



## EU citizens accept need for pension reform, resist enlargement

### First EU-wide Deliberative Poll<sup>®1</sup> reveals citizens' considered preferences

*Brussels, Thursday 18 October 2007*— "Tomorrow's Europe", the first-ever EU-wide Deliberative Poll<sup>®</sup> 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%.

#### **Caution on 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 an even larger 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

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<sup>1</sup> Deliberative Polling<sup>®</sup> 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 at Stanford.

make decisions" (52% before, 62% after) and the percentage agreeing that the EU is "adding too many countries too fast" (46% before, 53% after).

### **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% (a small but statistically significant change), while the percentage supporting its use "to prevent genocide in other countries" started at 82% and stayed high 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 sharply, 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% (another small but statistically significant increase), and the importance of "Russian interference in the affairs of eastern European and Central Asian countries rose significantly from 65% to 74%.

### **An Increased EU Role, but Resistance to Qualified Majority Rule.**

Participants were asked whether the EU or the individual member states should play more of a role in decision making in several distinct policy areas. At the end of the process there was majority support for the EU rather than just the member states in most areas—international trade (52%), military action (65%), climate change (83%), foreign aid (71%), energy supply (59%), and diplomatic relations (63%).

In pension policy, where the role for the EU was initially low, the percentage wanting the EU to have more of a role 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, from 56% to 63% for diplomatic relations and from 59% to 71% for foreign aid.

While there was general support for more of an EU role in many policy areas, there was also general opposition to its implementation through qualified majority rule. In most policy areas, there was more support for the unanimity rule than for qualified majority rule. Citizens after deliberation preferred deciding by unanimity rather than by qualified majority rule on taxation (45% to 38%), social policy (44% to 39%), foreign policy (59% to 28%) and defence (65% to 24%). Even if citizens wanted more of an EU role, they remained protective of national sovereignty and reluctant to impose decisions on states that disagreed.

### **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.

Most of the move against further enlargement came from the participants from the new member states. They dropped 15 points (from 78% to 63%) in their support for the notion that “additional countries that meet all the political and economic conditions for membership should be admitted to the EU.” Participants from the old member states only dropped two points (from 61% to 59%). On the admission of Turkey, the new member state participants dropped also 15 points (from 57% to 42%) while those from the older member states dropped only seven (from 54% to 47%). The new member state participants were explicitly not motivated by opposition to a Muslim country joining. Before deliberation 40% agreed with the proposition that “adding a Muslim country to the EU would make the EU too diverse”. But after deliberation support for this view dropped ten points to 30%. Rather, the new member state participants increased the most in their view that “adding more countries to the EU would make it more difficult for the EU to make decisions. Before deliberation, 47% agreed with this view but after deliberation, agreement rose 15 points to 62%. Among the participants from the old member states, it rose only ten points (54% to 64%).

The new member state participants also increased dramatically more than the old, in their positive evaluation of the EU and in their identification as Europeans. When asked whether or not their country's membership in the EU was a good thing, the new member state participants increased almost 17 points (from 72.5% to 89.2%) while the old member states increased 9 points (from 82% to 91%). When asked about whether or not they thought of themselves as European, the new member state participants increased 18 points (from 69 to 87%) while the old member state participants increased only 3 points (from 81% to 84%).

On many issues there was a pattern of convergence. For example, the percentage of the participants from the new member states agreeing that “keeping the retirement rules the way they are will bankrupt the retirement system” increased from 45% to 64% (an increase of 19 points), while the percentage of those from the old member states agreeing started higher but increased less (from 52% to 59%), closing the gap between new and old substantially. Those believing that investment in new technologies was a key element of global competitiveness rose from 72% to 93% among new participants (an increase of 21 points) while it rose from 88 to about 93% among old state participants. The new member states increased 21 points and the old only 4.3% but they ended up in exactly the same place. On average, across 119 questions including attitudes, general life issues, general politics questions, participants from the new members states showed 45% more change than those from the older ones. The average change for participants from the newer member states is 4.4% of what it could possibly have been. For participants from the older member states the same figure 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%).

## Identity and Mutual Respect

Participants increased in their identification as “Europeans,” in their mutual respect for those they disagreed with and even in the extent to which they liked those from other European states. The percentage who think of themselves as “being European” increased from 77% to 85% while the percentage who thought of themselves as “just from my own country” went down from 89% to 83%. Those agreeing that “people who disagree with me completely often have good reasons for their views” increased from 52% to 59%. Respondents were also asked to rate how much they liked or disliked people from other specific member countries as well as some non-EU countries. The index for the EU countries increased significantly but the non-EU countries did not.

## 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 effort to use social science for public consultation across all of Europe. It was coordinated by *Notre Europe* and sponsored by the European Commission, Allianz and around 20 other partners: [www.tomorrowseurope.eu](http://www.tomorrowseurope.eu)
- *Tomorrow's Europe* was designed by **Boucher, Stephen** (*Notre Europe*, ++33 6 75 54 16 98 [sboucher@notre-europe.eu](mailto:sboucher@notre-europe.eu)); **Fishkin, James S.** (Stanford University, ++ 1 650 384 5827; [jfishkin@stanford.edu](mailto:jfishkin@stanford.edu)); **Luskin, Robert C.** (University of Texas at Austin, , [rcluskin@stanford.edu](mailto:rcluskin@stanford.edu)); and **Monceau, Henri** (*Notre Europe*, + 32 478 403 400 - [hmonceau@notre-europe.eu](mailto:hmonceau@notre-europe.eu)).
- TNS Sofres – Press Center - Anne Courtois +33 (0)1 40 92 47 77