

EUROBAROMETER 61

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

SPRING 2004

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE NETHERLANDS

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

This report was produced for the European Commission's Representation in The Netherlands

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

Chapter 1 Context

- A majority (61%) of the Dutch people expects the **employment situation** in the Netherlands to worsen the coming months. While half of the people are still pessimistic about the **economic situation** in general getting better, this is an improvement from the last survey.
- Dutch people don't expect their **personal situation** to deteriorate. Within five years, a majority expects to be in either the same position or better off than now.
- Dutch people, with a figure of 73%, are the most likely in Europe to try to persuade people around them often or at least from time to time to share their **views**.
- People from the Netherlands have more **trust in trade unions** than the rest of Europe (54% to 36%). Traditional media, such as television, radio and newspapers, also enjoy a high degree of trust. While a majority of the Dutch trust the **army and the police**, (53% and 58%), the figures are lower than the respective European averages (63% and 65%).
- More than half of the Dutch people (53%) see **globalisation** as something good for the Netherlands and 60% think it is good for Dutch companies (60%). A large number of them think globalisation is good for them personally (41%). Having said that, 62% of Dutch people also feel that globalisation leads to power being concentrated in large companies, at the expense of others, 55% that it is a threat to employment in the Netherlands, 52% that it increases global environmental problems and a further 52% that it makes it more difficult to control the quality of food products sold in their country.
- To get the **effects of globalisation under control**, Dutch people, above all other Europeans, put their faith in, firstly, the European Union (43%) and, secondly, in the World Trade Organisation (39%).
- About half the Dutch people will see themselves in the near future as both **Dutch and European**, the other half will feel Dutch solely.

Chapter 2 Knowledge

- There are no Dutch people who think they really know a great deal about Europe. The majority state they have limited or average levels of **knowledge** about the European Union in general.
- 60% of Dutch feel badly informed about EU **enlargement** in May as opposed to a European average of 70%.
- Of all the **European institutions**, the European Parliament, the European Commission, the European Court of Justice and the European Central Bank are the **best known** among the Dutch people. Dutch people are, of all European citizens, the least familiar with the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.
- More than 75% of Dutch think that the European Parliament, the European Commission, the European Court of Justice and the European Central Bank play an **important role** in the European Union.
- More than 50% of Dutch **trust** the European Central Bank, the European Court of Justice, the European Parliament and the European Commission.
- 56% of Dutch incorrectly believed at the time of the poll that the European Union was made up of 12 **Member States** (in fact, 15 was the correct answer). This is the highest percentage found in the EU-15.
- 8% of Dutch know that the European Union has its own **anthem**, in contrast to an overall EU-15 average of 25%.
- 18% of the Dutch poll is aware of the existence of a **Europe Day** in all Member States, in contrast to 34% of Europeans in general.
- Almost half of the people know that the European Parliament is **elected directly** by European citizens and 65% know that it is not true that the citizens directly choose the President of the Commission.
- 27% of Dutch think the majority of the **European budget** is spent on agriculture. A further 27% believe that the money is spent on administrative costs and personnel.
- Dutch people predominantly use traditional media (television, newspapers) to obtain **information** on the European Union. However, the Internet is used much more frequently for this purpose than elsewhere in Europe (29% as opposed to an average of just 16% in the EU-15).
- A majority of the Dutch (53%) think the **media** do not pay enough **attention** to the European Union - the highest figure in the EU-15 (42%). 24% think the media report too positively, 42% objectively and 17% too negatively.

Chapter 3 Meaning of the EU

- 64% of the Dutch have positive views regarding Dutch **membership** of the EU. This is considerably higher than both the EU-15 average of 48% and the New Member States' average of 43%. 12% of people in the Netherlands think that Dutch EU membership is a bad thing.
- In the Netherlands, young people, more highly educated people and people with higher incomes are, on average, more positive about their country's **membership** of the EU.
- The **image** of the European Union in the Netherlands is predominantly neutral (42%). This is ten percentage points higher than the EU-15 average (32%). On the other hand, in the EU-15 as a whole, people tended to opt for a very or fairly positive image (43%), whereas, in the Netherlands, only 34% do so and a further 22% have a fairly or very negative image.
- When asked what the **EU means** to Dutch respondents **personally**, a majority mentions the Euro (56%), followed by freedom to travel, study and work in the EU (54%) – something which is cited particularly by managers and students. Other important aspects of the EU mentioned are a stronger voice in the world, bureaucracy, more crime and not enough control at the exterior borders.
- In general, Dutch people do not feel that they are any **safer** or that they are politically and economically **more stable** because of their country's membership of the EU. There are regional differences though. In the East of Holland, 45% think EU membership has brought economic stability, compared with 30% in the North.
- 46% of Dutch do not feel that their **voice** is heard in the European Union but 40% think it is. 61% believe the voice of the Netherlands counts in the EU.
- 61% are of the opinion that the Netherlands will not become more **influential** in the EU in the future. The 23% who think so are a small minority compared with the European average of 43% who think their country will gain influence.
- 40% expect the EU to become more **influential** in the coming five years and 34% actually want this to happen. 7% think the EU will become less important and 15% want it to be this way. The majority expects and wants the role of the European Union to remain about the same.
- 88% of the respondents in the Netherlands feel that the big countries possess the most **power** in Europe.
- A majority of Dutch people want the speed of **integration** of the European Union to be faster than it is at the moment.

- The main fears of Dutch people with respect to the European Union are that the Netherlands will have to pay more and more towards the EU's budget, that there will be more difficulties for Dutch farmers and that there will be a loss of jobs to other Member States with lower production costs.
- 66% are afraid of an increase in drug trafficking and in internationally organised crime and 61% fear the loss of social benefits.
- 63% have concerns about the loss of power for smaller Member States. Older people (55+) in particular hold this fear (73%), as opposed to only 44% of the youngest generation polled (15-24 years).
- A small majority of Dutch people is not afraid of the loss of national identity or of the Dutch language being used less and less.
- The most important issues in the Netherlands are crime (47%) and the economic situation (41%). Nowhere else in Europe are these issues seen to be more important.
- According to the Dutch, the EU plays its most valuable role in fighting terrorism and in the area of foreign policy. The role of the EU is considered to be most negative with regard to taxes and increased prices/inflation.

Chapter 4 EU Policies

- Since the Eurobarometer of Autumn 2003, **support for the Euro** has dropped by a further 4 points in the Netherlands to 58%. Together with Germany, this is the lowest result recorded in all of the 12 EU countries currently using the Euro.
- **Support for the Euro** is especially low amongst house persons (46%) and manual workers (48%). Over 70% of the self-employed, students and managers support the Euro.
- A **common EU foreign policy** has the support of 69% of the Dutch. 77% of them are in favour of a **common defence and security policy**. 70% are in favour of an **EU Foreign Minister** who can be the spokesperson for a common EU position and 84% feel the EU Member States should agree on a common position when an international crisis occurs.
- Most Dutch people favour a **common asylum- and immigration policy** and think the EU should guarantee **human rights** within the EU and should preferably also strive to do so in the rest of the world.
- 76% of Dutch respondents believe the EU should have a seat on the **Security Council** of the United Nations.
- Dutch support for the **enlargement** of the EU in May has dropped by 6 points since the last survey, to 44%. 46% of the Dutch support further enlargement in the future, in contrast to an EU-15 average of 37%.
- 70% of Dutch people are in favour of a **Constitution** for the EU. This is higher than the European averages (EU-15, NMS-10 and EU-25) of 63%.
- A majority of the Dutch (83%) wants a **European Commission** that is composed of Commissioners from all the individual Member States. Here, the EU-15 average is 70%.
- More than half of the people in the Netherlands feel that the 6-month **Presidency** is too short to achieve significant results and should therefore be extended.
- Almost half the Dutch want to preserve the existing **right of veto** to protect essential national interests; a quarter favours limiting the right of veto and one-sixth wants the veto to be given up in order to make the EU more efficient.
- A majority of the Dutch favour **one vote per Member State** in the Council of Ministers, regardless of the country's population size. 31% support the idea that the number of votes per Member State should be proportional to its population size.

- There is a significant difference in the degree of **satisfaction with the way democracy works** in the Netherlands (65% are very or reasonably satisfied) and the degree to which it is seen to be working in the EU (36% are very or reasonably satisfied). After the United Kingdom, the Netherlands has the lowest number of people who are very or reasonably satisfied with the functioning of democracy in the EU.
- Whereas 49% of Dutch people **would definitely vote** if national parliamentary elections were to be held now, only 32% say they would do so for European Parliament elections.
- In **deciding for whom to vote** in European elections, the Dutch base their decision primarily on the policies of the candidate and on their own opinion on European issues.
- 63% of the Dutch want the European **election campaign** to focus on crime – a figure that is higher than in any other EU Member State. 60% also wants attention to be paid to the employment situation.
- The most effective measures to **increase the number of Dutch people casting their vote**, are seen to be the organisation of local, regional or national elections to be held on the same day as the European elections (41%) and the possibility of voting over the Internet (36%). Young people especially (57% of 15-24 year olds) would be tempted to vote over the Internet.
- Since the EP-elections in 1999, half of the Dutch have seen **Members of the European Parliament** on television and 40% have read about them in newspapers and magazines. About a third of the people indicate that they have not seen or heard anything about the MEPs and 37% say they have no desire to change this. The Dutch people who do want to receive information are best reached by traditional media, the Internet and brochures and leaflets.
- About three-quarters of the Dutch population feels that the decisions of the European Union and the European Parliament have a great or at least some effect on their daily lives. About one-fifth think decisions of the European Union and European Parliament have no effect at all. National government or parliament decisions are considered by 90% of Dutch people to have an effect on their lives.
- 52% of the Dutch agree that the European Parliament has more power than the national parliament and 74% agree that the elections for the European Parliament are really important.
- 57% of Dutch respondents do not agree that the Members of the European Parliament are good at protecting their interests. However, 37% do think so.