

EUROBAROMETER 68

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Autumn 2007

NATIONAL REPORT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
SWEDEN

The Swedish part of this Eurobarometer 68 survey provides a snapshot of the economy and the labour market. Looking at the figures, it is quite clear that the Swedish economy has developed strongly in recent years and that there has been a marked decrease in unemployment. The high share of the poll who are positive regarding the situation in the economy and the labour market give Sweden a top position, together with a few other countries. The divergence between Swedish opinion and the European average is large.

However, it looks like public opinion in Sweden has reached its peak, or has already passed it. The share of the poll that thinks that things are moving in the right direction is smaller compared to a year ago. But the optimists still have a clear majority compared to the pessimists. Europeans, on the whole, are more optimistic than before but moving upwards from a much lower base than the Swedes.

The degree of trust people have in the European Union and its institutions shows itself in many ways. A large majority of Swedes feels that the voice of Sweden counts in the EU. Swedes have a stronger belief in the voice of their country than the average European. From the point of view of the European Union, it is important that the citizens feel that the Union takes their country's interests into consideration. In Sweden, a majority feels that the EU takes that kind of consideration and that is a larger share than the European average. Since Sweden is perceived as a country that is sceptical about the Union, these results are worth some attention. The assumed sceptical attitudes seem to be slightly ambiguous.

The discussion on the right level of decision-making will probably remain a characteristic of the European Union for a foreseeable future. Should decisions be made at the national level or in the Union is a topic creating surprising friends and opponents in European politics. But it seems to be the point at issue that is important to the citizens of the Union when they decide on the right level of decision. To the Swedes, environmental protection is a question that quite naturally transcends the national level. More than eight of ten think this is a subject for the European Union to decide upon. A large majority feels, on the other hand, that pensions and the economy should be a concern for the Swedish government. Among Europeans as a whole, there is a small majority for making decisions about the economy at EU level.

Swedes think that three-quarters of the population are poorly informed about the European Union. Only one in a hundred is felt to be very well informed. These results signal that the Swedes are aware of their lack of knowledge concerning the EU. A later part of this survey seems to indicate that the demand for information about what is happening in the Union is greater than the supply. This pattern is, with rather small variations, the same all over Europe.

The media have an important role distributing information about EU and the policies and positions taken by its members. For a great majority of people, TV, radio, newspapers and, to a lesser extent, the Internet are the dominant sources of information. The media shapes the picture people have of the EU but not necessarily their values or opinions. The fact that many are poorly informed about the subject cannot be explained solely by the media. The reasons are many but the survey does suggest that the media are part of the explanation.

Almost one in two Swedes thinks that TV talks too little about the European Union. And four in ten have the same opinion about the radio and the newspapers. The pattern in Europe is the same. Every second European thinks that there is too little information about the Union on TV.

To a large extent, the Swedes trust the television and the radio. Eight in ten trust the radio and six in ten the TV. For this reason, it comes as no surprise that six Swedes in ten feel that the information about the European Union on the radio and TV is objective. The survey clearly indicates that Swedes - and Europeans in general - want more information than they get.