

# EUROBAROMETER 61

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

## SPRING 2004

### NATIONAL REPORT

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### FRANCE

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

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

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.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Eurobarometer 61.1 public opinion poll was conducted on the request of the European Commission in all the fifteen European Union Member States in spring 2004. In France, 1019 people were interviewed between February 23<sup>rd</sup> and March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2004 - just a couple of months before the enlargement of the European Union to include a further ten member countries.

This report sums up the results concerning France. It is divided into four chapters.

Chapter 1 gives an overall view of French public opinion.

Chapter 2 deals with French attitudes towards the European Union.

Chapter 3 focuses on the debate on the future of the European Union.

Chapter 4 relates to the 2004 European Parliament elections.

## **1. OVERALL REVIEW OF THE FRENCH OPINION**

- Expectations for the next twelve months are quite pessimistic: 43% of the French expect their country's economic situation to get worse and 49% feel that unemployment will increase. 34% feel their present situation has got worse over the last five years.
- The main issues France has to face at the moment are unemployment (58%, +4%), crime (29%, -1%), the economic situation (26%, -3%) and inflation (24%, +2%).
- The French are much more sceptical about the effects of globalisation than the EU-15 average: 73% of the French think globalisation is a threat to employment in their country (EU average: 57%) and only 19% feel globalisation is a good thing for them (EU average: 29%).
- To get the effects of the globalisation under control, they have most trust in consumer rights associations (34%), citizens themselves (31%) and anti/alter-globalisation movements (22%).

- Radio, NGOs, the army and the police are the institutions that the French trust most. 42% of the French poll tend to trust the European Union (in contrast to 44% of them who tend not to trust it), 35% trust the French Parliament and 29% the French Government. The institutions the French trust the least are major companies (29%) and political parties (13%).
- Some European institutions are far better known than others. A large majority of the French population has heard of the Parliament (95%), the Commission (87%), the European Central Bank (71%), the Court of Justice of the European Communities (70%) and the Council of Ministers (67%). However, awareness of the other institutions is low.
- To get information about the EU, respondents mainly use television (75%), newspapers (52%), radio (39%) and discussions with friends and relatives (32%). 14% of the French use the Internet and 11% brochures and leaflets. Other sources, such as information offices, CD-ROMs and trade unions are widely ignored.

## **2. THE FRENCH AND THE EUROPEAN UNION**

- In the near future, 61% of respondents see themselves as both French and European, 30% as French only and 6% as European only.
- One Frenchman out of two (45%) has a fairly good (39%) or very good (6%) image of the EU; 22% have a fairly bad (17%) or a very bad (5%) image of it.
- 43% (-1%) of respondents consider their country's membership to be a good thing; 18% (+1%) think it a bad thing and 35% (-1%) neither good nor bad. Furthermore, 46% (-2%) consider their country has benefited from being a member of the European Union, while 20% (+1%) think the opposite and 34% (+1%) do not know.
- When asked what Europe means to them personally, 59% of the French mention the euro, 52% the freedom to travel, work and study in a foreign country and 38% cultural diversity.
- 68% of French citizens are in favour of the euro, 27% oppose it, while 5% do not know or do not express an opinion.
- France is no longer the country with the weakest support for enlargement. 37% of the French were in favour of the accession of the new member states in May 2004, whereas 47% were opposed to it (the survey was carried out between February and March 2004).
- The French are more sceptical about further enlargement of the European Union in the coming years: only 32% are in favour and 47% are against it.

### **3. THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

- Support for a common foreign policy (66%, +2%) and for a common security and defence policy (75%, +4%) has increased since the last survey. 52% of respondents think that decisions concerning European defence policy should be taken by the EU, 21% by national governments and only 8% by NATO.
- The French strongly support the idea of a European constitution: 62% (+2%) of them are in favour and 16% against (+8%). These figures are almost identical to the EU-15 average (63% in favour and 17% against). In France, 69% of left-wing voters, 66% of centrist and 57% of right-wing voters are in favour of a European constitution.
- Regarding the reform of the Commission, 67% of the French think that every Member State should have the right to designate its own Commissioner. 42% (-2% compared to EB 60) are in favour of keeping the right to veto in order to defend national interests, 30% think it should be limited to a very small number of key-issues; 11% feel it should be given up where all decisions are concerned, in order to make the EU more efficient.

### **4. THE ELECTION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

- Three months before the election of the European Parliament, 13% of the French are sure they will not vote and a further 15% are quite uncertain about it. 36% are definitely sure they will vote. None of the proposals to encourage participation in the forthcoming elections – such as voting on the same day throughout the European Union, voting at work or via the Internet – appear to have been met with much enthusiasm.
- 12% of respondents consider that the European Parliament's activities, decisions and so on have a 'great effect' on their lives and a further 44% believe they have 'some effect'.
- The issues that the French sample expected to feature in the European Parliament election campaign were unemployment (78%), environment (44%), crime (37%) and immigration (43%) (multiple answers were possible). Interest in specific European issues such as enlargement (14%), the reform of the European institutions (14%) and the activities of the European Parliament (12%) appears to be very low.