

# EUROBAROMETER 70

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

## AUTUMN 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 “Eurobarometer 70” survey in Latvia took place within the time period between 6 October and 6 November 2008 and surveyed 1,002 Latvian citizens over the age of 15. The survey was conducted by “TNS Latvia”, market and social research agency. “Eurobarometer 70” was the ninth “Eurobarometer Standard” survey since Latvia became a Member State of the European Union.

## **Assessment of the current situation**

**Overall, Europeans, including Latvian citizens, are critical of the economic situation in the country, Europe and the world, and their opinion has got worse over the last year. People in Europe are still pessimistic also about the overall situation with employment, while they are more optimistic about their individual employment situation, as well as their household’s financial situation. However, people are sceptical about the future prospects saying more often that household purchasing power will decrease.**

The current economic situation in the country is regarded by the EU27 poll more often as bad: about two-thirds (69%) say the economic situation in the country is rather bad or very bad, while one-third (29%) say it is rather good or very good. When compared to last year (autumn 2007), the overall outlook has deteriorated: the percentage of those who acknowledge that the economic situation is bad has increased by 20 PP.

**Among the Baltic States, the Latvian poll is still the most sceptical: the economic situation is regarded as rather good or very good by only 7% of respondents.**

Similarly, the current economic situation in Europe is regarded by the EU27 poll more often as bad: more than half (58%) of people admit it is rather bad or very bad contrary to one-third (33%) of Europeans who say the economic situation in Europe is rather good or very good.

The Baltic people are relatively more optimistic about the economic situation in Europe. **Among Latvians, 40% of respondents regard the economic situation in Europe as rather good or very good.** However it should be mentioned that **opinion about the overall economic situation in Europe has become considerably worse over the last year**: the percentage of those who were optimistic about the economic situation in Europe (rather good or very good) has decreased by 22 PP.

The majority (71%) of the EU27 population are also pessimistic about the current global economic situation (rather bad or very bad). One-fifth (20%) of Europeans claim that the global economic situation is rather good or very good.

People living in the Baltic States are more optimistic about the global economic situation, compared to the average in Europe: **29% of Latvian respondents say that the global economic situation is rather good or very good.**

People living in EU27 countries are critical of the situation regarding employment. 69% of respondents in the EU27 admit that the employment situation is bad or very bad, while one-third (28%) say it is rather good or very good.

**Latvian people are more critical: only 16% regard the employment situation as rather good or very good.** Within a year (since autumn 2007), Latvians have become even more critical of the employment situation: positive opinions about the employment situation have decreased by 22 PP (from 38% to 16%).

On the whole, the individual employment situation is regarded much more positively by EU27 respondents than the country’s employment situation in general. 56% of EU27 respondents say their individual employment situation is rather good or very good, while 27% of population regard it as rather bad or very bad.

**Among the Baltic States, Latvians are the most optimistic about the individual employment situation: 58% say that the situation is rather good or very good.**

However, 85% of Latvian respondents report that the employment situation in Latvia is worse than in European countries on average.

Overall, the household financial situation is mainly regarded by the EU27 population as positive: 64% of respondents say their household financial situation is rather good or very good, while 34% report it is rather bad or very bad.

**58% of the poll in Latvia say their household financial situation is rather good or very good.**

Compared to 5 years ago, household purchasing power is regarded as better by 18% of EU27 population. 29% of respondents say that purchasing power has not changed, while 51% report that household purchasing power has declined.

**In Latvia, like in the European Union on average, 28% say their household purchasing power has improved over the last five years, while 45% say that purchasing power has decreased, and 26% think that the situation has not changed.**

46% of EU27 poll agree with the statement that they have difficulties in paying all bills at the end of the month, while 51% of respondents claim they do not have such problems.

**In Latvia, only 47% of people are able to successfully pay all bills at the end of the month.**

50% of the EU27 poll report that the quality of life in their country is better when compared to the average in European countries, while 44% of respondents say it is worse.

**Among the Baltic States, Latvians are the most pessimistic about the quality of life in their country compared to the average in European countries: only 7% of Latvians say it is better, while 89% feel that it is worse.**

Overall, the way the countries are fighting inequality and poverty is regarded by the EU27 poll as negative: 67% of respondents say it is rather bad or very bad, while 27% say it is rather good or very good.

**Compared to the average in the European Union, Latvian people are more critical of their country's activities to fight inequality and poverty: 82% of the poll say the country's performance is rather bad or very bad, while only 12% admit it is rather good or very good.**

Availability of energy is more often regarded by the EU27 poll as bad: 69% of respondents say it is rather bad or very bad, while 26% of respondents regard it as rather good or very good.

**In Latvia, availability of energy is regarded as rather good or very good by 73% of the population, while 23% say it is rather bad or very bad.**

State administration is mainly regarded by the EU27 population as bad: 55% of respondents say it is rather bad or very bad, while 38% consider it is rather good or very good.

**In Latvia, state administration is said to be rather good or very good by only 17%, while almost three-quarters (73%) of people think it is rather bad or very bad. 10% of respondents do not have an opinion on this matter.**

## **Most important problems facing the country and individuals**

The two most **often mentioned problems** of the EU27 poll, in autumn 2008, are **inflation/rising prices** (reported by 37% of respondents in EU27 countries) and **the economic situation** (also reported by 37% of respondents in EU27 countries). It should be noted that concern over the economic situation among the EU27 population has grown by 17% (from 20% to 37%), thus exceeding **unemployment** which was one of the most frequently cited problems in autumn 2007 and is now regarded as a problem by 26% of respondents.

**Also, in Latvia, inflation/rising prices (59%) and the economic situation (45%) are regarded as the two most important problems.** Inflation/rising prices has been mentioned as the most important problem in the Eurobarometer surveys since 2004.

This year, **unemployment is regarded to be the third main problem in the country: 26% of Latvians mention it as one of the most important problems which is 11 PP more than last year.** In 2007, pensions were the third main problem in Latvia.

Similarly, people living in the EU27 countries mention inflation/rising prices (reported by 50% of respondents in EU27) and the economic situation (23%) as two main personal problems. The percentage of those who mention inflation as a personal problem is 13 PP higher compared to those who regard it as the country's problem. At the same time, the economic situation is recognised mainly as a problem on a national level: the percentage of those who mention the economic situation as a personal problem is 14 PP lower compared to those who regard it as the country's problem.

With regard to Latvia, three problems on a personal level match the problems which are recognised by people as the problems facing the country: inflation/rising prices (70%), the economic situation (30%) and unemployment (17%). It should be noted that respondents mention inflation/rising prices as a personal problem significantly more often than on a national level, whereas unemployment is mentioned less often.

## **Evaluation of current trends**

Overall, only 28% of respondents among the EU27 poll admit that things are going in the right direction in their country. Nearly half (49%) of respondents living in EU27 say that things are going in the wrong direction, while almost one-fifth (19%) say “neither the one nor the other”.

**The majority of people in Latvia consider that things are going in the wrong direction (61%), while only 19% of respondents admit that things are going in the right direction.**

Compared to the survey results of spring 2008 (EB 69.2), we can see that the situation in the EU27 has got a little worse: the percentage of those who think that things are going in the wrong direction has grown by 7 PP. **Also, in Latvia, the percentage of those people who think that things are going in the wrong direction has increased (by 8 PP).**

As regards the trends in the European Union, 35% of the EU27 poll feel that, in general, things are going in the right direction in the European Union, 34% of respondents hold a contrary view saying that things are going in the wrong direction in the European Union. 19% of population say “neither the one nor the other”.

34% of Latvians are sure that things are going in the right direction in the European Union, while 31% admit that things are going in the wrong direction. 16% of population say “neither the one nor the other”.

## **Expectations for the next 12 months**

About half (51%) of the EU27 poll expect the economic situation in the country to get worse within the next twelve months. One-third of the EU27 population (29%) think that the economic situation in their country will be the same, while only 15% are optimistic and expect the economic situation in the country to get better.

**In Latvia, half (49%) expect the economic situation in the country to get worse within the next twelve months.** One-tenth (12%) of people expect the economic situation in the country to get better, while 35% think that the economic situation in the country will not change.

About half (52%) of EU27 respondents expect that the financial situation of their household will remain the same within the next twelve months. 27% expect the financial situation of their household to get worse, while 18% are optimistic and expect the financial situation of their household to get better within the next twelve months.

**In Latvia, half (50%) expect the financial situation of their household not to change within the next twelve months, 22% think that the financial situation of their household will get better, while 24% expect the financial situation of their household to get worse.**

One-third of the surveyed EU27 population (31%) expects the economic situation in the EU not to change within the next twelve months. 41% think that the economic situation in the EU will get worse, while 16% are optimistic saying that the economic situation in the EU will get better within the next twelve months.

**Compared to the survey which was conducted in spring 2008, there is an increase of 15 PP in those who expect the economic situation in the EU to get worse within the next twelve months.**

41% of the Latvian poll thinks that the economic situation in the EU will remain the same within the next twelve months. About one-fifth (19%) expect the economic situation in the EU to get better, while a quarter (25%) say that the economic situation in the EU will get worse.

25% of the surveyed EU27 population expect the economic situation in the world not to change within the next twelve months. Half (49%) thinks that the economic situation in the world will get worse within the next year, while 15% expect the economic situation in the world to get better.

40% of the Latvian poll expects the economic situation in the world not to change within the next twelve months, 19% think that the economic situation in the world will get better, while one-fourth of population (25%) expect the economic situation in the world to get worse within the next twelve months.

28% of EU27 respondents expect the employment situation in the country not to change within the next twelve months. About a half (53%) think that the employment situation will get worse, while 13% expect the employment situation to get better within the next twelve months. **Compared to the survey in spring 2008, we see an increase of 14 PP in those who expect the employment situation in the country to get worse within the next twelve months.**

**In Latvia**, one-third (34%) expect the employment situation not to change within the next twelve months. Only 8% of population expect the employment situation to improve, and **about half (51%) think that the employment situation in the country will get worse.**

Compared to the survey in spring 2008, there is an increase (of 9 PP) in the percentage of those Latvian respondents who expect the employment situation in the country to get worse within the next twelve months.

As regards the personal job situation, people living in the EU27 are more optimistic compared to the employment situation on a national level: 58% expect their personal job situation not to change within the next twelve months. 12% think that it will get worse, while 18% expect it to improve within the next twelve months.

**In Latvia, half (51%) expect the personal job situation not to change within the next twelve months.**

18% think that the personal job situation will get better, and 11% expect it to get worse. Another 20% do not have an opinion on this matter.

Compared to the survey in spring 2008, it can be seen that the situation in Latvia has not changed significantly.

Half (51%) of EU27 poll expect their life in general not to change within the next twelve months. 24% think that it will improve, while 22% expect it to get worse. Compared to the results of the survey which was conducted in spring 2008, people have become a little more pessimistic: there is an increase of 6 PP in those EU27 respondents who expect their life in general to get worse within the next twelve months.

**In Latvia, 48% expect their life in general not to change within the next twelve months.** About a quarter (26%) think it will get better, while **23% expect their life in general to get worse.**

Compared to the survey in spring 2008, it can be seen that **Latvians have become a little more pessimistic as regards their expectations about their life in general for the next twelve months: there is a decrease of 8 PP in those respondents who expect their life to get better, and an increase of 5 PP in those people who expect their life in general to get worse within the next twelve months.**

62% of EU27 respondents think that the life of those who are children today will be more difficult than the life of those from their own generation. In Latvia, 41% think that the life of those who are children today will be more difficult than the life of those from their own generation, while 29% say it will be easier, and nearly a quarter (24%) of population expect it to be neither easier nor more difficult.

A quarter of EU27 respondents (25%) think that the life of children would be better if they emigrated to another country. At the same time, half (50%) of EU27 population do not agree with the above statement.

In Latvia, 32% of population admit that the life of children would be better if they emigrated to another country, while 48% do not agree with this statement, and 15% think it depends on the situation.

## **Country's membership of the European Union**

Half of Europeans (53%) feel that their country's membership of the European Union is a good thing. 15% of Europeans say it is a bad thing, while a large part (27%) do not have an opinion of their country's membership of the European Union, saying it is neither good nor bad.

27% of Latvian citizens are positive about membership of the European Union, which is the lowest percentage among the Baltic States. **In Latvia, most respondents are neutral about their country's EU membership – nearly half (49%) say that it is neither good nor bad.** Although, the positive evaluation of the EU membership in Latvia exceeds the negative evaluation – by 6 PP, it is tending to decrease. **The percentage of Eurosceptics has increased by 5 PP over the last 6 months.**

Overall, a little more than half (56%) of the EU27 poll think their country has benefited from being a member of the European Union. Nearly one-third (31%) hold the opposite opinion. The new EU Member States have a significantly more positive opinion about EU membership than the first 15 Member States.

**Latvian people are still of different opinions about whether their country has benefited from being a member of the European Union:** 48% claim that Latvia has benefited, while 43% say it has not. Thus, **Latvia ranks fourth among the most sceptic populations in the EU27.**

## **Impression of the European Union**

Nearly half (45%) of the EU27 poll has a favourable impression of the European Union, while 17% have an unfavourable impression. A little more than one-third (36%) take a neutral attitude. The new 12 Member States more often have a favourable impression (52%).

**More than a half (54%) of Latvians has a neutral opinion about the European Union.** Nearly one-third (29%) have a favourable impression of the European Union, while 16% have an unfavourable impression.

Among the overall EU27 poll, the European Union is most often associated with travel, study and work opportunities anywhere within the European Union. This is recorded by 44% of the EU27 poll, and this view is becoming more widespread - since spring 2008, it has increased by 7 PP. A large part of Europeans (34%) associate the European Union with the single currency, the Euro. For 27% of Europeans, the European Union means "peace".

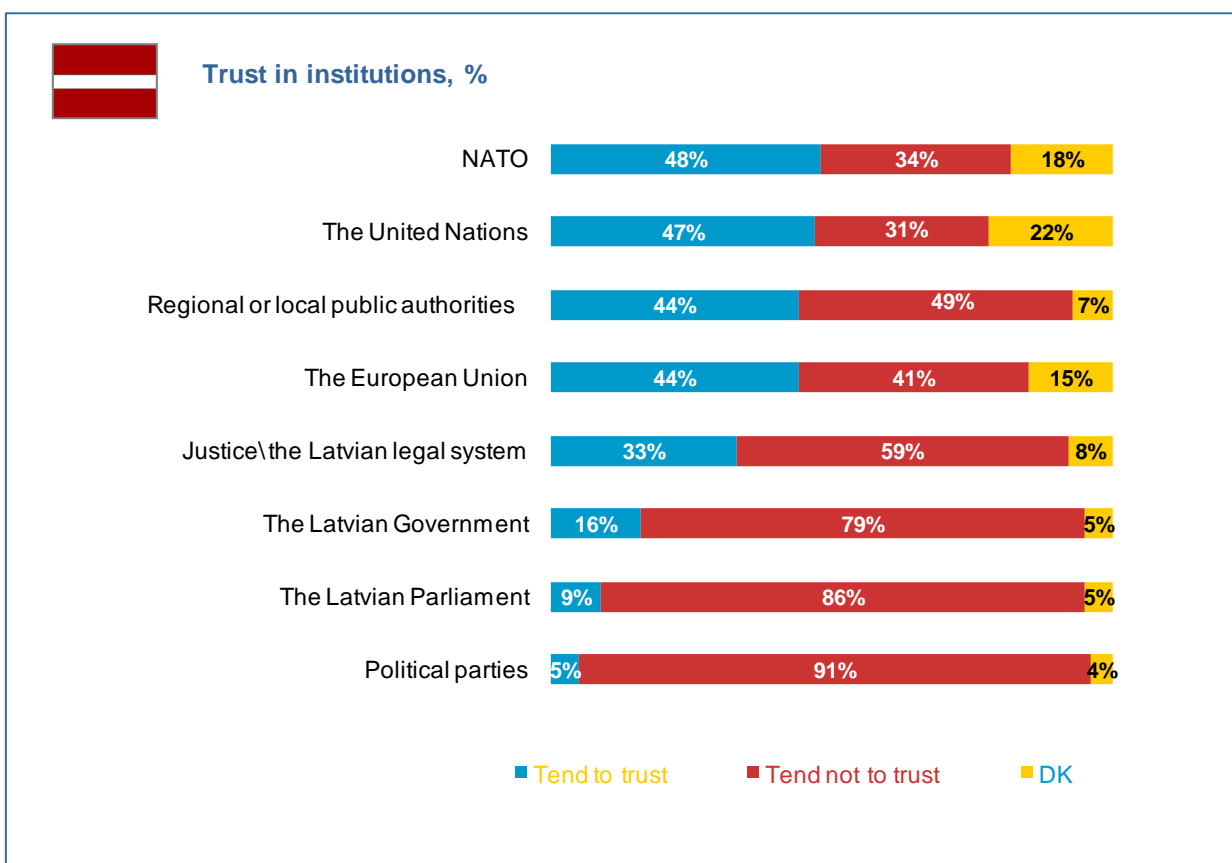
**In Latvia, the European Union is also mostly associated with travel, study and work opportunities anywhere within the European Union (57%).** At the same time, for Latvians, **the European Union means bureaucracy (16%) and a waste of money (16%).**

Compared to the average rates in Europe, Latvian people significantly less often associate the European Union with the single currency Euro (by 23 PP less than in the EU27), "peace" (7 PP less than in the EU27). Similarly, Latvian people mention less frequently that the European Union means such fundamental values of the European Union as "a stronger say in the world" (12 PP less than in the EU27) and democracy (by 12 PP less than in the EU27).

## **Trust in institutions**

As in Europe in general, Latvians trust more in the European Union and other international institutions such as NATO and the UNO than national government, parliament and political parties.

Since spring 2008, distrust in the Latvian government and parliament (Saeima) remains very high. **The absolute majority of the Latvian poll does not trust in the national government and Saeima – 79% and 86% of population respectively, which is one of the highest percentages in Europe.**



**Attitudes towards the European Union among Latvians are still different: 44% of respondents tend to trust in the European Union, while 42% tend not to trust.** Another 15% do not have an opinion on this matter. It should be noted that, **since spring 2008, the percentage of those who do not trust in the European Union has increased by 4 PP.** Distrust in the European Union among Latvians population has increased by 9 PP over the last year.

### **Institutions of the European Union and their role within the European Union**

Among the EU27 poll, the European Parliament is the most widely known (87%). As regards awareness, the European Commission (77%) and the European Central Bank are lagging behind a little (77%), while 64% of EU27 population have heard about the Council of the European Union.

Awareness of the European Union institutions among Latvians does not differ significantly from that of the average in the EU27. **The majority of Latvians are informed about and have heard of the European Parliament (83%) and the European Commission (76%), while the Council of the European Union (70%) and the European Central Bank (70%) are less well-known.**

The EU27 poll thinks that the European Parliament and the European Central Bank play the main roles in the life of the European Union – 74% and 73% of Europeans respectively say the above institutions have an important role. The role of the European Commission in the life of the European Union is regarded as important by 68%, while the role of the Council of the European Union is said to be important by 61% of Europeans.

**Latvians say that the roles of the European Parliament and the European Central Bank are important in the life of the European Union:** both institutions are recognised as important by 71% of Latvian citizens. The role of the European Commission in the life of the European Union is said to be important by 67%, while the role of the Council of the European Union is recognised as important by 64% of Latvians.

Latvians trust less in the European Union institutions than the EU27 average. **More often, Latvian citizens trust the European Parliament (41%) and the European Central Bank (40%), while a little less often Latvians trust the European Commission (38%) and the Council of the European Union (36%).**

Among the Baltic States, the trust of Latvians in the European Union institutions is the lowest. In Estonia and Lithuania, at least half of population trust the European Union institutions.

## **Opinions about the processes in the European Union and related issues**

Overall, the opinion about the processes in the European Union is different among EU27 poll. The majority of EU27 citizens agree that their country's voice counts in the European Union (60%), and the European Union imposes its views (60%).

Similarly, the majority of Latvians admit that their own voice counts neither in the European Union (79%), nor in Latvia (78%).

Opinions differ when it comes to the question whether the interests of Latvia are well taken into account in the European Union, as well as whether people understand how the European Union works. **The majority of Latvians (75%) say that the European Union imposes its views on Latvia: 15 PP more compared to the average in EU27.**

Concerning economic stability, the majority of **Latvians (74%) admit that the Latvian economy has not become more stable since it became a member of the European Union**, but one-fifth (20%) say economic stability has increased after the accession to the European Union.

## **Support for the processes in the European Union**

Overall, the EU27 poll mostly supports a common security and defence policy for the European Union Member States: claimed by three in four EU27 citizens. Similarly, the majority of the EU27 respondents support a common foreign policy for the EU Member States in relation to other countries (68% of EU27 population are "for") and the European Monetary Union with the single currency Euro (61% of EU27 population are "for").

**Among Latvians, it is as with the EU27 poll, a common security and defence policy for the European Union Member States receives most support: 83% of Latvian respondents express their support.** Similarly, Latvians more often support a common foreign policy for the EU Member States: a major part of the Latvian poll (70%) expresses support. However, the European Monetary Union with the single currency Euro receives less support from Latvians: only half (47%) of respondents (which is 14 PP less than the EU27 average) expresses support for the single currency Euro.

## **Opinions about the delegation of sovereignty**

Overall, the majority of the EU27 poll think that each country's government should itself make decisions on the pension system (70% of EU27 population), taxation system (66%), education system (64%), as well as fight against unemployment (57%). At the same time, the fight against terrorism, environmental protection, defence and foreign affairs, immigration and the fight against crime are the issues which should be solved by national governments together within the European Union (more than half of EU27 population hold this view).

**Latvians tend to more often want the European Union to solve the above issues. Latvians say the Latvian government itself should make decisions both on the taxation system (58%) and pensions (57%).** The absolute majority of Latvian population (89%) consider that the fight against terrorism is the issue which should be solved by the national government together with the European Union.



## Issues to be solved jointly with the European Union

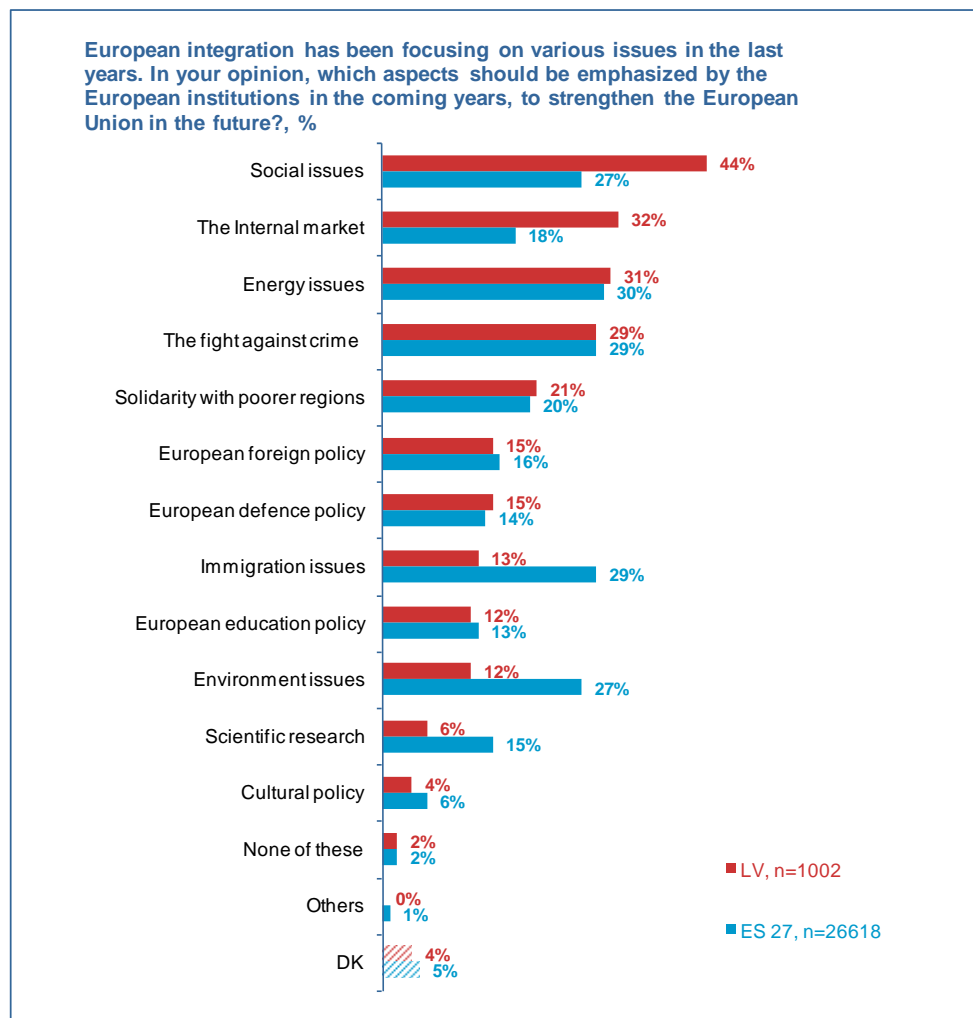
Overall, the majority of EU27 citizens say the following issues should be solved jointly by national governments within the European Union: scientific and technological research (72%), energy issues (63%), as well as support for regions facing economic difficulties (62%). At the same time, such issues as health and social care should be solved by national governments.

Similarly, compared to the average in the EU27, Latvians significantly more often tend to say that decisions on the economy should be made jointly within the European Union: 62% of Latvians hold this view, which is 11 PP more than the overall EU27 average (51%).

## Priority issues in the European Union

Overall, the EU27 poll feels that, to strengthen the European Union in the future, the following aspects should be emphasized: energy issues (30%), immigration (29%), the fight against crime (29%), environment (27%) and social issues (27%).

Latvians are of a different opinion to EU27 citizens in general. **Latvians (44%) say that social issues are the most important aspect which should be emphasized in the future to strengthen Europe, followed by the internal market (32%) and energy issues (31%).**



## **The European Union budget**

Overall, EU27 respondents are quite well informed: the majority (61%) of Europeans have heard of the European Union budget; however, only 10% clearly know what it is.

Latvian people, as in the new Member States in general, are better informed about the European Union budget. **71% of Latvians have heard of the European Union budget, and 10% of respondents clearly know what it is.**

According to the EU27 poll, most of the European Union budget is spent on administrative costs (13%), agriculture and rural development (11%), as well as economic growth (11%). Administrative costs more often are mentioned firstly, when thinking about on what the European Union budget is spent.

**Latvians more often think that the European Union budget is spent on economic growth (28%), defence and security (27%), agriculture and rural development (23%), and administrative costs (20%).** Also, respondents in Latvia more often tend to mention administrative costs firstly when thinking about on what the European Union budget is spent.

At the same time, EU27 respondents admit that the European Union budget should be spent more on economic growth (38%), employment and social affairs (36%), as well as public health (32%) and education and training (30%).

**One-third (27%) of Latvians mention economic growth as the first target on which the European Union budget should be spent.** The rest of activities are mentioned significantly less often. **Latvians say that the European Union budget should be spent mostly on economic growth (51%), education and training (37%), employment and social affairs (34%), agriculture and rural development (31%), as well as public health (30%).**

## **Attitudes towards globalisation**

Overall, there are different attitudes towards globalisation among the EU27 population. 42% of EU27 respondents are concerned about the globalisation process and agree with the statement that globalisation represents a threat to employment in their country, while 36% agree with the statement that their country has benefited from market expansion and globalisation.

**Latvians hold a very different view and tend to be against globalisation. 58% of Latvian citizens consider that globalisation is a threat to employment and companies in Latvia.** One-fifth of Latvians (20%) admit that globalisation is profitable for Latvian companies, which is the lowest assessment of benefits among citizens of all the countries surveyed.

People in the Baltic States hold very different views about the benefits of globalisation and threat to employment and companies. Latvian people are the most negative about the benefits of globalisation (58%). 47% of Estonians consider globalisation is profitable; however, one-third (30%) say it represents a threat. As regards Lithuania, 41% do not have an opinion on the benefits of globalisation, while one-third (34%) admit that globalisation is profitable to Lithuanian companies.