

THIRTY YEARS OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

Summary

EUROBAROMETER - the survey of public opinion in the European Community - has produced a particularly striking profile of Community attitudes 30 years after the Community was founded.

It points out that given that politics is of absorbing interest only to about 5 per cent of the public, it is not surprising that the idea of "a European Community" fails to raise an enthusiastic reaction. But answers to specific questions do reveal a sense of mutual trust in Community countries, and a belief that the Community should move beyond its present status towards some form of unification; one in five indeed favouring federation or a single entity.

Eurobarometer is conducted by the Commission's Directorate-General for Information, Communication and Culture (DG X), the individual surveys undertaken by national institutes, such as Social Surveys (Gallup Poll) in the UK. The surveys, undertaken each spring and autumn since 1973, cover between 11,000 - 12,000 respondents questioned in their homes by professional interviewers (1).

A balance sheet

Figures vary, depending on their contexts, but it appears that at least three out of five of the sample considered that their country's membership of the Community 'was a good thing'; the proportion is somewhat higher among the six early founders than among the six countries which joined later.

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

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

(1) Eurobarometer: EUROPE 2000, Special Anniversary Edition
March 1987, and No. 27 of June 1987.

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*** Note: Background reports are intended as non copy-right ready-reference material on topics of current interest concerning the European Community. An index will be provided periodically so anyone receiving the reports can refer to each number more easily.

increasing integration, with about a fifth of each supporting a Community Federation or the idea of a single country. Among the one in twenty who wanted 'the Community to be scrapped, some 25 per cent of Danes and 15 per cent of the British indicated their dislike of the Community.

Midway between the 1984 European Parliament election and the next one in 1989, it is not surprising that the sample showed a decline of interest in voting now. An election to the European Parliament was 'not a forecast of 1989 elections' now, says the survey, but 'a writing on the wall' of public concern. There were significant drops of voting interest from 13 to 15 per cent in the Netherlands, Greece and Ireland and 20 per cent in France - normally countries with high voting levels. In the UK and Denmark (where the British 1984 level was low anyway) there was a decline of 5 per cent and of 9 per cent in Italy.

Social and policy matters

Within the Spring 1987 survey (No. 27) the Commission encouraged several specialised studies, such as attitudes towards health and the fight against cancer, the situation of women in society, and on agriculture and the Common Agricultural Policy. In the latter study the questions were also put to a special sample of 300 farmers in each Community country. The reports will be published later, but the survey also indicated some changing sex roles in the Community.

In 1975 over a third (35%) of the sample supported the idea that 'politics should be left to men'. In 1983 the proportion had fallen to 25 per cent in nine countries and to 22 per cent in 1987 in the 12 countries. Today 41 per cent of the survey support the role of husband and wife having an equally absorbing job and sharing housework and care of children compared with only 36 per cent four years ago in 1983.

Science and agriculture

Considering British and some other countries' lack of enthusiasm on spending Community money on scientific and technological research, three out of five people (61%) believe that the EC share is not big enough. Three per cent felt that the contribution was too big, notably from Greece, West Germany and the UK.

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

Over a third (34%) of the sample thought that CAP expenditure (60% from the Community budget and 40% from budgets of member countries) was 'about right'. West Germany and The Netherlands thought that the Community's share was 'too big'. Greece, Portugal, Spain and Ireland thought the share was 'not big enough'.

Scenarios for January 2000

Eurobarometer invited its respondents to look ahead to January 2000, and to choose the ten scenarios that are likely to be a reality in practice within thirteen years.

The list showed:

- 1. European television 92 %
- 2. Fight ecological catastrophes in common 83 %
- 3. Fight terrorism in common 83 %
- 4. Freedom of travel, residence, study, work 72 %
- 5. More languages spoken than today 71 %
- 6. Referendum on constitution 68 %
- 7. Election of head of government of Europe 63 %
- 8. Common European defense 62 %
- 9. European currency 60 %
- 10. Europe on equal terms with USA, USSR 56 %

The classification, according to Eurobarometer, revealed a well-known pattern in mass public opinion surveys; people take a stand more easily on subject matters that they see concerning them directly and personally in their everyday life. Political matters proper are less prominent even though 'everyday life' matters depend on political preconditions. The idea of a European currency, for instance, is low in public interest. But looking at the list, one can perceive that the Community's future is encouraging.

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