

European elections: meeting the expectations of a fragmented public opinion in a “new age of uncertainty”

• Executive Summary

The forthcoming European elections will be a key democratic moment for Europe's citizens. It will be an important opportunity (every five years) to choose their European representatives directly by universal suffrage. The context in which these elections will take place highlights the challenges facing Europeans, the responses to which may be shaped – at least in part – by the legislative and budgetary choices made in the next legislature over the next five years. The partisan balance of power that will emerge from this election will have an impact not only on the agenda of the future Commission, but more broadly on the direction of European policy up to 2030.

Against this backdrop, citizens are expressing a heightened interest in the forthcoming European elections as a result of the effects of the recent crises and also due to a form of “normalisation” of European political life. **They are expressing concerns and expectations that will constitute political priorities at the heart of their demand for democracy: concern and very strong pessimism on the socio-economic front, due to inflation and the stagnation of activity resulting from the energy crisis; defence of their purchasing power, their health, the fight against climate change, defence of their security, immigration and asylum, which currently rank ninth among the priorities identified.** Faced with the return of war to the European continent, diplomatic and trade tensions between the United States and China, the climate emergency and the acceleration of technological, energy and



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digital transformations, Europeans are becoming aware of the need to strengthen European cooperation in these areas. Over the long term, opinion polls show that **there is strong public support for common European policies in areas affecting “European common goods” such as energy and defence.**

However, we need to go further in understanding Europeans’ attitudes to European integration. The distinction between ‘diffuse’ and ‘specific’ support means that attachment to the principles of European integration (‘diffuse’ support), on the one hand, and evaluations or demands in terms of public policy (‘specific’ support), on the other, cannot be placed on the same analytical footing.

With regard to the first dimension (“widespread support”), European opinion is first of all segmented geographically. Eleven countries are clearly in favour of European integration, in descending order of support: Denmark, Malta, Sweden, Ireland, Portugal, Finland, Luxembourg, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Latvia and Poland. **Five countries are in an intermediate position, very weakly on the favourable side or very weakly on the unfavourable side of European integration:** the western part of Germany, Croatia, Romania, Estonia and Belgium. **Twelve countries are clearly on the unfavourable side,** in ascending order of negative opinion: Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Spain, Austria, Slovenia, Cyprus, France, Slovakia, Greece and the eastern part of Germany. **While the ‘country effect’ continues to play a prominent role in mapping support for European integration, powerful sociological factors are producing effects that may be at least as important as those relating to belonging to a particular country.** The data shows a strong resilience to the social divide and the ‘sociological bias’ that opinions about Europe usually reveal. **The diploma effect, which is more powerful than the age or generation effect, acts here as a catalyst for the effects of social status on opinions.**

With regard to the second dimension (‘specific support’), the analysis highlights a divide - amplified by the Covid crisis, the war in Ukraine and the climate emergency - between citizens’ expectations of the EU institutions and their assessments of the latter’s actions. The most telling responses that emerge from all these requests, expectations and assessments, as well as from all these prospective or retrospective judgements about their country or the EU, show that **the divide between Europeans’ positive and negative opinions of the EU is strongly structured by an optimistic or pessimistic view of the economy and by confidence in national and European public action.** On the positive side, this clearly translates into support and confidence in the EU’s actions during and since the Covid pandemic, as well as approval of measures in support of Ukraine and sanctions against Russia. **When these Europeans, who are most in favour of European integration, are asked what the most important problems facing their countries are today, they cite “the environment and climate change”, “housing”, “the education system” and “the international situation” as the most important.** They also express strong support for further European integration in many areas. **In contrast, the Europeans most opposed to the EU and European integration are pessimistic about the economic future of their country and the EU, but are above all characterised by their very strong opposition to the EU’s support for Ukraine and dissatisfaction with its actions during major crises, such as the Covid pandemic.** The lack of support for European integration and the EU’s actions in favour of Ukraine interacts with an attitude of doubt about climate change and public policies for the ecological transition.

By cross-referencing the dimensions of ‘diffuse’ support for the EU with the dimensions of ‘specific’ support, the study identifies the major dimensions of support and the categories of the typology in sociological terms, in geographical terms and in terms of their support for European policies or European integration

projects. The analysis thus leads to the establishment of a typology of opinions that groups Europeans into five major 'classes' or categories.

A first 'class' (or category) represents 10% of Europeans: those who are very favourable to European integration and who choose all the response options that correspond to this general 'very positive' attitude: confidence in the European institutions, optimism about the EU and its future, the feeling that things are going in the right direction in the EU, satisfaction with democracy in the EU. **The second 'class' is made up of 48% of Europeans who have a fairly positive opinion of the EU:** while they always choose response options that are favourable to the EU, the intensity of their support is less strongly expressed and it is often the 'fairly positive' or 'fairly confident' response options that are found in this category. **The third 'class' is made up of 10% of Europeans who can be described as 'indifferent' or who do not have very structured opinions on the EU:** the most frequently encountered response modalities are 'don't know', 'neutral' or 'rather unfavourable'. **The fourth 'class' is made up of 26% of Europeans who share 'fairly negative' opinions about the EU,** with the most common responses being 'fairly negative' and 'fairly suspicious' of the European institutions. **Finally, the fifth 'class' is made up of 6% of Europeans who are 'very negative' about the EU,** and who always choose the most negative responses. **If we divide these five 'classes' into positive, ambivalent and negative opinions, we obtain: 58% positive opinions, 32% negative opinions and 10% ambivalent opinions but with a rather negative ambivalence towards the EU.**

The breakdown by country of these five categories shows very significant geographical and national contrasts. It is worth noting that the countries that have been members of the EU the longest almost never belong to the group of countries most favourable to the EU, notably France, which is clearly one of the three countries most unfavourable to European integration. **The significant national segmentation of opinions on European integration cannot simply refer to a sociological segmentation.** This typology reveals the links between representations and opinions on the EU. The data shows how difficult it is to create a consensus among Europeans on the meaning they give to European integration: **not only is support for the EU sociologically and nationally differentiated, but even more fundamentally it is divided on the meaning given to European integration.** The question of the meaning of European integration for citizens is essential because it affects not only its course (its direction) but also its meaning and therefore its legitimacy. This question is essential because what is at stake in the forthcoming European elections is precisely the possibility of determining the political and institutional conditions for forging common European policies to meet the expectations of Europeans in the face of current and future challenges. From this perspective, **defining the conditions under which new political compromises can be forged to give meaning to European action in the face of the current crises and to provide answers to the expectations and fears of citizens presupposes taking into account the political dynamics at work not only at institutional level in the Member States and at EU level, but also the transformations of European and national narratives with regard to the construction of Europe.** In this respect, the question of the political narrative is central, and the European elections must be a political moment of democratic confrontation between the different competing political messages.

• Introduction

The next European elections will take place between 6 and 9 June. This is an essential democratic moment. From an institutional point of view, democratic legitimacy results firstly from the democratic definition of the political objectives of the institutions; secondly, it implies the democratic adoption of legislation to achieve these

objectives; and thirdly, it requires the democratic control of the implementation of this legislation. The democratic legitimacy of the European institutions can be both direct and indirect.

With this in mind, at a time when the cycle of polycrisis that Europeans have been facing for the past 15 years has led most national and European players and observers to focus on the effectiveness of public decisions and policies as responses to shocks and emergencies, it is essential to stress that the issue of democratic legitimacy cannot be reduced to the sole question of effectiveness and the results produced. While effectiveness is naturally a necessary condition of legitimacy, especially in a context where representative democracies are being transformed into democracies of opinion, it is not a sufficient condition.

The elections are therefore the only opportunity for citizens to directly choose their representatives, who will sit for 5 years in the European Parliament, the only transnational institution in the world to be elected by direct universal suffrage. The partisan balance of power that will emerge from these elections will have an impact on the legislative and budgetary choices that will be made during the legislature, and will therefore determine the nature of European policy up to 2030.

With this in mind, this study proposes to: analyse the political demand expressed by citizens, as well as their political priorities and expectations in the run-up to the next European elections (1.); go further in understanding the attitudes of Europeans towards European integration, in particular by analysing the geographical and sociological divides that structure European public opinion (2.); establish a typology of European opinions, highlighting expectations that are divided as a result of representations of the EU that are strongly rooted in the Member States (3.).

I WHAT ARE THE PRIORITIES IN PUBLIC OPINION IN THE RUN-UP TO THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS?

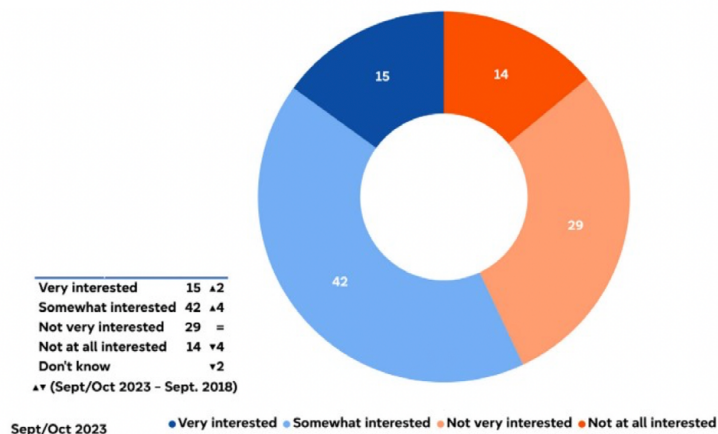
- European citizens faced with crises: increased interest in the European elections. What are the priorities?

The next elections to the European Parliament will take place in less than five months' time in a **very specific national, European and international context**: very strong pessimism about the socio-economic situation as a result of the inflation and stagnation of the economy caused by the energy crisis; the rise and normalisation of the radical and extreme right in many EU member countries; the risk of erosion of support for Ukraine invaded by Putin's Russia and the return of violence in the Middle East.

Against this backdrop, people are expressing greater interest in the forthcoming European elections, even more so than in 2019, which already saw an increase in voter turnout.

CHART 1.

The next European elections will be held in June 2024. How interested or not would you say you are in these elections? (EU27) (%)



▲ Source: Parlemeter, European Parliament Eurobarometer, six months before the 2024 European Elections, 2023

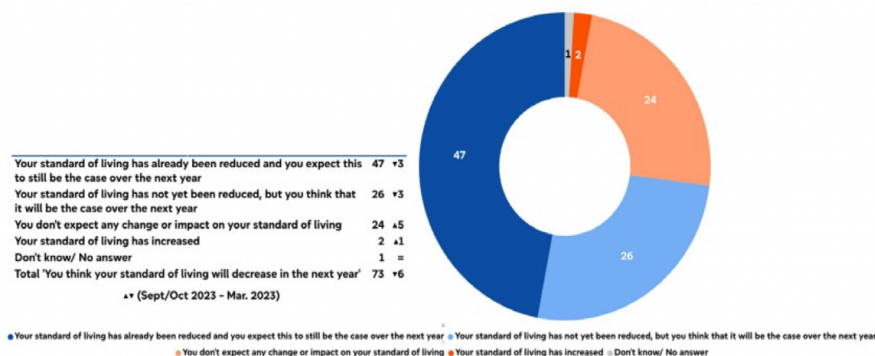
There are two possible reasons for this. Firstly, a form of “normalisation” of European political life: the European debate is no longer reduced to the divide for or against the European Union. This debate is now more focused on the political project, including for the radical left and right, who are transposing their political priorities to the European level. This reflects the limits in public opinion of a simplistic eurosceptic stance - the traditionally europhobic parties have, for example, abandoned their opposition to the euro, which worried public opinion. On the contrary, the radical parties are now promoting the project of a Europe in their own image: focused on the fight against poverty for the radical left, on the fight against immigration for the radical right, even if the latter’s recent gains in the polls seem to give it sufficient confidence to return to some of its traditional anti-European themes (as seen, for example, in the Netherlands and Germany). This indicates the direction the debate could take in the next European elections. It is likely to focus more on the direction of European policies and the shortcomings that have been revealed by successive crises¹. And the radical parties will seek to transpose the traditional divide between opposition and government to the European level.

Secondly, this heightened interest in the forthcoming European elections is no doubt due to the effects of recent crises: in particular the pandemic and the impact of the geopolitical and energy crises.

1 Chopin, T. (2024), « Quel projet politique pour les élections européennes de 2024 ? », *Telos*.

CHART 2.

Many elements, such as the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and rising inflation and prices affect the global economy, including the European Union Member States. Thinking about your personal standard of living (e.g. the goods and services you can afford), which one of these statements comes closest to your personal situation? (EU27) (%)

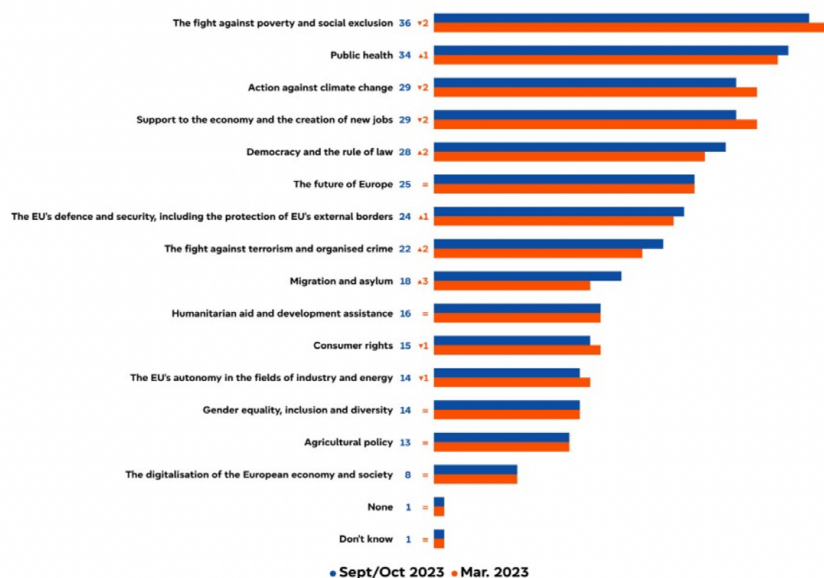


▲ Source: Parlemeter, European Parliament Eurobarometer, six months before the 2024 European Elections, 2023

This is reflected in the results of the latest Parlemeter, which identifies the fight against poverty and social exclusion (36%) and public health (34%) as the top priority issues. The fight against climate change, support for the economy and the creation of new jobs (29%) come a close second; it is notable that immigration and asylum (18%) are currently in ninth place among the priorities identified.

CHART 3.

Which of the following topics would you like to see addressed in priority by the European Parliament? Firstly? And then? (MAX. 4 ANSWERS) (EU27) (%)

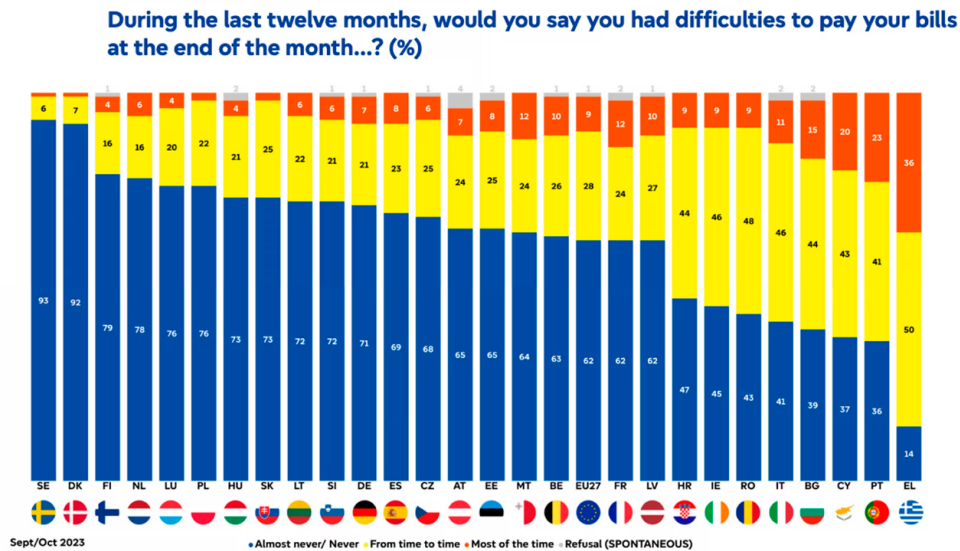


▲ Source: Parlemeter, European Parliament Eurobarometer, six months before the 2024 European Elections, 2023

— The primacy of socio-economic concerns

Socio-economic difficulties continue to affect many Europeans: 73% believe that their standard of living will fall over the next year. More than a third of Europeans (37%) are finding it difficult to pay their bills, either temporarily or most of the time.

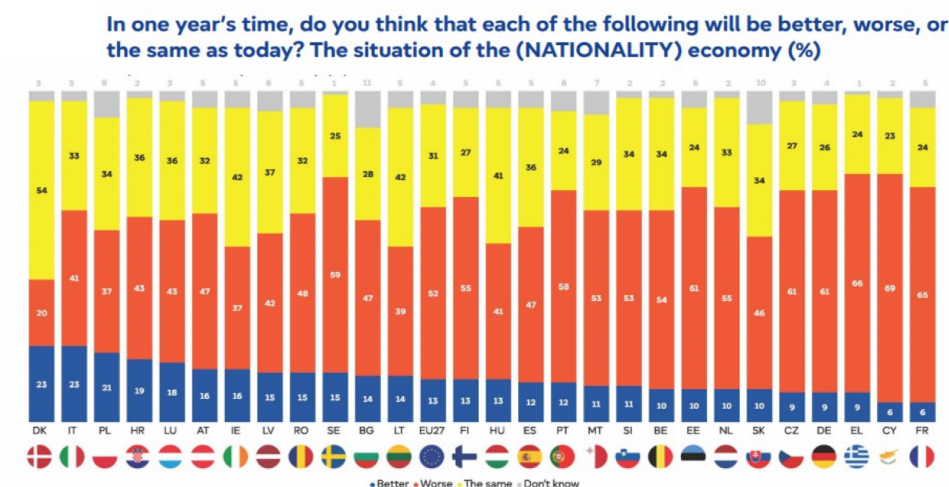
CHART 4.



▲ Source: Parlemeter, European Parliament Eurobarometer, six months before the 2024 European Elections, 2023

In the current context, characterised in particular by the return of inflation, which is weighing on both businesses and household purchasing power, it is notable that Europeans have a pessimistic perception of the economic situation, and that a majority of those questioned in all Member States (with the exception of Denmark, Ireland and Lithuania) fear a deterioration in their country's economic situation in the coming year.

CHART 5.



▲ Source: Parlemeter, European Parliament Eurobarometer, six months before the 2024 European Elections, 2023

— A “new age of uncertainty”

The forthcoming European elections are therefore part of a more structural context that could be described as a “new age of uncertainty”, both economically and socially, expressed in the fear of individual downgrading, and externally, expressed in insecurity about globalisation and the fear of collective downgrading in economic, geopolitical and technological terms.

The return of war to Europe, diplomatic and trade tensions between the United States and China, the urgent need to tackle climate change and the accelerating pace of technological, energy and digital transformations are making Europeans more aware of the need to step up European cooperation in these areas.

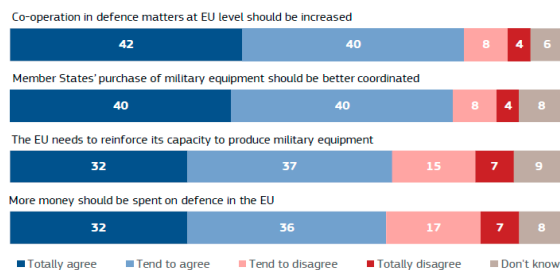
Faced with such external challenges, Europeans see the European Union as a relevant scale capable of providing concrete solutions to the challenges they face, as opinion polls show, particularly in the fields of defence and energy, but also in the area of migration.

CHART 6.

More than 8 in 10 agree that co-operation in defence matters at EU level should be increased (82%) and the purchase of military equipment better coordinated (80%)

Over two thirds of Europeans agree that the EU should reinforce its capacity to produce military equipment (69%) and spend more money on defence (68%)

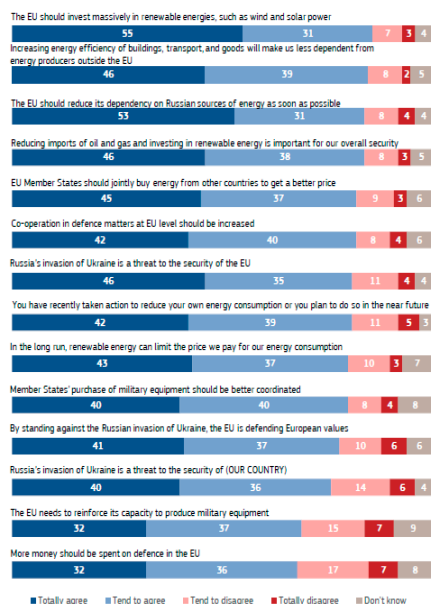
QE3. Please tell to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.
(% - EU27)



▲ Source: Standard Eurobarometer 98, Winter 2022-2023

CHART 7.

Please tell to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. (EU27)



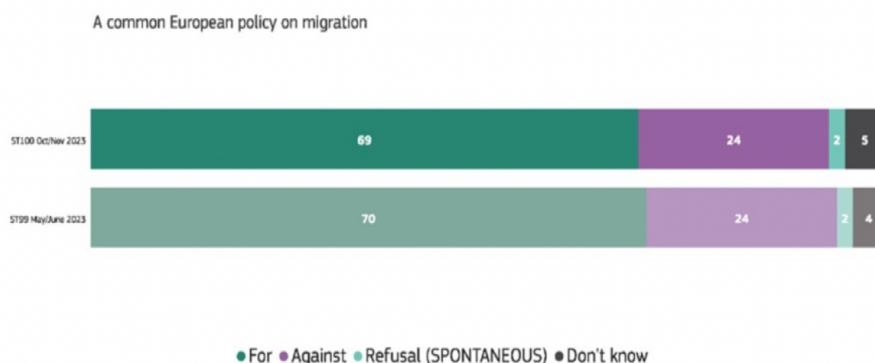
The large majority of EU citizens agree that the EU should:

- Invest in renewable energies (86%)
- Increase energy efficiency of buildings, transport and goods (85%)
- Reduce its dependency on Russian sources of energy (84%) as soon as possible

▲ Source: Standard Eurobarometer 98, Winter 2022-2023

CHART 8.

QB2. What is your opinion on each of the following statements? Please tell for each statement, whether you are for it or against it. (EU27) (%)



▲ Source: Eurobarometer Standard 100, Autumn 2023

Over the long term, opinion polls over the last twenty years have shown that a majority of European citizens expect the European Union and its Member States to take the joint action required by European public goods². Reflection for these public goods³ concerns subjects whose essential nature has been highlighted by recent crises, such as technology, energy and security and defence policy, and all have a (geo)political as well as an economic dimension; moreover, surveys show

² See Lamy, P. and Weizsäcker, J., « Il faut développer les biens publics européens », *Le Monde*, 26 November 2018.

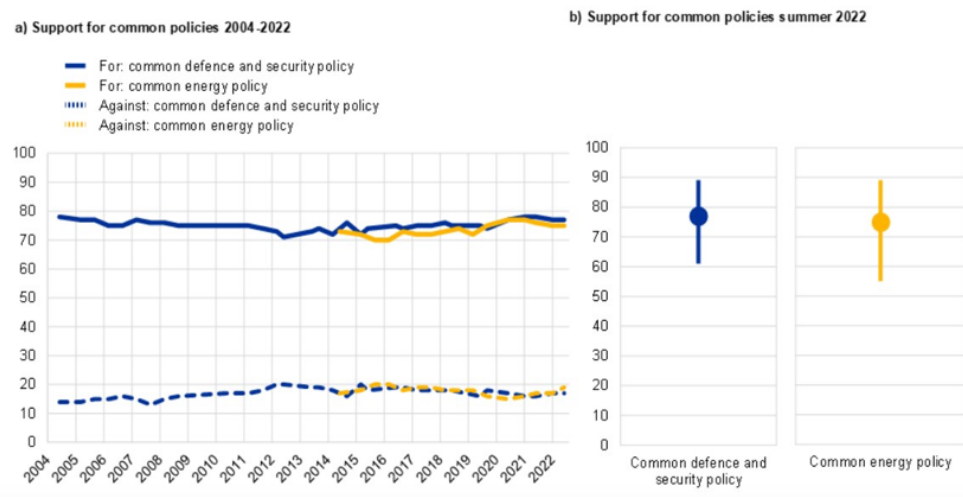
³ Richard Musgrave defined public goods as goods that benefit everyone and whose benefits to one individual do not reduce the benefits to others; cf. Musgrave, R.A., and Musgrave, P.B. (1973), *Public Finance in Theory and Practice*, McGraw-Hill.

that there is strong public support for common European policies in areas affecting these common goods, such as energy and defence in particular.

CHART 9. Support for common policies in EU

Share of EU population in favour of a common defence and security policy and a common energy policy

(percentages)



Note: The question in the Standard Eurobarometer asks "What is your opinion on each of the following statements? Please tell for each statement, whether you are for it or against it. [A common defence and security policy among EU Member States/A common energy policy among EU Member States]". The results in panel b show the share of population stating that they are "For" in latest Standard Eurobarometer 97 with fieldwork performed in June-July 2022. The lines represent the range between the maximum and minimum shares in Member States.

▲ Source: Eurobarometer, European Central Bank

I FRAGMENTED EUROPEAN OPINION: BETWEEN GEOGRAPHICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL SEGMENTATION AND A DIVIDE BETWEEN EXPECTATIONS AND EVALUATION OF EU ACTION, AMPLIFIED BY THE CRISES

To gain a deeper **understanding of Europeans' attitudes towards European integration**, we analysed data from the winter 2022/2023 Eurobarometer survey (Eurobarometer 98.2; see Appendix 1). The advantage of this major opinion survey is that it covers all the member countries⁴ and allows comparisons over time.

Let us begin by describing the state of opinion in general terms. Initially, we chose to use only those indicators that measure 'diffuse' support for European integration, i.e. support expressed in the most general terms. We consider that the expression of this support constitutes the keystone from which the demands expressed in terms of issues or public policies can be broken down and analysed. **The distinction between "diffuse" and "specific" support means that attachment to the principles of European integration ("diffuse" support) and assessments or demands**

⁴ The survey also covers 7 of the candidate countries (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Northern Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey) as well as Norway (a member of the European Economic Area), Switzerland (an EFTA member), Kosovo, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and the United Kingdom.

in terms of public policy (“specific” support) cannot be placed on the same analytical footing⁵.

The analysis of widespread support for European integration takes into account a series of fourteen opinion indicators posed to respondents by Eurobarometer (see Appendix 2).

Rather than analysing these indicators one by one, we can condense their data by processing them simultaneously using a multivariate statistical analysis (multiple correspondence factorial analysis). The aim is to highlight the major dimensions of opinion that structure the answers given to each of the questions. The analysis of the 2023 data is fundamentally in line with that of our previous analyses published in 2021⁶: **two major dimensions structure Europeans’ opinions on European integration. The first dimension, by far the most important and the most structuring (it accounts for 20% of the total variance in the opinions expressed), distinguishes between the most opposing opinions: on the one hand, the most negative opinions and, on the other, the most positive opinions with regard to all the indicators selected. A second, much less structuring dimension (8% of the total variance of the opinions expressed), contrasts the intermediate opinions (for example, the responses “tend to agree” or “tend to disagree”) with the extreme opinions, those that are the most strongly positive or negative.**

- The geographical and sociological logics of a fundamental opposition between opinions in favour of and against European integration

The analysis is based mainly on the first of the two dimensions, the one that allows us to obtain an optimal coding of responses along a continuum that runs from the most favourable to the most unfavourable opinions. Along this dimension, the countries can be ranked in descending order of support for European integration. **Eleven countries are clearly on the side of favourable opinions of European integration**, in descending order of support: Denmark, Malta, Sweden, Ireland, Portugal, Finland, Luxembourg, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Latvia and Poland. **Five countries are in an intermediate position**, very weakly on the favourable side or very weakly on the unfavourable side of European integration: the western part of Germany, Croatia, Romania, Estonia and Belgium. **Twelve countries are clearly on the unfavourable side**, in ascending order of negative opinion: Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Spain, Austria, Slovenia, Cyprus, France, Slovakia, Greece and the eastern part of Germany⁷.

While the ‘country effect’ continues to play a prominent role in mapping support for European integration, powerful sociological factors exert effects that may be at least as important as those of countries. Our analyses are again in line with our

⁵ See the work of Easton, D. (1965), *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*, John Wiley and Sons; see also Cautrès, B. (2014), *Les Européens aiment-ils (toujours) l’Europe ?*, La documentation française, Réflexe Europe.

⁶ Cautrès, B., Chopin, T., Rivière, E. (2021), *Un euroscepticisme à la française. Entre défiance et ambivalence. Le nécessaire « retour de l’Europe en France*, Report n°119/2, Cevipof-Sciences Po/Institut Jacques Delors/Kantar Public, December 2021.

⁷ An important methodological clarification must be made here: the position occupied by the countries along the first dimension of the factorial analysis is a direct function of the percentages of responses to the 14 indicators in the analysis. The method is based on the idea that the percentage profiles of each country are assessed in relation to the average profile observed for all countries. Let’s take Spain as an example: the percentages of opinion in favour of European integration are 8 times out of 14 lower than those found in the EU as a whole, 4 times almost at the same value and 2 times higher. This places Spain among the countries whose opinion of the EU is negative, although on other indicators available but not taken into account in the analysis of the most general and widespread support (for example, opinion on EU enlargement) Spain is very favourable to the EU.

previous analyses: educational qualifications, social class, indicators of socio-economic status and attitudes to unemployment order support for European integration along a scale that ranges from the most advantaged statuses (the most favourable) to the working-class and socially fragile categories (the least favourable). On the side of opinions in favour of European integration, we find (in descending order of support) senior executives, those who are studying, the middle classes, those who finished their studies at the age of 20 or later, the professions, entrepreneurs and company directors, young people and in particular the 15-24 year olds; on the side of unfavourable opinions, we find (in ascending order of unfavourable opinions): employees, craftsmen and shopkeepers, those who finished their studies between the ages of 16 and 19, skilled workers, farmers, unskilled workers, those who finished their studies at the age of 15 or earlier and those who are unemployed.

The data shows a strong resilience to the social divide and the ‘sociological bias’ that opinions about Europe usually reveal. The diploma effect, which is more powerful than the age or generation effect, acts here as a catalyst for the effects of social status on opinions. The sociological segmentation that emerges creates very strong dissensus in the social representations attached to Europe. When the Europeans surveyed by Eurobarometer who have a favourable opinion of the EU are asked what significance they attach to it, it is above all economic prosperity, democracy, social protection, quality of life for future generations, being stronger in the world, cultural diversity and freedom to travel that are cited. On the other hand, for those with an unfavourable opinion, it is above all unemployment, the increase in crime, bureaucracy or the waste of money that are cited. Similarly, when asked about the areas that most create a sense of community among EU citizens, Europeans who support European integration cite above all (in descending order of support): the rule of law, solidarity, values, concern for the environment, the economy, education, culture, inventions, science and technology. By far the top three areas in which Europeans feel united are the rule of law, solidarity and values. These elements confirm the diffuse, broad and rather vague nature of the support that our data measures. At the other end of the opinion spectrum, Europeans who reject European integration find nothing that unites Europeans: they answer ‘none’ and ‘nothing, no such feeling exists’ when asked what areas unite Europeans. The only area they mention, but far behind this lack of feeling, is religion.

- A divide between expectations and assessments of EU action amplified by crises: Covid, Ukraine and climate change

The Eurobarometer survey makes it possible to complete this first approach, that of diffuse support, with the help of numerous batteries of questions relating to the expectations of Europeans, which are defined in several ways: judgements about the economic situation of their countries or the EU, the most important problems facing them or their countries and the EU, support for the general objectives of European integration or unification, support for European public policies, confidence in the decisions taken by the EU during and since Covid and then the Russian invasion of Ukraine, retrospective judgements about the results achieved by the EU.

The most telling responses that emerge from all these requests, expectations and assessments, from all these prospective or retrospective judgements about their country or the EU, show that **the divide between positive and negative opinions of Europeans on the EU is strongly structured by an optimistic or pessimistic view of the economy and by confidence in national and European public action.**

In terms of positive views of the EU, this is clearly reflected in support for and confidence in the EU’s actions during and since the Covid pandemic, as well as approval of measures in support of Ukraine and sanctions against Russia. The

Europeans who are most positive about European integration say they are very satisfied with the way democracy works in their country, trust the EU (with the pandemic in mind) to take the right decisions in the future, rate the situation in their country as very good in general, feel very attached to the EU, and are very satisfied with the measures taken by the EU to combat the pandemic, consider the economic situation in the EU or in their country to be very good, feel that they are fully European citizens, ask for more decisions to be taken at EU level, declare themselves to be in full agreement with the EU's financing of the purchase and delivery of military equipment to Ukraine, or express their full support for the view that "by standing up against the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the EU is defending European values".

When these Europeans, who are most in favour of European integration, are asked what the most important problems facing their countries today are, they cite "the environment and climate change", "housing", "the education system" and "the international situation" as the most important. These views are fairly consistent with what they consider to be the two most important issues facing the EU: 'the environment and climate change', 'the EU's influence in the world' and 'the international situation' are the most frequently cited issues.

They also express strong support for further European integration in a number of areas (in descending order of support): support for the enlargement of the EU to include other countries in the coming years, for a common European policy on migration, for a common foreign policy for the Member States, for a common energy policy for the EU Member States, for a common European trade policy, for a common European health policy and for a common security and defence policy.

In contrast, the Europeans most opposed to the EU and European integration are pessimistic about the economic future of their country and the EU, but are above all characterised by their very strong opposition to the EU's support for Ukraine and dissatisfaction with its actions during major crises, such as the Covid pandemic and the war in Ukraine: they strongly disagree with "providing humanitarian aid to people hit by war", "welcoming people fleeing war into the EU", feel "not at all attached to the EU", not at all satisfied with "the measures taken by the EU to combat the pandemic", not at all in agreement with "providing financial aid to Ukraine" or that "cooperation in the field of defence should be strengthened at EU level", "not at all attached to Europe", not at all in agreement with the fact that "reducing oil and gas imports and investing in renewable energies are important for our global security", totally disagreeing with the idea that "Member States' military equipment purchases should be better coordinated". They clearly deny that "the Russian invasion of Ukraine is a threat to the security of the EU".

The lack of support for European integration and EU action in favour of Ukraine interacts with an attitude of doubt about climate change and public policies for the ecological transition: those most opposed to the EU and most hostile to support for Ukraine are at the same time those who least share the view that "the EU should reduce its dependence on Russian sources of energy supply as soon as possible", that "the EU should invest massively in renewable energies, such as solar and wind power", that "in the long term, renewable energies can limit the cost of our energy consumption", that "improving the energy efficiency of buildings, transport and goods will reduce our dependence on energy producers outside the EU" or that "EU Member States should buy energy jointly from other countries to get better prices".

In short, two antagonistic visions of sovereignty clash along the most structuring dimension of European opinion: on the one hand European sovereignty, on the other national sovereignty. This dimension almost perfectly orders the wishes for further European integration. When Europeans are asked whether they want

more decisions to be taken at European level, the answers range from one end of the continuum that our analyses have highlighted: “strongly agree” at the positive end of the spectrum, to “somewhat agree”, “don’t know”, “somewhat disagree” and “strongly disagree” at the negative end. It is interesting to note that the ‘don’t know’ opinion is not intermediate between opinions in favour and against further European deepening, but is on the latter side.

I A TYPOLOGY OF EUROPEAN OPINIONS: SHARPLY DIVIDED EXPECTATIONS AS A RESULT OF NATIONAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE UNION. THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION OF THE MEANING OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION...

The wealth of Eurobarometer data makes it possible to condense all the indicators we have just analysed into a typology of European opinions. The advantage of a typological approach is that it groups the responses and the individuals who chose them into clusters, types or categories. From a methodological point of view, this involves carrying out what is known as a ‘classification’, or more precisely a ‘hierarchical classification’.

We can propose a typology of opinions that groups Europeans into five major ‘classes’ or categories. The first ‘class’ (or category) represents 10% of Europeans: these are those who are very favourable to European integration and who choose all the response options that correspond to this general ‘very positive’ attitude: confidence in the European institutions, optimism about the EU and its future, the feeling that things are going in the right direction in the EU, satisfaction with democracy in the EU. The second ‘class’ is made up of 48% of Europeans who have a fairly positive opinion of the EU: while they always choose response options that are favourable to the EU, the intensity of their support is less strongly expressed and it is often the ‘fairly positive’ or ‘fairly confident’ response options that are found in this category. The third ‘class’ is made up of 10% of Europeans who can be described as ‘indifferent’ or who do not have very structured opinions on the EU: the most frequently encountered response modalities are ‘don’t know’, ‘neutral’ or ‘rather unfavourable’. The fourth ‘class’ is made up of 26% of Europeans who share ‘fairly negative’ opinions about the EU, with the most common responses being ‘fairly negative’ and ‘fairly suspicious’ of the European institutions. Finally, the fifth ‘class’ is made up of 6% of Europeans who are ‘very negative’ about the EU, and who always choose the most negative responses. If we divide these five ‘classes’ into positive, ambivalent and negative opinions, we obtain: 58% positive opinions, 32% negative opinions and 10% ambivalent opinions but with a rather negative ambivalence towards the EU.

- A mosaic of national cases: the geographical and socio-logical divides revealed by the typology

Table 1 shows **the breakdown by country of the five categories in our typology. This breakdown shows very significant geographical and national contrasts**, demonstrating that European opinion should be conjugated more in the plural than in the singular, and that it is made up of a mosaic of national cases. It is even difficult to find the logic behind the data in Table 1, since the countries with the most favourable profile for European integration include Northern Europe (Denmark, Finland, Sweden), two of the Baltic States (Latvia and Lithuania), the Netherlands, Ireland, Malta and Poland. **If we look at the countries that have been members of the EU the longest, we see that they almost never (with the exception of the Netherlands) belong to the group of countries most favourable to the EU, particularly France, which is clearly one of the three most unfavourable profiles for European integration⁸.**

⁸ Cautrès, B., Chopin, T., Rivière, E. (2021), *Un euroscepticisme à la française. Entre défiance et ambivalence. Le nécessaire « retour de l'Europe en France*, op. cit.

TABLE 1. Breakdown of the five typology profiles by country

	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5
France	4	39	16	31	11
Belgium	6	48	6	34	6
Netherlands	9	62	4	21	4
Germany - West	7	54	9	26	4
Italy	6	49	10	28	6
Luxembourg	8	58	5	24	5
Denmark	23	58	5	11	3
Ireland	25	48	10	15	3
Greece	7	29	9	42	13
Spain	8	39	12	36	6
Portugal	5	68	11	16	1
Germany - East	3	26	13	43	14
Finland	10	63	9	15	3
Sweden	10	67	5	13	4
Austria	10	35	11	34	10
Cyprus (Republic)	10	37	8	37	10
Czech Republic	8	40	13	27	11
Estonia	6	49	17	22	6
Hungary	5	49	10	31	5
Latvia	11	56	14	17	3
Lithuania	14	58	8	17	2
Malta	28	41	13	16	3
Poland	18	48	6	25	4
Slovakia	4	37	12	33	14
Slovenia	6	38	10	39	7
Bulgaria	14	37	19	20	11
Romania	8	40	14	33	5
Croatia	11	47	9	28	5
EU27 average (weighted)	8	46	10	29	7
EU27 average (unweighted)	10	48	10	26	6

The data in this table can be summarised and represented graphically using a simple correspondence analysis. Charts 10 and 11 represent the distribution of the five categories of our typology in a two-dimensional space (the horizontal dimension contrasts categories 1 and 2, those favourable to the EU, with categories 3, 4 and 5, those unfavourable; the vertical dimension contrasts moderate support for the EU, category 2, with all the others).

CHART 10. The five categories of the typology in a two-dimensional space

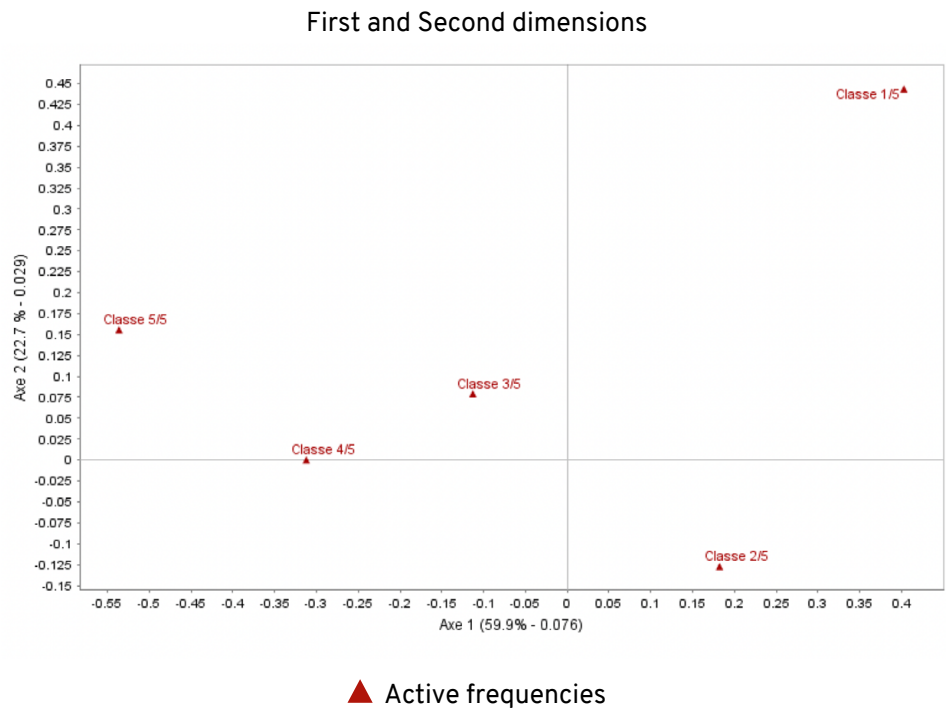
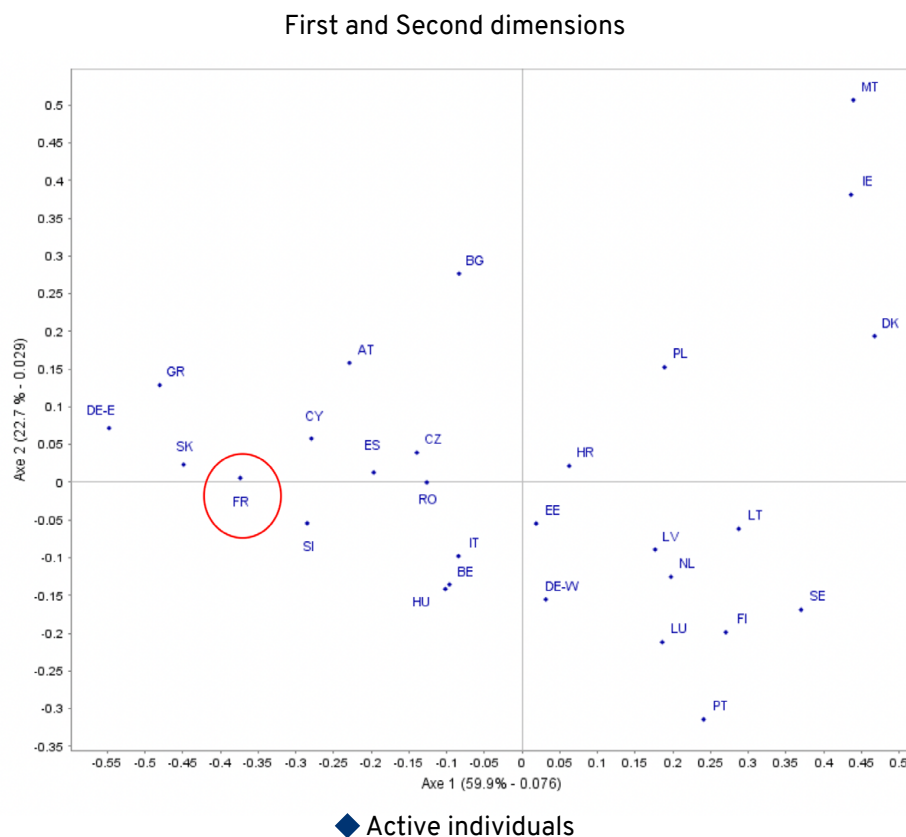


CHART 11. The position of countries (EU27) in the two-dimensional space of the typology of attitudes towards the EU



- Very sharply divided expectations: representations strongly rooted in the Member States

The significant national segmentation of opinions on European integration cannot simply be explained by sociological segmentation. While socio-economic status and positions in the social hierarchy strongly structure European opinions, these are partly independent of this material substratum: there are variations in support for European integration within social categories. Opinions on European integration reflect citizens' attachment to patterns of values and cultural representations rooted in their relationship with sovereignty and the State, which themselves only partly reflect the social positions occupied by citizens.

This is one of the paradoxes of European integration: the process of integration is based on the construction of an imaginary world in which the nation state is surpassed, and at the same time this imaginary world places at the heart of all the issues it deals with the question of sovereignty, borders and the perimeter of European integration in relation to that of nation states. This tension has given rise to a number of interpretative schemes for overcoming the contradiction: the duality of national sovereignty and subsidiarity (at the heart of the Maastricht Treaty) or, more recently, the idea of "European sovereignty" promoted by the current French Head of State.

Our typology reveals the links between representations rooted in the Member States and opinions on the EU. When Europeans are asked whether their country "could cope better with the future if it were outside the European Union", 27% of

Europeans say they completely agree with this idea; at the two extremes of our typology, considerable differences are expressed in relation to this idea: 17% and 18% among our two categories most in favour of European integration; 40% and 70% among our two most opposed categories. These differences, which are expressed on a question of principle but also of effectiveness with regard to their countries' membership of the EU, reflect very sharply contrasting social representations of what the EU means to its citizens.

Table 2 (in Appendix) reveals two logics in this respect. Firstly, there is a very strong opposition between the two most negative categories about the EU (classes 4 and especially 5) and all other categories, a very clear opposition between two semantic universes about the EU: the loss of cultural identity, the increase in crime, the lack of external border controls or the waste of money are the words most associated with the EU by those who are opposed to European integration; on the other hand, the freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the European Union, peace or the euro are strongly associated with the EU by those who are favourable or even hesitant (classes 1, 2 and 3). A second dimension is then expressed by the data in table 2: a clear opposition between the two categories most in favour of the EU (classes 1 and 2) and the three other categories (classes 3, 4 and 5) on all the meanings relating to the founding pillars of European integration: democracy, economic prosperity, quality of life for future generations, cultural diversity and having a greater voice in the world.

Not only is support for the EU sociologically and nationally differentiated, but even more fundamentally it is divided over the meaning given to European integration. It is therefore not surprising to see major contrasts between aspirations and expectations with regard to European public policies.

Tables 3 and 4 (in Appendix) largely confirm our previous analyses. A point of method must be made before commenting on these two tables: the Eurobarometer asks respondents to give their opinion on public policy issues that are very broadly defined by the questions asked: for example, they are asked for their approval of “a common security and defence policy for the Member States of the European Union” or “a common European policy on migration”. These indicators should be interpreted with caution: they in no way measure the desire for greater European integration, or at least they measure it only very vaguely. We could therefore be entirely in favour of a common European policy on migration that is more closed or more open to migration, that gives more or less power to the Member States to control migratory flows coming to their territories. We must therefore be wary of interpreting the percentages of approval, which are sometimes high (for example, 70% say they are in favour of “a common European policy on migration”) as necessarily reflecting a desire for European integration. To do this, we would need indicators that contextualise what type of common policy is involved and in what direction. Furthermore, for table 4 we have taken care to distinguish between the responses “completely agree” and “tend to agree”, considering that it is essentially the “completely agree” response that expresses approval.

Once these methodological precautions have been taken, five points can nevertheless be drawn from these two tables:

- Unsurprisingly, the category of Europeans most unfavourable to the EU has the lowest levels of approval and support for European policies or policy objectives.
- It is EU enlargement that elicits the least favourable reactions, with low or even very low approval rates in categories that are hesitant or unfavourable towards the EU.

- European policy objectives in the fields of security, defence and energy arouse far fewer reservations and even high levels of support among the categories most favourable to the EU.
- This ambivalence, which all our analyses show to be negative rather than positive towards the EU, fuels perplexity and doubts about European policies, even in fundamentally transnational areas such as security and energy.
- Support for European policy objectives in the fields of security, defence and energy is often slightly higher among those who are rather unfavourable to the EU (class 4) than among the hesitant/ambivalent (class 3).

• Conclusion

Citizens express expectations and priorities that are easy to identify (defending their standard of living, their health, combating climate change, defending the rule of law, their security, etc.). What's more, the majority of Europeans see the European Union as a relevant scale capable of providing concrete solutions to the challenges they face. Over the long term, opinion polls over the last twenty years have shown that a majority of European citizens expect the European Union and its Member States to take joint action in areas where European public goods are at stake, such as energy and defence.

Beyond this, a more detailed analysis of Europeans' attitudes to EU integration and public policy reveals a much more complex picture of European opinion. It is in fact highly fragmented: firstly, by geographical and sociological segmentations; but also by fractures, amplified by the crises, between citizens' expectations of the European institutions and their assessment of the EU's action. In addition, these expectations are strongly divided, particularly as a result of the representations of the Union that are deeply rooted in the Member States, raising the central question of the meaning of European integration for citizens.

Fundamentally, the question of the meaning of the European political project is essential from a civic point of view, as it affects not only its direction (its course) but also its meaning and therefore its legitimacy. It would be easy to consider that such national fragmentation on the meaning to be given to European integration would not make it possible to reach agreement at EU level. This is a very important question, because what is at stake in the forthcoming European elections is precisely the possibility of determining the political and institutional conditions for forging common European policies to meet the expectations of Europeans in the face of current and future challenges. Such a diversity of geographical/national, sociological, partisan and other representations of European integration has always been an inescapable political fact, yet it has not prevented progress throughout the construction of Europe on the basis of political compromises, which are admittedly sometimes very difficult to forge.

From this perspective, defining the conditions under which new political compromises can be reached to give meaning to European action in the face of the current crises and to provide answers to the expectations and concerns of citizens means taking into account the political dynamics at work not only at national and EU level, but also the transformations of European and national narratives with regard to European integration. In this respect, the question of the political narrative is central, and the European elections must be a democratic moment of confrontation between the different competing political messages. This is precisely what liberal democracy is all about: a political system that allows differences to be exposed and

recognised, legitimate disagreements to be managed in a civilised manner and the ability to act in a context of heterogeneous preferences on the basis of decisions taken by the majority, while protecting the rights of minorities. This may not be a bad definition of European democratic politics, and it will be one of the major issues at stake in the forthcoming European elections ...!

• Appendices

I APPENDIX 1 - METHODOLOGICAL BOX

In addition to the most recent data from the European Parliament's latest Eurobarometer (Parlemeter, December 2023) and the Standard 100 Eurobarometer (autumn 2023), this study focuses mainly on data from Eurobarometer 98.2 (winter 2022/2023), the main results of which can be consulted on the Eurobarometer website (<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2872>). This wave of the Eurobarometer was chosen because of its proximity in time to our study and the richness of the questionnaire, which includes a large number of measures of support for the EU, its policies and its actions (particularly with regard to Ukraine and the climate).

The data analysis was based on micro-individual data, the data file having been downloaded from the social science data archive of the Zentralarchiv/Gesis at the University of Cologne (https://search.gesis.org/research_data/ZA7953).

This survey wave is part of the 'Standard Eurobarometer', an opinion survey conducted by the European Commission twice a year (spring/summer and autumn/winter). The national samples are representative of the populations of the respective nationalities of the Member States of the European Union and other EU nationals, resident in each of the 27 Member States, aged 15 and over.

The survey was also carried out in Turkey, Northern Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, the Turkish Cypriot community, the United Kingdom, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Moldova, Kosovo, Norway and Switzerland. In these countries, it covers the national population of citizens and the population of citizens of all the Member States of the European Union residing in these countries and having a sufficient command of the national languages to answer the questionnaire.

Only samples from EU member countries and their nationals were included in our analyses. In all, 26,461 individuals were selected for analysis.

In order to exploit the wealth of indicators measured by the Eurobarometer and to bring out the complexity of attitudes towards the EU, the statistical analysis of the data was conducted with a threefold objective:

- Highlight the most salient dimensions of support (or lack of support) for the EU from the data by combining 14 questions on the diffuse forms of this support (these are indicators of the most general facets of support for European integration and general measures of confidence in the European institutions);
- To develop, on the basis of these major dimensions, a typology of Europeans' support for the EU which would make it possible to segment categories of opinion and weigh up the weight of each of these categories;
- Typify the main dimensions of support and the categories of the typology at the sociological level, at the geographical level and at the level of their support for European policies or European integration projects in order to cross-reference the dimensions of 'diffuse' support for the EU and the dimensions of 'specific' support (support for European outputs, i.e. public policies or public policy objectives). A large number of indicators from the Eurobarometer survey were used here in addition to the 13 used to identify the dimensions and create the typology.

Methodologically, these three data analysis objectives were achieved through the use of factorial statistical methods (multiple correspondence analysis) and classificatory methods (hierarchical ascending classification) carried out using SPAD data analysis software. The data and statistical analysis programmes are available on request from the authors.

I APPENDIX 2 - LIST OF THE FOURTEEN EUROBAROMETER 98.2 INDICATORS USED FOR FACTOR ANALYSIS AND HIERARCHICAL ASCENDING CLASSIFICATION

- At the moment, would you say that, generally speaking, things are going in the right direction or the wrong direction in the European Union?
- How much confidence do you have in the European Union?
- In general, do you have a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image of the European Union?
- Please say whether you have confidence or not in the European institutions:
 - the European Parliament
 - the European Commission
 - the European Central Bank
 - the European Council
- To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? :
 - I understand how the European Union works
 - France could cope better with the future if it were outside the European Union
 - more decisions should be taken at EU level
- Would you say you are very optimistic, fairly optimistic, fairly pessimistic or very pessimistic about the future of the European Union?
- Overall, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, fairly dissatisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in the European Union?
- To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? :
 - my voice counts in the European Union
 - the European Union's voice counts in the world

TABLE 2. Representations of the EU according to the five typology profiles

	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4	Class 5	% average
The freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the European Union	63	58	41	45	24	50
Peace	45	43	21	21	8	32
Democracy	45	35	12	15	6	26
A stronger voice in the world	42	35	13	16	5	26
Economic prosperity	41	25	7	11	5	19
Quality of life for future generations	38	26	9	13	7	20
Cultural diversity	33	29	14	19	9	24
The euro	33	35	31	30	21	32
Social protection	22	15	7	8	3	12
Bureaucracy	9	15	18	27	38	20
Not enough checks at external borders	7	14	22	25	42	19
A waste of money	4	10	23	28	60	19
The loss of our cultural identity	3	6	11	17	39	12
More crime	3	6	14	15	29	11
Unemployment	2	4	7	9	23	7

TABLE 3. Approval (declare themselves 'in favour') of a set of proposals relating to European policy objectives according to the five classes of the typology (% vertical)

	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4	Class 5	% average
A common foreign policy for the Member States of the European Union	90	82	53	61	33	71
A common security and defence policy for the Member States of the European Union	92	87	61	71	42	77
A common European migration policy	87	81	53	62	36	70
A common energy policy for the Member States of the European Union	92	86	57	65	36	74
The enlargement of the European Union to include other countries in the coming years	76	63	34	42	17	52
A common European health policy	83	78	52	59	36	67
A European political community, bringing together the leaders of the countries on the European continent, whether or not they are members of the EU	86	78	43	57	33	66

Example of how this can be read: Among Europeans as a whole (EU27), 71% approve of the idea of a common foreign policy for the Member States. Among those belonging to the first class of the typology (those most in favour of European integration), this approval rises to 90%, while among class 5 (those most opposed to European integration), it falls to 33%.

TABLE 4. Approval (declare themselves «strongly agree» or «somewhat agree») for a set of proposals relating to defence, security and energy objectives at European level, according to the five classes of the typology (% vertical)

		Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4	Class 5	% average
Defence cooperation should be strengthened at EU level	I totally agree	65	47	30	35	27	42
	Somewhat agree	28	44	35	43	29	40
The defence budget should be increased in the EU	I totally agree	50	35	22	27	23	32
	Somewhat agree	31	41	27	37	22	36
The EU must boost its military equipment production capacity	I totally agree	50	35	23	28	27	32
	Somewhat agree	32	42	29	38	23	37
The EU should invest massively in renewable energies, such as solar and wind power	I totally agree	72	62	43	48	40	55
	Somewhat agree	22	32	31	35	25	31
EU Member States should buy energy jointly from other countries to obtain better prices	I totally agree	65	48	38	38	34	45
		27	40	31	41	30	37

Example of how this can be read: Among Europeans as a whole (EU27), 42% say they “completely agree” with the proposition that “cooperation in the field of defence should be strengthened at EU level”. Among those belonging to the first class of the typology (those most in favour of European integration), this approval rises to 65%, while among class 5 (those most opposed to European integration), it falls to 27%.

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