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Comparative Analysis of the Party Systems Development in Russia and Lithuania

ABSTRACT

On the basis of factors such as ideology, the degree of populism, political leadership and form of the government a complex comparative analysis of the formation and development of the party system in Lithuania and Russia in the post-communist period was carried out. Summing up, it should be noted that both Russian and Lithuanian party parliamentarism are being progressively consolidated. At the same time they continue to suffer from many shortcomings owing to negative historical heritage, characterized by authoritarian single-party system, cult of the leader, ideological populism and undeveloped civil society, and also because of the prolonged transition period of young democracies. Speaking about the prospects of the development of the party systems of two countries, it can be assumed that in the medium term the current situation should not change dramatically.

Key words: Russia, Lithuania, party system, comparative analysis, ideology, populism, leader, president, opposition, political regime, effectiveness.

1. Theoretical and methodological basis of research

Theoretical and methodological basis of the political parties study was established by James Bryce, Max Weber, Robert Michels and Maurice Duverger. Of particular importance for the Russian political science is the contribution to the theory of political parties by Moisey Yakovlevich Ostrogorsky, who wrote the paper on "Democracy and political parties" in 1898, in which he described the role and importance of the political party institution in the political systems of Britain and the United States (Ostrogorskii, 1930).

This research is based on the structured approach, which allows viewing the political system as a single coherent mechanism, and a political party as an institutional policy tool. It should be noted that this approach to the study of party systems can be traced in the works of such well-known political scientists as M. Duverger and G. Sartori (Sartori, 1976, p.68).

Comparative study of the party systems of Lithuania and Russia involves the comprehensive study of the party building problematic in the light of its historical context¹ and key moments of its institutionalization. Therefore, the definition and general description of the main stages of post-Soviet development of the considered countries' party systems were completed by identifying the most important factors in their formation and functioning. In this case, the authors of the article relied on the classics of political science, who had made a recognized contribution to the study of individual elements of political systems, and contemporary works of Lithuanian and Russian political scientists.

One of the most important aspects that presents a theoretical value for the study is a quantitative characteristic of the party system, as well as the formation and development of the party-ideological spectrum. Dwelling on the conditions of the party system development, it is also important to take into account the principles and norms of political power exercising, which were forming and developing in parallel with the party system of the countries studied. In particular, this applies to the form of government, enshrined in the Constitutions of Lithuania and Russia, as well as their electoral system and the overall specificity of the current political regime. The works of Arend Lijphart, Robert Dahl, Juan Linz and a number of other recognized Western scholars are devoted to the problems of relationship between law and democratic institutions.

Finally, concerning the specifics of the formation and development of the party systems of the former Soviet Union, the analysis of the role of individuals (leadership) in the formation of the party system is indispensable (i. e. without combining structured approach to individualistic). Their role is often the key one. Max Weber was one of the first, who did research in the field of political leadership. He wrote in particular that the "party suite" (first of all a party official and a businessperson) expects that the personality of the leader will lead the party to power (Weber, 1919). In the case of Lithuania and Russia the importance of political leadership in general and the heads of the state factor in particular is undeniable (especially in Russia).

Thus, at the beginning of the practical part of the research the historical roots of the Lithuania and the Russian Federation party systems formation are considered, and then, based on the selected structural variables (single / multi-party system, ideological differentiation, impact of the power system specificity) and individualistic paradigm (the role of leadership in the party building), the qualitative comparative analysis of the two states' party systems is conducted. In conclusion, the authors of the article give a concentrated forecast of possible paths of their development in the medium term.

2. Stages of the party system formation in modern Russia.

¹ In this case, of special interest may be in particular the idea that culturally conditioned form of government for a new state may be more appropriate and effective than superficially attractive, but historically alien (the so-called theory of path dependence). In other words, the parliamentary system, which is based on the party system, in comparison with the control leadership (in one form or another) was originally alien to most post-Soviet countries or politically ineffective (sometimes even destructive), based on their historical experience.

Most often Russian authors divide the development of the Russian party system into the Russian electoral stages, which were six (1993, 1995, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011). Proponents of this approach are of the opinion that the result of the parliamentary elections, which reflects the actual balance of political forces, should form the basis. However, several election campaigns can fit in one cycle of the party system existence, distinguished by complex qualitative characteristics.

In Russia, at an early stage, the trend of creating parties “from above” for certain leaders manifested itself. In addition, a feature of the Russian party system was the presence of “power parties”. First created on the eve of the Duma elections of 1993 (the “Russia’s Choice” and the “Party of Russian Unity and Accord” (PRUA)), later they became indispensable parties in the Duma elections (Buyuk).

The analysis of the public opinion poll, conducted in electoral periods in 1993 and 1995, shows that the programs of political parties for Russian voters were of secondary importance. The main struggle raged between such personalities as Yegor Gaidar (Russia’s Choice 15.5%) and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy (LDPR 22.9%). Besides them Sergey Shahray, Gennady Zyuganov, Ivan Rybkin, Nikolay Travkin and Mikhail Lapshin participated in the elections. Remarkably, the figure of Russian President Boris Yeltsin at the time did not have key influence on the preference of the voters.

During the election campaign in 1995 trends persisted, but the balance changed. By 1995, the popularity of the Liberal Democratic Party lowered (11.2%) and the electoral base of the Communist Party increased (22.3%). Kremlin politicians also analyzed the errors of the “Russia’s Choice” block and launched a project, led by Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin “Our Home is Russia” (10.1%). Fourth place went to the party “Yabloko” (6.9%).

The second stage in the development of the party system begins in 1995 for several reasons. First, the change of the regulatory framework of the existence of political organizations should be noted. May 19, 1995 in Russia the Federal Law on Social Associations was adopted, which divided these structures into non-governmental organizations (membership-based) and social movements (without membership). In addition, the All-Russian public organization then had to open its representative offices in 45 regions, and each of these offices of such organization had to have at least three members.

The amendments of 1997-98 (to the Law of 1995) set forth that only political associations can participate in the election, i. e. political public organizations and political social movements. Parties were declared as a type of political public organizations. At the same time, they were finally obliged to have at least 5,000 members (Ivanov, 2008, p. 13).

Second, since 1995, the party field polarizing trend begins to manifest itself. That was especially evident in opposition between three leaders – Yeltsin, Zyuganov and Luzhkov. The strongest party at this stage was the Communist Party. The political power of Boris Yeltsin held at the administrative resource and lost its credibility every day. Yuri Luzhkov on the contrary started to gain political influence and became one of the key Russian politicians, who had to win the Duma elections of 1999 and to run for the presidency in 2000. For this aim, an alliance with the popular among the people Yevgeny Primakov was concluded and the party started a project, called the “Fatherland - All Russia².”

The well-known Russian political analyst Vitaly Ivanov, speaking of this opposition, said, “The Kremlin brainchild was originally called “The Bear” (Rus. «Медведь»). The bear is the embodiment of strength and also one of the traditional symbols of Russia. But then the word “bear” was decided to be “decoded”. So “the Inter-regional movement of “Unity” appeared (Rus. «Межрегиональное движение «Единство» (МЕДВЕДЬ – МЕ-ДВ-ЕД - МЕжрегиональное Движение ЕДинство). Further two names were used – “The Bear” and “The Union” (Ivanov, 2008, p. 39). The main problem was the Kremlin administration personnel crisis. Sergey Shoigu had to lead the new party, previously taking no active part in the political life of the country.

The third feature of the second stage of the party system development became the media-overblown topic of the communist revenge. It was the “golden age” of the Communist Party. Gennady Zyuganov’s going into the second round of the presidential elections in 1996, startled wide range of business elite, that caused them to support Boris Yeltsin financially and the Communist Party alternative projects.

The main event of the second phase of the party system development in Russia was the adoption of the 11 July 2001 law on political parties, which were an order of magnitude higher than public organizations and had the exclusive right to participate in elections. But of the first magnitude is that the law clearly stipulated the term “political party”.

The third stage of the party system existence was a consequence of this law adoption. The victory of the “United Russia” in the Duma elections in 2003 put an end to the dominance of the Communist Party, and finally brought to the forefront of the Russian public political field the concept “party of power”. Within the system, which then consisted of a limited number of participants, only the most influential members of the political elite were able to survive and form the systemic opposition parties. Others decided to continue the struggle with the leader of the “United Russia” Vladimir Putin, operating outside the party system. On the outcome of the electoral cycle of 2003 - 2004 the Russian opposition was divided into “systemic” and “non-systemic”.

The phenomenon of “non-systemic opposition” was reflected in various organizational efforts. On the right-liberal wing the “Committee 2008” was established, on the ultra-right wing there was a tradition of “Russian March”, on the left wing there was the “Left Front”. Organizational efforts were concentrated evidence of power centralization in order to maintain stability in the country. In the end, after the Duma elections, 2011, all non-systemic opposition representatives came together in the “swamp” front, which led to the adoption of another law regulating the activities of political parties.

Under the new law, initiated by Dmitry Medvedev shortly after mass opposition protests across Russia, for registration of a party up to 500 people would be sufficient, not 40,000 as it was until now. In addition, from now on, if the Justice Ministry identifies an error or irregularity in the registration documents filed, it will not mean immediate denial of registration, but suspension of the political party for three months. This is the time given to the party leadership to eliminate the shortcomings according to the written recommendations of the Justice Ministry (“V Rossii priniat novyj zakon...”, 2012).

The main result of the party system development of the Russian Federation for today is the realization by the Russian ruling elite of the need for more fair and open political competition. 2012 was marked by a shift from the Russian “sovereign” (authoritarian) towards “democratic” democracy³. The growth of protest sentiment and development of activist values in the political culture of Russian citizens. In addition, the country has formed a clear political spectrum with the usual names for Russian political parties (the Liberal Democratic Party,

² The founders of this movement were the electoral block “Fatherland” and political block “All Russia”, which was supported by the regional elite – Murtaza Rakhimov, Mentimir Shaymiyev etc.

³ Probably one of the most prominent practical expression of this shift was the “Law on the simplification of the political parties registration,” which simplified the registration requirements for political parties in the Russian Federation.

the Communist Party, the “United Russia”, the “Fair Russia”, the “Yabloko”). This suggests that the Russian party system is stable and favors the expression of the interests of the broad masses of the population, although a significant role is still played by leadership, the Kremlin and administrative resources in its development.

3. Party system development in Lithuania in the post-communist period.

One might say that the historical basis for the formation of the modern party system in Lithuania has become a socio-political movement “Sajudis”, formed in the late 80s of the last century. Initially, this movement was created as a “Movement in Support of Perestroika.” Later (when the ultra-right wing gained a lead) the basis for unity was the commitment to the country’s independence from the Soviet Union. At the same time, from the very beginning “Sajudis” was rather patchy in the political and ideological context association. After reaching the intended target, the unifying basis disappeared, and the conditions for the formation of the multiparty system with differentiated ideological orientation were created in the independent Lithuania. Concurrently the former Communist Party of the Lithuanian Soviet Republic was transformed into the Lithuanian Democratic Labor Party, which retained its popularity and in 2001 merged with the Social Democratic Party of Lithuania (SDPL), taking the name of the last. In the article “Stages of modern party system in Lithuania” Lithuanian political scientist Alvidas Lukosaitis states: “The elections, held during the period from 1990 to 1997, showed that the party system in Lithuania has a high level of fragmentation and polarization, as well as the variability of party preferences and voting results “ (Lukosaitis, 1997, p.114).

Here it should be noted that the process of institutionalization of democracy in the newly-free Republic of Lithuania passed quickly enough, resulting in the “non-systemic” and “anti-systemic” opposition is virtually absent in the political life of the country (the popularity of political force, such as the one led by Algirdas Paleckis “Socialist People’s Front”, is minimal). In addition, it is hard to imagine the appearance of the “party of power” in Lithuania. The most pressing problem is the consolidation of democratic regime.

The period of extensive party fragmentation ended by the parliamentary elections in 2004, involving 18 parties, which is approximately two times less than in the 90-ies of the last century. Gradually, 5-6 parties started to hold the parliament; and the turnover in the power of the Social Democrats (the current SDPL) and conservatives (the current “Homeland Union - Lithuanian Christian Democrats”) took shape. In fact, these two parties can now be called the traditional and dominant ones. In this case, the remaining party field continues to be unstable.

In other words, today in Lithuania the multi-party system operates with 5-6 parliamentary parties headed by SDPL and the “Union of the fatherland,” which have their “own” more or less loyal voter and around which the ruling majority often formed (here it should be emphasized that gradually the parliamentary coalition policy became an integral feature of the Lithuanian party life). As pointed out by Lukosaitis: “Based on the criteria of G. Sartori, J. Blondel, A. Staroff and other authors, one might say that de facto the two-party system functioned in Lithuanian 1990-1992⁴; in the period 1992-2000 there was the system of polarized pluralism with the dominant party, and the measured multi-party system formed in 2000-2008. Unfortunately, with time, because of the constant dissociation of political parties and other objective reasons, the number of so-called politically relevant parties increased in the measured multi-party system, and the signs of extreme pluralism emerged” (Lukosaitis, 2009, p.42).

These “politically relevant” parties do not display consistently high ratings - including because there is an appreciable fraction of populism in their political rhetoric that is not conducive to their entry into the “core” of the party system (primarily the “Labor Party” and the “Order and Justice” party are the vivid examples).

Such developments are primarily connected to the feature of the national electorate, which is mostly far in quality from ideal developed (conscious) civil society. Also the common disillusionment with the existing political forces is obvious, with the result that the party relies on the “new faces”, which later prove to be as untenable as everyone else. For instance, the “National Revival” party, formed by the stars of show business, with no experience of political work. This party successfully participated in the parliamentary elections of 2008, became a member of the center-right “coalition of change”, but then virtually disappeared from the political arena.

Additional factors that do not allow the Lithuanian party system to have the unique character include a problem with the clarity of ideological differentiation and its dependence on the leaders.

Almost all of the Lithuanian parties focus not on a particular voter, but on each one (the so-called catch all approach). The only exceptions are the conservatives and liberal parties.

A leadership role in the formation and development of the party system in Lithuania is also undeniable, that proves its relative inconsistency (unsystematic character). Traditional parties, having a group of prominent political figures (3-4 people), suffer from this to a lesser extent. However, on the other hand they face the problem of generational change, resulting in the aforementioned accumulated fatigue of the voter from the same individuals who are associated with the crisis in the socio-economic life of the country, corruption scandals, the Soviet nomenclature-past and so forth. Populist and semi-populist parties of Lithuania depend on their leaders almost entirely. For instance, the “Order and Justice” Party was formed around the former president Rolandas Paksas. Another example is the “Labor Party”, headed by Viktor Uspaskich, a Lithuanian businessman of Russian origin with the mixed reputation.

Speaking about the impact of the government form, the electoral system and the overall specificity of the current political regime on the development of the party system in Lithuania, there are several points to note. In 1998, the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania described the state as a parliamentary republic with the elements of semi-presidentialism (“Lietuvos Respublikos Konstitucinio...”). In general, it can hardly be said that the president of Lithuania has considerable powers in the field of domestic policy, but if the position is held by the popular and charismatic figure, his/her actual impact on the political parties (the formation and activities of the parliamentary ruling majority) may be strong enough. Nevertheless, the parties as a political force (especially if they are acting in concert and consolidated manner) are still the dominant entity in the relationship with the president⁵. Thus, the Lithuanian form of government is more of the parliamentary one and involves the party system development as the basis of government.

With regard to the conditions for the establishment of political parties in Lithuania, they are quite favorable. All it takes is one thousand people, and usually there are no problems with registration (if they meet all additional requirements). At the same time, one cannot say

⁴ Here the point is that there are the left and right wing party blocks, which at that time united in their ranks multitudinous and various political forces.

⁵ The situation after the parliamentary elections in 2012 only confirmed the conclusion about the dominant role of the parties in the domestic policy of the state. Popular among the people President of Lithuania D. Grybauskaitė tried to exert a significant impact on the formation of the ruling coalition, having publicly expressed her unwillingness to see “the Labor Party” as a part of it. However, the Social Democrats, who formed the coalition, ultimately went into an alliance with the Labor Party representatives, thus ignoring the position of the president, who was forced to become reconciled with the choice of the party.

that the barrier for parties in parliament is low (5% for a party and 7% for a coalition), but definitely it cannot be called very high, compared to other European countries (e. g. neighbors⁶). Reasoning from experience, these requirements can be described as well-balanced and non-infringing upon the voter's representation right. In general, the specificity of the political regime in Lithuania, being fully democratic (with some drawbacks of "the young emerging post-Soviet democracy"), has no significant influence on the development of the party system – it largely depends on the parties themselves, and not on the regime-institutional environment, where it takes place.

Summarizing, one can say that today the Lithuanian party system has more or less outlined forms, but it is early days to say about its ultimate stabilization. Due to the lack of the electorate's civic maturity, which promotes the party populism and complicates the clear ideological differentiation of parties with a focus on the particular voter, it remains to some extent unpredictable and, therefore, not enough effective in terms of well-functioning and productive parliamentary work. Such a conclusion in the article "The comparative analysis of party systems in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe: the case of the Baltic countries" (Saarts, 2011, p.104) was also made by Tonis Saarts. This is clearly manifested in the constant difficulties of forming the parliamentary majority and the government of the country, as well as in their volatility (depending on the political situation and party transformation in the form of dissociation and merger).

In addition, formally quite representative (effective from the ratio of the parties participating in the elections and passing in Parliament, that is important in the management of the state⁷), the party system in Lithuania in reality is not popular among the people, resulting in the permanently and extremely low level (less than 1%) ("Pasitikėjimas Vyriausybe ir Seimu..."⁸, 2011) of public confidence in the parliament and the government (as its party projection). Besides, the power isolation from the public is obvious, although under a parliamentary republic it is implied that it is the party that should act as a liaison, a conductor of the public interest. In this situation it is not surprising that the Lithuanian voters are increasingly in favor of the presidential powers expansion ("Pasitikėjimas Vyriausybe ir Seimu..."⁸, 2012), and that in turn suggests the dependence of public policy preferences in the field of the government form on the historical tradition of governing (nostalgia for the firm hand of an iron leader).

In conclusion, it is worth quoting, more than once referred to, a years-long researcher of the party system in Lithuania, A. Lukosaitis: "The flaws, occurred in the political system of Lithuania, are proper to the polarized parliamentarism: the ideologically and functionally weak political parties, the fragmented (if not atomized) party system and the constantly and radically changing composition of the Parliament (...)" ("Lietuvos gyventojų nuomone..."⁹, 2012, p.51). In other words, the Lithuanian party system is still in transition, trying to consolidate: to cope with the multitudinous challenges, faced by the young parliamentary democracy.

4. Comparison of the results of party systems development in Russia and Lithuania.

The results of a comparative analysis of party systems of Lithuania and Russia are summarized in the table (see Table.: №1).

Table⁸ №1

Results comparison of the party systems development in Lithuania and Russia on April 4, 2012⁹

INDICATORS	The Lithuanian Republic	The Russian Federation
A type of the party system	<i>The multiparty system (5-6 parliamentary parties) with 2 dominant parties.</i>	<i>The multiparty system (4-5 parliamentary parties) with the "Party of Power".</i>
The significance of an ideology in the party identity	<i>Low.</i>	<i>Low.</i>
The role of political leadership	<i>High.</i>	<i>High.</i>
The influence of the president on the party system	<i>Medium.</i>	<i>High.</i>
The barriers of the party system development	<i>Medium.</i>	<i>Medium.</i>
The opposition	<i>Only systemic one with the competitive access to power.</i>	<i>Systemic (controlled) controlled access to power; non-systemic one with low (1) access to power.</i>
The degree of populism	<i>High.</i>	<i>High.</i>
The efficiency of the party system	<i>Low.</i>	<i>Medium.</i>

In summary, it should be stated that both the Russian and Lithuanian party parliamentarism continue to suffer the obvious shortcomings (populism, dependence on political leadership, comprehensive ideological approach, etc.) caused by the protracted transitional period of the young democracies. Speaking about the prospects of the party systems of the two states, one can assume that in the medium term, the current situation will not change radically. The party life in Russia will continue in the presence of the "party of power" and be regulated by the Kremlin, where Putin dug in heels at least for six years. In Lithuania, however, the struggle between "politically significant" parties for entering the number of dominant ones will continue (in the first place the "Labor Party" is meant).

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- ⁶ For instance, in Poland it is 5% for parties and 8% for coalitions. In Latvia and Estonia there is 5% threshold for a party to enter the parliament, in Sweden it is 4%.
- ⁷ For instance, 18 parties participated in the 2004 parliamentary elections (three - only in single member constituencies), of which 6 were able to overcome the electoral threshold (efficiency - 33.33%), and 16 parties participated in the elections of 2008, of which 7 passed in the Diet (efficiency - 43.75%).
- ⁸ The table was made by the authors. The role of the factors, on the basis of which the comparison was conducted, was decided by them to be rated on a scale of qualitative significance (low, medium and high), except for a type of the party system and the opposition of a single country (in this case simply a brief description of them was given). The effectiveness of the party system can be evaluated, using several variables: the ratio of participating in the elections and in the parliament parties; stability (predictability) of the party system and the credibility of its citizens (the degree of isolation of power from the people). The first representative criterion, based on the results of the last two parliamentary elections, allows to talk about the average (even higher) efficiency of theoretically multiparty systems of Lithuania and Russia. However, qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the other two criteria significantly reduces its initial level. Predictability of the Russian party system is quite high, but this is the largely controlled (Kremlin) stability. Finally, in both states voters support this or that party, but when asked about how the servants of the people care about the interests of the people, one can often hear the answer of "swindlers and thieves", as well as of the gap between a common man and a government representative.
- ⁹ On this day, the "Law on the simplification of the registration of political parties" entered into force and created new conditions for the party system development in the Russian Federation.

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