

The Role of Partisan Politics in Lithuanian Higher Education Policies

How does left-right divide of Lithuanian political parties
matter for their higher education preferences and policy
output?

Kristina Saulytė

Abstract

Lithuania like other Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries has undergone major changes from the communist socio-economic order to the system based on democratic capitalism. This shift towards market economy and the collapse of communist ideology were also reflected in higher education (HE) reforms. Since political parties are the main actors in modern democracies, partisan politics could influence HE policy changes. This paper aims to examine the HE policy development in Lithuania, and analyse whether the process was shaped by ideological preferences of political parties. Theoretical expectations for partisan preferences of left and right-wing political parties are constructed using the partisan theory. In order to verify these conceptual expectations, the study employs the qualitative method by using semi-structured elite interviews with politicians from both left and right-wing political parties who initiated higher education policies. The expected preferences are then compared to HE policy goals and policy outputs. Results show that parties differ in their HE preferences along the redistributive policy dimension, however, this was not reflected in the policy output from left parties. This could be explained by institutional constraints that influence the HE policy implementation process.

Key words: higher education policy, political parties, partisan preferences, redistribution, governance

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1 Introduction

The emergence of Lithuania as independent state and its transition from the communist socio-economic order to the system based on democratic capitalism has led to a number of higher education (HE) reforms. These reforms have replaced the old HE system associated with state controlled and centrally planned economy where the supply of students had to meet the demands of heavy industry. A new, reformed HE system emerged, characterized by more autonomy and market orientated goals linked to better opportunities but also higher risks (Roffe 1996: 109). Despite these significant changes, the scholars do not agree on the main driving forces, the direction and rationale for HE policy changes in post-communist countries, including Lithuania.

There are two main positions in the literature that explain HE development and policy changes in the countries of post-communist Europe. First, HE reforms could be influenced by increasing institutional pressures produced by international organizations like the OECD, the European Union (EU), and the World Bank (Vaira 2004: 492). Hence, Lithuanian HE systems might reflect some common institutional trends where the New Public Management (NPM), markets and some business strategies are introduced to the public sector (Neave 2012: IX). This is what policy convergence, institutional isomorphism and related literature would suggest (Knill 2005). Second, there are indications that due to the impact of historically embedded domestic structures and institutions (Dobbins 2011), and unique political context (Radaelli 2005), Lithuania like other countries could be characterized by distinct and diverging development paths of HE. Even though both aforementioned perspectives explain how historical and transnational institutions affect given HE policy choices, it exclusively relies on structural explanations for policy preferences and policy output (Lieberman 2002: 697; Dobbins 2011). This is particularly evident in a number of studies focused on Lithuanian higher education policies (Leisyte and Kizniene 2006; Leisyte et al. 2009; Leisyte et al. 2015; Kralikova 2015; Dobbins and Leisyte 2014).

What is least investigated is the role of domestic agency, i.e. how key political actors influence the design and implementation of HE reforms. This is somewhat surprising since political parties are essential actors organizing political process and ensuring democratic representation of their electorate interests and policy preferences. While holding positions in government, the ruling political parties are expected to propose and shape the policies in accordance to certain ideological expectations thereby representing their electorate will (Klingemann et al. 1994; Benoit and Laver 2006), which means that produced HE policies should be directly linked to parties' ideological goals and preferences. Even though there are a lot of studies in political science focused on the relationship between ideological background of a party and the differences in policy preferences and output, the

partisan politics literature on HE is very limited (e.g. Castles 1989; Busemeyer 2009; 2015; Ansell 2010; Rauh et al. 2011; Busemeyer et al. 2013), especially in the context of newly formed democracies or former communist countries such as Lithuania. This introduces the area where the literature gap should be addressed.

1.1 Aim and research question

The aim of the paper is to investigate whether party politics play a significant role in the HE policy formation process in Lithuania. To investigate this, I examine Lithuanian partisan preferences from the party's perspective, and the actual parties' partisan influence on HE policies. I take into account the aforementioned transnational and historical institutional constraints as important intervening factors. First, I evaluate the partisan preferences based on the left-right orientation of key political actors along two policy dimensions: redistributive and governance policies of HE. The goal is to pinpoint how key political actors from different parties differ in their HE policy goals, and if given policy goals are aligned with party's political ideology. Second, I analyse the partisan influence on HE reforms. In this case, the focus is to establish whether participation of different political parties in government *actually* leads to realization of different HE policies. Accordingly, my research question (RQ) asks:

How do Lithuanian political parties differ in their HE policy preferences and policy outputs based on left-right ideological divide?

The RQ is answered through the qualitative case study that utilizes partisan theory to explore the influence of party politics on HE policy *preferences* and *actual* policies in Lithuania involving the period from 2000 to 2015, since the first important HE reform has been implemented. In order to collect the required data about preferred HE policy choices and their actual realization, eight semi-structured elite interviews with key political actors who participated in higher education reforms have been conducted. The respondents are former Education and Science ministers, vice-ministers, and the members of Committee on Education, Science and Culture. They were delegated by Social Democratic Party, Liberal Movement party, New Union (Social Liberals), Labour Party and Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats. As their answers should help to answer the questions in relation to the impact of party politics on HE in Lithuania, the broader implications of this thesis are expected to contribute to the scientific debate where agency or structure could be considered as the major determinants of different policies in European post-communist countries' context.

1.2 Motivation

Higher education policies have attracted significant interest during the last several decades (Gornitzka et al. 2007; Gornitzka 2008; Mattei 2014; Maassen and Stensaker 2011). A few years after the Second World War the relationship between the European University and society was quite stable. All expectations regarding the main university functions such as representation of the dominant belief system, production of new knowledge, and educating bureaucracy were met. However, the massification of HE, the contemporary discussions about the knowledge economy, European integration, and internationalization of knowledge systems has forced this relationship to change (Gornitzka et al. 2007: 183-184; Maassen and Stensaker 2011: 757-758).

The new so-called pact between university and society has been negotiated to the great extent in the political sphere. Political parties have proposed different strategies and general reframing of this policy field (Busemeyer et al. 2013: 533). One part of this negotiation is related to the fact that HE is not a public good accessible equally by all citizens like in the case of primary and secondary education in developed democracies, so there is still some space for redistribution. When HE was transformed from the elite to mass level in the 1970s, the topic was more discussed in the context of the welfare state and policies of social mobility. On the other hand, the contemporary debate is linked to the knowledge economy where HE is understood as a tool that supports economic growth, innovation and responds to the needs of market economy and competition. In all policy frames, political parties could have taken different positions by emphasizing welfare or economic aspects in forming HE policies (Jungblut 2014: 89-90).

The relationship between HE policies and party politics have been extensively analysed in western European states (Ansell 2010) and significantly overlooked in the case of post-communist counterparts. In this paper, I will therefore shift attention to Eastern Europe and focus on Lithuania, i.e. one of the Baltic States. All countries in the region were part or under the influence of Soviet Union for ~50 years, and are still often analysed in context of historical institutions, the communist legacies of the past, or by using explanations related to international forces. However, the current conceptual distinction here that divides east from the west in this area is that western HE systems have undergone gradual and path-dependent evolutionary changes. Lithuania, on the other hand, could be characterized by revolution-like speed transformations (Dobbins 2011: 13), where the actor-centred theories could be used to explain them (Busemeyer 2015: 38). In this work, I seek to investigate whether domestic political actors could influence the changes in the HE policy field, and therefore contributing to the understanding of HE evolutionary changes in the whole Eastern European region.

1.3 Thesis structure

The paper is organized as follows. In the next chapter, I give a brief introduction to the relevant concepts used in this work, such as the development of Lithuanian HE reforms and Lithuanian party system. The goal is to provide the reader with an essential background for understanding the study context. The third chapter focuses on reviewing the relevant body of research associated with changes of HE policies in western and eastern European regions. In the following chapter, theory of partisan politics, two-dimensional framework, and influence of ministerial power are going to be presented for the purpose to form policy related preferences for the key political actors based on left-right ideological parties' divide in Lithuania. The fifth chapter outlines the methodology which is based on qualitative case study with semi-structured elite interviews. In chapter six, the results obtained from the interviews are systematically analysed and discussed. In the final chapter, I conclude my work and propose directions for further research.

2 Background

Lithuanian partisan preferences based on left-right political orientation and the actual partisan influence on Lithuanian HE policies is the backbone of my work. Therefore, I use a number of concepts related to HE reforms and Lithuanian politics that need to be defined and clarified. First, I outline what HE policies (reforms) mean, and then introduce a short review of HE policy reforms in Lithuania. Finally, I describe the formation of the party system in Lithuania. The goal is to help the reader to acquire a comprehensive understanding of Lithuanian politics in terms of main (left-right) political contestation and its influence on HE policies.

2.1 Concept definitions of higher education policies

When I refer to HE policies (reforms) or HE policy output, I am talking about two-dimensional policy aspects: (1) the redistributive characteristics of the HE policies, and (2) how public HE institutions, in particular, universities have been governed and organized in Lithuania. This is important since the concepts of redistributive policies and governance could carry more meanings which have been used in different areas. The ones I used in this research are going to be explained in the following subsections.

2.1.1 Redistributive dimension in HE

The basic aim of redistributive policies is to eliminate the social issues such as poverty and social exclusion in order to create more equal society. Historically, this goal has been mainly reached through the transformations in the tax system thereby redistributing incomes from rich to poor (Herwartz and Theilen 2017: 74). Nevertheless, "...redistribution is not only about redistributing incomes, but also about redistributing opportunities: access to better education, better job opportunities...that may lead to greater equality in incomes in the long term..." (Sefton 2008: 611). Even though many states still rely on the tax policies in order to achieve their redistributive goals, recent studies indicate the influence of "equal opportunity" strategies and "active" welfare state (Sefton 2008; Herwartz and Theilen 2017). When I mention the redistributive policies or redistributive dimension in HE throughout my work I always refer to the latter meaning. Namely, improving opportunities to participate in HE e.g. for previously excluded groups with the purpose to create more equal society.

There are a number of policy instruments for targeting redistribution. In literature, redistributive dimension in HE could be characterized by three main pathways: (i) spending policies focused on HE, (ii) student support systems and (iii) regulations on access to HE (Jungblut 2014; 2016).

First, spending policies revolve around the public/private divide (ibid). In the former, tax-based public resources (the state budget) support HE, while the latter indicates that financial resources come from a private sector and individuals in a form of tuition fees. The public spending for HE is usually understood as alleviating the deep-rooted inequalities by creating opportunities for those who otherwise cannot afford to pay high tuition charges. The private spending in this context often means the tuition fees for students, i.e. fewer opportunities and increased inequality (Jungblut 2016: 333-334).

Second, redistribution through the social transfers involves the education-related benefits, e.g. student grants, scholarships or subsidized loans that represent student support system. Some of them target lower income groups whereas others are based on universal principles supporting everyone studying at universities. Even though all student support systems have positive effects on redistributive ends, some are more effective for targeting redistribution (ibid: 339-343). Changes in the social transfers are discussed in terms of characterizing redistributive dimension of Lithuanian higher education reforms.

The regulations on the access to HE is another influential policy instrument that captures the redistributive effect on HE (Espinoza 2008; Espinoza and Gonzalez 2013). The instrument can be exercised by controlling entrance qualification requirements and increasing/decreasing student quota at universities. Political actors that aim to achieve redistribution should favour flexible entrance qualification requirements as wider access to post-secondary education has important redistributive characteristics. This increases qualified labour which leads to relative distribution of income and creates positive externalities for people by growing transactions in the economy (Ansell 2010: 6).

All the aforementioned policy instruments are extremely important for achieving redistribution in HE. I address these instruments when the political parties' preferences and policy goals in Lithuania are discussed. However, all three instruments could not be adopted or reflected in one actual reform at once. Therefore, when I discuss Lithuanian HE policies I refer to different laws, by-laws and their consequences that catch this redistributive dimension.

2.1.2 Governance dimension in HE

The meaning and importance of the first, redistributive dimension and its policy instruments have been explained in the previous section. The second dimension of Lithuanian HE policies – HE governance, also requires clarification. HE governance describes the way in which universities are operated and which governing structures prevail. On the global scale the HE governing structures are quite different, however, certain models that share common heritage and similar characteristics do exist. I will utilize three ideal-type models of HE governance

developed by Clark (1983), Olsen (2007) and Dobbins (2011) to analyse the Lithuanian HE governance: (1) state control forces, (2) market mechanisms, and (3) the principle of academic self-governance.

In the state-control model the government directly controls many aspects of internal and external university matters such as admission requirements, hiring academic staff, curricula, duration of studies, grading, exams, also actively involves in quality assurance, internal structure, efficiency, business relations and appointment of even external stakeholders. Consequently, the university has limited decision-making powers and autonomy (Neave and van Vught 1991: xi–xxii; Dobbins 2011: 38-49; Leisyte and Dobbins 2014: 991). The main goal of this HE system is implementation of state prescribed objectives where universities are seen as rational instruments meeting the national priorities (2007: 26-31).

In the market-oriented model universities should act as real companies, determine the study price and research services without state's intervention. The model is often characterized as old-fashioned, inefficient (Agasisti and Catalano 2006: 248), and presents difficulties for institutions to meet their goals in the unpredictable, changing economic conditions enhanced by globalization or European integration (Neave 1998: 266). Economic efficiency or the so-called 'value for money' in times of growing public costs in meeting the social demands for HE is one of the main reasons behind such market-oriented policies. It relies on market competition as motivation for facilitating innovations at universities which is thought to be impossible through traditional the state controlled systems or 'academic oligarchy'.

University as a self-governing community of scholars is the third model. It originated in Germany, Austria and has been transferred to Italy and Central Europe before communist era (Scott 2002: 140–141; Nybom 2003). On the one hand, it is based on organizational form of academic self-governance (oligarchy), i.e. strong scientists and professional power in research and studies, and strong self-regulation of academic matters through institutions and university senates in tandem with some outside self-governing bodies (Clark 1983: 140). On the other hand, the state still intervenes and constraints to some extent the self-governance. Universities dependent on the government's financial support which, in turn, forms the virtue of collective agreement. However, the university is not under the pressure to achieve utility, applicability, economic efficiency or political correctness of research results by sacrificing its freedom (Olsen 2007).

The described characteristics of the two-dimensional HE policy are crucial when analysing how political parties position themselves with respect to these policies. This would allow to outline partisan preferences, assess how political parties differ in their policy targets and evaluate how governments influence HE policy outputs. In this context, it is important to analyse what kind of changes in Lithuanian HE policies have occurred. Therefore, the development of HE reforms based on two-dimensional policy aspects in Lithuania are going to be discussed in the following section.

2.2 Higher education policy reforms in Lithuania

Lithuania's HE system has been constantly changing and facing challenges since the state regained independence in the 1990s. Changes in redistributive and governance policy trends have started with *Law of Science and Studies of 1991* (LR Mokslo ir studijų įstatymas), and *The Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania* (1992). However, the focus of this research is the period between 2000 and 2016 since the most significant transformations have occurred since 2000 (Kralikova 2015: 68) with adoption of *Higher Education Law 2000* (LR aukštojo mokslo įstatymas), *2009 Higher Education Law* (LR aukštojo mokslo įstatymas), and other following by-laws. For this reason, I will put most attention to these older reforms with respect to the ones that took place in the 2000-2016 period.

2.2.1 Redistributive policy changes in HE

The HE system trends started with *Law of Science and Higher Education of 1991*, and *The Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania* (1992). Here, with respect to the re-distributive dimension, the state budget was the dominant part of income for public universities (Antanavicius et al. 2000: 9), while the business' sector contribution was relatively small, i.e. the state's share was more than 80% of all HE institutions income (Leisyte 2002). The state ensured free of charge HE at public universities for well performing students. On the negative side, due to deteriorating economic conditions the public funding has been gradually reduced during the years. Therefore, universities started to face financial difficulties (Leisyte and Dobbins 2014).

Not surprisingly, the new *Higher Education Law 2000* and other following bylaws have been adopted to address the issues. In 2002, the distinction between students was introduced that separated those that pay their student fees and the ones covered by the state's budget (Leisyte and Kizniene 2006: 384-389). Students were selected for state financed positions based on their academic performance in high school. This new mechanism stabilized student tuition fees which had a positive effect. This facilitated a wider access to HE since the fees were quite low at that time, and the students that previously failed to enter universities had more possibilities to study. In the same time, the student support system was not strong enough in a sense that only a minor group of students received need-based and merit-based grants. The university entrance qualifications were quite relaxed at the time, however, minimum requirements have been gradually increased. Interestingly, despite introduction of tuition fees, weak student support system and introduction of minimum requirements for university studies, enrolment rates have dramatically improved. From 2000 to 2009, the number of enrolled students have increased (Lithuanian Department of Statistics 2013: 13), meaning that the outcome of policies was the expansion of HE system.

In 2009, a new government has introduced another *2009 Higher Education Law*. The law outlined funding allocation with stronger mixture of input and output based parameters where the efficiency of produced research outputs started to become more significant in order to receive the state funding (Leisyte and Kizniene 2006). In addition, the tuition fees were significantly increased for students that were able to pay for studies, and almost 50% of the students were self-financed in 2016. The student support system was also modified and it was now based on three types of grants where: two were awarded to high performing students (one for the best ones, another for the best self-financing students), and the third type was social scholarship for lower socio-economic background students. A state-supported loan which mostly covered the interest rates of the loan was also introduced. However, only 12% of students received grants in 2016, and the number of working students were among the highest in the EU which clearly illustrated the need for external income sources. Not surprisingly, the number of students studying at universities per 10000 population have been decreasing since 2009, which means that the system started to be become more restrictive (Lithuanian Department of Statistics 2013: 13).

2.2.2 Governance policy changes in HE

HE governance changes have been also reflected in the policy reforms beginning with the *Law of Science and Higher Education of 1991* and *Lithuanian Constitution of 1992*, which ensured university's autonomy principle.

The university boards were established and the governance model was updated by issuing the *Higher Education Law 2000*. However, the university boards were not involved in strategic HE management but rather acted as evaluating and advising body. The university retained its autonomy, however, the ability to affect decision making was significantly diminished. In 2007, various attempts were made to reform HE governance towards the market oriented model which sought to bring more external stakeholders from the business sector into the governing board. Even though all political parties in the parliament signed the agreement for reforms, the law was not enforced until the next government (Kralikova 2015: 75-78).

The liberal and conservative parties formulated even more advanced HE law's draft. The goal was to open up universities to the external environment and enhance transparency. The architects of this law argued that university boards should have the decision-making power to appoint the university rector who would be independent from the academic community in order to implement the necessary reforms. They also sought that the boards would consist of majority of external stakeholders and would be selected by education minister. When new parties won the parliamentary elections, the new *2009 Higher Education Law* was adopted. The main changes were in regard to the university board. The education minister had the right to appoint half of the board stakeholders whereas the additional one had to be decided by both university senate and minister (Lithuanian Parliament 2009). The rest of the stakeholders were also chosen by

university. However, the definition of board was declared unconstitutional because it allowed the majority of external stakeholders to have seats in the board thereby violating university's autonomy principle (Constitutional Court 2011). In order to address the interpretation of the Constitutional Court, an amendment was produced. Henceforth, the academic self-governance remains the main governing principle at university's level even though the board has received more powers in comparison to the 2000 Law.

2.3 The development of Lithuanian party system

Since my research topic revolves around Lithuanian political parties and their ideological differences with respect to HE policies, it is essential to review the basic idea behind the development of the Lithuanian party system (Jungblut 2014: 90). Since according to Lipset and Rokkan (1967), a national party system is conceived as the expression of underlying social conflict, it is important to understand the reasons behind this conflict. Therefore, I am going to briefly describe the formation of Lithuanian party system in the light of underlying social conflict in Lithuania. In the following paragraphs, two distinct party system formation phases (Novagrockiene 2001) and the main political parties are discussed. Furthermore, the relationship between the party format and HE policies is elaborated.

The first phase (1) of Lithuanian political development coincided with transitional period of regaining independence involving the transformation of society from political homogeneity inherited from the Soviets to political diversity and pluralism. The initial stage of this period was marked by establishment of several traditional parties and mass reform based movement, *Sąjūdis* with clearly defined national ideology and ethnocentric values. Interestingly, the Lithuanian Communist Party (LCP) transformed into a normal parliamentary party rejecting communism, declaring its independence from Moscow and becoming a competitor for *Sąjūdis*. These events have led to further political diversification based on the elite and mass levels, the formation of ideological identities, and the emergence of party organizational structures, inter-party relationships, and gradual consolidation of social group identities along the left-right political spectrum with high degree of polarization. Here, two largest political parties being at opposite ends had considerably stable electorate and collected the largest share of election votes (ibid). Once the main goal of dismantling the previous governing system was reached, the second phase (2) in development of Lithuanian party system has started. The increased number of political parties and tendency towards a more moderate multiparty system was quite pronounced. Growing political apathy and electoral volatility became evident and continues up until now (ibid). Despite the multitude of newly established parties, only a few played a meaningful role in policy processes. Therefore, when analysing competition and configuration of party system (ibid) it is proper to select only relevant, i.e. major parties that usually win seat majority in parliament.

In terms of ideology, government formation, and the impact on policies implementation there are few key parties in Lithuania. The Social Democrats representing ideological position of left formed the government and ruled from 1992 to 1996, from 2001 to 2008, and from 2012 to 2016. During their ruling period, the party collaborated in a coalition with partners from New Union (Social Liberals) and Labour Party. Meanwhile, the Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats is a centre-right political party with liberal conservative, Christian democratic and nationalist oriented economically liberal ideology (Bugajski 2002: 141; Bakke 2010: 79) that remained in office between 1996 and 2000, and between 2008 and 2012. Their coalitional partners from the Liberal Movement party has also played an important role especially since the elections in 2008. Importantly, these political parties dedicated key partisan actors to the government cabinet and committees that had the power to initiate, evaluate and implement HE policy reforms.

Since existing literature on partisan impact on HE policies almost exclusively focus on left-right political contestation based on socio-economic conflict, using the class voting as an assumption Lithuanian case of electoral volatility might introduce some problems. The issue is that people can vote for the party that does not represent their interests, so there is a mismatch between the party and its electorate. However, it has been argued that assumptions of left-right divide and class voting could still be applied to the study of partisan preferences if the focus is on the relationship between the parties, and not between the voters and the parties (Bovens and Wille 2009: 411). The focus of this study is exactly on the former, so the assumptions of left-right distinction should be applicable here. In addition, as long as a party highlights issues that are on the top of the list of the electorate's agenda, this mismatch would not have negative effects for the party's ideology. Furthermore, I assume that Lithuanian party system carries characteristics of the left-right political contestation, because they were clearly visible in the first phase of political development (Novagrockiene 2001: 141). Even though the polarization has been reduced (ibid: 148), these tendencies are seen in all democratic world (Boix 1997: 841).

3 Literature review

After having described the development of Lithuanian party system and before turning to the theoretical part, I need to situate my research in relation to other studies by illustrating what has already been done in this area. Since this study seeks to investigate how Lithuanian political parties differ in their HE policy goals and policy outputs, the attention will be definitely given to the previous studies on partisan theory and its influence on higher education. However, this chapter starts and elaborates more on the partisan theory's major rivals, namely, the theoretical perspectives of policy convergence and historical institutionalism. The presentation of these theories and the previous studies based on them is important at this point because they help to understand where those theories fall short, and how and why party politics is important in this case.

There is a general assumption that states will eventually adopt comparable policies and governance patterns as a consequence of globalization and/or Europeanization effects (Vaira 2004; Knill 2005). In fact, some scholars claim that the states and state-centric agencies have already been losing their significance during the last thirty years. According to them, the considerable power to affect policies is now concentrated in the hands of multinational corporations, financial agencies and international organizations. These institutions first started to influence domestic policy changes by organizing, initiating or lobbying for certain strategies and plans. Developed countries, thus, have often mimetically and voluntarily accepted proposed policies compared to the less developed states that have been coercively pressured using financial instruments. World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) provide conditional loans with specific requirements attached regarding the institutional and organizational structure of the state. The only path to secure a financial loan is to implement the respective policies, restructure or imitate restructuring of the state's system (Vaira 2004: 491). The policy convergence mechanism should affect HE policies too. Coercive pressures from international financial institutions or imitation of similar structures from developed states would lead to similarities in HE policies.

European countries including post-communist Lithuania have also been under the pressure to reform their HE policies. In this context, scholars have already analysed how HE governance of Central and Eastern European (CEE) states have been influenced by these (global or European) institutional pressures (Dobbins and Knill 2009; Leisyte and Dobbins 2014). In particular, Leisyte and Dobbins (2014) have applied this theoretical explanation based on institutional (mimetic) isomorphism to Lithuanian policy change, and found that western policies have been important driving forces for HE policy reforms that resulted in convergence towards the market oriented model. Other studies have also led to similar conclusions where NPM model by using private sector management ways to

improve quality and efficiency started to penetrate into Lithuanian HE modes of coordination (Leisyte and Kizniene 2006). According to this position, HE policy's similarity and policy convergence is clearly observable.

However, the aforementioned theoretical perspectives do not explain well the unique development paths of HE systems in different states. For instance, the policy convergence theory provides no answer to why Lithuanian HE financing system differs from the one in the United Kingdom or other states. In this sense, historical institutionalism is a better choice to explain the distinctiveness of national political outputs. The approach treats institutional organization of the polity or political economy as the key element influencing the collective behaviour and producing distinctive outcomes (Hall and Taylor 1996: 937). The concepts of path-dependency and historical legacies are often applied with historical institutionalism. The idea behind these concepts is that institutions are resistant to changes and keep their paths, i.e. if social actors already devoted their commitments to existing institutions and policies, the cost of leaving and creating a new HE system is high, so they reject changes and stick to already determined paths (Pierson 2000: 259).

In the case of Lithuania, a few key studies used a similar theoretical framework including historical and sociological institutionalisms to analyse how transnationally promoted HE models were shaped by national institutional context. The results showed that the same models could be implemented differently due to various interpretations of the same reform (Leisyte et al. 2009; Leisyte et al. 2015). Furthermore, the HE governance model could only be changed if a generation change of actors who influenced the former reforms occurs. This is one of the reasons why internationally promoted "modernization agenda" model that aimed to establish the university governance boards with more external stakeholders was only partly realized in Lithuanian HE governance's case (Kralikova 2015).

One important study analysed HE governance change in four CEE states by including both perspectives of historical institutionalism and institutional isomorphism (Dobbins 2011; Dobbins 2015). The work shed light on the impact of historical institutional legacies in terms of (pre-) communist past, and of transnational institutional forces promoted by the EU, OECD, etc. The results showed the so-called *sluggish* convergence towards the market oriented model of HE governance. It provided a comprehensive understanding of when, how, where and why CEE HE systems converged or did not converge by using two approaches at once (ibid: 180-201). However, these structural approaches to HE policies fail to take into consideration that changes also depend on actors who design and initiate domestic HE reforms. In order to get a full picture of HE policy changes and rationale for driving forces, I turn my attention to well-established, actor-centred theories and their explanations for policy change.

The aforementioned study by Kralikova (2015: 79-80) showed that a HE governance model can only be successfully adopted if an entire generation of actors changes, too. In other words, individual perceptions of e.g. *academic* actors about appropriate and legitimate institutions affect HE reforms. Based on these findings, I will build my case further and argue that *political* actors are usually the

designers and executors of HE policies, so their perceptions, political ideology and preferences are crucial.

The partisan theory offers a set of assumptions about political actors and their different preferences regarding HE reforms. Insofar, the role of (1) partisan actors in general, and (2) government parties that act as agents of HE institutional change in eastern European states has not been investigated yet. In the case of Lithuania, the role of political parties and their representatives in governments with respect to the HE policy output has not been established either.

These questions have been addressed in the case of western European states. Ansell (2008; 2010) applied the partisan theory to education policy. The scholar has deduced the possible interests of different voter groups in respect to education policy (Ansell 2010: 129-136). The preferences of the political parties have also been deduced (ibid: 136-143). The results showed that different political parties take into account their voter interests (ibid: 163). These interests of different income groups over HE policies, however, show some interesting characteristics. For example, lower income groups favour stronger social policies and more public spending, and also support lower levels of state subsidization if participation to HE is restricted to the elite groups¹. Naturally, HE subsidies for rich people is not a preferred choice (Ansell 2008: 200). Thus, the government that is composed of different parties then should represent their electorate by implementing the respective HE policies.

Several other studies also showed evidence of partisan influence on HE policies (Castles 1989; Rauh et al. 2011; Busemeyer 2007, 2009; Busemeyer et al. 2013). However, all these studies are focused on one redistributive dimension, which is often related just to the level of public spending. According to Jungblut (2016), parties should differ in their policy goals on two dimensions: redistributive and public governance. However, the public governance dimension has been poorly studied with regard to HE from the political parties' perspective since theories that recognize different models of HE governance examine changes only from the aforementioned historical and transnational institutionalist's point of view. Jungblut (2016) formulated theoretical expectations with regard to partisan preferences for different party families based on these two dimensions, and then verified it. The qualitative content analysis and coding of election programmes of all respective political parties was chosen as the main method to analyse four western European states (ibid: 332). Generally, the results showed that the preferences of different party families were in accordance with expectations. This also raises the expectation level for similar partisan politics in other developed western states. The author of this study claimed that results might differ in developing states, presidential systems or autocracies, which requires the future research to test these assumptions (ibid: 345).

¹ In 1950, mostly all OECD countries had publicly subsidized HE limited to small group of population. However, many states have experienced the transformation from elite model into mass higher education system with enrolment rates exceeding 50 percent in the past several decades (Ansell 2008: 189).

Lithuania is a good candidate to verify these assumptions since it is clearly a less developed state in comparison to the affluent western countries. At the same time, it has similar political characteristics based on left-right ideological parties' division (Novagrokiene 2001) compared to western European states that were analysed in the study by Jungblut (2016). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the partisan influence could be significant and observable in the Lithuanian HE policy development process.

4 Theoretical framework

As it has been mentioned in the previous section, partisan theory that highlights the role of partisan actors and their preferences for explaining higher education policy reforms is considered to be the main theoretical approach which assumptions are tested in the analysis chapter. However, before addressing the RQ of how Lithuanian political parties differ in their HE policy preferences and policy output, deeper understanding of parties' difference and their behaviour is necessary. Therefore, some theoretical questions firstly need to be raised: How can we understand parties' differences? What are the general policy preferences of different political parties?

After having explained partisan theory and partisan preferences in more general terms, then the following section presents the two-dimensional framework by stressing that left and right-wing political parties have different preferences on two dimensions, one redistributive, and another public governance of HE. Building on that, government ministers, vice-ministers and persons related to executive political branch are presented as being the key partisan actors who are implementing the decisions and initiating HE reforms. Then, the chapter is finalized by formulating concrete expectations towards the partisan preferences and policy outputs for Lithuanian Education and Science ministers, vice-ministers and other important actors associated with HE policies.

4.1 Partisan theory

Why do the political parties behave in a certain way? How do they differ in terms of their policy preferences? These questions are definitely not new, so there have been a lot of theories trying to address them. However, the convincing explanation is offered by partisan theory that posits that differences in political preferences and policy outputs exist when government parties represent and serve the interests of their class-defined core political constituencies (Hibbs 1977: 1467).

Left-wing political parties raise the issues important for the lower income earners, namely, the working class and the lower middle class. This class requires stronger social insurance policies and redistribution to secure them from the social risks. Accordingly, the left-wing political parties should promote larger welfare state and redistributive policies by representing the interests of the electorate. Meanwhile, the right-wing political parties resist these policies because their constituencies come from the upper income and occupational status groups who are required to pay higher taxes in order to contribute to the expansion of the welfare state (Hibbs 1977). Therefore, the rightist parties and their constituencies

support welfare state retrenchment and oppose redistributive policies in this case. As a result, the welfare state politics could be seen as democratic class struggle where the parties are recognized “as representatives of social constituencies mostly defined in terms of industrial classes and as bearers of clear ideological stances for liberal, social-democratic or conservative welfare policies” (Häusermann et. al 2013: 221).

These assumptions about importance of partisanship on the structure and size of the welfare state, and its influence on certain policy areas have been supported by empirical research. The taxes are more progressive when at the same time the transfers and publicly provided services are more equally distributed in the welfare states headed by social democratic governments (Bradley et al. 2003: 197; Iversen and Cusack 2006:178). Social democratic countries could be also characterized by lower poverty rates as well as generally more women-friendly welfare policies (Orloff 1996: 66-67; Huber et al. 2009: 1). Thus, the findings of these studies clearly show that policies of the ruling parties are shaped by its ideological stance by representing its constituencies.

Importantly, the partisan theory has been used in several studies to analyze (higher) education policies (Boix 1997; Ansell 2010; Busemeyer 2009). In particular, the results of this literature correspond with the main arguments of partisan theory by showing that the left-right divide really matter for policy output. Evidence for this is that left-wing political parties raise the public spending to HE as a policy tool for redistribution thereby supporting the HE system’s expansion and contributing to the general expansion of the welfare state (Boix 1997; Busemeyer 2009). Several of these studies have purposively paid particular attention to the left-right ideological divide because the different political party families within the latter dimension definitely should represent their electorate from lower and upper socio-economic classes (e.g. Ansell 2010). By maintaining this clarity, the similar logic and separation between left and right-wing political parties, their expected policy preferences and policy outputs will be applied in this study, too.

4.2 Two-dimensional framework

In order to understand how political parties differ in their HE preferences, we can start with quite general statement that in HE area, the political parties differ in how much they promote or oppose its expansion. By knowing from the previous section that different political parties should promote or oppose the welfare state expansion, it can be assumed that they should promote or oppose HE expansion as well. Accordingly, left-wing political parties are expected to support HE expansion by providing opportunities for their electorate to participate in HE. However, the right-wing political parties should oppose HE expansion or at least to slow down the fast development process of it (Busemeyer 2015: 43). Importantly, the particular type of expansive or restrictive HE system could be achieved by employing different policy strategies and different policy instruments

where, for instance, increased public spending is only one of them. In similar way, different policy choices are also relevant for influencing the centralized or decentralized control over HE on the second governance dimension. More importantly, these policy instruments are the key indicators for later theorizing policy preferences and policy output of different Lithuanian political parties. Consequently, their influence for redistribution and accordingly redistributive dimension are explained first. Meanwhile, the different types of HE coordination in relation to governance dimension are going to be described second.

4.2.1 Redistributive dimension in HE

Speaking about redistribution, it is usually associated with eliminating social issues and creating more equal society. In this case, the significance of education by influencing more equal distribution of skills, better future income and better life possibilities seems rather clear. Therefore, investing in skills and education by some policy-makers appears logical decision as it contributes to lowering socioeconomic inequality and improving social mobility as well. For example, giving students from low income and marginalized groups better opportunities to participate in higher education should help to maintain more equal distribution of skills, income and positively influence future perspectives (Busemeyer 2015: 177). Thus, it can be claimed that higher education has generally redistributive capacity.

While redistributive activities are very often related to increased public spending for the social policies and several studies found that social democratic governments increased the public spending on HE sector (Busemeyer 2015: 177; Busemeyer 2009: 107), the latter could be considered one of the most important policy instruments for expansive HE system on redistributive dimension in HE. Truly, investing in human capital has been used as political instrument of leftist governments to counterbalance the growing levels of inequality, especially, in times of economic globalization (Busemeyer 2015: 177). However, the public investments for HE are more complex in comparison to other social policies as the redistributive effects depend on those who can access and who pays for it (Ansell 2010; Busemeyer 2015). Note that HE is not traditionally considered as the public good accessible by all. Children from upper socio-economic background are more likely to participate in HE in comparison to children from lower socio-economic background. Then, participation in HE is more common for wealthy part of society. Given this situation, the impact of public spending for HE is that lower-income individuals subsidize the higher-income ones (Fernandez and Rogerson 1995: 250). For this reason, it is not obvious to link left-wing political parties who are representatives of lower income people just with more public spending by assuming that this is the main or the only one redistributive instrument for HE.

The access to HE is equally or even more important policy aspect influencing HE redistributive capacity, which should be considered in relation to the policy instrument of public spending. The wider access to higher education has important redistributive effects when it increases the qualified labour and their perspectives

for better income (Ansell 2010: 6). If HE system is based on wider access meaning higher number of students being accepted to universities, then electorate of left parties should also have better opportunities to participate by making system more expansive. Then, they also prefer more public spending because they directly benefit from this. Accordingly, the left-wing parties should also favour a wider access to HE, hence, they should influence the enrolment rates and entrance qualifications in the way to increase participation of their electorate (Ansell 2010). In contrast, if a HE system is based on limited access and has low enrolment rates, it is very likely that only wealthy electorate of right-wing parties takes part in HE. This makes system definitely more restrictive. In this case, the empirical studies have indicated that (increased) public investments of higher education would lead to reverse redistribution effects (Rauh et al. 2011: 1186). Thus, it means that higher level of public financing without increasing participation rates could actually increase the socio-economic inequality as children from upper socio-economic groups would mostly gain an advantage from this (Busemeyer 2015: 178).

Speaking about private spending, raising and imposing tuition fees put some additional costs of HE on its students. These costs of HE deters prospective students from the lower socio-economic backgrounds, to participate in higher education more than those coming from wealthy families. Furthermore, several studies have clearly cited the fear of large debts, in particular, student loan debts, that deter qualified students from this lower socio-economic groups to enter universities (Callender and Jackson 2005: 513). Meanwhile, the students from wealthy families representing higher occupational status groups are less affected by the costs of HE, so do less by the tuition fees, too (Wolf and Zohlhöfer 2009: 234). However, if HE system is restrictive with low participation rates, where mostly students from affluent families can access it, then the lower income earners might not oppose privately funded HE system because they do not want to serve the interests of rich (Ansell 2008: 200; Busemeyer 2015: 40). Despite this, the private spending has obviously, the negative effect on HE redistribution and makes the HE system more restrictive.

Finally, the last factor having an impact on HE redistributive potential is student support system. It helps to reduce socio-economic differences among students by supporting and equalizing financial opportunities to participate in HE. Therefore, socioeconomically disadvantaged students should prefer the creation and expansion of financial student support system whereas socioeconomically advantaged ones should oppose this expansion because they benefit less (Garritzmann 2015: 144-145). In accordance, the left parties should prefer the expansion of student support systems while the right parties should oppose the support as they constituencies do not need it so much.

To sum up, the redistributive dimension in HE illustrates whether the HE system is expansive or a restrictive one. Three policy instruments are important to evaluate this: the type of financing, access to HE, and the student support system. Ideally, the redistributive dimension in HE could be characterized as expansive by increased public spending, wider access to HE and expansive student support system. Meanwhile, the restrictive HE system is based on increased private

spending, limited access to HE and restrictive student support system (see Table 1). Even though all three policy instruments influencing redistributive dimension are important, however, it is often the case that not all of them are preferred or implemented at once. For this reason, the decision about the preferred HE system is going to be reached by interpreting the context. For example, in the concrete political context, one policy instrument could be more influential (or even revolutionary) in comparison to other two. Hence, the interpretation of context in tandem with policy instruments are important by evaluating the preferred HE system.

Table 1: Redistributive dimension in HE

Redistributive dimension	
Expansive HE system	Restrictive HE system
Public spending Wide access to HE Expansive student support system	Private spending Limited access to HE Restrictive student support system

4.2.2 Governance dimension in HE

Speaking about the second dimension, the governance refers to the process of governing HE or who holds the control over HE. While the previous studies mostly focused on the convergence and divergence effects on HE governance caused by transnational and historical institutions, here the attention is put on the political parties. By knowing that Lithuanian political parties are divided along left-right political spectrum, they should be interested in achieving the different goals in how HE should be governed (Gingrich 2011). Thus, HE governance could reflect the partisan politics meaning the different preferences by political parties of who exercises the control over HE area. In other words, the second analytical dimension addresses the question of Lithuanian political preferences regarding the governance principle in HE.

In HE studies, the aforementioned conceptualization of governance is based on Clark's triangle of coordination where he distinguished three main forces shaping the relationship between the state and HE institutions. Here, the state, market or academic oligarchy plays the most important role (Clark 1983). Accordingly, Dobbins developed three ideal-type models of HE governance: state control model, market oriented model, and academic self-governance (Dobbins 2011). These three models of HE governance represent different ideological approaches to the division of authority where the partisan preferences then could be evaluated as the answer to the research question require. In addition, this difference in the preferences for HE model could also lead to different HE policies that are also examined in this research.

It is definitely true that ideal-type models do not exist in reality, but some HE governance arrangements could be similar to the theoretical ones depending on the way whose authority is preferred. For instance, the introduction of university

boards and preference for this model could be understood in terms of all three models depending on how composition and selection of members are chosen and who has the real power to govern. If most of members at university boards are academic staff, then the model is based on academic self-governance. On the other hand, if the members are from private companies and business world, so the model is considered to be market oriented etc. So, these three visions of HE governance contribute to assessing which real model is preferred.

However, the most important thing is that preferences based on HE model should indicate whether the HE system is centralized or decentralized. While the state control model should show the preferences of centralized HE system, the market oriented (liberal) and academic self-governance definitely signal the choice of decentralized form of university control (see Table 2). If the priority is given to the model based on university boards, again the composition of board becomes an important factor in order to understand who really holds the control and have the most decision-making power. This is relevant because left-wing parties should prefer centralized HE system (Kalyvas and van Kersbergen 2010) whereas the right wing political actors should favour decentralized HE system.

By knowing that the *Higher Education Law 2000* and *2009 Higher Education Law*, and other following by-laws have had the changing impact on redistributive and governing dimensions in Lithuania, it is important to find out which political parties influenced them and what are their real preferences in relation to HE redistribution and ideal-type models of HE governance. In this way, the conclusions about the influence of Lithuanian partisan politics on HE sector could be reached.

Table 2: Governance dimension in HE

Governance dimension	
Centralized HE system	Decentralized HE system
State control model	Academic self-governance Liberal (market oriented) model

4.3 Ministerial power

By following this partisan model for higher education policy making and assuming that political parties are the central actors influencing HE policies, however, the question can be raised what happens if the elected parties in parliament prefer different policies (Becher 2010: 37; Döring and Schwander 2015: 175). Then, it is crucial to determine the partisan preferences of those who have agenda-setting power because all parties or party members at once cannot

implement every policy strategy or policy instrument even if they would wish to do that all.

Importantly, many scholars argue that the government cabinet is one of the most important body of policy-making, however, the identity of the one directly responsible for agenda-setting in the cabinet, is still debatable topic. Some scholars explain this in terms of division of labour within a cabinet which means that most of the ministers have the power and authority to decide on certain policy matter. Relying on these policy jurisdictions and their department resources, the ministers have a right and capability of initiating and implementing policy proposals in the concrete field. Therefore, it would be hard to imagine that the policy would be implemented with a strong opposition from the assigned minister. Then, it makes the role of ministers, hence, the government formation completely different from the formation of legislative coalitions because the distribution of government portfolios is much more than only compromise influenced by coalition agreement. Thus, ministerial agenda power could be similar and compared to “policy dictatorship” in this case (Laver and Shepsle 1990).

This division of labour cabinet system should also inform us that the policy outputs in certain field will be alike as preferred by the political party if it nominates the respective minister. Meanwhile, any proposal that shows minister acting against the preferred party’s preferences is less credible (ibid: 874). As a result, it is expected in line with partisan theory that ministers are trustworthy agents of their political parties and have the same preferences as their party’s counterparts or at least very similar ones (Laver and Shepsle 1994: 301).

Accordingly, I assume that Lithuanian government’s ministers and other high rank politicians are agenda settlers, who are usually also the members of political parties which win the parliament election and form the government in Lithuanian state. For this reason, I need to identify the respective ministers and other important actors, who have been responsible for preparing the legislation and find out their policy preferences and their initiated HE policy changes (Döring and Schwander 2015: 184). In doing so, I could evaluate how well their expressed HE policy goals and their initiated policy proposals reflect the expected preferences for their party’s ideology. This should give me the answer whether the Lithuanian partisan politics have an impact on HE policy making thereby shaping in certain way HE laws.

4.4 Expectations for policy preferences

In an attempt to evaluate HE policy preferences of partisan ministers and other actors related to executive branch, first I need to formulate certain policy expectations towards them. Even though there are many different political parties in Lithuania and their preferences could differ to some extent, the main difference in which this study is interested is based on positions where the political contestation should be mostly expressed. Therefore, the following expectations

for HE policy preferences are theorized by focusing on the left-right ideological divide.

4.4.1 The expectations of left wing political parties

In Lithuania, Social Democrats (SDs), New Union² (NS) and Labour Party (DP) are the main left-wing political parties that headed government and nominated ministers for Education and Science Ministry during the considered period of time. As they are representatives of Lithuanian political left, it is expected that they should strive for extensive welfare state, high levels of taxes and government expenditure, and state intervention in the economy (Wolf and Zohlhöfer 2009: 234).

Accordingly, this should be applicable to the HE sector where the representatives of these parties in government should seek expansive HE system on the redistributive dimension. In order to achieve expansive HE system, it is necessary to promote key policy instruments that directly influence or could have the positive effects on opportunities to enter university, especially for those groups that were previously excluded (Busemeyer 2015: 44). In other words, the leftist political parties should seek redistribution in HE.

In relation to the three policy instruments on HE redistributive dimension, it can be assumed that representatives from Lithuanian political left should prefer public spending, wider access to HE, and (expansive) student support system. In case of preferring public spending, it could lead to situation where there is no need for private higher education expenditure, especially, if this is in the form of student tuition fees (Wolf and Zohlhöfer 2009). So, the left-wing parties are expected to limit private HE spending by opposing student tuition fees or decreasing them if they are already imposed. It would provide the redistributive advantages for their electorate and make possibilities for social mobility.

Regarding the second policy instrument on HE redistributive dimension, the left political actors are supposed to promote wider access to HE (Busemeyer 2015: 43), which is determined by regulations of student enrolment rates and entrance qualifications. Then, left-wing political actors should aim at promoting more flexible or lowered entrance qualifications that could at the same time have positive effect on enrolment rates even if they are not directly regulated by the state. Otherwise they should attempt to increase the number of students accepted to universities during the years.

In coherence to the partisan theory, the third policy instrument on HE redistributive dimension is student support system, which should be strongly favoured by the left government. As student support systems reduce socio-economic differences among the students, it is especially beneficial for the low income left-wing political parties' electorate (Garritzmann 2015). Therefore, the leftist parties should seek to expand the student support system by reducing

² It was a social-liberal political party in Lithuania.

eligibility criteria and increasing the level of given scholarships and social grants. In short, all these three policy instruments would provide the redistributive possibilities for the left parties' electorate thereby making the system more expansive on this dimension.

Talking about the governance dimension and by knowing the left parties' preferences for state intervention in the economy, they should be in favour of the state control model for HE (Wolf and Zohlnhöfer 2009). In real world cases, it implies the leading role of the state administration where the ministry exercises the hierarchical control over HE sector. If the direct ministerial control of HE is not possible, the control could be sustained, for instance, through the stakeholders' inclusion on university boards. Then, the board members should be ideologically close to the left-wing parties' electorate. This would go in line with expectations for centralized HE system.

4.4.2 The expectations of right wing political parties

On the right side of political spectrum, Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD) and Liberal Movement (LS) are the main right-wing political parties that influenced HE policies by leading the government formation from 2008 to 2012. They are expected to support different policies than political left meaning that these party families should advocate their electorate interests by preserving them from HE redistribution and applying 'hands-off' politics towards the welfare state expansion, government expenditure and state's intervention into economy (Wolf and Zohlnhöfer 2009). In accordance, these parties should aim to achieve more restrictive HE education system on redistributive dimension by seeking to restrain the massification or universal access to HE. This kind of system has negative effects for wider opportunities to enter universities, meaning that they should generally oppose the redistribution in HE.

This implies that the position of right political parties by supporting private spending, restricting access to HE, and limiting expansion of student support system should be expected on redistributive dimension. In relation to the first policy instrument on redistributive dimension, the right parties should favour private spending (Callender and Jackson 2005), which means the introduction of (higher) tuition fees and involvement of private investments into funding schemes. Meanwhile, the public spending if not entirely opposed it should be more willingly reduced to the certain degree.

Concerning the second policy instrument on redistributive dimension, the right parties should tend to adopt more limited access to HE, as they electorate are more likely to participate in HE anyway (Rauh et al. 2011). This can be influenced by applying strict regulations of entrance qualifications to universities which would have the negative effects on enrolment rates. Another way is to regulate directly by limiting the number of students accepted to universities during the years.

With regard to students support system, the rightist parties should oppose or prefer more restrictive student support system because their electorate would not

benefit from this a lot (Garritzmann 2015). However, these party families could have the positive attitude towards the loan based students support, and the merit based student grants, but they should oppose increasing the eligibility criteria for accessing student support system in Lithuania.

On the governance dimension, the right-wing parties are supposed to foster more decentralized HE system in comparison to their rivals of the left side of political spectrum. However, these parties could be characterized as having two contradicting positions on governance. On the one hand, these parties may support of giving more autonomy to local institutions combined with forms of market competition. On the other hand, they could highlight the qualitative homogeneity of public services, which requires the state to lead an active role. However, generally they should favour more the smaller state structures (Kalyvas and van Kersbergen 2010; Boix 1997). Thus, they can take a middle position concerning with regard to centrality of HE governance by choosing the model of academic self-governance with involvement of market mechanisms, and the limited state control.

Table 3: Expectations towards HE preferences and policy outputs

Redistributive dimension		Governance dimension	
		Centralized HE system	Decentralized HE system
	Expansive HE system	SD, NS, DP (left parties)	
	Restrictive HE system		TS-LKD, LS (right parties)

5 Methodology

Every study needs to confront the questions about the nature of its applied approach because it determines what sort of research is pursued, what claims and assessments of the findings are made (Halperin and Heath 2012: 25). Therefore, the presentation of ontology and epistemology of this research is essential, so the chapter will start by introducing them. Then, the logic behind Lithuanian case selection is explained next. Since this study is interested to get a detailed understanding of HE policy preferences, the semi-structured elite interviews are considered to be an appropriate method which is elaborated in the following section. After that, I continue by explaining the interview guide that should inform the reader how the interview questions are related to theoretical assumptions and how the answers to them should help to answer the research question. Finally, the validity, reliability and limitations are discussed in the last section of this chapter.

5.1 Ontology and epistemology

Every social scientist approaches the certain topic from the particular ontological and epistemological position. According to Furlong and Marsh (2010: 184), these positions influence the choice of theory and methods even if the scholar do not acknowledge them. They are "...a skin not a sweater; they cannot be put on and taken off whenever the researcher sees fit." (ibid). For this reason, it is important to recognize and defend these positions.

The ontological and epistemological debate revolves around the questions of what the social world is made of, how can we gain the knowledge of this reality and whether the structure or agency determines the certain outcomes. Some scholars claim that our political life is mostly determined by the operation of structure where, for instance, then HE policies could be understood through the influence of structural forces. This position is in line with the previous research discussed in the literature review section. There, historical and transnational institutional factors determine certain HE policies. On the other hand, other theorists highlight the importance of political actors or agents for creating and recreating respective changes in (HE) laws. This position corresponds with actor-centred theories (Halperin and Heath 2012: 87), such as partisan theory used as explanatory concept in this particular research. Then, I assume that the structures do not determine but rather they can restrict or facilitate certain policy actions. Meanwhile, actors in this case can interpret and change structures (Furlong and

Marsh 2010: 205). Thus, if Lithuanian political parties do not influence HE policies in the expected way, the certain restrictive structural forces need to be taken into consideration, too.

As the research is interested to assess empirically how Lithuanian political actors differ in their HE policy preferences and policy outputs, the approach regards that HE policies could be socially constructed in the way that preferences are the social constructions. As such, this research calls for the application of the qualitative methods that are based on interpretations of these preferences. Hence, the semi-structured elite interviews are conducted. However, some quantitative approach to the study is also visible because the responses from the interviews will be evaluated by using the majority principle. Thus, generally both qualitative and quantitative methods are considered and recognized as equally important (ibid).

Having considered the ontological and epistemological position of this research, we can now turn to the section explaining the logic behind this case selection.

5.2 The case study

The study of the partisan influence on higher education policies in Lithuania has been chosen as my case study. The main reason of this case selection is based on the fact that, unlike partisan politics on higher education policies in western Europe, the eastern part of the continent experiences the lack of research in this area.

Importantly, the good study cases should always have two important features. The first is that they should describe something important about the case that is being analysed whereas at the same time the case study should also aim to be involved in the broader academic debates (Halperin and Heath 2012: 205). In accordance, my case study will shed a light on the possible influence of partisan politics on higher education reforms in Lithuania. Moreover, it could help to understand the partisan politics in other parts of the world, for instance, in CEE states. Thus, the choice of this study justifies two described characteristics of good case studies.

Even though many scholars agree that case studies could use both qualitative and quantitative methods (ibid: 206), this study will represent the kind of qualitative research by using the data from semi-structured elite interviews. This is because the research question itself requires understandings of greater insights into the respondents' meanings, reasoning and experience. In addition, it could have been difficult to have a large number of respondents for the quantitative research because I am interested to interview only those who were related with HE policy-making.

According to Halperin and Heath (2012), the case studies could be used in many different ways and for different purposes. In general, they could be based on those that provide descriptive contextualization, apply existing theories to new

contexts, examine exceptions to the rule, and generate new theory. As many other case studies, I am aiming to *apply theory* from one context and to see if it is applicable to another, so my case study gives a new test for partisan theory (Geddes 2003) i.e. it will show whether higher education policy preferences and policy outputs could be explained by partisan affiliations of Lithuanian political parties. Geddes (2003) claims that the cases used for theory testing purposes should not be necessary the same as the ones from which arguments were generated. Then, Lithuania is a perfect candidate in the sense that it is a new democracy that gained independence just in the 1990s. Hence, it is really different from the industrial western European states where those arguments originally came from.

Lithuania as a case study has been chosen on purpose because firstly my language knowledge for the required specific method could be considered as big advantage. In order to conduct semi-structured elite interviews for getting deeper understanding of meanings, it is also good to know not only the language but also the particular country's context. In addition, Lithuania not like some other Eastern European states show some characteristics based on the left-right ideological divide, which is especially important in this study (Evans and Whitefield 1993: 541).

5.3 Semi-structured elite interviews

Methodologically, semi-structured elite interviews have been used as my main data collection source for this study. This could be regarded as a required method because this research focuses on exploratory goals to get greater insight into the understanding of HE policy preferences and policy output from the point of view of respondents in Lithuania.

The form of semi-structured interview has been chosen because I could obtain both more factual information and deeper understanding of respondents' experience. More factual information was needed in terms of real policy's implementation while HE preferences required more spontaneous and honest answers. The latter then could be compared with theoretical expectations and actual HE policies in order to evaluate how Lithuanian parties differ in their HE policy preferences and policy outputs.

This elite type of interview with open-ended questions have enabled me as a researcher to make conclusions about the beliefs and actions of political elites (Halperin and Heath 2012: 273) that are considered representing the positions of left and right-wing political parties. In relation to the expectations elaborated in the previous chapter, it has been expected: that left-wing politicians are more likely to improve opportunities to participate in HE, and that they support centralized control of HE governance whereas right-wing policy-makers should oppose this expansion of HE and prefer decentralized model of HE. As the goal is to identify the concrete respondents' position along these two HE dimensions, this type of interview allowed the respondents to articulate their views by explaining

why they think what they think (Halperin and Heath 2012: 274). This should help me to answer the RQ that is interested whether partisan politics could be as an explanatory factor for Lithuanian HE policies.

The selection of respondents has been crucial in this research because they had to be the ones who had an influence on HE policies. For this reason, I have conducted interviews with eight high rank political actors coming from the large Lithuanian parties of left (R1; R2; R3; R4) as well as the large Lithuanian parties of right (R5; R6; R7; R8). They are former Education and Science ministers (R1; R3; R4; R5), vice-ministers (R2; R6), and the chairman (R7) and member (R8) of Committee on Education, Science and Culture. The equal number of respondents from left and right-wing political parties is important in order to create two groups and compare their answer in relation to each other thereby seeing whether they differ based on left-right political contestation.

Individual in-depth face-to-face interviewing have been performed with six out of eight respondents while other two interviews have been conducted on telephone. These interviews have lasted around thirty minutes up to one hour and they have been recorded with the agreement of respondents. Even though face-to-face interviewing have been preferred, the main reason of conducting some telephone interviews is based on the distance factor and some respondents' busy schedule. However, both face-to-face and telephone interviews have allowed for certain degree of personal contact where follow up questions to specify certain information have been also asked (ibid: 254).

5.4 Interview guide

The interview guide is crucial in this case. It incorporates theories and concepts into questions that helps with answers to address the research question (Halperin and Heath 2012). Therefore, the questions here are theory-driven, and they are also oriented towards my expectations for policy preferences of key political actors.

Accordingly, the answers are examined and interpreted from partisan theory's perspective that emphasizes the left-right divide, so the answers of respective respondents are grouped and discussed in accordance to their party affiliations based on left-right divide. The responses are evaluated by the majority principle meaning that each question asked was given points/favours in order to later determine which HE system and type are preferred. The summaries and tables are given for better understanding and visualization at the end of each block of questions. Next, I will briefly discuss each block of questions and their significance for this research.

I started with first three questions about the respondents' experience of taking certain positions in government or parliament and about the current situation of higher education in Lithuania and possible problems in this area. These questions were asked to get more information about the respondent, its personal background

and knowledge of the area in order to start the topic and warm up before moving to the main body of questions (ibid: 264).

A set of questions about higher education system and, importantly, preferred system by the respondent, were given, along the redistributive dimension. In order to find out whether the respondents prefer expansive or restrictive HE system, the questions about preferences over publicly or privately funded system, wider or limited access to HE, and opinion about student support systems were asked (see Appendix 9.1 Interview questions - 4, 5, 6).

In order to get the information about partisan preferences along second dimension related to the question of how and by whom the control over HE sector should be exercised, there was asked to choose the most suitable model for Lithuanian HE from three described alternatives in the literature: state control model, academic self-governance or market-oriented model. The main idea for this question was to determine whether the respondents prefer centralized control over HE or decentralized one (see Appendix 9.1 Interview question - 7).

Finally, the last three questions were given to reflect by interviewees themselves on their higher education reforms, support or opposition from other political actors, and on the implementation success of HE policies. This should finally help me to understand whether there is conformity between theoretical expectations, the expressed HE preferences, and taken decisions for HE policies (see Appendix 9.1 Interview questions – 8,9,10).

5.5 Validity, reliability and limitations

By examining whether the partisan politics influence higher education policies in Lithuania, I seek to contribute to academic literature of partisan theory that examines its effects on different social policies, in this case, a unique and underexplored area of HE. As this particular application of theory to HE area has been limited, then this case study should show whether the findings that emerge from this study could explain HE policy choices and policy outputs in Lithuania from the partisan theory's perspective. In addition, semi-structured elite interviews are also used which aims at getting the greater insight into the meanings and understandings of HE preferences and policy outputs from the high rank politicians. Thus, these findings of qualitative Lithuanian case with method used of semi-structured elite interviews should show high *internal validity* (Halperin and Heath 2012: 205). However, this is not the only purpose of using this Lithuanian case. As it was already mentioned, the analysis of Lithuanian case could be also relevant for understanding whether higher education policies could be explained by partisan theory in other CEE post-communist nation-states. Thus, explanations of this study should be also *externally valid* to some extent (ibid).

However, there are also some fairly obvious limitations in terms of how far the findings from this particular case could be generalized to other contexts and whether or not the results confirm the theory. Furthermore, I admit that it is not

easy to compare the responses of different groups or the same group, since each respondent have been asked the same questions but in slightly different manner as semi-structured interview form allows. Thus, some could claim that the data is not very standardized and thus it can be difficult to generalize because the findings cannot be quantified and retested by getting exactly the same answers, hence, they are the *less reliable* (ibid: 258).

In an attempt to address those issues of reliability, the interview questions are formulated in the way by giving to choose between certain alternatives, which, in turn, could help to identify from the respondent's statements the different positions towards higher education policies. For instance, the question asked whether respondent favours wider or more restrictive access to HE, gives the respondent to choose between two options where the expressed position could be compared with other respondent's position. At the same time, it lets for respondent to elaborate more on the question by providing his arguments behind the certain policy choice. Visualization of answers and their meanings with the tables will also make easier to compare the expressed different respondents' positions. Thus, the way of research design should give both deeper understandings of HE preferences and policy outputs in tandem with possibility to compare, hence, to generalize also to certain extent.

6 Analysis

Now that the previous chapter has presented the methods used in the study, the following chapter presents and analyses the input (in the form of interviews) from former partisan Education and Science ministers, and other important actors. In order to answer the main RQ of how Lithuanian political parties differ in their HE preferences and policy outputs, the different party representatives' positions (preferences) are first identified. Second, the policies associated with given respondents are described in relation to the expressed preferences and theoretical expectations. Then, I compare and discuss the results which clarify how political parties *actually* differ. Finally, I summarize the results and outline the partisan influence on the HE sector in Lithuania.

6.1 The HE preferences of left political parties

I start with analysing responses from representatives of left political parties. The interviewees' responses are analysed using the majority principle. The goal is to reveal the main arguments behind the preferences and count which position was supported. The respondents from the left-wing political parties are not grouped by different party families because their preferences are expected to be the same, i.e. they should favour the expansive HE system and the centralized HE governance type.

6.1.1 Redistributive dimension

In relation to redistributive dimension, the following three policy instruments are important:

- i) The preferred type of financing on HE (public or private)*
- ii) Preferred access to HE (wider or restrictive)*
- iii) The position in relation to student support system*

These instruments indicate which expansive or restrictive HE system is favoured. Therefore, the interview questions have been formulated to target this (see Appendix 9.1 Interview questions - 4, 5 and 6).

i) The preferred type of financing on HE (public or private)

The respondents were asked about their preferences towards the type of financing which indicates the first policy instrument of redistributive dimension. Three out of four representatives from left parties stated that HE should mostly be financed by the state, and students should not pay any tuition fees at least for the first cycle of undergraduate studies (R1; R2; R4):

(R1): “I favour the state financed HE because the future of the state depends on people who complete these studies. The state should be responsible for this area...In my opinion, HE should be financed by the state if we want to have educated and responsible people in our country.”

Interestingly, the former minister of New Union party said that he supports an idea of introducing tuition fees that have been implemented during his term in the office. The limited state resources are the main reason for this:

(R3): “I think that students should contribute, but I emphasize that this should be the same for everyone. It should be called the solidarity payment. It would support HE system because the state is not able to do it well. It could be a small tuition fee, it should not be a significant one. When I was a minister we introduced this payment... It was 512 litas per semester, about 160 euro...”

Majority of the interviewees supported public funding for HE, and one of them favoured tuition fees which should be relatively small. Generally, their preferences fulfil theoretical expectations that are based on support of public spending for HE (Wolf and Zohlnhöfer 2009). In this way, the expansive effect on HE system is enhanced.

ii) Preferred access to HE (wider or restrictive)

In relation to the second policy instrument of redistributive dimension, the respondents were asked whether they prefer wider or more limited access to HE concerning the entrance qualifications and student enrolment rates. Two out of four politicians (R1; R4) quite clearly expressed their support for restrictive access to HE by increasing requirements for entrance qualifications. Meanwhile, other two stated that accessibility should not be restricted (R2; R3):

(R3): “There is a tendency in the world that universities are trying to create conditions for the demand of mass HE. People wish to study and we cannot stop this trend. We can only require from universities to ensure certain results...In my opinion, the selection regarding entrance qualifications is not very good requirement.... If a person has secondary school certificate, he should have a right to consult with university, and university should present the conditions individually... We have many nice stories when people entered universities with lower grades, but they achieved a lot...”

Interestingly, all the respondents including the supporters of wider access (R1; R2; R3; R4) argued that some potential students should better start with other type of education, e.g. colleges, occupational schools, etc. Especially, if they graduated high schools with low grades. However, two interviewees who do not support strict regulations argued (R2; R3) that conditions for students from colleges and

occupational schools to enter universities should be created, thereby showing the support for wider access.

The answers here indicate equal distribution of preferences: two respondents are clearly in favour of more limited access, and others support wider access by opposing the direct restrictions. As theoretical expectations suggest that representatives of left parties should prefer wider access thereby increasing the expansive effect on HE system (Busemeyer 2015: 43), two interviewees opposed this. Therefore, the expectations are only partially fulfilled.

iii) The position in relation to student support system

With regard to third policy instrument of redistributive dimension, three out of four respondents (R1; R2; R3) endorsed the idea of student support system, which favours the expansive HE system. The former SDs vice-minister elaborated that Lithuania should implement Swedish model which is very good. However, he was in doubt if it is achievable from a financial point of view:

(R2): "... We are unable to implement such a model, which is very socially fair. There are many reasons for this...Although the economy is growing, the social exclusion is also increasing. This is the problem of state management model. It has to be changed."

The former NS's minister also mentioned the financial problems of implementing the Scandinavian model. He argued that a loan-based support or the social grants for economically disadvantaged students sound more realistic (R3). On the contrary, the former minister from DP (R4) had an opposing view on the student support system. Generally, most of preferences were in favour of student support system, so the expansive effect on HE system is increased.

Summary of the answers

The results of the interviews are summarized in Table 3. The responses of representatives from left-wing parties confirm the theoretical expectations on the redistributive dimension. The majority of respondents favoured two out of three policy instruments contributing to HE expansion, so the restrictive preferences of two respondents on access to HE are reduced. The expansive HE system was preferred by majority of former leftist ministers and one vice-minister in Lithuania. Whether these expansive preferences have been realized legally is another question, which is addressed in section 6.3.

Table 3: Redistributive dimension in HE. The results indicate how many respondents (4 in total) preferred a given policy instrument, e.g. 3 out of 4 preferred the public spending policy. Each respondent provided 3 answers (12 answers in total). The answers are then grouped at the bottom of the table.

Redistributive dimension	
<u>Expansive HE system</u> Public spending (3/4) Wide access to HE (2/4) Expansive student support system (3/4)	Restrictive HE system Private spending (1/4) Limited access to HE (2/4) Restrictive student support system (1/4)
8 in favour	4 in favour

6.1.2 Governance dimension

With regard to the second dimension of HE policy preferences, there are three policy instruments:

- i) *The market oriented model*
- ii) *The state control model*
- iii) *Academic self-governance*

The interviewees have been asked to choose *one* of these three alternatives, i.e. which model is the most suitable for Lithuania (see Appendix 9.1 Interview question - 7). Consequently, these ideal-type models help to determine whether the respondent prefers centralized or decentralized HE system.

Respondents' answers

On this dimension, two out of four interviewees did not take a definitive position that could be well defined. The former SDs' minister was satisfied with the current model based on inclusion of stakeholders, and argued that entrepreneurs should not dominate the HE governing process, hence, the liberal model could be rejected. The former minister favoured academic self-governance with more than 50% of board members from academia (R1). Meanwhile, the party's colleague position was vague, he searched for compromises:

(R2): "It would be ideal if all three parts have the same contribution. What parts? Community, business and the state...We have tried all sorts of models. ... We are trying to find the best option, but since Lithuania is a young democracy, we are struggling."

Another former minister from NS's party quite clearly expressed his support for academic self-governance with a certain degree of state regulation. Meanwhile, he emphasized that university's autonomy should be guaranteed since academic freedom is crucial in knowledge creation and its transfer process. He then admitted that the state should support universities financially, for instance, via the state financed projects. The respondent highlighted that the state regulation cannot be avoided (R3). In contrast, the former DP's minister supported centralized control over HE system:

(R4): "I support the state control model because some rectors just ask for funding and liberty to manage the money. It is not fair because universities use tax payers' money, and they should use it in accordance to the state interest... Now, autonomy is above the state's interests, but it should not be the case."

Summary of the answers

The results are visualized in Table 4. The respondent answers indicate some variation from the ideological expectations based on centralized HE system. As the left-wing political parties should favour the active state in governing the HE sector, only one respondent endorsed the state control model (R4). Notably, others preferred academic self-governance (R1; R3), and one argued for compromises

meaning that none of these models should be prioritized (R2). Therefore, the majority of responses indicate the preference towards decentralized HE system.

Table 4: Governance dimension in HE. The results indicate how many respondents (4 in total) preferred a given policy instrument, e.g. 1 out of 4 preferred the state control model. Each respondent provided 1 answer. One respondent preferred all 3 options and the answer is not included here since proportionally this does not affect the final outcome of the study. Therefore, 3 answers in total. The answers are then grouped at the bottom of the table.

Governance dimension	
Centralized HE system State control model (1/4)	<u>Decentralized HE system</u> Academic self-governance (2/4) Market oriented model (0/4)
1	2

6.2 The HE preferences of right political parties

In order to determine how Lithuanian political parties differ in their HE policy preferences, it is also necessary to analyse the interview answers from the right-wing politicians. The goal is to clarify their position on redistributive and governance dimensions. The same logic is applied to identify the preferences of political right parties like in the case of left-wing parties. The main arguments behind the preferences are collected, and then the position on every policy instrument using the majority principle is estimated. The aim is to verify whether the respondents prefer the restrictive HE system and decentralized HE governance type, which is expected from the theoretical point of view. These results are later discussed in relation to the preferences of left-wing political parties thereby showing how ideology based on left-right divide affects the differences of HE policy goals in Lithuania.

6.2.1 Redistributive dimension

I start my analysis by determining the preferences for three policy instruments: i) the type of financing, ii) access to HE, and (iii) student support system. The interview questions that reflect this are listed in Appendix 9.1, i.e. the same as in the case of representatives from the left-wing parties (see section 6.1.1).

i) The preferred type of financing on HE (public or private)

In relation to the first policy instrument of redistributive dimension, the preferences of representatives from Lithuanian right political parties with respect to the type of financing in HE sector fulfils expectations. Three out of four respondents support private sector involvement or tuition fees in HE funding schemes (R5; R6; R7). Even though the former minister of Education and Science from Liberal Movement party referred to the Lithuanian Constitution which says

that well performing students should be supported by the state, he emphasized that the rest should study using private funds. Interestingly, he added that the level of public spending in Lithuania is higher compared to the European Union (averaged) level. At the same time, investments from private sector are scarce:

(R5): “Thus, it is the main reason why salaries at universities are low, and why our science performance on the international level is weak.”

He clearly indicated a support for private funding in HE by emphasizing that problems in the sector are the result of low business involvement. The position of a former vice-minister and a member of the same party was very similar. However, his reasons for supporting tuition fees were based on a view that public financing and state intervention into economy and market is a bad idea:

(R6): “...Planned economy is a bad thing because it does not work. We planned many things, but the people are leaving our country. That would be my answer.”

In an interview with a former representative of TS-LKD, the support for privately financed education was argued in a different way:

(R7): “...when one invests in education, one is after excellent results, higher quality of outcome, and naturally expects excellence from lecturers and the study process. It is necessary for mutual benefits.”

On the other hand, the party’s colleague emphasized that tuition fees cannot be increased otherwise Lithuanian students will choose to study in other countries. The respondent also claimed that free HE education is desirable and Lithuania should move towards it. The private sector involvement has been also mentioned but his position with respect to free HE separates him from other respondents (R8). Even though the preferences of last respondent demonstrate some discrepancy from right parties’ ideology, the preferences of other interviewees explicitly confirm expectations in terms of private sector involvement and introduction of tuition fees in HE. Thus, it enhances the effect on restrictive HE system.

ii) Preferred access to HE (wider or restrictive)

Then, I look into the second policy instrument influencing redistributive dimension, namely, access to HE. Here, the answers varied: two respondents support wider access, other two favour restricted participation in HE. The former LS’s minister and vice-minister were against limiting the access to HE:

(R5): “...the situation should be favourable for the majority of young people to study...The increased requirements for entrance qualifications is a bad idea. This would stimulate emigration which is a huge problem in Lithuania. Additionally, it would damage labour markets since grades in e.g. natural sciences have never been very high, which would limit accessibility to it even further.”

His party colleague also argued that everyone should have a possibility to study even though not everyone is able to finish. According to him, the desire to study is a positive thing and there should not be any artificial barriers (R6).

On the other hand, the respondent from TS-LKD claimed that entrance qualifications should be at a certain level where only good candidates are accepted

to universities. His arguments implicitly indicate that higher standards for entrance qualifications are needed. Even though he admitted that a mechanism that creates opportunities for students to get from one level of education to another, needs to be created (R7). A similar position was expressed by the current vice-chairman of the Committee on Education and Science, which confirms the restrictive expectations on access to HE:

(R8): “The standards should be tightened otherwise it is not HE anymore but something else. It is possibly glorified vocational training without providing any profession. The concept of HE is misunderstood. The access to HE should be restricted by introducing higher standards and supervising them...”

Thus, it is reasonable to assume that answers only partially fulfil the expectations since only two out of four politicians expressed the support for limited access to HE. Then, the student support policy instrument is going to play a decisive role in determining whether the restrictive HE system is preferred.

iii) The position in relation to student support system

Interestingly, all four respondents undoubtedly favoured the general idea of student support system, however, three of them preferred a more restrictive version of it. Two LS’s respondents had similar opinions in recommending loan based student support system where the interest rates are subsidized by the state (R5; R6). Both former minister and vice-minister added that they like the British way where the student returns the loan after reaching a certain level of incomes after her/his graduation. The former minister also highlighted that the merit based grants for well performing students should be sustained, which is in line with the so-called economic Liberal Party’s ideology.

The TS-LKD’s representatives also advocated for student support system. However, they had different visions on how it should be realized. One respondent emphasized the need for increased student grants that would positively influence students’ academic results. Indeed, he claimed that it is a problem since more than a half of students in Lithuania work during their studies. According to him, it means that independent incomes are very important in this case (R7). Thus, the respondent displays expansive redistributive preferences. However, other interviewee said that the current student support system based on subsidized loans works well. He also argued that self-financed student places should be cancelled so the need for student loans would be reduced. He suggested a way to save money that could be used for student grants, which indicates the restrictive preferences:

(R8): “... One way is to reduce access to HE thereby saving the money and dedicating them to the student grants... We should change this system by restricting access and giving opportunity for everyone to receive a student grant.”

Generally, most of the answers illustrates that the respondents prefer more restrictive student support system that is in line with theoretical expectations. Even though no one opposed the idea of student support system, only one of them had a more expansive vision of it. Others supported the system which is based on loans and merits, or by limiting access to HE. However, they have not shown any

interest in expanding the system by increasing eligibility criteria or referring to e.g. the Scandinavian model.

Summary of the answers

The results are visualized in Table 5. The right-wing political representatives' positions are aligned well with the expectations on redistributive dimension. The majority of respondents favoured private HE spending, and restrictive student support system which are influential policy instruments that illustrate the restrictive HE system.

Table 5: Redistributive dimension in HE. The results indicate how many respondents (4 in total) preferred a given policy instrument, e.g. 1 out of 4 preferred the public spending policy. Each respondent provided 3 answers (12 answers in total). The answers are then grouped at the bottom of the table.

Redistributive dimension	
Expansive HE system Public spending (1/4) Wide access to HE (2/4) Expansive student support system (1/4)	<u>Restrictive HE system</u> Private spending (3/4) Limited access to HE (2/4) Restrictive student support system (3/4)
4 in favour	8 in favour

6.2.2 Governance dimension

Regarding the governance dimension, the respondents are expected to favour decentralized governance over HE system and promote more autonomy for HE institutions (Kalyvas and van Kersbergen 2010).

Respondents' answers

These expectations have been fully confirmed by a former LS's minister and vice-minister. In particular, the former minister claimed that academic community should be involved in the most important decision-making process. However, universities should not work towards their own interests since they have a clearly formulated mission in society. He explained that their openness and responsibility should contribute to adding the value and conforming to demands in the labour market, and the best way to realize it is through HE boards with both academia and market representatives that are on equal terms:

(R5): "...this is not the state control mechanism, but the model involving experts of HE..."

The former minister chose the model that bridges the academic self-governance and the governance through stakeholders in boards. It means that some control from outside (but not governmental control) is required. The former vice-minister claimed that he supports the liberal model (R6), which normally represents the market competition playing the most important role. Then, it is clear that both respondents support decentralization through market mechanisms

and university's autonomy thereby diminishing the role of the state in the HE governing process.

Other interviewees had similar opinions, i.e. the state control should not be the dominant model. Instead, they thought that the state should be involved to a certain degree (R7; R8):

(R7): "...I think that the state should have an influence on the HE's optimization, consolidation and re-organization process because the academic communities are always interested to defend themselves and their own agenda...However, the state should not violate the autonomy of HE institutions. The autonomy and academic self-governance principles should prevail."

While the former chairman of Committee on Education, Science and Culture emphasized the academic self-governance (R7), another respondent said the following:

(R8): "...The centralized control could be effectively implemented through setting the criteria for entrance qualifications. However, the state should not directly influence the university's management process. The current board system with stakeholders from outside is quite successful..."

Both of them promote the role of the state which should not violate university's autonomy (R7), or the board's regulation. The neutral position regarding the centrality of HE governance was taken by respondents from TS-LKD.

Summary of the answers

The results are listed in Table 6. All four respondents fulfilled theoretical expectations on governance dimension where more or less decentralized control is preferred over the state domination in the HE sector.

Table 4: Governance dimension in HE. The results indicate how many respondents (4 in total) preferred a given policy instrument, e.g. 3 out of 4 preferred the academic self-governance model. Each respondent provided 1 answer. The answers are then grouped at the bottom of the table.

Governance dimension	
Centralized HE system State control model (0/4)	<u>Decentralized HE system</u> Academic self-governance (3/4) Market oriented model (1/4)
0	4

6.3 The HE laws from left parties

This study also provides some insights for partisan policy-making in Lithuania as it is realized in HE policy decisions. Expected HE policies should be aligned with the aforementioned policy goals (preferences) as the interview respondents are not only members of respective political parties, but also top political leaders. They were directly involved in the process of initiating and implementing HE reforms in Lithuania during the 2000-2015 period. There are clear indications that it would

have been difficult to implement HE policies with a strong opposition from these former ministers (Laver and Shepsle 1990). Despite the expressed HE preferences that are largely in line with expectations, there is a question whether these preferences are transformed into actual policy decisions. Henceforth, the goal is to examine how HE policy decisions reflect the expressed policy preferences, and what problems are encountered in the process.

Three interview questions were used here (see Appendix 9.1 Interview questions – 8,9,10). In short, the question number eight seeks to clarify the content of implemented HE policies with respect to expressed preferences and expectations. The last two questions identify possible realization problems.

In the HE policies and the type of financing part three individuals (3 out of 4) participated in initiatives that aimed to introduce/increase tuition fees (R1; R2; R3). Although some preferred the publicly financed HE (R1; R2). In relation to the policies on second policy instrument of redistributive dimension, i.e. access to HE, two out of four respondents (R2; R4) worked towards and implemented minimum or more strict university admissions requirements:

(R2): “When I was a vice-minister, I set the minimum requirements for those who want to study at universities. I understand that this is against the wider accessibility principle, but our system does not have a good admission regulation mechanism, and how the state should finance motivated and capable students.”

Regarding the third aspect of redistributive dimension and the policies related to improvement of student support system, there were no initiatives to enlarge student grants. This is surprising because the majority emphasized a positive attitude towards the student support system (R1; R2; R3). Hence, the decisions in relation to actual HE policies reveal the restrictive HE system rather than the expansive one by introducing tuition fees, increasing minimum requirements and sustaining the same merit and social grant-based student support system. Thus, it is *not* in line with theoretical expectations.

On the governance dimension, academic autonomy was sustained as the main principle until 2009. The respondents made no attempts to revoke or compromise it since *2000 Higher Education Law* was implemented. Thus, the decentralized HE system is in accord only with expressed preferences, but not with expectations meaning that HE policies do not fulfil expectations.

Then the respondents were asked whether they received support or faced opposition during the HE policy implementation process. Three out of four respondents (R1; R2; R4) experienced resistance from their party colleagues, which led to various problems and failure to realize the policy:

(R1): “When I was the minister of SDs we prepared HE law that included private financing, which was not entirely acceptable in the party...we finally agreed in the parliament that these changes are necessary...of course, it was not an easy task since some study programmes became very expensive. Therefore, perhaps our government have failed to implement it. Tuition fees were then imposed when liberals came to power”.

The answer indicates that implementation of tuition fees is against the party’s ideology. Interestingly, former minister emphasized that these changes were necessary. Note, some representatives from left-wing parties (R1; R2; R3) pointed

out poor state's financial situation in relation to their policy preferences or policy decisions. This is an important parameter which is going to be discussed in the discussion section.

Basically, all the interviewees experienced failures to implement their preferred HE policies. The majority of answers imply that party's ideology and real decisions are in conflict:

(R2): ...16th Government wanted to return free HE. Unfortunately, the Finance Ministry opposed it by simply stating that the budget cannot support it...If you have not convinced your colleagues, the result is zero. Then, we ended up with the same criticized financial system for HE, which has not changed in four years. This is very bad...The ideological preferences have not been realized. They were in our minds, but not implemented. People want the result. They have heard enough talk. Confidence in government is when actions go in line with promises...”.

Summary of the answers

The answers clearly illustrate that policy decisions are in favour of more restrictive HE system which is in contrast to the aforementioned expansive preferences (Busemeyer 2015: 43). However, the last two interview questions that implicitly targeted realization problems showed that sometimes it is not possible to live up to parties' ideology, i.e. the state budget simply cannot afford it. In this case, the decisions based on pragmatic calculations are prioritized. On the other hand, in some cases ideological decisions prevail, e.g. the former SDs' minister sought private financing but did not implement the policy because the party was against it.

6.4 The HE laws from right parties

The initiated HE policies and the problems associated with the implementation process from the involved right-wing political parties are presented in this section. The interview questions are listed in Appendix 9.1. The same set of questions are used in this analysis, too. This enables me to comprehensively group and compare answers from left and right political parties.

On the redistributive dimension, the *2009 Higher Education Law* substantially increased university tuition fees which improved universities' financial situation. Since the law was introduced, 50% of students have been paying tuition fees and other 50% have been financed by the state. All four respondents (R5; R6; R7; R8) were directly or indirectly involved in the process of implementation of tuition fees. This corresponds rather well with the expressed preferences and theoretical expectations, except the former member (current vice-chairman) of Committee on Education, Science and Culture from TS-LKD who preferred free HE.

With respect to access to HE, the entrance qualifications were (remained) universities' responsibility, and the requirements were quite flexible. Although the liberal minister and vice-minister supported expansive access to HE (R5; R6), theoretical expectations for right parties are based on more restrictive policy

outputs in this sense. Concerning the third policy instrument, the policies of student support system initiated by liberal minister correspond well with expressed preferences and satisfy the expectations. Namely, they implemented (1) state subsidized interest rates for the study loans, (2) separated social grants for disadvantaged families and (3) merit based grants for well performing students. These HE policies substantially increased tuition fees and introduced respective student support system which are *in line* with expressed preferences and theoretical expectations meaning more restrictive HE system.

On the governance dimension, *2009 Higher Education Law* implemented a more liberal type of university governance. All the respondents were part of a coalition that supported the model, and it is in line with preferences and conceptual expectations based on decentralized HE system:

(R7): “2009 Higher Education Law was our most important achievement. This reform has completely changed HE governing principles. It was a revolution because the Law ensured that a dominant part on the boards belongs to outside members.... It was a systemic HE sector’s reform...”

Contrarily to left parties’ representatives, there was a strong support and agreement in the coalition and inside the parties:

(R5): “I was one of the party’s leaders and we promised these reforms in election, so there was a strong support. The Prime Minister, who was the leader of other party, also supported it...”

The respondents emphasized that the biggest resistance came from left-parties. It shows that (ideological) differences were expressed very clearly, where right parties supported private spending and left-wing parties strongly opposed it:

(R8): “Not surprisingly, SDs strongly opposed the HE reform. Because of this confrontation, the implementation process was not so successful, we wanted to pass a stronger version of the reform...”

Once the question about the implementation success was asked, all respondents pointed out that they were dissatisfied with the 2009 Law. Two of them explained that there should be a continuity, which they lack:

(R5): “...the minister build the basis for the system. Later on, intellectuals and HE institution should contribute in implementing these changes, and not just leave it on a paper.”

Summary of the answers

The answers demonstrated that policy decisions are in line with more restrictive HE system which also corresponds well with the restrictive preferences and theoretical expectations. Interestingly, the last two interviewees indicated that in contrast to the left-parties, the agreement inside their parties and coalition was very strong. One reason could be that right parties’ preferences and ideology are better suited for implementation of restrictive meaning from the financial point of view, i.e. the state budget capabilities is not a problem in this case.

6.5 Discussing and comparing the results

While the left parties' expectations on redistributive dimension are based on expansive HE system where public financing, wider access to universities and enhanced student support system are promoted, the right parties should favour the restrictive HE system with more private financing, limited access to universities and weaker student support system. On the governance dimension, left parties should support state control model whereas right parties should favour autonomy, academic self-governance and involvement of market mechanisms. This main political contestation based on left-right ideological divide should be reflected in actual parties' preferences and HE policies on redistributive and governance dimensions.

When actual HE policy preferences of Lithuanian political parties are analysed it displays a similar picture. The responses indicate that the largest difference between left and right political parties with respect to the redistributive dimension are in seeing in how HE should be financed, and whether students should pay for their studies. While three out of four left party representatives supported public financing and one suggested small tuition fees (because of lack of state resources), a similar proportion of interviewees from the right emphasized the importance of private financing, i.e. three out of four politicians advocated students' contribution. This difference goes in line with expectations. The least visible difference is related to the second aspect of redistributive dimension: both left and right-wing political parties showed the same distribution of preferences over the access to HE. In particular, two respondents supported limited access and other two promoted the wider access to HE in both left and right-wing political parties, i.e. 50% split in both party wings. In relation to the third policy instrument of redistributive dimension, the preferences did not vary significantly in the sense that both parties expressed the support for student support system. However, the representatives from right-wing political parties had a more restrictive position on how student support should be implemented. For example, they emphasized the support based on loans, merits or the ones implemented by lowering access to HE. It means that the restrictive preferences still dominate. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the differences in the HE preferences on the redistributive dimension do exist where left-wing favours a more expansive and right-wing more restrictive HE system.

However, the question is why the preferences on the second policy instrument do not illustrate such a strong division between left and right political parties compared to the first policy instrument. It could be explained by isomorphic institutional explanations described in the literature review chapter. The authors of this approach claim that both regions west and east have undergone interrelated developments such as expansion and transformation from elite to mass based HE education (Dobbins 2011: 13). On the one hand, left parties could not identify reasons to widen further the access to HE because it is already wide. Lithuania has more university graduates compared to the EU average, so there is no way of improving it. On the other hand, the right-wing parties could see this massification

of HE as a favourable effect for labour markets, where the state should not intervene. So, the preferences of left and right political parties are not static and they could change since conditions in the world are continuously changing. Therefore, we have mixed preferences that do not represent the stark division on this policy instrument as traditionally partisan theory would suggest.

On the governance dimension, however, there are fewer differences on how HE sector should be governed. Even though one respondent from left-wing political party clearly showed stable preferences for the state control model indicating the centralized HE system, other three interviewees favoured more decentralized HE system by choosing stakeholders model, the mixed model or academic self-governance. This is not in line with expectations for left-wing political parties. Meanwhile, the right-wing political parties also favour decentralized control over HE by supporting academic self-governance model with more autonomy and involvement of market mechanisms, which fits their right ideology. Thus, the governance dimension does not indicate the political contestation based on left-right ideological divide, because both parties prefer decentralized control over HE sector.

The situation where the representatives from left political parties show some contradicting preferences by expressing support for decentralized HE system can be put into context and explained by historical institutionalist perspective that was presented in the literature review chapter. The state control model is closely related to Lithuanian historical past when the state was a part of Soviet Union, and all public and economic services and activities were mostly centrally planned. Accordingly, HE institutions were also under a strict state control. After the state's independence was restored the model was immediately changed. The reason for this sudden change is the desire to cut all ties and associations with the previous system. In this context, it would be difficult to imagine that even the left wing could support a centralized HE system, which would always remind the Soviet Union times. Moreover, it would also be difficult to reverse academic self-governance or more market-oriented model once institutions have already been established reflecting the aforementioned models. For the right parties, it is much easier to support the academic self-governance model which is in line with theoretical expectations and the historical context. In this HE governance case, institutional forces and institutional theories could be more relevant.

Concerning the main differences in HE laws initiated by left and right political parties, it does not correlate with expectations. Importantly, when the left parties' respondents were in power, the HE policies with private financing, the minimum entrance qualifications without expanding student support system have been introduced. It means that the restrictive HE system has been enforced on redistributive dimension. On the governance dimension, the HE laws have consolidated the principle of the university's autonomy meaning decentralized control over HE (*2000 Law on Higher Education*). Meanwhile, the HE policies instigated by right parties, which were in government from 2008 until 2012, show a trend towards a more restrictive HE system. Higher tuition fees for university studies in tandem with loan-based student support system, but also flexible entrance qualifications were introduced. On the governance dimension, the HE

policies supporting market mechanisms and academic self-governance were established (*2009 Law on Higher Education and Research*). The HE policies initiated by both party families have created a more restrictive HE system based on the decentralized control model. This indicates that political parties do not differ in their HE policies on redistributive and governance dimensions.

As the results show that Lithuanian political parties based on left-right ideological divide differ in their HE preferences more significantly than in their policy outputs, the situation requires more contextualization. On the governance dimension, the decentralized HE system was probably implemented to reflect the expressed policy preferences (but not expectations) by left parties. However, the redistributive dimension could raise more doubts and considerations. Since the representatives from left-parties prefer a more expansive HE system but at the same time implemented a more restrictive HE policies, one possible reason for this deviation is the lack of state resources. Note, three out of four left parties' respondents emphasized difficulties associated with the state's financial situation. Furthermore, the interview questions that were designed to clarify HE policies' realization problems showed that party's ideology is sometimes too expensive, i.e. most implementation issues are related to HE financing. Left-parties policies are more expansive but also more expensive, and in the post-communist country's case it appears to be a decisive factor.

If financial issues of state are indeed difficult to ignore, the left wing is sometimes forced to compromise. For instance, tuition fees, minimum requirements for entrance qualifications and the weaker student support system were introduced and sustained. Interestingly, although most of respondents from left parties were in one way or the other associated with introducing the tuition fees, study costs were quite low. The minimum requirements for university studies have also been set, but overall outcome of these policies have not affected opportunities to study in any negative way. In contrast, when three out of four left-wing parties' respondents were in power in the period 2000-2009, the university student enrolment rates significantly increased. Thus, despite the restrictive policy outputs required by economic situation of state, the expansive policy outcomes corresponding with expressed policy preferences were sustained.

Meanwhile, stability and agreement in the policies' implementation process without compromising the restrictive policy preferences were kept intact in the right parties' case. It can be argued that restrictive HE preferences are less capital intensive which is far easier to justify and realize in a less developed (compared to western counterparts) EU state such as Lithuanian. Therefore, substantially increased university study prices with student support based on loans, merits and limited social grants, despite flexible entrance qualifications, has led to a restrictive HE system. Once the right wing came to power in 2009, the student enrolment rates have started to decrease, which indicates that not only HE policy preferences and policy outputs but also the policy outcomes became more restrictive in contrast to the left governments' situation.

7 Conclusions

In the beginning of this study, the doubts and questions were raised whether it is worth analysing the difference of HE policy preferences and policy outputs from the perspective of partisan theory in CEE state, since even western governments are considered to be moving towards the similar policies (Boix 1997: 841) once politicians acquire desired positions. However, the findings of empirical analyses have time after time showed that ideology of western governments appeared to be an important factor for policy preferences and policy content. However, the previous literature has hitherto excluded from the investigation Eastern and Central European states. Instead, it focused on the explanations suggested by historical and transnational institutionalist perspectives for their HE reforms.

This study, therefore, aimed at answering the question of how Lithuanian political parties differ in their HE policy preferences and policy outputs based on left-right ideological divide. Grounded on the theoretical expectations derived from the partisan theory, substantial differences between the formulated HE politics of left and right political parties who headed governments from 2000 to 2016 were assumed to take place. However, it can be assumed that the influence of ideology on HE policy preferences are stronger than on actual HE policy decisions in the case of left-wing political parties because some constraining institutional factors in the expansive left policies could be involved.

By this perspective, this study has attempted to fill the lacking gap in the literature and it has also sought to make the contributions to the partisan theory by analysing in depth Lithuania as CEE representative case. In order to accomplish this, the qualitative case study with eight semi-structured elite interviews have been chosen. The goal of the study was more explorative with the aim to obtain a detailed understanding of preferences and policy outputs for HE as represented by interviewees.

Results of this research have demonstrated that representatives of Lithuanian political parties have different preferences on the redistributive dimension. Left parties expressed the expansive HE policy preferences while right parties argued for more restrictive ones. On the governance dimension, however, their preferences were not significantly different since both left and right parties' representatives supported a decentralized HE system. This is possibly due to historical institutional factors and path-dependence of existing HE system. With respect to policy outputs, the difference was even less pronounced, i.e. representatives from left parties implemented restrictive HE policies in contrast to what these parties are expected to do. Meanwhile, the right parties also enforced restrictive HE policies, i.e. in line with expectations. On the governance dimension, the same policies based on a decentralized control over the HE sector

by left and right political parties were also implemented and sustained. Thus, the difference was expressed in HE preferences rather than on HE reforms.

The empirical results obtained using this qualitative approach could have limited applicability to other countries since only one case was analysed. However, these results could be utilized when comparing contextually similar countries in terms of party politics literature, and also in a broader scientific agency and structure debate. While the results showed that certain HE policy outputs were more dependent on the characteristics of a given system instead of preferences of left political actors representing the agency, it is reasonable to assume that the system was beneficial for right political actors to implement their preferred HE policies thereby restricting the existing system. It had mutually reinforcing effect where both structure and agency are dependent and influencing each other (Halperin and Heath 2012: 93). It means that both are equally important and cannot be considered separately at least in this study case.

The future research is needed before drawing conclusions of why (Lithuanian) political parties have different HE preferences, but implemented rather similar HE policies. Importantly, the identification of major HE policy goals (preferences) and policy outputs was a substantial step towards understanding how left and right political parties differ based on the aforementioned dimensions. However, the interview answers have so far illustrated that a rather difficult financial situation in the state could be the main reason of why the left parties have not enforced the expansive HE policies on redistributive dimension which is simply too expensive. Meanwhile, the past legacies could be the reason of not conformity with expectations on governance dimension. Nevertheless, a deeper analysis explaining the reasons behind certain policy decisions of political parties have to be undertaken by further research.

8 References

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9 Appendix

9.1 Interview questions

1. Please can you tell me a little bit about your experience of being Minister of Education and Science/vice-minister/ member/chairman of Education and Science Committee in Lithuania?
2. What is the most difficult part of this work in comparison to other job positions?
3. How do you assess the current situation of higher education in Lithuania? What are the major problems in this area?
4. Do you think higher education in Lithuania should be more publicly or privately funded?
5. How do you think if there should be a wider participation or more limited access to higher education?
6. What is your opinion about student support systems, in terms of financing, for instance, student grants or subsidised interest rates for loans?
7. What do you think which university management model is the most suitable for Lithuania: 1) liberal (market oriented model), where the market economy plays a key role; 2) the state control model; 3) or academic self-governance, where the university community takes the most important decisions?
8. What kind of higher education policies have you or your colleagues initiated?
9. Who has supported or contrarily opposed your proposals?
10. Have you succeeded in implementing your initiated HE policies?

9.2 Respondents

Roma Žakaitienė (Respondent 1) – Lithuanian Social Democratic Party’s Minister of Education and Science in 2006-2008.

Rimantas Vaitkus (Respondent 2) – Lithuanian Social Democratic Party’s Vice-Minister of Education and Science in 2001-2004, and in 2012-2016.

Algirdas Monkevičius (Respondent 3) – Lithuanian New Union (Social Liberals) party’s Minister of Education and Science in 2000-2004, and in 2008.

Dainius Pavalkis (Respondent 4) – Lithuanian Labour Party’s Minister of Education and Science in 2012-2015.

Gintaras Steponavičius (Respondent 5) – Lithuanian Liberal Movement party’s Minister of Education and Science in 2008-2012.

Vaidas Bacys (Respondent 6) – Lithuanian Liberal Movement party’s Vice-Minister of Education and Science in 2008-2012.

Valentinas Stundys (Respondent 7) – the member of Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats party and the Chairman of Committee on Education, Science and Culture in 2008-2012.

Mantas Adomėnas (Respondent 8) – the member of Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats party, the member of Committee on Education, Science and Culture in 2008-2012, and the Vice-Chairman of Committee on Education and Science since 2016.