

EUROBAROMETER 72

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

AUTUMN 2009

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ESTONIA

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This document does not represent the point of view of the European Commission.
The interpretations and opinions contained in it are solely those of the authors.

Introduction

This summary is based on the results of **Standard Eurobarometer 72** that was conducted between **October 23 and November 18 2009** in **27 European Union Member States, three candidate countries (Turkey, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)** and in the **Turkish Cypriot community**.

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

In Estonia, the fieldwork was carried out between October 23 and November 16 2009. In total, 1006 European Union citizens who live in Estonia were interviewed, 1002 of whom had Estonian citizenship. When interpreting the results, it should be borne 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 European Union citizenship (for example, the opinion of the citizens of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, etc.) or who have not defined their citizenship (owners of the so-called grey passport). 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 autumn 2009, 73% of Estonian citizens were satisfied with their life in general. This is, to some extent, lower than the average for the European Union in general – 78%. Satisfaction with life in general has not changed significantly over the past two years. The share of people who are satisfied has been quite independent from the fluctuations in the country's macro-economic indicators. On the other hand, reflections about the economic situation by the media have had a great impact on peoples' expectations for the near future. The impact of economic indicators affects peoples' general satisfaction assessment when the economic situation of many households deteriorates steeply.

Satisfaction with life in general is not associated with the general assessment of the economic situation of the country that has become very critical over the past two years. The current economic situation is considered bad by 77% of Estonians and 75% of Europeans.

Expectations

Although macro-economic indicators have not improved over the past six months, citizens' expectations concerning the economic situation of the country have become considerably more positive. Whereas, in summer, the most widespread opinion was that the economic situation in Estonia would become worse and the economic situation of households would remain unchanged, now, people see their country's situation getting better in the near future, while the economic situation of the household continues to remain stable.

Most important values

Estonians value peace (51%) and respect for human life (50%) the most. These were also the most important values for Estonians a year ago. In Europe on the whole, the same values were also seen as the most important. During the economic crisis, people value solidarity and support to others more than they did before – compared to spring 2008, there are 5 percentage points more of those who consider solidarity important.

Compared to the EU average, Estonians value the rule of law, tolerance, self-fulfillment and respect towards other cultures more. Compared to Estonia, in Europe on the whole, citizens consider individual freedom, democracy, equality and religion to be more important.

Problems

For Estonian respondents the most important issue that the country is facing at the moment is unemployment (68%). Compared to summer 2009, there has been an increase of 4 percentage points in the share of people believing so. Unemployment is also seen as the most important issue in Europe as a whole. However, when we look at the member countries of the European Union individually, then, in Estonia, people are more worried about unemployment than in other member states. Seeing the economic situation as problematic has decreased to the level of 53% in Estonia. In Europe on the whole, the economic situation is considered to be a problem to a somewhat lesser degree (40%).

The healthcare system is seen as a problem by 12 percentage points more people than in summer; 22% think that it is one of the most important issues that Estonia is facing at the moment. The greater concern is probably due to the extensive coverage in the media regarding budgetary cutbacks for healthcare and hospitals. In Europe on the whole, the healthcare system is not seen to be as problematic as in Estonia, and only 14% of respondents pointed it out.

Trust in institutions

From the list of institutions that were included in the survey (13), Estonian citizens trust the army the most - 77%. Trust in the army has decreased to some extent compared to spring last year. Trust in television and radio has also decreased to some extent, but in general these institutions are equally trusted (68-70%).

Concerning international institutions, Estonians trust the European Union the most (69%). Among member states, levels of trust in the European Union are some of the highest in Estonia. Estonians also trust the UN and NATO (64%) more than they trust local political institutions.

As regards local political institutions, Estonians trust regional or local public authorities the most (59%). Trust in the Government has increased the most (by 9 percentage points), reaching the same level as a year ago (47%). Trust in the national parliament has also increased by 7 points compared to summer, reaching the last year's level (38%).

In general, Estonians trust the media and international institutions much more than Europeans on the whole. The only exception is trust in the press where Estonia and the rest of Europe are almost at the

same level (42-43%). Trust in the press has decreased in Estonia and also in Europe on the whole in recent years.

Assessment of the institutions, policies and actions of the European Union

Overall assessment of the European Union

People are still positive about Estonia being a member of the European Union – 62% of citizens responded that Estonia's EU membership is a good thing, only 6% have a negative opinion and 31% are neutral in this respect. In Europe on the whole, fewer people think that belonging to the EU is a good thing – 53%. This assessment has been stable in Europe since spring last year.

Support for the EU's common monetary policy

Support for the EU common monetary policy has grown to a great extent in Estonia since spring 2007 – from 51% to 63% and is now slightly above the European average. Adopting the euro is seen as a natural process to ensure the improvement of the Estonian economic situation. In Europe on the whole, support for the common monetary policy has been at 60% for several years.

The European Union and the UN

In the opinion of Estonian citizens, in regard to global threats and challenges, the UN should have an increased role especially in non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and in the field of peace-keeping. At the same time, when asked in what field the cooperation of the European Union and the UN would bring maximum benefits, the Estonians mentioned the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (31%), peace-keeping (28%) and human rights and democracy (29%).

In Europe on the whole, people would like to see an increased role of the UN in peace-keeping (35%) and in fighting against poverty (28%). Non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the role considered most important in Estonia, took only fifth place in Europe on the whole (22% mentioned it). Cooperation between the European Union and the UN is, in Europe on the whole, seen as important especially in the field of peace-keeping (33%), assuring human rights and democracy (25%) and fighting poverty (25%).

The European Union and the rest of the world

Estonian respondents are sure that the European economy is performing better than the Russian economy (74%) and also better than the Indian economy (67%). In Europe on the whole, people are not so sure about it and only 47% think that the European economy is performing better than the Russian economy, and 43% think that the European economy is performing better than the Indian economy. When comparing the economy of China and Europe, Estonians are also more certain that the European economy is performing better (42%) than Europeans on the whole (27%).

Concerning the Japanese economy, almost half of respondents in Estonia and in Europe on the whole think that it is performing better than the European economy. Concerning the American economy, people in Estonia and in Europe are divided into quite equal groups – one third think that the American economy is performing worse, one third better and one third that it is performing as well as the European economy.

From among nine categories, Estonian respondents found that in five of them (protection of the environment, education, the healthcare system, fighting social disparities, fighting against discrimination) the European Union is ahead of the United States of America. The United States and the European Union are seen as being at the same level in fighting unemployment (32%). Concerning innovation technology, entrepreneurship and scientific research, Estonians admitted that, in these fields the United States takes the lead. In Europe on the whole, people thought the same but the success of the United States in these three fields was seen as much greater than in Estonia.

Financial and economic crisis

Effectiveness of institutions

The most effective institutions for fighting economic crisis are, in the opinion of Estonians but also Europeans as a whole, the European Union (Estonia 25%, EU27 22%) and G20 (Estonia 25%, EU27 18%). In Europe on the whole, the effectiveness of the national government in fighting the economic crisis was seen as equal to the effectiveness of G20.

The role of single currency, the euro, in managing the financial crisis

Recently the media has reflected a lot on the adoption of the euro as an important decision to bring Estonia out of the economic crisis. However, at the same time, 53% of Estonian respondents thought that Estonia would not have been better protected against the influences of economic and financial crisis had the country adopted the euro.

Priorities and measures of the European Union for managing the financial and economic crisis

In the opinion of Estonian and European respondents in general, the most important priority that the European Union should deal with to help people overcome the financial and economic crisis, is support to SMEs - 41% and 37% accordingly. Investment in education, training and research and support to the unemployed were also seen as important. Compared to the EU27 average, Estonians consider supporting the unemployed (Estonia 31%; EU27 24%), and guaranteeing the provision of

healthcare (Estonia 22%; EU27 17%) to be more important, while, at the same time, they consider supporting the poorest (Estonia 19%; EU27 22%), investing in energy and environment (Estonia 9%; EU27 17%) and supporting pensioners (Estonia 9%; EU27 13%) to be less important.

48% of Estonians consider that, in order to boost growth in a sustainable way, the European Union should prioritize supporting agriculture; also, encouraging people to create their own enterprises was considered important (41%). In Europe on the whole, people prioritized other areas. The most, i.e. 31% of Europeans, think that, in order to boost growth in a sustainable way, the European Union should stimulate research and innovation in the European industry and 30% found that it is important to support the environmentally-friendly production of goods and services.

According to 34% of Estonians, the transparency of benefits, costs and risks on financial markets are the highest priority when reforming the financial system in the European Union. A stronger European system of supervision of financial markets and financial institutions was cited as the second most important aspect (24%). In Europe on the whole, the transparency of benefits, costs and risks on financial markets was also considered the most important aspect (26%), but, equally important, was the accountability of financial managers, something that Estonians placed as the least important aspect (only 7% thought it was important).

Priorities of the European Union for coming years

In the opinion of 74% of Estonian respondents, economic recovery should be the highest priority of the European Union in the coming years. In Europe on the whole, this was also considered as the most important challenge. Boosting growth in a sustainable way was stressed as the second most important factor by Estonians and also by Europeans in general, but it was mentioned somewhat less frequently by the latter. Estonians prioritize fighting against climate change much less often than Europeans on the whole – this was mentioned as a priority by only 24% of respondents whereas, in Europe, 44% of respondents thought that it was important.