

Comments on the Eurobarometer on energy technologies (January 2007)

It is important to bear in mind that the interviews were made in May- June 2006 just **after the Chernobyl accident's 20th anniversary**. Moreover the survey was carried out **in the EU-25** and does not include the two new comers, Bulgaria and Romania, which are countries using nuclear power, where public opinion is mainly in favour of nuclear.

- **Only 1 in 5 citizens supports the use of nuclear power** (p.33). The percentage of people in favour of nuclear energy (20%) has decreased compared to the results of the latest Eurobarometer on radioactive waste published in June 2005 (37%). However only 37% of the interviewees are now clearly against it, which shows a decrease by around 20% (55% in the June 2005 Eurobarometer, p.26).
- When looking to three decades ahead, Europeans anticipate a fundamental swing towards the use of renewable energies. The survey reveals that European citizens now rank nuclear energy as likely to be the third "most used" energy source in 30 years time - after solar (49%) and wind (40%). **Nuclear energy is therefore expected to be a substantial part of the energy mix in the future** (p.34-38). Four years ago when the previous Eurobarometer on energy was published only 6% of the EU citizens expected nuclear to be part of the energy mix in 20 years (p. 73, *Eurobarometer, Energy: Issues, Options and technologies*, December 2002).
- **Energy related issues seem to be of secondary importance.** The Eurobarometer on Energy Technology confirms that Energy is not a major concern or a top priority for EU citizens. It is a "back of mind issue". When today's challenging issues are considered as a whole, EU citizens rate energy issues (14%) far below unemployment (64%), crime (36%) and healthcare systems (30%), which relate more integrally to their daily life, economic stability, safety and health. (p.9) **Public opinion on energy issues can therefore evolve quicker than it is usually assumed.**
- **The concept of energy is most of the time associated with high energy prices.** A third (33%) of Europeans spontaneously relate energy issues with prices and 45% consider that their government should make guaranteeing low energy prices a top priority in their energy policies (p.13-15). **A majority of EU citizens also think that their country is significantly dependent on imported energy.** 61% think that their country is dependent on energy imports and it falls to 53% when talking about the EU (p.20-21). These are issues that nuclear power can contribute to solving.
- It is to remark that **in Sweden 30% of the interviewees think first about nuclear power where energy issues are concerned.** The current debate about the phasing-out of nuclear power can probably account for this trend. In 1980, the government decided to phase-out nuclear power after a referendum. But nowadays

nuclear power supplies half of the country's electricity needs and a majority of Swedes are in favour of it. An opinion poll issued in June 2006 that was commissioned by the Swedish Nuclear Safety and Training Centre (KSU) and conducted by the polling organisation TEMO¹ shows that public support for continuing to use nuclear power remains strong at 85%. The phase-out policy is therefore being questioned.

- **Over half of EU citizens have heard of nuclear fusion (58%).** The countries where the share of those knowing about nuclear fusion is the highest are: Sweden (99%), The Netherlands (86%), Denmark (72%), Germany (71%), France and Finland (69%)... (p. 12-13)
- **EU citizens are pretty well aware of the fact that nuclear power is one of the main energy sources in many European countries.** Nuclear power (36%) ranks third among the most used energy sources picked up by respondents after oil (81%) and coal (77%). However their views are not perfectly accurate. In countries where nuclear power is the main source of energy like France and Lithuania, it is still only the third most chosen answer (78% in France and 49% in Lithuania). (p.18-19)
- The majority of EU citizens trust above all scientists and environmental protection organisations to give them information about energy issues. **The credibility rating of the energy industry appears to have risen** (p.24). Nuclear industry was in last place in the credibility league with a rating of 11% according to the results of the Eurobarometer on waste management in June 2005. (p.69) In the new Eurobarometer, energy companies stand fifth in the list before journalists and national government and 35% of citizens trust their information. Although the list of answers was larger in the previous survey and mentioned the nuclear industry more specifically, we can assume that the credibility of the energy industry as a source of information has increased slightly.
- **EU citizens give a high importance to energy-related research.** 66% consider that it is a high priority and only very marginal shares in every country assign no importance to research.

¹ The TEMO survey is available at: <http://www.analys.se/engsite/engopin.html>