



Standard Eurobarometer



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PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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NATIONAL REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY **LATVIA**

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Executive Summary Latvia

The 'Standard Eurobarometer' survey has been carried out in Latvia for the third time since the country became a Member State of the European Union (EU). EU 25 citizens polled during 2005 are less positive towards issues facing their countries and the EU as a whole. This trend was highlighted by the rejection of the proposed Constitution for Europe by France and the Netherlands, a failure to reach an agreement on the 2007 – 2013 Financial Perspectives at the European Council in June and the difficulties with initiating talks regarding Turkey joining the EU. Latvian respondents in "Eurobarometer Standard 64" (EB 64) also showed this type of attitude for various reasons.

Climate of Opinion

EU 25 citizens' level of satisfaction with life in general has remained almost the same as in the last EB survey six months ago, with 80% satisfied and 20% dissatisfied.

The level of satisfaction with life in Latvia is still lower than the average of the EU 25 with 60% satisfied and 39% dissatisfied and is one of the lowest levels in the EU 25.

Latvian citizens believe that some areas of life, such as their household's financial and their own personal financial situation, will improve next year. The level of optimism for the next twelve months for an improvement in their personal lives is 10% higher than the average for the EU 25.

The largest part, 42%, of the EU 25 respondents believe that the economic growth in their country will remain at the same level for the next 12 months, and only 19% believe that economic growth will increase. In Latvia, 23% of respondents believe that national economic growth will improve and 30% believe that it will not. 39% of the EU 25 sample believes that their country's economic growth will decrease.

Trust in National and International Institutions

Latvian respondents trust **political parties** the least, recording a figure of 8% compared to the EU 25's 17%. Trust in political parties is the second lowest figure in the EU 25 with Poland's being the lowest. Denmark and Luxembourg have the highest level of trust in their political parties with 35%.

For the EU 25, the level of trust in **the national parliament** is 35%, whereas Latvia has one of the lowest figures recorded at 25%. The highest level of 74% was noted in Denmark. In the EU 25, there is a decrease in the level of trust in the national parliament, whereas in Latvia the level of trust continues to show a slight upward trend.

31% of the EU 25 sample claims to trust in their **national government**; a similar figure to that recorded in Latvia (29%).

The level of trust in **the judicial system and the police** in Latvia has decreased and is still lower than the EU 25 average. The level of trust in **the army** in Latvia has increased - probably due to the fact that it has now become a professional army rather than a conscript one.

The level of trust in **the mass media** in Latvia is higher than in the EU 25 on average with 66% trusting in both TV and radio and 54% in the press. In the EU 25 overall, these levels are 53%, 61% and 45% respectively.

The latest research has shown a decrease in the level of trust in the EU to 45% in EU 25 overall, which is a decrease of 11 percentage points over the past 12 months. Latvian respondents' trust in the EU is now the lowest in the Baltic States, having decreased to 42%, slightly lower the EU 25 average, in contrast to the last survey which showed a level slightly above the EU 25 average.

Still, as in all previous EB research, **the level of trust of Latvian respondents in the EU is higher than the level of trust in Latvia's national institutions.**

Image of the EU and knowledge of the EU

In the EU 25, 44% of respondents believe the image of the EU is positive, 34% are neutral and 20% negative. There has been an increase in the number of respondents who believe that the image is neutral or negative. **In Latvia, the largest share of the poll, 44%, believe the EU has a neutral image.** The number of respondents believing the EU has a negative image has increased.

In reply to the question *“Does the European Union give you personally the feeling of”*, the majority of both EU 25 respondents and Latvian respondents replied, **“hope”**: 42% and 51% respectively. In Latvia the second most popular response was **“mistrust”**, the third highest figure recorded in the EU, behind France and Austria. In Latvia, the third most popular response was **“anxiety”**. **Throughout the EU 25, the level of negative feeling towards the EU has increased.**

In the EU 25, only half of respondents believe their country's membership of the EU is a good thing, and this level is still decreasing. This trend was also apparent in Latvia with a decrease of 6percentage points to 36%, the third lowest level recorded in the EU 25 after Austria and the United Kingdom.

The number of Latvian respondents who believe that being an EU member state brings more benefits than disadvantages has decreased by 7 percentage points to 50% - a trend apparent throughout the EU 25 where there was an average decrease of 3 percentage points.

Latvian respondents' self-evaluation of their knowledge of the EU on a scale of 1 to 10 (with one being the least knowledgeable and 10 being the most knowledgeable) shows an average self-evaluation 4.5, with the EU 25 average at 4.2. This self-perception is not supported by the actual results when respondents are asked questions concerning different aspects of the EU.

The most widely used sources in Latvia for obtaining information about the EU are television (73%), followed by radio (48%) which is, in turn,, followed by the printed media. More Latvians use television and radio as a source of information about the EU than in the EU 25 as a whole, while the number of Latvians using daily newspapers is below the EU 25 average. In Latvia, the number of people using the Internet as a source of information about the EU is growing and is now at a higher level than the EU 25 average.

The aspects of the EU about which Latvians want to receive more information are rights of EU citizens, healthcare and social policy.

Trust in the EU Institutions

The best known EU institution is **the European Parliament (EP)** with 83% of Latvian respondents recognizing it, compared with an EU 25 average figure of 89%. The EU 25 level of trust in the EP is higher than in Latvia, 51% compared to 44%. The level of trust has decreased throughout the EU 25, but the decrease in Latvia has been greater than the EU 25 average.

The second best known EU institution in Latvia and the EU 25, as in previous EB surveys, is **the European Commission (EC)** with 46% of respondents claiming to know about it. However, the level of trust in the EC in Latvia has decreased and it is now 42%.

The third best-known EU institution is **the Council of Ministers of the EU**. This is the major institution where national interests are represented but the level of recognition is growing very slowly. The EU 25 level of trust in the Council of Ministers of the EU is 45%, whereas in Latvia it is only 34%.

Compared with overall EU levels, there is a higher level of recognition in Latvia of **the Committee of the Regions**, 34% compared to 25%, and **the European Economic and Social Committee**, 39% compared to 33%.

Involvement in European affairs

Latvian respondents do not feel involved in EU affairs. In response to the question "*Does my voice count in the EU?*" only 17% tended to agree. This is one of the lowest rates in the EU 25 where the average is 34%.

In response to the statement “*I feel very much involved in European affairs*”, **26% of the EU 25 respondents agree. In Latvia a similar level, 22%, agree.** However, there is considerable variation in the affirmative responses to this question, ranging from 11% in Slovakia to 51% in Hungary.

In response to the statement “*I would like to be more involved in European affairs but I do not know how to go about it*”, **47% of EU 25 respondents agree. In Latvia a similar rate, 50%, agree.** Most of the Latvian respondents, 83%, believe that the national government should make more effort to involve its citizens more in European affairs and 77% believe that this task should be performed by the European institutions.

Most significant problems in Latvia and the EU

Latvian respondents believe their country’s biggest problem is **inflation/rising costs**, with 63% selecting this, **an increase of 18 percentage points in 12 months.** Also, this is a significant 46 percentage points higher than the EU 25 average. **Latvia is the only country in the EU 25 that sees this as the most important problem.**

The major problem selected overall in the EU 25 remains **unemployment** with 44%, a decrease of 6 percentage points, whereas in Latvia this is the second ranked problem with a figure of 35%. The third ranked major problem in Latvia, appearing for the first time as a significant problem, was **the state of the national economy** with 26% selecting this. The state of the national economy is the second-ranked major problem in the EU 25 with 26% of the poll sharing this view.

The biggest discrepancies between the Latvian rankings and the EU 25’s were for **terrorism** (EU 25 14%, Latvia 2%) and **immigration** (EU 25 15%, Latvia 4%).

In the EU 25, respondents believe that the most important tasks for the EU are to improve the effectiveness of the economy, increase investment in education and professional training, and increase investment in science and measures to streamline the formation of new enterprises. In Latvia, the most important are investment in education and professional training, measures to streamline the formation of new enterprises and improving the transport infrastructure.

Fears relating to Latvian membership of the EU

In this survey the levels of all fears relating to Latvia being a member of the EU increased significantly; the rate of individual fears showed increases ranging between 9 and 22 percentage points.

Latvian citizens’ greatest fear is **the increase of drug-trafficking and international organized crime** as was the case in the last survey.

The second greatest fear of being a member of the EU is that there **would be greater difficulties for Latvian farmers**. In previous surveys, this had ranked as the greatest fear.

Remaining the third biggest fear was that **Latvia would have to pay more and more to the EU**.

The fear showing **the biggest increase** was that **being a member of the EU might cause an economic crisis in Latvia** showing an increase by of 22 percentage points to 64%, which is much higher than the EU 25 figure of 52%.

Before joining the EU, one of the greatest fears was that Latvia would lose its national identity, culture and language. Both of the two previous surveys, “EB 62” and “EB 63”, showed that these fears had diminished. However, the latest survey shows that these fears have again increased. **The fear that Latvians will lose their national language has increased by 11 percentage points to 50%. The fear that Latvians will lose their culture and national identity has increased by 13 percentage points to 46%.**

European Monetary Union

In “EB 62”, more than a half (56%) of Latvian respondents said that losing the national currency, the Lats, would be one of the worst consequences of joining the EU. In “EB 63”, the number of respondents was approximately evenly divided with 46% believing that changing from the national currency to the Euro is a good thing and 48% thinking that it was a bad thing. In this survey, **58% of Latvian respondents said that losing the national currency is a bad thing, an increase of 10 percentage points.**

When Latvia joined the EU it signed a treaty stating that it would join the single currency area. 55% of respondents, a decrease of 2 percentage points from “EB 63”, believe that it will be a good thing to join the European Monetary Union (EMU). In this survey, support for EMU has slightly increased throughout the EU 25 to 60%.

In the EU 25, support for the introduction of the Euro as an EU priority fell to 8%. In Latvia, support is at 10%. In Latvia, there is little interest in getting more information about the Euro with only 11% of respondents wishing to do so.

Further enlargement of the European Union

The attitude to enlargement of the European Union varies greatly throughout the member states. **The level of EU 25 support for enlargement is 49%**. The newest member states of the EU, the NMS 10, are more supportive to enlargement.

The majority (62%) of Latvian respondents said that they are in favour of the enlargement of the EU. They show a high level of support for the candidate countries that are scheduled to join in 2007 with 62% in favour of Bulgarian membership and 55% in favour of Romanian membership.

However, **Latvians show a decreasing level of support, 31%**, for Turkey joining the EU, which is at the same level as the EU 25. In Latvia, the rate of respondents opposed to Turkey joining the EU increased by 7 percentage points.

Currently, there is no EU 25 country where the support for Turkey joining the EU exceeds 50%. The main reason given for the fears about Turkey's membership is the increased immigration that would come from Turkey to other EU members. Also, respondents believe that Turkey's membership will not help solving the problem of an ageing European population. The positive aspects of the membership process for Turkey will be that human rights will become more significant and national economy better developed.

The Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe

The Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe was ratified in Latvia on the 10th of June by the national parliament after the rejection of the Constitution in the referenda in France and the Netherlands.

After the ratification process and the talks were frozen, support for the Constitution increased in the EU 25 - up to 63%. Support also increased in countries which had been showing a more negative attitude towards the Constitution, such as the Netherlands, France and the Czech Republic.

The level of support in Latvia for the Constitution was almost unchanged at 57%. However, the number of people who have no opinion regarding the Constitution is very high at 29%, the second highest in the EU after Estonia.

In the EU 25 and Latvia, the common reason which gets most support from respondents is that **the ratification of the Treaty is necessary to increase the influence of the EU in the world.** In Latvia, the common reason with an equally high rate of respondents' support is **increasing the competitiveness of the EU economy.**