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A Coalition Minority Government in Lithuania: Formations, Circumstances and Activity Problems

This article analyzes a case of a minority government in Lithuania. The main attention is paid to the circumstances surrounding its formation and activity problems. The research is based on Kaare Strom's, Valentine Herman's, John Pope's and other authors' theoretical expertise of a rational choice and the new institutionalism, making it possible to estimate the institutional and political factors that preconditioned the formation of a minority government, determine the key features (type) of the government, its survival, and also activity problems. The author of the article makes the assumption that the formation of the minority government was primarily a rational choice of political parties, making it possible to seek both short-term ('intermediate') and long-term ('electoral') goals. The key issue of the article is not the stability of the governing coalition and the government that it supports, but the effectiveness of its activity.

Introduction

On 18 July 2006, for the first time in Lithuania, a minority coalition Government was formed and instantly nicknamed the '2K' project.¹ Politicians treated this decision as stability seeking, whereas experts in politics criticized it because of activity ineffectiveness, 'ossification', etc. The political forces that formed and supported the Minority Government argued that such a government was the only one possible in the current political situation, while the majority opposition claimed that better variants were possible including an early elections to the Seimas.

In political science, minority governments were long treated as problematic cases; meanwhile majority governments - as a given 'norm'. This stand-

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¹ Named by using the initial surname letters of the leaders of the most important ruling and opposition parties – Gediminas Kirkilas, the Chairman of the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party, and Andrius Kubilius, the Chairman of the Homeland Union. The essence of the "formula" is the ability of the two opposing parties, namely the LSDP and HU, to come to an agreement on common goals and coordinated activity.

point is primarily based on the fact that governments, having parliamentary majority support, can guarantee political stability and effective governance. However, in the long run, this treatment was considerably changed due to the practice of parliamentary democracies: from the institutional point of view, political systems 'do not oppose' the formation of such governments; from the political point of view, the activity of minority governments can be tolerated by the opposition.

European practice indicates that for many years exclusively minority governments used to be formed in Denmark; very often – in Italy, Norway, the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden; also – in Ireland, Belgium, Iceland and other countries.² By the way, an analysis of the governments' formation practice in 'old' Western European democracies pointed out that minority governments make up more than 30 per cent of all governments ever formed.³ During recent years, post-Soviet Croatia, Poland, Slovakia, Romania and, as it will be discussed in this article, Lithuania have also acquired a certain practice in forming minority governments and their activity.⁴

Within the parliamentary system, the activity of any government depends on the confidence and support of the parliament; therefore, a minority government can survive if it manages to ensure the support of other (non-ruling) political parties and independent parliamentarians. This support can be both formal, institutionalized by signed agreements, and non-formal – the so-called *ad hoc* support.⁵

Some authors stress that the formation of minority governments is determined by five 'classical' political circumstances: (1) when after elections the party winning the parliamentary majority is incapable of forming [its own] single-party majority; (2) when certain features of the party system (for example, high ideological polarization) become a non-negotiable obstacle to form a majority coalition; (3) when, during 'the transitional period' ideological-party differences are forgotten and temporary [minority] governments are formed; (4) when cooperation of coalition partners collapses and one or more of the [former] partners agree to further remain in power; and (5) when the party – government formation initiator – simply goes short of ballots to form a majority government.⁶

On the other hand, the formation of minority governments is very often determined by interests of the political parties or even the motivation of individual politicians associated with pragmatic (tactical, conjuncture-related,

² Christiansen F., Damgaard E., "Parliamentary Opposition under Minority Parliamentarism, <http://www.psa.ac.uk/2007/paps/Christiansen.pdf>, 25.08.2007.

³ Strom K., *Minority Government and Majority Rule*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 58 – 59; Herman V., Pope J. "Minority Governments in Western Democracies", *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1973, p. 193 - 194.

⁴ Muller-Rommel F., Fettelschoss K. "Cabinet Government and Cabinet Ministries in Central Eastern European Democracies: A Descriptive Cross National Evaluation", <http://www.essex.ac.uk/ecpr/events/jointsessions/paperarchive/uppsala/ws10/MullerRommelFettelschoss.pdf>

⁵ Christiansen, Damgaard (note 2), *ibidem*.

⁶ Laver M., Schofield N. *Multiparty Government*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990, p.72 – 73; Herman, Pope (note 3), p. 195 – 198.

personal) considerations. This might be related to party ambitions to influence the political agenda, adoption of concrete decisions or efforts to guarantee better positions in the nearest elections.⁷

Significance of political factors regarding minority governments is undoubtedly very important. Yet, institutional factors which are related to constitutional principles of the political system and structure (relations) of power institutions should be considered still more important; primarily if in forming a government, a constitutional investiture (confidence in government voting) imperative is established. It should be pointed out at the outset that a 'successful' minority government is possible only in case 'the investiture voting' does not take place.⁸ Besides, from the institutional point of view, the parliamentary dismissal and government termination rules, as well as the ratio of parliament powers to those of the presidential head of state in the government formation and its activity process are no less important.⁹

As it was mentioned before, the European parliamentary practice demonstrated that a formed minority government can be sufficiently stable. Yet, the main problem should rather be considered not the stability of minority governments, but the effectiveness of their activity.¹⁰ According to Kaare Strom, a minority government should not only be viable, i.e., have the confidence of the parliament, but it should also be capable of working qualitatively, i.e., effectively.¹¹ Of course, the effective activity of the government calls for at least minimal stability.

Also, it is often pointed out that minority governments cannot be effective - this is confirmed by the fact that during socio-economic pressures or macro-economic crises they tend to increase the budget deficit, delay the adoption of political decisions, slow reforms, etc.¹² It is likely that these problems are still more urgent in post-Soviet cases where governments constantly face issues of systemic reforms, tight lawmaking agendas and others.

This paper investigates the coalition minority Government in Lithuania (summer of 2006 – autumn of 2007), more specifically, circumstances of its formation and activity. The investigation is based on the theoretical provisions of rational choice and new institutionalism. Attention is largely focused on two problems: first, the determination of political parties and their leaders to form a minority Government (analysis of formation circumstances); second, it

⁷ Strom K. "Minority Government in Parliamentary Democracies. The Rationality of Losing Cabinet Solutions", *Comparative Political Studies*, 17: 2, 1984, p. 209 - 210.

⁸ Martin L., Stevenson R. "Government Formation in Parliamentary Democracies", *American Journal of Political Science*, No. 45, 2001, p. 33 - 50; Strom K. "Democracy, Accountability, and Coalition Bargaining", <http://repositories.cdlib.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1117&context=csl>, 10.07.2007.

⁹ Kang Sh. "The Influence of Presidential Heads of State on Government Formation in European Democracies: Empirical Evidences", <http://troi.cc.rochester.edu/~sgkg/document/diss2.pdf>, 25.08.2007

¹⁰ In this study, the effectiveness of government activity is perceived as the ratio of formulated objectives, necessary costs to the results obtained.

¹¹ Strom (note 3), p. 5.

¹² Green-Pedersen Ch. "Minority Government and Party Politics: The Political and Institutional Background to the "Danish Miracle", http://www.mpi-fg-koeln.mpg.de/pu/mpifg_dp/dp01-1.pdf, 12.07.2007.

attempts to ground the statement that a much more important problem is not the stability of the minority government, but the effectiveness of its activity (activity analysis). On the one hand, the investigation of these two problems is based on a rational theory of minority government formation formulated by Kaare Strom and attempts to disclose what primary ambitions of the parties are – policy/program seeking or office seeking.¹³ On the other hand, it is sought to enrich this theory with the experience of the Lithuanian case by primarily taking into consideration the fact that the minority Government was formed without long-term democratic traditions and, what is more, in an unstable party system.

The article grounds these statements:

- First, the minority government formation was a rational choice of political parties and the implementation of their interests was favourably influenced by certain features of the party system;
- Second, the stability of the minority government was determined by the disunity of the parliament opposition and a formalized agreement with the main opposition party, yet all this did not create conditions for the effective activity of the government;
- Third, under the minority government, interest groups sought to influence public policy decisions not through the ruling coalition and the government supported by it, but through the divided opposition – this had a negative impact on lawmaking agendas of the parliament and implementation of the government program.

The investigation aims are achieved by analyzing the specifics of the Lithuanian political (governance) system, features of the party system, tactical attitude of political parties during government formation as well as certain public policy decisions on lawmaking issues.

The article consists of two parts: in the first part, the institutional and political context of the minority government formation process is presented (the main focus is on party system features); in the second part, circumstances of a specific minority government formation and issues of activity effectiveness are analyzed (the main emphasis is laid on the essential guarantees of government survival and ineffectiveness of public politics (lawmaking) process under a minority government).

¹³ Strom, (note 3), p. 68 - 69; Strom (note 7), p. 211 – 213; Kalandrakis T. “Minority Government: Ideology and Office”, <http://politics.as.nyu.edu/docs/IO/4754/kalandrakis.pdf>, 08.25.2007

1. Specifics of the Lithuanian Political System and Party System Features

1.1. Government Formation of Rules: Positive Parliamentarism

When a government is formed in any political system, institutional (constitutional) factors, primarily those related to investiture rules, play an important role.¹⁴ Kaare Strom calls them, the proximate government formation circumstances which are linked with government formation (governance crisis) duration, number of attempts made by parties to form a government, etc.¹⁵ Minority governments are most likely in systems where negative government formation rules are applied, i.e., where imperative investiture voting is absent. This means that the formed government can function until the parliament tolerates it; when forming the government, the parliament does not vote on government approval *in corpore* (for example, when voting on the program). It also implies that the government under formation need not seek confidence of the parliament, whereas the latter indicates its intolerance of the government by only expressing distrust for it. These are the so-called *negative parliamentarism systems*.¹⁶

However, in *positive parliamentarism* systems, minority governments are hardly probable. It is cases when formal investiture voting is applied, i.e., when the newly-formed government is granted the mandate to act by the parliament voting on the approval of the government *in corpore*, - usually on its activity program.¹⁷ In other words, if the imperative parliament voting on government (program) approval is constitutionally institutionalized, it is considerably more complicated to form a minority government. Since other parliamentary parties are not the initiators of the government under formation, it is more beneficial to choose the tactics for opposing and preparing for new elections.

These essential differences are confirmed by the long-term practice of negative and positive parliamentarism, i.e., negative parliamentarism systems are much more lenient in 'giving a green light' to minority governments, than are the positive parliamentarism systems (see Table 1).

¹⁴ Strom (note 7), p. 219; Strom (note 3), p. 25, 110.

¹⁵ Strom (note 7), p. 208.

¹⁶ Christiansen, Damgaard (note 2), *ibidem*.

¹⁷ Strom, *Ibidem*, p. 219.

Table 1. Investiture rules and types of governments in European countries (selected cases)¹⁸

No.	State	Investiture voting imperative (where '+' is positive and '-' is negative parliamentarism)		Prevalent types of governments
1.	Ireland	+		minority governments functioned
2.	Austria		-	coalition majority governments
3.	Belgium		-*	minority governments functioned
4.	Czech Republic	+		coalition majority governments
5.	Denmark		-	minority governments prevail
6.	Estonia	+		coalition majority governments
7.	Greece	+		coalition majority governments
8.	Spain	+		minority governments functioned
9.	Italy	+		frequent minority governments
10.	United Kingdom		-	single-party majority governments
11.	Latvia	+		coalition majority governments
12.	Poland	+		coalition majority governments
13.	Lithuania	+		coalition majority governments****
14.	the Netherlands		-	minority governments functioned
15.	Norway		-	frequent minority governments
16.	France		-*	coalition majority governments
17.	Slovakia	+		coalition majority governments
18.	Slovenia	+		coalition majority governments
19.	Finland	+**		From 1960 coalition majority governments dominate (before that –minority governments frequent)
20.	Sweden	+***		frequent minority governments
21.	Switzerland		-	coalition majority governments
22.	Germany	+		coalition majority governments

Notes:
 * The Head of state can ignore the results of investiture voting in the parliament (in France, voting on confidence is carried out in compliance with the tradition);
 ** In Finland, the investiture rule was not applied until 2000;
 *** In Sweden, the investiture rule is applied from 1975 and is used only with reference to the candidature of the Prime Minister; notwithstanding, based on the parliamentary tradition, confidence-in-the-government voting is also carried out;
 **** The current minority government in Lithuania should be treated as an exceptional case, since in general, the coalition majority governments are formed.

¹⁸ Source: compiled by the author.

Meanwhile, when forming a government in Lithuania, rules inherent in positive parliamentarism are applied. According to Clause 5 of Article 92 of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, a new government shall be empowered to act after the Seimas approves its program by the majority vote of the Seimas participating in the sitting.¹⁹ The logic behind the situation is simple: it is easy for parliamentary majority parties to achieve this, yet in case of absence of such a majority, the formed governing minority – the initiator of the government – has to seek support of other parliamentary parties. Thus, the political parties forming the ruling minority and opposing it, have to agree on such complex issues as the content of the government program, areas of influence and distribution of posts, regulation of interrelations, etc. In other words, in the case of positive parliamentarism, the formation of a minority government is a complicated process and possibilities of its staying in power are rather uncertain. Finally, other institutional and political factors should also be favourable for that.

1.2. The Powers of the President of the Republic in the Government Formation Process

The Lithuanian political system is based on the power division principle. Legislative and executive (as well as judicial) branches are separated yet sufficiently independent and ‘institutional balance’ is sought between them. In 1998, the Constitutional Court pointed out that “...according to the competence of power institutions as stipulated in the Constitution, state governance model of Lithuania is attributed to the governance of a parliamentary republic. Alongside, it is maintained that our state governance form also possesses certain specifics of the so-called mixed (semi-presidential) form of governance. This is reflected in the mandates granted to the Seimas, the Head of State – the President of the Republic, the Government as well as in legal structure of their interrelations.”²⁰

One of semi-presidency features – considerable powers of the president which are generally classified as legislative and non-legislative. On the basis of estimations made by some theorists, it is possible to state that the President of Lithuania is endowed with sufficiently considerable powers to effectively influence the political agenda. Yet, the political practice formed over several years leads to the conclusion that a certain absence of non-legislative powers of the President is felt. Attempts are made to compensate this by expanding the so-called nominal powers, i.e., every time granting the President new prerogatives for nominating top-level officials.²¹

¹⁹ The Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania 1992, Vilnius: Seimas Publishing House of the Republic of Lithuania, 1996, p. 41.

²⁰ The Decision of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania “On the 10 December 1996 Decision by the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania “On the Program of the Government of Lithuania”, *Valstybės žinios*, 1998, No.5.

²¹ Lukošaitis A., “Powers of the President of the Republic of Lithuania and Possibilities for the Realization of Election Promises”, http://www.valsty.be/?name=university&do=o_theme&oId=1&oType=university&fld=12&id=36, 25. 08.2007.

On the other hand, the President seeks to expand his powers by exploiting favourable political circumstances. That is typical of the semi-presidency: the formal powers of the President are influenced by non-formal political circumstances. This relationship with the parliamentary majority and the government supported by that majority serves as an example. After the majority supporting the President is formed in the Parliament, it is possible to expect not only the realization of the formal powers of the President, but also the attempts to realize or even expand his non-formal powers. In case a pro-presidential majority is not formed in the Parliament ('coexistence' regime), the President is left the role of a reactive observer. Yet, the Lithuanian practice of institutional cooperation of several presidents with the Parliament demonstrated that presidents do not intend to put up with this role though. This may manifest itself most clearly, right after elections to the Parliament, at the very beginning of the government formation process.

In Lithuania, the President seeks to influence or even control the process of government formation, primarily in appointing the Prime Minister, selecting, and also approving the candidacies of ministers. Institutional factors as well as the formed constitutional doctrine stipulate that the President must essentially take into consideration the will of the parliamentary majority in appointing the Prime Minister and ministers. However, the President, on the basis of his non-formal political powers, and making use of favourable political circumstances, can have a profound impact on the nomination and approval of candidacies in the Parliament. This happened more than once before, when the President 'would block' the candidacies not acceptable to him; this is what happened when forming governments after the 2004 elections to the Seimas, including the case of the majority government (about this see below, 'Prerequisites of Minority Government Formation' and 'Minority Government Formation: Agreements of Parties and Significance of Opposition Influence').

1.3. The Significance of Party System Factors in the Formation of the Minority Government

The theory of political sciences provides no unanimous opinion on determining party system factors, and positively or negatively affecting minority government formation. Some authors maintain that minority government formation is stimulated by a high voting volatility of electors, high indicators of party system polarization and fragmentation and also some specifics of political culture.²² Other authors claim that such statements are difficult to ground empirically; therefore, absolutely different factors should be estimated. For example, Kaare Strom maintains that previous 'theories of minority governments' have not been proven correct. In his opinion, minority governments are, first of all, a result of a rational choice of party leaders under certain institutional circumstances. Besides, they are usually formed in systems where the parliament opposition is granted great powers regarding the government.²³

²² Strom, (note 7), p. 206 – 208, Green-Pedersen (note 12), p. 10.

²³ Strom (note 3), p. 237-238.

From the theoretical point of view, the Lithuanian case is primarily important in that the majority government was formed in an unstable political system. In recent years, this was confirmed by a high voting volatility of electors, a fluctuating number of relevant parties, changing indicators of the party system polarization and also fragmentation. Finally, it should be pointed out that the dividing lines/breaks in the political conflict of parties have not yet been completely formed.²⁴ Therefore, values-related program provisions of parties are lifeless, during elections and after them parties act by taking into consideration the political conjuncture rather than their commitments to the electors. The underlying motive of the political activity of parties and their leaders has become power positions, but not the implementation of electoral programs and accountability to the electors.

Kaare Strom and Christoffer Green-Pedersen claim that minority governments are formed in unstable political systems – such governments are associated with social and political uncertainty. Also, the formation of minority governments is ‘encouraged’ by a high degree of the polarization and fragmentation of the political system as well as a great number of relevant parties. All these factors signify marked the ideological differences of parties and aggravated the possibilities to make an agreement on the formation of the governing coalition.²⁵

The polarization of the Lithuanian party system has been consistently decreasing over the last ten years; this tendency was confirmed by the results of the parliamentary elections in 2000. A two-pole ‘contraposition’ party system gradually turned into a tripartite system, where moderate centrist powers emerged. It is possible to say that within the party system a socio-economic dividing line began to dominate, thus excluding the communism/anticommunism conflict. In the party system, a ‘centripetal gravitation’ effect made parties mitigate the program extremes of ‘the leftism’ and ‘the rightism’. Confrontational relations between the parties were replaced by competitive ones and a coalitional potential of concrete parties became apparent. Thus, the prerequisites for cooperation between the position and opposition were created.

Clear-cut changes in the fragmentation and the number of relevant parties are also inherent to the development of the party system. For example, between the period of 1992 – 2000, the number of parties functioning in Lithuania was consistently growing, the number of relevant parties also increased. All these changes were undoubtedly determined by a strong variation in elec-

²⁴ State Science and Studies Fund of Lithuania, “Lithuanian political parties: investigation of structural and functional capability”, Vilnius, 2005, , [http://www.tspmi.vu.lt/files/news/partiju%20tyrimas%20\(sant%20rauka%201\).doc](http://www.tspmi.vu.lt/files/news/partiju%20tyrimas%20(sant%20rauka%201).doc), 22.08.2007; Jurkynas M., Ramonaitė A., “The right and the left in Lithuania: misunderstanding between experts and the electorate”, see Jankauskas A., comp., *Lithuania after the elections to the Seimas*, Vilnius: Naujasis lankas, 2005, p. 77.

²⁵ Strom, *ibidem*, p. 205; Green-Pedersen, *ibidem*.

torate voting when choosing parties in the parliamentary elections (see Table 2). It should be pointed out that the voting volatility of electors in Lithuania is one of the highest in all of Europe (by the way, the activeness of electors is, on the contrary, one of the lowest).²⁶

Table 2. The minority government and features of the Lithuanian party system²⁷

Year	Aggregated voting volatility (index)	Number of registered political parties	Number of effective parliamentary parties
1992 m.	20.4	11	3.1
1996 m.	35.9	33	3.2
2000 m.	48.5	39	4.9
2004 m.	50.1	34	6.1

Notes:

(1) aggregated electoral volatility index is derived according to the formula:
$$V = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n |\Delta p_i|}{2}$$
, where V is the electoral volatility index; n – the number of parties participating in the elections; Δp_i – a change in votes between the elections that the party i obtained. About this see: Pedersen M. Electoral Volatility in Western Europe, 1948 – 1977 // Mair P. (ed.). The West European Party Systems. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 197;

(2) the number of effective parliamentary parties is derived according to the formula:
$$N = \frac{1}{\sum p_i^2}$$
, where N is the number of effective parties, p_i – the part of party-obtained votes/seats in the parliament. About this see: Taagepera R., Shugart M. Seats and Votes. New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1989, p. 79.

It is noteworthy that in recent years, when party competition dividing lines essentially change, the electorate finds it difficult to define the objects (causes) of the political conflict and identify themselves with one or another party. Parties unify or even renounce their values-related (program) provisions and in doing so create in the party system a certain state of 'ideological uncertainty' enabling them to behave as conjuncture requires. Thus, party ambitions to represent the interests of the electors are more and more often replaced by other pragmatic priorities that might be primarily related to the control of the 'post-integration' political agenda and opportunities to influence concrete political decisions. Why not, to this end, to make an agreement to form a minority government?

Thus, it is possible to conclude that the minority government in Lithuania

²⁶Christiansen, Damgaard (note 2), *ibidem*.

²⁷ Source: compiled by the author.

was formed under a very high electoral volatility, the great fragmentation of the party system and a consistently growing number of relevant parties. In essence, these indicators define the instability of the party system and, consequently, aggravated the possibilities for the parties to negotiate on forming a parliamentary majority as well as assuming responsibility for the government policy that is being implemented.

2. The Formation and Activity of the Coalition Minority Government

2.1. Prerequisites for the Formation of the Minority Government

After the general elections held in 2004, the composition of the Parliament changed considerably. First of all, electors, as if repeating an unwelcome 'tradition', for the second time in a row squeezed in a party-newcomer, this time the Labour Party, among 'the old-timers' of the party system; also, the rightist Homeland Union considerably strengthened its positions in the Parliament, whereas the positions of the Lithuanian Social Democrat Party and the New Union/Social Liberals, which during the previous term in office in the Parliament formed the ruling majority and consequently the Government, were significantly weakened (*see Table 3*). In general, in comparison with the previous terms in office, the party fragmentation of the Parliament grew considerably: as many as 7 factions with no less than 10 members were established - this had not been the case in any of the previous terms in office.

Table3. Changes in Parliament factions, 2000 – 2004 and 2004 – 2008.²⁸

2000 – 2004 Seimas term in office			2004 – 2008 Seimas term in office		
No.	Name of faction	Number of places (%)	No.	Name of faction	Number of seats (%)
1.	SD coalition	48 (34.0%)	1.	LP	41 (29.0 %)
2.	LLU	33 (23.4)	2.	HU	26 (18.4)
3.	NU/SL	29 (20.6)	3.	LSDP	21 (14.8)
4.	HU/LC	9 (6.4)	4.	LiCU	19 (13.4)
5.	United	8 (5.7)	5.	NU/SL	11 (7.8)
6.	LPP ir NDP	7 (5.0)	6.	LDP	10 (7.0)
7.	Non-factional	7 (5.0)	7.	UPNDP	10 (7.0)

²⁸Source: compiled by the author.

		8.	Non-factional	3 (2.1)
Total	141	Total		141

Note: The data provided refers to the beginning of the parliament term in office.

Abbreviations:

- CDP – Civil Democracy Party
- HU (HU/LC) – Homeland Union (Homeland Union (Conservatives, Political Prisoners and Deportees, Christian Democrats), Homeland Union/Lithuanian Conservatives)
- LiCU (LLU) – Liberal and Centre Union (Lithuanian Liberal Union)
- LP – Labour Party
- LPNU (UPNDP) – Lithuanian Peasants Nationalists Union (Union of Peasants and New Democracy Parties)
- LSDP – Lithuanian Social Democratic Party
- NU/SL – New Union (Social Liberals)
- OaJ – “Order and Justice” (Liberal Democrats)

When the post-electoral negotiations between the parties began, it became obvious at the outset that it would not be easy to form a government. Not a single party in the Seimas had a more substantial majority; any two parties having close programs could not ensure that either. Besides, the building of the coalitional majority in the parliament was complicated by the Labour Party that had received the most electoral support and sought the most important posts in the Parliament and the Government. According to experts in politics, populism is typical of the Labour Party and, as to the essential program provisions and rhetoric of the party leaders it is even a radical anti-systemic party.²⁹ The so-called traditional parties, first of all the LSDP and HU/LC, could not but take this into consideration. What is more, they were supported by President Valdas Adamkus, having a substantial influence on the formation of the Government.

Finally, after the parties considered all possible variants, right after the elections, a ruling coalition consisting of four parties – the LSDP, LP, NU/SL and U PNDP– was formed. The negotiation tactics of the parties was determined not by ‘proportionality’ but by ‘negotiation ability’ principles, i.e., final agreements by parties were determined not by the number of received mandates, but by their negotiation potential. This enabled other parties, first of all the LSDP, to receive more than their share of important posts; what is more important, it managed to take over the government formation initiative from the populist LP (though the latter received four minister portfolios and also rather important posts in the Parliament). It should also be mentioned that coalition governments formed in systems based on ‘negotiating’ tend to more often encounter stability and efficiency problems.

From the structural point of view, the formed ruling coalition was

²⁹ For example, in the 2004 elections to the Seimas, the LP proposed to essentially change the election system, reduce the number of parliament members, create a “termination” mechanism of the national representative mandate, etc.

'inflated' too much (4 parties – coalition partners) and had surplus mandates in the Parliament (80). The inclusion of the populist LP in the ruling coalition automatically programmed ideological disagreements between the partners. As it soon turned out, reasons for that were abundant – ranging from the LP leader Viktor Uspaskich's interest conflicts, scandalous activity of the ministers delegated by the party to the traces of political corruption associated with the activity of the party. All this impeded the work of the coalition Government and had a negative impact on the political stability in the country. Finally, in the spring of 2006, President Valdas Adamkus, not being able to stand it any longer, suggested that the Seimas raised the issue of confidence in the coalition Government. Prime Minister Algirdas Brazauskas, in his turn, claimed that doubts concerning the activity of the Government headed by him were ungrounded, and he accused the opposing forces of lack of responsibility for the situation in the country and, on 1 June 2006, resigned alongside the Government.

Resignation of the Government headed by Algirdas Brazauskas to some extent coincided with the essential changes in the composition of the Seimas. In the Parliament, as never before, an intensive 'party tourism' began, i.e., members of the Parliament started moving from one faction to another. On the basis of the disintegration of the Seimas LP faction, a new Civil Democracy faction was formed in the Parliament.³⁰ When the competitiveness and political weight of the LP decreased (the number of faction members dwindled by nearly fifty per cent) opportunities emerged to form the Government without the participation of this party, probably to even eliminate it for some time from active political life. Yet the question is what other government it is possible to form in the current situation?

2.2. Formation of the Minority Government: Agreements between Parties and the Significance of the Influence of the Opposition

After the resignation of the Government and the collapse of the 'big' coalition, Social Democrats retained the initiative to form a new Government. However, it was only on the second attempt that the Seimas approved of the new party-proposed candidacy for the Prime Minister's post, whereas the first time it had been against the candidacy of the Minister of Finance Zigmantas Balčytis, a patron by the former Prime Minister Algirdas Brazauskas. So, on 4 July 2006, the Seimas approved of another candidacy, that of the Social Democrat Gediminas Kirkilas, thus authorizing him to form a new Cabinet of Ministers (this being the first 'step' of investiture). Having stated that representatives of the LP should not take part in the formation of the new Government, President

³⁰ In general, the tendency of "party tourism" in the Parliament is reflected by these figures: from the beginning of the term in office until 1 October 2007, the total of about 40 or 30 per cent of Seimas members had changed their membership in factions; about 20 or 15 per cent of them correspond to the criteria of a typical "deserter".

Valdas Adamkus openly supported the candidacy of Gediminas Kirkilas. Prior to voting in the Seimas on the Prime Minister's candidacy, the Social Democrats succeeded in building a new coalition, which was comprised of the LSDP, the UPNDP, the CDP and the LCU.³¹

However, this time the formed coalition was that of a minority and had no more than 20 mandates at its disposal. Consequently, it was necessary to ensure support from other parliamentary parties in order to approve the Government program in the Parliament (this was the second 'step' of investiture). Surprisingly enough, the HU, which hitherto was one of the severest critics of Social Democrats and the most influential opposition party, became a supporter of the new coalition.³² It is worth noting that under minority governments it is the influence of opposition parties that grows most considerably and they become strongly integrated into the political governance process (by the way, usually in systems of negative parliamentarism).³³

The HU support, which determined the approval of the Government program by a narrow majority of votes in the Parliament (58 for, 49 against and 2 abstained), was institutionalized by the official documents of the HU and the LSDP agreement.³⁴ They stipulated that the HU will not obstruct "left - centre coalition to form the minority Government" and will not direct interpellation at the Prime Minister or withdraw confidence from the Government and also will not oppose the approval of the State Budget for 2007. The LSDP, in its turn, pledged not to enter into any agreements with the LP and the OaJ, include in the Government program provisions proposed by the HU where, for example, "decisive changes in the fight against corruption are put forth", also a pledge is made to adopt certain amendments to the Seimas Statute so that the posts of the chairmen of some standing committees and commissions ensuring the implementation of parliamentary control (the Committee on Audit, the Anticorruption Commission, Commission on Ethics and Procedures) could be given to the representatives of the opposition.³⁵

Later, on 21 December 2006, the agreement between the LSDP and the HU was supplemented with new provisions and extended. However, on 8 September 2007, the Council of the HU made a decision to stop the support to Social Democrats and the ruling coalition. Thus, the agreement between the

³¹On 01.06.2006 the LSDP and LFNP agreed on cooperation, on 06.06.2006 the CDP joined them and on 16.06.2006 – the LCU.

³²In fact, with the successful functioning of the agreement "mechanism" between the LSDP and the HU, a year after it was made, the issue of the HU status was raised in the Seimas as to what kind of faction – ruling or opposition – it was. More on that see: ELTA, Guardians of Ethics are asked to explain whether the HU Faction is in Opposition, 19 April 2007.

³³Christiansen, Damgaard (note 2), *ibidem*.

³⁴On 02.07.2006 the LSDP and HU signed a protocol agreement on support and on 04.07.2006 provisions of this agreement were finally implemented with mutual consent on the list of mandatory tasks to be performed by the new coalition.

³⁵Eventually, the HU which supported the minority coalition was given the Committee on Audit, the Committee on European Affairs (consequently, the post of the Vice-Chairman of the Seimas) as well as the Health Committee and the Anticorruption Commission.

LSDP and HU on support and coordination of actions lasted over a year.

In terms of Valentine Herman's and John Pope's criteria, the Government of Gediminas Kirkilas can be considered as a coalition (multi-party) minority government supported from 'the outside', whereas according to Kaare Strom, it is not a real but formal minority government because with the support from the HU the coalition had about 60 per cent of mandates in the Parliament.³⁶ Since the HU support to the coalition was expressed *a priori* and formalized, thus, in Kaare Strom's opinion, such minority coalition does not differ in anything from a majority government and can be called an imperfect majority government.³⁷ In other words, it was possible to form such a *formal imperfect majority* only having guaranteed the support from the HU; it was this that ensured certain guarantees of the Government survival and its activity.

So, the essential question is - why the HU made a decision to support the formed minority coalition and the Government? Kaare Strom is convinced that the formation of minority governments is an outcome of party competition; besides, they are most frequently formed after all other possibilities have been exhausted or when such possibilities are simply unavailable. In concrete situations, the determination of parties is a consequence of a rational option or negotiations strategy, whereas other factors, as for example, such features of the party system as polarization or fragmentation, can only stimulate but decide the formation of a minority government.³⁸

In Kaare Strom's opinion, two essential factors (independent variables) determine the rationality of parties or, to be more exact, the rationality of their leaders in making their decision to form a minority government. First, the potential of the influence of the parliamentary opposition on the political agenda (the possibilities of the influence of the opposition are inversely proportional to its desire to take the governance responsibility); second, the decisiveness of election results to the formation of the government (the time in power is directly proportional to losses in the nearest elections). In other words, the stronger the political influence of the opposition and the more significant the election results in the formation of the government, the greater the possibility that a minority government will be formed. Kaare Strom aptly called the power of the opposition to influence political decisions as 'low governance benefit' and the level of party competition in the elections and the importance of their results - 'high governance costs'.³⁹ The essence of both constituent parts is that you govern without being in power.

On the basis of these rational choice criteria, it should be mentioned that the minority Government in Lithuania was formed with the consent of party leaders that all other variants, including a wide left - right 'rainbow', were hardly possible. Another reason why additional problems arose when

³⁶ Herman, Pope (note 3), p. 192; Strom (note 7), p. 204 - 205.

³⁷ Strom, *ibidem.*, p. 204, 222 - 223.

³⁸ Strom, *ibidem.*, p. 207 - 208.

³⁹ Strom, *ibidem.*, p. 210 - 216.

attempts were made to build alternative coalition structures was that the opposition, *de facto* the parliamentary majority, was highly fragmented and ideologically heterogeneous, this also being among the factors ‘stimulating’ the formation of the minority government. Motives for this kind of decision publicly declared by the parties, i.e. the aim to defuse the political crisis and stabilize the situation were not very convincing either. This assessment was more than once confirmed by later inter-party agreements (between the LSDP and the HU) as well as requirements formulated by some of the parties for the coalition partners (the UPNDP and the LiCU): having assessed the existing situation, the parties first of all sought the realization of their own interests and influence on the political agenda.

By the way, referring to forthcoming events, it can be noted that a large part of key issues provided for in the agreement between the LSDP and the HU were never implemented during the period of the activity of the minority Government (for example, in the areas such as the fight against corruption, provisions concerning family policy, issues related to activity of the State Security Department, problems of higher education reforms, etc.).⁴⁰ Thus, it held true that in forming a minority government, alongside other favourable party system factors, parties first of all seek pragmatic ends, i.e. to influence governance and prepare for the nearest elections. The HU was the first to differ from other parties, primarily because not only the fate of the minority government, but also the most important political decisions depended on it.⁴¹ Is it possible to claim that the party ruled without being in power? Undoubtedly, the HU, supporting the minority coalition, was seeking not only short-term but also long-term goals – a victory in the forthcoming elections to the Seimas. It is this fact that draws attention to such factor as a high electors’ vote-changeability in Lithuania. In such a situation, it is more reasonable for the party not to take responsibility for the governance, but to be in opposition to the government; this tactics allows one to expect success in elections.

2.3. Stability and Activity of the Minority Government

The key objective of party activity is power, but not always it is sought immediately; sometimes intermediate objectives, i.e. taking concrete political decisions, are far more important.⁴² In the latter case, parties have only to agree and guarantee the stability of the government, hoping that their interests will be taken into account. Only what kind of impact – positive or negative – such

⁴⁰ It is interesting to note that Gediminas Kirkilas, the Head of the minority Government, promised to resign provided he was not able to reduce the level of corruption in the country in a year. However, when a year later *Transparency International* published the same, i. e. not reduced, Corruption Perception Index (CPI = 4.8), the Prime Minister did not keep his promise to resign.

⁴¹ It is noteworthy that despite having officially withdrawn its support for the LSDP and the ruling coalition in the autumn of 2007, the HU did not refuse the assigned posts in the leadership of the Seimas.

⁴² Strom (note 7), p. 211.

agreements between parties have on other processes of democratic policy?

Among the main tasks for the minority Government in the period of its formation and later were those of the resolution of the crisis and guarantee of political stability. It might be stated that after the formation of the Government, the current problems of the governance crisis were successfully dealt with, and parties also managed to ensure the stability of the Government. In comparison to the former party governments that functioned in Lithuania, the minority Government can be estimated as a stable one. So, in terms of the activity of the Government in days, the minority Government has been functioning longer than many other previous governments (*see Table 4*). Moreover, in terms of the government survival coefficient, which is 35.13 per cent (the coefficient is expressed in per cent comparing the period of the government activity with the entire possible period of its activity), many other governments functioned for a shorter time than the minority Government.⁴³

Table 4. Activity duration of party governments in Lithuania (in days)⁴⁴

No.	Government and its head	Period of Government activity	Activity duration in days	Type of Government	Reason for Termination of Government Mandate
1.	5 th , B. Lubys	17.12.1992 – 31.03.1993	105	provisional coalition majority	Presidential election, return of mandate
2.	6 th , A. Šleževičius	31.03.1993 – 19.03.1996	1.025	one-party coalition	lack of parliamentary support, dismissal of Prime Minister from office
3.	7 th , M. Stankevičius	19.03.1996 – 10.12.1996	266	one-party coalition	election to Seimas, resignation of Government

⁴³ Levin S., “The Minority Government in Lithuania: Analysis of Stability and Efficiency”, the Institute of International Relations and Political Science of Vilnius University, Master’s Degree Thesis under the supervision of Lukošaitis A., 2007, p. 31 – 33.

⁴⁴ Source: compiled by the author.

4.	8 th (and reformed), G. Vagnorius	10.12.1996 – 10.03.1998	874	coalition majority	Presidential election, return of Government mandate
		10.03.1998 – 03.05.1999			critical situa- tion, resignation of Prime Minister
5.	9 th , R. Paksas	10.06.1999 – 11.11.1999	164	coalition majority	critical situa- tion, resignation of Prime Minister
6.	10 th , A. Kubilius	11.11.1999 – 08.11.2000	363	coalition majority	election to Seimas, resignation of Government
7.	11 th , R. Paksas	08.11.2000 – 12.07.2001	246	coalition majority	lack of parli- amentary support, resignation of Prime Minister
8.	12 th (and re- formed), A. Brazauskas	12.07.2001 – 04.03.2003	1.291	coalition majority	Presidential election, return of Government mandate
		04.03.2003 - 13.07.2004			Presidential election, return of Government mandate
		13.07.2004 – 14.12.2004			election to Seimas, resignation of Government
9.	13 th , A. Brazauskas	14.12.2004 – 01.06.2006	533	coalition majority	lack of parlia- mentary sup- port, resigna- tion of Prime Minister
10.	14 th G. Kirkilas	18.07.2006 -	440	coalition minority	?

Explanations:

(1) The first four governments are not considered to be party governments, because from the point of view of parties, the Parliament was not differentiated;

- (2) The period of the government activity is estimated from/to the time the government is given mandate, i.e. from the approval of its program;
- (3) The duration of the activity of the coalition minority government is estimated by 01.10.2007;
- (4) The return of government mandate is differentiated from government resignation (a distinguishing feature of the semi-presidential system in Lithuania).

The minority Government could successfully function mainly because of the favourite political context: a much divided opposition majority opposed it and the level of conflict within the coalition itself was far lower than in the most feasible new alternative coalition. Nevertheless, the ability of the LSDP to guarantee a formal, i.e. institutionalized by written agreements, support from the oppositional HU should be considered the principal factor. *Therefore, it can be regarded [relatively] as a stably supported minority coalition Government.* Minority governments that are capable of guaranteeing a stable support from the opposition are even called *almost majority governments*, thus emphasizing the importance of having constant opposition support. The more so, under the minority government, a tripartite and ideologically and, from the point of view of political activity tactics, a very heterogeneous ‘complicated’ opposition was formed in the Parliament; it was represented by the HU which supported the minority coalition, but, having a favourable opportunity, actively opposed it, and the ideologically amorphous LP and the OaJ.

On the other hand, it is also necessary to note that the stable activity of the Government does not yet imply political stability in a broad sense. The fact that during the rule of the minority Government the parliamentary opposition twice sought a vote of no confidence in the Chairman of the Seimas, five times initiated and discussed interpellations against various ministers is highly indicative of the political atmosphere in the Parliament and political stability at large (by the way, all these initiatives of the opposition were not approved of).

However, in the analysis of the activity of the minority Government the key problem, most probably, is not its stability but rates of its activity effectiveness, productiveness, etc. It is of particular relevance in the post-Soviet Lithuania where processes of public policy are characterized by dynamics, whereas delay in the resolution of urgent problems can cast negative ‘stabilization’ shades. It was not without reason that on 19 April 2007, in his annual report to the Seimas President V. Adamkus pointed out that “today the Government is more concerned about its own survival than about reforms”.

The ‘swampiness’ of the minority Government activity and resolution of problems is proved not only by sluggish reforms in the areas of health care, education system, agriculture, etc., but also some other facts such as unusual tendencies that emerged in the field of lawmaking, some peculiarities of the approval of the State Budget for 2007 as well as the increased influence of particular interest groups in preparing and adopting amendments to concrete laws. In my opinion, the analysis of the listed cases makes it possible to reveal and evaluate certain problems of the minority Government activity.

Earlier statistical data indicated that the influence of governments that functioned in Lithuania on the Seimas lawmaking agenda is fairly limited. This causes certain irrationality of lawmaking agenda, lack of steady single mindedness, and problems with the implementation of the ruling majority programs, etc.⁴⁵ This becomes still more evident in the investigation of the interaction between the Seimas and the minority Government in the lawmaking area; first, the 'success rate' of drafts of legal acts submitted by the Government and adopted by the Parliament significantly decreased in number; second, much more frequently Government drafts 'get bogged' in the Parliament at the discussion stage. For example, during two sessions of the Seimas (5th and 6th) under the minority Government the 'success rate' went down to 56 per cent (still worse was this rate during the 7th session – to 29 per cent). Meanwhile, during all other earlier sessions between the 2004 – 2008 Seimas term in office under the coalition majority Government this rate was approximately 90 per cent and corresponded to the popular '90 per cent' rule existing in the parliamentary practice. Besides, as has already been mentioned, the number of drafts that 'got bogged' at the discussion stage also significantly increased – from 11.7 drafts during 1st – 4th sessions to 97.5 drafts during 5th – 6th sessions.⁴⁶

All data presented make it possible to claim that under the minority Government the lawmaking process markedly slowed down, while the influence of the Government on the agenda of the Parliament became still smaller. At the same time, these data characterize the relations between the Seimas and the Government in the area of lawmaking: the decreasing productivity of Government initiatives pointed to serious problems of the institutional link and cooperation.

Minority governments are ineffective because they tend to increase the Budget deficit in macroeconomic crises or in case they are formed in order to resolve political crises.⁴⁷ When the minority Government was being formed, there were no signs of a macroeconomic crisis in Lithuania; as has been noted, it was formed for the purpose of dealing with certain consequences of the political crisis. It should be pointed out that the minority coalition managed to ensure the support of the oppositional HU after the latter pledged not to hinder the approval of the State Budget for the forthcoming year. A rather faulty practice exists in the Seimas when during the approval of the State Budget parliamentary parties or individual parliamentarians submit numerous amendments to the Budget draft which are useful for the electors of the represented constituencies, certain interest groups, etc. In this way, parties and parliamentarians try to win over the electors which, regrettably, have nothing in common with rational or planned allocation of the budget funds.

⁴⁵ Lukošaitis A., "Institutionalization of the Parliament and the Lawmaking Process: the Lithuanian Case", Vilnius: Vilnius University publishing house, 2005, p. 199 – 209.

⁴⁶ Data provided by the Secretariat of Plenary Sitings of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania and summarized by the author.

⁴⁷ Green-Pedersen (note 12), p. 18; Pech G. "Government Formation. Budget Negotiations and Re-election Uncertainty: The Cases of Minority and Majority Coalition Governments", <http://www.geraldpech.net/papers/relection.pdf>, 25.08.2007.

While analyzing the allocation of the State Budget funds for 2007, a question arises if they were not allocated taking into consideration the fact that the ruling coalition had to achieve certain Government stability guarantees. These guarantees should undoubtedly be related to the HU, the main supporter of the coalition, which had very concrete goals in the forthcoming municipal elections.⁴⁸ What is more, the State Budget for 2007 was approved by the votes of the ruling coalition partners and their supporter – the HU faction.

Estimations show that during the approval of the State Budget for 2007 in the Seimas, it was the proposals of the members of the HU faction that won the greatest support as compared to other oppositional parties (see Table 5).

Table 5. Allocation of 2007 Budget funds according to proposals submitted by factions⁴⁹

No.	Faction that submitted proposals for Budget draft	Amount of funds included in Budget draft	Percentage of funds 'received' by faction from all submitted proposals
1.	Liberal movement faction	3,477,000 Lt	3.4 %
2.	New Union faction	289,000 Lt	0.28 %
3.	Labor Party faction	9,557,000 Lt	9.37 %
4.	'Order and Justice' faction	2,725,000 Lt	2.67 %
5.	Homeland Union faction	19,779,000 Lt	19.4 %
6.	Minority coalition factions	66,065,000 Lt	64.83 %

According to proposals submitted by the HU faction and analyzed by the Parliament, the HU 'received' approximately 20 per cent of all re-allocated Budget funds (according to the proposals submitted by parliamentarians). Bearing in mind that by their proposals other factions 'received' several times smaller Budget funds, an assumption can be made that the HU support to the ruling coalition gave the party tangible short-time perspective or 'intermediate' results, as has already been mentioned. It was of particular importance before the forthcoming municipal elections hoping to gain the favour of electors in concrete constituencies.

On the other hand, what does it have to do with the interests of the entire society and long-term state development strategy? Besides, it is evident that expenditures of the approved State Budget noticeably exceeded revenues (1.4 billion Lt). This is indicative of certain features of the budget deficit, which in

⁴⁸ Elections to municipal councils were held on 25.02.2007. As usual, before every election ruling parties try to "please" electors of constituencies under their control; this time such an opportunity fell on the oppositional HU, on the support of which the approval of the State Budget draft depended (municipalities budgets are included in this draft).

⁴⁹ Levin (note 43), p. 60.

essence, is generally characteristic of all minority governments.⁵⁰ It is no accident that President Valdas Adamkus noticed that Budget expenditures are not related to essential reforms of structural management and restructuralization in the areas of health care and education, and in spite of the increased scope of the Budget, it was formed without the proper evaluation of previous spending experience. Experts on economics also stressed that 'the tradition of the deficit Budget' testifies to the tendency of politicians to ingratiate themselves with their electors at the expense of borrowed funds taking without taking into consideration the economic strategy of borrowing and its expediency.

A well known axiom in the theory of politics states that powers of interest groups are inversely proportional to the powers of proportional government (political power). The functioning of the minority Government provides a good opportunity to make sure of that. The observation of laws adopted and implemented by the Parliament suggests that the activity of interest groups acting in certain business and finance sectors has noticeably increased. Interest groups take advantage of the 'minority' situation and obviously accelerate the process of lawmaking, in this way causing harm to its publicity and transparency. It can be noticed that interest groups try to bypass the Government, which, by the way, in spite of having the main powers of the correction of tax laws at its disposal, has become a certain hostage to the ruling parliamentary minority and its supporter the HU.

In other words, it is possible to state that under the minority Government, interest groups find it more convenient to solve their problems in the divided Parliament rather than the Government. And still more important is the fact that interest groups seek beneficial amendments to laws, 'going' not through the ruling coalition, but making use of the opportunities of the tripartite opposition, trying to 'push' their initiatives either through the oppositional HU, the LP or other factions. For example, this was the case when the Seimas was adopting some amendments to the Law on Value Added Tax and the Law on State Social Insurance.⁵¹ The amendments to the laws that caused controversy within society, were initiated by the representatives of the opposition (the HU and the LP) and provided they had been adopted, the State Budget would not have received hundreds of millions in revenue.⁵² In the first case, attempts were made to institutionalize a value added tax concession (tax return) for importers of new cars, whereas in the second case, it was sought to determine the

⁵⁰ At the end of 2007, i.e. right before the approval of the new State Budget for 2008 in the Seimas, reports appeared that under the minority government the State Budget deficit increased.

⁵¹ The Law on the Amendment to Article 62 of the Law on Value Added Tax of the Republic of Lithuania. Vilnius, 04.07.2006, No XP-1530, http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter/dokpaieska.showdoc_1?p_id=279608&p_query=&p_tr2=, 11.09.2007; the Law on the Amendment to Clause 1 of Article 7 of the Law on State Social Insurance of the Republic of Lithuania. Vilnius, 09.06.2006, No XP-1469, http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter/dokpaieska.showdoc_1?p_id=277771, 11.09.2007.

⁵² Experts estimated that after the adoption of the amendments to the Law on Value Added Tax, the State Budget would have about 100 million Lt revenue loss and after the adoption of the amendments to the Law on State Social Insurance – about 260 million Lt.

so-called tax ceiling of State social insurance, i.e. to exempt people with a high level of income from the compulsory social insurance tax. In both cases, interest groups which were concerned with the amendments (for example, importers and sellers of cars, leasing companies, also organizations representing foreign investors, the Association of Lithuanian Banks, etc.) did not try to conceal their aims and actively influenced legislators.

Obviously, such interest groups in the first place seek economic benefit or profit and do not care what part of the revenue the State Budget will lose and, consequently, what harm will be done to the activity priorities declared by the Government, such as reduction in social disparity, pay raise for state employees and pensioners, more equal tax distribution for physical and juridical persons, etc. So, the decision of the Seimas to adopt amendments to the Law on Value Added Tax was opposed by the President of the Republic who, having assessed the harsh intervention of interest groups in the lawmaking area, vetoed the law (the Seimas, in its turn, taking a decision on the further fate of the returned law, took President's opinion into account and decided to consider the law not adopted). Meanwhile, the Seimas approved of the amendments to the Law on State Social Insurance after their submission; however, after the Government expressed a negative opinion, the draft 'got bogged' in Seimas committees.

More examples can be provided to confirm the fact that interest groups, acting not through the ruling minority and the Government supported by it, but through the divided majority opposition can essentially change the content of the Parliament agenda as well as the priorities of the Government activity. It is essential that in this way the hardly implementable financial commitments are imposed upon the Government, which, by the way, in the second half of its activity became the main reason, which raised doubts about the Government's survival and, at the same time, perspectives of political stability.⁵³

How should the activity of the first minority Government in Lithuania be estimated? The question is not simple, or more so not a rhetorical one. After over a year of the Government's activity, it is evident that representatives of the

⁵³ For example, on 04.07.2007, ignoring the positions of both the Government and the Chairman of the Committee on Social Affairs and Labour of the Seimas, the Seimas approved of the proposal of the opposition to considerably increase salaries for State politicians, judges, state officials and civil servants. The cost of this decision amounted to almost 900 million Lt. *About that see:* The Law on the Basic Position-based Salary for State Politicians, Judges, State Officials and Civil Servants to be applied from 2008. Vilnius, 04.07.2007, No. X-1270, http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter/dokpaieska.showdoc_1?p_id=301974, 20.08.2007; another example: on 27.09.2007, after a discussion the Seimas approved of amendments to some laws submitted by the opposition obligating to pay pensioners part of the unpaid pension which had to be paid some years ago (a total of 560 million Lt). Prime Minister G. Kirkilas immediately claimed that having adopted the discussed amendments, the Government would not be able to shoulder such financial burden and would resign. *About that see:* On the Unpaid Part of State Social Insurance Pensions of the Republic of Lithuania... Vilnius, 27.09.2007, No. XP-227(2), http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter/dokpaieska.showdoc_1?p_id=272972, 27.09.2007; On the Approval of the State Social Insurance Fund Budget for 2007... Vilnius, 27.09.2007, No. XP-2200, http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter/dokpaieska.showdoc_1?id=296743, 27.09.2007.

ruling coalition themselves still believe in their possibilities for further activity.⁵⁴ As has been mentioned, the oppositional HU, a supporter of the minority Government, withdrew its support for the ruling coalition in the autumn of 2007. Meanwhile, it seems that President Valdas Adamkus in his assessment of the minority Government, lacked consistency – the Government was either supported (“for the sake of that stability”) or criticized (for the ineffectiveness of its activity).⁵⁵

Probably, the most objective assessment of the formed political conjuncture was given by the Seimas itself in the discussion of the report on the Government annual activity. Thus, after several discussions of the annual report and postponements of a decision on this issue, the Seimas decided... not to take any decision on the Government activity report!⁵⁶ It was for the first time that the Parliament – extensively fragmented, with an unstable party structure and without a united opposition – was not able to take any decision on the assessment of the activity of the Government. Consequently, such an assessment made by the Seimas can be considered as an indirect statement that the coalition minority Government can further exist. However, does it mean that it can work normally too?

Conclusions

The rules of positive parliamentarism (Government investiture) applied in Lithuania are not favourable for the formation of a minority government. However, other, political factors made it possible for political parties to ignore institutional logic and form a minority Government, justifying this as seeking political stability. Among such factors are, first of all, of a high voting volatility for electors, and an extensive fragmentation of the party system and the Parliament as well as a large number of relevant parties. Besides, the opinion of the Head of State, President Valdas Adamkus, and the representatives of the most influential party elite were favourable to the formation of a minority Government.

From the theoretical point of view, the value of the study of the Lithuanian case lies in the fact that it can substantially supplement concepts of the

⁵⁴ On the other hand, in the spring of 2007, the Social Democrats themselves initiated a draft on the dismissal of the Seimas and early elections; however, after the draft was submitted, the Parliament did not approve of it. This “move” was assessed as controversial, firstly, as a sign showing how difficult it was for the minority Government to work, and secondly, as pressure on the Conservatives supporting the Social Democrats. *About that see:* Submission of the draft decision (No. XP-2142) of the Seimas “On Early Elections to the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania”, 03.04.2007, http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter/w5_sale.bals?p_bals_id=19397, 15.09.2007.

⁵⁵ The Annual Report by President V. Adamkus (2007), <http://www.president.lt/file/metinis2007.pdf>, 10.08.2007; ELTA, *V. Adamkus: Any instability in the Government would certainly not help us*, 17 April 2007; ELTA, *President believes in the success of the minority Government*, 12 July 2007.

⁵⁶ Adoption of the Seimas draft resolution (XP-2225) “On the Report on the Government Activity for 2006”, 07.06.2007, http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter/w5_sale.bals?p_bals_id=19805, 15.09.2007.

theory of the rational choice of minority governments that was created by Kaare Strom and other authors. First, attention should be drawn to the fact that the minority Government was formed in an unstable party system; second, the formed coalition minority Government in Lithuania is a typical example of the so-called formal and imperfect majority. Of no less importance is the fact (third) that the formation of the minority Government and its relatively stable activity is an unprecedented case (and instructive experience) in the modern parliamentarism history of Lithuania.

The 'complicated' results of 2004 parliamentary elections may be considered as the principle prerequisite for the formation of the minority Government, whereas the highly fragmented composition of the Parliament and unstable party composition as their consequence. Splitting of the parliamentary factions and very active party 'deserters' not long after the elections made it possible to essentially change the proportions of political influence in the Parliament; consequently, opportunities to build a new ruling minority coalition appeared. There are two key preconditions for the survival of the minority Government: ideologically tripartite and divided parliamentary opposition and formalized support of the oppositional HU for the LSDP, and hence for the whole minority coalition.

According to Kaare Strom's Valentine Herman's and John Pope's criteria, the formed minority Government can be characterized as a formal imperfect majority government. The HU support enabled the ruling coalition to ensure a critical majority of votes in the Parliament guaranteeing relative political security. On the other hand, the circumstances of the minority Government formation, the relations between the HU and the ruling coalition partners and concrete decisions taken in the Parliament under the minority Government make it possible to conclude that this decision – to form the minority Government – was a rational calculation of political parties. It enabled the parties, primarily the HU and the LSDP, to seek both short-term (taking concrete and pragmatically motivated decisions) and long-term (to retain the control of the political agenda and prepare for the nearest elections) goals.

During the governance of the ruling coalition and the Government supported by it, essential changes in the lawmaking agenda of the Parliament and the lawmaking process in general can be observed. First of all, it was confirmed that under the minority Government, the lawmaking agenda lacked rationality, and the lawmaking process in the Parliament slowed down. It is obvious that 'the minority situation' is useful to interest groups that seek particularistic goals that often have nothing in common with society interests. Moreover, interest groups seek their goals using the opportunities of the opposition rather than those of the ruling coalition. This caused the initiation, discussion and even adoption of a numerous law drafts in the Parliament which were not coordinated with the Government program. And again, it preconditions certain irrationality of the Parliament work, whereas the minority Government finds it more difficult to implement the approved activity program. All this has a negative impact on the process of public policy in general.

Finally, attention should be drawn to what has not been dealt with in this article. First, the minority Government was formed in the democracy by no means based on principles of consensus or in a stable political system where actors – political parties easily recognizable to electors – ‘play’. Non-civicism of political culture and the increase in the absenteeism of electors, vagueness of the dividing lines of the political conflict and indefiniteness of political identity of political parties, weakness of political practice traditions in the relations between the ruling majority and the opposition, unabated populism of parties and ‘post-integration’ period of self-awareness – all these phenomena and processes will be influenced to a greater or lesser extent by the minority Government which was formed in 2006 and acted in Lithuania for a rather long period of time. The fact of its formation was unusual, but, as they say, you get used after the first time. Hopefully, the consequences of this institutionally illogical experiment, i.e. impact on democracy, political culture, relations between power institutions and parties, will not be unusual in the same way. At any rate, the formation of the minority Government and its activity is a new and valuable experience in democratic politics.

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