

EUROBAROMETER 67

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Spring 2007

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Belgium

Introduction

This Eurobarometer survey was conducted in Belgium between 10 April and 15 May 2007. During this period, the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome is being celebrated in the European Union and the German Presidency increases its efforts to make the European constitutional process go forward. In Belgium, the population is about to vote for the federal elections on 10 June 2007.

The main results of this survey are described below. They relate to the tendency indicators which are usually used in the framework of the Standard Eurobarometer, but also to a number of new themes. Among other things, the Standard Eurobarometer 67 investigates, for the first time, if the Belgians feel they are well informed about European political affairs. The answers given by the Belgian respondents in this regard will be examined with particular attention.

1. The climate of Belgian public opinion

During spring 2007, **the Belgians are interested in politics in general (67%), but do not feel very much involved in European affairs (70%)**. At regional level, a clear disparity can be observed between, on the one hand, Flanders (72%) and Wallonia (75%), where this situation predominates, and, on the other, the region of Brussels-Capital, where a majority of respondents show the opposite tendency (56%). **Unemployment is still the main concern of the Belgian population (39%)**. Nevertheless, Belgians complain less often about difficulties related to their job situation (-7 points since autumn 2006) and the economic situation (-12 points since spring 2006). If Belgians are less preoccupied by social issues, **they are becoming increasingly aware of environmental threats (+9 points since autumn 2006)**.

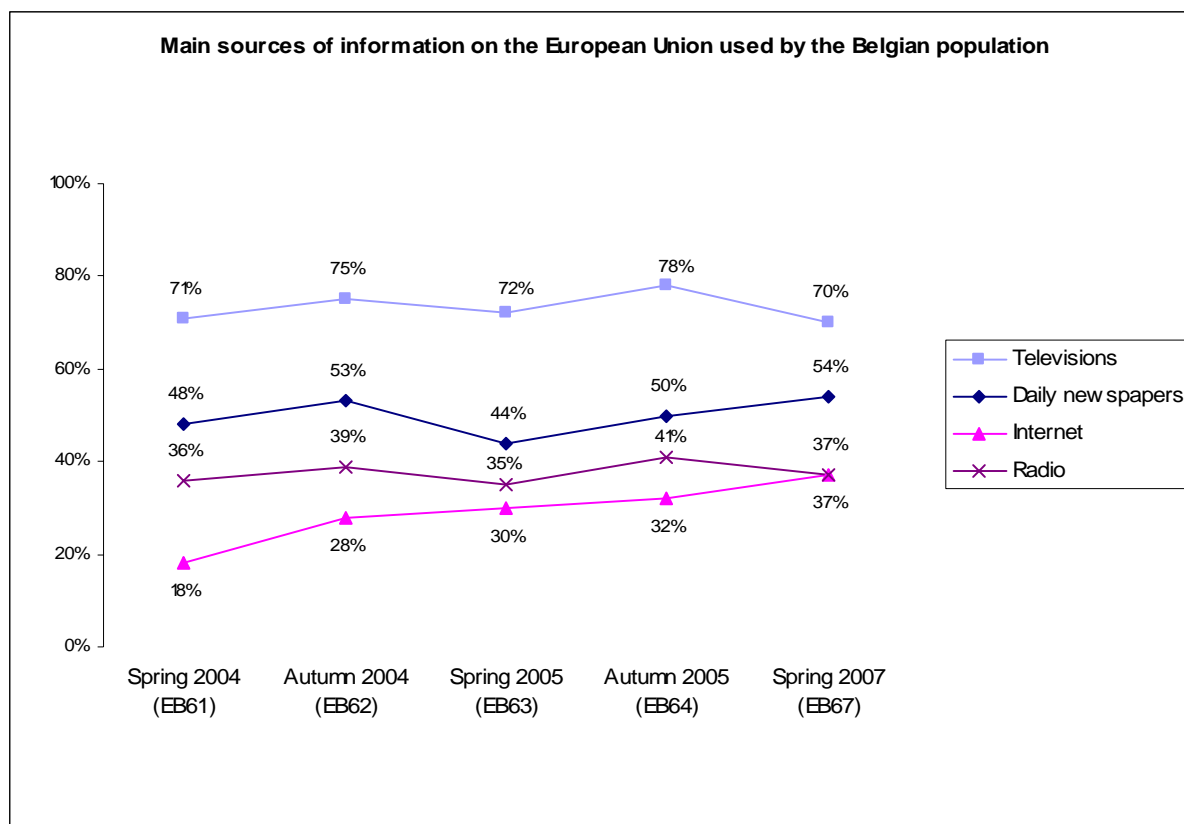
2. Perception of the European Union in Belgium

The Belgians are attached to the European Union (66%) and consider that their country's membership of the European Union is a good thing (70%). Since autumn 2006, **their support for the European Union has got stronger (73%, i.e. +12 points)**. They perceive the European Union as being 'democratic' (75%) and think that every European decision is the subject of negotiations in which the opinion of their Government is taken into account (66%). Belgium's voice counts in the European Union (75%) and its interests are well taken into account (56%).

3. Belgian citizens' information on the European Union

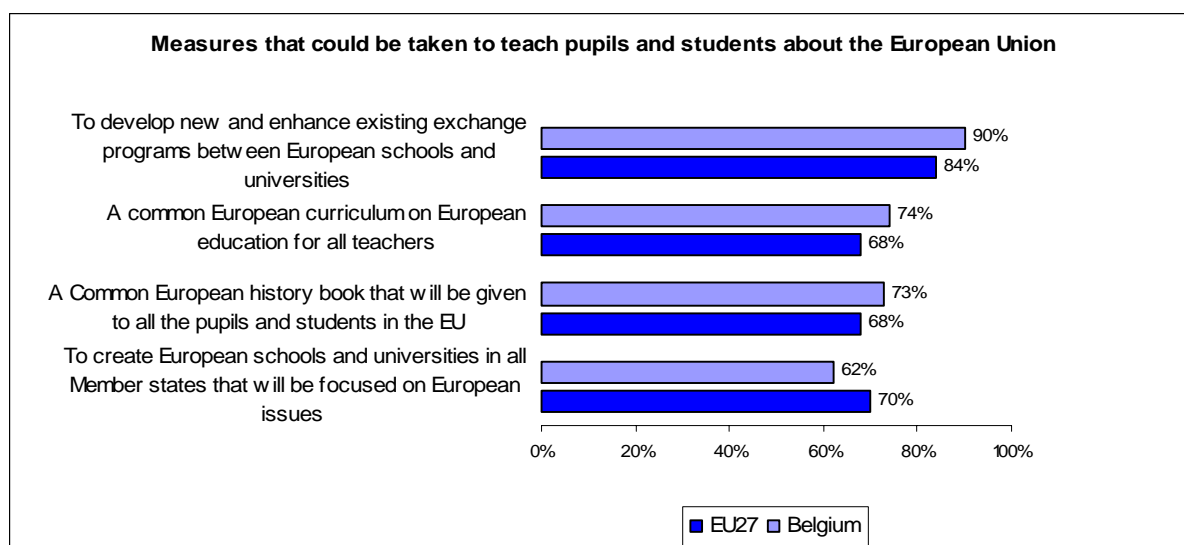
When they are looking for information on the European Union, its politics and its institutions, Belgians watch TV (70%) and read the dailies (54%), but also go on the Internet (37%) or listen to the radio (37%). In the last waves of the survey, **a significant increase in the number of Belgian respondents who use the Internet to inform themselves could be observed**. The increased use of

the Internet as an information medium can be explained by the fact that in spring 2007 the majority of Belgian citizens have access to a computer (68%) and an Internet connection at home (61%). It is also important to note that they trust this medium more than before (+5 points since autumn 2006).



A majority of Belgians say they understand how the European Union functions (51%). When they are tested about their actual knowledge, they give an average of 63% correct answers, a percentage that is higher than that obtained on average by European citizens (+13 points). Although the Belgians demonstrate a knowledge of the European Union that is higher than the European average, between **59 and 68% of them feel they are 'not well informed' about European political affairs**. It should be noted that this feeling is stronger in the European population taken as a whole (between 68 and 75%) than in Belgium.

In order to meet this information need, **95% of the Belgians advise teaching school children about the way EU institutions work**. They also say they are in favour of the development of the existing exchange programmes between European schools and universities (90%), the establishment of a common European curriculum on European education for all teachers (74%) and **the use of a common European history book for all pupils and students in the European Union (73%)**. 62% also suggest creating European schools and universities in all the Member States, which would be focused on European issues.



4. What kind of future for Europe?

When they envisage the next steps in the European integration process, Belgians say they are optimistic (73%). They want a deepening of the European integration process, through the adoption of a constitution for the European Union (82%), or a decision **allowing those countries which are ready to intensify the development of a common European policy in certain important areas to do so without having to wait for the others (56%)**.

On the other hand, Belgians oppose a further enlargement of the European Union in the coming years. **With 53% of favorable opinions, Belgium is one of the seven countries that are most strongly opposed to further enlargement**, i.e. Luxembourg (68%), Austria (64%), France (60%), Germany (59%), Finland (56%) and the United Kingdom (48%).

According to the Belgians, in the coming years, the European institutions should concentrate their action mainly in the following fields: the fight against crime (40%), **environmental issues (36%)**, immigration (34%), social protection (32%) and energy (27%). Since autumn 2006, Belgians feel more and more concerned about environmental issues (15%, +9 points). In a general way, they think that the European Union is in a better position to take decisions relating to environmental protection than their Government (75%). The European Union should urgently put new policies in place to fight against global warming (89%) and reduce greenhouse gas emission by at least 20% by 2020 (92%).

**Aspects that should be emphasized by the European institutions in the coming years
to strengthen the European Union in the future**

