



Standard Eurobarometer



European  
Commission

# EUROBAROMETER 65

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

## SPRING 2006

### NATIONAL REPORT

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### LITHUANIA

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The interpretations and opinions contained in it are solely those of the authors.

## **Introduction**

In spring 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 Lithuanian citizens' responses to the main questions of the survey. These responses are compared with the mean scores of the responses from all the 25 European Union Member States. In addition, where relevant, the report presents comparisons with the data from previous EB surveys, as well as an analysis of the survey results in various social and demographic groups of respondents.

During the survey, 1019 respondents aged 15 and over were interviewed throughout Lithuania. The respondent sampling 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 a CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviews) system.

The survey was conducted on March 27 – May 1, 2006. The survey questionnaire and technical information on the survey are attached as appendices to this report.

## **Lithuania in the European Union**

During the last six months, the most important events for Lithuania, relating to the European Union, were most probably the approval of the EU financial perspectives for the period 2007 – 2013 and the country's preparations for the adoption of the Euro. The above events are likely to have had a considerable influence on Lithuanian citizens' attitude to the European Union. It could probably be claimed that the favourable decision regarding EU support for the new member states, including Lithuania, was one of the key actions, which ensured that Lithuanians still maintain a very favourable disposition towards the European Union. The vast future financial support for the country's development means that citizens' expectations of the considerable impact of the EU on economic growth and prosperity are likely to be very positive. The survey results reveal that a majority of Lithuanian residents hold this opinion.

The decision of the European Commission regarding Slovenia's admittance and Lithuania's exclusion from the Euro zone was made when this survey had already been carried out. Therefore it is hard to decide what influence the decision will have on the

public opinion. Being aware, however, of the latter months' sceptical attitude of Lithuanian population towards the Euro and the fear regarding rising prices and possible swindling of salesmen, it can be presumed that the decision not to allow Lithuania to adopt the new currency from January 2007 will surely not worsen the image of the European Union in our country. Although Lithuanians are one of the biggest supporters of all the general guidelines and processes of the EU policy, they find the idea of the Euro to be one of the least attractive. Hence, Lithuania will have to work hard not only to fulfil the Maastricht criteria, but also to change the attitude of the Lithuanian population towards the Euro.

Favourable opinion on the European Union, however, depends not only on the actions of the EU itself. The country's internal events can also have a strong impact on the opinion. Lately, politicians, media and the public have been actively discussing the transparent distribution and use of the financial flows that the EU support will generate. The ratings of politicians will, above all, depend on whether Lithuanian state institutions succeed in guaranteeing the transparent and efficient use of the said funds. Undoubtedly, public attitude towards the European Union will also depend on that. The place of the hope of a better life, which is associated with the EU in Lithuania, could be superseded by that of corruption and scandals: Lithuanian residents could change from being the greatest supporters of the European Union into deep sceptics.

### **Satisfaction with various aspects of life**

When asked about the perspectives for the coming years, Lithuanians are greater optimists than the EU average. Lithuanian residents are most optimistic about the employment possibilities in their country: almost a half of them (44 percent) think that the coming years are going to be better with respect to this issue (the EU average is 21 percent). Moreover, Lithuanians view the future of their families' financial situation optimistically: one-third of respondents expect that their financial situation will improve. 25 percent of respondents in the EU on average hold such views.

Compared to Europeans in general, Lithuanians are also more optimistic about other spheres of life: according to 31 percent of respondents, the economic situation of Lithuania, as well as their personal job situation will improve. On the other hand, the average EU citizen is not so enthusiastic when talking about the next year, i.e. only one in five respondents expects an improvement in the economic situation and their personal job situation in the coming year.

Compared to last year, Lithuanians are slightly more optimistic both about their families' financial situation and about their personal job situation, whereas the expectations of the average European with respect to these issues remain almost unchanged.

### **Key problems**

As in recent years, Lithuanians currently attach the greatest importance to the problems related to crime and the economy. This differs from last year, however, as the top five of the key problems now include problems related to health care system. Thus, this year, Lithuanian residents cite as the key problems crime, rising prices, inflation, unemployment, economic situation and health care system.

Compared to last year, the shares of both Lithuanian and the EU residents who mention a particular problem remain similar. EU citizens cite unemployment as the key problem slightly more often (44 percent in autumn 2005 and 49 percent this spring).

### **Trust in institutions**

For several years, Lithuanian citizens have tended to distrust almost all their state institutions. Lithuanians distrust most of all political parties (even 85 percent of population, by 5 p.p. more, compared to the last year), followed by the Seimas (Parliament) (80 percent), the Government and the legal system. More than a half of Lithuanians trust the European Union, whereas about a half of them trust the United Nations.

Compared to the average EU citizen, Lithuanians tend more often to distrust state institutions: this gap is especially big when talking about trust in the Government (73 percent and 59 percent accordingly) and in the country's legal system (69 percent and 47 percent). Lithuanians, however, trust the European Union more than Europeans on average.

Lithuanians' trust in various institutions has remained similar to that back in autumn 2005, except that the trust in the Lithuanian Government (the difference is 6 p.p.) and the Seimas (Parliament) (the difference is 5 p.p.) has slightly decreased. Meanwhile, trust in the European Union and in the United Nations has increased slightly (3 p.p. in both cases).

## **Evaluation of the country's situation in various spheres**

Although a smaller share of Lithuanians, compared to Europeans in general, consider unemployment to be one of the key problems in the country, nevertheless, when discussing their country's situation, only 24 percent of Lithuanians, compared with a 37 percent EU25 average, think that the employment situation in the country is good. Presumably, Lithuanian residents do not mean the level of unemployment in Lithuania, but rather the other aspects of this problem escalated by the mass media, i.e. labour force shortages. Compared with the EU average, Lithuanians give lower ratings to the situation of the European economy (although, like all Europeans, they evaluate it better than the situation of their own country's economy), and they give a higher evaluation to the situation of the environment, the social welfare situation, the quality of life and the financial situation. Hence, except for the evaluation of the employment situation, Lithuanians see their country more optimistically than the average EU citizen does. It is noteworthy that Lithuanian residents rate their country's economic situation as highly as the average resident of the EU countries does.

## **Benefit of the European Union membership**

Of all European citizens, Lithuanians are some of the most favourably disposed towards European Union membership - more than two-thirds of the Lithuanian poll think that EU membership is beneficial for Lithuania, and Lithuania is considerably ahead of other EU member states in this respect, i.e. only slightly more than a half of all EU citizens think that EU membership is beneficial to their countries.

After its favourable disposition towards EU membership reached a peak in autumn 2004, this index has remained constant for the last one and a half years, i.e. from the spring 2005 up to now.

## **Priorities for European Union actions**

Like last year, more than half of Lithuanian residents think that the European Union should give most priority to fighting poverty, social exclusion and unemployment. The above two priorities also seem to be the most important ones to the average EU citizen. Like EU citizens in general, Lithuanians find it important for the EU to fight organized crime and drug trafficking, as well as to maintain peace and security in Europe. Fighting illegal immigration (which is important to 15 percent of EU citizens overall), reforming the EU institutions and the way they work, as well as asserting the political and diplomatic

importance of the EU around the world seem to be the least important priorities to Lithuanians.

Compared with the EU average, Lithuanians attach significantly more importance to fighting poverty and social exclusion, fighting unemployment, fighting organized crime and drug trafficking and implementing the single European currency – the Euro, whereas protecting the environment, the EU getting closer to European citizens, fighting illegal immigration and terrorism are less important.

Comparing the data of the survey conducted back in autumn 2005 with the data of the current survey, we see that the priorities for EU action cited both by Lithuanians and EU citizens in general are given the same importance. Only the share of EU citizens who indicated the fight against terrorism as a priority of the EU actions decreased by 5 percentage points (p.p.).

#### **Information on the European Union. The EU's image.**

The Lithuanian poll claims to be as knowledgeable about the European Union as the average European citizen. On a 10-point scale, where 1 means “does not know anything at all” and 10 stands for “knows a lot”, the mean score of the awareness level both among EU citizens in general and among Lithuanians is 4.5 points (compared to the data of the survey conducted last year - 4.2 and 4.1 points).

As was the case half a year ago, the actual level of knowledge about the European Union in Lithuania is the same as it is among average Europeans, i.e. Lithuanian residents are slightly more aware of the procedures of election to the European Parliament and the budget distribution, whereas they are less aware of the number of member states. The overall share of correct answers differs by 1 p.p., where Lithuania is very marginally ahead.

The main channels of information on the European Union still remain the same: television, radio and dailies. Like half a year ago, television and radio are more important information channels to Lithuanians, and dailies a slightly less important channel, compared to the situation for the average European citizen.

During the last half year, usage of television as a source of information on the EU increased in Lithuania, whereas regional newspapers and magazines have become a

slightly less important source of information. Television has also become a more important information channel to all EU citizens.

As was the case six months ago, more than half of Lithuanians associate the EU with the freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the European Union above all. In addition, associations with economic prosperity and the Euro are also frequent. Lithuanians relate insufficient control of external borders, unemployment and increasing crime with the EU least often.

Comparing the associations of Lithuanians and those of the average EU citizen, a tendency is observed whereby Lithuanians tend to see the EU more positively than the average EU citizen and they tend to less often cite the possible negative aspects of the EU: i.e. they associate the EU with waste of money, bureaucracy, more crime, unemployment and insufficient control of external borders less often. Interestingly, compared to Europeans in general, Lithuanians more often associate the EU with the freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the European Union, economic prosperity and social protection. They slightly less often associate the EU with peace, democracy and cultural diversity.

The most important fears of Lithuanians relating to EU membership are a possible spread of crime and the loss of the Litas, the national currency.

### **Attachment to one's country, Europe and the European Union**

A majority of Lithuanians and of all EU citizens most often claim that they feel attached to their country. Moreover, strong attachment is felt to their city/town/village and region. 34 percent of Lithuanians and 50 percent of all the EU citizens indicate that they feel attached to the European Union. A smaller share of Lithuanians and EU citizens feel attached to Europe.

### **Attitude towards enlargement of the European Union**

Lithuanian residents are more favourably disposed towards EU enlargement (i.e. new countries' accession to the European Union in the future) than the average EU citizen: 60 percent of Lithuanians and 45 percent of all EU citizens are in favour of future enlargement. Latvians and Estonians also tend more often be in favour of EU enlargement compared the average European citizen.

Compared with Latvia and Estonia, Lithuanian residents are the most favourably disposed towards enlargement, while Estonians are least in favour of it. Compared with six months ago, the attitude of Estonians has remained the same, whereas that of Lithuanians and Latvians has decreased slightly.