

EUROBAROMETER 72

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Autumn 2009

NATIONAL REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY UNITED KINGDOM

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Executive Summary of EB72 Main Report for the United Kingdom

Poll taken: 30/10 – 17/11/ 2009

Sample size: 1322 UK citizens

The fieldwork took place whilst politicians' expenses were still being investigated amid an ongoing economic recession, from which the UK appears to be emerging later than comparable continental economies.

The most important findings to arise from the Report are as follows:

What does the EU mean to you?

Freedom to study, travel and work throughout the European Union overtakes the negative features of bureaucracy or a waste of money which were previously the main characteristics cited by UK respondents in Eurobarometer polls.

This is now the most commonly cited benefit across the 27 EU Member States including the UK, where the figures have risen from 25% in the spring of 2009 to 30%.

While no significant variations or patterns emerged on analysis by gender or age, education was, once again, a major factor in determining attitude. Just 19% of those educated to age 15 or less saw this freedom as the key feature of the EU compared with 52% of those who have been educated to age 20 or beyond.

UK citizens don't understand how the EU works

Despite the positive view of the EU held by nearly a third of the UK poll, as noted above, 60% of UK citizens said they did not understand how it worked. In fact, across the whole EU, nearly half (48%) of those polled gave this negative response.

Making up the UK average are more than half (52%) of males and 67% of women.

As noted in previous reports, education plays a crucial part in this basic lack of knowledge, with 69% of those educated to 15 or less being uninformed on this issue in contrast with 44% of those educated to age 20 or beyond.

Three-quarters (75%) of house persons, 68% of manual workers and 67% of the retired said they did not understand how the EU works. This compares with relatively low figures of 42% amongst the self-employed and 45% amongst managers.

There is an implied link in this lack of understanding of the way the EU works amongst these demographic groups and the fact that, in other parts of this report, they will be seen to be less likely to have a positive view about the EU as well as benefits of membership may have brought to the UK.

An area of focus of activity in the UK could reasonably be seen to be an educational process on the workings of the EU.

Unemployment remains the subject that most concerns UK citizens

Public concern about unemployment doubled in the UK from 7% in the spring of 2008 to 16% in the autumn, before leaping to 41% in the spring of this year. Although it has now fallen slightly, to 38%, this is still the issue that gives UK citizens the most concern.

Economic situation is the second most important issue

In EB70, at the end of 2008, 34% of UK citizens and 37% of EU27 citizens viewed the economic situation as their most important issue. In the next eight months, the UK figure fell to 31% while, the EU average increased to 42%. In this latest poll, the UK figure continued its fall - to 28% - while the EU figure shows a slight decrease to 40%.

Immigration is the third most important issue

In the past six months, the number of UK citizens concerned about immigration has increased slightly from 25% to 29% - nearly one in three of those polled. This is, however, three times the EU27 average where, over the same period, the figures have remained unchanged at 9%.

UK citizens' trust in the EU, though limited, is still higher than trust for all major UK political bodies

23% of UK citizens say they trust the European Union and, although this is still less than half the EU27 average of 48%, it means that, amongst UK citizens, the EU is more trusted than UK political parties (9%), the UK government (19%) and the UK parliament (19%).

Nevertheless, the UK figure is still the lowest in the Union and only half that of the next most wary countries, France (42%) and Germany (44%).

Compared to trust levels in national institutions, there is a high 'don't know' response when UK citizens are asked whether they trust the European Union with a figure of 15%. This figure is made up of twice as many women (20%) than men (10%).

EU role in the financial crisis

53% of the UK poll believes that supervision by the European Union whenever public money is used by a financial institution would be an effective measure in combating the current economic and financial crisis

Education was a major driver in this view with nearly two-thirds (64%) of those educated to age 20 or beyond believing this measure would be effective compared with just 40% of those who had left school aged 15 or less.

Membership of the EU is not seen as a good thing by UK citizens

Across the EU27, more than half (53%) believe membership to be positive while in the UK, the figure is just 30% - a slight increase from the previous 28%. An equal proportion (30%) of UK citizens believes membership is a bad thing - this figure shows a fall from the 32% in EB71.

There is a noticeable difference by gender in response to this question. While 35% of men see membership as a good thing, only 26% of women do so.

UK respondents do not believe that membership has brought benefits to the country

Just 36% of UK respondents held a positive view on EU membership – a slight increase from the 34% noted six months previously, but still substantially less than the 57% average across the 27 Member States.

Making up this statistic are noticeably more men (41%) than women (32%), while this view is also held by 53% of those aged between 15 and 24 compared with just 29% of those aged 55 or more.

57% of the most educated of the poll believed that benefits had arisen compared with just 21% of those whose education had ended at age 15 or less.

Key indicators and five-year trends in UK sentiment (in %)

		EB61 Spring 2004	EB62 Autumn 2004	EB63 Spring 2005	EB64 Autumn 2005	EB65 Spring 2006	EB66 Autumn 2006	EB67 Spring 2007	EB68 Autumn 2007	EB69 Spring 2008	EB70 Autumn 2008	EB71 Spring 2009	EB72 Autumn 2009
Trust in the EU	UK	19	35	27	25	31	26	36	25	29	25	22	23
Trust in the European Commission	UK	26	39	31	26	28	25	29	22	24	27	22	21
Trust in the European Parliament	UK	30	39	35	27	31	25	33	25	27	27	22	25
Trust in national government	UK	19	32	31	33	30	24	34	30	24	29	21	19
Trust in national parliament	UK	25	35	36	37	36	29	41	34	27	30	17	19
Support for the euro	UK	36	31	28	28	28	29	29	24	26	28	27	28
Support for enlargement	UK	31	50	48	43	44	36	41	36	36	40	32	35
Number 1 concern of UK	UK	41 IMM	29 IMM	31 IMM	41 CRIM	41 CRIM	40 IMM	41 CRIM	44 CRIM	38 CRIM	34 EC SIT	41 EMP	38 EMP
Number 2 concern of the UK	UK	37 CRIM	28 TERR	31 CRIM	34 TERR	32 IMM	35 TERR	32 IMM	39 IMM	35 IMM	34 CRIM	31 EC SIT	36 CRIM
Membership a good thing	UK	29	38	36	34	42	34	39	34	30	32	28	30
Membership has brought benefits	UK	30	39	40	37	42	39	43	37	36	39	34	36
Number of Member States		15	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	27	27	27	27

Key: IMM = immigration; TERR = terrorism; CRIM = crime; EC SIT= economic situation EMP = unemployment

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