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West European Publics Are Confident in NATO, But Unclear About Its Potential New Missions *Somewhat More Consensus on Functions of EU, UN*

Confidence In NATO, EU Holds Steady

The west European public's confidence in various international institutions "to deal effectively with European problems" remains fairly high (Table 1). Consistent with previous USIA surveys over the last few years, half or more in Britain, France and Germany have confidence in NATO, the European Union and the United Nations. Confidence in the WEU and the OSCE are a has waned somewhat in recent years, due more to an increase in people offering no opinion than to an increase in dissatisfaction. This pattern is especially visible in Britain, where large pluralities venture no opinion on either organization.

Little Consensus on Each Organization's Role

Although many west Europeans favor some role for international organizations in addition to their own national governments, there is relatively little public consensus (either within or across these three publics) about which of these institutions should be "primarily responsible" for each of eight problems (see Table 2, next page). A plurality in all three countries think that the individual national governments should be

Table 1: Confidence In International Institutions

		Britain	France	Germany
NATO	Have confidence	72%	67%	55%
	Lack confidence	14	27	33
EU	Have confidence	52%	73%	54%
	Lack confidence	34	24	37
WEU	Have confidence	29%	43%	39%
	Lack confidence	25	33	40
OSCE	Have confidence	19%	47%	37%
	Lack confidence	19	25	41
UN	Have confidence	68%	72%	58%
	Lack confidence	18	23	31

This report is based on data from face-to-face interviews conducted in early- to mid-April 1998 with 1,029 adults (age 18 or older) in Britain, 1,148 in Germany, and 1,012 in France. The research firms IRB in London, Louis Harris in Paris, and INRA in Moelln conducted the interviews for USIA

primarily responsible for controlling illegal immigration, and pluralities also agree that the UN should take the lead on peacekeeping and humanitarian missions (“such as the evacuation of endangered civilians from combat zones or the protection of refugees”). However, there is less consensus on who should take primary responsibility for other problems. Pluralities in Britain and France think that the individual national governments should be responsible for reducing unemployment and combating both organized crime and illegal drug trafficking, while Germans tend to see each of these as within the EU’s purview. Opinions are especially scattered on combating international terrorism and coordinating international arms control efforts.

Table 2: Which Organization Should Be Primarily Responsible?

Now I am going to read you a list of problems facing our country and many other countries in the world. For each that I read, please tell me which of the organizations on this card should be primarily responsible for handling this problem. [SHOW CARD WITH ORGANIZATIONS]. First, [READ FIRST ITEM]. Which of these organizations should be primarily responsible for [READ FIRST ITEM]. And what about [READ NEXT ITEM]?

		<u>National Govts.</u>	<u>EU</u>	<u>NATO</u>	<u>UN</u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>Don't know</u>
<u>Combating international terrorism</u>	Britain	17%	10	21	27	9	16
	France	29%	24	12	25	6	4
	Germany	20%	38	12	18	6	6
<u>Coordinating intl. arms control efforts</u>	Britain	8%	8	29	33	4	18
	France	20%	21	21	31	3	4
	Germany	7%	23	30	29	2	10
<u>Combating organized crime</u>	Britain	53%	12	5	9	8	13
	France	35%	24	10	19	7	5
	Germany	29%	36	6	14	7	8
<u>Controlling illegal immigration</u>	Britain	52%	23	4	8	3	10
	France	48%	33	6	8	2	5
	Germany	42%	37	4	7	3	7
<u>Sending peace-keeping missions</u>	Britain	10%	6	26	43	2	14
	France	14%	19	19	41	2	5
	Germany	18%	14	23	32	2	11
<u>Combating intl. drug trafficking</u>	Britain	25%	15	7	20	19	14
	France	32%	24	10	20	10	4
	Germany	18%	40	6	18	9	8
<u>Supporting humanitarian missions</u>	Britain	9%	9	15	50	4	14
	France	19%	19	14	41	3	4
	Germany	15%	27	15	32	3	8
<u>Working to reduce unemployment</u>	Britain	71%	15	1	3	1	9
	France	67%	24	3	2	1	3
	Germany	43%	44	2	4	1	6

Responses Vary Somewhat By Country, Political Preferences

Generalizing across the eight problems named, the British and French are more likely than the Germans to say that either national governments or the UN should be responsible for handling these problems, while the Germans are the most likely -- and the British the least likely -- to name the EU. On average, NATO was named about one time by British, French and German respondents alike.

Within each country, those who support EU integration (by agreeing that both the economic and political “unification of western Europe is mostly a good thing”) are generally more inclined than others to prefer the EU over the other organizations named. In addition, those who think it is in the interests of their own country that the “U.S. exert strong leadership in world affairs” are generally more likely than others to prefer that NATO take the lead on these problems.

There are also some partisan differences in the patterns of responses. In Germany, supporters of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) are somewhat more likely than supporters of the governing Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) coalition to prefer that the national government take primary responsibility for problems, while CDU/CSU supporters are more inclined to favor both NATO and EU leadership. In Britain, Labour party supporters are somewhat more likely than Conservative partisans to choose the EU, while the opposite pattern holds for NATO. Partisan differences are generally less pronounced in France, although supporters of the Socialist Party (PS) are more likely to choose NATO than are supporters of either of two leading center-right parties, the UDF or the RPR.

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Methodology

This report is based on preliminary data from face-to-face interviews conducted in early- to mid-April 1998 with 1,029 adults (age 18 or older) in Britain, 1,148 in Germany, and 1,012 in France. The research firms IRB in London, Louis Harris in Paris, and INRA in Moelln conducted the interviews for USIA.

Survey questions for each country were prepared by the USIA Office of Research. The questionnaires were translated and formatted by the contractor and reviewed by Office of Research 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 each country. Sampling error is larger for subgroups within the population of each country. 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.
