

Finns' Attitude towards Globalisation: Preferably through the European Union

INTRODUCTION

The Finnish Business and Policy Forum EVA has a long tradition of surveying public opinion in Finland. The surveys have dealt with a large number of issues, with international questions always given prominence. Finnish attitudes towards European integration have been under special scrutiny since the spring of 1992, when Finland applied for membership in the European Union. The same methodology has been applied throughout the series, guaranteeing intertemporal comparability of the results. A brief description of the methodology and other details of the survey is given at the end of this article.

The latest in this series of attitude surveys was conducted between late November 2003 and mid-January 2004. The results were published in Finnish in February 2004. This article summarises some of the main findings of the study. The focus is on the Finns' view of globalisation, its benefits and drawbacks.

The general impression given by the survey results is that Finns see the European Union as their home base. General attitudes towards the EU are now more favourable than at any other time during Finland's nine-year membership. This does not, however, preclude criticism aimed at several features of the Union. The world outside, on the other hand, is viewed with concern, in some respects one might even say with apprehension. The EU is expected to provide a shelter against these 'outside' threats.

GLOBALISATION IS SEEN AS WORRISOME

Globalisation, the increasingly international nature of business, economics, and politics, is a phenomenon that most Finns do not appar-



KAI TORVI

Project Manager
Finnish Business and Policy Forum, EVA

ently welcome. The statement 'Globalisation means that countries with cheap labour will increasingly take away Finnish jobs' receives support from almost two-thirds of the respondents. It is also noteworthy that this attitude has become significantly more common over the past few years. (Figure 1.)

The relatively reserved attitude towards globalisation is widely shared. Even though dividing the sample by age, educational attainment, or socioeconomic position does produce differences between the various subgroups, no single subgroup has a majority against the statement. As can be expected, the young, those with an academic degree and students are the least pessimistic about the effects of globalisation on the Finnish economy. (Figure 2.)

Will globalisation benefit the world as a whole? The Finns' answer to this is mainly one of uncertainty. Well over forty per cent of the respondents find it hard to take stock of the statement 'Globalisation of the international

economy will increase worldwide welfare'. The proportion of those agreeing, just over one-fifth, is considerably smaller than the share of those disagreeing.

The rather pessimistic attitude displayed in Figures 1 and 2 is probably largely explained by recent public debate about the so-called 'China syndrome' in Finland. This phrase refers to the fact that in recent years several plant closures and other redundancies in Finland have been caused by the shifting of production to China or other low-cost countries. The media have, however, not emphasised the fact that the success of most of Finland's leading firms is very much based on the global reach of their activities. Therefore it is quite likely that the general public overestimate the negative effects of globalisation and fail to appreciate all of its benefits.

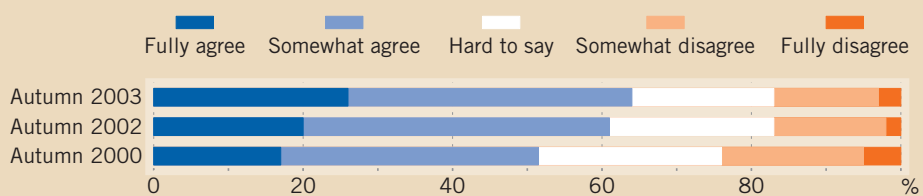
The European Union and its actions are seen as the main remedy to the problems caused by

globalisation. More than eighty per cent of citizens agree with the notion that the EU should act to improve European competitiveness to safeguard against further job losses (Figure 3). The Union is actually seen to be doing this already. When the respondents were given a list of 28 possible characteristics describing the EU, the notion 'It strengthens Europe's position in worldwide competition' received the third highest support. It is relevant to add that, of the positive features, this was the one receiving the most support.

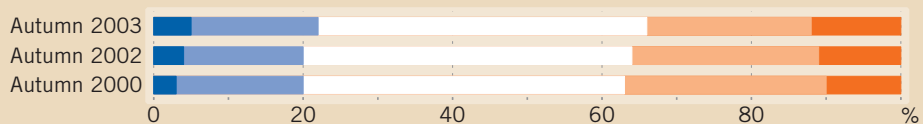
THE EUROPEAN UNION IS OK, BUT THE REST OF THE WORLD IS LESS SO

Almost ten years after joining the European Union, the Finns seem to have come to grips with their membership. Attitudes towards Finland's membership are mostly positive or neutral, with only a quarter of the citizens viewing membership negatively (Figure 4). Even fewer would like to see their country leaving the Union. At nineteen per cent, this is the

Figure 1. "A) Globalisation Means that Countries with Low Labour Costs Will Increasingly Take Away Finnish Jobs"



"B) Globalisation of the International Economy Will Increase Worldwide Welfare"



Sources: EVA, Yhdyskuntatutkimus Oy 2003-2004.

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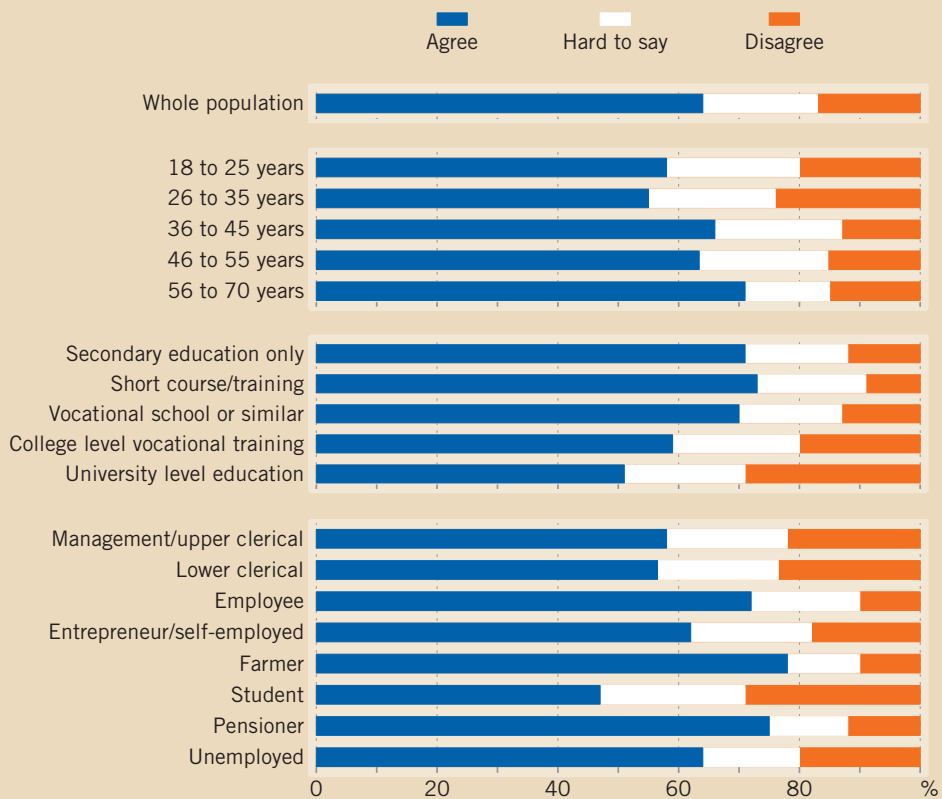
lowest figure encountered since 1995, the first year of Finnish membership. (Figure 5.)

When it comes to the world outside the EU, the Finns' attitudes are considerably less positive. The imminent enlargement of the Union by ten new members receives lukewarm support – roughly one-third feel positively and one-third negatively about it. Even this level of acceptance may be the result of surrendering to the inevitable: Over sixty per cent of the respondents

would like the enlargement process to be suspended for a lengthy period of time after the spring of 2004. (Figure 6.) This is in contradiction with official Union policy, as the accession of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007 has already been more or less decided on.

Russia has for obvious reasons always played a major role in Finland's external relations. At the moment, the Finns' views of this vast country are mixed. On the one hand, they view the

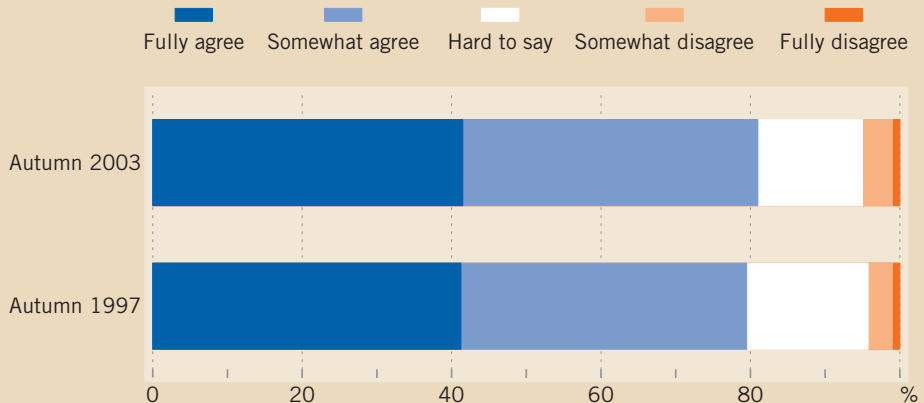
Figure 2. "Globalisation Means that Countries with Low Labour Costs Will Increasingly Take Away Finnish Jobs"



Sources: EVA, Yhdyskuntatutkimus Oy 2003-2004.

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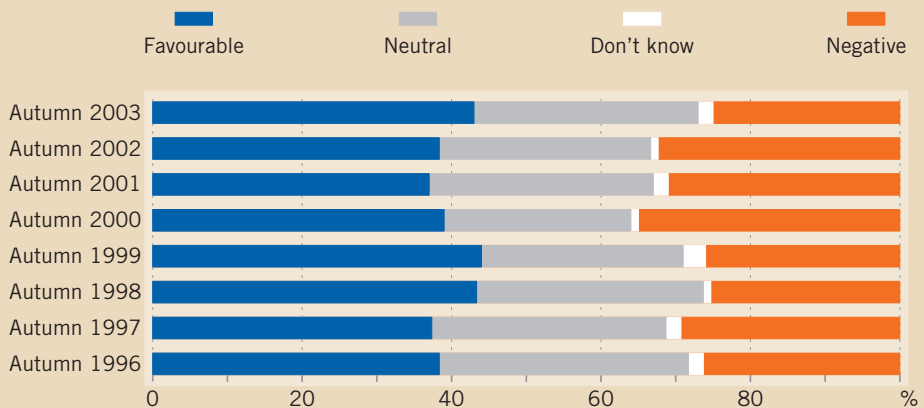
Figure 3. "The EU Should Work More Efficiently to Improve European Competitiveness to Avoid a Situation Where Most New Jobs are in America and Asia"



Sources: EVA, Yhdyskuntatutkimus Oy 2003-2004.

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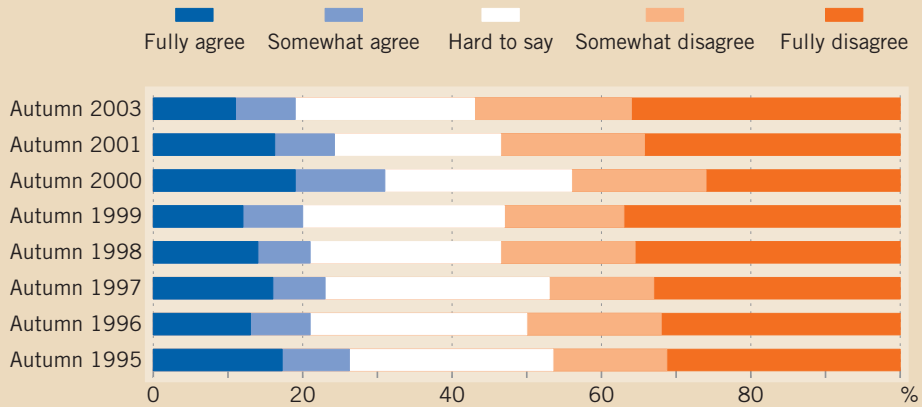
Figure 4. "Current Attitudes towards Finnish EU Membership"



Sources: EVA, Yhdyskuntatutkimus Oy 2003-2004.

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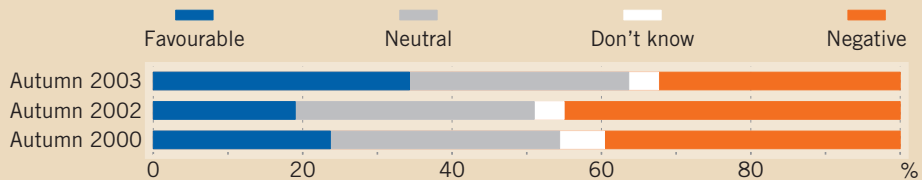
Figure 5. "Finland Should Leave the EU"



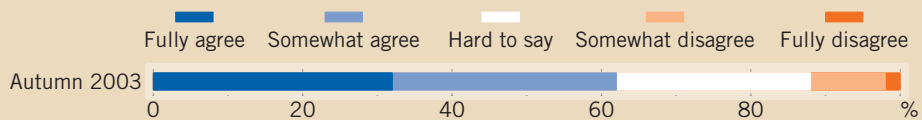
Sources: EVA, Yhdyskuntatutkimus Oy 2003-2004.

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Figure 6. "A) Current Attitudes towards EU Enlargement"



"B) EU Enlargement Ought to be Stopped for a Long Period After the Ten New Member States Already admitted Join the Spring of 2004"



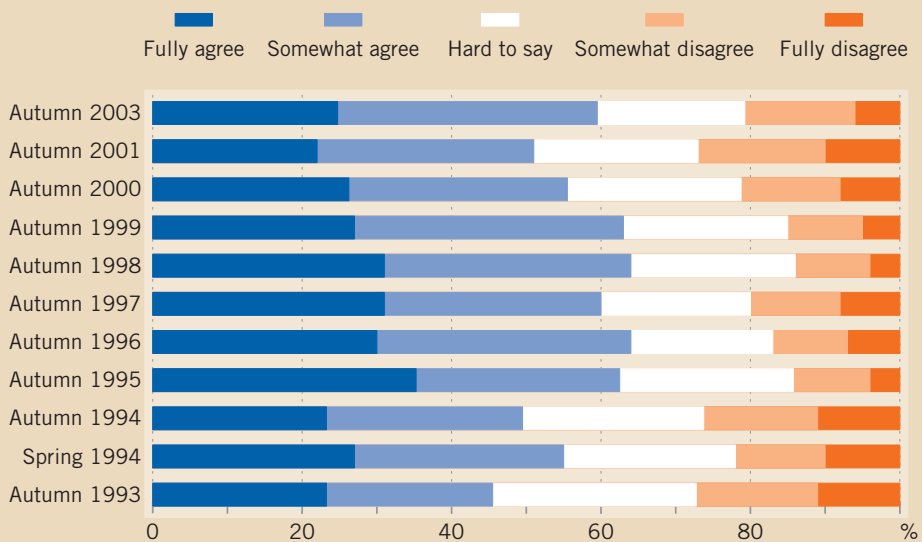
Sources: EVA, Yhdyskuntatutkimus Oy 2003-2004.

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possible instability of the country with apprehension, and seek refuge from the EU against this threat. A traditional military threat is apparently not, however, perceived from this direction, as membership in NATO is not felt to give the same degree of shelter as the European Union. (Figure 7.) On the other hand, more than sixty per cent feel that Finland should primarily develop her relations with Russia and over forty per cent hope that Russia would once again become Finland's largest trading partner.

Joining NATO, ending Finland's traditional policy of military non-alliance, has been a major issue in recent Finnish public debate. The majority of citizens (55 per cent) are against this course of action, and only a fifth support it. This is another case where Finns see the world outside the EU with suspicion. Although the majority of NATO member countries are members of the EU as well, the military alliance is in Finnish eyes dominated by the United States, and at least in purely military terms this is surely true.

Figure 7. "A) As a Neighbour of Unstable Russia, Finland is Better Off and More Secure as a Member of the EU than Outside the Union"



"B) As a Neighbour of Unstable Russia, Finland would be Better Off and More Secure as a Member of NATO than with Military Non-alliance"



Sources: EVA, Yhdyskuntatutkimus Oy 2003-2004.

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The United States is not viewed favourably by Finns. Her foreign policy receives scant support, and the level of criticism has increased from the high level recorded a year ago. Again, it is hoped that the EU would take a major role in challenging US dominance. (Figure 8.) There are obvious reasons for this: The Iraqi war and its aftermath, American refusal to join the Kyoto agreement, and general unilateralism that the present administration seems to be pursuing. As will be shown below, Finns hold international environmental agreements in high regard, and they would like global problems to be addressed multilaterally, e.g., through the United Nations.

China very much symbolizes the emerging economies in the Finnish discussion, as was pointed out above. The rise of this giant country to a position of economic and political power within the next decade is thought to be likely by 63 per cent of the respondents. On the other hand, only 17 per cent think this

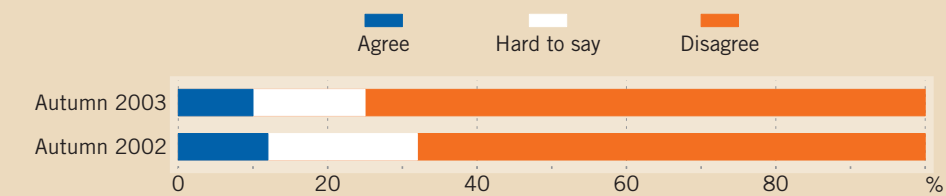
would be desirable, while 46 per cent disagree. This is further proof that global developments are considered to be threats rather than opportunities by the bulk of the Finnish population.

THE WORLD CANNOT BE IGNORED, HOWEVER

Although Finns show a certain degree of suspicion towards the world outside the European Union, this does not mean that they would shun global actions altogether. The United Nations is an organisation very much favoured by Finns, two-thirds of them hope that its influence in world affairs would grow significantly. They are not, however, guilty of wishful thinking: Less than a fifth holds this development to be likely within the next decade, while a clear majority disagree. Opinion on whether the UN should be developed into a world government is more divided, however (Figure 9).

Earlier attitude surveys carried out by EVA have shown that Finns care deeply about the environment, and that they are concerned about its

Figure 8. "A) The United States' Course of Action in World Politics is Correct, and it Deserves Support from Finns as Well"



"B) The EU Ought to be Developed into a Strong Economic and Political Counterweight to the United States"



Sources: EVA, Yhdyskuntatutkimus Oy 2003-2004.

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present state. This attitude also extends to the international level. Virtual unanimity reigns over the question of solving environmental problems in an international context (Figure 8). More than two-thirds also agree that the rules and regulations of international environmental agreements should be considerably tightened.

Global action is also seen necessary in the economic sphere. More than two-thirds of the respondents agree that a prerequisite for Finland's future success is an orientation to global co-operation and trade in addition to activities within the EU. It is noteworthy, however, that support for this notion has been slowly declining during Finland's EU membership. Does this imply that as the Finns are becoming more satisfied with their EU membership, their appreciation of the global arena is dwindling? (Figure 10.)

Liberalisation of international trade and investment receives lukewarm support at best. The

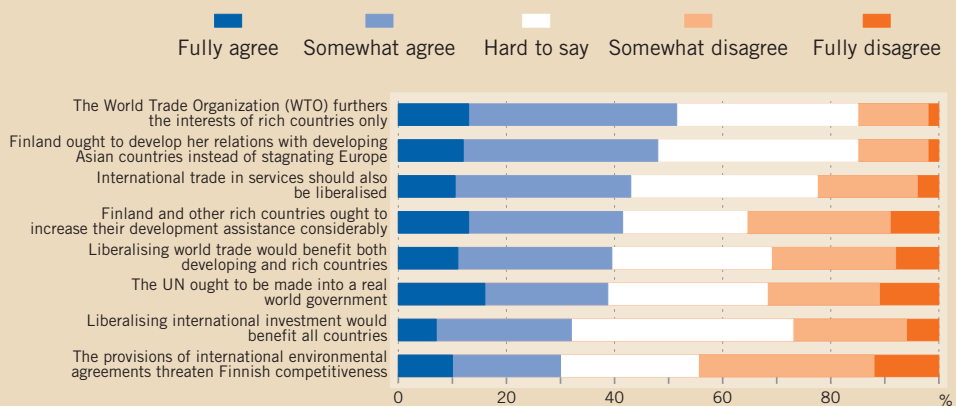
World Trade Organization, saddled with the task of promoting free trade, is viewed with some suspicion, and almost a third of the citizens doubt the global beneficialness of trade liberalisation. There is large-scale uncertainty about the effects of deregulating international investment. (Figure 9.)

HOW THE SURVEY WAS CARRIED OUT

The study is the thirteenth in the series of EVA's surveys of attitudes towards European integration and other international issues. The series was started in the spring of 1992. The survey, like the previous ones, was commissioned from Mr. Pentti Kiljunen of Yhdyskuntatutkimus Oy. The Finnish report, 'Turvassa EU:ssa – kaukana kavala maailma' was published in February 2004, and can be found on EVA's website: www.eva.fi.

The survey is based on polling 1,310 respondents, who formed a random sample of Finland's 18- to 70-year-old population. They

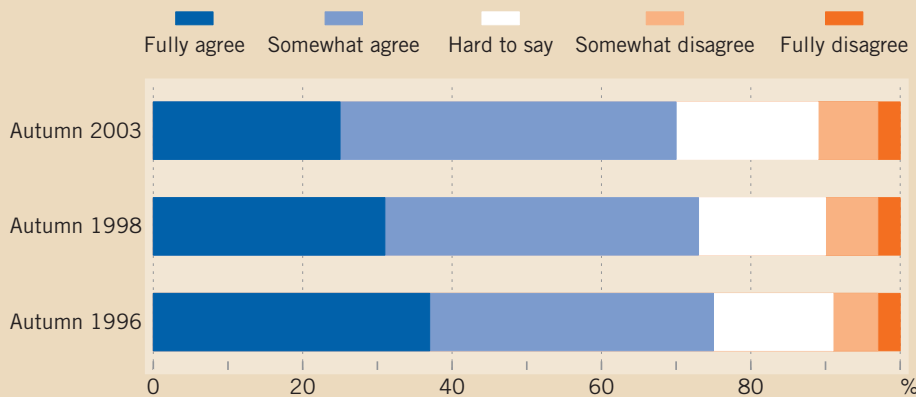
Figure 9. "Attitudes towards Statements on International Economics and Politics"



Sources: EVA, Yhdyskuntatutkimus Oy 2003-2004.

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Figure 10. "To be Successful in the Future, Finland Must Increasingly Direct Herself Towards Global Co-operation and Trade, EU Membership Alone is not Sufficient"



Sources: EVA, Yhdyskuntatutkimus Oy 2003-2004.

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received a written questionnaire by mail. The replies were received between November 26th, 2003 and January 16th, 2004.

The sample is representative of the whole population with respect to demographic, social and regional factors.

The five per cent confidence interval for the results in the whole sample is one to three

percentage points in either direction depending on the form of the distribution. In subgroups the confidence interval is somewhat larger.

The data of the whole series of surveys are held at the Finnish Social Science Data Archive (FSD), a unit of the University of Tampere. The data are available for research and teaching purposes. FSD's website is www.fsd.uta.fi.