

Political reconsideration of the Soviet past: attitudes and actions of the Lithuanian elites

Matonyte, Irmina

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Matonyte, I. (2013). Political reconsideration of the Soviet past: attitudes and actions of the Lithuanian elites. *Baltic Region*, 3, 86-97. <https://doi.org/10.5922/2079-8555-2013-3-9>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Free Digital Peer Publishing Licence zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den DiPP-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:

<http://www.dipp.nrw.de/lizenzen/dppl/service/dppl/>

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a Free Digital Peer Publishing Licence. For more information see:

<http://www.dipp.nrw.de/lizenzen/dppl/service/dppl/>

HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION

POLITICAL RECONSIDERATION OF THE SOVIET PAST: ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS OF THE LITHUANIAN ELITES

*I. Matonyte**



Different political elite groups of post-communist Lithuania offer different accounts of the Soviet past. Even twenty years later, after the collapse of communism Lithuanian politicians (with the exception of certain conservative anti-nostalgic leaders allied with some populists) still do not have a unified and coherent view on the Soviet political and social practices, truths, and methods. However, conservatives are very consistent in their restrictive views about the past and are willing to engage in propagating decision-making that prevents them from repeating the actions of the past. Social democrats, liberals, and populists are much more internally divided and tend to display lukewarm attitudes towards the Soviet past and its political reconsideration. Yet, the present analysis of the adopted laws and public policies, alongside a study on the attitudes of political elites make it possible to conclude that anti-nostalgia, the negative assessment of the Soviet lifestyle, criticism of it and attempts to keep the former Soviet decision makers out of Lithuania's public administration are key ways of treating the past in Lithuania. All efforts to accommodate a more permissive attitude towards the Soviet past and civil servants whose career began under the Soviets do not find much support within the Lithuanian elite.

Key words: political elite, memory, anti-nostalgia, collective identity, Soviet past

* ISM University of Management and Economics
18, Arkliu Str., Vilnius, LT — 01129,
Lithuania

Submitted on March 11, 2013.

doi: 10.5922/2079-8555-2013-3-9

© Matonyte I., 2013

1. Introduction: political action and memory

Memory has become an increasingly important analytical category for historians, sociologists, cultural theorists, marketing managers, and political scientists.

The narrative and representation, two major building blocks of memory, yield ample interpretations and insights about elite's and popular culture, provide agency to ordinary people and political leadership when it comes to understanding the past and projecting the future, contribute to the structuring of social identities and expand the public spheres trans-nationally.

Scholars have variously sought to explain the rise of interest in the past, memory, commemoration, and nostalgia in contexts ranging from consumer promotion, popular culture, interior and exterior design as well as the rise of compensations, apologies, and other forms of redress in domestic and international politics. Answers have included the decline of the nation-state as a carrier of collective identity, the end of faith in progress, the rise of multiculturalism, and post-modernity in general.

Some intellectuals have gone so far as to claim that memory is the new paradigm of history, overpowering and restructuring other frames of reference like class and gender [17]. The fall of communism and its ensuing social transformations are major historical events that further increased political and intellectual interest in the studies of memory. In post-communist Europe, of which Lithuania is a part, the complexity of the present-day situation, as well as its success, promises, disappointments, and hopes makes people rethink the recent past. Consequently, political elites in the region tend to address the issue of memory. Democratic regimes respect freedom of consciousness, speech and association as well as uphold the principle of free and fair elections. By doing so they create conditions that are essential for the emergence of historical memories that are analytically distinguishable from ideology, propaganda, and half-truths.

Historical memory is a form of social memory in which a group constructs a selective representation of its own imagined past. Historical memory may legitimate or challenge the status quo, teach a lesson, validate a claim, consolidate an identity, or inspire action — that is, it typically has a social or political purpose. It is important to emphasize that in any society there is no single historical or collective memory, but rather there are as many stories and feelings about the past as there are social or political groups vying for power.

Therefore the researcher's interest should encompass the actors and practical uses to which elements of the past can be put for current political ends. As Heisler forcefully argues, 'the current politics of the past deals with history, engages memory, and may invoke aspects of identity, but, in fact, it is a practical matter that unfolds in the present' [5, p. 201]. In a similar vein, Kratochwil in the Machiavellian tradition eloquently states that the 'politics is inherently practical since it deals with doing the right thing at the right time in view of the particular historical circumstances' [6, p. 6]. Heisler concludes that the researcher's task is 'less the determination of the bases in history of the attacks on particular positions, or which constructions of the memories of particular actions or events should prevail, than of the practical uses to which elements of the past can be put for current political ends' [5, p. 201].

Historical memories related to national or cultural trauma is a particular battlefield for members and non-members of imagined communities [for

instance, in the early 1990s American Lithuanians were very active in demonizing Soviet *nomenklatura*], high- and low-status groups, and holders of a particular value orientation or political identity and their detractors. Smelser defines cultural trauma as a memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation that is laden with negative affect, represented as indelible, and regarded as threatening a society's existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions [11]. In order to be overcome, cultural trauma must be 'understood, explained and made coherent through public reflection and discourse' [4, p. 2]. The cultural trauma in question is the 50-year long Soviet occupation of Lithuania.

Past cultural traumas might lead to positive and ethically constitutive stories that are more likely to integrate collectivities. Such narratives and the institutional arrangements, which support them, evolve over time, reflecting changing social, economic, political, and other conditions or the political exigencies. The updating, re-loading or revising of the narratives and institutional arrangements related to the management of the past are most commonly elite-driven. Formal and unofficial political leaders are important in the construction and reconstruction of ethically constitutive messages; in fact, they are *political* leaders in part because of their roles in articulating such responses [12, p. 42—43].

Political elites in this enterprise, however, meet an unpleasant challenge: the frequent need to integrate morally repugnant chapters from the past. It appears that most people would be more strongly motivated, rather than alienated, if they saw their political identities as partly constituted by histories displaying both good and bad elements [12, p. 160]. However, such positive attitudes towards lessons of the past are not at all self-evident. After all, there is no guarantee that former Soviet collaborators and passive bystanders, whose tacit complicity made the Soviet system possible, in the post-communist circumstances would be able to resist the temptation to have a comfortable career at the expense of, once again, damaging the society by the weakness of their own moral views. Bauman warns that awareness of the Evil, the knowledge that the unimaginable is possible, seems to have made the Evil more, rather than less likely [1]. In post-communist societies, hypocrisy is rampant, and lying (if silence is impossible) proves to be the most rational way of dealing with unpleasant facts. Paradoxically, positive self-concepts can be maintained in the face of betrayals of the principles on which they are based. Elites lie in their attempts to sustain the belief that they are virtuous in the minds of those they lead; as a result, they lie 'not only to others but also to themselves, with their everyday evasions, and the veil they draw over the more ugly features of the world they have made' [16, p. 42].

In this study, we look at how the conflict-laden past is used in public discourse and in political competition in Lithuania during more than twenty years after the breakdown of the Soviet rule. We mainly examine rhetorical use of the past. The study of the institutional arrangements designed to bring some order to the study of memory and the analysis the attitudes of parliamentary candidates (2008) show that political projects

related to the Soviet past constitute an important part of the political capital of those who aspire to legislative office. Indeed, in the Lithuanian politics, the growing distance from the Soviet times (laden with the cultural trauma) does not diminish the scope and the depth of the political saliency of the Soviet past. Rather, the time factor is important in another (cyclical) manner: the issues of the Soviet past compellingly re-emerge in the public domain during electoral campaigns.

It happens because an electoral campaign in democracies is a high season in the continuum of the process of political communication, occasionally challenged by other events, worth of increased political mobilization, public interest and media coverage. It is widely argued that the success of any electoral campaign depends on the mobilization effect, which it generates. Political mobilization techniques, themes and traps are very important in the Lithuanian politics: for instance, public opinion polls show that more than one third of voters in Lithuania make their voting decisions during the electoral campaign [20]. Longitudinal data also show that the share of the Lithuanian voters who decide about their electoral choice during the campaign is increasing over years of the democratic elections [13, p. 15].

2. Four patterns of discourse about the Soviet past in Lithuania

Individual and group memories, like individual and group identities, are products of active creation, not passive inheritance; through selective remembering and forgetting, people construct out of the randomness and fragmentation of human experience comprehensible stories in which past events cumulatively determine present existence and provide signposts to guide future action [2]. In terms of discursive practices, Velikonja proposed a four-fold typology of how people in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) today see and deal with their decades under communism [15].

The first way of dealing with that troubled past is renunciation — *anti-nostalgia*. In Lithuania (and in most of CEE) the dominant public discourse completely blacks out the communist time. New ideologies of nationalism, liberalism, conservatism are created and developed on the basis of a complete condemnation of everything related to the Soviet period. A quantitative topographic discourse analysis, based on codified data from the Lithuanian Language Dictionary (which includes texts published in 1994—2003 and contains more than 1000 million words) reveals that some nostalgic notions (such as *communist model*, *return to the past*, *good old times*, *Soviet system*) occur only in Lithuanian belles-lettres and the mass-media and are mostly associated with humoristic positions [7, p. 406].

Anti-nostalgic political attitudes are pro-active and are aimed at combating conformism and the passive escapism of people who cannot (or do not want to) adapt to new conditions, but prefer to live in a prolonged yesterday. There are many public policy instruments adopted in post-communist Lithuania that cater to an anti-nostalgic mood. In the early 1990s, the Lithuanian *Seimas* adopted several legislative acts, pertinent to retroactive and transitional justice, such as the law on restitution of real-estate, the lus-

tration law which banned former collaborators of the Soviet secret services from high-ranking positions in public service and in the educational system of independent Lithuania¹; the amendments to the electoral law requiring candidates to inform voters about their past collaboration with the KGB; the law on compensation of damage resulting from the USSR occupation was adopted on 13 June 2000², etc.

From its very inception in the early 1990s, the Center for Resistance and Genocide Studies has contributed much to forging anti-nostalgic moods in Lithuania (long-time director of the Center, historian Dalia Kuodyte, served her first mandate in the Lithuanian *Seimas* during 2008—2012 as a member of *Sąjūdis* and was running for re-election in 2012). Through its publications, conferences and public statements, notions of victimization, traumatizing history, psychology of transference, etc. have been introduced into the Lithuanian academic and public discourses.

The second way to deal with the Soviet past is *amnesia* that imposes silence about everything that happened before the breakdown of the Soviet rule. Public discourse in CEE commonly displays metaphors related to this, such as the spring of nations, democratic awakening, (belated) Europeanization, the new start, etc. The emerging social-democratic discourse in CEE frequently uses this strategy of amnesia in its attempts to avoid the stigma attached to the communist regime, which allegedly espoused a radical version of social-democratic values. Amnesia tactic is also embraced by many aspirants to political power across the entire political spectrum in CEE: many ambitious peo-

¹ The Lustration commission in Lithuania has been created in the early 90s and functioned as defined in art. 4 of the Lustration Law, forbidding former KGB collaborators to have decision making positions in public service and educational sphere (actual version of the Law is adopted in 1999). The Commission was composed of 5 persons (1 delegated by the State Procurator, 2 delegated by the Department of State Security and 2 delegated by the Center of genocide and resistance studies), its composition was approved in the *Seimas*, it was accountable to the Director of the Department of State Security, it functioned as a public interest organization (its members were not paid) and it supervised the implementation of the Lustration Law, i. e. represented the State in court trials, when anybody challenged the fact of his/her former collaboration with the Soviet security services. The Commission was disbanded in 2010, since the moratorium period established by law expired in 2009.

² It is quite natural that the Lithuanian conservatives (in charge of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the governmental coalition) in the early stages of the 2012 parliamentary electoral campaign renewed the diplomatic efforts, aimed at implementation of this particular law. It follows from the preamble of the law that under Lithuanian constitutional law no state organ or official can declare a waiver of the claim for Russia's responsibility because the law is based on and aims at implementation of the corresponding decision by the 14 June 1992 national referendum that demanded to seek reparation for the Soviet occupation. Therefore the waiver can be declared only by other referendum. To keep the claim for responsibility of another state admissible and valid, when it is being unresolved a long time, the injured state should do everything it can reasonably do to maintain the claim. Therefore, the law obliged the government to seek constantly the compensation for the damage caused by the Soviet occupation. [18, p. 52—53].

ple are in one way or another touched by the previous communist regime and therefore omissions in one's personal biography might help diminish the political vulnerability of the candidate and promote them to a decision-making position [8]. Evidently, in the context of the dominant anti-nostalgic pattern that prevails in the region, amnesia is not relevant to dissident activities or other anti-Soviet engagement. However, given the tremendous differences in shares of what is to be forgotten (collaboration in the Soviet times) and what is to be glorified (anti—Soviet resistance), tensions related to historical memory and reconciliation in Lithuania are big and chances to knowingly overcome some touchy elements in personal biographies of political aspirants are minimal (in her 2009 electoral campaign, Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaite unsuccessfully used the strategy of amnesia in relation to her studies of political economy in Leningrad in the 1970s and her career in the Vilnius Higher Party School in the 1980s).

The third method used by the post-communist societies to deal with their past is *historical revisionism*, which is, on the one hand, a reinterpretation of the Soviet past as something completely alien to CEE (and Russia) or, on the other hand, revealing the positive contributions of the Soviet system to the formerly agrarian societies of the region. One group of revisionists claims that Soviet rule and the Soviet system were merely imposed by a handful of (local) Bolsheviks, whose power was based on the use of terror and repression against the majority of the population, or — as in the case of Baltic countries — was established as a result of an international conspiracy (they refer to the secret protocols of the 1939 Soviet-German non-aggression agreement³).

Another group of revisionists tries to justify the pro-Soviet engagement by the generation of individuals born in the 1940—50s, who did not have any other options for having a full social life aside from teaming up with the handful of devoted communists sent by Moscow to supervise and impose the Soviet regime in their country.

Finally, the fourth approach to the Soviet past is *nostalgia*, an uncritical glorification of those Soviet times and experiences no matter what they were really like. Nostalgic moods in CEE have been reflected in sociological survey data since the very beginning of the post-communist transition. The 1992 parliamentary elections in Lithuania were a great surprise: they put former communists back in power. Sociologist Gaidys showed that the political preferences of Lithuanian voters can be reasonably well predicted by the level of their appreciation (or apprehension) of Soviet times: people who think that 'Life was better under the Soviets' score significantly higher on their intentions to vote for the ex-communist party (social democrats) than those who disagree with this statement and intend to vote for nationalist, liberal or conservative parties [3]. However, as alluded to above, in Lithuania the social-democratic party espouses rather anti-nostalgic or amnesiac patterns of collective memory in its public stances, and therefore the mass public's association of this party with Soviet nostalgia is even more extraordinary.

³ I. e. the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

In order to accurately capture the paradox of popular Soviet nostalgia we should bear in mind that *none* of the Lithuanian parties or individual politicians explicitly refer to Soviet nostalgia in their attempts to win electoral support. However, in a series of qualitative interviews and public opinion surveys, political scientist Ramonaite demonstrated that the Lithuanian people (irrespective of their social position) who feel some nostalgia for the Soviet times tend to favor pragmatist versus normative politics [10]. They also take less of a moralistic stance towards politicians and civil servants. Nostalgic Lithuanians are distinctive in terms of their party preferences, but they do not necessarily favor the ex-communist social democrats; they also like populist parties [10, p. 101]. In short, nostalgic people are concentrated among the most socially vulnerable groups. Their nostalgia is in fact a retrospective utopia, a wish and a hope for a safe world, a fair society, and well-being in general. Soviet nostalgia as such proves to be not so much an ideological effort to celebrate the Soviet past as it was, but rather an amorphous wish to transcend the (difficult) present.

Meanwhile, this bottom-up nostalgic culture because of its strong affective appeal is widely used in the culture industries, aiming to open new commercial niches, to win popular support, to get artistic inspiration, and so on [14].

It is worthwhile to underline that the new discipline of visual studies expands the notion of *discourse* to include the public sphere where the issues are not only pronounced and deliberated, but also where they are displayed visually and invite to experience them with their aesthetic, psychological, affective effects. The ability to render the world visible and invisible is a concrete form of power. With its law forbidden use of Soviet symbols in public space, Lithuania is the only post-communist country trying to trim down the visual scope of its culture of nostalgia by overtly political means. The Lithuanian civil code bans the public display of Soviet (and Nazi) symbols and prohibits their sale, except for as antiquarian items.

To sum up, versions of the Soviet past that emerge in public discourse, social practices, and cultural heritage, and the extent it does, depends on many factors and tells us much about the constitution and tendencies of Lithuanian society. At any rate, memories of the Soviet period provide agency to ordinary people and even more so to political elites, whose different ways of interpreting the past continuously re-establish themselves and interact with one another.

3. Political elites and lack of ideological coherence

The previous section amply demonstrates that Lithuanian elites are very much aware of the fact that memory is a source of political contestation. Political leadership thrives on discursive and institutional opportunities to reshape or renegotiate the recent past. Therefore, it is only natural that the discussion of memory might become a forum for particularly intensive and noticeably structured political contestation.

Our inquiry into patterns of political debates related to political management of the Soviet past is based on the data from the Lithuanian web-site

www.manobalsas.lt, which was developed on the basis of a similar study in Switzerland (*www.smarvote.ch*). The web-site has been since 2007 and offers on-line questionnaires to anyone who wanted to check the proximity of their views to their desired party representative. The questionnaires are separately presented for each election (to the *Seimas* in 2008, to the European Parliament in 2009, for President of Lithuania in 2009, and to the Parliament in 2012). The questionnaire uses a scale to identify to what extent the respondent agrees (or does not agree) with a certain way of managing historical memory (4 — strongly agree; 3 — somewhat agree; 2 — somewhat disagree; 1 — strongly disagree) [9]. Let us focus on the attitude of elites to the Soviet past: the former KGB employees and reservists, the ban on Soviet symbols, and open access to the KGB archives⁴. It is worth noting that the issue about the KGB reservists (the fact of their inclusion on election lists) was the most urgent (politically sensitive) in the course of the 2012 campaign. The research shows that political candidates have strong opinions about issues related to the political interpretation of the Soviet past. The most numerous ‘no opinion’ responses (11 out of 333) were on the question about banning the Soviet symbols. The other three questions generated only 2—4 ‘no opinions’ each. The obtained data show that conservative⁵ candidates advocate the most restraining and condemnatory attitudes towards the Soviet past and definitively support the strict preventive political management of collective memories.

In the second place to the conservatives on a broadly restrictive position is the populist camp⁶ (in 2008 parties TT and TPP, in 2012 the activists of the former TPP are running with liberals). Yet, highly restrictive views towards the Soviet past are not espoused by the representatives of the anchor party (DP) of the camp of Lithuanian populists. The representatives of the DP diverge strongly among themselves and therefore the party as a group converges to zero in its attitudes on the memory items. Somewhat unexpect-

⁴ The questions were as follows:

1. Do you agree that there must be certain restrictions on employment in civil service and education for individuals who previously collaborated with the Soviet secret services? [A law on this was adopted in 1990].

2. Do you agree that former KGB reservists should be banned from holding important decision-making positions in the state? [In 2007 there were several initiatives for passing such a law; however, each one failed to garner a parliamentary majority].

3. Do you approve of the ban on Soviet symbols? [A law on this was adopted in 2008].

4. Do you agree that the archives of the Soviet secret services should be made be accessible without any restrictions?

⁵ Conservatives TS-LKD+ [this party group label includes candidates from Homeland Union/Lithuanian Christian Democrats TS-LKD, Lithuanian Center Party LCP, and the nationalist party “Young Lithuania” JL; in 2008 N= 75].

⁶ Populists DP+, TPP and TT [this party group label includes candidates from the Labor Party and Labor Youths Party DP+, the National Revival Party TPP, and the party “Order and Justice” TTP; in 2008 N= 67].

edly, it appears that a big part of the populist politicians in Lithuania are very consistent in their restrictive attitudes towards both, general bans and blaming the Soviet era, as well as lustration of former Soviet collaborators.

The social-democrats⁷ are concentrated on the lower end of the scale of all four memory issues. Yet the social-democrats also display very lukewarm attitudes, as they rarely take strong positions and are not strongly opposed to the lustration of former Soviet collaborators, the opening of Soviet archives, and bans on the public display of Soviet symbols. Interestingly, the passing away of long-time leader of Lithuanian social-democrats, former First Secretary of the Communist Party in Soviet Lithuania, Algirdas Brazauskas (1932—2010) did not produce any major revisions in the lukewarm attitudes towards the Soviet past of the social-democratic elites campaigning in 2012.

The liberals⁸ are similarly lukewarm in their support of restrictive measures related to the past and rarely display strong opinions on any of the selected issues. The liberals are much less dichotomously structured than expected in their attitude towards the ban on the use of Soviet symbols. To some extent, in their tepid views on this issue, they show their disapproval of the existing law. In that respect, the Lithuanian liberals come close to the lukewarm social-democrats.

The candidates of another marginal party (NS) were the only ones to have strong (negative) opinions on all four selected issues in 2008. Their subsequent electoral failure in 2008 might be (partially) explained by their strong (permissive, amnesiac) stances towards the Soviet past, as this position in the field of memory is seemingly unattractive to Lithuanian voters. It is quite indicative that in 2012 the NS merged with the liberals and started to present 'no opinion' on the memory related issues.

To sum up, in 2008 and in 2012 there were (and there still are) some discernible party-related patterns that one can observe in the distribution of politicians' attitudes towards the past and its residues in contemporary Lithuanian politics. The conservatives and some Lithuanian populists express rather coherent anti-nostalgic stances. On the other extreme, amnesiac attitudes are exceptionally marginal. Yet, other political parties in Lithuania are not that clearly structured either ideologically or discursively. The social-democrats and liberals have lukewarm views on issues of memory. The liberals display a slightly conservative (anti-nostalgic) bias but do not support such strong as banning the public display of Soviet symbols. Neither liberals nor social-democrats in Lithuania display an unprincipled permissiveness (historical revisionism) or broad-minded approach (amnesia) towards the Soviet past. The dominant line of the social-democrats' reasoning reflects their belief in the salutary political and social *reconciliation* of different

⁷ Social-democrats LSDP+ [this party group label includes candidates from the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party LSDP, Political party "Frontas," and Lithuanian Social Democratic Union LSP; in 2008 N= 53].

⁸ Liberals LiCS+LRLS [this party group label includes candidates from the Liberal Movement of the Republic of Lithuania LRLS, and Liberal and Centre Union LiCS; in 2008 N= 77].

groups with their complex past and with their troubled approaches to the Soviet regime. Liberals tend to place the accent on the passage of time and believe that specially-enacted restrictive laws will eventually become obsolete. The Lithuanian populists bifurcate into two groups. One group, in proper populist manner, reflects the real *pot-pourri* of attitudes related to Soviet symbols and KGB archives and laws concerning KGB collaborators and reservists. However, there are very few populists who overtly stand against banning Soviet (and Nazi) symbols and against opening the secret archives for public access. In conservative manner, many populist politicians consider legal restrictions taken against former collaborators with the Soviet regime to be necessary and appropriate.

On the one hand, post-communist Lithuanian elites are rather strict when issuing verdicts of guilty and punishing individuals (and by doing so, they diminish the chances to impersonally distribute guilt across the entire society). Even Lithuanian liberals do not have much difficulty translating the discourse of lustration into laws, of retroactive justice which bases its legitimacy upon moral and ethical arguments and proceeds from an illiberal presumption of guilt.

On the other hand, Lithuanian elites are sensitive to the visualization⁹ and objectification of the Soviet experiences and memories. The elites try to rationally and convincingly educate and inform people about the Soviet past and to limit other sources of possible social learning that are less easy to control (because they relate to aesthetics and play upon affect and sentiments, as well as on collective imaginary and myths).

4. Conclusions

Memory is not located in the mind of individual actors, but rather it exists in the public discourse and messages produced by political contestation. From the feminist agenda, we are aware of the consciousness-raising techniques and the development of the self, which are inconceivable outside a politically and symbolically structured social context. Post-communist discursive approaches and institutional practices related to the management of the Soviet past resemble the feminists' aims to liberate an individual from a distorted identity formation (be it by the Soviet ghosts that permeate society or by male-dominated cultures).

Several stories about the Soviet times are constructed and displayed by different political elite groups in post-communist Lithuania. There is no elite consensus on that matter even twenty years after the breakdown of communism. With the partial exception of conservative anti-nostalgic leaders (allied

⁹ On that account, obsession to 'control the uncontrollable', to exercise power in the domain of visual, the Lithuanian elites are perhaps unique in the post-communist region. The Law of political campaigning (adopted in June 2008) completely forbidding political TV ads and allowing visual political publicity to be displayed only on specially designated public stands was revised and most of visual political campaign interdictions have been lifted since September 30, 2010.

with some populists), the Lithuanian political elite does not clearly cluster into any political clubs with coherent views towards Soviet practices, truths, and arts. The other political camps (social-democrats, liberals and populists) are much more internally divided and tend to display lukewarm attitudes towards the Soviet past and its political management.

Our study does not permit us to empirically demonstrate that the homogenization of political elites' attitudes has occurred over twenty years of the post-communist transition. However, the analysis of the adopted laws and public policies espoused, along with the results of the 2008 survey of political elites' attitudes with glances at the electoral debates of 2012, provide sufficient grounds for generalizing that anti-nostalgia and the negative assessment of the Soviet experience is the dominant way of relating to the past in Lithuania. The social-democratic, liberal, and populist (however partial) initiatives and efforts to accommodate more permissive attitudes towards the Soviet past do not enjoy much resonance among the Lithuanian elite at large.

List of party abbreviations used in the article

TS — LKD — Homeland Union — Lithuanian Christian Democrats;
 LCP — Lithuanian Centre Party;
 JL — Young Lithuania;
 DP — Labour Party;
 TPP — National Resurrection Party;
 TT — Order and Justice;
 LSDP — Social Democratic Party of Lithuania,
 LSDS — Lithuanian Social Democratic Union;
 LiCS — Liberal and Centre Union;
 LRLS — Liberal Movement;
 NS — New Union.

References

1. Bauman, Z. 1999, *In Search of Politics*, Stanford, Stanford University Press.
2. Boyd Carolyn, P. 2008, The Politics of History and Memory in Democratic Spain, *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, no. 617, p. 133—149.
3. Gaidys, V. 2005, *Lietuvos gyventojų partinės preferencijos 2004—2005 m. Praeities ir dabarties vertinimas, ateities lūkesčiai* in *Lietuva*, Vilnius, Europos Sąjungoje, pirmieji metai (Firidas).
4. Eyerman, R. 2001, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
5. Heisler, M. O. 2008, Challenged Histories and Collective Self-Concepts: Politics in History, Memory, and Time, *ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, no. 617, p. 199—213.
6. Kratochwil, F. 2006, History, action and identity: Revisiting the “second” great debate and assessing its importance for social theory, *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 12, no. 1, p. 5—29.
7. Matonyte, I. 2006, Why the Notion of Social Justice is Quasi-Absent from the Public Discourse in Post-Communist Lithuania, *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol. 37, no. 4, p. 388—411.

8. Matonyte, I. 2009, Ex-nomeklatura and ex-dissidents in the post-communist Parliaments of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, *Viesoji politika ir administravimas*, no. 29, p. 28—40.
9. Matonyte, I. 2013, «Elites» Games in the Field of Memory: Insights from Lithuania'. In: Mink, G. Neumayer, L. (eds.) *History, Memory and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe. Memory Games*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 105—120.
10. Ramonaite, A. 2003, The end of the Left-Right discourse in Lithuania? *Lithuanian Political Science Yearbook 2002*, p. 23—45.
11. Smelser, N. J. 2001, Psychological trauma and cultural trauma. In: Jeffrey, C. A., Smelser, N. J. *Cultural trauma*, California, California University Press.
12. Smith, R. M. 2003, *Stories of peoplehood: The politics and morals of political membership*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
13. Unikaite, I. 2007, *Rinkimų kampanijos sąsajos su rinkimų rezultatais: LR Seimo rinkimų (1996—2004 m.) atvejis* [Election Campaigns links with election results: the case of Lithuanian parliament elections (1996—2004)], Kaunas, Vytautas Magnus University.
14. Xue, H., Wooley, M. 2008, Collective Memory and Nostalgia. A New Perspective on Affective Design Strategy for the Chinese Market, Seoul, *IASDR 2009 (International Association of Societies of Design Research) conference paper*.
15. Velikonja, M. 2009, Lost in Transition: Nostalgia for Socialism in Post-socialist Countries, *East European Politics and Societies*, no. 23, p. 535—551.
16. Walzer, M. 1994, *Thick and thin: Moral argument at home and abroad*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press.
17. Winter, J. 2000, The generation of memory: Reflections on the “memory boom” in contemporary historical studies, *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, no. 27, p. 69—92.
18. Žalimas, D. 2006, SSRS okupacijos žalos atlyginimo įstatymas ir Rusijos Federacijos atsakomybės tarptautiniai teisiniai pagrindai, *Politologija*, Vol. 4, no. 44, p. 3—53.

About the author

Prof. Irmina Matonyte, ISM University of Management and Economics, Vilnius, Lithuania.

E-mail: irmmat@ism.lt