

EUROBAROMETER 63.4

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

SPRING 2005

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SLOVENIA

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

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

This document does not represent the point of view of the European Commission. The interpretations and opinions contained in it are solely those of the authors.

Background

Eurobarometer 63.4 (EB) is the second Eurobarometer survey to take place since Slovenia's accession to European Union membership in May 2004. This report examines public opinion in Slovenia one year after accession.

The new Slovenian government has been in power since December 2004. Prime Minister Janez Janša's cabinet has started with some reforms and enjoys relatively strong public support (up to 60%).

Slovenia has presided over the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe since 1 January 2005. This year, the Slovenian press has covered more news from abroad, especially from central Asia.

National media have paid considerable attention to the ratification process of the EU Constitutional Treaty. Slovenia was the third EU Member State to ratify it at the beginning of this year (1.2.2005). There was much attention focused on the pre-referendum campaigns in France and the Netherlands in May. The negative outcomes and subsequent freezing of the ratification process had no influence on public opinion presented in this report, as the poll took place earlier.

More optimism than before accession

A first general look at the survey data shows that Slovenians are still (as in the previous EB) more optimistic when talking about their personal situations and the general situation of the country than before 1 May 2004. Similar optimism, which differs from the situation in the rest of the NMS, is seen in Malta and the Republic of Cyprus. All three are new, small and Mediterranean Member States.

The level of trust in Slovenian political institutions is increasing gradually. The government, parliament and political parties have improved their ratings. Compared with the previous polls, the level of trust grew in one year from 27% to 40% for the national government, 25% to 39% for the national parliament and 16% to 23% for political parties.

The main reasons for optimism could be EU accession and the new government (the biggest political party - the LDS - has lost power after 12 years).

N 1 – the fight against unemployment

Slovenia has faced increased unemployment levels in recent months. Therefore, it is no surprise that unemployment is the issue that is cited the most frequently as one that respondents feel Slovenia should deal with – the same holds true for other New Member States (NMS) and for the EU25 in general.

83% of Slovenians consider the employment situation as bad. 65% believe that fighting unemployment is the first priority that the EU should address. Among the fears related to European integration, the main concern of EU25 citizens is the transfer of jobs to other Member States with lower production costs (73%).

Slovenians are worried about social security, the economic situation and fighting poverty. Social issues were the most important themes in the campaigns before the referenda on the EU Constitutional Treaty, so in this respect Slovenians are following the European trend.

Perceived and actual level of information

A majority of Slovenians perceive their own knowledge of the EU, its policies and institutions as average (the average is 5 on a scale of 1-10), the same as before 1 May 2004. However the actual level of knowledge (respondents have to answer if a statement about the EU is correct or incorrect) about some basic facts is much higher in Slovenia than in the EU25 as a whole. The proportion of correct answers has increased from +24% to +40% in one year.

29% of Slovenians answered correctly all four questions – this is the highest percentage in all of the 25 Member States.

Preferred sources of EU-related information

Traditional news media are considered to be the most important sources for acquiring EU-related information. The most frequently mentioned source for information regarding the EU is television (79%), followed by daily newspapers (55%) and radio (51%).

The majority (54%) perceived the image of the EU as portrayed by the media to be objective. On the other hand, the share of those who thought that the national media created an image of the EU that is too positive is quite high – 30%.

EU institutions

The best known European institutions in Slovenia are the European Parliament and the European Commission, known by 95% and 92% of respondents respectively. People also think that the European Parliament and the European Commission play important roles in the European Union and tend to trust them.

People with higher levels of education have heard of a higher number of EU institutions but they selectively describe their importance.

Very positive image of the European Union

49% of Slovenians think EU membership of their country is a good thing, 41% think it is neither good nor bad and only 9% think membership is a bad thing.

Taking everything into consideration, 62% of Slovenians would say that Slovenia has benefited from being a member of the European Union. The EU25 average is 55%.

More than half of Slovenian citizens agree that Slovenia is more economically and politically stable as a consequence of EU membership; they feel safer

because Slovenia is a member and they feel that Slovenia's voice counts more in the EU.

Fears of loss of national identity, culture and the Slovenian language being used less are not among the biggest fears related to Slovenia's EU membership.

For a stronger and bigger EU

Slovenians are, besides the citizens of the Republic of Cyprus, the strongest supporters of the EU's common foreign policy (84%) and common defence and security policy (90%).

EU enlargement (79%) has the biggest support in EU25 in Slovenia. The strongest support for entry into the EU is for Switzerland (92%), Iceland (87%) and Norway (91%). Poorer eastern European countries enjoy smaller support but still much bigger than the average in the EU25: Ukraine, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania and Croatia (all ranging from 64 to 68%). At the lower end, but still above 50%, may be found Serbia and Montenegro (60%), Turkey (53%) and Albania (50%).

The EU Constitutional Treaty has strong support. 75% think the Constitution would bring more transparency, democracy and effectiveness. After this poll, however, three more referenda were held, so we do not yet have a picture of the current situation.

Keyword for EU - Euro

Slovenians most often associate the EU with the Euro (62% mentioned it), freedom to travel, and the ability to work and study anywhere in the EU (54%). Generally speaking, Slovenians associate the EU with mostly positive characteristics, since the first negative characteristic (more crime) is ranked in eighth place.

83% of Slovenians support the European monetary union and one common currency, the Euro. On the other hand, 37% of the population fears losing the Slovenian national currency, the Tolar. The level of trust in the European Central Bank is higher than the EU25 average – 58% trust it.

The EU's role in the world

Slovenians most frequently perceive the role of the European Union in as equally positive a way as the EU25 in all the cited domains: peace, fighting poverty and terrorism, environment and economic prosperity.

They have a more negative view regarding the role of the USA compared to the EU25 average.

Languages

Slovenians are very good at speaking foreign languages. Only 1 in 10 does not speak another language beside his/her mother tongue. This compares well also with neighbouring countries, as 71% of Hungarians, 64% of Italians, 42% of Austrians and 29% of Croatians do not speak any foreign language.

64% of Slovenians speak Croatian, 56% English and 45% German. Knowledge of German is the second highest in the EU25, after Denmark, without counting Luxembourg, Austria, and Germany (where German is the official language).

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CONCLUSION

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August 2005