

EUROBAROMETER 64

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

AUTUMN 2005

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BULGARIA

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

This report was produced for the European Commission's Delegation in Bulgaria.

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.

Twice a year, the standard Eurobarometer surveys sample the opinion of the citizens in the current and future EU Member States on key issues of European integration, their countries' EU membership and the future of the Union. Nearly 30 000 citizens from 30 states and territories answered the autumn 2005 Eurobarometer questions. The survey, carried out between 10 October - 15 November, reveals the public opinion in the enlarging European Union at a time of reflection and debate, both for the EU and for the two accession countries, Bulgaria and Romania.

In the EU, this period was marked by tense negotiations on the Union's budget beyond 2007, which provoked a debate on the revision of the EU's priorities and policies in the aftermath of negative results in two referenda on the proposed Constitutional Treaty. In Bulgaria, the interviews coincided (19-31 October) with the publication of the European Commission's Comprehensive Monitoring Report, which assessed how Bulgaria complies with the EU legal norms and standards just one year ahead of the scheduled date for its accession. The criticism and recommendations in this report dominated national public debate.

The Bulgarian data for the survey were collected by BBSS Gallup International, using a representative national sample of 1001 persons, aged 15 and over.

The national analysis of the data aims to draw a picture of Bulgarian public opinion on the eve of EU accession and to show how it compares with the views of the citizens, recorded in:

- the 25 EU Member States, including the old (EU15) and the new (EU10);
- the other EU accession country, Romania;
- two EU Candidate Countries - Croatia and Turkey;

The particular focus of these comparisons is to show the opinion of the "average Bulgarian" versus the average European citizen. Frequent comparisons are also made with Romania, which is following the same roadmap as Bulgaria for its EU accession.

This national report is the third for Bulgaria and permits, for the first time, the measurement of trends in Bulgarian public opinion on EU integration versus trends in the opinion of EU citizens for a period that is longer than six months.

Bulgarians and the European Union - positive, but less pronounced feelings and image of the EU

Bulgaria remains among the countries with the most positive image of the EU (59%), after Ireland (70%), Romania (64%) and Turkey (60%). While the Irish have become even more upbeat on the EU, the people in the two accession countries are now slightly less enthusiastic than six months before. In line with the waning of the positive image of the EU for its average citizens, there are also fewer Romanians and one percentage point¹

¹ For convenience, further in the text the term percentage point may be abbreviated as "point" and/or "pp"

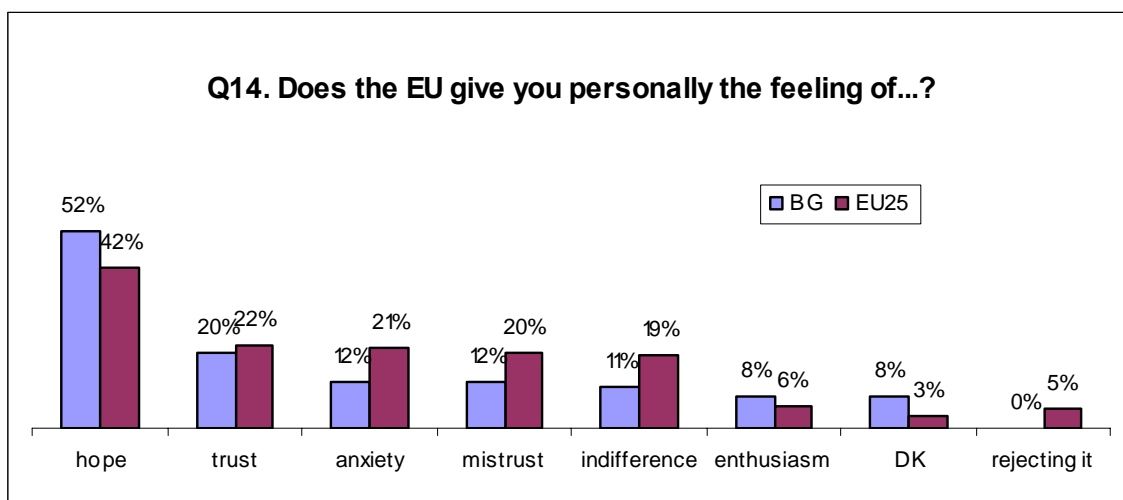
fewer Bulgarians sharing a positive image of the EU. Critical attitudes in Bulgaria have increased by 5 points (14%), but these represent only the opinions for a “fairly negative” image, while the “very negative” attitudes remain unchanged at a 2% low. For every fourth Bulgarian, the EU has a neutral image.

Being European triggers pride for every second Bulgarian. Among the Bulgarian poll, the proportion of those who feel not only Bulgarian, but also European (47%) is the same as the proportion of the poll who confess that they never feel European (48%). National public opinion is equally split when it comes to these feelings in a perspective. A similar pattern of equal national-European identity is also observed in Greece, Austria and Finland.

At least seven out of ten Bulgarians are proud to be Bulgarian and five out of ten are proud to be European. This shows that Bulgarians are less proud than the average EU citizen regarding both their national and European identity. Nevertheless, the distance between levels of national and European pride in Bulgaria almost coincides with that found in the EU25.

Bulgarian feelings for the EU remain positive and coincide with those of the average EU citizen. On the eve of EU accession, Bulgarians are becoming less emotional in their attitudes to the EU, but **hope** and **trust** remain the predominant feelings shared by more than a half (52%) and one-fifth of the respondents, respectively. The intensity of these feelings has diminished by nine points regarding hope and six points regarding trust in the EU, but it remains higher than or close to the EU average.

Figure 1 Feelings about the EU among the Bulgarians and the average EU citizen



The European Union means less for Bulgarians in personal terms than it used to mean before, but these are first and foremost positive things. With the date of their country's EU accession approaching, Bulgarians have become less pronounced as to what the European Union means personally to them. There is a change only in the intensity (the percentages), but not in the importance of what EU means for the Bulgarian poll. For the citizens of an acceding country, the EU means, first and foremost, positive things, which have an equal or similar weighting to what the EU means for its average citizen.

For nearly half of the Bulgarian poll, the EU means the *freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the EU* (+1 point), for one-third (-3 points) it means *economic prosperity* and for three out of ten interviewed it is associated with *peace* (-5 points). For every fourth Bulgarian, the EU also means *social security* and *democracy*. All negative associations with the EU, such as *unemployment, bureaucracy* (8%, unchanged), *waste of money* (7%) (+1 point), are at the bottom of the Bulgarians' list.

Expectations from EU membership - falling, but very positive

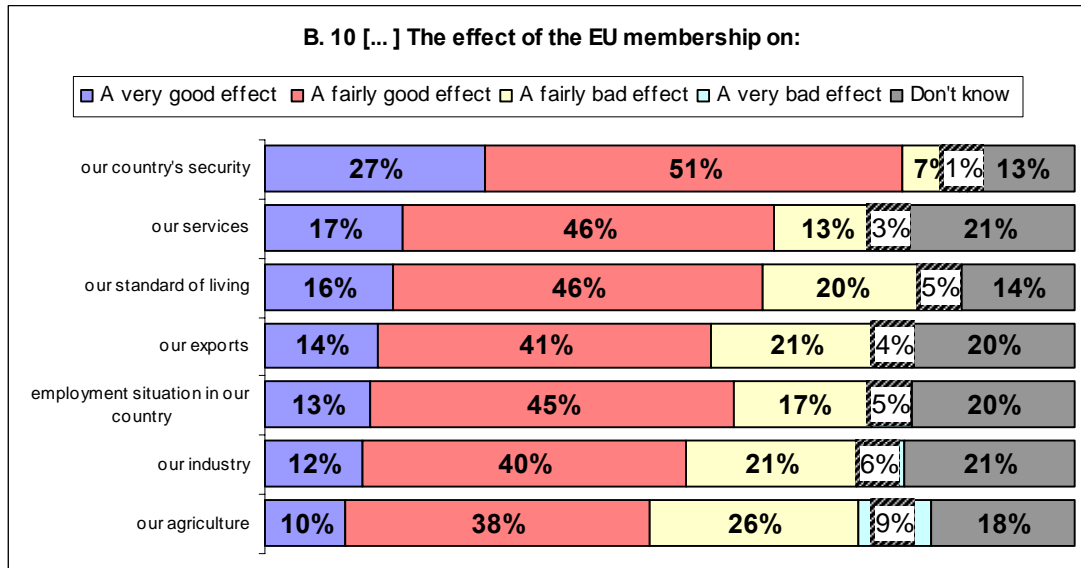
Bulgarians continue to show very high support for the EU membership of their country. At least eight out of ten interviewed are positive (84%), one in ten (11%) hesitates to give a definite answer, and, although on the increase, only 5% of the poll opposes it.

Every second Bulgarian considers their country's forthcoming EU membership as something good. This coincides with the opinion of the average EU citizen. However, the share of positive views, both in the EU25, and in Bulgaria, has dropped by four points, following the previous downturn, recorded in the spring. Negative opinions are on the rise, but, in absolute terms (9%), they remain among the lowest in the entire Eurobarometer poll. In Bulgaria and in the EU, three out of ten citizens polled remain neutral regarding their country's EU membership. Trends in public opinion in the country following the spring survey coincide with those in Romania, showing that the two accession countries are following the same path as countries involved in previous enlargements.

More than half of Bulgarians are convinced that their country will gain from its EU membership, but nearly a quarter hold the opposite opinion. There is a clearly negative trend, represented by a drop in the positive answers by 11 points in Bulgaria and 5 points in Romania, and a rise in the negative responses by 7 points in Bulgaria and 2 points in the other accession country, Romania.

The majority of Bulgarians are optimistic regarding the socio-economic advantages from EU membership. Like the average EU citizen, Bulgarians rank in first place the enhanced security of their country. Only for agriculture, is there no clear majority of positive opinions.

Figure 2 The effect of EU membership for Bulgaria



Although continuing to increase, fears regarding European integration remain lower than in the EU. On the eve of their country's EU accession, the majority of Bulgarians holds an equal fear (55%), of more difficulties for the national farmers and of paying more and more to the EU budget. This figure is ten points less than in the case of the average EU citizen and three to four points more than the Romanian figure. While on the rise, other fears, such as a possible economic crisis (42%, + 7 points) or the loss of social benefits (38%, +6 points), are not observed at least for half of the Bulgarian poll. Bulgarian fears in respect to EU integration are closer to those in the ten new Member States, but remain less pronounced.

Difficult climate of public opinion in Bulgaria

The survey found that only in the two accession countries – Bulgaria and Romania - less than half of citizens (an average of 42%) are satisfied with the life they lead. The Bulgarian poll continues to be the most dissatisfied with their way of life. While in the EU, eight out of ten citizens are pleased with the life they have, in Bulgaria seven out of ten interviewed state they are dissatisfied with their standard of living.

Pessimistic expectations of life over the next twelve months. Looking ahead, nearly half of EU25 and Bulgarian citizens do not expect any changes in their standard of living over the next year. While for half of the EU citizens this means a prospect for personal satisfaction, for the same share of the Bulgarian poll it means the opposite – continued dissatisfaction with the way of life. One-fifth of those interviewed in Bulgaria, the smallest proportion in the entire Eurobarometer poll, expect a better life in the forthcoming year. Every fourth Bulgarian also expects that his/her life will deteriorate

over the next year and according to four out of ten interviewed, this would be due to a possible future worsening economic situation in their country.

Rising prices and inflation have become the major concern for Bulgarians. They are also seen as one of the two most important priorities for the country in the long run.

The current Eurobarometer survey has registered a sharp increase of 28 points in Bulgarian concerns over rising prices and inflation. Forty five percent of the Bulgarian poll points to this as their major concern; one-third states that the fight against rising prices should be priority number one for the country in the long run and nearly four out of ten interviewed rank it in second place, following the priority to maintain order in the country, cited by 45% of those interviewed. For both these issues, Bulgarian opinions are more pronounced than those of citizens of the EU Member States

Trust in national and European institutions –on the rise again

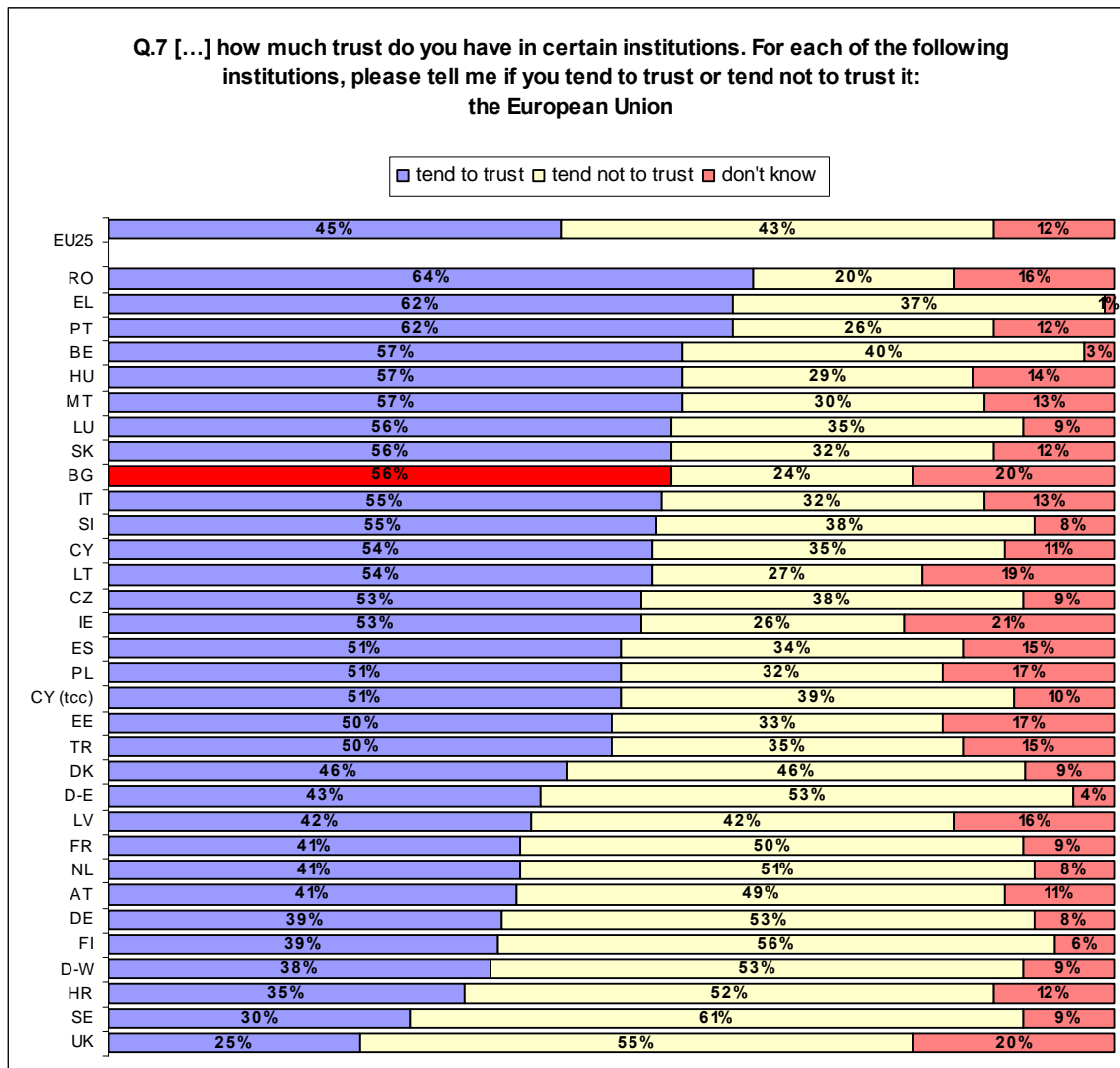
Following a crisis in confidence in the spring electoral period, trust in the national government and parliament was again very significantly on the rise during the period the survey was held. Trust in the Bulgarian government has increased by 10 pp and mistrust has decreased by even more – 13 points. Trust in the national parliament is up by nine points, but remains lower than the EU average (39%) and, more importantly, than the levels of Bulgarian trust registered one year ago (38%). As in the EU25, the attitude towards political parties is increasingly negative (+1 point) and expressed by 84% of respondents, while in the new Member States mistrust in political parties has fallen by four points to 76%.

Of the national institutions, Bulgarians above all trust television and this figure has remained stable at 66% over the last half year. The army, which is the most trusted institution for the average EU citizen (68%), comes second on the Bulgarian list (59%). While voluntary citizens' organisations rank second in terms of the level of trust in the EU25 (66%), only one-third of the Bulgarian poll tends to have confidence in them. Sixteen years after the transition to democracy, many of Bulgaria's institutions have still not yet gained the trust of its citizens.

Mistrust in the national justice system has decreased by four points over the last six months. Now it represents the opinion of two-thirds of the Bulgarian poll and is expressed mostly by retired men and young people under 20, living in small towns and lacking confidence in the EU. Trust in the judiciary, which continues to be the stance of one-fifth of Bulgarians is the lowest in all the countries surveyed. As a whole, EU citizens' trust in national legal systems is falling and it is now at the same level as the mistrust (47%), leaving public opinion split. Against this background, and given the importance of judicial reform for Bulgaria's EU accession, the drop in the level of mistrust in the Bulgarian legal system is a sign of a positive change.

The European Union is one of the three most trusted institutions in Bulgaria and the figure remains stable at 56%. This result is equal to the level of trust in one of the most euro-optimistic countries. It is also higher than the average in the new Member States and in the EU as a whole.

Figure 3 Trust in the European Union



Bulgarian trust in the three main EU institutions is on the rise again, following a strong downturn registered in the spring. **Confidence in the European Parliament and the European Commission has increased at the same level as the increase in the awareness about them** – with nine points for the Parliament, reaching a majority of 55%, and seven percentage points for the Commission, now at 48%. Four out of ten interviewed in Bulgaria say they trust the Council, which is one percentage point more than before. This upward trend is against the background of a negative change in public opinion in the Union, and, as a result of this, the confidence in the main institutions of the EU is now higher in Bulgaria than in the EU.

Trends and results for the remaining EU institutions are the opposite – trust in them in Bulgaria is decreasing and is much lower than the EU average. While in the EU the three main institutions gain the highest levels of trust and mistrust from citizens, in Bulgaria the levels of mistrust in all institutions is very low, due mainly to the high level of responses which show no opinion, resulting from little or insufficient information about the institutions.

Information and awareness about the EU – more realistic self-assessment and increased information needs

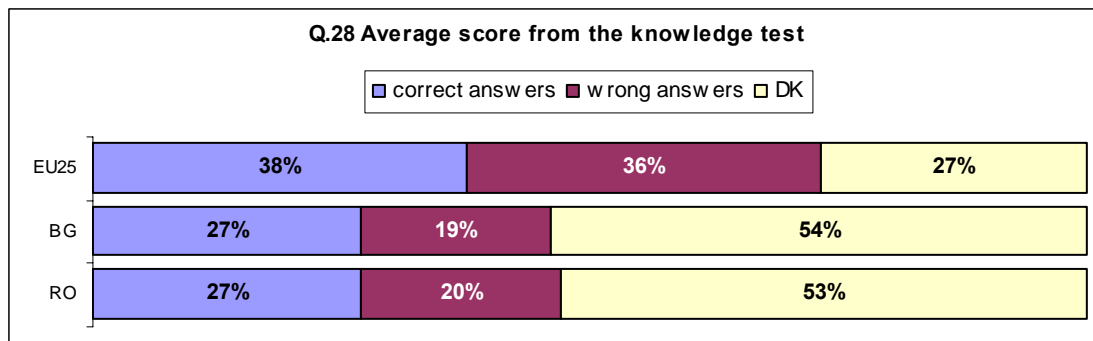
Bulgarians feel as (un)informed about the European Union as the average EU citizen. The results from their self-assessment, using a scale of 1 to 10, where 1-4 means “know nothing at all” and 7-10 “know a great deal”, coincide with those for the EU25 along the entire scale. More precisely, at present:

- Nearly one-quarter of Bulgarian citizens consider they know nothing at all about the EU (marks 1-2 on the scale)
- The majority of all interviewed, both in Bulgaria and in the EU25 consider they know very little (marks 3 to 5)
- One-fifth of Bulgarians and EU citizens believe they are well informed (marks 6-8)
- 3% of Bulgarians consider themselves to be very knowledgeable (marks 8-10)
- The share of those Bulgarians who cannot judge their knowledge has dropped significantly (by 7 points) and is now only 1%.

The majority of both Bulgarian and EU citizens say they do not understand how the European Union works. In the midst of an intensive public opinion debate on the EU budget across Europe, nearly half of the Bulgarians polled also confess they do not know on what most of the current EU budget is spent. Respondents in the other accession country, Romania, consider their awareness and knowledge of the EU to be much higher, than both Bulgarian and EU citizens.

The reality of the Bulgarian self-assessment is confirmed by the results of a knowledge test included in the standard Eurobarometer questionnaire. On the whole, the Bulgarian poll scores better than six months before but had again, and like Romania, the lowest scores in the entire survey. Slightly more than a quarter of those interviewed in Bulgaria, and the same percentages in Romania, provide correct answers to the general questions about the EU and its institutions. Only one-fifth are wrong which compares favourably with EU-average; however, more than half of the Bulgarian and the Romanian poll do not offer any answer at all. This shows that while citizens of the two accession countries diverge in their self-assessment of their knowledge about the EU, their knowledge levels about how the Union they are joining functions are similar and, if non-responses are counted, are the lowest recorded in the entire Eurobarometer poll.

Figure 4 Knowledge about the European Union



The majority of Bulgarians and EU citizens want to have more information on the European Union and this corresponds quite closely to the levels of self-assessment of their current knowledge about the EU, its institutions and policies. One-fifth of the Bulgarians say they want to know a lot more about the EU, and four out of ten interviewed want to know a bit more. A third group, comprising three out of ten polled in both Bulgaria and in the EU25, holds the opinion that to the extent to which the EU affects them, they are happy with what they know. In Bulgaria, these are mainly middle aged and retired people, with medium-level qualifications tending to belong to the middle class. They oppose, in principle, any further EU enlargement, and take a neutral position to the EU membership of Bulgaria. They are not expected to influence public opinion, as they do not consider themselves opinion leaders, but if the mechanism shaping their opinions is sustained, this may create, in addition to other social gaps, an information gap concerning the European Union.

The majority of the citizens in Bulgaria and in the other accession country, Romania, are interested above all in information about their rights as EU citizens. This has been confirmed by 53% of Bulgarians and 63% of Romanians (EU25 – 48%). Citizens of the two countries, as well as the average EU citizen, are interested mostly in information that affects their personal and professional situation. Nearly half of the Bulgarian poll wants more information about the EU health and social policies, one-third – about its employment policy, and a quarter – regarding the EU regional policy and the work of the EU institutions. One-fifth is interested in the EU's education and youth policy, as well as in its common agricultural and fisheries policies. Even those among the Bulgarian poll, who have a negative image of the EU and are not supportive of a further EU enlargement, express a strong interest in more information about the EU.

The media, especially television, are the main source of information about the EU. Television, which Bulgarians trust most of all other institutions, is the preferred source of information about the EU for nearly eight out of ten surveyed in the country and for two-thirds of EU citizens. The role of radio in Bulgaria has decreased by 6 points and now ranks third, after the daily press.

Bulgarians see as increasingly insufficient, but more objective, the information on the EU in the national media. Television is seen again as working in the best service of citizens' information needs, and opinions regarding radio and the daily press are very similar. In Bulgaria, only television receives a clear confidence rate for the objectivity of the information it provides (45%, with a 9 point increase). Opinion regarding the sufficiency and objectivity of information on the radio and in the press is dominated by "don't know" responses.

Bulgarian views on EU priorities – for a more secure and a more social Europe

Similarly to EU-average, Bulgarians also want to be more involved in EU affairs and expect that the national government should do more about this. Nearly half of EU citizens and four out of ten surveyed in Bulgaria would like to get more involved in European affairs but do not know how. This is also the view of one-third of the Romanian poll and the majority of citizens in the six founding members of the EU, showing that, in the countries with more experience of EU integration, citizens' desires for increased involvement in its affairs are strongly expressed. In Bulgaria also, those who want to be more involved in European affairs represent the social and professional groups which are most supportive of the EU and the country's EU membership, meaning that enthusiasm for the country's EU integration has not yet revealed its full potential

In the views of Bulgarians and Romanians, increasing citizens' involvement in European affairs in the accession countries depends primarily on their national governments, and then on the EU institutions, as well as on regional governments. The view in the EU25 and in the new Member States is that it depends equally on national governments and the EU institutions themselves.

According to both EU and Bulgarian citizens national governments are more important than EU decision-making in relation to social policies. This trend is characteristic mostly in the areas of unemployment, health and social protection, as well as education. In the course of one year, Bulgarian public opinion has changed to the extent that it now takes the opposite view, with 63% of the poll already thinking that health and social welfare, and 53% that the fight against unemployment should be within the realm of national decision-making. The majority of Bulgarians are also of the opinion that decisions regarding agriculture and fisheries should be taken at national level, while the majority of EU citizens think it should be, as it currently is, an EU competence.

Nearly six out of ten EU citizens support decision-making on energy policies at EU level, although Bulgarian public opinion remains split, with 43% in favour and 45% against taking decisions in this area jointly within the EU. Both the average Bulgarian and the average EU citizen support EU competencies in the areas of security, immigration, foreign policy, as well as regional development and cohesion, research and technological development and the protection of the environment. The majority of both EU citizens and Bulgarians say decisions in these areas should be taken jointly within the EU.

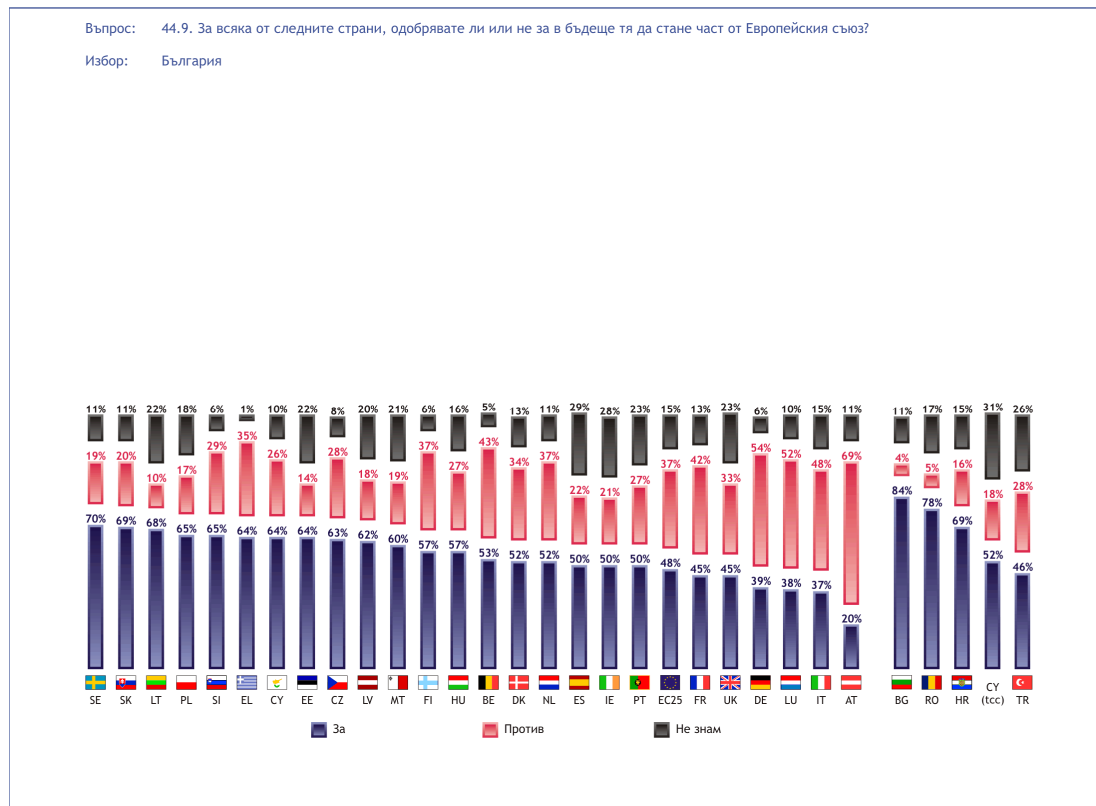
Social protection, security and solidarity top the list of EU priorities as seen by the Bulgarian poll. Nearly seven out of ten Bulgarians polled (68%) think that the fight against social exclusion and poverty is the main priority for the EU, compared with an average of only 44% of EU citizens sharing this opinion. Compared to six months before, Bulgarians believe more (+12 points) in the EU role in stopping crime and drug trafficking (45%), so it now ranks second on their list, while the fight against unemployment ranks third for Bulgarians (41%) and second for the average EU citizen (43%).

It may seem that Bulgarians contradict themselves with their views on EU decision-making, as they think unemployment should remain a national policy, yet, at the same time, it is cited among the three most important priorities for the EU. However, this only reinforces the opinion of those (41%), who think that the fight against unemployment is a competence of the EU and shows that Bulgarians attach similar importance to the EU social role, as to their national policies.

Bulgarians and EU Enlargement - wide support for membership

Nearly half of EU citizens support Bulgaria's accession to the EU, but this figure has dropped by two percentage points over the last six months (48%). This can be explained by the strong support in the new Member States, which stands at 64%, but has decreased by 6 pp, while support in the 15 old Member States has remained, as a whole unchanged, at 45%. In 16 out of the 25 Member States of the Union, Bulgarian EU membership is supported by a clear majority of those polled. **Supporters of Bulgaria's accession outnumber those against in 21 out of 25 Member States.** In three Member States, which belong to both the most Eurosceptic, and the most Euroenthusiastic countries, a clear majority of the population is against Bulgaria joining the EU: the Austrians, the citizens of Luxembourg and the Germans share this view. Another Eurosceptic country, Sweden, is the strongest supporter of Bulgarian accession among the EU Member States.

Figure 4 Support for Bulgaria's EU membership among the citizens of the EU Member States



Just a few months after the signature of the EU Accession Treaty for Bulgaria, and in the midst of its ratification, public support in most of the EU Member States is falling and this is most evident in Luxembourg (-11 pp), Poland (-10 pp) and Italy (-8pp), while in four EU countries – Germany, Estonia, Ireland and the Netherlands, it is on the rise,

alongside a decreased opposition. In neighbouring Greece, support has also increased (+4 pp), but so has opposition (+2 pp), expressed by over a third of its citizens.

In general, Bulgaria enjoys higher support and lower opposition to its EU membership than Romania but the trends in public opinion coincide and may imply that the two countries are perceived by the EU citizens as rather similar. As in the spring survey, Bulgarians and Romanians show mutual and the very strongest support for each other's EU membership, expressed by 78% of citizens in each of the two countries.

However, EU public support for the membership of Croatia, which started negotiations at the time of this Eurobarometer poll, is higher than for the two accession countries, reaching 47% among the old 15 Member States and 70% in the new Member States.

Bulgarians are very supportive of the EU enlargement towards the countries of former Yugoslavia. Against the background of enlargement fatigue among EU citizens, Bulgarians have become even more supportive of possible EU membership of countries from EFTA and former Yugoslavia. Two-thirds of the Bulgarian poll is in favour of Croatia's EU membership and support for FYROM, which is now a candidate country, is even higher (68%). Sixty-five percent of Bulgarians see Serbia and Montenegro as an EU member, and 61% think there is a future for Bosnia and Herzegovina in the EU. The membership of neighbouring Albania and Turkey is supported by less than half of the Bulgarian poll.

It may be concluded that one year before the date scheduled for their accession to the EU, Bulgarian perceptions and views on the European Union are converging in many ways with those of the average EU citizen. As a whole, the survey reveals a positive and more pronounced, realistic and pragmatic, but still uninformed, Bulgarian public opinion on the European Union and Bulgarian integration within the EU.