

EUROBAROMETER 68

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

AUTUMN 2007

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

LATVIA

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Introduction

In autumn 2007, a standard Eurobarometer survey was carried out in all the 27 member states of the European Union, two candidate countries (Croatia and Turkey), and in the Turkish Cypriot community. This report aims at reviewing the key results of the study.

The report presents the analysis of Latvian citizens' responses to the main questions of the survey. These responses are compared with the mean scores of the respondents from all the 27 European Union member states. In addition, where relevant, the report presents comparisons with the data from the previous EB surveys and data from the other Baltic States, as well as an analysis of survey results in various social and demographic groups of respondents.

During the survey, 1006 respondents aged 15 and over were interviewed throughout Latvia. The respondents' sample was defined by applying a random-probability sampling method and it represents the opinion of population throughout Latvia. The survey was carried out in the form of personal interview in respondents' homes by using the CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviews) system.

The Eurobarometer 68 survey was carried out in Latvia from September 25 to October 22, 2007. The survey was carried out by the market and social survey agency "TNS Latvia".

Eurobarometer 68 is the seventh Standard Eurobarometer survey carried out since Latvia became a member country of the European Union.

The European Union expanded in January 2007 – Romania and Bulgaria have become member countries. The euro-zone has also expanded with Slovenia, the first of the member states belonging to the post-Soviet area, joining it.

Evaluation of the situation within the country

- **The inhabitants of the 27 European Union member countries evaluate the economic situation in completely different ways:** about half of the people (48%) surveyed evaluated the economic situation of the country as rather good or very good, but the other half (49%) – as rather bad or very bad.

Latvians are the most sceptical people in the Baltic countries – only 16% of respondents characterize the economic situation as good or very good. (The number of sceptically minded people is smaller in Lithuania - 31% of respondents consider the economic situation as rather good or good. Comparatively speaking, the opinion of Estonians is much more positive – 67% of Estonian respondents consider the economic situation as rather good or good.)

As a result, Latvia has four times fewer positively minded people than Estonia.

In comparison to spring 2007, the situation has become slightly worse regarding the issue of Latvia's economic situation: the number of negatively thinking respondents reached 76% of those participating in the spring 2007 survey. Now, a slightly larger number evaluates Latvia's economic situation as rather bad or very bad - 81% (+5 PP).

- **The situation in the area of employment is evaluated in a rather critical way by the inhabitants of 27 EU member countries.** The situation in the area of employment seems rather good and very good for 36% of respondents from 27 EU countries, but rather bad or very bad – for 61% of them.

Latvia's figure is close to the EU 27 average: 38% of Latvians consider the situation in the area of employment as rather good or very good. But, in comparison to the other Baltic countries, the Latvians are most sceptical. (62% in Estonia and 50% in Lithuania think the employment situation is rather good or very good). But, comparing the data in EB68 to the survey of the previous year (autumn 2006), Latvians have become more optimistic about the employment situation in their country and the evaluation has grown by 11 PP.

- **The condition of the environment is evaluated by EU 27 countries in different ways:** 46% of respondents consider it rather good or very good, while 51% of them think it is rather bad or very bad.
58% of Latvian respondents evaluate the condition of the environment as rather good or very good. In the other Baltic countries, 62% of Estonian and 49% of Lithuanian respondents evaluate the condition of the environment as rather good or very good.
The opinion of Latvian respondents about the environment has not changed essentially since autumn 2006.
- **The opinions about the condition of social welfare totally differ in the 27 EU countries:** 46% of respondents think the condition of social welfare is rather good or very good, while 49% of them are of opinion it is rather bad or very bad.
Latvian respondents' opinion about their social welfare situation is the worst among the Baltic countries – only 14% think the social welfare system is rather good or very good. 28% of Lithuanian respondents speak in a positive way about social welfare in their country, but Estonia has more optimistic respondents - 38% of them evaluate social welfare of their country as being rather good or very good.

Conclusions: The evaluation of Latvian respondents about the situation in the area of employment does not differ much from the overall evaluation of 27 EU countries and it may be related to the low unemployment rates within the country. But, significant differences are observed between Latvia and the average indicators of 27 EU countries in the area of the economic situation, the social welfare situation and the environment.

The difference between the average Latvian figures and the EU27 average in the evaluation of the economic situation is 32 PP, i.e., the inhabitants of Latvia are considerably more sceptical about the economic situation in their country than people living in the EU27 countries. This may be explained by the continually rising inflation in Latvia because the development of the economy has become a less significant issue for the inhabitants of the country.

Also the evaluation of the social welfare situation differed between the inhabitants of Latvia and the EU27 by 32 PP, i.e., the inhabitants of Latvia are much more sceptic about the condition of social welfare of the country.

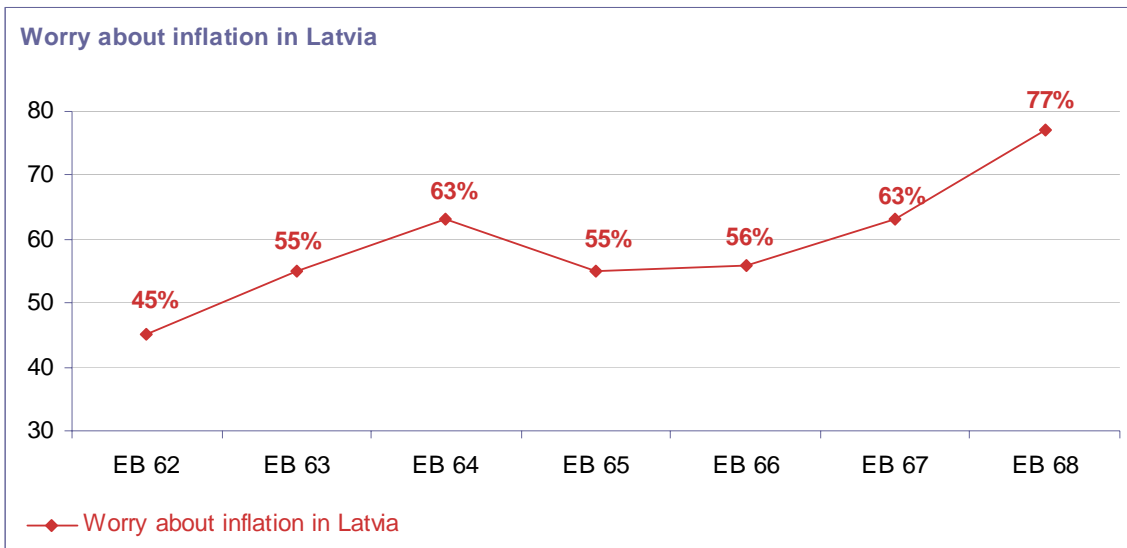
Although Latvians consider the condition of economic and social welfare as being worse than the EU27 average, the evaluation of the environmental condition is traditionally considered to be above the EU27 average (a difference of 12 PP).

The most important problems of the country

The problem mentioned most often in all 27 EU countries is unemployment (an opinion expressed by 27% of the EU27 respondents) **and inflation/rising prices** (the opinion of 26% of respondents).

In Latvia, in this seventh EB survey, inflation and rising prices is, as in the past surveys, cited as the most important problem (77% of Latvian respondents express this view).

Latvians, when compared with the results of the previous survey, have become more pessimistic regarding the issue of inflation (from 63% of the respondents in the previous survey to 77% today, i.e., +14 PP). This is also the case in Lithuania (from 38% to 62%, +24 PP) and Estonia (from 39% to 58%, +19 PP).



The second most significant problem mentioned is the economic situation of Latvia – this opinion was expressed by 23% of respondents. The most frequently cited problem (inflation and rising prices) is a concern for more than three-quarters of Latvians, while the second most important problem is a concern for only a quarter of respondents. At the same time, concerns about the economic situation in Latvia have decreased by 5 PP since the spring 2007 survey.

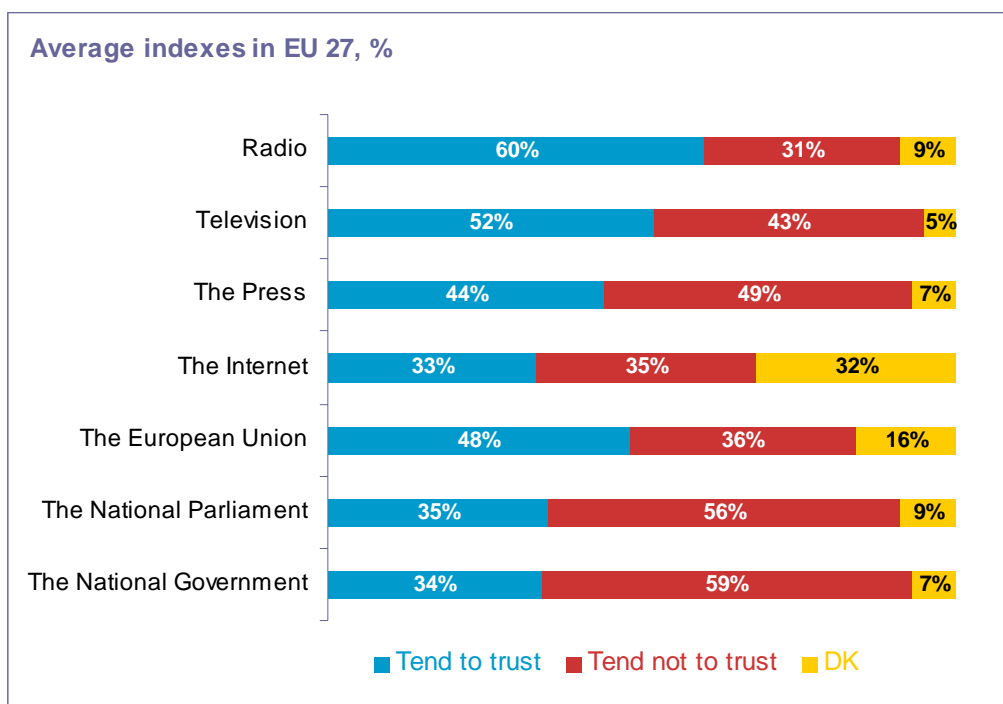
The movement of the existing processes in the right or wrong direction

- Only slightly more than one-third of EU27 respondents (34%) think that everything is moving in the right direction in their country.** 41% of EU27 respondents consider things are going in the wrong direction, but the “neither one, nor the other” response is recorded by one in five respondents (20%), while 5% of respondents have no opinion in the issue. When the Baltic countries are compared, Latvia is the most sceptical in its views. **25% of the respondents think things in Latvia are moving in the right direction.** Half consider that they are going in the wrong direction (50%), but “neither one nor the other” is the opinion of about every sixth respondent (16%). 8% of the respondents have no opinion. Things are moving in right direction according to the view of 39% of Lithuanians and 56% of Estonians (the second most positive average among EU27 countries). Latvia has the greatest fall in the number of optimistic respondents since the autumn 2006 – for 14 PP (from 40% in the autumn, 2006 to 26% in the autumn, 2007).
- Considering the issue as to whether things are moving in the right direction in the European Union in general, we see that **48% of EU27 respondents think things are moving in the right direction in the European Union**, but 15% are of the opposite opinion – i.e. that things are moving in the wrong direction. 18% say it is “neither one, nor the other”, but 19% have no opinion on the issue. Latvia has a relatively less optimistic view than the other Baltic countries.

Views on the European Union

Trust in the national institutions and mass media

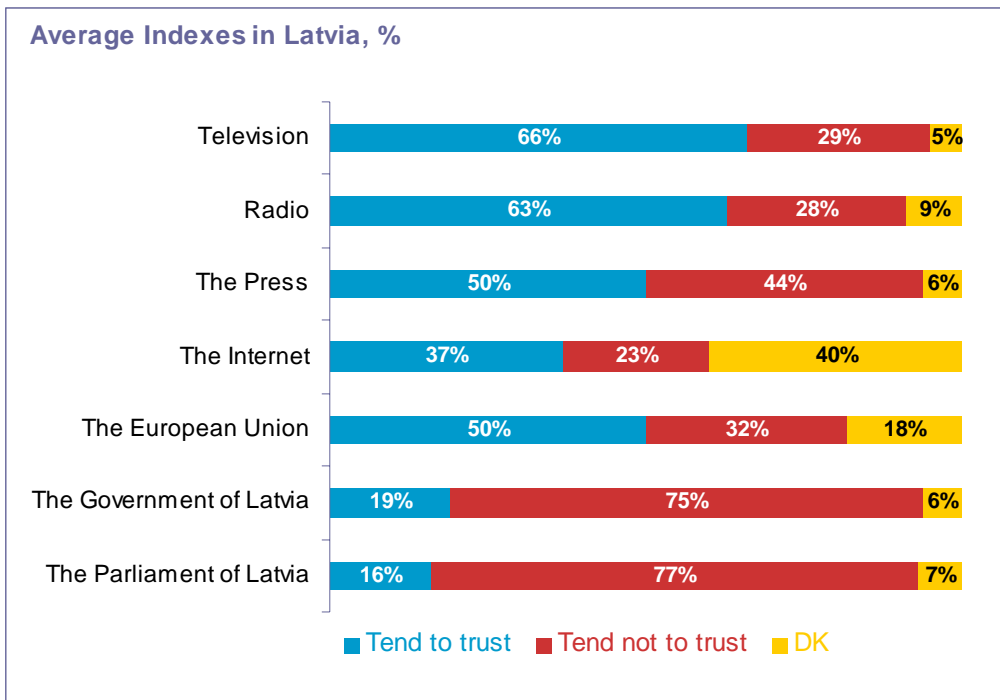
Radio (60%) is the most trusted of the mass media in the EU27 countries, followed by the television (52%) and the press (44%). Every third EU27 respondent trusts the internet (33%). The level of trust in the national parliaments and governments is very similar among 27 EU countries (35% and 34% respectively). Trust in the European Union was expressed by almost half (48%) of EU27 respondents, but distrust is expressed by 36%, while 16% have no particular opinion. In comparison to the spring 2007 survey, trust in the European Union has decreased by 9 PP (from 57% to 48% in this survey).



Respondents in Latvia, likewise, trust more in the mass media than in their parliament or government. Latvians have comparatively more trust in television and radio (these institutions are trusted by 66% and 63% of Latvians respectively). Every second inhabitant trusts the press (50%) but trust in the internet is lower at 37%.

Almost a fifth of respondents trust the Latvian government (19%), but trust in the Latvian Saeima (National Parliament) is even lower – 16%.

Among the Baltic countries, Latvia has the lowest number of respondents trusting the European Union (50%).



Evaluation of how the interests of the country are taken into account in the European Union

38% of EU27 citizens agree that “the interests of my country are taken into consideration to a great extent by the European Union”, while 16% do not have an opinion on the statement.

30% of Latvians agree with the statement that “the interests of my country are taken into account by the European Union”; however, 60% disagree, while 10% have no opinion.

Information about political affairs in Europe

When asked “overall, do you think that people in their country are well informed or not about European political affairs?” 18% of EU27 respondents answered positively. More than three-quarters of EU27 respondents (78%) think they are not well informed about political affairs in Europe.

Among the Baltic countries, Latvia has the highest number of respondents who think people are well informed about European political affairs – this is the opinion of one-third of respondents (33%). Almost two-thirds of Latvian respondents (64%) consider they are not well informed about the European political affairs, but 3% have no opinion on the issue. Of the EU27 countries, Latvia has the sixth highest figure in this regard.

Should decisions in each of the following areas be taken by the national government or at European Union level?

- In general, EU27 respondents are polarised regarding the level at which decision-making about the economy should take place:** almost half of EU27 respondents (47%) consider these decisions should be taken by the national government, while 48% think they should be taken at EU level.
 Latvia, like Lithuania, has a comparatively higher number of respondents who think decisions relating to the economy should be taken at EU level (61%), while, in Estonia, only every second respondent (50%) thinks this.

- In general, the answers given by EU27 citizens to the question as to how decisions relating to inflation should be taken are polarized:** almost half of EU27 respondents (49%) consider these decisions should be taken at EU level whereas 45% think these decisions should be taken by the national government.

The responses to this question were also polarized in the Baltic countries: half of Latvian and Estonian respondents consider the issue of the fight against inflation should be decided at EU level (50%), whereas the number of similarly thinking respondents is higher in Lithuania (55%).
- A comparatively higher number of EU27 citizens think decisions relating to pensions should be taken by the government of each country independently (70%),** but 26 consider they should be taken jointly at EU level.

A comparatively high proportion of respondents in the Baltic countries support the view that issues regarding pensions should be decided jointly at EU level – 42% in both Latvia and Lithuania compared with 36% in Estonia.
- The general opinion of EU27 respondents is that decisions related to environmental protection should be taken jointly at EU level (73%),** while 24% of the respondents think they should be taken independently by national governments.

Opinion regarding decision-making in the area of environmental protection should be taken only by the national government or jointly at EU level is similar: about two-thirds of Latvian (65%), Lithuanian (64%) and Estonian (66%) respondents consider these decisions should be taken jointly at EU level. These figures are slightly lower than the EU27 average.

What is the impact of European Union on the following areas:

- 39% of EU27 citizens consider that the EU plays a positive role in their country's economic situation.** 20% think the EU has a negative impact upon their country's economy, while 29% think its impact is neither positive. 12% of the respondents have no opinion on the issue.

Latvians have a diametrically opposed view about the positive or negative influence of the EU on their country's economic situation. Lithuania and Estonia consider the role of the EU on the economic situation of their country positively whereas the proportion of people holding this view in Latvia is the lowest of all the countries covered by the survey.

26% of Latvians agree that the EU plays a positive role in the economic situation of their country, 26% take the opposite view, while 34% think its impact is neither positive nor negative. 14% of respondents have no opinion on this issue.

Among the EU27 countries, Latvia has the second highest fall in the number of respondents who consider the EU plays a positive role in their economy: -13 PP (from 39% to 26%). (The highest fall is in Ireland – 17 PP).
- 21% of EU27 citizens think that the EU plays a positive role in combating increases in prices/inflation in their country.** 36% think that the EU plays a negative role in this respect, while 31% think it plays neither a positive nor a negative role. 12% of respondents have no opinion on the issue.

Of all the EU27 countries, Latvia has the most negative view about the EU's influence in this field. Figures in Lithuania and Estonia are also below the EU27 average: 20% in Lithuania and 19% in Estonia.

Only 10% of Latvians think the EU plays a positive role in the areas of rising prices/inflation in their country. More than half (53%) think the EU plays a negative role in this area and 26% think it plays neither a positive nor a negative role. 11% of respondents have no opinion on the issue.

Since the survey of the spring 2006, the number of respondents in Latvia who consider the EU plays a negative role (-14 PP, from 67% to 53%) has decreased, but the proportion of those supporting the view that the EU plays neither a positive nor a negative role has increased (+11 PP, from 15% to 26%).
- In general, 17% of EU27 respondents think that the EU plays a positive role in the housing issue in their country.** 19% think the EU has a negative role in the housing issue, while almost

half (49%) see its role as neither positive nor negative. 15% of respondents have no opinion on this issue.

11% of Latvian respondents agree that the EU plays a positive role regarding housing in their country; 16% think it plays a negative role, while more than half (58%) think it plays neither a positive nor a negative role in this area. 15% of respondents have no opinion on this issue.

- **Half (50%) of EU27 respondents think the influence of the EU in the issue of pensions is neither positive, nor negative.** 15% of the respondents agree that the EU plays a positive role in the country's pension issues, but 21% of the respondents think it plays a negative role. 14% of respondents have no opinion on this issue.

Latvia has a different opinion about the positive or negative role of the EU regarding the issue of pensions. Lithuania and Estonia see the EU playing a positive role in this area (Lithuania is in first, and Estonia in fourth position among the EU27 countries in this regard), compared with a much smaller figure in Latvia.

12% of the Latvian respondents think the EU plays a positive role in regard to pensions in their country, while 20% of the respondents say it plays a negative role. However, more than half (54%) the Latvian poll does not see the EU playing either a positive or negative role in relation to the pension issue. 14% of Latvian respondents have no opinion on this issue.

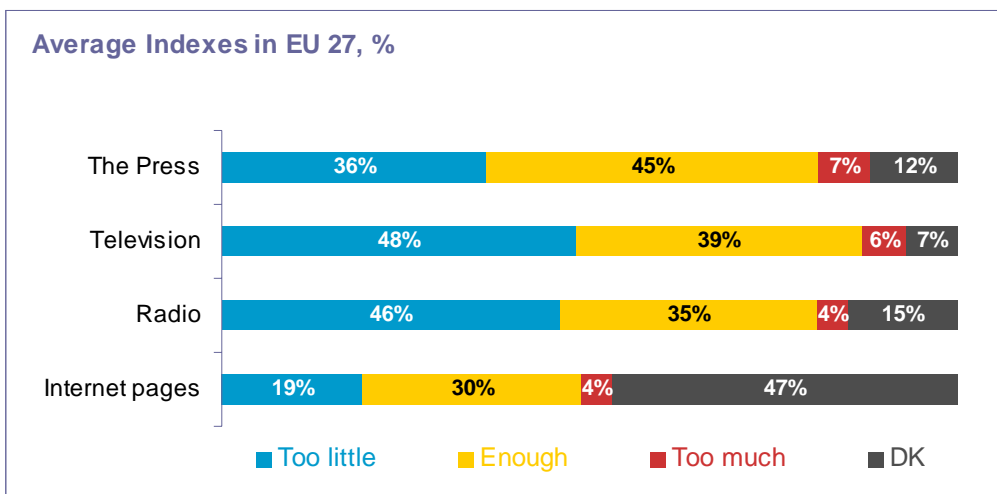
- **Slightly more than a half (52%) of the EU27 respondents think the EU plays a positive role in the environmental protection of their country,** 14% think the EU influences environmental protection in a negative way but 24% see its role as being neither positive nor negative. 10% of respondents have no opinion on this issue.

41% of Latvians think the EU plays a positive role in the issue of environmental protection in their while 10% see its impact as negative. However, 36% of Latvians see the EU's impact in this area as being neither positive nor negative. 13% of respondents have no opinion on this issue.

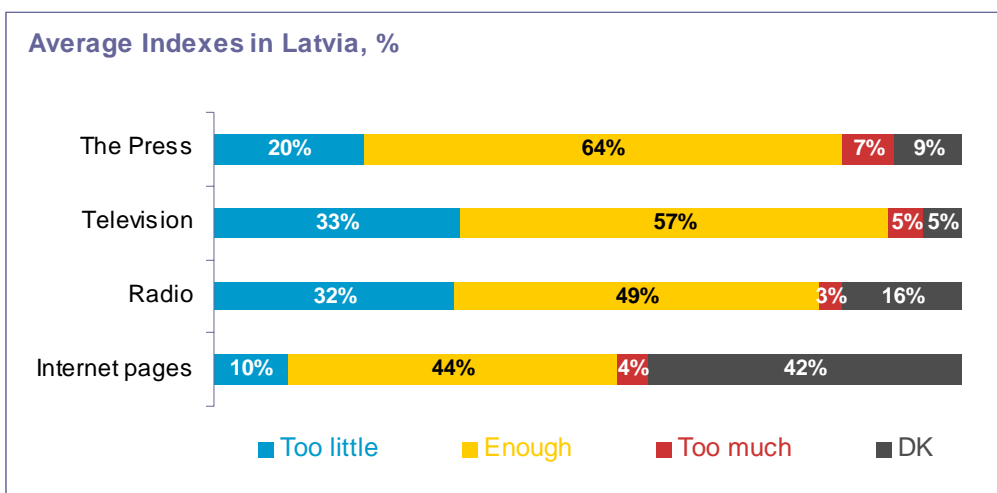
Mass media and the EU

In general, do the Latvian mass media speak about the European Union too much, sufficiently or too little?

According to EU27 citizens overall, it is the best to look for information in the press because, of all the media, the press provides the most coverage on EU issues. Almost half of EU27 citizens (45%) believe the press gives the EU sufficient. In the case of the television and radio, the majority of respondents think they provide too little information about the EU, while a minority considers these media talk enough about the EU.



As in the EU27, in Latvia, respondents think that the press and the television provide more information about the EU with figures of 64% and 57% respectively. Almost a half (49%) of Latvians consider the information about EU as satisfactory, but 44% of them think there is enough information available on the internet.

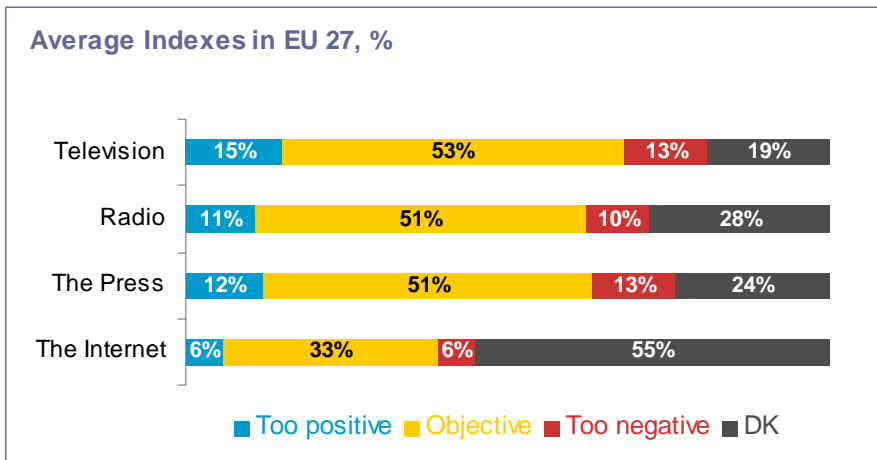


In general, do the Latvian mass media speak about European Union in a positive way?

According to 53% of EU27 respondents, the most objective information about the EU is provided by television. The press and radio are considered objective by more than half EU27 respondents.

More than half the EU27 poll (55%) has no opinion about the internet. This may be explained by the fact that not all EU27 citizens have access to or knowledge about the use of the internet. 50% of respondents taking part in the survey had access to internet at home.

Latvia has seen comparatively large positive changes among EU 27 countries. Within a year and a half, the number of respondents considering the press as an objective source about the EU has increased by 14 PP (from 40% to 54%).



The opinion about the objectivity of the mass media does not differ much from the EU27 average.

