

EUROBAROMETER 65

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

POLAND

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The following text is an executive summary of the Polish report from the Eurobarometer survey (wave 65.2 conducted between 27th March and 1st May 2006 on a representative sample of the Polish population aged 15+). It presents the most important trends in Polish public opinion concerning primarily the assessment of Polish domestic situation and its EU membership.

1. Public opinion in Poland: context

- Poles are increasingly more satisfied with the life they lead

The vast majority of Poles (72%) are satisfied with the life they lead. The number of people satisfied with their lives is increasing. It is now much higher than in 2003 when it reached 65% and slightly higher than in autumn 2005 (70%).

Despite an upward trend, the percentage of people satisfied with their life is a few percentage points lower in Poland than the average for the all EU countries, where 81% of citizens declare that they are satisfied with their lives.

- Poles do not expect changes in their life

Nearly one in two Poles (47%) does not expect any changes concerning his/her life in the next 12 months but they are not pessimists – if they do expect any changes, these are more often changes for the better than for the worse. In Poland (34% answers that the situation will be better), the level of optimism in regard to the changes in people's life situation does not differ from the European average (35%).

- Expectations for the next 5 years are better than the evaluation of the last 5 years

Polish society is divided into three more or less equal groups according to how they evaluate changes in their personal situation over the last 5 years. One in three Poles (32%) claims that his/her situation has improved. The same proportion says that nothing has changed. Not many more (35%) respondents admit that their situation has deteriorated.

Since the point of Polish accession to the EU (that is, spring 2004), the percentage of Poles who state that their situation had deteriorated in comparison with 5 years ago has been decreasing (from 49%). At the same time, both the numbers of people who think that their situation has improved and of those who think that it has stayed the same has been rising (from 21% and 28% respectively).

On the question of the development of their situation in the next 5 years, Poles turn out to be optimists. Only one in seven Poles (14%) thinks that his/her situation will deteriorate. Four in ten (39%) expect that it will improve. In Poland, the level of optimism in the evaluation of personal situation development in the next 5 years is the same as the average European level (39%).

- Poles feel more attached to Europe than to the EU

Depending on whether Poles are asked about their attachment to the European Union or Europe, there are significant differences in the answers. 61% of Poles feel attached to the European Union. If, instead of the EU, they are asked about Europe, the percentage of those who are attached to it rises to 84%.

Compared with the EU25 average, Poles (63%) feel more attached to Europe. Furthermore, Poland is the country where attachment to Europe is the strongest. Also the feeling of attachment to the European Union is stronger in Poland than in the other European countries (50%) and Poland is one of the countries which citizens feel the most attached to the European Union. Similar differences in attachment to Europe versus the EU are observed in other European countries.

2. Poles about their country

- According to the public, unemployment is the most important problem facing Poland at the moment

Poles consider unemployment the most important problem facing Poland today. It was mentioned by the majority of respondents (78%). The healthcare system, next in this ranking, was chosen by 30% of Poles. Apparently, the lack of jobs is much more important for Poles than any other problem. The next positions in the ranking are occupied by the economic situation (25%) and crime (16%).

The percentage of Poles who consider unemployment to be one of the most important problems in their country is the highest in the European Union. The hierarchy of problems perceived as the most important by the Europeans is similar to the Polish results: unemployment (49%), crime (24%), the economic situation (23%) and the healthcare system (18%).

In comparison with the situation in autumn 2005, unemployment is now considered by Poles as an even more important problem (78% in comparison with 70%). Apart from that, there were no significant changes in the ranking of problems facing Poland today.

- Despite an increase the trust in domestic institutions in Poland is still the lowest in the EU

The level of trust in domestic institutions and the justice system is exceptionally low in Poland. 29% of Poles trust the justice system. Trust in political parties (9%), the government (22%) and the parliament (13%) is very low.

In Poland, the level of trust in the justice system is much lower than in the EU (48%) as a whole. The same may be said about levels of trust in the government (35%), while, in Poland, trust in political parties is the lowest in the whole EU (22%).

However, over the past year (that is, since spring 2005), trust in national institutions in Poland has risen significantly. Particularly noticeable is the increase in trust in the government which has risen twofold.

- The trust placed by Poles in the EU is rising

The European Union is trusted by 58% of Polish inhabitants and the percentage of Poles who trust it is higher than the EU average (48%). Since autumn 2005, trust in the European Union has increased in Poland by 6 percentage points. It is also much higher than in spring 2004 when Poland was about to join the EU. At that point, the EU was trusted by one-third of Poles (33%).

- Poles consider that the EU's economic situation is good and the Polish situation is bad

The majority of Poles believe that the Polish economic situation is bad (71%) while the economic situation of the EU is assessed as good (77%). In comparison with the results from spring 2005, the assessment of the Polish economic situation has improved (there was a rise in the percentage of answers that it is good from 20% to 27%), whereas the assessment of the economic situation in the EU has not changed.

- According to Poles, the general situation in Poland is worse than their personal situation

Poles are often dissatisfied with the situation in their country (for example, 71% assess the Polish economic situation as bad) while when they assess their personal situation they are much more optimistic. Nevertheless, in this latter group, there is quite a high share of people who are not satisfied. Six in ten (60%) respondents assess the quality of their life as good but, in this case, the proportion of those dissatisfied is quite significant – 38%.

3. The Europeans and the European Union

- The trust placed by Poles in the European institutions is rising

The European Parliament is trusted by 56% of Polish inhabitants and the European Commission by 53% of them. Trust in both these institutions is at the moment slightly higher than at the point of Poland's accession to the EU, when the figures were 53% and 49% respectively. Trust in the European Parliament and in the European Commission is higher than the European average – 52% and 47% respectively.

- The number of Poles satisfied with EU membership is rising

The majority of Poles are satisfied with Poland's European Union membership – as many as 56% of the poll thinks that it is something good. Only 7% are of the opinion that it is something bad. The evaluation of EU membership is the same in Poland as in the European Union on average (55% of those asked say that it is something good) and the percentage of those who consider that its EU membership is something good is higher at the moment than it was in autumn 2004 (42%) when Poland had just joined the EU.

EU membership is considered something good most often by the Irish (77%), Dutch (74%), Spaniards (72%) and Luxembourgers (72%). On the other hand, EU membership is something good for only 34% of Austrians, 37% of Latvians, 39% of Finns and 42% of the British.

- The percentage of Poles who believe that Poland has benefited from EU membership is rising

It is little surprise that Poles are satisfied with their country's EU membership as the vast majority (64%) thinks that it has benefited from joining the EU. At the same time, however, one in four (23%) respondents believes that their country has not benefited from EU membership. In comparison with other European Union countries, Poland is one of those in which citizens relatively more often tend to think that their country has benefited from EU membership. In general, citizens of the new Member States (62%) more often than citizens of the old Member States (53%) believe that their country has benefited from membership.

Since Polish accession to the EU, the assessment of membership has systematically improved. In spring 2004, one in two Poles thought that Poland benefited from EU membership (50%); now, this opinion is shared by almost two-thirds of Poles (64%).

It is interesting that political views of respondents have little influence on the opinions about EU membership. People whose political orientation is on the right tend only slightly more often to consider that Poland has benefited from its EU membership (72%) than people with a left-wing orientation (67%).

- The majority of Poles have positive associations with the EU, most often freedom of travel, study and work

The number of Poles who have positive associations with the European Union (56%) is much higher than the number of those who have negative associations (9%). In Poland, there are more people with positive associations with the European Union than in the EU as a whole (50%). The most common associations Poles have with the European Union are: freedom of travel, study and work anywhere in the European Union (56%), peace (30%), the euro (26%), a stronger voice in the world (26%) and democracy (26%). The negative associations are less frequent – the most frequently cited negative association by Poles was bureaucracy (17%).

More often than in other EU countries, Poles have positive associations with the EU and they have negative associations less frequently. The ranking of associations in Poland is similar to that in EU countries on average: at the EU25 level, the European Union is most often associated with freedom to travel (50%), followed by the euro (39%) and peace (33%).

- Almost two-thirds of Poles claim that they understand how the EU works

A substantial share of Poles claim that they understand how the European Union works (62%). They tend to believe that they understand how the EU works more often than the average European (46%) and the Polish figure is the highest recorded anywhere in the EU.

However, when the real knowledge levels about the EU are examined, it emerges that some Poles know little about it. 53% of respondents know the right answer to the question about the number of the EU Member States. 60% know that the Members of the European Parliament are directly elected by EU citizens.

It is worth stressing that the level of knowledge about the EU is now higher than it was a year ago. In spring 2005, only one in two Poles (50%) knew that the Members of the European Parliament are directly elected and 49% that the EU does not consist of only 15 member states.

It turns out that Poles know more about the EU than the European averages (50%) in the case of the question about the number of EU Member States and 52% in the case of the question about how Members of the European Parliament are elected.

- The percentage of Poles who believe that their voice counts in the EU is decreasing

More than one in three Poles (37%) believes that his/her voice counts in the European Union but more than a half (53%) are of the opposite opinion. These results are similar to the results obtained in the two previous waves of the survey. The percentage of Poles who believe that their voice counts in EU is close to the European average (36%).

- Poles are not satisfied with the way democracy works in Poland but they are satisfied with the way it works in the EU

Almost two-fifths of Poles (39%) are satisfied with the way democracy works in Poland. However, 58% of respondents are not satisfied with the way democracy works. The percentage of respondents who are satisfied with the way democracy works in the EU is much higher (62%).

In comparison with the situation in spring 2005, respondents have a more positive opinion about both the way democracy works in Poland and in the European Union. The percentage of those satisfied with the way democracy works in Poland rose from 29% to 39%, while the percentage of those satisfied with the situation in the EU increased from 52% to 62%.

Poles are less satisfied with the way democracy works than Europeans as a whole (39% in comparison to 56%). On the question of satisfaction with the way democracy works in the European Union, Poland's average figure is much higher than the EU25 average (62% in comparison to 50%).

- The majority of Poles discern a positive role of the EU in protecting the environment and a negative one in fighting inflation

The majority of Poles think that the EU plays a positive role in protecting the environment (68%), defence and foreign affairs (57%) and fighting terrorism (63%). A negative role of the EU is the most often cited in regard to inflation (35%) and taxes (27%).

In comparison with autumn 2005, much fewer people discern a negative role of the EU as regards inflation (35% compared with 60%), the same is for taxes (27% compared with 44%); the efforts of the EU related to fighting unemployment are more and more visible in Poland – 38% of Poles have discerned a positive role of the EU as regards this issue, and, at the moment, this percentage stands at 50%.

- The vast majority of Poles are for the further enlargement of the EU

The further enlargement of the European Union is supported by nearly three-quarters of Poles (72%) and only 16% oppose it. However, the percentage of opponents to enlargement is slowly but systematically growing: in spring 2005, there were 12% of them; in autumn 2005, there were 14% and now there are 16%. Support for the further enlargement is much higher in Poland than in the EU as a whole (45%).

- In regard to European integration, Poles most of all fear an increase in crime and in their country having to pay more and more to the EU

Poles are still concerned about the impact of the European integration process. They most often fear increased drug trafficking and organised international crime (62%). Almost as frequently, they are afraid that Poland will pay more and more to the EU budget (60%) and as many as 58% of respondents are afraid of the transfer of jobs to the other Member States with lower production costs.

Some fears related to EU integration are shared in common by Poles and other Europeans. The percentage of Poles (40%) who are afraid of a loss of power for smaller Member States is the same as the European average (40%). A similar situation exists in the case of fears of an increase in organised crime (the EU average 60%) and fears that Poland will pay more and more to the EU budget (63%).

There are also fears related to further EU integration which are expressed less often by Poles than by Europeans on average. Poles definitely cite less often than EU citizens on average (38% compared with 50%) that they are afraid of the loss of social benefits and the loss of national identity and culture (28% compared with 39%). Poles are also less often afraid of an economic crisis (43% compared with 47%), the transfer of jobs to other countries with lower production costs (58% compared with 72%) and more difficulties for their farmers (51% compared with 61%).

There are some differences in comparison with the situation in spring 2004 (directly before Poland joined the EU). Above all, the percentage of respondents who are afraid of difficulties for Polish farmers has decreased significantly.

- According to Poles, the EU should give unemployment priority – the most important problem their country is facing today

According to the Poles, the European Union should give priority in this order to unemployment (73%), poverty and social exclusion (both 58%).

In the other Member States, people point to the same priorities but a much higher percentage of Poles than Europeans as a whole (43%) consider unemployment the most important priority. The situation is similar in the cases of poverty and social exclusion (43%).

- More than a half of Poles support the EU Constitution

Awareness of the European Constitution is almost universal in Poland but only a minority of Poles know its content. Nearly all (86%) have heard about the EU Constitution but 79% do not know much about its content. Only seven in a hundred Poles (7%) not only have heard about the European Constitution but also know its content.

Among the countries which had not yet ratified the European Constitution, Poland is the one where the highest proportion of citizens supports the document (56%). On average, in the EU, the Constitutional Treaty is supported by 47% of citizens.

Support for the European Constitution is rising in Poland. At the moment, it is much higher than in autumn 2004 (43%) and slightly higher than in autumn 2005 (53%).

4. Citizens and the media

- For Poles, television is the most important source of information about the EU

Nine in ten Poles (91%) at least sometimes look for information about the EU. Television is for them the most important source of such information (73%). It is used much more often than any other source of information and the same is the case in other European countries.

26% of respondents look for information about the European Union on the Internet. It is worth noting that the Internet as a source of information is used more often by Poles than by Europeans (23%) on average.

- Poles believe that the Polish media talk about the right amount about the EU and that its coverage is objective

Poles express the opinion that their national media (television, radio and the press) talk about the right amount about the European Union (57%, 50% and 47% respectively). According to the majority of Poles, the image of the EU depicted in the Polish media is either objective or too positive. 25% of respondents consider the image of the EU on television as too positive. 17% thinks that it is too positive on the radio and 14% that it is too positive in the press. The media coverage of the EU is objective, according to 59%, 58% and 50% of the poll respectively.

Poles think more often than EU citizens on average that their national television and radio present the EU too positively (25% compared with 20% for television, 17% compared with 13% for radio). This comment does not concern the press which is assessed the same in the EU and in Poland.

- The percentage of Poles who think that the media talks too little about the EU is decreasing

In comparison with the situation in autumn 2005, the percentage of respondents who think that Polish television talks too little about the EU has decreased – from 50% to 30%. Similarly, the proportion of Poles who think that radio talks too little about the EU went down from 40% to 28% and the proportion of those who think that the press talks too little dropped from 32% to 18%.

5. The future of energy

- The public authorities should support energy saving by informing people and introducing tax incentives

Nearly a half of Poles (46%) think that the public authorities' priority to help people to reduce their consumption of energy should be to provide more information on the efficient use of energy. Nearly as many respondents (42%) believe that tax incentives promoting the efficient use of energy would be the best way to persuade people to save energy.

- Poles do not want to pay more for the energy produced from renewable sources

70% of Poles would not agree to pay more for energy from renewable sources than for energy from conventional sources. One in four Polish inhabitants (24%) would agree to pay more but not much more – up to 10%. In general, in the EU, the percentage of people who would be willing to pay more for the energy from renewable source is higher at 34%.

Conclusion

The above data clearly show that Poland is one of those European nations which is most satisfied with EU membership and, in general, has positive opinions about it. Trust in the EU and in the EU institutions is high and rising. More and more Poles believe that EU membership is something good and that their country has benefited from it.

At the same time, the improvement in public feeling in regard to the domestic situation is noticeable. The percentage of Poles who are satisfied with their life and who expect changes for the better in the future is rising. Also, trust in domestic institutions is increasing. However, compared with other EU Member States, Poland is one of those countries whose citizens are rather dissatisfied with its situation.