

# **EUROBAROMETER 65**

**PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION**

## **SPRING 2006**

**NATIONAL REPORT**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**CZECH REPUBLIC**

This survey was requested and coordinated by Directorate-General Communication.

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

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Eurobarometer reports describe the climate of opinion in member and candidate countries of the European Union. This Eurobarometer 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 fourth Czech Eurobarometer report since the Czech Republic became a member of the European Union.

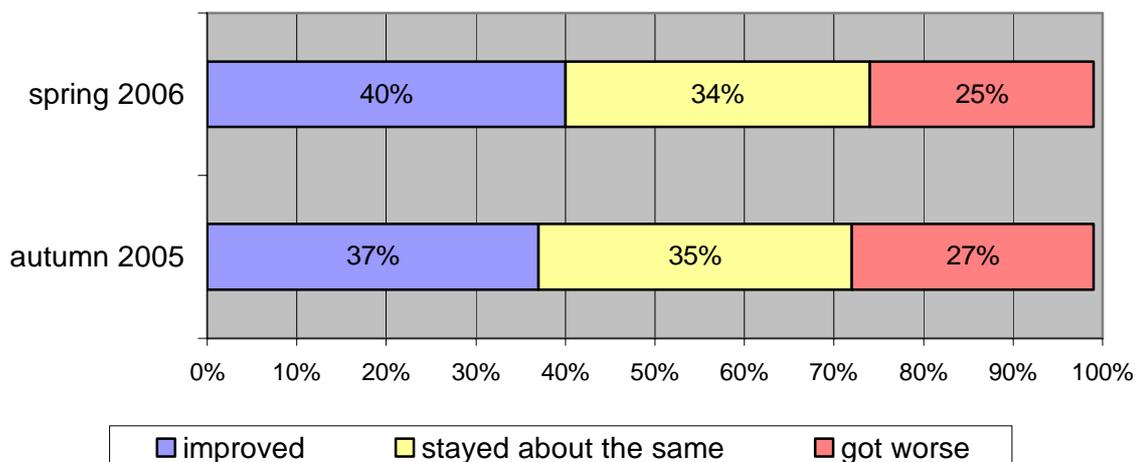
The opinion poll, upon which this report is based, was conducted among 1,068 Czechs between March 29 and April 14, 2006, that is towards the end of the first year of the "period of reflection" after the French and Dutch referenda on the European Constitution. In the Czech Republic, this marked the early stages of the campaign before the June Parliamentary elections. This Eurobarometer shows that when the immediate impact of the French and Dutch referenda faded away, perception of the European Union improved. The opinion that membership in the European Union is a good thing increased to 55 percent. Also, in some other topics, this Eurobarometer shows significantly better results compared to the previous edition from autumn 2005. Nevertheless, the need for bringing European citizens and the European institutions closer together was confirmed.

In general, the spring 2006 Eurobarometer survey found that Czechs are now more satisfied with their country's EU membership than they were in autumn 2005. At the same time, they do not think that the European Union helps them sufficiently in the areas that they perceive as the most troublesome in their country.

**Personal satisfaction and life expectations**

**Czechs are mostly satisfied with their life situation, but this feeling is less intense than the European Union average.** Shortly after EU accession, the percentage of very satisfied grew from 8 percent to 13 percent and, since that time, it has stayed at the same level – the figure measured in spring 2006 is 12 percent. The opinion that, compared with the situation 5 years ago, the present one is better, is nearly twice as frequent as that of those who think that the present situation is worse. Compared with autumn 2005, the opinion climate in the Czech Republic has become more positive and ranks higher than the EU 25 average, which is 36 percent – incidentally, the same as that for the 10 new Member States.

**Personal situation compared with 5 years ago**



**As for the coming 12 months, Czechs are slightly more pessimistic than the average in the European Union. There is just one exception - expectations about their**

**country's economic development.** Improvement in this area is expected by 26 percent of Czechs, with the EU average being 21 percent. Thus, Czechs are more optimistic than citizens of the 10 new Member States (only 24 percent anticipate economic improvement of their respective countries). In the 5-year perspective, one-third of Czechs expect improvement (34 percent), nearly half of them expect no changes (44 percent), and only one in seven believes that the situation will turn worse (15 percent). In this respect, Czechs rank among the sceptics in the European Union.

As in most countries of the EU, **unemployment continues to be one of the major concerns of Czech citizens.** However, the percentage of the people who rank unemployment among the two most important problems has decreased on average in the EU25 from 50 percent to 44 percent and in the Czech Republic by eight percentage points to the stable level of 40 percent. As a result of an intense political debate on the Czech healthcare system, disputes on ways how medical care should be financed and what the ownership structures of healthcare institutions (mainly hospitals) should be, **concerns about public healthcare occur as one of the two most important problems with a figure of 45 percent of Czechs being recorded - twice as high as it was in the autumn of 2004.** The difference in perception of this problem between the Czech and the overall EU25 poll grew to nearly 30 percentage points.

For several years, Czechs were distinct from the EU25 average in that they ranked crime among the most important issues slightly more often and their country's economic situation slightly less often. In the former case, the difference has completely disappeared. In the latter case, the discrepancy remains. There are still fewer Czechs who think that the economic situation is one of the most important problems of their country, compared with the EU-25 average. This may be partly caused by the swift economic growth of the Czech economy.

### ***Trust in European institutions***

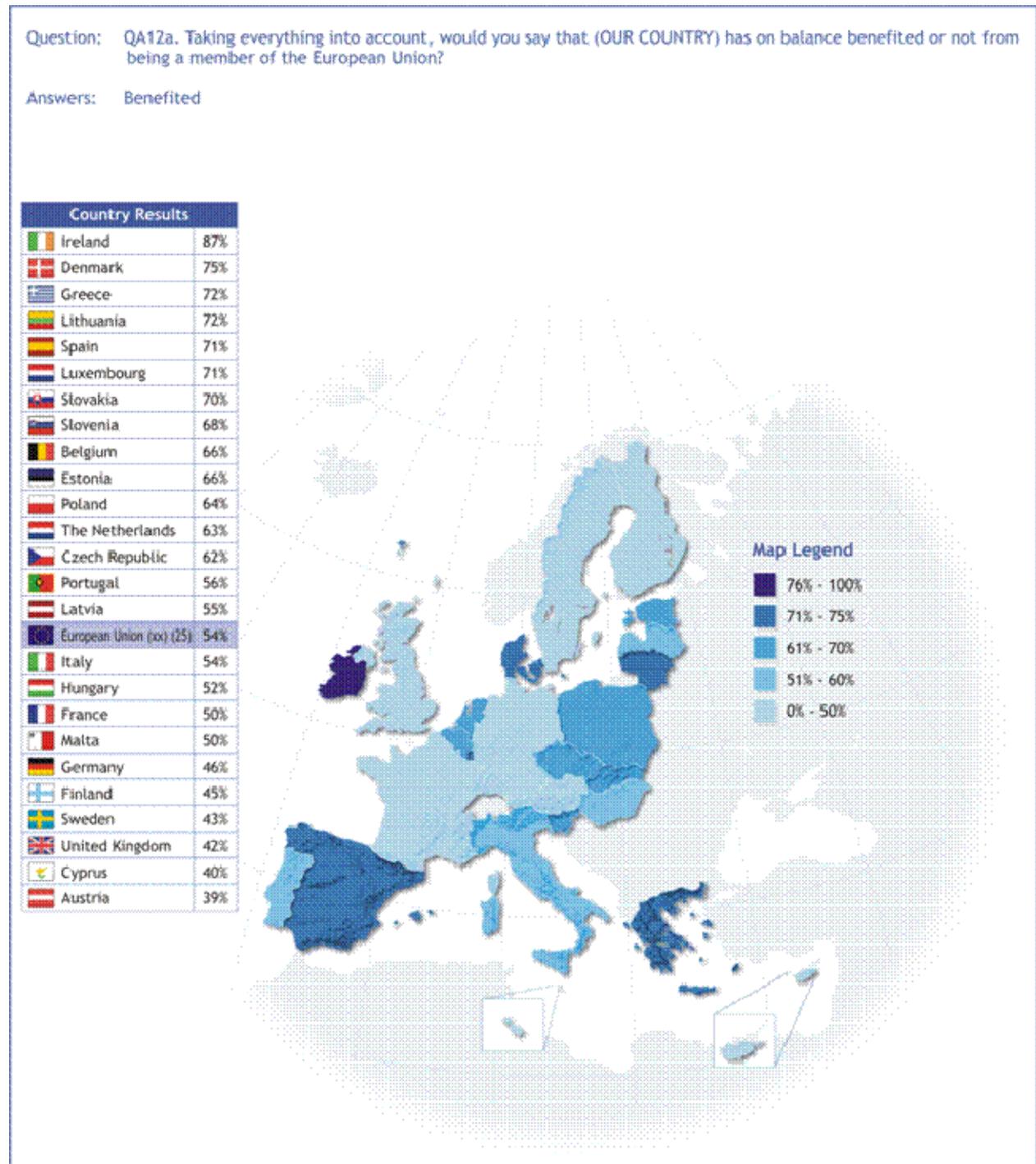
**The most trusted European institution is now the Court of Justice of the European Communities** – after an increase of 12 percentage points, it is now trusted by 58 percent of Czechs. This is 6 percentage points higher than the EU25 average. **The Czechs trust the European Parliament more than the European Commission,** even though the Czech parliament is less trusted than the national government. All these institutions, as well as the Council of the European Union and the European Central Bank, are more trusted in the Czech Republic than the EU25 average.

### ***Support for EU membership***

**The share of opinion that EU membership is a good thing had been gradually declining for some time** in the Czech Republic, as well as in the EU 25. **Now, this negative trend has stopped:** in the whole European Union, 55 percent of people share the opinion that EU membership is a good thing; in the Czech Republic it is 52 percent – eight percentage points more than in the autumn of 2005. The most positive perception of membership can be repeatedly seen in Ireland, the Netherlands, Spain and Luxemburg.

Compared with autumn 2005, 62 percent of Czechs now believe that their country has, on balance, benefited from being a member of the European Union - an increase of seven percentage points from 55 percent. Less than one-third of Czechs share the contrary opinion (30 percent). In this respect, Czech public opinion is more optimistic than the EU25 average. In the ten new Member States, 51 percent say that their country has benefited from being a member of the European Union. This is substantially less than in autumn 2005. Positive opinions on these issues can be seen in Ireland, Luxemburg and, among the new Member States, in Lithuania. Most sceptical are people in the United Kingdom and Austria. In Cyprus

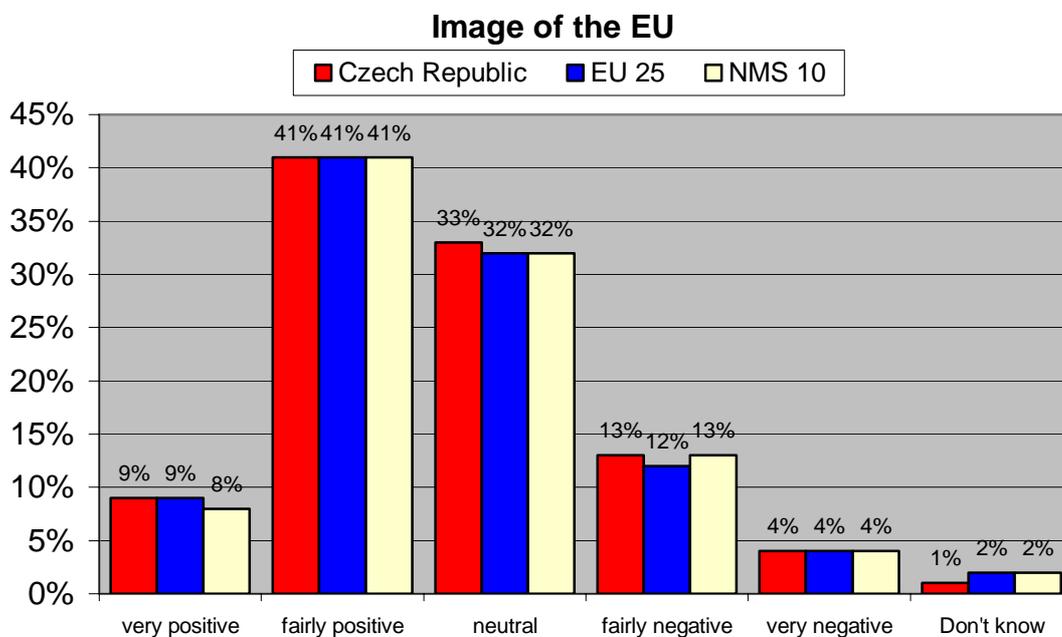
and in Sweden, the majority of inhabitants think that their country has not benefited from being a member of the European Union at all.



### ***Image of the European Union***

**The image of the EU in the Czech Republic has significantly improved.** In the autumn of 2005, a total of 40 percent of Czechs said the EU conjured up for them a positive image and, in spring 2006, this figure reached 50 percent. The opinion that the image is neutral dropped from 40 percent to 33 percent. Only for 16 percent of Czechs did the European Union conjure up a negative image (last year it was 20 percent). In spite of these changes, the Czech Republic ranks among the countries where a positive image of the European Union is

just at the EU25 average, which is 50 percent. The lowest percentage of positive image responses can be seen in Finland, Austria and the United Kingdom. In the new Member States, such negative results were measured in Lithuania and Estonia. At the opposite end of the scale is Ireland in first place with 73 percent of positive responses, followed by Italy, Spain, Slovenia, Cyprus and Poland. Among the acceding and candidate countries, only three show a majority of positive responses regarding EU image: Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey. The Croatian population ranks among those who are rather critical.



### ***Symbols of the European Union***

**For two-thirds of Czechs, the European Union symbolizes freedom of movement – travelling and studying, as well as working anywhere in Europe.** This dominant association grew stronger in spite of the fact that the labour market is still not fully open for Czechs. Freedom of movement is also the most frequent symbol of the European Union on the EU25 average (50 percent) and the new Member States average (40 percent). **As is the case for the EU25, for more than one-third of Czechs, the European Union is associated with the Euro and for nearly one-third with peace in general.** On the other hand, one in eleven Czechs associates it with a loss of cultural identity or with social protection.

**While more than one-third of the EU25 citizens associate the European Union with unemployment, in the Czech Republic, the number of people who identify with this opinion dropped from 21% in the autumn of 2005 to only 14% in the spring of 2006.** Compared with the EU25 average, Czechs more often associate the EU with economic prosperity. Most probably, this is linked to the increase in foreign investment after the Czech Republic's accession to the EU and with the impact of these investments on the Czech economy, including the labour market.

### ***Information about the European Union***

**Only slightly more than one-third of Czechs claim they understand how the European Union works (39%)** compared with an EU25 average of 46 percent. Together with Slovakia, Malta, Spain, Italy and Portugal, the Czech Republic ranks among those Member States with

the lowest levels of this type of knowledge. On the other hand, mainly the Poles and Slovenians, and among the “old” Member States, the citizens of Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Belgium are more confident that they understand how the EU works.

However, in the test of knowledge about the EU, Czechs repeatedly attained better results than the average. They scored best on the question as to whether the EU has 15 member states. Less well known in the Czech Republic was the principle of the direct election of Members of the European Parliament. Since only 46 percent answered this question correctly, the Czechs lag behind the EU25 average, which is, however, still rather low (52 percent).

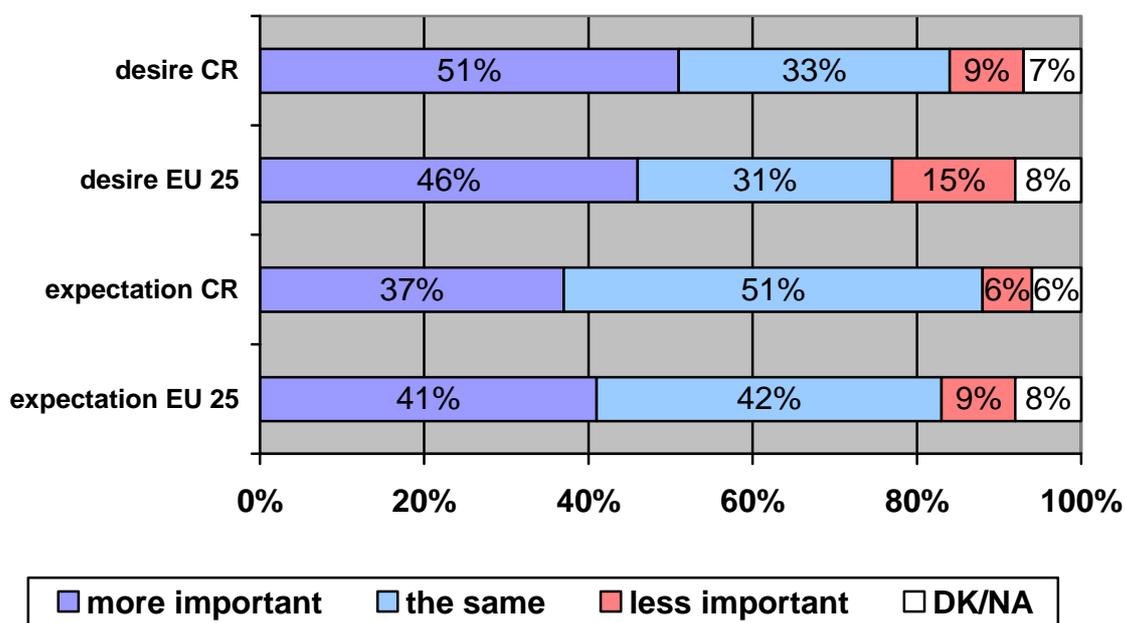
Administrative, personnel and operation costs represent just 4.5 percent of the EU budget, of which nearly 90 percent is allocated to economic, social, cultural and regional policies in both Member and Candidate States. Even so, **in the Czech Republic, the opinion that most of the European Union budget is spent on the administrative, personnel and operation costs remains relatively widespread – shared by nearly one-third of the population (31 percent).** If we take the EU25 average, people seem to be even less informed: this incorrect notion is shared by 41 percent. Even though more people are now aware of how the EU uses its budget, it is apparent that there still remains considerable room for improvement.

As is the case for the majority of EU citizens, **Czechs are more aware of the European Parliament than any other EU institution.** The European Commission, the European Central Bank and the Council of the European Union are much less well-known. Awareness of the Court of Justice of the European Communities is relatively low, although this institution is still known to nearly two-thirds of Czechs. Consistently, **the Czechs evaluate the role of all cited institutions as more important than does the average EU25 citizen.**

### ***Role of the European Union in 5 years' time***

The majority of Czechs want the European Union to play a more important role in their lives in the coming five years. However, just slightly more than one-third of them expect that this will really happen. There are relatively few people who wish the European Union to play a less important role in their lives both in the Czech Republic (one in eleven) and in the whole European Union (one in seven).

## Role of the EU in 5 years' time



### Fears over EU integration

Czech fears over EU integration have decreased in many ways but they still remain significant - above all, in two areas. There are serious concerns in the Czech Republic that Czech farmers will face more difficulties in the coming years (71 percent) and that there will be an increase in drug trafficking and international organized crime (68 percent). In both cases, the figures are higher than the EU25 average. In two other areas, Czechs are less concerned than citizens in the EU25 overall. This relates to the transfer of jobs to other Member States with lower production costs (63 percent) and an increase in the country's contributions to the EU budget (60 percent). As to the potential end of the national currency, the Czech crown, and the loss of smaller Member States' influence, those who fear and those who do not fear them are currently more or less balanced.

### Priorities of the European Union

Czechs repeatedly rank social issues among the top priorities for the European Union: **fight against unemployment (42 percent) as well as fight against poverty and social exclusion (40 percent)**. Other important priorities include the fight against organised crime and drug trafficking (29 percent), maintenance of peace and security in Europe (28 percent), environmental protection (27 percent) and the fight against terrorism (18 percent).

### Source of information on the European Union

Only 12 percent of EU citizens and 13 percent of Czechs never look for information on the European Union. Those who do, primarily use standard mass media sources: more than two-thirds of Czechs watch TV, half of the Czech public and only slightly fewer EU citizens read the daily press, one-third listen to radio and a quarter follow the news on the Internet. For a quarter, discussions with relatives, friends and colleagues and, for one-fifth, magazines and other press are the relevant information sources. At the same time, books, brochures,

information leaflets and, particularly, conferences, lectures, debates and information telephone lines, are utilized by only a small proportion of citizens.

**Most Czechs, who had sufficient information to express their opinion on this topic, said that the Czech media pay adequate attention to EU issues.** There are only a few who feel there is too much information on the European Union in the media, with this opinion being held by more or less the same proportion as the EU25 average. **The majority of Czechs and a large share of EU citizens think that the national media cover the European Union objectively. Of those who do not agree with this, the larger share feels that information about the EU is too positive.** This opinion is particularly accentuated when speaking about Czech television channels, where the ratio of “too positive” to “too negative” is 26:3 percent.