



Majority of EU citizens accept the idea of retiring later

First EU-wide Deliberative Poll^{®1} reveals citizens' considered preferences

Brussels, Thursday 18 October 2007— "Tomorrow's Europe", the first-ever EU-wide Deliberative Poll[®] gathered a scientific random sample of 362 citizens from all 27 EU countries to Brussels, where they spent a weekend deliberating about key social and foreign policy issues affecting the future of the EU and its member states. The deliberations, in 22 languages, took place in the European Parliament building. No event quite like this—with a scientifically drawn sample from all 27 member states deliberating at this length and in their own languages—has ever previously occurred.

As a result of deliberating, the participants became dramatically more informed and changed their views about a number of important issues. Participants from the 12 newer and 15 older member states generally started with different opinions but tended to converge.

Economic and social reforms: Europeans ready to make sacrifices

In social policy, the participants grew more willing to make sacrifices to secure their pensions. Support for "raising the retirement age" rose from 26% to 40%, and support for "making it attractive to work longer before retiring" rose from 57% to 70%. Part of the reason may have been the increasing realisation that something major needs to be done. The percentage agreeing that "keeping the retirement rules the way they are will bankrupt the retirement system" increased from 50% to 59%. Regarding economic reforms, the percentage who favoured encouraging foreign investment rose from 58.4% to 69.3%.

Movement against Enlargement

Support for enlargement diminished. The percentage agreeing that "additional countries that meet all the political and economic conditions for membership should be admitted to the EU" decreased from 65% to 60%. This does not seem to have been mainly because one of the countries most conspicuously in line for membership is Turkey. Support for admitting Turkey, if it met all the conditions for membership, fell from 55% to 45%, but support for admitting Ukraine, if it likewise met all the conditions for membership, fell by a similar amount, from 69% to 55%. Nor did the decreasing support for enlargement appear to result from concerns about Muslims. The percentage agreeing that "adding a Muslim country to the EU would make the EU too diverse" scarcely budged (43% before, 41% after), the same was true of the percentage agreeing that "adding a Muslim country to the EU would improve the EU's relations with the Muslim world" (49% before, 47% after). What may have been involved, however, was the increases in the percentage agreeing that "adding more countries to the EU would make it more difficult for the EU to make decisions" (52% before, 62% after) and the percentage agreeing that the EU is "adding too many countries too fast" (46% before, 53% after).

¹ Deliberative Polling[®] is a trade mark of James S. Fishkin. Any fees from the trade mark are used to support research at the Center for Deliberative Democracy.

EU Role in the World

There was strong and steady support for the use of military force for certain purposes but not for others. The percentage supporting its use to “defend another EU country against military attack” started at 80% and ended at 83%, while the percentage supporting its use “to prevent genocide in other countries” started at 82% and ended at 81%. On the other hand, support for the use of military force “to remove the threat of weapons of mass destruction,” while strong, diminished, dropping from 70% to 59%. On a related issue, support for strengthening the military power of one’s own country dropped from 39% to 31%.

In addition, there was an increased recognition of the problems currently posed by Russia. The importance of “Europe’s dependency on Russian energy supplies” rose from 81% to 83% (a small but statistically significant increase), and the importance of “Russian interference in the affairs of eastern European and Central Asian countries rose from 65% to 74%.

Citizens wish the EU to take overall a greater role

The percentage wanting the EU to have more of a role in pension policy increased from 32 to 41%, while the percentage wanting member states to decide independently from the EU about pensions decreased from 54% to 46%. There was also an increasing sense that the EU should take more of a role for certain other issues—support for an EU role increased from 52% to 59% for energy supply and from 55% to 63% for diplomatic relations.

Old and new member states—A convergence of views

The differences between the participants from older versus newer member states shed light on their reactions to enlargement and other issues. The participants from the 12 new member states admitted since 2004 and those from the other 15 countries generally started with different attitudes. Those from the newer member states generally changed their attitudes more, however, and in a direction that generally narrowed the gap between their attitudes and those of the participants from the older member states. Thus the deliberations did more than bring the participants from older and newer members states physically together in the same room; they also brought them together in terms of their views.

The largest difference between the participants from newer versus older member states was on the question of admitting Ukraine. Support for admitting Ukraine fell from 78% to 49% (a drop of 29%) among participants from the newer member states but only from 65% to 57% among those from the older member states. Similarly, support for admitting Turkey fell from 58% to 42% among participants from the newer member states but only from 53% to 46% among those from the older member states. However, this is not related in the newer member states to the fact that Turkey is a Muslim country. The percentage of people thinking that “adding a Muslim country to the EU would make the EU too diverse” actually fell by 20 points (from 52.2% to 32.2%) in the newer member states, whereas it increased by nearly 7% in the older member states (39.7% to 46.4%).

On common problems like retirement the convergence was greater. For example, the percentage of the participants from the newer member states agreeing that “keeping the retirement rules the way they are will bankrupt the retirement system” increased from 45% to 59%, while the percentage of those from the older member states agreeing with that started higher but increased less (from 52% to 59%), arriving in the end at the same point. On average, across 119 questions including attitudes, general life issues, general politics questions, participants from the newer members states showed 45% more change than those from the older ones. The average change on average for participants from the newer member states

is 4.4% of what it could possibly have been. That same figure for participants for the older member states is only 3.0%.

International Trade: moderate support for free trade

The participants became moderately but statistically significantly more receptive to arguments for freer trade. For example, support for lowering barriers to trade increased by 6% (from 54% to 60%). Similarly, the percentage *disagreeing* that that “freer trade puts our industry at a disadvantage” increased by 5% (from 37% to 42%).

Huge knowledge gains

Based on their answers to nine questions gauging factual knowledge, the participants learned a great deal. Those from newer and older member states learned about equally, although those from older member states started (and thus finished) at a slightly higher level. Those from newer member states averaged answering 37% of the knowledge questions correctly before deliberating and 53% of them correctly after deliberating, a gain of 16%. The participants from the older member states averaged answering 40% of the knowledge questions correctly before deliberating and 56% of them correctly after deliberating, an identical gain of 16%. The knowledge question topics included the EU budget (a gain of 22%), how members of the Parliament are elected (a gain of 23%), the role of the EU in unemployment benefits (a gain of 17%), and how EU foreign aid compares with US foreign aid (a gain of 22%).

Representativeness

The sample of 362 was recruited from an initial random sample of 3,500 in fieldwork conducted by TNS-Sofres in 27 countries. Participants who took the initial survey were randomly selected by country in proportion to their representation in the EU parliament. Because all participants were invited only after they had completed a comprehensive initial questionnaire, it is possible to compare participants and non-participants (those in the original sample who did not attend). The substantive significance is generally small. The participants are somewhat disproportionately male and distinctly more educated, among other demographic differences, but on policy attitudes, the differences are substantively small, averaging only 4% of what they could possibly have been. In all, this was a reasonably good microcosm of Europe.

Notes to Editors

- *Tomorrow's Europe* is an ambitious social experiment coordinated by *Notre Europe* and sponsored by the European Commission, Allianz and around 20 other partners: www.tomorrowseurope.eu
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