



Standard Eurobarometer



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1. Personal expectations and institutional trust

The ongoing context of a severe economic crisis appears to have had a considerable effect on the personal expectations of the Portuguese in this survey, with the results being marked by a considerably pessimistic outlook - at least for the near future. Indeed, Portugal is the only country of the EU-25 where a larger number of those surveyed expects their personal situation to get worse rather than better in a year's time. This pessimism extends to other questions regarding future expectations, both when these pertain to the personal dimensions of life and to the national economy or the labour market.

Yet this short-term pessimism contrasts with a greater optimism in the more distant future. When asked as to their expectations regarding their personal life in the next five years, almost half of those polled in Portugal predict that their personal situation will get better, against only 16 percent who forecast a downturn. This result is not only vastly more optimistic than the 12-month outlook, but is also more positive than the EU-25 average on this question.

In terms of the social issues addressed in this Eurobarometer, unsurprisingly, the dominant religious position in Portugal is Catholicism. Indeed, only in Malta, Poland, Italy and Ireland is the proportion of Catholics greater than in Portugal. Portugal also presents comparatively high levels of religious practice. The EB63 data also suggest Portugal has the sixth highest level of regular religious service attendance of the EU-25. At the same time, there has been a decline in participation over the past fifteen years, a pattern that cannot be dissociated from the social transformations in Portugal over the last few decades. As to the second major social theme of EB63, the results reveal an incipient penetration of computers and access to the Internet in Portugal. Only in Latvia and Lithuania does a smaller proportion of those surveyed own a computer; and the level of home access to the Internet is the fifth lowest in the EU-25.

As in previous Eurobarometer surveys, the Portuguese display high levels of trust in the EU and its institutions. Indeed, Portugal is the country with the highest levels of trust of the EU-25 in this survey, and levels of trust on specific institutions are consistently higher than the EU-25 average. Although trust in national institutions is lower than in our European

counterparts, the results suggest there is no crisis of confidence in national institutions, at least in comparative terms. Indeed, the trust of the Portuguese in their national institutions is, with the exception of the judicial system, higher than the EU-25 average.

2. The meaning and role of the European Union

In respect to the meaning and role of the European Union, the Portuguese display positive representations of Europe, but are less optimistic when asked to assess the action of the European Union in the political, economic, social and environmental domains.

The majority of the Portuguese sample expresses a positive general image of the European Union (56 percent), and favourable affective (“good thing”) and instrumental (“benefited”) attitudes. Furthermore, most of the respondents feel safer (60 percent) as well as politically (45 percent) and economically (42 percent) more stable due to the fact that their country is a member of the European Union. The average of EU-25 citizens who feel secure in the political and economic domains is similar to the proportion of Portuguese who expressed those feelings, but the sentiment of safety is more frequently associated with the EU among the Portuguese.

In addition, the Portuguese tend to share positive representations of the European Union. A plurality of them underlines the fact that its existence allows people to travel, study and work anywhere in Europe (this fact was cited by 41 percent of the respondents, when asked to identify the meaning of the European Union) and say that the Union gives them feelings of hope (42 percent). When compared to their co-citizens in the EU, the Portuguese are characterized by establishing less frequently associations between the Union and negative features such as “waste of money” (8 percent) and “bureaucracy” (4 percent), and also by being the national group that, on average, reported the least amount of negative feelings towards the European Union (9 percent). However, the European identity is accepted by about 55 percent of the Portuguese sample. This result could be interpreted as fairly positive, if we overlook the comparative and longitudinal data. In fact, the European identity in Portugal is weaker than the EU-25 average.

If a majority of the Portuguese attach generally positive sentiments and meanings to the EU, the results become less favourable when the subject is the assessment of the effect of the Union's practical measures in the political, economic, social and environmental spheres. The percentage of respondents who think that the European Union had a positive role in those spheres is lower in Portugal (22 percent) than in the EU-25 (33 percent). In fact, the Portuguese are less approving than the EU-25 average of the Union's role in eleven of the fourteen items of public policy used in this survey. However, the longitudinal analysis allows us to conclude that the evaluations made by the Portuguese are somewhat more favourable than those made in the last Eurobarometer. If this phenomenon is observed in the next surveys, we will be able to say that there is a trend towards the congruence between the general representations of the European Union and the assessment of its concrete political role.

When the EU's role in the international sphere is examined, however, the Portuguese become more optimistic – at least as optimistic as the EU-25 average. The majority of the Portuguese consider that the international role of the European Union has become more important (57 percent) and contributed positively to the resolution of the most relevant problems of the world: peace (64 percent), fight against terrorism (61 percent), world economic growth (58 percent), fight against poverty (50 percent) and protection of the environment (52 percent). However, they tend to think — like most Europeans — that the affirmation of the European Union as the major economic force in the world will not happen within the next five years (47 percent).

3. The future of the European Union

In comparison with the previous Eurobarometer survey, Portuguese support for the idea of a European Constitution remains strong and stable, with a majority of 59 percent being favourable. Support for the current text of the Constitutional Treaty is also stable in relation to the previous Eurobarometer, with 42 percent supporting it, while 11 percent oppose it. This, however, contrasts with the EU average in two ways. On the one hand, Portuguese public opinion has remained impervious to the general decline in support to the Constitutional Treaty visible in the rest of Europe, where those who oppose the Treaty

have risen, on average, by 12 percent. On the other hand, support for the Treaty in the Portuguese case is comparatively low.

This may be largely explained by the fact that, once again, a large number of those surveyed in Portugal were unable to respond to questions regarding the Constitution (47 percent), a proportion that is almost twice the European average (24 percent). This is congruent with the fact that the most cited reason for not supporting the Constitution in Portugal is, precisely, a self-perceived lack of information (48 percent).

The socio-demographic characteristics of those opposing the Constitution in Portugal once again confirm that lower levels of education are related to lower support, as well as to a greater tendency not to express a position. Similarly, women and/or manual labourers, house persons, the retired and the unemployed tend to exhibit above-average levels of rejection of the Constitution or, alternatively, to enlarge the ranks of the non-committed. Self-placement on the left-right scale also has an effect on attitudes towards the Constitution: respondents on the left of the political spectrum are far less supportive than those on the right or the centre.

The issue of enlargement still differentiates the EU-15 from the new member-states. While, in the latter, there is overwhelming support for enlargement, the EU-15 remain divided on this issue, with close to half of the respondents either expressing opposition or refusing to take a stand. However, among those, Portugal maintains comparatively high levels of support for the entry of new member-states. 56 percent of the Portuguese are supportive of enlargement, a result that is above the European average (51 percent). In fact, opposition to enlargement has fallen in Portugal by 8 percentage points, while the EU average has risen by 3 points. The Portuguese are also more favourable to Turkey's entry to the EU than the EU average: 43 percent of respondents support EU enlargement to Turkey, against 33 percent against it, compared with an EU-25 average of 35 percent in favour and 52 percent against. From a socio-demographic standpoint, support for enlargement tends to diminish with age and to increase with higher educational levels. In terms of the left-right scale, respondents on the right tend to be less supportive of enlargement.

Regarding expectations for the future of the EU, the Portuguese remain more fearful than the European average. Of special concern is the fear of an economic crisis: 74 percent of the Portuguese express this fear, against only 48 percent of Europeans overall. This represents an increase of 10 percentage points since the last survey conducted in Portugal, while the EU average fell by 4 points over the same period. Loss of power of the smaller states, greater difficulties faced by farmers and loss of social benefits are also fears which the Portuguese share in far greater numbers than average Europeans. And unlike what occurred in the previous survey, the association of the EU with the current economic crisis is now shared by all segments of the population. Similarly, we can no longer say that those who have a positive view of the EU tend to associate the EU less with the economic crisis. Attitudinal differences, in this matter, have ceased to be significant.

4. Knowledge of and information about the EU

EB63 indicates a reversal of a previous increase in the self-evaluation of knowledge about the EU among the Portuguese. Indeed, this new decline means that current levels of perceptions of information about the EU in Portugal have now returned to the 1999-2003 average. Paradoxically, however, as to what concerns the levels of actual knowledge about the European Union, Portugal maintains the pattern shown in previous Eurobarometers: high percentages of recognition of the European institutions (always higher than the European Union's average), rates of correct answers to questions about the Union that are similar or even above the average of the other member-states. Thus, although the Portuguese are more pessimistic than the EU-25 average when asked about how informed they feel about the European Union, their actual performance in the "true/false" questions concerning the Union is similar and, in some cases, better than the EU-25 average performance.

In Portugal, television remains the only mass medium capable of reaching large segments of the population. All other media — radio, daily newspapers and the Internet — show very little or no growth in their audiences, which were already comparatively low from the outset. The whole of the EU, on the other hand, demonstrates great growth in audiences for certain ways of accessing information, notably the Internet. In this respect, Portugal

seems again to be lagging behind in the “information age”, with an unavoidable impact in terms of information gathering. From a socio-demographic standpoint, those who claim not to seek information about the EU tend to remain the elderly, the less educated, and the retired. Lastly, depending upon the type of media, between 31 and 38 percent of the Portuguese believe their national media give too little information about the EU.