

EUROBAROMETER 2004.1

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE CANDIDATE COUNTRIES

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NATIONAL REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY CYPRUS

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Executive Summary

Setting the scene: experiencing life in Cyprus

Eurobarometer 2004.1 was conducted between the 24th of February and the 9th of March of 2004. This was an emotionally charged period of inward reflection for Greek-Cypriots. A period when Cyprus was at the doorstep of the European Union and Cypriot citizens had increased hopes for a final solution to the Cyprus issue that has kept the island divided for three decades.

Cypriots see the European Union from two central focal points; the political one and the economical one. From a political viewpoint, they have always expected that the European Union would contribute beneficially towards the solution of the Cyprus issue, while to the contrary, from an economic viewpoint many feared negative repercussions. For Cypriots, more than anything else, accession into the European Union meant a solution to the Cyprus problem and the application of basic human rights on the island. The political axis has always preceded the economic one, and for this reason Cypriots in their majority supported the accession.

These views are reflected through the answers given to issues that deal with life and the financial situation. On one hand, life in the near future is expected to improve by the majority, while on the other, most Cypriots expect that the economic situation will deteriorate.

One third of Cypriot citizens is optimistic about the near future expecting that its life will improve within the following 12 months. To the contrary, a quarter foresees its life worsening, while the remaining (34%) expects that it will remain unchanged.

With regards to their future financial situation and their employment status, the majority expects that these will remain unchanged (42% and 52% respectively). Nevertheless, even though only 20% expects its employment status to worsen, the percentage that expects its family's financial situation to deteriorate is higher and reaches 33%.

After analysing the expressed views in a wider background and comparing expectations as to their personal and the general situation, it is observed that Cypriot citizens believe that their personal situation will be much better than the general economic state of the country and the employment conditions in Cyprus. In spite of their fears as to the future economic and employment situation in Cyprus, on an individual basis Cypriots feel more optimistic about their personal economic and employment conditions. This may be attributed to the fact that they are judging from their present conditions of life and the current relatively high standard of living and low unemployment levels.

Comparing to average of all member states, Cypriots appear more pessimistic as to the general economic state of the country as well as in terms of their personal economic state and employment conditions.

Comparing to the past, Cypriots evaluate that their present personal state is nowadays better. Almost half state that in general their personal situation has improved within the past five years, whereas only 25% feels that it has deteriorated.

The positive perceptions of Cypriots in reference to the improvement of their personal situation are far more evident when compared to the average of all member states.

In terms of long run (five years) predictions, the percentage of optimistic Cypriots who foresee an improvement in their personal situation is slightly higher. With an almost equal number of mentions, the remaining predict that their personal situation will either remain as is, or that it will deteriorate (27% and 26% respectively).

In a period close to the accession date, Cypriots having to choose from a list of problems common among the member states, indicate that they consider the crime rate (51%) and the increase of prices/ inflation (41%) to be the major ones. At the same time, it is evident that the two major problems faced by the Cypriot society today are very different to those mentioned by the total population of all member states (unemployment and economic situation).

The trust that Cypriot citizens place in most institutions is high. Cypriots trust most the National Guard (83%), the Government of Cyprus (75%) and the House of Representatives (74%). They least trust political parties (31%) and large corporations (29%).

The trust shown by Cypriots towards the Government and the House of Representatives can easily be characterised as a unit of measurement of the acceptability of the way the state functions.

Comparing it to the total of the member states, the degree of trust Cypriots have towards most institutions is relatively high. Exceptions to this are the United Nations and the Police, institutions for which the degree of trust is lowest in Cyprus among all previous and new member states.

It is important to note, that Cypriots trust the European Union, to a greater degree than the average of the EU as a whole. On the other hand, Cypriots show the least trust towards the United Nations among citizens of all member states. This lack of trust towards the United Nations may be linked to the Cyprus problem.

Over time, there appears to be consistency in the degree of trust that Cypriots have towards the various institutions. It is worth noting the fact that the percentage that is satisfied (very satisfied, fairly satisfied) by the way democracy operates in Cyprus almost coincides with the degree of trust placed in the Government and the Parliament.

Information about the European Union

Cypriots perceive the European Union as the natural course in the long term socioeconomic progress of Cyprus and perhaps the only possibility for a solution to the Cyprus problem. This is why, the role of the European Union in the solution of the Cyprus problem and the application of basic rights and freedoms has been highlighted in various discussions and publications in Cyprus, while the necessary attention was not given to informing citizens on policies, institutions, and the way the European Union functions.

Most Cypriots describe their knowledge regarding the European Union and its institutions as average. On a ten-point scale, the mean is 4,5. This value is below the mid-point.

The actual knowledge on specific issues regarding the European Union is also low. Cypriots appear better informed about the colours and the design of the European Union's flag (89%), and the Europe Day (52%) than the average for all other countries. On the contrary, perceptions as to what each star on the flag represents are mostly wrong (one star for each member state). The wrong answer about the stars on the flag is far higher among Cypriots.

For the remaining issues, the degree of awareness among Cypriots does not differ to a large extent from the average for all countries. Exceptions to this are, the year the EU was established and the year that the next European Parliamentary Elections will be held, topics on which Cypriots appear to be less informed than the average for the EU.

Only a few months before the accession took place, the majority of Cypriots admitted that in general they were not satisfactorily informed about the enlargement of the EU (57%), while to the contrary most stated that they are satisfactorily informed as to the accession of Cyprus (57%). Facing a long-term political problem and expecting a solution by entering the European Union, Cypriots placed more emphasis on the accession of the island and less importance on the enlargement process.

Asked as to which sources they turn to when seeking information about the EU, its policies and institutions, 18% of all Cypriots spontaneously state that they are not interested in information relating to the European Union. This percentage is somewhat higher than both the average for all new member states (11%) and the average for all countries (10%).

The major sources of information on issues relating to the EU are the mass media and most prominently, television (70%). Some 38% is informed from the radio, while 32% and 26% is respectively informed from newspapers and magazines.

A third of Cypriots looks for answers relating to European issues through discussions with friends and relatives. Various other sources play a lesser role.

Most Cypriots (43%) believe that the EU's visibility through the mass media in Cyprus is too limited. Some 30% believes that the level is about right, whereas 20% believes that it is too great.

At the same time, almost one out of two Cypriots (47%) believes that the mass media present the EU objectively. The opinion that the European Union is portrayed positively in the media is shared by 30% of Cypriots, while only 5% believes that the media are negative towards the EU.

In comparison to the total population of the EU (41%), the proportion of Cypriots who believe that the profile of the EU in the media is too limited is almost the same (43%). At the same time, however, Cypriots mention to a higher degree that issues relating to the European Union are presented objectively (47% vs. 40%).

Among EU institutions, Cypriots tend to trust most the Court of Justice of the European Communities (76%) and the European Parliament (55%). About half also trust the European Commission, the Council of Ministers of the EU, the European Ombudsman and the European Central Bank.

In general, Cypriots trust the Court of Justice of the European Communities and the European Ombudsman to a higher extent than average of the EU. On the contrary, their trust towards the European Court of Auditors is lower, while for the remaining institutions the differences are marginal.

Support for European Union membership

A few months before the enlargement of the European Union 42% of Cypriot citizens consider Cyprus' accession into the EU to be in general a good thing. The level of positive attitudes towards membership coincides exactly with the average of all new member states.

At the same time, more than one out of two Cypriots (56%) believes that Cyprus will benefit from being a member of the European Union.

The analysis of results between 1999 and autumn 2002 reveals a period where the proportion of people viewing positively the accession was fairly stable and varied only between 47% and 53%.

This trend is disturbed in the spring of 2003 by a significant increase in the proportion that believed that Cyprus' accession was a good thing (72%). About the same time there were developments on the Cyprus issue and the signing of the accession treaty took place in Athens.

By autumn of the same year, however, optimism declined to 59% and by the spring of 2004 it dropped to 42%. The decreased optimism may be associated with economic problems (inflation, inflow of foreign workers, abolition of subsidies). Even though these economic problems may be largely the outcome of other global and local factors, inevitably they have been associated with the accession process by the general population.

A comparison over time of the level of optimism between Cypriots and citizens of all new member states of the European Union shows the evaluations following the same trend, with only a higher level of optimism being observed among Cypriots during the spring of 2003.

With regards to the benefits from the accession, from a general point of view, almost six out of ten Cypriots expect that these will be positive. This places Cypriots' expectations higher than the average of the new member states.

The evaluations as to the benefits of joining the EU follow the same trend as the optimism for the accession, with the percentage of positive responses, however, being higher.

The comparison with the figures for the total of the new member states shows expectations for the benefits of accession are always higher among Cypriots, with the wider gap being recorded during the spring of 2003 (important developments in terms of the Cyprus issue and signing of the accession agreement as stated before).

The majority of Cypriots (65%) support a European Monetary Union with Euro as its common currency. Throughout the different Eurobarometer surveys in 2004-2003, the level of support has ranged between 58% and 73%, reaching its lowest point in the autumn of 2003, and going on the rise again in the spring of 2004.

Cypriots strongly support a common foreign policy among the member states of the European Union. The latest recorded level of support for a common foreign policy stood at 81%, a percentage that has been relatively constant throughout the years.

The same holds true for the issue of a common defence and security policy among member states, which is also supported by the overwhelming majority. Over time, the support for a common defence and security policy has always been high, ranging between 87% and 91%.

Support has also been strong for the enlargement of Europe and the accession of ten new members in May 2004. Support for this has ranged between 75% and 84%.

It is worth noting that for all the aforementioned issues, the lowest recorded level of support was during the autumn of 2003.

Meanings of Europe

For Cyprus, the European Union has always been associated with a solution to the Cyprus problem and peace/ security on the island. This has been the dominant reason why Cypriots, as it has been shown through various political polls, have supported the island's accession.

The results of the latest Eurobarometer wave in spring clearly show that Cypriots primarily associate accession into the European Union with two issues. One of them is peace and the other one is the freedom to travel, work and study throughout Europe.

Nevertheless, a significant percentage of the population associates the meaning of the EU with negative repercussions to the island as well. Of these, the most important ones are unemployment (47%) and the rising crime rate (47%).

Comparing to the total population of all member states, Cypriots associate the EU to a significantly higher degree with several positive elements such as "peace", "democracy", "social protection", and "freedom to travel, work and study". Nonetheless, they simultaneously associate the EU to a higher extent with negative elements such as "higher crime rate", "unemployment" and "loss of cultural identity".

Only half of all Cypriots feel that they know the way the European Union operates. This is almost the same result as the average of all new member states. Concurrently, however, the percentage of Cypriots who believe that they know how the EU operates is higher than the total percentage for all member states.

Cyprus' accession brings about the feeling of safety (73%) and of more political stability (70%) in most Cypriots. The expectation that Cyprus' voice will be heard in the European Union is also expressed by many (61%).

Roughly one out of two Cypriots believes that Cyprus will have a more influential role within the EU (55%) in the future or that his/her own voice will count in the European Union (44%). Even though about half of all Cypriots hold these opinions, the overwhelming majority feels that the larger states have the most power within the European Union (82%).

Security and political stability are the greatest gains that Cypriots expect that they will receive once they have entered the EU. This may be associated to the island being divided and in the political grid-lock that has existed for the past three decades.

Simultaneously, Cypriots appear a lot more optimistic and expect that their country will play a more important role within the EU, than the citizens of the other new member states.

The majority of Cypriots view the European Union as playing an important role in global issues, such as protection of the environment and the fight against crime and terrorism. Also importantly is the fact that Cypriots recognize the European Union's positive role in social issues such as health, education, public transportation and pensions, and they do so to a higher degree than the total population in all member states.

The scene however, is quite different in relation to economic issues. Here, most Cypriots describe the role of the EU as being negative on the issue of the economic situation in general, as well as on other related issues such as rising prices/ inflation, taxation, the fight against unemployment and migration.

In addition, Cypriots fear that the accession will lead to an increase of other social problems. These are mainly, increased drug trafficking and international organized crime (81%), issues that have been becoming more predominant over time in Cyprus and may be associated with the accession, or other socioeconomic reasons or global political situations.

There are also intense fears relating to the economic situation on the island, such as an economic crisis (68%), transfer of jobs abroad where labour is cheaper (60%) and more difficulties for farmers (62%).

Cypriots' degree of fear is higher than the average for new member states concerning increased drug trafficking, international organized crime, the possibility of an economic crisis and the outflow of jobs abroad where production costs are lower. There is also greater fear among Cypriots concerning cultural issues, such as the loss of national identity and the decreased usage of their mother tongue.

Two thirds of all Cypriots state that they know where the bulk of EU funding is being spend on. To the contrary, roughly a third (36%) expresses ignorance. This level of ignorance is higher than EU 25 average.

Among those that state that they actually know where the money is being spend, most mention agriculture (15% of total sample). The sector of employment and social affairs receives the second highest number of mentions (13% of total sample) and of scientific research the third highest (12% of total sample).

Having to identify themselves as either being only Cypriot, Cypriot and European, European and Cypriot, or only European, Cypriot citizens are almost equally split among those who consider themselves only as Cypriots (49%) and to those who consider themselves both as being Cypriots and Europeans (46%).

The tendency of holding on to the National identity is strong, with half of the total population of the ten new member states identifying themselves only through their National identity. The overall total for all member states is lower, at 42%.

Comparing with the results of the fall 2003 wave, it is observed that the tendency to identify oneself only through National identity has been strengthened in both the new and old member states.

In the case of Cyprus, the total percentage of people who identified themselves only as Cypriots shows a substantial increase from 37% to 49%. This may be a side effect of the heated political atmosphere surrounding attempts to unify the country at that time. This atmosphere may have lead Greek-Cypriots to reinforce their identity as citizens of one Cyprus, irrespective of the community they belong to.

Institutional reform of the European Union

The majority of Cypriots (69%) support that the European Union should have a Constitution. This opinion has been supported over time by the majority of Cypriots within all demographic groups.

The opinions of Cypriots on maintaining or changing the veto right that every member state has in certain sectors are almost the same as the average of all member states.

More than half of Cypriots (54%) believe that the veto right of each country should be upheld so that each country can protect important national interests.

The majority of Cypriots (75%) believe that each member state of the European Union should have one vote in the European Council of Ministers, and rejects voting according to population size. Within a system where voting is proportional to size operated, Cyprus' voice would very quiet.

Comparing to the average of all the member states in the EU, Cyprus' support of each member country having one vote in the Council of Ministers is a lot stronger.

The opinion on extending the period that the President of the European Union remains in office does not find support with most Cypriots. The majority believes that the present system of each country holding the presidency for a six month period should be maintained. Over time, support for this opinion has risen from 41% to 47%.

Cypriots are in support of the rotation of the presidency every six months to a larger degree than is expressed on average by the all member states.

Methodology

The 2004.1 Eurobarometer study was conducted in Cyprus between the 24th of February and the 9th of March. In total, 500 interviews were carried out. All interviews were face-to-face and were carried out in the place of residence of respondents. Eligible to participate in the study were males and females over 15 years old with Cyprus citizenship. Sample selection was carried out through random multistage sampling, in order to give all eligible participants the same opportunity of being included in the sample. The sample distribution by district and area (urban/ rural) was in line with the true population.