

**CEBAST News**  
*A Newsletter from the Centre for Baltic Studies at the Öresund University*

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**\*\*\* Special Issue - Polish and Lithuanian EU Referenda: Analyses from Within \*\*\***

Editorial Note

*One year after its establishment, Cebast News launches its first major editorial project. We have realized that this time is by far the most appropriate to launch such initiative, since the enlargement of the European Union can be regarded as the single most important development in the political, economic and social milieu of the Baltic Sea Region since the end of the Cold War. By May next year, in fact, Poland and three Baltic Republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania will access the EU, turning the Baltic Sea into a truly EUropean Sea.*

*In order to make this historic development happen, citizens in these countries have been asked by means of a referendum to decide whether they favor the accession or not. In return, we have asked to a number of scholars from the four countries to comment upon the results of the referenda, in order to provide a view 'from within' with respect to these crucial upcoming changes, to which the international audience is perhaps less accustomed. The referenda in Lithuania and Poland took place in May and June, while in the cases of Estonia and Latvia the referenda will be in mid-September, as this number of Cebast News was issued. Hence, the account of the Lithuanian and Polish referenda appears in this number, before the sections that normally compose Cebast News, while the account on Estonia and Latvia will be presented in the next number.*

*Finally, we take the opportunity to thank the two contributors to this number: Mindaugas Jurkynas, from the Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Vilnius University and Kazimierz Musial from the Department of Scandinavian Studies, University of Gdansk and the Alfried Krupp Institute for Advanced Study, Greifswald, Germany.*

The Editor and CEBAST

**The Polish EU referendum**

By *Kazimierz Musial*, Department of Scandinavian Studies, University of Gdansk and Alfried Krupp Institute for Advanced Studies, Greifswald, Germany

As was expected, the national referendum held on June 7-8, 2003, indicated that a majority of the population in Poland accepted the membership of their country in the EU. Turnout at the polling stations was 58.85% of eligible voters, 77.45% of whom supported Polish membership in the EU, 22.55% against. The results were hardly surprising, as opinion polls have never shown the majority of Polish voters to be opponents of EU membership. Nevertheless, the referendum and the campaign witnessed the emergence of new dynamics in Polish politics.

The intensive referendum campaign has not changed the prevailing dominance of the “yes” votes, which has been one of the most stable factors in the EU campaign and constantly remained in excess of 65%. However, the debate mobilised the “no” voters, who presented themselves as the final and lone defenders of the Polish nation–state, national values and character. As the factions for and against EU membership had been more or less stable for quite some time, the only real challenge for the politicians and EU enthusiasts was to ensure that the threshold level of 50% turnout was secured. Failure to meet this criterion would have rendered the referendum invalid and the decision of joining the EU would have been surrendered to the parliament. Neither the parliamentarians nor any serious politician were interested in being forced to exercise this option to determine Poland’s future.

Poland has not had a long tradition of direct democracy; the referendum therefore became a testing ground for this kind of decision-making pursuant to lines introduced in the 1997 constitution. The first precedent was set when the parliament decided to allow the referendum to proceed over two days in order to ensure that as many people as possible had opportunity to cast their ballot. In reality most of the EU proponents were afraid that reaching the threshold level for participation may be problematic; therefore they welcomed the parliament’s decision. The second precedent to be observed was the constitution of a pro-European block in Polish politics, regardless of the varying political affiliations of its most active and influential members. In several respects this clearly demonstrated that for the majority of politicians and decisionmakers, the Polish *raison d’etat* superseded political dissonances.

The pre-referendum campaign, despite some less fortunate information spots, was conducted in an organised and professional manner; every effort was made to separate it from the current political situation. It was feared that the plummeting popularity of the current Social Democratic Government could reduce the referendum to a demonstration of dissatisfaction with the Government’s policy-making and economic stagnation. Immediately prior to the referendum, Prime Minister Leszek Miller was found to be the most unpopular government leader since 1989, despite his bargaining successes at the close of the EU membership negotiations in Copenhagen in December 2002. If he were to personify the campaign, he would surely be a heavy burden upon the optimistic visions presented by the Euro-enthusiasts. Indeed, a number of politicians representing the League of Polish Families and the Self-defence Party attempted to ride the populist wave of discontent with the economic situation, equating the alleged treachery of the EU with the broken promises of the Polish Government. By and large, however, the majority of Polish politicians and voters voted in favour of the country’s membership in the Union, thus clearly marking the Polish horizon of expectations. In Polish eyes, this decision seems to put an end to the continued division of Europe dating back to the treason of the Yalta conference, when the Western Allies surrendered Poland to the Soviet sphere of influence.

The notion of returning to Europe created the historical background for the debate about the EU and Europe. This was a familiar notion in Poland, and the referendum served to sharpen the focus on the history-based political and ideological dimension of Polish EU membership. One should conceive of the Polish space of experience in the nation’s history and past, recently as well as earlier. This may largely explain the idealistic attitudes towards the European Union initially shared by a greater part of the Polish populace, including the intellectual and political elite. In the beginning of the 1990s, they regarded the EU to be the very epitome of Polish ideals of solidarity and community that possibly should become characteristics of the EU in the future. The EU appeared to be a community of values; joining it was regarded to be a reasonable and natural act for a country living

up to its European ambitions. The transition period of the 1990s meant abandoning the moral, physical and economic ballast of the Cold War, when the country remained under the influence of the Soviet Union. Entry into the European Union in 2004 made the aim of the transition clearer, despite numerous Poles being disgruntled with the centralized nature of the European institutions. In the long run the membership of the Union, apart from its obvious economic benefits, will also bring greater rationality to the Polish self-conception. Poland must adjust to the rules of an organization in which economy matters more and where ideological concerns seem much less relevant. While the nature of ‘Polishness’ will be tested, the Poles will become better Europeans and will grow to feel themselves more firmly anchored in the common European construction.

### **Lithuanian Referendum on the EU: A Long Awaited Return**

by *Mindaugas Jurkynas*, Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Vilnius University

Euro-Atlantic integration has topped the political agenda in Lithuania for years; nevertheless, these political aspirations, so widely shared among the political and intellectual elite, required the confirmation of the general public. Indeed, the result of the referendum held May 10-11, 2003, was that 91% of votes cast, i.e. 57% of eligible voters, approved of Lithuanian membership in the European Union. A Finnish friend of mine even cracked a joke in reference to the “Saddam-like referendum outcome”. Bearing in mind a voter turnout of 63.4%, it is a rather high result for new democracies, where disillusionment with democracy and its inability to immediately realize widely anticipated improvements to living standards becomes apparent. Considered in relation to the other post-communist EU-applicant countries, the Lithuanian results are quite positive. In terms of support for membership, Lithuania has become *numero uno* in terms of counting eligible votes, and the Lithuanian turnout ranks second only after Malta, still the leader among the new democracies. Again, the Estonian and Latvian decisions are looming on the horizon, as both countries will be holding referenda on the EU in autumn this year.

<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>TURNOUT, %</b>	<b>‘YES’ VOTE, % of votes cast</b>	<b>‘YES’ VOTE, % of eligible votes</b>
Malta	<b>91.0</b>	53.6	52.9
Slovenia	60.7	89.2	54.1
Hungary	45.6	83.8	38.0
Lithuania	<b>63.4</b>	<b>90.0</b>	<b>57.0</b>
Slovakia	52.1	92.5	48.2
Poland	58.9	77.5	45.3
Czech Republic	55.2	75.6	41.7

Months prior to the referendum, opinion polls would reflect relatively strong pro-EU sentiment; However, low ratings and distrust in the Parliament and political parties raised the anxiety of political elite in terms of the threat of a low turnout, which would produce a negative outcome in the upcoming referendum. Disquiet over a possible ‘revenge of the masses’ led to electoral engineering. Voting was extended for an unprecedented two days, and legislation pertaining to referenda was also amended. The parliament abolished the required minimum of ‘1/3 of eligible votes in favor’, reducing it to an absolute majority of votes cast. Nevertheless, a minimum of 50%

of the constituency still had to turn out at the polls to render the referendum valid. Needless to say, the government, media, business and even popular figures launched an extensive advertising and information campaign about the European Union half a year prior to the referendum. The camp of Euro-skeptics, consisting of a handful of marginal nationalist politicians and rural dwellers, was barely heard against the mass choir of EU protagonists.

The key issues addressed by politicians and grassroots, as in other candidate countries, pertained to the pooling of sovereignty and socio-economic costs and the benefits of EU integration. The gravity of the European regionalizing logic was generally perceived as a positive soft security factor or at least a lesser evil than Russian influence. Some even viewed the EU as a final return to Western Civilization. By virtue of an ironic twist, while the agricultural sector is economically insignificant, it has social significance, as few Lithuanians can boast of a long-standing urban pedigree. Nearly everyone with a voting ballot in hand had at least a granny or aunt still milking her cow each day or weeding her kitchen garden. This serves to explain the disproportionate attention devoted to questions concerning agriculture and rural areas in the EU pre-referendum debate.

The first day of voting seemingly confirmed the rural bias of many citizens, as a final turnout on May 10, 2003, was a mere 23%. Commentators tended to blame the inactive constituency for retaliation against the political elite for broken promises and scandals. Others discerned a rural propensity to plant potatoes on a sunny spring day and leave the voting until after Sunday mass – regular practice on election days in the country. Top ranking politicians instantly appeared on TV urging voters to show up at the polls. The largest Baltic retail chain, Vilniaus prekyba, even joined the last-minute appeal by offering beer and washing powder for 0.003 Eurocents (sic!) for those who already had voted. Queues reminiscent of those outside of the Lenin mausoleum grew outside of shops, confirming the pattern of political activity. That is a likely tale, the turnout on Sunday steeply increased in the afternoon and the necessary 50% threshold was achieved shortly thereafter.

Opportunity to participate in EU decisionmaking, positive social and economic gains and ‘no alternative’ attitude drove to the positive outcome of the referendum. Those who wanted to say ‘yes’ did come. As usual, larger part absentees comprised of politically apathetic constituency. The most Euro-enthusiastic voters were in Western and Central Lithuania, with cities such as Alytus, Kaunas, and the region of Žemaitija at the top. In sum, the absolute majority of voters believed their voting had anchored the country to the continent Lithuania has always belonged to culturally, politically and economically, aside from the years of the occupation. The voting pattern does not seem to have been random. In July the Eurobarometer of the European Commission has revealed that among the Baltic nations, the Lithuanians had the greatest trust in the EU (55%), which actually exceeded their trust in the army (48%) and the Church (48%). Moreover, opinion polls conducted in June revealed 79.4% of respondents supported Lithuanian membership in the EU. This trend shows no indication of ebbing out in the near future, as the EU has yet to be blamed for anything in Lithuania.

## **Baltic Agenda:**

### ***October:***

- Baltic Development Forum Summit
- Conference on Euro-Regions
- General Conference of the Union of the Baltic Cities
- The Adoption of NDAP

- Euro-Conference in Gdansk

### **Baltic News<sup>1</sup>:**

#### **May**

- Euro-Summer School Baltic Sea Region 2010: Theories, Methods and Practicalities

#### **June**

- CBSS Ministerial Session in Pori

### **Baltic Publications:**

- Upcoming issue of the journal: *Vindue mød Øst* on the Baltic Sea Region
- *Dansk Industri* (The Confederation of Danish Industries) has published on the Baltic Sea Region



### **Baltic Agenda:**

#### **October:**

#### **The Baltic Development Forum Summit**

On October 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> the Baltic Development Forum will organise its 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Summit in the Latvian capital of Riga. The title chosen for this year's summit will be "New Europe meets Old Europe: the Baltic Sea Region as a Global Frontrunner". Among the themes that will be dealt with at the Summit, of particular interest is the political agenda. Items include regional integration after the EU enlargement and Russian participation in the region. As usual, the list of speakers is particularly prestigious, including among others, the Latvian President Vaira-Vike Freiberga, together with the presidents of Estonia, Lithuania and Poland, and Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Kasjanov, together with other prime ministers from the Baltic Sea Region. More info at [www.bdforum.org](http://www.bdforum.org)

#### **Conference on Euro-Regions**

In October 6<sup>th</sup> -7<sup>th</sup> the City of St. Petersburg and Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLARE) will organise a Conference on Euro-regions and the Co-operation between Local and Regional Authorities of the Baltic Sea Region, in St. Petersburg (more info <http://www.cbss.st/calendar/dbaFile2026.doc>).

#### **General Conference of the Union of the Baltic Cities**

On October 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> the VIII General Conference of the Union of the Baltic Cities will take place in Klaipeda, Lithuania. More information: [www.ubc.net/calendar/calendar.html](http://www.ubc.net/calendar/calendar.html)

#### **The Adoption of the NDAP**

On October 18<sup>th</sup>, the European Council in Brussels under the Italian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the new Action Plan for the Northern Dimension (NDAP) is supposed to be adopted (for more info cf. Cebast News 2 (3)).

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<sup>1</sup> This issue cover events until September 1<sup>st</sup>.

## **Euro-Conference in Gdansk**

The Euroconference "The Challenge of Mobility in the Baltic Sea Region", which is organised by the EU-financed project BaltSeaNet, will take place on October 23<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> in the Polish city of Gdansk. The conference is composed of four interdisciplinary workshops, besides plenary sessions and panel discussions. For more info see: [www.baltic-sea-seminars.org](http://www.baltic-sea-seminars.org).

## **Baltic News**

### *May*

#### **Euro-Summer School Baltic Sea Region 2010: Theories, Methods and Practicalities**

This summer school was organised by the EU-project BaltSeaNet (<http://www2.hu-berlin.de/BaltSeaNet/>) in cooperation with the Baltic Sea School Berlin ([www.ostseekolleg.de](http://www.ostseekolleg.de)). The school (the second of three events financed by the EU under the framework of the High Level Scientific Conferences) was organised in two separate sections. The first part was in the form of an on-line conference ('the Virtual Graduate Colloquium') between May 19<sup>th</sup> and June 13<sup>th</sup>. In this section, the participants discussed their papers in four different groups. The second part of the Summer School took place in Greifswald at the Alfred Krupp Institute for Advanced Studies between July 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>. In this second part participants also got acquainted with rhetoric and different presentation techniques. For more info see: [www.baltic-sea-seminars.org](http://www.baltic-sea-seminars.org).

### *June*

#### **CBSS Ministerial Session in Pori (Finland)**

This 12<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Session of the Council of the Baltic Sea States concluded the Finnish Presidency of the Council during 2002-2003. The importance of this event is to be attributed to the fact that this may be seen as the last CBSS major gathering (i.e. the annual ministerial sessions) before the EU and NATO enlargements. The meeting dealt with important issues related to the new Action Programme of the EU Northern Dimension, which will be adopted in autumn under the Italian Presidency. Moreover, the CBSS Ministers evaluated progress on all the various activities in which the CBSS is engaged, such as cross-border cooperation, civil society and Democratic development, higher education and culture, economic development etc. Finally, this Ministerial Session decided to terminate the mandate of the CBSS Commissioner for Human Rights and Democratic Development (cf. [www.cbss.st](http://www.cbss.st)).

## **Baltic Publications:**

### **Upcoming issue of the Journal *Vindue mod Øst* on the Baltic Sea Region**

The next issue (2/2003) of the Quarterly *Vindue mod Øst* will be out in October. The issue will be totally dedicated to the Baltic Sea Region with articles on different aspects of the region such as Russia and democracy (by Jakob Kelstrup); Social dialogue (by Mikkel Mailand); EU-integration (by Lars Johannsen and Karin Hilmer Pedersen); Pension reforms (by Helle Fallesen); regionalisation (by Fabrizio Tassinari); and knowledge society (by Kazimierz Musial).

### ***A Brave New Region? Removing Barriers to Trade in the Baltic Sea Region by Dansk Industri (The Confederation of Danish Industries)***

In this publication, issued in June 2003, the Confederation of Danish Industries (DI) wishes to make clear that the EU-enlargement cannot stand alone as a wrecking ball to free trade. The report "A Brave New Region? Removing Barriers to Trade in the Baltic Sea Region" is DI's contribution to

the launch of a joint effort to break down the remaining barriers to trade in order to realise, what to some, even in 2003, may seem like wishful thinking – a Baltic Sea Region without barriers to trade. Further information is obtainable at <http://www.di.dk/>.

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