



**EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01AM TUESDAY JUNE 2**

[www.taxpayersalliance.com](http://www.taxpayersalliance.com)

## **A divergence of minds? Polling MEPs and the public on key European issues**

**By Dr Lee Rotherham**

A new TaxPayers' Alliance/ComRes poll reveals the growing gulf of opinion on the EU between the public and MEPs sitting in Brussels and Strasbourg. 101 MEPs and 1020 members of the British public were surveyed to ascertain their opinions on a range of key issues regarding the EU and compare politicians to the people.

ComRes surveyed 1020 British adults by telephone between 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> May 2009, whilst MEPs' opinions were gathered during the month of April 2009. The MEPs surveyed are from across the European Union, and the results are weighted to make them a representative sample both geographically and politically of the European Parliament. The public poll was taken amongst a representative sample of the British public.

Both groups were asked whether they Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree or Neither Agree nor Disagree with six key statements about the EU's relationship with the people.

The six statements that we asked MEPs for opinions on were as follows:

- 1 Referendums should be held in member states before significantly expanding EU powers;
- 2 Member states should break EU rules if they think it is in their national interest;
- 3 Generally, the EU is good for ordinary people;
- 4 MEPs should pay a lower rate of income tax than the people they represent;
- 5 The EU listens to what the general public want;
- 6 All EU member states become members of the Euro.



The six parallel questions we asked members of the British public were:

- 1 The British people should be asked in a referendum before significantly expanding EU powers;
- 2 Britain should break EU rules if we think it is in our national interest;
- 3 Generally, the EU is good for ordinary people;
- 4 MEPs should pay a lower rate of income tax than the people they represent;
- 5 The EU listens to what the general public want;
- 6 Britain should become a member of the Euro.

As the MEPs polled were from a range of member states, their questions are framed with regard to EU/Member State relationships, whilst the questions for the British public specifically mentioned Britain where relevant.

We review the responses to each of these questions, by the British public and by MEPs, grouped alongside each other.

## Key findings

Question	Public		MEP	
	Net Agree, %	Net Disagree, %	Net Agree, %	Net Disagree, %
Referendum	88	10	50	38
Break rules	72	25	23	68
EU good	48	49	81	11
MEP tax	15	82	7	75
EU listens	26	71	41	30
Euro	28	68	55	32

### 1. Referenda on expanding EU powers

- 88% of the British public believe that there should be a referendum before expanding EU powers, compared to 11% against. This majority is clear and consistent across all ages, social grades and regions, and is particularly strong amongst the young.
- By contrast, MEP opinion was much less enthusiastic about referenda. Just 50% of MEPs agreed or strongly agreed with the proposition; 37% disagreed or strongly disagreed. This sets MEPs starkly at odds with the UK general public.
- Each main UK party is likely to be embarrassed by their EU allies. The Conservatives' allies are strongly opposed to referenda, Labour's allies are strongly in favour and the Liberal Democrats' group are overwhelmingly opposed.
- The strong opinion on this issue suggests that little known clauses of the Lisbon treaty, such as that which allows for future changes to be made without new treaties – and thus referenda – would be opposed strongly.

### 2. Breaking EU rules in the national interest

- 72% of the British public believes Britain should break EU rules if it is thought to be in the national interest. Only 25% of the public oppose that principal. As with support for referenda, this majority is strong and consistent throughout age groups, social classes and regions.
- The views of MEPs are directly the opposite of the British public's. 68% of MEPs disagree or strongly disagree, whilst only 23% agree or strongly agree. All three main political groups in the European Parliament are of the same opinion. British MEPs are in two minds about whether to break EU rules, but are still well behind the public.

### **3. Is the EU good for ordinary people?**

- On balance, the British public thinks that the EU is not good for ordinary people – by a very narrow margin of 49% to 48% of respondents. Within that, scepticism is more strongly entrenched than the belief that the EU is good for people.
- Regional variations are noticeable. The Midlands, Northern England, Wales and the South West have majorities believing that the EU is not a positive for ordinary people. People in the South East are the most supportive of the proposition that the EU is good for ordinary people.
- Wealthier social groups are clearly more positive about the EU's impact than less well-off groups.
- MEPs are out of touch with the opinions of the British public. 79 % of MEPs see the EU as being positive compared to a mere 11 % who think the EU is not positive for ordinary people.
- This suggests that the views of the main parties in the European Parliament are an exaggerated version of the liberal elite view of the EU. The views of the main political groupings are particularly out of touch with the views of the public – the EPP (88%), PES (85%) and ALDE (100%). These figures are far higher than even the most pro-EU social class or region in Britain.

### **4. Should MEPs pay less tax than their constituents?**

- The British public were overwhelmingly opposed to the idea that MEPs should enjoy lower taxes than their constituents, by 82% to 15%. No social class, age group or region showed anything other than a strong majority against the idea.
- Similarly, only 10% of MEPs were in favour of the proposition, whilst 75% were opposed.
- However, in practice the European Parliament have already voted for just such a special tax rate for MEPs. This demonstrates clearly the propensity for MEPs to say one thing to the public but vote in the opposite direction in the EU Parliament itself.

### **5. Does the EU listen to what people want?**

- 71% of the British public thought that the EU did not listen to what they want, whilst only 26% thought that it did.
- However, this viewpoint was not shared by MEPs. 41% thought the EU did listen, while only 30% did not. 29% answered that they neither supported nor opposed the proposition. One would naturally expect MEPs, elected to be the voice of the people in Brussels, to believe that the EU is listening, but the fact that not even an outright

majority could be mustered suggests that perhaps even MEPs are beginning to feel powerless in the face of the EU's institutions.

- The responses of UK/Ireland MEPs are particularly revealing, in that they are far more concerned that the EU does not listen to the public than their fellow MEPs from other countries – although they are still less concerned than the British public. This perhaps suggests a divide over the issue of the EU Constitution/Lisbon Treaty in particular.

## **6. Should Britain join the Euro?**

- 28% of the polled public were in favour of joining the Euro. 68% disagreed. Opposition to the Euro was more strongly entrenched than support, with only 12% supporting the Euro strongly, compared with 46% who opposed it strongly.
- Combined, these figures suggest the campaign to join the Euro has definitively been lost, at the very least for a generation.

## **Methodology**

British Public Poll: ComRes interviewed 1020 GB adults by telephone between 8th and 10th May 2009. MEP Poll: ComRes interviewed 101 MEPs by self-completion postal and online surveys 3rd April and 1st May 2009. Data were weighted to be representative demographically of all GB adults. ComRes is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules. Full data tables available at [www.comres.co.uk](http://www.comres.co.uk)



Matthew Elliott, Chief Executive of the TaxPayers' Alliance, said:

*"These results show the stark difference in opinion between the British people and politicians in Brussels. Whilst many MEPs still think the EU is great for everyone, that Britain should join the Euro and that EU rules are sacrosanct, the British public are heading in the opposite direction. People want more referenda, more national disobedience to draft EU rules and a sound rejection of the Euro. Brussels is utterly out of touch with the concerns of the real world."*

### **About the author:**

**Dr Lee Rotherham** is a graduate of the University of London and holds an MPhil and PhD from the University of Birmingham. Dr Rotherham is one of the most experienced researchers on EU issues working in British politics, having been a researcher for the "Westminster Group of Eight" Eurorebels and an adviser to three successive Shadow Foreign Secretaries, a role part-based within the European Parliament. This expertise led to his appointment as Chief of Staff to the Rt Hon David Heathcoat-Amory MP, British parliamentary delegate to the Convention on the Future of Europe. Dr Rotherham played a central role assisting delegates opposing the European Constitution, and the drafters of the Minority Report. A reservist with service in both Iraq and Afghanistan, he has been extensively published internationally.

To arrange broadcast interviews, please contact:

**Mark Wallace**

Campaign Director, The TaxPayers' Alliance

[mark.wallace@taxpayersalliance.com](mailto:mark.wallace@taxpayersalliance.com); 07736 009 548

To discuss the research, please contact:

**Lee Rotherham**

Policy Analyst, The TaxPayers' Alliance

[lee.rotherham@taxpayersalliance.com](mailto:lee.rotherham@taxpayersalliance.com), 077330 48160