

EUROBAROMETER 68

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

AUTUMN 2007

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

POLAND

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The following text is an executive summary of the Polish report from the autumn wave of the Eurobarometer survey (conducted between 22nd September and 3rd November 2007 on a representative sample of the Polish population aged 15+). It briefly presents the most important trends in Polish public opinion concerning primarily the assessment of Polish domestic situation and its EU membership.

1. Public opinion in Poland: context

- Three in four Poles are satisfied with the life they lead

More than three-quarters (76%) of Poles declare that they are satisfied with the life they lead and this figure has not changed significantly since last spring. The proportion of those satisfied is the highest among respondents aged 15-24 (87%) and among those people with the most education (84%). The percentage of Poles who are satisfied with the life they lead is slightly lower than the European Union average (80%) and much higher than the average for the “new” EU Member States (65%).

- The majority of Poles do not expect any changes in their lives

More than a half (54%) of Poles do not expect any changes in their lives in the next 12 months. 29% believe that the next year will be better and 12% are concerned that their situation will deteriorate. A year ago, respondents' expectations were similar – 32% thought that their life would get better, 13% that it would get worse and 51% believed that nothing would change. Poles' expectations regarding the next year are not significantly different than those of other EU citizens (30%), from the “new” (29%) as well as from the “old” Member States (30%).

- More than a half of respondents do not expect any changes in their household financial situation

As was the case a year ago, one in four respondents (24%) expects that the financial situation of his/her household will improve in the next 12 months. Fewer respondents than in autumn 2006 anticipate that it will deteriorate (14% compared with 18%).

The percentage of Poles who expect that the financial situation of their household will improve does not differ from the European average (24%) or from the average for the “new” EU Member States (25%).

- Poles do not anticipate any changes in their job situation

The vast majority of Poles (69%) believe that in the next 12 months nothing will change in their personal job situation. A year ago, the situation was similar (65%). The only difference is that now the percentage of people afraid that their job situation will deteriorate is lower (5% compared with 9%).

The percentage of Poles who anticipate an improvement in their job situation is a little lower than the European average (22%) but it is not significantly different than the average for the “new” Member States (19%).

- Poles are increasingly more optimistic about the economic situation in their country

A year ago, 18% of Poles expected that the economic situation would improve in the next 12 months, now, this percentage accounts for 28%. The proportion of respondents who expect a deterioration has decreased significantly – from 34% to 14%. The percentage of Poles who anticipate an improvement of the labour market rose from 26% to 37% and the percentage of those who expect a deterioration dropped from 29% to 11%.

Poles are more optimistic regarding the economic situation in their country in the next 12 months than Europeans on average (24%). They also more frequently expect that the situation on the labour market will be better – the EU27 average is 26%.

- In autumn 2007, trust in the national parliament in Poland was the lowest in the EU

In autumn 2007, only one in ten Poles (10%) declared trust in the national parliament. A little more – 17% - trusted the government. It is important to note that, in Poland, the survey was conducted between 26th September and 17th October - thus before the most recent parliamentary elections. In the European Union as a whole, one in three citizens trusts the national government (34%), as well as the parliament (35%).

- According to Poles, the healthcare system is the most important problem facing the country today

The healthcare system is regarded as the most important problem facing Poland today (49%). Unemployment, up to now considered the most important problem, was second in this ranking (32%). Next in line, according to Poles, are problems such as inflation (23%), pensions (17%), the economic situation (17%) and crime (15%).

Poles are becoming more and more concerned about inflation. At the same time, their concerns regarding unemployment are decreasing.

In the European Union, unemployment (27%), crime (24%) and the healthcare system (21%) are most often cited as the most important problems.

2. Polish membership of the European Union

- Support for EU membership is constantly rising

Support for Polish EU membership is constantly rising. Almost three-quarters (71%) of those interviewed consider it a good thing. At the same time, the number of Poles whose attitude towards membership is indifferent (21%) is gradually decreasing and the percentage of its opponents remains at a low level.

Much more often than Europeans as a whole (58%), Poles think that their country's EU membership is a good thing. Traditionally, the proportion of supporters of EU membership is highest in Luxembourg (82%) and in the Netherlands (79%). The percentage of its opponents is highest among UK (34%), Latvian (37%) and Austrian (38%) respondents.

- The percentage of Poles who believe that their country has benefited from EU membership is increasing

Since Poland joined the European Union, the percentage of people who think that it has benefited from membership has risen constantly. Currently, 83% of Poles hold this view and only 9% express the contrary opinion.

The percentage of Poles who think that their country has benefited from EU membership is much higher than the European average (58%). Benefits are the most often perceived by the Irish (87%) and Lithuanians (81%). The proportion of those who believe that their country has benefited is the lowest among inhabitants of the United Kingdom and Cyprus (both 37%).

- Poles place more trust in the EU than the average European

Despite a slight decrease in their level of trust in the European Union (from 68% in spring 2007 to 62% now), it is still much higher than in spring 2004 when it accounted for 33%. One in five Poles (21%) does not trust the European Union and this percentage rose by 3 percentage points since the previous wave of the survey.

Poles place much more trust in the European Union than Europeans (48%) on average. This figure is, however, similar to that of the "new" Member States (62%). The European Union is most trusted in Romania (68%), Estonia (67%) and Greece and Belgium (both 65%). Trust in the EU is lowest in the United Kingdom (25%).

- Trust in the European institutions is high in Poland

Trust in the European institutions has stabilised at a high level in Poland. The European Commission (61%) and the European Parliament (60%) are the most trusted. Trust in the Council of the EU (55%) is a little bit lower and 45% of Poles trust the European Central Bank.

In the European Union overall, the European Parliament is, on average, trusted by 55% of respondents, the European Commission by 50%, the Council of the EU by 44% and the European Central Bank by 47%.

- The vast majority of Poles think that, in the EU, things are going in the right direction

Almost two-thirds of Poles (64%) think that, in the European Union, things are going in the right direction. Only 8% of respondents express the opposite opinion. A year ago 55% of respondents thought that in the EU things are going in the right direction and 15% believed that they are not.

In the European Union on average, 40% of those interviewed think that things are going in the right direction – this figure is much less than that in Poland and in the “new” Member States (56%).

3. The Europeans and the European Union

- The majority of Poles claim that they understand how the EU works

59% of Poles declare that they understand how the European Union works. This percentage has remained stable for more than two years. One in three respondents (32%) admits that he/she does not understand how the EU works.

On average in the European Union countries (40%), the percentage of those who claim that they understand how the EU works is much lower than in Poland. More than a half of Europeans admit that they do not understand these rules.

- The vast majority of Poles declare that they have heard of the European institutions

More than eight in ten respondents declare that they have heard of the European Commission (84%) and the European Parliament (86%). Slightly fewer than three-quarters (72%) of Poles are aware of the Council of the European Union and 60% have heard about the European Central Bank.

Awareness of the European Parliament does not differ from the EU average (88%). Poles' awareness of the European Commission and the Council of the EU is higher than the European average (79% and 62% respectively). It is worth mentioning that awareness of the European Central Bank is lower in Poland than in the EU on average (64%).

- The great majority of Poles do not feel involved in European affairs

Three in four Poles (75%) do not feel involved in European affairs. Only 18% of the poll express the opposite opinion and this percentage has not changed significantly from previous waves of the survey – in spring 2007, it accounted for 22% and, in autumn 2006, for 15%.

In the EU Member States on average, one in five (20%) citizens feels involved in EU political affairs. In the “new” Member States, involvement (16%) is lower than in Poland.

- One in two Poles thinks that his/her voice does not count in the European Union

40% of Poles think that they have influence on European affairs. A half (50%) does not agree with this statement. The percentage of Poles who think that their voice counts in the EU is now a little bit higher than a year (36%) and two years ago (35%).

Poles - more often than Europeans on average (30%) - believe that their voice counts in the EU and less frequently (61%) that they do not have any influence. They also believe that their voice counts in the EU more often than inhabitants of other “new” Member States (29%).

- Two-thirds of Poles believe that Poland's voice counts in the EU

Two-thirds (66%) of those interviewed believe that Poland's voice counts in the EU. In previous waves of the survey, this percentage was at a similar level (in autumn 2003, it accounted for 67%). One in four (27%) respondents thinks that Poland's voice does not count in the EU.

The percentage of Poles who claim that their country's voice counts in the European Union is slightly higher than the European average (61%) and it is decisively higher than the average for the "new" EU Member States (51%).

- The majority of Poles think that the interests of their country are not well taken into account in the EU

The majority of Poles (52%) think that the interests of Poland are not well taken into account in the European Union. The opposite opinion is shared by one in three (33%) inhabitants. In spring 2007, the situation was the opposite – more respondents believed that Poland's interests were well taken into account in the EU (45%) than those who did not agree with this statement (39%). However, a year ago, 48% of Poles considered that the interests of their country were not well taken into account and 36% shared the opposite opinion.

Slightly more frequently than Europeans as a whole (46%), Poles are certain that the interests of their country are well taken into account in the EU and less frequently hold the opposite opinion (38%).

- Poles perceive the role of the EU more positively than Europeans as a whole

The role of the European Union is perceived most positively by Poles when it comes to protecting the environment and fighting terrorism. More than a half of Poles also think that the EU has a positive influence on the economic situation (57%), defence and foreign affairs (54%) and fighting crime (51%). Negative opinions prevail only when they evaluate the EU's influence on inflation (30% compared with 23%).

More often than the Europeans on average, Poles perceive the EU's role as positive in all areas covered by the survey.

- According to Poles, their society is not well informed about European political affairs

Poles claim that their society is not well informed about European Union political affairs (74%). People in Poland are well informed about EU political affairs, according to just one in five respondents (21%).

Poles evaluate the knowledge of their fellow-citizens better than the European average (18%). Slovenians (50%) and Danes (41%) assess themselves as the best informed, and Greeks (91%), Hungarians (86%), the Dutch (85%) and Cypriots (85%) as the worse informed.

4. Further integration of the EU

- Decisions concerning taxation, the educational system and pensions – according to Poles – should be made by the Polish government

According to Poles, decisions concerning fighting terrorism (87%), scientific and technological research (76%), protecting the environment (70%), defence and foreign affairs (70%), energy (70%), fighting crime (69%), support for regions facing economic difficulties (69%) and immigration (68%) should be taken jointly within the EU.

Respondents consider that the Polish government should decide in case of the educational system (67%), taxation (64%), pensions (61%), as well as health and social welfare (56%).

- One in two Poles supports a European Monetary Union

Between spring and autumn 2007, support for a European Monetary Union has decreased in Poland. Currently, less than a half of respondents (49%) are in favour of the common European

currency, whereas, six months ago, this percentage accounted for 54% and, three years ago, for 65%.

Polish support for European Monetary Union is lower than the EU average (61%). Support is the highest in Ireland (87%), Slovenia (86%), Luxemburg (85%), Belgium (82%) and the Netherlands (81%), while the lowest is in the United Kingdom (24%).

- The vast majority of Poles support a common foreign policy among the EU Member States

The vast majority of Poles (79%) favour a common foreign policy of the EU Member States towards other countries. The percentage of respondents who support this opinion has not changed significantly since the last wave of the survey (81%).

Support for a common foreign policy of the EU Member States is higher in Poland than in the European Union (70%) on average. It is much lower in Poland than in Greece (88%) and in Germany (85%) but much higher than in the United Kingdom (46%) and in Sweden (51%).

- Support for a common defence and security policy is high and stable in Poland

Support for a common defence and security policy has remained at a stable, high level in Poland since autumn 2004. Such a policy is now supported by 84% of respondents.

Poles - more often than the European average (70%) - support a common defence and security policy. This idea is most often supported by the citizens of Cyprus (90%), Slovakia (89%), Greece (89%), Belgium and Germany (both 88%). The opposite opinion is most often held by Swedish (38%), UK (31%) and Austrian (27%) respondents.

- In Poland, support for enlargement is the highest in the EU

More than three-quarters (76%) of Poles are in favour of the further enlargement of the EU. Since the moment Poland joined the EU, support for this idea has always exceeded 70%.

In Poland, support for enlargement is the highest in the whole Union. Among Europeans as a whole, 46% are for the accession of new countries. Support for enlargement is relatively high in Lithuania (67%), Slovakia (66%) and Hungary (64%), while it is lowest in Austria (24%) and Germany (28%).

- Support for the speed of building Europe being faster in one group of countries than in the other countries is very low in Poland

In Poland, the percentage of those who support the speed of building Europe being faster in one group of countries than in other countries is invariably low. This idea is supported by 39% while it is opposed by 47% of respondents.

In Poland, the proportion of respondents who support the speed of building Europe being faster in one group of countries than in other countries does not differ from the EU average (39%). The percentage of those who are opposed is higher than in the EU (40%). Support for this idea is highest in Estonia (66%) and in Denmark (54%) and lowest in Finland (55%) and in France (54%).

- According to Poles, in the coming years, European integration should be focused on fighting crime and energy

According to Poles, in the coming years, European integration should be focused on fighting crime (36%) and energy-related issues (33%). A relatively high percentage of respondents also point to social issues (29%), solidarity with poorer regions (24%) and European foreign policy (22%) as important problems which need special attention from the EU.

The results of the spring 2007 wave of the survey were similar.

Poles who think that European integration should be focused on fighting crime do not differ from other Europeans (EU average 36%). In the European Union, immigration and environmental issues (both 33%) are cited as the next two important areas. They are not as important for Poles (13% and 17% respectively).

5. The European Union and the media

- Of all the media, Poles place the most trust in radio

Of all the media covered in the survey, Poles place the most trust in radio (57%). One in two respondents trusts television (51%) and 45% the press. Only 34% of Poles trust the Internet but it is important to note that a major share of respondents never use it.

Trust in radio in Poland is slightly lower than the EU average (60%) and, in the case of television (52%), the press (44%) and the Internet (33%), it is at the same level.

- The majority of Poles think that the media in their country present the European Union objectively

The majority of Poles claim that the media in their country present the European Union in an objective way – 62% in the case of television, 61% radio, 59% the press and 43% Internet sites. Since spring 2006, the percentage of those according to whom the EU is presented too negatively has risen and the percentage of those who think that it is presented too positively has decreased.

Poles - more often than Europeans on average - think that the media in their country present the EU objectively and less often that they present it negatively.

- According to Poles, television and radio talk too little about the EU

The most common opinion among Poles is that television (46%) and radio (43%) talk too little about the EU, although the press (45%) and the Internet (38%) talk about the right amount. Compared with spring 2006, the percentage of respondents who think that the Polish media talk too little about the European Union has risen.

The opinion of Poles concerning the presence of the EU in the media is not significantly different from the European public opinion as a whole.

Conclusion

Analysing the results of the newest Eurobarometer wave, two major trends can be observed: there is a high level of social optimism and positive attitudes towards the European Union and its future.

Three-quarters (76%) of Poles optimistically assess their life; this indicator is close to the European average (80%). Poles are now more optimistic in their perception of the development of their country's economic situation. In autumn 2006, 18% of Poles expected that the economic situation would improve in the next 12 months, now, this figure accounts for 28%. Similar trends can be seen in the respondents' evaluation of labour market situation.

The high level of social optimism is in line with positive perception of the European Union. The level of Poles' satisfaction with European Union membership has risen systematically (71%), as well as the percentage of respondents who believe that their country has benefited from membership (83%). In this respect, Poles are one of the most euro-enthusiastic member countries in the Community. Analysis of the data from the report against results from previous waves of the survey confirms the high level of social support for the deeper and wider integration of the EU.

In spite of positive opinions about the European Union, the majority of Poles declare a lack of feeling of involvement in European affairs (75%) and think that their voice does not count in the EU (50%).