

# EUROBAROMETER 62

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

## AUTUMN 2004

NATIONAL REPORT  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**PORTUGAL**

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## **1. Portugal and the European Union**

Previous Eurobarometers have consistently placed Portugal in the group of countries whose citizens have the most positive feelings towards the EU. This pattern remains in the current Eurobarometer, in which ten new member-states are now included. The majority of Portuguese (around 60 percent of those interviewed) have a “positive” or a “very positive” image of the Union and consider EU membership to be a “good thing”. Following a pattern that has been identified for some years now, the positive “affective” attitudes are exceeded by the “instrumental” attitudes towards the EU: almost 70 percent of Portuguese believe that their country has on balance benefited from being a member of the EU, a value above the EU-25 average (53 percent).

The EU average of positive attitudes (both “affective” and “instrumental”) towards the Union has slightly increased since the previous Eurobarometer (EB61). However, that increment is not a consequence of enlargement – the average for the ten new member-states is, in fact, generally lower than the EU 25. Rather, what has actually increased is the EU-15 average. An increase can also be observed in the percentage of EU citizens who tend to trust the European Union. However, in this case, it seems this increase is at least partially accounted for by the new member-states. Indeed, the average for this group is of 54 per cent, compared with 50 percent for the EU as a whole. Interestingly, Portugal is closer to the new member-states when it comes to evaluating how democracy works in the EU and in the respondents’ own countries, with Portuguese and citizens of all the new member-States (with the exception of Cyprus) evaluating their own country’s democracy more negatively than its European counterpart.

Since 2001, despite some slight variations, the percentage of Portuguese who trust the EU has always been of at least 60 percent. At the moment, that percentage is particularly high among the youngest age group, those with higher levels of educational attainment and those who feel more informed about the EU. In addition, what had been highlighted in previous reports is once again confirmed – there is a strong correlation between the levels of recognition and levels of trust in the various EU institutions.

Despite the tendency to hold positive attitudes towards the EU, the sentiment of pride in being European (69 percent) is well below that of being Portuguese (91 percent). However, there is no EU country where the opposite happens. In Portugal, the percentage of people who feel “not attached” to Europe is particularly high among

women, those with lower education attainment and those who put themselves on the left (on a left-right scale).

## **2. European policies**

The two main concerns of the Portuguese at the time of this survey were unemployment and the economic situation, in this order. While these are also the two main concerns for the EU-25, it must be noted that these issues have a greater weight in Portugal than in the EU average. This concern over social and economic issues – by all accounts, at least partially explained by the prolonged and deep economic recession in Portugal since the turn of the century – is emphasized by the fact that inflation ranks as the third biggest concern for the Portuguese, a choice that is not reproduced at the EU level.

The relative unimportance attributed to the issues of terrorism and immigration in Portugal is also worth highlighting. Only 1 percent of those surveyed placed immigration as one of the two most important issues facing the country; and terrorism garnered 4 percent of responses. These levels are considerably below the EU averages of 13 percent and 16 percent respectively. On the issue of terrorism, the slight increase in EB61 – conducted shortly after the 11 March attack in nearby Madrid – has now been reversed, suggesting that there was no enduring “March 11” effect on Portuguese public opinion. The result for immigration is consistent with the negligible electoral results of the extreme-right in Portugal, and suggests that the fast pace of immigration has not (at least as yet) become a cause of concern for the Portuguese.

While the Portuguese show high levels of trust and support for the EU, it is interesting to note that they also tend to ascribe a more negative role to the EU than their European counterparts when the questions concern specific policy areas. In part, this seems to be the result of the economic situation. Indeed, it is on social and economic issues that the role of the EU is seen as most negative – precisely the issues the Portuguese rank as being top priorities for the EU.

When asked about the Common Security and Foreign Policy and the European Security and Defence Policy, the proportion of those polled in Portugal who are against these policies is relatively low. At the same time, the very high proportion that “does not know” or does not answer these questions must be highlighted. The Portuguese stand

out in the European context, with one-fifth to one-quarter in the DK/NA category on these questions, suggesting lack of information (and/or lack of interest) on defense and foreign affairs.

The survey also shows somewhat contradictory opinions on the issue of shared sovereignty in defence matters. On the one hand, the number of those surveyed who think defence decisions should be made by the national government outweighs those who think these should be made jointly within the European Union. On the other hand, nearly fifty percent of those polled respond that European defence policy should be made by the European Union, rather than by national governments or NATO; and a common EU defence and security policy is supported by 68 percent of those surveyed (with only 13 percent against it).

### **3. The Future of the European Union**

The great majority of the Portuguese agree with the move towards a political union: (66 percent of those interviewed). However, as with previous Eurobarometers, and indeed other questions, the Portuguese are among those who most frequently answer “don’t know” on this subject. Some 20 percent of those polled were in this category, a level matched only in Bulgaria, a country that is yet to become a member of the EU.

Ten countries became members of the EU in 2004, with other countries negotiating to also join the European Union. What is the opinion of the Portuguese on this matter? At this moment (Autumn 2004), 51 percent of those interviewed agree with a further enlargement of the EU, a percentage not dissimilar from the EU average (53 percent). However, a noticeable difference emerges with regard to the attitudes of the Portuguese in previous years – national public opinion tended to be more favourable to the accession of the ten new member-states than it is now to the current set of candidates.

Let us now examine attitudes towards the European Constitution. According to the EB62 data, 61 percent of those surveyed in Portugal support a Constitution for the EU, with 11 percent against it. Nevertheless, it must be noted that 28 percent of those interviewed were in the DK/NA category on this issue – the highest proportion in all EU member states. At the same time – and in contrast with attitudes over enlargement –

Portuguese public opinion remains essentially constant over time in its support for the Constitution.

What do the Portuguese most fear in the process of European integration? On average, those polled tended to be more pessimistic than their European counterparts in relation to “the transfer of jobs to other member states”, economic crises, “a loss of social benefits”, and “an increase in drug trafficking and organised crime” that may occur as a result of further integration. Yet it is interesting to note that this pessimism is now diminishing in comparison to previous EB surveys. In EB61, 72 percent of those interviewed feared that the European Union could contribute to economic crises; now just 64 percent share this opinion. The same can be said of the fears of “a loss of social benefits”: 68 percent feared this in the previous semester, compared with 61 percent now.

These trends are not equally felt in the various social and attitudinal groups: generally, women, house persons, the retired, those with lower educational attainment, and especially those who are against the European Union, tend to exhibit negative attitudes and indifference towards European integration, the Constitution and enlargement more frequently. Clearly, these groups also tend to have greater fears about the possible effects of European integration.

#### **4. Knowledge of and information about the EU**

On a scale from 1 to 10, in which 1 means “knowing nothing at all” and 10 “knowing a great deal” about the European Union, its policies and institutions, the average self-positioning of the Portuguese is 4.4. For the first time, the Portuguese have surpassed the average of the European Union in terms of self-evaluation of their knowledge on the EU.

Nevertheless, some relevant disparities remain in terms of perceptions of information in the different social and demographic groups. As observed in previous Eurobarometers, women tend to feel less informed than men about the EU’s institutions. To this can be added a number of other social and demographic variables: house persons, the retired, those with lower educational attainment also tend to feel less informed. At the same time, citizens with higher levels of satisfaction with the European Union are also those who feel more informed about its institutions.

The improvement in terms of feelings of information of the Portuguese in this Eurobarometer is accompanied by an increase in terms of the levels of objective information. The above-average knowledge of the Portuguese about EU institutions, their functioning and symbols contrasts however with a below-average (and indeed the lowest within the EU-25) knowledge about the EU budget. Only 4 percent of those interviewed correctly identified agriculture as the area where most of the European Union budget is spent, considerably below the EU-25 average of 16 percent correct answers. More significantly still, the proportion of correct answers is now almost half of the 7 percent correct responses in the previous Eurobarometer report of April 2004. The fact that the general pattern of improvement in subjective feelings of information and objective knowledge is not matched here suggests a need for reformulating communication strategies on the EU budget specifically, and EU policies in general.

The survey's results suggest that any communication strategy aiming at reaching a wide public cannot overlook the use of television in Portugal. Television remains not only the predominant source of information for the Portuguese, but also the source they would most like to get information about the EU from. This pattern is quite different from the EU average, where people tend to choose a wider variety of sources. Newspapers and magazines, leaflets and brochures, or the radio were chosen, on average, by only 16 per cent of Portuguese.

Lastly, there are two important – though contradictory – results that probably should be taken into account in the design of EU communication strategies. On the one hand, almost 40 percent of Portuguese think that the national media talk too little about the EU. This would suggest that many Portuguese are receptive to getting more information about the EU. On the other hand, 16 percent of those interviewed – the highest percentage anywhere in the EU – admit that they never look for information about the European Union. Among them are many women, those with lower education attainment and individuals with lower incomes. The conception of specific communication strategies aimed at these groups appears to be one possible solution to this problem. As seen above, these groups tend to be among those most distant from the EU across a number of indicators. While at the moment this distance is still largely reflected in indifference, there is nevertheless the risk that it may one day crystallize into greater opposition to the European process.