



Standard Eurobarometer



European
Commission

EUROBAROMETER 72

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

AUTUMN 2009

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CROATIA

Standard Eurobarometer 72 / Jesen 2009. – TNS Opinion & Social

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

This report was produced for the European Commission's Delegation in Croatia.

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EUROBAROMETER 72 – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Standard Eurobarometer public opinion polls are conducted twice a year. This one, the 72nd (EB 72), was conducted from 23 October to 18 November 2009 in all 27 member states of the European Union, in two candidate countries which are currently negotiating their membership – Croatia and Turkey, in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, which has candidates status, but the date for the beginning of negotiations has not been set yet, and among the members of the Turkish community in Cyprus. EB 72 is the eleventh poll by the Standard Eurobarometer cover Croatia. The responses were gathered in the field from 17 October till 11 November by Puls agency.

During the four months between the last two Standard Eurobarometer polls, Sweden took over the presidency of the European Union from the Czech Republic. The Lisbon Treaty was accepted with a majority of votes in the repeat referendum in Ireland. A few days later, Polish president, Lech Kaczyński, ratified the treaty. After additional delays, Czech president, Vaclav Klaus, also ratified the treaty, after the European Council agreed to meet his final request, the opt-out of the Czech Republic from the European Charter of Fundamental Rights.

The Croatian political scene was shocked in early summer by the sudden and unexplained resignation of Prime Minister, Ivo Sanader. Deputy Prime Minister, Jadranka Kosor, appointed by Sanader as his successor, admitted that the country's budget is impossible to sustain, so the government decided to fill the budget gap by introducing the unpopular "crisis tax" and raising value-added tax from 22 to 23 percent. However, Ms. Kosor's popularity increased since she agreed to deal with the emerging corruption affairs in state-owned companies and did not give in to pressures to protect those responsible.

The Swedish EU Presidency saw the end of the months-long blockade of Croatian accession negotiations, so Prime Minister Kosor and her Slovenian colleague, Borut Pahor, agreed to sign the arbitration agreement on resolving the border dispute. At the

Intergovernmental accession conference, held on 2 October, six new negotiation chapters were opened: *Free movement of capital, Taxation, Agriculture and rural development, Food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy, Judiciary and fundamental rights*, and *Regional policy and coordination of structural instruments*. At the same time, five chapters were provisionally closed: *Freedom of movement of workers, Company law, Customs union, Statistics and Trans-European networks*. Three chapters, ready for opening, remained blocked by Slovenia: *Fisheries, Environment and Foreign*, and *security and defence policy*.

By the time this survey was completed, Croatia had 28 opened and 12 closed chapters. Apart from the aforementioned three blocked chapters, two more chapters remain to be opened: *Competition policy*, awaiting confirmation from the European Commission that it is satisfied with the Croatian proposal for a shipbuilding restructuring programme, and *Judiciary and fundamental rights*, for which Croatia met the opening measures, in the European Commission's opinion, but several member states in the EU Council decided to wait for a positive report from Serge Brammertz, Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), on Croatia's collaboration with the ICTY.

The internal politics in Croatia between the last two Eurobarometer surveys were also marked by the preparation of presidential election campaigns.

The background to all these events in the EU and Croatia was the crisis that made its way from the financial world to the real economy, and reached its peak.

1. Climate of opinion

Satisfaction with life in the EU has continued to rise slowly, so there is one percentage point more of those satisfied than last summer (78%), and equally those unsatisfied (22%). In Croatia, satisfaction with life has stagnated (63%) after the previous five-point drop. However, there are now four percentage points more of those unsatisfied (34%). The negative difference in Croats' satisfaction with life compared to the satisfaction of Europeans as a whole increased to 15 percentage points, while, a year and a half ago, it was only 3 percentage points. Such a difference probably arose

because the EU is already on its way out of recession, while Croats still see no actions that would lead them out of crisis or give them hope of a more secure future. At the same time, the standard of living has been reduced by the crisis income tax and VAT increase.

The increase of optimism in the EU and pessimism in Croatia is evident from the fact that the satisfaction with the status of the domestic economy is steadily increasing in the EU, so that 23% of respondents are now satisfied with it, while, in Croatia, the already small number of those satisfied in the previous survey almost halved, to barely 6%. At the same time, the increasing majority of European Union respondents (54%) is satisfied with the status of their personal situation, while, in Croatia, the percentage of those satisfied dropped by 8 percentage points, to 35%. Satisfaction with the financial status of their households slightly decreased in the EU (to 64%), while, in Croatia, the drop was more significant (to 40%).

A downturn in the economic situation in their country is expected by a six percentage point higher majority of Croats than in the previous survey (57%), while only 11% of them believe in an upturn. In the EU, there is still a majority of those who expect no changes to happen (37%); those who expect positive changes have slightly increased (28%), while the number of European Union respondents who expect negative changes dropped slightly (31%).

Although the majority of Croats still does not expect any changes in the economic situation of their own households, this majority is now relative (49%), 3 percentage points lower than in the previous survey. At the same time, there are as many as 7 percentage points more of those who expect negative changes (35%) and 7 percentage points fewer of those who think that the changes will be positive (14%). In the EU, 57% expect no changes whatsoever, 21% expect positive changes, and 19% negative ones.

The number of Croats who cannot plan their future so they live from one day to the next has increased since the previous survey by 11 percentage points, so they are now in the majority (54%). In the EU, the number of such respondents remains at a steady 35%.

Crime is again the number one most important issue Croatia is facing (59%), increasing by 21 percentage points compared to the previous survey. It pushed unemployment into second place (50%), and the economic situation into third (45%). In fourth place

is inflation (17%), but it now worries 10 percentage points fewer respondents than in the previous survey. To European Union respondents, unemployment is the most important issue their country is facing (51%), followed by the economic situation (45%), crime and inflation (19%).

In both the EU (47%) and Croatia (71%), there is a majority of those who consider that things are going in the wrong direction in their countries, however, compared to the previous survey, their number decreased by 3 and 6 percentage points in the EU and Croatia respectively. Both Croatian and European Union respondents are increasingly optimistic when it comes to the trends in the EU. 33% of respondents in Croatia, 7 percentage points more than in the previous survey, think that things in the EU are going in the right direction, while 30%, or as much as 18 percentage points less, think that the things are going in the wrong direction. Among the EU respondents, 40% think that the things in the EU are going well, while 28% think things are going badly.

A majority of both Croatian and European respondents thinks that their children are going to live in poorer conditions than the current generation. However, Croats are, in this regard, less pessimistic than Europeans as a whole (56% and 61% respectively). Since the previous survey, in Croatia, the number of respondents who feel that their children would live better if they moved to some other country has increased by 8 percentage points, so they are now in a relative majority (42%). In the EU, the majority of respondents (53%, or three percentage points higher than in the previous survey), does not believe that the lives of their children would improve if they moved to some other country.

Since the last survey, trust in the Croatian government dropped by a single percentage point, to 12%, but the lack of trust has stagnated at 84%. 29% of Europeans trust their country's government, 3 points less, while those who have no trust in it are at 65%, 2 points more than in the previous survey.

The parliament is also trusted by 12% of respondents, while 84% percent of Croatian respondents do not trust it. The numbers are the same for the government as well, but the trust in the parliament dropped in the meantime by 4 percentage points, and the lack of trust increased by 3 percentage points. Among European respondents, 30% of them trust their parliaments, and 63% do not.

Regional and local authorities are trusted by 23% of Croats and as many as 50% of

Europeans, while 71% of Croats and 43% of Europeans do not trust them.

Trust in the Croatian justice system dropped by 5 percentage points to 15 percent, while the mistrust increased by 4 percentage points, to 80%. In the EU, the domestic justice system is trusted by 43%, and mistrusted by 52% of respondents.

Trust in political parties has dropped to the lowest level ever in Eurobarometer surveys: only 4% of Croats trust them, 3 points less than in the previous survey, while 92% do not trust them, a single point more. Low trust in political parties is also seen in EU member states: 16% of respondents trust them, while 79% do not.

The military is trusted by 46% of Croats and 64% of Europeans. It is not trusted by 42% of Croats and 26% of Europeans.

Trust of Croats in the European Union is again on the increase, so it has now reached 34%, three points higher than in the previous survey. Mistrust, at the same time, dropped 5 points to 57%. 48% of Europeans trust the EU, while 40% do not.

NATO is trusted by 40% of Croats and 48% of Europeans, and mistrusted by 45% of Croats and 30% of Europeans.

Trust in the media in Croatia is at a very low level. The most trusted media in Croatia is the radio with 47%, but an identical percentage of respondents do not trust it. Second is television, trusted by 42%, and mistrusted by 53% of Croats. The Internet is trusted by 35% percent of Croats, and mistrusted by the same percentage. Trust in the press is at the lowest level ever: it is trusted by only 30%, and mistrusted by as many as 63% of Croatian respondents.

Radio is the most trusted medium in the EU as well: it is trusted by 58%, and mistrusted by 35% of respondents. Television is trusted by 49%, and mistrusted by 46% of Europeans. The press is trusted by 42%, and mistrusted by 52%, while figures for trust and mistrust in the Internet are 37% and 41% respectively.

84% of respondents are not satisfied with the status of democracy in Croatia, whereas the majority of respondents in the EU (53%) are satisfied with the status of democracy in their respective countries.

2. Opinions on the European Union

The perception of the EU in Croatia is increasingly negative. There are now only 25% who see it as positive, 3 percentage points less than in the previous survey, while 32% of respondents see it as negative, 2 percentage points more. However, a majority of citizens have a neutral view of the EU, at a steady 40%.

To European respondents, the EU's image has improved in the meantime. 48% of respondents, 3 percentage points more, see the character of EU as positive, while 15%, one percentage point less, see it as negative. The number of Europeans who have a neutral image of the EU has decreased by one point, to 36%.

Less than a quarter of Croatian respondents (24%) would see their country's EU membership as a good thing, while more than a half of EU member state citizens (53%) finds membership to be good.

The number of respondents who consider that Croatia's membership of the EU would be bad has decreased since the last survey by 2 percentage points to 37%, while, in the EU, the proportion of those who think that their country's EU membership is a bad thing remained at 15%.

2 percentage points more of Croatian respondents consider that country's membership of the EU would be neither good nor bad (35%), while the figure for those who are neutral towards membership remains at a steady 28 percent.

57% of European respondents feel some benefit from their country's EU membership, one percentage point more than in the previous survey, while a steady 31% of respondents do not. In Croatia, the number of respondents who expect benefits from membership has, in the meantime, decreased by a single percentage point to 36%, but the number of those who do not expect benefits from membership has fallen by 2 percentage points, to 52%.

European monetary union with the common currency still enjoys great support among both European and Croatian respondents, although support has fallen slightly since the last survey: in Croatia, by 3 percentage points (59%) and by one percentage point in the EU (60%).

The majority of both Croats and Europeans oppose a "multi-speed Europe". The

opposition has increased since the last survey in Croatia by 2 percentage points (50%), and by a single point in the EU (43%).

Support for further EU enlargement has dropped in Croatia since the last survey by 4 percentage points, but it is still supported by a majority of respondents (56%). In the EU, support for further enlargement has, in the meantime, become the relative majority: there are now 3 percentage points more supporters (46%), and 3 percentage points fewer opposed (43%).

3. Globalization

A majority of Croatian respondents see globalization as an opportunity for economic growth. However, almost two-thirds feel that it also increases social inequalities. The vast majority of Croatian respondents advocate joint “world management” (68%).

A relative majority of Croatian respondents thinks that the EU helps protect its citizens from negative effects of globalization (45%), and that the EU also helps its citizens reap the benefits from globalization (48%).

Those who see globalization as a threat to employment in their own country (39%) significantly outnumber those who see it as an opportunity (31%).

Croats are significantly more liberal than Europeans on average: while a steady 61% of respondents think that the state meddles too much in their lives, 77% of Croatian respondents feel the same. Two-thirds of Europeans consider free market competition as the best guarantee for economic progress, compared to 76% of Croats.

When it comes to environmental awareness, Croats are still somewhat more confused than Europeans in general; however, neither are still clear about what is more important to them, the environment or economic growth, so they are susceptible to manipulative questions in their responses.

The overwhelming majority of Croats (76%) feels that Croatia needs to transform more in order to face the future. The majority is willing to make sacrifices in favour of the well-being of future generations.

4. Values

Croatian and European respondents are almost the same when it comes to values in economic and social terms. Their top values are security and solidarity, with trade and flexibility right behind them. They both place very highly the company, competitiveness, competition and welfare state, although the Croats slightly less so than Europeans in general.

However, Croatian and European respondents differ greatly in their views on public administration – its perception is positive for a majority of Europeans, but negative among two-thirds of Croats.

Human rights are the most important value to Croats, with human life being second and peace the third. It is interesting that faith is in last place for both Croats (4%) and Europeans as a whole (6%), with the respect of other cultures just before it (8%).

To both Europeans in general, as well as Croats, social equality and solidarity are the top issues on which society should focus in facing the major global challenges.

5. Profiles

The percentage of Croats who declare themselves as politically left-wing is now 2 percentage points higher than in the previous survey (28%), while those who declare themselves as politically right-wing are as many as 6 percentage points fewer (13%). At the same time, there are 6 points more of those who see themselves in the political centre (34%), so they are still in a growing majority. There are 3 points fewer of those who refuse to answer this question (9%), and a one point more of those who are undecided (16%).

The number of fixed telephony users in Croatia is falling, so the number of fixed telephone line owners has decreased by a single point compared with the previous survey (85%). The percentage of mobile phone users in Croatia also decreased, by two percentage points (80%). The significant decrease of Internet users at home by 8 points (43%) is a reason for concern, so Croatia now lags 19 points behind the European average. A small percentage of Croats use Internet at work (22%), 7 points below the European average.

6. Conclusion

Almost two-thirds of Croats and three-quarters of Europeans think that the EU is a necessity in facing global challenges. The European monetary union with the euro, its common currency, still enjoys great support among Croatian respondents, although this support has dropped by 3 points since the last survey. Support for EU enlargement policy also dropped somewhat, although a majority of respondents are still in favour of it (56%).

Nevertheless, the perception of the EU among Croatian respondents is increasingly negative. The EU's popularity in Croatia had grown slightly in the previous survey, but it has dropped yet again, so, now, only a quarter of Croatian respondents see it as positive. This figure is even less than that in the UK which is the strongest eurosceptic country in the EU. Still, the EU's image remains neutral for a steady relative majority of Croats.

The number of Croats who feel that Croatia's membership of the EU would be a good thing is even lower, only 24%, the same as in the previous survey. It is 6 points less than the British and only a single point more than the Latvians, which are in the last place when it comes to this issue. 37% would consider Croatia's membership of the EU to be bad, and 35% of those who would not find it either good or bad. Croats who still expect benefits from the membership significantly outnumber those who think that membership is good (36%), but the majority does not expect benefits from membership.

The data indicate that Croats are tired of the transition and accession process, and that the elimination of the Slovenian blockade took too long. Strong support for the euro and enlargement policy, as well as higher trust in European than domestic institutions (although those who do not trust the European institutions are in a majority) would indicate that Croats have not given up on their determination to join the EU. However, the prevailing pessimism is a warning that the acceptance of the Accession Treaty in a referendum in Croatia will not be an easy task.