

Standard Eurobarometer



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EUROBAROMETER

EUROBAROMETER 72

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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NATIONAL REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY BULGARIA

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The Eurobarometer 72 standard edition of the Eurobarometer survey, conducted in the autumn of 2009, confirms and consolidates the trend of recovery in Bulgarians' optimism regarding certain key political and social aspects, which started in the spring of 2009.

1008 Bulgarians were interviewed for the standard Eurobarometer 72 survey. The sample¹ is representative of the population of Bulgaria aged 15 and higher, distributed by administrative regions², as well as by gender and age group³. Interviewing in all surveyed countries was held in October and November 2009, and, in Bulgaria between 29th of October and 9th of November 2009.

Optimistic attitudes in the society nowadays are fed by Bulgaria's new Cabinet which took office on 27th of July 2009. People's wishes and hopes for finding a political alternative and for changing the status quo seem to have been met in the Parliament elections held on 5th of July 2009.

Data from the 2009 spring Eurobarometer showed the first indications of the recovery of optimism after the serious rise in pessimism caused by the 'gas crisis' in Bulgaria and other parts of Europe, the suspended financing of several EU programmes in Bulgaria, as well as the first negative effects of the world financial and economic crisis on the country. The 'crisis' in opinions from the beginning of 2009 seems to be forgotten and attitudes in Bulgarian society are moderately optimistic in the autumn of 2009.

As in previous survey periods, Bulgarians remain predominantly optimistic and positive on most aspects concerning the European Union and the situation in Europe.

- ❖ As in spring 2009, Bulgaria ranks second among the 27 EU member countries in regards to the share of population having a positive view on the European Union (63%). Attitudes on this indicator remain unchanged compared to the spring period, keeping the positive trend of stabilization after the drop in the winter of 2008/9.
- ❖ The positive trend is even stronger when it comes to the confidence of Bulgarians in the European Union and its institutions. Trust in the EU and the EU institutions not only continues the stabilization which started in the spring but has also reached its highest levels since 2004 (69%). The European Commission is the institution with the highest confidence growth (+7% compared to the spring of 2009).
- ❖ We also register a confirmation of the stabilization of attitudes when it comes to the opinions whether Bulgaria has benefited from its EU membership. In the autumn of 2009, the share of the population thinking that the country has benefited has passed the psychological border of 50%.
- ❖ Nearly three years of Bulgaria's membership in the EU have contributed to increasing the share of Bulgarians who believe that the European Union observes and respects democracy and democratic principles. A significant growth of over 10 percentage points (compared to the autumn of 2007) in the share of Bulgarians who feel satisfied with the functioning of democracy in the Union is observed.
- ❖ Increased optimism is also seen when it comes to the short-term future of the economic situation in Europe and in the world in general. Optimism for the global and European economy has reached its highest rates since autumn 2007.

¹ Effective sample is the sample of all completed interviews.

² NUTS III distribution - 28 administrative regions

³ Age groups 15-24 y.o.; 25-39 y.o.; 40-54 y.o.; 55-64 y.o.; 65 and more years old.

When it comes to Bulgarians' attitudes and expectations towards the domestic social and economic situation, opinions remain predominantly pessimistic:

- ❖ In spite of the growth of positive evaluations regarding the functioning of the democracy in the European Union, Bulgarians are becoming less satisfied (drop of 10 percentage points compared to the autumn of 2007) with the extent that democratic principles are respected in Bulgaria. Negative evaluations regarding the functioning of democracy in Bulgaria are shared by the majority of the population.
- ❖ Despite the increasing share of positive evaluations for the European economy, attitudes with respect to the economic situation in Bulgaria remain unchanged compared to the spring of 2009. The majority of Bulgarians say the national economy is in bad situation.
- ❖ When it comes to short-term expectations regarding the national economy, Bulgarians are moderately pessimistic. Equal shares of the population expect a deterioration of the economic situation in the country and the sustaining of the current situation, while optimism is significantly lower.
- ❖ Pessimism regarding the domestic economic situation is also confirmed by the fact that the majority of both Bulgarians and EU27 respondents believe that the worst of the financial and economic crisis is still to come.
- ❖ In addition to the negative expectations for the economic situation in the country, the assessment of the Bulgarians on the current employment situation and personal job status are also generally pessimistic. Attitudes regarding the employment situation have been gradually deteriorating since the autumn of 2008.
- ❖ Expectations for the employment situation in Bulgaria in the next twelve months are also mostly pessimistic, in line with the trend from the spring of 2009.
- ❖ The majority of the population (70%) evaluates the current financial situation of their households as poor.
- ❖ In addition to that, in autumn 2009, significant growth (+10 percentage points compared to spring 2009) is seen in the share of Bulgarians reporting their households live day to day and they are incapable of making long-term plans. Households living day to day represent more than a half of all Bulgarian households nowadays.

Despite the generally negative perceptions about the economic and social aspects of the domestic situation, the change in the political status quo after the Parliamentary elections held on 5th of July 2009, is marked by a rise in optimism and public confidence regarding certain domestic political aspects.

- ❖ Confidence in the Bulgarian government is up by 27% compared to the pre-electoral period in the spring. Currently, nearly half of the Bulgarian population state they trust the national government. This figure is comparable to the level of confidence Bulgarians have towards the EU institutions and is the highest since the 2007 autumn.
- ❖ It would seem that the new members taking office in Parliament after the elections in July brought a sense of renewal and caused a significant increase in Bulgarians' confidence in the Parliament in the surveyed period.
- ❖ The increase in confidence in the national government is also confirmed by a significant rise (+17 percentage points compared to spring 2009) in the share of Bulgarians who believe that the Bulgarian government is the institution best able to take effective actions against the consequences of the financial and economic crisis. The popularity of the national government among Bulgarians is almost double the EU27 average.

In conclusion, data from the autumn standard Eurobarometer 72 confirm the hypothesis for a recovery from the 'crisis' in public opinion from the winter of 2008/9 and normalization of the attitudes. Bulgarian society sustains (and has even increased) its positive perceptions about the European Union, European policies and the situation in Europe in general. When it comes to the domestic situation, the assessment and expectations about the economic and employment situation continue to be predominantly pessimistic. The signals that the world is already starting to recover from the financial crisis still only influence Bulgarians' positive expectations about the European and world economy and have not yet trickled down into their expectations regarding the national economy. The positive trends in the Bulgarian public opinion towards domestic issues are mainly related to the confidence in key institutions – the government and the Parliament.