

EUROBAROMETER 67

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Spring 2007

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BULGARIA

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The spring 2007 Eurobarometer survey samples for the first time “the euroclimate” of Bulgarian public opinion following the country’s accession to the European Union (EU) and shows how Bulgarians are thinking now that they are citizens of the EU. It reveals their evolving attitudes towards key issues relating to European integration, their country’s EU membership and the future of the Union in the context of its 50th anniversary. The analysis also provides a picture of how Bulgarian public opinion compares with the views of citizens in the other Member States, candidate countries and the opinion of the average EU citizen.

One thousand and thirty nine Bulgarians responded to the questions of the Spring Eurobarometer survey, carried out between the 10th of April and the 15th of May 2007 among nearly 30 000 citizens from 30 countries and territories. The Bulgarian sample is homogeneous and, like in all the other countries, it is representative of the opinion of citizens aged 15 and over.

The interviews for the survey in Bulgaria were carried out by TNS BBSS between the 13th and the 26th of April 2007- at the very start of the campaign for the first Bulgarian elections for Members of the European Parliament, and during a period of public debate on the preparations for the use of the EU Structural Funds in Bulgaria.

The national analysis of the data aims to provide a picture of Bulgarian public opinion in the first months after the country’s EU accession against the trends and changes in national and European public opinion, compared with the previous six-month period and since Bulgaria was first included in the Standard Eurobarometer in 2004. The particular focus of comparisons with other countries is to show the opinion of the “average Bulgarian” versus the “average EU” citizen, which includes now for the first time the opinions of Bulgarians. Frequent comparisons are also made with the other new Member States, including Romania - which joined the EU at the same time as Bulgaria.

Bulgarians and the European Union

Of the entire Eurobarometer poll, Bulgarians feel most involved in European affairs, as in the autumn of 2006. Figures for the country show the highest increase (+7 points) and stand at 37%, which is 13 points more than for the average EU citizen and 20 points more than in Romania. With a solid social basis and representation from all strata of the population, this European engagement is in a sharp contrast with the low turn out in the first Bulgarian elections for the European Parliament (28.6%) and may stand as an evidence that the campaign has not succeeded in mobilising fully the electoral potential of all Bulgarians who feel involved in European affairs.

Positive perceptions of the EU are waning, but Bulgaria preserves its position among the countries with the most positive image of the EU. There is a shift by 4 points from positive towards neutral perceptions of the EU in Bulgaria, running against an opposite trend in the EU27 (+6 points). As a result, in the first months following their

country's accession to the EU, six out of ten Bulgarians polled share a positive perception of the Union, which equals the score in Lithuania (59%) and is 7 points higher than the EU average. One in ten Bulgarians has a negative perception of the EU and 4% remain without an opinion, while nearly three of every ten have a neutral image of the EU.

Bulgarians see the European Union as “democratic”, “modern” and “protective” to a much higher extent than the average EU citizen. To the same degree as the Greeks and the Slovenians (78%), and slightly less than the Romanians (82%) who lead the results for the entire poll, Bulgarians are among those with the greatest conviction concerning the democratic nature of the Union. They also describe the EU as “modern” (76%) to nearly the same degree as the average citizen of the ten New Member States (78%). At least six out of ten Bulgarians agree that the EU is protective, which is 5 points higher than the EU average. At the same time, over half of the Bulgarian poll (54%) – the highest percentage among the Member States - is unable to state an opinion as to whether the EU is **technocratic**. With the lowest figures recorded in the entire Eurobarometer poll, Bulgarians agree that the EU is inefficient (13%), while every second citizen disagrees with this statement. Thus Bulgarians draw a highly positive image of the Union – they subscribe least of all to the negative, and agree the most with the positive descriptions of the EU.

Trust in the European Union is slightly down in both newly acceded countries, Bulgaria and Romania, without compromising the convincing majority in any of them. Mistrust is down by the same degree (2 points), which means that the ‘don’t know’ responses have increased. Upon accession to the EU, Bulgarians and Romanians show some signs of the usual eurofatigue, observed with previous EU enlargements. However, this has not led to euroscepticism. A convincing majority of the citizens in Bulgaria (54%), which is close to the EU average (57%), continues to trust the European Union, a quarter of those interviewed, and more than ever before, are undecided, and a fifth state they do not trust the EU. **In Bulgaria, Romania and three other new Member States, mistrust in the EU is the lowest in the entire Eurobarometer poll.**

Comparing the demographic profile of the trust in the EU among Bulgarians and the average EU citizen reveals some structural differences, which may explain to some extent the diverging trends in the change of their opinions observed for some years. These are related mainly to the occupation and political orientation of the citizens polled. For the average EU citizen the political cleavage does not influence trust in the EU. However, in Bulgaria right-wing citizens (71%) are those who trust the European Union, those in the centre show equal trust with the country's average (54%) and those to the left do not trust the EU, with positive scores 10 points below the Bulgarian average (44%), and negative scores – 5 points above (26%). Both in Bulgaria and in the EU 27, the highest levels of trust are expressed by students and managers and the lowest by pensioners and unemployed. Notable differences in the trust/mistrust figures according to occupation are observed among the self-employed, manual workers and house persons. The latter two groups show higher trust than the average in Bulgaria than is the case for the average EU citizen. Self-employed people in the EU27 trust the Union, while in Bulgaria they do not.

Views on Bulgarian EU Membership

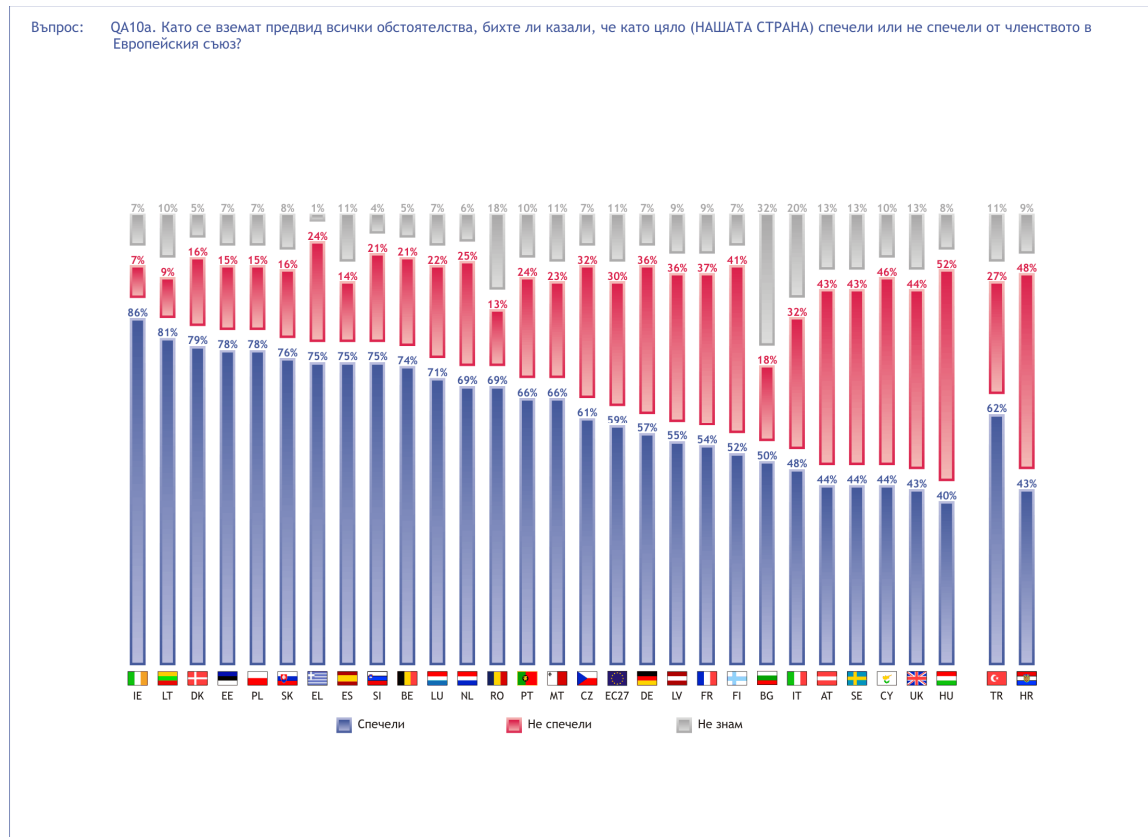
Public support for EU membership remains stable and convincingly high, but it is, for the first time, lower than the EU average, which is 4 points up (59%). Without any change since the 2006 Spring Eurobarometer survey, a majority of 55% Bulgarians believe their country's EU membership is "something good". Demographic analysis shows that this translates into **more business opportunities for entrepreneurs** - mainly for the young and the best educated (73%); **new prospects** – for managers (65%), **possibilities to work abroad** - for the manual workers (64%) and **a better quality of life** for house persons (62%). Neutral positions, which usually entail mistrust for the EU, are up by 2 points and reach 29%. Negative opinions (8%) remain among the lowest in the entire Eurobarometer poll.

Citizens from the newest Member State do not yet have a clear opinion as to whether their country's interests are well represented in the EU, but they are already confident that in the future it will be more influential. They believe least of all (35%) – with a figure that is just over half the EU27 average (66%) - that the voice of their country counts in the EU. Negative opinions score quite close (38%, +3 points), while the "don't know" answers are the highest registered by the Eurobarometer poll (27%).

Looking to the future, the majority of the Bulgarians interviewed (55%) are optimistic, and to a higher degree than the average EU citizen (+3 points). The remaining scores are distributed almost equally between the negative views (23%) and those without opinion (22%).

Positive feelings that the country has gained from its EU membership are now more moderate, with every second Bulgarian supporting this view. This represents a drop by 8 points, in contrast to the trend in the EU (+5 points). As a result, Bulgarians appear quite moderate in their optimism (50%), compared with the average EU citizen (59%). They also stand alone with the highest share of undecided answers, representing nearly one-third of all those interviewed. This is 18 points higher than in the other newest Member State, Romania, and 21 points more than the average for the EU27.

Figure 1 Q10a Taking everything into account, would you say that [our country] has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the EU? Answers: benefited, not benefited, do not know



The feeling of personal safety, political and economic stability, which is associated with EU membership, is now less pronounced, but closer to the EU average. Joining the Union has adjusted, and perhaps made more realistic, certain Bulgarian feelings about the impact of EU membership on their daily lives. There is a significant drop in the scores expressing these feelings – by 10 points for personal safety (BG-51%, EU27-52%), by 17 points – for political stability (BG-43%, EU27-45%), and most of all – by 20 points – for the economic stability of the country, which stands now at 43% and no longer represents a majority as in the EU27 (51%).

Socio-economic issues and the EU agenda

Life (dis)satisfaction remains without any change over the last six-month period. Following the positive trends in neighbouring Romania, Bulgaria now remains the only country where most of the people are dissatisfied with their life. This feeling dominates the opinion of nearly two-thirds of Bulgarians and is matched by a growing expectation that the status quo will prevail over the next 12 months.

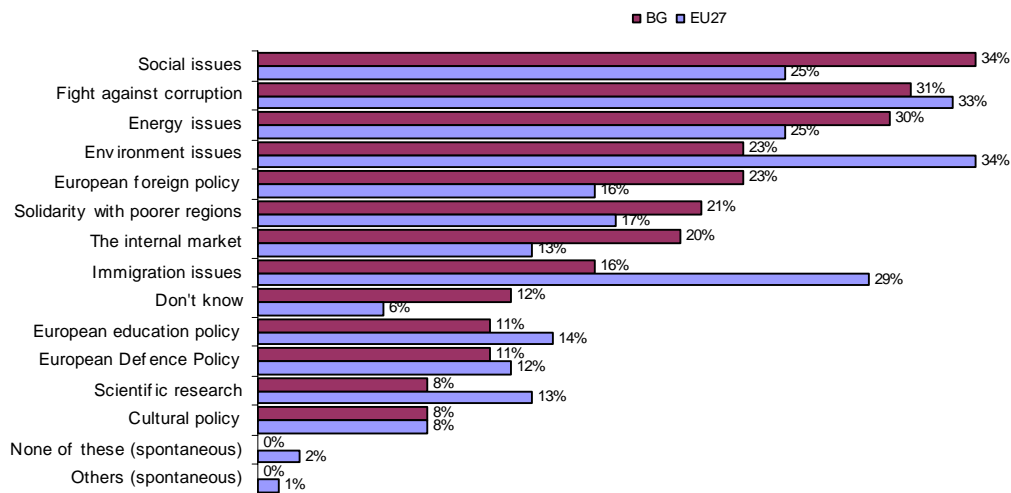
Social optimism remains amongst the lowest for the entire Eurobarometer poll, while in Romania it is nearly twice as high as the EU average, which stands at 27%. While the average EU citizen is more upbeat regarding the economic and employment situation in his country, Bulgarians have become increasingly hesitant to predict such developments over the following year. Only in Hungary is social optimism lower than in Bulgaria. The general mood, both in Bulgaria and in the EU is for preserving the status quo, which means that the average Bulgarian will remain dissatisfied with his way of life in the forthcoming year, unlike other EU citizens.

Crime has again become, along with the economic situation, the main concern for Bulgarians. For the first time, since Bulgaria has been covered by the Eurobarometer poll, there is much concern among its citizens regarding crime. It is up by 10 points compared with autumn 2006 and is a major issue for the country according to 35% of those interviewed. This is 11 points above the score for the average EU citizen, and tops, for the first time, the Bulgarian list of public concerns. However, compared with other countries, this concern is lower than in Cyprus and Croatia, where the majority of citizens are worried about crime.

The economic situation represents a major concern for at least one-third of Bulgarians polled, and for every fifth EU citizen, with a distance of 14 points between them. Those who are most concerned about it are the Romanians, scoring 10 points higher than the Bulgarians. Unemployment is now less of a concern for both Bulgarian and EU citizens. Rising prices and inflation are a traditional concern for citizens at the time of accession to the EU, but this is not the case for Bulgaria and Romania (29% and 27% respectively).

The fight against crime, along with solving social and energy issues should top the EU agenda, according to Bulgarians. For the average EU citizen, environment is the most important issue, followed by crime, which ranks second in both the Bulgarian and the EU27 list.

B.41 ...In your opinion, which aspects should be emphasised by the EU institutions in the coming years, to strengthen the European Union in the future?



Awareness and knowledge of the European Union

Use of the Internet is on the rise in the search of information on European Affairs.

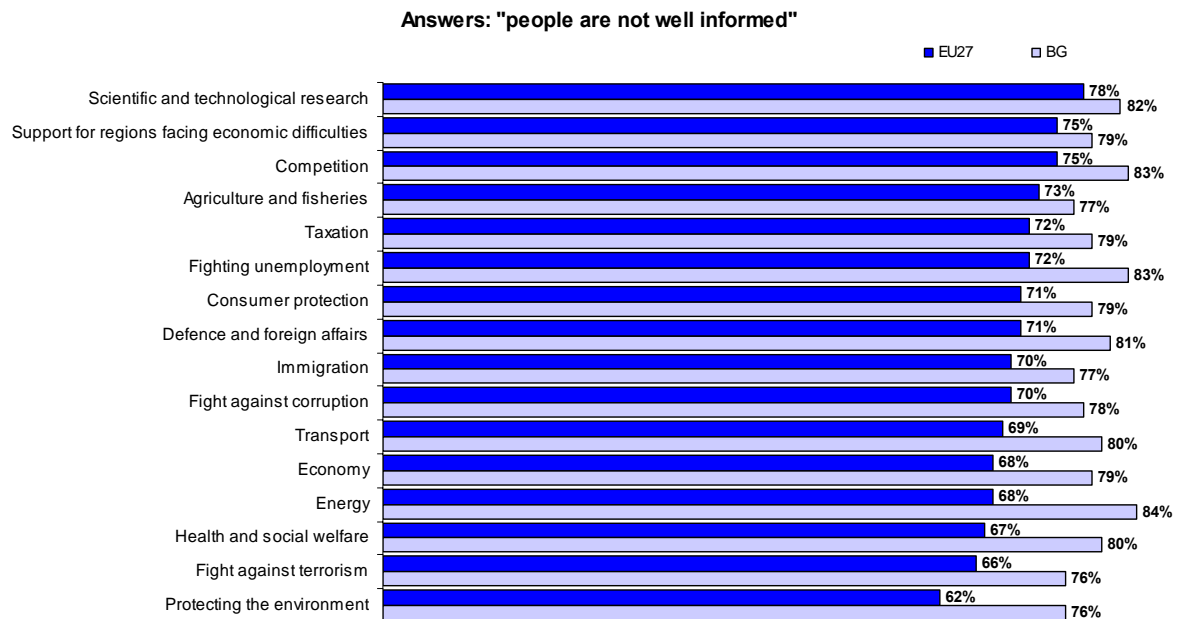
While television remains the main source of information on the EU and trust in it is increasing, the current Eurobarometer registered a growing interest in Internet and the new electronic media associated with it. This trend towards changing “old” with new electronic media is more pronounced in Bulgaria than in the EU. Use of the Internet in the newest Member State is up by 10 points and it is the source of information on the EU already for one-fifth of those interviewed. Use of television and radio has decreased by the same percentage points. The upward trend recorded in the EU27 is 5 points, while interest in TV and in radio has decreased by 7 points and 5 points respectively.

Lack of interest in information regarding the EU has increased by 7 points and at least every fifth Bulgarian polled now states that he/she never seeks such information. Among the other countries surveyed, this figure is higher only in the UK (29%) and in Ireland (26%). Demographic analysis also shows that this lack of interest in information is matched by lack of knowledge and understanding how the EU works. Bulgarians who are not interested in information on European affairs have a neutral or negative image of the EU; they do not trust the EU; they share pessimistic views regarding its future and do not think that Bulgaria has gained from its EU membership.

An overwhelming majority of Bulgarians and citizens of the EU27 share the view that their awareness on the EU policies is very scarce. On the whole, individuals consider themselves less informed than the general public on the measures developed at EU level in every specific policy area. Bulgarians also feel less informed in each policy field compared with the average EU citizen. Asked if they are aware of the national policies of the other Member States on the same issues, citizens in both Bulgaria and the

EU27 agree that they are even less informed, regardless of the opportunities to live and work in other EU Member states and to take part in their political life, thanks to their European citizenship.

Q23 More precisely, do you think that in our country people/you are well informed or not well informed about the measures taken at the EU level concerning the following topics?



Bulgarians are getting to know the European Union, but mainly by experience. They scored quite highly on the regular knowledge test, included in the Eurobarometer survey, and moved, with an average score of 55% from the lowest position in autumn 2006 to one that is above the EU average (51%). This is due to the fact that in the year when they joined the EU, and the month before the elections for the European Parliament in Bulgaria, two of the questions, included in the knowledge test asked about the number of EU Member States and the citizens' rights to elect their MEPs. The third question, regarding the EU Presidency, received an equal percentage (46%) of correct and "don't know" answers.

Bulgarians and democracy in the EU

Bulgarian and EU support for the Community method in European policy making gets a new boost. Asked which policies should be decided in the national capitals and which at EU level, Bulgarians show increased enthusiasm for a shared decision-making. For the first time, there is majority support for joint decisions at EU level in the fields of consumer protection (51%), the environment (57%) and energy (54%). The most significant changes in public opinion (+13 points) are observed in the area of consumer protection, which was only seen previously as a national policy by both Bulgarians and citizens of most other EU countries. There is now an upturn in the position of Bulgarian public opinion, after it was assigned as a separate portfolio to the first Bulgarian EU Commissioner. Influenced by the debate on implementing Natura 2000 in Bulgaria, trust in EU environment policy has also increased (+8 points), now with a convincing majority of 57% (12 points less than the EU average). For the first time, Bulgarians who consider that energy should be a common policy reach a majority - 54% (+6 points). This is still a smaller figure than in the EU as a whole, where it stands at nearly two-thirds of those interviewed.

Similar, but less intensive trends are observed in other policy areas. In general, the average EU and Bulgarian citizen share similar views on which policies should be decided in the national capitals and which – at EU level. A significant majority consider that the Community approach is most relevant for the so called “power” policies, such as the fight against terrorism and crime, as well as common defence and foreign policy. Policies contributing to economic growth are also seen as European, rather than national. These include policies supporting less-developed regions, research and innovation, environment, energy and competition. On agriculture and fisheries, views continue to diverge with a majority of Bulgarians (53%) even showing a stronger preference (+1 point) for national rather than EU decision-making. In the social, educational and financial spheres, where policies touch more directly upon citizens, both Bulgarian and EU citizens support the subsidiarity principle.

Bulgarians also claim to be the least aware of all Member States what is the role of negotiations in EU decision-making and how much these reflect their national interests. Every second Bulgarian agrees with the positive role of negotiations taking into account national interests. However, this is the lowest score in the poll, while the answers without an opinion score the highest of all (34%). This comes as no surprise, given the fact that, in the spring of 2007, with a score of 28%, Bulgarians are the least self-confident of all EU citizens that they understand how the European Union works.

Trust in the main EU institutions remains without significant changes. However, at the time of the campaign for the first European elections in Bulgaria, trust in the main EU institutions among Bulgarians is lower than for the average EU citizen. It is 2 points less for the European Parliament (EU27-56%); 4 points lower for the European Commission (EU27-52%) and 3 points for the Council (EU27-47%). Currently, only the European Parliament enjoys a clear majority of trust, while trust in the European Commission and the Council is less than 50%.

The image of the European Union in the next 50 years

Peace among EU countries and the establishment of the Internal Market are the most positive results from 50 years of European integration, according to the average Bulgarian and the average EU citizen. In both cases Bulgarians are more upbeat in their views than the average EU citizen and rank closer to the opinion in the new Member States than the EU15.

Two thirds of the Bulgarians are optimistic about the future of the EU, which is slightly less than the average EU citizen (69%). Against the background of overwhelming optimism in all countries and territories, reaching 82% in Poland, compared with their fellow EU citizens, Bulgarians appear to be moderate optimists, with the highest share of ‘don’t know’ responses (15%) from any of the EU Member States.

Citizens believe that before its next 50th anniversary, the EU will have many of the features envisaged by the Constitution, which continues to enjoy the support of 60% of Bulgarians (-3 points, compared with last autumn). The portrait of the future EU, presented in the views of both Bulgarians and EU27 citizens, describes the economic power and monetary unity, diplomatic leadership, military defence and democratic legitimacy of a reformed European Union. This portrait has stronger colours, i.e. higher scores in the EU of 27 than in Bulgaria, where the views of the majority are less pronounced.

Bulgarians believe most in the future strength of the Euro (54%) and EU’s growing diplomatic power (52%), while the average EU citizen shares these views to an equal extent (61%). EU citizens assign more importance to a common army, while Bulgarians are more pronounced on the democratic legitimacy of the Union, with 48% expecting the EU to have a president elected by its citizens. Neither Bulgarian nor EU citizens as a whole are convinced as to the future economic power of the Union. Bulgarian views on the future of the EU remain also largely undetermined, with around four of every ten interviewed not having an opinion on each of these issues.

Overall, the first Eurobarometer survey following Bulgaria’s accession to the EU found that, being inside the Union, Bulgarians continue to share a very positive image of it, to value its democratic nature and its ability to deal with issues which concern their every day life. Although less than before, a majority of Bulgarians trusts the European Union and its institutions and believes that their country has already gained from its EU membership. Their optimism on many European issues, including the European Union’s future is now more moderate, but may be more realistic, than it used to be. There are some signs of the usual eurofatigue which is observed at the time of accession to the EU, but there is a lot of evidence that, on many issues concerning EU integration, Bulgarians do not yet have a well-shaped public opinion. With the highest percentage of “don’t know” answers which sometimes dominate their views, Bulgarians appear to be optimistic and dedicated Europeans, but somehow lacking in self-confidence as EU citizens.