

# EUROBAROMETER 67

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

## SPRING 2007

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ESTONIA

This survey was requested and coordinated by Directorate-General Communication.

This report was produced for the European Commission's Representation in Estonia

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## Introduction

This summary is based on the results of **Standard Eurobarometer 67.2** that was conducted from **April 10 to May 15 2007 in 27 European Union Member States**, two candidate countries (Croatia and Turkey) and in the Turkish Cypriot community.

In the case of time trends, it should be kept in mind that during earlier surveys the basis for comparison was the average of 25 European Union member states. As of spring 2007, the basis for comparison is the average of 27 member states.

**In Estonia**, fieldwork was carried out from April 16 to May 14 2007. In total, 1005 respondents were interviewed, 1001 of whom had Estonian citizenship. When interpreting the results, it should be borne in mind that the target group of the survey was people who were citizens of at least one EU member state and who were able to answer the questions in Estonian or Russian. The survey does not represent the opinion of permanent residents of Estonia who do not have European Union citizenship or who have not defined their citizenship (owners of so-called grey passports). To avoid linguistic clumsiness, the report refers to the opinion of Estonian citizens.

The survey was conducted during a period of **extraordinary events**: the Bronze Night or the street riots initiated by the non-Estonian part of the population resulting from the relocation of the memorial for Red Army soldiers who had fallen during the World War II, which, in turn, led to a deterioration of relations between Estonia and Russia. It was in association with those events that the support given by the European Union to Estonia became evident, a fact that did not go unnoticed by common citizens.

The spring survey shows that the level of satisfaction with life in general has remained stable at the level it reached after a sudden increase last autumn. Evaluations of the country's economy and personal financial situations continue to be high but there are still shortcomings seen in the development of the social aspects compared with the average European level. When it comes to expectations for the future, the more euphoric attitudes have become somewhat more realistic approaches towards the future: in general, citizens are rather confident about the future, believing that the current good situation will continue or - to a lesser extent than in the autumn - that it will improve. When it comes to economy and employment, on the whole, there has been a certain increase in the share of those people in whose opinion things may get worse in these areas in the near future. At the same time, citizens do not believe that such developments might directly affect them or their family.

Regardless of their levels of satisfaction, citizens see a lot of room for improvement compared with the European average level. The situations of the Estonian environment and the education system receive the highest evaluations compared to European Union average. Pensions, social welfare and healthcare systems are considered bad compared with the European Union average.

The fact that the survey took place during rather extraordinary events – Bronze Night followed by strained relations between Estonia and Russia – can also be seen in the survey results. This impact may or may not persist. In the April-May period, trust in political institutions – Riigikogu (the Parliament) and government – increased significantly. The intermittent increase of different European Union-related indicators in a positive direction can be associated with these same events. Thus, as a result of the European Union's solidarity, support among citizens regarding Estonia's membership of

the European Union and the perceived benefits from European Union membership have increased; citizens are also more aware of various European Union institutions and trust them more. Citizens sense more and more that the European Union guarantees security, economic and political stability. When evaluating the impact of accession on Estonia, more than three-quarters of the population admit that it is positive or at least neutral. Support for several European Union policies and directions such as the common defence and security policy, common foreign policy and the constitution for the European Union has increased among citizens, other than when it comes to further enlargement and the euro.

In terms of the future of Europe, Estonian citizens are very positive, believing that, in 50 years from now, the EU will not be only a secondary economic power, and that it will have, with the euro, a more powerful currency than the dollar and might even have its own army. At the moment, Estonian citizens see the economy as the primary unifying factor of the European Union. To strengthen the Union, social issues and crime should be fought in the opinion of citizens.

### **General attitudes at the national level**

- The biggest change in Estonian citizens' **satisfaction with their lives in general** took place in the autumn of 2006 when satisfaction increased by 10 percentage points to 79% compared with spring 2006. By the spring 2007, the level of satisfaction with life has not changed: 78% of people are satisfied with their lives and 22% are not satisfied. Those indicators are similar to the average satisfaction level of European Union's 27 member states – 80%. On average, Estonian citizens are more satisfied than the citizens of other member states that joined in 2004 (74% are satisfied with their life).
- General satisfaction with life has increased hand in hand with the improvement of evaluations regarding the **development of Estonian economy**. As in autumn 2006, in spring 2007, 81% of Estonian citizens thought that the economic situation in Estonia is good or rather good. However, only 5% of citizens dared to deem the situation to be very good (6% in the EU on average).
- **Personal financial situation** receives increasingly improved scores. 72% of Estonian citizens find that their personal financial situation is either very good or rather good. Their share has increased by 7 percentage points compared with autumn 2006. The share of people who are not satisfied with their financial situation has dropped from 33% to 24%.
- When it comes to their **personal situation next year**, people feel secure. There is an almost equal number of those who believe that their personal life in general will improve during the next 12 months (46%) and those who believe that there won't be any significant change (44%). Compared with autumn 2006, the share of those who expect improvement in the future has somewhat decreased (-4 percentage points) and the number of those believing in stability has increased (+3 percentage points).
- The optimistic outlook in terms of the future financial situation of the household, as well as Estonian economy, is on the decline. The share of those who find that **the economic**

**situation will improve** has dropped from 50% to 37%. The share of those who believe in economic stability has not changed significantly (38%). At the same time, there has been an increase in the number of people who fear that the situation will become worse: an increase from 6% to 19%. The same trend can be seen when it comes to **the near future of the financial situation of the household**: the number of those who believe that their family's financial situation will improve during the next year has dropped from 45% to 38%. The majority rather believes that the situation will remain the same (53%).

- The optimistic outlook towards improvement in the **employment situation** has decreased. The share of those believing in the improvement in the situation has dropped to 38%. There is an equal number of those who find that the situation will not change. There has been a slight increase among citizens who fear that the situation will become worse: an increase from 8% to 12%. No significant changes have taken place regarding citizens' **personal job situation** compared with autumn: the majority of Estonian citizens – 45% - continues to believe that their job situation will remain the same and one-third expects that the situation will improve.
- In case of the four areas – **economic situation in Estonia, employment situation, cost of living and energy prices** – the majority of Estonian citizens believe that **the situation in Estonia is not better than in the member states on average**. 33% of the citizens consider the employment situation to be better than the European average, 26% think that about energy prices, 24% - the cost of living and 22% - the economic situation in Estonia (4% increase in a year). When we look at the situation two years ago, 13% of citizens considered the Estonian economy and 12% considered the employment situation to be better. Thus, citizens feel increasingly more than in these areas we are catching up with the European average.
- In areas associated with public services and social protection – **healthcare system, pensions, social welfare, educational system and situation of the environment** – the highest evaluations **compared with the EU average** were given to the situation of the environment (42%). In the case of the educational system, 35% of the citizens considered the situation in Estonia to be better while 42% thought that it was below the EU average. In other areas, the situation in Estonia is considered to be significantly worse than the EU average. In the case of pensions, 83% of the citizens consider the situation to be worse, 77% do so in the case of the social welfare system and 67% in the case of the healthcare system.
- **The most significant problem** in Estonia is still considered to be crime (44%), followed by inflation (39%, an increase of 9 percentage points compared with autumn 2006), the healthcare system (20%, a decrease of 13 percentage points compared with autumn 2006) and the economic situation (17%). A new issue that has come up is defence and foreign affairs, which was mentioned by only 2% in autumn 2006 but by 14% of citizens in spring 2007. This issue has most likely emerged in association with the so-called Bronze Night events that took place at the end of April and the reaction of Russia towards Estonia as a result.
- The most **trustworthy institutions** in Estonia in spring 2007 were **television** (78%), **radio** (76%) and **the European Union** (72%, an 11 percentage point increase compared to the previous autumn). Compared with last autumn, trust in political institutions - **Riigikogu (the**

**Parliament) and government** - has increased significantly as well. Trust in the government has gone from 53% to 66% and that of the Riigikogu – from 41% to 60%, which makes these the highest levels of trust seen in Eurobarometer surveys over the last two and a half years. Since the interviews were carried out during and after the Bronze Night, the increase in levels of trust reflects citizens' support for the actions of politicians.

## Image and meaning of European Union

- **Support for membership of the European Union** has increased in Estonia, as well as in other member states. In Estonia, 66%, instead of the earlier 56%, support Estonian membership of the European Union and this indicator has clearly been influenced by the events that took place in Estonia at the end of April.
- Since the spring of 2006, the perception of the benefits Estonia receives **from the European Union membership** is on the increase. In the spring of 2007, already 78% of citizens admitted the benefits. The Estonian indicator is approximately 20 points higher than the European Union average.
- Estonian citizens increasingly find the **European Union beneficial when it comes to increased safety, economic and political stability**. The number of those who consider that European Union guarantees increased safety has grown from 56% to 70%. In Europe on average, the total of 51% of citizens feel there has been an increase in economic stability, while in Estonia the number is 71%. People believe more and more that belonging to the EU also guarantees increased political stability: in Estonia, 66% of citizens share this view (an increase of 10% compared to the autumn of 2006). Views in Estonia are much more positive in regard to this issue than in other new member states where only 48% of citizens believe that becoming the member of European Union has brought about an increase in political stability.
- In the eyes of Estonian citizens, **European Union is above all modern** (76%), democratic (74%) and efficient rather than not because 53% of citizens found that the word "inefficient" describes the EU poorly. Compared with autumn 2006, the number of people who consider European Union inefficient has decreased by 11%.
- Among the **keywords associated with the European Union** the most positive associations came with the words company (88%), welfare state (88%) and competitiveness (86%). Flexibility (85%) and free trade (83%) also received positive evaluations. Estonians associate protectionism with being something positive the least (28%), but a total of 45% were unable to express an opinion in case of this keyword.
- Estonian citizens' **awareness of European Union institutions** has improved compared with the past. The more known the European institution is, the more significant its role is considered to be by citizens and the more they trust it. The best known and trusted institution is the European Parliament – trust in it has increased by 13 percentage points compared with autumn 2006, reaching 65%. The European Commission is known by 86% (+4 percentage

points) and trusted by 63% (+11 percentage points) of Estonian citizens. Awareness of the activities of the Council of European Union has reached the level of 80% and trust - 59% (+12 percentage points). Of the institutions mentioned, the European Central Bank is trusted the least (60%).

- Similar to the average of other new member states, people in Estonia are of the opinion that **joining the European Union has been positive for the country rather than not**. 56% consider Estonia's accession positively. However, the share of people who have a neutral attitude towards accession is rather big - 26% - as well.

## EU policies

- In the opinion of Estonian citizens, the **interests of Estonia are well taken into account in the European Union** – 50% believe that Estonian interests are well taken into consideration. In spring 2006, this indicator was much lower – 38%.
- In Estonians' opinion, the **main power in European Union** still belongs to the bigger countries (79%). This opinion has changed slightly in half a year (compared with autumn 2006) – when 84% of its citizens thought that the power in the EU belongs to the bigger countries. The fact that Estonians believe that Estonian interests are now taken more into account at EU level than before probably plays a role here.
- 67% of Estonian citizens think that **European decisions are the subject of negotiations in which the opinions of the national governments of all member states are taken into account**. 22% think that this is not so.
- **In the opinion of Estonians, the Estonian government should be the primary decision maker** when it comes to taxes, pensions and the educational system. More than half of the citizens are of the same opinion when it comes to consumer protection, transportation, healthcare, social welfare, fighting unemployment, and agriculture and fisheries. **Decisions should be made jointly** in the cases of fighting terrorism, scientific and technological research, defence and foreign affairs, in addition to protecting the environment, energy issues, fighting crime and supporting regions facing economic difficulties.
- Regarding the idea of **“two speed Europe”**, Estonian citizens are doubtful. Only around half (51%) agree with the statement according to which those countries that are ready to intensify the development of the common European policy in certain important areas, should do so without having to wait for the others. 30% of them support the statement that those countries that are ready to intensify the development of the common European policy in certain important areas, should wait until all EU member states are ready for it. A total of one fifth of citizens (19%) has no opinion on this.
- **Support for the common defence and security policy in the European Union** has reached 86% (+4 percentage points). Support in Estonia is similar to support in other new member states (85%). In older member states, support is somewhat lower (76%).

- **Support for a common foreign policy** started to increase in the autumn of 2005 (62%) and reached 72% in spring 2007. The average support level in the EU is the same.
- **Support for the constitution for European Union** has grown from 55% to 61% in half a year. Nevertheless, 28% of the citizens are neutral when it comes to the constitution. In Europe in general, support is somewhat higher (66%) and the number of those in doubt is also smaller (14%).
- **Support for the future enlargement of European Union** has dropped to the level it was at two years ago - 55%. In Europe in general, it is lower: 49%. Support is lower in old member states (43%) and higher in new member states, where enlargement is supported by almost 70% of citizens.
- **Support for European monetary union and the euro** is the lowest among Estonian citizens, remaining on the level of 51%. Support has remained stable on this level for the last few years.
- **In globalisation** Estonians see primarily the opportunity for companies to expand to new markets (28%) but they also admit the danger for Estonian companies in the form of increased competition (22%). In Europe in general, globalisation is primarily understood as relocation of some companies to countries where labour is cheaper (35%) but, in Estonia, this was mentioned by only 13% of citizens. Globalisation is not associated much with foreign investment either in Estonia (16%) or on the European level on average (14%).
- People have doubts in Estonia, as well as Europe in general, when it comes to whether the **European Union enables European citizens to better benefit from the positive effects of globalisation or not**. In Estonia, 56% of citizens believe this while 24% do not have position on this matter.

## The EU and its future

- **The most positive results of European integration** are considered to be the free movement of people, goods and services within the European Union (74%) and peace among the member states of the European Union (58%). In Europe, in general, those two results come first as well. Compared with the European average, Estonian citizens acknowledge the euro less positively: 13% of Estonian citizens cited it while the EU27 average is double: 27%.
- **Estonian citizens are optimistic about the future of European Union** – 77% are optimistic and only 18% are pessimistic. In Europe on average those indicators are slightly lower – 69% of citizens are optimistic and 24% pessimistic.
- Estonians believe that **in 50 years European Union** will be a significant economic power in the world with a strong common currency as well as an army. 59% of citizens believe in the existence of the European Union's own **army** in the future and 58% believe that the **euro** will be a stronger currency than the dollar. Only one-third believe that, in the future, the European Union will only be a **secondary economic power**. Estonian citizens are more sceptical than

other Europeans when it comes to the existence of a president directly elected by the citizens in 50 years: 39% of Estonians and 51% of European citizens find that possible.

- **In the opinion of Estonians, the following create the feeling of community among European Union citizens the most** – the economy (39%), culture (25%), languages (21%) and the welfare state (21%). Estonians see solidarity with poorer regions (12%) and religion (9%) as the factors that create the feeling of community the least. In new member states, the European Union is considered to be primarily an economic union; in the old member states, cultural links are considered equally important.
- **The aspects that should be emphasized to strengthen the European Union in the future** are, in the opinion of Estonians, **social issues** (25%) and **fighting crime** (35%). In raising these aspects, Estonia is very similar to other new member states. In the old member states, opinions are different – dealing with environmental issues (34%), fighting crime (33%) and addressing immigration issues (29%) are considered the most important, followed by energy and social issues. Energy issues were mentioned by 23% of Estonian citizens.