

EUROBAROMETER 63.4

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

SPRING 2005

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CZECH REPUBLIC

The survey was requested and coordinated by the Directorate General Press and Communication.

This report was produced for the European Commission's Representation in the Czech Republic.

This document does not represent the point of view of the European Commission.
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Eurobarometer reports measure the climate of opinion on European issues in member and candidate countries of the European Union. This report looks at Czech citizens' views about various aspects of the European Union and compares them with typical attitudes held across the EU. It also highlights major differences with other countries. This is the second Czech report since the Czech Republic became a member of the European Union.

The opinion poll, upon which this report is based, was conducted among 1,083 Czechs between May 18 and June 7, 2005, a time, which was marked by major events in the ratification process of the European Constitution. This Eurobarometer, in line with the results of French and Dutch referenda, shows that European citizens are today more critical in their analysis of the European Union, without, however, calling into question either their countries' membership of the European Union or European integration itself. Certain indicators reveal significant changes since the last Eurobarometer survey (autumn 2004) and highlight just how necessary it is to bring European citizens and the European institutions closer together.

In general, the spring 2005 Eurobarometer survey found that Czechs are more satisfied with their EU membership than they had been in the previous autumn. On another hand, they question some aspects of the future development of European integration.

Personal satisfaction and life expectations

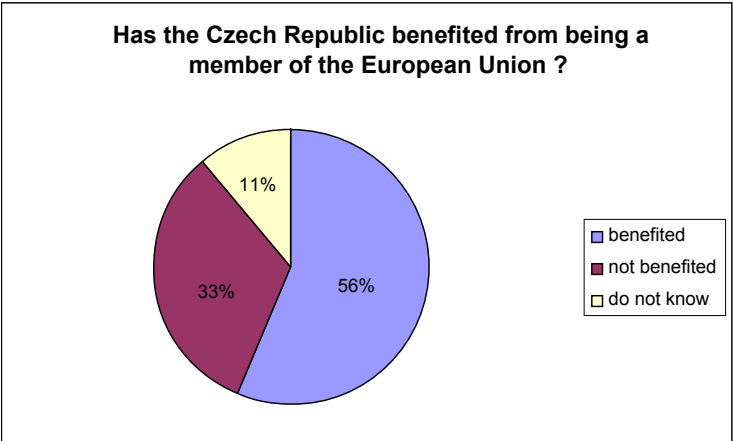
Czechs consider their life situation at the present time to be slightly better than the average European citizen. It was the other way round half a year ago. **A total of 83 percent of Czechs are satisfied with their life situation at the moment.** But, as in other countries of the European Union, **unemployment continues to be the major concern of Czech citizens.** **Concerns about health and pension systems have increased more than in other areas of the survey since the last poll.**

Perception of the European Union

The general opinion on the European Union has improved among Czechs. A total of **43 percent of Czechs have a positive view of the European Union.** Czechs praise the European Union for **guaranteeing free movement and travel** in all member states. Czechs also perceive the European Union as a **place without wars and a place with democratic principles and economic prosperity.** On the other hand, the European Union is also seen negatively, most markedly for having **high crime rates** and an overly large **bureaucracy where money gets wasted.**

Benefits from being a member of the European Union

As compared to last October, **the number of Czechs who are convinced of the advantages and benefits of joining the European Union has gone up by 14 percentage points to 56 percent.** No other European Union member country has registered such a high increase.



More than half of the Czech population feels safer because the Czech Republic is part of the European Union. Nearly half feel more stable economically because of their country's EU membership.

Concerning EU membership and European integration, **Czechs are most concerned about future prospects for their farmers, an increase in organized international crime, and transfers of jobs to other member countries which have lower production costs.**

Trust in European institutions

Trust in the European Union has not changed since the last survey and remains at 52 percent. The Czech Republic is thus above the EU average in this respect as levels of trust in EU countries overall dropped by eight percentage points to 44 percent. The survey showed that **Czechs trust the European Union as a whole, but believe less in its individual institutions.** Trust in the European Parliament and the European Commission, the EU key institutions, has decreased in the Czech Republic.

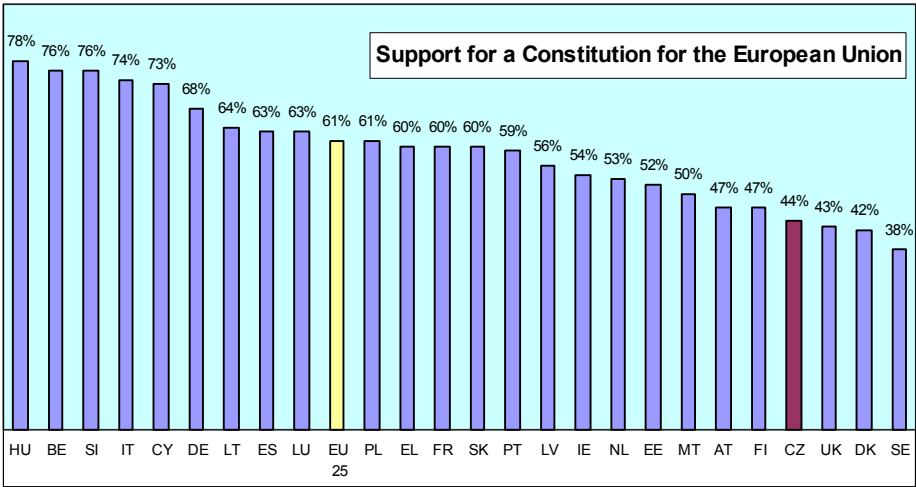
Information about the European Union

Czechs, like citizens of other EU countries feel their knowledge about the EU is less rather than more. When Czechs are looking for information about the European Union, they prefer to use television and press. **Seven out of ten respondents use television as a source for information about the EU.**

Citizens of the Czech Republic feel quite satisfied with the amount of information about the EU. **More than half the Czechs think that the Czech media present the European Union objectively.**

Support for a European Constitution

Support for the European Constitution in the Czech Republic has dropped by 19 percent to 44 percent, the lowest level so far. It is worth noting that the poll was conducted in the Czech Republic between May 18 and June 7, 2005, the period when the Constitution was rejected in referenda by citizens of France (May 29) and the Netherlands (June 1). European Union citizens are still in favour of the idea of a European Constitution (61 %). The Eurobarometer recorded that support was also below 50 percent in Sweden (38 percent), the United Kingdom (43 percent) and Austria and Finland (both at 47 percent).



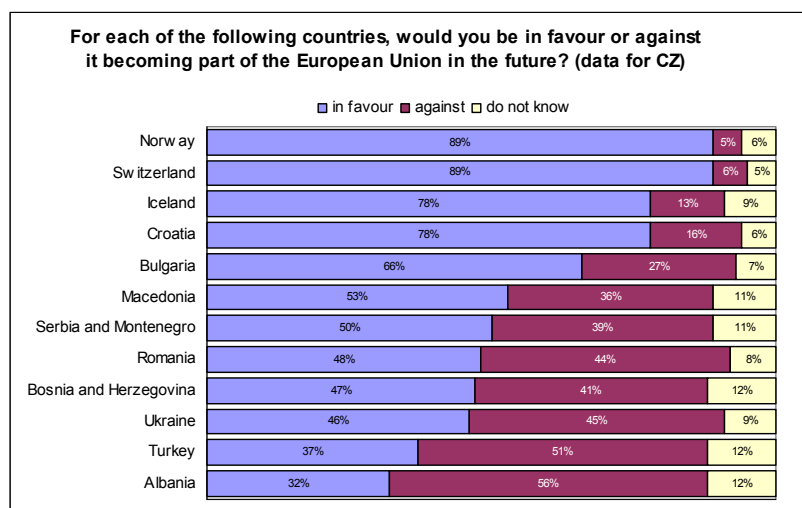
A vast majority of the Czech population have heard about the European Constitution, but at the same time they admit they know very little about it. Were a referendum on the European Constitution to take place in the Czech Republic, Czechs would be more likely to vote than not.

The most common argument of Czechs wanting a Constitution is that it is essential in order to pursue European integration. On the other hand, opponents of a Consitution fear the loss of national sovereignty.

Support of future EU enlargement

Two-thirds of Czechs, exactly the same number as in the previous poll, **are in favour of further enlargement. Accession of Croatia has the support of 78 percent of Czechs**, while **66 percent are in favour of Bulgaria joining the EU**. A total of 48 percent are in favour of Romania becoming a European Union member. Nine of ten Czechs would welcome Norway and Switzerland, countries which at the moment are not seeking EU membership.

A slight majority of Czechs – 51 percent – is against Turkey becoming part of the European Union in the future. Only 37% of Czech respondents are in favour of it.



Most Czechs think that Turkey will have to systematically respect human rights and significantly improve the state of its economy before it should join the European Union in about ten years' time. Half of the Czech population believes that Turkey does not belong to Europe historically or culturally speaking and that this is a major obstacle to Turkey's accession.

Eurobarometer found over 50 percent support for Turkey's EU membership in only three countries - Poland (54 percent), Slovenia (53 percent) and Hungary (51 percent).

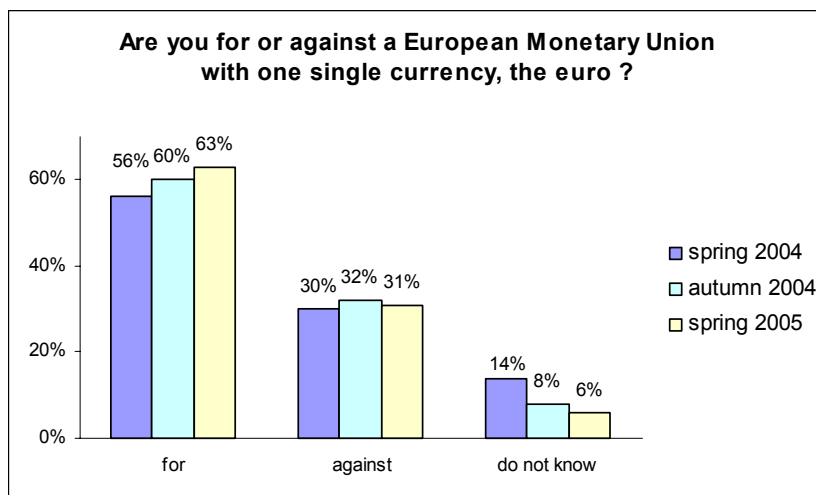
State of domestic and European economy

Although there was a significant improvement since the last survey, **only 36 percent of the Czech population judge the current situation of the domestic economy as being good.** The situation of the European economy is perceived as being much better – a total of **62 percent of Czechs perceive the state of the European economy as good.** A total of 73 percent of citizens of the ten new member countries have a similar feeling, compared to only 45 percent in the old member states.

Czechs believe that better education and professional training, as well as higher investments in research and in transport infrastructure, would help to improve the performance of the European economy.

Support for the European single currency

Support for the euro in the Czech Republic has slightly increased to 63 percent since the autumn of 2004. The lowest support of the euro was registered in those old member states where the currency is not yet in circulation – in the United Kingdom, Sweden and Denmark.



Support for the common foreign, security and defense policies

The support for the common foreign policy of the EU states has increased in the Czech Republic by six percentage points to 65 percent.

With support at 84 percent, the Czech Republic is among the strongest supporters of the European common security and defense policy.

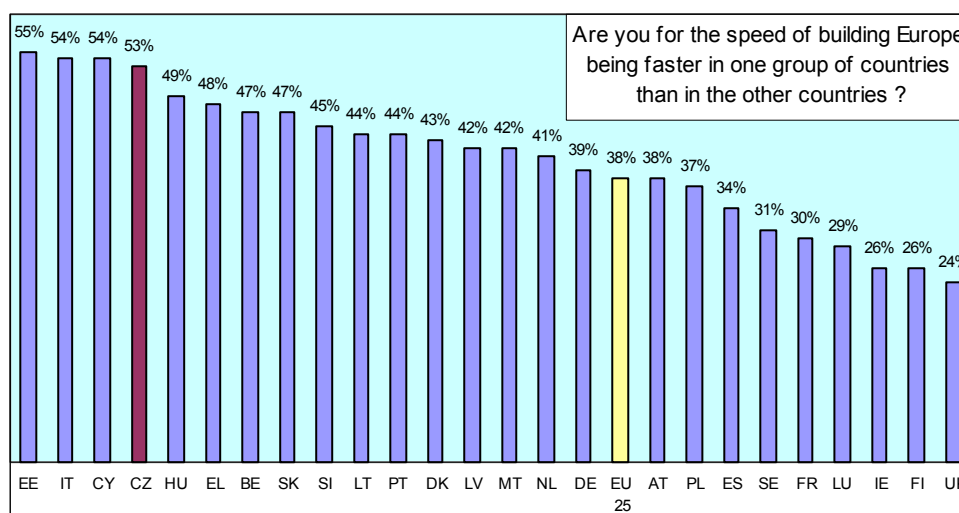
More than nine out of ten Czechs believe that the European Union Member States should agree on a common position when an international crisis occurs. A vast majority of the population of the Czech Republic is also of the opinion that the European Union's foreign policy should be independent of the United States' foreign policy and that the European Union should have common immigration and asylum policies.

Support of the development towards political union

Support for political union has increased in the Czech Republic since the last survey. **Over two-thirds of Czechs are in favour of the development of a political union.** The support is by ten percentage points stronger in the new EU member countries than in old member states, reaching 67 percent.

The speed of building Europe

The percentage of Czechs wishing that the speed of building Europe were faster in one group of countries than in other countries has increased since last autumn by 17 percentage points and is at 53 percent. This is the largest increase seen in any EU country. The share of supporters in the Czech Republic of a multi-speed Europe is far above the average in the whole European Union (38 percent).



What priority actions should the European Union follow

Fighting unemployment, poverty and social exclusion, as well as terrorism, organised crime and drug trafficking – actions taken in these areas should have first priority for the EU, according to Czechs. Maintaining peace and security in Europe and environmental protection are also important areas.