

EUROBAROMETER 66

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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NATIONAL REPORT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
FRANCE

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INTRODUCTION

Conducted on behalf of the European Commission, the Eurobarometer 66 public opinion poll surveyed 1007 people in France between 6-30 September 2006.

This report is made up of five chapters.

Chapter 1 gives an overview of the climate of opinion in France.

Chapter 2 studies the perception of the economic situation and attitudes towards globalisation.

Chapter 3 focuses on European and national values and on issues raised by public debate.

Chapter 4 deals with the French opinion on the European Union.

Chapter 5 is about the main European political issues.

1. THE CLIMATE OF OPINION

- 67% (+1) of the French are quite satisfied and 18% (-1) very satisfied with the life they lead. Only 11% (=) are not very satisfied and 4% (-1) not satisfied at all with their own situation. The life satisfaction results (85%) are slightly higher than the UE-25 average (82%).
- Expectations for the next twelve months are finally improving: 23% (+5) of the French expect the employment situation and 16% (+2) the economic situation to improve in the coming year. The percentages of those who feel the economic and the employment situation will worsen have decreased respectively by 16 and 10 points compared to Eurobarometer 65.
- Only 27% (-5) of the French trust their national Parliament, 24% (=) the national government and 12% (-2) political parties.
- Furthermore, 47% of the French trust the United Nations and 40% the European Union.

2. ECONOMY AND EMPLOYMENT

- In spite of the improvements in the economic situation, the French remain sceptical about their country. Only 20% of those interviewed think that, in general, things are going in the right way in France, whereas 61% consider that things are going in the wrong direction.
- The four main issues France is facing at present are unemployment (47%), crime (29%), the economic situation (23%) and inflation (20%).
- Three French respondents out of four (76%) are in favour of the Euro and only 21% are against it.
- 64% consider globalisation as a threat to employment and enterprises in France and only 25% see it as an opportunity for French companies.

- One Frenchman in two (49%) thinks the single market has had positive effects, whereas 30% feel it has had negative effects on the French economy.
- Asked as to the role of the European Union, 31% of French respondents believe that it “protects us from the negative effects of globalisation”, 33% tend not to agree and 19% do not agree at all with this statement.
- To improve the performance of the European economy, 67% advocate the improvement of education and professional training, 61% emphasise that the creation of enterprises should be encouraged and 46% recommend investments in research and development. Only 24% consider it necessary to increase the legal number of working hours and 17% to invest in transport infrastructure.

3. VALUES

- French political debate has been dominated by issues such as crime, immigration and participation of civil society. 62% of the French think the State intervenes too much in their lives; 85% feel citizens must participate more in French political life; 48% are for and 45% against allowing homosexual marriage, but only 35% are for (45% against) the adoption of children by homosexual couples. Furthermore, only 28% feel that the personal consumption of cannabis should be legalised throughout Europe.
- The three values which represent best the European Union are human rights (47%), peace (43%) and democracy (34%).
- Asked of what they consider to be most helpful for the future of Europe, the French cite comparable living standards (55%), a common Constitution (36%), the introduction of the Euro in all EU countries (29%), a common language (22%), well defined external borders of the EU (19%) and a common army (18%).
- More than half of the people interviewed in France (50%, +1) believe that European Union membership is a good thing for their country. For 30% (-2), it is neither good nor bad, while for 19% (+ 2) it is a bad thing.
- Furthermore, 50% (=) consider their country has benefited from being a member of the European Union, while 39% (-1) think the opposite and 11% (+1) do not know. The gap between the first two categories (11 points) remains at a very low level.

4. THE FRENCH AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

- Less than one French citizen out of two (46%, -2) has a fairly good (40%, -2) or very good (6%, =) image of the EU; 20% (+1) have a fairly bad (15%, =) or a very bad (5%, +1) image of it.
- A large majority of the French population has heard of the European Parliament (93%), of the European Commission (87%), of the European Central Bank (69%) and of the Council of Ministers (64%). The other institutions are less known.
- 50% of the French trust the European Parliament. The Parliament is followed by the European Commission (47%, =), the Court of Justice (42%, =) and the Council of the EU (41%). Only 37% trust in the European Central Bank.
- One French person in two (50%) gives a correct answer to the “knowledge test” on the European Union. However, only 43% of respondents know that Members of the European Parliament are directly elected by citizens. And 23% (-11) of the French continue to believe that administrative costs represent the main budget heading for the European Union.

5. THE MAIN EUROPEAN POLITICAL ISSUES

- One French respondent in two (49%) is in favour of an evolution towards a European political union, 39% are against it (12% do not know).
- “Fighting against poverty and exclusion” (50%) and “combating unemployment” (43%) are the top priorities the French would like the European Union to deal with. The other priorities are “protecting the environment” (29%) and “preserving peace in Europe” (28%). The “unemployment priority” has lost 15 points since the last Eurobarometer, which is a strong sign of the improvement of the French economy.
- In spite of a slight increase, support for further enlargement of the EU remains one of the lowest in Europe: 34% (+3) of the French are in favour of it and 58% (-4) are opposed to it. Only inhabitants of Germany, Austria and Luxembourg oppose enlargement more than the French do.
- There is far stronger support for the accession of Norway (78%), Switzerland (75%) and Iceland (68%) than for the two next accession countries, i.e. Bulgaria (43% for, 45% against) and Romania (41% for, 49% against).
- With the exception of Croatia (47% for, 42% against), the French are mainly opposed to the accession of the former countries of Yugoslavia, i.e. Macedonia and Montenegro (38% for, 47% against), Bosnia (37% for, 49% against) and Serbia (37% for, 52% against).
- Support for an enlargement to include Turkey remains very low: only 22% (+1) of the French are in favour and 69% (+1) are against.
- One French respondent in two (52%, -1) is against “the speed of building Europe being faster in one group than in other countries”, whereas 35% (+4) are in favour of it (13% do not know).
- Support for a common security and defence policy (81%, +1) and for a common foreign policy (70%, +5) remains at a very high level.
- Eighteen months after the “no” victory at the constitutional treaty referendum, 66% (+4) of the French support the idea of a European Constitution, 21% (-6) are against it and 12% do not know.
- 66% (-3) of the French think the Constitution should be renegotiated, 16% (+2) feel it should be abandoned and only 9% (-1) think the Member States should continue its ratification.