

Public Opinion and the Eurozone Crisis Synthesis of the presentation of the latest PEW Global Attitudes Survey¹

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Bruce Stokes, Director of Pew Global Economic Attitudes, presented the findings of the survey at a debate in Paris on 30 May 2012 which was moderated by Yves Bertoincini, Secretary General of Notre Europe.

The survey covers five Member States whose currency is the euro, two (Poland and the Czech Republic) that are committed to join the common currency, and Britain, a country with an opt-out. With respect to the [Fiscal Compact \(Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance – TSCG\)](#)²³, the two countries at the sidelines (Britain and the Czech Republic) are included. Greece, the Member State at the centre of the current crisis, is also surveyed. The eight countries (all six “big” Member States) whose public opinion is examined in the PEW Global Attitudes Survey make up 75% of the EU population.

What are the main findings of the PEW Global Attitudes Survey? A crisis of confidence across Europe, but its extent varies in the eight Member States that are covered. In short, “Greeks and Germans are at Polar Opposites”.

This opposition is clearly visible in the perception of the national economic situation which may have an impact on the perception of the European integration and the treatment of the Eurozone crisis.

Apart from this, the study investigates the opinion on membership of the EU and the Eurozone, the assessment of leading actors in the crisis, measures to combat the crisis, and the views of other Member States.

1. The perception of the national economic situation

1.1. National economic conditions are perceived positively by 73% of the population in Germany, elsewhere in Europe people think that their national economy is doing badly.

- The number for Germany increased by ten percentage points compared with 2007.
- In crisis-hit Spain, only 6% see their national economic situation as “good” (down from 65%).
- The French also see their economic situation worsened: In 2007 30% responded “good”, five years later only 19% respond “good”.

¹ Pew Research Center, [“European Unity on the Rocks. Greeks and Germans at Polar Opposites”](#), published 29 May 2012.

² The underlined words refer to documents available on *Notre Europe*’s website (www.notre-europe.eu).

³ António Vitorino, “The European ‘Fiscal Compact’: a goal or a starting point?”, *Tribune, Notre Europe*, June 2012.

1.2. Europeans are more pessimistic than Americans – but some of their worries are surprising if compared with other Member States: 82% of Czechs worry about their national debt (at 40% of GDP) and Germans worry least about inflation (56%).

- In Europe nearly half of the population (44%) think that their economy will worsen in the next 12 months (compared to only 20% of the population in the United States).
- Against conventional wisdom, Germans are less worried about rising prices than their fellow Europeans (for example Greece 93%, Italy 89%, Poland 79%).
- Also against conventional wisdom, the survey shows that among the top 4 “threats to well being” (lack of jobs, size of national debt, rising prices, power of financial institutions and banks), Germans worries the least about inflation (56% compared to 70-78%).

2. The mixed perceptions of membership in the EU and in the Eurozone

2.1. Is EU membership a good thing?

- The results vary from 65% for “is a good thing” in Germany to 30% in Britain and 28% in the Czech Republic. In Greece 43% say that EU membership is a “good thing”, 27% it is a “bad thing” and 28% “neither”.
- In the Czech Republic, Poland and Spain the share of the population saying that “membership in the EU is a good thing” dropped significantly by 13 to 17 percentage points. There are no previous data for Greece.

2.2. Majorities in the five countries whose currency is the euro want to keep the euro (52-71%).

- The paradox is as follows: minorities in the five surveyed Member States whose currency is the Euro think that the Euro is a good thing, but majorities want to keep it.
- The British, Czechs and Polish think that not having the euro is a good thing (54-73%).

Majorities Say Keep the Euro

	Keep euro	Return to	DK
	%	currency*	%
	%	%	%
Greece	71	23	6
France	69	31	0
Germany	66	32	2
Spain	60	36	4
Italy	52	40	7

* In France, question asked about franc; in Germany mark; in Spain peseta; in Italy lira; in Greece drachma.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Q67.

Source: PEW Global Attitudes Survey, p. 28.

2.3. Only a majority of Germans (59%) believe that European integration strengthened their national economy.

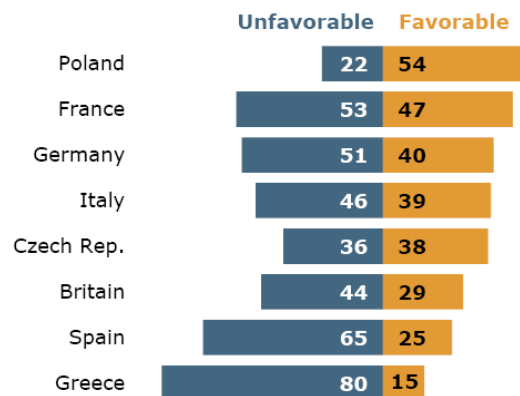
- For all other countries, less than 50% of the population see a positive impact of European integration on the national economy.
- In Greece (18% “strengthened”) and Italy (22% “strengthened”), clear majorities think that European integration has weakened their national economy (respectively 70% and 61% say “weakened”).

3. Assessing the leading actors in the Eurozone crisis

3.1. *The European Central Bank gets a mixed, but in most countries an unfavourable rating by citizens.*

- The rating “very unfavourable” (to be distinguished from “somewhat unfavourable”) varies largely from 5% in Poland, 8% in the Czech Republic and 9% in Germany, to 16% in Britain, 20% in Italy and 21% in France, and to high levels of 35% in Spain and 52% in Greece.
- In general, citizens do not see the European Central Bank in a positive light (see the graph below: “very unfavourable” + “somewhat unfavourable” in France 53%, in Germany 51% ...).

European Central Bank Generally Seen In Unfavorable Light



PEW RESEARCH CENTER Q8o.

Source: PEW Global Attitudes Survey, p. 27.

3.2. *National opinions about national leaders dealing with the crisis differ.*

- All countries (except Greece with 14%) agree that Angela Merkel does a “good job” (from 55% in Italy to 76% in France) and have a positive view of Germany.
- In her ratings Angela Merkel arrives in the first place, doing better than David Cameron or Nicolas Sarkozy and the respective national leader, in all surveyed countries except Greece.
- David Cameron’s action is approved in France (59% say he does a “good job”), but not in Germany where only 28% like his handling of the European economic crisis.

4. Austerity, solidarity and the control of national budgets by the EU

4.1. *Austerity⁴ is perceived differently in the eight surveyed Member States.*

- More than 40% of the population in Spain and the Czech Republic think that public spending has been cut too far, but only about 20% of the population in Germany and Poland say so.
- The British and the Spanish who have faced huge budget cuts say “no more austerity” while in another question 46% of the population in France and 52% of the population in Poland think that “efforts to reduce government spending have not gone far enough”.

⁴ Jacques Delors, António Vitorino and *Notre Europe*’s board of directors, “Stability and growth: perfecting the new European pact”, Declaration, 16 May 2012.

4.2. Only 49% of German, 44% of French, and 34% of British citizens approve financial assistance⁵ of their country, if other EU countries have major financial problems. 48% of the population in Germany, 56% in France, and 62% in Britain are against.

- In all countries the left of the political spectrum is more favourable towards financial assistance to another EU Member State than the right of the political spectrum.
- If combined with the question on the consequences of EU integration on the national economy, the findings show that those who think that EU integration strengthened the economy agree with EU financial assistance to struggling EU countries (59% in Britain, 63% in France, 64% in Germany).

Likely Donors: Partisan Split on Providing Financial Assistance

% EU members should provide assistance

	Total	Left	Center	Right
	%	%	%	%
Greece	91	86	93	93
Spain	90	88	92	92
Italy	79	90	81	77
Poland	63	63	61	72
Czech Rep.	55	61	55	50
Germany	49	56	48	46
France	44	53	44	40
Britain	34	57	30	30

*In Britain, France and Germany, the question wording was "Do you think the (survey country) government should provide financial assistance to other European Union countries that have major financial problems?"

In Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, Poland and Spain the question wording was "Do you think other European Union governments should provide financial assistance to member countries that have major financial problems?"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Q83 & Q83b.

Source: PEW Global Attitudes Survey, p. 33.

4.3. Increased EU authority over national budgets (as foreseen in Six-Pack and Fiscal Compact – TSCG) is opposed by majorities in seven out of eight countries.

- Italians see EU authority over national budgets more positively: only 40% are against.
- But the idea is particularly opposed in Greece (75%) as well as Britain (75%) and the Czech Republic (72%), the two latter countries did not sign up to the Fiscal Compact (TSCG).

5. Views of other Member States: between facts and stereotypes

5.1. Favourable ratings of one country for another vary largely.

- Anti-German sentiment dominates in Greece with more than three quarters of the population (78%) having a negative opinion of Germany and among them nearly half of the whole population (49%) saying that they have a very unfavourable view.

⁵ Sofia Fernandes, Eulalia Rubio, "The budgetary cost of solidarity in the euro zone: getting things clear and into perspective", Policy Brief No. 35, May 2012.

- But in France, Poland and the Czech Republic 80% of the population have a favourable view of Germany.
- The same applies to France with positive ratings given by 80% of Germans, Polish and Czechs. Italians became less favourable towards the French (53% favourable, down from 73% in 2007).

5.2. Other questions about EU countries that are more or less “hardworking” or that are more or less “corrupt” tend to confirm existing stereotypes and clichés.

- Greeks, Italians and Spanish are seen as least hardworking and citizens of these countries agree that their countries are most corrupt. Germans and the own country are seen as most hardworking.

Greeks, Italians, and Spanish Seen as Least Hardworking

*% Saying people are the **least** hardworking in...*

	Greece	Italy	Spain	Own country
	%	%	%	%
Britain	37	30	31	16
France	53	58	50	26
Germany	60	45	36	1
Spain	45	44	32	32
Italy	34	24	19	24
Greece	14	24	6	14
Poland	50	33	19	6
Czech Rep.	58	39	27	10
MEDIAN	48	36	29	15

Total adds to more than 100% because of multiple responses.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Q50b1, Q50b2 & Q50b3 combined.

Source: PEW Global Attitudes Survey, p. 39.

- Here, the survey reveals a North-South cleavage: Among all eight countries 48% name the Greeks, 29% the Spanish and 36% the Italians as the least “hardworking”. In Spain and Italy relative majorities of the population even see *themselves* as the least “hardworking”.
- Germany (39%), Britain (23%) and Sweden (19%) are seen as the least corrupt countries.

If compared to data from Eurostat, the OECD or Transparency International, many of these opinions (or better: stereotypes and clichés) would not hold true.