

# **EUROBAROMETER 67**

**PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION**

## **SPRING 2007**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **FRANCE**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Conducted on behalf of the European Commission, the Eurobarometer 67 public opinion poll surveyed 1013 people in France between April 10<sup>th</sup> and May 15<sup>th</sup> 2007, during the election campaign. After several years of pessimism, this Eurobarometer shows a strong improvement in citizens' levels of satisfaction, concerning their personal situation, future perspectives and trust in national and European institutions.

### **1. OVERALL CONTEXT**

- 64% of the French (-3 points compared with autumn 2006) declare that they are quite satisfied and 18% (=) very satisfied with their life. Only 13% (+2) are not so satisfied and 5% (+1) not satisfied at all with their own situation. The global satisfaction rate (82%) is slightly higher than the EU-27 average (80%).
- Expectations for the next twelve months keep on improving: 32% (+10) of the French expect the economic situation and 27% (+9) expect the employment situation to improve in their country. The percentage of those who believe the situation will deteriorate has decreased by 12 points and 9 points respectively compared with Eurobarometer 66. In addition, 48% (+5) think that their own situation will improve in the next five years.
- However, more than seven French out of ten still judge the economic situation of their country to be “fairly bad” (60%) or “very bad” (11%).
- According to the French, the four main issues France is facing at the moment are unemployment (51%, +4), crime (24%, -4), the economic situation (23%, =) and inflation (21%, +3).
- Compared with the EU-27 average, the French react more negatively to the words “liberalisation” (48% of positive answers, whereas the EU-27 average is 58%) and to “globalisation” (39% in France vs. 46% in the EU as a whole). The level of positive answers reaches 79% when it comes to "company" and 71% regarding "free trade".
- In France, 57% of respondents associate globalisation with the relocation of companies to countries where labour is cheaper, a figure that is the highest in the EU.) When interviewed about the role of the European Union, only 32% of French respondents consider that the EU “protects us from the negative effects of globalisation” and 35% that the EU enables European citizens “to benefit better from the positive effects of globalisation”, a figure that is far below the EU-27 average.

## **2. IMAGES AND IDENTITY**

- Half of the French population (50%, +4) have “a fairly good” (41%) or a “very good” (9%) image of the European Union; 21% (+1) have a “fairly bad” (18%) or a “very bad” image (3%) of the EU.
- For those interviewed, the EU represents above all freedom to travel, study and work throughout the EU (59%), the euro (50%), peace (49%) and cultural diversity (42%).
- The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Treaty of Rome brings to mind hope to 51%, concern to 30% and satisfaction to 25% of respondents. More than one-third (35%) of the French say it does not bring anything to mind.
- According to French citizens, the most positive results of European unification are peace (which comes in first place for 43% and in second place for 19% of respondents) and the free movement of people, goods and services (24% and 28%). The euro is considered by 16% as the best result and by 26% as the second best result of European integration.
- 72% of the French are in favour of the euro, 25% are against it and 3% do not know. Despite a 4-point drop, support for the common currency remains one of the highest among the EU Member states.
- Attachment to the European flag remains widespread. 84% of French people think that it is a good symbol for Europe (+6 points within a year) and 77% consider that "it stands for something good". In addition, 65% think that it should be seen on all public buildings next to the national flag.

## **3. THE FRENCH AND THE EUROPEAN UNION**

- Most indicators regarding support for the EU reach levels unseen since the referendum on the Constitution in 2005. 51% of the French now trust the European Union, i.e. 11 points more than in autumn. Those who do not trust the EU represent only 41% of the population (-7 points).
- More than one French person in two (52%, +2) believes that European Union membership is a good thing for their country. For 26% (-4) of the French, it is neither good nor bad, while for 21% (+2) it is a bad thing.
- Furthermore, 54% (+4) of the French consider that their country has, on balance, benefited from being a member of the European Union, while 37% (-2) think the opposite and 9% (-2) do not know. The gap between the first two categories, which had fallen since the 2005 referendum, is now widening again (17 points).
- 54% (+4) of the French trust the European Parliament. The EP is followed by the European Commission (47%, =), the European Central Bank (40%, +3) and the Council of the EU (38%, -3).

- Television (55%) and daily newspapers (37%) are the two main sources of information for French people who are looking for information about the European Union. The Internet (36%) is now ahead of radio (29%) and its score has almost tripled since 2003. Among young people (15-24 years old), it is even the first source of information.

#### **4. KEY ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE**

- Asked about what should be the priorities for the EU, the French put forward environment (38%), immigration (30%) and social (29%) issues.
- Decision-making at European level is preferred to national level for fighting terrorism (85%, +1), for scientific and technologic research (78%, =), for protecting the environment (76%, +7) and regarding energy issues (70%, +3). On the other hand, the French prefer the national level to deal with pension schemes (78%), taxation (75%), the health care system (75%) or education (71%).
- The public continues to be very positive regarding a common foreign policy (70%) and on a defence and security policy (82%). In addition, 64% believe that, in 50 years from now, the EU will have its own army and that it will be a leading diplomatic power in the world.
- With 68% in favour of a European constitution, France's figure is above the EU-27 average (62%).
- A few months after Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU, a clear majority is against further enlargement of the Union: 32% (-2) are in favour and 60% (+2) are opposed to the idea of including other countries in the years to come. Lower levels of support are recorded in only two EU countries (Luxembourg and Austria).
- Regarding the 2004 enlargement wave, 44% of respondents feel it has been "neither positive nor negative", 20% that it has been as negative as they thought and 10% that it has been as positive as they expected.
- 46% (-6) of the French are against "the speed of building Europe being faster in one group of countries than in the other countries", whereas 42% (+7) are in favour. The gap between the two categories appears to be narrowing: supporters of a multi-speed Europe are now almost as numerous as opponents to this idea.