

EUROBAROMETER 67

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

SPRING 2007

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

LITHUANIA

This survey was requested and coordinated by Directorate-General Communication.

This report was produced for the European Commission's Representation Lithuania

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Introduction

In spring 2007, a standard Eurobarometer survey was carried out in all the 27 member states of the European Union. This report aims at reviewing the key results of the study.

The report presents the analysis of Lithuanian population responses to the main questions of the survey; moreover, the above responses are compared to the mean scores of the responses among all the 27 European Union member states. In addition, where relevant, the report presents comparisons with the preceding studies' data and analysis of the survey results in various social and demographic groups of respondents.

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

The survey was conducted from April 10th to May 15th, 2007. The survey questionnaire and technical information on the survey are enclosed as appendices to this report.

Lithuania in the European Union

From this spring, the European Union has now got 27 member states, whereas Lithuania and other 9 countries who joined the EU in 2004 reserve a right not to be called "new" any longer. At the same time, it is also an opportunity for Lithuania not to be among the last European Union member states at least in some spheres. Having been the most or one of the most dissatisfied with their lives for a great while, Lithuanians have given up this position to residents of other countries. We are 6th from the end in terms of this index and we already exceed not only other new member states, but also countries such as Portugal, Hungary or our neighbour Latvia. Satisfaction with life has grown slightly, but constantly in the country, and we only have to hope this is not only the change of subjective attitudes, but the reflection of objective reality.

At the same time, the Lithuanian population shows an unfading optimism towards the near future. When evaluating all the aspects – **personal life, economic situation and employment situation within the next 12 months** – **Lithuanians are among the**

greatest EU optimists. Moreover, few countries are able to match Lithuania when it comes to the strength of favourable disposition towards the European Union. Currently, 81 percent of Lithuanians think that EU membership is beneficial to their country and this share is now higher than it was just after Lithuania had joined the Union. A number of challenges are anticipated in Lithuania and the EU in the near future, which presumably will have impact on the future attitudes of the Lithuanian population.

After political passions regarding the State Security Department calmed down and municipal elections were held, Lithuania has started to look forward to a lot of important actions: economic growth, inflation management, higher education reform, improvement of the health care system and the successful use of EU funds. Intensified fear regarding the possible overheating of the economy as well as uncontrolled inflation, are definitely a source of concern for Lithuanian society. Society considers the above problems as the most important in Lithuania today. In addition, the health care system – which is positioned close behind - probably receives less public attention currently, but, undoubtedly, its time will also come. As the educational system, which (first of all, higher education) is much discussed, is far from being the priority problem of public opinion, only 5 percent of respondents mention it.

The successful solution of the above issues will influence the attitude towards the state institutions. It should be mentioned that trust in the government increased by 6 percentage points, compared with spring 2006. Although the difference is not big, it is perhaps an indicator of things moving in the right direction.

At the beginning of this year, Lithuania received criticism for its slow utilisation of the EU Structural Funds. As was already mentioned, the Lithuanian population considers membership of the European Union to be very advantageous for the country. Successful utilisation of the support funding will also have a considerable influence on whether such an attitude will persist. However, it is not only events in Lithuania that will determine attitudes towards the EU. Actions of the European Union are also very important in this respect.

Just like other new EU member states, Lithuania is likely to succeed in joining the Schengen agreement in the short run. This will probably represent one more step towards feeling more European: apparently, we are placed below the EU average in terms of this index. Making agreements regarding the destiny of new EU reforms will be of no less importance. Will the new principles be honest with respect to all the EU member states? Feelings of Lithuanians towards the EU are only positive so far and no

one would like feelings of injustice or seclusion to appear among them. Lithuanians are increasingly looking towards the European Union as a result of the tough positions taken by Russia with respect to neighbours and concern about the forthcoming Russian presidential election. Will we receive the support we hope for and will the EU hold a clear and strict position? The spring events in Estonia do not permit us to answer this question unambiguously. Such a position can be very important, when attitudes of the Lithuanian population towards the EU are being formed.

Satisfaction with various life spheres

Compared with autumn 2006, Lithuanians remained equally optimistic when assessing various perspectives of the country and their own personal situations. More than one-third of Lithuanian residents think that their life in general, the country's economic situation, their families' financial situation and their personal job situation will be better within the next 12 months, while slightly more than a half the Lithuanian poll thinks the next year will be better when it comes to the employment situation in their country.

Likewise, during the last year, Lithuanian residents are considerably greater optimists than the average EU citizen is in terms of all the above attitudes. The biggest gap between the evaluations of Lithuanians and the average European is observed when it comes to personal job situation, the country's economic situation and the country's employment situation.

The above indices of Lithuanian optimism have kept growing from the last autumn, when they were at their highest in the entire history of the Eurobarometer survey in Lithuania. The results of this spring apparently exceed the results obtained in autumn 2004, after Lithuania had joined the European Union.

Compared with autumn 2006, the share of Lithuanian population satisfied with their current lives remained almost the same, i.e. **currently almost two-thirds of Lithuanians are satisfied with their situation.**

Trust in institutions

As in previous years, a tendency persists whereby Lithuanians have little trust in their state institutions. As was the case last autumn, 67 percent of Lithuanian residents do not trust their national Government, and 79 percent (77 percent in the autumn of 2006) do

not trust their national Parliament. **Trust in the European Union increased by 5 p.p. since last autumn, (i.e. from 60 to 65 percent) and a larger share of Lithuanians trust it than Europeans in general (57%).**

Lithuanians tend to have less trust in their state institutions compared with the average EU citizen the average European, Lithuanians trust radio, the press and the internet, and, above all, television.

Benefits of European Union membership

The populations of Lithuania and Ireland are the most favourably disposed towards EU membership, i.e. 81 percent of Lithuanian residents and 86 percent of Irish residents think that the EU membership is beneficial for their countries; the above results are much higher than those of other countries and they considerably exceed the EU average: only slightly more than a half of all EU citizens think that EU membership is beneficial for their countries.

Moreover, the Lithuanian population is more favourably disposed towards the membership in the European Union, compared with Latvians or Estonians, i.e. the share of those considering EU membership is beneficial to their country is 78 percent in Estonia and only 55 percent in Latvia. **The level of favourable disposition towards the EU has even exceeded the results observed just after Lithuania had joined the Union.**

Key problems

As in recent years, Lithuanians currently attach **greatest importance to the problems related to crime and economy**. Moreover, just like last year, the problems related to the health care system are also included into the top five key problems.

One dominating problem – unemployment – persists in the European Union. 34 percent of the EU population mentioned it on average (40 percent - last autumn). Actually, the urgency of this problem has decreased slightly, i.e. 6 p.p. fewer respondents mentioned the above problem this spring, compared with autumn 2006. A decrease of 9 p.p. was also observed last autumn, compared to spring 2006.

Compared with the last half-year, the urgency of all the problems in Lithuania remained quite similar; concern about the economic situation has slightly increased and the urgency of the unemployment issue has decreased.

Meaning of the European Union

As in previous years, more than half of Lithuanians primarily relate the EU with the freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the European Union; in addition, associations with economic prosperity, cultural diversity, Euro and peace are also frequent. Lithuanians least often associate the EU with unemployment, not enough control at external frontiers, more crime and bureaucracy. Meanwhile, the average European most often associates the EU with freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the European Union, Euro and peace, and the least often with social protection, loss of cultural identity and unemployment.

As was the case in autumn 2006, when comparing the associations of Lithuanians and the average EU citizen a tendency persists that **Lithuanians are inclined to see the EU more positively than the average EU citizen does; Lithuanians considerably less often point to the possible disadvantages of the EU: they considerably less often associate the EU with the waste of money, bureaucracy, more crime, unemployment and not enough control at external frontiers.**

Levels of decision-making

A majority of Lithuanian and EU residents agree with the statement that every European Union decision is the subject of negotiations in which the opinions of national governments of all the Member states are taken into account. 84 percent of the Lithuanian and 63 percent of the EU polls hold the above opinion.

Lithuanian residents, however, tend to believe that all the spheres, except for pensions, taxation, the educational system, transport, fighting unemployment and social welfare, should be decided jointly within the European Union. Other Europeans also tend to believe that the national Government should handle such spheres as pensions, taxation, health and social welfare, the educational system, fighting unemployment, transport and the economy better than the EU will. The survey reveals, however, that a tendency to trust the European Union remains, i.e. in all the spheres surveyed, 56.3 percent of Lithuanian and 51.4 percent of EU citizens on

average attribute the right of decision primarily to the European Union. However, when it comes to the national government, this ratio is 38.6 and 44.6 percent respectively (the above figures also indicate that Lithuanians have considerably less trust in the competence of their national government than the average European has). **Thus, as was the case last year, the average EU citizen attaches more importance to the European Union institutions than to the national government.**

Enlargement of the European Union

The Lithuanian poll remains one of the most favourably disposed towards the future expansion in the European Union: 68 percent of respondents approve of the accession of new countries to the EU, whereas the EU27 average is only 49 percent. Only the residents of Poland are more favourably disposed towards greater enlargement than Lithuania's (76 percent of Poland's population are positive towards the further enlargement of the European Union).