

EUROBAROMETER 63.4

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CROATIA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

During the eight months between the last two Standard Eurobarometer polls, the European Union has experienced one of its most difficult periods. The citizens of two of the founder countries, France and the Netherlands, held referenda rejecting the draft Constitutional Treaty. However, support for the European Constitution or for their country's EU membership did not fall significantly when compared with the results of the previous poll carried out in autumn 2004 (Eurobarometer 62).

The European Council, at its Summit in December 2004, had set the date for the opening of Croatia's accession negotiations for 17 March 2005. However, according to the evaluation of the EU Council, based on the opinion of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), the Croatian authorities failed to fulfil the conditions for the opening of negotiations – full cooperation with the ICTY. Therefore, the opening of accession negotiations has been postponed. A Task Force established by the Council in order to evaluate whether Croatia has reached full cooperation with the ICTY had still not issued a positive opinion before the summer recess.

Confidence of the Croatian public in the EU has fallen to only 28%, from 42% in EB 62. Support for the European Constitution, common policies and for EU membership in general decreased somewhat in respect to the previous poll. Nevertheless, still around two-thirds of respondents support them (in comparison with around three-quarters in EB 62) indicating that Euro-scepticism has increased among Croatian respondents – which may be caused by momentary events whereas, in the medium to long term, a great majority of Croats favour EU membership.

Life in Croatia

Although two-thirds of Croats are satisfied with the life they live, they are however considerably less satisfied than the citizens in the European Union, where as much as three-quarters of respondents are satisfied. In the short term, Croats are more pessimistic than Europeans overall, while in the medium term, their expectations regarding both their personal life and the country's economic situation are comparable. The current lesser degree of satisfaction may be explained by a financial status worse than that in the EU, while its medium term increase is due to expectations of further economic growth. This is despite the fact that both Croats and Europeans are more pessimistic regarding their own country's economy than when asked about expectations regarding their own personal economic status. Up to 95 per cent of Croatian respondents, compared with 62 per cent of Europeans in general, see their national economy as bad. Improvements in the national economy are expected in the next five years by 57 per cent of Croats in contrast to just 50 per cent of Europeans on average.

Knowledge and opinions about the European Union

Even if Croats think they know more about the EU than its own citizens, their answers to concrete questions show their knowledge to be deficient. Answers to questions such as what the EU represents for Croats and what impression it creates differ from answers given by EU citizens only in segments in which experience of EU membership has a direct influence (the Euro, bureaucracy, throwing money away, control over external borders). It is interesting that a quarter of Croats fear a loss of their cultural identity in the EU while those who have actually experienced life in the EU do not display such fears to the same degree.

Main sources of information on the EU for Croatian citizens are TV (80%), daily newspapers (44%), radio (31%), discussions with family members, friends and colleagues (30%), other newspapers and magazines (13%) and the Internet (12%). Only 7% of respondents answered that they never seek information or are not interested in the EU (4% in EB 62).

When asked directly about their country's membership of the EU, the majority of Croatian respondents do not take a strong stance (40% think it would be neither good nor bad, compared to 41% in EB62), while those who have a negative view on the issue (29% in EB63, 24% in EB 62) prevail over those who have a positive one (27% in EB63, 30% in EB 62). However, replies to concrete questions, imply that Croats stand for a stronger unification of Europe and expect to benefit from EU membership. Those that expect benefit for Croatia from EU membership amount to 36% of respondents (38% in EB 62). The percentage rises with their level of education, but even among the best educated respondents there are six percentage points more of those who do not expect any benefit for Croatia upon its accession to the EU.

47% of respondents would feel more secure if Croatia were an EU member state (48% in EB 62), while 43% tend to disagree (39% in EB 62); 49% think that Croatia would be economically more stable, while 38% tend to disagree (no change from EB 62); 50% think that Croatia would be more stable politically (52% in EB 62), while 37% tend to disagree (34% in EB 62).

The European Union compared to the USA

The majority of both Croatian and European respondents think that the USA plays a negative role on the world scene. But, when it comes to the fight against terrorism, the climate in the EU changes, so now more Europeans than in the EB 62 survey see the American role as positive, while the majority of Croats still sees it as negative. Europeans in general also see the role of the USA as positive in the growth of world economy, while Croats are divided on that issue. However, regarding all the questions asked, both Croats and Europeans see the EU role as predominantly positive.

The European Union compared to Croatia

Over three-quarters of Croatian respondents are dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy in their country, while they have a much better opinion regarding democracy in the EU. However, EU respondents have a much better opinion about the functioning of

democracy in their own country than in the EU, even if the majority has a positive opinion on the latter too.

95 per cent of Croatian respondents consider themselves to be patriotic – local, regional and national. In the EU, the figures are slightly lower but still constitute a large majority – on average 91 per cent of them identify with their country and 87 per cent with their local and regional area. There are fewer people in Croatia who feel ‘European’ than in the EU overall – 57 in contrast to 66 per cent.

The enlargement of the European Union

While two-thirds of EU Member States citizens think that the European Union must continue its enlargement process, less than a quarter think that all the countries wishing to accede the EU should in fact do so. A quarter of European respondents think that the EU should remain within its current frontiers. The continuation of the enlargement process enjoys much bigger support, up to 27 points more, in the 10 new Member States than in the 15 older ones.

EU citizens see Croatia as the fourth most desirable new Member State - 48% of respondents in the old and 72% in the new Member States or an average of 52% in the EU 25 support its accession to the EU. In Croatia, up to 84 % of respondents support the continuation of the EU enlargement process, while half of them think that all the countries wishing to accede the EU should be able to do so.

57 per cent of Croatian respondents compared with 32 per cent in the EU are in favour of accession of Turkey to the EU. Among the countries involved in the Stabilization and Association Process, 68% of Croatian respondents are in favour of the EU accession of Bosnia and Herzegovina (42% in EU), 65% the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (43% in EU), 59% Albania (36% in EU), and 48% Serbia and Montenegro.

The Constitution of the European Union

In the group of questions regarding the role of the European Union, 60 per cent of Croatian respondents claimed to be in favour of the European Constitution. 65 per cent of the poll said that they have heard about it but only 26 per cent gave a positive opinion on the EU Constitution. Only 15 per cent are against it whereas 60 per cent could not decide whether they were for or against. This indicates their rather high degree of lack of information despite the fact that the Croatian media have reported extensively on the EU Constitution. In the EU, knowledge about the Constitution is more extensive implying that the media alone are not sufficient and that a public debate on the issue is essential to inform the public.

As for the main reasons for having the Constitution, Croats point to its key role in the further integration of Europe and the smooth functioning of institutions. Those in Croatia who oppose the Constitution state mostly cite as their reasons the fear of losing national sovereignty and the fact that the Constitution does not recognise Europe's Christian roots.

Up to two-thirds of Croatian and European respondents think that the Constitution would make the EU more democratic, more efficient and transparent, and that by its adoption the EU would become stronger in the world, economically more competitive and more socially oriented.

Concerning information on the EU, Croatian respondents place most trust in newspapers, followed by friends and relatives and, thirdly, the European Parliament. Only after these come the Croatian Government, while national political parties are at the bottom of the list.

European profiles

Both in Croatia and in the EU, Catholicism is the predominant religion. But there are only slightly over one-quarter of active worshippers in Croatia – an average that is three times as few as in Malta and more than twice as few as in Poland – while in the EU they constitute an average of less than one-fifth of the population. Among the 30 countries included in this poll, Croatia ranks seventh in terms of active worshippers.

As regards possession of goods, the average Croat is a bit behind the average European, except for housing space which, on average, Croats possess almost twice as much EU citizens. An average of almost twice as many Croats as Europeans in general never travel

on holidays. There are considerably more Croats than Europeans in general who can converse in a foreign language, although Croats lag behind other Europeans the most in their knowledge of French.

Politically, the majority of Croats align themselves with the centre while one-fifth of the population align themselves with either the right or the left. In the EU, there is on average around ten per cent more aligned to the political left than to the right, and the majority of European respondents, but fewer than in Croatia, align themselves politically with the centre.

Conclusion

Opinions about the EU among Croatian respondents, much as in the previous poll, are still volatile and influenced by daily political events. Despite an increase in Euro-scepticism, in their answers to concrete questions, Croats showed that the large majority was in favour of a more strongly integrated Europe.

Note

The public opinion poll Standard Eurobarometer is carried out twice a year. This 63rd one (EB 63) was carried out in the period from 9 May to 14 June 2005 in all 25 EU Member States, two accession countries (Bulgaria and Rumania), two candidate countries (Croatia and Turkey), and in Northern Cyprus under Turkish administration. This is the second such poll to include Croatia. The Standard Eurobarometer poll has been commissioned by the European Commission's Directorate General for Press and Communication (DG Press), and was carried out by the consortium TNS Opinion & Social, constituted by TNS and EOS Gallup Europe. As was the case for EB 62, the data were collected by the Puls agency and were treated and reported on by senior correspondent of Večernji list, Stojan de Prato.