

EUROBAROMETER 66

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

AUTUMN 2006

NATIONAL REPORT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

LATVIA

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The interpretations and opinions contained in it are solely those of the authors.

Introduction

In autumn 2006, the “Eurobarometer Standard” survey was carried out in the entire 25 member states of the European Union, two accession countries (Romania and Bulgaria), two candidate countries (Croatia and Turkey) and in the Turkish Cypriot community. This report aims at reviewing the key results of the study. The report presents the analysis of Latvian citizens’ responses to the main questions of the survey. These responses are compared with the mean scores of the responses from all the 25 European Union member states. In addition, where relevant, the report presents comparisons with the data from the previous EB surveys and data the other Baltic states, as well as an analysis of the survey results in various social and demographic groups of respondents.

During the survey, 1015 respondents aged 15 and over were interviewed throughout Latvia. Applying a random-probability sampling method carried out the respondent sampling and the sample represents the opinion of population throughout Latvia. The survey was conducted on September 27 – October 9, 2006 and coincided with the Latvian parliamentary (Saeima) elections held on October 7, 2006. During the election campaign public opinion in the mass media was shown to be pessimistic about the economic and political development in Latvia. However, in the EB survey results showed the Latvian respondents to be more optimistic regarding these areas.

Climate of Opinion

- EU 25 citizens’ level of satisfaction with life in general has slightly improved compared with the last EB survey.
- The level of satisfaction with life in Latvia is still lower than the average of the EU 25. It has increased since the last survey but it still represents one of the lowest levels of satisfaction in the EU 25.
- Latvian citizens believe that some areas of life, such as the employment situation, household financial and personal financial situation, will improve next year. The level of optimism for the next twelve months regarding an improvement

in the household financial situation is 16% higher than the EU 25 average, an increase of 7 p.p. since the last survey half a year ago.

- Latvian citizens have shown a continued trend in not worrying about their employment situation, with the official rate of unemployment now improving to the twelfth highest in the EU 25 since the last survey half a year ago.
- The majority of the EU 25 respondents believe that the economic situation in their country will remain the same in the next 12 months. In Latvia, one third of respondent's believe that the national economic growth will improve which is a significant increase of 11 p.p. since the last survey.
- In response to the question "*....would you say that, in general, things are going in the right direction or in the wrong direction...both in the EU and your own country*" more Latvian respondents believe that the EU is going in the right direction than Latvia is going in the right direction.

Trust in National Institutions

- The highest levels of trust in national institutions of Latvia include the mass media with TV at 65%, radio at 61% and the army at 53%, followed by the press at 50%. In the EU 25, the highest levels of trust are recorded for the army 69%, the police 64%, which are only then followed by the mass media with radio at 63% and television at 53%.
- Latvian respondents, once again, trust least in political parties, 9%, compared with the EU 25 figure of 17%. Trust in political parties is now the third lowest in the EU 25. In the past two years, Latvians have always been one of the three countries that have the least trust in political parties.
- The level of trust in the Latvian national government has increased to 32%, a significant 7 p.p.; and is now higher than the rate of trust in the EU 25 (30%).
- The level of trust in Latvia in the national parliament has increased to 24%, still among the lowest in the EU 25.
- The level of trust in the justice system in Latvia has remained unchanged since the last survey, and is still lower than the average level of the EU 25. Over the past two years, there has been a downward trend in the level of trust in the justice system.

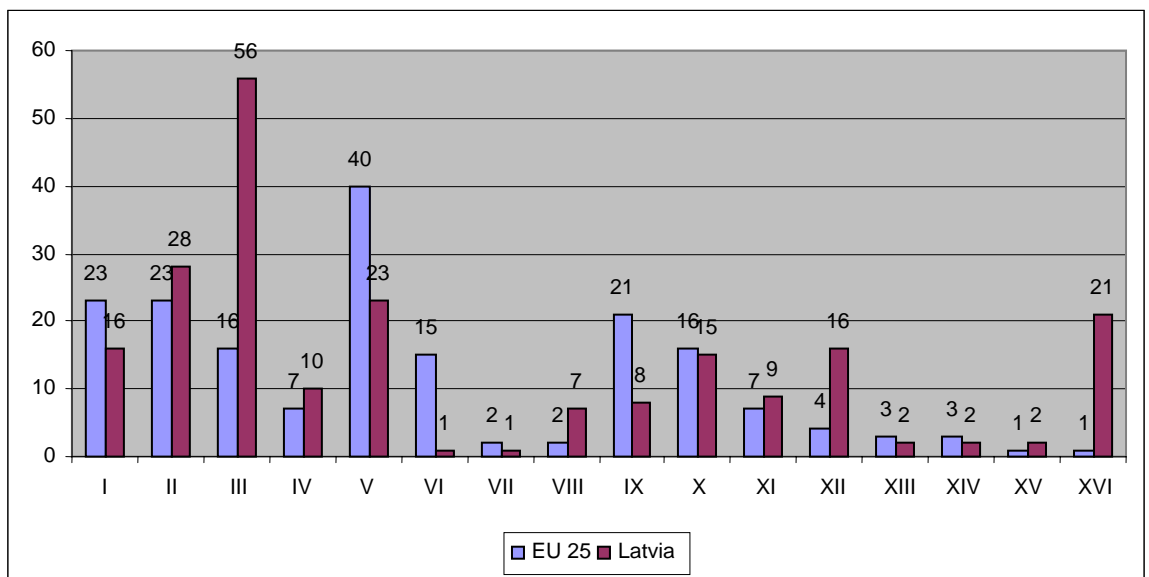
Trust in and knowledge of the EU Institutions

- In the EU 25, trust in the European Union (45%), has shown a decrease from the last survey. Latvian respondents' trust in the EU is the fifth lowest in the EU 25 (42%). In the Baltic states the levels of trust in the EU are relatively high with Estonia 61%, Lithuania 60% and Latvia 50%.
- Still, as in all previous EB surveys, the Latvian respondents levels of trust in the EU is higher than the level of trust in Latvian national institutions.
- The most well known EU institution is the European Parliament (EP), with 87% of Latvian respondents recognizing it, similar to the EU 25 level of 90%. The EU 25 rate of trust in the EP is higher than in Latvia, at 52% compared to 47%, Recognition of the EP in Latvia increased by 7 p.p. In Latvia the number of respondents who do not have any opinion about the EP has significantly decreased by 10 p.p.
- The second best known EU institution in Latvia and the EU 25, as in previous EB surveys, is the European Commission (EC). The level of trust in the EC in Latvia is 46% and it has increased by 8 p.p. However, it is still one of the lowest in the EU 25.
- The third best known EU institution is the Council of Ministers of the EU. This is the highest institution where national interests are represented, but the level of recognition in the EU 25 is growing slowly. In Latvia, the rate of trust of the Council of Ministers of the EU has increased by 6 p. p. and now it is 42% - the same as of the EU 25.
- Latvian respondents' self-evaluation of their EU knowledge on a scale of 1 to 10 (with one being the least knowledgeable and 10 being the most knowledgeable) has shown an average level of response at 4.4, with the EU 25 average at 4.2. Since "EB 65", self-evaluation of respondents' knowledge has decreased in the EU (-0,3) as well as in Latvia (-0,2) This self-perception is borne out by the actual results of questions concerning different aspects of the EU.

Most significant problems in Latvia and the EU

- For the fifth consecutive survey, Latvian respondents believe their biggest problems are inflation / rising costs (the inflation rate in Latvia, according to "Eurostat" for the past three years has been 6 to 7 percent). This is a significant 40% higher than the EU 25 average (16%). Latvia is the only country in the EU 25 that sees this as the major problem. The general trend in the EU has been a decline in the respondents who cite inflation/rising costs as a problem, with some countries reporting very small percentages of respondents (0% to 3%) who see this as a significant problem.

- A major concern for the EU 25 remains unemployment with 40% of respondents that is a 7% decrease. In Latvia unemployment is the third ranked problem.
- In the EU 25, the state of the national economy is one of the equal highest ranked problems, along with crime. In Latvia, the state of the national economy, with 28%, is the second ranked problem.
- The biggest discrepancy between how Latvians ranked problems and how the EU 25 as a whole did relates to terrorism (EU 25 15%, Latvia 1%).



I - Crime

II - Economic situation

III - Rising prices/inflation

IV – Taxation

V - Unemployment

VI – Terrorism

VII – Defence/Foreign affairs

VIII – Housing

IX – Immigration

X – Healthcare system

XI – The educational system

XII – Pensions

XIII – Protecting the environment

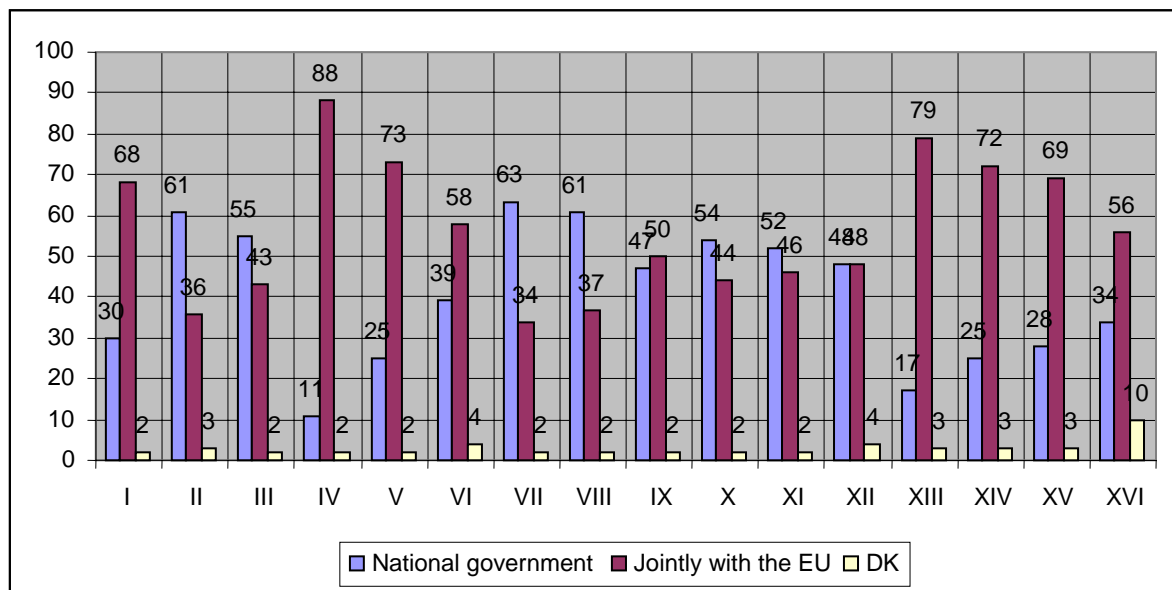
XIV – Energy related issues

XV – Other (Spontaneous)

XVI - DK

- In the EU 25, 54% of respondents believe their country’s membership of the EU is a good thing. However, in Latvia, there was an increase of 6 p.p. to 43% in the rate of respondents who believe that EU membership was a good thing. Latvia also continues to have the highest rate of respondents in the EU who believe that membership is neither a good nor a bad thing. This is the first time that the number of respondents believing EU membership is a good thing is almost equal to the number of respondents that believe that membership is neither a good nor a bad thing.

- The level of Latvian respondents who believe that being an EU member state brings more benefits than disadvantages has increased to 62%, which is 8 p.p. above the EU 25 average.
- According to Latvian respondents, being a member state of the EU has a positive influence on the following areas: defence and foreign policy and Latvia's influence on the world.
- According to Latvian respondents, being a member of the EU has a negative influence on standards of living. Also, Latvian respondents believe that the EU has a negative influence on the development of agriculture, but, these tend to be people not involved in the business. In fact, agriculture is the beneficiary of a large proportion of EU funds.
- Answering the question "For each of the following areas, do you think that decisions should be made by the Latvian Government, or made jointly within the European Union?" Latvian respondents have named only six (out of sixteen) areas where decisions must be made only at the national level, but ten - jointly with the European Union. Before accession to the EU, there were fears that by joining the EU, Latvia would lose sovereignty in the legislation process. However, surveys have shown that Latvian respondents agree to the EU making most of those decisions jointly with the national government.



I – Fighting crime

II - Taxation

III – Fighting unemployment

IV – Fighting terrorism

V – Defense and foreign affairs

VI – Immigration

VII – The educational system

VIII - Pensions

IX – Protecting the environment

X – Health and social welfare

XI – Agriculture and fishery

XII – Consumer protection

XIII – Scientific and technological research

XIV –Support for regions facing economic difficulties

XV - Energy

XVI – Competition

Development towards a European political union

- There are three groups of countries with different attitudes to the development of the EU as a political union. The first group, for example, the United Kingdom, supports an economic union. The second group, for example, France and Germany, supports a political union. The third group, for example, Latvia, supports certain aspects of the political union.
- Latvian respondents support closer political union of Europe on the following issues: common EU member states' foreign policy towards other countries (73%), common defence and security policy (76%), further enlargement of the EU (63%) and the Constitutional Treaty of the EU (59%).

Involvement in European affairs

- Latvian respondents do not feel very involved in EU affairs. In response to the question "*Does my voice count in the EU?*", only 21% tended to agree. This is a much lower level than the EU 25 average of 34%.
- However, 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 of respondents - 22% - supports this opinion.
- In response to the statement "*I know how the EU works*", 43% of EU 25 respondents agree. In Latvia, self-evaluation of this knowledge is higher, at 53 %.

Further enlargement of the European Union

- The attitude regarding enlargement of the European Union varies greatly across the Member States. The level of EU 25 support for enlargement is 46%. The newest Member States of the EU are more supportive of enlargement with none of these countries having a rate lower than the EU 25 average. There is no lower support for the enlargement of the EU than 50%.
- The majority (63%, almost the same as in "EB 65" and "EB 64") of Latvian respondents said that they are in favour of the EU's enlargement. Latvian respondents support the accession countries, Romania and Bulgaria as well as most of the candidate states, with the exception of Turkey.