

EUROBAROMETER 63.4

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

SPRING 2005

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ESTONIA

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This summary is based on the results of Eurobarometer 63 that was carried out from May 9 to June 14 2005 in 30 European countries (in addition to 25 European Union member states, surveys were also done in Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Turkey and in the Turkish Cypriot Community). This Executive Summary presents the main results for Estonia and compares them with average opinion in the 25 member states and, in some cases, with results in the new and old member states. The main purpose of the survey was to map opinions and attitudes associated with the EU. Most of the topics were also covered in the Eurobarometer survey in October 2004. This allows us to identify changes in attitudes where they are relevant.

In Estonia, the fieldwork was carried out from May 12 to June 7. In total, 1001 respondents were interviewed of whom 999 had Estonian citizenship. When interpreting the results, it should be borne in mind that the target group of the survey was people who had citizenship of at least one member country of the EU and who were able to answer the questions in Estonian or Russian. The survey does not represent the opinions of those people who do not have European Union citizenship or who have not defined their citizenship (bearers of so-called 'grey' passports).

Fieldwork of the current survey took place during the time when parliaments of several European countries ratified European Constitution and when it was rejected in referendums in the Netherlands and France. Those last events took place at the end of the fieldwork leaving little time for Estonians to draw any conclusions. Thus, they did not have major impact on the survey results. At the same time, a relevant topic in Estonia was associated with the surplus of sugar stocks held in the country at the time of EU accession and the possible fine that European Commission might charge for it. That was the issue that had a greater impact on Estonians.

The climate of opinion on national level

- Two-thirds of Estonians (67%) are **satisfied with their lives**. This is much less if compared to the EU average overall (81%) but comparable with the average of the new member states (68%). The share of those people who are very satisfied is well below the average of the EU: among Estonians, only 7% are very satisfied compared to 21% in the EU25 (13% in the new member states overall).
- At the same time, Estonia distinguishes itself with a high share of people who admit to an improvement in their **lives as compared to 5 years ago**: 58% (compared to 37% in EU25 and 32% in new member states). This indicates that people have been able to enjoy the fruits of the rapid development that has taken place in Estonia over recent years. Younger and more educated people especially have taken the advantage of it.
- Estonians believe in **improvement of their lives in the near as well as the more distant future**. 43% of them believe that their lives will become better in the next 12 months. However, the share of Estonians who believe that their life will remain the same is almost equal: 46%. In Europe in general, people believe more strongly in the stability (51%) of their lives than any change for the better (34%) or the worse (11%). Estonians are more optimistic also when compared to the other new member states.

- When making a **prognosis for the next 5 years**, the share of those who believe in improvement is again greater among Estonians: 54% compared to 42% in EU25. It should be noted that in Estonia, as well as in EU25 countries in general, the share of people who believe that their lives will improve in the more distant future is higher than those who believe it will remain much the same.
- **As regards the economic situation in Estonia in the next 12 months**, this difference of opinion between, Estonians and the average European stems from the fact that more Estonians tend to believe in stability (45%) or improvement (35%) whereas at the EU25 level, an equal number of people believe in stability (38%) or a worsening of the situation (37%).
- In terms of **their household's economic situation**, a majority of Estonians and Europeans believe in stability during next 12 months. However, once again, Estonians stand out in having a greater share of optimists: 34% of them believe in an improvement in the situation compared to 24% in EU25.
- There have been no major changes in predictions on different aspects mentioned above. Only in the case of their country's economic situation, there has been a shift towards believing in stability: in the case of Estonia, the increase has been 4 percentage points and at the European level 5 percentage points.
- In case of **national employment situation**, in Estonia, a majority of people believe the situation will remain the same (41%) or improve (32%), while in EU25 pessimism prevails: 42% believe the situation will worsen in the next 12 months and 34% expect it to remain the same.
- With regard to their **personal job situation**, both Estonians and Europeans in general predict stability: 53% in Estonia and 61% in EU25. 26% of Estonians believe in improvement of the situation compared to 22% in the EU25 and 19% in new member states overall. In Estonia, the share of people who cannot predict what happens in regard their job has increased compared to October 2004 from 10% to 16%.
- Of the six **institutions** cited in the course of the survey, Estonians trust the United Nations the most (57%). The European Union follows with 52%. Estonians trust the EU more than the average European citizen (44%). While at the European level trust in the EU has decreased considerably (by 6 percentage points compared to autumn 2004), the decrease in Estonia has been slightly smaller (4 points). Trust is stronger among younger and more educated people. Also, the more a person feels informed about issues related to the EU, the greater is the level of their trust. Of the remaining institutions, 49% trust the Estonian legal system, 44% trust the Government, 41% the Parliament and only 17% trust political parties (the overall European average is the same).
- 51% of Estonians are not satisfied with **the way democracy works in Estonia**. 44% are satisfied with it and 5% cannot say. Only 3% are very satisfied with democracy. Satisfaction remains below the European average (53%). This shows that there is still some way to go in increasing participation and strengthening civil society. Satisfaction with democracy in Estonia has not changed over time (compared to October 2004) but has declined at the European

level by 4 points. Satisfaction with the way democracy works in Estonia is higher among men, younger people (55% among those aged 15-24, 50% among those aged 25-39, below 40% among those who are over 40 years old), and among more educated people (among those who finished education at the age of 15 it is 32%, whereas among those who finished education at the age of 20 or above it is 48%). There are no differences between rural and urban inhabitants.

Estonia and the European Union membership

- Estonians consider their **knowledge about the European Union** to be rather low. The average level on the scale of 10 points is 4,2¹. At the same time, average European citizen is not much more aware about those issues with an average level of 4,4 points. People who are still studying are the most aware (5,1 points) and retired people the least aware (3,6 points).
- A slightly higher number of Estonians (48%) do not understand **how the European Union functions** than those who claim to understand it (45%). At the overall European level, the situation is the same.
- When asked to consider the validity of various statements regarding the EU, Estonians, in general, were just as aware as average citizens of the EU. However, their level of knowledge appears to be lower than in new member states on average. Their level of knowledge regarding European Parliament elections was particularly low.
- Television is the most important **source of information** regarding the EU for Estonians (70%). This is followed by radio (44%) and print media (40%). In younger age groups, the Internet is either on an equal footing with television (in the 15-24 age group, Internet and television were both cited by 68%) or followed closely behind television (among 25-39 year olds, 62% mentioned television and 54% the Internet). In general, the Internet is much more important for Estonians than for the average European citizen (important for 38% of Estonians and 22% of EU25 citizens).
- A majority of Estonians find that the various **forms of media talk a sufficient amount about the EU**. As regards the major source – television – 50% of Estonians find information they receive about the EU from it to be **objective**, 34% find it too positive and 3% too negative.
- **The general impression** Estonians have about the EU is neutral (49%); 38% find it to be positive and 12% negative. In the EU25 and in the new member states overall, a positive image prevails. People who consider their knowledge about the EU to be good more often tend to have a more positive image of it.
- To Estonians, **the European Union means** above all freedom to travel, work and study in other member states (50%), as well as bureaucracy (48%) and a stronger say in the world (27%). Estonians mentioned bureaucracy considerably more often than other European

¹ 1 means 'know nothing at all' and 10 means 'know a great deal'

citizens (21%) and this figure is higher than it was in October 2004 (an increase of 5 percentage points). This word was cited more often, on the one hand, by managers and white-collar workers and, on the other, by housewives (57%). This would lead us to assume that people encounter increasing bureaucracy in their everyday lives while the media have also created the image of increased bureaucracy: various new regulations and requirements are quite often covered by the media. Only the Finns, Swedes and British raise it almost as often as Estonians. Compared to average Europeans, the European Union is less associated with euro (25% in Estonia and 37% in EU25), cultural diversity (19% and 29% respectively), peace (18% and 37% respectively) and democracy (16% and 24% respectively).

- **The main fears** that people have in connection with the EU are associated with an increase in drug trafficking and international organised crime (63%), Estonia paying more and more to the EU (63%), as well as the transfer of jobs to other member countries with lower production costs (60%). Two first fears are mentioned considerably more often compared to autumn 2004. Estonians are the least worried of Europeans about a loss of national identity and culture, economic crisis and the loss of social benefits as a result of EU membership.
- 58% of Estonians find that Estonia **has benefited from the EU membership** (the EU25 average is 55%). This idea receives greater support from younger and more educated people, as well as from rural inhabitants and those who live in small or medium sized towns. Students, managers and other white-collar workers also mention it more often.
- **The main benefit** resulting from EU membership, according to Estonians, has been greater economic stability (58%), greater security (56%) and greater political stability (53%). Support for greater political stability has slightly decreased compared to autumn (by 4 points).
- **The most important problems in Estonia according to citizens** are crime (38%), the health care system (32%), unemployment (30%), and inflation/increasing prices (27%). Compared to October 2004, the two last problems are mentioned more often, while questions related to unemployment and the economic situation have become somewhat less important. Terrorism, housing and public transport are issues that worry Estonians the least.
- **The role of the EU** is seen as positive in other issues than those that are considered to be urgent in Estonia. According to Estonians, the role of the EU is positive in environmental protection (73% find it positive), in defence and foreign affairs (67%) and in the case of the economic situation (60%). The role of the EU is considered to be negative with regard to inflation, taxes and immigration. In the case of the most urgent issues for Estonians – crime and the health care system – the role of the EU is seen to be neutral.
- 47% of Estonians consider that **the role of the EU in their everyday lives in 5 years** will be the same as today. European citizens in general believe that it will increase (44%).
- 40% of Estonians **wish that the role of the EU** in their lives would remain the same and 41% wish it to increase (in the EU25, the figures are 29% and 49% respectively).
- As regards **the EU institutions**, Estonians are the most aware of the European Parliament and European Commission, recording figures of 87% and 81% respectively. Those institutions

are also the most trusted. 54% trust the European Parliament and 53% trust the European Commission.

Support to the European Union's major policies and developments

- Estonians consider that **priorities of the EU** should focus on social issues: fighting poverty and social exclusion (56%) and unemployment (39%), as well as fighting international organised crime and drug trafficking (40%). Respondents in the EU25 and the new member states cite unemployment as being the most important issue and its importance has increased compared to 2004, whereas in Estonia it has decreased by 8 percentage points.
- 44% of Estonians hold the view that the EU should have **more financial resources considering its political aims**, 32% feel that its budget should not be increased and 26% cannot say. The average European citizen, however, considers that the budget should not be increased (50%). Only a third is in favour of this. Younger and more educated people tend to be in favour of budget increase while older and less educated people had difficulty in choosing between two options. Interestingly enough, more of the self-employed find that political aims do not justify budget increase: 42% oppose it and 35% favour it.
- Estonians find that **most of the European Union's budget is spent on** agriculture (19%), while, in Europe overall, the prevailing opinion is that it is spent on administration, personnel and buildings (31%). 16% of Estonians are of the same opinion and an equal amount thinks that the budget is spent on foreign policy and aid to non-EU countries. People who have a positive impression of the EU tend to state that expenditures are mostly on agriculture and people with negative impression reckon that administration, personnel and buildings swallow up the biggest share.
- **Support for common defence and security policy and common foreign policy** is strong among Estonians: 87% and 71% respectively. They consider as most important that in the case of the occurrence of international crises, European Union member states should be able to agree a common position (90%). 87% believe that EU foreign policy should be independent of that of the USA and the EU should have its own seat at the United Nations Security Council. Creating the position of the EU foreign minister is considered to be least important (63% consider it necessary).
- 56% of Estonians are in favour of **further enlargement** of the EU (compared to averages of 45% in the EU25 and 72% in the new member states). However, Estonians think that the Union should accept only some countries that wish to access. These should be, above all, wealthier European countries such as Norway (85% support), Switzerland (83%) and Iceland (81%). **Turkey** as a potential member state is supported the least (27%). While 54% of Estonians find that Turkey belongs to Europe for partially geographic reasons and 43% find that it belongs for partially historical reasons, cultural differences between Europe and Turkey are considered to be too great to allow accession (63%).
- 68% of Estonians agree that **the role of the EU has increased compared to 5 years ago**.

- **The role of the EU in the world arena** is found to be positive - above all, in environmental protection (83%), ensuring peace in the world (76%) and the growth of the world economy (75%).
- 42% of Estonians are of the view that quality of life in the EU as **compared with the USA** is lower, while 31% think it is better and 20% cannot say. In terms of economic development, they think that the EU economy functions as well as that of the USA (30%) or functions worse (31%). The EU's strengths as compared to the USA's are to be found in terms of environmental protection, education and fighting social inequality. The EU is seen to be lagging behind in terms of innovation and scientific research.

European Constitution

- Estonians are in favour of the **development of a European political union**: 59% of them support it and 23% are against it (in the EU25, 58% are in favour and 28% against). This support has not changed substantially when compared to autumn 2004 figures.
- Estonia has chosen parliamentary ratification of the European Constitution with no referendum. According to initial plans, parliament should discuss this issue starting in autumn 2005. Public debates are going to be generated before a final decision is taken.
- While **awareness of Estonians about the European Constitution** has sharply increased (from 57% to 74%) the share of those who admit that they are familiar with the contents of the Constitution is still among the lowest in Europe (5%).
- Poor knowledge results also in a situation where 46% support the Constitution and 43% do not know whether to **support** it or not. Still, compared to autumn 2004, the Constitution has gained supporters: support has increased 14 percentage points at the expense of those people who did not have an opinion on that issue before. Surprisingly enough, some of the lowest levels of support may be found among the self-employed: 41% support it and 18% are against (on average 11% are against).
- **Those who support the Constitution** find that it is needed in order to pursue European integration (23%), to strengthen democracy in Europe (17%) and for the better functioning of the European institutions (15%). The arguments underlying support are less noteworthy as regards Estonians compared to average European citizens.
- **Reasons given for being against the Constitution**, above all, do not refer to its contents but tend to be related to lack of information (29%) and the fact that it is considered to be complicated (19%). The only more substantial fear is associated with the loss of national sovereignty (20%).
- Estonians would above all **trust the information on the European Constitution** coming from the Estonian Government (32%). Thereafter, information from journalists (17%), the European Parliament (13%) and the Commission (12%) would be trusted.

- In conclusion, it may be said that negative or cautious attitudes towards the EU very often stem from lack of information and low awareness. In general, these attitudes are more prevalent among older people and those who are less educated. The more people feel informed the more positive they are. In order to increase positive attitudes, considerable attention should be paid to educating and informing people about EU-related issues.