

Successful new parties in the Baltic states: similar or different?

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Introduction

Last elections in the Baltic states witnessed a rise of strong and significant new parties. In October 2000 parliamentary elections in Lithuania, the New Union – Social Liberals (*Naujoji Sąjunga – Socioliberalai*) led by Artūras Paulauskas, was supported by 19.6% of the electorate in the proportional representation part thereby coming second after the Algirdas Brazauskas' Social-Democratic Coalition. It gained 28 seats, being the third largest group in the *Seimas* as the Liberal Union was more successful in the single mandate constituencies. Nevertheless, the New Union was an equal partner in the governing coalition, Paulauskas becoming the chairman of the parliament. Furthermore, it has been in the Lithuanian cabinet ever since, while the Liberal Union was forced to leave after only eight months in office and was replaced by the Social Democrats.

Two years later, in October 2002 *Saeima* elections, the New Era (*Jaunais Laiks*) surfaced becoming the most popular party in Latvia. It won 24% of the votes and 26 seats in the 100-strong parliament. Despite being in a difficult position concerning finding appropriate coalition partners, the New Era leader Einars Repse succeeded in putting together a government rather swiftly (in less than three weeks, Ikstens 2002) and becoming the prime minister.

'Rally for the Republic' – Res Publica (*Ühendus Vabariigi Eest – Res Publica*) was the last in line to become a major player in its country's politics. In March 2003 *Riigikogu* elections, it acquired the support of 24.6% of the electorate in the parliament sharing the position of the strongest party with the Centre Party (both have 28 seats). As its Latvian counterpart, Res Publica was also successful in putting together a governing coalition with its leader Juhan Parts becoming the prime minister.

Even though party politics in the Baltic countries has been characterized by high levels of electoral volatility (Rose et al 1998, Krupavičius 1999, Sikk forthcoming) and persistent change in the major actors, the rise of the three new parties in last elections is somewhat unprecedented. First, by the extent of the success. Previously, the strongest new parties in the Baltic countries had been the National Party Young Lithuania in 1996 (with 4% of the vote in PR), People's Party in Latvia in 1998 (21.2%) and the Reform Party in Estonia in

1995 (16.2%). Second, there was much more genuine novelty¹ in the New Era and Res Publica compared to the latter two that had apparent links to the established party politics of their countries. People's Party was formed by the former Latvian prime minister Andris Šķele and the Reform Party was a metamorphosis of the former Liberal Democratic Party (contesting the 1992 elections in the Pro Patria coalition) that had recruited some new faces (among them the new leader Siim Kallas). Around a fifth of People's Party faction and almost half of the Reform Party MP-s had been actually sitting in the previous legislature. In contrast, the new parties emerging in the last elections have very weak, if any links with the already established parties of the countries, their factions in the parliaments almost exclusively made up of people with no former national political experience. The occurrence of strong new parties was especially surprising in Lithuania and also Estonia that had been sometimes claimed to have had more consolidated party systems than Latvia (Krupavičius 1999, Gunter 2002).

As mentioned above, all three parties entered the governments of their respective countries (with only the New Union not occupying the seat of prime minister). The coalition talks were not as difficult as could have been predicted,² and it took half a month in Lithuania and around one month in the two other countries from elections to the investitures of governments. However, all three faced a major government crisis less than a year later that brought the Latvian and Estonian coalitions to the brink of dissolution and led to the formation of a new coalition in Lithuania. Thus, while the parties were very successful both in elections and in the formation of cabinets thereafter, their subsequent success in actual governing has encountered more difficulties. While the New Era and Res Publica have at least until now retained high positions in public opinion polls, the popularity of the New Union has after longer term in government decreased significantly and it will be likely struggling with the electoral threshold in upcoming elections.

This study analyses the essence and performance of these new parties mostly with regard to the position of leaders and membership in their development and the parties' campaign practices coupled with their programmatic/ideological outlooks. It will be analysed

¹ A term used by Mair (1999) in the context of established party systems. I have elaborated on the topic of genuinely new parties in post-communist countries in Sikk (forthcoming).

² At least in Estonia and Latvia, as the new parties there campaigned rather upfront against the established parties.

whether some specific features of the countries' political systems or institutional setting could be considered to explain differences. Also, how can the analysis of emergence of new parties in the Baltic states contribute to the somewhat separate field of theory in the new parties (Hug 2000, Lucardie 2000) and could it add something to the growing literature on the development of post-communist party systems?

The Leaders

All the leaders of the new parties had been notable public figures for some time. Artūras Paulauskas had been the first prosecutor-general after Lithuania's restoration of independence. However, he rose to the utmost public spotlight when he won the first round of presidential elections in 1998, being only slightly short of absolute majority. Despite that, he was defeated by Valdas Adamkus in the run-off. Paulauskas' candidacy received the impetus probably from his nomination to prosecutor-general's position by that time president Algirdas Brazauskas – a nomination that was intensely opposed by the leading party of the government, the Conservatives.³

Einars Repše had been active in the Latvian independence movement and was among the founders of National Independence Movement. He was elected as a member of People's Front to the last Latvian Supreme Soviet in 1990 and was appointed the president of the Bank of Latvia in 1991. He remained in the position and outside party politics until the establishment of New Era and gained reputation for keeping the national currency stable, but was also known to be by far the best-paid public official in the Baltic states.

The Estonian State Auditor Juhan Parts joined Res Publica and rose to its leadership eight months after the former non-party political movement had transformed into a political party. Before becoming the State Auditor in 1998 he had worked six years as a Deputy Secretary General at the Ministry of Justice, in a position that seldom placed him into limelight. His personality acquired much more prominence after becoming the State Auditor and he was relatively well-known by the critical stance on government spending practices in his reports to the parliament.

³ Although the Conservative leader Vytautas Landsbergis was an ally of prosecutor general Paulauskas in the turbulent times of early 1990s, accusations of his father being connected to the KGB had turned the party against him.

The role of their respective leaders sets Res Publica clearly apart from its southern counterparts by relying least on its leader in its development. Furthermore, the leader problem was close to being a fatal Achilles heel for the newborn party. In contrast, the New Era and the New Union clearly started off as one-man parties.

Einars Repše, the president of the Bank of Latvia announced plans of forming a new political party in August 2001, slightly more than a year before the parliamentary elections, the party being officially established in February 2002 (some eight months before the Saeima elections). Before September 2001, when Repše introduced half a couple of his upcoming team in national television, very little was known either of the party's programme or any other members bar Repše. Most of the attention concentrated on the financial matters and sponsors of the party, with Repše's notorious claim for a huge fee to change the job at the Central Bank for the leadership in the party being the centre of attention. It was hinted on several occasions that if not enough funds would be gathered, the party might not be formed and Repše will retain his central banker's job. Thus, he ensured that the party was going to be successful based on the logic that if people are willing to support it financially, they are also ready to vote for it in elections; on the other hand the donations also guaranteed the sustainability of campaign, not to mention his personal well-being being ensured.⁴ The party was actually established only thereafter. No doubt it was an excellently masterminded plan worthy of the bank president, but it remains somewhat surprising that it went down so well with the electorate.

Not unlike the New Era, the New Union in Lithuania formed clearly around Paulauskas a few months after his defeat in 1997/1998 presidential elections. The party was clearly a continuation of his campaign, as it was reported that the programme of the political movement was going to be based on the electoral manifesto (BNS 1998).

The establishment of Res Publica as a party followed a remarkably different part. The party was established in December 2001 and although an organization by that name had

⁴ Two bank accounts were set up – one for the donations to the future party, the other for collecting the fee (500,000 lats) asked by Repše to become the leader of the party. The latter sparked much criticism in Latvia, Repše being accused from being blatantly materialistic in his values, to corruption (for taking 'legal bribes' while still being the president of the Central Bank).

existed in Estonia for long time,⁵ it went through a substantial transformation before turning into a party.⁶ Res Publica faced a leadership problem right since its establishment. Rein Taagepera, an internationally renowned political scientist who had been helping Res Publica in its transformation, was elected its first chairman. As he insisted on leading the party for the formation period only, and not bringing it to 2002 local elections, he hardly became an active political lead figure of the party, even though he most likely gave a good boost to its popularity. The question of Taagepera's successor was the most pressing one facing the new party as the local elections draw closer. The party was 'saved' in 9 August 2002, only two weeks before its second Congress and less than two months before its maiden local elections when the Chief State Auditor Juhan Parts stepped down from his office and joined the party with a clear prospect of becoming its chairman.⁷ Even though one might detect some indication of Res Publica turning into a 'Parts' party thereafter, it is by far less concentrated on its leader than the new parties in Latvia and Lithuania. Undoubtedly, if Parts was to step down from his position for some reason, it would likely harm the party, but would almost certainly not strike a fatal blow, that would very likely be the case with either Repše or Paulauskas.

An illustrative example of the difference in the position of the leader in New Union and Res Publica is posed by party council elections. In 2002, the Congress of New Union elected the party Council as a slate of candidates proposed by Paulauskas (RFE/RL Newline 2002). In contrast, when it was found out that Res Publica headquarters (associates of Parts) had circulated a list of recommended candidates to the Council among the members, it caused a considerable row in Estonian press (Ideon 2003).

An interesting similarity in the development of the parties was the existence of high-profile political advocates outside the party. Res Publica was strongly endorsed by Lennart Meri, the ex-president of Estonia who attended the founding congress of the party

⁵ It was established in 1989 as a right-wing non-party political youth organization. During the 1990-s it had connections to Pro Patria and Reform Party so that many of its members were active in these parties and the organization campaigned at times for their members in party lists. It had occasionally contested local elections in smaller municipalities on its own. However, Res Publica was never actively present in parliamentary politics prior to 2003.

⁶ Most of its present members are new and its ideological image has come a relatively long way towards centre from radical neo-conservatism or libertarianism it often had.

⁷ As Repše, Parts was accused of misconduct of public office by political opponents. It was argued that the Chief State Auditor could relinquish his duties and be allowed to join a party only after the parliament accepted his resignation after its summer vacation.

and Res Publica has been ever since been considered close to him. Also, the position of Rein Taagepera in the party was somewhere between being the actual leader and popular figurehead supporter. Likewise, the New Era received backing from Latvian ex-president Guntis Ulmanis (himself being a member in the Farmers' Party) and former prime minister Vilis Krištopans of Latvia's Way party, who had become disappointed of his own party (who however joined the Green and Farmer's coalition later). Artūras Paulauskas and his party have also received considerable backing from Lithuanian top politicians. First, during the 1997/1998 presidential campaign, his candidacy was endorsed by the sitting president Algirdas Brazauskas. Later, during the 2000 parliamentary election campaign, the New Policy bloc that included the New Union was strongly supported by that time president Valdas Adamkus. Hence, one can hypothesize that this kind of support from some of the countries most prominent politicians (who, however, were to an extent outside party politics) contributes to the success of new parties.

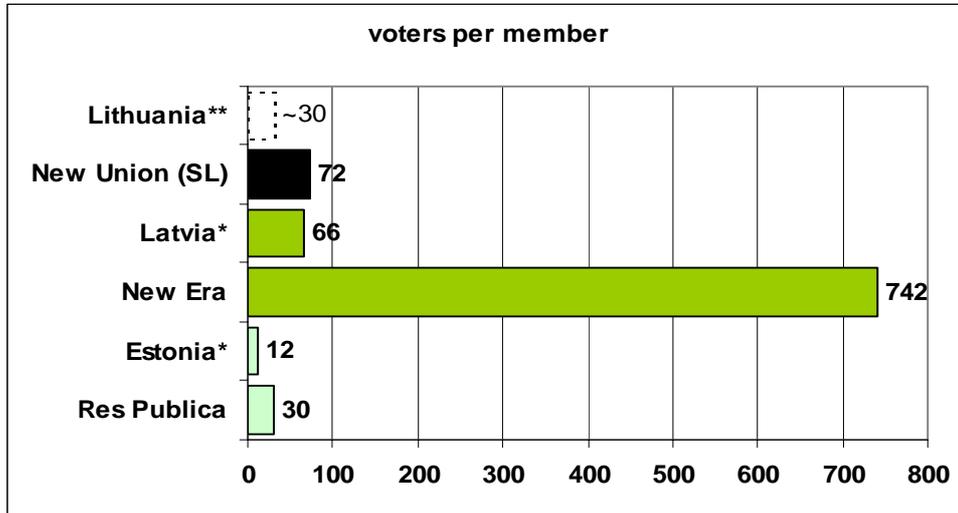
The Members

The New Union and Res Publica are clearly different from the New Era regarding their number of members. The realistic membership figures are very difficult to get hold of, but the difference in self-reported figures is vast. New Union has claimed to have around 4,000 members (RFE/RL 2002) and Res Publica around 4,100 members (as of June 2003, listed on its website <http://www.respublica.ee/?id=589>). In contrast, New Era only has 320 members (Auers 2003). That is relatively well in accordance with the general picture of party membership in the three countries. Latvia is well known for very low party membership, its largest party claiming to have only 2,700 members and the total party membership density among the electorate is below one per cent (Ibid.). In Estonia, the density is almost five per cent as the parties claim to have around 41,400 members (Sikk 2002). Lithuania has been well-known for its parties with relatively many members in post-communist context (Krupavičius 1998: 484).⁸ Therefore, the New Union, taking into account its success, is a party with relatively small membership by Lithuanian standards, and cannot be compared to the Homeland Union, Christian Democrats or Social

⁸ Krupavičius' claim that the Lithuanian parties are considerably larger compared to Estonian ones does not hold any longer, especially taking into account the difference of countries in size.

Democrats, ‘giants’ with more than 10,000 members (Møller 2002). Still, all the figures are self-reported and therefore subject to skepticism.

Figure 1. Number of Voters per Party Member (Last Baltic Elections)



Notes:

* – all voters in last national elections; all figures reported by parties.

** – data on total Lithuanian party membership not available, it can be estimated to be somewhat above 50,000, the resulting voters-members ratio being slightly below 30.

Sources: number of voters from Rose et al (1998), Estonian National Electoral Committee, Central Electoral Commission of Latvia, Elections to the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania 2000; number of party members from *Äriregistri Teabesüsteem*, <http://www.respublica.ee/?id=589>, Auers (2003), RFE/RL Newslines (2002).

It has been argued that in post-communist countries the membership is not any longer as vital a resource for political parties as it used to be in the old democracies (Chan 2001). That indeed seems to be the case in Latvia. However, the number of members possessed by the parties in Estonia and Lithuania are surprisingly high. Part of the explanation lies in the party legislation of the countries. In Estonia, the law on political parties requires to have a minimum of 1,000 members in order to be registered. Also, the parties have to submit the lists of their members annually to the party register and the lists are publicised on the Internet thereafter, somewhat increasing the truth-value of the lists.⁹ In contrast, the legal requirement regarding party membership in Latvia is significantly lower (200) and the parties have always had few members and been to an extent elitist. In Lithuania, the parties need to have at least 400 members, but as in Latvia, do not have to submit

⁹ However, the effect is limited. For instance, it is highly doubtful that several parties that have not even contested elections or have done so very poorly have more than 1,000 members as reported.

rolls. Relatively high membership of Lithuanian parties can probably be attributed to at least to other factors. First, the mixed electoral system may induce the parties to build up local organizations to contest the elections in single member constituencies successfully. Second, the different nature of party system development here can account for the high membership figures. Unlike its northern neighbours, the former communist party (inheriting a portion of members), and the Popular Front movement *Sajūdis* remained the central players of Lithuanian party politics for a long time, thus to an extent necessitating the other parties to build up a relatively extensive membership base.¹⁰ The dynamics of party membership in Estonia and Lithuania leads support to the explanations. Estonian party membership was considerably lower until the mid-1990s but increased considerably after the introduction of the membership threshold. In Lithuania, the membership of new parties might be smaller than the membership of older parties because of the decreasing importance of the ‘giants’ in country’s politics.¹¹

The Campaigns

The last parliamentary election campaigns in all three countries were fought on the backdrop of privatization scandals that had resulted in high level of public dissatisfaction with or even alienation from politics. The rightist political forces (Estonian ‘Pro Patria’; the People’s Party, Fatherland and Freedom and Latvia’s Way; Fatherland Union – Lithuanian Conservatives) had discredited themselves in the eyes the electorate, but not everyone was ready to vote for the clearly left-leaning parties.¹² That left the new parties in a good position to fight for the votes of centre-right and right-wing voters, many of whom otherwise would have probably abstained. The New Union is a somewhat deviating case here as it is considerably more left-leaning than its northern counterparts. Rather, the rightist position was at the time occupied by the former Conservative Prime Minister Rolandas Paksas’ party (the Liberal Union). However, the parties belonged with few others to the basically centrist so-called ‘New Politics’ block supported by president

¹⁰ I am grateful to Evald Mikkel for drawing my attention to that possible explanation.

¹¹ However, the number of party members in Estonian parties considerably exceeds the statutory requirements in some cases – a phenomenon that remains to be explained convincingly.

¹² Estonia presents an intriguing case as it has for long time been discussed whether the country has a viable left-wing at all. The Centre Party with its charismatic and populist leader Edgar Savisaar is generally conceived as being the most left-wing, though it identifies itself with the liberals in Europe.

Adamkus that, if considered together, can be argued to occupy principally the same position as the New Era and Res Publica.

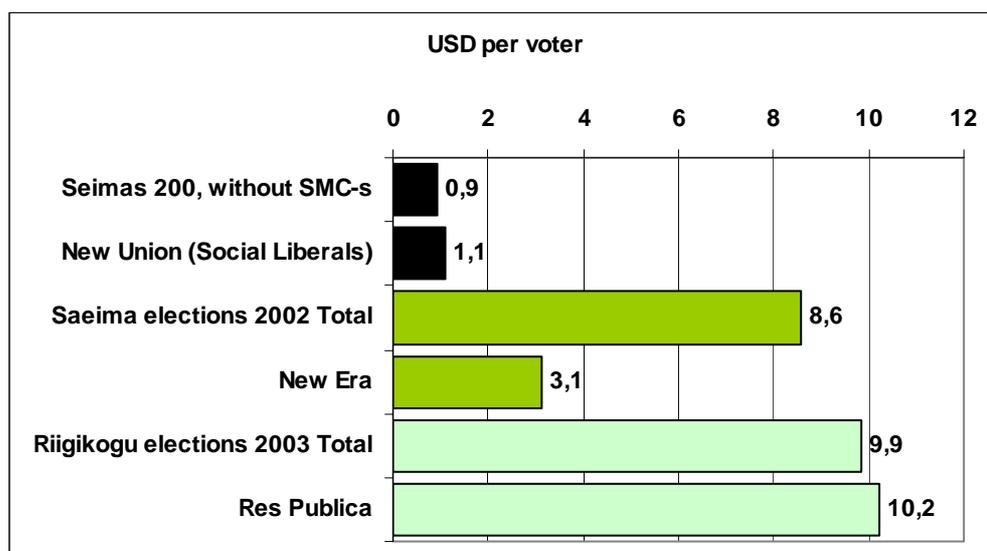
However, the parties were very similar in that their manifestoes were mainly concerned with conducting '*new politics*'.¹³ The parties were above all promising to fight corruption and promote ethical, open and accountable politics. All three have been accused of populism to an extent. In the case of Res Publica it was mainly due to their refusal to position itself convincingly on the left-right scale, and it was therefore accused of being ambiguous about the real content of '*new politics*'. The Lithuanian New Union could possibly be described as the most populist of the three – in different times it has argued for the reintroduction of capital punishment, strengthening presidentialism and held a public rally around the country against Williams International (the company in the centre of privatization scandals).

In *electoral campaigning*, the New Era stood out among the two others by extensive reliance on canvassing and spending relatively little money on ads, especially in contrast to other major Latvian parties that conducted an extensive and expensive professional campaign. In Estonia, Res Publica used forms of canvassing¹⁴ slightly more than other major parties, but at the same time spent more than average amount of money in a generally sumptuous campaign. Similarly, the New Union campaign was costly and 'noisy' (Tracevskis 2000), being the most expensive in 2000 Lithuanian parliamentary elections (BNS 2000), even though the general level of spending in Lithuanian elections is dwarfed by the campaigns in its northern neighbours.

¹³ The metaphor was used by Res Publica in Estonia and referring to the bloc of parties in Lithuania, but New Era's pledges echoed principally the same ideas.

¹⁴ Not door-to-door methods that would probably be considered as an utterly unacceptable violation of personal privacy in Estonia. This kind of criticism has been directed even against targeted posting, phoning and sending of mobile phone text messages, when there has been a suspicion that the addresses and phone numbers have been obtained from restricted databases.

Figure 2. Election Campaign Costs per Voter, Last Baltic Elections



Sources: Estonian National Electoral Committee, Čigāne (2003), 'Rinkimų politinės kampanijos finansavimo galutinių ataskaitų suvestinės'.

Notes: In Lithuania, only the cost associated with the PR part of the elections is included. Total cost of the campaign was 1.7 \$ per voter.

All three parties were heavily reliant on *sponsors*, even the New Era that run a campaign considerably cheaper than its opponents. Still, for a new party in a small and not exactly rich country, 0.74 million dollars is a considerable sum. Also, even more than for the actual campaign was required for the Repše's 'transfer fee' from the Central Bank to the central party office. Expecting close public scrutiny in their financial matters,¹⁵ the Latvian and Estonian parties took an unprecedented open approach towards the disclosure of their sponsors listing all the donations on their Internet websites.

The reaction of other parties to the emergence of strong new contenders for power was naturally not very welcoming. It was often anticipated and declared that the parties are not going to do well (i.e. Gunter 2002). After the success, it was often stressed that the new parties are inexperienced and thus prone to make bad mistakes and their reign is not going to last long and/or be stable. Sometimes it has also been feared that the skilled old coalition partners may take advantage of their lack of experience.¹⁶ On the other hand, the

¹⁵ That was both due to the promises to conduct politics more openly and honestly, as well as because the new parties are by definition relatively more reliant on private donations than the established ones raising more fears of improper dependence on sponsors.

¹⁶ For instance, it is often believed in Estonia that the Reform Party is using Res Publica to achieve its particularistic programmatic aims. The uncompromising insistence of Parts on

new parties themselves were often rather conceitedly confident in their success and excluding potential coalition partners already before the elections. In this manner, Juhan Parts predicted already in Autumn 2002 that the new prime minister would be him or Edgar Savisaar (the leader of the Centre Party) excluding later all co-operation with him. Einaris Repše was seriously contemplating winning absolute majority in the parliament and expressing basic dislike of coalition governments; he was also determined to fill cabinet posts rather with people who had not been in politics before.

Table 1. The New Parties in the Baltic States: Overview

Country	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania
Party	Rally for the Republic – Res Publica <i>Ühendus Vabariigi Eest – Res Publica</i>	New Era <i>Jaunais Laiks</i>	New Union – Social Liberals <i>Naujoji Sąjunga – Socialliberalai</i>
Established	8.12.2001 (pol. movement: 1989)	2.2.2002	25.4.1998
Leader	Rein Taagepera (until 24.8.2002) Juhan Parts (from 24.8.2002) – prime minister*	Einaris Repše – prime minister*	Artūras Paulauskas – chairman of the parliament*
Date of elections	7.3.2003 (local 20.10.2002)	5.10.2002	8.10.2000 (local 19.3.2000)
Days between establishment and elections	449 (312)	243	883 (684)
Votes%	24.6	24.0	19.6 (in PR part)
Seats (seats %)	28 (27.2)	26 (26.0)	28 (20.6)
Coalition partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reform Party • People's Union 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Latvia's First Party • Green and Farmer's Union • Alliance Fatherland and Freedom-LNNK 	Until 5.7.2001: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liberal Union • Supported by few other parties From 5.7.2001: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Democratic Party
Investiture of cabinet	10.4.2003	7.11.2002	26.10.2000
Major crisis	November 2003	Autumn 2003	June-July 2001**
Position/role of the leader	Moderate	Strong	Strong
Membership	Relatively extensive	Minuscule	Relatively extensive
Campaign	Relatively expensive, professional	Relatively inexpensive, much stress on canvassing	Relatively expensive, professional
Ideology	Vague, finding the middle-way between neoliberalism & social democracy	Clearly neoliberal	'Social-liberal', middle-way between liberals and social democrats
Main pledges	Ethical and open politics, law and order, balancing the society.	Fighting corruption, law and order, ethical and open politics.	Law and order, fighting corruption.

* – as of January 2004; ** – led to the formation of a new government.

accomplishing the Reform Party's pledge of substantially decreasing the personal income tax led Taagepera to call his party leadership 'the poodles of Reform Party'.

Theoretical considerations

How do party systems change? The recent Baltic experiences present a good testing ground for the question as there was a substantial transformation of party systems at approximately the same time. The next sections will consider some theoretical implications that can be inferred from the rise of the new Baltic parties.

First of all, it calls into question the appropriateness of sociological (cleavages) approaches to party systems in post-communist political systems. The basic ideas of Lipset & Rokkan model (1967) that has been useful in explaining the early party system development in Western Europe has had some success in explaining the general party constellations in Eastern Europe (see Kitschelt 1995). However, as an examination of the Baltic party systems would reveal, cleavages (at least those analysed initially by Lipset & Rokkan) might explain the *voting behaviour* to some extent, but are rather poor in making sense of the *party systems* (including coalition behaviour). Sociological theories are particularly ineffective in explaining such sudden transformations as the ones that occurred in the last Baltic elections. First, there are no signs of emerging new cleavages in the societies. Second, it could also be possible that some of the already existing cleavages have just surfaced to importance or gained political prominence. However, that is also more or less out of the question, as it is extremely hard to point out any clear cleavages the new parties can be claimed to correspond to. Therefore, sociological explanations of party system change and new party emergence that have worked elsewhere are not particularly useful in accounting for the success of new parties in the last Baltic elections.

Many new party studies rather use an institutional or rationalist than sociological perspective. One such example is Lucardie's (2000) analysis on the current state of theories on new party emergence and success.¹⁷ Drawing on the Western European experience, he distinguishes three types of new parties: *prophetic* parties that articulate a new ideology, *purifiers* that try to cleanse an ideology that has been soiled by existing parties, and *prolocutors* that articulate particular interests without clear reference to any ideology (Ibib.: 175–6). These categories seem not to fit well with the three new parties analysed here. They do not make (clear enough) references to ideologies, yet are not

¹⁷ Even though his approach is generally rational-institutional, it allows among other factors for the influence and role of cleavages in new party development.

focussing on any particularistic interests, but are addressing more or less all groups in a society. Their commitment to fighting corruption and conducting politics in a new way brings them closest to the purifiers, but they clearly address the politics more in general, not salvaging any particular ideology. Still, their notable success is in accordance with Western European experience, where the purifier parties have tended to be relatively successful at least in a short run (Ibid.: 182).

There are three groups of factors important for new party success: relevant political project, the availability of resources (members, media attention, money, leadership) and political opportunity structure – the openness of access to power, political culture that may improve or worsen the chances for success, presence of exploitable cleavages, and events that create chances for new parties. Ibid.: 179–81). As is apparent from above, the political *project* of the parties (cleansing of politics) was potentially very popular. However, no matter how promising, a good project is never sufficient alone for success.

As for the *resources*, the successful new parties in the Baltic states have demonstrated the substitutability of different resources. While the New Era had relatively limited money and even more limited membership, it made excellent use of charismatic leadership and the media attention Repše drew. Res Publica had considerable membership and sponsors that substituted for the lack in stable and charismatic leadership. The New Union, on the other hand, might be argued to have made very good use of the media attention its leader had gained throughout the 1997/1998 presidential elections. The experience of these parties leads support to the claims that we should not necessarily expect the post-communist countries to develop parties with mass membership (Chan 2001: 615), as there are potentially other resources that could substitute for the number of rank-and-file.

It is often hypothesized that majoritarian elements (single-mandate constituencies, direct presidential elections) of a political system have a negative effect on new party success. Willey (1998) shows that new parties are less successful under smaller district magnitude. His hypothesis on presidentialism having the same effect gets no confirmation. However, the Lithuanian example hints at the possibility that majoritarian features of political systems can also have to an opposite effect. The single mandate constituencies that can be won by parties with limited nationwide support can create a pathway into the core of national politics. Since the restoration of independence in Lithuania there have been at

least two parties that have first entered the parliament in the majoritarian part of elections, but have subsequently received significantly more support and become significant actors in the country's politics – more so the Lithuanian Liberal Union and to a lesser extent the Centre Union, that in 2000 returned to being represented by MP-s from single mandate constituencies only. However, the Labour Party, founded in late 2003 by the millionaire MP Viktor Uspaskich (who was elected to the parliament as an independent, but sympathized with the New Union and donated amply to its campaign in 2000) stands currently on the top of Lithuanian public opinion polls and stands a chance to enter the parliament also through the PR-part in 2004. In addition to the pathway created by the majoritarian part of the mixed electoral system, the direct presidential elections can be argued to provide a similar pathway into the core of party politics. As the analysis above shows, the success of New Union can be mostly attributed to its leader whose political career started off from being a non-party presidential candidate. The gained publicity was instrumental resource in the later formation of the party and its success.¹⁸

The influence of other facets of *political opportunity structures* in the Baltic countries is mixed – some of them are hospitable to the new parties and others are hostile. It is likely that the countries' political culture has not (yet?) developed to value stability very high. On the other hand, formal access to power is limited by different provisions, especially so in Estonia with high membership threshold and rather advanced system of public financing of parliamentary parties that handicaps the newcomers to some extent. The latter may explain the rather limited changes in Estonian party landscape until the 2003 elections (bar the high electoral volatility, see Sikk 2001). At the same time the privatization scandals provided an excellent 'event' to help the new parties gain momentum. The rise of the new parties was accompanied by the profound decline of others – mostly of those that had been governing during the previous electoral term. In Estonia, the rise of Res Publica was complemented with the fall of Pro Patria, the party of the prime minister from 1999 to 2002. The New Era surfaced when the electoral fortunes of the former governmental parties (the People's Party, Fatherland & Freedom, Latvia's Way and the New Party) waned. The Lithuanian New Policy bloc made headways in 2000 while the ruling conservative Fatherland Union came down from being close to the

¹⁸ Similarly, in 1994 a new party to enter the Bulgarian parliament (Bulgarian Business Bloc) was formed around Georges Ganchev Petrushev who received 16.8% of popular vote in presidential elections in 1992 (Sikk 2001: 50).

absolute majority to only nine seats in the parliament. The new parties offered themselves as replacements for the old ones whose popularity had decreased substantially due to the scandals. Thus, it can be argued that the success of the new parties is part of the same processes that brings down the old ones and in studying the successes of new parties, future research should probably also pay closer attention to the decline of others. Study into the 'death' causes of parties may shed light to the reasons for the 'birth' of others.

One possible line of reasoning here could be that the stakes have been so high in post-communist politics, that some of the basic mechanisms of democracy are just not working properly. The representative democracy is very much based on the principle of electoral accountability – the parties in power have to act in line with the will of people because otherwise they will be voted out of office in next elections. However, if the stakes in politics are high but steadily declining over time, the power holders can be tempted to make maximum use of their time in office by pursuing unpopular and/or unaccountable policies and for instance not care too much for the negative electoral effects resulting from corruption. It may be the case that the maximum achievable utility (for the parties or persons) from one term in office can outweigh even the expected total utility of future terms. In the 1990-s the stakes in the Baltic countries, as elsewhere in post-communist countries, were indeed high. Much of the state sector was to be privatized, many laws to be introduced, the whole framework of the political systems to be constituted. However, it was easy to foresee that each successive electoral term will offer the governments less and less important decisions. In addition, two factors might have further contributed to the appeal of unaccountable policies. First, the governing parties feared the decrease in their support in any case due to economic hardship. Second, the countries have lacked independent and effective law enforcement that could hinder corruption by other means than electoral accountability. It could be argued that for instance the decline of the Estonian Pro Patria, Latvia's Way and Lithuanian conservatives can be explained by that kind of reasoning, although an empirical test of the hypothesis is rather difficult.¹⁹

¹⁹ The demise of Estonian Coalition Party may however present the best confirmation of the hypothesis. The leading party in 1995 parliament was heavily involved in privatization and was surrounded by scandals. After its collapse in 1999 elections, the party put an end to its existence, openly declaring that it had fulfilled its objectives (whatever these might have been).

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Appendix: Elections in the Baltic countries 1992–2003

Estonia - Elections to the Riigikogu

		20 Sept 1992			5 March 1995			7 March 1999			7 March 2003		
		67.8			68.9			57.4			58.2		
Turnout		V%	S	S%	V%	S	S%	V%	S	S%	V%	S	S%
1	National Independence Party	8.8	10	9.9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	Pro Patria	22.0	29	28.7	7.9	8	7.9	16.1	18	17.8	7.3	7	6.9
3	Coalition Party	13.6	17	16.8	32.2	41	40.6	7.6	7	6.9	-	-	-
4	Centre Party	12.2	15	14.9	14.2	16	15.8	23.4	28	27.7	25.4	28	27.7
5	Moderates	9.7	12	11.9	6.0	6	5.9	15.2	17	16.8	7.0	6	5.9
6	Independent Royalists	7.1	8	7.9	0.8	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-
7	Better Estonia/Estonian Citizen	6.9	8	7.9	3.6	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-
8	Pensioners' and Families' League	3.7	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
9	Farmers' Assembly	2.9	0	0.0	w 3	w 3	w 3	0.5	0	0.0	-	-	-
10	Greens	2.6	1	1.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
11	Entrepreneurs' Party	2.4	1	1.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
12	Left Alternative	1.6	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
13	Reform Party	-	-	-	16.2	19	18.8	15.9	18	17.8	17.7	19	18.8
14	United People's Party	-	-	-	5.9	6	5.9	6.1	6	5.9	2.2	0	0.0
15	Right Wingers' Party	-	-	-	5.0	5	5.0	-	-	-	-	-	-
16	The Future's Estonia Party	-	-	-	2.6	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-
17	Justice	-	-	-	2.3	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-
18	Farmers' Party	-	-	-	1.5	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-
19	Country People's Party/People's Union	-	-	-	w 3	w 3	w 3	7.3	7	6.9	13.0	13	12.9
20	Christian People's Party	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.4	0	0.0	1.1	0	0.0
21	Russian Party in Estonia	-	-	-	w 14	w 14	w 14	2.0	0	0.0	0.2	0	0.0
22	Blue Party	-	-	-	0.4	0	0.0	1.6	0	0.0	-	-	-
23	Res Publica	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	24.6	28	27.7
24	Independence Party	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.5	0	0.0
25	Social Democratic Labour Party	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.4	0	0.0
	Others	2.1	0	0.0	1.3	0	0.0	0.4	0	0.0	-	-	-
	Independent candidates	4.3	0	0.0	0.3	0	0.0	1.5	0	0.0	0.4	0	0.0
	Total	100.0	101	100.0	100.0	101	100.0	100.0	101	100.0	100.0	101	100.0

Latvia - Saeima Elections

		5-6 June 1993			30 Sept 1995			3 October 1998			5 October 2002		
Turnout		89.9			72.6			71.9			71.5		
		V%	S	S%	V%	S	S%	V%	S	S%	V%	S	S%
1	Alliance Latvia's Way	32.4	36	36.0	14.7	17	17.0	18.4	21	21.0	4.9	0	0.0
2	National Conservative Party	13.4	15	15.0	6.3	8	8.0	w 6	w 6	w 6	-	-	-
3	Popular Harmony Party	12.0	13	13.0	5.6	6	6.0	14.2	16	16.0	18.9	25	25.0
4	Farmers' Union	10.7	12	12.0	-	-	-	2.5	0	0.0	w25	w25	w25
5	Equal Rights Movement	5.8	7	7.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
6	For Fatherland and Freedom	5.4	6	6.0	12.0	14	14.0	14.7	17	17.0	5.4	7	7.0
7	Christian Democratic Union	5.0	6	6.0	-	-	-	2.3	0	0.0	-	-	-
8	Authentic Democratic Party	4.8	5	5.0	15.2	18	18.0	1.6	0	0.0	-	-	-
9	Popular Front	2.6	0	0.0	1.2	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-
10	Green List	1.2	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
11	Russian Citizens of Latvia Party	1.2	0	0.0	1.3	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-
12	Popular Movement for Latvia - Siegerists	-	-	-	15.0	16	16.0	1.7	0	0.0	-	-	-
13	Latvian Unity Party	-	-	-	7.2	8	8.0	0.5	0	0.0	-	-	-
14	United List - Farmers, Christian Democrats	-	-	-	6.4	8	8.0	-	-	-	-	-	-
15	Labour and Justice	-	-	-	4.6	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-
16	Socialist Party	-	-	-	5.6	5	5.0	w 3	w 3	w 3	-	-	-
17	Political Union of Economists	-	-	-	1.5	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-
18	Union of Latvian Farmers	-	0	0.0	1.4	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-
19	Association of Underprivileged & Independence Party	-	0	0.0	1.0	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-
20	People's Party	-	-	-	-	-	-	21.2	24	24.0	16.7	20	20.0
21	Social Democratic Alliance	-	-	-	-	-	-	12.8	14	14.0	4.0	0	0.0
22	New Party	-	-	-	-	-	-	7.3	8	8.0	-	-	-
23	New Era	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	23.9	26	26.0
24	Latvia's First Party	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9.6	10	10.0
25	Green and Farmers Union	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9.5	12	12.0
	Others	5.7	0	0.0	1.1	0	0.0	2.8	0	0.0	7.1	0	0.0
	Total	100.2	100	100.0	100.1	100	100.0	100.0	100	100.0	100.0	0	0.0

Lithuania – Seimas Elections (votes % in PR part)

	25 October 1992					20 October 1996					8 Oct 2000				
	Turnout	75.2				52.9				58.6					
	V%	PL	SM	S	S%	V%	PL	SM	Total	S%	V%	PL	SM	Total	S%
1 Democratic Labour Party	44.0	36	37	73	51.8	10.0	10	2	12	8.8	31.1	28	14	42	29.8
2 Homeland Union ('Sąjūdis')	21.2	17	13	30	21.3	31.3	33	37	70	51.1	8.6	8	1	9	6.4
3 Christian Democratic Party	12.6	10	8	18	12.8	10.4	11	5	16	11.7	3.1	0	2	2	1.4
4 Social Democratic Party	6.0	5	3	8	5.7	6.9	7	5	12	8.8	w 1	w 1	7	7	5.0
5 Coalition for a United Lithuania	3.6	0	0	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
6 Centre Movement	2.5	0	2	2	1.4	8.7	9	4	13	9.5	2.9	0	2	2	1.4
7 Electoral Action for Lithuania's Poles	2.1	2	2	4	2.8	3.1	0	1	1	0.7	1.9	0	2	2	1.4
8 National Union	2.0	0	4	4	2.8	2.2	0	3	3	2.2	0.9	0	0	0	0.0
9 Freedom League	1.2	0	0	0	0.0	1.0	0	0	0	0.0	w 8	w 8	0	0	0.0
10 National Progress Movement	1.1	0	0	0	0.0	0.3	0	0	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-
11 Liberty (Freedom) Union	0.4	0	0	0	0.0	1.6	0	0	0	0.0	1.3	0	1	1	0.7
12 Chernobyl Movement	0.3	0	0	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
13 Christian Democratic Union	w 5	w 5	1	1	0.7	3.2	0	1	1	0.7	4.2	0	1	1	0.7
14 National Party Young Lithuania***	-	-	-	-	-	4.0	0	1	1	0.7	1.2	0	1	1	0.7
15 Women's Party / New Democracy Party	-	-	-	-	-	3.9	0	1	1	0.7	w 1	w 1	2	2	1.4
16 Alliance of Lithuania's National Minorities	-	-	-	-	-	2.6	0	0	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-
17 Liberal Union	1.5	0	0	0	0.0	1.9	0	1	1	0.7	17.3	16	18	34	24.1
18 Peasants' Party	-	-	-	-	-	1.7	0	1	1	0.7	4.1	0	4	4	2.8
19 Russian Union	-	-	-	-	-	1.7	0	0	0	0.0	w 1	w 1	0	0	0.0
20 Political Prisoners & Deportees	w 3	w 3	1	1	0.7	1.6	0	1	1	0.7	w 2	w 2	w 2	w 2	w 2
21 Economy Party	-	-	-	-	-	1.3	0	0	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-
22 New Union (Social Liberals)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	19.6	18	11	29	20.6
23 Moderate Conservative Union	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.0	0	1	1	0.7
24 People's Union "For the Fair Lithuania"	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.5	0	1	1	0.7
25 "Social Democracy 2000"	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.5	0	0	0	0.0
26 Modern Christian Democratic Union*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	0.7
Others	1.6	0	0	0	0.0	2.6	0	0	0	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	0.0
Independent candidates*	-	0	0	0	0.0	-	0	4	4	2.9	-	0	2	2	1.4
	100.1	70	71	141	100.0	100.0	70	67**	137**	100.0	100.2	70	71	141	100.0

PL - party list seats, SM - single member seats

* Only in SM ** Excludes 4 vacant seats

*** 2000: "YL", New Nationalists & Political Prisoners

1992: Sąjūdis: 2 SM by Charter of Lithuanian Citizens, National Union: 1 SM by Independence Party

Sources: Rose et al (1998), Estonian National Electoral Committee, Central Electoral Commission of Latvia, Elections to the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania 2000.