

# EUROBAROMETER 63.4

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

## SPRING 2005

### NATIONAL REPORT

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **POLAND**

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## Introduction

This executive summary examines the views of Polish citizens on various aspects of the European Union. It compares them with typical attitudes held across the Union (EU25 average), highlighting major differences vis-à-vis other Member States.

The bulk of the data making up this report was gathered between 9 May and 14 June 2005 and constitute wave 63.4 of the Standard Eurobarometer, which is published every year (spring/autumn) on the request of the European Commission.

### 1. Quality of life in Poland a year after enlargement

**More Poles are satisfied with the quality of their life than one year ago.** In spring 2004, 63% of Polish citizens felt positive about their standard of living. In spring 2005 this percentage rose by 5 points and now accounts for 68% (30% are dissatisfied). As in previous years, young people aged 15 to 24 are the most contented with the quality of life they lead (88%). This age group is more positive about its situation than elderly people (persons older than 55), of whom 60% are satisfied. In terms of the outlook of the various occupational groups, the largest percentage of persons perceiving their situation as positive is found among managers and students (91% each) and white collar workers (82%), with the smallest being among the unemployed (56%) and the retired (57%).

Across the EU25, the highest percentage of respondents satisfied with their life situation is in the "old" Member States (83% on average), and, in particular, Denmark (98%), Sweden (96%), and Luxemburg (95%). The highest amount of dissatisfied persons is in the candidate countries - Bulgaria (70%) and Romania (55%) - and in the "new" Member States (31% on average) - particularly in Hungary (46%) and Lithuania (45%).

**An increasing number of Poles claim that their life situation is better than five years ago.** Less than one-third of Poles (30%) believe that the life they currently lead is better than it used to be. The opposite view is held by 42% of Polish citizens, while 25% of respondents see no difference. One year ago, in spring 2004, fewer Poles (by 9 points) perceived their situation as better than five years ago and a greater number (by 7 points) claimed that their situation had worsened over recent years.

Young Poles positively evaluate the changes that occurred in the past five years. This view is shared both by respondents between 15 and 24 and between 25 and 39 (54% and 40% respectively). Significantly fewer satisfied respondents can be found in the other age groups. Taking into consideration particular occupational groups, the highest percentage of respondents content with the changes is found among students (52%) and managers (48%), the lowest among the retired (10%) and the unemployed (22%).

It is worth noting that Poles considering that their country has benefited from EU membership are happier with their current life situation compared to five years ago (36%) than respondents who hold the opposite view on membership (18%).

The highest percentage of those who believe their situation has improved in the last five years is in Ireland (60%) and Sweden (58%), and the lowest is in candidate countries Bulgaria (16%) and Portugal (20%).

**More and more Poles are optimistic about their future life situation and the majority expects positive changes in various areas.** When they think about the future, Poles expect that their life situation in the next five years will improve with 42% of respondents holding this opinion (a percentage equal to the EU average). The opposite view is held by only 15% of respondents. More than one-third of Poles (38%) believe

that their life situation will stay the same in the future. A year ago, Poles were less optimistic about their future. In spring 2004, only 33% of them expected an improvement of their situation in the next five years. 23% felt that their life situation would get worse, and 30% claimed that it would not change at all.

Moreover, the majority of Poles believe that the situation in different domains, such as the national economy, the economy of the EU, employment, the environment, or the quality of life in the country will improve within five years. In each of these areas the percentage of those who expect positive change exceeds 50%.

A greater number than in Poland and the highest percentage of respondents with an optimistic attitude towards their future can be found in Spain (57%). A comparable number is found in Ireland (55%), United Kingdom (55%) and Estonia (54%). The lowest percentages of respondents expecting a deterioration in their life situation occur in Greece (25%), Germany (21%), Republic of Cyprus (19%) and Hungary (19%).

The majority of Poles still do not trust their national parliament, government and political parties. The only noticeable change of attitudes concerns the judiciary – 23% (an increase of trust by 7 points compared to autumn 2004). The least trusted are political parties (5%). A slightly higher percentage of respondents trust the parliament (8%) and government (11%). **The lack of confidence in national institutions is mirrored by the dissatisfaction of the majority of Poles with the way democracy functions in their country. This sentiment has been stable from autumn 2002, at a level of around 60%, and in spring 2005 rose to 67%.** The opposite view is held by only 29% of Poles.

The situation in Poland differs considerably from the EU25. It is particularly stark in the case of the judiciary and parliament. Respectively 35% and 50% of EU citizens trust these institutions. Political parties, as in Poland, enjoy the lowest levels of respondents' confidence, 19%.

The majority of Polish citizens trust in the European Union (52%). However, three out of ten Poles (31%) express a lack of confidence in the Community, and almost one in five (17%) does not have an opinion on this issue. This score differs slightly from the EU25 average. In the Member States as a whole, 44% of citizens declare their trust in the Community. Almost the same percentage of citizens does not have confidence in it (43%).

A comparison of trust in national institutions as opposed to European ones highlights the fact that a significantly higher percentage of Poles tends to have confidence in the latter. In almost every case, it accounts for around 50%. The European Central Bank with a trust level of 40% is the one exception. Poles tend to have greatest trust in the European Parliament and the European Court of Justice (52% each). Slightly less than half of Poles trust the European Commission (49%).

## 1. European Union membership

**More than half of Poles have a positive opinion about their country's membership of the European Union (53%).** Only 8% have a contrasting view. However, over one-third of Polish citizens (36%) believes that membership is neither good nor bad for the country.

Among those satisfied with membership are predominantly young people (64% of respondents between 15 and 24, and 59% between 25 and 39). The lowest percentage occurs among people above 55 years of age (39%). Taking into consideration particular social groups, the most respondents to have a negative opinion on Poland's membership

are found among the retired (12%) and the unemployed (10%). The fewest are found among students, white-collar workers (3% each), and managers (4%).

Analyzing the changes in the attitude of Polish citizens towards EU membership, one can observe that from autumn 2002 to spring 2004 more than 50% believed that it is a good thing. A momentary breakdown of this trend (42%) is shown by a survey conducted just before the accession of Poland to the EU (February-March 2004). However, half of a year of membership was enough for Poles to change their attitude again. Already in autumn 2004, the percentage of respondents describing membership as a good thing had risen by 8 points (to 50%). At the same time, the level of people negatively assessing the membership dropped (from 18% to 8%).

Also, across the EU, the majority of citizens (54%) declare that EU membership is a good thing. However, a slight downward tendency is noticeable. In autumn 2004, 56% of EU citizens had a positive view of membership. There were fewer of those who were dissatisfied (13%, by 2 points).

The majority of Poles believes that their country has benefited from EU membership. Almost two-thirds of the respondents (62%) are of this opinion, while the opposite view is held by 25% of Polish citizens. Considering the survey results from autumn 2004, the percentage of persons believing that the country benefited from membership has grown in the last half year by 7 points. At the same time, the number of those who believe the contrary decreased (from 30% to 25%).

The benefits of membership are most appreciated by young people (15-24) – 74% and persons with higher education (79%). The difference of opinion in the two peripheral age categories (15-24 and 55+) is not as big in regard to the general view on the membership. More than half of respondents older than 55 (52%) believes that the country has benefited from membership.

Across the EU25, the Irish (87%), the Lithuanians and the citizens of Luxembourg (72% each) appreciate most the benefits of membership. At the other end of the spectrum are the Swedes (36%) and the citizens of the Republic of Cyprus (41%).

**For more than half of Poles the notion of the European Union conjures up a positive image.** Only 12% have negative feelings when thinking about the Community. This positive view of the EU results to a large degree from the fact that Poles in general are satisfied with the effects of membership. The EU is similarly perceived by the citizens of the other member countries (EU25 – 46%): most positively by the Irish (68%) and the least by the British (29%).

**Poles, when asked about what the European Union means to them personally, mostly single out, like other EU citizens (EU25 – 52%), the free movement of people within the Community (64%).** In second place they mention *a stronger voice in the world* (32%), and *peace* (30%).

Almost all Poles, like other EU citizens, are attached both to a big, middle, or small city, a village (91%), to a region (92%) and country (97%). A vast percentage of Poles also declares an attachment to Europe (83%). One can therefore conclude that the feeling of attachment to the place of residence, whether a city or a village, does not exclude strong bonds between Poles and Europe.

## 2. Information of and knowledge about the European Union

**Poles obtain knowledge about the European Union from the media with television being the main source (75%).** The fact that television is the greatest source of information is clearly attributable to **people's habit of using TV as the most**

**frequent, daily, supply of information programmes (60%).** A high percentage of the population (50%) says it also follows radio information programmes on a daily basis. Against this background newspapers appear to be less frequently used. Only 20% of those polled admit to reading newspapers every day, and 19% do not read them at all.

**The persons surveyed believe that the media present a sufficient amount of information about the European Union.** The worst perceived in this aspect is television. In spite of 46% of the population maintaining that TV provides enough information, as many as 41% have the opposite opinion. Respondents have a slightly better opinion about radio (32% believe that there is not enough information about the Union). The press is perceived by Poles as the best in this respect. The number of persons satisfied with information accessible in the press is twice that of those who are dissatisfied (44% as opposed to 24%).

**Poles perceive the level of their knowledge about the European Union as rather low. On a scale of 1 (no knowledge at all) to 10 (a great deal)** 44% of Poles marked their level in the first part of the range (1 to 4). The upper part (6 to 10) was chosen by 29% of those polled. The remaining respondents (26%) described their awareness as average (5).

**The Polish population has limited information of the basis facts about the European Union. However their level of knowledge is higher than the EU25 average.** The average of good answers to questions concerning the Community given by Poles reached 54% (EU average – 41%). **Poles also have partial knowledge of the spending structure of the European Union budget.** More than a third of those surveyed (36%) appropriately mentioned the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) as the main spending category. Nevertheless, 25% wrongly assumed that the biggest part of the resources is taken up by administration costs. In reality, this constitutes a very small chunk of overall EU spending.

### 3. The European Union in the World

**The majority of Poles perceive positively the role played by the European Union in the world.** The respondents appreciate the Union's contribution to the protection of the environment (75%), fight against terrorism (65%), as well as the development of the world economy and peace (63% each). **More than half of Poles, as well as the citizens of the other Member States (62% for both) believe that the EU has a much more important role internationally than five years ago.**

**The majority of Poles (77%) also maintains that the EU economy is currently in a good shape (the opposite opinion is held by 14% of respondents).** Similar feelings prevail in all other "new" Member States where 73% of inhabitants perceive positively the state of the Community economy (17% think the opposite). Significantly fewer persons (45%) share this view in the "old" Member States. The highest percentages of the population dissatisfied with the state of Union's economy are in Estonia (80%) and Slovenia (78%). The opposite, the fewest unhappy persons in this respect, live in Portugal (27%) and France (37%).

**Poles evaluate the functioning of the domestic economy and other associated sectors as poor.** The most negatively perceived is employment, welfare and the economy in general. Respectively 96%, 86%, and 78% of those surveyed think that the situation in these domains is very difficult. However, more positive opinions are expressed by Poles about their living conditions and financial situation. 56% and 48% of those polled maintain that they are happy with both.

**According to the opinions of those surveyed, the economic situation in Poland is worse than in other Member States.** The vast majority believe that Poland's labour

market (91%), quality of life (90%), domestic economy (85%), welfare (86%), or environment (56%) are in a worse state than in the other countries of the European Union. The only sector not so negatively perceived is the Polish system of education (48%).

**The majority of the respondents are happy with the results of the Community economy, in spite of the fact, that it is faring worse than the economies of the United States and Japan.** This opinion is expressed by 48% and 53% respectively. The opposite view is shared by 13% and 14%. **A comparison of the situation in particular domains, for example unemployment, the development of new technologies or scientific research only confirms the advantageous position of the United States.** Apart from education, in all the domains included in the survey, Poles ranked the United States first.

**Poles believe that in order to improve the functioning of the Union's economy, more emphasis should be put on the improvement of conditions for establishing new companies (50%).** According to the opinion expressed by Union citizens (60%), priority should be given to enhancing the educational system and professional training. A relative majority of Poles appear not to believe, however, that these actions would bring any results. Almost half (44%) of the population does not think that the European Union will become the biggest economic power in the world in the next 5 years. The opposite view is shared by 43% of Polish citizens.

#### 4. The European Constitution

**The idea of an EU Constitution, from the moment it first appeared, was supported by the majority of Poles.** From autumn 2002 to spring 2005, the percentage of persons, who believed that the EU should adopt such a document accounted for more than 60%. At the moment, it scores 61%. An opposing view is held by 17% of respondents.

If we take into consideration the political preferences of respondents, we notice that the idea of a constitution prevails among Poles who describe their political allegiance as 'centre' (66%). It is least popular among respondents with right-wing allegiances (58%).

Most opponents of a constitution are found in Finland (41%), the Netherlands (38%), Denmark (37%) and the United Kingdom (37%). The most proponents are found in Hungary (78%), Belgium and Slovenia (76% each) and Italy (74%).

**The majority of Poles have heard about the European Constitution, however, many do not know its content.** 80% of Poles have heard about the document (a rise of 19 points in comparison to autumn 2004). However, only 7% declare that, in addition to this, they have a general knowledge of its contents. A total lack of knowledge about the Constitution is declared by 13% - 19 points lower than in autumn 2004.

Among the respondents who have heard about the Constitution and have general knowledge of its contents, are young people, between 15 and 24 (8%), as well as those with secondary education (11%), managers (17%) and those living in big cities (12%). Among those declaring a lack of knowledge of the Constitution are older citizens, above 55 years of age (21%), those with just primary school education (35%), the retired (20%) and inhabitants of villages (18%).

When compared with data gathered across the Union, it may be seen that in the Community there are more people who have heard about the Constitution and know its content (by 6 points). At the same time, there are fewer respondents who do not know anything about this document (down by 5 points). However, there are also fewer people



who declare that they have heard about the Constitution, but do not know much about its content (down by 12 points).

**Asked about their trust regarding different sources of information on the Constitution, Poles, like other EU citizens, point mostly to journalists (27%).** In second place, they put relatives and friends (23%), followed by European institutions: the European Parliament and the European Commission (13% each). Poles have the lowest degree of confidence in trade unions, political parties, consumer organizations, and local councilors (1% each). A similar, low degree of trust is attributed to the government (5%).

**During the last six months, support among Polish citizens for a Constitution in its current form has risen.** In autumn 2004, 43% of respondents were for this document. At the moment this percentage accounts for 54% (20% of Poles are against).

Across the EU, the support for the actual concept of a Constitution is a bit lower. 48% of EU citizens agree that this document should be adopted, 28% are against it. The lowest number of supporters of a Constitution is currently found in France (44%) and the Netherlands (43%). At the other end of the spectrum, there is Belgium, where 71% of citizens want the Constitution in its actual form to be adopted (20% against), followed by Germany (59%) and Slovakia (57%).

## 5. 6. The Enlargement of the European Union

**Poles support the enlargement of the European Union.** The only country where the number of supporters is higher than in Poland is Slovenia (79% and 76% respectively). In terms of the Union as a whole, the percentage of persons advocating future enlargement is much lower than in Poland and averages 50%. A similar difference exists in the case of those opposing enlargement: 12% in Poland and 35% in the Union.

The highest proportion of opponents is in Germany (61%), Luxembourg (60%, + 6 points since autumn 2004), France (58%, +7 points since autumn 2004 - highest growth in the EU) and Austria (58%, - 4 points).

Most supporters live in Slovenia, Poland and Slovakia (73%), Republic of Cyprus (70%), and Lithuania (69%). This result shows a distinct difference of opinion between the "old" and the "new" Member States; countries that have only been in the European Union a little longer than a year support enlargement to a much higher extent than the other members of the Community. The difference is as large as 27%. 45% of the citizens of the "old" Member States back enlargement, whereas in the "new" Member States, the figure is more than 72%.

**Most Poles support the admission of Switzerland (86%), followed by Norway (85%) and Ukraine (76%). Less willingly, Poles would see Turkey (31%), Albania (56%), Romania and Serbia and Montenegro (both 61%) as new members.**

In the case of Switzerland and Norway, Polish support can be tied, without a doubt, to the respondents' awareness of the level of development and wealth of those countries. The main reason for mentioning Ukraine in this group of countries was the 2004/2005 "Orange revolution".

Of all the countries listed in the questionnaire, Poles are least favourable to the accession of Turkey to the European Union. The percentage of those opposed (31%) is, however, the lowest vis-à-vis the other Member States. At the same time, the admission of Turkey is approved by 54% of respondents.

In the European Union, as a whole, the most welcome in the EU are the current EFTA members or countries such as Norway and Switzerland (78% in both cases), followed by Iceland (70%). Significantly less favourably, the Europeans look at the remaining countries, like for example Croatia and Bulgaria. Only every second UE citizen (52% and 50% respectively) supports their admission into the Community.

## 6. Support for Community policies

**Poles, like other citizens of the Union (EU25 – 67%), strongly support the Common Foreign and Defence Policy (CFDP).** Compared to autumn 2004, the percentage of Poles supporting the policy has increased (by 8 points). At the moment, it numbers 78%, and is at its highest level since spring 2003.

**The vast majority of Poles, as well as citizens of other Member States (EU25 – 77%), support the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).** Almost nine out of ten respondents in Poland (86%) support this policy (6% oppose it). Also in this case, significant growth in the percentage of persons declaring their support for CSDP has occurred (one year ago – in spring – 79% of respondents were in favour). The current level of support is the highest since spring 2003.

**The majority of Poles (56%) and citizens of the Union (EU25 – 59%), albeit not as many as in the case of the CFDP and CSDP, support the European Monetary Union (EMU) with a common currency – the Euro** (34% oppose it). Compared to autumn 2004, support among Poles for this policy has fallen (by 9 points). The current level of acceptance for EMU is the lowest in Poland since 2003 (in the first quarter of 2003, 70% of respondents supported the EMU).