Crisis encourages Traditional Christmas

ACCORDING TO MAXIMA funded research conducted by RAIT in all three Baltic states, this year Lithuanians are more likely to greet Christmas at home, with family, and more modestly than in the recent past.

The research conducted in November showed that people will be buying cheaper presents, will mostly be setting the Christmas table with more traditional and simpler meals, and most of it will be prepared at home, rather than bought prepared from the store.

“The crisis has taught people to save and to better plan their spending, to buy less expensive products, and to cut down on spontaneous purchases. People appreciate the current economic climate, their own financial standing and are not sure when the downturn will end, and for that reason they are largely deciding not to waste money on presents this year,” said Saulius Jonušas, Maxima LT Marketing and Sales Department Director.

The economic situation indicated that the economic situation will have a negative impact on Christmas celebrations. Last year the figure was 71%. At the same time 58% said that their family is planning to spend less money this year than last, and more than half (53%) said they would be spending the same amount as last year.

This year 76% of respondents indicated that the economic situation will have a negative impact on Christmas celebrations. Last year the figure was 71%. At the same time 58% said that their family is planning to spend less money this year than last, and more than half (53%) said they would be spending the same amount as last year.

Almost two thirds (64%) will cook at home, and 52% will spend time looking for discounts and Christmas sales.

Christmas Spending

An EU initiated customer information campaign known as Know Your Rights and Win ordered their own Christmas research which showed that 40% of Lithuanians plan to spend up to LTL 101 on their presents this year. 23% said they would be putting aside up to LTL 100 for their presents, 15.9% up to LTL 200, 4% up to LTL 400, and 1.9% would spend over LTL 700.

Respondents were also asked if they had ever received unwanted or inappropriate presents and 30% said that had happened to them, while 63% said that had never happened to them. But surprisingly 6% also indicated that they would prefer it if receipts were included with presents so they could exchange them for other items if they wanted.

Kūčios – A mix of traditions

Deimante Dokšaitė & Sandra Sirvidienė

Kūčios (Christmas Eve) is one of the most important celebrations for Lithuanians. During Kūčios Lithuanians used to say goodbye to the old year and celebrate the upcoming New Year. Now Kūčios is identified with the Christian feast – the eve of the birth of Jesus.

The name Kūčios comes from the main dish of this celebration, which is intended for all family members and the souls of relatives. During the ritual evening dinner the first mouthful was dedicated to the souls and harvest gods. The kūčia dish was passed around the table and everybody had to taste it.

Kūčia was made from sprouted wheat, peas, beans, poppy, nuts, and hemp. At these seeds were mixed with honey and sweet water. The Kūčios ritual dinner would lead to a productive and fruitful new year.

Kūčios is a family celebration. All family members, even those far away come home for Kūčios and strengthen family ties. If somebody died during the year or is not present because of an important reason, an empty seat is left at the table. Candles used to burn in the empty places.

It was believed that a deceased’s soul would attend dinner with the rest of the family. Lithuanians also had a tradition of inviting lonely neighbours for Kūčios. If they could not come, they would take some Kūčios dinner to their house.

Preparations for Kūčios were planned by 44%, and 37% will buy less presents, while 13% will spend time looking for discounts and Christmas sales.

Almost two thirds (64%) will cook at home, and 52% will spend time looking for discounts and Christmas sales.

Kūčios dinner has to consist of 12 different dishes. They symbolise the 12 months of the year, and according to the Christian traditions the 12 Apostles of Jesus. All dishes have to be without meat, most popular is fish, herring, kūčiukai (small Christmas Eve cookies) with poppy milk, kisielius (a Lithuanian drink from cranberries), dried fruit soup, vegetable salad, mushrooms, boiled potatoes, sauerkraut, bread.

Kūčios is the last evening of Advent, so it has to be solemnly. Kūčios has magical meaning, with different magical rituals. People predict their future, whether younger girls will get married, and for that reason they are largely maintaining the tradition of not eating meat during Kūčios.

The Kūčios dinner table was set with hay under the tablecloth. It symbolised the birth of Jesus in a barn.

Hay also had a magic meaning. People used to take straw from under the table cloth, if it’s long – you can expect to have a long life, a short one – short life. Thick straw meant a rich and happy life.

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Refugees in Europe

THE EU27 MEMBER STATES granted protection to 16,300 asylum seekers in 2008.

The largest groups of beneficiaries of protection status in the EU27 were citizens of Iraq (16,600 persons or 22% of the total number of persons granted protection status), Somalia (9,100 or 12%), Russia (7,400 or 10%), Afghanistan (6,800 or 7%) and Etiria (4,600 or 6%).

Two thirds of all grants of protection status in the EU27 were registered in France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy and Sweden.

In 2008, the highest number of persons granted protection status were registered in France (11,500), followed by Germany (10,700), the United Kingdom (10,200), Italy (9,700), Sweden (8,700), the Netherlands (6,100) and Austria (5,700).

Iraqis were the single largest group of persons granted protection status in ten EU27 Member States. Of the 16,600 Iraqis granted protection status in the EU27, 6,400 were registered in Germany, 4,000 in Sweden and 2,100 in the Netherlands. Of the 9,100 Somalis granted protective status, 3,500 were recorded in Italy and 1,500 each in Sweden and the Netherlands, and of the 7,400 Russians, 2,700 were in Poland, 2,000 in Austria and 1,200 in France.

Lithuania declines Eurovision

Vilnius, Dec 15 (ELTA) - Lithuania has declined to participate in the next year's Eurovision Song Contest, however, should it succeed in raising the necessary funds, the decision would be changed.

According to the Head of the Lithuanian National Radio and Television Rimvydas Paleckis, the decision was a "formal action" that was needed before December 14; otherwise Lithuania would have been fined.

"If we had not refused by the set date, we would have had to pay fines. In order to avoid that and knowing that it will be possible to change the decision later, we decided to participate in the Eurovision Song Contest," said Paleckis.

Paleckis said that the preparation process and the broadcasting of the contest to take place in Portugal would cost Lithuania around LTL300,000 (86,890 euros).

Paleckis said it is not known yet how the country's representatives would be chosen, however, should Lithuania succeed in raising the funds and took part in Eurovision, the viewers would be able to express their opinion.

Eurovision is held by the EBU (European Broadcasting Union) together with all participating member countries. The only Lithuanian member of the EBU is Lithuanian Radio and Television.

Appeal to trace suspects for crimes abroad

THE METROPOLITAN POLICE Service in the UK is launching an appeal to trace 10 dangerous men who are alleged to have offended abroad but are believed to be living in the UK.

Operation Sunfire is a man-hunt by the MPS Extradition Unit to trace and arrest murderers, rapists and robbers, amongst other criminals, and put them through the extradition process to face justice abroad.

Extensive police investigation has not been able to identify where they are hiding but all are believed to have links to the London area. The list includes two Lithuanians:

Giedrius Rimidis, age 24. For: Rape of a woman on 18/07/08 at a dormitory in Klaipeda, Lithuania. Victim was an adult. Previously linked to Leyton and East London area.

Gintautas Rupšliaus, age 36. Offences of GBH, robbery and extortion in April 2008 near Kaunas City, Lithuania. He and others ambushed a taxi and kidnapped two men before assaulting them and holding them against their will for three days, torturing them and forcing them to sign debt receipts. Previously linked to the Manchester area.

Vilnius Clean Air Capital

Vilnius has been judged as having the best quality air in Europe, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit and Siemens, from a list of 30 cities throughout Europe.

Vilnius is home to 16% of Lithuania’s population with 534,000 citizens, and is one of the smaller cities in the index. From an economic perspective, however, Vilnius contributed just under two-fifths of the country’s GDP in 2007 and accounts for around 19% of total employment in Lithuania.

While Vilnius provides just 16% of the national industrial output, it has attracted more than two-thirds of total foreign direct investment in Lithuania. As well as increasing the number of tourists, Vilnius has attracted many migrants from other parts of Lithuania because of the employment opportunities that it offers.

In regards to water quality, Vilnius takes 1st position, but scores considerably lower in energy consumption largely because of its heavy reliance on a centralised and inefficient central heating system, and the uncertainty of future power production with the closing of Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant.

Vilnius ranks 1st in the overall index, with a score of 62.77 out of 100, making it the best-performing city in Eastern Europe as well as among the low-income cities in the index. Vilnius ranks around the middle of most categories in the index, but performs exceptionally well on air quality.

New Flights for Lithuania

Star I increases flights from London.

In the new year Star I will add an extra Vilnius – London flight to their schedule, making five flights per week. Now you can get a direct flight to London every day of the week except for Thursday and Saturday. The latest leg has been added to Star I’s existing destinations of Dublins and Milan.

Star I is now also accepting credit cards from the UK, Ireland, Canada and the US.

Ryanair adds Brussels

Ryanair announced a new destination, flying Kaunas – Charleroi from 1 April 2010. There will be three weekly flights, which will be especially welcomed by the bureaucracy.

Lithuanians Make Top Ten Prisoners List

A REPORT ON the origin of prisoners in the UK showed that 7,500 immigrants from 160 different nations who arrive in the UK go on to commit various crimes, according to The Sun.

The figures released by the Ministry of Justice show that foreigners make up almost one in ten of all prisoners held in the jails of England and Wales.

The foreign prisoners have been jailed for almost 900 sex offences, more than 2,000 drugs crimes, 1,500 violent attacks including murders, and over 900 cases of fraud or forgery.

Jamaicans have the worst records for drug crimes, violence and sex attacks, while Poles have the worst record for theft and handling.

Lithuanians top the list for driving offences, Nigerians have the most convicted fraudsters and the Irish have the worst record for gambling and robbery.

Overall the ten nations with the most citizens in this country’s prisons are:


In total about 200 of these foreign national prisoners are housed in open prisons and around 170 of them are under the age of 18.
EU Member States will not ignore principles of fairness in fight against climate change

President Grybauskaitė in attending the European Council meeting in Brussels pointed out that the EU Member States would not ignore the principle of fairness in their fight against the consequences of climate change.

The President of Lithuania welcomed the fact that the European Council has taken into consideration Lithuania’s request to stipulate that in the framework of the EU’s commitment to contribute financially to compensation to third world countries for the reduction of pollution, the EU Member States will pay according to their individual financial capacities.

“The fact that Lithuania’s share in the total of nearly €2.5 billion to be contributed by the European Union is only one million euros is a fair agreement, especially bearing in mind that the EU’s assistance to Lithuania totals up to five billion litas annually,” Grybauskaitė said.

The EU leaders also discussed the European Union’s economic development plan for the period until 2020 which will be given special attention in the coming European Council meeting in March 2010.

“I have underlined that at that time Lithuania will demand that electricity connection projects so important for Lithuania will demand that electricity connection projects so important for Lithuania will be given special attention,” the President said.

Tenth death of swine flu confirmed

Vilnius, Dec 11 (ELTA) - One more person died of the so-called swine flu in Vilnius. It is already the tenth officially confirmed death of the AH1N1 virus.

According to the Lithuanian Ministry of Health press release, a 39 year old man fell ill on November 20, he was taken to hospital three days later, where the AH1N1 diagnosis was confirmed. The man died of the complications caused by the swine flu.

Lithuanian intelligence chief quits

The head of Lithuania’s intelligence agency, the Department of State Security, stepped down on Monday 14 December.

Povilas Malakauskas, Lithuania’s intelligence chief for the past two and a half years, tendered his resignation during a morning meeting with President Dalia Grybauskaitė, a presidential spokesperson said.

The president’s office gave no explanation for Malakauskas’ decision.

An official with the Department of State Security said Malakauskas had resigned for personal reasons, but did not explain further.

The head of the Sąjūdis National Security and Defence Committee told Alfa.lt that Malakauskas’ departure could be related to a parliamentary probe into allegations that Lithuania hosted a secret CIA prison in 2004-2005.

Speaking to journalists later in the day, Anušauskas said that when his committee had first looked into the CIA prison allegations, before the launch of the formal inquiry, Malakauskas had been “ambiguous” in his answers.

Anušauskas also suggested that a formal inquiry would not have been needed if Malakauskas had been more forthcoming at the time. Anušauskas did not give any precise details about the questions asked of Malakauskas or the nature of the intelligence chief’s answers.

“If the responses we had requested had been presented to us on time and more thoroughly, there probably would have been no need to hold an investigation,” Anušauskas said.

Defence Minister Rasa Jukneviciene welcomed Malakauskas’ resignation.

“It was probably the right decision,” Jukneviciene told Alfa.lt. “The problems at the Department of State Security have not been resolved. It remains a politicized organization that does not engender the public’s confidence. Malakauskas has been unable to change this in the past two years.”

In its press statement the government said that “the intelligence agency has become a politicized organisation that does not respect the law, public freedoms and the ethical norms of public service.”

It’s critics say the agency, known in Lithuania by its acronym VSD, spends too much time watching Lithuanians, including politicians, journalists and civil society groups, instead of hunting spies, and that it operates with insufficient public oversight.

The VSD’s deputy director quit the scandal-plagued agency in August following weeks of intense media scrutiny.

The mysterious death three years ago of a senior VSD officer while on a posting in Belarus is still a frequent topic of public debate.

Although the death of Vytautas Pociunas was officially ruled an accident, many on the political right believe the true circumstances of his demise were covered up and that he was a victim in settling scores between opposing factions in Lithuania’s intelligence community.

Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius evaluated the future changes in SoDra favorably.

“So far I do not know any reasons as I have not seen the resignation letter. We will consider his application and we will probably satisfy it. Such changes seem to be beneficial. We need constructive thoughts and ideas. I think that we will meet the New Year in the SoDra system with good changes,” Kubilius told journalists after the Government’s meeting on Monday.

The prime minister said that he did not know who could replace Mikaila, but that he assured that an appropriate person would surely be found.

Grybauskaitė among most popular European politicians

THE INFLUENTIAL French political, business and financial daily **La Tribune** has listed President Dalia Grybauskaitė among top ten EU leaders.

President Dalia Grybauskaitė went up from twenty seventh to sixth place in the classification, leaving the French leader Noclas Sarkozy (9), British Prime Minister Gordon Brown (21), Italy’s Silvio Berlusconi (27) as well as Spanish, Portuguese, Polish and many other European leaders behind.

The prime ministers of Estonia and Latvia rank sixteenth and twentieth.

Le Monde evaluated the most active leaders in EU politics. Only two heads of state - Lithuanian and French presidents - were ranked, others on the list are heads of government. The EU-presiding Sweden’s Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt took the top position. He is followed by the Prime Minister of Luxembourg, Jean-Claude Juncker, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and Danish and Finnish prime ministers.

A jury of political correspondents in Brussels, coming from all Europe, evaluated EU heads of state and government on the basis of seven criteria: leadership, team spirit, engagement in counter climate change, management of national finances, respect for EU internal market rules, understanding of Lisbon Treaty attitudes, and general pro-European outlook.
Affordable Lithuanian linen luxury

Deimantė Dokšaitė

INGA LUKAUSKIENĖ (pictured) is the founder and owner of the online linen store - LinenMe. Originally from Plungė, and a graduate of KLC School of Design, she now lives in the UK. Inga started selling Lithuanian linen products to British customers, but now LinenMe sells their products throughout the world.

Inga, who is a textile and professional interior designer tells us about her inspiration, and her ABC of business which she learnt back in Plungė working for her parents as a young girl. She also talks about her thoughts on the new trends in linen fashion and the varying tastes of customers from different countries.

Let's start from the beginning - how did LinenMe come into your life? How did you start making money from it?

Linen production was not the first business area I got involved in. Firstly, my family had a florist business and as a little girl I used to help them sell flowers at a local market. Another task for me as a little helper was to assist with the gardening at the rose greenhouse, and at one point there were no more rose bushes so I had to learn arranging flowers into bouquets, so I suppose that was the first time I had to do colour arrangement and design!

Once Lithuania gained independence, my mother who has worked for foreign brand, sold on a famous high street shop or department store with just a tiny mention on the tag of Made in Lithuania.

We decided that it would be excellent to develop our own Lithuanian linen brand and try to establish it on a European, or perhaps even global level. This is how LinenMe was born in 2007. In November 2007 the online shop was officially opened and LinenMe products became widely available to the UK market.

What makes your linen production unique?

At LinenMe we have remained focused on producing handmade linen items such as hemstitched tablecloths, linen napkins, towels, cushion covers and luxurious bedding. Old traditional Lithuanian crafting skills are highly appreciated worldwide, for instance stunning embroidery, intricate hemstitching, crocheting and so on. For many years linen in Lithuania was just ‘something you would see at your grandmother’s place’, old-fashioned, un-cool and dated, however, linen is going through a revival. Pure linen is getting more popular, vintage weaving and designs are fashionable again, and linen shops are not just for tourists!

I would say the main difference is that our high quality linen reaches the customer without going through all the unnecessary designing/branding/marketing circles that inflate the cost of linen. We are the designers and manufacturers in one, offering affordable luxury.

Please tell us about taste in different countries.

Tastes and preferences differ depending on local traditions, popular styles and standards. Shoppers from certain regions adore coloured linen products, whilst others go solely for the natural unbleached/un-dyed linen look. Shoppers from the US prefer natural, earthy colours - browns, greens, oranges, while the British love blue. At the same time, blue-dyed linen is not to the European customs’ taste. Scandinavians absolutely adore natural and white linen, but from our perspective we try to cater for all styles and tastes.

Home improvement is extremely popular in the UK, and updating your home with soft furnishings, a set of new curtains, a couple of colourful cushions or new upholstery fabrics for your sofas can be financially rewarding and much easier to achieve than to repainting and refurnishing the whole living area.

Could Lithuanian linen be something like tulips for Holland, vodka for Russia, or Guinness for Ireland?

Absolutely! Even though Lithuania, as a small country in the Baltic region, it is better known for its basketball achievements and amber jewellery, I am a strong believer that Lithuanian linen also represents the country in a global context very well. I think flax growing and linen weaving as an industry has withstood many difficult periods in its history, but we doubt Lithuanian linen is well-known for its quality, traditional methods of processing, weaving, embroidery, hemstitching and so on.

Baltic linen is highly appreciated by textile experts all over the world, and many globally-known brands produce their linen in Lithuania. The Lithuanian climate has always been perfect for growing high quality flax. Baltic linen is unique for its naturally darker shade; the darker the fabric the better. It is unfortunate that Lithuanian flax industry is struggling at the moment and is not being treated as an important industry that deserves to be cherished. Traditional flax growing and linen production techniques are a significant part of the Lithuanian heritage.

How popular is linen back in Lithuania?

I would say that linen wouldn’t be as popular in Lithuania if it wasn’t for the global trend – people all over the world are tending to switch back to using natural textiles, investing in good quality affordable linen products. Perhaps we haven’t learnt to properly appreciate what we’ve had for centuries right under our noses.

Linen bedding, soft furnishings and accessories are coming back into fashion, and Lithuania is no exception. The home design specialists started ofersering wider ranges of linen products, in many cases labelled with foreign brands, but most likely manufactured and produced in Lithuania.

The partnership of linen and amber is already well appreciated – do you think this Lithuanian ‘couple’ have a good perspective in the international market?

Traditional Lithuanian folk outfits always included linen garments and amber jewellery. Lithuanian amber is valued for both its looks and healing qualities, while Lithuanian linen is unique for its dark natural shade and durability.

The look of a linen dress paired with an amber necklace is one thing, but using pure linen and amber in interior design is a completely different story. Linen napkins look great with silver napkin rings, but they also can be decorated with amber-bead rings.

We have added some table accessories made from Lithuanian amber to our assortment this summer, but it’s a matter of preference really.

While exhibiting at The Spirit of Christmas Fair in London last November we had some amber bead napkin rings displayed in our stand. Surprisingly, hardly anyone assumed the accessory was made with real amber. They thought it was plastic!

Tell us how everything is organized. I mean, creating collections, making them in Lithuania, ordering goods in your e-shop, paying, shipping, advertising etc.

As Lithuanian fashion designer Aleksandras Pogrebnojus once joked: “The reason why each year new colours are announced is fashionable to allow the designers to sell exactly the same garment over and over again.”

But on a more serious note, we attend textile fairs and industry shows (such as Heimtextil in Germany) where new trends for the next season are announced. Knowing and understanding the forthcoming trends is essential when creating new linen collections.

We do not hire any external designers at LinenMe products. As a recent graduate of London’s KLC School of Design, I am the main designer behind each and every product.

Inspiration comes from everywhere, any time of a day. We also offer linen design services, and are encouraging our customers to become home interior designers themselves. DIY is extremely popular nowadays, and if someone is looking for a specific soft furnishing, we are glad to produce it.

Once items are designed, they are produced in Lithuania and sold exclusively online. The process of running an e-shop is not that different from any other online business, but what is really convenient is that whatever the design, we can produce it and deliver it within the shortest possible period of time.
**Interview**

LiTnews

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**Culture**

**International Migration Day**

IOM Vilnius (Jaksto 12, 4th floor) hosts Doors Open Days on 17-18 (Thu-Fri) December to celebrate International Migration Day. A newly published handbook for migrants “First steps in Lithuania” will be freely available for visitors.

The handbook includes information on residency, work permits, social security, education, language education and other important issues. It is available in English, Russian, and Chinese.

Foreigners are also encouraged to use this opportunity to meet IOM staff and discuss various issues and problems they might face in Lithuania. IOM also has a toll-free line 8-800-25252.

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**Congress Latin-style**

The 13th World Lithuanian Youth Congress (WLYC or Kongresas) will take place in South America from 22 December 2009 to 7 January 2010. Delegates will meet with Lithuanian communities in Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil. The benefit of WLYC taking place outside of Lithuania is clear; they help not only strengthen the Lithuanian youth associations around the world that organise the event, they also help solidify the relationship with the host country’s Lithuanian community (Bendruomenė) and ensures the continued existence of a strong and vibrant Lithuanian community.

The World Lithuanian Youth Congress is an extremely important event for Lithuanian youth living in the Diaspora, as it brings together representatives of all Lithuanian youth associations from around the world to discuss various topics relevant to today’s youth and is a forum to help another deal with the unique challenges that various countries may face in uniting their groups.

A new Executive Committee of the World Lithuanian Youth Association (PLJS) will be elected at this Kongresas, as well as the selection of the location of the next Kongresas.

**Vortex hits Chicago**

Lithuanian film director Gytis Lukšas will present his new feature film “Dubury” (Vortex) at the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture on Saturday, 19 December at 6:30 pm, 5600 South Pulaski Road, Chicago. Entrance is $10.

The film is based on the novel by Romualdas Granaukas, winner of the Lithuanian National Cultural and Arts Award, and is the chronicle of a young man’s shifting relationships as he adjusts rather dramatically to the unfamiliarity of freedom.

**National Culture and Art Awards**

On 11 December the annual National Culture and Art Awards were announced, and the presentations will take place on 16 February, Lithuanian Independence Day.

Almantas Griekičius, a director, was given a lifetime achievement award, director Jonas Rimgaudas Jurašas was awarded for the creation of a modern theatre language and the re-establishment of legend of a modern theatre language, and has been invited to Cairo International Film Festival and the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Be2gether in the running for Best Festival

Music and art festival Be2gether nominated in the European Festival Awards 2009. It is the first Lithuanian festival nominated in the festival awards which is organized by Virtual Festivals Europe and festivals association Yource since 2004.

Be2gether is only three years old and is already nominated in Best Small Festival category - crowds of around 10,000. Festival fans can vote throughout December, and later a music industry juries will further rate the festivals. The winners will be announced on 13 January in Netherland.

Place your vote at: http://eu.virtualfestivals.com/index.cfm/section=euroawards&yearid=7.
Lithuania and India share opportunity

LITHUANIA’S MINISTER OF Foreign Affairs, V Slotskis Ušackas, together with Economic Minister Dainius Kreivys and a business delegation of 28 members arrived in India, Mumbai’s financial centre, recently led by Rajinder Kumar Chaudhary, Honorary Consul of India to Lithuania. The Minister attended a business forum at the Confederation of Indian Industry.

Business issues were discussed during the meeting between India’s Minister of External Affairs Somanahalli Mallahsh Krishna and Lithuania’s Minister of Foreign Affairs V.Ušackas on 3 December in Delhi.

During the meeting, Minister Ušackas noted that the visit of almost 30 Lithuanian businessmen, the Ministry of Economy and the Foreign Minister to India was the best proof of Lithuania’s interest to develop dynamic economic and political relations with India, the world’s largest democracy, with 1.1 billion people.

Ušackas was glad about the first Indian investment projects in Lithuania and expressed hope that more investors from India would follow the example set by the polyethylene producer Orison Global Pet that is established in the Klaipėda Free Economic Zone.

During the visit, Tadas Karosas, the head of Čilis Holding, signed a franchising agreement with head of the GIPL company Sandeep Grover.

Lithuania is bringing in one of the lowest corporate tax levies in the EU. An amendment to the Law on Corporate Tax was passed by Parliament on Wednesday and has reduced the 10% corporate profit tax rate to 15%, down from 20% in 2009 (5% for small businesses, down from 13% in 2009).

According to research carried out by the Ministry of Finance, these new rates will not have any significant adverse effects on business investment.

These tax reductions will promote entrepreneurship and, importantly, send a strong welcome signal to potential foreign investors.

In accordance with this agreement, the Čili restaurant chain will expand into India.

India’s pharmaceutical manufacturers took great interest in the distribution of medications on the Lithunian market and the whole of the European Union market. This was discussed with representatives from the Lithuania company Elva.

Lithuanian businessmen also visited a renewable energy factory of solar cells and discussed cooperation possibilities with its administration.

The head of India’s diplomatic division welcomed the interest of Lithuanian businessmen in trade and investment possibilities that India offered. Ministers S.Krishna and V.Ušackas agreed to develop a dynamic partnership.

In 2008, Lithuania’s India trade amounted to €793 million. Fertilizers constitute a significant part of Lithuania’s exports.

The Indian-Baltic Chamber of Commerce in Delhi is headed by Astar Kukate. Anyone interested in the business possibilities in India, Astar can be contacted at ak@ibcc.lt

On 4 December, Minister Ušackas also met with India’s Minister for New and Renewable Energy Farooq Abdullah and Minister of Commerce and Industry Anand Sharma.

A Lithuanian Consultant, headed by Osmiradžio Lohia was also opened in Mumbai.

Unemployment in Lithuania

STATISTICS LITHUANIA informs that, according to the Labour Force Survey data, the number of unemployed in III quarter 2009 was 228,100, just 500 more than in II quarter 2009, and that the growth in the unemployment had slowed.

In III quarter 2009, the unemployment rate stood at 11.3%, which is 0.2% higher than in II quarter 2009. Over the year (III quarter 2009 against III quarter 2008), the unemployment rate grew 2.3 times.

The most rapid growth has been in the youth (aged 15-24) unemployment rate. In III quarter 2009, 13,000 young people, or one in ten, were unemployed (a year ago it was 26,000).

The youth unemployment rate in III quarter 2009 reached 33.3%. Over the quarter the youth unemployment rate grew by 3.7%. The lowest youth unemployment rate (6.9%) was recorded in II quarter 2007.

Although the number of young unemployed persons a year ago, as compared with III quarter 2009, was twice as low, the number of young unemployed persons with higher education qualifications remained almost unchanged (7400 and 7800 respectively for III quarter 2009 and 2008). The male unemployment rate has been growing faster than the female rate. The male unemployment grew from 6% in II quarter 2009 to 7.3% in III quarter 2009, while the female – from 9.3% to 10.1%. In III quarter 2009, the male unemployment rate stood at 16.7%, the female one at 10.4%.

A higher male unemployment rate was conditioned by a rapid decrease in the amount of work in industrial and construction enterprises.

In II quarter 2009, there were 1,424,000 persons aged 15 and over working in the country; as compared with II quarter 2009, this figure remained almost unchanged (growing by 0.9%, or 0.1%), while over a year it dropped by 113,400, or 7.4%.

Over III quarter 2009, the number of persons working in agriculture, forestry and fishing grew by 7100, trade – by 9000, professional, scientific and technical activities – by 6700. The number of persons working in other economic activities remained almost unchanged.

The most marked decrease over the year was in the number of persons working in construction – from 167,000 to 117,000 (down 30%), accommodation and food service activities – from 45,000 to 36,000 (16%), manufacturing – from 262,000 to 225,000 (15%).

In III quarter 2009, an increase was observed in the number of employees working not under an employment contract (fixed or non-term), but under a verbal agreement. According to the estimates of Statistics Lithuania, in III quarter 2009, the number of such workers was 27,000, which is 11,000 more than in III quarter 2009. The largest share of such workers was recorded in manufacturing and agriculture (8,000 in each), as well as in construction, trade and other sectors.

In II quarter 2009, the employment rate stood at 60.4%; over the quarter, it grew by 0.1%, while a year ago it was by 0.5% higher. In III quarter 2009, the male employment rate stood at 59.6%, the female at 63.2%. Over a year, the male employment rate dropped by 2.9%, the female by 1.5% percentage points.

Unemployment in the Baltic States

According to the data of NSIs of the Baltic States, in III quarter 2009, the lowest unemployment rate was recorded in Lithuania (13.8%), the highest – in Latvia (18.4%); in Estonia, it stood at 14.5%. Over the quarter, the unemployment rate in Lithuania remained almost unchanged, while in Latvia and Estonia it grew by 1.7% and 1.1%.
Kubilius: a budget of responsibility and solidarity

Prime Minister Kubilius puts his spin on the newly approved budget

SEIMAS ADOPTED THE 2010 BUDGET. The Government had approved on measures to cut budget expenditure and raise revenue, which resulted in cutting the budget deficit by more than LTL2 billion (down to LTL4,930 million, or 5.9% of GDP).

Appropriations for state budget managers and programme implementation have been cut by approximately 33% in the 2010 budget, including 23% cuts in public administration expenditure, 10% reduction of salary for public servants, politicians, public officials, and municipal servants, 5% reduction of salary for teachers, military servants, and employees in the social sector and culture, and 2% cuts in salary for statutory officials. Furthermore, the number of budget appropriation managers will be reduced by 30 in 2010 as compared to 2009. All these measures have reduced the planned national budget expenditure by LTL1,581 million as against the 2009 budget reviewed in July 2009.

The 2010 budget revenue, including funds from the European Union and other sources of international financial support, will amount to LTL24,398.9 million. Planned 2010 financial support, will amount to LTL29,328.8 million. The Government and the Seimas, but for their support which has been of utmost importance at this difficult time of the economic recession, we are all the previous governments, and of course the global crisis. People who have difficulties facing current problems, but who see that indeed the decisions must be made.

The Prime Minister also expressed his appreciation to the Finance Minister Ingrida Šimonytė and the entire ministry, as well as to Speaker of the Seimas Irena Degutienė for their support which is of utmost importance at this difficult period of time not only for the Government and the Seimas, but for Lithuania as a whole.

Europeans cautiously optimistic about the economy, but remain concerned about unemployment – Autumn 2009 Eurobarometer

The first results of the latest Eurobarometer survey reveal that for Europeans unemployment is the most important issue facing their own country, while concerns about the economic situation have lessened slightly. However, a majority still believe the worst of the crisis is to come. Now that the G20 and the IMF have given the impetus for economic recovery, people believe that national governments and the European Union are best placed to take action against the effects of the crisis.

“Citizens have clearly identified jobs as their main concern, and the EU must continue to give its full attention and commitment to dealing with the crisis,” said Margot Wallström, Vice-President of the European Commission, responsible for Institutional Relations and Communication Strategy. A majority of Europeans (54%, +7 points compared to May-June 2009) believe that the worst is still to come regarding the impact of the crisis on jobs, 38% think that it has already reached its peak. This figure is ten points up from the previous survey.

The same more positive trend, compared to Spring 2009, can be observed regarding expectations for the economic situation in the EU in the next twelve months: 30% (+16) of Europeans think that the next twelve months will be better, 38% the same (+) and 21% (-7) worse. 11% (+1) do not know.

Similar more positive expectations were recorded for the future of the world economy: 29% (+5) think it will be better in the next twelve months, 36% (-) the same and 24% (-6) worse. 11% (+1) do not know.

Regarding expectations for the national economy, the positive trend is more moderate. A bigger share of Europeans believe that the overall situation of their national economy will be the same (37%, +1) or worse (31%, -3), rather than better (28%, +3). 4% (+1) do not know.

A majority (51%, +2) consider unemployment as the most important issue in their country at the moment. The economic situation (40%, -2) comes second while inflation, (19%, -2) is the third most important issue together with crime (19%, +3). At the personal level, inflation (38%, unchanged), the economic situation (36%, unchanged) and unemployment (20%, -1) remain the three most important issues.

Both the European Union (22%, +2) and the national governments (19%, +7) are seen as being best able to deal with the crisis. They are followed closely by the G20 (18%, -2) which has lost its second position to the national governments since the spring. Europeans see the European Union as the main way to boost growth in a sustainable way.

Overall, 50% (+2) of EU citizens believe it has benefited from being a member of the EU.
Basketballers of the Year

Linas Kleiza was voted the best male Lithuanian basketball player of 2009, while Gintaré Petronytė took the honours for the women.

A total of 14,057 Lithuanian basketball fans voted in the poll, with Petronytė getting 3071 votes and Kleiza 4153. Both players are plying their trade in the Greek leagues this year.

Kleiza replaces Ramūnas Šilkauskas as Lithuania’s number one player, and this year is the first time there have been separate awards for male and female players.

Kleiza also announced that he had establishment a foundation to support troubled and disadvantaged Lithuanian youth in providing them all with an equal chance to succeed in sport.

FIBA talks Turkey

After an agonising wait, the good news finally filtered through on Saturday 12 December that Lithuania indeed has a ticket to Turkey to contest the 2010 World Basketball Championships.

On Tuesday the group draw was held, and Lithuania is joined in Group D by Spain, France, Canada, New Zealand and Lebanon. While drawing one of the tournament favourites in their first round, even Kęstutis Kemzūra, the Lithuanian National Team Coach said that it was not too bad at all, and that it was an equal chance to succeed in sport.

Rytas v Olympiacos

Lietuvos Rytas went on to host Ol-ympiacos in an 8th round encounter that was important for both teams - Rytas to secure a berth in the next round, and for Olympiacos to put their surprise defeat against Partizan behind them.

The next two quarters followed the same script, with Rytas winning the third by three and Olympiacos taking the fourth by one - overtime - but the cost was heavy, as both Baynes and Bjelica had fouled out in regulation.

In the extra five minutes Olympiacos coach Giannakis instructed his players to play through the middle, and with an unimpeachable foul called on the first play, the visitors took full advantage dropping both free throws and scoring from the possession to take the wind out of the full house and shore up an away win.

In the round-up Kurtinaitis said his players performed well against one of the best clubs in Europe, and while they had shown good grit and character, it also showed them how much more work they had to do before they can really match it with the best.

Main Standings at 16/12/2009

GROUP A

Regal FC Barcelona 7-0
Montepaschi Siena 7-1
Aavel Basket 3-6
Fenerbahce Ulker 3-6
Cibona 2-6
Žalgiris 1-4

GROUP B

Olympiacos 6-2
Unicaja 5-2
Partizan 4-3
Lietuvos Rytas 4-4
Elles Pilsen 3-4
Elterre Orléanais 0-7

SPORT SHORTS

Sure this is Lithuania, but there has been a lot happening in the basketball world over the last few weeks. Next issue will get back to covering a broader range of sporting events, but for now it’s all basketball.

The next two quarters followed the same script, with Rytas winning the third by three and Olympiacos taking the fourth by four - overtime - but the cost was heavy, as both Baynes and Bjelica had fouled out in regulation.

In the extra five minutes Olympiacos coach Giannakis instructed his players to play through the middle, and with an unimpeachable foul called on the first play, the visitors took full advantage dropping both free throws and scoring from the possession to take the wind out of the full house and shore up an away win.

In the round-up Kurtinaitis said his players performed well against one of the best clubs in Europe, and while they had shown good grit and character, it also showed them how much more work they had to do before they can really match it with the best.