

# EUROBAROMETER 71

## PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

### SPRING 2009

NATIONAL REPORT  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

LATVIA

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

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

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.

The Eurobarometer 71 survey took place in Latvia from June 12-30, 2009, and covered 1,008 citizens aged over 15 years living in Latvia. The study was carried out by the market and social research agency, TNS Latvia. Eurobarometer 71 is the tenth Standard Eurobarometer survey to be undertaken since Latvia became an EU Member State in 2004.

## **Perception of the current situation**

**The majority of EU27 citizens are satisfied with their life in general:** 77% of EU27 respondents are very satisfied or fairly satisfied, while 22% are not very satisfied or not satisfied at all.

Remarkably high levels of satisfaction can be seen in Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden and Belgium, where an absolute majority of respondents is generally satisfied with their lives.

Meanwhile, the most dissatisfied inhabitants live in Bulgaria, Hungary, Greece and Romania.

**Latvians' satisfaction with life has fallen over the last 6 months** (by 8 PP), and, currently, attitudes among the population are polarised – **a half (54%) is satisfied overall, while the other half (46%) – is dissatisfied.**

**Perceptions regarding the current situation in the country and in Europe and in regard to other key issues has become significantly more sceptical since autumn 2008, both among EU27 and Latvian respondents.**

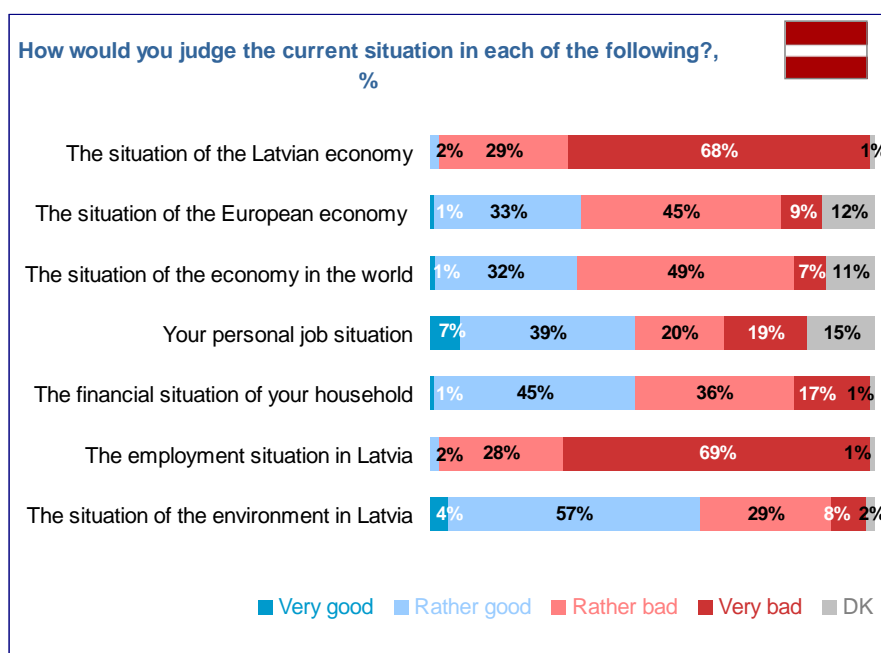
Europeans evaluate the current economic situation in their respective countries and in Europe, as well as the overall employment situation, considerably lower – negative evaluations have risen by 10 PP, 9 PP and 16 PP respectively.

Meanwhile, Europeans evaluate their household's financial situation and their personal job situation considerably more positively than the overall economic situation.

Latvians are more sceptical about the economic situation in their country and their personal situation than Europeans in general.

**In Latvia, the negative view regarding the employment situation in the country has increased by 17 PP since autumn 2008. Latvians have also become more negative about their personal job situation and their household's financial situation – the negative evaluation regarding both aspects has increased by 12 PP.** Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that respondents in Latvia perceive their personal situation much better overall than the general situation in the country and in Europe.

Latvians are more optimistic about the economic situation in Europe and worldwide than Europeans in general.



## **The most important problems facing the country and individuals**

**Europeans most frequently cite unemployment and the current economic situation as the main problems at country level.** Unemployment as the main current country concern was cited by 49% of EU27 citizens, while 42% cited the current economic situation.

Rising prices/inflation (21%) were also mentioned as the third most important problem among Europeans, followed by crime (16%) and the healthcare system (14%).

**The main concerns cited in Latvia, as in Europe as a whole, are unemployment and the economic situation** - 65% of respondents cited unemployment, while 59% cited the country's economic situation.

Other problems were mentioned considerably less frequently. Crime was cited as the third most important problem (17% of citizens), followed by healthcare and pensions (12% each); taxation (10%); and rising prices/ inflation (9%).

It should be stressed that more and more people in Latvia cite pensions as a concern of their country – a score that has increased by 7 PP (from 5% in the previous survey to 12%), the economic situation – by 5 PP (from 54% to 59%), as well as unemployment – by 4 PP (from 61% to 65%). Meanwhile, rising prices/ inflation, as a concern of the country, are mentioned comparatively less often – here, the score has fallen by 14 PP (from 25% to 9%).

**The three most frequently cited personal problems among EU27 citizens are rising prices/ inflation (38%), the economic situation (26%) and unemployment (21%).**

**In Latvia, the two most important personal problems are the same as mentioned at the state level – economic situation (45%) and unemployment (35%).** The third topic of concern to Latvian respondents is still inflation (27%). However, compared to autumn 2008, it was cited by a considerably smaller share of respondents (by 43 PP).

The healthcare system (18%), pensions (16%), taxation (15%) and the educational system (13%) are issues still of concern for a significant part of Latvian respondents on a personal level.

**Regarding financial priorities, Europeans cite the payment of bills (59%), savings for emergencies (44%) and living as well as possible with their current income (41%) as the most important.** Other important financial priorities are protecting the family in case of illness or the inability to work (28%) and paying off debts (22%).

In Latvia, likewise, the **two most important priorities are the payment of bills (77%) and living as well as possible with current income (37%).** Bill payment in Latvia is more important than in the European Union on average. Protecting the family in case of illness or the inability to work (36%), savings for emergencies (28%) and paying off debts (22%) are also important financial priorities for Latvian respondents.

## **Future expectations for the European Union and Latvia**

**EU27 citizens are rather sceptical about the development of their countries.** Only 27% consider that things are going in the right direction in their country. Meanwhile, half (50%) of Europeans think they are going in the wrong direction.

**Latvian respondents are even more sceptical about the direction of their country's development - only 9% think that things are going in the right direction in their country.** The most part of Latvian respondents (78%) consider that things in Latvia are going in the wrong direction, and the reason for this could be their high distrust in the government and public administration, as well as the rapid decline of the economic situation in Latvia.

**In respect to the direction of EU development, EU27 respondents, as well as Latvians are more positively disposed.** 34% of Europeans think that things in EU are going in the right direction. A similar proportion (35%) of Europeans think that they are going in the wrong direction.

**35% of citizens in Latvia consider that things in EU are going in the right direction**, and, in comparison to autumn 2008, their number has increased by 8 PP (from 27% to 35%). Meanwhile, 30% of Latvian respondents think that things in the EU are going in the wrong direction.

**Overall, Europeans are rather optimistic about their own - as well as their country's - future.** Considering their lives over the next twelve months, **27% of the EU27 poll considers life will get better**, 56% think it will remain the same and 14% that it will get worse.

**Eu respondents are a bit more pessimistic regarding the economic situation in their country over the next 12 months** - although 25% think that the situation will get better, there is a relatively large share (34%) that thinks that it will get worse. Nevertheless, around the same proportion (36%) thinks that the economic situation will not change during the next twelve months.

**The most pessimistic opinion among Europeans is regarding the employment situation in their respective countries – a major part (44%) the EU27 poll thinks that the situation will still get worse**, but 32% consider that it will remain the same. Only a fifth (20%) of EU27 respondents are optimistic about an improvement in their country's employment situation over the next 12 months.

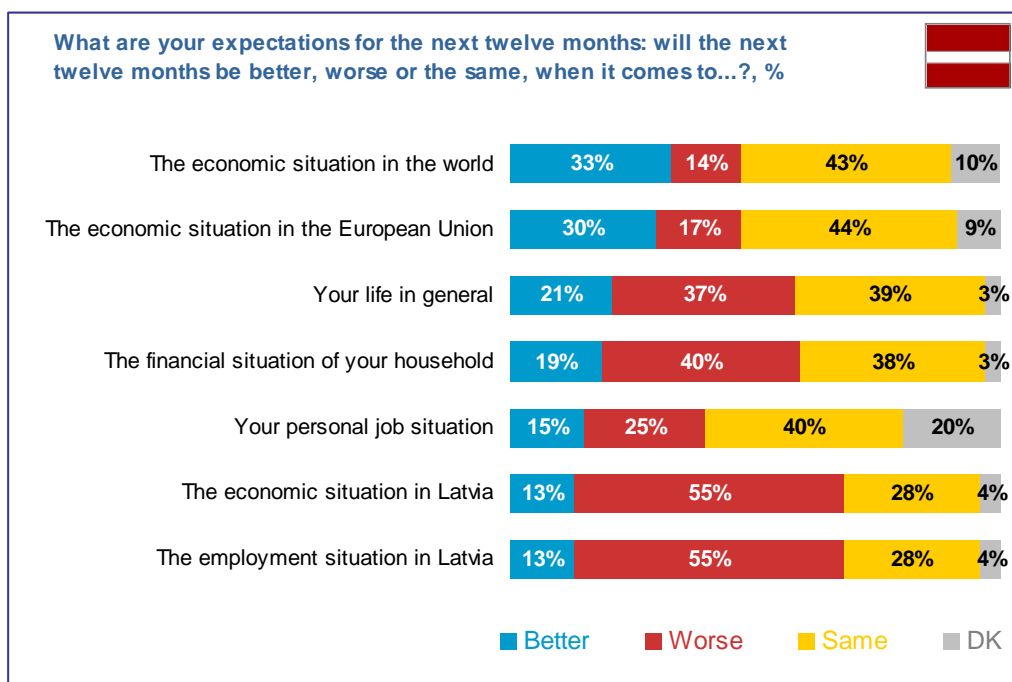
**Latvian respondents are more pessimistic about their future than EU27 respondents as a whole.** Regarding the next 12 months, 21% of Latvian respondents think their life will be better, while 39% consider it will remain the same and **37% think it will get worse (23 PP more than in the European Union on average).**

**Latvians are even more pessimistic about the economic situation in their country over the next year** - only 13% expect the economic situation to get better, while more than half (55%) think it will get worse. The proportion of those who think the economic situation will not change over the next 12 months is also quite high (28%).

**When thinking about the employment situation in their country, the majority of Latvian respondents (55%) expects the situation to get worse**, while 28% consider there will be no change and only 13% are optimistic about an improvement.

**Nevertheless, it should be noted that, over the last six months (since autumn 2008), the Latvian poll has become more optimistic about their personal lives, as well as about the situation in their county and worldwide.** In relation to all issues, there is an important increase in the share of those respondents who consider the situation will get better over the next 12 months.

A major increase can be observed in relation to their perceptions regarding the global economic situation and that in the EU – of 14 PP (from 19% to 33% in the world and from 16% to 30% in the EU). There has also been an increase of 6 PP (from 15% to 21%) which can be seen from the proportion of Latvian respondents who expect a general improvement in their lives within the next twelve months. Likewise, there is an increase of 6 PP (from 7% to 13%) of Latvian respondents who expect the employment situation in their country to improve.



## Country's membership of the European Union

**The attitude of Europeans about their country's EU membership has not changed since autumn 2008 - 53% of EU27 citizens think that EU membership is a good thing.** Nevertheless, a large part (27%) of Europeans still does not have an opinion on their country's EU membership, saying it is neither good nor bad, while 15% of Europeans say that EU membership is a bad thing.

Overall, a little more than half (56%) of EU27 respondents think their country has benefited from being a member of the European Union. Nearly one-third (31%) of EU27 respondents hold the contrary opinion saying that their country has not benefited from being a member of the European Union, while another 13% do not have an opinion at all.

**The smallest proportion of citizens in the Baltic States, as well as in Europe in general, in favour of EU membership may be observed in Latvian** – only a quarter of Latvian respondents (25%) hold a positive view regarding their country's EU membership. **In Latvia, most respondents are neutral about it** - nearly half (49%) of population say that Latvia's EU membership is neither good nor bad.

It should be pointed out that, among the Baltic States, in Latvia, there are considerably more Eurosceptics (23%), and their number continues to grow – it has increased by 7 PP in the space of a year.

**The number of Latvian respondents who evaluate the benefits from EU membership negatively, has increased** considerably since autumn 2008 – by 12 PP, **and, currently, they comprise the majority of the Latvian poll (55%).** Latvians are the most sceptical in regard to this issue, both in the Baltic and in Europe as a whole.

## Impression of the European Union

**Nearly half (45%) of EU27 respondents have a favourable impression of the European Union,** while 36% have a neutral attitude and 16% have an unfavourable impression. A more positive image of the EU is observed in Romania, Bulgaria, Ireland, Italy and Luxembourg.

**More than a half (57%) of Latvian respondents has a neutral opinion about the European Union.** Nearly a quarter (24%) has a positive impression of the European Union, while 18% has a negative impression. It should be pointed out that, since autumn 2008, the proportion of positive evaluations of the European Union has fallen by 5 PP.

Among Europeans as a whole, the European Union is more often associated with economic power and political influence - cited by 70% and 66% of the EU27 poll respectively.

**Most often, the European Union is associated by EU respondents as a whole with travel, study and work opportunities anywhere within the European Union** – 42% of EU27 citizens expressed this view. A third (33%) associate the European Union with the single currency, the Euro. For 25% of Europeans, the European Union means peace, for 23% - a stronger say in the world and for 22% - democracy.

**Thinking about the basic elements comprising the EU identity, Europeans most often tend to cite democratic values (41%).** Among the elements comprising the EU identity, an important part of EU27 poll cites Europe's geographical position (25%), its common history (23%), its high level of social protection (24%) and its common culture (22%).

Likewise, among Latvian respondents, the European Union is most often associated with economic power and political influence (77%).

**In Latvia, the European Union is also frequently associated with the possibility to travel, study and work anywhere within the European Union (56%).** However, at the same time, for Latvian respondents, it means bureaucracy (18%), waste of money (16%) and unemployment (15%) comparatively more often.

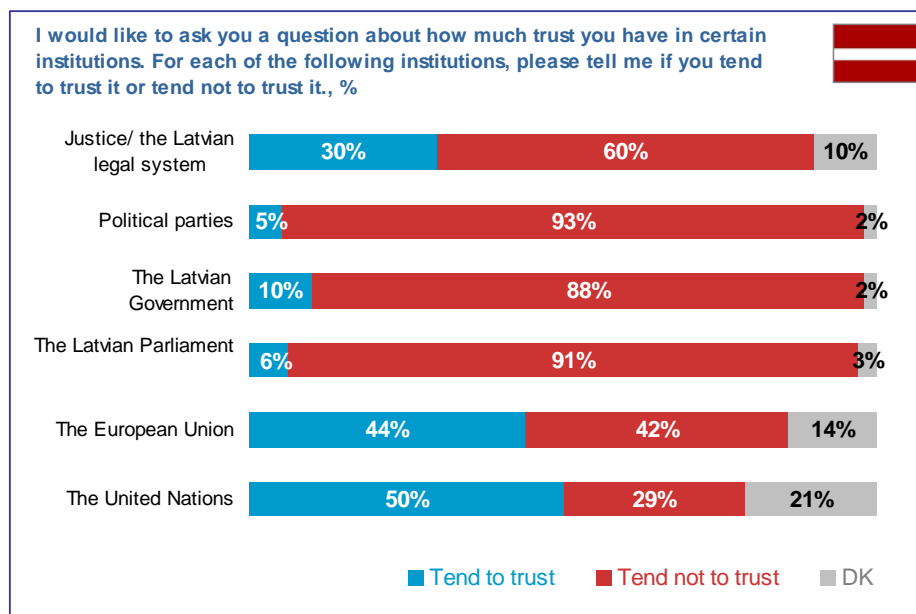
**The most basic element making up the identity of the EU from the point of view of Latvian respondents is geography** – regarded by a half of the Latvian poll (50%). Among the other elements most frequently cited by Latvian inhabitants are democratic values (26%), a high level of social protection (22%), entrepreneurship (20%) and a common history (19%).

## Trust in Institutions

**Overall, the highest level of trust in institutions observed among EU27 citizens is in the United Nations.** A half of Europeans (53%) trust this institution. A high level of trust is also observed in national legal systems (48%) and in the EU (47%).

Similarly, as in Europe in general, Latvians have most trust in the UN and the European Union compared to national institutions. **In Latvia, trust in the EU remains at a comparatively high level – 44%, still, it is a bit lower percentage than in Europe on average.**

Since spring 2008, distrust in the Latvian government and parliament (Saeima) has been very high - **the absolute majority of the poll does not trust the Latvian government and Saeima – 88% and 91% of population respectively. These are some of the highest distrust percentages in Europe.**



**Trust in the national legal system is polarised among the EU27 poll – about a half (48%) trusts it, while the other half (47%) does not.**

In Latvia, citizens trust the legal system much more than the government and the Saeima. Nevertheless, **overall, Latvians do not trust their country's legal system – 60% do not trust it compared to 30% who do.**

**The lowest trust level among EU27 citizens is in political parties – only a fifth of Europeans (19%) trust them, while the major part still does not (76%).**

**In Latvia, the highest level of distrust in political parties in the whole EU can be observed (93%), while only 5% of respondents trust them.** The high level of distrust in political parties in Latvia is likely to be connected to the high level of dissatisfaction among respondents regarding the government and the Saeima.

## European Union institutions and their role

**Levels of recognition of EU institutions, such as the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Central Bank, are high among EU27 respondents.** Among EU27 respondents, the European Parliament is the most widely known – the absolute majority (89%) have heard and know about it. As regards awareness, the European Commission (78%) and the European Central Bank lag behind a little (75%).

Meanwhile, trust in EU institutions among the EU27 poll has fallen slightly since autumn 2008. **Slightly less than a half of Europeans (48%) trusts the European Parliament, and an even**

**smaller proportion trusts the European Commission (44%) and the European Central Bank (44%).**

Awareness of the European Union institutions among Latvians does not differ significantly from the EU27 average. The majority is informed about and has heard of the European Parliament (90%) and the European Commission (78%), while the European Central Bank (71%) is recognized relatively less frequently.

Latvians trust the European Union institutions less than the average respondent in the EU27. **40% of Latvians trust the European Parliament**, while **35% of them trust the European Commission** and **33% trust the European Central Bank**. In Latvia, there has been an increase in those who do not trust EU institutions and mostly this has happened at the expense of those, who did not have an opinion previously.

### **Opinions about European Union processes and related issues**

Overall, opinion about European Union processes is polarised among EU27 respondents. **The majority look positively at the future of the European Union (64%)**. Nevertheless, nearly a quarter (23%) of European respondents is rather pessimistic about the future of the EU, while 6% are even very pessimistic about it.

**The majority of EU27 respondents agree that their country's voice counts in the European Union (61%)**. A half (51%) thinks that their voice counts in their country.

EU27 citizens are most sceptical about their personal voice in the EU – only 38% think their voice counts in the European Union.

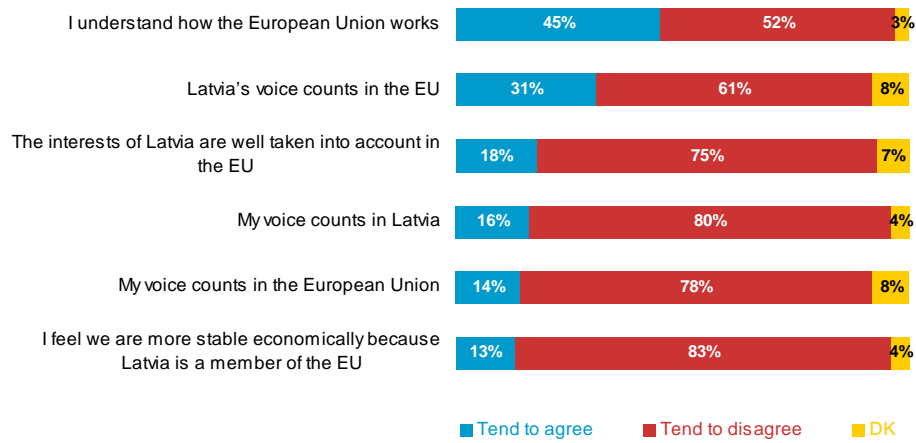
**Nevertheless, for the most part of these issues, EU27 respondents' opinion is polarized** and the proportion of those in favour and those against is similar. 44% of the EU27 poll agrees that they understand how the European Union works and that their country's interests are taken into account in the EU, while 43% think that the economic situation has become more stable since their country joined the EU.

In Latvia, opinions are significantly different to the EU27 as a whole. **Only a half (51%) of Latvian citizens looks positively at the future of the European Union**. In regard to the most part of issues relating to the EU, a negative opinion predominates in Latvia. The most negative opinion is about the stability of the Latvian economy since EU membership. **The absolute majority of the Latvian poll (83%) considers that the Latvian economy has not become more stable since Latvia became a member of the European Union**.

Similarly, the majority is of the view that their voice does not count either in the European Union (78%) or in Latvia (80%).

Three out of every four respondents in Latvia (75%) think that the interests of Latvia are not taken into account in the European Union.

Please tell me for each statement, whether you tend to agree or tend to disagree. ? %

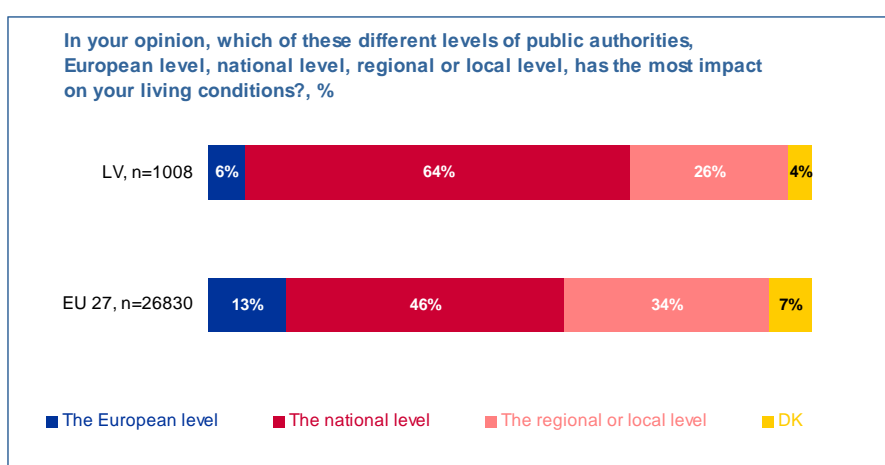


## Support for European Union processes

Overall, the EU27 population **supports the European Monetary Union with the single currency, the Euro** (61%). They express a polarized view on the further enlargement of the EU – 43% are for it while 46% are against new countries entering the EU in future years. Meanwhile, lowest support, the same as in autumn 2008, is for the statement that the speed of building Europe should be faster in one group of countries than in the other countries (supported by only 39% of EU27 respondents).

**Latvian respondents' opinion differs from that of EU27 respondents in general, especially in regard to the European Monetary Union with the single currency, the Euro.** The single currency, the Euro, received much less support from Latvians – only 48% of respondents are in favour of it (which is 13 PP less than the EU27 average).

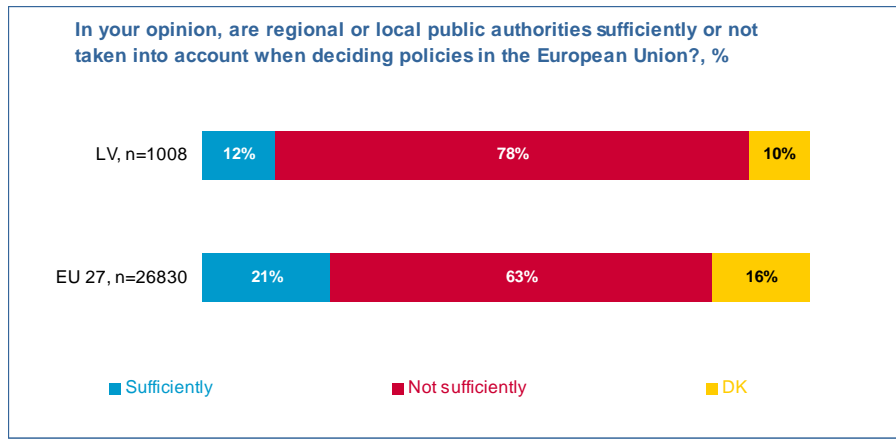
**According to EU27 respondents, the major impact on their living conditions should be at the state level** - 46% of EU27 respondents think that national institutions have the highest impact on their living conditions. A third (34%) of Europeans thinks that regional or local institutions have the major impact and only 13% consider the impact of the European institutions to be the most important.



Compared to the views of EU27 respondents in general, **among Latvians, the predominant opinion is that national institutions have the main impact on their living conditions** - 64% of Latvians express this view. Furthermore, over the last six months (since autumn 2008), the proportion of respondents in Latvia who consider national institutions to have the major impact on their living conditions has increased by 13 PP (from 51% to 64%). Every fourth respondent in Latvia (26%) considers their living conditions can be influenced at regional or local level, and only 6% think that this occurs at the European level.

Latvian, in comparison to EU27, respondents tend to think more often that national level institutions have the highest impact. Lithuania, Luxembourg and the Netherlands take the second place with 63% of people stressing the impact on their living conditions of the national level.

**The major proportion of Europeans think that regional and local public authorities are insufficiently taken into account when deciding policies in the European Union.** Only 21% of those polled across the EU27 responded that regional and local public authorities are taken into account sufficiently when deciding policies in the European Union.



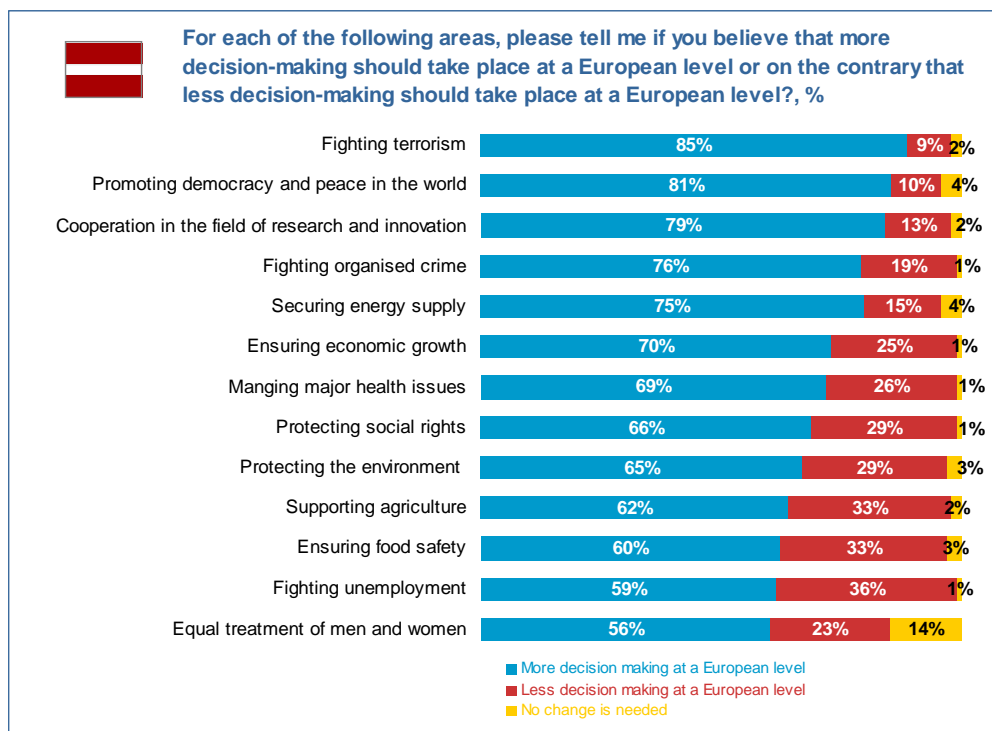
Latvians have the same sceptical view as other Europeans about the role of regional and local public authorities when deciding policies in the European Union – only just over a tenth of Latvians (12%) consider the role of regional and local public authorities as sufficient, which is the second lowest score after Bulgaria, where the figure is 10%.

### Further issues to be solved in the European Union

**Overall, the major proportion of EU27 respondents think that more decisions should be made at European level in all areas.** This is particularly the case as regards decisions that are global and affect many countries where only a common policy can provide an effective solution.

The issues that they would like solved most frequently at European level are in relation to fighting terrorism, promoting democracy and peace in the world - 81% of Europeans think these should be solved at European level. These issues are then followed by fighting organized crime (78%), cooperation in the field of research and innovation (78%), protecting the environment (77%), and securing the energy supply (76%).

Protecting social rights, supporting agriculture and fighting unemployment at European level are cited less often; nevertheless, the majority of European would like them to be solved jointly at European level.

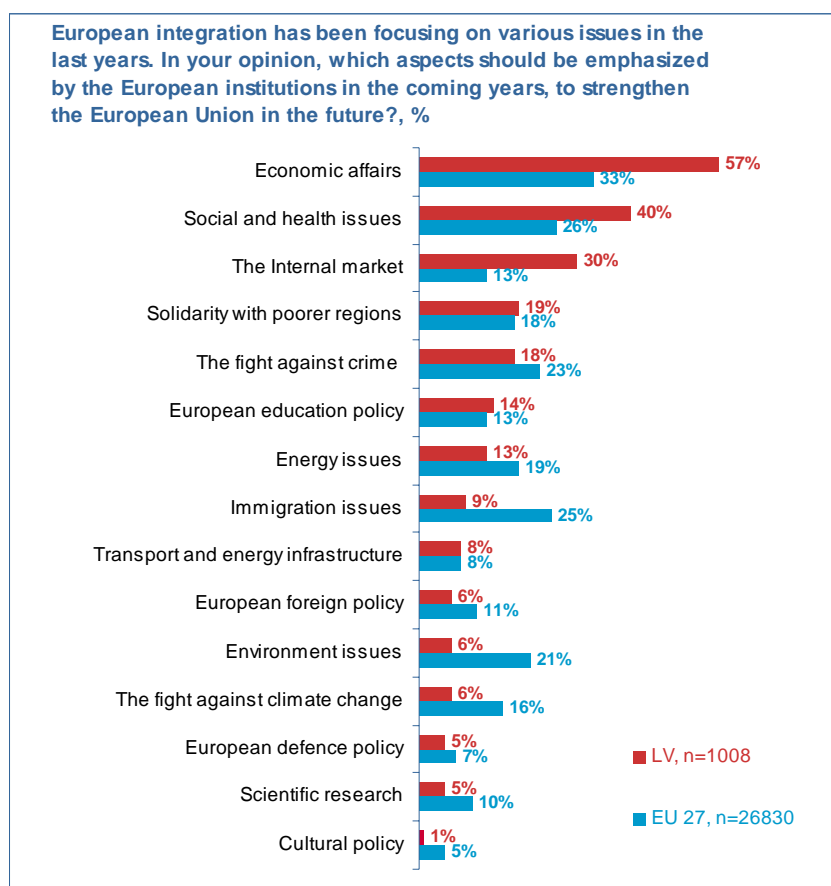


Like EU27 respondents in general, Latvians support more decisions being made at European level.

Latvians think that more decisions at European level should be made about fighting terrorism (85%), promoting democracy and peace in the world (81%), followed by cooperation in the field of research and innovation (79%), fighting organized crime (76%) and securing energy supply (75%).

However, in their view, issues such as ensuring food safety and fighting unemployment should be decided at a European level comparatively less frequently. It should be noted that the equal treatment of men and women is the issue where a comparatively large proportion of Latvian respondents (14%), and 7 PP more than the EU27 average, does not see the need for change.

Regarding the issues on which the EU should focus in the future, EU27 citizens most often cited economic affairs (33%) – an opinion that can be explained by the current economic crisis in Europe. Europeans believe that, in the future, greater attention should also be paid to social (26%) and immigration issues (25%). Environmental issues (21%), energy issues (19%) and solidarity with poorer regions (18%) are other topics to which greater attention should also be paid in the future.



In Latvian respondents' minds, there are three main issues on which the EU should focus its attention in the future. The most important issue to solve is economic affairs, cited by 57% of Latvian respondents – a figure that is 24 PP more than the EU27 average. The next most important are social and health issues (40%), followed by the internal market (30%).

## **Assessment of the global management of the economic crisis**

**The absolute majority of EU27 citizens think that the global economic situation affects the national economy.** 44% of Europeans say the global situation influences the national economy to a large extent, while 41% say there is some impact and only 1% thinks that the global economic situation does not influence a national economy at all.

**There are two major institutions in the minds of EU27 respondents that are the best able to take effective actions against the effects of the financial and economic crisis – the EU and the G20.** 21% of Europeans believe in the ability of the EU and 20% in the G20. National governments are perceived as having the least ability to take effective actions against the effects of the financial and economic crisis by EU27 respondents – only 12% think they would be effective.

Thinking about areas to be given priority **in order to overcome the economic crisis, EU27 respondents cite support for small and medium enterprises (37%).** Other areas include support for the unemployed (27%), investment in education, training and research (26%), as well as the support for the poorest (20%).

Latvians also link the national economic situation to the global economy – **the majority (58%) thinks that the global economy influences the Latvian economic situation to a great extent,** while 23% of people in Latvia think it somewhat influences the Latvian economy, and just 2% consider that it does not influence the national economy at all.

**Most frequently (32%) Latvians responded that the G20 would be the entity best able to take effective actions against the effects of the financial and economic crisis;** it is followed by the EU (15%), the International Monetary Fund (13%) and the USA (12%). Like EU27 respondents, Latvians also think that the national government has the least ability to take effective actions against the effects of the financial and economic crisis – only 9% expressed a positive opinion in this regard.

**Regarding areas to be accorded greatest priority in order to overcome the economic crisis, Latvians, like EU27 respondents, cite support to small and medium enterprises (49%)** and support for the unemployed (26%). Latvians also think it is important to support large companies/industry (23%). The least held opinion is in regard to the role of investments in energy and environment - only 4% Latvians think these issues should be given priority.