

EUROBAROMETER 63.4

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

SPRING 2005

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

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.

This Executive Summary presents the overall results from the Finnish National Report of the Eurobarometer Poll 63.4 conducted for the European Commission. The report is based on the analysis of results obtained from the Eurobarometer survey that was carried out in Finland and the other Member States of the European Union in May and June 2005. The Finnish report focuses among other things on:

1. Citizens' general knowledge about the European Union (EU) as well as their opinions on Finnish EU membership and the media and the EU
2. What national institutions the Finnish people trust in? And do they trust the European Commission and the European Parliament?
3. The European Constitution
4. The future enlargement of the European Union

On the basis of the results of the Eurobarometer poll from Spring 2005, the following conclusions can be made.

1. The climate of opinion

- On the whole, Finnish people are very satisfied with their lives at the moment. 95 percent say that they are very or rather satisfied and only 5 percent are not satisfied with their lives. Even 88 percent of those who are unemployed say that they are satisfied with their lives.
- Those cohabiting or having a family with children are slightly more satisfied with their lives than those living alone.
- 94 percent of Finns believe that their personal job situation and the financial situation of their household is going to get better or stay the same during the next twelve months. 96 percent believe that their personal life in general is going to get better or stay the same.
- 51 percent of Finnish people say that their present situation has improved if they compare it with five years ago. 37 percent consider their present situation the same as five years ago and only 12 percent of citizens are of the opinion that their situation has worsened.
- When asked about their expectations for the next five years, 42 percent Finns believe that their personal situation will improve and 49 percent think it will stay about the same. Seven percent of citizens fear that their personal situation will get worse.

2. Trust in certain institutions

- Citizens were given a list of names of different institutions in society and, for each of the institutions mentioned, they were asked whether they tended to trust it or tended not to trust it. Of the various alternatives provided, Finnish people place most trust in the Finnish legal system (78 %). 68 percent trust the national government and 67 percent the national parliament. Only 37 % say that they tend to trust political parties, a figure that is, however, 11 percentage points more than in the Eurobarometer poll six months earlier. 59 percent say that they do not tend to trust political parties.
- 41 percent of Finns trust the European Union, while 53 percent say that they do not.
- The European Commission is trusted by 54 % of Finnish citizens. This figure has gone down by four percentage points since autumn 2004 and it is five percentage points less than a year earlier. The number of those citizens saying that they do not tend to trust the European Commission has gone up at the same time.
- The European Parliament is trusted by 56 % - seven percentage points down from autumn 2004 when the previous Eurobarometer poll was carried out.

3. Finnish people's opinions on their own identity, some matters concerning their everyday life, the meaning of the European Union and Finnish EU membership.

- Two-thirds of Finnish people (63 %) are very attached to Finland. 96 percent are very or fairly attached to their country.
- 21 percent consider themselves to be very attached to Europe. This is ten percentage points up since autumn 2003. It seems that the Finnish people tend to feel themselves progressively more European as time goes by even though their sense of national identity is still very strong.
- The most attached to Europe are managers and highly educated citizens. The political groups most attached to Europe are the supporters of the political right wing and the least attached are those supporting the political left wing.
- Over 90 percent of Finnish people say that the concepts "social security", "company" and "public service" bring to their mind something positive. 71 percent of citizens in the Member States on average are of the same opinion. When Finnish opinions are compared with those of the Member States overall, it can be seen that more positive attitudes towards companies cannot be found in any of them.
- Monopoly, globalisation and protectionism are seen as something negative.
- When asked what European Union means to them personally, Finns cite freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the European Union. On the other hand, bureaucracy and the loss of cultural identity are seen as the negative sides of the Union.

- The number of citizens who think that European Union means more crime has gone down by 10 percentage points in one year. At the moment, only 10 percent of citizens think that European Union means more crime.
- 45 % think that, taking everything into consideration, Finnish EU membership is a good thing, whereas in the autumn of 2004, 48 % were of this opinion. 18 percent consider it to be a bad thing. The number of citizens considering membership a good thing has gone down for the first time since autumn 2003. The number of those considering membership a bad thing has gone up at the same time. The same phenomenon can be noticed in most other Member States.
- EU membership is considered as a good thing, especially by managers, highly educated citizens and students. Supporters of the political right wing are most positive regarding Finnish EU membership.
- Half of the population (50 %, + 1 percentage points in six months) thinks that Finland has benefited from EU membership. The number of those not believing that Finland has benefited from its membership has gone down by two percentage points from 45 % to 43 %. Seven percent of the population did not give their opinion. Men are somewhat more positive about membership than women and believe that Finland has benefited from EU membership. This opinion is also shared by students, managers, and highly educated citizens, as well as supporters of the political right wing. On the whole, it can be seen that Finnish citizens are slightly more negative about EU membership than the European average

4. Citizens' general knowledge about the European Union, the sources the citizens use when looking for information about the European Union and what do they think about national media coverage on the European Union?

- 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 - regardless of some minor variations.
- As their primary sources of information about the European Union, Finns cite television (79 %) and daily newspapers (64 %). Also popular as sources of information are the Internet (40 %) and the radio (31 %).
- The majority of Finns think that the Finnish media in general reports appropriately about the European Union. People are most satisfied with coverage in newspapers (74 %). 65 percent think that the extent of coverage by television is about right and 27 percentage think television coverage is insufficient.
- Approximately 60 percent of Finnish citizens think that the media presents the European Union objectively. Media coverage is considered to be most objective in newspapers (65 %) and the

least objective in radio (55 %). In the autumn of 2004, 57 percent of citizens thought that the European Union was presented objectively in the media. However, at that time, the questions were slightly different. The citizens were asked about the media as a whole and not separately.

5. European Constitution

- 83 percent of Finnish people have heard about the Constitution. Six percent of them say that they are familiar with its contents and 77 percent say that they know very little about its contents. In the Member States of the European Union overall, 81 percent have heard about the Constitution and 10 percent know about its contents.
- 49 percent of citizens are in favour of the Constitution, nine percent totally in favour and 40 percent rather in favour. 35 percent are opposed to it and as many as 16 percent are not able to give an opinion.
- The European Constitution has most support from students (67 %), those aged between 15-24 years (58 %) and supporters of the political right wing (56 %). The Constitution is opposed in particular by those aged 40-54, the least educated, self-employed persons, house persons and the unemployed.
- 48 percent of citizens trust the Finnish Government most to inform them about the European Constitution. The second most trusted source of information are journalists (12 %).
- Citizens were asked to give all the reasons why they are in favour of the European Constitution. 25 percent believe that the Constitution is essential in order to pursue European integration. 23 percent are of the opinion that the Constitution would strengthen democracy in Europe and consult citizens and 19 percent believe that it is essential for the smooth running of the European institutions.
- Citizens were also asked to give reasons why they are opposed to the European Constitution. 36 percent of Finnish people gave as the primary reason for them being opposed to the Constitution the lack of information. 34 percent believe that Finland will lose its national sovereignty with the Constitution and 14 percent say that the Constitution goes too far and advances too quickly and that it is not democratic enough. 13 percent of Finns cannot see any positive aspects of the Constitution (on the other hand, based on answers to an earlier question it transpires that only six percent of the Finnish people say that they know the contents of the Constitution. Hence, people seem to base their opinions largely on images they have rather than facts).
- Over half of the Finnish poll are of the opinion that if all Member States were to adopt the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe it would make the running of the European Union more democratic, more efficient and more transparent. If the answers of the citizens of all the Member States are examined, almost similar figures are found throughout. It can be concluded

that even though European citizens are largely opposed to the Constitution they believe, at the same time, that it would make the functioning of the European Union more transparent.

- Finnish people also believe that adopting the Treaty establishing the Constitution would make the European Union stronger in the world (72 %), more competitive economically (63 %) and more socially-minded (52 %).

6. The international role of the European Union

- 62 percent of Finnish people are of the opinion that the European Union's international role has become more important compared with five years ago. Eight percent of citizens hold an opposing view.
- 72 percent of citizens perceive the role of the European Union as being positive when it comes to maintaining peace in the world, whereas 69 percent think that the role of the United States in this regard is negative. The most negative about the role of the United States are the Greeks, of whom 85 percent think that the role of the United States regarding peace in the world is negative.
- 68 % of Finns think that the European Union tends to play a positive role when it comes to the fight against terrorism and 36 percent see the role of the United States as being positive in this regard (- seven percentage points in six months). On the other hand, 42 percent are of the opinion that the role of the United States is negative.
- Over 80 percent of Finns consider the financial situation in Finland to be good. Almost 70 percent, on the other hand, consider the financial situation of Europe to be good. 81 percent of Finns think that the financial situation in Finland is better than the average of the European countries, whereas 15 percent hold an opposing view.
- 55 percent of Finnish people believe that the financial situation in Finland will be better in five years' time whereas 33 percent think it will be worse. When it comes to the employment situation in Finland, 55 percent of citizens believe it will get better, whereas 36 percent are afraid that it will get worse.
- 81 percent of Finns think that the European economy is performing better than the economies of India and China. 42 percent believe that the European economy is performing better than the American economy. The Japanese economy is seen to be more efficient by 43 percent of those polled.

7 The future enlargement of the European Union

- 48 percent of Finns think that the European Union should be enlarged to include some of the countries wishing to join but only 18 percent would be ready to accept all the countries wishing

to join the European Union. Almost one-third (31 %) are of the opinion that the European Union should not be enlarged to any additional countries in the future. 23 percent of the average of all the Member States would be ready to accept all the countries wishing to join the European Union, while 42 percent are in favour of including only some of the countries and a quarter oppose any future enlargement.

- Respondents were given a list of countries and asked to say whether they would be in favour or against the country in question becoming part of the European Union in the future. Over 90 percent of Finns are in favour of Norway, Switzerland and Iceland joining the European Union and 49 percent would be ready to accept Romania joining the EU. The countries whose memberships are the most opposed are Turkey (66 %), Albania (60 %), Serbia and Montenegro (55 %) and Ukraine (54 %).
- Citizens were also asked about their views on Turkey. 70 percent of Finns believe that Turkey partly belongs to Europe by its geography. 79 percent think that Turkey's membership could risk favouring immigration to more developed countries in the European Union. The cultural differences between Turkey and the European Union Member States are seen to be too significant by 60 percent of the Finns to allow for this accession. 60 percent of citizens do not believe that Turkey's accession would strengthen security in this region. Nor do they believe that Turkey's accession would favour the rejuvenation of an ageing European population (63 %).
- The biggest supporters of Turkish EU membership are young citizens and students. Those least in favour of it are the self-employed, managers, people living in cities and supporters of the political left wing.

On the whole, it can be said that Finnish public opinion, once again, has become more negative when compared with the couple of previous Eurobarometer polls. The same phenomenon can be seen in most of the other Member States as well and is partly due to difficulties faced in referendums for adopting the Treaty establishing the Constitution.