

EUROBAROMETER 70

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

AUTUMN 2008

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PORTUGAL

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1. Introduction

Eurobarometer 70 was carried out in the autumn of 2008, with the aim of continuing the half-yearly analysis of the attitudes of European public opinion concerning various themes in the economic, political and social domains. The fieldwork for this survey was carried out between the 6th of October and the 6th of November 2008 in all 27 European Union Member States, as well as in the three candidate countries (Croatia, Turkey and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) and in the Turkish Cypriot Community. In all these countries, a random sample of the population aged 15 years and over was constructed. In Portugal, the fieldwork was carried out between the 11th of October and the 3rd of November 2008.¹ This executive summary highlights the main conclusions of the three analytic chapters of the Portugal national report.

2. Portugal and the EU: the Current State of Public Opinion

In this Eurobarometer, the overwhelming majority of the Portuguese (92 percent) considered the economic situation of the country to be bad, and an even higher proportion (95 percent) expressed an identical opinion with regard to the domestic employment situation. In comparative terms, the Portuguese stand out considerably from the European average – both with regard to the economic situation and to the employment situation, the proportion of negative evaluations in the EU was of 69 percent. Indeed, Portugal is the EU country with the largest percentage of negative assessments of the domestic employment situation; and presents the third highest proportion of negative evaluations of the country's economic situation. The pessimism of the Portuguese is also evident in their expectations for the coming year: 60 percent of respondents believe that the employment situation in Portugal will worsen over the next twelve months, and 58 percent have an equal expectation vis-à-vis the national economy. In both cases, the Portuguese exhibit a greater pessimism than their European counterparts, with the EU average being of 53 and 51 percent, respectively.

The overwhelmingly negative evaluation that the Portuguese make of the national situation finds echo in their assessment of their current individual situation. Thus, 68 percent of the Portuguese considers the financial situation of their household to be bad; and 45 percent are dissatisfied with their professional situation – 34 and 18 percentage points above the EU average, respectively. In both these indicators, only the Hungarians express higher levels of

¹ The technical specifications of this Eurobarometer, as well as the questionnaire used, are outlined in the *Portugal National Report – Eurobarometer 70*, pp. 46-80.

dissatisfaction. The pessimism of the Portuguese regarding the evolution of the national situation is not entirely replicated in their outlook for their individual situation over the coming year. Sixty-seven percent of the respondents expect their current professional situation to improve or remain unchanged, with 54 and 58 percent expressing an identical belief regarding their household's financial situation and their life in general, respectively. However, even these expectations are considerably less optimistic than the EU average (76, 70 and 75 percent, respectively). These results potentially help explain the high levels of dissatisfaction that the Portuguese express vis-à-vis their life in general. In this survey, fifty-four percent of the Portuguese said they were on the whole dissatisfied with the life they lead, 31 percentage points more than the EU average and a figure exceeded only in Bulgaria.

The most important issues for the Portuguese and Europeans as a whole, both at the national and individual levels, are inflation, unemployment and the economic situation. However, the Portuguese tend to emphasise these issues more than their European counterparts. In terms of national concerns, 44 percent of the Portuguese identify inflation as a priority issue, seven percentage points more than the EU average; 43 percent have a similar opinion regarding unemployment (17 percentage points above the EU average); and only in the case of the economic situation is the national pattern close to the EU average (35 percent in Portugal, 37 in the EU as a whole).

European citizens evince generally low levels of trust towards their domestic political institutions. Portugal's results are very close to the EU average in this domain. A longitudinal analysis of the Portuguese case shows a slight downward – albeit non-linear – trend since the spring of 2003. In the autumn of 2008, more than half of the Portuguese tended not to trust in political parties, their national government, the parliament and the legal system. Regional and local public authorities emerged as the most trusted domestic institutions in Portugal, with 43 percent of respondents saying they trusted these.

3. The Portuguese and the EU: Assessing European Integration

In Portugal, the overall assessment of European integration remains positive, with the majority of Portuguese considering membership of the European Union both as 'a good thing' (50 percent), and as a factor that has, on balance, benefited the country (60 percent). However, 2008 is also characterised by a reduction in the proportion of Portuguese who positively assess the consequences of EU membership, and this indicator now registers one

of its lowest levels since it began to be measured in Portugal. Along with this trend, we find that the Portuguese perceive European integration as occurring at a slightly slower speed than the EU average, and only 29 percent of respondents consider that, in general, things in the European Union are going in the right direction, six percentage points below the EU average.

This autumn, the four main institutions of the European Union – European Parliament, European Commission, Council of the European Union and Central Bank – are recognised by a vast majority of Portuguese citizens, and more so than the EU average. At the same time, however, the levels of trust in these institutions fell by approximately ten percentage points since the previous spring, and the proportion of respondents that consider these institutions to be important also fell (six to eight percentage points). However, the trust in the European Union is, among the Portuguese, still higher than the trust in the national government and parliament.

The representations of the European Union are, broadly speaking, positive, with the ideas of freedom of circulation and of the single currency as the most frequent in Portugal. Nevertheless, there was an increase in the proportion of people that referred negative representations of the European Union, such as criminality (18 percent) or unemployment (23 percent). In addition, the feelings of representation in the European Union of the Portuguese are quite weak, and also fell vis-à-vis the previous semester.

Among the Portuguese, the overall levels of knowledge about the European Union – assessed through a battery of four questions about concrete aspects of the EU, such as the number of Member States or the way the presidency of the Council is arranged – are higher than the European average. The Portuguese present an average of 56 percent correct answers, three percentage points more than the comparable EU level. The exception to this pattern concerns the knowledge of the budgetary priorities of the EU. On this question, the proportion of Portuguese respondents answering correctly is less than half the EU average.

4. The role of the EU in Europe and in the World

Thirty nine percent of the Portuguese consider that globalisation is negative for national companies and workers, but that proportion is lower than the European average (42 percent). Both national respondents and Europeans as a whole tend to consider (43 percent) that the EU can help protect them from the negative aspects of globalisation. The opposite

position is held by 25 percent of the national citizens and by 37 percent of Europeans as a whole.

With regard to the EU's external dimension, both the Portuguese and Europeans as a whole are more favourable to a common defence and security policy than to a common foreign policy among the Member States of the EU, although in both cases the support is majoritarian. The Portuguese, as well as the Europeans, tend to have the same level of confidence in the United Nations as in the EU itself. Trust in NATO is slightly lower.

This Eurobarometer survey included questions on the crisis in South Ossetia, which permit an assessment of the perceptions of the external dimension of the EU in a concrete and recent instance. For the Portuguese, the preponderant role in the conflict's resolution must be shared equally between the EU (33 percent) and the United Nations (also 33 percent). These results diverge from the EU average, with a majority of European respondents considering that the EU played the most important role in bringing the conflict to an end. The Portuguese also distinguish themselves from their European counterparts in their assessment of the impact of this conflict on the security of energy supply in the EU. Only 39 percent of Portuguese respondents expect negative consequences from this conflict in terms of energy supply, well below the European majority (60 percent).

The Portuguese are among the Europeans that most desire an increase in the speed of European integration. In the whole of the EU-27, only in Austria, Finland and Luxembourg is a preference for a deceleration of this process expressed. At the same time, Portugal is among the EU countries which less support the notion of variable speeds in European integration, with only 30 percent of the Portuguese respondents supporting this notion, and 40 percent expressing the contrary opinion. In the EU as a whole, the situation is more divided, with 39 percent of the respondents in favour of a multi-speed Europe, against the opinion of 42 percent. For what concerns support for EU enlargement, the Portuguese are within the European average: 43 percent of the Portuguese, and 44 percent of Europeans as a whole, are in favour of a further enlargement of the EU. However, opposition to enlargement is lower in Portugal than in the EU as a whole, with 31 percent of the Portuguese against further enlargement, well below the EU average (43 percent).

The Portuguese defend that the future priorities of the Union should be social affairs (43 percent), the fight against crime (37 percent) and solidarity with poorer regions (29 percent). Priorities of great importance in Europe as a whole, such as the environment, immigration and energy issues, are considerably less important in Portugal. The Portuguese also

consider that the EU budget should be allocated primarily to social affairs (18 percent), economic growth (14 percent), public health (13 percent), and on education and training (12 percent).