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French Public Less Eager than in '96 to Welcome New Members to NATO

Majority Say NATO is Essential to French Security

President Chirac's announcement that France would reintegrate militarily into NATO, coupled with the upcoming Madrid summit on possible expansion of the alliance, has made NATO a high-profile issue in France and in the French media. This USIA-commissioned survey finds that the French public remains supportive of NATO but fewer now than last year believe that enlargement of the alliance will benefit European security.

KEY FINDINGS

- The public is now closely divided (39% vs. 41%) between those who think that NATO enlargement will benefit the overall security of Europe and those who think it will not. In 1996 a majority (56%) expected benefits.
- Six in ten among the French public say that NATO is still essential to France's national security. Even more (70%) say they have confidence in NATO's ability to deal effectively with European problems.
- Majorities continue to support a stronger European role in NATO (57%) and a greater

French presence in the international arena (74%).

French Think NATO Essential

Six in ten (58%) in France say that NATO is still essential to their country's national security. This is in line with measures over the last few years (54% in 1996, 60% in 1995, 55% in 1993). Among those who say it is essential, the large majority find that it is just *one of several elements* of French security. One in five says it is the *most important* element. Overall, three in ten among the French public say that NATO is no longer essential, but among this minority, as many say that the alliance should be kept as say it should be dismantled.

Modest Levels of Support for Enlargement

This survey measured support for admitting specific countries into NATO enlargement by asking how people would vote in a referendum on the issue if one were held "tomorrow," *keeping in mind that NATO members must defend any NATO country that comes under attack*. This stringent measure showed fewer than half voting in support of accepting central and east European countries into NATO immediately.

Low levels of support for enlargement may be due in part to the fact that many doubt whether an enlarged alliance will increase their security. Fewer now (39%) than a year ago (56%) think that NATO enlargement will benefit the overall security of Europe. Slightly more now (41%) think it will harm security (31% in 1996). Also, more are now unsure (20%) whether or not NATO enlargement will benefit European security.

Six in ten (60%) support the idea that the West should not move too quickly to enlarge NATO since Russia feels threatened by NATO enlargement. Only one-quarter say it is important for NATO to move quickly to address the "security vacuum" in central and eastern Europe. Those think enlargement will benefit overall security are slightly more likely to support quicker enlargement.

Public Favors Role on International Stage

Some French may feel that before enlarging the alliance, the European role should be strengthened. A majority (57%) favor a greater European role in NATO, as in 1996, but this view has declined since earlier surveys (71% in 1994; 70% in 1995). The French public

continues to support (69%) the European Union proposal to create a common European defense. This support is also slightly lower than a year ago (74%). While confidence in NATO's ability to deal effectively with European problems (70%) has remained steady from a year ago (67%), confidence in the European Union's ability (66%) has slipped (78% in 1996). This may be due in part to NATO's role in maintaining the peace in Bosnia, while the EU's role in the resolution of the conflict was not as significant.

Slight Decline in Confidence in U.S. Security Commitment

While still solid, confidence that the U.S. would come to their defense if France were attacked (71%) has dipped slightly from previous years (78%). A quarter (26%) of the French public has little or no confidence that the U.S. would come to their aid. Those who doubt the U.S. security commitment are more likely than others to say that Europe should take a greater role in NATO but they are also less likely to say that the alliance is essential to their security. This suggests that this segment of the population favors some degree of self-reliance in the area of security.

At the same time, the French public supports an internationalist outlook, with a majority (81%) agreeing that it is best for the future of France that it take an active part in world affairs. As many (82%) also say that France is *entitled* to play a leading role in Europe and nearly as many (74%) say that France should strive for more power and authority in the international arena.

Confidence that France would be able to defend itself if it were attacked remains high (71%) and confidence that European allies would come to France's defense is even higher (76%). Only a third among the French

"Keeping in mind that NATO members must defend any NATO country that comes under attack, please tell me how you would vote if there were a referendum tomorrow on including [country] in NATO? What about ..."

	Support	Oppose
Poland	43%	44%
Czech Republic	34	52
Hungary	37	46
Bulgaria	34	51
Slovakia	32	53
Baltic Countries	33	48
Romania	34	48
Slovenia	33	49
Russia	29	59
Ukraine	30	51

public are concerned about outside attack, but somewhat fewer now (31%) than a year ago (45%) believe that the end of the Cold War has made the world a safer place.

How This Poll Was Conducted

This survey is based on face-to-face interviews with a nationwide probability sample of 1003 adults residents of France aged 18 and older. Interviewing was conducted between January 10 and 18, 1997. Louis Harris in Paris conducted the survey. Survey questions were prepared by the USIA Office of Research. The questionnaire was translated by the contractor and reviewed by the Office of Research staff.

Nineteen times out of 20, results from samples of this size will differ by no more than about 4 percentage points in either direction from what would be found if it were possible to interview every adult in France. Sampling error is larger for subgroups within the population. In addition to sampling error, the practical difficulties of conducting a survey of public opinion may introduce other sources of error into the results.

Data used in historical trends are from earlier USIA surveys in France with the same question wording. In the 1996 surveys, respondents were contacted and interviewed by phone rather than face-to-face.

Additional information on the methodology for this study may be obtained from the analyst.