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European say U.S. should pay to rebuild Iraq

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BRUSSELS (Reuters) - Two-thirds of European Union citizens think the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq was unjustified and the United States should pay to rebuild the country, an opinion poll taken for the European Commission shows.

The survey, taken in all 15 EU member states in the run-up to last week's Iraq donors' conference in Madrid, found that most Europeans want the United Nations and Iraq's provisional government to manage the reconstruction effort, not Washington.

And most oppose sending their own country's troops to keep peace in Iraq, although opinion on that is more evenly divided.

The poll published on Monday showed overwhelming support for EU humanitarian assistance to the Iraqi people but a much narrower majority in favour of financial participation in rebuilding the country.

Detailed findings reflected some predictable splits between those countries whose governments supported or participated in the war to oust Saddam Hussein, and those which opposed it.

But six months after the toppling of Saddam, a majority in every EU country except Denmark said the war was unjustified.

Overall, 68 percent of EU citizens questioned said the war was totally or rather unjustified, while 29 percent said it was totally or rather justified.

The biggest anti-war majorities were in Greece (96 percent), Austria (86 percent), France (81 percent) and Spain (79 percent), even though the Spanish government supported the war.

Asked who should finance the rebuilding of Iraq, 65 percent of EU citizens said the United States, 44 percent the United Nations, 29 percent the Iraqi provisional government and 24 percent said the European Union. Multiple answers were allowed.

Asked whether they favoured their own country's financial participation in rebuilding Iraq, 54 percent said they were totally or partially in favour, while 45 percent said they were totally or partially opposed.

Overall, 54 percent opposed sending peacekeepers from their own country while 44 percent were in favour.

However, the detailed breakdown showed majorities for sending troops in Denmark, the Netherlands, Ireland, Italy, Sweden and Britain. The strongest opposition to sending peacekeepers was in Germany, Greece, Austria and France.

The Eurobarometer poll was conducted in all 15 EU member states by the Taylor Nelson Sofres/EOS Gallup Europe organisations with a total sample of 7,515 -- roughly 500 per country -- questioned between October 8 and 16.

The margin of error stated was +/- 1.2 percentage points for the overall EU findings, and +/- 4.4 percentage points in individual member states.

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