

EUROBAROMETER 60.1

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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NATIONAL REPORT LUXEMBOURG

Enlargement, perception of European
policies and European institutions

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

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A timid approach in Luxembourg

43% of citizens in favour of enlargement involving only some of the candidate countries

One-third opposed to the membership of new countries

In Luxembourg, citizens are cautious when talking about enlargement. 43% of them want the European Union to limit itself to enlargement involving only some of the candidate countries. Nearly one-third of the poll does not want other countries to enter the European Union and 15% believe that all the countries wishing to join should be allowed to do so.

Since May 2001, the results for Luxembourg have changed appreciably. The percentage of those who supported enlargement to include all of the candidate countries has varied between 14% and 18%, at the beginning, before reaching its highest level at 23% in April 2003. Since then, it has fallen to 15%. The percentage of people in favour of taking in only some of the candidate countries rose steadily as high as 61% in September 2002 and has now fallen to 43%. The level of opposition to EU enlargement, which remained unchanged over a two-year period, has strengthened since April 2003 and has reached its highest level at 32%.

This was revealed by the Eurobarometer 60.1 survey conducted by the European Commission in autumn 2003. The survey gives a general overview of what Europeans think about enlargement, the information they receive about the EU, their perception of the EU's policies and its institutions. The survey is tailored to Luxembourg's special demographic situation, with a sample comprising 75% Luxembourg nationals and 25% nationals of other EU Member States. In the commentary, the special report produced on behalf of the Commission's Representation in Luxembourg therefore refers to "people in Luxembourg", a broader concept than Luxembourg nationals proper.

Generally speaking, respondents in Luxembourg say their knowledge about the European Union is good. 26% (-3 points) give an average number of 5 on a scale from 1 to 10 (EU: 19%, +1 point). There are also more people in Luxembourg than in the EU on average who say that they are well informed. When the results 5-10 are aggregated, the result is 50% in Luxembourg and 46% in the EU overall.

A large majority in favour of a European political Union

A large majority of citizens in Luxembourg (62%) are in favour of the evolution of the EU towards a political European Union, whereas 22% are against it.

In Luxembourg, the top priorities for the EU cited by respondents are the preservation of peace and security (93%), the fight against poverty and social exclusion (92%) and the guaranteed the quality of food (92%). The reform of the institutions and enlargement are the lowest priorities, according to the Luxembourg poll (62% and 23%).

People say that the EU should have a common position in the event of an international crisis (89%) and that it should guarantee human rights in every Member State (86%). 81% of citizens feel the EU should guarantee human rights in other countries. 77% think that the EU should be a member of the UN Security Council. Only 28% of those asked in Luxembourg think that the new Member States should already have a say in European Union foreign policy matters.

Health and social security must remain the responsibility of national authorities

In general, in Luxembourg, the health and social welfare system (73%), education (70%), the fight against unemployment (64%), basic rules for broadcasting and press (60%), cultural policy (58%) and agriculture and fishing (50%) are seen by the majority of those questioned as matters that should be dealt with by the national authorities only.

In regard to issues that should be handled at Community level, citizens in Luxembourg cite different priorities to other EU citizens. First comes the currency (72%), followed by scientific and technological research (70%), foreign policy (65%), information about the EU and its policies (64%), support to regions facing economic difficulties (61%), defence (56%), humanitarian aid (54%), protection of the environment (47%), fight against poverty (47%) and agriculture and fishing policy (42%).

The majority in Luxembourg say that matters like police (69%), justice (66%), juvenile crime prevention (61%), urban crime prevention (57%), rules for political asylum (51%), immigration policy (50%) and tackling the challenges of an ageing population (46%) should remain within the competence of the national authorities. On the other hand, decisions should be taken jointly within the EU regarding the fight against international terrorism (79%), the fight against trade and the exploitation of human beings (70%), the fight against organised crime (62%) and the fight against drugs (47%).

The right of veto, an essential privilege

In comparison to the results of autumn 2002, the percentage of people in favour of the right of veto has fallen within Luxembourg. It is interesting to see that the percentage of people in favour of abolishing the right of veto is also falling. Persons surveyed in Luxembourg continue to see the right of veto as an essential prerogative, with 54% wanting it must be retained in order to preserve national interests. 7% are in favour of dropping it in order to improve the effectiveness of the EU. One person in five (19%) thinks that the right of veto should be restricted to a very few essential areas.

The vast majority in favour of the membership of the EU

The vast majority of those questioned in Luxembourg (77%) are in favour of their country's membership of the EU. Despite these positive results, there is a decline in the results, both in Luxembourg and within the EU15 overall.

More than two-thirds (69%) of those polled in Luxembourg believe that their country has benefited from EU membership. 21% claim that their country has not benefited.

A consequence of the strong link with the European Union is that two-thirds of people in Luxembourg (63%) said they would be very sorry if they were told that the EU had been scrapped, while only 6% would be very relieved and more than a quarter (27%) would be indifferent.

Sufficient information on the EU in the media

In Luxembourg, 58% of citizens think that national media talks enough about the EU. More than a quarter (28%) thinks that the media are not giving the EU enough coverage and 5% say the opposite. Half of the citizens in Luxembourg (49%) say that media speak objectively about the EU, while 27% say that the press coverage of the EU is too positive and 8% say it is too negative.

A positive image of the Union and the institutions

57% of Luxembourg residents have a very positive or fairly positive image of the European Union. 29% of people surveyed in Luxembourg have a neutral image of the EU. For 12%, the EU has a negative or even a very negative image.

For 55%, the EU represents freedom to travel, study and work. For 55%, the EU stands for the euro. Within two years, the euro has become an important symbol of the European Union. 43% of people in Luxembourg identify the EU with peace, but for more than a third (35%), the EU represents a rise of crime.

One in three (33%) says that the EU stands for a more important voice in the world and 30% think that it contributes to cultural diversity. In negative terms, people in Luxembourg speak about the EU contributing to the loss of their national identity (11%) and associate it with bureaucracy (14%). For 14% also, it stands for unemployment. The perception of these negative aspects is less important in Luxembourg than in the European Union in general, although the fear of inadequate border controls is more important in Luxembourg.

People in Luxembourg are very familiar with the Community's institutions, because a number of them have headquarters in the capital or meet there; the scores are, in any event, above the EU average. Generally speaking, results are lower than in earlier Eurobarometers: 95% of those questioned know the European Parliament, 92% the European Commission, 85% the European Central Bank, 90% the Court of Justice, and 81% the Council of Ministers.

The greatest confidence in the Court of Justice and the Parliament

People in Luxembourg have far more confidence in the Community institutions than the EU15 average. Generally speaking, there is a significant fall in confidence in European institutions in comparison with spring 2003.

The Court of Justice (70%) leads the field, followed by the European Parliament (66%), the European Central Bank (63%), the European Commission (61%), and the Council of Ministers (56%).

The EU, symbol of hope and trust

In Luxembourg, the EU evokes the feeling of enthusiasm for 6% of citizens, hope for 44%, trust for 28%, fear for 19%, indifference for 16% and mistrust for 13%. Positive feelings are stronger in Luxembourg than in the EU overall. It is also logical that negative feelings are expressed less frequently.

Citizens want to have 'their' commissioner

Statements regarding various aspects of the EU activities were put to those surveyed. Luxembourg citizens were strongly in favour of the proposal of keeping 'their' commissioner (87%), followed by the proposal to teach children at school how the EU works (87%), the monetary union (83%) and the common security and defence policy (83%). Keeping the EU responsible for all matters not resolved by national or regional governments is placed in the last position with 71% of the poll in favour. As for the EU as a whole, all proposals get a lower percentage of positive answers than within Luxembourg.

First a national of one's own country, then European

As a rule most of those surveyed consider themselves, in the near future, first as nationals of their own country and, second, as Europeans, the rate being 43% in Luxembourg. A sense of being first European and then a national of one's own country is felt by 14% of people in Luxembourg. 15% consider themselves Europeans only.

A majority in favour of taking decisions concerning defence on Community level

A majority of people polled in Luxembourg (53%) think that decisions regarding the defence of the EU should be taken jointly at EU level, followed by NATO (16%) and the national government (16%).

Support for the direct election of the Commission President

Several possible options were proposed for the designation of the President of the European Commission: direct election by citizens, election by the European Parliament, appointment by the Heads of State or Government or chosen by the European Parliament and the Heads of State or Government. Direct election (50%) is the method favoured in Luxembourg, well ahead of election by the European Parliament and the Heads of State or Government (15%) or the election by the European Parliament (12%). Appointment by Heads of State or Government is supported by only 11% of those questioned in Luxembourg.

Most people satisfied with the functioning of democracy

74% of Luxembourg citizens are satisfied with the functioning of democracy in their country, 23% say the opposite. Almost two-thirds, i.e. 59% of those questioned, are satisfied with the functioning of democracy in the EU, but 31% are not satisfied.

Crime and unemployment are the major problems

Luxembourg residents think that the major problems that the country faces have changed totally within six months. In March 2003, they were crime, unemployment, education and the economic situation. In September 2003, those questioned in Luxembourg say that the major problems are unemployment (45%), inflation (20%), the economic situation (19%), education (18%) and crime (15%).

A large majority in favour of a European Constitution

A large majority is in favour of a European Constitution (66%), but one in ten is against it.

One in two polled in Luxembourg is in favour of extending the term of the Presidency of the European Union because six months is too short a period to achieve significant results. 37% think that the six-month period should be maintained because it gives each Member State a chance to hold the Presidency.