

# **EUROBAROMETER 68**

**PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION**

## **AUTUMN 2007**

### **NATIONAL REPORT**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **PORTUGAL**

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

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

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## **1. Portugal and the Portuguese: the current state of public opinion**

The overall assessment of the national economic situation by the Portuguese is very negative. This Eurobarometer shows that 89 percent of the Portuguese consider the economic situation to be bad. Negative perceptions of the employment situation – evaluated negatively by 94 percent of the Portuguese – add to the overall pessimism regarding the national situation. Moreover, only 14 percent of respondents consider the social welfare situation in Portugal to be good, a level that is ten percentage points below that of a year ago. In these three areas, Portugal is among the EU countries with the most negative assessment of the national situation. At the European level, 49 percent of respondents consider their domestic economy to be bad, and 61 percent assess the employment situation negatively. Likewise, 46 percent of Europeans regard their national social welfare situation as being positive.

This negative evaluation of socioeconomic conditions in Portugal co-exists with a large degree of dissatisfaction with the way national democracy works. Some 60 percent of the Portuguese are dissatisfied with the functioning of their democracy, as compared to an EU average of 39 percent. Portugal, along with Italy, stands out from the remaining older member-states (EU-15) on this indicator. The levels of satisfaction with democracy are rather closer to those of the twelve new member-states of the fifth EU enlargement (NMS-12), such as Hungary (73 percent dissatisfied), Lithuania (70 percent dissatisfied), Bulgaria (60 percent dissatisfied), Slovakia (62 percent dissatisfied), and Romania (61 percent dissatisfied).

According to the Portuguese, the most important issues faced by the country are economic in nature. Unemployment is mentioned most often (by 54 percent of respondents), followed by inflation (35 percent) and the economic situation in general (25 percent). The cohorts that are most worried about the current unemployment situation are unemployed citizens, young people and those who live in large cities. While this economic dimension is also a feature of the concerns of EU citizens as a whole, it is less prominent at the European level (27 percent of references to unemployment, 26 percent to inflation, 17 percent to the general economic situation), and co-exists with other issues, most notably the fight against crime.

Concerning the future, only 16 percent of the Portuguese consider that the economic situation will improve in the next twelve months (against an EU average of 24 percent), and 15 percent have the same opinion regarding their household's financial situation (vs. an EU average of 25 percent). A disaggregated analysis of these

indicators shows that it is the elderly, those with fewer years of schooling, the unemployed and inhabitants of rural areas who are most pessimistic, exhibiting a percentage of negative opinions which is considerably higher than the national average.

## **2. Portugal and the EU: National Involvement in European Decisions**

The Portuguese hold a largely favourable opinion of the EU, with 56 percent of respondents having a positive image of the Union, against a European average of 49 percent. This result is closer to the level of the NMS-12 than of the EU-15, with the member-states of the new enlargement having, on average, a more positive view of the EU than their older counterparts.

Affective support for the European project has increased over the past year in Portugal. An average of 57 percent of the Portuguese considers membership of the EU to be a “good thing” in 2007, against an average of 49 percent in the previous year. The 2007 results thus suggest that 2006 constituted an exception in the level of affective support in Portugal, especially when set against the decade average of 55-60 percent. Looking at the data for this semester, the Portuguese present a level of affective support on par with the EU average (58 percent).

Regarding the instrumental component of Portugal’s support for the EU, the proportion of the Portuguese that believe that the country has benefited from membership has also increased over the past year, from 59 percent to 68 percent. Once again, 2006 seems to have been an atypical year in a decade of high instrumental support. The level of instrumental support in Portugal also exceeds the EU average, which stood at 59 percent in 2007.

This survey also asked respondents whether they preferred decisions to be made by their national government or jointly within the European Union in a number of policy areas. The Portuguese are among the Europeans who most support joint decision-making in economic affairs. Almost two-thirds of the Portuguese believe that the economy should be a joint competence of the Union, well above the European average of 48 percent. The same pattern emerges in the areas of pensions and of fighting inflation. Portugal is the EU country where support for joint decision-making on pensions is strongest (54 percent in favour), contrasting with a generalised European rejection of this option (the EU average of support stands at 26 percent).

Likewise, the Portuguese are among the Europeans who most strongly advocate that fighting inflation should be an EU-wide policy domain, with 64 percent holding this position against an EU average of 49 percent.

However, the evaluation of the role the EU plays in actual policy is less favourable. The proportion of Portuguese respondents who considered the EU to have a positive impact on the economy was of 19 percent, the lowest in the EU, and considerably below the European average of 39 percent. This largely negative assessment also occurs vis-à-vis the EU's role in fighting inflation and protecting the environment. In terms of the former, 46 percent of the Portuguese consider that the EU has had a negative impact in controlling inflation (against an EU average of 36 percent); in terms of the latter, only 28 percent of the Portuguese evaluate the EU's efforts for the protection of the environment positively, almost half the level of the EU as a whole (52 percent).

Both the Portuguese (47 percent) and Europeans in general (46 percent) consider by-and-large that their national interests are not taken into account by European institutions. Equally, the majority of the Portuguese feel they do not have a voice in the process of European integration, with this opinion being held by 72 percent of national respondents (as compared with an EU average of 61 percent).

### **3. Information, the Media and the EU in the context of the Portuguese Presidency**

This Eurobarometer indicates that the feeling of information about the European Union in Portugal is very low. The Portuguese present one of the lowest levels of agreement with the idea that national citizens are well informed about the Union (13 percent, as compared to an EU average of 18 percent), as well as the lowest proportion of respondents that consider that they understand how the Union works (32 percent, vs. an EU average of 40 percent). Regarding the latter indicator, there was a drastic drop in the percentage of national citizens who feel they understand how the EU works vis-à-vis the first semester of 2007. Despite these negative assessments, the Portuguese performed relatively well in questions that measure concrete knowledge of the European Union (54 percent of correct answers), and better than the EU average (42 percent). However, it must be noted that the proportion of correct answers varied considerably from question to question, and that

women, the elderly, the less educated and residents in rural areas tended to perform substantially worse than the national average.

The percentage of national citizens that received information on the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union through the media was of approximately 60 percent. Once again, women, the less educated, older respondents and those who live in rural areas were less exposed to media information on the Portuguese Presidency.

Media consumption in Portugal is characterised by an intensive exposure to generalist television networks and a weak consumption of the written press or radio. In addition, two-thirds of the Portuguese do not access any internet website. The analysis of the trust in these four media show that there are no considerable differences between Portugal and the EU average, but rather between the index of trust in the traditional media (television, radio and the written press) and in the internet (which presents a very high proportion of non-answers). Trust in the media dropped substantially in Portugal between the first and the second semesters of 2007. Additionally, in the case of the press and the internet, trust is especially low amongst older respondents, housepersons and the unemployed.

The role of the media in disseminating information about the European Union was gauged along two dimensions – the respondents' assessment regarding the quantity of information on the EU, and the objectivity with which European issues are covered. Regarding the first dimension, the Portuguese consider that European issues are sufficiently covered in the written press but insufficiently so on the radio, while opinions are divided with regard to television coverage. Turning our attention to evaluations of media objectivity, the majority of the Portuguese consider that the radio, the written press and the television are not biased in the way they portray the European Union, even if there was a decline in the perception of objectivity vis-à-vis the first semester of 2007.