

EUROBAROMETER 68

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

AUTUMN 2007

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HUNGARY

This survey was requested and coordinated by Directorate-General for Communication.

This report was produced for the European Commission's Representation Hungary.

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.

The mood and contentment of EU citizens

Citizens of Hungary remain the most pessimistic among the EU member states, although the level of general dissatisfaction was higher in Bulgaria and Romania in the autumn of 2007, according to the latest Eurobarometer survey. In Hungary, only 15% believes that life will improve in twelve months' time. Around half of the people do not expect any improvement and a significant proportion expects negative changes.

Slightly more than half of the Hungarians say they are content with their lives. The average of all EU member countries was significantly higher (80%). Similarly to the results of the previous surveys, Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands are at the top of the list. Romania and Bulgaria took the last two places, followed by Hungary.

Among the ex-socialist states, only Slovenia and the Czech Republic were able to keep up with Western European states: the proportion of people who are content with their lives exceeded the EU average. The other states with a similar history are well behind.

The pessimism of Hungarians is restricted to views on their own country and lives. When it comes to questions on the EU, the Hungarians have positive or negative thoughts in a similar proportion to citizens of other countries. When participants were asked to assess the economic situation in the EU, more than half of the Hungarians were positive, which is close to the average level of all member states.

Both in Hungary and in the EU on average, only one-fifth of those questioned expect negative developments in the economic situation of the EU. The majority of people believe that the situation will improve or that there will not be a significant change.

Hungarians are less optimistic about the future of their own country. Only 10% expect an improvement, for the next twelve months, in the economic situation of the country, in the employment situation of the country, in their own job situation or in the financial situation of their own households.

During the Eurobarometer interview, participants were asked to pick two areas from a list that they consider as the most important issues currently facing their country. Like the results of earlier surveys, most of the participants ranked unemployment first. In the spring of 2007, first place was shared by unemployment and the economic situation but the latter came fourth in the latest survey, following the areas of healthcare and inflation.

Unemployment was the first issue cited on average in the member states as a whole but with a lower proportion (27%) than in Hungary (41%). The second was inflation, followed by crime.

There is a significant difference between the proportion of people in Hungary and in the EU average that thinks terrorism and immigration are important areas. Only a few

Hungarians said these were important issues while 10% of the EU27 poll cited the problem of terrorism and 15% immigration.

In addition to the mood and contentment of people, another important question in the Eurobarometer surveys was what people think about different institutions and whether they trust them. Compared to the average of all member states, a higher proportion of people in Hungary trust the EU,, while their trust in the national government is significantly lower.

The opinion on the police has significantly changed in Hungary in six months. In the spring of 2007, more than half of the Hungarians said they had trust in the police. By the autumn of the same year, this proportion decreased to 49%. In the EU as a whole, only one-third of the people said they have serious doubts about the national police.

Trust in the national government and the parliament has further decreased in Hungary. Political parties suffered the biggest loss in trust. In the spring of 2007, 14% of Hungarians had trust in the political parties but this proportion decreased to 8% in six months.

Trust in political parties is similarly low in Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Bulgaria, according to the Eurobarometer survey. In general, the majority of EU citizens do not trust political parties. The most outstanding result was shown in Spain, where almost one-third of the people asked had trust in political parties. Luxembourg and Austria had similar results.

In line with the lack of trust in political parties, the government and the parliament, Hungarians excelled in their level of discontent with the way democracy works in their country. Only a quarter of Hungarians expressed satisfaction with democracy in their country, while the proportion across the EU27 member states was 58%.

Views on the EU

The number of Hungarians who believe the country's EU membership is a good thing has gradually decreased in the last few years, while the number of those who say it is neither a good thing nor a bad thing has increased. By the autumn of 2007, the proportion of people sharing these views was almost the same (40% and 41% respectively). In the meantime, almost one-fifth of Hungarians say the country's membership is a bad thing and the number of people who have this opinion has not changed significantly during the history of the Eurobarometer surveys.

Political views seem to determine opinion on the country's EU membership. More than half of people who place their views on the left of the political spectrum say the country's membership is a good thing. Among those who place themselves on the right or in the middle of the spectrum, the proportion is significantly lower (39% and 38% respectively).

The Eurobarometer survey in Hungary has proved again that young and educated people tend to be more positive regarding the country's EU membership than older or less educated Hungarians. More than half of people between the ages of 15 and 24 and people who have a level of higher education or are still studying say that Hungary's membership is a good thing. Only a third of the people in the highest age group and in the lowest education group share this opinion.

Although the proportion of people who trust the EU is significantly higher in Hungary than in the average of the EU, the proportion of people who believe their country's membership is a good thing is lower in Hungary than the EU average. In the EU member states as a whole, 58% said it is a good thing to be a member of the EU. Citizens of Luxemburg excelled in their enthusiasm for their country's EU membership.

The Eurobarometer poll in the autumn of 2007 also included questions on how people see the role played by the EU in their country's affairs.

In Hungary and in the EU on the whole, the highest number of people believes the EU plays a positive role in the fight against terrorism. In Hungary, it is followed by defence and foreign affairs and protection of the environment with similar figures. Half of Hungarians said the EU plays a positive role in fighting crime.

Hungarians had a different view on the role the EU plays in the country's economy. More than one-third of the interviewees said the EU plays a positive role in this field but the proportion of those who think the EU plays neither a positive nor negative role in the country's economy was almost the same. In Hungary, 28% said the EU plays a negative role in the country's economy.

The opinion of people on this question was also influenced by their political views. Around half of those who say they are on the left side of the political spectrum said the EU plays a positive role in the country's economy while only a quarter of the people on the right end of the spectrum shared this view.

After giving their opinion on the national government and the role the EU plays in their country's affairs, the interviewees were asked to decide if decisions should be made by the national government, or made jointly within the EU.

More than two-thirds of the Hungarians said that the national government should be solely responsible for pensions, education and healthcare. A similarly high proportion of Hungarians insists on having the Hungarian government decide on taxation issues.

More differences were discovered by the Eurobarometer survey in people's opinion when they were asked about transport, social welfare and fighting inflation. Slightly more than half of Hungarians would prefer decisions on these issues to be made by the Hungarian government while almost the same number of interviewees would share the responsibility jointly within the EU.

Regarding unemployment, agriculture, fisheries and the economy, the proportions of Hungarians wanting decision-making at national level and those wanting decision-

making at EU level are similar but the number of those who would opt for jointly decision-making at EU level was slightly higher. The majority said the contribution of the EU is important in the areas of consumer protection and competition.

Cooperation with the EU had a major role in those fields where the joint efforts of countries are needed to be efficient or where significant investments are needed. These areas are the problem of immigration, the support for regions facing economic difficulties, fighting crime and terrorism, scientific and technological research and defence and foreign affairs.

The desire for the right to make decisions on the most sensitive issues, like pensions, education, healthcare and taxation, to remain in the hands of the national government is surprising bearing in mind that trust in the national government is extremely low in Hungary and the number of people who trust the EU is significantly higher.

The explanation for this might be that only one person in ten of Hungarians feels they are personally involved in European affairs. Only 29% believes their voice counts in the EU. The majority of people believe they are unable to influence decisions in the EU.

Although half of the Hungarians feel that Hungary's voice counts in the EU, only 35% believes that the interests of the country are well taken into account in the EU. The interviewees tend to believe that the insufficient representation of the country is a consequence of its size, as 86% of Hungarians said the biggest countries have the most power in the EU.

However, it has to be taken into consideration that 60% of the interviewees said they do not understand how the EU works. This means that, when evaluating the weight of the voice of the country and individuals in the EU, people tend to rely on impressions and have no specific criticism regarding the decision-making processes of the EU.

In the EU27 on average, 74% of people said the biggest countries have the most power. Typically, the highest proportion of people sharing this opinion was measured in the smaller countries of the EU. The only exception was Luxemburg, where the Eurobarometer found the lowest proportion of people who agree with the statement, among all member states.

The future of the EU

It has always been an important question in the history of the Eurobarometer survey as to how people see the future of the EU and which are the areas they believe that need to be further developed in the integration process. The common defence and security policy and a common foreign policy towards other countries got most support, both in the EU27 member states on average and in Hungary.

People were less enthusiastic about creating a European Monetary Union with one single currency, the euro. In the EU27, 61% of people said they support it and in the eurozone, 69% of the interviewees said they support the Monetary Union. The lowest

level of support was measured in the United Kingdom, where only a quarter of the people said they like the idea of a single currency.

According to the Eurobarometer poll results, less than half of EU citizens support further enlargement of the EU to include other countries in future years. In Hungary, a higher proportion of people (64%) are in favour of having new member states.

The EU in the media

According to the results of the latest Eurobarometer survey, only 12% of Hungarians believe that people in Hungary are well informed about European political affairs. This proportion was not significantly higher in the EU27 member states (18%) on average.

During the interview, people were asked to give their view on the level of media coverage of the EU. Only a small proportion of Hungarians think the press, the radio, television or websites report too much on the EU.

About half of the Hungarian interviewees said the media report the right amount on the EU. The proportion of those who think more information would be needed on EU-related issues is relatively high. More than one third of people said there should be more coverage of the EU on television

The proportion of people who did not want to or could not answer the question regarding websites was extremely high (59%). The reason is that many people do not have Internet access and so they would not like to judge if it provides a sufficient amount of information on the EU. Among those who answered the question, 70% said that websites provide the right amount of information on the EU.