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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

LITHUANIA

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Introduction

In Spring 2009, 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 poll's responses to the main questions of the survey; in addition, the 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 from preceding studies and an analysis of the survey results from the perspective of various social and demographic groups of respondents.

During the survey, 1,016 respondents were interviewed throughout Lithuania. The respondent (aged 15 and over) sample was generated 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 on June 12-25, 2009.

Lithuania in the European Union

The last half year was the time of tough challenges both for Lithuania and the European Union in general. The economic crisis, which pervaded Lithuania last autumn, gained an unprecedented level not experienced before the last six months. Even the gloomiest forecasts back in autumn 2008 did not predict such a big decline in GNP and such a large growth of in the unemployment rate. Yet, it seems that the first shock, which struck Europe after the financial crisis of autumn 2008 and spread across Lithuania after the election to the Seimas (Parliament), is calming down. As experts get more courageous in talking about the first signs of recovery in the world, the public moods are stabilizing little by little, while the overwhelming pessimism is receding, giving way to a more neutral attitude. This is all the more so because all Europeans are perfectly aware of this crisis being global – no country can solve its problems on its own. Therefore, everyone directs their attention to international organizations – the European Union, the IMF and the G20 – from whom they expect measures to overcome the crisis.

Although the economic and especially the employment situation in the country are still evaluated as being very complicated, the future, however, does not seem so gloomy.

The proportions of people claiming that the next year will be worse are not increasing, and declines are even observed in some cases. On the one hand, a considerable share of the people, especially those who have not lost their jobs and did not have credit liabilities, have not yet had to face the real impact of the crisis. On the other hand, the situation has now become so bad, it is hard to expect that times could become even worse.

The decisions of the present Government clearly also cast a lot of doubts among Lithuanians. A Government starting its activities with the shocking news about the status of the economy and increases in taxes, as well as decreases in public expenditure, can hardly expect great popularity. We shall see in a couple of years, whether its works will be evaluated by the society in a long-term perspective. Unquestionably, the present Government has made a number of controversial decisions. When asked what measures should be adopted to fight the repercussions of the economic crisis, both the Lithuanian and European polls give a very clear priority to support for small and medium business. Unfortunately, when looking at the decisions of the Seimas and the Government to date, many people would probably think that the national Government has quite different priorities.

European Union membership is still perceived as beneficial for Lithuania. Having dropped half a year ago, this index increased slightly again this spring. Although the European Union has not changed its attitude regarding the closing of Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant and we anticipate new challenges of energy in the beginning of the year, and though the European Central Bank and the European Commission did not offer the new EU member states the introduction of the Euro as a matter of exception, Lithuanians are, nevertheless, convinced that European Union membership is a positive thing. During the last half year, we were able to ascertain the benefits of membership when going shopping in neighbouring Poland which was cheaper. After all, when asked what the European Union means to them personally, both Lithuanians and respondents of other EU countries cite freedom to travel, study and work in first place. Probably, if such a great number of our country's residents had not moved to work in other EU countries, the problem of unemployment would have been even more painful. On the other hand, the current crisis has helped Lithuanian citizens to get rid of the illusions that the EU can be a shelter from all disasters.

Moreover, the convincing victory of Dalia Grybauskaitė in the Presidential election corroborates the fact that Lithuanians are very favourably disposed towards the European Union and its institutions. The election of the former member of the European

Commission corroborates a positive image of the EU institutions and trust in their competence and transparency. Distrust in the country's political institutions and its legal system, as well as a feeling of lack of social justice at the same time, were behind the core ideas of the electoral campaign of the new President. If the President and the Government succeed in rebuilding the trust that each person can expect justice, Lithuanian society will become considerably stronger and more capable of fighting various crises in solidarity. Although another election – to the European Parliament – passed uneventfully in Lithuania, it did produce some positive results too. The proportion of people aware of this institution increased in the country.

Despite hard times, majority of Europeans and Lithuanians view the future perspectives of the EU very optimistically. A majority of EU citizens believe that even in 20 years' time the EU will remain strong in economic terms and that it will become an even more important diplomatic power and its expansion will not be limited to the European continent. Thus, all we have to do now is to work to implement this optimism of Europeans. This hard period is a perfect time to reassess one's priorities and activity principles, get rid of unnecessary ballast and move forward with a new power.

Satisfaction with various spheres of life

Compared to the autumn of 2008, the share of Lithuanians satisfied with their current lives has remained almost unchanged, i.e. currently fewer than 6 out of 10 Lithuanians are satisfied with their current situation.

Lithuanians' opinion on the economic situation of the country has deteriorated rapidly. During the last half year, the share of people claiming the situation is good almost halved, and now only 8 percent of respondents hold this opinion. Similar, but even stronger trends are also observed with respect to the employment situation. The share of people considering the employment situation in their country good decreased to a seventh, i.e. from 21 to 3 percent.

Expectations for the next year

During the half year from the spring to autumn of 2008, the share of Lithuanians optimistically disposed to various aspects halved. However, we can now see the signs of recovery or at least of stabilization both in Lithuania and throughout Europe. In the autumn of 2008, 10 percent of Lithuanians thought the next year would be better. After half a year, the share of such people has reached 18 percent. The share of people claiming the economic situation will get even worse decreased from 60 percent to 47

percent. Similar tendencies are observed also when it comes to the family's financial situation and employment situation.

Benefit of the European Union membership

Respondents in Slovakia, Ireland, Estonia and Denmark are the most favourably disposed towards EU membership: more than three quarters of these countries' polls think that EU membership is beneficial for their countries. A favourable attitude towards the European Union has slightly increased in Lithuania (by 2 percentage points) during the last half year, whereas, it remained unchanged throughout the European Union as a whole. Nevertheless, this index is still 10 p.p. lower in Lithuania, compared to its highest point back in 2007.

Key problems

During the last half year, quite a number of changes occurred when it comes to the society's key problems. Inflation was the most important problem half a year ago. However, it is now superseded in the top three list by unemployment, the economic situation and taxation. Having been identified as some of the country's key problems for a long time, crime and inflation have moved into the background. Unemployment has become the most urgent problem both to Lithuanians and Europeans in general. The economic situation and taxation are the other two problems that top the list. The importance of the latter two problems has increased by 10 or more percentage points.

Image of the European Union

For a long time, Lithuanians have been evaluating the image of the European Union more positively than the rest of the Europe. However, this year, their figure is almost identical to the European Union average. 46 percent of Lithuanians evaluate the EU's image positively, whereas this share is 45 percent in the EU on average. During the crisis, the EU's image has suffered both in Lithuania and in other EU countries. In the spring of 2008, 59 percent of Lithuanians and 52 percent of EU respondents evaluated the EU's image positively.

European identity

Lithuanian and the average European respondents perceive the roots of European identity quite differently. According to Lithuanians, the European identity should first of all be based on two keystones: democratic values and a high level of social protection. The average European attaches the same importance only to one of the elements cited: democratic values. The idea of the social welfare state as an element of the European identity is most characteristic of Lithuanians in contrast to respondents across the European Union.

In addition to the two elements mentioned above, the average European indicates three more: a common history, geography and culture. These three elements are considerably less important to Lithuanians than the two mentioned previously. Interestingly, religion as an element of European identity is not important at all.

Economic crisis

A majority of both Lithuanian and European Union respondents think the situation of the economy in the world affects their countries greatly or at least partly. The proportion of people convinced the impact is very minimal or there is no impact at all reaches 13 percent in Lithuania and only 8 percent throughout the EU.

According to Lithuanians, their national government is the institution the least capable of dealing with the repercussions of the financial and economic crisis. Only 10 percent of people hold the contrary opinion. Moreover, a majority of respondents throughout the EU consider their national governments are the least capable of fighting the crisis. Therefore, a majority of Lithuanians and Europeans think international organizations would be the most successful in dealing with the repercussions, with the European Union being in first place. Lithuanians also cite the IMF and the USA, whereas the average European cites the G20 and the USA.

Both Lithuanians and Europeans as a whole perceive the measures most appropriate to handle the crisis very similarly. These should be, first of all, the support of small and medium businesses. According to respondents, support for the unemployed should be another priority.

Vision of the European Union's future

During this survey, European citizens were asked to imagine what the European Union would be like in 20 years' time. Although they see possible problems in the future, Europeans are essentially optimists when it comes to what they anticipate for the European Union in 20 years or more. 74 percent of Lithuanians and 64 percent of Europeans in general view the future optimistically. A majority of Lithuanians think life will be easier in the EU in the future.

A majority of Europeans believe the Euro will be stronger in the near future, compared to the US dollar, and the EU will be the leading diplomatic power throughout the world. In terms of the latter attitude, Lithuanians are not so optimistic, although quite a considerable proportion of them hold this view. 30 percent of Lithuanians think the EU will be only a secondary economic power in the future and 44 percent of them expect that the EU will expand beyond the borders of the European continent.