of 2002. After the first impeachment of the President in Lithuanian history, the party turned into radical anti-establishment party and became an outcast in the Lithuanian party system. It changed the name to Order and Justice (*Partija "Tvarka ir teisingumas", PTT*) in the eve of the national election in 2004. One of the reasons for changing the name was the need to dissociate from liberal tradition in order to present itself as the defender of "traditional national values".

VNDS, later renamed as the Party of Peasants and People (*Valstiečių liaudininkų partija, VLP*), increased its popularity after the successful performance of its leader Kazimira Prunskienė<sup>3</sup> in the presidential election of 2004. This party was based on political union of

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<sup>2</sup> Rolandas Paksas is the controversial Lithuanian politician. He was a member of the Communist Party during the soviet period. In the post-communist period he began his carrier as a member of HU-LCD. Then he joined the LU and became its chairman. In 2002 he founded LDP and ran for the presidency winning the run off against Adamkus. He was roved from office by the impeachment in 2004. He was elected to European Parliament in 2009 and reelected in 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Kazimira Prunskiene was one of the co-founders of Sąjūdis. She was elected to the position of the Prime Minister of the first post-communist government. After nine months in the office, Prunskienė resigned and later headed the Department of Agriculture in Lithuania. She was one of the key persons in left wing of Lithuanian politics, took part

Prunskiene and Ramunas Karbauskis. Their relations were highly strained and Prunskiene created her own political organization. Karbauskis in the eve of the election of 2016 publicly confessed that the collaboration with Prunskiene was his biggest political mistake<sup>4</sup>.

Despite the political invasion of new parties, LSDP succeeded in dominating the formation of the new government. Though the relations between members of ruling coalition were complicated and in the summer of 2006 LSDP had to form a minority government.

The national election of 2008 was successful for TS-LK, as it won 45 seats. After a long period the traditional or “old” parties (TS-LK and LSDP) were dominating in the Seimas. Both parties fought for the right to form the new government, therefore the role of king maker in Seimas was the greatest surprise of the elections – National Revival Party (*Tautos Prisikėlimo partija*, TPP), with 16 seats.

TPP was founded only a couple of months before the beginning of the election campaign. The party was headed by a popular TV star from the entertainment shows and producer Arūnas Valinskas<sup>5</sup>. The majority of its members were colleagues of Valinskas from the show business. Those people had no political experience but were skillful in effective communication techniques. They insisted that pop artists could be better politicians than specialists who have considerable knowledge but no skills in communication with the audience.

The success of TPP revealed that there was a real danger of replacing politics by imagology (about such warnings – Donskis 2005). It is the art of creating sets of various slogans and images that people are supposed to follow without thinking or critically questioning. Imagology is an offspring of media and advertising. All contemporary politicians have to care about the techniques of political communication, however in some cases we can rather speak about the public relations campaigns which use masks of politics. NRP was one of such examples. The political carrier of this party was short, though in Seimas of 2008-2012 it played the crucial role and was an important part of the ruling right wing coalition. The decision of

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in presidential elections twice and once was very close to the victory. He founded Lithuanian Women Party, then collaborated with Karbauskis, after the split she tried to popularize new founded Lithuanian people movement. She left political area because of serious health problems.

<sup>4</sup> Karbauskis published such confession in his Facebook account in April 10 of 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Arūnas Valinskas In 1990s, Valinskas began his acting and hosting career. He created several famous TV shows in Lithuania and became quite popular. Valinskas founded the NRP in 2008 before the elections to the Seimas. He was the Speaker of the Seimas from 17 November 2008, to 15 September 2009. Valinskas declared as a candidate for the 2009 Lithuanian presidential elections, but withdrew right before the election. In 2011 National Resurrection Party merged with the Liberal and Centre Union and it was the end of its formal existence. Valinskas returned to business in 2012.

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Valinskas to collaborate with TS-LK, not with LSDP, opened the way for the government headed by Andrius Kubilius<sup>6</sup>, who faced very complicated economic problems.

It was the period of severe economic recession. The government attempted to control the situation by introducing broad austerity measures, including cuts in public spending and higher taxes. Despite the unpopularity of measures and the resulting public protests, the coalition government became the first one in the history of post-communist Lithuania to serve the full term of the parliament. Still, it was clear that the national election of 2012 would be a very difficult test for TS-LK. Despite all attempts to change the public opinion, the important decision to consolidate right wing politics was to merge with LKDP, TS-LKD<sup>7</sup> was doomed to cause losing the elections. The winner was LSDP. It became the largest party in the Seimas with 38 seats. LSDP and other left wing parties had campaigned on the promise of ending the austerity measures, increasing the minimum wage, reducing unemployment and boosting up public spending.

The “black horse” of the election was a newly created party Way of Courage (*Drąsos kelias*, DK). The main aim of this party was to fight corruption and to make essential changes in the legal system, especially the courts. This party was very skeptical about “systemic parties” and promised radical transformation of the whole political system. In general election this party gained 8% of the popular vote. It assured the fraction in the Seimas but not a real political influence. This party declared to be in opposition and eventually *de facto* disappeared.

It seemed that we could speak about the stabilization of Lithuanian party system after the national election of 2012 (Ramonaitė 2014: 278). Despite the fact that coalition government was formed by four political parties (LSDP, DP, PTT and Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania (*Lietuvos Lenkų rinkimų akcija*, LLRA), the real power was in the hands of social-democrats. Their traditional opponents – TS-LKD – were the strongest fraction in opposition. It seemed that after a long period of liquid party system the classical ideological triad would consolidate in Lithuania: TS-LKD (right wing), LSDP (left wing), and Liberals Movement of the Republic of Lithuania (*Lietuvos Respublikos liberalų sąjūdis*, LRLS) (in the center).

However, all speculations about the new stability of the party system in Lithuania were cut short by national elections of 2016.

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<sup>6</sup> Andrius Kubilius entered politics as the member of Sąjūdis. He became one of the leaders of HU-LC and succeeded Vytautas Landsbergis as a chairman of this party (until 2015). He served as the Prime Minister twice: from 1999 to 2000 and again from 2008 to 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Homeland Union and Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party merged in 2008 and was named as – Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats (*Tėvynės Sąjunga-Lietuvos krikščionys demokratai*, TS-LKD).

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*National elections of 2016: revolution or evolution?*

The national election of 2016 was like a thriller. Before the election different opinion polls predicted that three political parties would achieve approximately the same number of seats: LSDP, TS-LKD and Lithuanian Peasants and Greens Union (*Lietuvos valstiečių ir žaliųjų sąjunga*, LVŽS)<sup>8</sup>.

LSDP as the ruling party tried to convince people to keep the political course. Both TS-LKD and LVŽS campaigned for radical changes. In the election campaign these two parties fiercely criticized the widespread political corruption, stagnation in economics and unsuccessful measures to stop exodus.

The first round of the election revealed the great volatility of voters. LVŽS gained votes from all the spectrum of electorate and reached 22.45% in the nationwide constituency. It was only slightly less than the result of TS-LKD (22.63%) and much better than LSDP (15.04%). The message from the first round of election was that Lithuanian people strongly voted for changes.

The second round of the election was a great surprise for both - politicians and political analysts<sup>9</sup>. LVŽS candidates defeated their rivals in the majority of single-mandate constituencies. LVŽS secured 56 seats in Seimas<sup>10</sup>. The second biggest fraction was formed by TS-LKD but it only had 31 members. It was absolutely indisputable that the new government would be formed by LVŽS and this party had the possibility to choose its partners.

At a first glance it seems that the victory of LVŽS was the repetition of the success of Law and Justice in Poland and Fidesz in Hungary, ANO 2011 in the Czech Republic. But it should be pointed out, that there are some important differences and it is reasonable to analyze the origins, tactics and the message of LVŽS more precisely. Unlike DP, TPP or DK, which were founded shortly before the beginning of the campaigning period, LVŽS has more than ten

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<sup>8</sup> Until the summer of 2016 there was only one political organization with great political ambitions – Liberals Movement of the Republic of Lithuania. Its chairman Eligijus Masiulis was one of the most popular Lithuanian politicians in the public opinion polls in 2015 and the first half of 2016. LRLS won the battle against our political organizations which pointed to liberal part of the electorate and it seemed that Masiulis is one of the solid candidates to Prime Ministry offices after the national elections of 2016. However, in May 2016 Masiulis was alleged for €106k bribe from MG Baltic, one of the largest business groups in the Baltic region.

<sup>9</sup> For example, in the press release in English about the results of the first round of elections, BNS (Baltic News Service) insisted that TS-LKD had the biggest chances to be win the elections. (BNS seen April 10, 2016)

<sup>10</sup> The candidates of LVŽS list won 54 seats. However, two extra seats to the fraction of LVŽS came from the candidates who took part in the elections independently as “non-party”. This “freedom” was very paradoxical. For example, Darius Kaminskis won in the single seat constituency in Kedainiai. In the electoral campaign he highly criticized all parties and stressed his independence. However, he left DP only in 2015 and it was his third party. He was elected on the DP list in Municipality of Kedainiai. However, he claimed to be a physician not a politician.

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years history with various combinations of its name. Despite this fact, LVŽS took part in the latter national election as a platform rather than a consistent political party. It was not the sign of poor political management or lack of time to prepare a different campaign. It was a conscious choice of Karbauskis.

An industrial farmer, one of the richest businessmen of Lithuania, Karbauskis has participated in politics since mid 1990s. He has been elected for Seimas three times, his political career began when he was elected as an independent candidate in the single-seat constituency in the national election of 1996. In 1998 he joined the Lithuanian Peasant Party (*Lietuvos valstiečių partija*, LVP) and became its chairman. LVP was founded as a left wing party which was nostalgic towards soviet times. It was appealing to rural people and had no real influence in political life. Karbauskis revitalized this political organization. However, it failed to pass the threshold in the nationwide constituency. Karbauskis himself and some other members of LVP were elected only in the single seat constituencies. Furthermore, he was elected as the deputy speaker of Seimas for one year. Eventually he announced that the career of politician is not for him and decided to return to the governing of *Agrokoncernas*, one of the largest agricultural groups in Lithuania.

Karbauskis came back as the chairman of Lithuanian Peasants Popular Union (*Lietuvos valstiečių liaudininkų sąjunga*, LVLS, former LPP) in 2009, when, after a lot of various transformations, merges and splits, the party was in a difficult situation. In 2012 this party merged with a group of politicians who were dissatisfied with the politics of Lithuanian Green Party. It was an impetus to change the name of the party once again to LVŽS.

LVŽS successfully took part in the European Parliament Election (1 seat) and in Municipal elections of 2015 (140 seats). In both elections Karbauskis was active as an agitator, though had no interest in participating as a candidate.

Only after the Municipality elections Karbauskis announced that he had decided to join the campaign for national elections of 2016 and promised that LVŽS would suggest very different way of action from other political parties.

The first novelty was the statement of Karbauskis that he had no ambitions to lead the new government or to be the chairman of Seimas. He declared that his aim to change the political system was not to be on top. Karbauskis also stated that LVŽS would be open for people outside this political organization.

The majority of Lithuanian political parties usually have “legionaries” on their lists of

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candidates. For example, the member of Seimas from TS-LKD is a famous economist Ingrida Šimonytė. She has no affiliation with this party but worked in the government of Kubilius. The “legionaries” were common on the lists of TPP or DK. They were people united by the same group of colleagues (the case of TPP), or by the same fight against the corruption of legal system (the case of DK). However the final electoral list of LVŽS involved 44 “legionaries” and many of them were not familiar until the beginning of the campaign and they came from the groups with very different societal values.

Even the leader of the LVŽS list Saulius Skvernelis was an “outsider”. He was the Minister of Internal Affairs in the cabinet of Algirdas Butkevičius<sup>11</sup> and was delegated to the office by PTT. He gained a reputation of being a trustworthy operator during his time as a police chief and was a popular minister. It seemed that he would be included in the electoral list of LSDP and had serious negotiations with Butkevičius, but Karbauskis suggested that he should be on the very top of LVŽS list. Until this suggestion Skvernelis had nothing to do with agrarian or ecological topics. On the other hand, despite the name of LVŽS, these topics were not the most important issues for this party.

The electoral slogan of LVŽS was – *Harmoniuos Lithuania*. It was psychologically attractive and had a minimal content so it was possible to speak about different things to different audiences.

LVŽS succeeded to attract the most conservative people by the promise to defend the values of a traditional family, to fight for sober way of living, to protect Lithuanian language from the attempts to introduce letters in Lithuanian passports not included in the Lithuanian alphabet.

On the other hand, they appealed to traditional electorate of left wing parties and promised to reduce social inequality, to make more investments in social sphere, and to increase minimal wages. The representatives of LVŽS criticized TS-LKD for anti-Russian sentiment and abandoned traditional political cleavage of “ex-communists and anti-communists”.

The greatest victory of LVŽS was the mobilization of “the protest voters”, angry and disappointed people who usually do not participate in elections or vote against the ruling party.

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<sup>11</sup> Algirdas Butkevičius has served as a member of Seimas from 1996. He was SDP candidate in the 2009 Presidential election. After the elections he became the chairman of SDP (until the spring of 2017). He was Prime Minister after the elections of 2012. In the beginning of the term he was one of the most popular politicians, however his popularity decreased after various corruptional scandals and the passivity of Butkevičius himself. The elections of 2016 were unsuccessful for SDP and Butkevičius declared about the resignation from the chairman of the party.

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Karbauskis, the leader of LVŽS, offered “protest voters” a new scapegoat. He declared that the main difference between his and other parties was that it did not try to be a political party, but rather a possibility for the professionals from various spheres, who do not want to have any affiliation to traditional politics, to get together and take part in the governing of the state<sup>12</sup>. During the electoral campaign the representatives of LVŽS list insisted that they are professionals, not politicians.

What is the main difference between a politician and a professional? According to the classical book on the topic, politics arises from recognizing the need of restraint alongside opportunity, it is founded on the acceptance of difference and on the belief in conciliation (Crick 1962: 12). The technocrat (or the professional) rejects negotiations or deliberations, they use “true knowledge” to resolve the problem. A politician knows that pluralism of opinions is important and many different ideas require to look for a compromise, whereas, for a technocrat, there is only one most efficient solution in all cases, and those who suggest other solutions are people who are not competent, enough, people who try to “politicize” the problem.

The initiative of the *New Politics* in 2000 was an attempt to enrich very antithetical political life. Since 2004 it was common to challenge “systematic parties” as alienated from the society and corrupted. However, these actions aimed “to fix politics” not to replace it. The true novelty of LVŽS was the ideology of anti-politics. The main aim of Karbauskis was not only to win the national election but to change the rules of political life and implement radical opposition between “a subjective and bounded by ideology politician” and “a free and competent specialist”.

### ***Various faces of anti-politics***

Miloš Havelka, in an excellent analysis on the phenomena of anti-politics, reveals that the rejection of politics has different forms and each of them has its own reasons and roots. Havelka has no intention to create a comprehensive typology of anti-politics, however on the basis of his analysis it is reasonable to distinguish **technocratic**, **cultural** and **civic** rejections of politics (Havelka 2016).

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<sup>12</sup> For example, Baltic News Service on March 23, 2016, published information about Skvernelis choice and revealed Karbauskis' plans to include as many as possible candidates from various spheres to LPGU list as possible. According to Karbauskis, the great number of candidates without any affiliations with parties would be the important trace of LPGU.

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Already in 1920 Max Weber could sense social phenomena such as the breaking away of the private sphere, lowered interest in public affairs, the personalization of politics, the uprooting of social interests and growing tension between political conviction and political responsibility. Weber insisted on the importance of the pressure of capitalistic rational mode of living. According to him, economic rationality broke the unity of liberty and politics and the outcome was the economization of the ends.

Bernard Crick in 1962 warned: “There is a great danger to politics in the desire for certainty at any price” (Crick 1962: 87). This certainty is unrealistic and the paradoxical outcome of technocratic anti-politics – the increase of dissatisfaction with politics. The usual tactics of “neutral and scientific” technocrats is to blame the stubborn political opposition.

Matthew Flanders in 2012 presented the problem of anti-politics as the shift from a “citizen” to a “consumer” (Flanders 2012). The latter does not want to be responsible or to go deep into the political alternatives. The consumer strives to get “the best product for the lowest price” and always feels dissatisfied. Zygmunt Bauman reveals the reason: “While consumer society rests its case on the promise to gratify human desires to an extent which no other society in the past could reach or even dream of reaching, the promise of satisfaction remains seductive only as long as the desire stays *ungratified*; more importantly, as long as the client is not ‘*completely* satisfied’; that is, as long as the desires that motivated and set in motion the search for gratification and prompted consumerist experiments are not believed to have been truly and fully gratified” (Bauman 2007: 46).

The greatest paradox of the consumers’ society is that *objectively* it needs political not technical decisions, though the majority of its members are sure that the politics and politicians are the main source of their problems.

In the very beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a very different conception of anti-politics emerged. In 1919 famous and influential writer Thomas Mann presented an interesting essay – “Reflections of a Non Political Man”. The impetus for the essay was the emerging mass society and mass culture.

Mann was dissatisfied with the fact, that political debates were narrowed to economic affairs and discussions on various short term actualities. Politics, according to this famous writer, became one-sided and politicians became barbarians who lack minimal competence and care only about elections. The writer was sure that it is important to turn away from the politics

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and concentrate on spiritual acts. Nonpolitical man of Mann is not a politically irresponsible person without any interest in public affairs. He is not a passive one. He overcame the sphere of politics, because it became too narrow. According to Mann, we need order and decency, we ought to create the spiritual basis for the public sphere and this task is a responsibility of nonpolitical intellectuals. Culturally oriented anti-politics rejects the technocratic alternative: it is the medicine which is worse than the disease it tries to cure. We need to base our actions on culture in politics, not on new political techniques.

The roots of the last form of anti-politics can be traced to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The term “non-political politics” was coined by the intellectuals from the stateless nations of the Central and Eastern Europe who were struggling for emancipation. Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk emphasized the party's transcending unity of civil interests and society values: education, responsibility, mutuality, honor and open-mindedness. At the same time, he viewed it as a means of cultivating the political sphere, as well as means for improving civic self-consciousness and political literacy. The main thesis of “nonpolitical politics” - there are historical situations, when the only way to change the sphere of politics is to use nonpolitical means.

The same motive can be found in the works of Hungarian writer and cultural critic Gyorgy Konrad. He advocated anti-politics and looked for radically different possibilities for action and decision making in the situation when we could not accept the official politics of a ruling party. Konrad rejected both – the possibility of political resignation and collaboration with non-acceptable political system. For him, anti-politics was the search for non conventional civic activity.

### ***The journey to anti-politics and back?***

In the book “Defending Politics” Flinders writes: “I am not arguing that democratic politics as we know is perfect. Politicians too often promise too much and deliver too little and some have abused their positions for personal gain but I will not let the behavior of a few destroy the achievements of the many. Although imperfect, we can do much worse than honor “mere politics”. Indeed, we must examine very carefully the claims of those who would do better or who would apparently turn their back on politics completely. We must also challenge those who bemoan politics but in the next breath demand than the institutions of the state do more and more. Politics can and does make a positive difference in people’s lives” (Flinders 2012: 10)

The healthy skepticism and critical challenging of politicians are sane for every

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democratic society, but in the case of anti-politics we ought to speak not about healthy skepticism but about corrosive cynicism (Flinders 2012: 11). The former suggests a belief in the nature of regime alongside a large dose of caution about the risk that some individuals may be tempted to abuse the system for their own benefit rather than the public's. The latter, by contrast, suggests the toxic distrust which easily becomes the target of various manipulations and illusionary promises.

It would be unfair to demonize LVŽS and Karbauskis for the attempts to impose anti-political mode of thinking. All political organizations in Lithuania have a lot of problems and the gap between politicians and the rest of the society becomes wider and wider. In 2009 a group of Lithuanian scholars published an important study “Partinės demokratijos pabaiga?”<sup>13</sup>. In this book the scholars revealed the weakness of Lithuanian party system and speculated about the prospect of various civic movements. Can they replace the parties and foster stability of political life?

However, the national elections in 2016 introduced a lot of new important questions. It seems that those political parties, which have representatives in Seimas, do not care much about the future of politics. Most politicians look at the phenomena of LVŽS as the model of success, and try to learn the effective tools to attract people. Very likely, in the Municipal elections of 2019 a great wave of anti-politics will run through the country.

On the other hand, the first half of the year after the national election revealed the main problems of technocratic version of anti-politics in Lithuania. We can find all three versions of anti-politics in contemporary Lithuania. However cultural and civic anti-politics is still very weak. The version of anti-politics which was introduced by LVŽS was technocratic with some elements of cultural sentiments.

In theory it looked quite attractive, however tone encountered a lot of problems while implementing it.

The beginning was hopeful. The members of the new government, chosen by Skvernelis, were praised even by opposition. LVŽS nominated 12 members, including Prime Minister, while only 3 ministers represented the minor coalition partner LSDP. The key feature of the new government was that the majority of its members were formally independent politicians. It was

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<sup>13</sup> English translation of the title of the book – “The End of Democracy of Parties?”. The editor – a very skillfull scholar Ainė Ramonaitė.

one of the key pledges of LVŽS in the election campaign- to appoint the “government of experts” formed primarily on the basis of competence as opposed to party affiliation.

The dominance of independent politicians in the government, many of which were without experience of working in any political institutions and without comprehensive contacts with LVŽS, raised important questions whether it will be able to assure stable support in Seimas for such government suggestions and to keep the constructive relations with the LVŽS fraction. The government had problems in preparing the program and the plan of actions. The main reason was that agreeing on the preferences was not only a technical act. It is always based on the set of values and principles.

Prime Minister Skvernelis announced that he had no interests in the processes inside LVŽS. Such statements seemed not important until the first serious clashes between Karbauskis and Skvernelis<sup>14</sup>. Eventually the friction between Skvernelis as the Prime Minister and the fraction of LVŽS in Seimas became more and more evident.

On the one hand, it can be explained by psychological factors (Karbauskis and Skvernelis as very different personalities) and by the fact that the majority of ministers and many members of LVŽS fraction in Seimas have very little experience of work in political institutions. On the other hand, anti-political LVŽS “program” was an attractive document during elections, but it is a very fragile basis for the real solution of huge political problems.

For example, Karbauskis and Skvernelis communicated opposite opinions on the way to fight the reasons of intensive emigration. Karbauskis suggested to sign the national agreement of political parties and the leading scientists in order to improve the demographic situation in Lithuania. Skvernelis reacted with the statement that tackling emigration requires initiatives, which would be included in the plans of the government, rather than setting up new working groups or commissions. They are communicating like people from alternative realities and it seems that they do not seek agreement. Prime Minister is more likely to discuss the political situation with one of the leaders of opposition in Seimas, the chairman of TS-LKD, Gabrielius Landsbergis than with Karbauskis<sup>15</sup>.

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14 The informative digest on the relations of Skvernelis and Karbauskis - <http://en.delfi.lt/corporate/what-is-the-real-reason-behind-skvernelis-and-karbauskis-squabbles.d?id=74321432> (seen April 10, 2017).

15 Prime Minister Skvernelis and the chairman of TS-LKD Landsbergis had at least three long talks face to face during the first quarter of 2017. Such meetings are an unusual practice in Lithuanian political culture and they increase the speculations that Skvernelis prefers Landsbergis to Karbauskis.

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On the other hand, Karbauskis consciously failed to fulfill politically important functions other than becoming the head of the Committee of Culture in Seimas. He wanted to show that his authority is based on more firm basis than the political office. Karbauskis also wanted to maintain the opposition *culture/politics*. However, such tactics of Karbauskis has its weak points.

Skvernelis is not a member of LVŽS, so Karbauskis has no formal authority over him. Of course Karbauskis is still the head of LVŽS fraction in Seimas, though this fraction is not homogeneous.

LVŽS politics of culture raises many critical questions too. There were no essential changes in cultural politics of social democrats during the first half of the year. The most famous initiative of Karbauskis was an idea to give national costumes for children in 2018<sup>16</sup>. Karbauskis presented such an idea as the fostering of national identity, though it was not very popular and critics required more comprehensive initiatives in the cultural sphere.

During the campaign Karbauskis promised not to waste time in political discussions but to present the solutions of the political problems by the experts. However, the trap of technocratic anti-politics is that the consumer always wants more. So it is impossible to solve the problems of a consumer, because every solution creates new problems. It means that LVŽS has only two possible alternatives now. First, it will have to be transformed as new promise, new “commodity”. For example, it can be purified from the foes inside the organization or it can introduce new attractive political initiatives. Second alternative is that it has to find a political enemy which would be presented as the main obstacle to success. TS-LKD is one of the most convenient candidates to this role. However, after the opening the Pandora’s box of anti-politics there are no guarantees that other groups will not try to introduce new, more radical forms of anti-politics.

In 2009 sociologist Bauman published his book “Does Ethics Have a Chance in the Society of Consumers?”. He states: “We have created a society that is perpetuating selfishness to a degree so severe that there might not be a turning back point” (Bauman 2009: 231). This Bauman’s statement is not a capitulation, it is rather the requirement to be more responsible and to work harder in order to suggest real alternative for the current moral landscape. If we want to change something, we ought to face uncomfortable reality. The same thing can be said about the political situation in Lithuania as well as in all post-communist countries.

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<sup>16</sup> At the very beginning of April, 2017, Karbauskis publicly announced that the idea to give national costumes as presents for Lithuanian children would be postponed because of media hostility. This idea was one of the first initiatives of Karbauskis after his success in the national elections.

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*Homo sovieticus* can easily transform into a consumer, who claims “bread and entertainment”. The aim of this article is not to state conclusions but to provoke reaction and questions. The most important one – *do we understand that the antipolitics promises a lot however gives very little?* The second one – how can we change the situation?

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