

EUROBAROMETER 67

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

SPRING 2007

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

UNITED KINGDOM

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UK support for membership, the constitution and enlargement

One of the major features of the UK responses in Eurobarometer 67 (EB67) was a noticeable increase in support for the country's membership of the European Union, a majority support for a European constitution, as well as approval of enlargement from the existing base of 27 member states.

39% of the UK poll believed that membership of the European Union was a good thing compared with 26% whose opinion was neutral and 30% who said it was a bad thing.

Across the EU in general, belief that membership was a good thing rose from 53% to 57% in the period between autumn 2006 and spring 2007. Even though the figures are smaller, the UK figures saw a greater percentage increase over this six-month period from 34% to 39%. The gap between UK citizens thinking it was a good thing compared with those taking the contrary view has now increased from three percentage points (34% - 31%) to nine percentage points (39% - 30%).

Men¹ (42%) rather than women (36%) were more inclined to see membership of the EU as a good thing. Support for membership was also stronger amongst the youngest group (15-24) than amongst the oldest group (55+).

Has the UK benefited from being a member of the European Union?

Across the European Union, there is a clear predominance of opinion that membership has, on balance, brought **benefits to member countries** and the EU27 average has 59% of citizens holding this view. In the UK, 43% of the poll believed that the country had benefited, while marginally more (44%) took the contrary view.

In the UK, just six months ago, 47% of the poll believed that the country had not benefited compared with 39% who saw membership as positive. This gave an eight percentage point gap in favour of the negative view. Today, the position has changed substantially. While those UK citizens taking the negative view has fallen to 44%, the positive view has increased and is now held by 43% of the UK poll. The opinion gap is now down to just one percentage point.

Younger people also hold this belief more strongly than older segments of the population with 55% of the youngest group affirming this position compared with just 30% of those aged 55 or more.

When it comes to levels of education, differences become even more pronounced. The 43% UK average is composed of 24% of those educated to age 15 or less, 42% of those educated to age 16-19 and 61% of those educated to age 20 or beyond.

¹ Throughout this Executive Summary all socio-demographic data cited relate to the UK.

A European constitution

Another key result of this latest Eurobarometer is the UK public's attitude towards a possible European constitution. The concept of a written constitution is essentially foreign to UK citizens but, despite this, noticeably more were for than were against this principle with 43% of UK citizens polled in favour while 36% were against and 21% were undecided.

While there were virtually no changes in UK attitude over the past six months, support in general across the European Union rose from 63% to 66% with a one percentage point fall in those who were against the constitution (21% - 20%) and a two percentage point fall in the 'don't know' factor from 16% to 14%.

Younger people were more likely to support the idea of a constitution and the concept was accepted by 48% of people aged 15-24 compared with just 36% at the far end of the age spectrum.

Enlargement of the European Union

Although eight percentage points behind the EU average, 41% of the UK poll were for future enlargement of the EU. Both the UK and EU27 averages show an increase in the number of citizens' who are for further enlargement of the European Union. The EU27 figure increases from 46% to 49% and, while there are still more UK citizens against further enlargement, the gap has decreased from fifteen percentage points (51% - 36%) to just seven percentage points (48% - 41%).

Positive results of European integration

By far the most popular results of European integration were seen to be **peace** amongst the Member States and the **free movement of people, goods and services**.

34% of the UK poll gave **peace** as the most positive result – a figure echoed by 39% of EU27 citizens while 30% of UK citizens and a slightly higher 33% of those polled across the Union chose **free movement** as the most positive result of European integration.

Concerns of UK citizens

When UK citizens were asked what they thought were the two most important issues facing their country, the following results were observed.

Rank	Issue	UK %	High %	Low %	EU %	EU Rank
1	Crime	41	51 CY	9 LU	24	2
2	Immigration	32	36 ES	2 HU	15	6
3	Terrorism	25	47 ES	0 MT	12	7=
4	Healthcare	24	50 IE	4 ES, MT	18	4=
5	Pensions	11	20 CZ	3 IE	12	7=
6	Housing	10	32 LU	0 EL, DE	8	10=
7=	Unemployment	8	58 DE	5 DK	34	1
7=	Education system	8	20 LU	1 MT	9	9
7=	Protecting environment	8	26 DK	0 PT	7	12
10=	Inflation	7	63 LV	3 SE	18	4=
10=	Taxation	7	21 SI	2 ES	8	10=
12	Economic situation	6	44 RO	5 DK	20	3
13	Energy	4	18 FI	0 EL, PT	4	13
14	Defence/foreign affairs	3	14 EE	0 IE,HU, BG	2	14

It is interesting to see the variation over the last three Eurobarometer surveys when the four major issues of concern are reviewed.

The four main issues of concern to UK citizens remain constant and it would seem that their individual ranking is determined by recent events and/or media coverage.

Rank	Spring 2007	%	Autumn 2006	%	Spring 2006	%
1	Crime	41	Immigration	40	Crime	41
2	Immigration	32	Terrorism	35	Healthcare	30
3	Terrorism	25	Crime	34	Immigration	28
4	Healthcare	24	Healthcare	20	Terrorism	18

Awareness and knowledge of matters European

81% of the UK poll had heard of the **European Parliament** compared with an EU average of 89% and figures as high as 98% in Denmark.

Across Europe, fewer people had heard of the **European Commission** than had heard of the European Parliament and figures of 82% are noted as an EU27 average and just 74% in the UK.

Just 43% of the UK poll had heard of the **Council of the European Union** and the EU27 average is also the lowest of the three institutions at 68%.

Knowledge of the EU

30% of UK citizens incorrectly believed that the Union was **made up of just 15** Member States. This view was also held by an average of 23% of EU citizens.

An improvement was seen in the UK figures over the past six months, where, with the 'don't know' factor falling from 33% to 30%, the percentage of UK citizens correctly saying this statement was false rose substantially from 34% to 40%.

46% of UK citizens correctly stated that Members of the European Parliament were **directly elected by EU citizens**. This level of awareness is slightly higher than the EU27 average (45%) and noticeably greater than figures of 38% in France, 41% in Italy and 42% in Germany – the three other largest countries in the Union.

When asked about the **rotation of the Presidency**, UK citizens were not particularly confident in their responses with just 34% correctly saying that the Presidency changed every six months, 32% saying that this was not true and 34% giving a 'don't know' response.

In the year since this question was last asked, in the spring of 2006, there has been a sharp increase in the number of UK citizens who now **recognise the European flag**. In just twelve months, the UK figure has risen by seven percentage points from 85% to 92%, while over the same period the EU27 figure rose from 92% to 95%.

Assessment of level of information of fellow-citizens

Generally, across the European Union, the great majority of citizens feel that people in their country are not well-informed about European political affairs. The EU27 average figure and that for the UK are identical at 75%.

Trust in national institutions and the European Union

While across the European Union, 41% of those polled tended to **trust their government**, this figure falls to just 34% in the UK. However, since this question was asked in EB66.1 in the autumn of 2006, there has been a substantial change in the attitude of both EU and UK citizens. In the UK, the percentage of people trusting the national government has risen from 24% to 34%, while across the European Union, the figure has grown from 30% to 41%.

In the UK, this means that the gap between those trusting and those not trusting their government has narrowed from forty five percentage points to twenty four percentage points in just six months.

41% of UK citizens tended to trust **their own Parliament** – a figure very much in line with the EU27 average of 43%. In the autumn of 2006, the proportion of people who said they tended to trust the UK parliament was just 29%. In just six months, this figure has moved to 41% and a similar sharp increase in trust is seen across the whole European Union where the figure has increased from 33% to 43%.

As is seen above relating to the national government, there is still a higher proportion of the poll tending not to trust these institutions but the major shift in attitude over the past six months should be carefully studied to see if a longer term trend appears in the Eurobarometer of autumn 2007.

36% of UK citizens tended to trust the **European Union** compared with an EU27 average of 57%.

Mirroring the substantial increases in trust levels shown above in relation to the UK Government and Parliament, the trust level in the UK towards the European Union has moved from just 26% in EB66 to 36% in this latest edition - over a period of just six months.

This change of attitude is also seen across the European Union as a whole with the 45% of the poll who tended to trust the European Union in the autumn of 2006 increasing to 57% by the spring of 2007.

Trust in EU institutions

Just a third (33%) of the UK poll **trusted the European Parliament** compared with an EU27 average of 56%.

Over the past six months, the trust level across the European Union towards the European Parliament has increased from 52% to 56% meaning that a majority of European citizens now tend to trust this institution.

In the UK, over the same period, there was a proportionately greater increase in trust from 25% to 33%. Even though this obviously means more UK citizens (46%) tend not to trust this European institution, the percentage point gap has more than halved from twenty seven percentage points to just thirteen.

Just 29% of the UK poll tended to **trust the European Commission** compared with an overall EU27 average of 52%.

It is also interesting to note that an identical number of UK citizens (29%) felt unable to give an answer to this question, implying a fundamental lack of knowledge on the subject.

Repeating the pattern shown above, the largest proportion of the UK poll (39%) was unable to give a response to the question as to whether they tended **to trust the Council of the European Union**, once again indicating a strong possibility of lack of knowledge on the workings of this body.

Decision-making

One of the major stumbling blocks on European integration has been the historical reluctance of the British citizen to accept legislation from Brussels that they perceive is something over which they have no control. The fact of the matter is, of course, that the UK government actually participates in the shaping and adoption of all European legislation.

In a number of areas, citizens were asked whether decisions should be made by the UK government alone or jointly within the European Union. What emerges is a steady move by UK citizens towards the broader EU approach in virtually all areas. In addition, areas which they see as clearly requiring a broad united approach such as **fighting terrorism**, the issue of **scientific and technological research** and steps to be taken in relation to **protecting the environment** are issues where the EU option gets a clear majority vote.

61% of UK citizens believed that this issue of **fighting crime** should be dealt with by the UK government while just 37% felt that it should be handled jointly within the EU. These figures are almost exactly contrary to general EU27 opinion where 60% feel that the decision should be made jointly and only 38% feel it should be made at national level.

While the EU average figures remained virtually constant since the last EB poll six months previously with a marginal increase from 59% to 60% favouring decisions taken jointly within the EU, there is a substantial move in this direction from the UK poll where the figures rise from 28% to 37%.

Although the great majority of the UK poll still favours decisions of this nature to be taken at a national level, it is perhaps significant to notice this substantial move to the EU option.

Across the European Union, **taxation** is seen to be very much a national issue and more than two-thirds (68%) of those polled across the Union held this view. The comparable UK figure, although relatively high at 78%, is still well below the 90% observed in Denmark, the 89% in Sweden and the 86% in Finland.

69% of UK citizens felt that decisions on **fighting unemployment** should be made at a national level – this compares with a EU27 figure of 58%.

Although starting from a smaller base, there was a noticeable difference in the trends between the UK and EU27 figures on this issue. While the number of EU27 citizens believing that decisions relating to fighting unemployment should be taken jointly within the EU rose by just one point from 38% to 39%, a much more substantial shift was seen in the UK figures where the percentages rose from 22% to 28%.

One of the areas where there is substantial support for decision-making jointly within the EU concerns **fighting terrorism**. Accordingly, eight out of ten Europeans believe decisions in this area should be made jointly within the EU and this figure, which reaches nearly three-quarters (71%) of the UK poll, rises to 92% in Slovakia, 91% in Latvia and 90% in Hungary.

As was seen in the previous example, there is an undercurrent of support for handling certain issues at EU level rather than solely from a domestic viewpoint. Accordingly, while this view increased in support across the 27 Member States by two percentage points from 79% to 81%, the increase in the UK was considerably larger with figures growing from 61% to 71%.

Making up the 33% average of EU27 countries who believe that **defence and foreign affairs** should be dealt with at a national level are figures ranging from 15%

in Malta and 19% in Luxembourg to 54% in Sweden and 80% in Finland. The UK figure, at 56%, shows that a majority of citizens polled believe decisions on these issues should be made nationally.

As is noted in the section on concerns of citizens, **immigration** is an issue of major importance to UK citizens. Accordingly, it is not surprising to notice that the UK figures are virtually the reverse of the EU27 averages with 59% of the UK poll believes that decisions on this issue should be taken at national levels while 39% believe they should be made jointly within the EU.

However, there has been a noticeable change in UK attitude over the past six months on the question of whether immigration is an issue that should be handled at a national level or jointly within the European Union. In the autumn of 2006, 63% of those polled believed the issue should be dealt with nationally and just 33% took the contrary view. Now, with a fall in the 'don't know' factor from 4% to 2%, the percentage point gap between the two views has fallen from thirty percentage points to just twenty with figures of 59% and 39% respectively.

As was seen above in the case of taxation, a clear majority of EU citizens thinks that **education** is an issue best dealt with at national level. Accordingly, 64% of those polled across the Union held this view which gained the support of 77% of the UK poll.

Following the pattern shown above on taxation and education, a clear majority (72%) of EU27 citizens believing that **pensions** should be dealt with on a national basis and, in the UK, the figure is 78%

As with a number of issues that citizens understand will be dealt with more efficiently by joint decision-making within the EU, **protecting the environment** is recognised as one which does not respect frontiers.

Support for the European option increased over the past six months with the EU average figure growing from 65% to 69% and the UK figure from 55% to 62%.

The issue of **health and social welfare** falls into the category which citizens broadly feel should be decided at national level. Accordingly, two-thirds (66%) of citizens across the Union hold this view and the figure rises to 75% in the UK.

Europeans are fairly equally divided when asked whether decisions on **agriculture and fisheries** should be handled at a national level or jointly within the EU. 45% of those polled across the Union and 53% in the UK preferred the national option while figures of 50% and 42% respectively were recorded for the broader joint decision-making process at EU level.

At EU level, over the last six months, there was virtually no change in citizens' attitude on this issue with the number of citizens supporting the European Union option rising marginally from 49% to 50%. However, in the UK, the change was much more marked with support for the EU option rising from 35% to 42%.

While European Union citizens are equally divided (48%) on the issue of **consumer protection**, citizens of the UK were noticeably more in favour of this issue being handled at a national level with figures of 56% and 39% respectively.

In the UK, the percentage of citizens supporting the EU option is nine percentage points less than the EU average of 48% but this figure of 39% is itself a noticeable increase of a fifth from the 33% noted just six months previously.

Perhaps realising the need for collaboration and economies of scale, EU citizens are strongly in favour of **scientific and technological research** decisions being made jointly within the European Union with figures of 71% preferring this option compared with 24% believing these decisions should be made nationally.

The UK follows this pattern and, although the figures are slightly closer (62% and 33%), the EU option is virtually twice as popular as the national one.

53% of UK citizens are in favour of decisions relating to **giving Support for regions facing economic difficulties** being made jointly within the European Union - a figure just seven percentage points less than the 60% EU27 average.

Across the Union, over the last six months, support for the EU option increased from 57% to 60% while, in the UK, the figure grew from 48% to 53%. Together with a decrease in the 'don't know' factor from 8% to 6%, the difference between the national and EU option has increased substantially in the UK from four percentage points in the autumn of 2006 to twelve percentage points just six months later.

The broad EU27 view, held by 61% of those polled, is that decisions relating to energy should be made jointly within the European Union. However, three countries had a majority of their citizens who were polled believing that decisions of this nature should be made nationally. These were Finland (59%), Austria (58%) and the UK (52%). These figures should be compared with an EU27 average of just 35%

There was virtually no change in attitude on this issue over the past six months with support for the EU option rising marginally across the Union from 60% to 61% and from 44% to 45% in the UK.

A majority (57%) of EU27 citizens believe that decisions on competition should be made jointly within the European Union while just 34% take the contrary view.

There was, however, a relatively high 'don't know' factor of 9% across the European Union which rose to double digits in ten of the twenty seven countries surveyed.

In the last Eurobarometer, 50% of those polled believed that the first option was the better one while 36% supported the EU alternative. In just six months, this fourteen point percentage point differential has been erased and an equal number of UK citizens (44%) give their support to each of the two options.

Across the European Union, opinions relating to transport were broadly divided on this issue with 45% of the poll believing that decisions should be made jointly and 51% opting for the national alternative.

In the UK, however, the difference was substantially greater with 72% of those polled preferring the national option and just 26% preferring the broader EU alternative.

Perhaps reflecting the confidence in the UK economy shown earlier in this report, a substantial majority (72%) of the UK poll believe that decisions relating to the **economy** should be taken nationally.

Global warming and climate change

The important and topical issues of global warming and climate change are dealt with in two new questions in this edition of Eurobarometer. The first question relates to the urgency with which the European Union should deal with the problem of **global warming**, while the second is more specific and assesses citizens' views as to the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Across the European Union, 88% of the 27,000 people polled felt that **global warming** should be dealt with urgently by the EU. In fact, this was felt to be a very urgent matter by 57% of those polled and fairly urgent by the remaining 31%.

The UK figures are broadly similar to the average across the Union with a total of 84% of which 51% felt the matter should be dealt with very urgently and 33% fairly urgently.

Making up the 84% UK average of people believing that global warming should be dealt with urgently by the European Union were a higher percentage of young people and those who were better educated.

Accordingly, between 86% and 88% of people between the ages of 15 and 54 believe this issue should be dealt with urgently. UK citizens aged 55 and above appeared to be less concerned and only 78% of their number took this view.

Amongst people who had left school aged 15 or less, a relatively small 74% viewed this as being an urgent matter compared with 85% of those who had been educated to age 20 or more.

89% of EU citizens agreed that the European Union should urgently put new policies in place to **reduce greenhouse gas emissions** by at least 20% by 2020 – a figure just three percentage points greater than the 86% noted in the UK.

Concern decreased with age so a figure of 90% is noted for those aged between 15 and 24 compared with 82% for those who were aged 55 or more.

Educating young citizens about the EU

The great majority (78%) of UK citizens were in favour of teaching schoolchildren about the way EU institutions work. This view was also strongly held throughout the EU with 86% of those polled being in favour of this initiative.

Making up the 78% UK average of citizens who were in favour of teaching schoolchildren about the way EU institutions work, were a particularly high

proportion of people (87%) educated to age 20 or beyond, as well as 88% of managers.

While two-thirds (68%) of EU27 citizens were in support of the production of a **common European history book** that would be given to all the pupils and students in the EU this measure found favour with a relatively small portion (56%) of the UK poll. Nevertheless, this was a majority of the UK sample, and just 33% thought it would be inefficient.

The measure of creating a **common European curriculum on European education for all teachers** created responses very much mirrored the first with 68% of the EU poll deeming it an efficient measure compared with 53% of the UK poll.

While the **creation of European schools and universities in all Member States** that will be focussed on European issues was a measure was deemed efficient by 70% of the EU27's citizens, it gained favour with just half (50%) of the UK poll. The UK also had a relatively high (15%) 'don't know' factor compared with an EU27 average of 10%.

This measure of developing **new and enhanced exchange programmes between European schools and universities** was, by far, the most popular of those proposed and virtually three-quarters (73%) of the UK poll believed this would be an efficient measure and, with figures as high as 93% in Luxembourg, 92% in Cyprus and 90% in Latvia, the Czech Republic and Belgium, the EU27 average rose to 84%.

This was deemed an efficient measure by 85% of those educated to age 20 or more compared with just 64% of those who had left school aged 15 or less. Support for this idea was, perhaps surprisingly, seen from just 68% of students compared with 80% of white-collar workers and 82% of managers.