

EUROBAROMETER 71

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

SPRING 2009

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CROATIA

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EUROBAROMETER 71 – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The public opinion polls by Standard Eurobarometer are conducted twice a year. This one, the 71st (EB 71), was conducted from June 12th to July 8th 2009 in all 27 member states of the European Union, in the two candidate countries which are currently negotiating their membership – Croatia and Turkey, in the Former Yugoslav Republic Macedonia, which has candidate status, but the date for the beginning of negotiations has not been set yet, and among the members of the Turkish community on Cyprus. EB 71 is the tenth poll by Standard Eurobarometer which included Croatia. The responses were gathered in the field from June 15th to 30th by the Puls agency.

During the nine months between the last two polls by Standard Eurobarometer, the Czech Republic took over the presidency of the European Union from France. As Slovenia continued blocking Croatia's accession negotiations, no negotiation chapters were opened or closed in that period. Until the closure of this poll Slovenia blocked the opening of nine and closing of four chapters. The Czechs assembled two Inter-government Accession Conferences, but they were both canceled at the request of Slovenia. For the opening of negotiations on the chapter on competition, European Commission's approval of the program of privatization of Croatian shipyards was being expected, while the System of Justice and the Basic Rights chapter, for which the European Commission had already established that the Croatian side had fulfilled the set criteria, was still waiting for the EU Council's confirmation of the full cooperation of the Croatian Government with the International Penal Court for Former Yugoslavia in Hague. That way the negotiations were still open in 22, and closed in seven chapters.

The domestic policy field between the last two Eurobarometer's polls was marked by the local and regional elections and the economic crisis. Although Croatia, thanks to Croatian National Bank's policy, successfully avoided the spillover of the crises from the US and EU, the crisis of the actual economy hit it hard as early as the first trimester of 2009 owing not only to the decrease of orders for Croatian products from abroad, but also to the decrease of domestic consumption. The Croatian Government

resisted for a long time to recognize the gravity of the crisis due to the proximity of the next elections. By the closure of this poll, the general public still had no idea of how big became the gap in the treasury resulting from diminished tax revenues and only symbolic decrease of public consumption.

1. The Opinion Climate

While satisfaction with the life in the EU turned its former negative trend and increased one percent point compared to last year's autumn, to 77%, in Croatia its decrease became steeper, and now there is five points fewer of those satisfied, i.e. 63%. Compared to the last year's spring, in the EU there are only one point fewer, and in Croatia as many as 14 points fewer examinees who are satisfied with their life. The negative difference of as many as 14 percent in life satisfaction of the Croats, compared to the satisfaction of the Europeans – while last spring the difference was only three percent – indicates the decrease in their standard of living as well as their uneasy view of the future given the crisis. In fact, while in the EU, during the course of this poll, the anti-recession measures were already sprouting their first green shoots, in Croatia, which was bypassed by the financial crisis itself, but hit badly by its tail, the crisis in the real economy, the Government had still not begun implementing any anti-recession programme. In addition to that, the prospects of EU membership are becoming less clear by the day because of the Slovenian blockage about which the other member states are doing nothing.

It is also evident that, in the opinion of European respondents in general, the state of the European economy is still bad: now, only one-fifth of them think it is good, which makes nine percentage points less than last autumn. Half as many of the Croatian respondents, only one-tenth – one percentage point less than last autumn – rate the state of the Croatian economy as good.

The percentage of European respondents thinking that the state of the European economy is good decreased by 10 points, to 23%. In Croatia, those holding this view (27%) account for 5 points less than last autumn, but four percentage points more than in the EU.

It is quite interesting that, in Croatia, the percentage of those who rate the state of their personal standard of living as good (43%) did not change in the meantime, and that there are still a few more of them, than those who rate it as bad (42%), which points to the fact that the crisis at the time the poll was undertaken had still not reflected on personal standards of living. There is even one percentage point more of those who rate the financial situation of their household as good (49%), while there is one percentage point fewer of those who rate it as bad (also 49%). In the EU, the percentage of those who rate the financial state of their household as good also increased by one percentage point (to 65%), and the proportion of those who rate it as bad decreased by one point (to 33%). Satisfaction is also significantly more evident in the EU than in Croatia when it comes to personal standards of living, although in the EU it decreased by four points in the meantime, to 52%, while the level of dissatisfaction remained as it was last autumn (42%).

An overview of short-term expectations points to the fact that a growing majority of more than fifty percent of respondents in both the EU and Croatia do not expect changes in their lives in general, in their household's financial situation, or their own standard of living in the next 12 months, although, in the EU, optimism has grown slightly, while in Croatia it has fallen. However, when it comes to expectations for the state of the economy and employment in the country, in Croatia, the pessimists make up more than 50%, significantly more than in the EU.

For the European, as well as for the Croatian respondents, the two most important issues their countries face are unemployment and the state of the economy. In Croatia, 19 and, in the EU, as many as 23 percentage points more of respondents than last autumn – 52% and 49% respectively – are concerned by unemployment.

The state of the economy now concerns 14 percentage points more Croats, and five points more Europeans – 49% and 42% respectively.

The distrust in domestic institutions, which was bad already, has worsened further in Croatia since last autumn – nine points (84%) for the Government, five points for the Parliament (81%), as well as for the political parties (91%), and two points for the judiciary (76%). In the EU, distrust increased too, but, however high it may be, it is still significantly lower than in Croatia. There, 65% of respondents do not trust the Government, 61% the national Parliament, and 76% political parties. There is still one

percentage point more of those who believe in the national judiciary/legal system (48%) than those who do not.

62% of Croats currently do not believe in the European Union – four points fewer than last autumn. There is also one point fewer of those who do, 31%, while, among the European respondents, levels of trust in the EU have stagnated at 47%, and distrust at 41%.

Figures for those not trusting the key European institutions also increased: 46% of respondents do not trust the European Parliament, four points more than last autumn; 47%, or five points more, do not trust the European Commission, while 44%, or four points more, do not trust the Central European Bank.

In the EU, levels of trust in the key European institutions also fell, but those who believe in them are still a relative majority.

There are as many as 77% of Croats who think that things in the country are going badly, 14 percentage points more than last autumn, while, in the EU, a half of respondents hold this view – a point more than last autumn. The bad development of things in the EU is now noted by 48% of Croats – 8 points more. In the EU, there are 35% of those who think the developments are bad, one point more than last autumn, and 34%, or one point fewer, of those who perceive them as good.

2. Opinions on the European Union

For a relative majority of Croats (40%), the EU continues to have a neutral character, but this figure is 4 points lower than in autumn 2008. The percentage of those who have a negative perception of the EU increased by one point (to 30%), while the proportion of those who view it positively rose by four points, although there only 28% in this camp.

There is the same relative majority as last autumn in the EU of respondents who see the character of EU as positive (45%), while the proportion of those who see it as negative decreased by one point (16%).

The country's membership of the EU is seen as a good thing by only 24% of Croats, a point more than last autumn, and six points fewer respondents than last spring, while

the percentage of Europeans holding this view is a steady 53%. There are now 39% of Croats who think that EU membership would be bad for Croatia, also a point more than last autumn, and as many as 14 points more than last spring, while one-third of Croats remain neutral towards EU membership.

Benefits from their country's EU membership are now expected by 37% of Croats, four points more than last autumn but seven points fewer than last spring, and a steady 56 percent of Europeans. 54 percent of Croats do not expect any benefits, a point less than last autumn but 12 points more than last spring.

Slightly more Croats (63%) than Europeans on average (61%) are in favour of European monetary union, or the common currency, the euro. However, while the number of those in favour is steady in the EU, in Croatia, their proportion has decreased by 2 percent points since last autumn. A larger relative majority of Croats (48%) than Europeans (42%) is opposed to a "multi-speed Europe".

While support for the continuation of EU enlargement increased by one point in Croatia since last autumn, to 60 percent, it decreased in the EU by the same amount, to only 43 percent, while the opponents to further enlargement became the majority (46%). In favour of its continuation are all the new member states, but only Sweden, Spain, Portugal and Ireland out of the old ones (EU15).

For the Croats, there are three key questions regarding the continuation of European integration: solidarity with poor areas, internal market and economic issues. For the citizens of the EU, these are: economic, social and health and immigration issues. The vast majority of Croatian, as well as European, respondents support strengthening common decision-making on all issues, although Croats are still a little bit more cautious than Europeans in general.

Less than a half, although a majority, of Croats only favour joint decision-making on major health difficulties. In their evaluation of the efficiency of the EU, Croats and Europeans do not differ much – they mainly evaluate it as half-way.

3. Globalization

A majority of more than a half of Croatian and European respondents respectively,

see globalization as an opportunity for economic growth. However, they both feel that it increases social inequality at the same time. The vast majority of Croats and EU respondents advocate joint “world management” of globalization. A growing majority of Europeans and Croats alike also think that the EU provides its citizens with greater benefits than the positive effects of globalization. While the EU respondents believe that the EU, in the first place, can work against the consequences of monetary and economic crisis the most effectively, and the G20, in second place, Croats cite twice as often local government in first place, and the International Monetary Fund in second.

4. Values

Apparently, Croats seem to be more liberal than the average Europeans: while a little bit more than three-fifths of respondents in the EU feel that the state meddles too much with their private affairs and that free competition is the best guarantee for an economic growth, in Croatia about three-quarters of the respondents share this view. However, both Croats and EU citizens are, in approximately the same majority, prone to distancing themselves from materialism, and to putting more emphasis on technological development.

Social inequality and solidarity are, for Europeans, as well as for Croats, the first among the issues which society should emphasize when confronting with the main global challenges.

Only four percent of Croats and Europeans are satisfied with the state of the society in which they live. Still, majorities of more than half of Croats and Europeans are in favour of gradual social changes.

To both Croatian and European respondents, when choosing a job, job security comes in first place. Croats put a good salary in second place, but for them, it is only half as important as job security. Not even one-tenth of the Croatian respondents pay attention to how interesting a job is, while, for EU respondents, this aspect is as important as a good salary.

Democratic values are the most important principle underlying European identity – for Croats as well as for Europeans. Only two percent of Croats and five percent of Europeans think that a European identity does not exist.

While, in the EU, 74 percent of respondents think of themselves as Europeans at least to some extent, in Croatia, there are only 48 percent who share this view. Eight percent of EU respondents, and as many as 23 percent of the Croatian poll, do not consider themselves European at all. At the same time, as many as 70 percent of the Croatian respondents consider themselves as cosmopolitans, to at least some extent, which shows that a relatively small percent of Croats who declare themselves as Europeans is not a consequence of provincialism, but a kind of a protest against the long duration of the accession procedure and the Slovenian blockage.

Among Croats, there is a strong sense of regional belonging (82%), which is more pronounced than in Europeans (68%).

5. The European Union in 2030

Optimism regarding the future of the EU predominates in the EU (64%) and Croatia (56%). Pessimism is, however, much more pronounced in Croats (39%) than in Europeans (29%).

Those who expect that, in the year 2030, life in the EU will be harder than today, are among a relative majority among European (32%), as well as in Croatian respondents (32%). The relative majority of Croats (47%) and Europeans (significantly smaller – 33%), expect that, in 2030, more importance will be accorded to the economy than to the environment. While a relative majority of Croats (36%) would like to see more importance being attached to the economy than to the environment, an even greater majority of Europeans (40%) would like it to be the other way round.

The relative majority of Croatian (36%) and European respondents (35%) think that, in the EU, in 2030, solidarity will be more pronounced than individualism. However, the vast majority of Croats (61%) and Europeans (58%) wish there were a greater sense of solidarity than individualism in 2030.

Almost a two-thirds majority of Croats (63%) and a majority of less than fifty percent of Europeans (47%) expect to see more importance being attached to work than free time in the EU in 2030. A small relative majority of Europeans (33%) and a bigger relative majority of Croats (42%) would like free time to be considered more important than work.

Significantly more Croats (47%) than Europeans (35%) expect order to be more important than personal liberties in the 2030 EU. Croats are divided when it comes to wishing that more importance is given to order or to personal freedoms (38% respectively), while, in the EU, those who wish the personal liberties to be more important make up a relative majority (35%).

More than two-thirds of Croatian respondents (68%) and a majority of less than fifty percent of Europeans as a whole (44%) think that, in the EU, in 2030, people will have less time for family life than today.

A relative majority of Croats (49%) and Europeans (43%) expect, in the EU, in 2030, a greater tolerance for ethnic and religious minorities.

About three-quarters of Croats (76%) and Europeans (73%) wish, however, that EU society, in 2030, were more tolerant towards ethnic and religious minorities than today.

Croatian respondents deem that the economic situation (35%) and crime (32%) will be the two difficulties that will bother Croatia the most in 2030. EU respondents think that the major difficulties their countries will face will be the economic situation (23%) and unemployment (20%).

6. Society

Approximately equal majorities of more than a half of Croatian (53%) and European (54%) respondents agree that immigrants from other ethnic groups enrich the cultural life of a country. While a majority of fewer than fifty percent of Europeans (45%) regards such immigrants as the cause of insecurity, an above fifty-percent majority of Croats (45%) does not. A majority of below fifty percent of Europeans (49%)

supposes that such immigrants increase the unemployment in their countries, while a somewhat smaller majority of Croats (46%) does not share this opinion.

A majority (48%) of European respondents sees the necessity of immigrants in some economic sectors, while a majority of 49 percent of Croats does not.

Neither the majority of Croats (47%) nor of Europeans (45%) thinks that immigration can counteract the problem of the ageing of the population.

Those who do think that immigrants contribute more to the national budget than they spend from it on health and social care, make up a majority of more than fifty percent in the EU (51%), and a below fifty-percent majority in Croatia (40%).

A relative majority of European respondents sees coverage of the social care system in their countries as sufficiently broad. In Croatia, however, almost two-thirds of respondents (65%) are not satisfied with the coverage of their social care system.

Only 46 percent of Europeans and only 12 percent of Croats believe that their social care system could serve as an example to other countries. An identical majority of 54 percent of Croatian and European respondents agrees that their social care system is too expensive for their country.

7. Profiles

The percentage of Croats who declare themselves as politically left-wing is equal to that of last autumn (26%), and four percentage points more than last spring. There are two points more of Croatian respondents than last autumn who declare themselves as right-wing (19%), which is three points fewer than last spring. Those who see themselves as in the political centre are still a majority (28%), although there are two points fewer of them than last autumn, and four points fewer than last spring. The proportion of those respondents who refuse to declare their political convictions increased in Croatia, while the number of those who are undecided decreased.

There are three points fewer leftists (24%) in the EU than last autumn, and four fewer than last spring. The percentage of rightists (21%) has not changed since the last poll, but there is one point fewer of them than last spring. There is one more point of those who see themselves in the political centre (34%) than last autumn, and three points

more than last spring.

After the earlier decrease of percentage of the Croatian owners of fixed telephone lines in the last two polls, there is growth again (86%), probably due to the fact that, in Croatia, ADSL Internet access is much cheaper than the mobile. In the EU, the number of owners of fixed telephone lines has stagnated (72%). There are three percentage points more of Croatian mobile phone owners (82%) than last autumn, which places Croatia close to the European average (85%).

While there are now three points more of computer owners in the EU, than last autumn (67%), in Croatia, there are six points more (57%), which is still significantly below the European average. The number of those with Internet access from home increased at the same time by 10 points (51%) in Croatia and five points (60%) in the EU.

At home, 26 percent of Croats and 37 percent of Europeans use Internet every day, while 43 percent of Croats and 23 percent of Europeans never use it. At work, only 12 percent of Croats and 18 percent of Europeans use Internet every day, while 66 percent of Croats and 51 percent of Europeans never use it.

While, in the EU, the number of car owners has stagnated (72%), in Croatia, it increased by one point (to 70%), but it is still four points less than a year and a half ago.

In Croatia, the number of living spaces for which there are no further payments to be made decreased by four points in the last six months, to 73 %, while, in the EU, it fell by only one point, to 43%. There is now one percentage point more of Croats who are still paying for the purchase of their homes (12%), while, in Europe as a whole, there is one point fewer than last autumn (25%).

The main difference in the number of home owners between average Europeans and Croats points not only to a greater attachment of Croats to their homes, but also to the underdeveloped market for apartments to rent in Croatia, both facts resulting in a lower mobility of the work force.

8. Conclusion

After the popularity of the European Union in Croatia decreased significantly last autumn, it has now grown slightly, at the expense of those holding a neutral stance. 28% of respondents view the EU as positive and 24% see their country's membership of the EU as a good thing, but the number of those who view the EU negatively has increased (30%), as well as the number of those who think that EU membership would not be good (39%). While the fact that the Slovenian blockage of the accession procedure is still in progress certainly influences the unpopularity of the EU in Croatia, the growth in the popularity of the EU at the same time can most probably be attributed to the fact that the EU members, especially those which are in the Euro zone, are going through the current economic crisis less painfully. A few more details that tend to support this assumption include: the fact that the number of those who expect benefits for Croatia from membership of the EU (37%) is growing again, that there are now many more respondents who express a positive attitude towards the EU, and that as many as 63 percent of Croats support the European Monetary Union, or the euro, as a common currency.

The desire for most decisions on common issues to be taken together, at EU level, indicates that Croats, in spite of the low level of EU popularity among them at the moment, are in fact advocates of European integration. However, although there is a great support for the common decision-taking, it is still lower than that in the EU. It is quite likely that, if the finalization of the Croatian accession procedure continues to be obstructed and delayed, euro scepticism will intensify.