

EUROBAROMETER 67

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

SPRING 2007

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

LATVIA

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

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

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”The Standard Eurobarometer 67” (EB67) survey was carried out in Latvia on 1013 respondents, from the 14th of April to the 15th of May 2007, for the sixth time since the country became a member of the European Union (EU). In January 2007, the EU was further enlarged - Romania and Bulgaria became member states. The Eurozone was also enlarged – to include the first country from the group which joined in 2004 – Slovenia.

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 27 European Union member states. In addition, where relevant, the report presents comparisons with the data from the previous EB surveys and data from the other Baltic States, as well as an analysis of survey results in various social and demographic groups of respondents.

The EB67 national report showed that Latvian respondents’ attitude to the EU became more negative reflecting dissatisfaction with Latvian domestic issues.

Climate of Opinion

EU27 citizens’ level of satisfaction with life in general is still relatively high, with 80% satisfied and 19% dissatisfied.

In the Baltic States, the country with the highest level of satisfaction with life in general is Estonia with 78%, followed by Lithuania with 65% and Latvia with 63%. The level of satisfaction with life in Latvia is still lower than the average of the EU and is still one of the lowest levels of satisfaction in the EU27. **The increasingly optimistic trends in Latvia shown in the last few surveys are not apparent in the latest survey.**

According to 24% of respondents in Latvia, less than the EU average, the **economic situation in their country** will improve. This is a large decrease of 7 p.p. from the last survey where Latvia was 11 p.p. above the EU average.

Latvian citizens believe that their **personal life** will improve next year. In “EB 62”, two and a half years ago, 33% of respondents believed that their personal life would improve. Now this has increased by 15 p.p. to 48%, in equal first place with the United Kingdom.

Latvian citizens believe that some areas of life, such as **household financial and personal financial situation**, will improve next year. The level of optimism for an improvement in the household financial situation over the next 12 months is 9 percentage points higher than the EU27 average. Similarly high levels are shown in Lithuania and Estonia.

Latvian citizens have shown a continuing trend in not worrying about their **employment situation**, although the official rate of unemployment is the seventh highest in the EU27.

Trust in National Institutions and the EU

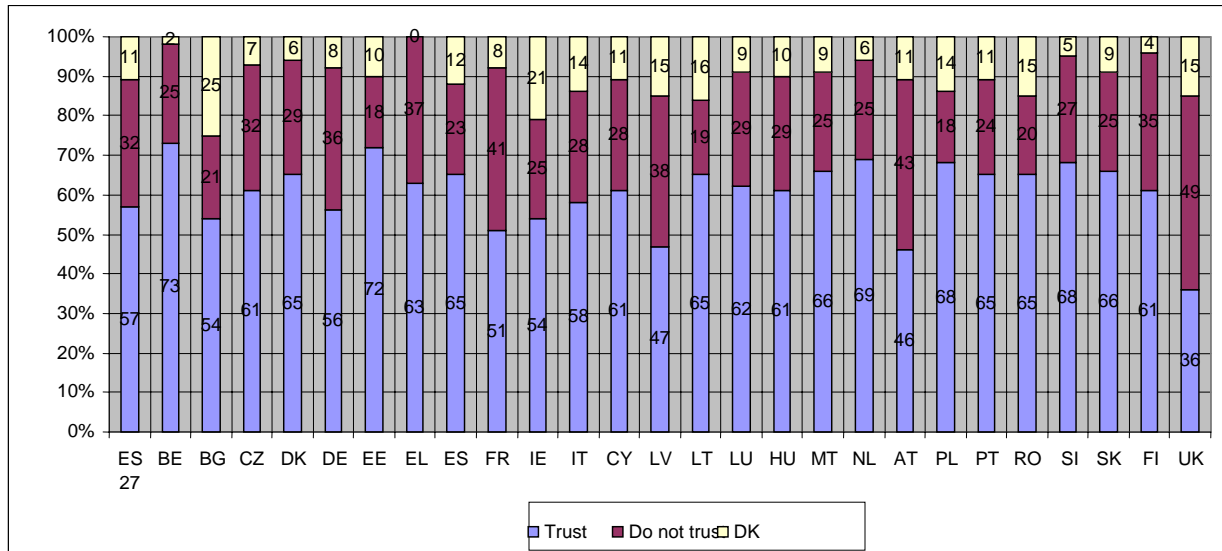
In Latvia, in the last six months since EB 66, the level of trust in the national government has decreased dramatically by 12 p.p. to 20%. Trust in the national government in Latvia is now 21 p.p. below the EU average. A similar tendency was also seen in the levels of trust in the national parliament. **Half a year after the last elections, the level of trust in the national parliament has dropped by 6 p.p. to 18%.** Compared with the EU27 average rate of trust in national parliaments, Latvia is now 25 p.p. lower.

The highest levels of trust in national institutions in Latvia include the mass media with TV 72%, radio at 66%, followed by the press at 47%. The level of trust in the internet in Latvia is 43% - notably higher than the EU27 average. The level of trust in the mass media in Latvia in the past six months has increased.

Trust in the EU, in the latest research, has shown a large increase of 13 p.p. to 57% in the EU27, which is the highest level of trust since 2004.

In the Baltic States, the level of trust in the EU varies markedly. Estonia has one of the highest levels in the EU with 72%, Lithuania is slightly above the EU average with 65%, but Latvian respondents' trust in the EU is the third lowest in the EU 27 (47%), which is 10 p.p. below the EU 27 average of 57%. Still, as in all previous EB surveys, Latvian respondents' levels of trust in the EU are higher than their levels of trust in their own national institutions.

QA16.7 I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions. For each of the following institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it.



Trust in the EU Institutions

The most well-known EU institution is the **European Parliament (EP)**, with 87% of Latvian respondents recognizing it, in contrast to the EU27 level of 89%. The EU27 rate of trust in the EP is higher than in Latvia, the difference showing a marked decrease.

The second most well-known EU institution in Latvia (47%) and in the EU27 (52%), as in previous "EB" surveys, is the **European Commission (EC)**. The rate of trust in the EC in Latvia has decreased to one of the lowest levels in the EU, whereas, in the EU27, this level has increased. A continuing problem is the high level of Latvian respondents who do not have an opinion regarding the European Commission – 28%.

The third most well-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 EU27 is growing very slowly. The rate of trust and recognition of the Council of Ministers of the EU in Estonia and Lithuania continues to increase. However, in Latvia this level of trust has decreased.

Knowledge of the EU

The most commonly used sources for obtaining information about the EU in Latvia are **television** with 63% of those polled (EU27 – 63%) giving this response, followed by **radio** 31% (EU27 – 28%), followed by the **daily newspapers** with 33% (EU27 – 41%), and **other printed media** with 19% (EU27 - 15%). The rate of Latvians utilizing television as a source of information about the EU is higher than the EU27 rates. The rate of Latvians using printed media is lower than the EU27 levels.

In Latvia, there is a trend that the number of people using the aforementioned mass media is decreasing as well as the level of trust in them.

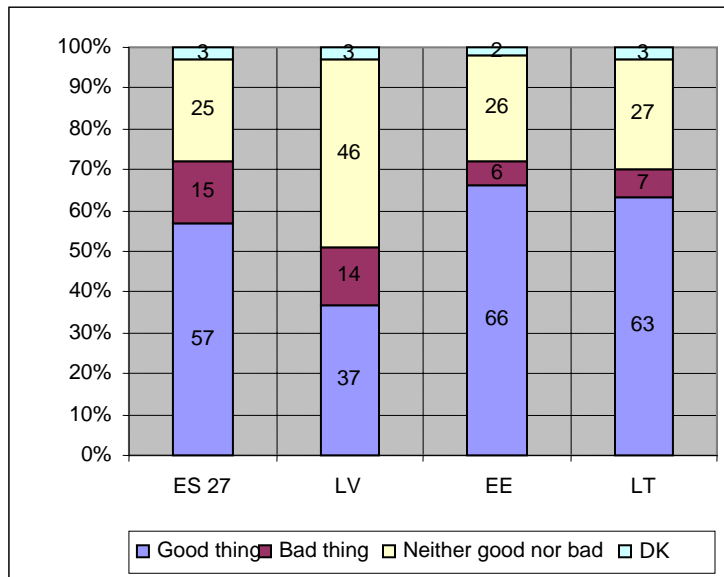
In Latvia, the number of people using the internet as a source of information about the EU is growing, and is now 37%. Throughout the EU the internet is becoming a more widely accessed source of information about the EU.

13% of Latvian respondents say they do not look for information about the EU at all.

Image of the EU

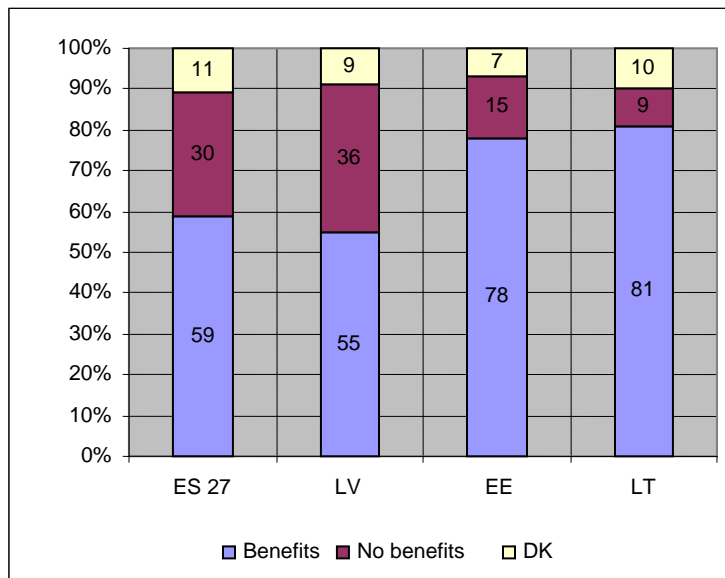
In the EU27, an increasing number of respondents believe their country's membership of the EU is a good thing. There has also been a decrease in the number of respondents that believe their country's membership in the EU is bad thing.

QA9a Generally speaking, do you think that membership of your country of the European Union is...?



In Latvia, there was a decrease in the rate of respondents who believe that EU membership is a good thing, down to 37% - the lowest rating in the EU27 and the lowest rating since Latvia joined the EU. 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 figure increased since the last report EB66.

QA10a Taking everything into account, would you say that your country has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the European Union?



The level of Latvian respondents who believe that being an EU member state brings more benefits than disadvantages has decreased (55%) to a level which is lower than the EU27 average (69%).

The latest survey shows that the difference between the Baltic States results is growing. Estonia has changed from being the most euro-sceptic country to the most euro-optimistic. Lithuania, in the past year and a half, had become more negative towards the EU, but now it is becoming more positive and has, once again, reached the same level as when they joined the EU. In the past half-year, in Latvia there has been an increase in negative attitudes to being a member of the EU and benefits of being a member state.

Latvian respondents primarily associate the EU with **the freedom of travel, work and study within the EU** – a figure which is significantly higher than in the EU27 overall.

Secondly, Latvian and EU27 respondents associate the EU with **peace**.

Thirdly, Latvian respondents associate the EU with **cultural diversity**. The number of Latvian respondents' associating the EU with **bureaucracy** has diminished, and no longer constitutes one of the top three places in the ranking.

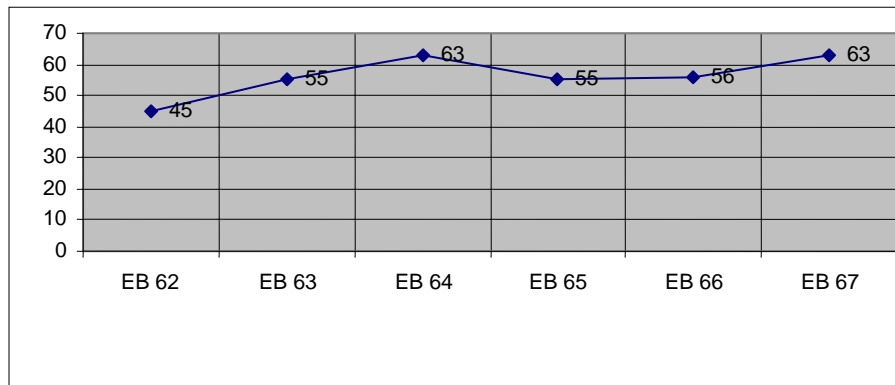
According to Latvian respondents, the loss of cultural identity, a higher level of crime and weaker border-control are the traits they least associate with the EU.

The main difference between Latvian and EU27 respondents is their opinions about the **Euro**. In the EU27, 39% of citizens think that the Euro is important for them personally, whereas in Latvia this level is only 14%.

Most significant problems in Latvia and the EU

For the fifth consecutive survey, Latvian respondents believe their **biggest problems are inflation / rising prices** (the inflation rate in Latvia, according to “Eurostat” for the past three years has been between 6 and 7 percent). This is significantly higher than the EU27 average. Latvia is the only country in the EU27 that sees this as a major problem. The general trend in the EU has been a decline in respondents who cite inflation/rising prices as a problem, with some countries reporting very small percentages of respondents (1% to 3%) who see this as a significant problem.

* **Concerns of Latvian respondents about inflation / rising prices (“EB 62”-“EB 67”)**



The state of the national economy is the third-ranked major problem in the EU27 and the second in Latvia

The major concern for EU27 respondents remains **unemployment** but the number of citizens who cite this has decreased. In Latvia, unemployment is ranked in fourth place.

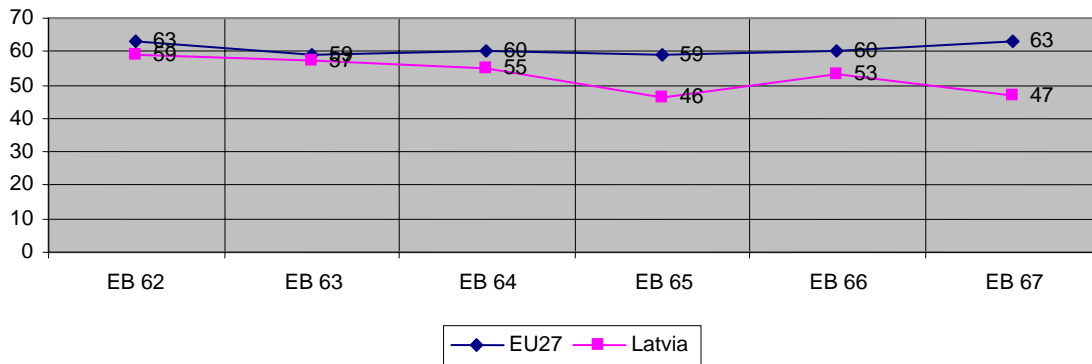
The biggest discrepancy between Latvians' ranking of problems and that of the EU27 is in relation to **terrorism** (EU27 12%, Latvia 1%).

A remarkable lack of concern regarding **energy supplies** exists throughout the EU. Only 4% of respondents in the EU27 and 2% of Latvian respondents regard this as a major concern.

European Monetary Union

In this survey, the level of support for the European Monetary Union, EMU, has increased by 3 p.p. to 63%. In Latvia, this level of support has decreased by 6 p.p. to 47%.

Attitudes towards EMU between autumn 2004 (“EB 62”) and spring 2007 (“EB 67”) in Latvia



In Slovenia, which joined the Euro zone this year, the highest level of support for the EMU is found - at 91%.

The newest 11 EU members are hesitant about joining the EMS. The least support for the Euro is in Lithuania (54%), Estonia (51%) and Latvia (47%).

Further enlargement of the European Union

The largest enlargement in EU history occurred on the 1st of May 2004, when 10 countries joined the Union. The EU15 basically regarded this enlargement neutrally – neither positively nor negatively. There were no EU15 countries where the percentage of negative or positive response was greater than 50%.

Those countries (EU10) that joined the EU in 2004 regard enlargement in a much more positive light. The average of the EU10 was 51%, 22 p.p. higher than that of the EU15 at 29%.

The newest members of the EU regard further expansion more positively than the EU15, with none of the newer member countries having a level of support lower than the EU27 average. **Latvia has the third lowest level of support of further enlargement** after Cyprus and Hungary.

Several countries which did not regard the 2004 enlargement in a very positive light – e.g. Belgium, the Czech Republic, Cyprus and Hungary – now are showing more support for further enlargement.

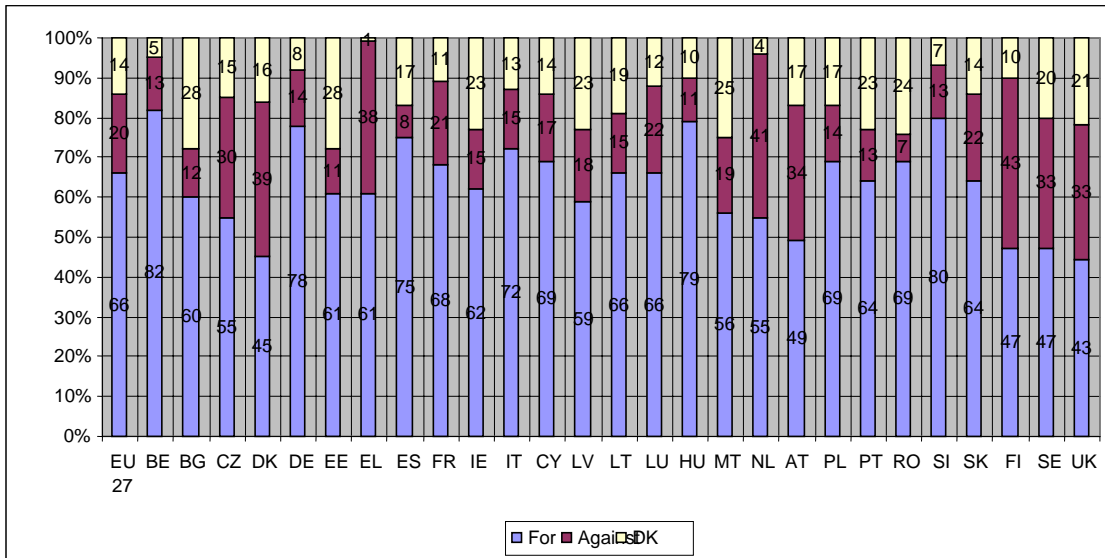
Latvia showed a 56% level of support for further enlargement (- 7 p.p.) which is the lowest level in the last two years.

The Treaty of the Constitution for Europe

The Treaty of the Constitution for Europe is once again on the agenda for the EU. The European Council has tabled this as the Reform treaty.

Across the EU27, support for the Treaty of the Constitution for Europe has a high level of support - at 66%. In France, where the treaty was rejected in a referendum, the level of support in the EB67 is 66%. Furthermore, the Netherlands, which also rejected the treaty, it has a level of support of 59%.

QA27.5 What is your opinion on each of the following statements? Please tell me for each statement, whether you are for it or against a constitutional treaty for the European Union.



In Latvia, support for the Treaty of the Constitution for Europe is 59%, an increase of 7 p.p. during the past year. The level of respondents in Latvia who have no opinion regarding the Constitution is decreasing, but is still high at 23%.