

# EUROBAROMETER 68

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

## AUTUMN 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

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.

## Introduction

This summary is based on the results of **Standard Eurobarometer 68** that was conducted from **September 22 to November 3 2007 in 27 European Union Member States**, two candidate countries (Croatia and Turkey), in the Turkish Cypriot community and in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

In the case of time trends, it must 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 September 27 to October 22 2007. In total, 1012 respondents were interviewed, 1011 of them had Estonian citizenship. When interpreting the results, it has to be kept in mind that the target group of the survey was people who had citizenship 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 a so-called grey passport).

According to the data from the survey conducted last autumn, the Estonian citizens continue to be satisfied with life in Estonia and continue to evaluate the economy and employment situation positively. When it comes to expectations for the near future, people primarily expect stability, having a rather wait-and-see attitude when it comes to economic development: compared to autumn there is an equal number of those believing that it will get better, worse, as well as remain stable, which is why we can say that only approximately one third of the citizens are afraid of the negative scenario. Compared to the rest of Europe, Estonian citizens stand out with their belief that the economy of their country will do well.

When it comes to employment, it is expected that the current situation will continue in the near future, which means that the labour market and the opportunities for finding a job are considered to be good. The signals given by the media concerning the possible changes on the labour market, especially when it comes to an increase in unemployment, had influenced the opinion of only a small share of the citizens by autumn. Estonian citizens see rising prices as a more important problem than the Estonian economy and employment situation, and it has now overtaken crime into first place;

The survey in the spring of 2007 took place right in the middle of the Bronze Night and its aftermath, which influenced attitudes towards different situations, including the European Union, in a positive manner. By autumn the attitudes have stabilised again, reaching a more regular level. This means that citizens are very positive when it comes to belonging to the European Union and trust that union more than European citizens on the whole. This is reflected in the high support to being a member of the EU, which is also associated with the benefits from membership by an increasing number of citizens. The role of the European Union in Estonia is considered positive in many areas: primarily defence and foreign affairs (in association with that, the fight against terrorism), the economy and environmental protection. At the same time, the myth of the European Union as the reason for rising prices persists.

## General attitudes at the national level

- Estonian citizens' **satisfaction with life** remained near the European average during last year. In the autumn of 2007, 78% of Estonian citizens were satisfied with life compared to 80% of European citizens in general.
- **The situation of the Estonian economy** is considered to be good by two thirds of citizens. The euphoric evaluations of the economic situation that were prevalent in the spring, with 81% of citizens considering the situation to be good, have become more realistic by now. **The employment situation** is considered to be good by 62% of citizens, which is two times what it is in Europe in general.
- **The state of the environment** is considered to be good or rather good by 62% of Estonian citizens. Over the last year the evaluation has changed very little, dropping only 4%.
- **Social welfare** is the only area where positive evaluations in Estonia still remain below the European average. Still, over the last three years the share of those giving positive evaluations has increased from 17% to 38%.
- 44% of Estonian citizens believe that their life in general will not change in 2008. At the same time, over the last year the share of those citizens who believe that **life will improve** in the near future has continued to decrease: from 50% in the autumn of 2006 to 46% in the spring of 2007 and to 44% in the autumn. The share of those people, who fear that life in general may get worse, has increased (+9% compared to spring).
- Attitudes towards how the **Estonian economy will do in 2008** are divided almost equally between three opinions. According to the results from autumn, 35% of citizens believe that the Estonian economy will do just as well next year as it did in 2007. But there is almost an equal number of those who fear that the situation may worsen – 32% - which is 13% more compared to the survey in spring. The number of those who think that the economy will do even better in 2008 has decreased by 8% to 29%.
- While an increasing number of people have certain fears when it comes to the economic development in Estonia, people are more optimistic when it comes to the **financial situation of their household**. It is believed above all that next year will be the same (47%) or even better (35%). Only 17% of citizens are afraid that their family is facing difficult times financially. Still, compared to the survey in spring the number of those people has increased (+10%) and primarily on the account of people who used to believe that the situation will remain the same.
- 43% of the citizens believe that the **employment** situation in Estonia will remain the same during the next year, their share has increased slightly compared to autumn (+4%). Similar to the future predictions that people make when it comes to their life in general as well as the economy, we can see a clear trend in this field – the number of people with optimistic attitudes towards the future has decreased (-9%) and the share of pessimists has increased (+7%). Almost one fifth of citizens fear that the employment situation will worsen.

- Regardless of expectations towards development in terms of employment, there have not been significant changes in people's evaluations when it comes to **personal employment situation** compared to last year: the majority of citizens would not predict any changes. 29% of citizens believe that the situation might improve and, unlike other previously mentioned questions, a total of 19% of respondents are unable to evaluate what the situation might be like next year.
- **The most important issues in Estonia** in the autumn of 2007 were considered to be inflation (58%), crime (33%), the healthcare system (18%) and the economic situation (17%). Unemployment, which causes most concern for the average European, was mentioned by only 7% of citizens.
- 56% of Estonian citizens are convinced that **things are moving in the right direction in Estonia**, 22% find that things are moving in the wrong direction and 17% that it is neither one nor the other. 5% of respondents were unable to answer. There have not been very big changes compared to the autumn of 2006: the share of those people who believe that things will go in the right direction has increased slightly (+3%) but so has the number of those who find that things are going in the wrong direction (+4%).
- Leaving out the trustworthiness of such media institutions as television and radio, **Estonian citizens trust State and law enforcement institutions the most**: the armed forces and police. The Defence Forces are trusted by 79% of citizens (+5% over one year). The trustworthiness of the police has increased significantly from 58% in the autumn of 2006 to 70% in the autumn of 2007.
- **The level of trust in the European Union** continues to be high in Estonia, as it is trusted by 67% of citizens. Compared to spring, the level of trust has decreased slightly (-5%) but the level in spring was rather an exception, being influenced by the statements made by the European Union in support of Estonia in association with the events of the Bronze Night.

## Views on the EU

- The share of citizens who consider **belonging to the European Union** to be a good thing has decreased slightly compared to spring – from 66% to 61%, being still above the average level of previous years. By autumn, a certain number of people who supported belonging to the EU took a more neutral position, considering belonging to the EU neither a good nor a bad thing (30%). Only 7% of Estonian citizens consider belonging to the EU to be a bad thing.
- 80% of citizens think **Estonia will benefit from being a member of the European Union**, which is slightly more compared to spring (+2%). Perceiving the benefit from being a member of the EU has continued to increase since the autumn of 2005, when 56% of citizens perceived there to be a benefit. At the same time, the share of those who do not see a benefit from belonging to the EU has continued to increase, being 14% in the autumn of 2007.

- 43% of Estonian citizens find that the interests of Estonia are well taken into account in the European Union, 50% find that Estonian interests are not taken into account enough and 7% of citizens are unable to say if the interests of Estonia are taken into account or not.
- Citizens continue to know and trust **The European Parliament** the most, 86% having heard of it and 61% trusting it. In Europe on the whole 88% of citizens know and 55% of citizens trust this institution. 80% of Estonian citizens know and 57% trust **The European Commission**. In Europe on the whole this institution is known by 79% and trusted by 50% of citizens.
- 26% of Estonian citizens believe that people are **very well or rather well informed of European policies** and 72% believe that people are not very well informed or not informed at all.

### European Union policies

- The citizens were asked to evaluate in the case of several areas **if it should be only the Estonian government making the decisions or should the decisions be made jointly within the European Union**. At least half of the citizens find that it should be up to the Estonian government to make the decisions in the following areas: taxes, education, pensions, fighting unemployment, consumer protection, agriculture and fishery and transport. In the case of health and social welfare, immigration, the economy and inflation the number of those supporting either level of decision making is almost equal. Competition issues, fighting crime, environmental protection, support for regions facing economic difficulties, energy issues, defence and foreign affairs, scientific and technological research and fighting terrorism are areas in which at least half of the citizens would leave the decision making to the European Union level.
- The **support** of Estonian citizens for **further enlargement of the European Union** has remained relatively unchanged during the last three years. It was at its highest immediately after joining the EU in the autumn of 2004 (63%) and then dropped to 50% in the spring of 2006. In 2007 the support remained stable at 55%.
- The citizens are rather doubtful when it comes to the **European Monetary Union and the single currency, the euro** – only approximately half of them (54%) support the idea of a single currency. Even though the support towards the euro has increased since the spring of 2005, the increase has been relatively small - 6% - increasing primarily on the account of those who didn't have an opinion before. 40% of citizens are against the euro.
- In the majority of significant areas, the **role of the European Union in Estonia** is seen as positive. This mainly concerns defence and foreign affairs, the fight against terrorism, environmental protection and the economic situation in Estonia. Unemployment is the only area in which case there is an equal number of those who consider the role of the EU as positive as well as those who find that it is neither positive nor negative. In the case of the education and healthcare systems, public transportation, immigration, pensions and housing the citizens mentioned the neutral role of the EU the most. The EU is associated negatively with tax issues and rising prices.

## European Union and media

- **Television** is trusted by three quarters of the citizens. **Trust in the radio** is comparable to that of television. **Trust in the press** is traditionally lower than that of television and radio. It is trusted by half of the citizens. Approximately one third of the citizens are unable to evaluate their **trust in the Internet, but**, at the same time, the citizens distrust it more than the press. In the case of the Internet, distrust is above average in the target group that comes into contact with it the most: 36% of 15-24-year-olds distrust it.
- In the case of all four types of media – television, radio, press and internet - at least 50% of the citizens consider the **information about European Union covered in media to be sufficient**. In the case of the press and television the number of people considering the information to be sufficient is the highest: more than 60%. In the case of radio, 55% consider the information to be sufficient and in the case of Internet - 50%. Only 4-5% think that there is too much information.
- Television, radio and press are considered to be equally trustworthy when it comes to information about the European Union, which means that slightly more than half of the citizens think that those **media channels are objective when it comes to this topic**. Television is considered to be objective by 65%, radio by 63% and press by 59% of citizens. Objectiveness of the Internet received the lowest evaluations (44%) but that is caused by a rather large number of people who have no contact with the Internet and thus lack the ability to evaluate it objectively.