

EUROBAROMETER 64

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Autumn 2005

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BELGIUM

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

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

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

Wave 64 of the standard Eurobarometer survey was conducted during autumn 2005, between October 13 and November 6. In the framework of this wave, the Eurobarometer again tackles a number of topics that were covered six months ago and seeks to highlight how Belgian public opinion has evolved with regard to these topics. Among other things, Eurobarometer 64 invites Belgians to give their opinion as to whether a constitution for Europe is necessary. The Eurobarometer 64 also asks Belgians to express their opinion on the possibility of Turkish accession to the European Union and on the Common Agricultural Policy. As a matter of fact, just before the launch of the survey, on October 3, the European Parliament stated that it was in favour of the opening of negotiations with Turkey. As the survey was being carried out, the United Kingdom proposed reviewing the budget allocated to the Common Agricultural Policy in the framework of the 2007-2013 budget negotiations.

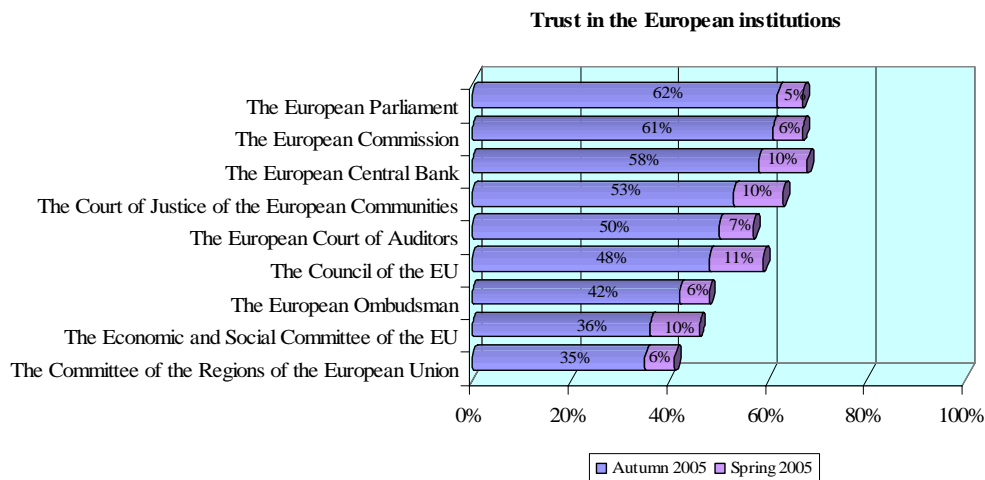
In the following pages, the reader will find a concise presentation of the various topics that were covered in the framework of Eurobarometer 64. The structure of this presentation follows the thematic order of the questions which the Belgians were asked: 1) The climate of Belgian public opinion in autumn 2005; 2) The European Union as seen by Belgians; and 3) Belgians and the European integration process. The main results of the Eurobarometer 64 may be summarized as follows:

- In a general sense, Belgians oppose further enlargement of the European Union to include other countries in future years (50%). More precisely, they are against the accession of Turkey to the European Union (60%).
- Belgians think that a European Constitution is necessary to ensure that the European institutions work well (78%), but in view of the current status of the ratification process, they suggest that the European Constitution should be renegotiated (60%).

1) The Climate of Belgian Public Opinion in autumn 2005

In autumn 2005, Belgians claim they are satisfied with the life they lead (88%), but are concerned about unemployment (52%) and pensions (30%), the two biggest problems that their country is facing. In the last six months, Belgians' concern about pensions has increased noticeably (+19%).

Belgian citizens show more interest in politics than previously (+5%), but still distrust their national institutions. They are more inclined to trust the European institutions, especially the European Parliament (62%) and the European Commission (61%). Their trust in those institutions, which is stronger than the European average, is mitigated by a fall in the figures recorded over the last six months (-5 and -6%, respectively).



Although they distrust their national political institutions and support the European institutions, Belgian citizens consider that the Belgian Government should keep its decision-making power with regard to pensions (80%) and the fight against unemployment (57%). However, Belgians consider that decisions should be made jointly within the European Union for each of the following areas: fighting terrorism (87%), scientific and technological research (78%), defence and foreign policy (78%), protecting the environment (70%), fighting crime (67%), competition policy (66%), support for regions facing economic difficulties (65%), immigration (65%), energy policy (64%), agricultural and fishing policy (63%) and consumer protection (51%). According to the Belgians, the European Union plays a positive role on the

international scene with regard to: protecting the environment (65%), maintaining peace in the world (64%), fighting terrorism (63%), fighting poverty in the world (53%) and fostering the growth of the world economy (51%).

2) The European Union As Seen by Belgian Citizens

Belgians consider that they have an average knowledge of the European Union, but recognize they do not understand very well how it works (52%). In general, Belgians would like to have more information about the European Union (54%). More precisely, the Belgians would like to have information on their rights as European citizens (59%), as well as about the European Union's health and social policy (58%) and employment policy (52%).

When they are looking for information about the European Union, Belgians watch TV (78%), read daily newspapers (50%) or listen to the radio (41%). According to the Belgians, the media talk about the right amount about the European Union and present it objectively. Belgians are in favour of teaching school children about the way EU institutions work (95%).

Belgians' perception of the European Union has altered during the last six months (-11%). While the European Union previously conjured up a positive image for 56% of Belgians, it now does so only for 45% of them. For the Belgians, the European Union means the euro (62%) and the freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the EU (56%).

In comparison with the previous wave of the Eurobarometer, Belgians are less inclined to see the European Union as a source of peace (-11%) and economic prosperity (-8%). On the contrary, a larger number of them think that the European Union represents the euro (+5%), a stronger say in the world (+4%), but also a waste of money (+4%) and not enough control at the external borders (+3%).

More than anything else, the European Union gives a feeling of hope to Belgians (47%). In a lesser way, the European Union also gives them the feelings of trust (28%), anxiety (25%), indifference (22%) and mistrust (19%). Since the previous wave of the Eurobarometer, Belgians are less confident (-4%) and more worried (+3%) vis-à-vis the European Union.

Taking everything into account, Belgians think that their country's membership of the European Union is a good thing (59%) and that it has benefited from being a member (65%), among other things, with regard

to exports (79%), the country's security (74%) and the standard of living (61%). However, Belgians are less inclined to consider their country's EU membership favourably than in the previous survey (-8%). As a matter of fact, they trust the European institutions less (from -5 to -11%), even if their support remains stronger than average.

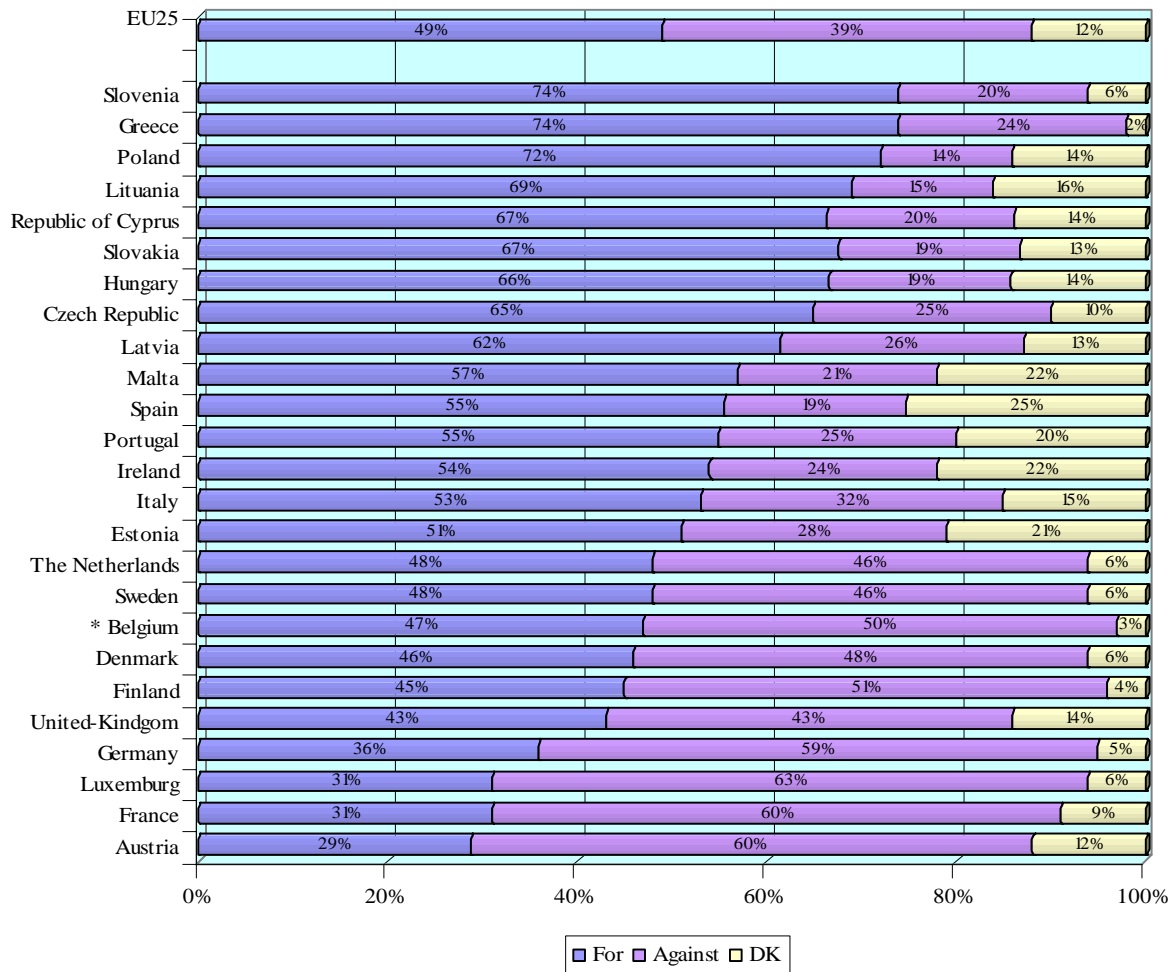
Belgians say that the Common Agricultural Policy plays its role fairly well in ensuring that agricultural products are healthy and safe (75%) and in protecting the environment (68%). They regret that this policy does not manage to ensure stable and adequate incomes for farmers though (51%).

3) Belgians and the European Integration Process

Some Belgians have fears about European integration: these include the transfer of jobs to other Member Countries which have lower production costs (86%), more difficulties for farmers (80%), a larger budget contribution (70%), an increase in drug trafficking and international organised crime (70%), an economic crisis (61%) and a loss of power for smaller Member States (54%).

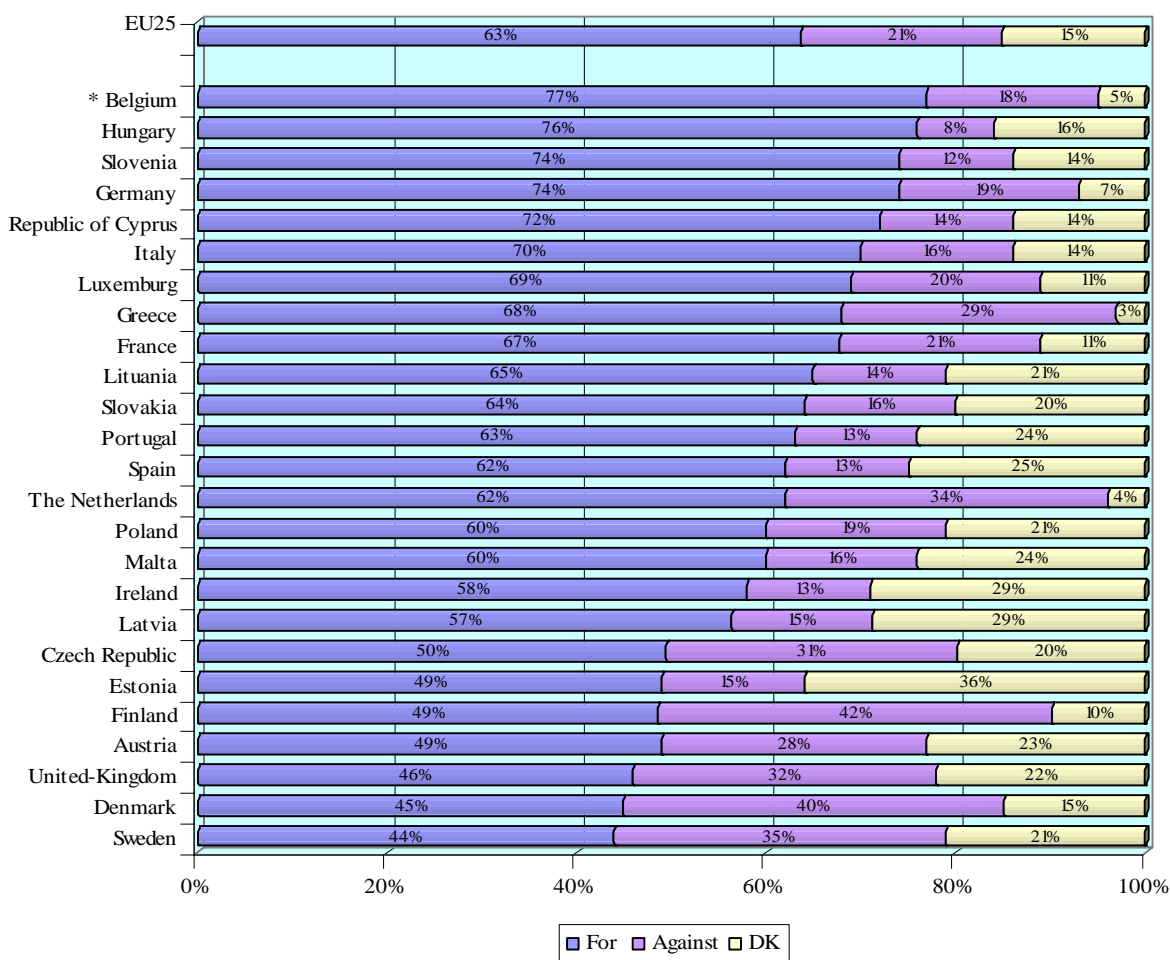
Overall, Belgians are against further enlargement of the EU to include other countries in future years (50%). More precisely, they oppose Turkey's accession to the European Union (60%). They fear that the accession of Turkey would favour immigration to more developed countries in the European Union (67%). In addition, they consider that the cultural differences between Turkey and the EU Member States are too significant to allow for this accession (62%).

Opinion on further enlargement of the EU to include other countries in future years



Belgians think that a European constitution is necessary to ensure that the European institutions work well (78%) and anticipate that if all Member States adopt the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, it will make the running of the European Union more transparent (79%), more efficient (79%) and more transparent (69%). In addition, it would make the European Union stronger in the world (82%), more competitive economically (73%) and more socially-minded (67%). In view of the current state of the ratification process, Belgians suggest, however, that the Constitution should be renegotiated (60%).

Support for a constitution for the European Union



According to Belgians (61%), decisions regarding the European defence policy should be made within the European Union. They also support the development of a common foreign policy among the Member States of the EU towards other countries (77%).

Lastly, the Belgians stress that in the next ten or fifteen years it will be important to fight rising prices (41%), to give people more say in important Government decisions (22%) and maintain order in the country (22%). They also indicate that the priorities the European Union should follow are the fight against unemployment (56%), the fight against poverty and social exclusion (53%) and the protection of the environment (27%).