LITHUANIA AT THE DAWN OF 2025

Report of a Listening Post held in Vilnius, 7th January 2025

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Lithuanian Listening Post was held on-line, it had 14 participants.

PART 1: THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

Quotes and Images from the first part 1:

Meat grinder
A ploughing tractor
Fascism
Shiva – destroyer of evil
Generational trauma
Eye of the storm
Communism
Unbearable noise
An Orwellian situation: war is peace
Crooked Hollywood movie scripts
Europe – a retirement home
The Vatican

PART 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

Theme 1. Everything is fine in the personal sphere, but the public sphere causes much anxiety

These are two lines: the personal line is like everything is in order, I feel safe, I do my job, I take care of my family, children, and home, but that external, political, social line is like some kind of shadow.

We founded two companies; we are starting to move to work with young people.

It is a strange feeling; on one side, everything seems good, and on the other, there is such a meat grinder. I don't know, this tractor is ploughing.

As long as you think about your home, family relationships, and village, everything is fine, but if you look at the broader context, you understand that everything is not so fine.

I can still trust my close environment but don't know what is beyond it. I have to admit that it is no longer possible to trust.

Theme 2. War anxiety, anticipation and fatigue

War anxiety have been going on for years. Whether it will happen or not – I do not know. All news starts with the war.

A new government and its first work have come – a visit to Ukraine.

It feels like it was 1939, that we are living on the eve of the war.

We live on the border of Lithuania, so we seem to be constantly on alert: we sit and wait – will there be war here or not?

I have read a lot about the interwar period and the scientists who created the atomic bomb. It is an exciting time when you understand that anything can happen and that people also had to make choices back then.

An ambiguous feeling: if you keep a loaded gun, sometimes an accident happens at home. The gun must be locked.

If they say that there will be that war, then I want them to tell me when this delay is starting to bother me.

Every 30 years, there are perturbations, geopolitical upheavals, redistributions of power, the crisis of the 70s, then the 90s; it is not clear how we will get out of this now; for example, the Syrians took advantage of the fact that Russia is fighting in Ukraine. North Korea is helping Russia, it is not clear how everything can get out of this.

Theme 3. Crisis of values – disappointment with election results

During the elections in Lithuania, Europe and the USA, a decisive change in values was felt.

Society no longer demands transparency or reputation from leaders. Both convicted and convicted people, as well as people with very dubious reputations and values, are candidates, and society elects them, and they become leaders.

The topic of non-transparency has arisen at the national, municipal and organizational levels.

In Germany, everything is now happening as it was when the Nazis came. The far right is forming the government in Austria, and so are the Hungarians and Slovaks. The far-right has parallels with fascism.

After these elections, there is such a great sense of injustice, a tearing apart of oneself, because I grew up thinking that the value is to learn, to seek knowledge, and then apply it. Now, I see people come to power without education or even being convicted.

For me, as a young person, the elections brought a series of disappointments: Nausėda is OK, nothing has changed, but when we elected Gražulis to the European Parliament, Blinkevičiūtė, who was elected to the Seimas, withdrew, and then we elected Žemaitaitis to the ruling coalition...

Theme 4. Conscious detachment from the public space, retreating to the personal

War anxiety, has been going on for years, but I stopped worrying. I started practising Kundalini yoga, focusing on my inner self, where there is peace and no turbulence, and if it appears, I meditate, and peace returns again.

Dissociating from everything that is happening in the outside world. I still follow events, but I look at many angry voices screaming at each other and think, let them scream. My friends and I will play an African drum circle.

This year I have devoted much effort to what is most important: to the community, my family, myself, and my inner child. I am gradually moving on to activities that interest me and that I want and can afford to do.

Moreover, I turn away from the sometimes-unbearable hustle and bustle. Furthermore, I practice yoga sacredly every day.

I no longer find myself in society; people experience all sorts of excess physical and intellectual stress, so for me, meditation and creativity are survival as a response to the world around me.

I see many people who take care of themselves and nature—getting well as a survival strategy.

A survival strategy is drifting, distancing yourself from that large flow of information.

In recent years, my survival strategy has been to distance myself from what is happening both in Lithuania and in the world, and then I can function peacefully.

I, my family, and my children say that we need to enjoy life now because it is unclear what will happen. Do we need to be threatened with war so that we can start enjoying life?

Theme 5. Powerlessness: is the government capable of solving the problems of a complex reality?

It is so complicated inside (in Lithuania); everyone sees the same things differently that it is difficult to agree on how to solve problems, so attention is directed to external problems, such as war.

It is very difficult to communicate when you think that you are right or know how to live, and everyone else is an idiot. It is very difficult to agree when we do not think about common interests, only personal ones.

We only hear about the check scandal, the lies of the Social Democrats, and corrupt politicians. But I feel that there are those in power who are not lying, who are not corrupt, but they are somehow very silent.

Systems management has reached a crisis that we no longer know how to manage. Large companies reach such a scale of growth that they collapse.

The bureaucratic-democratic apparatus of the European Union is turning very slowly.

Theme 6. What is the government not telling us? or what are we projecting onto the government?

The government only scares us with war to mobilize, gather people, and teach them to enjoy the present moment and what they have. However, the government knows that there will be no war.

Here, the newly formed government in full has left for a visit to Ukraine, and after all, this is a great carelessness; if war broke out - everyone would die immediately.

The government scares us with war to divert citizens' attention from the country's internal problems, which it cannot solve.

Divisive and projecting politicians are seen and heard in public; those who are able to reflect (are in a depressed position) are silent or are not seen in public.

Citizens are not provided with all but only part of the distorted information; we watch it as a show or Hollywood movies that distort reality.

The government does not say that it cannot cope or that it does not know how to solve complex problems and situations.

Controlling and manipulative manager (mother). Employees support and defend such a manager.

Theme 7. Generational trauma - echoes of the government's violence against its citizens?

It is as if you want to stand and fight for your values, but when you remember the pre-war deportations, it becomes scary. Those who spoke tried to resist and fought but were unsuccessful.

That anxiety comes from somewhere... from somewhere from those generational traumas that we sometimes repeat; what did we feel, or did our parents or grandparents feel?

My husband is of Jewish origin; his grandparents fled from Belarus. Furthermore, they never... have never talked about their experience. When there were protests about the government's manifestations of anti-Semitism, I said, "Maybe you want to go?"... His first reaction was this: "No, we will not go anywhere because there might be filming, and people will be captured" from instinct, not from his personal experience, but from the experience of previous generations.

PART 3: ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In our personal lives, everything is going well, but we experience significant anxiety in the public sphere. At home and with our families, we feel safe and are able to navigate challenges effectively. In a recent group discussion, participants shared their personal achievements, methods for calming down, and strategies for coping with anxiety. These strategies included focusing on specific tasks, enjoying the present moment with family, spending time on hobbies, and engaging with local communities.

However, national and international political events create a tremendous amount of anxiety, fear, and distrust. The public sphere feels uncertain, complex, unpredictable, disappointing, and disempowering. This leads many to want to distance themselves from it, escaping to focus on personal connections or smaller communities where they can feel a sense of control. The anxiety surrounding war has persisted for years, prominently featured in our daily news cycle. It often feels as though we are teetering on the edge of conflict, yet the exact moment it might erupt remains unclear. We are weary of the prolonged anticipation; it would be preferable to have a definitive start date for the war. The ongoing discussions and uncertainty take an emotional toll on us. Moreover, by continuously focusing on the prospect of war, we may inadvertently invite it into our lives, much like how a gun stored at home can unexpectedly discharge.

There is a growing suspicion that the government is withholding information or keeping certain matters under wraps. People project omnipotence onto the government, believing it must have all the answers and solutions. However, this illusion quickly crumbles when it becomes evident that the government

fails to meet these expectations. Disappointment arises, accompanied by accusations of corruption, theft, non-transparency, confusion, and disorder within the government. Some individuals may defend the government's authority under the assumption that it is keeping secrets. They may be reluctant to acknowledge that the government might be unsure about how to address the current situation. It can feel safer or more comforting to believe that the truth is being concealed from ordinary citizens, as this leads to the assumption that there is someone who understands what is happening and will ultimately resolve the chaos.

There is a belief that uneducated, convicted felons with controversial reputations won the elections. Why is this the case? Perhaps those in charge have always presented themselves as moral leaders, but in reality, they are corrupt and untrustworthy. We have nothing to lose because the newly elected candidates are no worse than their predecessors. So, what difference does it make? Maybe we secretly admire those who defy the law and refuse to follow the rules because we believe that if we were in their position, we would do the same. This reflects a normalization of non-compliance with the law, or perhaps it stems from jealousy. If we had the same opportunities, we might also take the chance to break the law.

Lithuania's role in the world is often viewed as insignificant. This perception leads to greater anxiety about global crises than local ones, as we have grown accustomed to local government crises and changes following each election. We have become used to these shifts. In contrast, the redistribution of power among global actors causes us much more concern.

In the current climate of war anxiety, many individuals are searching for survival strategies. Approaches like yoga, prayer, art, and proactive preparation for conflict can help mitigate the anxieties stemming from the anticipation of war. However, the question remains: what will we do if war actually breaks out? Some people already know their plans, while others are uncertain. Those who have made up their minds can find solace in each day of peace. Some will choose to fight on the battlefield, while others may opt for flight or decide to stay and adapt. The notion of resisting an external aggressor is often overshadowed by the trauma of past defeats at the hands of occupiers, which has been passed down through generations, alongside memories of a controlling, manipulative, persecuting, and repressive authority.

Hypothesis:

People’s lives appear to continue as normal. However, the ongoing anxiety and fear of war, along with advances in technology and the shifting centers of global power, compel individuals to create a distinction between their personal and social (public) lives. In search of comfort and stability, many retreat into smaller, more manageable environments. This strategy of adaptation helps address issues related to emotional and spiritual well-being, but the question of physical security in the face of war remains unaddressed, leading to strong feelings of helplessness. This creates an unconscious desire for omnipotence that individuals project onto political authorities. People hope, or want to believe, that the government understands and can control the geopolitical situation. However, the government’s inability to find solutions only intensifies feelings of frustration and helplessness.

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