



Standard Eurobarometer



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PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FRANCE

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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.

INTRODUCTION

Conducted on behalf of the European Commission, the Eurobarometer 63 public opinion poll surveyed 1012 people in the weeks before and after the French referendum on the European Constitution (May 16th - June 14th, 2004).

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

Chapter 1 gives an overall view of the climate of opinion in France.

Chapter 2 deals with the confidence expressed in the national and European institutions.

Chapter 3 focuses on the European Union's image.

Chapter 4 deals with information in the European Union.

Chapter 5 looks at the role of the EU in the world.

Chapter 6 is about the support for a European Constitution and the future of European integration.

Chapter 7 analyses the attitude of the French towards further enlargements of the EU.

1. THE CLIMATE OF OPINION

- 64% (=) of the French are quite satisfied and 19% (+1%) very satisfied with the life they lead. Only 13% (+1%) are not very satisfied and 3% (-2%) not satisfied at all with their personal situation.
- Expectations for the next twelve months are still quite pessimistic: 42% of the French expect the economic situation of their country to get worse and 50% feel that unemployment will increase. 29% consider their current situation has worsened in the last five years.
- 44% of the French think their personal situation will improve in the next five years, 35% that it will remain the same and only 18% expect it to worsen.
- The main issues France is facing at the moment are unemployment (67%, +16%), economic situation (25%, +1%) and inflation (24%, +3%).

2. TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS

- Only 33% (-5%) of the French trust the national Parliament, but only 24% (-5%) the national government and 14% (+1%) political parties.
- The popularity of international organisations has decreased since the last survey: 50% (-2%) of the French tend to trust the United Nations and 39% (-11%) the European Union.
- A large majority of the French population has heard of the Parliament (93%), the Commission (86%), the European Central Bank (70%), the Council of Ministers (69%) and the Court of Justice of the European Communities (58%).
- Probably because of the referendum campaign in France, confidence in the European Commission fell significantly during the first half of 2005: 45%, i.e. a fall of 5 points in comparison to the very positive result obtained in October.

3. THE IMAGE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

- One Frenchman out of two (48%, -5%) has a fairly good (40%, -5%) or very good (8%, =) image of the EU; 18% (+1%) have a fairly bad or a very bad (5%, +1%) image of it.
- More than half of the people interviewed in France (51%) think that European Union membership is a good thing for their country. Although this level is five points lower than that recorded in October 2004, it is still among the most positive recorded in the last years.
- Furthermore, 53% (-1%) consider their country has benefited from being a member of the European Union, while 35% (-1%) think the opposite and 13% (+3%) do not know.
- When asked what Europe means to them personally, 52% respond peace, 50% freedom to travel, work and study in a foreign country, 42% cultural diversity and 41% the euro.
- French youth (15-24 years) is much more sensitive to freedom to travel (64%), cultural diversity (49%) and to the euro (45%) than to peace (only 36%) and the diplomatic role of the European Union (30%).
- 76% (-2%) of the French are in favour of the common currency, 21% opposed to it (+2%), while 3% do not know.

4. BEING INFORMED ABOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION

- To get information about the EU, respondents use mainly television (75%), newspapers (40%), radio (36%) and discussions with friends and relatives (33%).
- The French consider that the most objective European information is given by the press (44%), whereas 33% consider the television presents the European Union too positively.
- One Frenchman out of four (25%, -2%) continues to believe that administrative costs represent the main budget heading for the European Union. Agriculture represents the main area of budget spending for 23% of them, which is 5 percentage points higher than the EU-25 average.

5. EU ROLE IN THE WORLD

- Support for a common security and defence policy (81%, =) is stable whereas support for a common foreign policy (65%) has fallen by 4 points since the last survey.
- 88% of the French think that in the event of an international crisis, the Member States of the European Union should agree on a common position and 84% that European Union foreign policy should be independent from United States foreign policy.
- Only 15% of respondents think the United States plays a positive role regarding peace in the world, and 11% regarding the fight against poverty in the world.
- We found mounting fears concerning globalisation: the word “globalisation” brings to mind something fairly negative to 43% of the French and very negative to 18% of them. Only 28% have a very positive (4%) or a fairly positive (24%) image of it.
- Furthermore, for 59% of the French, the word “globalization” is mainly linked to the delocalization of some companies to countries where labour is cheaper; for 22% to more intense competition for French companies. These figures are higher by 21 and 4 points respectively than the EU-25 average. Only a small minority thinks about positive aspects of globalization, such as opportunities for French companies (8%) and foreign investment in France (4%)

6. THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

- The idea of European political union is supported by 54% of respondents, which represents an increase of 2 points since the last survey.
- While 53% of respondents are satisfied with the way democracy works in France (-4%), the percentage of respondents satisfied with the way democracy works in the European Union is lower at 42%.
- More than ever, combating unemployment is the top priority for the European Union (63%), which represents an increase of 16 points since the EB 62. It should also be noted that this figure is much higher than the EU-25 average (47%)
- In spite of the “no” to the constitutional treaty during the referendum of May 29th, the French still support the idea of a European Constitution, even though support has dropped by 10 points since the last survey: 60% (-10%) of the French are in favour ; 28% against (+10%); 12% do not know (-10%).
- One French person in of two (53%, +4%) is against “enhanced cooperation” (i.e. “the speed of building Europe being faster in one group than in other countries), whereas 30% (-5%) are in favour of it (17% do not know).

7. SUPPORT FOR FUTURE ENLARGEMENT

- Support for further enlargement of the EU has fallen by 7 points in six months: 32% of the French are in favour of it and 58% opposed to it. Only Austria, the Republic of Cyprus, Germany and Greece are more opposed to enlargement than France.
- A more detailed analysis reveals that 10% think the EU should be enlarged to any country wishing to join, 40% to only some of the countries and 43% think the EU shouldn't be enlarged at all.
- Support for enlargement is much lower among young people in France compared to the average of 15-24 year olds in Europe as a whole: 35% of respondents in France are in favour of it (EU-25: 61%) and 57% against (EU-25: 29%)
- There is far stronger support for the accession of Norway (78%), Switzerland (74%) and Iceland (69%) than for the new accession countries, such as Croatia (47% for, 42% against), Bulgaria (46% for, 43% against) and Romania (48% for, 48% against)
- However, support for the accession of the Balkan countries has considerably increased in three years: +23% for Croatia, +16% for Bulgaria, +20% for Romania, +18% for FYROM, +18% for Bosnia Herzegovina, +12% for Serbia Montenegro and +14% for Albania.

- On the contrary, support for an enlargement to Turkey remains very low: only 21% (-2%) of the French are in favour of it.