

EUROBAROMETER 60.1

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE NETHERLANDS

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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.

Chapter 1

Context

- Most Dutch people are very to fairly satisfied with the lives they lead.
- The Dutch expect that the employment situation and economic situation will be worse in 2004 than in 2003. For the most part, they expect that life in general and their own job will stay the same in 2004. Few Dutch people expect that the employment, economic or financial situation, life in general and their own job situation will be better in 2004.
- Important issues for the Netherlands, according to the Dutch poll, are crime, the economic situation, healthcare and unemployment.
- Dutch people are more satisfied with the way democracy works in the Netherlands than with the way it works in the European Union.
- 64% of Dutch people discuss political matters with friends.
- Most Dutch people trust the radio, television, charitable institutions, the police, the press, the army and the United Nations. A minority trusts the Dutch Parliament, the European Union, large corporations, religious institutions, the Dutch Government and political parties.

Chapter 2

Perception of the European Union

- A majority of the Dutch people thinks that the fact that the Netherlands is a member of the European Union is a good thing. A majority believes that the Netherlands has benefited from its EU membership.
- Most Dutch people have an image of the EU that varies from fairly positive to neutral. Very few have either a very positive or very negative image.
A majority (57%) would be in favour of the development of a European Political Union but 30% would be against it.
- 43% of the Dutch poll sees itself in the near future as only Dutch, whereas 48% sees itself first as Dutch, and then as European.
84% are proud to be Dutch, 62% are proud to be European.
Dutch people feel most attached to their village and region; they do not feel very attached to the European Union.
- 23% of the Dutch want the EU to be enlarged to include all countries wishing to join; 50% want an enlargement with only some of the countries wishing to join and 20% do not want enlargement at all.
- The Dutch consider that both the European Union and the United States are playing a positive role in the fight against terrorism. The role of the US is seen as negative with regard to protecting the environment.

Chapter 3

European Integration

- In the Netherlands, the role of the EU is perceived as positive as far as areas such as the fight against terrorism, foreign affairs or defence are concerned. Its role with respect to inflation is perceived rather negatively in the Netherlands.
- The Dutch consider that decisions relating to education, the police, urban crime, healthcare, juvenile delinquency, broadcasting and the press, pensions, the fight against unemployment, cultural policy and justice should be taken by the Dutch government. On the other hand, decisions concerning the fight against international terrorism, trade in, and the exploitation of, human beings, crime, foreign policy, currency, humanitarian aid, defence and environment should be taken jointly within the EU, according to the Dutch.
- Almost all Dutch people are in favour of educating children at school about the European Institutions. A large majority also favour a European Commission composed of commissioners from each of the Member States.
- More than 80% of Dutch are of the opinion that maintaining peace and security in Europe, the fight against crime and drugs trafficking, the fight against unemployment and poverty, the fight against illegal immigration, consumer protection, protecting the environment and bringing the EU closer to citizens should be priority areas for the EU. 64% consider that enlargement should not be a priority for the EU.
- In areas such as maintaining peace in Europe, ensuring food quality, the successful implementation of the euro and the fight against terrorism, action by the EU is perceived as effective by a majority of the Dutch. However, action in areas such as the fight against unemployment, illegal immigration, poverty or bringing the EU closer to the citizens is not perceived to be effective.
- More than 80% of Dutch agree with the statement that the EU should guarantee human rights in every Member State of the EU and with the statement that the EU Member States should take a common position in the event of an international crisis. Most Dutch people disagree with the statement that candidate countries should already have a say in the EU's foreign policy.

Chapter 4

European Institutions

- 67% of the Dutch people think the EU should have a Constitution.
60% think that the current 6-month presidency period should be longer, as 6 months is too short a period to achieve significant results. 27% think this 6-month term should be retained to give each Member State the opportunity of holding the presidency on a regular basis.
45% are in favour of maintaining the current right of veto in the Council in order to protect national interests, while only 18% want to give up this right.
35% want the President of the Commission to be directly chosen by EU citizens, whereas 23% want him/her elected by the European Parliament.
- On a scale ranging from 1 – 10, most Dutch assess their own knowledge of the EU as being between 4 and 6.
- The traditional media, i.e. television, newspaper and radio, are the most frequently used sources of information when the Dutch are looking for information about the EU. Around 25% use the Internet or conversations with relatives and friends to acquire information. Less than 5% make use of EU information centres, CD-ROMs or the national government.
When asked how the Dutch would prefer to receive information about the EU, it is the traditional media that are preferred. The Internet, a more detailed brochure or a short leaflet with an overview, follow this.
Half of the Dutch poll considers that the Dutch media do not pay enough attention to the European Union.
- When asked if they have ever heard of the various European Institutions, it appears that the European Parliament, European Central Bank and the European Commission are the best known with more than 80% having heard of them. The Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions are the least known European institutions or bodies.
- More than 75% of Dutch think that the European Court of Justice, the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the European Parliament play an important role in the European Union.

- More than 50% of Dutch people trust the European Central Bank, the European Court of Justice, the European Parliament and the European Commission. 30% (on average) indicate that they do not know whether they trust the above-mentioned institutions.