



## **Eurobarometer Qualitative Study**

# **THE PROMISE OF THE EU**

**Summary – English version**  
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**This summary is available in Danish, English, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Polish, Portuguese and Swedish.**

This study has been requested by the European Commission,  
Directorate-General for Communication.

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**Eurobarometer Qualitative Study – TNS Qual+**

## **Introduction**

### ***Objectives***

- "The Promise of the EU" aims to develop a vision for the EU's future based on three questions:
  - How much unity do citizens want and what are the areas where more integration should take place?
  - What would make the EU more democratic and how can EU politicians be made more accountable for the decisions they make?
  - What is the right balance between responsibility and solidarity?
- The broad objectives of this study are to understand how people perceive the EU and what the European idea means to them, especially in the wake of the economic and financial crisis.
- The study was carried out by TNS Qual+, on behalf of the European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, between 30 June and 11 July 2014 in six EU Member States: Italy, Germany, Denmark, Portugal, Finland and Poland. These countries were chosen to represent different stages in the development of the EU and to ensure a broad geographical balance.
- This document summarises the key findings. The full report is available online at: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/quali/ql\\_promise\\_eu\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/quali/ql_promise_eu_en.pdf)

### ***Methodology***

- Fieldwork consisted of a series of focus groups with the general public, supplemented by in-depth interviews with experts on European affairs from the media, business and cultural sectors in the six Member States.
- Six focus groups, lasting approximately two hours in length, were conducted in each country. These focus groups were divided according to age (up to 35 years old, and over 35) as well as attitude towards the EU, with two "pro-EU", two "neutral" and two "Eurosceptic" groups per country in each age category. It should, however, be noted that such focus groups are never statistically representative.

## Key findings

### *The Promise of the EU*

- For pro-EU or neutral respondents, **being European is much more than a matter of geography**, although many Eurosceptics described it in purely geographical terms. The most frequently mentioned characteristics that people associated with being European were:
  - Tolerance
  - Peace
  - Diversity
  - Shared history
  - Freedom of movement and the removal of borders
  - Democracy
  - A single currency
  - Shared values
  - A higher standard of living
  - Respect for human rights
- Most **people identified with their nationality before feeling European**. However, younger respondents – who are more likely to study and travel abroad, and who have only ever known the EU and the euro – are generally seen as the ones who will consider themselves **European in the future**.
- When asked about the **story of Europe**, many respondents described it in terms of history, starting with Ancient Greece and its foundation of democracy, then the Roman Empire, followed by the World Wars. There has, however, been a **recent shift in this story**, from one of peace to one of economic turmoil.
- The **next chapter in the story of Europe** was seen in terms of a continent where nations seek a peaceful community and economic cooperation without having to give up too much of their identity, diversity or national interests.
- The story of Europe was perceived as being **written by the economically strongest European countries**, especially by respondents in Poland and Portugal. The view of many in these countries is that the economic imbalance could also mean that the future of the EU is not decided by all Member States.

### *Unity and Integration*

- Respondents saw the following as **positive aspects of EU membership**:
  - Increased economic stability, growth and benefits
  - The free market
  - Freedom of travel
  - A common currency
  - The protective effect of being part of the EU
  - Being able to compete in a globalised economy
  - More integration and cultural exchanges, such as Erasmus
  - EU funding
- **Negative aspects of EU membership** were felt to include:
  - Too many regulations, with the EU being seen as inefficient and interfering with things that should be regulated at national level.

- The inability to restrict imports from EU countries that produce low-quality goods, resulting in more products of poor quality coming in to the country.
- Concerns, especially among Eurosceptics, that open borders will lead to citizens of other EU countries coming and taking jobs, or taking advantage of high social benefits without ever having the intention to contribute to local society.
- Most respondents were of the opinion that the **benefits of the EU outweigh the negative aspects**.
- Many respondents identified **several areas where closer cooperation would be beneficial**, although Eurosceptics typically did not want more cooperation between Member States. The most commonly mentioned areas were:
  - Dealing with international refugees and immigrants
  - Economic cooperation
  - Strengthening common EU banking and financial supervision
  - A common labour market with EU mediation
- The concept of an **EU army** was received with mixed views.
- There was no enthusiasm for common **EU taxation** in any of the countries.
- There is a general **resistance to the EU continuing to expand** in the future. While "big" is seen to be better in terms of security, further enlargement is not regarded as desirable and will make it even harder to define a European identity, according to most respondents.

## **Responsibility and Solidarity**

- In terms of the economic and financial crisis, **opinions varied as to whether being in the EU had helped in dealing with the crisis**.
- The idea of **solidarity also provoked a mixed response**, especially in relation to financial assistance and whether the EU should help Member States that are facing financial difficulties.
- Respondents in Portugal, Poland and Italy felt that countries facing such difficulties should be helped as a **matter of principle**, since solidarity between Member States is one of the EU's core values.
- In Denmark, some pro-EU and neutral respondents agreed with this, but most Danish and Finnish respondents felt that **their country should not be responsible for others** and should therefore not be obliged to help them.
- While similar sentiments were expressed in Germany, there were respondents who were in favour of providing financial assistance. However, they always felt that such **assistance should be conditional**.

## **The EU and Democracy**

- Most of those who took part in the study had voted in the European elections. In the majority of the countries, they chose to vote because they believed that, **in a democracy, one should participate in elections**.
- **Most did not feel sufficiently informed about the elections**, the European Parliament or the different political parties. There was thus a general feeling that more information could have been made available.

- Respondents who did feel informed about the elections had found information on the **Internet** by themselves.
- Although most had not heard of either the "**Citizens' Dialogues**" or the "**European Citizens' Initiative**", both concepts were well received by respondents in general.
- Other **suggestions for how the EU could interact with citizens** included:
  - Creating a platform where citizens could leave their opinions on different subjects
  - Organising initiatives like referendums
  - Taking part in online surveys/online voting

### ***Role of the Media***

- **Citizens get information about the EU from a wide variety of sources**, the most common being the media, the Internet and discussions with friends.
- There are doubts in most countries about the independence and objectivity of the media when reporting on the EU, and a general perception across most groups that **the media tends to portray the EU in a negative light**.
- There was no consensus as to whether there is a difference between how **public service broadcasters** and commercial broadcasters portray Europe.
- Respondents expressed a desire to see:
  - More EU stories touching on issues that have an impact on their day-to-day lives, such as education and unemployment
  - Information about how the EU is constructed and what it has achieved
  - How citizens can get involved in the EU
  - More stories that hold the EU accountable for what it is doing
- Information needs to be provided in a way that is **accessible and easy to understand**.

## National summaries

### Italy

- For many Italian respondents, the **EU is about thinking beyond national borders, about financial security through unity and about protecting human values**. Eurosceptics, on the other hand, were more likely to view the EU as a fragmented collection of disparate cultures, economies and languages. In general, European identity is regarded as something that is still being developed and, while it is not yet widely-felt, it will be automatic for the next generations. Italy was the only country where people were generally in favour of an **EU army**, mainly as a way of reducing national spending on defence, although a more cooperative approach to security was broadly welcomed in all countries.
- The opportunities brought about by free movement and trade were contrasted with the more negative aspects of what is seen as an inflexible monetary policy, which is not favourable for Italy and has had a direct impact on the quality of life there. In general, Italians wanted to see a **more flexible Europe in the future**, particularly with regard to monetary policy. However, none of them wanted to leave the Euro area – for the neutrals and the pro-Europeans because remaining in Europe will be an opportunity in the future, for the Eurosceptics because they say it is now impossible to leave.
- The **economic environment** across the EU was seen to be a key challenge for the future of Europe. Despite its origins as a means of strengthening economic ties, respondents felt that the different Member States of the EU are now drifting further apart economically and that these **inequalities are preventing the EU from reaching its potential** as a true union of equals.

### Germany

- The **sense of being European was viewed most positively in Germany**, and while diversity was seen as a potential barrier between countries, it was also seen as a source of enrichment. Europe was associated with **high standards and quality of living, increased security and the values of democracy, peace and social welfare**.
- The **story of Europe was regarded as one of achievement**, and respondents expressed considerable **pride** in European history – one of scientific discovery and continuous development. Younger Germans were more in favour of increased integration, although generally there was support for closer collaboration on bank supervision and socio-economic issues. A united approach to dealing with refugees was also welcomed.
- However, the economic and financial crisis has exacerbated respondents' perceptions of differences between countries in the EU. Specific to Germany was **frustration with its perceived role bankrolling Member States that are facing financial difficulties**. As with Denmark and Finland, solidarity was seen as "helping people to help themselves" rather than purely as financial assistance. While respondents in Germany felt strongly connected with the EU, there was still a **desire for much more transparency and information** in order to strengthen the democratic nature of the Union.

## Denmark

- Danish respondents were more likely to link being European with values such as **freedom and democracy**, while the EU is more likely to be associated with bureaucracy and a lack of transparency. **Few Danes said they felt European** or thought this was likely to change in the future.
- Although most voted in the European elections, **many respondents expressed dissatisfaction with democracy in the EU**, considering the European Parliament to have insufficient power compared with the Commission. At the same time, many felt that the debate during these European elections reflected a more constructive and less confrontational approach in Denmark than in previous elections, and that this signalled a more mature relationship between the country and the EU in the future.
- Most felt that being part of the EU had fostered economic stability in Denmark, but economic solidarity was viewed as problematic and revealed **clear divisions for Danish respondents between Northern and Southern Europe**. There was a feeling that financial assistance to struggling Member States has to be linked to responsible behaviour, and that **such assistance was not the solution to structural problems or reckless financial behaviour** in these Member States.

## Portugal

- Portuguese respondents associated being European with shared values and the concrete benefits of free movement and being able to work and travel in other Member States. However, in Portugal more than elsewhere there was a sense that the **key barrier to feeling European is the huge disparity between Member States**, something which has been emphasised further by the economic and financial crisis.
- For almost all respondents, **Portugal is better off as part of the EU**. This is seen in terms of mobility and access to funding, which has driven significant improvements to infrastructure in transport, energy and sanitation. However, the **perceived inequality between Member States** in terms of both economic strength and influence within the EU is the main disadvantage for Portuguese respondents. There was a strong sense of solidarity in Portugal as a basic principle of the EU, and it was felt that **Member States in financial difficulties should be helped** without question. At the same time, there was a feeling that financial assistance should be carefully evaluated to fit a country's specific needs and ability to repay the debt.
- In view of the European election results, some respondents were concerned that the European Parliament will face **greater difficulties in being able to make decisions** in collaboration with the Member States. They attributed this to the increase in the number of MEPs from parties who proclaim themselves to be Eurosceptic.

## Finland

- **National identity was strongly felt** among Finnish respondents, and people were quite sceptical that there would ever be a shared European identity in the future. However, there were some positive feelings towards the EU and being European, something which was seen in terms of unification and cooperation for many respondents. Freedom of movement and trade, and the common currency, were all seen as making life better and more convenient.
- There was **widespread criticism of the financial assistance given to the countries worst affected by the economic and financial crisis**. It was felt to be counter-productive, making the problem worse by failing to address the underlying causes. Respondents tended to feel that other forms of help – advice or investment – would be preferable. There were divided opinions on what the crisis meant for the future of the EU and whether, in the long run, it would have an effect on the overall story of Europe.
- While the general opinion was that there was enough cooperation between Member States on most issues, it was felt that **defence and security would benefit from more cooperation** (although there was no support for a common EU army). There was also some support for more cooperation at EU level in the areas of financial regulation and taxation.

## Poland

- Polish respondents, while associating the feeling of being European with shared (largely Christian) values and other concepts of freedom, justice, democracy and tolerance, were more inclined to emphasise pragmatic aspects such as freedom of movement and access to the labour market and education in other Member States. The geographical element, being part of the European continent, was also more important for Polish respondents than in other countries. People in Poland were particularly positive about the **international credibility their country gains from EU membership** and were generally in favour of continued enlargement, despite having some reservations about the financial implications and potential increases in migration.
- **For younger Poles, being European is a mind-set**, an attitude that goes beyond national borders and is about a sense of community with other European citizens. Solidarity, and helping Member States that are facing difficulties, is also regarded as one of the cornerstones of being part of the EU. However, there is a feeling that Poland does not have an equal say in the EU, with the **story of Europe being written by the largest economies** – Germany, France and the UK.
- Respondents had an **ambivalent attitude towards EU funding**, reflecting the general feeling that Poland is moving from being a beneficiary to a contributor. While the benefits of funding were clear to people – with many aware of the tangible advantages it offers farmers, entrepreneurs and the country overall – the lack of transparency in its allocation was a source of controversy.