

HOW DO CITIZENS SEE THE EUROPEAN UNION?

Virginie Timmerman | *project manager Citizenship and Democracy*

Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute, with the assistance of the OPTEM network, organised the first stage of the “Horizon EU: European citizenship, a horizontal development” from 7 December 2013 to 3 January 2014 collecting opinion in discussion groups of 157 European citizens from 18 member states about their visions of the EU and their access to European institutions. This synthesis covers the main points of the discussion on the vision of European citizens about the European Union.

Introduction

157 citizens from 18 European Union member states (*see Map 1*) met in representative groups in order to discuss their visions of the EU and their access to the EU. Discussion groups were organised by the OPTEM network from 7 December 2013 to 3 January 2014 (*see Annex I*).

They were chosen so as to establish a sample in which the diversity of European citizens is represented considering several socio-demographic criteria (*see Table 1*).

Table 1 ► The profile of the 157 European citizens participating in the first stage of the “Horizon EU” project

Participants		157
Age range	20-34	52
	35-49	59
	50+	46
Socio-professional category	Low to middle	76
	Middle to upper	81
Gender	Male	80
	Female	77
Nationality		18

This text, written by Virginie Timmerman, is based on the elements from a European synthesis written by Daniel Debomy and the (18) national reports produced by the partners of the Optem network¹. Opinions expressed here are only those of the participants in the discussion groups, and do not necessarily reflect those of the whole European citizens.

1. The first impressions about the EU

In the first part of group discussions, citizens were asked to talk about “what first came to mind” about the EU.

Three main categories were able to be identified: member states in which citizens have a relatively positive attitude vis-à-vis the EU, member states in which citizens had a mixed view and lastly member states in which citizens had a negative image of the EU. Spontaneous associations of citizens participating were extremely varied, while the major themes such as peace, funding, bureaucracy or even the unequal influence of countries came up in almost all the group discussions in the 18 member states of the EU (*see Map 1*).

1. Daniel Debomy, “The involvement of EU citizens in the European project”, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute, July 2014; Optem network, “European citizens’ involvement in the EU: national syntheses”, Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute, December 2013/January 2014.

Map 1 ► The European Union seen by citizens participating in the “Horizon EU” project: the first impressions

Austria
Freedom of establishment, economic freedom, peaceful coexistence, human rights, democracy, lobbying

United Kingdom
Brussels, corruption, free movement, immigration, euro, UKIP

Bulgaria
Gloomy, opportunities for business, education, travelling, regulations, bureaucracy

Czech Republic
Bureaucracy, regulation and directive dictate, identity, tradition and freedom restriction, no voice for small states

Estonia
“Big buildings in Brussels”, repair of Tallinn-Pärnu motorway, Indrek Tarand (Estonian MEP), EU fines, Common agricultural policy inequality

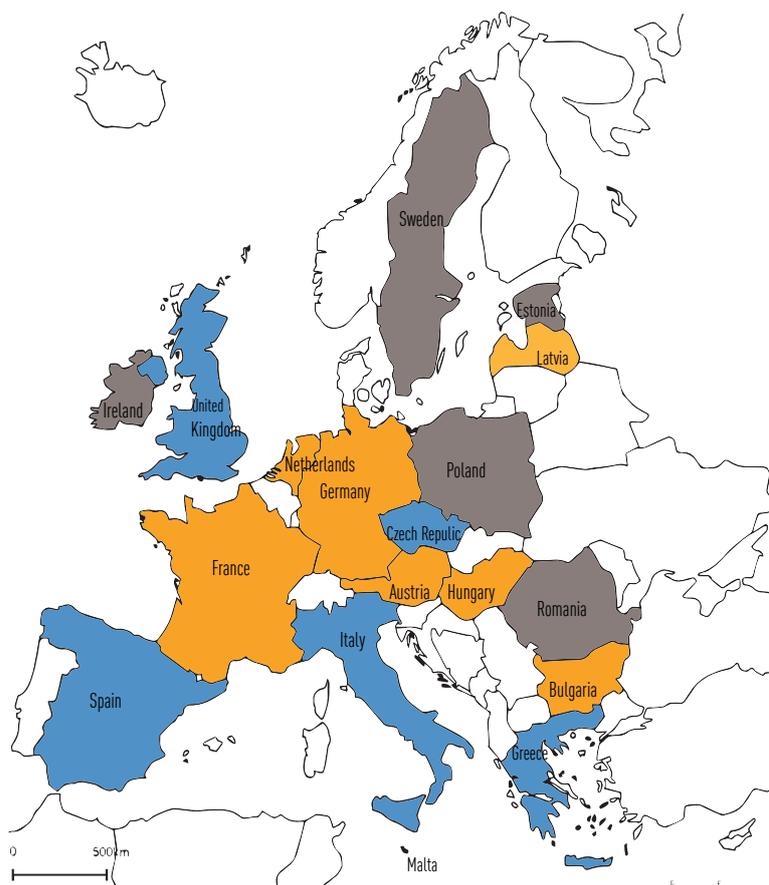
France
EU stronger regarding international competitors, peace, mixing of cultures, food standards, EU legislation above French law

Germany
Vast community, solidarity, integration, trade exchanges, European Central Bank

Greece
European and global recession affected Greek economy, EU not able to be proactive, inequalities, economic gap, euro

Sweden
General cooperation, influence, work mobility, peace, bureaucracy

Spain
Disappointment, inequality and imbalance, power concentrated in a few countries, lack of identification with the EU, abandon



Hungary
Negative economic trend, Hungarian economy controlled by foreign interests, funding, freedom linked to the end of borders, political and value community

Ireland
Money, Troika, bureaucracy, Big Brother, protection

Romania
Brotherhood, unity in diversity, progress, freedom of movement, community, consensus, United states of Europe

Poland
Freedom, openness with no boundaries, development, opportunities, diversity, tolerance and modernity

Netherlands
Distant but necessary, “making a union to solve problems”, complex, limited influence, economic crisis

Malta
Paperwork, agreements between a group of countries, different countries, cultures and languages, movement of people, products and services, travelling

Latvia
Euro, flag, Brussels, Latvian MEPs, distant

Italy
EU responsible for the economic and financial crisis, euro, excessive taxation, favouritism, opportunity for mental and cultural opening

Key ► Maps 1, 3 and 4

POSITIVE	MIXED (BOTH POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE SIDES)	NEGATIVE
Estonia	Austria	Czech Republic
Ireland	Bulgaria	Greece (major disappointment)
Malta	France (deterioration)	Italy (disillusion and resentment)
Poland	Germany (deterioration)	Spain
Romania (moderation)	Hungary	United Kingdom
Sweden (partially offset)	Netherlands	
	Latvia (initial fear substantially reduced)	

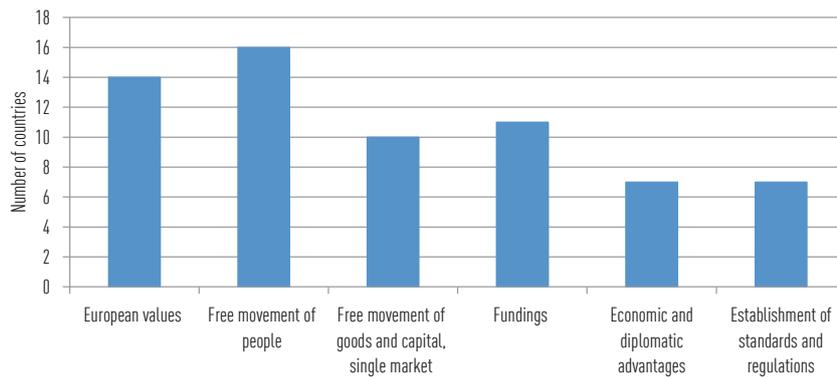
Note:
Maps 1, 2 and 4 are identical. However there are used:
- first to show the first impressions,
- secondly to remind what were the first impressions when presenting the positive aspects of the EU
- and thirdly to remind what were the first impressions when presenting the negative aspects of the EU.

2. Positive aspects of the EU seen by participating citizens

In the second part, participating citizens in each discussion group were asked to talk about aspects of the EU they considered to be positive.

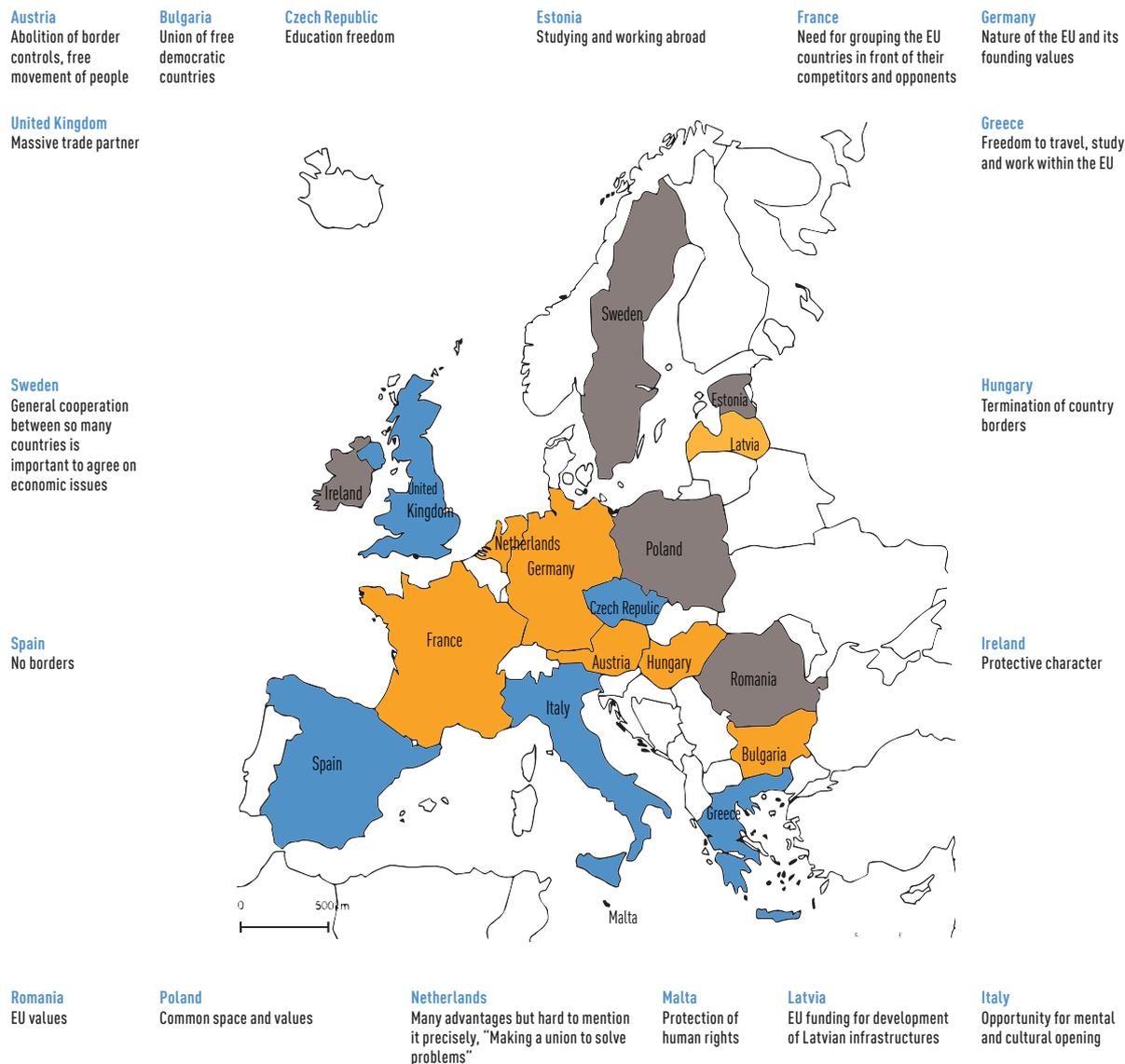
The positive aspects citizens talked about can be divided into six categories (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 ► Positive aspects of the EU mentioned in the group discussions of the “Horizon EU” project



Although the positive aspects of the EU mentioned by the participating citizens coincided, those mentioned first differ according to the country (see Map 2).

Map 2 ► The first positive reactions expressed by citizens participating in the “Horizon EU” project with regard to the EU



The **free movement of people**, whether to study, work or travel, was mentioned in all the participating countries as a positive aspect, with the exception of France and Germany. The Erasmus programme, a huge EU success, was mentioned by the majority of participating countries.

Citizens' voices

- Free movement of people

"No need for visa or even a passport" Greek citizen

"The right of free movement and stay is definitely a positive feature" Hungarian citizen

"I don't look at it like they are watching us, I think of the good things. I think we can travel more freely and work in different countries. Now my kids have the freedom to go and work and start in another country" Irish citizen

"Everybody sees it as people (only) coming here to take up benefits but that is not true" British citizen

- Studying

"The Erasmus programme...you can spend some studying time abroad" Greek citizen

"More students are able to travel abroad to study" Maltese citizen

- Working

"More working opportunities in other European countries" Greek citizen

- Travelling

"No borders - this makes travelling within the EU very pleasant" Austrian citizen

In addition to the free movement of people, **the free movement of goods, services and capital** was also mentioned as a positive aspect of the EU in ten countries². Overall, the common market, the most

successful achievement of the EU, was recognised by the participating European citizens.

Citizens' voices

- Free movement of goods, services and capital

"Not having any customs or trade restrictions anymore results in a major advantage for all of us - you can hardly remember how troublesome these things have been before" Austrian citizen

"Online shopping in Germany or Spain is really not an issue anymore" Austrian citizen

"Market freedom - you can do business internationally" Greek citizen

European values and the nature of the European project were unanimously mentioned by the citizens participating in the different discussion groups, except by the British, Czech and Latvian citizens. The elements mentioned vary from country to country; however three major values often came up: the feeling of belonging to a European community linked to exchanges between cultures was mentioned in seven participating countries, solidarity and unity, then peace in six of the participating countries (see Map 3).

Citizens' voices

- Nature of the EU

"Something which must be lasting to bear its fruit, something fragile that must be protected and cherished" German citizen

"It is like a kindergarten which must accommodate and federate children from various backgrounds and make them live together on an equal footing" German citizen

"These countries understood that the best thing they have in common is being diverse, but that they share a continent and have some values that bring them together" Romanian citizen

"I would like the EU to be the most beautiful place on Earth..." Romanian citizen

² Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Poland, United Kingdom.

- Peace

"This is a great success - we have never had such a long period of peace in Europe before" Austrian citizen

"War within the EU is definitely not an issue. I don't think that any of the 28 member states would want to wage war against the others" Austrian citizen

"The most positive point is that there are no more wars" French citizen

"EU was created after the second world war with the goal of keeping the peace among countries, it has a community of political and economic aims" Italian citizen

"The EU's primary function is proved by the fact that we have no longer had wars, without the European Community something would probably have taken place" Italian citizen

"The founders realized that fighting won't work anymore, so we have to unite and do something together" Romanian citizen

- Community

"A vast community" German citizen

"Solidarity with the weakest members" German citizen

"Feeling a community of interest" German citizen

"A will to integrate" German citizen

"Belonging to a community. At last, we can feel European. In fact, the country always joined some organisation, either this way or that way, but perhaps this is a good direction" Hungarian citizen

"I have the feeling that I am a citizen of the European Union as I am a citizen of Romania" Romanian citizen

- Unity in diversity

"For me, more than anything else Europe means a mixing of cultures..., each one brings his own stone" French citizen

"This membership is much more voluntary than any other former blocs. Hungary has always wanted to belong to the Western part" Hungarian citizen

"We have the possibility of learning from others' experience - some nations have more experience than others; there is mutual help" Romanian citizen

"During so many hundreds of years of common history, peoples of Europe still developed different cultures. Through consensus, we can conceive systems that will maintain this diversity of cultures" Romanian citizen

"Only in that way traditions can be preserved, showing that you cannot have France without Spain, for example..." Romanian citizen

"Through the European Union, a single community is being formed out of several communities, and subsequently more widespread traditions can arise" Romanian citizen

- Democracy and human rights

"It is a union of democratic countries looking for larger markets. That is why they are united. And which, I hope, will guarantee us a democratic development in the future" Bulgarian citizen

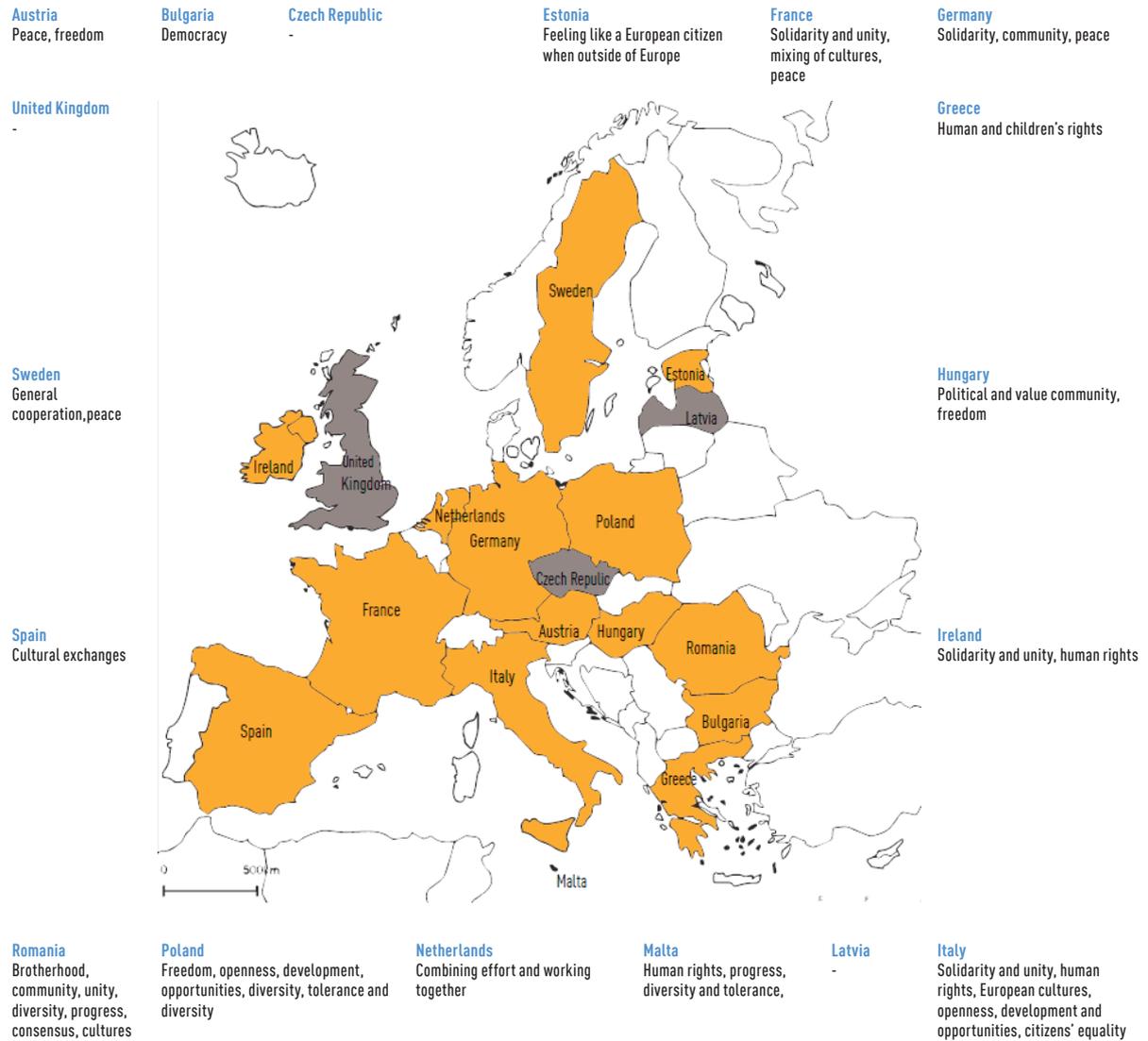
"When it goes to the European Courts you feel confident that the right decision will be made" Irish citizen

- Freedom

"It involves a higher level of freedom but it also implies restrictions" Hungarian citizen

"It is a necessary evil, as it offers some freedom and some restrictions at the same time" Hungarian citizen

Map 3 ► European values seen by citizens participating in the “Horizon EU” project



Citizens of 11 participating countries³, mainly countries which have most recently joined the EU and countries which have been hardest hit by the crisis, mentioned **European funding** as a positive element of the EU. Citizens think funding is most often directed to infrastructure projects, transnational projects like Erasmus or support during the crisis.

Citizens' voices

- European funding

"Subsidies to support private businesses and large-scale projects" Greek citizen

"Without EU funding, Greece would not have the infrastructure it has today" Greek citizen

"I think the incoming and outgoing payments are more or less balanced, or we are slightly on the positive side. There are huge investments going on in the country. Wherever you go in Hungary, you can see what subsidies were used, and these are quite significant amounts. I never saw these posters before. You can see them at so many places now that I don't think these could have been achieved without our membership" Hungarian citizen

"When it comes to any development, they must display a big board saying exactly how much money is allocated and what for purpose. The way these are made public is really a kind of marketing" Hungarian citizen

"Maybe this is a programme-closing period, maybe the available funds have to be spent. Perhaps this is why it is promoted stronger than before" Hungarian citizen

"Although we are rather sceptical regarding different EU-related issues, one thing is indisputable - Latvia has received large financial resources from the EU" Latvian citizen

"They (West European citizens) pay more into the total EU treasury than we do" Latvian citizen

In eight different discussion groups⁴, some **economic and diplomatic advantages** were recognised. The euro was mentioned as a positive aspect in Germany, Austria, France, Italy and Lithuania (which will join the euro area on 1 January 2015).

Citizens' voices

- Euro

"I don't think that the euro is the worst of all currencies. There have been many discussions in the beginning on how strong the euro might become but I think it has developed pretty well" Austrian citizen

"I am personally in favour of the euro because we benefit by it. Greece is not being given any money, everything returns to us and the most important thing is that you do not wage war on your partners. We have not had wars in Europe for 60 years. Just to achieve that, it was worth it" German citizen

- Economic advantages

"It is a crisis, so the financial situation would have been as bad as now without the EU as well" Dutch citizen

"If we come out (of the EU) it will have a massive (adverse) effect..." British citizen

- EU in globalisation

"Grouping countries together in order to be stronger vis-à-vis e.g. the Americans, to count in front of the other big countries. France alone would not have enough weight, whereas Europe can make myself be heard" French citizen

"We know it is indispensable, we have no choice, in order to form a bloc against China, the USA, etc." French citizen

"I am favourable to the European Union. I think that in the era of globalisation, at a time when emerging countries like China are more and more powerful, it is essential for the European countries to be united, otherwise they stand no chance" German citizen

3. Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Spain.

4. Austria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Latvia, Poland.

Establishment of European standards and regulations seeking to harmonise legislation of member states was recognised by a number of participating citizens, since seven different discussion groups talked about this⁵. The citizens who addressed this issue considered these regulations to be a guarantee of high quality.

Citizens' voices

- Establishment of standards and regulations

"Influence of European legislation" French citizen

"The introduction of regulations and comprehensive solutions which have been formulated EU-wide and which have to be implemented on a national level, without individual countries opposing them, is a positive aspect in my opinion" Austrian citizen

"It is nice to know that you can rely on finding equal standards throughout all of Europe" Austrian citizen

"This will particularly benefit citizens in the new member states" Austrian citizen

"Yes, this is important, especially in the food industry" Austrian citizen

"EU regulations are as a safety guarantee that our government will not do anything wrong. EU is like a big brother which looks after the 'small brother' - Latvia" Latvian citizen
Quality of food

"I know it has an influence on food standards and many other things, construction for example... We do not keep thinking about it, but it does have an influence" French citizen

- Security

"Crime does not stop at the border" Dutch citizen

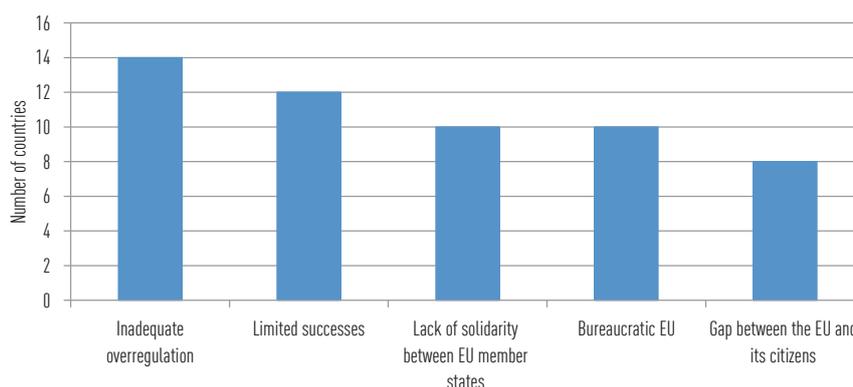
3. Negative aspects of the EU seen by the participating citizens

In the third part, participating citizens in each discussion group then talked about the aspects of the EU that they considered to be negative.

The negative aspects the citizens mentioned in the discussion groups can be divided into five categories (see Figure 2).

Every European citizen has different attitude and vision of the EU; therefore, the negative aspects were evaluated differently in every country (see Map 4).

Figure 2 ▶ The negative aspects of the EU mentioned in the discussion groups of the "Horizon EU" project



5. Austria, Czech Republic, France, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Malta.

Map 4 ► The first negative reactions expressed by citizens participating in the “Horizon EU” project with regard to the EU

Austria
Lobbying

Bulgaria
The country is not ready yet to meet EU requirements

Czech Republic
Excessive EU bureaucratic apparatus

Estonia
Over-regulation

France
Something complex, heavy and slow

Germany
“It is no longer what it used to be”

United Kingdom
Free movement of people and immigration

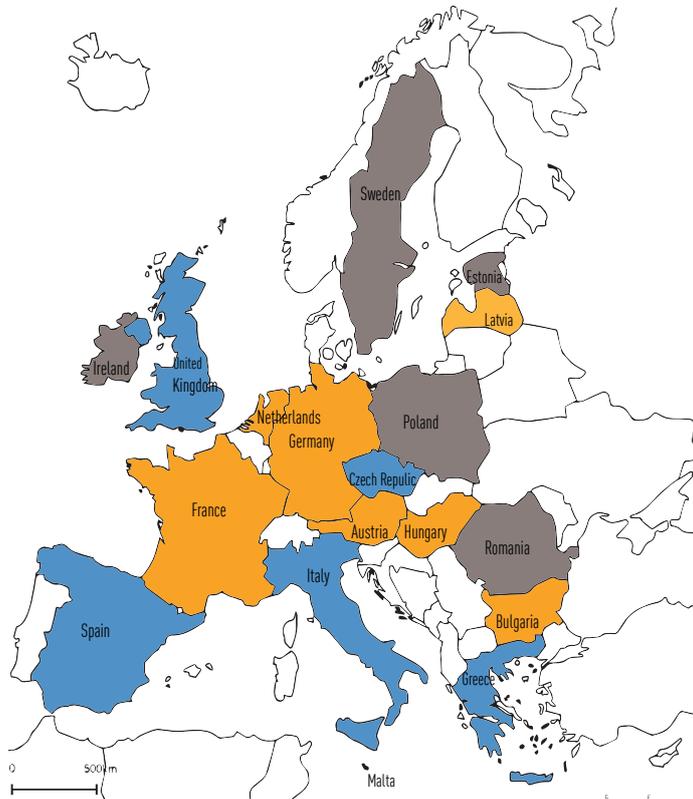
Greece
The EU as an institution cannot tackle or proactively avoid crisis situations

Sweden
Too bureaucratic

Hungary
EU as an economic formation

Spain
Inequality and imbalances between countries

Ireland
Loss of individualism or control of internal affairs



Romania
Some member states might exit the EU

Poland
Unification of national cultures

Netherlands
One common solution to solve problems

Malta
Bureaucracy

Latvia
Overregulation

Italy
Economic crisis caused by the EU

The main criticisms of the citizens participating about the EU concerned the EU as an institution⁶. It was first the EU as a legislator that citizens criticised, they think that there is an **over-regulation** at European level, which is more than **inadequate**. The harmonisation of European regulations seems complex due to economic imbalances between the different countries and cultural differences; this creates competition between member states, which European citizens do not appreciate. Lastly, citizens evaluated a loss of autonomy of their national institutions when it comes to internal affairs.

Citizens' voices

- Inadequate over-regulation

"They force you to obey rules which we are not able to. As for the business - if you want to receive funding, you need to assure half of the amount you have applied for. This is unbearable and causes businesses to close" Bulgarian citizen

"Overregulation is seen as 'foolishness that drives from boredom of deputies in EU'" Estonian citizen

"Some of it seems silly. You tend to think of it as only affecting us, not thinking that there are 27 other member countries, so it's applying to everyone. But sometimes it just feels silly. There's a huge amount of waste because of what they say should be standard you know" Irish citizen

"Laws are not tailor made" Maltese citizen

- Impossible harmonisation and standardisation

"It's not easy considering the economic and cultural differences" French citizen

"How can we speak of a Union, when salaries in Northern Europe are 4 times up the Greek ones?" Greek citizen

"I don't see any will to personalize the various countries, we, Italians, are artists and this quality is not enhanced; we have a culture envied by the whole world. I go to France and see Italian pieces of art at best, whereas here in Italy all falls down to pieces. I don't identify myself with Europe at all" Italian citizen

"The European Union was a beautiful project carried out in an awful way" Italian citizen

"All countries lose their individual character, because we all belong to this community and try to be the same. Or at least we aim at the same ideals. And previously it was all divided into different countries. Everybody cherished his own... so if we are to talk about disadvantages as well, then there is this unification going on. No doubt about it. I am far from being nationalistic, but it is a little like that" Polish citizen

- Loss of individualism and sovereignty

"It was nearly like if they had told us to start jumping I would say we would have to do it. It was literally yes, what they said went but I know they were helping us out" Irish citizen

"We had to delegate to some institutions part of our sovereignty, our decision power" Spanish citizen

"We've been put on a leash, and they take us out for a walk occasionally" Spanish citizen

In addition to this institution-related criticism, many participating citizens in just over half of the countries⁷ talked about their vision of a **bureaucratic EU**.

Citizens' voices

- Bureaucracy

"Very bureaucratic" Austrian citizen

"Huge bureaucracy" Austrian citizen

"The problem of the EU is the administration itself - complicated structures, very high paid, sometimes doing stupid things" Bulgarian citizen

"A fantastic machine, but it needs to be oiled - and it lacks oil at the moment. It is needed, but it is complex indeed..." French citizen

"Plenty of bureaucracy... They are things impossible to understand..." French citizen

⁶. Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, United Kingdom.

⁷. Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden.

"It is not utopic, there are things that could be done faster..." French citizen

- Institutional inconsistency

"Partly very abstract" Austrian citizen

"I have serious problems with some of the projects I work on. They are of purely administrative nature - figuratively speaking, the paper work is seven times more than the actual work" Bulgarian citizen

"E111 (The document required for social security health care insurance coverage when travelling in another EU country), is paradoxically very complicated... And I can't even figure out how complicated things are in areas where there are no European measures in force yet..." French citizen

"They are many possibilities to block the system with the requirement for unanimous decisions, it is bound to fail. We are making very, very slow progress owing to member countries having very different economies. Perhaps the EU was enlarged too quickly, as the expectations are so different from one country to another" French citizen

"For example, someone was telling me that those working in the EU have to take their medical test in Brussels - which costs way more than taking the test locally" Maltese citizen

European policies were perceived positively, but citizens also mentioned them as negative aspects in 12 countries⁸ on account of some things that do not work properly.

Citizens' voices

- Free movement of people

"The freedom can be assessed as positive; a negative aspect of open borders however is a criminal tourism which has never existed like this before" Austrian citizen

"The school I work in is only 10% English speaking. It is only going to get worse..." British citizen

"What worries me is borders becoming completely open and all those people arriving thinking that Germany is a heaven. Right now, it is Romania and Bulgaria. The eligibility criteria for membership should absolutely be made more stringent. Otherwise, it will turn out like Greece they will be bankrupt and at some stage the European Union will no longer be able to cope" German citizen

"Something that bothered me is a matter regarding the Rom people. It is being said that the Roms left Romania and populated the streets of Europe. [...]. If you study the statistics, they also went [in the West] from countries like Poland or former Yugoslavia; more of them left from Hungary" Romanian citizen

- Immigration

"I have lived in the Netherlands for 14 years now, coming from Surinam, but by working hard I can develop myself and earn a living. Getting people here from other countries is just importing problems" Dutch citizen

"It is not enough that other member states and the EU sympathise with Malta regarding the issue of immigration, if we are a union of different countries, then we should be there for one another even during hard times, the EU should provide more help to Malta in relation to illegal immigration" Maltese citizen

"Each country sets different priorities: national security, immigration and border protection are essential for us, while they mean nothing for countries like Belgium" Greek citizen

- Euro

"At first, a common currency seemed a positive thing... now we are not sure at all" Greek citizen

"Due to the euro, Greece is in a crisis right now and prices continue to rise" Greek citizen

"Euro thwarted the countries with the weakest exchange. The Union helps at making up the debt, but this means an increase in taxation" Italian citizen

"Euro and taxes: everything Italy does is controlled by a superior governing entity" Italian citizen

⁸ Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, United Kingdom.

- European funding

"We pay some money, and we get some amounts back, but certain funds are granted for specific purposes, e.g. agricultural, industrial support etc., so we cannot freely decide on them" Hungarian citizen

"There is a big box where they collect money from each country, and then they allocate amounts from that big box. However, the allocations and developments are not determined by the specific countries, but by the whole community. The targets are pre-determined. If we look at it from this aspect, we can feel that we get a huge opportunity. This is promoted on all posters because of transparency. And there is another side: they do not point out what areas are not developed. Some fields that are not EU priorities but would be important for Hungary are not developed" Hungarian citizen

"Member states spend their funds just because they do not want to lose the money... each member state should be able to reallocate the funds to different sectors to ensure that the money is well spent" Maltese citizen

The **lack of solidarity between EU member states** was raised in just over half of the discussion groups; in countries affected by the crisis directly (Greece, Ireland, Italy, Spain) and indirectly (Germany) and in countries which have most recently joined the EU (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Romania).

Citizens' voices

- Unequal influence between the member states

"It is where we will never be. Western countries will never accept us as equal to them and we will always be second hand. Just as we perceive Africans, they perceive us. There is no basis for comparison. I don't know how we can fit in the other EU countries" Bulgarian citizen

"It is not the same in all states. My daughter, who is a student in UK, has taken out a loan. She will return it after she has found a job that is well paid. Here in Bulgaria you get a loan and the bank is indifferent of whether you have found a job or not. So it is not the same in all countries" Bulgarian citizen

"It offers a lot of opportunities, but it is not right doing everything centrally; you might pull strong countries down. And at the same time not make the others better, by the fact that the good people from the less strong countries will leave their country" Dutch citizen

"Decisions are directed by the strongest member states, we, as the weak ones, have to suffer them, whether we like it or not" Greek citizen

"Our lives and our future depend on the decisions taken by some member states, not the EU as a whole" Greek citizen

"Even the fact that EU headquarters are set in the Hague, Brussels and Strasbourg carries a symbolism... Madrid, Athens, Sofia are mere followers, not active contributors" Greek citizen

"You heard that thing about our budget being discussed in their parliament (Germany) before it was even presented. That just shows you how powerless Ireland is" Irish citizen

"They did not get a good solution by putting these countries all together, they only emphasized pre-existent differences, there are two-speed Europes, Germany runs at a doped speed and other countries such as Italy go slowly" Italian citizen

"All member states should have an equal stake in all EU related decisions" Maltese citizen

"[...] I am not a nationalist, but I see certain things and I don't feel it is fair for us to be regarded as a poor brother within the Union. It is a problem here, to consider Romania, sometimes unfairly, the black sheep of Europe... That is how they are treating us, at least at the present moment" Romanian citizen

"The last to come does not really have equal rights... Romania is like the most recent employee in a firm - he will do the dirty work..." Romanian citizen

"I used to believe in the EU, but after seeing what's happened, now we're going through tough times, I think such a union does not exist" Spanish citizen

"Northern European countries have a certain status. We don't, and we're virtually the poor relation" Spanish citizen

"Latin and Mediterranean countries seem to be playing in a different league" Spanish citizen

"In the end, only two countries rule - Germany and France. I have the feeling the remaining countries are like a piñata, to be broken so money pours out" Spanish citizen

"We are nothing in the EU. Whatever Merkel says, that's what goes" Spanish citizen

"For example, my cousin was studying industrial engineering in London, and they have all the tools, special classrooms, companies that offer them the chance to have a future. Here at the university I'm not that lucky. And you think: I'll have to go abroad to have a good future" Spanish citizen

- No respect of EU regulations by few countries

"Countries might want to step out. Germany for example may not want to pay for the weaker countries. I do hope it will not happen, but I am afraid" Dutch citizen

"The only ones who comply with all the EU regulations and laws are the Estonians!" Estonian citizen

"The problem is that a partner is fine only as long as he is honest. But today, as we can see it with Greece, let us call things by their name; what has happened is corruption, taking liberties with the truth" German citizen

"I wonder if some countries may be obliged to leave the European Union, countries who continue to get into debt. One day, the rescue plan will be empty; the Union will no longer be able to finance anything" German citizen

"Heterogeneity is becoming stronger lately... States are after their own interests, not caring for the common good" Greek citizen

"Decisions are directed by the strongest member states, we, as the weak ones, have to suffer them, whether we like it or not" Greek citizen

"We are also to blame ourselves... For years we thought of the EU as a milking cow only" Greek citizen

"Before the European Union Germany was not so strong. Germany became strong due to bad EU

choices. Some countries, such as Germany were given more power than others" Italian citizen

- Inequalities between contributors and beneficiaries of European funding

"At the beginning I felt the European Union was quite fine, it seemed to work, but afterwards you notice that more and more countries are running into debt, that those who still have some money hardly manage to cope and must support the others in addition, so for Germany's sake it's not terrific. All this makes me dubious" German citizen

"I don't believe in miracles. I cannot imagine that 2-3 big and strong countries would act as Santa Claus and go to Eastern Europe to support the poor. What do they take out of the country in exchange for the support they offer? Now that we have no agriculture, we do not have any industry, banking system, etc. either" Hungarian citizen

"Truth being told it was probably always the case anyway. Because they (Germany) were the paymasters, like it or lump it. You mightn't like it, but you know" Irish citizen

"We haven't contributed enough to gain the advantages offered by EU" Romanian citizen

"Our contribution is real - from 'strawberry gatherers' working in Spain to the bright minds who leave to study in England or France and remain there; they are trained in Romania, on our money, and they bring a contribution to their culture..." Romanian citizen

"... Or those who go directly there for a job, and they bring a contribution to their GDP" Romanian citizen

The **gap between citizens and the EU** was raised in eight discussion groups⁹. Every citizen felt this gap differently. Most of them talked about their feeling of not being heard or represented, particularly in comparison to lobbies and banks. The lack of information, the distance or even the abstract nature of the EU were reasons given to explain the lack of involvement for most of them.

9. Austria, France, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Spain, Sweden, Romania.

Citizens' voices

- Citizens without influence

"I don't approve of regulations if it's impossible to track their drafting and if they are based on massive lobbying by organised interest groups" Austrian citizens

"The average citizen is not really involved" Austrian citizen

"The tricky question is whose interests have had influence on the respective provisions and laws" Austrian citizen

"Lobbying" Austrian citizen

"Theoretically, the EU is a good thing – yet in the current form it rather seems to be a Union for big enterprises" Austrian citizen

"(Regarding the weight of the different countries, of which France, in the decision making process) How is it distributed? One does not know, one has the impression of technocrats taking their decisions in isolation" French citizen

"Enlarging, enlarging, enlarging, (but) the peoples have not been consulted... In 2005, the French voted against Europe in the referendum... perhaps it was a way of sanctioning the government, but the French were not the only ones, the Dutch did it too (...). A referendum may be a costly thing to set up, but perhaps they should listen to the peoples..." French citizen

"Decisions being taken on behalf of the Europeans, without asking them what they want..." French citizen

"We are indeed very seldom consulted on Europe" French citizen

"If you reject a treaty then you can do the treaty again and then pass it you know" Irish citizen

"We said 'no', what are you asking us again for?" Irish citizen

"Citizens are not heard" Maltese citizen

"The EU is a political ball" Maltese citizen

"I think that the perceived negative aspects of the EU are influenced by local politics and their media influence, as different political parties portray a different image of the EU, therefore it is sometimes difficult to get a clear understanding of what is actually happening in the EU" Maltese citizen

"To rescue governments or banks, there is no problem. But to rescue the people... like we didn't exist" Spanish citizen

"These facets of politicians are not only present at the European level, but also at the local level in every country. It is not caused by the EU, but unfortunately, the tendency is like that" Spanish citizen

"You have to vote for someone who will defend your interests, whatever their ideology, and someone you can hold accountable, but that is not the way it is" Spanish citizen

"The European Parliament members from the different parties should defend the same projects, everything that is good for our country, and it is not the way it is" Spanish citizen

- Lack of information and distance

"In my opinion, citizens are not given sufficient transparency when it comes to decision-making processes" Austrian citizen

"Most of the time, the EU acts in the interests of the industry, not in the interests of the citizens" Austrian citizen

"It is hard to figure it out... it is not clear who actually runs it" French citizen

"An impression, as external observers, of remote steering" French citizen

"It is very hazy, we do not have much information, it is far away from us and our everyday life" French citizen

"There is some reluctance – many wonder how they benefited from our joining the European Union. The expected advantages of that are not seen" Romanian citizen

Despite the different attitudes - positive, mixed, negative -, all citizens recognised, more or less easily,

relatively similar positive and negative aspects about the EU.

Annex 1 ► Calendar of discussions organised by the OPTEM network during stage 1 of the “Horizon EU” project

Calendar	PLACE OF DISCUSSION GROUP	OPTEM, EUROPEAN QUALITATIVE NETWORK
7 December 2013	Tallinn (Estonia)	SariPoll
10 December 2013	Sofia (Bulgaria)	Alpha Research Ltd
	Lille (France)	OPTEM worked in cooperation with Inter View Partners
11 December 2013	Athens (Greece)	Focus Bari
	Dublin (Ireland)	Behaviour & Attitudes
	La Valette (Malta)	MISCO International Limited
	Amsterdam (Netherlands)	True Research
12 December 2013	Bucharest (Romania)	Data Media Ltd
13 December 2013	Cologne (Germany)	Echanges Marktforschung in relation with Psyma
16 December 2013	Budapest (Hungary)	Psyma Hungary
	Milan (Italy)	Periscope
17 December 2013	Vienna (Austria)	Karmasin Motivforschung
18 December 2013	Warsaw (Poland)	BSM
	Madrid (Spain)	Psyma Ibérica Marketing Research
	London (UK)	AIMR
19 December 2013	Prague (Czech Republic)	Mareco, s.r.o
	Stockholm (Sweden)	Kommunicera
3 January 2014	Riga (Latvia)	Latvian Facts

WHAT DO CITIZENS THINK THE FUTURE CHALLENGES OF THE EU ARE?

Virginie Timmerman, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, December 2014

HOW WOULD CITIZENS LIKE TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION?

Virginie Timmerman and Daniel Debomy, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, December 2014

HOW DOES THE EUROPEAN UNION COMMUNICATE WITH CITIZENS?

Virginie Timmerman and Daniel Debomy, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, November 2014

▶ HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE EU? THE OPINION OF EUROPEAN CITIZENS

Video, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, November 2014

CITIZENS FACING “BRUSSELS’ EUROPE”

Virginie Timmerman, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, August 2014

EUROPEAN CITIZENS IN BRUSSELS: WHAT MESSAGES?

Virginie Timmerman, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, August 2014

THE INVOLVEMENT OF EU CITIZENS IN THE EUROPEAN PROJECT

Daniel Debomy, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, July 2014

▶ WHAT THE FRENCH TOLD US ABOUT GLOBALISATION

Video, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, May 2014

▶ WHAT THE FRENCH TOLD US ABOUT EURO

Video, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, May 2014

▶ WHAT THE FRENCH TOLD US ABOUT THE EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY

Video, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, May 2014

▶ WHAT THE FRENCH TOLD US ABOUT THE EMPLOYEMENT IN THE EU

Video, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, May 2014

EUROPEAN CITIZENS’ INVOLVEMENT IN THE EU: NATIONAL SYNTHESSES

Optem network, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, December 2013/January 2014

EU NO, EURO YES? EUROPEAN PUBLIC OPINIONS FACING THE CRISIS (2007-2012)

Daniel Debomy, *Policy Paper No. 90*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, March 2013

DO THE EUROPEANS STILL BELIEVE IN THE EU?

Daniel Debomy, *Studies & Reports No. 91*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, June 2012

MIGRANTS – EUROPEAN STORIES

Frédéric Praud, Florence Brèthes, Hamed Borsali and Kiel, *Comics, Paroles d’hommes et de femmes / Notre Europe*, May 2012

THE CITIZENS OF EUROPE AND THE EUROPEAN UNION IN THE CURRENT CRISIS

Daniel Debomy, *Policy Paper No. 47*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute / Fondation Jean Jaurès, November 2011

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