

EUROBAROMETER 64

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

AUTUMN 2005

NATIONAL REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY CZECH REPUBLIC

Standard Eurobarometer 64 / Autumn 2005 – TNS Opinion & Social

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

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

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.

Eurobarometer reports measure the climate of opinion on European issues in member and candidate countries of the European Union. This report looks at Czech citizens' views on various aspects of the European Union and compares them with typical attitudes held across the EU. It also highlights major differences with other countries. This is the third Czech report since the Czech Republic became a member of the European Union.

The opinion poll, upon which this report is based, was conducted among 1,161 Czechs between October 14 and November 5, 2005, at a time that was marked by discussion on the Financial Perspectives of the European Union for 2007 to 2013. This Eurobarometer shows that both the results of French and Dutch referenda and difficulties in the search for a generally acceptable Financial Perspective have made European citizens more critical in their perception of the European Union. For the first time, the opinion that membership of the European Union is a good thing, dropped to 50 percent. Nevertheless, the process of European integration is not called into question and further enlargement is supported in most Member States, even if the accession of Turkey remains a sensitive issue. Certain indicators reveal significant changes since the last Eurobarometer survey (spring 2005) but the need for bringing European citizens and the European institutions closer together was confirmed.

In general, the autumn 2005 Eurobarometer survey found that Czechs are now less satisfied with their EU membership than they were in the spring. At the same time, they question the future development of European integration and enlargement in the direction of the South-East even more so than in the past.

Personal satisfaction and life expectations

Czechs are mostly satisfied with their life situation but this feeling is less intense than on average in the European Union. **A total of 83 percent of Czechs are satisfied with their life situation at the moment**, of which only 13 percent are very satisfied. Czech expectations for the next 12 months are slightly more pessimistic than those of the EU 25 as a whole. **Compared to spring 2005, positive expectations have declined with the exception of economic development of the country.** As in most EU countries, **unemployment continues to be one of the major concerns of Czech citizens.** As a result of intense political debate on the Czech health insurance system and the organization of medical care, **concerns about the health system have increased for the second time in a row and unlike other countries are ranked at No. 1 in the Czech Republic.** A total of 42 percent of Czechs rank the health system among their key concerns - 27 percentage points higher than the European average.

National and European competences

The vast majority of Czechs want to see all the “power” policies fall within the competence of the European Union: **fighting terrorism, fighting crime, as well as defence and foreign affairs. The same applies to scientific and technological research and protecting the environment.** It is significant that in all these policies, the citizens in the new Member States are more often ready to accept European competences than the people in the “old” EU 15 countries. On the other hand, **in policies of a social nature, Czechs strongly prefer national competences. This applies to the education system, fighting unemployment, health and social welfare, and, most specifically, pensions and taxation.** In this respect, the opinions in the Czech Republic are very similar to the EU 25 average.

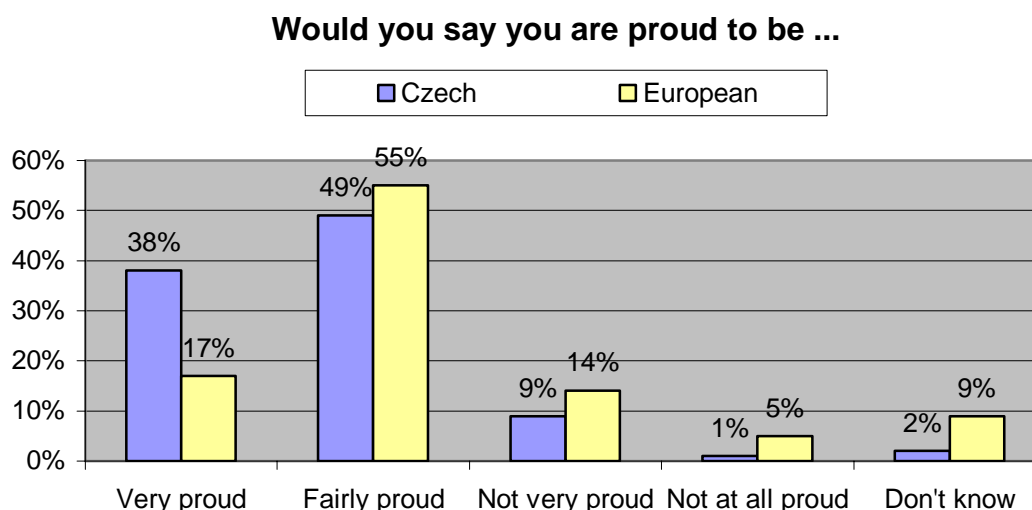
Priorities of the European Union

Like other Member States, **Czechs rank social topics among the top priorities of the European Union: fighting unemployment as well as fighting poverty and social exclusion.** Important priorities are also those of a security nature, incl. environmental security: fighting organised crime and drug trafficking, maintaining peace and security in Europe, fighting terrorism and protecting the environment. **The percentage of the population ranking fighting terrorism among the priorities of the European Union is growing** not only in the Czech Republic but also in the whole of the European Union.

Perception of the national and European identity

Nearly every other Czech citizen thinks at least sometimes of himself/herself as not only Czech but also European. Like most EU citizens, Czechs expect that also in the near future their national identity will be more important than the European one. A total of 87 percent expect to see themselves as Czechs only or Czechs in the first place. Another point of view reveals that for most Czechs, European identity is important. **Nearly three-quarters of Czechs think that in the near future they will see themselves as Europeans or also Europeans,** even if this aspect of their self-perception will not necessarily dominate.

Nearly nine out of ten Czechs are proud to be Czech and seven out of ten are proud to be Europeans. Since the autumn 2004, these opinions have been stable.

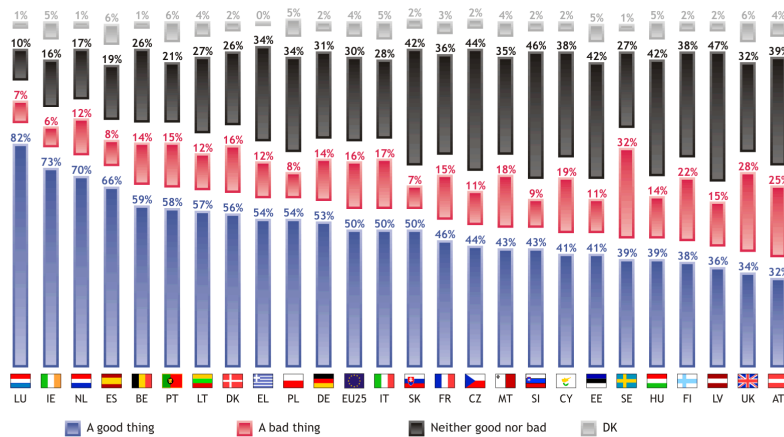


The feelings that the European Union evokes in Czechs are similar to those in other European countries. In the first place, Czechs mention hope but compared to spring 2005 this reaction is less frequent. This may be one of the consequences of the results of the French and Dutch referenda, as well as of the difficulties in the preparation of Financial Perspectives for 2007 to 2013. On the other hand, these issues may have supported the feeling of trust linked to the European Union which has increased since the spring.

Support for EU membership

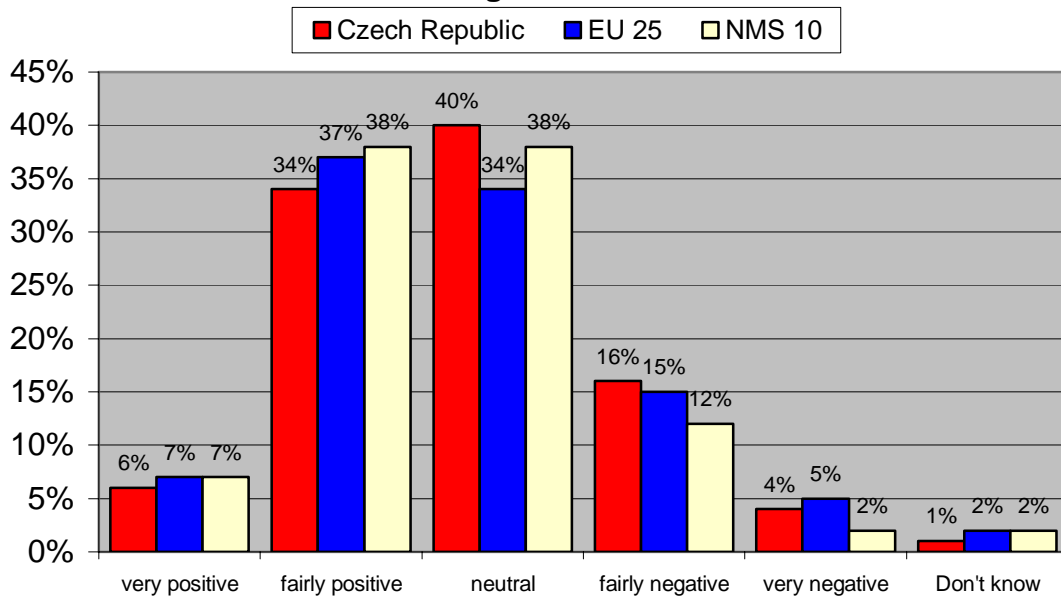
The share of opinions that EU membership is a good thing is gradually declining in the whole of the European Union. The Czech Republic is no exception in this trend. Exactly one **half of EU citizens feel that EU membership is a good thing, but in the Czech Republic it is only 44 percent** – five percentage points less than in spring 2005. The most positive perception of this issue can be repeatedly seen in Luxemburg, Ireland, the Netherlands and Spain.

Question: 8a. Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY)'s membership of the European Union is...?



The image of the EU in the Czech Republic is not bad but, as in other European countries, it is not very positive. **A total of 40 percent of Czechs say the European Union conjures up for them a very or at least fairly positive image, for another 40 percent the image is neutral and for 20 percent fairly or even very negative.** Thus, together with Germans and Hungarians, Czechs rank among the nations with a rather sceptical point of view, even if this scepticism is not as extreme as in Great Britain, Finland and Austria.

Image of the EU



Involvement of citizens in European affairs

Eurobarometer reports repeatedly show that only a few Czechs share the opinion that their voice counts in the European Union. **Just 17 percent of Czechs agree that their voice counts, the EU 25 average being twice as high (34 percent).** Like other Europeans, the vast majority of Czechs thinks that the **Czech government, European institutions and the local governments should make more efforts to further involve citizens in European affairs.**

Four out of ten Czechs claim that they would like to be more involved in European affairs but they do not know how to go about it. In the whole EU 25, this opinion is even more common. At the same time, the percentage of Czechs who feel very much involved in European affairs is lower than both in the new and the old Member States.

Advantages of EU membership

Most Czechs believe that the Czech Republic benefits from being a member of the European Union. Czech public opinion on this issue is more positive than the average of the “old” EU 15 but at the same time less positive than the average of the ten new Member States. The most positive opinions on the advantages of EU membership can be seen in Ireland, Luxemburg and Lithuania; the British and Austrians are rather sceptical and, in the Republic of Cyprus as well as in Sweden, the majority of the population think that their country does not benefit from being a member of the European Union.

The Czech public appreciates in the first place the positive effect of EU membership on the country’s security, followed by exports and services. Slightly less frequent but still in the majority is the opinion that the EU has a positive effect on the standard of living. Czechs are almost equally divided when it comes to assessing the EU membership’s impact on employment: 48 per cent think it is positive, 44 percent think it is negative.

Trust in European institutions

The most trusted European institutions are the European Parliament and European Commission. For a long time, **Czechs have trusted the European Parliament slightly more (recently 56 percent) than the European Commission (53 percent).** After the French and Dutch referenda, trust in the European institutions dropped but the latest Eurobarometer indicates recovery.

Information about the European Union

Czechs show a lack of self-confidence in the degree of information about the European Union. Only one-third of them claim they understand how the European Union works, while the average of the EU 25 is 41 percent and the average of the ten new Member States even 49 percent. However, in the test of knowledge of basic facts about the EU Czechs attained results better than the average. They scored best in the question whether the EU has 15 members. Less well known in the Czech Republic was the principle of direct election of the members of the European Parliament by the citizens of the European Union. The percentage of Czechs who know the date of the last European election declined but the worst lack of knowledge shown by the Czechs relates to the question of whether or not the EU has its own anthem.

Only 15 per cent of Czechs know that most of the European Union budget is spent on agriculture, which demonstrates the usual level of (bad) information throughout the EU. Even if the administrative and personnel costs plus buildings represent just 4.5 percent of EU

spending and nearly 90 percent of the budget is allocated for economic, social, cultural and regional policies in both Member and Candidate States, **every fifth Czech thinks that most of the European Union budget is spent on administrative and personnel costs plus buildings**. Opinions in most Member States are similar. In this respect, the European Union has not managed to communicate about its spending in a sufficiently understandable way.

Support for European political union

Support for the development towards a European political union is more widespread than the opinion that membership in the European Union is a good thing. Close to two-thirds of Czechs are in favour of such development. Together with several new EU Member States, the Czech Republic ranks among the main supporters of a future political union.

Views on the European Constitution

Half of Czechs believe that if all Member States adopt the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, it will make the running of the European Union more democratic, efficient and transparent. Two-thirds think that in such a case the European Union would be stronger in the world and a large majority expects it would be more competitive economically. The expectation that the adoption of the European Constitution would make the Union more social-minded is less frequent and, in this respect, Czechs, together with Austrians and Danes, belong to the most sceptical nations surveyed in the Eurobarometer.

The opinion that the European Constitution should be renegotiated dominates in the whole European Union. It is shared by 49 percent of European citizens, more often in the new Member States including the Czech Republic. Only every fifth Czech recommends continuing in the ratification process - which is similar to the EU 25 average. The opinion that the European Constitution should be dropped is also supported by every fifth Czech.

At the same time, three-quarters of European citizens think that a European Constitution is necessary to ensure that the European Institutions work well. This opinion is most frequent in Belgium and Slovenia and least frequent in Finland. The Czech Republic ranks among countries where a European Constitution is considered necessary for this purpose by less than a half of the population.

Support for future EU enlargement

Nearly two-thirds of Czechs support future EU enlargement, but a quarter of them are against. There have not been any major changes since spring 2005 and the Czech public supports this process much more intensely than the EU 25 average.

Like other Member States, **the most welcome future EU members would be** the countries that do not intend to join: **Switzerland, Norway and Iceland. Three-quarters of Czechs would welcome the accession of Croatia and two-thirds that of Bulgaria.** The accession of any other country is supported just by a minority of Czechs. In the case of ex-Yugoslavian countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro), as well as Romania and the Ukraine, there are roughly equal numbers (approximately 40 percent) of supporters and opponents of their accession and positive opinions are less frequent than in the spring 2005. **As for Turkey and Albania, support for their EU membership is only slightly above one-quarter of the Czech population, substantially less than in spring 2005.** The falling support for enlargement concerning economically less-developed countries may be related to the discussion on Financial Perspectives for 2007 to 2013.