

# EUROBAROMETER 64

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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### NATIONAL REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY THE NETHERLANDS

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## Summary and Conclusions

### Dutch context

The majority (95%) of Dutch citizens are happy with the life they are leading. The Dutch are satisfied more often than the average citizen European Union countries.

In terms of their expectations for the future, the Dutch are most positive about the short term. The majority (88%) of the Dutch expect to be able to continue their job at least over the next few months. They find it more difficult to predict the medium and long term as far as their life in general, the financial situation of their household, their work situation, employment in general in the Netherlands, and the economic situation in the Netherlands are concerned.

Overall, people are confident that things will remain the same. After that, the majority of the Dutch expect that the situation will *improve* in the medium term in terms of their life in general, employment in their country, and their own work situation. In relation to the economic situation of the Netherlands, the next largest group (after those not expecting any changes) expects that the situation will deteriorate. In relation to the financial situation of their household, about the same number of people (after those not expecting any changes) expect that the situation will either deteriorate or improve. In the longer term, most of the Dutch expect that their situation will remain the same and (38%) expect that their situation will improve.

The expectations of the Dutch for the medium and longer term coincide largely with those of Europeans as a whole. Compared to the average, the Dutch are a little more pessimistic in their expectations regarding the financial situation of their own household, but somewhat more optimistic about employment in their country in the medium term.

The Dutch have more confidence in their national institutions than the average European citizen. Their levels of trust are highest in charities and voluntary organisations, the police and the radio.

The Dutch feel that the most important issues for the Netherlands at this time are combating terrorism (40%), health care (37%), the economic situation (35%), and combating criminality. The main priorities for the next 5 to 10 years are protecting the freedom of expression and maintaining public order in the Netherlands.

### The European Union: Information, Knowledge and Trust

To keep up with the news, the Dutch use the television as their primary source of information. Three-quarters of the Dutch (74%) watch the news every day, followed by those who read the newspaper (61%) and those who listen to the radio (54%). The Dutch read the newspaper every day - more often than the average in Europe.

Two-thirds of the Dutch (65%) feel that there is too little news about the European Union on television. They feel that an objective picture of the EU is more often provided by the written press (52%) than by the television (44%) or radio (39%).

Half of the Dutch (51%) say they understand how the EU works. This is higher than the European average (41%). A minority (33%) of Dutch citizens are happy with their knowledge of the EU. The Dutch would mainly like more information about their rights as European citizens, health care and social policy in the European Union, education, and employment.

Where the European Union is concerned, the European Parliament is the best-known institution among the Dutch (94%), followed by the European Central Bank (85%), and the European Commission (81%). The Dutch are familiar with the European Central Bank more often than the European average.

Trust in the European Parliament and the European Commission has, in comparison with the previous measurements, now stabilised, after a decline in confidence. Approximately half of the Dutch trust the European Parliament and Commission, which is comparable to the rest of the European Union. Trust in the European Central Bank, however, is declining. Whereas 72% of Dutch citizens had a positive view of the ECB in the fall of 2004, this has now dropped to 65%. Nevertheless, this is still higher than average (44%).

The Dutch feel, more than average in the EU (63% versus 49%) that the political objectives of the EU do not justify a growth in its budget. One quarter (25%) of the Dutch feel that the EU should have more resources compared to 32% of European citizens overall. One third (33%) of all Dutch feel, incorrectly, that the EU spends most of its budget on administrative and personnel costs and buildings. In reality, only 5% of the total EU budget is spent on this. Three out of ten Dutch are correct in thinking that the EU spends most on agriculture.

## Significance of Europe in the Netherlands

Six out of ten citizens of the Netherlands (58%) sometimes consider themselves to be European citizens, in addition to being Dutch citizens. Roughly six out of ten (57%) expect that in the near future they will consider themselves as European citizens, as well as Dutch.

Seven out of ten Dutch citizens (70%) feel that it is right that the Netherlands is a member of the European Union. This is higher than the European average (61%), but less than in the previous survey (77%). Furthermore, nearly two-thirds (61%) feel that, all things considered, the Netherlands does benefit from its membership of the European Union. This, too, is higher than the European average (52%), but less than in the previous survey (67%).

Where the expansion of the European Union is concerned, the Dutch are, in particular, afraid of the relocation of jobs to other Member States with lower production costs (71%), as well as of more trouble for farmers and stockbreeders in their own country (74%). The Dutch have a greater fear than the EU average about a possible loss of influence of the smaller Member States and of trouble with farmers. However, they are less afraid of a possible increase in drugs trafficking (51% versus 65%) and international organised crime (33% versus 52%).

The image of the EU is, on the whole, *positive* in both the Netherlands and Europe. There are more Dutch citizens who have a positive view of the EU (41%) than a negative view (25%). However, the image is *less* positive than the average in the European Union, with the EU generating a positive image in the eyes of 44% (on average) of the populations of the other countries. In the previous survey (spring of 2005), the image of the EU among Dutch citizens had deteriorated (38%) compared to the survey before that, when 45% of the Dutch still had a positive view of the EU. It would now appear that the EU's reputation in the Netherlands is starting to improve again. However, since autumn 2004, the EU's reputation throughout the EU member states has been deteriorating: from 50% with a positive view to 47% in the spring of 2005, to 44% in the current survey.

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 'the euro' (50%) and a 'stronger influence in the world' (47%). For the average European, the 'freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in Europe' is the most important issue (50%), although less pronounced than in the Netherlands. For the average European, the euro (38%) and 'peace' are the next most important implications of the EU (32%).

For most Dutch citizens, the European Union evokes a sense of hope (38%) or trust (33%).

## Role of the European Union

Eight out of ten Dutch (79%) feel that the quality of life is better in Europe than in the United States of America. About half feel that the Netherlands lags behind the US in terms of

scientific research (54%) and medical research (43%). 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. Furthermore, half or more of the Dutch feel that Europe plays a more positive role than the US in the field of combating terrorism (66%), maintaining world peace (64%), protecting the environment (58%), the growth of the world economy (58%), and combating poverty in the world (49%). The average European agrees with this assessment.

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 (71%) and investing in research and innovation (53%).

Over half of the Dutch (55%) believe that the safety of their food is guaranteed thanks to the EU's agriculture and stockbreeding policy.

Other often-quoted effects of the European agriculture policy are guarantees of good-quality, healthy food at a reasonable price. The highest priority of the European agriculture policy is to ensure that farmers have a stable and adequate income. The Dutch, more than the rest of the Europeans, feel that promoting organic production methods and protecting the welfare of animals in agriculture and stockbreeding should have a high priority.

More *often* than the average European, the Dutch feel that the European Union should prioritise actions that would bring Europe closer to its citizens (37%). This is a relatively high percentage compared to the European average of 17%. A relatively large number of Dutch citizens also advocate a reorganisation of the European institutions. Furthermore, the Dutch, more so than the EU25 average, want to prioritise the battle against terrorism and the safeguarding of individual rights, as well as the respect for democratic principles in Europe.

Over three-quarters of the Dutch feel that decision-making about combating terrorism, supporting areas with economic difficulties, protecting the environment and scientific and technological research should occur at European level.

## **Further expansion of the European Union**

According to most of the Dutch, the current expansion of the European Union is proceeding at an acceptable rate. Opinions about further expansion are divided: half (48%) of the Dutch population is in favour of further expansion, while a roughly equivalent group (46%) is against.

Most of the Dutch support the possible accession of Norway, Switzerland and Iceland. There is least support for the possible accession of Albania. Nearly half of all Dutch citizens (46%) believe that the differences between Turkey and the EU Member States are too important to permit accession. However, an equivalent group feels that accession will, on the contrary, stimulate understanding between European and Islamic values. Virtually all Dutch citizens

(95%) believe that, in order to facilitate admission within 10 years, Turkey should more systematically respect the laws concerning human rights; 83% feel that Turkey will also have to improve its economy significantly.

### **Common Policy and the European Constitution**

At least half of all respondents in the Netherlands are in favour of a common European policy in the field of defence and security (82%), monetary union (71%), foreign affairs (69%), and a possible political union (51%). Compared to Europe as a whole, the Dutch are more positive in terms of the monetary union (60% European average), but less positive in relation to a political union (55% European average).

The attitude of the Dutch in terms of a European Constitution seems to be improving. In this survey, 62% of the Dutch were found to be in favour of a European Constitution, roughly the same percentage as for Europe as a whole (63%). A majority of the Dutch feel that a European Constitution will make Europe stronger, more efficient, more democratic, more competitive, and more transparent.

However, despite these positive words, support for a continuation of the ratification process in the Netherlands is below average. The Dutch have a tendency to believe that the European Constitution should be re-negotiated more than the average European citizen.

## Conclusions

### Positive

The great majority of Dutch citizens are happy with the life they are leading, more so than the rest of the European Union. Those who expect a change in their own situation in the medium term usually expect an improvement in terms of their life in general, employment in their country and their own work situation.

The majority of the Dutch feel that the quality of life is better in Europe than in the United States of America. They also believe that Europe is ahead of the US in terms of protecting the environment, combating social inequality, providing health care, combating discrimination, and combating unemployment. Furthermore, half or more of the Dutch feel that Europe has a more positive role than the US in the field of combating terrorism, furthering world peace, encouraging the growth of the world economy and combating poverty in the world.

Despite the fact that the press often talks about a ‘crisis of trust’, the Dutch have *more* trust in their national institutions (parliament, government, political parties, legal system) than the European average.

The majority of the Dutch feel that EU membership is a good thing and that the Netherlands ultimately benefits from its membership, more so than the European average. However, these positive feelings have decreased since the previous survey.

Trust in the European Parliament and the European Commission has now stabilised after a decline, in comparison to the previous survey. Approximately half of the Dutch trust the European Parliament and Commission, which is comparable to the rest of the European Union.

The image of the EU is *positive* in both the Netherlands and Europe as a whole. It also appears that the EU’s reputation in the Netherlands is starting to improve once again after a drop recorded in the previous survey. For most Dutch citizens, the European Union inspires a sense of hope (38%) or faith (33%).

At least half of all citizens are in favour of one common European policy in the field of defence and security, the monetary union, foreign affairs, and a possible common political union.

## Negative

Faith in the European Central Bank is higher than average in the Netherlands, but it has been deteriorating since autumn 2004.

The Dutch feel, more than the average EU citizen, that the political objectives of the EU do not justify increasing its budget. This can be explained in the light of the ongoing discussion in the Netherlands regarding the biggest net payer.

One-third of all Dutch feel, incorrectly, that the EU spends most of its budget on administrative and personnel costs and buildings. In reality, only 5% of the total EU budget is spent on this.

Concerning the expansion of the European Union, the Dutch are, in particular, afraid of the relocation of jobs to other Member States with lower production costs. The Dutch are more afraid than the EU average of a possible loss of influence of the smaller Member States and of problems for Dutch farmers.

More *often* than the average European, the Dutch feel that the European Union should prioritise actions that would bring Europe closer to its citizens. The complaint that Europe is not close enough to the citizen was often heard in the period around the Dutch referendum on the European Constitution. A relatively large number of Dutch also advocate a reorganisation of the European institutions.

According to most of the Dutch, the current expansion of the European Union is proceeding at an acceptable rate. Opinions about further expansion are divided, however: about the same number of Dutch are in favour of further expansion as against it.

The attitude of the Dutch in terms of a European Constitution seems to be improving. However, despite these positive words, support in the Netherlands for a continuation of the ratification process is below average. More than their counterparts in the rest of Europe, the Dutch believe that the European Constitution should be re-negotiated.



## **Conclusion**

Compared to the average European citizen, the Dutch are clearly strong supporters of the European Union. They are fairly satisfied with a considerable number of aspects. The European Union benefits the Netherlands. The Dutch express their support for a common policy in many fields. Support for a European Constitution seems to be increasing. This might be due to increased knowledge among the citizens as a result of the attention devoted to the subject since the referendum.

Nevertheless, there are feelings of fear with regard to an increasing influence of the EU, which many believe to be undesirable. A majority of the Dutch have an incorrect view of what the European Union does with its money. One-third believes, incorrectly, that it is spent on 'bureaucracy'. The expansion of the European Union also evokes considerable insecurity and fear, such as the fear of the loss of influence and jobs, and the fear that the Netherlands will have to pay more. Lastly, the Dutch often feel that Europe is not sufficiently close to the citizen.