

# EUROBAROMETER 67

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

SPRING 2007

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AUSTRIA

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Author: Heike Hausensteiner-Obermayr

## EUROBAROMETER SURVEY EB67.2

For the spring 2007 Eurobarometer survey (EB67.2), 1,011 citizens (age  $\geq 15$  years) living in Austria and having a sufficient command of the German language were polled in April and May 2007 by the “Austrian Gallup Institute Karmasin Market Research”. The random sample of Austrians for the survey was selected in accordance with the Austrian electoral districts. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in people’s homes. Concerning the accuracy of the observed results, readers are reminded that the survey results are estimated percentages within a respective confidence interval depending on the sample size.

For the complete Eurobarometer archive see:

[http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm)

## SITUATION IN AUSTRIA

During the survey period, from April 10<sup>th</sup> to May 1<sup>st</sup>, the Austrian population was still under the influence of the change of government in January and the new grand coalition between the Social-Democrats and the conservative People’s Party. On the one hand, this might have influenced the results with regard to trust in the Austrian parliament and the government, due to high expectations among the population. On the other hand, the political atmosphere is characterized to a high degree by disputes between the political parties concerning a reform of the school system and the purchase of Eurofighter jets in order to control Austrian airspace.

With regard to the European Union, Austrian media covered intensively the rotating presidency that Germany headed in the first half of the year. The reports were focused to a great extent on the reanimated debate about a constitution for the European Union, particularly as its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary was celebrated in March of this year.

However, the European Union is almost absent from the day-to-day agenda of the political parties and the government. In January, a lawsuit for breach of contract was initiated by the European Commission against Austria because of the restriction on access to universities. This measure (following a judgement of the European Court of Justice in July 2005) provoked some “EU-bashing” statements by, among others, high-ranking politicians.

## **GENERAL MOOD, ATTITUDES AND TOPICS OF CONCERN IN AUSTRIA**

Austrians’ overall satisfaction with their life in general remains constant. In the current Standard Eurobarometer survey, 84% of Austrians say they are very or fairly satisfied, 15% are not very or not at all satisfied. With these results, Austria is situated more or less in line with the EU average.

It is worth noting that the Austrians record significantly better results than the EU average when it comes to the economic and job situation in their country. They are ahead of the other Member States with regard to the status quo and their expectations as far as the economy (70% and 31%, respectively; EU: 38% and 28%, resp.) and the employment situation (71% and 35%, resp.; EU: 32% and 31%, resp.) are concerned. Nevertheless, one of the major concerns of many Austrians is the fear of losing their job (37%), followed by inflation (25%), crime (22%) and immigration (20%).

Austrians are critical about the living costs in their country. They are still estimated as being “better” than in the other Member States by a majority of 53% (-16 pp). Yet, the portion of those saying that the living costs in Austria are “less good” than the average of the European Union countries has increased sharply within one year and is now at 30% (+16 pp).

Nevertheless, the Austrians consider their country as being liveable to a greater extent than respondents from other Member States. For instance, as far as several aspects of social security (such as the welfare or the pensions system), or education, the environment or public transport are concerned, the results in Austria are far ahead of the EU average. The Austrians outnumber respondents in the other EU countries with regard to the confidence they have in the media: 75% trust the TV (EU: 58%), 74% trust radio (EU: 66%) and 64% the written press (EU: 47%).

### **AUSTRIA'S MOOD REGARDING EU-MEMBERSHIP**

Concerning the key question of the biannual Eurobarometer survey, i.e. "Do you think that Austria's membership of the European Union is 'a good thing' or 'a bad thing'" Austria's attitude remains unchanged: 36% think positively, 25% negatively. Remarkably, more than one-third of those interviewed, i.e. 37%, think that Austria's EU membership is "neither a good, nor a bad thing". These results are far below the EU average and show that Austria is one of the most EU critical countries (after the United Kingdom).

44% of the population are of the opinion that, on balance, Austria has benefited from being a member of the European Union; however, 43% disagree. In this regard, Austria is again one of the most critical Member States. Yet, young people and men tend to have a more positive attitude, whereas the elderly and women tend to be more eurosceptic. The major points of criticism are, e.g. that Austria's interests are not well taken into account in the EU (56%), that the Austrians' voice does not count in the EU (62%), that they do not feel very much involved in European affairs (70%), and that the biggest countries have the most power in the EU (83%).

## **AUSTRIA'S MOOD CONCERNING A CONSTITUTION FOR THE EU AND FURTHER ENLARGEMENTS**

Austria's positive attitude towards a constitution for the European Union remains stable. Before the idea of a new reform treaty was agreed at the EU summit in June, 49% of Austrians (surveyed in April-May) supported a constitution; 34% were against it and 17% said "don't know". These results again show a gender and a generation gap: Young people and men are more supportive whilst the elderly and women tend to be opposed to it. Furthermore, 68% of Austrians favour an EU "Foreign Minister" who can be the spokesperson for a common EU position to a much greater extent than they are for a constitution in general.

During the last semester, between EB66.1 and EB67.2 surveys, the share of Austrians who are opposed to further EU enlargements has continued to increase. Now, 64% (+7 pp) are against and 28% (-3 pp) are in favour. The big enlargement round of the year 2004 provoked mixed feelings among the Austrians: 32% are of the opinion that the accession of ten new Member States had a positive impact on the European Union. For 27%, it was negative and, for 29%, it was neither positive nor negative (12% said "don't know").

## **THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE FUTURE**

The results of the EB67.2 survey underline the position of the national governments that do not allow majority votes, i.e. harmonization, in certain political fields: According to the poll in Austria, as well as in the other EU countries, decisions should be taken by national governments as far as pensions (80%, EU: 72%), the social welfare system (78%, EU: 66%) and the fight against unemployment (64%, EU: 58%) are concerned. The same applies for taxation (74%, EU: 68%) and education (70%, EU: 64%).

It is worth noting that the Austrians prefer national against joint decisions at EU level especially regarding immigration (63%) and energy matters (58%). At the EU level, however, the population decisively opts for common decisions within the Union concerning immigration (59%) and energy questions (61%).

In Austria, the speed of building Europe being faster in one group of countries than in the other countries is favoured by a majority of 47%. 38% are against such a “two-speed Europe”.

Concerning the future of the European Union in general, 53% of Austrians are optimistic, 38% are pessimistic. With these values, Austria lies far below the EU average levels of 69% and 24%, respectively. Regardless of the broad EU scepticism in the country, a majority of the population thinks that, in 50 years from now, the EU will have its own army (54%), a more powerful currency than the dollar (52%), as well as its own president directly elected by European citizens (47%).