

EUROBAROMETER 67

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

SPRING 2007

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AUSTRIA

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

This report was produced for the European Commission's Representation in Austria.

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.

Author: Heike Hausensteiner-Obermayr

EUROBAROMETER SURVEY EB67.2

For the spring 2007 Eurobarometer survey (EB67.2) 1,011 citizens (age ≥ 15 years) living in Austria and having a sufficient command of the German language were polled in April and May 2007 by the “Austrian Gallup Institute Karmasin Market Research”. The random sample of Austrians for the survey was selected in accordance to the Austrian 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/index_en.htm

SITUATION IN AUSTRIA

During the survey period from April 10th to May 1st the Austrian population was still under the influence of the change of government in January and the new grand coalition between the Social-Democrats and the conservative People’s Party. On the one hand, this might have influenced the results with regard to the trust in the Austrian parliament and the government, due to high expectations among the population. On the other hand, the political atmosphere is characterized to a high degree by disputes between the political parties concerning a reform of the school system and the purchase of Eurofighter jets in order to control the Austrian airspace.

With regard to the European Union, Austrian media covered intensively the rotating presidency that Germany headed in the first half of the year. The reports were focused to a great extent on the reanimated debate about a constitution for the European Union, particularly as its 50th anniversary was celebrated in March of this year.

However, the European Union is nearly absent from the day-to-day agenda of the political parties and the government. In January, a lawsuit for breach of contract was initiated by the European Commission against Austria because of the restriction on access to university. This measure (following a judgement by the European Court of Justice in July 2005) provoked some “EU-bashing” statements also by high politicians.

GENERAL MOOD, ATTITUDES, AND TOPICS OF CONCERN IN AUSTRIA

The Austrians’ overall satisfaction with their life in general remains constant. In the current Standard-Eurobarometer survey 84% of the Austrians say they are very or fairly satisfied, 15% are not very or not at all satisfied. With these results Austria is situated more or less at EU level.

It is worth noting that the Austrians reach significantly better results than the EU average when it comes to the economic and job situation in their country. They are above the other Member States with regard to the status quo and the expectations as far as the economy (70% and 31%, respectively; EU: 38% and 28%, resp.) and the employment situation (71% and 35%, resp.; EU: 32% and 31%, resp.) are concerned. Nevertheless, one of the major concerns of many Austrians is the fear of losing their job (37%), followed by inflation (25%), crime (22%) and immigration (20%).

Apparently the Austrians are critical about the living costs in their country. They are still estimated as being “better” than in the other Member States by a majority of 53% (-16 pp). Yet, the portion of those saying that the living costs in Austria are “less good” than the average of the European Union countries has highly increased within one year and is now at 30% (+16 pp).

Nevertheless, the Austrians consider their country as being livable to a greater extent than does the population in the other Member States. For instance, as far as several aspects of the social security such as the welfare or the pensions system or as far as education, environment or public transport are concerned, the results in Austria are far ahead the EU average. The Austrians outnumber the other EU countries with regard to the confidence they have in the media, too: 75% trust the TV (EU: 58%), 74% are confident with the radio (EU: 66%) and 64% with the written press (EU: 47%).

AUSTRIA'S MOOD REGARDING THE EU-MEMBERSHIP

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'" Austria's attitude remains unchanged: 36% are thinking positive, 25% negative. Remarkably, more than one third of the interviewed people, i.e. 37%, think that Austria's EU-membership is "neither a good, nor a bad thing". These results are far below the EU average and show that Austria is one of the most EU critical countries (after the United Kingdom).

44% of the population are of the opinion that on balance Austria has benefited from being a member of the European Union, 43% disagree. In this regard Austria is again one of the most critical Member States. Yet, young people and men tend to have a more positive attitude whereas the elderly and women tend to be more EU sceptical. The major points of criticism are e.g. that Austria's interests are not well taken into account in the EU (56%), that the Austrians' voice does not count in the EU (62%), that they do not feel very much involved in European affairs (70%), and that the biggest countries have the most power in the EU (83%).

AUSTRIA'S MOOD CONCERNING A CONSTITUTION FOR THE EU AND FURTHER ENLARGEMENTS

Austria's positive attitude towards a constitution for the European Union remains stable. Before the new reform treaty was accorded at the EU summit in June, 49% of the Austrians (survey April-May) supported a constitution; 34% were against it (17% said "don't know"). These results show again a gender and a generation gap: The young people and men are more supportive whilst the elderly and women tend to be opposed. Furthermore, with 68% the Austrians favour an EU "Foreign Minister" who can be the spokesperson for a common EU position to a much higher extent than they are for a constitution in general.

During the last semester, from EB66.1 to EB67.2 survey, the portion of Austrians who are opposed to further EU enlargements has continued to increase. Now, 64% (+7 pp) are against and 28% (-3 pp) are in favour. The big enlargement round of the year 2004 provoked mixed feelings among the Austrians: 32% are of the opinion that the accession of ten new Member States had a positive impact on the European Union. For 27% it was negative and for 29% neither positive nor negative (12% say "don't know").

THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE FUTURE

The results of the EB67.2 survey underline the position of the national governments that do not allow majority votes, i.e. harmonization, in certain political fields: According to the population in Austria as well as in the other EU countries, measures should be taken by the national governments as far as the pensions (80%, EU: 72%), the social welfare system (78%, EU: 66%) and the fight against unemployment (64%, EU: 58%) are concerned. The same applies for taxation (74%, EU: 68%) and education (70%, EU: 64%).

It is worth noting that the Austrians prefer national against common decisions especially in migration (63%) and energy matters (58%). At an EU average level, however, the population decisively opts for common decisions within the union (59% concerning migration, 61% concerning energy questions).

In Austria, the speed of building Europe being faster in one group of countries than in the other countries is favoured by a majority of 47%. 38% are against such a “two-speed Europe”.

Concerning the future of the European Union in general, 53% of the Austrians are optimistic, 38% are pessimistic. With these values Austria lies far below the EU average levels of 69% and 24%, respectively. Regardless of the broad EU scepticism in the country, a majority of the population thinks that from now on in 50 years the EU will have its own army (54%), a more powerful currency than the dollar (52%), and its own president directly elected by the European citizens (47%).