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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

LITHUANIA

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Introduction

In autumn 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 an analysis of the Lithuanian 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 data and analysis from previous surveys, as well as socio-demographic results for various groups of respondents.

During the survey, 1016 respondents aged 15 and over were interviewed throughout Lithuania. Respondents' sample was compiled 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 CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviews) system.

The survey was conducted from September 24th to October 15th, 2007.

Lithuania in the European Union

During the past months, both European and world media have been filled with doubts about the future of the economy. Problems in real estate and credit markets, as well as growing inflation, are causing great anxiety about a possible slowdown in the world economy and concern about regional crises which could have serious consequences. Discussion of the above economic problems receives a lot of public attention and Lithuania is no exception in this respect. Many foreign experts outline a rather gloomy perspective for Lithuania's economy, by talking about a sudden slowdown in economic growth and uncontrolled inflation, whereas every Lithuanian citizen, when going to the shops is able to see that inflation is not just found in reports from the department of statistics, but on the shelves too.

Due to the abovementioned, as well as other factors, a vast majority of the population cites rising prices as the key problem in Lithuania, which has now overtaken a former leader – crime – and is almost double in percentage terms. The above, in its turn, raises doubts about future prospects. Optimism about the future, which had been growing for a long time, saw a noticeable drop (by almost 10 percentage points) during the last half-

year. Lithuanian residents are less optimistic both about their country's economic situation and about their own personal welfare. Today, the said indices are close to the 2003 levels, before Lithuania joined the EU. Still, the above result is far from the low scores recorded between 1998 – 2000.

Notwithstanding the concern about the future, Lithuanian residents evaluate their current situation as being quite good; moreover, they remain the same faithful supporters of the European Union membership. Lithuanian residents are among those who evaluate the benefits of EU membership for their country most favourably. They see a positive image of the EU and trust the EU institutions. Lithuanian residents think the European Union plays a positive role in almost all the spheres. Rising prices and taxation are the only exception. An increasingly higher cost of living and increased taxes on some goods are some of the reasons why Lithuanians evaluate the role of the EU in taxation and rising prices negatively. Thus, all we have to do is wait and see whether increasing prices will hit not only purses, but also the image of the European Union in Lithuania.

It is possible that inflation has hit trust in the government of the Republic of Lithuania. The trust in this institution, which had been increasing earlier in the year, is now fading again. Trust in other state institutions also remains low. According to the poll, dissatisfactory and unconstructive work of the state institutions, often provoking doubts about transparency, thereafter increases alienation between the state and society. This autumn, the index of satisfaction with democracy is one of the lowest in Lithuania's history. Consequently, a rhetorical question arises: can this country and its institutions, which its citizens do not trust, have a significant influence in the European Union? Lithuanian citizens considerably less often believe in their country's abilities to represent its interests in the EU, than residents of other EU member states.

Lithuanians support the delegation of additional powers to the European Union in various spheres of politics. This is related to poor trust in their state institutions, the quality of democracy and the contrasting, high level of trust in the EU institutions. Because of the reasons mentioned, the Lisbon Treaty, signed on December 13, 2007, enabling the Union to make decisions more efficiently and transparently, and granting new powers in the sphere of foreign policy and defence, should meet the expectations of Lithuanians. This survey was conducted before Lithuania joined the Schengen area. It is probable that the possibility to travel across Europe with even fewer obstacles than before will encourage Lithuanians to feel more European.

Satisfaction with various life spheres

Compared with spring 2007, the proportion of Lithuanians satisfied with their current lives remained almost the same, i.e. **almost two-thirds of Lithuanians are satisfied with their current situation.**

The level of satisfaction with life remains the same throughout the whole EU as well: just like last spring, this autumn 80 percent of the EU population on the average are satisfied with their lives.

Among all the EU member states, the Hungarians, Portuguese and Romanians are most dissatisfied with their lives, whereas people in Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland and Luxemburg are the most satisfied.

Lithuanians give the lowest ratings to their country's social welfare, the evaluation of this aspect falls behind the EU average by 18 percentage points (hereinafter p.p.), and the economic situation in Lithuania – the divergence from the EU average is 17 p.p. Lithuanians evaluate the situation of their national job market considerably higher than the average EU citizen does, i.e. according to a half of Lithuanians and 36 percent of the EU citizens, the situation in their country is good in respect to this issue.

Like EU citizens as a whole, Lithuanians give better ratings to the situation of the European economy. Lithuanians evaluate the European economy more favourably than the average European does, i.e. according to 75 percent of Lithuanians and 58 percent of the EU27 poll, the situation of the European economy is good.

Expectations for the next year

As in spring 2007, Lithuanians are currently more optimistic about their future than the average European is, i.e. the share of people thinking the next year will be better is larger in Lithuania by 4-5 p.p. than elsewhere in Europe on average, whereas a particularly big difference is observed in the case of expectations of Lithuanians and the average EU27 citizen concerning their personal job situation (+10 p.p.) and the employment situation in their country (+19 p.p.).

A comparison of the results obtained in spring and autumn reveals the optimism of Lithuanians, when forecasting the situation in their country, is fading, i.e. this autumn, a number of people thinking the next year will be worse increased, while a

number of optimists in various spheres decreased. The share of people thinking life in general will be worse increased by 11 p.p.; the share of people expecting the economic situation to get worse increased by 12 p.p., while the share of those thinking the financial situation of the household will get worse increased by 12 p.p. Opinion regarding personal job situation remained almost unchanged, whereas the share of people thinking the employment situation in Lithuania will get better decreased by 8 p.p.

Trust in institutions

As in earlier studies, a tendency that Lithuanians have little trust in their state institutions persists this autumn. 69 percent of Lithuanian residents do not trust the Lithuanian government (67 percent in the spring of 2007) and 81 percent (79 percent in the spring of 2007) do not trust the Lithuanian parliament.

Compared to spring 2007, trust in TV decreased (-6 p.p.), as well as in the internet media (-5 p.p.). In addition, trust in the European Union slightly decreased (from 65 percent to 59 percent).

Lithuanians tend to have less trust in the state institutions, trades unions and political parties, compared to the average EU citizen; like the average European, Lithuanians have trust in radio and the internet, as well as in religious institutions and they have slightly more trust in television and the press. Lithuanians have more trust in the European Union, compared to EU citizens on average (59 and 48 percent respectively).

Benefits of the European Union membership

Residents of Ireland, Poland, Lithuania, Estonia and Greece are the most favourably disposed towards EU membership, i.e. with respective figures of 87 percent, 83 percent, 81 percent and 80 percent considering EU membership to be beneficial for their countries. The above results considerably exceed the EU average: only slightly more than a half of EU27 citizens (58 percent) think EU membership is beneficial for their countries.

Furthermore, Lithuanians are more favourably disposed towards EU membership than their Latvian neighbours, i.e. the share of those thinking EU membership is beneficial is only 57 percent in Latvia. Nevertheless, the above results are much higher than the results obtained in countries such as Cyprus, the United Kingdom or Hungary, where only about a half of the population thinks EU membership is beneficial, i.e. 52 percent, 47 percent and 47 percent respectively.

Key problems

As in many recent years, Lithuanians still attach the greatest importance to problems related to the economy, crime and health care system.

Just as in Lithuania, rising prices, inflation and crime are the key problems in the European Union overall as well. Unlike Lithuanians, EU27 citizens are more concerned about the level of unemployment, i.e. about a quarter of the EU27 poll considers this problem important. Nonetheless, the importance of unemployment in the EU is decreasing over time, i.e. 34 percent of people indicated unemployment as one of the key problems in the spring of 2007, whereas it was 40 percent in autumn 2006.

Compared to the last half-year, the importance of problems like crime, the economic situation and unemployment decreased in Lithuania (by 12 p.p., 8 p.p. and 6 p.p. respectively). However, concern about rising prices and inflation has increased considerably (14 p.p.). Concern about the latter problem also increased across the EU27 (8 p.p.).

European Union's role in various spheres of life

According to the Lithuanian poll, the European Union plays a positive more than a negative role in all the spheres, except for taxation and rising prices/inflation (the shares of people thinking the EU plays a positive role in these two spheres are 26 percent and 20 percent respectively, whereas a corresponding 29 percent and 50 percent of respondents think its role is negative in those spheres).

According to Lithuanians, the EU plays the most positive role in defence and foreign affairs, the economic situation, fighting terrorism, fighting unemployment and protecting the environment. The average EU27 respondent ranks these slightly differently: he thinks the EU plays a positive role in fighting terrorism, protecting the environment, defence and foreign affairs, fighting terrorism and the economic situation.

Lithuania's status in the European Union

Compared to EU27 citizens as a whole, Lithuanians more often tend to think that the biggest countries have the most power in the European Union; accordingly, a smaller

share of Lithuanians think their country's voice counts in the EU. Lithuanians also remain optimistic that Lithuania will become more influential in the EU in the future.

Image of the European Union

As in autumn 2006 and spring 2007, Lithuanians evaluate the European Union more favourably than residents of other countries do. Nevertheless, **the EU's image, which had been improving stably for a long time, slightly worsened this autumn both in the eyes of Lithuanians and Europeans in general:** 57 percent of Lithuanians and 49 percent of Europeans overall evaluate the EU positively, whereas the figures were 59 percent and 52 percent respectively in spring 2007 (53 percent and 50 percent in autumn 2006, and 51 percent and 44 percent in spring 2006).

Latvians evaluate the European Union less positively, whereas Estonians rate it similarly to Lithuanians, i.e. the shares of people in these countries thinking the EU conjures up a very positive or a positive image are 36 percent and 51 percent respectively.

Democracy in the European Union

The same tendency persists concerning the way democracy works, i.e. Lithuanians rate the situation in their country considerably lower than that across the EU - barely 24 percent of Lithuanians are satisfied with the way democracy works in their country, whereas 47 percent of Lithuanians are satisfied with democracy in the European Union. The above results reflect a big "Lithuanian" contrast, since this tendency is of a "reverse" nature in the EU as a whole – the average European is more satisfied with the way democracy works in his country than in the EU. **The index of satisfaction with the way democracy works in Lithuania is one of the lowest in the whole history of Eurobarometer survey.**

Levels of decision making

Although trust in the European Union has slightly decreased, Lithuanians tend to want decision-making in all the spheres, except for pensions, taxation and the educational system (last spring – also transport, fighting unemployment and social welfare) **at European Union level.** Other Europeans also tend to believe that the national government should handle aspects such as pensions, taxation, health and social welfare, the educational system and fighting unemployment 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, 62.3 percent of Lithuanians and 53.9 percent of the EU citizens on average favour joint decision-making at EU level. When it comes to the national Government, this ratio is 34.3 and 41.5 percent accordingly. Lithuanians have considerably less trust in the competence of their national government than the average European has; what is more, both Lithuanians and Europeans tend to favour more decision-making at EU level, i.e. last spring, 56.3 percent of Lithuanian citizens and 51.4 percent of EU citizens on average favoured decision-making at European Union level. **Thus, as was the case last year, the average EU citizen attaches more importance to the European Union institutions than to their national government.**

European Union institutions

The European Parliament, the European Commission, the European Central Bank, the Council of the European Union and the Court of Justice of the European Communities are the best known institutions of the European Union. More than a half of all the Lithuanians and EU27 citizens have heard about the above institutions.

Awareness of all the European Union institutions, except for the Committee of the Regions of the European Union and the Economic and Social Committee of the European Union, is lower among Lithuanians than the average EU citizen. Nonetheless, the level of trust in almost all the institutions (except for the Court of Justice of the European Communities, the European Ombudsman and the European Court of Auditors) is higher among Lithuanians than elsewhere in the EU.