

Public opinion and the EU in the age of Trump's decrees

I. Changes in public opinion up to 2025: a marked rise in pro-EU sentiment since the subprime crisis

The year 2025 provided an opportunity to look back at the evolution of public opinion in the EU Member States over the forty years that have passed since Jacques Delors became President of the European Commission¹.

These four decades have been marked by significant fluctuations: an initial surge in pro-EU attitudes linked to the interest generated by Jacques Delors's proposed plan to revitalise European integration, followed by a pattern of setbacks and recoveries over a period of some twenty years and then, since the end of the 2007–2008 financial and economic crisis, a new, very marked rise between 2011 and 2018, which has been consolidated in the years since.

Changes in public opinion can be assessed primarily through the responses to two questions asked in the Eurobarometer surveys twice a year: is their country's membership of the EU a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good nor bad? And has the country benefited from it or not²?

In spring 2024 (a question that was not asked again in the following two six-month periods), 60 per cent of citizens surveyed regarded their country's membership of the European Union as a good thing, compared with 12 per cent who held an unfavourable view (and 27 per cent who described themselves as neutral). This figure was up by 13 points from 47 per cent in spring 2011.

The perception of the benefits of EU membership appeared even more positive. Favourable views exceeded 70% in both spring (71%) and early 2025 (74%, compared

DEMOCRACY &
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POLICY BRIEF
JULY 2026

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1 European Citizens and the European Union 1985–2025, Analysis, Daniel Debomy, Jacques Delors Institute.

2 Questions asked in the European Commission's Standard Eurobarometer surveys up to 2010–2011, subsequently included (less regularly) in those of the European Parliament, and then reintroduced in 2025–2026 in the Commission's questionnaires.

Unless otherwise stated, the other data referred to in this document are taken from the Commission's surveys.

with 22% who held the opposite view). This represented a **dramatic increase** compared with 2011, when only 52% of respondents believed that their country benefited from its EU membership.

Other questions, which had already been asked in 2011, **led to similar findings**. The European Union's image, optimism about its future, the feeling that it is moving in the right direction, and declared support for it all showed a moderate increase, ranging from 3 to 7 points. The trust it inspires rose by 11 points, the sense of being a citizen of the Union by 13 points, and the belief that one's country's interests are properly taken into account within the EU even rose by 23 points.

These results may come as a surprise, given the scale of the challenges facing the EU and the difficulties it has at times shown in tackling them effectively. Nevertheless, they point to a **strengthening of European sentiment in a context marked by threats and uncertainties**.

II • Over the past year: limited impact from Donald Trump's attacks

At the time the spring 2025 Eurobarometer survey was conducted, **Donald Trump's return** to the US presidency was already causing concern, but **had not yet led to the initiatives** that were to follow – some of which appeared clearly detrimental to European interests.

There were therefore grounds to fear a decline in support for the EU. This fear was fuelled in particular by the July 2025 meeting between Donald Trump and Ursula von der Leyen on a Scottish golf course, a meeting which gave some observers the impression that the European Union was **kowtowing to American demands**. In several European countries, a survey by Grand Continent revealed a strong sense of humiliation amongst citizens. Since then, the Trump administration's often haphazard but at times destabilising initiatives have continued to highlight certain European vulnerabilities.

Yet in 2026, the attitude of citizens in the Member States towards the EU appears largely unaffected by these events.

In spring 2026, 58 per cent of respondents viewed their country's membership of the European Union positively, just two percentage points down on the last survey in 2024 (following a peak of 62 per cent in autumn 2025); the proportion of unfavourable views remained stable at 12 per cent. As for the view that membership of the EU benefits the country, it still garners 72 per cent of favourable opinions, compared with 23 per cent of unfavourable opinions (having reached 74 per cent at the start and end of 2025).

The EU's image has not deteriorated; in fact, it has improved slightly, rising from 43% and then 42% to 45% of positive views, compared with 19% of negative views at the start of 2026. Trust in the EU, after falling by four points in autumn 2025, has risen by three points to reach 51 per cent, compared with 43 per cent holding unfavourable views. It thus remains significantly higher than the level of trust citizens place in their national governments, which has remained virtually stable at 37 per cent, compared with 59 per cent holding unfavourable views. Support for the EU, which had fallen by two points, has risen by one point and now stands at 62 per cent, compared with 37 per cent. The sense of being a citizen of the EU has also returned to its previous level, at 75 per cent, compared with 25 per cent. Finally, 61% of respondents believe that their country's interests are well represented within the EU, just one point lower than in the two previous surveys.

It should be added that optimism about the future of the European Union, after falling by three points, has recovered slightly (+1 point) to reach 60 per cent, compared with 37 per cent holding negative views. Conversely, the view that the situation in the EU is moving in the right direction – already held by a minority – has fallen to 32% (-3 points), compared with 55% who hold the opposite view. This assessment nevertheless remains significantly more favourable than that of the United States, where only 14 per cent of respondents believe things are moving in the right direction, whilst 78 per cent hold the opposite view.

In summary, favourable views of the European Union (after a slight decline during 2025) remain today at a level very close to that observed a year ago.

III • With the United States' image in decline, the European Union is perceived as a beacon of stability

The United States' image among Europeans has deteriorated significantly in recent months. Already rather poor at the end of 2024 (44 per cent favourable opinions compared with 47 per cent unfavourable), it fell to 29 per cent six months later, then to 24 per cent at the start of 2026, when negative opinions reached 73 per cent.

The United States is now perceived even more unfavourably than China on this measure. And this decline in support appears particularly marked in several countries traditionally regarded as the most pro-Atlanticist.

When asked about the direction in which events are heading, European citizens are also much more pessimistic about the United States than about the European Union. Thus, 78 per cent believe that things are moving in the wrong direction in the United States, compared with 55 per cent for the European Union. Admittedly, negative views still outnumber positive ones in the case of the European Union, but by a significantly smaller margin (32 per cent positive views compared with 55 per cent negative).

Other recent findings confirm this trend.

In a survey by the Bertelsmann Foundation published in May, a growing majority of Europeans (58 per cent versus 42 per cent – four percentage points more than a year earlier) now consider that the United States is not a trustworthy partner. The proportion of those who name the US as the European Union's best ally has fallen to 31 per cent, twenty points lower than in 2024. Furthermore, 73 per cent of those surveyed believe it is time for the European Union to go its own way after several decades of close cooperation with the United States; this proportion has risen by ten points in two years.

It is also worth noting the considerable decline, highlighted by the US-based Pew Research Centre, in the perception that the United States is a reliable partner: a global survey shows a drop of around thirty to forty points in this view, compared with a survey carried out in 2022, in European countries including notably France, Spain, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, as well as Poland (the only one of these countries where opinions on this subject remain predominantly positive); there is little doubt that the US President's stance over the past year has contributed significantly to this.

It is noteworthy, however, that this loss of confidence does not extend to NATO. The Atlantic Alliance continues to enjoy a positive and remarkably stable level of confidence: 52 per cent of respondents hold a favourable view, compared with 39 per cent who hold an unfavourable view – just one percentage point lower than at the start of 2025.

Against this backdrop, the view that the EU is a stabilising force in a world marked by crises and uncertainties is widely held. Nearly three-quarters of European citizens (73%, compared with 24%) agree with this statement, which is four points higher than in spring 2025.

Similarly, 66 per cent of respondents (compared with 29 per cent) believe that their country is better equipped to face the future within the EU than outside it, although this proportion has fallen slightly (–2 points) over the past year. The view that the EU's voice carries weight on the international stage also enjoys broad support: 67% of those surveyed agree with this, compared with 30% who believe the opposite, a figure that has remained virtually unchanged over the past year.

However, there has been a four-point fall in the percentage of citizens who believe that the EU has the powers and tools necessary to effectively defend Europe's economic interests in the global economy. This view nevertheless remains held by a large majority, with 66 per cent in agreement and 29 per cent in disagreement.

IV • Persistent expectations for European action

The view that more decisions should be taken at EU level continues to command a clear majority: 61 per cent of European citizens are in favour, compared with 34 per cent who oppose it. This proportion is almost identical to that recorded a year earlier (to within one percentage point), following a slight dip in the meantime. It is also up by five percentage points compared with 2011.

When asked about a dozen European policies, EU citizens express a high level of support. Support exceeds 80% in some areas, and stands at over 70% or close to that level in most of them. Only the prospect of further enlargement of the Union in the coming years meets with more limited support: 53 per cent of Europeans are in favour, compared with 41 per cent who are against, with strong reservations in several Member States.

These levels of support have changed very little over the past year: depending on the area, they have remained stable, fallen by one or two percentage points, or, conversely, risen by one percentage point.

These are, of course, expressions of support in principle, which do not necessarily pre-judge future reactions to specific decisions. Nevertheless, they reflect a favourable disposition towards joint action and the fact that citizens regard a European response as desirable in many areas.

Support for a common security and defence policy remains particularly strong and stable: 81 per cent of Europeans are in favour, compared with 15 per cent who oppose it. Support for the proposal for a common foreign policy, though slightly lower at 72 per cent to 22 per cent, also represents a strong majority, despite a slight decline.

The idea that defence cooperation should be strengthened at EU level garners 80 per cent in favour, compared with 15 per cent against. An increase in the defence budget in the EU is also supported by a significant, albeit smaller, majority: 64 per cent of Europeans are in favour, compared with 29 per cent who are against. However, on both these points,

there has been a slight decline compared with the previous year.

Awareness of the threat posed by Russia's aggression against Ukraine to the EU's security remains very high: 76 per cent of Europeans share this view, compared with 20 per cent who do not (following two surveys in which the figure was one percentage point higher).

A similar proportion of Europeans believe that the EU should support Ukraine until a just and lasting peace is achieved.

75 per cent approve of the financial and humanitarian aid provided to Ukraine, and 70 per cent support the sanctions imposed on Russia. Majorities are, however, less clear-cut when it comes to the supply and funding of military equipment – supported by 56 per cent of Europeans compared with 39 per cent – or granting Ukraine candidate country status, backed by 57 per cent compared with 30 per cent.

Across all these issues relating to Ukraine, there has been a slight decline in support. However, the assessment of the EU's response to the Russian invasion remains broadly stable: 55 per cent of Europeans say they are satisfied with it, compared with 40 per cent who are dissatisfied, representing a one-point increase in satisfaction over the past year.

V • Significant differences persist between Member States

Whilst the views of European citizens appear relatively stable in the latest surveys, they continue to vary significantly from one Member State to another.

Attitudes towards EU membership provide a prime example of this. In most Member States, EU membership is viewed as a positive thing by more or less clear majorities. Support thus exceeds 80% in Ireland and Portugal – two countries where it has risen sharply since the crisis that hit them hard – but also in Luxembourg and the Scandinavian countries, which have long been more reserved about European integration. Next come Finland, Lithuania, the Netherlands,

Germany and Spain, with figures in the region of 70 per cent, followed by Estonia, Malta and Cyprus, at around 65 per cent. Belgium, Slovenia, Poland, Latvia and Slovakia stand at around 60 per cent, whilst Croatia and Hungary remain above 50 per cent.

In seven other countries, majorities in favour of EU membership are only relative, even though they generally exceed opposing views by a significant margin. This is the case in Italy, where there remains a certain bitterness linked to the perceived lack of solidarity shown by the EU in the face of the country's difficulties: 46 per cent of Italians regard membership as a good thing, compared with 14 per cent who see it as a bad thing. This is also the case in France, which is sinking into European gloom, with 44 per cent in favour and 17 per cent against; in the Czech Republic, traditionally more sceptical, with 40 per cent in favour and 17 per cent against; Austria, where the benefits of membership are more frequently called into question, with 49 per cent in favour and 26 per cent against; Bulgaria, which is more reserved than opposed, with 49 per cent in favour and 16 per cent against; and Romania, which has moved away from the strong pro-European sentiment that preceded its accession, with 43 per cent in favour and 23 per cent against. Greece is the most striking example of persistent Euro-pessimism in a country that had, however, long been very supportive of the Union: only 34 per cent of Greeks regard EU membership as a good thing, compared with 22 per cent who consider it a bad thing.

Responses to the question on the benefits of EU membership reveal a fairly similar pattern. Firstly, it is evident that, in all Member States, positive opinions clearly outweigh negative ones. The highest levels are found in particular in Ireland, Portugal, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Malta, the Nordic countries, Spain, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia and Croatia. In these countries, positive assessments approach or exceed 80 per cent, and even reach 90 per cent in the first few countries mentioned.

Conversely, the least positive assessments come from the Greeks, the French, the Austrians and the Bulgarians, down by 7 to 8 points over the past year (there has also

been a drop of a few points in the Netherlands, Italy and Croatia). However, positive assessments remain in the majority in these countries too, where they exceed negative assessments by around 20 points or more.

As regards confidence in the European Union, some of the same countries top the list: Portugal, followed by Denmark, Sweden, Lithuania, Ireland, Finland and Malta. At the other end of the scale are, unsurprisingly, Greece and France, but also Cyprus, Slovenia – despite recognition of benefits brought by the EU – the Czech Republic and Belgium. Between 2025 and 2026, scores varied slightly, rising or falling depending on the country. The declines were particularly evident in France, Spain, Austria, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia and Latvia, whilst the European average remained virtually unchanged, with a fall of just one point.

This Euro-pessimism should not, however, be confused with opposition to Europe. The responses to the question of whether more decisions should be taken at EU level clearly demonstrate this. Among the highest scores – ranging from two-thirds to nearly eight out of ten respondents – are those of the Italians, Greeks and Romanians, alongside the Spanish, Portuguese, citizens of the Benelux countries, Cypriots, Lithuanians, Slovenians and Croatians. Yet the latter appeared significantly more 'Euro-depressed' in their responses to the previous questions. This can therefore be seen less as a rejection of the EU than as a strong, unmet and therefore frustrated expectation regarding European action.

Conversely, the lowest favourable scores – significantly lower than the rates of opposing responses – are recorded in the three Nordic countries, despite the fact that they have become particularly pro-European in other respects. This highlights the persistence, in these countries, of strong reservations towards a system perceived as being too federal. Behind them, Estonians – whose attitudes are sometimes similar to those of the Scandinavians – and the Irish, despite being very pro-European, appear divided, as do the Czechs.

Between spring 2025 and spring 2026, we finally see a slight improvement in several Member States, but also a certain decline in a few others, notably in France, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Finland, Portugal and Malta.

• Conclusion

Against a backdrop marked by confrontation with the US President's erratic initiatives and a sharp deterioration in the image of the United States, European citizens generally confirm the marked improvement in their perceptions of the EU, observed since the end of the 2007–2011 financial and economic crisis.

European cohesion appears to have been strengthened by a heightened awareness of external threats and by the feeling that the Union provides a framework for protection and collective action. However, this trend remains uneven: significant disparities persist between Member States, with some countries – including France – standing out for their particularly pronounced 'Euro-pessimism'.

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