

## 7. Citizens attitudes towards Europe

In the preceding chapter we examined European Union citizens' level of real knowledge concerning certain aspects of the Union, its structures and functioning. In this chapter we will look at the question of European citizenship, the awareness and importance of citizens' rights, citizens' feelings concerning their influence on the processes of democracy both at national and European level and, finally, citizens' concerns for the future.

### 7.1 Feeling European

The standard Eurobarometer has, since 1992, regularly asked respondents questions concerning "feeling European" in an attempt to get to grips with the question of European identity. The principle question asked:

*"In the near future, do you see yourself as:*

- ☐ *nationality only*
- ☐ *nationality and European*
- ☐ *European and nationality*
- ☐ *European only"*

The last time this question was asked in Autumn 1995<sup>1</sup> 40% felt their own "nationality" only, 46% felt their nationality **and** European, 6% felt European and their nationality and 5% felt European.

In the Mega survey we introduced a new question which attempted to get citizens to prioritise their self perceptions using the following question:

*"In the near future, do you see yourself **above all** as a citizen of the European Union, a citizen of (country) or a citizen of your region? And which next?"*

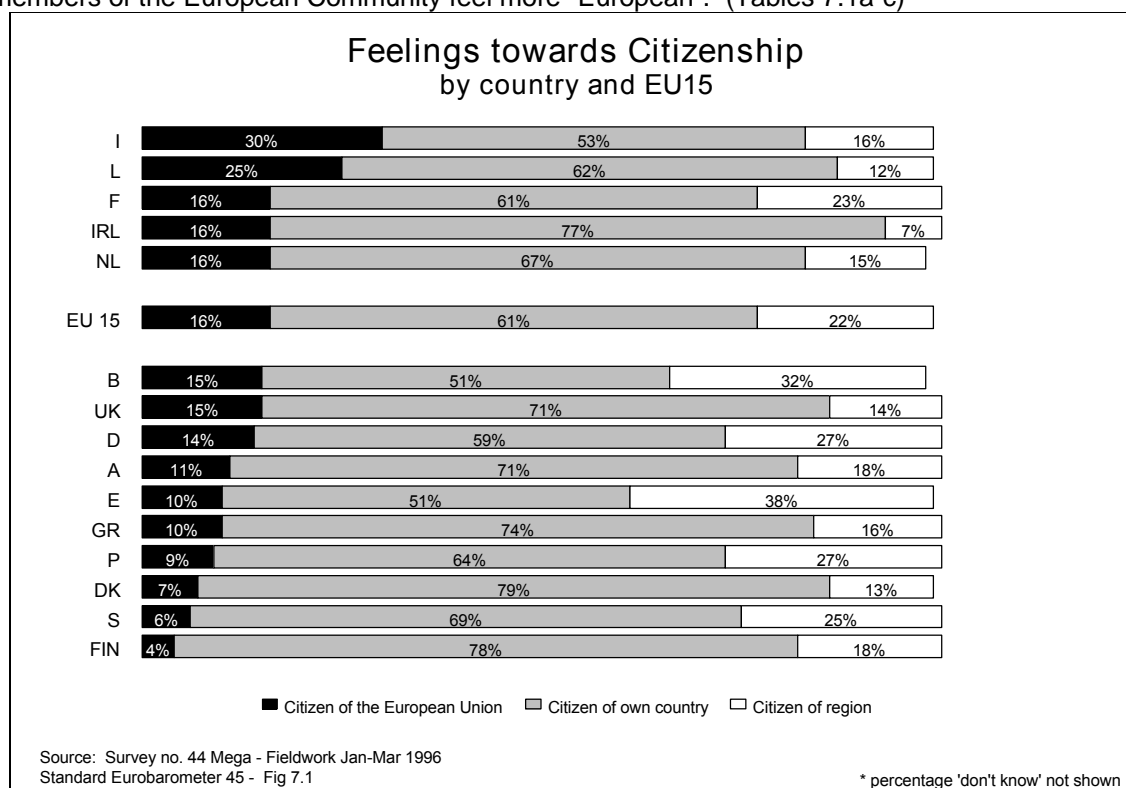
We thus obtained three preferences. On the first preference round it was clear that feelings relating to one's country prevailed, 61% claiming this as their first sense of identity; higher than the 40% claiming "nationality only" in the previous formulation. In the second preference we see regional attachment emerging as an important element with 42%. By the third preference European citizenship was the main choice.

FEELINGS TOWARD CITIZENSHIP			
	First Preference	Second Preference	Third Preference
Citizen of Europe	16	21	56
Citizen of (country)	61	32	4
Citizen of region	22	42	30
Do not know	0	6	11

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<sup>1</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 44.

Feelings of European citizenship were highest in Italy (30%) and Luxembourg (25%); nowhere else did the figure pass 20% in the first preference ranking. This ranking is similar to the results from the earlier question despite a different question formulation; generally respondents from longer standing members of the European Community feel more "European". (Tables 7.1a-c)



Demographic analysis shows that, as with the more general positive feelings concerning the European Union, feeling a citizen of Europe is more likely to be associated with men, the young, those still studying and those holding management positions. (Tables 7.2a-c)

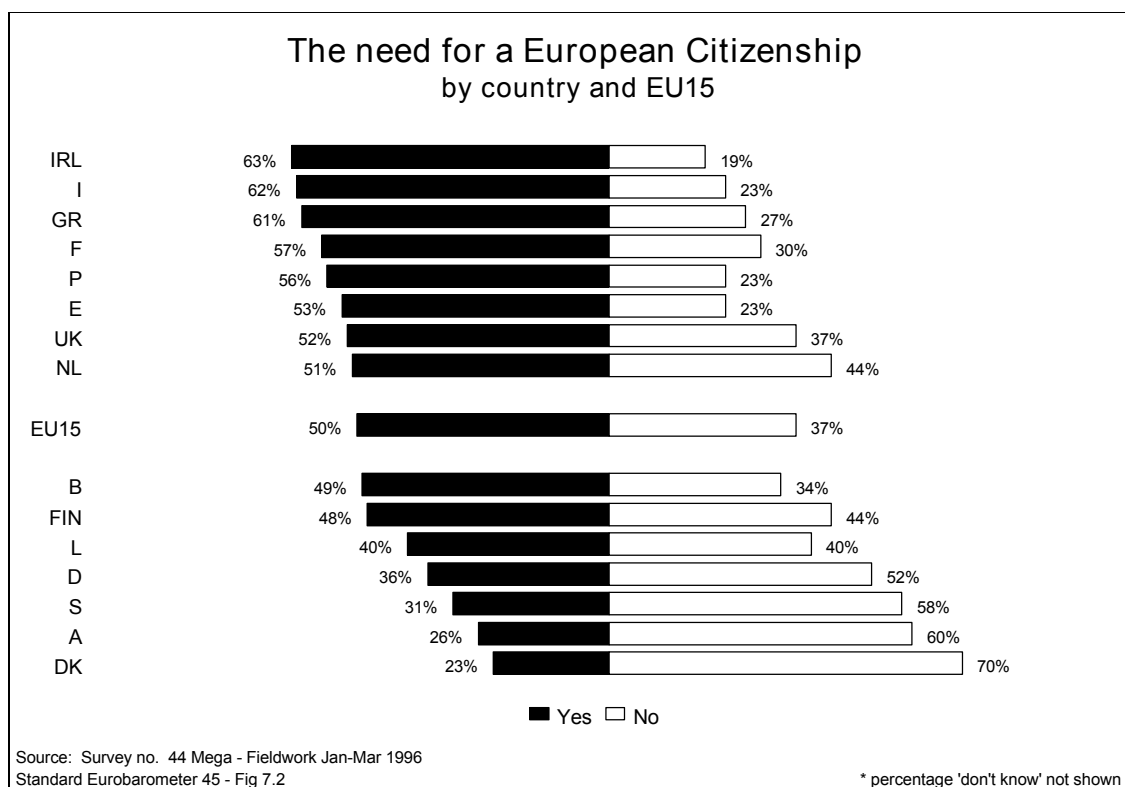
## 7.2 The need for European Citizenship

In a second question relating to European citizenship respondents were asked if, in their opinion, it was necessary *"to make further progress in building Europe"* to have a European citizenship in addition to their own national citizenship.

Just on half of those interviewed considered having European citizenship in addition to their national citizenship as necessary for the future of European construction. Thirty-seven percent did not think it was necessary, while 14% held no opinion.

The variations between countries indicates that in eight of the fifteen member states support for a European citizenship is expressed by a half or more of the population. The Mediterranean countries plus Ireland are the strongest supporters, and even in the "Eurosceptic" United Kingdom 52% consider it necessary, just above the EU average of 50%.

Support is lowest in Denmark (23%), Austria (26%) and Sweden (31%) and, interestingly, only 40% in Luxembourg; is this simply that they feel the "most" European, a quarter put feeling "European" as a first preference in the previous question, almost certainly explained in part by the very high level (approximately one third) of foreigners living there. Again the feeling for a European citizenship correlates with high education levels, high opinion leader scores and pro-European feelings generally. Men are also marginally more in favour than women (52% to 48%). (Tables 7.3 and 7.4)



### 7.3 Awareness of Citizens' rights in the media

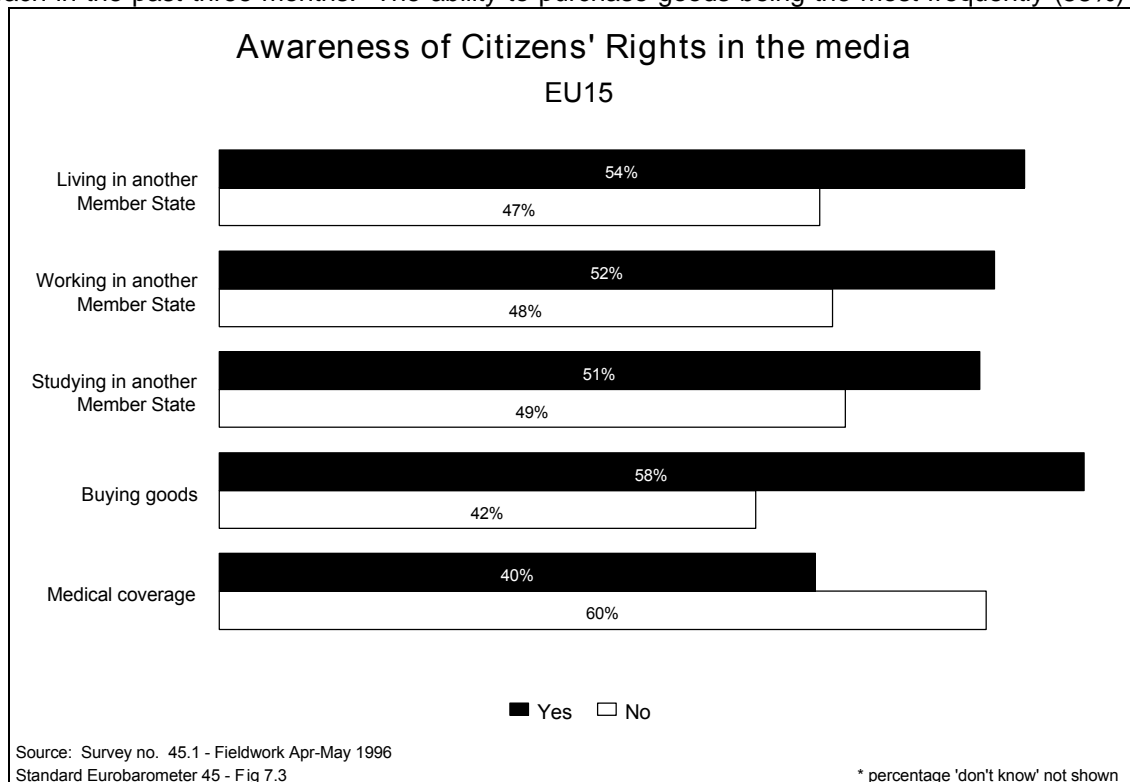
European Union citizens' awareness of European issues, including citizens' rights depends not only on the interest they show in these topics, but also in part upon their political awareness as reflected through media usage.

The awareness of five specific areas in which Union citizens already have rights is reflected in the question:

*"Over the past three months, have you or have you not heard or read anything about the rights you have as a citizen of the European Union (concerning)*

- ☐ *Living in another member state*
- ☐ *Working and/or setting up a business in another member state*
- ☐ *Studying in another member state*
- ☐ *Buying goods in a member state and bringing them into another member state without border formalities*
- ☐ *Being covered, even if you do not have a private medical insurance for medical care you would receive in another member state*

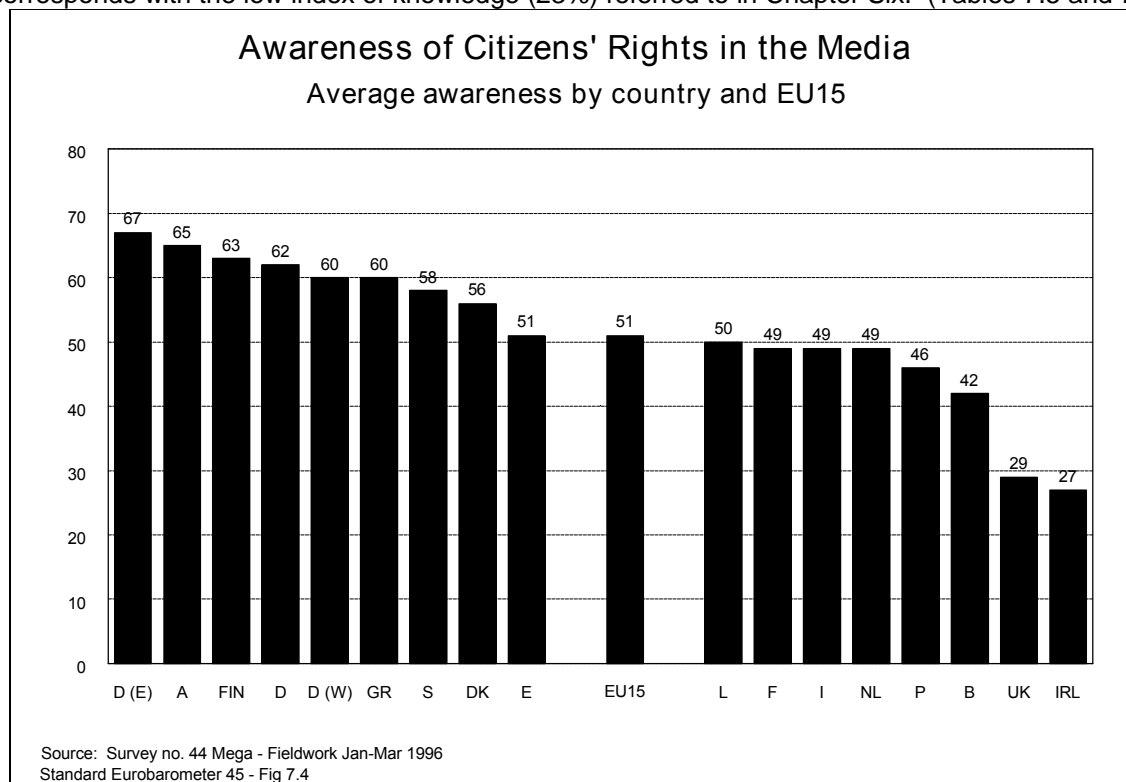
Overall, awareness through the media of all five rights relating to "free movement" of persons and goods, as underpinned by the introduction of the Single Market, is comparable with other European themes and issues. We find that around half of those interviewed had read or heard something about each in the past three months. The ability to purchase goods being the most frequently (58%) cited,



while the issue of reciprocity of medical care between member states the lowest (40%).

Cross country analysis shows that media awareness of the five topics was very variable both between countries and within themes. If we calculate an average number of mentions for all five themes, we find an EU 15 average of 51, with particularly high scores being recorded in East Germany (67), Austria (65), Finland (63) and Germany (62 - East and West combined).

The lowest levels of media awareness were half these high scores and were found in Ireland (27) and the United Kingdom (29). In the case of the United Kingdom this lack of attention in the media corresponds with the low index of knowledge (23%) referred to in Chapter Six. (Tables 7.5 and 7.6)



Demographic and attitudinal variables highlight some dramatic differences between various subgroups. Calculating the same awareness index for different groups, we find men 10% more likely to be aware than women (56% : 46%). Managers and the well educated both have high scores with 67% and 63% respectively, however, those leaving school before they were 16 are at a very low 37%, followed by "housepersons" at 40%, and the unemployed are only slightly more aware at 45%.

## 7.4 Knowledge and importance of Citizens' Rights

While the previous question gave an indication of the levels of national debate on certain aspects of freedom of movement, the survey went on to examine citizens' perceptions of a number of aspects concerning life as a European citizen. Were certain concepts true or false, and indeed how important were they considered by respondents?

The question read as follows:

*"For each of the following statements, please tell me whether it is true or false that the citizens of the European Union have the right to..... **and** do you think this right is important or not?"*

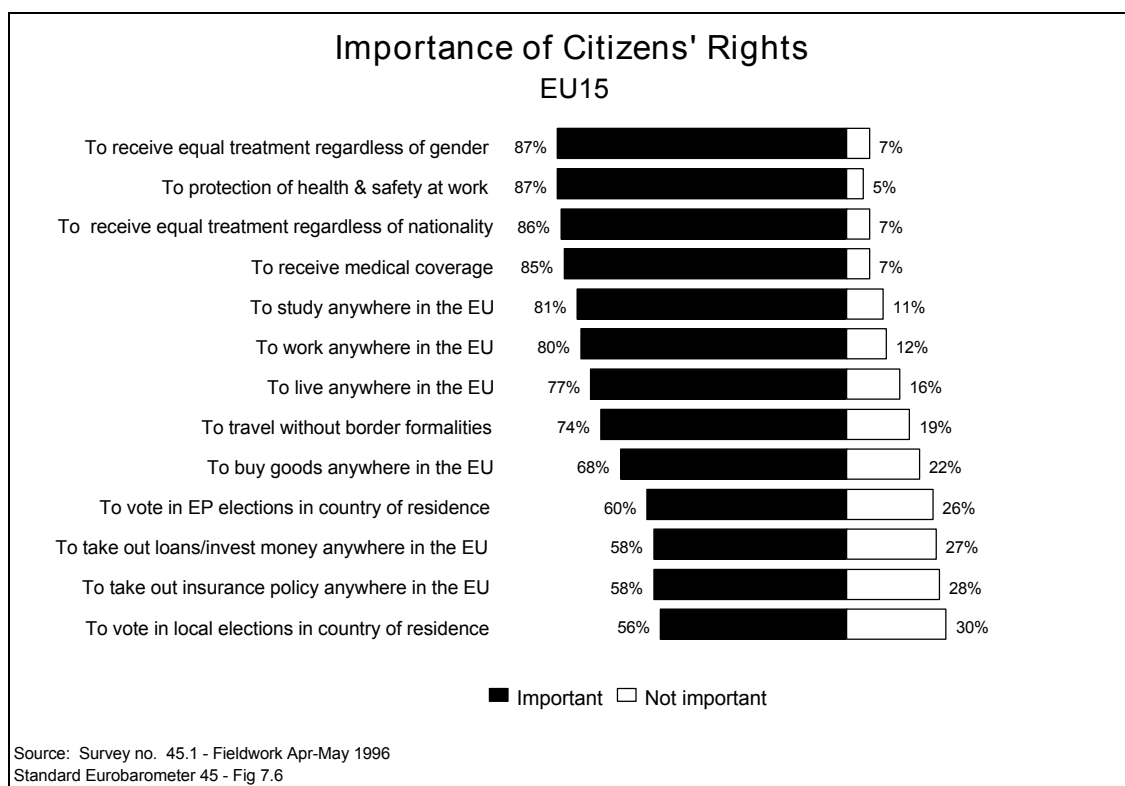
- ☐ *go and live anywhere in the European Union*
- ☐ *go and work and/or set up a business anywhere in the European Union*
- ☐ *go and study anywhere in the European Union*
- ☐ *be covered for medical care they would receive anywhere in the European Union even if they do not have a private medical insurance*
- ☐ *travel anywhere in the European Union without border formalities*
- ☐ *buy and take goods from one European Union member state to another without border formalities*
- ☐ *equal treatment at work regardless of gender anywhere in the European Union*
- ☐ *equal treatment at work regardless of nationality anywhere in the European Union*
- ☐ *protection of their health and safety at work anywhere in the European Union*
- ☐ *take out a loan from or invest their money with banks anywhere in the European Union*
- ☐ *take out an insurance policy anywhere in the European Union*
- ☐ *vote in elections for the European Parliament in another member state than their own, if they reside in that country*
- ☐ *vote in local elections in another member state than their own, if they reside in that country"*

It was clear that the basic aspects of freedom of movement were well understood by respondents; to study, live, work and travel in the European Union were recognised by approximately seven in ten of all EU citizens. These results confirm findings from earlier surveys examining this issue. Even in countries recording lower levels of knowledge it would appear that these basic rights have been recognised.

For the other themes covered by the question we find varying levels of response. Equality and fair treatment as reflected in the statements *"protection of health and safety at work"* or *"equal treatment regardless of gender or nationality"* are recognised by approximately six in ten respondents.

Greater uncertainty concerns medical coverage (52%), insurance and financial dealings (48% and 45%) and greatest ignorance exists concerning voting rights both for European Parliament elections and for local elections in one's country of residence. (Tables 7.7 and 7.8)

If we examine the perceived importance of these various rights we find that greatest importance is attached to those rights which fall broadly into the category "equality and fair treatment"; this is followed by the group which can be described as "freedom of movement" (studying, living, working). Less importance is attached to voting rights and financial dealings.



The importance accorded to these various rights is predictably associated with a number of demographic characteristics. In the category "equal opportunities" we find strongest support from the well educated, opinion leaders and those in management. However, little difference between men and women.

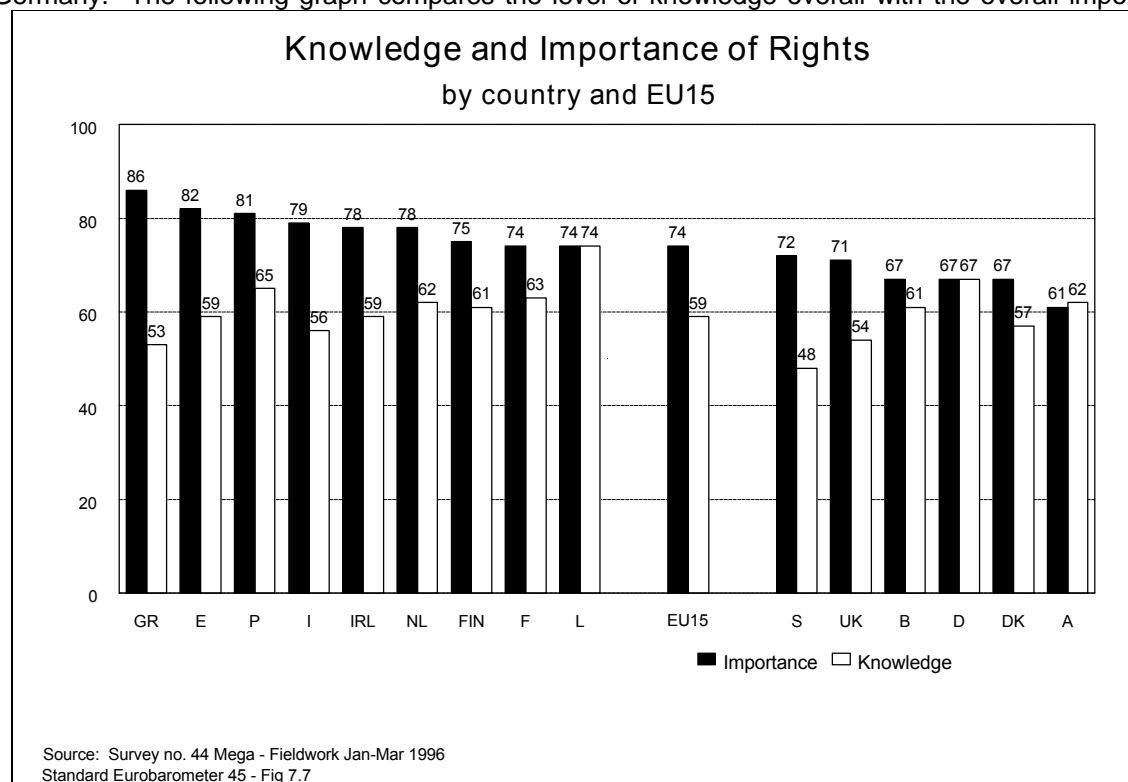
The group entitled "freedom of movement" was rated important in particular amongst the young, educated, opinion leaders and by both managers and white collar workers. Men were marginally more adventurous than women, but overall these rights were considered important by most subgroups.

In the category loosely entitled "financial", including taking out loans, investing money or buying an insurance policy, men rated these more highly than women. They tended to be in the middle age groups 25-54, well educated and most frequently self-employed.

Finally, in the category "voting rights" either for the European Parliament or in local elections in the country of residence we find strongest support in the 40-54 age group and those who describe themselves as falling to the left on the political spectrum.

The overall analysis of the inter-relationship between knowledge of rights and their relative importance shows that knowledge of rights does not necessarily translate into importance: for example, while Luxembourg residents were particularly well informed, but they only ranked seventh in attaching an overall importance to such rights. (Tables 7.9 and 7.10)

Greatest overall importance was seen in the Mediterranean countries of Greece, Spain, Portugal and Italy; while less importance was attached to rights in Austria followed by Belgium, Denmark and Germany. The following graph compares the level of knowledge overall with the overall importance



attached to citizens' rights.



## 7.5 Influence of Citizens

While citizens were articulate about their perceptions of citizens' rights, the surveys also asked respondents how they saw their role in the democratic process, did they feel they had any influence on the decisions taken by national governments or by the institutions of the European Union?

Certainly people do not feel they have much influence over decision taking, be it at national or EU level; 4% believe they have a "great deal" of influence, these tend to be those described as "opinion leaders" in our classification, otherwise few differences emerge between subgroups. Approximately one in five (18%) believe they have "some" influence, while about three-quarters believe they have "little" or "no influence". These negative findings are marginally higher (77%), when asked for the institutions of the European Union.

At national level, Luxembourg (41% a great deal or some influence) and Portugal (36%) top the list in their confidence at being able to influence decisions, while in the United Kingdom only 15% of citizens believe they have any influence and only 17% of Italians and Belgians feel they have a say in the decisions of government. (Tables 7.11 and 7.12)

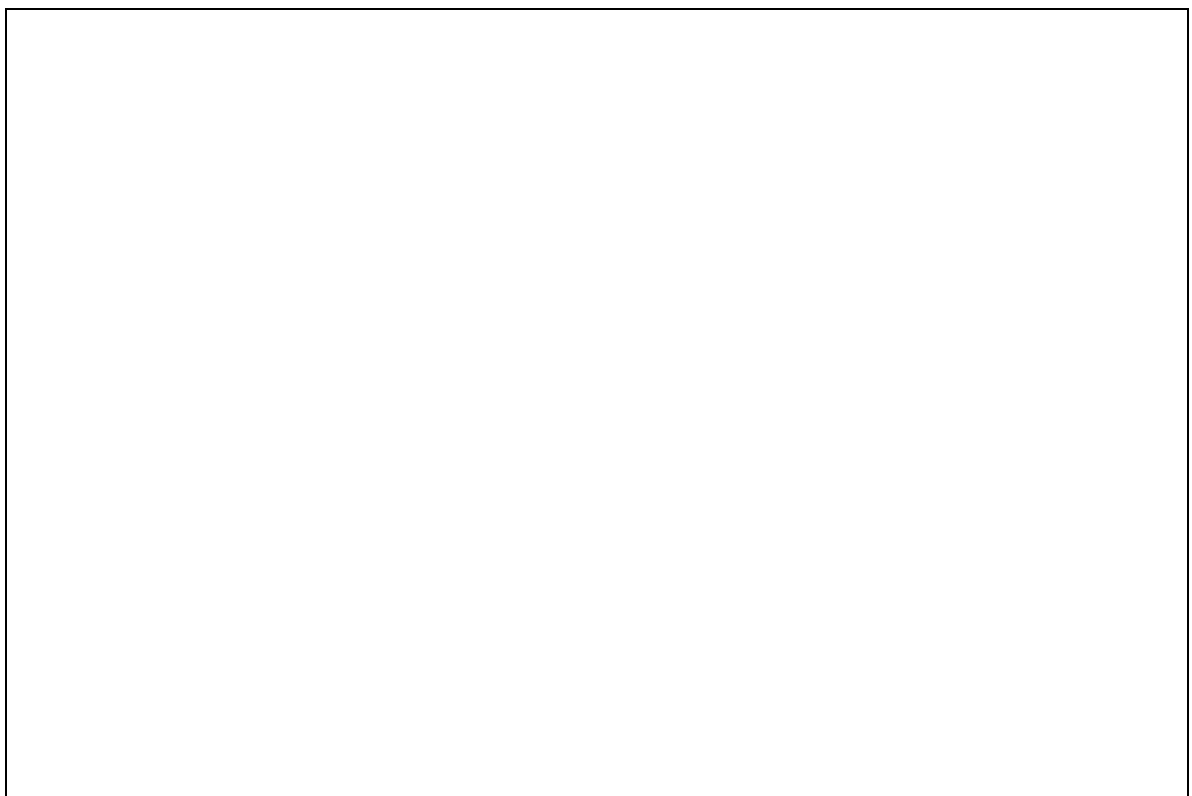
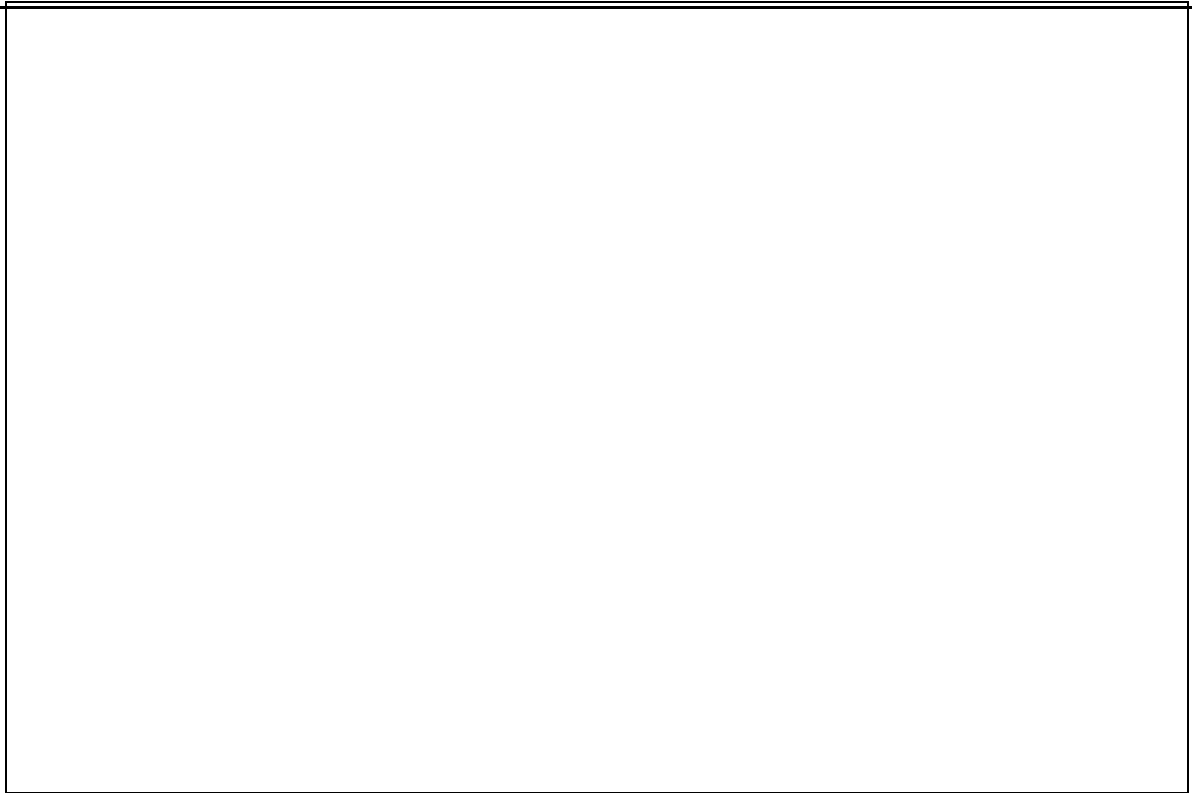
In European terms again Luxembourg and Portugal lead in believing they have some influence on the European institutions. Those believing themselves having "little" or "no influence" include the three new member states plus again, the United Kingdom.

Overall it is clear that citizens' perceptions about their role in the democratic process are negative, but an analysis of the profile of the more optimistic compared with the below average group shows that at both national and EU level there is a consistent pattern. Those believing they have at least some influence are:

- ☐ men
- ☐ the 25-54 age group
- ☐ managers
- ☐ opinion leaders
- ☐ high media users
- ☐ those holding positive opinions generally of the EU
- ☐ those supporting their country's membership of the EU
- ☐ the well informed

Those who feel they have little or no influence on the processes of government include:

- ☐ women
- ☐ the elderly
- ☐ the lower educated
- ☐ housepersons
- ☐ the unemployed
- ☐ the political right
- ☐ those holding negative opinions of the EU
- ☐ those against their country's membership of the EU

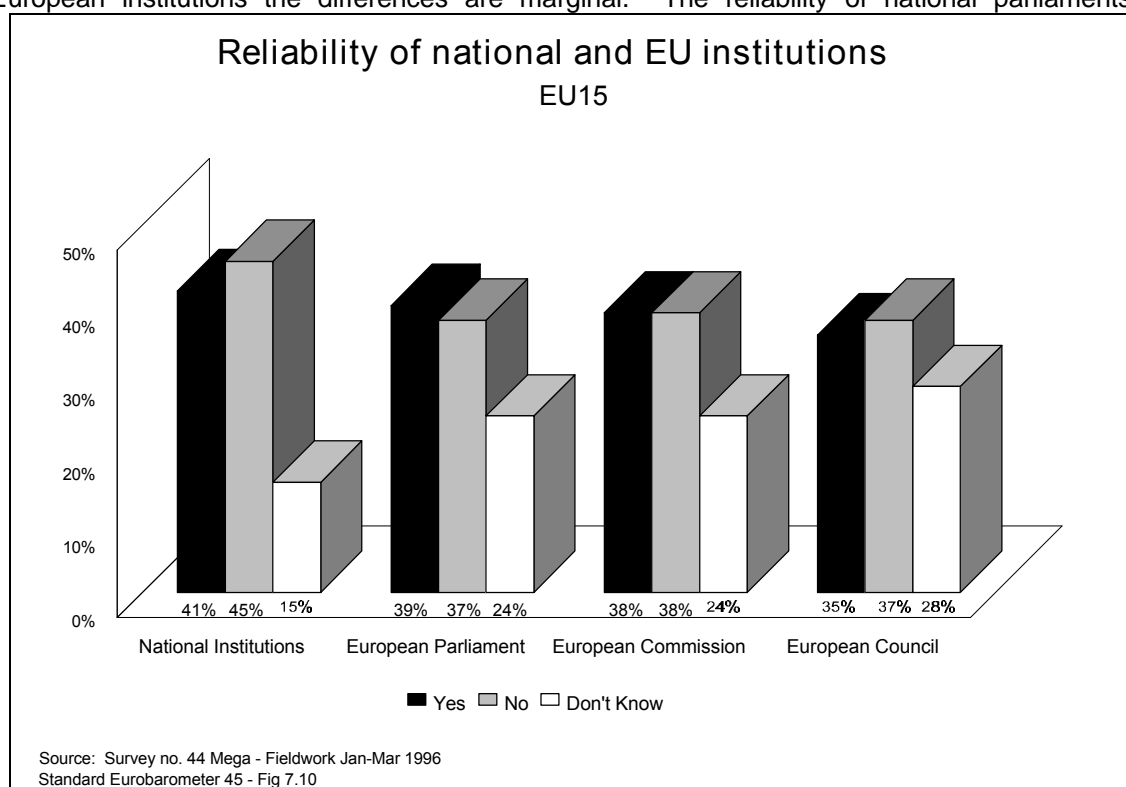


## 7.6 How reliable are the Institutions of Government?

If the general public feels it has little influence on the institutions of government either at national or EU level, then how reliable do people feel the various governing bodies are? We asked the following question for each of the following groups; the European Commission, the national government, the European Parliament, the national parliament<sup>2</sup>:

*"Many important decisions are made by the European Union. They might be in the interest of people like yourself or they might not. To what extent do you feel you can rely on each of the following institutions to make sure that the decisions taken by this institution are in the interest of people like yourself?"*

In general terms we witness a decline in trust for both national institutions<sup>3</sup> and European institutions since it was last measured in the Winter of 1995<sup>4</sup>. While national parliaments retain a slight lead over European institutions the differences are marginal. The reliability of national parliaments is 3



percentage points above that for the European Parliament. (Tables 7.13 and 7.14)

<sup>2</sup> In each country the national Parliament or the name of the lower House was specifically named, i.e. Assemblée Nationale (France), Bundestag (Germany) and House of Commons (United Kingdom).

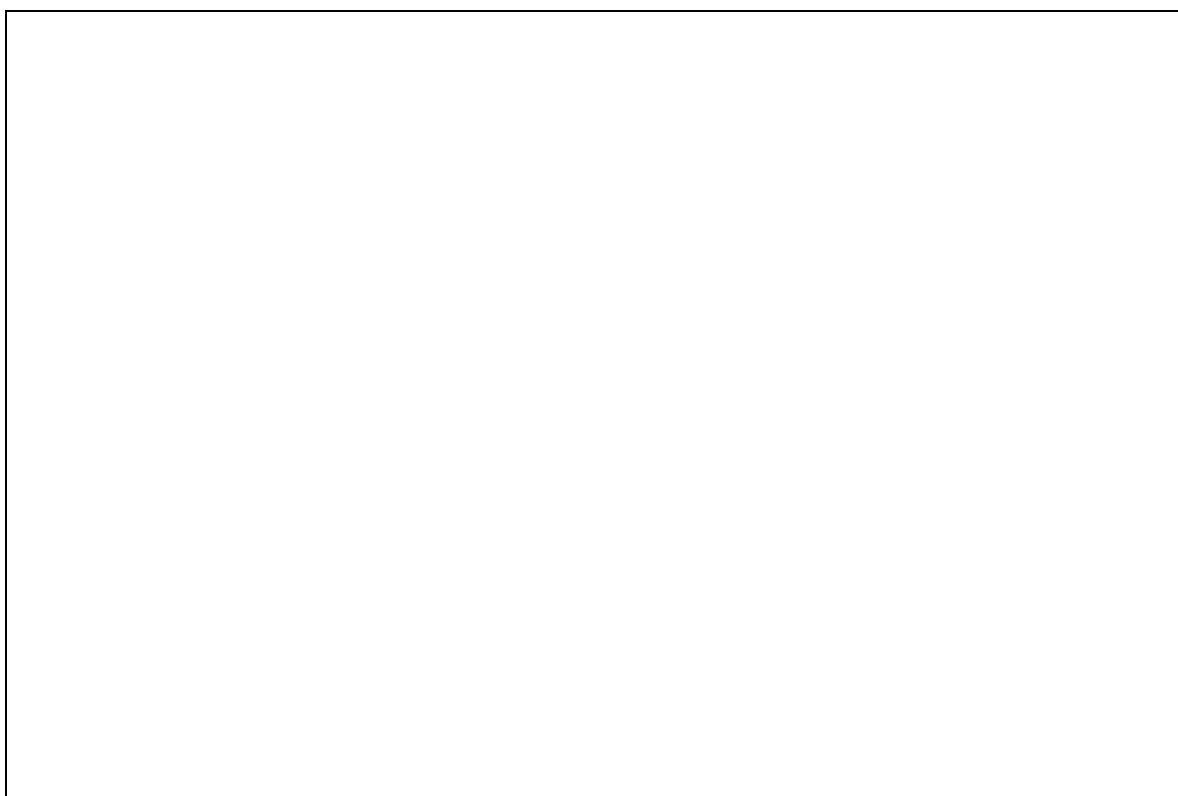
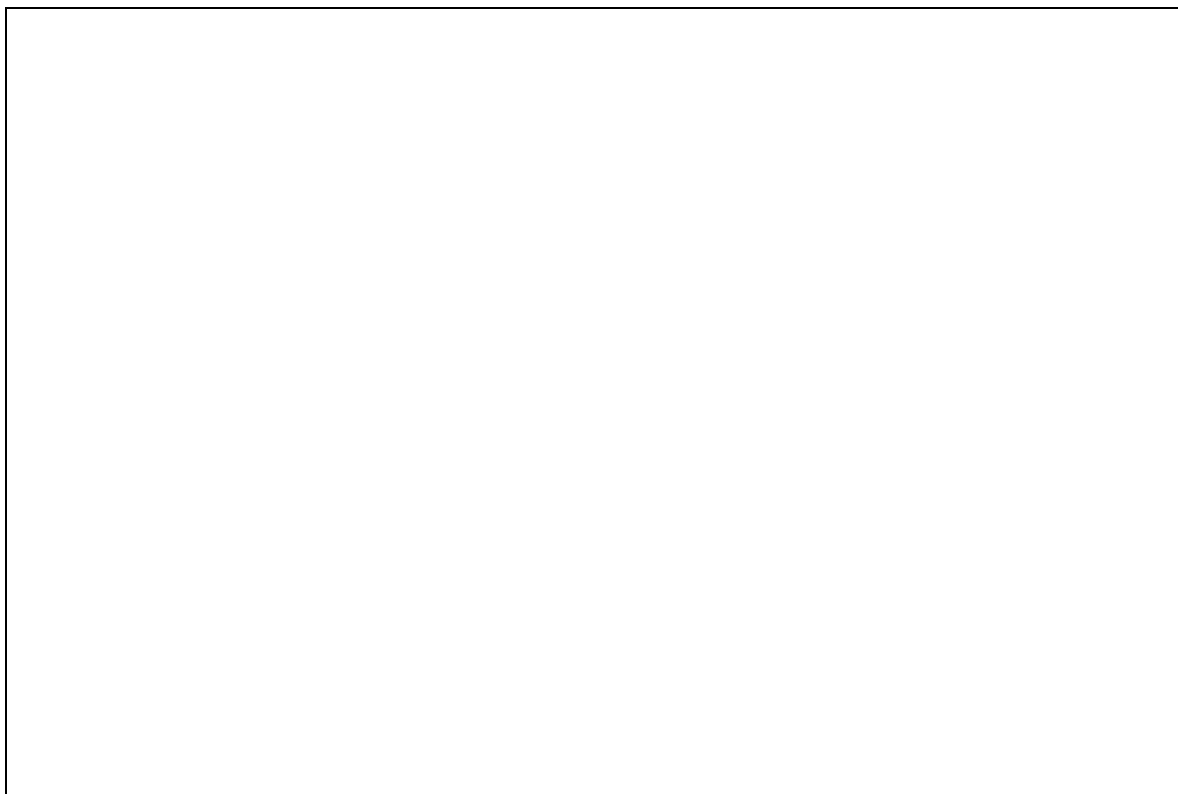
<sup>3</sup> National parliament plus national government.

<sup>4</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 44.

TRENDS IN RELIABILITY OF NATIONAL AND EU INSTITUTIONS			
	EB 43 Spring 95	EB 44 Winter 95	EB 44 Mega Spring 96
National Parliament	45	48	42
National Government	42	45	39
European Parliament	41	45	39
European Commission	39	41	38
European Council	36	40	35

At both national and European level we witness a drop in trust for the parliamentary process in a number of member states; the exceptions being largely in the South; in Spain increases at both national and EU levels, likewise in Portugal. Greece shows increase in support for the national parliament but less support for the European Parliament. Of the Mediterranean countries Italy is the only one to show a reverse trend; here support has dropped for both levels. France shows only a slight shift, but elsewhere the trends are downwards.

NATIONAL TRENDS IN RELIABILITY OF INSTITUTIONS				
	National Parliament		European Parliament	
	EB 43 Spring 95	EB 44 Mega Spring 96	EB 43 Spring 95	EB 44 Mega Spring 96
Austria	57	48	31	29
Belgium	45	42	58	47
Denmark	65	62	43	39
Germany	44	39	26	24
Greece	51	56	58	53
Spain	43	45	43	51
France	45	46	48	51
Ireland	48	53	55	50
Italy	35	29	50	46
Luxembourg	70	67	65	55
Netherlands	69	68	55	55
Portugal	33	48	31	36
Sweden	55	47	29	26
Finland	63	55	42	38
United Kingdom	44	37	37	29
EU 15	45	42	41	39



## 7.7 Citizens Fears

In the preceding two sections we have examined attitudes towards the way citizens feel democracy and its' institutions work. In general terms we sense a feeling of disenchantment and lack of trust in those institutions which were set up to serve the ordinary people. In order to establish which issues are preoccupying citizens of the Union we asked the following question:

*"Regarding the building of Europe, the European Union, some people may have fears. Here is a list of things which some people say they are afraid of. For each one, please tell me if you personally are currently afraid of it or not?"*

Respondents were presented with a list of 27 items and asked for each if they were afraid or not and a follow up question as to whether they felt it was likely to happen.

As we saw in Chapter 3 the top social issue amongst Union citizens is the fear of increased drug trafficking and international organised crime; 66% rate it as a problem and 69% think it will occur.

Amongst the other fears most are related to the changing structures of our industries and concerns over taxation and the economic crisis. People cited concern over the loss of small to medium size enterprises and of small farming units. They are also concerned about the loss of small and medium fisheries.

Additional job related issues refer to the loss of jobs to cheaper areas of production, both within and without the Union<sup>5</sup>, the increase in cheaper but lower quality imports and the presence of more foreign workers on the labour market.

Other areas involved decision making and the balance of power between the member states. People cited concern over a too centralised system which could slow down decision taking, and along with this was the fear that small member states would be overruled by the larger countries.

The cost of enlargement was a fear for just over half the sample, but nevertheless 68% expected other member states to join the Union<sup>6</sup>.

The introduction of a single currency was feared by 44% of respondents, yet 66% expected it would occur.

In a final category broadly entitled "national identity" we grouped together fears concerning loss of national identity, culture and language and the fear that one's country would cease to exist. Approximately one in three people are fearful of these issues and the expectation is similar. (Tables 7.15a and 7.15b)

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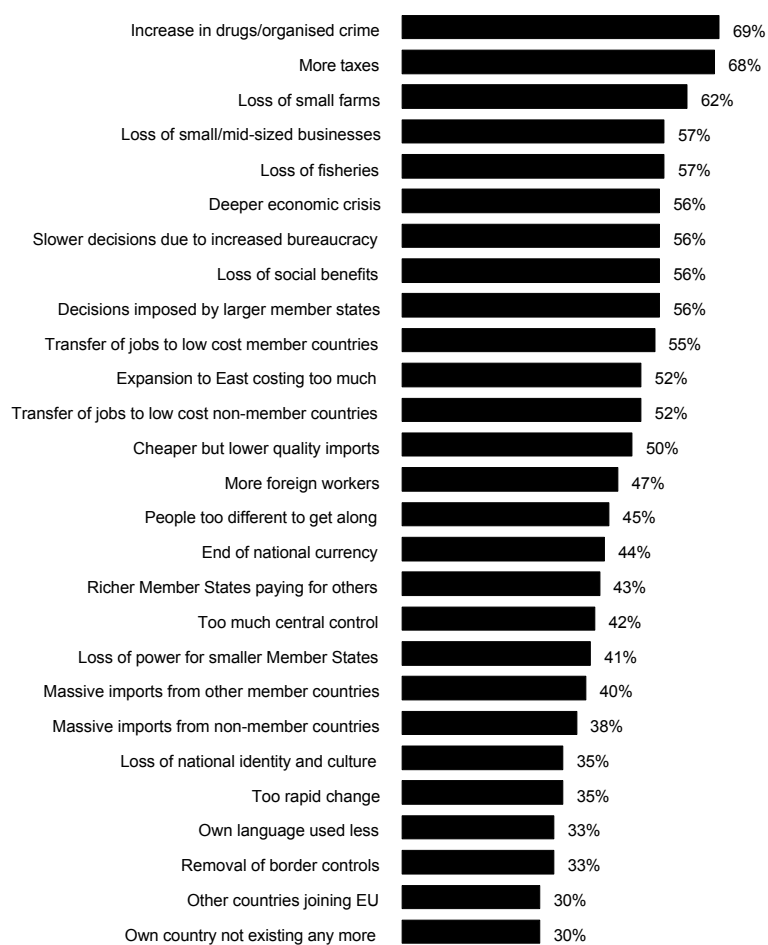
<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 5 for further discussion of this point.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 4 for further discussion of this point.

CITIZENS FEARS AND EXPECTATIONS		
	Percentage Fearing	Percentage Believing
<b>Drugs and Crime</b>	69	66
<b>Financial</b>		
More taxation	68	67
Loss of social benefits	56	53
Deeper economic crisis	56	52
Richer member states paying for others	43	60
<b>Loss of enterprises</b>		
Loss of small farms	62	67
Loss of small & medium sized enterprises	57	58
Loss of small & medium sized fisheries	57	62
<b>Job related issues</b>		
Transfer of jobs to low cost member states	55	64
Transfer of jobs to low cost non-member states	52	56
Cheaper but lower quality imports	50	59
Massive imports from other member states	40	61
Massive imports from other non-member states	38	48
More foreign workers	47	62
<b>Decision Making</b>		
Loss of power for smaller member states	41	50
Too much central control	42	47
Slower decisions due to increased bureaucracy	56	62
Decisions imposed by larger member states	56	62
Too rapid changes	35	39
<b>Single Currency</b>		
End of own national currency	44	66
<b>Enlargement</b>		
Expansion to East costing too much	52	59
Other countries joining EU	30	68
<b>National identity</b>		
People too different to get along	45	51
Loss of national identity and culture	35	32
Own language used less	33	34
Own country not really existing any more	30	26
Removal of border controls	33	60

## Fears among European Union citizens

EU15



Source: Survey no. 44 Mega - Fieldwork Jan-Mar 1996  
Standard Eurobarometer 45 - Fig 7.13



## **Country by Country Analysis**

In the country analysis we observe some predictable fears; richer countries concerned about paying for the others, small member states fearing loss of power and decisions being imposed by the large countries.

In a number of other areas we find the levels of concern vary considerably between countries. Below we give an indication of the fears in each country which are significantly above or below the EU15 average, together with an overall index which is a calculation of the average number of fears recorded in each country. In addition we provide a graph which is based on the total number of fears expressed in each member state.

### **Belgium**

Belgians score 49% on the overall index of fears. Higher than average concerns were expressed on the deepening of the economic crisis (+12 over EU average) and the possibility of even more taxes (+18).

### **Denmark**

Denmark scores about the EU average on the index at 50%. Areas recording above EU average scores were noted for loss of power for smaller member states (+20), slow bureaucratic decision taking (+16), decisions being taken by big member states (+15) and increase in drugs and crime (+12). Below average scores were recorded for a deeper economic crisis (-17), massive imports from inside or outside the Union (-16 and -11).

### **Germany**

The overall index for Germany was below the EU average at 46%. German fears centred on concern for having to pay for others (+13), the cost of enlargement (+11) and the end of national currency (+10). Conversely low scores were recorded concerning too much central control (-15) and, predictably, decisions being imposed by big member states (-17).

### **Greece**

Greece was second only to France in its anxiety concerning the European Union with an index score of 55%. Above average scores were recorded for a number of issues. The largest differences from the EU average were loss of power for small member states (+26), the disappearance of SME's (+25), massive imports from other member states (+19) and decisions imposed by the large member states (+19).

### **Spain**

The Spanish were amongst those expressing least concern over European construction. We find an overall figure of 41% on the index and in very few areas did respondents rate issues above the EU average. In contrast, a number of concerns were significantly below: problems of people getting on with each other (-20), the cost of enlargement (-18), transfer of jobs to non-member countries (-16) and slow bureaucratic decision taking (-16).

### **France**

Of all the 15 countries the overall number of concerns expressed by the French was the highest with an index score of 57%. Anxiety was highest concerning imports from non-EU countries (+20),

cheaper but lower quality imports (+17), the cost of enlargement (+15) and the disappearance of small farms (+15).

**Ireland**

Ireland with a low overall index score of 45% was only significantly above EU15 scores on one item; loss of power of smaller member states (+10). On a number of other issues the scores were well below the EU average; these included: deeper economic crisis (-21), loss of social benefits (-17), even more taxes (-14), more foreign workers (-11) and loss of SME's (-11).

**Italy**

Italy was the country to record the lowest overall level of concern regarding European construction with a score of 39%. Scores were particularly low for loss of social benefits (-26), disappearance of SME's (-18) and transfer of jobs to non-member states (-17).

**Luxembourg**

Luxembourg residents show below average concerns for issues relating to the European Union with a score of 45%. Highest concern was for our language being used less (+12) and the removal of border controls (+10).

**The Netherlands**

The Netherlands ranked fourth in the general index with a 50% overall rating. In the analysis greatest concerns were related to decisions being imposed by the bigger member states (+18), decisions becoming slow and bureaucratic (+16), too much central control (+15) and loss of social benefits (+15). On the positive side, the Netherlands felt the economic crisis would not deepen (-21).

**Austria**

The overall index score for Austria was below the EU average at 46%, and as a result recorded more below average scores. Those items falling significantly below the EU average were slow and bureaucratic decision taking (-13), too much central control (-10), the disappearance of border controls (-8) and the loss of power of the small member states (-7).

**Portugal**

As one of the countries falling below the average at 47% Portugal, nevertheless, registered higher scores on loss of power of smaller member states (+13) and the disappearance of small and mid-sized fisheries (+13). On the below average side, lesser scores were noted for richer countries will have to pay for others (-19), transfer of jobs to non-member countries (-14) and transfer of jobs to member countries (-13).

**Finland**

At 48% Finland was just on the EU average for the overall index, but there were some concerns which were, nevertheless, above the EU average including too much central control (+19), an increase in drugs and crime (+14), loss of power for small member states (+12) and the disappearance of small farms (+11). On the other hand scores were below average for more foreign workers (-15), a deeper economic crisis (-14), the cost of enlargement (-14) and massive imports from non-EU countries (-14).

**Sweden**

Sweden scored 50% on the overall index close to the EU average, but this masks some very dramatic variations within the data. On no less than eight of the issues scores are in excess of 10% of the EU average and in six issues scores are significantly below the EU average. High scores related to too much central control (+22), decisions imposed by big member states (+21), decision taking being heavy and bureaucratic (+20), removal of border controls (+23), increase in drugs and crime (+18), loss of power of small member states (+17) and loss of social benefits (+15). Below average scores were recorded for massive imports from other member states (-22), more foreign workers (-21) and the disappearance of SME's (-17).

**United Kingdom**

The United Kingdom finds itself in third place concerning the overall index with a score of 52%, and on many of the issues remains very close to the EU average with two striking exceptions. Fear that "our country not really existing any more" is 20% above the EU average with half of all respondents stating this to be a real concern, along with this and 19% above the EU average is the fear of the "loss of our national identity and culture". Nowhere else in the Union are these sentiments so pronounced.