



# EUROBAROMETER 71

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

## Spring 2009

NATIONAL REPORT  
**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
UNITED KINGDOM

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## **Highlights of EB71 in the United Kingdom**

The EB71 poll was conducted in June 2009 and involved face-to-face interviews with 1,352 UK citizens.

The field work took place approximately one month after the politicians' expenses scandal broke and amid the ongoing economic recession which is seeing an unprecedented fall in GDP, rising unemployment and falling property values.

The key long-term trends - both in the UK and in the EU-27 - are shown in the table below, while, on pages three to seven, the most important issues are detailed.

### ***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	EB71 Summer 2009
Trust in the EU	UK	19	35	27	25	31	26	36	25	29	25	22
	EU	41	50	44	45	48	45	57	48	50	47	47
Trust in the European Commission	UK	26	39	31	26	28	25	29	22	24	27	22
	EU	47	52	46	46	47	48	52	50	47	47	44
Trust in the European Parliament	UK	30	39	35	27	31	25	33	25	27	27	22
	EU	54	57	52	51	52	52	56	55	52	51	48
Trust in national government	UK	19	32	31	33	30	24	34	30	24	29	21
	EU	30	34	34	31	35	30	41	34	32	34	32
Trust in national parliament	UK	25	35	36	37	36	29	41	34	27	30	17
	EU	35	38	35	35	38	33	43	35	34	34	32
Support for the euro	UK	36	31	28	28	28	29	29	24	26	28	27
	EU	60	63	59	60	59	60	63	61	60	61	61
Support for enlargement	UK	31	50	48	43	44	36	41	36	36	40	32
	EU	42	53	50	49	45	46	49	46	47	44	43
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	41 EMP
	EU	16	13	14	24	24	21	24	24	20	37	49
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	31 EC SIT
	EU	26	16	23	14	14	15	15	15	11	17	42
Membership a good thing	UK	29	38	36	34	42	34	39	34	30	32	28
	EU	48	56	54	50	55	53	57	58	52	53	53
Membership has brought benefits	UK	30	39	40	37	42	39	43	37	36	39	34
	EU	47	53	55	52	54	54	59	58	54	56	56
Number of Member States		15	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	27	27	27

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

***The most important issues to rise from this report are as follows:***

### **UK citizens don't understand how the EU works**

Noticeably more than a half (57%) of UK citizens said they did not understand how the EU worked. In fact, across the whole EU, 48% of respondents gave this negative response.

Other high national figures were observed in the Czech Republic (55%) and in Italy and France where the figures, at 56%, were only just below the UK figure.

When the UK socio-demographic data are analysed, there are some substantial variations. Making up the UK average are 47% of males and a disturbing two out of three (67%) women. Add to this an overall 'don't know' factor of 6% and the need for the UK government to take action to rectify this situation could reasonably be deemed a pressing duty.

Education plays an important part in this basic lack of knowledge with 70% of UK citizens educated to 15 or less being uninformed on this issue.

63% of house persons and the retired said they did not understand how the EU works, as did 61% of manual workers and 60% of the unemployed.

There is a strong link in these groups which, as is seen in other parts of this report, are generally much less likely to have a generally positive view about the EU as well as the benefits membership has brought to the UK.

### **Unemployment now becomes the subject that most concerns UK citizens**

There has been a massive increase in public concern about unemployment, doubling in the UK from 7% in the spring of 2008 to 16% in the autumn of that year, and now leaping to 41%.

The EU27 average has also virtually doubled from 26% in autumn 2008 to 49% in this latest survey, and figures in excess of 60% are seen in France (62%), Estonia (64%) and Latvia (65%).

Making up this 41% UK average were noticeably more women (45%) than men (37%).

Concern about unemployment decreases with age and it is seen as one of the two most important issues by 51% of 15 to 24 year olds compared with just 32% of those aged 55 or more.

Unemployment is also seen as an important issue in larger households. While just 33% of people living on their own see this as important, the figure rises to 48% in households with four or more people.

### **UK concerns over inflation and immigration are at variance with EU averages**

While concerns over the linked issues of **inflation** and rising prices have fallen from 21% to 10% in the UK over the past eight months, the EU average remains twice as high at 21%.

The EU27 average includes high figures from Malta (40%), Romania (36%) and Cyprus and Hungary where the figure is 34%.

However, it is interesting to note that inflation is only cited by 8% of the Dutch poll, 5% of Danes and 3% of Swedes – all figures down by more than half in just 8 months.

Concerns over **immigration** still loom large amongst the UK poll and have increased from 23% to 25%. This issue is, however, relatively unimportant across the EU as a whole where the figure is just 9%.

High levels of concern (32%) were noted amongst those educated to just 15 or less – a figure twice as high as the 16% of those educated to age 20 or beyond.

18% of managers and 16% of other white-collar workers were concerned about immigration compared with 27% of the self-employed and 30% of house persons.

### **UK citizens' trust in the EU, though limited, is still higher than trust for all major UK political bodies**

Compared to trust levels in national institutions, there is a high 'don't know' response when EU citizens are asked whether they trust the European Union. The 'don't know' response rate across the 27 Member States is relatively high at 12% but increases to 19% in the UK.

22% of UK citizens say they trust the European Union and, although this is less than half the EU27 average of 47% and is down by three percentage points on the previous Eurobarometer, it means that the EU is more trusted in the UK than UK political parties, the UK government and the UK Parliament.

Nevertheless, the UK figure is still the lowest in the Union and only half that of the next most wary country, France. Particularly high levels of trust in the EU are observed in Estonia (68%), Romania and Slovakia (65%), Bulgaria (63%) and Malta (62%).

Making up this UK 22% average were slightly more men (24%) than women (19%). However, greater differences were seen by age and education.

The European Union was trusted by 38% of 15 to 24 years olds in the UK compared with just 14% of those aged 55 or more. 12% of those educated to age 15 or less said they trusted the EU compared to 32% of those educated to age 20 and more than half (51%) of those still studying.

In addition to these marked variations by age and education, household composition and occupation also generated widely varying results.

Amongst people living on their own, just 15% tended to trust the EU compared with 30% in households of four or more people.

Reflecting these earlier data, just 15% of the retired and 18% of manual workers had trust in the EU compared with 28% of managers.

A further sharp variation was noted between the 17% figure in rural villages and the 26% in large towns.

## **A majority of UK citizens expressing an opinion, believe that more decision making should be taken at European level on a number of key issues**

There has been a noticeable increase from 48% of UK citizens who, three years previously, believed that more decision-making should take place at European level in the **fight against organised crime** to a majority figure of 57% in this latest report.

Reflecting the international aspect of **terrorism**, two-thirds (66%) of the UK poll believed that more decisions in this area should be made at European level. This figure shows an increase from the 63% the last time this question was asked in EB65.

On the issue of **protecting the environment**, 60% of UK citizens believe there should be more decision-making at European level and this figure shows just a minimal decrease from the 61% observed in EB65.

Having more decision-making at European level in regard to **managing major health issues** gains support of 72% of all EU citizens and 59% of UK citizens.

Nearly two out of three (65%) of UK citizens believed there should be more decision-making at a European level towards **promoting democracy and peace in the world**.

Showing an increase from the 57% noted in 2006, 61% of UK citizens now believe that there should be more decision-making at a European level in **cooperation in the field of research and innovation**.

58% of UK citizens and three-quarters (76%) of EU27 citizens think that more decision-making should take place at a European level on the important issue of **securing energy supply**.

### **What does the EU mean to you?**

When asked what the European Union meant to them personally, the most common reply from UK respondents was that it was a **waste of money**. This was a response given by 29% of the UK poll and shows a marked increase on the 23% recorded just eight months previously.

The EU27 average, at 20% (up marginally from 19%), consisted of figures as high as 39% in Austria, 36% in Sweden and 34% in Denmark, as well as some very low figures including 8% in Poland, Ireland and Spain, and 7% in Romania and Bulgaria.

Older people and the least educated also believed the EU was a waste of money. Accordingly, this was a view held by 40% of people aged 55 or more – more than twice the figure noted amongst 15 to 25 year olds of just 19%.

While less than a quarter (22%) of those educated to age 20 or more believe the EU was a waste of money, this figure rises to 38% amongst those who left school aged 15 or less.

The **freedom to study, travel and work** throughout the European Union is the aspect of the European Union most commonly cited across the 27 Member States.

Figures as high as 70% in Estonia, 62% in Cyprus and 61% in Slovakia contribute to an overall figure of 42% which is, however, down from 44% in EB70.

The number of UK citizens citing this as a core characteristic has fallen from 31% in the autumn of 2008 to 25% in this latest poll.

While there was only a minor variation between the proportion of UK men and women having this as a view of the EU, major variations were, again, noted by education. Just 12% of those educated to age 15 or less saw this as a characteristic of the EU compared with nearly half (45%) of the most educated segment.

This characteristic was selected by 26% of 15 to 24 year olds compared with 18% of those aged 55 or more.

### **The future focus of the EU**

It is interesting to note that out of the 15 aspects offered as choices, EU27 and UK respondents hold broadly similar views. They concur on the eight most important issues (though not in the same order) that should be emphasised by the European institutions to strengthen the European Union in the future.

Rank in UK	Aspect	UK %	Change since EB71.1	EU27 % (and rank)	Change since EB71.1	High %	Low %
1	Immigration	41	-1	25 (3)	+2	MT 59, ES 37	HU, LV & SI 9, PL 8
2	Crime	32	+2	23 (4)	-1	AT 44, DK 38	ES 14, MT 7
3	Economic affairs	26	-9	33 (1)	-7	LT 55, CZ 49	MT 17, LU 15
4	Social & health	20	-1	26 (2)	-1	BG, CY & SI 40	IT 20, SE 18
5	Climate change	19	+4	16 (8)	-1	SE 34, DK 33	BG & PT 5, ES 4
6	Environment issues	18	+2	21 (5)	+4	DK & FI 36	PL 13, LT 9
7	Energy issues	16	-9	19 (6)	-4	LT & MT 39, BG & SK 38	EL 9, PT 8
8	Poorer regions	11	+3	18 (7)	+2	CY 35, EL 31	MT 10, AT & IE 9

### **Membership of the EU is not seen as a good thing by UK citizens; nor do they believe membership has brought benefits to the country**

28% of EU27 citizens and 32% of UK citizens said that membership of the EU was neither good nor bad.

However, the similarity in response ends abruptly there as while, on average, across the Union, 53% of those polled say that membership is a good thing and just 15% consider it a bad thing, in the UK, almost a third (32%) of those polled consider membership a bad thing – four percentage points more than the 28% who consider it a good thing. The last time a figure of this size was seen was the 29% in the spring of 2004.

Looking at the socio-demographic data of the 28% of UK respondents thinking membership was a good thing were slightly more men (31%) than women (25%).

This positive view was held noticeably more strongly by 15 to 24 year olds (38%) than the oldest age segment where only 20% held this opinion.

Differing attitudes were highlighted by level of education on this important question. Virtually half (48%) of UK citizens educated to age 20 or beyond saw membership of the EU as a good thing compared with just 15% of those educated to age 15 or less.

Widely varying views were also observed in an analysis by occupation. 48% of the self-employed and 43% of managers saw membership as a good thing compared with just 19% of the retired and house persons and 18% of the unemployed.

When asked whether they considered their country had **benefited or not from being a member of the European Union** 56% of the total EU27 poll gave a positive answer and figures as high as 80% were seen in Slovakia, 79% in Ireland, 78% in Estonia and 77% in Denmark.

The UK figure shows a two percentage point reduction of people believing membership had benefited the UK and the view is held now by just one in three (34%) Britons.

With 16% giving a 'don't know' answer compared with an EU27 average of 13%, this means that 50% of the UK population, as opposed to 31% across the whole European Union, believes their country has not benefited from membership.

Looking in more depth at the 34% of UK respondents who believe the UK has actually benefited from EU membership, are considerably more men (38%) than women (30%).

Once again, education and age were the two major factors at play. 50% of those educated to age 20 or more believed the UK had benefited from membership compared with less than half this number (22%) amongst those educated to just age 15 or less.

A similar disparity was seen by age with nearly half (49%) of 15 to 24 year olds believing the UK had benefited compared with just 26% of the oldest age-group (aged 55 or more).

Just 24% of the retired and 29% of manual workers and the unemployed thought EU membership had been beneficial to the UK. However, this figure rises to 64% amongst students, 51% among managers and 39% among the self-employed.

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