

EUROBAROMETER 66

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

AUTUMN 2006

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AUSTRIA

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THE EUROBAROMETER SURVEY EB66.1

For the autumn 2006 Eurobarometer survey (EB66.1) 1,016 citizens (age ≥ 15 years) living in Austria and having a sufficient command of the German language were polled in September and October 2006 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://www.europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/index_en.htm.

INTRODUCTION

During the survey period from September 6th to October 5th the Austrian population was under the influence of the legislative elections campaign. The elections were held on October 1st. The main topics which dominated the election campaign were mainly social issues such as unemployment, social security, and problems regarding migration. Especially migration was discussed in a very emotional way, a matter which might be reflected in the Eurobarometer results as well. The same applies to the political institutions, e.g. the trade unions: Irregularities, in fact a political scandal within the bank of the trade unions which were revealed to the public in the first semester of 2006 had without any doubt lasting effects for the workers' representation.

The European Union barely figured as at topic on the Austrian legislative election agenda. Although the public and the media were focusing on the rotating EU presidency of Austria from January to June 2006, this hype of European issues was reduced dramatically in the second half of the year. Yet, the Austrian EU presidency might have influenced certain results of the present survey.

GENERAL MOOD, ATTITUDES, AND TOPICS OF CONCERN IN AUSTRIA

83% (-2 Pp) of the Austrian population are satisfied with their current state of life. Concerning the expectations of the Austrians for the year 2007, almost a quarter (23%, +3 Pp) are hoping for a better life in general, only 12% are afraid that their situation could deteriorate, and almost two thirds (63%, -4 Pp) are expecting the same living standard with young people and in particular men tending to be more optimistic than the others. Moreover, the Austrians think that the economic and financial situation in the country as well as their personal job situation would remain unchanged. While a quarter of the population (25%, +5 Pp) tends to be more optimistic about the job market and is expecting positive signals for the labour market, slightly more are pessimistic (26%, -6 Pp) and nearly a half of the population (45%, +3 Pp) does not expect any changes.

Nevertheless, one of the major concerns of many Austrians is the fear of losing their job (50%, -9 Pp), although this percentage is slightly decreasing.

With regard to the image of certain political institutions, the results for the trade unions are disastrous: The positive respondents decreased from 52% to 33% (-19 Pp) since the last Eurobarometer survey and the absolute majority of Austrians (55%, +20 Pp) does “rather not” trust the unions. At the same time, the public image of the Austrian government decreased from 53% to 44% (-9 Pp) positive answers and vice versa, the distrust increased from 35% to 44% (+9 Pp). A similar trend can be observed for the political parties. Only the Austrian Parliament, which is directly elected every four years, could maintain its reputation: 52% (-4 Pp) trust the members of parliament, 38% (+4 Pp) do not.

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% (+2 Pp) are thinking positive, 23% (-1 Pp) negative. Remarkably, more than one third of the interviewed people, i.e. 37% (+2 Pp), think that Austria’s EU-membership is “neither a good, nor a bad thing”.

In comparison to the Eurobarometer survey conducted in spring 2006, the estimation of the positive role of the European Union has slightly decreased concerning peace in the world (pro: 46%, -6 Pp; against: 19%, +2 Pp) as well as the fight against terrorism (pro: 41%, -5 Pp; against: 16%, +2 Pp). Nonetheless, in general the European Union still plays a positive role in contributing towards the promotion of peace on a global scale. Further on, the Austrians’ opinion towards the growth of the world economy (pro: 47%, +3 Pp; against: 12%, -3 Pp) and towards the fight against poverty in the world (pro: 43%, -2 Pp; against: 17%, -1 Pp) remains stable.

AUSTRIA’S MOOD CONCERNING ECONOMY AND EMPLOYMENT

Concerning the Austrian economy, 58% of the population see the membership of the European Union as positive and 37% have a negative opinion. Yet, in general, the Austrians are much more satisfied with the economic situation in their country: More than two thirds (69%, +9 Pp) see good effects, 27% (-11 Pp) bad effects.

The employment situation in Austria is judged the other way round, but with a remarkably increasing trend: 39% (+12 Pp) can see positive effects, 54% (-10 Pp) negative effects.

In the EU Member States, the Single Market has increased competition in a number of areas such as transport, telecommunication services, banking and insurance services. That is an advantage the Austrians seem to be content with: 56% (+8 Pp) can see a positive effect, 18% (±0 Pp) disagree. Moreover, nearly one half (45%) judges the international competitiveness of Austria as good as ten years ago, and only 17% as bad.

Scepticism against globalisation is declining within the Austrian population. In this respect, 41% (+9 Pp) see it as a good opportunity for national companies due to the opening of the markets, while 42% (-10 Pp) are in disagreement.

In order to further improve the performance of the European economy (in accordance with the “Lisbon Agenda”), the vast majority of Austrians is in favour of improved education and professional training (68%, +11 Pp); 44% (+6 Pp) are in favour of fostering the creation of companies, and 43% (+1 Pp) find investment into research and innovation important.

AUSTRIA’S MOOD REGARDING A EUROPEAN POLITICAL UNION

Austrians are undecided concerning the development towards a European political union (pro: 40%, +5 Pp; against: 43%, -5 Pp).

They favour common decisions within the European Union only in the following areas: fighting terrorism (pro: 69%, -1 Pp), scientific and technologic research (pro: 57%, -4 Pp), fighting organised crime (pro: 55%, -6 Pp), defence and foreign affairs (pro: 55%, -1 Pp), support for regions facing economic difficulties (pro: 53%, -1 Pp), and competition (pro: 48%, ±0 Pp).

When it comes to social issues, the Austrians rather prefer measures by the national government, e.g. concerning pensions (pro: 80%, ±0 Pp), taxation (pro: 72%, +1 Pp), health and social welfare system (pro: 72%, -2 Pp), education system (pro: 69%, +2 Pp), fighting unemployment (pro: 62%, +8 Pp), consumer protection (pro: 60%, -1 Pp), agriculture and fishery (pro: 57%, +5 Pp), immigration (pro: 57%, ±0 Pp), energy (pro: 54%, +4 Pp), and protection of the environment (pro: 50%, +9 Pp).

A European Monetary Union with one single currency, the Euro is increasingly supported by two thirds of the Austrians (67%, +7 Pp) while only 23% (-6 Pp) are rejecting it.

From an Austrian’s point of view, items which the European Union should tackle with priority are the following areas: fighting unemployment (pro: 48%, -4 Pp) as well as poverty and social exclusion (pro: 42%, +2 Pp). Neither the enlargement of the European Union (pro: 3%) nor the accession of new Member States (pro: 2%, -1 Pp) should be a priority.

AUSTRIA’S MOOD CONCERNING A CONSTITUTION FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION

Austria’s positive attitude towards a constitution for the European Union is still increasing (pro: 51%, +7 Pp; against: 29%, -5 Pp).

If all Member States adopt the “Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe”, the Austrians think it will make the European Union stronger in the world (pro: 61%, +9 Pp), more democratic (pro: 56%, +7 Pp), more efficient (pro: 52%, +5 Pp), more transparent (pro: 51%, +3 Pp), more socially minded (pro: 44%, +4 Pp) and might ensure that the European institutions work well (for 48%, +2 Pp).

AUSTRIA'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS A FURTHER ENLARGEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

The Austrians definitely reject a further enlargement of the European Union to include other countries in future years (pro: 31%, +4 Pp; against: 57%, -4 Pp).

Yet, there is a majority for the possible accession of four countries: Switzerland (pro: 75%, +3 Pp), Norway (pro: 71%, +1 Pp), Iceland (pro: 59%, +4 Pp) and Croatia (pro: 50%, ±0 Pp). Nearly three-quarters of the population (about 70%) are against a membership of Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Montenegro, Serbia, Ukraine, and Albania. Outstanding is Austria's negative position regarding Turkey: Within one year the support among the population dropped from 11% to 5%, the opponents increased from 80% to 87%, so that Austria ranks last within the European Union in this respect.

AUSTRIA'S MOOD REGARDING VALUES OF EUROPEAN CITIZENS

The present survey again reflects Austria's ambivalent or rather negative attitude towards the European Union. On the one hand and in comparison to the other Member States, a relatively large number of Austrians believe they understand how the European Union works (pro: 42%, -3 Pp). On the other hand they do not at all feel well informed on European topics (pro: 42%, -1 Pp). Similarly, they do not feel much involved in European affairs (pro: 22%, +3 Pp) and they do not believe that their voice counts in the European Union (61%, -4 Pp).

The most important personal values for the Austrian population are: peace (pro: 56%, -3 Pp), individual freedom (pro: 46%, -5 Pp) and, with an increasing trend, human rights (37%, +8 Pp). The same ranking of values best represents the European Union in Austria's point of view.

Austrians' attitude towards certain socio-political issues can be summarised as follows: "Nowadays there is too much tolerance. Criminals should be punished more severely" (pro: 79%, +10 Pp); "free competition is the best guarantee for economic prosperity" (pro: 72%, +6 Pp); "the State intervenes too much in our lives" (pro: 62%, +4 Pp); "we need more equality and justice even if this means less freedom for the individual" (pro: 56%, +2 Pp); "more importance should be given to spare time than to work" (pro: 51%); "the place of religion in our society is too important" (pro: 44%). In the eyes of only 37% (+1 Pp) "immigrants contribute a lot to Austria".