

EUROBAROMETER 62

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AUSTRIA

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► In the run-up to the completion of their first decade as EU members, Austrians are, on the one hand, anxious about socio-economic pressures on their society and the ramifications of EU enlargement. Unemployment, crime and drug trafficking are matters of major concern to the Austrian poll. This, rather than high politics, might be the main explanation why Austrians display the lowest support for further EU enlargement in all of the EU25 countries. On the other hand, Austrian trust in European institutions and demands for a more assertive stance of the EU in the world, especially in security matters, has increased robustly since spring 2004. This means the Austrian poll is in favour of European integration as a political, historical, and security project of major scale, while it sends a clear message to the EU's policymakers regarding the immediate pains attributed to EU enlargement, the restructuring of the social state and globalisation.

GENERAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EU IN AUSTRIA

► **Austria is one of 11 EU-member countries where support has been rising or steady in nine key indicators since spring 2004.** This list includes Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and the United Kingdom. Support in all nine key indicators has also risen if one looks at the EU25 average, the EU15 average (old members), and the EU10 average (new members). This means declining support remains restricted to specific issues and countries. The nine key indicators include EU membership as such, as well as support and trust in key EU institutions and policies.

► **Following a spring 2004 low point in EU attitudes, Austrians demonstrate a rather positive attitude towards the EU in autumn 2004.** 46% view Austria's EU membership as a good thing (plus 16 percentage points, or PP, since spring 2004). 45% trust the EU (plus 14 PP). For 34% (plus 9 PP), the EU has a positive image, and for 36% (plus 6 PP), a negative one. However, a majority (45%, minus 2 PP) do not feel that Austria benefits from EU membership, while 43% (plus 5 PP) take the contrary view.

► **Austrians continue to associate the EU primarily with the euro (57%),** followed by the freedom to live, study, and work anywhere in the EU (51%), which is new to score second. The list continues with critical points such as crime (46%, the highest figure in all the EU25) and a waste of money (40%). Altogether, Austrians associate more aspects, and more positive ones, with the EU than they did in spring 2004.

Flag fatigue. 38% identify with the EU flag (decline), and 42% (decline) want to see the flag on public buildings.

Hope, anxiety, and trust: These are the three primary feelings the EU conjures up among the Austrian poll.

Austrians' biggest fears in the context of European integration are the transfer of jobs to EU countries with lower production costs and an increase in drug trafficking and organized crime.

► **Only 28% of the Austrian poll supports further EU enlargement rounds. This means that Austria's score is the lowest in all the EU25.** Despite a slight increase in support since spring (plus 3 PP), Austrian enthusiasm for further enlargement remains exceptionally low compared to the EU average of 53%. Roughly two-thirds (62%) of Austrians oppose further enlargement, which is nearly double the EU25 average of opponents (35%).

► **According to the Austrian poll, unemployment should be the priority topic to be tackled by the EU** (54%, 10 PP more than the EU25 average). This is followed by the fight against organized crime and drug trafficking (42%), the fight against poverty and social exclusion (37%), efforts to maintain peace and security in Europe (29%) and the fight against illegal immigration (24%). The Austrian priority list deviates slightly from the EU25 list.

► **67% of the Austrian poll (plus 7 PP since spring 2004) support a European constitution.** 73% of Austrians support the fact that the European Commission consists of one commissioner per member state. This is less than in large EU countries, such as Germany (75%) and France (82%), which is surprising in so far as one might expect very strong opposition to a rotation system from small member countries, who tend to support the all-inclusive composition of the commission with larger majorities than in large member states.

► **The Austrian poll shows more trust than mistrust towards nine key EU institutions such as the European Commission, the European Court of Justice and the ECB.** This constitutes a change in attitude since spring 2004 towards considerably more trust and less mistrust. Austrian trust in the Court of Justice, the Court of Auditors, and the Committee of the Regions is higher than the EU-average.

► **The Austrian poll expects a high workload from the EU.** A majority thinks the EU rather than the national government should make decisions in 16 out of 27 presented topics. 81% think the EU should decide in the fight against terrorism. 78% think that for the fight against human trafficking, 74% for the fight against organized crime, and 70% for the fight against drugs. The national government, however, should decide on issues like the police, the legal system, the media, as well as social policies and health care.

► **Austrians feel rather well informed about the EU,** topping the EU average of 4,3 on a 10-point scale (10: very much informed). Their subjective classification results in a middle point of 5,0. 47% say they understand the way the EU works. In a quiz, Austrians score above the EU average.

Still: Austrians show limited knowledge on the EU's spending patterns. 34% (plus 6 PP since spring) think most of the EU's budget is spent on administrative and personnel costs and buildings. Only 14% (minus 5 PP) think it is agriculture, the actual top item.

The Austrian poll receives most information about the EU from TV (decline), followed by daily newspapers (increase), the radio (increase), discussions with friends and colleagues (increase), other newspapers and magazines (decline), the internet (increase), and books and brochures (increase). More than a third (35%) says the Austrian media report too little about the EU.

GENERAL MOOD, ATTITUDES, AND TOPICS OF CONCERN IN AUSTRIA

► **According to those polled, the number one topic of concern in Austria remains unemployment** (52%, strong increase since spring 2004). Next comes crime (24%, decline), the economic situation (23%, no change), rising prices/ inflation (23%), immigration (20%, strong increase), and pensions (20%, decline).

A majority assesses the role of the EU negatively in five out of Austria's 12 main topics of concern. Those are unemployment, immigration, rising prices/inflation, public transport and taxation. In four issues (pensions, health, education, environment), the EU's role is viewed as irrelevant. In the fight against terror, crime and the economic situation, the EU is said to play a positive role. For the economic situation, this means a change of opinion towards a positive image of the EU since spring 2004.

Austrians deviate considerably from the EU average in judging the EU's role. 54%, which is the highest score among the EU15 (EU25 49%), see the EU's role in rising prices/inflation negatively. Also, the Austrians have a particularly negative impression of the EU in the fields of public transport and taxation, and a lukewarm positive impression of the EU in the fields of immigration and the environment.

► **Austria's national institutions and media enjoy exceptionally high trust from the polled,** while political parties and big companies are rather mistrusted. 74% trust the police (EU25 64%) and 68% trust their legal system (EU25 45%). Since spring 2004, the EU, the national government and parliament, and the trades unions trust-deficits were transformed into surpluses. Trust has also increased and mistrust has decreased towards the UN, the army, voluntary and charitable organizations, as well as the radio, the press, and TV. Big firms face a considerable increase and religious institutions a small increase in their trust deficits. Political parties are mistrusted most, i.e. by 71%. Less Austrians trust their national parliament (51%) than the European Parliament (56%).

► **71% are satisfied with the way democracy works in Austria. 26% are not.** 45% are satisfied with the way democracy works in the EU, 43% are not. This means very high satisfaction with democracy in Austria and rising satisfaction with democracy in the EU. Yet the Austrian "satisfaction gap" between the national level and the EU has grown to 26%, which is three times the EU25 gap of 9%.

► **Six in ten Austrians expect no major change of their life in general, their job situation and the financial situation of their household** in the coming 12 months. Nearly a quarter of those polled expect improvements in these three areas. This optimistic view contrasts with the general prospect: 47% of the polled expect the job market to worsen and 38% think the economic situation will deteriorate.

THE EU AS A GLOBAL PLAYER

► **An overwhelming majority supports further development of a common European foreign-, security-, and defence policy.** In Austria, support for ten topics including human rights, an EU seat in the UN Security Council, and a rapid military reaction force, has increased since spring 2004. 70% or more advocate common policies on asylum and immigration, neutral countries' voice in EU foreign policy decisions, an EU foreign policy that independent of that of the U.S., and a common stance in the case of external crises. More than 80% demand a rigorous internal and external EU human rights policy. 72% (plus 10 PP since spring) advocate a common European foreign policy.

► **70% of the Austrian poll supports a common security and defence policy, which means an increase of 13 PP since spring, and, together with Belgium, the EU's record-level of growth in support.** Decisions in European defence policy should be primarily taken by the EU (46%, strong increase) while 30% (decline) prefer the national government, and a mere 7% (decline) prefer NATO. This constitutes a major change of attitude since spring 2004. Then, a majority (39%) said such issues should be decided upon in Austria and 35% thought they were the EU's business.

► **Austrians present an extremely negative balance sheet regarding the U.S. and a relatively negative one to the EU regarding their respective roles in the world.** Austrians view the international engagement of both the U.S. and the EU more negatively than the EU average in all points except one, which is the role of the U.S. in the growth of the world economy (slight improvement of image).