

EUROBAROMETER 71

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

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This report does not present the standpoint of the European Commission. Interpretations and opinions included belong to the author only.

The Standard Eurobarometer public opinion survey is conducted twice a year. This year's 71st survey of the Standard Eurobarometer (EB 71) was conducted in 27 Member States of the European Union and in the three candidate countries – the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia¹, Croatia and Turkey, as well as in the part of Cyprus that is under Turkish authority, between 12th June and 7th July 2009.

Survey results on the citizens' perceptions, hopes and expectations of the European Union and the candidate countries in the last eight months illustrates the changes and trends in public opinion about important themes for the country and the Union.

The climate of public opinion

The perception of the actual social conditions of citizens covered by the Eurobarometer, in the first half of 2009, has remained strongly influenced by the world economic and financial crisis as in 2008. In the period between the autumn 2007 and the autumn 2008 edition of Eurobarometer, the number of citizens who assessed that the condition in their national economies was good decreased by 19 percentage points (48%; 29%), while dissatisfaction with the condition of EU economy became more frequently cited (58%; 33%). After the first shock of facing the consequences of the crisis, there followed a period of stagnation in the trend of low optimism regarding both the national and the EU economy (January – June 2009). This trend continued until the beginning of 2009, when only 19% of Union citizens assessed the economic situation in their country as good. The results from June show that this negative trend has stopped. In June, the number of those who considered that the national economy was in good condition practically remained unchanged (20%). The assessment of the EU economy exhibits similar changes. In January 2009, the number of citizens in the Union who assessed the EU economy as good decreased to 22%. The latest Eurobarometer shows that the declining optimism among Europeans regarding the EU economy has stopped (23%). A similar trend of declining optimism regarding the national economy is noticed among the citizens in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In the period between the autumn 2007 and autumn 2008, the number of citizens who assessed the national economic situation as good decreased from 32% to 30%, but their number continued to decline in the period January – June (27%; 25%). The decreased optimism in the country regarding the European economy is even more drastic. Between autumn 2007 and spring 2009, the proportion of citizens who assessed the European economy as good has decreased by 24 percentage points (69%; 45%).

One of the consequences of the crisis which has a direct impact on citizens is the worsening employment situation. Between autumn 2007 and spring 2009, the proportion of respondents in the EU27 countries who assessed the employment situation in their country as good decreased by 23 percentage points (36%; 13%), and in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, where the number of satisfied is nonetheless very low, it decreased by an additional 3 percentage points (11%; 8%). In the period January – June 2009, the citizens in the country were personally mostly affected by the economic situation (41%; 48%) and unemployment (46%; 43%), while in the Union, it was by the increase in prices and inflation (45%; 38%) and by the economic situation (27%; 26%). An analysis of the results shows that families having difficulties paying all their bills at the end of the month feel the consequences of the

¹ The temporary code does not prejudice in any way the definitive nomenclature for this country, which will be agreed in accordance with the conclusions of negotiations currently taking place in the United Nations.

crisis the most. Among the poor families prevails the feeling of having no perspective, because their day-to-day existence means that they are unable to make plans for the future (71% MK; 72% EU). It is important to note that almost three times as many families in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia most often have problems paying their bills than the average in the European countries (31%; 11%).

An analysis of short-term expectations shows that, in the period January-June 2009, the most respondents in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia expressed hope in the improvement of the EU economy (30%; 37%), while there is a decrease in optimism that their personal condition will improve in terms of employment (25%; 22%) and in terms of their household's financial situation (31%; 29%). Among EU27 respondents, there is increased optimism regarding the national economy (15%; 25%), the EU economy (14%; 24%) and employment in their country (12%; 20%).

The atmosphere of disappointment among the people in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and in the Union, in the period January-June 2009, is reflected in respondents' falling tendency to express confidence in national governments (40%; 36% MK and 38%; 32% EU27) and in the national parliaments (29%; 27% MK and 35%; 32% EU27).

- Perception of possibilities to emerge from the crisis

This latest Eurobarometer shows that there is a widespread opinion among the public that the national economies have been affected by the world crisis (69% MK; 85% EU27). The situation is similar in the remaining two candidate countries² for EU membership - 68% in Croatia and 73% in Turkey.

Respondents are divided when it comes to the question of who is the most capable to take efficient measures against the consequences of the crisis.

A significant share of the poll in the surveyed countries does not express confidence in any international institution or organization, which points out to the fact that there is confusion among citizens regarding the possibility of taking efficient measures for overcoming the crisis.

In the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the largest share of the poll (25%) reported that the USA was the most capable to take efficient measures against the effects of the crisis, followed by the EU (23%), the national government (22%), the IMF (13%) and the G20 (9%). In the EU27, an almost equal number chose the EU (21%) and the G20 (20%), followed by the USA (16%) and the IMF (14%), and the least number of citizens cited national governments (12%).

In the conditions of uncertainty created by the crisis, the financial priorities for the greatest number of respondents are paying the bills (MK 62%; EU27 59%), emergency savings (MK 32%; EU27 44%) and to lead as best as possible a life with current income (MK 31%; EU27 41%).

The latest Eurobarometer shows widespread concern among citizens that even with high qualifications it is very difficult to find a good job (93% MK; 80% EU27). This

² The three countries candidates for membership in the European Union; Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Croatia and Turkey will be addressed further in the text as countries-candidates.

scepticism is accompanied by the fear of losing jobs (MK 70%; EU27 47% of respondents are convinced that their jobs are uncertain).

- Citizens' views of EU membership

This survey also confirms the prevailing positive attitude among the public towards EU membership. Over the last six months, the number of respondents who see EU membership of their country as a good thing remained unchanged (64%; 64%).

Far more citizens in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia expect benefits from EU membership (74%; 75%), which is significantly higher than in the other two candidate countries – Turkey (47%; 57%) and Croatia (50; 54%).

The results show a trend of declining support in EU member states for further enlargement of the Union. In the period between the two last surveys, in the EU27 countries, this support has practically remained unchanged (44%; 43%), but the number of respondents who are against the enlargement has increased (43%; 46%).

Support in the candidate countries for the enlargement of the Union shows an increasing trend (79%; 85%) in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, (59%; 60%) in Croatia and (45%; 47%) in Turkey. It is noteworthy that scepticism regarding enlargement has significantly increased in both Turkey and Croatia equally on account of a fall in the proportion of undefined responses to this question.

Freedom to travel, study and work all over Europe remain the beneficial aspects associated with the EU most frequently cited by respondents in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (44%; 42%) and in the EU (61%; 57%), regardless of the respective decreases of 2 and 4 percentage points. Croatians respondents most frequently (34%; 33%) associate the Union with the freedom to travel. Compared with the other two candidate countries, Turkish respondents associate the Union with economic prosperity (32%; 33%) rather than with the freedom to travel (23%; 24%).

- Feelings towards the EU and identity

The percentage of citizens in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia with positive feelings (59%) towards the EU is larger than the average in the EU member states (45%). The EU evokes a more positive image among the national public than in the other two candidate countries – Croatia (28%) and Turkey (46%).

In sharp contrast to the positive image of the Union among the national public is the feeling of non-acceptance by the EU. The great majority of citizens in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia consider that the Union does not take their voice into consideration (65%), or that of their country (63%).

The largest proportion of citizens in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia sees themselves as citizens of their region (95%); then as citizens of their country (85%), and a significantly lower proportion sees themselves as Europeans (53%). The identity of respondents in the Union is predominantly determined by the nation they belong to (94%), 91% see themselves as citizens of their region and 74% as Europeans. In Croatia, the identity of the largest proportion of citizens is determined by their ethnicity (98%), and then they see themselves as citizens of their region (97%) and as Europeans (72%). In Turkey, identity is mostly determined by ethnicity (90%); 88% of

respondents consider themselves as citizens of the region, and less than one-third as Europeans (30%).

The most important elements that constitute European identity in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are democratic values (36%) and the high level of social protection (30%). For the citizens of the 27 EU member countries, the most important elements that characterize European identity are democratic values (41%), followed by geography (25%) and common history and the high level of social protection (24% each)

- Attitudes toward the future of the European Union

The latest Eurobarometer shows that the optimism expressed in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia about the EU's future is 10 percentage points higher than the average in the EU member states (74% MK; 64% EU27). In this period of global crisis, the proportion of optimists about the EU's future in the country has declined by 9 percentage points compared to spring 2008 (83%; 74%).

Citizens in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia consider that, after 2030, life in the EU will be easier. This figure is 19 percentage points higher than the European average (47%; 28%). They also show more optimistic attitudes than the other two candidate countries, Croatia and Turkey (31%; 39%).

The economic situation in the country and unemployment, which currently preoccupy the national public, are expected to be the most important issues our country will face in 2030. The largest number of respondents in the country (39%) considers that the most important issue would be the economic situation in the country, and the second most important issue would be unemployment (25%).

The citizens of the Union and Croatia (23%; 35%) also consider that the economic situation is the most important issue that countries would face in 2030. Like the public in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, EU citizens expect unemployment to be the second most important issue that their countries will face in the future (20%). For Croats, the second most important issue is crime (32%). Compared to other countries, respondents in Turkey give priority to unemployment (37%) in contrast to the economic situation (34%).

As for many other issues associated with the EU in the future, citizens in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are optimists regarding the development of European society. The majority consider that, in 2030, the people in the EU would live in a society which would be more tolerant towards ethnic and religious minorities and their number exceeds the EU27 average by 11 percentage points (54%; 43%). Turkey, as one of the other candidate countries, is closer to the European average (42%) while the figure for Croatia (49%) is closer to the average in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

About one-third of the citizens (31%) within the 27 EU member-states feel that society in 2030 will be less tolerant of ethnic and religious minorities. The scepticism in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia regarding tolerance towards ethnic and religious minorities is less widespread (26%) than the EU27 average and the other candidate countries, Croatia (33%) and Turkey (38%).

-Challenges of Globalization

The spring Eurobarometer 2009 shows that the EU countries feel that globalization contributes less to economic development (56%; 59%) than a year ago. The public in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continues to see globalization as a perspective for rapid economic development (66%; 66%).

According to respondents, the price paid for the positive effects from globalization is an increase in social inequalities between people. The perception of this negative influence of globalization is increasing among the national public (53%; 64% MK) and the Union (56%; 62%).

Citizens in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (61%) express more confidence in the measures undertaken by the EU for citizens' protection against the negative effects of globalization than the EU27 average (47%).

The increased awareness of the need for common rules in the world to deal with globalization is evident in the EU member states. Among the EU countries, this awareness has increased by 9 percentage points (64%, 73%), while it has increased in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia by 4 points (58%; 62%), in Croatia by 7 points (63%; 70%) and in Turkey by 19 points (40%;59%).

The national and European public share similar attitudes on issues that require particular attention in order to face the global challenges more successfully.

The respondents in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia consider that social inequality and solidarity (49%) and the free market economy (48%) are the most important issues that should be emphasised in order to deal with the global challenges. One-third considers that the society should focus on environmental protection, while 22% cite progress and innovation.

In the countries of the EU27, 45% of respondents consider that solidarity and social equality is the most important issue in this context, followed by environmental protection (36%), progress and innovation (35%) and the free market economy (31%).

It is noteworthy that the public covered by the Eurobarometer places less emphasis on cultural differences (EU14%;MK13%;HR12%;TR17%) and tradition (EU11%;MK 8%; CR13%;TR10%). These data indicate that Europeans do not consider that globalization represents a threat to traditions and identity.