



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

The Public Opinion about the EU Can Easily Be Swayed in Different Directions

Saris, W.E.

Citation

Saris, W. E. (1997). The Public Opinion about the EU Can Easily Be Swayed in Different Directions. *Acta Politica*, 32: 1997(4), 406-435. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3450481>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Leiden University Non-exclusive license](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3450481>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Public Opinion About the EU Can Easily Be Swayed in Different Directions

Willem E. Saris¹

University of Amsterdam

Abstract

Following the Treaty of Maastricht the European Union entered a political crisis. The public demanded referenda over the Treaty and these referenda, where held, did not produce clear mandates for European integration. This was the first occasion on which politicians were confronted with strong opposition to European integration. In this paper an argument will be presented that such a crisis of political legitimation can recur at any time because the general public lacks information about European policies, is in general not interested, and has no strong opinion. In this situation public support for any kind of policy in favour of or against European integration can be swayed rather easily. This point will be demonstrated by empirical research using experimental survey research.

1 Introduction

On June 18 1996, the Dutch newspaper *NRC-Handelsblad* published an article based on a survey of the Dutch population. In a separate article in the same newspaper, Kapteyn suggested, on the basis of the same study, that there was a big gap between public opinion on European integration and the opinion of the political parties on these issues. For several days following this article the study gained considerable attention. Several leading politicians felt obliged to comment critically on the study, arguing that the questions had been suggestive and that more positive results would have been obtained with other formulations (*Volkskrant* 20-6-1996). In parliament, during the debate on the Dutch government's European policy, the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Van Mierlo) referred to the article and also suggested that different formulations would have produced a different result. Leaders of other political parties reiterated this line during the debate.

One wonders why politicians paid so much attention to this particular study when they do not normally find it necessary to react to survey research. The most likely explanation is the memory of the reactions of the public in different countries to the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992 and the subsequent referenda.

After the signing of the Treaty of Maastricht, there was a demand in several countries for a referendum to determine whether people really wanted such a treaty. Politicians who were not normally challenged by their voters with regard to European matters were in this case unexpectedly confronted with opposition. Referenda were held in several countries; some at the request of the population, others because of constitutional laws. These referenda were won after much effort by politicians and only by minimal margins. Shortly after this shock, referenda were held in several countries on EU membership. It turned out to be much more difficult than expected to convince people of the advantages of a united Europe. In Austria, the choice in favour of Europe was made on the basis of a very small margin; in Norway and Switzerland the populations even overruled the preferences of the politicians and chose to reject integration in the European Union.

These events have shown the politicians that the European voters are not as much in favour of European integration as they had always thought. This is why they probably also thought it necessary to criticize the result of a survey which suggests that the population is less in favour of European integration than are the politicians. This is the most logical explanation for their immediate and fierce reaction to this survey in the Netherlands. Having unanimously suggested that a different formulation of the questions would have produced very different results, as far as they were concerned the debate was closed. Because of the unanimity of their reaction, they probably felt reassured on this issue.

The debate, however, has not been closed. Politicians have made a serious accusation against survey methodologists, suggesting that the results of such surveys are rather arbitrary and that they are not to be relied on with respect to policy-making. Such comments are usually made when the results are not favourable to the client of the research in question. In this case we have accepted the challenge and as a result carried out the study which will be presented in this paper.

It has indeed been found in the past that minor changes in the formulation of questions can lead to considerable differences in results. Schuman and Presser (1981), Billiet et al. (1986), and Molenaar (1986) have all discussed this phenomenon extensively. Although researchers agree on the fact that answers to a question can vary depending on the wording, researchers do not agree on the meaning of this phenomenon. Some, for example Converse (1964, 1970), claim that the general public has no crystallized opinion on many issues. He argued that even if you ask people the same question repeatedly you will get different answers. Others, for example Zaller (1992: 33-34), say that people do not have one opinion on a particular issue, but several, not necessarily consistent, opinions. The formulation and the context of the questions determine the answers. Finally, there are those who offer a methodological explanation.

Some say that the observed differences in responses are a consequence of measurement errors due to the vagueness of the questions used (Achen 1970; Judd and Milburn 1980; Judd, Krosnick and Milburn 1981); others suggest that the wording itself might explain the differences (Schuman and Presser 1981; Billiet et al. 1986; Molenaar 1986).

The politicians who criticized the Dutch study mentioned above have chosen the latter, methodological option for their evasion. They suggested that a slightly different formulation would have led to completely different answers. However, to apply the methodological explanation the content of the question must remain unchanged and only the formulation may be varied. For example, in methodological formulation experiments, people are asked in one form whether they think that abortion should be allowed and in the other form whether abortion should be forbidden. The answer 'no' in the 'allow form' should in principle mean the same as 'yes' in the 'forbid form' (Schuman and Presser 1981). We will argue that the question wording suggested by the politicians was not of this kind. They formulated questions which are directed at slightly different issues, or provided a different context. The methodological explanation, therefore, cannot be applied to these questions. If very different results are obtained with these questions, as was shown by Saris (NRC-*Handelsblad*, 2-8-1996) this probably means that the general public does not realize what aspects are relevant for the issues at stake and therefore can be influenced by the context or the formulation of the questions. This would suggest that the substantial explanations are preferable: either the public does not have a crystallized opinion, as Converse has suggested, or it entertains different contradictory opinions on issues with respect to Europe, as Zaller has argued.

For the substantive arguments and their consequences, it makes a considerable difference which interpretation is followed. If the effects are merely methodological artefacts and these artefacts are very large, surveys cannot be used for practical purposes. If the general public has no opinion, or holds inconsistent opinions on a specific issue, a dangerous situation exists because public opinion can be changed quite easily, and this might have serious consequences for the political reality.

This paper reports on three experiments which show that it is very easy, in fact too easy, to change the opinions of people about the European Union. We believe that the general public does not have a crystallized or consistent opinion with respect to the European Union.

In previous research we have shown in a similar way that at least some of the general public does not have a stable opinion on immigrants (Saris and Hartman 1990) or on the role of women (Batista and Saris 1997). A person's opinion could be changed during a 20 minute interview. Sniderman, Piazza and Kendrick (1991: chapter 12) report similar results on policies with respect to job support for blacks in the US. It is not always possible, however, to realize such

changes. If the public is asked about issues with which they are more familiar, such as satisfaction with their income, their home, their family, etc., much smaller changes can be observed (Scherpenzeel 1995). Sniderman, Piazza and Kendrick (1991: 238/239) report similar results regarding quotas for blacks at universities and housing policies.

In this paper the design of the study will be discussed first, then the results will be presented and finally the results will be interpreted.

2 Study design

The study was conducted as a continuation of a previous study carried out in the Netherlands in June 1996 and which led to the debate in parliament. In the first study, three questions in particular were strongly criticized. The same questions were used in the second phase. The questions were presented to the same panel of people in July 1996 - 2266 persons 16 years or older, representative of the Dutch population of that age group. For the original study, computer-assisted data collection was used, utilizing the Telepanel of the Telepanel Foundation in Amsterdam. The sample was large enough to be split into two sub-samples, which were asked different questions. These two groups were selected at random. To show that these groups are comparable with respect to their answers to the three questions of the initial research, their answers are shown in Table 1. The table only shows the answers of the approximately 1700 respondents who participated in both the June and the July studies. This group did not deviate significantly from the original sample of 2266 persons with respect to their answers.

These three questions are certainly not good examples of well-formulated questions; on the other hand they do not differ much from standard Eurobarometer questions and could therefore be used for the intended experiment. For a more detailed discussion of these questions and the subsequent debate, we refer to Kapteyn and Schijf (1996).

Politicians had good reasons to react to these results because, as can be seen in Table 1, a large majority of the general public seems to be in favour of maintaining the national states' right of veto, whereas this right of veto has in fact already partly been handed over to the European Union. The second question suggests that a majority of the public prefers the national government to maintain control over decisions that concern social security and environmental problems.

Finally, the answers to the third question suggest that people do not want to extend the power of the European Parliament if this means any reduction of the national parliament's power. On all three issues, the opinions of the politicians seem to be wholly at variance with the opinions of the general public.

Table 1 also shows that the sub-samples are very similar, so that subsequent differences in the answers between the samples cannot be due to initial differences between the samples.

In order to show that many people do not have crystallized opinions on these issues we conducted three experiments. The first experiment (July 1996) looks at what happens if the questions formulated by the politicians are presented. Our argument is that they did not reformulate the same questions, but in fact formulated questions which emphasize different aspects of the choice. As a consequence, we suggest that it is not a methodological problem when the results are very different; it is a problem of substance. This hypothesis was tested in the second and third experiments.

The second experiment offered the opportunity to test the idea that the problem is substance. The respondents were provided with pro-European information about the issue. If the information has a significant effect on the answers one can doubt whether the public has a firm opinion on these issues. This experiment was carried out with the study testing the politicians' questions in July 1996.

The argument that people do not have firm opinions on Europe becomes even more convincing if we are also able to change public opinion back again to a nationalistic point of view by giving anti-European information after a strong pro-European opinion has been expressed in the second experiment. The third experiment, carried out in January 1997, aimed to generate this change in the opposite direction.

If these changes are due to a lack of information on the part of the general public it must be true that the opinions of those people with little knowledge

Table 1 The responses to the three original questions given by the respondents in the two sub-samples of the original study

Right of vetos

The countries within the European Union have a right of veto, which means that a country is able to block a decision of the European Union.

Do you think that the Netherlands should maintain its right of veto with respect to important decisions, even if that it is done at the cost of decision-making in the European Union ?

	sub-sample 1		sub-sample 2	
	absolute	%	absolute	%
don't know	158	19.0	164	19.1
maintain the right of veto	547	65.6	557	64.9
give up the right of veto	128	15.4	137	16.0
total	833	100.0	858	100.0

National policies

The European free market means that there are increasingly fewer possibilities for the Netherlands to follow its own policies with respect to social security and environmental problems.

Do you think that the Netherlands should extend the power of the European Union with respect to these two policy issues or that the Netherlands should try to protect its own decision-making possibilities?

	sub-sample 1		sub-sample 2	
	absolute	%	absolute	%
don't know	110	13.2	127	14.8
The Netherlands should extend the power of the European Union with respect to social security and environmental problems.	244	29.3	256	29.8
The Netherlands should try to protect its own decision-making possibilities with respect to social security and environmental problems.	479	57.5	475	55.4
total	833	100	858	100

European Parliament

If the power of the European Parliament is extended this will be done at the expense of the power of the national parliament.

Do you think that the power of the European Parliament should be extended ?

	sub-sample 1		sub-sample 2	
	absolute	%	absolute	%
don't know	206	24.7	207	24.1
yes, the power of the European Parliament should be extended	282	33.9	310	36.1
no, the power of the European Parliament should NOT be extended	345	41.4	341	39.8
total	833	100	858	100

about the EU should change more than the opinions of the people with a lot of knowledge. In order to test this hypothesis the respondents were asked whether ten European countries were members of the EU; whether the same countries were members of NATO; and twelve questions concerning European policies. Although these questions were not asked to measure knowledge, the

number of "don't know" answers can be interpreted as a measure of (lack of) knowledge. In the last section of the paper we will discuss these three knowledge measures and indicate whether people with less knowledge indeed change their "opinion" more frequently than people with more knowledge.

The results of the experiments are presented below, beginning with the effect of the reformulation of the questions. In the following subsections the effects of the information will be discussed.

3 Experiment 1: Effect of the politicians' wording of the questions

Because the events which took place between the first and the second interview could have affected the respondents' opinions, we asked sub-sample 1 exactly the same questions during the second interview. The alternative formulations were presented to sub-sample 2. By comparing the answers of the two sub-samples the effect of a reformulation of the questions as suggested by the politicians can be established.

With reference to the right of veto the question was reformulated as indicated in Table 2, which shows the results of the original question and the new question. Before we interpret these results, we should point out that this reformulation of the question is not an arbitrary reformulation of the same question. Politicians accused the researchers of using suggestive formulations (*Volkskrant*, 20-6-1996). This alternative question is certainly a suggestive question whereas the original question is not. The original question indicated both sides of the problem: the national advantages and the European disadvantages. In the reformulation, only the European side of the problem is emphasized. In addition, the answer categories have been changed. With the original question one could choose between maintaining or giving up the right of veto. In the new formulation the choice is between maintaining or limiting the right of veto. The latter category specifies a less extreme alternative to giving up the right of veto and which might therefore be more popular. In fact, several changes have been introduced in this question and therefore it cannot be argued that it is only a methodological problem. However, we expected people who had not given much thought to these problems to give different answers to this question, and that is reflected in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that the percentage of people who explicitly state that they have no opinion remains approximately the same, but that the two substantive categories change considerably. In the first sub-sample there was a clear majority in favour of "maintaining the right of veto", whereas in the second sub-sample (which originally had the same opinion as the first sub-sample, Table 1) the option to "limit the right of veto" almost gained a majority and

Table 2 The effect of the reformulation of the right of veto question on the response distributions in the two samples

Sample 1		Sample 2	
The countries within the European Union have a right of veto, which means that a country is able to block a decision of the European Union.		The countries within the European Union have a right of veto, which means that a country is able to block a decision of the European Union if it does not get what it wants.	
Do you think that the Netherlands should maintain its right of veto with respect to important decisions, even if that is done at the cost of decision-making in the European Union?		Do you think that the Netherlands should try to limit this right?	
	%		%
don't know	25.3	don't know	23.9
maintain the right of veto	55.5	maintain the right of veto	28.4
give up the right of veto	19.2	limit the right of veto	47.7
total (n = 833)	100	(n = 858)	100

the option to "maintain the right of veto" gained less than half the support of the previous time.

This very large difference in answers gives an indication that the respondents listen carefully to the questions asked and as a result gave different answers to the new question. It also shows that the people had no really strong opinion on this issue. It is remarkable that the difference in information in these questions has such a large effect. This is only possible if Converse or Zaller are correct in asserting that large proportions of the population have no crystallized opinion on this issue, so that new information can change public opinion considerably.

The second question was not a very good one because it contained two different subjects. Therefore, in the alternative formulation the number of subjects was reduced as people's views on social security may be quite different to their views on environmental problems. This was suggested in one of the comments. Of course, by changing the subject of the question in this way a different question is formulated. Omitting social security in the question indeed led to different answers, as can be seen in Table 3. The difference is, however, smaller than in the previous example.

We cannot interpret this result as an indication of a methodological formulation effect. Furthermore, the fact that these two questions are so different means that the results do not suggest that people have no strong opinions. The result

Table 3 The effect of the reformulation of the national policy question on the response distributions in the two samples

Sub-sample 1		Sub-sample 2	
The European free market has the consequence that there are increasingly less possibilities for the Netherlands to follow its own policies with respect to social security and environmental problems.		The European free market has the consequence that there are increasingly less possibilities for the Netherlands to follow its own policies with respect to environmental problems.	
Do you think that The Netherlands should extend the power of the European Union with respect to these two policy issues or should The Netherlands try to protect its own decision-making possibilities?		Do you think that The Netherlands should extend the power of the European Union with respect to this policy issue or should The Netherlands try to protect its own decision-making possibilities?	
	%		%
don't know	17.6	don't know	23.9
The Netherlands should extend the power of the European Union with respect to social security and environmental problems.	25.0	The Netherlands should extend the power of the European Union with respect to environmental problems	28.4
The Netherlands should try to protect its own decision-making possibilities with respect to social security and environmental problems	57.4	The Netherlands should try to protect its own decision-making possibilities with respect to environmental problems	47.7
total n = 833	100	n = 858	100

only shows that the respondents indeed react differently to different questions. It shows that they read the questions carefully and give different answers to different questions.

With respect to the third issue, it was suggested that in addition to comparing the division of power between the European Parliament and the national parliaments it is also interesting to compare the division of power between the European Commission and the European Parliament. In this case as well, a different question is formulated because the comparison is changed. One would therefore also expect differences in responses, and again not because of methodological issues but because a different choice is presented to the people. The result of this experiment is presented in Table 4.

Indeed a very different result is obtained for this issue. The extension of the power of the European Parliament gets much more support if its power is

extended at the expense of the European Commission than if its power is extended at the expense of the national parliament. Furthermore, the number of people with no opinion increases considerably. These two effects are again not due to methodological problems but to real changes in the content of the question.

Table 4 The effect of the reformulation of the European Parliament question on the response distributions in the two samples

Sub-sample 1		Sub-sample 2	
If the power of the European Parliament is extended it will be done at the expense of the power of the national parliament.		Currently, the European Parliament has much less power compared with the European Commission than the national parliament compared with the national governments.	
Do you think that the power of the European Parliament should be extended?		One could increase the power of the Parliament at the expense of the European Commission.	
Do you think that the power of the European Parliament should be extended at the expense of the European Commission ?		Do you think that the power of the European Parliament should be extended at the expense of the European Commission ?	
	%		%
don't know	24.5	don't know	37.8
yes, the power of the European Parliament should be extended	33.3	yes, the power of the European Parliament should be extended	44.9
no, the power of the European Parliament should NOT be extended	42.3	no, the power of the European Parliament should NOT be extended	17.4
total n = 833	100	n=858	100

All three examples show that considerable changes were obtained by employing the questions suggested by the politicians. These changes, however, are not methodological artefacts but consequences of real changes in the subject or the information provided in the question. If the respondents listen to the questions carefully and try to answer the new questions such changes can be expected.

The fact that such large differences were obtained for the first question does suggest that people did not have a strong and stable opinion on this issue, since the new information contained in the question changed their responses considerably.

4 Experiment 2:
The effect of pro-European information

In order to demonstrate the effect of information more clearly we will now discuss two further controlled experiments. Two issues are covered in these experiments. The first is the question of the power of the European Parliament and the second is the question of the right of veto.

With respect to the power of the European Parliament, a simple procedure was used. In this experiment the same two sub-samples of the original sample were used. Sub-sample 1 was given the same question as was used in the first study. Sub-sample 2 was presented with new information as to why an extension of the power of parliament would be useful before the question used in the other sub-sample was asked. Table 5 presents the results of this experiment.

It is clear that this additional information had a considerable effect on the preferences of the people. Whereas their original point of view was rather nationalistic, the extra information caused a change in a more European-oriented direction so that the majority is currently in favour of an extension of power of the European Parliament.

Table 5 The effect of extra information in the European Parliament question on the response distributions in the second sub-sample

Sub-sample 1: no information		Sub-sample 2: pro-European information	
		Many problems are not restricted to national boundaries. For example, 50 % of the acid rain in The Netherlands comes from abroad. These problems can only be regulated by international laws.	
If the power of the European Parliament is extended it will be done at the expense of the power of the national parliament.		If the power of the European Parliament is extended it will be done at the expense of the power of the national parliament.	
Do you think that the power of the European Parliament should be extended ?		Do you think that the power of the European Parliament should be extended ?	
	%		%
don't know	24.5	don't know	23.8
yes, the power of the European Parliament should be extended	33.3	yes, the power of the European Parliament should be extended	53.5
no, the power of the European Parliament should NOT be extended	42.2	no, the power of the European Parliament should NOT be extended	22.7
total n = 833	100	n = 858	100

It is also interesting to compare this result with the result in sub-sample 2 in Table 3. There, the same sample expressed a highly nationalistic point of view on this issue: 47 % was in favour of more power for their own nation. Now, 53.5 % prefers more power for the European Parliament with respect to the same issue. This indicates in a different way the effect information can have on survey results concerning these issues. We think that this is only possible because a large part of the general public does not have a crystallized opinion on these matters or, at the least, holds no consistent opinions.

The second example was concerned with the right of veto and in this case the information was given in the form of questions. The questions concerned events which occurred approximately at the same time related to the "mad cow disease". After the standard question the people of sub-sample 1 were asked the following questions:

As a result of the 'mad cow disease' the EU has decided to enforce an export ban on British beef in order to prevent this disease from spreading over the whole of Europe and even infecting human beings.

Do you agree that it was right to take such a measure even though Great Britain was strongly against this decision ?

The answers to this question were 84.2% yes, 7.0% no and 8.8% don't know. The next question was:

As a reaction to the EU's decision to ban British beef, Great Britain has used its right of veto on several different decisions the EU wanted to make.

What do you think of this reaction of Great Britain ?

- 1 a legal use of its right
- 2 misuse of its right
- o don't know

In this case 75.9% chose misuse of its right; 11.9% legal use of its right and 12.2% don't know.

After these two questions, a changed version of the right of veto question was asked. Table 6 compares the answers to the standard right of veto question and the version asked after the two questions on mad cow disease policies. Unfortunately, in this case as well, the alternative "give up the right of veto" has been changed. This time a "decision by majority" was specified which is certainly a specific way of giving up the right of veto. We do not think that the observed differences in Table 6 are due to this change.

This table makes it clear that the information has had a considerable effect. After two intermediate questions, the opinion of the same people changed from a majority in favour of maintaining the national right of veto to an even larger

Table 6 The effect of information of the right of veto question on the response distributions in the first sub-sample

<i>Sub-sample 1: before pro-European information</i>		<i>Sub-sample 1: after pro-European information</i>	
The countries within the European Union have a right of veto, which means that a country is able to block a decision of the European Union.		On the basis of these experiences one can ask the question of whether the right of veto should remain or whether it should be adjusted to majority decision-making	
Do you think that The Netherlands should maintain its right of veto with respect to important decisions, even if that it is done at the expense of decision-making in the European Union ?		Do you think that the current form should remain or do you think that a form of decision-making based on a majority should be introduced (for example 2/3 of the countries have to agree)	
	%		%
don't know	25.3	don't know	13.8
maintain the right of veto	55.5	maintain the right of veto	26.7
give up the right of veto	19.2	decisions by majority rule	59.5
total (n = 833)	100	(n = 833)	100

majority in favour of giving up the national right of veto and introducing decisions by majority rule.

A second phenomenon that can be seen is that in this case the number of respondents who explicitly admit to having "no opinion" has been reduced. It seems that the questions about the policies regarding mad cow disease were sufficiently informative to give many respondents the idea that they now knew how to respond to the right of veto question. The alternative formulation of the right of veto question did not produce this effect as can be seen by comparing this with the results in Table 2.

Again it is clear that the extra information, even in question form, had a considerable impact on people's opinions. We think that this is only possible if people do not have crystallized opinions on this matter.

5 Experiment 3:

The effect of anti-European information

In the third experiment we wanted to test whether it would also be possible to change the "public" opinion back again to a very nationalistic opinion. This required a study using the same panel, this time providing an argument in favour

of a more nationalistic course of action. The discussions in the Netherlands about the EU drug policy during the last few months of 1996 could be used for this purpose. Therefore, in early January 1997, we conducted a second experiment to change the "public opinion" in the survey. Since we had no clear predictions about the opinions of the respondents at that time we also wanted to ask the original questions again. On the other hand, we did not dare to ask the same questions twice with different information on the two occasions. Therefore, two randomly selected sub-samples were used.² One sub-sample received the same questions without any preliminary information, as in previous studies, while the second sub-sample received the same questions after having been given information about the discussion in the European Union with respect to the policy on drug use. The information was again presented in question form and was formulated as follows:

Over the last few weeks a debate has taken place in Europe about the relationship between the Netherlands and Europe. We would like to ask some questions about this topic.

The discussion revolved around the Dutch drug policy.

The so-called "permissive policy" was introduced in the Netherlands after all other means to fight the use of drugs had failed.

The policy entails recognizing that some youths will try soft drugs, that it is impossible to prevent this, and that one should at least try to prevent these young people, who are looking for soft drugs, from coming into contact with dealers in hard drugs.

To achieve this:

- the use of soft drugs is allowed in coffee shops;
- the selling of hard drugs is fought against vigorously.

Therefore, a coffee shop licence is withdrawn as soon as it is discovered that hard drugs are being sold there.

This policy has obviously been successful because at this moment the Netherlands has the lowest percentage of hard drug users of all European countries.

What do you think of this approach to the drug problem ?

- 1 good
- 2 bad
- 3 don't know

The Dutch sub-sample (n = 1057) confronted with this information was very positive about the Dutch drugs policies: 69.8 % said it is good, 12.4 % bad, and 17.8 % had no opinion. The next question was as follows:

Other countries of the European Union, especially France, are very strongly against the Dutch drug policy, because they find it unacceptable to allow any kind of drugs. In these countries drugs are forbidden and children who want to use soft drugs will, therefore, immediately contact dealers who also sell hard drugs.

The consequence of this is that the number of hard drug users in these countries is higher than in the Netherlands.

What do you think of this policy ?

- 1 good
- 2 bad
- 3 don't know

In contrast with the previous question the same sub-sample was now very negative: only 9.6 % gave the answer good, 71.8 % the answer bad, and 18.5 % did not know what to answer. The following question was then asked:

Now back to the decision-making in the European Union. In the context of European integration France wanted to force the Netherlands to abandon its drug policy and introduce the same drug policy as the other European countries.

What do you think of this French action?

- 1 legitimate use of its power
- 2 misuse of its power
- 3 don't know

In this case as well the respondents' opinion was very clear: 13.2 % felt it was a legitimate use of power, 74.2 % a misuse of power, and 12.7 % had no opinion.

Following these questions, which were meant to provide people with one-sided information about the European Union decision-making process, the question about right of veto was repeated in a slightly modified form.

The countries within the European Union have a right of veto which means that a country is able to block a decision of the European Union.

There is a discussion within the European Union about the question of whether the right of veto by individual countries should continue or not.

As an example, the Netherlands could protect itself against pressure from France and other countries which want us to abandon our own drugs policies and other regulations. If the right of veto was abolished this possibility to protect national regulations would disappear.

Given the experience of the recent past with respect to the drug policy and the pressure France is putting on the Netherlands through the decision-making process of the European Union, we would like to ask you:

Do you think that the Netherlands should maintain its right of veto with respect to important decisions, even if that is done at the expense of decision-making in the European Union ?

- 1 maintain the right of veto
- 2 give up the right of veto
- 3 don't know

The answers to this question are included in Table 7. Only those people who had also answered the question about the right of veto after being given pro-European information are included in this table. In this total group only 26.7 % was in favour of the continuation of the right of veto and 59.3 % was against in the second interview. Now, six month's later, the same people are highly nationalistic: in the third interview without receiving new information 52.9 % were in favour of continuation of the right of veto while, even after receiving negative information, 61.4 % were now in favour of continuation.

Table 7 The effect of anti-European information about the drug policy discussion in Europe on the response distributions of the right of veto question in the different sub-samples

<i>Sub-sample 1: no information</i>		<i>Sub-sample 2: anti-European information</i>	
The countries within the European Union have a right of veto, which means that a country is able to block a decision of the European Union.		Given the experience of the recent past with respect to the drug policy and the pressure France is putting on the Netherlands through the decision-making process of the European Union we would like to ask:	
Do you think that the Netherlands should maintain its right of veto with respect to important decisions, even if that it is done at the expense of decision-making in the European Union ?		Do you think that the Netherlands should maintain its right of veto with respect to important decisions, even if that it is done at the expense of decision-making in the European Union ?	
	%		%
don't know	24.3	don't know	20.2
maintain the right of veto	52.9	maintain the right of veto	61.4
give up the right of veto	22.9	give up right of veto	18.4
total (n = 734)	100	(n = 663)	100

It is striking that the people returned to a response distribution close to that found before the pro-European information had been given, even though they answered in a very pro-European way in that experiment. We will come back to this issue in the conclusions.

With regard to the question concerning the European Parliament, we provided no further information, but merely adjusted the question after people had been given the above information about the EU drug policy, as can be seen in Table 8 by referring to the drug discussion in Europe.

A distinction has to be made in the table between the group of people who received the pro-European information for this issue and those did not.

The latter group was against an extension of the power of the European Parliament in the second interview: 42.2 % were against, and 33.3 % were in favour. In the third interview the sub-group which had received anti-European information showed a large change in the expected direction, as can be seen in the top part of Table 8. However, the sub-group which did not receive anti-European information also changed a little: in the third interview they showed a slight preference for an extension of the power of the European Parliament which had not been evident in the second interview.

The sub-group which received a pro-European question in the second interview is of course more interesting given the outspoken pro-European opinion in the second interview (see Table 5, right side): 53.5 % were in favour of extending the power of the European Parliament while only 22.7 % were against. In the third interview, the sub-group which received no anti-European information (lower-left side of Table 8) remained slightly in favour of extending

Table 8 The effect of extra information about drug policy on the response distributions of the European Parliament question

Sub-group which did not receive pro-European information in the second experiment			
<i>Sub-sample 1: no information</i>		<i>Sub-sample 2: anti-European information</i>	
		Given the experience with the drug policy of the European Union and especially the pressure France is putting on the Netherlands through the European Union, what do you think of the division of power in Europe ?	
If the power of the European Parliament is extended it will be at the expense of the power of the national parliament.		If the power of the European Parliament is extended it will be at the expense of the power of the national parliament.	
Do you think that the power of the European Parliament should be extended?		Do you think that the power of the European Parliament should be extended?	
	%		%
don't know	22.7	don't know	25.2
yes, the power of the European Parliament should be extended	39.2	yes, the power of the European Parliament should be extended	24.8
no, the power of the European Parliament should NOT be extended	38.1	no, the power of the European Parliament should NOT be extended	50.0
total n = 365	100	n = 322	100

Sub-group which received pro-European information in the second experiment

<i>Sub-sample 1: no information</i>		<i>Sub-sample 2: anti-European information</i>	
		Given the experience with the drug policy of the European Union and especially the pressure France is putting on the Netherlands through the European Union, what do you think of the division of power in Europe?	
If the power of the European Parliament is extended it will be at the expense of the power of the national parliament.		If the power of the European Parliament is extended it will be at the expense of the power of the national parliament.	
Do you think that the power of the European Parliament should be extended?		Do you think that the power of the European Parliament should be extended?	
	%		%
don't know	24.1	don't know	28.4
yes, the power of the European Parliament should be extended	39.0	yes, the power of the European Parliament should be extended	29.3
no, the power of the European Parliament should NOT be extended	36.9	no, the power of the European Parliament should NOT be extended	42.3
total n = 369	100	n = 341	100

the power of the EU parliament with 39.0 % in favour and 36.9 % against, but not so outspokenly as before. On the other hand, the sub-group which received information about the EU drug policy in the third interview (right-hand side of the same table) returned to the position they held before receiving the pro-European information, with 29.3 % in favour of extending the power and 42.3 % against.

The change in the situation when no new information is given is at least as remarkable as the expected change among those people given information. We will discuss this issue in the conclusion.

6 The role of knowledge

The first set of experiments clearly indicated that the changes in the formulation of questions did affect public opinion quite dramatically. These changes, however, were not due to methodological artefacts, as politicians have tried to argue, but due to the formulation of different choice options and the provision of different information in the question. The right of veto question

was reformulated in a highly biased way. The second question was altered by omitting one of the two question subjects of the original question. The third question formulated a choice between two different subjects. The consequences of such changes in the formulation of the questions, i.e. introducing new aspects, have been called "framing effects" (Gamson and Modigliani 1987; Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock 1991: 49). This is not an arbitrary effect of the methodology used but a substantial result.

However, if these changes of the questions are not methodological artefacts, the only possible explanation for the significant changes in the responses must be that the people had not considered these newly introduced aspects before. This suggests that their opinions can easily be changed by highlighting different aspects and that the underlying reason for the changes could be that many people did not have a strongly held opinion.

In the second experiment this possibility was studied more directly. It was shown that the same people could be convinced as a majority to move from a nationalistic opinion to a European-oriented opinion by including only a few sentences containing extra information or two intermediate questions. This suggests to us that the general public which is said to have little interest in matters concerning Europe (Scherpenzeel 1995) also has no strong opinion about these issues. This is why the results of survey research on these matters can be changed rather easily.

In the third experiment, we tested whether public opinion could be changed back again in the reverse direction. This turned out to be very simple. If we provided anti-European information about the drug policy discussion in Europe, the expected effect did in fact occur: the majority of people was again in favour of nationalistic policies.

Looking at the political science literature the obtained results do not come as a surprise. There has been a lengthy debate about the lack of crystallized opinions, as we indicated in the first section. Without repeating this discussion, one can at least hypothesize that one of the reasons for this is that many people do not have enough knowledge about these issues to form a crystallized opinion. This point was emphasized by Converse in several papers (1964 and 1970). According to Converse we could suggest hypothesis 1:

H1 The less knowledge people have about a topic the less stable their opinion will be.

The stability of an opinion is less if the percentage of people who give the same answers to the same question over time is lower. This hypothesis suggests that we should find increasing percentages of change in groups with less knowledge about the European Union. This point will be evaluated below.

Zaller (1992: chapter 7) studied the effect of new information and suggested that the level of political awareness affects the predictability of a change in

opinion when new information is given. On this basis we would like to formulate hypothesis 2:

H2 If new information is given the probability of a change in opinion depends on the political awareness of the people: the people with low or high levels of awareness are the least likely to change and the people with moderate levels of awareness are the most likely to change their opinion.

It should be mentioned that one can not predict for concrete cases exactly what the form of the relationship between awareness and the probability of change will be. This depends on the level of awareness in the population with respect to the issue, and the strength of the message (Zaller 1992: chapter 8). This second hypothesis can also be tested with these data when a measure of awareness is available. There has been a lot of debate about the measurement of this concept and the related concept "political sophistication" (Luskin 1987). The conclusion was that the best way to measure levels of awareness and sophistication is by a person's knowledge of the field of interest (Stimson 1975; Zaller 1992). Following this suggestion we will use the same variable for both tests which measures people's knowledge about European issues.

In this study we measured knowledge in three different ways. The first two procedures asked people to specify for ten different European countries whether they belonged to the EU and the NATO. For each correct answer they received a point. The list of countries is given in the Appendix. The third procedure counted the number of "don't know" answers in response to twelve different questions related to EU policies. The twelve questions are also given in the Appendix. The scores for this variable, which we call DKN, range from 0 to 12: 0 means no "don't know" responses were given and 12 means that 12 "don't know" answers were given. The distribution of the respondents on these three scales are presented in Table 9.

The table shows that the distribution of the two knowledge questions about EU and NATO countries is quite similar. The distribution of the DKN scores is very different. The reasons for the difference are: first, that the scale is reversed – people with a 0 score on the variable DKN are supposed to have the most knowledge and people with a 12 score have the least knowledge. Second, it is quite likely that not all people are willing to admit that they have no knowledge about certain issues. Therefore, the number of people with seemingly "perfect knowledge" is certainly too high.

In order to see if there is agreement between these measures we have calculated the correlations between the variables. It turned out that the correlation between the knowledge about the membership questions was indeed quite high (.67) compared with the correlation with the DKN measure (-.33 and -.37). This

Table 9 The distribution of the scores on three measures of knowledge about Europe

Knowledge about EU countries		Knowledge about NATO countries		Lack of knowledge about EU policies	
correct	%	correct	%	DKN	%
0	12.6	0	14.0	0	25.8
1	1.9	1	3.2	1	24.3
2	4.9	2	2.3	2	16.7
3	7.4	3	5.7	3	10.9
4	9.8	4	9.6	4	8.4
5	14.5	5	10.2	5	5.2
6	19.1	6	16.2	6	2.9
7	15.1	7	12.8	7	0.7
8	9.8	8	11.1	8	1.6
9	4.7	9	9.4	9	0.7
10	0.1	10	5.5	10	0.7
				11	1.4
				12	0.4

result raises the question which type of question should be selected for further research?

There is one more relationship which can be used for the validation of these questions. That is the relationship between the number of "don't know" answers and EU questions of interest. It might be expected that the number of "don't know" answers to the questions of interest increases with the score on the knowledge measure. It turns out that this is clearly the case with the DKN indicator but not with the other two measures. Therefore the DKN measure is used in the analysis to see if the change by chance (H1) and the change due to new information (H2) is affected by the amount of knowledge people have. In doing so we used a 5-point scale for knowledge because only very few people had a score above 5 on the DKN scale.

Tables 10 and 11 present the results for these knowledge groups with respect to change by chance and change due to new information. The right of veto question was used as both change by chance and change by information could be studied. The tables show that there are quite large differences between the different knowledge groups. These relationships are significant (.05 level) on an individual level as well as on an aggregate level.

First of all, column 2 of Table 10 shows that with each decrease in knowledge (or increase in the DKN score) the percentage of changes in responses also goes up except for the last category. The last two categories are quite problematic because they contain many people who stated twice that they had no opinion. These people contribute to the stability although they would have given an

Table 10 The percentage of people who changed their opinions given their knowledge about Europe

Knowledge # of DKN	percentage of changes by chance	percentage of changes corrected for 2x DKN	size of subgroup
0	.25	.25	215
1	.30	.32	203
2-3	.32	.34	230
4-5	.43	.53	113
>5	.38	.61	72

Table 11 The percentage of people who changed their opinions on the basis of new information given their knowledge about Europe

Knowledge # of DKN	percentage of changes			size of subgroup
	of all	of opponents uncorrected	corrected for 2x DKN	
0	.38	.52	.52	215
1	.46	.52	.53	203
2-3	.57	.56	.63	230
4-5	.61	.55	.67	113
>5	.36	.27	.55	72

arbitrary answer if there had been no "no opinion" category. Therefore in the third column of Table 10 the percentages are corrected for the number of people who have given the answer "don't know" twice. This correction makes it again very clear that the probability of change increases in accordance with the lack of information people have. This result is in complete agreement with hypothesis 1 which we formulated in line with Converse's ideas.

Column 2 of Table 11 shows the increase in change due to new information. In this case more people change – even when they have the highest level of knowledge. If the knowledge decreases (the score on DKN increases) the percentage of changes increases with approximately .10 in the beginning, but the fourth category is only a bit higher than the third, and the last is the lowest of all. This result seems to be in agreement with Zaller's idea that there is a non-linear relationship between levels of awareness and the probability of change in opinion if new information is provided. However, so far, the change could go in all directions, this only indicates that the probability of change will be greater if people have less information. A more interesting question is

whether the change goes in the expected direction. In order to evaluate this point, the percentages of people who change in the expected direction of all people who did not state this opinion the first time is given in the third column of the table. We see that a majority of people change their opinions in the expected direction, except for in the last category. As mentioned above there are many people in this category who gave a "don't know" answer twice. We have corrected for this again in the fourth column. This correction mainly effects the categories which include the people with the least knowledge. This result shows that the proportions of change are even greater. In this column, we also see that the changes are the smallest for the categories of people with the highest and the lowest levels of knowledge, as suggested by Zaller.

7 Conclusions

Although several studies suggest that the Dutch population has quite accurate knowledge about many issues (Van der Brug 1997:134), this study has shown that the public opinion on European issues is not very well developed, as could be expected from the literature on this issue. The reasons for this conclusion are:

- relatively small changes in the questions led to quite different results;
- it was quite simple to change the public opinion considerably during one interview from a nationalistic to a European position;
- it was possible to reverse this back again to a national position within a short time.

The reason for this lack of opinion is clearly that many people are not interested in European policies and are not informed. The fact that the amount of knowledge makes the difference was demonstrated by creating different groups based on the levels of knowledge in order to study if these levels of knowledge vary with the percentages of change of opinion by chance (according to Converse), or by confrontation with new information (according to Zaller). Testing both hypotheses showed that the knowledge groups differed significantly with respect to the proportion of change. This suggests that lack of knowledge is a very important reason why there is no crystallized opinion about European issues. Due to this lack of knowledge the people often change their opinion even if the same question is asked (Converse) but even more when they are confronted with other aspects of the same problem (Zaller).

It should be added that the group with the highest level of knowledge also showed a considerable amount of change. The change by chance was around 25 % and the change due to new information was 38 %. These high percentages

can be explained in three different ways. One possible explanation for this is that our measure of knowledge is not a good measure in the sense that many people without strong opinions did not mention that they had little knowledge on the issue. We think that this is certainly the case for a number of people. A second possible explanation is that the format of the questions is too vague and for this reason considerable errors can be expected (Achen 1975). Also these response errors will contribute to the probabilities of the change obtained. Finally, the third explanation is that even the most sophisticated respondent has only limited knowledge about Europe and therefore changes in opinion will be quite large. This last explanation seems plausible in this specific case. Unfortunately, it is not possible to make a distinction between these three possible explanations in our data.

On the other hand we should mention that differences between the groups cannot be explained by measurement errors because that would assume that the errors in one group are much larger than in the other group. This seems to be an unrealistic assumption given the simple errors we are talking about. It would be more realistic to accept what has been presented here in many different ways: that people have differing levels of knowledge and that this knowledge strongly affects the likelihood of whether or not people have a crystallized opinion.

Another result that is noteworthy in the last experiment is that the people who received no anti-European information also changed from a pro-European point of view to a more nationalistic one. This was the case for both topics introduced. In fact, the response distributions were not exactly the same as before the pro-European information was provided but a little more pro-European. It seems as though the respondents had almost completely forgotten both the pro-European information and their earlier opinions although they showed a more positive attitude towards Europe than before. This result is in agreement with some findings in political science research. The research of Lodge, Steenbergen and Brau (1995) suggests that people do not store the information given to them but retain only a tally of the positive and negative arguments. In this way it is possible that they forget the arguments but gradually change their opinion based on the information received. This so called "online model" can also explain why the groups which did not receive additional information became more pro-European than they were before they received the pro-European information. This model, however, cannot explain why people gave such deviant responses after receiving pro-European information. This point requires a different explanation.

All these results together suggest that the general public has a weak but general attitude towards Europe which is rather stable if no disturbances occur. Standard public opinion research measures this opinion. This type of research only provides information about the situation if no new events occur.

As we have shown large changes can be expected as a result of minor changes in the information or in the formulation of the choice.

The experiments described above suggest a more interesting application of survey research in such cases – namely, to determine the stability of public opinion. By posing survey questions in different forms and with different (even opposing) information, one can determine the range of uncertainty in public opinion. This approach was tested in practice by Saris and Hartman (1990), by Batista and Saris (1997) and by Sniderman, Piazza and Kendrick (1991), and promoted by Piazza and Sniderman (1996). Quite a different suggestion for survey research was made by Saris, Neijens and De Ridder (1985). If one would like to determine public opinion on well-balanced information, one can use a procedure which we have called the Choice Questionnaire (Saris, Neijens and De Ridder 1985; Neijens 1987). In this procedure the information about advantages and disadvantages of and uncertainties about the issue is provided to the respondent before he or she is asked his or her opinion. The answers given in a Choice Questionnaire are less superficial because respondents are given a large amount of information. Such questionnaires can be helpful in obtaining opinions on important policy issues like the ones mentioned above where many people lack the information to develop a well-founded opinion.

We have emphasized the difference between methodological artefacts and the lack of a strong opinion because, as we have stated previously, the consequences are quite different. When people do not have strong opinions on European matters this does not mean that politicians can relax and simply assume that there is no problem.

We have shown that it is very easy to change the opinions of the "Dutch population" in an interview from being highly nationalistic to pro-European and back again. But what can be done in an interview, in a very simple way, can also be done by politicians in the real world. This has also happened in the period since the Treaty of Maastricht; and as we have said, this is possible because people have no firm opinions on European matters. The problem is that politicians only seldom try to explain these problems to the public. Unless efforts are made to improve the situation, the risk of another political crisis in the EU remains. It is only a matter of time.

Notes

1. I would like to thank Anna Melich, HansPeter Kriesi, Peter Mohler, Peter Neijens, Jaak Billiet, Bert Schijf and two anonymous reviewers of *Acta Politica* for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper. Information about this study can be obtained from the author, Statistics and Methodology Department of the Political,

Cultural and Sociological Faculty of the University of Amsterdam, o.z.. Achterburgwal 237, 1012 DL Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

2. In the second data collection all people received the BSE questions. Both sub-samples gave the same results but we reported only sub-sample 1 to make the reasoning clearer. In the third experiment the total sample was again split up randomly into two groups: one was given the original questions and the other the new formulation. Due to this design some people received the question on the power of the European Parliament in the same original form twice without new information. This gave us the possibility to study the change over time without new information as will be discussed in both this and the following sections.

Bibliography

- Achen, C.H. (1975), 'Mass political attitudes and the survey response', *American Political Science Review* 69, pp. 1218-1231.
- Battista, J.M. and W.E. Saris (1997), 'Tests of stability in attitude research', *Quality and Quantity* 31, pp. 269-285.
- Billiet J., G. Loosveldt and L. Waterplas (1986), *Het survey-interview onderzocht*. Leuven: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.
- Converse, P.E. (1964), 'The nature of belief systems in mass publics', in: D. Apter (ed.), *Ideology and Discontent*. New York: Free Press.
- Converse, P.E. (1970), 'Attitudes and non-attitudes: continuation of a dialogue', in: E.R. Tuft (ed.), *The quantitative analysis of social problems*. Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley.
- Gamson, W.A. and A. Modigliani (1987), 'The changing culture of affirmative action', *Research in Political Sociology*.
- Judd, C.M. and M. Milburn (1980), 'The structure of attitude systems in the general public: Comparisons of a structural equation model', *American Sociological Review* 89, pp. 309-325.
- Judd, C.M., J.A. Krosnick and M.A. Milburn (1981), 'Political involvement and attitude structure in the general public', *American Sociological Review* 46, pp. 660-669.
- Kapteyn, P. (1996), 'Tussen Nederland en Europa gaapt een diep gat', *NRC-Handelsblad*, 18 June 1996.
- Kapteyn, P. and B. Schijf (1996), *Europese gezindheid in Nederland*. Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis.
- Lodge, M., M.R. Steenbergen and S. Brau (1995), 'The responsive voter: Campaign information and the dynamics of candidate evaluation', *American Political Science Review* 89, pp. 309-326.
- Luskin, R.C. (1987), 'Measuring political sophistication', *American Journal of Political Science* 31, pp. 856-899.
- Molenaar, N.J. (1986), *Formulerings-effecten in survey-interviews*. Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit Uitgeverij.
- Neijens, P. (1987), *The choice questionnaire: Design and evaluation of an instrument for*

- collecting informed opinions of a population. Amsterdam: Free University Press.
- Piazza, T. and P.M. Sniderman (1996), *Incorporating experiments into computer-assisted surveys*. Paper presented at the Intercasic conference in San Antonio, Texas, December 11-14.
- Saris, W.E., P. Neijens and J.A.de Ridder (1985), *Kernenergie: Ja of nee?* Amsterdam: SSO.
- Saris, W.E. and H. Hartman (1990) 'Common factors can always be found but can they also be rejected?', *Quality and Quantity* 24, pp. 471-490.
- Scherpenzeel, A.C. (1995), *A question of quality: Evaluating survey questions by MTMM studies*. Amsterdam: NIMMO.
- Schuman and Presser (1981), *Questions and answers in attitude surveys: Experiments on question form, wording and context*. New York: Academic Press.
- Sniderman, P.M., R.A. Brody and P.E. Tetlock (eds.) (1991), *Reasoning and choice: Explorations in political psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sniderman, P.M., T. Piazza and A. Kendrick (1991), 'Ideology and issue persuadability: Dynamics of racial policy attitudes', in: P.M. Sniderman, R.A. Brody and P.E. Tetlock (eds.), *Reasoning and choice: explorations in political psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stimson, J.A. (1975), 'Belief systems: Constraint, complexity and the 1972 election', in: R.D. Niemi and H. Weisberg (eds.), *Controversies in American voting behavior*. San Francisco: Freeman.
- Van der Brug, W. (1997), *Where's the party? Voters' perceptions of party positions*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Amsterdam.
- Zaller, J.R. (1992), *The nature and origins of mass opinion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Appendix: Measurement of knowledge about Europe

Three measures have been developed. The first two are based on knowledge about the membership of different countries of the EU and the NATO.

The questions were as follows:

During the last few months a discussion has been going on about the European Union and the NATO. Can you indicate which of the following countries belong to the EU/NATO?

- 0 do not know
- 1 is a member
- 2 is not a member

Denmark
Austria
Sweden
Norway
Portugal
Turkey
Greece
Switzerland
Monaco
Finland

On the basis of the answers a scale from 0 to 10 correct answers could be built. The results have been presented in Table 9. If a person replied 'don't know' this answer was evaluated as incorrect.

The third measure was based on the number of 'don't know' answers on policy question about the EU. The questions used were the following:

1. Can you indicate with which statement you agree the most:
 - 1 the EU serves the safety of Europe
 - 2 the EU serves the wealth in Europe
 - 3 the EU makes Europe a world power
 - 4 the EU promotes the European culture
 - 5 the EU serves the interests of Germany, France and Great Britain
 - 6 the EU is a threat to the Dutch state
 - 0 do not know
2. What is the value of the ECU?
 - 1 fl 1.00
 - 2 fl 1.75
 - 3 fl 2.50
 - 4 fl 3.25
 - 5 fl 4.00
 - 0 do not know

3. Which of the following organizations has most of the power in the EU ?
- 1 European Commission
 - 2 European Parliament
 - 3 The Council of Ministers
 - 0 do not know
4. The EU is a free market and not a state. Do you expect that in the next 15 years the EU will change into a United States of Europe of which the Netherlands will be a part ? Or do you expect the EU to remain what it is; a union of co-operating but independent states ?
- 1 Europe will be a state
 - 2 Europe will remain a union of independent states
 - 0 do not know
5. Which option is the most attractive one in the long-term?
- 1 Europe will be a state
 - 2 Europe will remain a union of independent states
 - 0 do not know
6. The open borders between the European countries increase the chances of criminality. If you had a choice between some options to reduce these chances which one would you chose ?
- 1 intensify the control at the national borders
 - 2 create a European police force and justice system
 - 0 do not know
7. Are you in favour of a European army under the supervision of France, England and Germany or do you think that NATO under the supervision of the US must be continued?
- 1 a European army under France, England and Germany
 - 2 continue NATO under the US
 - 3 I am against an army
 - 0 do not know
8. A European currency will improve the economic traffic but take away the financial independence of the Netherlands. Are you in favour of a European currency ?
- 1 in favour of the European currency
 - 2 against a European currency
 - 0 do not know
9. Recently the Netherlands has paid more for European activities than it has received. Is that acceptable ?
- 1 yes, acceptable
 - 2 no, not acceptable
 - 0 do not know

10. Do you think that European integration will lead to the end of the kingdom in the Netherlands ?
- 1 yes
 - 2 no
 - 0 do not know
11. Do you think that through European integration the Dutch language will become a kind of dialect ?
- 1 yes
 - 2 no
 - 0 do not know
12. Do you think that European integration will lead to a reduction in social security in the Netherlands ?
- 1 yes
 - 2 no
 - 0 do not know

Here only the number of do not know answers was counted and used as a measure for knowledge. The score goes from 0 to 12. The distribution of the scores is presented in Table 9.