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1. Portugal: the Current Climate of Opinion

Previous Eurobarometer surveys have shown the Portuguese as being particularly dissatisfied with their lives in general, and this remains the pattern in this current survey: after the Hungarians, the Portuguese are the EU citizens least satisfied with life in general. At the same time, a sense of optimism regarding the future seems to be gathering strength. Thus, 51 per cent of respondents in Portugal believe that their life situation will improve in the next five years. This value, which is ten percentage points higher than the EU average, represents an increase in optimism compared with the situation at the end of 2005.

Given the ongoing economic crisis, the pessimism detected since 2001 in Portugal concerning citizens' expectations on specific issues such as the country's economic and employment prospects indicates some realism. Around 60 per cent of respondents in this survey said they expect this situation to worsen in the next twelve months. Yet, while undoubtedly high, this percentage does represent a slight decrease in respect of the pessimism rates of the previous Eurobarometer.

Citizens' concerns about Portugal's economic prospects are again visible in the issues they consider to be national priorities. "Unemployment", "the economic situation" and "inflation" were the three most frequently cited issues, the first of these being by far the most frequently mentioned issue of all (64 per cent). Apart from economic concerns, only "crime" and the "health system" were mentioned by a considerable portion of the Portuguese population (around 14 per cent).

While a gloomy outlook concerning the economy is characteristic of all EU citizens, the Portuguese appear to be more concerned with the economic situation than the EU average. Indeed, the national priority issues for Portuguese respondents – with a high level of concern on unemployment and a relatively low level of concern regarding immigration or terrorism – are closer to those of their counterparts in the ten new member-states than to the EU-15 average.

EU citizens tend to trust European institutions more than national ones. In fact, there is a general scepticism towards national institutions all around Europe. In the case of the Portuguese, the gap between the level of trust in European and national institutions is larger than the EU average. This appears to be due to higher levels of trust among the Portuguese in the European institutions – and not lower levels of trust in the national

ones. As in previous Eurobarometer surveys, the Portuguese trust the European institutions more than the EU average.

2. The Meaning of the European Union in Portugal, twenty years after joining

The image of the EU in Portugal remains positive, even if it is now below the European average. However, for the first time in ten years, the number of Portuguese who believe that belonging to the EU is a good thing has dropped to below 50 percent (now standing at 47 percent), compared to a European average of 55 percent. This constitutes an eleven percentage point drop when compared with the previous semester. At the same time, most of the respondents in Portugal still believe that the advantages of belonging to the EU outweigh its disadvantages.

For the Portuguese, the primary feature associated with EU membership is the ability to travel, study and work in any country of the Union, with 40 percent referring to this as the main impact of the EU. There seems to be a relatively low identification of the EU with peace and democracy in Portugal. By the same token, political stability is not considered by the Portuguese as an outcome of the EU's development. The perception of the security advantages resulting from the integration process also seem to be diluted in Portugal. At the same time, the Portuguese tend not to associate the EU with bureaucracy, unlike the European average.

The EU is associated in Portugal with unemployment by 29 percent of those surveyed. That places it among the countries which most identify the European Union with rising unemployment, being only surpassed by Austria (43 percent), Greece (35 percent) and Germany (34 percent). Economic stability, on the other hand, is not associated with the EU. When asked about their economic and financial situation, an overwhelming majority of the Portuguese (fluctuating between 80 and 90 percent in the various questions) consider these to be bad. When asked to compare their situation with that of the general European economy, the Portuguese perceive their situation to be worse than that of their European counterparts.

3. What kind of Europe? The future of the European Union for the Portuguese

The majority of citizens in Portugal hope for a greater role of the European Union in their daily lives in the future. At the same time, the percentage of Portuguese that have this hope (60 per cent) is higher than the proportion of respondents that consider that

this greater role will in fact occur. This suggests that, in the Portuguese case, citizens' perspectives concerning the future deepening of the European Union's action are in fact quite distant from their ideal scenario.

The action of the European Union in the coming years must, according to the Portuguese, be focused on the fight against unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. These two subjects are clear priorities in Portugal. Both issues were mentioned by more than half of the respondents, while the third topic (maintaining peace and security in Europe) is cited by less than a quarter. Economic issues are seen as the biggest challenges that Portugal faces right now, and are also the areas in which the European Union's action is assessed least positively. This latter result may well be linked to the importance that the Portuguese attribute to these issues. Moreover, it is worth noting that the fight against poverty, social exclusion and unemployment are mainly prioritized by citizens who live in large towns.

Regarding the internal evolution of the European Union's institutions and procedures, the Portuguese are more supportive of actions leading to an overall deepening of the Union (such as a common immigration policy, the Constitution and the existence of a Minister of Foreign Affairs of the European Union), and less supportive of a two-speed deepening and further enlargement.

Lastly, the main fears held by the Portuguese concerning the evolution of the European Union in the years to come are of an economic nature – the transfer of jobs to other countries, greater difficulties for national farmers, and an economic crisis. This concern about the adverse effects of the European Union on the economy is, generally speaking, evident predominantly among those citizens who express negative attitudes towards the Union, as well as the elderly, those with lower educational attainment, the unemployed and house persons.

4. What do the Portuguese know about the EU? Levels of information and knowledge

Portugal remains amongst the countries whose citizens believe they know least about the EU and its functioning, with the average of 3.8 (on a 1-10 scale) - which is only higher than Spain's (3.7) and equal to that of Hungary (3.8) - while the EU average is 4.5.

Analyzing specific questions, an overwhelming proportion of the Portuguese claim to have heard about the most important European institutions (with consistently 80 to 90 percent of positive answers), considerably more than the EU average for all these questions. However when directly questioned about their understanding of the functioning of the EU institutions, 51 percent of the Portuguese claim not to understand how the EU works. Although an improvement of 12 percentage points *vis-à-vis* the previous survey (where this value was 63 percent), it still places Portugal among the Member States whose citizens do not feel they understand the functioning of the EU. When examining concrete knowledge of the EU, evaluated through questions on specific aspects of the integration process, it is seen that the Portuguese have in fact an average real knowledge of the EU which, while somewhat above the European average, remains below the levels of real knowledge in ten other Member States.

Concerning the media, television remains the source of information for the Portuguese, with radio and newspapers being considerably less used than in other European countries. Regarding media coverage on the EU, the Portuguese believe that more news coverage should be given to European affairs, with only 39 percent claiming that the media already gives them enough coverage. Moreover, 50 percent of the respondents also believe that the Portuguese media talk objectively about the EU, with television perceived as being the most objective source of information, when compared with the written press or radio.