



EUROBAROMETER

EUROBAROMETER 66

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HUNGARY

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Life in the European Union

The pessimism of Hungarian citizens is evident once more in autumn 2006. It has now become almost a tradition in the series of Eurobarometer surveys that, of all the Europeans, Hungarians are the least content with their lives. In addition, the ratio of those who expect positive changes in their lives or in the economic situation of the country during the next year has dropped drastically.

Despite that, Hungary is one of the most positive member states in its assessment of the European Union.

The mood and contentment of EU citizens

Exactly half of Hungarians interviewed in the autumn of 2006 said they were satisfied with their lives in general. This places Hungary last among current EU member states, significantly behind all the other countries. Only the citizens of Romania and Bulgaria, slated to join the EU in 2007, are less content with their lives. At the other end of the scale is Sweden, where virtually all citizens are satisfied with their lives and the majority of these, or half of all people interviewed, said they were very satisfied with their lives.

Over the past six months, there has been a dramatic change in Hungary in the way people expect their own lives and the situation of the country to develop during the next year. At a poll in the spring of 2006, two-thirds of those surveyed thought their personal situation would improve during the following 12 months, but this percentage had dropped by more than half by the autumn. An even bigger decrease was evident in expectations on the development of the country's economic situation. A quarter of those interviewed expected an improvement in the spring of 2006, but this figure had dropped to 8% by September.

Despite the generally negative mood, Hungary is still in a very good position on the list that ranks countries by the proportion of citizens having confidence in the EU. However, it must be noted that the percentage of people relating to the EU in a negative way increased significantly in spite of the general positive assessment over the past six months.

Attitude on EU membership

In line with earlier values measured by Eurobarometer, the proportion of people who have trust in the EU is significantly lower than the percentage of those who consider the country's membership of the EU a good thing overall. The number of people sharing the latter view has dropped significantly compared with results recorded six months ago.

There are significant differences in opinions on EU membership according to political preference. More than half of those professing themselves to be left-wingers consider EU membership to be positive, while only a little more than a third of those on the right share this view.

This was the first time in the history of Eurobarometer surveys in Hungary when the figure for those who thought membership offered no advantages was higher than that of people who thought membership was advantageous.

The highest proportion of Hungarians interviewed found membership positive because it led to a wider selection of goods in stores. This was followed by advantages when traveling, as they can cross borders faster and more easily due to less stringent inspections.

Expectations concerning the EU

The Eurobarometer survey also sought to find out what people thought were the most important challenges their country was facing. In the list compiled by Hungarians, the development of the economic situation was at the top, followed by unemployment. During the past six months, there has been a significant increase in the number of people who thought increasing prices were a major problem, so this issue replaced the healthcare system in third position.

Participants in the survey also had the opportunity to pass judgment on the role the EU played in the world. Those Hungarians interviewed attributed the most positive role to the EU in environment protection and the fight against terrorism.

Economy and employment in the EU

Eurobarometer also surveyed the role EU citizens attributed to the EU in the economic life of their country and in changes in the employment situation. In Hungary, those who think EU membership plays a negative role in these areas are in majority.

At the same time, the majority of Hungarians interviewed considered the effects of competition positive in certain segments of the common market, such as in transportation, telecommunication services or banking and insurance services.

In Hungary, as well as in the 25 member states on average, there seemed to be a consensus that education and training was the area to which the EU had to pay the most attention in order to develop the economy. This was followed by increasing the efficiency of energy use, making it easier to set up companies and supporting innovation and research.

The outstanding proportion of those who rated the situation of the Hungarian economy and employment as bad or rather bad shows that there is strong demand for improving the economic situation. This generally negative picture was unchanged compared to the results six months ago, although there was a slight improvement in the assessment of the employment situation.

Assessment of economic effects of the EU

More than half of Hungarians interviewed thought the EU had a negative effect on the economy of Hungary, and almost as many said its effect was positive.

The results are similar regarding employment. More than half of Hungarians said the country's EU membership had a negative effect on employment and a third said it had a positive effect.

In the average of all member states, the people polled had a much more positive assessment of the economic situation of their country. A third of them said their economy was performing well, up 10 percentage points from the spring 2006 results. The Danish proved to be the most satisfied.

Effects of the common market

During the Eurobarometer survey, people interviewed could also rate the effects of competition that had been increased by the Common Market in several sectors (transportation, telecommunications, banking and insurance services). In Hungary and in the whole of the EU alike, more than half of the people interviewed said increased competition had a positive effect.

Assessment of the effects of globalization

Similar to the issue of the common market, the effects of globalization on domestic companies and employment have also divided the people interviewed. An almost identical proportion in Hungary and in the 25 EU member states thought globalization represented a threat to domestic companies and employment. In the whole of the EU, the number of those who said globalization was rather a good opportunity for companies was only slightly lower. In Hungary, only some 34% share this latter view.

European Political Union

The Eurobarometer survey also revealed how people felt about making European integration tighter and about progress towards the political union. The replies indicate decisively that the majority of people in Hungary, as well as in the other countries that joined the Union recently, were in favour of European political union.

Supporting tighter integration

According to the findings of Eurobarometer, nearly two-thirds of Hungarians support political union. The proportion of supporters in the entire EU is somewhat lower than

that. The figures for those who could not or did not wish to reply to this question were very high.

The European Constitution

Compared with the survey undertaken six months ago, the percentage of those who think the EU will become more democratic after the new European Constitution is ratified increased by 9 percentage points. The proportion of those sharing this view across the EU remained largely unchanged at 65% on average.

A decisive majority of Hungarians support adopting the European Constitution, which they think will make the Union more democratic, more efficient, more transparent, more competitive and generally stronger in the world.

It is worth noting that in France, the country that rejected the Constitution and thus blocked the ratification process, the proportion of people who think the Constitution is necessary for the proper operation of the European institutions is 67%, higher than the EU average. In contrast, less than half (48%) of people interviewed in the Netherlands thought so.

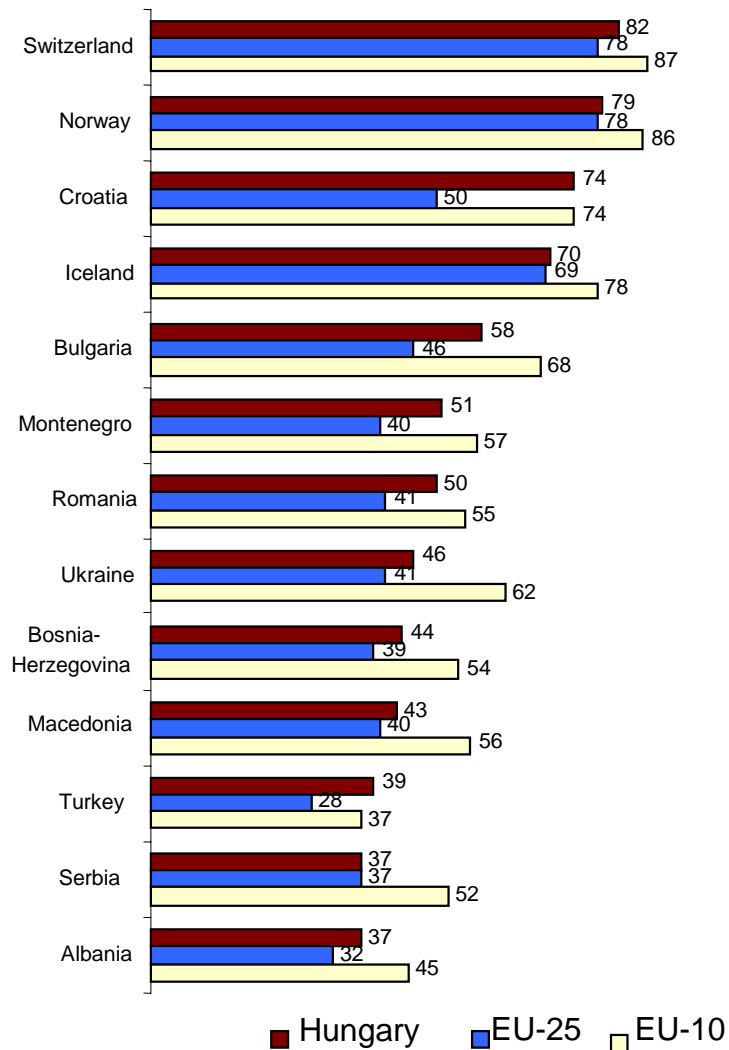
Expansion of the EU

The Eurobarometer survey always looks at how citizens in EU Member States feel about the further expansion of the EU. Results show that citizens in the countries that joined the Union in the latest round of expansion are more open about the accession of new members to the EU than citizens in older member states.

According to the Eurobarometer survey, support for enlargement in autumn 2006 was more or less unchanged from the results recorded six months previously.

Support for the accession of various European countries varies significantly. Countries that had not requested accession to the EU proved to be the most popular, as four-fifths of people interviewed would support the membership of Switzerland and Norway both in Hungary and in the EU on average.

Support for individual countries (%)



Source: Eurobarometer 66

Support for the accession of Croatia is very high both in Hungary and in the other nine recently admitted member states.

Half of Hungarians interviewed support the accession of Romania, which will take place in 2007, and that of Bulgaria enjoys slightly higher support. Support for Turkey was the lowest in the average of the EU, but among Hungarians it ranked higher than for Serbia or Albania.

Exhibiting and representing European values

During the Eurobarometer survey, respondents were also given the opportunity to expound on what values were close to them and how much they thought the EU represented these. As the results reveal, less than half of EU citizens feel that their views make a difference in the EU. The proportion of those who think they are familiar with the operation of the EU, and, as such, could also be aware of ways to represent their interests and values, was similar.

Representation of European citizens

Less than half of respondents in Hungary feel that their opinion and vote makes a difference in the EU. A similar amount of people said they were familiar with the operation of the EU. The percentage of those who feel involved in European affairs was even lower in Hungary as only about a fifth of respondents were of this opinion.

The Eurobarometer survey also examined which values were most important for people and how well they thought the EU was representing these. Respondents could pick three of the ideas listed. For the majority of Hungarians, peace was of top importance, and two-thirds of all respondents thought the EU represented this value. Close to half of respondents considered respect for human life important, although a significantly lower ratio of them could associate that concept with the image of the EU.

A third of the people interviewed picked human rights as an important value, but a higher percentage of them said it was represented by the EU.

Aside from human rights, the concept most Hungarian respondents associated with the image of the EU was democracy, but the proportion of those who said this value was important to them was substantially lower. There was a similar discrepancy in the assessment of rule of law, which was important for just half as many respondents as the number of those who thought it was represented by the EU.