

# EUROBAROMETER 67

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

SPRING 2007

## NATIONAL REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY THE NETHERLANDS

This survey was requested and coordinated by Directorate-General Communication.

This report was produced for the European Commission's Representation in the Netherlands (by TNS NIPO).

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.

## Summary and conclusions

### Personal circumstances

Dutch citizens are some of the *most satisfied* citizens of the European Union in how they view their own daily lives. In this respect, the Netherlands top the list, together with the Scandinavian countries.

On almost all the aspects of life surveyed in a particular country, the Dutch believe that the Netherlands functions better than the average EU country. This refers to the national economy, national employment, the cost of living, health care, pension schemes, the national social security system, the national education system, quality of life, public transport, national environmental developments and national knowledge of languages.

Most Dutch citizens do not expect their lives to undergo any substantial changes in the short or medium term. Those who do expect a change, think there will be an improvement. On average, more people in Europe – compared with the Netherlands – expect a deterioration in their personal circumstances.

The majority of Europeans expect stabilisation or growth of the national economy in the short term. The expectations of the Dutch population regarding the national economy are even more optimistic (41% of Dutch citizens expect growth, compared to 28% in Europe as a whole). In regard to personal financial situation, national and personal employment situation and the European economy, the Dutch are also more positive – to a lesser or greater extent – than the average European.

Issues that are most important for the Dutch are crime and health care, and – to a lesser degree – education and the economy. Unemployment, one of the most important issues for the average European, is one of the least important issues for the Dutch.

Compared with the European average, the Dutch have a remarkably great trust in the national authorities (government and parliament). They also have a greater trust in the media.

### The European Union: knowledge, image, trust

About half of the Dutch say that they know how the European Union operates.

Regarding the knowledge of the EU and its institutions, the Dutch seem to be slightly better informed than average. Nevertheless, almost half of the Dutch do not know that the European Parliament is elected directly.

The trust of the Dutch in the European Union and its institutions is greater than average, and is showing an upward trend. In comparison with the rest of Europe, however, the Dutch image of the European Union is often less positive. More so than in the rest of Europe, the Dutch find the EU 'protective', but also more often 'inefficient' and 'technocratic'. The percentage of Dutch people who consider the EU as 'democratic' or 'modern' is less than the European average.

Even though the Dutch feel that the EU takes sufficient account of the voices of separate member states and individuals, relatively few Dutch citizens feel that the interests of the Netherlands are well-represented. The Dutch are also not very positive about the influence of the Netherlands in Europe, either now or in the future. The Dutch mainly see the economic advantages of EU membership.

Compared with the European average, more Dutch people think that children should be educated in the way the European institutions operate. However, they are a little more sceptical when it comes to the effectiveness of the proposed educational methods.

### **Significance of Europe in the Netherlands**

Compared with Europe as a whole, the Dutch have a less strongly developed 'European feeling'. The Netherlands have the smallest percentage of citizens in Europe that can identify with the flag. Nevertheless, a large majority of the Dutch - much more than in the rest of Europe - thinks that membership of the European Union is a good thing. The *free movement of people, goods and services in the EU* and *peace between member states* are the most important positive results of the European Union, according to the Dutch and the other Europeans.

The main effects of the EU on the personal lives of the Dutch are the freedom to travel, work and study everywhere in the EU, and the euro. A stronger influence in the world, bureaucracy and economic prosperity were also mentioned by many Dutch citizens. The Dutch are equally involved with the EU as the average European.

### **Advantages and disadvantages of European Union membership**

Compared to the European average, more Dutch are of the opinion that the membership of the European Union offers advantages. The majority of the Dutch, for instance, are positive about the opportunity EU membership offers to profit from the positive consequences of globalization.

Just like their fellow-Europeans, the Dutch feel that the European Union should give priority to environmental issues and the fight against crime. Immigration issues and social issues are considered of more importance in Europe, compared with the Netherlands. The Dutch, on the other hand, give more priority to a European education and foreign policy.

The level at which they feel decisions should be made (European or national level), strongly varies per issue. The Dutch would prefer to see issues in the fields of 'fighting terrorism', 'supporting economically underdeveloped areas', 'environmental protection', 'competition', 'agriculture and fisheries' handled at European level.

### **Common EU policy**

Most Dutch citizens feel that countries that are ready to intensify the development of a common European policy on certain important areas should be able to do this without having to wait for other countries. With its support for this ‘two-track policy’, the Netherlands are taking a leading position in Europe.

Almost three-quarters of the Dutch are *in favour* of a European Monetary Union with one currency. Public support of the Monetary Union is significantly *higher* in the Netherlands, than in the rest of Europe. In the Netherlands, there is relatively little support (though still a majority) for a common foreign policy. Support for a European constitution is also still lower than in the rest of Europe. Support in the Netherlands for a common defence and security policy and for further enlargement of the EU is equal to the European average.

According to most Dutch citizens, the European Union should have its own minister of Foreign Affairs. The foreign policy of the EU should be independent of the foreign policy of the US. According to most European and Dutch citizens, the EU should pursue a common immigration policy.