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PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HUNGARY

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Hungary in the European Union

The first Eurobarometer report carried out after Hungary's accession to the European Union in May 2004 shows an increase in Hungarians' trust in the EU and its institutions. Also, most respondents have become more optimistic regarding their medium-term expectations about the life they lead and their personal situation.

On the other hand, it is now clear that many became disillusioned concerning the benefits of EU membership just a few months after Hungary's accession. A possible explanation is that there were no sudden changes in everyday life after the country's accession, which proved to be different from what many Hungarians had previously expected.

Satisfaction with various aspects of life

Half (50%) the Hungarian respondents said they are generally satisfied with the life they lead, but almost the same proportion claimed they were not satisfied (49%). In the average of the 25 EU countries, more people feel satisfied (81%) and fewer respondents said they were unhappy with their life in general (19%).

Most Hungarians have been pessimistic about the economic situation in Hungary since the autumn of 2003, but by the third quarter of 2004 the majority believed that Hungary's economy was stable. The number of those believing that Hungary's short-term economic expectations are fairly positive has increased by 3% to 18% within a year. In autumn 2003, 38% expected their household's financial situation to get worse in the future and only 14% believed it would improve. By autumn 2004, the difference between these two proportions had fallen significantly (will get worse: 30%, will improve: 21%).

Problems Hungary is facing today

Most Hungarians (47%) cited unemployment as one of the major problems facing Hungary. The second most frequently cited problem was the economic situation (33%). In the 25 EU member countries overall, the ranking of these two aspects is similar to in Hungary, although only 27% of citizens considered the economic situation a problem, which is 6 percentage points lower than in Hungary.

Further problems Hungary is facing, according to the majority of respondents, include inflation (27%) and health care services (24%). These are followed by pensions (13%) and housing (8%).

Trust in various institutions

The European Union and the United Nations are the two most credible institutions to Hungarians among the 15 institutions listed, with figures of 64% and 61% respectively. Trust in the European Union was third highest in Hungary among all the member and candidate countries, after Romania (74%) and Lithuania (68%).

Roughly one third of Hungarians trust their national government and parliament. 38% said they trust their government and 40% their parliament. The corresponding proportions are 34% and 38% overall in the 25 EU countries.

Hungarians trust big companies (29%) and trades unions (26%) the least. In the EU25, trust in big companies and trades unions is 2 percentage points and 13 percentage points higher, respectively.

Familiarity with the European Union

Most Hungarians believe they are not sufficiently informed about the EU, its institutions and activities even after the country's accession to the Union. On the other hand, Hungarians have similar or better knowledge than the EU average regarding European symbols and the number of member countries, as well as Europe Day.

In Hungary, 12% of respondents said they have no knowledge about the EU, while only 1% claimed to know the EU very well. In the EU25 overall, some 35% believe they are not well informed, 57% said they have average knowledge and only 7% think they have good knowledge about the EU.

Out of the 6 questions about the symbols and basic information about the EU, a majority of Hungarians provided the correct answers in 4, which is higher than the EU average. But roughly one-quarter of Hungarians could not answer the question about how the EU budget is spent. Of those answering the question on the budget, 17% said that the EU spends most on agriculture and 16% said it was spent on administration and personnel costs.

Awareness of EU institutions

The European Parliament is the best-known EU institution in Hungary of all the EU bodies and organizations listed: 94% of Hungarians said they have already heard of it. The next two most known institutions are the European Commission (82%) and the Council of Ministers of the European Union (76%).

Hungary's membership of the European Union

Support for the country's EU membership stood at 49% in autumn 2004. This places Hungary in seventh position on the list of member states in terms of their level of support for membership.

Among the new member states, support for membership was highest in Lithuania (69%), which is followed by Slovakia (57%), Slovenia, Estonia and Cyprus (52% in all three countries). The number of people claiming the membership is a 'good thing' was lowest in Latvia (40%), the Czech Republic and Malta (45% in both countries).

The level of support in favour of Hungary's membership increased until autumn 2002, when 67% of Hungarians believed that membership would be favourable. Following the completion of accession talks in December 2002, the number of people with doubts about membership started to increase. The average level of support fell to a historic low in the spring of 2004, when only 45% of Hungarians said they supported Hungary's accession.

Since spring 2004 and the country's entry in May 2004, that trend has been reversed, with the number of supporters starting to rise again, while the proportion of those who were uncertain falling significantly. The proportion of Hungarians in favour of accession has increased by four percentage points to 49%, while the numbers have fallen for those not expressing an opinion (by seven percentage points) and of those opposing membership (by five percentage points).

Benefits of EU membership

Despite the growth in support, many Hungarians became disappointed with the benefits of membership in the first few months after their country's accession. In autumn 2004, less than half (48%) of the population believed that Hungary benefited from its EU membership. According to the last survey undertaken before joining the Union, 58% of Hungarians expected that their country would benefit from accession. At the same time, the proportion of those saying membership did not bring benefits grew by six percentage points to 33% by the fourth quarter of 2004.

The country's EU membership brought neither political nor economic stability – according to a relative majority of Hungarians. Some 48% of the respondents said Hungary had not become more stable politically with its accession, while 50% believed membership did not help Hungary's economic stability.

Fears about Hungary's membership

The most important fear about Hungary's EU membership is that farmers will have more difficulties in the EU – this was cited by 75% of respondents. The second most important concern is the potential increase of unemployment due to the relocation of jobs to cheaper labour markets (72%). This is followed by a fear of a rise in international organized crime and drug trafficking (69%).

European identity

Among the 25 countries of the European Union, European identity is the least important to Hungarians. According to the survey results, 64% of Hungarians consider themselves only Hungarian, while only about a third said they are Hungarians firstly and then Europeans. After the Hungarians, the Czechs and Greeks insist on their national identity the most in the EU25. On the other hand, the lowest proportions of those considering national identity the most important were found in Cyprus, Belgium and France.

What does the European Union mean?

Like the results of the previous Eurobarometer survey, in autumn 2004, most Hungarians said that to them the EU means freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the European Union. But the proportion of people mentioning this has fallen to 49% from the previous 56%. The EU means peace and democracy to 34% and 32% of Hungarians, respectively, followed by economic prosperity (31%) and the euro (28%).

The role of the EU in Hungary

Most Hungarians believe that the European Union plays the most important role in environmental protection and the fight against terrorism (both areas mentioned by 62%). The EU helps solving problems in defence and foreign affairs, according to 57% and 54% of the respondents respectively. However, the EU plays an indifferent role in public transport and housing, according to 64% and 58% of Hungarians, respectively.

Decision-making: nationally or jointly with the EU?

In which areas should Hungary make decisions on its own and what issues should be solved jointly with the EU? Hungarians said that 11 out of the 15 listed issues should be dealt with jointly within the European Union.

The largest proportion would favour the European Union's involvement in Hungary's policies on environmental protection (76%) and scientific research (73%). However, culture and education should rather remain a national responsibility, according to the majority of responses.

The international role of the European Union

Like domestic issues, environmental protection is the area where most Hungarians (70%) think the European Union plays a positive role. The EU also has a positive role in working for world peace (67%) and the fight against terrorism (62%), according to the majority of Hungarians surveyed.

The development and priorities of the European Union

As a member of the EU, Hungary's opinion – similar to that of other member countries – may be decisive in the planning and the execution of strategic goals and policies within the Union.

Most Hungarians believe the fight against unemployment (56%) and poverty (50%) should be on the top of the EU's priority list. These two tasks were similarly important in the view of citizens of the 25 member states on average (44% and 40% mentioned them, respectively).

Support for EU More than two thirds of Hungarians (63%) support the EU's common foreign policy and 84% agree that the EU should have a common defence and security policy. In times of an international crisis, EU members should come to a

common position, according to 75% of Hungarians. In addition, 75% think that the EU should have a rapid military force that can be sent quickly to trouble spots when an international crisis occurs.

The proportion of support is also high for a common European immigration policy as well as a common policy towards asylum seekers (76% and 80% of respondents agreed respectively with these).

The level of support for further enlargement of the EU has dropped by nine percentage points in Hungary since spring 2004. At the same time, the proportion of those opposing enlargement nearly doubled to 21%.

Further enlargement is supported by 70% of Hungarians holding left-wing views and 61% people on the right. There are more right-wing Hungarians who oppose enlargement: 26% of respondents with that political orientation said they are against further enlargement. This proportion is 18% among people who vote for the left.

Well over half (60%) of those surveyed in Hungary said they are in favour of the European Monetary Union and the euro, while nearly one-third (26%) of them oppose it. The proportion of people opposing the euro in Hungary is the largest since the beginning of 2003.

Among those saying that EU membership is a 'good thing', 80% support the common currency. It should be noted that people on the political left and right wings are equally in favour of the euro (65% and 64%, respectively) and the number of those opposing it is also the same (24% in both groups).

The European Constitution

In Hungary, where the Parliament was the second in the EU to approve the EU Constitution after Lithuania, 62% of those surveyed supported the Constitution. Less than a quarter (23%) of Hungarians opposed the Constitution, while 15% did not express an opinion.

Among those who are in favour of Hungary's EU membership, 74% also support the European Constitution. The proportion of supporters is higher (77%) among those, who believe that Hungary benefited from its EU membership. Even among those who said Hungary had not benefited from its membership, 50% support the European Constitution.