

EUROBAROMETER 66

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

AUTUMN 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 report describes the climate of opinion in member and candidate countries of the European Union. This report looks at Czech citizens' views on various aspects of the European Union as well as their own life and compares them with typical attitudes held across the EU. It also highlights major differences with other countries. This is the fifth 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 1,091 Czechs between September 7 and 26, 2006. In the Czech Republic, this period was marked by the difficult political situation generated by the 100 to 100 result in the Parliamentary elections. This Eurobarometer shows that the impact of the French and Dutch referenda continues to fade and the perception of the European Union is improving. The opinion that membership of the European Union is a good thing is held by 53 percent of citizens in the European Union. Also, in some other topics, the Eurobarometer shows significantly better results compared with the previous survey in the spring of 2006.

Nevertheless, the need for bringing European citizens and European institutions closer together was confirmed, even if this does not rank among top priorities of European citizens. The people do not feel really involved in European issues and they say their voices are not sufficiently respected in the European Union.

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. Since that time, it has stayed at the same level – the figure measured in spring 2006 was 12 percent and the recent one reaches 13 percent.

As to the coming 12 months, one-third of Czechs expect that their life in general will improve (32 percent); more than a half think that it will be the same (53 percent), 14 percent expects their life in general will get worse. **Czechs are slightly more pessimistic than citizens in the European Union as a whole.** There is just one exception – the expectation of their country's economic development. An improvement in this area is expected by 26 percent of Czechs, in contrast to the EU25 average of 20 percent.

Trust in institutions





























In the European Union as a whole, nearly half of the people trust in justice and the legal systems in their countries and more than one-third trust in their national governments and parliaments. **In the Czech Republic, trust in justice and the legal system is only slightly above one-third, a quarter of Czechs trust in their national government and just one-fifth trust in the Parliament.** The result for political parties is even worse with 14 percent trust among Czechs. The Czechs trust international institutions more than national ones, with the United Nations being trusted by 66 percent and the European Union by 62 percent of citizens.

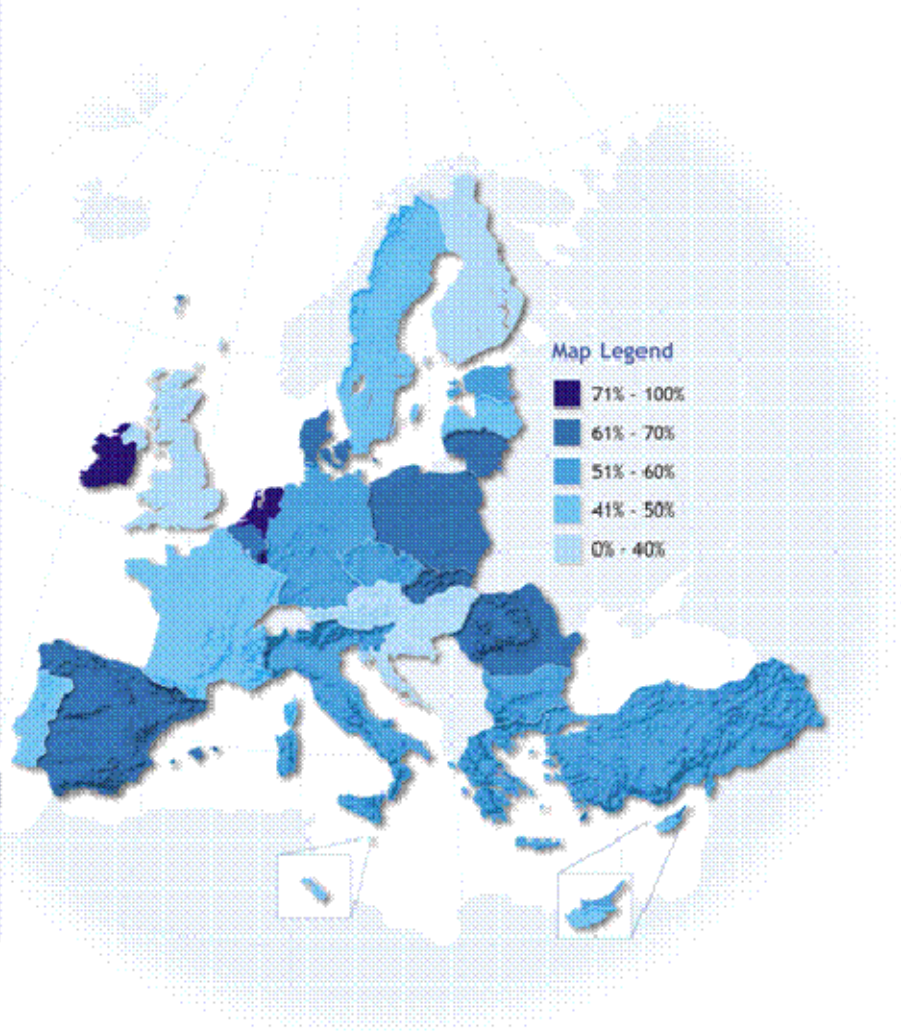
Support for EU membership

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 as a whole. **This negative trend stopped at the beginning of 2006.** In the whole European Union, 53 percent of people share the opinion that EU membership is a good thing; in the Czech Republic it is 51 percent. The most positive perception of membership can be repeatedly seen in Ireland, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Belgium and Spain and, among the new Member States, this is the case in Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia.

Question: QA7. Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY)'s membership of the European Union is...?

Answers: A good thing

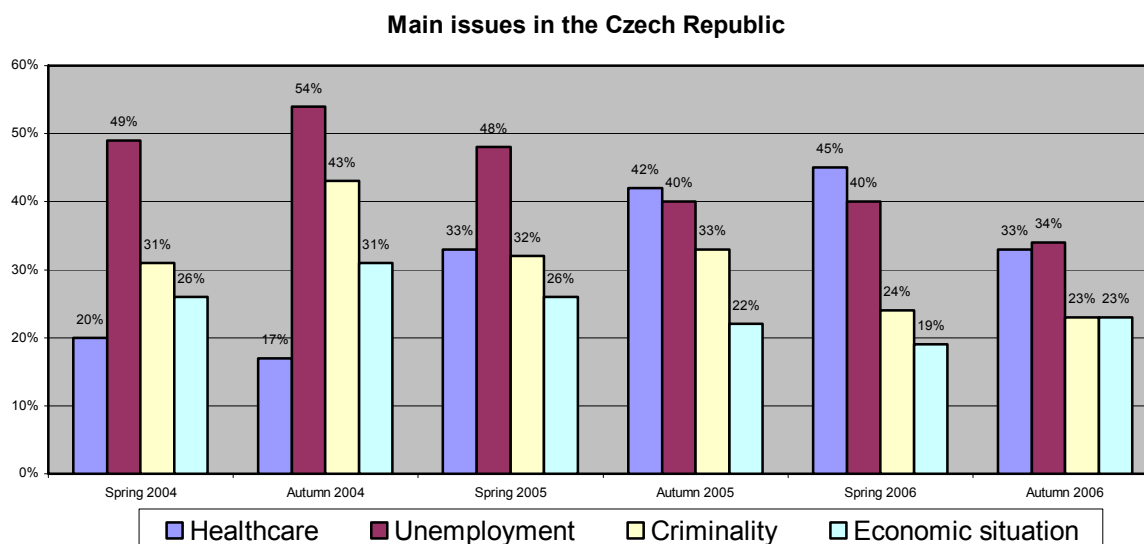
Country Results	
 Ireland	78%
 Luxembourg	74%
 The Netherlands	72%
 Belgium	69%
 Spain	62%
 Lithuania	62%
 Poland	62%
 Denmark	61%
 Slovakia	61%
 Germany	58%
 Greece	57%
 Slovenia	57%
 Estonia	56%
 European Union (25)	53%
 Italy	52%
 Czech Republic	51%
 France	50%
 Portugal	50%
 Sweden	49%
 Cyprus*	47%
 Malta	45%
 Latvia	43%
 Finland	39%
 Hungary	39%
 Austria	38%
 United Kingdom	34%
* Cyprus = 56%	
Other Countries	
 Romania	62%
 Bulgaria	55%
 Turkey	54%
 Croatia	32%



Compared with autumn 2005, eleven percentage points more of Czechs believe that the Czech Republic has, on balance, benefited from being a member of the European Union (an increase from 55 percent to 66 percent). About a quarter of Czechs share the opposite opinion (27 percent). In this respect, Czech public opinion is more optimistic than the EU25 average. Positive opinions on these issues can be seen in Ireland and Lithuania. People in the United Kingdom, Hungary, Sweden and Austria are the most sceptical.

Issues facing the Czech Republic

As in most EU Member States, **unemployment continues to be one of the major concerns**. Nevertheless, the percentage of people who rank unemployment among the two most important problems has decreased from 49 percent to 40 on average in the EU25 and to the level of 34 percent in the Czech Republic since spring 2006. **Concerns about public healthcare** were recorded as the most important problem with 45 percent of Czechs in spring 2006. Since that time, there has been a drop in the figures and public healthcare now ranks second.



A relatively small number of Czechs (5 percent) ranks **terrorism** among the main issues facing their country but even this is a substantial growth compared with spring 2006 (1 percent). In the EU25 average, this opinion is shared by 15 percent of citizens.

Global role of the EU

Czech citizens see the global role of the European Union as a positive one and this opinion is more frequent than in the EU25 on average. Taking into account the role of the EU regarding peace in the world, 79 percent of Czechs say it is positive and only 4 percent say it is negative. Regarding the fight against terrorism, the role of the EU is perceived as positive by 75 percent of Czechs which is seven percentage points less than one year ago.

Economic situation and employment

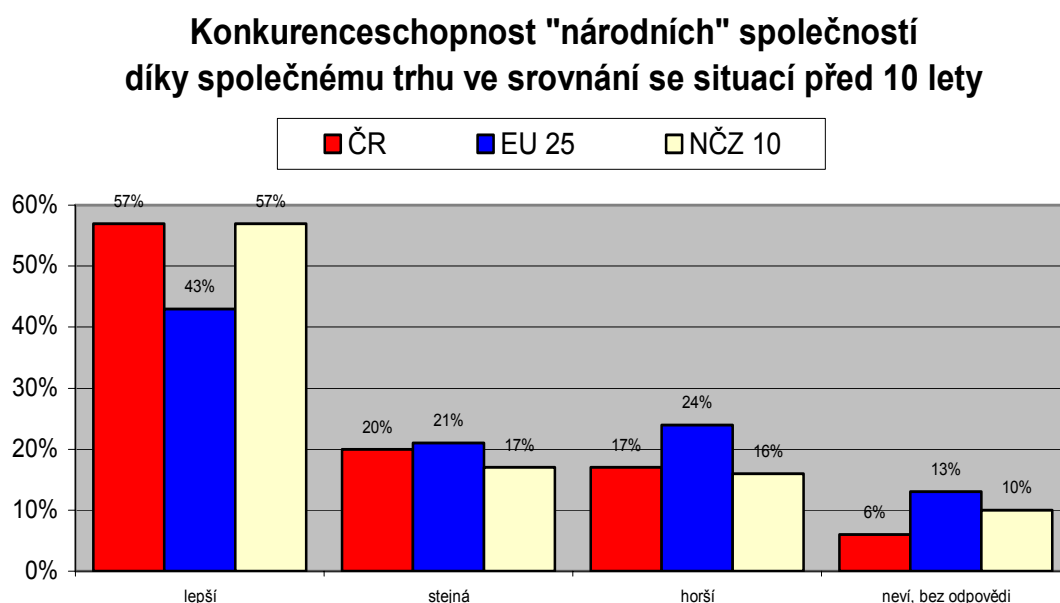
According to 47 percent of Czechs, the situation of the Czech national economy is good while 52 percent consider it to be bad. Compared with spring 2005, positive opinions grew by ten percentage points. This trend is similar to that shown in the EU25 average. Throughout the EU, the opinion that **EU membership has a positive impact on national economies** dominates (56 percent); in the Czech Republic this position is even stronger (63 percent).

Nearly **three-quarters of Czechs (74 percent) think that the European economic situation is good**. The opinion on employment is completely different. In the spring of 2005, 85 percent of Czechs said the situation in this area was bad in their country. One and a half years later, there are slightly fewer negative opinions but **in spite of a substantial drop in the unemployment level in the Czech Republic, the latest figure being 7,4 percent,**

there are still 76 percent of Czechs who think that the situation regarding employment is bad. On average in the EU25, such an opinion is shared by 70 percent of citizens.

European common market, competitiveness and globalization

More than two-thirds of Czechs (69 percent) feel that increased competition due to the European single market has a positive influence. This is 7 percentage points more than in the autumn of 2005. Most Czechs think that, due to the single market, the international competitiveness of Czech companies is now better than 10 years ago. Opinion in the Czech Republic, as well as that in 10 new Member States on average, is more positive than on the EU 25 average.



According to 50 percent of Czechs, globalisation represents a good opportunity for Czech companies, thanks to the opening-up of markets. Only 35 percent think that globalisation means a threat to employment and companies in the Czech Republic. Together with the Estonians, Slovaks, Dutch, Swedes, as well as the Danes, Czechs rank among the optimists. On the other hand, French, Finnish, Luxembourg, Belgian and Cypriot citizens perceive globalisation as a threat to employment and companies in their countries.

To improve the performance of the European economy, European citizens mainly prioritise improvement of education and professional training (59 percent in the Czech Republic). Investment in research and innovation ranks second (53 percent). In the Czech Republic, investment in transport infrastructure ranks third, whereas, in the EU25 as a whole, the facilitation of the creation of companies is in third place.

European competences and European perspectives

Support for development towards a European political union is more frequent than the opinion that membership of the European Union is a good thing. Whereas 51 percent of Czechs think that membership of the European Union is a good thing, 69 percent support development towards a European political union. This is 6 percentage points more than in the autumn of 2005 and even 10 percentage points more compared with the end of 2004.

European citizens recommend decisions in several areas should be made jointly within the European Union rather than by national governments. **Most often, people prefer “European” decision making in “security” areas such as fighting terrorism and crime, defence and foreign affairs.** Similar opinions were shown on scientific and technological research, as well as protecting the environment. In all these areas, almost two-thirds of Czechs prefer decisions made jointly within the European Union. At EU25 level, opinions are similar.

A majority of Czechs also prefer decisions at European Union level in the areas of immigration, consumer protection, support for regions facing economic difficulties and energy. The same applies in the EU25 as a whole except for consumer protection. Nevertheless, those who prefer decisions to be made by national governments in these areas are more numerous. In autumn 2005, competition was also included in this group. Since that time, support for decisions about competition being made jointly within the European Union has declined by 5 percentage points.

As to health and social welfare, pensions and mainly taxation, the opinion that decisions should be made by national governments clearly dominates both in the Czech Republic and in the EU25 as a whole.

In the EU25 average, a large majority of people approve of a common defence and security policy and a common foreign policy among European Union Member States (in the Czech Republic, this is 86 percent and 68 percent respectively.) **Nearly two-thirds of EU25 citizens also support a European Monetary Union with one single currency, the euro, as well as a constitution for the European Union** (in the case of the latter, Czechs are slightly less in favour: 56 percent).

Main EU priorities

According to Czech public opinion, the **top priorities of the European Union are those concerning social welfare: fighting poverty and social exclusion** (45 percent in the Czech Republic) **and fighting unemployment** (36 percent). These priorities are followed by maintaining peace and security in Europe (31 percent), protecting the environment (27 percent) as well as fighting terrorism (27 percent). Less often, fighting organised crime (16 percent) or fighting organised crime and drug trafficking (13 percent) is preferred. Fighting poverty, social exclusion and unemployment also rank first and second in the EU25.

As in the past, **less than one-fifth of European citizens rank among the top three priorities of the European Union, getting closer to European citizens, for example by giving them more information about the European Union, its policies and its institutions.** This outcome confirms that the Plan D (democracy, dialogue and discussion) has not really been welcomed by the European public. In the Czech Republic, this task ranks among important priorities of the European Union even less frequently (14 percent). Reforming the institutions of the European Union and the way they work, welcoming new member countries and asserting the political and diplomatic importance of the European Union around the world traditionally belong to the least preferred EU priorities in the Czech Republic.

In the countries which have not ratified the **European Constitution** yet, Eurobarometer measured the level of agreement with this document. In the Czech Republic, there are now 8 percentage points more people who support European Constitution. **The pros-cons ratio equals 5 to 3 with exactly 50 percent giving their support.** The situation in the average of all the European countries which have not ratified the European Constitution yet is similar.

Compared with autumn 2005, there are now 7 percentage points more Czechs who believe that a European Constitution is necessary to ensure that the European Institutions work well (55 percent). Thus, Czech public opinion has come closer to the EU25 average (61 percent).

EU enlargement

Two-thirds of Czechs support the further enlargement of the European Union to include other countries in future years (7 percentage points more than a half year ago). The same opinion is shared by only 40 percent of the people in the EU25 on average.

Like in other Member States, **the most welcome future EU members would be Switzerland, Norway and Iceland** (supported by at least 80 percent in the Czech Republic). **Four Czechs out of five would welcome the accession of Croatia and two-thirds that of Bulgaria.** Accession of Montenegro is supported by 54 percent of Czechs, that of any other country by just a minority. **Support for Turkish and Albanian EU membership is below one-third of the Czech population.** Support for Turkish membership has been declining over the long term in the EU25.

In the EU25, in general, most people think that to join the European Union in about ten years, Turkey will have to systematically respect human rights (an 85 percent EU25 average) and to significantly improve the state of its economy (77 percent). In the Czech Republic, such opinions are even more frequent. Three-quarters of Czechs, 11 percentage points more than on the EU25 average, are afraid that Turkey's joining could risk favouring immigration to more developed countries of the European Union.

Involvement of citizens in European affairs

Just **one-third of Czechs (34 percent) understand how the European Union works.** There has not been any change since autumn 2005. Neither Plan D, nor the communication strategy of the Czech government has given rise to any substantial change in this direction. The EU25 average stands at 43 percent, two percentage points more than last year.

Eurobarometer reports repeatedly show that only a few Czechs share the opinion that their voice counts in the European Union. **Just 24 percent agree that their voice counts, with the EU25 average being twice as high (34 percent).** Together with the United Kingdom, Italy, Estonia and Latvia, the Czech Republic ranks among the countries showing the lowest percentage of people who feel that their voice counts in the EU. Even fewer Czechs feel very much involved in European affairs (14 percent).

Values and Value orientations of citizens

A large majority of European citizens agree that nowadays there is too much tolerance and criminals should be punished more severely. In this respect, the Czechs are less strict with 70 percent agreement compared with the EU25 average of 85 percent. In other issues like free competition being the best guarantee for economic prosperity and the State intervening too much in our lives, the differences between the Czech Republic and the EU25 average is small; in both cases, about two-thirds of people agree.

Peace, respect for human life, law in the broad sense of the word, tolerance and democracy rank among the most important values of the European citizens. In people's minds, some of them characterize the European Union, others – e.g. respect for human life – do not.

As to the value of individual freedom, Eurobarometer showed a big difference between the Czechs (Individual freedom ranks among the top values of 37 percent of them) and the EU25

average (22 percent). In any event, this value characterizes the European Union only according to 15 percent of Czechs and 10 percent of all EU25 citizens.