

EUROBAROMETER 71

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

SPRING 2009

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FINLAND

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

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

This summary provides an overview of the main findings of a Eurobarometer opinion poll conducted at the request of the European Commission. The survey was carried out in 27 member states, three candidate countries and Northern Cyprus during 12th June and 6th July 2009.

The Eurobarometer addresses European citizens' attitudes about the European Union, globalization and related issues. A total of 30 342 Europeans aged 15 or more participated in the survey, 26 830 of whom were citizens of EU member states. The Finnish national report is based on a survey in which 1012 Finns were interviewed.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES

Finland and Europe as a whole suffer, but individuals are still coping

A great majority of Finns are rather satisfied with their own household's economic situation (89 %), the environment (84 %) and their personal employment situation (75 %). Instead, the state of the world economy is regarded to be fairly or very poor by a clear majority of Finns (75 %). The same applies to perceptions of the employment situation in Finland (73 %) and the economic situation of Europe (55 %) and Finland (53 %) in general.

Finns' opinion of the economic and employment situation of their own country has changed fundamentally since autumn 2008. Their perceptions have almost reversed in just a bit more than six months. A smaller change (but in a similar direction) took place in views regarding the state of European economy. Views about personal employment situation and the economic situation of the household remained more or less unchanged.

Irrespective of their standpoint, Finns see the economic and employment situation in a clearly more positive way than the average EU citizen.

Unemployment has become a top concern

There are three issues Finns worry about more than most other Europeans. A primary concern is unemployment, the economic situation of Finland coming a close second on the list of major worries. The third-ranking concern is the state of Finnish healthcare system.

In comparison with general European opinion, the Finns place special emphasis on health care.

Certain changes have occurred since autumn 2007 in Finns' thinking. Unemployment, the economic situation in Finland and health care are now regarded as bigger problems. On the other hand, rising prices, pensions, crime and environmental protection are issues causing less concern than before.

Finns more satisfied with social security than EU citizens on average

Finns are proud of their social security system. A clear majority (73 %) considers that our system could serve as a model for other countries. In addition, a majority of 57 per cent rejects the statement that the Finnish social security system is too expensive.

In comparison with the EU average, Finns take a strong stand for their own social security system.

A slight majority of Finns (51 %) would be willing to pay more in social security and pension contributions in order to keep their age of retirement unchanged. A third (32 %) would be willing to work longer. Only a few (7 %) favour the idea of keeping the age of retirement as it is and cutting pensions.

FINNISH EU MEMBERSHIP

More people support Finland's EU membership

A majority of Finns (52 %) considers Finland's membership in EU to be positive. Only a fifth (20 %) reacts negatively to it. Support for membership has been rising gradually since autumn 2006.

A clear majority thinks that Finland has benefited from membership. A third can be said to be doubtful on this matter. This indicator confirms the impression that Finns' satisfaction with membership is strengthening.

The share of those who feel that Finland has gained has grown by 9 percentage points since spring 2008. Respectively, those who hold the opposite opinion now constitute a group which is 8 percentage points smaller.

One can place the Finns quite close to the EU average on this question now. They would have been among the sceptical Europeans earlier.

Finns content with the euro, but unhappy about citizens' say in EU affairs

A majority of the Finnish population (65 %) considers that the economic situation in Finland is more stable than it would be if Finland were not an EU member. This opinion has been unchanged since autumn 2008.

Citizens of numerous European countries do not feel the same way about their own national economies. An average of about 50 per cent of all EU citizens feels that their country's economy is more stable due to EU membership.

A majority of Finns do not think that their voice has any significance in the European Union. Disbelief in people's say in the EU is rather widespread in other EU countries as well.

Finns have changed their way of thinking since autumn 2008. At that time, only one out of four believed that his/her voice matters. Now, two out of five tend to think that way. The latter percentage equals the share of those who voted in the EU election in June 2009.

Even though the Finns say they have benefited from EU membership, they tend to reject the idea that Finland's interests are taken into account sufficiently within the European Union. The Finns are considerably more reserved in their perceptions than the EU citizens on the whole. However, they tend to be less critical now than a year ago. Still, they belong to a group which could be called "unhappy nations" in the EU.

EU IN 2030

Life will become neither easier nor harder

About one-third of Finns (35 %) believes that an ordinary citizen's life will be easier in 2030 than today. Every fourth (25 %) hold the opposite opinion, while two out of five think that life will be neither easier nor harder. The Finns hold only a slightly more positive view of the future than EU citizens in general.

A clear majority (62 %) assumes that, in 2030, they will be living in a society where communal values take precedence over individualism. This trend would suit the majority well: 58 per cent said that they would prefer such a society.

Finns are not alone with these ideas; their position is very close to the European average.

Finns prefer to emphasize leisure

A Finnish majority of 55 per cent believe that in 20 years' time they will be living in a society where work is emphasized more than leisure within the European Union. This figure is higher than the EU average.

Hopes and predictions do not necessarily meet. 56 per cent wish to live in a society where leisure would be given more importance than work. The Finns express this wish more strongly than Europeans on average.

GLOBALIZATION AND ECONOMIC CRISIS

Finns would curb globalization

A great majority of Finns believes that globalization makes economic growth possible. In the same breath, two out of three (66 %) say that globalization increases social inequality. Partly for this reason, 78 per cent of Finns think that some common worldwide rules are necessary because of globalization. Finns wish that globalization could be regulated at a global level.

The majority (59 %) feels that the European Union protects its citizens from the negative effects of globalization. This conception is more common in Finland than in the EU countries as a whole. Quite a few nations had difficulties in forming an opinion on this matter. This was especially the case in many of the new member countries.

The Finns are more convinced than most EU citizens that they will benefit from the positive effects of globalization with the help of the European Union. Almost three Finns out of four (73 %) believe that they will benefit more as EU members than they would without membership. This idea characterizes Finns more than EU citizens in general.

The Finns, like other EU citizens, have no consensus on who would be best equipped to take care of the consequences of financial crisis. About one fourth of Finns relies mostly on the International Monetary Fund, about one fifth on the European Union and also one fifth on the G-20 countries. Only a few have any confidence in the United States.

If we compare the results to earlier ones, dating back from January – February when this question was asked previously, one can see that people in both Finland and the European Union as a whole tend to rely more on the capacity of the EU now than they used to.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND IMMIGRATION

EU has not done enough to promote human rights globally

A majority of Finns (59 %) feels that the EU does not work hard enough to promote and protect human rights globally. Few in Finland would dare to say that the EU is too active in this matter.

The Finns tend to demand a more active human rights stance than Europeans on average. Together with the other Nordic countries, Finland belongs to a group in which a clear majority reproaches the European Union for its passivity on the human right issue.

The statement that ethnic groups cause insecurity in society split Finnish opinion. Just over two out of five (43 %) agreed with the idea, whereas 50 per cent rejected it, the latter being a larger share than the European average. The proportion of those who agree with the statement and believe that ethnic groups bring about insecurity is now somewhat higher than earlier.

Immigrants needed in certain sectors of economy

Finns proved to be rather tolerant in their reactions to the statement that the presence of other ethnic groups increases unemployment. Almost two out of three (63 %) disagreed.

Attitudes have changed slightly since 2006, however, towards a connection being made between the presence of ethnic groups and rising unemployment. Still, ethnic groups are seen as a bigger threat in other EU countries than in Finland.

A clear majority of Finns accepts the idea that we need immigrants to work in certain sectors of the economy. Other EU citizens on average are more reserved when considering this idea in relation to their country.

Two out of three (66 %) reject the idea that the taxes paid by immigrants exceed their benefits from social security and health care. Rejection of this statement is higher among Finns than the EU average. The Germans, Austrians and French agree with the Finns.