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NATIONAL REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY THE NETHERLANDS

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Summary and conclusions

Netherlands context

Dutch citizens are still the most satisfied Europeans when it concerns their day-to-day lives. Almost all Dutch citizens (95%) say they are satisfied with the life they live. Together with Danes, Luxembourgers, Swedes and Finns, Dutch citizens are the most satisfied in Europe.

Compared to the European average, the Dutch are more positive about their national economy, their own work situation, their household's financial situation, employment opportunities in their country and the environmental situation in their country. The figures have not really changed in comparison to the summer of 2009.

Most Dutch citizens do not expect their life to change a great deal in the coming year, and feel the same way about their work situation. Again, the figures have not really changed from the summer of 2009.

As far as expectations regarding the economic situation in their country are concerned, a clear change can be seen. The Dutch are more positive than in summer of 2009. At that time, half of all Dutch citizens expected the economic situation to worsen in the coming twelve months, compared to an average of a third in other EU member countries. In the autumn of 2009, only three in ten Dutch citizens thought the economy would worsen. This means the Netherlands figure is now similar to the European average, which has remained approximately the same since the summer of 2009.

In relation to the summer of 2009, Dutch citizens are also considerably more positive about employment opportunities in their country. At that time, two-thirds expected conditions to worsen. By the autumn of 2009, that share had dropped to less than half. Though this still makes Dutch citizens slightly more pessimistic than average Europeans - four in ten Europeans expect employment opportunities to worsen in their respective countries. Compared to the summer of 2009, this figure is approximately the same.

Despite an increase in optimism, the economic situation in the Netherlands remains at the top of the list when it concerns the most important subjects within the Netherlands. Unemployment is in second place. The importance of pensions has risen in comparison to the summer of 2009. For average Europeans, the subject of unemployment is at the top of the list, followed by the economic situation. When it concerns issues that one personally encounters, we see that healthcare and the economic situation are of greatest importance to Dutch citizens. The importance of healthcare has increased compared to the summer of 2009. Just like the summer of 2009, the average European views rising prices/inflation and the economic situation as the most important subjects.

The Dutch have greater confidence in mass media than the average European. They have most confidence in radio, followed by television, the written press and the internet.

Confidence in the government, parliament and political parties has fallen further compared to the summer of 2009, after a temporary resurgence in the autumn of 2008. Confidence has dropped to the level of spring 2008. There is hardly any change in the rest of Europe. The confidence of the average European, in politics within his own country, remains low in comparison to Dutch citizens.

The majority of Dutch citizens (seven in ten) are satisfied about the way in which democracy functions in the Netherlands. Three in ten Dutch citizens are dissatisfied. The average European is less satisfied: over half are satisfied, while over four in ten are not satisfied about the way in which democracy functions in their respective countries.

European context

Just like half of all EU27 citizens, half of all Dutch citizens are positive about the European Union in general. A considerable portion of Dutch citizens (four in ten) and European citizens (one in three) have a neutral view of the EU.

For Dutch citizens and other Europeans, the European Union primarily represents four issues: legislation, democracy, peace and human rights.

For Dutch citizens, the European Union primarily stands for freedom to travel, study and work, the euro, greater influence in the world, peace and economic prosperity.

The confidence of Dutch citizens in the European Union is approximately the same as the summer of 2009. Six in ten Dutch citizens state that they have confidence. This figure is lower in the rest of the European Union: slightly less than half of all Europeans have confidence in the EU.

Confidence in the European Parliament and the European Commission has stabilised. However, confidence in the European Central Bank has continued to slide since winter 2008. In the winter of 2008, eight in ten Dutch citizens still had confidence in the ECB; now, that figure is only six in ten. Even so, the confidence of Dutch citizens is still a lot higher than the EU average. Of all EU27 citizens, four in ten have confidence in the institution.

Dutch and European citizens have become slightly more positive about Europe since the summer of 2009. Almost half of Dutch citizens, and four in ten of all Europeans, think that the EU is heading in the right direction. A comfortable majority (eight in ten Dutch citizens) is optimistic about the future of Europe. On average, Dutch citizens are more optimistic than other Europeans (six in ten Europeans are optimistic).

Dutch support for membership of the EU is one of the highest in the entire European Union. Three quarters of all Dutch citizens support membership, compared to half of all EU27 citizens. The same proportion also thinks that the Netherlands benefits from its membership. This is also higher than the European average (almost six in ten).

Almost all Dutch citizens think that Dutch interests are well represented in the European Union. However, simultaneously, four in ten Dutch citizens believe the opposite to be true.

European economy

Dutch citizens are now more positive about the economic situation in Europe compared to the summer of 2009. Dutch citizens are also more positive than average Europeans. Four in ten Dutch citizens regard the economic situation in Europe to be bad, compared to an average of six in ten in the EU27 Member States.

When compared to the economies of America, Japan, China, Russia and Brazil, Dutch citizens are generally more positive about the European Union than the average citizen in other European Member States.

More than eight in ten Dutch citizens support a European Monetary Union with a single currency – the euro. The European average is lower, namely six in ten. With regards to further expanding the number of EU member countries, people are less positive. Slightly less than half of all Dutch and European citizens think this is a good idea.

When it concerns issues that should be given top priority by the EU, economic recovery is in first place among Dutch citizens and average European citizens.

The main aspect that Dutch citizens feel must be prioritised by the EU, in order to guarantee economic recovery, is the introduction of greater European supervision over financial markets and financial institutions.

Knowledge about the EU

Two-thirds of all EU27 and Dutch citizens have not heard, seen or read about the Swedish presidency of the European Union in the second half of 2009. And only two in ten Europeans have seen, heard or read about the Spanish presidency as of 1 January 2010. Dutch citizens are even less informed – only one in ten have seen, heard or read something on the matter.

The percentage of Dutch citizens who say they understand the workings of the EU has dropped compared to the summer of 2009 and previous measurements. The percentage of Dutch citizens who understand the workings of the European Union is now approximately in-line with the average among EU27 member countries.

Familiarity with European institutions is almost unchanged in comparison to the summer of 2009. The best-known remains the European Parliament – over nine in ten Dutch citizens know of this institution. The least well-known is the Council of the European Union, or the Council of Ministers (among seven in ten). Dutch citizens are slightly more familiar with European institutions than the average European citizen.

The knowledge of Dutch citizens, concerning the number of Member States in the European Union and the number of countries that have introduced the euro, leaves a bit to be desired. Only four in ten Dutch citizens know that the EU does not consist of 25 Member States and, again, only four in ten know that the EU does not consist of 12 member countries. There is a slight improvement concerning knowledge about the membership of Iceland – almost six in

ten Dutch citizens are aware that Iceland is not a member. Over six in ten also know about the positive outcome in the Irish referendum concerning the Lisbon Treaty. People displayed the most knowledge about the membership of Switzerland – over three quarters know that Switzerland is not an EU member country. Dutch citizens are more aware than average European Union citizens.

If it concerns subjects like healthcare, protection of the environment, prevention of social inequality, prevention of unemployment and discrimination, Dutch citizens often feel that the EU is ahead of the USA. If it concerns subjects like enterprise, technological innovation and scientific research, Dutch citizens feel that the USA is more advanced than Europe.

According to Dutch citizens, the issues to which European institutions must pay greater attention in order to improve the EU, include crime prevention, economic matters, social issues and healthcare, prevention of climate change and environmental issues. Dutch citizens feel that crime prevention and the fight against climate change are of greater importance than the average European – who feels that immigration and energy issues are more important.

The majority of Dutch citizens feel that decision-making at European level should primarily focus on anti-terrorism, protection of the environment, defence and foreign affairs, immigration, prevention of discrimination, support of areas with economic problems, scientific and technological research, prevention of inflation, energy, economics and transport.

Only a minority of Dutch citizens are in favour of European-level decision-making regarding unemployment, the education system, taxes, pensions, healthcare and social security.

Globalisation

In general, Dutch citizens are more positive than average Europeans about the effects of globalisation:

- Six in ten Dutch citizens expect positive consequences for industry. Europeans are less positive – only four in ten Europeans expect positive consequences for industry.
- Eight in ten Dutch citizens think that globalisation offers opportunities for economic growth. Only six in ten Europeans think the same.
- Almost half of all Dutch citizens think that globalisation increases social inequality. An equal amount believes this not to be the case. Six in ten Europeans think that globalisation increases social inequality.
- Six in ten Dutch citizens think that globalisation will help to improve world peace, compared to half of EU27 citizens.
- Six in ten Dutch citizens think that globalisation helps the development of poor countries.
- Two thirds of Dutch citizens, and the same proportion of Europeans, think that globalisation makes people more open to other cultures.

People see fewer benefits when it concerns price inflation: six in ten Dutch citizens and six in ten EU27 citizens think that globalisation will *not* prevent price inflation.

Over half of all Dutch and EU27 citizens regard economic strength to be the most important factor in determining a country's power and influence on the world stage. Political influence is a distant second (a quarter of all EU27 citizens and almost three in ten Dutch citizens). Little importance is placed on military prowess (one in ten Europeans and one in sixteen Dutch citizens).

Over half of all Dutch and EU27 citizens feel that the EU is best characterised by 'economic power'. A third of all Dutch and EU27 citizens think that the EU is best characterised by 'political influence'.

When it concerns the main values needed to meet global challenges, social equality and solidarity occupy first place among Dutch citizens, followed by progress and innovation. These are followed by protection of the environment and free trade/free markets. The average European also regards these values as the most important, though in a slightly different order.

How should the EU use its resources to improve stability in the world? Dutch citizens feel that the EU should opt for human rights and democracy, improvement of global healthcare, prevention of illness, prevention of poverty, peace-keeping, education, anti-terrorism, climate change and the environment. The average European primarily opts for prevention of poverty, peace-keeping, human rights, democracy and climate change.

Economic crisis

Three-quarters of Dutch citizens and seven in ten EU27 citizens are gloomy about the world economy. The average European is slightly more optimistic than in the summer of 2009 – Dutch citizens are equally gloomy.

However, we do notice that Dutch and European citizens are more optimistic about the employment market than in the summer of 2009. Half of all Dutch citizens and average Europeans think that the worst impact on employment has now passed. Six months ago, only a third of all Dutch citizens, and three in ten average Europeans, thought the same.

A comfortable majority of Dutch citizens and average Europeans think that reforms must be implemented to benefit future generations, even at the expense of the current generation. A comfortable majority of Dutch citizens and average EU27 citizens think that more reforms are needed in their own respective countries in order to face the future with greater confidence.

Like average Europeans, Dutch citizens have greater confidence in the European economy than in the summer of 2009. Half of all Dutch citizens are positive about the European economy; four in ten are negative. Dutch citizens are more positive about the European economy than the average European – three in ten think the current situation is good, while seven in ten think it is bad.

Which institution must take the initiative in fighting the impact of the crisis? Dutch citizens mainly state the G20, while only two in ten EU27 citizens mention the G20.

Two-thirds of all Dutch citizens do not think the guilder would have offered better protection against the crisis. The average European in the euro-zone is less positive – around half thinks that their economy would have been better off under their ‘old’ currency; the other half thinks the opposite. Half of Dutch citizens think that the euro has softened the impact of the crisis. Slightly more than four in ten think otherwise. Europeans are less likely (four in ten) to believe that the euro softened the impact of the crisis.

In relation to measures the EU should take to effectively prevent the consequences of the crisis, Dutch citizens generally agree with the following suggestions:

- Greater coordination between member countries in terms of financial and economic policy;
- Greater supervision of financial groups;
- An important role for the EU in regulating financial services.

Which measures should the EU take to improve the performance of the European economy?

The majority favours the following measures:

- Improvement of education and professional training;
- Investment in research and innovation.

Which reform measure should the EU introduce for its own financial systems, if only one could be selected? Almost half of all Dutch citizens opted for a better system to supervise financial markets and institutions. A quarter prefer making financial managers more accountable (including making bonuses performance-based); over two in ten think it is the best way to make benefits, costs and risks in financial markets more transparent.