

EUROBAROMETER 72

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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NATIONAL REPORT

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. The 72nd survey of the Standard Eurobarometer (EB 72) was conducted in 27 Member States of the European Union and in the three candidate countries – Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia¹, Croatia and Turkey, as well as in the part of Cyprus that is under Turkish authority, between 23rd October and 18th November 2009.

Survey results on the citizens' perception, hopes and expectations of the European Union 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

In the first half of 2009, there are the first signs that the large world economies have overcome the recession. These encouraging signs influenced the climate of public opinion in the countries covered by the Eurobarometer. A dose of precautionary optimism is prevalent among the citizens with a tendency to renounce their worries gradually and give preference to hopes and expectations to overcome the economic and financial crisis.

Respondents' satisfaction with their life reflects the general climate of public opinion. The proportion of European Union citizens who are satisfied with their lives has increased slightly between the last two survey periods (77%; 78%)², while the proportion of those satisfied in the country has decreased by one percentage point (67%; 66%). On average, the citizens in the European Union are now 12 percentage points more satisfied than the citizens in the country.

The latest Eurobarometer reveals a general trend of an increase in optimism in relation to the European economy by six percentage points in the EU (24%; 30%) and by four percentage points in the country (37%; 41%).

The hope of the national public that these positive trends will also reflect the local economy led to a fall in the number of respondents who consider that unemployment is one of the two biggest problems in the country, by four percentage points (68%; 64%). Apart from this significant decrease, unemployment remains top on the list of concerns among citizens. Unemployment remains the biggest problem for those surveyed in the European Union as well.

However, the perception of national economic conditions remains pessimistic. Out of those surveyed in the country, 74% of the respondents in June and 75% in October 2009 were not satisfied with the state of the national economy, while the EU27 figures were 75% and 78% respectively.

A general tendency in the countries covered by the Eurobarometer in the period between the two last surveys (June – October 2009) is the decreasing public confidence in national institutions.

There has been a general trend among the national public towards falling confidence in institutions. The most trusted institution is the army (65%; 59%), followed by the Government (36%; 31%), the Parliament (27%; 25%) and judicial organs (23%; 20%). Political parties are in last place on the list; their low level of confidence decreased by a further percentage point compared to the previous survey (15%; 14%).

The EU public is also less inclined to express trust in national institutions. On average, the decrease in trust in the EU countries is as follows: armies (70%; 64%), judicial organs (48%; 43%), national parliaments (32%; 29%) and political parties (19%; 16%).

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.

² The first number in brackets refers to the previous survey results, while the second one refers to the latest survey.

Only trust in local and regional governments does not reveal a negative trend. In the country, trust has increased (28%; 36%), and in the EU countries, it remained unchanged in both surveys (50%).

Influence of the world economic and financial crisis

As to whether the EU is heading in the right direction, there is an increase in optimism in the Union and in the country as well. In the countries of the EU27, the number of respondents who consider that the things are heading in the right direction has increased from 34% to 40%, and in the country from 53% to 58%. On the other hand, in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, there is an increase in those holding the neutral attitude that the country is going in the right direction, which is most probably due to the unclear situation in terms of setting a date for the start of negotiations on EU membership. The rate of responses that things in the country are heading in the right direction has fallen by four percentage points (38%; 35%), but there is also a decrease in responses that the country is heading in the wrong direction (from 43% to 34%) on account of the increased number of responses “neither in the right nor in the wrong direction” (16%; 26%) and the increased number of “don’t know” responses (2%; 6%).

In the country, there is a more optimistic perception of labour market trends. In the autumn survey, 46% of the respondents considered that the influence of the economic crisis on the labour market has reached its maximum, but almost the same percentage of respondents (47%) assessed that the worst is yet to come. By contrast, in May 2009, 25% of respondents considered that the crisis has reached its maximum, and 64% that the worst is yet to come. There is similar perception of the labour market situation in the EU27 countries. The number of respondents who feel that the influence of the crisis on jobs has already reached its maximum has increased by 10 percentage points (28%; 38%), and the number of pessimists, who assess that the worst is yet to come, has decreased by seven percentage points (61%; 54%).

The survey shows that the crisis in the country has obviously affected households’ financial possibilities. More than half of households face serious problems, which do not allow them to make plans for the future (50%; 56%), and about one-third are able to make plans for the next six months (30%; 30%). The smallest segment is that of the households that can make plans for the next two years (14%; 12%). Survey data confirm that the consequences of the crisis in the country are felt with a certain delay.

In the European Union, there are signs that the negative effects on households’ financial situation are stagnating. The number of respondents in the European Union who stated that they are not able to make future plans and struggle to live from day to day remains unchanged (35%; 35%), the number of those who can make short-term plans has increased by three percentage points (29%; 32%), and the number of those who can make long-term plans for the next two years (31%; 28%) has fallen by the same percentage.

Aside from all the difficulties they face, the great majority of citizens are ready to support the reforms that would bring benefits for the future generations, even though they have got to pay the price by making such sacrifices. About 64% of respondents in the country agree that such reforms should be introduced even though it means that the current generation should make some sacrifices. In the EU, this percentage is 71%.

European public opinion is divided when it comes to the question of who is the most capable to take efficient measures against the crisis. In the country, 24% consider that the EU is the most capable, followed by the national government (22%), the USA (21%), the G20 (8%) and the IMF (11%). In the EU, 22% cited the EU was the

most capable, followed by the national government (19%), the G20 (18%), the USA (12%) and the IMF (11%).

Future expectations

The survey showed that economic issues are the main focus when respondents are asked about the factors for a stronger EU in the future. Out of the list of factors for more efficient functioning of the European Union in the future, the largest number of respondents chose economic issues (in the country 31%; 36% - in the EU 32%; 33%). Among the national public, the second and the third place on the list of factors that may contribute to a stronger EU in the future are solidarity with the poor regions - compared to the previous survey, the number of respondents decreased by seven percentage points (in the last survey 35%; 28%) - and the fight against crime, which was chosen by eight percentage points more respondents (20%; 28%). In the European Union, second place on the list is solving the health and social issues, which was chosen by every fourth respondent (26% in the last two surveys), and third place is shared by solving immigration issues (24% in both surveys) and the fight against crime, which was chosen by two percentage points more respondents compared with the previous survey (22%; 24%).

Compared with the national public, a higher proportion of the EU public prefers to give less importance to money and the possession of certain material goods in life. Changes in the way of life, which create more space for spiritual, non-material goods in the EU are sought by an equal proportion of respondents (56%) in the June and October surveys. In the country, this perspective prevails among a smaller proportion of respondents (44%; 43%).

Among EU countries with a higher standard of living the orientation towards non-material goods is given greater emphasis than in the countries with lower standard of living (the group of the new member states NMS12). As is the case in our country, among the new EU member states, 48% wish to place less emphasis on money and material goods in the future. The outlook observed in these countries is mainly due to the decades-long socio-economic and existential deprivation experienced by citizens, which has left deep marks on their value orientations. As a consequence, their aspirations for the future are generally oriented towards material rather than non-material goods.

Among Europeans as a whole, four times more citizens (64% in June, 61% in October) expressed pessimistic views with regard to the future and consider that the life of children today will be more difficult compared with those who predict that their life will be easier (13% in June, 15% in October). In the country, pessimistic expectations have decreased by six percentage points (44% in June, 38% in October) and there is an almost equal number of respondents believe that children will have an easier life (34%) as that of those who believe that their life will be more difficult (38%).

The latest Eurobarometer shows that, apart from the decrease by three percentage points, the majority of national respondents (59%; 56%) consider that children who live in the country would have a better life if they were to emigrate to another country. In the other two candidate-states, apart from the changes in the period between the last two surveys, a significantly smaller number of respondents consider that children would have better life if they emigrated to another country. In Croatia, the number of citizens who agree that the children would have better life if they emigrated to another country has increased by eight percentage points (34%; 42%). In Turkey, in contrast to the trend in Croatia, that number has decreased by seven percentage points (37%; 30%), on account of the percentage of those who do not see a possibility for a better life for children by emigrating to another country (41%; 49%).

In the EU27 countries, on average, the number of those who agree that emigration from the country would mean a better life for children has fallen by three percentage points (25%; 22%), and there is an increase in the number of respondents who disagree (50%; 53%).

Attitudes towards EU membership

For the majority of those surveyed in the country, EU membership would be a good thing (66%). In contrast, a significantly smaller proportion of the public in the other two candidate-states consider that EU membership would be good (Croatia - 24% and Turkey - 45%). In the EU27 countries, there are no changes between the June and October surveys: 53% of the respondents revealed positive feelings regarding their EU membership.

In the country, those citizens with a positive perception of the EU are more likely to reveal a positive attitude regarding EU accession. The great majority of respondents with a positive image of the EU (82%) assess EU membership as good, and it is considered a good thing by 20% of those with a negative image. Moreover, the anticipation of benefits from EU accession has an influence on the evaluation of membership as a good or a bad thing for the country. The largest proportion (83%) of those who believe that the country will benefit from EU accession considers that EU membership would be a good thing for the country.

Support for the country's EU membership is motivated by the expected benefit to be derived from it. A large and stable majority of citizens expects benefits from EU membership (75% in June; 76% in October). In the remaining two candidate countries, significantly smaller proportions of citizens expect benefits from EU membership. (in Croatia, 37%; 36% and in Turkey, 57%; 50%). In EU27 countries, on average, a stable majority of respondents (56%; 57%) considers that they have benefited from EU membership.

The national public almost consensually supports the EU's enlargement to include new members (85%; 85%). In the EU, although the public is still divided, the positive climate regarding public support for enlargement has improved. The survey shows that support for the Union's further enlargement is increasing (43%; 46%) on account of the falling number of those opposed (46%; 43%) to it.

The growth in the positive image of the EU in the country (59%; 65%) is larger than the average growth in the EU member states (45%; 48%). In the remaining two candidate countries, the positive image of the EU is declining (Croatia - 28%; 25% and Turkey - 46%; 42%).

The national public (57%; 56%) and the EU public (42%; 46%) most often associate the Union with the freedom to travel, study and work everywhere in the EU.

European Union values

The survey results show that the citizens in the country and in the EU have a relatively stable and close system of social values. More than three-quarters of the public revealed a significantly positive attitude towards solidarity (in the country 85%; in the EU 84%) and security (in the country 83%; in the EU 83%), considering them as the most important social values. The results show that security, human solidarity, help and cooperation between citizens are fundamental values for society to function more effectively.

As to the importance of EU values for the citizens personally, the largest number of respondents (47%) cited peace as the most important value. Human rights are in second place (42%) and respect for human life in third place (37%). Europeans, in

general, attach importance mainly to values relating to the respect for human life (44%), peace (42%) and human rights (40%).

Over the past period, there has not been any significant change among the public covered by the Eurobarometer regarding the evaluation of the values that in their opinion best represent the EU. Respondents cited peace (in the country 38%, in the EU 36%), human rights (in the country 37%, in the EU 37%) and democracy (in the country 35%, in the EU 39%) as the values that best represent the EU.

The survey showed that a large segment of the national and the European public considers that the state interferes too much in the life of the citizens' lives. An almost identical proportion of respondents in the country (61%; 58%) and in the Union (61%; 61%) consider that the state interferes significantly in their lives.

The challenges of globalization

The survey results show that citizens most often associate the global power of countries with their economic and political power, half as many with military power, and the least with cultural influences. Respondents consider that economic power is the main factor that determines the global power of countries in the world (in the country 84%; 86% - in the EU 80%; 81%). Political influence is in second place (in the country 51%; 52% - in the EU 60%; 63%), and military power, which is in third place (in the country 30%; 33% - in the EU 30%; 30%) is almost twice as frequently cited as cultural influences (in the country 18%; 18% - in the EU 14%; 15%).

Specific to the perception of the EU as a global power is the balanced consideration of its economic power and political influence relative to the perception of the global power of specific countries in the world. The EU's economic power is a major factor for the respondents and determines its global power in the world (in the country 75%; 78% - in the EU 70%; 73%). The political influence of the EU in the world is cited by a somewhat smaller number of respondents (in the country 59%; 60% - in the EU 66%; 68%).

As to the attitudes towards globalization, there are more similarities than differences between the national and the EU publics. Data from the latest Eurobarometer show that the attitudes of the national and the EU public are very similar in 8 out of 14 surveyed aspects. The greatest similarity can be observed in the attitude that globalization brings profit only to big companies, but not to citizens. This opinion was recorded among 62% of respondents in the country and 63% in the EU27 countries. But, there is also an area where public attitudes differ considerably. The largest difference between the national and the EU public is in relation to the thesis that the EU and the USA have both the same interests when it comes to globalization. In the country, 63% of the respondents agree with this attitude and in the EU, 37%.

There is agreement among the national and the EU public that the most important measure that society should take in order to mitigate the negative effects of globalization is to establish social equality and solidarity (in the country 49%; 47% - in the EU 45%; 45%).