



Standard Eurobarometer



European  
Commission

# EUROBAROMETER 64

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

## AUTUMN 2005

NATIONAL REPORT  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  
UNITED KINGDOM

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The main data making up this EB64 report were gathered between 11 October and 15 November 2005 from a sample comprised 1,320 persons, 48% being male and 52% female. 98% of those polled were British.

All socio-economic data in this executive summary refers to the UK alone.

When levels of life satisfaction were reviewed, there was no change in general sentiments across the EU and 80% of those polled in the 25 Member States were broadly satisfied with the life they lead.

Across the European Union, 49% of those questioned believe their life in general would be the same over the next twelve months – a figure similar to the 51% six months previously while 35% believed it would be better.

Once again, UK citizens are noticeably more optimistic than the EU average about the future with nearly half (49%) believing life would be better. This is a substantial increase on the 42% noted six months previously and is, in fact, the highest figure in the 25 EU Member States.

### **Trust**

While the UK figures of those tending not to trust the press at 76% are still substantially higher than the EU averages and represent more than three-quarters (76%) of the UK sample, they show an improvement on the 82% noted six months previously.

There was virtual unanimous mistrust of political parties across the EU25 and the UK and more than three out of four (76%) of EU25 citizens tended not to trust them. Particularly strong changes in attitude over the past six months were seen in Denmark where the proportion of people trusting these institutions fell from 51% to 35% over this short period.

Falls from 30% to 24% were also seen in Belgium, 22% to 14% in the UK and, in France, where trust levels were already at a low 14%, a further deterioration to 9% was noted.

Governments across the EU, although relatively mistrusted, can congratulate themselves that they are more trusted than political parties. However, in France, Poland and the Czech Republic, nearly three-quarters (71%) of those polled did not trust their governments and, in Slovakia, this figure rises to 78%.

### **Decision Making**

Overall, it can be seen that the UK is keener to retain the decision-making process within the country than to share it within the EU.

However, on some issues (fighting terrorism, protecting the environment, scientific research and development and support for regions facing economic difficulties), there is strong UK support for shared decision-making.

### **Am I a European?**

While 17% of EU25 citizens often think of themselves as European in addition to their own nationality, this is a sentiment felt by less than half this number (8%) of UK citizens. However, in Luxembourg, the largest proportion of those polled (38%) often considered themselves to be European as well.

At the other end of the scale, two-thirds of the British poll (66%) never considers themselves to be European compared with just 42% across the 25 states of the Union and 28% in Luxembourg.

Nearly two-thirds (63%) of the UK poll saw themselves as being just British while half this number (31%) saw themselves as being British and European.

These figures are in stark contrast to the EU25 averages where half (48%) of the total poll consider themselves to be both a national of their own country and a European and a smaller proportion (41%) consider themselves to be just citizens of their home country.

Slightly less than half (46%) of EU25 citizens were very proud of their nationality, although this statistic conceals figures that range from 80% in Greece to 19% in Germany. In the UK, this figure is 61% - an increase of four percentage points from the 57% noted in August 2004.

Across the European Union, 12% of those polled were very proud to be European. This is a noticeable and perhaps significant fall from the 16% noted a year ago.

9% held the totally contrary view and said they were not at all proud to be European - an increase of just one percentage point over the same period.

In the UK, however, a totally different view prevails. Just 5% of those polled said they were very proud to be European while four times as many (21%) said that they were not at all proud to be described in this way. These figures compare with the 9% and 18% figures recorded a year previously and mirror the broad decline across the EU25 noted above.

### **Does my opinion count?**

Across both the UK and the European Union in general, there was an increase in the percentage of those polled who believed that their opinion had no relevance to the running of the EU.

Accordingly, this negative view was now held by 59% of EU25 citizens (an increase from 53% six months previously) and three-quarters (74%) of UK citizens - also a noticeable increase from the 65% recorded in the spring of 2005.

The great majority of EU citizens felt that they were not strongly involved in European affairs. While the average figure across the EU25 was nearly three-quarters (72%) of those polled, in the UK, this figure rises as high as 85%.

However, there is a glimmer of hope in that nearly half (47%) of the EU25 poll and more than a third (36%) of the UK sample agreed that they would like to be more involved in European affairs but did not know how to go about it.

### **The UK Presidency**

While the fieldwork for this survey was being undertaken, the UK held the six-month Presidency of the European Union. It is interesting therefore to look at the responses given to two questions (Q A29 a and b) asked only in the United Kingdom.

When respondents were asked whether they had either read in the newspapers or heard on the radio or television anything about the United Kingdom's Presidency, half of the poll (50%) stated that they had heard nothing. With 4% saying they did not know, only 46% of those polled gave an affirmative answer.

The sample was then asked, irrespective of whether respondents had heard about the Presidency, whether it thought it was important that the UK held this role and 67% of the UK sample viewed this as important.

### **Membership of the EU: a good thing?**

Although relatively high when looking at broadly comparable figures over the past ten years, the 50% of EU25 citizens seeing their country's membership of the European Union as being a good thing shows a fall from the 54% noted six months ago and the 56% recorded a year ago.

The UK figures mirror this decline and, over the past twelve months, the figures have fallen from 38% to 36% to now reach 34% in the current survey.

An analysis of the broad results which shows just a third (34%) of the UK poll sees membership of the EU as a good thing produces some widely varying data.

Men (37%) are noticeably more enthusiastic about the EU than women (30%). In addition, 44% of people between the ages of 15 and 24 see it as being a good thing. This figure reduces steadily with age so that only 27% of people over 55 share this view.

An even greater disparity is shown when levels of education are reviewed. Nearly half (48%) of the best educated group in the poll see EU membership as being a good thing. This group also has 32% of its number taking the neutral view of the EU being neither good nor bad, with just 16% seeing it as a bad thing.

When the feelings of the least educated are analysed, 41% see the EU as a bad thing, 29% are neutral and just 19% see the EU as being a good thing.

Across the EU, 52% of those polled believe that their country had benefited from being a member of the European Union. This figure is down from the 55% noted six months previously and the 53% twelve months ago.

This average figure, once again, conceals substantial country-by-country variations which range from 86% in Ireland to 32% in Sweden.

### **Membership of the EU: has the country benefited?**

Over the past 18 months, the number of UK citizens believing the country has benefited from EU membership has moved erratically. The figures grew steadily from 30% to 39% and to 40% before slipping back in this latest survey to 37%.

Once again, noticeably more men (40%) than women (33%) held this opinion.

And, once again, positive views are more likely to be held by young people with more than half (51%) of those aged 15-24 taking this position compared with just 34% of those aged 40-54 and 30% of those aged 55 and more.

Education is also a key driver with 50% of the most educated supporting the positive viewpoint compared with less than half (22%) of this figure when the same question is posed to the people who left school aged 15 or less.

### **Do I know about the EU?**

Making up the largest proportion (41%) of UK citizens expressing an opinion on this issue were those who were happy with their knowledge level relating to the European Union.

This group comprised 44% of men compared with just 38% of women. A marked variation in attitude on this issue was also observed by age and education. While this view was held by 53% of the least educated, the figure falls to just 35% of those educated to 20 or more.

Younger people were also less happy with their knowledge level on the European Union. While more than half (53%) of those aged 55 or more were happy with what they already knew on the EU, people aged between 15 and 24 were keen to have further information and only a third (33%) of their number were happy with the extent of their knowledge.

This concern by younger as well as better educated people is also shown in the broad desire for more information. This is a wish of virtually half (46%) of the youngest group compared with a modest 30% of those aged 55 or more. Similar figures are demonstrated on the basis of education with just 27% of those who left school at 15 compared with half (49%) of those educated to 20 or beyond expressing a desire for more information on the European Union.

Across the EU 11% of those polled spontaneously said that they never looked for information about the European Union or were not interested. In the UK however this figure has increased over the past six months by one percentage point and is a response now given by 28% of those polled.

### **Sources of Information**

Of those who actually seek information, the most popular source across the EU is television although this is used by considerably more EU25 citizens than in the UK with figures of 66% and 47% respectively.

Daily newspapers continue to be the second most popular choice with figures of 42% (EU25) / 37% (UK) and radio (EU25:30% / UK: 24%) is in third position.

On the other hand, use of the internet as an EU information source has slipped noticeably in the UK since EB 63. While in the spring of 2005 it was used by 30% of UK citizens compared with 22% of the EU25, in this latest survey the figures were 20% in the UK and 22% for the EU25 - a fall of a third in the British figures.

Use of the internet to obtain information on the European Union was very much focused on the young and better educated. Accordingly 29% of those aged 15 to 24 and a similar 28% of the most educated used the internet for this purpose. These

figures can be compared with just 8% of both the oldest group and the least educated.

### **Trust in European Bodies**

Half (50%) of the UK poll don't trust the **European Commission** and this figure is sharply up from the 38% noted just six months previously.

Trust levels decreased with age so while trust in the European Commission was 32% for those aged 15-24, it falls to just 19% for UK citizens aged 55 or more.

Education was a significant factor in this area with 33% of the most educated tending to trust the Commission compared with just 15% of those who had left school aged 15 or younger.

Over the past six months, trust levels towards the **European Parliament** fell by one percentage point across the European Union and by a substantial eight points in the UK.

While half (51%) of EU25 citizens trust the European Parliament, in the UK, this figure has fallen to just over one in four (27%) of those polled.

Making up the 27% figure of those trusting the European Parliament were 30% of the male poll compared with just 25% of the female.

And, once again, it is noted that age has a substantial bearing on this issue. While 41% of 15-24 year olds trusted the European Parliament, this figure falls to just 22% among people older than 55.

Higher levels of education again had an effect on trust levels with just 17% of those who left school aged 15 or less expressing trust compared with twice this number (34%) of those educated to age 20 or above.

### **Understanding how the EU works**

More than half of EU citizens (52%) and 62% of those polled in the UK say that they do not understand how the EU works.

While there were no clear patterns by age, education was a key factor. 27% of the least educated compared with 43% of the most educated claimed they understood how the EU worked.

### **European Political Union**

In the UK, more than half of those polled are against the development towards a European political union and, over the past six months, this figure has grown from 50% to 53%. This is the second highest figure in the EU – just one percentage point less than in Sweden.

While a substantial majority (43%) of younger people aged 15 to 24 were favourable to developments towards a European political union, this figure decreases with age so that only 18% of people over 55 give this their support.

Yet again, education is a key element in attitude with the better educated in favour of this development.

### **The European Constitution**

13% of the EU25 poll and a quarter (25%) of that conducted in the UK believe that the European Constitution should be dropped.

However, nearly half (49%) of EU25 citizens believe the Constitution should be renegotiated – a view shared with the largest proportion (41%) of the UK poll.

This average figure includes 45% of respondents aged 15 to 54, but only 32% of those aged 55 or more.

Making up the sample of those who had left school earliest were 40% who were in favour of dropping the Constitution compared with just 17% of those educated to age 20 or beyond.

### **The Euro**

The UK figures remain unchanged since EB63 in the spring of 2005 with virtually two-thirds (64%) of those polled against the idea of a single currency.

While no clear patterns emerged by age or gender on this issue, there is a substantial difference between the 44% of the most educated who are 'for' the euro compared to just 19% of those who left school aged 15 or before.

### **Common foreign Policy**

When looking at the question of the EU member states adopting a common policy towards other countries, the UK figures show a noticeable and positive change since the last Eurobarometer in that the 'don't know' factor decreases from 18% to 16%, those against decrease from 38% to 34% with the ensuing result that half (50%) of the UK poll are now for this common foreign policy compared with 44% just six months previously.

Strong support for this initiative is seen amongst 15-24 years olds (55%) and the most educated (61%). This support for matters European from young UK citizens is noted constantly throughout EB64 and gives hope for the future.

### **Common defence policy**

On the issue of a common defence and security policy, the majority (59%) of the UK poll gave its support as did more than three-quarters (77%) across the EU25.

Over the past six months, UK opinion has become less open to enlargement. In the previous Eurobarometer report 48% of those polled were for further enlargement of the EU, while 39% were against it. These figures are now identical at 43%.

While only 25% of people over 55 are in favour of enlargement, the figure rises to 63% of those aged 15-24.

A similar wide variation is seen by education with just 28% of the least educated in favour of this action compared with nearly half (49%) of those educated to age 20 or above.

### **Enlargement**

Over the past six months, there has been a noticeable change in the UK's attitude to new members of the European Union with a less welcoming stance being adopted.

Six months ago, in the previous Eurobarometer survey, a majority of the UK poll was in favour of eleven of the twelve countries cited becoming part of the EU in the future and on the twelfth the decision was equally divided. Only six months later, just eight of the countries gain the approval of the UK poll.