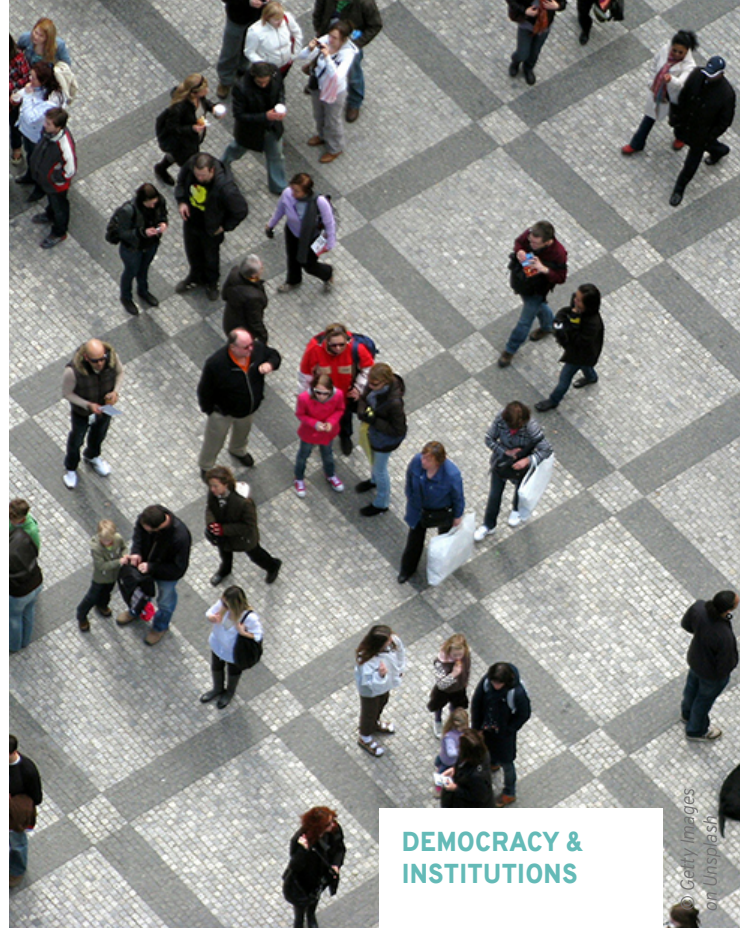


European citizens and the European Union 1985–2025



DEMOCRACY & INSTITUTIONS

POLICY BRIEF
OCTOBER 2025

• Introduction

The year 2025 marks both the centenary of Jacques Delors' birth and the fortieth anniversary of his accession to the presidency of the European Commission in 1985.

As the European Union and its Member States face new and considerable challenges, we felt it would be useful to examine the extent to which the Union has benefited – and continues to benefit – from public support, by tracing the evolution of citizens' attitudes towards it over the past four decades.

After an initial phase of growing interest in European integration, these attitudes have fluctuated considerably. However, since the end of the subprime financial and economic crisis, there has been a steady increase in support for the European Union – a deve-

lopment that may seem paradoxical given the difficulties currently facing the EU and European countries. The benefits of EU membership are widely recognised, many EU policies are approved, and, more profoundly, there is a strengthening of emotional ties with the EU and a growing sense of belonging.

These trends are largely reflected in public opinion in the various Member States, although there are notable differences – and even divergent trends – from one country to another.

This document is based mainly on the results of Eurobarometer surveys conducted every six months for more than 50 years for the Commission, as well as, for certain aspects, on those (initiated more recently) by the European Parliament¹. The results of other surveys conducted by various organisations

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¹ Standard Eurobarometer surveys conducted by the Commission and Parliament – Eurobarometer conducted by the Parliament, generally carried out in spring and autumn each year (although there have been a few exceptions to this schedule).

are also cited where appropriate. Finally, the quantitative data from these surveys are supplemented by the findings of **qualitative studies**, most of which were carried out for the Commission or other EU institutions².

I • Membership of the Union: four decades of changing opinions

Two basic indicators of citizens' attitudes have been measured throughout these four decades: first, every six months until 2010-2011 in European Commission surveys, then – with less regularity – in European Parliament surveys.

- Perception of EU membership: is it considered a good thing, a bad thing, or neither for one's country?
- Benefits of membership: has the country benefited from it or not?

These two indicators show broadly parallel trends, although they are not perfectly identical. It should be noted that the first is based on a question with three possible answers, while the second offers a binary choice, with no neutral intermediate option.

As successive enlargements have taken place, these indicators have been measured across an increasing number of Member States, which naturally raises questions about the relevance of the continuity of the curves shown in the graphs tracing their evolution. In practice, it has been found that the impact of enlargements on overall results has been small and temporary: the new Member States, many of which are sparsely populated, have had a limited impact on the overall average, and the high levels of 'euro-favour' in some have often offset the initial 'euro-gloom' in others. However, one notable exception is worth mentioning: the withdrawal of the United Kingdom. This country, one of the most populous in the Union, had always been characterised by strong reservations about European integration. After Brexit, it is estimated that its departure led to an automatic increase of around 2 points in European averages – without, however, calling into question the favourable trend observed in recent years.

² Studies conducted by the Optem Institute with its partners in all Member States (except for the first one, which was conducted by the Iris network institutes, but also coordinated at the time by the author of this article).

I SIX SUCCESSIVE PERIODS

Between 1985 and today, six major stages in the evolution of opinions can be identified, as illustrated by the graphs on the following pages³:

- **FROM SPRING 1985 TO SPRING 1991, there was a strengthening of favourable opinions** as Europeans became aware of the European Community's recovery plan launched by Jacques Delors, whose 'Objective 92' attracted growing attention and interest.

In spring 1985, according to Eurobarometer, 57% of those surveyed considered their country's membership of the European Community to be **a good thing**, compared with 12% who considered it **a bad thing** and 24% who considered it neither good nor bad. Six years later, in the spring of 1991, the proportion of citizens expressing a positive opinion had risen to **72%** (compared with 17% negative opinions).

With regard to the **perceived benefit of membership**, opinions followed a similar trend: from 50% in 1985, the percentage of affirmative responses rose to **59% in 1991** (compared with 25% who disagreed), despite a slight temporary decline in early 1986 (linked in particular to the indecision of many new Spanish and Portuguese members, who were still hardly able to judge the concrete effects of their integration).

Citizens' growing interest in Europe was highlighted by a **qualitative study conducted in 1986** in ten countries, including eight Member States at the time. When asked to express their views on Europe freely, the participants focused primarily on **the idea of a shared history, marked by conflict but based on common cultural roots, humanist and democratic values, and a centuries-old tradition of exchanges between peoples and nations**. Europe thus appeared to them as a specific entity with its own identity, quite distinct from other major countries or groups of countries in the world.

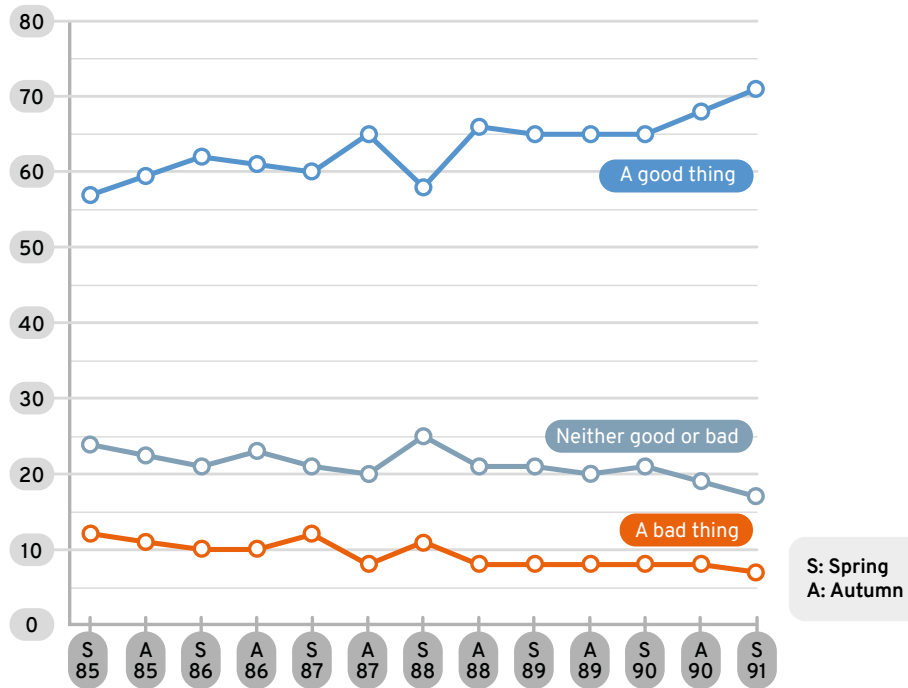
Although they had very limited knowledge of the Community and its institutions, these citizens showed a **genuine interest in European integration** and the European projects being promoted at the time, particularly in the **economic and technological fields, but also, potentially, in other areas** (for example, those relating to currency, culture and defence came to mind).

However, this general observation needed to be qualified according to the country concerned. In **France and Germany**, whose reconciliation had been the initial driving force behind integration, citizens were particularly sensitive to this **desire for unity**, while claiming a prominent place for their nation in the European project – more so among the French than among their neighbours, who were still timid in asserting their German identity. This aspiration was also found among the **founding states of the Benelux**, which were aware of the limitations of their size but committed to the common project – although the Dutch were more inclined to claim influence commensurate with what they saw as their country's weight.

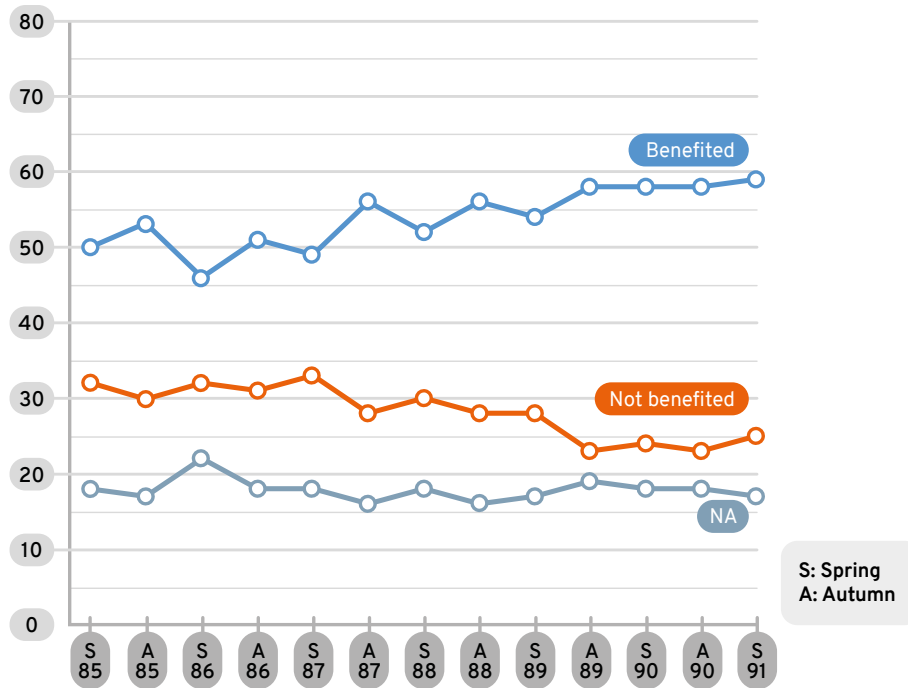
The **Italians** saw Europe above all as a **vehicle for progress and modernity**, an idea that was even more pronounced among the recently integrated **Spanish**. Further north, the **British**, who were rather pessimistic about the future, saw the European Economic Community as a framework within which their country could **continue to exert influence on the international stage**, while maintaining a **pragmatic and commercial** approach focused on the expected benefits of the single market. As for the **Danes**, who were more confident about their country's future, they were open to economic and technological cooperation, while remaining keen to **preserve their national identity** within this enlarged entity.

³ The few non-responses (a few % only) were not included in the membership graphs to avoid overloading them.

(Country's) membership of the EU



Has (country) benefited or not from being a member of the EU?



- **FROM SPRING 1991 TO SPRING 2001, both indicators declined significantly and sustainably**, following the controversies surrounding the Maastricht Treaty (which was difficult to adopt in some countries).

This decade was marked both by notable **advances** – new European achievements, the accession of three new Member States and the uncertain first steps of the post-communist transition in the countries of Central Europe that would later join the Union – and by **an economic slowdown that dampened the hopes** raised during the previous period. The **single currency** project was also beginning to meet with strong **resistance** in several countries. **The implosion of Yugoslavia** was a stark reminder to Europeans that **war, which they thought had been consigned to the past, could still break out on their doorstep** (a particularly sensitive issue in Greece and Spain, where it revived fears of regional tensions or internal secessions).

Opinion polls showed a sharp decline. **The indicator of support fell from 72% in spring 1991 to less than 50% in 1996-1997**, before stabilising at around that level until 2001 (48% compared with 13% negative opinions in spring). Similarly, **the indicator of the benefits of membership declined steadily from 59% in 1991 to 41% in 1997**, then stabilised relatively for four years before improving slightly at the end of the period (45% compared with 30% in spring 2001).

As early as 1993, a **qualitative study** conducted in the twelve Member States highlighted a **rise in gloom and concern**, to varying degrees depending on the country.

In France and Belgium, pessimism prevailed: perceptions of economic decline, rising unemployment, growing inequalities, and marked disaffection with politics. **In Luxembourg, morale remained higher, but new questions** were emerging, particularly among the less well-off.

In other Member States, concerns were present but less acute. The **British** seemed resigned to **prolonged stagnation**, while the **Italians** expressed the need for a **political 'clean-up'**, while retaining their confidence in national resourcefulness. The **Spanish**, for their part, were becoming aware that **economic**

recovery would take longer than hoped, while the Germans, relatively calm on the economic front, were more concerned about the rise of violence and xenophobia.

In the Netherlands and Denmark, economic fears were limited, but citizens expressed concern about rising crime and signs of erosion in social cohesion, long considered exemplary.

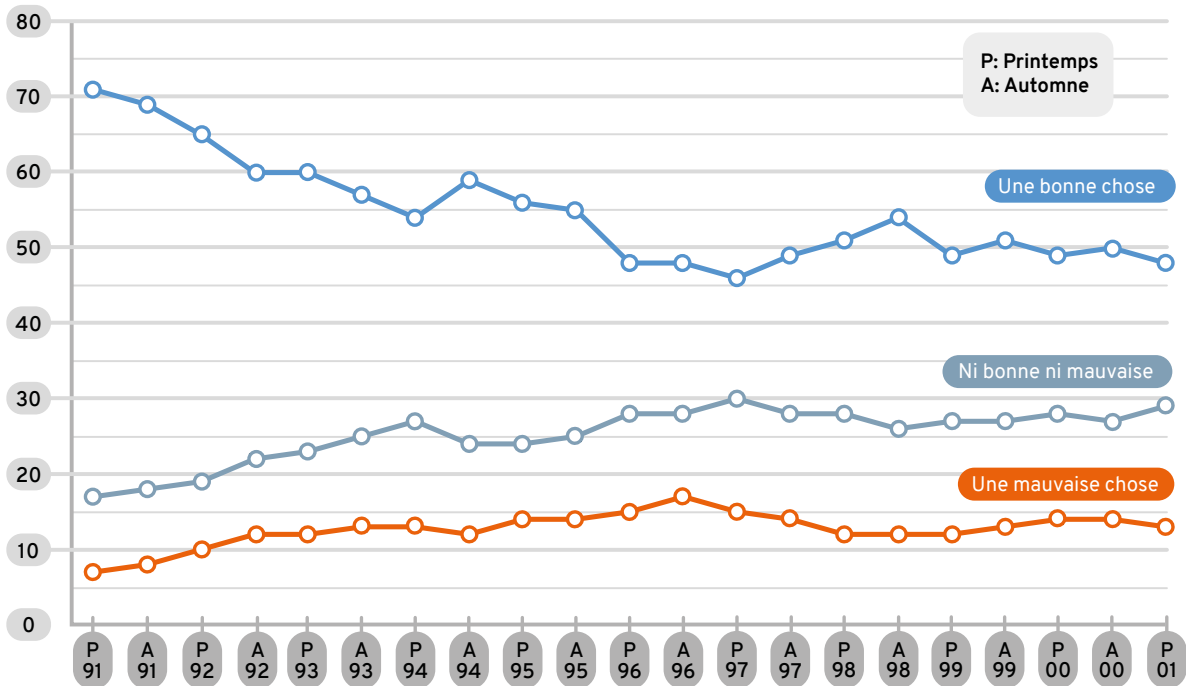
Conversely, optimism remained dominant in Portugal, Greece and Ireland, where the progress made possible by EU funds was clearly measurable.

Outside these three cases, the European Union was rarely mentioned spontaneously; its economic contributions were not denied, but remained largely abstract for many citizens. Tendencies towards withdrawal were appearing here and there, particularly in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Denmark, where criticism of 'Brussels centralisation' was becoming more frequent.

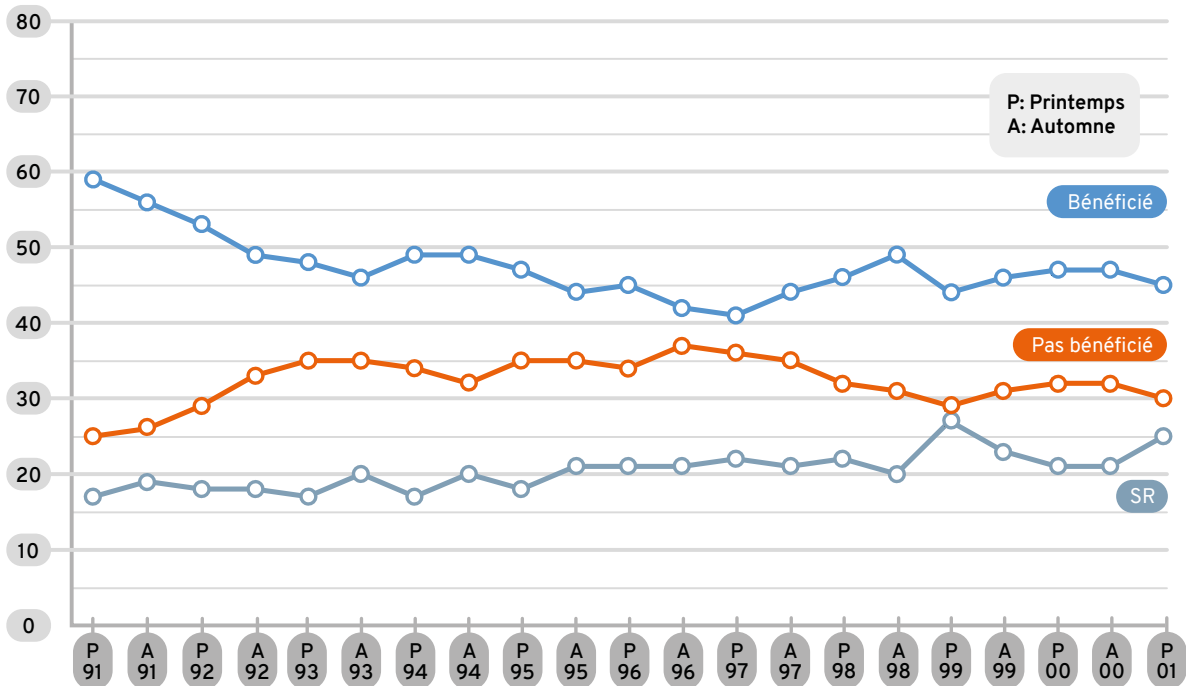
In short, Delors' message seemed to be muddled.

Other studies conducted towards the end of the decade, particularly on the introduction of the euro, confirmed this diagnosis: interest in European cooperation remained strong, especially among the wealthy (with the notable exception of the British), but reluctance varied greatly from country to country. **Support for the European project remained strongest in the southern countries** (Italy, Spain, Portugal), as well as in **Ireland and Luxembourg**. **Conversely, it was accompanied by reservations in France, Belgium, Germany** – where hostility to the euro was particularly strong – **Austria, Finland, and also Greece, where frustration with Member States considered more developed and influential prevailed.** Attitudes remained very **reserved in the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden, where mistrust of harmonisation policies remained widespread.**

Appartenance (du pays) à l'UE



(Le pays) a-t-il bénéficié ou non de son appartenance à l'UE ?



- **FROM SPRING 2001 TO AUTUMN 2007**, there was a **partial recovery** during a period marked by **significant economic improvement**, the generally successful **introduction of the euro**, which helped to alleviate previous reservations, and the **enlargement** of the EU to include twelve new member states (although this development was not without controversy). It was also marked by the failure of the **draft European Constitution**, which was rejected by referendum in two countries before new negotiations led to the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon at the end of 2007, incorporating many of the provisions of the initial text.

Between the beginning of 2001 and the end of 2007, the **European average for the membership indicator rose by ten points to 58%** (compared with 13% negative opinions). **The indicator of the benefits of membership followed a similar trend, gaining 13 points to reach 58%** (compared with 29%), after a steady rise.

At the beginning of this period, several qualitative studies conducted among various population groups still highlighted persistent gloom and widespread concerns. Many citizens felt unsettled by the rapid pace of change: the rise of new information technologies, an increasingly virtual and volatile economy, controversies surrounding genetic manipulation – GMOs, mad cow disease, etc. There were also fears about the loss of bearings, the deterioration of social ties and the rise of inequality and insecurity.

These observations concerned both the **fifteen Member States at the time and the future members** already included in certain surveys, where the prevailing feeling was one of **deterioration** over the previous ten years – weakening of public services, disappearance of state safety nets, economic insecurity – particularly noticeable among the most vulnerable populations.

In several countries, **economic improvement remained barely noticeable**. However, there were a few exceptions: **Spain, Portugal and Ireland**, which continued to reap the benefits of European funds for their development, and, to a lesser extent, **Greece** (among the wealthy), the **Netherlands, Finland and Sweden**.

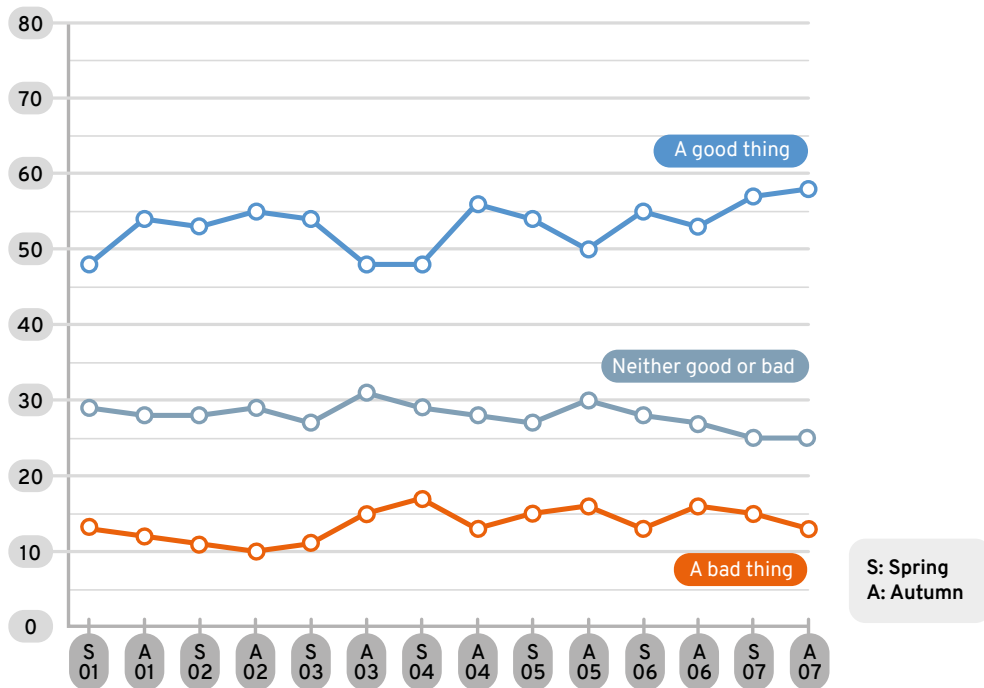
In the future Member States, Slovenians, Estonians, Czechs and Cypriots – who were more economically advanced – were more aware of the progress that had been made. Romanians, although aware of the scale of their country's difficulties, were resolutely optimistic about their future within the Union. Conversely, Poles and Latvians took a more pessimistic view.

Euro-favour was particularly strong in southern countries – despite frustrations over the slow pace of catching up with northern countries – as well as in Ireland. Belgians, Luxembourgers, Austrians and Finns were generally open to the European Union; the French and Germans remained favourable but felt particularly keenly the gap between the European ideal and the perceived reality. The British, Dutch, Danes and Swedes, while recognising the economic usefulness of the Union, remained emotionally distant, and rather reluctant to share or harmonise in other areas. Among the future Member States, the Estonians and Czechs adopted somewhat similar positions, while the Poles expressed mistrust of the Union's intentions and the Latvians feared that they would not be able to 'measure up'. The Lithuanians, for their part, displayed a more confident and empathetic attitude. The Slovenians, Hungarians, Slovaks and Maltese were generally favourable and optimistic, and even more so the Romanians, who stood out for their genuine pro-European fervour, while the Bulgarians, very aware of the challenges of adaptation, expressed cautious optimism for the medium to long term.

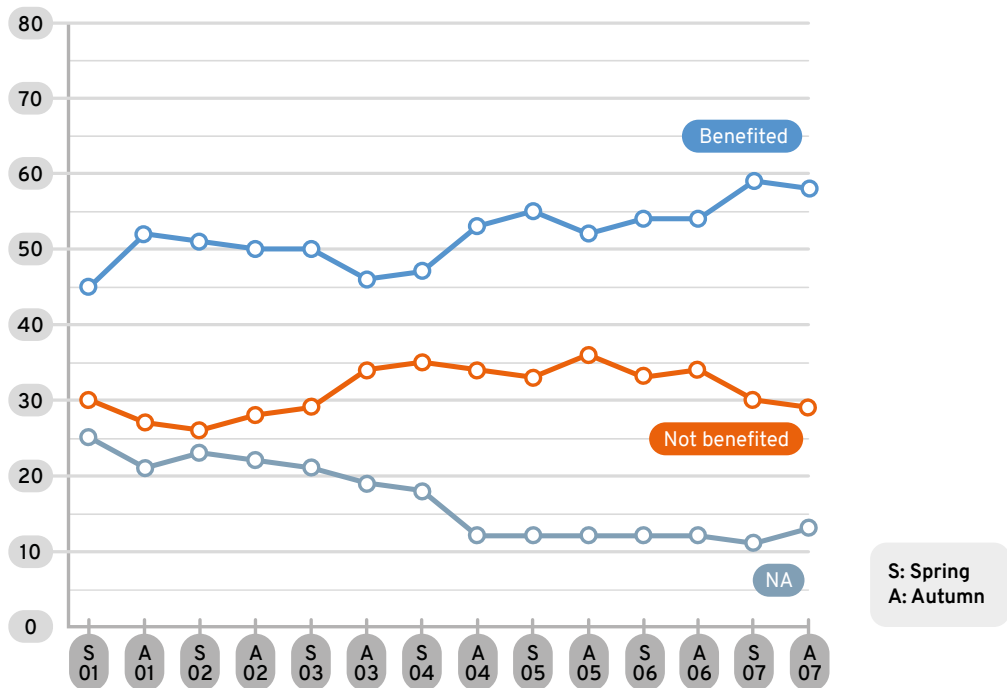
Over the years, the situation gradually changed. Despite lingering concerns, the idea of **economic improvement** gained ground in many countries, particularly among the new members, who gradually became more confident about their integration. Initial reluctance towards the euro diminished as adaptation proved easier than expected. Despite the lingering perception of price increases, the common currency established itself as a **concrete and valuable symbol of European unity**, at least in the eurozone.

More broadly, **negative attitudes towards the EU** softened in most countries – with the notable exception of the United Kingdom – without disappearing entirely (particularly in the Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic). However, the **overall improvement did not extend to all Member States**, as evidenced by *Italy*, where scepticism remained strong.

(Country's) membership of the EU



Has (country) benefited or not from being a member of the EU?



- **FROM AUTUMN 2007 TO SPRING 2011:** a decline was again observed, linked to the financial and economic crisis caused by subprime mortgages, which affected Member States, placing some of them in critical situations.

Between the beginning and end of this period, the proportion of those who considered their country's membership of the European Union to be a good thing fell from 58% to 47%, returning to the low level observed in 2001 (compared with 18% who considered it to be a bad thing). As for the assessment of the benefits of EU membership for their country, it fell by six points compared to the end of 2007, reaching 52% (compared to 37% who had a negative opinion).

Qualitative studies conducted at the beginning of this period confirmed a previously observed link between perceptions of the economic and social situation and favourable or unfavourable opinions of the European Union: the more difficult the economic situation is perceived to be, the less confidence there is in the EU.

In the old Member States, citizens – not yet aware of the scale of the crisis to come – often expressed dissatisfaction and concern. The mood was particularly gloomy in France and Austria, but also in Portugal and Greece, two countries that had previously been rather optimistic. Italians feared that their country would fall behind, unlike Spain, which was perceived at the time as making progress. Citizens of the Benelux countries said they were worried about the future, while acknowledging that they were generally better off than others.

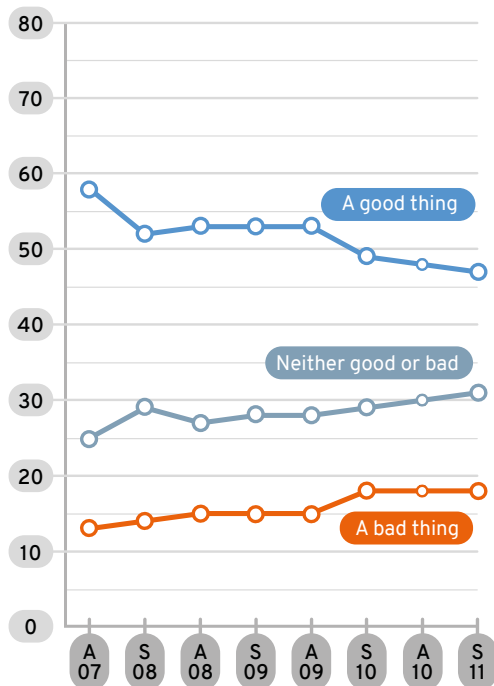
The British were expressing fears of recession, while the Irish were wondering whether the “Celtic miracle” was coming to an end. In Germany, opinions were more divided, but the rise in precariousness was causing serious concern. In Spain, worries focused mainly on the lack of prospects for younger generations.

In the new Member States, the Czechs were increasingly gloomy, and the Hungarians, once considered the most advanced towards the West, were sinking into disenchantment, now fearing that they would become a mere market for Western products. Although less acute, concerns were also apparent among Latvians, who compared themselves unfavourably with their Baltic neighbours, and among Bulgarians. Conversely, moderate optimism was observed in other countries, including Poland, which was a new phenomenon in that country.

In terms of negative perceptions of the EU, several factors stood out among a significant proportion of respondents:

- a feeling that there were no concrete benefits for the population, even though positive macroeconomic effects were recognised;
- a feeling of ‘paying for others’, particularly prevalent in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany and also France;
- fears linked to enlargement in several former Member States;
- concerns about immigration, particularly in Greece and Cyprus (and, conversely, fears of emigration in some new Member States, which fear a brain drain);
- finally, the feeling of weak national influence in European decisions – shared by small states, but also by countries such as Italy and Poland – and recurring criticism of centralisation, which is considered bureaucratic, particularly in northern countries.

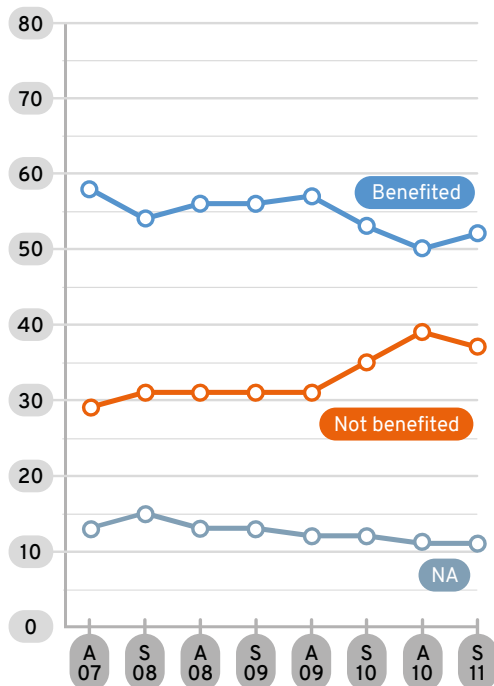
(Country's) membership of the EU



S: Spring
A: Autumn

Question not asked in A10, A11, A12, A13, S14, S15, S16, S20, S21. Data reported for these periods are the result of interpolations.

Has (country) benefited or not from being a member of the EU?



S: Spring
A: Autumn

- **FROM SPRING 2011 TO AUTUMN 2018:** there was a marked resurgence in support for the euro as the economy recovered from the crisis, strongly supported by EU action. This period was also marked by the migration crisis, which affected some countries more severely than others, and by the British referendum leading to the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union – a symbolically significant event, but one that does not seem to have had a significant impact on attitudes in other Member States.

The recovery was indeed spectacular: favourable attitudes towards EU membership rose by 15 points to 62% (compared with 11% negative), while the proportion of those who believed that their country had benefited from EU membership rose by 16 points to 68% (compared with 24%).

However, the latest *qualitative study available (2013-2014)*, conducted in 15 Member States, showed that *perceptions still varied from country to country*.

In France, where morale remained low, citizens confirmed their *attachment to the European project* and the founding values of the Union, while perceiving it more than in the past as a *cumbersome and distant institution* – a relatively new criticism of its 'bureaucratic' nature in this country.

Germans, who were also committed to the EU, remained deeply *affected by the financial crisis* and often *resentful towards countries considered to be undisciplined*, starting with *Greece*, which was accused of not respecting the rules while benefiting from EU solidarity. On the other hand, criticism of the euro had largely disappeared.

In Italy, a feeling of *resentment* prevailed: the handling of the crisis was considered inadequate, exacerbating economic difficulties and reinforcing the feeling of *German domination*. Young Italians, however, appeared more open-minded. *In Spain*, a *similar scepticism* was expressed: citizens recognised the concrete benefits of the Union, while lamenting the *persistence of a North-South divide* and the *perceived distance from European institutions*.

In Greece, perceptions were similar to those observed in other Mediterranean countries, but *even more negative*: although the EU brought benefits, it was seen as *unequal, failing in its mission to protect its citizens and imposing itself on national decisions*.

For the record, the *British* remained *firmly Eurosceptic*, with some already raising the idea of leaving the Union.

More positive attitudes were noted in other Member States.

In several of the older Member States, attitudes were improving. *In Ireland*, the 'bailout' had *not left any bitterness*: on the contrary, the Union was seen as a *protective safeguard*, whose role in the country's development remained widely recognised. The *Swedes* also showed a *positive change*, valuing the values of peace, openness and cooperation, while their former criticisms of bureaucracy were softening.

Among *Austrians*, opinions were *more nuanced*: democratic values and the rule of law were welcomed, while the cumbersome nature of processes and the influence of lobbies were deplored. The *Dutch*, for their part, remained *moderately favourable* to the EU, which they continued to perceive as *distant, cumbersome and overly centralised*, but were *less critical* than before.

In the new Member States surveyed, there was *greater confidence but persistent nuances*: opinions were generally *more positive than negative*, while remaining diverse.

The *Poles* now stood out for their *marked pro-European stance*, in stark contrast to the past. They saw the Union as a *community of values* and recognised the *rapid progress* made thanks to Community policies – Structural Funds, CAP, Erasmus programmes – while now calmly approaching the *prospect of economic convergence* with the West.

The *Latvians*, who had previously been very concerned, were now showing a *certain optimism*, reinforced by their *accession to the eurozone*, which was seen as a symbolic recognition. *Estonians*, whose '*Scandinavian*' reservations had diminished, emphasised the protective nature of the Union, freedom of movement and the concrete benefits of Euro-

pean funds – while denouncing the **institutional inertia and irresponsibility** of certain Member States, such as Greece, which they believed was jeopardising the stability of the whole.

In **Bulgaria**, attitudes were also improving: the **concrete benefits** of membership were recognised, but a feeling of **distance** persisted, with the Union sometimes being perceived as a **group to which one belongs without being fully integrated**. In **Malta**, positive opinions outweighed negative attitudes, but the **migration issue** was a source of criticism, particularly in view of the perceived **lack of European solidarity** on this issue.

In **Romania**, **pro-European sentiment** remained, albeit **more measured** than in the past: citizens lamented **the lack of visible benefits**, while recognising that their country **bore its share of responsibility**. There was a feeling of being a **minor state within the EU**.

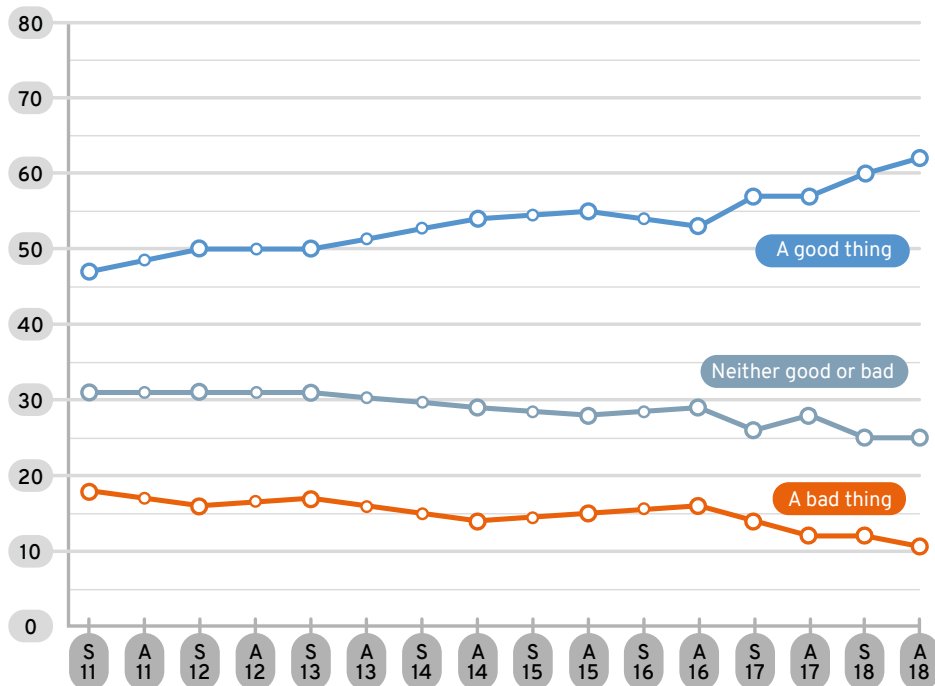
Finally, citizens in two countries expressed **much bleaker views**. In the **Czech Republic**, traditionally Euro-sceptical, **criticism of bureaucracy, the excessive weight of large states and the supposed instability of the Union**, attributed to the economic situation of southern countries, dominated. The **positive aspects** – free movement, extended social security coverage, Structural Funds – were nevertheless recognised. In **Hungary**, opinions were **deeply ambivalent**: while free movement and certain positive contributions were welcomed, **frustrations** linked to the perceived loss of economic and political autonomy were strongly expressed.

- **FROM AUTUMN 2018 TO SPRING 2024** (latest measurement available for the first indicator) **and THEN TO WINTER 2025** (most recent measurement for the second indicator, taken in the early winter): **the progress made in the previous period was consolidated**.

During these years, the indicator of belonging remained fairly stable: **62% in 2018, 60% in 2024** (compared to 12%). The indicator for **benefit** to the country continued to **rise slightly**: from 68% to **over 70%** (71% in spring 2024 and even 74% in early 2025, compared to 22%).

Several observations suggest that **successive crises have not undermined support** for the Union. The Covid-19 pandemic has had no discernible negative impact on opinions about the EU. Similarly, Russia's aggression against Ukraine has tended to strengthen European cohesion. Finally, Donald Trump's initiatives since his return to the White House seem, so far, to have consolidated European unity rather than the opposite.

(Country's) membership of the EU

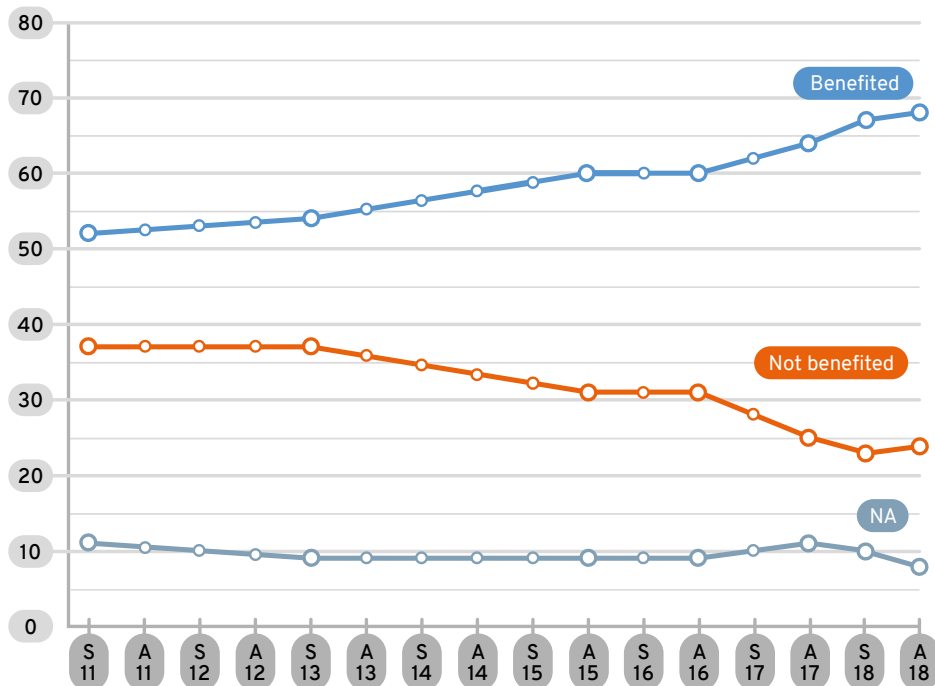


S: Spring

A: Autumn

Question not asked in A10, A11, A12, A13, S14, S15, S16, S20, S21. Data reported for these periods are the result of interpolations.

Has (country) benefited or not from being a member of the EU?

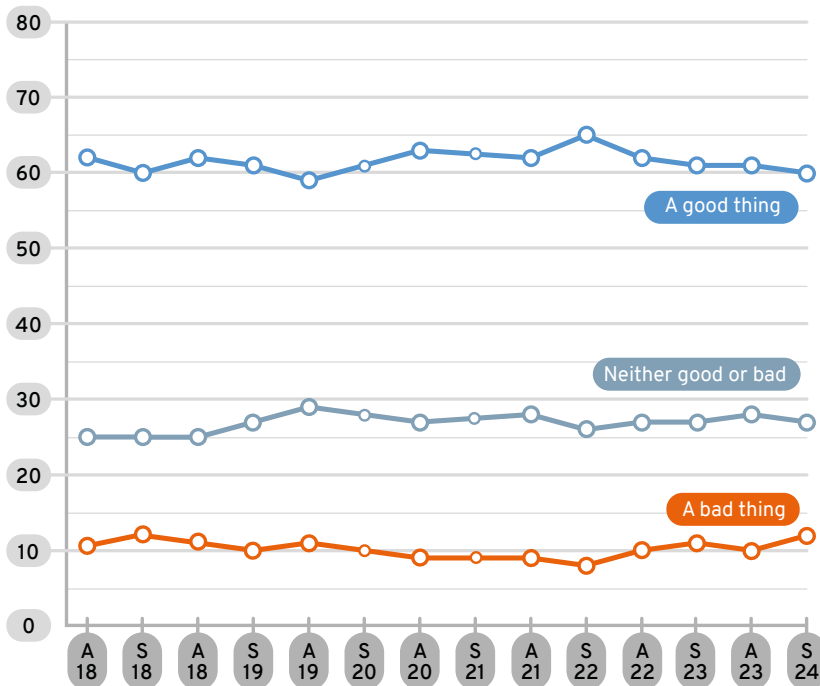


S: Spring

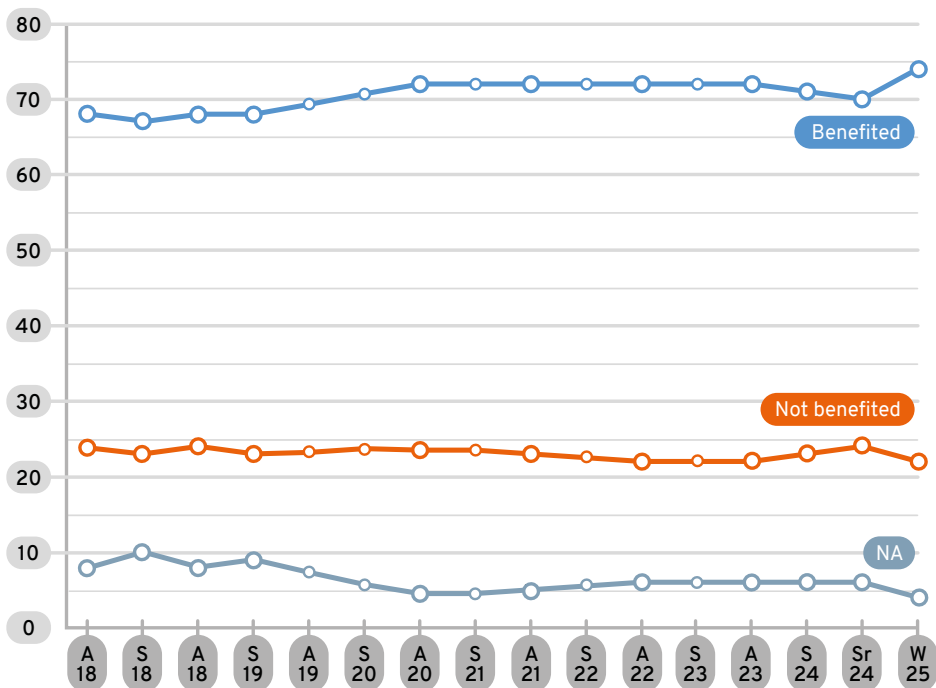
A: Autumn

Question not asked in A11, S12, A12, A13, S14, A14, S15, S16, S17, A19, S20, S21, S22, S23. Data reported for these periods are the result of interpolations.

(Country's) membership of the EU



Has (country) benefited or not from being a member of the EU?



I EVOLUTION OF EUROPEAN OPINION: SUMMARY

Opinion in favour of EU membership has fluctuated significantly over the years, ranging from a high of **71%** to a low of **46%**. However, at the end of the four decades, it stands at a **level close to that at the beginning of the period**. Even when it fell below 50%, it still remained **well above negative opinions**, which **never exceeded 18%**: citizens who are clearly opposed to EU membership remain a **small minority**.

On the other hand, **indecision** – those who consider membership to be ‘neither good nor bad’ – remains common: between **a quarter and a third of those surveyed** over the last thirty years (a higher proportion than in the previous decade). **Majority approval** does not therefore mean **overwhelming support**.

Opinions on the benefits of membership have followed a similar pattern, marked by alternating progress and decline over the six periods identified above. The **recent period**, however, is distinguished by a steady increase to **remarkably high levels**, above **70%**, compared with an **average of around 50%** in the early years observed.

Favourable opinions have always **outnumbered negative ones** (but sometimes only slightly, particularly in the middle of the second period). The levels reached in recent years suggest that a growing number of citizens, even if they are not convinced ‘Europhiles’, now recognise that **the balance between advantages and disadvantages clearly tips in favour of the former**. The Brexit experience has probably contributed to this realisation.

In an **uncertain and threatening global context**, the European Union is increasingly seen as a **pole of stability and security**. In fact, according to recent **Eurobarometer surveys**, **more than two-thirds of European citizens (69%)** believe that **the EU is an area of stability in a troubled world**, compared with **27%** who believe the opposite in spring 2025 – and a **clear majority in all Member States**, with the lowest score recorded in the Czech Republic (57%).

At the same time, **68% of citizens** believe that **their country is better off in the EU than outside it**, compared with 27% who believe the opposite. This result marks a **spectacular jump of 38 points** compared to autumn 2024 (when it was 30% versus 65%). This rapid increase probably reflects a **collective realisation**: in a world of **growing threats** and with the **United States increasingly perceived as an unreliable partner**, many Europeans now believe that it is **impossible to cope in isolation**.

This opinion is **held by a majority in all Member States**, with **particularly high levels** (above 75%) in the **Netherlands, Finland, Sweden, Belgium and Portugal**. The smallest majorities are found in **Bulgaria** (50% versus 37%), **Greece** (53% versus 41%) and **Italy** (59% versus 35%).

I TRENDS IN THE DIFFERENT MEMBER STATES

— In the largest EU countries

The table below shows **the values of the membership indicator at various significant points in time in the largest Member States**, compared with the European averages at the same points in time (percentage of respondents who consider their country’s membership to be a good thing).

Opinions on EU membership

	S 85	S 86	S 91	S 01	A 04	A 07	S 11	A 18	S 24
EU	57	62	72	48	56	58	47	62	60
France	68	69	70	49	56	60	46	61	53
Germany	54	64	71	45	45	67	54	81	67
Italy	72	74	79	57	54	50	41	42	45
Spain	-	62	78	57	72	68	55	72	60
Poland	-	-	-	-	50	71	53	70	60
Romania	-	-	-	-	-	71	57	49	47

The **French**, initially among the most pro-European – Jacques Delors’ project having undoubtedly become familiar to them more quickly than to others – are now **significantly less enthusiastic**: their level of approval has fallen by around **15 points** since the beginning of the period, after fluctuating.

The **Germans**, whose scores were **lower initially**, caught up with the French at the **peak of approval in 1991**, before experiencing a **sharp decline in the early 2000s**, followed by a **marked rebound** that peaked in **2018**. Since then, a **further decline** has been observed against a backdrop of **economic and political difficulties**, but their opinions remain **significantly more favourable** than in France – **14 points higher in 2024**.

In **Italy**, the decline, which began after an initial very high level, was **less abrupt between 1991 and 2001**, but **continued thereafter**, before a **slight recovery** in the most recent period.

In **Spain**, opinions followed a similar pattern, but the **declines were less pronounced**, and the **final level is significantly higher** than that observed in the other two Latin countries.

Poland, which started from a **modest level** when it joined the EU, has seen a **steady increase** in its indicators.

In contrast, **Romania** has seen a **steady erosion** of support for the European Union since 2007, after **initial overwhelming support for accession**.

The same trends can be seen in the **changes in the benefit indicator**, which measures the proportion of citizens who believe that their country has **benefited from EU membership**: the national dynamics appear to be similar, although the **differences between countries** remain marked.

Perceived benefits of membership

	S 85	S 86	S 91	S 01	A 04	A 07	S 11	S 18	S 24	W 25
EU	50	46	59	45	53	58	52	68	71	74
France	53	50	57	47	54	57	52	64	63	65
Germany	45	(52)	56	39	49	58	48	76	73	76
Italy	65	63	64	49	50	47	43	43	59	67
Spain	-	(9)	58	54	70	64	79	75	77	76
Poland	-	-	-	-	55	83	73	87	81	84
Romania	-	-	-	-	-	67	61	64	65	70

▲ (*) W 25: W = Winter, the Parliament's latest survey having been conducted in January-February

(**) Germany: data not available for S 86 ; 52% recorded in A 85

(**) Spain: score not very significant immediately after joining the EU, as many respondents did not yet feel able to comment on this issue

As we have seen, **opinions in Europe regarding the benefits of membership have been on an upward trend** since the low point in 2001, **and particularly since 2011**, after suffering a decline with the subprime crisis.

It is now widely recognised in all Member States that the country has benefited from its membership, even in those where opinions on the merits of membership (whether it is a good or bad thing) are not entirely positive: even if reservations are expressed, it is difficult not to acknowledge the positive effects.

This is particularly true in Germany (where the idea that it is ‘the others’ who benefit most, which was common in the early days, has greatly diminished), **Spain and Poland. The French, Italians and Romanians remain somewhat behind.**

In the countries most affected by the financial and economic crisis

It is particularly interesting to observe the evolution of opinions in three **old Member States – Greece, Portugal and Ireland** – which experienced **very serious difficulties** during the financial and economic crisis. Their respective trajectories illustrate contrasting dynamics.

In **Greece**, the indicators of belonging and benefit were initially at a **modest** level: 45% and 49% in 1985, then 44% and 50% in 1986. The country still perceived itself as **being on the margins** of a Union composed of Western European partners that were significantly more economically advanced. These scores **improved substantially** in the following years, reaching **76%** for both indicators in 1991, a level above the EU average. But the trend then **reversed**. The indicator of belonging fell to **less than 60%** in the following decade, before **collapsing to 39%** at the beginning of 2011. The sense of **benefit**, long supported by recognition of the contribution of the **Structural Funds**, remained high until 2007, before **falling by around 30 points** from the crisis onwards, only gradually returning to a more positive level (**65%** in the latest available measurement). On the other hand, opinions on EU membership remain **mixed**, at around **45%** in 2018 and 2024.

In **Portugal**, opinions in favour of membership, which were close to the European average when the country joined in 1986, initially followed a similar trajectory: stable at around **60%** until 2007, they **fell to 39%** during the crisis, but **rebounded strongly** to reach **78%** in spring 2024. The benefit indicator, measured at **82%** in 1991 (after an initial insignificant assessment in 1986), remained close to **70%** for more than a decade, then also **fell sharply to 51%** in 2011. Since then, it has **recovered spectacularly**, reaching around **90%** in 2024-2025 – one of the highest levels in Europe.

In **Ireland**, the trend has been more linear and generally more positive. EU membership, viewed favourably by **53%** of citizens in 1985, reached **78%** in 1991 and **remained above 70%** in the following decades, falling only moderately to **63%** during the 2007-2011 crisis before **exceeding 80%** thereafter. The benefit indicator **has always remained at very high levels** (above 80% since 1991), experiencing only a **slight erosion** during the crisis before exceeding **90%** in the last two available measurements.

— In other Member States

A quick review of other Member States shows that, since **the low point in 2011**, **attitudes in favour of membership have strengthened in almost all countries**, with the notable exception of Bulgaria, where relative stability has prevailed since accession.

The increase has been **particularly marked in the Nordic countries** – where scores now exceed **80%**, well above previous levels – and in the **Baltic States**, with increases of **20 to over 30 points** (although slightly less in Estonia and Latvia). These countries are now among the **most Euro-positive**, alongside the **Benelux** countries (including the Netherlands).

The lowest scores are recorded in **Cyprus, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Austria**. In other countries, such as **Malta, Slovenia, Hungary, Croatia and Slovakia**, scores are **intermediate but fairly high** – close to **60%**, or at least **55%** for Slovakia – with **significant progress** in recent years.

As regards **the benefit indicator**, levels are now **high in all these countries**. The **lowest scores – still above 60% –** are found in **Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Austria**. The **highest scores** are found in the **Nordic countries, the Baltic States and the Benelux countries**, confirming their positive perception of the benefits of EU membership.

II • Perceptions of the EU and attitudes towards it

Europeans' perceptions of the European Union can be analysed through the responses to other questions in the European Commission's Eurobarometer surveys, some of which have been asked regularly for many years – although none cover the four decades of the two indicators examined above.

The following developments provide an overview based on the results of the latest Standard Eurobarometer survey, conducted in spring 2025, as well as an analysis of the changes observed since the rise in favourable opinions on EU membership, which began in 2011.

I ASSESSMENTS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THE EU

– Economic situation

European citizens are divided on the economic situation in the EU. 44% consider it to be good, while 48% consider it to be bad. However, this represents a clear improvement on 2011 (30% good, 61% bad) – an increase of 14 points.

The most positive views in this regard are found in the Netherlands (74% «good»), Denmark (69%), Lithuania (69%), Ireland (66%), Poland and Malta (also above 60%). Conversely, the least positive views are those of the French (30% «good» versus 59%), Germans (37% versus 57%) and Italians (39% versus 56%), along with the Czechs (35% versus 60%). Negative views also outweigh positive ones in Greece, Austria and Belgium. Furthermore, the two are balanced in Spain, Estonia and Cyprus.

It is worth noting that the largest Member States appear to be among the most pessimistic.

The countries where favourable opinions increased the most between 2011 and 2025 include, first and foremost, Ireland and Portugal, which are recovering from the severe economic crisis that hit them (gains of more than 50 percentage points in the former and more than 40% in the latter), followed by the Netherlands, Malta, Hungary, Spain and Sweden. However, in five countries, positive

scores have fallen slightly (Germany, Austria, Estonia, Cyprus) or remained at the same level (Belgium).

– Current trends

When asked about the current direction of the situation, whether good or bad, **only 35% think that things are moving in the right direction in the EU, while 52% think they are moving in the wrong direction** (and 7% think they are neither good nor bad). There has been a **slight improvement since 2011** (up 4 points).

These responses are slightly more favourable than those relating to the direction they perceive in their own country (33% positive, 58% negative) – for which the improvement over the same period has been similar (up 5 percentage points).

However, they are much better than those relating to the United States, which were already more unfavourable (28% versus 58% in a survey conducted in autumn 2024) and which have fallen to a very low level of 17% (versus 73%) – most likely due to Donald Trump's first initiatives after his return to power in the United States.

This is confirmed by the responses to another question on the image of the United States: positive images fell from 44% to 29% in six months, while negative images jumped from 47% to 67%. It is striking to see that the Member States in which this decline has been greatest include not only countries that have traditionally been reserved towards the United States (such as Spain and France), but also others often considered to be Atlanticist (Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium and Portugal), as well as the two newcomers to NATO, Sweden and Finland.

In 2025, favourable views on the current direction of the EU are most prevalent in Portugal (54% versus 28%), Ireland (51% versus 35%), Poland (50% versus 36%) and Romania (50% versus 41%). They also outweigh negative views in Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania and Malta. However, they are least positive in France (21% vs. 64%), Slovenia (25%), Cyprus (25%), Greece (28%) and Spain (29%).

The scores for responses concerning the EU and the respondents' own countries are often of the same order of magnitude, although there are exceptions: relatively more favourable with regard to the EU, notably in Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Malta, Latvia and Sweden (something very new in the latter country); less favourable, on the other hand, particularly in Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Austria.

Despite some improvement, the situation is not particularly rosy. It should be noted, however, that observing a depressed situation does not necessarily mean questioning the EU's actions – other external factors are of course at play.

I IMAGE OF THE EU

In the spring 2025 survey, 43% of Eurobarometer respondents have a positive image of the EU. This far exceeds the number (18%) who have a negative image, but 38% do not take a position ('neutral' answer). Since spring 2011, there has been a slight improvement of 3%.

There are significant differences between Member States. The most favourable are undoubtedly the Portuguese (70%), followed by the Irish (64%), the Danes (63%), the Swedes and the Dutch (59%), the Luxembourgers and the Lithuanians (also above 55%). In four other countries, positive images also exceed 50%: Malta, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria.

On the other hand, the EU's image appears to be least favourable in the Czech Republic (29%), Cyprus (30%), Greece (33%), Austria, France (36%), Hungary (37%) and Slovenia (38%); however, negative views do not outweigh positive ones in any of these countries.

An examination of developments since 2011 reveals remarkable improvements in Portugal (up 35%), the Scandinavian countries (up more than 25%), the Netherlands (also up more than 20%), Malta, the Baltic States, Finland and Ireland. The trend has been in the opposite direction in Cyprus (down 12%), Italy (down 8%), Slovakia (down 7%), France, Belgium, Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia.

What are the characteristics associated with the EU? A question from the Standard Eurobarometer survey in spring 2025 sheds some light on this issue.

Is the EU democratic? Yes, according to 70% of respondents, compared with 27% who said no, which is the average response among citizens.

This idea is particularly supported by the Swedes (the strongest of all), the Danes, the Irish, the Finns, the Dutch, the Luxembourgers (all northern Europeans), the Portuguese, the Poles, the Maltese, the Lithuanians and the Croats; The Greeks are the most opposed to it, followed by the Cypriots, Czechs and French.

The idea of a protective EU is shared by 62% of those interviewed, compared with 34% who disagree.

Those who particularly support it are the Danes, Swedes, Irish, Dutch, Portuguese and Lithuanians, followed by the Maltese; here again, opposition is strongest among the Greeks, followed by the Cypriots.

Is it united? 53% say yes, while 43% say no.

Those most likely to consider it united are the Danes, Irish, Portuguese, Poles, Croatians and Bulgarians, followed by the Austrians, Maltese and Romanians; the Czechs are the most sceptical.

Is it remote? 57% feel this way, while 38% do not.

The Finns consider it particularly distant, followed by the Slovenians, Estonians and Hungarians; but not by the Lithuanians and, curiously enough, the Czechs (the perceived distance is obviously not only geographical).

Is it complex? This is a very common perception: 75% think so, compared with 20% who do not.

The Swedes, Danes and Finns are the most likely to think so, followed by the Italians, Luxembourgers and Hungarians; the Lithuanians and Bulgarians, on the other hand, lean in the opposite direction more than average.

The idea that it is effective is controversial: 49% say yes, 46% say no.

The most favourable include the Irish, Portuguese, Poles, Lithuanians, Romanians, Croatians and Bulgarians, followed by the Maltese and Hungarians. However, this idea is less prevalent in Sweden, Finland, France, Germany and Greece.

Her ability to react quickly in times of crisis also divides respondents, with 50% agreeing and 44% disagreeing.

Those most inclined to attribute this quality to her are the Swedes, Irish, Portuguese, Poles, Romanians, Croatians and Bulgarians, as well as the Danes and Maltese – in contrast to the Greeks, Cypriots, Latvians, Estonians, Czechs and also the Germans.

On a positive note, 60% agree that it is forward-looking, compared with 34% who disagree.

This is particularly the case among Irish, Portuguese, Polish and Croatian respondents. On the other hand, Greeks, Cypriots, Czechs and Belgians are the least likely to agree with this statement.

These responses paint an average picture of the EU that is consistent with other observations drawn from these surveys: little controversy over its purpose, but more over how it actually works.

I CONFIDENCE IN THE EU

In 2025, 52% express confidence in the EU (compared to 41%) – a significant increase since 2011 (41% compared to 47% at that time).

The countries with the highest levels of confidence include Portugal, Denmark and Sweden (over 70%), the Netherlands, Finland, Lithuania and Ireland (all above 60%). On the other hand, mistrust prevails in Greece, Cyprus, Slovenia (largely in these countries), the Czech Republic and France, while the two positions are relatively balanced in Belgium, Italy and Hungary.

Since spring 2011, confidence has strengthened in around two out of three Member States:

significantly in Portugal (up 29%), Sweden (up 25%), Denmark (up 22%), Ireland, Germany (up 17%) and then in Spain, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland and Austria (up 10% or more). On the contrary, it has declined somewhat in Cyprus (by 11%), Estonia (by 10%), Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Belgium (and to a lesser extent in the Czech Republic and Malta).

On average, citizens have significantly more confidence in the EU than in their national government (36% confidence in the latter, compared to 60%), despite a slight improvement since 2011 (4%) in the latter's case.

This is now the case in all Member States except one, Luxembourg (where the government enjoys particularly high levels of trust), whereas in 2011 the opposite was true in several countries (including Luxembourg, the Nordic countries, the Netherlands, Germany and Austria). The countries with the largest gap in favour of the EU now include the Netherlands, Sweden and Finland, along with Portugal, Spain, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Croatia.

These results can also be compared with those concerning citizens' trust in NATO, measured in the same way in the latest Eurobarometer. On average, 53% say they trust NATO, compared with 37% who do not.

However, there are considerable differences between Member States in this regard.

The highest scores are found in Denmark, the Netherlands, Finland (over 70%), Poland, Lithuania (69%), Romania, Sweden, Belgium, Portugal and the Czech Republic (60% or more).

The lowest scores are those of Cypriots (16%), Greeks (21%), Slovenians and Maltese (34%), and positive and negative opinions are of the same order of magnitude in France, Italy, Spain, Austria, Croatia, Slovakia and Bulgaria.

In some Member States, confidence in NATO is greater than in the EU (although generally by a small margin): Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Finland, the Baltic States, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania – with both at the same level in France.

I OPTIMISM OR PESSIMISM FOR THE FUTURE OF THE EU

In spring 2025, 62% say they are optimistic, compared with 35% who are pessimistic – a 4% increase on 2011.

Optimism prevails in all countries except three: Greece (43% versus 54%), Cyprus (48% versus 49%), and France (48% versus 47%). The most optimistic are citizens of the three Nordic countries, Ireland, the Netherlands, Lithuania and Portugal (scores of 70% or higher). In the Czech Republic (53% versus 45%), Hungary (56% versus 42%), Bulgaria (57% versus 37%), and Belgium (57% versus 42%) in particular, positive opinions are more modest.

Compared to 2011, there has been a rise in optimism in almost one in two Member States – most notably in the Nordic countries, the Netherlands, Ireland, Malta (by around 10 points), Latvia (by 15 points) and, even more so, Portugal (where optimism and pessimism were previously equally balanced). Optimism has also increased by 5 points or more in Germany, Austria, Hungary and Lithuania. The opposite is true in Cyprus (down 11%), Romania, Slovakia (down 7%), Bulgaria (down 6%), Estonia (down 4%) and also Belgium (down 13%).

In summary: increased confidence in the EU and widespread optimism about its future contrast sharply with the rather gloomy picture of the situation and trends affecting it in the short term: for the most part, citizens seem to remain confident about a better future for Europe.

III • Sense of belonging and citizenship

I ATTACHMENT TO THE EU

63% of citizens surveyed say they are attached to the EU, compared to 36% who are not. This represents a **7% improvement compared to 2018** (the question was not asked in 2011).

The highest scores are in Luxembourg (over 80%), Latvia, Denmark, Portugal, Poland, Lithuania (70% or more), Ireland, Spain, Hungary and Slovenia (close to 70%). **The lowest scores** are in Cyprus and Greece (40% and 41% respectively, compared to nearly 60%), followed by the Czech Republic (where the positive score is also in the minority). In addition, relatively low majorities in favour are recorded in Estonia, Austria and Finland (around 55%).

It should be noted that the same question, applied to 'Europe' rather than the 'EU', gives slightly more favourable results: 7% on average. The gap is particularly wide in Finland, Sweden, the Czech Republic (20 points or more), Austria, the Netherlands and Hungary, reflecting a greater distance from the EU as an institution felt by citizens of these countries, regardless of their more or less pro-European sentiments.

A very similar proportion (64%) of respondents agree with the idea that people in the EU have a lot in common (33% disagree).

This view is particularly prevalent in Sweden, Ireland and Portugal, as well as in many of the new Member States, with at least 70% agreeing. Majorities are smaller in a number of countries, with approval ratings just above 50% in France, Slovenia and Estonia, and below 60% also in Belgium and the Netherlands.

I TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE INTERESTS OF ONE'S COUNTRY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

In spring 2025, 62% of citizens agree that their country's interests are well represented in the EU (34% disagree). This marks a **considerable increase from the minority of 39%** (compared to 50%) recorded in **spring 2011** (with a slightly different wording

of the question), through to a relative majority (49% compared to 43%) in autumn 2018.

The most likely to hold this opinion are the Portuguese, Irish, Luxembourgers, Germans, Danes and Swedes (over 70%).

However, it is a minority opinion in Cyprus (35% versus 48%), Greece (39% versus 57%), the Czech Republic (43% versus 53%), Bulgaria (44% versus 48%) and Slovenia (45% versus 53%) – and only a narrow majority in Finland and Estonia.

The countries where this score has increased the most since 2011 include Sweden, Portugal, Ireland, Austria, Luxembourg, Latvia and the Netherlands.

I FEELING OF BEING AN EU CITIZEN

Overall, 75% of respondents (compared to 24%) say they feel like citizens of the EU – a proportion that has increased by 13 points since spring 2011.

The scores are high in all Member States, less so however in Greece (58%) and Bulgaria (59%); it should also be noted that the levels of agreement among Italians, French and Czechs are 10 to 12 points below the average.

This sense of citizenship has **increased in all countries**. The largest increases were in Latvia (up more than 30%), Lithuania and Hungary (up more than 25%).

I UNDERSTANDING OF THE EU

These are self-assessments by respondents of their level of understanding of the EU.

When asked if they understand how the EU works, 61% (compared to 37%) tend to give an affirmative answer – 16% more than at the beginning of 2011.

Positive responses exceed negative responses in all countries except one: the Czech Republic (and the French are divided almost equally between the two opinions). Those who consider themselves most likely to understand how the EU works are the Swedes, followed by the Danes, Luxembourgers, Lithuanians, Finns, Latvians, Irish, Slovenes, Portuguese, Dutch, Poles, etc.

Strangely, the citizens of four of the founding Member States are not among those who claim to have the best understanding; after the French, the Italians are among the least likely to think so (50% versus 40%).

In summary, these results undeniably show a growing sense of belonging and greater emotional closeness to the EU.

*A comparison of these results with those from spring 2011 highlights **particularly notable progress** in certain new Member States (Bulgaria, Romania, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta) but also in the three Nordic countries (very strongly in Sweden), as well as in Ireland, Spain and Portugal.*

I OPINIONS ON DEMOCRACY IN THE EU

With regard to democracy in the EU, 56% (compared to 39%) express satisfaction – a similar proportion to those who say they are satisfied with democracy in their own country (58% compared to 41%).

There is no data on this subject in the spring 2011 survey wave, but **a comparison can be made with the autumn 2018 survey: positive assessments of democracy in the EU gained 6 points**, while those concerning democracy at national level remained virtually unchanged (up 1 point).

The most positive countries in this regard include Denmark, Sweden, Ireland, Portugal and Poland (at least 70% of responses), followed by Luxembourg, Lithuania and the Netherlands (at least 65%).

The least favourable in 2025 are Greece (38% versus 59%), Cyprus (45% versus 52%) and France (48% versus 44%), followed by Slovakia (51% versus 44%); these countries are among the Member States where the state of democracy is also subject to mediocre assessments at the national level.

Favourable scores have increased in particular in Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Malta and Slovenia.

In some countries, the state of democracy is viewed more favourably in the EU than at the national level, particularly in Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Slovakia, Hungary, Cyprus, Greece and Malta, almost all of which are recent Member States. The opposite is true in the three Nordic countries, Luxembourg, Germany and Austria.

IV • Support for EU action

I PROPENSITY TO WANT JOINT DECISION-MAKING

62% of citizens say they would approve of more decisions being taken jointly within the EU, compared with 33% who are opposed. This result can be compared with the responses given in 2018 (the question was not asked in 2011): **6 points above the autumn 2018 score** (56% versus 34% at that time).

It is interesting to note that **the highest scores are recorded both in Member States with generally favourable opinions of the EU and in others that are more reserved:** Portugal, Spain (80%), the Benelux countries (all three above 70%), Italy (70%), Croatia, Malta, Greece and Slovenia (65% or more). Conversely, **the least favourable include citizens of the three Nordic countries (despite their tendency to now give very positive responses to other questions about the EU) and the Irish, as well as the Estonians and Czechs** (traditionally Euro-sceptical in several respects): positive scores below 50% in these countries (and well below negative scores in Sweden, Finland and the Czech Republic).

Although they remain below average, there has been an improvement, particularly in countries where scores were particularly low in 2018 (the Nordic countries and the Czech Republic, as well as Austria) and in others that were already more favourable in this regard (Portugal, Italy, the Netherlands, Greece, etc.).

I SUPPORT FOR EU POLICIES

The questions asked in Eurobarometer surveys make it possible to assess the degree of public support for certain policies.

— Economic policies

Economic issues are logically among the main concerns of European citizens. When asked to identify the most important problems facing their country, respondents primarily choose economic issues: rising prices/cost of living (by far the number one problem they say they face personally) and the economic situation in general – to which we can add public debt, unemployment and taxes.

And when it comes to their views on the most positive achievements of the EU, economic growth and power are among the most frequently cited items, along with the euro (although less so than peace between Member States and the free movement of people, goods and services, which are widely approved).

Their responses to another question asked in spring 2025 suggest **that they are fairly confident in the EU's ability to defend Europe's economic interests in the world: 70% believe that the EU has sufficient powers and tools to play this role successfully, compared with 24% who doubt it.**

In all Member States, at least 60% (or only 1% less in one country) share this opinion; the most positive of all are both countries with particularly positive views of the EU (such as Portugal, Ireland and Poland) and others that are less favourable (such as Greece and Austria).

In this case, faced with the US President's threats to increase customs duties, a very large majority of EU citizens (80% versus 14%) agree at the beginning of 2025 that the EU should retaliate, for example by imposing higher customs duties itself – a measure approved by at least 70% in all Member States.

NB: The Eurobarometer data currently available (from spring) does not allow us to assess the extent to which this very consensual opinion has been affected by the announcement of the agreement reached with the US President over the summer.

*However, a survey conducted in the five largest countries for the publication *Le Grand Continent* shows strong dissatisfaction with the Commission's negotiating behaviour, with a widespread feeling that Europe has been humiliated (particularly in France and Spain).*

— Monetary policy: the euro

Economic and monetary union, with the euro, is approved by 74% of EU citizens (compared to 22% who disapprove) – and by a very large majority of 83% (compared to 14%) in countries that have adopted the common currency. Approval ratings in the eurozone range from 65% to 90%, with only one country below 75% (Croatia, a newcomer to the euro).

Outside the eurozone, the picture is mixed.

In Hungary and Romania, approval is in the majority (at 68% and 60% respectively), while only 29% are in favour in Denmark, 39% in Sweden, 35% in Poland, 31% in the Czech Republic – and 43% versus 50% in Bulgaria, where adoption of the euro has only just been formally approved.

– Energy policy

The proposal for a common energy policy is widely approved – by 75% against 20%.

The most positive responses come from citizens in Luxembourg, Cyprus, Germany, the Netherlands, Malta, Italy, Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Spain and Lithuania (scores of 85% to 80%). Majorities are less strong in Austria, Sweden, Finland, Bulgaria, Romania (60% to 65% in favour) and the Czech Republic (52% in favour, 42% against).

On this subject, we can also mention a question in which respondents were asked whether they agreed with the idea that the EU should become less dependent on Russian energy supplies as quickly as possible. 80% agreed with this proposal, compared to 15% who disagreed. This is the majority opinion in all Member States (even in Bulgaria, a country with strong historical and cultural ties to Russia, 57% agree, compared to only 29% who disagree).

– Migration

71% (compared to 24%) are in favour of a common migration policy.

The highest approval ratings (though not necessarily for the same reasons) are found in the Netherlands, Spain and Italy (where bitterness and resentment towards the EU and other Member States ran high at the peak of the migration crisis, with Italians seeking support feeling they had been left alone), Cyprus, Portugal and Germany (scores above or close to 80%). **Opposition to this proposal is in the majority in two Member States: the Czech Republic (40% in favour, compared to 54% against) and Hungary (43% in favour, compared to 54% against).**

– Enlargement

The issue of enlargement to include new Member States is controversial. Approval stands at 54% on average, compared to 39% against. Spain and Portugal are the most favourable countries (70%), followed by Malta, then Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and Romania (probably with Ukraine in mind), Croatia, Sweden, Ireland, etc. Conversely, **the idea of enlargement only has minority support in France (41% against 49%), Germany (42% against 53%), Austria (also 42% against 53%), and the Czech Republic (41% against 51%).**

– Foreign policy

While a clear majority of 68% (versus 29%) of European citizens believe that the EU's voice counts in the world, **75% (versus 19%) call for a common foreign policy.** Particularly high scores are found in a wide range of Member States: Germany, the Netherlands, Cyprus, Spain, Portugal, Lithuania, Latvia, Italy, etc., with no score below 63%.

The European average score is 11% higher than in spring 2011.

Countries whose citizens were previously particularly reserved – Sweden, Denmark and, to a lesser extent, Finland – are now joining the others in their expectation of a common policy in this area; in Sweden's case, this change has only taken place in the last few months (and the improvement in Danish opinion is also recent).

– Security and defence

The idea of a European security and defence policy is approved by large majorities in all Member States. The European average score of 81% (compared to 15%) marks a 6% increase compared to spring 2011.

The highest scores (equal to or close to 90%) are recorded in Germany, Luxembourg, Lithuania, Finland and the Netherlands.

Citizens are **less unanimous** in Austria, Bulgaria, Romania, Ireland, Hungary and Malta – but **even there, favourable opinions are around 70%.**

Support for a common defence has grown dramatically since 2011 in Ireland, Sweden, Finland (by around 25%) and Denmark (by 17%). Significant gains have also been noted in Portugal, the Netherlands and Germany (from 10% to 12%), as well as (more recent data) in Croatia. On the contrary, favourable opinions have declined somewhat in Bulgaria, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania.

This state of affairs is confirmed by the results of other surveys. A pan-European study by the Bertelsmann Foundation in early 2024 found that 87% of Europeans were in favour of the idea of a common defence.

More recently, in a March 2025 survey for Le Grand Continent in nine Member States (Germany, France, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Poland and Romania), respondents were asked whether, in their opinion, the EU should “rely on its own forces to ensure its security and defence” or whether it could “rely on Donald Trump’s United States” for this. In six countries, majorities of between 70% and 80% favoured the first option, compared with only 4% to 11% for the second. The majorities were 58% to 12% in Italy, 59% to 23% in Poland and 57% to 27% in Romania – less dominant but still quite significant.

The threat to the EU posed by Russia’s aggression against Ukraine is clearly perceived in most Member States: by 77% of citizens on average (compared to 20%) – most strongly in the three Nordic countries (by 90% or more), Poland, Portugal, Ireland and the Netherlands; least strongly in Cyprus and the Czech Republic (but still by a majority). *As for the threat to their own country, it is perceived to a slightly lesser extent on average (73% versus 24%) – but in the Baltic States, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Hungary, the two results are more or less similar.*

Satisfaction with the EU’s response stands at 54% overall, compared with 41% dissatisfaction. Positive scores in this regard are very high in eight Member States: Portugal, Poland, Sweden, Denmark, Romania, the Netherlands, Ireland and Finland (above 70% or close to this level).

However, this issue is controversial in many other countries: positive scores do not exceed 50% (and are offset by nega-

tive scores of the same order) in Germany, France, Belgium, Spain, Estonia, Latvia, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Hungary – and are even much lower in Greece, Cyprus and Slovenia (around 35%). Various factors, which differ from one country to another, may explain this situation (for example, the European response may be considered excessive, inappropriate or, on the contrary, insufficient). However, satisfaction with the EU’s response is generally higher than with the national response to the aggression, despite a few exceptions (Estonia, Latvia, Hungary, ...).

Several proposals put to respondents in this context, however, are widely supported: strengthening defence cooperation at EU level (82% in favour, compared with 13% against); better coordination of defence equipment procurement by Member States (81% in favour, compared with 12% against); strengthening the EU’s military equipment production capacity (73% versus 20%); and increasing the defence budget in the EU (69% versus 25%).

The Member States most in favour of these measures include the Nordic countries, the Netherlands, Germany, Luxembourg, Lithuania, Poland and Portugal. Approval is generally less enthusiastic (but still in the majority) in countries such as the Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Malta.

In summary: European citizens’ attitudes towards EU policies have improved, although some of them remain controversial. With regard to foreign and security policy and defence in particular, recent events on the international stage have certainly contributed to a greater consensus.

Of course, the responses provided by interviewees to these questions should be regarded as statements of intent or approvals in principle that do not pre-judge their future positions when faced with concrete decisions that need to be taken – as can be seen, for example, in the reluctance to join in joint decision-making in countries that otherwise appear increasingly Euro-positive. But this progress can hardly be denied.

• Conclusion

After experiencing significant fluctuations for more than twenty years, citizens' attitudes towards the European Union have regained positive momentum since the end of the *subprime* financial and economic crisis. There has been a clear improvement between 2011 and 2018, followed by a period of consolidation since then.

This development has been accompanied by greater recognition of the advantages and benefits of EU membership. There is also a growing sense of belonging and European citizenship, while optimism about the future of the EU remains the majority view in most Member States.

This may seem paradoxical, given the still gloomy perception many citizens have of the current situation and the considerable economic, technological and political challenges facing Europe in an increasingly unstable world. However, growing awareness of threats – whether from Russian aggression or, more recently, the positions taken by the US president since his return to power – seems to have contributed to a certain strengthening of ties between Europeans.

It is to be hoped that leaders will understand that this is an opportunity to be seized in order to revive the European dynamic through new initiatives. As Jacques Delors pointed out forty years ago, the question facing Europe is one of «survival or decline». Today, we can strengthen the prospects for survival – to begin with – by relying more on public opinion, which is undoubtedly more receptive than it was until recently.

However, we must hope that the impression left by the EU of giving in without a word to the dictates of the US president during the recent trade negotiations will not have undermined this favourable disposition.

Of course, this overall picture does not rule out situations of particular gloom and concern. This is particularly the case in France, a founding member that has long been a driving force behind European integration, but where pessimism remains more pronounced than among other partners who

have regained confidence and momentum. Here and there, there is also resistance to joint action, which will need to be overcome in order to consolidate the progress made.

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