HIGHLIGHTS

Central and Eastern Eurobarometer Nr. 8 interviewed 10,349 persons face to face in their homes in ten Central and Eastern European countries during November 1997 to assess public opinion on the European Union and the political climate in the region. For the second time now, 1,615 "decision-makers/opinion formers having an impact on European integration" were questioned at random by telephone in the ten applicant countries. The key results are:

- In the five first wave countries negotiating an entry to the European Union, opinions on the EU have either improved (Hungary, Estonia, Slovenia) or remained stable and positive (Poland, Czech Republic). 42% of people in this group see the future of their country most closely tied up with the European Union. 50% have a positive impression of the EU´s aims and activities (only 6% a negative one). Public support for EU-membership amounts to 59% (respondents who would vote for EU-membership in case of a referendum) having increased everywhere except in Poland, the country with the highest pro-accession voting intentions in this group anyway. Younger and better educated people in particular hold an above-the-average positive view about the European Union.

- In the other five countries, opinions on the European Union have improved markedly in Slovakia and Bulgaria, while Latvia and Lithuania are still lagging behind in this respect. In Romania the general mood about the EU has worsened, the United States of American gaining importance in that country. The sometimes more critical opinions in Latvia and Lithuania can be explained partly by a lack of information on the EU. At the same time, decision-makers and opinion formers in these two countries are very ambivalent about the European Commission´s assessment as regards the readiness of their countries to join the European Union. Slovaks, however, who are very critical about the situation in their country, consider the European Union a positive point of reference for their aims and ambitions and Bulgarians, who now see a more positive future for their country, are more "European" in their outlook.

- The negative trend in opinions about the EU which has been characteristic of the Baltics in the last years has been reversed. Interestingly, ethnicity is not an important factor for voting intentions (in the case of an EU-referendum) here. Ethnicity is, however, influencing voting intentions as regards a NATO-membership in that members of the ethnic minorities (mainly Russians) show a negative attitude on this issue.

- The opinions about NATO-membership have remained rather stable in the whole region (52% intend to cast a positive vote in case of a referendum), the highest support being found in Romania and Poland. For most respondents an eventual NATO-membership of their country would have no impact on their voting intentions in case of an EU-referendum , if there is an influence it is mainly a positive one.

- A market economy is considered to be right for the future of their country by more than half of respondents all over the region. Pro-market voices are strongest in Romania, Poland, Bulgaria and Estonia. In the Czech and Slovak Republics one finds a majority of market critics - a negative view, however, less directed against the new system as such than against its actual working. The overall situation of the country is evaluated very negatively in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Opinions in Hungary and Bulgaria, however, have markedly improved. Satisfaction with the development of democracy has increased notably in Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria. A definite improvement has also taken place with regard to the human rights situation in all countries. Dissatisfaction with democracy and a negative evaluation of the market economy are found below the average among younger and better educated people, an indicator for an ongoing consolidation of both the political and the economic system in the region.

INTRODUCING THE EUROBAROMETER

Standard EUROBAROMETER public opinion surveys have been conducted in the European Union (EU) several times a year since Autumn 1973 on behalf of Directorate-General X for Information, Communication, Culture, Audiovisual of the European Commission. As from January 1996, around 16,300 inhabitants of the 15 Member States, aged over 15, have been interviewed face-to-face on a nationally-representative basis. Reports on the results have been regularly published and a "trends" volume appears once a year. Furthermore European Continuous Tracking is published every 3 months in "Europinion", showing the views of ´800 EU citizens per month in each of the Member States. In 1996, a survey of top decision-makers was conducted as a pilot study.

Central and Eastern EUROBAROMETER started in Autumn 1990 when nationally-representative surveys were undertaken on behalf of the European Commission in Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia. For the second wave of research, the number of countries was expanded to include nationally-representative samples from Albania, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Russia west of the Urals. Central and Eastern EUROBAROMETER no. 3 included Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Slovenia and Ukraine, while taking into account the split of Czechoslovakia. Georgia and Moldova were not surveyed in 1993, while Georgia and Kazakhstan were added in 1994. In 1995 the survey was extended to Croatia. Yugoslavia was included in 1996. In 1997 the survey was restricted again to the ten countries in the region which are applying for EU-membership (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia). In all of the 10 countries covered by Central and Eastern EUROBAROMETER no.8, a sample of around 1000 persons were interviewed in their homes.

The survey was coordinated with the help of GfK EUROPE Ad hoc Research, in cooperation with Fessel - GfK Austria. Data processing was undertaken by GfK Data Services Germany.

The report for 1998 (fieldwork in 1997) also includes the main results of a short survey among top decision-makers and opinion-formers in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. A total of 1.615 persons were interviewed in the ten countries.

In accordance with the normal practice for this type of survey, the European Commission disclaims all responsibility for questions, results and commentaries. This report is published by the Public Opinion Surveys and Research Unit of Directorate-General X for Information, Communication, Culture, Audiovisual in cooperation with the External Information Unit of the same Directorate-General and is an internal document of the European Commission.

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MAJOR NEWS ITEMS AROUND TIME OF FIELDWORK

31 OCTOBER - 25 NOVEMBER 1997

23/24 May	NATO-referendum in Slovakia
25 May	NATO-referendum in Slovakia declared invalid
23 September	General elections in Poland are won by the opposition (conservative party AWS led by Marian Krzaklewski and liberal party UW led by Leszek Balcerowicz)
September	International Court of Justice in Den Haag rules in the Slovak-Hungarian case about the Danube electric power plant at Gabcikovo/Nagymaros
2 October	"Amsterdam Treaty" signed by EU Foreign Ministers
23 October	Czech Foreign Minister Josef Zieleniec resigns from office; crisis between the coalition partners and inside the leading governmental party ODS
27 October - 2 November	Foreign Ministers of Bulgaria, Greece and Romania hold meeting in Sinnaia (Romania). The meeting focuses on integration into the EU and NATO and on efforts to combat organised crime
31 October	New Polish government led by Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek sworn into office
10 November	Baltic Presidents and Foreign Ministers reject the security guarantee for the Baltic states offered by Russian President Boris Yeltsin
17 November	NATO referendum in Hungary: 85% vote in favour of Hungary joining NATO (turnout: 50%)
23 November	Incumbent Slovenian President Milan Kucan reelected
30 November	Czech President Vaclav Klaus resigns from office
12/13 December	EU summit in Luxemburg

1. THE EUROPEAN UNION - The general public

1.1. Where does the future of different countries lie?

People in Central and Eastern Europe see the future of their country closely linked with the European Union. This holds **especially** true for **the first five countries**[1] **negotiating an EU entry:** 42% of the respondents in this group name the European Union as the future partner of their country (annex figure 1). The United States of America comes next (17%), followed by Germany (spontaneously named by 8%) and "other Central und Eastern European countries" (6%).

The EU is undisputed first in Slovenia (52%). **High** ratings are also achieved in Estonia (48%), Poland (45%), Hungary (42%) and the Czech Republic (38%). **The European Union has improved its standing markedly in Hungary** (+15 compared to CEEB 7) and gained ground in Estonia (+6). The situation remained unchanged in Slovenia and Poland. By contrast, the EU lost (minus) six points in the Czech Republic; however, no other country holds a comparable position there.

The United States of America are given their strongest rating in Hungary (20%), Poland (19%) and Slovenia (16%). Germany was chosen in significant numbers in Poland (9%) and Hungary (8%). **"Other Central and Eastern European countries"** are seen as a partner for the future mainly in the Czech Republic (15%), followed by Poland (8%). Russia is named practically only in Estonia (17%), while **"other Western European countries outside the EU"** hold a certain position in Estonia (11%) and the Czech Republic (10%) suffering, however, a loss of importance in the latter (-7 compared to CEEB 7).

In the **other five countries**[2] the **European Union** is seen as the **most important partner for the future** too. Here, however, the EU has lost (minus) six points compared to CEEB 7 (CEEB 7: 37%, CEEB 8: 31%). The United States of America are named by 26% and Russia by 12%.

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[1]Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia
[2]Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia

Although Slovakia is not one of the five countries included in the first wave, the EU has **notably improved its standing** there (CEEB 8: 48%, +10). To a lesser degree this also holds true for Latvia (CEEB 8: 36%, +9) and Bulgaria (CEEB 8: 34%, +6). There was no significant change in Lithuania (CEEB 8: 27%). In Romania, however, the EU lost (minus) 16 points (24% in CEEB 8) and comes behind the United States of America (39% in CEEB 8).

Except in Romania the USA are seen as an important partner for the future in Bulgaria (12%), Lithuania and Latvia (10% each), less so in the Slovak Republic (8%). Russia´s importance is greatest in Latvia (24%) but it has lost ground since last year (-7 compared to CEEB 7). It also holds a comparatively strong position in Lithuania (19%) and Bulgaria (15%).

Looking at the **Baltics** as a whole, the European Union has gained compared to last year (CEEB 8: 29%, +5), while Russia has remained stable at 20%. Especially younger and better educated persons and the ethnic majorities see their country´s future closely linked to the European Union. By contrast, members of the ethnic majorities in the Baltics (mainly Russians) put Russia in first place (annex figure 2).

1.2. The European Union´s profile and image in the region

To discover the level of public awareness of the European Union in the candidate countries CEEB 8 used two questions. First, interviewees were asked (on being shown a sticker of the European flag) to identify it. The following replies were all accepted as correct: the European Union, the European Community, the Common Market, the Council of Europe and Europe in general.

52% of those interviewed gave a correct response, compared to 15% of people who mentioned the wrong institution (for example: 6% the United Nations, and 2% NATO) and 35% of people interviewed who could not or refused to reply (annex figure 3). **Public awareness of the European flag is much greater in the first wave countries** (57% of correct answers) than in the other countries (45% of correct answers).

In absolute terms public awareness of the European flag is greatest in Slovenia (73%), Slovakia (67%), Estonia (66%) and the Czech Republic (60%, annex figure 4). The flag´s association with Europe is least known in Lithuania (40% of correct answers, 15% of wrong answers, 44% of don´t knows) and in Bulgaria (40% of correct answers, 10% of incorrect replies and 51% of don´t knows).

In 1995 (CEEB 6) the European flag was correctly identified by 47% of respondents in the ten candidate countries. Compared to CEEB 5, public awareness has increased in Estonia (+12), Latvia (+12), Lithuania (+12) as well as in Poland and Hungary (+11 each).

Of those who replied correctly, the European flag is most frequently associated with the "European Union" (41%) and the "European Community" (7%). The European Union is most often cited in Slovakia (61%), the Czech Republic (52%), in Hungary and in Slovenia (50% each). The term "European Community" appears most frequently in replies from Slovenia (20%) and Estonia (14%).

A second question asked if respondents were aware of the existence of "The European Union, or EU" as well as the "European Bank for Reconstruction and Development".

92% of respondents in all ten candidate countries (94% in the five first wave countries and 90% in the other countries) said they had **heard about the European Union** (annex figure 5). **The awareness of the EU is greatest in Slovenia** (97%), followed by **Estonia** and **Slovakia** (96%). With the exception of Lithuania (15% of don´t knows) and Bulgaria (14% of don´t knows) more than 90% of those interviewed by CEEB 8 had heard of the EU.

As was to be expected, the awareness of the **European Bank for Reconstruction and Development** is lower: **in the ten candidate countries, 52%** of interviewees said they had **heard of the EBRD** while 43% responded that they had never heard of it (annex figure 5). People in the five first wave countries are less aware of the bank (53% yes, 47% no) than those in the other countries (63% yes, 37% no). The awareness of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development is **greatest** in **Romania** (68%), **Slovakia** (65%), the **Czech Republic** (64%) and **Bulgaria** (61%), while it remains rather low in Lithuania (42%).

The image of the European Union is very positive among people living in the candidate countries. 50% say that their "impression of the aims and activities of the European Union" are generally positive (29% neutral, 6% negative; annex figure 6). Interestingly there are no significant differences in this respect between the first five countries negotiating an EU entry (49% positive, 30% neutral. 6% negative) and the five other countries (50% positive, 27% neutral, 4% negative).

Looking at the five **first wave countries** the **positive opinion** among the general public **is most evident in Poland** (56%), **Hungary** (42%) and **Slovenia** (40%) coming next. People in the Czech Republic (34% positive, 38% neutral, 7% negative) and Estonia (30% positive, 50% neutral, 8% negative) tend to have a neutral view but even here there are very few negative voices. Compared to CEEB 7 positive impressions of the aims and activities of the EU have increased notably in Hungary; the net difference between positive and negative views improving also in Estonia (CEEB 7: +14, CEEB 8: +22) and in Slovenia (CEEB 7: +22, CEEB 8: +31; annex figures 11, 10, 17).

In the **other five countries** the image of the EU impoved markedly in Slovakia (positive: 34% in CEEB 7, 46% in CEEB 8), Lithuania (positive: 22% in CEEB 7, 34% in CEEB 8) as well as in Bulgaria (42% and 50% respectively) and in Latvia (26% and 33% respectively; annex figures 16, 13, 8, 12). Only in Romania are there fewer positive voices (65% in CEEB 7, 56% in CEEB 8) but Romania remains the country with the most favourable judgement of the whole region in absolute terms (annex figure 15).

Taking the **Baltic states** as a group the **image of the European Union** is much **better** than last year (positive: 24% in CEEB 7, 33% in CEEB 8) a reversal of the negative trend of the last years. These results are congruent with the finding (mentioned already in chapter 1.1. above) that the EU has strengthened its position as a partner for the future in the Baltics, as well as with the increase of declared "yes" vote intentions in the event of an EU-referendum (chapter 1.4. below).

1.3. Getting informed about the European Union

CEEB 8 paid special attention to information interests and information habits. More specifically, a new question was asked about the frequency of the information flow on the EU and the question on information sources was modified. Thus, information sources are now standardizised for all ten candidate countries. The change of answer categories, however, does not allow a direct comparison between CEEB 8 and the previous surveys.

In all countries surveyed national television is most frequently mentioned as the principle source of information on the European Union: 84% in the region as a whole (86% in the five first wave countries and 81% in the other five countries) cite national television as their main source of information[3] (annex figure 18).

Great importance is also given to **national newspapers** (57% in all ten countries, 66% in the Baltics) and to **national radio** (52% in the region).

National periodicals as a source of information are most common in Slovakia (32%), the Czech Republic (25%), Poland (24%) and Estonia (21%), but much less elsewhere (annex figures 24, 20, 22, 26).

Information sources from EU countries are playing only a limited role: television broadcasts from EU-countries are used as a source of information mainly in Slovenia (22%, most probably Italian and German-speaking programmes given the vicinity of Italy and Austria and the high number of Slovenes knowing at least one of these two languages (annex figure 25). **Radio broadcasts from EU-countries** have a certain importance in Slovakia and Romania (7% and 6% respectively; annex figures 24 and 23). By contrast only 2% in all candidate countries get information about the EU from **periodicals from EU countries.**

[3] The lowest value is found in the Baltics (72%, annex figures 26, 27, 28). Note that the information sources enquired about have been modified in CEEB 8 compared to the previous surveys, especially in these three countries.

Information distributed by national government is quite an important source in Poland (11%; annex figure 22). Government information plays a greater role in the five first wave countries than in the other countries.

People get information **in the workplace** fairly often in Estonia and Slovakia (11% each) as well as in Latvia and Slovenia (10% each). **Schools** (5% in all ten countries) and **universities** (3% on average) are mentioned most often in Slovenia (7% and 5% respectively).

Libraries (mainly in Estonia: 11%) and the **internet** (9% in Poland and in Slovenia) are seen as important sources of information by 3% in each of the candidate countries.

Visits to countries of the European Union are named more often than average in Slovakia (6%) and Slovenia (5%), Slovenia also being the country where relatively many people get information from **personal contracts with people from the EU in their own country** (7%).

Other information sources are of minor importance: 2% mention cinemas, 1% the European Union Delegation in their capital and another 1% embassies, consulates and foreign cultural centres.

The largest number of people in candidate countries who do not get information on the EU from any source encompassed by the CEEB survey are found in Bulgaria (13%) and Lithuania (11%); a finding already observed the last two years.

The frequency of information about the European Union respondents are exposed to is quite high: 15% of those interviewed by CEEB 8 in the ten candidate countries see, read or hear something specifically about the European Union as a whole every day, another 32% at least once a week. 26% say that they get information on the EU at least once a week. By contrast, 10% get information only once or twice a year and a mere ten percent never get EU-related information (annex figure 29).

There are considerable country specific differences with regard to the information flow. The **frequency of information is highest in Slovenia** (26% daily, 48% at least once a week), followed by Hungary (36% daily, 32% at least once a week) and the Czech Republic (19% daily, 39% at least once a week). In Estonia daily information is less common (11%) but 44% see, read or hear about the EU at least every week. Among the five first wave countries, information is the least frequent in Poland: only one third of interviewees receive daily or weekly information on the EU, 30% at least once a month. One quarter of Poles are informed only once or twice a year, or never.

In the other ten countries, Slovaks (21% daily, 36% at least once a week) and Romanians (18% and 36% respectively) do get information on the EU fairly often. Bulgarians hold a middle position in this respect (13% and 38%). By contrast, only one third of respondents in Latvia and one quarter in Lithuania receive daily or weekly information on the EU. 33% of Lithuanians and 17% of Latvians say that they have never seen, read or heard anything specifically about the EU.

Asked about the EU issues of most interest to them, people living in the ten candidate countries would like in particular to hear more about working and living conditions (55%) and human rights (49%); (annex figure 30).

There is also considerable interest in issues like bilateral relations between the European Union and one´s country (39%), the environment (36%), agriculture and fisheries matters, trade with the European Union, economic and monetary affairs (34% each), business, industry and technology (33%) and common foreign and security policy (31%). About one quarter of the people interviewed in the ten countries declare an interest in the single market (26%), cultural and audiovisual matters (25%), the EU assistance programme "Phare" (24%), questions of science, research and development, EU institutions and how they work (23% each) and economic competition and privatisation (21%). Least interest is shown in the EU´s activities in the fields of energy and transport (17% each).

The ranking of interest priorities remains much the same as last year although working and living conditions in the EU and environmental issues are met with less interest than reported by CEEB 7.

On the whole **people living in the five first wave countries show a greater interest than those in the other five countries**. This is especially the case as regards matters pertaining to the environment, the single market, common foreign and security policy, trade with the European Union, bilateral relations between the EU and one´s own country, EU institutions and how they work, and science, research and technology. Except for the environment and science, research and technology, these are all issues closely related to the functioning of the EU and bilateral relations.

1.4. Referendum on membership of the EU and NATO

In the ten candidate countries on the whole, an overwhelming majority of citizens[4] **would vote in favour of joining the European Union in the event of a referendum**: 60% of those questioned in the ten countries would vote for membership, a mere 8% would vote against and 17% remain undecided at the time of the survey (annex figure 32). The overall results are nearly identical to those reported in CEEB 6 and CEEB 7.

In the five first wave countries 59% declare a voting intention in favour of their country´s EU-membership while 8% say that they would cast a no-vote in case of a referendum. The **declared pro-membership voting intention is highest in Poland** (63%) albeit lower than found last year (-7 compared to CEEB 7). There was, however, no increase in no-vote intentions (6% in CEEB 8). This difference is to be explained by an increase of those who are undecided or persons who would abstain from the vote. In the other four countries of this group, the **intention to vote in favour increased** notably, most of all in **Slovenia** (57% pro, +10) and in **Hungary** (56% pro, +9), but also in the Czech Republic (49% pro, +6) and in Estonia (35% pro, +6). Estonia is the country with the highest percentage of undecided persons (37%) as was the case last year. People who said they would vote against EU membership of the country are found mostly in Slovenia (18%), in Estonia (14%) and in the Czech Republic (13%). In Hungary the share of intended no-votes fell from 15% in CEEB 7 to 9% in CEEB 8.

With the exception of Poland, where the reported pro-membership vote is the highest anyway, the **decision of the EU to open negotiations** with the first wave countries has thus had a **positive effect on the intended pro-membership voting**.

At the same time, there was **nearly no negative effect in the other five candidate countries**. On the whole, 63% of citizens in this second group declare that they would vote for EU-membership; 7% would vote against and 15% are undecided - much the same as last year. Only in Romania did the share of declared pro-membership votes fall from 80% (CEEB 7) to 71% (CEEB 8). But Romania remains the country where people are most in favour

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[4] Note for the referendum question the results are given obviously for citizens, not residents.

of EU membership and a negative attitude remains limited to a mere 4% of respondents. By contrast, there is a substantial increase of intended pro-membership votes in the Slovak Republic (62% pro, +16) and Bulgaria (57% pro, +8).

The Slovak case is particularly interesting since ordinary citizens there increasingly have a positive opinion of the EU in practically all fields increasingly despite the sometimes less than positive discussions between their government and the European Union. It appears that the rather negative evaluation of the country´s internal situation has led many Slovaks to look for an external point of reference for their hopes and ambitions. Latvians too are more in favour of an EU entry than they were last year (CEEB 8: 34% pro, +6), the opposing position remaining stable at 13%. In Lithuania both the intended pro and against-votes have increased (pro: 35% in CEEB 7, 40% in CEEB 8; against: 6% in CEEB 7, 13% in CEEB 8) at the expense of those who are undecided or would abstain from participating in a referendum. Generally the uncertainty in the Baltics reported by CEEB 7 last year has given way to a more positive attitude towards the European Union.

There are considerable **group specific differences** regarding the willingness to cast a pro-membership vote in case of a referendum about joining the European Union. Generally, better educated persons, the upper income strata, younger people and urbanites are more in favour of their country joining the EU; males more than females.

The smallest number of pro-vote intentions comes from farmers and pensioners (annex figure 33). With the exception of farmers (where 14% say they would cast a no-vote) members of the less enthusiastic groups show no above-the-average tendency to vote against EU membership rather, these people remain undecided or say that they will abstain from the vote. Interestingly enough, **ethnicity is not a very important factor even in the Baltic states**: Looking at the overall population in the Baltics[5] 39% of those belonging to the ethnic majority say that they would vote in favour as would 36% of the ethnic minorities; a no-vote intention is reported by 13% of the majority and by 8% of the minorities. Although a relatively high number of ethnic minorities in the Baltics see the future of their country as related to Russia rather than to the EU, many of those people do not want to cast a negative vote.

[5] Due to national laws which sometimes require specific qualities for citizenship, in some parts of the Baltics, a considerable number of people belonging to the ethnic minorities, notably Russians, do not have the right to vote. To analyse the influence of ethnicity on voting intentions, therefore, one has to seek the opinion of residents rather than only the elegible voters.

Like last year, CEEB 8 asked for the **reasons** for a vote "for" or "against" joining the European Union (annex figure 34). **The strongest argument given for a vote in favour** of EU-membership is the expectation that **general progress** can be made thanks to the EU (35% in the region as a whole but 44% in Lithuania and 40% in Romania). **Economic improvement and open markets** come next (25%). In Slovakia this argument is the strongest of all (41%).

Higher standards of living as a reason for a "pro" vote are given mostly in Poland (26% compared to an average of 17% in all candidate countries).

The **wish for integration** in Europe (10% in all countries) is strongest in Bulgaria (28%). **Economic and financial aid from the EU** (another 10%) serve as prominent arguments both in Romania and Bulgaria, two countries where the results of economic reform policies have been felt only recently.

9% in all candidate countries name **open borders and a broader world outlook** as a reason for joining the EU, mainly in Poland. The **European Union´s contribution to peace, human rights and democracy** is also of importance for 9%, especially in the Baltics (*"the EU could influence democracy in Estonia"* to quote one Estonian or *"the rights of Russians and other minorities will be defended"* to quote another) and in the Czech Republic.

General cooperation in the fields of science, technlogy, culture and education are given as "pro"-arguments by 4%, while 3% hope that **the EU "will make us strong".** The first line of reasoning is most developed in Poland, the second one in Slovakia.

A **negative vote** is justified most of all by the fear that EU-membership will **worsen the economic crisis, is too expensive and brings no benefits** to one´s own country (6% of respondents in all candidate countries). Fears of this kind are harboured especially in the Baltics (17% in the three Baltic states); many people there are preoccupied that their countries are not yet ready to join the European Union or fear for local business (*"it would result in the import of European goods and the destruction of local manifacturing"* to use the words of a Latvian respondent).

Other "contra" arguments are the **fear of losing one´s identity and independence** (2% in the region). This argument plays some role in the Baltics but much less in East Central Europe than last year. 2% in all candidate countries think that **the EU acts in its own interests** (and consequently not so much in the interest of the respondents´countries) while a very small number (1%) is afraid of the EU being a cause of **instability and disintegration**.

The overall picture also remains much unchanged as to the question of **NATO membership**. In all candidate countries 52% say that they would vote for NATO membership (53% in the five first wave countries, 52% in the other countries), 11% say that they would vote against (10% in the first and 13% in the second group), 18% of the interviewees remain undecided (19% and 17% respectively; annex figure 35). Support of NATO membership is highest in Romania (67%) and Poland (61%) and lowest in Estonia (32%), Lithuania (31%) and Slovakia (31%). Pro-membership voting intentions increased notably in Hungary (47% pro, +15), Bulgaria (37% pro, +10), the Czech Republic (36%, +8) and Slovenia (45% pro, +6), but declined in Romania (67% pro, -9). On the other hand voting intentions against NATO membership became stronger in Slovenia (23% against, +8), Slovakia (27% against, +8), Lithuania (16% against, +7) and in Romania (9% against, +6) but got weaker in Hungary (15% against, -8).

Group specific differences are also found in the **voting intentions in favour of NATO membership** (annex figure 36). Higher education, higher income and (male) gender appear to work in favour of a yes-vote. Farmers and housewives are significantly less inclined to cast a favourable vote. Again, there is much less difference as regards negative voting intentions. However, **in the case of NATO membership, ethnicity does play an important role in the Baltics**. Looking at the resident population (and not only at eligible voters) 35% of the ethnic majorities declare a voting intention for joining NATO, while only 14% of the ethnic minorities do so. Correspondingly, only 11% of the ethnic majority announces a no-vote but 24% of the minority does (annex figure 57).

The clearly **dominating reason for a pro NATO vote** is the expectation that NATO will guarantee **security and stability in the region** (52% in all candidate countries), an argument most prominent in Poland (71%). **Security from Russia** is named by 6%, most of all in Estonia and Latvia (annex figure 37).

The hope that **NATO will control and reform the army and the military industry** is mentioned by an overall 13 percent as a reason for a pro-membership vote; in Lithuania this holds true for 35% outnumbering all other arguments in this country. **NATO´s contribution to general progress and cooperation** (not only in the military field) is named by 10%, most often in Bulgaria and Romania. 7% simply state that their country needs NATO support while 4% believe that NATO membership would make them a **part of Europe** (20% in Bulgaria).

Reasons for a no-vote (very few in total) are more diffuse. 6% declare a wish for **neutrality** (especially in the Baltics), another 6% take a general stand **against the military** and **war** (mainly respondents in the Czech and Slovak Republics). 5% think that **NATO membership is financially impossible** for their country (above the average in Slovakia and the Czech Republic).

Three of the ten candidate countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland) are also negotiating NATO-membership, in the other six countries this topic is a very much discussed issue on the public agenda. CEEB 8 asked interviewees "if (country) joins NATO before the European Union, would that make you more likely to vote for European Union membership, less likely to vote for European Union membership, or would it make no difference?" **Most respondents** said that **(eventual) NATO membership would make no difference as regards their voting intention on EU-membership** (54% in the whole region). **23% are more likely to vote for EU membership** and 4% are less inclined do so (annex figure 38).

Joining NATO can be expected to have a positive influence on a pro-EU-vote mainly in Romania (40% "more likely", 40% "no difference"). Poland (21% "more likely") and Slovakia (21% "more likely") coming next, albeit by a large margin. On the other hand a negative effect is most probable in Estonia, Latvia and Slovakia ("less likely" 8% each). Two out of ten respondents (19% in the region) don´t know whether NATO membership of their country would influence their vote on EU membership; above-the-average numbers of "don´t knows" are given mainly in Lithuania (30%), Hungary (26%) and Bulgaria (26%).

1.5. European integration: who expects to benefit or to lose?

Asked who they think benefits most from the **relationship between their country and the European Union**, 42% of citizens interviewed in the **ten candidate countries** say that **both benefit equally**, while 25% believe that their country benefits most and 17% assume that the European Union does (annex figure 39).

In the **five first wave countries 40%** see the **relationship** as a **balanced** one, **19%** believe that the **European Union** benefits most and **19% that their country** is the primary beneficiary. CEEB 8 thus confirms the result from last year according to which citizens in the economically more developed countries, namely Slovenia and the Czech Republic, tend to see a relationship more favourable to the European Union although a relative majority in both countries see benefit for both sides (36% in Slovenia and 35% in the Czech Republic). In Poland 40% view the relationship as a balanced one, while 22% each assume either more benefits for their own country or for the EU. In Hungary 40% see both sides as benefiting, 24% believe that their own country benefits most and 15% that the EU does. In Estonia, the number of people who view their country as the primary beneficiary equals those who see a balanced relationship (32% and 31% respectively; EU: 22%).

Compared to last year´s results there have been **visible shifts** in three of the five first wave countries: in the Czech Republic the share of respondents who consider that the EU benefits most declined from 27% (CEEB 7) to 20% (CEEB 8), in Slovenia the share of respondents who believe their own country benefits most increased from 14% (CEEB 7) to 21% CEEB 8, in Hungary both developments took place.

In the **other five countries, 45% assume a balanced relationship, 30% one beneficial most of all for their own country (+7 compared to CEEB 7) and 11% one favouring the EU.** A relationship benefiting both sides equally is seen to be the case mainly in Romania (53%, but -7 compared to last year), in Slovakia (43%) and in Bulgaria (38%). In Lithuania those seeing more benefits for their own country increased notably (39% in CEEB 8, +12), the same being true to a lesser extent in Bulgaria (30% in CEEB 8, +6) and the

Slovak Republic (25% in CEEB 8, +10). In Latvia there was a decline of the number of respondents viewing the EU as the most favoured party (CEEB 8: 12%, -7). Looking at both sides of the coin one can find a **clear trend** since this question was first asked in 1994 (CEEB 5):

in **Bulgaria, Latvia, Romania and Slovakia** there are **more people** now who see their **own country benefiting** more from a closer relationship with the EU, at the same time there was a **reduction** of those who believe **the European Union** benefits most. In **Lithuania** the evaluation remained rather **stable** over time.

When asked **"who do you think is likely to benefit or lose out as ties between (our country) and the European Union increase?" great majorities** of interviewees indicate the **private sector** (62% in all candidate countries) and the **armed forces** (60%) as the **primary winners. Other beneficiaries** are said to be the educational system (55%), and health and social services (52%). Benfits rather than losses are also assumed for civil servants, state enterprises, manual workers and low income groups(annex figure 40).

On the other hand farmers are thought most likely to lose out (34%). On the whole people in the **five first wave countries** are more preoccupied about the future of **farmers than are those in the other countries**. This holds **especially** true for **Slovenia** (66% lose out, +9 compared to CEEB 7), Estonia and the Czech Republic (43% each). However, both Estonians and Czechs are less worried about the prospects for farmers than last year (annex figures 50, 42, 43).

Looking at the **individual countries, Hungarians** are seeing a **rosier future** for the educational system, civil servants and also for state enterprises, low income groups and manual workers than they did in CEEB 7 (annex figure 44). Czechs see better or less negative prospects for farmers, low income groups and manual workers (annex figure 42) but growing problems for civil servants and private business. The future of the latter is also viewed more pessimistically in Slovenia.

In the **other countries** there is a tendency for **increased optimism** for manual workers, low income groups, the educational system, state enterprises and farmers in **Slovakia**; for the health and social services, state enterprises and civil servants in Latvia, for private business, the educational system and health and social services in Lithuania, for farmers, private business and low income groups in Bulgaria (annex figures 49, 45, 46, 41).

By contrast, Romanians see more problems for most groups compared to last year, but the net balance of benefits and losses remains a very positive one for all groups in this country (annex figure 48).

Private enterpreneurs are especially **optimistic** about the future of private business as ties between their countries and the European Union increase - a tendency already observed last year (annex figure 53). **A big change look place in the outlook of farmers as regards their prospects**: while in CEEB 7 only 26% of farmers thought to benefit from a closer relationship with the EU, 34% believed they would in CEEB 8; at the same time, the number of farmers holding a pessimistic view of the future fell from 51% to 44% (annex figure 54). In a mid´term perspective, farmers, and to a lesser extent people living on low incomes, show a notable improvement of their views about the future of their respective groups.

1.6. Knowledge of languages

CEEB 8 asked for the first time about the **ability of people to read** languages easily thus changing the point of view of the previous surveys[6]. Due to the size of the respective ethnic groups, Polish (37%) and Romanian (21%) are the two languages the most people can read. Russian comes next with 19% (annex figures 55 und 56). The most widely known Western languages are English (12%) and German (10%) followed by French (4%).

Russian is known by the largest number of people in the Baltic countries (Latvia: 87%, Lithuania: 82%, Estonia: 73%). Elsewhere, relatively large numbers of people able to read Russian are found in Slovakia and Poland. Knowledge of English is highest in Slovenia (32%) and in Estonia (17%). German is read by the largest percentage of people in Slovenia (27%), the Czech (20%) and Slovak (19%) Republics. 14% of the interviewees in Romania can read French. Other Western languages known - typically the ones spoken in neighbouring countries - are Italian (11% in Slovenia) and Finnish (13% Estonia).

1.7. Opinions on the European Union - a summarized view

To summarize the findings of those questions which reveal the general view of the EU (future of countries, image of the European Union, voting intentions in case of a referendum on joining the EU) (annex figures 1, 6, 32) one can distinguish **three groups of countries: Poland, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria score high on all three issues** (with the partial exception of Romania where more respondents see their country´s future linked to the United States of America rather than to the European Union). **Hungary and Slovenia** hold a **middle position**. On the other hand, the general opinion on the European Union is well **below average** in the **Czech Republic**, **and the Baltic states** (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) although it is clearly positive in all three cases (text figure 1).

Compared to CEEB 7 **opinions on the EU improved strongly in Hungary, Slovakia and Estonia and visibly in Bulgaria, Latvia and Slovenia**. They

[6] In the previous CEEB surveys the question was about the ability to speak. Results are therefore not directly comparable.

remained rather stable in Lithuania, the Czech Republic ("stable low") and Poland ("stable high"). A definite **worsening** is reported **in Romania** (text figure 2).

CEEB 7 had already noted that opinions on the EU are also related to internal conditions in candidate countries. Hungarians and Bulgarians show a much more **positive attitude on the general development** of their respective countries than last year, notably due to an economic boom in **Hungary** and the first signs of a recovering in **Bulgaria**. The **upward trend in Estonia** has been visible for three consecutive years now. Slovaks have much to criticise in the internal situation of their country and are looking for an external point of reference for their hopes and ambitions: this is evidently the European Union, although **Slovakia** is not one of the first wave of countries negotiating an EU entry.

Slovenes and Czechs who live in the two economically most developed countries in the region show above-the-average concern about the cost of an EU-membership for some groups of the population (**annex figures** 42 and 50) the Czech situation being aggravated by a growing pessimism about the overall development of the country. **Polish** opinions on the European Union have been positive and relatively stable over the last years.

Romania has made a big step forward as regards the overall development of the country as well as to views on the European Union compared to last year. These hopes, which were also connected to the change in government and presidency[7], have become somewhat dampened and the symbolic presence of the United States of America was highlighted by a visit of President Clinton to Romania.

Lativa and Lithuania show the lowest level of positive opinions on the EU of all countries, although the perceived cost-benefit balance of closer relations with the EU has improved from CEEB 7 to CEEB 8. In both countries, but especially in Lithuania, the communication flow about the EU is still not satisfactory (annex figure 29). As indicated by data from the decision-makers´ survey (annex figure 58) there is also a relatively high level of disappointment

[7]CEEB 7 fieldwork was conducted immediately after the parliamentary and presidential elections in November 1996

about the EU´s decision not to include these two states in the first wave five-group.

2. THE EUROPEAN UNION - Decision Makers and Opinion Formers

2.1. Image of the European Union

Surprisingly, looking at the whole region the decision-makers´ and the opinion-formers´ impressions of the aims and activities of the European Union have remained constant compared to last year. **Eight in ten respondents** have a **positive attitude towards the EU**, 17% have a neutral view or no opinion and only 3% a negative one (annex figure 7)[8].

The positive opinion among decision-makers is most evident in **Poland** with 95%, which means an increase of 7 percentage-points since 1996 and Bulgaria up 8 points at 88%.

In contrast, the image of the EU in the **Baltic states** is still below average (just 65% respond "positive" compared to 66% in 1996), consisting mainly of Estonia (62%) and Latvia (63%). However, in Estonia the rate of positive impressions of the EU has increased from only 50% of the respondents last year to 62% this year.

Comparing different types of organisations the **most positive view of the EU** is found among **academics** (90%), members of local government and press/media representatives (84% each). This means a slight increase in these sectors (+5 to +7 pps).

Business-people are less enthusiastic with a 71% approval vote and a 6% disapproval vote, an even smaller amount than in 1996 (74% vs. 5%).

2.2. Assessment of EU opinion

Six out of ten decision-makers and opinion-formers judge the **assessment given by the European Commission on the readiness of their countries to join the European Union to be very accurate (11%) or**

[8]A random sample of 1,615 candidate country decision-makers/opinion-formers were surveyed by telephone. The sample was drawn from a specially created European Commission database of 33,000 "decision-makers/opinion-formers having an impact on European integration" who receive the bimonthly magazine "European Dialogue" published by the Commission as part of its pre-accession strategy.

quite accurate (49%). 20% say it is not very accurate and a mere 3% see it as not at all accurate (annex figure 58).

Respondents in the first wave countries have a more **positive view on the EU´s assessment** (62% "accurate", 17% "not accurate") than those in the countries not currently negotiating an entry into the European Union (57% "accurate", 30% "not accurate").

In **Estonia**, an overwhelming majority (90%) express their **positive impression** of the EC´s opinion, followed by **Bulgaria** (72%) - although it is not one of the first applicant countries - **Slovenia** (72%) and **Poland** (71%).

Two countries, **Lithuania** and **Latvia**, are tremendously **ambivalent** concerning this issue: In both states, only approximately half of the target-group agrees with the EC´s assessment, while about 40% disapprove. This attitude can easily be understood considering the position of the Baltics as regards joining the European Union.

There appears to be a huge lack of information among decision-makers and opinion-formers in Hungary on the issue of Hungary´s readiness to join the EU: nearly four out of ten (38%) cannot reply to the question or are unacquainted with the subject. This high amount of DKs reduces the number of people agreeing with the estimation to 36%.

Differentiating between types of organisations, the highest percentage of people who accept the EU´s assessment is to be found among journalists, with a majority of almost three quarters (74%) approving of it. This is vital in view of the influence this group can have on the public.

2.3. Getting informed about the European Union

Decision-makers and opinion-formers show most interest in **relations between the EU and their countries** (73%) and the EU assistance program **"Phare"** (70%). There is also a wish for more information on economic and monetary affairs (65%) and environmental issues (63%). The top four subjects have remained in the same position compared to last year (annex figure 31).

Considering the process of economic change taking place in the candidate countries, one finds a great need for information on all economic-related subjects (business/ industry/technology: 62%, trade with the European Union: 59%, competition/privatization: 58%, single market: 58%). Other high ranking issues are the institutions of the European Union and how they work, as well as working and living conditions in the EU.

The European Dialogue magazine[9] **is - along with the national newspapers** - the **most important information source for decision-makers** according to the respondents. 73% think that these two are their main sources of information about the European Union. National television is in second place at 62%. National periodicals come next with 52%, closely followed by fruitful personal contacts with people from the European Union (51%). Likewise, around half of the interviewed persons (49%) consider national radio and visits to European Union countries (48%) as one of their primary information sources. Remarkably, for as many as 45% of respondents, the **internet** plays an important role in their search for information. Along with the place of work, it is in seventh place of popular ways to hear about the activities of the European Union. Nearly four in ten respondents (38%) consider the government an important informant (annex figure 59).

Mass-media from EU-countries play a less important role in the applicant countries than do their national equivalents: television broadcasts from European Union countries are still substantial, although less than one third

[9] Since all decision-makers and opinion-formers interviewed in this study receive the European Dialogue magazine (a European Commission publication) the impact of this source of information might be somewhat lower outside the sample.

(31%) of people quote it. 28% make use of libraries. Newspapers from European Union countries are used by roughly one fourth (27%), as is the case with embassies, consulates and foreign cultural centres. Every fourth respondent says to have had contact with the European Union Delegation in their capital one way or the other.

Radio broadcasts from European Union countries play a small role in informing target-persons in the applicant countries (16% answer). The same goes for universities with 15%. Cinema and schools do not play a significant role as information channels.

Regarding the **trustworthiness of the information sources**, the European Dialogue magazine has the best results of all possibilities given: About two thirds of all respondents (67%) believe that the European Dialogue magazine is a reliable source of information about the European Union (annex figure 70).

Mass-media from European Union countries are considered more trustworthy then their national equivalents. One has to take into consideration, however, that European media are only accessible to, as well as used by, a minor number of respondents, thus resulting in rather high non-response rates concerning trustworthiness.

National newspapers are regarded as reliable by almost six in ten decision-makers (56%), newspapers from European countries, on the other hand, are trusted by almost three in ten persons (29%).

Roughly half of the decision-makers and opinion-formers interviewed (49%) trusts national television. TV broadcasts from European Union countries are credible for 31%. National radio is considered trustworthy by 43% while European Union radio stations are judged reliable by 20%.

National periodicals are considered trustworthy by roughly half of the sample (46%). Exactly one third finds that periodicals from European Union countries are trustworthy.

Information published by the government is regarded as reliable by 37% of the interviewees. Information distributed by embassies, consulates and foreign cultural centres is trusted by three in ten persons. The results for the European Union Delegation as a source of information are that 30% consider it trustworthy.

For managers, executives and other decision-makers, one of the most reliable references are visits to European Union countries, considered trustworthy by roughly half (49%) of the interviewees. Nearly the same findings occur in connection with information gained through local personal contacts with people from the European Union (53% consider these a trustworthy source).

2.4. Decision-makers and Opinion-formers compared to the General Public

Like last year, CEEB compared the opinions of the general public with those held by **decision-makers and opinion-formers**. The **views** of the latter **on the aims and activities of the European Union** are even more favourable than those expressed by ordinary citizens: 80% have a positive impression of the EU (general public: 50%), 14% hold a neutral one (as compared to 29%) and 3% a negative one (6% among respondents of the ten candidate countries (annex figures 6 and 7).

The average difference of positive opinions between the groups thus amounts to +30 percentage points in the whole region, the greatest differences are reported in Hungary (+44), Poland and the Czech Republic (+39 each).

Decision-makers and opinion-formers also rely on a much **broader range of information sources** on the EU (annex figure 18). While there is relatively little difference regarding the use of national media, decision-makers name to a much greater extent **media from EU-countries**, the **Internet** and especially personal **contacts** with people from the EU as well as **visits** to EU countries as primary sources of information. As to be expected, this group also gets more information about the European Union at their place of work and from institutional contacts.

Not surprisingly and consonant with the results of CEEB 7, CEEB 8 also shows **considerable differences regarding the issue priorities between decision-makers and opinion-formers and the general public**. The predominant interests of the first group are relations between their country and the EU, the EU-assistence programme "Phare" and monetary and economic affairs. In the general public the three top issues are working and living conditions in the EU, human rights and bilateral relations (annex figures 30 and 3). Decision-makers and opinion-formers also show a comparatively high interest in EU-institutions and how they work (59% compared to 23%).

3. ECONOMIC AND DEMOCRATIC REFORMS

3.1. Market economy

The ten countries covered by CEEB 8 do not only differ in their level of economic performance but also in their individual paths towards a market economy and the degree to which the rules and institutions of a market economy have been established so far. While most of the East-Central European countries and parts of the Baltics have already restructered their economies to a large degree, other countries, e.g. Romania and Bulgaria, have taken decisive steps towards economic reforms only recently. Market economy thus means different things to different people: in the first case it has become a social reality which is evaluated according to practical experiences and criticized with an aim to making practical adjustments ("which market economy?"); in the second case the transformation process is still far from being completed and the evaluation of a market economy is more that of an alternative to the remnants of the old economic order than a judgement about concrete achievements and shortcomings.

In CEEB 8 as in CEEB 7 a majority of respondents in all candidate countries advocate a market economy. In the first five countries negotiating an EU entry (1st wave five) **52%** personally feel that the **creation** of a **market economy,** that is, one largely free from state control, i**s right for the future of their country** while 27% hold the opposite view (annex figure 71). **Pro-market orientations are strongest in Poland** where 62% think that the creation of a market economy is right and only 19% feel that it is wrong; public opinion following the extraordinary economic sucess of the last years. Estonia comes next (55% "right", 32% "wrong"). In both countries there was a majority of market supporters in all CEEBs up to today and the positive values polled by CEEB 8 nearly equal those of the early 90ties when there were high hopes but few experiences with the new system (annex figures 81 and 77). In Hungary supporters (37%) outnumber critics (31%) but one third of the respondents take no clear position. However, the negative trend registered between 1990 and 1995, has been replaced by a stable relative majority of supporters in the last years (annex figure 78). In Slovenia, the economically most developed country of the region, both supporters and critics are of equal strength (42% each) a situation already found in CEEB 6 and CEEB 7 (annex figure 84).

Only the Czech Republic shows a clearly negative trend from CEEB 1 to CEEB 8 (annex figure 76). In 1997 in particular, there has been a sharp rise of critical voices (CEEB 7: 41%, CEEB 8: 50%) and a concomitant drop of positive ones (CEEB 7: 42%, CEEB 8: 28%). While the long-term development is probably reflecting growing concerns about "a market economy without a (social) epithet" (to quote former Prime minister V.Klaus) - which have also contributed to notable gains of the opposition Social Democrats in the 1996 elections - the recent drastic change is also heavily influenced by increasing economic problems, austerity measures and the political tumoil of last winter (including scandals in the grey area between economy and politics and harsh ciriticism of President V. Havel in respect of the decline of moral values in public and economic life).

In the **other five countries** 55% of respondents favour and 30% oppose the creation of a market economy (annex figure 71). Here, Romania comes first in its support of a market economy (64% "right", 26% "wrong") although the high flying enthusiasm related to the fundamental changes initiated by the new government has fallen somewhat (annex figure 82). Pro-market orientations have increased markedly in Bulgaria (44% "right" in CEEB 7, 52% "right" in CEEB 8, annex figure 75) and in Lithuania (36% right in CEEB 7, 48% right in CEEB 8; annex figure 80). In Latvia, supporters and critics each hold a share of 40% - an equilibrium characteristic of the last few years (annex figure 79). Only in Slovakia are there now more respondents who feel that the creation of a market economy is wrong for their country (45%) than who believe it is right (35%; annex figure 83). The Slovak figures, however, seem to indicate a view that is critical of the situation in general rather than of the actual economic performance in particular (see also chapter 3.3.).

3.2. Democracy and human rights

Satisfaction with the development of democracy has increased since last year in the 1st wave countries. While in 1996 39% of the citizens in these five countries said they were very or fairly satisfied with the way democracy was developing in their country, 48% said so in 1997; at the same time the share of not very or not at all satisfied persons fell from 53% to 44% (annex figure 72A). Democratic satisfaction rose especially in Poland and Hungary. In absolute terms it is highest in Poland (57% satisfied), Estonia (42%) and Slovenia (40%).

In the other five countries democratic satisfaction remained at a lower level (35% satisfied; 62% not satisfied (annex figure 72A). Here satisfaction with the way democracy is developing is expressed foremost in Romania (44%), although less so than a year ago, and in Lithuania (39%). In Bulgaria only 21% claim to be satisfied with the way democracy is developing in their country (75% not satisfied) but the judgement is much more positive than last year (net difference in CEEB 7: -81; in CEEB 8: -54) (annex figures 82, 80, 75).

CEEB 8 used a split ballot to measure democratic satisfaction for the first time: **in most countries people are more satisfied with the way democracy is developing than with the way it actually works**. This holds expecially true for Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia, to a lesser degree for Estonia, Latvia and Hungary. Those interviewed in Romania, Slovakia and Bulgaria, on the contrary, are more satisfied and especially less dissatisfied with the way democracy works in their countries than with the way it is developing (annex figures 72A and 72B). These differences seem to indicate that there is still some uneasiness about the future prospects of democratic development in the latter countries, an interpretation also supported by the rather erratic changes in levels of democratic satisfaction and dissatisfaction over time, especially in Romania and Bulgaria.

A definite improvement has also taken place regarding the **respect for human rights**. In the **five first wave countries** the impression that there is a lot or some respect for individual human rights has increased from 42% (CEEB 7) to 49% (CEEB 8) while the opposite view fell from 52% to 46% (annex figure 73). The improvement was strongest in Hungary, Slovenia and the Czech Republic but was also visible in Poland and Estonia (annex figures 78, 84, 76, 81). In absolute terms, Hungarians (61% "respect"), Estonians (54% "respect") and Czechs (52% "respect") express the most positive views while Poles (50% "no respect") and Slovenes (52% "no respect") seem to be more concerned.

More respect for human rights is also seen in the other five countries: (CEEB 7: 33% "respect", CEEB 8: 40% "respect") although critical views are still predominant here (CEEB 7: 63% "no respect", CEEB 8: 57% "no respect") (annex figure 73). The strongest improvement took place in Bulgaria (CEEB 8: "respect" 50%, +11 compared to CEEB 7) and in Slovakia (47%, +10), the net difference between those who see respect for individual human rights and those who hold the contrary opinion improving also in Latvia, Lithuania and Romania (annex figures 75, 83, 79, 80).

3.3. Overall situation

The overall situation in the five first wave candidate countries looks more promising than last year. 42% believe that their country is going in the right direction (+4 compared to CEEB 7) while 39% hold the opposite view (-5 compared to CEEB 7; annex figure 74), In the **other five countries** most people perceived only relatively few changes (47% "right", 41% "wrong").

There are, however, big differences within the two groups of candidate countries (annex figure 74). In the **first five countries** negotiating an EU entry, one finds a **markedly better_perception of the overall situation** in Poland (49% right direction, +9), and Hungary (28% right direction, +14). Although a majority of Hungarians still cling to a pessimistic view (52% wrong direction, -21) the economic improvements of last year and the beginning of the negotiations with the EU seem to be having a positive impact. Poland continues its upward trend, a development also strengthened by the results of the general elections in 1997. In Estonia 58% see the country as being on the right track and only 30% on the wrong one, basically the same results as last year. However, **the number of critics increased in Slovenia** (CEEB 7: 53% "right", 27% "wrong"; CEEB 8: 46% "right", 40% "wrong"), and **most of all in the Czech Republic**. In the latter country the percentage of positive views droped from 48% (CEEB 7) to a mere 26% (CEEB 8), while the number of those fearing that their country is going in the wrong direction increased from 39% to 60%. Evidently the governmental crisis of last autumn had a very negative effect on public opinion (annex figure 76).

In the other group **Bulgaria took a big step forward** (CEEB 8: 52% "right", +42), high hopes being connected with the political change which took place at the end of last year. Optimism is still prevails in Romania (51% "right", 40% "wrong") albeit less outspoken than last year. In both countries the general mood has been characterized by big ups and downs over the period surveyed by CEEB (annex figures 75 and 82). In Lithuania the rise of optimism already visible last year is continuing (CEEB 8: 40% "right", +13) in Latvia positive voices (45%) outnumber negative ones (37%) for the first time in nearly half a decade (annex figure 79). Only in Slovakia does the overall impression (26% "right", 64% "wrong") remain stable, anchored to the negative side, (annex figure 83) the internal political conflicts (and their negative reflection abroad) overshadowing a rather successful economic development.

Taking a longer perspective, public opinion thus shows a positive tendency in most Central and East European countries. Even Hungarians, whose mood was very pessimistic for many years, and Bulgarians, who experienced an economic disaster in 1996, are seeing rays of hope on the horizon. Even the recent disillusionment in the Czech Republic also holds both good and bad news: on the one hand, one finds a drastically worsened evaluation of the performance of the market economy and the overall situation; on the other, one finds an improvement in the evaluation of the human rights situation and no further deterioration of democracy satisfaction. This can be interpreted as indicating a consolidation of the new democratic system: problems in one area of the social system, e.g. criticism of the actual economic and political performance, do not necessarely create problems in other areas.

3.4. Demographics of Change

Although there are marked country-specific differences in the evaluation of the market economy, satisfaction with the new democratic order and views on the overall development of the individual countries, CEEB 8 also found **common general trends**. Younger people accept the **market economy** by a large majority, the oldest population segment is rather divided about whether the creation of a market economy is right or wrong for their country. The respective differences are even greater if one looks at the educational background of the respondents: three out of four East and Central Europeans with a higher education advocate a market economy, among those with only an elementary education 38% think that the market economy is right but 35% believe that it is wrong (annex figure 85).

Younger respondents are also more satisfied with the development of democracy: among people under the age of 25, more than half express **satisfaction with the development of democracy in their country**, in the old generation this holds true only for 38% (annex figure 86). There is also an increasing tendency for democracy satisfaction when moving up the educational scale.

Finally, **the younger and better educated the respondents the more optimistic they are about the overall development** of their country. Among people with only basic education and those 55 years or older there is a relative majority of pessimists. On the other hand the upper educational strata see their country evolving in the right direction and so do 50% of the youngest group of interviewees (annex figure 87).

Given the natural development of the demographic composition and the rather well developed educational systems in Central and Eastern Europe, these results can be seen as a **sound basis for an ongoing consolidation of both the new political and economic systems**. Of course people´s subjective orientations are only one factor in the overall consolidation process, the concrete economic development and the behaviour of political, economic and societal elites playing a very important role too. However, a market oriented economic culture and growing levels of democracy satisfaction are important assets for the future and can serve to counterbalance backlashes in other fields.

At the same time CEEB 8 results also show that **better educated** and **younger people are more likely to vote in favour of their country joining the European Union** than older and less educated respondents (annex figure 88). While there are relatively few differences regarding the intention for a no-vote, the latter groups are less inclined to a secure pro-accession vote (higher percentage of undecided voters, abstentions, no response).