

EUROBAROMETER 69

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

SPRING 2008

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FRANCE

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INTRODUCTION

Eurobarometer survey No. 69 was carried out by *TNS Opinion & Social*, on behalf of the European Commission, among a total sample of 30,170 people in the EU Member States, the candidate countries and the Turkish Cypriot community. In France, 1040 people were surveyed between March 27th and April 27th 2008. This opinion poll took place in a tense social context, due to inflation during the first semester of the year. This trend had a serious impact on the perception of national and European institutions.

1. OVERALL CONTEXT

- 78% of the French declare that they are very or fairly satisfied with their personal life, i.e. 7 percentage points less than in Autumn 2007. This result is slightly above the EU-27 average (77%).
- The French feel their country's situation is worse than European countries on average in a series of domains (cost of living, energy prices, employment situation and economic situation), except when it comes to the quality of life: 67% consider it to be better in France than in other EU countries.
- The four main issues France is facing at present are inflation (51%), unemployment (30%), the economic situation (19%) and pensions (17%). Worries about inflation have increased dramatically (+24 percentage points compared with 6 months earlier, +30 percentage points compared with one year earlier) and rank first, above unemployment, for the first time. 46% of the French admit that they have difficulties paying all their bills at the end of the month and 64% say that their purchasing power has decreased over the last 5 years.
- 82% think that the life of those who are children today will be more difficult than the life for their own generation. This is a higher percentage than in any other Member State.
- In France, 63% (+5) of respondents associate globalisation firstly with relocation of some companies to countries where labour is cheaper (the highest level in the European Union, 5 points above results from last year) and 12% (-1) with increased competition for French companies. Only 10% (-6) consider globalisation as an opportunity for companies and 8% (+1) think about foreign investments in France. In addition, 82% of the French consider that globalisation is profitable only for large companies, not for citizens, the highest such score in all EU Member States. 74% also believe that globalisation increases social inequalities.
- Regarding institutions, the army receives the highest level of trust (74%) and is followed by the police (63%), the UN (51%) and the European Union (50%). On the other hand, the level of trust reaches only 28% for the national government (-14 points compared with last Autumn) and only 10% for political parties.
- Radio is the only mass media the French trust (60%) more than mistrust (35%). Opinions on the written press are more mixed: 46% trust it, 49% do not. Only 38% of the French trust television, while 59% do not. Judgments about the Internet remain uncertain: 34% trust it, 38% mistrust it and 28% do not know.

2. THE FRENCH AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

- One French person in two has a fairly/very good image of the European Union (49%, -4 percentage points compared with last Autumn). 17% (+2) have a fairly/very bad image.
- When asked what Europe means to them personally, 50% answer “freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the EU”, 41% “the euro”, 38% “peace” and 33% “cultural diversity”.
- Asked to pick from a list, the three values they consider as the most important for them, the French mention firstly peace (48%) and respect for human life (48%), followed by human rights (46%). Furthermore, they associate the European Union mainly with human rights (45%), peace (41%) and democracy (34%).
- After the exceptional results from last Autumn, levels of support tend to have decreased: 48% of the French think that EU membership is a good thing (-12 percentage points), 17% (+5) a bad thing, and 33% (+6) neither a good nor a bad thing.
- Furthermore, 49% (-8) of the French consider that their country has benefited from being a member of the EU, vs. 36% who share the opposite view (+4).
- Trust in the European Union remains stable (50%, -1 percentage point), but 40% say that they tend not to trust it (+6). The level of trust reached 51% for the European Parliament, 44% for the European Commission, 43% for the European Central Bank and 40% for the Council of the European Union.
- 49% of the French say that they have recently heard of the French Presidency in the media and 73% believe that it is very/rather important that France will chair the European Union Council. At the EU-27 level, 27% of the respondents have heard of the French Presidency.
- 71% (-3) of the French are in favour of the euro, 26% (+5) against and 3% (-2) do not know. Support for the common currency is slightly above the euro-zone average (67%) and above the EU-27 average (61%).
- According to the “knowledge test”, the French know slightly more about the EU than other Europeans: 58% of their answers are correct, whereas the EU-27 average is 50%.
- 71% of the French are in favour of the euro (-3 points), 26% are against (+5) and 3% have no opinion (-2). Support for the single currency is slightly higher than the euro zone average (67%) and than the EU-27 average (61%).

3. THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

- Opinions about the future of Europe are mixed: 38% of the French feel “things are going in the wrong direction” in the EU (+12 points compared with the situation 6 months ago), whereas 34% (-5) feel that they are going in the right direction. In spite of these results, more than one Frenchman in two (53%) feels fairly/very optimistic about the future of the European Union.
- The French consider that environmental issues (38%), immigration (34%), energy issues (31%) and research (31%) are aspects that should be emphasised by the EU institutions in the coming years. The three first items are actually official priorities for the French Presidency.
- The EU level is perceived as the most appropriate to deal with terrorism (85%), scientific research (78%), protecting the environment (77%), defence and foreign policy (72%) and energy (71%). On the other hand, the French prefer the national level when it comes to decisions regarding pensions (81%), the health system (81%), taxation (76%) and education (75%).
- Support for a common defence and security policy (79%) and for a common foreign policy (64%) remains strong even though it has decreased respectively by 3 points and 5 points compared to six months ago.
- A clear majority of the French are against further enlargements of the EU: only 31% are in favour of it (- 1 percentage points compared with last Autumn) and 60% are against it. Only Austrians (67% against enlargement) are more reluctant.
- Support for the accession of Norway (79%), Switzerland (76%) and Iceland (72%) remains very strong. The public is evenly split about Croatia joining the Union (45% in favour, 44% against). Support for Turkey's membership remains strong: 71% oppose this idea, while 19% support it. However, 35% of the French would support Turkey's accession if the country were to meet all the required criteria.