

EUROBAROMETER 62

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Eurobarometer survey of Luxembourg

Strong support for the EU

Sincere regrets in the event that it were to be scrapped

Questioned in the context of the Eurobarometer survey, a large majority of Luxembourg's citizens clearly express support for their country's membership of the EU, whereas this opinion is only shared by half of European citizens overall. Luxembourg's figure thus tops the European Union rankings.

The percentage of citizens in Luxembourg who do not approve of their country's EU membership is low (4%), in contrast to the somewhat higher European average of 13%. Three new Member States show particularly low levels of support for membership i.e. the Czech Republic, Malta and Latvia, as well as the United Kingdom, with a figure of only 38%.

More than two-thirds of the Luxembourg poll think that their country has benefited from EU membership, which is an opinion shared by only one of two European citizens on average. Only in Ireland, Lithuania and Greece were the figures recorded higher than in the Grand Duchy. More than one-third of Europeans surveyed believe that their country has not benefited from EU membership, as opposed to only one in five in Luxembourg. The rate of negative evaluations exceeds that of positives in Austria, Cyprus, the United Kingdom and Sweden.

For 61% of Luxembourg citizens, the EU evokes a positive or quite a positive image, an opinion held by 50% of European citizens. With this figure, the Grand Duchy is situated close to the top of the ranking, just behind Ireland, Italy, Spain and Slovenia. Only 9% associate it with a negative image (EU: 15%), one of the lowest rates in the whole European Union.

These are some of the conclusions of the Eurobarometer survey conducted by the European Commission, in autumn 2004, in all the European Union Member States. The survey took into account Luxembourg's special demographic situation by using a sample a quarter of which comprises nationals of other EU Member States.

Unemployment and poverty are priorities for the EU

A majority of European Union citizens consider that the EU plays a positive role in assuring freedom in the world. This is supported by more than two-thirds of the citizens of Luxembourg. A majority of EU citizens see the EU as playing a positive role in the fight against terrorism.

With regard to decision-making on defence matters, a majority of those surveyed in Luxembourg think that the EU should take such decisions. NATO is cited in second place, followed by the national government. At European level, the responses follow a similar trend, although the figures for those in favour of the EU taking such decisions are lower overall, while those opting for national governments are higher.

EU citizens cite three main priorities concerning the development of a common security and foreign policy and a European security and defence policy: the adoption of a common position in the event of an international crisis, the guarantee of human rights in the Member States and political independence with respect to the United States.

Respondents in Luxembourg strongly favour teaching school children about the way the European institutions work, and also show high levels of support for the Euro. At EU level, however, support for European Monetary Union is in sixth position, due to the impact of the responses from countries that are not members of the euro zone.

When asked about the priorities they see for the EU, 43% of respondents in Luxembourg cite the fight against unemployment, 35% the fight against poverty and social exclusion, 40% the preservation of peace

and security in Europe, 36% the fight against organised crime and drug trafficking and 24% the fight against terrorism.

Citizens support the idea of one commissioner per member state

Luxembourg's residents favour a Commission composed of Commissioners from each member state, a common security and defence policy, a Constitution for the EU and a common foreign policy. Their opinions regarding the acceleration of the integration process in one specific group of countries (43%; EU: 43%) and further enlargement (54%, EU: 35%) are clearly negative, and rate above the EU average.

At the European level, there is a strong support for schoolchildren being taught how the EU institutions work and for a common security and defence policy. Next comes the idea that there should be one commissioner per member state and a common foreign policy. Two-thirds of Europeans surveyed are in favour of an EU constitution. Support for having different speeds of integration comes in last position.

In Luxembourg, the problems cited as being the most important are the same as in the last Eurobarometer survey conducted in spring 2004. However, the ranking of priorities has changed and several figures are in progression. In March 2004, unemployment was placed first by citizens before the educational system, inflation, housing, immigration and the economic situation. At European level, unemployment, the economic situation, insecurity and inflation dominate the answers.

Transfer of jobs, increase of drug traffic and organized crime constitute the main fears

Speaking about their fears concerning a wider Europe, citizens in Luxembourg mention the transfer of jobs to other member countries where production costs are lower, the increase in drug trafficking and organized crime and a loss in the use of their national language. In EU countries overall, citizens are less sensitive to the last problem due to their larger size. Other fears relate to potential problems for farmers, having to make a more important contribution to the European budget, a loss of social benefits, economic crisis, a loss of national identity and a loss of power for smaller member countries.

The media, an important information source

The three first sources used by Luxembourg respondents for information about EU institutions and policies are the television, the daily newspapers and the radio. At EU level, the trend is similar, although with lower figures: the television is the most used source, far ahead of daily newspapers and radio, followed by discussions with family and friends and the Internet.

In Luxembourg, a majority of those surveyed think that the national media talk enough about the EU. Less than one-third thinks that the media do not give it enough coverage and just 5% think the opposite. The majority thinks that the media presents the EU quite objectively, while one in four considers coverage of the EU overly positive and 7% that it is too negative.

Looking at the level of knowledge about the EU, both in Luxembourg and at EU level, the most frequent answers are those situated in the middle of the scale. Luxembourg respondents' self-assessment of their level of knowledge is among the highest in the EU: Luxembourg is situated in the second position, just behind the Netherlands and Austria, ex aequo with Germany and Sweden.

When asked five questions about the number of member states, the election of Members of the European Parliament, the designation of the President of the Commission, as well as symbols of the EU, Luxembourg respondents have a degree of knowledge far superior to the EU average. 75% of those questioned know that Members of the European Parliament are directly elected by EU citizens, 54% know that every year there is a Europe Day and 53% know about the EU's anthem. 85% of those surveyed confirm that the EU actually has more than twelve members states and 74% that the citizens do not directly elect the President of the European Commission.

In Luxembourg, the European institutions are extremely well known. This is most likely because some of them have their headquarters in the capital and hold their meetings there, and the levels reached by the country's responses are well above the EU average. 97% know the European Parliament, 93% the European Commission, 91% the Court of Justice, 87% the European Central Bank and 86 % the Council of Ministers. The Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions are less known than the other institutions. Luxembourg respondents are convinced about the influence of the institutions in the EU's life. Their level of positive responses is considerably higher than the average figures recorded at EU level.

The euro, first symbol of the EU for a majority of citizens

Within only a few years, the euro has gained in acceptance. For 60% of Luxembourg's residents, the euro is the first symbol of the EU. For 58%, the EU is a synonym for freedom, for 56% a synonym of freedom to travel, study and work. 43% of the citizens identify the EU with peace. When Luxembourg respondents make reference to negative aspects of the EU, they cite the increase in crime, lack of controls at borders and unemployment.

31% of people in Luxembourg think that the EU spends a large part of its budget on administrative expenses, staff and buildings, followed by agriculture (22%). In reality the most important budgetary expenditures are agriculture, regional aid and employment. Administrative expenses amount to 5%.

Luxembourg respondents have greater trust in the European institutions than the average EU citizen. The Court of Justice (72%) is situated on top, followed by the European Parliament (71%), the European Commission (67%), the European Central Bank (64%) and the Council of Ministers (62%). The Committee of Regions is in the last position (30%).

At European level, 59% of those surveyed are in favour of development towards a European political union. In the top rankings of the countries are Slovenia, Estonia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Hungary, all new member states. Luxembourg's figure is lower compared with the EU average at 53%.

63% of those polled in Luxembourg would deeply regret it if the EU were scrapped. This rate puts the country far ahead of Ireland, Portugal, Denmark and the Netherlands. When asked about the feelings that EU evokes in them, 59% claim to feel hope, 39% trust and 11% indifference. 13 % say they have a feeling of mistrust and 22% anxiety. Only 9% cite enthusiasm. At EU level, positive feelings are less favourable and negative feelings more pronounced.