

EUROBAROMETER 61

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AUSTRIA

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1. 30% of Austrian respondents consider their country's membership of the EU to be 'a good thing', 29% see it as 'a bad thing' and 36% believe it is 'neither good nor bad'. 38% hold the opinion that, on balance, Austria has benefited from its membership and 47% that it has not. Positive evaluations have fallen continuously since 2002. (These indicators were introduced in 1995/1996 and the February/March 2004 results are the worst recorded.)

2. Only a quarter of the Austrian poll holds a 'very positive' (7%) or 'fairly positive' image (18%) of the EU. One-third of respondents have a 'fairly' (24%) or 'very negative' (8%) image. Most frequently, however, the EU's image is seen to be 'neutral' (37%). In autumn 2003, one-third of the population still had a positive image in their minds compared to a quarter with a negative image. Of the European institutions, the Court of Justice, the Court of Auditors and the Central Bank enjoy most trust among Austrian citizens. However, only 43% trust and almost as many (40 %) tend not to trust the European Parliament. On the negative side, most Austrians tend not to trust the European Ombudsman, the Commission, the Committee of the Regions, the Economic and Social Committee or the Council of Ministers. Since October 2003, levels of mistrust have increased and trust decreased for all the European institutions. The most significant falls in trust concern the Parliament, the Council, the Commission, and the Economic and Social Committee.

3. In February/March 2004, Austrians believed that the most important issues that their country faces at the moment are unemployment, crime, pensions and the economic situation. They attribute less importance to rising prices/inflation, the health care system, public transport and immigration. Generally speaking, Austrians see the role of the European Union in their country negatively - particularly in respect of issues such as unemployment, the economic situation and inflation - and they see its role with respect to pensions as irrelevant. Only in the area of fighting crime do Austrians believe that the EU plays a positive role. The critical attitudes of autumn 2003 have intensified. The only exceptions to this are the positively rated role of the Union in fighting crime and terrorism and the stable negative view on the EU's importance in fighting unemployment.

4. Almost two-thirds of Austrians (64%) report that, on the whole, they are 'very' (12%) or 'fairly' (52%) satisfied with the way democracy works in Austria. A third are not satisfied (25% 'not very', 7% 'not at all'). At European level, 5% are 'very' and 35% 'fairly' satisfied with the way democracy works in the Union. Almost half (46%) report dissatisfaction (31% 'not very satisfied', 15% 'not at all satisfied'). The discrepancy between satisfaction with democracy in their own country (64% satisfied, 32% dissatisfied), on the one hand, and euroscepticism, on the other, (40% satisfied, 46% dissatisfied) has increased since 2003.

5. 42 % of Austrians polled support and 32 % oppose the idea that the speed of building Europe should be faster in one group of countries than in the others (26% don't know). Respondents who are more EU-friendly tend to agree with the notion of a country-specific pace. As for the enlargement to include ten new countries, 34% agree with it and 52% are against it. In autumn 2003, opinions for and against enlargement were about even. 59% of Austrians oppose and 25% favour the further enlargement of the European Union to include other countries in future years.

6. 31% of Austrians anticipate that the EU will play a 'more important' role in their daily lives within five years'; 15% expect it to play a 'less important' role and 42% predict the Union will play the same role in the future as it does now. 29% of Austrians would like to see the Union playing a 'more important' role in the future, 22% to play a 'less important' role and 37% the 'same role' as at present. In other words, desirability limps behind the anticipated developments.

7. Intentions to go to the ballot box to elect the European Parliament have fallen since spring 2003. 41% of Austrians indicate there is a high likelihood that they will vote, 20 % an average likelihood and 24% state that it is unlikely they will vote or that they are certain they will not do so.

8. 49% of Austrians think the next European Parliament election campaign should mainly focus on employment, 48% on issues specific to Austria, 36% on the environment, 26% cite both the issues of rights of European Union citizens and education, and 23% agriculture. The lowest level of interest relates to enlargement, the reform of the European Union institutions, the activities of the European Parliament as well as foreign and defence policies. For Austrians, the most important reasons determining for whom they vote are their own opinions about national issues (34%), their opinions on European issues (33%), and the personality of the candidate up for election (29%).

9. The data suggest that election participation is most likely to be rather low, and even lower than it was in 1999 (49%). The most important reasons for this development are:

- The Parliament's activities, decisions and so on are considered to have little or no effect (28% believe them to have 'no effect' - a higher figure than in spring 2003). The European Parliament is seen to have less effect than the EU as a whole, or the national institutions.
- Although six out of ten agree that the EP elections are really important and that the EP has more power than the Austrian National Assembly, only just over a third (38%) believe that EP members are good at protecting their interests (while 50% disagree that they are). In spring 2003, almost half the Austrian poll believed in the positive activities of the EP members while only a third did not.

- Attitudes towards the EU and its institutions, and above all the Parliament, have worsened markedly over recent years; Eurosceptics, however, are significantly less inclined to participate in elections than advocates of the Union, its activities and institutions.
10. 47% of Austrians consider that the six-month term of the presidency of the European Council should be retained because it gives each member state a chance to hold it on a regular basis. 36% would prefer the period of the presidency to be extended because six months is too short to achieve significant results. Almost two-thirds (64%) think that the right of veto should be retained in certain areas to preserve essential national interests; 17% consider that the right of veto should be limited to a very few essential areas and 6% would like to see its abolition to make the Union more efficient. Similarly, 63% support the idea that each member state should have one vote within the Council of Ministers regardless of the size of the member state's population.
 11. A majority of the Austrian poll advocates the further development of the Common Security and Foreign Policy. 39% want the national government to make decisions about European Defence Policy whereas 35% want the EU to do so. Only 10% want to transfer these powers to NATO. Attitudes on this issue have clearly changed since autumn 2003 when 40% wanted the EU to do so and only 36% the national government.
 12. Austrians show limited knowledge about how the Union's budget is spent: 28% think most of it is spent on administrative and personnel costs and buildings – among eurosceptics, the percentage is about twice as high than it is among respondents with EU-friendly attitudes. 19% believe most is spent on agriculture (in the Tyrol, a majority holds this opinion), 11% cite employment and social affairs, 10% regional aid, 7% foreign policy and aid to countries outside the European Union and 6% scientific research. 17% did not express an opinion.
 13. Generally speaking, Austrians view globalisation negatively: seven out of ten respondents believe that globalisation makes it more difficult to control the quality of food products sold in Austria; two-thirds suspect that it leads both to power being concentrated in large companies at the expense of others and to increases in global environmental problems; and 54% fear a threat to national employment. On the positive side, two-thirds think globalisation increases the variety of products for sale in Austria; almost half see good opportunities deriving from it for national companies. Opinions are divided regarding the impact on prices of products and services through increased competition. All in all, 46% disagree that globalisation is a good thing for Austria (36% agree). An even higher

proportion state the view that globalisation is not a good thing for them personally (28% think otherwise).

14. Overall, no institution gets much credit as having the ability to control the effects of globalisation. Nevertheless, 22% say that they trust the EU in this regard, 21 % in citizens themselves and 19% in consumer rights associations. Other institutions/groups cited were the national government, green/environmental/ecological groups and the World Trade Organisation.