

# Lithuanian Citizens' Panel on the Future of Europe

## Report

This report is divided into four parts. The first briefly presents how the event was organised. The second sets out the recommendations for EU and Lithuanian national policies formulated by the Citizens' Panel participants. The third provides a brief analysis of the groups' discussions and the main outcomes of the panel. The fourth compares the outcomes of the Citizens' Panel with the results of surveys of Lithuanian citizens on the state and future of Europe.

### 1. *Organisation of the National Citizens' Panel*

Following the Conference on the Future of Europe guidance for organising National Citizens' Panels, in December 2021, the Lithuanian branch of research agency Kantar TNS, on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, developed a methodology for the random, stratified and representative selection of Lithuanian citizens, on the basis of which Kantar TNS selected 25 Lithuanian citizens aged between 18 and 65, representing different socio-economic groups and all the geographic regions of Lithuania<sup>1</sup>.

On 4 January, the selected citizens were invited to a virtual opening session, during which the idea behind the National Citizens' Panel was presented and the topics most relevant to the future of Europe were discussed. After the event, the participants received a document describing the issues discussed in more detail and providing sources of information.

On 15 January, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted the National Citizens' Panel on the Future of Europe. The event was organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Eastern European Studies Centre (EESC) and Kantar TNS research agency. The 25 selected citizens participated in person.

The panel participants discussed two EU policy issues: what the **EU's role and powers in foreign policy** should be, and what its **economic role** should be. During the event, a separate session was dedicated to each of these topics, at the beginning of which EU policy experts Linas Kojala (EESC) and Prof. Ramūnas Vilpišauskas (University of Vilnius) briefly familiarised the citizens with information and issues relevant to the subject of the session. The citizens could ask questions and share their views. After the introduction from the expert, the participants were divided into three smaller groups that each formed a representative sample, and each group had to consider a different question related to the topic of the session. In the session on foreign policy, the following questions were discussed:

- 1.1. Is there a need for an autonomous EU defence and foreign policy?
- 1.2. What sort of relationship should the EU have with its neighbours in Eastern Europe, with North Africa and with Turkey?
- 1.3. What kind of migration policy should the EU have?

In the session on the economic role of the EU, the following questions were addressed:

- 2.1. Is there a need for greater redistribution of funds under the EU budget, and for common EU borrowing?
- 2.2. Should social standards be regulated at EU level?
- 2.3. How can the EU's economy be strengthened?

At the end of the session, each group had to formulate the main conclusions of their discussion, in the form of statements of principle or more concrete proposals regarding current EU policy issues. Then, during the general discussion, a representative from each group presented those conclusions to the other panel participants, and the participants from the other groups could ask questions and offer suggestions to complement the proposals. After the presentations and discussions, the citizens voted individually in favour of two conclusions: the proposal or statement that was most important for strengthening Lithuania's role in the EU and for the success of the EU itself across Europe; and the statement or proposal that seemed most important for the personal well-being of the participant as a resident of the EU. The vote was followed by a discussion summarising the main ideas raised during the National Citizens' Panel.

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<sup>1</sup> Citizens representing the cities of Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Šiauliai and Panevėžys and the counties of Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Šiauliai, Panevėžys, Alytus, Marijampolė, Tauragė, Telšiai and Utena were selected, according to data from the Lithuanian Department of Statistics.

In the week following the event, the experts examined the content of the discussions and refined the ideas put forward by citizens. On 25 January, a virtual summary session was held during which citizens were presented with the recommendations that had emerged from the content of their discussions. The citizens had the opportunity to state whether they supported the recommendations, to supplement their content and to rank them. This opportunity was open to all participants for one week after the summary session, during which they could send their views and comments in writing to the panel organisers.

## 2. *Outcomes of the National Citizens' Panel*

This part of the report presents the outcomes of the National Citizens' Panel, i.e. the recommendations and statements formulated by the working groups on the role of the EU in foreign policy and the economy.

### **First session: The EU's role and powers in foreign policy**

1. We invite the EU to develop a more effective policy towards China. Stronger support for Lithuania is needed, but Lithuania should also better align its position with its EU partners. In order to ensure a more effective alignment of interests within the EU and a unified policy on China, as well as on other foreign policy issues, we recommend that consideration be given to the possibility of creating an EU Minister for Foreign Affairs.
2. We recommend returning, at EU level, to the question of establishing a quota system for migrants.
3. We recommend that a commission dedicated to dealing with migration challenges be set up at EU level, to ensure a quicker response to migration crises, to guarantee Member States' right to explain and defend their national interests, and to draw up and implement common guidelines for migration management.
4. We recommend strengthening economic and humanitarian ties with North African countries, keeping their political situations in mind, in particular with a view to reducing the influence of China, Russia and other countries on the region.
5. We recommend strengthening ties with Eastern Europe, promoting economic measures that reach individuals.
6. We call for EU sanctions against foreign entities to be stricter, more targeted and to include key individuals from the sanctioned state (e.g. political leaders).
7. We call for the EU's common foreign and security policy to be based on the fundamental principle of solidarity between different EU Member States, European regions and societies.
8. We recommend that the EU review its hitherto open migration policy, which is causing security problems, driving up crime and creating closed communities within society.
9. We invite Lithuania to speak up more actively on migration policy issues and initiate discussions about migration challenges.
10. We recommend that the EU pursue an active and rigorous policy towards states that use migratory flows as a tool for hybrid attacks, by unanimously applying stricter sanctions while also talking to them with a view to de-escalating the situation.

### ***Second session: The economic role of the EU***

1. We recommend that the EU take various measures to enhance the security of supply of important goods: prioritising intra-EU trade, promoting the manufacture of high-tech products and further diversifying import sources. We also recommend continuing to look for new export markets.
2. We recommend reviewing the approach to natural gas contracts, to pursue both long- and short-term contracts. We recommend further diversifying energy supply sources.
3. We recommend assessing the measures of the European Green Deal and their implementation, taking into account possible negative socio-economic consequences. In working towards the objectives of the Green Deal, we recommend using energy from nuclear and natural gas in addition to renewable energy sources.
4. We stress that it is essential for all Member States to respect the primacy of EU law. We call for Lithuania to take a clear and principled position in this regard.
5. We recommend that Lithuania make greater use of best practices in EU countries, to achieve its goals of

higher social standards, business development and balanced and sustainable development.

6. We recommend that greater emphasis be placed on enhancing cybersecurity, including data infrastructure protection.
7. We recommend that the EU and its Member States prioritise the promotion of economic literacy among citizens, education and the dissemination of information.
8. We recommend that new EU trade agreements include ambitious social, labour and health standards. We recommend setting guidelines at EU level as to what social media platforms are required to do and what they may not do in their management of user information and personal data.
9. We recommend that further consideration be given to common borrowing at EU level, with a view to creating more favourable borrowing conditions. We also recommend developing financially sustainable and responsible policies that reduce Member States' need to borrow.
10. We recommend strengthening oversight of the absorption and use of EU funds, starting with municipalities, and consolidating the current practice of adjusting the use of funds. Since the objective circumstances of the beneficiaries of EU funding can change, it is very important to balance the need for transparency with the need for flexibility.
11. We recommend that Lithuania continue to actively promote business development and investment in its regions.

### 3. Analysis of the discussions and outcomes of the National Citizens' Panel

Participants in the National Citizens' Panel considered the most important issues currently relevant to Lithuania (ones which are widely debated in national politics and the media) and their possible solutions. The vote on the panel's most important conclusions showed that almost 45 % of the total votes in both sessions were given to proposals on two topics: relations with China and management of migration flows (see table below). The issue of energy policy also received a great deal of attention: although there was only one proposal on this subject, it received almost 10 % of all the participants' votes. These voting results suggest that citizens' perception of the future of Europe may be determined by existing (national) political problems and current affairs.

Recommendation	Votes
<b>First session: The EU's role and powers in foreign policy</b>	
1. We invite the EU to develop a more effective policy towards China. The support Lithuania is currently receiving is insufficient, but Lithuania has also not sufficiently aligned its position with its EU partners. In order to ensure a more effective alignment of interests within the EU and a unified policy on China, as well as on other foreign policy issues, we recommend that consideration be given to the possibility of creating an EU Minister for Foreign Affairs.	11 (22.9 %) <i>8 important for Europe as a whole, 3 personally</i>
2. We recommend returning, at EU level, to the question of establishing a quota system for migrants.	9 (18.8 %) <i>9 important for Europe as a whole</i>
3. We recommend that a commission dedicated to dealing with migration challenges be set up at EU level, to ensure a quicker response to migration crises, to guarantee Member States' right to explain and defend their national interests, and to develop and implement common guidelines for management of migrants.	7 (14.6 %) <i>3 important for Europe as a whole, 4 personally</i>
4. We recommend strengthening economic and humanitarian ties with North African countries, keeping their political situations in mind, in particular with a view to reducing the influence of China, Russia and other countries on the region.	6 (12.5 %) <i>6 important personally</i>
5. We recommend strengthening ties with Eastern Europe, taking economic measures that reach individuals.	5 (10.4 %) <i>5 important personally</i>
<b>Second session: The economic role of the EU</b>	
1. We recommend that the EU take a range of steps to enhance the security of supply of important goods: prioritising intra-EU trade, promoting the manufacture of high-tech products within the EU and further diversifying	9 (19.6 %) <i>3 important for Europe as</i>

	import sources. We also recommend exploring new export markets.	<i>a whole, 6 personally</i>
2.	We recommend reviewing the approach to natural gas contracts, to pursue both long- and short-term contracts. We recommend further diversifying energy supply sources.	9 (19.6 %)  <i>9 important for Europe as a whole</i>
3.	We recommend assessing the measures of the European Green Deal and their implementation, taking into account possible negative socio-economic consequences. In working towards the objectives of the Green Deal, we recommend using energy from nuclear and natural gas in addition to renewable energy sources.	6 (13 %)  <i>6 important personally</i>
4.	We stress that it is important for all Member States to respect the primacy of EU law. We call for Lithuania to take a clear and principled position in this regard.	4 (8.7 %)  <i>2 important for Europe as a whole, 2 personally</i>

Moreover, the issues that matter most to citizens – relations with China, migration and energy – are not of an ad hoc nature: how they are resolved will have a big impact on Europe’s long-term future. Accordingly, the fact that current affairs are likely to be at the forefront of citizens’ minds when they think about the future is not problematic. As the future is built in many small steps starting today, understanding citizens’ basic expectations in the short term is a prerequisite for being able to manage long-term processes and solve problems in a sustainable way. This reasoning underpins the below analysis of the main outcomes of the National Citizens’ Panel.

The highest total number of votes (11, or close to 12 %) went to the statement that **the EU needs a more effective policy towards China**. This overall conclusion encompassed a number of more specific statements. Firstly, participants stressed that the EU support provided thus far to Lithuania in the face of economic pressure from China had been insufficient. Secondly, the representatives of the group that delivered the conclusion stressed that Lithuania also needed to step up its coordination of its policy towards China with its EU partners, especially because trade with China remained important for the EU as a whole. Thirdly, citizens put forward the idea that establishing the post of an EU Minister for Foreign Affairs could help to coordinate positions and shape common policies on China and other issues more effectively. Eight participants identified this conclusion as particularly important for Europe as a whole and three as important for themselves personally.

The issue of relations with China is closely linked to two other proposals that received a high number of citizens’ votes. Nine participants voted in favour of the conclusion drawn during the second session that **the EU needs to strengthen security of supply** (three participants indicated that this was of great importance for Europe as a whole and six others that it was personally important for them). This conclusion, too, encompassed several facets. Firstly, citizens stressed the need to prioritise EU markets, which were characterised by reliable suppliers and higher product standards. Secondly, participants stressed the need to promote high-tech production capacities within Europe itself. Thirdly, citizens were in favour of further diversifying import sources. In formulating these recommendations, those taking part in the discussion continually referred to China as a factor: security threats associated with Chinese products, dependence on the supply of raw materials from China for manufacturing high-tech products, and China’s practice of copying or stealing technologies from Western companies operating in its market. A further six votes (‘personally important’) went to the proposal to **develop the EU’s economic and humanitarian cooperation with North African countries**, because it was important to reduce the influence of China, as well as Russia and other unfriendly states, in those countries.

The results of the voting also revealed citizens’ concerns about migration issues. In the area of foreign policy, two of the three conclusions that received the most votes centred on migration. Nine participants voted in favour of the proposal that **the EU should revisit the possibility of setting up a system of compulsory migrant quotas for Member States** (they all stressed the particular importance of this proposal for the whole of Europe). The participants who formulated the conclusion were in favour of basing national quotas on population and allocating EU co-financing to provide for the migrants distributed according to the quotas. A further seven participants voted in favour of the proposal to **set up a permanent functional commission at EU level to address migration issues, to which representatives of the Member States would be delegated** (three considered the proposal of particular importance for Europe as a whole and four personally important for them). Participants stressed that such a body could speed up the EU’s response to migration crises, while ensuring an appropriate balance between respect for common EU principles and the right of Member States to defend their national interests and security.

During their discussions on migration policy, participants discussed two different crises in the management of migration flows: the 2016 Mediterranean migration crisis and the 2021 Belarusian hybrid attack on Lithuania, Latvia and Poland, when Minsk exploited flows of migrants from the Middle East and Africa. A number of panel participants said that the 2016 crisis had seemed distant and irrelevant, both for them and for Lithuania as a whole, and that the proposal first put forward at that time to set up a migrant quota system had not seemed appropriate. According to the participants, the experience of a hybrid attack had brought migration in Eastern Europe into focus and led to a fresh assessment of quotas as an appropriate, effective and solidarity-based migration policy instrument. Several participants stressed that when confronted with the 2021 crisis it became difficult to distinguish between refugees, migrants and persons posing security threats entering the country's territory. All participants in the debate agreed that the current 'open' EU migration policy did not sufficiently take into account the threats posed by migration, the national interests of the Member States, the capacity to integrate migrants, etc. The citizens also criticised the EU for its slow or negative response to Lithuania's needs, including its refusal to finance the construction of a barrier at the external border.

In conclusion, the two most prominent policy issues for Lithuania in 2021 – relations with China and the management of migration flows – are prompting Lithuanian citizens to demand greater EU involvement and more effective common policy. Citizens are concerned about China's policy and its growing influence in Europe and the EU's neighbourhood. It must be acknowledged that China's economic influence compels Europe to seek appropriate balanced policy measures. The main solution, according to the citizens, is to strengthen common EU foreign policy instruments, industrial policy and cooperation with neighbours. Similarly, citizens identified united action at EU level, including a possible new quota system for migrants, as probably the most appropriate way to avoid the security threats posed by migration and to manage migration flows to Europe quickly and effectively. The participants in the Citizen's Panel took the view that a stronger and more closely coordinated common EU policy would be the best response to the increasing pressure from China and the hybrid attack by Belarus.

The panel participants' views on these crises can be compared with their proposals on energy and climate policy issues. At the end of 2021, many Lithuanian citizens were directly confronted with the challenge of rising heating costs, and the energy price crisis quickly became one of Lithuania's most important current issues. Concerns about energy prices were also reflected in how the panel participants voted: nine citizens even voted in favour of the conclusion that this was the most important topic for Europe as a whole. The participants' main recommendation was to **review Member States' current practices in concluding energy supply contracts with different suppliers with a view to concluding both long-term and short-term contracts**. In other words, citizens supported a policy of energy diversification, but did not make any recommendations for a common EU policy and did not recommend further integration of energy policy.

As regards climate policy, citizens recommended **evaluating the measures of the European Green Deal in terms of their expected socio-economic impact and ambition**. Six participants voted in favour of that proposal, all of them classing it as personally important. Some participants worried that the 'green transition' was being carried out too quickly and argued that Lithuania needed to assess more carefully whether such policies might be detrimental to the needs of the country and its citizens. The need to use nuclear energy and natural gas alongside renewable energy sources was also raised by several participants. In support of their position, they referred to Germany's decision to continue using natural gas and tap the potential of the new generation of so-called modular nuclear power plants. In their discussions of climate policy, the panel participants thus prioritised Member States' policies designed to meet national needs, rather than an ambitious common EU climate governance policy.

Given the relatively small number of participants in the panel and the citizens' different responses (more united action or more flexibility) to different types of crises, it would not be appropriate here to consider generalised and more widely applied measures. However, this trend in opinions may yield interesting topics for further research into the attitudes of Lithuanian citizens to EU integration issues, which should take into account changes and differences in citizens' attitudes towards autonomous EU policies and institutional measures.

#### *4. Outcomes of the Citizens' Panel in the broader context of Lithuanian public opinion*

To put the outcomes of the National Citizen's Panel in context, this last section of the report compares them briefly with the results of two relevant public opinion polls and the interim results of other

preparatory activities for the Conference on the Future of Europe. The first opinion poll examined in this part of the report is a [survey](#) of citizens carried out by Eurobarometer in October and November 2020 on the Conference on the Future of Europe. The second is the most recent Standard Eurobarometer [survey](#), conducted in summer 2021. As parts of these surveys focused on other policy matters and on citizens' expectations of the conference itself, the following comparisons are made in respect of the topical issues covered by the panel. The analysis of the preparatory activities for the Conference on the Future of Europe is based on an initial report on those activities by the EESC, which sets out the views of the participating citizens on a wide range of EU policy issues.

The results of the Eurobarometer surveys suggest that the discussions and voting patterns of the Citizens' Panel participants are a fair reflection of the views prevailing in Lithuanian society. The panel participants' recommendations to strengthen common foreign and migration policy and some decision-making at EU level are in line with the wider public opinion polls:

- Lithuanian citizens are more supportive of a common EU defence policy than the EU average (90 % and 78 %, respectively);
- Lithuanian citizens are more supportive of a common EU migration policy than the EU average (76 % and 71 %; a possible margin of error should be indicated with this difference);
- Lithuanian citizens see migration as one of the two main challenges for the EU;
- Lithuanian citizens are more favourable to solutions at EU level (49 % as compared to 42 %).

Lithuanian citizens who participated in the preparatory events for the Conference on the Future of Europe also highlighted the importance of defence cooperation, common EU migration policy and EU foreign policy as areas in which Lithuania would be interested in seeing greater EU involvement.

The data from the Eurobarometer surveys may explain the panel participants' views on relations with China and energy prices: Lithuanians were more concerned than the EU average about deteriorating relations between the world's countries and the resulting geopolitical tensions (33 % as compared to 18 %). The panel participants' conclusions on the need to develop a more ambitious common policy towards China are in line with both these findings and the abovementioned support for decision-making at EU level and for a common EU defence policy. On the other hand, the panel participants' concerns about finding various solutions to reduce energy prices may be linked to the fact that Lithuanians are much more concerned than the EU average about rising inflation and rising prices (53 % and 23 %). Sensitivity to rising inflation makes containing price increases seem more important than developing common EU policies or other policy objectives.

The Eurobarometer data also reveal an interesting change in Lithuanian citizens' attitudes towards migration as a political problem. In the 2020 survey, fewer Lithuanians than the EU average identified migration as the most important challenge for the future of the EU (16 % versus 27 %); but in the 2021 survey, the proportion of Lithuanian respondents identifying migration as the main problem for the EU had increased to 32 % (EU average: 25 %). While such a shift in opinion may be attributable to differences in the wording of the question, it is also in line with the insights that the participants in the Citizens' Panel discussions shared into how their views on migration issues had developed.

In addition, a comparison of the outcomes of the Citizens' Panel and data from the Eurobarometer survey reveals a difference between the rather cautious attitude of the panel participants to EU climate policy and the concerns of Lithuanian citizens about climate change. While the panel participants called for an assessment of whether the European Green Deal is too ambitious and could harm Lithuania's interests, Lithuanians have consistently cited climate change as one of the most important challenges for the EU, according to the Eurobarometer surveys. In the 2020 survey, 47 % of Lithuanian respondents named the climate as the main global challenge for the future of the EU (EU average: 45 %); in the 2021 survey the figure was 28 % of Lithuanian respondents (EU average: 25 %). It should be stressed that citizens who participated in the other preparatory events for the Conference on the Future of Europe also referred to climate policy as one of the areas where Lithuania should be most interested in greater EU involvement. This difference may well be explained by the panel participants' motivation for voting: all those who voted for the recommendation to re-examine the European Green Deal measures indicated that the topic was important to them personally. This means that personal opposition may not be incompatible with the view that climate change is one of the most important policy challenges facing the EU.