

EUROBAROMETER 66

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

POLAND

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The following text presents the climate of public opinion in Poland regarding the situation in the country and its EU membership. It is based on the results of the Eurobarometer survey (wave 66.1, conducted between 6th September and 10th October 2006 on a representative sample of the Polish population aged 15+). Existing trends, here only briefly presented, are described in more detail in the Polish country report on this survey.

1. Public opinion in Poland: context

- Poles are increasingly more satisfied with the life they lead

Life satisfaction is increasing steadily among Poles. Three years ago, 63% of respondents declared that they were satisfied. In spring 2006, this proportion reached 72%. Now, almost three-quarters of Poles (74%) are satisfied with the life they lead.

Hungarians (50%) and Portuguese (62%) are the least satisfied with their lives, while Swedes (98%), Danes (97%), Dutch (95%) and Finns (94%) are the most satisfied.

- Poles believe unemployment is the most important problem facing their country at the moment

Two-thirds of respondents (66%) consider unemployment to be the most important problem facing Poland today. The healthcare system, which is next highest in this ranking, was chosen by 27% of the poll, followed by the economic situation (25%), crime (20%) and inflation (14%).

Unemployment is also one of the most important problems, according to the citizens of other EU Member States, but in Europe as a whole (40%), it is mentioned by a lower percentage of respondents than in Poland. Apart from this, there were no significant differences between Poles and Europeans in general as to the ranking of the most important problems. The next positions in the ranking are occupied by crime (23%), the economic situation (23%) and the healthcare system (16%).

- Poles believe that EU membership has a good effect on the Polish economy and labour market

The vast majority of Poles (79%) believe that membership of the EU has a positive influence on the Polish economy. This proportion is higher than the EU average (56%). The positive influence of membership is recorded most often among the Irish (89%), Estonians (81%) and Danes (80%). At the same time, the Hungarians (52%), Portuguese and French (both 49%) are the nationalities that most frequently consider this influence to be negative.

Over a half of Poles (52%) also think that EU membership positively influences the employment situation – a figure that exceeds the EU average (38%).

- Trust in the government, the parliament and political parties in Poland is the lowest in the EU

The level of trust in the government, the parliament and political parties is exceptionally low in Poland. Only 7% of Poles trust political parties, 15% the government and 11% the national parliament. Compared with spring 2006, trust in the government, the parliament and political parties has fallen. This decrease was especially significant for the government (from 22% to 15%).

- The international role of the EU is considered positive by the majority of Poles

73% of Poles think that the European Union tends to play a positive role in the protection of the environment. The role of the EU in the fight against terrorism is considered positive by 71%, in peace in the world by 68%, in the growth of the world economy by 67% and in the fight against poverty in the world by 57%. It is worth mentioning that public opinion in the majority of the new Member States evaluates the role of the EU somewhat higher than respondents in the old Member States.

2. Membership of the European Union

- The majority of Poles are satisfied with EU membership

62% of Poles think that EU membership is a good thing. The contrary opinion is shared only by 6% of the public. One in three Poles (31%) believes that it is neither a good nor a bad thing.

The percentage of people who consider Poland's EU membership a good thing (42%) was lowest in spring 2004 when Poland was about to join the EU. Since that time, a gradual increase in this indicator has been observed. Poles evaluate EU membership more highly than the European average (53% consider that it is a good thing). EU membership is perceived as a good thing most often in Ireland (78%), Luxembourg (74%) and the Netherlands (72%), and least often in the United Kingdom (34%), Austria (36%), Hungary (39%) and Finland (39%).

- Respondents believe that Poland has benefited from being a member of the EU

A considerable majority of Poles (73%) consider that Poland has benefited from accession to the EU. Only one in six (16%) respondents has a contrary view. The number of Poles who feel Poland has benefited from its EU membership has risen significantly during the last year – from 64% to 73%. This is the continuation of an upward trend which started when Poland became an EU member (in spring 2004). Compared with other European nations (the EU average is 54%), public opinion distinguishes itself by a high percentage of answers that Poland has benefited. However, of all the Member States' citizens, it is the Irish (87%) who most often consider that their country had benefited from EU membership.

- Trust in the European Union and its institutions remains at a high level in Poland

The EU is trusted by 58% of Poles. This level has not changed in comparison with last spring but it is significantly higher than in autumn 2005 (52%). Trust in the EU is also considerably higher than in spring 2004 when Poland was about to join the EU (33%). Moreover, Poland is one of the countries where trust in the EU is high. The European average in this case accounts for 45%. The European Union is least trusted in Britain (26%) and most often in Slovenia (70%).

Similarly, as in the European Union as a whole, the European institutions are highly trusted by Poles. 59% of those interviewed trust the European Parliament, 58% - the European Commission, 52% - the Council of the EU and 54% - the European Ombudsman. Compared with the situation half a year ago, trust in the European institutions has risen, especially in the case of the European Commission - from 53% to 58%. Trust in the European Parliament and in the European Commission is higher in Poland than the EU average where the figures are 52% and 48% respectively.

3. Europeans and the European Union

- The majority of Poles have positive associations with the EU

For more than one in ten Poles (11%), the EU conjures up a very positive image and for a further 47% a fairly positive one. Only 7% of Poles have negative associations with the EU and one in three (35%) have neutral associations. In Poland, there are more people with positive associations with the European Union than in Europe as a whole (46%). Among the citizens of other European countries, the EU has a positive image most often for the Irish (73%) and the least often for the British (28%).

- According to Poles, democracy is the value which best represents the European Union

According to Poles, democracy is the value which best represents the European Union – it was chosen by 46% of respondents. Next in this ranking are human rights (38%) and peace (29%). The

same values are cited by Europeans in general: democracy (38%), human rights (38%) and peace (36%).

- Poles perceive themselves as Europeans more often than other EU citizens

17% of Poles often think of themselves as Europeans and 48% sometimes do so. At the same time, as many as 33% of those interviewed never think of themselves as Europeans.

Particularly noticeable is the fact that respondents are proud to be Poles (53% very and 38% fairly) than being Europeans (16% very and 59% fairly). However, the survey shows that Poles, more often than citizens in other Member States (54%), consider themselves Europeans and they are more often proud to be Europeans (74% compared with 59%).

- More than a half of Poles claim that they understand how the EU works

More than half (59%) of Poles claim that they understand how the EU works. In this respect, Poles differ significantly from other Europeans (43%) and the percentage of those certain that they understand how the EU works is one of the highest in the whole Union. Only in Luxembourg (65%), is this figure higher than in Poland.

- Almost every Pole has heard about the European Parliament and the European Commission

Awareness of the European Parliament and the European Commission is almost universal in Poland. Nine in ten Poles have heard about them (with scores of 92% and 90% respectively). Awareness of the Council of the European Union and the European Ombudsman is much lower, although the majority of respondents have heard about them – 75% and 72% respectively. In Poland, awareness of specific European institutions is higher than the EU average. In comparison with the previous waves of the survey, awareness of the EU institutions has risen.

- Only one-third of Poles believes that their voice counts in the European Union

More than one in three Poles (36%) believes that their voice counts in the EU. The feeling of influence on the EU affairs is quite low in Poland but it does not differ significantly from the European average (34%). The percentage of the citizens who think that their voice counts in Europe is highest in Luxembourg (56%), the Netherlands (55%), Belgium (53%) and France (51%). On the other hand, Estonians, Italians, Latvians (21%) and the British (22%) tend to be those who least frequently believe that their voice counts in the EU.

- The sense of involvement in European affairs is very low in Poland

Although Poles rate their knowledge about how the EU works relatively highly, only 15% of them feel that they are involved in European affairs. The European average is a little higher (19%). Danes (29%) tend most often to be involved in contrast to Cypriots (8%), Finns (9%) and the British (10%).

- More than one in three Poles never looks for information about the EU

Poles quite rarely look for information about the European Union on their own initiative. Only 5% of Poles look for it often and 24% sometimes do so. More than one in three citizens in Poland (37%) never do so and a further 34% do so rarely. Nevertheless, the percentage of citizens of other Member States who sometimes look for information about the European Union is similar (37%).

- The majority of Poles think that information about the EU is easily accessible

For the majority of Poles (59%), it is easy to find information about the European Union, its policies and institutions. However, a quarter of Poles (24%) hold the opposite opinion. At the same time, finding information about the EU is easier for Poles than for Europeans in general (48%).

- Interest in European and domestic affairs in Poland is the highest in the EU

82% of respondents state that they are interested in Polish domestic affairs. Interest in the situation of the European Union is slightly lower – it is claimed by 71% of Poles. It is worth mentioning that

interest in domestic and European affairs is in Poland significantly higher than the corresponding European averages – 58% and 44% respectively.

4. Support for the European Constitution and different forms of cooperation within the EU

- Poles are enthusiastic about the European Constitution

Almost two-thirds of Poles (63%) are in favour of the European Constitution and this figure is the highest in the EU. It is also higher than last spring when the Constitution received support from 56% of Poles. On average, in the EU, (in countries which had not yet decided whether or not to accept it) the Constitutional Treaty is supported by 53% of citizens. It is worth mentioning that support for this document has also risen in the Netherlands (59% - an increase of 6 percentage points), and in France (56% - an increase of 5 percentage points) – the two countries that rejected the Constitution in 2005.

- A little more than a half of Poles support a European Monetary Union

A little more than a half of Poles (52%) support a European Monetary Union with one single currency – the euro. This figure is less than the European Union average (60%). Support for European Monetary Union is lowest in Britain (29%) and highest in Ireland (87%), Belgium (85%), Luxembourg (83%) and Slovenia (83%).

- The vast majority of Poles are in favour of a common foreign policy among the EU Member States

Over three-quarters of Poles (78%) are in favour of a common foreign policy among the EU Member States, towards other countries. This is one of the highest figures recorded in the EU. This figure is only higher in Greece, Slovenia (both 80%) and Cyprus (78%). Support for the idea of a common foreign policy is lowest in Britain (48%) and Sweden (51%) and the EU average amounts to 68%.

- The significant majority of Poles support a common defence and security policy

As many as 84% of Poles support a common defence and security policy. This percentage is one of the highest in the European Union (the EU average is 75%). It is only higher in Cyprus (89%) and Belgium (88%). On the other hand, support for this idea is lowest in Ireland (52%), Sweden (56%) and Britain (57%).

- Six in ten Poles support the development towards a European political union

Six in ten Poles (60%) are in favour of the development towards a European political union. This percentage is somewhat higher than the average for all the EU countries (54%). A political union has greatest support in Slovakia and Slovenia (both 77%) and Greece (73%). The lowest percentage of respondents in favour of political union is in Britain (31%) and Finland (36%).

- According to Poles, decisions concerning European defence policy should be taken at the European Union level

According to Poles, decisions concerning European defence policy should be taken by the European Union – this opinion is shared by the highest proportion of respondents - 43%. Less than one in three Poles (29%) would rather leave decisions to NATO and 18% think that decisions should be taken by national governments. The averages for the European Union as a whole tend somewhat more often to favour decisions concerning European defence policy being taken by the European Union (49%) but less often by NATO (17%).

5. Poles on the enlargement of the EU

- Polish support for the EU enlargement is the highest in Europe

A substantial share of Polish respondents support the idea of EU enlargement (76%). Poland's average figure is the highest recorded anywhere in the EU.

Poles are most favourable to the inclusion of Switzerland and Norway in the European Union (both 87%). Support for the membership of Iceland (79%), Croatia (75%), Bulgaria (71%) and Ukraine (69%) is only slightly lower. They are most averse to the accession of Turkey. Although this is supported by 40%, 42% are against it.

- The majority of Poles think that Turkey partly belongs to Europe but they underline significant cultural differences between Turkey and the EU

The majority (73%) of Poles agree with the statement that Turkey partly belongs to Europe due to its geography. Furthermore, 61% agree that it belongs to Europe by its history. Nevertheless, over a half of Poles (56%) consider cultural differences between Turkey and the EU Member States to be too significant to allow its accession to the EU.

6. Opinions of Europeans on various statements

- More than a half of Poles think that the State intervenes too much in their lives

More than a half of Poles (56%) agree with the statement that the State intervenes too much in their lives. However, this percentage is lower than the European average (63%). The highest proportion of people who share this opinion is found among the Hungarians (73%), Slovenes (72%) and the Swedes and British (both 71%). Estonians (27%) and Latvians (36%) are those who least often agree with this statement.

- The vast majority of Poles agree that criminals should be punished more severely

Nearly every Pole (88%) agrees that criminals should be punished more severely. This percentage does not differ much from the European average (85%). This view is most often shared in Cyprus (97%) and the Czech Republic (95%). Those who are most frequently against punishing criminals more severely are the Dutch (27%) and the Austrians and French (both 18%).

- Peace, human rights and respect for human life are the most important values for Poles

The most important values for Poles (amongst those listed in the questionnaire) are peace (51%), human rights (50%) and respect for human life (46%). The average EU citizen agrees with Poles as far as the three most important values are concerned. They cite: peace (52%), human rights (41%) and respect for human life (43%).

Conclusion

An analysis of the results of the latest Eurobarometer survey allows us to distinguish two basic trends in Polish public opinion. The first is the growing support for Poland's membership of the European Union and for further integration. The second is a steady improvement in the mood in the country.

Since Poland has joined the European Union, the percentage of Poles who believe that EU membership is something good has been systematically rising (from 42% in spring 2004 to 62% now). Similarly, the number of respondents who think that Poland has benefited from membership has been increasing (from 50% in spring 2004 to 73% now). Trust in the EU and its institutions has been gradually rising (an increase from 33% in spring 2004 to 58% now). Poles are in favour of

further integration: a common foreign policy, a common defence and security policy, a European political union, the European Constitution and further enlargement of the EU.

A steady improvement in the way Poles evaluate the situation in their country has also been observed. Satisfaction with life is increasing and Poles look towards the future more and more optimistically (in spring 2004, 63% of Poles stated that they were satisfied with their life; now, this percentage accounts for 74%). The improvement is visible especially in their assessment of the economic and employment situation (unemployment is still considered the biggest problem facing Poland today but it is cited by 66% of respondents compared with 78% in spring 2006). However, trust in Polish institutions: the government, the parliament and political parties is still exceptionally low.