

EUROBAROMETER 70

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE 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. This year's 70th survey of the Standard Eurobarometer (EB 70) was conducted in 27 Member States of the European Union and in the three candidate countries – the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia¹, Croatia and Turkey, as well as in the part of Cyprus that is under Turkish authority, between 6th October and 6th November 2008.

Survey results on the citizens' perception, hopes and expectations of the European Union in the last six months illustrates the changes and trends in public opinion about important themes for the country and the Union.

The climate of public opinion

The increase in prices and inflation over the last six months diminished the purchasing power of a great number of citizens throughout Europe. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 42% of citizens assessed that their purchasing power had decreased, and for 38% it had remained unchanged. In the last 6 months, the number of families having difficulties paying all their bills at the end of the month increased from 79% to 82%. Although the purchasing power of the majority of EU citizens (51%) has decreased, the percentage of respondents who face problems paying their bills is (46%) – a figure considerably lower than that in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The pressures on the standard of living have reduced the number of citizens who are satisfied with their life. In the last 18 months, the number of those who were satisfied in the country has decreased by 3 percentage points (66%; 63%), and in the Union by 4 percentage points (80%; 76%). This declining trend did not avoid the other two candidate countries². In Croatia, satisfaction declined by 4 percentage points (72%; 68%), and, in Turkey, it fell by 13 percentage points (76%; 63%).

Dissatisfaction among the larger part of the public in Europe is a result of the perception of current living conditions as bad. In the country, the expressed dissatisfaction is larger than the average in the countries of the EU27. The majority of citizens in the country are mostly dissatisfied with the cost of living (92%). That percentage in the Union is 78%. Second place is taken by the dissatisfaction with energy prices in the country – 88% (in the EU 69%). Dissatisfaction with the manner of solving problems in relation to inequalities and poverty takes third place – 80% (in EU 67%).

The climate among the national public is largely influenced by the perception of unemployment (61%; 60%) and the economic situation (42%; 41%), as the main problems in the country. The last survey shows that there is a tendency for these problems to be “accompanied” by the problem of increasing prices and inflation (29%; 31%). In the countries of the EU27, in spring 2008, “alone” at the top of the list of problems was the increase in prices and inflation (37%). Data from the latest Eurobarometer shows that the number of citizens who are worried about the economic

¹ Provisional code which does not prejudice in any way the definitive nomenclature for this country which will be agreed following the conclusion of negotiations currently taking place on this subject at the United Nations

² The three candidate countries for membership of the European Union; the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Croatia and Turkey will be addressed as candidate countries further in the text.

situation dramatically increased by 17 percentage points (20%; 37%) and now it shares first place with the increase in prices and inflation.

An equal number of citizens in the country are personally affected by the increase in prices and unemployment (47%). In the Union, on average, every second citizen is personally affected by the increase in prices and inflation (50%), and 14% are affected by unemployment. There was a tendency for fewer respondents to consider that unemployment had a personal effect on them compared to the number of those who consider that it was the main problem in the country (the difference in the Union, on average, is one of 12 percentage points, in the country, 13 points, in Croatia, 14 points and, in Turkey, 17 points). This gap indicates that there is an image among the public that unemployment affects a larger number of citizens than is the case in reality.

Public confidence in international institutions is decreasing, but it remains higher than confidence in national institutions. In the last six months, the trust of the EU public greatly decreased– by 13 percentage points (64%; 51%), but the majority of citizens are still inclined to express trust in the Union. Now, the first place in the ranking of trust in institutions and international organisations is taken by the UN, despite a decrease of 8 percentage points (61%; 53%). In third place on the list is NATO with 47%, and 40%³ were not inclined to express their confidence. 39% of the respondents trust the Government, which represents a decrease of 1 percentage point compared to the previous survey, and it is in first place on the list of national institutions in terms of citizens' trust. In the country, in last place on the list are political parties. 19% of respondents express confidence in political parties, in contrast with the majority of the public (76%) who do not. Political parties are at the bottom of the list of confidence rankings in all countries where Eurobarometer is conducted.

Differences regarding reality in the country and the EU

The global crisis has influenced perceptions regarding the situation of the national economies and the European economy as a whole. The optimism among the Europeans regarding the European economy shows a larger decrease compared to the optimism regarding the national economies. Over one year, the atmosphere in the EU has changed radically – if, previously, the majority perceived the European economy with optimism, now pessimism prevails. In the Union, the number of citizens who consider that the EU economy is in a good state, on average, decreased by 25 percentage points (58%; 33%). Optimism regarding their national economies has decreased by 19 percentage points (48%; 29%).

Optimism regarding the European economy also significantly decreased in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia by 11 percentage points (69%; 58%). Apart from that, a majority of citizens consider that the European economy is in good condition. The pessimistic views towards the national economy have not changed significantly. Since last autumn, the number of respondents who considered that the situation in the national economy was good has decreased by 2 percentage points (32%; 30%), while the number of those who consider that the situation is bad has increased by 2 percentage points (67%; 69%).

The majority of citizens consider that the situation in the country is worse than on average in European countries. Almost all respondents surveyed in the country (92%) point to the cost of living. About 90% consider that the situation is worse in terms of employment, and 85% in terms of quality of life.

³ Confidence in NATO was not surveyed in the previous research.

Such perception of differences between the realities in the country and the average in the EU has an important and ongoing influence on the motivation of the national public to support the country's accession to the Union.

Over the last six months, the number of citizens who felt that the country was heading in the right direction decreased by 4 percentage points (47%; 43%). Compared to the EU, the decrease in optimism among the national public is much greater. The number of those who considered that the EU is heading in the right direction has fallen by 13 percentage points (65%; 52%), but, despite that, optimism still prevails.

The implications of the global financial crisis have left their mark on the general mood of the public in the Union countries. The number of citizens in the Union that consider that the EU is heading in the right direction has decreased from 42% to 35%, on account of the increase of respondents holding the view that the EU is heading in the wrong direction from 25% to 34%.

Citizens' view of EU membership

In the period between the spring and autumn editions of Eurobarometer 2008, the number of those surveyed who see EU membership of the country as a good thing decreased by 10 percentage points (from 72% to 62%). This change in the positive climate towards EU membership is due more to the increased number of respondents (from 20% to 26%) who have doubts regarding this question (they consider that EU membership is neither good nor bad thing), than to the increase by 2 percentage points of those who consider that EU membership would be a bad thing (6%; 8%) and to those who don't have any attitude (2%; 4%).

However, the positive attitude towards EU membership in the country is far more present compared to the other two candidate countries and the average in the EU. In the countries of the EU27, on average, 53% of citizens consider that the EU membership is a good thing for their country; in Croatia, this is the case for 23% of respondents, while, in Turkey, 42% of those surveyed held this view.

Citizens' enthusiasm in the candidate countries regarding the benefits of EU membership is also declining.

During the last six months, the number of citizens in the country who expect benefits from EU membership decreased by 8 percentage points (82%; 74%). The belief that the country would benefit from membership remains widespread among those citizens who express confidence in the Union, although their number slightly decreased over the last year (92%; 89%). Such expectations also exist among those citizens who do not express confidence in the Union, but the decrease in enthusiasm among them is more marked (63%; 58%). From the aspect of public support for the integration process of the country into the Union, it is important to point out that, although constituting a smaller number, the majority of sceptics still expects benefits for the country from EU membership.

In the remaining two candidate countries, there is a decrease in number of those who expect benefits from EU membership and, now, that number covers less than half citizens in those countries. In Turkey, the number of optimists has decreased by 10 percentage points (58%; 48%), and in Croatia by 11 points (44%; 33%).

The majority of the public in the country feels that it is not accepted by the EU. Two-thirds of citizens surveyed (66%) do not agree that their vote means something in the

EU. Such an opinion is shared by 58% citizens in Croatia, 54% in Turkey, and also the majority of citizens in the EU (61%). While the majority of citizens in the countries covered by the Eurobarometer share the feeling of the neglect of their personal interests by the Union, the survey observed great differences among the citizens in the Union and the citizens in the candidate countries as far as the acceptance of their countries' interests by the Union is concerned. In the countries of the EU27, on average, the majority of respondents consider that the Union takes into consideration the vote of their country (61%; 60%), and this opinion is shared by a significantly smaller number of citizens in the candidate countries. In the country, in the period between the two last surveys, the number of citizens who considered that the vote of their country is taken into consideration in the Union did not change and it remained at the low level (23%). Scepticism in Turkey increased significantly with - 14 percentage points lower (38%; 24%) - considering that the vote of their country is taken into consideration in the Union. In contrast, in Croatia, the number of those who consider that the interests of their country are taken into consideration in the Union has increased by 4 percentage points (31%; 36%).

Attitude towards the future

As a result of the global economic crisis, pessimistic views towards the future of the EU economy are clear. In the Union, on average, the number of citizens who expect a worsening of the EU economy has increased from 26% to 41%. In the country, although the number of pessimists has increased by 5 percentage points (13%; 18%), it is still half the size of the number of the pessimists in the EU. There is an increase in pessimism in Croatia (25%; 36%) and in Turkey (29%; 38%).

Short-term expectations on a personal level have become more pessimistic. The number of citizens who in the following 12 months expect their life to be generally improved decreased by 5 percentage points (from 40% to 35%). In the countries of the EU27, on average, the number of optimists has decreased by 8 percentage points (32%; 24%) the same as in Croatia (31%; 23%), and, in Turkey, it remained practically unchanged (25%; 24%).

The long-term expectations of citizens in relation to the life of younger generations have remained unchanged. In the last two surveys, 37% of respondents considered that the future of today's young people will be easier than it is for adults today, while 38% consider that young people will have a more difficult future. The majority of citizens in the Union still expect the future of today's young people to be more difficult (61%; 62%).

Out of all countries covered by the Eurobarometer, the majority of respondents in the country (59%) agreed that the young people who live in the country would have better life if they immigrated to another country. This attitude is, in particular, shared by students (67%).

In the other two candidate countries, significantly smaller number of respondents considers that young people would have better life if they immigrated to another country (37% in Turkey and 34% in Croatia). In the countries of the EU27, on average, every fourth respondent (25%) agrees that emigration from their country would mean a better life for young people.

Attitudes towards the EU

Over the period between the two Eurobarometers, the positive image of the Union records a decrease. In the country, the number of respondents with a positive image of the EU decreased by 7 percentage points (67%; 60%); the number of those with a negative image increased by 4 percentage points (7%; 11%); and, among those with neutral image, by 2 percentage points (25%; 27%). The reduced positive image of the EU in the country is a result of complex changes in the perception of the Union (a decrease in confidence in the Union, a widespread feeling of a lack of acceptance by the EU and falling enthusiasm for accession to the Union). The situation is similar in the remaining two candidate countries, where the positive image of the EU has decreased from 32% to 24% in Croatia and from 49% to 41% in Turkey.

However, apart from the decrease in the positive image of the EU in the eyes of the national public, the country, together with Romania, remains at the top of the list of countries whose citizens have positive feelings towards the EU.

Support for further enlargement of the Union, between the two last surveys, decreased among the national public by 11 percentage points (90%; 79%), and the number of those who are against increased from 5% to 8%. An important change in this period was the increased number of respondents (from 5% to 13%) who gave a 'don't know' response to this question. These changes are partly a manifestation of dissatisfaction that the country has still not received a date for the launch of accession negotiations. In addition, debates among politicians and experts' as to the reasons for the slow pace in bringing the country closer to the Union have contributed to greater confusion among certain parts of the public regarding questions related to EU expansion.

In Croatia, the number of supporters has increased from 51% to 59%, and the number of those who are not in favour has decreased from 40% to 23%, but also the number of respondents who did not know the answer to this question has doubled (from 9% to 18%). In Turkey, support for enlargement is decreasing (52%; 45%), as well as the number of those who are not in favour (28%; 21%), and, on that account, the number of "don't know" responses has increased (from 20% to 34%).

Support for further EU enlargement, between the two last surveys, in the countries of the EU27, on average, fell by 3 percentage points (47%; 44%), and the number of those against enlargement increased by 4 percentage points (39%; 43%).

Globalisation

The world financial crisis seems to have significantly changed the views towards globalisation among the national public. The number of respondents who consider that the globalisation is a good opportunity for the country has decreased from 57% to 38%, and the number of those who consider that the globalisation represents a threat to employment and companies in the country has increased (from 21% to 31%). An indication that the consequences of globalisation have become more uncertain is the increased number of respondents who give a 'don't know' response to this question (22%; 31%).

In the remaining two candidate countries, uncertainty regarding the consequences of globalisation remains widespread, apart from the decreased number of respondents who did not know the answer to this question (in Croatia from 23% to 19%, and in Turkey from 45% to 32%).

In the EU countries there has also been an increase in uncertainty regarding the consequences of globalisation where, on average, the number of those who did not know the answer to this question increased from 18% to 22%.

A general trend among the public in the countries covered by the Eurobarometer is the increase in the concern that globalisation represents a threat to employment and companies on account of falling expectations that globalisation represents a good opportunity for their countries.