

**QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE EURO
AND SENSITIVE POPULATION SEGMENTS
OF ELDERLY AND
OF SOCIO-ECONOMICALLY VULNERABLE PEOPLE**

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION, OBJECTIVES, STUDY METHODOLOGY	00
CHAPTER II: THE EURO AND EUROPE – UNDERSTANDING THE PURPOSE AND JOINING THE EURO PROJECT	00
II.1 Basic attitudes to the euro in the eleven Member Countries of the euro zone	00
II.2 Attitudes to the euro in the four countries that are non-members of the euro zone	00
Summarising table	00
CHAPTER III: KNOWLEDGE, QUESTIONS, EXPECTATIONS AND FEARS RELATING TO THE EURO	00
III.1 The situation in the eleven Member Countries of the euro area	00
III.2 The situation in the four countries that are not members of the euro zone	00
Summarising tables	00
CHAPTER IV: THE EURO IN DAILY LIFE AFTER THE NATIONAL CURRENCIES DISAPPEAR	00
IV.1 Attitudes to the prospect of day-to-day life with the euro: Accuracy and nature of the concerns	00
IV.2 Planned approaches to adaptation	00
IV.3 Reactions to euro price simulations	00
IV.4 The prospect of the dual circulation period of the euro and the national currency	00
Summarising table	00
CHAPTER V: TRANSITION TOWARDS THE EURO	00
V.1 Attitudes to the transition period	00
V.2 Realisable expectations of disseminating information	00
V.3 Planned information and familiarisation resources	00
V.4 Reactions to possible initiatives for smoothing the transfer to the euro	00
Summarising table	00
CHAPTER VI: REACTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION INITIATIVE	00
CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSIONS	00
ANNEX I: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION OF GROUPS	00
ANNEX II: DISCUSSION GUIDES	00

CHAPTER I:
INTRODUCTION
OBJECTIVES
STUDY METHODOLOGY

- **This report presents out the outcomes of a study conducted, at the request of DG X and DG XXIV of the European Commission, by OPTEM and its partners in the group of qualitative studies agencies that hold the ‘Études qualitatives’ framework contract established by DG X (A-2).**

OPTEM was responsible for the design, analysis and synthesis of the study in collaboration with other leading institutes in the Group (PQR (Netherlands), Echanges Marktforschung (Germany) and Escario y Asociados (Spain)), which also carried out those parts of the survey that concerned their respective countries.

Field work in other Member Countries of the European Union was carried out by IGM (Austria), Yellow Window (Belgium and Luxembourg, in association with OPTEM), Vilstrup Research (Denmark), Marketing Radar (Finland), BVA (France), Focus (Greece), MRBI (Ireland), Market Dynamics International (Italy), Euroteste (Portugal), CRAM (United Kingdom) and Valuescope (Sweden).

- **The study sought to acquire a better understanding and knowledge of:**
 - ◆ what people in the sensitive population segments concerned know, and do not know, about the euro;
 - ◆ their sources and channels of information;
 - ◆ their attitudes to the euro project, and the extent to which they feel involved and affected;
 - ◆ the advantages and disadvantages of the introduction of the euro as perceived by these people, and the standpoints and positions from which they express their views (e.g. as consumers, as citizens with the same rights as all others, and as members of disadvantaged, vulnerable sections of the population);
 - ◆ how they look forward to the period after July 2002 when national currencies will have disappeared: for example, what problems and fears are there likely to be in which fields in respect of which actors, and what steps will be taken to change over to the cost of things in euros?
 - ◆ how they envisage the period of dual circulation of the euro and the national currency, and the transition period that is already under way in the 11 Member Countries of the euro zone; the aim will be to identify how the transition period might most effectively be used to raise awareness of the single currency, to provide information on it, and to enable people to change over as quickly as possibly;
 - ◆ the steps that might usefully be taken to make good shortfalls in information, allay fears, raise confidence and enable people to change over to the euro – and employing which actors and networks.
- **The study was carried out in all Member Countries of the European Union, including the four that have not yet adopted the euro.**

The Discussion Guide used for the eleven countries in the euro zone¹ is to be found in the Annex, together with a modified version for the other four countries².

- **It was based on two discussion groups in each country:**
- ◆ one of **elderly people** aged 65-75, in low and medium socio-professional categories³, and probably retired for at least five years⁴;
 - ◆ the other of **middle-aged people** (aged 30-45) **facing serious social and economic difficulties** including precarious or poorly paid jobs, unemployment, at least partial dependence on the social assistance from the state, and a low standard of education (secondary level at most, and usually not completed).

Measures were also taken to ensure that the groups included not only people living alone, but also people living in couples, the majority of whom had one or more children living at home.

The study covered citizens in each of the countries concerned.

In both cases, the groups contained very similar numbers of men and women.

At the request of DG XXIV, and with support from the European Blind Union, participants also included a blind or visually impaired person, thereby meeting the selection criteria described above (mostly in the Group of Elderly People).

The exact composition of the samples interviewed in each country is set out in the annex.

¹ In the French version.

² In English.

³ Blue- and white-collar staff, supervisory and skilled craft workers.

Also excluded from the remit of the study were people who had worked in the agriculture, commerce, financial services, accountancy, information technology, tax administration, and marketing, opinion poll and publicity surveys sectors, on the grounds that they were like to have 'atypical' professional knowledge of the euro.

⁴ This condition was applied to both spouses if both had worked.

CHAPTER II:
THE EURO AND EUROPE:
UNDERSTANDING THE PURPOSE
AND JOINING THE EURO PROJECT

II.1 BASIC ATTITUDES TO THE EURO IN THE ELEVEN MEMBER COUNTRIES OF THE EURO ZONE

As a recent study on the euro and European women has confirmed, attitudes to the single currency are not unrelated to more general attitudes to Europe and European integration; there are also similarities within various sub-groups in Member Countries.

We set out below a brief country-by-country overview organised by sub-groups.

2.1.1. South European countries that are beneficiaries of the cohesion policy, and belatedly 'qualifying' for the single currency

Italy

- Participants at both meetings were notable for **their clear perception of the euro as a key element in European unification; they support it**, and to a large extent even idealise it (particularly in the Group of Elderly People).

For Italy, Europe is a **key reference point**; her membership of the euro has considerable symbolic value and is a source of pride.

'It's always been my dream to be part of a united Europe.' (Group of Elderly People)

- Although they all know that 'the euro is coming', they display **quite considerable ignorance** on the subject; notwithstanding their overall support in principle, **considerable uncertainties and anxieties remain**, as we shall see in detail in due course.

Spain

- **Elderly Spaniards** hold positions that are close to those of Italian interviewees, in that they generally support a **project that holds out promise** and which, in their eyes, forms part of the broader picture of **the unification of Europe and its stronger position on the world stage**, particularly with regard to the United States.

'With the same currency, we Europeans will be able to rise to the challenge – otherwise we will be forever dominated by the Americans, their currency and their wealth.' (Group of Elderly People)

Membership of the euro is also a **factor of modernity** for Spain through its membership of Europe.

Anxieties exist against a background of a **varying standard of knowledge of the euro**, but on the whole they are minor.

- The situation is very different among **people with social and economic difficulties**, some of whom, like elderly people, see themselves as Spanish and European citizens who applaud the ideal of Community integration. However, most display **attitudes of rejection and distrust, or of indifference**, to a project that ‘goes straight over their heads’, was not designed for them, will only lead to complications, and could make their situation even worse.

‘Ordinary people like us – we have to put up with all sorts of things... But that’s life – you can’t do anything about it.’ (Group of Vulnerable People)

Portugal

- **Attitudes are generally favourable** to the euro project as a **factor in the strengthening of Europe** against world competition (mainly the United States), **in economic development in Europe (an a priori positive factor for Portugal)** and **in the bringing together** of European countries outside the field of economics.

‘So that Europe can become strong and fight the dollar and other currencies.’ (Group of Vulnerable People)

‘Having the same currency is almost like a way of communicating. Business transactions will get cheaper... that might benefit everyone in the end.’ (Group of Elderly People)

‘It’s communication with the rest of Europe. It’s cultural convergence. People can be different, but the currency remains the same.’ (Group of Elderly People)

The Portuguese view is that membership of the single currency is also **symbolic of the fact that the country has caught up** with more developed European countries. Although the catching up has been gradual and incomplete, it is nonetheless a positive ideal.

- Furthermore, as in Italy and Spain, there is little understanding of the euro, confusions are frequent, and **there are fears that people will not be able to adapt**, particularly among people in both groups with the lowest standard of education. **These fears rarely turn into anxiety.**

2.1.2 Ireland, a beneficiary country of the cohesion policy, and marked by very fast economic development and a traditionally stronger currency

- **Elderly people** recognise all the **virtues of a single currency** and of membership of the European Union; however, at a more personal and direct level, they also express **serious anxieties** about a process of which they know little and in which they hardly feel involved.

'It's a great move for Ireland; we become part of a larger picture and will benefit by being part of Europe.'

'It goes over our heads.'

- Nearly all vulnerable **people** are **too concerned with their own problems** to comprehend the euro as citizens aware of the single currency's collective benefits. For them, the euro is mainly an **additional source of uncertainty, and therefore of anxiety**.

'We'll lose out – the poorer people, because we can't afford a change.'

2.1.3 North European countries that are more developed economically and have a strong currency

France

- Attitudes among **elderly people** in France are marked by a **good understanding of the objective**, with the euro marking a stage in the positive process of European integration and in its strengthening with regard to the United States.

'It will give an impetus to the formation of Europe.' (Group of Elderly People)

'Bringing together European countries that have been fighting one another for the last 100 years.' (Group of Elderly People)

However, many of them **also** feel that the euro is a **world of complexity and constraints** that generates fears and attitudes of distrust of, and remoteness from, an imposed process in which they have played no part (despite the fact that, unlike people in the afore-mentioned countries, the French have a fairly good understanding of the main provisions of the process).

'We should have been asked for our opinion.' (Group of Elderly People)

'We're going to be taken for a ride – I'm telling you.' (Group of Elderly People)

- Among **vulnerable people** – they are *a priori* distrustful of any institution or change, and also very focused on their own difficulties – there is almost no perception of the purpose, **very considerable confusion** about an ill-understood process, **overwhelming anxiety**, and a strong propensity to behave as if 'they are onto a loser'.

'We do what we're told. We have no choice.' (Group of Vulnerable People)

'What I'd like to know is why they want a single currency at all. We've always managed with the franc in the past. I tell you: I'm going to be absolutely lost.' (Group of Vulnerable People)

'When you see that our currency is stronger and everything is going to be thrown together in a pot... that's why there are going to be winners and losers.' (Group of Vulnerable People)

Belgium

The attitudes of Belgians (in Flanders) who were interviewed are close to those of French people, although they divide into two groups:

- **elderly people who are spontaneously in favour of the euro project** (they have a fairly good understanding of the main elements of the introductory process) and **of the higher purpose of European integration, despite the fact that they sense there will be problems in adapting;**

'They should have done it years ago.' (Group of Elderly People)

'It's good to have a single currency so that we can compete with the dollar.' (Group of Elderly People)

- **vulnerable people**, who do not dismiss the positive idea of a great project (but which nonetheless remains abstract), who have a less secure understanding of the euro, and who, as far as the implications for their own situation are concerned, **mostly look upon its introduction with fatalism at best, and with distrust and anxiety at worst.**

'Whatever will be, will be.' (Group of Vulnerable People)

'Ordinary people will lose out.' (Group of Vulnerable People)

Luxembourg

In this traditionally Europhile country – it presents almost entirely as a frontier area and many people there are well used to 'juggling' various currencies – the euro prompts **mainly positive reactions in both groups:**

- **as a project that acts as a driving force for European unification**

'European integration.' (Group of Elderly People)

'A wonderful way of bringing countries together.' (Group of Elderly People)

'A natural follow-up to the unification of Europe.' (Group of Vulnerable People)

- as a **concrete factor which**, as far as consumers are concerned, **brings tangible, unequivocal benefits** that outweigh possible and vaguely feared disadvantages. Also as a factor in improving the lot of some people.

'The euro is an excellent idea – you can compare prices in all countries.'
(Group of Elderly People)

'The arrival of the euro will make life easier for shop-assistants because foreigners all speak with their currency – and shop-assistants always have to work it out.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Part-time shop-assistant)

They acknowledge that that there will be difficulties in adaptation, but **it is the view of all, or nearly all, that adaptation is controllable and does not generate anxiety.**

Germany

Participants in both groups exhibited **extremely negative attitudes to the euro.**

- **Elderly people lament giving up the Deutschmark:** for them, it was a symbol of the German recovery that their generation had achieved; it also had an identity value.

Doubts on the value of the new currency linger on (they have been reactivated by its recent performance against the dollar), and they are accompanied by a confused fear of seeing Germany 'paying' for countries that have traditionally weaker currencies.

'At the moment, the euro is losing ground to the dollar. And then, it'll get worse because we will have to pull the poor countries along after us.'
(Group of Elderly People)

- **The Deutschmark may not have the same emotional historic dimension for vulnerable people, but it is still an identity reference; as a factor that gives a sense of security, its loss would be lamented in a world whose rapid development is leaving them far behind.**

'I sometimes get the feeling I'm in a science fiction film. So many things have changed in the last 15 years – what with the explosion in computers and everything going so quickly. Sometimes, I get the feeling I'm a foreigner in my own country... When I realise I'm going to have euros instead of Deutschmarks in my purse, and I'm going to be walking past telephone boxes that don't have a 'T' on top...' (Group of Vulnerable People)

There is also an idea that **the introduction of the euro will be an expensive operation** that increases the debts and charges facing countries, and therefore their own particular difficulties.

'As far as I'm concerned, it can only mean debts, because we'll still have to pay for everything – destroying the old notes, printing new ones. It'll cost a fortune!' (Group of Vulnerable People)

'All countries have gone further into debt so as to meet the conditions for entering the euro, and our country has to pay off these debts, too.' (Group of Vulnerable People)

- Of course, that is not to say that German interviewees question the basis of the objectives (e.g. the setting up of an economic force that can compete with the United States, and economic stability that will foster employment and consumption); indeed, some - including the least old and best educated in each group - actually mention them and are not challenged. However, the fact that few people believe these objectives will be achieved, together with a sense of bitterness left by a process that took place at a remove from them, has **caused them to be inward-looking and focus on their personal fears.**

Netherlands

Nearly all the Dutch people interviewed displayed a very negative attitude to the euro.

There is no marked difference between the two groups or, for that matter (unlike Germany), between them and the women's groups that represent half of the population and were interviewed in an earlier study.

The 'sensitive' population segments under review here do not see themselves as such. **Against a backdrop of a fairly good understanding of the euro and the introductory process,** they believe they reflect the general view taken by their fellow citizens, and in fact, seem to do so very effectively.

The Dutch people interviewed were mainly notable for:

- **considerable distrust of the European Union, and of Community institutions** that are distant, extravagant and endowed with excessive powers, and which the euro will strengthen even further;

'I'm afraid it's going to be an additional stage on the road to a unified Europe and a kind of unity that determines everything that passes over their heads.' (Group of Vulnerable People)

- **an overall perception** (accentuated by this distrust) **of the project as something that has been imposed,** that was developed with no thought for citizens, and **which serves the interests of others** (e.g. the politico-economic establishment, large enterprises and the well-off);

'This project has been designed by people who do not care about ordinary people.' (Group of Elderly People)

- an inability to see things from the standpoint of citizens affected by possible benefits and by the single currency for Europe generally, and even their own countries, and (as consumers) **attitudes dominated by the perception that there are no substantial individual benefits;**
- a lack of confidence in the implications of introducing the euro (e.g. a fear of inflation, and a hazy suspicion that the process will benefit European countries that are economically weak).

'I trust the guilder. I've lived my whole life with the guilder, and things have gone all right. But with the euro, you never know.' (Group of Elderly People)

2.1.4 Countries in the euro zone that have recently joined the European Union

Austria

- **Elderly people see the euro as a logical and necessary consequence of their country's membership of the European Union; they do so without enthusiasm, but equally without displaying any real resistance or major fears.**

'We will all be a little more European.' (Group of Elderly People)

They see that it has validity for progress on European integration, and on possible positive implications for Austria, her economy and her enterprises; they do not think that runs counter to the interests of citizen consumers.

'Austria cannot be excluded from the euro.' (Group of Elderly People)

Austrians live in a country with a currency, the Schilling, that is traditionally strong, although only marginally so at international level. **They focus their queries both on the future robustness of the new currency, and on the cost of the move to the euro** 'which someone will have to pay for' – but they do so much less strongly than the Germans.

- **Vulnerable people** are, as well as being less well informed, **more uncertain and more anxious** about the implications of the euro, and concentrate mainly on the impact that the introduction could have on their own personal situations.

'I don't know whether the euro will serve a really useful economic purpose.' (Group of Vulnerable People)

'In two generations' time, people may have a better life if the euro goes well, but it won't make much difference to us, though.' (Group of Vulnerable People)

'As soon as the euro is properly introduced, we'll see the drawbacks.'
(Group of Vulnerable People)

However, they display no strong resistance to the introduction of the euro.

Finland

Reactions in both groups reflect **basically open attitudes to Europe, and to European integration**, of which the euro forms part of a **logical and important step**; there is a higher level of understanding, a clearer perception of the issues and, among elderly people, greater preparedness to take an interest.

Interviewees expect the euro to provide some personal benefits, but they also want to be seen **as citizens who are aware of the importance of the euro for Europe in general and for the country**. This is despite the fact that Finland is not one of the countries that initiated the project or took it forward, and that the euro could also create problems for her enterprises.

'A more competitive Europe with the euro, competing with the American dollar and the Japanese yen.' *(Group of Vulnerable People)*

'Guaranteed peace between European countries that used to be historical enemies.' *(Group of Elderly People)*

'It's important for Finland to cooperate with the major European countries, and take part in discussions.' *(Group of Elderly People)*

'Devaluation is no longer an option... companies will have to look at a lot of things in different ways.' *(Group of Elderly People)*

There are anxieties about complications brought about by the transfer to the euro, but they are only slight.

II.2 ATTITUDES TO THE EURO IN THE FOUR COUNTRIES THAT ARE NON-MEMBERS OF THE EURO ZONE

2.2.1 Greece

- In Greece which, like other countries in southern Europe, is a beneficiary of the cohesion policy, the positions of those interviewed on the euro are marked by **ambiguous perceptions and by a sense of the frustration they feel about the European Union in general**, and also by the lower status that they feel Greece enjoys by comparison with big countries, and with economically more developed countries to the north.
- This matter of perceptions mainly affects **elderly people**: they **support European integration, and the aims of the euro project**, which is consistent with it, but **the implications of these aims for Greece and Greek people elicit ambivalent responses**. They talk about monetary stability and sustained economic growth in Europe, but there is nonetheless a suspicion that the arrival of the euro will mainly benefit other countries.

'So that Europe can have a strong currency and compete in the United States and Japan.' (Group of Elderly People)

'So that we can have a single economic policy for the whole of Europe.' (Group of Elderly People)

However,

'When you get to my age, you've seen a lot. I know that the stronger European countries haven't always really supported us in the past. They look after their own interests.' (Group of Elderly People)

- **Vulnerable people** are so aware of what Greece has done to 'qualify' that they appear uncritical, but they have a **particularly low level of overall understanding of the euro**. This Greek inferiority complex is combined with a **feeling of exclusion from, and general scepticism about, any institution and any project**.

They are not expressing their views as Greek citizens compared with other Europeans, but **as an excluded sector of the population** compared with the well-off.

'The euro is supposed to be for everybody, but actually it was created for those who own capital. The gap between the very poor and the very rich is widening.' (Group of Vulnerable People)

Arguments in favour of the euro are not ignored, but they remain totally abstract as far as vulnerable people are concerned; they think they are unlikely to be affected.

2.2.2 Denmark and Sweden

- Neither of these countries has decided to adopt the euro despite meeting the conditions for transferring to the single currency; **their general attitudes to the European Union are marked by distrust**. They both display somewhat similar reactions, at least in the Groups of Vulnerable People.
- **They can picture the positive aspects of the euro** (e.g. stability, a halt to monetary speculation in Denmark, and benefits for enterprises) **but, given their poor understanding of provisions relating to the single currency, they have difficulty in seeing how these aspects could affect them personally; as a result, their uncertainties turn into anxieties.**

Moreover, in the groups in both countries, these anxieties are reinforced by a predominantly anti-Europe subjectivity, allied to a suspicion that the euro is **a factor in strengthening Community government: this is perceived as somewhat totalitarian, and threatening in respect of specific national features** (including the social state) to which interviewees are strongly attached.

'I haven't got a view on the euro, but if you want to know what I think right now, I'm against it.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Denmark)

'It's something I view with suspicion.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Sweden)

'For those of us who rely on social assistance, it won't give us any more money – or a job.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Denmark)

'There are already cuts in public services so that they can meet the objectives of the European Union.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Sweden)

'Eventually everything will be run by Brussels. The weakest will be eliminated.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Denmark)

'It makes no difference what we think – the decisions have already been taken by the European Parliament.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Sweden)

'It's the politicians who want to create larger entities. It goes straight over the heads of ordinary people.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Sweden)

- There is a difference of opinion between **elderly people** in **Denmark and Sweden**.

The **former** admit to being **uncertain, and sometimes sceptical**, about the single currency: they understand little about the implications, and are worried about the impact it might have on the Danish identity and sovereignty. **However**, they are **more prepared to picture benefits both for the country's economy and for themselves**, and they display a **favourable awareness of the ideal of European unity**; the latter is linked to their age and history.

'Apart from what it does for exports, it's also good for us because we travel a lot, and it will be much easier if we have the same money.' (Group of Elderly People – Denmark)

'I'm all for a united Europe. Particularly when you've been through a war... [the European Union] is one of the reasons why we've had peace for so many years.' (Group of Elderly People – Denmark)

Elderly **Swedish** interviewees, too, are very uncertain about the impact of the euro. They articulate the same doubts as their Danish counterparts, and express concerns about the danger of the dissipation of Swedish identity, of which the krona is a symbol. Like the Danes, they consider the possibility of benefits for the country and for citizens; however, this is **based on a more disillusioned view** linked to a widespread feeling in their country that elderly people enjoy low status.

'There will be less danger of war if we have the same currency.' (Group of Elderly People – Sweden)

'One of the aims of the single currency might be more stability.' (Group of Elderly People – Sweden)

'A small country like Sweden will not have a strong voice in the European Union.' (Group of Elderly People – Sweden)

'What with computers and the Internet, young people have got a head start. Old and retired people can't afford these things and don't know how to use them. And in Sweden they're closing the post offices that we use.' (Group of Elderly People – Sweden)

2.2.3 United Kingdom

Participants in both groups presented broadly similar attitudes.

- Spontaneous reactions were marked both by a form of **Euroscepticism** (a clear majority view among the elderly, and very

common among vulnerable people) that extended to overt Europhobia and chauvinism, and by **a strong attachment to national sovereignty that is threatened** by ‘bureaucrats in Brussels’ or by ‘Germany pulling strings behind the scenes’.

‘It’s an open ticket to foreigners. They’ll take jobs away from English people, and take advantage of our National Health Service.’

‘Britain is always the first country to rescue people, but no one in Europe reserves us.’

‘We’ll just be a small cog in a bigger wheel. I’m proud to be British.’

- In such a climate, and given **an almost total lack of understanding of the single currency**, the idea of the United Kingdom adopting the euro prompts **wide-ranging questions and anxieties**: they concern its implications for day-to-day living, and people’s personal situations (e.g. fears of inflation, of the value of money falling, of the consequences for employment, salaries and pensions, of a fall in the standard of living, and of pressure on the system of social protection).

The failure of the government to adopt a clear position and differences of opinion between experts contribute to uncertainties and doubts.

‘Our own government seems to agree, so how could we know whether the euro is a good thing or not?’

- Like the women who were studied earlier, representatives of these ‘sensitive’ population segments **can see how the euro brings advantages for commerce and enterprises, but they do not immediately identify the benefits that could affect them; in fact, their reaction is sometimes quite the opposite.**

‘Business fat cats will get richer, while the poor will get poorer.’

- However, as the discussions took shape, and under the influence of a few Europhiles (or, at least, Euroneutrals), it was observed that **participants began to be aware of those concrete benefits of the euro** (and even of Europe) that might affect them; they included economic development, strengthening European countries to enable them to confront the United States, the peace factor, lower taxes and interest rates, a gradual alignment of social systems to continental systems seen as more generous, and greater ease of travelling.

'Pensions are lowest in England. If we join with Germany, perhaps we will get the same level of pensions that German people get.'

This change in the starting-points was observed **mainly in elderly people, some of whom tacitly fear that the United Kingdom will be isolated and 'miss the boat'**. Although vulnerable people are more prey to scepticism and their ghetto psychology, they are not all totally impervious.

BASIC ATTITUDES TO THE EURO PROJECT:

TABLE SUMMARISING INTERVIEWEES'

MAIN DIMENSIONS OF PERCEPTION

	Elderly people	Vulnerable people
The euro project as the bearer of the European ideal	++ I, E, P, L + F, B, SF (+) IRL, A, GR, DK, S	++ I, L + P (+) E, B, SF
The euro factor in strengthening Europe on the world stage	++ E, P + I, F, B, A, SF, GR (+) D	++ P + I (+) E, D, SF
The euro factor in the loss of sovereignty and identity	-- NL, GB - D, DK, S (-)	-- NL, DK, S, GB - D (-)
Joining the euro as a symbol of modernity for the country	++ I, E, P + GR (+) IRL, SF	++ I, P + (+) SF, GR
The euro bringing the country macro-economic benefits	++ P + I, E, IRL, A, SF, GR, DK (+) F, B, L, D, S, GB	++ I, P, SF + E, F, B, L, D, A, GR, DK, S, GB
The euro introducing the danger of negative economic effects to the country's detriment	-- NL - D, GR, GB (-) A, SF	-- D, NL, GB - A, GR (-) F
The euro bringing citizens concrete benefits	++ L + P, DK (+) I, E, A, SF, GR, S, GB ?	++ L + P (+) I, SF, GB ?
The euro as a factor in accentuating inequalities	-- - S, GB (-)	-- E, IRL, F, GR, GB - B, D, DK, S (-) A
The euro as a factor of complexity, uncertainty and anxiety	-- IRL, GB - F, D, NL, GR, S (-) I, E, P, B, L, A, SF, DK	-- E, IRL, F, GB - P, B, D, NL, GR, DK, S (-) I, L, A, SF

CHAPTER III
KNOWLEDGE, QUESTIONS,
EXPECTATION AND FEARS
RELATING TO THE EURO

III.1 THE SITUATION IN THE ELEVEN MEMBER COUNTRIES OF THE EURO ZONE

3.1.1 Italy, Spain and Portugal

Italy

Reference has already been made to the existence of very positive basic attitudes to the euro project in both groups, albeit in a **context of uncertain understanding**.

- Briefly, **Italian interviewees appear to have understood the principle and the logic of the process well** (the single currency will eventually replace the lira and other national currencies following a staged introduction), **but they have a poor understanding of how it will happen.**
 - Only half the people know the value of the euro to a relatively accurate order of magnitude (approximately 2000 lire).
 - The content of the various stages is blurred.
 - Many people are unaware of the date for the introduction of euro notes and coins, and how the national currency will be replaced.
- Their **sources of information** on the euro include:
 - the news media: mainly television (general information programmes, special short information broadcasts, commercials, and games in which winnings are expressed in both lire and euros) – but also the press;
 - dual indication of lire and euros of such matters as bank documentation, public service bills and pensions;
 - Community action that they hear is provided by some local authorities, although they are adamant that it has not happened yet where they live (i.e. in Milan);
 - the provision of certain ‘gadgets’ (e.g. conversion calculators in shops) by certain commercial enterprises;
 - word-of-mouth advice from family members or friends and acquaintances.

These sources are fairly well identified and known, but **the content of the information put out is widely criticised**: for example, short public information broadcasts that are unappealing, lack clarity, try to pack in too much detail in the time available (30 seconds) and

use complicated, technical language; free floppy disks as inserts in 'Il Corriere della Sera' but which most people find unusable; and (in Milan at least) an absence of back-up information.

- **The euro's perceived advantages combine non-conflicting macro-economic aspects and potential benefits for citizens:**
 - economic (not to say political) stability, with Europe and the euro forcing Italy to adopt a more rigorous approach;
 - economic development and job creation;
 - stable prices;
 - price harmonisation in Europe, and hopes of lower prices on some products in Italy;
 - harmonisation of pensions (Group of Elderly People);
 - harmonisation of interest rates (Group of Elderly Persons);
 - journeys to other parts of Europe made easier because it is no longer necessary to change currency.
- **Perceived disadvantages and fears** operate essentially at two levels:
 - **expectations aroused by the euro remain a dead letter** with regard to the retention of bank commission, and particularly the harmonisation that is expected to benefit ordinary people;

'What about bringing in new social laws and keeping prices the same? Prices keep going up – things are just as they were.'
(Group of Vulnerable People)
 - the process of transferring to the euro involves **no overcharging, short-changing or speculation** (these particular fears were mainly articulated by elderly people);

'They're already short-changing you with lire – just imagine what it will be like with the euro.' *(Group of Elderly People)*

Spain

- The level of Spanish people's understanding of the euro is fairly similar to that of Italians, that is to say they have a **clear perception of the fact that the euro will eventually replace the peseta, and a fairly general understanding of the euro's order of magnitude, but they are confused about dates and how the transition will take place.**

- **Their sources of information include:**
 - the news media, including television (but with poor recall of what is said);
 - dual display of prices in shops, and on public service bills and bank statements;
 - banks (through information that they sometimes send out);
 - information support systems for elderly people (e.g. third age clubs and parish associations).

On the one hand, this information is **too vague and inadequate**; on the other, one is surprised and concerned by the **impression that information has dried up** following an initial, and somewhat triumphalist, period surrounding the euro's arrival; this surge has now subsided, and the euro continues to be an abstraction.

- **The advantages of the euro were referred to:**
 - **by elderly people in macro-economic terms, together with a sort of credo of eventual positive consequences for people's lives, but with no firm expectations of concrete personal benefits:**

'We probably won't see the fruits, but maybe our children and grandchildren...' (Group of Elderly People)

- **by vulnerable people, most of whom see it as something that has nothing to do with them, and from which they cannot benefit:**

'I think the euro is just for them, for multinationals doing business – for them it will be easier not to have to change currency. If I go and buy something, it'll cost a fortune just as it does now. What difference does it make if it's in pounds, francs or whatever? It'll still cost the same.' (Group of Vulnerable People)

Some of these people appear to have been seduced by the **positive lure of harmonisation; they are now disenchanted, and view it with a degree of bitterness.**

'When I first heard of the euro, I was really pleased because I thought it would even things up – so if a German worker earns

five euros an hour, a Spanish worker gets the same.’ (Group of Vulnerable People)

- **Perceived disadvantages and fears** relate to:
 - **the danger for vulnerable people**, in the absence of personal benefits, **that the gaps between rich and poor will get wider**;
 - **difficulties**, anticipated **mainly by elderly people**, in **getting used to the new currency**, and in working out new personal price references;
 - **the fear** (expressed in both groups) **of being overcharged and short-changed** when the notes and coins are introduced. Vulnerable people in particular refer to the way dishonest retailers round off prices.

‘If they round up the price of bread, fruit and vegetables – things you buy every day... we’re talking here about people who can’t make ends meet. If that’s the way things go, people with money will do well out of it – we won’t.’ (Group of Vulnerable People)

Portugal

- **Information** of the euro among Portuguese people interviewed **is variable**:
 - **generally good on the principles** (a single currency that will replace national currencies), although not everyone knows that the conversion rate is already irrevocably fixed;
 - **variable on the value of the euro** in escudos: generally good among elderly people, particularly men; poor among vulnerable people;
 - **uneven on implementation and dates (both key processes)**: people often know about a three-year transition period, but very few clearly know the date of introducing notes and coins in euros, and not everyone know about the dual circulation period that follows.
- **Quoted sources of information** are mainly:
 - the news media: people have assimilated information from television and the press passively; it was unevenly understood and assimilated. There was also frequent criticism of **excessive complexity** and of language ‘that is not aimed at simple people like me’;

- dual indication of prices and totals (e.g. products in supermarkets, banking operations, salaries and other payments); not everyone seemed to be aware of this.
- **The euro's perceived advantages are mainly linked to expected macro-economic benefits for the country and for enterprises, and with no conflict between their interests and those of people in general (i.e. including the people interviewed).**

'More wealth will be produced in our country.' (Group of Elderly People)

The importance of tourism to the Portuguese economy may make the **positive effect of monetary unification** a more concrete factor than in other countries; several interviewees made this point spontaneously.

- Another advantage concerns the **greater ease with which people will be able to travel** around Europe.

'It will be easier to travel from Portugal to other countries.' (Group of Elderly People)

Even if they themselves do not directly benefit, they do not feel excluded. Portugal was only recently a country of emigration, and this may suggest that greater ease of movement is not a factor that only benefits the better-off.

- The ideas of some interviewees with socio-economic difficulties include **somewhat imaginary hopes for a general harmonisation of prices and incomes in Europe**, although these are **tempered** by realism and by an awareness of the necessarily progressive nature of economic catch-up.

'It would be good if they could work out a single wage.' (Group of Vulnerable People)

- **Perceived disadvantages and fears are rarely focused on the principle; they mainly refer to anticipated difficulties linked to the physical transfer to the euro. They include:**
 - **an initial loss of personal price references;**
 - **the need to get used to new notes and coins;**
 - **fears that small retailers will short-change them** by rounding up prices, and in other ways.

However, these fears are **relatively slight**.

'There will be great confusion at the beginning, but as time passes we'll slowly get used to it.' (Group of Vulnerable People)

'As soon as you get the money in your hands, you will count it exactly as you do with the escudo now.' (Group of Elderly People)

3.1.2 Ireland

- Irish people's **understanding** of the euro is **extremely poor and confused**:

- **ignorance almost everywhere about the value of the euro** in the national currency, or even its approximate order of magnitude;

- **a misunderstanding among many people of how the conversion mechanism will work**;

'It's confusing that the rates are all different. We thought it was going to be the same everywhere.' (Group of Elderly People)

'They say it's the same value everywhere, but then the currencies are different between them.' (Group of Vulnerable People)

- **an incomplete knowledge of the stages and key dates of the introduction process**; this remains **abstract** and still a long way off.

- Their **sources of information** are, as elsewhere:

- the news media (i.e. television, newspapers, and radio (for elderly people));

- references to prices in euros and Irish punt (pounds) in shop displays, statements and bills (not often mentioned, particularly not by vulnerable people);

for some people with no basic price reference, this can reinforce the sense of insecurity;

- seeing converter calculators in some post offices and banks;

- word-of-mouth advice that clearly spreads alarmist fears and rumours, and **the absence of clear, comprehensible information aimed at these people**.

'It goes over our heads.' (Group of Elderly People)

- The issue of the euro's **possible benefits** arouses the following reactions:
 - **effects** that are perceived as **positive for Irish enterprises, exports and the economy**: they are often **acknowledged by elderly people**, but for **vulnerable people**, who rarely identify the impact it could have on their own situations, **they are very theoretical**;
 - **hopes** expressed in both groups for **lower prices on imported goods** (they are thought to be higher in Ireland than elsewhere);
 - sometimes also **uncertain and confused hopes for a move to harmonise pensions**, or bring them closer together;
 - **making travelling easier** (this only makes any concrete sense for **elderly people** planning foreign holidays)
- The issue of **disadvantages** prompts a spontaneous outpouring of **irrational fears of all kinds focusing on basic questions and on problems relating to the transition to a new currency**:
 - **basic questions**: vulnerable people and some elderly people feel **the kind of anxiety that all people on the breadline feel about any change**. Their survival is sufficiently threatened by the negative effects of these changes for their attention to be exclusively focused on the possibility that they could actually happen (whether this is 'rationally' likely or not).

Fears refer equally to reductions in pensions, social benefits and incomes from their modest savings, and to increases in mortgage credit payments and prices in general. As with decimalisation, a time that many remember, they assume that 'they are going to be done';

'As usual, the less well-off will suffer most, the euro being in won't change that.' (Group of Elderly People)

'The people who will benefit from the euro will be those who have money, not us. It will cost us more.' (Group of Vulnerable People)

 - **problems relating to transition**: these include **losing price references and the fear of being the victims** of retailers who 'will be able to put up prices without you even realising', of banks (which are distrusted in this country) and of any institution, including the state.

3.1.3 France, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands

France

- French interviewees fall into two groups that are **relatively well informed on the main provisions of the euro**, including its status (as a single currency that will take the place of the national currency), its value in francs (understood by all or nearly all to be 6.65 francs, sometimes to further decimal points), the irrevocable nature of the conversion, the existence and dates (with very few areas of uncertainty) of the transition period, and the anticipated six-month period when the two currencies will co-exist.

They also know that it will be possible to do such things as have cheques and make payments in euros, although this is more symbolic than a concrete reality at the moment.

However, some vulnerable people are less well informed on the euro.

- Their **sources of information** are **varied** and, in each case, **copious** (as result of a massive dissemination of information by all actors concerned):
 - television (including broadcasts with high viewer-ratings like the Christine Bravo programme) is the main medium, and much more so than the press, which is little read by these target groups;
 - financial institutions, banks and the post office, all of them major providers of information and energetic disseminators of information brochures and pamphlets: these reinforce, yet obfuscate – or else are confused with – similar documents distributed by the state;
 - the widespread and long-established practice of posting both prices in department stores (as prices of things in euros were not already established in people's minds, this undeniably advertised the arrival of the euro), and conversion boards in the same shops;
 - similarly, dual indication of prices on bank documentation, pay and pension statements, rent receipts from low-cost housing agencies, and bills;
 - children (who do 'sums in euros' in class).

There appear to be no substantial differences between these two groups.

- The **benefits** of the euro include:
 - **(among elderly people)** an awareness – as we saw earlier – of a **positive impact at a macro-economic level**: this means simplifying trade, thereby making things easier for enterprises and banks; it is therefore a factor of economic upturn, and may benefit employment,

but it also generally highlights the absence of a perception of tangible benefits for citizens;

- **(among vulnerable people)** the abstract nature of the macro-economic advantages for many of them, and a feeling that they are not affected by the concrete benefits that may exist for others.

'I never travel anywhere, so as far as I'm concerned...' (Group of Vulnerable People)

- The issue of **disadvantages and fears** prompts the following reactions:

- they are **mainly centred on the perceived prospect of, and problems associated with, transition** to the euro: these include losing price references, confusion about the number of decimal points, a complete misunderstanding of the implications for rounding off prices in euros and cents, and fears of dishonesty on the part of small retailers;

'That worries us, because after the comma you've got several figures. What do they all mean? We might just lose them, mightn't we?' (Group of Vulnerable People)

'When you see the differences in price in shops, and you see the price in francs and euros, it's cheaper in euros than in francs. I think we're losing money.' (Group of Elderly People)

- **secondly**, they focus on the **danger of aggravating the exclusion of people who have been disadvantaged** by their financial position, age or standard of education, and who will find it hard to embrace a change they see as threatening.

'Really, I won't know whether I'm coming or going.' (Group of Vulnerable People)

Belgium

- Participants in the Belgian groups similarly displayed a **correct understanding of basic details relating to the euro**:
 - a conversion rate with full decimal points known by most elderly people, and at least the correct order of magnitude (BEF 40) known by vulnerable people (who do not see the point of decimal points);
 - a transition period known perfectly by elderly people, and sometimes known by others together with uncertainties relating to the date when it finishes;

- the fact that it is already possible to transfer money in euros, and that European stock exchanges have moved over to the euro;
 - the existence of a dual circulation period following the introduction of notes and coins in euros;
 - the values of the various notes and coins (elderly people);
 - the fact that coins have a national identity side (and, some think incorrectly, that notes also have one).
- **Their main sources of information** have been:
 - television (including French channels) and – more so than in France – newspapers and magazines (elderly people);
 - banks;
 - sales points in chain stores (dual display of prices);
 - word-of-mouth advice, whereby some people had come to hear of such things as a ‘euro desk’ in Antwerp and an announcement by the state that it intends to distribute calculators.
 - **The observed advantages of the euro are mainly macro-economic benefits for Europe and Belgium. Elderly people** have no difficulty in seeing that it will naturally benefit them, although they are not very sure about how. By contrast, only **some economically disadvantaged people** see possible concrete benefits for themselves as consumers (for example, because it will be easier to compare prices in other countries, and a hope that greater transparency will trigger greater competitive pressure).
 - **Perceived disadvantaged and fears** relate to:
 - **problems linked to transition:** these include ways of doing business, the danger of confusion associated with the existence of national identity sides on coins, getting used to new currency and the possibility of being short-changed;

It is notable that elderly people only refer to the ‘technical’ problems of getting used to the euro and of doing business, and have no observable basic anxieties, while vulnerable people display fears that are both more confused and more varied;
 - **a poorly articulated anxiety of the unknown on the part of vulnerable people.**

‘There is theory, but the reality may be different.’ (Group of Vulnerable People)

'There is the risk of bigger disagreements in a broader system.'
(Group of Vulnerable People)

Luxembourg

- Luxembourg citizens in both groups display the same **good understanding** (as Belgians) **of the main provisions relating to the euro**: this includes a single currency replacing the national currency, the exact value of the euro in Luxembourg francs, a timetable for the transition period and the dual circulation period, the fact that it is already quite possible to carry out transactions in euros, and the disappearance of currency exchange.
- The **sources of information** they refer to are:
 - the news media (news flashes on television and radio);
 - banks (of which there are many in this country);
 - department stores (systematic dual display of prices);
 - the marking of prices in both currencies on many documents (e.g. statements, bills and reports);
 - public authorities clearly identified as such by their direct involvement in providing information (e.g. distributing a very comprehensive Euro Guide to all homes, brochures containing photographs of notes and coins, an announcement that a representation of the Grand Duke will appear on the reverse of Luxembourg euros, and the free distribution of calculators to all homes);
 - other sources.

These additional sources are **numerous and take many forms**. Even where the information has not necessarily been digested and retained, it has substantiated and consolidated the idea that the process has been planned and is under control; people expressed very little spontaneous dissatisfaction.

- Apart from the Europhile credo of macro-economic benefits, the euro's perceived **advantages are concrete**:
 - **easier to travel and make purchases abroad** (a comment frequently made by Luxembourg citizens);
 - **reduced exchange rate charges** (pending their anticipated withdrawal) and – a small but important detail – an end to the loss incurred when one used to return from trips abroad and could not change small denomination coins;

- easier to **compare prices** in Luxembourg and nearby neighbouring countries, and thereby benefit consumers;

'Car insurance will cost less because cheaper foreign insurance companies will compete with Luxembourg firms.' (Group of Vulnerable People)

- **making business easier for Luxembourg retailers**, who will no longer have juggle with all the currencies they are given every day.
- **Disadvantages and fears** take two forms:
 - **moderate fears relating to problems of transition**: these include getting used to a new point of reference (and the existence of centimes that were last used in Luxembourg many years ago) and the opportunity during the early stages for small retailers to short-change;
 - **more concrete fears among some people of the harmonising effects of European integration, despite the fact that it has been acclaimed as positive in principle**: these include the downward harmonisation of Luxembourg salaries and social benefits, the relocation of Luxembourg enterprises from the other side of the frontier, and an irrational fear of price rises. These fears are natural in a small country that will lose specific features as it is incorporated into a large unit, but they do not amount to positive anxiety.

Germany

- **Knowledge** of the euro among interviewees in Germany was **quite good**, but slightly less secure than in the three north European countries referred to above:
 - the status of the single currency replacing the Deutschmark is clearly understood, but **the irrevocability of the conversion rate is not clear in some people's minds** (it is associated with a confusion about fluctuations in the value of the euro against the dollar);

'The rate of exchange has not yet been fixed for good – it can vary.'
(Group Elderly People)
 - the conversion rate of the euro is sometimes known to the final decimal point by elderly people, as is the correct order of magnitude by people suffering socio-economic hardship (1 euro = 2 DM);
 - an understanding of the transition period is accompanied by a degree of uncertainty about the date marking the end of this period, when notes and coins in euros will be introduced (2001 or 2002?), and when the dual circulation period – which, as we shall see, itself prompts a number of questions – will end;

- there is uncertainty about that what can be done with the euro during the transition period (e.g. whether it is possible to make payments or not);
- people know, or think they know, the values of the various notes and coins; it is also understood that the euro will be sub-divided (despite the fact that the word 'cent' is not familiar to all), but generally speaking people have not been exposed to the issue of notes and coins; the idea that coins will have a national identity side prompts incredulity and incomprehension.
- **Sources of information** are:
 - the news media, the most important of which (by contrast with many countries) is the press;
 - banks (notices and brochures);
 - dual display of prices in shops, and dual indication of costs on bank statements and other financial documentation;
 - Community information campaigns (referred to not only by the blind participant, and also by other people who had seen a travelling exhibition in one of the main squares in Cologne).

This information leads to frustration both because of the content and, reflecting the consistently abstract nature of a euro that no one can actually touch, **because of the impression that information has dried up since the massive campaign at the end of 1998.**

'When it came round to the elections, they bombarded us with political arguments to persuade us it was a good thing. What we don't have is hard information that can be understood by the man in the street.' (Group of Vulnerable People)

- The **advantages** of the euro referred to by participants are **mainly macro-economic**, for example a possible impact on employment and a halt to relocation. **On a more personal level**, they include:
 - the fact that it is **no longer necessary to change currency** (for **retired people** holidaying in Spain);
 - **more transparent prices**, making comparisons easier, and opening up the possibility of finding bargains: in Spain when on holiday, and in Luxembourg and the Netherlands when buying petrol and tobacco (for people suffering socio-economic hardship);
 - a (possibly illusory) **hope of lower prices on goods as a result of competition.**

In other words, the advantages are relatively specific and uncertain.

- They also find the **negative aspects** of the euro difficult to comprehend; they tacitly fear:
 - **price rises on goods and services** arising out of tax increases that everyone thinks are inevitable to pay for both joining the euro (increases in VAT and the price of petrol) and Germany's contribution to the Community budget;
 - **an eventual downward harmonisation** affecting salaries and pensions;
 - disagreements on economic and monetary policy as factors of uncertainty and instability.

'I have some savings. I hope nothing will happen to them.' (Group of Elderly People)

This is not so much a matter of the certainty of negative effects as of **anxieties**, but they are based on the distrust that has already been referred to in respect of the euro and its introduction. These anxieties cause people, particularly vulnerable people, to keep their concerns to themselves and have feelings of resignation.

'For the time being I'm just keeping my feelings to myself – I don't think about them. When I hear that the stock market is down, or the dollar is rising or the euro is falling, I get a bit worried, but for the time being, I'm not bothered.' (Group of Vulnerable People)

'It's going to happen anyway – that's why I'm just waiting. I have no special fears or hopes.' (Group of Vulnerable People)

Lastly, **even though joining the euro prompts certain fears** (for example of 'endless calculations' and of unscrupulous retailers 'massaging' prices up a few cents) **they are not the most acute**, although the simplicity of the rounded-off conversion (factor of 2) rate is undoubtedly a serious matter for many.

Netherlands

- There is **quite a good understanding** of the euro in respect of:
 - its status (the single currency that will eventually replace the florin);
 - its approximate value (close to the exact value of 2.20 guilders), although, as in Germany, **there continue to be uncertainties about what the final conversion rate will be;**

- the timetable for the transition period and the date for introducing notes and coins on 1 January 2002;
 - the existence of a transition period, although people think it is much shorter (a few weeks) than the six months provided for under the Treaty;
 - the existence of certain transactions in euros as of now (Stock Exchange);
 - less clearly, the issue of notes and coins, which some people 'have seen on television'; all noted that a representation of the queen will appear on coins struck in the Netherlands, but with the inscription 'Dieu avec nous' (God with us). By contrast, there is much uncertainty about the values of the various euro notes and euro coins (or cents).
- **Sources of information** referred to by interviewees include:
 - television and (particularly regional) newspapers;
 - banks, through their brochures, and dual indication of sums of money on statements;
 - publicity handouts that give prices in euros;
 - certain supermarkets (one chain in particular displays its prices in both currencies).

These sources of information have clearly given Dutch people an **understanding of the basic features of the euro**, but they do not exhibit the high level of awareness to be found, for example, in France and Luxembourg.

- **The euro's perceived advantages only just extend beyond the macro-economic field, and include the perception of personal benefits** – if only the fact that people who travel in Europe no longer need to change currency (although that only affects the 'well-off').
- **There is a much more limited perception of disadvantages** associated with the euro; this is compounded by the opposition and distrust already referred to in connection with the project's principle:
 - an ill-defined fear of paying 'for others';
 - fears of currency instability and inflation;
 - fears of the effects of rounding off prices;

- fears of difficulties in certain sectors (for example, banks will have to adapt, and will need fewer staff following the abolition of currency exchange and commission);
- anxieties relating to difficulties of adaptation and the problems of transition.

Existing fears are closely linked to deep, fundamental concerns about the validity of the euro project in principle, but they do not have any concrete foundation.

3.1.4 Austria and Finland

Austria

- **Elderly people have quite a good understanding** of the main features of the euro. They understand very clearly that the single currency is going to replace the national currency, they know the irrevocable value of the euro (often exactly), they know the main components of the timetable for transition, and they are aware that they can carry out certain transactions in euros before notes and coins are introduced on 1 January 2002.

Vulnerable people have a less good understanding, for example, of the value of the euro (usually rounded off at 13 Schillings) and, particularly, of the irrevocable nature of the rate of conversion.

Many have no understanding at all of the effects of the single currency.

'How can a litre of milk cost the same in Italy and Austria?' (Group of Vulnerable People)

- **Sources of information** are varied. They include:
 - the news media (i.e. television and, for elderly people, newspapers in which articles on economic affairs often refer to euros);
 - banks (by disseminating general information and, in the case of certain banks, giving customers calculators and conversion cards);
 - dual display of prices in shops;
 - games with prices given in euros;
 - occasionally (for elderly people) meetings in third age clubs organised by a bank.

The information that is given out **causes no major dissatisfaction** among elderly people, **despite the fact that it is often considered too theoretical** and sadly lacks examples of what the notes and coins will look

like. Vulnerable people are more dissatisfied, more worried, and more eager for practical, concrete information.

- As we have seen, the presumed **benefits** of the euro in the **macro-economic field** are **widely acknowledged by elderly people**, notwithstanding a few concerns about its solidity; however, they rarely refer to them spontaneously as **direct benefits** for people.

Vulnerable people keep their anxieties more to themselves; they do not deny **the macro-economic benefits although, as far as they are concerned, these continue to be very abstract**, and have little impact on their personal lives.

The only concrete advantage referred to by participants in the two groups was that travelling will become easier, because there will no longer be any need to change currency – although this did not directly affect many of them. Elderly people also expressed the view that the euro will be more easily accepted in far-off foreign countries than the Schilling, the little-known currency of a small country.

- With regard to the **disadvantages** and **fears** associated with the introduction of the euro:
 - **elderly people have**, as we have seen, **questions about the euro's robustness** that re-awaken old inflationary fears; they also think that costs incurred by banks and companies while transferring to the euro 'will no doubt be passed on to the consumer'.

Their fears focus on **transition and adaptation to a new currency** (e.g. deciding on new personal price references, and distrust of the effects of rounding-off), but they are relatively mild.

- **Vulnerable people have more confused fears**. These mainly concentrate on the likely problems of transition (the possibility of being short-changed), but undoubtedly reflect a deeper anxiety linked to their general difficulties.

Finland

- The two groups interviewed displayed a **very similar understanding of the euro and its introduction**, in respect of its status (replacing the national currency), its value (nearly everyone thought it was approximately six Finnish marks), the transition period (frequent confusion about how long it will last and the date for introducing notes and coins), and the existence of a dual circulation period.

Some (better educated) people added that it is already possible to carry out transactions in euros.

By contrast, they knew little about the values of the various notes and coins, or of what they will look like, although some had seen a photo.

'I don't know whether there is any information about it, or if the colours or values have already been decided. I know absolutely nothing about it.'
(Group of Elderly People)

- **Sources of information** on the euro were also more or less the same for both groups:
 - the news media (television and newspapers);
 - banks (through information booklets, the indication of sums of money in euros on statements, and (individual) gifts of small calculators);
 - the dual display of prices in shops (apparently not yet everywhere, but acknowledged as a useful, concrete measure) and the dual indication of costs on receipts, bills and other paperwork;
 - 'mystery shopping in euros' games in a local third age club (mentioned by an elderly person).

These sources of information give rise to **little dissatisfaction** at this stage.

- The euro's perceived **advantages** are **generally macro-economic, and are linked to mainly positive expectations regarding the project in principle** (e.g. stabilisation of the economy, and opportunities for business). **However, nothing very clear emerged with regard to the implications for citizens as ordinary consumers**, except that it will be easier to travel and make purchases in other European countries. It is notable that expectations of lower prices deriving from more transparent competition are rarely expressed.
- The **disadvantages** and **fears** focus mainly on the **problems likely to arise out of the transition** (e.g. the need to adapt and set up new personal price references for the euro, and possible confusion about the notes and coins for customers and retailers alike), **but there is no real concern**.

'We'll muddle through, as we did before.' (Group of Elderly People)

Some elderly people also queried how harmonious cooperation will be maintained between states joining the single currency.

III.2 THE SITUATION IN THE FOUR COUNTRIES THAT ARE NON-MEMBERS OF THE EURO ZONE

3.2.1 Greece

- **It is known that the euro is the ‘unified’ currency of the countries of the European Union**, and that Greece is striving to join, but often there is no information on such matters as where other countries stand, which of them have already adopted it, and whether the conversion rates are irrevocably fixed.

Similarly, it is not generally known **whether the drachma will eventually disappear completely or not.**

Few people (mainly men) know the value of the euro in drachmas, and little was known about how the move to the euro, and the timetable, will work.

- **Sources of information are specific and limited:** they include reports on the general debate on the subject on television (and occasionally in newspapers and on the radio), some pamphlets provided by banks, general word-of-mouth advice, and a wide range of other sources.

Many people find this information **complex and difficult to understand, and beyond their scope.**

‘They use a strange language, and they talk about everything so quickly I can’t keep up.’ (Group of Elderly People)

‘I can’t afford a newspaper, except once a week to look at the job ads, so...’ (Group of Vulnerable People)

- On the subject of the euro’s **advantages and disadvantages**, interviewees had **great difficulty in casting their minds into the future and taking a view**, particularly as the elderly and people with socio-economic problems alike feel at a remove, not to say excluded, from discussions affecting the country.

‘We don’t have much time left at our age. If we live that long, we shall see how well we come to grips with it.’ (Group of Elderly People)

‘It isn’t one of my priorities. I have other important matters to think about.’ (Group of Vulnerable People)

Responses include:

- **a priori positive implications on a general** (and somewhat abstract) **macro-economic level** (e.g. easier to conduct trade, opportunities for business, and a confused hope of lower unemployment);

- **monetary stability** (a **significant factor** for Greek citizens): it is mentioned particularly by elderly people, but people with socio-economic problems feel unaffected;

'Devaluations do damage to people with lots of money and investments. It doesn't affect people like us.' (Group of Vulnerable People)

- the idea that it is now **easier to travel in Europe**, although it continues to be a **rather abstract matter** for many people;
- the **somewhat imaginary prospect of a form of European harmonisation** that will raise salaries and pensions in Greece: a Utopia tinged with doubts, but a Utopia nonetheless;
- **ill-articulated, and largely irrational – although quite well established – fears** about the negative impacts on people for whom change and uncertainty mean anxiety and a potential threat: they include maintaining the level of salaries and pensions, the cost of living, and higher unemployment caused by companies going bankrupt because they are unable to resist stiffer competition.

These fears are expressed particularly by vulnerable people.

'Small firms and shops will be swept aside by chain stores and multinationals.' (Group of Vulnerable People)

- other **fears concerning problems of adapting** to a new currency and the **dangers of transition** (including short-changing).

'I'm afraid I don't understand what I have to do to avoid being cheated or losing money.' (Group of Elderly People)

3.2.2 Denmark and Sweden

- **Knowledge** of provisions relating to the euro is **fairly insecure** in both countries, **although most people have a moderately good idea of the (approximate) value of the euro** in their own currency (7-8 Danish kroner and about 9 Swedish kronor)

Danish interviewees appear to have understood that, if their country joins, the euro will eventually replace the national currency; however, some had difficulty in understanding how it could be 'that a euro is worth the same in Portugal and Denmark despite the fact that a krone is worth more than an escudo', and how conversion rates can be irrevocable once they have been fixed.

No Swedes properly understand that their krona will disappear if their country joins the euro.

The existence of **stages** in the transfer to the euro is generally known, but there is **little understanding** for the most part of how the timetable will operate.

The main **source of information** referred to in both countries is the news media, which report on the public debate and put out information on the establishment of the euro in other countries. People rely mostly on television, but newspapers (mainly among elderly people) and the radio also play their part.

Mention was also made in Sweden of pamphlets available from banks and post offices.

- The **advantages** of the euro are perceived to operate:
 - **at a general macro-economic level** for the country and its enterprises, for exports, for the development of trade and cooperation and other objectives;
 - **at a level that can affect ordinary people in a concrete way**, for example, the issue of **monetary stability** and a halt to the speculative movements that have impacted on national currencies. The question was addressed particularly by the Danish Group of Vulnerable People and by the Swedish groups;

'There's a kind of support for other currencies to prevent them losing value and having to devalue.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Denmark)

'In 1992, we weren't able to defend ourselves against speculation and pressure on the Swedish krona.' (Group of Elderly People – Sweden)

- **at commodity level (i.e. making it easier to travel and buy things abroad)**; this **concretely** affects a large number of **elderly people** who take their holidays in southern Europe.

'Apart from what it might mean for exports, it's also good for those of us who travel a lot – it would make things a lot easier if we had the same currency.' (Group of Elderly People – Denmark)

'I'm really looking forward to the day when I can travel anywhere with just the one currency.' (Group of Elderly People – Sweden)

However, this benefit is one from which vulnerable people feel excluded.

'If I were well off and travelled a lot.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Sweden)

- **Disadvantages and fears** relating to the euro include:
 - the **danger of diminished autonomy**, the political *quid pro quo* for the country's membership of larger entity referred to in the last section;
 - **uncertainties**, rather than fears, about the **'mechanical' effect** that the conditions under which the country will enter the euro zone (e.g. the conversion that will be adopted at the time, interest rates, and incomes from savings) will have **on the situation of the elderly**;
 - **deeper uncertainties that are rarely articulated by people in socio-economic difficulties** in either country: they include fears that the country and its citizens must one way or another pay 'the cost of joining the euro', that the long-awaited stability will be compromised by future dissent, and that the euro does not open the way to a form of downward harmonisation of social benefits;
 - generally **moderate anxieties about the transition itself**: these include new personal price references to be worked out, and the danger of being short-changed (although this is in fact limited by pressure of competition).

To conclude, in both countries, even in the Groups of Vulnerable People, it is less a matter of concrete fears that people will suffer personally as a result of the euro's introduction, than of a feeling that they will benefit little on an individual level.

United Kingdom

- **Information on the euro is almost non-existent**:
 - it is understood that, if the United Kingdom were to adopt the euro, the new currency would be substituted for the pound in the long term more or less (but replaced entirely?);
 - both groups were almost completely unaware of provisions adopted for joining the euro (e.g. the transition period, the dual circulation period, and how they will work);
 - with rare exceptions (one person in each group), no one had any idea of the value of the euro against the pound

Perceptions of the euro continue to be that it is a 'foreign affair' at this stage.

- **The only sources of information** are television and newspapers: these reflect the political debate on the desirability or otherwise of the euro, rather than provide concrete information on it.

- The possible **advantages** of the euro are identified, for example, **at the abstract level of macro-economics**, of expanded trade and of benefits for companies; no spontaneous link is made with the consequences for their own situation.

However, as we saw in the last chapter, a more developed discussion is beginning to address possible harmful consequences for the country if it stays outside and, in the view of some, to extend these queries to embrace imaginary (and uncertain) hopes about the importance this might have for certain aspects of European harmonisation (e.g. pensions, social conditions and taxation).

There are some, but not many, references to easier travelling.

- The issue of the euro's **disadvantages** prompts a **spate of largely irrational fears, and of basic attitudes fundamentally opposed to the project:**

- the dissipation of national identity;
- lack of confidence in the value of the new currency against the pound;

'The strength of the pound will benefit Europe, to the detriment of Britain.'

- a fear of seeing 'foreigners taking our jobs';
- in short, **imprecise but general fears of 'losing out' one way or another;**
- fears about **difficulties of adaptation and problems of transition.**

'Corner shops will use it as an excuse to cheat us, and then play dumb because it's the euro.'

**INTERVIEWEES' UNDERSTANDING
OF THE EURO :
SUMMARISING TABLE**

	Elderly people	Vulnerable people
The euro's status as a single currency replacing the national currency	++ I, E, P, F, B, L, D, NL, A, SF + IRL, GR, DK (+) S, GB ?	++ I, E, P, F, B, L, D, NL, A, SF + IRL, GR, DK (+) S, GB ?
Irrevocability of conversion rates	++ I, E, F, B, L, A, SF + P, D, NL (+) GR, DK	++ I, E, F, B, L, SF + P, D, NL, A (+) GR, DK
The value of the euro in the national currency	++ F, B, L, D, NL, A, SF + E, P, DK, S (+) I, GR	++ F, B, L, D, NL, SF + E, A, DK, S (+) I, P
The existence of a transition period and how it will work	++ B, L + F, D, NL, A, SF (+) I, E, P, IRL, DK, SF	++ L + F, B, D, NL (+) I, E, P, IRL, A, SF, DK, S
The date for introducing notes and coins in euros	++ B, L, NL, A + F, D (+) I, E, P, IRL, SF, (DK), (S)	++ L, NL + F, B, D, A (+) I, E, P, IRL, SF, (DK), (S)
The existence of a dual circulation period and how it will work	++ + F, B, L, D, NL, A (+) I, E, P, SF	++ + F, B, L, D, NL, A (+) I, E, P, SF
Unit value of notes and coins	++ + B, L, D (+) NL	++ + L, D (+) NL
The appearance of notes and coins	++ + L (+) B, NL, SF	++ + L (+) B, NL, SF

**INTERVIEWEES' SOURCES OF
INFORMATION ON THE EURO:
SUMMARISING TABLE**

Television	+	I, F, B, L, D, NL, A, SF
	(+)	E, P, IRL, GR, DK, S, (GB)
The press	+	B, D, NL, SF
	(+)	I, P, IRL, (F), A, (GR), DK, S, (GB)
Other news media (e.g. radio)	+	L
	(+)	IRL, (GR), DK, S
Documents distributed by the state (and identified as such)	+	L
	(+)	
Dual indication of prices (statements, bills and information bulletins)	+	I, E, F, D, NL, SF
	(+)	P, IRL, B, L
Dual display and labelling of prices in chain stores	+	E, F, B, L, D, A
	(+)	P, IRL, NL, SF
Banks and the post office (distribution and availability of documentation)	+	F, B, L, NL, A, SF
	(+)	E, GR
Games in euros	+	
	(+)	I, A
Availability/gifts of calculators and conversion calculators	+	L
	(+)	I, IRL, A
Support networks	+	
	(+)	(I), E, (B), L, D, A, SF

**THE EURO: THE MAIN ADVANTAGES FOR,
AND THE EXPECTATIONS OF,
INTERVIEWEES:
SUMMARISING TABLE**

	Elderly people	Vulnerable people
(Macro-)economic growth benefiting citizens	++ I, P, F, B, L + E, IRL, A, SF, DK, S (+) NL, GR, GB	++ I, P, L + SF, DK, S (+) (IRL), NL, (A), GR, GB
Monetary stability	++ I, GR, DK, S + (+)	++ I, DK, S + (+) GR
Lower prices for goods and services (through transparency and competition)	++ IRL + I, L (+) D, SF	++ IRL + I, L (+) B, D, SF
Easier travelling	++ + I, P, IRL, L, D, A, DK, S (+) F, SF, GR	++ + I, P, L (+) (A), SF, (GR)
Corss-border purchases	++ L + (+) D, (SF)	++ L + (+) B, D, (SF)
Hopes of upward harmonisation	++ + I (+) P, IRL, GR, (GB ?)	++ + (+) (E), P, GR, (GB ?)

**THE EURO: THE MAIN DISADVANTAGES
AND INTERVIEWEES' FEARS:
SUMMARISING TABLE**

	Elderly people	Vulnerable people
Fears relating to the value and stability of the euro	-- - D, NL, GB (-) A, (SF)	-- - NL, GB (-) D, DK, S
Effects of the cost of introducing the euro	-- GB - D, NL (-) A	-- GB - D, NL (-)
Solidarity cost with less affluent countries	-- D, NL, GB (-)	-- D, NL, GB (-)
Specific negative economic effects	-- GR - L, NL, DK, S (-)	-- GR - L, NL (-)
Fears of downward harmonisation	-- - L, D (-)	-- DK, S - L, D (-)
Non-fulfilment of hopes for upward harmonisation	-- GR - I (-)	-- I, E, GR - (-)
Increased exclusion	-- - S (-)	-- E - F - D (-)
Irrational fears of all kinds	-- GB - (IRL) (-)	-- IRL - A, GR, GB - B, F (-)
Problems and difficulties associated with transition (irrespective of the basis of the euro)	-- IRL, GB - I, E, F, GR (-) P, B, L, D, NL, A, SF, DK, S	-- IRL, GB - E, F, B, A, GR (-) I, P, L, D, NL, SF, DK, S

CHAPTER IV

**THE EURO IN DAILY LIFE
AFTER THE NATIONAL CURRENCIES
DISAPPEAR**

IV.1 ATTITUDES TO THE PROSPECT OF DAILY LIFE WITH THE EURO: ACCURACY AND NATURE OF THE PERCEPTIONS

At this stage, participants in the discussion groups indicated, or recalled, the details of the final move to the euro. They were then asked to take themselves beyond the date when the single currency has entirely replaced national currencies.

'As you know, the introduction of the euro is taking place in several stages. There is what is called a three-year transitional stage (we shall return to that in due course) before the notes and coins are introduced on 1 January 2002; these will replace the coins and notes in (national currency), which will in turn disappear within six months at the latest.

First, however, let us try and pretend that we have gone way past July 2002 – by which time the euro will have completely replaced the (national currency) – and imagine what day-to-day life will be like for us then. What problems and difficulties do you think you will encounter, in what areas of your lives, and why?⁵

- It is clear from the outset that, **when confronted with the concrete and definitive arrival of the euro in their lives, interviewees do not normally panic.** Some appear to betray signs of a kind of exhilaration, or at least relief, as they look forward – at the end of a series of gradual, preparatory stages in which there continued to be no more than a virtual Europe – to a situation that is at long last clear and concrete.

In several countries, elderly people particularly refer to other changes and events that have taken place in their lives, and which 'they have survived'. They include:

- key monetary events (e.g. the establishment of the Deutschmark after the war in Germany, German currency imposed on Luxembourg during that country's occupation, the adoption of the Schilling in Austria in 1945, and decimalisation of the pound in the United Kingdom), and less important ones (e.g. abandoning sub-divisions of the main monetary unit, and the disappearance of the 'tostão' and 'meio-tostão' in Portugal);
- curiously, neither the French nor the Finns make much mention of the transfer to the new franc or the new Finnish mark (except that the former make references in negative, albeit now outmoded, terms);

Of Ireland, little can be said save that decimalisation appears to be felt *post facto* as a painful experience, and that there is a general feeling 'of having lost out during the transfer';

⁵ With a modified formulation for non-member countries of the euro zone (see appended Discussion Guides).

- non-monetary, but significant, events (e.g. not only the war, but also the replacement of the former Greek unit of weight, the 'oka', and changing over to driving on the right in Sweden).

They also refer to the relative ease with which they have changed over to the currencies of foreign countries where they have had the opportunity to go (mainly in north European countries, the source of massive flows of tourists moving southwards).

The above statement certainly needs qualifying: the country-by-country analysis in particular highlights **real anxieties in Ireland, the United Kingdom and Greece, and greater concerns in Spain and France than elsewhere.**

Concerns on this issue are slight in countries like Italy, Portugal, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden (in the latter case, among elderly people at least).

- **The nature of the concerns** is more or less the same in most countries. They may be briefly classified as follows:
 - **Difficulty in getting used to prices of things in euros, and determining new personal price references**

This is, of course, a central issue, and other kinds of concern flow from it.

It is felt with particular keenness in two countries that are not members of the euro zone (Greece and the United Kingdom) and in Ireland: these countries are characterised both by fundamental resistance to the single currency, and by a poor, or very poor, understanding of its value.

'We're going to be spending money without really knowing what we're spending it on.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Greece)

'I don't have a clue what the euro is worth.' (Group of Elderly People – Ireland)

It is also strongly felt in Spain and France

However, this difficulty was somewhat played down by interviewees in Portugal, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark, and by some Italians and Swedes. Some of the countries concerned are dominated by very favourable attitudes to the principle of the euro; others are marked by unfavourable attitudes or reservations.

'I think people will already be used to it by then.' (Group of Elderly People – Portugal)

'We had Marks during the war, and we got used to them. It'll be the same this time round.' (Group of Elderly People – Luxembourg)

'It's like being on holiday: I convert prices from 1 to 12 or from 1 to 2, or from 1 to 1000 in Italy – it's still the easiest way.' (Group of Elderly People – Germany)

'We'll have prices in euros instead of prices in guilders. Nothing else is changing. Prices aren't going to go up just like that – they'll stay the same.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Netherlands)

'We'll soon learn to do sums in euros and work out if something is too expensive.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Sweden)

There is no direct link between support for the euro and the idea that people will change over to it quite easily.

It is not possible to identify all the impacts of these attitudes in this study, but the following hypotheses might nonetheless be advanced:

- that favourable responses to the project and the expectation of benefits might help people to swallow the 'change-over' pill (in Italy, Portugal, Belgium and Luxembourg);
 - that greater ease of travelling and relocations abroad put the difficulties into perspective: this is particularly true of Luxembourg, but also of north European countries, at least among retired people who have experience of holidaying in other countries;
 - that the simplicity of the (rounded-off) rate of conversion also plays a part: obviously for Germany (x 2), but also for the Netherlands (x 2.2, or x 2 with a corrective factor), Luxembourg and Belgium (x 40), and even Italy (x 2000) and Portugal (x 200).
- **The illusion that things are not expensive** because prices in most countries are expressed in smaller numbers in euros than in the national currency.

This factor is mentioned in the evidence of interviewees in all countries (except, of course, Ireland and the United Kingdom).

However, it is rarely a source of serious anxiety, although it means there is a need for initial vigilance; this is particularly accentuated by particular economic difficulties and/or a poor standard of education.

'It won't be that easy buying a bottle of whisky that costs DM 18.98 and paying 9.95 for it. You can easily fall into the trap of thinking you're only

paying half. You've got to say to yourself, "Careful! These are euros – and I've still only got half of what I started off with..."

However,

'... The trouble will start on 2 January, but the real crunch will come six months later.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Germany)

'Things might look cheaper because the numbers are smaller.' (Group of Elderly People – Finland)

This vigilance sometimes goes as far as a wish for temporary de-consumption – refusing, for example, to make important, non-urgent purchases until personal price references are fixed; this option is mentioned particularly by Spanish and (elderly) Italian participants.

'I think my mother will go shopping less than usual. She's going to be frightened – she'll go out with just enough money on her.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Spain)

At the same time, the euro's strong unit value against most national currencies can surprise and frustrate people when they receive their pay slips or paperwork setting out their pension or social benefits.

By contrast, **in countries where the currency has a higher unit value than the euro at present, seeing prices in euros can initially give an impression that they are high.** Because most interviewees do not know the value of the euro, they are not spontaneously aware of it; however, their subsequent reactions (during euro simulation exercises that they took part in during discussions) demonstrate that they are, and suggest that confusion can arise alongside the notion of inflationary price rises.

'Very expensive, much more than the Irish value.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Ireland)

- **The fear of being short-changed**

This was articulated in all countries and by both categories of people interviewed, but in different ways and above all with different intensity.

- **The most frequently mentioned danger is that of seeing retailers and skilled craft workers taking advantage of the confusion and customers' usual absence, and surreptitiously raising their prices, or at the very least giving them 'a nudge' when rounding off.**

In this context, it is notable that, even in countries where people are best informed on the general provisions relating to the euro, **interviewees appear to be unaware that precise rounding-off rules have been introduced and, for a number of reasons, that that is**

why conversion rates have been fixed to six decimal points (although some see them it as a pointless measure that will simply make their lives more complicated).

This danger is itself assessed differently by different sectors of the sample interviewed because they make different assessments of both the likelihood and the consequences.

It is viewed **without concern in many cases, particularly in north European countries.**

'The problem... is quite simply that at the moment of the changeover, when shopkeepers work out a price that should come to 1.78, they will round it up to 1.80. But in the main, competition will sort it out. Anyway, there's a department for monitoring that.' (Group of Elderly People – Germany)

'Maybe traders will round up, and prices will be (slightly) higher as a result.' (Group of Elderly People – Finland)

'Taxi-drivers, waiters and door-to-door sales reps will over-charge, but in shops competition will act as a regulator.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Denmark)

It is generally regarded with **more anxiety in south European countries**, where short-changing can be something of a 'national sport', **and among vulnerable people** rather than the elderly, because of the impact that even quite modest additional costs will have on already stretched budgets.

'They're already conning us with the lira. Imagine what will happen with the euro!' (Group of Elderly People – Italy)

'They might round up the price of bread – something you buy everyday, like fruit and vegetables.'

'I get fed up when you're criticised for asking for a peseta change, but if we start out like that, everything will end up much dearer.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Spain)

'Shopkeepers will be dancing in the streets. We're going to be the losers when prices are rounded off.' (Group of Elderly People – France)

'Small traders are going to make a personal profit out of overcharging.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Greece)

- In the view of participants in most groups, **this danger is only to be found among small businesses** (or skilled craft workers). By contrast, large chain stores are often widely trusted: this is because they have

equipment for carrying out checks (e.g. cash registers that automatically print out receipts), and would not risk jeopardising their reputations. However, this also derives from the dominant positions they have adopted in several countries.

However, there are **exceptions, principally in Greece and Ireland, where general suspicion is much more widespread than elsewhere.**

'The shops will put up their prices and profit more. Supermarkets will start charging more, and we'll have to pay the prices anyway even if we can't afford to.' (Group of Elderly People – Ireland)

- **There is a general feeling of confidence about areas other than shopping.** These include salaries, pensions, social benefits, rent, loans, savings, banking operations in general and other payments.

'The Post Office has strict rules, and payments have to be written clearly on receipts.' (Group of Elderly People – Italy)

'In banks... these days, transactions – everything – are done in euros. Nobody complains.' (Group of Elderly People – France)

'Employers won't be able to underpay us any more because they are monitored by public bodies that deal with wages.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Belgium)

'Banks don't cheat.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Luxembourg)

'We'll get exactly the same (in social benefits) in euros as what we're now getting in Schillings.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Austria)

'[In these areas] nothing changes – except the figures.' (Group of Elderly People – Finland)

However, there are exceptions in respect of the confidence people may have in:

- **employers (among some vulnerable people in France and Greece);**

'The bosses are going to make fools of us.' (Group of Vulnerable People – France)

'The bosses have always tried to exploit their employees.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Greece)

- **landlords (among some Italians, Portuguese and Austrians);**

'Landlords can bill you for repairs and other charges in euros if they want to, and tenants don't know if the figures are right.' (Group of Elderly People – Italy)

'Generally we're trusting, but you should always check the rent.'
(Group of Elderly People – Austria)

- **doctors and dentists (among some Italian interviewees)** on the grounds that they can charge any fees they like;
- **banks** and, to an extent, even public bodies (**among a large number of (mainly elderly) Irish interviewees**, who once again express wide-ranging distrust;

'The banks will use it as a way to hide more scandals and more lies. We don't trust the banks so it will be worse with the euro because they'll be trying to make up for the lost revenue on foreign currency.'

- **The fear of unintentional mistakes**

As well as temptations to short-change, interviewees also cite the dangers of mistakes made in good faith both by retailers and by their staff. In most cases, these are human errors, and the electronic component in transactions normally provides an element of security.

These dangers are particularly highlighted by some people in France, the Netherlands, Austria, Finland and Greece. They do not seem to have had any traumatising effect, no doubt because they are both occasional and unintentional.

- **The fear of confusing notes and coins in euros**

This is expressed spontaneously by some people (in Belgium, Germany, Finland, Greece and the United Kingdom):

'I hope the notes and coins will be easy to recognise by their size and colour, and that the value is clearly marked.' (Group of Elderly People – Finland)

'You mustn't get them confused – with the new 10,000-drachma note, for example.' (Group of Elderly People – Greece)

However, the fact that these fears are rarely articulated spontaneously at the moment does not mean that they will not be triggered as the date for introducing the new notes and coins approaches.

Nonetheless, **the point is stressed by blind and visually impaired participants**, whose different positions no doubt derive from their age and socio-economic level, and according to whether they have attended meetings of their associations designed to familiarise them with the euro. In the latter case, and so far as one can judge from the very small number of cases in the sample throughout Europe, they may not (certainly do not?) as a rule feel the fears as keenly as sighted people.

- **The fear of forged money in circulation**

This is **very occasionally raised** (by some Finns and Greeks).

IV.2 PLANNED APPROACHES TO ADAPTATION

Because of the nature of the concerns – they are dominated by dangers linked to purchases (e.g. not being aware of the value of things, unintentional mistakes, and short-changing) – this is where interviewees concentrate their evidence when asked to describe how they think they will go about finding new price references (in all countries).

? **The first type of behaviour that is referred to universally (outside the field of purchases) involves systematic care and vigilance with regard to oneself and others:**

- **carefully checking** prices, receipts, change, bills and other documents

'We'll have to pay close attention to paperwork we receive – social security statements, everything.' (Group of Elderly People – France)

'You'll have to keep our eyes open and check your change.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Portugal)

'It's going to be quite complicated. Good reason for putting your glasses on!' (Group of Elderly People – Austria)

Personal vigilance is sometimes accompanied by a **call for stricter government controls (mentioned, for example, in Italy and Spain)**. In most countries, monitoring by the state is discreetly done, but it is nonetheless clear that it has to be done;

- **voluntary restraint on making non-essential purchases** until one gets used to the euro (mentioned mainly by Italian, Spanish and elderly French interviewees)

'I'll buy less – at the beginning, anyway – until I feel relaxed about converting.' (Group of Elderly People – Italy)

- **requests for outside help**, particularly from children (mentioned by some elderly people);

'I won't have any difficulties myself. I'll have a word with my children – they'll know it all off by heart.' (Group of Elderly People – France)

Overall, however, interviewees in both population segments are not prepared to rely on others: they display every intention of tackling these problems themselves.

? **The second type of measure: using a calculator or conversion calculator**

This is mentioned **everywhere**, but in different terms and referring to quite a wide range of circumstances in which they might be used.

- **Systematic use of a calculator**

In fact, this is quite unusual, and generally speaking it is only given any consideration by people who are particularly worried, and do not have a personal price reference in euros (e.g. some – but not all – Irish and British interviewees, and some people who admit that they are ‘completely lost’ when they are abroad).

‘I would use the converter which is available in banks and at the post office.’ (Group of Elderly People – Ireland)

‘You won’t be able to go out without your calculator.’ (Group of Elderly People – France)

Otherwise, the potential use of a calculator is limited to people who do not necessarily know how to use it – or who are afraid of being made to look foolish.

‘I don’t like calculators myself. I can’t stand them.’ (Group of Elderly People – France)

- **Using a calculator for important purchases only, and approximate mental arithmetic for everyday purchases**

‘For day-to-day shopping, you can do it in your head quickly; for more important things, use the calculator.’ (Group of Elderly People – Belgium)

‘With the calculator at home, for important purchases that you don’t make on the spur of the moment.’ (Group of Vulnerable people – Netherlands)

‘For things you buy often, it will be easier to have a quick idea of the price.’ (Group of Vulnerable People – Sweden)

- **Using a calculator only at the beginning, or only occasionally to prevent short-changing or to carry out checks**

‘At the beginning, we’ll certainly take our calculators with us.’ (Group of Vulnerable People – Luxembourg)

‘The calculator – as a precaution.’ (Group of Elderly People – Finland)

It is noteworthy – and this is based on observations in many countries – that elderly people anticipate using calculators less than other people. This is not only because some of them have not familiarised themselves with how to use one, but also because they are still able to do mental arithmetic ('we used to learn it at school in our day'), and which they know is less widely used now. In this respect, they do not at all see themselves as being particularly disadvantaged by joining the euro.

? **A variant on using a calculator: using conversion cards or tables with personal price references in euros**

This solution is **quite frequently mentioned** either because of difficulties in using a calculator, or for the sake of discretion or convenience. Measures include tables that are distributed by the government and by economic actors (some people have already received one) or available in shops – or else just 'cobbled together' privately.

'I'll make up my own card with prices in lire and euros.' (Group of Elderly People – Italy)

'Some shops are already selling conversion cards.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Luxembourg)

'Conversion tables, as was available during decimalization.' (Group of Elderly People – United Kingdom)

? **Quick mental calculations of prices in the former national currency based on prices in euros**

This approach is fairly widely canvassed by many interviewees, possibly after a very short period of familiarisation. They realise that they will have to sort out the euro 'without crutches' sooner or later, and seem determined to get started at once.

? **The simplicity of the conversion rate naturally helps people to respond like this without any major worry.** For example, in Germany:

'For Germans, it's extremely easy: I see a tin of mushrooms costing 99 Pfennigs, I count 1 DM plus 50 or 51 cents, halve it – and there's the answer.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Germany)

However, it is also true of countries where the approximate conversion rate is relatively simple.

'Multiply by 40. When you're working out prices, it's like the Deutschmark, which we reckon at 20 Luxembourg francs.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Luxembourg)

'All you have to do to get the price in euros is to double the price in lire.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Italy, where different numbers of zeros (3 for the lira, 2 for the euro with cents) could well lead to confusion)

'Pure guesswork.' (Group of Elderly People – Spain)

'If you're going to round off [the price of something], it's easier to multiply by 2000.' (Group of Elderly People – Portugal)

'By using a factor of 2, and adding a bit.' (Group of Elderly People – Netherlands)

'We'll multiply by 14.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Austria)

'All you have to do is multiply by 6 – and there you are.' (Group of Elderly People – Finland)

Difficulties in responding in this way seem to be substantially greater, or else the danger is greater, both:

- **in countries where the conversion rate, even if complicated, is well known (mainly France);** here, as the exercise in simulating prices in euros later shows, over-simplified mental arithmetic can produce answers that are different from the real price;

'I'll use a base of 6 – and there's the answer. Otherwise, we're going to get really bogged down.' (Group of Vulnerable People – France)

- **in countries where people are not yet familiar with the rate, particularly those that have not yet joined the euro, and in Spain and Ireland.**

? **Getting ready to go shopping, having already worked out the prices of goods that one has to buy in the national currency in which one has personal price references, and going shopping with limited amounts of euros.**

This behaviour is to be found not only **among people in serious financial difficulties**, but also **among elderly people** in Ireland, France, Austria, Greece and Sweden (where the conversion rates are among the least easy) **who see themselves as vulnerable**.

'I'll just memorise what the prices should be at their current price in Irish pounds, and I'll know the euro price for these goods. I'll shop around until I find the euro price or cheaper.' (Group of Elderly People – Ireland)

'I'll make a detailed shopping list, and I'll go where I can see prices (in euros) that match.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Austria)

- ? **An idea close to the one above: memorising the 'normal' price of basic goods in euros** (mentioned particularly by participants in Portugal, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Denmark and the United Kingdom) in respect of the most frequent everyday expenses.

'The price of bread, milk, an ice cream.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Belgium)

'When I see half a pound of butter on sale at 1.75 euros for six months, I'll believe it.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Germany)

- ? **Abandoning all reference to the national currency, and simply looking for good prices in euros**, either by visiting various shops in search of the best prices, or simply by going to those that are known for their low prices.

This projected behaviour reflects **attitudes of two kinds:**

- **confidence in one's ability to get used to the euro quickly;**
- **a feeling of resignation because the task is too difficult** (observed particularly among people who see themselves as **the most financially vulnerable**, and most disadvantaged by the arrival of the euro).

Statements of those trusting their abilities include:

'Portuguese people learn fast if they suspect that someone is trying to do them.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Portugal)

'Just as we now go to shops that offer the best prices, in future we will go where things are cheaper.' (Group of Elderly People – Germany)

Statements of those giving up include:

'Don't expect me to get too excited. I'll make do with advertised prices.' (Group of Vulnerable People – France)

'The bills are still going to be paid, it doesn't matter whether they are lower or higher.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Ireland)

- ? **A conscious move towards prices in euros before the currency is introduced**

This type of behaviour is **very unusual** among those interviewed. It is only found in an active form among some interviewees in Luxembourg, Italy, Portugal and France.

IV.3 REACTIONS TO EURO PRICE SIMULATIONS

With a view to complementing and focusing on reactions to ways of working out prices in euros, group participants were asked to take part in a series of exercises in which they were presented with hypothetical prices for five goods and services: a litre of milk, a television set, a small car, an electricity bill and a cinema ticket⁶.

It goes without saying that the group interview situation is not an ideal way of making a detailed analysis of participants' thought processes and assessment mechanisms (some responded passively and waited for more active members to complete their calculations), but it is possible nonetheless to draw the following conclusions:

? **No one has any price references in euros at present**

The small number of cases of prices being marked in euros might *a priori* suggest inexpensiveness, but one must not be taken in by what an Austrian interviewee referred to as 'this optical effect'.

In Ireland, by contrast, the fact that prices are given in (slightly) larger numbers gives some people (including the most vulnerable) a negative impression of expensiveness; this in turn reinforces their irrational fears of higher prices.

To try and determine whether goods are expensive, people in all countries pass through an intermediate stage of converting into the national currency, either by using a form of mental arithmetic or by approximating.

In countries where few people know the conversion or exchange rate, there is a need from the outset for a rate that can be referred to – and for which participants rely on colleagues who have a (sometimes very approximate) idea

? **Much the same mechanism is used in all the various countries and groups (i.e. first round off the marked price; then multiply by a conversion rate, which is itself rounded off):**

This is clearly what people do if it is easy to round off a conversion rate that is close to a simple value: examples include not only Germany (factor of 2), Italy (2000, or 2 if you temporarily ignore the zeros), Portugal (200), Belgium and Luxembourg (40, or 4 and add a zero), Finland (6) and Austria (14 rather than 13), but also some Danes (7 or 8) and Swedes (9).

⁶ See appended Discussion Guides. Note: Some prices were altered to match current prices in each country.

In the first six of the above countries, mental arithmetic often produces the correct answer to the nearest few cents; this persuades participants that they will soon be able to determine personal price references for themselves.

However:

- this process works as long as one also takes not only the first, but also the second, decimal point into account during the proposed rounding-off stage; for example, one is in for a painful surprise if one compares the price of a car costing 8385 francs (rounded off to 8000) with the real price;
- even if the order of magnitude thus obtained is generally accurate, there can still be a considerable disparity with the real price in the national currency on goods of high unit value (i.e. hundreds or thousands of euros)., this supports the view that, while possibly erring on the side of caution, people will use calculators and other aids when making purchases of this type;
- disparities of 10% go unnoticed more easily in euros than in national currencies on goods of low unit value. Some deliberately ignore this difference; others, including the most financially disadvantaged, see that there is a need for increased vigilance.

The same logic is adopted by Spanish and Greek interviewees, for whom crudely rounded-off (i.e. 200, 300 or 350)

value of the euro

value of the national currency

ratios lead to disparities that are sometimes quite considerable, and which can also be deceptive.

The same goes for French people, for whom the situation is made more embarrassing by the fact that the conversion rate is more closely rounded off to two decimal points (6.50) – and, what is more, is written with a comma.

Their temptation to over-simplify (a factor of 6), combined with the omission in euro prices of a key second decimal point, can lead to serious disparities (e.g. a cinema ticket costing 6.80 euros rounded off to 6, multiplied by 6, gives 36 francs, that is to say almost 20% less than the real price).

Just one person mentioned, and successfully uses, the mnemonic [divide the value in francs by 2, add the result, and divide by 10] when converting from the franc into euros.

A variety of mechanisms are used in the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden.

Some **Dutch** interviewees, particularly the more elderly, multiply the price in euros by 2.2 and obtain a figure close to the correct answer; others simply use a factor of 2, and they may, or may not, intuitively add a corrective factor. This sometimes produces answers that are deceptively lower than the correct figure.

Danes and **Swedes** either use simple, approximate multiplying factors (7 or 8, or 9 respectively), or they more or less intuitively think that the euro is equal to 10 of their kroner/kronor – ‘minus a bit’. Although their answers are usually consistent with the order of magnitude, the degree of approximation is quite considerable (about 10%).

Lastly, **the Irish and the British** are in a situation in which **the value of the euro is below that of the national currency**. When the matter is explained to them by the (few) participants in their groups who think they know the (approximate) conversion or exchange rate (80-90 Irish pigin (pence) and 65-70 UK pence), they try to calculate prices by identifying differences rather than by multiplying (e.g. ‘a bit less than an Irish punt’ and ‘2/3 of the pound sterling’).

In so doing, they realise that it is possible to have some idea of prices in euros but, here too, with a margin of error that can be deceptive.

In countries that do not have a conversion rate that is close to a simple value, interviewees expressed the same emphatic views as the others on matters such as:

- the inadequacy of mental arithmetic when one has to determine whether or not a product of high unit value is expensive – and substantially more so than in other countries;
- less sensitivity to small differences in euro prices, or hundredths of euros – except, of course, in Ireland and the United Kingdom;
- **overall, it is clear that elderly people are more comfortable with mental arithmetic than other groups** – except in Ireland and Greece, where they rather see themselves as ‘cut off’ from most people.

? **It derives from the following simulations:**

- **the ability of some of the sensitive population segments (through converting into the national currency) to have a more or less approximate idea of ‘what something costs in euros’**

However, it is important to bear in mind:

- that, for most people, this is the first time they have attempted to make estimates of this kind, despite the sometimes massive

information campaigns that have been mounted on the euro: **the information is not enough to promote approaches involving ‘training’ or acclimatisation;**

- **the danger of false reassurances**, given the disparities between estimates and the right answer;
- **attitudes of resignation on the part of other participants at meetings**, particularly among vulnerable people: the latter made no real attempt to take part in the game, and simply tried to follow the more active members before ‘giving up’. Such attitudes were particularly prominent in Spain, Ireland, France, Luxembourg, Greece and the United Kingdom; however, in other countries, the propensity to take part in the exercise was more or less spontaneous.

This qualitative study does not measure these attitudes of resignation in percentage terms, but they are likely to be found **among a very substantial minority of the population segments interviewed;**

- **the felt need for measures providing assistance and security** (e.g. calculators and approximate conversion cards) – **particularly for important purchases in all countries, but also for more day-to-day items, where the use of a ‘crudely rounded off’ conversion rate can produce figures that are very long way from the correct answer.**

IV.4 THE PROSPECT OF THE DUAL CIRCULATION PERIOD OF THE EURO AND THE NATIONAL CURRENCY

After asking participants to project their minds forward in time when the euro is here for good, facilitators invited them to move back to the date when notes and coins in euros will be introduced (1 January 2002⁷), and give their views on the maximum six-month period leading up to the disappearance of national currencies⁸.

- ? This period is seen as **the most crucial, and also the one that causes most confusion.**
- ? Generally speaking, **it is the focus for all fears and anxieties caused by the euro's arrival** in citizens' daily lives.

These fears and anxieties have been addressed in earlier chapters, and we will not be dealing with them in detail. For the record, they are:

- **fears of being overcharged and short-changed, and of 'interpretative' rounding off**

They are most keenly felt, and have crystallised most during this period, **in south European countries and in Ireland.**

In Italy and Spain, there are calls for a specific tightening up of controls carried out by the government.

In countries where the elderly remember the time of the German occupation, the prospect of change reminds them of the manifestation of a different form of dishonesty that involved 'notes that will be brought out from under the mattress' (Belgium, Luxembourg and Denmark);

- **fears of human error**, both by oneself (because one is unused to the new currency, having encountered it rather abruptly) and by others (mainly traders, cashiers and check-out assistants), for whom the euro will be equally new.
- ? In countries that are not members of the euro zone, **there are also questions about adapting systems and procedures to the transfer to the euro.**

'Everyone will ask for euros just in case they're left with drachmas that are worth nothing.' (Group of Elderly People – Greece)

⁷ Or the equivalent of this date in countries that have not yet adopted the euro.

⁸ And highlighting the main points (see appended Discussion Guides).

'It's going to be a monumental task to change everything over to euros. Shops and supermarkets will have to mark everything in both prices.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Denmark)

'What will my pension be paid in? Euros?' (Group of Elderly People – Sweden)

'Will banks charge something for converting?' (Group of Vulnerable People – Sweden)

'What about bank statements, pay slips, bills – will they be in euros or pounds?' (Group of Vulnerable People – United Kingdom)

These countries together with Ireland are virtually the only ones where articulated concerns step outside the area of purchases and relationships with retailers.

By contrast, the absence of such concerns in member countries of the euro zone suggests that, even if interviewees do not think so, the preparatory measures have played their part.

? **In relation to purchases and relationships with retailers, there are also questions and concerns in all countries about practical matters:**

- **the need for a double purse is seen as a major inconvenience**

'I'll have to have one purse for escudos, and another one for euros.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Portugal)

'In practice, it's going to be very difficult to live with two currencies.' (Group of Elderly People – Austria)

- **many questions on the 'currency you get your change in', and general opposition to the idea that it might be in any currency other than the one handed over in the first place**

'It's going to be a complete shambles. If I pay for something in francs, I want my change to be in francs. If I pay in euros, I want it in euros.' (Group of Vulnerable People – France)

- **questions about the possibility of making a purchase oneself in both currencies**

'If you go into a shop and you've only got 60 francs and 1 euro, the shopkeeper may not sell you your packet of cigarettes.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Luxembourg)

- a fear of finding that cashiers and check-out assistants have no change in euros or the national currency, and of long queues forming in shops.

'We're going to spend ages queuing for the right check-out desk and sorting out the two currencies. Check-out assistants are going to go round the bend.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Austria)

- questions on problems that will face retailers (e.g. investing in double tills, and a greater risk of theft because the two currencies mean they will have to keep more money in their tills).

The practical problems of the co-existence of the two currencies were stressed with particular force by visually impaired and blind people in the groups.

'For blind and visually impaired people, six months with two currencies is a catastrophe. One currency is bad enough; two are almost impossible.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Luxembourg)

? **These various considerations led the overwhelming majority of interviewees:**

- to declare that they are determined to adopt the euro, insofar as it concerns them, from the beginning of the dual circulation period;
- to call for the period to be shortened, sometimes radically.

'I'll start using the euro immediately.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Portugal)

'The sooner it's over and done with, the better. One month is enough.' (Group of Elderly People – Belgium)

'As short a period as possible. It will be a relief in a way to get rid of the two currencies.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Germany)

'Getting used to the euro could take more than six months. But it won't be made any easier by a long dual circulation period; in fact, it might create even greater confusion.' (Group of Elderly People – Netherlands)

? **Clearly there is a widespread desire in most countries of the euro zone for a shorter period in which the two currencies will co-exist:**

- almost unanimous in Portugal, Belgium Luxembourg, Germany and the Netherlands;
- a majority view in Austria and Finland;

- less pronounced, but well established, in Italy and Spain;
- divided views in France and Ireland.

In the latter countries, it is natural that those who fear the arrival of the euro most are unlikely to accelerate matters. However, there are very few requests for a longer period: it is as if they realised it would simply be ‘putting off the evil day’.

Interestingly, countries where basic attitudes to the European single currency are notable for reservations and distrust are often those where people are calling for the period to be radically reduced.

- ? **In countries that are not yet members of the euro zone**, there is a majority trend ‘not to run before you can walk’ and **to keep the scheduled six-month period** (and some requests for a reduction) – but again, very few calls for an extension.

**MAIN CONCERNS ARTICULATED BY INTERVIEWEES RELATING TO
THE IDEA OF DAILY LIFE WITH THE EURO:
SUMMARISING TABLE**

Difficulty in getting used to prices in euros	-- IRL, GR, GB - E, F
A deceptive feeling of inexpensiveness	-- - All countries except IRL, GB
A deceptive impression of expensiveness	-- IRL - GB
Fear of being short-changed (mainly by retailers)	-- E, I, P, IRL, GR - Other countries
Fear of unintentional mistakes	-- - All countries
Fear of confusing the coins and notes	-- - B, D, SF, GR, GB
Fear of counterfeit money circulating	-- - (SF), (GR)
Questions about systems and procedures during the dual circulation period	-- GR, DK, S, GB - IRL
Questions about the practical aspects of relationships with retailers during the dual circulation period	-- Tous - Pays

CHAPTER V

TRANSITION TOWARDS THE EURO

V.1 ATTITUDES TO THE TRANSITION PERIOD

Following a logic of 'going backwards in time' from the disappearance of national currencies, questions on the transition period mainly focused on how this period could most profitably be used to accustom citizens to the euro, given their relative propensity to make preparations for themselves in advance.

Attitudes in all countries are passive and 'wait-and-see':

- ? **because 2002 seems a long way off to most people in countries that are members of the euro zone**

'This period is so far off I'll go and get some information when the date starts getting nearer.' (Group of Elderly People – Portugal)

'Because 2002 seems a long way off to us. For myself, I'm not bothered about the euro. Frankly, nobody cares one way or the other. We'll all go to sleep for three years.' (Group of Vulnerable People – France)

'We're not going to make ourselves ill three years before we have to.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Germany)

- ? **because some of these countries and some sectors of the population display forms of resistance to the euro project that discourage taking an active interest**

'It's a waste of time – most people couldn't care less.' (Group of Vulnerable People – France)

'They say all Dutch people want the euro, but it's not true. They never came and asked us.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Netherlands)

'Elderly people are being left out of it, and are not being informed of what it means.' (Group of Elderly People – Ireland)

- ? **because of uncertainty whether the country will actually adopt the single currency (in countries that are not members of the euro zone)**

This uncertainty does not prevent people from having views, or actively posing questions, on the euro project and on the legitimacy or otherwise of adopting it. However, the citizens concerned have clearly not got round to wondering how the timetable works.

'It is of no concern to us.' (Group of Elderly People – Sweden)

- ? **because citizens see the euro as having a virtual existence during this period; they often have the feeling that nothing concrete is happening – at least as far as they are concerned.**

'There's nothing you can try the euro out on.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Belgium)

'Nothing changes. Nothing happens.' (Group of Elderly People – Austria)

Participants in several countries were surprised at the difference between the copious information that was disseminated in late 1998 when the euro was introduced, and the apparent lack of any change in what is happening.

'When it was first announced, everybody was for the euro: it was something new, it was a project for a united Europe, and everybody was talking about it.' (Group of Elderly People – Spain)

'When it came round to the elections, they bombarded us with political arguments to persuade us it was a good thing. What we don't have is hard information that can be understood by the man in the street.' (Group of Vulnerable People)

Paradoxically, passivity may be encouraged both through reassuring information on the absence of any (negative) impact on people's lives, and as a result of occasional uncertainty that the way the euro will be introduced (starting with the conversion rate) has already been determined.

'Everything will stay exactly as it was.' (Group of Elderly People – Austria)

'The rate might change again...' (Group of Vulnerable People – Netherlands)

It is also clearly linked at the present time to the absence of any opportunities for physical contact with the euro's existence (i.e. notes and coins).

'What we need to do is see the euro – the notes, the coins. As soon as we have them in our hands, problems will disappear.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Portugal)

'As long as we don't have the currency in our hands, it will be difficult to understand.' (Group of Elderly People – Ireland)

'As soon as I have the notes in my hand, I'll start paying attention.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Germany)

Very few people spontaneously plan to take the initiative and do something themselves to get ready for the euro:

- because they do not really see what they can do;
- because they rarely see the point of getting started too soon, forgetting it all, and then having to re-learn;
- because, as we have seen, not everyone is panicking at the idea of the introduction of the euro in itself, although they fear confusion during the dual circulation period.

Most participants are not *a priori* more inclined to focus in any concrete way on the issue of the euro's arrival in their lives before 2001, or even the second half of the year.

'Around September 2001 should be about the right time.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Ireland)

'It's best to find out beforehand, otherwise people will have forgotten everything when the day comes.' (Group of Elderly People – Luxembourg)

'Anyway we'll have plenty of information as 2002 approaches.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Austria)

'We'll start thinking about it in 2001.' (Group of Elderly People – Finland)

'They should tell us about it in detail six months before it is introduced.' (Group of Vulnerable People – United Kingdom)

That is not to say that there are no conscious or (more frequently) latent information needs to be met, but that the citizens who were interviewed will rarely take the initiative to formulate these needs, and themselves go looking for information and ways of becoming familiar with the euro.

V.2 REALISABLE EXPECTATIONS OF DISSEMINATING INFORMATION

The areas in which it is possible and relevant to conduct awareness campaigns capable of addressing the concerns, sensitivities and interests of citizens in the categories under examination may be classified as follows:

? **Explaining once again the project's objectives and validity**

In addition to the countries and sectors of the population where these objectives and validity are generally supported, there are others where there continue to be doubts, and even strong resistance:

- among the eleven Member Countries of the euro zone, Ireland, Germany and the Netherlands, and among the most disadvantaged people (particularly vulnerable people) in Spain, France, Austria and even Italy;
- in the four applicant, or potential applicant, states for euro membership.

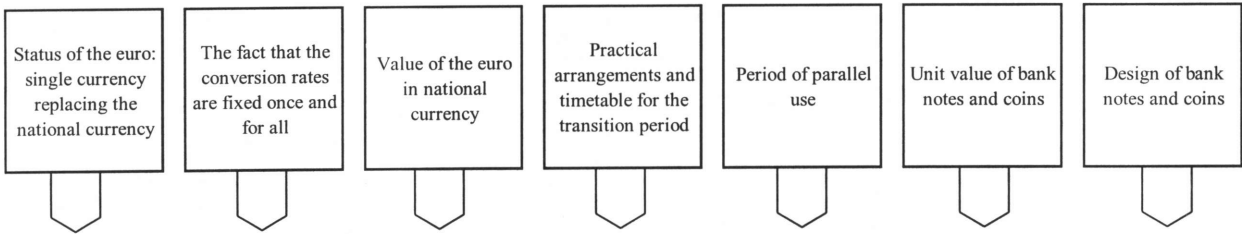
Rationally, the euro project should mean that these antagonistic citizens are open to a logic that argues for a strengthening of Europe and of its positions on the world stage. However:

- they query its credibility (starting with the euro's stability), or criticise the cost that they fear they will have to bear (the Netherlands, Germany, Austria to a lesser degree, and potentially the United Kingdom and Scandinavian countries);
- or else they see it as a purely economic logic that does not concern them, or which simply promotes powerful people's interests at their expense.

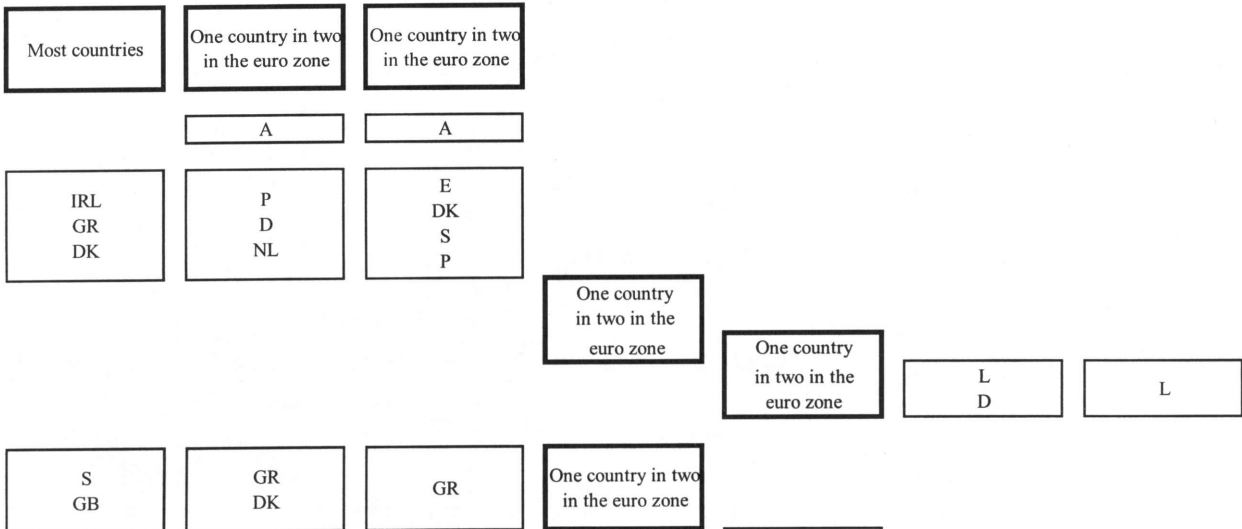
It is therefore necessary to continue communicating about 'why':

- **by reassuring those who are anxious to know whether the euro is really 'effective' at achieving the objective it is pursuing:** for example, by explaining again that it is the prospect of, and preparation for, the single currency that has halted inflation, and reassuring people about the euro's performance against the dollar by stressing the positive consequences for exports, and therefore for growth in European countries;
- **by demonstrating that the interests of the various European countries converge in the euro:** for example, the fact that it is now impossible for countries with strong currencies to have competitive devaluations, and the protection that the euro offers

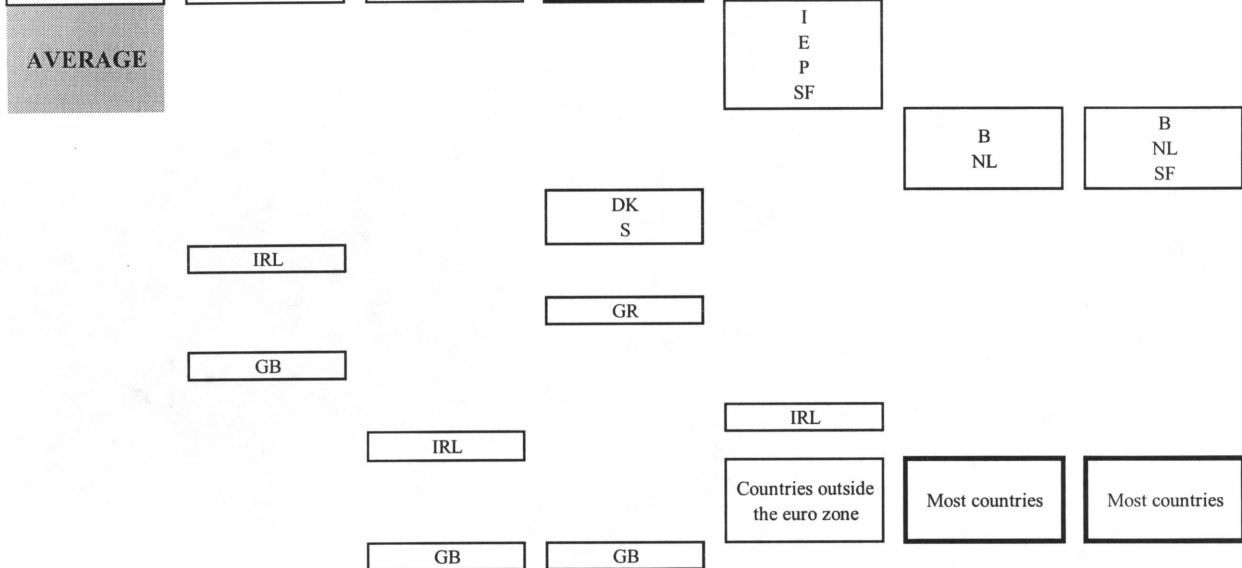
LEVEL OF PEOPLE'S KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE EURO



SATISFACTORY



AVERAGE



POOR

against monetary speculation (something that Danes and Swedes, for example, are particularly aware of);

- **by stressing the benefits that could really affect the consumer citizens under examination;** these include not only the fact that it is easier to make journeys (that not everyone can afford) to different European countries, but also lower interest rates, and more transparent anti-inflationary, competition between enterprises that might even reduce the prices of some goods;
- **by not stressing advantages** (e.g. being able to have a euro account, and making payments in euros) **that are still felt to be abstract**, particularly by these sectors of the population, and whose existence in practice is anyway refuted by the survival of handling charges for cross-frontier payments.

? **Allaying irrational fears**

Such fears are expressed by the most vulnerable people in many countries, and particularly strongly in Ireland and in countries that have not joined the euro. They are focused on the possible effects on salaries, and sometimes on possible increases in such areas as prices, rent and loans.

Sometimes concerns of this type are even found in countries where basic information on the euro is good overall.

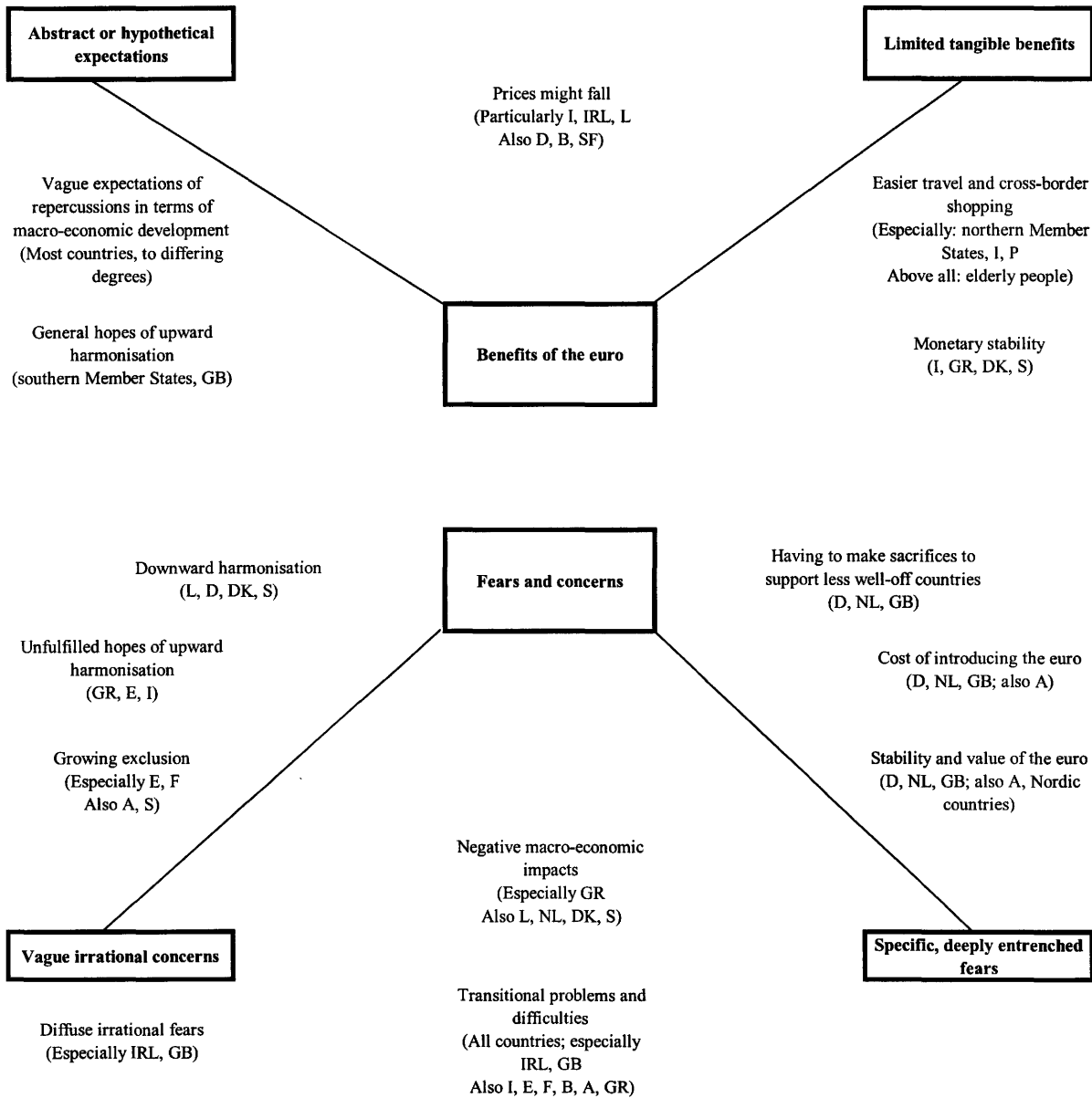
It is therefore vital to give reassurance, mainly by reaffirming the euro's neutrality in these fields, by improving information on the inviolability and continued validity of contracts, and (at least in those countries where it is a valid argument) by stressing the positive impact on lower interest rates.

? **Continuing to explain 'how' the euro will be introduced**

Even in countries that belong to the euro zone and where there is a reasonable standard of basic information, **there continue to be major uncertainties about the measures that have already been announced and implemented.** In other countries, and particularly in the four non-euro countries, people have much hazier ideas on matters such as:

- **the irrevocability of the conversion rate** (or of a future conversion rate when fixed);
- **the value of the euro** (poorly or very poorly understood in some countries); even if citizens show little interest in indulging spontaneously in thought processes and operations in the new currency, a clear understanding of its value is vital if they are ever to come to terms with it;

**POTENTIAL ADVANTAGES OF THE EURO
AND PEOPLE'S FEARS**



- **the timetable:** it is necessary to **remind people of it**; however, there is also a need to **explain** the slow pace (which suggests that things have come to a standstill) with arguments that speak directly to the people concerned (e.g. the need to give retailers time to adapt, to adapt their equipment without having to make an ‘emergency’ investment, and to train their staff properly);
- **fixing conversion rates using a number of decimal points (the purpose of which few people can understand)**, and which look like an unnecessary complication, and **explaining** how such precision will prevent short-changing when rounding off;
- **the continuing validity of contracts** (already referred to) and the purely mechanical nature of converting sums of money in euros.

In countries that are not currently members of the euro, it can also be very useful to show how the initial introduction of the euro has passed off without any major upheaval.

- **the values of notes and coins, and what they look like**

Apart from the technical need to provide this information (and first and foremost to say that relevant decisions have already been made), **this is an opportunity to make it clear that these measures have not been determined by experts sitting in an ivory tower, but have been designed with associations of groups such as consumers, the disabled and the visually impaired in mind.**

? **Explaining issues underlying decisions that have not yet been announced**

This mainly concerns provisions relating to **the period when the euro and the national currency will co-exist side by side**; we have already seen how it is perceived as **the most critical period** with regard to how long it will last and how it will work.

As we await the final decisions, **it is important not to give the impression that ‘nothing is happening’, and to explain how an attempt is being made to find the simplest and most appropriate solutions** in collaboration with representative organisations of citizens and consumers and relevant professional associations.

It will also be useful to **reassure people about how long it will be possible to carry on exchanging the former national currency for euros.**

? **Reassuring people that the government has the matter in hand**

This is all about **reassuring people about the provisions that have been adopted or planned to prevent overcharging and short-changing**: these might include legislation (e.g. the rounding-off regulations) and monitoring exercises and, where appropriate, the issue of sanctions (particularly in countries in the south where people are very concerned).

- ? **Developing measures that will help people change over to the euro (existing information campaigns are necessary, but they are not enough)**

In addition to information campaigns in the strict sense of the term, there is a need to implement, or develop, measures and initiatives that promote familiarity with, and acclimatisation to, the euro.

Interviewees' concerns include:

- **the usefulness and limitations of dual display and labelling of prices, and the dual indication of costs on financial documentation**

It is clear that these practices have greatly helped both to establish the idea that the euro and its value are realities that have come to stay, and to make them an acknowledged component of daily life in the future (not to say the present).

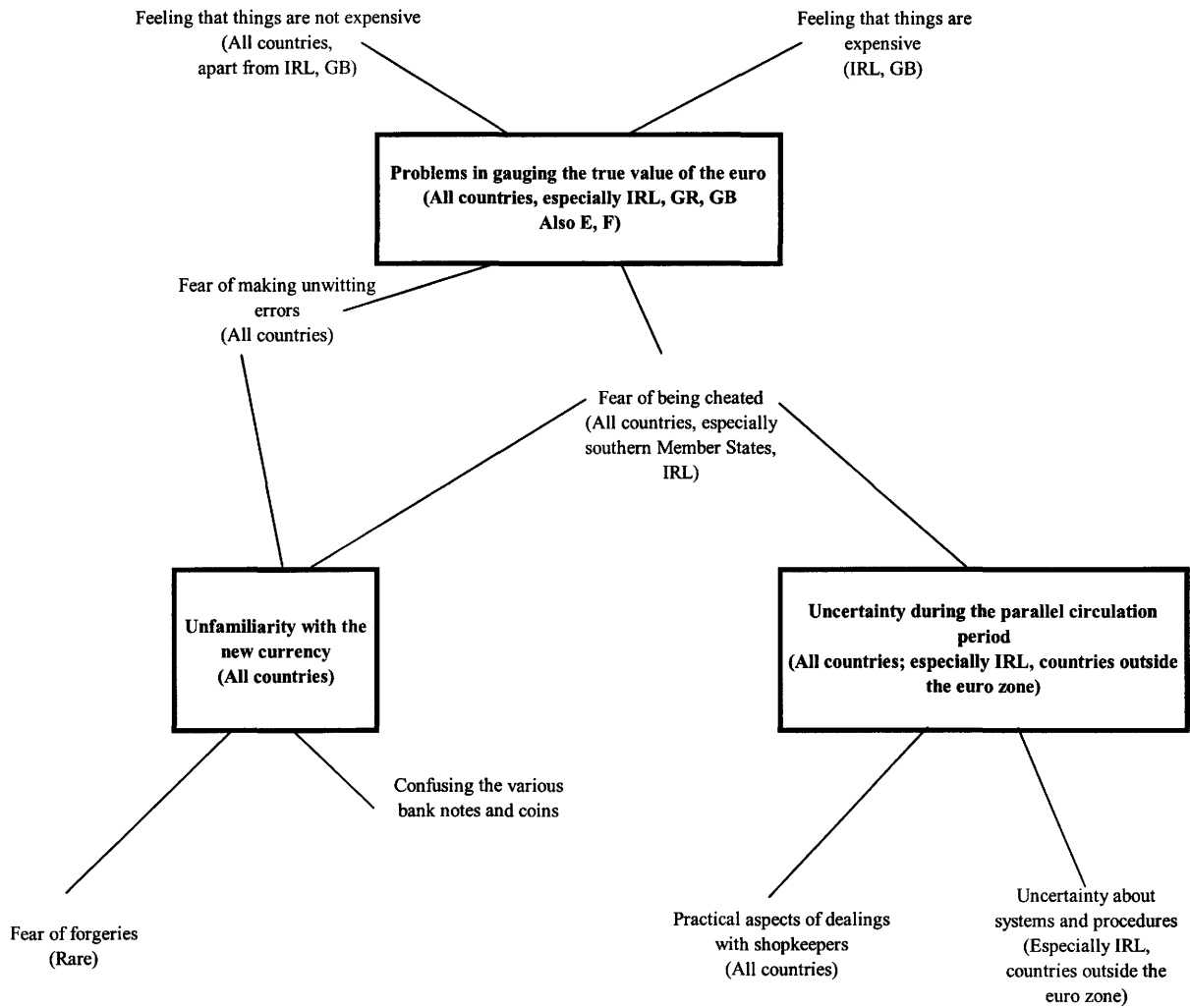
This applies at least in countries where these practices are used systematically, and it would be a good idea to encourage their development in other countries. However, it is also clear that these indications are rarely consulted, and that they do little to encourage consumers to work out personal price references.

- An interest expressed in many countries in **the availability of euro calculators and simplified conversion cards**; these would certainly encourage an active response.

Not all citizens can be expected to start doing these calculations overnight in euros using these methods. The example of Luxembourg, where the government distributed conversion calculators to all homes, reveals that, in the absence of any immediate practical applications or of a proper understanding of how they work, many are still inside the packaging. However, they will become more useful as the physical introduction of the euro approaches.

- **The frequently mentioned need to see what euro notes and coins look like**, and ideally to touch them, and to do so in ways (not yet determined) that will start to give the single currency a concrete reality.

LIKELY PROBLEMS IN GETTING USED TO THE EURO



- **A minority, but significant, predisposition on the part of the population under discussion to commence some euro ‘training’, despite the fact that few neighbourhood resources or structures make any provision for this.**

This appears to be true of people who are both keen to join the euro project, and are uncertain or anxious about the conditions in which it will be introduced (in Italy and Spain, among elderly people in France and Greece, and in Sweden after the country joins up)

*‘Euro training programmes with role-playing where you pretend to convert the price of everyday shopping items from lire to euros.’
(Group of Elderly People - Italy)*

‘Like the story of the village where they operated in euros for a whole day, and forgot the peseta.’ (Group of Vulnerable People – Spain)

‘By doing little sums or, when you get a bill, you convert it to see if you get the right answer.’ (Group of Elderly People – France)

‘I’d like to go on a course. In fact, my pensioners’ association is putting one on free.’ (Group of Elderly People – Sweden)

Analysis of the discussions also suggests that the setting up of such neighbourhood initiatives could subsequently foster favourable reactions in other countries.

V.3 PLANNED INFORMATION AND FAMILIARISATION RESOURCES

Before testing participants' reactions to a series of precise, planned measures, they were asked which resources they thought would be helpful in finding out about the euro and familiarising themselves with it.

They were mainly as follows:

? **The news media**

Television comes top of the list in all, or nearly all, countries.

This is hardly surprising given the role that television plays in daily life, and it is the reply given to similar questions on any – or almost any – subject. However, it does not necessarily reflect any particular kind of involvement, or a real preparedness not to 'go channel-hopping' (physically or mentally) as soon as people have to move on from passive, listening behaviour to the more sustained attentiveness that the subject requires.

Interviewees' statements in this respect seem to be more than simple clichés without real meaning, given the precise detail with which their ideas are articulated; the way their demands for television back-up also differ from what they have generally had a chance to see hitherto.

'Television shows everything that's going on, but you don't see much about the euro.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Germany)

Generally speaking, there is a desire for **information bulletins on the euro that are short and concise, focus on one aspect at a time (for example, showing ordinary people using the euro in everyday life), and are presented clearly in simple (but not simplistic), everyday language.**

These conditions are essential if televised information on the euro is to be fully effective.

Privately – and these feelings are expressed everywhere – this would be the reverse of political statements and expert debate, despite the fact that the government, which has the authority and main responsibility for providing information on the euro, is clearly expected to provide a programme of this type.

'The language of politicians is often hard to follow... We want more examples of real-life situations, like the game we've just played [a euro simulation exercise].' (Group of Elderly People – Finland)

'Two-minute slots on between TV soaps to explain the difference when buying bread, milk or vegetables in euros and Irish pounds.' (Group of Elderly People – Ireland)

'Short euro documentaries in simple layman's language, approachable, but not patronising.' (Group of Vulnerable People – United Kingdom)

The press is only referred to in some countries, particularly in northern Europe where (daily) newspapers are widely read: Belgium, Germany, Austria (elderly people), Finland, the Netherlands (with some reservations), Ireland and the United Kingdom, and Italy.

The aim, given the less fleeting nature of written information, is a **complementary relationship with audiovisual tools**. Examples include not only concrete information and explanations, but also supplements containing photos of notes and coins, and conversion cards.

'You might keep an interesting article.' (Group of Elderly People – Germany)

'You might see what the coins and notes look like in the newspaper.' (Group of Elderly People – Greece)

Other news media (e.g. the radio in Austria, and advertising on public transport in Italy) are rarely mentioned.

? **The dissemination of information documents**, the official source of which would again be the government (e.g. the state, the central bank or a government information agency)

'It is the job of the authorities to inform us.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Portugal)

'It is the duty of the state to inform.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Belgium)

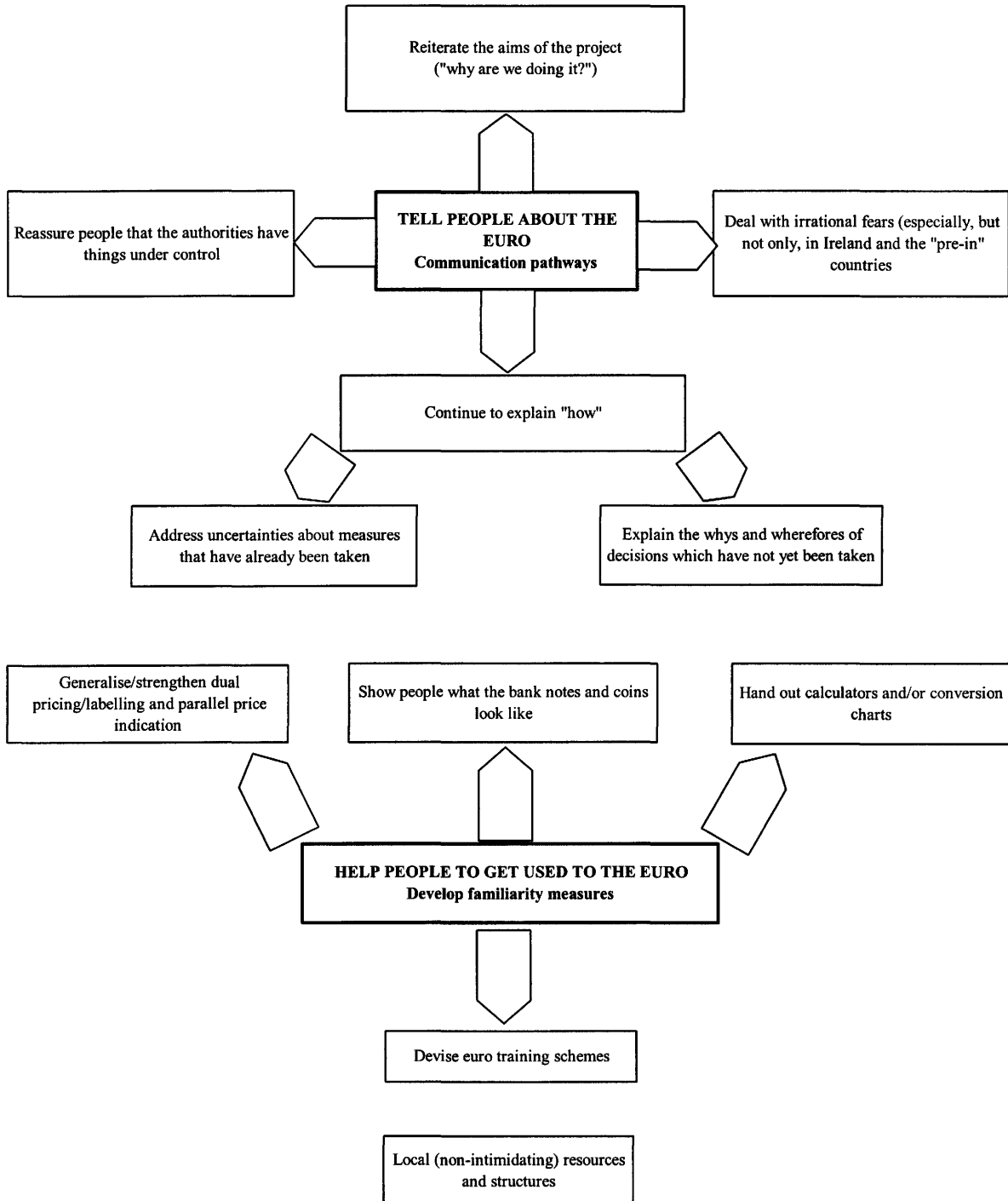
in the form of **Euro Guides**,

- or in the form of **short, simple, to-the-point pamphlets** that contain no technical jargon and have a clear objective.

'Several pamphlets if there are lots of issues, otherwise you get snowed under with all these words.' (Group of Elderly People – Italy)

'Information in the form of pamphlets sent to all homes, and easy to read – with advertising spots on television as back-up.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Denmark)

WHAT DIRECTION SHOULD ACTION TAKE?



This approach is supported in countries as diverse as Italy, Spain, France, Luxembourg (where a comprehensive guide to the euro has already been published), the Netherlands, and in countries that are currently not members of the euro zone.

Means of dissemination vary: they include the state sending it to every home, enclosing it with documentation relating to the payment of pensions and social benefits, and making it available in local authority and public service offices, or even in banks and post offices (which, in turn, may have their own documentation arising out of their financial responsibilities).

- ? **Information put out by banks**, in the form of documentation of the type referred to above, and as answers they give to questions from customers.

'They're going to explain everything to us at the bank when we go in to get money out.' (Group of Elderly People – France)

'People could be given the chance now to look at, and touch, euros in banks, post offices and railway stations.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Luxembourg)

However, **vulnerable people have reservations about this in several countries**: they do not always have a bank account, or are excessively dependent on them (e.g. they owe large amounts of money or rely on loans), or at the very least are intimidated by their widespread availability (clear examples of this in our samples in Ireland, Greece and the United Kingdom)

- ? **Systematic dual display and dual labelling** in (large) stores, and sometimes very specific demands (e.g. that goods themselves should be labelled, and prices not just displayed on the shelves) that price displays should draw particular attention to the cost in euros, and not the national currency. We have seen how this helped to fix the euro in people's minds, but did little to encourage them to actively 'own' the new currency.

'Now you can see prices in lire in large numbers, and in euros in small numbers underneath.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Italy)

'It's a good idea, but I realise I haven't taken much notice.' (Group of Elderly People – Portugal)

This demand emanates mainly from countries (Italy, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Finland and an applicant country, Greece) where the distribution process may not yet have systemised the practice.

On the other hand, there are few spontaneous calls for supermarkets to employ staff to help customers with the euro: the legitimacy of their intervention in this setting is not clear.

- ? **The systematic practice of dual indication of costs on statements, bills, advice notes and other paperwork** for the same reasons (particularly in the same countries, and in Sweden and the United Kingdom)

'Let's pay telephone and electricity bills in euros – let's get used to it in a practical manner.' (Group of Elderly People – Spain)

- ? **The provision of calculators and/or conversion cards:** this is much more advanced in Italy, Belgium (where the state has promised to do something, but has yet to deliver), Luxembourg (conversion cards), Austria and the United Kingdom than elsewhere, although interviewees in some countries already have received this kind of resource from banks and other commercial operators.

'It should have been distributed with the calculators.' (Group of Elderly People – Luxembourg)

'Simple conversion tables, particularly for small sums of money spent on day-to-day purchases, plastic cards – like telephone cards.' (Group of Elderly People – Italy)

- ? **The setting up of neighbourhood networks** (although that is not what interviewees instinctively call them); there is a request for this in all countries in various forms and taking the needs of various organisations into account:

- **local public authorities and services** (frequently mentioned);
- **social services** (particularly highly regarded in Belgium, the Netherlands, Finland, Ireland and the United Kingdom, but not trusted by vulnerable people elsewhere);
- **schools** (in many countries);
- **association networks** (highly regarded for being close to people's real concerns): they include retired people's federations, third age clubs, neighbourhood clubs, and associations of all kinds including parish associations (mentioned in Portugal, Greece and Sweden).

These networks are less often mentioned by vulnerable people than by elderly people.

'At election time, they distribute pamphlets to all homes in the towns and surrounding areas.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Germany)

'In the new districts, which have closer links with people, you can go and complain, or at least talk to them.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Sweden)

'The post office or local welfare offices can help by explaining the differences that people should expect in their pensions or in their savings.' (Group of Elderly People – Ireland)

'Home-call nurses.' (Group of Elderly People – Belgium)

'Teaching young people to prepare for the day when the franc will disappear.' (Group of Vulnerable People – France)

'Senior citizens' associations, which could organise meetings where you could go and ask them questions.' (Group of Elderly People – Belgium)

'Caritas or the Red Cross should do it for the poorest people.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Luxembourg)

'People still go to church quite a lot in the provinces. The Church should be doing something.' (Group of Elderly People – Portugal)

'Some disadvantaged people don't understand a thing. We've got to explain it to them.' (Group of Vulnerable People – France)

V.4 REACTIONS TO PROPOSED INITIATIVES FOR SMOOTHING THE TRANSFER TO THE EURO

Interviewees were handed a list of ideas for initiatives that could be adopted, or which have already begun to be adopted, in some countries⁹.

A - A comprehensive guide to the euro containing detailed information sent to every home

This idea usually prompts positive reactions, except in Latin countries and among some people in France (elderly people approve; vulnerable people do not), Belgium and the United Kingdom. We should not forget that such a guide has already been published in Luxembourg: it is highly thought of, although many people have either not yet opened it or have only glanced at it.

Sometimes, the idea is less well received by vulnerable people, as they may find it difficult to read.

On the positive side, there is the fact that it looks reassuringly like a kind of 'bible' that gives you answers to questions when you need them, the fact that it is a lasting document that you can keep, and – at a more or less conscious level – an auspicious sign that the government has the main details of the process dealt with in this study under control.

'A good idea, you could actually sit down and study it.' (Group of Elderly People – Ireland)

'It's good. You need something that tells you what we're missing – how to use it, the notes, the coins, and support from social services.' (Group of Elderly People – France)

'You don't think of everything on your own. It's good that it's simple.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Austria)

'It's best to have everything in one place – better than a collection of pamphlets.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Sweden)

The fact that the document is **dependent** for its effectiveness on being **readable and written in everyday language**

On the negative side, it might be rejected precisely because of its indigestible appearance and doubts that it can meet these criteria.

'It's great. Everything's there. All we have to do now is understand it.' (Group of Luxembourg)

⁹ These included ideas that were not necessarily applicable as such in practice, but were used in this exercise as prompts.

'Make it simple and practical – and no jargon.' (Group of Elderly People – Netherlands)

'Engaging, easy to read, user-friendly.' (Group of Elderly People – United Kingdom)

B - Very short pamphlets that are easy to read, and are only distributed to every home when there is important, new information

This proposal receives a warm welcome, except in four countries where the reception is muted: **Spain** (where many think it looks like a publicity brochure 'that you put straight in the dustbin'), **France** (where people are relatively indifferent, possibly because they have received a lot of information from different quarters in recent months), **Germany** (for reasons similar to those in Spain, but where it is suggested that they should be available in public places and banks) and **Austria** (where vulnerable people think they are useless compared with 'what you get on television').

Interest focuses on the **concise nature** of the documents: people want them to be **clear, to avoid technical jargon, and to address just one aspect (or very few) at a time** – not drown the reader with mindless hotchpotch.

'It's just what I said: a big guide – boring. Something like that ought to be enough.' (Group of Elderly People – Portugal)

'A complement to the guide.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Sweden)

Reservations focus mainly on the danger of them being confused with advertising materials: this could be resolved by an 'official' form of presentation, a distinguishing (e.g. A4) format, or a method of distribution that side-steps the problem (e.g. it could be enclosed with electricity bills, or with other communications from government departments and services).

'I'm afraid all the pamphlets that come through the letter-box every 4-6 weeks end up in the wastepaper basket. It's the same with commercials – we don't watch them.' (Group of Elderly People – Germany)

'Ten or so pages in A4 format would be better. You can easily lose a small pamphlet.' (Group of Vulnerable People – France)

'All homes in Milan should be sent a set of pamphlets to their private addresses.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Italy)

'Get them to enclose it with the pension cheque.' (Group of Elderly People – Italy)

C - An information service that can be accessed free of charge (e.g. by telephone, minitel¹⁰/Teletext or the Internet)

Views on this idea touch on **telephone access** to such a service; other proposed methods were materially or psychologically inaccessible to members of the population segments under examination.

It is favourably received by both groups only in some north European countries (Netherlands, Finland and Sweden); reactions are clearly negative in Italy, Ireland and France, and they are divided, or mixed with reservations, elsewhere.

These reservations mainly relate to the following issues: not having a telephone at home; busy telephone lines and other undefined fears; the inherent limitations of telephonic communication, and the fact that elderly and disadvantaged people find the telephone difficult to use; the fact that it is possible to get answers to specific questions, but no explanation on more complicated issues; the short-lived nature of the relationship; and the absence of any written reply that one can put to one side and re-read another time.

'These things are too complicated to understand over the telephone.'
(Group of Vulnerable People – Italy)

'It's not personal enough and difficult to explain over the phone what your problem might be.' (Group of Elderly People – Ireland)

'I disagree. On the telephone, they swamp you with words, and you haven't got time to note it all down – not when you get to my age anyway.' (Group of Elderly People – Germany)

Even among those who are in favour, it is seen as complementary to other approaches, rather than as a self-sufficient source of information.

'A good idea as long as it is backed up by pamphlets.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Belgium)

D - People specially trained to provide information on the euro in the public services you have dealings with (e.g. Mayor's Offices, social workers, post offices and banks)

Reactions to this proposal are **generally positive in half of the countries** (i.e. Latin countries and Ireland, the United Kingdom and Finland); elsewhere, they are divided.

They embrace **a number of perceptions:**

¹⁰ Minitel is only available in France.

- Access to a large number of public and private information agencies (including banks and supermarkets) in countries where reactions are positive – with a tendency on the part of people who are very elderly, ill, disabled or isolated to ‘specialise’ in public services (social services).

‘I don’t think we need that sort of thing – not those of us who live in Lisbon anyway. But when you go out into the provinces, it’s a quite different matter... it might be a good idea in some places.’ (Group of Vulnerable People – Portugal)

‘I don’t think I’d go to the Mayor’s Office for help, but perhaps social workers might be able to tell people who are ill and people with problems.’ (Group of Elderly People – Luxembourg)

Prominence is given here to the possibility of a ‘human’, face-to-face relationship, and to the idea of being able to take the opportunity to visit these departments, rather than making a special journey just to ask questions.

‘Personal human contact – now that’s something positive.’ (Group of Elderly People – Austria)

‘People who would help consumers to understand the euro.’ (Group of Elderly People – United Kingdom)

- A tendency to see banks and post offices (i.e. financial services) as the sole, natural and authoritative sources of information in Belgium, Luxembourg, Denmark, Germany and Austria.

‘This is not much use. If you’ve got a problem about the euro, it’s obvious where you go – to the bank or the post-office.’ (Group of Vulnerable People – Belgium)

- Civil servants in Greece are generally held in low esteem (e.g. fears of interminable queues, slow replies and a failure to give requests proper consideration).

‘Most of the time they couldn’t care a damn. They aren’t properly trained, and sometimes they aren’t even at their workplaces.’ (Group of Vulnerable People – Greece)

- A tendency to think favourably of public social services in the Netherlands and Sweden on the part of elderly people (also thinking of people older than themselves), but distrust among vulnerable people. This distrust for the proposal is also to be found in other countries, mainly Germany and Austria.

‘I don’t want to queue up. I don’t think they know what they’re doing.’ (Group of Vulnerable People – Austria)

Some of the reservations expressed here and there may appear paradoxical, despite the fact that the idea of neighbourhood networks was spontaneously mentioned during an earlier stage of the discussions. **If such a service is introduced into public services, it is important to take account of existing perceptions that can lead to distrust, or at least to a lack of confidence.**

- E - People like you in your locality and circle of friends, eager to provide information on the euro and help people with their problems**

This proposal initially prompts **reactions of distrust and uncertainty, except in Latin countries and Finland, for reasons partly connected to a restrictive interpretation of what it involves.**

For example, attitudes of rejection observed in Ireland, the Netherlands, Austria, Greece and part of Luxembourg, particularly among vulnerable people, flow from **fears of intrusion into one's private life** (imagining people knocking at the door).

'I would not really like to see someone coming to people's home. Too much gossip in local housing estates.' (Group of Elderly People – Ireland)

'I don't talk about money with my neighbours.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Netherlands)

'You don't normally open your door to a stranger.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Greece)

Elsewhere (i.e. the elderly in these, and other opposed, countries), distrust is mainly encouraged by **doubts about whether 'people like you' are qualified to talk about the euro.**

'The voluntary workers are full of enthusiasm, but they often don't have the right information.' (Group of Elderly People – Netherlands)

'It's a bit of a laugh for people like us. We basically know nothing about it.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Sweden)

Lastly, there are **doubts about the need for such a measure** in Germany ('It hasn't got complicated yet') and Luxembourg (where almost everyone has a bank employee in his/her circle of friends, and it is thought that the change-over will happen naturally).

An analysis of reactions in countries where there is majority support shows that participants there are aware of **the close relationship with people 'at their level'**: they can see it could work within already existing frameworks (e.g. third age clubs, neighbourhood associations,

and meetings run by social workers and volunteers who work in the field and in whom people have confidence), without it intruding into their home lives.

'A national training programme to give people a practical grasp of the euro... organised by local authorities... and involving young people doing their compulsory civic service.' (Group of Elderly People – Italy)

'Because if you're with people you know well, you have more confidence – and it's less official.' (Group of Vulnerable People – France)

'Like in the local authority activity centres with volunteers – that would be a simple and natural way of doing it.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Finland)

As we have already seen, neighbourhood networks of this type are among the ideas that interviewees in many countries expressed spontaneously. One might deduce from this that a **more accurate presentation of the proposal**, which avoids negative interpretations of the danger of intrusion into one's private life, **may well be more broadly and favourably received**, particularly among people who are most disadvantaged by, and distrustful of, traditional institutions.

F - The distribution to every home long before 1 January 2002 of a set of real notes and coins in euros, to help people make the changeover

In a large number of countries, this proposal met with incredulity, or at least with some serious questions.

It is seen everywhere as an initiative that would meet people's need to know what the euro looks like, and have a concrete representation of it.

- It is **unreservedly welcomed by participants in both groups in Spain and Portugal, and in countries that have not yet decided on their candidature for the euro** (i.e. Denmark, Sweden and the United Kingdom); no one asks 'How?'

'It would be nice to be able to go to the bank and ask for a set of notes and coins in euros, so that I could get used to them in my own time and without having to rush.' (Group of Elderly People – Portugal)

'An excellent idea.' (Group of Elderly People – Sweden)

- It is rejected as **unrealistic in Germany and the Netherlands**, where few would expect the government 'to give money away for

nothing', and where people are apparently satisfied with visual representations of the new currency.

'Is this April Fool's Day or what?' (Group of Elderly People – Germany)

- It is ***a priori*** appealing in the other countries, but there are doubts about how realistic it is. These include the danger of forgery (raised in France, Belgium and Luxembourg); the danger of theft 'from the bag of the postman who delivers letters to the estate' (in France); the danger of getting confused 'with money that can actually be used' (in Ireland); the idea that we will eventually have to pay for them, or compensate for them (in Belgium, Austria, Finland and Greece); and questions about 'who is going to fund it' (in Austria and Finland).

People who still entertain these uncertainties are prepared to make do with 'specimens' or 'reproductions'.

'Some people will just force open your letter-box – either that or the postman will have to go round accompanied by a guard.'
(Group of Vulnerable People – France)

'How are we going to pay for this money in Belgian francs?'
(Group of Vulnerable People – Belgium)

'Brilliant idea! Free money! As much as possible please! But somebody will have to pay...'
(Group of Vulnerable People – Finland)

'That would be very helpful – you'd be able to see what it looks like... [but] they don't dish out money like that any old how. They'd ask you to pay it back.'
(Group of Elderly People – Greece)

Given these reactions, one may suggest that:

- it is unquestionably useful for citizens to see what the new currency look like
- the precise operation of the planned initiative would need to be set out in great detail; the purpose of this would be: to avoid any misunderstanding and unrealistic interpretations that might arise from an excessively succinct formulation of the proposal, and insufficient time at the end of the discussion to examine reactions more closely; and to explain further the various forms that such a measure could take (e.g. through neighbourhood networks).

G - The introduction of notes and coins in euros before 1 January 2002 so that people have time to get used to them

This idea was put forward in order to stimulate reactions on the need to familiarise oneself with the new currency in advance.

The favourable reactions that were noted principally in Latin countries, Belgium and the United Kingdom, and among vulnerable people in Luxembourg and Sweden, confirm that this need exists – usually as long as it does not extend the dual circulation period.

'We need to be able to get our hands on euros as quickly as possible.' (Group of Elderly People – Spain)

'The sooner we have it in our hands, the better.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Portugal)

'Three years – that's too long. Perhaps we could start with the euro before then – I'd go along with that.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Luxembourg)

'But more than anything, don't extend the period when we'll have francs and euros at the same time.' (Group of Elderly People – Belgium)

The majority unfavourable reactions in the other countries are directly associated with the refusal to extend this period – and in countries that are not yet members of the euro zone, with reservations about accelerating a process that they still find too uncertain.

'Let's not add to the confusion. That would make the [dual circulation] period even longer.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Netherlands)

'It would just add to the confusion.' (Group of Elderly People – Denmark)

In practice, this proposal would require the transition period to be shortened.

H - Local euro observatories, that is to say services that can, among other things, monitor the problems that present themselves day by day, and identify overcharging and short-changing.

No one knows of the existence of these observatories.

Reactions to this proposition are **generally favourable, particularly in south European countries and in Ireland** where, as we have seen, fears of being short-changed are especially acute and where there have been spontaneous calls for stricter monitoring. That apart, the idea has not been rejected, but it is generally held that competent services of the state are in existence, and should normally be adequate to the task. The proposal is rejected in the Netherlands on the ground that it serves no purpose.

'It's what we were saying before – we need to step up the monitoring.'
(Group of Vulnerable People – Spain)

'Definitely required. Against fraud and cheating.' (Group of Elderly People – Ireland)

'The price monitoring unit could be expanded, but it'll have to do.'
(Group of Elderly People – Luxembourg)

'It sounds obvious; they must have provided for it.' (Group of Elderly People – United Kingdom)

Accordingly, it is clear that **these observatories are only seen by interviewees in the context of monitoring, and that their work should be expanded and focused in other ways** before an informed judgement can be made.

- I - **Providing every home with a free, basic calculator that converts prices in euros into (the national currency) and (the national currency) into euros**

This initiative has already been adopted in Luxembourg.

It is also **favourably received in Greece, the United Kingdom** (where it may be replaced by conversion cards), **Ireland** (except among some elderly people who are afraid they will not know how to use them) **and France**; all of these are countries where conversion seems to be more difficult than elsewhere.

'Yes, but how easy will it be to remember the calculation and how to work it out?' (Group of Elderly People – Ireland)

'Very useful, just before the six-month period.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Greece)

The idea was **also welcomed in the two Belgian groups**, where it was seen as 'compulsory' (perhaps because the state had apparently promised to go ahead, but has yet to do anything) **and in Austria** (where distribution is already undertaken by the City of Vienna and by banks).

It has been received **positively, if with less enthusiasm, in the Netherlands and Finland.**

In Italy, Spain and Portugal, the fact that the card is assumed to be free appeals to vulnerable people; on the other hand, elderly people are more likely to reject the idea, either because they already have one – or think they have one – from their bank or some other commercial actor, or because it is a tool that they do not know how to

use (or, as in Italy, they are afraid that the numbers ‘will be too small for them to read’).

‘Very useful at the beginning of the period.’ (Group of Vulnerable People – Spain)

‘If it’s free, Portuguese people will go along with it.’ (Group of Vulnerable People – Portugal)

‘Not for me – and anyway, young people ought to be able to do it in their heads.’ (Group of Elderly People – Portugal)

By contrast, **vulnerable people in Sweden, and Danes and Germans generally reject the idea** – because they already have calculators, because they have an unusually simple conversion rate (in Germany, where conversion cards are sufficient), or because they think it is a waste of public money.

In this context, it is worth recalling **the interest shown in simplified conversion tables and cards**: they will have to be carefully fine-tuned to meet the needs and thinking processes of the people concerned.

J - Placing ‘badges of trust’ in shops that are prepared to give customers information on the euro

This proposal is only partly understood, and it encounters reservations in most countries, although sometimes for quite opposed reasons:

- **A lack of credibility and lack of confidence in the business community in general in Italy, Spain, France and Greece, and among male interviewees in the United Kingdom.**

‘If it’s something you learn with, it should be somewhere else – not in shops.’ (Group of Vulnerable People – Spain)

‘Any Tom, Dick or Harry could get one.’ (Group of Elderly People – United Kingdom)

In fact, as we have seen, this distrust is less associated, or is not at all associated, with large stores with their ‘help desks’, but one sometimes has the feeling that they would provide an information service anyway, even it were not ‘institutionalised’

‘You mean you believe that?’ ‘But there are “advice desks” in Carrefour. It might work there.’ Group of Vulnerable People – France)

- **By contrast, there are fears of short-changing in Germany, the Netherlands and the Nordic countries** (although the idea is not rejected in Finland and Sweden)
- **Absence of any perception of a basic need in Belgium and Austria** (also felt here that it is not the place one would go looking for information on the euro)

'Do you really think people would go to these shops just to do their shopping?' (Group of Elderly People – Belgium)

The idea receives a more favourable reception in Portugal (although it is not perceived as being fundamentally useful) **and Luxembourg**, where consideration is only given to 'accredited' shops that undergo ongoing price checks. This idea is also put forward by some Austrian interviewees.

'I don't think shops should be in the business of giving us information on the euro.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Portugal)

'I don't think that's the point. There's just one question: how much is the euro worth? There's nothing else to explain.' (Group of Elderly People – Portugal)

'It's all right as long as it's properly supervised.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Luxembourg)

K - All prices to be labelled and displayed as from now in euros and in (the national currency)

The reactions of all interviewees in all countries confirm that **the measure is perceived as concrete and very useful**, even though, in countries where the system is already largely up and running, it is often pointed out that people pay little attention, and it is not enough to help people work out personal price references in euros.

There is a feeling in most member countries of the euro zone that this measure is already in wide use.

'We may not pay much attention, but we know it's there.' (Group of Elderly People – Portugal)

'It's wonderful. We've made it!.' (Group of Vulnerable People – France)

However, there is a wish in **Finland and Luxembourg for the idea to be further developed** (among small retailers, even though they are unlikely to get involved), **extended in Ireland** to systematically labelling the product itself (in addition to displaying prices on shelves),

and **modified in Italy** in such a way that the price in euros is written in larger characters than in lire.

'Very positive. You already see them around a lot. Let's hope they get used more as the months pass.' (Group of Elderly People – Finland)

'Having the prices shown on the packaging means you could check when you go home to see what the differences are; some products are already doing this, but not what we are buying every day – for example milk, bread, butter.' (Group of Elderly People – Ireland)

In countries that are not members of the euro zone, there is unanimous support for adopting this measure, and for it to be introduced as soon as the country joins the single currency, but not before.

'Should be done from the beginning, as soon as it is officially decided that Greece is to be a member.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Greece)

'Absolutely. It's very important.' (Group of Elderly People – Denmark)

'A critical thing to get used to it.' (Group of Elderly People – United Kingdom)

L - Short television programmes giving simple, jargon-free information, and showing how people use the euro concretely in their daily lives

We have seen that this idea was mentioned spontaneously by discussion participants. When it was presented here, it was given a **warm welcome everywhere**; reservations were only expressed in the Netherlands, where it was felt unlikely 'that it could serve any purpose before 2002', and among elderly Austrians who wondered whether they would contain any useful information.

The appeal of the proposal lies in **its promise to be concise, to use clear, 'everyday' language, and to have ordinary people using the euro**; this view is expressed in countries that are both members and non-members of the euro zone.

'Short, clear, to-the-point information programmes on the RAI.' (Group of Elderly People – Italy)

'Short, snappy TV programme spots. It would have to be done in a humorous light, or people won't watch it.' (Group of Elderly People – Ireland)

'It would be good if they had examples.' (Group of Vulnerable People – France)

'In simple language, otherwise some people won't understand what they're saying.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Belgium)

'It's got to give details on how to use the money, examples of mistakes you might make...' (Group of Vulnerable People – Greece)

In terms of form as distinct from that of basis, these programmes are felt to be similar to commercials.

It was also unanimously felt that they should be broadcast **at peak viewing and listening hours** 'round about the same time as information slots', 'in the evening after the weather forecast', 'in the commercial break during soaps that are watched by lots of people' or 'after the evening news'. This was a sign that they were eager to be exposed to such information.

'After the weather flash – Euro Hour instead of the full weather forecast.' (Group of Elderly People – Spain)

'Short information broadcasts at peak viewing hours – and the kids could watch as well.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Finland)

It is important in this context to bear in mind the limitations of a 'passive listening' news medium in creating real awareness.

M - That prizes that can be won every day (e.g. the lottery, 'loto' and televised games) should be given solely in euros

Several interviewees pointed out that there are already games in which the prizes are given in euros (and the national currency).

The idea does not arouse any enthusiasm. It is **not rejected out of hand** (perhaps because it is just one of many ways of familiarising people with the euro), but **it is not seen anywhere as essential**.

'A good idea if prizes are in Danish as well.' (Group of Elderly People – Denmark)

'It might be a good way of getting the process off the ground.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Portugal)

'Most Irish people either watch the lotto draw on TV or check the papers regularly. This would be a good route as we would check how much we have won.' (Group of Elderly People – Ireland)

There are also **uncertainties and misunderstandings**; these include the idea that people will get something they cannot spend, as the euro is not yet in use

'So you win and they pay you – but can you take the money away with you?' (Group of Vulnerable People – Spain)

'What would I do with 6 million if I couldn't use it?' (Group of Vulnerable People – Luxembourg)

N - Television programmes in which well-known singers and actors are asked to present the euro in a simple, amusing way.

This idea is only positively received in a few countries (Spain, Portugal, Ireland and the United Kingdom), as long as the programmes feature presenters who are well known (therefore close to ordinary people) and amusing (to make the euro less serious), and have a reputation for being reliable.

'That would be great... if they presented it amusingly, people wouldn't flick over to another channel.' (Group Vulnerable People – Spain)

'Billy Connolly, John Cleese, Rodney Trotter, presenters who have a sense of humour and who speak for the people.' (Group of Elderly People – United Kingdom)

Elsewhere, it is rejected mainly on the grounds that 'the euro is a serious matter': people want to see it presented without ponderousness, pedantry or excessive technical language, but they do not want it brought into disrepute either.

'Ts! I can't imagine any singer talking about the euro.' (Group of Vulnerable People – France)

'They're not going to pay actors and singers to do that!' (Group of Elderly People – Belgium)

'This is serious business. It's not a joking matter.' (Group of Elderly People – Netherlands)

'That's for kids – not for the likes of us.' (Group of Elderly People – Greece)

'No. it would be stupid.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Sweden)

REACTIONS TO IDEAS FOR INITIATIVES FOR

EASING ENTRY INTO THE EURO:

TABLE SUMMARISING INTERVIEWEES' POSITIVE REACTIONS

	Elderly people	Vulnerable people
Comprehensive guide to the euro	+ IRL, F, L, D, NL, A, SF, GR, DK, S ?	+ IRL, D, NL, A, GR, DK, S ? L, SF
Short pamphlets giving new information	+ I, P, IRL, B, L, NL, A, SF, GR, DK, S, GB ? F, D	+ I, P, B, L, NL, SF, GR, DK, S, GB ? IRL, F, D, A
Free telephone etc helpline	+ NL, A, SF, S ? E, P, B, D, GR, DK, GB	+ P, B, L, NL, SF, S ? E, D, A, DK, GB
People specialising in public services	+ I, E, P, IRL, F, SF, GB ? B, L, D, A, NL, S	+ I, E, P, IRL, F, SF, GB ? B, L, D, A
Voluntary workers in your locality/circle of friends	+ I, E, P, F, SF ?	+ I, E, P, IRL, F, SF, GB ? B, L, D, A
A set of real notes and coins	+ E, P, DK, S, GB ? I, IRL, F, B, L, A, SF, GR	+ E, P, DK, S, GB ? I, IRL, F, B, L, A, SF, GR
Advance introduction of notes and coins	+ I, E, P, B, GB ? F	+ I, E, P, B, S, GB ? F, L
Local euro observatories	+ I, E, P, IRL, F, GR ? B, L, D, A, SF, DK, GB	+ I, E, P, IRL, F, GR ? B, L, D, A, SF, DK, S, GB
Basic calculators provided free of charge	+ F, B, L, A, GR, GB ? IRL, D, NL, SF, S	+ I, E, P, IRL, F, B, L, A, GR, GB ? NL, SF
'Badges of trust'	+ P, L ? A, S GB	+ P, L ? A, SF, GB
Widespread use of dual labelling and displaying	+ I, E, P, IRL, F, B, L, D, NL, A, SF, GR, DK, S, GB ?	+ I, E, P, IRL, F, B, L, D, NL, A, SF, GR, DK, S, GB ?
Short, to-the-point television programmes	+ I, E, P, IRL, F, B, L, D, SF, GR, DK, S, GB ? NL, A	+ I, E, P, IRL, F, B, L, D, A, SF, GR, DK, S, GB ? NL
Competitions with prizes given only in euros	+ IRL ? E, P, L, D, SF, DK, S	+ IRL, S ? E, P, F, L, D, SF, DK
Public information broadcasts on television with singers and actors	+ E, P, IRL, GB ? SF	+ E, P, IRL, GB ? L, SF, GR

CHAPTER VI
REACTIONS TO THE
EUROPEAN COMMISSION INITIATIVE

When the meetings were over, interviewees were told that the study in which they had just taken part had been carried out 'at the request of the European Commission in collaboration with Member States of the European Union'.

Reactions to this information were immediately analysed.

- ?
- **Reactions were extremely positive in south European countries (and Ireland), where the benefits of belonging to the European Union are generally acknowledged and the image of Europe is good.**

Interviewers found:

- **evidence, on the basis of this study, that the European Commission concerns itself with people's fates and opinions**

'It's extremely positive. They want to know if the new currency is going to be well received. It's very positive.' (Group of Elderly People – Portugal)

'It's good, it shows they care about us.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Portugal)

- **that the Commission can be trusted to be involved in the provision of information on the euro**

'Yes, I think it is good for the Commission to say this and that and tell us what we already know, and that things are going to improve; but it isn't good if we pick it up by hearsay, or by eavesdropping on what people are saying in the underground. We need a solid basis if we're going to do it properly. We've got to go about it seriously. The more information there is in different places, the better. The more communication there is, the better.' (Group of Elderly People – Spain)

In Greece, despite attitudes of distrust expressed by some people regarding Europe, it is felt that the Commission is reliable and can be trusted to contribute to this work, particularly in disseminating experiences in other countries.

'Their experiences could be useful examples for us to follow.' (Group of Elderly People – Greece)

- **a desire for intervention on the part of the Community authorities, clearly expressed in Italy and Ireland.**
 - The Commission's intervention is sought in Italy concerning both the introduction of notes and coins (people calling for this are unaware that it has already been arranged) and the implementation of euro familiarisation programmes, and even the monitoring of overcharging.

- There are fervent hopes in Ireland that there will be Community monitoring

'The European Commission should be able to control the different countries and ensure that the rights of the consumer are protected.' (Group of Elderly People – Ireland)

'Ireland has seen a lot of scandals in the financial services sector. The banks are not trusted. The European Commission need to take charge, or there will be a lot of fraud in Ireland.' (Group of Elderly People – Ireland)

'EU representatives or inspectors should be sent to make sure that shops are not abusing their power by putting prices up.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Ireland)

- ? Support for the institution is less whole-hearted in **other Member Countries of the euro zone**, but the initiative taken by the Commission is generally seen as positive, even though starting points are very varied:

- a very warm reception in **Belgium** (particularly among the elderly) and **Austria**, where information that might have come from the Commission is seen quite favourably as 'neutral and objective'
- a favourable reception among elderly people in **France**, and a more neutral response (but not opposition) from vulnerable people, for whom Europe continues to be extremely abstract
- a welcome accompanied by requests (that the Commission ensures that the process reaches its conclusion) in **Finland and in Luxembourg** (where it was naïvely suggested that the country should intervene to 'get rid of all these decimal points' and shorten the period when the two currencies will co-exist)
- a pleasant surprise in **Germany and the Netherlands** after an unpromising start.

'They stick their noses into things that have nothing to do with them, but this time at least they're doing something useful.' (Group of Elderly People – Germany)

- ? Lastly, in the three countries that have not yet offered themselves as applicants for euro membership, and where the image of the Commission was initially negative, it was observed:

- that the fact that the Commission took such an initiative **has not prompted a general outcry**, and

- **that extreme distrust continues to be directed in the United Kingdom** at a faceless, non-transparent institution that was recently touched by corruption, and which does not care about the interests and concerns of British people

'It's a shambles – there's too much nepotism.' (Group of Elderly People – United Kingdom)

- that **this distrust is receding somewhat in Scandinavian countries** where the same issues of image are present, but where people are also prepared to acknowledge that the Commission has a useful role to play in communicating exchanges of experiences

'Those promises of what we'd get if we entered the European Union – lower food prices and so on – none of them have been kept.' (Group of Vulnerable People – Sweden)

'I'm not very confident, but now that the President and lots of people have been shown the door, things might get better.' (Group of Elderly People – Sweden)

'I want them to tell us how they are getting on in other countries.' (Group of Elderly People – Sweden)

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

Structure of attitudes

Attitudes to the single currency project of the *a priori* 'sensitive' people interviewed for this study do not differ fundamentally **in their structure** from those in more 'average' categories of the population (see a recent study of European women).

Their vulnerable situation does not stop them wanting to be seen as citizens. Nor does it prevent them from understanding the euro as a project that forms part of the logic and continuation of European integration, and seeks to achieve this by working for a deepening of European integration and for Europe to become stronger on the world stage, particularly in competition with the United States and the dollar.

In this respect, the differences that can be observed in attitudes to the euro project largely reflect general, broader attitudes to the Community purpose, with each country's criterion being one that identifies major differentiation.

Differences in attitude by country

The views expressed in the various Member Countries may be summarised as follows:

- ? a generally high level of support in groups in southern countries, (where Europe is a reference point and a symbol of modernity and, despite some reticence among vulnerable Spaniards and a degree of ambivalence mixed with frustrations in Greece, where belonging to the euro is a source of self-enhancement), in Luxembourg (a traditionally 'no holds barred' Europhile frontier country), in Finland and, albeit less actively, in Austria whose recent membership of the European Union has naturally been followed by adoption of the euro;
- ? good support also among elderly people in France and Belgium, but a much weaker understanding in both countries among vulnerable people, for whom the project is still an abstraction;
- ? somewhat Europhile feelings in Ireland, but very little understanding of the euro and considerable anxiety at the prospect of its introduction;
- ? a fairly negative consensus among Dutch people in the categories examined (they appear to be no different from the population as a whole in their distrust of the European Union and of EC institutions in general) and among German interviewees (who seem to be more isolated in this respect and more inward-looking);
- ? opposition linked to widespread Europhobia in the United Kingdom;
- ? a theoretical understanding of objectives in Denmark and Sweden; however, resistance to enlargement of the Community as this could lead to the dissipation of national identity, and doubts about the benefits for the country and themselves (although 'average' women

who were interviewed in the earlier study tended to see adoption of the euro as a logical step to take now that they were in the European Union – for better or worse);

by contrast, elderly Danes are notable for a more open attitude to the objectives of the euro and to the idea of Europe in general.

Differences in attitude by category of population studied

This analysis highlights a more favourable attitude to Europe and the euro among elderly people (whose views on this are close to those of more average categories of the population) **and a distance and sense of exclusion that are peculiar to vulnerable people**: this may be observed particularly in Spain, France, Belgium, Greece and Denmark, and less so in Austria. This feeling of being left outside is also found among vulnerable people in Ireland and Sweden, and among a large number of elderly people in both countries.

2 – Level of understanding of the euro¹²

Overall understanding

The ‘basic’ level of understanding may be described as:

- ? relatively satisfactory in France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Austria, Finland, Germany and the Netherlands, notwithstanding a number of uncertainties in the latter two countries about the irrevocability of the rate of conversion;
- ? uneven in Italy, Spain and Portugal;
- ? extremely low in Ireland;
- ? in countries that are not yet members of the euro zone: poor in Greece, uncertain in Denmark and Sweden, and almost zero in the United Kingdom.

What is, and is not, known

Except among some British, Swedish, Danish and Irish people, it is generally understood that the euro will eventually replace the national currency completely and immutably, but even in some countries that are members of the euro zone, there continue to be doubts about the irrevocability of the conversion rate.

The value of the euro in the national currency is well known, or quite well known, in most countries in the euro zone, but there are still some shortcomings. This knowledge is poor in Greece, and almost zero in Ireland and the United Kingdom.

¹² See Chapter III.

There is a general understanding of the existence of a transition period in principle, and uneven knowledge of how it will work and its duration – except in the United Kingdom and Greece. There is much less information about the dual circulation period.

Virtually nothing is known in most countries about what the notes and coins will look like or the unit value of each one.

Differences by category of population under examination

There is relatively little difference between what elderly and vulnerable people know about the euro.

In some countries, the latter are generally a little less informed on the situation and process of entering the single currency: some know really nothing, but they are rare.

It follows that these ‘sensitive’ population segments do not differ from more average sectors of the population in respect of basic information on the euro.

3 – Perceptions of the potential benefits of the euro and of fears¹³

Perceived benefits of the euro

On a personal basis, European interviewees perceive the potential benefits of the euro after its introduction as follows:

- ? they may flow from a belief in the positive consequences for the country and its citizens of widely acknowledged macro-economic benefits; this applies particularly to people in Italy, Portugal and Luxembourg, and to elderly people in France and Belgium;
- ? they include confused (and sometimes naïve) fears of general upward harmonisation in countries that are beneficiaries of the cohesion policy, an issue of which British interviewees are also aware;
- ? they also include uncertain hopes of lower prices on goods and services resulting from more transparent competition in some countries, particularly Ireland, Italy and Luxembourg;
- ? more concretely, they include hopes for monetary stability in Italy and parts of Greece, and in Denmark and Sweden;
- ? they definitely focus on easier travelling; this particularly appeals to people in Italy, Portugal and Luxembourg (for cross-frontier purchases), and to elderly people in north European countries (Germany, Austria, Scandinavia and some in Ireland) that are notable for massive flows of retired holidaymakers to countries in the south.

¹³ See Chapter III.

However, for these people it is no more than an occasional benefit, and for others it is abstract or minor; vulnerable people feel generally excluded.

For the most part, the anticipated benefits of the euro are modest, or else abstract and general. In our view, the difficulty in bringing tangible, personal benefits to people's attention reinforces **the need not only to address targeted groups simply as consumers of these benefits**, but to see them first and foremost as citizens who, like other people, are able to form opinions on the single currency as a political project (whether they currently support it or oppose it).

Fears and anxieties

Basically (and ignoring questions relating to transition), **the following specific fears and anxieties are expressed** on day-to-day issues:

- ? the value and stability of the euro, mainly in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Germany, and among elderly Austrians and vulnerable people in Denmark and Sweden;
- ? the cost of introducing the euro (mainly in the United Kingdom, but also in the Netherlands and Germany, and to a lesser degree among elderly people in Austria);
- ? the solidarity cost with less affluent countries (in the same three countries);
- ? the danger of downward harmonisation, for example, of salaries, pensions and social protection (ill-defined fears in Luxembourg, more keenly felt fears among vulnerable people in Denmark and Sweden);
- ? a negative impact on the country or on some of its economic activities (strongly felt in Greece, and the source of ill-defined fears in Luxembourg and the Netherlands, and among elderly Scandinavians);
- ? increased exclusion and greater social disparities particularly among vulnerable people in Spain, France and Germany and elderly Swedes.

There are also irrational fears of all kinds concerning the matters set out above and other questions in the United Kingdom and Ireland, especially among vulnerable people in the latter country: they also have particular anxieties in Greece, Austria, France and Belgium.

Analyses of these fears identify **uncertainty as an important component of fear**. This derives from the response of many interviewees when asked to project themselves beyond the final introduction of the euro following the disappearance of the national currency; it was almost as if they felt a sense of relief at the prospect of a situation that would at long last be clear and

concrete, following a series of preparatory stages in which the euro had a virtual and disquieting existence.

This link between uncertainties and anxieties is clear in Ireland, the United Kingdom and Greece, and particularly so in Spain and France.

Differences by categories of population under examination

Generally speaking, **vulnerable people are more anxious, and more aware of potential benefits**, either because they feel excluded from concrete benefits (e.g. easier foreign travel), or because the impact on their personal lives of macro-economic advantages is still no more than an abstraction for them.

4 – Anticipated difficulties in getting used to the euro¹⁴

The nature of the problems

? Difficulty in getting used things in euros, and in fixing new personal price references

Clearly, no one has any euro price references yet. When trying to establish whether a product marked in euros is expensive, people try to convert the sum into the national currency by multiplying by a rounded-off conversion rate, usually after first rounding off the price.

This exercise appears to be relatively straightforward in countries with a conversion rate that is close to a simple value: they include not only Germany, but also Italy, Portugal, Belgium and Luxembourg, Finland and Austria, and even the Scandinavian countries. In the latter country and in the Netherlands, thought processes are sometimes different and the answers less accurate.

It is clearly more difficult and much less reliable for French, Spanish and Greek people.

As for the Irish and the British, nearly all of them are completely ignorant of even the approximate value of the euro; when they convert like this, they similarly get very approximate answers.

It is worth noting that elderly people find it generally less difficult to do the mental arithmetic that they learned when they were at school, while some vulnerable people approach the problem resentfully, or promptly refuse to tackle it at all.

However, all elderly people find it hard to carry out these estimates; even when they do, there are more or less major discrepancies between

¹⁴ See Chapter IV.

the answers they get and the real price. This usually encourages them to:

- make mental calculations or approximations on day-to-day purchases of low unit value (with the risk of very substantial discrepancies between these estimates and the real price);
- feel the need for aids and support (e.g. calculators or basic conversion cards) for important purchases in all countries, and for more day-to-day purchases where there is a complicated conversion rate.

? **The illusion that prices marked in euros are not high; this prompts the need for vigilance, but rarely true anxiety.**

? **The fear of being short-changed, particularly in south European countries and in Ireland.**

This fear is largely confined to purchases from, and relationships with, (mainly small) retailers; they are widely suspected of taking advantage of the confusion to 'round up' their prices.

In this context, there are signs that people are unaware of the existence of precise rounding-off rules, and that they fail to understand the reason for the six decimal points in conversion rates (they are often seen as a pointless complication).

By contrast, there are few anxieties in fields outside shopping (e.g. salaries, pensions, social benefits, rent and banking operations) except particularly in Greece and Ireland, where general suspicions are more widespread than elsewhere.

? **The fear of unintentional mistakes (one's own or somebody else's)**

? **The fear of confusing euro notes and coins.** This is rarely expressed spontaneously nowadays (except by visually impaired interviewees), but they may well be exacerbated as the date for physical introduction of the euro approaches.

? **The fear (very unusual at this stage) of forgeries.**

Several measures have been proposed to deal with these problems. They include general vigilance; using a calculator or conversion card as back-up (or as reassurance) for mental arithmetic or approximations; and thinking carefully in advance about likely prices before going shopping.

Some people intend to do away with any price reference, and simply look for the best prices in euros, but this might reflect two opposed attitudes: either confidence in one's ability to adapt quickly to the price in euros, or an attitude of resignation in the face of a task that is too difficult (this is particularly true

of those who are most socio-economically vulnerable and have no personal price references).

Responding passively to the need to change over to the euro

Although they identify difficulties, very few interviewees anticipate taking the initiative to 'train up' in advance of the euro. **Their attitudes continue to be largely passive and 'wait-and-see' because:**

- ? the physical introduction of the euro is still a long way off in their minds;
- ? it has been no more than a virtual reality until now;
- ? for a large number of people, particularly the most disadvantaged, the task is so great that they are unlikely to tackle it spontaneously;
- ? even for those few people who demonstrate a propensity to prepare for the euro in advance, it is difficult to see how they could 'train up' and what they could use: there is a shortage of objects, resources and training structures.

It follows that there is a **real danger that the transition period will be little more than a waiting period in which things are put off, instead of being used by people to 'own' the euro and familiarise themselves with it.**

5 – Difficulties expected during the dual circulation period¹⁵

The period of dual circulation of the euro and the national currency is seen as the most crucial, and as the one that will cause most confusion; it is also the focus for all the fears and anxieties described above.

In countries that are not members of the euro zone, there are also questions about adapting to the systems and procedures involved in transferring; together with Ireland, they are almost the only countries where the concerns step outside purchases and relationships with retailers.

In this field, and in all countries, **there are also questions and anxieties about practical matters:** a double purse, the currency in which change will be given, the possibility of making a purchase using both currencies, the fear of abuse and queues at cash desks, and questions about the problems facing retailers.

These considerations encourage the overwhelming majority of interviewees to:

- ? say that they are determined to start using the euro as soon as the period begins

¹⁵ See Chapter V (§ 5.1)

This positive intention is welcome but, in the absence of existing measures for training and 'owning', there may be considerable difficulties.

- ? argue, in most countries, for the period to be shortened, sometimes radically

However, this is less true in Italy and Spain, and particularly in France and Ireland, and in countries that are not members of the euro zone, where people mostly wish to keep the scheduled period of six months (but not extend it).

6 - Desirable directions for activities¹⁶

Main issues for communication

These issues affect *a priori* all countries in the European Union, but with different intensities and different emphases. It is necessary to:

- ? **explain the objectives and validity of the project yet again, and continue to focus on 'why':**
- by reassuring those who are worried that the euro will not be really 'effective' in achieving the objective: explaining again that it was preparation for the single currency that halted inflation, and reassuring people about the euro's performance against the dollar by highlighting the positive consequences for exports, and therefore for other factors in European countries (e.g. growth);
 - by showing how the interests of the various European countries converge on the euro, and that competitive devaluations, previously used as a bastion against monetary speculation, are no longer possible;
 - by drawing attention to benefits that can really affect consumers, and ignoring advantages that are still completely abstract (e.g. being able to make payments in euros and have euro accounts);
- ? **allay irrational fears** frequently found in Ireland and in countries that are not yet members of the euro zone:
- by re-stating the neutral role that the euro plays in respect of such payments as salaries, pensions and social protection benefits;
 - by providing more information on the inviolability and continuing validity of contracts;

¹⁶ See Chapter V (§§ 5.2, 5.3 & 5.4).

- by drawing attention to the positive impact of lower interest rates (in countries that are afraid of inflation);
- ? **continue explaining ‘how’ the euro will be introduced**, so as to reduce remaining uncertainties about provisions that have already been decided:
- the irrevocability of the rate of conversion;
 - the value of the euro (about which little, or very little, is known in some countries);
 - the timetable (explaining the slow pace, which might give an impression that things have come to a standstill, with arguments that speak directly to the people affected);
 - the fixing of the conversion rates, together with an explanation of the reason for the number of decimal points;
 - the continuing validity of contracts;
 - the values and appearance of the notes and coins;
- ? **explain the issues underlying decisions that have not yet been taken:**
- by explaining how a search is on for the most suitable solutions, and stressing consultations with representative organisations of civil society;
 - by reassuring people about how long they will be able to continue exchanging the former national currency for euros;
- ? **reassure people that the government has things in hand.**

Developing measures for enabling people to get used to the euro

In addition to information that is needed on the euro, it is essential to develop measures for enabling and ‘training’ people to get used to it in advance, in a setting where citizens in the categories under consideration, irrespective of their attitudes to the project, display passivity and wait-and-see responses:

- ? **general or increased use of dual display and labelling** of prices, and of the dual indication of costs on financial documents

These indications have greatly helped to establish the idea that the euro and its value really exist. Ideally, this practice could be implemented shortly after the adoption of single currency in countries that are not yet members of the euro zone.

As such, **they are not enough to enable people to determine personal price references in euros**, because during the transition period, the reference continues to be the national currency, and the euro is no more than a complementary indication;

- ? **distributing calculators, or better still, conversion cards:** these are more educational, and are better adapted to the circumstances of daily shopping;
- ? **being able to see** the new notes and coins;
- ? **developing the provision of euro training** using non-intimidating local resources and structures.

It is **essential** to implement this provision, particularly for the most vulnerable sections of the population.

Channels of information and communication

Research into available information and familiarisation resources identifies the following elements as useful:

- ? **the essential use of television:** short, to-the-point public information broadcasts concentrating on one issue at a time, for example showing ordinary people using the euro in their everyday lives, and presented clearly without technical jargon. Interviewees say they do not want to have to listen for hours.

Television is a key resource for the government in developing awareness and providing explanations of the euro. **However, it does not always meet all information needs** in the present passive climate, **or, of course, act as a resource for enabling people to get used to the euro.**

- ? **the complementary use of newspapers,** particularly in northern countries where readership is high, by taking advantage of the more lasting nature of the written word (e.g. supplements containing photos of the notes and coins and conversion cards, together with concrete information and explanations);
- ? **distribution of official information in written form** (it is highly regarded by elderly people in particular, but more generally plays a reassuring role); examples include a guide to the euro in simple language, and dealing solely with questions that affect people directly, and short, concise pamphlets issued to coincide with important decisions and events.

These documents will certainly be distributed by banks and financial institutions, which can also themselves be used as dissemination points, but we think they should include documentation that has been officially issued by the government and is identified as such (not the case at the moment in many countries); vulnerable people in several countries feel that banks are very remote;

- ? **the systematic or, as we already earlier, more widespread practice of dual display and labelling of prices**
- ? **looking for the most effective and reliable way of helping people to get used to notes and coins in euros**

The rapidly tested proposal to make a set of real notes and coins available was not always well understood, but it excited interest; it needs to be developed, particularly using neighbourhood networks that can be brought into use.

- **More detailed preparation of a case for making euro calculators or conversion cards (clearly a more educational tool) available; their introduction will have to be carefully thought through if they are to meet users' requirement for simplicity.**
- **Help in setting up neighbourhood networks, which will inevitably take different forms in different countries; vulnerable people will *a priori* be the most difficult to get through to.**

It is essential to make use not only of local departments of government departments and public services, but also of **associational networks**; they enjoy 'psychological proximity' and confidence by addressing fears of intrusion into people's private lives and realistically developing a collective, user-friendly style in euro information and training meetings. Banks and commerce can also play a role in some countries.

Of the proposals tested in the course of the survey, local euro observatories come under this heading as long as they can make more of an impression (at the present time, no one knows anything about them), and clearly establish that their possible role extends beyond what they are currently perceived as performing: a simple monitoring function.

The group discussions that this study prompted were viewed very positively by participants, even when they had initial reservations, and the Commission is credited with an initiative that may foreshadow a user-friendly measure for enabling people to change over to the euro.

ANNEX I

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION OF THE GROUPS

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION OF GROUPS
ELDERLY PEOPLE

	I	E	P	IRL	F	B	L	D	NL	A	SF	GR	DK	S	GB	Total
Gender																
Men	4	4	5	4	4	3	3	4	4	5	4	5	4	5	4	62
Women	4	4	5	5	6	5	4	5	5	5	4	4	5	6	4	71
Age																
65-69 years	5	3	7	4	6	4	3	6	4	7	3	5	3	4	4	68
70-75 years	3	5	3	5	4	4	4	3	5	3	5	4	6	7	4	65
Socio-professional category¹⁷																
Blue-collar worker	3	5	7	3	3	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	4	2	44
White-collar worker	3	3	2	4	3	3	2	5	4	3	3	4	4	4	3	50
Supervisory/Middle management	0	0	0	0	2	2	1	1	3	3	2	2	2	2	1	21
Skilled	1	0	1	2	2	1	0	1	0	2	1	1	1	1	2	16
Non-active	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2

Venues of meetings: (I) Milan, (E) Madrid, (P) Lisbon, (IRL) Dublin, (F) Viroflay (Paris Region), (B) Antwerp, (L) Gonderange (Luxembourg Region), (D) Cologne, (NL) Amsterdam, (A) Vienna, (SF) Helsinki, (GR) Athens, (DK) Copenhagen, (S) Stockholm, (GB) London

¹⁷ The job carried out prior to retirement by the person concerned or his/her spouse.

**SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION OF GROUPS
OF VULNERABLE PEOPLE**

	I	E	P	IRL	F	B	L	D	NL	A	SF	GR	DK	S	GB	Total
Gender																
Men	4	4	4	4	3	2	2	4	3	4	3	4	4	3	4	52
Women	4	4	3	4	3	5	4	5	4	4	3	4	4	3	4	58
Age																
30-39 years	6	4	4	4	4	3	5	7	3	4	4	2	5	2	5	62
40-45 years	2	4	3	4	2	4	1	2	4	4	2	6	3	4	3	48
Social Status¹⁸																
Regular employment (low paid)	0	0	4	3	2	1	4	1	3	4	1	3	2	2	0	30
Part-time/casual/precarious employment	4	4	0	0	2	0	1	1	1	0	2	1	1	0	4	21
Unemployed	4	4	3	5	2	6	1	7	3	4	3	4	5	4	4	59

Venues of meetings: (I) Milan, (E) Madrid, (P) Lisbon, (IRL) Dublin, (F) Viroflay (Paris Region), (B) Antwerp, (L) Gonderange (Luxembourg Region), (D) Cologne, (NL) Amsterdam, (A) Vienna, (SF) Helsinki, (GR) Athens, (DK) Copenhagen, (S) Stockholm, (GB) London

¹⁸ The job carried out prior to retirement by the person concerned or by his/her spouse.

ANNEX II

DISCUSSION GUIDES

**MEMBER COUNTRIES OF THE EURO ZONE (FRENCH)
NON-MEMBER COUNTRIES OF THE EURO ZONE (ENGLISH)**

**DISCUSSION GUIDE
(EURO – 11)**

INTRODUCTION

Good (morning / afternoon / evening). Let me first of all introduce myself : I am ... and I work with the research company ..., where I am in charge of the study for which we are here together today.

This is what we call a qualitative study, in which we invite small groups of people to give their views on certain subjects. In this type of study, there is no questionnaire, and there are no answers to pre-worded questions, but an open discussion between us, where each one can give his/her view and tell us how he/ she sees things personally.

In such groups, the participants may agree with each other on certain points and disagree on others, as is the case with the country's citizens generally : that is part of the game, and we are particularly interested to understand the different points of view.

Just one other word to confirm that what is said by the participants of such discussions is naturally kept strictly anonymous and confidential, as is the rule in our profession.

Before we move to the subject of the study, may I ask each of you briefly to introduce him/herself, and to tell us who he/she is, where he/she lives, if he/ she is married or lives together with someone else or not, if he/she has children and how old they are, whether he/she has a job right now or if he/she had one at some earlier time, what sort of a job, etc.

THEME 1

In the next 2 to 3 hours, we are going to talk about the introduction of the new currency, the Euro, and what that can mean to us in our daily lives

First of all, I would like to hear your first reactions on this subject, what comes to your minds when you hear the word the Euro

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe (rapidly at this stage)
 - What participants spontaneously say about the Euro
 - In what terms and from which points of view / positions they discuss it
 - Which feelings are spontaneously expressed about the Euro
 - To what extent the participants appear involved

THEME 2

Let us talk more precisely about what we know – and about what we know less well – about the Euro, from what each of us may have seen or heard ; and also from where we know about it : how, through whom, or through which channels you have heard about it

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe
 - What is known ; what is known less well ; what is not known
 - Through which channels (in the widest sense of the term) has one learnt what one knows about the Euro
 - Does one feel informed : enough or not ; well or not well ; clearly or not ; on what and on what not
 - To what extent has one actively tried to inform oneself, or not ; on what precisely ; was that information easy or difficult to find, why ?
 - Does one feel concerned and involved as a “target” of the information which has been issued on the Euro, or on the contrary excluded or unconcerned ; why ?

THEME 3

3.1 Let us now discuss not only what you know about the Euro, but also what you think and feel about it

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe
 - Attitudes of interest / indifference / distrust / opposition
 - What are the a priori positive / negative aspects of the Euro ; why ?
 - From which points of view and from which positions do the participants express themselves on this subject : advantages / disadvantages for Europe, for the country, for one (their own) specific category of the population, for themselves as consumers, as workers, as retired people, as people relying on social aid, etc.
 - To what extent do they feel concerned and involved by the coming of the Euro.

3.2 This Euro project, according to you, by whom was it designed and developed, what for, what was the aim which they pursued ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe
 - Identification of the actors of the Euro project
 - Perceptions of the aims pursued in introducing the Euro
 - What does one think about those aims, in what does one feel concerned or not ?
 - What would one like to know more about, or better to understand, regarding the aims pursued ?

3.3 The introduction of the Euro may give birth to hopes or to fears. As far as you are concerned, what would you hope, what would you fear ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe
 - The hopes (and their reasons)
 - The fears (and their reasons)

THEME 4

As you know, the introduction of the Euro will take place in several stages. There is a so-called transition period of 3 years (which we will discuss later) before banknotes and coins in Euros are introduced, on January 1, 2002, to replace the banknotes and coins in (*national currency*) which will disappear at latest in the following 6 months.

But let us try to imagine that we are already after July 1, 2002, when the Euro has entirely replaced (*the national currency*), and to imagine what will happen for us in our daily lives. Which problems and which difficulties do you think that could bring about for you, in which areas, why ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe
 - Intensity of fears
 - Nature of fears
 - Difficulties to identify and to use the new banknotes and the new coins
 - Difficulties to estimate the value of things in Euros
 - Fraud
 - Cheating in the application of the conversion rate
 - Reduced purchasing power (for which reasons)
 - Etc. etc.
 - Areas in which there are fears
 - Salaries
 - Retirement pensions
 - Social aid benefits
 - Purchases (which kinds particularly)
 - Rents (or mortgage credit payments)
 - Consumer goods credit instalments
 - Miscellaneous payments (which kinds particularly)
 - Savings, financial investments
 - Etc. etc.
 - Actors trusted / distrusted
 - Employers
 - Public social aid organisations
 - The State, and state organisations (which ?)
 - Retailers (probe : large chain stores / small retailers)
 - Landlords
 - Banks
 - Etc. etc.

THEME 5

Let us now discuss how we will go about to get used to values in Euros, to make sure there is no error or no cheating, to evaluate if something is expensive or not, to compare prices, etc.

5.1 First of all, do you know the Euro's value in (*national currency*)

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe
 - Precise knowledge or approximate order of magnitude.

5.2 Once everything is stated in Euros, how do you imagine that you will proceed to go about with it ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe
 - Usage of a calculator
 - Simplified conversion tables / slips
 - Mental calculation
 - Mnemotechnic tricks
 - Memorising the price of a few key products (which)
 - Tables / slips with the average prices in Euros of a few key products (which)
 - Etc. etc.

5.3 We are now going to take a few concrete examples, to try and understand how we will be able to get used to the value of things in Euros, and to evaluate if something is expensive or not.

Moderator : for each product or service :

- Say : “You find this product / service sold for ... Euros. What impression does it give you ?
- Probe :
 - Impression of expensiveness or inexpensiveness
 - How do the participants proceed to evaluate the expensiveness or the inexpensiveness. Do they try to make the conversion in national currency, by what kind of process, how easily or uneasily ? Is the result of that conversion (roughly) correct or not ?
(**Moderator** : verify by having made the calculation yourself beforehand)
- Give the correct result of the conversion in national currency. Is the impression of expensiveness or inexpensiveness the same ?
- Calculate a price lower by 10 % and say : “In another place, or at another time, the same kind of product /service costs ... Euros. (NB : **Moderator** : do not say that this second price is 10 % lower)
- Probe :
 - Does the difference appear substantial, or not ?

(The objective is to try and appreciate, from those examples, to what extent new currency reference points can be created, if products in Euros give an impression of expensiveness or the opposite ; to what extent one is able to appreciate slight price differences ; if prices with Euros and cents are a problem, etc.)

Products / services to probe (in that sequence)

▪ A litre of milk	Initial price 0,48 Euros	10 % lower price 0,43 Euros
▪ A television set	Initial price 595 Euros	10 % lower price 535 Euros
▪ A small size car	Initial price 8 385 Euros	10 % lower price 7 546 Euros
▪ Your electricity bill	Initial price 59,50 Euros	10 % lower price 53,50 Euros
▪ A cinema ticket	Initial price 6,80 Euros	10 % lower price 6,12 Euros

5.4 Now that we have discussed these price examples, I would like to return to my earlier question : once everything is stated in Euros, how will we proceed to get about with it ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe
 - Differences (if any) compared to 5.2

THEME 6

As was said earlier, the Euro is being introduced in several stages.

The Euro was officially born on January 1, 1999, when the conversion rates between each national currency and the Euro were very precisely and definitively fixed.

Between January 1, 1999 and January 1, 2002, there is a 3 year transition period during which usage of the Euro will gradually grow ; for example, one can already make payments with bank cards or cheques in Euros, have one's savings stated in Euros etc. – but there is no obligation to use the Euro at the present stage, neither for us consumers nor for retailers - and banknotes and coins in Euros are not yet available.

On January 2002, banknotes and coins in Euros will be introduced. For a maximum period of 6 months, they will coexist with bank notes and coins in (*national currency*). At the end of that period (*the national currency*) will disappear and will be entirely replaced by the Euro.

I would like to discuss how you envisage that period, of at most 6 months, when banknotes and coins in Euros will replace banknotes and coins in (*national currency*), starting on January 1, 2002.

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe
 - Problems perceived : nature, intensity
 - Specific fears :
 - Difficulties to identify and to use the new banknotes and the new coins
 - Modalities of replacement of banknotes and coins
 - Difficulties to estimate the value of things in Euros
 - Fraud
 - Cheating in the applications of the conversion rate
 - Reduced purchasing power (for which reasons)
 - Etc. etc.
 - Areas in which there are fears
 - Salaries
 - Retirement pensions
 - Social aid benefits
 - Purchases (which kinds particularly)
 - Rents (or mortgage credit payments)
 - Consumer goods credit instalments
 - Miscellaneous payments (which kinds particularly)
 - Savings, financial investments
 - Etc. etc.
 - Attitudes towards the length of the dual circulation period
 - Is it perceived as useful to help adapt ?
 - Is it perceived as sufficient ?

THEME 7

Let us now talk about the transition period of 3 years, until the introduction of banknotes and coins in Euros on January 1, 2002.

How do you personally envisage that period ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe
 - Propensity to “experiment” the Euro during the transition period, or passive attitudes

Thinking back of what we said earlier about the period of coexistence of banknotes and coins in Euros and in (*national currency*) and about the problems we will have to adapt ourselves, what do you think could be done before then, that is to say during the earlier transition period of 3 years, to begin to adapt and to « train ourselves » to the Euro ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe
 - What you could do yourself ?
 - How you could be helped to do it ?

THEME 8

I believe we all know a little more about the introduction of the Euro now, and also about the questions which different people among us have about it, their expected problems and difficulties.

I would now like to have your views on what could be done to inform people better, to help them to get used to the Euro, and to solve those problems and difficulties.

How do you personally envisage that period ?

8.1 On which aspects is there the need to know more about it, to be better informed, to find ways of helping us to change over to the Euro ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe (in relation with preceding themes)
 - Nature and intensity of the perceived information needs (on what, for what purpose)
 - Nature and intensity of the perceived needs for “helping tools” to change over to the Euro ?
 - At which time(s) should information be given (on the different information contents)
 - Propensity to look for information and “helping tools” actively oneself, or passive attitude.

8.2 Who could best contribute to inform better and to help people change over to the Euro, and how ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe credibility and possible role of :
 - The State
 - Local authorities (municipal, etc.)
 - Public services (Post office, electricity, telephone, transport ...)
 - Social aid departments
 - Schools
 - Banks
 - Retailers (probe : large chains stores / small retailers)
 - Employers
 - Local “proximity relays” ; which type ?
 - Media : television, radio, newspapers and magazines ...
 - Etc. etc.

THEME 9

I would like to submit to you different ideas which could be developed to help people switch over to the Euro. Some of those ideas have already started to be implemented in certain places, others not. We will discuss each of them, and you will tell me if you have already heard about something similar, what you think about it, in what that could be useful, and what forms it could possibly take ?

- A **comprehensive** Guide of the Euro, made available to each household, including **all** information details
- **Short**, concise, easy to read brochures, which could be distributed to every home **only** when there are new and important information items
- An information service which one could call free of charge by telephone, or through teletext or Internet
- Specially trained people responsible for informing the public about the Euro in the public services with which you may be in contact
Probe : municipal services, social workers, post offices, banks, etc.
- People **like you**, in your own area or neighbourhood, who volunteer to inform other people about the Euro and to help them solve their difficulties
- The distribution to all households, well **in advance** of January 1, 2002, of a set of **real** of bank notes and **real** coins in Euros, to help familiarise with them
- The actual introduction of bank notes and coins in Euros **earlier** than January 1, 2002 to give people more time to get used to them
- Local Euro observatories, to spot the problems which may emerge on a day to day basis, to detect frauding and cheating, etc.
- Making available to all households free of charge simplified calculators to convert values from Euros to (*national currency*) or from (*national currency*) to Euros.
- Displaying “trust logos” in stores and shops which are ready to give their clients information on the Euro
- Displaying and labelling all prices in Euros systematically as early as today (next to prices in (*national currency*))
- Very short television programmes giving simple information without technical jargon, and featuring people concretely using the Euro in their daily lives
- That the prizes which can be won in **all** games (lottery, loto, TV games, etc.) should be given **only** in Euros.
- TV spots featuring famous singers or actors to present the Euro in simple, humorous words

THEME 10

This study is being carried out at the initiative of the European Commission, in relation with the European Union’s member States.

As far as they are concerned, what could they or should they do to make the process of introduction of the Euro easier for people ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe
 - Credibility
 - Specific roles of the European institutions

DISCUSSION GUIDE
NON EURO 4

INTRODUCTION

Good (morning / afternoon / evening). Let me first of all introduce myself : I am ... and I work with the research company ..., where I am in charge of the study for which we are here together today.

This is what we call a qualitative study, in which we invite small groups of people to give their views on certain subjects. In this type of study, there is no questionnaire, and there are no answers to pre-worded questions, but an open discussion between us, where each one can give his/her view and tell us how he/ she sees things personally.

In such groups, the participants may agree with each other on certain points and disagree on others, as is the case with the country's citizens generally : that is part of the game, and we are particularly interested to understand the different points of view.

Just one other word to confirm that what is said by the participants of such discussions is naturally kept strictly anonymous and confidential, as is the rule in our profession.

Before we move to the subject of the study, may I ask each of you briefly to introduce him/herself, and to tell us who he/she is, where he/she lives, if he/ she is married or lives together with someone else or not, if he/she has children and how old they are, whether he/she has a job right now or if he/she had one at some earlier time, what sort of a job, etc.

THEME 1

In the next 2 to 3 hours, we are going to talk about the introduction of the new currency, the Euro.

As you may know, it is adopted first by a number of countries, and other countries may follow later. I would like to discuss what the introduction of the Euro will mean to us in our daily lives.

First of all, I would like to hear your first reactions on this subject, what comes to your minds when you hear the word the Euro.

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe (rapidly at this stage)
 - What participants spontaneously say about the Euro
 - In what terms and from which points of view / positions they discuss it
 - Which feelings are spontaneously expressed about the Euro
 - To what extent the participants appear involved

THEME 2

Let us talk more precisely about what we know – and about what we know less well – about the Euro, from what each of us may have seen or heard ; and also from where we know about it : how, through whom, or through which channels you have heard about it

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe
 - What is known ; what is known less well ; what is not known
 - Through which channels (in the widest sense of the term) has one learnt what one knows about the Euro
 - Does one feel informed : enough or not ; well or not well ; clearly or not ; on what and on what not
 - To what extent has one actively tried to inform oneself, or not ; on what precisely ; was that information easy or difficult to find, why ?
 - Does one feel concerned and involved as a “target” of the information which has been issued on the Euro, or on the contrary excluded or unconcerned ; why ?

THEME 3

3.1 Let us now discuss not only what you know about the Euro, but also what you think and feel about it

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe
 - Attitudes of interest / indifference / distrust / opposition
 - What are the a priori positive / negative aspects of the Euro ; why ?
 - From which points of view and from which positions do the participants express themselves on this subject : advantages / disadvantages for Europe, for the country, for one (their own) specific category of the population, for themselves as consumers, as workers, as retired people, as people relying on social aid, etc.
 - To what extent do they feel concerned and involved by the coming of the Euro.

3.2 This Euro project, according to you, by whom was it designed and developed, what for, what was the aim which they pursued ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe
 - Identification of the actors of the Euro project
 - Perceptions of the aims pursued in introducing the Euro
 - What does one think about those aims, in what does one feel concerned or not ?
 - What would one like to know more about, or better to understand, regarding the aims pursued ?

3.3 The introduction of the Euro may give birth to hopes or to fears. As far as you are concerned, what would you hope, what would you fear ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe
 - The hopes (and their reasons)
 - The fears (and their reasons)

THEME 4

As you may know, the introduction of the Euro will take place in several stages in the 11 countries of the European Union who have already decided to adopt it. There is a so-called transition period of 3 years (-which we will discuss later) before banknotes and coins in Euros are introduced, on January 1, 2002, to replace the banknotes and coins in the national currencies, which will then disappear at latest in the following 6 months.

Our country is not among the first 11 to adopt the Euro immediately, but it may decide to do it later, and one can imagine that the same sort of schedule will apply here.

So let us try to imagine that our country adopts the Euro, and that we are already beyond the day when the Euro has entirely replaced (*the national currency*), and to imagine what will happen for us in our daily lives. Which problems and which difficulties do you think that could bring about for you, in which areas, why ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe
 - Intensity of fears
 - Nature of fears
 - Difficulties to identify and to use the new banknotes and the new coins
 - Difficulties to estimate the value of things in Euros
 - Fraud
 - Cheating in the application of the conversion rate
 - Reduced purchasing power (for which reasons)
 - Etc. etc.
 - Areas in which there are fears
 - Salaries
 - Retirement pensions
 - Social aid benefits
 - Purchases (which kinds particularly)
 - Rents (or mortgage credit payments)
 - Consumer goods credit instalments
 - Miscellaneous payments (which kinds particularly)
 - Savings, financial investments
 - Etc. etc.
 - Actors trusted / distrusted
 - Employers
 - Public social aid organisations
 - The State, and state organisations (which ?)
 - Retailers (probe : large chain stores / small retailers)
 - Landlords
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 - Etc. etc.

THEME 5

Let us now discuss how we will go about to get used to values in Euros, to make sure there is no error or no cheating, to evaluate if something is expensive or not, to compare prices, etc.

5.1 First of all, do you know the Euro's value in (*national currency*)

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe
 - Precise knowledge or approximate order of magnitude.

5.2 Once everything is stated in Euros, how do you imagine that you will proceed to go about with it ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe
 - Usage of a calculator
 - Simplified conversion tables / slips
 - Mental calculation
 - Mnemotechnic tricks
 - Memorising the price of a few key products (which)
 - Tables / slips with the average prices in Euros of a few key products (which)
 - Etc. etc.

5.3 We are now going to take a few concrete examples, to try and understand how we will be able to get used to the value of things in Euros, and to evaluate if something is expensive or not.

Moderator : for each product or service :

- Say : “ You find this product / service sold for ... Euros. What impression does it give you ?
- Probe :
 - Impression of expensiveness or inexpensiveness
 - How do the participants proceed to evaluate the expensiveness or the inexpensiveness. Do they try to make the conversion in national currency, by what kind of process, how easily or uneasily ? Is the result of that conversion (roughly) correct or not ? (**Moderator** : verify by having made the calculation yourself beforehand)
- Give the correct result of the conversion in national currency. Is the impression of expensiveness or inexpensiveness the same ?
- Calculate a price lower by 10 % and say : “ In another place, or at another time, the same kind of product /service costs ... Euros. (NB : **Moderator** : do not say that this second price is 10 % lower)
- Probe :
 - Does the difference appear substantial, or not ?

(The objective is to try and appreciate, from those examples, to what extent new currency reference points can be created, if products in Euros give an impression of expensiveness or the opposite ; to what extent one is able to appreciate slight price differences ; if prices with Euros and cents are a problem, etc.)

Products / services to probe (in that sequence)

▪ A litre of milk	Initial price 0,48 Euros	10 % lower price 0,43 Euros
▪ A television set	Initial price 595 Euros	10 % lower price 535 Euros
▪ A small size car	Initial price 8 385 Euros	10 % lower price 7 546 Euros
▪ Your electricity bill	Initial price 59,50 Euros	10 % lower price 53,50 Euros
▪ A cinema ticket	Initial price 6,80 Euros	10 % lower price 6,12 Euros

5.4 Now that we have discussed these price examples, I would like to return to my earlier question : once everything is stated in Euros, how will we proceed to get about with it ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe
 - Differences (if any) compared to 5.2

THEME 6

As was said earlier, the Euro is being introduced in several stages in the 11 countries of the European Union who have already decided to adopt it.

The Euro was officially born on January 1, 1999 when the conversion rates between each of the 11 national currencies and the Euro were very precisely and definitively fixed.

Between January 1, 1999 and January 1, 2002, they have a 3 year transition period during which usage of the Euro will gradually grow ; for example, one can already make payments with bank cards or cheques in Euros, have one's savings stated in Euros etc. – but there is no obligation to use the Euro at the present stage, neither for consumers nor for retailers - and banknotes and coins in Euros are not yet available.

It is only on January 1, 2002 that banknotes and coins in Euros will be introduced. For a maximum period of 6 months, they will coexist with banknotes and coins in the national currencies. At the end of that period, the national currencies will disappear and will be entirely replaced by the Euro.

Assuming again that our country adopts the Euro later, I would like to discuss how you envisage that period, of at most 6 months, when banknotes and coins in Euros will replace banknotes and coins in (*national currency*).

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe
 - Problems perceived : nature, intensity
 - Specific fears :
 - Difficulties to identify and to use the new banknotes and the new coins
 - Modalities of replacement of banknotes and coins
 - Difficulties to estimate the value of things in Euros
 - Fraud
 - Cheating in the applications of the conversion rate
 - Reduced purchasing power (for which reasons)
 - Etc. etc.
 - Areas in which there are fears
 - Salaries
 - Retirement pensions
 - Social aid benefits
 - Purchases (which kinds particularly)
 - Rents (or mortgage credit payments)
 - Consumer goods credit instalments
 - Miscellaneous payments (which kinds particularly)
 - Savings, financial investments
 - Etc. etc.
 - Attitudes towards the length of the dual circulation period
 - Is it perceived as useful to help adapt ?
 - Is it perceived as sufficient ?

THEME 7

Still assuming that our country adopts the Euro later, and that we also have a transition period of 3 years or so before the introduction of banknotes and coins in Euros, how do you personally envisage that period ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe
 - Propensity to “experiment” the Euro during the transition period, or passive attitudes

Thinking back of what we said earlier about the period of coexistence of banknotes and coins in Euros and in (*national currency*) and about the problems we will have to adapt ourselves, what do you think could be done before then, that is to say during the earlier transition period of 3 years, to begin to adapt and to « train ourselves » to the Euro ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe
 - What you could do yourself ?
 - How you could be helped to do it ?

THEME 8

I believe we all know a little more about the introduction of the Euro now, and also about the questions which different people among us have about it, their expected problems and difficulties.

I would now like to have your views on what could be done to inform people better, to help them to get used to the Euro, and to solve those problems and difficulties.

How do you personally envisage that period ?

8.1 On which aspects is there the need to know more about it, to be better informed, to find ways of helping us to change over to the Euro ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe (in relation with preceding themes)
 - Nature and intensity of the perceived information needs (on what, for what purpose)
 - Nature and intensity of the perceived needs for “helping tools” to change over to the Euro ?
 - At which time(s) should information be given (on the different information contents)
 - Propensity to look for information and “helping tools” actively oneself, or passive attitude.

8.2 Who could best contribute to inform better and to help people change over to the Euro, and how ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe credibility and possible role of :
 - The State
 - Local authorities (municipal, etc.)
 - Public services (Post office, electricity, telephone, transport ...)
 - Social aid departments
 - Schools
 - Banks
 - Retailers (probe : large chains stores / small retailers)
 - Employers
 - Local “proximity relays” ; which type ?
 - Media : television, radio, newspapers and magazines ...
 - Etc. etc.

THEME 9

I would like to submit to you different ideas which could be developed to help people switch over to the Euro. Some of those ideas have already started to be implemented in certain places, others not. We will discuss each of them, and you will tell me if you have already heard about something similar, what you think about it, in what that could be useful, and what forms it could possibly take ?

- A **comprehensive** Guide of the Euro, made available to each household, including **all** information details
- **Short**, concise, easy to read brochures, which could be distributed to every home **only** when there are new and important information items
- An information service which one could call free of charge by telephone, or through teletext or Internet
- Specially trained people responsible for informing the **public** about the Euro in the public services with which you may be in contact
Probe : municipal services, social workers, post offices, banks, etc.
- People **like you**, in your own area or neighbourhood, who volunteer to inform other people about the Euro and to help them solve their difficulties
- The distribution to all households, early in **advance** of the introduction of banknotes and coins in Euros, of a set of **real** of banknotes and **real** coins in Euros, to help familiarise with them
- The actual introduction of banknotes and coins in Euro **earlier** than planned to give people more time to get used to them
- Local Euro observatories, to spot the problems which may emerge on a day to day basis, to detect frauding and cheating, etc.
- Making available to all households free of charge simplified calculators to convert values from Euros to (*national currency*) or from (*national currency*) to Euros.
- Displaying “trust logos” in stores and shops which are ready to give their clients information on the Euro
- Displaying and labelling all prices in Euros systematically as early as today (next to prices in (*national currency*))
- Very short television programmes giving simple information without technical jargon, and featuring people concretely using the Euro in their daily lives
- That the prizes which can be won in **all** games (lottery, loto, TV games, etc.) should be given **only** in Euros.
- TV spots featuring famous singers or actors to present the Euro in simple, humorous words

THEME 10

This study is being carried out at the initiative of the European Commission, in relation with the European Union’s member States.

As far as they are concerned, what could they or should they do to make the process of introduction of the Euro easier for people ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe
 - Credibility
 - Specific roles of the European institutions