

**PUBLIC OPINION AND THE FUTURE OF EUROPE:  
TRENDS AND THESES**

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Presented at the Fifth Biennial International Conference of the European Community  
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## **PUBLIC OPINION AND THE FUTURE OF EUROPE: TRENDS AND THESES**

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Abstract of a paper presented at the Fifth Biennial International Conference of the European Community Studies Association, May 29 - June 1, 1997, Seattle, Washington. A slightly revised version was published in *Social Forces* 75(1):119-143 (1996).

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We analyze trends and sources of support for European unification on the basis of *Eurobarometer* data gathered from individuals in member-states of the European Union over the past two decades. Results indicate that unification of Europe generally receives overwhelming support. However, further analysis reveals important country differences in levels of support. Citizens of most countries of Europe favor unification: Support for the EU has over the years been relatively high in most countries and only in a minority of countries (Great Britain, Denmark, and Norway) citizens reveal substantial anti-European sentiments.

Beyond the country differences, in addition, there are socio-demographic and political influences on popular support, but these do not account for country differences. In other words, it is the identification of citizens with estimated advantages or disadvantages of united Europe for their own country which determines their respective sentiments on the EU.

Therefore, in the absence of a developed European identity, the people of Europe remain first and foremost nationals. This may have crucial and paradoxical consequences for the future of Europe. Because both favorable as well as unfavorable attitudes towards the European Union emanate from national concerns, united Europe is not secured, not only because anti-European citizens do not support unification, but also because pro-Europeans do so only because of various nationalist concerns. A cosmopolitan "Euro-citizenship," uniting people across national borders, at present remains but an illusion.

**PUBLIC OPINION AND THE FUTURE OF EUROPE:  
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With the recent ratification of the Maastricht Treaty, the states of the newly created European Union (EU) have taken an important step towards reshaping their collective existence. Despite various turmoils and occasional mishaps, Europe's politicians finally seem to have found common ground on which to build their common future. But unification requires more than the treaties and policies negotiated by the members of the EU councils, administrative units, and national representatives. The success of united Europe will also -and to no small extent- depend on the support it receives from the citizens of the various states in the Union.

Relying on an analysis of *Eurobarometer* data gathered from individuals in member-states of the European Union between the mid-1970s and 1992, unification of Europe generally receives overwhelming popular support. Fairly constant, about 80% of respondents are in favor of efforts made to unify Europe while a clear majority view their respective country's membership in the EU as favorable.

However, further analysis reveals important country differences in levels of support. Citizens of most countries of Europe favor unification: Support for the EU has over the years been relatively high in most countries (for example, in Belgium, the Netherlands, France,

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is a much shortened version of our previously published paper on popular support and European unification (Deflem and Pampel 1996). In it, we analyzed Eurobarometers conducted in the years 1983, 1986, 1989, and 1992. At the meeting, data from a cumulative Eurobarometer file, covering the years from 1975 to 1992, will be used (see the enclosed appendices)

and Germany) while unification is even more highly favored by citizens from some smaller countries, such as Ireland, Italy, Greece, and Portugal. On the other hand, in Great Britain, Denmark, and Norway, citizens reveal substantial anti-European sentiments.

Beyond these country differences, in addition, there are some socio-demographic and political influences. Specifically, higher educated and richer Europeans show more, and blue-collar workers less, support for unification. Age and gender only minimally affected opinions on Europe (older citizens and males tend to support European unification somewhat more). In terms of political affiliation, more left-wing oriented citizens tend to be more against unification.

Most importantly, however, these political and socio-demographic factors do not account for country differences. In other words, it is the identification of citizens with estimated advantages or disadvantages of united Europe *for their own country* which determines their respective sentiments on the EU. Indeed, country differences explain both pro-European as well as anti-European attitudes. Citizens of Great Britain, for example, view the EU negatively because they assume it will threaten British sovereignty. Like attitudes are prevalent in Norway and Denmark because the EU is thought to possibly interfere with established welfare policies.

But citizens of the pro-European countries, too, are oriented towards their own national well-being. In Spain, Greece, and Italy, for instance, citizens highly favor the EU because of the economic benefits they hope it will bring to their national economies. Citizens from Germany and France are pro-European because they favor securing for their countries a strong leadership position within Europe.

Thus, in the absence of a developed European identity, the people of Europe remain first and foremost nationals. This may have crucial and paradoxical consequences for the future of Europe. Because both favorable as well as unfavorable attitudes towards the European Union emanate from national concerns, united Europe is not secured, not only because anti-European citizens do not support unification, but also because pro-Europeans do so only because of various nationalist concerns. A cosmopolitan "Euro-citizenship," uniting people across national borders, at present remains but an illusion.

*Source:*

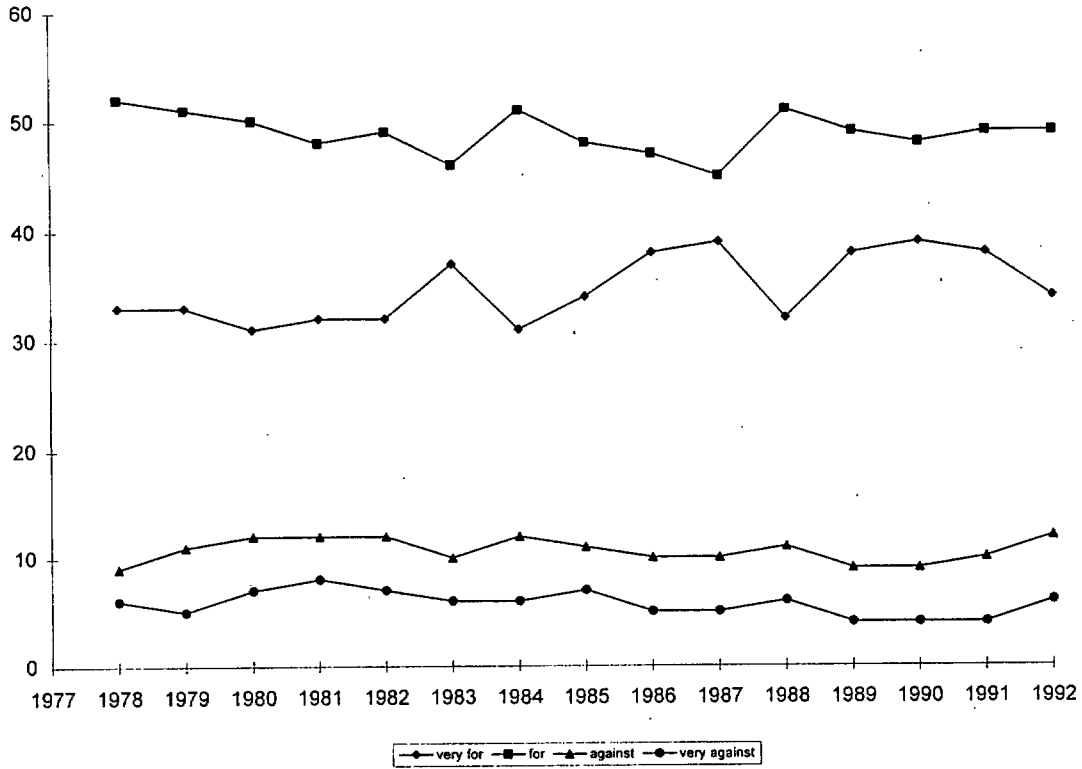
Deflem, Mathieu and Fred C. Pampel. 1996. "The Myth of Postnational Identity: Popular Support for European Unification." *Social Forces* 75(1):119-143.

*Note on Tables in Appendix:*

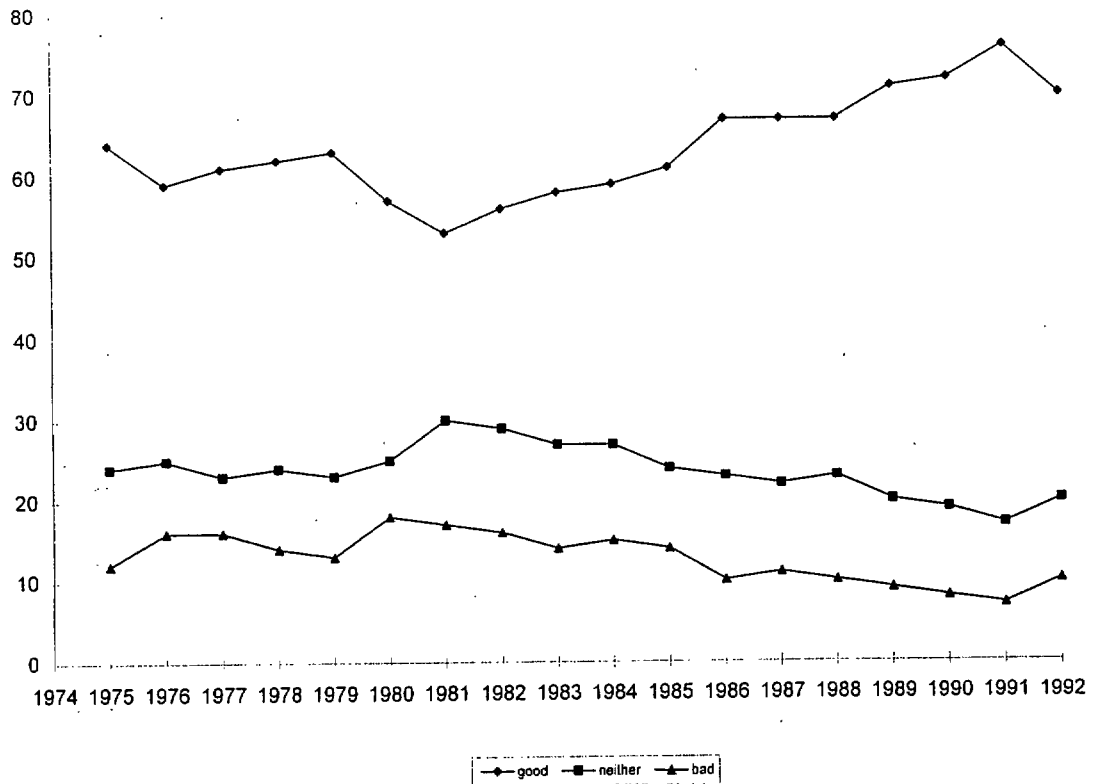
Two variables are used as measures of popular support for European unification. First, *European Unification* is based on the question "In general, are you for or against efforts being made to unify western Europe?". Answer categories range from 'very much for' to 'very much against'. Second, *EC Membership* is a three-category variable based on the question "Generally speaking, do you think that (your country's) membership in the European Community (common market) is a good thing, neither good nor bad, or a bad thing?". The tables represent the evolution from year to year for all countries combined, and percentages for the 'good' and 'bad' categories of *EC Membership* per country for selected years (1979, 1981, 1983, 1986, 1989, and 1992). Tables of regression analyses for selected years can be found in Deflem and Pampel (1996).

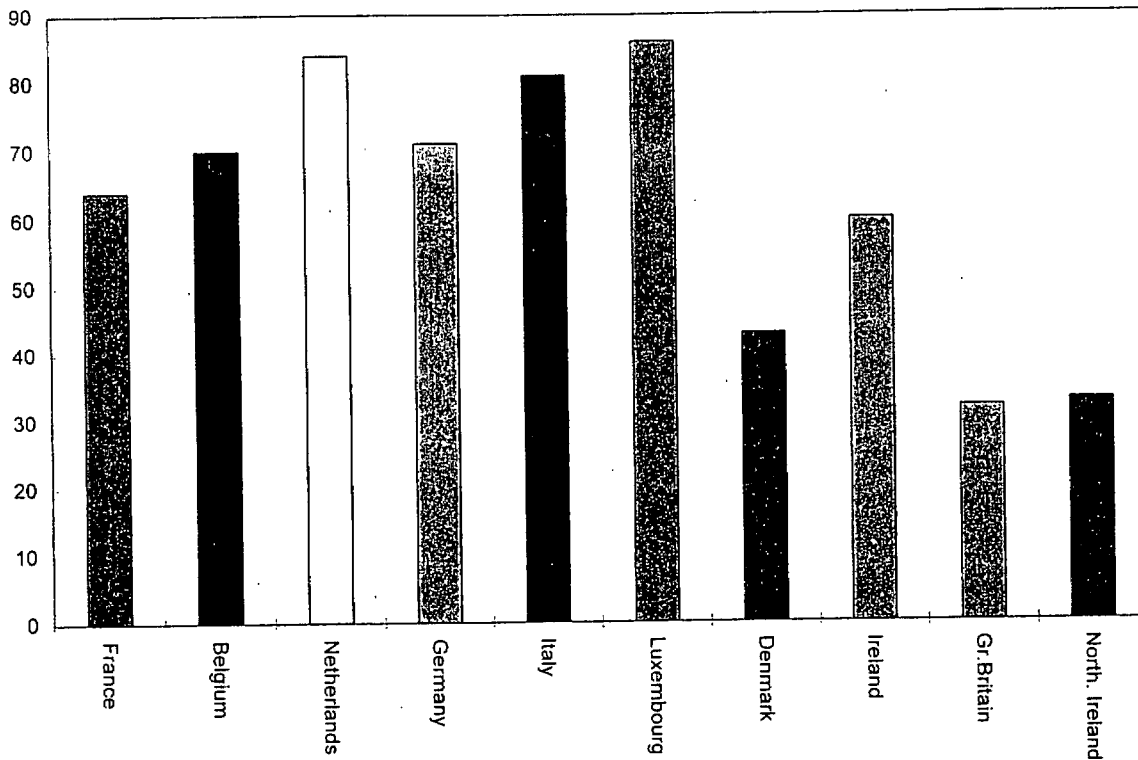
EUROPEAN UNIFICATION

App. 1

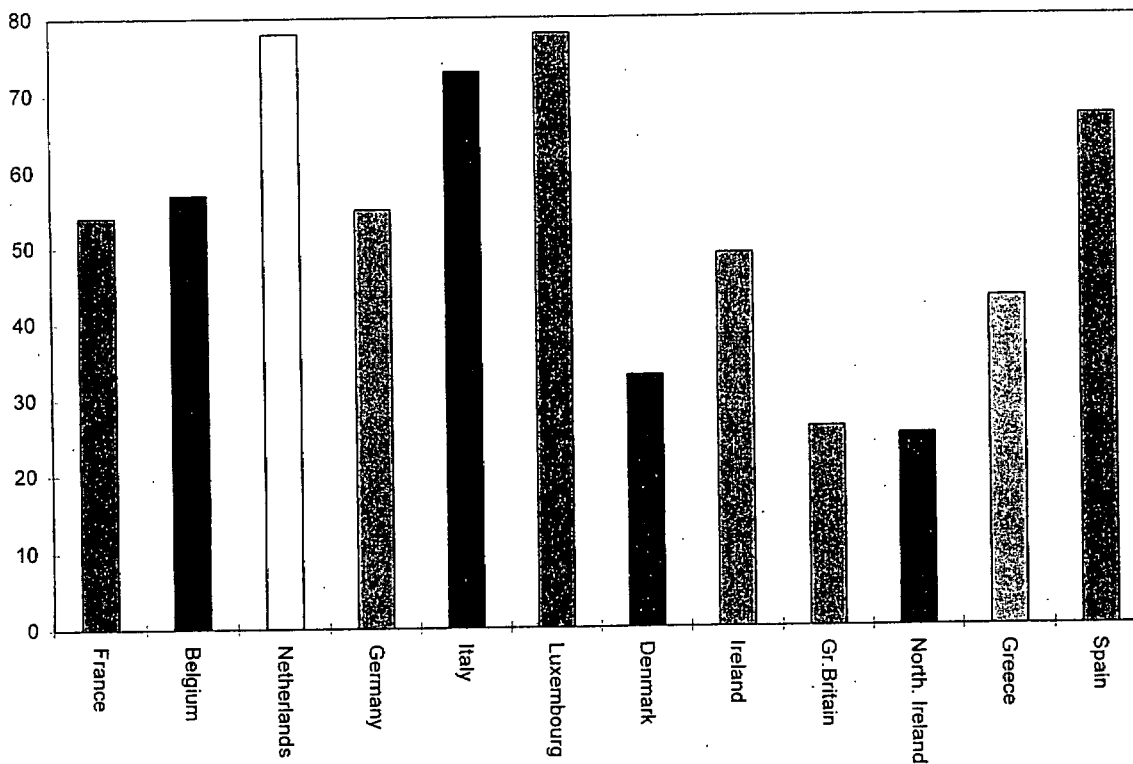


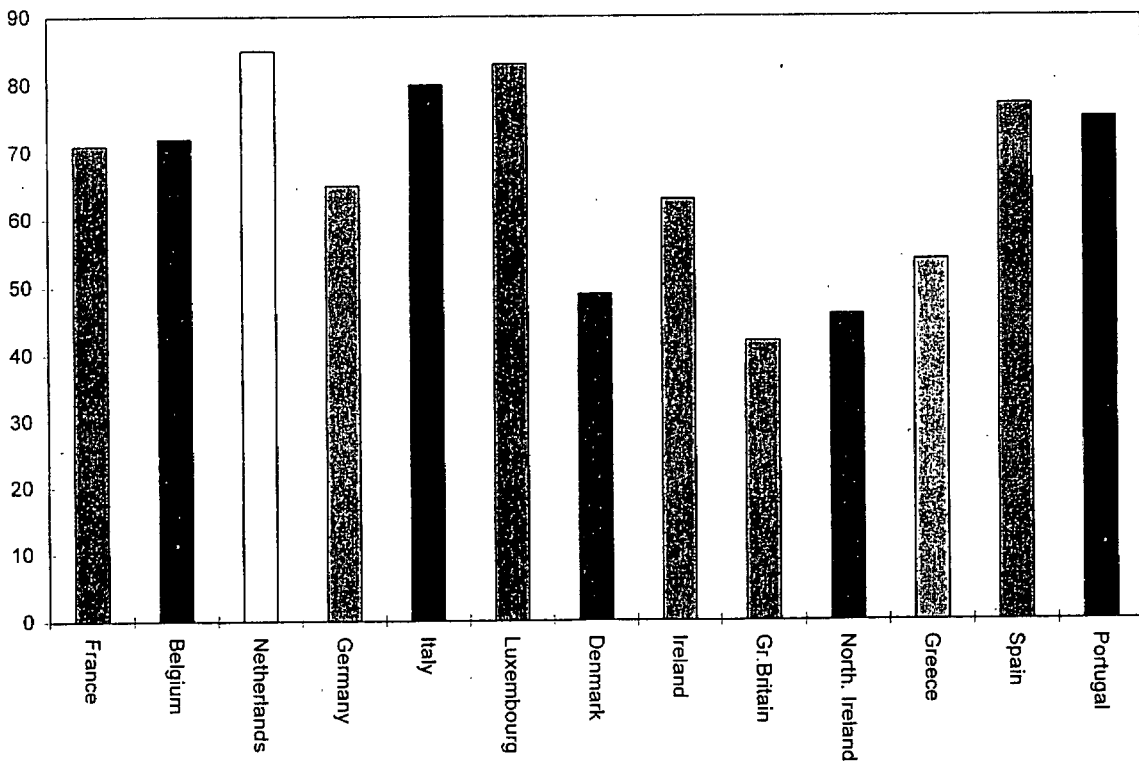
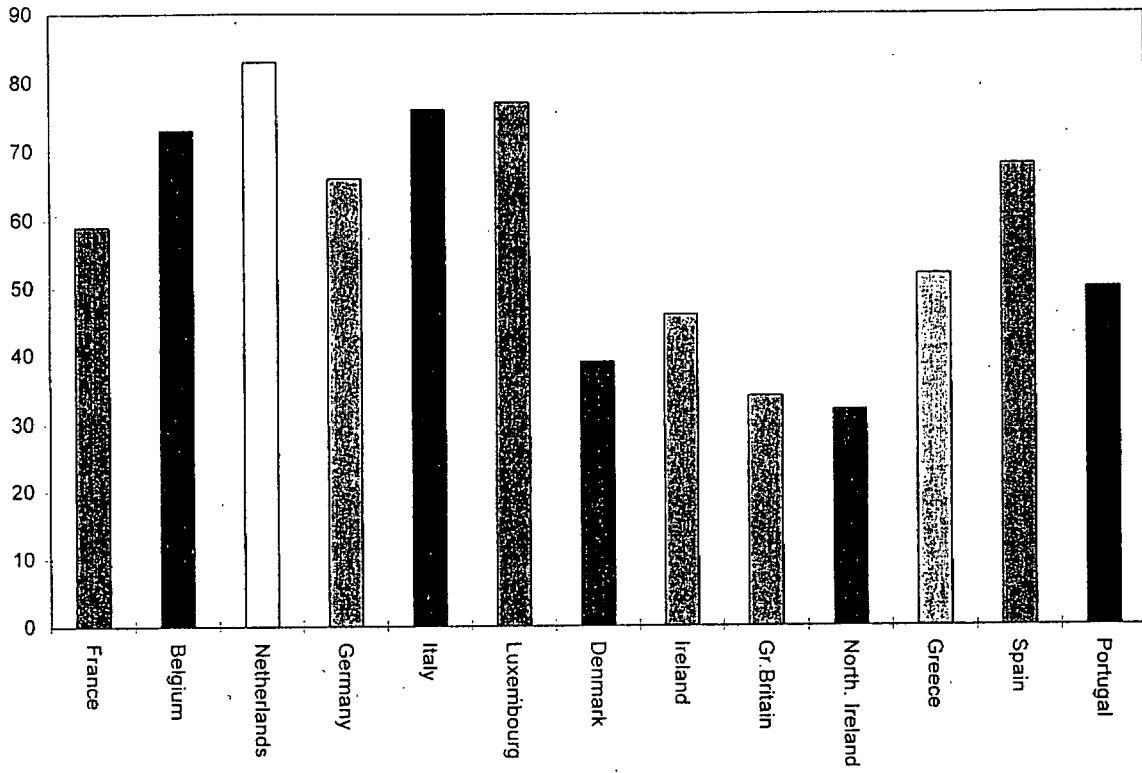
EC MEMBERSHIP



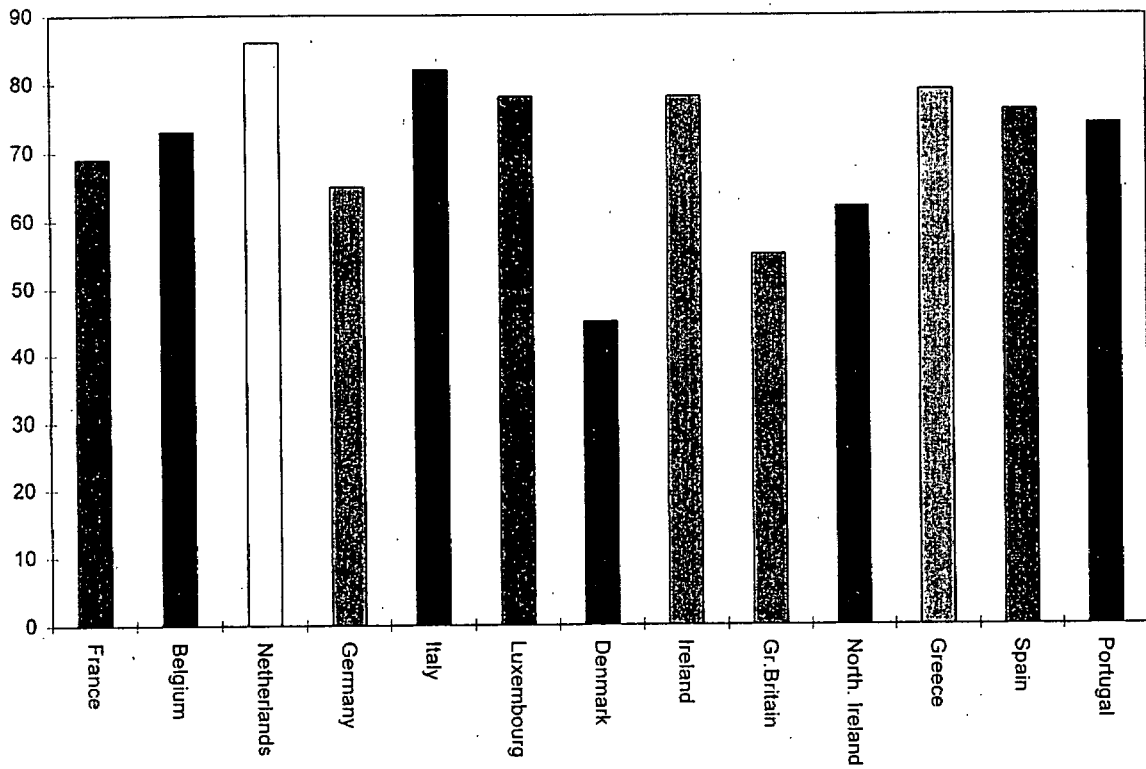


GOOD MEMBERSHIP 1981

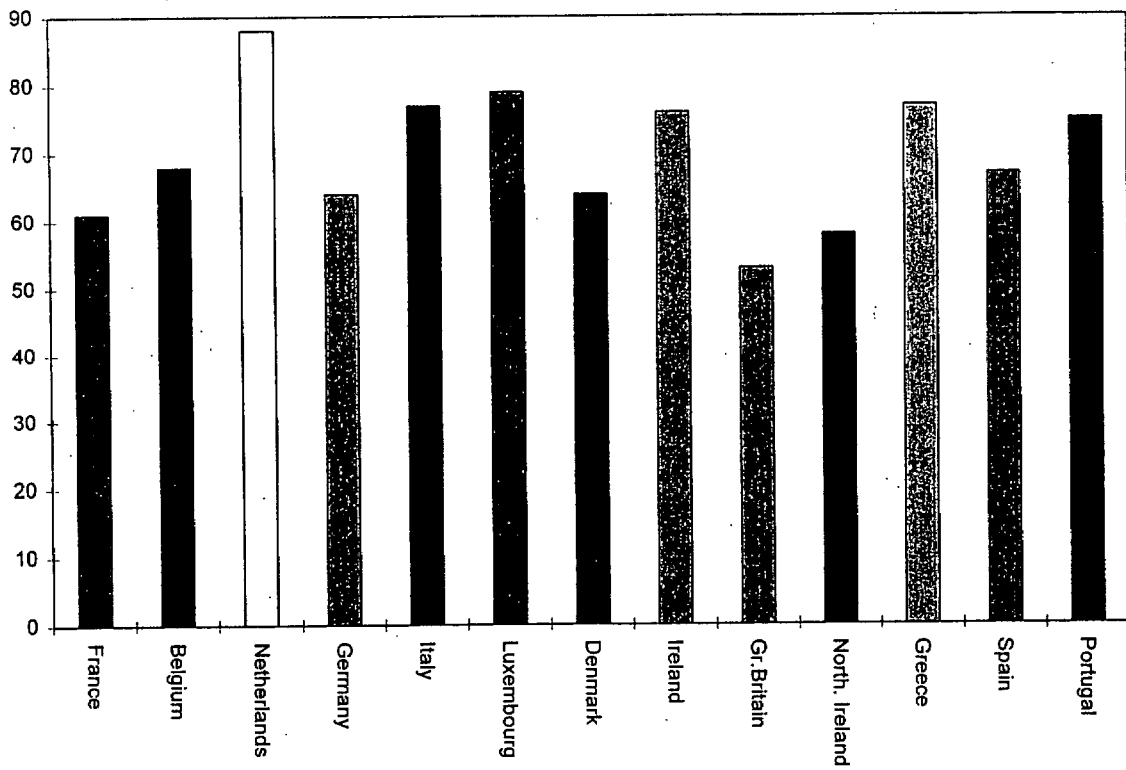


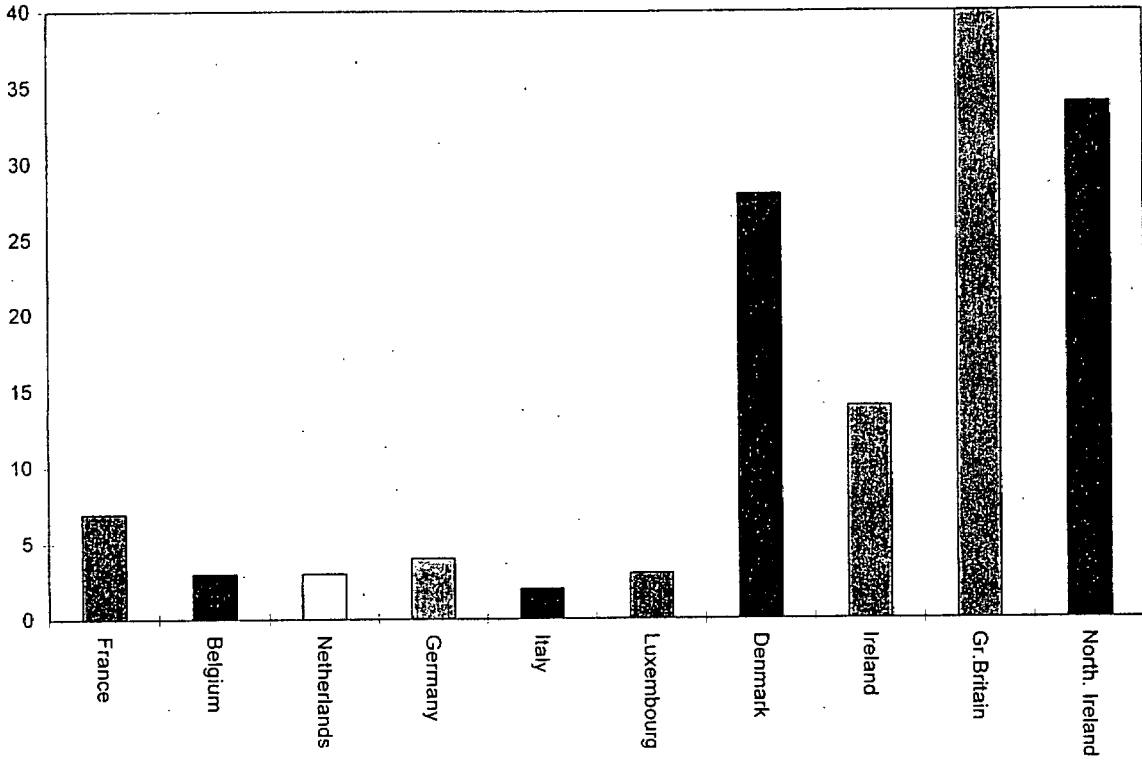




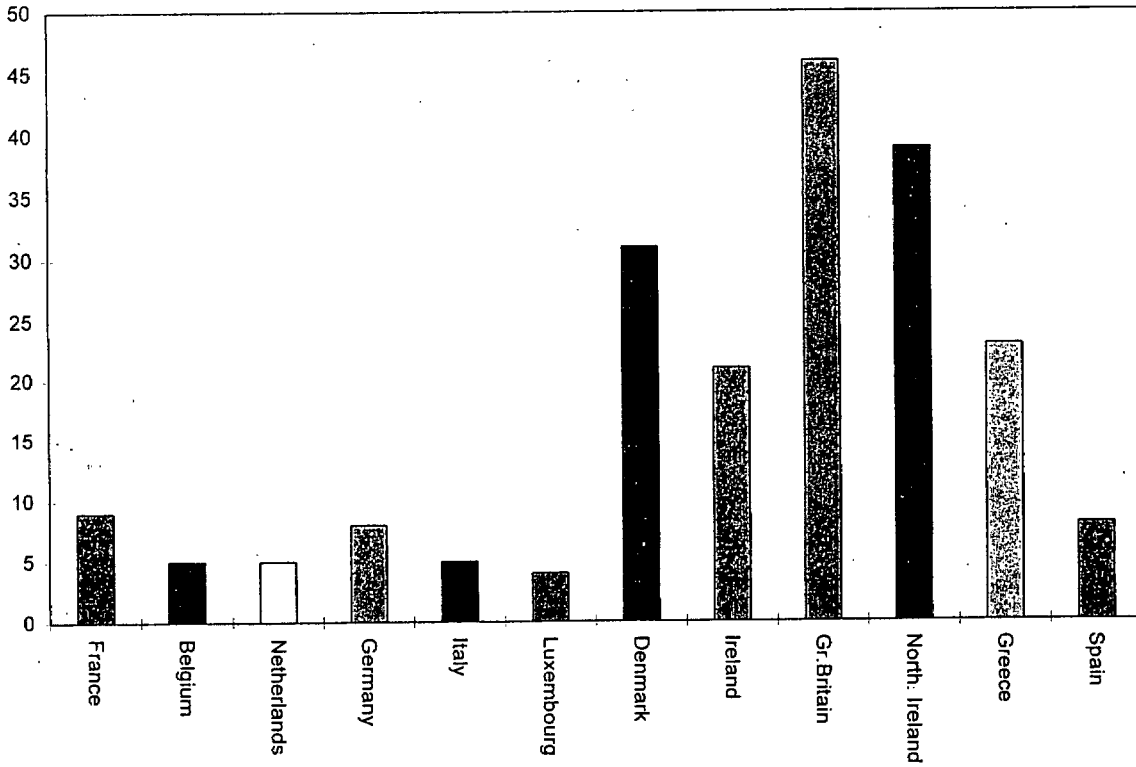


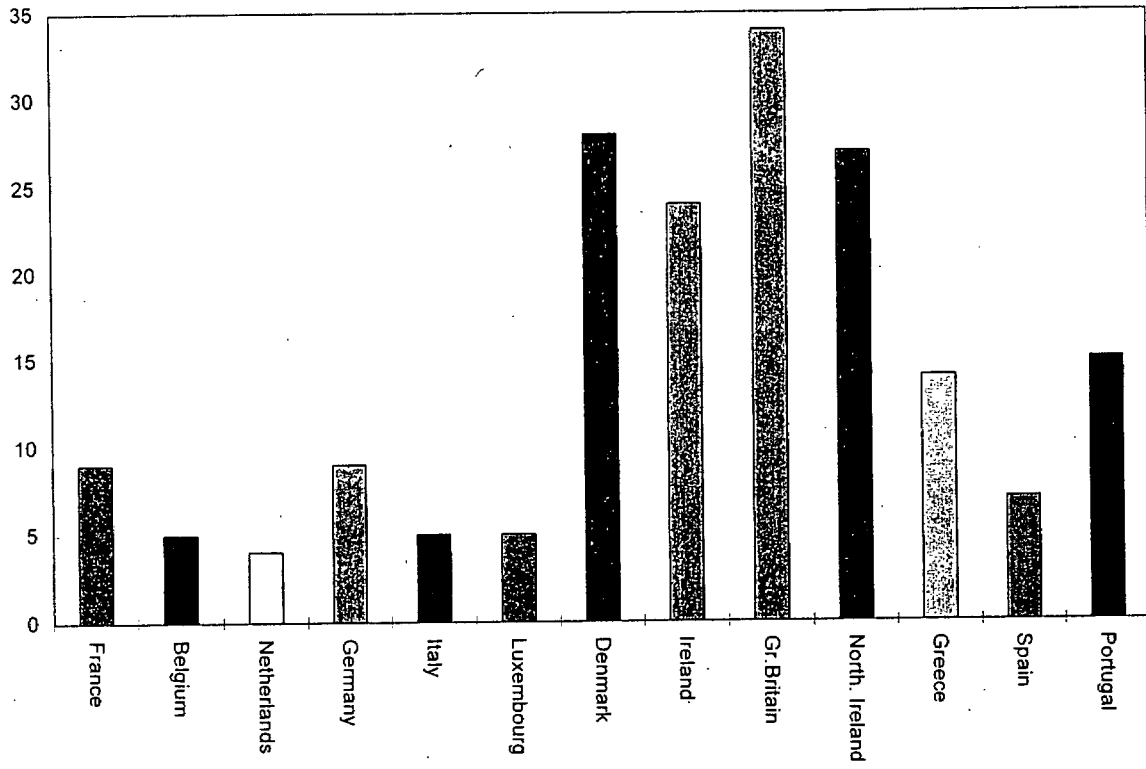
GOOD MEMBERSHIP 1992



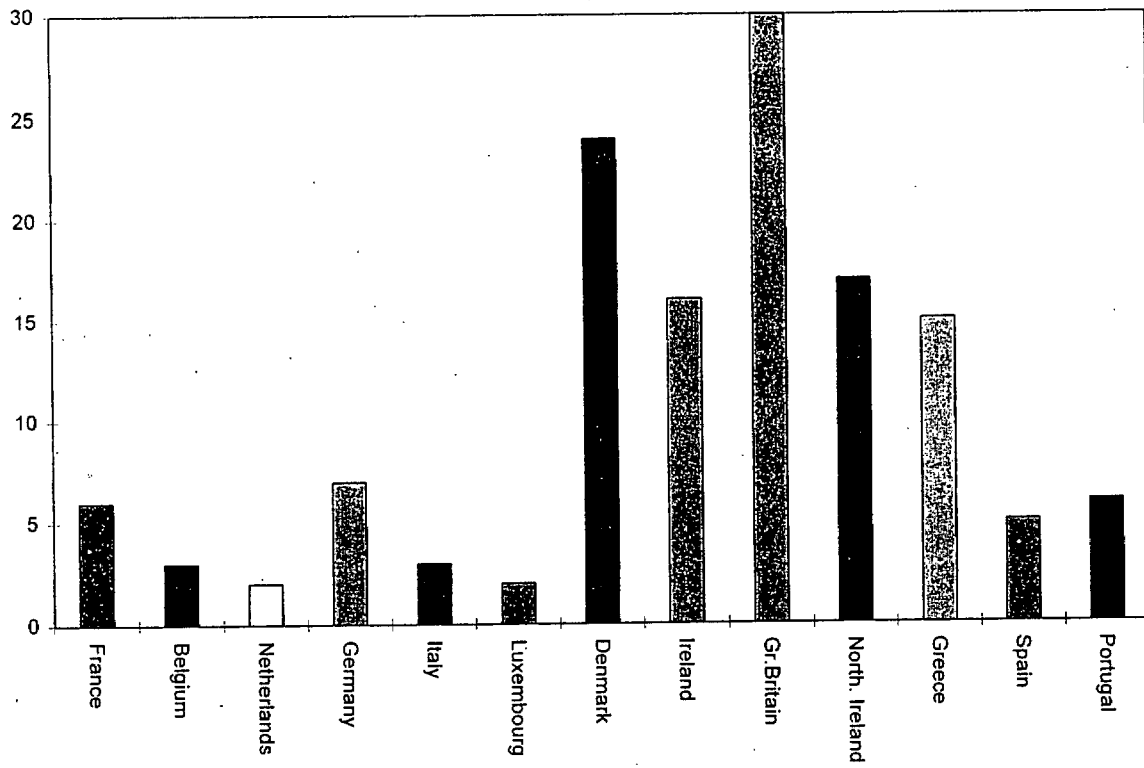


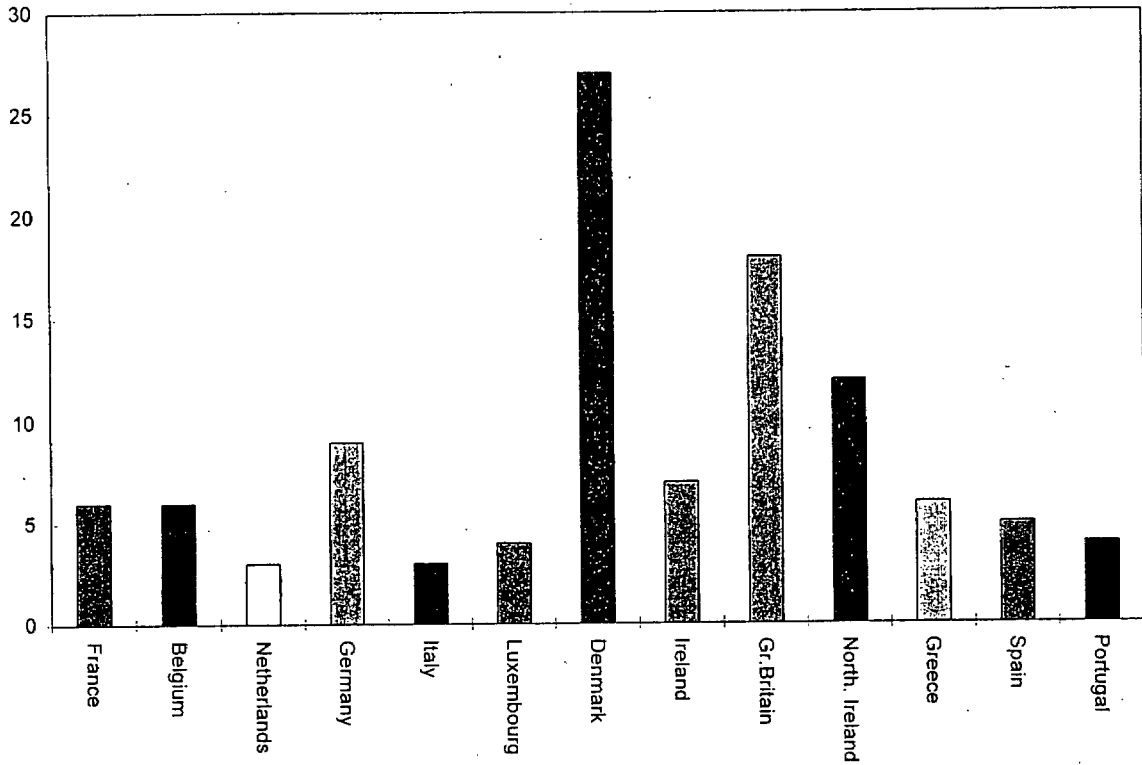
"BAD" MEMBERSHIP 1981





"BAD" MEMBERSHIP 1986





"BAD" MEMBERSHIP 1992

