

EUROBAROMETER 69

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

POLAND

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The Eurobarometer survey is regularly conducted for the European Commission. Its aim is to examine public opinion concerning the European Union and the situation in its Member States. The following text briefly presents the most important figures from the latest wave of the Eurobarometer. In Poland, the survey was conducted between 30 March and 23 April 2008 on a representative sample of 1000 people aged 15 and above.

1. Public opinion in Poland: context

- Three-quarters of Poles are satisfied with the life they lead

Three-quarters of Poles (75%) are satisfied with the life they lead and almost one in four (24%) of those interviewed feels dissatisfied. Since autumn 2005, satisfaction with life in our country has remained at a high level, exceeding 70%.

The percentage of Poles who are satisfied with their life does not differ significantly from the European average (77%). People in Poland are much less satisfied with life than people in Denmark (96%), the Netherlands (96%), Luxembourg (95%), Sweden (95%) or Finland (94%), but much more satisfied than people in Bulgaria (40%), Hungary (47%), Portugal (52%) or Romania (53%).

- The number of Poles who have optimistic expectations for the future is rising. At the same time, the number of pessimists is rising too

One in three respondents (35%) thinks that the next 12 months will be better regarding life in general. In autumn 2007, 29% of respondents had similar expectations. In the same period, the percentage of Poles who expect the situation to deteriorate increased from 12% to 16%. The percentage of optimists among Poles is only slightly higher than the European average (32%) and the percentage of pessimists is exactly the same (16%).

A quarter of Poles (26%) expect that, in the year to come, the financial situation of their household will improve but only a slightly smaller number of respondents expect that it will deteriorate (21%). Half a year ago, these figures were 24% and 14% respectively. The percentage of Poles who expect the financial situation of their household to improve is slightly higher than the European average (22%).

- A significantly higher number of Poles are optimistic about the economic situation in their country than Europeans on average

30% of respondents (28% six months ago) expect that the economic situation in Poland in the next 12 months will be better. The opposite opinion is shared by 21% (14% six months ago). The percentage of Poles who expect that the economic situation in Poland in the next 12 months will improve is significantly higher than the average in the EU countries (16%). The percentage of pessimists in our country is more than twice as high as the European Union average (46%).

- Poles are optimistic about the labour market

According to 41% of respondents, in the next 12 months the employment situation in Poland will improve. 13% expect that it will deteriorate. In autumn 2007, the percentages of both pessimists (11%) and optimists (37%) were lower. Twice as many Poles think that the next 12 months will be better for the labour market in their country than Europeans on average (21%) and three times as many (39%) expect that it will be worse. Moreover, one in five (20%) Poles expect that their personal job situation will improve in the next 12 months and only 7% of those interviewed worry that it will deteriorate.

- More than a half of Poles think that things are going in the right direction in their country

More than a half of Poles (55%) think that things are going in the right direction in their country. According to one in four (24%) respondents, things are going in the wrong direction. In autumn 2007, 47% of respondents thought that things were going in the wrong direction and only 31% assessed the direction as good.

The percentage of Poles who think that things are going in the right direction is much higher than the European average (32%). Only in Malta (56%), Romania (53%), Estonia (51%), Cyprus and

Finland (both 50%) is there a comparable proportion of society that thinks things are going in the right direction.

- The vast majority of Poles assess the state of the Polish economy as worse than the state of the EU economy

Only 14% of Poles believe that the state of the Polish economy is better than the state of the economy of the EU Member States on average. Three quarters of respondents (75%) do not agree with this opinion. Poles consider the state of the Polish economy to be better than that of the EU on average to a much lesser extent than Europeans (35%) and they consider it to be worse to a greater extent (56%).

According to Poles, the quality of life in their country is worse than the average quality of life in the European Union Member States (82%). The percentage of Poles who think that the quality of life is better than the average quality of life in the European Union Member States, is much lower than the European average (46%). The percentage of those who think that it is worse is significantly higher (48%).

- Trust placed by Poles in the government and the parliament is rising

One in four Poles (26%) trusts the government, while parliament is trusted by 16%. In autumn 2007, the government was trusted by 17% and the parliament by 10% of respondents. Previously, the government was trusted by such a high proportion of respondents in autumn 2002 (27%) and the parliament in spring 2003 (18%). Trust placed in the government is a little bit lower in Poland than the European average (32%) and trust placed in the parliament is much lower (34%).

- Radio is still the most trusted medium in Poland

Radio is still the most trusted medium in Poland. It is now trusted by 57% of respondents. Trust in television is a little bit lower – it is trusted by 52% of respondents. Trust in these two institutions has been stable since Poland joined the European Union (spring 2004). Trust placed by Poles in the press is significantly lower than four years ago. In spring 2004, it was trusted by one in two (50%) Poles and now by less than a half of those interviewed (42%).

Trust in the press in Poland does not differ from the European Union average (44%). Moreover, the average level of trust in radio in the European Union (61%) is only slightly higher than the level observed in Poland. Trust in television is at the same level as in Europe as a whole (53%).

- According to Poles, the most important issue facing their country at the moment is the state of the healthcare system

For one in two Poles (49%), the state of the healthcare system is one of two most important issues facing our country at the moment. According to one in three (33%), inflation is a problem and 27% cited unemployment as an important issue. The following places in this ranking are occupied by crime (17%), pensions (16%) and the economy (15%).

Over the last year, the significance of the state of the healthcare system and inflation as issues currently facing Poland has been rising. The percentage of respondents who think that unemployment is the most important issue dropped from 78% in spring 2006 and 45% in spring 2007 to 27% now.

Europeans believe that inflation is the most important issue (37%). This is followed by unemployment (24%), crime and the economy (both 20%).

2. Polish membership of the European Union

- Two thirds of Poles regard Polish membership of the European Union as a good thing

Support for membership is very high in our country – it is a good thing according to 65% of Poles, neither good nor bad according to 25%, and bad according to 6%. In comparison with autumn 2007, support for membership dropped by 6 percentage points.

Support for membership of the European Union is higher in Poland than in the EU on average (52%). The Dutch (75%), citizens of Luxemburg and the Irish (both 73%) are most likely to say that

membership of the EU is a good thing. It is a bad thing according to the British (32%), Austrians (26%), Swedes (22%), Hungarians (21%) and Finnish (20%).

- More than three quarters of Poles believe that our country benefited from being a member of the EU

More than three quarters (77%) of Poles believe that our country benefited from being a member of the EU. The percentage of Poles who think that membership of the European Union is beneficial decreased by 6 percentage points in the last six months.

Poles claim that their country has benefited from being a member of the EU to a greater degree than Europeans on average. Apart from Poles, the benefits of enlargement are most often cited by the Irish (83%), Danes (77%), Estonians, Slovaks (both 76%) and Lithuanians (75%). The highest proportion of people convinced that their country did not benefit from EU membership was registered in Hungary (52%), the United Kingdom (50%), Austria (47%), as well as in Latvia (42%) and Finland (41%).

According to the Poles who are satisfied with EU membership, our country has benefited mostly because the EU brings people new employment opportunities – this opinion is shared by one in two respondents (51%). Respondents who have opposite views think that Polish people have very little influence in decisions made at EU level (31%) and that issues which are important for Polish people are best dealt with at national level (22%).

- Six in ten Poles trust the European Union

The European Union is trusted by 59% of respondents and not trusted by 22%. Trust in the EU is decreasing – it is now 9 percentage points lower than in spring 2007 but many more Poles place trust in the EU now than in spring 2004 when Poland was entering the EU (33%).

Trust in the European Union is 9 percentage points higher in Poland than the average for the EU Member States. The EU is trusted the most by citizens of Cyprus (71%), Estonia (69%) and Belgium (68%). The level of trust is lowest in the United Kingdom (29%), as well as in Austria (38%), Italy (40%) and Germany (43%).

- Trust placed by Poles in the European institutions decreased slightly

The European Commission is trusted by 54% of Poles, the European Parliament by 53% and the Council of the European Union by 48%. In comparison with the last wave of the survey, trust placed by Poles in these institutions decreased – by 7 percentage points for each of them.

Trust in the European Commission is much higher in Poland than in the European Union on average (47%). The European Parliament is trusted by a similar percentage of Europeans (52%) and Poles' trust in the Council of the EU is slightly higher than the European average (43%).

3. Poles views on the European Union

- Almost two thirds of Poles estimate that things are going in the right direction in the European Union

Almost two thirds (63%) of Poles claim that things are going in the right direction in the European Union. According to 14%, the direction is neither right nor wrong, while 9% think that things are going in the wrong direction. This assessment is a little bit better than two years ago when 58% of respondents believed things were going in the right direction.

More Poles than Europeans on average (42%) think that things in the EU are going in the right direction and the percentage of those who see things going in the wrong direction (25%) is almost half that of the average European. The opinion that things in the EU are going in the right direction is shared most often, but to a lesser degree than Poles, by Romanians (61%), Estonians (60%) and Slovenians (59%). The opposite opinion is most often shared by the Finnish (40%), French and Austrians (both 38%).

- Three quarters of Poles are optimistic about the future of the European Union

Three quarters (76%) of Poles are optimistic about the future of the European Union. Only 15% of respondents are pessimistic. The percentage of pessimists has increased by 5 percentage points in the last year and the percentage of optimists has fallen by the same value.

Poles are more optimistic than Europeans (63%). The highest proportion of optimists was observed in Denmark (77%), the Netherlands (76%), Ireland, Romania (both 75%), Slovenia (74%), Lithuania and Estonia (both 73%). The percentage of pessimists is highest among the French (42%), Austrians and the British (both 40%).

- More than a half of Poles have positive associations with the European Union

58% of Poles declare that they have positive associations with the European Union. 35% of respondents have neutral and 6% negative associations. Since autumn 2007, the number of people whose associations are neutral increased (by 5 percentage points) and the number of those with positive associations decreased (by 6 percentage points). Poles have positive associations with the EU more often than Europeans on average (48%).

The most common (63%) association with the European Union is the freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the EU. Likewise, for Europeans the EU means above all the freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the EU (49%).

4. Europeans and the European Union

- More than a half of Poles state that they understand how the European Union works

More than a half (58%) of Poles state that they understand how the European Union works. 31% admit that they do not understand the rules. For three years (since spring 2005), the percentage of respondents certain that they know how the European Union works has not changed. Poles state that they understand how the EU works more often than Europeans on average (44%). The percentage of respondents who declare that they know how the EU works is only higher in Cyprus (65%), Slovenia (62%), Luxembourg and the Netherlands (both 61%) and it is similar in Belgium and Sweden (58%).

- Basic knowledge of the facts of the EU in Poland appears to be average

59% of Poles realise that Switzerland is not a member of the European Union. 57% know that the EU does not currently consist of fifteen Member States. A half (50%) of Poles confirm that every six months a different Member State becomes the President of the Council of the EU and 20% that the Euro zone does not currently consist of twelve Member States.

On average, 52% of respondents in the European Union know that the EU does not currently consist of fifteen Member States. 68% of those interviewed do not think that Switzerland is a member of the EU. 51% of Europeans are aware that every six months a different Member State becomes the President of the Council of the EU. 28% of respondents in Europe know that the Euro zone does not currently consist of twelve Member States.

- Awareness of the European institutions remains at a high level in Poland

Among the European institutions, Poles are most frequently aware of the European Parliament (85%). To a slightly lesser extent, 82% of respondents have heard of the European Commission. 70% state that they are aware of the Council of the European Union. In spring 2007, 89% of respondents stated that they were aware of the European Parliament, 88% the European Commission and 75% the Council of the EU.

Awareness of the European Union institutions in Poland does not differ significantly from the average level in the European Union. 87% of Europeans are aware of the European Parliament, 78% have heard of the European Commission and 62% are aware of the Council of the EU.

- Almost half of Poles think that their voice does not count in Poland or in the European Union

45% of Poles believe that their voice does not count in the European Union. A slightly smaller percentage (38%) have the opposite opinion. The percentage of Poles who feel that they have

influence over European Union affairs has not changed significantly since spring 2005. Many Poles not only think that they do not have influence over European Union affairs, but they also believe that their voice does not count in Poland. 51% of respondents trust that they have influence over Polish affairs while 38% disagree. The percentage of Poles who believe that their voice counts in the European Union is higher than the European average (31%). In the EU on average, 48% of citizens believe that their voice counts in their country and 45% do not agree.

- More than two thirds of Poles think that Poland's voice counts in the European Union

68% of those interviewed believe that Poland's voice counts in the European Union. The opposite opinion, that Poland has no influence on EU affairs, is shared by a slightly more than one in five respondents (22%). The percentage of Poles who believe that Poland's voice counts in the EU has risen slightly (by 6 percentage points) since Poland joined the Community in 2004.

61% of respondents in Europe as a whole believe that their country's voice counts in the European Union. The percentage of people who believe their country can influence European affairs is highest in Sweden (86%), Denmark and Luxembourg (both 83%). The number of citizens who believe that their country does not have any influence is lowest in Italy (34%), Bulgaria (38%), Latvia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia (all 41%) as well as in Austria (43%).

- Less than a half of Poles believe that the interests of Poland are well taken into account in the EU

44% of Poles think that the interests of Poland are well taken into account in the EU. One in three respondents (33%) disagrees with this view. The percentage of people who share this opinion has risen since autumn 2007 by 11 percentage points but it does not significantly differ from the last year's level. The majority of Poles think that the European Union imposes its views on Poland (60%). One in four respondents disagrees (25%).

5. Further European integration

- The majority of Poles would like to leave decisions concerning the education system and taxation to the Polish government

According to Poles, decisions that should be taken jointly within the European Union include: fighting terrorism (85%), scientific and technological research (78%), support for regions facing economic difficulties (71%), protecting the environment (72%), fighting crime (70%), defence and foreign affairs (67%), immigration (64%), energy (63%) and transport (61%).

The Polish government should make independent decisions concerning: the education system (66%), taxation (59%), pensions (53%), social welfare (52%) and health (50%). In terms of fighting inflation, opinions are divided – 46% of respondents prefer joint decisions made within the EU and 47% prefer independent decisions made by the Polish government.

- One in two Poles support European Monetary Union

One in two (49%) Poles are in favour of the single currency. European Monetary Union is not supported by 39% of respondents. The percentage of Poles in favour of the Euro has not changed in the last 6 months and it was only significantly higher in autumn 2004 (65%). Poles' support for the single currency is significantly lower than the European average (60%). The level of support for the Euro is highest in Slovenia (90%) and Ireland (87%) and lowest in the United Kingdom (26%), Sweden (48%) and Poland.

- Three quarters of Poles support a common foreign policy among the Member States of the EU

Three quarters of Poles (76%) support a common foreign policy of the Member States of the EU towards other countries. 13% are against this idea. The support for a common foreign policy of the EU has been steadily decreasing since spring 2007 when it stood at 81%. Support for a common foreign policy of the EU in Poland is higher than the European average (68%). This idea is most highly supported in Cyprus (86%), Germany, Slovenia (both 82%) and Greece (80%). The level of support is lowest in the United Kingdom (49%), Portugal (51%), Sweden and Malta (both 55%).

- A vast majority of Poles support a common defence and security policy

A common defence and security policy is supported by 84% of Poles. 8% of Polish citizens are against it. The support for this idea has been stable since autumn 2004. The support for a common defence and security policy in Poland is higher than the EU average (76%). A common policy in this respect is most highly supported in Cyprus (94%), Belgium (89%) and Germany (88%). The lowest percentages of people in favour of this idea were observed in the United Kingdom (56%), Portugal (59%) and Ireland (60%).

- Three in four Poles are in favour of further enlargement of the European Union

Three in four Poles (74%) are in favour of further enlargement of the EU to include other countries in future years. Enlargement of the Community is not supported by only 12% of Poles. Since Poland joined the European Union, support for its further enlargement has remained at a high and stable level. Polish support for the idea of further enlargement of the European Union is the highest in the EU and easily exceeds the European average (47%). The percentage of citizens in favour of enlargement is only as high in Slovenia (74%).

- According to Poles, in the coming years the EU institutions should emphasise the fight against crime and social issues

Among issues which should be emphasised by the European institutions in the coming years to strengthen the European Union, Poles most often cite the fight against crime (34%) and social issues (33%). 28% of respondents cite energy issues and solidarity with poorer regions and 24% environmental issues. The hierarchy of issues that are important for the European institutions according to Poles has not changed significantly since 2007. Europeans on average also believe that the EU should above all concentrate on the fight against crime (33%) and energy issues (30%).

6. Attitudes towards globalisation

- For Poles, globalisation means more foreign investment in Poland

66% of Poles agree with the statement that globalisation means more foreign investment in Poland. Slightly fewer respondents (59%) think that globalisation is an opportunity for economic growth. Poles rarely (28%) claim that globalisation protects us from price increases. 43% of those interviewed think that globalisation does not help us to avoid inflation.

More Poles than Europeans on average (57%) believe that globalisation means more foreign investment in their country. The view that globalisation is an opportunity for economic growth is not as strong among Europeans as a whole (56%) than among Poles. Slightly more Polish citizens than Europeans on average (22%) claim that globalisation protects us from inflation.

- Half of Poles think that globalisation increases social inequalities

One in ten Poles (10%) are certain that globalisation increases social inequalities and 38% "rather agree" with this view. One in four (26%) respondent do not agree with this opinion. Slightly fewer Poles than Europeans on average (56%) believe that globalisation increases social inequalities. The highest percentages of those who share this opinion are found in Slovenia, Greece (both 76%) and France (74%). Danes and the Dutch are most likely to disagree (both 44%).

- One in three Poles claim that globalisation represents a threat to Polish culture

According to 32% of respondents, globalisation represents a threat to Polish culture. The percentage of Poles who do not agree with this is higher and stands at 46%. Fewer Poles than Europeans on average (39%) believe that globalisation represents a threat to their country's culture. Inhabitants of Cyprus (65%) and Greece (63%) worry the most about the negative influence of globalisation on their culture. Germans (64%), Danes, the Dutch (both 59%), Belgians and Swedes (both 57%) are most likely to think that globalisation is not a threat.

- More than a half of Poles think that globalisation is only profitable for large companies

More than a half (53%) of Poles think that globalisation is only profitable for large companies and not for citizens. The opposite opinion is shared by 23% of respondents. Fewer Poles than Europeans on average (63%) believe that globalisation is only profitable for large companies. The percentage of those who do not agree with this (22%) is similar in Poland and the whole of the EU. Greeks (84%) and the French (82%) claim more than any other Europeans that globalisation is only profitable for large companies. Danes (54%), Swedes (45%) and the Dutch (41%) are most likely to disagree with this view.

- A half of Poles agree that the European Union protects us from the negative effects of globalisation

A half of Poles (49%) agree that the European Union helps to protect us from the negative effects of globalisation. 24% of respondents hold the opposite opinion. Slightly more Poles than Europeans on average (44%) think that the European Union helps to protect us from the negative effects of globalisation. 35% of respondents in the EU do not agree with this opinion.

57% of Poles agree that the European Union enables European citizens to better benefit from the positive effects of globalisation. 16% of those interviewed do not agree with this statement. More Poles than Europeans on average (48%) believe that the EU enables European citizens to better benefit from the positive effects of globalisation and the number of Poles with the opposite opinion is almost two times lower than the EU average (31%).

Conclusion

According to the results of the latest Eurobarometer wave, Poland is a nation of optimists. Poles are satisfied with the situation in the country and their lives in general and expect further improvement. Three quarters of Poles (75%) are satisfied with their life and one in three (35%) expect that it will be better in the following 12 months.

Answers given by Poles to the question about the most important issues currently facing our country reflect their positive attitude towards the economic and employment situation. They are increasingly concerned about rising prices (6% in 2006 and 33% now) and the state of the healthcare system (30% and 49%). At the same time, concern about unemployment is decreasing (78% and 27%).

Poles are optimistic not only about the future of their country but also about the future of the European Union. 63% of Polish respondents believe that things are going in the right direction in the EU, while the European average stands at 42%. More than three quarters of Poles (76%) are optimistic about the future of the EU and only Danes are more positive (77%).

The level of support for Poland's membership of the European Union is stable and high. 65% of Poles regard it as something good and 77% believe that the country has benefited from membership. Both percentages have decreased in the last six months (in both cases by 6 percentage points) but a similar increase in the percentage of respondents against Poland's accession was not observed.