

EUROBAROMETER 71

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

SPRING 2009

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ESTONIA

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Introduction

This summary is based on the results of **Standard Eurobarometer 71** that was conducted between **June 12 and July 6 2009** in **27 European Union Member States, three candidate countries (Turkey, Croatia, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)** and in **Turkish Cypriot Community**.

This report mostly concentrates on presenting the results observed in Estonia compared to the average results of the 27 European Union member states and, in some cases, the results are also compared to certain countries. The main purpose of the report is to map opinions and attitudes relating to the European Union. Many of the topics have been covered in previous surveys of Eurobarometer, which have been carried out every spring and autumn, and this enables the analysis of trends over time.

In Estonia, the fieldwork was carried out between June 12 and July 2 2009. In total, 1,006 European Union citizens who live in Estonia were interviewed, 1003 of them had Estonian citizenship. When interpreting the results, it has to be kept in mind that **the target group of the survey included people who have the citizenship of at least one EU member state, who live in the country permanently and who were able to answer the questions in Estonian or Russian.** The survey does not represent the opinion of permanent residents of Estonia who do not have the European Union citizenship (for example, the opinion of citizens of Russia, the Ukraine, Belarus, etc.) or who have not defined their citizenship (owners of so-called grey passports). Further information about the methodology of this survey can be found in the appendix of the report.

General evaluations of life

Satisfaction with life in general

In summer 2009, 73% of Estonian citizens were satisfied with their life in general. The average of European Union's 27 member states is approximately the same – 77%. Satisfaction with life in general has not changed much compared to last year, but when looking at a longer perspective, it has still dropped to some extent over the past 3 years.

Those most satisfied with their lives are the citizens of small Northern-European countries: Denmark (98%), Sweden (96%), Finland (96%) and Holland (96%), as well as Luxembourg (96%). Less than half of the citizens are content with their lives in general in Bulgaria (40%), Greece (44%), Hungary (44%) and Romania (47%) i.e. the citizens of South-Eastern Europe.

Satisfaction with life in general is not in association with peoples' overall perception of the economic situation in the country, which has become very critical in past two years. The current economic situation is perceived as "bad" or "rather bad" by 79% of Estonians and by 78% of Europeans. For example, in autumn 2007, as many as 67% of Estonian and 48% of European citizens evaluated the economic situation of their country as "good" or "rather good".

The overall satisfaction with life in general is strongly correlated with the assessment of the household's financial situation.

Most people in Estonia (72%) and in the European Union (65%) assess their financial situation as “good” or “rather good”. Most critical about household’s financial situation are people in Hungary (only 26% think the situation is positive) and in Bulgaria (32%). Most content with their family’s financial situation are the same countries that dominate the top of the satisfaction with life in general league (Denmark, Finland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Sweden).

Expectations

Concerning the expectations, the same phenomenon as in the answers to the questions about the current situation can be seen: the assessments about the situation of the country are much more dynamic than the assessments about the personal near future. Nevertheless, expectations regarding the near future of the household’s financial situation have changed somewhat more than the satisfaction with life in general and assessment of the present personal situation.

The most widespread opinion is that the Estonian economic situation will get worse but households’ situation is expected to be the same.

The expectations for the future of the household’s and the country’s financial situation have become somewhat more positive compared to last autumn. For example, 23% of Estonian citizens expect a better financial situation for their households in the near future (+4 points compared to autumn 2008) and to the country’s economic situation in the near future 24% (+8 points). Optimism has grown especially among the age group who is younger than 25.

The share of optimists in the European Union average indicators has increased even more: the share of those who expect the country’s economic situation to get better has grown by 10 percentage points and the share of those who expect their household’s situation to get better has grown by 5 percentage points.

In Estonia, the share of those who expect their household’s financial and job situation to get better or worse is similar to the average results across the European Union.

Problems

Unemployment has become the most important problem in Estonia (64%), which is followed by economic situation (57%). In third place, but already accorded much less importance, is inflation/rising prices (19%).

The perception of many areas as a problem has dropped more or less. The share of those who see price rises as an important problem (-26%) has dropped considerably compared to autumn. The share of those who see crime, the healthcare system and energy issues as a problem has also dropped to a great extent.

The ranking of problems as expressed by citizens is similar in Estonia and in the European Union.

Are things in Estonia moving in the right direction?

The share of those who think that things are going in the right direction is, for the first time, a minority one. 44% of Estonian citizens see things moving in the wrong direction and 30% see things moving in the right direction. People who see things going in the wrong direction are especially those with lower incomes.

The assessments in Estonia concerning this aspect have become close to the European Union average. In most of the European Union countries, the assessments of the direction in which a country is moving already became negative in 2007.

Trust in local institutions

Trust in local institutions, that were mapped, has dropped steeply in Estonia in a year's time. Elsewhere in Europe, trust towards local institutions has been significantly more stable. Although, in summer 2009, only 38% of citizens trusted the Estonian Government, the share of those who trust the country's government is still higher than the EU27 average trust in national governments (32%).

Assessments of the EU institutions, policies and actions

Overall assessments of the European Union

The prevailing attitude towards the European Union is positive – 59% of Estonian citizens think that being a member of European Union is “good” or “rather good” and only 7% had a negative attitude towards the European Union. The proportions between positive, neutral and negative attitudes have not changed over the past two years either in Estonia or in the European Union countries as a whole.

Attitude towards the European Union institutions

The best-known and trustworthy institution in the European Union is the European Parliament – nine people out of ten know it. 63% of Estonian citizens tend to trust the European Parliament and 60% tend to trust the European Commission – these figures are much higher than the EU average. Trust in the European Union institutions has grown gradually, but, in Europe in general, it the trend is downward.

Assessment on how things are going in the European Union

51% of Estonian citizens are convinced that things in Europe are going in the right direction, but this is a gradually falling trend because of the deepening global economic crisis. In most of the European Union countries, citizens are much more pessimistic about the direction in which the EU is going.

Support for the European Union's common monetary policy

Support for the Euro has grown remarkably since spring 2007 – from 51% to 61% and has now become equal to the long-term European Union average level. The Euro is probably seen as one of the most certain solutions to the current economic uncertainty.

Support for the European Union's enlargement policy

The share of Estonian citizens who support further enlargement of the European Union has dropped from 60% to 51% - probably because of the uncertainty caused by economic crisis.

In the European Union in general, support for further enlargement of the European Union has been a dropping trend for a while now.

Assessments regarding the actions of the European Union

From a variety of actions taken by the European Union, European citizens are the most satisfied with the cooperation in the field of research and innovation and promoting democracy and peace in the world. In these fields, citizens' satisfaction has not changed during the past 3 years.

Estonian but also European citizens in general tend not to be satisfied with the actions of the European Union in the fields of ensuring economic growth and fighting unemployment. Compared to three years ago, this discontent has grown to a great extent. These two are the fields that EU citizens consider as the most important problems that need to be solved.

Priorities in time of global crisis

Do citizens prefer quick or slower changes in society?

Most of the citizens in Estonia and in the European Union in general prefer changes achieved "little by little" (62%). Those who prefer "acting quickly" are clearly in a minority - 26% of all citizens.

Those who prefer "acting quickly" (26%) include somewhat younger people and those who have higher levels of education.

What kind of principles should be followed to cope with global challenges?

Likz other European Union citizens, Estonian citizens also think that it is most important to follow the principle of "social equality and solidarity", which was seen as important by 40% of Estonian and 45% of European Union citizens. Estonians, unlike other Europeans, think that the second important principle to follow is "free trade/market economy" (36% in Estonia and 31% in Europe). The rest of the EU considers environmental protection as much more important (in Estonia 27% and in the EU 35%). In Estonia and in the EU in general, innovation (35%) is seen to be equally important in coping with global challenges.

Identity issues

How much do the citizens perceive themselves as Europeans and as citizens of the world?

About 80% of Estonian citizens feel that they are Europeans. This is a higher percentage than the average across Europe. The European average is considerably lower because of the countries of Southern Europe: Greece (53%), Bulgaria (49%), Cyprus (65%) and Italy (68%) and also because of the United Kingdom (48%).

Citizens identifying themselves more as Europeans than Estonian citizens live, for example, in Luxembourg, Denmark, Sweden, Germany and Spain.

Perceiving one's self as a European or a citizen of the world depends in Estonia and in other European countries mostly on the educational level and on the age of the respondent. The younger and the more educated the person, the wider is his/her geographical identity.

Elements that define European identity in peoples' assessments

Respondents in Estonia (34%) and also in most of the European countries (average 41%) highlighted democratic values. High social protection was cited in second place - Estonians (31%) emphasize it more than citizens in Europe in general (24%). These were followed by aspects such as geography, common culture and history that were highlighted almost equally in Estonia and in the European Union.

Compared to other Europeans, Estonians emphasized entrepreneurship more (in Estonia 21%, in the EU 11%) but cited common history and common religious heritage less frequently. For example, a common history was greatly emphasized in Hungary (35%) and a common religious heritage in Poland (14%).

Vision about the future of the European Union

Optimism-pessimism

Concerning the near future, the attitudes of Estonian and European citizens were almost the same optimistic or pessimistic, but when looking at a longer time period, then Estonians are the most optimistic about the future of the European Union (in Estonia 78% and in Europe on average 64%). The reason for optimism probably lies in the above-average trust levels in the European Union institutions and in their actions.

More pessimistic than the average in Europe are citizens in Greece (45% are pessimistic about the future), in Hungary (44%) and in Latvia (45%).

In Estonia, older people and people with lower levels of education are more pessimistic.