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Hungary in the European Union

The Eurobarometer survey carried out in the autumn of 2005 shows that an increasing number of Hungarians are satisfied with the life they lead compared to previous periods and more respondents expect their personal situation to improve in the medium term. At the same time, the level of support in favour of the country's EU membership has further declined, while the number of people having no positive or negative opinion or just being uncertain about membership is relatively high and stagnating. The situation may partially be due to the recent debates about the European Constitution and the future EU budget scenario.

Satisfaction with various areas of life

The proportion of people saying they are satisfied with their lives has slightly increased compared to the results of the survey carried out one year earlier and reached 56% in the autumn of 2005. The result was the same in the last Eurobarometer survey in the spring of 2005.

The proportion of people who feel satisfied with life is still much lower in Hungary than the EU-25 average (80%). The EU-25 average shows that every fifth person is not satisfied with the life he or she leads and in Hungary every second person has the same feeling. One in three Hungarians says he or she expects a positive change in life over the next 12 months. However, the proportion of Hungarians expecting a positive change in the Hungarian economy in the same period is much lower - at only 19%.

Problems Hungary is facing today

Every second Hungarian respondent still mentions unemployment as the greatest problem Hungary is currently facing. Although the unemployment rate in Hungary is below the EU-25 average, it showed an increase in the second half of 2005 and exceeded 7%. The second most important problem is the economic situation, mentioned by 34% of Hungarian respondents. Further problems Hungary is facing include the situation of healthcare services (30%) followed by inflation (20%) and crime (19%).

Trust in various institutions

According to Hungarians, the European Union is the most credible institution (57%). It is followed by the police and charitable organisations (both mentioned by 55%). These are followed by the United Nations (trusted by 54% of Hungarian respondents), the national army (49%) and religious institutions (46%). Trust in political parties (14%), trades unions (20%), the press (25%) and big companies (25%) was the lowest in Hungary. Only 26% of the Hungarian respondents have trust in their national parliament.

Opinions on Hungary's membership of the EU

More than a year after Hungary's EU accession, the proportion of people saying the country's membership is a good thing was 39%, according to Eurobarometer. The

proportion of people opposing Hungary's EU membership (14%) is significantly lower than the proportion of people saying Hungary has not benefited from being a member of the EU (42%). This means that people saying Hungary has not benefited from its membership do not necessarily believe that membership is a bad thing - they just tend to be neutral in relation to this question.

The 41% saying the country has benefited from EU membership is 11 percentage points below the EU-25 average. Countries ranked behind Hungary regarding the opinion that the country has benefited from its membership are Sweden (32%), Austria (35%), the United Kingdom (37%) and Cyprus (39%).

Benefits of EU membership

In the autumn of 2005, most respondents said that EU membership has a positive impact on the security of the country and 52% said it has a positive impact on the services sector of the country. However, 55% said it has a negative impact on the employment situation in Hungary and even more (66%) believe it has a negative impact on agriculture. The proportion of respondents saying that membership has improved the standard of living (42%) is almost the same as that of those who said it had a negative impact (45%).

Fears relating to EU membership

In the autumn of 2005, the most serious concern of Hungarians vis-à-vis membership was that farmers face more difficulties in the EU (80%). A large proportion of respondents (75%) said that the relocation of jobs to other member countries with lower production costs was their largest concern. These are followed by the fear of increasing organized crime. The loss of influence of small countries is also on the list of Hungarians' greatest fears concerning EU membership (51%), exceeding the EU 25 average.

National identity and European identity

According to Eurobarometer, 20% of Hungarians think of themselves as not only Hungarians but also as Europeans, while, on average, 17% of EU-25 citizens said they think of themselves as not only their own nationalities but also as Europeans. The proportion of those who sometimes think of themselves also as Europeans was higher in the EU-25 as a whole than in Hungary (38% and 33%, respectively) but the proportion is even higher in the new member states (43%). In Hungary, 45% of people never think of themselves as Europeans.

Being informed about the European Union

Eurobarometer measured if the citizens of the EU require more information on the European Union and also how well informed people consider themselves to be regarding EU issues and if they are aware of basic facts about the EU. In comparison with the EU-25 average, fewer Hungarians considered themselves well informed, but a higher proportion of them provided correct answers to the questions about the symbols and basic facts about the EU.

Being informed about the EU budget

Like average EU-25 citizens, the highest proportion of Hungarians (20%) believes that the EU spends most of its budget on administration, personnel and office costs. This is followed by agriculture (15%), foreign policy and aid to countries outside the EU (11%), employment and social affairs (10%), regional aid (8%) and scientific research (6%). In fact, most of the budget is spent on agriculture. Administration, personnel and office costs were over-estimated, as only 5%-6% of the budget is spent on this area.

Awareness of EU institutions

Like the results of previous Eurobarometer surveys, of all the EU bodies and organizations listed in the questionnaire, the European Parliament is the best-known EU institution in Hungary with 89% of respondents saying they had already heard of it. The next two best-known institutions are the European Commission (82%) and the Council of Ministers of the European Union (72%). These results have not changed significantly in comparison with the results of previous Eurobarometer surveys.

Sources of information on the EU

14% of Hungarians said they never look for information about the European Union and 2% were unable to mention any source of information about the EU. For others, the most frequently used source of information on EU issues is television (70% of the respondents cited it). The internet was ranked fourth, 17% of people said they use it when looking for information about the EU.

The role and meaning of the EU

The EU in general has a positive image for 39% of Hungarians, which is 6 percentage points lower than it was in the spring of 2005. The proportion of neutral respondents has not really changed - it was 41% in the autumn of 2005. Most respondents still mentioned the freedom of travel, study and work in the European Union when they were asked what the European Union meant for them.

The role of the EU in Hungary

Out of the 16 areas listed, Hungarians mentioned only four, where the Hungarian government's role to make decisions is more important than cooperation within the EU. According to the respondents, the Hungarian government has the least important role in the fight against terrorism. In the fields of scientific and technological research, environmental protection, defence and foreign affairs, the majority of Hungarians said decisions should be made jointly within the European Union.

The international role of the EU

The largest proportion (72%) of Hungarian respondents said that the EU plays a positive role in international environmental protection. Following this, most Hungarians believe that the EU has a positive role in the fight against terrorism (68%)

and in maintaining world peace (64%). A smaller proportion, but still more than half of respondents, said that the EU has a positive role in the fight against poverty in the world. Regarding the question of world peace, the proportion of people saying the EU plays a negative role has increased from 4% to 10% in six months.

Future developments in the EU

Compared to the results of the last Eurobarometer survey in the spring of 2005, the results of the most recent survey do not show significant changes in the proportion of Hungarians supporting the European Union's strategic goals, the Monetary Union and the single currency, the common foreign policy, defence and security policy and the further enlargement of the EU. Like the EU-25 average, Hungarians believe the top priority in the EU's economy is the improvement of education and professional training.

Support for strategic goals of the EU

As in previous Eurobarometer surveys, the common defence and security policy is the strategic goal most of the respondents support (83%). The proportion of people supporting the common foreign policy (73%), the European Monetary Union and the single currency (64%) also remained unchanged in comparison with the previous survey, as did the proportion of people in favour of the further enlargement of the EU (66%).

The European economy

The Eurobarometer asked what citizens of the European Union think about their standard of living and the performance of the EU's economy in comparison with that of other countries. The results show a significant difference between the opinion of Hungarians and the EU-25 average. Only 25% of Hungarians think the standard quality of life in the EU is higher than in the United States: this proportion is more than twice as high as the EU-25 average. A similar difference was measured when comparing the EU's standard of living and the economy's performance with those of Japan.

The European Constitution

Among the 25 members of the EU, the level of support for an EU Constitution is the second highest in Hungary - only Belgium is ahead of Hungary with 77% of the people supporting it. The lowest proportion was recorded in Sweden, where only 44% of the respondents said they support the Constitution.

The future expansion of the EU

Overall, 49% of those polled in the EU-25 support the further enlargement of the European Union is 49% and the proportion of people against it is 10 percentage points lower. After Hungary joined the European Union in May 2004, the proportion of people supporting the further enlargement had decreased by 9 percentage points and started to increase slowly again, totalling 66% in the spring of 2005. It has not

changed by the autumn of the same year. Between the spring and the autumn results in 2005, the proportion of people against the enlargement has slightly decreased to 19%.

Support for the membership of specific countries

Like the overwhelming majority of EU citizens, most Hungarian respondents support the membership of Switzerland, Norway and Iceland, although none of these countries is planning to initiate talks on their accession. Support for Croatian membership is lower with only 51% of EU-25 citizens in favour, while 70% of those polled in the ten new member countries and 75% of Hungarians support Croatian accession.

Opinion on Turkey's membership

Support for Turkey's EU membership in Hungary (41%) is 10 percentage points higher than the average of all member countries, but the proportion of Hungarians supporting the country's accession has decreased by 10 percentage points compared with the results of the previous Eurobarometer survey. The proportion of Hungarians saying Turkey partly belongs to Europe due to geographical and historical reasons is higher than the proportion in member countries as a whole. At the same time, the proportion of Hungarians saying the accession of Turkey would strengthen the security in the region is below the EU-25 average.