

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

Virginie Timmerman | *project manager Citizenship and Democracy at Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*

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

## Introduction

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

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

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

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

This synthesis looks at the main points addressed in the discussion on the future challenges of the EU. This text, written by Virginie Timmerman, is based on the elements from a European synthesis written by Daniel Debomy and the (18) national reports produced by the partners of the Optem network<sup>1</sup>. Opinions expressed here are only those of the participants in the discussion groups, and do not necessarily reflect those of the whole European citizens.

## 1. The future challenges of the EU, spontaneous reactions

Participants in discussion groups were asked to talk about the future of the EU and what things they believe would be important to know more about and to better understand in this regard.

Many citizens, particularly in Austria, Estonia, France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, had trouble imagining what the future challenges of the EU could be. This can be explained first of all by the complexity of European issues effectively leading to a passive attitude with regard to information<sup>2</sup>,

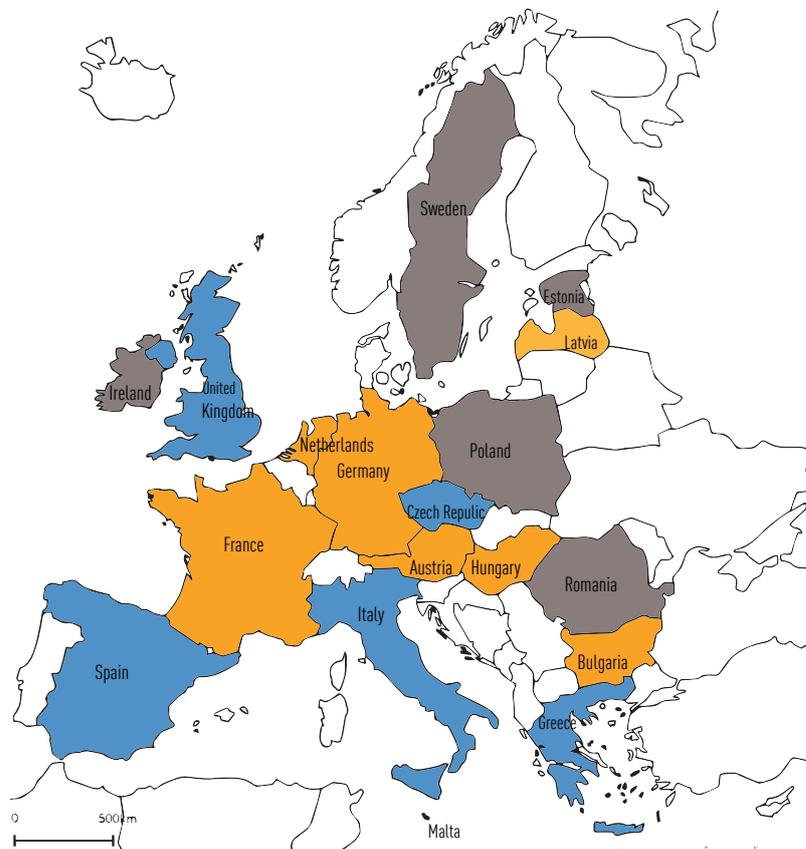
1. Daniel Debomy, “The involvement of EU citizens in the European project”, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, July 2014; Optem network, “European citizens’ involvement in the EU: national syntheses”, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, December 2013/January 2014.  
2. Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Sweden, United Kingdom. See Virginie Timmerman and Daniel Debomy, “How does the European Union communicate with citizens?”, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, November 2014.

to a lack of interest<sup>3</sup> on the part of most citizens and to a relatively low level of knowledge. In addition to these obstacles, there were doubts concerning the influence on decisions taken by institutions<sup>4</sup>, European and national alike, and about their lack of trust in these institutions and institutional and media information<sup>5</sup>.

The future challenges and issues that citizens raised during group discussions reflect their overall attitude towards the EU and the vision that they currently have of it (see Map 1)<sup>6</sup>.

They expressed many doubts and uncertainties with respect to future challenges of the EU, which can be divided into five categories (see Graph 1) due to their main concerns related to the crisis and the economy, for most of them (see Map 2). Although the European project and its values were also mentioned first in some countries, the other issues - European policies, citizenship, the functioning of the EU - were then addressed; except in Poland and the United Kingdom where citizens respectively spoke spontaneously about energy policy and belonging to the EU, two crucial issues in these countries.

MAP 1 ► General attitude of citizens involved in the project "Horizon EU" vis-à-vis the EU



KEY ► Map 1

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

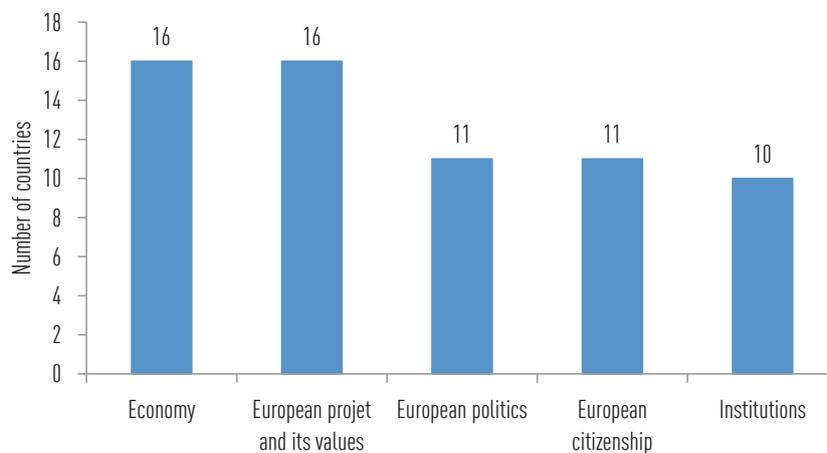
3. Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary; to which can be added Austria, Estonia, Italy, Latvia, Poland, groups in which citizens had expressed a lack of interest for European issues earlier in the discussion. See Virginie Timmerman and Daniel Debomy, "How does the European Union communicate with citizens?", *op. cit.*

4. Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Romania, Spain. See Virginie Timmerman and Daniel Debomy, "How does the European Union communicate with citizens?", *op. cit.*

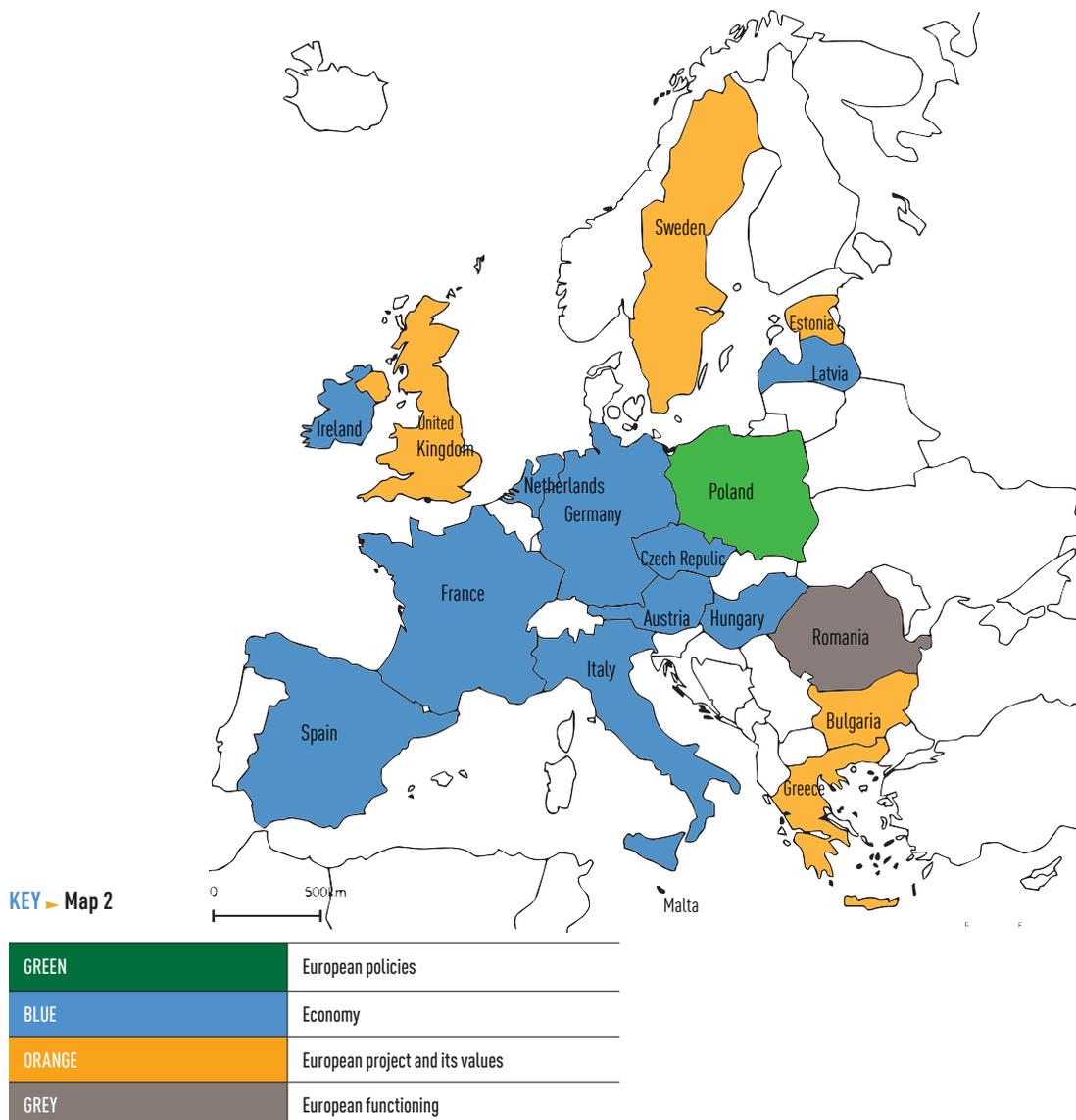
5. See Virginie Timmerman and Daniel Debomy, "How does the European Union communicate with citizens?", *op. cit.*

6. See Virginie Timmerman, "How do citizens see the European Union?", *Synthesis*, Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute, November 2014.

**GRAPH 1** ▶ Future challenges of the EU raised in the group discussions of the “Horizon EU” project



**MAP 2** ▶ Future challenges spontaneously mentioned by participants in group discussions of the “Horizon EU” project



### Citizens' voices

*"I don't know what the future might look like and I believe that many people are extremely anxious at the moment when it comes to the future of the EU."*  
Austrian citizen

*"Right now, we can't tell at all what will happen next."*  
Austrian citizen

*"Right now, we can't give estimation. The EU is currently concerned with getting a grip on the banking crisis and all of its consequences from 2008 by imposing new measures which haven't been tried out before."* Austrian citizen

*"Yes, there is no look into the future at the moment."*  
Austrian citizen

*"The actual goals have been postponed since 2008."*  
Austrian citizen

*"I don't think the EU is currently having great plans for the future; right now, they are concerned with anti-crisis measures."* Austrian citizen

*"We don't know enough to know what the future will be."* British citizen

*"It is so big and complex. It is just like large corporations that split up to make it workable again."* Dutch citizen

*"The message should be different and simplified. I don't want to hear any longer how bad things are in the Netherlands."* Dutch citizen

*"Some of such decisions are made in secret meetings, as is common in politics, therefore simple citizens won't have access to such information."* Estonian citizen

*"It's confusing between the European Parliament and the European Commission and something else, what is what."* Irish citizen

*"You only really tend to pay attention to the things that will affect us on a national level. I think that tends to get coverage in our national press you know."* Irish citizen

*"Nobody knows for sure how the EU will be in the future. We can identify some objectives, such as enlargement, but I don't know anything more than that."* Romanian citizen

*"I think this would be a very important step forward - to be aware of absolutely all decisions and that, if possible, my opinion as a citizen be taken into consideration."* Romanian citizen

*"[...] We have to be kept informed more. We only find out about things when the decision has already been made."* Roumanie

*"I would like to find out more about the decisions regarding our country. I did not find out too much so far."* Romanian citizen

*"I would like the EU to be less impersonal, but I don't know if that is possible. I would like it to have a better communication platform, so that Europeans get to know very well what we are aiming for. The ideals of the EU should be more present and more transparent - to reach the people."* Romanian citizen

*"From my point of view, we are poorly represented in the European Parliament. We don't have the experts we need - we did not choose them properly. They are our representatives there, who could keep us informed."* Romanian citizen

## 2. What will the future European policies be for citizens?

For a large number of citizens, European policies are included in the future challenges of the EU. Whether they exist yet or not, it is important to develop them, reinforce them and/or change their main directions.

### 2.1. The crisis and its consequences on European economic policies

On account of the crisis, citizens considered economic issues to be the EU's main challenge; it was the first issue mentioned in 11 countries (see Map 2) and discussed in all the countries except for Poland and Sweden. More than a future challenge, it is a current concern to be dealt with as swiftly as possible.

It was important for many citizens<sup>7</sup> to be more informed about the EU's financial issues: resources, financial flows and operations, support plans and funds, waste, the EU's monitoring of the finances and debt of member states, their influence on the EU's stability and the euro. Everything related to European finances seemed very unclear, and they believed that this is the main reason that the EU and the euro area are undergoing a crisis today.

Therefore one of the priorities for some citizens was to stabilise the EU, or the euro for some<sup>8</sup>, by establishing a real crisis management strategy, particularly by extensively harmonising national economies or even amending regulations and directives that are needed. Stabilising the EU's economic situation also would make it possible to deal with other concerns of citizens including unemployment<sup>9</sup>, competitiveness compared to other major economic powers<sup>10</sup>; and national issues are pushed into the background to satisfy European obligations according to Estonian citizens. In this regard, Austrian citizens would like to see stepped-up European support for research and innovation in order to remain competitive. Lastly, four economic issues, related to certain specific national issues, were raised: issues related to banks and to their monitoring in Ireland, the desire for harmonisation of minimum salaries in Bulgaria, the connection between the euro and the City in the United Kingdom, and finally the rise in crime rates related to the increase in social inequalities, according to Maltese citizens.

### Citizens' voices

- Crisis

*"The steady merging showed us that the idea of a confederation can't be carried out that easily in practice, and now the EU is trying to fix everything to make it work." Austrian citizen*

*"Yes, a common economic space does have many positive aspects, yet if individual countries don't play by the rules, this leads to massive problems. Only two countries complied with the stability guidelines of the*

*euro and now more or less all of the member states are struggling with the crisis." Austrian citizen*

*"The certainly reasonable Maastricht criteria were adopted in 2001 or 2002, but nobody adhered to them. I'm sure that the Greek have already known at that time that they wouldn't be able to accomplish everything; they lied to all of us and now all of the EU is working to tackle the crisis." Austrian citizen*

*"There is too much pressure on control. More involvement should be created." Dutch citizen*

*"I would like to know how the rescue plan for the euro (ESM) is financed." German citizen*

*"Regarding the European budget, I would be interested to know what the EU does with it. I think there has just been a vote for a budget of 18 billion." German citizen*

*"What would be interesting to me is to know where the money comes from. How can one quote figures if it is virtual money? They show us graphs and we do not even know what it is about!." German citizen*

*"When we were in need, they did not protect us, they just made it harder for us... what kind of Union is this?" Greek citizen*

*"We also need a mentality change... Each nation and each culture could have contributed more creatively, but we did not. Now, I am afraid it could be too late for all." Greek citizen*

*"I think that debt of the nations, Portugal, Greece, Spain, when I see countries as big as Spain, Italy, if they were to go under God knows what would happen here. There was talk before, we were talking about a retrospective deal on banking debt and stuff for bailing out Anglo, but they (the EU) weren't concentrating on us at all. They were looking at the bigger countries within the European Union." Irish citizen*

*"One European Central Bank, like in the States." Irish citizen*

*"I think that once the EU make a rule it should be across the board." Irish citizen*

7. Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Netherlands, Spain.

8. Czech Republic, Italy.

9. Estonia, France, Ireland, Hungary, Spain. See Virginie Timmerman, "How do citizens see the European Union?", *op. cit.*

10. Austria, Hungary, Netherlands, Romania. See Virginie Timmerman, "How do citizens see the European Union?", *op. cit.*

“... but I mean they will say you work by that plan but if you need to go up or down that is your own business.” Irish citizen

“I see a lot of friends here and friends in Spain, France and Italy and there is a similar trend happening over there that is happening here. Which is a lot of younger people are going back to live with their parents, because the parents are the only ones who have the money as the kids can't get a job. Now when the hope goes with people you are in serious trouble.” Irish citizen

“I would love to know what they've got planned for us in years to come, like you know. In a few years' time, if we are all supposed to be on the up now, the few quid is coming in, what have they planned for us, like if we get another recession.” Irish citizen

“...The economic problem, especially given that many member states are seriously shaken as a result of the crisis.” Romanian citizen

- Economy

“I think it's important that the EU member states regain their economic stability and can report a decline in unemployment. Right now, the USA and the Asian region develop very well which can't be said about the EU.” Austrian citizen

“We need to increase economic power in the long term in order to be able to keep up.” Austrian citizen

“It is important to remain innovative and invest in research so as not to be left behind the other powerful economies.” Austrian citizen

“What I'm really interested in is the balance. Once someone should put it on the table to show how much money is taken out by multinational companies, by banks, what profit is lost, and - compared to this - how much subsidy funds come in. I would be very interested in this, as this would actually help me to decide if I like it or not.” Hungarian citizen

“Many multinational companies may take their profits out of the country. But they do leave some money here, as well. They are given tax exemptions but they also create “x.” number of jobs. This is a line of figures that can be displayed. On the other side, we also have to see how much money we, Hungarians, leave in, and

take out from various parts of the world, or the EU, through our companies and subsidiaries.” Hungarian citizen

“I would like to see the scheme of support because I think we have stepped back. I think the EU is more or less at fault in this respect. We used to have milk and sugar industry, and these have totally disappeared from the provincial areas.” Hungarian citizen

“There exist worries that with time we here would have like it is now in London where there are districts of the city where nobody speaks English. For Latvia this would be fatal.” Latvian citizen

“I hope for a more balanced relation between income and living costs; a standardisation of lifestyles and incomes.” Romanian citizen

“I think that the challenges to the European Union are economic - whether it will manage to remain competitive against countries such as China or Brazil.” Romanian citizen

## 2.2. Consolidating European policies to be better united when dealing with countries outside the EU

In addition to the economic issues, citizens raised in several discussion groups<sup>11</sup> a number of themes that the EU is addressing or should address. They thought that the aim is to be better coordinated and to have a more united EU with the possibility to speak with a single voice in most cases.

The two themes that were raised most often were energy and migration. Concerning energy<sup>12</sup>, citizens considered that the EU needs to move towards a common energy policy to conserve the environment and fight global warming, but also to be independent from Russian resources, Russia being considered a threat, particularly in Poland. As regards migration<sup>13</sup>, citizens, particularly Italian and Maltese ones, were very worried about clandestine immigration and would like to see European coordination. Others were also concerned about internal migration because there is an imbalance in work forces between EU countries. Therefore, Hungarian and Latvian citizens were worried about the demographic deficit threatening the EU.

11. Austria, Bulgaria, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Romania.

12. Bulgaria, France, Malta, Poland, Romania.

13. Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Netherlands.

In both cases, there was a desire for internal coordination in order to better meet external challenges. In three countries<sup>14</sup>, citizens mentioned the need for common foreign policy, coupled with a security and defence policy. In this regard, Polish citizens would like to see the EU move closer to the United States.

Some citizens<sup>15</sup> would like to be better informed about possible European financing and funds for companies or agriculture so that the possibilities they offer and their distribution are transparent, for better monitoring and better use.

### Citizens' voices

- General comments

*"In numerous fields, a uniform legislation hasn't been established yet, such as financial policy, foreign policy... The question is: do we want to go on further or shouldn't we rather stabilise what we have?" Austrian citizen*

*"I think so too - I can't simply go somewhere if I haven't even reached my previous goal." Austrian citizen*

*"We should build a European political and military force." French citizen*

*"There is no common law that binds us together. Every country has their own laws - we have nothing in common other than market." Spanish citizen*

- Energy

*"They talk about diversification all the time but I don't see it, especially after they rejected Nabucco pipeline." Bulgarian citizen*

*"And the energy issue is also important. As far as I can see, Germany has an energy policy very much orientated toward Russia. I know the Germans prefer a tight relation with Russia and want to play a role with regard to energy, which is not our case." Romanian citizen*

*"Romania has a different line... Maybe it is not interested - see the story with Nabucco or Southstream." Romanian citizen*

- Environment

*"The European commitments on Kyoto,... The good and the bad pupils within Europe (...)." French citizen*

*"I would like to know if all the countries who belong to Europe today had ratified the environmental treaties." French citizen*

- External policy

*"The problem with Russia is that they are so much against the EU. And I think they see us as not wanting to make close relations with them. Because we declared to be on the European side. And we care more about the integration with the Western countries than with the East. And then they have exactly the same problem with Ukraine. Either you are their friend or else their enemy. They treat us as their colony. Russia is quite dangerous. It has always been so, and it will stay that way." Polish citizen*

*"The major disadvantage of the EU is its foreign policy; Europeans are known to be weak, they argue against one another - see the case of Syria or Libya... In Libya, it was about nations operating separately, not together, as the European Union. I would like the EU to have a unique global stand." Romanian citizen*

- Immigration

*"Migration is the problem in Europe." Dutch citizen*

*"They should include a good policy on asylum it has to stop at some point, otherwise everyone again tries to go to Lampedusa." Dutch citizen*

*"Migration is the basis, if all good young people move away, you beat out the whole future. Look at how the elderly live in Romania, now that the youngsters left." Dutch citizen*

<sup>14</sup>. Austria, Netherlands, Romania.  
<sup>15</sup>. Ireland, Italy, Latvia.

### 3. What direction should the European project take for the citizens?

In all countries except for Ireland and the Netherlands, citizens considered the European project and its values to be a challenge (see Graph 1); they were even the top issue raised in five countries (see Map 2).

#### 3.1. Defining the essence of the European project and affirming its values

The issue of European borders was the number one concern of citizens concerning the European project. The membership of the United Kingdom, or rather its possible departure, was a central issue. Of course this question is being asked in the United Kingdom but also in Bulgaria, Latvia, Malta and Romania. Bulgarians citizens were worried about the effect that the United Kingdom's departure could have on other member states, particularly Germany, as opposed to Romanians citizens who did not really believe this will happen. Latvians citizens were concerned about a possible destabilisation of the EU if rich countries leave. And lastly, Maltese citizens were worried about debates taking a possible Eurosceptic turn this possibility would cause. More generally, Austrian and Czech citizens were alarmed about the EU's development over the next five years, which could possibly collapse given the economy. Citizens in certain countries had mixed feelings about possible future enlargement. Czech and Austrian citizens would not like to see any enlargement in the coming years. Latvians ones were divided on the access of Turkey to the EU because it could be an economic advantage, but culturally difficult. As for Ukraine and countries close to Russia, Latvians citizens thought that it would be very problematic for relations with Russia while Polish citizens were favourable.

This issue is eminently linked to citizens' questioning the essence of the European project that was never really explained and about which they would like to have a clear idea<sup>16</sup>. Where is the EU headed? What are its values, its borders, its common projects? To have a better vision, some countries would like to know what the benefits of the EU are and have been for their countries, and about the situation of the member states before and after their joining the

EU<sup>17</sup>, whether with respect to legislation, their rights or the economy<sup>18</sup>. As for values, some Europeans thought that the EU should move towards a model of transparent democracy<sup>19</sup>. Spanish citizens for example no longer wanted to see secret bilateral meetings being held. In this regard, Swedish citizens would like to know more about the role of lobbies. Some also considered that the EU should present itself as being more united<sup>20</sup>, develop even more consensus and solidarity<sup>21</sup> and further seek common interest among member states<sup>22</sup>.

#### Citizens' voices

- Enlargement or break up?

*"And yet [despite of the crisis] we still let states like Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, which are deeply in debt, join the EU." Austrian citizens*

*"The corruption in these countries is also a major problem." Austrian citizens*

*"They were told to work on their corruption and legal security and we believe them not to be corrupt anymore in two years time and let them join - I don't think this is the right way." Austrian citizens*

*"New countries can join the EU in the long term; there is no doubt about that. However, this needs to be discussed and the future development needs to be considered." Austrian citizens*

*"A more centralised EU is even desirable, that was proven by the economic crisis." Latvian citizen*

*"What if countries start pulling out of the system? What will happen then?." Maltese citizen*

*"The future of the European Union is clear. It will be like it has been so far... I think it will stick to this format - two-three countries may join, two-three may exit...." Romanian citizen*

*"Germany is a very powerful country, and the Germans are not willing to exit the European Union." Romanian citizen*

<sup>17</sup>. Bulgaria, Italy.

<sup>18</sup>. Spain, United Kingdom.

<sup>19</sup>. Germany, Greece, Hungary, Romania, Spain, Sweden.

<sup>20</sup>. France.

<sup>21</sup>. Greece.

<sup>22</sup>. Spain.

<sup>16</sup>. Estonia, Greece, Spain.

*"I don't think that Greece wants to exit either. There will be something going on in England - I know they are having a big referendum in two years or three; they have always been different. There are other countries that stay out - Switzerland, Norway." Romanian citizen*

- Essence of the European project

*"We can only do this together." Austrian citizen*

*"The major global challenges, such as climate change and general prosperity, can only be realised if we work together; many people don't seem to realise this." Austrian citizen*

*"We have to re-invent what unites us; all we hear about is on what sets us apart." Greek citizen*

- What are the benefits of belonging to the EU?

*"What have we gained? Bosch washing machines ... That's what we want to know - the benefits need to be more publicised!." British citizen*

*"We are blocked by the fiscal drain, the firms close down because we have a fiscal drain of 60%, I would like to understand how EU could help us." Italian citizen*

*"From the political talks I hear that the entry in Europe gave us only disadvantages, I would like to understand what on the contrary represented an advantage to us and in which sense we would do better than 20 years ago." Italian citizen*

*"I would like to hear somebody proving that the aim of this project had not been that of upsetting the economic balances, as it eventually happened." Italian citizen*

*"For me, the only difference brought by being in the Union is that there are funds we can access." Romanian citizen*

- European values

*"The natural evolution should be a common constitution and a higher power to the European Parliament instead of the Commission. If we want a unified Europe, we need to have at least a common set of rules." Greek citizen*

*"The problem is that all information we get is about the differences between member states. There is no common political directive, something that says to the world: "this is what Europe as a whole believes on this issue." Greek citizen*

*"To start with, if our politicians had more courage, if the European Union spoke with one voice on key problems (...), it should not be so difficult to agree." French citizen*

*"We (the European countries) are always opposing each other! While we are building Europe? (Unfortunately) it will take decades for it to be a beautiful machine (...). This lack of unity is shocking." French citizen*

*"We should have a clearer insight because there are some grey spots. Most of us can only see a grey spot here. No one can see clearly, including me." Hungarian citizen*

*"I am firmly convinced that we don't have access to all the information we need to form an opinion." Romanian citizen*

*"I think that a handful of people know precisely what is going to happen." Romanian citizen*

### 3.2. Affirming the role of citizens in the EU

A large number of citizens<sup>23</sup> were questioning the European identity and citizenship. Citizens were particularly afraid of losing their national identity because of the EU and globalisation<sup>24</sup>, while Maltese citizens were questioning the lack of feeling of belonging to the EU. Spanish citizens believed that the EU should help step up exchanges and travel of European citizens. In this same vein, German and Latvian citizens would like to have comparative information about other European citizens. British citizens had doubts whether company interests, which are very well represented at EU level, and those of citizens, which are not the same, are aligned. German citizens would like to see their representatives address "real" citizens and their problems. Spanish citizens were also questioning their European representatives and their preparation. These last cases reflect the fact that citizens do not feel that they are properly represented. Spanish, Irish, Italian and Swedish citizens

23. Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Romania, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom.

24. Bulgaria, Greece, Latvia, Romania.

would also like to have more information about the rights and duties of citizens as well as about their possibility to defend them in the justice system.

### Citizens' voices

- Citizens' reality

*"I saw a debate with Maybritt Illner. There was a Greek restaurant owner from Cologne who said that we were not helping Greece with that rescue plan. We do not know what we should think any more! I would like someone to explain to me if it is or not a good thing! Does it really help them?." German citizen*

*"I would like to be informed on the people. Now are they faring? How are we helping them? Not only the country." German citizen*

*"I saw in the media that 50% of young Spanish graduates do not find a job. And then the subject disappeared (from the media). I would like to know what has become of them." German citizen*

*"Personally what I would like to know is how a country like Greece has arrived at the point where it now is? Who is responsible? Some people committed suicide and nobody is interested, at least not the European Union." German citizen*

- Information about the different European citizens

*"I would like to know what countries like Greece think of Germany. They must feel rushed. Sure! They hate us and they don't conceal it." German citizens*

- Identity

*"This is the idea of globalization, to take away national identities - not to have separate national states but a huge state called Europe. The well developed countries will benefit from globalization. The ones like us are easily manipulated all the time." Bulgarian citizen*

*"Once, we believed that a European identity is possible... now I strongly feel that we, as Europeans, have not worked hard enough to reach this goal." Greek citizen*

*"I still believe that one of the most important problems that the EU needs to address is the preservation*

*of traditions. This globalisation may threaten diversity. [...] I would regard diversity as the main priority and then the economic problem." Romanian citizen*

*"Globalisation does not mean losing identity. It is only a union of forces and a faster spreading of technologies, of development. This does not mean that we are destroying culture and traditions. On the contrary: we need to support them. But we are having an exchange: we give what we have and they do the same. We are creating a mix for the benefit of all." Romanian citizen*

*"I think that traditions might be destroyed, I think we are on the verge of destroying them. Maybe we should not have such a large opening toward other things." Romanian citizen*

- Rights of European citizens

*"I would like to have information on our rights in the European Community, I don't know my rights as an Italian, let's imagine what could they be as an European." Italian citizen*

*"I would like to have indications and guidelines on how to grow up as a people, how to take out our Italian blames." Italian citizen*

*"I would like to know better what they offer. I illustrate what I sell to people coming into my store." Italian citizen*

*"Diversity must be maintained. I am Romanian - that is fundamental. But, at the same time, I cannot do without the others. It is pointless if I live in Romania and don't travel or study in another country. I need them in order to know what I am doing, what I am thinking, but at the same time I don't want to leave my country. That is how I think it should be." Romanian citizen*

*"Of course, diversity must be preserved, we have to avoid standardisation." Romanian citizen*

*"You should vote for a member of the European Parliament you could tell, OK, I will vote for you, and then I'll hold you accountable." Spanish citizen*

### 3.3. Making the functioning of the EU clear

Lastly, a number of European citizens mentioned that the functioning of the EU was a challenge<sup>25</sup>. First at institutional level, citizens<sup>26</sup> would like to understand and consequently be informed about how the EU works. They would like to know the role of the different people who work for the EU and represent it, what their salaries are, what their decision-making process is, and how it works in a practical and concrete terms.

Then at the level of relations between the EU and its member states, Romanian citizens thought that the EU should have a European leader, in other words a public figure who the citizens and the international scene could identify with. In some countries in the East<sup>27</sup>, citizens considered that there is an imbalanced relationship among member states. They had the feeling that European decisions are taken for a small group of privileged countries for Romanian citizens, for countries using the euro for Polish citizens, but also that countries are labelled and consequently receive different treatment for Czech citizens. Yet Romanian citizens thought that opportunities should be the same for all. Some have even developed an inferiority complex and considered that adaptation of their respective administrations is a major challenge in order to finally be in line with the EU and its requirements<sup>28</sup>. Spanish and Estonian citizens would like to know how much room to manoeuvre and independence member states have concerning their national problems and their budget.

#### Citizens' voices

- Relationship between the EU and its member states

*"There are quite a few states in the EU that need to be restructured, us included, but the question is: what can the European Union do in this respect since no country likes to be told what to do."* Austrian citizen

*"And the governments react against such actions; you can see the German and the French governments react against these interventions."* Austrian citizen

*"The national goals are totally contrary - every state just tries to claim as many right as possible for itself but the „together.“ aspect falls by the wayside."* Austrian citizen

*"That's still the major problem in the EU - they just don't seem to be able to reach an internal agreement."* Austrian citizen

*"And this is not going to change in the foreseeable future."* Austrian citizen

*"The catching up of other countries results in a loss of prosperity for us, in the EU as well as globally. This can be seen by the fact that we will be paying for Greece for decades, that's our prosperity, our money. Greece is being financed by the other States and will increase in strength in a global context. When India and China catch up, they will take something away from us in a sense that they will have more and we will have less. No state would want that because nobody is ready to give up on things."* Austrian citizen

*"The European legislation is too loose."* French citizen

*"Perhaps there should be more controls."* French citizen

*"Why should Europe direct me on what is right or wrong... we have our own national representatives."* Greek citizen

*"It seems to me that the main danger is that some countries become very powerful. It can be clearly seen that Germany supports, financially speaking, countries like Greece or Spain. Practically, the Greeks are Germany's slaves. All their debt comes from there."* Romanian citizen

*"I don't think that a country should be assessed only from an economic point of view. Quality of life has many components, and they are not only material ones."* Romanian citizen

*"I wish there was a relative standardisation of opportunities, I wish it was much easier than now to go and study in another country."* Romanian citizen

*"I think that the support given by the EU to all of its members is an exceptional thing in the history of Europe. It seems to be an opportunity that anyone, any group, should benefit from. I have heard of these*

25. Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden.

26. Bulgaria, France, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Sweden.

27. Czech Republic, Poland, Romania.

28. Bulgaria, Romania.

*funds and I tried to think of a historical precedent – I have not found one.” Romanian citizen*

- Institutions

*“It’s just they are playing to the sensitivities of the French, shifting off to Strasbourg every couple of weeks. (...) but then if it did get a permanent seat everyone would be saying why did they pick there?.” Irish citizens*

*“In general, you need leadership for every new thing you want to develop, and I don’t see a leader here. America has Obama... We might have it, but it is anonymous. If you ask me to indicate one single representative name at the top of the EU, I don’t know what to answer.” Romanian citizen*

*“If we would have a leader like Obama, then we would be the United States of Europe, and I don’t think that this is the ideal.[...] To much ‘personality’ at the centre is not good either, for then you lose something. It is a difficult project. The problem is that there is no solution to that.” Romanian citizen*

*“I think that the EU seeks to secure equality of opportunities and the distribution of European funds. The fact that we succeed or not in accessing them, as the Germans or Poles do, is questionable. It depends on the practical spirit of each country.” Romanian citizen*

*“Regarding European funds – we receive them, but we have to be capable of managing them, and the bureaucracy does not help. It depends on who gets these funds, because there have been many grants and the money just vanished.” Romanian citizen*

*“The only problems we have are those we ourselves created. We are not capable of managing European funds, we are not capable of being a transparent country – corruption is massive. It is pointless that they are giving us funds if these funds don’t go where they should. I am not sure that this is the problem of the EU. It is our problem.” Romanian citizen*

*“We wanted to join the EU and then we realised that we don’t really know what to do with this. We have to determine our priorities, to know what we are going to do with this membership and then make the best out of it.” Romanian citizen*

*“We are more indolent, we wait for others to fix the problem.” Romanian citizen*

*“We are not being helped either, we are being used only as a market for foreign products.” Romanian citizen*

*“That is what I expect from the EU, to help us, to support us in reaching their level.” Romanian citizen*

*“The industry has been ruined and there are no jobs. It is difficult now to reach a GDP similar to that of Western countries. We don’t get any help from the outside. But I don’t think that this is necessarily the solution, to get foreign help – we have to find that help within ourselves.” Romanian citizen*

*“I don’t think that we are not being helped; we should not be that melodramatic, because we are being helped, but I feel like the support gets lost somewhere on the way and I don’t figure out where exactly.” Romanian citizen*

*“I think we are too small.” Romanian citizen*

*“It is also about the feelings of inferiority we have at a national level. I think that very many Romanians say ‘that’s how we Romanians are’. I know many Romanians who are very nice and I would not change them for other Europeans.” Romanian citizen*

*“The way we are now being perceived in the EU and we are taking part in this Union depends on what we can do at the present moment. We can make progress.” Romanian citizen*

*“Solidarity is impossible because we live under a capitalistic system, ruled by self-interest only. A global group is impossible to build because members only come together to protect their own interests. They don’t care whether their interests have an impact on a third country.” Spanish citizen*

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

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

On the same themes...

HOW WOULD CITIZENS LIKE TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION?  
 Virginie Timmerman and Daniel Debomy, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, December 2014

HOW DOES THE EUROPEAN UNION COMMUNICATE WITH CITIZENS?  
 Virginie Timmerman and Daniel Debomy, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, November 2014

HOW DO CITIZENS SEE THE EUROPEAN UNION?  
 Virginie Timmerman, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, November 2014

▶ HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE EU? THE OPINION OF EUROPEAN CITIZENS  
 Video, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, November 2014

CITIZENS FACING “BRUSSELS’ EUROPE”  
 Virginie Timmerman, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, August 2014

EUROPEAN CITIZENS IN BRUSSELS: WHAT MESSAGES?  
 Virginie Timmerman, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, August 2014

THE INVOLVEMENT OF EU CITIZENS IN THE EUROPEAN PROJECT  
 Daniel Debomy, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, July 2014

▶ WHAT THE FRENCH TOLD US ABOUT GLOBALISATION  
 Video, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, May 2014

▶ WHAT THE FRENCH TOLD US ABOUT EURO  
 Video, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, May 2014

▶ WHAT THE FRENCH TOLD US ABOUT THE EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY  
 Video, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, May 2014

▶ WHAT THE FRENCH TOLD US ABOUT THE EMPLOYMENT IN THE EU  
 Video, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, May 2014

EUROPEAN CITIZENS’ INVOLVEMENT IN THE EU: NATIONAL SYNTHESSES  
 Optem network, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, December 2013/January 2014

EU NO, EURO YES? EUROPEAN PUBLIC OPINIONS FACING THE CRISIS (2007-2012)  
 Daniel Debomy, *Policy Paper No. 90*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, March 2013

DO THE EUROPEANS STILL BELIEVE IN THE EU?  
 Daniel Debomy, *Studies & Reports No. 91*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, June 2012

MIGRANTS – EUROPEAN STORIES  
 Frédéric Praud, Florence Brêthes, Hamed Borsali and Kiel, *Comics*, Paroles d’hommes et de femmes / Notre Europe, May 2012

THE CITIZENS OF EUROPE AND THE EUROPEAN UNION IN THE CURRENT CRISIS  
 Daniel Debomy, *Policy Paper No. 47*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute / Fondation Jean Jaurès, November 2011

Managing Editor: Yves Bertoncini • The document may be reproduced in part or in full on the dual condition that its meaning is not distorted and that the source is mentioned • The views expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher • *Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute* cannot be held responsible for the use which any third party may make of the document • Original version and partial translation from French: Janet Roberts Maron • © *Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*



ISSN 2257-5510

19 rue de Milan, F - 75009 Paris  
 Pariser Platz 6, D - 10117 Berlin  
 info@notre-europe.eu  
 www.notre-europe.eu

