



Standard Eurobarometer



European
Commission

EUROBAROMETER 65

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

AUTUMN 2006

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BULGARIA

The survey was requested and coordinated by the Directorate General Communication.

This report was produced for the European Commission's Delegation in Bulgaria.

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Twice a year, the standard Eurobarometer surveys sample the opinion of the citizens in the current and future EU Member States on key issues relating to European integration, their countries' EU membership and the future of the Union. Nearly 30 000 citizens from 30 states and territories answered the autumn 2005 Eurobarometer questions. The survey, carried out between 27 March and 1 May, reveals the public opinion in the enlarging European Union on the eve of Bulgaria's EU accession.

In the EU, this period was marked by a reassurance of the public opinion following the end of the tense negotiations on the Union's budget beyond 2007, and a dialogue with the citizens, prioritised by the Austrian EU Presidency during the first term of the year (1 January – 30 June). A major concern for the Bulgarian public opinion during this crucial period was the date for the country's EU accession. The national debate on EU integration is dominated by the issues highlighted in the ongoing European Commission monitoring of Bulgaria's readiness to join the EU and the preparations for the absorption of the EU funds, which will become available following the country's EU accession.

Against these important changes in the public "euroclimate", the analysis of the results from the Spring Eurobarometer survey focuses on the trends in the changes of the national and European public opinion, compared to the previous six-month period and since Bulgaria was first included in the Standard Eurobarometer in 2004.

The Bulgarian data for the spring 2006 survey were collected by BBSS Gallup International between 27 March and 4 April 2006, using a representative national sample of 1015 persons, aged 15 and over.

The national analysis of the data aims to draw a picture of Bulgarian public opinion on the eve of the EU accession and to show how it compares with the views of the citizens, recorded in:

- the 25 EU Member States, including the old (EU15) and the new (EU10);
- the other EU accession country, Romania;
- two EU Candidate Countries - Croatia and Turkey;

The particular focus of these comparisons is to show the opinion of the "average Bulgarian" versus the average EU citizen. Frequent comparisons are also made with Romania, which is following the same roadmap as Bulgaria for its EU accession.

Bulgarians and the European Union – the positive meaning and image of the EU is again on the rise

Bulgaria remains among the countries that have the most positive image for the EU. While the image of the EU for its average citizen and in many of the Member States is increasingly positive, in Bulgaria and Romania, it remains unchanged, but significantly high to retain leading positions for the two acceding countries among those who have the most positive image for the EU. With six out of ten interviewed having a positive image, Bulgaria ranks equal with Slovenia, behind Ireland, Italy, Romania and Spain. The spring

results also show a small positive trend, with 3 percentage points less for those Bulgarians who have a negative image of the EU (11%) and a compensatory increase in those who do not state any opinion (7%). For nearly every fourth Bulgarian, the EU retains a neutral image, which is 9 points less than for the average EU citizen.

More than in the case of the average EU citizen, for the Bulgarians (and Romanians) the EU means freedom of movement and work, economic prosperity, peace and social security. For Bulgarian citizens aged 15 and over, the EU means, first and foremost, the solution to two of the most important issues for the country today – unemployment and the economic situation.

For nearly half of those interviewed, and without any change in the share of opinions, the EU means the *freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the EU*; for at least one-third, and with 2 points more than before, it means *economic prosperity*; and for three out of ten interviewed it is now associated with both *peace and social security*, showing increased support for the European social model (+2 points). As is the case for the average EU citizen, for every fourth Bulgarian, but with 2 points less than before, the EU also means *democracy*. All negative associations with the EU, like *unemployment, bureaucracy, waste of money*, are at the bottom of the Bulgarians' list and have further decreased by up to 2 points.

The positive opinions in Romania are significantly more pronounced, which makes the averages for the two acceding countries the highest compared to the other country groups.

Confidence in forthcoming EU membership as being something good has increased and has now reached a clear majority, with a score of 53% recorded. Bulgaria is the only country outside the EU where the increase in the positive perception of the EU membership is clearly expressed (+3 points) and, similar to six months before, this is in line with the general trend in the EU25. With this, the Bulgarian public's approval for the country's EU accession is back to the level registered one year before (54%). The negative opinions (9%) and the responses without an opinion (10%) remain unchanged and Bulgaria retains its position as one of the countries where the negative perception of EU membership is one of the lowest in the survey and where there is one of the highest number of respondents giving a 'don't know' answer in this regard.

Increasingly positive expectations regarding the forthcoming EU membership

The growing majority of Bulgarians who are convinced in the advantages from the EU accession is mirrored by a decrease in those with negative perceptions. Compared to the last six months, and in line with the increasing optimism among EU citizens, especially in the new Member States, the Bulgarian poll has become even more upbeat (+3 points) in its expectations that the country will benefit from its forthcoming EU membership (54%). There is a positive trend, represented also by a weakening in the position of those holding pessimistic views which have decreased by 4 points and are now shared by less than a fifth of the Bulgarian poll. Bulgarian optimism is equal to that

of the average EU citizen, and very close to the level of perception of the EU membership as a good thing. The results of the survey also show that it is linked to the positive perception of the EU as something good. The higher the EU ranks in the social values of the citizens, the stronger the belief that there is an advantage for their country to be a member of the Union.

Bulgarians are upbeat on the positive role of the EU in fighting terrorism and crime.

At least six out of ten respondents share this view concerning crime, which is 19 points more than the EU average; a comfortable majority of both EU and Bulgarian citizens think that EU plays a most important role in the fight against terrorism (63% in Bulgaria and 58% in the EU25), followed by foreign policy and security (52% in both BG and EU25). Nearly half of the Bulgarian poll remains of the opinion that the EU can influence positively the economic situation in the country, while every other EU citizen assigns a more important role to its positive influence in protecting the environment.

Regarding unemployment, which is seen by both Bulgarians and EU citizens as the most important issue for their countries, Bulgarians are more optimistic (38%) than pessimistic (32%), while the prevailing view in the EU25 is negative, with more than one-third of respondents sharing this opinion. In the same way as in spring 2005, Bulgarians perceive as neither positive, nor negative the EU's role in the social and cultural sphere. Since then, the most significant shift in Bulgarian public opinion has been the strengthening of the negative views on the EU's role in the financial sphere – with 7 points regarding rising prices and inflation, and with 3 points regarding taxation. The predominant view among EU citizens is also negative and, although decreasing, it is expressed in higher percentages than in Bulgaria, especially in the countries from the Eurozone, where nearly half of the interviewed are pessimistic about the EU's role in taming rising prices and inflation.

A reduced majority of Bulgarians want and expect the EU to play a bigger role in their daily lives. Compared to spring 2005 when the Eurobarometer surveyed opinions on this for the last time, Bulgarians and EU citizens appear less enthusiastic about the desired and expected role of the EU in their daily lives. There is a slightly negative trend, expressed by a 2-percentage point shift in the expectations regarding the EU's role in the daily life of Bulgarian citizens in the next five years. This negative trend is also common among EU citizens and, as a result, with a majority view of 52%, Bulgaria retains its place among the countries where EU is expected to have the most significant impact on the daily lives of the citizens. Only in Romania, Cyprus and Greece are these expectations higher.

Fears regarding European integration are decreasing significantly and losing majority views. Only the concern about more difficulties for national farmers remains characteristic for more than half of the Bulgarian poll. However, it has dropped by 4 points and stands at a lower level than similar fears in the countries that benefit most from the EU's Common Agricultural Policy. With equal or very close results, Bulgarian and Spanish respondents now fear least of all that their countries will have to pay more

and more to the EU budget and the danger of crime as a consequence of EU integration. Bulgarian fears in respect to EU integration are closer to those in the ten new Member States, but remain, as before, less pronounced.

More positive, but still difficult climate of public opinion in Bulgaria

Growing life dissatisfaction. The survey found that Bulgarians, who were the most dissatisfied with their way of life in autumn 2005, have become even more pessimistic in the spring 2006. Life satisfaction has decreased by another 4 points and is now shared by a quarter of the poll, while dissatisfaction rose by 3 points and is now expressed by nearly three-quarters of those interviewed. At the same time, the general mood of EU citizens is slightly more positive, and the high levels of life satisfaction have increased even in countries like Denmark, Finland and Belgium, where at least nine out of ten interviewed share this positive view. Looking back in time, again, as a result of a negative trend, only in Bulgaria, Portugal and Greece does a majority of citizens think that they now live in worse conditions than they used to live five years ago.

Slight optimism for the next twelve months and five years to come. Looking ahead, Bulgarians are now slightly more positive in their expectations for the next one and five years, which are foreseen to be marked by the EU membership of their country. Their social optimism has improved by two points for the next twelve months, and by six points – for the five years ahead. There is a clearly positive trend, showing that pessimistic views have also decreased - by 3 points regarding the situation over the next year, and by 2 points, regarding quality of life in five years' time. As a result, more than one-fifth of Bulgarians now think they will live better in the next twelve months, and nearly three out of ten interviewed think that their life will improve in the course of the next five years. Those who share the opposite view regarding the next twelve months amount to nearly a quarter of the poll, with one-fifth of Bulgarians being pessimistic about their life in the five years to come. The positive trend, registered by the current Eurobarometer survey is, however, still too weak to lead to a shift in the general public opinion mood, and to move Bulgaria up the scale from its position amongst the most pessimistic countries in the Eurobarometer poll. While Germans, Austrians and Portuguese appear more pessimistic than the Bulgarians in their straightforward answers about the future, their life satisfaction is high or even higher than the EU average. In Bulgaria, every second citizen now thinks that in the course of the next year his personal situation, which the survey found to be very unsatisfactory, will remain the same.

The current Eurobarometer also found a **notable decrease in the negative expectations** of Bulgarians regarding their personal financial situation, as well as the economic and the employment situation in their country. However, this is not matched by an increase in positive thinking. It has only strengthened the views that the situation will not change, which are now clearly the prevailing opinion among the Bulgarians.

Crime has now become, alongside with unemployment and the economic situation, a major concern for Bulgarians. The current Eurobarometer survey registered increased

concern over these three issues – by 8 points regarding the economic situation, by 7 points regarding crime, and by 3 points regarding unemployment. Nearly four out of ten Bulgarians interviewed express spontaneously their opinion that crime is now one of the two major issues facing their country. However in Ireland, Cyprus and the United Kingdom there is even more concern over this issue, while the figures for Romania are 16 points lower, and coincide with the EU average (21%). Romanians are less concerned about unemployment than Bulgarians, but more concerned about over the economic situation in their country, where they show, along with Turkish Cypriots, the highest level of concern in the entire Eurobarometer poll. Bulgarians, who consider unemployment to be the major issue for their country are twice as few as in Germany, where at least eight out of ten polled are worried about the employment situation in their country. Bulgarian results are also seven points lower than the EU average and 15 points below the average for the new Member States, where concern is highest amongst all country groups.

More trust in European than in the national institutions

After the positive change in the autumn, Bulgarians are again losing trust in some of their national institutions, in particular the Parliament and the Judiciary. There is a clearly negative trend, which shows that the Bulgarian government has lost more trust and gained more mistrust than the national Parliament. As a result, two-thirds of Bulgarians now do not trust their national government, and three-quarters of the poll show the same attitude to the national parliament. The survey found that Bulgarians trust the executive power more than the national legislature - with a seven-point difference, while EU citizens tend to trust national parliaments more than the governments in their countries, with a three-point difference. With no shifts in the attitude towards political parties, the spring Eurobarometer shows that Bulgarian attitudes towards the main political institutions - parties, parliament and the government - remain closer to, but more critical than public opinion in the new Member States.

Of all the countries covered by the survey, Bulgarians trust least and mistrust most their national justice and legal system. Mistrust is on the rise by seven points and is now a sentiment shared by nearly three-quarters of the Bulgarian poll. The survey also found that in countries with high levels of life satisfaction trust in the national justice and legal systems is higher, while countries, like Lithuania, where mistrust is almost as high as in Bulgaria, are also at the bottom of the list regarding life satisfaction. Socio-demographic analysis also shows that it is the social pessimists who do not trust the Bulgarian justice system. These are the poorly educated, middle-aged workers and unemployed people, living mainly in small towns. They have a negative image of the EU and do not trust the Union.

Trust in the European Union remains high and without any change since the spring 2004 Eurobarometer survey. It is nine points higher than the EU average, and due to the positive changes in public opinion in most of the EU Member States, it is now for the first time lower (with 3 points) than the average level of trust registered in the new Member States.

Trust in the main EU institutions has gone down. The share of “don’t know(s)” remains high, but not the highest of all, as in the autumn survey. Trust has decreased by four-percentage point for the European Commission and the European Parliament, and by one-percentage point for the Council of the European Union. At the same time, trust in the EU’s three decision-making institutions in the Member States is slightly up and, unlike in the autumn survey, it now exceeds the levels registered in Bulgaria. Of all the EU institutions covered by Eurobarometer, only the European Parliament gains the trust of the majority, while in the EU this is also the case for the European Court of Justice. Overall, Bulgarians trust considerably more the EU decision-making, legal and executive bodies than the national ones, with the largest and still increasing distance between trust in the European Court of Justice and in the national legal system. Compared to all other EU institutions, Bulgarian trust in the Court of Justice, which has constitutional powers, remains the lowest, with 11 points difference in the figures between the Bulgarian poll and that of the average EU citizen.

In terms of trust in the EU institutions, Bulgarian public opinion appears again to be close to the views of the citizens from Lithuania, and also Latvia, where the survey registered the highest level of mistrust in the European Court of Justice. Greeks, Belgians and Italians, as well as the citizens of Luxembourg, show considerably higher levels of trust in the three decision-making institutions of the EU, while citizens of the Scandinavian countries stand out with their confidence in the EU’s legal and financial institutions.

Eurobarometer also found that the decreasing confidence in the EU institutions among the Bulgarian poll is linked to the lower levels of information and awareness about them, compared to the autumn results. Trust in the European Commission and in the European Parliament has gone down by the same percentage points as the decrease of awareness about them with four points for the European Parliament, which is known to three-quarters of those interviewed, and with two points for the European Commission, now at 67%.

Information and awareness about the EU – more realistic self-assessment

Bulgarians have a more realistic self-assessment about their awareness and knowledge of the EU. The results from their self-assessment, using a scale of 1 to 10, where 1-4 means “know nothing at all” and 7-10 “know a great deal”, show a shift of the opinions from those who do not know anything towards those who have little or some knowledge about the EU. Those who assess their knowledge with the average score of five, now represent one-fifth of the poll, with two points more than before. All scores between 1 and 5 have decreased by up to four points, while the scores above are up by one or two points each. This means that, in the spring of 2005, the average Bulgarian thinks he is slightly better informed about the EU than before. However, Bulgarian self-confidence is weaker than in other countries surveyed and, as a result, Bulgarians appear to be among those who are, alongside with British, Hungarians, Portuguese, Spanish and Turkish, least informed about the Union.

The results from the knowledge test, included in the Eurobarometer questionnaire confirm the reality of the Bulgarian self-assessment. While in the autumn of 2005 both Bulgarians and Romanians had equal results in the quiz, six months later it is the Bulgarians who score worst of all. This is, to a large extent, due to the high level of indefinite answers. Nearly three-quarters of the poll were unable to answer at least one of the three general questions about how many Member States there are in the European Union, if Members of the European Parliament are elected directly, and if it is true that the largest share of the EU budget is spent on administration.

Bulgarians score slightly better than six months before, with a quarter of them providing correct answers, but this is not enough to move them up the from bottom position. As in the previous autumn, citizens from the new Member States score best of all, confirming that knowledge of the EU is not subject only to the experience in the European integration process.

The media, especially television, are the main sources of information about the EU, but interest in the daily press and in the informal discussions is growing. Bulgarians rely more than the average EU citizen and Romanians on television as a source of news on the EU. They also rely on informal discussions with family, friends and colleagues whose importance has increased by 8 points and ranks now immediately after the media. Interest in the daily press is up by 2 points, but its role as an information source is less important for Bulgarians compared with the preference of the EU citizens. The importance of radio has also increased by 2 points, and shows that Bulgarians attach more preference to those information channels that can keep them up-to-date and provide a forum for the ongoing debate.

Bulgarians see as increasingly sufficient, but less objective the information on the EU in the national media. Between the two Eurobarometer surveys in autumn 2005 and spring 2006, there are more Bulgarians who think that television, radio and the daily press provide them with a sufficient amount of information, and, for the first time, Bulgarian public opinion on this issue coincides with the thinking of the average EU citizen. However, there is also an increase in the opinions that television, and, to some extent, also the press and radio, talk too much about the European Union. There is also a decrease in confidence that information about the EU provided in the national media is objective.

Trends in Bulgarian public opinion and in that of the EU on this issue are diverging. The positive views about the objectivity of television expressed in Bulgaria are lower than in other countries and ten points less than the average for the EU25, where they represent the majority view. While more than four out of ten Bulgarians believe that TV news on the EU is objective, only one-third support this opinion regarding the daily press and the radio. The survey also shows that public opinion regarding the objectivity of the media is not stable. Some of the views that information on the radio and in the press is too positive have now been transformed into “don’t know”. Also, opinions regarding the sufficiency and objectivity of information on the radio and in the press are dominated by “don’t know” responses.

As a comparison, citizens in the new Member States show much higher levels of confidence in their national media than in the EU25 – on average, nearly six out of ten interviewed believe that TV news on the EU is objective, 57% are of the same opinion regarding the radio and more than half of those interviewed regarding the press. There is a big distance in the results with Bulgaria – 17 points regarding television, 25 points regarding radio and 18 points regarding the daily press.

Based on these figures and on the results from the knowledge test, it may be concluded that confidence in the objectivity of the information on the European Union is an important factor for the increase in awareness and knowledge about the European Union and its policies, as well as confidence in its institutions and in the benefits to be derived from EU membership.