



EUROBAROMETER 63

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

SUMMER 2005

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

UNITED KINGDOM

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This report was produced for the European Commission's Representation in the United Kingdom.

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.

Introduction

This executive summary looks at the most important aspects of UK citizens' views about various aspects of the European Union and compares them with typical attitudes held across the Union (EU25 averages) and also highlights major differences with other individual member states.

Views are assessed across the European Union and results are based on both a country-by-country view and a detailed socio-demographic analysis of the UK that attempts to highlight variations by such varied factors as age, education, occupation, etc.

The main data making up this report were gathered in May and June 2005 and are part of wave 63 of the Standard Eurobarometer.

The UK sample

The UK sample comprised 1,347 persons, 647 male and 700 female. 98% of those polled were British.

In each country, a number of sampling points were chosen which would reflect the population size and density. This random sampling technique gives an accurate representation of metropolitan, urban and rural areas.

Starting addresses were selected at random and further addresses were selected as every nth address by standard random route procedures.

All interviews were face-to-face in respondents' homes.

Editorial Highlights

A number of contrasting points emerge from the UK statistics when Eurobarometer 63 is looked at in broad terms.

One of the most important is that the marked improvement in UK attitude to matters European that was so apparent in the last Eurobarometer has partially faded away.

When citizens were asked if the European Union conjured up for them a positive or negative image, it will be recalled that there were exceptional increases in positive attitude shown by UK citizens just six months ago. In the autumn of 2004 the results of EB 62 showed increases in the positive view held amongst UK citizens from 26% to 32%.

Now six months later these levels of support have declined to 28% - down 4 percentage points over the period although they are still ahead of the figures a year ago.

However there are an increasing number of people in the UK who believe the country has benefited from EU membership. While this figure is still two percentage points behind those taking the contrary view, it continues to rise slowly so that it now is 40% - an increase of one percentage point over six months but up from the figure of 30% just a year ago.

Another important factor is the make up of the demographics of those UK citizens who believe that joining the EU has brought benefits to the country. This view is much more established amongst younger people with nearly half (48%) of fifteen to twenty-four year olds taking this stance compared to less than one in three (30%) of those aged 55 or over.

There are also large variations based on education with more than twice the number (59%) of the best educated having positive views of the benefits of EU membership compared with just 27% of those who had left school aged 15 or less.

Although there is still the underlying suspicion of matters European, the UK citizen is by no means about to adopt an isolationist island policy.

Accordingly, UK citizens were supportive of pan European action on several broad issues. For example nearly three quarters (71%) of the UK poll were in favour of an EU rapid military reaction force – a figure three percentage points higher than the EU average.

Immigration, which UK citizens listed as their most important domestic concern, was also an issue where three quarters (74%) of those polled thought a common EU immigration policy should be adopted.

Although 39% of the UK poll believe that UK media talk “about the right amount” on the subject of the European Union, there are a substantial number who believe there is not enough information being circulated.

Accordingly a third (33%) of UK citizens, when discussing their preferred source of information on European matters, stated that there is too little information on television about the EU; this compares with just 13% taking the contrary view. This situation repeats itself with both radio and the press.

In addition a large percentage of UK citizens not only feel that there is not enough information on the European Union but that it is essentially presented with a negative bias. Although the largest percentage of the UK poll believe the news on Europe is presented objectively more than twice as many people believed that it is too negative compared with those who take the view that it is presented too positively.

In the light of these attitudes towards classic media, the strong development of the internet as a preferred method of obtaining information on the European Union is a development that should be watched with interest. The internet is now the third most used source of this type of information in the UK.

What are the two most important issues facing our country?

UK Rank	ISSUES	UK %	EU25 %	EU25 rank	High %	Low %
1=.	Immigration	31	14	6	DK/UK 31	SK 1
1=	Crime	31	23	3	IE 51	LU 10
3	Healthcare system	30	17	4	IE 49	ES 3
4	Pensions	19	11	7	SI 23	CY 2
5.	Education system	15	7	9=	SI 23	ES/IT/PL 2
6.	Terrorism	14	10	8	ES 46	LV/MT/SI/EE 1
7	Unemployment	11	50	1	DE 81	UK 11
8	Protecting environment	9	4	11	DK 12	PT 0
9=	Economic situation	8	27	2	DE/EL/MT /PT 42	IE 5
10=	Taxation	7	7	9=	SI 23	ES/NL 2
10=	Housing	7	5	11	ES 20	EL/DE 0
12	Defence/Foreign affairs	5	2	12=	CY 11	BE/CZ 0
13=	Public transport	3	2	12=	LU 9	LT/LV/LU/EL 0
13=	Inflation	3	16	5	LV 55	SE 1

Where do you go to find out about the European Union?

	EU25 rank	EU25 %	UK rank	UK %	High %	Low %
Television	1	70	1	46	DK/EL/LU 83	UK 58
Daily newspapers	2	43	2	35	Sweden 68	Portugal 21
Radio	3	32	5	22	Luxembourg 56	Portugal 13
Discussions with relatives, friends, etc.	4	23	6	13	Luxembourg/Sweden 42	Portugal 12
Internet	5	22	3	30	Netherlands 42	Greece 9
Other newspapers and magazines	6	17	7	8	Netherlands 38	Spain 5
Never look for such information, not interested	7	16	4	27	UK 27	Lux/France 0

Television, once again, emerged as the most popular source of information on the European Union, being cited by 70% of all EU25 citizens – a figure showing a slight decrease from the 73% noted in spring 2004 and 71% in autumn 2004.

In the UK, **television** was a source of information for 52% of men as opposed to 40% of women and was substantially more used by the two older sections of the poll (51%) than the youngest (28%).

The medium was now slightly more used by the least educated (51%) as opposed to 46% amongst the most educated.

Daily newspapers again fell in popularity across the EU as a source of information in this area. They were chosen by 43% of EU25 citizens – a noteworthy fall from the 54% figure recorded in spring 2004 and 49% later that same year.

Across the European Union, the third most popular source of information on the EU, which was selected by a third (32%) of EU25 respondents, was **radio** – a figure down from 34% six months previously. The UK figure at 22% showed a relatively large fall from the 29% in the previous Eurobarometer.

The increased market penetration of the Internet is a probable cause of its take-up as a source of information.

Across the EU, it rose from being the sixth most used source to the fifth (22%) and, in the UK, it is now the third most popular medium being used by nearly one in three (30%) of citizens. This figure has risen from 19% in spring 2004 and 26% in autumn 2004.

Across the EU25, **discussions with relatives, friends and colleagues** remained the fourth most popular source of information with 23% of EU25 citizens using this method.

Does the media talk enough about the European Union?

	Press		Radio		TV	
	EU25%	UK%	EU25%	UK%	EU%	UK%
Talk too much	9	16	5	7	10	13
Talk about the right amount	50	39	41	39	48	43
Talk too little	24	26	30	29	35	33
Don't know	18	19	24	25	7	11

The largest proportion of both EU and UK citizens believe that all three types of media talk about the right amount about the European Union.

However, compared with those who feel there is information 'overload', there is a considerably larger group taking the contrary view.

For example, only 9% of EU25 and 16% of UK citizens feel the press talk too much about the EU. This compares with 24% and 26% respectively taking the opposite view.

The figures for television show an even greater disparity. Considering this is the favourite medium for citizens across Europe to obtain information about the Union, it is perhaps disturbing to see that while 10% of EU and 30% of UK citizens believe television devotes too much airtime to the European Union, roughly a third of the total poll believes there should be more programmes on the subject. A similar pattern is seen relating to radio.

How does the Press present the European Union?

The major finding from this part of the survey is that the UK feels much more strongly than the EU average that all types of media present the EU **too negatively**.

Analysing all three media, both the EU and UK statistics show that the largest segment of those polled believes that television, radio and the press present the European Union in an objective way.

Across the EU, these figures range from 45% to 48% (virtually half of those polled).

In the UK, the range is from 32% (press) to 39% (radio) to 42% for television.

Where the major difference comes relates to the issue of the media presenting the EU too negatively.

In all cases the UK figures are at least twice as large as those from the EU. Accordingly while 11% of the larger poll sees TV coverage of the EU as being too negative, the figure rises to 22% in the UK. Similar patterns are seen in relation to radio (8%EU/17%UK) and more dramatically press (11%EU/30%UK).

This means that nearly one in three people in the UK poll believes the UK media presents matters European too negatively.

Is the UK's membership of the UK a good thing?

More than half of those polled (54%) across the European Union felt that their country's membership of the European Union was a **good** thing and this figure rises to 80% in Luxembourg. Although this figure is down from the 56% recorded in the last survey, it is still one of the highest recorded over the past 10 years.

In the UK, the comparable figure is 36%, down from 38% six months previously but well ahead of the 29% recorded in spring 2004.

Younger people in the UK were, as previously, more convinced of the benefits of membership of the EU as is shown by the fact that membership gains the support of 41% of 15-24 year olds but only 27% of those aged 55 or more.

Additionally, while 56% of those educated to age 20 or beyond saw membership as a **good thing**, this figure falls to just 25% of those whose education had ended at age 15 or less.

The '**don't know**' factor in the UK has risen from 6% to 9% but this is still lower than the 13% recorded a year ago. Women in the UK (12%) represented twice the level of men (6%) answering in this way.

Has the UK benefited from being a member of the European Union?

Across the EU, more than half (55%) of those polled believed that their country had **benefited** from being a member of the European Union. This figure is up from 53% six months previously.

However, this average figure once again conceals substantial country-by-country variations ranging from 87% in Ireland to 36% in Sweden.

The number of UK citizens who believe that their country has **benefited** from EU membership has risen by a third over a year from 30% to 39% and now to 40%. Making up this number were 43% of the male poll and 37% of the female – this latter figure showing a continuing rise from 24% and 35% in the two previous polls. Enthusiasm for membership in the UK, although shared by all age groups, was more pronounced amongst younger people with nearly half (48%) of 15-24 year olds taking this view compared with just 30% of those aged 55 or more.

The UK figures importantly show that 59% of the most educated people believed the UK had **benefited** compared with just 27% of those who had left school at the earliest opportunity.

While 63% of students and 55% of managers believed the UK had **benefited** from membership, this figure falls to 31% of the retired and 30% of manual workers.

Encouragingly, the proportion of those believing the UK has **not benefited** has fallen from 47% to 45% to 42% over the past year.

The UK '**don't know**' factor at 18% shows a slight increase of 2 percentage points from the 16% recorded in the previous survey.

Making up this 18% '**don't know**' factor in the UK were 15% of the male poll and 22% of the female one.

Do you trust the European Union?

One of the most significant findings of EB63 relates to a further substantial change of attitude amongst citizens regarding their trust in the European Union.

In the spring of 2004, 55% of the UK poll did not trust the EU. By the autumn of that year, this figure had fallen to 47%. In this latest poll, however, the figures return towards the level of a year ago with a 'don't trust' reading of 53% - more than half of the UK poll.

Across the EU, the trust factor falls from 50% to 44% - just one percentage point ahead of the 43% not trusting the European Union.

Younger people in the UK are much more likely to trust the EU, as is shown by the fact that the 27% average figure is made up of 42% of those aged 15-24 compared with just 14% of those aged 55 or more.

Education was again a highly important factor in relation to this issue, with 37% of those educated to age 20 or beyond trusting the Union compared with just 16% amongst those educated to age 15 or less.