

# EUROBAROMETER 60.1

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

## AUTUMN 2003

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FINLAND

The survey was requested and coordinated by the Directorate General Press and Communication.

This report was produced for the European Commission's Representation in Finland.

This document does not represent the point of view of the European Commission.  
The interpretations and opinions contained in it are solely those of the authors.

## **Executive Summary**

This Executive Summary presents the overall results from the Finnish National Report of the Eurobarometer Poll 60.1 conducted for the European Commission. The report is based on the analysis of results obtained from the Eurobarometer survey that was carried out in Finland and the other member states of the European Union in October and November 2003. The Finnish report focuses on:

- a. Finnish citizens' expectations for the year 2004
- b. Opinions on various European Union policies
- c. The process of integration in the European Union
- d. Reform of the institutions of the European Union and how they work

### **Finnish citizens' expectations for the year 2004**

In general, Finnish people are satisfied with their lives at present, with 25 % saying that they are very satisfied and 66 % who are fairly satisfied. The happiest are those living in the North, people in managerial positions and those supporting the political right wing. Women are more satisfied with their lives than men.

The majority of Finns believe that the financial situation of their household, their personal job situation and their life in general will remain the same or improve in 2004. In this respect, the Finns are amongst the most optimistic citizens in the European Union. However, one-quarter think that the economic situation in Finland will worsen in 2004 and 43 % fear that the jobs market in the country will decline. Over half of the population believe that unemployment is the most pressing problem in Finland and that it should be dealt with urgently.

### National identity

Two-thirds of Finns think of themselves as being Finnish, whereas only 11 percent think of themselves as European. Those most likely to consider themselves to be Finnish were citizens over 55 years of age, those who had left school at age 15 or before and pensioners. People living in the eastern parts of the country are more likely to think of themselves as being Finnish than citizens living in other parts of the country.

68 % of Finns are very proud of their nationality and when it comes to being proud of being European they are above the European Union average. Women take greater pride in their nationality than men.

### Opinions on Finnish membership of the European Union

Almost 39 % of Finns think that, taking everything into consideration, Finnish membership of the European Union is a good thing and 37 % think that membership is neither a good nor a bad thing. When these results are compared with the results of Eurobarometer poll 59.1, conducted in Spring

2003, it can be seen that the number of those considering membership to be a good thing has declined by a couple of percentage points, whereas the number of those considering membership as a bad thing has increased.

One-third of Finns support the development of the European Union towards a European political union and half of the population oppose it. Support for the European Union was measured also by asking the public how they would feel if they were told that the European Union had been scrapped. One-third said they would be very sorry, one-third very relieved and one-third indifferent.

When asked what kind of feelings the European Union gives them, 36 % of respondents said “hope”, 28% “mistrust”, 23 % “anxiety” and 20 % “indifference”.

### Media

63 % of Finns are of the opinion that the Finnish media report about the right amount of news regarding the European Union and a quarter believe that the media report too little. Increased reporting and discussion about the European Union is sought by the self-employed, those over 55 years old and pensioners.

Half the Finnish population thinks that their media present the European Union objectively. A further 36 % of Finns think that the EU is talked about too positively, while 4 % take the contrary view. In particular, the least educated, supporters of the political left wing, people living in the countryside and in the eastern or northern parts of the country think that the media presents the European Union in too positive a light.

### Euro

Finns are strongly in favour of the common currency, the euro, with as many as 70 % giving it their backing. Highest levels of support are seen among managers, white-collar workers, 25-39 olds and men, as well as the supporters of the political right wing and citizens living in the southern parts of the country.

### **Opinions on certain policies of the European Union**

65 % think that the European Union works very or rather effectively when it comes to maintaining peace and security in Europe. Over half of the population also believe that the European Union works effectively in matters concerning guaranteeing the quality of food products, protecting the environment and welcoming new member countries. However, on the whole, the Finns see the European Union as being rather inefficient.

Finns want decisions about defence, agriculture and fishing policy, immigration policy and rules for political asylum to be dealt with primarily on a national level. On the other hand, they think that issues

concerning protection of the environment, accepting refugees and the fight against organised crime should be dealt with jointly within the European Union.

### **The process of European Union integration**

Finns consider the speed at which the European Union is being built today to be too fast and would prefer the European Union to be built at a slower pace. Only in the United Kingdom and Denmark does this slower pace receive more support than in Finland.

Of the actions that the European Union could undertake, Finns believe that reforming the European Union institutions and the way they work should be a priority.

A common foreign policy is supported by half of the Finnish population and opposed by one-third.

### Common Security and Defence Policy

Even though 87 % of Finns believe that national defence should be in the hands of the Finnish government, almost half (46 %) think that decisions regarding European defence policy should be made jointly within the European Union. At the same time, 42 % oppose this proposition.

However, support for the Common Defence and Security Policy is down by five percentage points since the last Eurobarometer Poll in Spring 2003. When it comes to the Common Defence and Security Policy, the support for the national government is by far the highest among the Finns when compared with the other member states. Only 3 % believe that NATO should take decisions concerning European defence policy.

A European Union rapid military reaction force that can be sent quickly to trouble spots when an international crisis occurs is supported by half of the Finnish poll. 76 % believe that when an such a crisis occurs, European Union Member States should agree a common position.

### Enlargement

Half of the Finnish population support enlargement and, while 36 % are opposed to it, the number of those opposing enlargement has decreased by a couple of percentage points in six months. 41 % of Finns would prefer the European Union to be enlarged to include only some of the countries wishing to join. The alternative of the European Union being enlarged to include all the countries wishing to join is supported by 29 % of Finnish citizens. Those most in favour of this alternative are pensioners, those who finished their education by the age of 16 and house persons.

## The Presidency of the European Council

46 % of Finns think that the six-month period should be retained as it gives each Member State a chance to hold the presidency on a regular basis. However, 44 % of Finns believe that the rotating 6-month period of the Presidency should be extended because six months is too short a period to achieve significant results

## Right of veto

48 % want the right of veto to be retained in order to preserve essential national interests but 11 % would be ready to give it up in order to make the European Union more efficient. The number of those willing to give it up has gone up by 3 percentage points since the previous survey and, at the same time, the number of those wanting it to be retained has decreased.

## The European Constitution

The number of Finns supporting the European Constitution has gone up by five percentage points since the last Eurobarometer poll. At the moment, 49 % are in favour of the Constitution. Pensioners, house persons, those who finished school at age 15 or before and those living in the southern regions of the country, in particular, think that the European Union should have a constitution. Students, young people, the unemployed and people living in cities are the biggest groups to oppose the Constitution. Support for the Constitution is lower only in Denmark and the United Kingdom.

## **Conclusions**

On the whole, it can be said that the Finns still appear to be among the most negative in their opinions about the European Union. In the Eurobarometer Poll 59.1, it could be seen that their opinions had become slightly more positive than over the previous few years. However, in Eurobarometer Poll 60.1, it appears that opinions have returned to the more negative side (the reason for this development could be, for example, the worsening economic climate and the tighter jobs market, as well as disputes within the European Union). This trend can be seen throughout the European Union, and not only in Finland.

An interesting fact is that support for the European Constitution has increased in Finland, whereas the support for it in the European Union as a whole has declined.