

Communication Strategies Within the Member States and Candidate Countries Concerning the European Union Enlargement

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In a democratic society, a complex process as enlargement can be achieved only by the citizens' participation. The current European Union enlargement is the most complex in its history and requires an attentive preparation, including the attitude of the citizens from the member states (including the former candidate countries), from Romania and Bulgaria towards this process. Therefore communication with the public opinion is essential. The second reason for communicating is the necessity to accelerate the implementation of the acquis communautaire, by informing and consulting the target groups.

In this paper, we will analyse the public opinion from the 12 candidate countries and 15 member states¹.

The public opinion is not homogenous in the member states and candidate countries, illustrating different attitudes towards the enlargement process and their country's accession to the European Union, reacting very differently to the European issue, European identity, EU institutions, enlargement etc., according to specific cultural, economic, and social patterns. Some influence factors could change this attitude. Nationalist movements, social actors and groups could persuade the public opinion.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the evolution of the public opinion in the European Union and the candidate countries (former and current candidates) and the effect

of communication campaigns in some member states and former candidate countries. The communication strategies within the Member States and candidate countries have been very different in both finality and tools. In member states, the aim has been to inform and enhance the acceptance of the public for the enlargement process, while most of the candidate countries aimed to mobilize the citizens to vote in the referendum and to prepare internally to cope with the competition on the EU market.

The case studies are focused on two former candidate countries: Hungary and Poland, and a member state: Germany. Poland was the largest candidate country, with powerful social actors (church, farmers), actively involved in the accession negotiations. They have had a strong impact on the public opinion. The paradox is that, now, after the EU accession, the farmers, the strongest opponents of accession with a discourse highly focused on costs, have become one of the biggest beneficiaries of this process, profiting from the increased prices and the EU payments. In Hungary, there was a huge campaign for mobilising citizens to vote for the EU accession, but the results were rather poor (under 50% participation rate, 84% voting in favour of accession). Germany is the main contributor to the EU budget, having a different attitude towards enlargement, due to the re-unification.

The European Union, Seen by Citizens of the Member States and Candidate Countries (the 10 new Member States, Romania and Bulgaria)²

Europe can be defined geographically, but this definition is of secondary importance. When it is mentioned – mainly in the candidate countries – it is to exclude countries or areas which do, nevertheless, objectively constitute part of the European continent according to criteria other than geography, i.e., Russia (with the sole possible exception of its far western fringe, accepted by some as being historically European) and, by extension, Ukraine and Belarus. Turkey is also often spontaneously considered to be non-European. What makes Europe is mainly its history and culture. When perceptions of its identity and the feeling of being European are analysed,

the main dividing line runs between a very big South and a very small North.

“South” includes the vast majority of European countries, both Member States and candidate countries, geographically in the south, centre or east of the continent, whose citizens, who are strongly aware of the existence of cultural ties, see in Europe first and foremost a historical entity, a land – even *the* land – of culture, a place of constant combination and exchange over the centuries between diverse peoples but with common roots.

These relationships have loosened in certain periods of history and degenerated into conflict, but their existence down the ages is undeniable.

Feeling European in the Member States (EU - 15)

Citizens of all these countries feel, more or less spontaneously, that this model, built on the foundations of cultural and humanistic values, is unique (according to the Optem study). There is a more or less spontaneous empathy for other Europeans – even if people are not very familiar with them, or attribute certain flaws or different ways of seeing things to them. The force of cultural ties is felt with particular intensity in the Latin countries, Belgium and Luxembourg, and in most Central European countries. It has less of a pull for the Germans (who aspire to be more European, but at the same time are sensitive to disparities), the Irish (who are rather cut off from the others by virtue of being an island and the fact that many of them lack knowledge of the languages of the other countries, but who are open to new ideas) and the Finns (also somewhat isolated in their corner of the far Northwest of the continent, but very curious and contact-friendly).

Conversely, in a few countries located in the northern part of Europe, the concepts of roots and cultural proximity are given much less prominence, and the sense of common historical and cultural ties is much less present in people's minds. Of the Member States, this applies to the UK – many of whose citizens, when asked, refused to consider themselves as Europeans, the Netherlands, Denmark and (less strongly) Sweden: in these countries there is a deep-seated conviction of the superiority or specificity of the model of society that the country has developed with its own values, and a weak propensity to share with others, who tend to be seen as a threat. These countries have only weak empathy with other Europeans, particularly with those in the South, whose mentality is seen as very different, and who are even quite overtly despised (for not being responsible, hard-working, orderly, etc.)

Image of European Union in the Member States (EU - 15)

The Optem study revealed that the citizens of the countries in the geographical South are generally favourable towards the idea of a strong European Union, with the purpose of bringing together and federating Europe's nations and States at every or almost every

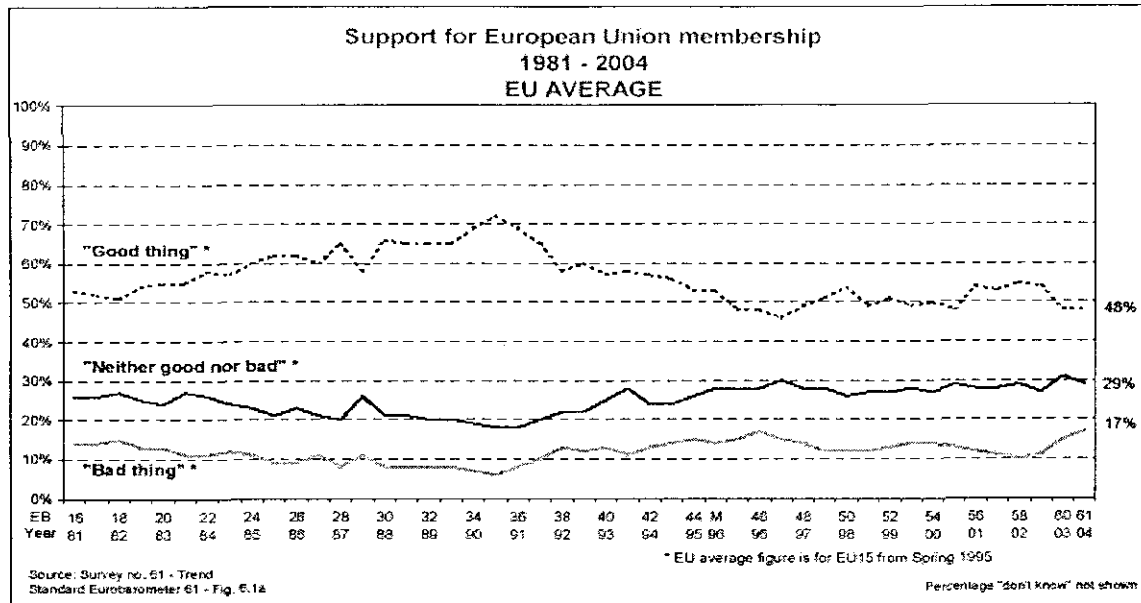
level – above and beyond merely economic issues, with the clear objective of asserting itself as a great power vis-à-vis its major global competitors, prime among them the United States. The Irish also endorse this idea of a close-knit Europe. In all these countries,

there is a clear awareness of the benefits gained from belonging to the Union, and of its major contribution to economic and also social development, and of the Structural Funds as the tangible evidence of Community solidarity. Support for Europe is very strong, with virtually no reservations, in Portugal and Ireland. It is tempered in the other countries by a relative disappointment that the reality of the Union does not live up to this aspiration of a unifying entity in all spheres; in Italy, there is also a tendency to keep one's distance from any kind of institution (which applies at least to the same extent with national institutions); in Spain and Greece, there is veiled frustration due to the persistence of a marked economic gap between them and the more developed countries, and also the feeling that their countries do not count for much in Europe, that they are not given the recognition they deserve, and even that their interests and opinions are somewhat neglected. The citizens of Belgium and Luxembourg are traditionally pro-Community and also have a vision of the European Union as a kind of egalitarian melting-pot, and a broad conception of its legitimate scope – in addition to the fact that they are clearly aware that, for small countries, belonging to this kind of group is an unavoidable necessity if they are to have a place on the international stage. The Finns and the Austrians also come out as largely pro-Community, both emotionally and rationally, and open to an EU with broad powers beyond the economy. The former, made less isolated by their accession to the Union, are particularly keen on contacts with the others, and their accession also gives them security against their huge neighbour with its history of dangerously protective tendencies; the latter, also sensitive to the still recent presence of the Eastern bloc on their doorstep, and also with the memory of the rifts of the Second World War still alive, value the ideal of peace and cooperation, at the same time as recognising the EU's contribution on the economic front – even though they also express concern about certain implications of accession for their

country, or about its lack of clout in Community decisions. In both cases, there is also a strong awareness that it is impossible for countries of this size to remain isolated. The French and the Germans – both aware of the original political aim behind the construction of the Community (developing cooperation to avoid the risk of new wars) – also clearly support the ideal of a European integration process heading in the direction of a united Europe and a closer alignment of its countries in all spheres. The Germans have prejudices against an institution perceived as ponderous, bureaucratic, only interested in details while neglecting core issues, and financially burdensome – with the ever-present idea of Germany as a milk-cow: it is not opposed to the notion of solidarity, but believes that it is paying more than its fair share. It is also clear that the “Cresson affair” has exacerbated the Germans' suspicions about the integrity of the Community institutions in general.

In the 4 countries whose citizens have a tendency to exclude themselves from Europe, to feel little empathy for the other Europeans and to focus exclusively on their own models and values, these general attitudes translate into a strong distrust of the European Union and a desire to contain its scope for action, shows the Optem study.

It can be seen, rationally and pragmatically, that belonging to the European Union is useful for the economic interests of the country (its businesses, its exports), but in all other fields it appears to be more of a threat: interventionist, potentially undermining the national values and traditions or damaging the model of society: any “harmonisation” tends to be perceived as a downward harmonisation, to the lowest common denominator, or as contrary to the interests of the country. It is these countries that have the most widespread caricatures of the Community being only concerned with pointless, absurd, even freedom-infringing measures. The Swedes appear to be a little less virulent in their criticisms.



Source: Eurobarometer 61/spring 2004

At the beginning of 2004, support of EU15 citizens for their country's membership of the European Union (48%) remains constant, whereas neutral responses ('neither a good nor a bad thing') have fallen very slightly (29%, -2). Opposition, which is still quite low, has increased by two points to reach 17%, a record level already reached in 1981 and in 1996. Luxembourgers (75%), followed by the Greeks and the Irish (71% each) are the nations where respondents are most positive about their country's membership of the EU, while the British (29%) and Austrians (30%) are the least enthusiastic. A third of Swedes see their country's membership as 'a bad thing'. The Austrians (36%), French and Germans (35% each) are most likely to view their country's membership as 'neither a good nor a bad thing'.

Feeling European in the Candidate Countries (10 Former Candidate Countries, Romania and Bulgaria)

In the candidate countries, the Optem study revealed that some Estonians and also some Czechs have a similar stance, restricting the Europe for which they feel an affinity to the most highly developed, most organised countries of the Northwest of the continent – even if they also strongly assert their awareness of both historical and cultural values and the contrast between Europe as a whole and the US. The Latvians questioned seemed rather to be more introspective, but this may be for reasons linked to their feeling of great vulnerability. The countries in the first group, which make up by

far the majority, are roughly those which, over the course of their history, have belonged to larger entities in which they mixed with others: the Roman or Byzantine Empires, the Holy Roman Empire, the Habsburg Empire, and even the Napoleonic Empire by virtue of the influence it has had on legal systems in spite of being short-lived and autocratic. Furthermore, the countries in the second group are characterised by the predominance of strict Protestant values, whereas the others are imbued, at least in part, with a culture rooted in Catholicism (or Orthodoxy).

Image of the European Union in the Candidate Countries and the New Member States

The citizens of the countries (including the 10 new member states, Romania and Bulgaria) have had a broader, and fairly clear, view of what the European Union is and what it aims to do, as shown by the Optem study. It seemed to

most to be a union in the strongest sense of the word, both economic and political (and, from now on or at least potentially, military), with the aim of mutual strengthening in a whole array of fields, by developing cooperation and

putting in place common rules, and affirming Europe as a power in the world. Implicitly, or even sometimes very explicitly (such as in Slovenia, where people are familiar with the concept), the EU is indeed perceived as a federal grouping or one with federal aspirations. The citizens of four of the former candidate countries, however, tend to have a more restrictive vision of it, more limited to the economy and less imbued with an ideal. This is the case for the Czechs (who are not unaware of the larger scale of the general plan, but who believe they can observe a marked gap between it and reality, and who sometimes express criticisms of the German type), the Estonians (who are somewhat Scandinavian in their sensibilities), the Latvians (who are very caught up in their fears and whose attention is focused on the economic problems afflicting their country), and the Poles (who aspire to a Europe

with a broad scope of action, but who see it primarily as a club of rich countries looking to mutually reinforce each other and among whom they are afraid of always being the poor relations, ignored or looked down on).

Attitudes towards the European Union appeared to be the most open in Slovenia (where people already feel close to it), Romania (where accession is seen by everyone as a historical necessity, an opportunity and a pressing obligation), than in Cyprus, Hungary and the Slovak Republic. The Czechs were not against it, but they had a more pragmatic approach, as do the Estonians. Generally, attitudes were most positive (or least hedged about with questions and doubts) in the most dynamic categories of the population (the middle or upper social strata, the youngest, the best educated), but there are exceptions to this general rule.

Knowledge About the European Union and the Enlargement Process

Member States (15)

Just before the enlargement, the Eurobarometer³ revealed that 29% of the citizens said they felt very well informed or well informed about the enlargement of the European Union. This represents an increase of five points compared with Spring 2003. This sentiment is increasing in eleven of the fifteen Member States and it is particularly noticeable in Italy (+10), Ireland and the United Kingdom (both +9), as well as in the Netherlands and Sweden (both +8). The situation remained unchanged in Austria, but saw a small drop in three countries: Denmark (-6), Finland (-5) and Luxembourg (-4).

In spite of this improvement, the feeling of not being very well informed or not at all informed is shared by at least one person in two, in twelve of the fifteen Member States. In Luxembourg, although the number of people feeling badly informed does not reach the 50% mark, this feeling is held by the majority. At the same time, in Austria, there are just as many respondents feeling well informed as there are feeling badly informed. However, in Finland, more than one citizen in two feels

well informed. As was the case a year ago, people who feel they are well or very well informed tend most often to be men, managers, self-employed or white-collar workers and this feeling is all the more marked when the latter respondents' fulltime education is finished.

At the beginning of 2004, 92% of EU-15 citizens had already heard of the European Parliament, 80% had heard of the European Commission, 74% of the European Central Bank, 73% of the European Court of Justice, 65% of the EU Council of Ministers and 51% of the European Court of Auditors. On the other hand, awareness of the EU's Economic and Social Committee, the European Ombudsman and the Committee of the Regions is still low (37%, 34% and 29% respectively). In comparison with autumn 2003, levels of awareness have all risen by one point, and even by two points in the case of the Economic and Social Committee. However, there are two exceptions: awareness of the European Commission and the European Ombudsman have fallen by one point.

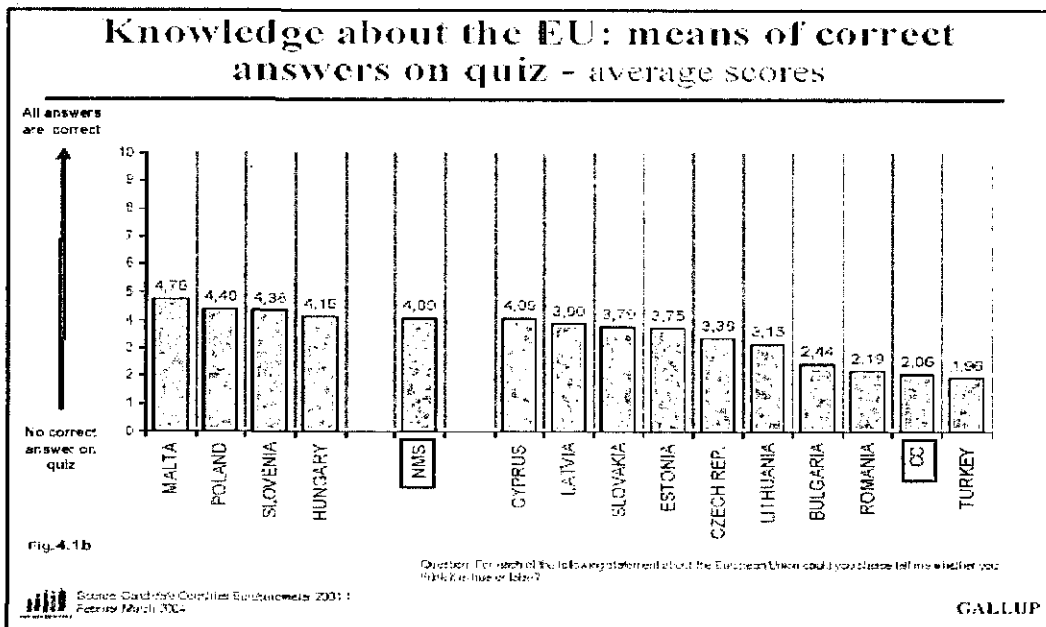
New Member States and Candidate Countries

Attitudinal analysis shows that respondents who consider their country's EU membership to be a good thing are a bit more likely to feel they are well or very well informed (37%, +5) than those who consider their country's EU membership to be a bad thing (27%, +7) or neither a good nor a bad thing (23%, +5). It should be noted that, compared with the previous time these data were collected, the figures have increased for each one of these categories.

As regards the perceived knowledge, the comparative results show that a quarter (25%) of the accession country citizens feel they know "quite a lot" to "a great deal" (i.e., those choosing the numbers 6 through 10 on the scale) about the European Union. This is highly stable compared to autumn 2003 (26%). The perceived knowledge of the previous member states is higher than that of the NMS, where 30% of the citizens mention they have quite a lot to a great deal information on the European Union.

In the former candidate countries and in Romania and Bulgaria, the citizens are increasingly but still surprisingly poorly informed about some very basic facts of the European Union. The most widely known trivia-fact is what the European flag looks like; 87% of the new member countries citizens and 58% of the CC countries can recognize it. It is an interesting development that such trivia knowledge is now sometimes higher in the new EU member countries than in the EU 15 zone, the flag is an example: in the previous member states fewer citizens (81%) think that the EU flag is blue with yellow stars.

The new EU member countries' population, on average, gives 4.09 (4.74 in autumn 2003) correct answers to the 10 statements, but in the CC countries 2.06 is the mean of correct answers (2.83 in Autumn 2003). The Maltese (4.76), Polish (4.40) and Slovenians (4.38) give the most correct answers, and the Turkish (1.96), Romanians (2.19) and Bulgarians (2.44) give the fewest ones to some basic questions.



Source: Eurobarometer 61/2004.1
 Knowledge about the enlargement process

In spring 2004, candidate Countries Eurobarometer finds that the majority of people in the accession and candidate region – just ahead of the historic event – are still very poorly informed about the enlargement process. Nonetheless, at the time of the fieldwork, there were 3-4 months left to go until the enlargement of the European Union in May 2004. There are more citizens in all new EU member countries feeling well and very well informed about their own country accession process than feel the same about the general

enlargement process – but there are big differences among the countries. In the Czech Republic (+3), Hungary (+4), Poland (+4) and Slovakia (+4) only slightly more citizens said so, but vastly more people would agree in Estonia (+27), Lithuania (+24) and Latvia (+17).

Table 6.6 Feeling very well and well informed about enlargement of [COUNTRY] and of the European Union			
	COUNTRY's accession	EU enlargement	Net difference
CZECH REP.	35	32	3
HUNGARY	35	31	4
POLAND	45	41	4
SLOVAKIA	37	33	4
NMS	44	38	6
SLOVENIA	62	55	7
MALTA	55	46	9
CYPRUS	58	43	15
LATVIA	56	39	17
LITHUANIA	66	42	24
ESTONIA	59	32	27

Source: Eurobarometer 61/2004.1

The traditional media are the sources most likely to be used by the public, but other sources also have to be mentioned, e.g.

discussions with relatives, friends, Internet, brochures, meetings, etc.

*The European Union Enlargement – Public Opinion Perception
Member States
2001-2002*

According to the OPTEM study, in the Member States, attitudes towards enlargement were directly linked to general attitudes towards Europe and the feeling of Europeanness analysed in Chapter II of the general report. In most “Southern” countries, the legitimacy of the candidate countries’ accession is not contested, and it is felt most strongly in the countries of the geographical South which are least economically developed and which show particular empathy and solidarity with the candidate countries, whose difficulties they understand better by virtue of going through or having gone through the same difficulties themselves. While the citizens of these countries would probably not be prepared to accept the Structural Funds, which they receive, being completely cut or drastically reduced, they at least

spontaneously declare themselves willing to participate in the common effort to help the newcomers. Naturally, the arrival of new Member States also arouses real concerns, for the country and, collectively, for the Union (there are sometimes fears that it will become “unmanageable”) – but there is also a sense that there will be benefits at national and Community level.

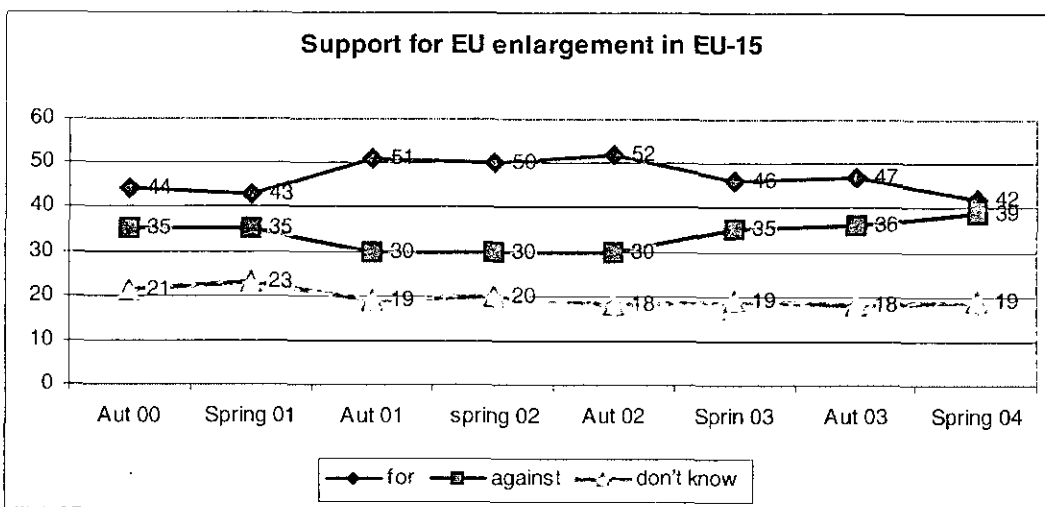
The citizens of the “North”– the Dutch, Danes and Swedes – are particularly resistant to enlargement, which they oppose or accept as inevitable only reluctantly, seeing almost exclusively negative effects for themselves; many of them are clearly impervious to considerations of solidarity beyond their own borders. The British are no more willing either to “pay” for future members, towards whom they are rather indifferent.

2002-2003

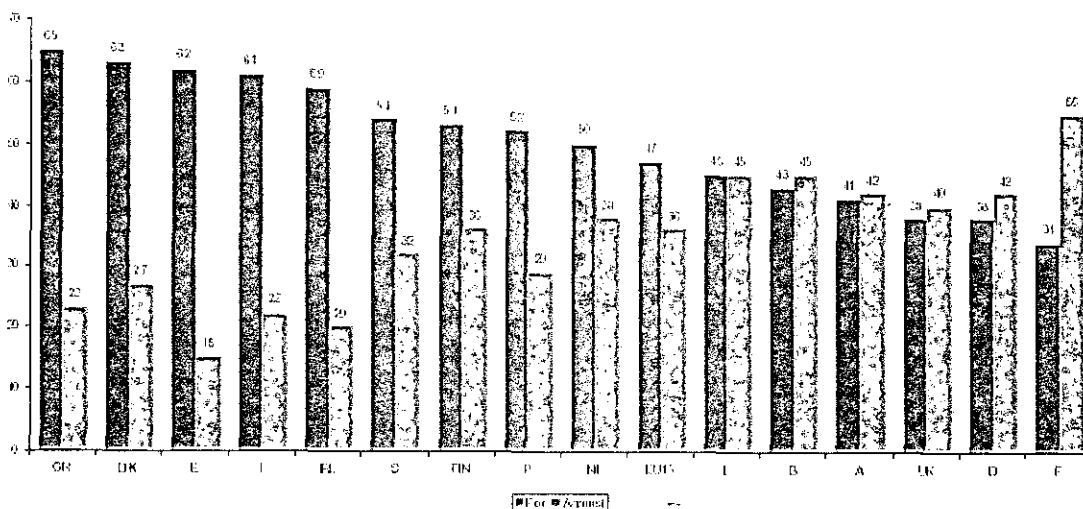
The Eurobarometers showed, in October 2002⁴, that 50% of the EU member states citizens were supporting the enlargement process. 53% were considering that the enlargement was a guarantee of peace and security in Europe and contributed to an increased role of the Union at the global level. 21% feel uninformed about this process. Most of them, 65%, were considering that, after enlargement, the decision making process was to become more difficult. In December 2003, 47% supported the enlargement, while 36%

were against this process. The enlargement support increased in Belgium (+5%), Finland (+3%), Spain, Italy, Netherlands, Great Britain (+2%) and decreased in Portugal (-8%), Greece (-6%), Germany (-4%).

At the beginning of 2004, when the largest enlargement in the European Union's history was looming on the horizon, a relative majority of EU15 citizens claimed that they supported it: 42% favoured the membership of the ten new countries, while 39% opposed it.



Support for enlargement (by country)



Support for enlargement in member states, by country

Source: Eurobarometer 60, public opinion in the European Union

Public perception concerning EU accession in the 10 new member states (before accession), Romania and Bulgaria

2001-2002

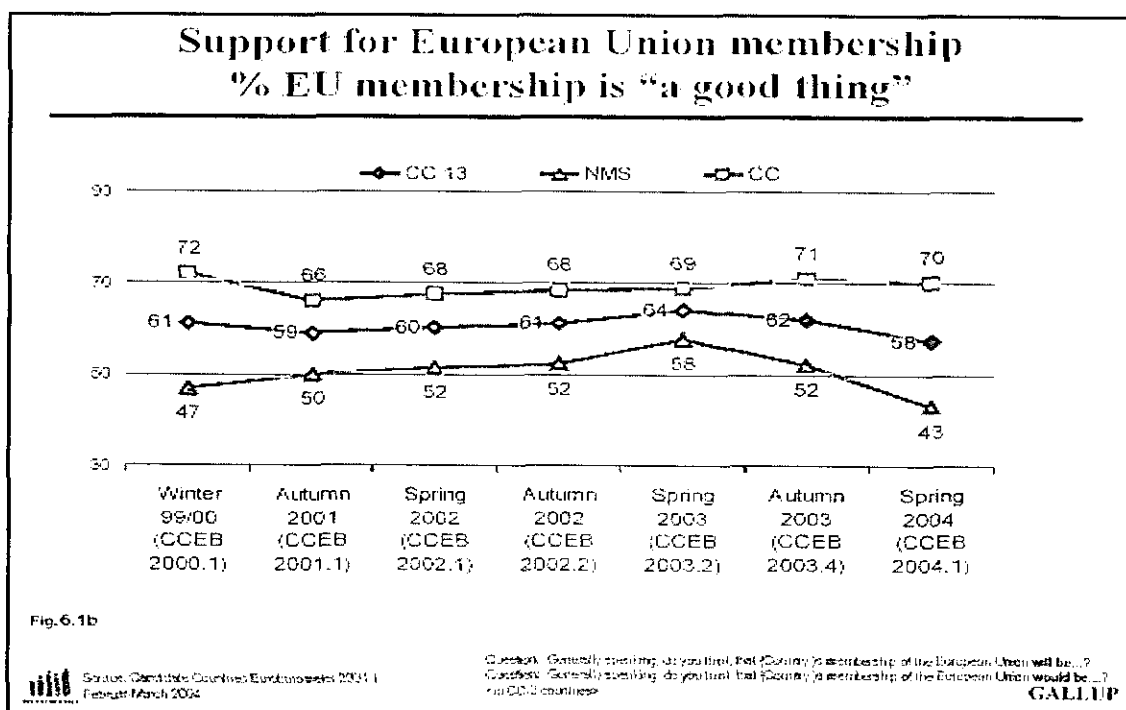
Of the countries with which accession negotiations were started earliest, the Slovenes appeared to be very much in favour, in spite of reservations in the oldest and least dynamic section of the population; broadly, the same can be said of Cyprus, and, with more pragmatic and less emotional considerations, in the Czech Republic and Estonia; the Hungarians certainly see accession as a necessity, which generates great hopes as well as strong fears; as for the Poles, the fears clearly prevail over the hopes, which their very great pessimism somehow prevents them from expressing. They fear of being mistrusted as EU members, comparing with the citizens of the founding member states.

Among the countries with which negotiations have been started more recently,

there is a huge contrast between the Romanians, who are unanimously enthusiastic at the prospect of joining the European "family" (even though they foresee serious difficulties, given the decay and disorganisation of their country), the Slovaks, who have contrasting attitudes, but with hardly any radical opposition to accession, and the Latvians, who are particularly anxious about its consequences for their country, which is economically very vulnerable, and, particularly, about maintaining the country's capacity to take decisions autonomously – though not about the risk of threats of force (the word "Union" sometimes conjures up the spectre of the Soviet Union): it is only with great reservations that a majority seem to accept joining the European Union as inevitable.

2002-2003

The EU accession support was constant during 2002-2003, varying between 59% and 64%.



Source: Eurobarometer 61/spring 2004

In 2002-2003 the trust in EU institution was bigger than the trust in national institutions, according to the Eurobarometer published in December 2003⁵. 52% considered

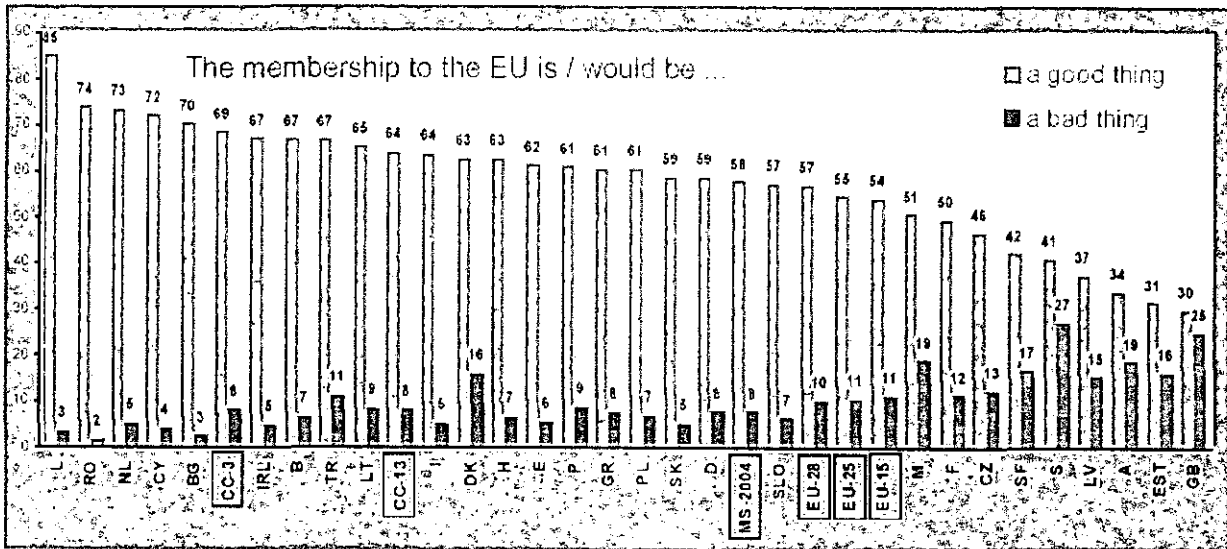
that the EU accession was a positive fact and 12% considered it as a negative one. 40% considered that EU accession would bring advantages.

2003-2004 - referenda

The referenda organized in the former candidate countries proved the support of the public opinion for the EU accession. In Czech Republic, 77% of population voted for and 23% against, in Estonia, 67% for and 33% against, Hungary – 84% for and 16% against, Latvia, 67% for and 32% against, Lithuania, 90% for and 9% against, Malta – 53% for and 46% against, Poland – 77 % for and 23%

against, Slovakia – 92% for and 6% against, Slovenia – 90% for and 10% against. Cyprus did not organize a referendum, but has a public support for the EU accession of 84% and 8% against, according to an Eurobarometer.

Currently, 49% of the EU 25 citizens consider that the EU member status is a positive fact⁶.



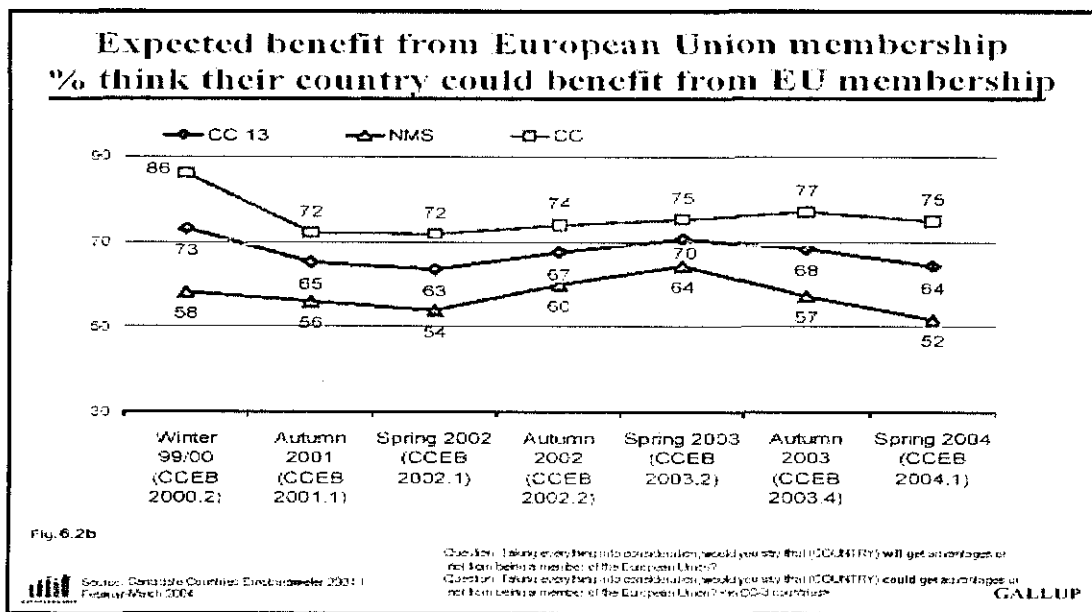
Source: Eurobarometer EB 60 – CC-EB 2003.4

Table 1. Support for EU membership (% by country)

Question EB59: Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY)'s membership of the European Union is ...?
 Question CCEB 2003.2: Generally speaking, do you think that (CCOUNTRY)'s membership of the European Union would be...? (READ OUT)

	EU-28 ⁵	EU-25 ⁵	EU-15 ⁵	CC-13 ⁶	MS-2004 ⁶	CC-3 ⁶	B	DK	D	GR	I	E	F	IRL	L	NL	P
a good thing	57	55	54	64	58	69	57	63	59	61	64	62	50	67	25	73	61
a bad thing	10	11	11	8	8	8	7	18	0	8	5	8	12	5	3	5	9
neither good nor bad	25	27	27	19	26	15	20	17	26	29	22	27	34	16	11	18	24
DK / NA	8	8	7	8	8	8	6	4	9	2	9	6	5	12	1	3	6
TOTAL	100	101	99	99	100	100	108	180	101	180	100	101	101	100	180	99	100
	UK	SF	S	A	BG	CY	CZ	EST	H	LV	LT	M	PL	RO	SK	SLO	TR
a good thing	29	42	41	34	70	72	46	31	33	37	65	51	61	74	59	57	67
a bad thing	23	17	27	19	3	4	13	16	7	15	0	19	7	2	5	7	11
neither good nor bad	31	26	30	41	17	21	32	42	23	43	23	24	23	15	30	32	14
DK / NA	14	4	2	6	19	3	9	15	5	8	3	3	9	10	3	3	8
TOTAL	100	99	100	100	100	100	100	99	101	100	100	180	100	101	180	100	100

Source: Eurobarometer EB 60 – CC-EB 2003.2



Source: Eurobarometer 61/2004.1

Expectations of Information on the European Union

The Optem study has shown a need for information, which is strongly and spontaneously expressed by many citizens in the candidate countries, and that the citizens of the Member States have expectations which are not so strong until their attention is drawn to the fields of EU activity, which they (in some countries at least) initially perceive as abstract and remote, and which there is less of an active demand to know more about. In these countries (broadly speaking, the least Europhile ones or those in which the Union's image is the least positive), expectations do nonetheless develop from the point at which their interest is piqued by being made to feel that what the EU does concerns them.

As far as the content of the information is concerned, it is expected to: inform and give a sense of how Community activities concern the country and the individual in his or her daily life and to furnish people with a better general knowledge of EU affairs, its plans, activities, decisions and workings.

As far as the form and tone of the communication is concerned, there is a very broad consensus rejecting anything dry, boring or written in technocratic jargon or "officialese", and in favour of lively presentations which involve as well as explain, and appeal to the emotions as well as to reason.

Regarding possible channels and relays for information on the EU: the interviewees mentioned the media first and foremost; the Internet as a way of accessing information was mentioned by a substantial minority; people often spontaneously suggest that children should be "immersed" in Europe and the European Union at school; people would in fact be in favour of local, open debates in which they could participate. Interesting, national political figures were often automatically discredited. The idea of information being presented by a European Commissioner was, in spite of some lingering reservations, received much more favourably – which confirms the Commission's potential credibility.

Communication Strategies of the European Union Concerning the Enlargement Process

The first communication strategy of the European Union was elaborated by the European Commission in 2000 and was to be implemented in the Member states and

candidate countries by the EC Delegation and Representations.

A communication strategy was necessary in the member states to legitimise the Parliament

action to ratify the Accession Treaty and, in the candidate countries, it was necessary to have a positive result in referenda.

In the **member states**, the strategy had three key objectives:

- to communicate the reasons for enlargement to the public including its likely impact and the challenges it poses. The outcome should be improved understanding of the enlargement process, which in turn should assuage apprehensions about its impact.
- to promote dialogue at all levels of society between policy-makers and the public on issues related to enlargement. This should ensure that progress through the negotiations towards enlargement is accompanied by public understanding and support; and
- to provide information about the candidate countries to help promote general understanding.

In the **candidate countries**, the key objectives were:

- to improve public knowledge and understanding of the European Union;
- to explain the implications of accession for each country;
- to explain the link between the pace of preparations for membership and the progress of the negotiations. This should encourage the acceleration of the transposition of EU laws and the creation of the necessary administrative structures. It will also increase public understanding of the reasons why negotiations may proceed at different speeds in different candidate countries.

The content of messages:

For member states:

- The reasons why the EU has undertaken a new round of enlargement;
- The enlargement process (negotiations, preparations in the EU and in the candidate countries);
- The relationship between enlargement and the strengthening of the EU (institutional reform, financial perspectives etc.);

- The impact of enlargement on different segments of the population and sectors of the economy; the candidate countries, their geographic location, recent history and profiles.

For candidate countries:

- The objectives and nature of the EU, its reasons for existing, its policies and activities, its openness to new members and its previous enlargements;
- The impact of accession and its significance for the citizens;
- EU support programmes for candidate countries, notably PHARE, SAPARD, ISPA and, where applicable, MEDA;
- The relationship between legal/administrative preparations for membership and the conclusion of the accession negotiations.

In third countries delegations should include enlargement among the priorities of their information and communication activities.

The EC strategy has addressed the general public by means of a decentralised approach, adapted to the specific requirements of individual countries, regions, localities and sectors. The Commission services in Brussels are mainly responsible for generating information on enlargement as well as core messages, which are universally applicable. However the offices of the Commission and of the European Parliament in the member states and the Commission delegations in candidate countries would work in close cooperation with governments, existing information centres and other local partners to adapt this information to their country's specific communications requirements. Opinion leaders in the member states and the candidate countries (government ministers, members of the European Parliament and of national parliaments, television and press, interest groups, teachers, civil society organisations) would have the main responsibility for generating informed discussion on enlargement. The communications strategy would address or involve: political institutions (The European Parliament and other European institutions, governments, parliaments

and regional assemblies), business and industry (business leaders, trade unions, professional associations), civil society (non-governmental organisations, religious and intellectual bodies, universities, teachers in secondary and higher education), etc.

The communication strategy has established a number of guidelines for developing the communication strategies:

Information

- Electronic media – the essential means for transmitting information. These are more efficient and less costly than traditional instruments (pamphlets, publications etc.). Commission websites that deal with enlargement were to be extended, made more user-friendly and interactive and updated regularly. A team of Commission experts, with the necessary professional support, were to be on stand-by for rapid response to questions.
- The Internet server EUROPA, the TV service “Europe by Satellite” and the question and answer service EUROPE DIRECT were to be given a major enlargement focus. The availability of these services was going to be widely publicised.
- The existing Phare-Facis Information Centre in Brussels was to provide information about enlargement.
- TAIEX would provide specialised information in candidate countries about the *acquis* and its transposition.

Communication

- Enlargement would become a central component of the Commission’s communication activities, taken into account as part of the communication and information activities of all Commission services.
- The Commission president and other Commissioners should regularly include enlargement themes in their public

statements. Close coordination was necessary in order to ensure a coherent approach. With this aim in view, the Commissioner responsible for enlargement will ensure that members of the college dispose of the necessary elements. DG Enlargement’s Information Unit will provide back-up. Such activities should be undertaken in cooperation notably with the Commissioners responsible for relations with the European Parliament and for Education and Culture.

- Commission representations and EP offices in the member states and Commission delegations in the candidate countries would develop their communications activities in conjunction with relevant governmental and non-governmental bodies.
- The media, in particular TV and radio, are of crucial importance in conveying key messages. Fast and easy access by the media to Commission and other EU institution sources is therefore essential. Senior Commission representatives and spokespeople should be available to the media at all times.
- Dialogue would be promoted with opinion leaders and public speakers, building on the experience with the Dialogue on Europe. The Commission’s representation offices and EP offices in the member states and Commission delegations in the candidate countries, together with local partners were to develop supporting material.
- The ECVP and other visitor’s programmes for journalists, officials, teachers and regional politicians were to be expanded, in cooperation and coordination with the European Parliament.

Communication Strategies Concerning the Enlargement

Also, the member states and candidate countries developed different communication strategies, following the European Commission guidelines.

For the member states, the key objectives have been: to increase the interest concerning the enlargement; to increase the understanding of the enlargement process, the knowledge about

the candidate countries, to eliminate the pre-conceptions ‘we’ and ‘them’, to calm the fears concerning the unemployment, trafficking in human beings and drugs, illegal migration, etc.

Most of the candidate countries launched a communication campaign in 1998, 1999 or 2000 or later (Romania and Bulgaria – 2000, 2001). Their target groups have been: the

public opinion, farmers, young people, workers, parents, housewives, trade unions, business associations, business men and women, NGOs etc.

Main actions developed in the member states and candidate countries, having a positive effect were:

- Working with schools and children: effective because it engages "the future citizen", but also because by involving the child (e.g. in course work, events or quizzes/ competitions) EU was hoping to involve the whole family, thereby reaching public audiences that are often otherwise removed from political/EU affairs
- Regional networks are one of their most successful and effective information activities.
- Importance of relations with "informal" networks – NGOs, national/regional government bodies etc. Particularly in big, diverse countries, action needs to be at regional level.
- Training and trips for journalists have paid big dividends, in terms of improved media coverage, both qualitatively and quantitatively
- Cooperation of the Member states with the former candidate countries and candidate countries – useful, for improving the information and increasing understanding and sympathy
- Actions involving the diplomatic missions and organisations in the former candidate countries
- Eurobuses (Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia etc.) itinerant exhibitions – effective especially during the pre-referendum period
- Importance of "face-to-face" contact with rural audiences, in particular farmers – can be extended to many other sectors.
- Cultural events are an excellent way of overcoming "them and us" attitudes on both sides of the equation
- "Europlus" game is very popular among children
- Developing business links between Member state businessmen and potential partners in former candidates /candidates
- Training of the locally elected municipality leaders to realize and seize the opportunities of the enlargement for their respective regions, project developed by Sweden, has proved to be successful and could be extended
- Sport is always an excellent vehicle for creating cross-national and cross-cultural sympathy and understanding (football in particular); the cyclist tour to Brussels, organised involving Polish farmers, was a success
- Audio-visual projects – very good coverage
- Quiz concerning the EU accession
- Distribution information by the national post

Case studies:

Germany

The communication campaign was implemented by the European Commission representation, in cooperation with the federal government and land authorities and civil society. The main characteristics of this communication campaign were: a working group concerning the EU enlargement, implementing the campaign in cooperation with the Chambers of commerce and trade unions from Germany, extending the communication activities at the local level, coordinating messages. The main arguments used, in order to increase the motivations and to decrease the psychological fears were: political – democracy,

state of law; economic – free market of 500 consumers; labour market – unfounded fears concerning the unemployment (the European Commission obtained transitional periods for the new member states); as regards the Common Agricultural Policy, the enlargement is the moment to operate the necessary reforms.

The messages were based on a win-win approach: contribution to re-unifying Europe, new chances for economic and social development of Europe, bringing advantages for Germany, a country concentrated on external trade, benefits concerning the social security, state of law and environment; the enlargement is

a challenge. Those messages were oriented towards the public opinion and opinion leaders.

The number of actions concerning the enlargement increased in the second part of 2002 and 2003, when the national parliaments ratified the Accession Treaty.

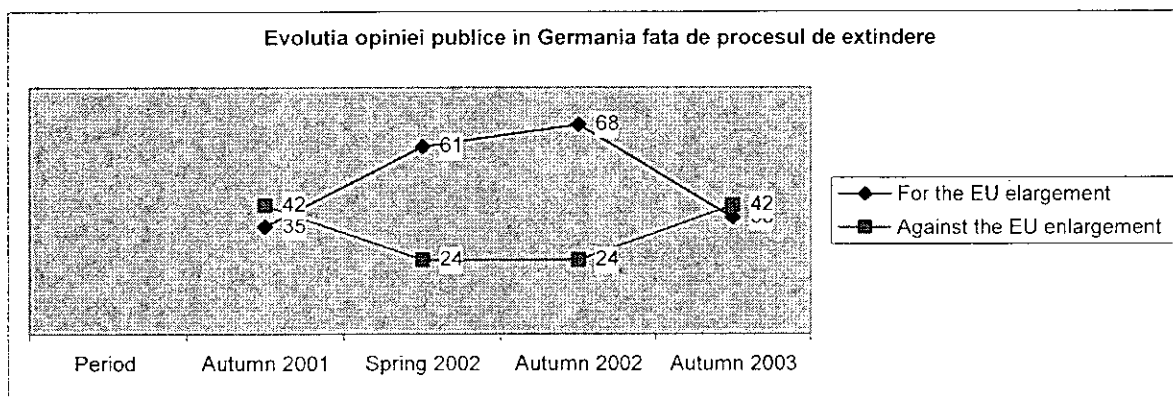
The actions for communicating the enlargement were focused on: organising debates, conferences, roundtables, information documents and materials (brochures, CD-ROMs, etc.), journalists visits in the candidate

countries, spectacles concerning the candidate countries customs (at the Poland border), information centres, discussions with elites and politicians from the candidate countries, advertisement in the regional press, multi-media games, road-shows, cultural activities with the candidate countries, etc. The European Commission Delegation promoted a direct dialogue in schools between politicians and children, very effective.

The Public Opinion in Germany and the EU Enlargement

For German citizens, the European Union is, besides the economic aspects, an opportunity to express the attachment for the free world, the only one capable to assure the peace and stability⁷. The German citizens are more tolerant towards the enlargement and have a collective guilt because of the World War II,

which produced the partition of Europe. The number of enlargement supported decreased by the accession data, despite the communication campaign. The support for EU enlargement was 35% in autumn 2001, 61% in spring 2002, 68% in autumn 2002 and decreased to 38% at the end of 2003, while the opponents increased.



This situation could be explained by the fears for the migration from new member states (Poland). On the other side, Germans are not in favour of a bigger contribution to the EU budget, considering the economic problems of Germany.

Another explanation is that the communication strategy was directed mostly to the elites (academia, NGOs, business etc.), not

to the common people, the most reluctant (ex. workers). The television, having a good exposure to the public, was not used in the communication campaign, using especially the newspapers, where the enlargement theme was not systematically presented. On the other side, the defavourable political and economical internal climate contributed to this reluctant attitude.

Poland

The communication Strategy of Poland was initiated in 1996, by a law that set up a Committee for European Integration and a Department for Social Communication and European Integration. The first communication strategy was elaborated in 1999, for 4 years,

having a budget of 4 million zlots (1 million euro). For the 2003 referendum campaign, the budget was bigger.

The campaign concentrated on 3 phases:

1. During the negotiation process, the objectives were to consult the society on the negotiations, to present the Poland position, to inform about the negotiations process.
2. Before the referendum on EU accession: objectives were to present the results and conditions of EU accession, to continue the social debate concerning the future member state, to encourage the citizens to participate to the referendum.
3. Before the EU accession, having as objectives: to disseminate information concerning the EU functioning, to prepare the economy to cope with the competitive market of the EU, to prepare the participating to the European Parliament elections.

The main target groups were: general public, politicians, public servants, public administration, mass-media, business community (SMEs), farmers, teachers, students, church and religious associations, trade unions, public organisations, associations etc.

Poland relied also on multipliers, persons having the necessary expertise concerning the EU policies: public administration representatives, entrepreneurs, farmers etc. The implementation of the communication strategy was realised in cooperation with NGOs (financially supported by the Government), local public administration, specific associations etc. The Government in cooperation with the civil society tailored information.

Several information centres were set up at the voievodships level, through the cooperation between the Government and the NGOs. Since 1999, 35 regional centres, run by NGOs (foundations, associations, universities, regional development agencies etc.) and 300 village centres offer and distribute European information, organise conferences, implement European programmes, offer access to libraries etc. Their quality is not equal and depends on the owner. There are also other information centres that can offer European information.

Poland paid increased attention to the rural area, due to the force of the farmers'

representatives at the political level and within the civil society. Poland set up 35 agricultural information centres, 340 agricultural services, and 10 rural development centres offering consultancy. Also, there were organized more than 400 trainings for almost 10.000 farmers, brochures were printed, etc. A bicycle race, from Warsaw-Germany-Netherlands-Brussels, with young Poland farmers was organised by the presidency.

For the media, the Government organised training seminar "understanding negotiations", visits to Strasbourg, Brussels, press meeting (formal and informal). The Government allocated funds in order to organise tenders for media shows.

For the local authorities, the training focused on EU funds management. A special campaign for SMEs – "your company in the European Union" provided them with some information concerning the EU. For the students and pupils, the schools set up more than 4000 euro-clubs, organising different activities with European relevance. A contest for schools was organised in 2003, concerning the EU funds management and the European Parliament elections.

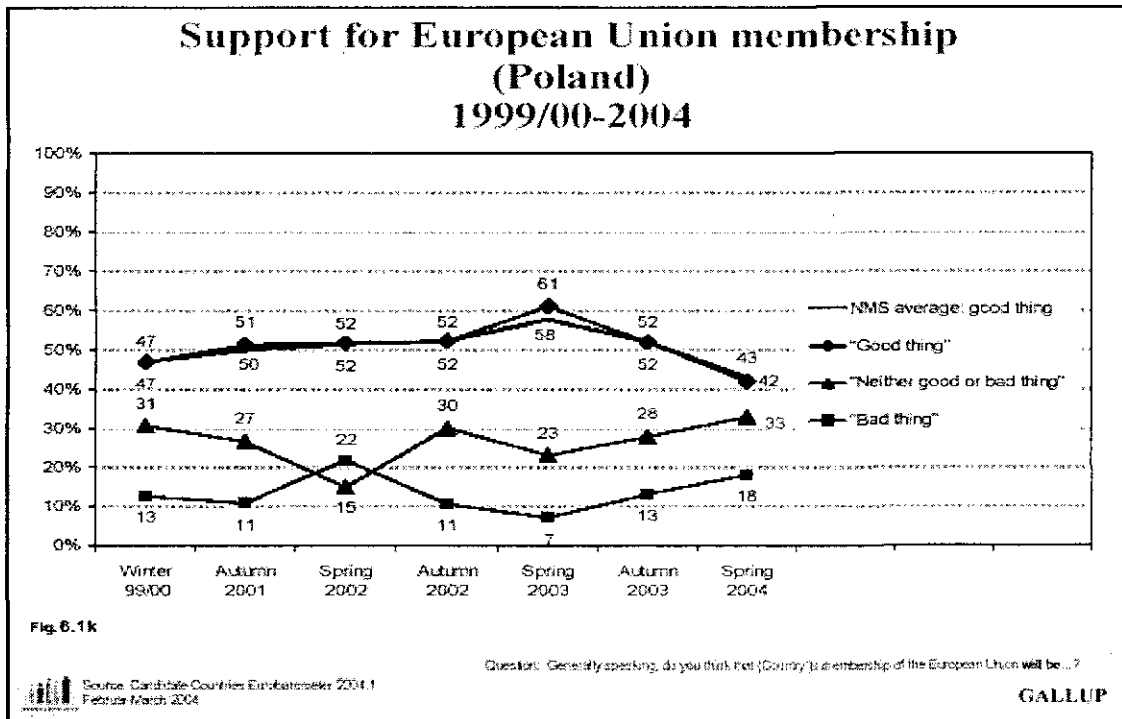
Another efficient target group was the Catholic Church. At the beginning, the Church wasn't very supportive (because of some political aspect– homosexuality, abortion etc.). In Malta, the success of the cooperation with the Catholic Church consisted in the non-involvement of the Church; in Poland, the Church supported the EU accession process and advised the Christians to vote for accession. The Polish Pope John Paul II had an important role in this process. Unlike in Hungary, the communication campaign focused on communication. The country dimension was a big challenge for Polish communicators.

Public opinion in Poland

Before the referendum, the public opinion had a positive attitude towards the enlargement. The farmers were the most reluctant, but after accession, they proved the biggest EU accession beneficiary. Before the referendum, the intention for vote participating was 56%.

The spring 2003 Eurobarometer showed 70% votes for, 14% against, 6% undecided, meaning a 1% decrease of EU accession supporters. The

referendum result was (8 June 2003): 77% for, and 23% against, bigger than the support shown by the previous opinion polls.



Support for the EU accession. Source: Candidate countries Eurobarometer 2004.1

Conclusions:

The EU communication campaign of Poland was efficient, taking into consideration the referendum result. On the other side, one of the Polish characteristics is national pride, fed by the Political class. There was a measure in order to put pressure on the accession negotiations: the Polish politicians tried to enhance the pride, in order to use the argument of internal pressure in negotiations. On the other side, the effect was the real pressure of the Polish farmers for bigger direct payments and lower rural development funds. The effect was a pressure on negotiators, with collateral

effects. The Government tried to focus on European Council in Copenhagen (December 2002). On this occasion, they organised a live studio in the Government building, to transmit live this summit, in order to emphasise the struggle for obtaining the best results in negotiations.

Over the longer term, the Polish attitude in the European Union is rather negative (e.g. European Constitution) and this create some controversies and problems in an institution where negotiation and cooperation is the main rule.

Hungary

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

In Hungary, the communication concerning the EU accession was initiated in 1988, by setting up 19 information centres in the main departments of the country, having regional and local points. The Ministry of

Foreign Affairs, the coordinator of the accession negotiations, asked to the local authorities to provide those information centres with space, to finance the wages of the employees (2 persons, average). The Ministry

has given training for employees, equipment (computers, Internet access), and financing for organising meetings with the citizens at the local level. The initial expensive was assured by a PHARE programme.

During the accession negotiations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs offered EU information to the citizens through a special programme for libraries (64 libraries in the whole country), sponsored EU media programmes and organized the Europe Day, with the European Commission Delegation. Also, the Ministry edited brochures concerning the negotiations chapters, Hungary's position in negotiations etc. Also, more than 4000 journalists at the central and local level were trained and, by now, more than 300 of them are still working in the EU affairs.

Before the referendum, the Ministry gave permanently information concerning the Accession Treaty, negotiations result, costs and benefits of EU accession, by publishing brochures, direct meetings with citizens etc. In February 2003, the Ministry set up a call centre, where the Hungarian citizens could receive information concerning the EU accession. The Ministry's site is another communication tool.

Public Foundation - EUKK

The Hungarian Government set up the Foundation on December 2002, in order to lead the communication campaign concerning the EU accession. The Foundation is independent, headed by a board of directors, including power, opposition and civil society representatives. The objectives of communication campaign were: a high participation to the referendum; a positive vote for accession; transforming the referendum day into a memorable one for the citizens; obtaining the national unity in order to reach the EU accession goal; increasing the knowledge about Hungary's accession to the EU; involving NGOs and business sector into this effort; increasing the volunteer participation, in order to multiply information. In order to implement the communication strategy, the Foundation cooperated with several PR and advertisement companies; the funds spend for this campaign was 10 million eur for January-March 2003.

The main messages were: the referendum is a unique moment, an essential decision, the EU accession attenuates the internal conflicts and unifies the Hungarian citizens, connecting them to the European Union; the Hungarian nation has to take the responsibility for this decision.

The first phase of the campaign (15 February – 15 March) focused on personal involvement, with the message: "you should ask any question". In this phase, the advertisement (TV, radio, billboards etc.) focused on information having a positive answer (e.g.: can we work in EU? Yes.) The purpose of this campaign was the awareness on EU issue. 11 brochures concerning the main interest fields (working, studying in EU, agriculture, etc.) were elaborated. A huge direct marketing campaign was initiated. Almost 4 million letters were sent to Hungarian families, asking them the permit to receive those EU brochures. They were asked to choose 3 brochures. The EUKK received 500.000 replies, an important number for a direct marketing campaign.

Also, a call centre was set up, with more than 90 operators and a database of 2000 questions.

The second phase of the information campaign (15 March- 12 April- referendum day) was aiming to "inspire" and to generate a positive attitude from different target groups: the referendum is a unique moment, requiring a common effort. The message was: "we are different, but we think the same on EU accession". The advertisement focused on presenting some public figures having different attitudes, and even conflicts, but agreeing on Hungary's accession to the EU (e.g.: the chief of the police and a well known criminal). The direct marketing campaign was continuing during the second phase.

More than 1000 events for SMEs (conferences), farmers (meeting, seminars, information for the professional associations and mayors), young people (sites, games, Internet games, contests etc.) were organised, as well as caravans, road shows, daily press conferences etc. The women magazines published special pages concerning the women's life in EU etc.

The European Commission Delegation

The European Commission Delegation had an information centre in Budapest. The ECD realised several actions to train the journalists, including in Brussels. The PHARE, ISPA and SAPARD programmes were communicated to the public. The European Commission Delegation had several meetings with farmers, workers, young people etc.

Political parties

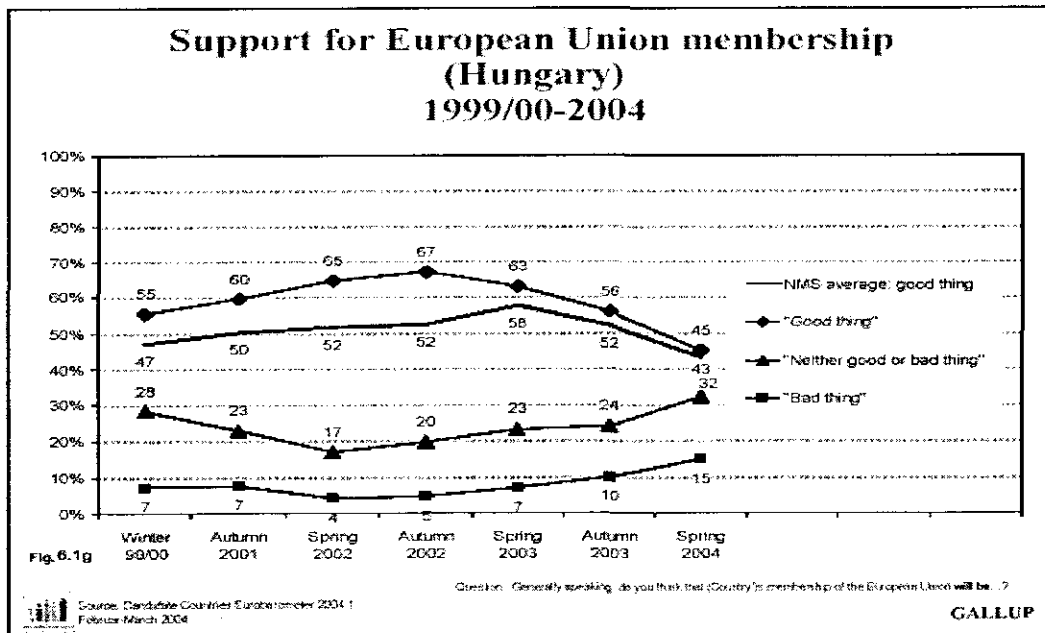
The interest of the Hungarian media for the EU issue was rather low by December 2002. The opposition exploited the European Council in Copenhagen (December 2002) to show the weakness of the Hungarian government in negotiating the accession (especially agriculture).

The Hungarian politicians did not have homogenous positions towards the EU accession (Eva Ring⁸). FIDESZ lost the elections in May 2002 and considered that this result was a consequence of Brussels' critics. FIDESZ had good relations with Franjo Tudjman, with the extreme right leader Jorg Haider, adopted the Hungarian Law, determining vivid reactions of the European Union. Several foreign companies were closed and FIDESZ accused the foreign managers for that. FIDESZ found an ally in an extremist party (the Party of Justice).

Nevertheless, the polls were showing that the Hungarians consider the EU accession advantages bigger than costs. As a consequence, Viktor Orban stepped back, recognising that the EU accession offer something. As a result, the number of EU accession supporters increased.

Public opinion

Since 1996, the opinion polls indicated that the Hungarian population is in favour of EU accession (61% in 2001, 67% in October 2002, and 56% after the European Council in Copenhagen, the lowest support rate from the beginning of the accession negotiations). After negotiations, some problems were raised concerning the prices and Hungarian competitiveness on the EU market). On October 2002, Szonda Ipsos Institute⁹ revealed that 67% of Hungarians would vote for accession in a referendum. Median institute revealed a high rate of absenteeism (275 wouldn't go to vote and 17% undecided¹⁰). In January 2003, the participation intention increased to 64%. The EU accession supporters are young (50%), middle class (55%), and young elite (52%). The biggest advantages from EU accession are perceived for experts, politicians and the biggest costs, for rural and old population. The eurobarometers showed a support fluctuation between 55 and 67%.



Source: candidate countries Eurobarometer, 2004.1

At the referendum, on April 12, 2003, the participation rate was 45,6% (the Hungarian law requires 25% to validate the referendum)

Conclusions:

Despite the yes vote, the overall result was rather bad, because of the low participation rate. Nevertheless, the favourable vote was high, taking into consideration the results of the previous opinion polls (67% for).

The main problems were:

- After the European Council in Athens (broadcast by all the televisions), the citizens had sensation that the EU accession is a solved problem and the referendum is only a formality.
- The opposition did not cooperate and had an ambiguous discourse till the end (we are not against the accession, we are still thinking ...)
- There was little dialogue with Hungary's accession opponents
- The referendum was organised on Saturday- working day (in other candidate countries, like Poland, the referendum was organized on Saturday and Sunday)

Communication campaign

- Too much accent on publicity, underestimating the communication (the European Union was sold as a "washing powder")
- Short time for communicating
- Low cooperation with civil society, transformed into an adversary of the EUKK

Final remarks

Analysing the communication strategies in the 10 former candidate countries (today, the 10 new member states) and member states, we can notice that those campaigns were more efficient in candidate countries. However, the information level has not tremendously increased. The referenda results were positive, while such referenda organised in Member states would have had an uncertain result. The Accession Treaty was voted by the parliaments of the Member States.

The quality of the communication campaigns was different, comparing the 10 former candidate countries and the member

and 83,76% for the EU accession, much more than indicated by opinion polls.

states and the former candidate countries. The stake was different: the former candidate countries had to obtain 50% + 1 in favour of EU accession, but also to communicate to accelerate the internal preparation for the EU membership. In member states, the campaigns pursued to inform citizens (concerning the acceding countries, identifying fears, in order to better negotiate – e.g. 2+3+2 transitional period for free movement of persons, transitional period for transport).

As regards the administrative capacity, the situation was different: the funds allocated by the European Commission were consistently bigger in the former candidate countries than in the member states. On the other side, government of the former candidates allocated significant funds for their own communication campaigns, especially before the referenda. They cooperated with the civil society, local administration etc., thus multiplying the communication effect and making it more credible. In the former candidate countries, the target groups were carefully tailored, while in the member states, the target groups were more general.

Lessons to be learned:

- Carefully strategising: analysing possible problems and intelligent tactics
- Existence of an exist strategy
- Using multiplying networks
- Maximising the impact by using the information in order to generate more information (ex. utilisation of mass-media when the enlargement commissioner, Gunther Verheungen, handed the flags to some Hungarian cities; when the European Commission Delegation in Cyprus handed information material in schools)
- Careful survey of the target groups behaviour, in order to avoid using wrong messages or channels
- Pre-testing the actions by pilot programmes

- Realising some actions, despite the lack of funds (meeting, discussion in schools etc.)
- Evaluating the projects and using the evaluation for planning future actions
- Support the efforts of other groups, persons etc.
- Associating the communication actions with public figures at the central or local level
- Sharing information and experiences, mistakes, success etc. with experts from other member states and candidate

countries, in order to avoid the same mistakes

Romania and Bulgaria should learn very carefully from experience of the former candidate countries, not only to prepare for a referendum (if it is organised), but most of all, in order to help the society (companies, citizens etc.) to prepare for the EU accession. The communication should be intensified internally and externally (in the Member States), in order to prepare the public opinion and to obtain a positive vote for the Accession Treaty.

NOTES:

¹ Turkey and Croatia will not be analysed because they are not part of the enlargement process with 12 candidate countries.

² Perceptions of the European Union: a qualitative study of the public's attitude and expectations of the European Union in 15 member states and 9 candidate countries, realized by OPTEM S.A.R.L., June 2001 http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/quali/ql_perceptions_summary_en.pdf

³ Eurobarometer spring 2004, joint full report of Eurobarometer 61 and CC Eurobarometer 2004.1

⁴ Eurobarometer 57, http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p_action.gettxt=gt&doc

⁵ http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/archives/cceb/2003/cceb2003.4_first_annexes.pdf

⁶ Eurobarometer, 2003, autumn – comparative highlight report, http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/archives/cceb/2003/cceb2003.4_full_report.pdf

⁷ Andreas Wilkens, *Le désir d'Europe et réalités nationales: l'opinion publique allemande et la construction européenne*, in *Les opinions publiques face à l'Europe Communautaire, entre cultures nationales et horizon européen* PIE Peter lang, Bruxelles, 2004

⁸ Eva Ring, *Le regard hongrois sur l'intégration européenne*, in *Les opinions publiques face à l'Europe Communautaire, entre cultures nationales et horizon européen*, PIE Peter lang, Bruxelles, 2004

⁹ www.kum.hu

¹⁰ www.median.hu/kutatasok, p.2, tabelul 2

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