

# EUROBAROMETER 69

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

## Spring 2008

### NATIONAL REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY **ROMANIA**

Standard Eurobarometer 69 / Spring 2008 – TNS Opinion & Social

This survey has been carried out upon request of and under the coordination of Directorate-General for Communication.

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## ***Synthesis<sup>1</sup>: Social Romania in European context***

When considering the change in Romanian's state-of-mind, it can be said that, over the last six months, between autumn 2007 and spring 2008, nothing has fundamentally changed. In spring 2008, when the data were collected, 53% of Romanians stated that they were satisfied with their own living standards (4% more than half a year earlier). However, can we talk about an increase in Romanians' satisfaction with the quality of their own living standards? No. The difference is minimal with the increase not being statistically significant<sup>2</sup>. Actually, if the interval of reference is increased, it can be noted that one year before, in spring 2007, the percentage of people satisfied with their own living standards was also 53%.

If the interval of reference is further expanded to 2 years, then the results are modified. For this interval, Romanians' level of social satisfaction has increased considerably (an increase of 10 percentage points). Only the Bulgarians have witnessed a higher increase, of 15 percentage points, over the same time interval. Within the EU, the level of peoples' satisfaction with their living standards has remained relatively unchanged over the same 2 years, with 77-78% people satisfied:- a figure which is significantly higher than the 53 percent registered in Romania.

*There is the same level of dissatisfaction as last year, but higher levels of satisfaction than 2 years ago.* Together with the Bulgarians, Hungarians and the Portuguese, Romanians represent the "dissatisfaction elite" as regards their living standards.

*Previous surveys showed an important deficit of satisfaction, but a high degree of optimism. This is still the case.* 44% of Romanians consider that their lives will be better in 12 months' time (at the time of EB69). Only the Swedes had a higher percentage of optimists (50%). Nevertheless, there are major differences in terms of the people's state-of-mind. While in Sweden, people are both satisfied (95%) and optimistic about their own living standards, in Romania the population is optimist but amongst the most dissatisfied Europeans in this respect. Analysing the data over several years, it could be said that a society becomes optimistic at European level (meaning "European from within the EU") when the threshold of the optimistic population exceeds 39-40%. For the last couple of years, the leading optimists are citizens from Sweden, Denmark, the UK and Romania.

*When considering the direction things are going in Romania,, if one takes into account the last Eurobarometer, things are going in a very good direction: 53% of Romanian respondents consider that "in general, things are going in the right direction" in the country. Quite a high percentage of the population view the evolution of the society they belong to positively, taking into account the fact that relevant percentages are 42% in the New*

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<sup>1</sup> Author: Dumitru Sandu. English translation: Roxana Morea

<sup>2</sup> Based on results of t test for differences in percentages.

Member States, the 2004 accession wave (NMS10), and only 29% in the old Member States (EU15). Romanians' social optimism is similar to their views on their own living standards, that is amongst the most positive. We have high levels of social optimism, similar to Polish, Finnish, Estonian, Maltese and Cypriot people. In all these cases, the percentage of people who consider their country to be going in the right direction is at least 50%. Amongst EU Member States, Danish and Swedish people, mentioned previously as having a high level of personal optimism, also demonstrate high levels of social optimism, but under the 50% threshold.

*It can be noted that Romanians, Swedes and Danes are included in both rankings, as regards personal and social optimism. Should it be considered that the 2 types of optimism are linked? There is, surely, a 'contamination' effect between the belief that "I will live better" and that "in my country things are going in the right direction"*<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, it is known that feelings of personal optimism are more easily converted into social optimism in societies in transition, meaning those belonging to the NMS group.

When considering whether Romanians believe that things are going in the right or in the wrong direction in their country, qualitative analyses and in-depth interviews should be used. Nevertheless, from the "statistical and sociological screening" of the Eurobarometer data, several hypotheses can be formulated. The average Romanian tends to consider the country's evolution as positive if:

- he/she is satisfied with their own living standards,
- he/she considers that their own household's purchasing power has increased over the last couple of years<sup>4</sup>,
- he/she has a better opinion on the main state institutions, such as the Government, Parliament or justice system.

*Can optimistic or pessimistic societies be considered in the same way as optimistic or pessimistic people?* Pessimism and optimism at society level, just as at individual level, are dynamic and specific for certain stages or time intervals. Currently, Romanian society is ranked, together with that of the Swedes and the Danes, amongst those with high levels of optimism, and this trend is on the rise. Levels of optimism are also high, in the European context, in France, the UK and Malta, but are experiencing a downward trend. At the other end of the spectrum, are societies with high levels of pessimism where this trend is increasing. This is the case of societies such as Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Austria.

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<sup>3</sup> I encoded the variable for "direction" using 3 terms: "correct", "don't know" and "wrong"; I have also used 3 different values to encode personal optimism. Regression of "direction" over "personal optimism" is for Romania  $b=0.33$ , significantly different from 0 for  $p=0.01$ . Relevant indexes are 0.37 for NMS10 and 0.18 for EU15. In all cases, their values are significantly different from 0.

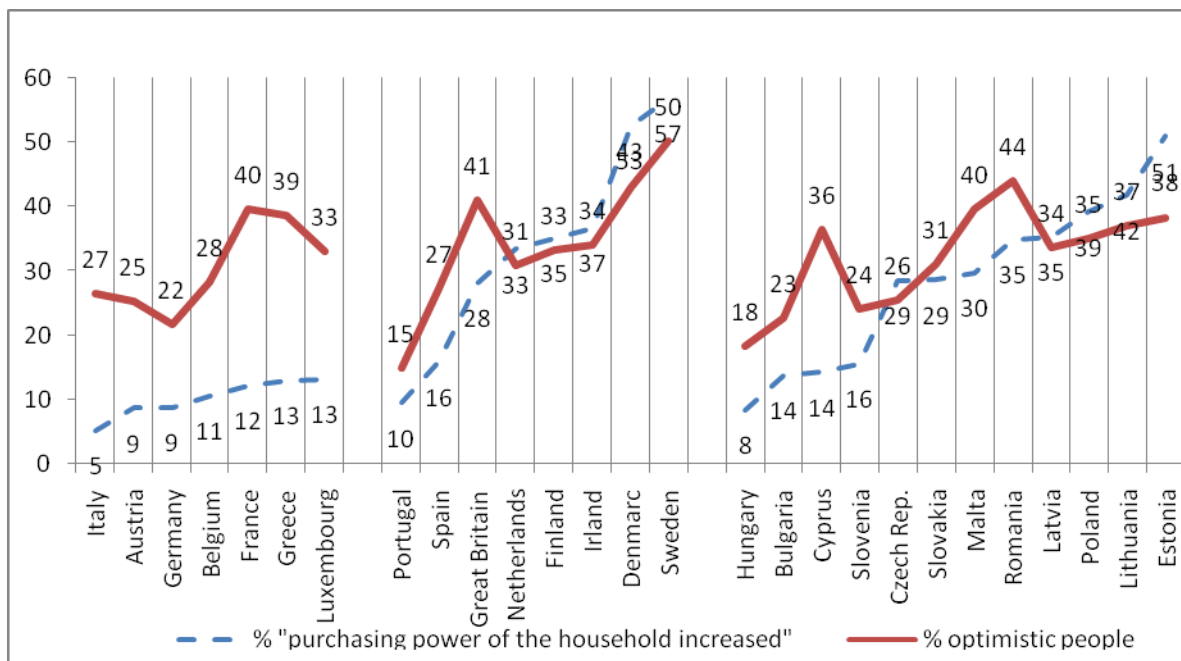
<sup>4</sup> From the approximate one-third of Romanians considering their own household's purchasing power to have increased over the last couple of years, 70% argue "things are going in the right direction". The relevant percentage amongst those who believe their purchasing power had decreased is only 28%.

## SOCIETIES IN TERMS OF STATUS AND DYNAMICS OF SOCIAL OPTIMISM

	optimism on upward trend	optimism on downward trend	
optimist	Romania Sweden Denmark	UK France Malta	
with an average level of optimism	Greece Cyprus Luxembourg The Netherlands	Lithuania Poland Slovakia Finland Estonia	Belgium Latvia Spain Ireland
pessimist		Germany Bulgaria Italy Portugal	Slovenia Czech Republic Hungary Austria

(Classification is based on data in Table 1 in the report)

*What can optimism / pessimism at society level be linked to?* Estimations are multiple and complex. From data available in the Eurobarometer, factors that are directly relevant for inducing optimism/pessimism are those referring to economic dynamics of the household. People from households that have witnessed an increase in purchasing power over the last 5 years are most likely to manifest optimism. Pessimism is significantly associated with perceptions of deteriorating purchasing power in the household.



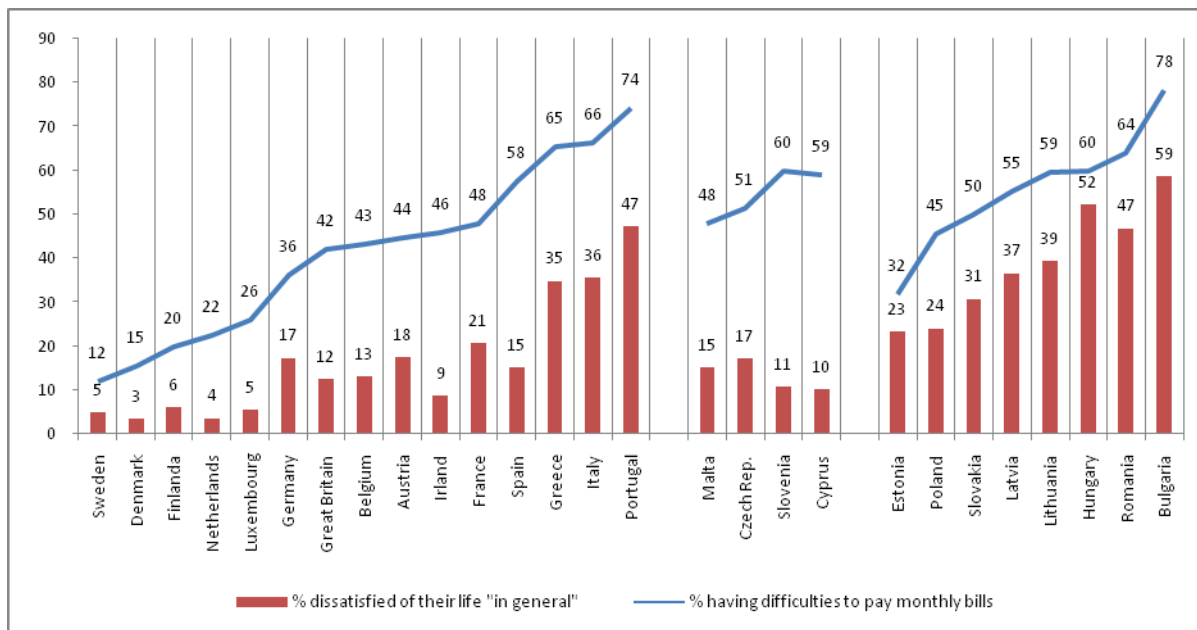
In Romania, almost one-third of people interviewed for EB69 declared that the purchasing power of their own household had increased over the last 5 years. Those who consider that the purchasing power of their own household has decreased represent 27%. The remainder believe that the economic situation of their own

household has remained unchanged. In this context, Romania is ranked, amongst countries from the NMS group, in the category of Member States with an important percentage of the population having a positive perception over the economic dynamic of the household. This category also includes Poland, Lithuania and Estonia. On the other hand, those countries with a high percentage of the population with a negative perception of the evolution of their own purchasing power include Hungary, Slovenia and Cyprus. Over 50% of these countries' populations consider that the purchasing power of their own household has been reduced over the last 5 years.

*When considering what can be generally associated with the satisfied/dissatisfied state of mind as regards own living standards at society level*, of major relevance, and within the limits imposed by data available in EB69, are situations linked to the payment of monthly bills. A large percentage of the Romanians interviewed (64%) consider that they have major difficulties in paying their monthly bills. A similar proportion, or even greater, of people in the same situation are registered in Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, Slovenia and Bulgaria. As a trend, at country level, the percentage of those dissatisfied with the quality of their own living standards increases when the number of people complaining of difficulties in paying monthly bills is on the rise. In the NMS group, high levels are registered for both indexes especially in Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary. Estonia, Poland and Slovakia are examples of societies from the NMS group where the indexes register low levels for both dissatisfaction with their living standards and concerns over the payment of monthly bills.

Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Malta and Cyprus seem to be societies that are the exception to the rule. In their case, concerns over the payment of monthly bills are at reduced levels. Consequently, there should also be a low proportion of people dissatisfied with the quality of living standards. This is not the case. The levels of dissatisfaction are quite considerable. Factors other than economic ones could be responsible for this situation. It could be that, in these countries, there is a high level of aspirations, a favourable condition for dissatisfaction, when material resources available to the population are average, in the European context.

In the various societies belonging to the EU15, Greece, Italy and Portugal are characterised by an important social dissatisfaction, associated with increased concerns over the payment of monthly bills. Northern countries, like Sweden, Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands, represent the opposite situation, with low levels of dissatisfaction with the quality of their living standards and reduced financial concerns amongst the population.



*Are people dissatisfied or satisfied, optimists or pessimists, a function only of their material situation, the evolution of their purchasing power or the capacity to pay monthly bills?* In the happiness or optimism equation, there are other factors to be included. Amongst these, within the limits of the data provided in the EB, there are factors of an institutional nature. People tend to consider that things are going in the right direction in their own country, not only if they feel their household's purchasing power is increasing, but also if they trust their own Government or justice system.

When Romanians are asked whether their trust *in their justice system has changed*, the level of trust is the same as recorded previously. Over the last 18 months, compared to the beginning of 2006, the percentage of Romanians who trust the justice system has remained within the 26-28% bracket. In the short-term, over the last six months, institutions that have gained in terms of people's trust are the mass-media. Radio and the printed media have registered an increase in trust levels of 10 percentage points, while trust in television increased by 6 points. Political institutions, whilst they register very low levels of trust, have nevertheless recorded significant increases in terms of people's trust over the last semester – from 17% to 22% for the Parliament, from 11% to 18% for political parties and from 21% to 25% for the Government. These figures are significant as the process of regaining trust in national institutions amongst the population is a fragile one. This process is ‘fragile’ because, despite the increases noted, the level of trust in national institutions remains low; in fact, they are below the levels registered in spring 2006. Moreover, an upward trend can be considered as such only if it is sustainable and continues in the long term.

*Compared with the EU average, when considering what level of trust Romanians' place in institutions, this depends on the type of institution. Romanians' trust in the mass-media is by far the highest when compared with the rest of EU. As regards the justice system or the police, the average Romanian is significantly less trusting*

than the average citizen in the NMS10 or EU15. Trust in the army (70%) is under the average level registered in the EU. Opinion on political institutions – Government, Parliament, parties – is similar amongst Romanians and EU citizens: they register low levels of trust. As for other state-of-mind situations, the population's opinion on national institutions follows certain national or regional patterns of trust.

Romanians fit in a model dominated by high levels of trust in the mass-media and strong distrust of political and public order institutions (police and justice system). In this respect, Romanians are similar to Czechs, Slovaks, Lithuanians and Latvians.

MODEL OF INSTITUTIONAL TRUST	Best representation of the model	Countries with a profile close to the model, yet different
<i>Generalised trust in political and public order institutions and mass-media</i>	Austria, The Netherlands, Ireland, Estonia	Finland
<i>High trust in political institutions and average trust in public order institutions and mass-media</i>	Spain, Sweden, Luxembourg	Denmark, Cyprus, Malta
<i>Trust only in mass-media</i>	Romania, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Latvia	Bulgaria, Poland, Slovenia
<i>Typical for EU average</i>	France, Germany	UK
<i>Generalised distrust in political and public order institutions and mass-media</i>	Hungary, Italy	Greece

For arguments, see graphs 13 and 14

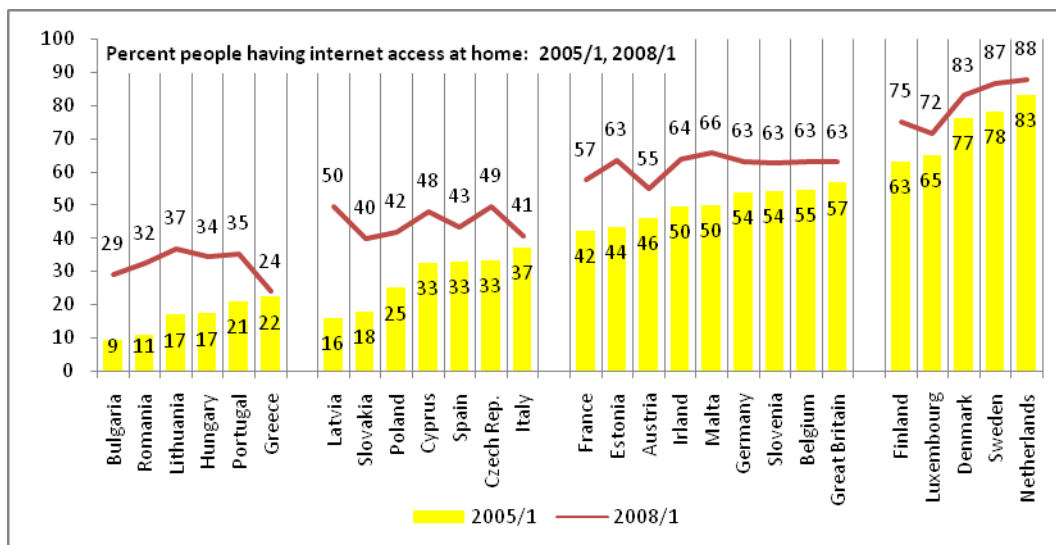
The type of society characterised by generalised distrust in national institutions is represented by Italy and Hungary. At the opposite end, with high levels of generalised trust are people from Austria, the Netherlands, Ireland and Estonia. The closest to the EU average, in terms of trust in institutions, are the German and French citizens.

*When Romanians are asked whether they trust the EU*, 66% of the population claim that they trust the EU. Romania is ranked at the same level as the Spanish and Slovenian people. The maximum level of trust, 71%, was registered in spring 2008 in Cyprus. In 2005, Romania was the country with the highest level of trust in the EU, from amongst the current Member States. Since 2006, the highest levels of trust in the EU have been observed in Hungary, Slovenia, Belgium and Estonia. With the exception of Belgium, since 2004, trust in the EU has been highest among the new member countries

The trust levels basically follow the pattern of respondents' perceived benefits of EU membership. For Romania, for example, the percentage of people declaring their trust in the EU is practically identical to the proportion of people who consider that the country benefits from membership status. On the whole, the trust in the EU curve follows the curve of the perceived advantages from being an EU Member State. There are also notable

exceptions, such as Ireland, where there is a strong opinion that the country has benefited from EU membership, but the level of trust in EU institutions is low.

*Of course, it is important to know the evolution of levels as regards satisfaction with own living standards, trust in institutions, optimism or concerns over payment of monthly bills, as well as in terms of price increases.* The Eurobarometer survey does not provide detailed information on changes in behaviour as the comparative survey at European level is focused on perceptions and the population's state-of-mind. There is, nevertheless, information of major relevance for the population's behaviour as regards modern means of communication. Access to the Internet has practically tripled in Romania over the last 3 years. This phenomenon is specific to countries that were, and still are, less internet-connected within the EU. Similar increases have also been registered in Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia and Lithuania. These are clear signs of a gap-reducing process in terms of the IT stratification of the EU's population.



The countries best placed in terms of internet access opportunities are Sweden, Denmark and Finland, The Netherlands and Luxembourg are, at the same time, the countries where the population registers the highest levels of satisfaction with their living standards. At the other end of the spectrum, Europe's poor in terms of Internet access – Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Lithuania – are the main countries that are dissatisfied with their living standards.

Of course, it cannot be argued that “internet brings happiness”, but there are enough reasons to believe it favours it, that there are common processes that promote both the dissemination of the intangible social happiness and the expansion of communication opportunities.