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**THE LITHUANIAN REFERENDUM ON EXTENDING THE
WORKING OF THE IGNALINA NUCLEAR POWER STATION: THE
RATIONALITY OF ACTORS WITHIN (UN-)CHANGING
STRUCTURES**

Liudas Mažylis

Professor; Dr.

**Faculty of Political Sciences and Diplomacy, Vytautas Magnus University
(Lithuania)**

Contact information

Address: Gedimino str. 44, LT-44240 Kaunas, Lithuania

Phone: +370 37 206 704

E-mail address: l.mazylis@pmdf.vdu.lt

Aušrinė Jurgelionytė

Doctoral Candidate

**Faculty of Political Sciences and Diplomacy, Vytautas Magnus University
(Lithuania)**

Contact information

Address: Gedimino str. 44, LT-44240 Kaunas, Lithuania

Phone: +370 37 206 704

E-mail address: a.jurgelionyte@pmdf.vdu.lt

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the structural factors and the arguments of the political actors in the Lithuanian referendum of 2008 on extending the working of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Station. By applying a new institutionalism theoretical perspective, this article studies campaign development, its structural framework and the actors' arguments. The presupposition has been confirmed that the value normative environment of the referendum

was long-term and sustained, without any „paradigmatic shifts“ during the referendum debates themselves. With that said, the equilibrium of competing normative attitudes was shifted towards agreeing with an extension of the work as a „minor evil“. Within this structural environment, a range of „second order“ features was typical for the referendum campaign model, additionally reinforced by another parallel (chronologically coinciding) campaign, that of the elections to the *Seimas*. Minor shifts in the otherwise overwhelming YES vote could be evoked by formal mechanical nuances, if nothing else. The diverse positions of the political actors involved in the campaign – whether active, critical, reluctant, or floating ones – were supposed to shift their opinion(s) within a stable structural value normative environment, not seeking any reconsideration. This model of referendum campaign development is typical for the Lithuanian direct democracy tradition. Frequently, a referendum serves as a supplementary formal institutional instrument allowing an expansion of the field of political debates and/or the possibility for political actors to place themselves within a stable value normative structure where they may strive for additional mobilization of behalf of their electorate.

KEYWORDS

Referendum, Lithuania, Ignalina nuclear power station, institutions, campaign, political actors

INTRODUCTION

The consultative referendum on prolonging the working of the Ignalina nuclear power station took place in Lithuania in 2008 together with elections to the *Seimas*. In legal terms, the Lithuanian Parliament, *Seimas*, took initiative to consult the nation on recalling a provision of an international treaty. Namely, it has been stated in the EU Accession Treaty (Protocol 4 of the Accession Treaty, 2003) that "Lithuania commits to the closure of Unit 1 of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant before 2005 and of Unit 2 of this plant by 31 December 2009 at the latest and to the subsequent decommissioning of these units".¹ Thus the working of the Ignalina nuclear power station must be stopped unambiguously and without any reservations. However, according to the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, the "most important questions of State and Nation are to be solved by referenda"; the status of consultative referenda is provided by the Law on Referenda.² Broader analysis of political and sociological context is needed to understand evident legal collision, to analyze political developments and to interpret political consequences. This referendum can be qualified politically as "excessive",³ or, rather, the situation does recall the manipulative nature of direct democracy instruments themselves.⁴ The manipulative nature of this particular referendum is becoming even more evident after more detailed analysis. The referendum was superposed with regular parliamentary elections. The elections were successfully passed but the referendum was not because of the "low turnout". Out of those who participated, 91.07 % voted YES: "I approve of the extension of operation of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant for a technically safe period, but not longer than completion of the construction of a new nuclear power plant". The overall result represents a successful maneuver by the Lithuanian elites: they called for a public verdict but it was ignored due to a formal argument, namely, the lack of 1.5 per cent voter turnout to call a referendum valid.⁵ Naturally, one can assume that a call for a

¹ *The Treaty of Accession 2003, Protocol No 4 on the Ignalina nuclear power plant in Lithuania*, p. 4765 // http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/pdf/enlargement_process/future_prospects/negotiations/eu10_bulgaria_romania/treaty_2003/en/aa00042_re03_en.pdf (accessed April 29, 2012).

² A consultative (deliberative) referendum shall be deemed as having taken place if over one half of the citizens, who are eligible and have been registered in voter lists, have taken part in it (*Law on Referendum of the Republic of Lithuania* // http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=269831 (accessed May 02, 2012)).

³ Kai Opperman, "The Politics of Pledging EU Referendums. A Typology of Reasons for Governments to Commit to Referendums on European Integration," *Paper prepared for presentation at the 6th ECPR General Conference* (25-27 August 2011): 3-4.

⁴ Liudas Mažylis, *Kodėl netiko Europai Konstitucija Europai* (Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas, 2005), p. 35.

⁵ The Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania, "Election to the Seimas and the Referendum on prolonging the work of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant of 12th October 2008, Results of Referendum" // http://www.vrk.lt/2008_seimo_rinkimai/output_en/referendumas/referendumas.html (accessed April 22, 2012).

referendum might be explained by the motivation to form additional campaign context for other, electoral, political debates. By that, a referendum campaign should be treated as supplementary and "second-hand" to the main campaign, that of elections to the *Seimas*.⁶

However, a referendum's initiating and processing problems are important, at least for two reasons. First, there are important referendum implications from the political practice point of view. Debates on the future of nuclear energy were raised up to the level of "high politics" and continued far beyond the end of the 2008 referendum campaign. The law on building a new atomic power plant commonly called LEO.LT was already in force since 2007. It was controversially discussed by the society and finally recalled by the new parliamentary majority. In 2011 negotiations with a Japanese conglomerate Hitachi were started. When in the beginning of 2012 an agreement on the construction of a new nuclear power station was initialed, new referendum initiatives emerged: signatures began to be collected on the (non-) approval of its construction, argued for by "long-lasting obligations for tax-payers and eventual influence for life security".⁷ The geopolitical context should also be taken into consideration (Lithuania remaining within the Russian energy system, and perspectives on energetic independence of Lithuania).⁸

The initiative to analyze the case of the Ignalina referendum was inspired by the increased amount of studies connected with lost referenda on the Constitution of Europe in France and The Netherlands.⁹ The case of the Ignalina referendum could be analyzed while employing various theoretical perspectives.¹⁰ On the one hand, the "value/ideologically" oriented branch¹¹ of theoretical approaches draw our attention to certain values raised in the context of referenda. The application of the rational-choice-based perspective¹² focuses on actors' behavior. Moreover, various levels of analysis can be applied, namely macro-, meso-, and individual-based.¹³

⁶ Liudas Mažylis and Ingrida Unikaitė, "Europe and Election of the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania," *EPERN Election Briefing* No. 47 (October 2008): 4 // www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/epern-election-briefing-no-47.pdf (accessed April 26, 2012).

⁷ From reflection of initiative of referendum on extension of work of Ignalina Nuclear Power Station in the two main Lithuanian media portals.

⁸ Žygimantas Vaičiūnas, "Europos Sąjungos bendros energetikos politikos formavimasis ir Lietuvos interese," *Politologija* Nr. 55 (2009): 92-95.

⁹ Taggart, Paul. "Questions of Europe - The Domestic Politics of the 2005 French and Dutch Referendums and their Challenge for the Study of European Integration", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Volume 44, Issue Supplement s1 (September 2006).

¹⁰ Sara Binzer Hobolt, "Direct Democracy and European Integration," *Journal of European Public Policy* 13:1 (January 2006): 154-161.

¹¹ Mark N. Franklin, "Learning from the Danish case: A comment on Palle Svensson's critique of the Franklin thesis," *European Journal of Political Research* No. 41 (2002): 752.

¹² Vaughne Miller, "The Treaty of Lisbon after the Second Irish Referendum," *Research Paper* 09/75 (October 8, 2009): 28-39.

¹³ Piret Ehin, "Determinants of Public Support for EU Membership: Data from Baltic Countries," *European Journal of Political Research* Vol. 40, No. 1 (2001).

The application of new-institutionalism studies¹⁴ will enable the research to encompass both structural and individual-level factors influencing the processes.

The aim of this article from the new institutionalism perspective is to analyze structural factors and actors' motivations as regards the 2008 referendum on the Ignalina nuclear power station campaign. Below are the following objectives of the research:

- Review the political and legal institutional circumstances of the referendum initiative by the factual consequence of campaign events;
- Divide the referendum campaign into appropriate stages with subsequent reconstruction and a test alleged model of action of initiators;
- Characterize the structural institutional factors of event flow by comparing contradicting values and norms;
- Characterize the most important actors involved in the campaign, their positions and political motivation;
- Analyze campaign developments alongside the intervening actors' interests in the context of value and normative factors;
- Position the analyzed referendum within the context of all Lithuanian referenda.

Following these objectives, two of the most important internet portals – DELFI and Irytas.lt – were utilized. Using their search system, the keywords “referendumas dėl Ignalinos atominės elektrinės” were used for a fixed number of publications within certain calendar months, and, subsequently, a number of comments by portal users. In the content-based analysis, the main actors of appropriate stage of the campaign, as well as their positions, were set. The data is summarized and presented below in the form of graphs and tables.¹⁵

1. CAMPAIGN PROCESS

At the beginning of 2008, sheets for collecting signatures for instigating a referendum on extending the working of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Station were issued to the initiative group by the Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania. The same initiative group was also collecting signatures concerning another referendum question – the constitutional amendment enabling citizens to dissolve the *Seimas* by the referendum.

¹⁴ Laurence Morel, “The Rise of ‘Politically Obligatory’ Referendums: The 2005 French Referendum in Comparative Perspective,” *West European Politics* Vol. 30, No. 5 (November 2007): 1052-1055.

¹⁵ Based on the results of the scholarly group of Lithuanian Scientific Council “Effect of non-electoral campaigns for political processes in Lithuania” (chief L. Mažylis, participants A. Jurgelionytė, B. Ivanovas, S. Rakutienė, J. Tirvienė, I. Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė).

According to the information of the Electoral Commission,¹⁶ the referendum was initiated by people such as Arvydas Akstinavicius and Violeta Linkiene, which means, mainly by the non-parliamentarian Lithuanian Social Democratic Union¹⁷. The initiative also included Algimantas Matulevicius, Chairman of the Committee of National Security of the Seimas, a Member of the Academy of Sciences, Algimantas Kudzys, leaders of a number of NGO's and professional unions, etc. (further referred to as "minor actors"). At the last moment before registering, the parliamentary political party, Liberal Movement, joined the initiative group. The application was signed by its leader Eligijus Masiulis, Member of the Seimas Kęstutis Glaveckas, and others.

Table 1. Reflection of initiative of referendum on extension of work of Ignalina Nuclear Power Station in the two main Lithuanian media portals

Date	Reflection of event or action	Number of publications per month	Comm. per month	Actors
January 2008	Trade unions (professional?) supporting referendum idea	DELFI Lrytas.lt 1 -	24 -	Professional unions, President Valdas Adamkus
February 2008	Initiative to collect signatures for referendum	DELFI Lrytas.lt 1 1	48 36	Liberal Movement, its leader E. Masiulis
March 2008	Leader of Homeland Union A. Kubilius doubtful of referendum idea. Lists for collecting signatures issued by Electoral Commission on extension work of Ignalina Nuclear Power Station, also on Constitutional amendment enabling dismissal of Seimas by	DELFI Lrytas.lt 6 5	596 7	Homeland Union - Lithuanian Christian Democrat Political Group, A. Kubilius. Lithuanian Social Democratic Union.

¹⁶ The Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania. "Referenda initiatives. Declare the referendum had not obtained the required number of signatures" // <http://www.vrk.lt/lt/pirmas-puslapis/referendum/buve-referendumai.html> (accessed April 24, 2012).

¹⁷ Not to confuse with parliamentary Lithuania Social Democratic Party.

	<p>referenda.</p> <p>"Undermine the referendum that failed"</p> <p>"Undermine the referendum that passed".</p> <p>Project of Seimas decision to call referendum started to deliberate by Seimas</p>				<p>E. Masiulis</p> <p>Senior negotiator for the EU on Ignalina extension A. Abišala.</p> <p>Head of European Commission Representation in Lithuania K. Sadauskas, Liberals Movement, Seimas.</p>
April 2008	19 thousand of signatures were collected out of 300 thousand required – dynamics are insufficient	DELFI Lrytas.lt	1 1	15 1	Professional Unions, NGOs
March 2008	Ongoing signature collection	DELFI Lrytas.lt	2 1	88 -	Lithuanian Social Democratic Union
June 2008	Referendum initiative by collecting signatures fails – 47 thousand signatures were collected, which is only 1/6 of those required. European Committee of the Seimas proposes obligatory referendum	DELFI Lrytas.lt	3 5	211 7	Liberal Movement, Lithuanian Social Democratic Union, Professional unions. European Committee of the Seimas
July	Decision of Seimas to	DELFI	10	525	Seimas

2008	call for consultative referendum. Referendum is "useless"	Lrytas.lt	4	80	Head of European Commission Representation in Lithuania K. Sadauskas
August 2008	Report of European Commission: referendum results will have no influence for expanding work of nuclear power station	DELFI Lrytas.lt	2 1	39 5	European Commission
September 2008	Variety of opinions on referendum	DELFI Lrytas.lt	6 12	420 142**	Prime Minister G. Kirkilas, Leader of Homeland Union A. Kubilius, Senior negotiator for the EU on Ignalina extension A. Abišala,
October 2008	Continuation of September debates. Announcing referendum invalid – comments on Electoral Committee decision	DELFI Lrytas.lt	15 11	2976 725**	The same; also a few EU officials
December 2008	Perspective of retrenching electricity connected with referendum results	DELFI Lrytas.lt	3	624	A. Abišala

*Data collected during the work of the scholarly group of Lithuanian Scientific Council "Effect of non-electoral campaigns for political processes in Lithuania" (chief L. Mažylis, participants A. Jurgelionytė, B. Ivanovas, S. Rakutienė, J. Tirvienė, I. Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė).

**Comments of both campaigns, election to the Seimas and referenda, summarized.

Table 2. Context of different campaigns connected with nuclear energy in Lithuania

June 2007	Proposing the idea of a referendum on nuclear energy by Lithuania's environmentalists
End, 2007	Initiative of formation of LEO.LT (a national energy holding company in Lithuania, owned shares of Lithuania's three major electric power production and distribution companies; it was established to raise funds for the construction of the planned Visaginas Nuclear Power Plant after close down of Ignalina, and Lithuania-Sweden and Lithuania-Poland power connections).
2008	First initiative of a referendum on extending the working of Ignalina Nuclear Power Station and its failure (insufficient number of citizen signatures collected). Second initiative – a consultative referendum called by the Seimas decision together with regular elections. Failure: insufficient voter turnout.
July, 2009	End of activities of LEO.LT – its liquidation enabled by Seimas
March, 2012	The Government of Lithuania and Hitachi, Ltd. initialed a new nuclear power plant construction contract.
April, 2012	New referendum initiative on prohibition of nuclear energy in Lithuania.

Consecutive analysis reflecting the campaign in the two most important Lithuania internet portals enables the evaluation of a number of important factors such as campaign duration, its nature, actors, their positions and the changing importance of the actors for the process. The limits of this analytical tool are: possible biased or misinformation of portals themselves; for instance, the campaign for collecting signatures lasted three months but was very poorly reflected in the aforementioned portals; at the same exact time other campaigns of a different nature were dominating the portals as well as other mass media and general public, for instance, on the issue of double citizenship, higher education reform, or the so-called *Rinau* case.¹⁸

However, although not very intensely, the problem of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Station was reflected in the media portals. Our effort to examine the chronology of this matter shows the presence of the three “waves” of the media attention towards the aforementioned problem (see Fig. 1).

¹⁸ Data collected during the work of the scholarly group of Lithuanian Scientific Council “Effect of non-electoral campaigns for political processes in Lithuania” (chief L. Mažylis, participants A. Jurgelionytė, B. Ivanovas, S. Rakutienė, J. Tirvienė, I. Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė).

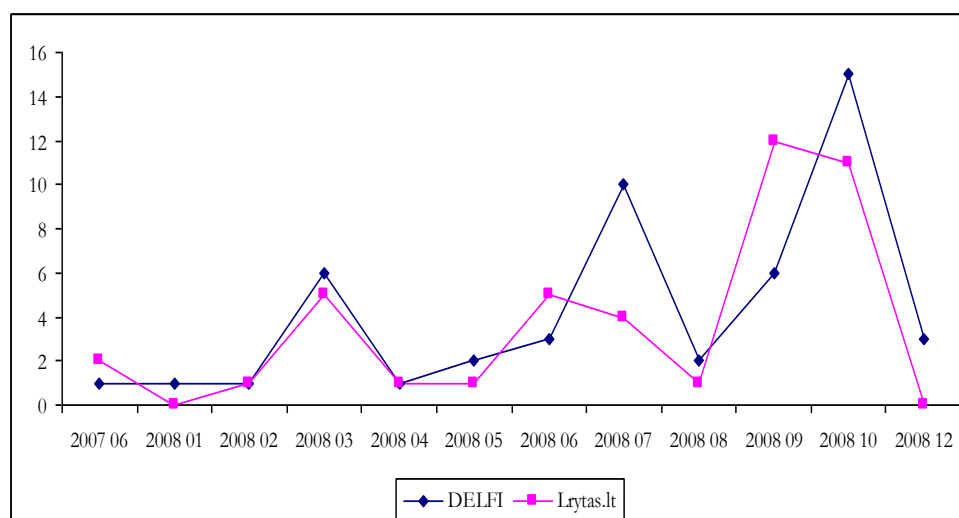


Fig. 1. Chronology of reflection of referendum on extension work of Ignalina Nuclear Power station in the media (keywords "referendumas dėl Ignalinos atominės elektrinės")

Stage 1

February – March, 2008

The initiative of collecting a required number of signatures (300 thousand, according to the Lithuanian Constitution) on extending the working of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Station was instigated.

Quite a large number of different political actors supported the initiative of collecting signatures: Liberal Movement, trade unions, Lithuanian Social Democratic Union. Skeptical positions as to whether the signature collecting action is a good thing were expressed by the President of the Republic Valdas Adamkus, leader of Homeland Union Andrius Kubilius, and Head of European Commission Representation in Lithuania Kęstutis Sadauskas. Environmental organizations, who were proposing a referendum on the nuclear future of Lithuania in 2007, during this stage of campaign in 2008, were not mentioned. There were up to fifty comments by the internet portal *lrytas.lt* users, and several hundred of them on *delfi.lt*.

Quite paradoxically, the active stage of signature collection (within 3 months of March 3, three hundred thousand signatures had to be collected) was almost not reflected in the main portals analyzed. Thus, after the first stage of the campaign under analysis, there is a decline in the campaign intensity curve. It can be said that signature collection is a matter for its initiators but not the media or general public. The only message sent during this stage was informing the society about the insufficient dynamics of signature collection. One can guess, there was an effort (by the media?) to devalue the importance of the campaign, its initiators as actors, or the idea itself. This campaign coverage can be clearly modeled as "second order":

poor media involvement is one of the crucial features of "second-orderness" of the campaign according to definition given by Reif and Schmitt in 1980.¹⁹

Stage 2

June – July, 2008

When it was becoming more and more apparent that the dynamics of collecting signatures is insufficient (approaching only 1/3 of signatures required by the Constitution), heavyweight campaign actors were getting gradually involved in it. The Committee of European Affairs of the Seimas came up with the idea of an obligatory referendum. When it came to the Seimas decision, instead of obligatory, a consultative referendum on extending the working of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Station was announced. This time twice the number of comments by portal users were attained. However, debates during this campaign stage were rather dull and apathetic; a skeptical position was expressed by K. Sadauskas again; but in August the debates were becoming even more sluggish.

Stage 3

September – October, 2008

The official campaign of the referendum announced by the Seimas goes on; it does coincide with the regular elections to the Seimas. Within the context of general electoral debates, the referendum on the Ignalina Nuclear Power Station plays a relatively unimportant part. It can be proven by the comparison of radio and TV air-time distribution. The topic of Seimas elections takes up the majority of time on different (both commercial and public) TV and radio stations. At the same time, significantly less exposure and no prime time was dedicated to the referendum.²⁰

Concluding our analysis of the two most important Lithuanian media portals, it shows that political actors were experimenting in the use of a variety of legal institutional possibilities. Two "waves" of referendum initiatives are evident (see above). They started with collecting signatures reflected in the first wave of media attention. However, it became just the introduction to the referendum announced by the decision of the Seimas. Based on the assumption of the "second order" nature of the campaign, the absence of the tactics of "total mobilization" is evident. Possibly, bigger parties and other heavyweight actors themselves were feeling

¹⁹ Karlheinz Reif and Hermann Schmitt, "Nine Second-Order National Elections. A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of European Election Results," *European Journal of Political Research* No. 8 (1980): 3.

²⁰ The Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania, "Central Election Commission Report" // <http://www.vrk.lt/lt/naujienos/vyriausiosios-rinkimu-komisijos-pranesimas.html> (accessed April 28, 2012).

insecure, and avoiding any empowering of marginal forces. However, this assumption is confirmed by further analysis.

The further analysis clearly indicates that the referendum campaign became secondary to the electoral campaign.²¹ This is proven even further by comparing the actual quality of air time dedicated to one or the other campaign. In addition, this can also be supported by the decrease of media attention towards the referendum in the summer of 2008. It is clear that media attention towards the referendum was slow and not engaging.

2. STRUCTURAL (VALUE AND NORMATIVE) FACTORS: COMPETING, CHANGING, PERSISTING?

The aim of this sub-chapter is to review structural factors of the referendum campaign, assessing their stability, or, possibly, fluctuations or paradigmatic institutional (as value and normative)²² changes.

The referendum factors are divided into "agent-driven" and "structure-driven" explanations by Carlos Closa.²³ As previous studies show, taking into account structural campaign factors is, in its nature, a rather difficult task.²⁴ As Kathleen Thelen summarizes, "it reviews some distinctions that are commonly drawn between the 'historical' and the 'rational choice' variants of institutionalism and shows that there are more points of tangency than typically assumed. However, differences remain in how scholars in the two traditions approach empirical problems."²⁵

To some extent²⁶, structural factors of the referendum on the Ignalina Nuclear Power Station can be tied to the "macro-sociologic background" mentioned in an article by Vladas Gaidys ir Leonardas Rinkevičius. In their individual level sociological study regarding the attitudes of Lithuanian inhabitants towards nuclear energy (results of the 2008 referendum itself were not included into their study) they are distinguishing "non-safety" or "fear" reasoning contra deliberations about "costs and benefits".²⁷

²¹ Liudas Mažylis and Ingrida Unikaitė, *Euro-Referenda: Lithuania's Case. The Central Europe beyond Double enlargement* (Vilnius: Vilnius University Press, 2004), p. 47.

²² Kathleen Thelen, "Historical Institutionalism and Comparative Politics," *Annual Reviews Political Science* No. 2 (1999): 387-399.

²³ Carlos Closa, "Why convene referendums? Explaining choices in EU constitutional politics," *Journal of European Public Policy* No. 14:8 (December 2007): 1314-1316.

²⁴ John FitzGibbon, "Ireland's No to Lisbon: Learning the Lessons from the failure of the Yes and the Success of the No Side," *EPERN Working Paper* No. 21 (2009): 15.

²⁵ Kathleen Thelen, *supra* note 22.

²⁶ As seen and important in European context too: Roger Buch and Kasper M. Hansen, "The Danes and Europe: From EC 1972 to Euro 2000 - Elections, Referendums and Attitudes," *Scandinavian Political Studies* Vol. 25, No. 1 (2002).

²⁷ Vladas Gaidys and Leonardas Rinkevičius, "Černobylio baimė, pigios energijos nauda ar kai kas daugiau? Dvidešimties metų visuomenės nuomonės apie Ignalinos AE sociologiniai tyrimai Lietuvoje," *Filosofija. Sociologija* T. 19, Nr. 4 (2008): 103-107.

We intend to expand this sociological reasoning by political arguments, adjusting it to context of new institutionalism. We insist that one important structural institutional argument was the belief that the Ignalina Nuclear Power Station had to be closed because its closing was agreed upon in the Accession Treaty of 2003. However, the analysis carried out and presented by "Vilmorus" shows that the "value-based" argument that "treaties are to be followed" was important only for seven percent of the respondents. It was completely unimportant to twenty-five percent, whereas thirty-three percent of the respondents voted for "re-negotiating the Treaty". Possibly, this latter option, "re-negotiating", was actively exploited in the comments of different campaign actors/government elites.²⁸ It was important that Lithuanian inhabitants were aware; closing Ignalina Nuclear Power Station was an international obligation, moreover, approved by the overwhelming majority of Lithuanian electorate in the EU accession referendum in 2003. Thus agreeing by the EU to "re-negotiate" could be most welcome. The "re-negotiating" agenda was formally institutionally reinforced by creating a special „senior negotiator" post. With that, into the field of political game one more actor, called "Mr. Ignalina", was introduced (see below arguments that it was an *ad hoc* institutional imitation "for internal use" – i.e. especially for the referendum purposes).

Following this assumption, the political campaign on extending the working of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Station (February-October 2008) was following society's position that "benefits are higher than costs" rather than staying somewhere between "it is a good thing" and "obligations are to be followed" or advocating for a safe environment, commitment to properly using EU financing or the obligation to follow international treaties.

This "value/ normative" attitude (we, the authors, believe it is an important "structural" factor) was formed during a long-lasting period, much longer lasting than the period of our research (2008). The importance of other behavioral norms was very unlikely during this campaign – these are all old arguments widely discussed since 1997.

We argue that during the referendum opposing ideas were not at the forefront of this campaign. If so, there was no possibility of the "value shift"/ "paradigmatic institutional shift", which means that it was unlikely that the values would shift during the ongoing campaign.

Further analysis should be concentrated on the actors, their access to the information channels, and possibilities to pose themselves on the background of

²⁸ *Ibid.*: 108.

values acceptable for the general public. This model fits within the rational choice institutionalism approach.²⁹

3. ACTORS: ACTIVE, RELUCTANT, CRITICAL, FLUCTUATING

There was a broad variety of different political/institutional actors involved in the campaign. This variety allows us to categorize these actors according to the different criteria such as governmental and non-government sector representatives, those representing national or transnational level, basing their positions on value/normative arguments of different kinds. As it typically happens in referenda, a set of these arguments may influence the final acceptance of particular actors to one of the referendum statements, YES or NO.

In the effort to categorize campaign actors according to their activeness of involvement, one political party, although "minor" and marginal, here can be called most active, namely, the Lithuanian Social Democratic Union. This group initiated collecting citizen signatures in March 2008. They were supported by other "minor actors" (see the aforementioned list above). With that said, an enormous involvement of marginal actors, especially during the first stage of development, makes the Ignalina Nuclear Power Station referendum campaign look like a typical "second order" campaign.

In the second stage of the campaign, as it happens almost always in referenda, its major actors were aware of the complicated structural environment formed. Their official position towards YES or NO statements became rather ambiguous and reluctant.

When talking about the involvement of parliamentary parties into a referendum by the *Seimas* (after insufficient result of citizen signature collecting), some quantitative criteria is evident. From those parliamentarians who initiated the consultative referendum by *Seimas*, the "outgoing" parties' representatives dominated. There were 9 representatives from the Liberal Center Union, 6 Social Democrats, 2 Social Liberals, 6 Peasant *Liaudininkai*, 13 Labor Party, 8 Law and Order, 3 Liberal Movement, and 1 Homeland Union representative. Only the latter 12 can be called opposition, out of the 48 initiators.³⁰ However, it would hardly be true to call this *Seimas* decision a "clear signal" to the electorate on how to vote.

When referring to the "official" stage of the referendum campaign, very few of the political analysts tended to call it "non-existent" at all, as it was fully "physically shielded" by a parallel election campaign.³¹ There was neither any clear agreement

²⁹ Kathleen Thelen, *supra* note 22.

³⁰ "Referendumą inicijavusiems Seimo nariams – daugiau laiko TV ekranuose," *delfi.lt* // <http://www.delfi.lt/archive/article.php?id=18412878> (accessed April 27, 2012).

³¹ Indrė Makaraitytė, "Ignalinos AE neverta nemokamo alaus," *Atgimimas.lt* //

between political party leadership nor even the possibility to understand their position, and it was not unpredictably changing. When talking about political parties, leaders of opinion polls such as Homeland Union or Social Democrats (dominating in the outgoing minority government), it seemed like they would not be against a YES vote. But when commenting on the importance of the referendum vote, positions were controversial.

The leader of the Homeland Union-Christian Democrats, Andrius Kubilius, the forthcoming election winner, was skeptical about the referendum idea itself claiming it is a sign of slack/torpidity in the ruling Social Democrats and called it "people fooling" (i.e. deceptive). However, he never supported the NO vote, either. The leader of an emerging political force, Arūnas Valinskas, also criticized the idea of "this kind" of referendum. At the same time, acting Prime Minister Gediminas Kirkilas, leader of the minority coalition, was in favor of an extension of the working of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Station when directly questioned by the media. But there was no active agitation by him delivered in response. In particular episodes one can notice the support of Social Democrats for referendum. But the dynamics of popular support in the parallel election campaign made important corrections. There was an increasing self-determination within society to not support the acting government; the support for the Social Democrats was decreasing; finally it was reflected in the election results.³² Similarly, the behavior of one more parliamentary party, the Liberal Movement, was changing. Initially they were among the "active minority" initiating citizen signature collecting. Later on, they were rather reluctant when supporting a YES vote. Some actors, such as the Law and Order group, tended to use the situation to mildly criticize European institutions. But even they did not go too far, avoiding the claim that Europe was "impervious to the appeals of small nations". However, they supported the referendum idea as meaningful. Soon before the voting date, President Valdas Adamkus changed his initial position. In his most recent declaration as a citizen, he intended "to spoil his ballot" in an initial referendum, but suddenly and unexpectedly called to vote in favor of the extension of the working of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Station. Certain critics of this idea were in the evident minority, including Kestutis Sadauskas, Representative of the European Commission in Lithuania, who was undoubtedly against "breaking the Treaty". Senior Negotiator Aleksandras Abisala ("Mr. Ignalina"), though he was officially appointed to "re-negotiate" the Treaty provisions on closing the Ignalina

<http://www.atgimimas.lt/Aktualijos/2008-metai-spaliu/Ignalinos-AE-neverta-nemokamo-alaus> (accessed April 28, 2012).

³² The Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania, "Election to the Seimas and the Referendum on prolonging the work of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant of 12th October 2008. Voting results of 12th October 2008" // http://www.vrk.lt/2008_seimo_rinkimai/output_en/rinkimu_diena/rezultatai1.html (accessed April 29, 2012).

Nuclear Power Station, at times was also rather skeptical about the successful outcome of the negotiations. Environmentalists – “hard” followers of the idea of the renewable energy sources, thus being deeply against the core idea of nuclear energy – are also worth mentioning. Yet quite paradoxically, their position was also fluctuating somewhere between YES and NO.

Therefore, combining the results of both structural factors and the actors' positions, the development can be explained rather by rational calculations of the actors towards unchanging, stable value-normative structures such as “equilibrium of costs and benefits” (of extending work of Ignalina Nuclear Power Station, in our case). The majority of political actors, be they active, reluctant, critical or undecided, did not intend to evoke any “paradigmatic” institutional changes by involving themselves in campaign. Or rather, both towards formal institutional rules and beyond them, within informal institutional structures such as values and norms, they intended to maximize their interests though not necessarily regarding nuclear energy. Thus, the referendum became a complementary tool to the most important campaign, that of regular parliamentary elections.

4. DISPUTABLE INPUT INTO DEVELOPING A DIRECT DEMOCRACY TRADITION IN LITHUANIA

The formal results of the referendum (an overwhelming YES was not institutionalized into a positive decision due to the microscopic deficit of turnout) created political consensus for all the actors. This proves that Lithuanian elites can work together in the difficult situations of direct democracy. It is worth comparing the referendum analyzed with others that have previously taken place in Lithuania.

Parallels can be drawn to the 1992 referendums initiated by the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania. Political elite groups represented in the Supreme Council were aware of the value orientation in the society of that time and the very fact of its stable nature.³³ Then, instead of influencing and changing these values, they were trying to use formal institutional opportunities in their quest for a political result. This strong presidential constitutional model of power was striving to enhance turnout by coupling a “Presidential” referendum with another one on moving out occupational troops. These politicians opposing a strong presidential model were seeking to isolate referenda data and were successful in this task: a referendum in May 1992 on a strong Presidential model was lost due to insufficient turnout, and another one in June 1992 was won (both turnout and popular support for a YES vote were high). The referendum of 1994, by dominating opinion of the

³³ Juozas Žilyis, “Konstituciniai politinės sistemos pagrindai”: 72-73; in: Algis Krupavičius and Alvidas Lukošaitis, *Lietuvos politinė sistema. Sąranga ir raida* (Poligrafija ir informatika, 2004).

analysts, was impossible to win and became just a campaign for mobilization of the emerging party, Homeland Union/ Lithuanian Conservatives. The initiating bunch of referenda in October 1996, parallel with regular *Seimas* elections, was probably a desperate effort of the "outgoing" ruling party to mobilize its electorate, and that of November 1996 – one of the branches of the electorate. Only in four Lithuanian referenda were both a "continuous" structural value/ normative context and "nearly total elite agreement" present. All four – plebiscite on Lithuania's independence in 1991, referenda on removing occupational troops and on new Constitution in 1992, and on Lithuania's EU membership in 2003 – were won with an overwhelming YES.³⁴ Thus the referendum of 2008 can be seen as a continuation of a range of referenda that served the self-prominence of political actors rather than expecting deep structural value-normative changes.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Employing a new institutionalism theoretical approach, structural factors and rational actor arguments in the referendum on extending the working of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Station in 2008 were analyzed.

2. There were no "paradigmatic" value/normative changes provoked by the referendum campaign. The equilibrium of costs and benefits, as well as the argument about a "minor evil" was understood by the campaign actors as deeply enrooted in the society, and there were no evident intentions to change it.

3. A rather short time after the referendum, an idea emerged within the political game field, and its actors positioned themselves as active, reluctant, critical, and fluctuating.

4. Formal mechanical institutional nuances were expected to be crucial. In reality, it was a microscopic turnout deficit that became this kind of crucial factor. Finally, the result (popular approval to YES but invalidity of referendum due to low turnout) became almost unanimously acceptable for the majority of actors involved.

5. In terms of developing a political tradition, the referendum on extending the working of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Station falls into a range of referenda expanding the field of broader political (frequently coinciding with electoral) debates. Exploring the manipulative nature of this kind of referenda could be a fruitful perspective in pursuing further analysis here.

³⁴ Liudas Mažylis, "Lietuvos referendumas dėl narystės Europos Sąjungoje," *Politologija* Nr. 2 (34) (2004).

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