

REFERENDUM BRIEFING NO 8 THE LITHUANIAN EU ACCESSION REFERENDUM 10-11 MAY 2003

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Key points:

- After numerous changes in the law, the Lithuanian referendum on EU accession was held on 10-11 May 2003. It was the fourth of nine referendums to be held among the candidate states, and the first to be held in a former Soviet republic.
- The referendum was decisive and binding.
- Persuading voters to turnout appeared to be a problem: The Law on Referendums required a turnout of above 50% of all eligible voters in order make it valid.
- All the major political groups supported the Yes campaign and No supporters were only to be found among marginal political leaders and minor political parties.
- The campaign mainly supported the Yes camp and concentrated on raising the level of voter turnout.
- With 57% of all eligible voters turning out to vote Yes, the vote in favour of accession was the highest among the candidate countries to date¹.

The Legal Framework

The Lithuanian Law on Referendums remained unchanged since the Gorbachev “democratization” era (when it was adopted by the Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic on November 3rd, 1989) until the late 1990s. Only in 1999 did parliament begin to discuss proposals to amend the law, evidently connected with the forthcoming referendum on EU accession. The 1989 Law stipulated three thresholds. Firstly, more than 50% of eligible citizens had to turn out to vote. Secondly, more than 50% of eligible voters had to support the proposal. Thirdly, for a popular

¹ Also among all the nine accession referenda held in 2003

initiative for a referendum to succeed, 300, 000 voters' signatures were required. The third provision was also included in the 1992 Lithuanian Constitution.

As Table 1 shows, although the conditions of the 1989 Law were strict, there were three successful referendums held during the 'period of political enthusiasm' in 1991-1992. Firstly, the February 1991 plebiscite on whether or not Lithuania should become an independent democratic republic. Secondly, the June 1992 referendum on withdrawal of Russian troops. Thirdly, the October 1992 referendum on the adoption of the Constitution. One attempt to introduce a strong presidential model of government failed in a May 1992 referendum.

Table 1. Referendums* in Lithuania held before the May 2003 EU referendum

	Mode of initiative	Sufficient turnout	Positive decision	Total number of referenda held
1991-1992	Parliament	4	3	4
1994-1996	Popular initiative	0	0	1
	Parliament	4	0	5

NB - Popular initiatives when the required number of signatures (300,000) was not collected are not included here.

The same Law on Referendums was applicable after the adoption of the 1992 Constitution, although in no cases was there a positive outcome. This might be explained by a general decline in political activity by Lithuanian citizens. (Typical turnout in various recent elections is slightly above 50%.)

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, “the most significant issues concerning the life of the State and the People shall be decided by referendum”. The question of what is “the most significant issue” was to be determined by those who initiated the referendum. The Constitution instituted two means by which a referendum could be initiated: by parliament or by a popular initiative involving the collection of 300,000 signatures.

The Constitution also stipulated special cases when a referendum was mandatory and a qualified majority needed for a positive outcome. Firstly, amendments to the Constitutional provision “the State of Lithuania shall be an independent and democratic republic” require a 75% majority of all eligible voters to be in favour. Secondly, amendments to the Constitutional Act “On the Non-Alignment of the Republic of Lithuania to Post-Soviet Eastern Alliances” and amendments to Chapter I of the Constitution (“the State of Lithuania”) and Chapter XIV (“Amending the Constitution”) required a majority of more than 50% of all eligible voters.

Numerous and often controversial changes were made to the Lithuanian legislation (as in other Central and East European candidate states) in the run up to the 2003 referendum. In total, one can find 250 documents and their drafts which included word “referendum” in the database of the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania.

The first draft proposal to amend the 1989 Law was officially registered in a Parliament in 1999. It was proposed that there should be three kinds of referendums. Firstly, “decisive” ones, when a 50% vote in favour was still required, with the outcome being legally binding. Secondly, “ratification” referendums, when international agreements are ratified, and, thirdly, “consultative” referendums. In both of the latter cases, a turnout of more than 50% and more than 50% of the participants voting in favour was required. This proposal would have facilitated the ratification of the EU Accession treaty, at the same time as limiting the possibilities for using referendums as an instrument of internal politics. However, debate on the project did not begin until 2002, delayed by the agreement

among the main Lithuanian parties at the time of the 2000 parliamentary election to prioritise joint efforts towards Lithuania's integration into the EU.

The April 2002 draft proposal for a new Law on Referendums was discussed in the Lithuanian Parliament for two months. Its final version was adopted in June 2002, and it came into force at the beginning of 2003. In this version, all "Constitutional" referendums (see above) were called "obligatory/ mandatory". A special type of referendum, "regarding participation by the Republic of Lithuania in international organizations, should this participation be linked with the partial transfer of the scope of competence of Government bodies to the institutions of international organizations or the jurisdiction thereof" was introduced. A positive decision on this required more than a 50% turnout and at least one third of eligible voters to be in favor. Although the 2002 Law was designed to facilitate a positive result in the eventual EU accession referendum by being less restrictive than the 1989 Law, it remained restrictive enough, especially when compared with the corresponding laws in other candidate countries.

When this version of the Law entered into force, further discussions started again. On 21 January 2003, a draft proposal of the parliamentary decision for an obligatory referendum on EU accession to be held on 11 May 2003 was tabled in parliament. (An alternative date, 7 September 2003, was rejected by the Parliament). A new draft of the Law on Referendums was also proposed. On 19 February 2003 proposals to amend the 2002 Law were tabled in the Parliament containing two important innovations. Firstly, to abolish the requirement for a qualified majority of one third of the electorate for a positive decision. Secondly, if turnout is 50% of all of the electorate or less, an "expressed opinion could be accepted when parliament is discussing draft laws and other documents". This latter statement was treated as a violation of direct democracy by the population (it implied that the EU referendum would only have a consultative status). Following this negative reaction the proposal was withdrawn. Finally, the Law on Referendums (2003 version) was passed containing two thresholds. Firstly, that turnout had to be more than 50% of all eligible voters. Secondly, that a simple majority of participants was required for there to be a positive decision.

Finally, it was announced by parliament that the referendum "On the Accession of the Republic of Lithuania into the European Union" would be held on 10-11 May 2003. Voters would be asked to vote 'Yes' or 'No' to the following statement: "I am for Lithuania's membership of the European Union". The referendum would be decisive and binding, with no possibility for parliament to ratify the Accession Treaty in the event of a low turnout.

Although the hurdle for a positive decision was lowered twice compared to the 1989 Law, the conditions stipulated in the referendum legislation were still the strictest compared with other Central and East European candidate countries. The issue of securing the required 50% turnout on May 10-11 appeared to be a major problem.

Various measures were, therefore, included in the legislation to facilitate a higher turnout. Voting time was extended (6 am-10 pm instead of 7am-8pm during last elections) and voting was to be held over two days. All the voters were given the possibility to cast their vote in a "territory of temporary presence" during the polling days until 6 p.m. of the second voting day. The contingency of voting at home was also expanded. The possibility of postal voting was extended to 11 days prior to referendum (instead of 5 days). The question had to be written on the ballot paper in languages other than Lithuanian in those territories densely populated by ethnic minorities.

It is important to note that all the discussions described above were, to a significant extent, politically inspired by another, almost parallel and almost successful referendum initiative. On February 20, signatures started to be collected on amendments to the Constitution. Some important articles of the Constitution were to be amended: abolishing the proportional system of elections,

reducing the number of parliamentary deputies, and introducing directly elected mayors. Lithuanian political elites were strongly against this initiative, making the lowering of the referendum threshold hurdle seem less acceptable. Eventually, however, this referendum initiative collapsed due to an insufficient number of signatures being collected.

As an aside, it is worth noting that the actual result, 57% of all eligible voters voting in favour, would have been valid under all three versions of the Law on Referendums: 1989, 2002 and 2003.

The legal rules governing the referendum campaign itself provided for a special category of “discussion broadcasts” on LTV (Lithuania's public TV channel). Participants in these discussions had to register as either supporters or opponents, and the cast itself had to be organised by inviting at least one person with an opposing position (or, in cases where only one side of the argument was present, it was obligatory for the moderator to question them). However, LTV kept its right to broadcast information on the legal provisions connected with the referendum issue in addition to the “discussion broadcasts”.

The Referendum Campaign

The official campaign strategy

The government's European Union information campaign started officially in 2000. According to the government's “Strategy on Public Information and Education Preparing for Membership of European Union” its European Committee was to become the main body responsible for planning and implementing the strategy. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other state institutions, the non-governmental sector, prominent persons and community leaders, municipalities, the Delegation of the European Commission, member and candidate state Embassies were also mentioned as other key actors. In addition to the government structures, the mass media (central, regional, and specialised) were also to be involved. The different stages of the strategy were clearly delineated. The first stage of the strategy involved creating an infrastructure for state information sources and a local network for information distribution (with European information centres being established in 10 regions) and took place before the accession negotiations began. The second stage, that took place during the period of the accession negotiations, included an intensive and task-oriented information campaign, which ran up until the third stage around the signing and ratification of the accession treaty. The fourth stage, which will take place after the referendum, deals with the dissemination of specific and more detailed information.

The government's strategy was based on the assumption that positive attitudes towards European integration were stable and would not be changed by the accumulation of specific information (which could easily shift them in a positive or negative direction). Rather they would be more influenced by statements made at the national level emphasising national security and European identity. At the same time, the strategy sought to ensure that voting in the referendum was based on knowledge rather than emotion.

Moreover, the government's strategy included annual programmes containing specific and clearly defined tasks. These were designed to reinforce contacts with the regional media, regulate different tactics aimed at informing specific audiences and amending the strategy to take account of opinion poll results. The 2003 programme contained a number of innovative features that included involving well-known key personalities and hiring a public relations agency (chosen by a competitive process). New communications instruments were introduced as well as advertising and coverage on Lithuania's public TV channel, LTV. As agreed in a parliamentary debate on 28 January two new institutions were established to secure “a positive result in the referendum on

accession.” These were: a Co-ordinating Council including 22 of the highest ranking officials and presided over by the Chairman of the Lithuanian Parliament, Arturas Paulauskas; and a working group on the implementation of the information campaign.

A number of factors that could have had a possible influence on the outcome of the campaign were taken into account when formulating the official campaign strategy:

- Elections (parties were successful in avoiding pro and anti-European cleavages in candidates' programmes) and social protest (although public confidence in parliament and the government was consistently low, there were no extreme scandals in the months prior to referendum);
- The opinion of well-known leaders of member states towards Lithuania's EU accession (the negative impression given by the decision of the 1997 Luxembourg European Council not to include Lithuania in the first group of candidate countries had not been forgotten);
- Eliminating the incorrect rhetoric used by public officials about Europe (“Europe demands reforms/ unpopular decisions” was typical);
- The “domino effect” of referendums held in other candidate states (the influence of which was, in the event, positive even the low turnout in the Hungarian referendum which acted as a mobilising factor; see below).

The main campaign slogan was “Let's be Europeans”. There were comments that the referendum was an “emotional step,” a choice for which there was no alternative, that the country should unite around a symbol that was understandable to everyone: the choice of West instead of the East.

At the local level, especially in rural territories, the sub-municipal units (Seniunijos) were also closely involved in the campaign, as they possessed the highest levels of public confidence among all the government institutions. A separate, special programme for farmers and other rural inhabitants had already been introduced in 2002.

The financing of the information campaign cost approximately 1 million litas a year (1 Euro is equivalent to approximately 3.45 litas). For 2003, 1.545 million litas of campaign spending was planned but it was supplemented three times and, according to various sources, ended up spending as much as 5 million. However, compared to other candidate countries, the information campaign was actually relatively cheap.

Beyond the official government strategy and information campaign, a particularly important role was played by the Lithuanian Catholic Church, one of the most popular institutions according to the public opinion polls (Catholicism is the dominant religion in Lithuania). This unrestrained participation by the Lithuanian Catholic Church hierarchy in a political campaign was quite exceptional. The involvement of formal and informal Church networks encouraging participation in the referendum and sending clear signals in favour of accession might be one of the most important factors in explaining the positive referendum outcome. Churches themselves were one of the most reliable places where one was able to be sure in finding information on EU accession (there were special leaflets distributed in every church). Interviews with local political elites in South Eastern Lithuania, populated densely by ethnic Polish and Russian speakers (Catholics and Orthodox, respectively), showed that the Catholic Church was particularly influential here for Polish Catholics.

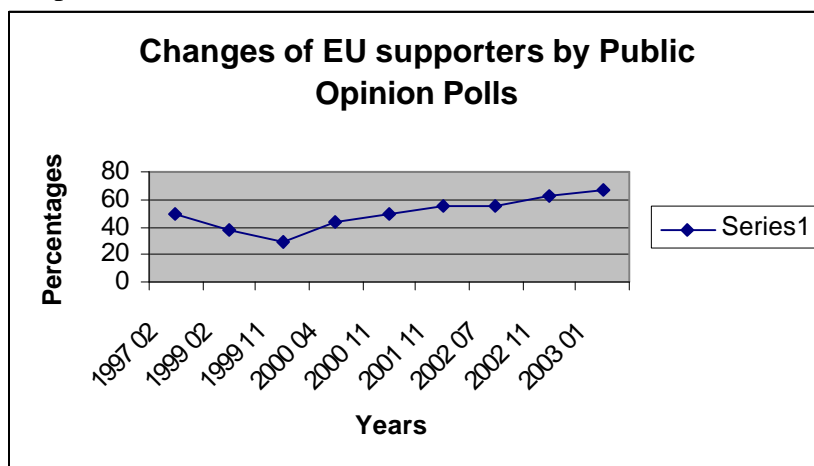
Information campaign chronology and public opinion changes

Integration into the EU probably became a subject of public debate, and began to be separated in the public mind from the "other integrations" (such as the Council of Europe or NATO), at the end of 1997. Six candidate countries were invited to begin accession negotiations by the Luxembourg European Council and, among the Baltic states, only Estonia was included, while Latvia and Lithuania were not.

Public opinion polls taken since 1997 point to a pattern of substantial instability in terms of attitudes towards EU membership.² As Graph 1 shows, at the beginning of 1997 there was a substantial number of EU supporters (49%) and small number of EU opponents. Subsequently, the numbers of Eurooptimists was reduced. By the end of 1999 only 29% of respondents answered that they were in favour of EU membership. For the first time number of Euro pessimists had increased to 35%. However, a few months later, in April 2000, the number of people supporting EU membership increased rapidly to 42%. From that moment on, support for EU membership continued to grow steadily.

All this instability could be explained by some events in Lithuanian domestic politics. According to the analysis set out in the government's public information strategy, more Eurosceptics appeared in December 1999 because of the unclear privatisation of one large oil company 'Mazeikiu nafta' when people were not sure if the government had concealed important information from them. As an important event affecting the level of Euro pessimism it is also possible to mention the consequences of the 1998 Russian financial crisis which led to the lowering of incomes and disappointment with the then ruling coalition. Citizens also felt that they knew too little about the EU and the rules of accession.

Graph 1.



Source: European Committee under the Government of Lithuania// www.euro.lt

Particular issues such as land property for foreigners (1995 and 2001), EU demands to close the Ignalina nuclear power station (1998), and transit of Russian citizens through Lithuanian territory to Kaliningrad exclave (2002) also raised public interest in the problems of integrating Lithuania into the EU.

The sudden increase in the number of Eurooptimists in 2000 could, therefore, be seen as representing the success of the public relations institutions responsible for Lithuanian EU

² www.euro.lt

integration. During this period there were: more speeches by political leaders with positive references to the EU; more interesting and informative TV programmes; and more newspaper articles on this subject.

During the first three years of the accession negotiations Lithuanian society had little feeling that the process of EU accession was one that involved the government. Only in 2002-2003 did this situation begin to change and accession came to be seen as an element of government politics. That is not surprising given that the closer that the country was to reaching the destination of EU membership, the more immediate became the relationship between the government and the accession process. If one compares the two stages of the public information strategy, then one could refer to the first stage as a neutral 'information campaign', and the second stage as a more aggressive 'agitation campaign'.

If one examines the socio-demographic features of the Lithuanian Eurosceptics and Eurooptimists, public opinion polls show that European integration was most actively supported by the young people (61.2%) together with those living in urban territories, having higher education and with higher incomes. The majority of Lithuanian Eurosceptics were to be found among people aged 40-49, living in rural regions, the less educated and those on the lowest incomes. We can also find a lot of ethnic Russians and Poles among the Eurosceptics.

Public opinion in favour of EU accession remained generally stable during the 2002-2003 period, but there were doubts about how actively people would participate at referendum. For example, forecasts of high participation in the 2002-2003 Presidential election were not realised with the actual turnout being only slightly higher than 50% due to apathy and protest voting habits. The relatively low voter turnout in the Presidential election was a clear signal that referendum campaigners would need to put a lot of resources into mobilising the necessary number of voters (50%) to participate in the EU referendum.

Public opinion studies taken in 2003 reported that many respondents had little sense that their vote would make any difference to the referendum results. A significant de-mobilising factor may have been the signing of EU accession treaty in Athens on 16 April 2003. Some people thought that this actually completed the accession process and that their opinion was irrelevant. Thus, informal surveys of rural voters showed that in some small towns and villages less than 30% of eligible voters intended to participate.

In April 2003, the public information campaign reverted to agitation. A typical reaction of participants in focus group discussions conducted during campaign was: "we feel ourselves pushed by the authorities to vote in favour instead of them giving us deeper knowledge on subject of the EU". Indeed, this time there was no more distinction in the public mind between an information campaign and agitation in favour of a Yes vote. Unfortunately, therefore, the pre-referendum information campaign came to be seen as being simultaneously both too intensive and too superficial.

The danger that the referendum could fail due to a low turnout was taken seriously, and even dramatised, by media. From these media discussions, citizens were thereby able to understand the consequences of their apathy and non-participation. Fears of voter passivity were reinforced by the Hungarian case. In contrast with Hungary, Lithuanian politicians had deprived themselves of the option to ratify the accession treaty through parliament in the event of a low turnout. That is why Lithuanian political elites awaited the referendum results with great anxiety. Indeed, after the first day of voting signs of panic became evident among the Lithuanian political leadership. In the event the final results revealed a much higher than expected turnout (although clearly in line with opinion poll forecasts).

The Yes and No camps

Officially, all the major parties expressed their support for the Yes campaign. The absence of visible campaigning efforts by almost all of the parties was understandable. Apart from being generally under-financed, parties did not receive any extra money from the government to conduct this particular campaign. The most visible party campaign was the Lithuanian Christian Democrats' 'Yellow bus ride' (supported by the European People's Party) that travelled across the country in two weeks, together with the government's 'Blue bus ride'. Other parties made their official statements, organised informal efforts, their leaders made public speeches and participated in media broadcasts.

Four prominent personalities that enjoyed the highest ranks in opinion polls – President Rolandas Paksas, former President (and current premier) Algirdas Brazauskas, parliamentary speaker Arturas Paulauskas, and former President Valdas Adamkus - were active in supporting the Yes campaign. The European Commissioner responsible for enlargement Guenther Verheugen also participated in a number of campaign events. An aerobatics display led by President Paksas, who is a professional pilot, was a notable highlight of the Yes campaign!

There were only three poorly organised groups of No campaigners: right wing radicals and extreme nationalists; small milk producers; and Russian speakers. There was also a poorly organised Eurosceptic movement, whose members were unknown to the general public. No one from the main political parties declared themselves publicly as a Eurosceptic. **No campaigners** could not even find a legally constituted organisation so that they could receive state funding, because they registered too late. As a result, the No campaign was weak, poorly funded and lacking any co-ordination. In fact, only three members of parliament, two marginal political parties and nineteen separate persons were registered as Eurosceptics; the **majority of them** virtually unknown. A number of potential Eurosceptics removed themselves from active campaigning, partly in order to avoid drawing attention to divisions within their own parties that could cause them to lose support.

According to the one of Eurosceptic deputies the mass media were influenced by the government “through different funds” to describe EU critics as marginal, populist and radical. All the usual Eurosceptic arguments (loss of sovereignty etc.) were only expressed consistently in television programmes after the referendum, where one of the Eurosceptics' repeated arguments was that “nobody had a right to agitate, to participate.”

It is possible to guess that the No campaign's strategy was based on an attempt to lower turnout. At least the television programmes broadcast after the referendum appeared to show this. The leader of the Young Lithuania party argued that the possibility to be able to publicly call upon voters to come to the polls and vote during polling days was a violation of law, because it enhanced turnout. He argued that “equal rights to say 'do not participate' are guaranteed by the Constitution.”

The weakness of the Eurosceptic argumentation, together with an absence of funds, made this a very one-sided campaign, although this was only really commented upon much later after the referendum was over. During the campaign, the media and elites did not wish to escalate such criticisms, compared with, say, the Czech Republic where opposition parties were criticising the campaign. The principle on which the information strategy was based, of “informing people, using the language of arguments and facts,” appears to have been violated during the final stages of the campaign.

Typically, the word “propaganda” was used in a positive context in a speech by prime minister Algirdas Brazauskas after the EU referendum was over, **an indirect acknowledgement that there was little distinction in the government's campaign between the “information” and “propaganda.”**

However, the government's activities were also in line with the natural and long developing mood of the majority of the nation of “feeling European” (that is, “non-Soviet” or “non-Russian-dominating”). Like Slovenians, many Lithuanians had the feeling that they were still “in the process of seceding from dangerous empires”, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia respectively.

The Results

Although a Yes vote was widely expected, experts were warning that voters might be passive in turning out to express their opinion on the EU membership. However, the results of the binding accession referendum did not confirm these warnings. According to the Lithuanian Central Electoral Committee, as many as 63.37% of Lithuanian voters turned out to vote. Among valid votes 91.07% were Yes votes and only 8.93% No votes (see Table 2).

Table 2: Results of the 2003 EU Accession referendum in Lithuania

	Total	% of valid votes	% of registered votes
Registered Voters	2 638 886	100	
Votes Cast	1 672 317	63.37	
Invalid Votes	20 526	1.23	
Valid Votes	1 651 791	98.77	
Yes	1 504 264	91.07	57.00
No	147 527	8.93	5.59

Source: The Lithuanian Central Electoral Committee,

http://www.vrk.lt/2003/referendumas/rezultatai/rez_e_16.htm

The precise referendum question was: "I am for Lithuania's membership of the European Union."

The geographical pattern of voter turnout was much the same as in other elections. Urban dwellers, especially those living in the big Lithuanian cities, were among the most active (average turnout was 65%, Yes' support 92.2%). The protest voting that was expected in rural areas did not transpire. The turnout in villages or smaller towns was about the same as the average for the whole of the country. The most passive voters were in the South-Eastern region of Lithuania where a majority of people are Russian and Polish speakers. The lowest turnout (37.2%) was in Visaginas where a majority of citizens are Russian speakers working in the Ignalina nuclear power station, with 21.56% voting against EU membership. There were similar result in the Salcininkai region where a large number of Polish people live alongside ethnic Lithuanians; there was a higher turnout (56.13%) but a similar No vote (20.6%). Opinion polls taken prior to the referendum indicated that these would be the areas of greatest opposition to EU membership.

Unfortunately, there is no information available from Lithuanian exit polls. The referendum campaign organisers did not make any results available, so it is impossible to know the precise reasons why people voted Yes or No.

Pre-referendum public opinion polls and other studies predicted the relatively low turnout. Nevertheless, the referendum turnout was higher than in previous elections held in Lithuania. Politicians and analysts have several explanations for this relatively high turnout. Firstly, Lithuanian political leaders decided to hold a two day referendum, and they were very active in persuading voters to come to the polls on both days even though the referendum law forbids agitation 30 hours before voting is due to begin. These exhortations could have had a significant impact on the final turnout. Secondly, some commentators argue that Lithuanian civil society is becoming more active, and many people who voted did so out of civic mindedness. Thirdly, the information/agitation campaign was successful in mobilising voters. Fourthly, the strong support of the Lithuanian Catholic Church was also of great value. Fifthly, a special campaign by Lithuanian supermarkets

launched on the second day of the campaign - selling cheaper beer, soap and chocolate to any person who proved his participation in the referendum - might also have been important.

The very high level of support for EU membership, with 91.07% voting Yes, was much more surprising. Opinion polls known to the public and politicians had predicted a 60-70% Yes vote³. Several factors account for this very high Yes vote. Firstly one cannot deny the success of information and agitation campaigns in selling EU idea to the Lithuanian society. Although this campaign paid more attention to voters' emotions than their knowledge on EU matters, its final results were very effective. One important achievement of this campaign was the mobilisation and activation of young people who have usually been very passive during Lithuanian elections. During the referendum campaign these people were very active Yes supporters. Secondly, due to the fact that the campaign stressed that substantial sums of money would be coming to Lithuania from EU, many those who were sceptical or undecided people eventually voted for membership, believing that it would meet their aspirations more effectively than the Lithuanian government. Thirdly, a wish to be part of the West and not the East was the final motive in persuading people to vote for EU.

Conclusion and Future prospects

With all the major political groups supporting the Yes campaign and No supporters only to be found among marginal political leaders and minor political parties, it is not surprising that Lithuanians turned out to vote Yes so overwhelmingly. The main issue was whether or not the 50% turnout would be met to make the referendum valid. In the event, this was comfortably secured with 63.37% of voters turning out to vote and 91.07% of these voting Yes. With 57% of all eligible voters supporting EU membership, the proportion of all voters in favour of accession was the highest among **all of the nine accession referendums held in 2003**.

Opinion polls carried out after the referendum showed that it had no noticeable impact on the ratings of the political parties.⁴ Although there were several statements by the ruling coalition representatives such as "this successful referendum showed the strength of our party", in fact no one party particularly benefited from it. The positive result of the Lithuanian EU referendum maintains the stability of both the internal and external political situation. In contrast, the long-drawn out and unsuccessful election of the Mayor of Vilnius, the capital city of Lithuania, was commented upon as having a greater impact upon citizens' support for political parties.

However, public interest in European issues seems to have been enhanced by referendum campaign: for instance, with the outcome of the European Convention seen as quite significant. After the successful ratification of the accession treaty, the June 2004 European Parliament elections will be another important event in the process of further Lithuanian integration to EU. European Parliament elections will be held shortly before the next regular parliamentary elections (scheduled for October 2004). These two campaigns are expected to be mutually connected: apart from the fact that parties will compete ideologically on European issues, the European Parliament elections will also be seen as a test of their domestic strength.

This is the latest in a series of election and referendum briefings produced by the European Parties Elections and Referendums Network (EPERN). Based in the Sussex European Institute, EPERN is an international network of scholars that was originally established as the Opposing Europe Research Network (OERN) in June 2000 to chart the divisions over Europe that exist within party

³ Although the May 2003 Eurobarometer prognoses, published in July 2003, showed that within a sample of respondents who indicated they would definitely come and vote, 93% were Yes supporters.

⁴ <http://www.5ci.lt/ratings2/lit/frameset.htm>

systems. In August 2003 it was re-launched as EPERN to reflect a widening of its objectives to consider the broader impact of the European issue on the domestic politics of EU member and candidate states. The Network retains an independent stance on the issues under consideration. For more information and copies of all our publications visit our website at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/1-4-2.html>.