

# EUROBAROMETER 71

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**FRANCE**

## Introduction

The Eurobarometer survey was carried out in the 27 member countries of the European Union, in the three candidate countries (Croatia, Turkey, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), and in the Turkish Cypriot Community in the region not controlled by the government of the Republic of Cyprus. This survey, called “**Eurobarometer 71**” was carried out in France between 12 and 30 June 2009 by **TNS Sofres** among a representative sample of 1,038 people aged 15 and above.

### 1. The French and the social and economic context

- Although the crisis has well and truly made its home in Europe, the French remain optimistic about their own lives and are generally happy: 84% say that they are very or fairly satisfied with their lives. This represents a clear improvement compared to autumn 2008 (+ 4 points) and remains considerably higher than the European average (77%, + 1 point).

On the other hand, when we start looking at issues on a macro-economic level, the French are very negative, and much more so than the European average:

- **The state of the French economy:** 87% perceive it to be bad or very bad compared with 78% of Europeans commenting on their respective national economies;
- **The state of the European economy:** 73% of views were negative compared with the European average of 68%;
- **The state of the global economy:** 82% of views were negative compared with 77% across Europe as a whole;
- **The employment situation in France:** it was on this issue that the French are most pessimistic, with 94% of them saying that the situation is bad, compared with a European average of 85%.

Overall, the French are very pessimistic about both the development of the situation in France and in Europe:

- 61% of French people feel that things are going in the wrong direction **in France** compared with 25% who think the opposite, i.e. that things are going in the right direction. These results are, nevertheless, a slight improvement compared to autumn 2008, with a 5 point reduction in pessimism;
  - The French are a little less pessimistic when it comes to how the **European situation** is developing, with 51% feeling that things are going in the wrong direction compared with 26% who say that things are generally going in the right direction.
- The new Eurobarometer shows unemployment as the main area for concern, with nearly two-thirds of those interviewed (62%) citing it as one of the biggest problems which **France has to deal with at the moment**, a long way ahead of the economic situation (35%), with rising prices only being cited by a quarter of those interviewed.

On the other hand, **as far as personal situations are concerned**, inflation remains the main worry for the French, although at a slightly lower level than for the EB 70: 47% compared with 58% in autumn 2008.

- However, the French do feel that the future should improve, and their views are tinged with a certain degree of optimism, more so than in autumn 2008:
  - **About their life in general:** only 12% of those interviewed feel that the next twelve months could be worse while 31% of them think that things will improve and 55% suspect that there will be no change;
  - **About the state of France's economy:** opinions have changed significantly over the last nine months, with 25% of those interviewed now saying that the economic situation will improve (compared with 19% in autumn 2008), 42% saying there will be no change (compared with 23% in autumn 2008), and only 29% thinking that it is going to deteriorate (compared with 53% in autumn 2008);
  - **About the employment situation:** here, changes are less evident, with 43% of those interviewed still feeling that the employment situation is going to get worse (compared with 57% in autumn 2008);
  - Lastly, **about the economic situation in the European Union and the rest of the world:** the French are expecting slightly fewer positive changes than for their own country.

## 2. The French and the European Union

- **The image of the European Union remains relatively stable for the French**, although there has been a slight dip: 44% of French people have a very positive image (4%, -2 points) or fairly positive (40%, stable) image of the European Union, while 17% have a very negative (4%, -1 point) or fairly negative (13%, -3 points) image of it. More than one in three French people have a neutral image of it, a rise of 6 points and a higher level than in past surveys.
- Associations with Europe still largely relate to three main areas: the **freedom to travel and study** (41%), **peace** (39%) and the **Euro** (37%). These are followed by money-wasting (29%), a greater likelihood of being heard in the world (28%) and cultural diversity (25%).
- Indicators of belonging and the benefits associated with the European Union are on the rise:
  - Half of French people feel that **France's membership of the European Union** is a good thing (+1 point compared with autumn 2008), only 17% think that it is a bad thing, a drop of 4 points, and 30% feel that it is neither a good thing or a bad thing;
  - As far as **the benefits of France's membership of the European Union** are concerned, the shift is the same, with 54% of French people thinking that France has benefited from membership of the European Union (a rise of 3 points), while 34% feel the opposite is true (down 4 points) and similar results for the European average (56% compared with 31%).

### 3. Regional, national and European institutions

- The level of trust in the **French government** is very close to the level observed in autumn 2008: 29% of French people trust it and 66% do not.
- At the same time, the **level of trust in the European Union has gone down, with negative opinions now being the majority**: 47% of those interviewed do not trust it (+ 2 points compared with October 2008), and 43% do (- 3 points).
- There has been a **drop when it comes to the image of EU institutions** both for the Parliament (from 52% to 46%) and the European Central Bank (from 44% to 38%), as well as for the European Commission (from 45% to 41%), no doubt a consequence of the European elections and the financial crisis.
- Awareness of the **Czech presidency** is not wide among French or Europeans in general: 28% and 34% of them respectively have heard about it.
- The French seem to be in favour of consolidating the influence of the European Union and of **increasing decision-making at a European level**, in particular in terms of administrative dimensions, but also for economic aspects: combating unemployment, protecting welfare rights or safeguarding economic growth.

### 4. The European Union, the world and globalisation

- The very negative perception of globalisation, which has been a **characteristic of French views** since this question was introduced, with a clear majority seeing globalisation as a threat, **has increased**, with no more than 20% of the population expressing a positive view of globalisation, compared with 25% before the summer of 2007 and the start of the crisis.
- French people, like Europeans, are very much **in favour of introducing global regulations** which they feel have been made necessary by globalisation: 73%, a rise of 13 points compared to April 2008, feel this way, in line with the level and change in the European average.
- The French are convinced that the European Union is a **“well-equipped” power in terms of global economic competition**: 63% feel that it has enough power and tools to defend its economic interests in the global economy, a view which is similar to that of Europeans in general (66%). However, this perception of a powerful Europe economy among the French does not necessarily mean that Europe is seen as having a protective role in this area, either as far as globalisation is concerned, or the financial crisis.
- Having said this, the **solution for reacting to the crisis seems to be global rather than European**: while the European Union is seen by Europeans as most likely to be able to react to the crisis effectively (21%, ahead of the G20, cited by 20% of Europeans), it is only given fourth place by the French (16%), behind the G20 and the IMF.

### 5. Values – Human Rights

- **Commitment to liberalism falling**: while nearly two-thirds of Europeans agree that free competition is the best way of guaranteeing (65%), only 48% of French people share this

view, compared with 40% who think the opposite (26% at a European level). The change since April 2008 is fairly high in France when 54% said they agreed and 33% said they disagreed.

- The French are more concerned with **social and environmental themes** than the European average:
- French people who feel that the European Union does not do enough to promote and defend human rights around the world think that it should concentrate its human rights efforts on the **rights of children** (42%), **combating people trafficking** (41%), **combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination** (36%) and freedom of speech (35%).

## 6. European and national identity and immigration

- For the French, as well as for Europeans in general, European identity is first and foremost represented by democratic values (47%), geography (36%) and shared history (26%).
- The French, in the same vein as their neighbours, feel French first (“totally” 80%) and “inhabitants of their region” (65%, -4 points compared with March 2008), and then European (33%, + 7 points) or “citizens of the world” (35%, +10 points).
- When the French are asked about their views of immigration and immigrants, they are positive, often more so than the European average: other ethnic groups enrich culture for 64% (54% in Europe as a whole); “We need immigrants to work in some sectors of our economy” for 61% (42% in Europe as a whole).

## 7. Social welfare, health insurance

- French people are rather pessimistic about the evolution of social welfare:
  - many more of them than two years ago assume they will have to make a financial contribution to the medical care of their parents;
  - fewer than in 2007 think that they will be given the help and care they need in the future.
- The social security system still has a better reputation in France than the European average, although there is a slight dip compared to December 2006: 68% of French people feel that their system gives them adequate protection, while only 48% of Europeans feel this way.
- The French are no more confident about their retirement: only 27% say that they are “very” or “fairly” confident, compared with an average of 39% across the EU. Views on solutions for **funding retirement** have not changed very much since 2006, and remain at the same level as the European average: 25% of French people who work are ready to work and pay their contributions for longer (21% on average), 31% would agree to increases in their social security contributions (30% in Europe), while 14% would agree to get less (12% on average).

- Looking at the issue of **employment**, French people appear to be more negative than the European average: 65% think that it will “definitely” be difficult to find a job in 2030, even with qualifications (compared with a European average of 54%), and only 20% think that it will “definitely not” be difficult, with the remainder not expressing an opinion.

## 8. The future: the European Union in 2030

- When asked overall how they see the future of the European Union, the French are fairly optimistic, but less so than their European neighbours: 57% say that they are very optimistic (4%) or fairly optimistic (53%), while the figure for Europeans is 64% (9% and 55% respectively). It appears that:
  - **the life of citizens will be harder** (39%) or the same as now (35%);
  - more attention will be paid to **the environment** (48%), **solidarity** (43%) and **individualism** (41%), **work** (60%) and **order** (45%);
  - people will have less time to spend with their family (50%);
  - opinions are **divided** when it comes to **tolerance** towards ethnic and religious minorities: 43% think that it will be reduced and 41% imagine that it will be greater.

However, this view is somewhat different from their stated desires.

- Lastly, French people are relatively **confident about the role that the European Union will play on a global level in twenty years' time**:
  - 58% think that the Euro will be a stronger currency than the dollar;
  - 56% feel that it will be one of the greatest diplomatic powers in the world;
  - 49% that it will extend far beyond the borders of the European continent (Europe 43%);
  - Opinions are nevertheless divided about Europe's economic power, with 41% thinking that Europe will be a secondary economic power and 42% thinking the opposite.