

EUROBAROMETER 63.4

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

SPRING 2005

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Netherlands
English Version

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 by TNS NIPO.

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.

Summary

Dutch context

The majority (95%) of Dutch citizens are happy with the life they are leading and describe their own financial situation as 'good' (86%). The Dutch are satisfied more often with these aspects of their life than the average in the European Union. Furthermore, the Dutch feel that the social security system (62%) and their own country's economy (53%) are 'good' more often than the average European.

Looking at the expectations for the next five years, at least 60% of Dutch citizens expect the Dutch economy, the European economy, and environmental development to improve. An exception is the expectations with regard to the Dutch social security system. In the Netherlands, more people than the European average expect that this aspect will deteriorate (62% versus 41%). However, this can be interpreted in the light of their current satisfaction with the Dutch social security system. In the section above, we saw that this is above average. Moreover, the changes in social security in the near future affect these expectations (e.g. elimination of the existing disablement insurance scheme).

The Dutch have more confidence in their national institutions than the average European citizen. In both the Netherlands and Europe, people have most faith in their national legal system, followed by the national parliament, the national government, and national political parties.

The European Union: Information, Knowledge and Trust

To keep up with the news, the Dutch use the television as their primary source of information. 80% watch the news every day, followed by the newspaper (60%) and the radio (59%). The Dutch read the newspaper every day more often than the average in Europe.

51% of the Dutch feel that there is too little news about the European Union on television. They feel more often (50%) that the written press provides an objective picture of the EU than the television (41%) or radio (38%).

Where it concerns the European Union, the European Parliament is the best known institution among the Dutch (95%), followed by the European Central Bank (89%), the European Commission (84%), the Council of the European Union (74%), and the Court of Justice of the European Communities (69%). The Dutch are familiar with the European Central Bank more often than the European average. This may be due to the fact that the former President of the European Central Bank is Wim Duisenberg, a Dutchman. Where it concerns the importance of the role of the various institutions, the order is the same. Most people (> 80%) feel that the European Parliament, European

Central Bank, and the European Commission play an important part in the general state of affairs in the European Union. The Council of the European Union and the Court of Justice of the European Communities are felt to have the least important role.

Faith in the European Parliament and Commission has dropped compared to the previous measurement. The previous survey (fall 2004) showed that 63% of Dutch citizens had faith in the European Parliament, and 57% in the European Commission. In the spring of 2005, these figures had dropped to 51% and 49%, respectively. If the faith of the Dutch was above the European average at that time, it is now at the same level as that of the average European. However, the Dutch do have more than average faith in the European Central Bank (69% versus 64%) and the Court of Justice of the European Communities (64% versus 52%).

The Dutch feel, more than average in the EU (71% versus 51%) that the political objectives of the EU do not justify the growth of its budget. This can be explained in the light of the ongoing discussion in the Netherlands on the biggest net payer. 22% of the Dutch feel that the EU should have more resources compared to 32% of Europeans. About one third (35%) of all Dutch feel, incorrectly, that the EU spends most on administrative and personnel costs and buildings. In reality, only 5% of the total EU budget is spent on this. A little over 25% of the Dutch estimates this correctly. They are correct in thinking that the EU spends most on agriculture.

Significance of the European Union in the Netherlands

Three-quarters of all Dutch (77%) feel that it is right that the Netherlands is a member of the European Union. This is well above the European average (54%). Furthermore, two-thirds of all Dutch (67%) feel that, all things considered, the Netherlands benefits from its membership in the European Union. This, too, is well above the European average (55%).

Where it concerns the expansion of the European Union, the Dutch are afraid in particular of the relocation of jobs to other Member States with lower production costs (76%) as well as more trouble with farmers and stockbreeders in their own country (71%). These fears are shared to approximately the same extent by the average European citizen. The Dutch are more afraid than the EU average of a possible loss of influence of the smaller Member States (61% versus 43%). However, they are less afraid that drugs trafficking and international organised crime will increase (44% versus 60%).

The image of the EU is *positive* in both the Netherlands and Europe as a whole. There are more Dutch who have a positive view of the EU (38%) than a negative view (20%). However, the image is *less* positive than the average in the European Union, with the EU inciting a positive image in 47%. Furthermore the percentage of respondents with a positive view of the EU has dropped compared to the previous Eurobarometer (autumn 2004), for both the average European and the Dutch citizen. However, confidence in the EU dropped *faster* in the Netherlands than the EU average. (In the fall of 2004, 45% of Dutch citizens had a positive view compared to a European Union average of 50%).

The Dutch feel that the personal significance of the EU relates primarily to 'the freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the EU' (61%), followed by 'peace' (48%), 'the Euro' and a 'strong influence in the world' (both 45%). The order is the same for the average European, but 'cultural diversity' must be added to the series (all EU citizens mention this as often as 'a strong influence in the world').

Half of all Dutch (51%) believe that the European Union will play a more important part in their lives in five years' time, while only 37% actually wants this. In other words, a Dutch majority feels that the EU's influence should not be extended further.

More than half of all Dutch (>50%) believe that the EU plays a positive part in combating terrorism, protection of the environment, defence and foreign policy, and combating criminality. The EU's role is perceived as negative in price increases and inflation (50%).

Role of the European Union in the world

Three-quarters of the Dutch population believe that Europe will not succeed in becoming the world's most important economic power over the next five years. However, three-quarters are of the opinion that economic conditions in Europe will be better in five years than now. The main measures that must be taken to improve the performance of the European economy are, according to the Dutch, primarily improving education and professional training (73%) and investing in research and innovation (62%).

80% of all Dutch feel that the quality of life is better in Europe than in the United States of America. More than half feel that the Netherlands lag behind the US in terms of scientific research (56%) and medical research (54%). On the other hand, more than 80% of the Dutch believe that Europe is ahead of the US in terms of protecting the environment and combating social inequality. More than 60% feel that Europe is ahead of the US in the field of healthcare, combating discrimination, and combating unemployment. More than half of the Dutch feel that Europe has a more positive role than the US in the field of combating terrorism (70%), world peace (69%), and protecting the environment. The average European agrees with this assessment.

A notable point is that the Dutch are in favour of one European Monetary Union with one currency more often than the European average (71% versus 59%).

More often than the average European, the Dutch feel that the European Union should prioritise actions that would bring Europe closer to the citizens (39%). This is a relatively high percentage compared to the European average of 19%. The complaint about the feeling that Europe is not close enough to the citizen was often heard in the period around the Dutch referendum on the European Constitution. Furthermore the Dutch, more than average in the EU, want to prioritise protection of the environment and safeguarding individual rights, as well as the respect for democratic principles in Europe. *Less often* than the European average, the Dutch believe that combating unemployment should be prioritised (23% versus 47%).

Further expansion of the European Union.

Most Dutch support is in favour of the possible accession of Norway (91%) and Switzerland. Most are against the possible accession of Turkey (39%) and Albania (34%). 49% of the Dutch feel that the differences between Turkey and the EU Member States are (still) too important to allow for accession. Virtually all Dutch (96%) believe that Turkey should systematically respect the human rights to be admitted in 10 years; 86% feel that Turkey will also have to improve its economy significantly.

The European Constitution

The Dutch Referendum on the European Constitution was held during the fieldwork period of this Eurobarometer. The European Constitution was discussed frequently and in detail in the media in this period. In the results, we therefore notice that the Dutch have more knowledge of this subject than the European average.

Virtually all Dutch (97%) have heard about the European Constitution. The Dutch also answer a number of content-related questions about the European Constitution correctly more often than average. Still, 62% say they know little about its content. According to the Eurobarometer figures, 49% of all Dutch are basically in favour of the European Constitution; 43% are against (8% don't know). The result of the Referendum was 61.6% 'No, *against* a European Constitution' and 38.4% 'Yes, *in favour of* a European Constitution'. Research by TNS NIPO shows that one quarter of the people who were basically in favour of a European Constitution in the week before the Referendum, decided to vote against in the end. The Flash EB172 survey entitled 'The European Constitution, Post-Referendum Netherlands' discovered that the main reason for voting against was the lack of information, followed by the fear of losing national sovereignty.

Conclusions

Positive

The Dutch are more satisfied with their situation (their life, financial situation, the social security system and economy in their country) than the average European. Despite the fact that the press often talks about a 'crisis of trust', the Dutch have faith in their national institutions (parliament, government, political parties, legal system) *more* than the European average. The Dutch often believe the quality of life in the European Union to be *better* than in other countries, e.g. the United States of America. Furthermore, the Dutch believe that the economy in Europe is better than that of the USA, also *more* than the average European. Moreover a *majority* of Dutch citizens feel that Europe has a *positive* impact in terms of combating terrorism, protection of the environment, defence

and foreign policy, and combating criminality. *More often* than the European average, the Dutch are *in favour of* one European Monetary Union with one single currency, the Euro. Furthermore the Dutch feel that the Dutch membership of the European Union is a *good thing* more than the European average. They also believe, *more* than the European average, that the Netherlands benefits from its membership in the European Union.

Negative

Compared to the previous Eurobarometer (fall 2004), *faith* in the European Parliament and Commission has *dropped*. At the time of the previous Eurobarometer, their trust was *higher* than the European average; at present it is at the average level.

While the *image* of the EU is still *positive* on balance in the Netherlands, it is *less positive* than the European average. The faith in the European Union is also dropping faster than average. A majority of Dutch citizens do not want the EU to play a more important part in their lives in five years. Still, half of the Dutch citizens think this will happen. The Dutch are against an increase in the budget of the European Union *more often* than the European average. Please note that most Dutch were found *not* to know on what the biggest share of European funds is spent. Only one quarter know that it is spent on agriculture, while one third incorrectly believe that most money goes to administrative and personnel costs and buildings. A majority of the Dutch feel that the policy of the European Union encourages a price increase. *More often* than the average European, the Dutch feel that the European Union should prioritise actions that would bring Europe closer to the citizens. Where it concerns the expansion of the European Union, the Dutch are afraid in particular of the relocation of jobs to other Member States as well as more trouble for Dutch farmers, the loss of influence of smaller Member States, and that our country will have to pay more and more. In June 2005, a majority of the Dutch voted *against* a European Constitution. The main reasons for voting against were the lack of information on the constitution, followed by the fear of losing national sovereignty.

Conclusion

Compared to the average European citizen, the Dutch are clearly serious supporters of the European Union. They are fairly satisfied with a considerable number of aspects. The European Union benefits the Netherlands. And despite the fact that the Dutch believe that Europe encourages price increases, the majority are in favour of one European Monetary Union. Still, there are feelings of fear with regard to an increasing influence of the EU, which many believe to be undesirable. The expansion of the European Union also incites considerable insecurity and fear, such as of the loss of influence and of the fact that the Netherlands will have to pay more. Finally, a majority have an incorrect view of what the European Union does with its money. One third believes, incorrectly, that it is spent on 'bureaucracy'. Finally, the Dutch often feel that Europe is not sufficiently close to the citizen. This was a common complaint in the period of the Dutch Referendum on the European Constitution.

Faith in the European Parliament and Commission is still positive on balance, although it is dropping. One should keep in mind that, if faith in the European institutions is reduced even further, it might put pressure on the positive image.

