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NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

POLAND

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Introduction

This executive summary examines the views of Polish citizens on various aspects of the European Union. It compares them with typical attitudes held across the Union (EU25 average), highlighting major differences vis-à-vis other Member States.

The bulk of the data making up this report was gathered between 11 October and 15 November 2005 and constitute wave 64 of the Standard Eurobarometer, which is published every year (spring/autumn) at the request of the European Commission.

-The level of satisfaction of Poles is gradually increasing over time-

During the last two years, there was a gradual increase in the percentage of Poles who express satisfaction with their life. The difference recorded between the two polls reached 7 percentage points (63% in comparison with 70%). The results of the survey indicate that the level of satisfaction with life does not depend on gender or place of residence, but more on occupation, age and education.

In other Member States, the level of satisfaction with the standard of living is 82%. It is worth noting that in the "old" Member States, the average rate accounts for 82%, whereas in the "new" countries for 69%. The most optimistic are the Danish and the Swedish (96%, respectively). The two largest groups of people dissatisfied with their living standard are found in Hungary (44%) and in Lithuania (41%).

-Poles do not expect any change in their situation in upcoming year-

A vast number of Poles (47%) do not expect an improvement in their situation in the coming 12 months. The rest hold the opposite view (34%), or claim that their living conditions will worsen (13%). It is worth noting that, among the occupational groups, the most optimistic are students (54%) and the unemployed (46%).

Expectations of Polish citizens regarding the future are similar to the EU average. More than one-third of EU citizens (35%) expect that the coming 12 months will bring an improvement in their situation. The most optimistic are the British (49%), the least the Portuguese and Germans (21%, respectively). Almost half of EU citizens claim that they do not expect their life to change (49%), whereas 13% hold the opinion that it will deteriorate. The most pessimistic are Portuguese citizens (36%), followed by Greeks (25%).

-The number of Poles who expect a worsening in their standard of living is dropping-

During the past two years, the percentage of Poles convinced that their life situation would be better in the coming 5 years has increased. The difference accounts for almost ten percentage points (33% in relation to 42%). Simultaneously, the percentage of respondents holding the opposite view decreased (23% in spring 2004 and 13% in autumn 2005). Across the EU, citizens' expectations did not change much in the last two years (the fluctuation accounts for 2 points) regarding both aspects: those who expect the improvement in five years and those who foresee a deterioration.

-Despite change, the trust in main national institutions in Poland still remains at the lowest level in the European Union-

The level of trust Poles have in the most important national institutions, such as government, parliament and political parties, has recently increased. The highest rise occurred in the case of parliament (4 points), and currently accounts for 12% (the lowest level in the EU). A similar result was seen in the case of the government (an increase from 11% to 14%). Also, trust in political parties has recently increased by two points (from 5% to 7%). Apart from the rise in trust levels, the considerable increase of the number of Poles who do not hold any view on this subject can be seen. In each respective category, apart from the judiciary, the increase in those respondents who are undecided fluctuates from 5 to 10 points.

In other EU Member States, confidence in parliament is shared by one-third more citizens than in Poland (35%) – the most in Denmark (74%). Almost one out of three EU citizens trusts his or her government (31%). The highest number occurs in Luxemburg (70%), the lowest in Poland (14%). Political parties are trusted by almost one-fifth of EU citizens (17%). The highest level occurs in Denmark (35%), whereas the lowest figures are in Slovakia and Poland (both at 7%).

-The majority of Poles claim that the lack of jobs is the most important problem to be solved-

When asked to indicate the two most important problems facing their country, Poles most frequently cited unemployment (71%) and the healthcare system (35%). The lack of jobs has been high in the hierarchy of important problems in Poland for a long time. In autumn 2004, 74% of Poles classified it as a highest priority problem. Other EU citizens also find unemployment as the most urgent issue (44%). In second place, they list the general economic situation (26%). There is a major difference between “new” and “old” Member States in this respect. Unemployment is much more frequently cited as the first priority problem by the “new” countries (57%) than by the “fifteen” (42%).

-The maintenance of order in the country is a priority for the citizens of Poland and other EU countries-

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When Poles were asked what goals should be given top priority in the coming years, the highest proportion of the poll mentioned the maintenance of order in the country (38%). The fight against inflation was chosen as the second most important goal (36%). The survey results indicate that other EU citizens share a similar point of view.

CHAPTER II

-One-third of Poles claim that they never think of themselves as Polish and at the same time European-

One-third of Poles perceive their nationality as resolutely Polish. Almost half of them (46%) claim that only from time to time they think of themselves as Polish and simultaneously European. One-fifth admits that they often have such a feeling. In other EU countries, there are more people than in Poland who never think of themselves as European (42%), whereas there are fewer of these who do it often (17%).

Asked about the future, the majority of Poles (53%) admit that they see themselves as both Polish and European. A high percentage (40%) claims that their identity will have in the future only a national character. Only 5% of respondents admit that in the future they will feel themselves as European and at second place Polish. Other EU citizens have similar feelings.

-The majority of Poles claim that their voice does not count in the EU-

A majority of Poles (57%) do not agree with the statement that their voice counts in the European Union. More than one-third holds the opposite view (35%). Similar results were gathered in other EU Member States, where almost two-thirds of respondents (59%) believe that their voice has importance in the Community. The highest percentage of these who share this opinion is found in the Netherlands (58%) and Luxembourg (54%). The lowest levels are seen in Latvia and the Czech Republic (17%, respectively), and Estonia (18%).

-The majority of Poles declare they are not willing to become more involved in European affairs-

A majority of Poles (75%) do not feel very involved in European affairs. More than half (52%) of the poll states that they are not willing to become more involved. However, a significant majority of Polish citizens consider, at the same time, that the EU institutions should enhance their efforts to make citizens more involved in European affairs. Similar expectations are articulated by Poles with regard to central (84%) and local (83%) authorities. In other Member States, the results are similar. Nearly a majority of European citizens are not interested in further involvement in the Community's activities, whereas 72% of them admit that at the moment they do not feel involved. The most involved among EU citizens are the Hungarian (51%) and the Swedish, while the least engaged are the Slovaks (11%) and British (13%).

-The Poles think that decisions taken in a majority of policy areas should be taken within the EU framework-

A majority of Poles believes that decisions concerning areas such as taxation (69%), education (62%), pensions (66%), social and health protection (61%) should be taken by the Polish government. A majority consider that other policy fields (eleven in total), including combating terrorism and crime, defence and foreign affairs, and immigration, should be decided jointly within the European Union. Inhabitants of other EU Member States agree with Poles and also feel that most decisions should be taken at EU level.

CHAPTER III

-The majority of Poles claim that EU membership is a "good thing"-

A majority of Poles (54%) believe that EU membership is a "good thing". Only 8% of them hold the opposite view and 34% claim that it is neither a "good" nor a "bad thing".

Opinion among the Poles regarding EU membership has fluctuated in recent times. Since spring 2004 (the lowest level of positive opinion regarding membership – 42%) there has been a gradual increase in the percentage of respondents perceiving membership as something "good".

In other EU Member States, half of respondents regard membership as a positive thing (50%). The highest number appears in Luxembourg (82%) and the lowest in Austria (32%). In spring 2005, the average for the EU was 4 points higher. This falling trend continues. In autumn 2004, 56% of EU citizens had a positive opinion on membership. At the same time, there is an increase in the percentage of those who believe that membership is a "bad thing". In spring 2005, it was 15%, in autumn 2004, it was 13% and, today, it is 16%. A small difference over the level of satisfaction with membership appears between "new" and "old" countries (49% to 50%, respectively). However, compared with spring 2005, there has been a decrease (by 6 points) in the number of respondents in the "new" Member States regarding membership as a positive thing. At the same time, in the "new" countries there are fewer people than in the "old" who hold a negative view on membership (10% in comparison to 17%).

-Poles believe that their country has benefited from EU membership-

As in spring 2005, a majority of Poles (63%) now claim that their country has benefited from its membership of the EU. When we take into consideration the results from autumn 2004, it can be clearly seen that the percentage of respondents sharing this point of view increased by 8 points over the last year. At the same time, the number of people holding the opposite opinion has dropped (from 30% to 24%).

Across the EU, the percentage of respondents convinced that their country has benefited from membership of the EU accounts for 52% (the highest result occurred in Ireland - 86%, the lowest in Sweden - 32%). The opposite opinion is held by 36% of EU citizens. Compared to spring 2005, there has been a decrease in the percentage of people who perceive the effects of membership as positive (from 55% to 52%). The change is seen more in "old" Member States, where the difference accounts for 3 points, than in "new" ones (a decrease from 59% to 58%). There has also been an increase of 3 points in the number of European citizens claiming that their country has not benefited from membership.

-There are now fewer Poles than half a year ago for whom the EU conjures up a positive image-

There are now fewer Poles than in spring 2005 for whom the EU conjures up a positive image (a decrease from 51% to 49%). The percentage of those holding a negative view about the Community remained stable at 12%.

In other countries, the percentage of people for whom the EU conjures up a good image accounts for 44%. The highest result occurred in Ireland (69%) and the lowest in Austria (24%). Twenty percent of respondents have a negative opinion of the EU. The highest rate of negative attitudes towards the Community was observed among the Swedes (38%) and Austrians (36%). One-third of respondents have in turn a neutral attitude.

CHAPTER IV

-Poles claim they are aware of the Commission and the European Parliament-

A majority of Poles (83%) claims that they have heard about the Commission before, although 16% admit that hardly have any knowledge about this institution. This is a good result compared with the EU average (79% and 19%, respectively). Among Poles, the level of awareness about the European Parliament is higher than that of the Commission and accounts for 87% (those who are familiar with the Parliament) and 13% (those who haven't heard about this institution). The equivalent averages across the Union are 89% and 10% respectively.

-The percentage of Poles claiming to trust the European Commission has dropped-

Almost half of Poles (46%) admit that have confidence in the Commission. One in five Poles declares a lack of trust in this institution (22%). Every third respondent admits that he or she has no opinion on this subject (32%). In spring 2005, the percentage of those who had trust in the Commission was 3 points higher and accounted for 49% of the poll. The percentage of those undecided was also high (30%). In other EU countries, the level of trust in the Commission amounts to 46% (the same level as in spring 2005). The lowest level occurs in Great Britain (26%), the highest in Portugal (65%).

-The level of trust in the European Parliament has dropped-

Poles trust the European Parliament a bit more than the Commission (49% compared with 46%). However, there is a higher percentage of those who admit to having no trust in this institution (24% in comparison to 22%). In spring 2005, the level of trust in the Parliament in Poland was 3 points higher, while the percentage of respondents not trusting it was at that time 4 points lower.

Across the EU, 51% of citizens have trust in the European Parliament. The highest percentage occurs in Luxembourg (68%), the lowest in Great Britain (27%). 34% of EU citizens hold the opposite opinion. This result is similar to the one recorded in spring 2005 (52% and 31%, respectively).

CHAPTER V

-In Poland there is the highest percentage of respondents claiming they understand the way the EU institutions work-

Almost two-thirds of Poles (59%) claim they understand how the European Union works. This is the highest result among all Member States. One-third (34%) admit to having no knowledge on this subject.

In other EU Member States, the percentage of respondents who admit they understand how the EU works accounts for 41%. A majority of EU citizens claim they are not familiar with the functioning of the EU institutions (52%). The least informed are the Spanish (29% understand how the EU works), Slovaks and the Portuguese (32%, respectively).

-Poles perceive their level of knowledge on the EU as lower than half a year ago-

In this latest survey, Polish citizens perceive their knowledge on the EU as worse than it was in spring 2005. On a scale of 1 (no knowledge at all) to 10 (a great deal), 53% of Poles assessed their level in the first part of the range (1 to 4). A similar result occurred in other EU countries (47%). The upper part (6 to 10) was chosen by 30% of those polled. The average for the EU in this regard amounts to 24%. The value placed in the middle of the scale was chosen by fewer EU citizens than a year before (19%, 21% in spring 2005). In the case of Poland, the figure was 16% - 10 points lower than in the last poll (spring 2005).

-The level of real knowledge on the EU has dropped-

Poles are better informed on the EU than other EU citizens (44% in comparison to 38%). However, it is worth noting that the real level of knowledge of Poles on the EU is today lower than half a year ago (10 points).

CHAPTER VI

-Poles support the development of the EU as a political union-

When Poles are asked about their opinion on the development of the EU into a political union, they were mostly positive (56%). The opposite view was held by 22% of respondents. The same number of these who were polled had no opinion on this subject.

In other EU Member States, there are more opponents than in Poland to the idea of political union (31%). The percentage of supporters is at a similar level (55%). However, there are fewer respondents who are undecided (14%). The highest percentages of respondents supporting political union are seen in Slovakia (72%) and Slovenia (71%), and the lowest in Great Britain (30%) and Austria (35%).

-The majority of Poles support the European Constitution and believe that the EU Member States should continue the ratification procedure-

A majority of Poles (53%) declare support for the European Constitution. 21% are against its ratification. Among the countries where the survey was conducted, the highest number of opponents is in Denmark (37%), the Czech Republic and Finland (36%, respectively). The highest percentage of supporters occurs in Belgium (73%) and Romania (68%).

A majority of Poles who were asked about the future of the European Constitution opt for the continuation of the ratification process (57%). Almost one-fifth (17%) of the poll considers that the Constitution should be renegotiated. One-tenth proposes to drop the ratification (11%), while 15% have no opinion on this subject.

CHAPTER VII***-Fewer and fewer Poles support the enlargement of the European Union to include new countries-***

A majority of Poles (72%) supports the enlargement of the EU. The opposite view is held by 14% of citizens. A similar percentage has no opinion on this subject.

The percentage of support for enlargement in Poland is today 4 points lower than in spring 2005, whereas the number of those opposing it is 2 points higher. This is the latest stage in what is a decreasing trend. In autumn 2004, 78% Polish citizens were for the continuation of this process. Within a year, support had decreased by 6 points.

Across the EU, the percentage of respondents supporting enlargement is lower than it is in Poland and accounts for 49% (the most supportive are Greeks and Slovenes – 74%, and the least supportive are the Austrians – 29%). A similar wide disparity is seen in the figures of those opposing it. In Poland, there are 14% who are against enlargement in contrast to the EU average which is 39%. The highest percentage occurs in Luxembourg (63%) and the lowest in Poland (14%).

-Support for enlargement has dropped, especially regarding Ukraine-

Most Poles support the admission of Switzerland and Norway (81%, respectively), followed by Iceland (72%). Less willingly, Poles would see Turkey (42%) and Albania (48%) as becoming EU members. Compared to spring 2005, support for enlargement has decreased. The highest drop occurred in the case of Turkey (12 points) and Ukraine (11 points). A much lower level of support was observed in the case of Albania (8 points).

EFTA countries, Norway and Switzerland (77%, respectively) as well as Iceland 68% enjoy the greatest support across the EU25. Europeans, on average, look significantly less favourably on the membership of the remaining countries listed, such as, for example, Croatia and Bulgaria (51% and 48%, respectively). The strongest opposition is aroused by Turkey. More than half of EU citizens are against its admission (55%) – an increase of 3 points in comparison to spring 2005. The largest number of opponents occurs in Austria and Cyprus (80%).

In the case of Ukraine, EU citizens are divided into supporters (42%) and opponents (43%). The highest level of support was seen in Greece (69%) and the lowest in Austria (19%). The level of opinion of EU citizens on the Ukraine's accession has changed in comparison to spring 2005. The percentage of supporters increased by 7 points, while the level of opponents dropped by 9 points.