

# EUROBAROMETER 72

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

AUTUMN 2009

## NATIONAL REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PORTUGAL

This survey was requested and coordinated by Directorate-General for Communication.

This report was produced for the European Commission's Representation in Portugal.

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## **1. Introduction**

The Eurobarometer 72 survey was carried out in the Autumn of 2009, thus continuing the biannual analysis of European public opinion on different themes in the economic, political and social domains. The fieldwork for this survey was carried out between the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October and the 18<sup>th</sup> of November 2009 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 29<sup>th</sup> of October and the 15<sup>th</sup> of November 2009.<sup>1</sup> This executive summary highlights the main conclusions of the three analytic chapters of the Portugal national report.

## **2. The Portuguese and the EU: Assessing European Integration**

In the autumn of 2009, 53 percent of the Portuguese stated that the image of the European Union is positive. This perspective is, however, less frequent amongst women, elderly citizens, people with low education levels, house persons and people positioning themselves in the lower social classes. While 52 percent of the national citizens consider that European integration is a good thing, almost two thirds of the respondents acknowledge that Portugal's accession to the EEC in 1986 was beneficial to the country. Despite the substantial increase in the levels of optimism during the previous semester, the proportion of Portuguese respondents who look positively at the future of the European Union is still smaller (60 percent) than the European average (66 percent). In addition, just 40 percent of the national citizens believe that the Union is following the right path.

In Portugal, as well as in the European Union as a whole, the majority of citizens consider that the EU's economic power (71 and 73 percent, respectively) and political impact (58 and 68 percent, respectively) are the bases of its relevance in the international context. Almost half of the Portuguese (48 percent) defend that the EU should use its impact and power to fight poverty; on the other hand, in Portugal, issues such as peace, trade and economic development, climate change, terrorism, environment and weapons of mass destruction were underlined less frequently as priorities for the EU's international action than in the European Union as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> The technical specifications of this Eurobarometer, as well as the questionnaire used, are outlined in the *Portugal National Report – Eurobarometer 72*, pp. 51-110.

Security and the economy are seen by the Portuguese as the most important areas on which the EU should focus (both mentioned by 31 percent of respondents). Issues such as the environment, immigration, energy, foreign policy, climate change and scientific research were mentioned more frequently in the 27 Member-States as a whole than in our country. More than two-thirds of the Portuguese accept shared decision-making power between national governments and the EU to deal with a variety of policy areas including the economy (67 percent), immigration (69 percent) or the fight against terrorism (78 percent).

For European citizens, the European Union still means, generally speaking, the possibility to move freely within the European borders (34 percent in Portugal; European average of 46 percent) and the use a single currency, the Euro (31 percent in Portugal; European average of 37 percent). In this wave of the Eurobarometer, the majority of the respondents acknowledge that the similarities between the peoples of the European Union are more important than the differences, but this perspective is slightly more frequent in the EU as a whole (75 percent) than in Portugal (72 percent). This is explained by the existence of more sceptical attitudes amongst some Portuguese socio-demographic groups, such as women, the less educated, the elderly, people outside the workforce (house persons and the unemployed), residents of small villages and rural areas, and people who have positioned themselves in lower social classes.

### **3. Portugal: The Current State of Public Opinion**

In this edition of Eurobarometer, Portuguese public opinion continues to be one of the most pessimistic of the EU, both in terms of its perception of the country's economy and in terms of its perception of the country's employment situation. However, when compared to the Autumn of 2008, Portugal's results are now considerably closer to the EU average. This is largely explained by worsening EU average on both indicators. Thus, the proportion of EU citizens who assess their country's economic situation negatively increased from 69 to 75 percent; and there was an increase from 69 to 85 percent in terms of negative evaluations of national employment situations. However, despite the generally pessimistic view on economic views, the majority of Portuguese respondents (53 percent) are satisfied with life in general, maintaining the positive trend highlighted in Eurobarometer 71. This feeling is especially prevalent among the young, those with the highest educational attainments and those in general management, director or top management positions.

Alongside the negative assessment of the economic situation, there is a lower degree of satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in Portugal than in the EU as a whole. Only 40 percent of Portuguese respondents declare that they feel satisfied with the functioning of their national democracy, compared to an EU average of 53 percent. These levels of satisfaction with the functioning of national democracy are only higher than those registered in Slovakia (40 percent), Slovenia (37 percent), Hungary (23 percent), Latvia (21 percent), Bulgaria (18 percent), Romania (18 percent) and Lithuania (18 percent).

Economic issues are perceived as the most relevant to the country at the current time. Unemployment is seen as the most important issue (57 percent), followed by the economic situation (36 percent) and by inflation (29 percent). These themes' salience is similar to the EU average, although the issues of unemployment and inflation are highlighted more in Portugal (with differences of six and ten percentage points above the EU average, respectively).

At the same time, the welfare state is important or very important for the majority of Portuguese respondents (58 percent). Moreover, 30 percent of them consider that social and public health questions should be a priority within the EU. A disaggregated analysis of this indicator by socio-demographic groups reveals that the strengthening of European integration in the domain of social protection and public health is mainly supported by the retired, the elderly, those with the lowest educational levels, women and the unemployed.

Consistently, Portuguese respondents emerge as being less concerned about immigration issues than the EU average. As in Slovenia, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria and Estonia, less than one of percent of respondents highlighted immigration as a problem in their country. At the same time, economic, generational and occupational differences can be noted regarding the recognition of the benefits of the Europeanization of immigration policies. In fact, those with the highest educational attainment (75 percent), the self-employed (77 percent) and the young (75 percent) are the groups that position themselves most favourably with regard to the Europeanization of immigration policies.

#### **4. Globalization and the Economy: the assessment of the Portuguese**

In this edition of Eurobarometer, a battery of questions on the issue of globalization was included. The data gathered suggest that European citizens are able to distinguish among different aspects of this multidimensional phenomenon. Generally speaking, the perceptions on the economic effects of globalization are negative: 67 percent of Portuguese respondents consider that globalization is only advantageous for big enterprises and 55 percent think that globalization increases social inequalities. These negative views, however, do not distinguish Portugal from the average of the EU, where perceptions are also relatively pessimistic. Considering the economic and political consequences of globalization, the consensus is less negative. Indeed, a large majority of Portuguese (65 percent) consider that globalization requires the application of global rules.

The next topic dealt with in this chapter focuses on the effects of the international financial crisis on the national economy. In this respect, the majority of Portuguese respondents (53 percent) consider that the crisis's worst effects for the labour market are yet to come. This perception of the negative future effects on the labour market is similar to the EU average (54 percent), which means that, at present, Portugal is not one of the most pessimistic countries in regard to this specific issue.

Taking into account that the Portuguese are still worried about the continuing effects of the crisis on the labour market, it is important to note that they attribute a very important role to European institutions in combating the crisis. Indeed, Portugal is the eurozone country with the highest proportion of citizens (57 percent) who consider that the single currency has served to reduce the negative impact of the current economic and financial crisis. Given the singularity of Portugal in this respect, the chapter went on to enquire which socio-political groups hold this opinion to a greater degree. It is among residents in rural areas (67 percent), the elderly (67 percent), those in the centre and on the right of the political spectrum (both with 62 percent), house persons and women (both with 61 percent) that this perception is strongest.

It is also noteworthy that only 17 percent of the Portuguese believe that the national government is the most effective actor to deal with the repercussions of the financial crisis, whereas 30 percent think the EU is the most relevant actor in this context. Moreover, only five percent of the most educated respondents and nine percent of those in general management, director or top management positions believe that the national government has

the capacity to deal with economic and financial crisis (compared to a national average of 17 percent).

Lastly, when questioned about the two most important global challenges which contemporary society should emphasize, the issue of social equality and solidarity was the main priority for the majority of the Portuguese (55 percent), with the environment placed a relatively distant second (31 percent). While the rank ordering for the EU average was similar, the overall weight of these priorities was more balanced – 45 and 37 percent, respectively – a finding that corroborates the great importance attributed to social issues by the Portuguese when compared to the EU average.