

PUBLIC OPINION MONITORING TOOLS FOR SURVEYING

Unit X.A.2 "Public opinion monitoring" (soon to be "Surveys and analysis of public opinion") uses five kinds of research instruments with which to measure the attitudes, reactions, fears and expectations of public opinion in the fifteen Member countries towards the European Union, its policies and its institutions.

These five instruments (governed by framework contracts) are:

1. **The Standard Eurobarometer,**
2. **The Flash Eurobarometer,**
3. **Qualitative studies,**
4. **The "European Continuous Tracking Survey"**
5. **Content analysis of written and broadcast media.**

These five instruments are available to all administrative units of the European Commission, as well as other community institutions, above all the Representation Offices of the Commission in the Member States.

1. STANDARD EUROBAROMETER:

The Eurobarometer is conducted twice per year (in spring and autumn), in the 15 Member States simultaneously. A sample of 2,000 members of the public is interviewed face to face in Germany, 500 in Luxembourg, 1,000 in each of the other member states plus 300 in Northern Ireland. Those interviewed constitute a representative sample of the population aged 15 and over. Certain categories of the population (such as women or young people) can be over-sampled.

The margin of error of the Standard Eurobarometer is +/-3.1%. According to the requirements of a particular survey, the size of the sample can be increased (as was the case with the Eurobarometer Magnum, which depended on a sample of 65,000 interviewees in the 15 Member States). In such cases the margin of error is much reduced. The coordinating (framework contract, DG X) opinion poll organisation is INRA-European Coordination Office in Brussels.

The Eurobarometer results are published every six months in a document with the same name. They are distributed to the Representation Offices in the member states. An "early release" is published as soon as possible after the arrival of the results and sent to the Representation Offices (by e-mail in the future) with notification of the date of embargo. Results are also available on the internet Europa server (<http://.../en/comm/dg10/epo/eb.html>).

The Representation Offices have the right to add a question free of charge to each Eurobarometer survey, which will be asked in their respective countries. The precise wording must arrive at Unit X.A.2 by the end of August or end of February at the latest. Like the complexity of DGs and European institutions, they can also commission specific studies of public opinion, at their own expense.

Finally, the Representation Offices can request analyses of the national results of their countries from any Eurobarometer survey through the respective national opinion poll organisations (members of INRA), in consultation with Unit X.A.2.

2. FLASH EUROBAROMETER:

The "Flash" opinion polls are only conducted on the request of the Representation offices, the services of the Commission or other institutions.

These are telephone surveys, consisting of only a few questions, prepared in a very short space of time, whose results are made available one week after the end of the fieldwork. The sample size is of 500 people per country (1,000 in Germany), which can be increased according to need.

The Flash surveys are more flexible than those of the Standard Eurobarometer, since they can be put into operation at any time of the year.

The contract allows for opinion poll studies to be made on specific target groups (for example, decision-makers, businesses and certain professional groups) and the addition of supplementary questions in "omnibus" surveys. These are carried out in any case by the contract-holding opinion poll organisations on a monthly basis for their other clients.

Each commissioning DG, service or Representation Office chooses whether or not to publish the results.

A new framework contract will be signed before the end of 1996 (tender already accepted by the CCAM).

3. QUALITATIVE STUDIES:

A new framework contract will be available to the Representation Offices as well as all the services of the Commission and other community institutions at the start of 1997 (a call for tender has been made and is waiting for the CCAM). It will be possible to commission studies in one or more Member States at the same time.

"Qualitative" studies of opinion are distinguished from "quantitative" ones in so much as the choice of opinions studied is not based on a calculation of probability. Their results are therefore not "representative" of the population. However, qualitative studies, which use several methods of social psychology, examine the motivations, feelings and reactions of social groups selected for particular reasons, by listening to and recording the way in which those sampled express themselves. Quantitative studies "put words in the mouths of

interviewees"; qualitative studies listen to the "words which tell it" from the mouths of those targeted.

Of great use prior to launching a campaign (for example, by measuring sentiments on the object and messages of the campaign or evaluating material), this method operates on the basis of "focus groups meetings" and/or "in depth interviews" of a smaller quantity of people.

Qualitative studies are often preliminary stages in the preparation of campaigns and are also used in preparing quantitative studies (enquiries) on the same issues.

4. EUROPEAN CONTINUOUS TRACKING SURVEY:

Unit X.A.2 is also responsible for the Continuous Tracking Survey (CTS) opinion polls, whose questions are drawn up exclusively by DG X, the Cabinets and the Forward Studies Unit.

The CTS is a survey conducted through continuous telephone interviews, six days per week during four week periods, and throughout the year (except in August). The sample size - 800 interviewees in 14 member states and 1,600 in Germany - allows for a +/-3.5% margin of error and the addition of data collected over eight weeks (producing samples of 1,600 per country). The contract holder appointed by DG X for the CTS is EUROQUEST-MRB in London (linked to CSA in Paris).

The CTS results are published every three or four months in **Europinion**, of which occasional special issues appear (such as "The opinion of Europeans on institutional reform" I and II).

The whole of Europinion can be consulted on the Europa server (<http://.../en/comm/dg10/infcom/epo/eo.html>).

Europinion is sent to the Representation Offices by e-mail three days prior to its publication (the embargo date is communicated very late). The graphs are not included (on account of computer incompatibility) and arrive on paper, by post.

The Representation Offices and DGs do not have the right to add their own questions to the CTS, although their wishes are taken into account.

5. EUROMEDIA

Through **qualitative and quantitative analysis**, Euromedia reports every month on the manner in which the **press of the 15 member states (200 titles)** and the television of 6 Member States deal with themes relating to the Union.

With regard to significant European events (like European Councils and European Round Tables), the analysis covers in equal part every news programme of each television channel of the 15 member states.

The monthly Euromedia and its special editions are regularly distributed to the Representation Offices, via their Coordination Unit (X.A.3).

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