

Lithuania – President Grybauskaitė's veto activity

Philipp Köker

Please cite as:

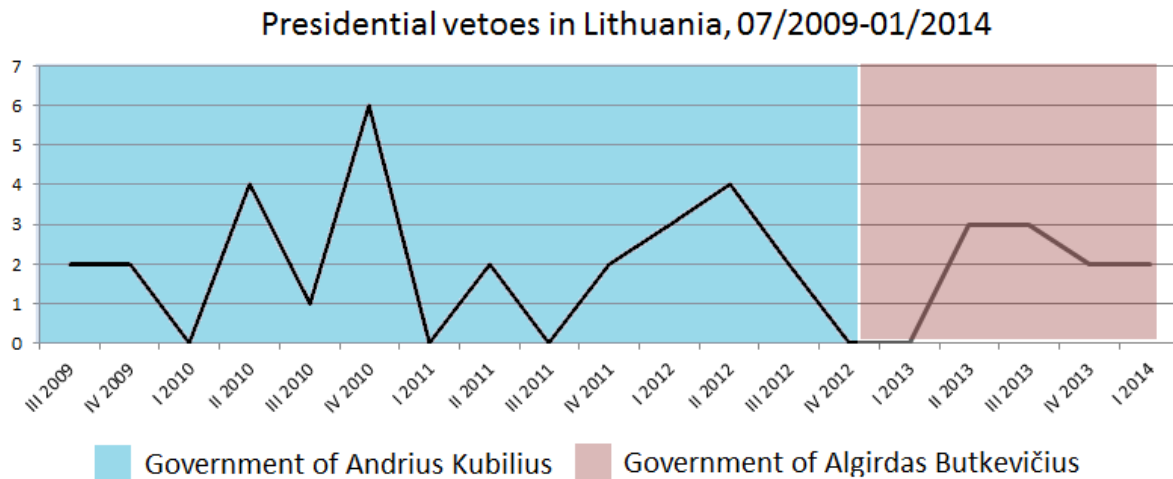
Köker, Philipp (2013) Lithuania – President Grybauskaitė's veto activity. *Presidential Power*, 13 January 2013.

Available at: <https://presidential-power.com/?p=575>

On Thursday last week, Lithuanian president Dalia Grybauskaitė vetoed amendments to the 'Law on Fisheries' enumerating several legal problems with the regulations on how to assign and transfer fishing quotas. A strong involvement of the presidents in legislation as well as executive decisions is nothing in semi-presidential Lithuania. Nevertheless, as Dalia Grybauskaitė's first term in office is coming to an end in May this year, this post will use it as an opportunity to give a brief overview of her veto activity and explain the regulations on presidential vetoes in Lithuania.

Articles 71 of the Lithuanian constitution gives the president the right to send any bill back to parliament for reconsideration. The president returns the bill with 'relevant reasons for considerations' – a term likely introduced to avoid vetoes for other purely partisan reasons – within ten days of receiving it (which gives the president relatively little time compared to other Central and East European counterparts, most of whom are allowed at least 15 days). Parliament can override any presidential veto with an absolute majority (i.e. 71 of its 141 members). However, parliament also has the possibility to adopt or incorporate any changes proposed by the president. This – as [Tsebelis and Rizova \(2007\)](#) have noted – gives the president an advantage over parliament as it is easier to adopt the president's so-called 'amendatory observations' than to override the veto as a whole.

For most of her presidency Grybauskaitė served alongside the government of Andrius Kubilius whose Homeland Union had supported her candidacy in the 2009 presidential elections despite her running as an independent. As there were no major policy differences between the government and the president, intra-executive relations can be described as neutral, even friendly. However, the relationship with the Butkevicius government has been far from free of problems. Already in the formation phase, Grybauskaitė actively intervened and showed her dislike for the inclusion of the Labour Party into the government, highlighting the beginning of a period of cohabitation. Interestingly, this change in government appears not to have affected the president's veto activity. While cohabitation is usually associated with a more frequent use of presidential powers, Grybauskaitė vetoed 1.8% of legislation (28 vetoes) under Kubilius and only 0.2% (10 vetoes) more under Butkevicius.



Source: www.seimas.lt

Even though several key predictors of presidential veto use (such as parliamentary fragmentation or the size of the government majority) did not vary during Dalia Grybauskaitė's presidency, it is a look at the abovementioned 'amendatory observations' that reveals an interesting characteristic of presidential vetoes in interplay with legislation in Lithuania. Not only in the case of the 'Law on Fisheries', has president Grybauskaitė made use of amendatory observations to constructively influence legislation (that is, apart from her right to introduce legislative initiatives). All of her vetoes were also accompanied by suggestions for further amendments. Furthermore, in all cases were these suggestions were (at least partially) incorporated despite the fact that the governments disposed of an absolute majority in the assembly. This veto success shows that rather than for partisan/ideological reasons, Grybauskaitė returned bills to ensure their quality. This becomes even clearer when looking at the justifications for vetoes which almost exclusively list concrete legal problems such as incompatibility issues (rather than alleged non-compliance with relatively vague principles).