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Satisfaction with Life

The percentage of people expressing general satisfaction with their lives has remained unchanged in the European Union (EU) Member States since the autumn of 2004 and remains at 80%. In Turkey, between autumn 2004 and spring 2005, this ratio increased by 2 percentage points to 73% and has remained at this level since.

Despite increasing levels of overall satisfaction with their lives, satisfaction among the Turkish public remains well below that of the EU. However, in Bulgaria and Romania, levels of overall satisfaction with life are lower than in Turkey.

Expectations for the Future

The Turkish public is considerably more optimistic about the future than the EU public as a whole.

Between spring and autumn 2005, there has been no change in the optimistic evaluations concerning the economic conditions of the country as a whole. However, respondents' expectations of their own financial situation over the next 12 months have improved.

Trust in institutions

One element that is closely linked with the current economic conditions and expectations about them in the future is the level of trust in the country's institutions. On the whole, Turks' level of trust in their national institutions is considerably higher than that of citizens of European Union countries. However, the overall ranking of these institutions according to levels of trust remains, for the most part, the same in Turkey as in EU member countries. Noticeable exceptions are the relatively higher levels of trust in voluntary aid organisations and radio in the EU member countries.

The country's most important problems

When asked to indicate the two most important problems facing their country, differences were observed between respondents in Turkey and in the EU Member States. According to the Turkish poll, the two foremost problems are unemployment and terrorism followed, after a large gap, by the economic situation, crime and education. While the top priority has not changed since last year, terrorism has been constantly rising in importance in the minds of the public. In autumn 2004, terrorism was cited by 18%. The figure then increased to 29% in spring 2005, to reach its present level of 41%. Inflation does not feature among the top problems facing either Turkey or the EU member states as a whole. However, considerable variation is observed in this priority list of problems in the various countries surveyed.

Moving from the short to the long-run, the top priority list for Turkey is remarkably more materialistic in its orientation compared to the EU member states as a whole. The Turkish public attaches more importance to security, social and economic order while EU citizens attach more importance to giving people more say in important government decisions and protecting the freedom of speech.

EU's policy priorities

When considering policy decisions after its accession to the EU, the Turkish public shows a stronger preference for joint decision-making within the EU institutional framework for policy areas that are largely concerned with social and economic redistribution issues than respondents in the EU member states. Among the EU member states there exists a greater

preference for policy areas that might be considered as more strategic, such as fighting terrorism, scientific and technological research and environmental protection.

When asked to choose from a list of actions, the three priority actions that the European Union should follow, the Turkish public cites fighting unemployment, poverty and terrorism, while respondents in the EU member states add to this list maintaining peace and security in Europe. Fighting illegal immigration is emphasized in the EU member states while welcoming new member countries is emphasized by the Turkish public.

Feelings about being European

EB 64 questioned the degree to which those surveyed associate themselves with a European identity. The results suggest that national identities are still much more powerful than a commonly shared European identity. Turkey differs from this overall trend only in degree but not in direction. In this respect, Turkey stands out – it is the country where pride in national identity is the strongest of all the countries surveyed.

Information about the EU and its institutions

The general level of information about the EU continues to be low. However, it is increasing. The *subjective* evaluations about the level of information about the EU are obtained on a scale of 1 to 10. The average subjective evaluation of the level of information a respondent possesses about the EU in Turkey is only higher than three out of 29 countries (Hungary, the United Kingdom and Spain) included in the study. The objective evaluations are obtained by asking the respondents a number of questions for which there are correct or incorrect answers. For each respondent, the number of correct answers forms a measure of their *objective* level of information. When objective criteria are used to replace self-evaluation to measure people's level of knowledge about the EU, on average 29% of Turks (27% in spring 2005) scored correct answers which is well below the EU average of 38% (41% in spring 2005).

An equally if not more important diagnosis is that Turkish public has the highest level of willingness to be informed about the EU. When asked about the specific area of information about which they are more interested, the Turkish public shows similar preferences to those of the EU member states, focusing on information about the rights of European citizens, measures for education, training and youth and the EU enlargement process.

The primary sources of information about the EU are not much different in Turkey than in the EU. Television, daily newspapers and discussions with relatives, friends, and colleagues are the main sources of information; however, the intensity of resorting to such sources differs. Television is used as a source of information by a much larger group in Turkey (73% in autumn 2005 and 87% in spring 2005) than in the EU (66% in autumn 2005 and 70% in spring 2005). The use of radio and internet is much lower in Turkey (radio 12% and internet 8%) compared to the EU (radio 30% and internet 22%).

11% of people in the EU25 indicate that they are not interested in having information about the EU whereas this figure is only 4% in Turkey.

Discussions with friends and relatives as a source of information comprise a large group with 30% in Turkey and 24% in the Member States.

According to 29% of the Turkish public (41% in 2004 and 37% in spring 2005), there is extensive media coverage in Turkey on EU topics while the respective figure for the EU25 is

only 7% (11% in 2004 and 10% in spring 2005). A vast majority of Turks consider this coverage to be pro-EU while only 15% (15% in 2004 12% in spring 2005) considers it negative. In short, the decreasing perception of negative media coverage seems to have ended.

What does the EU mean to people?

What the European Union means to them is different for Turkish people than for those in the EU. For Turkish people “economic prosperity” (43% in spring 2005 and 41% in autumn 2005), “social protection” (27% in spring 2005 and 32% in autumn 2005) and “freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the EU” (27% in spring 2005 and 25% in autumn 2005) top the list. “Peace” (23% in spring 2005 and 25% in autumn 2005), “democracy” (19% in autumn 2005) and “cultural diversity” (18% in spring 2005 and 19% in autumn 2004) are only of secondary importance in terms of what the EU means to Turks. It is noticeable that while negative aspects remain of low importance to the Turkish public they seem to be more prevalent among the citizens of EU member states.

We see that the EU has a different meaning to citizens of the member states. For example, “freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the EU” comprises the largest group (52% in 2005 and 53% in 2004). The euro comes in second on this list with 37% in 2005 and 44% in 2004.

When asked about personal feelings associated with the EU, Turkish and European sentiment is more similar. Both put “hope” and “trust” at the top of the list with “anxiety” coming third.

In Turkey, 19% (17% autumn 2004 and 21% in spring 2005) indicated “anxiety”. Similarly, “feelings of rejection” comprised a group of 10% in autumn 2004 and 18% in spring 2005 reaching 6% in autumn 2005. “Feelings of mistrust” have risen from 13% in 2004 to 15% in spring 2005 and back down to 13% in autumn 2005. In short, the increase in negative feelings among the Turkish public with regard to the European Union seems to have stabilized in autumn 2005.

Evaluations of EU membership

In autumn 2005, the ratio of those stating that membership would be a “good thing” has declined in Turkey compared to the 2004 and earlier 2005 results. In spring 2005, 59% (62% in autumn 2004) of the Turkish public considered that EU membership would be a “good thing” while 20% (12% in autumn 2004) indicated the opposite. In autumn 2005, those who indicate that membership in the EU would be a good thing has continued to decline to 55%, while those who disagree reached 15%, with 21% of the poll undecided. This proportion of the poll supporting membership is still larger than in the case of Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania.

68% of the Turkish public indicated that their country becoming a member of the EU would be an “advantage” for Turkey. These evaluations remained unchanged since spring 2005 and they seem to prevail in the various policy areas, such as defence and the country’s exports.

The overall “image of the EU” is positive among 60% of the Turkish public (61% in spring 2005). The EU has a more positive image only in Ireland and Luxembourg. Austria, with a figure of only 24%, is the lowest in the ranking in this respect.

Information and trust in the EU institutions

One reason for the continuing fall in the size of the group who consider EU membership as a good thing for the country may be the low level of information about and trust in the EU

institutions. We observe that only a slight rise has taken place in the average subjective evaluations of information levels about the EU over time. However, strikingly, trust in the EU institutions continues to be low in Turkey compared to EU member states and is falling over time. Such a negative trend may be due to the fact that only 29% admit to understanding the workings of the EU institutions. It can also be seen that the Turkish poll's opinion as to where the EU budget is spent is not in line with the views of respondents in the EU member states and is far from the prevailing reality.

Evaluations about European political union and the European Constitution

It cannot be claimed that support for European political union is on the rise among the EU member states. Turkish public opinion remains more favourable towards European political union than opinion in the EU member states as a whole. In 7 EU countries, support for the principle of a European constitution is below 50%. In Turkey, barely a majority (51%) gives it their support.

In response to the question "According to what you know, would you say that you are in favour of or opposed to the European Constitution?", 48% of the EU25 poll indicated that they were in favour of the constitution back in spring 2005. In autumn 2005, however, 53% indicated their support for the European Constitution being on the agenda. The French and the Dutch public, who rejected the European Constitution before the summer, seem to have shifted back to being supportive. However, the supporters of the European Constitution in five countries, including the United Kingdom, appear to be in the minority in autumn 2005.

Support for EU Expansion

Similarly, support for the expansion of the EU to include new members has fallen below 50% among respondents in the EU member states as a whole. Turkish public opinion mimics this fall but still maintains a slight majority with 52% being supportive of EU expansion.

There are major differences in opinion over which countries should be allowed to join the EU in the future. However, compared to spring 2005, groups that support membership of all 12 countries listed in the question have shrunk. Turkish public opinion runs counter to this trend by being even more supportive of the membership of 10 out of the 12 countries (only the level of support for the membership of Switzerland and Norway has fallen among the Turkish public).

The overall level of support for Turkey's future membership in the EU has also fallen among the EU member states from 35% in spring 2005 to 31% in autumn 2005. Support for Turkey's future membership has risen slightly in only four countries, while, in the rest of the countries, support levels have fallen, sometimes quite significantly.