

EUROBAROMETER 69

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

SPRING 2008

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AUSTRIA

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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 SURVEY EB 69

For the spring 2008 Eurobarometer survey (EB 69), 1,000 citizens (age \geq 15 years) living in Austria and having a sufficient command of the German language were polled in March and April 2008 by the "Austrian Gallup Institute Karmasin Market Research". The random sample of the interviewed people was selected in accordance to Austria's electoral districts. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in people's homes. Concerning the accuracy of the observed results, readers are reminded that the survey results are estimated percentages within a respective confidence interval depending on the sample size.

For the complete Eurobarometer archive see:

http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/standard_en.htm

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF EB DATA

In this national report for Austria, the results are statistically estimated means within respective 95%-confidence intervals which determines the accuracy of estimations for the whole country and has to be kept in mind regarding comparisons to previous EB values. A difference of approx. \geq 6 percentage points (pp), i.e. a range of approx. ± 3 pp, determines significant trends (see the detailed confidence intervals for the sample $n=1,000$ respondents, cf. "Technical Specifications EB 69").

INTRODUCTION

This year Austria commemorates the "Anschluss" to the German Nazi regime 70 years ago. The public commemoration took place especially in March. However, from the beginning of the year the preparations to the

European Soccer Championship, which Austria held together with Switzerland, were much more present in the media.

Before and during the Eurobarometer survey in spring 2008, the Austrians were under the influence of a very heated discussion about the Lisbon treaty especially among the opponents. Significant for the dispute was the fact that the right-wing opposition parties FPÖ and BZÖ, as well as parts of the left-wing intelligentsia and anti-globalisation groups, joined their arguments against the Reform Treaty. Before ratification through the Austrian parliament, as foreseen in the Constitution (like in most other European countries), they appealed to protest rallies throughout the country. The negative propaganda was mainly pushed by the largest newspaper, "Kronen Zeitung". Instead of discussing about the measures in the EU treaty revision, emotional arguments dominated the public debate. Nevertheless, the Parliament passed the treaty in April 2008 and, according to Austria's ratification procedure, the Federal President signed the document thereafter.

At the beginning of 2008, domestic politics was overshadowed by a scandal within the Interior Ministry in charge of security because of assumed political intervention. Furthermore, political stagnation with mutual recriminations within the government parties, the Social-Democrats and the People's Party, was characteristic from the beginning of this year. The main points of differences were: the rising prices, a tax reform – with regard to the tax policies in neighbouring Liechtenstein ("tax evasion") and Austria's banking privacy, the introduction of a general minimum wage, and a reform of the health care system, since the local public operators cannot cover their costs anymore. There was also a debate about the consequences of climate change and the future of renewable energies.

It is worth noting that during the first half 2008 Austria had a good employment situation.

The European Union still barely figured as a topic on the Government's and political parties' agenda. By the way, together with the Slovak capital Bratislava, Vienna applied (unsuccessfully) for the European Institute of Technology (EIT).

GENERAL MOOD AND ATTITUDES IN AUSTRIA

In terms of the economic situation and the democratic institutions in the country, the Austrians are doing very well. Their constant life satisfaction is shown once again by the Standard Eurobarometer 69 survey results: 82% of the Austrian population are satisfied with their current state of life. Their confidence in democratic institutions is relatively high, compared to the EU average levels: For example, 60% and 73% each trust the written press and the justice system (EU: 44% and 46% each).

The Austrians' biggest concern is inflation, i.e. 54% (EU: 37%). Nevertheless, 80% of the population are of the opinion that the quality of life in their country is better than in other Member States (EU: 46%).

Austrians have a constantly positive attitude towards their economic situation, which is judged above the EU average. 75% say the economy in their country is better than in other parts of Europe (EU: 35%). 72% are of that opinion as far as the job market is concerned (EU: 34%).

However, it is noteworthy that Austrians apparently do not see any relationship between the fairly positive economic situation in their country and the European Union and the enlargement.

AUSTRIA'S MOOD REGARDING EU-MEMBERSHIP

Austrians' scepticism towards Europe remains stable. Concerning the key question of the biannual Eurobarometer survey, i.e. "Do you think that Austria's membership of the European Union is a good thing or a bad thing" 36% think positively and 26% negatively. One-third of the respondents, i.e. 36%, think that Austria's EU-membership is "neither a good, nor a bad thing". This question is regularly double-checked by a similar question with regard to possible benefits, which reaffirms the split and rather EU-sceptical opinion in Austria: In the eyes of 36% of respondents, their country has benefited from EU membership, 47% see it the other way round. So, the Austrians' mood still lies clearly below the European mean values (in the EU27, 54% think that their country has benefited from EU membership and, for 52%, EU membership is "a good thing").

The most frequently mentioned arguments of those who are in favour of EU membership are: better cooperation with other countries (41%) and more economic growth in Austria (33%). The opponents argue mainly that Austria has not enough influence on EU decisions (42%) and that the EU jeopardises Austrians' jobs (36%).

In order to explain Austria's mood towards the EU that invariably lies below average, only hypothetical reasons can be derived from the Eurobarometer. For example, "the country's voice does not count in the EU" is an argument mentioned by 46% of Austrians (EU: 29%), which cannot stem from the fact that Austria is one of the smallest Member States, compared to the much higher values in other smaller countries or of similar size. In Austria, the European Union is mostly associated with the Euro (53%) and the freedom of movement (46%), but also with a waste of money (44%).

The EU scepticism goes with the trust in the European Union clearly below the European average: No more than 38% trust the EU and 48% tend not to trust (EU: 50% and 36% each).

GLOBALISATION & EU ENLARGEMENT

According to the Standard Eurobarometer of spring 2008, there seem to be more critics of globalisation in Austria. The main arguments against it are: globalisation is profitable only for large companies, not for citizens (72%) and increases social inequalities (61%). Austrians see the advantages of globalisation as being an opportunity for economic growth (55%) and increasing foreign investments in their country (58%).

Many Austrian companies have benefited a lot from the EU enlargement towards Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, in Austria, there is still a very strong opposition to further enlargements. During the spring survey, 27% were in favour of new Member States in future years and 63% were definitely against, whereas in the EU27 there is still a slight majority in favour of further enlargements (47% in favour, 39% against).

Of particular note compared to the EU27 is Austrians' opposition to the accession of South-Eastern European countries. Of these, Croatia is the only country that the Austrians would accept as a new Member State (50%). But three-quarters of the population are opposed to the other Balkan countries. As far as Turkey is regarded, 7% are in favour and 85% against its accession to the European Union. The Austrians would not change their mind even if Turkey were to fulfil the necessary EU criteria (79% against, 16% in favour).

THE EUROPEAN UNION & INFORMATION POLICY

45% of Austrians say they understand how the European Union works. After double-checking this result via detailed questions (e.g. with regard to the number of Member States and the Euro zone), Austria lies above the European average.

In general, the media's trustworthiness is judged relatively high: 60% of respondents trust the written press (without distinction between tabloid and quality papers), and 68% trust both the radio and TV.