

# EUROBAROMETER 62

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

## AUTUMN 2004

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**POLAND**

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## Executive Summary

### 1. Experience of living in Poland, an EU country

#### 1.1 Satisfaction with personal life and situation in the country

More and more of Poles are **satisfied with their lives**. At the moment, the figure is 71% in contrast to only 63% in spring 2004. Within the new member countries, Poles are in the middle of the ranking. The most satisfied in Poland are those who see a great future for themselves in the European Union. These are young (15-24 years old) and well-educated people. These are also mostly men, probably because Poland in its transformation period is a “post-social” state, and job-wise it is not very different than before for men but hugely changed for women. The country’s new type of economy has meant that many typical ‘female’ jobs have been eliminated so it is hard for women to find new employment.

Like Poles, most of the citizens of the European Union’s 25 Member States (81%) are happy with their current life situation. In comparison with the last edition of the Eurobarometer poll, this percentage has increased by two percentage points. The most content are people living in the old member countries, especially Denmark and Sweden, and within the new member countries, Slovenia and Malta.

According to 55% of Poles **their country has benefited from membership of the European Union**. In spring 2004, exactly half of the Polish poll shared this view. Among all new EU citizens, the highest percentages of those who felt their country has benefited from EU membership were in Lithuania (78%) and in Slovakia (62%). Cypriots, on the other hand, see least advantage from their country’s EU membership.

Although Poles perceive their life situation in a positive way, 46% think it has deteriorated over the last five years. Of all the new and candidate countries only in Bulgaria was this percentage higher (47%). The Irish recorded the highest figure in the EB62 poll of people who think their life has changed for the better.

In Poland, the most optimistic about the improvement of their life in general in the coming months and years are, again, young people. Otherwise, the older the respondent, the more pessimistic they tend to be about the future. More Poles (and also of Europeans) are hoping for positive changes over a longer period of time, like five years. They believe that there is a higher possibility that the political and economic situation in Poland will improve over a period of several years rather than in just twelve months, so that the general changes in their country may also influence their lives. They also hope that EU membership, still quite recent, will bring a positive upturn in Poland. Since spring 2004, the percentage of optimists has increased by 7 percentage points to 40%. A similar outcome was noted in the EU 25 (42%) and in the new member countries, among which the Czechs were noticeably the most pessimistic.

#### 1.2 Issues facing Poland

Although the **unemployment** rate has decreased in 2004, the lack of jobs is still the main problem for Poles. It touches many people in all age groups, but especially young people under 24 years old, and more women than men. This group also includes some who think that Poland has benefited from EU membership.

The hierarchy of problems in Poland is similar to that in the EU 25 overall. Differences in perception of the importance of certain issues only arise in the case of immigration which does not appear to be a concern for Poles (only 1% says it is) but rather for the old member countries’ citizens (13% think it is a problem).

#### 1.3 Trust in various institutions

Most probably the common need to fight against terrorism, which has arisen over the past few years, is one of the reasons why most people in Poland (71%) and in the EU 25 (69%) rank the **army** in first place in terms of trust. Other popular institutions among Poles are **voluntary and charitable organisations** (65%, EU25-66%) and **radio** (61%, EU25-63%). Recent corruption and scandals involving high-level politicians and businessmen have eroded Poles’ faith in their government, parliament and political parties. Nor are most of them (65%) satisfied with the way democracy functions in Poland. Every second person surveyed prefers the model of democracy practised in the European Union. The proportion of Poles dissatisfied with

democracy in their country increases with age. They are mostly well-educated and self-employed or retired people. Among the citizens of the new countries only in Slovakia (25%) is a higher figure recorded in this respect. Nevertheless, the percentage of those satisfied with the way democracy works in Poland has almost doubled since spring 2004.

## 2. Information about the European Union

### 2.1 Actual level of knowledge

Most Poles say they have **medium levels of knowledge on the European Union**. Their average knowledge on European matters is exactly the same as EU citizens in general, which is 4,3. This figure has decreased since the last survey, in spring 2004, by 0,16. It is also the lowest in all of the new EU countries. The Maltese and Cypriots considered their knowledge to be the highest among all the new EU countries and, of all the 30 countries surveyed, the highest results were recorded by the Austrians and Dutch.

Most Poles know the European Union anthem and almost half are aware that there is a Europe Day on the 9th of May each year. Unfortunately, every fifth person is convinced that the European Union consists of 12 – and not 25 – member countries. Most of them know that Members of the European Parliament are elected directly by EU citizens, but they also mistakenly think that the President of the European Commission is elected in the same way. Although the last elections to the European Parliament took place only a few months before the survey - in June 2004 – one in five in the Polish poll thinks they were held in June 2002.

#### 2.2a Knowledge of the European Union institutions

A high percentage of Poles has heard of the two most popular European bodies, the **European Parliament** (90%) and **European Commission** (87%), but only half of them tend to trust these institutions. The **most trusted** (by 53% of respondents in Poland and 57% in the EU 25) is **the European Court of Justice**. For Poles, greatest importance is attributed firstly to the European Parliament (86%) and the Council of Ministers of the European Union (86%) and only then to the European Commission (84%). The least trusted, and perhaps because it is the least known by Poles, is the European Court of Auditors.

#### 2.2b Budget of the European Union

Nowadays, more people than prior to Poland's accession to the EU are convinced that the European budget is spent mainly on **agriculture**. Half a year before, the figure was 23% and now it is 32%. A relatively high percentage of Danish (51%) and Swedish (36%) are of the same opinion. In most of the other countries, people think that the greater part of the budget is spent on **administration, personnel and buildings**. Compared with other EU member countries, in Poland, only 13% of those polled did not express an opinion as to how they thought the EU budget was spent.

#### 2.2c Symbols of the European Union

Almost all (96%) of those interviewed when shown **the EU flag** said they know the symbol and its meaning. Twelve golden stars on a blue background are also familiar to 94% of other European citizens and 92% of them know what they stand for. Only every tenth British person has never seen the EU flag and a similar proportion of British and Latvians have no idea what it means.

According to 81% of Poles, the European flag is a “good symbol” for Europe and 67% think it symbolises something good. Most of them (69%) would also place this flag next to the national one on public buildings and every second person in Poland identifies with it.

### 2.3 Sources of EU-related information

**The broadcast media and daily newspapers** remain the most popular source of information about the EU in Poland, as well as in other European countries. Most respondents rely on **TV** (76% of Poles and 71% in the EU 25 overall) in spite of the fact that they trust **radio** much more (see chapter 1.3). As far as the matter of preferred sources is concerned, the Polish put radio in second place before daily newspapers - in contrast to the EU25 average.

As was the case in the spring 2004 poll, Poles feel that there is not enough information about the EU. The percentage of those who share this view increased by 1 percentage point and equals 45%. Of all of the 30 countries surveyed, the least satisfied in terms of media coverage of the EU were found in Greece (54%) and in the Netherlands (53%). In the EU as a whole, 38% of respondents want more information on Europe and 46% think these issues are being covered well enough. For half of Poles and Hungarians, looking at the new member countries, the image of the EU in their national media is too positive. Nevertheless, in spring 2004, more Polish people held this opinion and now they are divided mostly into two groups one of which thinks the EU's image in the national media is objective (44%) and the other which sees it as being too positive (43%).

### 3. European Union membership

#### 3.1 Image of the European Union

Half a year after Poland's accession to the European Union, the percentage of Poles for whom the EU conjures up a **positive image** has increased by 7 percentage points. Today, every second person is mostly content with his/her life situation and optimistic about its future. This opinion is shared, in particular, by young people (up to 24 years old), the well educated and managers. Of all the new member countries, this opinion gets greatest support in Slovenia (62%) and Lithuania (60%) and, in the EU as a whole, in Ireland (75%).

Over half of Poles (61%) - 14 percentage points more of them than just six months previously – claim they would feel indifferent if the European Union were scrapped. The same kind of reaction was observed among 43% of all EU 25 citizens. The highest degree of euroscepticism (those who declared relief in this case) is found among British and Swedish respondents. Those who would regret the EU's demise most mainly come from Luxembourg (63%) and Romania (58%).

Nevertheless, about 66% of Poles are in favour of the development of a European political union. The most common feeling about the EU among them is still firstly **hope** (56%) and only then **indifference** (25%). Fewer Polish citizens are **anxious** (15%) or **trust** the EU (17%). But compared with the results of the last Eurobarometer, the percentages of those living with hope is smaller and with indifference is higher.

#### 3.2 Support for the European Union membership

Every second Pole thinks that his/her country's EU membership is a **“good thing”**. A similar number say it is “neither good or bad thing” and only 8% see it as a “bad thing”. Looking at the spring poll, it may be seen that the figure for the latter group has decreased by 10 percentage points. In all the age groups, those thinking positively now dominate and are mainly represented by men. Most satisfied with their recent membership are Lithuanians (69%) and Slovaks (57%) and, among the old member countries, the Irish (77%), Dutch (75%) and Belgians (73%).

#### 3.3 European Union membership benefits

Poland is known in the European Union as a country that does not easily give up its own interests for the well being of the rest of Europe. It gained this reputation over several years of long and hard negotiations concerning its accession to the EU. Perhaps this is why Poles perceive their country's position in the EU very positively. Almost 67% agreed that Poland's voice counts in Europe and, according to 72%, it will be more influential in the future. However, more than half those polled feel that their individual voice does not count in the Union. The same number of respondents confirm that they feel safer being EU citizens. Not much fewer (49%) think Poland - as an EU member - is now more stable from an economic point of view. When talking about political stability, these voices were not so numerous (41% in favour of the proposition and 44% against it). According to 88% of Poles, the biggest countries have more power in the EU.

As in spring 2004, most people in Poland and in other European countries, believe that the Union above all means the **freedom to travel, study and work in any member state**. The group of 68% of Poles sharing this opinion consists of young people (up to 39 years old), mainly very well-educated women. For other, especially the old member countries, the meaning of the Union also lies in the **common currency**. Half a

year previously, this was also important for 40% of Poles, but this figure has now fallen by 16 percentage points to 24%.

### 3.4 European Union role in certain domains

Poles perceive the EU's role in a diverse way. Like most EU citizens, they appreciate its role in **protecting the environment** (71%), **defence** (53%) and in the **fight against terrorism** (52%). However, half of them complain about taxes, which have become standardised according to EU law and have risen in Poland. Its role regarding rising prices/inflation is cited by 68% of Poles and by every second European citizen. Also, only 40% of Poles believe the Union will help to eradicate unemployment in their country.

It is probable that awareness of the growing threat to people's safety because of events over the last few years is one of the reasons why Poles prefer to make decisions in international matters together with other European countries. This mainly concerns the **fight against terrorism** (92%), **organised crime** (87%), **drugs** (86%) and the **trade in and exploitations of human beings** (83%). Poles want the right to decide by themselves only in the areas of **cultural policy** (61%) and **basic rules for broadcasting and press** (59%).

### 3.5 Expectations and fears related to the European Union membership

Polish people and other Europeans perceive the current speed of building Europe to be at a medium pace. Every third Pole would like it to be as fast as possible (like many Greeks, Portuguese and Turkish), while, within the EU 25 overall, most citizens want it to increase a little bit. It is interesting that as many as 12% of Britons and 10% of Swedes do not want this acceleration.

Half of Poles expect the EU to play a more important role in their life than it does currently and 68% declare that they want this to happen. Perhaps this need stems from another one – that of the change in Poland from a political and economic point of view, for which Poles have been waiting for a long time.

Poles do have fears regarding building of Europe, especially when it comes to **increase of drugs trade and international crime** (70%) and **increasing contributions to the EU budget** (63%). They are also afraid of the **transfer of jobs to other member countries which have lower production costs** (59%), although this remains more of a problem for the old member states. As is the case for the rest of new EU citizens, only 30% of Poles fear the loss of national identity, while 67% do not see this danger as having any probability.

## 4. Identity and attitude to common initiatives within the European Union

### 4.1 National and European identity

The latest enlargement of the European Union brought interesting **changes in the identity of Europeans**. Compared with the spring 2004 Eurobarometer, it may be seen that, over recent months, the percentage of people identifying themselves only with their own country has decreased, not among new member countries' citizens but in the old members - especially among the Dutch, Austrians, Swedes and Finns. A relatively high percentage was noted in one of the candidate countries – Cyprus. On the other hand, the increase took place in 11 of all the 30 countries surveyed. In Poland, it gained one percentage point - further proof of change in the society's identity, because in the first half of 2004 the increase had been 12 percentage points. Nevertheless, Poles' national identity prevails over the European one. Moreover, 42% of respondents do not feel European at all but uniquely Polish. Almost everybody (94%) is proud to be Polish and somewhat fewer (81%) proud of their European roots.

Poland is a country with a rather homogeneous society. It has few immigrants (except for some students and workers from an eastern direction) because of the poor shape of the country's economy. Perhaps this is why most of them claim a strong attachment to the places they come from – their country, city, their region and Europe, in that order. Only 2% of respondents say they are not attached to Poland and 13% to Europe. Citizens of the candidate countries (except for Turks) claim to have relatively stronger ties with the continent than for example southern Cypriots, Estonians, Lithuanians or Spanish.

## 4.2 Hierarchy of the most important tasks for the European Union

Poles, like other European nations, think the European Union should, above all, deal with problems they have in their own countries. The issue of **unemployment** that is also afflicting Germany, Greece and Portugal has already been mentioned. This is why most of Europeans (76% of Poles) consider it to be a priority task for the Union and **poverty and social exclusion** in second place. Every third Pole and 30% of EU25 citizens also cite **organised crime and drugs trafficking**. The lowest positions in the Polish ranking relate to issues that do not constitute a big problem for those polled: immigration (only Britons and Maltese are afraid of it on a wide scale) and welcoming new member countries (only a serious concern for northern Cypriots). It is interesting that only 2% of Poles see institutional reform of the EU and democracy as important priorities for the Union. Polish negotiators and prime ministers spent long hours trying to achieve a consensus to satisfy them on these issues.

## 4.3 Support for common initiatives in the European Union

Poles endorse the idea of further enlargement of the European Union and 65% (six percentage points more than half a year ago) are willing to give up their national currency for the euro. When it comes to institutional matters 87% of respondents (and most Europeans) want the **European Commission to consist of commissioners coming from each member state**. Most Poles (73%) are also in favour of the European constitution, which does not automatically mean they support the current version of it, which has no reference to the Christian religion as being at the root of European civilisation. This may also be the reason why least support for the constitution is among people over fifty-five years old. Those most in favour of it are mainly aged 40-54, more men than women and mostly residents of cities not the countryside. Surprisingly low support for the constitution was noted among Danish (44%), British (49%), Swedish (50%) and Maltese (56%) respondents.

Compared with spring 2004, more Poles (85% now, a rise of six percentage points) endorse the idea of **common defence and security policy in the European Union**. They also support its further development. For example, 86% support the proposition that, in the event of an international crisis, member states should agree on a common position. As many as 78% of Poles also want their country to have a common foreign policy with the European Union.

Most Europeans and Poles (83% - which is ten percentage points than six months previously) believe that the European Union's foreign policy should be independent from that of the United States. Also 79% of Polish respondents (and 71% in the EU 25 overall) want the EU to have a rapid military reaction force that could be sent quickly to trouble spots when an international crisis occurs. The least popular idea among Poles is that of giving a say in European foreign policy to those countries who have opted for neutrality. When it comes to defence, 44% would favour decisions being taken by EU, 23% would prefer NATO and a similar number their national authorities.

Without doubt, the US President's initiation of the war in Iraq is the reason why 40% of Poles and 58% of the Union's population think that the **United States' role in peace in the world is negative**. The highest percentages of those who share this view are in Greece (88%) and, historically anti-American, France (74%). Among Poles, it is mostly young people (15-24 years old), more women than men, well educated (mostly still students) and the unemployed who hold this view. The European Union's role regarding the same issue is much better perceived. Every fourth Pole does not appreciate the American role in the field of the fight against poverty in the world. According to half, the EU deserves appreciation in this case. More Poles notice the US's positive contribution regarding issues such as the fight against terrorism (55%) and economic growth in the world (52%), but they also tend to evaluate positively the EU here (62% respectively). As many as 71% emphasise Europe's efforts in domains such as protection of the environment whereas only 34% give credit to the US. In general, most of those who appreciate the American role in all these areas tend to be of Czech, Lithuanian and Romanian origin. The most sceptical about the US are Greeks, southern Cypriots and French.