

EUROBAROMETER 70

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

AUTUMN 2008

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

UNITED KINGDOM

The survey was requested and coordinated by Directorate-General Communication

The report was produced by the European Commission Representation in the United Kingdom.

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Poll taken: 7/10/08 to 2/11/08
Sample size: 1,308 in UK (26,661 in EU-27)

Eight key themes:

1. How satisfied are you with your life at present and how do you see the future of the UK economy in the coming twelve months?
2. What issues are important to the UK?
3. How much do you understand of the workings of the EU?
4. What institutions at both a national and EU level do you trust?
5. What decisions should be made jointly within the EU?
6. Is membership of the EU a good thing and has the UK benefited from it?
7. What does the EU mean to you?
8. The future of the EU.

Some of the top findings

- The economy has taken over from crime as the key concern of the UK public.
- There is clear and continued majority support in the UK for EU-level decision-making in the fight against terrorism (67%) and environmental protection (57%).
- There have been large increases in support for EU-level decision-making on defence (+4 to 43%) and immigration (+8 to 43%).
- Trust in the European institutions is low (27%) but only just below levels of trust in national government.
- UK women answer "don't know" to key questions more often than men. Two thirds claim not to understand the EU, compared with just under half of men.
- Enthusiasm for the EU is directly proportional to education levels and is (broadly) inversely proportional to age.
- There is still no enthusiasm for euro membership (28%).

Key indicators and five-year trends in UK and EU sentiment (in %)

		EB61 Spring 2004	EB62 Autumn 2004	EB63 Spring 2005	EB64 Autumn 2005	EB65 Spring 2006	EB66 Autumn 2006	EB67 Spring 2007	EB68 Autumn 2007	EB69 Spring 2008	EB70 Autumn 2008
Trust in the EU	UK	19	35	27	25	31	26	36	25	29	25
	EU	41	50	44	45	48	45	57	48	50	47
Trust in the European Commission	UK	26	39	31	26	28	25	29	22	24	27
	EU	47	52	46	46	47	48	52	50	47	47
Trust in the European Parliament	UK	30	39	35	27	31	25	33	25	27	27
	EU	54	57	52	51	52	52	56	55	52	51
Trust in national government	UK	19	32	31	33	30	24	34	30	24	29
	EU	30	34	34	31	35	30	41	34	32	34
Trust in national parliament	UK	25	35	36	37	36	29	41	34	27	30
	EU	35	38	35	35	38	33	43	35	34	34
Support for the euro	UK	36	31	28	28	28	29	29	24	26	28
	EU	60	63	59	60	59	60	63	61	60	61
Support for enlargement	UK	31	50	48	43	44	36	41	36	36	40
	EU	42	53	50	49	45	46	49	46	47	44
Number 1 concern of UK	UK	41 IMM	29 IMM	31 IMM	41 CRIM	41 CRIM	40 IMM	41 CRIM	44 CRIM	38 CRIM	34 EC SIT
	EU	16	13	14	24	24	21	24	24	20	37
Number 2 concern of the UK	UK	37 CRIM	28 TERR	31 CRIM	34 TERR	32 IMM	35 TERR	32 IMM	39 IMM	35 IMM	34 CRIM
	EU	26	16	23	14	14	15	15	15	11	17
Membership a good thing	UK	29	38	36	34	42	34	39	34	30	32
	EU	48	56	54	50	55	53	57	58	52	53
Membership has brought benefits	UK	30	39	40	37	42	39	43	37	36	39
	EU	47	53	55	52	54	54	59	58	54	56
Number of Member States		15	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	27	27

Key: IMM = immigration; TERR = terrorism; CRIM = crime; EC SIT= economic situation

Proportion of UK and EU27 respondents believing that decisions should be taken jointly at EU level also showing percentage changes since EB69.

Issue	UK %	UK % change	EU27 % (and ranking in brackets)	EU27 % change
Fight against terrorism	67	+2	79 (1)	0
Protecting the environment	57	-4	67 (2)	-4
Immigration	43	+8	60 (4)	+2
Defence and foreign affairs	43	+4	64 (3)	0
Fighting crime	34	+1	38 (6)	+1
Unemployment	27	-2	40 (5)	0
Education	20	+2	33 (7)	+2
Pensions	19	+1	26 (9)	+2
Tax	18	-1	28 (8)	+1

Summary analysis

The economic crisis concerns UK citizens

For the first time in five years, the economy ranks as the top concern, overtaking crime, immigration and terrorism. In spring 2008, only 13% of UK citizens cited the economy as one of the two most important issues facing the country (EU-27: 20%). Six months later, this had jumped 21 percentage points to 34%, just below the EU average of 37%.

Crime still a major concern

In EB69, crime was the most important issue to 38% of UK citizens compared with 20% across the European Union. Both these figures have now fallen – the UK figure to 34% and the overall EU27 figure to 17%. Nevertheless, crime is still one of the two joint major concerns of UK citizens.

Immigration decreases in importance

In the six months since the last Eurobarometer survey, UK citizens' worries have started to focus more on the economy, which probably accounts for a drop in concern over immigration from 35% to 23%. This is however still twice the EU27 average where, over the same period, the figures have declined from 11% to 9%.

Enthusiasm for the EU still low but possible signs of improvement

The UK is lagging behind EU averages in its enthusiasm towards the EU. Nevertheless, there are indicators on key issues that show a possible improvement in the situation.

The latest figures show more people think that the UK has benefited from being in the EU (up 3% to 39%) and that membership is a good thing (up 2% to 32%) and.

On both issues, the UK figures have, over the past three Eurobarometers, moved closer to the EU average, with differences of 21, 18 and 17 percentage points respectively on the latter, and 24, 22 and 21 percentage points for the former.

At the moment, just a nucleus of better-educated and younger people have a positive view of the EU. For example, nearly three times as many (41%) of young people aged 15 to 24 believe that membership of the EU is a good thing compared with just 12% who do not.

This figure rises to 46% amongst people educated to age 20 and beyond. When these two factors are combined, it emerges that **51% of those still studying see EU membership as being a 'good thing' compared with just 4% who do not.**

Similarly, 54% of youngsters between 15 and 24 think EU membership has been beneficial overall compared to just 31% of those aged 55 and over.

Amongst those who had finished education aged 15 or less, just one in four (27%) thought it had been beneficial while more than half (53%) educated to age 20 or beyond and an even larger 62% of those still studying did.

Interestingly, while across the European Union, the proportion of citizens believing that their country's membership was a bad thing had increased from 14% to 15%, over the past six months, the UK figure shows a small two percentage point decline.

Lack of understanding in the UK about how the EU works

As Eurobarometer surveys have shown for many years now, UK citizens do not really understand how the EU works.

Accordingly, while 58% of UK citizens say they do not understand how the EU works, it is hardly surprising that the entity itself gets only lukewarm support.

Male/female divide on knowledge

Another key factor to emerge from EB70, as from past reports is the continuing variation in knowledge levels between men and women in the UK.

Women consistently return a higher 'don't know' response to a broad range of questions. It would be interesting to see whether this is down to a lack of information which, if remedied, would cause the gender difference to disappear. This 'don't know' response is also very evident amongst the youngest citizens interviewed in this poll.

Low overall levels of knowledge on European matters

When the responses to four questions on the EU relating to the number of member states, the revolving presidency and the Euro zone are bundled together, the UK poll gave 34% of correct answers, 26% wrong answers and a substantial 40% 'don't know'.

The 40% 'don't know' score was made up of half (49%) of women compared with just 31% of men. In addition, men got 40% of the answers right compared with a 27% success rate amongst women.

Young people gave the lowest proportion of correct answers (24%), as did the least educated (31%). Both these segments had 'don't know' factors of 47%.

However, this lack of understanding is not a purely UK phenomenon as 66% of the Italian poll and 59% of the Hungarian and Portuguese polls contribute to a majority (51%) of the total EU poll giving this response. In addition, this EU figure disturbingly shows an increase from 47% just six months previously.

Making up the 58% of the UK poll who said they did not understand how the European Union worked were noticeably more women (67%) than men (48%).

While there were basically no variations by age, education was, once again, an important factor with a minority (42%) of the most educated being in this category compared with 63% of people educated up to age 19.

Broad attitude to issues

UK citizens' attitudes towards Europe have some interesting contradictions.

On the one hand, support for the euro, despite an increase from 24% a year ago to 28% in the most recent poll, remains particularly low amongst UK citizens. However, support for joint decision-making at EU level on certain issues having no national boundaries, is attracting support from an increasing number of UK citizens.

So while the euro gets minority support from UK citizens, they are happy to share decision-making with 26 other countries when it comes to matters such as immigration, defence and foreign affairs and the fight against terrorism.

These attitudes seem to be fairly pragmatic and support is given to a joint decision-making process within the EU in relation to issues that have no national boundaries such as fighting terrorism and immigration. Surprisingly, support for decisions on the environment being taken jointly at EU level, although showing a clear majority, are one of the very few areas where the figures show a decrease.

Trust towards institutions

What emerges from this set of data is the general low level of trust accorded by EU citizens towards their national political institutions, including both national parliaments and governments.

The European Union and its institutions

There is a major difference between UK and EU27 averages when European institutions are given the same assessment.

While roughly a half of EU citizens trust European institutions, the corresponding figure in the UK falls to just 25% with a slightly larger 27% trusting the European Parliament and the European Commission.

What is, however, worth noting is that UK citizens' trust in all three European institutions was only slightly smaller than their trust in the two UK political institutions reviewed.

One of the more significant facts relates to those giving a 'don't know' response. While the UK average is 22% - a figure relatively close to the EU27 average of 18% - a ten percentage point gap is seen between the 17% figure for men and the 27% figure for women.

There was also a major variation between the 16% noted amongst those aged 55 or more and a figure more than twice as large (35%) amongst citizens aged 15 to 24.

Trust in the European Commission

There is a glimmer of hope relating to UK attitudes towards the EU in that the percentage of UK citizens who tend to trust the European Commission has risen from 24% earlier this year to 27%, though this increase would have to be sustained before any real trend could be confirmed.

This compares with a figure of 47% across the European Union as a whole and figures of 64% in Belgium and 63% in Slovakia.

Once again, interesting data emerge from a more in-depth analysis of those who responded 'don't know'. Just 23% of men compared with 33% of women make up the 28% average noted in the UK - again, a figure not far removed from the 23% EU27 average.

Making up the 27% of the UK poll who said they tended to trust the European Commission is a higher than average proportion of the male poll (32%), the most educated (38%) and the largest proportion of the self-employed (45%).

There was also a small but significant difference between the 24% noted in rural villages and 31% in large towns.

Trust in the European Union

In the past six months, public trust across the 27 Member States as a whole (rather than in its constituent bodies) has fallen from 50% to 47%, while, in the same period, the UK figure has fallen from 29% to 25%.

Once again, a noticeably higher proportion of women (22%) gave a 'don't know' response to this question and figures of 27% were noted amongst respondents aged 15 to 24 - a figure just slightly less than the 28% noted amongst the unemployed.

There was a noticeable difference between the 21% of women and 28% of men making up the UK 25% average who had trust in the European Union.

As the age of respondents increased, their trust in the European Union diminished. Accordingly, more than a third (36%) of UK citizens aged between 15 and 24 said they tended to trust the European Union. This figure decreases for each subsequent age-group and is just 19% amongst citizens aged 55 or more.

Trust levels also varied substantially according to respondents' level of education. 21% of those educated to age 15 or less and 19% of those who had left education aged 16 to 19 trust the European Union. These figures are substantially less than the 38% observed amongst those still studying or whose education had continued until age 20 or beyond.

Respondents' occupation was also a major factor in influencing this trust. 16% of house persons, 20% of the retired and 22% of manual workers and the unemployed said they trusted the European Union - figures noticeably less than the 37% noted amongst managers.

Has the UK benefited from membership of the EU?

The longer-term figures about whether or not membership has benefited respondents' countries are more positive. In autumn 1995, 42% of people in the then EU believed that their country had benefited. This figure has now risen to 56% in this latest poll and, although less than the 59% achieved in the highly positive EB67 of the spring of 2007, is up from the 54% noted earlier this year.

In the UK, there has been a small but perhaps significant increase from 36% to 39% in the number of citizens believing that the UK has benefited from membership of the EU.

What does the EU mean to UK citizens?

Here too, UK citizens show relatively low levels of knowledge, with 'don't know' figures of 13% compared with a 4% EU27 average.

The main plus point of the EU for people across the EU27 is their ability to travel, study and work anywhere in the EU. This is an opinion held by 44% of them and even in the UK (31%), it is still seen as the most important advantage of the EU.

Perceived negative aspects show a slight decline

Since the spring 2008 poll, there has been a small but noticeable improvement in UK citizens' attitudes towards three of the perceived negative aspects of the European Union.

The EU is a waste of money

In the UK, the number of people citing this as a characteristic of the EU has fallen from 26% to 23%.

Across the EU as a whole, this figure, at 19%, remains unchanged since the last report.

Bureaucracy

17% of EU27 citizens say they associate bureaucracy with the European Union – a figure which has fallen from 18% six months previously.

The UK figure shows a greater fall – from 25% to 22%.

Loss of our cultural identity

While this figure has remained unchanged, across the 27 Member States of the EU, it is identified by 11% of the poll.

In the UK, the percentage of citizens citing has fallen from 24% to 21%.

The future of the EU.

The euro

Across the European Union, 61% of the 27,000 citizens polled supported the concept of a single currency across the Union. In the UK, although the figure is only 28%, this shows a small increase from the 26% earlier in the year. The concept of a common European currency therefore remains a problem for most UK citizens.

While no clear pattern emerged by age, men (32%) were more in favour of the euro than women (25%). An even greater divergence is seen when results by education levels are reviewed. 40% of those educated to age 20 and beyond support the euro – a figure virtually double the 21% of those who had left school aged 15 or less.

Similar wide disparities were seen by respondents' occupations with just 23% of manual workers and the unemployed and 25% of the retired supporting the euro compared with 42% of the self-employed. The euro claims support from just 34% of managers.

A common foreign policy

The largest single response in the UK (49% favoured a common foreign policy among the member states of the EU towards other countries. Although this is less than the 68% EU27 average, it still represents half those polled in the UK.

While a common foreign policy was seen to be more attractive to men (53%) than women (46%), low support levels were found amongst the oldest segment of the poll and the least educated with figures of 44% amongst those aged 55 or more and 42% amongst people who had left school aged 15 or less.

A common defence and security policy

The proportion of UK citizens in support of a common defence and security policy has risen slightly by one percentage point to 57% of the poll. This means that virtually twice as many UK citizens support this policy with 30% being against it and a relatively high 'don't know' response of 13%. Across the EU as a whole, three-quarters (75%) are in favour of this policy.

17% of women compared with 10% of men gave a 'don't know' response to this question and there was a seven percentage point gap between the 53% recorded by the least

educated segment of the poll compared to the 60% amongst those educated to age 20 or beyond.

The idea of a common defence and security policy across the EU received relatively lukewarm support from 44% of the unemployed and 48% of manual workers compared with figures of 66% amongst managers and a similar 67% amongst the self-employed and students.

Further enlargement of the EU

While across the EU as a whole support for further enlargement has fallen from 47% to 44% in the past six months, the UK figures show an increase of more than 10% from 36% to 40%.

At the same time, 48% of UK citizens are against further enlargement – a figure similar to the 43% observed across the Union as a whole.

Once again, there was a high level of 'don't knows' amongst women on this question (16%) compared with 7% of men.

Opinion amongst men was evenly split on this issue with 46% being for enlargement and 47% against.

Amongst women, however, just a third (35%) was for enlargement compared with nearly half (49%) who were against it.

Similar variations were seen by age with a decline in support from the 57% amongst UK citizens aged 15 to 24 to just 29% amongst those aged 55 or more.

When responses were analysed by education level, a substantial variation was seen between the 28% approval given by those who had left school aged 15 or less to the majority 47% amongst those educated to the highest level. The highest level of support from three quarters (74%) of the segment was seen amongst people who were still studying.

When looking at respondents by occupation, only the self-employed (55%) and students (74%) showed a majority in favour of further enlargement and figures as low as 35% were observed amongst house persons and the unemployed and 29% amongst the retired.