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SUMMARY

LITHUANIA

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This document does not reflect the attitude of the European Commission
It presents the author's interpretations and opinions.

Introduction

In autumn 2006, a standard Eurobarometer survey was carried out in all the 25 member states of the European Union. This report aims at reviewing the key results of the study.

The report presents the analysis of the Lithuanian population's responses to the main questions of the survey. Moreover, the above responses are compared to the mean scores of the responses among all the 25 European Union member states. In addition, where relevant, the report presents comparisons with the preceding survey data and analysis of the survey results in respondents' various social and demographic groups.

During the survey, 1000 respondents aged 15 and over were interviewed throughout Lithuania. The respondents' sample was carried out by applying a random-probability sampling method and the sample represents the opinion of population throughout Lithuania. The survey was carried out in the form of personal interview in respondents' homes by using CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviews) system.

The survey was conducted from September 6th to October 2nd, 2006. The survey questionnaire and technical information on the survey are provided as appendices to this report.

Lithuania in the European Union

Many events took place in Lithuania during the latter half year, which have influenced the opinion and attitude of Lithuanians towards the European Union. Three most important events should probably be mentioned: the decision of the European Commission not to allow Lithuania to adopt the Euro from 2007, the reduction of residents' income tax from July and the change of government, accompanied by scandals. Can the first of the above-mentioned events be a real reason for the increase of the favourable disposition towards the European Union? Having not allowed the substitution of Litas by the Euro was not expected by the country, the European Commission won the support of Lithuanians, and their positive attitude towards the EU reached almost a record high.

At the same time, however, the above decision set in train endless discussions about the threats of inflation. The reduced income tax replenished the pockets of almost every working person. The national budget for 2007 being debated also seems to be oriented

towards an increase in residents' buying power. Although experts have been issuing dire warnings, it appears that, so far, these have been unheeded by the Lithuanian population. Lithuanians have never been so satisfied with their current lives. Over a five-year period, satisfaction with life has increased by more than 20 percentage points. Furthermore, Lithuanians are more optimistic about the future, compared with the majority of the EU population.

Thus, what does an ordinary (or not ordinary) scandal over a member of the Seimas or the government, a leader of a political party, a security official or a grey cardinal ostensibly determining all the policy of the state mean in this context? There has been an abundance of the above scandals for several years. Therefore, they no longer have an influence on the ratings of trust in the government and other institutions. In fact, trust in the government even increased slightly in the last half year. Probably, the new Prime Minister will be able to win a favourable disposition not only towards himself, but towards the whole institution as well.

All the same, a lot of work and decisions are anticipated, related to membership of the European Union. Will we succeed in allocating the EU support, the amount of which is the subject of great rejoicing, efficiently and, most importantly, transparently? Will we succeed in joining the Schengen agreement on time and without problems? Probably, when having no borders with neighbours any longer, Lithuanians will finally feel like real Europeans. However, it is most likely that this will only happen when the standard of living in Lithuania is equal to that in Ireland, a country to which tens of thousands of people, who have not found happiness in Lithuania, are making their way. Emigration helped to solve the problem of unemployment in Lithuania, but the question is whether it will not have a boomerang effect, if unstopped: the Lithuanian population always considered assimilation as one of the major threats related to the EU. Will the European Union support Lithuania when dealing with the issues of energy and relations with Russia? When left on its own, the Lithuanian population will certainly not start identifying more with Europe. The attitude of Lithuanians not only towards their national government, but also towards the European Union will greatly depend on the solution of the above issues in the future.

Satisfaction with various aspects of life

Compared with spring 2006, Lithuanians have become even greater optimists when assessing various perspectives of the country and their own personal perspectives. The share of those claiming their life will be better within the next 12 months has increased

by 6 percentage points (hereinafter p.p.) up to 43 percent. The same increase (up to 37 percent) is observed among those thinking that the economic situation in Lithuania will improve. The share of respondents thinking that their families' financial situation will improve increased by 5 p.p. and the share of those claiming that the employment situation will improve increased by 9 p.p.

In terms of all the above attitudes, Lithuanian residents are considerably greater optimists than the average EU citizen.

Lithuanian levels of optimism are the highest recorded since Eurobarometer surveys started in Lithuania. Comparable figures were observed back in 2004 after Lithuania had joined the European Union, but levels of optimism were even lower then. Undoubtedly, these attitudes are determined both by the country's favourable economic situation, the results of which are probably felt by a great part of society, and by the significant amount of EU support for the country's development, giving optimism for the future.

The share of Lithuanian residents claiming they are satisfied with their current life also increased by 4 p.p. **Compared with the survey carried out five years ago, in autumn 2001, the share of respondents satisfied with their lives has increased by 23 p.p. in Lithuania and, currently, almost two-thirds of Lithuanians are satisfied with their situation.** It is difficult to say what has had a greater influence on this jump: whether it has been a growing economy, reduced income taxes, membership of the EU or the fact that dissatisfied people had emigrated from the country.

Benefit of European Union membership

Lithuanians are some of the most favourably disposed towards membership of the EU, i.e. 77 percent of Lithuanian residents think that EU membership is beneficial for Lithuania, and, in terms of this attitude, Lithuania's figure considerably exceeds those of other EU countries: only slightly more than a half of all EU citizens think that EU membership is beneficial to their countries. **The level of favourable disposition towards the EU reached almost the same level in autumn 2006 - just after Lithuania had joined the Union.**

Key problems

Likewise, in many recent years, Lithuanians currently attach **greatest importance to problems related to crime and economy**. Moreover, problems related to the health care system are also included into the top five of the key problems identified.

A dominating problem – unemployment – persists in the European Union. On average, 40 percent of the EU population cited it. In fact, compared with the spring survey, the share of respondents citing this problem has decreased by 9 p.p. The importance of this problem to Lithuanians has also decreased by 8 p.p.

On the other hand, rising prices / inflation is becoming a more urgent problem in Lithuania (7 p.p. increase). The discussions relating to the adoption of the Euro and the European Commission's warnings to Lithuania about increasing inflation also had an influence on public opinion on this problem.

As was seen in earlier surveys, Lithuania differs greatly from the EU as a whole in how it perceives terrorism and immigration problems. These problems are among the most urgent ones in the EU, on average: 21 percent of respondents mention emigration as a problem, whereas 15 percent cite terrorism. In Lithuania, the above problems are mentioned by only 10 and 1 percent of respondents respectively.

European economy

The survey reveals differences in the opinions between Lithuanians and European Union citizens as a whole in terms of how to improve the performance of the European economy.

According to more than two-thirds of Lithuanians, the improvement of education and professional training would enhance the European economy most of all: 71 percent of Lithuanians and 65 percent of EU citizens consider this measure would be effective. Along with investment in human capital, respondents also consider investment in scientific research and innovation to be an effective measure: 49 percent of Lithuanians and 47 percent of all the EU citizens speak for the said investments. **Increase of the legal number of working hours seems to be the least appropriate measure, however, 10 percent of respondents in the EU on the average and only 1 percent of Lithuanian residents agree with this option.**

What is more, a larger share of European Union citizens (36 percent, compared with 27 percent in Lithuania) consider the more efficient use of energy to be a more appropriate measure.

Priorities for European Union action

Both when talking about emerging problems and when stating priorities for action, the opinions of Lithuanians and EU citizens in general differ slightly. Like a year ago, **more than a half of Lithuanian residents think that the EU should make fighting poverty and social exclusion a main priority. 4 out of 10 respondents think that fighting unemployment should be a priority (this index decreased by 10 p.p., compared with spring 2006), whereas almost every third respondent thinks that maintaining peace and security in Europe should be a priority. The average EU citizen also cites the above priorities for action.**

In fact, it is in relation to further priorities that Lithuanians and the European Union citizens on average start to differ. Lithuanian residents put more stress on fighting crime, whereas the average European accords priority to fighting terrorism (this priority has gained even more importance, since the last survey), protecting the environment and fighting illegal immigration.

Achievements of the European Union

Europeans think that no border controls when travelling is the most useful achievement of the EU: 59 percent of EU citizens consider this aspect useful. Lithuanians mention a greater variety of goods from other EU countries in first place (76 percent; the EU average – 52 percent). Furthermore, Lithuanian residents mention the possibility of working or studying in other EU countries and freedom to travel.

Lithuanians see more personal benefit from EU membership than the average European does. An especially big difference, compared with other EU citizens, is observed in their perception of the benefit of the right to recourse in the EU Court of Justice: since there is a lack of the feeling of justice in their own country, Lithuanians look for it in Europe. There is only a small share of Lithuanians who perceive the Euro as a beneficial achievement of the EU.

Attitude to European Union enlargement

Lithuanians are one of the peoples the most favourably disposed towards the future enlargement of the European Union: 68 percent of respondents approve of the new countries' accession to the EU. Only the citizens of Poland, Slovenia, Greece and Slovakia are more favourably disposed towards enlargement than Lithuanians. The mean score throughout the EU is only 46 percent. This index has remained almost unchanged, compared with previous surveys. A majority of citizens in the old member states still have quite a sceptical attitude to further enlargement. In Lithuania, as in neighbouring countries, the share of those in favour has increased, compared with the survey carried out in spring 2006.

European citizens' values

Although the attitudes of Lithuanians to various issues almost totally coincide with the average attitudes of Europeans in terms of priority, there are still some aspects that receive differing levels of approval in Lithuania than in the EU overall. Both Lithuanians and EU citizens strongly agree with the statement that nowadays there is too much tolerance, and criminals should be punished more severely. 85 percent of EU residents on average agree with this statement and, even in Denmark, the country which has the smallest number agreeing with this statement, 71 percent of the poll support this attitude.

Compared with the average European, Lithuanians agree considerably more often with the statement that free competition is the best guarantee for economic prosperity. **It would appear that the ideas of the free market have finally become established in Lithuanians' consciousness and the idea of any regulation of the economy is totally alien to them.** French, Spaniards and Portuguese are the most sceptical with respect to free competition. In fact, the values of both Lithuanians and Europeans are slightly inconsistent, since two-thirds of them also agree that we need more equality and justice, even if this means less freedom for the individual.

In Europe as a whole, it is the Baltic countries that least complain that the state has too big a role in their lives. **Only 42 percent of respondents in Lithuania think that the State intervenes too much in their lives, whereas the EU average is 62 percent.** A considerably smaller share of Lithuanians, compared with the EU average, agree with the statement that more importance should be given to spare time than to work. The above statement has strongest support in Cyprus (68 percent), Estonia (67 percent), Greece (67 percent) and Spain (66 percent) residents, whereas it has least support in Germany (27 percent).

Compared with the EU average, a smaller share of Lithuanians approve of the authorisation of homosexual marriages and the legalization of cannabis cultivation for personal consumption. As might be expected, the Dutch are the most tolerant in this respect (82 percent of them approve of the authorisation of homosexual marriages and 49 percent of them approve of the legalization of cannabis cultivation).