



Directorate General for Communication
Direction C - Relations with citizens
Public Opinion Monitoring Unit

Strasbourg, 12 January 2009

EUROPEAN ELECTIONS 2009

European Parliament Eurobarometer (EB Standard 70) - autumn 2008 Analysis

The results of this second EB/EP dedicated specifically to the 2009 European Elections should be read bearing in mind that the survey was conducted at the height of the economic and financial crisis during the months of October and November 2008¹

A number of trends are highlighted:

- ⇒ Campaign themes: concerns of an economic and social nature are already the principal preoccupations since the previous survey of spring 2008 and show a large increase.
- ⇒ Level of awareness of the elections: knowledge of the election date is clearly increasing. At the height of the crisis, interest in the European elections has fallen slightly as has voting probability.²
- ⇒ The EU and the expectations of European citizens:
 - Regarding the policies to be defended foremost by the EP, we find a group of concerns linked to security (CFSP, the protection of consumers and health, climate change).
 - As regards values, the idea of solidarity takes precedence over all others.
- ⇒ Ties which unite Europeans:
 - The Euro is seen as the most important element of European identity.
 - A unified social protection system between Member States would be the main factor in reinforcing the sense of being a European citizen.

¹[1] EB Standard: face to face with 26,618 Europeans from the 27 Member States.

² Intention to vote is not to be confused with voter turnout. In fact at eight months from the elections it is a state of opinion (the answer to a question in a context unrelated to elections); while during election time, it is a state of action (the vote itself).

For a detailed analysis of each question (for each country and socio-demographic variables) the reader should consult the note on the first results and also the Power Point presentation.

I. Campaign themes

The three sets of themes found since the last EB remain the same, however with some noticeable differences which are also linked to the economic and financial situation:

a) A set of economic concerns linked to individual situations, over 40%:

There is a large increase in the three main themes: economic growth (51%, +6), unemployment (49%, +2), inflation and purchasing power (47%, +6).

On the other hand, themes related to long term perspectives are not at the centre of current concerns: support for a European social model only receives 13% (+1) and the future of pensions receives 33% (+1).

Those which are at the centre relate to areas in which the EU does not have its own competence.

b) Concerns relating to global common security, between 28% et 33%:

The trend regarding collective concerns has fallen considerably: insecurity (33%, -4), the fight against climate change (29%, -4), immigration (29%, -3) and terrorism (28%, -7).

c) Certain policies of the EU and the institutions, between 13% and 20%.

The Euro and agriculture (17%, =), the role of the EU on the international stage (17%+2), institutional powers and also identity and values, each at 13% (+1).

As regards each of these themes, there are significant national differences and large socio-demographic variations evident (see note on "First Results").

II. Awareness of the election date

Once asked about the date of elections, respondents were then questioned on their level of interest and their likelihood of voting in the elections.

a) A growing awareness of the election date

A year ago, only 9% of Europeans cited the year 2009 (EB 68). Today this figure is 26%. Six months ago (EB 69), 4% of those polled were aware of the month of the elections, today this figure is 8%.

The number of respondents who are unaware (DK) is declining: this number is currently at 67% while it was 75% for the EB 68 and 69.

For the differences between countries consult the page "First Results"

- *Socio-demographic criteria:*

We can observe a better awareness of the date of elections by men compared to women. This applies also to the answer "June 2009".

Amongst those aged 17-24 years, the level of DK rises to 72%. Furthermore, a larger number from this category failed to answer this question correctly compared to any other age group.

- *Left/right scale:*

Respondents from the right have a better knowledge of the date of the elections compared to those from the left.

- *Key opinion leaders³ :*

15% answer « June 2009 » as opposed to an EU average of 8%, 42% answer « 2009 » against 26% and 49% answer DK as opposed to 67%.

b) Interest still limited

- 54% of those surveyed declare to be "not interested", compared to 51% in the EB69.
- 44% declare themselves "interested", compared to 46% in the EB 69.

At the height of the crisis, as illustrated from the response to campaign themes, this slight reduction in interest shows that Europeans are above all most concerned about economic issues.

c) Further encourage mobilisation

The number of citizens who say they are likely to vote is less than it was six months ago (EB69).

On a scale of 1-10, the number of voters who are most likely to vote (level 9 and 10) is 34%, versus 37% (EB69).

On the same scale, the number of those who say they will probably not vote is essentially the same (15%, +1).

In fact, these two figures are the cornerstone of those, who in principle should vote and those who should not vote.

⇒ ***Intention to vote and level of turnout not to be confused***

It can in no way be inferred from this data that the figure of 34% corresponds to any level of turnout. In fact at eight months from the elections it is a state of opinion (the answer to a question in a context unrelated to elections); while during election time, it is a state of action (the vote itself).

³ A person in a social network who would serve to increase the level of information.

III. The EU and the expectations of citizens

a) Priorities to be promoted by the EP

- ⇒ A need for protection: Europeans prioritise a CFSP permitting the EU to face up to international crisis (36%), improving consumer and public health protection (33%), combating climate change (31%).
- ⇒ Paradoxically, the coordination of economic, budgetary and tax policies only comes seventh with 26%; while economic concerns dominate the campaign themes. Once again, it is the individual concerns which hold more importance for citizens than a collective means of responding to a crisis.

b) Values to be defended by the EP

The hierarchy of values stays the same, except for during the crisis when solidarity has overtaken equality: "Solidarity between Member States" (36%, =) comes ahead of "equality between men and women" (36%, =), which is behind the "protection of human rights in the world" (53%, -5).

The fall in percentage points is not comparable. In fact, those surveyed could give three answers: since EB70, they have been more selective in their choices by concentrating on values which they saw as the most important.

c) Present and future objectives of the construction of Europe

- ⇒ For Europeans, still in this context of the financial crisis, the main objective of the construction of Europe currently is the development of the economy and European growth (23%), ahead of the improvement of living standards of all EU citizens (18%) and the maintenance of peace and stability (16%).
- ⇒ On the other hand, when asked what *should be* the main objective of the building of Europe, 23% answered the improvement of living standards of all EU citizens; ahead of economic development and European growth (17%) and also the maintenance of peace and stability (17%).

Europeans would prefer that the building of Europe be more focused on improving living standards than developing the economy and growth, of which the effects are less concrete for citizens.

IV. Ties which unite citizens

At the height of the debate regarding the aims of the building of Europe, it is important to look at what ties Europeans together and their reasons to unite together.

a) Elements relative to the building of a European identity

At 40%, it is the Euro which is the most important element of European identity. It comes ahead of democratic values (37%) and history (24%).

Due to the stabilising role of the Euro, notably as a shock absorber during the crisis; would it be better perceived by Europeans now than in the past?

b) Elements relative to the sense of European citizenship.

Respondents were asked what they thought were the elements which strengthened the sense of being a European citizen.

39% responded a European social welfare system harmonised between Member States, 24% responded a community action service to fight natural disasters, and 20% said a President of the EU directly elected by citizens. We can note therefore two themes linked to solidarity and security.

Regarding these three areas, young people of between 15 and 24 years clearly distinguish themselves from their elders:

24% of young people (EU average: 18%) think that a European identity card in addition to a national identity card, would strengthen the sense of European citizenship. 21% support being able to vote in all elections organised in the Member State where one resides as opposed to 19% of older respondents and 21% support a European civic education course for children from primary school age as opposed to 18% of older respondents.

V. The current state of the building of Europe

At eight months from elections, it was equally interesting to survey Europeans on their perception of the current state of the construction of Europe and what they thought about it.

a) The degree of perception

Europeans feel that:

- The EU has grown too fast (56% agree; 32% disagree)
- What brings citizens of different countries together is more important than what separates them (72% agree, 17% disagree)
- Currently, the EU is short of ideas and projects (42% agree; 38% disagree)
- The EU is indispensable in meeting global challenges: climate change, terrorism, etc. (73% agree, 16% disagree)

On reading these results it is clear that the construction of Europe is not called into question but however it must be given a new lease of life. Conversely, the majority of those surveyed, except for in Italy and in Poland, consider that the EU has grown too quickly. Surprisingly, this feeling is even expressed in the 12 new countries even if the figure is greater by 10% in the EU15 (63%) than in the EUI2 (53%).

b) Support for the building of Europe

The responses to this question confirm the results which have just been discussed:

- The building of Europe must be pursued (54%)
- The building of Europe has gone too far, we need to back-track (19%)
- We should neither go any further in the building of Europe nor back-track (Spontaneous) (16%)
- Don't know (11%)

VI. Image, media recall and level of knowledge about the PE

a) Image of the EP

The EP is described as a democratic institution (describes well: 66% as opposed to describes badly 19%) but still not well known (51% versus 37%); does not listen enough to European citizens (40% against 43%), it is dynamic (44% against 36%) but also technocratic (40% versus 25%). 43% think the term "inefficient" describes badly the EP as opposed to 34% who think the opposite.

b) Media recall of the EP

Respondents were asked if they had recently read in the paper, seen on the Internet or heard on the radio something about the EP. 44% said yes (42% a year ago) and 53% responded no (54% a year ago).

c) The level of information about the activities of the EP

73% (=) of respondents think that they are badly informed while 23% (24% EB68) consider themselves to be well informed.

VII. The role and confidence in institutions

a) The role in the context of the EU NB: EB Standard n°70 (spring 2009).

The perception of the importance of the role of the EP, the Commission and of the Council remains stable. On the contrary, the role of the Central Bank has increased by two points.

⇒ Europeans attach the following role to the **European Parliament**: it is important for 74% (75% EB69), not important for 12% (11% EB69) and 14% (= EB69) don't know.

- ⇒ 68% of Europeans see the **European Commission** as having an important role (=), 11% see it as not important (10% EB69) and 21% don't know % (22% EB69).
- ⇒ 61% of Europeans attach an important role to the **Council of the European Union** (60% EB69), it is not important for 12% (= EB69) and 27% (28% EB69) don't know.
- ⇒ For the **European Central Bank**, 73% of Europeans see it as having an important role (71% EB69), it is not important for 8% (= EB69) and 19% (21% EB69) don't know.

b) Confidence in the institutions - NB: EB Standard n°70 (spring 2009)

Compared to the EB 69, we can note a consistency or a very slight reduction in confidence towards the institutions of about 1%-2%.

- ⇒ 51% of Europeans tend to trust the **European Parliament** (52% EB69), 31% tend not to trust it (27% EB69) and 18% (21% EB69) don't know.
- ⇒ The percentage of Europeans who tend to trust the **European Commission** is 47% (=), 30% tend not to trust it % (27% EB69) and 23% (26% EB69) don't know.
- ⇒ 42% of Europeans tend to trust the **Council of the European Union** (43% EB69), 29% tend not to (26% EB69) and 29% (31% EB69) don't know.
- ⇒ The percentage of Europeans who tend to trust the **European Central Bank** is 48% (50% EB69), 30% tend not to trust it (24 EB69) and 22% (26% EB69) don't know.

In the analysis of the EB Standard, it is interesting to note that the confidence in certain governments is on the increase, especially towards those who were in the first line at the height of the financial crises. Germany 42% (36%), Denmark 60% (55%), France 31% (28%), Italy 26% (15%), United Kingdom 29% (24%).

Public Opinion Monitoring Unit.