

NUCLEAR ENERGY DEVELOPMENT FAILURE

Political & Strategic Lessons from Lithuania

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REPORT

DEVELOPING NUCLEAR ENERGY IN ESTONIA AN AMPLIFIER OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES?

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Background

- Closure of the Ignalina NPP** with its x2 Soviet-design RBMK reactors in the end of 2009 (Lithuania's EU membership condition)
- Lithuania overnight turns into a **net importer of electricity**
- Public in favour of continuation** of nuclear power (in 2007 – 60%)
- Conditions in place** for a new project (regulatory and technical competence, infrastructure, workforce)
- Declaration by three Baltic PMs in 2006: **support to a new regional NPP**
- Lithuanian National Energy Strategy 2007**: a new NPP by not later than 2015
- Poland** joins the project
- Agreement with *Hitachi*** in 2012: 1 350 MW ABWR reactor at a cost of 5bn euros by 2018-20.
- Consultative referendum** in October 2012 (together with the general election): 34% supported a new plant (overall turnout – 52%)
- Opposition wins the elections and pledges to honour the results. **Visaginas AE project discontinued**

Key lessons

-Context and timing matter:

- Fukushima disaster
- Global financial crisis and its impact
- Implosion of popularity of and trust in the governing parties
- Societal divisions & vulnerabilities

-A small stone can overturn a cart:

- The power of marginal actors in the age of social media

-The enemy has a say:

- Russia's 'active measures' to secure its interests
- Government's capacity to counter

The Enemy Has a Say

-**Parallel projects:** Baltiyskaya (cancelled) and Astravyets (completed) NPPs

- A 'siren song': "join us, drop Visaginas"
- Cognitive warfare: undermining perceptions of the economic rationale of Visaginas
- Further prerequisites for tightening energy dependence of the Baltic states

-**Information warfare:**

- Sowing doubts concerning the economic costs & future profitability
- Conspiracy theory: "purposeful impoverishment of the Lithuanian people by the elite"

-**Political warfare:**

- Harnessing the (pseudo)greens
- Exploiting corruption: the 'Bastys Case'
- Leveraging 'gas lobby'
- Intimidation & physical threats

But So Do You...

-Early threat identification and warning

-State Security Department's (VSD) annual reports of 2010 & 2011

-Political signals from top leadership

-President's calls to stem persistent disinformation

-Political will to counter illegal lobbying:

-Impeachment proceedings against MP Mindaugas Bastys (not enough votes; stepped down himself)

-All too late and too little?

-Russian influence operations running too deep and wide?

-Societal and political consensus too fragile and vulnerable?

Consequences

- Nuclear energy discredited** for years to come
 - National energy strategy does not mention it
 - Some tentative mentioning by the officials in the light of the energy crisis
- Continuing deficits** of (low-carbon and stable) electricity generation sources
- Tensions between the Baltic states**
 - Astravyets NPP as a case-study of 'reflexive control'
- Undermined economic prospects** of a sensitive region
 - Visaginas: around 75% of the population are Russian-speakers

Some takeaways

- Build and maintain a **broad political and societal consensus**
 - Don't think marginal groups will not have an impact if ignored
 - Arrogance kills ideas
- Make a **clear economic, environmental and geopolitical case**
- Be honest and transparent about **all the risks** and have a convincing strategy how to manage those risks
- Counter disinformation and misinformation** narratives early on
 - Attacks on the reputation of the government, involved companies, technology (and its source) are inevitable
- Deal with corruption and illegal lobbying**
- Monitor and expose **Russia's influence operations**, act to disrupt them
 - Inter-agency, private-public partnership
- Attend to **cyber and physical threats** to involved people and organisations

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