



EUROBAROMETER 62

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
CZECH REPUBLIC

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This is the first Eurobarometer report that analyses the climate of opinion on European issues in the Czech Republic since the country's accession to European Union membership. The poll was conducted among 1,075 Czechs between October 15 and October 30, 2004. The report looks at Czech citizens' views about various aspects of the European Union and compares them with typical attitudes held across the EU. It also highlights major differences with other member states.

In general, the autumn 2004 Eurobarometer survey found increasing euro-optimism in the minds of European citizens. However, the Czech Republic belongs among the least optimistic nations.

Personal satisfaction and life expectations

Czechs consider their current life situation to be slightly worse when compared with the average in all 25 EU countries. **A total of 77 percent of Czechs are satisfied with their life at the moment**, compared to the average of 81 % in the European Union as a whole. In general, managers, entrepreneurs, young people, those who vote for right-wing parties and those with university-level education are the most satisfied segments of the population.

Compared with the spring 2004 survey, the latest poll revealed an increased level of trust in improving standard of living. Slightly more than one-third of EU respondents believe that their general life conditions will improve over the next twelve months, while roughly one-tenth are afraid of a deterioration. Czechs are less optimistic – only one-fifth of them believe better life conditions will occur, while slightly fewer think the opposite.

The main concerns of Czech citizens

As in other European Union countries, **unemployment continues to be the major concern of Czech citizens.** Unemployment in the Czech Republic was mentioned by over half the Czech interviewees. On the other hand, Czechs are quite optimistic regarding their own employment situation – only 13 percent of those polled expect a deterioration in this respect.

As elsewhere in the European Union, Czechs are greatly concerned with fighting crime and the economic situation. **Changes in levels of concern about crime have been greater than in any other area of the survey since the last poll in spring 2004.** On the other hand, the biggest improvement in perception of problems among Czechs was seen in respect of taxation and the health system.

Perception of the European Union

The image of the European Union is perceived less favourably in the Czech Republic than in other countries of the European Union. **The European Union evokes a positive image among two-fifths of the Czech population**, while in the European Union overall it is every second citizen on average.

The Czechs associate the European Union with **freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the Union.** Czechs also perceive the European Union as an area of **peace democracy and economic prosperity.** On the other hand, to some Czechs the European Union has negative associations, such as **more crime, the waste of money and bureaucracy.**

Understanding of the European Union

When compared with citizens in other EU countries, fewer Czechs think they know how the European Union works, and the functions and importance the Union's individual institutions have. Only 37 percent of Czechs think they understand how the European Union works. This is 10 percentage points less than the EU average.

Role of the European Union

According to Czechs, **the European Union plays a positive role above all in policies connected with security** – such as defence, fighting terrorism or crime and foreign affairs. On the other hand, **the European Union is believed to play a more negative role with regard to the economic situation in the Czech Republic**, and on some specific problems, such as rising prices/inflation, immigration, taxation or pensions.

Concerns regarding Czech membership in the European Union

Concerning EU membership and further European integration, Czechs are most concerned about a growth in drug trafficking, an increase in organized international crime and the future prospects for Czech farmers. **Czechs also fear a loss of power of smaller member states.** Only the Finns are more concerned about a loss of power of small member states than the Czechs.

Czechs are less concerned about losing their national identity and culture, the demise of their national currency or social welfare, or an imminent economic crisis than their fellow EU citizens. It is worth noting that, in general, Czechs concerns regarding economic issues increased in comparison with the previous survey.

The speed of building Europe

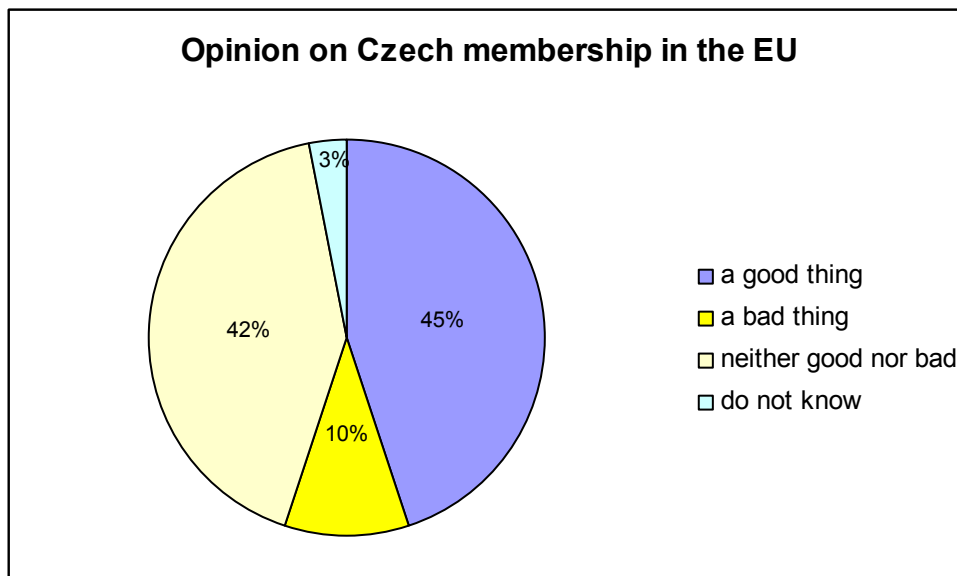
Czechs want the speed of the process of European integration to increase. The Czechs are slightly more radical than the average EU citizen in this regard.

Less than 40 percent of Czechs believe that the European Union will play a more important role in their lives five years from now. **Ideally, however, over half the Czech respondents express the desire that the European Union would play this more important role in five years' time.** Thus Czechs showed once more their tendency to be "sceptical realists" on EU matters, who nonetheless have the idealistic views of a common Europe.

Judging Czech membership

As compared to the time just before joining the European Union, **the percentage of Czechs who are convinced of the advantages and benefits of joining the European Union has gone down slightly** to 42 percent. The percentage of those who think the opposite has increased by almost one-tenth - to 41 percent.

Every tenth Czech citizen believes, that membership in the European Union is a bad thing, **45 percent (41 percent in the spring 2004) of Czechs believe that membership is a good thing.**



Citizens of the Czech Republic are less convinced than average fellow EU citizens that EU membership improved the economic and political stability of the country. Compared to other countries, Czechs evaluate their EU membership in a relatively reserved manner, which puts them somewhere among the old EU member states, rather than the more optimistic new ones.

European identity

When compared with the results of the spring survey, **the number of Czech respondents who identify themselves as being "Czechs" (in terms of national identity) has increased quite considerably.** A total of 57 percent of citizens believe that in the near future they will identify themselves solely as Czech, which is an increase of eight percentage points from the spring of 2004. This places the Czech Republic 16 percentage points above the EU average when it comes to subscribing to one (national) identity.

The same amount (16 percent) of Czechs as citizens of other EU nations stated they were proud to be European. **Czechs thus tend to understand "being European" as one facet of their individual identity, which does not eliminate an additional potentially strong link to national identity.**

Trust in institutions in the Czech Republic

The media - radio, television and the press – are perceived by Czechs to be the most trustworthy institutions in the Czech Republic. The United Nations, the army and the European Union also enjoy the trust of more than 50 % of Czechs. On the other hand, **political parties and the lower house of the Chamber of Deputies are the least trusted institutions** in the Czech Republic. The police, the national parliament and religious institutions enjoy considerably lower trust in the Czech Republic when compared with the European Union average.

Trust in European institutions

Trust in the European Union has increased by 10 percentage points to 52 percent since the spring of 2004. The Czech Republic is thus slightly above the EU average in this respect. The survey showed that Czechs trust the European Union as a whole, but believe less in its individual institutions. The European Parliament, perceived by Czechs to be the most trustworthy institution, is the only exception. Six out of ten Czechs trust the European Parliament. The European Commission is trusted by slightly over half of Czechs, whereas the Council of Ministers of the European Union enjoys the trust of only 37 percent of Czechs.

How democracy works

Less than half of Czechs – 45 percent – are convinced that democracy works in their country, which is by 12 percentage points less when compared with the average figures for the European Union overall. More than half – 53 percent – think the opposite. The relatively high share of Czechs satisfied with democracy in their country is in contrast with the low trust in political parties, the Chamber of Deputies, and the Czech government. Eurobarometer found that **Czechs trust the democratic climate in their country, but do not consider the current political actors to be trustworthy.**

Perceived and actual level of knowledge about the EU

In comparison with spring 2004, shortly before the Czech Republic's entry to the European Union, Czechs now feel better informed about the European Union than their EU fellow citizens. This improvement has probably something to do with Czechs' feelings as "new" members of the EU. However, **Czechs' actual knowledge about the European Union, is lower than the EU average.**

Preferred sources of information about the European Union

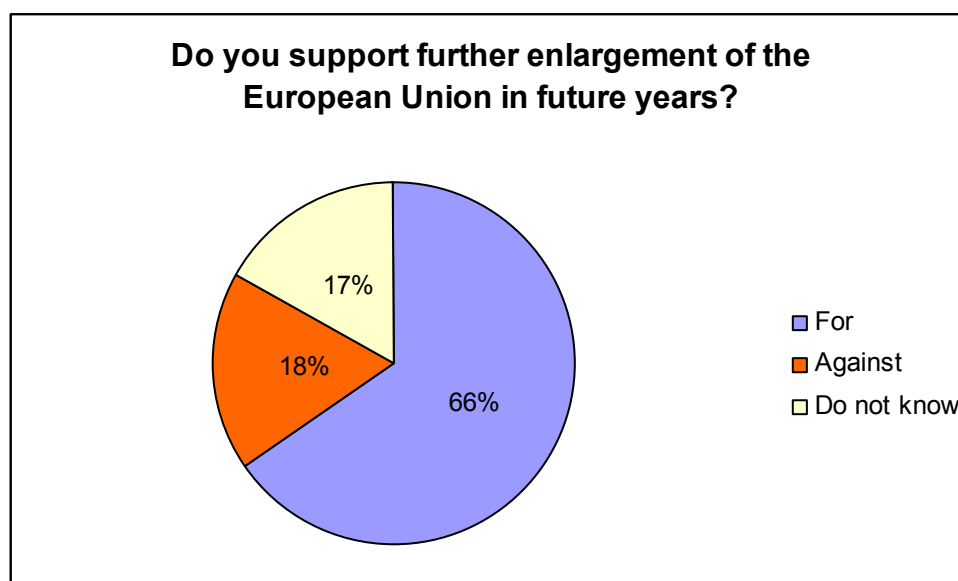
The mass media – television, the press and the radio – are the most frequently used information sources for getting information about the European Union among Czech citizens. Czechs' interest in getting the information from the mass media is very likely connected with the fact that the media are the most trustworthy institutions in the Czech Republic. **In the future, Czechs would like to use also more active means,** such as the Internet or reading brochures and leaflets.

Presentation of the European Union in the Czech media

In comparison with the European Union average, Czechs are more satisfied with the amount of information on the EU presented by the mass media. A total of 55 percent of Czechs and 46 percent of EU citizens assess the amount of information on the EU presented by the mass media to be adequate. Compared with spring 2004, the share of Czechs who believe that the media carry the right amount of information about the EU and that they inform objectively increased. Nevertheless, there is still quite a high share of Czechs who think the media create a too positive image of the European Union.

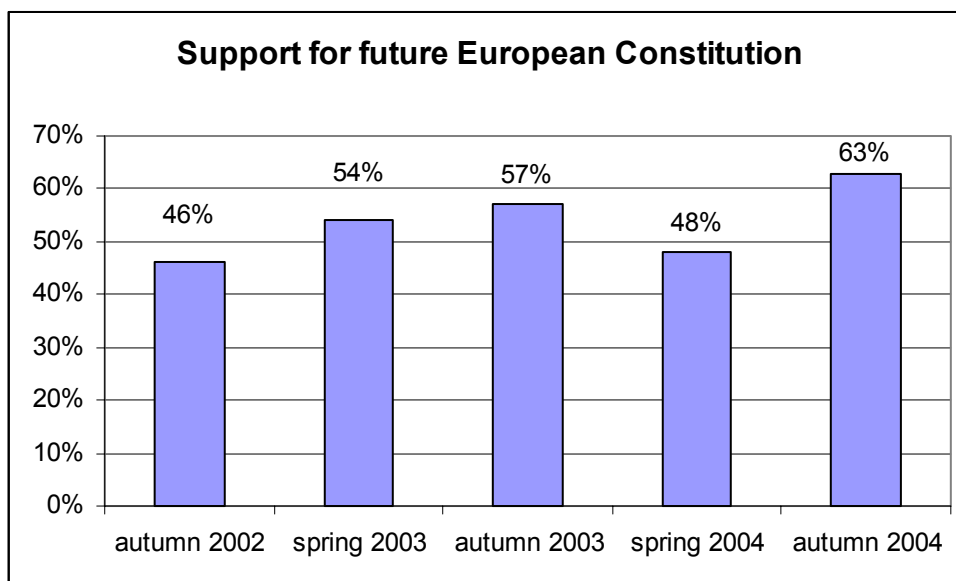
Support for future enlargement

Two thirds of Czechs are in favour of further enlargement in the coming years. This score represents a 17 percentage points increase from spring 2004. Support for future enlargement increased also in the European Union, mainly thanks to high support in new member states. The highest share of opponents of future enlargement was registered in countries which border with new member states.



Support for European Constitution

Support for a European Constitution in the Czech Republic has increased significantly since spring 2004 and has reached its maximum level of 63 percent. European Union citizens are in favour of the idea of a European Constitution since 68 percent of respondents are in favour of such a legal instrument.



It is interesting to note that the support for a European Constitution is the lowest in two of the countries which will hold a referendum on the Constitutional Treaty – in Denmark (44 percent) and the United Kingdom (49 percent).

Should the European Union develop towards a political union?

Nearly two thirds of Czechs (61 percent) are in favour of the development of a political union, while a quarter are against. The Czech average is 2 percentage points higher than the EU25 average. From the socio-demographic point of view, mainly men, young people with higher education, those who vote for right-wing parties, and supporters of the euro and further enlargement were in favour of political union.

Decision-making at national and European levels

Czechs see the fight against international terrorism, the fight against organized crime and the fight against the trade in, and exploitation of, human beings as the areas with the greatest potential for joint decision-making within the European Union. On the other hand, setting basic rules for broadcasting and press, cultural policy and the police are areas for which Czechs want decisions to be taken at national level.

Support for European single currency

Support for the euro in the Czech Republic has increased slightly since spring 2004 to 60 percent. Slightly less than one-third of Czechs oppose the European single currency. It is worth noting that the highest share of opponents of the euro was registered in countries where the currency is not yet in circulation – in the United Kingdom, Sweden and Denmark. On the other hand, the highest support for the euro was seen in Belgium and Slovenia.

Support for the common foreign policy

Czechs are not as open to the idea of a common European foreign policy when compared to other European citizens. Nevertheless, **the support for a common European foreign policy is quite high at 60 percent. Support for the common foreign policy increased since spring 2004**, as it has in all 25 countries of the European Union where the average rate of support reached nearly 70 percent.

Support for the common security and defence policy

The already strong support for the common security and defence policy in the Czech Republic has increased since the previous survey. **With support at 84 percent, the Czech Republic**

belongs among the strongest supporters of the European common security and defence policy. In general, support is high in the new member states because they are more sensitive to this issue. Within the enlarged European Union, support for a common security and defence policy is now close to 80 percent. It has not enjoyed such a strong level of support since 10 years ago.

Roles of national governments, the European Union, NATO, and the USA in the world

Czechs believe that decisions concerning European defence policy should be taken more by the European Union, rather than by national governments or NATO. Support for the European Union as the main actor of the European defence policy reached 52 percent in the EU, which is 10 percentage points more than in the Czech Republic. Highest support was registered in Cyprus, while the the lowest was in the United Kingdom.

Eurobarometer discovered that **Europeans consider the United States' role in promoting world peace and combatting terrorism internationally has decreased.** While two years ago, over half of EU citizens thought that the United States played a positive role regarding the fight against terrorism, now only two in five believe so. However, **the Czech Republic is an exception in this regard. The country is the least critical of the United States on both issues when compared with all other EU member states.**

There is a broad consensus among member states that the European Union has played a positive role in promoting world peace and combating terrorism. Nearly two-thirds of EU citizens polled are positive about that. Again, the Czech Republic belongs among the strongest supporters.