



# EUROBAROMETER 2003.4

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE ACCEDING AND CANDIDATE COUNTRIES

Fieldwork: October - November 2003

Publication: December 2003

## FIRST RESULTS Autumn 2003

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

This document does not represent the point of view of the European Commission.  
The interpretations and opinions contained in it are solely those of the authors.

## Preface

---

This Candidate Countries Eurobarometer measures public opinion in the 10 acceding countries and the 3 candidate countries on European Union matters.

12,165 people were interviewed face-to-face between October 11 and November 9, 2003.

This wave reveals that:

- There is a great deal of pessimism in the countries that will join the European Union next May about what 2004 will bring for citizens. As many people expect their life in general to become worse in 2004 as expect it to remain the same. With almost half of the citizens expecting negative economic changes in their country the outlook is quite gloomy for the accession year. As a result, in the acceding countries the confidence in political institutions (parliaments, governments) dropped in historic lows.
- Support for the European Union membership, though it remains high in the acceding countries, dropped 6 percentage points since spring 2003. This unfavourable change can be attributed to the generally gloomier mood measured in economic pessimism throughout the region, as well as to the fading away of the direct effects of the mobilisation campaigns that preceded EU referenda in the acceding countries. In addition, as citizens acquire a more realistic picture of the costs accompanying a common currency, support for the euro has fallen as well.
- Finally, candidate and acceding citizens continue to favour the creation of a European Union Constitution as well as a more articulated European presence in settling international conflicts. All measures of the Common Foreign and Security Policy meet with strong approval among those who will become European citizens in May 2004, including the creation of a common Foreign Minister and effective European army.

(CC-13 stands for the whole candidate region, 2004 members are those countries that are to join the Union next May, and CC-3 is the group of countries that will remain candidates after the 2004 enlargement as well: Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey.)

*The Candidate Countries Eurobarometer surveys are conducted twice a year.*

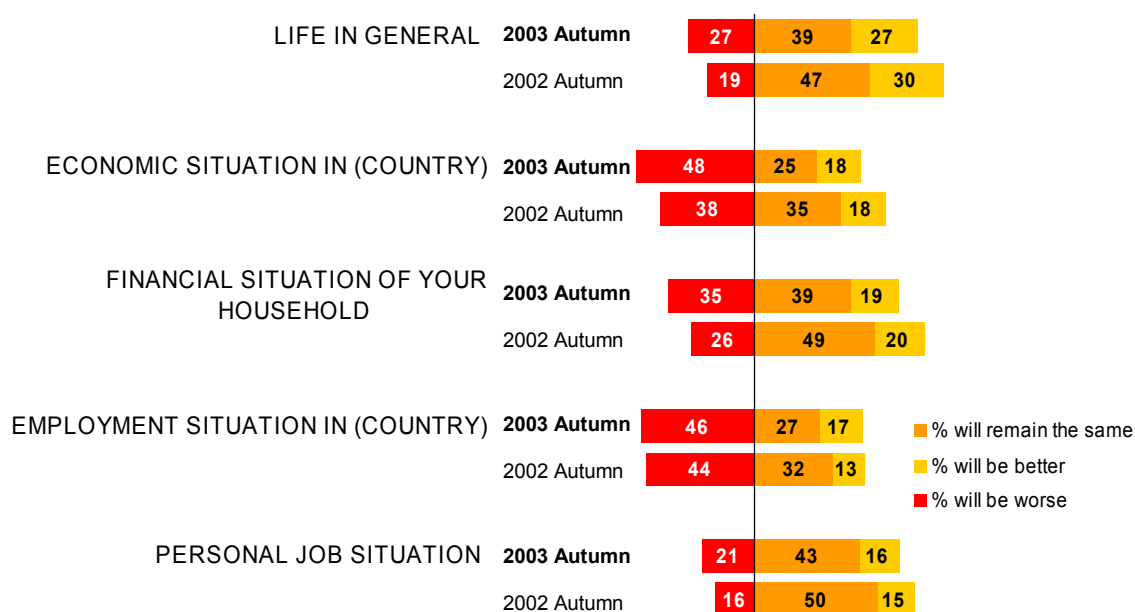
*Key indicators arising out of each wave are published soon after the completion of the fieldwork, followed within a few months by the complete set of results.*

*The complete report of Candidate Countries Eurobarometer 2003.4 will be available in January 2004.*

## Citizens in the new member countries are, compared to one year ago, less optimistic about their personal situation

Compared to their past predictions for 2003, citizens in the acceding countries report a gloomier personal outlook for 2004. Now over a quarter of all teenagers and adults in the candidate countries — about 15 million people — expect their life to change for the worse in 2004, which is significantly more than the 19% expressing pessimism last Autumn.

### Expectations for the year to come in the countries joining the EU in 2004

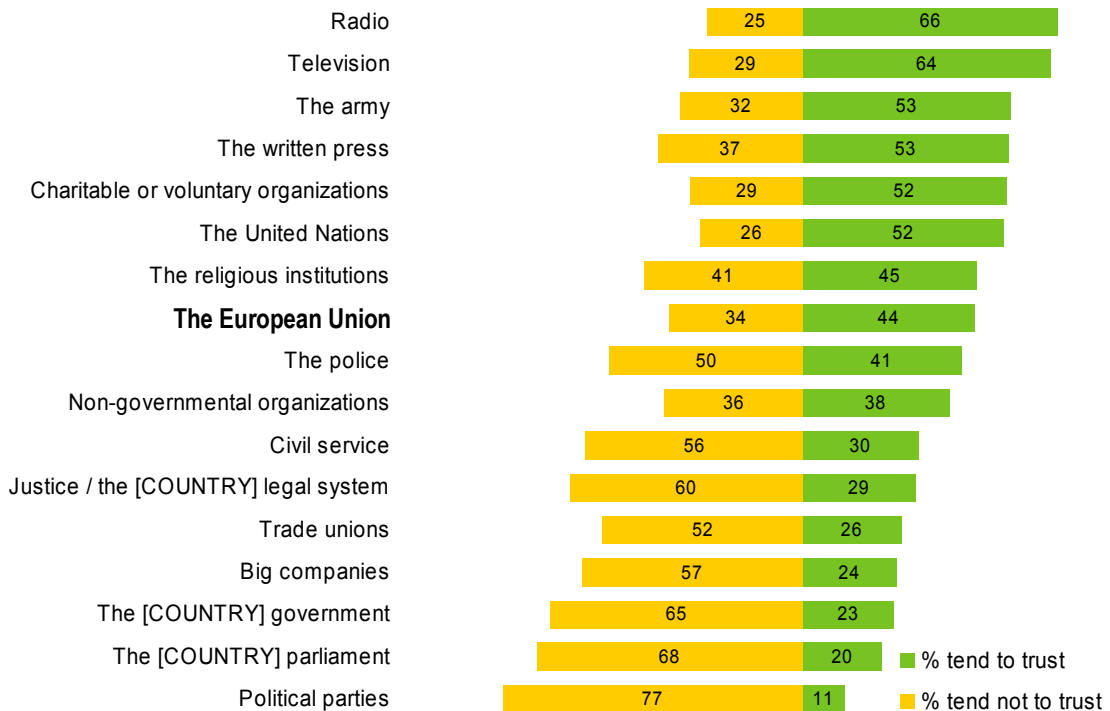


Overall the proportion of those expressing optimism in the various tested domains did not change dramatically. Yet the proportion of those expecting negative changes within the economic situation of their country, the financial situation of their household, and their personal job situation increased significantly. Additionally, the public remains very sceptical about short-term dynamics of employment in their own country: almost half of all citizens expect deterioration in the employment situation in their country (46%). Nevertheless, on the positive side, we find hopefulness for an improved employment situation to be reported in a slightly higher proportion than last year.

**Trust in the political system has declined sharply in the acceding countries, where the press remains the most trusted national institution**

Citizens in the new member countries trust radio and the television more than all other institutions tested in this study. Further, as written press ties in third place with the army, it is clear that the press overall demands a large amount of trust in the societies of the 2004 member countries. Trust in the press has not changed in the ten acceding countries, while trust in the army remained stable as well. Among the least trusted institutions, national governments and parliaments suffered a huge drop in confidence. Since last autumn, level of trust in governments and national parliaments fell 11 points (to 23%) and 20 points (to 20%), respectively.

**Trust in institutions  
(MS-2004)**



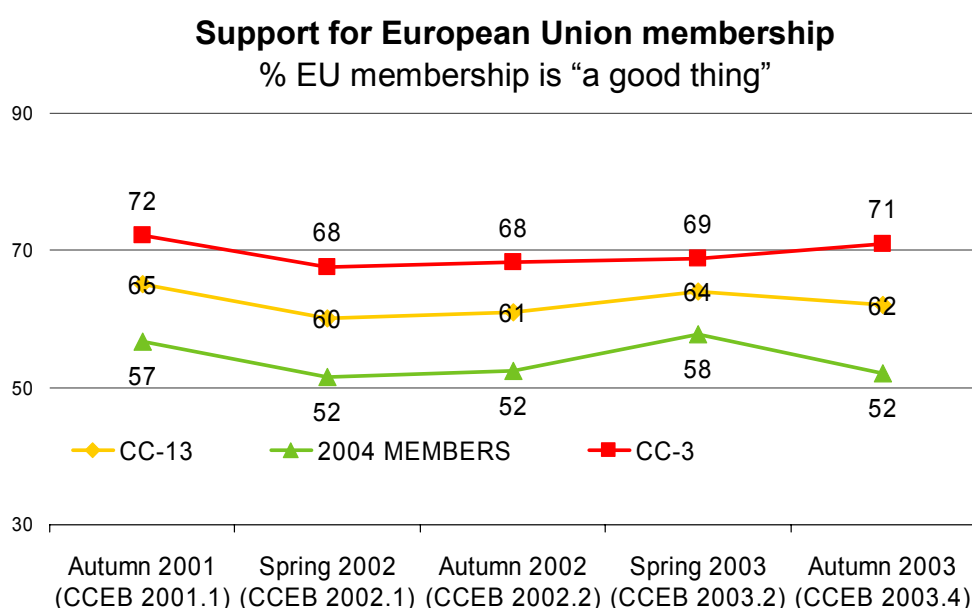
In a sense, this change is very significant: currently not only trade unions (who had been suffering from a serious trust-deficit in the post-communist countries of the region, and were among the least trusted social institutions in the past decade), but even big companies attain higher levels of trust than the national government and parliament.

In this rather unfavourable environment the European Union remains in the middle of institutional trust ranking, with no significant change from 2002 (trust in the EU went down just 1 point, to 44%). Close to half of the citizens in the ten acceding countries expressed trust towards the EU. This should be compared not only to the 23% who trust their own government, but also to the 52% who trust the United Nations. Reported trust in the European Union is similar to that of the police and religious institutions.

## This autumn, after a surge of euro-optimism induced by referendum campaigns, the Candidate Countries Eurobarometer found a normalisation of euro-sentiment

One might consider that the increase of support we measured in the spring was just a temporary result of the so-called mobilisation campaigns that were aimed to popularise the European Union and to motivate citizens to attend referenda about membership. These campaigns could have contributed to 6% increase in support for membership, but after the referenda and in a context of gloomy prospects for the year to come this increase seems to have faded away. Currently, 52% of the citizens in the ten acceding countries support their countries European Union membership, which is exactly the same proportion we measured throughout 2002.

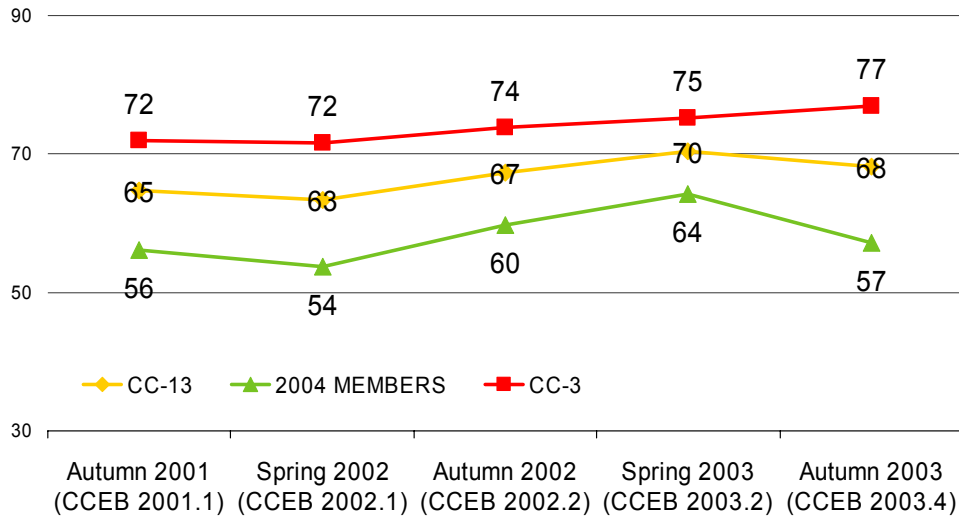
A much lower proportion, only 12% (+4 percentage points from Spring 2003), think that their country's upcoming membership would be "a bad thing," while 29% (+3) see no dominance of either the positive nor the negative effects.



Among the countries that will join the EU next year, the top three supporters of membership remain the same with Cyprus (59% believing that membership would be a "good thing") in the lead, Slovakia (58%) in the second place, and Hungary (56%) placing third. Levels of outright support remain the lowest in Estonia (38%) and in Latvia (46%).

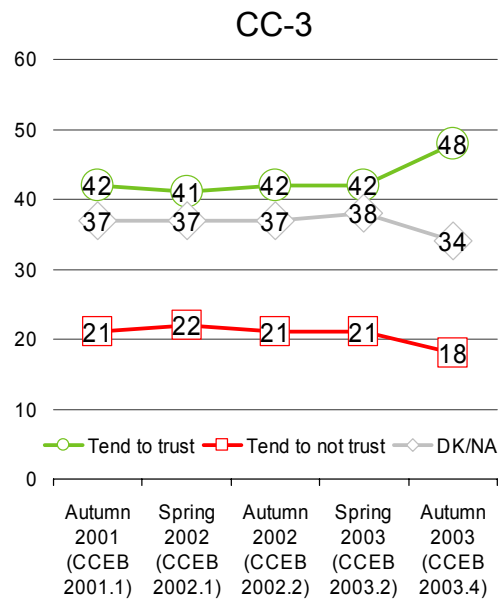
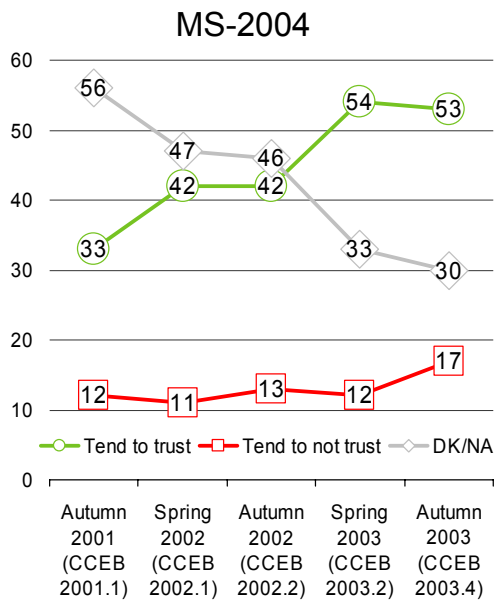
The same pattern prevails when we look at how beneficial citizens believe their country's European Union membership will be. After the increase that started a year ago and peaked this spring we see a sudden drop in optimism among the countries that are soon to join the Union. In spite of the recent 7 percentage point drop, the overall opinion remains positive: 57% expect benefits from the EU membership for their country while 25% do not.

**Expected benefit from European Union membership**  
 % think their country could benefit from EU membership



In other aspects the effects of the spring campaigns appear have proven more resolute. Awareness of and trust in the major European institutions remained at the relatively high levels recorded in the spring. Both the European Parliament and the Commission preserved the trust they built up during Spring 2003. However, looking at the trends, we find a noteworthy change. Up until the spring of 2003 a continuous decrease in the proportion of those who could not form an opinion had been paralleled with the increase of trust. Since spring, however, a decrease in those lacking an opinion has been met with an increase in the number of those who do not trust the institutions. As a result, mistrust towards both the EP and the Commission rose by 5 percentage points, while trust decreased insignificantly.

### Trust in the European Parliament



### Trust in the European Commission

