

EUROBAROMETER 61

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

SPRING 2004

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

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This Executive Summary presents the overall results from the Finnish National Report of the Eurobarometer Poll 61.1 conducted for the European Commission. The report is based on the analysis of results obtained from the Eurobarometer survey carried out in Finland and the other European Union Member States in February and March 2004.

The Finnish report focuses on:

1. Finns' expectations for the next twelve months and what the European Union means to them personally.
2. Knowledge about the European Union, as well as opinions on the media and the EU.
3. Fears about the European Union and opinions on how the budget of the European Union is spent.
4. The process of integration in the European Union.

On the basis of the results of the Spring 2004 Eurobarometer poll, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Finnish people's expectations for the next twelve months and what the European Union means to them personally

- 47% of Finns think that their life was better at the time of the interview compared to what it had been five years previously. Those who thought their life had improved more than others were managers, those aged between 15 and 24 and between 24 and 39, manual workers and students.
- Finns are concerned about unemployment and 64% of respondents cite this as one of the two most urgent problems needing to be solved. When it comes to expectations for the twelve months to come, Finns see their future more positively than do citizens of the European Union on average. In fact, the Finnish people see the future quite positively.
- When asked what the European Union represents to them personally, most Finns cite the freedom to travel, study and work everywhere in Europe or the common currency, the Euro.
- 93% of Finnish people believe that the biggest member countries have the most power in the European Union and 59% believe that Finland will be less influential in the European Union in the future. Even though 59% of the Finnish population believe that Finland's voice counts in the European Union, only 27% believe that their personal voice counts.
- 65% of the Finnish population see themselves as Finnish only, 34% as both Finnish and European and 1% European only. This question was posed in two different ways to the respondents, and no real differences can be seen between these two groups. More than any

other socio-demographic groups, the unemployed, those aged over 55 years of age, the retired and those who finished their studies between the ages of 16 and 19 say they feel themselves Finnish only. Managers, house persons and the better educated feel themselves to be both Finnish and European more than other groups.

- Over half the Finnish poll (56%) believes that globalisation is a good thing for Finland. On the other hand 70% believe that globalisation presents a threat to employment in Finland. Three-quarters of Finns think that globalisation increases the variety of products for sale in Finland and 59% think that globalisation is going to cut the prices of products and services through increased competition. When asked who they trust to get the effects of globalisation under control, 37% cite the European Union.

2. Knowledge about the European Union and opinions on the media and the EU

- The Finns estimate their average level of knowledge about the EU to be about the same as a year ago. This figure is above the European average, as it has been during the past four years - albeit with some minor variations.
- In spring 2004, just over half of the population (53%) believed that there are twelve member countries in the European Union. 90% of respondents knew that the European flag was blue with yellow stars on it, whereas 69% thought that on the European flag there was one star per member country. 54% of Finns recognized the statement 'the next elections to the European Parliament will take place in June 2006' to be wrong. Only in Greece and Luxembourg (55% each), were citizens more knowledgeable in this respect. 69% of the Finns also knew rightly that Members of the European Parliament are elected by European Union citizens, with only the Greeks recording a higher figure (74%).
- 69% of Finnish people are of the opinion that the Finnish media report about the right amount of news regarding the European Union, this shows a five percentage point increase in one year.
- Over half the population (57%) thinks that the media presents the European Union objectively, 34% think that the EU is talked about too positively and 5% think that the media reports too negatively about the European Union. Manual workers, supporters of the political left wing and people living in the northern parts of the country, in particular, consider that the media present the European Union too positively.
- When asked about the enlargement of the European Union that was to take place on 1 May of this year, 7% of Finns say they were very well informed and further 45% say they were well informed about the enlargement. If the Finnish results are compared with those of the other Member States, it can be seen that Finns have a sense of being well informed to a degree that is not shared by citizens elsewhere in the EU.

3. Fears about the European Union and opinions on how the budget of the European Union is spent

- 46% of Finns think that, taking everything into consideration, their country's membership of the European Union is a good thing, whereas in the autumn of 2003, only 39% held this opinion. This represents an increase of 7 percentage points. 31% think that membership is neither a good nor a bad thing and 21% think it is a bad thing. In particular managers, those living in cities and in the Uusimaa region in the South, students, supporters of the political right wing and white-collar workers say that the Finnish EU membership is a good thing. The unemployed, manual workers, the self-employed and those living in the country tend to consider it as a bad thing. When comparing the opinions of supporters of different political parties, it can be noted that those who are most positive about membership support the political right wing and the most negative are supporters of the political centre. Clear regional differences are also apparent with backing for Finnish membership of the Union highest in the Uusimaa region (63%) but only 43% in Central Finland and 35% in Lapland.
- Almost half the population (46%) think that Finland has benefited from its EU membership. However, almost as many people are of the opposite opinion (44%). Only the Swedes, the British and the Austrians think that they have benefited even less. Men (50 %) are somewhat more positive about EU membership than women (42%) and believe that Finland has benefited. Managers, those living in the cities, white-collar workers and highly educated citizens, also share this opinion. Looking at respondents' political orientations, 51% supporting the right wing think that Finland has benefited from its membership in contrast to only 45% of those on the left and 44% at the centre. When it comes to different geographic regions, it is noted that support for membership is higher in southern parts of the country and lower in northern parts.
- When asked what fears they had about the European Union, Finns mentioned the following things: the transfer of jobs to other member countries where there are lower production costs, an increase in drug trafficking and international organised crime, more difficulties for Finnish farmers, Finland paying more and more to the European Union and a loss of power for smaller Member States.
- When it comes to the budget of the European Union, 36% believe that most of it is spent on administrative and personnel costs, 24% think it is spent on agriculture and 19% on regional aid.

4. The process of integration in the European Union

- Over half of Finns (55%) are against the further enlargement of the European Union to include other countries in the future, whereas 35% support this. Opposition to further enlargement is only larger in Austria and in Germany.
- The number of Finnish people supporting the European constitution has gone up by three percentage points since the last Eurobarometer poll, in autumn 2003, and eight percentage points in one year. Currently, 52% are in favour of the Constitution and 35% oppose it. Support for the Constitution is smaller only in Denmark (37%) and in the United Kingdom (42%).
- When asked their opinion about the speed of building Europe being faster in one group of countries than in others, 63% of Finnish respondents are against this kind of development and only 22% are for it.
- Three-quarters of Finns believe that every EU Member State should have one vote - regardless of its population size whereas 18% think that the number of votes per Member State should be proportional to its population size. 85% think that the European Commission should be composed of commissioners from each of the Member States.
- Over half the population surveyed wants the right of veto to be retained in order to preserve essential national interests and 10% would be ready to give it up so as to make the European Union more efficient. The number of those wanting to retain it has gone up by 7 percentage points since the last Eurobarometer poll.

Conclusions

Overall, therefore, it may be said that the Finns still seem to be some of the most negative EU citizens in terms of their opinions about the European Union (when compared with the other member states before the enlargement that took place on May 1st 2004).

In the Eurobarometer poll 59.1 (spring 2003), it was seen that opinion had become slightly more positive than previously; in the Eurobarometer poll 60.1 (autumn 2003), opinions reverted to their previously negative trend, and now, in spring 2004, there has, once again, been a switch back to more positive opinions.