

EUROBAROMETER 68

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

AUTUMN 2007

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AUSTRIA

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THE EUROBAROMETER SURVEY EB 68

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For the autumn 2007 Eurobarometer survey (EB 68) 1,015 citizens (age \geq 15 years) living in Austria and having a sufficient command of the German language were polled in September and October 2007 by the "Austrian Gallup Institute Karmasin Market Research". The random sample of the interviewed people was selected in accordance with Austria's 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/standard_en.htm

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF EB DATA

In this national report for Austria, the results are statistically estimated means within respective 95%-confidence intervals which determines the accuracy of estimations for the whole country and has to be kept in mind regarding comparisons to previous EB values. A difference of approx. \geq 6 percentage points (pp), i.e. a range of approx. ± 3 pp, determines significant trends (see the detailed confidence intervals for the sample $n=1,000$ respondents, cf. "Technical Specifications EB 68").

INTRODUCTION

During the survey period, the Austrian population was influenced by several disputes within the government parties, the Social-Democrats and

the People's Party. These disputes were over the reform of the school system, the legalization of nursing assistants providing care at home, some judicial reforms, as well as a discussion concerning asylum rights and especially those of the family of the young student, Arigona Zogaj, from Kosovo. From an economic point of view, the main topics in the media were a possible takeover of the Hungarian energy company "MOL" by the Austrian OMV and the situation on the international stock exchanges following the big banking and real estate crisis that had occurred in the USA during summer 2007. The media continued to cover the lawsuit against the Austrian trade union's bank, BAWAG.

The European Union still barely figured as a topic on the Government's and political parties' agenda. However, considerable coverage of the new EU treaty and the enlargement of the Schengen zone was noted in the media.

GENERAL MOOD AND ATTITUDES IN AUSTRIA

In terms of the economic situation, the social welfare and the democratic institutions in the country, the Austrians are doing very well. Their constant life satisfaction is shown once again by the Standard Eurobarometer 68 survey results: 87% of the Austrian population are satisfied with the life they lead and 12% are "not very" or "not at all" satisfied. Moreover, 43% are of the opinion that, in Austria, things are going in the right direction. 26% consider that things are going in the wrong direction.

With regard to the image of certain political institutions, the Austrians seem to be relatively confident and the EB results are within or above the European averages. The Austrian parliament, which is directly elected every four years, and the government could maintain their reputation: More than half the population, i.e. 52%, trusts the members of

parliament, 38% do not. 53% trust the government, 38% do not. Although the European Union lauds its democratic values, in the member states, political parties and their trustworthiness are in a bad way. In Austria, only 30% trust politicians, 61% do not. The European average is even lower than that. The trade unions, which are traditionally important on Austria's political stage and who suffered when the BAWAG scandal erupted in 2006, seemed to recover in the autumn 2007 survey: trade unionists are increasingly trusted by 42% of Austrians, while 46% still do not trust them.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ATTITUDES IN AUSTRIA

Austrians have a constantly positive attitude towards the economic situation and the welfare system in their country. The job market, in particular is judged, once again, to be above the EU average. Their biggest concern is no longer the fear of losing their job, but inflation and high prices. As far as immigration is concerned, Austria is out of step with the European average.

- **Economy:**

Invariably, 83% of respondents are satisfied with the Austrian economic situation; only 15% are dissatisfied. Concerning the decision-making process, they are split: 48% prefer decisions to be made by the national government and 48% jointly within the EU.

- **Welfare system:**

With a satisfaction level of 81%, Austria lies far above the EU average as far as their welfare system is concerned; only 16% are dissatisfied (EU: 46% satisfied vs. 49% dissatisfied). Thus, Austrian respondents definitely prefer national decision-making, i.e. regarding social welfare (72%), health (76%), and pensions (80%).

- Job market:

There has been a strong improvement on Austria's job market within the last year: 66% of respondents are satisfied with the employment situation in their country. 32% are dissatisfied. The EU average values are the other way round, i.e. 36% are satisfied, 61% dissatisfied with the job situation in their country.

- Inflation:

Austrians' biggest concern is the high inflation rate (41%), followed by unemployment and immigration (26% each). In order to combat higher prices, they have an equal preference for national measures and decisions taken jointly within the EU (48% each). However, as far as the role of the European Union in this area is concerned, in Austrians' eyes, the EU is clearly playing a negative role (54%).

- Immigration:

Regarding questions relating to immigration, Austrians are strongly in favour of decisions being made by their national government (57%) in contrast to the EU average. This appears to contradict their opinion that the EU should have a common immigration policy towards people from outside the EU" (68%). 46% of respondents in Austria think that the European Union plays a negative role in the immigration issue.

AUSTRIA'S MOOD REGARDING EU-MEMBERSHIP

The Austrians' scepticism towards Europe remains stable. 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", 38% think positively and 26% negatively. One-third of the respondents, i.e. 34%, think that Austria's EU membership is "neither a

good, nor a bad thing". This question is regularly double-checked by a similar question with regard to possible profits, which reaffirms the split and rather Eurosceptic opinion in Austria: In the eyes of 42% of respondents, their country has benefited from EU membership but 43% see it the other way round. So, the Austrians' mood still lies clearly below the European average values (in the EU27, 58% think that their country has benefited from EU membership and 58% that membership is "a good thing"). Nevertheless, half of Austrians do trust the European Union, i.e. 46% while 43% do not.

In order to explain Austria's mood towards the EU that invariably lies below the EU27 average, only hypothetical reasons can be derived from the Eurobarometer. The most frequently mentioned points of criticism are: Austria's interests are not well taken into account in the EU (57%), "my voice does not count in the European Union" (65%), "I do not feel very much involved in European affairs" (75%), and "the biggest countries have the most power in the EU" (85%).

Where further enlargement of the EU is concerned, there is still very strong opposition in Austria. 24% are in favour of new Member States in future years, 67% are definitely against.

THE EUROPEAN UNION IN AUSTRIAN MEDIA

Although given their rather Eurosceptic attitude, Austrians tend to expect more from media coverage about EU-related topics. In general, the media's trustworthiness is judged relatively high: 62% of respondents trust the written press, 71% the radio and 72% the TV; the Internet is trusted by only 40%. More than 50% of Austrians are satisfied with the extent of EU coverage in the written and broadcast media. Yet, there is an increasing tendency, i.e. 30%, to criticise EU information in the traditional media as being too little. More than half of respondents consider the

coverage of EU-related matters as being objective, but for 20% the European Union is presented too positively. A weak point in that regard seems to be the online media: Half of respondents are not able to make a judgement about either the quantity or the quality of information about the EU.