

# EUROBAROMETER 69

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

## SPRING 2008

### NATIONAL REPORT

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### LATVIA

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

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

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

In Latvia, “Eurobarometer 69” took place from April 2 – 29, 2008, and surveyed 1,008 people over the age of 15. The survey was conducted by “TNS Latvia”, a market and social research agency. “Eurobarometer 69” is the eighth Standard Eurobarometer survey to be carried out since Latvia joined the European Union.

In January 2007, Romania and Bulgaria became part of the European Union. The Eurozone was extended to include Slovenia, the first among those Member States that belong to the post-Soviet area. In January 2008, Cyprus and Malta joined the Eurozone.

### **Short-term expectations**

An absolute majority (77%) of EU27 citizens are satisfied with their lives in general (22% of respondents are not very, or not at all, satisfied).

The largest proportion of the Latvian population are also satisfied with their lives (63%), however in the overall EU27 context, Latvia is placed significantly below the EU27 average (-14 percentage points [PP]).

Almost half (46%) of the EU27 population expect the economic situation in their country to deteriorate within the next twelve months. A third (33%) of citizens think that the economic situation in their country will remain the same, and only 16% are optimistic in their expectations, saying that the economic situation in their country will improve over the next twelve months.

The situation in Latvia is similar to the average in the EU27 countries: 45% are pessimistic, 11% are optimistic, while 39% expect the economic situation in Latvia to remain unchanged.. When compared to autumn 2007, the number of pessimistic citizens in Latvia, who believe that the economic situation will become worse over the next twelve months has grown by 12 PP.

Half of the EU27 population surveyed expect the financial situation of their households not to change in the coming twelve months. A quarter (25%) of EU27 citizens think that the financial situation of their households will deteriorate,, while 22% are optimistic in their expectations saying that the economic situation of their households will improve within the next twelve months. The situation in Latvia is similar to the average in the EU27 countries: 51% expect that the financial situation of their households will remain the same in the coming twelve months, while 27% are optimistic and 20% are pessimistic.

Almost two-fifths (38%) of EU27 citizens surveyed expect the economic situation in the EU to remain the same in the coming twelve months. Just over a quarter (26%) of EU27 citizens believe that the economic situation in the EU will deteriorate, while 18% are optimistic expecting the economic situation in the EU to improve within the next twelve months. A further 18% of EU27 respondents do not have an opinion in this respect.

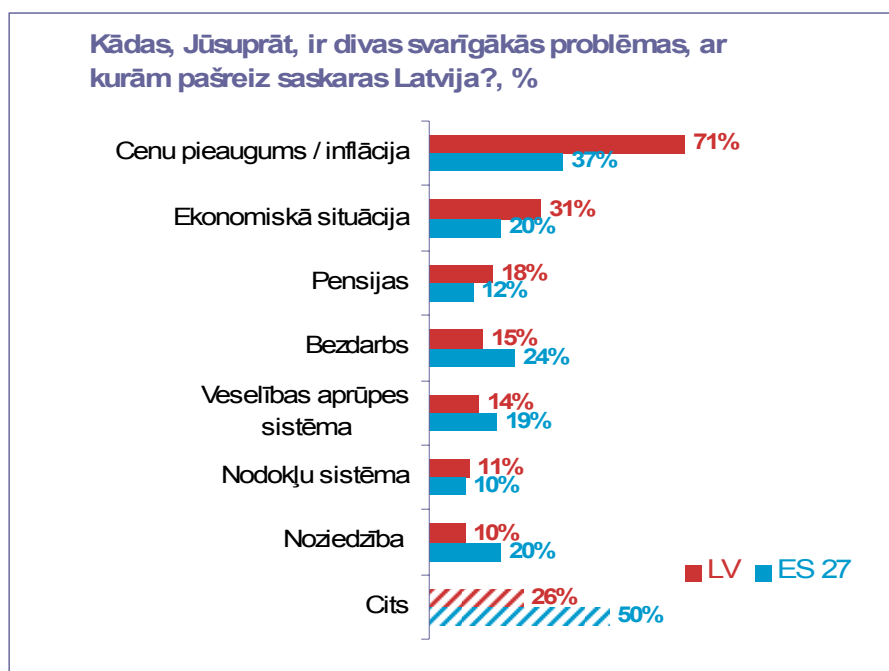
Almost half (45%) of Latvian respondents believe that the economic situation in the EU will not change in the next twelve months. Almost one in five citizens (19%) expect the economic situation in the EU to improve, while every seventh respondent (16%) thinks that the economic situation in the EU will deteriorate. An additional 20% of Latvian respondents cannot form an opinion on the matter.

Compared to autumn 2007, an increase of 10 PP is observed in the proportion of the Latvian population who expect the economic situation in the EU to deteriorate in the coming twelve months.

In general, during the previous six months, citizens in Latvia have grown more pessimistic about the economic prospects of their country and their households.

### Most Important Issues Facing the Country

In general, the two most frequently mentioned concerns in the EU27 have not changed since autumn 2007: rising prices/inflation (expressed by 37% of respondents in the EU27) and unemployment (mentioned by 24% of respondents). It is noteworthy that concern over rising prices/inflation has increased by 11 PP among EU27 citizens.



Rising prices and inflation is also the highest concern in Latvia (mentioned by 71% of the citizens surveyed in Latvia), and such a trend is observed in the eighth EB survey (since 2004).

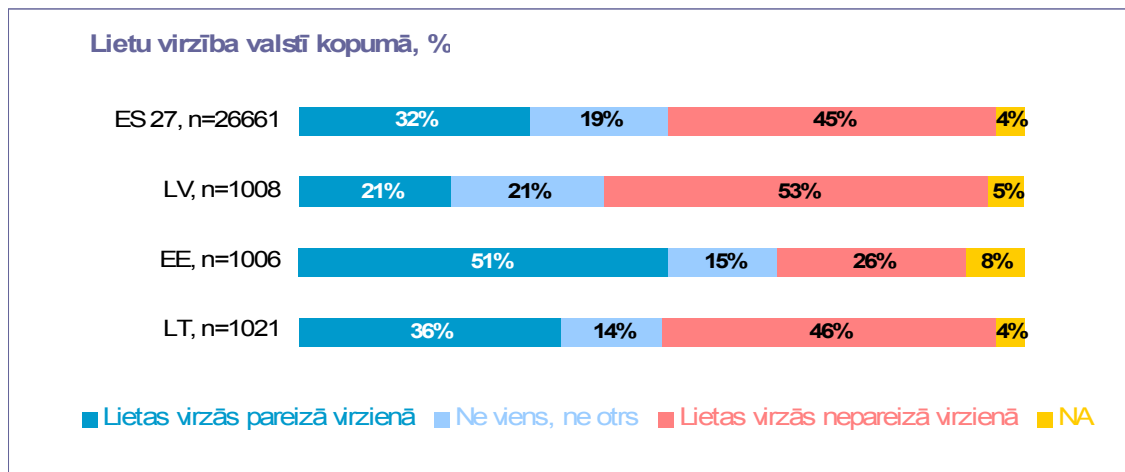
Also in both neighbouring countries, rising prices and inflation is the main concern. 63% of Lithuanian citizens and 54% of Estonian people are of this opinion. .

When assessing the concern over rising prices and inflation at EU27 country level, it is clear that Latvia is the country with the highest number of people who are concerned about this issue (71%).

When comparing the results of Eurobarometer surveys, it is evident that since last year, EU27 citizens' concern over rising prices and inflation has doubled (from 18% in spring 2007 to 37% in spring 2008).

In Latvia, the economic situation is ranked as the second highest concern – it is mentioned by 31% of respondents, which is an increase of 8 PP when compared to autumn 2007. When compared to the most frequently mentioned concern (rising prices and inflation), which is considered to be a problem by almost three-quarters of Latvian people, the second highest concern is regarded as an important issue only by a third of citizens.

### The Direction in Which Things are Going



When comparing the results obtained in the Baltic States, it is evident that the Latvian population is the most sceptical in its overall opinions on the direction of national developments.

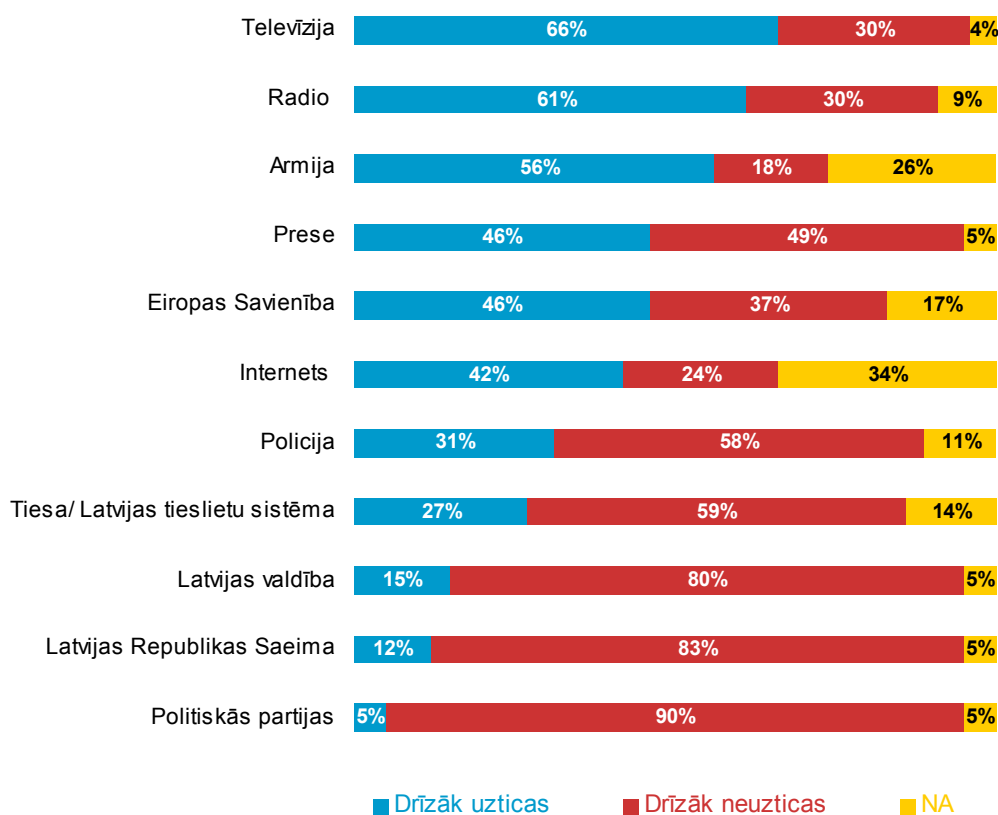
42% of EU27 citizens believe that things are moving in the right direction in the European Union, 25% believe the opposite, and 19% of the population say “neither the one nor the other”, while 14% cannot form an opinion on this issue.

Among the Baltic States, the Latvian population is the least optimistic. While Estonia (60%) and Lithuania (52%) top the list of EU27 optimists (believing that things are going in the right direction in the EU), Latvia lags behind with two-fifths of citizens who are optimistic (40%). 19% of Latvian respondents say that things are going in the wrong direction in the EU, 22% say “neither the one nor the other”, while 19% of the poll are not able to form an opinion on this issue.

Since autumn 2007, the situation in Latvia has deteriorated – the proportion of optimistic respondents has dropped by 8 PP (from 48% to 40%).

### Trust in Institutions

#### LV: Uzticēšanās dažādām institūcijām, %



Latvian respondents have greater trust in television (66%) and radio (61%), while an absolute majority do not trust national administrative bodies (political parties, the parliament of the Republic of Latvia (Saeima) and the Latvian government).

### Institutional Transparency

The majority of the EU27 population (68%) believes that state administration in their country is not very transparent or not at all transparent. Only a quarter of respondents living in the EU27 say that state administration in their country is transparent or very transparent (24%).

Greek (86%), Latvian (85%), Hungarian (82%) and Lithuanian (79%) citizens are the most sceptical about the transparency of their state administration.

For the majority of the EU27 population (87%) it is very important to have transparent state administration. Only 8% of respondents in the EU27 say that transparency of state administration is not very important or not at all important.

77% of Latvian respondents believe that it is very important to have transparent state administration, while for 18% of citizens transparency of state administration is not very important

or not at all important. It is interesting to note that, when compared to the rest of the EU27 countries, the highest levels of those who believe that transparency of state administration is not very important or not at all important were recorded in Latvia.

Just over half of EU27 citizens (54%) say that EU institutions are not very or not at all transparent. Only a quarter of respondents from the EU27 believe that EU institutions are transparent or very transparent (26%). One-fifth of the population (20%) cannot form an opinion on this matter.

65% of Latvian respondents say that EU institutions are not very or not at all transparent, while 14% of citizens believe that EU institutions are transparent or very transparent. One-fifth of respondents (20%) are not able to form an opinion on this matter.

## **Membership of the European Union**

Slightly more than half (52%) of the EU27 citizens surveyed believe that EU membership is a good thing. Every seventh respondent in the EU27 (14%) says that EU membership is not a good thing, while 29% believe that it is neither a good nor a bad thing.

Just over half (52%) of the Latvian poll say that EU membership is neither a good nor a bad thing, 29% believe that EU membership is a good thing, while 16% consider Latvian membership of the EU to be a bad thing. Among all EU27 countries, Latvia has the lowest proportion of respondents saying that EU membership is a good thing. Since autumn 2007, the proportion of the Latvian population believing that EU membership is a good thing has decreased by 8 PP, while the number of those with a neutral opinion has increased (EU membership is neither a good nor a bad thing).

More than half (54%) of the EU27 population thinks that their country has benefited from being a member of the EU. Almost a third (31%) of EU27 citizens have the opposite opinion, saying that their country has not benefited from EU membership. A further 15% of citizens do not have an opinion on this matter.

Latvian respondents have a polarised opinion about the benefits of EU membership: 48% believe that Latvia has benefited from being a member of the EU, while 42% say that Latvia has not benefited. A further 10% of Latvian citizens are not able to form an opinion on this matter. Thus, the Latvian population ranks fourth among the most sceptical citizens of the EU27.

Since autumn 2007, the number of Latvian citizens who believe that Latvia has not benefited from being a member of the EU has increased by 10 PP.

One of the main reasons why EU27 citizens believe that their country has benefited from being a member of the EU is as follows: EU membership improves cooperation between their country and other countries (37%). Around one in three respondents from the EU27 (32%) believe that the European Union contributes to maintaining peace and reinforcing security. 30% of the EU27 population are sure that the European Union contributes to economic growth in their country. A quarter of EU27 citizens (25%) think that the European Union brings people new work opportunities.

Among Latvian respondents, the four most common reasons for satisfaction with EU membership correspond to the overall EU27 opinion; however, their order of priority is different. New work

opportunities created by the EU are ranked first by Latvian citizens (44%), while EU27 citizens rank this reason in fourth place (difference of 19 PP). The remaining three most common reasons for satisfaction with EU membership mentioned by Latvian citizens are placed in the same order as by EU27 citizens. 31% of Latvian people think that EU membership improves cooperation between Latvia and other countries. Almost a quarter of Latvian respondents (22%) say that the European Union contributes to maintaining peace and reinforcing security, while 18% believe that the European Union contributes to economic growth in Latvia.

One of the main reasons why EU27 citizens are dissatisfied with their membership of the European Union is as follows: people have very little influence on decisions made at European Union level (36%). Over a quarter (28%) of EU27 citizens believe that the European Union decreases peoples' standard of living, as well as putting peoples' jobs in danger. A further reason for dissatisfaction is the view that EU membership has a negative effect on economic growth in the country (mentioned by 26% of the EU27 population).

For Latvian respondents,, the four most common reasons for dissatisfaction with membership of the EU correspond to the overall EU27 opinion, however, their order of priority is different. Almost half of Latvian citizens think that the European Union decreases Latvian peoples' standard of living (46%) and that EU membership has a negative effect on economic growth in Latvia (44%). The third reason for dissatisfaction with EU membership is that Latvian people have very little influence on decisions made at EU level (39%). A further 20% of Latvian citizens believe that the European Union puts Latvian peoples' jobs in danger.

## **Image of the European Union**

Just under half of EU27 citizens say that the EU conjures up a positive image for them (48%), while 15% of EU27 respondents think that the EU image is negative. Just over a third (35%) of EU27 citizens take a neutral stance.

More than half (56%) of Latvian respondents have a neutral view of the EU image. Almost a third (29%) of respondents attaches positive attributes to the image of the EU, while 19% of citizens have a negative image of the EU. Since autumn 2007, positive opinions in Latvia have decreased by 7 PP (from 36% to 29%).

## **What Does the European Union Mean to You Personally?**

In general, EU27 citizens most often associate the EU with freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the European Union (mentioned by almost half of EU27 respondents). Other frequent answers include the “euro” (35%) and “peace” (26%).

In Latvia, the EU is also most often associated with opportunities to travel, study and work anywhere in the European Union (41%). The same proportion of Latvian citizens (40%) associate the EU with bureaucracy, although among EU27 respondents as a whole, the EU is associated with bureaucracy much more rarely (18%).

The majority (more than 78%) of Latvian people believe that their voice does not count and is not listened to in Latvia, the European Union, or the EU institutions. 73% of Latvian citizens believe that the Latvian economy has not become more stable since joining the EU. Furthermore, the majority of citizens believe that the EU imposes its views on Latvia (79%), and that the interests of Latvia are not taken into account in the EU (68%).

## **The Institutions of the European Union**

The highest proportion (87%) of EU27 citizens are informed about the European Parliament, followed by the European Commission (78%) and the European Central Bank (73%). At the same time, 62% of the EU27 population have heard of the Council of the European Union.

In Latvia, awareness of the institutions of the European Union does not differ much from the average EU27 rates. The majority (82%) of Latvian citizens have heard of the European Parliament and the European Commission (79%), while a smaller number of people have heard of the Council of the European Union (67%) and the European Central Bank (64%).

## **Attitude towards the Enlargement of the European Union**



The majority of the EU27 population are in favour of the European Union's enlargement in the future with regard to Norway, Switzerland and Iceland (reported by more than 70% of EU27 citizens). Respondents are more sceptical about the enlargement of the European Union towards Albania, Kosovo and Turkey: half of the EU27 population are against such an enlargement, while only a third supports the accession of the above countries to the European Union in the future.

Latvian people are of a similar opinion to the overall EU27 opinion concerning EU enlargement. The accession of Norway to the European Union in the future is supported most (80%), followed by Switzerland (79%) and Iceland (74%). At the same time, Turkey (34%), Kosovo (34%) and Albania (33%) rank among the least supported countries.

The overall EU27 attitude towards Turkey's accession to the European Union (if it was able to comply with all EU regulations) is polarised: 45% of EU27 citizens are in favour and 45% are against Turkish membership of the EU, even if it complied with all EU standards.

Among Latvian people, 41% are in favour of, while 48% are against, Turkey's accession to the European Union, even if it complied with all EU requirements. The Lithuanian and Estonian populations share similar opinions.