

# EUROBAROMETER 68

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

## AUTUMN 2007

### NATIONAL REPORT

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### CZECH REPUBLIC

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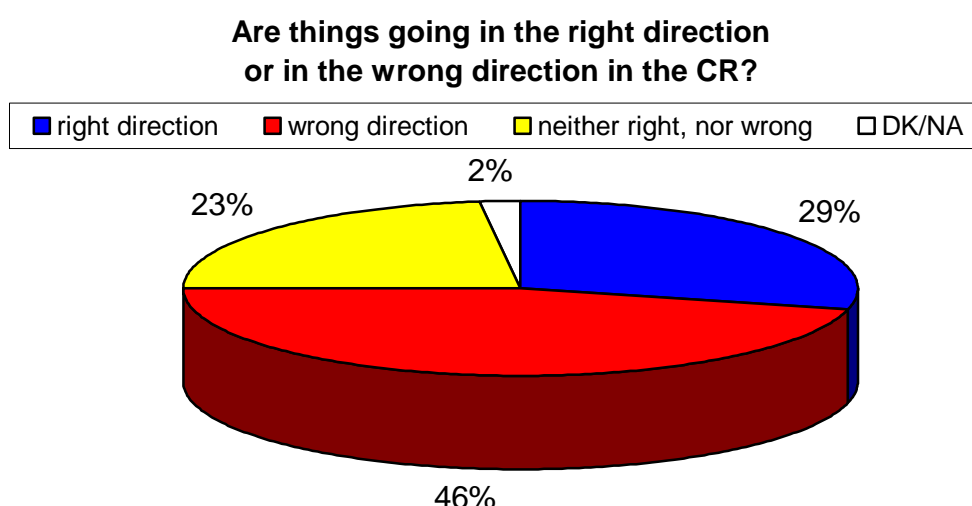
The Eurobarometer report describes the climate of opinion in member and candidate countries of the European Union. This report looks at Czech citizens' views on various aspects of the European Union as well as their own life and compares them with typical attitudes held across the EU. It also highlights major differences with other countries. This is the seventh Czech Eurobarometer report since the Czech Republic became an EU Member.

The opinion poll, upon which this report is based, was conducted among 1,106 Czechs between September 24 and October 15, 2007. In the Czech Republic, this period was marked by hot political discussion on reforms proposed by Topolánek's coalition government that dealt with taxation, social payments and funding of the public healthcare system. Another hot topic was a plan to install a US military radar on Czech territory. Due to this situation, the Czech population paid relatively little attention to the EU agenda including the effort to negotiate a new version of the Treaty on Europe.

Currently, the opinion that membership in the European Union is a good thing is held, on average, by 58 % of citizens in the EU 27. On some other topics, in the EU as a whole, the Eurobarometer shows better or at least comparable results to the previous edition from spring 2007. Nevertheless, the need for informing European citizens about the European agenda was confirmed again. Less than one fifth of the European citizens expressed the opinion that they are well informed about European political affairs.

### ***Opinion on the situation in the Czech Republic***

**Only 29% of Czech citizens think that things are going in the right direction in their country**, while 46% of people believe things are going in the wrong direction. In the autumn of 2006, 41% of Czechs thought that things were going in the right direction. Many surveys of Czech polling institutions suggest that this turn in public opinion was caused by increasing discontentedness with the political situation in the Czech Republic together with fear of the consequences of the so called "reform back-pack".



In spite of massive economic growth, the **Czech public sees the situation of the national economy rather critically**. Negative opinions dominate with 56% compared to 42% positive opinions. In the EU 27 average, positive and negative opinions are balanced (48 to 49%).

**In addition, the situation regarding employment is assessed highly negatively.** Even though the unemployment rate dropped to 5.5%, the **employment situation in the Czech**

**Republic is seen as bad by 52%** of citizens. The same opinion is shared, on average, by 61% of citizens in the EU 27. In another part of the Eurobarometer, however, we discover that unemployment no longer ranks among the most important issues in Czech public opinion.

In the past, the **state of the environment** was evaluated as rather good by citizens. Currently, positive opinions have decreased in the Czech Republic as well as in the entire EU. **In the Czech Republic, the majority share a positive opinion** (52% positive compared to 47% negative). On average, **among the EU 27, negative opinions slightly dominate** (51% negative compared to 46% positive).

At the beginning of 2005, Czech citizens evaluated **social welfare** slightly more positively than the economy. In 2006, the opinions grew even more positive but the trend has changed since then. Nowadays, only **slightly more than one third** of respondents (35%) **think that social welfare** in the Czech Republic is good. On average, among the EU27, this opinion is more frequent (46%).

### ***Issues facing the Czech Republic***

Although inflation in the Czech Republic was not very high during the Eurobarometer data collection period, **Czechs most often mentioned rising prices** as one of the two major concerns facing their country (42%).

As in most EU Member States, **unemployment continues to be a major concern**. Nonetheless, due to economic growth, the percentage of Czech people who rank unemployment among the two most important problems has decreased continuously, from 54% in autumn 2004 to the present level of 21%. A similar trend can be seen in the whole of the EU, where the share of EU citizens who rank unemployment among the most important issues has decreased to 34%.

Due to concerns linked to the healthcare part of the “reform back-pack”, together with the long-lasting political discussion on the Czech healthcare system, **healthcare remains high in the ranking of issues facing the Czech Republic. It is perceived by 38% of Czechs as one of the two major concerns facing their country**. This level is nearly twice as high as the EU 27 average (21%).

As in many other EU countries, **unemployment** was seen, on the whole, as the most important issue facing the Czech Republic for a rather long time. Since 2005, economic growth has apparently influenced Czech public opinion. The percentage of citizens who rank unemployment among the two major concerns facing their country **dropped from 54% in autumn 2004 to the present level of 13%**. According to the EU 27 average, such opinions are now less frequent (by 7 percentage points) compared to spring 2007. In spite of falling from 34 to 27%, the EU 27 average is still twice as high as the Czech level.

### ***Trust in institutions***

According to the EU 27 average, national governments and parliaments are trusted by more than one third of citizens (34%). In the Czech Republic, the **national government is only trusted by every fifth citizen** (21%), and the **Parliament only by every sixth citizen** (16%). Trust in the EU is much higher – this trust has been shown by a majority of Czechs for some time (recently 58%) and remains higher than the EU 27 average (48%).

## *Information about European political affairs*

The Czechs **do not feel properly informed about European political affairs**. Only 2% of Czechs think the people in the Czech Republic are very well informed in this respect and another one quarter (24%) share the opinion that the Czech population is fairly well informed. The negative opinions “not very well informed” and “not informed at all” amount to 72%. Since the spring of 2007, the feeling of being informed about **European political affairs** decreased by three percentage points. According to the average EU 27 citizen, there are only 18% who think that people in their country are well informed about European political affairs. The Eurobarometer shows the same level in the average of the 12 new member states.

## *Conditions in the EU*

Only very rarely do Czech citizens feel that the interests of the Czech Republic are taken well into account in the EU. The percentage of Czechs who share this opinion dropped by 8 percentage points to the level of one-quarter (26%). Comparable results were recorded in spring 2006. At that time the difference between Czech opinions and the EU 25 average was 4 percentage points lower than the present difference between the Czech and EU 27 figures.

**The public, both in the Czech Republic and in the whole of the EU, would like to entrust many public affair issues to the competence of the European Union.** The latest Eurobarometer confirmed that a large part of the public think that decisions on **protecting the environment** should be made jointly within the European Union. In the Czech Republic, such opinions are now 6 percentage points more frequent than in spring 2007 and now comprise 74% of citizens. According to the EU 27 average, there was an increase of 4 percentage points to 73%.

Opinions on economic issues, however, lean towards the opposite view. Only 45% of Czechs prefer decisions in the area of **fighting inflation** to be jointly made within the European Union, 51% prefer decisions to be made by the Czech government. According to the EU 27 average, there are slightly more people who think that decisions should be made jointly within the European Union (49%) than those who prefer decisions to be made by the government (45%). In the general area of the **economy**, the situation is similar. In the Czech Republic, those preferring decision making at the European level are in the minority (44% compared to 54% sharing the opposite opinion). According to the EU 27 average, preference for decision making at the European level slightly dominates (48% over 47%).

In the area of **pensions**, the opinion that competences should remain in the hands of the national governments clearly dominates. Only 30% of Czechs think that decisions on pensions should be made jointly within the European Union, the EU 27 average amounts to 26%.

## *Role of the EU*

As far as **protecting the environment** is concerned, nearly two thirds of Czech citizens (62%) think that the European Union plays a positive role in the Czech Republic. According to the EU 27 average, such opinion is shared by approximately one half of the people (52%).

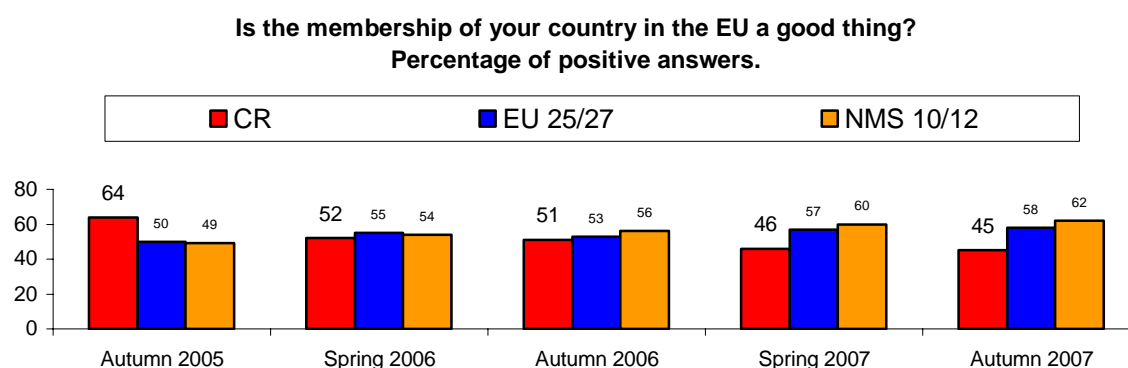
Positive opinions also dominate regarding the **impact on the economic situation** – in the Czech Republic, the ratio of positive to negative opinions is 40 to 22%, and, for the EU 27 average, a similar 39 to 20%. In slight conflict with that, the influence of the European Union on **inflation** is seen rather negatively. In the Czech Republic, the ratio of positive to negative

opinions is 17 to 43%; for the EU 27 average it is only slightly less negative with a 21 to 36% ratio.

In the areas of **housing** and **pensions**, most Czech people think that the European Union plays neither a positive nor a negative role in the Czech Republic (53 and 56% respectively). Among Czech citizens who think that the European Union plays some role in these areas, positive opinions are more frequent in terms of housing (22 % compared to 20% of negative opinions) but the negative opinions dominate in respect to pensions (23% compared to 15% of positive opinions).

## ***Support for EU membership***

**The measure of opinion that EU membership is a good thing has been gradually declining for some time in the Czech Republic.** At present, only 45% of Czechs share this opinion. This trend is contradictory to that shown in the whole European Union as well as in the new member states. The opinion that EU membership is a bad thing accounts for, on average, 13% among the EU 27, 15% in the Czech Republic and 8% for the 12 new member states.



**According to nearly two thirds of Czechs (61%), the Czech Republic has, on balance, benefited from being a member of the European Union.** This opinion has remained unchanged since spring 2007. Less than one third of Czechs share the opposite opinion (29%). Czech opinions are closer to the EU 27 average than to the average of the 12 new member states. According to the EU 27 average, 58% of citizens think that their country has, on balance, benefited from being a member of the European Union, and for the NMS 12 the corresponding figure is, on average, 68%.

## ***Support for EU enlargement and the euro***

**In the long run, nearly two thirds of the Czech people support further enlargement of the EU to include other countries in the future, currently 62%.** However, this prospect has, on average, only minority support in the EU 27 (46%).

**Most Czechs also support the idea of a European Monetary Union with one single currency, the euro.** At the same time, the approach of the leading party of the government coalition has influenced the attitudes of the people towards this European project. The support lost 7 percentage points and is now lower (53%) than the EU 27 average (61%).

## *How do the media report on the EU*

In spring 2006, most Czech citizens thought that the media talk about the right amount about the European Union. This opinion was, on average, similar in the EU 27. Recent data, however, show negative trends. The percentage of citizens holding the opinion that there is too little information on the EU grew by 10 percentage points concerning Czech TV stations (nowadays 44%), by 11 percentage points in regards to Czech radio stations (up to the current 43%) as well as by 13 percentage points in relation to the Czech press (37%). However, when it comes to national press, most Czech citizens believe that it sufficiently informs about the EU (50%). The structure of newly assessed opinions on the amount of information on Czech websites is even more positive. According to 44% of Czechs, there is enough information about the EU in this medium. Conversely, 21 % stated there is too little information. It should be taken into account that 32% of people did not know or gave no answer.

In the EU 27 as a whole, the opinion that national TV and radio stations inform too little about the European Union clearly dominates. On the contrary, the opinions on information in the national press and national websites are rather positive according to the EU 27 average, even if not as positive as in the Czech Republic.

**The majority of Czech citizens**, as well as, on average, the majority of EU 27 citizens, **think that the national media portray the EU objectively**. In the Czech Republic, this opinion is shared by 63% concerning Czech TV and radio stations, 62% in relation to the national press and 51% regarding national websites (given 35% in the category “don’t know/no answer”). At the same time, one should not forget that among those who think that the individual media do not inform objectively, most think that the information is too positive. This is most evident with Czech TV stations, with the ratio of the answers “too positive” and “too negative” being 23% to 5%.

## *Trust in the media*

The media are mostly trusted. The **most trusted medium**, both in the Czech Republic and the EU 27, on average, is the **radio** (70% and 60% respectively). Though slightly less, **television is** still trusted by a majority of the people both in the Czech Republic (68%) and in the EU 27 (52%). While **national press** ranks third in the EU 27 (44%), **in the Czech Republic national websites receive more faith** (55%).

Generally speaking, the **Czech public trusts the media more on average than the EU 27 citizens**. The Eurobarometer shows the most significant difference in the case of internet, namely 22 percentage points. In general, trust toward all media platforms diminished. In the Czech Republic, the largest decrease was shown concerning national websites (by 7 percentage points) and Czech radio stations (by 5 percentage points).