

EUROBAROMETER 67

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

SPRING 2007

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SWEDEN

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

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

This document does not represent the point of view of the European Commission.
The interpretations and opinions contained in it are solely those of the authors.

Executive Summary

A solid economy, better employment prospects and life satisfaction for all but a handful are parts of a snapshot view that Swedish people give of their mood and country in the latest Eurobarometer survey to emerge from the European Commission. It reveals that support for the country's membership to the European Union has climbed to 50% and that almost as many are in favour of the EU's adoption of a constitutional treaty.

The recurrent survey is one of the Commission's chief tools for gauging public opinion across the EU and beyond. This edition draws on some 29,000 interviews conducted this spring in the 27 EU member states, two candidate countries (Croatia and Turkey) and in the Turkish Cypriot Community. In Sweden 1005 people were polled between 10 April and 6 May.

In Sweden, the survey comes against the backdrop of a buoyant economy, a booming employment market and a relatively recent change of leadership. However, despite the fact of the economy going from strength to strength, the effects of the previous downturn have been slow to disappear from the job market.

It is perhaps no wonder then that, while Swedes are growing increasingly optimistic about the country's employment situation, according to the survey, 43% of the population still rates unemployment as being one of the most pressing issues facing the nation. According to Statistics Sweden, by June, unemployment stood at 3.9%, down 0.7 percentage points since the beginning of the year. In July, Eurostat reported that EU unemployment was down to 7%.

Better job prospects

A mere two-fifths, or 37%, of Swedish respondents think that their country's economic situation will improve in the year ahead, while 35% believe it will remain unchanged, according to the Eurobarometer survey. Swedish people tend to have a more optimistic outlook on the domestic economy than their counterparts in the EU member states on average. There, the largest share of people (39%) predicts that the economic situation will stay the same.

Other EU citizens are evenly divided between those who think their country will grow more prosperous in the next 12 months (28%) and those who see gloomier days coming for their national economies (27%). Moreover, 49% of Swedes predict that their household will be neither better nor worse off in the year ahead, while 38% believe their household budget will receive a boost.

Over half the population—54%—predicts that the employment market in Sweden will improve in the next 12 months, according to the survey. This represents a ten-percentage-point increase in six months. No other country in the survey has as large a share of residents

who believe that brighter days lie ahead for the domestic job market. Only one in three European citizens claims to do so, on average.

Perhaps a telltale sign of the times is that 97% of Swedish respondents say that they are satisfied with the life they lead. In comparison, four in five Europeans give the same response. Only Denmark and the Netherlands have as large a share of contented people among their ranks as Sweden. As for the year ahead, most Swedes either expect their life to improve (47%), or to remain the same (48%).

Jobs, health, environment key issues

Unemployment remains one of the most important issues facing the country, according to just over two Swedes in five. However, fewer people share this view compared with six months ago. Still, Swedish people are more likely to express concern about unemployment than their European counterparts on average. One in three EU citizens rates joblessness as a most pressing national matter.

In Sweden, 31% refer to the national health care system, increasingly fraught with delays and lack of capacity, as being a chief concern for the country. For 27%, protecting the environment is top of the list, while dealing with political hot potatoes, such as immigration and pensions, are singled out as being highly important domestic matters by merely 9% and 7%, respectively. Between a fifth and a quarter of the population of Sweden and of the whole of the EU agree on the urgency in fighting crime.

Majority backs membership, trusts EU

While Sweden's directly-elected parliament, Riksdagen, continues to enjoy solid majority support, trust in the government dipped (by six percentage points) to 55% in the last six months, according to the Eurobarometer. On the other hand, confidence in the EU's body politic has seen an 18 percentage-point jump to 56%.

Along the same lines, support for the Sweden's EU membership rose to 50%, with only 24% now claiming to look unfavourably on the country's union with the other 26 member states. Even though the level of support is still too weak to match the EU average (of 58%), the fact that half the population throws its weight behind Union membership is significant by Swedish standards and confirms a slow trend of increasing support.

However, only 44% of citizens say Sweden has benefited from being an EU member country, while 43% think it has not. Similarly, only two Swedes in five state that they have a positive image of the Union, compared with one in two EU citizens overall. Swedish people tend to perceive the EU as being modern, democratic and protective of its citizens, but also inefficient and "technocratic."

Environment, energy, issues for EU

There seems to be widespread consensus among Swedes on what the EU should and should not do. Decisions on terrorism, environmental protection, research and regional support

should be taken at EU level, they argue, confirming the outcome of previous Eurobarometer surveys.

Like their European counterparts, a majority of Swedish people now believe that crime should be tackled jointly in the EU, the study reveals. Not so, though, for a range of societal functions or basic services. The vast majority state that decision-making on pensions, taxation, health care, education—and unemployment—should be solely a national affair. However, transport and energy issues are exceptions.

There is broad support in Sweden and among EU citizens in general for the Union to tackle climate change as a matter of urgency. Ninety-five percent of people in Sweden, and 89% in the EU on average, consider that the bloc’s politicians should move swiftly to adopt new rules to cut greenhouse gases by at least 20% by 2020, to 1990 levels. Similarly, when Swedes are asked about which aspects of policy they think that the EU institutions ought to prioritize in the coming years, environment comes in first place and energy issues in second (Fig. III.1, from report).

Fig. III.1 Many Swedish-based and EU residents agree that the EU should emphasize environmental protection, energy issues and the fight against crime

POLICY AREA / POLITICAL ISSUE	SWEDEN, PERCENT %	EU, PERCENT %
The internal market	10	13
Cultural policy	3	8
Foreign policy	14	16
A European defence policy	5	12
Immigration issues	22	29
European education policy	7	14
Environment issues	75	34
Energy issues	41	25
Solidarity with poorer regions	21	17
Scientific research	15	13
Social issues	24	25
The fight against crime	40	33
None of the these	1	2
Others (spontaneous)	-	1
Do not know	2	6

Go ahead for ‘two-speed EU’- & constitution?

Almost three Swedes in five, or 58%, back the idea of giving the possibility to groups of member states to intensify cooperation in certain important policy areas without having to wait for the rest of the EU countries to be ready to do so, the survey reveals. In comparison, 47% of the total EU population approves of the notion of such a “two-speed Europe,” while 37% do not.

The prospect of the EU's adoption of a constitutional treaty continues to be controversial in Sweden, survey results suggest. The support for such a move has dipped to 47%, while 43% are against it. Sweden hosts a larger share of people who are sceptical towards the idea than the EU member states on average. In the latter, two in three come out in favour of agreeing a constitutional treaty for the Union which, following a deal struck by EU leaders at their June summit, looks more likely to re-emerge in the form of a "reform treaty" than a constitution.

Most Swedes are not ready to swap the Swedish krona for the euro, the survey suggests. Fifty-one percent claim to be against its introduction and thus the country's joining the European Monetary Union. Fewer people back introducing the European currency than six months ago.

Enlargement supported

Just over half of Swedish respondents, 52%, are in favour of further EU enlargement, the survey says. That represents a one-percentage-point decline in the support in the last six months, but which continues to hover above the EU average of 49%. When it comes to judging the impact of past enlargement, every second Swede says that the bloc's expansion from 15 to 25 member states in 2004 has had neither a positive nor a negative effect on the Union.

Approximately seven in ten Swedes take a positive view on globalization and believe that the EU helps them better to benefit from it, the survey says. However, only two in five say that being part of the Union helps to protect them against the negative effects of living in an increasingly globalized world.

Further, nearly seven in ten people in Sweden and in the Union on average are optimistic about the future of the EU, the study says. A comfortable majority predicts that, in 50 years, the bloc will have considerable diplomatic and economic clout in the world and its own army, but no president directly elected by European citizens.

To most Swedes, peace and the internal market are the most positive outcomes of EU integration and things that most serve to unite Europeans are economy, history and shared values.

EU challenges

Almost two Swedes in five feel that their voice counts in the EU. More than half the population, or 55%, does not. With that, they buck a positive trend. On the other hand, Swedish people tend to believe that their government's voice is heard and counted in the Union: As many as 86% argue for this to be the case. Only Germany has as large a share of residents who believe their country's voice counts in the EU. In addition, in Sweden, 63% say that their country's interests are taken into account at the EU level and that their Nordic nation of about 9.1 million yields more influence in the Union today than a decade ago. However, the view that the biggest member states have the greatest say in EU proceedings holds sway and is held by 85% of the population.

When it comes to understanding how the Union works, Swedish people are rather evenly divided between those who claim to do so (46%) and those who say they do not (51%).

Although Swedes are more likely to discuss politics with their friends than their European counterparts, according to the survey, only 16% percent claim to feel very much involved in what the EU does. This score represents only a slight decrease in people's level of involvement in EU affairs compared with six months ago, but comes on the back of a radical dip in the previous year.

THE STANDARD EUROBAROMETER is a survey carried out every six months on behalf of the European Commission. This spring edition builds on interviews with 26 717 residents of the 27 European Union member states. Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Denmark, Ireland, the UK, Greece, Portugal, Spain, Finland, Sweden and Austria are the first 15 countries to have joined the EU. Twelve more states have entered the Union since 2004: Cyprus (Cypriot Community), Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania. In addition, 1000 and 998 residents of the EU candidate countries Turkey and Croatia participated in the survey, respectively. Five-hundred interviews were conducted in the Turkish Cypriot Community of Cyprus.

Anna Strom, a journalist, authored this summary, and the Swedish-language report that goes with it, on behalf of the European Commission's Directorate General Communication and the Commission's Representation in Sweden. Technical specifications in English are available in the report. To contact the author, email: stromanna@gmail.com