

# EUROBAROMETER 68

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Autumn 2007

## NATIONAL REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY BULGARIA

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

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

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Every six months, the standard Eurobarometer surveys the climate of opinion on issues relating to European integration and the future of the European Union, among a poll of nearly 30 000 citizens from all EU Member States, Candidate Countries and the Turkish Cypriot community. Nearly one thousand Bulgarians responded to the questions posed in the autumn Eurobarometer survey, which was carried out between 22 September and 3 November 2007 upon the request of DG Communication of the European Commission.. The Bulgarian sample is homogeneous and, as in all the other countries, it is representative of the opinion of citizens aged 15 and over among all social, professional and age groups, whether in cities, smaller towns and rural areas.

The interviews for the survey in Bulgaria coincided with the campaign for the municipal elections, which addressed the opportunities and challenges related to the use of the Structural Funds and thus demonstrated that EU policies now have a central place in domestic politics, not only at national, but also at local level.

The national analysis of the data aims to provide a picture of public opinion in Bulgaria at the end of the first year of its EU membership. It presents the trends and changes in national and European public opinion, compared to the last six months and over the period since Bulgaria was first included in the Standard Eurobarometer in 2004. The particular focus of comparisons with other countries is to highlight the opinion of the “average Bulgarian” versus that of the “average EU citizen”. Frequent comparisons are also made with the other new Member States, and Romania - which joined the EU at the same time as Bulgaria.

### **Bulgarians and the European Union**

**Of the entire Eurobarometer poll, Bulgarians continue to feel, although to a lesser extent than before, most involved in European affairs.** Bulgarian public opinion stands out from the entire Eurobarometer poll: with the highest proportion of positive responses (34%), the lowest proportion of negative ones (26%) and the highest share of answers without an opinion (26%). Every third Bulgarian now feels involved in European affairs; while in the EU only one in five of those polled shares this feeling.

**Positive perceptions of the EU are waning and enthusiasm for EU membership has dropped.** For the first time in the last 18 months, the majority of Bulgarians who are convinced that their country’s EU membership is “something good” is on the decrease (-3 points<sup>1</sup>). The figure is now 52% while, in neighbouring Romania, which joined the EU at the same time as Bulgaria, the trend has risen by 4 points, reaching 71% (13 points above the EU average). The difference between the positive (52%) and the negative (34%) scores in Bulgaria has decreased and the country now ranks among those, mostly new EU Member States, where negative opinions are most strongly pronounced.

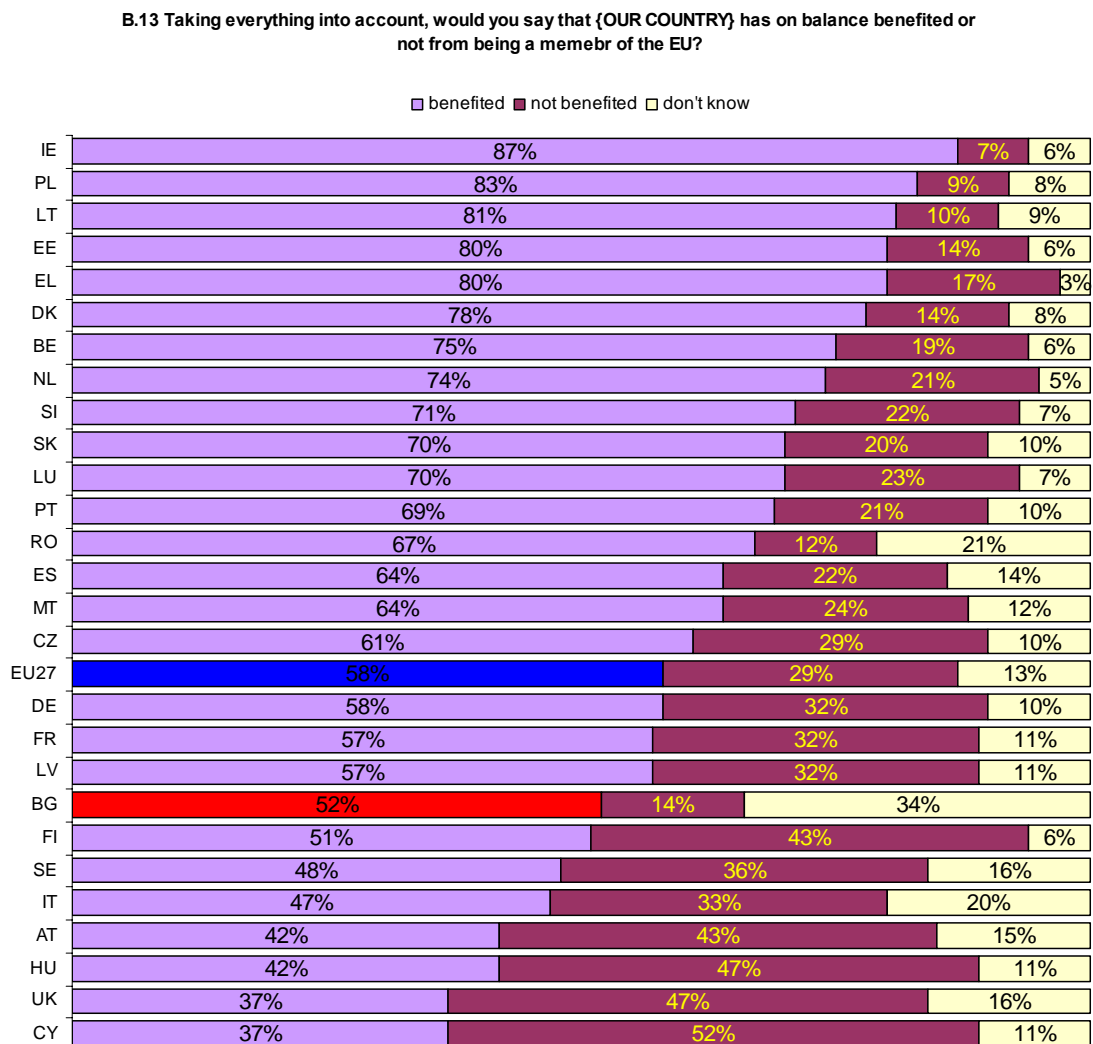
**Bulgarians are less convinced that the interests of their country are well taken into consideration in the EU, but more confident that it has gained from its EU**

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<sup>1</sup> This term will be used throughout this document to signify “percentage point”

**membership.** Nearly one in every four Bulgarians thinks the interests of his country are well taken into consideration in the EU (23%), with a notable decrease of 8 points. This is compensated for by the increase of the “don’t know” answers (with 9 points, to 34%), which score the highest of the entire Eurobarometer poll. The percentage of negative opinions (43%) remains almost unchanged (-1 point) and continues to dominate national public opinion. Less than the Finnish and to an equal degree with the Cypriots, Bulgarians are the least likely of all Europeans to feel that the interests of their country are well taken into consideration in the EU.

The majority of Bulgarians are convinced that their country has benefited from its EU membership (52%), although to a lesser degree than the average EU citizen (58%) and of citizens in the New Member States (69%). There are fewer supporters of the opposite opinion (14%), which means that Bulgaria, like Estonia and Denmark, is among the countries where citizens are the least negative regarding the benefits of EU membership.



**Bulgarian optimism for the future of the EU is more moderate and has fallen more than the optimism of the average EU citizen.** More than two out of three EU citizens

are now confident regarding the future of the EU (3 points less than in the spring), while Bulgarian optimism has dropped by 4 points and remains more moderate (62%). This stands out even more, against the fact that in all EU Member States the majority of citizens are confident in the future of the EU, and this optimism is most strongly expressed by the citizens of the New Member States (73%).

**Bulgarians are more hesitant in their opinions on key issues of European integration.** Of the entire Eurobarometer poll, it is now Bulgarians who find it most difficult to judge if they are very much involved in European affairs (26%, compared to 6% for the EU27) and if EU membership is “something good” for their country (9%, compared to 4% for the EU27), while, in spring 2007, this was, in fact, the case for the Romanians. At least one-third of Bulgarians have no opinion as to whether the interests of their country are well taken into consideration in the EU (EU27 - 14%) and if it has benefited from EU membership (EU27 – 13%). Asked if they are optimists for the future of the EU, it is again the Bulgarians who are most indecisive in their answers (17%) from the entire Eurobarometer poll (the EU average is 8%). A similar lack of confidence is also observed in the public opinion in the other very new EU Member State, Romania, but to a lesser extent than in Bulgaria.

#### **“Climate” of opinion**

The autumn 2007 Eurobarometer survey found that, nearly one year after EU accession, social optimism in the two newest EU Member States, Bulgaria and Romania, has increased.

**Both Bulgarians and Romanians see the economic and employment situation in their countries as better.** Positive opinions regarding the economic situation in Bulgaria are on the increase (by 7 points, compared with the spring 2007 Eurobarometer survey) and have reached 17%. In Romania, the scores are up by 8 points (to 26%). Negative opinions have decreased – by 10 points in Bulgaria (to 75%) and by 7 points in Romania (to 70%). This positive effect of EU membership does not overshadow the fact that Bulgaria ranks, on a par with Hungary and Portugal, among the countries where citizens are most critical regarding the economic situation in their countries. Positive opinions score 31 points less than the EU average (48%), while negative opinions score 26 points higher than the EU average of 49%.

Compared to spring 2007, Bulgarians see **the employment situation** in their country more positively (22%, which is by 10 points higher,); however, this score is 14 points lower than the EU average of 36%. Negative opinions have decreased by a higher degree (-16 points) than in the EU27 (-9 points). However, they continue to dominate Bulgarian public opinion (66%) more significantly than that of the EU27 (61%).

Of the entire Eurobarometer poll, Bulgarians rank the situation of **social welfare** in their country (10%) the least positively. The rate of “don’t know” responses is twice as high as that of the positive ones (21%) and the highest recorded in this Eurobarometer poll.

**Citizens are less concerned by the issues facing their country, since it has become a member of the EU.** This can be seen as an example for another positive effect from EU accession. Concerns regarding crime and the economic situation – the two most important issues for citizens in the previous year, have decreased by 6 points (to 28%) and by 12 points (to 23%) respectively. Worries about healthcare went down by 11 points to 13%, about unemployment – by 8 points (to 22%), about pensions – by 2 points (to 16%).

The only exception is the concern about inflation, which caused a wave of extreme worry among citizens in most of the EU Member States, due to the financial crisis in the autumn 2007. Concerns about inflation increased more significantly in Bulgaria (by 26 points to 55%) and in the New Member States (by 45 points in Slovenia), compared to the EU average (by 8 points to 26%). Bulgaria is among the few countries, like the Baltic States and Slovenia, where the majority of citizens are worried about inflation.

**Bulgarians are moderate optimists regarding the EU's role for solving the major problems which their country is facing.** Unlike the average EU citizen, Bulgarians consider the positive influence of the EU for solving the problems of inflation and taxes as rather limited. Facing the realities of EU membership, they are less convinced than before, of the possibility of a positive EU influence over the country's economic situation (42%, -6 points). Alongside Hungary, Cyprus and Latvia, Bulgaria is one of the countries with least optimism regarding the EU's influence for handling rising prices and inflation (15%). Negative views, expressed by at least one-third of the Bulgarian poll (35%) dominate national public opinion.

Conversely, citizens' conviction in the positive role of the EU regarding the fight against crime in their country has increased most (by 6 points), reaching the highest score (67%) since Bulgaria has been covered by the Eurobarometer survey. Bulgarians continue to believe most of all in the positive role of the EU regarding the fight against crime in their country.

**Moderate optimism regarding the development of the national situation in Bulgaria and strong optimism regarding trends in the EU.** Bulgarians now believe less than the previous year in the improvement of the national situation (decrease of 8 points to 25%). Opinions that things are going in the wrong direction are on the increase (by 4 points, to 35%) and dominate public opinion. On the other hand, following Poland, Estonia, Romania, Lithuania and Slovenia, Bulgaria is one of the Member States, where citizens have the strongest conviction that things in the EU are going in the right direction (53%). The Bulgarians are the least negative (4%) and the most hesitant (35%) of the entire Eurobarometer poll in their views on the development of the situation in the EU.

**Support for joint decisions with the EU and its common policies is on the increase:** by 8 points regarding defence and foreign affairs (to 70%), by 7 points regarding immigration (71%) and the fight against crime (64%), by 5 points regarding healthcare and social welfare (33%), by 4 points regarding environment protection (61%) and by 1 point regarding education (25%). At the same time, the views that policies have to be

decided only in national capitals are decreasing, even in the case when such views are expressed by the majority of the poll. As a result of this, the majority of Bulgarians do not consider any more that decisions regarding agriculture and fisheries should be taken only by the national government (decrease of 6 points to 47%).

The most significant change of opinion concerns transport. While, in the spring, nearly every second Bulgarian felt that decisions in this field should be taken jointly within the EU, now the same proportion of those polled (49%) shares the opposite view that transport should remain within the national government's remit. There is also a notable decrease in support for EU competition policy (by 13 points, to 41%), however, this does not overturn the public opinion views on this issue.

Bulgarian support for joint decisions with the EU remains lower than the EU average in key areas for the development of European integration, such as transport (33%) and competition (41%) (16 points less than the EU average in both cases), energy (54%) (14 points lower than the EU average) and the protection of the environment (61%) (11 points lower than the EU average).

**There is increased support for joint decisions with the EU regarding the environment;** however, Bulgaria remains one of the few countries without a majority on the positive influence of the EU on this issue (48%) (EU27 - 52%). The autumn Eurobarometer also found that the intense debate on the implementation of Natura 2000 in Bulgaria has left a strong mark on national public opinion. Positive views on the situation regarding the environment have decreased by 8 points (to 16%) and represent the lowest scores in the entire Eurobarometer poll. The survey also registered the highest level of "don't know" answers in Bulgaria regarding the positive influence of the EU on the state of the environment (22%). Of all the EU27 countries, only in Romania and Austria is there less confidence than in Bulgaria (61%) that decisions regarding the environment have to be taken jointly with the EU (EU27 – 73%).

### **Democracy in Bulgaria and in the EU**

**Dissatisfaction with Bulgarian democracy has decreased although it continues to dominate public opinion,** while, in the EU27, the majority of those satisfied with the way national democracy functions continues to increase (up by 2 points, to 58%). Bulgarians are now more satisfied with democracy in their country (up by 4 points, to 26%). Dissatisfaction has decreased by the same number of percentage points. However, at least two out of three Bulgarians (67%) remain dissatisfied with democracy in their country. Bulgarian public opinion on this issue is close to the citizens' views in Hungary and Latvia, where satisfaction with democracy is the lowest (24%) and dissatisfaction the highest (73%) of all.

**Satisfaction with EU democracy has decreased, although dissatisfaction is among the lowest of all.** Less than a year after EU accession, Bulgarians are less satisfied by the way democracy functions in the EU (down by 13 points). Positive views are no longer shared by the majority of the poll. The "don't know" responses (40%) are almost as high

as the positive views (41%) and the highest in the entire Eurobarometer poll. Dissatisfaction with EU democracy, expressed by nearly every fifth Bulgarian respondent (19%) ranks among the lowest recorded in autumn 2007.

**Bulgarians trust institutions less than the average EU citizen.** Only television and the European Union gain a higher degree of trust in Bulgaria – television – by 9 points (BG - 61%, EU27 - 52%) and the EU – by 10 points (BG - 58%, EU27 - 48%). These are the only institutions included in the survey, which are trusted by the majority of Bulgarians. The average EU citizen trusts most of all institutions of security and public order, i.e. – the army (71%) and the police (64%), as well as consumer organisations (65%). The biggest divergence between the Bulgarian and EU average scores relates to trust in consumer organisations (43 points). Unlike the EU27, in Bulgaria, trust in these organisations has decreased (by 6 points to 22%) and, as a result, almost half of the Bulgarian poll now does not have a clear view on this issue (47%, up by 11 points).

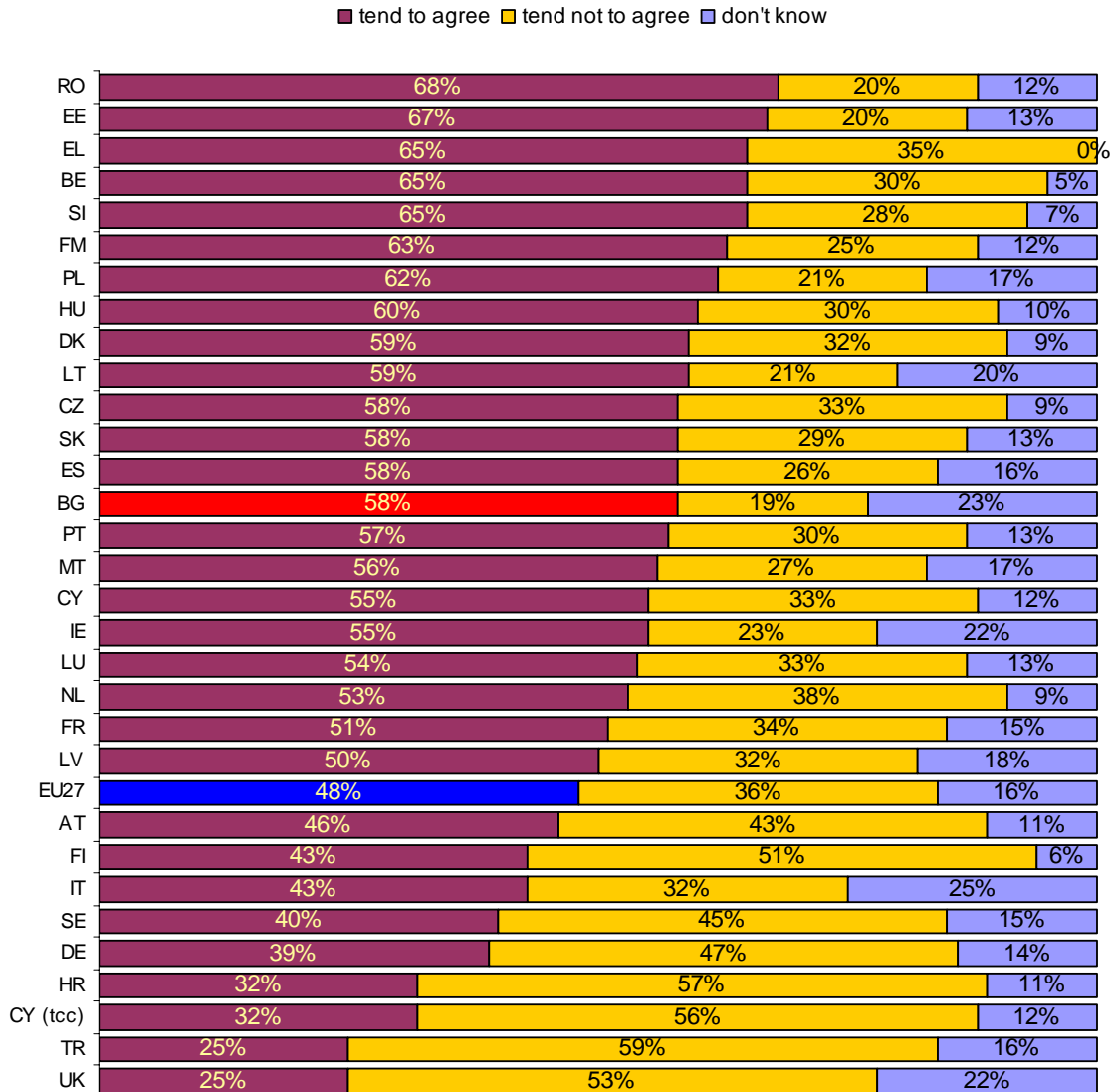
**Both in Bulgaria and in the EU27, citizens trust least of all the political institutions –** political parties (BG - 7%, EU27 - 18%), the national parliaments (BG - 11%, EU27 - 35%) and the governments (BG - 16%, EU27 - 34%). Also, both Bulgarians and the average EU citizens trust European more than national political institutions.

Trust in the national parliament has dropped (by 3 points) and is now at its lowest (11%) since Bulgaria's inclusion in Eurobarometer surveys. On the other hand, trust in the European Parliament is up slightly more (by 4 points) and is now at its highest (58%) since Bulgaria's inclusion in the Eurobarometer surveys. Taking into account the fact that the survey was carried out at a time when the first directly elected Bulgarian Members of the European Parliament became actively involved in its activity, it may be argued that Bulgarians tend to “transfer” trust from national to EU institutions of direct democracy.

Trust in the executive at national and European level has decreased, both among Bulgarians and the average EU citizen. Trust in the national government has fallen more dramatically (by 6 points for BG and by 7 points for the EU27), compared to trust in the European Commission (by 2 points, both in BG and EU27). Now every sixth Bulgarian (16%) trusts his national government, and 46% the European Commission (a difference of 30 points), while in the EU27 the average scores stand at 35% and 50% respectively (a difference of 15 points). The autumn 2007 Eurobarometer recorded the lowest level of trust in the Bulgarian government since the country has been covered by the standard surveys. Bulgarians also expressed the lowest trust in their national government in the entire Eurobarometer poll in autumn 2007.

Unlike the case of the average EU citizen, Bulgarians' trust in the European Union has received a new boost and has reached its highest score since the country's inclusion in the survey (58%). This figure is 10 points higher than the EU27 average (48%). Distrust towards the EU scores among the lowest of all (19%). As a result, the Bulgarian index of trust in the European Union, which is measured by the difference between the positive and the negative answers (39) is higher than for other countries, which take leading positions in the absolute scores for trust in the EU. It is higher than the EU average (12) and lower only than the index for EU trust measured in Romania (48), Estonia (47) and Poland (41).

**B.8.13 I would like to ask you how much trust do you have in certain insitutions:  
the European Union**



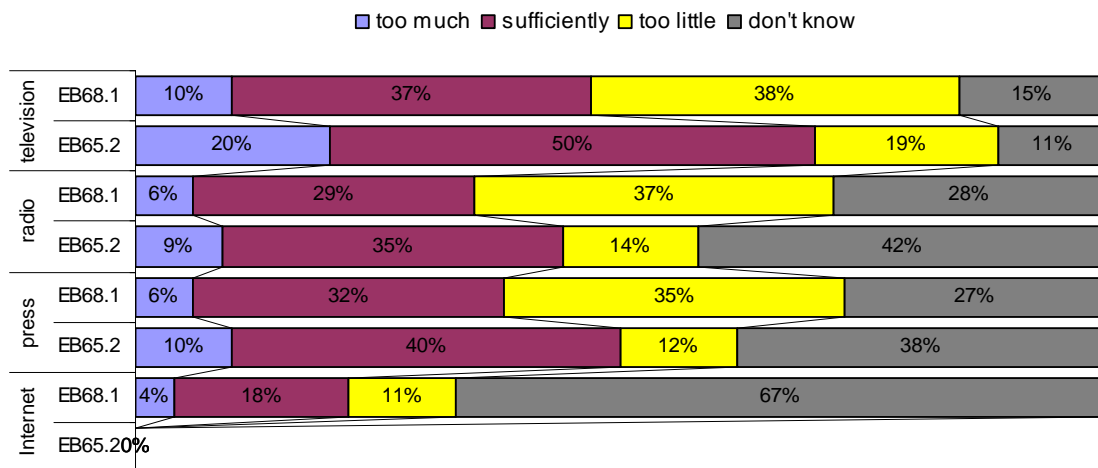


## Information about the EU

**Of the entire Eurobarometer poll, Bulgarians and Greeks feel least informed about European political affairs.** Nearly one year after becoming an EU member, only one in ten Bulgarians (9%) thinks that his fellow citizens are well informed about European political affairs. At least three out of four Bulgarians asked (77%) and almost the same proportion of those interviewed in the EU27 (78%), give a negative response, while 14% and the highest figure recorded across the EU27 countries, do not express any opinion. People who state that they are not at all informed about European political affairs (27%) are social pessimists and sceptical about European integration, their country's EU membership and the benefits that may be derived from it. Conversely, the remaining 50% who think that people are not very well informed about European political affairs are social optimists and supporters of European integration. This shows that the overall opinion regarding lack of information about European affairs is rather an expression of the need for more information about the EU and its policies.

**According to Bulgarians, as well as the average EU citizen, there is a growing need for more information about the EU in the media.** One and a half years ago, before the European Commission published its White Paper on Information and Communication Policy and started an active dialogue with EU citizens, the overall opinion in Bulgaria and the EU was that the media provide sufficient information on the EU. There is now a turnaround in citizens' views, which is more notably expressed in Bulgaria. It is valid mostly about television, which registered the highest drop in the scores that it informs sufficiently on the EU (13 points in BG, 11 points in the EU27). Negative views are also on the rise – by 23 points for the radio and the press (for the EU27 – by 12 and 11 points respectively) and by 19 points for television (EU27 – by 10 points). Of the entire Eurobarometer poll, Bulgarians are the least convinced that the press informs them sufficiently on EU matters (32%, 13 points below the EU average).

**C1. Generally speaking, do you think that the [NATIONALITY] media talks ..... about the European Union?**



**The media are seen as more objective than before in presenting information on the EU:** there is an increase of 7 points regarding the radio and the press (to 39% and 41% respectively) and of 1 point regarding television (to 44%). Compared to the average EU citizen, who is now convinced in the objectivity of all three media, Bulgarians only consider their national television as objective. Opinions regarding the press are unstable, i.e. positive views (41%) exceed by only 1 point the “don’t know” responses (40%). Positive views on the objectivity of the radio (39%) are exceeded by ‘don’t know’ responses (42%).

Comparisons with other countries show that Bulgarians are less convinced of the objectivity of their national media than fellow-citizens of the EU. Bulgarian scores for the objectivity of the media are less pronounced than the EU averages (by 13 points regarding the radio, by 10 points regarding the press and by 7 points regarding television). They rank close to the lowest scores recorded in the EU member countries.

Of the entire Eurobarometer poll, Bulgarians are most hesitant in their judgements regarding the objectivity of the media in their country: 42% regarding the radio, 40% regarding the press, 30% regarding television and 73% regarding the Internet. However, overall high percentages of “don’t know” responses are not an exception in other countries either. An analysis of the data also shows that negative answers to the question of media objectivity are not characteristic of Bulgarian public opinion. The negative views on the objectivity of national media in Bulgaria are amongst the lowest in the entire Eurobarometer poll.

**There is a crisis of trust in the media, both in Bulgaria and in the EU.** This trend is more pronounced in Bulgaria than in the EU27. Trust in television has decreased by 28 points (to 61%), while in the EU27 – by 6 points (to 52%). Trust in Bulgarian radio has dropped by 11 points (to 49%), and by 6 points in the EU27 (to 60%). The press is no longer trusted by the majority of Bulgarians (down by 18 points to 41%), while, in the EU27, trust levels have fallen by only 3 points (to 44%) and are now higher than in Bulgaria. Distrust in the three media is on the increase: by 23 points regarding television in Bulgaria to 29%), by 16 points regarding the radio (to 43%) and by 7 points regarding the press (to 31%).

As a result of this negative trend:

- The majority of Bulgarians continue to trust television (52%), to a higher degree than the EU average (+6 points);
- Nearly every second Bulgarian trusts the radio (49%), although this is less pronounced than the EU average (60%) and the lowest in the entire Eurobarometer poll;
- There is an insignificant difference between the figures for levels of distrust in the Bulgarian press (43%) which are higher than levels of trust in it (41%), although negative views in Bulgaria are less pronounced than in the EU (49%) as a whole;
- Both in Bulgaria and in the EU as a whole, public opinion has no clear position yet regarding the objectivity of the online media – in the EU27, negative views (35%)

only exceed by 2 points the positive ones (33%) while, in Bulgaria, the majority of the poll (57%) does not have a clear opinion.

**Overall**, the results from the autumn 2007 Eurobarometer survey show that emotional optimism, a characteristic of the pre-accession period, has now ceded its place to greater realism in Bulgarian views on European integration. Compared to other EU countries, Bulgarians remain more moderate both in their positive and negative opinions. They prefer to give a “don’t know” response instead of an outspoken negative one. Bulgarian public opinion does not yet have a clear view on many of the issues surveyed by Eurobarometer. Often, the ‘don’t know’ responses exceed the positive or negative views. Through their views expressed in the autumn 2007 Eurobarometer, citizens declare the need for a wider information campaign on European affairs, through the institutions and the media.