

EUROBAROMETER 66.1

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

AUTUMN 2006

NATIONAL REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ESTONIA

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Introduction

This summary is based on the results of **Standard Eurobarometer 66.1** that was conducted between **6 September and October 1 2006 in 25 European Union Member States**, two accession countries (Romania and Bulgaria), two candidate countries (Croatia and Turkey) and in the Turkish Cypriot community. This executive summary presents the main results for Estonia and compares them with average opinions in the 25 member states and, in some cases, with those of the new and old member states as groupings. The main purpose of the survey was to map opinions and attitudes associated with the EU. Most of the topics were also covered in previous Standard Eurobarometer surveys which have been carried out in Estonia twice a year since autumn 2004. This allows us to highlight changes in attitudes, where they are relevant.

In Estonia, the fieldwork was carried out from 8 September to October 2 2006. In total, 1000 respondents were interviewed, 998 of whom had Estonian citizenship. When interpreting the results, it has to be kept in mind that the target group of the survey were people who were citizens 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).

Eurobarometer 66 reveals the **growing satisfaction** of Estonian citizens with life in general and with the development of different aspects in the country more clearly than previous studies. People have got used to the idea that their country is doing well, and, thus, expectations for the future have increased furthermore as far as personal life, economic development or employment in the country are concerned. In the European Union on average, faith in stability dominates. However, compared with Estonia, there is also more pessimism in Europe.

People who are more satisfied with life are also **more positive towards European Union**. It seems that the majority of citizens have accepted membership by now and acknowledge its positive impact on the Estonian economy, employment, living standards and agriculture. There is general positive approval for **greater openness towards single market, as well as globalisation**: these processes are viewed as bringing more advantages than disadvantages. On average, older member states are noticeably more cautious towards the single market, as well as globalisation, associating them with deteriorating situation in their economies and employment.

Estonian citizens also associate the general good development of the country with increasing personal as well as family-related wellbeing. The European Union is clearly considered to have an important role in this. However, the share of people who have **personally benefited** from opportunities provided by the EU is still limited. A majority of citizens claim to have benefited from greater variety of goods from other EU countries and from freedom of movement (simplified conditions for travelling, studying or working in other member states) but rather fewer feel they have benefited from other rights of European citizens, such as consumer rights. Estonian citizens have benefited less than new member states on average.

Strong support for the European Union manifests itself also in **support for several important EU policies**, and, above all, support for a common defence and security policy and foreign policy. Support is somewhat weaker for the European Constitution. The majority of citizens believe that the constitution is necessary but they would like the current draft to be renegotiated. The most difficult

aspect for citizens is acceptance of a common monetary union: the introduction of the euro is associated with various fears.

The climate of opinion at national level

- **Satisfaction with life in general** has experienced a considerable increase during the last half year. The level of satisfaction, which had been stable at close to 70% since autumn 2004, has now increased by 9 percentage points to 79%, thus reaching the level of the EU average. This increase varies depending on age and a gap between older and younger people still remains. The reasons for this lie in Estonia's recent history with the end of Soviet era bringing to an end the careers of many people, especially those who were middle-aged at that time. Growing satisfaction can be explained by rapid economic growth that has been accompanied by increasing incomes, as well as declining unemployment. However, it is expected that levels of satisfaction with life should remain stable at the current level in the future.
- The majority of citizens find **the economic situation, employment and the environment** in Estonia to be good: 81% in the case of the economic situation, 60% in the case of employment and 66% in the case of the environment respectively. Satisfaction with developments in those areas has increased gradually since autumn 2004. However, a majority of citizens do not see the economic success to have been transformed into increased **social welfare**: 60% of them find the social welfare situation to be poor. Estonia stands out on the background of European average, where majority of people see the situation in economy and employment in rather grim tones.
- An increasing share of Estonian citizens is **positive about the future**. Half of them believe that the next 12 months will be better as regards their personal life in general, the economic situation of the country and the employment situation. Their personal job situation is expected to remain the same by 47% and to improve by 31%. In the case of households' economic situation, 45% of citizens expect an improvement and a further 45% expect things to remain the same. On average, only 6% of citizens expect the future to be worse as regards these different areas of life.
- Despite the fact that people evaluate the situation in different areas of life very highly, only 53% of them are convinced that **things are moving in right direction in Estonia**. Around 1/3 of citizens hesitate: 22% believe that things are not moving either in a right or in a wrong direction and 7% cannot estimate the developments in Estonia. The attitudes towards the European Union are somewhat similar: 49% of Estonians believe that things are moving in the right direction in the EU but only 10% of them, compared with an average of 18% of EU25 citizens, believe that things are going in the wrong direction in the EU.
- The top five of the **main issues Estonia is facing**, according to its citizens, have remained the same over the last two years. However, the ranking of problems has changed somewhat. While **crime** still occupies the first position (cited by 45% of citizens), **inflation** and **unemployment** have become less significant. 30% of citizens mention inflation (a year ago, the figure was 42%). Unemployment, which is ranked in first place in Europe on average (cited by 40% of European citizens), is raised by only 13% of Estonian citizens. At the same time, the **health care system** poses problems for an increasing share of citizens: there is an

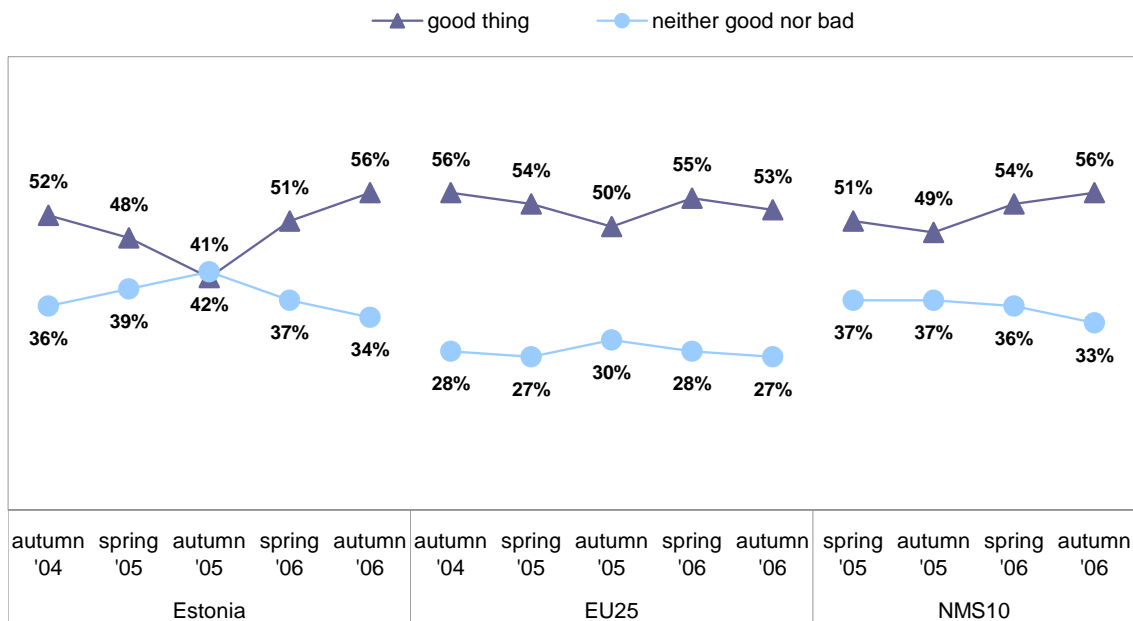
increase from 21% a year ago to 33% in autumn 2006. The top five also includes concern about the **economic situation**; however, only 16% of citizens mention it compared with 23% of citizens in EU on average.

- **The most trusted institutions** in Estonia are television (75%), the armed forces (74%) and radio (71%). In the European Union on average, citizens trust the army (69%) the most, followed by the police (64%) and the radio (63%). Of the national political institutions, **the government** is the most trusted: 53% of citizens trust it. Trust in the **parliament** is traditionally lower at 41%.

Only 46% of citizens trust the **printed media** – a figure that is much less than in the case of television or radio. 42% of citizens trust the **Internet** and 38% do not know what to think about its trustworthiness. In general, younger people are able to evaluate the trustworthiness of the Internet better and trust it more than older people.

- **Support for EU membership** is increasing again. It dropped in autumn 2005 when it was at its lowest level over the past two years. Discussions about the future of the EU, provoked by failed referenda in Netherlands and France, may be seen as one cause of this.

QA7a. Support of the EU membership 2004-2006



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

- An increasing share of people acknowledge **benefits stemming from EU membership** for the whole of Estonia: their share has increased from 56% in spring 2005 to 72% in autumn 2006.

- Approximately 3/4 of citizens believe that the **EU plays a positive role in the world** as regards environmental protection, the growth of world economy, as well as peace in the world. 70% consider that the EU role is positive in fighting terrorism and 62% that it is positive in fighting poverty in the world. European citizens, on average, are somewhat more sceptical regarding the positive role played by the EU in the world arena.

Economy and employment

- A majority of Estonian citizens believes that the **European Union has a positive impact on their country's economy** (81% of citizens agree), **standard of living** (74%), **employment** (70%), and **agriculture** (62%). European citizens, on average, are considerably more pessimistic as regards the good influence played by the EU, particularly as far as the economy is concerned (56% agree that it has a positive impact) and employment (38% agree that it has a positive impact).
- Estonian citizens have **very positive attitudes towards the impact of the single market**. 73% of them believe that **competition in the services sector** resulting from the single market has been positive. This attitude dominates in the new member states: six out of the top ten member states where the impact of the single market is perceived the most positively are new member states. Also, 78% of Estonian citizens find that **single market has increased the international competitiveness of Estonian enterprises compared with the situation ten years ago**. This takes Estonia to the top of the list of the EU member states followed by Lithuania (68%) and Denmark (67%). Clearly, this opinion is also shaped by the fact that, ten years ago, the experience Estonia had in pursuing a market economy was still poor and the competitiveness of enterprises was inevitably weaker.
- In addition to the single market, slightly more than half of citizens consider **globalisation to be positive**: 59% of citizens believe that it has a positive impact on economic growth in Estonia and 51% believe that it has a positive impact on employment. All Europeans, on average, as well as citizens in the new member states, are less convinced about the positive impacts of globalisation, particularly as regards employment.
- Like their satisfaction with the economic situation in Estonia, Estonians believe that the **European economy in general is doing well**: 82% of them find the situation of the European economy to be very good or rather good and only 4% find the situation to be the opposite. In general, respondents in the new member states tend to be much more positive as regards the situation of European economy than those in the older member states.
- An overwhelming majority of citizens believes that the **development of the European economy needs the improvement of education and occupational training** (72%). Less individual-centred solutions are mentioned less frequently: 38% mention investing in research and innovation, 37% in the more efficient use of energy and 37% investing in transport infrastructure. Only 5% agree with increasing the legal number of working hours.

European political union

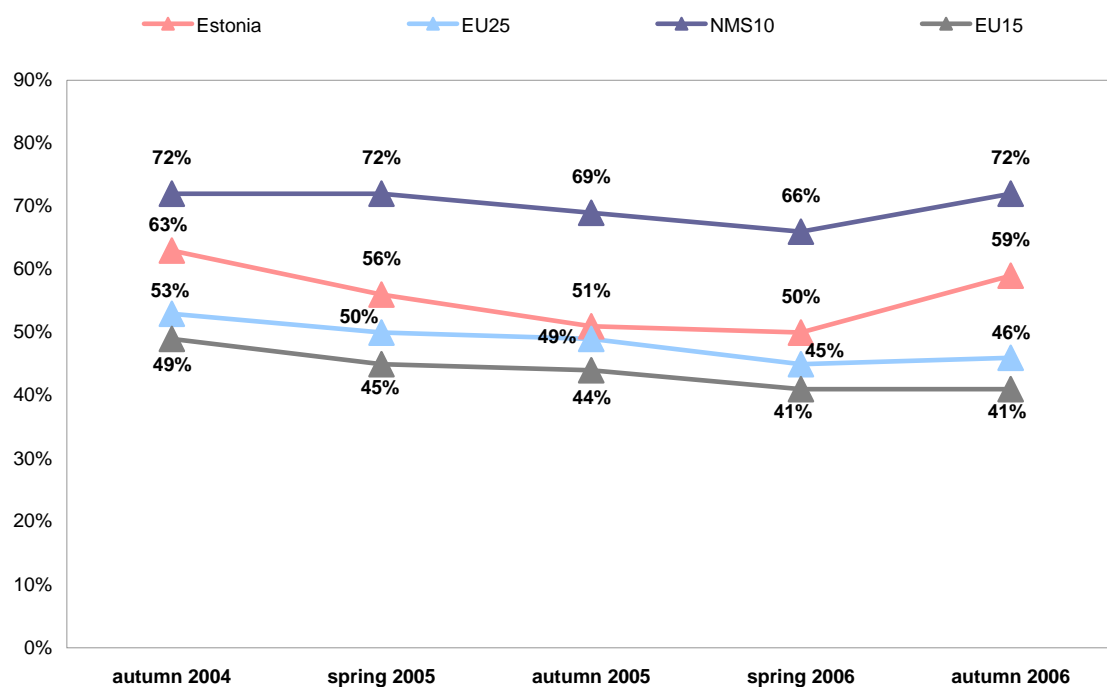
- **Support** for the political unification of Europe **is again stronger than previously**. While support decreased from 62% in autumn 2004 to 53% in autumn 2005, it has now returned to 59%.
- At least 2/3 of citizens find that **decisions** regarding taxation, pensions and the educational system should be **made exclusively by the Estonian government**. More than half of citizens also support national decision-making in following areas: consumer protection, fighting unemployment, healthcare and social welfare, immigration, and agriculture and fisheries. In all those areas, the share of people who would leave those questions to the Estonian government to decide has increased approximately 10 percentage points over the past year. The greatest support for **common decision-making at European Union level** is for fighting terrorism (89% consider it should be subject of common decision-making) and scientific and technological research (76%). Also, decisions regarding defence and foreign affairs, energy issues, support to regions in economic difficulty, environmental protection, fighting crime and competition should be made jointly at EU level.
- As in previous years, Estonians see the main **priority of the EU** to be to fight poverty and social exclusion (mentioned by 53% in 2006). However, the ranking of other priorities has changed somewhat. Maintaining peace and security in Europe occupies the second place now, instead of fourth place where it was a year ago, with 39% of citizens considering it should be prioritized. In third place, citizens wish the attention focused on environmental protection and, in fourth place, fighting unemployment (which was in second place just a year ago).
- **Support for the main EU policies** remains strong also compared with a year ago. Support is strongest for a **common defence and security policy** with 82% of citizens in favour of it. 2/3 of citizens also support a **common foreign policy**. In both cases, the attitudes of Estonian citizens overlap with the European average.
- As regards **integrating Europe faster in certain groups of countries**, Estonian citizens are surprisingly in favour: 58% support the idea (EU average: 40%). Support has increased by 5 percentage points when compared with autumn 2005.
- The **European Constitution**, on the contrary, is supported less than in Europe on average with 55% of citizens in favour of it. However, Estonians feel that the European Constitution is necessary (66% of citizens believe it would facilitate the functioning of the EU institutions) but 58% of them consider that it should be renegotiated (the Estonian Parliament has already ratified the Constitution).
- Support for the European monetary union and the **euro** is weakest: only 49% of citizens are in favour of it. Other surveys show that the greatest fear associated with the introduction of the euro relates to inflation.
- Citizens have **personally benefited from greater variety of goods from other European countries (69%) as well as from less border controls when travelling (67%)**. Half of them have benefited from working or studying abroad; however, their share probably also includes

more indirect benefits (e.g. friends or relatives working/studying abroad). 42% of citizens have benefited from **consumer rights** – a figure that is considerably less than in the EU on average (54%). Estonians have also enjoyed the **rights of European citizenship** less than other EU citizens: 42% compared to the EU average of 52%. 36% have benefited from the right to bring a case to the EU Court of Justice and only 23% have benefited from the **euro**. The euro has brought along more benefits for younger (and also more mobile) people aged 15-39, as well as to self-employed people and those who work in managerial positions.

Support for EU enlargement

- Support for EU enlargement in Estonia **has increased again**, although is still lower than in the other new member states on average. Support is particularly strong in new member states while older member states are clearly growing tired of enlargement. In Estonia, younger people, especially students, are more positive towards further enlargement.

QA25. Support to EU enlargement 2004-2006



- In regard to the accession of **Bulgaria** and **Romania**, Estonians support the former more than the latter: 67% of citizens support the accession of Bulgaria and 56% the accession of

Romania. As for Romania, 56% of citizens support the idea of Croatian accession (support has increased by 7 percentage points over the past half year).

- Support for **Turkey** is low: only 26% of citizens support its accession to the EU (28% in EU25). A majority of people agree that in order for Turkey to accede to EU in 10 years' time, it should systematically respect human rights (62% agree with the statement) and improve its economic situation (77%). 77% of Estonians are afraid of the growing immigration of Turks to Europe after Turkey becoming a member. Still, according to 58% of citizens, Turkey partially belongs to Europe and 46% acknowledge its historical connections with Europe. Nevertheless, 65% of citizens find cultural differences to be too large in order for Turkey to join the EU. Attitudes of Estonian citizens towards Turkey's EU accession have been stable over the past year.

Important values

- The most important values for Estonians from the twelve surveyed are **peace** (52%), **respect for human life** (49%) and **human rights** (39%). This ranking overlaps with the European average. The least important value is religion (4%).
- The values that **represent the European Union** the best, according to Estonian citizens, are **human rights** (39%), **democracy** (38%) and **peace** (36%).
- 48% of citizens consider the **member states to be close to each other in terms of shared values**. However, only 1% considers the member states to be very close. 38% of citizens do not find that member states share many values.
- **While citizens understand the way the EU functions better than a year ago, they do not feel themselves to be more involved in European affairs.** While, a year ago, 39% of citizens claimed that they understand the functioning of the EU, in autumn 2006, 51% of citizens made this claim. However, only one out of five citizens feels they are involved in European issues.