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## French Public Endorsement of NATO Benefits From Kosovo Campaign

*NATO action in the Balkans could be solidifying the French public's commitment to NATO.*

### KEY FINDINGS

- Belief that NATO is essential to French security was at its highest level since 1995.
- Support for enlarging the alliance to include Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic (65%) grew substantially since a year ago (56%).
- When asked to choose, the French public continued to favor the EU (50%) over NATO (33%) as the organization that should make the most important decisions about European security in the future.

This survey was conducted in early April, prior to accidental bombings of refugees and the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade. While these events may affect public attitudes toward the Kosovo campaign, they are unlikely to reverse the upward trend in views of the importance of NATO.

### NATO Viewed as Essential by Two-Thirds of French Public

Two-thirds (66%) of the French public said that NATO is essential to their country's security -- a substantial increase over recent years (Table 1). Only one in five (22%) said that NATO is no

longer essential -- a sizable decrease from previous years (37% in 1998, 29% in early 1997, 34% in fall 1997, 39% in 1996).

**Table 1. NATO Essential**

*"Some people say that NATO is still essential to our country's security. Others say it is no longer essential. Which of these views is closer to your view?"*

(Percentage who say "essential")

May 1992	50
Mar. 1993	55
Jun. 1995	68
Jun. 1996	54
Jan. 1997	58
Sept. 1997	49
April 1998	50
April 1999	66

This boost in support was likely related to the relative unity among France, Britain and the U.S. regarding NATO's military activity in Kosovo. In fact, three-quarters of the French public thought that U.S. and French policies in Kosovo (and also in Bosnia) are "working in the same direction." A year ago, the French were slightly more likely to see U.S. and French policies toward Kosovo as working in different directions, though a sizable minority did not have an opinion at that time.

### **French Have Confidence in NATO; Support Enlargement**

Confidence in NATO was up slightly compared to last year. Seven in ten (71%) in France expressed confidence in NATO's ability to deal responsibly with European problems (67% in 1998). This level of confidence is as high as that found in Britain (72%).<sup>1</sup> In addition, more in April (65%) than a year ago (56%) supported the enlargement of the alliance to include Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic (22% *strongly*). Nearly two in ten (17%) were opposed, down from 34 percent a year ago.

### **EU and UN Also Garner French Confidence**

As many had confidence in the EU (71%) as had confidence in NATO. This high confidence level held steady despite recent scandals and the resignation en masse of the European Commission. A large majority (70%) of the French public continued to support the establishment of a common European defense force under the direction of the European Union. Most of those who supported such a force envisioned one which would work in conjunction with NATO rather than separately from or as a replacement for the alliance. Asked which organization, NATO or the EU, should make the most important decisions about European security in the future, more said the EU (50%) than NATO (33%). In 1998, six in ten (60%) favored the EU over NATO (27%).

The United Nations inspired confidence in seven in ten (68%). A quarter (24%) lacked confidence. The French were more inclined than not to have confidence in the OSCE (49% confident vs. 21% not confident) and the WEU (42% vs. 23%), but roughly a third did not express an opinion, suggesting less familiarity with these organizations.

### **French Solidly Oppose NATO's Use of Nuclear Weapons Under Any Circumstances**

Eight in ten (79%) said NATO "should never use nuclear weapons under any circumstances." Fewer than two in ten (16%) disagreed and thought that NATO should "have the power to use nuclear weapons under some circumstances. When asked about four possible circumstances, majorities among the small minority who allowed for the possible use of nuclear weapons, agreed that NATO should have the right to use them "if another country uses them first in attacking a NATO member country" or "if a NATO country is attacked by chemical and/or biological weapons." Only half of those who allowed for the possible use of nuclear weapons agreed that NATO should have the right to use them "if an attack by either chemical and biological or nuclear weapons is believed to be imminent" or "to defend itself if an attack by another country threatens to overwhelm conventional NATO forces."

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on British views toward NATO, please see "British Support for NATO Unwavering," M-80-99, May 7, 1999.

**How This Poll Was Conducted**

This report is based on face-to-face interviews conducted March 30-April 7, 1999 with a nationally representative sample of 1,003 adults age 18 and older in France. The research firm Louis Harris in Paris conducted the interviews for USIA.

Survey questions were prepared by the USIA Office of Research and Media Reaction. The questionnaire was translated by the contractor and reviewed by Office of Research and Media Reaction staff.

In theory, 19 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.

For further information, please contact the analyst.