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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

LITHUANIA

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Introduction

A standard Eurobarometer survey was carried out in the autumn of 2004 in all 25 Member-States of the European Union. This was the first survey of this kind to take place in Lithuania since it became an EU member on 1 May 2004. This report deals with the responses of the Lithuanian poll to the main questions in the survey; in addition, the country's results are compared to the average scores recorded in the other EU Member States, to previous surveys and by various socio-demographic variables.

1002 respondents aged 15 and over were interviewed throughout Lithuania during the survey. The sample was obtained by applying a random probability sample method and it represents the opinion of the population of Lithuania. The survey was carried out using face-to-face interviews in respondents' homes.

The survey was conducted in October 2004. The questionnaire of the survey is enclosed as the appendix of this report.

Lithuania in its first year of the European Union membership

The last couple of years have been full of important political events for Lithuania. In the first half of 2004, Lithuania became a member of two international organizations: NATO and the European Union. A long stage came to a successful conclusion and the key aims of the country's foreign policy were achieved at the same time. The majority of the Lithuanian population perceive membership of these organizations as the final separation from the Eastern political space, as well as a greater feeling of security and trust in the future. Thus, probably not accidentally, Lithuanians have recently become more and more optimistic with regard to their future.

European Union membership has also meant new everyday experiences for many residents of Lithuania. These experiences were twofold. On the one hand, soon after accession they had to adapt themselves to slightly increased prices and new regulations. On the other hand, travelling to Europe became much easier, legal employment in other countries became less complicated. The active part of society has seen that EU support is a real and accessible thing. The survey results indicate that the positive aspects of the experience still significantly outweigh the negative.

The country's rapidly growing economy also contributes to optimism. For several years in a row, Lithuania has been one of the most rapidly developing economies in the world. Lastly, not only economics experts, but also a large share of society have been able to feel the results of the said

development. Lithuanian people have finally got rid of the inferiority complex in regard to their closest neighbours. It appears that Lithuania can be a leader and that its achievements can be enviable.

This internal optimism is also supplemented by expectations about membership in the European Union. Lithuanians expect that EU membership will help to develop the economy and promote welfare in the country. Thus they remain some of the greatest supporters of the EU in any of the Member States.

Satisfaction with various spheres of life and attitudes towards the future

For a long time, Lithuanians have been distinguished among Europeans for being one of the most dissatisfied with their lives and most pessimistic about the future. However, this situation has been gradually changing for several years and the Lithuanian population is starting to demonstrate a more positive attitude towards their lives. More than half (54 %) claim that they are satisfied with their lives. Actually, this percentage is significantly lower than the European Union average. Lithuanians, however, excel over other EU countries in terms of their positive attitude regarding the future. The level of satisfaction of the Lithuanian poll with their lives has remained unchanged, compared to the results of the survey conducted in the spring of 2004.

An analysis of the results for various social groups shows that considerable differences exist among them. Some groups – young people, respondents with a university education, residents of large towns – approach the European Union average in terms of satisfaction with their lives. However, residents of rural areas, older people and respondents with a lower level of education tend to be more dissatisfied with their lives. These characteristics and their income levels are the key distinguishing features between the winners and the losers from the reforms, and at the same time between the optimists and pessimists.

A comparison of the Lithuanian population with EU citizens overall shows that Lithuanians are noticeably greater optimists about the future than the average EU citizen. Especially big differences as compared with the EU average are observed when evaluating employment possibilities in their home country. While pessimistic moods exist with respect to this issue in the European Union overall, i.e. the majority of residents expect worse (47%) or at least not better (31%) next year, the vast majority of Lithuanians think that next year will be better (39%) or at least the same (36%). Evidently, the growing economy, prospect of EU membership, emigration of Lithuanians to other EU countries and, as a consequence, a lack of employees in some spheres of the economy contributed to optimism in this case.

A similar difference between Lithuanian and EU citizens is observed when evaluating the country's economic perspectives. Four-fifths of Lithuanians think that the next year will be better (35%) or at least the same (42%). The EU average is the opposite: four fifths expect it to be worse (43%) or only the same (33%) year for the economy.

As regards the dynamics of optimism, a rather significant leap compared with the spring of 2004 must be noted. The share of optimists in Lithuania increased by almost 10 percentage points during the half year after Lithuania had become an EU member.

In terms of changes in life during the past five years, as many as 42 percent of Lithuanian residents claim that it has improved. In the EU, on average, a slightly smaller share of citizens claims that their lives have improved.

However, only half a year ago, a mere quarter of Lithuanian residents claimed that their situation had improved during the last 5 years. Thus, talk about the improving situation in the country and the growing economy have finally turned into something real and a considerable share of Lithuanians have actually felt this change. The same tendency is observed in this case: people with higher income, residents of large towns, younger people and respondents with a higher level of education tend to indicate more often that their lives have improved. Thus, the benefits of the changes are unequal in the society but the overall trend is positive.

The same could be also said about expectations for the next five years. Lithuanians (48 percent claim that life will improve) are greater optimists than Europeans on average (42 percent). Evidently, the difference is not as substantial as the one observed when evaluating the perspectives for the next 12 months. In other words, European Union citizens are more optimistic in terms of the long-term, compared with the short term.

Key problems

Throughout the period since the restoration of independence in Lithuania, the most important problems have been related to the economy: unemployment and living standards. Crime has stood next to them all the time. The results of this survey are no exception. In Lithuanians' opinion, crime is a key problem. It is followed by unemployment and economic situation. Paradoxically, increasing prices/inflation is in fourth place, although the reverse process – deflation or a very insignificant inflation - was recorded in Lithuania throughout the past few years.

When comparing Lithuania with other EU countries, several differences and similarities can be found. In Lithuania, as well as in the European Union, the three key problems are the same, but unemployment is in top place in the EU25, whereas crime is in third. Moreover, it should be noted that European Union citizens on average are much more concerned about terrorism: as many as 16 percent of them indicated it as an important problem, whereas only 3 percent of respondents mentioned this problem in Lithuania. This is not surprising, since several countries of the European Union have faced or are facing this problem. The same reason probably determines the differences when describing immigration as a

problem: only 4 percent of respondents mentioned it in Lithuania, whereas as many as 13 percent cited it in the EU on average.

When comparing Lithuania's results with those of the last survey carried out in the spring of 2004, the importance of the unemployment problem slightly decreased (from 52 to 45 percent). Evidently, this is related to Lithuania's membership of the EU and employment opportunities that have newly appeared.

Trust in various institutions

For several years now, the Lithuanian population has not changed their tradition of trusting the media and not trusting almost any state institution. Lithuanian residents have greatest trust in the European Union, their army and the electronic mass media (the written press is slightly less trusted). However, political parties, the Seimas and trades unions are the least trusted.

In this respect, Lithuanian residents are not very different from the average European. They also had least trust in their countries' political parties, parliaments, governments, but also in large companies. The army, charities and voluntary organizations, as well as police are the institutions that inspire the highest levels of trust in Europe overall. Perhaps this is the greatest difference between Lithuanians and the EU average: Lithuanians do not trust the police and law enforcement. Moreover, compared to the European average, Lithuanians trust trades unions and charitable organizations considerably less. However, this is quite understandable: the aforementioned organizations are still very weak in Lithuania. They are developing and trying to find their place in society.

Attitude towards membership of the European Union

The Lithuanian population had a very positive attitude towards EU membership both during the period of pre-accession and later on. EU membership has never been uniquely related to pragmatic issues in Lithuanian political debate. Quite on the contrary, most often this was an "ideological" issue: the changing of a geopolitical orientation from East to West, restoration of the historical truth, recognition of western values and, lastly, security of the state and the nation. Thus, having been euro-optimists all the time, Lithuanians have remained the same since the country joined the EU.

Benefits of membership of the European Union

The vast majority of the Lithuanian population has preserved a very favourable attitude towards EU membership even after their country has become a member of the European Union. Almost four-fifths of Lithuanians think that EU membership is beneficial to Lithuania. Hence, with respect to this attitude,

Lithuania differs considerably from other EU Member-States. In the EU overall, only slightly more than half of the population on average think that EU membership is useful for their country.

Conviction of the benefits of EU membership is currently at a record high in Lithuania. Compared to the spring of 2004, it has increased by 20 percentage points, whereas compared to the previously highest index (in the autumn of 2003) it had increased by almost 10 percentage points. The first months of the EU membership revealed a number of benefits to Lithuanians: easier trips, new opportunities for employment and EU support or projects.

In analysing the responses of various socio-demographic groups, it is obvious that citizens who have most difficulties in availing of the benefits provided by the EU are those who are most sceptical. They tend to be older people, respondents with a lower level of education and residents of rural areas.

EU impact on various spheres

Lithuanians see (or rather, due to the short period of their membership obviously expect) a positive impact of the European Union on many spheres of life. A higher number of Lithuanians think that the European Union will rather have a negative impact than a positive one in 2 spheres only – inflation and taxes. A positive impact of the EU is expected most of all in the spheres of defence (69% of respondents see a positive impact), foreign policy (67%) and the overall economic situation (66%).

Moreover, more than half of respondents see a positive impact of the European Union on the fight against unemployment and in the area of environmental protection. The least positive impact of the EU is expected in housing provision and in the above-mentioned areas of price/inflation and tax. Evidently this is a rational decision of Lithuanians: even now it is clear that the EU membership will bring an increase in some excise duties, as well as an increase in prices for some goods.

Lithuanians are significantly more optimistic about the positive impact of the European Union when compared with the results of the EU25 poll overall. A particularly substantial difference in opinions regarding the EU's positive impact is observed in the cases of the economic situation and fight against unemployment.

European Union institutions

As a new member of the EU, Lithuania still lacks information about the Union's institutions. Compared with the European Union population on average, Lithuanians have less knowledge about all the Union's institutions. The European Parliament, elections to which took place in the summer of 2004, is the institution known best in Lithuania. Moreover, awareness of the European Commission where Lithuania

delegated one of the best-known government personalities is quite high. A small share of Lithuanians claimed to know of the European Ombudsman, Court of Auditors and Committee of the Regions.

Trust in the European Union institutions is considerably higher than trust in Lithuanian governmental institutions. More than half of Lithuanians trust most EU institutions.

Priorities of EU activities

Although no wide-ranging discussion regarding the priorities and strategic aims of the EU activities takes place in Lithuania, it could be said that Lithuanians would in fact approve of the majority of the Lisbon Strategy issues. When asked about the actions the European Union should undertake, they most often cite in first place two aspects: the fight against poverty and social exclusion and the fight against unemployment. Other priorities (fight against organised crime, preserving peace and security in Europe) are considerably less important. Although the priorities of the European Union are ranked in a similar sequence, the gap between the most important and least important issues is not as significant as in Lithuania. In other words, Europeans see a greater number of important priority actions compared with Lithuanian citizens. Unemployment and poverty also occupy top places in the EU, but peace and security and the fight against crime and terrorism receive only slightly lower evaluations there. Moreover, environmental protection and illegal immigration are considered to be a more serious problem in the European Union overall than in Lithuania.

The perception of the majority of people concerning European Union budget expenditures is evidently influenced by the mass media. Most Lithuanians think that the greatest share of the European Union budget is allocated to agriculture, and this is not surprising: in the EU context, agriculture is one of the key topics of public discussion in the country.

Compared with spring 2004, the share of those thinking that a greater share of the budget is allocated to agriculture has increased significantly in Lithuania (by 8 percentage points), whereas the share of respondents thinking that the largest amounts go to employment and social affairs decreased. No particular differences according to social-demographic profiles are observed in the responses to this question. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that respondents who claim that EU membership is not a good thing think significantly more frequently (22 percent) that a greater share of the budget goes on administrative and personnel expenditure, and that it is allocated to agriculture less often (15%).

Information channels on the European Union and image of the EU

The promotion and information campaigns that took place before the referendum on EU membership and before actual EU accession have contributed to the fact that Lithuanian residents obtained considerable knowledge about the EU. When the data of the present survey are compared with the results of the survey conducted half a year ago, it can be seen that the level of knowledge about the EU has significantly increased in the country (as high as 2-3 times on some issues). Undoubtedly, the elections to the European Parliament and issues relating to the beginning of membership – the appointment of the Lithuanian Commissioner, activities related to EU Structural Funds - contributed to that.

Information on the European Union

Lithuanians feel almost as well informed about the EU as the average European. On a 10-point scale, where 1 means “do not know anything at all” and 10 stands for “know a lot”, 11 percent of Lithuanians chose points from 7 to 10. The average of the European Union is 13 percent. 55 percent of respondents chose points from 1 to 4, whereas this index is 52 percent in the European Union on average.

The actual level of knowledge of the European Union in Lithuania is also the same as among average Europeans. Lithuanians know about some issues (about Europe Day, the anthem, the elections to the European Parliament) slightly better than average citizens of the European Union, whereas their knowledge about certain other issues (number of Member-States, procedures for electing the President of the European Commission) is slightly lower.

The main sources of information on the European Union traditionally remain the same: TV, radio and press. In this respect, Lithuanian residents hardly differ from the EU average. However, the radio and regional press play a slightly more important role in Lithuania. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that compared with the results of the spring 2004 survey, the number of respondents not interested in information about the European Union decreased from 20 to 7 percent.

Only 8 percent of the Lithuanian population think that mass media presents too much information on the European Union. However, almost 40 percent of the respondents claim that the amount of the information is insufficient. Lithuanian figures are absolutely in line with the EU average in this respect. Compared with spring 2004, almost no changes in opinion are observed.

However, almost 30 percent of Lithuanians think that information on the EU is presented too positively. Slightly more than half feel the information is objective and only 4 percent think that the information is too negative. 14 percent of the European Union citizens hold the latter opinion.

Respondents aged 25 – 54, people with a university education, respondents with left-leaning political views and, it goes without saying, people unfavourably disposed towards EU membership, consider that the media presents the EU in too positive a light more often than average.

Image of the European Union

When answering questions about the personal meaning of the EU, the majority of Lithuanian residents first of all associate it with the possibility to travel, study and work freely in any Member-State. Economic prosperity is the second most cited association and is followed by peace, social protection, democracy, cultural diversity and the euro.

When comparing the associations expressed by Lithuanians and other Europeans with respect to the EU, several differences are observed. On average, European Union citizens associate the EU with economic prosperity and social protection less often. Compared with Lithuanians, they relate the EU with the euro, culture diversity and a more important role in the world more often. Moreover, in contrast to Lithuanians, the average EU25 citizen more frequently sees the negative aspects of the EU as well: more crime, bureaucracy, money squandering, unemployment and insufficient controls at external borders.

Lithuanians claim that they feel more secure and more politically and economically stable since Lithuania has become a member of the European Union. About two-thirds hold this opinion. The same share of Lithuanians is convinced that their country's voice will be taken into consideration in the European Union. However, at the same time, Lithuanians realise that the biggest countries in the EU enjoy the most power. More than four-fifths of respondents agreed with this statement.

Role of the European Union and local authorities

The distrust of the Lithuanian population in state institutions is also revealed in their wish to hand as many functions as possible over to the European Union. Except for a few spheres – basic rules for broadcasting and press, cultural policy, police and urban crime prevention – the majority of Lithuanians would like decisions to be made together within the European Union. Lithuanians believe in the greater efficiency of European policy and bureaucracy, and having been disappointed with the capacities of their local authorities, they would gladly agree to forfeit independence in many spheres.

Compared with the European Union average, a significantly greater share of Lithuanians would like to transfer decision-making competences to the EU in the following spheres: health care and social protection, poverty reduction, the fight against unemployment, education, police, justice and juvenile crime prevention. The said spheres in fact are probably the most problematic in Lithuania and get frequent and unfavourable attention from the media. Health care reform is progressing slowly; the

system operates inefficiently and many patients feel dissatisfied. The same may be said about social protection and unemployment. Certain groups in society feel strong social exclusion as the national government cannot offer any efficient programme for their integration.

Principles of European Union policy

Discussions have been going on for a while in Lithuania on various issues of internal and foreign policy of the European Union. From time to time, the Bank of Lithuania issues statements about the readiness of the country for the introduction of the euro. The media discuss EU policy with respect to other countries, particularly relations with Russia (which is especially important for Lithuania) or the USA. Moreover, further enlargement of the European Union, particularly the long-term perspective of including countries such as Turkey or even the Ukraine, has been a frequent topic of discussion in recent months. The Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania was the first in the European Union to ratify the Constitution for the European Union without extensive parliamentary and public discussion. All these issues received considerable attention from the media, while Lithuanian residents had an opportunity to obtain sufficient information and form their own opinion on every issue. It can be said that Lithuanian residents are strong supporters not only of EU membership, but also of EU policies in various spheres.

Lithuanian residents are very favourable of further EU integration and the granting of additional powers to EU institutions. The vast majority of Lithuanians approve of the introduction of the euro, the common foreign policy, the defence and security policy, as well as the EU Constitution (compared to spring 2004, approval increased from 52 to 73 percent). Support in Lithuania for all the above-mentioned issues is slightly higher than in the European Union as a whole. Lithuanians speak about the further enlargement of the European Union significantly more often than the EU average. Even among the new EU Member-States, Lithuania is distinguished as having a more favourable attitude towards enlargement.

Like the majority of European Union citizens, Lithuanians tend to support an active EU policy with respect to other countries, in the event of international crises and in promoting human rights. Most Lithuanians, just like other Europeans, are in favour of a joint policy, the creation of the position of EU Foreign Minister and a seat for the EU on the United Nations Security Council). However, Lithuanians are traditionally more favourably disposed towards the USA compared to the majority of European Union citizens. A smaller share of Lithuanians, compared with the EU average, think that the Union should have a foreign policy independent of that of the USA. Nevertheless, as many as three-quarters of respondents in Lithuania agree with this statement.