

EUROBAROMETER 66

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

AUTUMN 2006

NATIONAL REPORT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

IRELAND

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

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The interpretations and opinions contained in it are solely those of the authors.

Introduction

- This is the tenth in a series of six-monthly reports on Irish attitudes to the European Union.
- This report is based on *Eurobarometer 66.1*, which was conducted in autumn 2006.

Attitudes towards EU Membership and Policies

- Seventy-eight percent of Irish people believe that Ireland's membership of the European Union is 'a good thing'.
- Eighty-seven percent of Irish people believe that Ireland has benefited from EU membership.
- Seventy-three percent of Irish people have a positive image of the European Union.
- Irish people tend to regard EU membership as having a 'good effect' on the economy: 'our economy' (89 percent), 'our standard of living' (88 percent) and 'employment in our country' (81 percent).
- People also tend to be very positive about the effects on membership on 'our influence in the world' (75 percent) and 'our country's security' (70 percent).
- When it comes to 'our agriculture', the percentage of Irish people who believe membership has had a 'positive effect' is 64 percent.
- When it comes to political union, Irish people are amongst the least enthusiastic (55 percent).

The European Constitution

- Fifty-eight percent of Irish people are 'for' a constitution.
- Fifty-six percent of Irish people support the European Constitution.
- In order to progress ratification of the European Constitution, the most popular strategy amongst Irish people is to renegotiate the European Constitution (35 percent); 24 percent believe that the EU Member States should continue with the ratification process and nine percent believe that it should be dropped.

Enlargement

- There is little appetite or enthusiasm for enlargement: three percent of respondents believe the EU should prioritise 'welcoming new Member Countries' and three percent believe it should prioritise 'preparing a new enlargement of the EU'
- Irish people have a more favourable attitude toward Bulgarian (41 percent) than Romanian (38 percent) membership.

Salient Policy Issues and Policy Capacities

- Five percent of people see energy as one of the two most important issues facing Ireland.
- Most Irish people see it as issue best dealt with through international co-operation: 65 percent of people believe that energy decisions should be made jointly within the EU while 32 percent believe such decisions should be made by the national government.
- The most salient policy issues for Irish people are 'crime' (55 percent) and 'healthcare system' (44 percent).

Attitudes toward the Economy, the Single Market and Globalisation

- The vast majority of Irish people are 'satisfied' with life in Ireland (90 percent).
- Irish people tend to be slightly more optimistic about their own situation than the national economy: 47 percent of Irish people think their 'life in general' will improve over the next twelve months and 36 percent think the financial situation of their household will improve; 33 percent believe the employment situation in Ireland will improve and 31 percent think the economic situation will improve.
- Irish people exhibit a positive attitude toward the single market as 73 percent of people feel it has had a positive effect.
- Sixty-four percent of Irish people think Irish companies are more competitive internationally than they were 10 years ago.
- Seventy-four percent of Irish people report that they have benefited from 'a wider variety of goods from other EU countries' and 69 percent from 'the common currency, the Euro' (26 percent report that that they have not benefited from the common currency).
- Most Irish people agree that 'free competition is the best guarantee for economic prosperity' (70 percent).
- Most Irish people regard globalisation as having a positive effect on 'scientific and technical progress' (57 percent), 'economic growth in our country' (56 percent) and 'employment in our country' (52 percent). Irish people tend to be less sure about the positive effects of globalisation on issues such as the 'environment' (44 percent), 'health' (39 percent) and 'disparities between countries' (38 percent).

Information on the European Union

- Irish people are not very interested in talking about politics: 40 percent of Irish people say that they never discuss political matters when they get together with friends.
- Irish people tend to be more interested in 'domestic affairs' (74 percent) than 'European affairs' (52 percent).
- Irish people are not very willing to look for information about the EU, its policies and its institutions: 49 percent of Irish people say that they 'never' look for information on the EU.
- Forty-three percent of Irish people say that it is 'easy' to find information on the EU while 14 percent say that it is 'difficult'.
- Irish people are most likely to 'tend to trust' radio and television (73 percent and 66 percent, respectively) and are more likely not to trust the press than to trust it (55 percent 'tend not to trust' while 38 percent 'tend to trust').
- About a third of Irish people tend to trust domestic political institutions such as the Dail (36 percent), the Irish government (34 percent) and political parties (23 percent).
- Respondents in Ireland tend to trust international institutions: the United Nations (59 percent) and the European Union (55 percent).

Conclusion

- In general, Irish public opinion towards Ireland's membership of the European Union continues to be very positive. However, the reality of Irish opinion is more complex when account is taken of people's attitudes regarding specific policies.