



Axing Visaginas 'bad for Lithuania, good for Russia'

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Lithuania's outgoing prime minister has warned that a rejection of the Visaginas nuclear power plant will damage Lithuania's independence while benefitting Russia.

A coalition of the Social Democrats, the Labour Party and the Order and Justice Party won parliamentary elections on 28 October and Social Democrat leader Algirdas Butkevicius is expected to be the country's next prime minister, once President Dalia Grybauskaite has finalised a coalition.

In a referendum held alongside the country's general election, also in October, almost two-thirds of Lithuanians did not favour the construction of the Visaginas plant. The referendum was proposed by the the Social Democrats.

Although the referendum was non-binding, Butkevicius has already said that he will not allow the Visaginas plant to be built. Speaking to *15min.lt*, he said that while his party was not against nuclear energy, "The people expressed their viewpoint at the referendum, and I will carry out their wishes. Seimas must draw up a bill as soon as possible so that the plan to build the nuclear power plant is ruled null and void, and we will support it."

Independence concerns

Kubilius has warned that cancelling the Visaginas plant will harm the country's energy independence, while ultimately benefitting Russia.

Russia is constructing the twin VVER-1200 Baltic project in Kaliningrad, an exclave of the Russian Federation that sits between the EU states of Poland and Lithuania. The plant is expected to export most of the electricity it generates.

According to Kubilius, "It's our money, the population's money, the money our customers will pay for importing electricity that will be used [by Russia] to construct the nuclear power plant in Kaliningrad. It is no surprise that the Russians are happy about it. But I do not see any reason for us to be happy."

He added, "Therefore, I again call on all parties to carefully consider Lithuania's long-term independence strategy. We must not act now in a way that will ultimately be absolutely useless to us, living here in Lithuania."

Visaginas is a joint project supported by the governments of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and investors from all three countries - Visagino Atominė Elektrinė (Lithuania), Latvenergo (Latvia) and Eesti Energia (Estonia) - are to take shareholdings in the plant. Hitachi is to be the strategic investor for the plant, which will be based on Hitachi-GE advanced boiling water reactor (ABWR) technology.

Following a meeting in Vilnius on 9 November, the Baltic Council of Ministers and the Baltic Assembly pledged continued support for the Visaginas project. In a joint statement, they said: "The Visaginas nuclear power plant is an important project which will increase the energy security of the region."

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