



Standard Eurobarometer



EUROBAROMETER 68

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

AUTUMN 2007

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FRANCE

The survey was requested and coordinated by the Directorate-General for Communication.

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

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

Carried out on behalf of the European Commission, the Eurobarometer 68 public opinion poll surveyed 1036 people in France between September 27th and October 20th 2007. This survey took place six months after the election of Nicolas Sarkozy as Head of State and after the European Council in Berlin, which found a solution to the institutional crisis resulting from the French and Dutch referenda. Following these events, things have changed in a dramatic way. Hence, this Eurobarometer gives a very optimistic image of the French opinion, whose support for EU membership has never been higher in the last fifteen years.

1. CONTEXT

- 85% of the French declare that they are very or fairly satisfied with the life they lead, i.e. 3 percentage points more than in the previous semester. This result is 5 points above the EU-27 average.
- When asked about the current situation, 81% of respondents still judge the employment situation to be rather bad or very bad. Moreover, 72% consider the French economic situation to be negative. Nevertheless, 68% of the French are satisfied with the social welfare situation in their country.
- According to the French, the four main issues France is facing at present are unemployment (38%, -13), inflation (27%, +6), pensions (20%, +8) and the economic situation (19%, -4).
- Expectations for the next twelve months are slightly more optimistic: 30% (+1) of the French expect the economic situation and 32% (=) the employment situation to improve in the coming year.
- Trust in the political situation is improving: 42% of the French feel “things are going in the right direction”, with a spectacular increase by 22 points, whereas 39% (-22) feel “things are going in the wrong way” in France and 14% do not know.
- Six months after the presidential election, trust in the government has increased by 6 points, to 42%, while 51% of French citizens say that they tend not to trust it.

2. THE EU TODAY

- All results of this survey show a substantial improvement in the perception of the European Union. One Frenchman out of two (53%, +3) has a fairly/very good image of the European Union; 15% (-6) have a fairly/very bad image of the EU.
- Trust in the European Union (51%) remains at the same level as six months earlier, but the percentage saying they tend not to trust the EU has fallen by 7 points and has reached 34%.
- Support for EU membership has reached its highest level since 1991: six Frenchmen out of ten (60%, +8) believe that European Union membership is a good thing for their country. 27% (+1) say that it is neither good nor bad, while 12% (-9) think that it is a bad thing. The “good thing – bad thing” gap has increased 31 to 48 percentage points.
- Furthermore, 57% (+3) of the French believe that their country has benefited from being a member of the European Union, i.e. the highest result recorded since the beginning of the new millennium. 32% (-5) believe that their country has not benefited from EU membership and 11% (+2) do not know. The gap between the two views has increased to 25 points (vs. 10 points in spring 2006).
- 63% of French respondents consider that the EU plays a positive role in fighting terrorism in France. 60% do so when it comes to protecting the environment. However, 38% believe that the EU plays a negative role in regard to rising prices. For all policy areas, more people think that the EU plays a positive role than in the previous survey.
- No fewer than 86% of the French believe that their country's voice counts in the EU, the highest such score in all the EU Member States.
- Some European institutions are far better known than others. A large majority of the French population has heard of the Parliament (90%, -3), the Commission (86%, -1), the European Central Bank (76%, +7), the European Court of Auditors (64%), the Council of Ministers (63%).
- 58% (+8) of the French trust the European Parliament, 54% (+7) the European Commission and 46% (+5) the Council of the EU. The Central European Bank is the least appreciated of the European institutions: 45% trust it, but 30% do not.

3. THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN PROJECT

- 59% of respondents are very/fairly optimistic about the future of the European Union. Furthermore, 39% of the French feel “things are going in the right direction” in the EU (+17 percentage points compared with last year), whereas 26% (-24) feel “things are going in the wrong way” and 14% do not know.
- 54% of the French are against “the speed of building Europe being faster in one group than in other countries” (+8 points) and only 29% (-13) are in favour of it. Support for a multi-speed Europe has fallen dramatically since the previous survey.
- As in the previous Eurobarometer, the French consider that environmental issues (41%, +3), immigration (36% +6) and crime (31%, +3) as key priorities for the EU.
- The European level is perceived as the most efficient to fight terrorism (87%, +2), for scientific and technological research (81%, +3) and to protect the environment (80%, +3). On the other hand, the French prefer the national level for pensions (76%), taxation (69%), the health system or education (68%).
- Support for a common defence and security policy (82%, =) and for a common foreign policy (69%, -1) remains high.
- The majority of the French is still against further enlargement of the EU: only 32% (=) are in favour of it and 59% (-1) are against it. A lower level of support can only be found in Austria, Germany and Luxembourg.
- 74% (+2) of the French are in favour of the euro, far above the EU-27 average (63%).

4. INFORMATION ON THE EUROPEAN UNION

- Radio (65%, +2 points compared with the situation six months earlier) and the press (55%, +2) are the mass media the French trust the most. There is a slight fall in trust in the Internet (33%, -3) and in television (42%, -2).
- 65% of the French think the television talks too little about the European Union and 62% think that there is too little EU coverage on the radio. The figure falls to 42% for the press and to 25% for the Internet. A plurality thinks that the coverage is objective for TV (43%), radio (44%), press (48%) and the Internet (28%). Only 1% (press) to 15% (television) of the French sees the media as too positive.
- Only 17% of respondents consider themselves “very well” (1%) or “fairly well informed” (16%) on European issues, whereas 83% admit they are “not very well” (61%) or “not at all informed”

(22%) on political issues concerning the EU. For example, only 41% correctly answer that MEPs are directly elected by the citizens. 40% take the opposite view and 19% do not express an opinion.