

Public opinion and the Eurobarometer

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Public opinion and the Eurobarometer

In September 1973, the European Commission began conducting opinion polls every six months, in April and in October, in all the Member States of the European Community. They followed on from the one-off polls that the Commission held in 1962 and in the early 1970s. The period 1972–73 was characterised by the accession of Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom to the Community and by the national referenda required for this initial enlargement. Assessing public opinion and keeping citizens informed came to be seen as essential elements in the process of European integration.

The Eurobarometer consists of a list of questions that are identical for all Member States and are given to sample groups deemed to be representative of the whole population aged 15 and over. National polling organisations carry out the polls using accepted methodologies. These regular surveys make it possible to assess and compare the attitudes and reactions of European citizens to Community-related or everyday issues such as European enlargement, elections to the European Parliament, the environment, the family, health, tourism, agriculture, racism and xenophobia, eating habits, equal opportunities, drugs, sport, etc. In October 1980, an opinion poll was conducted in Greece in anticipation of the country's accession to the European Communities on 1 January 1981. The Eurobarometer also assessed the opinion of the Spanish and Portuguese public in 1980 and 1985 before these countries acceded to the Communities.

The opinion polls cover the most significant topics related to what is happening in the Community, the degree of commitment of different segments of the population to European integration, and social issues. They also make it possible to determine to what extent a Europe-wide public opinion exists. The results of the Eurobarometer polls are published by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Information. At the request of other directorates-general, polls on more specific issues can be conducted. As well as being of intrinsic interest for the international academic community, the Eurobarometer above all serves to ensure that the Community institutions are better acquainted with European public opinion and, at the same time, to inform European citizens about the institutions and policies that concern them.