



Standard Eurobarometer



European  
Commission

# EUROBAROMETER 72

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

## AUTUMN 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 in Latvia

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 72 survey in Latvia took place between 30 October and 16 November 2009 and surveyed 1,006 Latvian citizens aged over 15. The survey was conducted by TNS Latvia, market and social research agency. Eurobarometer 72 was the eleventh Eurobarometer Standard survey since Latvia became a Member State of the European Union.

## **Assessment of the current situation**

Overall, satisfaction with life of people living in 27 Member States of the European Union has not changed since spring 2009 – **the majority of Europeans (78%) are satisfied with their life**, while 22% of Europeans are dissatisfied with it.

Since spring 2009, no significant changes have been observed in the mood of the Latvian population either. Latvia is still among those European countries where people’s satisfaction with life is significantly below the average European rate (-21 PP). **The attitude of Latvians is polarized: a little more than half of them are satisfied with life (57%), while 43% are not.**

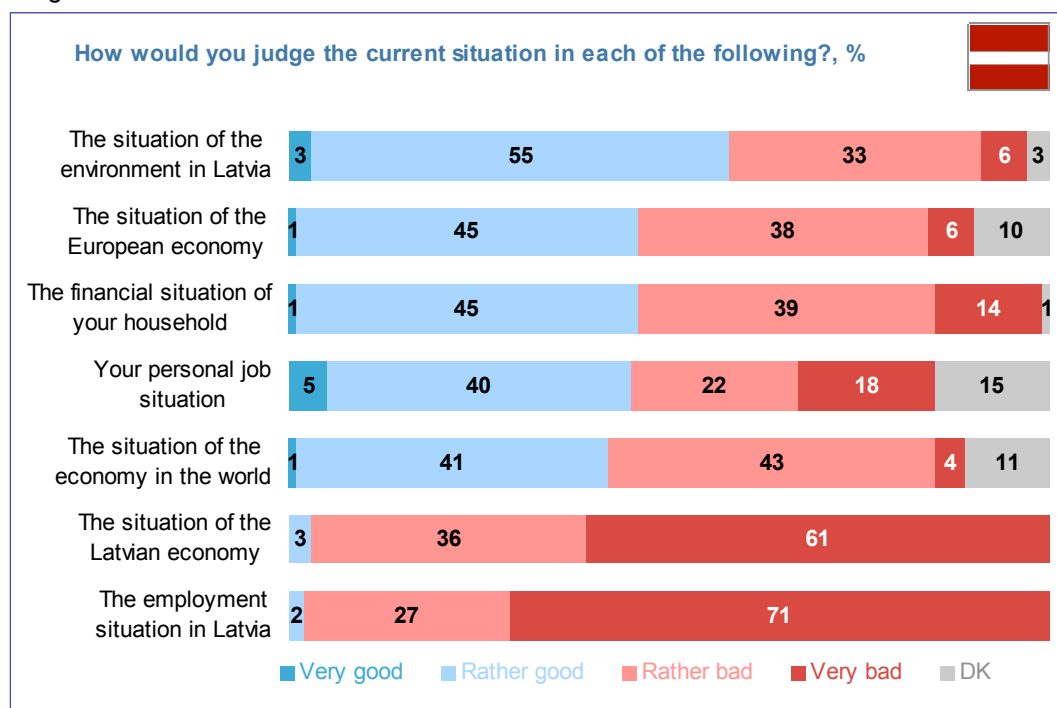
**Both in the 27 countries of the European Union and in Latvia, people’s assessment of important issues such as the economic situation and employment in the country, as well as their household’s financial situation and personal job situation has not changed significantly since spring 2009.**

Both in Europe in general and in Latvia, people are more sceptical about the economic situation and the employment situation in the country.

Positive changes among Europeans and Latvians were observed in regard to their assessment of the situation of the economy in Europe and the world in general. A significant increase was observed in the number of those people who positively rate the situation of the world and European economies.

Latvians are more sceptical than Europeans in general as regards the economic situation in their country, as well as their personal job situation. An absolute majority of Latvians say that the economic situation (97%) and employment situation in Latvia (98%) are bad.

Their personal situation and the economic situation in Europe and the world are more positively rated by people living in Latvia.



## **Overall assessment of living conditions**

**Overall, compared with 5 years ago, Europeans are rather sceptical about household purchasing power. More often, Europeans (45%) say that their household purchasing power has decreased.** 36% of Europeans say that their household purchasing power has not changed, while 17% report that their purchasing power has increased.

**As regards the changes in living conditions in the long-term future, Europeans are rather pessimistic. The majority (61%) think that the life of their children will be harder than today.** However, the majority of Europeans (53%) do not agree with the statement that their children would have a better life if they emigrated to another country.

**In Latvia, people are more critical of living conditions compared to respondents in the European Union as a whole – the majority of respondents (62%) say that their household's purchasing power has decreased compared to 5 years ago.**

Speaking about living conditions in **Latvia** in the future, negative opinions are more common: **41% think that the life of their children will be harder.** However, Latvian people, more often than Europeans in general, say that their children's living conditions will be better (25%). 27% say that living conditions will not change in the future.

**A significant share of Latvian respondents (45%) thinks that their children would have a better life if they emigrated to another country.** At the same time, 37% do not agree with this statement.

## **Most important issues facing the country and individuals**

**Both people from 27 countries of the European Union and those living in Latvia say that most important problems facing the country are still unemployment and the current economic situation.**

Unemployment as the most important problem facing their country was mentioned by 51% of people in 27 Member States of the European Union and 64% of people living in Latvia.

40% of Europeans in general and 50% of Latvians regard the current economic situation as the most important problem facing the country.

In Europe as a whole, the next most important problems at a national level include crime (19%), rising prices/inflation (19%) and the healthcare system (14%).

At the same time, Latvians regard the healthcare system (20%), crime (17%) and taxation (11%) as relatively problematic issues at a national level. It should be mentioned that, since spring 2009, Latvian people have cited the economic situation as a problem at a national level less frequently (drop of 9 PP), and, instead, cite the healthcare system as an issue which should be solved at a national level (increase of 8 PP).

People living in the European Union and those living in Latvia hold different opinions about the most important problems facing them personally.

**The most important issue facing Europeans personally is inflation/rising prices (38%).** It is followed by the **economic situation (26%) and unemployment (20%).**

Europeans in general significantly more often say inflation is a personal problem not an issue facing the country – by 19 PP more. At the same time, the economic situation and unemployment are more often regarded as issues facing the country, not individuals. They are mentioned as private problems more seldom – 14 PP and 31 PP respectively.

**The two most important issues regarded as private problems by Latvian people are still the economic situation (46%) and unemployment (33%), which were also cited as the most important issues at a national level.**

The next most important personal issues are healthcare (23%) and rising prices/inflation (22%). It is worthwhile mentioning that, since spring 2009, healthcare as a private problem has been mentioned more often (by 5 PP), while rising prices/inflation is becoming less relevant (5 PP).

## **Expectations for the future in the European Union and Latvia**

**Overall, people living in the European Union are still rather sceptical about developments in the country in the future.** Almost half of Europeans (47%) think that, in their country, things are going in the wrong direction, while only 30% of Europeans say that things in their country are going in the right direction.

**Latvians are still among the most sceptical people within the European Union as regards their country's development. The majority (79%) thinks that things in Latvia are going in the wrong direction,** and some of the main reasons for that are the important long-term problems related to the stabilisation of the country's economic situation and people's dissatisfaction with the government's activities and decisions as regards reducing the budget deficit.

**Thinking about the future developments in the European Union, both people living in 27 Member States of the European Union and Latvia hold more positive opinions.** An increase was observed in the number of those people living in Europe who positively rate the development of the European Union – by 6 PP, which means today they include 40% of Europeans. 28% of Europeans think that in the European Union things are going in the wrong direction.

It is worth mentioning that, since spring 2009, the number of people who were sceptical about the development of the European Union has decreased (by 5 PP).

**As regards the development of the European Union, the opinion of the Latvian population is similar to that of Europeans in general.** About half of Latvian respondents (51%) are optimistic about the future of the European Union. **However, only 37% think that in the European Union things are going in the right direction,** while 25% say that things in the European Union are going in the wrong direction.

## **Evaluation of country's membership of the European Union**

**Overall, the attitude of Europeans towards their country's membership of the European Union has remained unchanged since autumn 2008. Half of Europeans (53%) say that their country's membership of the European Union is a good thing.** It should be mentioned that a significant part of Europeans still do not have an opinion on their country's membership of the European Union: 27% of people say it is neither good nor bad thing.

**In Europe in general, a little more than half (57%) thinks that their country has benefited from being a member of the European Union.** Almost one-third (31%) holds the opposite opinion – they say that their country has not benefited from being a member of the European Union. At the same time, 12% do not have an opinion on this matter.

**In Latvia, the number of people who support their country's membership of the European Union is still the lowest both among the Baltic States and European countries in general – only 23% of Latvians say that their country's membership of the European Union is a good thing.** People living in Latvia are more often neutral towards the country's membership of the European Union – about half (51%) says that Latvia's membership of the European Union is neither good nor bad thing.

**The opinion of Latvians as regards their country's benefits from being a member of the European Union has not changed since spring 2009.** It is still the most sceptical both among the Baltic States and European countries in general – 55% say that Latvia has not benefited from being a member of the European Union.

## **Impression of the European Union**

**Nearly half (48%) of the European poll has a favourable impression of the European Union,** while 35% have a neutral impression and 15% have an unfavourable impression.

**Europeans tend more often to associate the European Union with its economic power and political influence – 73% and 68% of Europeans correspondingly.**

**Among Europeans, the most often mentioned values which best represent the European Union include “democracy” and “peace” – 39% and 36% respectively. A significant proportion of Europeans (37%) also mention human rights as a value which represents the European Union.**

**Overall, among Europeans, the European Union is most often associated with the freedom to travel, study and work anywhere within the European Union.** This opinion is held by 46% and, since spring 2009, this percentage has increased a little (by 4 PP).

Since spring 2009, a significant increase has been observed in the number of Europeans who associate the European Union with the single currency, the euro. Today, the percentage of such Europeans has reached 37% (+4 PP). For a large part of Europeans, the European Union also signifies peace (28%), democracy (26%) and a stronger say in the world (25%).

**Latvians tend more often (55%) to have a neutral opinion about the European Union.** Since spring 2009, the positive opinion on the European Union has increased a little (by 4 PP), and, today, 28% of population have a favourable impression of the European Union.

**The absolute majority of Latvian population (82%) characterize the European Union as a strong economic power,** and, since spring 2009, the percentage has increased (by 5 PP). **At the same time, 78% characterize the European Union as having influence in politics.** In Latvia, the economic power and political influence of the European Union were cited as its characteristics more often compared to Europe in general.

**Latvians say that the value which best represents the European Union is “human rights” (40%).** About one-third have mention peace (32%), the Rule of Law (30%) and democracy (30%) as the values representing the European Union.

**For Latvians, the European Union mainly means the freedom to travel, study and work anywhere within the European Union (62%)** and, since spring 2009, the percentage of people holding this opinion has increased (+6 PP).

Other aspects were cited less frequently by Latvians: comparatively more Latvians associate the European Union with bureaucracy (19%), waste of money (18%), unemployment (18%) and peace (17%). Since spring 2009, a significant increase has been observed in the number of Latvians who associate the European Union with peace (+5 PP), the single currency, euro (+5 PP) and loss of cultural identity (+6 PP).

## **Trust in institutions**

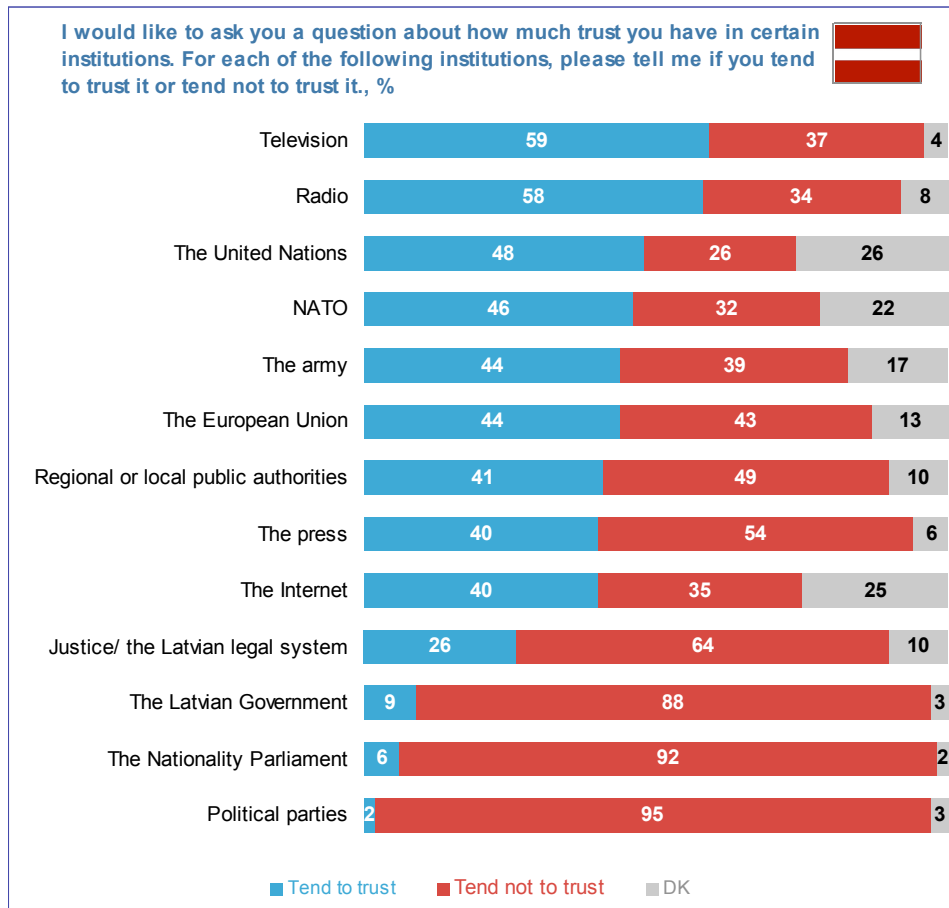
**People living in the 27 Member States of the European Union trust the army (64%), radio (58%) and the United Nations (55%).** Overall, trust in international organizations, among Europeans, is much higher than in the media in general, local authorities and political parties. Only 16% of Europeans trust political parties, 29% of people trust national government, while 30% of trust their national parliament.

**Among Latvians, higher trust was shown in television (59%) and radio (58%). The majority of people trust those mass media.** People also trust the United Nations (48%) and NATO (46%) highly. **The attitude towards the European Union remains unchanged, and it is ambiguous: 44% of respondents tend to trust the European Union, while 43% of them tend not to trust it.**

In contrast, Latvians tend to more often trust the media in general, international organizations and the army rather than national authorities and political parties.

Of all the Europeans, Latvians are still those who most strongly distrust the national **government (88%), the Saeima (92%) and political parties (95%).**

As regards local authorities, **Latvians tend to have more trust in regional and local public authorities (41%) and the national legal system (26%),** while only 9% trust the national government and 6% trust the Saeima. However, it is worth mentioning that, since spring 2009, distrust in the legal system has increased a little (by 4 PP).



**Institutions of the European Union and their role within the European Union**

**Awareness of the EU institutions: the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Council of the European Union and the European Central Bank, is high among people living in 27 Member States of the European Union, and the majority of Europeans know the above institutions. Europeans’ trust in the EU institutions has not changed significantly since spring 2009. About half of Europeans (50%) trust the European Parliament, and a slightly smaller number of people trust the European Commission (46%) and the European Central Bank (44%). Trust in the Council of the European Union is lowest (41%) which, to a certain extent, may be explained by its comparatively low overall awareness.**

Awareness of the European Union institutions among Latvians is similar to that of the average in the European Union. The majority of Latvian population have heard of the European Parliament (88%) and the European Commission (82%), while people are a little less aware of the European Central Bank (76%) and the Council of the European Union.

**Since spring 2009, a small increase has been observed in awareness of the European Commission (by 4 PP) and the European Central Bank (by 5 PP).**

Latvian people trust less in the European Union institutions compared to the EU27 average. **Latvians tend more often to trust the European Parliament (41%) and the European Commission (38%), and less often the Council of the European Union (35%) and the European Central Bank (33%).**

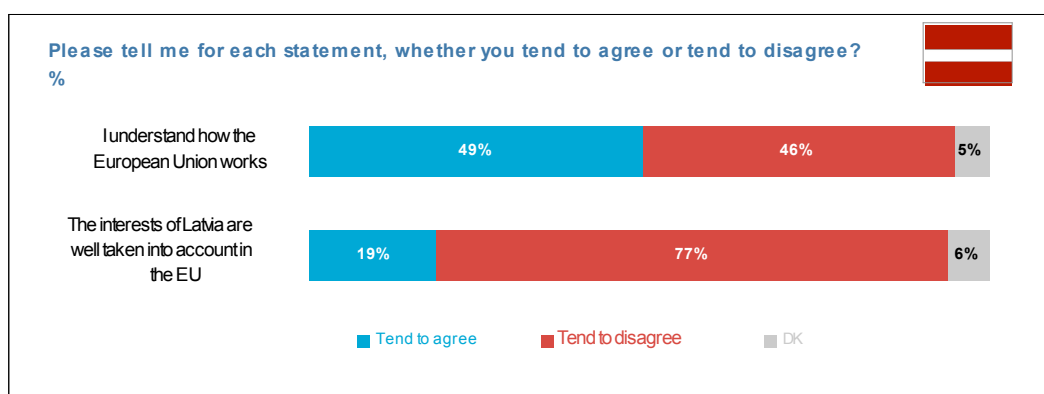
**Opinions about the processes in the European Union and related issues**

Opinions are polarised when it comes to the question about the European Union works – **44% of people living in the 27 Member States of the European Union tend to agree with the statement that they understand how the European Union works**, while almost half (48%) of people tend to disagree with

the above statement. Likewise, in Latvia, **opinions also differ about how the European Union's works** – half (49%) of Latvians say that they know how the European Union works, and a slightly smaller proportion (46%) say they do not.

**Europeans are sceptical about how the interests of their country are taken into account in the European Union.** Only 39% of Europeans agree with the statement that the interests of their country are well taken into account in the European Union.

**The majority (77%) of Latvians think that the interests of their country are not taken into account in the European Union.** Only 19% agree with the statement that the interests of Latvia are well taken into account in the European Union.



People living in the EU's 27 countries **mostly support the European Monetary Union with one single currency, the euro**: it is supported by 60% of citizens.

At the same time, opinions of Europeans are polarised regarding the **further enlargement of the European Union** to include other countries in future years – 46% of Europeans are for the further enlargement of the European Union, while 43% are against it.

However, as in spring 2009, the idea of the **speed of building Europe** being faster in one group of countries than in the other countries only received lukewarm support. Only 40% of people living in the EU's 27 countries are for this idea.

**The opinion of Latvians in these regards is different from the overall EU27 opinion, especially as regards the European Monetary Union with one single currency, the euro.** Latvians show **significantly less support for the single currency** – only 53% of Latvians are for the euro, which is 7 PP less than the average rate among the EU's 27 countries.

As in spring 2009, the opinions among the Baltic States are different. When compared to Europeans in general, Lithuanians, like Latvians, are significantly more sceptical about the single currency, the euro – half (52%) of Lithuanians are for the euro. On the other hand,, Estonians show more support for the single currency, the euro – 63% are in favour of it.

It is worth noting that support for the euro in Latvia has increased during the last six months – by 5 PP (from 48% to 53%). In Lithuania and Estonia, support for the single currency euro remained unchanged during the last six months.

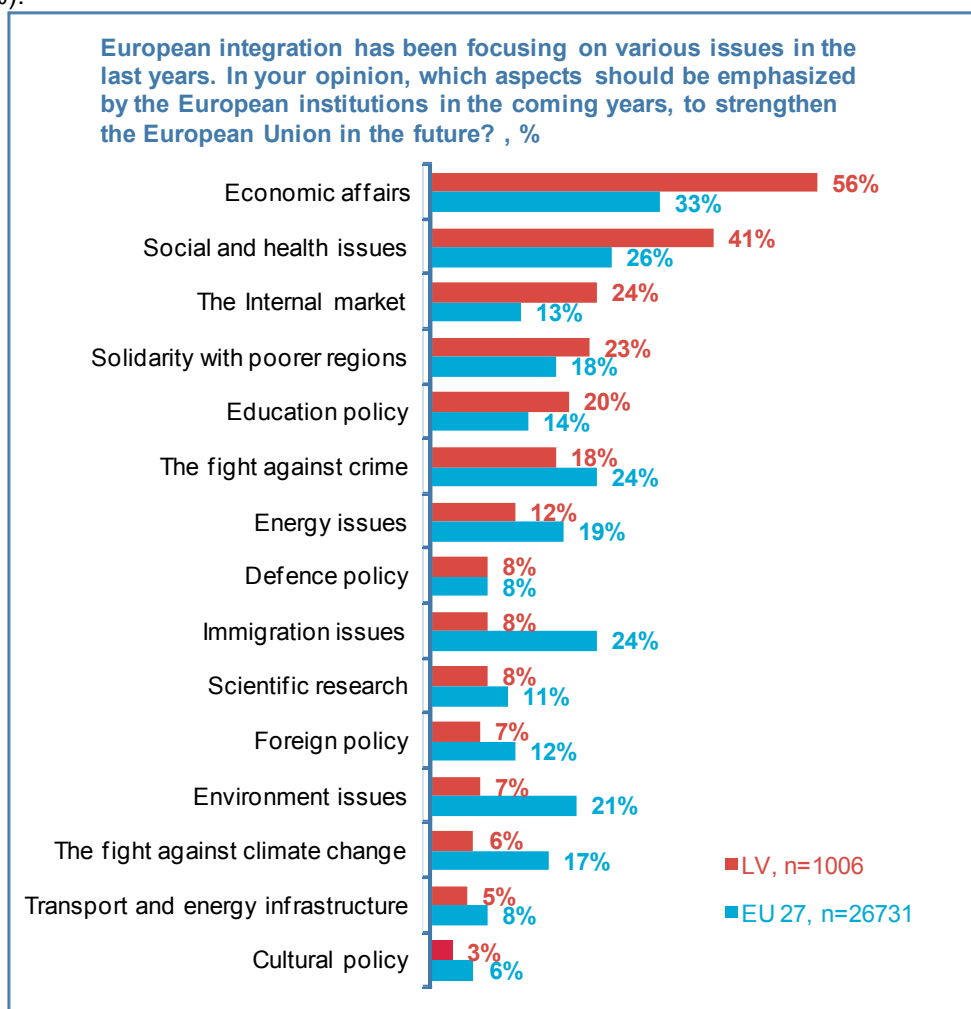
## Issues to be solved in the European Union in the coming years

When thinking about the issues which should be solved by the European Union in the coming years, a significant share of EU27 respondents mentioned economic issues (33%) – the same as in the previous Eurobarometer survey which was conducted in spring 2009.

According to the opinion expressed by Europeans in general, **social and health issues (26%), the fight against crime and immigration issues (24% for each) should also be emphasized in the coming years.** Similarly, more attention should be paid to solving environmental issues (21%), as well as dealing with energy issues (19%), solidarity with poorer regions (18%) and the fight against climate change (17%).

**As was the case in spring 2009, Latvians thought about the two main aspects to be emphasized by the European Union in the coming years. In their view, the most important aspect is economic affairs which was mentioned by 56%,** and it is 23 PP more than the average rate in the European Union. This means that economic issues are important among Latvians and they are certain that the European Union is the most appropriate level for solving these issues.

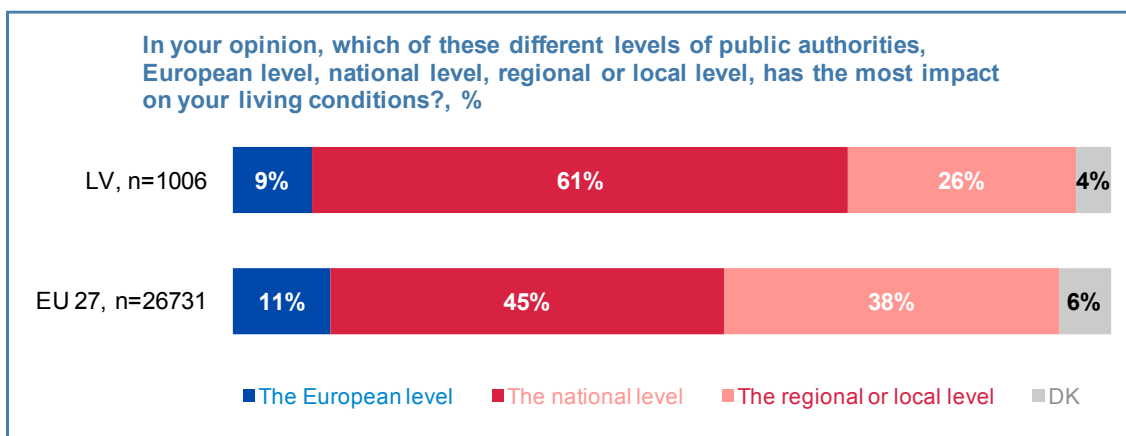
The next most important aspects which should be emphasized in the coming years are social and health issues (41%), as well as the internal market (24%), solidarity with poorer regions (23%) and education policy (20%).



## Opinions on decision making in the European Union

As in spring 2009, EU27 respondents think that the national level has the most impact on their living conditions – 45% of Europeans say that national authorities affect their living conditions to the

greatest extent. A little more than one-third (38%) of them think that regional or local authorities have the most impact, and only 11% that the European level has the most impact on their living conditions.



As in the European Union in general, **Latvians share the dominant opinion that it is the authorities at national level that have the most impact on their living conditions** – this view was expressed by 61% of them. No significant changes in opinion on this matter were observed over the last six months. One in four (26%) Latvians thinks that the regional or local level has the most impact on their living conditions. And only 9% of Latvians think that the European level has the most impact on their living conditions.

When thinking about whether local and regional public authorities are taken into account in the European Union, **the majority of Europeans (66%) say that regional and local public authorities are not sufficiently taken into account when deciding policies in the European Union**. Only 19% of Europeans expressed the opinion that regional and local public authorities are sufficiently taken into account when deciding policies in the European Union.

**The opinion of Latvians in this regard has remained unchanged during the last six months.**

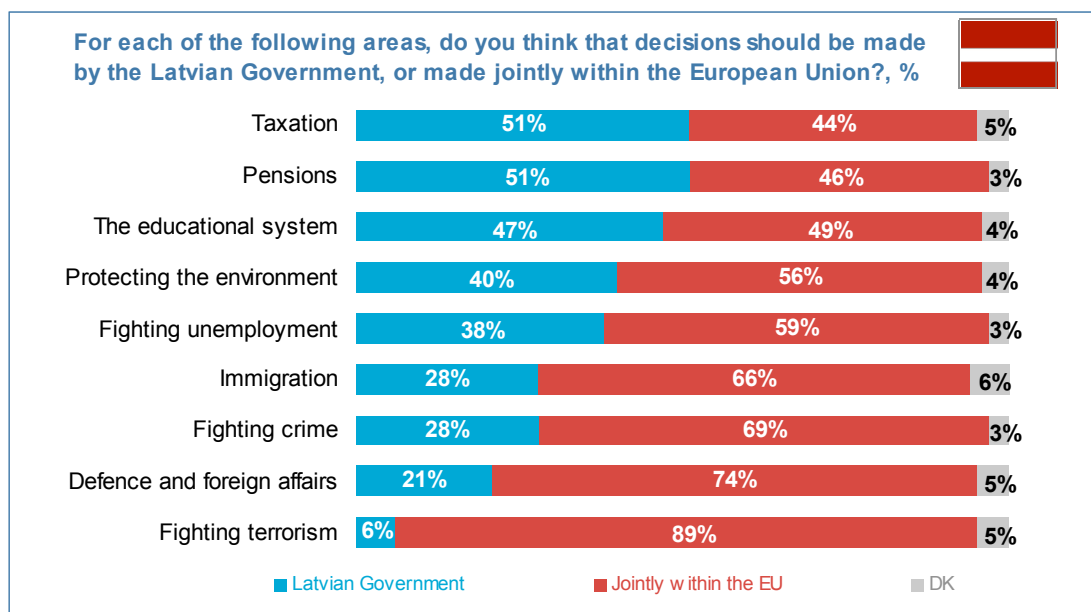
Like other Europeans, Latvians are rather sceptical about whether regional and local public authorities' views are well taken into account when making decisions – **only one-tenth of Latvians (12%) say that the role of local and regional public authorities is sufficiently taken into account when deciding policies in the EU**, and this is the third lowest rating in the entire European Union.

### **Issues to be solved jointly with the European Union**

**Overall, the majority of EU27 respondents say that the following issues should be solved by national governments themselves: pensions (69%), taxation (65%), the educational system (60%), as well as unemployment (53%).**

At the same time, fighting terrorism, protecting the environment, defence and foreign affairs, immigration and fighting crime are the issues which the government should solve jointly within the European Union.

**Compared with overall opinion in the European Union, it can be seen that Latvians are more likely to want the European Union to solve the above issues.**



Only half of Latvians say that the Latvian government should make decisions both on taxation (51%, 14 PP below the EU27 average) and pensions (51%, 18 PP below the EU27 average).

**The reason why people want the government to solve these issues jointly within the European Union is most probably due to their low trust of people in the national government, frequent changes in taxes and comparatively higher trust in the European Union’s institutions.**

Opinions are polarised as regards the delegation of responsibility for the educational system. Half of Latvian respondents say that decisions in this area should be solved solely by the Latvian government, while the other half think those decisions should be made jointly within the European Union.

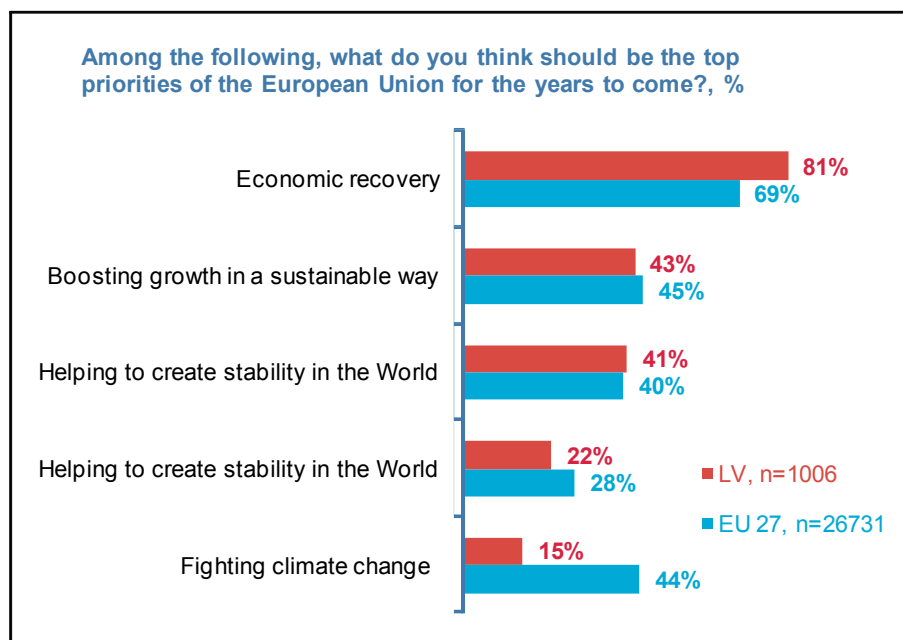
More than half of Latvians say that **decisions should be made by the government jointly with the European Union in such areas as protecting the environment (56%), fighting unemployment (59%), immigration (66%), fighting crime (69%), as well as defence and foreign affairs (74%)**. Similarly, an absolute majority of the Latvian poll (89%) say that fighting terrorism is an issue which should be solved by the government jointly within the European Union.

**When thinking about issues which should be solved within the European Union, the majority of EU27 respondents say that issues in the following areas should be solved by the national government jointly within the European Union: scientific and technological research (72%), energy (67%), support for regions facing economic difficulties (60%), as well as competition and fighting inflation (59% for each)**. At the same time, issues such as health and social welfare should be solved by national governments themselves.

Like Europeans in general, **Latvians think that issues in areas such as scientific and technological research (80%, 8 PP above the EU27 average), energy (76%, 9 PP above the EU27 average) and support for regions facing economic difficulties (72%, 12 PP above the EU27 average) should be solved jointly within the European Union.**

**Latvians tend to think, more often than Europeans in general, that economy-related issues should be solved jointly within the European Union – this opinion is held by 68% of Latvians (11 PP more than Europeans in general (57%)).**

However, when thinking about the further development of the European Union and the issues which should be solved in the future **EU27 respondents say that the top priorities of the EU for the years to come are economic recovery (69%), boosting growth in a sustainable way (45%), fighting climate change (44%), as well as helping to create stability in the world (40%)**.



Latvians also say that economic recovery is the top priority of the European Union for the years to come (81%, 11 PP more than the average rate in the EU).

The next most important priorities include boosting growth in a sustainable way (43%), as well as helping to create stability in the world (41%).

Fighting climate change is regarded by Latvians as the least important priority in the years to come (it was cited as their top priority by only 15% of them).

When asked about the aspects which should be prioritised in the European Union in order to ensure economic recovery, EU27 respondents say it is putting in place a stronger European system of supervision of financial markets and financial institutions – an opinion held by 40% of them.

The next most frequently cited aspects include the necessity to improve the quality of education (35%) and to limit excessive public deficits in the future (34%). 31% of Europeans think that the development of further economic policy coordination at the European level should be prioritised.

Among Latvians, putting in place a stronger European system of supervision of financial markets and financial institutions is also regarded as the issue which should be prioritized in order to ensure economic recovery (41%).

The development of further economic policy coordination at the European level was mentioned by Latvians as the next most important aspect (38%). However, less than one-third (29%) of Latvian citizens expressed an opinion that it is necessary to improve the quality of education.

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

More and more often, it is said that the economic crisis has already been overcome. However, EU27 respondents are rather sceptical as regards the impact of the crisis on the labour market. More than half (54%) of Europeans think that the worst is still to come. Four in ten (38%) believe that the impact of the economic crisis on the job market has already reached its peak and things will recover little by little. Almost one-tenth (8%) of Europeans do not have an opinion on the further development of the crisis.

However, Latvians are much more sceptical when speaking about the impact of the economic crisis on the job market having reached its peak, and three out of four (74%) Latvian people say that the worst is still to come. Only one-fifth (22%) say that the worst is behind us. This is related to the economic situation in the country and the continuously high level of unemployment. A rapid improvement in the labour market is not expected in the nearest future.

**When thinking about overcoming the crisis, EU27 respondents say that the European Union, the national government and the G20 are the three institutions which are best able to take effective actions against the effects of the economic crisis.** 22% of EU27 respondents say they believe that the European Union is able to cope with the effects of the economic crisis, 19% are certain that their national government is best able to take effective actions against the effects of the crisis, while 18% say it is G20 group of countries.

It should be mentioned that, when compared to spring 2009, there is a significant increase in the percentage of those who say that the national government is best able to take effective actions against the effects of the economic crisis (from 12% to 19%).

**Like six months ago, Latvians most often (31%) expressed the opinion that the G20 countries are best able to take effective actions against the effects of the economic crisis.** They are followed by the European Union (15%) and the Latvian government (14%). It should be noted that the **percentage of those who are certain that the Latvian government is best able to take effective actions against the effects of the economic crisis has grown** by 5 PP (from 9% to 14%).

Latvians have become less certain about the International Monetary Fund and the USA – less than one-tenth – 9% and 8% of Latvian population correspondingly, say that the IMF and the USA are best able to take effective actions against the effects of the economic crisis.

**When thinking about the measures which should be prioritized by the European Union in order to help people overcome the effects of the economic crisis, EU27 respondents say that support to small and medium-sized enterprises is most important (37%).** By promoting entrepreneurship, countries would overcome the crisis more rapidly.

The following measures were cited by Europeans as the next most important priorities: investment in education\ training\ research (28%), support for the unemployed (24%), support for the poorest (22%), as well as investment in energy and the environment, and guaranteed healthcare (17% for each).

**Like Europeans in general, when asked about the measures which should be prioritised in order to overcome the effects of the economic crisis, Latvians mentioned support to small and medium-sized enterprises (53%).** Measures such as support for large companies and industry (24%), as well as support for the unemployed (22%) are also regarded by Latvians to be important.