

EUROBAROMETER 67

PUBLIC OPINION ON THE EUROPEAN UNION

SPRING 2007

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CROATIA

The present opinion poll was requested and coordinated by the DG Communication.
The present report was made for the Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Croatia

The present dossier does not represent the position of the European Commission

The interpretations and opinions hereto expressed are solely that of the author.

Introduction

The Standard Eurobarometer opinion poll is carried out twice a year. The present one, the 67th (EB 67) was carried out in the period between 10 April and 15 May 2007 in all 27 European Union Member States, two candidate countries under accession negotiations: Croatia and Turkey (the opinion poll was not carried out in the Former Republic of Macedonia which has not yet been set a date for the opening of accession negotiations), and in the part of Cyprus under Turkish administration. This is the sixth such opinion poll that includes Croatia.

During the half-year period between the previous and the present Standard Eurobarometer opinion polls, Germany succeeded Finland in assuming presidency over the European Union. The German economy came out of the recession and its more rapid growth encouraged the other EU economies as well. This is certainly one of the reasons for a renewed growth in optimism of EU citizens shown by this opinion poll. The second indicator of increased optimism is the fact that, on 1 January 2007, two new Member States, Bulgaria and Romania, joined the EU. As these are medium-sized and relatively undeveloped countries, positive expectations of the citizens thereof regarding EU accession also on average positively influenced the increase in optimism in the EU.

In the period from the previous Standard Eurobarometer opinion poll to the present one, Croatia opened five new chapters in the EU accession negotiations – four under the Finnish presidency – Education and culture which was closed the same day, economic and monetary policy, customs union and enterprise and industrial policy, and one – intellectual property law - under the German presidency, and submitted eight negotiating positions and a fulfilled opening benchmark for one chapter – justice, freedom and security.

Domestic policy was marked by preparations for the pre-electoral campaign for the parliamentary elections due in autumn. The illness and subsequent death of the leader of the leading Social Democrat Party (SDP), Ivica Račan, and the announcement of Ljubo Jurčić as SDP's presidential candidate were the topics that were covered the most by the media.

The Standard Eurobarometer opinion poll, commissioned by the European Commission Directorate General for Communication, was carried out by the

consortium TNS Opinion & Social, composed of Taylor Nelson Sofres and EOS Gallup Europe. In Croatia, data were collected by the Puls agency and were treated and reported on by Brussels-located senior correspondent to Večernji list, Stojan de Prato.

A representative sample of citizens over 15 years of age among whom the opinion poll was carried out covered a total of 29.222 respondents – 26.717 citizens of the EU27, 1000 citizens from Croatia, 1005 from Turkey and 500 citizens from the part of Cyprus under Turkish administration. The researchers interviewed the respondents directly in their homes.

The term Croat used in the text does not refer to national affiliation but to a civil one. The term European refers to a responding citizen of any of the EU Member States.

1. Opinion climate

Satisfaction with their way of life of Croats has stagnated at the level of 72 per cent between the previous Standard Eurobarometer opinion poll and the present one and is eight percentage points lower than the European average. As regards short-term expectations in the EU, optimism is rising whereas, in Croatia, it is pessimism that is on the increase. Looking into the medium term, optimists prevail over pessimists both in Croatia and the EU. Unemployment and crime rates are the two most important issues that need to be tackled both for Croatian and European respondents, although the percentage of citizens in Croatia who are concerned about these issues is significantly higher than the European average. Unemployment, however, concerns a lesser and lesser percentage of Croatian citizens over time.

While trust in institutions has increased significantly in the EU27 overall, in Croatia, trust in the Government has slightly increased but is still at low level. Trust in the national parliament has stagnated at the same level, while trust in the EU has slightly increased and distrust in it has slightly decreased. However, the trust of Croatian citizens in the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU has fallen while trust in the European Central Bank has increased - even though distrust still prevails.

While trust in all the media has increased in the EU, in Croatia, trust in information from the Internet has decreased. Trust in the press has slightly increased while trust in the radio and especially TV has registered a noteworthy increase.

2. Opinions on the European Union

The majority of European respondents (52 per cent) perceive the European Union positively with only 15 per cent perceiving it negatively. In Croatia, both groups represent 30 per cent, while a further 38 per cent are undecided. Half a year ago, the EU was positively perceived by 46 per cent and negatively by 17 per cent of EU citizens. At that time, 33 per cent of Croatian citizens had a positive attitude towards the EU, while 29 per cent had a negative one. Only 29 per cent of Croatian citizens think that EU membership would be good for Croatia and those thinking it would be bad represent one percentage point less. 43 percent of Croatian citizens expect benefits from EU membership but still five per cent more do not. While the EU now counts 59 per cent of those who felt the benefits of EU membership, i.e. five percentage points more than last year, in Croatia, there are two percentage points less of optimists and five percentage points more of pessimists who have now taken the lead. Nevertheless, the majority of Croatian citizens (49:43 %) would feel safer and think that Croatia would be economically (53:39%) and politically (45:35%) more stable if Croatia were a Member State.

Croatian citizens do not differ much from the average EU27 citizen in the kind of Union they want. An approximate two-thirds majority of both wants the common European currency for which support in the past half year has increased. An even bigger majority - also with increasing support - wants a common foreign, as well as common defence and security policies. A two-thirds majority of both European and Croatian citizens also want the EU to have a Constitution - again with increasing support.

Support for continued EU enlargement has also increased. But while in the EU 27 it only increased by three percentage points and enlargement is supported by a bit less than the majority (49%), in the past half year, in Croatia, it increased from less than two-thirds to almost three-quarters (72%) of respondents. Opponents to further enlargement of the EU prevail in Austria, Belgium, France, Luxemburg, Germany and the United Kingdom. In Luxemburg, support for further EU enlargement is the lowest (25%), while it is highest in Poland (76%), followed by Croatia.

Croatian citizens inform themselves about the EU mostly through TV (78%), followed by the daily press (40%), radio (24%) and Internet (19%). Only nine percent said they do not look for information on the EU because they are not interested.

3. Distribution of authority

Close to three-fifths of Croatian citizens (59%) believe that the opinions of all the EU Member States are taken into account when adopting European decisions.

The majority of Croatian citizens want the Croatian Government and the EU to jointly handle the fight against crime and terrorism, defence and foreign affairs, political immigration, scientific and technological research, assistance to regions with economic difficulties, as well as energy, market competition and transport policies.

Croatian respondents would keep within national competence the following: taxation policy, the fight against unemployment, the education system, pension policy, environmental protection, health care and social welfare and economic policy.

Interestingly, the majority wants to keep consumer protection standards and common agriculture and fisheries funds under national authority which probably reflects their lack of adequate information.

4. The European Union - Fifty years

The 50th anniversary of the Rome Treaties which represented the beginning of the European Union evokes hope in almost half (49%) of Croatian respondents. Second, however, is concern (38%), while this anniversary means nothing to a third of the poll. Just above one-fifth (21%) feels satisfaction with that anniversary while 18% are disappointed with it. A tenth of the respondents are proud of it and nine percent have regrets.

For Croatian respondents, the free movement of persons (69%) and peace (60%) are the biggest achievements of European integration. For slightly more than one-fifth of Croatian citizens (22%), it is also the Euro, followed closely by student exchange programmes such as Erasmus (17%), thanks to which European students spend a study semester or a year at a university outside their country. Only a tenth of respondents consider the common agriculture policy to be an important achievement.

Croatian respondents consider the economy as the factor which most creates a feeling of community among citizens of the EU (35%), followed by sports (23%), religion (21%), geography (20%), culture and history (19%), languages (17%), legislation, solidarity with less developed regions, inventions, science and technology (16%).

Only 13 per cent point out common values and only 11 per cent of Croatian respondents mentioned the state of prosperity, i.e. the European social concept by

which the European Union distinguishes worldwide and considerably differs from the liberal USA and the materialistic China. Only four per cent of Croatian citizens think that the feeling of European community does not exist even if five per cent of them do not know why that feeling exists.

Anxieties leading to pessimistic answers by Croatian respondents can be observed from the following answers: while Europeans expect the influence of their country to grow within the EU, the majority of Croatian citizens expect the contrary; while two-thirds of Europeans think that the interests of their country are well taken care of in the EU, almost the same percentage of Croatian citizens think that the EU does not care for the interests of Croatia.

The majority of Croatian citizens (53%) are optimistic regarding the future of the European Union and, for Croatian respondents, the fight against crime is the most important issue that European integration should focus on. In second place is solidarity with less developed regions, followed by social issues.

A great majority of Croatian respondents are in favour of a Minister of Foreign Affairs of the EU, a European foreign policy that is independent of that of the US and a common immigration policy.

Although they do not expect the EU to be the world's leading economic power fifty years from now, the majority of Croatian respondents, nevertheless, think that the Euro will then be a stronger currency than the US Dollar. The majority of Croatian citizens expect the EU to then have a President elected directly by the citizens and its own army.

92 per cent of Croatian citizens consider the fight against global warming an urgent task for the EU. An equal percentage supports new policies aimed at reducing emissions of greenhouse gases by 20 per cent by 2020.

5. Globalisation

Croatian respondents mostly do not see globalisation (54%) in a positive light, and the majority (53%) does not believe the EU will protect them from its negative impacts. A relative majority (43%), however, thinks that the EU will help them better use the positive impacts of globalisation.

Economy-wise, Croatian respondents seem to be very liberal – 81 per cent are in favour of free trade, 60 per cent against protectionism, 67 per cent for liberalisation

and reforms and 77 per cent for flexibility. Still, 70 per cent look positively upon labour unions and 62 per cent at the welfare state.

6. Profiles

Croatian citizens are extremely attached to the place they live in (94%) and to their country as well (95%), which explains poor labour force mobility. Less than a third of Croatian respondents (32%) feel attached to the European Union.

As regards their political affiliation, Croatian citizens are mostly positioned on the political Centre (37%). In second place, with a quarter of respondents are the Left followed by the Right with less than a fifth (19%). 13 per cent of Croatian respondents do not know their political affiliation, while six per cent refuse to take sides.

Slightly more Croatian citizens own a car than the European average (73%), but fewer Croatian citizens (41%) have an Internet connection at home - eight percentage points below the European average.

In Croatia, 91 per cent of inhabitants possess their own house or apartment already paid off or in the process of repayment. This is 21 percentage points more than the European Union average. This shows both a bigger attachment of Croatian citizens to the place they live in and a poorly developed market for apartments to rent.

Conclusions

A great majority of Croatian respondents are in favour of common European policies; they expect to feel safer in the European Union and Croatia to be more politically and economically stable. In that, as well as in their fears, wishes and expectations, they do not differ much from respondents from the EU Member States.

However, the majority of Croatian respondents cannot decide whether to give the EU a positive or negative view, or whether Croatia's accession would be good or bad, and the majority does not expect EU membership to bring benefits to their country. While the trust in the EU of Croatian respondents has slightly increased, when it comes to European institutions, it has decreased considerably - except for the European Central Bank trust in which shows an increasing trend.

Such mutually conflicting answers indicate that Croatian citizens still do not know precisely what EU membership will bring to them and that they answer direct

questions about the EU based on emotions generated by articles and reviews in mostly sensationalist media. But when asked about concrete European policies, their very positive attitude indicates that, in the medium term, Croatian citizens see themselves as citizens of the EU.

As regards Euro-optimism Lika and Banovina ranked first in Croatia, followed by Zagreb.