

EUROBAROMETER 70

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

POLAND

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The following text briefly presents the most important figures from the latest wave of the Eurobarometer. In Poland the survey was conducted between the 11th and 31st of October 2008 on a representative sample of 1000 people aged 15 or more. The Eurobarometer survey is conducted regularly for the European Commission. Its aim is to examine public opinion concerning the European Union and the situation in its Member States.

1. Public opinion in Poland: context

- The majority of Poles are satisfied with the life they lead

The majority of Poles (76%) are satisfied with the life they lead, whereas 24% of interviewed feel dissatisfaction. The indicator of life satisfaction has remained high – exceeding 70% - since autumn 2005. The proportion of Poles who declare satisfaction with their lives is the same as the European average (76%). In the European Union, the highest percentage of persons satisfied with their lives was found among the inhabitants of the Netherlands (98%), Sweden (97%), Denmark (96%) and Finland (95%), while less often than in Poland and in the EU on average life satisfaction is felt by Bulgarians (38%), Hungarians and Portuguese (both 46%) as well as Romanians (47%).

- Three in five Polish citizens believe the current financial situation of their households is good and more than a half of respondents are optimistic about their personal job situation

Three in five Poles (60%) are optimistic about the economic situation of their households. The percentage of those interviewed who are pessimistic about the financial situation of their households is significant – it is one third of the population (36%). More than a half of Poles (56%) say that their personal job situation is good. One quarter of respondents (26%) are pessimistic about their personal job situation.

In comparison with the European Union average (64%) Poles are slightly less often satisfied with the financial situation of their households. Assessment of the financial situation of Polish households remains far from such positive estimations that are found in the Netherlands (92%), Sweden (91%), Finland (89%) or in Denmark (86%). However, the satisfaction of Poles from their personal job situation is similar to the European average (56%).

- Number of Poles who have optimistic expectations for the future is descending and one in five respondents is concerned that the next 12 months will be worse.

A half of Poles think that, in the next 12 months, their life in general will not change (50%). One in four respondents (26%) expects an improvement, and one in five (19%) is afraid that their life could worsen. In Poland, the shares of persons expecting their lives in the next year to be better and those who believe there would be no change are comparable to the European averages (24% and 51% respectively). Compared with the EU27 average (22%), slightly fewer persons view the future with pessimism in their country.

Swedes (38%), Danes (34%), the French (30%) and Romanians (29%) most often expect a positive change in their lives in the next 12 months, whilst Hungarians (47%), Portuguese (36%) and Lithuanians (34%) look at their lives in the next 12 months with much greater pessimism than Poles.

- The proportion of Poles who expect that, in the next 12 months, the financial situation of their households will worsen is rising – a quarter of Poles share this opinion

One in five Poles (21%) thinks that the financial standing of his/her household will improve in the next 12 months. However, one in four (24%) is afraid of a deterioration. The percentage of respondents who do not anticipate changes in the financial situation of their households has not changed since the last survey – 49%. Poles expect an improvement of the financial situation of their households in the next 12 months slightly more often than Europeans on average (18%). There are fewer persons in Poland than in the EU, on average, who are pessimistic about the financial situation of their households (27% in the EU) or who do not expect changes in this area (52% in the EU).

- Majority of Poles think that their personal job situation will not change in the next 12 months

The majority of Poland's inhabitants (61%) believe their personal job situation will not change in the next 12 months. One-fifth of those interviewed (19%) state that their personal job situation will improve while 9% express the opposite opinion.

- The vast majority of the population consider the cost of living in Poland as too high

A large majority of Poles (85%) believes that the cost of living in Poland is too high. A positive evaluation of this aspect of life in Poland is shared by scarcely 13% of respondents. The bad assessment of the costs of living in Poland is a little bit (by 7 percentage points) more frequent compared to the EU27 average. Generally, negative opinions on the costs of living are expressed in Hungary (95%), Portugal (95%), Greece (93%), Latvia (93%), Bulgaria (92%), Ireland and Romania (both 90%). Mostly positive opinions about the living expenses were noted in Sweden (64%), the Netherlands (62%) and Denmark (54%).

- Over three-quarters of Poles believe the costs of energy in their country to be too high

Dissatisfaction with the affordability of energy in their country is shared by a straight majority of Poles (78%). Only 16% of respondents evaluate positively the price of energy. The percentage of Poland's inhabitants who find the costs of energy expensive is 9 percentage points higher than the European average (69%) and is on the same level as in Denmark (78%). Hungarians (95%), Greeks (93%), Portuguese (91%), Cypriots (88%), inhabitants of the United Kingdom and Malta (both 82%) as well as the Irish (79%) more often than other European nations judge this aspect of life as bad, in contrast with inhabitants of the Czech Republic, Latvia, Spain, Denmark and the Netherlands, who largely (76%, 73%, 61% and 52% respectively) are satisfied with the costs of energy.

- Poles are among those European nations where a majority is dissatisfied with the health care provision

Three-quarters of Poles (74%) assess negatively the health care provision in Poland. A positive opinion about the health care provision is expressed by a little bit more than one-fifth of the poll (23%).

EU27 respondents view positively the health care provision in their countries twice as often (55%) than Poles. The best marks for health care provision in the European Union are given by Belgians (92%), the Dutch (88%), Austrians (87%), citizens of Luxembourg (82%), inhabitants of Malta, Sweden and Finland (80% each). Only Bulgarians (80%), Greeks (78%) and Romanians (77%) judge the health care provision in their country to be bad more often than Poles do.

- Poles believe the economic situation in the European Union to be better than in Poland

Over a half of Poles (55%) view the economic situation in Poland as bad, while the same aspect in the European Union is evaluated negatively less often – only by 30% of those interviewed. Two-fifths of Poles (39%) think positively about the Polish economic situation, while the economic conditions in the EU are perceived positively by over a half of those polled (56%).

Compared with the EU27 average (29%), the economic situation in Poland is more often evaluated as good. When it comes to opinions on the situation of the EU economy, the average assessments of Poles are inversely proportional to the average assessments of average Europeans. Poles more often than the European average (33%) believe the economic situation of the EU to be good.

- More Poles believe that things are going in the right direction in the EU than in Poland

Things in Poland are going in the right direction – 41% of Poles agree with this statement. The share of respondents taking the opposite view is almost the same (37%). Nearly one-fifth of the population (17%) holds the view that matters in Poland are going neither in the right nor in the wrong direction. The direction in which things are going in the European Union is perceived as right by over a half of Poles (53%), while the opposite view is held by 14% of those interviewed. One-fifth of Polish respondents (19%) think that matters in the EU are not going in either the right or the wrong direction. The direction in which things are going in their country is much more often

evaluated as good than in the EU on average (28%). At the same time, the share of Poles finding matters in their country to be going in the wrong direction is much lower than the European average (49%). Poles, like the inhabitants of Luxembourg (41%), are one of the most optimistic nations in the EU with regard to the evaluation of the direction in which things are going in the country. Only Slovenians (49%), Swedes (47%), Danes (44%), Slovaks and Estonians (both 42%) perceive the direction of matters in their country more positively than Poles. Citizens of Poland, like Estonians (53%), belong to those nations of the EU that most often believe the direction of matters in the EU to be good. The average share of positive assessments regarding the direction of things in the European Union for all Member States is 35%.

- The trust in Government, the Parliament and the political parties in their country remains low

The vast majority of Poles (89%) do not trust political parties; two-thirds of those interviewed (74%) do not trust the Government, and four out of five respondents (81%) do not trust the Parliament. Since spring 2003, trust in the political parties remains at a very low level. Compared with the results of the last survey, a fall in the confidence in the Government and the Parliament was observed – by 6 and 3 percentage points respectively – at the same time, the percentage of those interviewed who do not trust these institutions has risen – by 9 and 6 percentage points respectively.

Poland above all other EU countries with the exception of Latvia (91%) has the highest proportion of persons who do not trust political parties (89%), while the average in the EU amounts to 75%. Poles' confidence in the Government or in the Parliament is significantly lower (by 14 and 21 percentage points respectively) than the averages across the European Union.

- Poles still think that the healthcare system is the most important issue facing their country

Over two-fifths of Poles (43%) consider the healthcare system as one of the two most important problems facing their country. In second place, respondents cite rising prices/inflation (36%). A quarter of those interviewed hold the view that Poland is struggling at present with economic problems (24%), and one-fifth of respondents (21%) think that unemployment is the most urgent problem of their country.

The economic situation and the inflation (both 37%) are problems most often mentioned by Europeans in general. Unemployment (26%) was cited in second place in the ranking of the most important issues facing the countries of Europe. A significant share of Europeans consider crime (17%) - in Poland cited much less often – and the healthcare system (10%) - as problems facing their countries.

2. Support for Poland's EU membership of Poland

- Support for Poland's EU membership remains at the same level as half a year ago and is much higher than the average for the European countries overall

Two-thirds of Poles (65%) believe Poland's membership of the EU to be a good thing. The opposite view is shared by 7% of those interviewed, whilst one in four respondents (25%) has an ambiguous attitude towards Poland's EU membership.

Compared with the EU27 average (53%), Poland has more enthusiasts of accession to the EU. Higher figures than those in Poland and in Europe, as a whole, in regard to satisfaction from the accession to the EU were found among the Dutch (80%), the inhabitants of Luxembourg (71%), the Irish (67%) and Romanians (66%).

- Over 70% of Poles think that their country has benefited from the membership of the EU

Poles believing that their country took advantage of the EU's membership comprise a majority (73%) in contrast to 15% of respondents expressing the opposite opinion.

Poland, after Ireland (79%), Estonia (78%), Slovakia (77%), the Netherlands and Denmark (both 76%) belongs to the group of countries, where the majority claims that they have benefited from joining the EU. The share of Poles who do not find any benefits from being a member of the European Union is only half the EU average (31%).

- Over a half of Poles feel more economically stable thanks to membership of the EU

Thanks to membership of the EU, a majority of Poles (61%) feel more economically stable. 28% of those interviewed express the opposite view. Among the Member States not belonging to the Euro zone, Poland tops the list of countries, where EU membership is perceived as giving more economic stability – on average 45% of inhabitants of the EU countries not belonging to the Euro zone claim this, while in Poland and in Denmark it is as much as 61%.

- Trust in the EU is falling

The European Union is trusted by 55% of Poles, while 28% of the population does not feel it trusts it. 17% of respondents have no opinion on the matter. Since spring 2007, the percentage of Poles trusting the EU has been falling.

The level of trust that Poles have in the European Union is much higher - by 8 percentage points - than the European Union average (47%). Amongst the European countries, the highest trust in this institution is expressed by Slovakia (70%), Estonia (67%), the Netherlands (64%), Romania (63%), Belgium (61%) and Denmark (60%), and the lowest was cited by the United Kingdom (25%), Italy (41%) and Austria (42%).

- The image of the EU in Poland is more positive than in other European countries

Over a half of Poles (54%) have positive associations with the EU. 9% of respondents have negative connotations with the Community. One-third (36%) of the population views the European Union in a neutral way. Poles, much more often than Europeans on average (45%), have a positive image of the European Union and less often than other Europeans (17%) express a negative one.

- The European Union most often means the freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the EU

For over a half of Poles (56%), the European Union still means the freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the EU. This freedom is also most often cited by the Europeans on average (44%).

- Trust in the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Council of the European Union and the European Central Bank has declined

Out of four European institutions, Poles trust the European Parliament the most (52%). 47% of the inhabitants of Poland trust the European Commission, that is less (by 7 points) than in the previous survey. Over two-fifths of Poles (43%) trust the Council of European Union – that is, by 5 points less than in the previous Eurobarometer wave. Relatively speaking, the lowest confidence is given to the European Central Bank which is trusted by two-fifths of Poles (40%). Each of the listed institutions is distrusted by one-fifth of the population (19% ÷ 20%). Polish confidence in three European institutions: the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of European Union is at the similar level as the European averages (51%, 47% and 42% respectively). Poles express significantly lower (by 8 points) trust in the European Central Bank than Europeans on average (48%).

3. Europeans and the European Union

- Poles, more often than Europeans on average, declare their apprehension as to how the European Union works

A half of Poles (53%) say that they understand how the European Union works; however, over one-third of respondents (36%) admit they do not. Poles declare they have an understanding of how the European Union works significantly more often than the European average (41%) and as often as in Belgium (53%).

- The majority of Poles have the basic knowledge about the European Union

Three-fifths (61%) of those interviewed know that the EU does not consist of fifteen Member States. A half of Poles (53%) realise that Switzerland is not a member of the EU. 49% of those

interviewed know that every six months a different Member State holds the Presidency of the Council of the EU and 28% of respondents confirm that the Euro zone does not currently consist of twelve Member States.

- Poles are aware of the European institutions

The overwhelming majority of Poles have heard about the European Parliament (85%) and the European Commission (80%). Over two-thirds are aware of the Council of European Union (68%), and over three-fifths of those interviewed had heard about the European Central Bank (63%).

Compared to other EU nations, Poles are a little bit less aware of the European Parliament (87% in the EU) but are more often conscious of the European Commission (77% in the EU) and the Council of the European Union (64% in the EU). Inhabitants of Poland, right after citizens of the United Kingdom (59%) and alongside the Hungarians (63%), form a group of nations that are the least aware of the European Central Bank.

- Poles believe that they have more influence on Polish matters than on European matters

One-third of Poles (33%) say that their voice counts in the European Union. 54% of the respondents have the opposite opinion. The proportion of Poles who believe that their voice counts in the EU does not differ from the average for the European Union (30%). However, Poland's inhabitants significantly more rarely than Europeans in general express the opposite view (54% in Poland vs. 61% in the EU).

Poles' views on their influence on matters in their country are almost equally divided. 44% agree that their voice counts in Poland, while a slightly higher percentage of those interviewed (49%) expresses the opposite opinion.

The percentage of Poles who feel that their voice counts in Poland is similar to the European Union average (46%). Almost all Danes and Swedes (both 90%) believe that they have the influence on things in their countries.

- Proportion of persons believing that Poland has influence on the European Union exceeds by twofold the share of those interviewed who think that the voice of their country does not count in the EU

Twice as many respondents in their country agree that Poland's voice counts in the European Union (62%) than the number of persons disagreeing with this statement (29%). Compared with the results obtained 6 months previously, the proportion of those interviewed who think that the voice of Poland counts in the EU dropped by 6 points, while simultaneously the percentage of Poland's inhabitants who express the opposite view has risen by 7 points.

- The percentage of respondents claiming that the interests of Poland are well taken into account in the EU is falling

One-third of Poles (35%) think that the interests of Poland are well taken into account in the EU. Two-fifths (43%) of Poles take the opposite view. One-fifth of respondents (22%) have no opinion on that topic. The number of Poles believing that the interests of Poland are well taken into account in the EU decreased significantly, by 9 points, compared with the previous wave. At the same time, there was a 10-point increase in the proportion of those expressing the opposite view.

Two-thirds (65%) of Poles claim that the European Union imposes its views on Poland. The opposite view is expressed by one-fifth of those interviewed (19%). 16% of respondents do not have an opinion on this topic.

Poles consider that the interests of Poland are well taken into account less often than Europeans as a whole (43%). The proportion of citizens of Poland who believe that the EU imposes its views on their country is higher than among other Europeans (60%).

4. Further European integration

- The majority of Poles would like the Polish government to decide on the educational system and taxation

The vast majority of Poles believe that in the following areas decisions should be taken jointly within the European Union: fighting terrorism (85%), scientific and technological research (76%), support for regions facing economic difficulties (67%), fighting crime (66%), protecting the environment (65%), energy (65%), defence and foreign affairs (65%), immigration (64%) and transports (63%).

According to the majority of the poll, the Polish government should independently decide about: the educational system (65%), taxation (59%), pensions (56%) and the healthcare system (53%).

- Public support for the European Monetary Union has decreased in Poland

44% of Poles are in favour of the European Monetary Union. The same number of respondents is against it (43%).

In comparison with spring 2008, support for the single currency is currently 5 percentage points lower and it recorded its lowest level over a period of 5 years.

Public support for the EMU and the single currency is, in Poland, significantly lower than the European average (61%). Support for the euro is the highest in: Slovenia (90%), Ireland (87%), Luxemburg and the Netherlands (in each country - 83%), Belgium and Finland (both 82%).

At the other end of the scale, much lower figures are noted – apart from Poland - in the United Kingdom (28%), Latvia (47%), Lithuania and Sweden (both 48%).

- Three-quarters of Poles are in favour of a common foreign policy among the Member States of the EU

Three-quarters of Poles (77%) support a common foreign policy of the Member States of the EU towards other countries. 12% are against this idea.

Support for a common foreign policy of the EU in Poland is higher than the European average (68%).

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

A common defence and security policy is favoured by 81% of Poles. 10% of Polish citizens are against it. The support for a common defence and security policy in Poland is higher than the EU27 average (75%). This common policy is favored mainly in Slovakia (91%), Cyprus (89%), Belgium, the Czech Republic (both 87%) and Slovenia (86%).

- The vast majority of Poles is in favour of further enlargement of the European Union

69% of Poles are in favour of the further enlargement of the EU to include other countries in future years. The share of Poles who are against further enlargement is 15%. 16% have no opinion on this issue. In autumn 2008, for the first time since Poland joined the European Union, support for its further enlargement fell below 70%.

Together with Slovenia (70%), Poland tops the list of countries where support for the further enlargement of the European Union is the highest. On average, in the European Union, this idea is approved by 44% of citizens.

- In Poland there are more opponents than supporters of the diversified pace of the European integration

The idea of building Europe faster in one group of countries has more opponents (46%) than supporters (35%) in Poland. The number of persons who do not have any opinion on this issue is high and amounts to one-fifth (19%) of Polish society.

Polish support for the diversified pace of the European integration is a bit lower than the European average (39%).

The idea of building Europe faster in one group of countries than in the other countries has highest support in Greece (62%), Denmark (54%) and Slovakia (50%).

- According to Poles, in the coming years, the EU institutions should focus on energy and social issues

Among issues which should be emphasized by the European institutions in the coming years, Poles listed energy (31%) and social issues (30%) most often.

Europeans in general also claim that the EU should focus most of all on energy issues (30%); fighting crime and immigration issues (both 29%) come as secondary objectives, while social issues and protecting the environment (both 27%) are cited in third place.

- According to Poles, most of the European Union budget is spent on agriculture and rural development, but public health and economic growth should be priority objectives of these expenses

29% of Polish respondents think that most of the European Union budget is spent on agriculture and rural development. Poles would like the budget to be spent primarily on public health (this aim is indicated by 37% of respondents) and economic growth (32%).

Poles are more often aware that the European budget is spent on agriculture and rural development than Europeans on average (29% vs. 24 % in the EU27).

Compared with the European averages, the Polish public wants the EU budget to be spent more on public health (37% vs. 32% in the EU as the whole), and less on economic growth (32% vs. 38% in the EU), employment and social affairs (28% vs. 36%), education and training (24% vs. 30% in the EU27), energy issues (17% vs. 22%), scientific research (12% vs. 19% in the EU), climate change and environmental protection (10% vs. 23% in the EU27) and immigration issues (3% vs. 12%).

Conclusion

According to the results of the latest edition of Eurobarometer, Poles are satisfied with their lives, their personal job situation and financial situation of their households.

More and more inhabitants of their country have pessimistic expectations for the next 12 months and think that their financial situation will get worse.

Cost of living, energy costs and health care in Poland are areas negatively evaluated by the public. Health care is still considered to be the most important issue facing their country.

Support for Poland's membership of the European Union is high and stable. Moreover, the majority of Polish society believes that Poland has benefited from EU membership.