

THIRTY YEARS OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

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Eurobarometer, the EC Commission's periodic survey of public opinion in the European Community, has produced a particularly striking profile of Community attitudes 30 years after the EC was established. Given that politics is of really great interest only to about 5 per cent of the public, the survey points out that it is not surprising that the idea of «a European Community» fails to raise an enthusiastic reaction. But answers to specific questions do reveal a sense of mutual trust in Community countries, and a belief that the Community should move beyond its present status, towards some form of unification; one in five indeed favouring a federation or a single political entity.

Eurobarometer is conducted by the Commission's Directorate-General for Information, Communication and Culture, the individual surveys being undertaken by national polling institutes. The surveys, having been undertaken each spring and autumn since 1973, cover between 11,000 - 12,000 respondents, questioned in their homes by professional interviewers.

A balance sheet

The figures in the survey vary, depending on their context, but it appears that at least three out of five considered that their country's membership in the Community 'was a good thing', the proportion being somewhat higher in the six founding countries than it is in the six countries which joined later.

When reminded of the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957, the interviewees were asked to choose from eight developments in the Community in the period, and to indicate the most striking. Almost a quarter (24%) favoured mutual trust, developing cooperation and trust between countries that had been in conflict for much of their history. One in seven (14%) was struck by free trade and travel in the Community, and/or by food surpluses. Some 12 per cent of the sample gave no answer.

Looking at options for the future of the European Community, among those who replied to the question, 6 per cent wanted the Community to dissolve and 18 per cent just wanted things to go on as at present. The vast majority, 75 per cent of the respondents, backed the Single European Act

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and favoured further integration, with about a fifth supporting a Community Federation or the idea of a single country. Among the one in twenty who wanted the Community to be scrapped, were some 25 per cent of the Danes and about 15 per cent of the British.

Nearly one in two Europeans expects that elections to designate a head of government of Europe will be held by the year 2000. If no other country joins The Twelve of today, the head of government of Europe would be of another nationality than their own for citizens in eleven Member States. Would they accept this? Could they imagine voting for somebody from another country? This would be a rather crucial test of «Europe mindedness». About 66 per cent of the French say they could vote for a non-French candidate. Only the Luxembourggeois ranked higher than the French in this poll. Lowest in this survey were the British at 47 per cent. Most surprising, however, was the drop of German and Dutch acceptance of respectively a non-German and non-Dutch head of government for Europe, compared to a previous poll asking the same question.

#### The situation of women in society

In 1975, over one-third (35%) of the sample supported the idea that 'politics should be left to men'. In 1983, the proportion had fallen to 25 per cent in nine countries, and to 22 per cent in all 12 Member States in 1987. Today 41 per cent of the respondents support the idea that the role of the husband and wife is to have an equally absorbing job, share the housework, and the care of the children, compared to only 36 per cent four years ago.

#### Science and agriculture

Considering some countries' lack of enthusiasm for spending Community money on scientific and technological research, three out of five respondents (61%) believe that the EC contribution to research is not big enough. Only three per cent felt that the contribution was too big.

The views on agriculture were mixed. About 34 per cent of those interviewed thought that the farmers of their country had benefitted from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP); 37 per cent thought they had not. Among farmers, 36 per cent considered that the farmers in their country had benefitted from the CAP; 53 per cent said the contrary. As for the public at large, the survey revealed that 46 per cent supported the view that «although there is a lot to criticise and to put right in the Common Agricultural Policy, on balance it is worthwhile». Almost a fifth (18%) disagreed and 36 per cent took no stand. Among farmers, 50 per cent agreed, 25 per cent disagreed and 25 per cent had no opinion.

#### Scenarios for the year 2000

Eurobarometer invited its respondents to look ahead to January 2000, and to choose the ten scenarios which were most likely to be a reality within thirteen years.

The list revealed the following:

1. A common European television channel ..... 92%
2. Fight ecological catastrophes in common ..... 83%
3. Fight terrorism in common ..... 83%
4. Freedom of travel, residence, study, work ..... 72%
5. More languages spoken than today ..... 71%
6. Referendum on a European constitution ..... 68%
7. Election of head of government of Europe ..... 63%
8. Common European defence ..... 62%
9. Establishment of a common European currency ..... 60%
10. Europe will be the equal of the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. .... 56%

The above responses revealed a well-known pattern in public opinion polls: it is much easier for people to take a stand on matters that concern them directly and personally every day; it is more difficult to predict the international political situation, even though one's daily life very much depends on the overall political situation.

Surprisingly, the establishment of a common currency was ranked very low in the survey, although money, cheques, etc., are an every day phenomenon. But by looking at the list, and the high percentages, it is certain that further European integration will occur across a wide range of different areas before the year 2000.

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