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SUMMARY

LITHUANIA

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This document does not reflect views of the European Commission.
It contains interpretations and opinions of the author.

Introduction

A standard Eurobarometer survey was conducted in all the 25 EU Member States in May of 2005. This Report presents an analysis of Lithuanian residents' responses to the main questions of the survey, comparing them with responses of the 25 EU Member States. Furthermore, the Report contains a comparison with the findings of previous surveys and an analysis of survey results across different social and demographic respondent groups.

1003 respondents aged 15 or over were surveyed in the entire territory of Lithuania. Respondent selection was performed on the random/probability sampling basis and represents the opinion of the Lithuanian population. The form of the survey was a personal interview at the respondent's home.

Lithuania in the First Year of EU Membership

In May 2005, Lithuania marked the first anniversary of its membership of the European Union. Before accession, people in Lithuania had cherished different hopes relating to the country's EU membership. Although one may assert, based on the findings of the survey, that most residents are satisfied with the first year of EU membership, attitudes towards the EU have become slightly more rational during the year, as the enthusiasm has started to subside. If the first half-year of the membership was marked by optimism, the second shows a more rational outlook (characteristic also of many citizens in the old EU Member States).

This process is quite understandable. During the year, Lithuanians were able to better acquaint themselves with the EU institutions and their problems, the people working in them, as well as to learn about opinions of citizens of other EU Members States on EU matters. Information provided by the mass media has become more diverse compared with that available prior to EU accession. Lithuania's EU membership did not result in a miracle; life has not suddenly changed in substance; therefore, that the euphoria should subside is understandable.

It is probable that other factors, both external and internal, have contributed to this. Discussions prior to the referenda on the Constitution for Europe held in France and the Netherlands may be the first of such factors. Ongoing discussion on the principles of allocation of the EU budget are important to Lithuania too as it will form a basis for future assistance to the country in general

and to individual areas in particular. One may assume that the quite ambiguous position of the EU with respect to relations with Russia has not gone unnoticed by Lithuanians either.

The optimism of Lithuanians may have also been diminished by expert opinions regarding the slowing down of economic growth, which are being voiced more and more frequently. Most people probably have not experienced the results of previous rapid growth as yet, and now economic problems are already being forecast. Although there are no clear grounds for such concern, the mass media's attention to this subject arouses concern among Lithuanians. All the more so given that increasing oil prices and rising inflation pose a threat to the euro, which gives rise to fears in Lithuania.

Lastly, the first half-year of 2005 was full of political scandals including those related to the distribution of the EU assistance funds. If anybody had cherished hopes that EU membership would change something in domestic affairs (in particular, in politicians' activities), such hopes have now vanished. The new Seimas (Parliament) and the Government are persecuted by constant scandals, which add to the weakening of trust in political institutions and the political system in general.

Satisfaction with Different Areas of Life and Outlook

For a number of years already, the level of Lithuanians' satisfaction with their current situation has not changed. A little over one half say that they are satisfied with life. Nevertheless, this is one of the lowest figures recorded anywhere in Europe.

During the year that has passed since Lithuania's accession to the EU, Lithuanians' optimism has decreased. If Lithuanians are compared with residents of the European Union as a whole, one may conclude that Lithuania is approaching the EU average. 35% of Lithuanians and 34% of European residents expect that the next year will be better. Similar shares of people (28% of Lithuanians and 24% of Europeans in general) expect that the financial position of their families will improve during a year.

There are considerable differences from the EU average in the area of assessment of the country's economic prospects and employment opportunities. Most Europeans are quite pessimistic in this respect, with most (75%) saying that next year will be worse or at least not

better for the economy, whereas most Lithuanians (71%) are of the opinion that the economic situation will be better or at least the same next year.

As regards expectations for the coming 5 years, Lithuanians remain slightly more optimistic than residents of other EU Member States (45% of Lithuanians and 42% of Europeans). The difference is not as large as in case of assessment of prospects for the nearest 12 months.

Key Issues

Crime rates remain a central problem for Lithuanians. As in the previous year, unemployment is in second place, followed by rising prices/inflation and the economic situation.

Comparing Lithuania with other EU Member States, a number of similarities can be found. However, several substantial differences can also be seen. Both in the EU and in Lithuania, crime rates and economic issues are among the most important ones. However, unemployment is the number one problem for the EU Member States. EU residents are much more concerned about terrorism: as much as 10% consider it to be an important problem, while only 1% of Lithuanians have mentioned it.

A comparison of results for Lithuania with the autumn of 2004 shows a significant increase in the number of respondents considering taxes to be one of the most important problems in Lithuania: 20% compared with 11% in the autumn of 2004. The number of people concerned about health care and immigration has also increased. On the other hand, the importance of crime decreased from 50% to 44% and that of unemployment from 45% to 36%. In fact, the rate of unemployment continues to decrease in Lithuania, and sometimes concern over a reverse issue – the shortage of labour – is voiced.

Trust in Institutions

As in the previous year, Lithuanian institutions (political parties, the Seimas and the Government) have earned the lowest degree of trust by Lithuanians. International organisations – the European Union and the United Nations are trusted most by Lithuanian respondents.

In this respect, an average Lithuanian and an average European do not differ much. For Europeans, political parties and national parliaments and governments are in the bottom place in the ranking of trusted institutions. However, contrary to Lithuanians, the Europeans place more reliance on the national law enforcement systems. Despite that, trust in the Lithuanian law

enforcement system has increased by several percentage points (at present, the share of those trusting it amounts to 30%) compared with the autumn of 2004, and it remains below the European average, which is not a good sign from the point of view of social stability.

Attitude Towards EU Membership

Lithuanians viewed their country's EU membership very positively throughout the pre-accession period and later. Although at present the number of those thinking that membership is useful to Lithuania has decreased slightly, Lithuanians can still be considered to be among the greatest Euro-optimists in the EU. However, heated discussions over the future of Europe and criticism of the EU voiced in many countries have encouraged Lithuanians to be more critical of benefits of the EU membership. Lithuanian residents' opinion about the EU institutions has become more critical as well.

Benefits of the EU Membership

The absolute majority of Lithuanian residents remain very favourably disposed towards EU membership since Lithuania's accession. More than two-thirds are of the opinion that the membership is beneficial to Lithuania. In this respect, Lithuania differs considerably from other EU Member States. Only slightly more than half of European residents think that EU membership is useful to their countries.

The degree of conviction that EU membership is useful remains high in Lithuania. It has to be admitted that it has fallen slightly since autumn 2004: from 78% to 72%. It seems that the first year in the EU has dampened the optimism. However, for most Lithuanians, EU membership seems to be providing more advantages than disadvantages.

EU Influence over Different Areas

Lithuanian residents see the positive influence of the EU over many areas of life. There are only 2 areas – inflation and taxes – where the number of Lithuanians attributing a negative influence of the EU is larger than the number attributing positive effects. According to responses, the greatest positive effects will be seen in the economy (59%), fighting unemployment (52%) and fighting terrorism (47%). The EU's influence is seen to be least positive in the area of housing and, as has already been mentioned, prices/inflation and taxation.

Lithuanians are much more optimistic with respect to positive influence of the EU in such areas as the country's economic situation, taxation, fighting unemployment, immigration and healthcare compared to EU citizens on average. A marked divergence in opinions is seen on the issue of the EU's positive influence over the economic situation and unemployment, where Lithuanians are much more favourably disposed towards the EU than Europeans on average. However, citizens of other EU Member States see a more positive influence of the EU in the areas of fighting crime and terrorism and of healthcare compared to Lithuanians.

Institutions of the European Union

During the past year, after Lithuania's access to the EU, there has been a lot of information presenting EU institutions in the mass media and in society in general. Therefore, it is not surprising that awareness of almost all EU institutions has increased compared with autumn 2004. The European Parliament and the European Commission remain among the best known EU institutions. According to respondents, the European Central Bank and the Council of the European Union are least known to them.

Both importance of and trust in the EU institutions have decreased in the eyes of Lithuanians compared to autumn 2004. In particular, the number of those thinking that the European Court of Justice plays an important role and the number of those placing trust in it has decreased (decrease of 13 points and from 65 to 50% respectively). This result is lower than the average EU result.

Priority activities of the EU

When asked about what actions should be taken by the EU as a priority, Lithuanian residents (just as before) emphasise two aspects: fighting poverty and social exclusion and fighting unemployment. Other priorities such as fighting organised crime and drug trafficking, peace and security in Europe remain less important to Lithuanians than to residents of other EU Member States.

Knowledge about funding by the EU has not changed in substance compared with the autumn of 2004. The number of respondents thinking that the majority of the budget goes to agriculture, foreign policy, support to third countries and administrative expenses has increased slightly (a couple of points). The number of Lithuanians who could not say which area receives the greatest

share of the EU budget, was larger than the number of Europeans. Thus Lithuanians lack knowledge about the EU budgetary policies.

Sources of Information about the EU and Image of the EU

While favourable information about the European Union prevailed in the mass media prior to the referendum and right after it, in the first year of membership more and more news about membership-related problems appeared in public discussions. In addition, there is increasingly more information in the mass media about actual EU experiences (both positive and negative) of Lithuanian people. According to the level of knowledge about the EU, Lithuanians do not fall behind other EU residents and sometimes even exceed the average. Despite that, many Lithuanians would like to receive more information and many think that the information is “embellished”.

Information about the EU

Lithuanian residents feel that their knowledge of the EU equals that of the average European. In a 10-score scale, where 1 means “don’t know anything” and 10 means “I know a lot”, the response “from 7 to 10” was selected by 14% of Lithuanian residents (European average – 17%), “from 1 to 4” – by 49% (same as the European average).

The actual level of knowledge about the EU in Lithuania equals that of average Europeans. Some things are known to Lithuanians slightly better than to EU citizens on average (e.g., questions about the European anthem, procedures of election to the European Parliament), while others are not known so well (number of EU Member States, EP elections).

Television, radio and the press remain the main sources of information about the EU. In this respect, Lithuanian residents hardly differ from the EU average. It is interesting to note that the average share of persons searching for such information on the Internet is the same in the EU overall as in Lithuania.

Only 5% of Lithuanians expressed the opinion that there is too much information on the EU in the mass media. For more than one half of respondents the current level of information is sufficient. This result is slightly higher than the European average. Among the sources of information, 22% of respondents have indicated that the press could provide more information about the EU. Similar opinions prevail in other EU Member States.

However, more Lithuanians (29%) than Europeans on average consider information about the EU to be too positive. Around one-half of the respondents think that the information is objective, while 2% say that the information is too negative. In the EU as a whole, the latter opinion was expressed by 10% of respondents.

Image of the European Union

Most Lithuanians (57%) first of all associate the European Union with the opportunity to freely travel, study and work in any country of the EU. Economic welfare is the second most frequently cited association (30%), followed by peace, the euro, social security, cultural diversity and democracy.

In the comparison of associations by Lithuanians and Europeans overall, several differences can be seen. On average, EU residents link the EU with economic welfare and social security less frequently. However, they associate it with the euro, cultural diversity and a more important role in the world more often than Lithuanians. In addition, Europeans see the negative aspects of the EU (higher crime rates, bureaucracy, money squandering, unemployment and insufficient control of external borders) more frequently than Lithuanians.

For Lithuanians, membership of the EU lends the feeling of personal security and political and economic stability. Such is the opinion of more than one half of the respondents. The same share of Lithuanians think that Lithuania's opinion will be taken into consideration in the EU. However, at the same time, Lithuanians understand that the largest EU Member States are the most powerful. A little more than 4/5 of the respondents agreed with this statement.

EU Political Principles

Despite lack of certain information, Lithuanians generally approve of the key political principles of the EU to a higher degree than Europeans on average.

Educational work at education establishments is among the most important EU matters both to Lithuanians and Europeans in general. This is the opinion of 4/5 of Lithuanians and 9/10 of Europeans. Most Lithuanians hold a favourable view of the EU's common defence/security policy and foreign policy. Lithuanians stand out from other Europeans by their more favourable opinion on EU enlargement. Lithuanians attach little importance to the matter of differentiating the speed of European integration by different country groups.

Compared with the autumn 2004 survey, importance of all these matters has decreased in the eyes of Lithuanians. As discussions over the introduction of the euro and the Constitution have become more active, the number of those approving of Europe with a single currency and of the Constitution for Europe has decreased significantly (9 percentage points).

Attitude Towards EU Enlargement

During the last few years, discussions over EU enlargement have become much more active. In this respect, opinions of Lithuanians and residents of other EU Member States are generally similar. However, some material differences may be observed. Both Lithuanians and other Europeans agree that the EU should enlarge by admitting only certain applicants. However, the number of Lithuanians holding such a view is 10 percentage points higher than among Europeans on average (52% of Lithuanians and 42% of Europeans overall). The largest differences in opinions are seen in the unwillingness to admit new members to the EU (8% of Lithuanians and 25% of Europeans overall).

The past exerts an influence over present likings and attitudes towards other European countries that are not members of the EU. Compared with opinions expressed by residents of other EU Member States, the views of Lithuanians as regards potential EU membership of countries such as Switzerland, Norway, Croatia, Iceland, Serbia and Montenegro are very similar to those of Europeans on average. However, views differ as regards the future of the countries of the former Eastern bloc. Much more Lithuanians would like to see the Ukraine, Bulgaria or Romania in the EU (more than one half of Lithuanians are favourable disposed to these countries) as compared with Europeans overall (less than one half).

Turkey is the country the potential EU membership of which is viewed least favourably both in Lithuania and other EU Member States.

The majority of Europeans stress that Turkey should respect human rights on a systematic basis (84%) and improve its economic situation (76%) in order to join the EU in 10 years' time. These aspects are most important for Lithuanians as well (67% and 64%) respectively. There is a smaller number of Lithuanians compared to other EU citizens who think that Turkey's accession would increase immigration to the developed countries (47%). Also, there are fewer Lithuanians who think that cultural differences between Turkey and the EU Member States are too large (42%). The fact that Turkey's accession would make the average EU resident "younger" is least

important both for Lithuanians and other Europeans. This aspect is least important for residents of other EU Member States as well.

General Information on Lithuania's Population

Opinions on the EU matters is not the only point of difference between residents of Lithuania and the average European. There are also differences in religious beliefs, domestic life and behaviour.

Most Lithuanians (89%) consider themselves religious. However, the number of practicing believers is smaller in Lithuania than in other EU Member States. Only 17% of Lithuanian respondents say that they attend church more frequently than 2-3 times per month and almost 1/3 indicate that they never go to church. The number of people in other EU Member States who attend religious ceremonies on a regular basis is twice as large as in Lithuania (34%).

As regards household provision with consumer goods and durables, differences between Lithuanians and other Europeans are noticeable. The number of households having a DVD player, a CD player, a PC or a car is smaller in Lithuania than in other European countries. In addition, smaller number of Lithuanians have Internet access at home compared with other Europeans (17% and 44% respectively). The number of persons residing in their own flats or houses is larger in Lithuania compared to other EU Member States on average, and these are mostly elderly people. On average, 26% of Europeans reside in a house or flat bought on the basis of a loan. In Lithuania, such people account for only 5%, and the majority of them are people aged from 25 to 39.

The poorer financial position of Lithuanian residents compared with other EU Member State citizens, because of lower salaries, may be one of the reasons why Lithuanians rarely spend their holidays away from home compared to the average European. More than half of Lithuanian residents spend less than one week's holiday away from home and only slightly more than one-tenth of Lithuanians leave their homes for holiday for more than three weeks in a year.

Most Lithuanian residents (79%) speak Russian apart from their mother tongue. The majority of such residents are elderly people. The English language is the most popular language among young people (43%). In general, 26% of all residents of Lithuania can communicate in English. It should be noted that the average number of Europeans overall who can communicate in

English is lower. Only 2% of Lithuanians can communicate in French, 1% in Italian and 1% in Spanish.