

# EUROBAROMETER 65.2

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

## SPRING 2006

NATIONAL REPORT  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ESTONIA

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

This report was produced for the European Commission's Representation in Estonia

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.

## Introduction

This summary is based on the results of Eurobarometer 65.2 that was conducted from March 27 to May 1st 2006 in 25 European Union Member States, two accessing countries (Romania and Bulgaria), two candidate countries (Croatia and Turkey) and in Turkish Cypriot community. Summary presents the main results for Estonia and compares them with average opinions in 25 member states and in some cases, to new and old member states separately. The main purpose of the survey was to map opinions and attitudes associated with the EU. Most of the topics were also covered in Eurobarometer survey in October 2004, May-June 2005 and October-November 2005. This allows us to bring out changes in attitudes, where they are relevant.

In Estonia, the fieldwork was carried out from March 31 to April 24. In total, 1002 respondents were interviewed, 997 of them had Estonian citizenship. When interpreting the results, it has to be kept in mind that the target group of the survey were people who had the citizenship of at least one EU member state and who were able to answer the questions in Estonian or Russian. The survey does not represent the opinion of permanent residents of Estonia who do not have European Union citizenship or who have not defined their citizenship (owners of so-called grey passports).

The Eurobarometer 65 survey confirms the positive attitudes of Estonians towards the future that have also been observed in previous studies. Despite the fact that Estonians are still not so satisfied with their life on the whole and with different specific areas of life, as people in the European Union are on average, the rapid economic growth and constant improvement of life over the recent years gives them more reason for optimism than for "old" Europe which is struggling with slow economic growth and increasing unemployment. These two aspects worry Estonians increasingly less. At the same time, they would like to see the level of security and social welfare rising in their country.

Attitudes towards the European Union have not changed much over the past one and a half years. The survey in autumn 2005 revealed some more hesitant attitudes but this is to be expected given the certain degree of insecurity on the European Union level due to the not so successful fate of the European Constitution. By now, Estonians have regained their previous attitudes that cannot be considered to be openly positive but rather, and characteristically of Estonian people, careful and neutral. However, two-thirds of Estonians admit that Estonia has benefited from becoming a member of the EU and benefits have, above all, been of an economic nature. Hesitant or negative attitudes (the share of negativism is, however, rather modest, with fears related to the EU showing a declining trend) often stem from being insufficiently informed. Uninformed people tend to expect negative rather than positive from EU. At the same time, it is a vicious circle: people who are not sufficiently informed are often also not too interested in European Union issues.

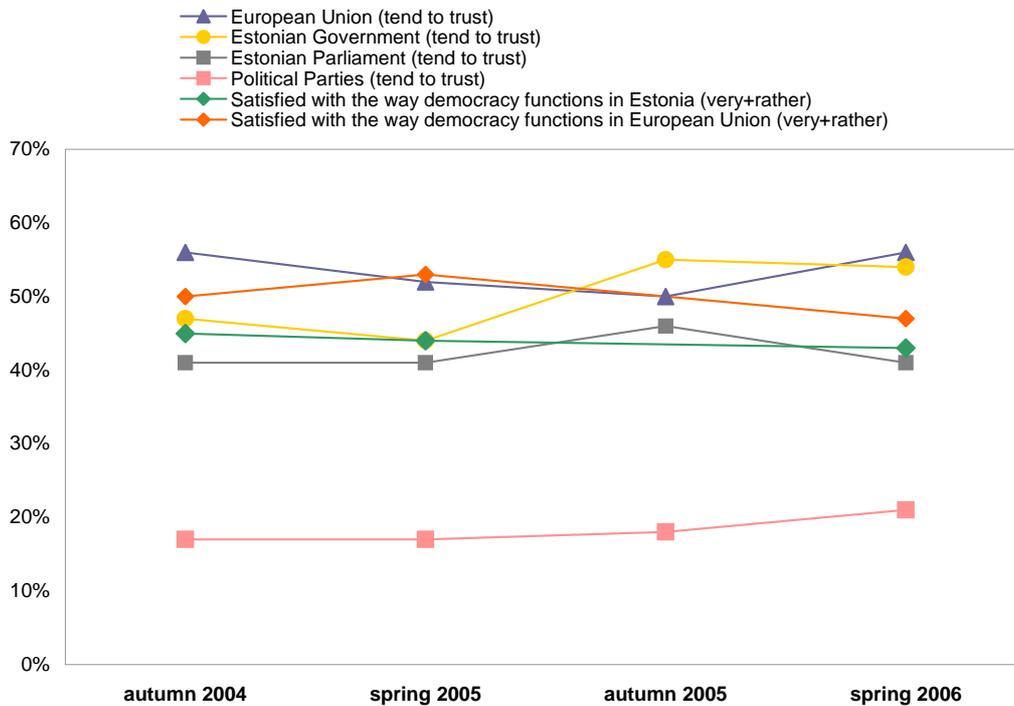
In general, people feel that there is a sufficient amount of European Union in their lives, they do not wish its role to increase. Estonians do not like excessive regulations but currently half of them associate European Union with bureaucracy. Making the face of the EU friendlier in this sense should definitely be one important priority. Clearly, the more personal contacts people have with the EU (through different supports, training, projects), the more there is a chance for more positive attitudes to develop.

## The climate of opinion at national level

- Estonians' satisfaction with life has been stable over the last one and a half years, fluctuating around 70%. In spring 2006, 69% of citizens were satisfied with life in general, 8% of them were very satisfied. This result corresponds to the average of new member states but lags behind the older ones.
- Estonians are increasingly more optimistic regarding the next twelve months. While in Estonia 43% of citizens believe their lives will improve in the nearest future, on average of only 35% of Europeans have a similar expectation.
- Citizens are also optimistic about the improvement of the economic situation in Estonia as well as the economic situation of their household. Twice as many people in Estonia as in Europe as a whole believe in the improvement of the economic situation in their country: on the average 42% in Estonia and 21% in European Union respectively. While 42% of Estonian citizens believe in the stability of the situation, only 9% compared to the EU 25 average of 35% believe the situation will become worse. Such optimism is clearly supported by the rapid economic growth that has taken place in Estonia over the recent years. The expectations for the future of the household situation are rather similar: 50% believe in stability, 39% expect the situation to improve and only 8% to become worse.
- Regarding employment issues, Estonians are more confident about the national employment situation improving rather than their personal employment situation. 39% of citizens expect an improvement (40% stability) in the national employment situation and 28% - in their personal work situation (50% expect stability). Europeans on average expect the employment situation in their country to worsen (39%) but the personal employment situation to remain the same (61%).
- Estonians, together with the Irish, are at the top of the European ranking in admitting that their lives have improved over the last five years: 62% of Estonians and 63% of Irish people admit that. People who are the most likely to make this claim are 15 - 24 years old, belong to the highest educational group or are still studying. By occupational status, managers and self-employed people have experienced the improvement in their lives the most.
- In line with general optimism, 53% of Estonians expect their life to improve in the next 5 years compared to only 39% of Europeans on average.
- The three most trusted institutions among the six measured were the United Nations (56%), European Union 56% and the Estonian Government (54%). The Parliament is trusted less but still by a greater share than in Europe on average. While at European level trust in the European Union tends to dominate over trust in the national government, this situation does not apply to Estonia where support for the new government has increased since spring 2005.
- However, Estonians tend to be slightly more satisfied with the way democracy works in Europe than in Estonia. When looking at the time trend, it can be seen that this difference,

however, has declined due to decreasing satisfaction with the way democracy functions in the European Union. By spring 2006, satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in Estonia and Europe is almost the same: 43% and 47% are satisfied with it respectively. It should also be noted that more than a quarter of citizens - 28% - were unable to evaluate the functioning of European democracy (compared to 8% in the case of democracy in Estonia).

### Trustworthiness of the Political System

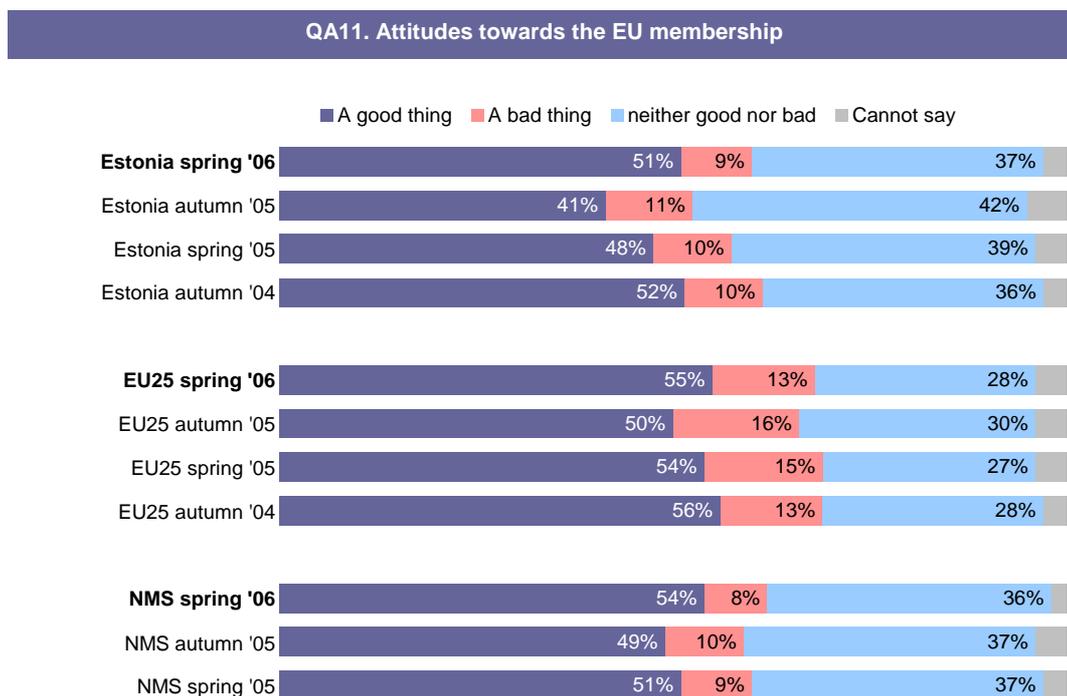


- According to Estonian citizens, the most important problems their country today are crime, increasing prices and the health care system. Crime is troubling an increasing amount of people (48%) while inflation poses a problem for slightly fewer people than in autumn 2005 (36%). Unemployment and the country's economic situation, which are important problems across the European Union, are seen decreasingly less as problems in Estonia.
- The majority of citizens in Estonia find the quality of their lives good (72%) and are satisfied with their country's economic situation (70%). 62% are satisfied with their financial situation, 43% with the environment situation, 43% with the employment situation and 31% with the social welfare situation. Estonians are clearly more satisfied with the economic and employment situation in their country and less satisfied with the quality of life and social welfare in their country compared to Europeans as a whole.
- Paradoxically, Estonians believe that the situation in Europe, compared to Estonia, is better in the case of environment, employment, the economic situation, quality of life and social welfare.

- Estonians feel the most attached to their country (92%). This is followed by attachment to their town/village (85%), their region (83%) and to Europe (38%). It should be noted that attachment of Estonian citizens to Europe is much lower than it is in the European Union on average (63%).

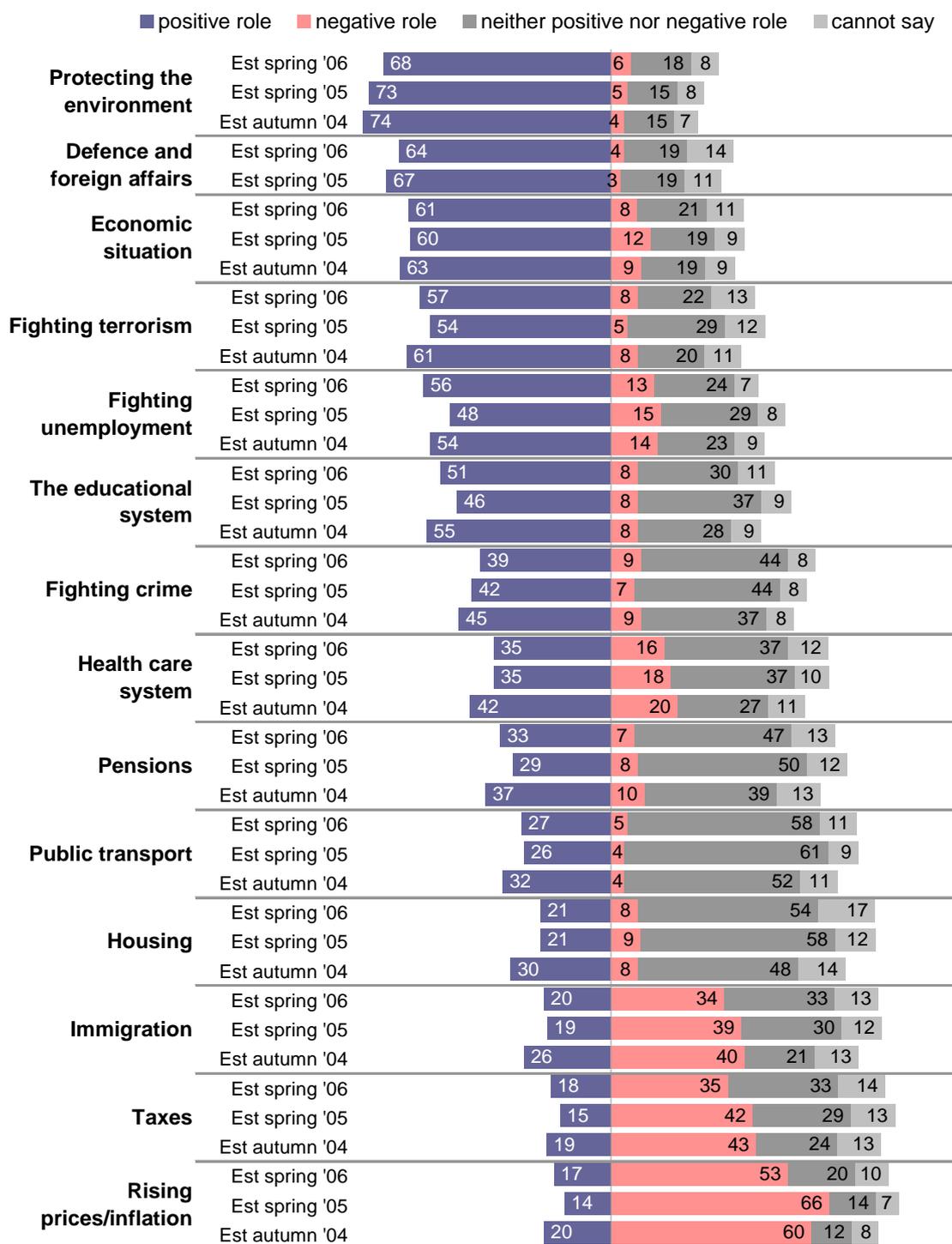
## Estonian citizens and the European Union

- As has been the case for the last one and a half years, a neutral image of the EU dominates among Estonians: 46% consider it neither positive nor negative. 40% of citizens have a positive image and only 12% have a negative image.
- There have not been any changes in associations Estonians have with the European Union: it is associated, above all, with freedom to travel, study and work everywhere in the European Union (48%), bureaucracy (45%) and greater say in the world (26%). Estonians, together with Finns and Swedes, draw associations with bureaucracy the most. Estonians are least likely to relate the European Union to unemployment (13%), loss of cultural identity (12%) and waste of money (11%).
- 51% of Estonian citizens support Estonian membership of the European Union and 37% find it neither good nor bad. Only 9% find it a bad thing. Generally speaking, the trend across the European Union is the same.



- 66% of Estonians believe that Estonia, all in all, has benefited from being a member of the EU. Thus, even those who remain neutral about their support for membership, admit that there are benefits to be gained from it.
- Citizens find that, above all, that the EU increases economic stability (62%), security (56%) and political stability (56%).
- 48% of citizens understand the way European Union works compared to the average of 46% in the European Union. The most well-known and trusted institutions are the European Parliament (known by 87%, trusted by 52%) and European Commission (known by 82%, trusted by 52%).
- 45% of Estonian citizens believe that the role of the EU in their lives will be the same in 5 years. 42% of them also would like this role to remain the same. 39% predict that the role will become more important and 38% would like it to become more important.
- The role of the EU is found to be positive, above all, in the case of environmental protection, defence and foreign affairs and the economic situation. In the case of environmental protection, citizens consider the role of the EU more highly than European citizens on average do. The trend shows a decline in the faith that the EU is playing a positive role in that area.
- Estonians also find that the EU plays a positive role in the case of the fight against terrorism and unemployment, as well as in case of the educational system.
- The role is seen as neutral in case of fighting crime (which is considered to be the most important problem in Estonia), the health care system, pensions, public transport and housing. In the case of immigration and taxes, an equal share of people find the role of the EU to be negative or neutral. Only in the case of increasing prices is the EU clearly found to be playing a negative role (53% of Estonians hold this opinion).

## QA29. Role of the EU in Estonia



- Estonians find that the priorities of the EU should be fighting poverty and social exclusion (50%), maintaining peace and security in Europe (35%), and protecting the environment (31%). The last activities in the list of priorities are reforming the European Union institutions and their functioning (3%), and ensuring the political and diplomatic importance of the EU in the world (3%). Such activities are clearly too abstract to be perceived as important .
- The fears people have had in connection with the EU are decreasing over time as the experience of being a member state grows. In spring 2006, the list of the fears was the same: the fear that drug-related crime rate would increase (64%), that Estonia is paying more and more to the EU (56%) and that the Estonian currency will disappear (54%). Compared to average Europeans, Estonians are clearly less afraid of transfer of jobs to other member states (51% compared to European average of 72%), that there will be more difficulties for farmers (48% vs. 61%), economic crises (32% vs. 47%), and loss of social benefits (22% vs. 50%).

### **Media consumption and the European Union**

- Estonians get news daily from the TV, read daily newspapers and listen to the radio daily more than European citizens on average. Daily, 74% of Estonians watch news on TV (EU average 66%), 45% read them in newspapers (EU average 35%), and 57% listen to them over the radio (EU average 40%).
- Similarly to the results of the previous surveys, the main sources of information about the EU for Estonians are television (70%), radio (41%) and daily newspapers (40%). Compared to average Europeans, Estonians consider radio as well as Internet (36% vs. 23%) a clearly more important source of information. Internet is number one for finding information for people aged between 15 and 24.
- Estonians are among the top of those nations in Europe who find that media in their country sufficiently covers topics related to the EU. 64% think it is so in case of television, 54% in case of radio and 63% in case of print media. 23% find that television speaks too little about the EU, 22% think it is so in case of radio and 16% in case of print media.
- At least half of the citizens find that media is objective when covering EU related issues. Television (which is the most trusted type of media in general) is found to be objective by the greatest share of people: 58%. An equal share of 54% find that radio and print media are objective. Very few people find that media coverage is negative. 15% in case of radio, 17% in case of print media and 22% in case of television find the coverage to be too positive.