

EUROBAROMETER 66

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PORTUGAL

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1. Portugal and Europe: the Current Climate of Opinion

Since 1986, the levels of satisfaction of the Portuguese with the lives they lead have been below the European average, and this difference has increased over the last few years. However, when compared to Eurobarometer 65 of April 2006, we see a slight reduction in the number of dissatisfied people in Portugal. Younger Portuguese respondents are also significantly more satisfied with their lives than their older counterparts, although, once again, a comparison of the levels of satisfaction of the younger cohorts in Portugal and the EU reveals the former to be less satisfied.

As what concerns expectations for the next year in terms of life in general or the country's economic situation, the Portuguese again reveal a more pessimistic outlook than their European counterparts. Indeed, around half of the respondents in Portugal expect the country's economic situation to worsen over the next twelve months. However, the Portuguese are considerably more optimistic *vis-à-vis* the prospects for their households' financial situation over the next year.

The Portuguese have demonstrated very favourable attitudes towards the EU since joining in 1986, almost invariably above the EU average. However, the last few years (particularly between 2005 and 2006) have witnessed a decrease in the levels of support for the EU in Portugal. This may partly be due to national circumstances, notably the prolonged economic crisis Portugal has faced in the new millennium.

The Portuguese still present high levels of trust in the EU (58 per cent), as well as a feeling of involvement in EU affairs above the European average. In terms of the latter, the relatively low feeling of involvement of EU citizens is noteworthy (around 20 per cent). Equally, the proportion of European citizens who consider that their voice counts in the Union is also relatively reduced (34 per cent). Portugal does not constitute an exception to this pattern. Among the Portuguese who share this feeling of political inefficacy, there is a high percentage of individuals who have a negative image of the EU or who do not trust it.

Economic issues, such as unemployment or the economic situation, continue to be a priority for a substantial part of the Portuguese and of the EU population in general. The Portuguese are, however, considerably less concerned with immigration than their European counterparts. Sixty-six percent of Portuguese respondents in this survey agreed that

immigrants constitute a major and positive contribution to the country, a proportion only exceeded in Sweden.

Attitudes towards immigrants are just one of the socio-cultural values examined in this Eurobarometer. Respondents' positions along these various values dimensions permit analysing whether Portugal has witnessed the kind of value shift that is seen to have taken place in the generality of post-industrial societies over the past few decades. When taking all values into account, the Portuguese tend to have a slightly more "traditional" outlook than the EU average, with this disparity being most evident on the issue of gay marriage. Within Portugal, there are significant generational differences, with the young being less traditional than older cohorts.

From a list of abstract values, the majority of European respondents – including the Portuguese – attribute importance mainly to values related to human security, such as "peace", "respect for human life" and "human rights". "Peace", "democracy" and "human rights" are the three values that, according to both the Portuguese and European citizens in general, best represent the EU.

2. The economy and the labour market in the context of the European Union

When questioned about the national economic situation in their countries, the overwhelming majority of the Portuguese (87 per cent), and half of Europeans (50 per cent) consider it to be negative. This position changes when questioned about their perception of the European economy, with the majority of Europeans (58 per cent) and of the Portuguese (52 per cent) considering it quite positive. If we turn to opinions on the national labour markets of Member States, we again find a majority of negative perceptions, both of European citizens in general (70 per cent), and the Portuguese specifically (91 per cent).

Another aspect analysed in this Eurobarometer is the perception of citizens regarding the common market and its impact on the national economy of the Member States. Here, the respondents appear to differentiate two distinct levels of impact. Asked about the impact of the common market at an internal level, the majority of Europeans (61 per cent) and of the Portuguese (57 per cent) declare that it has had a positive effect through the increase of internal competition in several sectors of the economy. However, this assessment becomes less positive when questioned about the impact of the common market on the international

competitiveness of national firms, even if positive evaluations outnumber negative ones in both Europe as a whole (42 per cent) and in Portugal more specifically (37 per cent).

Negative opinions about the impact of the EU emerge when the impact of the Union on Member States' national economies is questioned. For half of the Portuguese (50 per cent), the process of European integration has had a negative impact on their country's economy, although the majority of Europeans (56 per cent) thinks otherwise. Respondents' perception of the EU's impact on the national labour market is also largely negative, with a majority of both Europeans (51 per cent) and of the Portuguese (60 per cent) considering that the EU has had a negative impact on employment.

Another of the topics analysed in this survey was respondents' position on the ideological values underlying current economic processes, notably globalisation, free market competition and a trade-off between equality and individual liberty. When questioned if they would consider trading part of their individual liberty in exchange for greater equality and justice, the majority of Europeans (60 per cent) responded that they were willing to accept a lessening of their liberty to alleviate social and economic disparities, with the proportion of favourable responses in Portugal (80 per cent) one of the highest in the EU. The Portuguese are also those who least adhere to the view of free market competition as essential to economic prosperity – only 46 per cent of Portuguese support this notion, against a European average of 64 per cent. Lastly, regarding globalisation, a sizeable proportion of Europeans (41 per cent) and of the Portuguese (37 per cent) considers it to have adverse economic effects.

3. Toward an “ever closer union”?

In Portugal, the majority of citizens support the development of a political union between European countries (57 per cent), although the enthusiasm concerning this European project is lower than the one expressed by respondents in Greece, Slovakia and Slovenia. Among the Portuguese, there is a substantial amount of respondents who do not express support or opposition to this subject (25 per cent – the second largest proportion in the European Union). In addition to this support for further European political integration, there is a substantial proportion of Portuguese citizens who consider they benefited from the various measures that have been introduced as EU deepening proceeds, such as the single currency or the abolition/reduction of border restrictions (percentages between 46 and 72 per cent, always higher than the European average). Most of the Portuguese are also in favour

of shared sovereignty on various policy areas, being in general at least as favourable (and often more so) to shared governance than EU citizens in general.

According to Portuguese public opinion, the European Union must focus its attention on the fight against unemployment, poverty and social exclusion (issues referred to by around 60 per cent of respondents), but also guarantee the maintenance of peace and security in Europe (33 per cent). The high priority attributed to the former themes is consistent with the fact that economic matters are currently the chief concern for the Portuguese. Regarding the assessment of specific measures, as observed in previous Eurobarometer surveys, the Portuguese are more supportive of actions leading to a homogeneous deepening of the Union (such as the Constitution or the creation of common policies in the areas of defence, security and foreign affairs), and less supportive of a 'variable geometry' deepening that proceeds faster in some countries than others.

Regarding the European Constitution, a majority of Portuguese (60 per cent) supports its adoption, but there is also a considerable proportion of respondents that do not express opinion on this matter. Most of the Portuguese acknowledge that the Constitution is needed in order to ensure the efficient functioning of European institutions, and agree that its adoption will make the European Union stronger in the world, more democratic, efficient, socially-minded, competitive and transparent.

The enlargement of the European Union is also seen in a positive light by more than half of Portuguese citizens (54 per cent). The support for enlargement varies considerably according to the candidate country – in Portugal, as in the European Union Member States in general, public opinion is more supportive to the accession of Switzerland, Norway or Iceland than of Serbia, Albania or Turkey. Regarding this last country, the opposition to its membership of the EU in Portugal is high. However, the Portuguese tend to agree more with the arguments that make Turkish accession conditional on improvements in its economy and the respect of human rights, and less with perspectives that support an unconditional refusal of Turkish accession to the European Union.