



*Eurobarometer*



European  
Commission

# EUROPEANS AND LANGUAGES

**Fieldwork: May – June 2005**

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Special Eurobarometer 237-Wave 63.4 – TNS Opinion & Social

This survey was requested and coordinated by Directorate-General Press and Communication

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Wave 63.4 of the Eurobarometer was carried out between 9 May and 14 June 2005. The survey was fielded in 25 EU Member States, and in addition, in the accession countries (Bulgaria and Romania), the candidate countries (Croatia and Turkey), and among the Turkish Cypriot Community<sup>1</sup>. A total of 29 328 people aged 15 years and over were interviewed.

As part of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked about their **mother tongue, which other languages they know, and what the level of their language skills is**. The results of this survey are compared with a number of previous Eurobarometer reports<sup>2</sup>. It should be noted here, that the questions have been modified and the total population varies between the studies. Thus, the trends should be interpreted with care.

### **1. MOTHER TONGUE**

As expected, the mother tongue of the majority EU citizens is **the national language**<sup>3</sup> of their country. 100% of respondents in Poland name Polish as their mother tongue, and 99% of the respondents in Greece, Cyprus and Hungary name their national languages. In Belgium, Ireland, Luxembourg and Finland, several languages have official or national status. Also in these countries, a vast majority of respondents name one or more of the official languages as the mother tongue(s).

The highest number of interviewees stating their mother tongue is **another language than one of the official languages of their country** can be found in the Baltic States: 29% of the interviewees in Latvia and 19% of the interviewees in Estonia indicate Russian as their mother tongue. This is also the case in Lithuania but to a lesser extent (8%).

On the other hand, the most notable changes in time are also found in Latvia and Estonia: the proportion of people speaking Russian as their mother tongue has dropped respectively 9 and 14 points compared to the Eurobarometer survey conducted in spring 2003 in the candidate countries at the time. In return, the number of citizens stating the national languages as their mother tongue has gone up 14 points in Estonia and 13 points in Latvia.

In addition, there are several **regional languages** without official status in the whole country spoken in the Member States. In Spain, 9% of respondents name

<sup>1</sup> Cyprus as a whole is one of the 25 European Union Member States. However, the "acquis communautaire" is suspended in the part of the country that is not controlled by the government of the Republic of Cyprus. For practical reasons, only the interviews conducted in the part of the country controlled by the government of the Republic of Cyprus are recorded in the category "CY" and included in the EU25 average. The interviews conducted in the part of the country not controlled by the government of the Republic of Cyprus are recorded in the category "CY(tcc)" [tcc: *Turkish Cypriot Community*].

<sup>2</sup> Standard EB 55.1 (2001), Europeans and languages EB 54.1b (2001), CCEB 2003/2 (2003)

<sup>3</sup> By national languages we refer to languages having full official status in the Member State.

Catalan<sup>4</sup> and 1% Basque<sup>5</sup> as their mother tongue. The Spanish constitution states that Castilian is the official Spanish language of the kingdom, and the other languages of Spain are also official in the respective autonomous communities, in accordance with their Statutes. Other regional and minority languages used within the EU were not explicitly covered in this survey. Respondents speaking these regional or minority languages as their mother tongue are categorized in the group 'other'.

<b>MOTHER TONGUE - % MENTIONS (MULTIPLE ANSWERS POSSIBLE)<sup>6</sup></b>				
	<b>National languages</b>	<b>Regional languages</b>	<b>Other EU languages</b>	<b>Other</b>
BE	Dutch 57%, French 39%, German 0+%		1%	3%
CZ	95%		3%	0%
DK	97%		2%	1%
DE	92%		1%	4%
EE	80%		0%	20%
EL	99%		0%	0%
ES	87%	Catalan 9%, Basque 1%	2%	1%
FR	94%		4%	3%
IE	English 94%, Irish 9%		2%	0%
IT	97%		2%	0%
CY	99%		1%	
LV	70%		1%	30%
LT	87%		4%	8%
LU	Luxembourgish 73%, French 7%, German 5%		14%	1%
HU	99%		0%	0%
MT	97%		5%	
NL	98%		0%	1%
AT	97%		2%	2%
PL	100%		0%	0%
PT	97%		3%	
SI	95%		2%	4%
SK	90%		10%	1%
FI	Finnish 94%, Swedish 6%		2%	
SE	94%		4%	1%
UK	92%		0%	5%
BG	88%		0%	11%
HR	98%		2%	1%
RO	95%		4%	1%
TR	93%		0%	9%
CY(tcc)	100%		1%	

<sup>4</sup> Catalan is protected by the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia (4/1979), which states that Catalan and Castilian are the official languages in Catalonia. The Law 7/1983 on Language Standardization in Catalonia was replaced by the Act on Linguistic Policy (Act No 1, 7 January 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Basque is protected by The Statute of Autonomy of Basque Country (1979), which states that that both Basque and Castilian (Spanish) are official languages in the Basque Country.

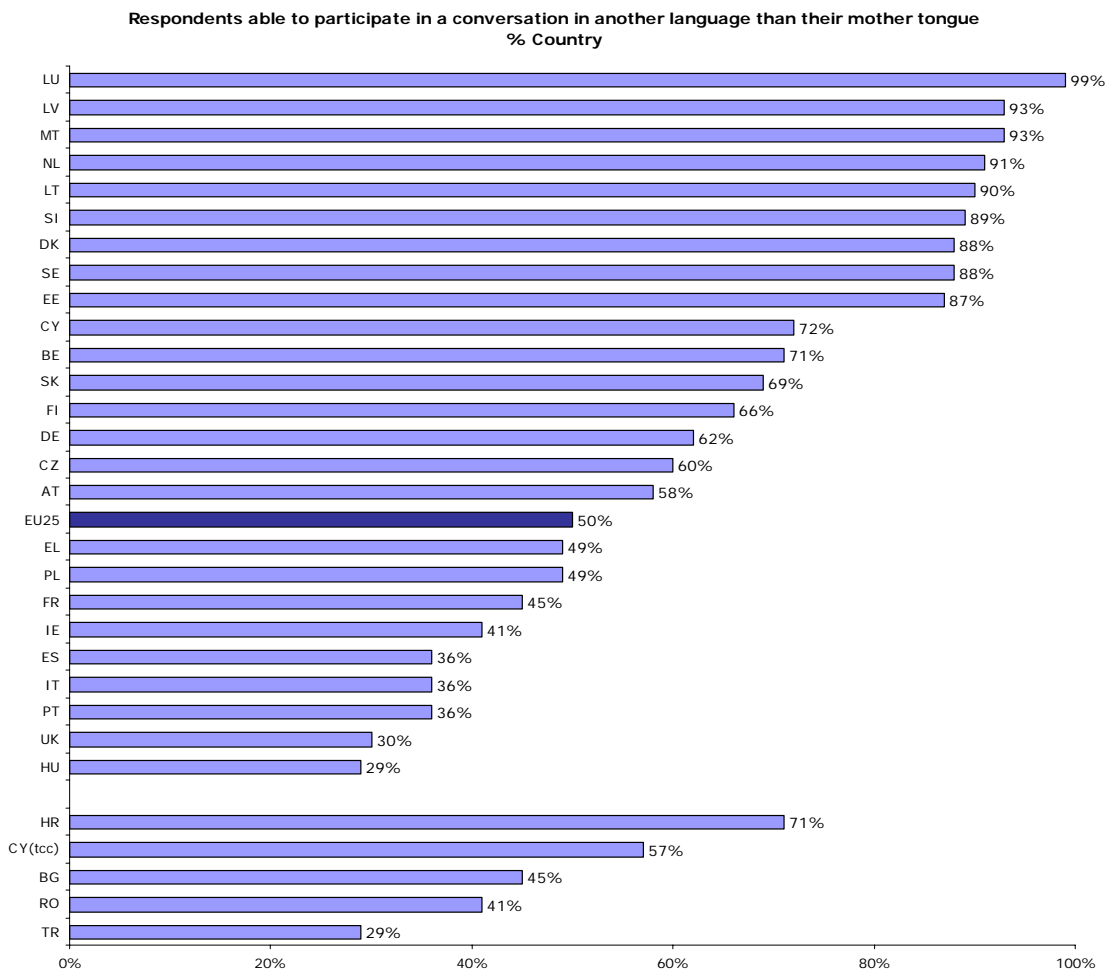
<sup>6</sup> The respondents could state one or more languages as their mother tongue, and also, an option to reply 'do not know' was included. Due to this and to rounding procedures, the rows may add up more or less than 100%.

Furthermore, due to the free movement of labour and the possibility to study in another Member State, in most of the countries there are **people of other EU nationalities** speaking another **EU language**<sup>7</sup> as their mother tongue. This is especially the case in Luxembourg, where 14% of respondents state their mother tongue to be another EU language than one of the three official languages of the country. Finally, for some EU citizens their mother tongue is **the language of their country of origin outside the EU**. This is especially the case in countries with immigration traditions, like Germany, France or the UK.

Of the accession countries, Bulgaria has a notable percentage of respondents stating Turkish as their mother tongue (10%).

## 2. OTHER LANGUAGES KNOWN

**Half of the citizens** of the Member States assert that they can speak at least one other language than their mother tongue at the level of being able to have a conversation. This is 3 points more than perceived in 2001 in the EU15 (EB 51.1). Nevertheless, the percentages vary considerably from country to country.



<sup>7</sup> The official Community languages of the European Union are Czech, Danish, Dutch, Estonian, English, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish and Swedish.

Not surprisingly, **the best language skills are found in relatively small Member States** with not widely spoken national languages. 99% of Luxembourgish, 93% Latvians and Maltese, and 90% of Lithuanians know at least one other language than their mother tongue. On the contrary, large majority in Hungary (71%), the UK (70%), Spain, Italy and Portugal (64% each) reply to master only their mother tongue. In the acceding and candidate countries (except Croatia), the proportion of respondents being able to have a conversation in another language than their mother tongue is below the EU average.

In the EU, **English** (34%) is the most widely known language besides the mother tongue followed by **German** (12%) and **French** (11%). **Spanish** and **Russian** are spoken as a foreign language by 5% of respondents.

THREE MOST WIDELY KNOWN LANGUAGES - %					
<b>BE</b>		<b>CZ</b>		<b>DK</b>	
English	52%	German	31%	English	83%
French	44%	English	24%	German	54%
German	25%	Russian	19%	Swedish	19%
<b>DE</b>		<b>EE</b>		<b>EL</b>	
English	51%	Russian	62%	English	44%
French	12%	English	41%	French/German	8%
German	7%	Finnish/German	18%	Italian	3%
<b>ES</b>		<b>FR</b>		<b>IE</b>	
English	20%	English	34%	Irish/Gaelic	21%
Spanish	9%	Spanish	10%	French	19%
French	8%	German	7%	English	6%
<b>IT</b>		<b>CY</b>		<b>LV</b>	
English	29%	English	71%	Russian	67%
French	11%	French	11%	English	34%
German/Spanish	4%	German/Italian	3%	Latvian	24%
<b>LT</b>		<b>LU</b>		<b>HU</b>	
Russian	79%	French	90%	German/English	16%
English	26%	German	84%	Russian/Other	2%
Polish	17%	English	66%	several languages	1%
<b>MT</b>		<b>NL</b>		<b>AT</b>	
English	89%	English	87%	English	53%
Italian	60%	German	66%	French	11%
French	17%	French	24%	Italian/other	8%
<b>PL</b>		<b>PT</b>		<b>SI</b>	
English	25%	English	26%	Croatian	61%
Russian	24%	French	20%	English	56%
German	19%	Spanish	10%	German	45%
<b>SK</b>		<b>FI</b>		<b>SE</b>	
Czech	31%	English	60%	English	85%
German	28%	Swedish	38%	German	28%
Russian	25%	German	17%	French/Norwegian	10%
<b>UK</b>					
French	14%				
English	7%				
German	6%				
<b>BG</b>		<b>HR</b>		<b>RO</b>	
Russian	21%	English	43%	English	26%
English	15%	German	33%	French	17%
Bulgarian	11%	Italian	12%	Other	5%
<b>TR</b>		<b>CY(tcc)</b>			
English	18%	English	43%		
Turkish	6%	Greek	19%		
German	4%	German	5%		

At country level, English is the most widely spoken foreign language in 16 Member States, and also mentioned most often as a first foreign language. Slovakia is the only country where English is not mentioned among the three most widely spoken languages, though it follows fourth with 24% share. French is most widely known language apart from the mother tongue in the UK and Luxembourg, and German in the Czech Republic and Hungary.

As can be seen in the table above, **the accession of the 10 new Member States has increased the diversity of the language map within the European Union** and there is a difference between the predominant foreign languages in the EU10 and the EU15.

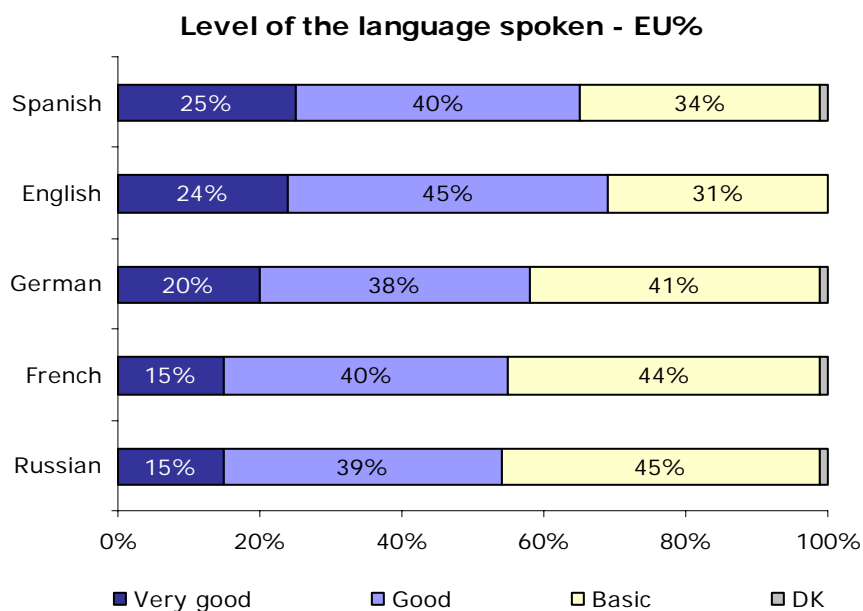
- Notwithstanding English constantly increasing its foothold (+2 points compared to 2001), it is still less spoken in the EU10 than the EU15 (26% versus 36%).
- German has caught up French as the second most spoken foreign language in the EU due to its more widely spread use in the “new” Member States (21% versus 12%). French is known by 3% of the respondents in the EU10 whereas 12% speak it as a foreign language in the “old” Member States.
- Russian is the most widely spoken foreign language in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and also commonly known in other Central and Eastern European countries. This has lifted Russian to the fourth place ex aequo in the list of most widely spoken foreign languages in the EU.

Finally, when language skills are analysed according to the socio-demographic variables, some predictable patterns can be depicted. **Men** state more often than women to speak at least one foreign language (52% to 47%) and the likelihood to speak at least one foreign language increases **the younger the respondent is** (69% in the youngest age group versus 35% among the oldest group). The differences are even more striking between the ones that finished their studies at the age of 15 and those who are **still studying** (20% and 79% respectively). On occupational scale, **students and managers** are most likely to speak at least one foreign language (79% and 73%). That is also the case to a lesser extent with **people living in large towns** compared to people living in the countryside (55% versus 47%).

Respondents able to participate in a conversation in another language than their mother tongue - %	
<b>EU25</b>	<b>50%</b>
<b>Sex</b>	
Male	52%
Female	47%
<b>Age</b>	
15-24	69%
25-39	58%
40-54	47%
55 +	35%
<b>Education (End of)</b>	
15	20%
16-19	46%
20+	73%
Still Studying	79%
<b>Occupation</b>	
Self-employed	52%
Managers	73%
Other white collars	54%
Manual workers	46%
House persons	36%
Unemployed	47%
Retired	33%
Students	79%
<b>Subjective urbanisation</b>	
Rural village	47%
Small/mid size town	49%
Large town	55%

### 3. LEVEL OF LANGUAGE SKILLS

The respondents were also asked to evaluate their skills in the foreign languages by three-step scale: very good – good – basic. The EU averages of the five most commonly spoken languages do not vary significantly. 69% indicate their level of English to be 'very good' or 'good', and 65% of those speaking Spanish respectively. Respondents speaking French or Russian tend to rate their language skills slightly lower.



Overall, in each language in question, **the respondents assess their skills to be better** compared to the survey conducted in 2001 (EB 54.1). That is mainly due to the increasing confidence of their language skills by the citizens in the old Member States.

When analysed at country level, respondents in countries where the language in question is known widely, tend to rate their language skills higher. This is naturally also the case if the language named as a foreign language is one of the official languages of the country. Accordingly, in Netherlands where 87% reply to speak English in addition to their mother tongue, 88% consider to do so at very good or good level. Out of 90% of Luxembourgish knowing French as a foreign language, 99% state to speak it well or very well, French also being an official language in the country.

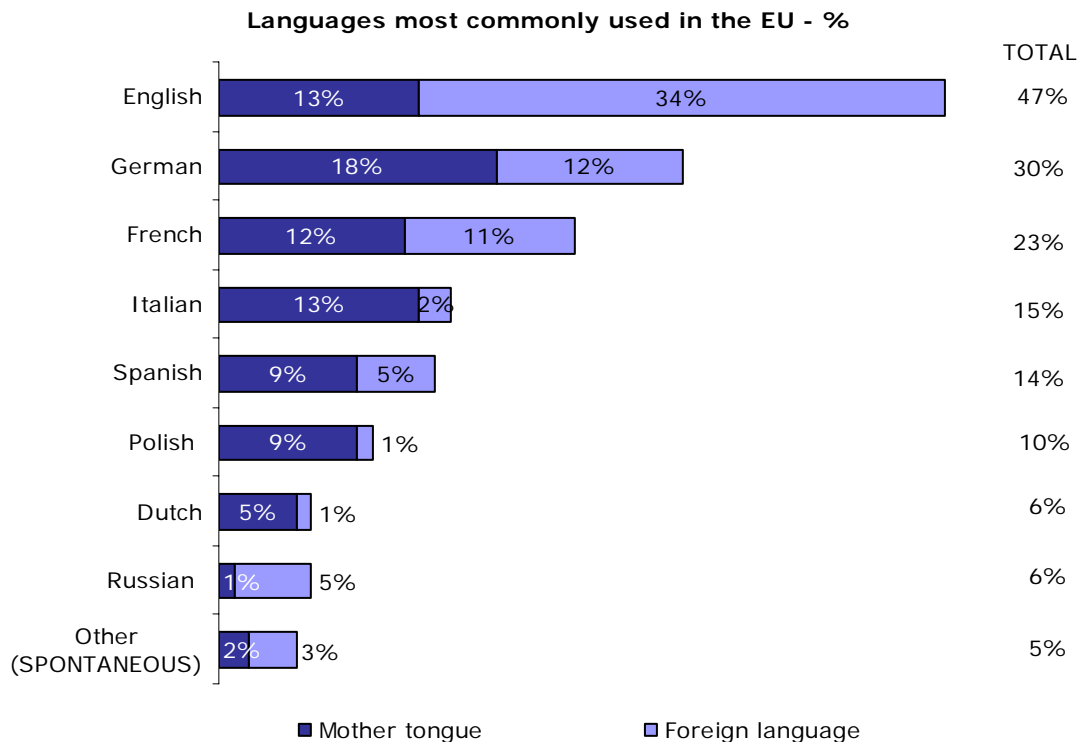
#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The following general remarks can be drawn:

- **The mother tongue of the respondent is in most of the cases one of the official languages of the country of residence.** Mobility inside the EU and immigration from outside the EU do not have significant impact on the figures.

Half of the citizens of the European Union speak at least one other language than their mother tongue. **The languages known slightly differ between EU15 and EU10 which joined the EU in 2004.**

**English keeps on growing its share as the most widely spoken foreign language.** Both French and German have also slightly increased their share compared to the situation in 2001.



- When looking at the overall situation within the European Union, **English remains the most widely used language, followed by German and French.** Compared to the situation in 2001 (EB51.1), the enlargement of the EU has brought Polish and Russian into the list.
- **The level of foreign languages spoken tends to be good, according to the respondents.** Considering five most widely used languages spoken as a foreign language, over half of the respondents rate the level of their skills good or very good (English 69%, Spanish 65%, German 58%, French 55%, Russian 54%). In all these languages, the estimate of the level of language skills is higher than what was observed in 2001 (EB 54.1).



## **EUROBAROMETER**

### **« SPECIAL NOTE ON EUROPEANS AND LANGUAGES »**

### **TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS**

Between the 9<sup>th</sup> of May and the 14<sup>th</sup> of June 2005, TNS Opinion & Social, a consortium created between Taylor Nelson Sofres and EOS Gallup Europe, carried out wave 63.4 of the EUROBAROMETER, on request of the EUROPEAN COMMISSION, Directorate-General Press and Communication, Opinion Polls. In the frame of this wave, special questions on the language skills of Europeans were asked.

The EUROBAROMETER is part of wave 63.4 and cover the population of the respective nationalities of the European Union Member States, resident in each of the Member States and aged 15 years and over. The EUROBAROMETER 63.4 has also been conducted in the four candidate countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Turkey) and in the Turkish Cypriot Community<sup>1</sup>. In these countries, the survey covers the national population of citizens of the respective nationalities and the population of citizens of all the European Union Member States that are residents in those countries and have a sufficient command of one of the respective national language(s) to answer the questionnaire. The basic sample design applied in all states is a multi-stage, random (probability) one. In each country, a number of sampling points was drawn with probability proportional to population size (for a total coverage of the country) and to population density.

In order to do so, the sampling points were drawn systematically from each of the "administrative regional units", after stratification by individual unit and type of area. They thus represent the whole territory of the countries surveyed according to the EUROSTAT NUTS II (or equivalent) and according to the distribution of the resident population of the respective nationalities in terms of metropolitan, urban and rural areas. In each of the selected sampling points, a starting address was drawn, at random. Further addresses (every Nth address) were selected by standard "random route" procedures, from the initial address. In each household, the respondent was drawn, at random (following the "closest birthday rule"). All interviews were conducted face-to-face in people's homes and in the appropriate national language. As far as the data capture is concerned, CAPI (*Computer Assisted Personal Interview*) was used in those countries where this technique was available.

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ABREVIATIONS	COUNTRIES	INSTITUTES	N° INTERVIEWS	FIELDWORK DATES	POPULATION 15+
BE	Belgium	TNS Dimarso	1.000	10/05/2005 13/06/2005	8.598.982
CZ	Czech Rep.	TNS Aisa	1.083	18/05/2005 07/06/2005	8.571.710
DK	Denmark	TNS Gallup DK	1.051	20/05/2005 14/06/2005	4.380.063
DE	Germany	TNS Infratest	1.520	14/05/2005 06/06/2005	64.174.295
EE	Estonia	Emor	1.001	12/05/2005 07/06/2005	887.094
EL	Greece	TNS ICAP	1.000	16/05/2005 06/06/2005	8.674.230
ES	Spain	TNS Demoscopia	1.024	12/05/2005 07/06/2005	35.882.820
FR	France	TNS Sofres	1.012	14/05/2005 08/06/2005	44.010.619
IE	Ireland	TNS MRBI	1.006	09/05/2005 10/06/2005	3.089.775
IT	Italy	TNS Abacus	1.004	13/05/2005 11/06/2005	49.208.000
CY	Rep. of Cyprus	Synovate	505	10/05/2005 07/06/2005	552.213
LV	Latvia	TNS Latvia	1.015	13/05/2005 08/06/2005	1.394.351
LT	Lithuania	TNS Gallup Lithuania	1.003	12/05/2005 06/06/2005	2.803.661
LU	Luxembourg	TNS ILReS	504	10/05/2005 04/06/2005	367.199
HU	Hungary	TNS Hungary	1.014	16/05/2005 02/06/2005	8.503.379
MT	Malta	MISCO	500	12/05/2005 06/06/2005	322.917
NL	Netherlands	TNS NIPO	1.006	12/05/2005 10/06/2005	13.242.328
AT	Austria	Österreichisches Gallup-Institute	1.000	12/05/2005 07/06/2005	6.679.444
PL	Poland	TNS OBOP	1.000	14/05/2005 07/06/2005	31.610.437
PT	Portugal	TNS EUROTESTE	1.005	12/05/2005 05/06/2005	8.080.915
SI	Slovenia	RM PLUS	1.045	13/05/2005 10/06/2005	1.663.869
SK	Slovakia	TNS AISA SK	1.108	18/05/2005 05/06/2005	4.316.438
FI	Finland	TNS Gallup Oy	1.024	12/05/2005 12/06/2005	4.279.286
SE	Sweden	TNS GALLUP	1.024	12/05/2005 02/06/2005	7.376.680
UK	United Kingdom	TNS UK	1.347	11/05/2005 12/06/2005	47.685.578
BG	Bulgaria	TNS BBSS	1.018	17/05/2005 31/05/2005	6.695.512
HR	Croatia	Puls	1.000	10/05/2005 03/06/2005	3.682.826
RO	Romania	TNS CSOP	1.004	23/05/2005 03/06/2005	18.145.036
TR	Turkey	TNS PIAR	1.005	12/05/2005 05/06/2005	47.583.830
CY(tcc)	Turkish Cypriot Community	KADEM	500	13/05/2005 31/05/2005	157.101
TOTAL			29.328	09/05/2005 14/06/2005	442.620.588

For each country a comparison between the sample and the universe was carried out. The Universe description was derived from Eurostat population data or from national statistics offices. For all countries surveyed, a national weighting procedure, using marginal and intercellular weighting, was carried out based on this Universe description. In all countries, gender, age, region and size of locality were introduced in the iteration procedure. For international weighting (i.e. EU averages), TNS Opinion & Social applies the official population figures as provided by EUROSTAT or national statistic offices. The total population figures for input in this post-weighting procedure are listed above.

Readers are reminded that survey results are estimations, the accuracy of which, everything being equal, rests upon the sample size and upon the observed percentage. With samples of about 1,000 interviews, the real percentages vary within the following confidence limits:

<b>Observed percentages</b>	10% or 90%	20% or 80%	30% or 70%	40% or 60%	50%
<b>Confidence limits</b>	± 1.9 points	± 2.5 points	± 2.7 points	± 3.0 points	± 3.1 points