



SECRETARIAT WORKING PARTY  
TASK-FORCE  
"ENLARGEMENT"

THE COORDINATOR  
JF/bo Luxembourg, 22 April 1999

**Briefing No 41**

**PUBLIC OPINION ON ENLARGEMENT  
IN THE EU MEMBER STATES  
AND APPLICANT COUNTRIES**

\* *The views expressed in this document are not necessarily those held by the European Parliament as an institution.*

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2	Hungary and the enlargement of the European Union	167.296/rev. 2	01.02.99	All
3	Romania and its accession to the European Union	167.297/rev. 2	26.02.99	All
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To obtain copies of the above briefings, please contact: Mrs E. Deguffroy, Luxembourg, SCH Room 602, Tel. (352) 4300-22906 / fax: (352) 4300-29027  
Task Force on Enlargement, Brussels, LEO 06D119, Tel. (32 2) 284 2381 / fax: (32 2) 284 4984  
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**BRIEFING  
ON  
PUBLIC OPINION ON ENLARGEMENT  
IN THE EU MEMBER STATES AND APPLICANT COUNTRIES**

CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
<b>I. PUBLIC OPINION ON ENLARGEMENT IN THE EU MEMBER STATES</b>	<b>4</b>
1. Summary	4
2. Country profiles	5
<b>II. PUBLIC OPINION ON ACCESSION IN THE APPLICANT COUNTRIES</b>	<b>12</b>
1. Summary	12
2. Country profiles	13
<b>III. ENHANCING THE DIALOGUE WITH SOCIAL PARTNERS</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>IV. CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>ANNEX</b>	

## **I. PUBLIC OPINION ON ENLARGEMENT IN THE EU MEMBER STATES**

### **1. Summary**

The current status of public opinion on enlargement in the EU member states is a multi-layer phenomenon. The data provided by official public opinion polls exposes a diversity of attitudes towards enlargement, with a European Union average of 44% of the population supporting the objective and 25% having no clear attitude as yet.

To state that the public interest in the enlargement of the European Union in the Member States is low would be an unacceptable simplification. Firstly, support for enlargement differs in individual countries. A high percentage of the population, however, supporting enlargement is not automatic evidence of a well developed public policy in that respect, nor does it imply that an in-depth public debate is taking place.

Various interpretations of the dynamics of public opinion can be provided, and while there is a tendency for a growing diversity in the attitudes towards individual applicant countries, it is necessary to look at the particular context in the country in question. It could be taken as evidence of developing a new approach towards the issue of enlargement in the general public. In the majority of cases acceptance of the new democracies as eventual members of an enlarged EU is no longer an issue for a moral or emotional decision. With the political process developing rapidly, EU citizens are faced with a changing reality which will inevitably be affected by the accession of the new member states, although possibly without a clear impact on the individual household. From the level of emotional acceptance, the issue of enlargement is being transferred to the level of rational consideration.

At the same time, the deepening of the accession process entails an inevitable differentiation of bilateral and multilateral contacts, with all the positive and negative outcomes that follow. It is clear that geopolitical motivation plays a role in the attitudes towards some individual applicant countries. Close economic and/or cultural relations established in the course of history play their role in building up general attitudes. On the other hand, however, people in those EU member states which have a border with a candidate country are obviously more concerned about the possible immediate negative implications of accession.

Finally, it might be assumed that countries in which national governments have provided timely positive arguments supporting enlargement would display a more stable positive tendency. Yet, the countries with a considerably high percentage of the population supporting enlargement do not obviously have a well developed public policy in that respect. In fact, very few governments have provided their citizens with more specific arguments on this issue. Both at the level of government and at the level of interest groups within society, the issue of enlargement is closely linked with the debate on the Agenda 2000 package.

While the general public is mostly concerned with very general arguments on enlargement, the most established interest groups within society have in the majority of cases addressed the issue more specifically, though with a different degree of in-depth analysis.

It could be assumed that as far as institutionalised interest groups are concerned, there is a consensus among different actors in society on the goal of EU enlargement, despite the vast range of sensitive issues to be dealt with. The European Trade Unions Confederation (ETUC) resolution adopted on 16 December 1998 calls for negotiations to progress rapidly with six applicant countries. Those

countries which have not yet begun the negotiations should not be relegated to the margins of the process and left without any credible prospects, as this would inevitably create new divisions within Europe and threaten the reform progress in these countries. Series of financial and institutional reforms should be undertaken in order to avoid a slowing-down of the enlargement process. The Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (UNICE) encouraged the European Commission to continue supporting the process of enlargement, with due regard to the challenges involved. UNICE is convinced that in the medium term the full integration of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe into the European internal market can greatly benefit the European economy and strengthen the competitive position of European business in world markets.

## 2. Country profiles

### Austria

Austria has the second lowest level of public support for enlargement after Belgium and the widest spread of public opinion on individual applicant countries, equal with that of Greece. Average support for the enlargement is 30% with 20% undecided. The latter is almost unchanged compared to the earlier surveys, while support has fallen slightly by 3%.

The high spread is caused mainly by the fact that traditionally, Hungary is strongly supported, due to close historical links, while support for Romania's and Bulgaria's membership falls well below average. Hungary is also Austria's third most important export market after Germany and Italy.

1997 ended with excellent results for Austria's export economy with a 31.7% increase in exports to Central and Eastern Europe from the previous year. Enlargement is seen as offering enormous growth potential for exports and securing long term stabilisation of positive economic development. EU membership for CEEC will bring approximation of standards and consequently, equal conditions for Austrian firms. Eventually the convergence of interests will strengthen the political weight of the Danube region.

The position paper on enlargement, adopted by the Federation of Austrian Industry (IV) in September 1998 restated its position from October 1995, confirming the goal of striving for the «earliest possible time for enlargement under the consequential preparation of the requirements.»

In response to the fears of added strain on the job market, danger along the border areas, disadvantages for agriculture and excessive financial demands, the Federation of Austrian Industry claims that all problems could be coped with once the necessary precautions are taken by the EU and by the candidate countries themselves. An efficient regional policy must identify strong and weak areas and consider the forthcoming enlargement as a fixed component of a development strategy.

There is still enough time to prepare the local market for the free movement of labour, also bearing in mind the free movement of services and some branches of the service industry. This position is supported by the Federation of Austrian Trade Unions (FAI), which considers the threat of the free movement of labour to be overestimated and assumes that the prospect of improvement in the living conditions will reduce the attraction to move abroad.

More arguments along these lines are put forward in a public debate on enlargement issues. Public opinion nevertheless remains quite critical, manifesting itself in the results of the recent local elections.

## **Belgium**

Belgium has maintained its position as the country with the lowest support for the enlargement of the European Union. The latest polls show 28% average support in favour of applicant countries, with 20% of the population having no clear opinion. Both figures fell from 32% and 22% respectively, compared to Spring 1998. Support for the EU in general is growing, after hitting its lowest point in 1996 and 1997. The diversity of attitudes towards individual applicant countries widened from an average of 7% in Spring 1998 to 16% in Spring 1999.

In line with the general trend in priorities among the enlargement criteria, respondents in Belgium consider the respect for human rights, fighting organised crime and improving environmental protection to be the most important issues to be dealt with by the applicant countries. A clear concern that enlargement should not be too costly has increased by 16% compared to Spring 1998.

The position of the Belgian government which stresses the necessity of further institutional reform prior to the first enlargement is broadly supported by the main interest groups in society.

According to the National Employers Organisation, enlargement can only be successful if the candidate countries are able to accept the whole "acquis communautaire" and establish the necessary institutional and administrative mechanisms to implement the acquis. European policies should support the process of approximation between the Union and the CEEC's, prevent an over rapid opening of the internal markets for the CEEC's, involve rationalisation of structural funds and the CAP, and restrict growth in EU expenditure.

At regional level, both Walloon and Flemish trade union representatives have a clearly expressed view. The position of the consultative body representing the Flemish employers organisation, Flemish trade unions and the Flemish government has shown clear concerns about the structural policy for the period 2000-2006 and specifies that withdrawal of support for regions being excluded in the future should be very gradual. The counterpart bodies for Walloon employers and Walloon trade unions are of the opinion that enlargement and the reform of structural funds will have a major influence on the Walloon region, that current budgetary means are insufficient to ensure the successful integration of the candidate member states and at the same time conduct an efficient structural policy able to resolve the social problems. Certain Walloon regions will be excluded from the objective 1 financing whereas problems in these regions will persist <sup>1</sup>.

## **Denmark**

Denmark is consistently the EU country with the second highest average public opinion support for eastward enlargement, behind Sweden, at 61%. It also is notable that there was no evidence of change in this percentage compared to the polls in 1997 and 1998. The diversity of opinions on each applicant country though has increased from 23% in Spring 1998 to 32% in Spring 1999.

The Danish government is of the opinion that the enlargement process could be stepped up as soon as there is an agreement on the Agenda 2000 among the Member States governments. Within society at large, there is a consensus of all the major actors supporting the accession of the candidate countries, with the Baltic Sea region seen as a priority area.

An intensive debate within society, which was taking place prior to the ratification of the Amsterdam Treaty, has slowed recently. A report by TEPSA distinguishes three levels of argument provided by the government and most often used in support of the enlargement process. Firstly, the

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<sup>1</sup> Enlargement/Agenda 2000 Watch - October 1998.

security argument claims that the enlargement is basically a question of security and stability in Europe. Therefore, the EU has to accept newly established democracies to prevent drawing new dividing lines between the applicant countries. Secondly, the moral argument states that after the end of cold war, the EU is morally obliged to support the newly established countries. The third argument is an economic one and assumes that enlargement will be beneficial for business <sup>2</sup>.

The Danish Federation of Industries is in total agreement with this line of reasoning, since Denmark has a major trade surplus with the applicant countries. The Danish Trade Unions consider it is their duty to help Central and Eastern Europe to create societies with high social standards. Both organisations have well established channels for communicating their position to the government in order to step up discussion when it is appropriate.

### **Finland**

Finland, alongside its Nordic neighbours Sweden and Denmark, is among the strongest supporters of EU enlargement. Positive public opinion supporting the accession of candidate countries remains high at 52%, though with a fall in support compared to 56% in Spring 1998. In line with the general tendency, the difference in opinions on individual applicant countries has increased, bringing the average spread of attitudes to 34% in Spring 1999 compared to 26% previously.

The general attitude towards enlargement in Finland is traditionally positive, favouring a clear pragmatic approach to the timetable for negotiations with the applicant countries. With the prospect of the EU presidency in the second half on 1999, the Finnish government is strongly committed to ensuring the continuity of the enlargement process.

The possible consequences of EU enlargement are viewed with a certain degree of reservation by the general public. The applicant countries are expected to be sufficiently ready for accession to minimise the impact to the EU budget, agricultural policy and, especially, the employment situation due to the possible influx of labour workers. Various reports have been prepared to shed more light on the issues. However, nationwide opinion polls show that enlargement is not a key issue for a deep public debate as such.

Surveys by the Central Chamber of Commerce of Finland show that business is generally positive on EU enlargement to the East. As in a number of other countries, the business community assumes that successful enlargement will result in the formation of a clear and stable market in Central and Eastern Europe, that business will become less complicated, that bureaucracy will diminish and that predictability will increase. Their concerns are more those of the nature assuring equal, free and open competition as well as full adoption of internal market regulations <sup>2</sup>.

### **France**

The average support for enlargement in France remains stable, with 35% of population in favour, a figure that has not changed compared to Spring 1998. Compared to Autumn 1997 however, the increase in favour of the candidate countries is 10%. Similar increases were recorded at the same time in Spain and Portugal.

The French government is firm in its position on the necessity of reforming EU institutions and securing common policies, especially the CAP before enlargement takes place. It also stresses the continuity of the process of the negotiations with all the applicant countries.

The French public shares the same priorities as the majority of other countries, with human rights,

the fight against crime and environmental protection being consistently seen as being of the highest importance. The French public seems to have become more interested in the economic development of the applicant countries and their ability to put EU interests ahead of national ones. Though there is an understanding of the process of enlargement as a vehicle for even stronger European consolidation, enlargement seems not to be a major topic of public debate.

Until recently the accession of the candidate countries could not have been considered as a major challenge to the main partners of French society. However, increasing involvement of different institutions indicates a changing situation. The Mouvement des Entreprises de France has started a series of analytical reports on the applicant countries and has submitted to the European Commission draft proposals on a new level of pre-accession co-operation with the candidates.

The main employer's organisation the CNFP (Conseil National du Patronat Français) has no set opinion on the issue of enlargement. One possible explanation is that the implementation of the Europe Agreements signed with Central and Eastern European Countries has already resulted in the entry of industrial products into the single market and led to a growing trade surplus for France. Secondly, France has no borders with the applicant countries, and is therefore not worried about the inflow of a low-cost labour force. The main farming Union, the FNSEA (Fédération Nationale des Syndicats d'Exploitants Agricoles) is not opposed to EU enlargement to the East (January 1996), though it does have a number of reservations<sup>2</sup>.

### **Germany**

In Germany, public support for EU enlargement has changed slightly during the last year, falling from 36% to 34%. This puts Germany in the third place among the countries with the lowest public support for the issue, with Belgium and Austria having lower figures. The number of people not having an opinion has increased, up from 19% in Spring 1998 to 22% now. Public attitudes towards individual applicant countries are quite stable though the spread is still high at 31%.

The German position is very complex due to various actors and decision making levels. The government, the Federal level and the Länder, the interest groups all have their own priorities and perspectives. Traditionally, the northern Länder have closer ties with the countries of the Baltic Sea region, while Bavaria has close historical links with the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia.

There is widespread consensus among the German political, economic and academic elite for the need to reform EU structural policy. The public debate on enlargement, however, has focused more on Agenda 2000, with particular emphasis on the budgetary implications. Public concern that applicant countries pay their share of the EU budget has increased. 92% of respondents want the enlargement not to be costly. The biggest increase, however, is in the need to put EU interests ahead of national ones. On the whole, 85% of people in Germany think that applicant countries should comply with the enlargement criteria in order to access.

### **Greece**

The number of people supporting EU enlargement is 61% and has gone up during the last year by 5%. It makes Greece, next to Sweden and Denmark, one of the most positive countries on enlargement. The number of people not expressing a clear opinion has fallen from 17% to 11% according to the latest data. The spread of attitudes towards individual applicant countries remains stable at 38%, being the largest compared to the relevant data for other member states and equals that of Austria. This is to a large extent due to the high level of support for Cyprus' application, with 87%. Another strongly supported country is Malta ranking 72%.

Supporting EU enlargement, the Greek government is firm in its commitments to secure the full accessibility of structural and solidarity funds. Views on the current EU enlargement is closely related in Greece to the question of EU funding.

In Greece, 89% of the population considers that the enlargement criteria are important for the accession of the applicant countries. At the same time, there is a clear increase in the desire for enlargement not to be costly, up by 9%, and that the EU interest be put first (increase by 11%). There are indications that Greece might take a negative position on enlargement, if the budget negotiations go the wrong way.

The opinion of the Federation of Greek Industries is that eastward EU enlargement at a reasonable cost should strengthen the Union's position in world markets and enable European companies to improve their competitiveness. However, it is important that the integration of new members should not dilute the *acquis communautaire* or introduce new distortions in competition. Cyprus, Bulgaria and Romania are considered priority countries for Greek enterprises.

### **Ireland**

Average support for the enlargement is 1% below the average EU support, at 41% according to the latest data. 36% of population has no clear opinion, the second highest «don't know» figure after Portugal. Compared with Spring 1998, the number of undecided is stable while support has fallen by 3%. The diversity of attitudes towards the individual applicant countries has not changed as dramatically as in a number of other member states, and is now 18%, compared with 12% a year ago.

The Irish government is convinced that the accession of the applicant countries should be based on progress on an individual basis. The general public has so far not shown any great interest in the enlargement process, being more concerned about the implications of the structural reform for their country.

The Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) supports enlargement, stating it will present Ireland with some new threats, but also potential business opportunities. Overall, enlargement should have a positive effect on the Irish economy, though it feels the government must seek guarantees about the level of EU transfers to Ireland during the period of the next EU's financial perspectives. The IBEC is at present involved in a project which will result in a detailed analysis of the implications of enlargement on the Irish economy in the context of overall dynamics of the European economy.

### **Italy**

Public support for enlargement in Italy is 48%, with 24% undecided according to the latest data. The number of people with no clear view has fallen by 5%, while the number in favour has increased slightly. At the same time there is a growing difference in attitudes towards individual applicant countries, the spread doubling to 20% in the latest polls.

The Italian government is firm in its opinion that enlargement is possible only after the agreement on institutional reform. The debate on the enlargement issue at a political level is primarily the debate on Agenda 2000. However, it is not a public debate and enlargement is perceived more as an issue for the future.

The Italian trade unions confederation Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (CGIL) stated

that the ensuing benefits of enlargement will not come automatically and will pose a challenge for the European Union. The problem of the smooth political and institutional operation of the Union should be dealt with long before membership exceeds twenty and a new Intergovernmental Conference should be convened during the negotiations.

### **Luxembourg**

36% of people questioned in Luxembourg favour EU Enlargement, 2% down from Spring 1998.

The number of people not expressing a clear opinion has grown from 18% to 23% over the last year, and the diversity of attitudes towards individual applicant countries has grown from 9% to 17%.

There is tendency to give more attention to the capacities of the candidate countries to protect environment, fight against organised crime and to protect human rights. The acceptance of the *acquis communautaire* is also important. On the other hand there is a decrease in the opinion that economic development, the costs of the enlargement and ability to pay a budget share are the main problems. The support for these requirements has decreased by average 4%.

### **The Netherlands**

The latest data from The Netherlands show, that 51% of population is in favour of the EU enlargement to the East. 16% of the population have no clear opinion. Compared with other member states, the number of «don't know» is low. It should be noted, however, that support is down from 57% in Spring 1998. The diversity of opinions about the individual applicant countries has remained unchanged during the last year.

The Dutch government has stressed that institutional reform is a necessary precondition for enlargement. The Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (FNV) is of the opinion that the EU enlargement underpins democracy, peace and stability for the whole European continent and has the potential to foster economic success and social progress for all of Europe. The EU must reform internal policies and institutions to prepare for the realities of a larger and more diverse membership. But this must not be used as an excuse for delaying the enlargement process. The application of the four freedoms of the internal market could have a major impact on labour markets, especially in border regions. The extent of this impact will depend on the degree of success achieved in securing economic and social stability and development in the applicant countries.

The Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers (VNO-NCW) also firmly supports eastward enlargement. While enlargement offers good economic opportunities for business, it feels that candidate countries should be allowed to join if they are absolutely ready to do so, and must adopt the *acquis communautaire* before joining.

### **Portugal**

42% of the Portuguese public is in favour of EU enlargement. This figure has fallen by 4% and is now in line with the most recent EU average. The 37% «don't know» response is slightly up. On the other hand, there does not appear to be an increase in the spread of opinions on the individual applicant countries.

The Portuguese government and the main political parties have declared their support for enlargement and are of the opinion that every country should be judged primarily on individual achievements. The discussion on enlargement related issues is being carried out within the framework of Agenda 2000. There seems to be no great interest in the enlargement issues amongst the general public. The main concern is the future financing of the EU which should promote economic and social cohesion within the European Union. Consequently, there is a considerable increase of those in favour of a more advanced economic development of the applicant countries. Compared to 1997, support for this particular requirement has increased by 10%, up to 70% in 1998. Still, the majority of the Portuguese public consider the applicant's respect for human rights and the fight against crime and drugs as being the most important among the accession criteria. Overall, the Portuguese public might be very supportive to enlargement, assuming Portugal's specific interests are satisfied.

The Confederation of Portuguese Trade Unions in its Action Programme adopted in June 1996 declared support for the EU enlargement process, noting that the Union's enlargement to other countries should be carefully monitored and analysed, since the consequences would inevitably be contradictory, notably for more peripheral and less developed EU countries, like Portugal, in different economic, financial and political aspects.

### **Spain**

The average support for enlargement in Spain in the beginning of year 1999 was 51% and had fallen by 3% over the last year. 34% of population had no opinion on the issue, and this figure has remained more or less stable compared to the earlier polls. On the other hand in Spain, as well as in Portugal, the general tendency for the increase in diversity of opinions regarding individual applicant countries seem not to be relevant. The diversity of attitudes towards individual candidate countries is a stable 5% and can be considered as very low, compared to the EU average of 16%.

### **Sweden**

Future enlargement of the EU enjoys broad support in Sweden, most recently 63%. The figure has remained unchanged during the most recent polls and the number of those with no clear opinion has fallen from 24% to 19%. The diversity of opinions on individual applicant countries remains unchanged at 18% and is close to the EU average.

However, the main public debate is on whether Sweden should remain a member of the European Union rather than the future of an enlarged European Union. Therefore, the difference in yes and no for enlargement can be seen to a major extent as part of the wider EU membership debate. Security, greater economic and political stability are the main arguments for the EU supporters, who would welcome the accession of the candidate countries. The biggest problems are seen to be the transition to a well functioning market economy, under the rule of law, and to create efficient decision-making procedures. Free movement of labour and the CAP are considered to be the most difficult areas of the negotiations. It should be noted also, that those who are against the EU are not necessarily against enlargement. They are rather stressing that the decision on the EU membership should be made by the citizens of the candidate countries, not by the governments, a view put forward by the Green party.

The Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) has not taken an official position on EU enlargement, although it broadly supports the government position. Above all, the applications for membership from the Baltic States and from Poland are supported, since they are closest neighbours.

## **United Kingdom**

In the United Kingdom support for EU enlargement is 44%, with 29% expressing no clear opinion. Compared to Spring 1998, the average number of undecided has fallen by 3%. The diversity of opinions on individual applicant countries has increased dramatically from 16% in Spring 1998 to 30% in Spring 1999.

The British government is of the opinion that the enlargement should take place as soon as is practical. The issue of enlargement does not feature prominently in British public debate. This is more an issue to be discussed in the context of debate on the single currency and issues of European integration.

With the view of opening Eastern European markets to the British exports, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) supports the objective of the EU membership for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Setting out its position based on the CBI member response to a consultation paper on Enlargement and Agenda 2000, the CBI stressed significant potential economic and political benefits of enlargement. However, the enlargement should be preceded by substantive policy and institutional reform in order to achieve its goals. The reform of structural funds must result in greater effectiveness in managing economic change. The EU institutions must be reformed in the interests of efficiency, effectiveness and transparency. The influx of labour force was not seen as a major threat to the UK, more to the border areas of the EU. The Trade Union Congress (TUC) generally supports the political and economic criteria adopted by the EU for assessing applicant countries.

## **II. PUBLIC OPINION ON ACCESSION IN THE APPLICANT COUNTRIES<sup>2</sup>**

### **1. Summary**

There have been no surveys of public opinion on EU membership in the applicant countries published by the Eurobarometer recently. In individual applicant countries, the frequency of monitoring public opinion differs, with some countries polling more regularly than others.

According to the Eurobarometer data from Spring 1998, public opinion in all the countries in the first wave of accession negotiations has remained positive towards the EU, and in some cases has improved. The same positive tendency was followed in the rest of the countries, except Romania.

The various data from local polls would indicate that recently public support for EU membership has fallen in Estonia, Lithuania and the Czech Republic. In Lithuania, the fall in the number of EU supporters since 1990 is the smallest. Earlier more critical opinions in the Baltic States were explained partly by a lack of information on the EU. Now, however, the governments in these countries have started detailed information campaigns. In all three Baltic States there is a tendency now to feel better informed on EU matters.

In a number of cases, changes in the support might be explained as a result of the debate on the integration process, sometimes accompanied by a diversity of opinions. However, despite these variations, the image of the EU is generally positive among people living in all the candidate countries, with 50% saying they had a positive impression of the EU's aims and activities.

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<sup>2</sup> Central and Eastern Eurobarometer n° 8, unless mentioned otherwise.

The governments of the candidate countries have launched information campaigns on the EU and relations between the EU and the respective country. The programmes are mostly financed from the national budget, with support from the European Commission. However, in most cases the majority of the general public does not perceive the question of EU membership as having a direct impact on everyday life. Instead, enlargement is mainly a matter of interest to the political elite. This could be explained mainly by the lack of information, since most information programmes are still in their infancy. The effectiveness of the campaigns launched by the governments of the candidate countries remains to be seen.

The main source of information on the EU is the national media, with increased information more recently. However, in most cases this has tended to concentrate on political matters rather than developing in depth public knowledge. There has been more discussion on the possible negative implications of EU membership for particular sectors.

## 2. Country profiles

### **Bulgaria**

57% of population in Bulgaria would vote for the country's membership in the EU if there were a referendum tomorrow, according to data from Spring 1998. 50% of those polled had positive impressions of the aims and activities of the EU, and only 3% negative. 40% considered that the country's future ought to be closely linked to the EU, which is seen as bringing many benefits. 30% are of the opinion that their country would benefit more from the membership than the EU and 38% consider that both would benefit equally. Among the different interest groups it would be private business that benefits most from the membership, followed by health care, the social services system and agriculture.

### **Czech Republic**

The latest local opinion polls in the Czech Republic show 64% in favour of EU membership. In January 1999, support was 57%, with 18% against and 25% undecided. These figures compare with 85% in favour in 1993 and 72% in July 1998. Part of the reason for declining support for EU membership may be disputes with the EU over import quotas for Czech products in the second half of 1998. Another reason could be the frustration with delays in the accession process.

The major public figures are all in favour of EU membership. There is a close contact between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the business community on EU matters. Despite the sensitivity of the agricultural sector, the Agrarian Chamber is not opposed to joining the EU. The trade unions are also very supportive of EU enlargement, stressing the need for dialogue among the social partners, similar to the view of the European Trade Union Confederation.

There is a continuing debate about membership in the media. Since January last year more than 50 episodes of "Europe and us" have appeared on TV, in addition to coverage of EU affairs on TV and in the press. There is also an official information campaign run by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and co-sponsored by the EU delegation in Czech Republic. The website Euroskop was launched on 1 March 1999.

### **Cyprus**

There have been no opinion polls on EU membership carried out in Cyprus lately. However, it is thought there is a large majority in favour of membership.

Taking into consideration the full support of the Cypriot people and all political parties for EU

membership as well as the fact that there are no social groups acting against the membership there are no significant debates on the issue.

An information campaign on EU membership was launched by the Office of the Head of the Negotiating delegation for the Accession of Cyprus to the EU. The Office has a web site in Greek, Turkish and English, through which it provides information on the European Course of Cyprus, the acquis screening, the accession negotiations, the benefits that both communities (Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot) will acquire from membership.

### **Estonia**

A local survey from November 1998 found 27% of those questioned in favour of Estonian membership of the EU, and 14% against. A year previously, the number in favour was 35% and 37% were undecided. At the same time, people's interest in and awareness about EU matters has grown. There is no clear division between those for/against on the ground of education and on the basis of nationality.

All the parties represented in the newly elected Estonian parliament (Riigikogu), have agreed on Estonia's accession to the EU. Trade Unions and associations of industrial enterprises are also in favour of joining. However, public interest had not as yet led to any major pro- or anti-EU groups being formed.

A lively debate on the future EU membership has started recently in the press, led by prominent public figures. As part of the information campaign a public page on Euro-debate on the Internet has been opened. The page has had numerous visitors putting forward their views on both sides of the argument. An information secretariat of the EU (ISEU) has been set up by the state Chancellery of the Republic of Estonia.

7m EEK has been allotted from the national budget to cover the EU accession related costs. 2.5m has been earmarked for the purpose of informing the general public about the essence of the EU accession. Money has also been set aside for the training of state officials.

### **Hungary**

56% of the Hungarian population would vote for country's membership in the EU if there were a referendum. Almost two thirds of public are of the opinion that Hungary would benefit from accession. This positive view is reflected in the fact that there are no specific organisations campaigning against Hungary's EU membership.

Hungarian business is strongly in favour of accession. This has been helped by the improving performance of Hungarian companies during the transitional period, which has strengthened their belief in their ability to withstand the competitive pressure of the single market.

Public awareness of EU issues has been slowly rising, as the impact of EU membership affects more areas of public life. This can be seen in the growing tendency for news broadcasts to show domestic affairs with an EU slant.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched an information campaign on 1 January 1996. The project is financed partly by the Hungarian government and partly by Phare money. In 1998, the government provided 238.66 million HUF (936 000Euro) from the national budget and an additional 794,000 Euro was set aside from the Phare programme in the years 1997-1998 to support the programme.

## **Latvia**

The most recent local poll in November 1998 showed 46.6% in favour of Latvia's membership of the EU, 26.8% against and 26.6% undecided. In a poll in Autumn 1997, the results were 40% in favour, 13 % against, 26.6% undecided.

Most supportive of EU integration are those aged under 25, city-dwellers, those with better education and/or higher incomes. More sceptical are pensioners, housewives, and the unemployed. Sex, ethnic origin or citizenship status have no significant effect. Following a trend seen in several of the applicant countries, farmers are the most sceptical group. Within that group the division of opinions is 45% in favour, 45% against, 10% undecided.

Attitudes towards EU membership have become clearer over the past year, partly because of the national elections and the referendum on changes to the Law on Citizenship in October 1998. During the public discussions leading up to the elections and the referendum, the need to fulfil the EU requirements was often mentioned as a strong argument. However, more detailed information about what EU membership entails is still not available widely enough. Furthermore, most of the available information comes from government sources, which may be fairly unpopular with certain sections of the public. In addition, a vocal and active against movement has not yet taken shape, where this would be a catalyst for wider active public debate.

The public can currently get information from various sources: government, NGOs, mass media, schools and universities. In 1998, the European Integration Bureau, a government agency directly responsible to the Prime Minister, adopted a Public Awareness Strategy on the EU in Latvia. The strategy incorporates information services, preparation and distribution of information material, including cooperation with television and radio, and research.

## **Lithuania**

Local polls carried out in April showed the support for EU membership in Lithuania at its lowest level at 27%. It is a dramatic fall from 51% in favour in October 1998. The previous increase from 40% in Spring 1998 (CEEB) was mostly conditioned by the Russian economic crisis and the strong commitment of the Lithuanian government to start negotiations with the EU. However, the recent decrease could in part be a direct outcome of the intense public debate on the decommissioning of the Ignalina nuclear power plant. There is increasing public concern about the possible profound effects on Lithuanian economy and consequently on the living standards of the population. A local poll taken in autumn last year showed that 80% of Lithuanians want the plant to continue operating. Debate on closing the power plant follows other unpopular government initiative, the abolition of death penalty, which is widely seen as a measure made to satisfy EU.

According to another poll, 48% of the business community in Lithuania felt that EU membership will provide them with more opportunities and benefits. The most difficult effects to predict are in the agricultural sector. One of the other concerns highlighted is an eventual limitation of sovereignty.

40% of Lithuanian population has no clear opinion on the EU. 11% of the public claim they do not have information about the EU. This is the biggest number of uninformed people after Bulgaria (13%) among the applicant countries. 57% of population would like to receive more information on the EU issues and 29% are satisfied.

In order to increase public awareness, a public information strategy was adopted by the Lithuanian government in 1998. A detailed implementation plan covers different target groups and is designed to be updated every year according to needs of the public. Implementation of this strategy is coordinated with the EU delegation in Vilnius, which has its own programme. The national information programme is financed from the budget and supported by Phare money. Implementation is under the direct scrutiny of the Seimas.

### **Poland**

According to local polls at the beginning of 1999, 64% of those questioned are in favour of Polish EU membership, while 19% of the population would be against. In fact, results of numerous surveys during the last years show that there is a constant majority of people in favour.

Compared to Autumn 1997, the number of people who thought Poland should modernise its economy before joining has risen from 43% to 50%. The number of people seeing EU membership as a prerequisite for the modernisation of economy has fallen from 39% to 34%. Only 13% of the public think that Poland should be bound to compromise during the negotiations, whereas 69% feel that the negotiators should be firm defending the Polish interests. 56% think that the eventual outcome of the negotiations will depend on the Polish negotiators to a large extent.

Well-educated people, entrepreneurs, and those with higher incomes are the strongest supporters of EU membership. Business considers integration to be primarily an economical process. The strongest opponents of the integration are farmers, who are considered to be one of the main problems of the integration process. In a survey of April 1998, over half the respondents (54%) thought that membership would have a bad influence on the functioning of individual farms. Also 56% thought EU membership will have a good influence on functioning of private companies<sup>2</sup>.

Two thirds of the Polish population would like to be better informed about the EU. Analysts admit that EU integration was not a priority issue during the 1995 and 1997 elections. On the other hand, as in most of the other candidate countries, the integration process is the domain of the political elite. The politicians have also a strong tendency to try to control the information flow.

### **Romania**

71% of Romanians polled are in favour of joining the EU if there were referendum, according to a Eurobarometer survey in Spring 1998. In fact Romania was the only applicant country to prefer to be more closely linked to the USA(39%) than with the EU (24%). In Spring 1998, Romanians had the most positive impression about the EU after Poland (56%), although this was down from its peak of 65% in 1996.

71% of those asked felt that private business would benefit most from closer ties with the EU, while state enterprises would benefit least of all. Government civil servants, low income groups and farmers are considered to be potential losers. Other beneficiaries were felt to be health and social services, the armed forces and the educational system.

### **Slovakia**

A survey carried out by the Institute for Public Affairs in April 1998 showed 79% in favour of joining the EU. 11% were opposed and 10% undecided. Polls from December 1996 showed that 59.4% of population supported the country's membership of the EU. This broad view is reflected in the consensus among most of the major social actors on the membership in the EU.

The opposition Movement for a Democratic Slovakia has an ambiguous attitude towards EU integration, declaring official support while on the other hand issuing strong eurosceptic statements.

Other groups who have declared their opposition to membership include the Slovak National Party, Communist Party and the Workers Association of Slovakia.

In order to increase public awareness of EU integration, there is an information campaign, run by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Phare. The programme has been developed with the cooperation of Slovak NGOs, the Centre for European Policy, and the Slovak Foreign Policy Association.

### **Slovenia**

The proportion of the population favouring EU membership has increased, up from 42% in 1994 to 57% in 1998. Public opinion in Slovenia supports the official policy of the Slovenian government and the major political parties which are all pro-European. EU integration was one of the main issues in parliamentary elections in 1996. International economic co-operation and economic stability are considered the major factors of security for Slovenia. 67% of people believe that strengthening security means economic stability. On the whole the number of those who believe that their country will benefit most from the EU membership has increased significantly.

However, the number of those who doubt whether the country is going in the right direction has increased as well. The most sensitive areas for the integration process are seen to be questions of ownership, national identity, the Slovene language and agriculture, in that order <sup>2</sup>.

Generally it is considered that the membership will have a positive effect in consolidating the overall development of the Slovenian economy. However, interest groups within the society seem not to have defined their specific positions in detail as yet. The mid-term economic strategy for Slovenia, prepared by the government, is the main road map for the adaptation of the Slovenian economy.

Finally, media reporting can be characterised as giving more accent to political themes. The source of most information is the political ranks. However, with negotiations in progress, the issues discussed in the media have become more diverse and been covered in greater depth.

## **III. ENHANCING THE DIALOGUE WITH SOCIAL PARTNERS**

The organisations of European social partners welcomed the initiative of the European Commission to gather representatives of the trade unions' and employers' organisations from the Member States of the European Union, European Economic Area and from the candidate countries on 18 and 19 March 1999 in Warsaw.

Enlargement of the European Union to the East and South is a process of a historical importance. The candidate countries and the European Union are faced with a double challenge of profound economic and social reform currently taking place in the candidate countries.

The tasks to be fulfilled require active participation of social partners who must fully live up to their responsibilities by contributing to the enlargement process both at national and European level.

The European Trade Union Confederation, the European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation and of the Enterprises of General Economic Interest and the Union of Industrial and Employers Confederation of Europe are convinced that social dialogue and participation of trade

unions and employer's organisations are necessary for the success of the reform process and for the preparation of enlargement in the candidate countries. In a joint declaration adopted at the conference in Warsaw in March 1999, they invite the governments of candidate countries to involve social partners, in an appropriate way, in the enlargement process.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

Positive attitudes compared - average supporters for the EU enlargement is 42% and 24% against in the member states. In the applicant countries those who would vote for the membership in the EU according the CEEB spring 1998 is 60% and 17% undecided and 8% against.

Generally, the citizens in the candidate countries are more interested in, and positive about, the European Union than the citizens of the member states are about the candidate countries. Firstly, it could be due to the fact that the applicants are more motivated to be interested in the European Union. On the other hand the public opinion in the EU is aware, to a different extent in individual states, of the fact that the enlargement will have a considerable impact on their own country.

Secondly, the public opinion in the applicant countries has the advantage, especially in a longer perspective, of official information campaigns which are launched by national governments and supported by the European Commission. Access to information being a pre-requisite though not a decisive factor of positive attitude building process.

With the deepening of the integration process there is a stronger tendency for differentiation of attitudes in the EU towards individual applicant countries. Though it could be assumed that, with the level of awareness being considerably low, only the most general argument (for/against) is being taken into account, which often lacks precision. On the other hand, the information received by the public in the applicant countries is still strongly dominated by the political elite and broad political issues.

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*For further information, please contact the author of the present document:  
Mrs Ruta BUNEVICIUTE, Tel. (322) 284.46.56 (Brussels), or  
Mr J. Javier FERNÁNDEZ FERNÁNDEZ, Coordinator of the "Enlargement" Task Force,  
Tel.: (352) 4300-22758 / Fax: (352)4300-29027 (Luxembourg)  
Tel.: (322) 284.23.81 / Fax: (322) 284.49.84 (Brussels)  
Tel.: (33) 3.88.17.44.08 / Fax: (33) 3.88.17.90.59 (Strasbourg)  
e-mail: [jfernandez@europarl.eu.int](mailto:jfernandez@europarl.eu.int)*

## ANNEX 1

<b>REFERENDUM ON EU MEMBERSHIP IN CANDIDATE COUNTRIES <sup>3</sup></b>				
<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>SPRING 1998 <sup>4</sup></b>			<b>SPRING 1999 <sup>5</sup></b>
	<b>FOR</b>	<b>UNDECIDED</b>	<b>AGAINST</b>	<b>FOR</b>
Romania	71 %	11 %	6 %	no data
Poland	63 %	17 %	6 %	64 %
Slovakia	62 %	16 %	8 %	79 %
Slovenia	57 %	11 %	18 %	no data
Bulgaria	57 %	17 %	4 %	no data
Hungary	56 %	20 %	9 %	no data
Czech Republic	49 %	19 %	13 %	64 %
Lithuania	40 %	26 %	13 %	27 %
Latvia	40 %	32 %	13 %	47 %
Estonia	35 %	37 %	14 %	27 %
<b>Average</b>	<b>60 %</b>	<b>17 %</b>	<b>8 %</b>	<b>-</b>

<sup>3</sup> No data available for Cyprus in the CEEB n° 8.

<sup>4</sup> Source: Central and Eastern European Barometer, n° 8.

<sup>5</sup> Source: Local polls.

PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION IN THE MEMBER STATES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN FAVOUR OF APPLICANT COUNTRIES BECOMING PART OF THE EUROPEAN UNION <sup>6</sup>							
SPRING 1998				SPRING 1999			
COUNTRY	Average % support	Spread <sup>7</sup>	Average % of "don't know" responses	COUNTRY	Average % support	Spread	Average % of "don't know" responses
Sweden	63 %	18	24 %	Sweden	63 %	18	19 %
Denmark	61 %	23	16 %	Denmark	61 %	32	13 %
The Netherlands	57 %	21	15 %	Greece	61 %	38	11 %
Finland	56 %	26	18 %	Finland	52 %	34	16 %
Greece	56 %	38	17 %	The Netherlands	51 %	21	16 %
Spain	54 %	6	33 %	Spain	51 %	5	34 %
Italy	47 %	10	29 %	Italy	48 %	20	24 %
Portugal	46 %	5	35 %	United Kingdom	44 %	30	29 %
<b>EU15</b>	<b>44 %</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>25 %</b>	<b>EU15</b>	<b>42 %</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>24 %</b>
Ireland	44 %	12	36 %	Portugal	42 %	7	37 %
United Kingdom	43 %	16	32 %	Ireland	41 %	18	36 %
Luxembourg	38 %	9	18 %	Luxembourg	36 %	17	23 %
Germany	36 %	32	19 %	France	35 %	16	20 %
France	35 %	16	22 %	Germany	34 %	31	22 %
Austria	33 %	35	20 %	Austria	30 %	38	19 %
Belgium	32 %	7	22 %	Belgium	28 %	16	20 %

<sup>6</sup> Average % support for the 11 (Spring 1998) / 12 (Spring 1999) applicant countries, spread from lowest to highest % support, and average % of "don't know" responses.

<sup>7</sup> Spread between the highest and lowest support on individual applicant countries.