

# EUROBAROMETER 70

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

## AUTUMN 2008

### NATIONAL REPORT

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### LITHUANIA

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## Introduction

In Autumn 2008, 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 an analysis of Lithuanian population's responses to the main questions of the survey. Moreover, the said 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, 1011 respondents were interviewed throughout Lithuania. The respondent (aged 15 and over) sample was carried out by applying a random-probability sampling method and it represents the opinion of the population throughout Lithuania. The survey was carried out in the form of personal interviews in respondents' homes using the CAPI (*Computer Assisted Personal Interviews*) system.

The survey was conducted over the period October 9-28, 2008.

## Lithuania in the European Union

The trends in public opinion, which were already seen back in the spring of 2008, are very evident in the current Eurobarometer survey: the current situation is bad and the immediate future will be even worse. If, half a year ago, such trends in Lithuania were mostly related to the growth of inflation rates and a still unclear concern about the economic situation, then, now, everything has become clear: the economy is stagnating, a crisis has struck the financial system and hard times are anticipated in the future. The crisis of the financial system and an economic crisis that has followed it have an impact on the mood of all European Union residents: the number of optimists is constantly decreasing in all the countries. With respect to this last attitude, Lithuanians regressed to the levels recorded in 2001. Furthermore, since the survey was carried out before the new government started speaking about the crisis and presented a plan for dealing with it could be supposed that the pessimistic attitude in regard to the immediate future in Lithuania has not yet reached its lowest point.

Half a year ago, the population related the problems to business, financial institutions and macroeconomic indices. Now it is clear to all the people that the crisis will directly or indirectly affect everyone. There are several reasons to claim the above. The people

who thought earlier that the next year would be worse only in regard to the country's economic situation, now also think the future will be worse for them personally. Unemployment, which had vanished from the list of key problems in Lithuania in previous editions of Eurobarometer, is re-entering it again, irrespective of the fact that, at the time of the conduct of this survey, the mass media were not discussing employee redundancies and official forecasts for unemployment had not yet been presented by the government.

Trust in state institutions has dropped by several more percentage points during the last half a year. This survey had been carried out before the results of the election to the Parliament (Seimas) were known and the formation of a new government was started. Thus, it is true to say that the index of trust, which has dropped by more than double since the beginning of their term of office, is a very clear evaluation of the retiring government and Seimas's activities (or inaction). Usually, citizens grant a credit of trust to a newly elected Seimas and a newly formed government at the beginning. This time, however, we can be doubtful about that. The new government, which has taken on drastic actions to overcome the crisis, is unlikely to receive a more favourable attitude.

The new government will have to solve a great number of other major issues. These relate, first of all, to energy. The Lithuanian population is getting more and more concerned about drastically rising prices of housing heating, gas and electricity. The results of the Eurobarometer survey also reflect this. Energy, which was in 7<sup>th</sup> place in the country's problem list half a year ago, has risen to 4<sup>th</sup> place over this short time. And it certainly has a potential to climb even higher in the event that it becomes clear that Lithuania might face electricity supply problems or that this energy will cost not a couple, but several tens of cents more than up till now.

It is probable that the declining favourable attitude of Lithuanians towards the European Union is related to energy. This tendency can also be related to the overall negative situation, concern about the future and the unfulfilled hope the EU membership would protect us from economic disasters. What is more is that it is also probably partly related to the final say in the issue regarding prolonging the operation of the Ignalina nuclear power station. After the European Commission had made its final statement that there could be no further discussions regarding the prolonging of the INPS's work, Lithuanian residents were given a new opportunity to evaluate the benefit and costs of the EU membership.

It is likely that the billions of euros allocated by the EU for implementing energy projects will improve the EU's image again. This is quite possible because, compared to other countries, the image of the European Union is certainly not the worst (even on the contrary) among Lithuanian residents. The essence of this image is also very well illustrated by responses of EU citizens in general to the question as to on what, in their opinion, most of the EU budget is spent. According to a majority of Europeans, these are the costs for maintaining bureaucracy. In Lithuania, however, this attitude is not supported. In this respect, the Lithuanian population is accidentally or not accidentally much better informed. The Lithuanian population thinks very correctly that most of the budget is spent on promoting economic growth and assisting agriculture and rural development. Yet, when asked about their priorities when distributing the EU budget, Lithuanian residents and the population throughout the EU agree that the share of the budget spent on agriculture and rural development should be reduced.

### **Satisfaction with various spheres of life**

Compared with the spring of 2007, the share of the Lithuanian poll satisfied with their current lives has slightly decreased, i.e. currently less than 6 out of 10 Lithuanians are satisfied with their current situation.

A larger share of respondents in Lithuania, compared to the EU average, claim their purchasing power has increased compared to that five years ago. This contrasts with the fact that a considerably larger share of respondents throughout the European Union claim their purchasing power was greater five years ago. However, during the last six months, the situation in this respect has also started to change: the share of people who claim their purchasing power had decreased rose by 10 percentage points, and now the share of people in Lithuania, thinking the situation was better five years ago, is larger than the share of those thinking the opposite.

59 percent of Lithuanians claim they have difficulties paying all their bills at the end of the month. The share of people in this situation in Lithuania has increased by 5 p.p. over two and a half years. The share of such people throughout the European Union has increased by 10 p.p. over the same period and, currently, almost a half of EU27 respondents claim they have difficulties paying bills at the end of the month.

### **Expectations for the next year**

During the last half a year, the share of Lithuanians who think that things are going in the right direction in Lithuania has decreased by 17 percentage points, i.e. to 19 percent;

whereas, 30 percent of Lithuanians believe that things are going in the right direction in the EU, i.e. a fall of 22 percentage points, compared to half a year ago.

In the spring of 2008, 23 percent of Lithuanians thought that the next year would be better. After half a year, there are only 10 percent of such people remaining. What is more, 60 percent of respondents think that the next year will be worse. Not only has the evaluation of the country's economic perspectives got drastically worse, but also the evaluations of the employment situation and households' financial situation. Such a low level of optimism regarding the future was observed back in the autumn of 2001, when the country had just started recovering after an economic crisis sparked off by the Russian crisis.

### **Trust in institutions**

As in previous years, the tendency for Lithuanians to have no trust in their state institutions still persists. 84 percent of Lithuanian residents do not trust their national government (67 percent in the spring of 2007) and 89 percent (79 percent in the spring of 2007) do not trust the Lithuanian Parliament (Seimas). Compared with the spring of 2007, the trust in the above institutions has decreased considerably. Trust in all the EU institutions remains at a relatively high level: about a half of both the Lithuanian and EU polls trust these institutions.

### **Benefits of European Union membership**

Residents of Ireland, Estonia, Slovakia, Denmark and the Netherlands are the most favourably disposed towards EU membership: more than three-quarters of these countries' polls think that EU membership has been beneficial for their countries. These results are considerably higher than the EU average, i.e. only slightly more than a half of all the EU citizens (56 percent) think that EU membership is beneficial for their countries. A favourable attitude towards the European Union has dropped in Lithuania by 6 percentage points during the last half a year, and is currently 69 percent. However, the favourable attitude has slightly increased throughout the European Union (by 2 p.p). The decline observed in Lithuania is probably the biggest in the whole European Union.

### **Key problems**

In recent years, Lithuanians have attached greatest importance to problems relating to the economy, crime and the health care system (see table 9 in the main report).

However, in a couple of recent surveys, one problem has come to light: inflation, which more than a half of Lithuanian population consider important. In fact, inflation is the most urgent problem at European Union level. The share of people thinking the economic situation is one of the key problems has increased considerably both at the European Union level and in Lithuania during the last half a year. Unlike Lithuanians, the EU citizens in general are more concerned about the level of unemployment, i.e. about a quarter of the EU population consider this problem to be important. The urgency of the latter problem has been growing rather rapidly in Lithuania (during half a year, 5 p.p. more of the poll cited unemployment as a key problem).

### **Image of the European Union**

As in previous years, the Lithuanian poll is slightly more favourably disposed towards the European Union than respondents from other EU countries. Nevertheless, the EU's image, which had been gradually improving for a long time, has got worse both in the eyes of Lithuanians and Europeans as a whole: 48 percent of Lithuanians and 45 of Europeans evaluate the EU positively, whereas this ratio was 59 percent and 52 percent accordingly a year ago (in the autumn of 2006 - 53 percent and 50 percent, in the spring of 2006 – 51 percent and 44 percent).

### **Attitude towards establishment of the EU budget**

10 percent of Lithuanians and the same share of Europeans in general claim that their knowledge about the EU budget is rather good (see graph 11 of the main report). Furthermore, slightly more than a half of them have heard of the budget, but they think they are not very familiar with it.

The respondents' replies with respect to the distribution of the EU budget, once again, reveals that the EU's image is rather bad and not very correct in the eyes of its citizens. The majority of EU citizens think most of the EU budget is spent on administrative and personnel costs and buildings. Lithuanian citizens perceive the EU budget considerably more correctly. A majority of them think that most of the budget is spent on economic growth (39 percent) and agriculture and rural development (38 percent).

When asked about their wishes for how the budget is spent, respondents list somewhat different priorities. According to EU citizens overall, considerably more of the budget should be spent on economic growth, energy issues, as well as on employment and social affairs, public health, education and climate change. They consider that less of the budget could undoubtedly be spent on administrative costs, assistance to the EU's neighbours and agriculture. The priorities of Lithuanian population are essentially very

similar, although they mention defence and security among the spheres which should receive less finance.