



Commemoration of the 30th Anniversary of the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania as a Parliamentary Library: The International Research Conference ‘Political Leadership in a Parliamentary Democracy’

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Abstract. Three decades ago, on 20 November 1991, the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania was entrusted with the function of a parliamentary library. On this occasion, there was the international research conference ‘Political Leadership in a Parliamentary Democracy’ held at the National Library on 23–24 November 2021 with a view to discussing the following thematic issues: (1) provision of information services for legislators and decision makers (challenges related to information analysis), (2) communication and philosophy of political leadership from the perspective of democratic parliamentarism, (3) developments in information policy, and (4) role and experience of national libraries in a social crisis. Reports were presented by researchers from the United Kingdom, France, Poland, Bulgaria, Latvia, and Lithuania. The article introduces the presentations clustered according to these thematic issues.

Lietuvos nacionalinės Martyno Mažvydo bibliotekos, kaip parlamentinės bibliotekos, 30-mečio minėjimas: tarptautinė mokslinė konferencija „Politinė lyderystė parlamentinėje demokratijoje“

Santrauka. Prieš tris dešimtmečius, 1991 m. lapkričio 20 d., Lietuvos nacionalinei Martyno Mažvydo bibliotekai pavestos parlamentinės bibliotekos funkcijos. Ta proga 2021 m. lapkričio 23–24 d. bibliotekoje surengta tarptautinė mokslinė konferencija „Politinė lyderystė parlamentinėje demokratijoje“. Joje aptarta: 1) įstatymų leidėjų ir apskritai sprendimus priimančių pareigūnų informacinis aprūpinimas (informacijos analizės iššūkiai); 2) politinės lyderystės komunikacija ir filosofija demokratinio parlamentarizmo kontekstuose; 3) informacijos politikos kaita; 4) nacionalinių bibliotekų vaidmuo ir patirtis socialinės krizės aplinkybėmis. Pranešimus skaitė mokslininkai iš Jungtinės Karalystės, Prancūzijos, Lenkijos, Bulgarijos, Latvijos ir Lietuvos. Jie pristatomi tematiškai sugrupuoti pagal konferencijos siekius.

General background and objectives of the conference

In the late 80s of the 20th century, at the start of the Lithuanian national renaissance movement, the Republican Library of Lithuania was named after Martynas Mažvydas in 1988 and one year after that, it was given the status of a national library. On 21 November 1991, when the era of the independent Lithuania had already begun, it was entrusted the function of a parliamentary library by an order of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of Lithuania, which later was fixed in the Law on Libraries. On the occasion of the commemoration the 30th anniversary of a parliamentary library, the National Library organized the international research conference ‘Political Leadership in a Parliamentary Democracy’ with a view to discussing provision of information services for legislators and decision makers (challenges related to information analysis), communication and philosophy of political leadership from the perspective of democratic parliamentarism, developments in information policy, and the role and experience of national libraries in a social crisis. The conference had also the purpose to assess to what extent and how the National Library contributed and was capable of contributing to the nation’s progress by performing the function of a parliamentary library.

The conference, during its two-day run, featured 19 presentations by researchers from the United Kingdom, France, Poland, Bulgaria, Latvia, and Lithuania.

An important partner of public authorities

The conference opened with the welcoming speech by its patroness, the Speaker of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania Viktorija Čmilytė-Nielsen. The keynote of the speech was strong synergies of political leadership and high-quality information in today’s world. The parliament’s Speaker said that in this field, an exceptional role was played by the National Library, which, within its active involvement into interinstitutional cooperation, continued performing its function of a parliamentary library.

Among the conference’s guests, there was the President-elect of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) the President of the General Council for Libraries (Greece) Antonia Arahova, who emphasized the strong potential of the National Library manifesting itself in the organizing of this conference and in the successful response to challenges sent by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The positive view regarding the National Library expressed by the Speaker of the Seimas was confirmed by the Chair of the Committee on Culture of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania Vytautas Juozapaitis. He emphasized the Library’s sociocultural function:

<...> the Library, which possesses extensive and trustful information resources, has become an important partner of public authorities in their legislative activities. It gives us satisfaction that aside from being partners, we are also companions.

In his welcome, the Minister of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania Simonas Kairys highlighted a fundamental element of information, i.e., criticism. In the Minister’s words, the National Library as a parliamentary library provides politicians and civil servants with critically analyzed information, which allows them avoiding fragmented outlook, strengthening democratic processes, and arming themselves with tools for fighting information battles.


The opening part of the conference was concluded by the Director General of the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania Renaldas Gudauskas, who briefly outlined activities and functions of the parliamentary library as well as presented a roadmap for the future:


The previous three decades of intensive work and successful cooperation with the principal public authorities created the conditions for the Library to undertake a qualitative step forward. This


anniversary represents a good opportunity to take a fresh look at our strategies and accelerate the development of the National Library's parliamentary function. Though put to the test by changing realities in ways that are hard to imagine, we continue to believe in our potential to have sustained economic, social, and cultural impact nationally.


Presentations given at the conference are introduced here in clusters according to the conference's thematic issues.


Information services for legislators

In his report 'Some Reflections on Legislators in the Administrative State in Contemporary European Democracies', Cyril Benoît  (Centre for European Studies and Comparative Politics at the Paris Institute of Political Studies), by drawing on examples from the areas of social policy and finance, pointed out challenges that arise for legislatures when most information processing capacities related to policies are placed in the hands of nominally independent experts who are also charged with crucial decision making capacities.

The contribution by Danguolė Bardauskaitė  (General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania) 'Think Tanks and Decision Making in Foreign and Security Policies in the Baltic States' was about think tanks of the Baltic countries dealing with issues of foreign and security policies. The speaker stated that the scale of performance, financial potential, and visibility of think tanks differed in each Baltic country because of divergent perceptions of government officials of a particular country on the existing and desirable role of think tanks on the national and international levels.


Giedrius Česnakas  (General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania) introduced the research study 'Security Bubble: Knowledge and Decision Making on National Defence Issues' based on a theoretical model of neoclassical realism. It demonstrates how decision making on national defence issues is predetermined by knowledge and perception filters (bubbles). It means that decisions on security issues depend not only on elements of the nation's material power but especially on how decision makers view the country's position and the international context.


The presentation by Ainė Ramonaitė  (Vilnius University) 'National Election Studies Around the World and in Lithuania: Benefit for Decision Makers and Civil Society' builds upon the research project 'The 2020 Lithuanian National Election Study'. By focusing on the results from the study of the 2020 election of the Seimas, the reporter showed how results of a national election study could contribute to the improvement of the quality of political representation. As regards decision makers, such data allow them gaining more in-depth knowledge about Lithuanian citizens: to whom actually a mandate was given during an election to the Seimas (a leader, team or particular political programme), what decisions are prioritized by voters, what the thoughts of those citizens who deliberately ignore elections are, etc. As regards citizens, the results of a study allow them getting better acquainted with their representatives and candidates during an election: to evaluate political opinions of parties and politicians and their dynamics, the unanimity of parties regarding specific political issues, and differences in political programmes or their absence.


In his contribution 'Choosing a Subject for Political Analysis: Agendas, Conceptual Maps, and Chronological Trajectories', Magnus Tomas Kėvišas  (Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania), by focusing on parameters that decide the subjects chosen for political analysis, discussed various agenda setting paradigms. An agenda can be predetermined by (1) ambition to cover a broad scope (systemic planning), i.e., an intention to address the current / changing (pragmatic) context and (2) an attempt to set the agenda with regard to preferred schedules of certain parties or personalities. The report introduced the results from an empirical study comparing the output of two different Lithuanian analytical centres (*ex-ante* vs. *ex-post*). One of them is a public sector institution (the Government Strategic Analysis


Centre, STRATA) and the other, a non-governmental think tank. The study results showed that the publicly funded work was liberal and unfocused in terms of any tendency with regard to its being past or future oriented, whereas the privately funded output focused exclusively on what might be done in the future.


Communication and philosophy of political leadership

The talk by Emma Crewe  (SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies) at the University of London) 'Political Leaders Navigating Complexity' presented itself as a reference point and something of a flagship for the conference. The reporter (she is the author of the recently published book *The Anthropology of Parliaments: Entanglements in Democratic Politics*. London: Routledge, 2021) raised a problematic issue: why are leaders and politicians, in spite of being awash with concepts on leadership, no nearer to improved practice? Emma Crew suggested starting with the determining of the problem's causes. The problem arises in the first place because the world / environment increasingly becomes more complex, conflictual, and unpredictable, which calls for more complex leadership. Another reason is that views inside and outside academia classify leadership into simplified individual traits and cultures as well as promote over-optimistic recipes for change as well as demonizes and romanticizes leaders. In the words of the reporter, it is timely to shift towards reflecting commonalities and differences in assumptions about, and practices of, leadership in order to enable a better-informed debate about how leaders, including politicians, actually work in practice.


The problematic issue as regards political leadership raised by Emma Crew found its expression in a slightly different light in other presentations. In her contribution, Līga Romāne-Kalniņa  (University of Latvia) 'Communication of Political Leadership Against the Background of Parliamentary Democracy in the Baltic States: A Linguistic Perspective' presented corpus-assisted discursive analysis of public communication of the parliamentary leaders of the post-Soviet Baltic States. One of the central elements of the national identities of these states within the communication of parliamentary leaders were such keywords as 'returning to the West', 'returning to democracy', etc. This was how the idea of sustainable democracy as part of the national identities in the Baltic States was constructed.

The issue raised by Emma Crew manifested itself also 'on a practical level'. Barbara Roskoša and Ilga Kreituse  (Rīga Stradiņš University) introduced the research study 'Framing a Populist Leader: Case Study of the Latvian Parliamentary Election' about how populist leaders, by using targeted messaging and technological advantages, won the election of the 13th Saeima of the Republic of Latvia in 2018. The 13th Saeima election proved the effectiveness of populism; however, because of the fallout of populist parties not being able to form a Cabinet and, therefore, get the Prime Minister seat, the parties collapsed later on. Following the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the emergence of populist leaders for the upcoming 14th election of the Saeima began. In the opinion of the presenters, public despair was turning into a breeding ground for populist parties to gain votes, and a rhetoric question was arising: would political actors, the media and, most importantly the electorate, prepare for this election and would they learn from the mistakes of 2018?


In her presentation, Joanna Rak  (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, Poland) 'Why Potent Political Leaders Failed in the Struggle for Women's Rights? The Case Study of 'Gals for Gals', discussed the failure of political leaders of the 2016/18 pro-choice protest movement in Poland 'Gals for Gals'. In the words of the presenter, the potent political leaders (the movement's initiators) did not make use of tremendous social support for their initiative to support women's rights. The movement demobilized itself, and its goals were not achieved.

The topic of the competence of political leaders was continued by the Bulgarian researchers Antoaneta Getova  and Kamen Kovachev (Sofia University, Bulgaria) in their presentation 'How Much is 22%?'. At the time of the conference, Bulgaria was an EU country with the lowest rate of COVID-19


vaccination (22 percent of the country's population), though it possessed sufficient quantities of every vaccine approved in the EU, and thousands of centres were in place for free-of-charge and voluntary vaccination. The reporters pointed out that the main reason for the sluggish vaccination rate was, to a large degree, mistakes done in the promotion of vaccination campaigns and political leaders' approach to vaccination (from indifference to clear opposition).


Within this thematic cluster, two of the conference's contributions were devoted to the interaction of political and legislative authorities. In his talk 'An Impossible Role to Play: The Prime Minister on the Stage of the French Constitutional System', Guillaume Tusseau  (Law School at the Paris Institute of Political Studies) questioned the possibility to restore the political power of the institution of the Prime Minister within the contemporary Fifth Republic of France (such an ambitious goal had been set by the Constitution of the Fifth Republic). The disincentive is, in the first place, that the President's mandate, which lasted seven years, has been reduced to five years and aligned to that of the National Assembly. Then the legislative election takes place a few weeks after the presidential election. The five-year period (*Quinquennat*) thus has paradoxically contributed to reinforcing the President's institution and seriously impaired that of the Prime Minister. In his report 'Interaction of Political and Judicial Authorities According to the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania', Dainius Žalimas (Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas) concluded that proper interaction of political and judicial authorities builds upon their respect of the Constitution and each other as well as upon the leading role of judiciary within the domain of the supremacy of law and its openness to society.

Developments in information policy


This thematic cluster of reports includes four presentations. Andrius Šuminas  (Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania; Vilnius Gediminas Technical University) presented a review of peculiarities of the 2020 election campaign of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania 'Characteristics of the Campaign of the 2020 Election of the Seimas on Various Media Channels', where he analyzed messages by politicians who had participated in the election according to communication objectives and forms, elements of visual expression, and the subject matter of their messages. Also considered was the election content related to the COVID-19 pandemic and forms of its expression.


The subject of the talk 'The Problem of Trusting the Lithuanian Mass Media During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Challenges of Legal Regulation of Public Information' by Liudvika Meškauskaitė (Vilnius University) was a topical concern of today, public trust in mass media, related to not only to increasing flows of custom information and the identification of the fourth estate with political power but also legal regulation issues. The presentation detailed challenges in the management of the public broadcaster, the mission of which, in a democratic society, is ensuring pluralism of opinion, consolidation of society, and social peace.

Liutauras Ulevičius  (Vilnius University) introduced the research study 'Disinformation Narratives in the Public Communication of Lithuanian Political Leaders During the COVID-19 Pandemic' presenting analysis of disinformation narratives by political leaders. The study identifies the main false narratives developed by Lithuanian political leaders starting with the January of 2020 and singles out those narratives which determined politicians' subsequent success or even popularity of some earlier or new social movements and political parties.

The contribution by Arūnas Brazauskas and Andrius Vaišnys  (Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania) 'Media Policy and the Reality of Journalism: Some Conclusions on Media Resilience in a Pandemic' introduced an empirical study of regional media conducted in March–April 2021. The study found out economic and management measures undertaken by editors' offices of regional media in order to survive during the COVID-19 pandemic, the main of which were public support (the Press, Radio, and Television Support Foundation) and transition to digital media.


Role and experience of national libraries in a social crisis

This thematic cluster was addressed by the conference's three closing presentations devoted to the role of libraries. In the report 'Libraries in the Context of European Open Data Information Policy' Regina Varnienė-Janssen and Jūratė Kuprienė  (Vilnius University) spoke about one of the most urgent issues of today's information policy, open linked data and reuse of library data and information. The research that had been done by the speakers identified requirements for such reuse and initiatives of libraries in achieving interoperability of their data with the Semantic Web. The presentation discussed best practice examples from various countries. The speakers sought to encourage broader discussion within the library sector as well as draw the attention of cultural policy makers to the necessity of putting forward, in a strategic document for library development, provisions orienting the library data management towards the paradigm of linked open data by emphasizing the integration of such data with the Semantic Web.

The concern of Lithuanian libraries to conform to today's requirements was also addressed by Daiva Janavičienė  (Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania) in her contribution 'Transformations of the Lithuanian Librarian's Profession: Professionalism and Development of Competences'. The reporter, by drawing on the conception of the professionalism of today's librarian and qualitative empirical research, spoke about how representatives of administrations of Lithuania's public libraries perceived changes in competences determining the librarian's professionalism as well as about the main obstacles and challenges hampering the development of professionalism.

The report by Rasa Januševičienė (Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania) 'Activities of Lithuanian Public Libraries in the Face of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Migrant Crisis: The Endeavour to Ensure Human Rights' discussed the role of public libraries in a social crisis. The speaker, by drawing on experience of public libraries and results of empirical research, generalized activities of Lithuanian public libraries in ensuring the reinforcement of human rights during the COVID-19 pandemic and migrant crisis. She also presented recommendations for public libraries how to contribute to solving issues caused by today's crises in Lithuania.

Closing of the conference: plans and wishes

The conference's two-day agenda was tight, and there were plenty of discussions after the presentations. On the first day, the conference was moderated by Magnus Tomas Kėvišas and on the second day, by Andrius Vaišnys and Darius Žiemelis . It was gratifying (given the situation with the COVID-19 pandemic in Lithuania) that the interest in the conference was considerable: its participants were not only those who were present in the conference hall but also a relatively large number of those who watched it online because, for objective reasons, they were unable to attend. The video record of the entire conference is available at <https://konferencijos.lnb.lt/pb30/>.

The final word was presented by the Director of the National Library's Information and Communication Sciences Department Andrius Vaišnys (who was one of the conference's organizers), where he emphasized information services as an object unifying the conference's audience. The provision of such services requires well-functioning information systems, but first and foremost it calls for appropriate competences, non confrontational interaction with law, and coherence of separate elements. The demand for such an interdisciplinary approach was well understood by the organizers of the conference, who invited researchers from various countries representing different scholarly domains. In thanking all those who had contributed to the conference's organization and its smooth progress, Andrius Vaišnys wished that the conference, an event devoted to the topic of political leadership and information services, should become continuous and be periodically held as one of the conferences organized by the National Library.