

EUROBAROMETER 66

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

FALL 2006

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TURKEY

The survey was requested and coordinated by the Directorate General Communication.

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

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.

Satisfaction with Life

The percentage of people expressing general satisfaction with their lives has slightly increased in the European Union (EU) Member States since the autumn of 2004 and is at 82% in autumn 2006.

Despite ups and downs in the overall level of satisfaction with their lives, satisfaction among the Turkish public remains about 10 percentage points below that of the EU. From autumn 2004 to spring 2005, this ratio has increased by 2 percentage points to 73% in Turkey and remained at this level throughout 2005. However, in spring 2006, it fell to about 70% and, in autumn 2006, it once again reached 71%.

Expectations for the future

The Turkish public is consistently more optimistic about the future 12 months on all financial and economic evaluations than the EU public.

Looking into the next 12 months, the overall optimism of public opinion back in spring 2006 seems to have disappeared. 38% expect overall economic conditions in the country to deteriorate, while only 27% expect them to improve. Back in spring 2006, however, optimists were 6 percentage points above the pessimists at around 34%. The pessimistic group is greatest concerning the expectations over the next 12 months regarding work conditions and employment. In this case, 42% expect work and employment conditions to deteriorate while only 24% expect them to improve.

Trust in institutions

As an overall trend, the level of trust in Turkish institutions is considerably higher than their counterparts in the EU member countries. The only exception is the case of labour unions for which the overall EU level of trust is slightly higher than that in Turkey. The government in Turkey is trusted by 63% while the overall average for the EU member states is around 30%. Similarly, the Parliament or the Turkish Grand National Assembly is trusted by 64%, while its counterparts in the EU Member States are trusted only by 33%.

Trust in the EU, however, remains lower in Turkey (41%) than in EU Member States (45%).

The country's most important problems

When asked to indicate the two most important problems of the country, differences were observed between Turkey and the EU Member States. According to Turkish public opinion, the two foremost problems are unemployment and terrorism, followed, with a large gap, by economic conditions, crime, inflation and education. While the top priority has not changed since last year, it seems that terrorism has been constantly rising in salience in the minds of the public. In autumn 2004, terrorism was cited by 18% and then increased to 29% in spring 2005 and then to 41% in autumn 2005. In spring 2006, terrorism was cited by 43% and, in autumn 2006, by 52% as amongst the top two problems facing the country. In the EU Member States, terrorism was picked by only 15% as amongst the top two problems. Inflation however, is not seen among the top two important problems facing either Turkey or the EU Member States in general. However, considerable variations from country to country are observed in this priority list of problems.

Evaluations of EU membership

In autumn 2006, the ratio of those stating that membership would be a “good thing” has stopped its continuous decline in Turkey since early 2004. In spring 2006, 44% (55% in autumn 2005) of the Turkish public indicated that membership of the EU would be a “good thing” while 25% (15% in autumn 2005) indicated the opposite. In autumn 2006, however, those who indicated that membership of the EU would be a “good thing” reached 54% which is close to its autumn 2005 level.

As such, those who think membership would be a “good thing” is a larger group than those found only in Croatia. Nevertheless, 63% (68% in autumn 2005 and 51% in spring 2006) of the Turkish public indicated that becoming a member of the EU would be an “advantage” for Turkey.

The overall “image of the EU” is positive for 55% (60% in autumn 2005 and 43% in spring 2006) of the Turkish public.

EU's policy priorities

When asked to choose from a list of actions, the three actions that the European Union should follow in priority, the Turkish public picks fighting unemployment, poverty and terrorism. The EU public does not attach so much importance to fighting terrorism and, instead, emphasizes the fight against organized crime as a priority.

Economy and employment

Questions concerning the economy and employment can be compared with spring 2004 results and the overall trend is that, in many of the cases, there exists a reduction in positive evaluations. For example, when asked to what extent EU membership would be advantageous for agriculture in Turkey, only 56% (64% in spring 2004) said that membership would have a positive impact on Turkish agriculture. Evaluations of a similar positive impact on employment (65% in autumn 2006) and the overall Turkish economy (56% in autumn 2006) are both down from their levels in spring 2004.

Turkish public opinion is no different than that of the overall EU Member States' publics concerning the evaluation of the single European market over the last decade. Only 42% think, in both cases, that the single market has rendered their country's companies more competitive in the international arena. 40% in the EU Member States (36% in Turkey) view globalisation as a good opportunity for their countries' companies.

When asked about what should be done to ameliorate the economic performance in the EU, a large majority emphasized education and training first, and then research and development. The third and fourth priorities are different in the EU Member States and in Turkey. In the EU, the third priority is rendering bureaucratic formalities easier for the establishment of new companies. In next place is increasing energy efficiency. In Turkey, energy efficiency occupies third place, followed by more investment in transportation infrastructure.

It is striking that evaluations of the current state of affairs in the Turkish economy are much worse (62% evaluate the current situation as bad) than is the case for the average of the EU Member States (50% give a bad evaluation).

European Political Union

When asked whether they are for development towards a political union in Europe, 54% of the public in EU Member States are in favour while 55% in Turkey are in favour.

Turkish public opinion approaches decision-making at the level of the EU more favourably for policy areas related to welfare and poverty alleviation but unfavourably for security and foreign affairs. The preferences of public opinion among the EU Member States concerning decisions at the national as opposed to EU level are more varied. However, it is clear that among the Member States common EU-level foreign policy decision-making is regarded much more favourably than is the case for Turkey.

Support for a European Constitution has a comfortable majority in France (66%) and the Netherlands (59%). However, it is below 50% in the United Kingdom, Sweden and Denmark.

Enlargement

Support for EU enlargement is below 50% among the Member States and is barely 50% in Turkey.

Turkey's membership is supported by only 28% of the public among the EU Member States. As such, Turkey has the lowest level of support for EU membership among all other potential members. Although in some Member States, such as Greece, France, Republic of Cyprus, Lithuania and Slovakia, public support for Turkey's membership has slightly increased, in a number of others, it has declined significantly. For example, in Austria, support for Turkey's membership is only 5% and in Germany and in Luxemburg only 16% and 17% respectively.

In evaluations concerning Turkey's potential membership of the EU, it becomes evident that the geographical difference argument is no longer supported by a majority of the public in EU countries. In other words, 56% agree that Turkey geographically belongs partially to Europe. However, a clear majority of about 60% support the view that Turkey's cultural differences with those of EU members are so large as to impede its membership.

Values of European Citizens

Differences in the value systems of the EU Member States and Turkey are apparent in many of the questions asked. For example, political efficacy among the EU public is relatively higher than among the Turkish citizens.

Respect for human life, human rights, democracy and religion are much more important as values in Turkey than in Europe, while tolerance, peace, respect for other cultures and personal satisfaction are more important for the EU public than for the Turkish public.