

EUROBAROMETER 72

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

AUTUMN 2009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FRANCE

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Introduction

The Eurobarometer survey was conducted in the 27 Member States of the European Union, in the three candidate countries (Croatia, Turkey, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), and the Turkish Cypriot community located in the area not under the control of the government of the Republic of Cyprus. This “**Eurobarometer 72**” survey was conducted in France between 28 October and 16 November 2009 by **TNS Sofres** covering a representative sample of 1,005 people aged 15 years or over.

1. A difficult post-crisis period

- The results of the Autumn 2009 in France show a view [of the economy] that continues to be significantly damaged by the economic situation despite some signs of improvement.
 - **The situation of the French economy:** 15% of the French feel it is fairly good and 81% judge it is fairly poor or very bad as against 87% in the spring and a European average of 75%;
 - **The situation of the European economy:** 19% hold positive views and 68% negative views in contrast to the 62% European average;
 - **The situation of the world economy:** 80% hold negative views in contrast to a 72% European average;
 - **The employment situation in France:** 92% hold positive views;

- The tremor observed in the economic performance indicators was widely amplified in the **expectations of the French for the next twelve months, which sharply improved:**
 - **On the economic situation in France:** 31% of the French anticipate an improvement, 37% expect stability and only 27% expect a worsening (as against 53% in autumn 2008).
 - **On the employment situation:** 37% of the respondents still believe that the employment situation will worsen (as against 58% in autumn 2008 and 43% in spring 2009).

- **Lastly, on their lives in general:** only 11% of the respondents believe that the next twelve months could be worse, while 34% of them think that things will be better and 53% think that there will be no change .
- Despite these more favourable outlooks, the French continue to express a **very pessimistic view about the development of the situation in France**. They are slightly more optimistic about the situation in the European Union as a whole and relatively confident about the situation in the United States.
- This pessimism is coupled with a focus on the problem of unemployment (59% of those polled) which, in the eyes of the French, is the chief problem facing France. In addition, the French are still very **concerned about the impact of the economic crisis on the labour market**: 60% of them consider that the worst is yet to come, as against 33% who believe that the impact of the crisis on employment has already peaked.
- Against this background of sharp pessimism, we note the **very high stability in indicators of people's personal lives**, be it before the crisis erupted, at the height of the crisis or today - while the prospects for the future are significantly improved.

2. A greater distrust in national institutions and broadly stable confidence in the European Union

- The EB 72 shows a **further drop in confidence in the French national political institutions while confidence in the EU remains stable**. Confidence in the French government once again lost 7 points dropping from 29% to 22%; the same goes for the French Parliament, trust in which fell from 33% to 28%, and political parties trust in which fell from 13% to 9%.
- At the same time, the **confidence rating for the European Union is broadly stable**: 42% of those surveyed trust the European Union (down 1 point compared to May 2009), 48% of respondents do not trust it (up 1 point), meaning a level of trust substantially higher than that for national institutions, but lower, for example, than that for the UN.

These results do show, however, a **slight drop in the image of EU institutions**, reflecting the economic crisis and the rising distrust of institutions: the European Parliament, the Commission and the Central Bank lost two points each since Spring 2009. Compared to the Eurobarometer of autumn 2008, the drop is respectively, 8, 6 and 8 points.

- This increase in distrust is confirmed by another indicator on the functioning of democracy. **The French say they are divided on the functioning of democracy in France**: 51% declare themselves satisfied with it and 46% dissatisfied, i.e. down 14 points in the level of satisfaction and a parallel increase of 14 points in the level of dissatisfaction compared to October 2007 (a period marked by improved indicators, after the election of Nicolas Sarkozy as the President of France and before the start of the crisis).

Across the European Union as a whole, there is also a decline in the level of satisfaction but to a lesser extent, from 58% to 53%. EU citizens as a whole are now more positive about the functioning of democracy in the EU than about that in their own country.

3. The image of the European Union: improving indicators

- **The image of the European Union is improving among the French:** 49% of them have a very positive (7%, up 3 points) or somewhat positive (42%, up 2 points) image of the European Union while 19% have a very negative (4%, stable) or somewhat negative (15%, up 2 points) image. Nearly one in three in French has a neutral image.
- The image of Europe remains fundamentally linked to three major dimensions: **freedom to travel and study** (45%), **the Euro** (43%) and **peace** (39%). Then come cultural diversity (34%), waste of money (32%), and a greater voice in the world (29%).
- Half of the French believe that **France's membership in the European Union is a good thing** (down 1 point compared to June 2009); only 20% of them consider it a bad thing (up 3 points) and 29% feel that membership is neither good nor bad.
- Regarding the **benefits of France's membership of the European Union**, the results remain unchanged from the previous survey with 54% of the French feeling that France has benefited, while 35% believe the opposite. These results are slightly below the European average (57% against 31%).
- **The Czech presidency** was relatively little known by the French, as was the case with Europeans as a whole: 22% and 30% respectively have heard about it.

We also note that the **Spanish presidency**, which is getting under way, was even less known with an awareness level of only 12% in France and 21% for Europeans as a whole.

4. A strong demand for regulation

Despite a slight easing, the French remain **among the most suspicious of the inhabitants of the European Union regarding globalisation**: for 70% of them, it is perceived as a threat to employment and business in France (42% in the EU27), rather than as an opportunity for companies thanks to the opening up of the markets (23%, 43% in the EU27).

These fears about globalization originate from a number of fields for the French, for whom globalisation is almost always perceived as a source of pain.

For the French, more so than for Europeans as a whole, globalisation has negative economic and social effects: it is in essence **a purveyor of social inequality** (75% agree on this point, 60% in the EU27) and **fails in counteracting rising prices** (79% of the French share this opinion, down slightly compared to April 2008).

From a more international perspective, contrary to the majority of Europeans, most French believe (52%, down 4 compared to April 2008) that **globalisation does not contribute to world peace. Furthermore, 54% believe it does not contribute to the development of the poorest countries.**

- In this context, in the eyes of French public opinion, the EU does not appear as a **key player in addressing the crisis**. Indeed, only 15% of the French perceive it as likely to act more effectively, the solutions seeming to need to fall under a geographically broader authority such as the **G20** (23% of those polled) or on the contrary, to a more national dimension such as the French Government (19%), an institution that is attracting renewed interest since June 2009 (up 7).
- In this context of globalisation and crisis, the French point to **the need for increased regulation**, a responsibility in which the EU appears to be a legitimate player and one that it can effectively take on, in their view.

5. Expectations for the European Union

- When asked to decide, regarding a number of areas, if these should be handled by the French government or jointly within the European Union, the French set out a clear division of roles:
 - by the government, everything concerning economic and social issues: education, taxes, pensions, social security, etc.
 - **jointly** within the EU, everything concerning international issues, but also that which affects the **choice of society for the future**; the fight against terrorism, defence and foreign policy, but also scientific and technological research, environmental protection, energy and immigration.
- In the eyes of the French, this division of roles should be done with a **European monetary union of 27 countries**, expressed in a somewhat less pronounced fashion, however, than it was in the spring. Although they tend to associate the euro with difficulties in terms of purchasing power, the French still remain, as a whole, committed to the principle of a single currency. However, they are somewhat hostile to the idea of a two-speed Europe.
- Lastly, French public opinion remains very reserved with regard to the future **expansion of the European Union**: 34% of respondents were in favour of it and 60% were opposed. These results, however, marked a slight trend reversal with an increase of 3 percentage points of those expressing support for the accession of new states and a parallel decrease of 3 points for those against.
- All in all, the French are **predominantly positive about the future of the European Union** (58% are indeed optimistic about it, as against 36% who are pessimistic), but to a lesser extent than the EU average (the rate of optimism is at 66% for the Union as a whole).