



# europaean community

# NEWS

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## CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEANS LOOK TO EC AS MAIN FUTURE PARTNER

A recent EC Commission public opinion survey of 18 Eastern European countries including former Soviet republics found that the European Community is seen by many as the region's most important future trading partner. The survey, Central and Eastern EUROBAROMETER No. 3, is the largest opinion poll to date on the progress of political and economic reform in the region.\*

Of those polled between October 30 and November 17, 1992, a quarter of Central and Eastern Europeans (26 percent) said they see their country's future tied mainly to the EC, followed by Russia (19 percent) and the United States (17 percent). Russians, who replied to a separate question, said their future was primarily with the US (25 percent) or with other members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS - 23 percent), while the EC comes third among them (14 percent).

Asked whether important trading partners are "fair/unfair", little difference is discernable concerning the EC (29 percent/20 percent), the US (30 percent/21 percent) and Japan (29 percent/17 percent).

Awareness of the Community is high throughout the region -- 71 percent have heard of it, 44 percent are positive, 27 percent are neutral and only 4 percent negative. Outside of the CIS, most people (78 percent) support EC membership in the future and 68 percent favor "Europe Agreements" to boost trade and living standards. (Europe Agreements formalize and deepen political and economic cooperation and are seen as a first step toward EC membership. The Community has signed Europe Agreements with Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania.)

Sir Leon Brittan, EC Commission Vice President for External Economic Affairs, commented on the findings: "This survey shows that Eastern Europeans really appreciate the importance of the European Community in the region's future. It is clear that the current transition period is proving painful to many. We must buttress faith in the free market throughout the region by setting an example. Opening our markets will be a major boost in helping these countries out of their current difficulties."

The EC has been assisting reform in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989. Since then, the number of countries benefitting from the EC's PHARE grant program has quadrupled, while the program's annual budget has doubled from 500 million ECU in 1990 to 1040 ECU in 1993 (1 ECU = \$1.18 approximately). These countries have also received over 2 billion ECU in EC balance of payments loans, as well as assistance from the European Investment Bank and European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), and emergency and food aid. The EC aids the CIS plus Georgia under TACIS, a technical assistance program which aims to help accelerate economic reforms through privatization and the development of a pluralistic democracy. The 1993 TACIS budget is 510 million ECU, up from 400 million ECU in 1991. In addition, the Community has provided grants and loans for commodity imports (mainly food and medical supplies).

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Many are impatient with the pace of reform. For the region as a whole, more than four out of ten say their country's economic reform and the process of privatizing state enterprises are going "too slowly". Half say they were better off previously, and only over one quarter (27 percent) say they are better off now. On the whole, those interviewed in TACIS countries tend to be more negative (59 percent) about the new system than those in PHARE countries (36 percent) where reform is more advanced. This shows that most people are finding the transition from a command to a market economy very difficult, but do not necessarily wish to see a return to communism.

On respect for human rights, the aggregate result shows that 56 percent of the poll sample are dissatisfied. This is more extreme in CIS states (two-thirds) than in other Central and Eastern European countries (less than half). Reasons for negative responses were mainly economic. An absolute majority of people say there should be little or no state control over their media. This view is as strongly felt in CIS as in non-CIS countries.

\*The survey was conducted in Albania, Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia (West of Urals), Slovakia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Slovenia and Ukraine. One thousand people aged 15 years and over were interviewed face-to-face in each country in the appropriate national or minority language. Gallup UK helped with the coordination of the survey.

Press Copies of Central and Eastern EUROBAROMETER, No. 3, are available.

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