

## EVA ATTITUDE AND VALUE SURVEY 2009:

### Finns' Opinions in the Midst of Economic Crisis

#### English Summary

##### Executive summary

Finns support free competition in the market economy but sternly criticize excessive greediness and pursuing a quick profit. Above all, more humaneness, incentives and responsibility are desired from the market economy after the economic crisis. The majority of Finns do not want the central government's role as an economic actor to grow, but there is wide confidence in its basic activities.

The most significant reasons for Finland ending up in the economic crisis stem from abroad, but concerns about jobs are at the core of the Finnish crisis. Lay-offs cast a shadow on Finns' attitudes towards business activities.

In the midst of the economic crisis, the opinions of Finns are undergoing change: Although Finns are still sceptical when it comes to politics, respect for it is rising. Attitudes towards immigration are showing signs of becoming colder. Attitudes towards the EU and NATO membership, however, are living in a time of milder temperatures.

Finns are widely concerned about the state of the environment, coping at work, the sustainability of the pension system, inequality and the continuing of well-being. Despite their worries Finns are for the most part content with their lives. All these results become clear from the fresh value and attitude survey of the Finnish Business and Policy Forum EVA.

The report *Kapitalismi kansan käräjillä* was published 9<sup>th</sup> march 2009 and is the thirteenth in the series of EVA's value and attitude research studies started in 1984. It has been written by Ilkka Haavisto from EVA and Pentti Kiljunen from Yhdyskuntatutkimus Oy, who has also taken care of the technical execution of the research. The following summary includes a few of the main results selected from the wide-ranging study. The report (in Finnish) can be read in its entirety on EVA's website [www.eva.fi](http://www.eva.fi).

## **Finns are prepared for prolonged downturn**

Despite the "poor visibility" of the economic situation, Finns have an idea where their country's economy is headed. Finns see that the trough of the economic crisis will arrive next year, but it will take about five or so years until the economy has recovered back to a stable growth path. Almost six out of ten (58%) predict that the economic crisis will lead to a long and difficult recession at least. About four out of ten (39%) see a depression ahead of us.

## **Economic plight seen as coming from abroad**

When asked about the reasons for the downturn in Finland's economy, domestic decision makers are forgiven for their sins by the majority of citizens. Economic excesses and mistakes that took place in the USA and other countries, and globalization of the economy are named as reasons for Finland getting caught up in the economic crisis. Fault is also seen in the excessive freedom of the international economy and deficiencies in regulations in addition to the nature of the market economy changing into "hard capitalism". Economic freedom is not seen, however, to have grown to such extent in Finland that it could be regarded as a significant cause of the economic crisis.

## **Greed and speculation are condemned in the market economy**

Finns do not take a clear stand for or against the market economy system based on principles. The feedback about Finnish market economy is nevertheless sharp. There is seen to be too much greed, pursuing ones own interests and "quick profits", speculation and "hard capitalism". Instead of these more humaneness, shared responsibility, social cohesion as well as long-term planning and stability of development are wanted in the Finnish economic model. However, the criticism and hopes for the market economy are not solely directed towards the values of the market economy, but rather people want it to function better in practice than at present.

## **Basic principles of market economy are still valued**

A clear majority (71%) also wishes for more incentives from the Finnish market economy for the people to try their best. More appreciation for work is also on the wishlist. Many (57%) hope for better rewarding of entrepreneurship and risk-taking. The freedom of entrepreneurship should be increased rather than decreased and room for improvement is seen in the chances of gaining wealth. There are also shortcomings in competition: there are too many businesses in a monopoly position, and very few see that there is too much competition between businesses.

## **People are not enthusiastic about “third way”**

The clear majority of Finns (70%) see free competition in the market as beneficial to citizens and consumers. On the other hand, almost as many (67%) see that the market powers are controlling the activity of Finnish society too much. The idea put forward in the political debate to increase the state's role in the Finnish market economy does not, however, receive very extensive support from the people. Only slightly more than a fourth wish for more control and regulation exercised by the public authorities in our market economy, and about a third are in favour of more state companies or companies with state ownership. On the other hand, the full relinquishing of state-owned businesses is hardly supported by anyone.

## **Attitudes toward business split**

The majority (57%) of Finns believe that the success and profits of businesses are widely beneficial to the entire society, and still even more see that well-being in our country is dependent on the competitiveness of the export industry. However, only a few (16%) indicate that they trust large Finnish corporations. One explanation for the phenomenon is lay-offs. Only one fourth approve of them as being financially necessary. The majority (60%) see that businesses have a responsibility to keep their employees even in harder times. Attitudes towards small businesses and entrepreneurship, on the other hand, are still very positive. Six out of ten trust entrepreneurs. Even more see that a more positive attitude towards entrepreneurship would benefit the entire society.

## **The state is Finland's most dependable player**

The basic functions of the state rank high when Finns are asked who they trust at the moment. The police, education system, army, social security system, the Finnish broadcasting company YLE, judicial system and the current president of the nation enjoy the trust of the majority of the people. Finns are also comparatively confident in the media, entrepreneurs and - taking into account the present cyclical situation rather surprisingly - also the banking system.

## **Eye kept on political institutions – a third trust in labour unions**

On the other hand, Parliament and the government deciding on state matters enjoy significantly less trust than the basic functions of the state (about four out of ten have confidence and as many do not). Of the actors in the comparison, less trust is enjoyed by political parties, whom only a few (14%) trust. Confidence in the church is also left rather low, on the level of Parliament and the government. Labour market organizations and civic organizations are ranked even lower. One third are confident in the labour unions. At the bottom of the confidence ladder, only slightly higher than the political parties are the EU, employer organizations and corporations.

## **Economy down, politics up?**

Although confidence in political parties is moderate, the interest of Finns towards politics is seeing a slight upswing. Half of the people are interested in politics and follow it actively. Only slightly more than a third (36%) see that no party is advocating the things that are important to them. Although attitudes are still sceptical, politics is doing better than in a long time by historical comparison. The return of politics does not, however, seem to be a sign of "the return of politics to politics". According to Finns parties have widely lost their ideologies, and the clarification of ideals (e.g. by moving towards a two-party system) does not arouse noteworthy interest either. On the one hand, it is a question of the rise of politics as the economy weakens. This is also suggested by the fact that the longing for a strong leader, having been on the decline for a long time, has again started to increase.

## **Confidence in pension system low – labour market attitudes on ice**

In previous surveys the confidence towards the sustainability of the pension system has turned to a descent after having risen gradually in recent years. Slightly more than a third (36%) predict the collapse of the pension schemes and only one fourth of Finns openly trust them to withstand the challenges of the future. Likewise, the basic sentiment toward labour policy is also grim. Less than a fourth of Finns (23%) believe in the common nature of the interests of employees and employers. Attitudes in favour of the right to strike are rather strict. Over six out of ten believe that the right to go on strike should not be restricted under any circumstance. A third (31%) would be ready to ban strikes causing great harm to outsiders entirely.

## **Attitudes colder toward immigrants – warmer toward Europe and NATO**

Half of the Finns (49%) are against the idea that immigration should be eased due to challenges concerning ageing. The slow but systematic strengthening of attitudes towards foreigners has come to a halt in other ways as well. On the other hand, Finns attitudes towards our country's EU membership and the common currency the euro have become more positive. Four out of ten relate positively towards EU membership, one third neutrally and one fourth negatively. Half relate positively to the euro and three out of ten negatively (28%). Also attitudes towards the possible NATO membership have become less negative (positive attitudes 24%, negative 48%).

## **Importance and desirability of economic growth widely questioned – strong support for environmental protection**

Despite the economic crisis the appreciation of growth in Finland is at its

lowest in twenty years. Only a generous fourth stands by the statement that the continuation of welfare can only be based on economic growth. The result is partially explained by the concerns coming across from the other results of the study regarding excessive hurry, uncertainty and indifference prevalent in the modern way of life. The environmental consciousness of Finns is still rather strong. Two out of three (67%) indicate that they are prepared in principle to lower their standard of living for the good of the environment. Concern for the environment is common in almost the entire population. The rather strong belief traditionally in the responsibility of our country's business life is showing signs of weakening. Support for additional construction of nuclear power has also decreased from the last survey (32% for, 44% against).

### **Inequality rubs Finns wrong way – still satisfied with own lives**

The majority see Finns as being at least rather equal in relation to many of the requirements of a good life. These are e.g. education opportunities, freedom of speech, justice, equality of genders, career development opportunities and political rights. Views of equality in health and among generations are strongly divided. Citizens are seen as unequal especially regionally (South vs. North, cities vs. the countryside) and financially (differences in income and well-being, the appreciation of vocational groups, wages and taxation). Despite their worries and being critical Finns come off as being basically content when asked about satisfaction with their own lives. Almost nine out of ten (89%) indicate that they are at least rather satisfied with their own lives and being content with other aspects of their lives, including income level, is comparatively widespread.

### **Background information of the study**

The results of the report are based on answers provided by 2,346 people. The data was gathered by mail between January 2, 2009 – February 2, 2009. The target group of the survey was the 18-70 year-old population of the entire country (excl. Åland). The research was conducted in a bilingual fashion, i.e. the respondents received either a Finnish or Swedish language form. The research data is representative by structure. The confidence interval, i.e. the so-called margin of error, is about 1-2 percentage points in both directions on the level of the entire data. The survey form with distribution of responses is presented in the appendix of the report. As previously, the practical implementation of the research was carried out by Yhdyskuntatutkimus Oy. The research data will be handed over to the Finnish Social Science Data Archive (FSD). Data can be obtained from FSD for research and teaching purposes.

### **Additional information**

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