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Assessing the Implications of EU Enlargement for  
the Existing Member States: The Public Opinion  
Perspective

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Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

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*Assessing the Implications of EU Enlargement for the Existing Member States:  
The Public Opinion Perspective*

**RICHARD SINNOTT**

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## Introduction

An examination of the implications of enlargement for the existing member states of the Union must include an assessment of the response of the mass of the citizens to the proposed enlargement and an assessment of what this response implies in terms of the challenge of consolidating the legitimacy of the Union. In order to provide the necessary background for a discussion of these issues, this paper begins with a brief survey of trends in attitudes to European integration, paying particular attention to indicators of the nature and quality of orientations to integration. It then deals with preferences regarding the enlargement process and the priority attached to it, with people's expectations of the consequences that enlargement will have, with the structure of preferences regarding the admission of a range of applicant and potential applicant countries and with the degree to which European publics have a sense of being on top of the issue and of participating in a debate about enlargement.

## Trends in Support for Integration

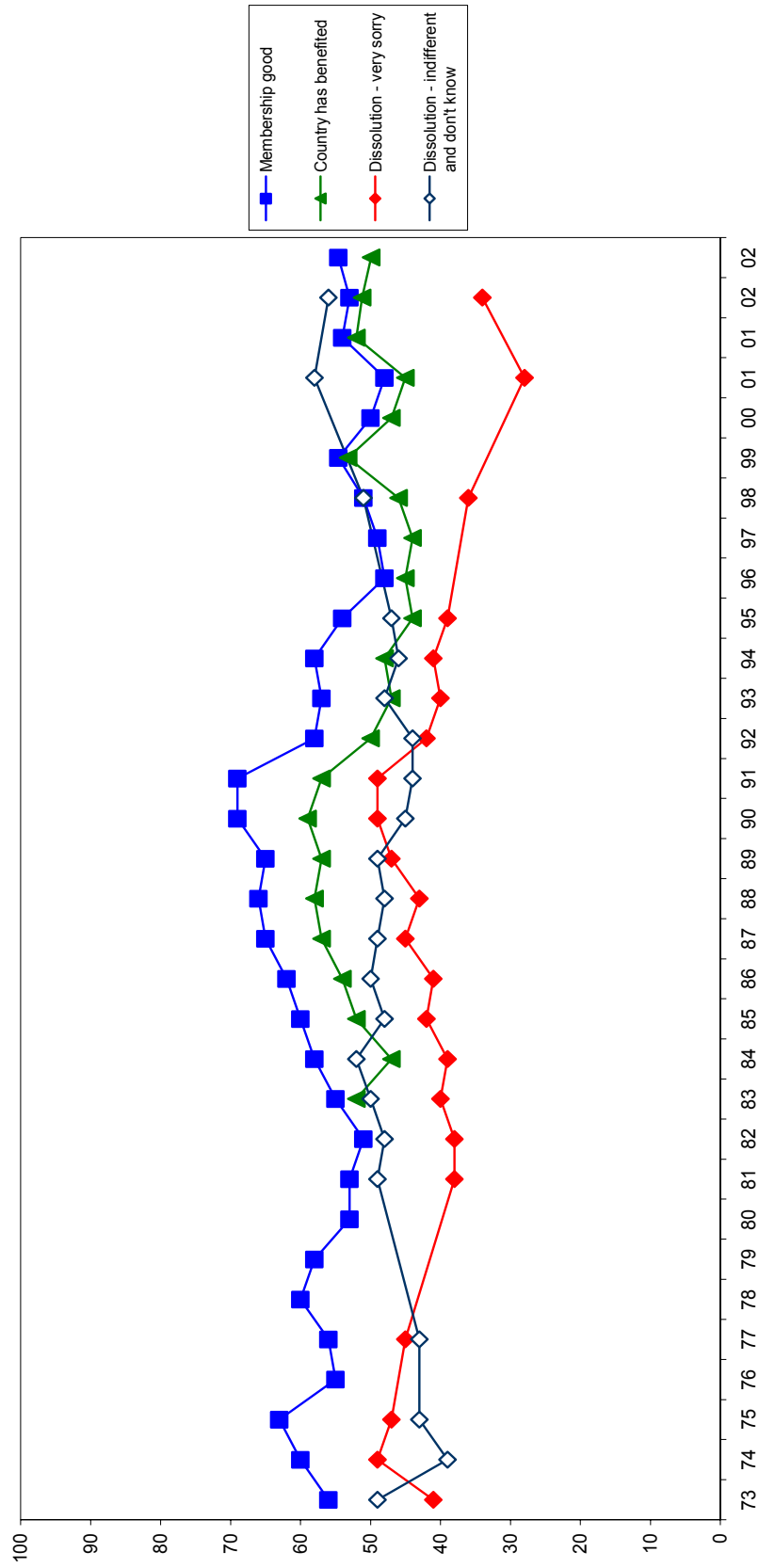
The essential features of long-term trends in orientations to European integration can be illustrated by reference to three indicators, now widely referred to as the membership indicator, the benefits indicator and the dissolution indicator.<sup>1</sup> The first of these indicators asks whether the respondent thinks that his or her country's membership of the European Union is a good thing, a bad thing or neither/nor. The benefits indicator asks whether the respondent thinks the country has benefited or not from membership of the Union and the dissolution question elicits responses to the situation of a hypothetical dissolution of the Union ('if you were told in the morning that the European Union had been scrapped...'). Figure 1 presents the pro-integration responses based on these three indicators and also adds a line to indicate the proportion who give either an indifferent or a don't know response to the dissolution question.

The main point to emerge from even a brief examination of the trends considered in Figure 1 is the responsiveness of public opinion to events and developments in the Union. Support for integration was either static or declining during what is often referred to as the doldrums period of European integration, i.e. the mid-to-late 1970s and early 1980s and then showed a remarkable and sustained rise from the early 1980s to 1990. Our main interest in the present context however, centres on the marked decline in support for integration since 1991. This is clearly evident in the membership indicator and is mirrored in the benefits indicator. Both indicators do show a slight and rather bumpy increase since the mid-1990s but these recent trends still leave us with an approximately 20 percentage point fall in support for integration over the last decade. The third indicator (dissolution) shows a fall of similar size in the early 1990s. Positive responses to this question can be interpreted as a measure of enthusiasm for integration. It is significant, therefore, that, over the entire period for which data are available, support for integration on this measure has been lower than on the other two indicators considered. The dissolution indicator also points to a particularly important trend, i.e. the growth in indifference to integration. Since the early 1990s 'indifferent' plus 'don't know' responses to the dissolution question have consistently outstripped 'very sorry' responses, culminating in an almost 30 percentage point deficit in enthusiasm relative to indifference/don't know in 2001. The fact that a majority of European citizens are either indifferent to the future of the European Union or don't know what view to take on the matter is a particularly important feature of the background against which contemporary attitudes to enlargement must be assessed.

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1 For a detailed discussion of these indicators and of the format of the questions see Oskar Niedermayer (1995) 'Trends and Contrasts' in Oskar Niedermayer and Richard Sinnott (eds.) *Public Opinion and Internationalized Governance*, pp.53-57. Oxford University Press.

**Figure 1 Attitudes to the European Union on three Eurobarometer indicators (membership, benefits and dissolution), 1973-2002**

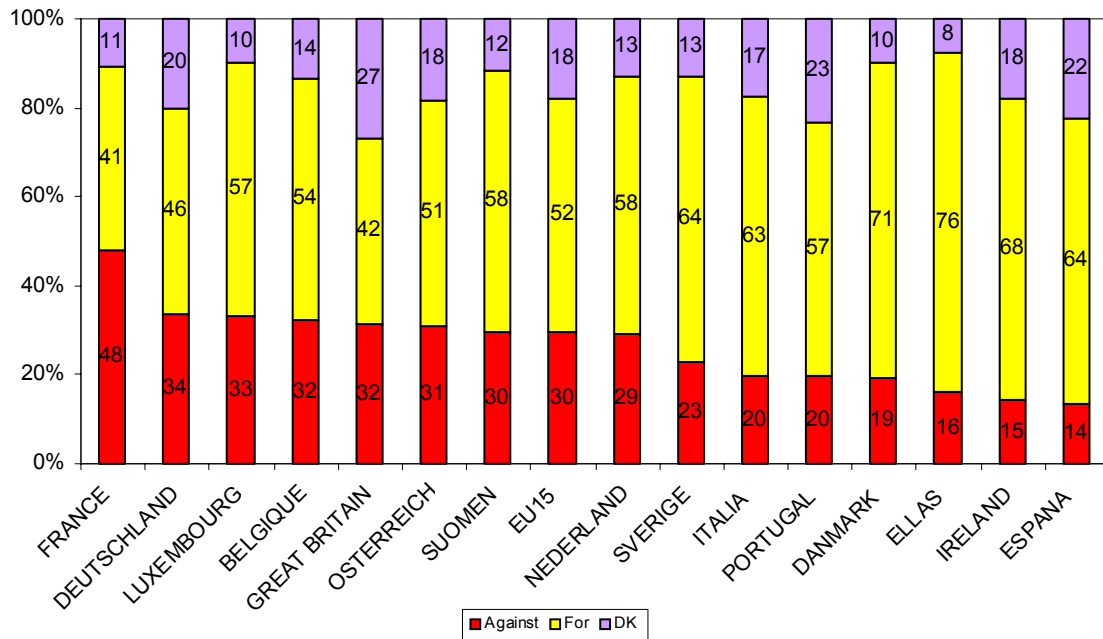


Source: E3 – EB58.1 (Dissolution question was not asked in Autumn 2002 (EB58.1))

## For and Against Enlargement

On a very summary measure (for or against enlargement of the European Union to include new countries), a majority of European citizens in autumn 2002 were in favour of enlargement, one in six had no opinion and close to one-third were opposed (see Figure 2). The range of attitudes across the existing member states was quite considerable, going from 45 per cent opposed in France to between 14 and 17 per cent opposed in Spain, Ireland and Greece.

**Figure 2: For or against enlargement (in descending order of opposition to enlargement), Autumn 2002**

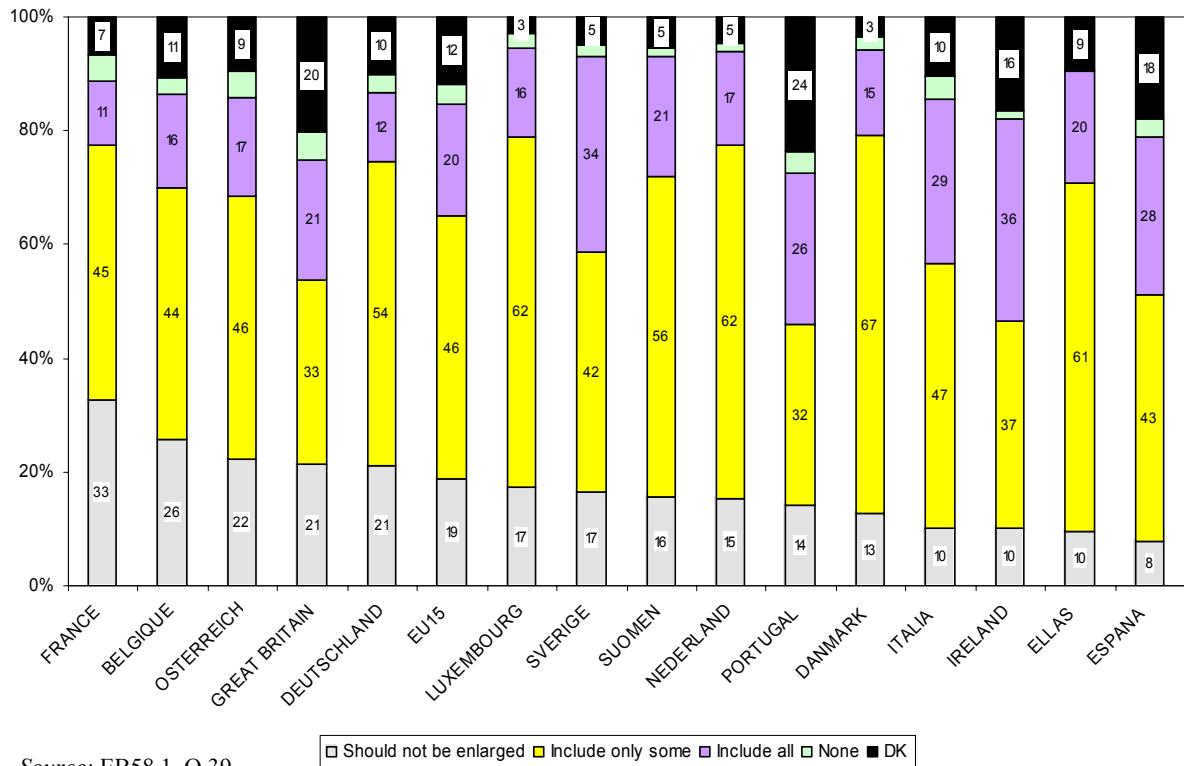


Source: EB58.1, Q.26.4

A subsequent question in the same survey brought out a more nuanced picture by offering the alternatives of enlargement to include all the countries wishing to join, enlargement to include only some of the countries wishing to join and the third alternative ‘the EU should not be enlarged to any additional countries.’ The results show 20 per cent in favour of a comprehensive enlargement (all countries wishing to join), 46 per cent in favour of conditional enlargement and only 19 per cent opposed to the admission of any additional countries to the Union (see Figure 3). The latter kind of outright opposition to enlargement was found among one-in-three people in France, among one-in-four in Belgium and among one-in-five in Germany, Austria and the UK. The lowest levels of outright opposition to enlargement of the Union were again found in Ireland, Greece and Spain.



**Figure 3 Enlargement preference (include all/some/none) by country (in descending order of outright opposition to enlargement), Autumn 2002**



### The Priority Attached to Enlargement

As well as looking at the balance of opinion for and against an issue like enlargement, it is important to take account of the priority that citizens attach to the issue. The evidence from the autumn of 2002 suggests that, relative to a wide-ranging list of possible actions the EU might undertake, welcoming new member countries ranks at the very bottom of the scale of priorities and is a substantial distance adrift of the next lowest priority. Thirty-one per cent regard welcoming new member countries as a priority action; 58 per cent say it is not a priority; this compares to the next lowest priority of reforming the institutions of the EU (52 per cent regard this as a priority while 32 per cent consider that it is not a priority (see Table 1).

Further clarification of attitudes to EU priorities and of the place of the enlargement issue among such priorities can be gained by pushing the analysis of the priority action data in Table 1 a bit further. This can be done by employing an exploratory statistical technique that is widely used to identify the broad dimensions that may underlie responses to a large number of attitude items such as those contained in Table 1.<sup>2</sup> The outcome of such an analysis in this case suggests that there are two attitudinal dimensions underlying the priority responses. Taking into account the size of the factor

2 Factor analysis examines the relationships or associations between a given set of variables (in this case the responses to the questionnaire items) in order to discover the common 'factors' or dimensions underlying the pattern of responses. The first thing to be decided in a factor analysis is the number of factors or dimensions that best account for the patterns in the data. This decision is made in the light of a number of statistical criteria while taking into account also the interpretability of the factors. The interpretation of the factors or dimensions is based on the contribution of each variable (questionnaire item) to the factor as indicated by the magnitude of the factor 'loading' for that item (shown in the factor analysis tables in the text).

loadings in Table 2, the first underlying dimension might be summarily described as a ‘problem priorities’ dimension (with high loadings on terrorism, organised crime, unemployment, police and security, quality of food products, poverty and social exclusion, consumer protection, illegal immigration, and the environment). The second dimension comprises a range of actions that focus on European integration as such (asserting the political and diplomatic importance of the EU, reforming the institutions of the EU, welcoming new member countries, getting closer to European citizens, and successfully implementing the single currency). This second dimension can be described as an ‘integration priorities’ dimension. The key point in the present context is that enlargement is bracketed with these integration priorities rather than with the series of high-profile problem priorities that arise from the need to confront the various difficulties and threats that preoccupy the citizens of the Union. In short, enlargement is a low priority issue associated with aspirations to greater European integration rather than with the challenge of finding solutions to pressing problems.

**Table 1 Priority attached to actions to be taken by the European Union, Autumn 2002**

	Priority	Not a priority	DK
Fighting terrorism	91.4	5.5	3.1
Maintaining peace and security in Europe	91.2	5.6	3.2
Fighting unemployment	90.6	6.3	3.1
Fighting poverty and social exclusion	89.8	6.6	3.6
Fighting organised crime and drug trafficking	88.9	7.6	3.5
Protecting the environment	87.5	8.9	3.6
Guaranteeing the quality of food products	86.1	10.3	3.6
Fighting illegal immigration	84.1	11.4	4.5
Protecting consumers and guaranteeing the quality of other products	82.1	13.5	4.3
Guaranteeing the rights of the individual and respect for the principles of democracy in Europe	80.6	12.6	6.8
Getting closer to European citizens	71.1	21.2	7.7
Successfully implementing the single European currency, the euro	63.0	29.7	7.3
Asserting the political and diplomatic importance of the EU around the world	54.7	34.2	11.1
Reforming the institutions of the EU and the way they work	52.2	32.4	15.4
Welcoming new member countries	30.9	58.0	11.1

*Source:* EB58.1, Q.27

It might be argued that the attitudes considered so far—in favour or against enlargement and regarding enlargement as a priority or not—are now of little consequence. Enlargement is a done deal and the view might be taken that people had simply better get used to it. This is a simplistic view. If significant numbers of people have reservations about enlargement and if only one-in-three European citizens regard it as a priority, it is essential to examine the reasons for these doubts about and apathy towards the issue. A better understanding of what lies behind these attitudes should, at a minimum, help in addressing them.

Probing the possible reasons behind these attitudes can be approached by examining the expectations people have regarding the consequences of enlargement. This paper looks at two sets of such expectations—a set of specific perceptions of the consequences and implications of enlargement and, secondly, a set of expectations regarding winners and losers from the enlargement process.

**Table 2 Two dimensions underlying EU priorities: ‘problem priorities’ and ‘integration priorities’, Autumn 2002**

	Component	
	(1) Problem priorities	(2) Integration priorities
Fighting terrorism	<b>0.731</b>	0.072
Fighting organised crime and drug trafficking	<b>0.712</b>	0.124
Fighting unemployment	<b>0.683</b>	0.066
Maintaining peace and security in Europe	<b>0.672</b>	0.173
Guaranteeing the quality of food products	<b>0.663</b>	0.203
Fighting poverty and social exclusion	<b>0.661</b>	0.140
Protecting consumers and guaranteeing the quality of other products	<b>0.635</b>	0.243
Fighting illegal immigration	<b>0.619</b>	0.153
Protecting the environment	<b>0.595</b>	0.222
Guaranteeing the rights of the individual and respect for the principles of democracy in Europe	<b>0.489</b>	<b>0.453</b>
Asserting the political and diplomatic importance of the EU around the world	0.205	<b>0.694</b>
Reforming the institutions of EU and the way they work	0.130	<b>0.693</b>
Welcoming new member countries	-0.039	<b>0.633</b>
Getting closer to European citizens	0.277	<b>0.594</b>
Successfully implementing the single European currency. the euro	0.182	<b>0.546</b>
% Variance	35.291	10.388

Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis; Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

Source: EB58.1, Q.27

### Expected Consequences of Enlargement

Expectations regarding the consequences of enlargement vary considerably—from well over two-thirds of the citizens who anticipate that enlargement will make the European Union more important in the world to a similar proportion who believe that it will make it more difficult to make decisions in the European Union. In attempting to understand the implications of these and related views of the consequences of enlargement, it is again instructive to examine the structure underlying the expectations. A factor analysis (Table 4) suggests that there are three dimensions underlying the expectations listed in Table 3. The first dimension comprises four items measuring expected disadvantages of enlargement (that one's own country will become less important, one's own country will receive less financial aid, there will be more unemployment in one's own country and decision-making in the EU will become more difficult). As we have seen in Table 3, endorsement of these negative expectations ranges from a high of 68 per cent (difficulty of making decisions) to a low of 43/44 per cent (country become less important and more unemployment in own country). A second dimension is defined by the three items measuring expected advantages. These are the importance of the EU in the world, cultural enrichment, and peace and security. Overall, these expected advantages are somewhat more widely endorsed than the expected disadvantages—expected advantages range from a high of 69 per cent (Europe more important in the world) to a low of 55 per cent (more peace and security). It is, however, quite striking that these expected advantages are a good deal more intangible than the very tangible negative aspects that comprise the first dimension of expectations.

**Table 3 Expectations/perceptions regarding enlargement, Autumn 2002**

	Expectation/perception regarding enlargements		
	Positive	Negative	DK
Importance of EU in the world	69.4	16.2	14.4
Cultural enrichment of Europe	66.0	19.3	14.8
Need for EU institutional reform	59.2	13.2	27.6
Peace and security in Europe	54.9	31.2	13.9
Importance of country in Europe	41.1	43.8	15.1
Employment in own country	38.3	42.7	19.0
EU help for future member countries financially. even before they join	33.4	50.1	16.6
Cost of enlargement for existing member countries	24.5	57.7	17.8
Financial aid for own country from EU	23.1	56.9	20.0
Making decisions on a European scale	19.1	67.9	13.0

Source: EB58.1, Q.43

The third dimension underlying expectations of the consequences of enlargement comprises two cost-related items—the expectation of an additional financial burden and the willingness to make financial transfers to applicant countries). As is clear from Table 3, attitudes to the financial aspects of enlargement tend to be negative – only 25 per cent feel that there will be no additional costs involved while 58 per cent believe that enlargement will cost more for existing member countries. Furthermore, only one-third endorse the proposition that the EU should help future member countries financially before they join.

**Table 4: Three dimensions underlying attitudes to enlargement: manifest costs, intangible benefits and expectations, Autumn 2002**

	Component		
	(1) Expected disadvantages	(2) Expected advantages	(3) Attitude to costs
Country will become less important in Europe	<b>0.704</b>	-0.182	0.107
Country will receive less financial aid from EU	<b>0.691</b>	0.079	-0.146
There will be more unemployment in country	<b>0.666</b>	-0.269	0.058
It will be much more difficult to make decisions on a European scale	<b>0.545</b>	0.098	-0.390
The EU will be more important in the world	-0.087	<b>0.762</b>	0.066
Europe will be culturally richer	-0.091	<b>0.730</b>	0.082
More peace and security will be guaranteed in Europe	-0.153	<b>0.616</b>	0.307
Enlargement will not cost more for existing member countries	-0.104	0.034	<b>0.744</b>
The EU should help future member countries financially. even before they join	0.057	0.233	<b>0.649</b>
The EU must reform the way its institutions work before welcoming new members	0.362	0.437	-0.095
% Variance	23.546	16.228	10.601

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis; Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

Source: EB58.1, Q.43

The Eurobarometer data also make it possible to examine the expected gains and losses affecting various groups and sectors in society as a result of enlargement (see Table 5). The question regarding winners and losers takes account of eleven groups and shows fairly widespread agreement on three

groups that are expected to lose out as a result of enlargement (farmers, fishermen and small companies). At the other end of the scale there is a widespread consensus that big business will benefit from enlargement and that young people will, by and large, also be beneficiaries.

**Table 5 Groups perceived as losing out/benefiting as a result of enlargement, Autumn 2002**

	<b>Lose out</b>	<b>Benefit</b>	<b>Neither lose out nor benefit</b>
Farmers	51.7	18.9	29.3
Fishermen	49.4	14.7	35.9
Small companies	40.8	21.0	38.1
The unemployed	33.2	14.9	51.9
People living in the countryside	32.2	13.9	53.9
Employees in general	31.0	22.1	46.9
Old people	29.4	13.2	57.4
Young people	19.9	46.0	34.0
Ethnic minorities	19.8	32.3	47.9
People living in big cities	17.1	26.8	56.1
Big businesses	9.4	67.3	23.4

*Source:* EB58.1, Q.46

A factor analysis of these data (Table 6) suggests that there are two dimensions underlying the expectations of gains and losses from enlargement. The two dimensions point to a broad distinction between traditional sectors or social groups and modern sectors or groups. Thus the first dimension (traditional) is defined by expectations in regard to the outcome for fishermen, farmers, people living in the countryside, small companies and old people. The second (modern) dimension is defined by expectations regarding the effect of enlargement on young people, urban dwellers, big businesses, ethnic minorities and employees. It should be noted that there is some overlap between the two dimensions in regard to old people, employees in general (possibly because of the very unspecific definition of this social group) and the unemployed. Bearing the distribution of the responses to each of these individual items as shown in Table 5 in mind, the general expectation seems to be that traditional groups or sectors will experience the drawbacks while the rewards accrue to more modern social and economic sectors.

### **The Boundaries of an Enlarged European Union**

Few debates about enlargement get very far or without encountering the issue of the ultimate boundaries of the Union. Figure 3 above showed that, for a majority of EU citizens, enlargement preferences are selective, i.e. some but not all applicant or aspirant countries should be admitted. Table 7 spells out the implications of such selectivity by showing the level of support for each of 21 countries 'becoming part of the European Union in the future'.<sup>3</sup> The level of support for these countries becoming part of the EU ranges very widely—from 75 per cent in the case of Switzerland and Norway to 27 per cent in the case of Albania. Apart from the distinctiveness of Switzerland and Norway and, to a lesser extent, Iceland, there are no obvious gaps in the ranking of countries that would suggest a clear sub-division into a group of countries whose membership is favourably regarded and a group of countries whose membership is not so regarded. Thus, on the evidence in Table 7, the subjective or psychological boundaries of an enlarged Europe, as seen from within the existing member states, are decidedly fuzzy. A factor analysis of the data is more helpful in this regard, suggesting a sub-division of potential new members into three regional groups, with fairly minimal overlap between them.

<sup>3</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that some of the countries concerned do not currently aspire to membership.

**Table 6 Two dimensions underlying perceptions of group benefits/losses resulting from enlargement: traditional and modern demographic/socio-economic sectors, Autumn 2002**

	Component	
	(1) Traditional sector	(2) Modern Sector
Fishermen	<b>0.858</b>	0.027
Farmers	<b>0.844</b>	0.026
People living in the countryside	<b>0.646</b>	0.339
Small companies	<b>0.550</b>	0.304
Old people	<b>0.500</b>	<b>0.464</b>
Young people	0.225	<b>0.727</b>
People living in big cities	0.220	<b>0.675</b>
Big businesses	-0.132	<b>0.627</b>
Ethnic minorities	0.228	<b>0.594</b>
Employees in general	<b>0.504</b>	<b>0.551</b>
The unemployed	0.385	<b>0.460</b>
% Variance	39.283	12.156

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis; Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

Source: EB58.1, Q.46

**Table 7 In favour of or against EU membership for particular countries in the future, Autumn 2002**

	In favour	Against	DK
Norway	74.9	11.9	13.2
Switzerland	74.9	12.4	12.7
Iceland	61.2	20.9	17.9
Malta	52.4	27.9	19.7
Hungary	51.5	30.0	18.6
Poland	48.0	33.7	18.3
Cyprus	47.0	32.5	20.4
Czech Republic	46.3	33.2	20.4
Slovakia	41.1	37.3	21.6
Estonia	41.0	36.4	22.7
Latvia	40.6	36.6	22.8
Lithuania	40.0	37.1	22.9
Bulgaria	38.8	39.7	21.5
Slovenia	37.8	39.9	22.3
Croatia	35.1	44.5	20.4
Romania	35.0	44.9	20.2
Yugoslavia (Federal Republic)	32.7	46.4	20.9
Turkey	31.7	48.8	19.5
Bosnia and Herzegovina	31.2	47.3	21.5
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)	30.0	48.0	22.1
Albania	27.2	51.8	21.0

Source: EB58.1, Q.41 and Q.42

The first group identified by the factor analysis comprises eight of the ten countries that have just successfully concluded accession negotiations with the EU (see Table 8).<sup>4</sup> Since the two countries that

4 Note that, to a much greater extent than in the other factor analyses reported in this paper, the first dimension dominates the factor structure. This is indicated by the fact that, as reported in Table 8, the first factor explains 62.8 per cent of the

have successfully concluded negotiations but are not included in this group are Malta and Cyprus, this dimension or grouping of countries makes up a contiguous Central European region stretching on a north-east to south-west line from Estonia to Slovenia. The second region or grouping of countries identified by the factor analysis in Table 8 comprises the countries of South-Eastern Europe—stretching from Croatia and Serbia in the North-West to Turkey in the South-East.

The third regional grouping consists of a set of countries that are not geographically contiguous but have a clear political similarity. The grouping is defined principally by Norway, Switzerland and Iceland, with Malta and Cyprus included in the grouping but with more modest loadings (see Table 8). What these countries have in common, relative to all but one (Turkey) of the countries in the first two groupings, is that they were not part of Eastern Europe as this term was defined in a cold-war context. Accordingly, with some stretching of the strictly geographical meaning of the term, this third group of countries can be labelled Western European.

**Table 8 Dimensions underlying enlargement preferences (21 countries): South-Eastern Europe, Central Europe and Western Europe, Autumn 2002**

	Component		
	(1) Central Europe	(2) South-Eastern Europe	(3) Western Europe
Latvia	<b>0.831</b>	0.334	0.227
Lithuania	<b>0.823</b>	0.353	0.218
Estonia	<b>0.823</b>	0.330	0.235
Slovakia	<b>0.729</b>	0.437	0.241
Czech Republic	<b>0.707</b>	0.370	0.308
Hungary	<b>0.697</b>	0.343	0.361
Slovenia	<b>0.686</b>	<b>0.530</b>	0.193
Poland	<b>0.683</b>	0.405	0.303
The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)	0.372	<b>0.840</b>	0.156
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.392	<b>0.819</b>	0.157
Yugoslavia (Federal Republic)	0.371	<b>0.814</b>	0.180
Albania	0.307	<b>0.810</b>	0.168
Croatia	0.406	<b>0.787</b>	0.180
Turkey	0.201	<b>0.689</b>	0.238
Romania	<b>0.550</b>	<b>0.639</b>	0.169
Bulgaria	<b>0.552</b>	<b>0.585</b>	0.237
Norway	0.229	0.124	<b>0.869</b>
Switzerland	0.132	0.127	<b>0.856</b>
Iceland	0.385	0.245	<b>0.684</b>
Malta	<b>0.483</b>	0.383	<b>0.516</b>
Cyprus	0.426	<b>0.451</b>	<b>0.461</b>
% Variance	62.836	8.100	5.106

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis; Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization  
Source: EB58.1, Q.41 and Q.42

Not surprisingly, there is some overlap between the three regions identified in Table 8. Also not surprisingly, the countries that give rise to the overlap lie on the borders of the regions as defined.<sup>5</sup> Thus Slovenia, while belonging primarily to the Central European region as defined in Table 8, also

(Contd.) \_\_\_\_\_

variance. However, although the other two factors are therefore of considerably less importance in a statistical sense, they do meet the eigenvalue-equals-one criterion and they do form quite distinct and interpretable dimensions.

5 An overlap is considered to occur if country has a factor loading above 0.45 on more than one dimension in Table 8.

has a not insubstantial loading on the dimension identifying a South-Eastern European region. Conversely, Romania and Bulgaria, which on the basis of the factor loadings belong primarily to the South-Eastern European region, also have a non-negligible loading on the Central European dimension. Finally Malta and Cyprus also show some overlap or ambiguity. While Malta loads primarily on the Western European dimension it also has a loading above the cut-off point on the Central European dimension. Cyprus figures on two dimensions and comes close to figuring on all three—its highest loading is on the Western European dimension but it has an almost equally high loading on the South-Eastern European dimension while coming close to having a loading above the cut-off point also on the Central European dimension.

It could perhaps be argued that the distinction between Central and South-Eastern Europe as outlined here in fact reflects the current state of accession negotiations—after all the countries that define the Central European region in Table 8 are not only geographically contiguous but also share the immediate and certain prospect of membership of the EU. However, the non-inclusion of Malta and Cyprus in this group argues against the interpretation that the regional groupings identified are simply a reflection of current negotiation/application status. A more fundamental problem for any interpretation that would regard the regional distinctions identified here as simply a reflection of the negotiation process is that, as we shall see in a moment, the publics of the existing member states do not follow enlargement issues closely enough or do not feel sufficiently well-informed about enlargement to warrant the assumption that they are aware of the details of which countries are about to be included and which countries are on a negotiation/waiting list. It seems more reasonable to conclude, therefore, that the regional groupings identified here reflect political or cultural familiarities and/or affinities rather than simply reflecting the current state of membership negotiations with the countries concerned.

The findings just reported enable one to go back to the ranking of countries in Table 7 with a better sense of the structure underlying the preferences expressed. Broadly speaking, public opinion in the existing 15 member states responds to the possibilities of enlargement in terms of different degrees of support for membership of countries in three distinct regions. Average support for admission to membership of the EU of the countries here labelled Western European is 62 per cent, for the countries in the Central European region it is 43 per cent and for the countries in the South-Eastern European region it is 33 per cent. Two points should be noted about the differences between these average levels of support. In the first place, the fact that the average level of support for the admission of the countries of Central Europe that make up the bulk of the current group of countries to be admitted is only 43 per cent does not imply that there is a majority opposed to enlargement. We have seen from Figures 2 and 3 that this is certainly not the case. What it does imply is that the citizens of the existing member states, while supportive of enlargement as such do not have a clear sense of welcoming individual new member states—as they would have if the Union were admitting Norway or Switzerland. In short, there is a considerable way to go if the accession countries are to be fully incorporated into an ever closer union of the peoples of Europe. The second point suggested by the variations in average support for the admission of particular countries is that further progress in the enlargement of the European Union beyond the 2004 intake and in a south-eastern direction will require a process of communication and persuasion if it is to be done with the support of public opinion in the current 15 member states.<sup>6</sup> Some idea of the challenge that would be involved in mounting such a process of communication can be gleaned from considering how the debate about enlargement has been experienced (or not experienced) in the 15 existing member states.

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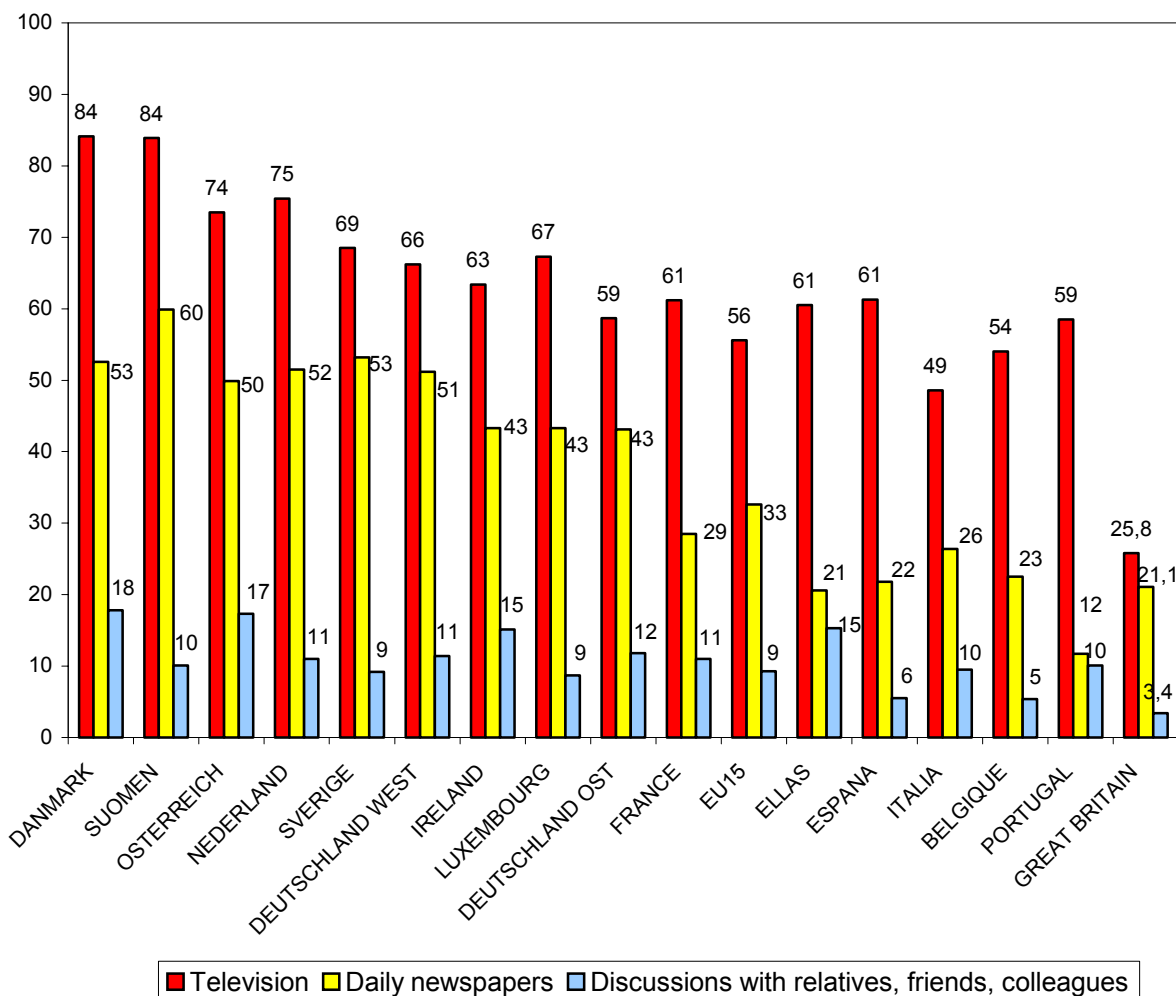
6 Of course the composition of public opinion on enlargement issues will change significantly when the current round of enlargement takes effect in 2004 and any future debate about enlargement will be fundamentally affected by the fact that it will take place within a Union of 25 rather than a Union of 15.



## The Public's Involvement in the Enlargement Issue

Figure 4 shows that, as of autumn 2002, a majority of EU citizens had been recently exposed to some communication about enlargement via the main medium of mass communication in contemporary European societies, namely television. The proportion experiencing some form of active engagement with the enlargement issue via reading about it in the newspaper is, however, only about one in three. When the criterion is the more demanding one of discussion of enlargement with relatives, friends or colleagues, the proportion falls to one in ten. The ranking of countries in descending order from left to right is based on taking the average of the three forms of communication shown in the table. While this ordering of countries is likely to be a heavily influenced by various aspects of each country's political culture and political processes, there is some suggestion in Figure 4 that exposure to the issue of enlargement is in part a function of geographical or geopolitical proximity to and involvement with the candidate countries.

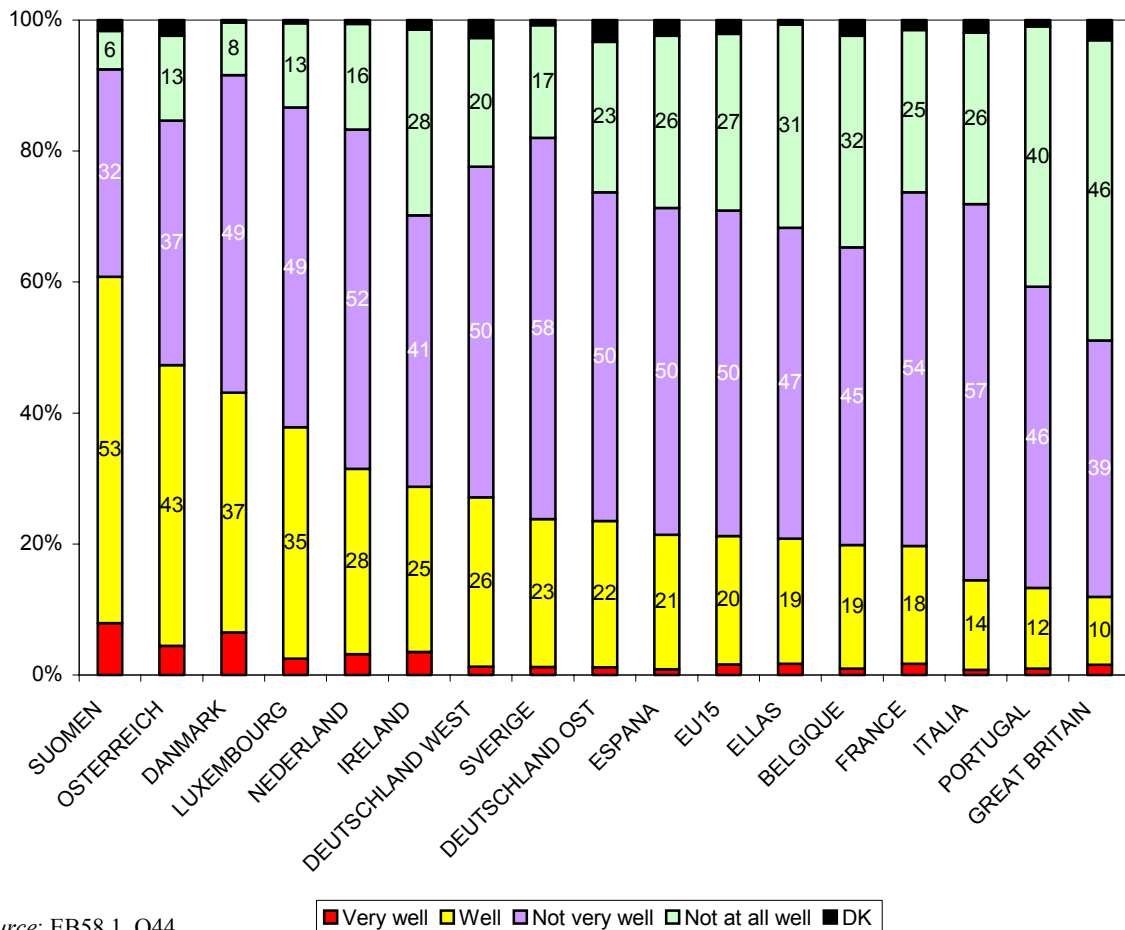
**Figure 4 Recently read/seen/been told something about enlargement-daily newspapers, television and discussions with relatives, friends, colleagues (in descending order of average here media), Autumn 2002**



Source: EB58.1, Q.45

The limited impact of the communication process just described is reflected in the fact that more than 75 per cent of the citizens of the EU feel that they are either not at all well informed or not very well-informed about enlargement as compared to the one-in-five who feel either well-informed or very well informed (see Figure 5). This subjective sense of being well informed is significantly higher in Finland, Austria, and Denmark and significantly lower in Britain, Portugal, and Italy.

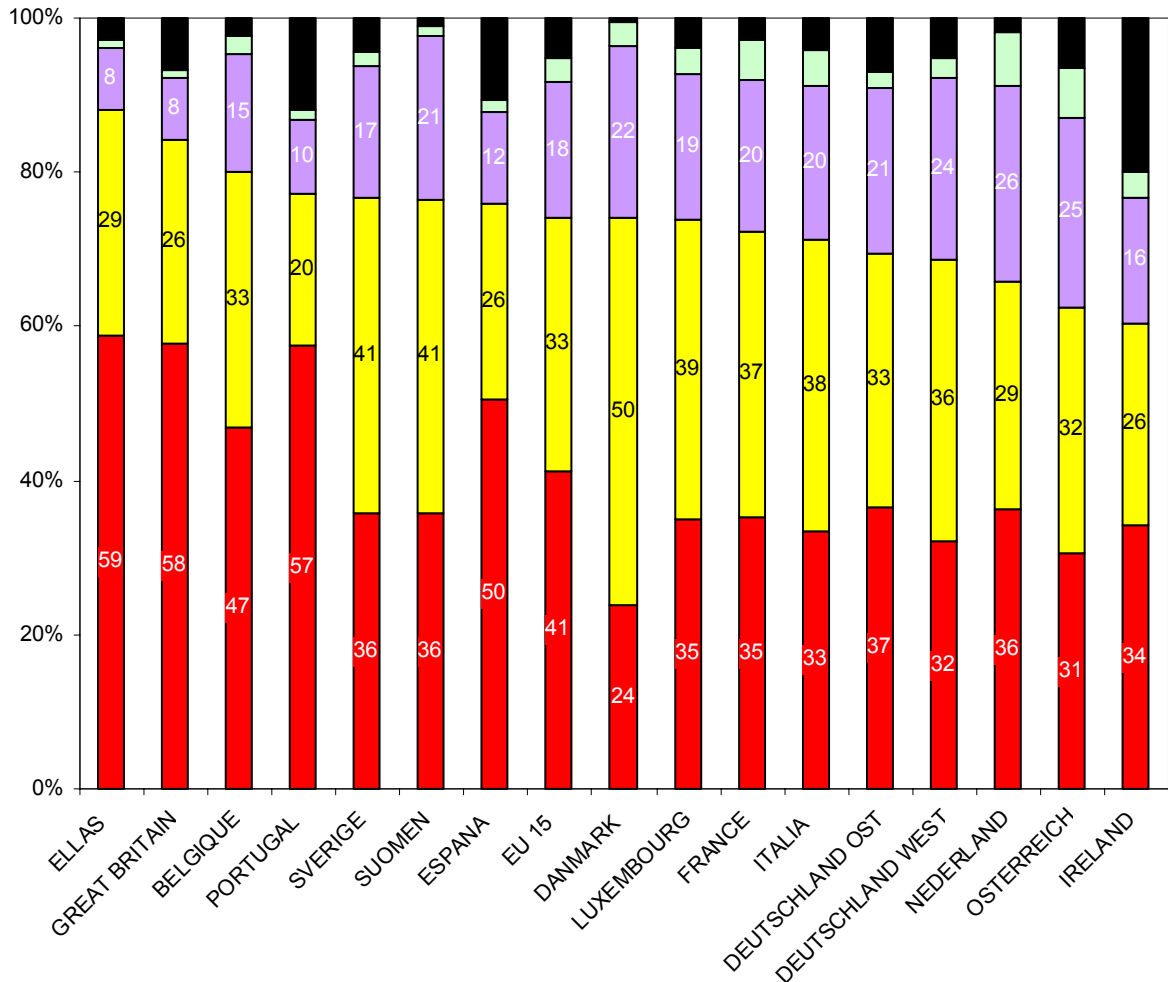
**Figure 5 Sense of being informed about enlargement (in descending order of very well plus well informed), Autumn 2002**



Source: EB58.1, Q44

Using a more demanding criterion of degree of involvement with the enlargement issue, Eurobarometer 58 asked respondents ‘How much do you feel you are participating in the political debate about enlargement?’ This question produced significantly higher levels of don’t know than the question about sense of being informed about the enlargement process considered in Figure 5. Perhaps the best way to look at responses to the question is to combine those who feel ‘not at all involved’ in such debate with those who feel ‘not very much involved’, in other words to focus on the lowest two points on what is essentially a four-point scale (the other responses on the scale were ‘a great deal’ and ‘somewhat’). Looked at in this way, Figure 6 shows that three-quarters of respondents admit to having effectively no sense of participation in the debate about enlargement. This proportion ranges from 60 per cent in Ireland with little of no sense of participation to 90 per cent in Greece. Accompanying Ireland at the lower end of the scale of non-involvement are Austria and the Netherlands while Britain and Belgium are found with Greece at the top end of the scale.

**Figure 6 Sense of participating in political debate about enlargement (in descending order of a great deal plus somewhat), Autumn 2002**



Source: EB58.1, Q.40

■ Not at all ■ Not very much ■ Somewhat ■ A great deal ■ DK

The Irish case is instructive in this regard. The fact that it has the lowest level of explicit sense of non-participation in the debate about enlargement is due no doubt to the referendum process that was in full swing during the period in which the fieldwork for EB 58 was carried out. However, the Irish data can also be read as showing the limits of what even a referendum can accomplish. In the midst of a referendum campaign on the Treaty of Nice, 60 per cent of Irish people did not feel even somewhat involved in a political debate about enlargement. A further 20 per cent were uncertain about whether or not they were so involved and gave a don't know response. Judged by what is admittedly an ideal standard (that citizens should feel that they are participating in the political debate about enlargement), this suggests that it will be difficult to bring about any substantial improvement in the degree of citizen involvement in the enlargement process. Short of that ideal, however, something can and should be

done about the extremely low levels of subjective sense of being informed about enlargement issues that are revealed by Eurobarometer 58.<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusion

The main conclusions to be drawn from this analysis can be briefly summarised. In the first place, evidence on attitude to enlargement must be seen in the context of modest levels of support for European integration and quite high levels of indifference. Secondly, however, opposition to enlargement it found among only a minority of the citizens of the existing member states. Thirdly, for the bulk of the citizens, enlargement is a low priority issue that is part of an integration-driven agenda rather than part of the problem-driven agenda that preoccupies both European citizens and European governments. Fourthly, the publics of the existing member states anticipate both positive and negative consequences of enlargement, the former tending to be more intangible and the latter. They also have expectations regarding winners and losers from the enlargement process, the former tending to be from the modern social and economic sector and the latter tending to be from traditional sectors. Fifthly, in terms of the admission of particular member-states now and in the future, the public shows some evidence of making a distinction between a Central European region and a South-Eastern European region and, if enlargement is to proceed beyond its present phase with the support of the publics of the existing member states, considerable debate and persuasion will be required. The evidence indicates, however, that such debate may be difficult to engender. Be that as it may, much can and needs to be done to improve the public's sense of understanding of the enlargement process.

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7 Studies of attitudes and behaviour in the two Nice referendums in Ireland suggest that citizens' understanding of issues of this kind, or at least their sense that they understand the issues, can be substantially improved by effective communication and that such improvement can have positive effects on support for integration (as measured in the Irish case by voting decision in the second referendum) - see [http://europa.eu.int/comm/public\\_opinion/flash/fl108\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/flash/fl108_en.pdf) and [http://www.euireland.ie/news/TreatyofNice\(2\)report.pdf](http://www.euireland.ie/news/TreatyofNice(2)report.pdf)