



*Standard Eurobarometer*



European  
Commission

# EUROBAROMETER 62

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

## AUTUMN 2004

NATIONAL REPORT  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  
**BULGARIA**

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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

The inclusion of Bulgaria in the Eurobarometer is now a reality. This is the first national report for Bulgaria to fall within the series of public opinion polls carried out twice yearly in the European Union, on the request by the European Commission. This current edition, the 62<sup>nd</sup>, of the standard Eurobarometer survey was carried out by TNS Opinion & Social using the same questionnaire for the 25 EU Member States, the four Candidate Countries (Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia and Turkey), as well as the northern territory of Cyprus.

The fieldwork in Bulgaria was carried out by BBSS Gallup International between 12 and 24 October 2004 - soon after the accession of countries from Central and Eastern Europe to EU membership and the technical conclusion of the negotiations for Bulgarian EU membership. A method of individual, face-to-face interviews was used with a random sample of 1004 Bulgarians interviewed aged 15 +, representative of the Bulgarian population.

An analysis of data allows the comparison of Bulgarian public opinion with those in the EU. It also highlights trends in public opinion during one of the most eventful years in the history of the EU and of Bulgaria's EU integration process.

- **Climate of Bulgarian public opinion**

**Bulgarians appear to be the most pessimistic regarding their current and future way of life.** Only one-third of those interviewed were satisfied to some extent with the life they lead. The number of those who indicated they were not at all satisfied (29%) is several times higher than the numbers of those dissatisfied in other countries.

Regarding the forthcoming 12 months, like EU25 citizens, nearly half of Bulgarian respondents (49%) do not expect any changes in their situation. Nearly a quarter (23%) are optimistic, while every fifth Bulgarian interviewed expects that the following year will be worse as regards the life they lead.

Like citizens in the new EU Member States, Bulgarians expressed higher hopes for improvements in their country's economy or employment prospects, compared with their personal financial or job situation. 20% expect improvements in the country's economic situation. 18% expect improvements in their household's financial situation. 18% are optimistic about the employment situation in Bulgaria and 15% are optimistic about their personal job situation.

**Unemployment and the country's economic situation represent citizens' main concerns in both the EU and Bulgaria.** Six out of ten Bulgarian respondents consider unemployment and one in three the economic situation as the most important issues facing their country.

**Bulgarians believe that the EU plays a positive role in solving these issues.** Four out of ten Bulgarians polled feel that the EU can help fight unemployment and nearly half

(49%) believe the EU could help improve the economic situation. 67% think the EU plays a positive role in fighting terrorism and crime (60%), as well as in international relations (55%) and defence (49%). Regarding social policies, such as housing, healthcare and education, the EU is seen mainly as playing neither a positive nor a negative role. Only one-fifth of respondents are convinced of the positive role of the EU as regards taxation and combating rising prices/inflation.

**Bulgaria's forthcoming EU membership is seen as something good** for six out of every ten respondents. While remaining significant, this support has decreased by 6 points over the last six months. The share of negative opinions remains static at a low of 6%. The differential between supporters and opponents of Bulgaria's EU membership is so big (53 percentage points) that it will be practically impossible for eurosceptics to overcome the apparent support for EU membership.

- **The European Union's Image**

**Bulgaria is among the countries for which the EU has the most positive image.** It ranks fourth after Romania (76%), Ireland (75%) and Italy (64%), and ranks together with Turkey (63%) in the list of countries whose citizens think most highly of the EU (EU25 - 50%).

**EU triggers positive feelings among Bulgarians.** Both in the EU Member States and in Bulgaria, the main feelings associated with the EU are **hope** (for every six out of 10 respondents, EU25 - 47%) and **trust** (for every third respondent, EU25 - 24%). **Enthusiasm** follows in third place on the Bulgarian list (25%), while in the EU what comes third is indifference, expressed by every fifth respondent. Only 1% of the Bulgarian sample **rejects** the EU. This is 5 times less than the corresponding EU25 average and less than in Romania (2%). It should be noted that Bulgaria had the highest number of respondents not expressing an opinion (11%) (EU25 - 3%).

**Above all, for Bulgarians, the EU means freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the EU, as well as economic prosperity,** e.g. a personal solution to the two most important issues for the country, unemployment and the economic situation. The EU is associated only with positive things: freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the EU (52%), economic prosperity (47%), peace (42%), democracy (34%), and social protection (31%). For a quarter of those polled, it also means the euro (26%), cultural diversity (26%), as well as a stronger say in world politics (24%). Negative associations, such as unemployment (12%), bureaucracy (9%) and wasting money (7%) rank lowest.

**Fears associated with the EU are not typical for Bulgarians.** The majority of Bulgarians surveyed do not express or cannot specify any fears resulting from EU enlargement and the EU in general. With the exception of labour migration, which is only a fear expressed in the EU15, Bulgarians and EU citizens share the same fears: an increase in drug trafficking and international crime (EU25 - 65%, BG - 53%), more

difficulties for national farmers (EU25 - 64%, BG - 44%), as well as the possible demand for more and more payments into the EU budget (EU25 - 64%, BG - 44%).

**The EU plays a more important role than the USA regarding peace in the world and the fight against terrorism.** The positive role played by the EU in international relations is ranked higher in Bulgaria than in the EU Member States: for peace in the world (+ 7 points) (BG - 68%, EU25 - 61%), for the fight against terrorism (+10 points) (BG - 68%, EU25 - 61%). Bulgarian respondents perceive the role of the USA in the fight against terrorism as predominantly positive (42% positive; 24% negative), while EU citizens see it as predominantly negative (42% negative; 39% positive).

- **Bulgarian and the European Union in terms of national public opinion**

**Half of Bulgarians see themselves as being European.** While the majority of the EU citizens see themselves first as nationals of their own country and then as Europeans (48%), more than anywhere else, Bulgarians polled perceive themselves as equally Bulgarian and European (BG - 13%, EU25 - 7%). However, after the Germans, it is the Bulgarians who are least proud of their national identity (BG - 80%, EU25 - 86%). In comparison to other Candidate Countries, there were no Bulgarians polled who did not see themselves as Europeans.

**Trust in the EU is higher than in Bulgarian institutions.** During the last six months, trust in the EU, which is traditionally high, has decreased by 8 points (currently 58%). Television has now taken the lead in terms of public trust (65%). However, trust in the EU continues to be higher in Bulgaria than in the EU (+8 points).

Broadcast media have a higher level of trust in Bulgaria (TV - 65%, radio - 56%) than in the EU (TV - 50%, radio - 50%), while trust in the press is almost the same (BG - 40%, EU25 - 42%). Half of EU citizens trust their national justice and legal systems, while this is true only for one-fifth of Bulgarians.

The highest level of mistrust is demonstrated towards political institutions – political parties (78%), the national Parliament (71%), the national government (63%), as well as the national legal system (65%). Trades unions (60%) and other social institutions generate negative rather than positive attitudes, while attitudes towards civil society is not yet clearly determined (31% trust it, 36% do not and 33% have no opinion).

**Public acceptance of joint decision-making within the EU.** In all areas where the EU has clear competencies assigned by the founding Treaties, there is higher figure recorded by Bulgarians than among EU citizens overall considering that decisions should be taken jointly with the EU. The only exceptions where it is considered that national governments should have the final say relate to culture (BG - 54%, EU25 - 62%) and education (BG - 55%, EU25 - 60%).

- **Awareness and knowledge about the EU**

**Almost half of Bulgarian respondents consider they do not know anything about the EU.** It should be noted that Bulgarians who do not seek information about the EU and who are not interested in it (16%) are at least twice the number found in the EU25 (8%). However, those who do not wish to receive information (7%) are half the number of those who are not seeking information on the EU (16%).

**Television is the most popular source for information about the EU.** 75% of those interviewed rely on television for their information (EU25 - 71%). The practice and expectations in both the EU and in Bulgaria are that information on EU affairs is part of the daily media information flow. Audiovisual media are more preferred in Bulgaria than in the EU (+8% for television and +11% for the radio).

**Bulgarian media coverage of the EU is overly positive than objective.** Only one-third of Bulgarian respondents think they get sufficient information about the EU from their national media. The same number of Bulgarians find media coverage of the EU objective. The rest of opinion is split between those who consider there is too much information on the EU (22%) or too little (23%). 37% criticise the media for being too positive with regards to the EU and one-third of Bulgarians questioned expressed no opinion. Bulgaria is one of those countries where criticism of the media for being too negative in its EU coverage is least (2%).

**Lack of knowledge about the EU.** According to their self-assessment, Bulgarian citizens know as much about the EU as the citizens of the home of the EU's capital, Belgium (average score of 4.5 on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1-4 means "know nothing at all" and 7-10 "know a great deal"). The analysis for each specific category, however, reveals that nearly half the Bulgarians interviewed (49%) have no knowledge about the EU, while only one in five interviewed is convinced he/she knows a great deal about the EU.

The results from the test included in the questionnaire show that Bulgarians lack practical knowledge about the EU and its institutions:

- ❖ Only one-fifth of those interviewed (21%) know that the EU does not consist of 12 countries.
- ❖ Only 16% realise that they would be able to elect Bulgarian Members to the European Parliament.
- ❖ Nearly four-fifths (76%) cannot confirm if it is true that the last elections for the European Parliament took place in 2002.
- ❖ 61% are hesitant as to whether the President of the European Commission is elected directly by EU citizens.
- ❖ 44% gave the correct answer that the EU has its own anthem, but there was a larger percentage of respondents who did not give an answer (53%).
- ❖ Only in response to the question of whether Europe Day is celebrated every year did the share of correct answers (53%) prevail

Furthermore, half of respondents (51%) had no opinion on where most of the EU budget goes, while the largest share of remaining answers points inaccurately to foreign policy and aid to non-EU countries (16%).

**Bulgarians trust the EU institutions.** Most Bulgarians polled have heard of the European Commission (63%), with nearly the same percentage (63%) considering that the European Commission plays an important role in the life of the EU and 50% tending to trust it. In Bulgaria, as in the EU, the European Parliament is the institution that is best known and trusted by citizens: 70% have heard of it, 70% think it plays an important role and 57% tend to trust it. It is also noteworthy that, in Bulgaria, the most trusted EU institution following the Parliament is the European Court of Justice (63%). The European Commission gains the same level of trust as the European Central Bank (50%).

**Bulgarians express higher support for common EU policies than EU citizens:**

- ❖ The European Monetary Union with a single currency, the Euro, is supported by two-thirds of the Bulgarian poll. This is 4 points higher than in the EU (63%).
- ❖ The European Common Defence and Security Policy receives virtually equal levels of support in Bulgaria (77%) and in the EU (78%). However, Bulgarian opponents to this policy are significantly less than in the EU (BG - 6%, EU25 - 14%).
- ❖ The concept of an EU Constitution gains almost the same support in Bulgaria (66%) as in the EU (68%).

• **Expectations regarding the future and EU Membership**

**For personal life**

The majority of Bulgarian Eurobarometer respondents expect that during the next five years, when Bulgaria is expected to become a member of the EU, the Union will play a much bigger role in their everyday lives (52%). Moreover, Bulgarians would like the EU to play an important role in their everyday lives - to a much higher degree (+17 points) than EU citizens (69%). This could be explained by the positive role, which is assigned to the EU for solving the major problems facing Bulgaria (unemployment and the economic situation). This is also indicated by the fact that Bulgarians, compared with citizens of other countries, are the least optimistic about their personal situation improving over the next five years (BG - 32%, EU25 - 42%).

**For the country**

Two out of three Bulgarians surveyed believed that their country will gain from its future EU membership. This is considerably less (-10 points) than in Romania (76%) and in other candidate countries.

**For the European Union**

According to Bulgarian Eurobarometer respondents, it would appear that the building of Europe (EU Constitution, enlargement and various policies) is currently running at an

average speed. This is calculated using a Eurodynamometer (on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means “standing still” and 7– “running as fast as possible”). Bulgarians questioned would like to see the EU running faster. The distance between the current (3.7) and the desired speed (5.7) is considerably higher than in other countries (+2 points). It is notable that the idea of a two-speed Europe does not gain Bulgarian support (36% are against, 32% in favour and 32% do not know).