

EUROBAROMETER 67

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Spring 2007

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.

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.

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 sixth Czech Eurobarometer report since the Czech Republic became an EU Member.

The opinion poll, upon which this report is based, was conducted among 1,043 Czechs between April 10 and May 15, 2007. In the Czech Republic, this period was marked by the hot political discussion on reforms proposed by Topolánek's coalition government. Reform bills dealt with taxation, social payments and the public healthcare system funding. Due to this situation, Czech population paid relatively low attention to EU agenda incl. the effort of the German Presidency to find a way out of the trap caused by the results of the French and Dutch referenda.

In this time, the opinion that membership in the European Union is a good thing is held by 57 percent on the EU 27 average. Also, in some other topics, in EU as a whole the Eurobarometer shows better results compared to the previous edition from the autumn 2006.

Nevertheless, the need for bringing European citizens and European institutions closer together was confirmed again, 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.

Opinion on living in the Czech Republic

Czechs are mostly satisfied with their life situation (82 %), but this feeling is less intense than the European Union average. Shortly after the EU accession, the percentage of very satisfied Czechs grew from 8 to 13 percent. Since that time, it has stayed at the same level.

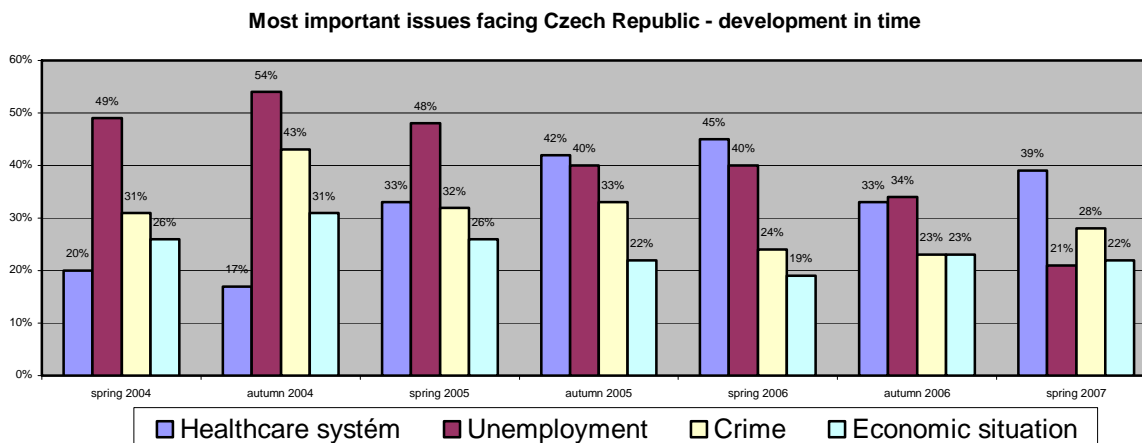
As to the coming 12 months, one fourth of the Czechs expect that their life in general is becoming better (27 percent); more than one half think that it will be the same (54 percent), 14 percent expects their life in general is getting worse. Czechs are slightly more pessimistic than we can see on the average in the European Union. In spite of growing Czech economy, there are less people expecting further improvement of the economic situation (21 percent compared to 26 percent in the autumn 2006).

Situation of the Czech Republic compared to European Union

Most EU citizens see the situation in their countries less optimistic than that in other EU countries. Czechs are no exception in that. In the area of national economy, three-and-a-half times more Czechs think that the situation in their country is worse than in other EU countries (72 percent) than those who think it is better (20 %). On the EU 27 average, the difference is smaller but still rather important (49 percent "worse" vs. 37 percent "better").

Issues facing the Czech Republic

As in most EU Member States, **unemployment continues to be one of the major concerns.** Nevertheless, due to economic growth, the percentage of Czech people who rank unemployment among the two most important problems decreases continuously from 54 percent in the autumn 2004 to the present level of 21 percent. Similar tendency can be seen in the whole EU, the share of EU citizens who rank unemployment among the most important issues has decreased to 34 percent.



In spring 2006, **concerns about public healthcare** occurred as the most important problem with 45 percent of Czechs due to the debate on founding the system. After that, there was a drop and public healthcare ranks second. Tough political discussion about patients' direct participation in the system caused a new increase of concerns in this area to the present level of 39 percent. The difference between Czech public opinion and the EU 27 (18 percent) became substantial again.

Image of the European Union

For nearly one half of the Czechs (45 percent), the European Union conjures a positive image, for one third a neutral one (34 percent) and for every fifth Czech (21 percent) the European Union conjures a negative image.

As to the attributes linked to the image of the European Union, Czechs are quite typical representatives of NMS 12. Compared to the EU 27 average, Czechs slightly more often perceive the European Union as **modern** (75 percent), **democratic** (76 percent) and at the same time **protective** (63 percent). Prevailing positive image is linked also to the fact that only one in fourteen Czechs (7 percent) see the EU as inefficient. In the opinions whether the EU is technocratic, the Czechs are close to the EU 27 average, much more critical than the people in the new Member States on average (CR 45 percent, NMS 12 34 percent).

Values of the European citizens

The Eurobarometer respondents were asked to say whether different terms bring to their minds something positive or negative. Based on the results, the terms can be clustered into groups representing values of the European citizens. In the first cluster, we can find **competitiveness, company, free trade and flexibility**. In all these cases, positive impressions are three to four times more frequent than the negative ones, both in the Czech Republic and on the EU 27 average. **Welfare state** and **trade unions** form the second cluster where positive impressions are twice as frequent as the negative ones. In the last group we will find **reforms, liberalization** and **public administration**. Prevalence of positive perceptions of these items is only tiny.

The 2004 EU enlargement

In **10 new Member States** that joined EU in 2004, most of the people think that this **enlargement had a positive impact** on their countries (51 percent). This applies mainly to

Polish, Slovenian and Slovak people. Czechs (39 percent) are rather cautious, similarly as Hungarians and Latvians.

In the **old Member States**, nearly one half of the population cannot decide whether the impact of this enlargement on the EU was positive or negative. Positive **opinions are slightly more frequent** (29 percent) than the negative ones (23 percent).

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. In 2006, this negative trend stopped but can be seen again in spring 2007. **Only 46 percent of Czechs think that EU membership is a good thing** compared to 57 percent on the EU 27 average. The most positive perception of membership can be repeatedly seen in the Netherlands, Ireland, Luxembourg, Spain and Belgium, among new Member States this is in Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Lithuania.

By nearly two thirds of Czechs, Czech Republic has on balance benefited from being a member of the European Union (61 percent compared to 66 percent in the autumn 2006). About one third of Czechs share the opposite opinion (32 percent). In this respect, Czech public opinion is closer to the EU 27 average (59 percent of positive opinions) than to that of NMS 12 (65 percent).

Main results of the European integration

For the people in **12 new Member States**, the most positive result of the European integration is **the free movement of people, goods and services within the EU** (stressed by 73 percent of the Czechs) followed by **peace among the Member States of the EU** (61 percent) and student exchange programmes such as ERASMUS (35 percent). Only small part of Czechs rank among main results of the European integration euro (19 percent) and the Common agricultural policy. In the old Member States, the opinions differ, the most frequent main result of the European integration being peace among the Member States.

In connection with the **50th anniversary of the Rome Treaty**, the most often association of the Czechs is the **hope** (54 percent). The second most frequent reaction is **“nothing”** (52 percent). This result indicates a knowledge deficit of the Czech population. The second most often specific association in the Czech Republic is a worry (32 percent). In this area, Czechs differ substantially not only from the EU 27 average but also from the average of the 12 new Member States where the second and third most often associations are satisfaction and pride. In the Czech Republic, pride was mentioned just in 13 percent cases.

Attitudes on specific issues of the European agenda

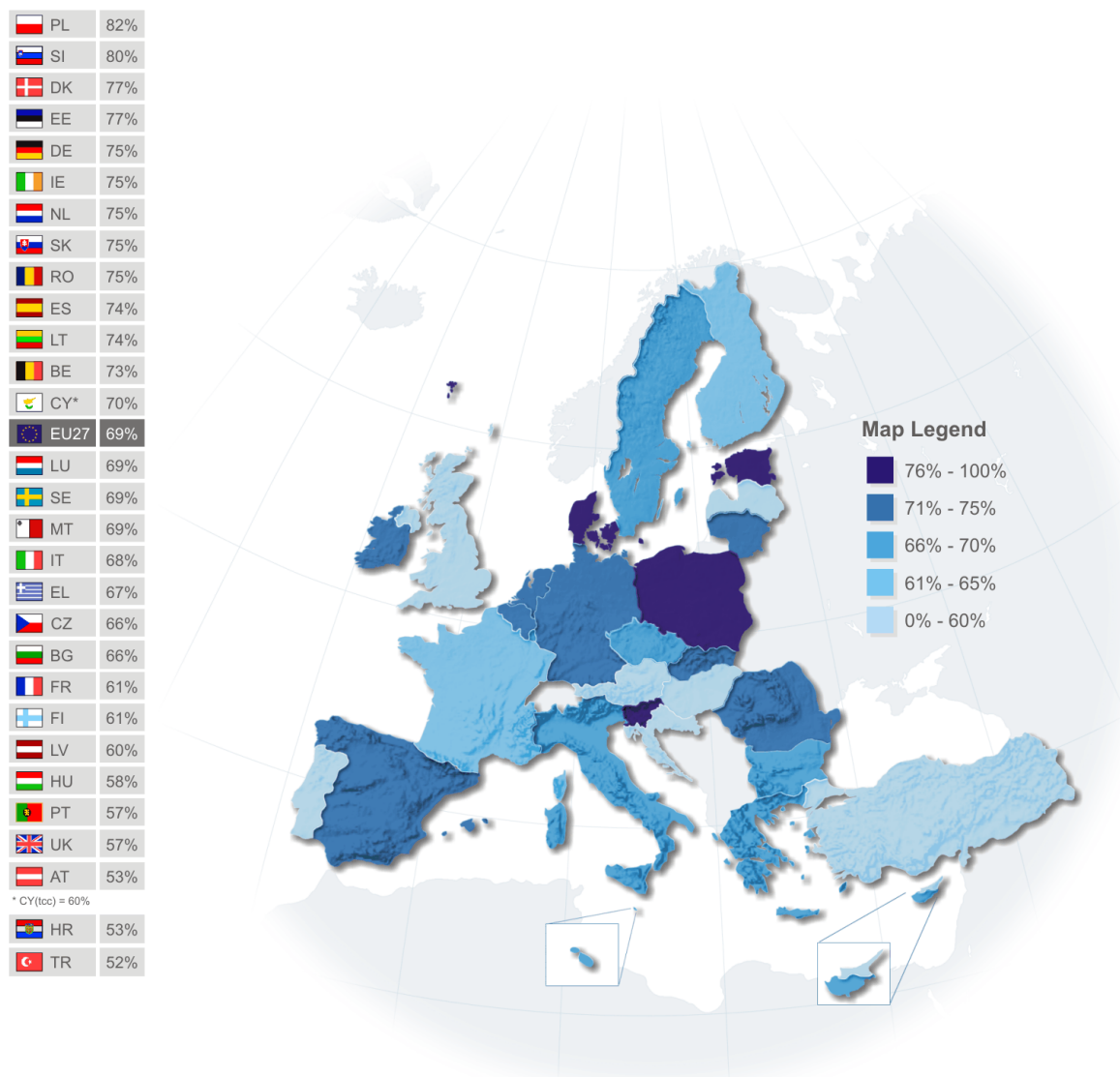
Several controversial issues of the European agenda enjoy substantial support of the Czech citizens. This applies mainly to **common defence and security policy** among EU Member States (87 percent) as well as **common foreign policy** towards other countries (68 percent). Only slightly less Czechs support **further enlargement of the EU** (64 percent) and the **European Monetary Union** (60 %). In spite of relatively severe opinion of the President Vaclav Klaus concerning a **constitution for the European Union, there is still 55 percent of Czechs who support it**. On the other hand, this figure is by 11 percentage points lower than on the EU 27 average.

Opinion on the EU future

Most European citizens are optimistic as to the future of the EU. Two thirds of the usually rather sceptical Czechs are optimistic in this respect (66 percent compared to 69 % on the EU 27 average). At the same time, Eurobarometer shows that in other new Member States, there are even more optimists (74 percent on the NMS 12 average). Most frequent optimistic opinions can be seen in Poland, Slovenia, Denmark and Estonia.

Question: QA37. Would you say that you are very optimistic, fairly optimistic, fairly pessimistic or very pessimistic about the future of the European Union ...?

Answers: Very optimistic + Fairly optimistic



According to a majority of Czech citizens, the European Union will have **its own army** (62 percent) and, with the euro, a **more powerful currency than the dollar** (56 percent) in 50 years from now. On the EU 27 average, most people expect that at that time the EU will

be a **leading diplomatic power in the world** and will have its own **president directly elected** by European citizens. Czechs are rather sceptical in this respect (45 percent and 42 percent respectively).

Trust in institutions

During 2006, the trust of Czechs in constitutional institutions dropped and it remains low. On the EU 27 average, there are more than 40 percent of people who trust their national governments and parliaments. In the Czech Republic, the **national government is trusted by 27 percent and the National Parliament only by 21 percent**. The trust in the EU is much higher, namely 61 percent, which is close to the EU 27 average.

In the Czech Republic, the **most trusted European institution is the European Central Bank** (61 percent) followed by the European Parliament (58 percent), the European Commission (56 percent) and the Council of the European Union (54 percent).

The most **trusted medium**, both in the Czech Republic and on the EU 27 average, is the **radio** (75 percent and 66 percent respectively). Television is slightly less trusted but still by majority of the people both in the Czech Republic and the EU 27. Czechs trust the press less (56 percent) than the Internet (62 percent) which is not typical in the EU.

European competences

European citizens recommend decisions in several areas to be made jointly within the European Union rather than by the national governments. Czech citizens **most often prefer “European” decision making in “security” areas such as fighting terrorism** (89 percent) **and fighting crime** (78 percent), **defence and foreign affairs** (72 percent). Similar opinions were shown on scientific and technological research (79 percent). On the EU 27 average, only joint decision making on fighting terrorism enjoys such a high support.

A majority of Czechs also prefer decisions at the European level in the areas of **protecting the environment, immigration, consumer protection, support for regions facing economic difficulties and energy**. The same applies in EU 27 except for consumer protection. Nevertheless, those who prefer decisions to be made by national governments in these areas are more numerous. Competition, fighting unemployment and the educational system should be decided at the European level by less than one half of the Czechs.

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 EU 27 as a whole.

Information about European political affairs

The Czechs do not feel properly informed about European political affairs. Only one Czech in hundred thinks the people in the Czech Republic are very well informed in this respect. In total **29 percent of Czechs share the opinion that the Czech population is well informed**, the negative opinions “not very well informed” and “not informed at all” amount to 68 percent. Compared to the other countries, Czechs are still rather positive in this respect. On the EU 27 average, there are only 22 % of those who think that people in their country are well informed about European political affairs.

The main **source of information about the EU** is on the long term run **the TV** even if its importance declines. In total, 70 percent of Czechs (and 63 percent of all the EU 27 citizens) use television when looking for information about the European Union, its policies and its institutions. The second most often used source of information is still **the press** (47 percent

in the CR and 41 percent on the EU 27 average). Eurobarometer proved growing importance of the Internet in this area. In the Czech Republic, the internet went up to rank (32 percent) and became more frequent than the radio (29 percent).

Opportunities and challenges of globalization

Compared to the autumn 2005, there are now **more people who link globalization with opportunities for their national companies** in terms of new outlets (21 percent in the CR and 22 percent on the EU 27 average). Nevertheless, the **most frequent** association with globalization is the potential **relocation of some companies to countries where labour is cheaper** (31 percent in the CR and 35 percent on the EU 27 average).

In the Czech Republic, only **four people in ten believe that the European Union helps to protect us from the negative effects of globalisation** (39 percent); **five in ten do not** think so (50 percent). This can be seen as major negative shift as the positive opinions prevailed 43 to 37 percent in the autumn 2006. In the European Union as a whole, the opinions are balanced (42 percent positive vs. 40 percent negative).

Climate changes and greenhouse gas emission policies

In the whole EU, the opinion that the European Union should urgently deal with global warming dominates (91 percent in the Czech Republic, 88 percent on the EU 27 average). In line with that, 93 percent of Czechs agree that the European Union should urgently put new policies in place to reduce greenhouse gas emission by at least 20% by 2020, the EU 27 average being 89 percent.