

# EUROBAROMETER 64

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

## AUTUMN 2005

### NATIONAL REPORT

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### AUSTRIA

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For the autumn *Eurobarometer* survey (EB64), 1,020 Austrians were polled in October and November 2005 by the Austrian Gallup institute. For the complete EB archive, see [http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/public\\_opinion/index\\_en.htm](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/index_en.htm)

## INTRODUCTION

One might have expected a Europhile attitude in Austria in 2005. This year, Austria celebrated its first decade as an EU member, and the tangible benefits from the enlargement round of 2004. Also, Austria took stock of 50 years of sovereignty (*Staatsvertrag 1955*) and of 60 years since the end of WWII, which saw all leading politicians publicly reiterating the importance of Austrian neutrality. Austria prepared itself to take over the rotating EU presidency on 1 January, 2006, pledging special attention to the Balkans. In the domestic fray, looming legislative elections in 2006 have made their way on to the public agenda.

And yet: Austrian attitudes towards the EU dropped to another low point in autumn 2005. EU fatigue manifests itself in enlargement matters and emotional themes rather than questions of the internal market. Euroscepticism is most strongly pronounced in Eastern Austria, and among 55- to 64-year-old Austrian men.

Three sources have been feeding current Austrian disenchantment with the EU. One is the perception of an EU in crisis, which spiralled upwards since spring 2005, and is by now a mainstream view. EB polling started a few days after October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2005, when the EU had officially kicked off negotiations with Turkey. In the run-up to this decision, the Austrian chancellor and foreign minister staunchly opposed the negotiation mandate envisioned for Turkey. Eventually, a common negotiating framework with Turkey was agreed, and Croatia's way to open membership negotiations with the EU was cleared. The Austrian public apparently endorsed their leaders' gambit.

The second force of pressure has been of an internal nature. The Social Democrats, who are in opposition nationally, won elections in three Austrian provinces in autumn 2005. Referring to the upcoming legislative elections in 2006, polling experts say EU scepticism, and especially enlargement scepticism, helps political parties in "sharpening their profile." Thirdly, a verdict by the European Court of Justice on access of EU students to Austrian universities in early autumn 2005 met widespread criticism in Austria and has been intensely debated to this day.

After the buzz surrounding Turkey, headlines in autumn 2005 featured the upcoming EU presidency and the EU budget debate, including Austria's net-payer position. The FPÖ, a right-wing opposition party, announced plans for an "anti-EU" petition in 2006. The future of the EU

constitution has not been debated much in Austria since the referendums in France and the Netherlands. The Austrian parliament had ratified the EU constitution on 11 May 2005.

## **GENERAL MOOD, ATTITUDES, AND TOPICS OF CONCERN IN AUSTRIA**

► **Austrians' major domestic concern remains unemployment** (57%, minus 6 PP\* since spring 2005). This equals the NMS10\*\* average. Next on the list of concerns are *rising prices/inflation* (28%, plus 8 PP), the *economic situation* (26%, plus 5 PP), and *pensions* (17%, plus 3 PP). Concerns over *crime* plummeted from 24% in spring 2005 to 14% in the autumn. Also the fear over immigration dropped slightly, to 14%. Ideologically, Austrians see themselves as slightly more left-wing than the EU-average, resulting in a median of 4.9 on a 10-point scale (1=very left, 10= very right) compared to the EU25 median of 5.1.

► **Fears in the context of European integration are slightly less pronounced than in spring 2005.** 71% fear the *outsourcing of jobs to low-cost countries* (minus 2 PP since spring 2005), and 66% fear an *increase in drug trafficking and organized crime* (minus 4 PP). On the other hand, 70% fear *rising payments to the EU* (plus 5 PP). Fears over the position of farmers and the loss of national identity, culture, and language have been alleviated. Fears over an economic crisis, and a loss of power of small EU member states, have been rising.

► **The fight against unemployment remains the first item on the Austrian to-do list for Brussels** (55%, plus 2 PP), followed by demands for the EU *to fight against poverty and social exclusion* (45%, =\*\*\* since spring 2005), *to fight against organized crime and drug trafficking* (28%, minus 14 PP since autumn 2004) and *to maintain peace and security in Europe* (25%). Then follow *environmental protection* (20%, plus 7 PP since spring 2005), *getting closer to EU citizens* (18%, minus 8 PP since spring), and *the fight against illegal immigration* (17%, minus 7 PP since autumn 2004).

► **Austria's provinces voice specific demands for the EU.** Looking at the maximum regional deviations from the Austrian average (max deviation at 22 PP), one learns Vienna is particularly interested in the EU prioritizing work on environmental protection. Styria wants the EU to protect food quality, and to combat organized crime and drug trafficking. Carinthia wants the EU to enhance its international clout. Salzburg wants the EU institutions to reform. Tyrol wants the EU to fight social exclusion and unemployment.

## ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EU IN AUSTRIA

► **Only 32% of Austrians see gains in EU membership**, down from 46% in autumn 2004, and down from 37% in spring 2005. On average, 50% of EU citizens see gains in EU membership. In Austria, 25% say EU membership is “a bad thing”, and 39% are indifferent. This lukewarm balance sheet means Austria scores lowest within the EU25. However, like many other EB questions, this issue reveals severe regional and demographic differences. In Salzburg, 59% say EU membership is “a good thing”. Also 56% of 15- to 24-year-old Austrian men endorse that view. In Vienna, 35% say EU membership is “a good thing”, and 35% say it is “a bad thing.”

► **On average, European trust in the EU has been stable since spring 2005** despite the debates over the constitution and the EU budget. 45% of EU citizens trust the EU, and 43% say they don't. 41% of Austrians (minus 1 PP) say they trust the EU, and 49% say they don't (plus 1 PP). When compared to the NMS10, this means Austrians are much more sceptical on trust (NMS10 average: 53% trust the EU), and they are also more sceptical than the EU15 average (EU15: 43% trust the EU). Interestingly, as many Austrians as Dutch and French trust the EU (all: 41%), although one could expect a gap here given the Netherlands and France said “no” to the EU constitution.

Trust in the EU differs greatly in Austria's nine provinces. In Salzburg, 56% trust the EU, followed by Vorarlberg (53%), Carinthia (51%), Tyrol (46%), Upper Austria (43%), Lower Austria (40%), Vienna (38%), Burgenland (30%), and Styria (26%).

► **Young Austrian women display the highest level of trust.** 15- to 24-year-old females are the group with the highest level of trust in the EU (59% “trust”) among 29 demographic groups. 55- to 64-year-old males distrust the EU most (61% “no trust”).

► **The EU conjures up rather negative feelings with Austrians.** Austrians associate primarily *anxiety* (39%), *hope* (32%), and *mistrust* (31%) with the EU. This is different to the rest of Europe. On average, the EU is associated with *hope* (42%), followed by *trust* (22%), and *anxiety* (21%). In the NMS10, the EU is associated with a very strong feeling of *hope* (52%), followed by *trust* (22%), and *indifference* (20%).

► **Austrians associate different aspects with the EU than other Europeans.** Austrians associate primarily the *Euro* (48%), *more crime* (44%; highest level of all EU countries), and the *freedom to live, travel, and work everywhere within the EU* (43%) with the EU, followed by *unemployment* (42%, plus 6 PP since spring 2005), and *a waste of money* (41%). This pattern of associations is gloomier than in spring 2005. Young Austrians, however, associate primarily positive aspects with the EU, such as mobility, cultural diversity, and peace.

## EU-KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS SPECIFIC EU PROJECTS IN AUSTRIA

► **Austrians feel rather well informed about the EU**, and score above the EU average in the EU quiz. 55% of Austrians know that the EU does not have 15 member states (EU25: 44%), and 43% say they think they understand how the EU works. Yet Austrians show limited knowledge of the EU parliamentary elections and the EU's spending patterns. In Tyrol, only 10% know that the members of the European Parliament are elected directly by EU citizens. 29% of Austrians know the last European elections did not take place in 2002. 34% think most of the EU budget is spent on administrative and personnel costs. Only 12% think it is agriculture, which is actually the top item. 63% of Austrians say the political goals of the EU do not justify a higher budget (EU25: 49%). Most resistance comes from 55- to 64-year-old men (76%). Almost certainly, the government's line (until late autumn 2005) that Austria's contribution to the EU budget should not exceed 1% of GDP has influenced this lukewarm readiness to pay more into the EU's coffers.

► **67% of Austrians support the European Monetary Union (EU25: 60%)**, 63% support a common foreign policy (EU25: 68%), 62% support a common security and defence policy (EU25: 77%), and 49% say "yes" to an EU constitution (EU25: 63%).

► **Young Austrians are more likely to support EU policies than older ones.** 15- to 24-year-old Austrians support most EU projects more strongly than older Austrians. This is particularly true for the monetary union, supported by 75% of young people, a common security and defence policy (70%), and future EU enlargement (41%). Support for the EU constitution is highest among 25- to 39-year-old Austrians (60%), and more EU education in school is supported mostly among 40- to 54-year-olds (88%).

► **Integration euphoria in Salzburg.** Salzburg, a rich Austrian province at the German border, stands out with its overwhelming support for the EU and its policies. Here, a staggering 98% say "yes" to the monetary union. 84% support the EU constitution, 90% support a European defence and security policy, 87% a common foreign policy, 51% support further EU enlargement, and 56% trust the EU.

## ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EU CONSTITUTION AND ENLARGEMENT

► **49% of Austrians support an EU constitution, while only 41% say the draft should be renegotiated** (EU25: 49%), and 23% say the EU constitution should be dropped (EU25

13%). A mere 28% (EU25: 22%) say ratification should continue. Austrian women especially seem to circumvent the topic. 25% say they “don’t know” the answer to the question.

► **29% of Austrians (EU25 49%) support further EU enlargement**, which puts Austria last among the EU25. 60% are against future enlargement (EU25: 39%). 50% support the accession of Croatia (EU25: 51%) to the EU. 11% support the accession of Turkey (EU25: 31%), with 80% opposing it (EU25: 55%). These figures put Austria in last place among the EU25. Potential gains from Turkish membership are hardly acknowledged in Austria and many believe the cultural differences between Turkey and the EU are too large to allow for an accession.

\* **PP** = abbrev. for percentage points  
\*\* **NMS10** means the 10 new EU member states that joined the EU in 2004  
\*\*\* **=** means no change since last EB polling