

SEPTEMBER 19, 1997

M-157-97

Many in France Receptive to NATO's Chosen Course

But Many Still Favor a Greater Role for Europe

Last July, French and other European leaders initially chafed at the U.S. position of limiting enlargement to three new members at the NATO summit in Madrid. Just a few months after the crucial announcement was made, this just-completed USIA poll in France finds that prevailing French opinion seems satisfied with this decision.

KEY FINDINGS

- Just over half in France support NATO's decision to offer membership to Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, though there is no consensus on who should pay for enlargement.
- Belief that NATO is essential to French security is at about half. Support for a greater European role in NATO persists.
- There is broad public support for the use of NATO troops, "including French troops" in a variety of potential types of NATO operations. Support for French participation in the peacekeeping effort in Bosnia is quite strong.

Majority of French Support NATO Enlargement
Reminded of NATO's collective security commitment, a small majority (54%) support the

enlargement of the alliance to include Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. In fact, six in ten (59%) say they would favor sending NATO troops, including French troops, if the security of one of these new member states were threatened. A third (32%) are opposed to the current enlargement and as many (32%) would oppose sending troops to assist in their defense.

The French are not particularly well-informed, however, about the way the enlargement decision was reached. While more say that the U.S. unfairly imposed its own preferences on other countries (31%) than say the decision was reached fairly "in the interests of all NATO members" (9%), a majority (60%) say they have not heard enough to say or express no opinion. Similarly, four in ten (43%) express no opinion about the degree of consideration given to Russian concerns. A quarter (27%) think that NATO did not give Russian concerns enough consideration; nearly as many (24%) think it did.

Opinion Diverges Over Who Should Pay

The public is very much divided over who should pay the cost of NATO enlargement. A small plurality (35%) think that the cost should be paid primarily by the new member countries, while somewhat fewer

think it should be paid primarily by France and other members (14%) or the U.S. (13%). Two in ten (21%) say it should be paid equally by old and new members. Asked specifically about their own contribution, however, a majority (65%) would oppose an increase in the amount France pays to the alliance in order to cover the “*costs associated with NATO enlargement*” (27% say they are in favor). Looking toward the future, the public is evenly divided between those who favor accepting more new members into NATO within the next five years (43%) and those who think the alliance should not invite more countries “*any time soon*” (41%).

French Continue to Value NATO Membership

Half the French public (49%) believe NATO is *essential* to French security (34% say it is no longer *essential*). Among those who believe that NATO is *essential* to French security, more consider the alliance one of several elements in their security structure than view it as the most important element. Among those who say NATO is no longer *essential*, nearly as many think it should be maintained as say it should be disbanded.

Importance of NATO to French Security

One of several elements	38%
Most important element	10
Should be maintained	12
Should be disbanded	18
Don't know/No answer	22

Confidence In the Alliance Remains Solid

Six in ten (62%) express confidence in NATO to deal effectively with European problems. French confidence in the alliance has remained about the same since 1992. Seven in ten (70%) express confidence in the EU. Fewer express confidence in the WEU (33%) and the OSCE (34%) to deal with European problems. Four in ten express no opinion about these latter organizations.

French Support Greater European Role

A high level of confidence in the EU is consistent with the belief of half (53%) who think the EU rather than NATO (22%) should make the most important decisions about the European security. In the same vein, public support for a stronger European role *within* NATO (“*assuming more of the responsibility and control of our security*”) persists (53%). When an increase in cost is emphasized (“*assuming more of the responsibility and cost of our security*”) support for a greater European role drops to four in ten (41%) and half (47%) prefer to preserve the current U.S.-European security relationship.

Those who favor strong U.S. leadership in world affairs and/or consider Russia “*aggressive by nature*” are most inclined to favor NATO as the forum for European security decisions. Those less traditional in their outlook tend to favor the EU. Still, even among those who favor EU preeminence on critical European security matters, a majority concede the continued need for NATO to deal with emerging post-Cold War security threats.

French Supportive of Varied Role for NATO

Large majorities in France support using NATO troops -- *including French troops* -- to combat international terrorism (86%) and international drug trafficking (83%) and to provide peacekeeping in case of conflicts between NATO member countries (82%). Three-quarters support using troops to provide peacekeeping in countries bordering NATO members, such as Bosnia (75%). Seven in ten support using NATO troops to strengthen security in a particular region, “*such as in the Mediterranean*” (70%) and to coordinate arms

control efforts among NATO members (70%). Only half support the use of NATO troops to defend western interests outside Europe, "*such as in the Persian Gulf*" (49%).

Including Bosnia

The practical aspect of these sentiments is reflected in opinion on current French military participation in Bosnia. The French public solidly supports their own troops' presence in Bosnia (73%) and more believe they should stay in Bosnia "*for as long as it takes to achieve stability in the country*" (52%) than think that they should leave when U.S. forces withdraw (37%).

How the Poll Was Conducted

This survey is based on face-to-face interviews with a probability sample of 1,016 French adults, aged 18 and older. Interviewing was conducted August 20 - September 4, 1997. USIA commissioned *Louis Harris* of France to conduct this study. 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.

In theory, 19 times out of 20, results from samples of this size will differ by no more than about four 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 the same country using similar samples and the same question wording.

For further information regarding this analysis, please contact the preparers or another member of the European Branch.