

EUROBAROMETER 68

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

AUTUMN 2007

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

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Introduction

The public opinion survey, Standard Eurobarometer, is carried out twice a year. This Standard Eurobarometer survey (Eb68) was conducted between 22 September and 3 November 2007 in the 27 member states that make up the European Union and in 3 candidate countries – the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Croatia and Turkey, as well as in the part of Cyprus which is under Turkish rule.

The survey comprised 30,281 respondents from the 27 Member States of the European Union and the candidate countries who have applied for full membership of the EU.

The Standard Eurobarometer was commissioned by the Directorate-General for Communication of the European Commission; it was carried out by the consortium TNS Opinion & Social, assembled from Taylor Nelson Sofres and EOS Gallup Europe. In the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the survey was carried out by TNS Brima, member of the association Gallup International and Taylor Nelson Sofres. The report was written by the research director in Brima, Gjorgji Kimov.

The results from the previous Spring Eurobarometer (Eb67) were influenced by improvements of the economic performance in the EU during the previous years. The improvements in the economy in the EU helped develop a feeling of optimism among the citizens of the Union and of candidate countries. The optimism of the public is reflected in the results of the Spring Eurobarometer in a positive direction concerning many questions. The results showed widespread support for expanding the Union, a positive image of the EU and the trust of citizens in its institutions.

Half a year later, the results of the most recent Autumn Eurobarometer (Eb68) show a trend of decreasing optimism among the citizens, which is due to the rise in energy prices and especially the gradual but continuous increase in the price of oil on the world market. In this context, with citizens facing the implications of rising prices in many areas of everyday life, a sense of worry and uncertainty regarding the future arises. This sense of concern was reflected in the responses to many questions in the survey. Based on examining the dynamic processes in a broader social context, an analysis of the Eurobarometer data shows that there are changes in the public's mood which has now returned to what it was in autumn 2006.

For the public in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, apart from the pressure of prices on citizens' already low standard of living compared to the EU average, what was also disappointing were the media announcements that the speed of the process for moving closer to the European Union is slowing down and that it is now not realistic to expect a date for negotiations with the EU in the near future. This atmosphere clashed with the optimism of the citizens manifested in the previous Eurobarometer.

All of the effects of the change in the overall context of the country have been recorded in this new Eurobarometer survey by way of a decrease in the previously high level of optimism regarding the answers to several questions on EU integration, which were also asked in the previous survey.

- **Economic and social aspects of the social climate**

The citizens' perception of the socio-economic climate in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia considerably differs to that in the Member States of the EU. In the FYROM, public awareness of poor conditions: employment, social welfare, the economy, and environmental protection is greater than the average in the countries of the EU27.

FYROM citizens perceive the employment situation in the country as bad **(88%)**, which is eight times more than those interviewed who perceive the situation as good **(11%)**. Compare this with the EU27, where 61% of the citizens think that the employment situation is bad and 36% good.

In all three candidate countries, the majority of citizens rate social welfare as bad, unlike the average in the EU27 countries.

31% of the public in FYROM think that the state of the environment is good whereas twice as many people, or two-thirds of those interviewed, rate the environment as bad **(66%)**. In the EU countries, the public is divided, 46% think it is good and 51% think it is bad.

Still at the top of the list of major problems which the country faces (despite a decrease compared to previous surveys) are: unemployment, the economy and crime. The proportion of citizens concerned about unemployment has decreased from 72% to 67% and concern about crime has fallen from 42% to 40%. However, the greatest change in the perception of problems among the public is the increase by 9 percentage points of the proportion of citizens who consider the rise in prices and inflation to be one of the major problems faced by their country (from 7% in the previous survey to 16% in this one).

The Eurobarometer indicates a similar increasing trend for the number of citizens concerned about the rise in prices and inflation in the countries of the EU27. This problem in the Union affects 8 percentage points more of the citizens compared to the previous survey (18%:26%).

- **Direction of the country and trust in the institutions**

According to the citizens of FYROM, the conditions within the country are linked to the expectations regarding the process of European integration. The results from the most recent Eurobarometer confirm that there is a considerably strong connection between the perception of the situation in the country and its European prospects. The opinion that the country is going in the right direction is given by 42% of those who see membership of the EU as a positive thing and by considerably fewer (31%) of those who believe that membership of the EU is a bad thing. Data from the survey indicate that expectations regarding the European integration process among the public, despite the socio-economic difficulties that the country faces, influence the public climate in a positive way, and thus those who believe that

the country is heading in the right direction (38%) outnumber the people who consider the country is heading in the wrong direction (33%).

Global movements within the EU are reflected in the mood of the public compared to the trust in the governments of the EU27 member states. On average, trust in the national governments in the countries of the EU27 has decreased by 7 points, from 41% to 34%. This trend does not bypass the government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as the level of trust in the government decreased by 4 percentage points between the Eurobarometer surveys. In the previous survey, the government was supported by 40% of the citizens compared to 36% in this one.

The citizens of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia show greater support for their government (36%) than their parliament (23%). Trust in the parliament has fallen by 9% (32%: 23%) between the two surveys.

- Public perception in the candidate countries concerning the attitude of the EU towards their country

The perception of the citizens from the candidate member states about the way the European Union takes into account the interests of their country determines the actual, real support that they will have for the process of European integration of their country.

Comparison with the results from the two previous Eurobarometers indicates that the citizens of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey are disappointed by the attitude of the EU towards their aspirations for integration in the European Union.

Among the public, the number of citizens who think that the EU takes into consideration the interests of the country sufficiently has decreased considerably, from 54% in the summer of 2007 to 40% in the autumn of 2007. In Turkey, a decrease of 14 percentage points (37% to 23%) was recorded since the last Eurobarometer, in terms of the proportion of citizens who believe that the EU takes the interests of the country into consideration. In Croatia, this ratio has remained practically unchanged between the two Eurobarometers. The results indicate that, in Croatia, 31% believe that the EU takes the interests of their country sufficiently into consideration, compared to an almost identical level (32%) in the previous survey.

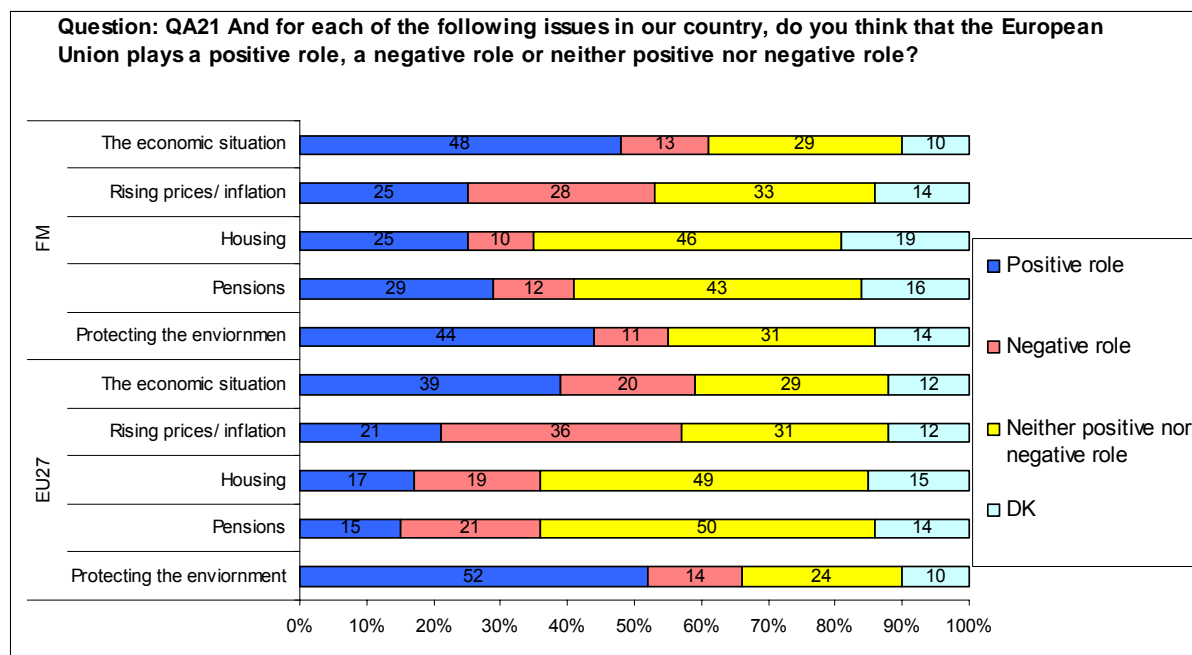
- Association with the EU

In this most recent Eurobarometer, the public was divided between those who believe that the decisions on the economy should be made independently by the national government (49%) and those who think that these decisions should be made together within the EU (46%).

57% of those interviewed think that the government in this country should independently bring in measures for fighting inflation, while 36% think that such problems need to be coordinated with the EU. A very similar structure is noted in the answers of the other two candidate countries. In Croatia, 56% of respondents are in favour of independent measures, as opposed to 39% who prefer coordination within the EU, and in Turkey, the figures are 57% and 29% respectively.

The results for the EU27 indicate that the citizens of these countries believe that measures for fighting inflation should be introduced by the national government in coordination with the European Union (49%), while (45%) choose the option for independent decisions of the national governments.

The public in this country believe that the EU has the greatest positive influence on the domestic economy (48%), and that the least positive influence of the Union is on inflation and the housing issue (25%).



- EU and the media

The perception of the prevalence of EU subjects in the media is diametrically opposed when the views of FYROM citizens and those of EU27 citizens are compared.. Among FYROM citizens, the prevailing opinion is that the domestic media report too much on the European Union (on TV 38%, in the press 31%, and on the radio 22%) as opposed to the opinion of EU-27 citizens that these subjects are not discussed enough in the media (38% on TV, 46% on the radio, and 36% in the press).

The EU27 citizens believe that there is a tendency in the media to idealise the EU. The data of the survey indicate that the public in the candidate countries are prone to thinking that the media present the EU too positively rather than neutrally.

Between the two Eurobarometers, throughout Europe, citizens' trust in the media has decreased. In the EU27 countries, trust in the electronic media – television, radio and the Internet – has decreased. The results of the last Eurobarometer indicate a similar trend in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia where trust in the media has decreased by 7 percentage points.

Conclusion

Among the public of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, awareness of the poor situation in terms of employment, social care, the economy and environmental protection is more widespread than the average in the EU 27 countries. Despite the unfavourable socio-economic climate in the country, in the context of its European perspectives, there are more people who say that the country is headed in the right direction (38%) than think that it is going in the wrong direction (33%). The analysis of the results of the survey carried out in this country indicate that the evolution of the effects of European integration influence the social climate in the country. The results of the latest Eurobarometer indicate that the optimism of the citizens of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is declining due to the effects of the integration process. These changes in the public's mood reflect the overall implications of the slow progress that the country is making in the process of European integration. Among the public, the number of those who think that the EU sufficiently takes the interests of the country into consideration decreased from 54% in the spring of 2007 to 40% in the autumn of 2007.

The rate of progress towards EU integration has had an effect on the view, in candidate countries, of the media's coverage of EU issues.. The public in Croatia, which is further down the road in the process of European integration, has a need for more information about the EU. However, the public in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and in Turkey "feel" that "there is a long way to go" to achieve European integration due to the fact that a major part of the public in these countries is prone to believing that the domestic media reports too much on EU issues. These answers portray the specific discontent of the citizens in terms of the results achieved in the process of integration of the country in the EU.