

EUROBAROMETER 70

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

AUTUMN 2008

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ESTONIA

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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 70** that was conducted from **October 6 to November 6 2008 in 27 European Union Member States**, three candidate countries (Turkey, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) and in the Turkish Cypriot community.

In the case of trends over time, it should be borne 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 October 10 to November 3 2008. In total, 1000 respondents were interviewed, 997 of whom 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 the 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 (holders of the so-called grey passport).

In autumn 2008, Estonian citizens' satisfaction with their personal life, on the whole, remains strongly positive and higher than in other Baltic countries. Estonians are quite calm as regards their personal immediate future, but, when talking about the future of the whole country, people see some difficulties in terms of the economy and employment. Economic and employment problems are those that concern Estonian citizens the most. However, Estonians still see the country's immediate future more positively than people from other Baltic countries and from the neighbouring country, Finland, do. The Estonian and European visions for the near future and for satisfaction with their life are very similar.

Although there are some problematic themes in Estonia, people have not changed their minds about the Estonian developmental situation – they say that things are still moving in the right direction.

Estonian citizens can be characterised as having more trust towards different national and international institutions than what is average for Europe – for example, Estonians' trust in their Government is much higher than in other Baltic countries and is more similar to Scandinavian countries where trust levels are the highest.

Estonians have also not changed their attitude towards the European Union – nine people out of ten evaluated being a member of EU as a positive or neutral thing and they steadily see a benefit from the membership. Estonians also evaluate the developmental direction of the European Union as more positive than is average for Europe. Estonian people wish to see a more speedy building of Europe; the current speed is seen as rather slow. Estonians are also more positive for what concerns the enlargement of the European Union and they think that it is a development that helps to strengthen the European Union.

The overall support for a single currency, the Euro, has shown an increasing trend in Estonia where it is approaching the European average.

Estonian citizens hesitate to some extent as to whether their personal opinion is heard in the European Union. However, more than half of them believe that Estonian opinion is taken into account. Two people out of three still believe that the European Union forces its views on Estonia. Only 54% of

citizens think that they understand how the European Union works; therefore, for almost half of the people in Estonia, the European Union is something unintelligible.

For what concerns the levels on which decisions should be made, European and Estonian citizens are quite alike – taxation, the educational system, pensions, social welfare, fight against unemployment and healthcare should be left to the decision of the national government. Estonians would also want the decisions to be made by the Estonian Government in the fields of consumer protection, agriculture and transport. In other areas that demand more resources and international coordinated action (fight against terrorism, scientific and technological research, defense and foreign affairs, support to the areas that are in economic difficulties, the fight against crime, energy, competition, environmental protection, economy and fighting inflation), European and Estonian citizens would like decisions to be made jointly within the European Union.

Estonian citizens have heard about the European Union budget but they are not very familiar with the subject. In their opinion, the highest proportion of the Budget is spent on defence and security, agriculture and rural development and economic growth. Citizens would like the spending of the European budget to focus mostly on economic growth, healthcare, education and training, social issues and employment.

General attitudes at the national level

- In autumn 2008, three Estonian citizens out of four are **satisfied with their life on the whole**. Satisfaction with their personal life has decreased slightly compared to some years ago. Estonians' level of satisfaction with their life is very similar to the European average (76%), but somewhat higher than in other Baltic countries.
- Respondents' forecast for **the situation of the Estonian economy in 12 months' time** has become more pessimistic – while, in spring, 45% of citizens saw a worsening of the economic situation, in autumn, considerably more (53%) cited this. Estonian opinion is very similar to the European average. Compared to spring 2008, citizens do not see the worsening of economic situation not only at the level of the country but already at the level of the household. While, in spring, 33% forecasted an improvement in their **household's economic situation**, in autumn, the share of optimists dropped to 19%. Nevertheless, the share of those who think that the economic situation remains the same is 53%. By now, Estonians' more optimistic view on their household's economic situation has dropped to the level of the European average.
- As recently as spring 2008, 17% of Estonian citizens thought that the **employment situation** in Estonia would become better in the near future. However, already in the autumn, only 10% of citizens are positive about its future. The share of those who see the employment situation getting worse has grown (compared to spring +20%, total 59%). However, there are five times fewer people (11%) who believe that their personal employment situation will become worse than there are those who are negative about the country's employment situation in the near future. Nevertheless, the share of citizens who believe that their personal employment situation will become better (16%) has decreased by 8 percentage points compared to spring.

The perception of a worsening of the situation is seen more among people with lower education qualifications.

- In spring, 51% of citizens said that they feel their **purchasing power** has become better in the last five years, but, in autumn, some of them have changed their minds and only 44% say that it has become better. 28% of respondents find that their purchasing power has become worse. Compared to Europe, as a whole, Estonia is still more positive as far as purchasing power is concerned.
- In the survey, all European citizens were asked if **the situation in different fields in their country is better or worse than what is average in Europe**. In all measured areas – the situation of the economy and employment, energy prices and the quality of life – Estonians evaluate their situation as worse than it is on average in Europe. In the worst situation is the Estonian economy – 81% of Estonian citizens evaluate the situation of their national economy as worse than the average in European countries. The share of those who evaluate the average European economy as being better than the Estonian economy has grown by 6 percentage points.
- Since autumn 2007, the **most significant problem for Estonians** had been inflation but now it has lost its top position. In autumn 2008, the most serious problem for citizens is the economic situation. Whereas, a year ago, only 17% of citizens thought that the economic situation was a significant problem, today, 50% see it as a problem. The share of those who see unemployment as a problem for Estonia has grown significantly – if, a year ago, unemployment was seen as a problem by only 7% of citizens, now, this share has grown to 20%. Inflation is still a problem for 45% of citizens, but the importance of this problem has decreased by 13 percentage points over the period of a year. Also, among other areas like crime, healthcare and energy system, the share of those who see it as a problem has decreased.
- Despite the difficult times in the country, 42% of citizens still consider the **direction of Estonian development** to be the right one. It is slightly less than in spring, when 51% agreed that things in Estonia were moving in the right direction, but only 34% think that the direction is wrong.
- Of the institutions that we measured, **people trust the European Union** (67%) the most. Estonians equally trust the United Nations and NATO (61%). Citizens are stable in their trust in the Estonian justice/ legal system (59%) and equally trust local public authorities. The Estonian Government, that in spring was trusted by 56% of citizens, has, in autumn, lost some trust to 48%. Nevertheless, Estonians' trust in their national government is higher than in Europe as a whole. Estonians' trust in their Government is most similar to Scandinavian countries where trust is the highest.

Attitudes towards the European Union and its institutions

- Estonian citizens' **attitude towards being a member of the European Union** has stayed strongly positive or neutral. In autumn, 93% held this view, comprised of 61% who thought that

it is positive and 32% that it is neutral. Benefits from European Union membership are seen by 78% of citizens and only 15% say that they have not benefited from it. Estonian citizens have not changed their minds about the benefits of the European Union in two years.

- 53% of Estonian citizens are convinced that **things in Europe are moving in the right direction**; this figure has decreased by 7 percentage points compared to spring.
- Estonian citizens **associate the European Union the most** with freedom to travel, work and study everywhere in Europe (69%). In second place, they positioned peace (31%) and, in third, cultural diversity (23%).
- Only 23% of Estonian citizens agree with the statement that their opinion is heard in the European Union. They are also sceptical about the statement my voice counts in Estonia, with only 41% agreeing. Therefore, it can be said that people feel that they personally cannot influence a lot what is going on either in Estonia or in European Union. Somewhat more people (56%) believe that Estonian opinion is heard in European Union, but this figure has decreased by 9 percentage points compared to spring. Less than half of Estonians (41%) believe that European Union takes Estonian interests into account; rather, they tend to believe that the European Union forces its views on Estonia (63%). More than a half of citizens (56%) agreed with the statement that we are economically more stable because Estonia is a member of the European Union. The share of those who agree with the statement has decreased to some extent compared to spring. Only a little more than half of the respondents agreed that they know how the European Union works (54%).
- The **most well-known institution** of the European Union for Estonians is still the European Parliament – nine people out of ten had seen or heard something about it and 61% of Estonians tend to trust it. Awareness has grown in regard to the European Central Bank – in spring 2008, 68% of Estonians had heard something about it but this rose in autumn to 76%.
- Estonians would rather see the rapid **building speed of Europe** – 51% of citizens said so. Every fourth Estonian would prefer an optimal speed and only 15% would like to see a slow building speed. But when characterizing the current speed, people think it is rather slow (39%).

European Union policies

- In the survey, **the respondents were asked to evaluate, for a number of areas, whether decisions should be made by the Estonian Government or jointly within the European Union**. At least half of the Estonian and European respondents would leave in the hands of national government decision-making the following areas: taxation, the educational system, pensions, social welfare and healthcare. In the opinion of Estonian and European citizens, decisions should be made jointly within European Union in the following more resource and international coordinating action-demanding areas: terrorism, science and technology, defence and foreign policy, support to the regions that are in economic difficulties, the fight against crime, energy, competition, environmental protection, economy and fighting inflation.

- Support for **European Monetary Union with one single currency, the euro**, has grown since autumn 2006 from 49% to 58%. Support for a **European common defence and security policy** is 81% (only 8% of Estonian citizens oppose it). Support for a **European common foreign policy** is 75% (only 14% of Estonian citizens oppose it).
- 97% of Estonian citizens have heard of the **armed conflict that took part between Russia and Georgia**, 46% of them know what this conflict was about. Estonians see the European Union as having played the biggest role in bringing this conflict to an end (28%). Other institutions' role is seen as less important – USA (14%), NATO (10%). 60% of Estonians consider that the conflict that took place between Georgia and Russia might have had an influence on European energy supply. 14% of them find that the influence on energy supply is important.
- 60% of Estonian citizens **support the enlargement of the European Union** and 26% are against it. Estonians regard the enlargement as quite positive and, therefore, share more than European citizens, as a whole, the opinion that enlargement has strengthened the European Union.
- 60% of Estonian citizens have **heard about the European Union's budget** but only 2% of them are familiar with it. As many as 36% of citizens had not heard anything about the European Union's budget. Despite the fact that Estonians are not very familiar with this theme, they were still asked to express an opinion on what the European Union budget, in their opinion, is spent. Citizens cited defence and security (27%), agriculture and rural development (24%) and economical growth (21%) the most. The least spending is seen in the field of transport (5%), immigration (5%) and in culture and media (4%). Opinion about on what the budget is spent is quite similar in Estonia and in Europe as a whole. For Estonian citizens, the most important areas that European Union budget should be spent on are economic growth (39%), healthcare (37%) and education/training (34%). In these previously mentioned areas, there exists a big difference in current spending and the spending that citizens would like to see.