

EUROBAROMETER 67

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

SPRING 2007

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FRANCE

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INTRODUCTION

Conducted on behalf of the European Commission, the Eurobarometer 67 public opinion poll surveyed 1013 people in France between April 10th and May 15th 2007, during the election campaign. After several years of pessimism, this Eurobarometer shows a strong improvement in citizens' levels of satisfaction, concerning their personal situation, future perspectives and trust in national and European institutions.

1. OVERALL CONTEXT

- 64% of the French (-3 points compared with autumn 2006) declare that they are quite satisfied and 18% (=) very satisfied with their life. Only 13% (+2) are not so satisfied and 5% (+1) not satisfied at all with their own situation. The global satisfaction rate (82%) is slightly higher than the EU-27 average (80%).
- Expectations for the next twelve months keep on improving: 32% (+10) of the French expect the economic situation and 27% (+9) expect the employment situation to improve in their country. The percentage of those who believe the situation will deteriorate has decreased by 12 points and 9 points respectively compared with Eurobarometer 66. In addition, 48% (+5) think that their own situation will improve in the next five years.
- However, more than seven French out of ten still judge the economic situation of their country to be “fairly bad” (60%) or “very bad” (11%).
- According to the French, the four main issues France is facing at the moment are unemployment (51%, +4), crime (24%, -4), the economic situation (23%, =) and inflation (21%, +3).
- Compared with the EU-27 average, the French react more negatively to the words “liberalisation” (48% of positive answers, whereas the EU-27 average is 58%) and to “globalisation” (39% in France vs. 46% in the EU as a whole). The level of positive answers reaches 79% when it comes to "company" and 71% regarding "free trade".
- In France, 57% of respondents associate globalisation with the relocation of companies to countries where labour is cheaper, a figure that is the highest in the EU.) When interviewed about the role of the European Union, only 32% of French respondents consider that the EU “protects us from the negative effects of globalisation” and 35% that the EU enables European citizens “to benefit better from the positive effects of globalisation”, a figure that is far below the EU-27 average.

2. IMAGES AND IDENTITY

- Half of the French population (50%, +4) have “a fairly good” (41%) or a “very good” (9%) image of the European Union; 21% (+1) have a “fairly bad” (18%) or a “very bad” image (3%) of the EU.
- For those interviewed, the EU represents above all freedom to travel, study and work throughout the EU (59%), the euro (50%), peace (49%) and cultural diversity (42%).
- The 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome brings to mind hope to 51%, concern to 30% and satisfaction to 25% of respondents. More than one-third (35%) of the French say it does not bring anything to mind.
- According to French citizens, the most positive results of European unification are peace (which comes in first place for 43% and in second place for 19% of respondents) and the free movement of people, goods and services (24% and 28%). The euro is considered by 16% as the best result and by 26% as the second best result of European integration.
- 72% of the French are in favour of the euro, 25% are against it and 3% do not know. Despite a 4-point drop, support for the common currency remains one of the highest among the EU Member states.
- Attachment to the European flag remains widespread. 84% of French people think that it is a good symbol for Europe (+6 points within a year) and 77% consider that "it stands for something good". In addition, 65% think that it should be seen on all public buildings next to the national flag.

3. THE FRENCH AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

- Most indicators regarding support for the EU reach levels unseen since the referendum on the Constitution in 2005. 51% of the French now trust the European Union, i.e. 11 points more than in autumn. Those who do not trust the EU represent only 41% of the population (-7 points).
- More than one French person in two (52%, +2) believes that European Union membership is a good thing for their country. For 26% (-4) of the French, it is neither good nor bad, while for 21% (+2) it is a bad thing.
- Furthermore, 54% (+4) of the French consider that their country has, on balance, benefited from being a member of the European Union, while 37% (-2) think the opposite and 9% (-2) do not know. The gap between the first two categories, which had fallen since the 2005 referendum, is now widening again (17 points).
- 54% (+4) of the French trust the European Parliament. The EP is followed by the European Commission (47%, =), the European Central Bank (40%, +3) and the Council of the EU (38%, -3).

- Television (55%) and daily newspapers (37%) are the two main sources of information for French people who are looking for information about the European Union. The Internet (36%) is now ahead of radio (29%) and its score has almost tripled since 2003. Among young people (15-24 years old), it is even the first source of information.

4. KEY ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE

- Asked about what should be the priorities for the EU, the French put forward environment (38%), immigration (30%) and social (29%) issues.
- Decision-making at European level is preferred to national level for fighting terrorism (85%, +1), for scientific and technologic research (78%, =), for protecting the environment (76%, +7) and regarding energy issues (70%, +3). On the other hand, the French prefer the national level to deal with pension schemes (78%), taxation (75%), the health care system (75%) or education (71%).
- The public continues to be very positive regarding a common foreign policy (70%) and on a defence and security policy (82%). In addition, 64% believe that, in 50 years from now, the EU will have its own army and that it will be a leading diplomatic power in the world.
- With 68% in favour of a European constitution, France's figure is above the EU-27 average (62%).
- A few months after Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU, a clear majority is against further enlargement of the Union: 32% (-2) are in favour and 60% (+2) are opposed to the idea of including other countries in the years to come. Lower levels of support are recorded in only two EU countries (Luxembourg and Austria).
- Regarding the 2004 enlargement wave, 44% of respondents feel it has been "neither positive nor negative", 20% that it has been as negative as they thought and 10% that it has been as positive as they expected.
- 46% (-6) of the French are against "the speed of building Europe being faster in one group of countries than in the other countries", whereas 42% (+7) are in favour. The gap between the two categories appears to be narrowing: supporters of a multi-speed Europe are now almost as numerous as opponents to this idea.