

Eurobarometer: Public opinion and Europe

What is the 'Eurobarometer'?

For over 15 years, the *Eurobarometer* surveys have enabled more than 300 000 Europeans to voice their attitudes and opinions on more than 3 500 different questions.

Each *Eurobarometer* is made up of three distinct parts. One part is devoted to one or more new subjects (for example, *Eurobarometer* No 30 included a study on racism); a second part consists of questions already asked previously so as to assess the development of opinions on subjects as diverse as the environment, energy and trust between peoples; a third part is given over to a series of some 20 questions which are asked systematically in all *Eurobarometers* and which evaluate the degree of attachment to the European idea.

Most of the data mentioned in this publication has been taken from *Eurobarometer* No 30. This survey was undertaken by European Omnibus Survey; Dimarso for Belgium; Gallup Markedsanalyse for Denmark; Emnid-Institut for Germany; Icap Hellas for Greece; Intergallup for Spain; the Institut de sondages Lavialle for France; Irish Marketing Surveys for Ireland; Istituto per le ricerche statistiche e l'analisi dell'opinione pubblica (Doxa) for Italy; the Institut luxembourgeois de recherches sociales (Ihres) for Luxembourg; Nederlands Instituut voor de publieke opinie (Nipo) for the Netherlands; Norma for Portugal and Social Surveys (Gallup Poll) for the United Kingdom. International coordination was provided by Faits et opinions (Paris).

On all *Eurobarometer* surveys a report is published by the Commission of the European Communities (Directorate-General for Information, Communication and Culture – Surveys, Research and Analysis Service). Like the other reports in this series, the one on *Eurobarometer* No 30 provides full details of the methods used, the population sample, etc.

The data derived from all the *Eurobarometer* surveys is deposited in the Belgian Archives for the Social Sciences, Place Montesquieu 1, Box 18, B-1348 Louvain-la-Neuve.

Twice a year since 1973, the Commission of the European Communities has organized the *Eurobarometer* public opinion surveys in the 12 member countries. These surveys allow us to improve our knowledge of the views and feelings of Europeans on a range of issues.¹

This file confines itself to a selection of those issues: the morale and degree of satisfaction of Community citizens; their fundamental attitudes with regard to society; their deep-seated views of the Community; their understanding of its future; their expectations for the large market of 1992.

The morale and degree of satisfaction of Europeans

Since the beginning of the 1980s, the people of the Community have shown themselves progressively more confident. Where only 20% were optimistic in 1980, nearly 40% now believe that the future will be an improvement on the past.² In the autumn of 1988, 39% of persons questioned considered that 1989 would be better than 1988, 19% considered that it would not be as good and 42% believed that there would not be any significant change from the previous year.

- 36% of Europeans predicted for 1989 an increase in social conflict (strikes, social disturbances), compared with 49% who made such predictions during the period 1980-85.
- Regarding international conflicts, 24% of people questioned thought that 1989 would be quite unsettled. Between 1980 and 1985, 49% had envisaged major international unrest.

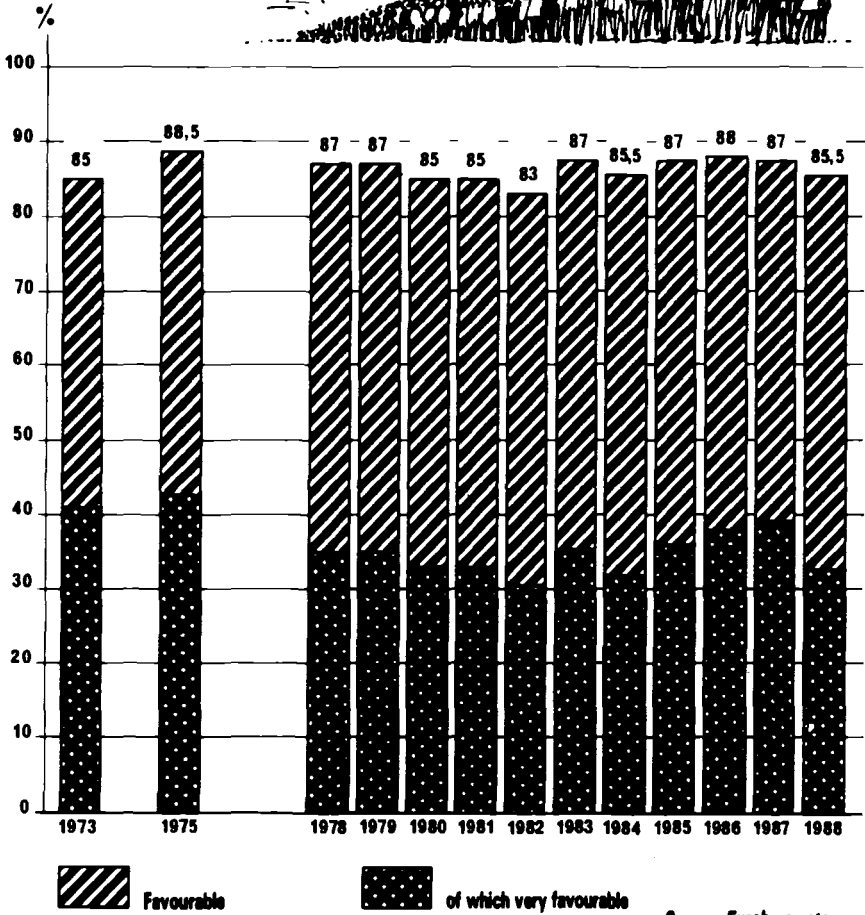
Since 1945, Europeans have been living in a situation which is quite unusual for them: the absence of serious armed conflict on their territory. Since the end of the 1950s, this has given rise to quite a degree of confidence in a future where the risk of a war between European armies on European territory appears to have been eliminated. In autumn 1988, the fear of a new war between now and the year 2000 was shared by only 7% of European Community citizens. Apart from 1980-81 (the second petrol crisis), when the number of pessimists grew to 32% this proportion used to vary between 10 and 18%. Confidence in peace has never been as great as it is today.

- This relative optimism (or at least, the decrease in pessimism compared to the period 1980-85) is due as much to the objective conditions governing economic and social life as to the reading and interpretation given to events by the individual European.

¹ This file replaces our No 10/82. For economy, the word 'Europeans' has been used in parts of the text and should be understood to mean 'citizens of the 12 member countries of the European Community'.

² In order to facilitate the reading of percentages and tables, the figures relate only to those who replied to the particular question ('no answers' are excluded from the calculations).

Evolution between 1973 and 1988 of attitudes favourable to the unification of Europe (as %)



Source: Eurobarometer.

- When people were asked to evaluate changes in the global economic situation in relation to preceding years, 37% in 1988 forecast that the following year would be a definite improvement or a bit better. Since 1982, this percentage of optimists has evolved as follows: 14% (1982), 22% (1983), 25% (1984), 28% (1985), 36% (1986), 28% (1987).
- On the other hand, when it came to assessing changes in their domestic financial situation *vis-à-vis* preceding years, the optimism of Community citizens was tempered slightly. 25% of them considered that their financial situation was either greatly or a little improved. In 1982, 15% of Europeans believed this to be the case, 17% thought so in 1983 and 1984, 19% in 1985, 23% in 1986 and 22% in 1987.

All this raises the question whether people in the European Community are satisfied with the lives they lead. Three quarters of them are. Since 1973, this Community average has scarcely changed – the minimum level of 75% of those satisfied was recorded in 1976 and 1985, the maximum of 80% in 1973, 1977, 1978 and 1984. In 1988, as in previous years, there were significant differences between countries. For example, 66% of satisfied persons in Greece and 63% in Portugal as compared with 90% in Luxembourg and 93% in the Netherlands.

What do people think of the way democracy works in their country? Here there are rather more satisfied persons than dissatisfied ones. 60% belong to the first group while 40% are more pessimistic. Yet again, these Community averages conceal strongly contrasting national percentages: from 77% of satisfied persons in the Netherlands and 75% in Germany and Luxembourg to 46% in Italy. However, the level of satisfaction appears very stable since 1973. This question was asked in 24 surveys and those who declared themselves satisfied always represented between 50 and 60% of Europeans. Of course in interpreting these results we cannot ignore the link between the degree of satisfaction of individuals and the question of whether or not the political party they support was in government at the time.

Basic attitudes of Europeans towards society

- When people in the Community are asked to choose a basic attitude towards the society in which they live, and when the choice of attitudes proposed ranges from revolutionary to reformist to reactionary, very little significant differences are recorded between countries. In autumn 1988, Community averages were as follows: 'The whole structure of our society must be changed radically by revolutionary action' – 4%; 'Our society must be improved gradually by reforms' – 73.5%; 'Our society must be defended courageously against all subversive forces' – 22.5%.

Variations in public opinion on this matter depend not so much on nationality as on other factors, such as level of education or the degree of 'leadership'. Among the 4% of the population with revolutionary attitudes one finds above all, no matter what their country of origin, young people with a high level of education

who influence others more than others can influence them. Nationality may slightly increase or decrease the phenomenon, but certainly does not condition it.

- [] What are the great causes to which people in the Community are today ready to devote themselves and for which they will accept sacrifices? As shown in Table I, there is a priority here which is the same for all countries. For two out of three Europeans, the priority is peace. After that, there are four major issues with a high percentage in their favour: human rights (43%), the fight against poverty (41%), the protection of nature (38%) and individual freedom (36%). Revolution, on the other hand, does not really hold the attention of Europeans; only less than 3% consider it to be worth sacrifices. Other major causes have average percentages of between 10 and 20%; it is worth noting, however, the small number (11%) of persons ready to make sacrifices for European unification!

Table I – Great causes for which European Community citizens would accept sacrifices – average of survey results between 1982 and 1987

(in %)

World peace	63
Human rights	43
Fight against poverty	41
Protection of nature	38
Individual freedom	36
Defence of one's country	20
Equality of the sexes	16
Religious belief	15
Unification of Europe	11
Revolution	3

Source: Eurobarometer Nos 17 and 28.

Attitudes of Europeans towards the Community

What do the people of the Community think of the institution of 'Europe' which has now existed for over 30 years? In order to find out, several questions are asked regularly.

- [] One very general question, to find out whether Europeans are for or against efforts to unify Europe, has been posed more or less systematically since 1973. This is a highly interesting question because it does not limit itself to actual achievements – the European Community, the common agricultural policy, etc. – but examines a global feeling, probably tinged with emotion, of support for the concept of European unification.

Our diagram shows the positive attitudes aroused since 1973 by European unification. The results are quite remarkable: in 15 years, the various degrees of attachment to the European idea stay within a range of 83 to 88.5% of favourable attitudes.

- Another *Eurobarometer* question aims to find out whether Community membership is felt to be a good or a bad thing. In autumn 1988, 69% answered positively and 9% negatively. The remaining 22% believed that it was neither good nor bad. Since 1973, the proportion of favourable judgments has always been above 54% with the highest percentage being achieved in 1975 (68%), 1986 (66%), 1988 (69%) and the lowest recorded in 1981 (54%) and 1982 (55%). Once again, there are differences between countries: only 50% of positive appreciation in Denmark and the United Kingdom as against more than 80% in the Netherlands and Luxembourg, and in excess of 85% in Italy.
- In 1983, a further question was added to those measuring the degree of support for the European Community: it relates to the advantages derived by a particular country from Community membership. In autumn 1988, 67% of Community citizens considered that their country was benefiting from membership (since 1983, the Community average in this respect is 62%). Six member countries recorded scores of 80% or more (Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Portugal) while two other countries had scores near or below 50% (the United Kingdom with 54% and Spain with 33%). Since 1983, this feeling of having benefited from the Community has remained relatively stable for each country, with the exception of two – Belgium and Germany – where variations greater than 20% have been recorded between one survey and another.
- A different way of assessing real public attitudes towards the European Community is to envisage the regret or relief that would be felt if it were announced tomorrow that the Community was no more. This question has been posed many times since 1973. In autumn 1988, 49% of Community citizens indicated major regrets, 43% said they would be indifferent and only 8% intimated that they would be greatly relieved. Variations in these proportions have been relatively slight since 1973, although a slight transfer from 'major regrets' to 'indifference' has been noticed. As with other indicators of support for the European Community, there are strong differences between some national public opinions and the Community average. As against less than 1% of Italians or Luxembourgers who would experience great relief, there are 21% of Portuguese and 31% of Danes. From only 28% indifferent in Denmark, a proportion of more than 50% is to be found in Belgium, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

From the answers given to the four preceding questions, it can be deduced that between 1973 and 1988, public opinion in the Community averaged approximately 62% of persons in favour, 25% indifferent and 13% opposed to the maintenance and development of European integration.

For a whole range of problems, people are more inclined to trust the Community than their own governments. In 1987, in answer to the question whether they

preferred joint (Community) action or separate (national) action, a large majority of those questioned declared themselves in favour of joint action, no matter what the problem (see Table II).

Table II – Percentage of Community citizens who consider it preferable that certain problems be dealt with at Community level

	<i>(in %)</i>
Fight against terrorism	88
Help for poor countries (Africa, Asia, etc.)	86
Protecting nature and defending the environment	81
Maintaining energy supplies	75
Defending the interests of one's country <i>vis-à-vis</i> the superpowers	73
Strengthening military defence capacity	66
Reducing social inequality	66
Fighting unemployment	65
Reducing regional inequality	55

Source: Eurobarometer No 28.

This trust in the Community for dealing with the problems that preoccupy its citizens is not new – actually it has grown. Between 1976 and 1987, the percentage of people more in favour of Community action has increased from 42% to 65% with regard to the fight against unemployment, from 56% to 81% for the protection of nature and from 57% to 66% for defence problems.

Though there are differing national emphases on different problems, nine countries out of the 12 are close to the Community average for all problems; only Denmark, Ireland and Spain record marked differences regarding certain questions. In Denmark and in Ireland, when the issue in question is unemployment, preference is given to national action (65 and 58% respectively); in Spain, a majority want to retain responsibility for their own defence (60%).

The future of the Community

In an exceptional *Eurobarometer* survey to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome, questions dealing with the future of the European Community were broached.

- When people were provided with a series of 10 possible scenarios for the year 2000, a large majority of them believed that the realization of these hypotheses was feasible: 92% believed in the emergence of a European television channel; 83% considered that joint action would be possible against ecological disasters; 83% believed in a joint fight against terrorism; 72% counted on freedom of movement, residence, study and work within the European Community; 71% believed that the individual would speak a greater number of languages than at

present; 68% considered a referendum on a European constitution was possible; 63% envisaged the election of a European head of government; 62% believed in joint defence; 60% counted on a European currency and 56% considered it possible that Europe would be treated on the same level as the USA and the USSR.

- Given these figures, it may be asked how far the people of the Community want to go. More than two out of three favour the formation of a European government responsible to the European Parliament and more than three out of four say that they support the establishment of a 'United States of Europe'. The development of the European Community into a political union is therefore supported by a majority of Europeans, even though the actual realization of this before the end of this century is viewed as probable by only 25% of the population.

It is worth noting that for 60% of Europeans, a 'United States of Europe' does not signify the end of their national, historical or cultural identity; nor does it mean that their national economic interests would be sacrificed for it. Only 24% of those questioned indicated that they were greatly worried about the consequences of political union for their national identity or for their national economic interests while 16% said they were moderately worried. These percentages vary from one country to another. In Italy, 78% of those questioned felt no fear for their national identity and in France 72% gave the same response. By contrast, 55% of Danish, 38% of British and 36% of Irish said that they were very worried for the defence of their national identity and for their national economic interests.

Europeans and the 1992 deadline

- The 1992 deadline is not unknown to public opinion in the European Community. In autumn 1988, three out of four were familiar with the concept of the 'large European market of 1992'.

Three out of four Community citizens said that they placed great hopes on the establishment of this single market. 60% believed that 1992 would be a good thing for them (and for people like them) while only 8% of those questioned were pessimistic and for a further 32%, it was neither a good or a bad thing. 89% were favourable to the establishment between now and 1992 of a joint economic and social policy, particularly in the area of employment. 83% declared their support for a joint security and defence organization. 74% had a positive attitude to defining a joint policy towards countries outside the European Community and 67% said that they supported a common European currency: the ecu.

- How do the citizens of the European Community see the advantages or disadvantages of the European market of 1992? When invited to assess different elements of the large market as beneficial or otherwise, people give, on the whole, very positive responses (see Table III).

Although public opinion in the various Member States is fairly well in agreement over the various advantages of 1992, three countries stand alone over one or other aspect of the establishment of the large market: the British see as many advantages as disadvantages in the elimination of customs controls (51% against 49%); Luxembourgers are suspicious of the approximation of VAT levels (68% consider it to be disadvantageous as against 32% who see advantages in it); likewise the Danes with regard to the buying of real estate in another country (60% positive, 40% negative).

When it comes to social problems, public opinion is almost unanimous in seeing more advantages than disadvantages in 1992. This applies as much to the harmonization of safety and hygiene regulations (94% see advantages in this) as to the mutual recognition of diplomas (91%), the joint definition at Community level of principles for the introduction of new technology (88%), the determination of common rules for worker participation (87%) and for flexibility in work (85%), and even the negotiation at Community level of collective agreements (84%). Only the Danes disturb this unanimity by finding more drawbacks than advantages in European Community collective agreements (54% against 46%).



This is some of the significant information to emerge from the public opinion surveys undertaken by the Commission of the European Communities, particularly from the most recent survey. The *Eurobarometer* series has for 15 years represented an inexhaustible source of knowledge, both qualitative and quantitative, on public opinion in the European Community. It helps the people of the Community to know themselves better ■

Table III – Percentage of Community citizens who see various elements of the large market as advantageous

(in %)

	Autumn 1987	Autumn 1988
Being able to make payments throughout the Community without complications	91	92
Being able to bring any amount of money when travelling in other Community countries	87	89
Being able to obtain in one's own country any product sold in other Community countries	89	88
The possibility for every citizen of a European Community country to go and live without restriction in any other Community country (e.g. retirement, study)	85	87
The possibility for every citizen of a European Community country to go and work in another Community country	86	84
Being able to open a bank account in any Community country	81	84
Being able to acquire real estate or property anywhere in the Community	80	83
Approximation of VAT levels applicable in the different Community countries, so that products are sold under the same conditions	82	79
Elimination of customs control at inter-Community border crossings	73	71
Equal access for the entrepreneur to public procurement contracts in a country other than his own, if his bid is more reasonable for a similar level of quality (e.g. the construction of a bridge or road)	63	64

Source: Eurobarometer Nos 28 and 30.

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