

EUROBAROMETER 64.2

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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NATIONAL REPORT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ESTONIA

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This summary is based on the results of the Eurobarometer 64.2 survey that was conducted between October 11 and November 15 2005 in 25 European Union Member States, two accession countries (Romania and Bulgaria), two candidate countries (Croatia and Turkey) and in the Turkish Cypriot Community. This summary presents the main results for Estonia and compares them with the average opinion in the 25 member states and, in some cases, to the new and old member states as separate groups. The main purpose of the survey was to map opinions and attitudes associated with the EU. Most of the topics were also covered in the Eurobarometer surveys carried out in October 2004 and May-June 2005. This permits us to highlight any changes in attitudes that may be relevant.

In Estonia, the fieldwork was carried out from October 14 to November 5. In total, 1000 respondents were interviewed of whom 996 had Estonian citizenship. When interpreting the results, it needs to be borne in mind that the target group of the survey were people who had citizenship of at least one member country of the EU and who were able to answer the questions in Estonian or Russian. The survey does not represent the opinion of permanent residents of Estonia who do not have European Union citizenship or who have no defined citizenship (bearers of so-called grey passports).

Summing up the survey results, it can be said that Estonians' attitudes towards the EU have not changed considerably over the last year. The same old rather pragmatic attitude dominates: the EU is neither good nor bad. As the challenges that the European Union had in 2005 were to ensure solidarity and to ratify the European constitution were not very successfully met, some confusion has arisen among Estonian citizens, particularly with regard to support for European political union. Support for this idea is declining. However, Estonians are still optimistic regarding the constitution. Support for it has increased and a majority of citizens find that it should be renegotiated. It could be said that people long for a more stable and cooperative environment at European level.

The climate of opinion at national level

- The share of people in Estonia who are **satisfied with their lives** has been broadly stable over the past year fluctuating around 70%. This figure corresponds to the average satisfaction level in the new member states. Average satisfaction with life is, however, higher in the EU on average thanks to the figures in the older member states some of which reach 80%.
- While the average satisfaction level in Estonia still does not reach the average European level as in the previous year, **Estonians are still more optimistic in their predictions** for the future than Europeans on average. In regard to their personal life over the next 12 months, 43% of Estonians believe it will become better and 45% believe it will remain the same. At the European level, stability dominates clearly over the belief in improvement.
- After a very successful year economically speaking, Estonians are **even more optimistic regarding the future economic situation** of their country than in spring 2005. 40% of people believe the situation improves compared to 19% at the European level. At the more personal level i.e. predicting the **economic situation of the household** during the next 12 months, stability dominates over other opinions: 50% of people believe that nothing will change. However, 38% expect their household's economic situation will improve (compared to the 25% average for the EU25).

- While Europeans on average are very pessimistic regarding **employment in their country** (the majority - 40% - believe the situation will get worse), Estonians are either optimistic (36%) or believe in stability (36%). Twice as few people as in Europe as a whole - 17% - expect the situation to get worse. In terms of personal employment situation, half of Estonian citizens do not expect there to be any changes in it.
- The three most **trusted institutions** in Estonia are television (73%), army (72%) and radio (69%). It should be noted that Estonians have greater trust in television than Europeans on average (53%). While Estonians trust audiovisual media to a great extent, the print media are not in such a privileged position: only 46% trust it. **As regards political institutions**, Estonians trust the government the most with 55% expressing their trust. Trust has increased due to the change in government in spring 2005. In the EU25 as a whole, only a third of the poll trusts the government. The same discrepancy applies to trust in parliament: in Estonia 46% of citizens trust it, while in the EU25 the figure is only 35%. Of the political institutions, political parties are the least trusted throughout Europe, and, in Estonia, less than one-fifth of citizens trust them. As regards the **European Union**, half of Estonian citizens trust it, while the corresponding figure in Europe as a whole is 45%. Compared with autumn 2004, there has been as fall in Estonian levels of trust in the EU from 56% to 50%.
- As regards the **main problems facing Estonia today**, increasing prices are increasingly of concern to Estonians: there has been a sharp increase from 27% to 42% in spring 2005 and the overriding explanation for this is rising fuel prices. Next to this, crime is still cited as the most important problem by 43% of Estonians. In third place is unemployment which is mentioned by 27%; however, its importance has decreased over time in line with declining trends in unemployment figures.
- Stemming from those the most important problems Estonians consider that a **long-term priority** for Estonia should be fighting increasing prices (37%) and maintaining order in the country (36%). Only a fifth of citizens demand a greater say for people in important government decisions and 4% consider protecting freedom of speech as a main priority.

European identity and involvement in regard to European Union

- 88% of Estonians are either **very proud or proud** regarding their **nationality**. On average, a similar share of Europeans state they are proud of their nationality. However, a majority of European countries record figures above this level.
- The share of people who are **proud of being European** is among the lowest in the whole of the European Union: in Estonia, 51% of citizens feel proud of it, while, in the European Union, the equivalent figure is 63%.
- Estonian citizens, like average Europeans, do not think very often about their sense of **belonging to Europe**. In Estonia, 16% think about it often and 35% of the poll sometimes. 48% never give a thought to it (compared with an EU25 average of 42%).

- **Feeling proud of being European** as well as thinking about this belonging **clearly depends on age**: younger people tend to be proud and think about being European considerably more often than older people. It could be concluded that Estonians still make a rather strong differentiation between “us” and “them”. The perception of being European and belonging to Europe is not yet an automatic feeling. At the same time, age group analysis shows that the younger generations already feel differently: easier travel opportunities, improved financial situation, the existence of different exchange and cooperation programmes enables Estonian youth to travel and live in other European countries, see the similarities and differences and feel more ‘European’.
- Estonians are usually rather sceptical regarding their voice counting in the way their state is governed and about their ability to have an influence on policy making. It is thus not surprising that they are sceptical that their **voice would count** in the European Union which is usually perceived as a huge bureaucratic organisation: only 18% believe this compared to 31% in the EU25. Also, only 17% admit that they are already **involved in European affairs** to a great extent. 46% of Estonians would like to be more involved in European issues but they do not know how they should go about it. In general, younger people are more optimistic regarding that their voice is heard in EU (27% believe in this). However, the age group that considers itself to be the most involved in European issues is that of the 40 to 54 year olds (23%). Among young people aged 15-24, 19% feel they are involved.

Knowledge on EU

- **The perceived level of knowledge of Estonians** on the European Union, its policies and institutions is still at the EU25 average level. On a scale of 10 points, where 1 means that a person knows nothing about the EU and 10 means that he knows a great deal, Estonians score, on average, 4 points, while the EU25 citizens’ average is 4,2 points. Age and levels of education do not, in general, appear to have much bearing on awareness.
- Estonians think that most of the **EU budget is spent** on administrative and personnel costs, buildings (19%), foreign policy and aid to countries outside the EU (17%) and agriculture (16%). The average EU25 opinion overwhelmingly considers that it is spent on administrative and personnel costs (31%).
- Half of Estonian citizens would like to **receive somewhat more information on the European Union**, 36% are satisfied with their current level of knowledge and 11% would like to know a lot more about the EU. Older people (aged over 55 years) and retired people are slightly more prone to wanting considerably more information (15%). People with lower educational levels are the most likely to be satisfied with what they already know, although, at the same time, they actually estimate their knowledge to be low.
- Regarding **particular information needs**, personal rights as European citizens elicit greatest interest (56%), in second place, health and social policy (48%), followed by employment policy (40%) and measures for education, training and youth (39%). Compared to average Europeans, Estonians are more interested in the European currency and less interested in

environmental and nuclear safety policies (22% and 17% respectively), cooperation and development aid policy, humanitarian aid (20% and 14% respectively), and enlargement of the EU (21% and 13% respectively), but also in how European institutions work (29% and 19% respectively).

Estonia and the European Union

- Among Estonians' a **neutral impression of the EU** dominates: 47% have such a view on it and this share has remained stable over the past year. 37% have a positive impression about the EU and 14% have a negative one.
- Estonian pragmatism regarding EU issues reveals itself also in regard to **Estonia's support for being an EU member state**. Opinions fall into two halves: one half finds it to be a good thing (41%) and another half finds it to be neither good nor bad (42%). Support, i.e. finding membership to be a good thing, has declined since autumn 2004 from 52% to 41%. Younger and more educated people are more positive, while increasing age and decreasing educational level show more hesitant attitudes.
- 56% of Estonian citizens consider that Estonia has in general **benefited from being a member of the EU**, 25% find that Estonia has not benefited and 18% do not have a view on this issue. Younger people have benefited more (with a figure of 66% for those aged 15-24, compared with one of 50% for those aged 55 years and above). From an occupational perspective, managers, students and entrepreneurs are the most likely to consider that Estonia has benefited.
- The great majority of Estonians find that the **EU has above all had a good effect** on Estonian security (76%) but also exports (71%) and services (71%). In contrast to average European citizens who consider employment and agriculture have been negatively affected, Estonians do not cite the negative effects as being more than the positive ones in any of the fields under review.
- **The priorities of the EU** should be fighting poverty and social exclusion (69%) unemployment (39%) and organised crime, drug trafficking (38%). Thus, Estonians prioritise those problems at the European level that they also consider to be problems in their own country. Fighting poverty and social exclusion are considered a priority among all age groups and people with different educational levels.
- When considering **how decision making in different policy areas should be divided between the Estonian Government and European Union institutions** Estonians find that questions related to taxes, the educational system, pensions and consumer protection should be decided by Estonian Government solely. On the other hand, they consider that fighting crime and terrorism, matters related to agriculture and fishery policies, energy policy, environmental protection, competition policies, support to regions in economic difficulties, defence and foreign affairs, scientific and technological research should be dealt jointly in the European Union. Fighting unemployment, healthcare and social welfare and immigration are

borderline cases: half of the people consider them to be internal matters while the other half is of the opinion that decisions regarding those areas should be made at the EU level.

- **Awareness of two important European institutions**, the European Commission and European Parliament, is high in Estonia: over 80% of citizens have heard of them. 49% of citizens **trust** the Parliament and 48% of them trust the Commission. Around a third of the poll do not seem to have enough information to decide whether or not they trust these institutions.

Support for EU policies: European Constitution and future enlargement

- **Support for European political union** among Estonians shows a declining trend: a year ago, in autumn 2004, 62% of Estonian citizens supported this idea and in autumn 2005 53% support it. Obvious difficulties in reaching agreement at the EU level have made the Estonian population hesitate: the share of those who do not know whether to support political union or not has increased from 14% (autumn 2004) to 21% (autumn 2005)
- Clearly, people who consider belonging to the EU a good thing express support for European political union more often: 80% of them support it. Of those who do not support EU membership, 72% are also against European political union.
- Despite the failure of the ratification process of the **European Constitution**, support among Estonians for it has increased from 46% in spring 2005 to 51% at the expense of those who did not have any opinion on the issue. Thus, the shares of people who support political union and those who support the constitution are at the same level.
- However, Estonians find that rather than continuing the ratification process of the current constitution (only 14% support this idea), it should be **renegotiated** (59% support this). Only 7% feel that the constitution should be dropped. At European level, 49% are in favour of renegotiating and 22% are for continuing the process already started.
- Estonian support for the European constitution would appear to be based on, among other things, the belief that it is necessary **to ensure that the European institutions work well**. This idea is supported by 59% of Estonian citizens.
- 51% of Estonians support **future enlargement of the EU** to include other countries. Support is greatest for wealthier European countries: Norway, Switzerland, and Iceland. Also, over half of the poll supports the potential membership of Bulgaria, Romania and Ukraine. Much less support is expressed regarding Balkan countries and Turkey.
- With regard to **Turkey**, 27% of citizens support its **membership**. 60% consider that Turkey belongs to Europe geographically. Turkey's historical belonging to Europe is admitted by 45%. 65% find that cultural differences between Europe and Turkey are too great to enable membership. Only 42% of citizens believe that Turkish membership would strengthen security in this region and 35% believe that it would favour the mutual comprehension of European and Muslim values. 77% are afraid rather that Turkey's accession could risk the increase of

immigration to more developed countries in the EU. A majority of Estonians are of the opinion that in order to join the EU in about ten years' time, Turkey will have to show systematic respect for human rights (81%) and significantly improve the state of its economy (74%).