

EUROBAROMETER 67

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

SPRING 2007

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 67.1, conducted between 10th April and 15th May 2007 on a representative sample of 1000 Poles 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

For more than two years, the percentage of respondents satisfied with their lives has been increasing steadily and now more than three-quarters of Poles (77%) declare that they are satisfied.

Poles are still much less optimistic than the Danes, Dutch and Swedes who are almost commonly (97%) satisfied with their lives. On the other hand, the situation in our country is much better than in Bulgaria (36%), Hungary (51%) and Romania (53%) and only slightly below the European average (80%).

- The number of Poles who expect positive changes in their lives is rising

The percentage of Poles who expect that the next 12 months will be better for them than the last 12 months has risen significantly (from 32% in autumn 2006 to 40%). Poles are optimistic in regard to the changes in their life situation a little bit more often than the Europeans in general (40%).

The expectations of Poles in regard to their household's financial situation in the next 12 months are considerably better than last autumn. One in three respondents (31%) expects an improvement, while, six months ago, similar optimism was expressed by only one in four (24%). More than a half (53%) of Poles do not expect any changes concerning their financial situation. Also, in this case, Poles are more optimistic than the EU average (27%).

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

Despite a small increase over the last six months, trust in the government (18%) and the parliament (15%) in Poland are among the lowest in the European Union. Trust in the government is comparably low only in Romania (19%), Lithuania (20%) and Bulgaria (22%). Trust in the parliament is slightly lower in Bulgaria (14%) and at the same level in Lithuania (15%).

- Significance of unemployment as the most important problem facing Poland today is decreasing

The significance of unemployment as one of the two most important problems facing Poland today has decreased considerably. Now, it is mentioned by 45% of respondents - thus much less than last year (78%). The healthcare system is regarded as one of the two most important problems facing our country by one in three Poles (34%). It is followed by the economic situation (25%) and crime (19%).

In the UE as a whole, as in Poland, unemployment is considered to be the most important problem but it is mentioned by only one in three respondents (34%). According to Europeans in general, the next positions in the ranking are occupied by crime (24%), the economic situation (20%), the healthcare system and inflation (both 18%).

- Poland is one of the European nations that is the most attached to the EU

97% of respondents claim that they feel attached to Poland. Attachment to their city, town or village is relatively strong – 93%. The percentage of people who declare that they are attached to Poland and their city, town or village is invariably high and, in all previous waves of the survey, it exceeded 90%.

The proportion of Poles who feel attached to the European Union is lower (65%), but despite this, it is one of the highest in the whole EU. Only in Belgium do slightly more respondents (66%) claim

that they are attached. The percentage of citizens who feel attached to the EU is lowest in Finland (30%), the Netherlands (32%), Cyprus (32%) and the United Kingdom (34%)

2. Economy and employment

- Assessment of the Polish economic situation is improving

Two years ago (in spring 2005), only one in five Poles (20%) assessed the economic situation in Poland as good. Half a year ago, this opinion was shared by one in three (33%) respondents. Now, nearly a half (45%) of the poll thinks that the Polish economy is in a good condition. The percentage of Poles who assess the economic situation in their country as good is a bit lower than the European average (52%). Evaluation of the economic situation is more positive in the old (58%) than in the new Member States (34%).

55% of Poles assess their own financial situation as good, whereas 40% assess it as bad. Poles regard their financial situation as good a bit less often than Europeans overall (61%). In general, inhabitants of the old EU Member States (65%) are in a better financial situation than those from the new Member States (46%).

- Poles are not concerned that the economic situation in the EU may deteriorate

40% of Poles expect that, in the next 12 months, the economic situation in the EU will improve. Almost the same number (39%) thinks that it will not change. Only 4% of Poles are concerned that it may deteriorate. The level of optimism in regard to the economic situation in the European Union in the next 12 months is higher in Poland than in the EU as a whole (28%). Only Lithuanians (45%) and Slovaks (41%) expect improvement of this situation more often than Poles.

- The number of respondents who expect improvement in the Polish economic situation has risen significantly

In the last six months, the percentage of respondents who expect improvement in the Polish economic situation in the next 12 months has risen significantly – from 18% to 33%. It is higher than the EU average (28%).

Almost a half (45%) of Poles expects that, in the next 12 months, the situation on the Polish labour market will improve. Expectations concerning the Polish economic situation are now significantly more optimistic than a year ago when only 18% of respondents were expecting improvement. In the EU as a whole, the average percentage of people who think that the situation on the labour market will improve accounts for 31% - thus much less than in Poland.

Poles rarely expect any changes – for the worse (4%) or for the better (22%) – regarding their employment situation. Two-thirds of respondents (66%) are certain that, in this respect, nothing will change.

- Poles perceive the Polish economic situation as worse than the EU's economic situation

According to the majority of respondents (80%), the Polish economic situation is worse than the EU's economic situation. The share of respondents who agree with this opinion has not significantly changed in comparison with the survey conducted last spring (77%). Poles are one of those EU nations which are the most pessimistic in assessment of their country economic situation compared to the average situation in the EU Member States. The average result for the EU, in this case, is 38% of respondents regarding the situation in their country as better and 49% regarding it as worse.

Also, the situation on the Polish labour market is almost always considered to be worse than the average situation in the EU (82%) and, last year, this figure was similar (84%). The percentage of Poles who claim that the situation on the Polish labour market is worse than the situation in the other European countries is higher than the EU average (54%).

The cost of living in Poland is less favourable than the EU average according to more than three-quarters of respondents (78%). The assessment of the cost of living is closer to the EU average (65%) than the assessment of the economic and the labour market situation.

3. Polish membership of the European Union

- The percentage of Poles satisfied with EU membership is rising

The number of Poles who think that EU membership is a good thing has increased since Polish accession into the European Union (May 2004). Just before the accession, it was regarded as a good thing by 42% of respondents; now, this is the view held by more than two-thirds (67%). In Poland, the level of satisfaction with European Union membership is higher than the European average (57%).

- The number of Poles who believe that Poland has benefited from EU membership is increasing

The percentage of Poles who believe that our country has benefited from EU membership is rising. Now, more than three-quarters (78%) of respondents agree with this opinion and this proportion has been increasing systematically since spring 2004 when it accounted for 50%.

The percentage of Poles who are convinced that our country has benefited from EU membership is significantly higher than the EU average (59%). Citizens of the new Member States (68%) more often than citizens of the old Member States (57%) believe that their country has benefited from EU membership.

- According to two-thirds of Poles thanks to EU membership we are more stable economically

Almost two-thirds (63%) of Poles think that Poland is more stable economically because it is a member of the European Union. According to a half (49%) of respondents, thanks to EU membership, our country is more politically stable.

Poles much more often than Europeans as a whole (51%), think that their country is more economically stable thanks to European Union membership. The influence of EU membership on political stability of their country is much more often observed by Poles than by Europeans in general (45%), but still less often than among Estonians (66%) who distinguish themselves by high prevalence of this opinion.

- Trust placed by Poles in the EU is rising systematically

Since the moment Poland joined the EU, one could observe a systematic increase in trust placed in the EU. Just before accession, the EU was trusted by one in three Poles (33%), half a year later, by one in two (50%), and now, it is trusted by two-thirds (68%). At the same time, only one in five Poles (18%) does not trust the European Union.

Poles place trust in the EU much more often than Europeans in general (57%). Moreover, levels of trust placed in the EU are significantly higher in the 12 new (65%) than in the 15 old Member States (55%).

- Trust placed by Poles in the European institutions is still rising

The European Parliament and the European Commission are trusted by six in ten Poles (60%) and the Council of the European Union by 54% of them. In the EU, on average, the European Parliament is trusted by 56% of citizens, the European Commission by 52% and the Council of the EU by 47%.

A question about the trust placed in the European Central Bank was also asked in the Eurobarometer survey. It turned out that it is trusted by a half of respondents (50%). The European Central Bank is an exception with the level of trust lower in Poland than in the EU as a whole (53%).

4. Europeans and the European Union

- The number of Poles who have positive associations with the EU is rising

Almost two-thirds (64%) of Poles have positive associations with the EU. The percentage of respondents who have positive associations with the European Union has risen since autumn 2006 by 6 percentage points and since autumn 2005 by 15 percentage points. Only 5% of Poles have negative associations with the EU and the associations of one in three (30%) are neutral. Poles more often than the European average (52%) have positive associations with the EU.

- According to Poles, the EU is best described by the word “modern”

According to 82% of Poles, the EU is the best described by the word “modern”. 12% of respondents do not agree with that choice. “Democratic” is a word which describes the EU well, according to 80% of Poles and badly according to 12%.

Poles relatively seldom agree that the EU is described by negative words like “inefficient” (fits according to 19% of the poll) or “technocratic” (32%). 66% and 29% of Poles respectively do not agree that these words describe the EU well.

Poles, the most often in the whole EU, think that the word “modern” describes the EU well – in the EU on average, 70% of respondents agree with that. Much less often than EU citizens in general, Poles (37%) think that the word “inefficient” describes the EU well.

- Poles the most often associate the European Union with freedom of travel, study and work

For Poles, the European Union first of all means freedom of travel (66%). Much fewer respondents associate it with stronger say in the world (32%). For 28% of Poles, the EU symbolises peace and, for 26%, democracy.

In Poland, positive associations with the EU outweigh negative ones. The EU means bureaucracy for only 14% of Poles, unemployment for 10% and more crime for 8%.

- Poles claim that the free movement of people, goods and services is the most positive result of European integration

According to Poles, the free movement of people, goods and services within the EU is the most important result of European integration – for 42% of respondents, this is the most positive effect and, for 32%, the second in terms of importance. Peace among the Member States of the EU is the most positive for 36% of Poles and the second most positive for 25%.

Europeans in general, the inverse of the Poles, consider peace among the Member States of the EU to be the most important result of European integration (39% think it is the best) and the free movement of people, goods and services is for them in second place (33%).

- According to Poles, their individual voice does not count in the EU but they believe that Poland’s voice counts

38% of Poles believe that their voice counts in the European Union. More, that is 49% of respondents, are of the opposite opinion and think that their voice does not count. Poles trust that their voice counts in the EU a little bit more often than Europeans in general (35%).

Poles rarely believe that their voice counts in the EU but much more often they are convinced that Poland’s voice counts. This opinion is shared by more than two-thirds (68%) of respondents and one in four (25%) does not agree. The percentage of Poles who are convinced that the voice of their country counts in the EU does not differ significantly from the European average (66%).

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

More than a half of Poles (59%) claim that they understand how the EU works and this figure has been stable for the last two years. One in three respondents (34%) admits that he/her does not understand how the EU works. Poles much more often than the rest of the Europeans (43%) claim that they know how the EU works.

- The vast majority of Poles claim that they have heard about the European Commission and the European Parliament

Almost nine in ten (88%) Poles declare that they have heard about the European Commission. More or less the same share (89%) has heard about the European Parliament. Since spring 2004, awareness of these two institutions has remained on the same level - higher than 80%.

Awareness of the Council of the European Union (75%) and the European Central Bank (70%) is lower. However, it has risen since spring 2004. Then the Council of the EU was known to 61% of respondents and the European Central Bank to 58%.

Awareness of the European Parliament in Poland does not differ from the EU average (89%). Awareness of the European Commission and the Council of the EU is, in our country, higher than in the EU as a whole (averages are 82% and 68% respectively). On the contrary, the European Central Bank is known to fewer Poles than Europeans in general (75%).

- Poles lack some basic information about the EU

18% of Poles agree with the statement that the EU currently consists of 15 Member States though two-thirds (66%) of respondents know that it is not the case and the percentage of wrong answers has decreased since last spring (28%).

More than a half (52%) of inhabitants of our country know that the members of the European Parliament are directly elected by citizens of the EU. Unfortunately, the percentage of right answers has fallen since spring 2006 when it accounted for 60%.

49% of Poles, a little bit more than in spring 2006 (43%), know that, every six months, a different Member State becomes the President of the Council of the European Union.

- The majority of Poles claim that they are not well-informed about the European policy

Two in a hundred Poles (2%) claim that they are very well-informed about the European policy and the other 32% feel that they are fairly well-informed. However the majority of Poles think that they are not well-informed (49%) or not informed at all (13%). At the same time, Poles feel that they are informed about EU policy a little bit more often than EU citizens in general (30% of answers "well-informed").

- The importance of the Internet as a source of information about the EU is rising

For Poles, television is still the most important source of information about the European Union (66%); however, it is now mentioned by fewer respondents than a year ago (72%). The importance of the Internet as a source of information about the European Union, its policies and institutions is rising – the percentage of respondents who look for information about the EU on the Internet increased from 26% to 32%. The Internet (67%), more often than the television (62%), is the most important source of information about the EU for the youngest respondents.

Television (63%), just like in Poland, is the most important source of information about the EU in all the other European countries. The hierarchy of the information sources in Poland is similar to that in the whole EU but it is worth mentioning the slightly higher importance of the Internet in our country (the EU average is 28%).

5. Further integration of the EU

- Decisions concerning education, taxation, pensions as well as health and social welfare – according to Poles – should be made by the Polish government

According to respondents, the Polish government should mostly make decisions concerning education (63%), taxation (56%), health and social welfare (52%) and pensions (51%).

Decisions concerning fighting terrorism (85%), scientific research (76%), support for regions facing economic difficulties (73%), as well as immigration (67%) should be made jointly within the European Union. The EU is chosen more often than the Polish government as the proper level for decisions regarding defence and foreign affairs policy (65%), fighting crime (68%), protecting the

environment (67%), energy (63%), competition (57%), agriculture and fisheries (55%), as well as consumer protection (51%).

In the case of fighting unemployment, respondents are divided. 49% of them think that decisions should be made jointly within the EU and 48% claim that they should be made by the Polish government.

In comparison with other Europeans Poles are more inclined to entrust decisions in the above-mentioned areas to be made within the EU rather than by the Polish government.

- More than a half of Poles support a European Monetary Union

More than a half (54%) of Poles are in favour of a European Monetary Union with one single currency – the euro. Support for a Monetary Union has remained stable for the last two years. A Monetary Union is still opposed by more than one in three respondents (36%). Poles are less favourable to a European Monetary Union than other Europeans (63%).

- Support for a common foreign policy among the EU Member States has never been so high

Support for a common foreign policy among the EU Member States is rising and now 81% of Poles are in favour of it. In Poland, it is considerably higher than the European average (72%). Moreover, more than two-thirds (68%) of respondents think that the European Union should have its own Minister of Foreign Affairs who can be the spokesperson for a common EU position.

Poles, in general, agree that EU foreign policy should be independent of US foreign policy. This opinion is shared by 80% of respondents and only one in ten (10%) does not agree with it.

- The vast majority of Poles are in favour of a common defence and security policy

Support for a common defence and security policy among the EU Member States is high and steady in Poland. Nowadays, 85% of respondents are in favour of this idea and only 8% are against. In Poland, support for a common defence and security policy is higher than the EU average (77%).

- More than three-quarters of Poles are in favour of an EU common immigration policy

More than three-quarters of Poles (77%) agree that the European Union should have a common immigration policy towards people from outside its territory. The opposite opinion is shared by one in ten respondents (10%) and 13% do not have opinion at all. In Poland, support for a common immigration policy is slightly higher than the European average (75%).

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

The further enlargement of the EU is supported by three-quarters of Poles (76%). This figure is similar to that observed in autumn 2006 (77%) and a little bit higher than the one observed in spring 2006 (72%). Average support for this idea in the EU as a whole is only 49%. The level of support in Poland is not comparable with the level observed in any other country – in Lithuania, which is the second with regard to enlargement support, has a figure of 68%.

- Support for the European Constitution is rising in Poland

More than two-thirds of Poles (69%) are in favour of a European Constitution. Support for a Constitution has been rising systematically since autumn 2005 (60%). In Poland, support for the European Constitution is a little bit higher than the European average (66%).

- The majority of Poles are opposed to the speed of building Europe being faster in one group of countries than in the other countries

Support for the speed of building Europe being faster in one group of countries than in the other countries, if compared with the European Union average which is 48%, is relatively low in Poland (39%). Almost a half of Poles (47%) are still against this idea and 14% do not have an opinion.

Conclusion

What is the most interesting in the results of the latest Eurobarometer wave is the substantial improvement in social mood in Poland, as well as the high and still rising support for EU membership and European integration.

Poles are increasingly satisfied with their lives (77%) and they also, more and more often, expect that the next 12 months will be better than the last (40%). Improvement of social moods in Poland concerns mostly evaluation of the economic and the labour market situation. The percentage of people who assess the situation in the Polish economy as good has risen from 33% to 45% and the proportion of respondents who expect that it will improve in the next 12 months has risen from 18% to 33%.

In Poland, the level of trust in the European Union (68%) and satisfaction with membership (67%) are among the highest in the EU and have been rising systematically. The vast majority of Poles are in favour of the further integration of Europe: a European Constitution (69%), the enlargement of the EU (76%), a common defence and security policy (85%) and a common foreign policy (81%). A Monetary Union (54%), as the only exception, is treated by Poles with caution.