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## Introduction

Two thousand and four was an important year in Ireland's relationship with the European Union. The Irish government held the Presidency of the Council of Ministers for the first six months of the year. During this period a number of important developments occurred. Enlargement of the European Union took place in May as ten countries became Member States. In June, under Irish chairmanship, agreement was reached on the text of a draft Constitution of the European Union. Also, in June, elections were held for a new European Parliament. All of these events would be expected to have increased the salience of the European Union in Ireland and might have been expected to strengthen pro-integration sentiment.

This is the sixth report in a series of six-monthly reports on Irish attitudes to the European Union. Each report is based on evidence from the most recent Eurobarometer survey of public opinion. This report is based mainly on *Eurobarometer 62.0*, which was fielded in autumn 2004.<sup>1</sup> We say 'based mainly' on *Eurobarometer 62.0* because we also have to hand the results of an additional Eurobarometer survey that was conducted during November 2004.<sup>2</sup> This latter survey focused directly on the issue of the new European Union constitution. In the first part of this report, we use *Eurobarometer 62.0* to deal with overall attitudes to European integration, with national and European identity, with images of the European Union and with perceptions of European institutions and policy-making processes. In the second part of this report we turn to the specific issue of the new constitution using *Eurobarometer 62.1* as the source of our evidence of people's attitudes to and knowledge of the Constitution. Comparing the evidence contained in the two surveys brings us face-to-face with a syndrome that has been noted before in these reports and in the Commission Representation reports on attitudes and voting behaviour in the first and second Nice Treaty referendums in Ireland. The syndrome is characterised by a striking contrast between, on the one hand, Irish people's overall favourable attitudes to Ireland's membership of the European Union and, on the other hand, their

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<sup>1</sup> In Ireland the fieldwork for *Eurobarometer 62.0* took place between 8<sup>th</sup> October and 8<sup>th</sup> November, 2004. In the 25 Member States, the fielding of this survey began on 2<sup>nd</sup> October and finished on 8<sup>th</sup> November, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Fieldwork for *Eurobarometer 62.1* took place between 2<sup>nd</sup> November and 28<sup>th</sup> November,

considerable hesitation about endorsing recurring European Union Treaty changes. The hesitation is evident in high levels of don't know responses and in low levels of subjectively and objectively assessed knowledge. The availability of *Eurobarometers 62.0* and *62.1* provide a useful opportunity to re-examine this syndrome and its implications on the eve of another referendum campaign.

### **Attitudes Towards European Integration**

The European Union continues to enjoy widespread support amongst Irish people. Over three-quarters of Irish people (77 percent) regard Ireland's membership of the European Union as 'a good thing'. This is not only much greater than the percentage of respondents in the 25 Member States who regard their countries membership as 'a good thing' (56 percent), it also represents an increase in the percentage of Irish people who hold this view (from 71 percent in *Eurobarometer 61*). Over the course of 2004 there was also a notable increase in the percentage of people who believe that Ireland has benefited from membership of the European Union (up from 80 percent in *Eurobarometer 61* to 87 percent in *Eurobarometer 62*). Again, Irish attitudes are more positive than those amongst respondents in the 25 Member States: only 53 percent of these believe their country has benefited from membership of the European Union with 34 percent saying that their country has not benefited (compared with 6 percent of Irish people saying that Ireland has not benefited). It would appear that the downward trend in Irish approval of the European Union that began around the time of the first Nice Treaty referendum, and has been noted in previous reports in this series, has been substantially reversed.

### **Levels of European and National Identity**

Given these high levels of support, do Irish people have a strong sense of European identity? We begin with the question of identity because of the particular relevance of identity to the issue of a new constitutional treaty. Constitutions are more than legal texts outlining the rules of governance. By their nature they are endowed with symbolic importance. Constitutions can be seen as expressions of a political identity

and of the values that a society holds to be important. From this point of view, the Constitution of the European Union can be seen as an attempt to express a European identity. In this report, therefore, we focus on a number of components of identity: how close people feel to various territorial areas and whether or not they identify with particular symbols.

As people's identities are structured on a variety of different dimensions, analysing identity is a complex process. While the design of *Eurobarometer 62.0* does not allow for a detailed examination of people's identities, the data does allow us to examine certain aspects of the matter. We begin by examining how close people feel to a variety of territorial areas. Then we examine how proud people are of their own national identities and their identities as Europeans. Finally, we consider people's attitudes to more political aspects of identity, including the use of items such as flags and anthems as symbols through which citizens can identify with the state.

### *Closeness to Territorial Areas*

In *Eurobarometer 62.0*, people were asked to state how attached they feel to their town or village, to their region, to their country and to the Europe. It is evident from Figure 1 that Irish people, like people across the 25 Member States, are more likely to feel close to their own country than they are to Europe. Eighty percent of Irish people report that they are 'very attached' to their own country while only 23 percent say that they are 'very attached' to Europe. Yet, it is worth noting that when we include the next highest level of proximity ('fairly attached'), 72 percent of Irish people feel at least 'fairly attached' to Europe. Compared with respondents across the 25 Member States, Irish people are more likely than Europeans in general to feel close to their own country and to the Europe.

### *Pride in National and European Identity*

We now turn to a related measure of identity: pride in being Irish and pride in being European. As with feelings of closeness to their own country, it is evident from Figure 2, that people in general are a lot more likely to be ‘very proud’ of their own national identity than they are of their European identity. Amongst Irish respondents, as well as amongst respondents in the 25 Member States, more than twice as many people are ‘very proud’ of their own nationality than are ‘very proud’ of their identity as Europeans. This gap narrows when we include the second strongest level of pride, ‘fairly proud’. Amongst Irish respondents, 97 percent say they are at least ‘fairly proud’ to be Irish while 82 percent say they are at least ‘fairly proud’ to be European. Amongst respondents in the 25 member states, 86 percent are ‘fairly proud’ of their nationality with 68 percent saying they are at least ‘fairly proud’ to be European.

Thus, Irish people are more likely than respondents in the 25 Member States to be proud of both forms of identity. While 78 percent of Irish people are very proud of their nationality, only 45 percent of respondents in the 25 Member States are very proud of their nationality. Respondents in Greece (83 percent), Cyprus (76 percent) and Malta (76 percent) are like the Irish in that large percentages of respondents are ‘very proud’ of their nationalities.<sup>3</sup> With regard to the pride that people take in their European identity, the percentage of Irish people (33 percent) who are ‘very proud’ is twice the percentage of respondents in the 25 Member States; 16 percent of whom are ‘very proud’ to be European.<sup>4</sup> In those countries that were ‘very proud’ of their nationality, only in Malta (29 percent) are people, like the Irish, proud of both identities.

Anticipating a set of measures that we shall consider in a moment, note must be taken of the fact that Irish people also tend to fear that European integration will result in a loss of national identity and culture (See Figure 6 and discussion of items on page 7). Fifty-six percent of Irish respondents are afraid that the building of Europe will result in a loss of national identity and culture (37 percent of Irish respondents are not afraid of this). By comparison, amongst respondents in the 25 Member States, 42 percent are

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<sup>3</sup> People in Germany (20 percent), Belgium (32 percent) and the Netherlands (33 percent), are a lot less likely to be ‘very proud’ of their own nationalities.

<sup>4</sup> Like the Irish, respondents in Lithuania and Hungary (34 percent in both countries) are more likely than those in other European countries to be ‘very proud’ of their European identity.

afraid that integration will result in a loss of national identity and culture (54 percent are not afraid of this).

### *Symbols of Identity*

Pursuing the issue of identity further, *Eurobarometer 62.0* poses a number of questions about the European flag. These items provide additional insight into people's identification with Europe. The vast majority of respondents report that they have seen the flag: 92 percent amongst respondents in Ireland and 94 percent amongst respondents in the 25 Member States. The UK is the country with the lowest number of respondents stating that they have seen the flag (88 percent report that they have seen it while 11 percent said that they have not). With regard to what the flag represents, the vast majority of respondents identify it as representing Europe (91 percent in Ireland and 92 percent in the 25 member states).<sup>5</sup> Again, respondents in the UK prove to be least familiar with the flag (only three-quarters of respondents were able to state correctly what the flag represents). Most people regard the European flag as 'a good symbol for Europe' (See Figure 3). In both Ireland and across the European Union, 82 percent of people agree that the flag is a good symbol (71 percent of people in the UK agree that it is 'a good symbol for Europe').

While Irish respondents may accept that the European flag is a good symbol for Europe and that it represents something good, they are somewhat circumspect about identifying with it and granting it equal status with the Irish flag on public buildings. While two-thirds of Irish respondents say they identify with the European flag, a fifth state that they do not. A somewhat smaller percentage of respondents agree that the European flag should be beside the national flag on public buildings (60 percent; 19 percent disagree with this statement). Thus when this symbol of Europe is taken as separate from the traditional symbols of the nation-state people feel some affection for it. However, when it is juxtaposed with the traditional symbols of their country, people are less willing to grant it equal status.

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<sup>5</sup> A number of answers were accepted: Europe, the European Union, the Community, the Common Market and the Council of Europe.

## Images of Europe

So far we have seen that Irish people have positive attitudes towards their country's membership of the European Union. When it comes to identifying with Europe, while Irish people tend to identify more closely with their own country, there is evidence that they also have some feeling of identity with Europe and some pride in their identity as Europeans. The purpose of this section is to examine more closely the images that people have of the European Union.

When asked whether the European Union conjures up positive or negative images, 75 percent of Irish respondents report that it conjures up a positive image with just four percent saying it has a negative image. Ireland shows the greatest net difference between the percentage of people with positive and negative images of the European Union (71 percentage points)<sup>6</sup>. Amongst the 25 member states, 50 percent of respondents say that they have a positive image of the European Union while 15 percent have a negative image (a net difference of 35 percentage points). On our index of people's images of the European Union, the next most positive countries are Slovenia and Italy where the net differences are 57 percentage points.

In *Eurobarometer 62.0*, respondents were also given the opportunity to give expression to what they felt about the European Union. In responding, people were asked to select as many words from a list as they wished. The use of a close-list confined people's expressions of how they felt to a limited set of descriptors (Figure 4). In Ireland and across the 25 Member States the largest percentages of respondents said that the European Union gave them a feeling of 'hope' (59 percent of Irish respondents and 47 percent of respondents in the 25 Member States). The next most salient positive feelings amongst Irish respondents are 'enthusiasm' (23 percent) and 'trust' (17 percent). Irish people differ from respondents in the 25 Member States in that they are more enthusiastic about the European Union but less trusting. Amongst respondents in the 25 Member States only seven percent have a feeling of 'enthusiasm' for the European Union while 24 percent have a feeling of 'trust' in the European Union. With regard to 'negative' feelings, the most salient of these amongst Irish people is 'indifference' (19 percent) with just seven percent having feelings of

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<sup>6</sup> That is, the difference between the percentage of people who have a 'positive image' and the percentage of people who have a 'negative image'. Positive scores indicate a general positive image.

‘anxiety’ and four percent feelings of ‘mistrust’.<sup>7</sup> While the percentages of Irish people expressing negative feelings about the European Union is more or less in line with the percentages who have negative feelings about Ireland’s involvement in the European Union (see above), it is interesting that less than a quarter of Irish respondents mention the two positive feelings of ‘enthusiasm’ and ‘trust’. The low level of salience in both of these feelings is striking in the light of generally more positive Irish attitudes towards the European Union.

These positive and negative feelings can be examined in greater depth by means of a question in which respondents were presented with a number of statements about their experiences of membership and their fears about the integration process. With regard to their experience in the European Union, respondents were asked to state whether or not they ‘tend to agree’ or ‘tend to disagree’ with nine statements. The differences between the percentages saying that they agree and disagree with each statement are presented in Figure 5.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, respondents were also presented with nine statements and asked to state whether they were ‘currently afraid’ or ‘not currently afraid’ of each. The differences between the percentages saying that they are afraid and not afraid of each statement are presented in Figure 6.<sup>9</sup>

In Ireland, public debate about the country’s experience of the European Union has often focused on the economic benefits of membership. Membership of the European Union has had an important impact on Ireland’s economic development and the Irish are very positive about the economic effects of European Union membership. Three-quarters of Irish people tend to agree that ‘we are more stable economically because Ireland is a member of the European Union’. Only 15 percent of Irish respondents disagree with this view. In this, Irish respondents differ from respondents across the 25 Member States. While 44 percent of respondents in the 25 Member States agree that their country is ‘more stable economically’ because it is a member of the European Union, 46 percent disagree with this view. A further illustration of Irish

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<sup>7</sup> Amongst respondents in the 25 Member States the latter negative feelings are greater, as 18 percent have feelings of ‘mistrust’ and 17 percent have feelings of anxiety. A similar percentage of respondents in the 25 Member States as in Ireland have feelings of indifference towards the European Union (19 percent).

<sup>8</sup> Here, we subtract the percentage of respondents who ‘disagree’ from the percentage of respondents who ‘agree’. Positive scores indicate general agreement with the statement.

<sup>9</sup> In Figure 8, we calculate the index by subtracting the percent of those respondents who are ‘not currently afraid of’ from the percentage of respondents who are ‘currently afraid of’. Positive scores indicate a general fear about the building of Europe.

people's confidence in the economic benefits of membership is evident from the fact that the percentage of people who are not afraid of 'an economic crisis' is greater than the percentage of respondents who are afraid. Amongst the Irish, 51 percent are not afraid that integration will result in an economic crisis (34 percent are afraid of this). In contrast to this, 52 percent of respondents in the 25 Member States are afraid that integration will result in an economic crisis (41 percent are not afraid).

Despite the positive assessment by Irish people of the economic benefits of their country's membership of the European Union, economic concerns are also their most salient fear. They fear that the 'the building of Europe' will involve 'the transfer of jobs to other member countries which have lower production costs' (See Figure 6). This fear is articulated by 74 percent of respondents in Ireland and by a similar percentage of respondents in the 25 Member States.

When it comes to individual people feeling that they have any influence within the European Union, Irish people, like those in the 25 Member States, tend not to have a sense of personal political efficacy. More Irish people tend to disagree than agree with the statement that 'My voice counts in the European Union'. Only 36 percent of Irish people feel their voice can be heard.

The other salient fear about the integration process amongst respondents in Ireland and in the 25 Member States is 'an increase in drug trafficking and international organised crime' (70 percent and 65 percent respectively). This fear is in part based on an opening-up of borders between countries to allow for the free movement of people within the European Union. As an issue, drug trafficking and international organised crime transcends national boundaries. But how do mass publics in the Member States view this issue?

The internationalisation of this issue is reflected in the belief amongst Europeans that this issue should be dealt with through joint decision-making within the European Union (See Figure 7).<sup>10</sup> In general, people are willing to allow for joint decision-making when there is an international dimension to the policy area. People accept

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<sup>10</sup> In *Eurobarometer 62* respondents were asked where they believe competence for particular policies should lie. The choice available to respondents was decisions should be made by their own national governments or should be made jointly within the European Union. In Figure 9 we compare the percentage of people who believe that a policy should be dealt jointly within the European Union.

joint decision-making in the fight against international terrorism, organised crime, trade and exploitation of people and drugs. People are also willing to accept joint decision-making with regard to certain aspects of the economy (currency and support for regions in economic difficulties), protection of the environment, foreign policy, humanitarian aid and scientific and technological research. However, people are concerned that decision-making with regard to other issues should remain within domestic decision-making structures. In particular these issues relate to law and order within their own country and other areas of traditional domestic policy such as health and social welfare, education, culture and regulation of the media.

With regard to the foregoing issues it is evident that Irish people's views on what policies should be dealt with by the Irish government and what decisions should be made jointly are similar to those of respondents across the 25 Member States. However, public opinion in Ireland diverges from that in the 25 Member States on a number of other issues. Irish people are less willing to allow joint decision-making in the areas of defence, immigration and accepting refugees. Amongst Irish respondents 59 percent believe that the Irish government should make decisions on defence policy. Large percentages of Irish people also feel that decisions in relation to immigration (53 percent) and accepting refugees (60 percent) should rest with the Irish government. Amongst respondents across the 25 Member States majorities believe that there should be joint decision-making in these areas with the European Union: 57 percent with regard to defence, 58 percent in the case of immigration and 56 percent with regard to accepting refugees.

It is clear from this that people expect states to co-operate with each other in order to address some policy issues but not other policy issues. The European Union is one major arena in which states engage in co-operative problem solving. In the next section we consider people's attitudes to the institutions that facilitate such co-operation and in the subsequent section, we consider people's attitudes to recent efforts to streamline the constitutional framework on which co-operation is based.

### **Salience of the European Parliament and Other European Institutions**

The European Parliament remains the most familiar European institution to both Irish respondents and to respondents in the 25 Member States. Almost all Irish respondents (97 percent) report that they have heard of the European Parliament. With regard to the other European Union institutions, the next most familiar is the European Commission (92 percent) followed by the European Central Bank (82 percent), the Court of Justice of the European Union (76 percent) and the Council of Ministers of the European Union (71 percent).

It is curious that, despite Ireland's Presidency of the Council of Ministers in the first six months of 2004, less than three-quarters of Irish respondents have heard of the Council of Ministers. This percentage is very similar to the percentage of Irish people who had heard of the Council when Ireland actually held the presidency during the first six months of 2004 (72 percent). Despite the importance of the Council within the policy-making process of the European Union, it would appear that its visibility has peaked at around three-quarters of the population. After all, if Irish people are going to hear about the Council of Minister it is reasonable to expect that they would do so when Ireland holds the Presidency. The evidence from earlier Eurobarometers suggests that the salience of the Council amongst the Irish public ranges from about 67 percent (*Eurobarometer 57* and *Eurobarometer 59*) to 74 percent (*Eurobarometer 58*).<sup>11</sup>

In Figure 8, we compare the percentage of Irish people who have heard of each of these institutions with the percentage of people who regard each institution as important in the life of the European Union. Eighty-eight percent of respondents regard the European Parliament as playing an important role in the life of the European Union. Given the reality of the decision-making process in the European Union, if 88 percent believe that the European Parliament is important, then it is reasonable to expect that at least this percentage of people would regard the Council of Ministers as important. As is evident from Figure 8, the percentage of people who

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<sup>11</sup> When compared with respondents in the 25 Member States, Irish people are slightly more familiar with the main institutions of the European Union. Across the Member States respondents are most familiar with the European Parliament (92 percent), followed by the European Commission (82 percent), the Court of Justice of the European Union (75 percent), the European Central Bank (71 percent) and the Council of Ministers of the European Union (66 percent). Given the role of the Council of Ministers in the European Union decision-making process, its relatively low level of recognition suggests that fundamental misconceptions of the working of the European Union may be quite widespread.

regard the Council of Ministers as playing an important role in the life of the European Union is twenty percentage points less than the percentage that regards the European Parliament as important.

The parliament and the Council of Ministers are designed to give ‘a voice’ to the wishes to the people that, in their different ways, each of these institutions ‘represent’. Seventy percent of Irish respondents feel that ‘Ireland’s voice counts in the European Union’. Moreover, three-quarters of Irish people feel that ‘Ireland is more influential in the European Union now than it was ten years ago’. Our index suggests that there is a notable difference in opinion between Irish people’s attitudes to this statement and the attitudes of people across the European Union (i.e., people whose countries have been Member States for at least 10 years). Compared to Irish attitudes, the index suggests differences in opinion amongst respondents across the Member States (55 percent tend to agree while 29 percent tend to disagree). However, while large percentages of Irish people may feel their country has influence and that that influence has increased, they are realistic when it comes to perceptions of which countries have the most power. More than 50 percent of Irish respondents fear ‘a loss of power for smaller member states’. Three-quarters of Irish people feel power lies with the biggest countries. Furthermore, while three-quarters may have felt that Ireland’s influence increased over the previous decade, just over half of Irish respondents are optimistic about Ireland becoming more influential in the future.

### **A Constitution for the European Union**

In June 2004, the Member States agreed the text of the draft European Constitution. This was the culmination of a long process of deliberation by the Convention on the Future of Europe. Beginning with *Eurobarometer 61* (Spring 2004) and continuing in *Eurobarometer 62.0*, respondents were asked:

“What is your opinion on each of the following statements? Please tell me for each statement, whether you are for it or against it?”

5/ A constitution for the European Union

The evidence of both surveys suggests that, for the most part, ‘a constitution for the European Union’ meets with a favourable response (Figure 9) and, since the agreement on the draft text, Irish attitudes towards ‘a constitution’ have remained more or less unchanged. The evidence of *Eurobarometer 62.0* suggests that 61 percent of Irish people are in favour (59 percent in *Eurobarometer 61*) while 13 percent are against (12 percent in *Eurobarometer 61*). That said, while a large percentage of Irish people are in favour of ‘a constitution’, it is worth noting that, despite overall positive Irish attitudes towards the European project, the percentage of Irish people in favour of ‘a constitution’ is less than that amongst respondents in the 25 Member States (68 percent). Moreover, a quarter of Irish people have yet to make up their minds as to whether they are for or against ‘a constitution’. In the very general sense measured by this question, ‘a constitution for the European Union’ is most popular in Belgium, Slovenia, Germany and Luxembourg. In these countries over three-quarters of respondents are in favour of it. However, less than half of respondents in the UK and Denmark are in favour of ‘a constitution’. Moreover, at least a fifth of respondents in both of these countries as well as in Finland, Sweden, Malta, Hungary, Greece and the Netherlands are against ‘a constitution’ for the European Union.

While change in Ireland on this matter has been marginal, in other Member States there have been notable shifts in people’s attitudes since the text of the draft European Constitution was agreed. To examine these changes we construct an index that measures the net percentage of people in each country who are in favour of ‘a constitution for the European Union’.<sup>12</sup> This allows us to compare across *Eurobarometer* surveys (see Figure 10)<sup>13</sup>. The index tells us that amongst respondents from EU15 countries (those that were Member States before the 2004 enlargement), the percentage of respondents in favour of ‘a constitution’ is greater than the

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<sup>12</sup> To calculate this index we subtract the percentage of people who are ‘against’ the EU constitution from the percentage of people who are ‘for’ the EU constitution. This index runs from +100 (everyone is in favour of the EU constitution) to –100 (everyone is against the EU constitution). Calculating this index allows us to focus on those respondents who have expressed an attitude, either ‘for’ or ‘against’. Throughout this report we will calculate similar indices for a variety of different attitudinal items.

<sup>13</sup> In examining these changes we are highlighting patterns of change in the percentages of those who are ‘for’, ‘against’ and ‘don’t know’. In the absence of longitudinal data (asking the same people the same questions in a number of surveys) we can only state that there ‘appears’ to be shifts to ‘for’ from ‘don’t know’/‘against’. We do not know at the individual level what is happening with people’s attitudes. This is one weakness of comparing aggregate level data.

percentage against. However, it is important to remember that in many Member States large minorities of respondents remain undecided about ‘a constitution’ (see Figure 9).

The index points to notable shifts in favour of ‘a constitution’ in Belgium, Germany, France, Austria and Portugal. With the exception of Portugal, the shifts in attitudes would appear to be a consequence of those who were unsure before the agreement on the draft European Constitution making up their minds (See Table 1). In these four countries the percentage of people who were unsure fell by about 10 percentage points. In each of these countries the percentages of people in favour increased while the percentages against remained more or less the same.

In Portugal, and also Denmark, the shift in attitudes appears to reflect change amongst those who were initially against the idea of ‘a constitution’. The percentage of Portuguese people who are against ‘a constitution’ has decreased while the percentage in favour has increased (the percentage of people who ‘don’t know’ has remained the same). Amongst Danes, the index indicates that there has been a shift in attitudes from opposition to ‘a constitution’ to support. This change in Danish attitudes appears to be a consequence of people who were against ‘a constitution’ changing their minds. In two countries, Italy and Finland, the index suggests that the gap between those in favour and those against has narrowed. In Italy, it would appear that this change is a consequence of those who were in favour turning against ‘a constitution’. In Finland, there has been a notable drop in the percentage of people who ‘don’t know’. This shift in opinion would appear to favour those who are opposed to ‘a constitution’. Moreover, the percentage of Finns in favour has also dropped.

It must be borne in mind that the above item is very general. At best it can be seen as referring to the idea of ‘a constitution of the European Union’. It does not refer to the fact that agreement had been reached on a draft European Constitution nor does it make any reference to the content of the Constitution. During November 2004, a Eurobarometer survey (*Eurobarometer 62.1*) that specifically addressed the issue of the draft European Constitution as agreed was fielded.<sup>14</sup> The evidence of this more focused and more detailed survey suggests that support for the Constitution is much

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<sup>14</sup> Fielded 2-28 November 2004.

less widespread, and in particular that large segments of the population have yet to make up their minds. In *Eurobarometer 62.1*, respondents were asked:

According to what you know, would you say you are in favour of or opposed to the draft European Constitution?

While 28 percent of Irish respondents are in ‘in favour’ and 5 percent are ‘against’, a big majority, 67 percent, ‘don’t know’. There is a 33 percentage-point difference between the percentage of Irish respondents who are ‘for’ ‘a constitution for the European Union’ (*Eurobarometer 62.0*) and the percentage ‘in favour’ of the draft European Constitution (*Eurobarometer 62.1*). By comparing Figure 11 (attitudes towards the draft European Constitution) with Figure 9 (attitudes towards a constitution for the European Union) that Ireland is not the only country where there are large differences in these percentages. In fact, only in Denmark, are the percentages of people who are ‘for’ ‘a constitution for the European Union’ (*Eurobarometer 62.0*) and who are ‘in favour’ of ‘the draft European Constitution’ (*Eurobarometer 62.1*) the same (44 percent in both cases). In all other countries the percentages of people who are ‘in favour’ of the ‘draft European Constitution’ (*Eurobarometer 62.1*) are less than the percentages who are ‘for’ ‘a constitution for the European Union’ (*Eurobarometer 62.0*).

The reason for the large number of ‘don’t knows’ may lie in the preceding question:

Have you personally heard about the draft European Constitution?

Yes, and overall you know its contents

Yes, but you know very little about its contents

No

This question established the context for the ‘in favour/against’ question the results of which are displayed in Figure 11. In order to remain consistent, respondents who answered ‘no’ to whether or not they had ‘heard about’ the Constitution would be expected to respond ‘don’t know’ when asked for their attitude towards it. Respondents are unlikely to articulate an attitude to something they have already admitted to not having ‘heard about’.

Amongst Irish respondents, 55 percent say ‘yes’ they have ‘heard about’ the draft European Constitution. However, the vast majority of these admit to knowing ‘very little about its contents’. That is, 45 percent of Irish respondents say that yes they have heard about the draft European Constitution but know very little about it. Just 10 percent of Irish respondents say that yes they have heard about the Constitution and know its contents. The remaining 45 percent of Irish respondents say that they have not ‘heard about’ the Constitution. This first question also acts as a filter to remove those who have not heard about the Constitution from giving an opinion on it. When it comes to articulating an attitude towards the Constitution, only a negligible proportion of respondents who say that they have not heard about the Constitution, express a favourable or negative opinion.<sup>15</sup>

Amongst those who have ‘heard about’ the Constitution, respondents are differentiated between those who believe that they ‘know very little about its contents’ and those who ‘know its contents’. This difference has the effect of encouraging those who feel they have low levels of knowledge about the Constitution to opt for the ‘don’t know’ option when asked their attitude towards the Constitution. On the one hand, of the 45 percent of Irish respondents who say they ‘know very little’, almost half of these opt for the ‘don’t know’ response. On the other hand, of the 10 percent of Irish respondents who say they ‘know its contents’, about a fifth of these opt for the ‘don’t know’ response.

Amongst those people who feel they have a good knowledge of the Constitution (‘know its overall contents’), a large majority of these are ‘in favour’ of the Constitution. Amongst Irish respondents who believe they know a very little about the Constitution, just less than half of these are in favour of the Constitution (about ten percent are against).

It must be acknowledged that it is somewhat curious that only 55 percent of Irish respondents say that they have ‘heard about’ the draft European Constitution. If this question is a measure of salience, then on face value, the salience of the Constitution appears to be low. This is surprising given the context in which the draft European

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<sup>15</sup> Amongst Irish respondents, 0.4 percent said that they had not heard about the Constitution but are in favour of it, while 0.2 percent said that they had not heard about the Constitution but are against it.

Constitution was agreed. Agreement was reached under the Irish presidency. In the aftermath of agreement, there was much speculation in the Irish media that such was the admiration for Mr. Ahern (the Irish Taoiseach) amongst his European colleagues, that he had only to indicate his interest in the position of President of the European Commission and the job would be his.

The reason why salience is so low may have to do with the wording of the question. To have ‘heard about’ something suggests that someone has provided you with information about a particular object. As we will see, Irish people have very poor levels of knowledge of the details of the Constitution. This suggests that they have not received such information, and as such have not ‘heard *about*’ the Constitution. The widespread media coverage of the agreement on the text of the Constitution in May and June 2004 suggests that people may have ‘heard *of*’ the Constitution but not *about* it. That is, they know of the Constitution’s existence but know nothing of its details.

A number of knowledge questions are asked in *Eurobarometers 62.0* and *62.1* (general knowledge about the European Union in the former and specific knowledge of the details of the draft European Constitution in the latter). In Figures 12 and 13 we present the percentage of Irish people who answer each of the knowledge questions correctly. It is notable from both Figures 12 and 13 that on nearly all questions, the percentages of Irish people answering correctly are less than the percentages of people across the 25 Member States. With regard to the Constitution, the percentages of correct Irish answers are less on all counts. Moreover, in most cases the differences between the percentage of Irish people answering correctly and percentage of Europeans answering correctly are about 15 percentage points. Three percent of Irish people in *Eurobarometer 62.0* answer all six questions correctly while 13 percent fail to answer any question correctly. In *Eurobarometer 62.1*, one percent of Irish people answer all six questions correctly while 34 percent fail to answer any question correctly. Taken together with the evidence of Figures 12 and 13, it is evident from this that while Irish people know few specific facts about the European Union, they know even less about the draft European Constitution they will be asked to ratify over the next year or so.

Since these questions in *Eurobarometer 62.1* can be seen as a measure of people's knowledge about the draft European Constitution we can compare the levels of knowledge of those who say they know about the contents of the Constitution and those who say that they do not know about its contents. Those Irish respondents who say that they have not 'heard about' the Constitution are reflecting their levels of knowledge about it. Of the 45 percent of respondents who had not heard about the Constitution, 60 percent fail to answer a single question correctly, while 30 percent answer no more than three questions correctly. However, amongst those who feel they know the contents of the Constitution, only about half of these manage to answer four or more questions correctly. In the group that is more modest about its knowledge, that is those who feel they know 'very little', just over a third answered four or more questions correctly. Amongst this group of respondents, 16 percent fail to answer any question correctly.

These measures also allow us to examine the relationship between people's knowledge and their attitudes towards the European constitution (See Table 2). We begin by comparing people's overall knowledge of the European Union and whether they tend to be for or against 'a constitution for the European Union'. It is evident from Table 2, that the greater people's overall knowledge of the European Union, the more likely they are to be in favour of 'a constitution' and the less likely they are to be unable to articulate an attitude. For instance, two-thirds of Irish respondents who fail to answer any question correctly do not express an attitude while only nine percent of those who answer all six questions correctly fail to articulate an attitude. Amongst the latter group, three-quarters of these are in favour of 'a constitution' while amongst the former group only a quarter are in favour of 'a constitution'. The percentages of people who are against 'a constitution' also increases as levels of knowledge increase. However, these percentages are very low. Seven percent of those who fail to answer a question correctly are against 'a constitution' while 15 percent of those who answer all six questions correctly are against 'a constitution'.

A similar pattern is evident when we look at people's specific knowledge of the provisions of the draft text and whether they tend to be in favour or against 'the draft European Constitution'. Again, the greater people's knowledge of the draft text, the more likely they are to be in favour of 'the draft European Constitution' and the less

likely they are to be unable to articulate an attitude. It should also be noted that while the percentage of people against ‘the draft European Constitution’ is low, opposition increases with people’s knowledge of the specific provisions of the Constitution.

Despite these similarities there are some notable differences evident when we compare across the two Eurobarometer surveys. First, the percentages of people who are in favour of the ‘draft European Constitution’ are lower than the percentages in favour of ‘a constitution’ by at least 20 percentage points. Second, the percentages of people who are unable to articulate an attitude about the ‘draft European Constitution’ are greater than the percentages of respondents are unable to do so about ‘a constitution’ by at least 25 percentage points. As we note above, the reason for these differences in percentages almost certainly lie in the context set by the preceding question in *Eurobarometer 62.1* (‘have you personally heard about the draft European Constitution’) as well as by the first clause of the question about people’s attitudes towards the ‘draft European Constitution’ (‘according to what you know’). This should not be taken as grounds for dismissing the findings of the more recent and more focused survey (*Eurobarometer 62.1*). Rather it reinforces the point that positive attitudes to integration in general or ‘an EU constitution’ in particular can co-exist with hesitation about specific constitutional changes that make people conscious of their lack of a comprehensive understanding of the issues.

## **Conclusion**

Over the next couple of years, a number of countries, including Ireland, will be holding referendums as part of their ratification of the Constitution of the European Union. While people may feel that they know little about how the European Union works, there is a general sense of good will towards the European project. From this report it is evident that Irish people have strong positive feelings towards their countries membership of the European Union and tend to have positive images of the European Union. It is also evident that, while Irish people, like those in other countries, have stronger attachments to their own national identities they have some sense of a European identity. They feel some degree of attachment to Europe and to the symbols of the European Union (as represented by its flag in this case). Moreover,

people's images of the European Union are by and large positive though there is some concern about 'out-sourcing' and about loss of cultural identity.

Despite these overall positive evaluations of the European Union, there are grounds for concern about the levels of knowledge people have about the European Union and about the impact this has on people's attitudes and political behaviour. Our analysis of *Eurobarometers 62.0* and *62.1* shows that what appears to be a positive attitude towards 'a constitution for the European Union' is much less evident when people are first asked have they 'heard about' the draft Constitution and are then asked whether or not they are in favour of it. Moreover, knowledge of the draft Constitution among Irish people appears to be a lot lower than knowledge of it across the 25 Member States.

Analysis of the knowledge items in *Eurobarometers 62.0* and *62.1* also shows that there is a close relationship between knowledge and positive responses (either to the notion of a constitution in principle or to the draft Constitution itself). It is clear that the higher the level of knowledge the greater the support for the Constitution. This reinforces one of the main findings of the analysis of the Nice referendum, namely that low levels of knowledge were associated with both abstention and with voting 'no'.

The overall lesson of the Irish referendums on Nice is the need for elites to inform and engage with their citizens. Favourable attitudes to the European Union cannot be taken for granted as indicating a willingness to participate in a referendum, or to vote 'yes'. Failure to engage people, to communicate with them and to mobilise them to vote may have serious consequences for the ratification process.

Table 1: Shifts in Attitudes to a Constitution for the European Union in Selected Countries (%)

[Change between Eurobarometer 61 (Autumn, 2003) and Eurobarometer 62 (Autumn, 2004)]

	Change in % For	Change in % Against	Change in % Don't Know
Ireland	+2	+1	-3
Germany	+11	-1	-10
Belgium	+9	+1	-10
France	+8	+2	-10
Austria	+7	-1	-6
Denmark	+7	-5	-2
Portugal	+4	-5	+1
Finland	-4	+19	-15
Italy	-5	+4	+1

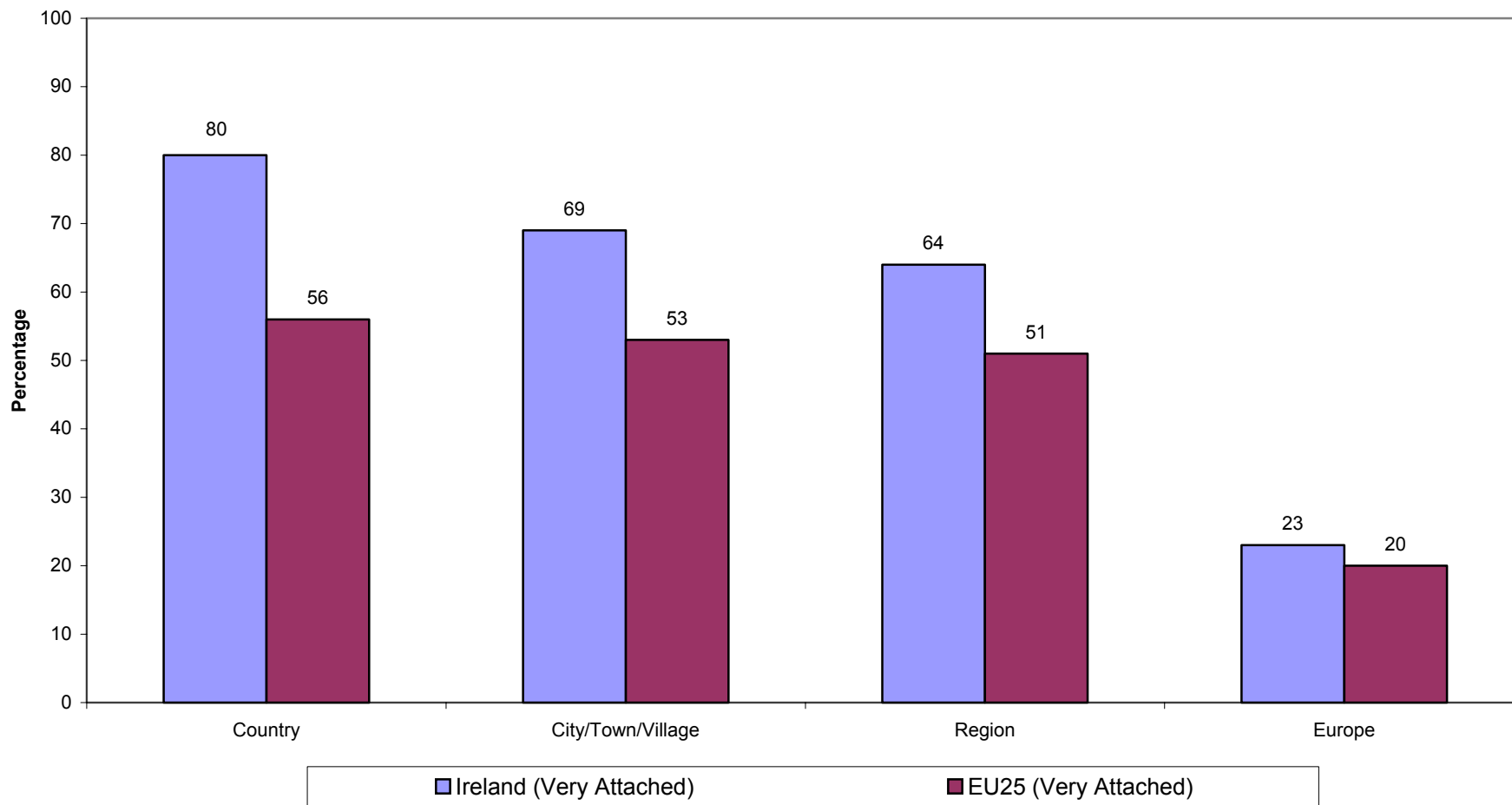
Source: Q36, Eurobarometer 62.0; Q29 Eurobarometer 61

Table 2: Attitudes Towards ‘a constitution for the European Union’ by Overall Knowledge of the European Union (*Eurobarometer 62.0*) and Attitudes Towards ‘the draft European Constitution’ by Knowledge of the Provisions of the Draft Text (*Eurobarometer 62.1*)

	Number of Questions Answered Correctly			
	None %	One or Two %	Three or Four %	Five or Six %
<i>Eurobarometer 62.0</i>				
For Constitution	26	55	72	76
Against Constitution	7	11	14	15
Don't Know	67	34	14	9
N. of Cases	134	306	430	130
<i>Eurobarometer 62.1</i>				
In Favour	5	28	45	56
Against	2	6	7	14
Don't Know	93	67	48	30
N. of Cases	343	247	314	96

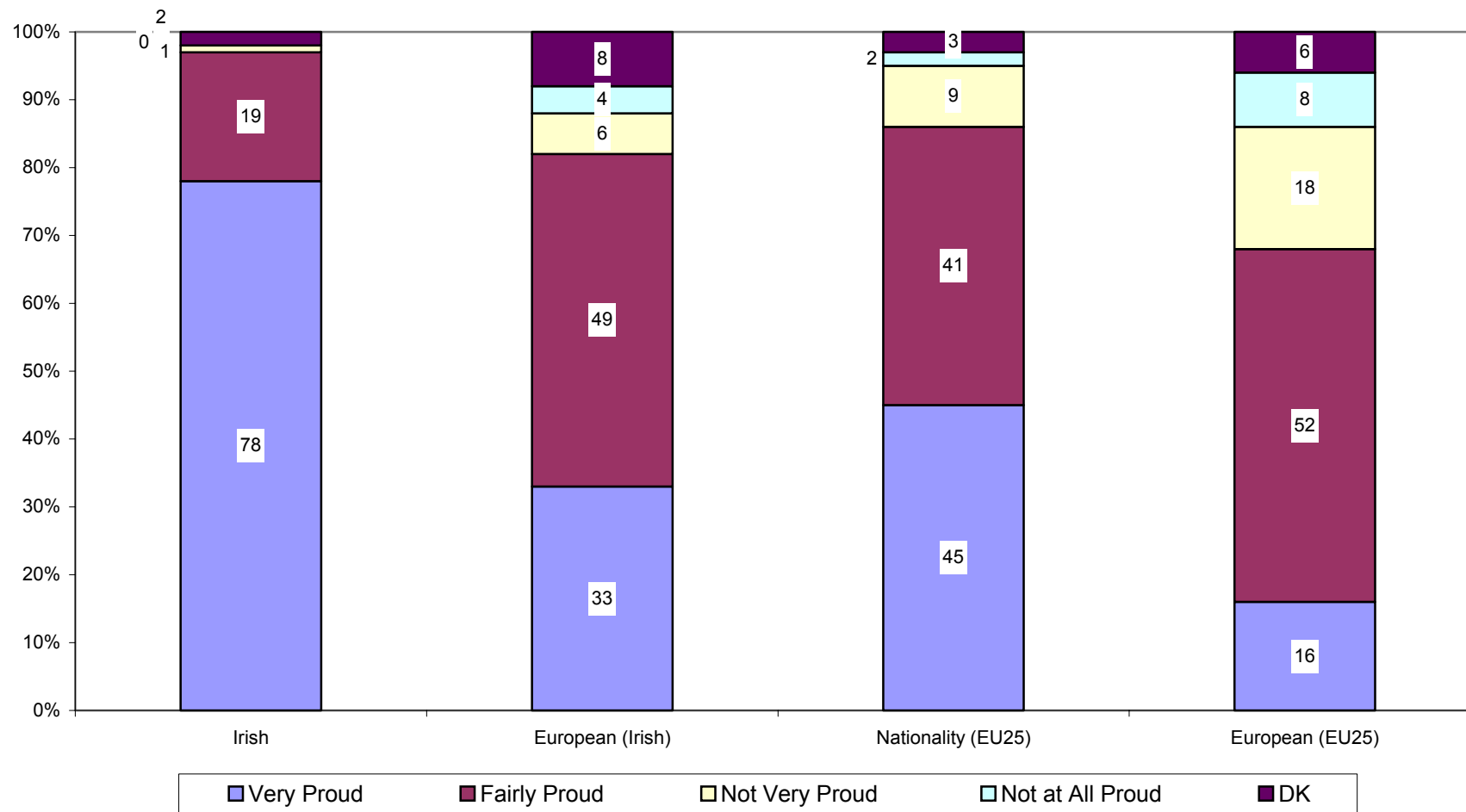
Sources: Q30 and Q36, Eurobarometer 62.0; Q2 and Q5, Eurobarometer 62.1

Figure 1: Sense of Attachment to Levels of Community/Governance in Ireland and in 25 Member States (%)



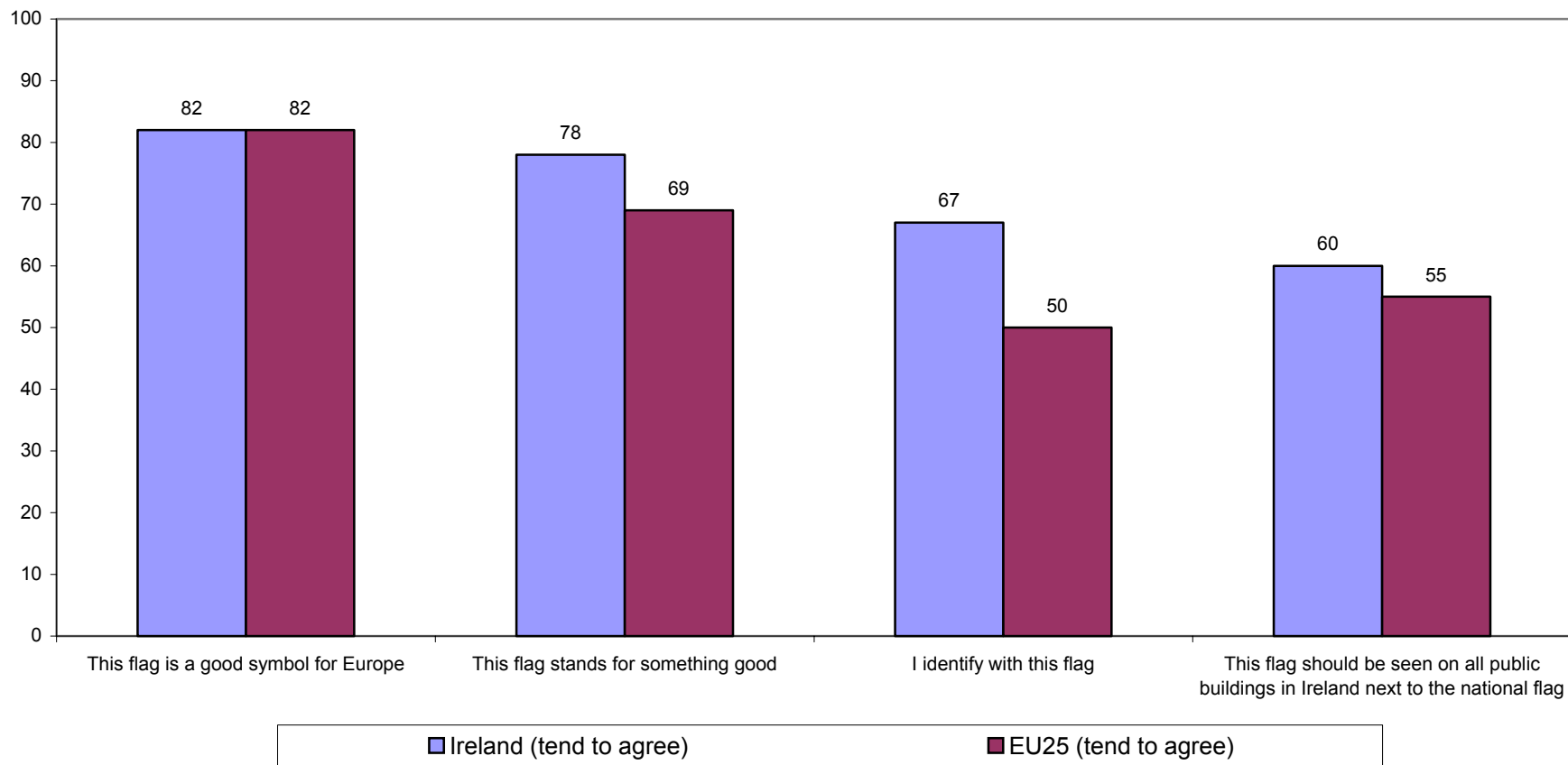
Source: Q47, Eurobarometer 62.0, Autumn 2004.

Figure 2: Pride in National Identity and in European Identity in Ireland and in the 25 Member States (%)



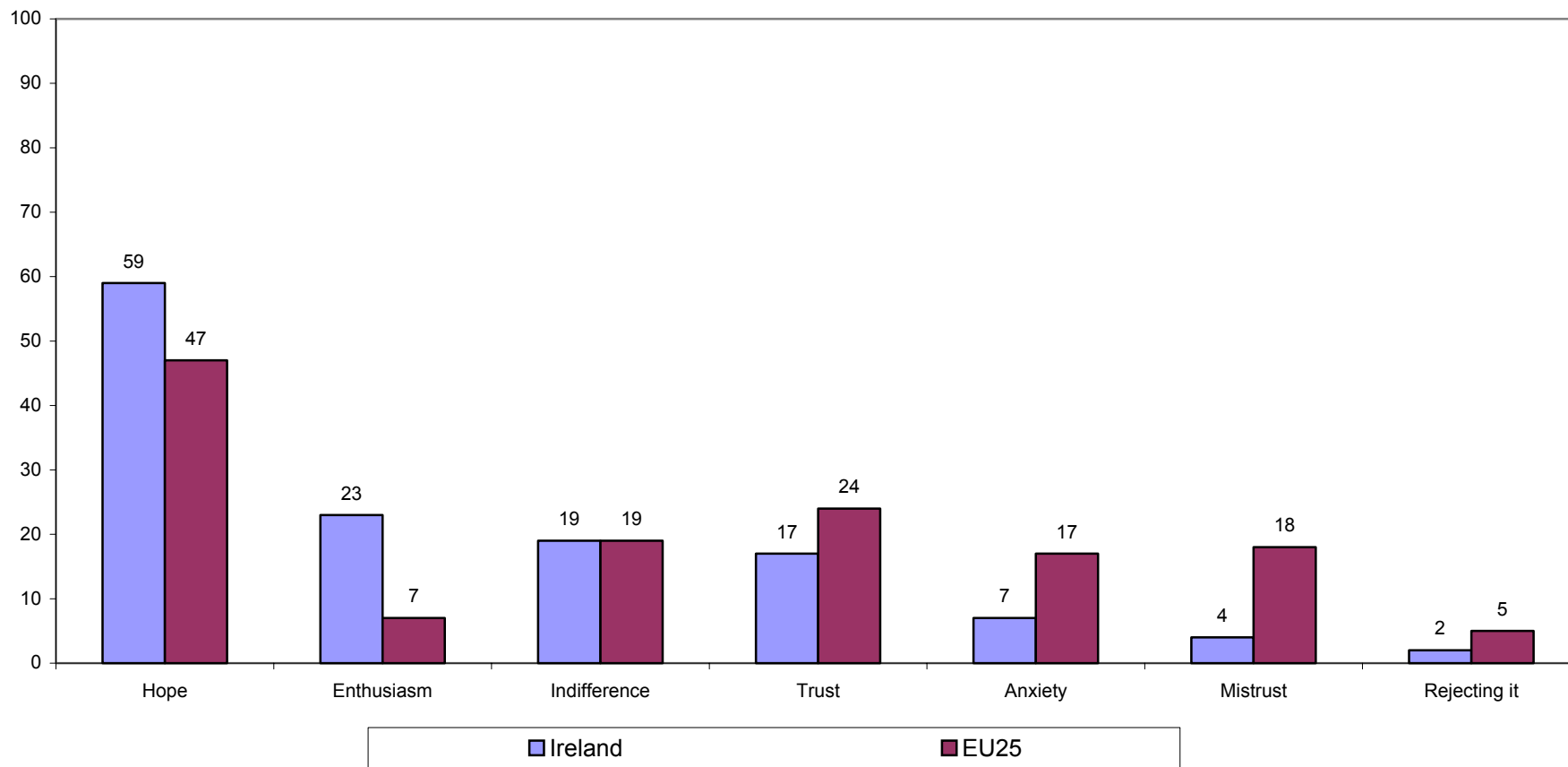
Source: Q45 (National Identity) and Q46 (European Identity), Eurobarometer 62.0, Autumn 2004.

Figure 3: Attitudes to the European Union Flag in Ireland and in the 25 Member States (%)



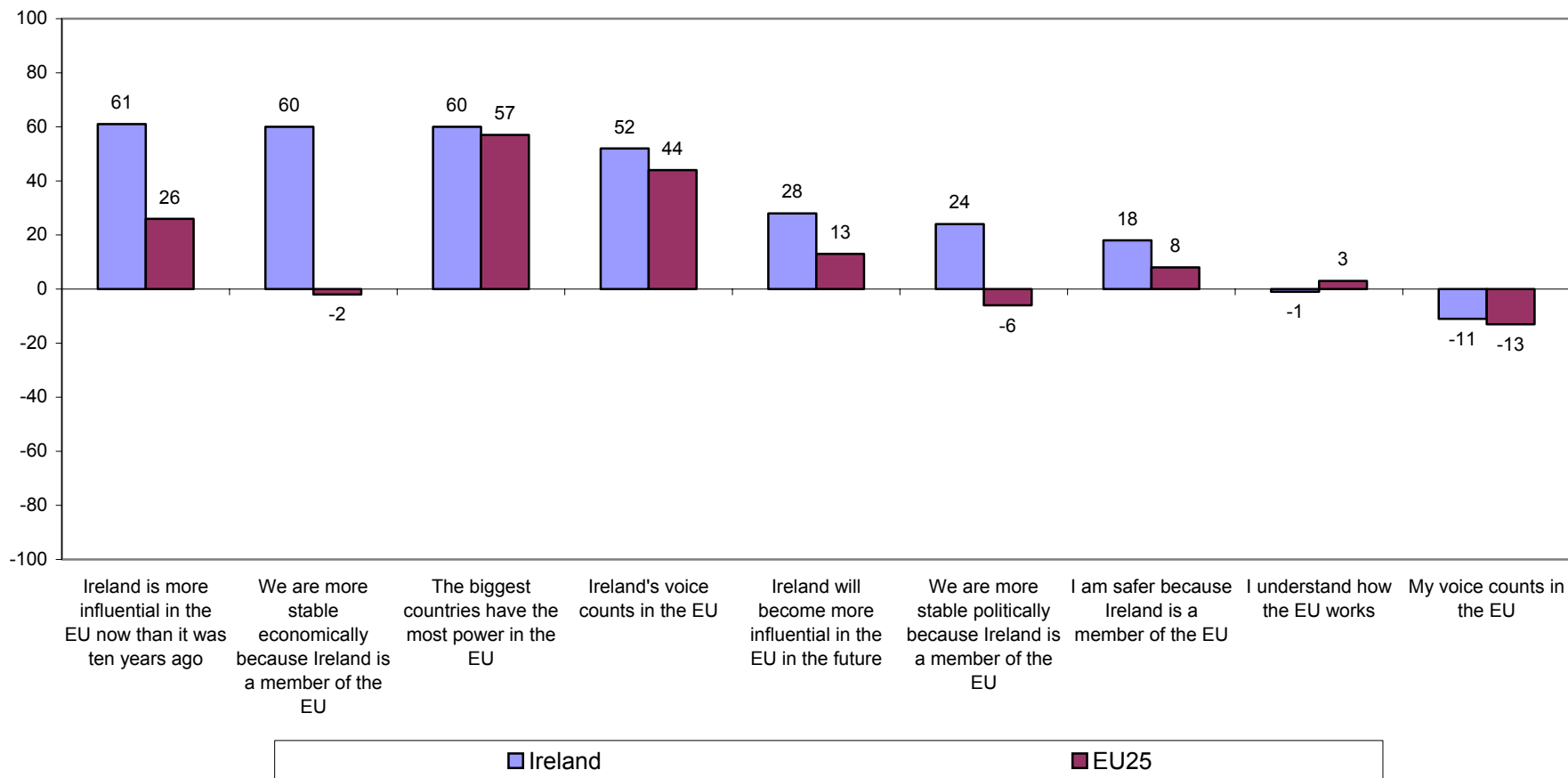
Source: Q9, Eurobarometer 62.0, Autumn 2004.

Figure 4: Images of the European Union in Ireland and in the 25 Member States (% mentions)



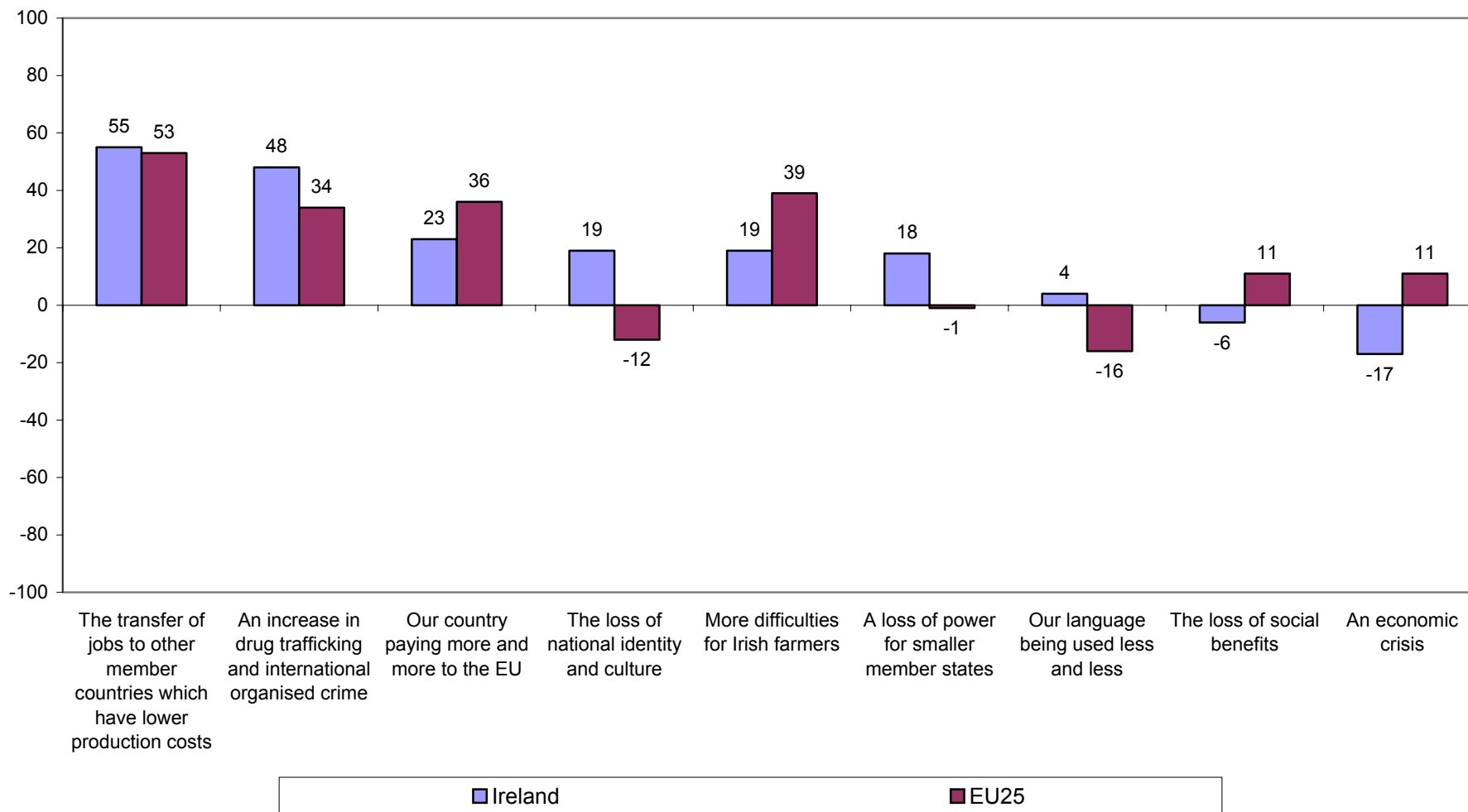
Source: Q17, Eurobarometer 62.0, Autumn 2004.

Figure 5: Experience of Membership of the European Union in Ireland and in the 25 Member States (% Positive - % Negative)



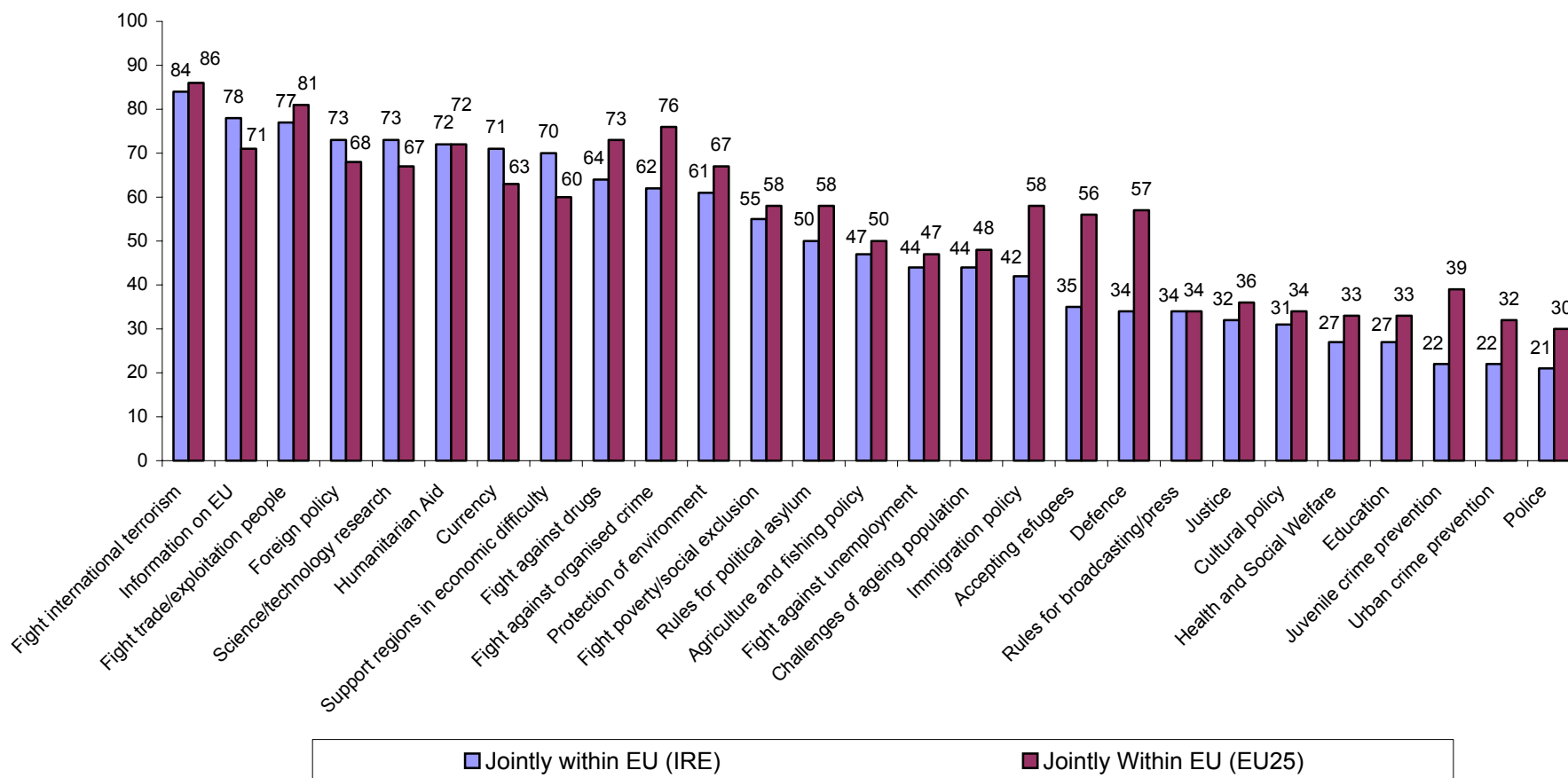
Source: Q18a, Eurobarometer 62.0, Autumn 2004.

Figure 6: Fears Associated with European Integration in Ireland and in the 25 Member States (% Positive - % Negative)



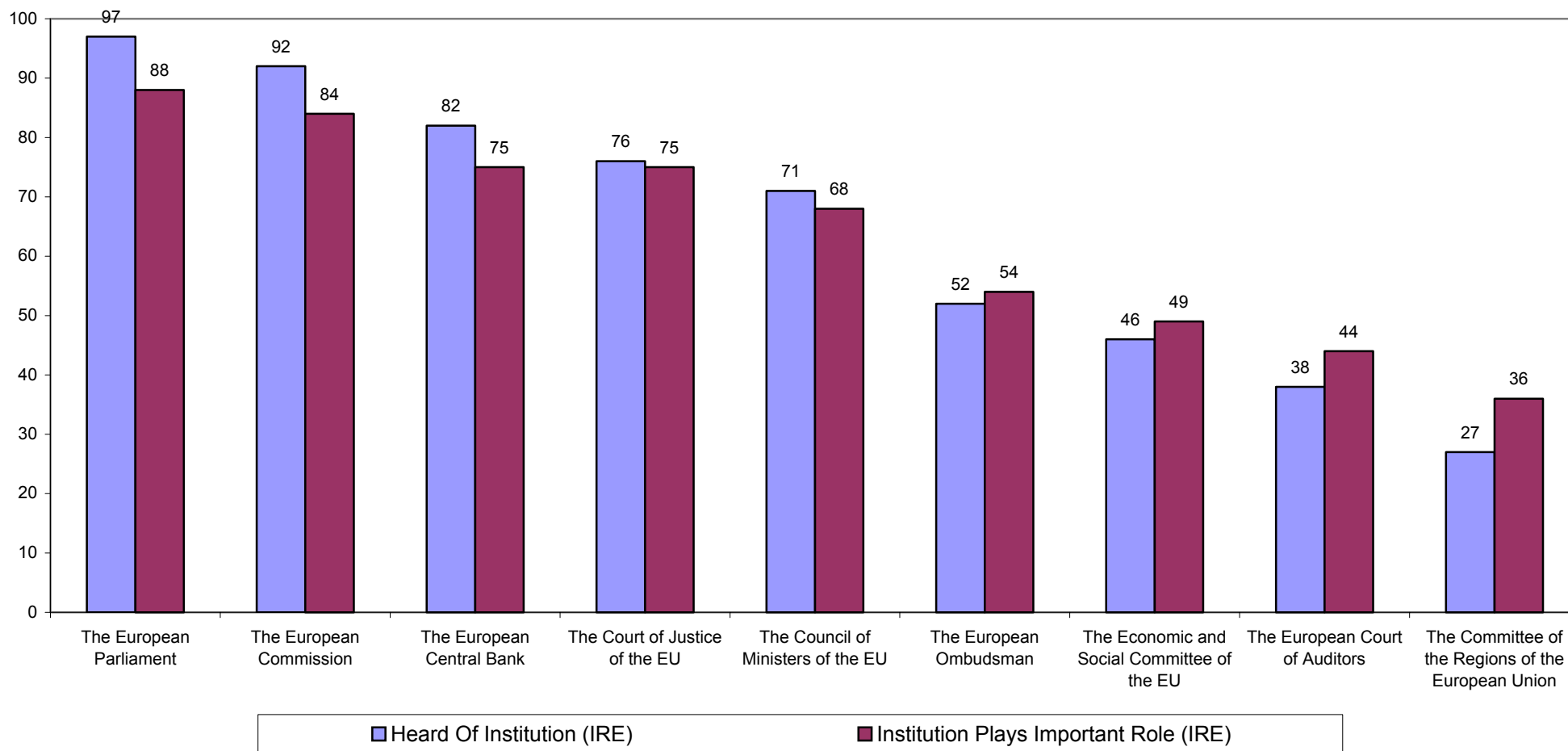
Source: Q21, Eurobarometer 62.0, Autumn 2004.

Figure 7: Location of Competence of Decision Making on Policy: % Respondents Believe Policy Area Decided on Jointly Within European Union in Ireland and in 25 Member States



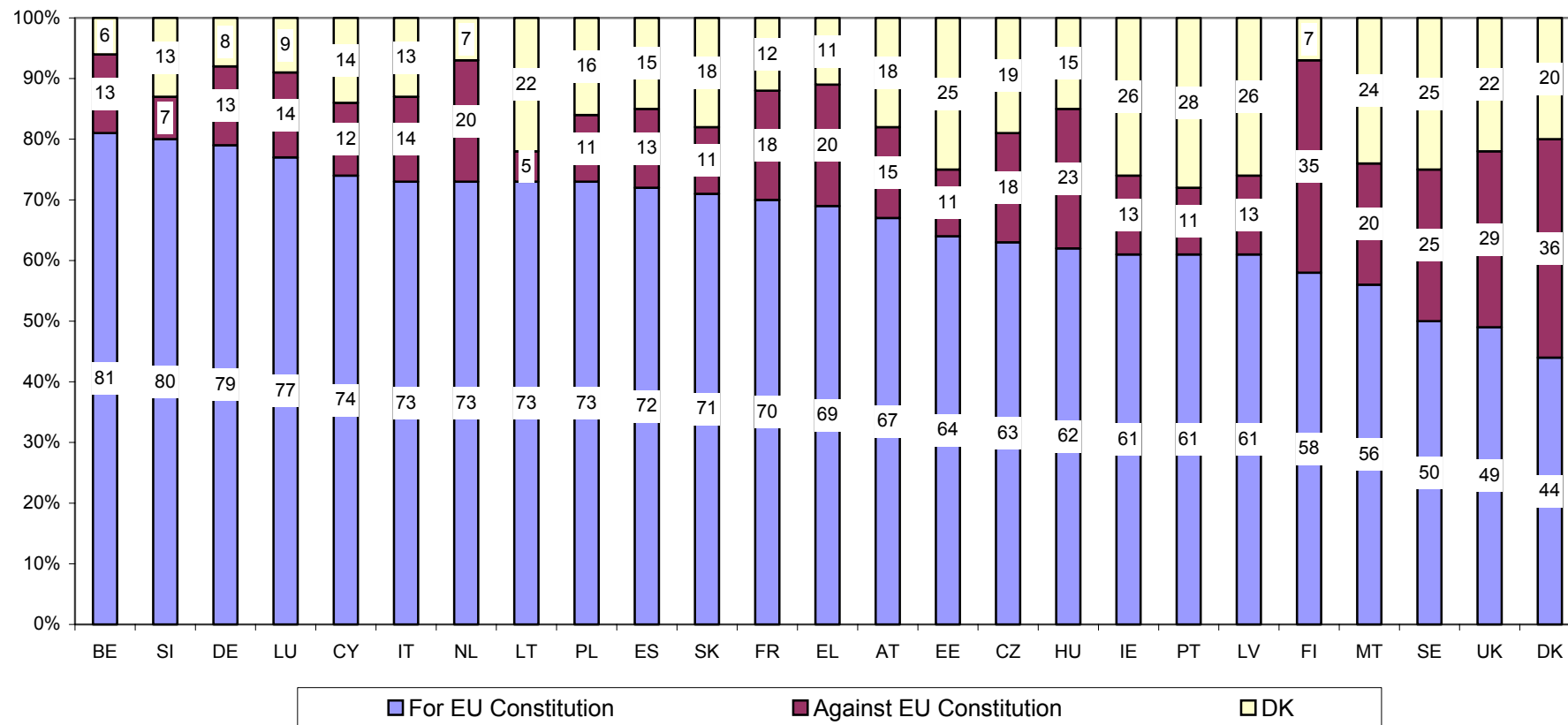
Source: Q18a, Eurobarometer 62.0, Autumn 2004.

Figure 8: Salience of European Union Institutions and Respondents Perceptions that Institution Plays an Important Role (%)



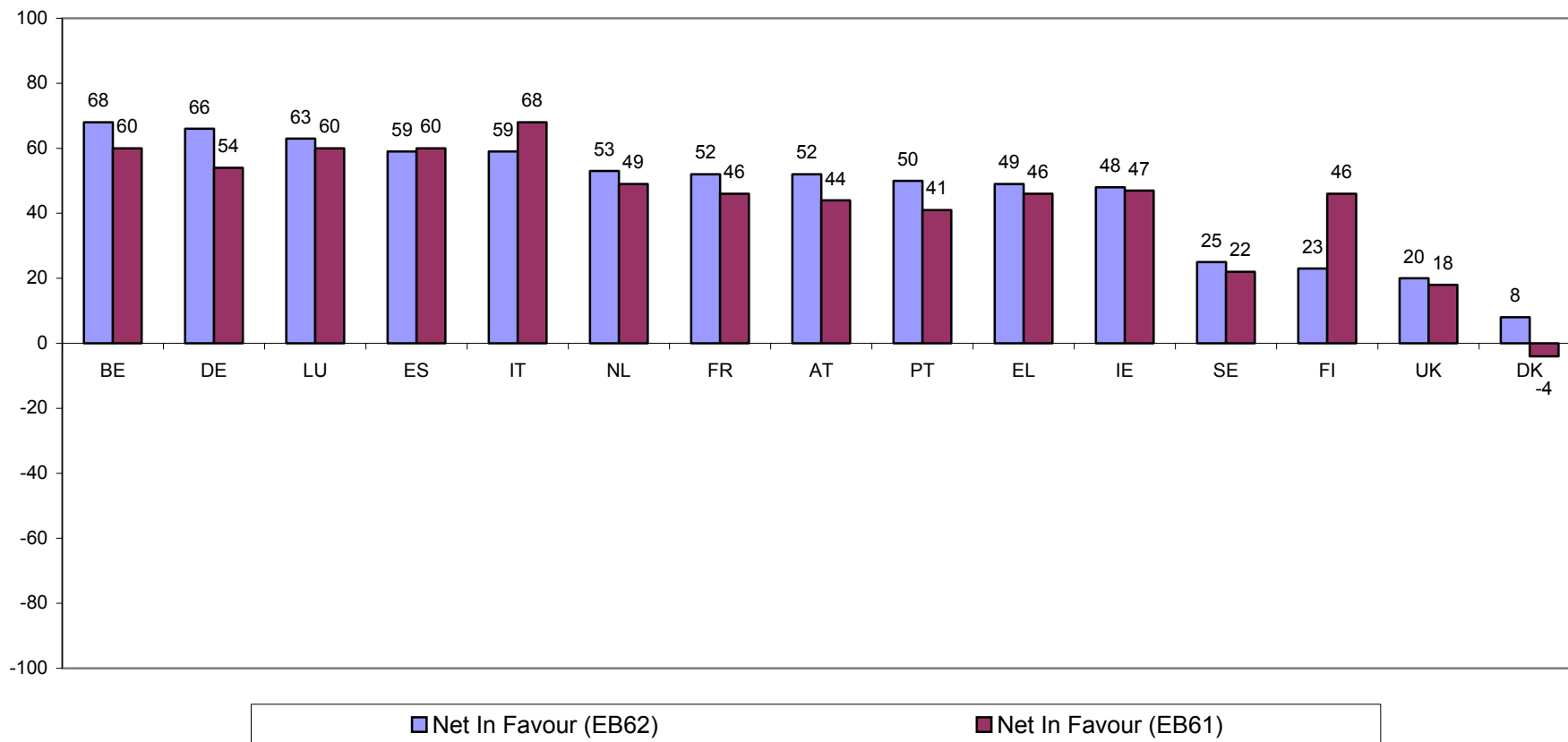
Source: Q27 and Q28, Eurobarometer 62.0, Autumn 2004.

Figure 9: Attitudes Towards 'a Constitution of the European Union' by Country (%)



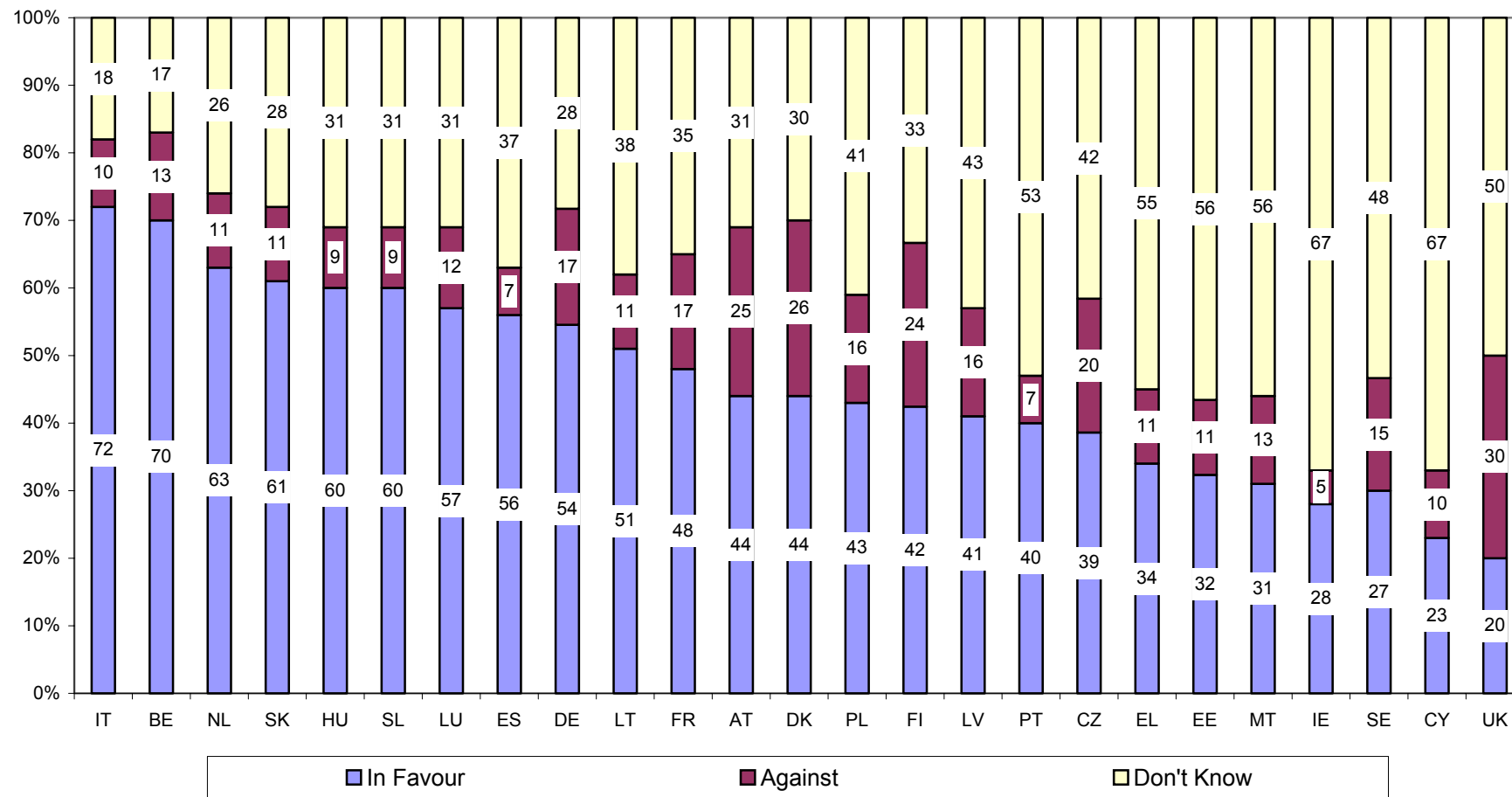
Source: Q36\_5, Eurobarometer 62.0, Autumn 2004.

Figure 10: Net Attitudes Towards a Constitution for the European Union by Country Over Time (% For - % Against)



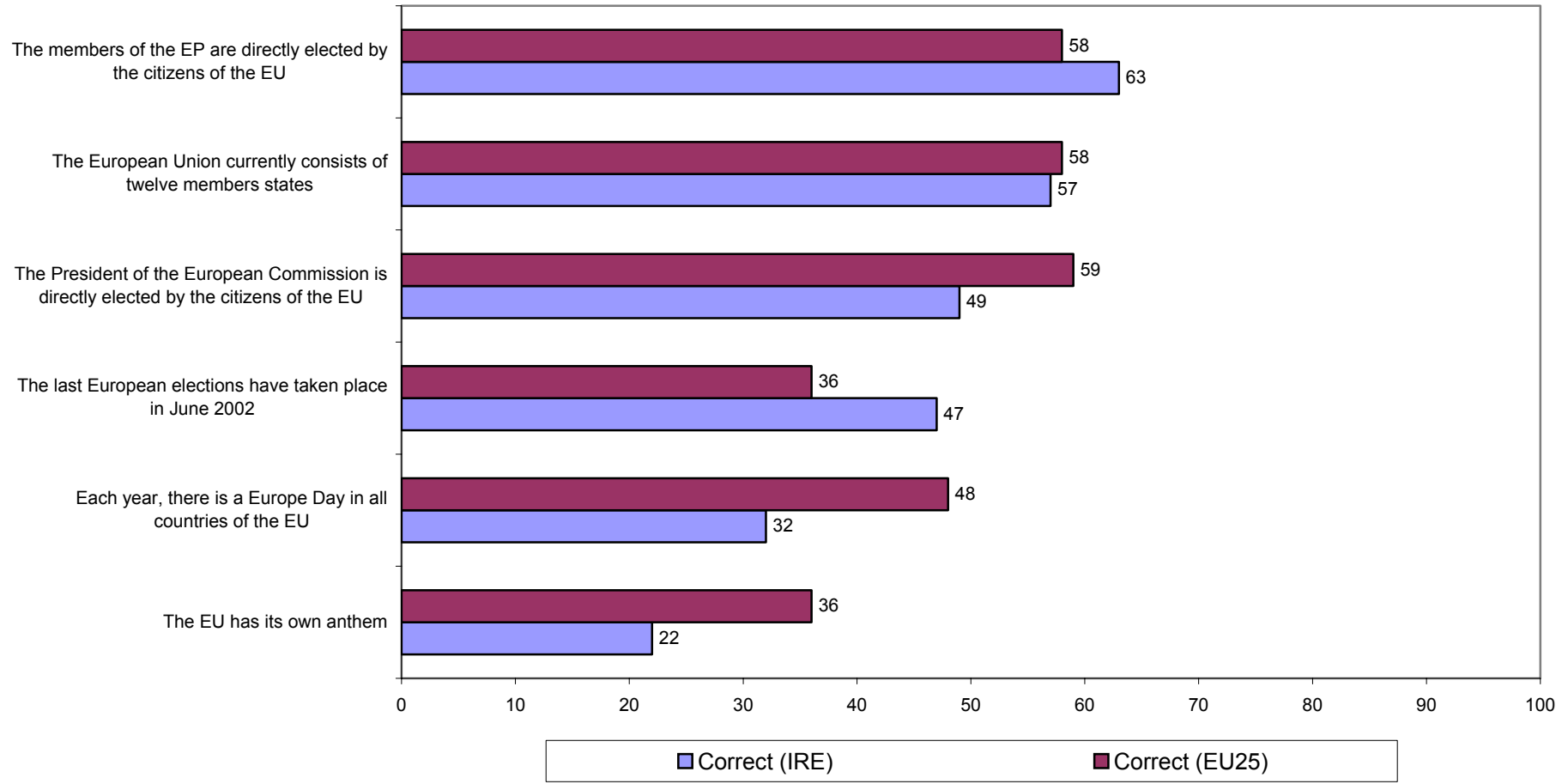
Source: Q36\_5a, Eurobarometer 62.0, Autumn 2004; Ireland National Report, Eurobarometer 61, Spring 2004

Figure 11: Attitudes Towards the 'draft European Constitution' by Country (%)



Source: qa2, Eurobarometer 62.1

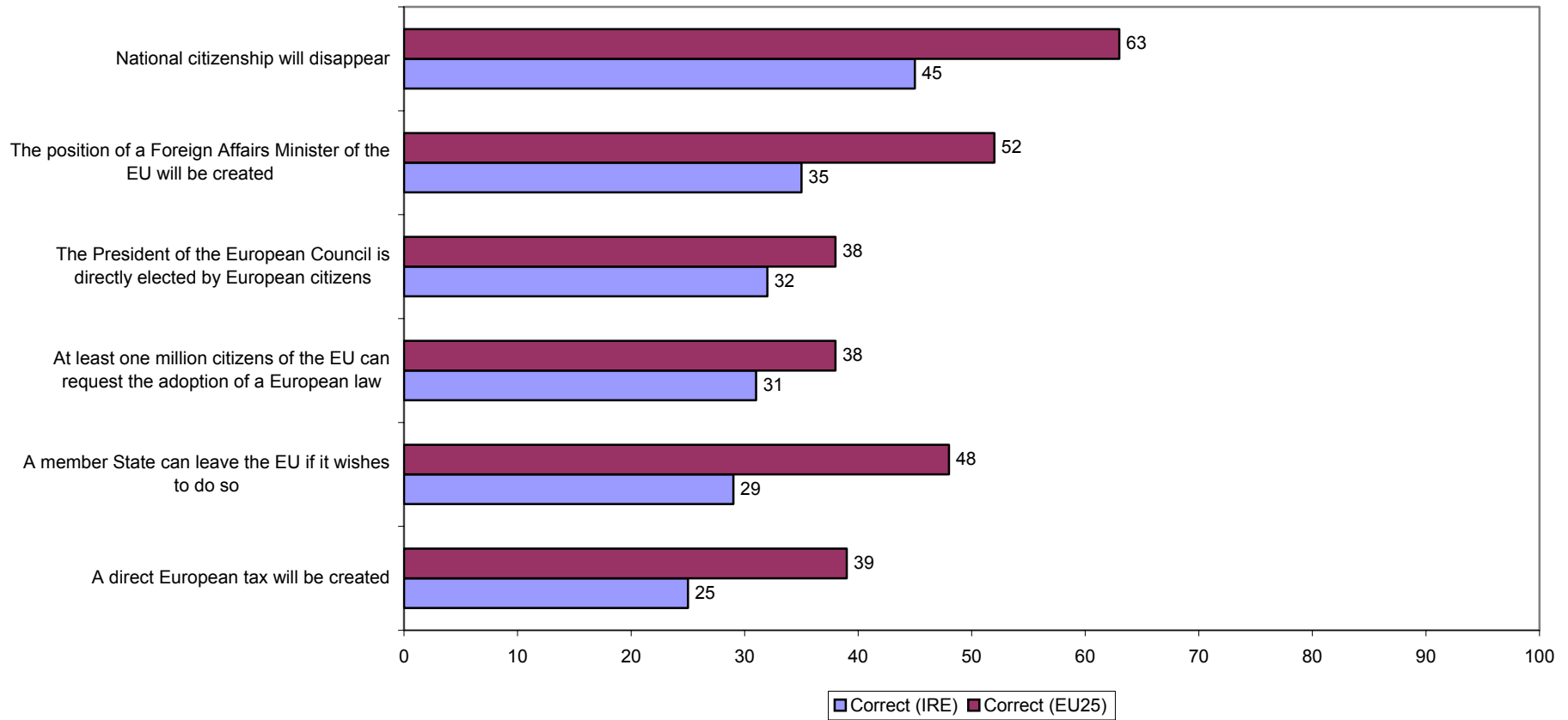
Figure 12: Knowledge of the European Union in Ireland and in 25 Member States (% of Respondents Answering Each Item Correctly)



Source: Q30 Eurobarometer 62.0

Figure 13: Knowledge of the draft Constitution of the European Union in Ireland and in 25 Member States

(% of Respondents Answering Each Item Correctly)



Source: Q5 Eurobarometer 62.1