

EUROBAROMETER 64

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

AUTUMN 2005

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SLOVENIA

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

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

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.

Background

Eurobarometer 64 (EB64) comes a year and a half after the accession of Slovenia to the European Union. This report covers Slovenian public opinion a couple of months after the rejection of EU constitution in two referenda. It still reveals strong euro-optimism although not as strong as in the period immediately following the accession

Satisfied with their life

A first general look at the survey data shows that Slovenes are (as seen in previous EBs) more optimistic when talking about their personal situation than the general situation of the country and its economy. Similar optimism about their personal situation, which differs from the situation in the rest of the NMS10, is also seen in Malta and Cyprus. All three are new, small and Mediterranean Member States. 87% of Slovenes are satisfied with their lives, which is above the average of EU25 and NMS10. Comparing their current personal situation with that of five years ago, every fourth Slovene considered it has disimproved, while 38% said it has not changed and 36% said it has improved.

Very positive image of the European Union

The majority of Slovenes, i.e.58%, are proud to be Europeans although 36% Slovenes see themselves in the near future as Slovenes only.

"My voice does not count in the EU"

61% of Slovenes believe their voice does not count in the EU, while 36% are convinced it does count. 83% of them do not find themselves involved in European affairs. 72% said they would not like to be more involved in European affairs. The reason for this may be the apathy towards politics in Slovenia which is much stronger than in other member states. On the other hand, 77% said that the European institutions should make more effort to further involve EU citizens in European affairs.

Relatively good EU knowledge

A majority of Slovenes perceive their own knowledge of the EU, its policies and institutions as poor. However, the actual level of knowledge (respondents had to respond as to whether a statement about the EU is correct or incorrect) about some basic facts related to the EU is much higher than in the EU25 on average. 26% of Slovenes answered all four questions correctly – this is the highest percentage in all 25 Member States. In general, better knowledge of EU affairs can be found in smaller states.

Desired sources of EU-related information

Traditional news media are considered to be the most important source of acquiring EU-related information. The most frequently mentioned source of information regarding the EU is television (75%), followed by daily newspapers (49%) and radio (47%).

“EU membership is a good thing”

43% of Slovenes believe EU membership of Slovenia is a good thing compared to the 48% in the previous EB, while only 9% think membership is a bad thing. The enthusiasm following the accession on 1 May 2004 no longer seems to be so strong.

Taking everything into consideration, 57% of Slovenes are of the opinion that Slovenia has benefited from being a member of the European Union (in spring 2005 the level was higher - 62%). The EU25 average is 52%.

81% of Slovene citizens feel safer because Slovenia has become an EU member and feel that Slovenia's voice counts in the EU.

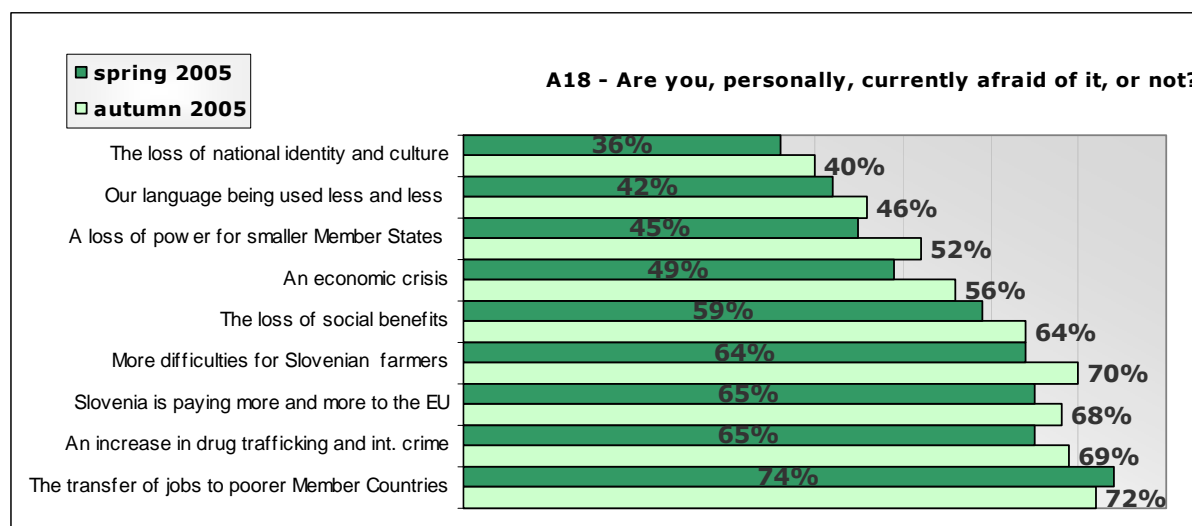
Notwithstanding the huge subsidies for agriculture in the EU, a majority of the European (48%) and Slovenian (58%) population said the Union has a bad effect on their national agriculture. 70% said they fear more difficulties for Slovenian farmers.

Fears about the EU

The current EB reveals more fears in all the mentioned categories compared to the previous EB. There are two reasons for this:

- a) a decrease in enthusiasm after the accession, and
- b) the rather negative media coverage of EU affairs after referenda in France and the Netherlands.

The biggest fear relates to the transfer of jobs to other Member States with lower production costs (72%), an increase in drug trafficking and international organised crime (69%) and fears that Slovenia will have to pay more and more to the EU (68%).



Key words for EU – Euro and freedom

Slovenes most often associate the EU with the Euro (55% mentioned it), freedom to travel, and ability to work and study elsewhere within the EU (53%). Generally speaking, Slovenes associate the EU mainly with positive characteristics, since the first negative characteristic (more crime) is ranked in only 8th place.

77% of Slovenes (83% in spring 2005) support European monetary union and a common currency, the Euro. On the other hand, 39% of the population fears losing the Slovene national currency, tolar. The main fears regarding the currency change are related to inflation which increased after the introduction of the Euro in neighbouring Italy and Austria.

No. 1 – the fight against unemployment

Slovenia has faced increased unemployment levels in the last year(s). Therefore, it is no surprise that unemployment is the issue that comes up most frequently among those that the respondents feel Slovenia should deal with – the same goes for other NMS10 Member States and for the EU25 in general.

65% of Slovenes believe that fighting poverty and unemployment are the priorities which the EU should address.

Slovenes are worried about social security, the economic situation and tackling poverty. Social issues were the most important topics during campaigns prior to the referenda on the EU Constitutional Treaty, so in this respect Slovene public opinion is only following that in other Member states.

Which are the competencies of EU and which of national Government?

When should decisions be made by the Slovenian Government, or made jointly within the European Union was a question asked in relation to several topics. According to Slovenes, EU should take decisions regarding terrorism, science, defence, foreign policy, crime and immigration, whereas the Slovene government should focus on pensions, taxes, social security, unemployment, education and consumer protection.

For a stronger and bigger EU

Slovenes largely support the European integration process. Most of the aspects cited in the survey are supported by more than three-quarters of the Slovene poll.

Slovenes are, apart from citizens of the Republic of Cyprus, the strongest supporters of a common foreign policy (77%) and common defence and security policy (85%).

EU enlargement has greatest support in Slovenia and Greece (74%). The strongest Slovene support regarding eventual new EU Member States goes for rich countries: Switzerland (92%), Iceland (87%) and Norway (92%). Eastern European countries (Ukraine, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro and Croatia) enjoy less support but still much more than the EU25 average (with most figures ranging from 59 to 66%). At the bottom end, with support levels of close to 50%, are Turkey (49%) and Albania (48%).

Support for accession of the candidate country, Croatia, is lower than for Ukraine which has not even been included in the enlargement process.

The EU Constitutional Treaty enjoys strong support. 78% of the respondents are of opinion that the Constitution would bring more transparency, democracy and effectiveness. In the previous EB, i.e. before the referenda, the support amounted to 75%. On the other hand, 41% Slovenes would want some changes made to the Constitution and only 37% would continue with the ratification process.

Immigration

Immigration cannot solve problems relating to skill shortages in certain sectors of the economy nor efficiently solve the problem of Europe's aging population.

44% of Slovenes agree with the statement that "we need immigrants to work in certain sectors of our economy" while 55% oppose it. In this context, Slovene public opinion is converging more closely to that of the NMS10 - although 6 months ago it was closer to that of the EU15.

Energy

Due to high energy prices, Slovenes favour tax incentives and more information in order to take new measures that would help people reduce their energy consumption. Regarding lower dependency on imported energy resources, most Slovenes would choose solar energy, while nuclear energy is considered highly unpopular in Slovenia.