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Introduction

This is an executive summary of a full report on data collected in the UK in September and October 2007 when a total of 1,340 citizens were interviewed in their own homes.

The generally high level of cynicism towards the EU among UK citizens has been a matter of concern for several years. There has been a strong groundswell of opinion that this attitude is, to a large extent, driven by ignorance of matters European which have generated high levels of mistrust and this issue is studied in depth in the main report. The role of the media in this area is also of major importance.

Attitudes to the EU in terms of whether membership is a good thing and, more specifically, whether the UK is seen to have benefited from being a member are also discussed, as well as whether the sample felt that the UK's voice was important in Europe.

The legislative process, for so long the prerogative of countries before they became Member States, has witnessed a sea-change. The entry into force of the Single European Act, in 1987, saw the beginning of a gradual process whereby more and more legislation was made at EU level and this is also a subject reviewed more fully in the full report.

How do citizens feel?

Across the European Union generally and in the UK in particular, citizens feel less confident about the future when it relates to their **lives in general**.

Six months ago, 37% of EU27 citizens and nearly half (48%) of UK citizens felt their lives would be better. These figures have now dropped to 30% across the EU and by a substantial 13 percentage points to 35% in the UK. However, the majority of EU citizens believe their lives will be the same with figures of 54% across the 27 Member States and 55% in the UK.

In the spring of 2007, 27% of EU27 citizens and 35% of those in the UK believed their **financial situation** would improve. In a similar way to responses to the 'life in general' question above, there has been a reduction in this level of optimism to 25% across the Union and 29% in the UK.

There was virtually no change in view on this issue with 61% of EU27 citizens believing their **job situation** would be the same, 22% believing it would get better and just 8% believing it would get worse. The UK figures are broadly in line with these averages with figures of 58%, 28% and 6% respectively.

As has been noted in previous editions of Eurobarometer, it is interesting to note that the general upbeat view held by European citizens relating to their personal job situation is not as strongly reflected in their views about the **employment situation in their country** as a whole and, in this latest survey, 61% of EU27 citizens polled believe that the job situation in their country is bad. The corresponding figure for the UK is relatively low at 39%.

UK citizens were noticeably less upbeat about **their country's economy** than they were six months previously. Whereas in EB67.2 there were more than two-thirds (70%) of those who said the situation was good, this figure has now fallen to 63%. This latter figure is still, however, fifteen percentage points higher than the EU27 average of 48%.

When citizens across the Union were asked the much broader question relating to the **European economy** as opposed to their national economies, there was, as might be anticipated, a much higher level of 'don't knows' and this figure increases from 3% to 15% across the Union as a whole while it more than twice as large at 31% in the UK.

EU27 citizens are more confident about the economic situation across the Union as a whole than their national situation, with a positive view being taken by 58% of the total poll believing the European situation was good rather than the 48% taking this view in regard to their national economies.

In contrast, just 47% of UK citizens believe that the European economy is in good shape compared with 63% holding this view on the UK economy – a view noticeably out of line with the EU average.

Important Issues

When questioned about the important issues facing their country the UK citizen is noticeably more concerned about **crime** than the average EU27 citizen. Accordingly, 44% of UK citizens listed crime as one of the two most important issues facing their country compared with just a quarter (24%) on average across the European Union.

However, this differential is dwarfed by the figures relating to concerns about **immigration** where just 15% of EU27 citizens cite this as being one of the two most important issues facing their country compared with 39% of UK citizens. In the UK, these average figures which are more than twice as large as the EU average are made up a wide variety of figures. For example, while 43% of the least educated see immigration as being a key issue, this figure falls to just a quarter (27%) of those educated to age 20 or beyond.

The next two most important issues cited by the UK poll were **healthcare** (26%) and **terrorism** (17%).

The most important issue to EU27 citizens generally which was cited by 27% of the total poll – **unemployment** – was only of importance to 9% of the UK poll. This can be compared with a massive 54% in Portugal.

A similar disparity was seen concerning the issue of **inflation** which was the second most important issue for the whole of the EU (26%) with figures as high as 77% in Latvia. In the UK, the spectre of inflation was largely ignored and was mentioned by just 8% of the poll.

Understanding and trust in UK and EU institutions.

Over the past six months, there is some good news in that there was a slight increase from 35% to 37% amongst UK citizens stating that they **understood** how the EU works. In contrast, over the same period, the average EU27 figures fell from 43% to 40%.

Analysing the UK figures in more detail, while there is no clear pattern established by age, education is, again, a key factor. The proportion of those educated to age 15 or less who understand how the EU works is just 26% - less than half the 55% figure observed amongst those educated to age 20 or above.

Another major variation is by gender with the 37% average figure saying they understood how the EU works being composed of 45% of the male poll and just 29% of the female one.

There has been a decline in European citizens' **trust** in both their national governments and the European Union over the past six months.

Just a third (34%) of EU27 citizens trust their **governments** – a noticeable fall from the 41% average recorded in the spring of 2007. In the UK, this fall has been less pronounced but even so the 34% of citizens who trusted the UK government earlier this year has now declined to just 30%.

However, this decline in trust is much more marked when the subject is the **European Union**. In the previous Eurobarometer survey, 36% of UK citizens said they trusted the EU – a figure two percentage points greater than those trusting the UK government. In just six months, this figure has tumbled to 25% which means that only one in four UK citizens trust the EU. This figure is virtually half the EU27 average of 48% which itself shows a major fall from 57% earlier this year.

Trust levels are also substantially higher amongst the youngest segment of the poll (42%) and the most educated (38%) while just 16% of those aged 55 or more and 18% of those who had left school aged 15 or less bring the UK average figure down to the 25% noted above.

Attitudes to the European Union

58% of the total EU27 poll saw the Union as being **a good thing**, a figure just marginally higher than when this issue was discussed six months previously. A further 25% took a neutral standpoint while the number of citizens viewing the EU as a bad thing fell slightly from 15% to 13%.

A very different picture is, however, seen when the UK figures are reviewed. 28% of those polled viewed the European Union as being a bad thing and the only small consolation is that this figure (the highest amongst the 27 Member States) shows a small decrease from the 30% observed six months previously.

The largest proportion of the UK poll, albeit by a small amount, takes the view that the EU is a good thing but this figure of 34% shows a decline from the 39% recorded in the spring of 2007.

In the spring of 2007, opinion in the UK was evenly divided with 43% of those polled believing that the UK had **benefited from EU membership** and 44% taking the contrary view, with 13% giving a 'don't know' response.

These figures have changed noticeably in that now while 37% of those polled believed the country has benefited, 47% of the UK sample take the contrary view meaning that the gap has moved from one percentage point to ten percentage points.

Analysing in more detail the UK figures, certain established patterns once again emerge. 62% of the most educated group believe that the UK has benefited from EU membership as do 46% of 15-24 year olds. Less educated and older people take a very different view as is evidenced by the fact that just 25% of those educated to age 15 or less and 29% of those aged 55 or more share this view.

The importance of the country's voice in the EU

In the spring of 2007, two-thirds (66%) of EU27 citizens believed that their country's voice counted within the Union. Figures as high as 86% in Germany, 82% in Denmark and France, and 80% in Luxembourg were noted, while the UK figure was just 55%.

However, in the six months since EB67, these figures have slipped back and the average across the EU indicates that now only 61% of those polled believe their country's voice counts within the EU. In the UK, however, the fall is much more marked and now just 47% of the poll believes their country's voice counts in the EU – just two percentage points ahead of those holding the contrary view.

The decision-making process

UK citizens are less prepared than most other EU 27 member states for decisions to be made jointly within the European Union rather than by their national government.

Nevertheless a majority of UK citizens support the broader pan-European decision making process in five areas and support figures of 68% are seen for fighting terrorism, 62% for environment, 59% for scientific and technological research, 56% for regions facing economic difficulties and 50% for energy.

However, the EU average for a majority of citizens supporting the view that the decisions should be made jointly within the European Union covers not just the five areas selected by the UK poll but a further six. These additional half dozen are defence and foreign affairs (67%), immigration (63%), fighting crime (61%), competition (57%), consumer protection (53%) and agriculture and fisheries (53%).

Attitudes to Media

Attitudes to media is one of the more important issues discussed in this report in that this information flow is the basic raw material from which opinions are formed. To what extent the key media are trusted and citizens' views as to the level and content of coverage of EU affairs is a key part of the results of this most recent Eurobarometer survey.

In the UK, one in five of the poll (21%) trusts **the press** – a figure less than half the 44% across the EU. However, in both the UK and EU27 statistics, the majority of the people polled do not trust this medium. In addition, the largest proportion of both the UK (37%) and the EU27 (36%) believes that the press gives too little coverage on Europe.

But perhaps the most important observation coming from these data is that more than one in three (36%) of the UK poll believe that the UK press presents the EU too negatively. This compares with an EU average of just 13%. The only figures anywhere approaching the UK data are observed in Sweden (20%) and the Netherlands (24%).

Trust in **television** in the UK has fallen slightly over the past six months from 51% to 48%, whilst across the EU as a whole it has moved more significantly from 58% to 52%.

Examining the levels of coverage, a substantial 48% of the UK poll thinks there is too little coverage on television about the European Union and, as significantly, more than twice as many people (27%) see the attitude of television towards the European Union as being too negative compared with just 12% who view it as being too positive.

Amongst the most educated segment of the poll, the view that the attitude is too negative is held by more than one-third (36%) of the segment.

Radio remains the most trusted domestic medium with figures of 60% across the European Union and 58% in the UK. The level of coverage is a matter of some concern to the UK poll with 43% of citizens thinking there is too little coverage on matters European.

There was, however, a relatively high proportion (33%) of the UK poll that was unsure of radio's attitude to the European Union and, within this figure, a noticeable difference was observed between men (25%) and women (41%). However, the largest proportion of the poll thought that radio presented the EU in an objective manner.

As might be anticipated from a new medium with relatively low market penetration, there was a high 'don't know' factor when the issue of trust in **the internet** was raised and this response was given by a third (32%) of both the EU and UK polls.

When respondents were asked about the level of coverage of the EU, the 'don't know' factor rises to 50% in the UK and 47% across the European Union.

However, this 50% figure in the UK is made up of demographics that might be anticipated for this medium with figures of 76% amongst those aged 55 or more and 77% of those educated to age 15 or less compared with figures of just 15% of those aged 15 to 24 and 39% of those educated to age 20 or beyond.

As this medium is so recent, there is high figure of 60% of UK respondents saying they do not know the attitude of this medium in this area.

Many pundits see a key part of the future of the internet is that it will encroach upon the three older types of media in that citizens will be able to watch television, listen to the radio and read their favourite newspapers and magazines through the new medium. This is highly likely to increase the importance of the internet in future surveys of this kind.