

EUROBAROMETER 69

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

SPRING 2008

NATIONAL REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ESTONIA

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The interpretations and opinions contained in it are solely those of the authors.

Introduction

This summary is based on the results of **Standard Eurobarometer 69** that was conducted from **March 25 to May 4 2008 in 27 European Union Member States**, three candidate countries (Turkey, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) and in the Turkish Cypriot community.

When considering trends over time, it must be kept in mind that during earlier surveys the basis for comparison was the average of 25 European Union Member States. As of spring 2007, the basis for comparison is the average of 27 Member States.

In Estonia, fieldwork was carried out from March 27 to April 21 2008. In total, 1006 respondents were interviewed, 1003 of them had Estonian citizenship. When interpreting the results, it must be kept in mind that the target group of the survey were people who had the citizenship of at least one EU Member State, and who were able to answer the questions in Estonian or Russian. The survey does not represent the opinion of permanent residents of Estonia who do not have European Union citizenship or who have not defined their citizenship (owners of so-called grey passports).

In spring 2008, the majority of Estonian citizens were satisfied with their life and most of them believed that their personal life, on the whole, would either not change or become even better. However, there are curious discrepancies regarding people's expectations on how the country will do and how they personally will fare in the nearest future. Under the conditions of economic slowdown, citizens firstly predict that both the country's economy and the employment situation will continue to worsen. Nevertheless, most of them tend to hope that these negative trends will not affect their personal life: people think that their economic situation and professional status will either remain unchanged or will even improve. Only a marginal proportion of respondents fear that the situation might worsen. These trends are quite similar in Europe on the whole.

Based on the survey, one can say that even though Estonian citizens used to display optimism compared to the rest of Europe, the country currently stands closer than ever to the European average in terms of attitudes and worries. However, those few pessimistic forecasts have not undermined the faith of Estonian citizens that the country is generally moving in the right direction: as in previous years, half of Estonian citizens believe that Estonia is on the right track; and only a quarter of them are not convinced of that. These figures suggest that the faith of Estonians is stronger than that of an average European. Estonian citizens still see a much room for development in their country: compared to the European average, they consider the development in a number of areas in Estonia to be poor rather than good.

Although some signs of pessimism can be detected, the general social background has not become negative – in terms of personal lives, people still tend to be optimistic and have few problems. It is for this reason that attitudes towards the European Union have not changed significantly. People are still positive about European Union membership and view it as beneficial. A number of citizens believe that the European Union will expand employment opportunities available to Estonian citizens and contribute to peace and stability. A small number of respondents are put off by fears that Estonia does not have a say in the EU decision-making process, that the European Union will worsen the Estonian standard of living and that it will prevent the country's economy from developing.

General attitudes at national level

- In spring 2008, three in four Estonian citizens were **satisfied with their** life and 11% of them were very satisfied. In the European Union, on the whole, 77% of citizens are satisfied with their life. Thus, the figure in Estonia is still comparable to the European average.
- **Expectations concerning personal life** have remained unchanged compared to the autumn 2007 results. The majority of citizens (44%) are still of the opinion that their life will not change in the coming year, 38% think that it will improve and just 16% fear that it might worsen.
- Even though, in autumn 2007, the **evaluations of Estonian citizens regarding the economic situation** could be equally divided into three, people now clearly display a more pessimistic attitude. 45% of the respondents believe that the Estonian economy will continue to decline, 33% hope that the situation will remain stable and just 18% think that it will improve. In autumn 2007, 32% feared that it might worsen and 29% thought that it would improve.
- Although the forecasts regarding the country's economic situation have changed substantially, people are more optimistic when it comes to the **future economic situation of their household** and evaluations have not changed compared to autumn: almost half of Estonian citizens believe that their family will do as well as it has done so far, a third of citizens think that the situation will improve and only a fifth fear that the situation might get worse.
- Similar evaluations prevail in terms of employment and personal professional situation: people think that although problems with employment in general might increase, it will have no bearing on their personal life. Although, in autumn 2007, most citizens (43%) believed that the **employment** situation would be stable in the near future, the evaluations were more negative by spring 2008: 39% of the citizens are afraid that the situation might worsen (+20 points compared to autumn). The number of those who believe that the situation will improve has decreased by 8%.
- In comparison with autumn 2007, there have not been significant changes in people's evaluations when it comes to their **personal employment situation**. The number of those who believe that things will remain unchanged has increased by 4% (50% in total). The increase mainly comes at the expense of those who believe that the situation will improve (-5 points; 24% in total). A small number of citizens are of the opinion that the worsening employment situation may have a negative effect on their personal professional status (9%).
- Half of Estonian citizens feel that, compared to the situation 5 years ago, their **purchasing power has improved**. 51% of respondents admitted that their purchasing power has improved over the past 5 years. 26% thought that the situation has remained the same and 22% were of the opinion that the purchasing power of their family has decreased.
- 50% of citizens are afraid that **the life of today's children will be more difficult** and this attitude is not related to current pessimistic forecasts concerning the country's economy or

employment. They held the same view in autumn 2006 when economic growth was booming. A third of the respondents (32%) hope that the life of future generations will be easier and 16% believe that it will be neither easier nor harder than it is today.

- Estonian citizens consider the economic and employment situation, the cost of living, the price of energy and the quality of life in general **in Estonia to be worse than the average of other European countries**. These negative evaluations mostly concern **the country's economic situation and the cost of living** – 75% of Estonian citizens think that, compared to other countries in Europe, the situation is worse in Estonia. 60% (+15% compared to spring 2007) consider the **employment situation** in Estonia to be worse than the European average. The **price of energy** is the only area which received less negative evaluations compared to evaluations in other countries in Europe: 55% of respondents in Estonia expressed a negative attitude to the price of energy compared to 73% in Europe as a whole.
- 51% of citizens are convinced that things are moving in the right direction in Estonia. 26% believe that things are moving in the wrong direction (+4% compared to autumn 2007), while 15% are of the opinion that it is neither one nor the other, and 8% of respondents were unable to answer.
- **The most important problems in Estonia** in spring 2008 were considered to be inflation (54%), the economic situation (33%, +16 points compared to autumn 2007) and crime (26%). In comparison with the previous surveys, worries concerning the economic situation have begun to take precedence.
- State and law enforcement institutions, as well as the media, are still considered to be the most trustworthy institutions in Estonia. The trustworthiness of **the defence forces** has increased from 74% in autumn 2007 to 81% in spring 2008. The trustworthiness of **police** has similarly shown continuous growth: in autumn 2007, 58% of the citizens had faith in the police, this spring, however, the figure has increased to 74%. 75% of Estonian citizens trust **television**. 69% respondents trust **the European Union** and the reliability of this institution has remained unchanged from autumn 2007.

Views on the EU

- Most Estonian citizens consider belonging to the European Union as a good thing (58%) or take a more neutral position (considering it neither good nor bad, 32%). Changes between the two opinions can be primarily attributed to people changing their mind from good to neutral or vice versa. A partly negative attitude towards European Union membership has constantly remained at a low level (below 10%).
- By spring 2008, the general situation had changed: an ever-growing proportion of citizens are concerned about the economic and employment situation. This, in turn, has a direct influence on the **evaluations concerning benefits that come with the European Union**: the proportion of those who see benefits has decreased from 80% to 76%. Half of citizens think that the **main benefits** come in the form of new employment opportunities and the

contribution of the EU to Estonian economic growth. Those who **cannot see any benefits** say that Estonian people have very little say in the decision-making process concerning the European Union (25%), that the European Union decreases the standard of living of Estonian people (25%) and that the membership status has a negative effect on Estonian economic growth (24%).

- People mostly know and trust **the European Parliament (EP)**. 87% of respondents have heard of it and 61% trust it. In Europe on the whole, 87% know this institution and 52% trust it. 83% of Estonian citizens know and 53% trust **the European Commission (EC)**. In Europe, overall, this institution is known by 78% and trusted by 47% of citizens.
- The **trust in both institutions** mainly lies in their ability to protect the interests of European citizens (35% for the European Parliament and 29% for the European Commission). **The main reason for distrust** can be attributed to the fact that people consider both institutions to be too remote from ordinary citizens (EP 44% and EC 47%).
- **The institutions of the European Union are not sufficiently transparent for citizens:** just a quarter of Estonian, as well as European, citizens consider the EU institutions to be transparent. 48% of Estonian and 54% of European citizens do not consider the European Union institutions to be transparent. 80% of Estonian citizens, however, consider transparency of institutions to be extremely relevant.

European Union policies

- Estonian citizens' **support for the European Monetary Union and its single currency, the Euro**, has been growing steadily over the past 18 months – from 49% to 56%. This growth is mainly due to the decreasing number of opponents. Nevertheless, support of Estonian citizens for the European Monetary Union and the Euro is weaker compared to the European average, which has remained close to 60% over the past 18 months.
- **Support for common policies of the European Union** has remained high over the past year: in spring 2008, 72% of Estonian citizens showed their support. Common policies were not supported by 18%, and 10% of respondents were unable to answer.
- **European common defence and law enforcement policies** are supported by most citizens (86%). Just 7% are against such common policies and 7% were unable to give an answer. Support has remained at the same high level throughout the past year and was equally high in previous years.
- The support of Estonian citizens for further expansion of the European Union has showed three peaks since Estonia's accession. The first of these could be detected in autumn 2004, immediately after Estonia joined the European Union, followed by a second peak was in autumn 2006. In spring 2008, support was at the same level as right after the accession: further expansion was supported by 63% of the citizens (+8% points compared to autumn 2007).

- **From among the current member countries**, Estonian citizens support Croatia's accession the most (56%). 53% are in favour of the accession of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Support for Turkish accession is still the weakest – 34%, however, compared to autumn 2006, it has increased by 8%. Nevertheless, 48% of Estonian citizens will support Turkish accession once Turkey complies with all the conditions set by the European Union.
- In the survey, the respondents were asked to evaluate, for a number of areas, **whether decisions should be made by the Estonian Government, or jointly within the European Union**. At least half of the citizens believe that the Estonian Government should make decisions in the following areas: taxation, the educational system, pensions, consumer protection, social welfare and health. Regarding fighting unemployment, inflation and economic downfall, the evaluations concerning either decision-making body are equally divided. At least half of Estonian respondents believe that the European Union should make decisions regarding environmental protection, energy, crime, defence and foreign policies and terrorism.

Attitudes on globalisation

- Estonian citizens tend to agree with the advantages and positive effects of globalisation rather than the disadvantages or negative effects.
- People see **the main positive effect of globalisation** as openness to external cultures (72%). Almost two-thirds believe that globalisation primarily brings about economic benefits, which, considering the current pessimistic attitude concerning the Estonian economy, is a relevant argument. Thus, over half of the citizens agree that globalisation contributes to the development of poorer countries, enables economic growth and means more foreign investment in Estonia.
- Citizens show no common opinion on **who benefits from globalisation**. 54% of them agree that it is predominantly large companies rather than ordinary citizens who benefit; a third of the respondents disagree with this and 17% were unable to give an answer.
- 55% of Estonian citizens admit that the European Union enables European citizens to **benefit from the positive effects of globalisation**. Although just 21% of the respondents disagree with this statement, 24% of citizens are unable to evaluate the role of the European Union.