

EUROBAROMETER 64

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

AUTUMN 2005

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FRANCE

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

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 64 public opinion poll surveyed 1009 people between October 11th and November 7th, 2005).

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 national and European institutions.

Chapter 3 focuses on the European Union's image according to French public opinion.

Chapter 4 deals with information about the European Union.

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

Chapter 6 is about the future of European integration.

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

1. THE CLIMATE OF OPINION

- 65% (+1) of the French are quite satisfied and 16% (-3) very satisfied with the life they lead. Only 14% (+1) are not very satisfied and 5% (+2) not at all satisfied with their personal situation.
- Expectations for the next twelve months are still quite pessimistic: 51% of the French expect the economic situation of their country to become worse and 49% feel that unemployment will increase. 35% think their current situation has worsened in the last five years.
- 46% of the French feel their personal situation will improve in the next five years, 32% that it will remain the same and only 19% expect it to worsen.
- The main issues France is facing at the moment are unemployment (52%), crime (26%), the economic situation (25%) and inflation (24%).
- 85% of the French are quite worried (40%) or very worried (45%) about the future of the pensions system.

2. THE FRENCH AND THE EU

- 13% of respondents are “very proud” and 54% “quite proud” of being European.
- 54% see themselves as “French and European” and 8% as “European and French” in the near future.
- Less than half of the people interviewed in France (46%) think that European Union membership is a good thing for their country, which represents a drop of 5 points. For 36% (+6%) of the French, it is nor “good or bad”, and for 15% (-1%) it is a bad thing.
- Furthermore, 51% (-2) consider their country has benefited from being a member of the European Union, while 38% (+4) think the opposite and 11% (-2) do not know. 71% think membership had a fairly bad (53%) or a very bad (18%) effect on employment in France and 53% a fairly bad (42%) or a very bad (11%) effect on French agriculture.

3. THE IMAGE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

- Less than one Frenchman out of two (46%, -2) has a fairly good (40%, =) or very good (6%, -2) image of the EU; 24% (+6) have a fairly bad (19%, +1) or a very bad (5%, =) image of it.
- When asked what Europe means to them personally, 52% answer freedom to travel, work and study in a foreign country, 45% peace and the euro and 38% cultural diversity.
- 76% of the French are in favour of the common currency, 21% oppose it, while 3% do not know. These results are identical to those of EB 63.
- The EU gives a feeling of hope to 44% of the French, a feeling of anxiety to 36% and a feeling of mistrust to 34%. French opinion is thus the most anxious after the Austrian one and the most mistrusting after the Swedish one.
- The French mainly fear the transfer of jobs to other EU countries (89%) and more difficulties for French farmers (77%).
- Only 28% (-5) of the French trust the national Parliament, 23% (-1) the national government and 9% (-5) political parties.
- The popularity of international organisations hasn’t changed since the last survey: 47% (-3) of the French tend to trust the United Nations and 41% (+2) the European Union.

- A large majority of the French population has heard of the European Parliament (91%), of the Commission (85%), of the European Central Bank (66%) and of the Council of Ministers (65%).

4. BEING INFORMED ON THE EUROPEAN UNION

- 85% of the French agree that the national government and 83% the European Commission should give more information on European issues. The main areas of interest are rights of European citizens (54%), employment policies (49%) and health and social affairs (48%).
- To get information about the EU, respondents mainly use television (63%), newspapers (40%), radio (34%) and discussion with friends and relatives (33%).
- The Internet is used by 27% of respondents, which should be compared with the 8% recorded in October 2001.
- The French consider that the most objective European information is given by the press (42%) and by the radio (40%), whereas 27% consider the television presents the European Union too positively.
- One Frenchman out of four (26%) continues to believe that administrative costs represent the main budget heading for the European Union. Agriculture represents the main area of budget spending for 21% and foreign policy for 19% of respondents.

5. THE EU's ROLE IN THE WORLD

- Support for a common security and defence policy (83%, +2) is stable and support for a common foreign policy (71%, +6) remains at a very high level.
- 5% of the French feel that the single market had a very positive, 48% a fairly positive, 20% a fairly negative and 6% a very negative effect.
- Furthermore, for 59% of the French, the word “globalization” is mainly linked to the relocation of some companies to countries where labour is cheaper; for 15% to greater competition for French enterprises. These figures exceed the EU25 averages by 22 and 3 points respectively. Only a small minority see positive aspects of globalization, such as opportunities for national enterprises (10%) and foreign investments in France (8%).
- Only 14% of respondents think the United States play a positive role regarding peace in the world, 9% regarding the fight against poverty in the world and 8% regarding environmental protection.

- In these three fields, the role of the EU is perceived in a positive way by 68%, 44% and 61% of respondents respectively.

6. THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

- The idea of European political union is supported by 52% of respondents, which represents a decrease by 2 points since the last survey.
- More than ever, combating unemployment is the top priority for the European Union (57%): this figure is higher by 14 points compared to the EU-25 average (43%). The other priorities are fighting against poverty and exclusion (53%), preserving peace in Europe (28%) and protecting the environment (28%).
- In spite of the “no” to the constitutional treaty (May 29th), 68% of the French still support the idea of a European Constitution. Support has increased by 8 points since the last survey. Furthermore, 68% of respondents feel a European constitution is necessary for the smooth running of the European institutions.
- After the “no” victory, 65% of the French think the Constitution should be renegotiated, 15% that it should be abandoned and 14% that the other member States should continue its ratification.
- One French person in two (53%) is against “the speed of building Europe being faster in one group than in other countries”, whereas 30% are in favour of it (17% do not know).

7. SUPPORT FOR FUTURE ENLARGEMENT

- The level of support for further enlargement of the EU remains one of the lowest in Europe: 31% of the French are in favour of it and 60% oppose it. Only inhabitants of Austria and Luxembourg are more opposed to enlargement than the French.
- There is far stronger support for the accession of Norway (80%), Switzerland (76%) and Iceland (70%) than for the new accession countries, such as Bulgaria (45% for, 42% against), Croatia (43% for, 44% against) and Romania (41% for, 46% against).
- Support for enlargement to Turkey remains very low: only 21% (=) of the French are in favour and 68% oppose it.

