

► Compared to the fall 2004 *Eurobarometer* survey, the Austrian pattern of public opinion towards the EU has changed considerably. Since the spring round of polling fell into the period where a majority of French and Dutch voters rejected the European constitution, the sudden surge of Europe-wide skepticism towards the current state of the Union proved contagious. Entering the Austrian fray and fuelling a traditionally rather Euro-skeptic people. In the spring *Eurobarometer* survey (EB 63.4), 1,000 Austrians were polled in May and June 2005 by the Austrian Gallup institute. For the EB archive and background documents, see [http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/public\\_opinion/index\\_en.htm](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/index_en.htm)

## GENERAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EU IN AUSTRIA

► Key issues during the time of polling in Austria were the future of financing the EU, and the rejection of the EU constitution by the French and Dutch voters (Austria was the 8<sup>th</sup> country to ratify the European constitution via parliamentary resolution on 11 May 2005.). The ensuing debate focused on Austria's contribution to the EU budget, EU enlargement, a new and quite tough asylum law, and rising unemployment. In light of the European headlines and increasing voices demanding stronger citizen participation in EU policy-making, Austrian trust in and perceived gains of EU membership plummeted. Despite previous ratification, the EU constitution became a renewed issue of dispute. The *Social Democratic Party* (SPÖ), the junior-coalition partner *Bund für die Zukunft Österreichs* (BZÖ, a new party comprised of the majority wing of the former *Freedom party*, FPÖ), and the remaining core of the actual FPÖ demanded changes in, and – partly, an Austrian referendum on – the EU constitution. Some called for the preservation of Austria's neutrality, more citizen participation in EU decision-making, and a maximum 1 percent of the Austrian GDP to be contributed to Brussels. Major buzzwords were Austria's "net payer" role in the EU, and a demanded "enlargement stop." The sudden surge of domestic and European criticism coincided with a period where Austria took stock of 50 years of sovereignty and of ten years as an EU member. The governing People's Party (ÖVP) celebrated both anniversaries. The smaller parties and voices of civil society (but not the business community) tend to assess EU membership rather critically, concentrating on the EU's shortcomings. A majority of the Austrian population seems to perceive the alleged disadvantages of EU membership more strongly than the advantages.

► **Austrian developments on EB key indicators.** Since fall 2004, only one key indicator, enlargement, has seen rising support by the Austrian poll. Support is now at 31% (plus 3 percentage points, or PP), which still puts Austria last in the EU25 list of enlargement supporters. The largest changes in attitudes since fall 2004 concern the EU constitution (minus 20 PP) and a possible EU membership of Turkey (minus 17 PP). 42% of Austrians display trust in the EU (minus 3 PP), which is roughly in line with the EU25-average (44%, minus 6 PP). Trust in the EU soured most in Spain, and has increased only in Latvia and Poland. 39% (minus 8 PP) of Austrians say they understand how the EU works. 27% (minus 9 PP) think

their voice counts in the EU (EU25: 38%). In France, Cyprus, and Malta, nearly 60% think their voice counts in the EU.

► **For Austrians, the EU means primarily the Euro** (50%) and *the freedom to live, study, and work anywhere in the EU* (48%), followed by more critical points such as *a waste of money* (43%), *more crime* (42%), and *unemployment* (36%). 35% mention *peace*. Most other Europeans see this differently. On average, the *freedom to live, study and work anywhere in the EU* (EU25 52%) tops the list, followed by *the Euro* (37%) and *peace* (37%). Only then follow *a waste of money* (22%), *bureaucracy* (21%) and *unemployment* (19%).

► **A lukewarm balance sheet for EU membership and EU institutions.** 41% (minus 2 PP) of Austrians see gains in EU membership, moving against the European trend of increased perceptions of gains. 37% (minus 9 PP) see Austrian EU membership as “a good thing”. This means second-weakest support after the Brits (36% “good thing”). On average, 54% (minus 2 PP) of Europeans see EU membership of their countries as “a good thing.” 44% (minus 5 PP) of Austrians say they trust the European Commission, and 45% (minus 8 PP) trust the European parliament. In both aspects, Austria scores below the EU25-average.

► **Austrians feel rather well informed about the EU**, and score above EU average in the EU quiz. Yet they show limited knowledge on the EU’s spending pattern. 34% (plus 3 PP) think most of the EU budget is spent on administrative and personnel costs. Only 12% (minus 2 PP) think it is agriculture, the actual top item. Austrians inform themselves about the EU via TV (70%), newspapers (61%), and the radio (46%). Newspapers and radio score considerably above the EU-average (EU25: newspapers 43%, radio 32%). Also, Austrians inform themselves more than others via discussions with their friends (37%, EU25 23%).

## **A EUROPEAN CONSTITUTION AND ENLARGEMENT**

► **Enlargement fatigue.** 31% (plus 3 PP) of Austrians support further EU enlargement (EU25: 50%). 21% support the EU accession of Bulgaria, 17% the accession of Romania, and 10% the accession of Turkey. This means Austrians show the weakest support within the EU towards accession of these three candidate countries.

► **On Turkey, young Austrians are more positive than older ones.** 16% of 15- to 24-year-olds support the EU accession of Turkey. Support declines to 11% among 25- to 54-year-olds, and to a mere 7% among Austrians aged 55 and more. Accordingly, young Austrians’ opposition to Turkey joining the EU is, at 75%, slightly weaker than that of older citizens. Opposition increases with age, to 78% among 25- to 39-year-olds, 80% among 40- to 54-year-olds, and, eventually, 82% among citizens aged 55 and more.

► **Support for a European constitution.** 47% (minus 20 PP) support a European constitution, which is, besides the Netherlands, the strongest relative decline of the EU25. The EU25-average is at 61% (minus 7 PP). Support for a constitution increased only in Italy (74%, plus 1 PP). The Hungarians (78%) and Slovenes (76%) display the highest support.

► **Austrian support of European political union.** 40% (minus 9 PP) support a European political union, which means the strongest relative decline in the EU. Only the Finns (38%) and the Brits (34%) are more lukewarm than the Austrians. On average, 58% of Europeans support a European political union.

## THE EU AS A GLOBAL PLAYER

► **Support for global role of the EU.** 46% of Austrians think the EU became more important globally (EU25: 62%). Austrian support for a common EU foreign policy (62%, minus 10 PP) and a common security policy (61%, minus 9 PP) remains high despite steep declines since fall 2004. Austrians assess the global role of the EU more positively than that of the U.S., especially in the realms of world peace, poverty reduction, and environmentalism.

► **Majority of Austrians pledges for international engagement of the EU.** 84% (plus 2 PP) of Austrians want the EU to promote human rights internationally, even if that faces opposition by other countries. 73% (plus 2 PP) pledge for a common EU immigration policy, and 69% (minus 1 PP) for a common EU asylum policy. 60% (minus 6 PP) of Austrians want to see an EU foreign minister who presents a common EU stance.

► **United Nations.** 65% (minus 3 PP) want to see an EU seat in the UN Security Council. 60% of Austrians say they trust the UN, while 29% say they mistrust the UN.

## GENERAL MOOD, ATTITUDES, AND TOPICS OF CONCERN IN AUSTRIA

► **High trust in Austrian government.** 49% (plus 4 PP) of Austrians display trust in their government, moving against the European trend of declining trust towards national governments (EU25: 31%, minus 3 PP).

► **Austrians' biggest concern is unemployment** (63%, plus 11 PP), followed by *crime* (24%), *the economic situation* (21%), *inflation* (20%), and *immigration* (16%). Concern over the education system surged since fall 2004, from a mere 4% to 10%.

► **Unemployment the number one topic the EU should tackle.** That is the view of 53% of the Austrian poll. Other key issues are *the fight against poverty and social exclusion* (45%, plus 8 PP) and *the fight against organized crime and drug trafficking* (32%, minus 10 PP). 26% (note: plus 15 PP since fall 2004) want the EU to be closer to its citizens. Fears in the context of European integration are slightly less pronounced than in fall 2004. *Outsourcing of jobs to low-salary countries* still tops the list (73%, minus 3 PP), followed by *an increase of drug trafficking and organized crime* (70%, minus 3 PP).

► **Wordrap: Majority displays “positive attitude” towards keywords such as social security, enterprises, competition, and public service.** 70% and more favor these four concepts. 55% and more Austrians say *protectionism, monopoly, and globalization* stir a “negative attitude.”