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# MEDIA AND SOCIETY: THE PREREQUISITES FOR INFLUENCE ON LITHUANIAN FOREIGN POLICY

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## *Abstract*

The article discusses the prerequisites for a more active public engagement in Lithuanian foreign policy-making. It aims to test the communication chain linking three different subjects: the media, the public and foreign policy decision makers. Information flow among these three subjects is examined by conducting media content analysis, analysing public opinion polls and carrying out a survey on Lithuanian foreign policy decision makers, thus testing the communication chain model on three different issues: the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, 2008; Lithuania's position during the Russia-Georgia conflict, 2008; and Lithuania's decision to consider accepting ex-prisoners from Guantanamo Bay, 2009.

## **Introduction**

For a long time public opinion on foreign matters was considered to be too shallow and unstable to have an actual impact on foreign policy decisions which were normally a sphere of political elite.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, in comparison to other fields of public policy, the attention that public is paying to foreign policy is traditionally low.<sup>2</sup>

However, the shift towards liberal democracies and alterations within the public sphere, alongside new communication tools, in theory may have changed the relationship between the society and foreign policy decisions. In an age of live 24/7 broadcasts, intermediate communication and a time when borders between foreign and domestic matters are fading, it is only natural to expect

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<sup>1</sup> Holsti O., "Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: Challenges to the Almond-Lippmann Consensus", *International Studies Quarterly*, 1992, 36 (4), p.440

<sup>2</sup> Moisy C., "Myth of Global Information Village", *Foreign policy*, No. 107, 1997, p. 79

that the public<sup>3</sup> should become more concerned about foreign matters and have more interest in being vocal on the main foreign policy decisions.

Nevertheless, nowadays scholars observe the contrary situation. The expression of public interest as well as its representation is becoming increasingly problematic. The concept of the “ideal citizen” who would carry and express his or her political interests is far off from reality. More than half of all citizens become oblivious when it comes to the opportunity to participate in elections. They have even less interest in engaging in specific fields of politics, such as foreign policy, which has always been considered “closed” and “elitist”.<sup>4</sup>

The present article focuses on the weakness of the dialogue between the citizens and foreign policy decision makers, which decreases the level of people’s trust in the authorities and state institutions as well as their interest in active engagement in foreign policy. The simplex relations between decision makers and the society, when the public is formally informed about the decisions only after they have already been made, presuppose the situation, when promising new ideas, which could originate in the society, are denied. In addition to that, lack of public feedback creates freedom for policy makers to manipulate passive and inattentive parts of society while making decisions on foreign policy which under certain circumstances may become dangerous.

The objective of this article is to display the communication chain linking three different subjects: media, the public and the foreign policy decision makers, and to reveal its weakest links. This will further identify the barriers diminishing public participation in foreign policy formation.

Empirical research has been designed to test three hypotheses. These may supply the reasons behind vague dialogue between foreign policy decision makers and those they represent.

*Hypothesis I:* The emphasis on foreign policy issues disseminated by the mass media within the public sphere is inadequate. This acts as an obstacle

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<sup>3</sup> According to the Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy, “the concept of “a society” (the public) implies a system of more or less settled statuses, to each of which correspond particular patterns of actions appropriate to a range of situations“. Since this article focuses on foreign policy decision-making and the public input in it, the term “public” here, first of all, refers to citizens of the state who can participate in electing or indirectly controlling their representatives, who make political decisions.

<sup>4</sup> Risse-Kappen, T., “Public Opinion, Domestic Structure, and Foreign Policy in Liberal Democracies”, *World Politics* Vol. 43, No. 4, p. 481.

for the public in shaping opinions and reactions to important issues regarding Lithuanian foreign policy.

*Hypothesis II:* The public is generally not interested in distant fields like foreign policy: since the subject does not relate to its daily-life experiences, the public therefore has no motivation to express opinions about it.

*Hypothesis III:* Foreign policy makers treat public opinion formally and count on mediated public opinion sources rather than contact with their constituents. This prevents them from developing deeper feedback when it comes to decisions.

These hypotheses presuppose that three filters might diminish the possibilities for the public to have a larger impact on foreign policy. The *media filter* puts limitations on the information provided for the mass audience as well as on reporting manner, including agenda-setting, priming and framing. Second, the *selective nature of public attention* has a direct impact. Some groups of society are simply not interested in foreign matters. Third, in their professional practice *foreign policy decision makers* use only specific public opinion sources. As a result, some public voices remain unheard.

Each link of the communication chain model was empirically tested on three different Lithuanian foreign policy issues: the Lisbon Treaty Ratification (May, 2008), Lithuania's position during the summer 2008, the Russia-Georgia conflict, and, finally, Lithuania's decision to possibly consider accepting prisoners from Guantanamo Bay. The first part of the empirical research contained content analysis of three varying Lithuanian media outlets: The daily newspaper "Lietuvos Rytas", the news magazine "Veidas" and the biggest Lithuanian Internet news portal "[www.delfi.lt](http://www.delfi.lt)." The results of the media content analysis were discussed in the context of public opinion polls; Lithuanian respondents were questioned on the issues discussed (all used polls were carried out by companies of public opinion and market research and published in open sources). Finally, in March-April 2009 the author of this article conducted a survey of 75 officials at the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Most scholars prefer to examine one of the communication links, for instance, the relation between the media and public opinion, or the impact of the media on decision making, while the entire communication chain usually receives theoretical analysis only. Furthermore, scholars generally focus their research on the US or Western European countries, and their findings,

due to the differences of political culture, often cannot be transferred and directly applied to the context of the new EU Member States, such as the Baltic countries. This article is the first attempt to empirically examine all of the links of the communication chain in Lithuania.

A discussion of empirical findings is preceded by an overview of the communication chain model and a brief theoretical background.

### **1. Media, the public and foreign policy decision making: linking the communication chain**

Differently from the public space until the 20th century, largely due to the development of the media, present-day political discussions do not depend on time and space. J. B. Thompson, Professor of Sociology at Cambridge University, has analysed the migration from the public sphere described by J. Habermas (in which information is shared in live discussions during bourgeois salon meetings) to the mediated one, where the model of *deliberative democracy*, in which different agents and society groups take part in mediated discussion, share their opinions and find the most noteworthy decisions, could arise. As he claims, “the more that individuals are able to in the deliberation concerning the issues that affect them, and the more that the results of such deliberation are fed into decision-making procedures, the greater their democratic stake will be in the social and political organizations that shape their lives”. This is why the mass media institutions have a particularly important role to play in the development of deliberative democracy. Media institutions, functioning both as a means of information and a means of expression, provide tools that could be used by individuals capable of gathering and sharing information. It has mechanisms which help to include the opinion of those groups and which otherwise would most likely remain unheard.<sup>5</sup>

However, the question still being asked is whether the modern media, which is based on commercial practices, could act as such idealised public sphere? In practice, the theoretical model could face some limitations, since the mass

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<sup>5</sup> Thompson J. B., *The Media and Modernity: Social Theory of the Media*, Cambridge: Polity press, 1995, p. 257

media serve not only as a democratic public sphere, but also as a way to bring profit to publishers, editors and companies financing commercials. In addition to that, according to M. A. Baum, Professor of Communication at Harvard University, in this case information can be equalized to economical goods. It is dependent on the demand (audience) and the supply (information sources: government and foreign policy events).<sup>6</sup>

In this chapter the links connecting the three agents – the public, the media and foreign policy decisions – are described and the model is constructed, which will be used as the basis for the empirical research presented in the next chapter.

### **1.1. First filter: the media logic**

In our model, the media are defined not as a passive information channel, transmitting the information to the society, but as an active actor in the communication process between foreign policy decisions and the society. The term “media” here is used in two ways: a) as communication transmitters gathering, editing and spreading the information; b) as information content provided in the mass media, which is affecting people’s knowledge and attitudes towards foreign policy.

Media is balancing between access to information and its audience. According to Baum, the media primarily rely on leaders for access to information, therefore “information usually comes pre-packaged in a frame that leaders would prefer that the media retain.”<sup>7</sup>

All the information reaching the media is going through the “media logic mechanisms”, which include journalist’s decisions determining the newsworthiness of the stories, the way the material is organized, the style in which it is presented, emphasis on particular characteristics of behaviour.<sup>8</sup> Among the functions of the media transforming and shaping the information the most important ones are agenda-setting, framing and priming, drawing the audience’s attention to particular issues or angles. The reader’s impression is shaped with

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<sup>6</sup> Baum M. A., Potter, P. B.K., „The Relationships Between Mass Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis“, *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2008, 11, p. 50

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 50

<sup>8</sup> Altheide, Snow, p. 9

respect to what aspects of certain issues are most important. Thus the information transformed by the media logic loses part of its content by making some aspects of the problems more noticeable than others. Here it is called a “media filter,” as it puts limits on the information reaching the general public.

### **1.2. Second filter: the selective nature of public attention**

Even after the media reports certain issues, it will not necessarily increase people’s interest in them. According to R. W. Neumann, typical citizens are interested in such events as economic crisis’ or presidential elections. Still, when it comes to some relatively minor or more specific issues, there is a smaller group of concerned citizens who act in discussion, follow the information, attempt to share their opinions and influence others, including by bringing their opinions to the attention of the authorities. Each issue attracts its own group of participants, which depends on their occupation, religious affiliation and so on. Public attention toward the information provided by the media is selective. Therefore, not everybody will react to the same piece of information. Similarly, different groups of people will react differently. While most likely the largest sector will remain ignorant, there will be some groups characterized by a greater interest in particular issues. Those groups will continue to follow news on an issue that interests them.<sup>9</sup>

“Media effect,” which may be defined as „the exposure to the media’s changes on people’s behaviour or beliefs,”<sup>10</sup> could be divided into two categories: short- and long-term. The short-term effect could evoke a fast reaction in the audience – acknowledging some news or participating in protests or demonstrations. On the other hand, the long-term effect could influence the shift in cultural, social or political attitudes bringing about a change in values.<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that sometimes “media effect” may have a suppressing

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<sup>9</sup> Neumann R. W., *The Paradox of Mass Politics: Knowledge And Opinion in the American Electorate*, Harvard University Press, 1986, p. 32

<sup>10</sup> Livingstone, S., „On the Continuing Problem of Media Effects“, in Curran J., Gurevitch M. eds., *Mass Media and Society*, 2nd ed., London, New York, Sydney, Auckland, 1996, p. 307

<sup>11</sup> McQuail D., *Mass communication theory: an introduction*, London: SAGE Publ., 1994, p. 335, 337

outcome, in which pluralism of opinions diminishes. In this case the society becomes a passive observer of events. According to E. Noelle-Neumann, if there are no alternative opinions provided in the media, the spiral of silence can be formatted. The part of the society, which would otherwise have had a different point of view, will hesitate to express opinions. As a result, alternative thoughts will remain unexpressed.<sup>12</sup> This could very well be one of the biggest threats to the functioning of the deliberative democracy model.

However, scholars have pointed out certain features of information, which can potentially increase public attention or even cause active reaction. These include: 1) social and political context in which the news is reported:<sup>13</sup> if the problem is reported in the context of important local events, it will most likely not get great public attention. 2) contextual knowledge held by the audience toward the issue.<sup>14</sup> 3) type of the problem: public reaction toward foreign matters is entirely different during periods of conflict or crisis.<sup>15</sup> 4) Intensity of reporting: the more frequently messages on some particular issues appear, the more recognizable they become for the readers.<sup>16</sup> 5) Proximity. Foreign news can attract more attention if it has a local angle, for instance, posing the question on the way the problem may affect the local people, their country's security or economy.<sup>17</sup> 6) Access to various alternative opinions: the less informed the audience, the more likely it will withhold judgement on positions of the elite.<sup>18</sup> The vaster the opinions, the greater public attention the issue may get, and the less likely it is to the format a spiral of silence. 7) Reliability of the source: the trustworthier the source of information is, the higher tendency there is for the public to express some sort of reaction toward the issues being reported.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Noelle-Neumann, E., *The Spiral of Silence*, Chicago and London, 1993 p. 5

<sup>13</sup> Baum, p. 55

<sup>14</sup> McQuail, p. 350

<sup>15</sup> Baum, p. 44

<sup>16</sup> Neuman R. W., „The Threshold of Public Attention“, *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 54, No.2, p. 161

<sup>17</sup> McQuail, p. 342

<sup>18</sup> Brody R. A., „Crisis, War, and Public Opinion in Bennet L., Paletz, D., eds., *Taken by Storm*, Chicago, 1994, p. 210-230

<sup>19</sup> McQuail, p. 341

### **1.3 Third filter: foreign policy decision makers**

Finally, after some part of the information is lost in the newsroom filters and only a certain part of the public actually becomes interested, we move to the third filter: foreign policy decision makers. The extent to which these decision makers are attentive to the public opinion depends on the political culture, values, economic and social conditions, specific questions discussed and numerous other factors.<sup>20</sup> In addition to that, even if the public opinion is included in the foreign policy decision making process, it is important which public opinion sources are mostly used – that is, which groups are being most represented.

For example, there are differences among public opinion sources used in different countries during various periods of time. This shift may be observed while analysing two similar studies, conducted in timeframes by B. Cohen (1973) and J. T. Powlick (1995). Both authors attempted to find out what kinds of public opinion sources were used in American foreign policy decision making. Comparing their findings two trends should be noted: a) over time mass public opinion (public opinion surveys) has become of greater importance; b) the importance of elite sources has decreased. J. T. Powlick found that the most important public opinion sources for officials were the mass media and the Congress. This matched Cohen's results. However, according to Cohen, elites were mentioned amongst the most important sources, noted by 50 per cent of officials. Only 4 per cent of J. T. Powlick's respondents mentioned them as most used.<sup>21</sup> This clearly illustrates the shift from an elite foreign policy decision making tradition towards a more open system, where the public voice is becoming more important.

Amongst the main channels through which the public can communicate their interests, reaching the foreign policy decision makers, the following are mentioned most often: 1) impact through elections; 2) parliamentary control – constituents expressing their interests to their members of the parliament; 3) public opinion surveys – as a source of public opinion; 4) media influence – when media is used as a source of public opinion; 5) direct com-

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<sup>20</sup> Hill, Ch., *Changing Policies of Foreign Policy*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p.222-227

<sup>21</sup> Powlick Ph. J., „The Sources of Public Opinion for American Foreign Policy Officials“, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.39, No.4, 1995, p. 441



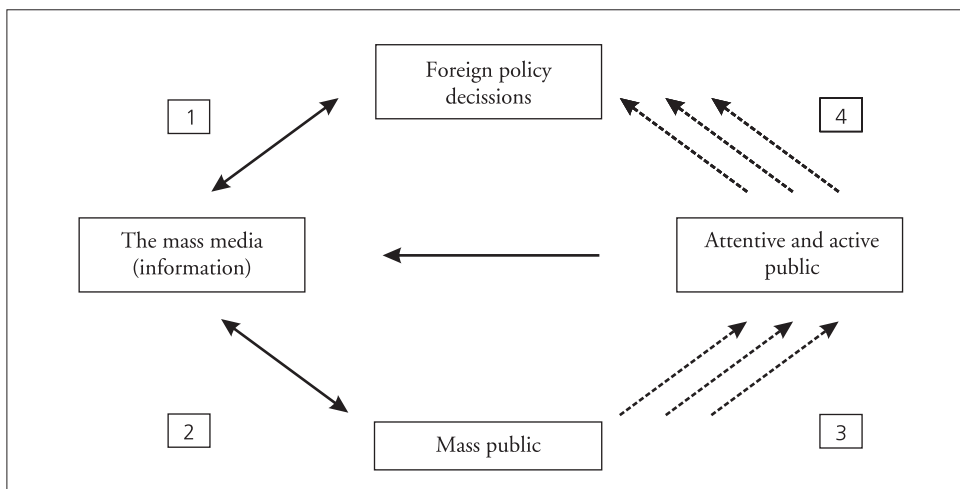
munication – meetings with interest groups or ordinary citizens; 6) influence of organized groups; 7) expression of the opinion through experts and academic elites 8) use of informal channels.

According to J. Manza and F. L. Cook, the more unbalanced the use of different public opinion sources, the more likely it will push political elites to policies unwanted by the mass public, even when politicians want to follow public opinion.<sup>22</sup>

#### 1.4. Constructing the model of communication chain

Summarizing theoretical aspects discussed in the previous sections we will attempt to construct the model of the communication chain, which links foreign policy decision makers and the public. There are four steps (see Figure 1) to be explained in the communication chain, which places the original information to be changed within the communication process, and proves that only a small part of the public opinion may potentially be reflected in foreign policy decisions.

Figure 1. **Communication chain model and its filters**



<sup>22</sup> Manza J., Cook F. L., *A Democratic Polity? Three Views of Policy Responsiveness to Public Opinion in the United States*, *American Politics Research*, 2002, 30, p.649

First, only some of the information gets through the media filter and becomes the news (1). Then it is modified according to the media logic. Only some angles, viz. angles relevant to that media logic, are reported (2). The public is selective; only some groups choose to follow the information on certain issues while other groups have different reactions (3). They express their opinion using different channels. Foreign policy decision makers tend to use certain public opinion sources more than others. Consequently, some public groups remain unheard even though they have shaped and attempted to express their interests (4).

This theoretical model is empirically tested in the second chapter, using three different foreign policy issues of Lithuania.

## **2. Testing the communication chain: the prerequisites for the media's and public influence on Lithuanian foreign policy decisions**

The model of deliberative democracy, when policy makers and the society participate in a mediated discussion and look for the best solutions, as discussed in the first chapter, may sound too idealistic – especially given the context of practical realities. Is the society capable of participating in that type of discussion? On the other hand, is the political elite ready to accept public input and see its supplementary value?

The empirical part of this article aims to test the chain of communication, which links foreign policy makers, public (society) and media. Functioning of the communication process is tested on three Lithuanian foreign policy issues: 1. The ratification of the Lisbon Treaty (2008); 2. Lithuania's standpoint during the Georgia-Russia conflict (2008); 3. Lithuania's decision to consider accepting prisoners from Guantanamo Bay.

The research was conducted in three steps. First, content analysis of three different Lithuanian media outlets was conducted in order to understand how the three issues of Lithuanian foreign policy were covered in Lithuanian media. Then the results of content analysis were analysed in the light of sociological data that reveal public opinion about the issues. Finally, the survey of

75 officials working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was conducted in order to find out what kind of public opinion sources were in use while relevant decisions were being made.

### 2.1. Media filter

Media content analysis is the first step in the empirical research presented in this article. It helps to verify the first hypothesis: *The stress on foreign policy issues disseminated by mass media within the public sphere is inadequate. This acts as an obstacle for the public in shaping opinions and reacting to important issues regarding Lithuanian foreign policy.*

Three different Lithuanian media outlets were chosen for content analysis: the biggest daily newspaper “Lietuvos Rytas”, the weekly news magazine “Veidas” and the Internet news portal [www.delfi.lt](http://www.delfi.lt). These media outlets are reaching various types of audiences and are different in terms of the format. Content analysis helps to have an inside look into the kind of information that has reached the Lithuanian public. Articles dealing with the Lisbon Treaty, published between December 2007 and June 2008, the Russia-Georgia conflict, published in August and September 2008, and articles covering the Guantanamo prisoners’ issue, published between January 15<sup>th</sup> and April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2009, were analysed according to 18 different criteria. The method of content analysis was selected as the tool helping to reveal not only quantitative, but also qualitative features of the information.

Based on the theoretical background, there are three main aspects of media research considered: 1. Intensity of information. 2. Potential emotional impact of the information. 3. Access to a variety of information on the issue. An analysis on these aspects is provided in the following sections.

#### 2.1.1. Intensity of the information

The more regular, intense and visible the problem is in the media, the more likely it is to have, at least, a short-term media effect which, depending on the more qualitative features of the information, could potentially bring public attention to a particular problem.

The intensity of reporting on the three foreign policy issues was measured by the following criteria: a) Amount and length of stories published on the

issue; b) Regularity of reporting; c) Subject (e.g., “Lisbon Treaty”) visibility in the headlines; d) The share of the original content (created by authors rather than rewritten from news agencies) on the subject; e) The share of analytical articles on the researched issue (see Table 1).

Table 1. **The intensity of information on the three different foreign policy issues**

Information intensity criteria	Lisbon Treaty	Russia-Georgia conflict	Guantanamo prisoners' issue
Amount of news items published during the research period	86	453	46
Share of news items, which appeared on the front page	3 %	16 %	0
Share of analytical stories	35 %	22 %	24 %

As the research shows, the most intensively reported issue was the Georgia-Russia conflict. It received 453 stories in total. Because of the large number of stories published on the subject it is also fair to say that it was reported not only most regularly, but also received the largest number of analytical and in-depth reports. This issue matched the theoretical news values the most, and because of that its dynamics was reflected most actively. An important role in this case was played by the proximity factor, since Russia is Lithuania's closest neighbour and main business partner.

On the contrary, the Lisbon Treaty appeared the least obvious in the media pages. In fact, the media faced the greatest problem in presenting it to the public. Regardless of this fact, the Lisbon Treaty issue received a somewhat larger share of analytical publications. However, the general number of stories on the issue was poor. The complexity of the subject-matter of the Lisbon Treaty and lack of event-related characteristics brought about a situation, in which only a small part of the public would be expected to get a deeper interest in it. More importantly, only 27 out of 86 articles devoted to the Lisbon Treaty were published after its ratification by the Lithuanian Parliament. This indicates that the media were only reacting to the events, rather than encouraging active discussions within the society, before the decision was made.

The Guantanamo Bay issue received a similar amount of news coverage as the Lisbon Treaty, despite the fact that it has had less high-priority in the foreign policy agenda. The reasons for the attention of the media to the issue may be explained by clear borders between “good” and “bad”, clear options to “accept” or “deny”, which matched the media format. In addition to that, Guantanamo Bay was already slightly known due to the previous reports on terrorism threats. So it fitted the logic of the media to follow up on the stories that had previously attracted some attention. However, just as in the Lisbon Treaty case, many of the stories dealing with Guantanamo Bay were published after the decision had been made. This proved that media only states the facts, instead of analysing different decision alternatives. The latter would encourage people’s interest and bring attention to foreign policy.

### 2.1.2 Potential emotional impact of the information

In the content analysis this category is one of the most important, since it defines whether a news item will get noticed and read in general. This category was evaluated by determining: a) whether the subject, which appeared in the headlines, was reported in the positive or negative informational context; b) whether there was any information about possible threats to Lithuania or its citizens.

The research proves that all three issues were often presented in the negative context (see Table 2). This means that the media is looking for some negative, problematic angles. Often the message stated in the headline and subhead line is the only information which actually reaches the audience. Therefore the given emotional impact is quite important.

Table 2. **Potential emotional impact of the stories on the three foreign policy issues**

Emotional impact criteria	Lisbon Treaty	Russia-Georgia conflict	Guantanamo prisoners’ issue
Negative context in the headline	28 %	44 %	35 %
Share of analytical stories containing information about possible threats to Lithuania	21 %	15 %	24 %

One of the most essential elements of the articles is whether they contain information about possible threats to the audience (or its close environment). This parameter is basically determining whether the audience will take the information passively or whether it will have some kind of active reaction, which could be expressed by voicing opinions, participation in discussions with officials, and so on.

Statistically, possible negative factors were most frequently mentioned in the articles devoted to the Lisbon Treaty. However, in this case, a merely statistical evaluation does not help to understand the real effect of the messages, since the proximity of the problems, types of risks mentioned and the possible influence of those threats are different. For example, in the articles devoted to the Lisbon Treaty the fact that „Lithuania could become even weaker in the context of the big EU members” was understood as a threat. Meanwhile in the articles dealing with the Russia-Georgia conflict not only the possibility of economic sanctions against Lithuania, but in some cases even threats to the country’s physical security were made clear. When it comes to Guantanamo Bay, the main mention was that, in the case of accepting ex-prisoners, Lithuania could provoke a negative reaction from terrorist groups. Another threat was the creation of a legal case (precedent), which would run counter to the existent legislation in Lithuania.

### **2.1.3. Access to the variety of information on the issue**

The greater the difference of sources and opinions available for the audience, the more likely it will shape critical and civic position on relevant political matters. On the contrary, when there are only a few elite sources quoted, the threat of the formation of the spiral of silence arises. This means that citizens keeping to a different opinion than the one broadcast will not attempt to express it and instead will follow the decisions of the elite.

This category was measured by analysing such parameters as 1) the number of different sources quoted in the articles; 2) the kinds of sources (politicians, foreign political elite, experts, etc.) quoted, 3) availability of different opinions on the subject; and 4) the standpoint supported by the authors of analytical articles.

Generally, the variety of sources quoted in the articles reporting on all the three subjects was very low. Information was based on few sources, and usually the standpoints presented were of those of Lithuanian President and Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Table 3. Use of different sources in the stories on three different foreign policy issues

Information variety criteria	Lisbon Treaty	Russia-Georgia conflict	Guantanamo prisoners' issue
Share of stories having 1 or less quoted sources	59 %	60 %	49 %
Share of stories where Lithuanian politicians were quoted	38 %	24 %	37 %
Share of stories where academics and analytics were quoted	15 %	14 %	20 %

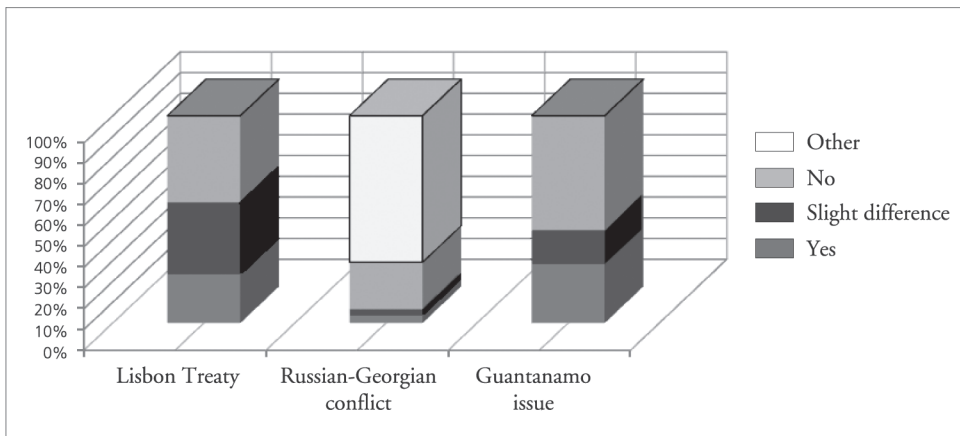
The results of the study demonstrate that there were more foreign than Lithuanian sources, which suggests that news items were frequently prepared on the basis of the information of news agencies and were missing a “local” angle, which would have helped local audiences to understand the importance of the issue.

Alternative sources, such as views held by business people or NGOs, were rarely quoted in news items (3-9 percent, with the exception of the academic opinion, which appeared in less than one fifth of the stories).

The media discourse on the issues discussed was quite unanimous, too. Different opinions or critical, alternative solutions to the problems were provided randomly. It was especially obvious in the Georgia-Russia conflict issue, where a very clear message supporting Georgia's position in the conflict was broadcast. Almost no criticism of that position appeared (see Graph 1). The position of the media in this case matched the Lithuanian political elite's rhetoric and was supported by most of the population, which contributed to its uncontested nature. However, the extent to which the media discourse lacked any alternative opinions in this case could even be even called critical,

since this type of one-sided information on the issue could provoke the spiral of silence and subsequent manipulations. Nevertheless, it is hard to predict whether Lithuanian public opinion would be less homogenous if more diverse opinions had appeared on the issue within the public sphere.

Graph 1. **The variety of alternative positions introduced in analytical articles on different foreign policy issues**



The only issue that sparked some kind of discussion within the media was the Guantanamo issue, where experts and academics, who were more hesitant about the idea of accepting the prisoners, took positions different from those of the officials. Turning to the Lisbon Treaty issue, some variety of opinion concerning the decisions could be observed, however they were not expressed clearly enough (since the difference was usually quite negligible). There was no discussion on the different outcomes ensuing from different decisions, nor greater reporting on the facts (ratified treaty) that took place with a view to inspire public discussion about the best possible solutions.

## 2.2. Public filter

In this section, the media research results are summarized according to the criteria stated in section 1.2., and are analysed in the context of available public opinion surveys on the issues.



**The Lisbon Treaty.** There were two surveys conveyed that measured the extent to which Lithuanian people were informed about the Lisbon Treaty. Since one of them was conducted in November 2007 and the other one in June 2008, which matches the period of the media research, it is easy to evaluate the potential impact of the information on people's knowledge about the Treaty.

In November 2007, only 26,6 percent of the respondents stated that they "have heard of" the Lisbon Treaty.<sup>23</sup> In June 2008, half a year later, there were 36,9 percent claiming that they had heard of it. The second survey included an additional question, checking if the respondents knew the content of the Treaty: only 17,9 percent of the respondents answered in the affirmative.<sup>24</sup>

The increase in general knowledge (people who "have heard of" the Lisbon Treaty) could be attributed to the short-term media effect. However, the deeper, long-term effect, which is related not so much to quantitative as to qualitative information characteristics, such as providing information on what the treaty was all about, coming up with a variety of different, alternative opinions and explanations of different outcomes, was rather poor. Table 4 illustrates the results of the brief analysis of the potential impact of information on public attention to the Lisbon Treaty.

Table 4. **Characteristics of the information published on the Lisbon Treaty and its potential impact on public awareness**

Characteristics of the information on the Lisbon Treaty in Lithuanian media	
1. Social and political context	Good. There were no important domestic problems in the political agenda during the period, which could have caused the decline in attention toward foreign matters.
2. Contextual knowledge held by the audience about the problem	Poor. Less than one fourth of the population knew about the Treaty in 2007.
3. Type of the problem and its importance	High. However, the issue requires deeper contextual knowledge, which was absent within the society. The issue remained unnoticed by most of the people due to the fact that it did not belong to the crisis-type situations or other problems which would naturally receive greater public attention.

<sup>23</sup> "Vilmorus Ltd.", *Public opinion survey on the awareness about the Lisbon Treaty*, November, 2007

<sup>24</sup> "Vilmorus Ltd.", *Public opinion survey on the awareness about the Lisbon Treaty*, June, 2008

Characteristics of the information on the Lisbon Treaty in Lithuanian media	
4. Intensity of reporting	Poor. The Lisbon Treaty statistically received the least attention in the media of all three foreign policy issues discussed.
5. Proximity and threat expectation	Low. The media did not succeed in “localizing” stories on the Lisbon Treaty or showing what kind of effect it would have on Lithuania and its people if it were ratified or denied. Therefore, the information about it did not match the proximity criteria. 21% of all articles were informing us that, in the case of ratification, Lithuania might lose some of its independence in the foreign policy decision making process. However, this threat was less affective than, for example, information about direct, economical or even physical threats to the state security, so it remained unnoticed.
6. Access to various alternative opinions.	Medium. The variety of different opinions on the issue was relatively low. Most of the alternative opinions were mentioned only after the ratification process. In general, within the public space the discussion on the Lisbon Treaty was quite elitized and closed. Essentially it was conducted by a few analysts whose arguments, due to the lack of contextual knowledge, could barely be understood by the majority of the media users.

Overall, most of the information on the Lisbon Treaty that appeared in the media was based on the official, governmental sources, while there was a shortage of more intense discussions on the issue between experts and politicians. Hence, it is fair to claim that this issue was not evaluated by the media and did not receive the coverage it deserved, knowing that in the case of ratification of the document Lithuanian Constitutional norms could be affected. The research has shown that most of the information provided was quite formal, with no intentions to provoke more active public discussions. Therefore, the complexity of the issue, poor media attention and the belated debate questioning the decision to ratify the treaty allowed only a small part of the population to form an opinion on the problem and attempt to follow the news about it.

The **Russia-Georgia conflict** of 2008 has a political and historical prehistory, but this article basically focuses on its “hot” period – the military conflict *per se*. There were no opinion polls made prior to the conflict, so it is hard to measure public interest on the issue at that time. However, surveys conducted later on indicated that Lithuanian people were very aware of the conflict: 15 percent of all residents of the EU claimed they had not heard about the conflict, while in Lithuania only 3 percent stated so. The share of people who claimed that they “knew exactly” what had happened during the conflict was

64 percent, which is the highest rate within the EU. Those results are good indicators that reflect the attention both the media and Lithuania's politicians paid to the problem.<sup>25</sup>

Table 5. **Information published on the Russia-Georgia conflict as well as its potential impact on public attention**

Characteristics of the information about Russia-Georgia conflict in the Lithuanian media	
1. Social and political context	Problematic. The conflict sparked at the very same time as the Beijing Olympics. In addition to that, preparations for the Lithuanian Parliamentary elections were to begin. This distracted some of the public's attention away from foreign policy.
2. Contextual knowledge of the audience on the problem	Medium. Before the conflict started, most Lithuanians were not overtly aware of the situation in Georgia. However, some of contextual knowledge could be expected due to Lithuania's historical past in the Soviet Union and presently a fairly active neighbourhood policy and cooperation with Georgia.
3. Type of the problem and its importance	High. Military conflict sparked between the most important Lithuanian business partner, Russia, and Lithuania's Eastern cooperation partner, Georgia. Therefore, this conflict was very significant for both Lithuanian politicians and the media.
4. Intensity of reporting	Very high. Due to the dynamics of the event it received the biggest media attention.
5. Proximity and threat expectation	Rather high. Since there were numerous reports on the conflict it is fair to claim that there were also the biggest number of articles on the "threat" factor, basically mentioning economic threats, but also some radical as well as physical threats to the state's security.
6. Access to various alternative opinions	Very low. The media content analysis revealed that the information provided on the issue was extremely one-sided. The discourse within the public sphere definitely lacked a variety of opinions, alternative solutions, proposals and critical approach by the experts. However, the lead on the stories supporting Georgia, matched the official rhetoric by the highest-ranking Lithuanian officials.

Very high awareness on the issue assured that 80 percent of the population managed to form an opinion. 30,1 percent of the recipients said they wholly agreed with the official Lithuanian position supporting Georgia. 39,7 percent

<sup>25</sup> *Eurobarometer 70*, < [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70_en.htm) >, 29 04 2009

said they agreed with it to some extent and 10,1 percent expressed disagreement.<sup>26</sup> However, homogeneity of media discourse alone cannot explain those results. There are also other factors, such as historical relations between Lithuania and Russia. Nevertheless, the fact that the most categorical position was taken by the least informed part of the society, while those holding a higher education degree tended to be more critical towards Lithuanian official policy by saying it could be more reserved, perhaps similar to the official EU position.

In conclusion, despite the great number of news items published on the conflict, the mass media did not serve as a space for public discussion, but rather as a tool to help the Lithuanian political elite air their position. The uncontested official discourse, even if it encouraged reaction by certain groups of the society,<sup>27</sup> could also be evaluated as too emotional. As a result, it stifled the dialogue and discussions about the possible alternatives during the crisis.

When it comes to the Lithuanian decision to start the consultation process on **accepting prisoners from Guantanamo Bay**, the issue has received relatively greater media attention. In contrast to the other two issues, the Guantanamo Bay issue inspired active debate within the public sphere, where political elite sources were not as commanding. This is because the official position received some criticism by academic elites and experts. Due to this the qualitative parameters of the information on the Guantanamo Bay prisoners may be viewed as rather high. However, just as in the Lisbon Treaty case, most of the opinions on the issue appeared only after the decision to start the consultation process with the US had been announced.

A public opinion survey conducted in March 2009 revealed that 80 percent of the Lithuanian people were clearly against this decision whilst only 7 percent supported it. 13 percent had no opinion on the issue.<sup>28</sup> The clear public

<sup>26</sup> Spinter tyrimai, *Public opinion survey concerning Russian-Georgian conflict*, August, 2008

<sup>27</sup> It is worth noting that the Russia-Georgia conflict received the most active public reaction, such as charity gathering, official support for Georgia events, letters to the Parliament and the President. According to the information provided by the Committee of Foreign Affairs of the Lithuanian Parliament letters concerning the Russia-Georgia conflict made up 25 percent of all the letters received on foreign policy issues and letters to the President regarding the conflict made up 50 percent of all the letters on foreign policy dealing with foreign policy.

<sup>28</sup> *Dauguma Lietuvos gyventojų Gvantanamo kalinių šalyje nenori*, [Most Lithuanians do not want Guantanamo prisoners in the country], Alfa.lt. <[http://www.alfa.lt/straipsnis/10266927/?Dauguma.Lietuvos.gyventoju.Gvantanamo.kaliniu.salyje.nenori=2009-04-02\\_17-42](http://www.alfa.lt/straipsnis/10266927/?Dauguma.Lietuvos.gyventoju.Gvantanamo.kaliniu.salyje.nenori=2009-04-02_17-42)>, 29 04 2009

denial of accepting Guantanamo prisoners may have been stipulated not only by discussions and critical views expressed in the media, but also by the generally negative approach toward those prisoners, or toward politicians, who are often blamed for adulation of the United States.

Table 6. **Informational characteristics on the Guantanamo Bay prisoners issue and its impact on Lithuanian public attention toward the issue**

Characteristics of the information about ability to accept Guantanamo prisoners in Lithuanian	
1. Social and political context	Complicated. Compared to the other two issues, the Guantanamo issue had the worst informational environment, since all the attention of media, politicians and the society were first of all concentrated on the new government and economic problems in the country.
2. Contextual knowledge of the audience on the problem	Rather low. Lithuanians have heard about the Guantanamo prison essentially in the context of fighting terrorism and human rights violations, so the information was not totally new for Lithuanian people.
3. Type of the problem and its importance	Low. The weight of the problem was lower than that of the other two issues discussed earlier, even though it had importance as the legal precedent of state practice for the future.
4. Intensity of reporting	Rather low, but not lower, possibly higher, reporting than on the Lisbon Treaty.
5. Proximity and threat expectation	Medium. There were some threats mentioned within the media discourse. Some of the authors mentioned the problem of the legal precedent while others noted possible terrorist threats toward Lithuania.
6. Access to various alternative opinions	Good. In contrast to the other two issues, the state officials, academic experts and the mass public formed and clearly expressed a variety of opinions, which may have encouraged public discussion on the issue.

To summarize, the research of information flow and public opinion has shown that the public is able to form attitudes towards certain foreign policy issues only when it receives relevant information about their possible outcomes for Lithuania. This confirms the first hypothesis: the importance of foreign policy issues as represented within the public sphere is biased in the media selection, formation and editing processes. It explains why an important, but rather complicated and long-lasting process, such as the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, received the least media coverage.

Public opinion surveys have disclosed that the public “gave up” on ranking the problems constructed by the media which, due to the media techniques,

set different priorities for the issues. The public shaped the clearest attitudes on the issues which were “localized” by the media reporting on their possible outcomes for Lithuania. Supporting arguments introduced in the first chapter, the research shows that in those cases, when the variety of opinions and the debate within the media were lacking, which is a prerequisite for critique, the public tended to accept the political elite’s decisions.

### **2.3. Public opinion sources used by foreign policy officials**

The last part of the communication chain research is devoted to the survey of foreign policy officials working at the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This section should help examine the third hypothesis predicting *that foreign policy makers treat public opinion formally and count on mediated public opinion sources rather than contact with their constituents.*

In order to test what kind of public opinion sources are used while making foreign policy decisions, a survey of 75 Lithuanian foreign policy makers was conducted in March-April 2009. The number of participants constitutes about 15 percent of all Lithuanian diplomats working at the Ministry. The respondents were selected in a way so as to maintain balance between different types of positions and get responses from 12 different Ministry’s Departments.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its officials were chosen due to the fact that career bureaucrats remain within the system even when President and his/her advisors or Members of Parliament are changing. Thus the results reported here remain applicable since they represent the permanent foreign policy apparatus.

The survey questionnaire was partly based on the previous research by Powlick and Cohen with a view to receive comparable results. The questionnaire contained 6 multiple-choice questions and 1 open question. Below is a brief overview of the main research findings.

#### **2.3.1. Trust vs. use of public opinion sources**

First of all, the officials were asked to choose three public opinion sources which they considered to be most reliable and three sources that are mostly used in their professional practice. The questionnaire suggested 10 possible

sources, selected in accordance with the findings of Powlick's research. The results of the survey are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. **Most reliable and most frequently used public opinion sources by Lithuanian foreign policy officials**

Public opinion sources	Most reliable, %	Most used, %
Opinion of academics and experts	77	79
Public opinion polls	56	77
Analysis of the news media	53	48
Discussions with NGOs and interest groups	40	28
Open public discussions, debate	29	24
Members of the Parliament	21	17
Opinion articles in the mass media	12	16
Letters, phone calls	11	8
Friends' opinion	4	4
Protests and demonstrations	0	0
Other	1	1

The survey indicated that one of the least reliable sources for the officials were standpoints of the Members of Parliament, which were trusted only by 21 percent, and used even more seldom – merely by 16 percent of respondents. This differs from the findings by the US authors, where the Congress was considered to be the main source of the public opinion. Low-trust in officials could be related to the generally weak confidence of Lithuanian society in the Parliament institution: according to opinion polls, the Parliament is the least trusted institution in Lithuania, trusted by 4,8 percent of inhabitants.<sup>29</sup>

The research has revealed another paradox: despite the fact that only 53 percent declared the news media to be one of the most reliable sources, its use scored much higher rate (77 percent). This suggests that some of the officials use the media in spite of low trust in it.

<sup>29</sup> „Mažiausiai pasitikima partijomis, Seimu ir Vyriausybe“, [Political parties, the Parliament and the Government are trusted the least], <<http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/article.php?id=23275981>, 25 07 2009

In addition to that, it is worth noting that officials consider direct public opinion sources more reliable than the mediated ones. However, in practice they tend to choose mediated sources more often than direct communication, such as debate or meetings. In general, it is obvious that direct access to public opinion sources is used quite seldom: meeting with the interest groups was mentioned by 28 percent, discussions and public debate – 17 percent, letters and phone calls – 8 percent of the respondents. This indicates that public opinion used by foreign policy makers is basically mediated; therefore, understanding of the broader context and public expectations is missing. This situation could have been caused not only by officials' personal choice of public opinion sources, deliberately prioritizing mediated ones, but also by some systematic limitations, when citizens are hesitant to express their opinions while officials, due to financial or other burdens, have no opportunity to encourage direct dialogue even in situations where it might be appropriate.

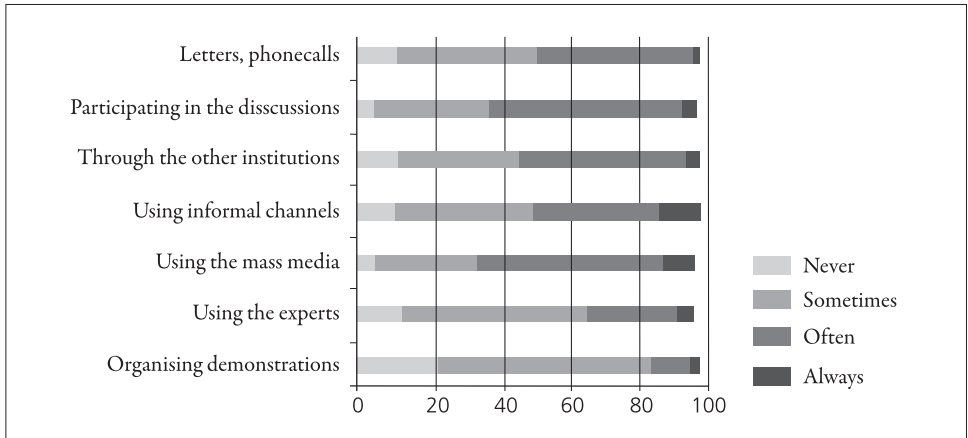
### **2.3.2. Communication channels used by the public**

Turning now to the question of public responsiveness to foreign policy problems, the officials were asked to evaluate, on the basis of their personal experience, types of communication channels most frequently used by the public when the latter is trying to affect foreign policy decisions or merely to air its position on certain foreign matters. The respondents could evaluate each of the channels by marking it as being used “Always”, “Often”, “Sometimes”, and “Never”.

The research has shown that organized interest groups express their opinions on all channels more actively than individual citizens, who do not belong to any of the organised interest groups. It was found that organized interest groups choose more successful communication channels, which are often matching the channels used by the officials: among the most frequently used ones mention was made of the mass media (64 % of recipients stated that groups used it “always” or “often”), participating in discussions (61 %) and working through other institutions (53 %). Moreover, informal channels, such as personal relationships, were also mentioned as being quite strong (48 %) (see Graph 2). However, according to the results of the survey, in general the public is quite hesitant to express their views on foreign matters.



Graph 2. **Channels used by NGOs and interest groups while expressing their views on foreign policy**



### 2.3.3. Public opinion sources used by foreign policy makers while making decisions on the three foreign policy issues

Similarly to the media and the society, when solving different issues foreign policy makers choose different public opinion sources. For this reason the findings above should not be too generalized. The last part of the survey was devoted to more specific matters testing what kind of public opinion sources were used while making decisions on the three foreign policy issues that are the subject matter of this article.

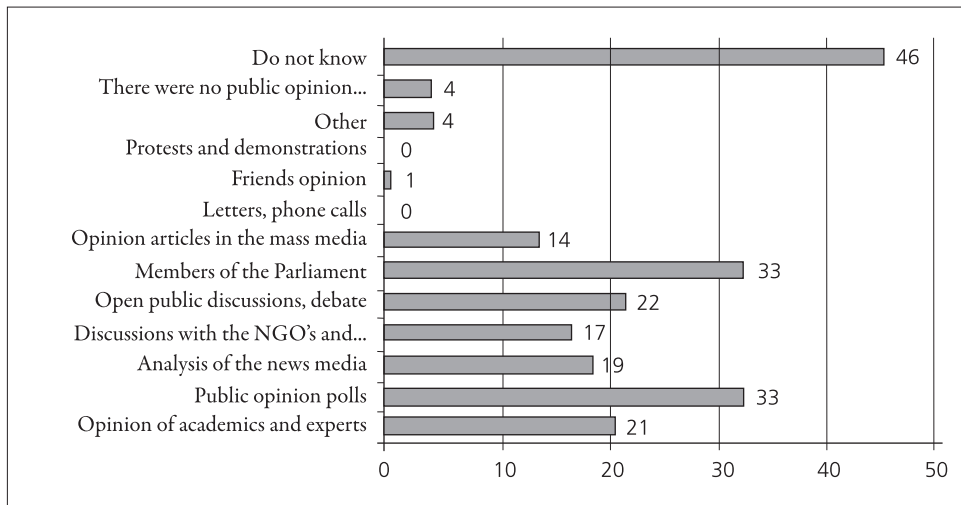
This part of the survey helped to reveal some of social desirability bias. The latter became evident in the comparison of answers to general questions like “If there were different public opinion sources available, which three of those would you trust the most?”, as described in section 2.3.1., with answers to more specific questions addressing specific situations.

The officials were asked to mark all public opinion sources used when making decisions on certain foreign policy matters; they were also given answer options like “I do not know” and “There were no public opinion sources used”.

**Ratification of the Lisbon Treaty.** Although most of the officials did not express high trust in Members of the Parliament as public opinion sources, this appeared to be one of the most used sources discussing the ratification of

the Lisbon Treaty in Lithuania (see Graph 3). Even more surprisingly, 33 percent of all the officials mentioned public opinion surveys as a relevant source of public opinion. This may sound quite ambiguous, especially having in mind that there were only a slightly more than 17 percent of Lithuanians who actually knew the content of the Treaty (see 2.2).

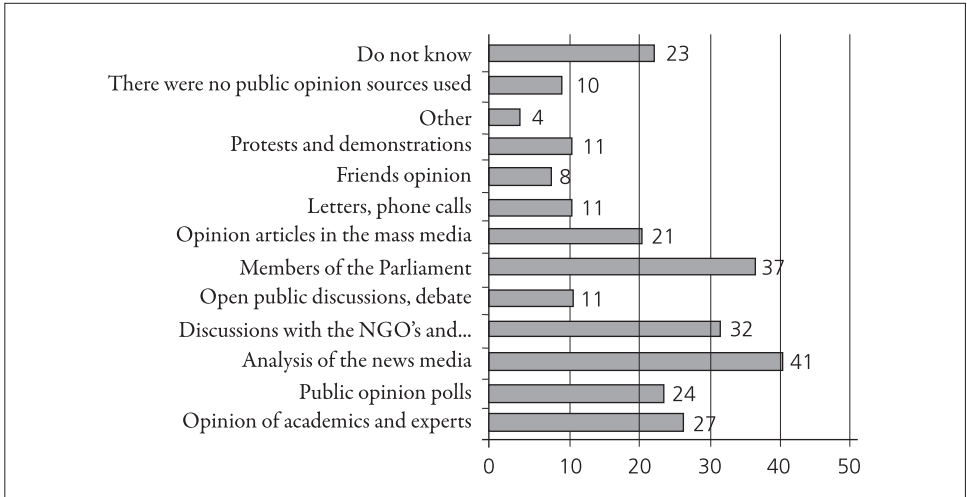
Graph 3. **Public opinion sources used by the officials of Ministry of Foreign Affairs while making decisions on the Lisbon Treaty**



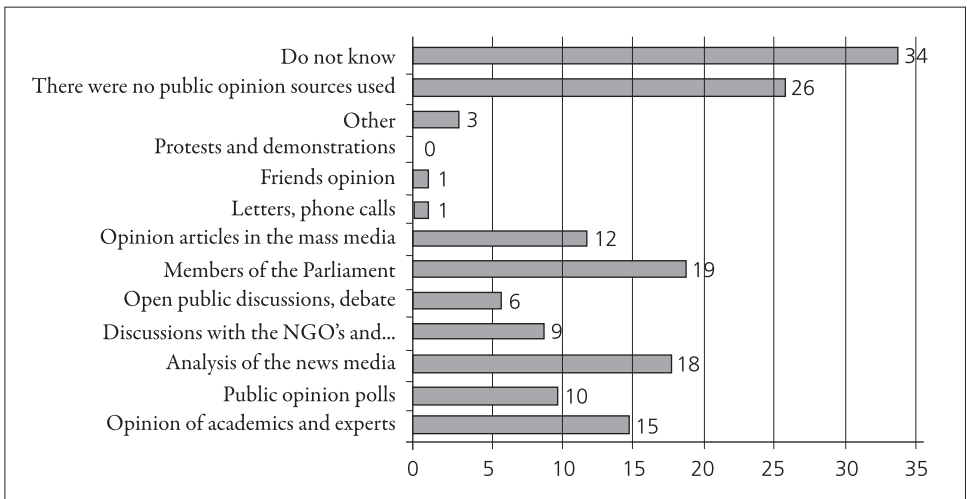
**Lithuania's position during the Russia-Georgia conflict.** The survey revealed that the use of public opinion sources on this issue was the most intense. However, differently from what could have been expected, after an analysis of the most frequently used and trusted public opinion sources stated in section 2.3.1., the former were contrasting: the news media were mentioned as the main source of public opinion (41 %), followed by the views of Members of Parliament (37 %) and NGOs together with interest groups (32 %) (see Graph 4).

**Lithuania's decision to possibly consider accepting prisoners from Guantanamo Bay.** The survey shows that, making their decision on this issue, officials rarely consulted a public opinion source (or did not consult it at all). 26 percent of all the respondents claimed that there were no public opinion sources used (see the Graph 5).

Graph 4. **Public opinion sources used by officials of Ministry of Foreign Affairs when making decisions on Lithuania's position during the Russia-Georgia conflict, 2008**



Graph 5. **Public opinion sources used by officials of Ministry of Foreign Affairs when making decisions on Lithuania's decision to possibly consider accepting prisoners from Guantanamo Bay**



It is fair to claim that the research has shown that the dialogue between the public and foreign policy makers is vague. Although the society had an extremely negative approach towards the governmental decision to start consultations with the US on the possibility of accepting prisoners from Guantanamo, there were no governmental steps taken, for example, in order to hold a more active debate with the public, which would have helped to explain this decision to the people. The communication was very weak, and the use of public opinion sources was rather formal.

Several conclusions could be drawn on the basis of the survey findings. First of all, despite claims by foreign policy officials that the most reliable and frequently used communication channels with the public were experts and academics opinion, the analysis of public opinion sources on the three foreign policy issues proved differently. The survey results suggest that expert opinion has never been the most important factor when making a decision. It could be viewed not only as social desirability bias, but also as a problem revealed in communication between foreign policy makers and experts, due to which expert opinion is consulted rather seldom.

Secondly, low use of direct public opinion sources, such as debate and meetings with the citizens, is the cause of low communication quality between the public and the decision makers. Since officials tend to use mediated public opinion sources, a remarkable part of the social context, in which the opinions have originally been formed, is lost.

The importance attached to the mass media as a public opinion source is critically high and stifles the use of other communication channels. Despite criticisms in evaluating the mass media, it often becomes the main communication channel between the public and foreign policy makers. Due to the reflection of modified reality provided in the media, which is biased because of the media mechanisms, it presupposes a situation that both the officials and the public do not get the right image of each other's interests.

Another relevant point is that channels used by the public trying to express its interests, and those used by the officials are often different. Thus the successful dialogue between the public and the decision makers is rarely accomplished.

On the other hand, the hesitant use of communication channels while addressing officials on foreign matters proves the second hypothesis, which

claims that the society in general does not show very high interest in foreign matters and therefore, is not motivated enough to voice the opinions on it.

### **Conclusions**

The empirical research has revealed the following obstacles within the communication chain and has partly or fully proved the hypotheses raised in the beginning of the paper.

*Hypothesis I:* The stress on foreign policy issues disseminated by the mass media within the public sphere is inadequate. This acts as an obstacle for the public in shaping its opinions and reactions to important issues in the sphere of Lithuanian foreign policy.

The research has proved this hypothesis. Due to news selection and formatting processes, which first of all serve commercial purposes, the mass media cannot always function as an ideal public sphere, where a balanced view on the most important issues is provided. Although the media seeks to cover the most important problems, at times news selection mechanisms bring about a situation when some of the more complex issues, or those that are rather process than event type, remain underreported. This explains the poor and shallow coverage of the Lisbon Treaty ratification in Lithuania.

One of the key problems of news coverage in Lithuania is the fact that, reporting on foreign issues, newsrooms use their resources sparingly. Newsrooms demonstrate high use of news agencies, only episodically quote expert or other alternative sources and basically rely on few highest-ranking Lithuanian officials, the President and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Since most of the news are taken from news agencies, weaknesses in localizing and adapting it to target audiences reveal themselves: there are few explanations why a particular issue is important and what kind of consequences it could have for the readers' well-being. Furthermore, in most cases the media reported on decisions that had already been made, instead of encouraging public discussion about possible alternatives.

Lack of public attention to foreign policy could also be partly caused by a shortage of discussions which should first spark within expert, academic and political circles. Since even those elite groups of the society were hesitant to

hold more active and public discussions on the issues of foreign policy, and the media did not succeed in reporting on alternative positions except one-sided opinions held by foreign policy decision makers, the public was not encouraged to become more engaged in foreign politics.

*Hypothesis II:* The public is generally not interested in distant fields like foreign policy: since the subject does not relate to its daily-life experiences, the public therefore has no motivation to express opinions about it.

This hypothesis was proven only partially. Lack of public interest in foreign politics has also been observed in the countries which hold a long history of democratic tradition. In Lithuania, where the civic society is generally weak, and public disappointment of politics is a reality, public hesitation to engage into foreign politics is even stronger.

However, the research has shown that public (in)attentiveness is not something constant. Rather, it is determined by the other two filters: the media and foreign policy makers. The analysis proved that the public was incapable of forming any kind of position on the Lisbon Treaty. First of all, it was due to the fragmentary and incoherent information provided by the mass media. Secondly, it was stipulated by a rather formal approach of officials to public engagement: the decision that affects the core political processes and in a way affects the Constitution, was taken at the time when 65 percent of the population were even not aware of it. Moreover, groups of the society that actually voiced different opinions on the decision and (later) asked to discuss it again did not receive attention from the decision makers.

The present research has revealed that public ability to form views on foreign policy matters depends not only on the characteristics of the society, but also on the factors, such as access to information and interest of foreign policy makers in a more significant public involvement during discussions and making decisions.

*Hypothesis III:* Foreign policy makers treat public opinion formally and count on mediated public opinion sources rather than on contact with their constituents. This prevents them from developing deeper feedback when it comes to decisions.

The results of the research support this hypothesis. Prioritising mediated sources may be caused not only by one's personal choice of officials, but also

stipulated by some objective conditions, such as lack of human resources that could work with the public. Due to this fact foreign policy makers sometimes (yet not necessarily purposefully) stay ignorant to public opinion.

In addition to the fact that mediated sources are used several times more often than direct communication, there are also several other trends observable. For example, weak correlation between communication channels chosen by the public in its attempts to address officials, and those selected by policy makers shows that communication links between the public and foreign policy makers are still not stable.

Several other trends are presented below.

*Foreign policy making in Lithuania remains to be closed and elitist.* Information in the mass media on foreign matters is mostly based on political elite sources, whilst alternative sources, such as those held by NGOs, business, academic elite or ordinary citizens are included very seldom. This creates an impression that foreign policy is solely the concern of those who are in power, while ordinary citizens cannot influence it. The media only states decisions that have already been made rather than discusses issues beforehand.

*On the other hand, the survey of Lithuanian foreign policy makers has disclosed that diplomats tend to rely on few public opinion sources: academics and the mass media.* Due to this high temptation to “eliticize”, foreign policy Lithuanian officials are much closer to the respondents of Cohen in 1973, than those of Powlick in 1995 who already were more open to the engagement of the general public in foreign matters. This proves that Lithuanian diplomacy has not yet experienced a shift from the elitist manner of foreign policy making towards the more open practice that would encourage the public living in a globalized world to be more actively engaged in external affairs.

*Obstacles in communication between the public, the media and foreign policy makers are brought about not only by the features of those agents, but, even to a greater extent, by the lack of discussions devoted to foreign matters, which should primarily be the initiative of the circles of political and academic elite.*

Both the media and the society only react to the events. The cases under analysis have revealed that one of the main reasons for poor reporting on foreign matters and thus little attention of the public was lack of alternative opinions. Neither political parties, nor public organisations voiced their views on the issues discussed in the article. Consequently, there was no background

for deeper media analysis or public discussions established. Under these circumstances the society tends to simply accept the *status quo* and not to question the decisions made.

*In conclusion, the research has revealed that quality of information within the mass media, public attention to foreign policy and communication channels with the public used by foreign policy makers are the factors determining the public's ability to be engaged in foreign policy.*

Based on these findings, the following guiding principles for further research may be put forward. A more effective communication model that would link the public and foreign policy decision makers needs to be created. In this situation the media should be treated, first of all, as a subject functioning according to its own business principles and, therefore, having some limitations when it comes to its ability to serve as an ideal and the only public sphere. Shifting from the approach that the media is the only link between the public and foreign policy decision makers, new solutions, such as open debate within the circles of attentive citizens (like academics and politicians) should be encouraged. This would increase the number of alternative opinions within the public sphere and thus help to present them to the public. It is to be noted that this type of debate culture already successfully functions in some other Western countries. It encourages media attention to foreign politics and helps increase literacy of the mass society on foreign matters. This would help to decrease public's distrust in governmental institutions and avoid the danger of having the society that can easily be manipulated.