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EUROPEAN ELECTIONS 2009

Eurobarometer European Parliament (EB Standard 71) - Spring 2009 Analytical Summary

Population: EU 15+
Sample: EU 27 (27 218 European citizens)
Fieldwork: mid-January - mid-February 2009
TNS Opinion

The results of this survey on the elections should be **considered in the context of the current international situation.**

In fact, the survey's fieldwork (January/February) coincides with highly-charged international events: the inauguration of Barack Obama, the launch of his first recovery plan, the situation in Gaza, etc.

The previous survey (EB/PE 70) which itself coincided with an international situation where the European Union, and by the same token the European Parliament were more visible in the media. During a growing financial crisis under the French presidency, the European Union was a leading actor in seeking to provide urgent solutions. At this time, numerous debates took place in the European Parliament, thus improving its visibility to European citizens.

There are a number of important trends to note:

- ⇒ **Campaign issues: unemployment** is by far the campaign issue which Europeans wish to see tackled as a priority during the European electoral debate. This result confirms that of the survey on the economic and financial crisis (EB71) which reveals the enormous concern of Europeans in the face of the present situation and that which is to come.
- ⇒ **Level of awareness of the elections:** the increase in **awareness** of the date is confirmed in comparison with the last two surveys. On the other hand, **interest** in the elections is not increasing and the likelihood of voting or not voting remains the same.

The factors influencing the voter's choice in the election (candidates' experience both in the European and national domains, electoral program etc.) as well as the factors which cause them to abstain from voting are practically the same as those which were analysed in the EB/PE69 (Spring 2008). They are detailed in the note "First Results" which accompanies this analytical summary.

⇒ **The role of the EP: opinion is polarising** gradually as we get closer to the election. Practically half of Europeans want to see it play a more important role while one sixth states the contrary. The number of "don't know" answers is decreasing.

⇒ **Media recall of the EP:** it is decreasing because of the international context as previously mentioned.

⇒ **The EP and the expectations of European citizens:**

- The demand for **greater protection** of the consumer and of public health as well as a better **coordination** of economic, budgetary and fiscal policies are the issues citizens most want to see addressed as a priority by the EP.

As unemployment is the priority campaign issue, it is absolutely clear that it is the areas associated with the **daily and personal life** of Europeans which are paramount. This leads to a **demand for greater protection at EU level** in the face of a crisis, the end of which no-one currently knows.

In parallel, we note from these results that **the international role of the EU is perceived as less important for European citizens**. There is currently an increase in those who would like the Union to address, as a priority, their everyday problems.

- As regards values, the protection of **human rights in the world** is still in first place with a jump of 4 percentage points. The international context, marked by an intensification of certain conflicts and by increasing repression in many regions of the world, undoubtedly has a bearing on this.

It is also presumably the reason why the **defence of freedom of expression**, evaluated for the first time, is found in 4th place (30%) of the values which the Parliament should defend as a priority.

For a detailed examination of the results by country and by socio-demographic category, the reader can refer to the note "First Results".

According to the different questions posed during the course of the surveys, comparisons were drawn between this EB/PE71 and the EB/PE68 (fieldwork September/November 2007), 69 (fieldwork March/April 2008) and 70 (fieldwork October/November 2008).

I. Campaign themes

We note, even more evidently than during the two previous surveys that Europeans place much more importance on subjects directly linked to their daily life than on global issues. Three categories clearly emerge and the comparisons are drawn with the EB/PE69 of spring 2008, from one year ago.

a) Numerous economic and social preoccupations linked to individual situations, between 32 and 57%:

The top three are always the same: unemployment with 57% (+10% in comparison with the EB/PE69), economic growth with 52% (+7%), inflation and purchasing power at 40% (-1%).

In this context, issues of a general nature or those in the long term gain much fewer answers: the preservation of a social European model 11% (-1%) and the future of pensions 32% (=).

b) Concerns associated with collective global security, between 23% and 29%:

In one year, this issue has greatly decreased in importance for Europeans.

In comparison with the EB/PE69, the results are: insecurity 29% (-8%), the security of energy supplies 27% (new), the fight against climate change 26% (-7%), immigration 24% (-8%), terrorism 24% (-9%), food security 23% (new).

c) Certain policies of the EU and its institutions, between 10% and 19%.

These issues suffer as a result of the focus of answers on fears of an economic or social nature: agriculture 19% (-2%), the euro 13% (-4%), the jurisdiction and powers of the European institutions 10% (-2%), European identity and values 10% (-2%).

II. Awareness of the elections

a) A better knowledge of the date

- In one year, the awareness of the date has doubled. The year 2009 is cited by 32% of respondents as opposed to 16% a year ago. The month of June is cited by 16% as opposed to 4% a year ago (EB/PE69).

By comparison, 5 years ago, a month before the June 2004 elections, only 36% of respondents knew the exact date of the election, as opposed to 16% this year who know the date 5 and a half months before the elections.

- 62% of respondents state that they do not know when the next European elections will take place as opposed to 75% a year ago.
- Finally, 6% cite a different date.

- As during the previous surveys, we note the quite clear socio-demographic differences. 57% of men answer "don't know" as opposed to 66% of women. 69% of the youngest respondents (between 15 and 24 years old) answer "don't know".

b) A level of interest which remains stable

The interest of Europeans in the European elections is identical to the preceding wave of Eurobarometers (autumn 2008/EB/PE70): **44% say they are interested in the European elections, as opposed to 53% who are not interested.**

c) A level of mobilisation which remains identical

The proportion of citizens who say they will most likely vote, or not, is exactly the same as 6 months ago (EB/PE70): **34% of Europeans say they will definitely vote, as opposed to 15% who say they will definitely not vote.**

One cannot, at any rate, deduce from these findings that this is a prediction of a low turnout. In fact, 5 and a half months before the election, citizens always respond with a logical opinion (one responds to a question in a context outside of elections). On the other hand, one enters election mode the moment the electoral debate begins, that is to say more or less in the two months preceding voting day.

III. Media recall and awareness of the workings and jurisdiction of the EP

a) Media recall of the EP

- As indicated in the introduction, **the media recall of the Parliament is directly related to the visibility of the European Union** at the time the survey fieldwork is carried out. Therefore, it is not surprising to see this went from **44% in the EB/PE70 to 36%**. The number of Europeans who do not have a media recall of the Parliament is at 60% as opposed to 53% in the previous survey. The differences between Members States are very important, reaching a difference of 43 percentage points.
- People with a media recall of the Parliament were then questioned on their **perception** of that which they had read, seen or heard: **44% had a good impression, 32% neither a good nor bad impression, and 21% rather a bad impression.**

b) Awareness of the procedure of appointment, the functioning and the jurisdiction of the EP

- In response to the question of whether the members of the Parliament are directly elected by citizens, 53% of Europeans answered yes as opposed to 48% a year ago; 23% answered no and 24% "don't know".

- The manner in which seats are distributed in the hemicycle is better known than it was a year ago. In fact, 36% of Europeans answered that seats were distributed according to "political alliances" as opposed to 33% (EB/PE68). 36% answered that they were distributed according to "nationality" as opposed to 44%.
- Do Member States have the same number of European deputies? 48% answered no, 20% answered yes, 32% "don't know".
- Is the budget determined jointly by the EP and the Member States? 54% answered yes, 12% no, 32% "don't know".
- Are legislative decisions taken equally between the Parliament and Member States? 53% yes, 16% no, 31% "don't know".

IV. The role of the EP

a) What is the perception of its current role?

Europeans feel that the role of the European Parliament during the last ten years has increased. This perception was slightly stronger a year ago (EB/PE68). Thus, 42% think that it has increased as opposed to 45% a year ago, 29% think that it stayed the same as opposed to 26%, 11% think that it was weakened as opposed to 8%.

Again, the differences between Member States are quite substantial and reach 46 percentage points: from 18 to 64%.

b) Role in the future?

As for the other questions, we note that Europeans' choices are now more defined: 48% want to see it play a more important role in the future (= EB/PE68); 22% a less important role (12%); 16% the same (22%); 14% "don't know" (18%).

The differences between Member States reach 48 percentage points: from 27 to 75%.

V. Confidence in the institutions

These results do not find their origin in the EB/PE survey but in the **EB Standard no. 71 (Spring 2009) conducted by the European Commission** which should be soon published.

- Once again, the responses should be analysed in the global context of Europeans' **increasing concern** about the economic and financial situation in the world as regards their personal future.

We noted in the previous survey that they regarded unemployment as the no. 1 campaign issue and that they wanted the elected Parliament to defend as a priority consumer protection and public health as well the coordination of economic, budgetary and fiscal policies. This call for **greater protection** concerns policies which are not strictly under the jurisdiction of the European Union.

- For all of these reasons, it is, thus, not surprising that **confidence in the institutions has undergone a significant decrease.**
 - **European Parliament:** 45% of Europeans are inclined to place their confidence in it as opposed to 51% in EB70; 37% do not trust it as opposed to 31%; 18% do not know (=).
 - **European Commission:** 42% of Europeans are inclined to place their confidence in it as opposed to 51% in EB70; 36% do not trust it as opposed to 30%; 22% do not know as opposed to 23%.
 - **European Central Bank:** 39% of Europeans are inclined to place their confidence in it as opposed to 48% in EB70; 40% do not trust it as opposed to 30%; 21% do not know as opposed to 22%.

VI. Priorities and values to be defended by the EP

a) The priorities to be promoted by the EP

- **The top three have greatly changed.**
 - **Greater protection of the consumer and public health** is now in 1st place (it was 2nd place in EB/PE70). 36% of respondents put in first place as opposed to 33% in the previous survey. 38% of women put it in first place as opposed to 34% of men.¹
 - **The coordination of economic, budgetary and fiscal policies** moves from 6th to 2nd place: 34% as opposed to 26% in EB/PE70. This time, it is men who regard it as most important at 36% as opposed to 32% of women.
 - **A security and defence policy allowing the EU to deal with international crises.** It is now cited as the 3rd priority whereas it was the first in the previous survey: 32% as opposed to 36% in EB/PE70.
- **A combination of policies that contribute to the finding of a better global balance:**

¹ As evident from the EB Flash 266 report which was devoted to the female electorate and the European elections, in the difficult economic and financial context, women are more preoccupied than men by concrete issues closer to them which affect their daily life.

The next three priorities, as desired by Europeans are as follows: the fight against **climate change** and an **energy policy** aimed at guaranteeing the independence of the EU in this domain, both at 30%; **farming** which is respectful of the environment and which contributes to a global balance of food is at 29%.

b) Values to be defended by the EP

- The three values prioritised by Europeans remain the same: the **protection of human rights** in the world 57%; **solidarity** between Member States 31%; **equality** between men and women 31%.

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