

World Publics See European Union as a “Positive Influence”

March 21, 2007

Most would like to See Europe Grow More Influential than the U.S.



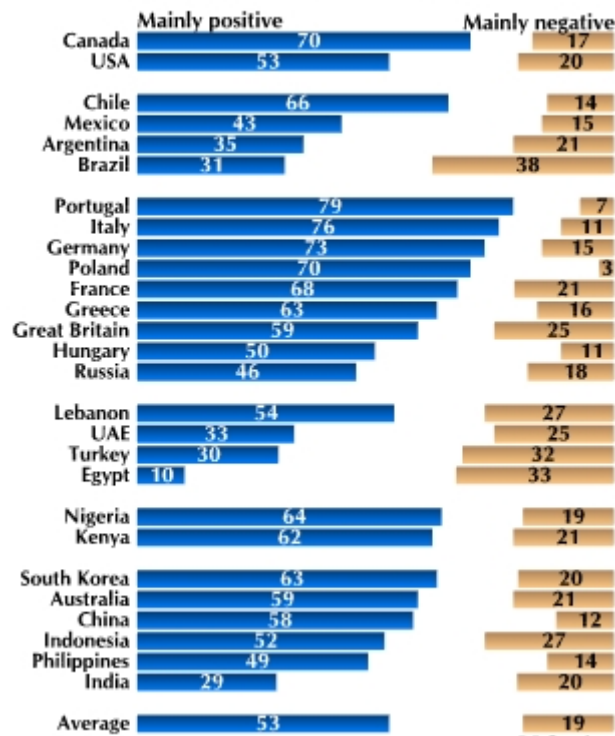
The European Union celebrates its 50th birthday March 25 with its members embroiled in controversies over enlargement, a proposed constitution and how to create jobs while spurring growth.

But EU boosters can take comfort in the fact that publics both inside and outside of Europe tend to view the union positively. In 24 out of 27 countries surveyed in recent months for the [BBC World Service](#), people mostly approve of the EU's influence in the world. Overall an average of 53 percent worldwide say the EU has a positive influence while only 19 percent say it has a negative one.

Moreover, when asked whether they would like Europe to become more influential than the United States, majorities around the world say yes.

European publics are among the most positive about the EU's global role. Even when EU member states are excluded, however, the union's image is rosy: in 16 out of 19 non-EU countries the most common opinion is that the EU plays a constructive role in world affairs. On average 48 percent say the EU's influence is positive while only 22 percent say that it is negative.

Views of European Union's Influence



BBC, 1/07 Two of the three exceptions are in the

Middle East: Egypt and Turkey. The other is Brazil.

The EU's positive image contrasts starkly with that of the United States: the same poll finds that the United States' influence is viewed more negatively than the European Union in 24 of the 27 countries polled. The three countries where the EU's negative ratings are the same or higher than the United States' are Nigeria and Kenya, where roughly one in five see both countries negatively, and the Philippines, where 14 percent rate the EU negatively and only 11 percent see the US that way.

Majorities around the world would prefer to see Europe, rather than the United States, play a leading role. A [23-nation poll](#) conducted in 2005 by the BBC found that on average 58 percent favored Europe becoming more influential than the United States in world affairs.

A majority supports European leadership even when European countries are excluded: in the 17 non-EU countries polled 53 percent on average would like to see Europe grow stronger than the United States, including majorities or pluralities in every country except the Philippines.

The United States' neighbors and NAFTA partners are among the most enthusiastic about European leadership: 66 percent of Mexicans would like to see Europe surpass the United States as would 63 percent of Canadians. Strong majorities in China (66%), South Africa (63%), Australia (62%) and Russia (60%) agree.

High Marks in Europe, the Americas, Asia and Africa

The BBC World Service has asked countries about their views of EU influence for two consecutive years. Among the 19 countries that the BBC also polled the previous year, views of the EU are largely unchanged, though certain countries have shown significant shifts.

In Europe, majorities in all of the member states polled say its influence is positive, with views ranging from 79 percent positive in Portugal to 50 percent in Hungary, one of the union's newest members. In Russia, a non-EU member, about half rate the EU's influence positively (46%) and less than a fifth (18%) call it negative.

On the other side of the Atlantic, most Canadians (70% to 17%) think the EU has a constructive impact on the world as do a smaller majority of Americans (53% positive, 20% negative). Both Canadians and Americans have become more positive about the EU over the past year, with favorable views in Canada up 19 points from 51 percent and those in the United States rising 11 points from 42 percent.

In Latin America, three of the four countries polled consider the EU to have a more positive than negative impact: Chile (66% to 14%), Mexico (43% to 15%) and Argentina (35% to 21%). Brazil—which has clashed with European leaders over trade policy—is the exception. Thirty-eight percent of Brazilians judge the EU's influence as negative and only 31 percent see it as positive. A year ago, a plurality of Brazilians (45%) saw the EU influence as positive.

Majorities in four of the six Asian/Pacific countries polled see the EU's influence as positive as do pluralities in the other three. South Koreans are the most likely to give the EU a good score (63%) though this has declined over the past year (from 71%). Positive ratings have gone up in Australia (59%, up from 46%) and the Philippines (49%, up from 39%). They have remained stable in China (58%) and Indonesia (52%).

Less than a third of Indians see the EU as a positive influence, though this is still the most common view in their country. Twenty-nine percent of Indians view the EU's role favorably, down from 37%. Twenty percent say it is negative.

The two sub-Saharan African countries polled are quite favorably disposed toward the EU: Majorities in Nigeria (64%) and Kenya (64%) say the EU plays a positive role in the world.

Mixed Views in the Middle East

Two of the four countries polled that have mainly negative views of EU influence are in the Middle East. Egyptians tend to see its influence as negative (33%) rather than positive (10%). Attitudes in Turkey—which has so far seen EU states spurn its efforts to secure membership—are quite mixed and growing more negative. Turks are evenly divided between positive views (30%, down from 40%) and negative (32%, up from 16%). Large numbers declined to answer.

Two other majority-Muslim countries take a more favorable view of Europe. The United Arab Emirates tend to be positive (33% to 25%) though many decline to answer. And a majority of Lebanese express approval of the EU: 54 percent say it has a positive influence on the world while only 27 percent say it has a negative one.

The BBC poll was conducted by GlobeScan and the Program on International Policy Attitudes of the University of Maryland, which publishes WorldPublicOpinion.org. Interviews took place between November 2006 and January 2007. More details are available [here](#).