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NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HUNGARY

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Evaluation of the current situation

The latest Eurobarometer survey conducted in the spring of 2008 shows that citizens of Hungary still keep the leading position in terms of pessimism among the EU member states and candidate countries. Only Bulgarians are more pessimistic than Hungarians.

As in the previous survey, it is mostly youngsters and well-educated people who are satisfied with their lives and, regarding the future, these groups proved to be the most optimistic. On average, less than one-fifth of the Hungarian population thinks that their quality of life will have changed positively in a year's time.

Hungarians are pessimistic not only about their lives but also about developments in areas such as the economy, employment and working conditions. Less than 10% of Hungarians believe in a brighter future whereas other EU citizens are far more optimistic.

Views on the EU

In Hungary, slightly more than one-third of people think that the country benefited from joining the EU. The former enthusiasm about EU membership has turned to strong scepticism within the space of a few years.

In 2004, more than 50% of Hungarian respondents felt the EU membership was a good thing but in the spring of 2008 only one-third holds this view. Around 50% of EU citizens on average think positively about their country's membership.

The ratio of those who say the EU has a positive image is higher than the proportion of those who think positively about Hungary's EU membership. Even more consider themselves as impartial. Students are the only socio-demographic group in Hungary in which more than 50% think that it that EU membership is good for their country.

The Eurobarometer survey uncovered the reasons why people think about their country's membership either positively or negatively. The findings show the main reason why Hungarian people are disappointed is that they do not feel that Hungary has a significant role in decision-making within the EU.

Most of those who think positively about EU membership say that the EU contributes to the growth of the Hungarian economy and positively impacts on the employment situation. They also mention that EU membership enables co-operation among member countries and that the EU helps to maintain peace and reinforce security.

According to the results of the Eurobarometer survey, for the majority of Hungarian respondents, the EU primarily means the freedom to travel, study and work. This was cited by three-quarters of the youngest age-group as the main benefit of membership although, of all the age-groups, they are the least likely to remember those times when it was particularly difficult for Hungarians to work or study abroad.

In spite of the fact that there were many negative notions associated with the EU, a prominent ratio, nevertheless, declared that they trusted the EU.

In the rank of institutions trusted by Hungarians, only the United Nations preceded the EU. More than 50% of Hungarians declared that they trust the EU, which is a significantly higher ratio than their trust any national institution. Nevertheless, the proportion of people trusting the EU has fallen by the spring of 2008 compared to the previous studies.

On the list of institutions Hungarian respondents trust, the EU is followed by the police, which is trusted by less than half of the respondents. The series of Eurobarometer surveys have shown a negative tendency in trusting the police. Also, a notable loss in trust is shown in the Hungarian army and in the national justice or legal system.

Trust in the national Government and Parliament has fallen significantly, Six months earlier, one-fifth of the Hungarians trusted the Government and the Parliament but, by the spring of 2008, this had changed and with only 13% supporting the Government and 15% supporting the Parliament.

Considerably different rankings evolved in terms of the EU27 average. The majority of citizens trust their own national army and the police. The United Nations and the EU, trusted by nearly 50% of EU citizens, follow these institutions. Nearly half of respondents also trust their national justice and legal system. Almost one-third of EU citizens trust their national Parliament and Government. Trust in political parties is the last in the EU average ranking but with a figure twice the size that recorded in Hungary.

Although trust in the EU was significantly higher in Hungary than the trust in the national government, Hungarian respondents would not like the EU to influence decision making in what they consider national matters. Hungarians would not welcome foreign influence on healthcare, pensions, education or taxation. Regarding those areas that demand international cooperation or substantial investments, Hungarians say the government should make decisions jointly within the EU. These areas are scientific and technological research, foreign and security policy and action against terrorism.

Institutions of the EU

In spring 2008, Eurobarometer examined in detail how much people trust their national institutions and the EU. It also analysed the trust they have in each of the main EU institutions. The results show that among EU citizens trust in the European Parliament is the highest. It is followed by the European Central Bank and European Commission. The Council of the European Union gained the least confidence among the listed institutions,

Most respondents who said they do not trust the EU said that EU institutions are too remote from ordinary people and that they do not have enough information on the institutions.

In the spring of 2008, Eurobarometer tested how much the respondents know about the EU's current situation. The result is that only one-fifth of EU citizens have heard about Slovenia's forthcoming presidency and only slightly more knew that the next one would be France. Only 50% of the respondents have heard about the existence of the Council presidency.

In the course of the survey, it also emerged that almost a quarter of Hungarians polled believe that the EU consists of 15 countries, with only half of the respondents denying this statement. Far more knew that Switzerland is not an EU member country. No more than a quarter denied that the Euro area has 12 members.

The performance of Hungarians was better than the EU average in the questions on EU members and about Switzerland's membership but the ratio of correct responses was lower than EU average for the other questions.

The future of the EU

Besides evaluating the current status of the EU, the Eurobarometer survey aimed to examine how EU citizens see the EU's future. Significantly more than half of the respondents are optimistic about the EU's future in the average of all member countries while in Hungary this ratio slightly exceeds 50%.

The majority of Hungarian respondents support all fields of the EU's development, primarily the Common Defence and Security Policy, followed by the Common Foreign Policy, the further enlargement of the EU and, lastly, the European Monetary Union.

The ranking is slightly different in the average of all EU member countries but the area with most support is also the Common Defence and Security Policy. This is followed by the Common Foreign Policy and the establishment of the European Monetary Union. Less than 50% of EU citizens support the further enlargement of the Union.

It also turned out that the respondents would primarily support the membership of certain countries that have not announced any intention to join. EU citizens are less enthusiastic about those ones that wish to join.

The country where the most significant difference was found in support by all member states and Hungary was Croatia. Four-fifths of Hungarians support its accession while the EU average is only 50%. Hungarian respondents were far less enthusiastic about the membership of other countries in the region, with only Montenegro achieving a majority in favour. Serbia and Kosovo are the least likely to be welcomed as members of the EU.

Although the majority of all EU citizens are optimistic about the future of the EU, only 42% said that things are going in the right direction in the EU. A quarter of respondents said that things are going to the wrong direction.