



DEMOCRACY ON THE MOVE

EUROPEAN ELECTIONS - ONE YEAR TO GO

Eurobarometer Survey 89.2 of the European Parliament
A Public Opinion Monitoring Study



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Eurobarometer survey commissioned by the European Parliament

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With one year to go to the European elections in May 2019, the latest Parliament Eurobarometer survey confirms citizens' steadily growing support for and favourability of the European Union. Over two-thirds of respondents are convinced that their country has benefited from being a member of the EU. This is the highest score ever measured since 1983. Moreover, for the first time a majority of Europeans think their voice counts in the EU. Almost a third of respondents already today know the date of the European elections in 2019. The *Spitzenkandidaten* process is seen as a positive development by citizens who want it to be accompanied by a real debate about European issues, including the future of the EU.

The Eurobarometer indicator measuring citizens' support for membership in the European Union had always received steady support from respondents over time. In 2018, this support significantly strengthens to a European average of 60% of citizens who believe that the EU membership of their country is a good thing. In addition, 67% of respondents think that their country has benefited from being a member of the EU. This is the highest score recorded for this indicator since 1983.

For the first time in the last decade, a majority of respondents (48%) believe that their voice counts in the EU. Trend results show that this positive development started in the second half of 2016, which might be related to the 'wake up call' experienced after the Brexit referendum in the UK.

The Spitzenkandidaten process

This survey focusses on citizens' perceptions on the upcoming European elections. Respondents all over the EU see the *Spitzenkandidaten* (lead candidates) process as important cornerstone of democratic life in the EU. Europeans voters had the opportunity to participate indirectly in the process of electing the President of the European Commission for the first time in 2014. Today results show that nearly half of EU27 citizens (49%) say that this process would encourage them to go to vote in the next European elections. Moreover, 70% of citizens believe it only makes sense if being accompanied by a real debate about European issues and the future of the EU. In addition, most respondents agree that the lead candidates process brings about more transparency (63%), is a significant progress for European democracy (61%) and gives more legitimacy to the European Commission (60%). In contrast, less than half of respondents think that this process would prevent national governments from choosing the best candidate (46%) and that it has no real impact (45%).

Campaign topics

During the upcoming election campaign, Europeans want to hear about security in the broadest sense, including the issue of immigration. At the same time, issues surrounding matters of personal prosperity and well-being are equally high on their agenda. 49% of Europeans cite the fight against terrorism as campaign priority topic, followed by 'combatting youth unemployment' (48%), immigration (45%), economy and growth (42%). Around one third of Europeans cite the fight against climate change and the protection of the environment (35%). Promoting human rights and democracy as well as the social protection of EU citizens are listed as priority by 32% of respondents.

Attachment to democracy

Europeans feel attached to democracy both on EU level and in their own country, with the economic context having a direct impact on their views. A majority of respondents continues to be satisfied with the way democracy works in their country (55%) and in the EU (46%). While respondents from some countries are more satisfied with the workings of democracy in the EU, citizens from some larger Member States express a significantly lower degree of satisfaction with the way the democracy works in the EU. This becomes even clearer when put into perspective with the countries' GDP per capita as well as their current unemployment rates.

New and emerging parties

Between 2013 and 2018, more than 70 new parties and political alliances emerged in EU Member States, some of which campaigned successfully by protesting against the political establishment. When asked to position themselves on a range of statements about such new parties and movements, a majority of Europeans perceive them rather positively.

Half of the respondents (50%) on EU average do not consider that such parties or movements are a threat to democracy, whereas a bit more than a third (38%) think they would be. 70% of citizens surveyed consider that just being against something would not be enough and would not improve anything. While 53% of citizens agree with the fact that new parties and movements could find new solutions better than the political establishment, 56% believe that they can bring real change.

Perceptions on voting

One year ahead of the European ballot, this survey takes a look at citizens' perceptions of voting. Respondents say it is easy to go voting in the European elections, while still thinking that taking part in national elections is in fact easier: 72% declare that it is easy to go to vote in the national elections, while 62% also

believe that voting in the European elections is easy. When looking at the importance citizens attach to voting, 68% of Europeans declare that voting in national elections is of 'high importance'. 49% share this opinion about the European elections.

With twelve months to go, almost a third of respondents (32%) know that these elections are taking place in 2019, moreover one respondent in two (50%) declares to be interested in the European elections.

Reasons to vote ...

In line with previous surveys, civic reasons - such as 'it is their duty as citizens' - come first with 47% when Europeans are asked why they think people would vote in the European elections. European reasons come next with a high results for 'they can change things by voting' (33%). Other reasons cover the feeling of being European (30%) and the wish to support the EU (29%). To a lesser extent, the European ballot is also seen as occasion to express general discontent towards the EU (21%) or the national government (17%).

In line with the returning lead candidate process in the upcoming European elections, 17% of respondents declare that Europeans would vote in order 'to participate in the choice of the next President of the European Commission'. This result gives ground to the assumption that Europeans are becoming more familiar with the process of electing of the President of the European Commission.

... or to abstain

The survey also inquired about the main reasons why people would decide not to vote in the European elections. A great majority think that people would abstain because 'they believe that their vote will not change anything' (60%), 'they distrust the political system' (48%) or 'are not interested in politics or in elections in general' (43%). The lack of information is also a relevant element to be considered, as citizens believe that people might abstain because 'they do not know enough about the role of the European Parliament' (34%), or 'believe that they are not sufficiently informed on the positioning of the different political parties on European issues' (22%).

Some respondents think that 'the European Parliament does not deal sufficiently with problems that concern people like them' (32%) or that potential abstainers are 'against Europe, the EU, the building of Europe' (17%). Technical reasons play a considerable role as well, as 15% of respondents believe that people would not vote as they might have 'no time or something more important to do', while 12% 'do not know where or how to vote'.

CONTEXT

As with every survey of this kind, understanding context at a national, European and international level is key to a proper placement and thus understanding of the results. One year ahead of the European elections in May 2019 economic indicators are turning green. Yet Europeans are still facing with major challenges such as migration, the ongoing Brexit negotiations or the ongoing terrorist threat. All this is played out against a backdrop of a shifting balance of power both inside and outside the European Union.

From an economic point of view, after 10 years of crisis, the vigour of recovery has been remarkable, resulting in a clearly more positive economic context. According to Eurostat, the unemployment rate fell to 7.1% in February 2018, its lowest level in the EU28 since December 2008.

One year after their launch, Brexit negotiations have moved slowly forward, showing both progress and remaining obstacles in an ever clearer light. In March 2017 the European Parliament adopted a resolution laying out the criteria for a possible association agreement for the future relations between the EU and the United Kingdom.

One month earlier, Members of the European Parliament had massively voted to support the *Spitzenkandidaten* process in order to elect the future President of the European Commission, agreeing to reject any candidate that had not been previously endorsed as frontrunner by a European political party.

Indeed, the run-up to the European elections saw the debate over the *Spitzenkandidaten* process revitalized, gathering a large support across the European institutions, European political parties and Member States. In this context, the European Parliament organized several discussions with EU leaders to debate the future of Europe and the upcoming European elections. During the April 2018 plenary session in Strasbourg, French President Emmanuel Macron expressed his general support for the 'lead candidate' process and called for a real European debate all over the Union.

Against this backdrop, migration and terrorism remain top EU challenges. According to Eurostat, the number of first time asylum applicants in the EU decreased over one year by 26 points in the end of 2017¹. Similarly, the total number of irregular migrants on the main migratory routes has notably decreased over the past months. However, the overall situation remains precarious, and additional efforts will be needed to ensure effective response to the migration challenge. As co-legislator in the field of asylum policy, the European Parliament has often emphasized the need for a holistic and solidary EU approach to migration.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_quarterly_report

In recent years, terrorism had dominated the public debate across the European Union. The apparent drop in the number of attacks does however not mean that the threat disappeared, as shown by a recent series of terrorist attacks in March 2018 in the southern French towns of Carcassonne and Trèbes.

During the past months several elections took place in various EU Member States. In Italy, elections were held in March but did not yet lead to the formation of a new government. In Hungary, on the other hand, Viktor Orbán was widely re-elected as Prime Minister after April's legislative elections which his party Fidesz had won by a supermajority. In January, Presidential elections were held in the Czech Republic, where Miloš Zeman was elected for a second term in office, as well as in Finland, where the incumbent Sauli Niinistö was re-elected. In February, Nicos Anastasiades was re-elected President of Cyprus.

2018 also saw three unexpected resignations of heads of government: Romania's Prime Minister Mihai Tudose resigned in January, Slovenian Prime Minister Miro Cerar resigned in March, as did Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico. The latter's resignation came after the murder of the 27-year-old journalist Jan Kuciak and his fiancée, Martina Kušnírová, at their home in western Slovakia on February 26. Kuciak is the second investigative reporter murdered in the EU in recent months. In October 2017, Maltese journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia was killed by a car bomb in her home country. Caruana Galizia was widely known on the island and had reported extensively on corruption in Malta.

In Spain, after the 2017 Catalan regional elections on 21 December 2017, the parliament of Catalonia had not yet, at the time of the fieldwork, succeeded in electing a president of the Generalitat. In Germany, the September 2017 elections led to unprecedented difficulties in forming a new government. After a long process, Angela Merkel was re-elected as chancellor of a renewed 'grand coalition' of Christian Democrats (CDU, CSU) and Social Democrats (SPD) in March 2018.

On the international stage, Russia and China's presidential elections took place, while US President Donald Trump was intensifying his attempts to mediate between South and North Korea. Besides, during the fieldwork of the survey, the United States, the United Kingdom and France gathered forces to respond militarily to the chemical attack that took place against civilians in a suburb of Damascus, Syria, a week before.

The European Union acted in remarkable unity after the attack on a former Russian agent in the United Kingdom by the use of a nerve agent, in March 2018. The expulsion of dozens of Russian diplomats from various European capitals was an unprecedented act of solidarity with the United Kingdom.

CHAPTER I: TRENDING TOWARDS THE EU

The gradual economic recovery over the past years experienced in the European Union is manifesting itself as concrete and tangible reality for more and more Europeans. This survey's background indicators are continuing to depict an again growing favourability towards the European Union, best shown in the unprecedented positive results regarding the benefits of EU membership.

After ten years of crisis, the economic context is finally now more positive: markets are no longer anticipating a collapse in the euro area, the euro area itself has returned to growth², unemployment rates are falling³.

And yet, in spite of the recovering economic indicators, Europeans still feel concerned about the situation of their national economy, mirroring the growing inequalities perceived at a national level.

My voice counts in the EU: reversing curves

Every year, the Parliament's Eurobarometer is asking European citizens whether they think that their voice counts in the EU. One year ahead of the 2019 European elections, and for the first time over the last decade, a majority of respondents answered positively: 48% believe that their voice counts in the EU. This positive development started after September 2016⁴, considered as the inflection point for this indicator, resulting in an 11-point increase of the proportion of respondents who feel that today their voice counts in the EU. In parallel, 46% disagree with this statement, decreasing by 13 percentage points (pp) since September 2016.

The trend over time shows that European elections traditionally have an impact on this indicator. Indeed, 'my voice counts in the EU' increased by 9 pp after the 2004 European elections (from 30% up to 39%), then the indicator fell. It increased again by 8 pp in June 2009 to 38% before a new declining, and finally rising to 41% after the 2014 European elections.

Yet for the first time, this indicator is starting to increase in the middle of the legislature, compared to previous legislative periods when the indicator would normally meet its cyclical trough and thus its low-

² According to Eurostat, GDP growth in 2017 grew by 2.5% in both the European Union as a whole and in the euro area.

³ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/8662991/2-14022018-BP-EN.pdf/ccf970c0-bb55-4a22-b8ea-d50d5a92586d>

³ At 7.1% in the EU as a whole and 8.5% in the euro area in February 2018, unemployment is at its lowest level since September 2008. <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/8782899/3-04042018-BP-EN.pdf/15f41da1-720e-429b-be25-80f7b-2fb22cd>

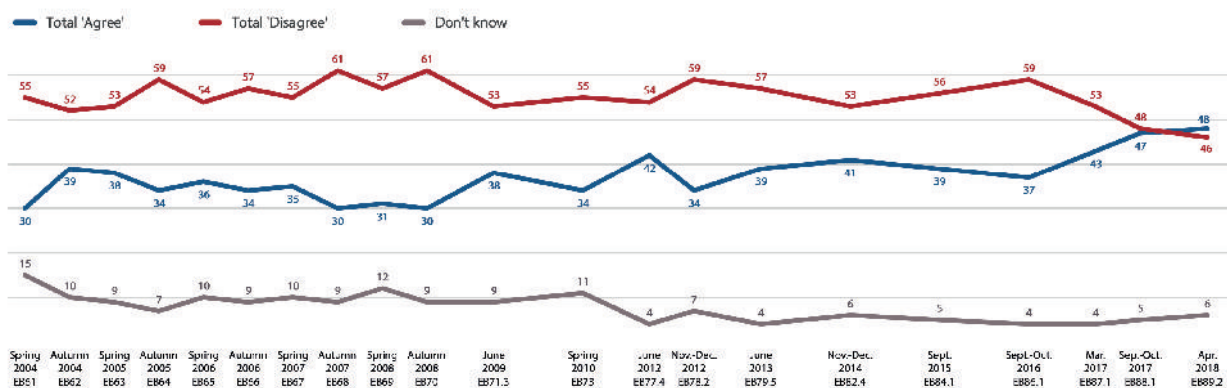
⁴ Parlemeter 2016: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/atyourservice/en/20161110PVL00113/Parlemeter-2016>

est level in mid-legislature⁵. In April 2018, the slight but progressive evolution sees a confirmation of this positive trend.

Looking back at the context when this upward trend started in 2016, it becomes more and more clear that the Brexit referendum of 23 June 2016 had a deep impact on Europeans' views about their place and membership within the EU. Both the choice of a referendum as voting method and the direct effects of the result on the daily life of many Britons may have had a symbolic impact on Europeans' perception of 'their voice in the EU'. This could even have awakened the feeling that their voice matters in a growing share of respondents.

National results tend to confirm this scenario with a majority of positive views in 15 countries. Sweden (80%), Denmark (80%) and the Netherlands (79%) top the list of those who feel that their voice counts in the EU. A major 11 point increase is to be noted in Hungary, where 50% now think that their voice counts in the EU.

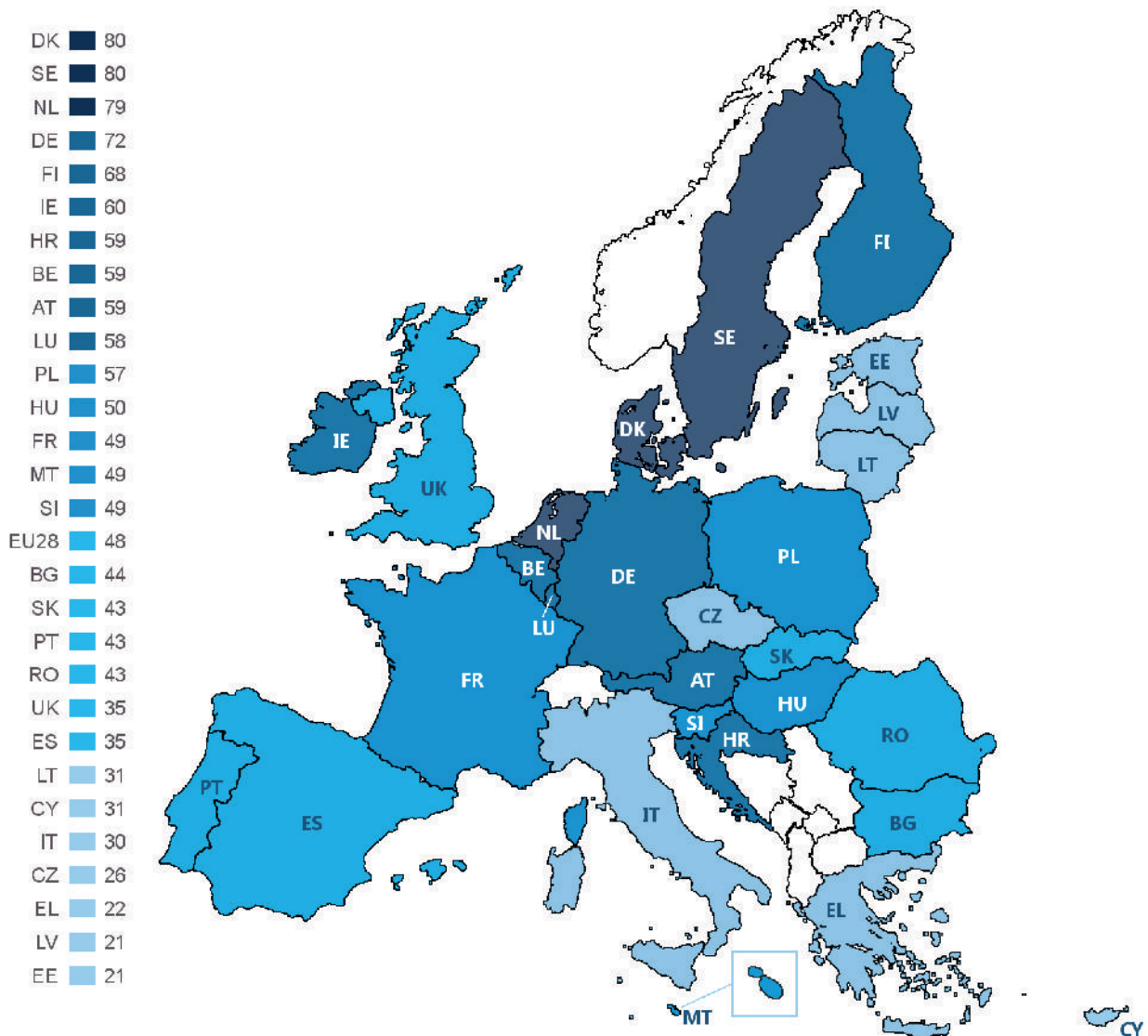
Q Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement: My voice counts in the EU (%)



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, D72.1

⁵ European Parliament, 'Major changes in European public opinion regarding the European Union', November 2017; http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/eurobarometre/2016/major/desk_research_historique_2016_en.pdf

Q Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement:
My voice counts in the EU (Total 'agree' - %)



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, D72.1

However, this positive view is not granted for Greece. Here, 76% of respondents do not think that their voice counts in the EU, such as Estonians (72%) and respondents from 10 other Member States, where a majority disagree with this statement (Latvia, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Italy, Spain, the United-Kingdom, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania and Slovakia). As for Bulgaria, opinions are equally shared between pros and cons.

At European level the majority of respondents up to 64 years of age find that their voice counts in the EU. Conversely, people aged of 65 or more, obviously the retired respondents, are likely to believe that their voice does not count in the EU. Unemployed, manual workers and housepersons share the same view.

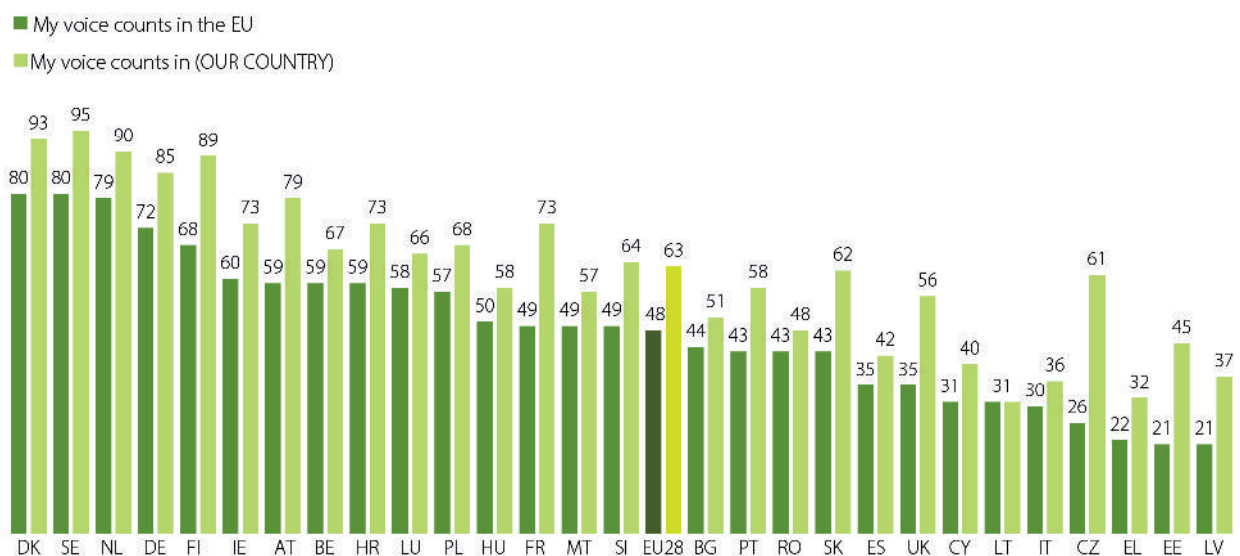
This indicator is actually highly correlated with the way respondents feel about their place in the EU in general. People who believe that their voice counts in the EU are more likely to feel interested in EU affairs and the upcoming European elections. Furthermore, a cross-analysis of the results show that this group of the population, who think that their voice counts, tend to believe that voting is important and that they can change things by voting in the European Parliament elections. Consequently, they declare themselves more likely to go to vote in the next elections.

Besides, respondents were asked about the way they feel about their voice being heard in their own country. In 21 Member States, they feel they have a say: 63% think their voice counts in their country (+2 pp compared with September 2017) and 33% disagree with this statement (-2). Still, this view is not shared by respondents in 7 states, starting with the strongest disagreement expressed by respondents in Greece with 67% think that their voice does not count in their own country.

Traditionally, this question shows more positive results compared with people's opinions regarding their voice being heard in the EU. As shown in the chart below, this difference reaches 15 points when the two EU averages are compared. In 27 Member States the feeling that 'my voice counts in my country' is stronger than the feeling that 'my voice counts in the EU'. In Lithuania both replies return on the same level (31%).

Nevertheless, national figures show wider differences. The Czech Republic best demonstrates this fact with a 35-point difference between those who think that their voice counts in the country (61%) versus those who believe that it is the case in the EU (26%). Significant differences can also be seen in Estonia and in France (both 24 points), in the United Kingdom and in Finland (both 21 points), in Austria (20 points) or

Q Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:
My voice counts in the EU / My voice counts in (OUR COUNTRY) (%)



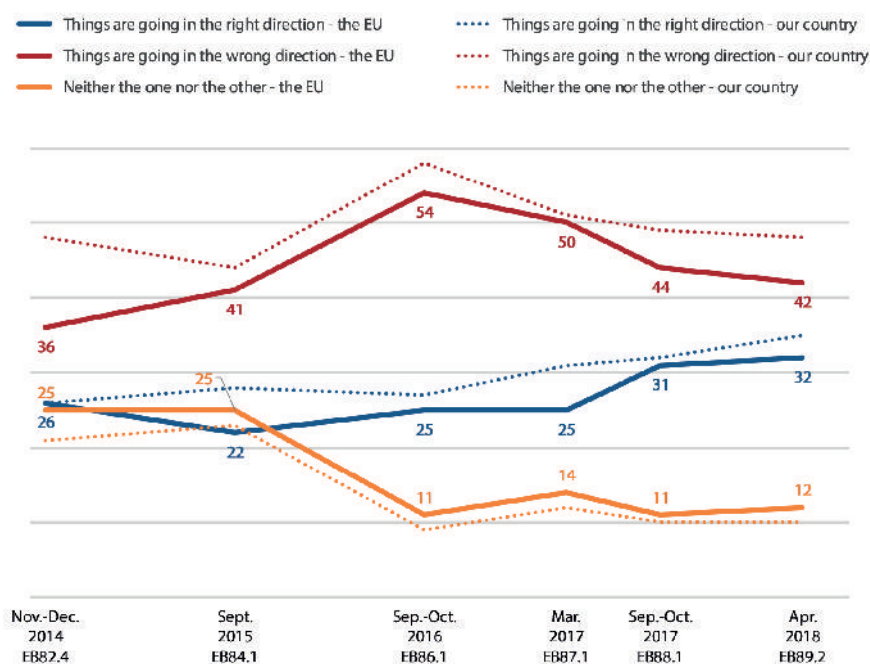
Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, D72

in Slovakia (19 points). A complementary question was asked about whether citizens find that the voice of their country counts in the EU. Answers actually level up to the previous question: 63% of respondents think that their country's voice counts in the EU. In the same line, in all countries, respondents believe that their country has a stronger voice than themselves as individuals on the European stage. In some countries, especially in the Baltic states, the difference of opinion is significant: 39 points difference in Estonia, 30 points in Lithuania, 29 points in Latvia, but also a significant 29 points in France and Latvia, 26 points in Portugal and 19 points in Malta.

Slowly but surely going in the right direction

Background indicators show an encouraging recovery of optimism when it comes to the future of the European Union, as already shown in the Autumn 2017 Standard Eurobarometer⁶. Firstly, drawing a positive trend over the past year in that survey, 57% of Europeans feel optimistic about the future of the EU (+7 pp since autumn 2016), whereas a decreasing 37% (-7 pp) feel pessimistic about it. According to these results, all but two Member States share this feeling of optimism. Secondly, almost half of Europeans consider that the situation of the European economy is good (48%), a majority view in 23 countries.

Q At the present time, would you say that, in general, things are going in the right direction or in the wrong direction, in...? (OUR COUNTRY / EU) (%)



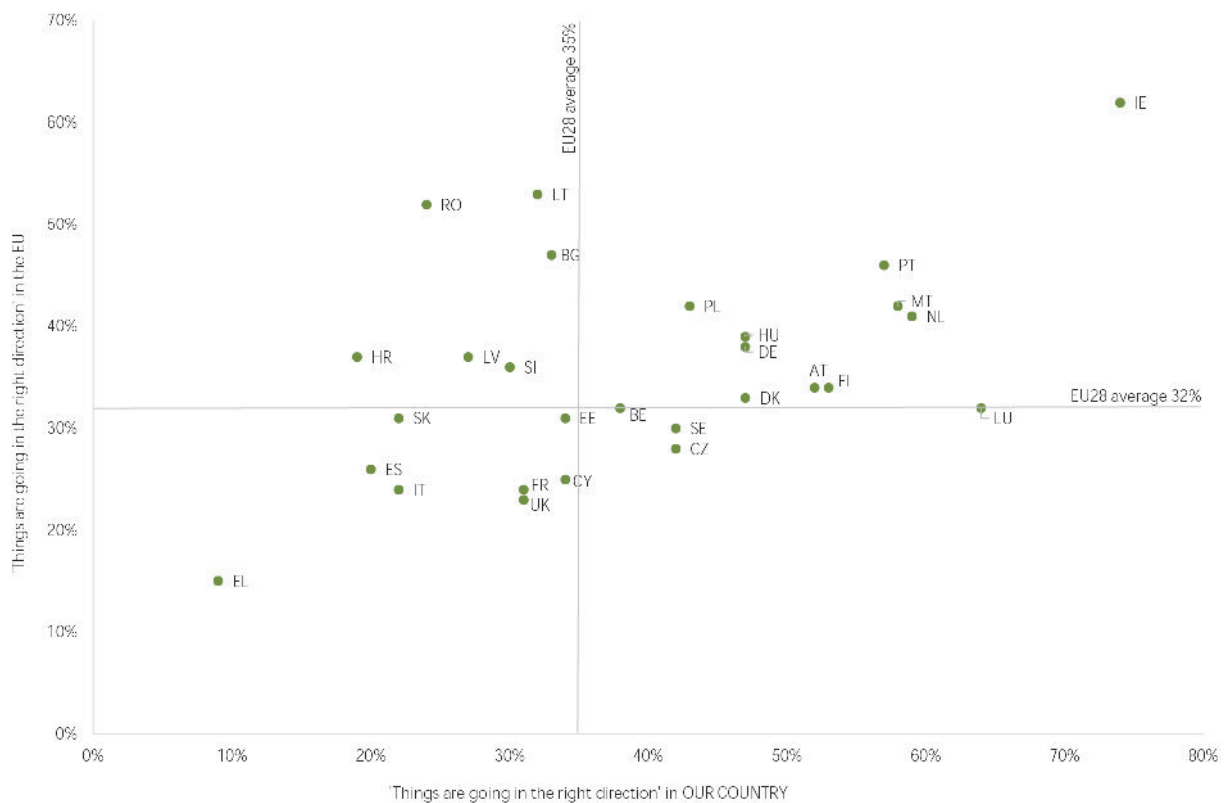
Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, D73

⁶ European Commission, Standard Eurobarometer 88, autumn 2017.

The same phenomenon applies regarding the direction that things are taking at a national level and in the EU. One year before the European elections, the present survey shows that a change tends to be manifesting itself in people's minds since 2014. A growing share of respondents seems to believe that things are getting back on track: 35% think that things are going in the right direction in their country and 32% think so regarding the European Union. For a majority though, although decreasing compared to the positive trend, things are still going in the wrong direction both in their country (48%) and in the European Union (42%).

Like in the Parlemeter 2017, the 28 Member States have been positioned according to their views regarding 'the right direction' in their own country and the EU. As the chart below shows, 10 countries express the most positive perceptions at both levels: they are above the EU average. Conversely, respondents in 8 countries see, more than Europeans on average, things taking the wrong direction both in their respective countries and in the EU.

Q At the present time, would you say that, in general, things are going in the right direction or in the wrong direction, in...? (OUR COUNTRY / EU)

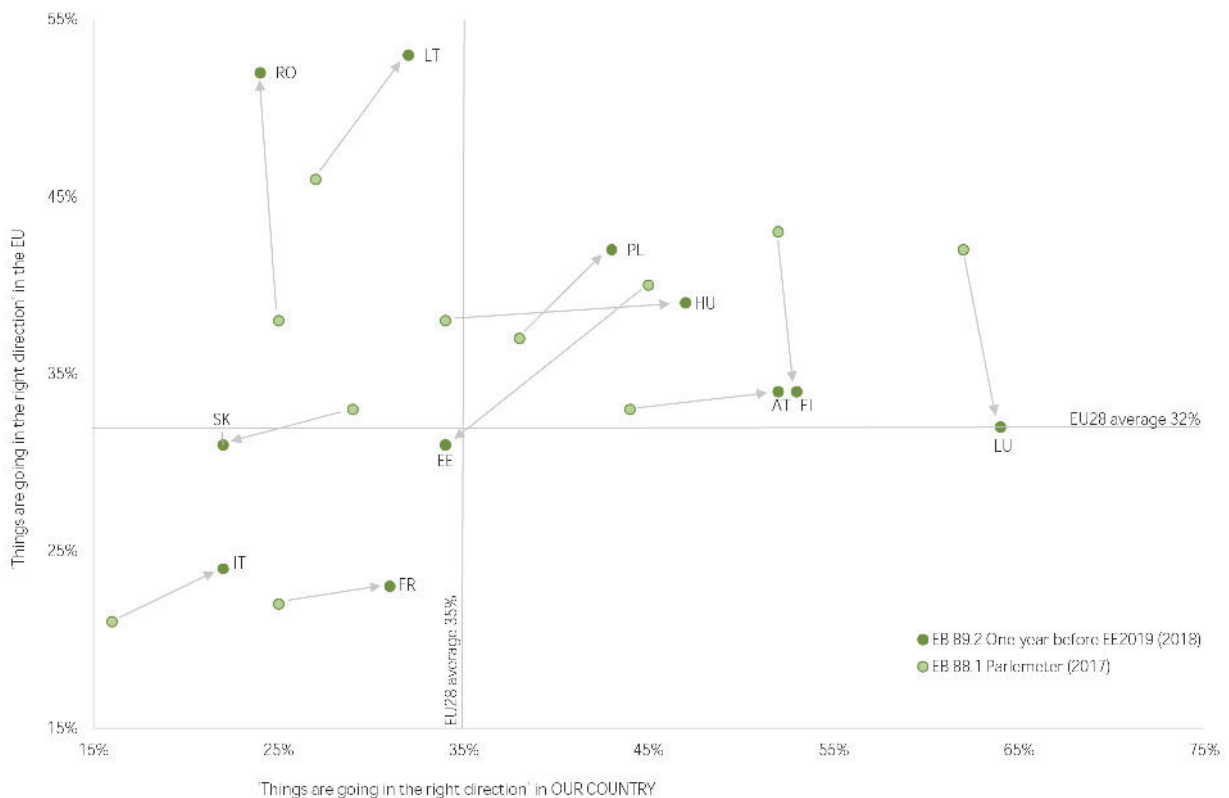


Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, D73.1 and D73.2

Just as in the 2017 Parlemeter, the same two Member States circumscribe the picture. On the top right side of the spectrum, Ireland outlines by showing the highest values for ‘things are going in the right direction’ both at a national (74%) and a European level (62%). On the bottom left, Greece’s position remains unchanged with less than one in ten (9%) who believe that ‘things are going in the right direction’ in the country and about one in six (15%) in the EU. It is also interesting to note that in a range of countries (Croatia and Slovenia, the Baltic states Lithuania and Latvia as well as Romania and Bulgaria) citizens believe with values above EU average that things in the EU are going in the right direction while at the same time having the opposite view on things in their own country.

Over half a year only, respondents’ perceptions about their own country moved sometimes significantly. As the graph below shows, in Estonia, for instance, the proportion of respondents who believe that ‘things are going in the right direction’ in their country deteriorates to 34% (-11 pp). On the other hand, it increased markedly in Hungary (47%, +13) and in Austria (52%, +8), both possibly connected to recent elections or government formations in both countries. The perception of the European situation follows the same pat-

Q Things are going in the right direction? Differences 2017-2018

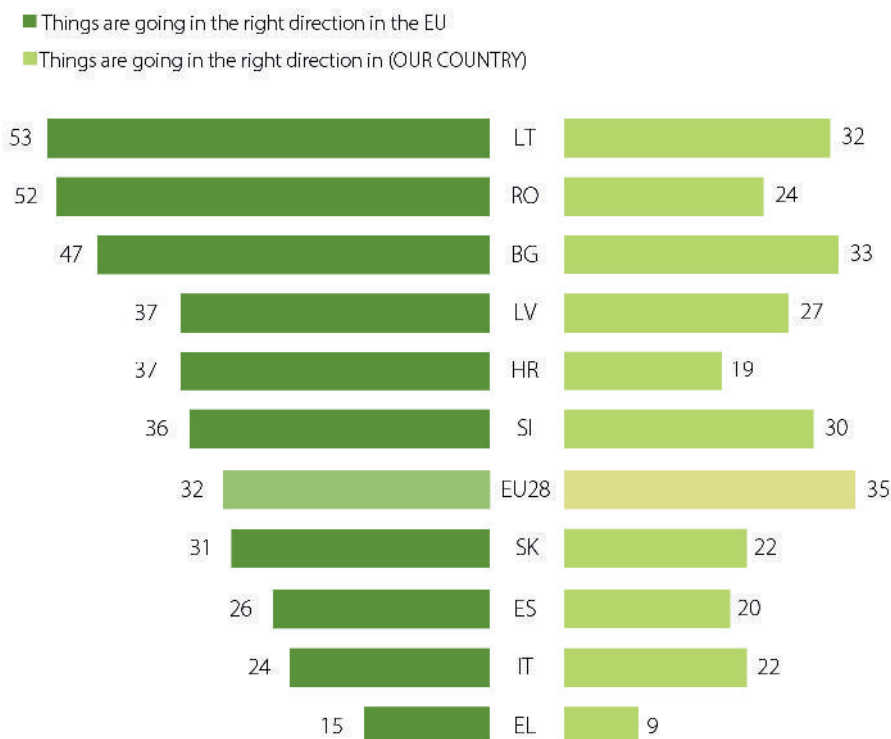


Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, D73.1 and D73.2

tern with a significant deterioration again in Estonia (31%, -9), but also in Finland (34%, -9) and in Luxembourg (32%, -10) over the six past months. On the other hand, Romania shows a 14-point improvement on EU direction, at 52%. The national contexts can certainly help to understand each evolution and their consequences, to a certain extent, on the European stage. According to the autumn 2017 Standard Eurobarometer⁷, perception about the situation of the national economy is much nuanced. Hidden behind 48% of positive views on average, very large variations between countries can be noticed when it comes to the evaluation of the current situation of the national economy (from 2% of answers 'good' in Greece to 91% in Germany and the Netherlands). Likewise, the way respondents perceive the direction things are taking in the EU and in their country help to better understand the importance of national contexts for interpreting survey results.

In this view, it appears that respondents in 10 Member States find that things are actually doing better at EU level than at the national one. Seven of them actually suffer the highest unemployment rate in the EU (Greece, Spain, and Italy) or above average (Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovakia)⁸. Three other countries complete this group, namely Romania, Bulgaria and Slovenia.

Q At the present time, would you say that, in general, things are going in the right direction or in the wrong direction, in...? (OUR COUNTRY / EU) (%)



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, D73.1 and D73.2

⁷ European Commission, Standard Eurobarometer 88, autumn 2017.

⁸ Eurostat, 'Euro area unemployment at 8.5%' February 2018. <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/8782899/3-04042018-BP-EN.pdf/15f41da1-720e-429b-be25-80f7b2fb22cd>

Other factors can be taken into account to study why a majority believes that things are not going in the right direction. One could come from people's views on their chances in the future. Asked in December 2017 about their views on income inequality⁹, a large majority of respondents (84%) agreed that the income differences in their country are too great. Yet, at the same time 58% of citizens find that nowadays in their country they have equal opportunities for getting ahead in life, and 46% say this has improved in the last 30 years. However, national variations remain significant. In spite of the lowest unemployment rate recorded in the EU28 since September 2008 (7.1% in February 2018¹⁰), perceptions tell a different story in many regions as new challenges arose after the crisis.

There is a significant negative correlation between unemployment rate and 'things are going in the right direction' both in the country and in the EU: the more unemployed persons in the population, the more unsatisfied respondents feel about the direction things are taking. In other words, the least optimistic countries in this view are currently suffering from the highest unemployment rates in the EU. As shown in a darker shade, unemployment reached 20.8% in Greece in February 2018, which ranks latest with only 9% of respondents considering that things are going in the right direction at a national level, and 15% in the EU. Likewise, one Spanish respondent in five (20%) think that things are going in the right direction in Spain, the second highest unemployment rate in the EU (16.1%). Same applies in Croatia: 19% think that things are taking the right direction while unemployment reaches 9.4%, or in Italy: 22% think that things are going in the right direction while unemployment is at 11%.

Highest support for EU membership in a decade

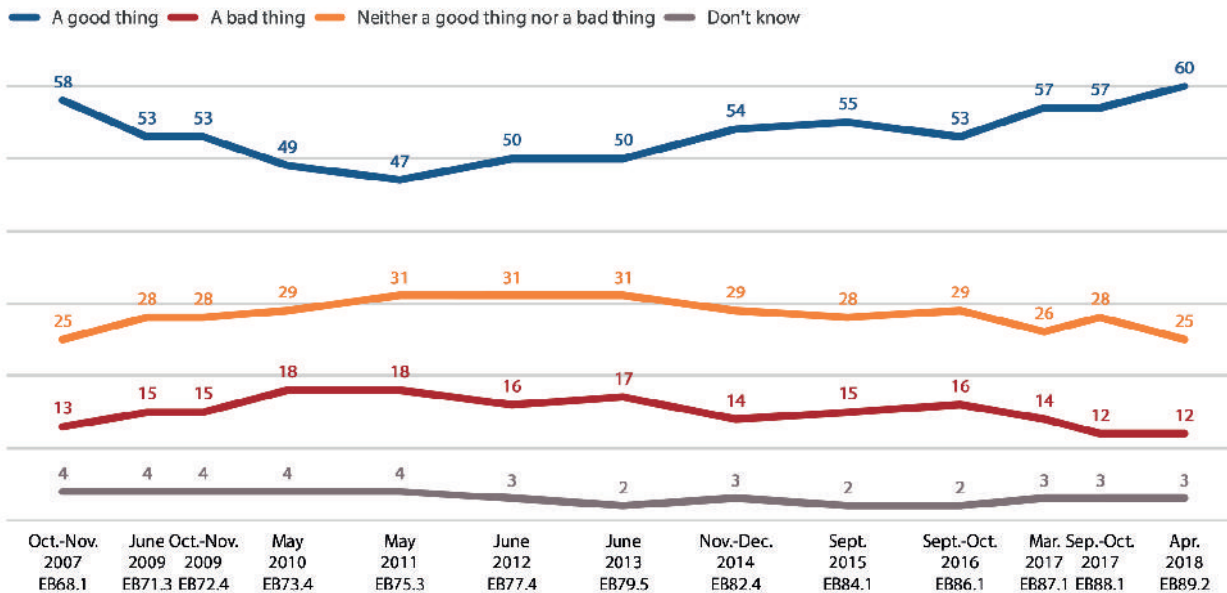
Membership in the European Union is one indicator that had received the steadiest support from European respondents over time. Looking at the six past years, results significantly strengthened to an average of 60% of citizens who believe that the European membership of their country is a good thing. This is the highest rate this question received since the European Parliament started with its own Eurobarometer surveys in 2007. Twelve percent believe it is a bad thing, whereas a fourth of respondents (25%) find it neither a good nor a bad thing.

The trend line shows May 2011 as the starting point of the gradual upward trend for this indicator. However since Autumn 2016 the curb starts rising significantly. Again, the Brexit vote of June 2016 certainly played a part in this revived European positivity even if the nature of the Brexit effects remains uncertain until the United Kingdom will actually leave the European Union on March 29, 2019.

9 European Commission, Special Eurobarometer 471 'Fairness, inequality and inter-generational mobility', December 2017.

10 Eurostat, 'Euro area unemployment at 8.5%' February 2018. <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/8782899/3-04042018-BP-EN.pdf/15f41da1-720e-429b-be25-80f7b2fb22cd>

Q Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY)'s membership of the EU is...? (%)

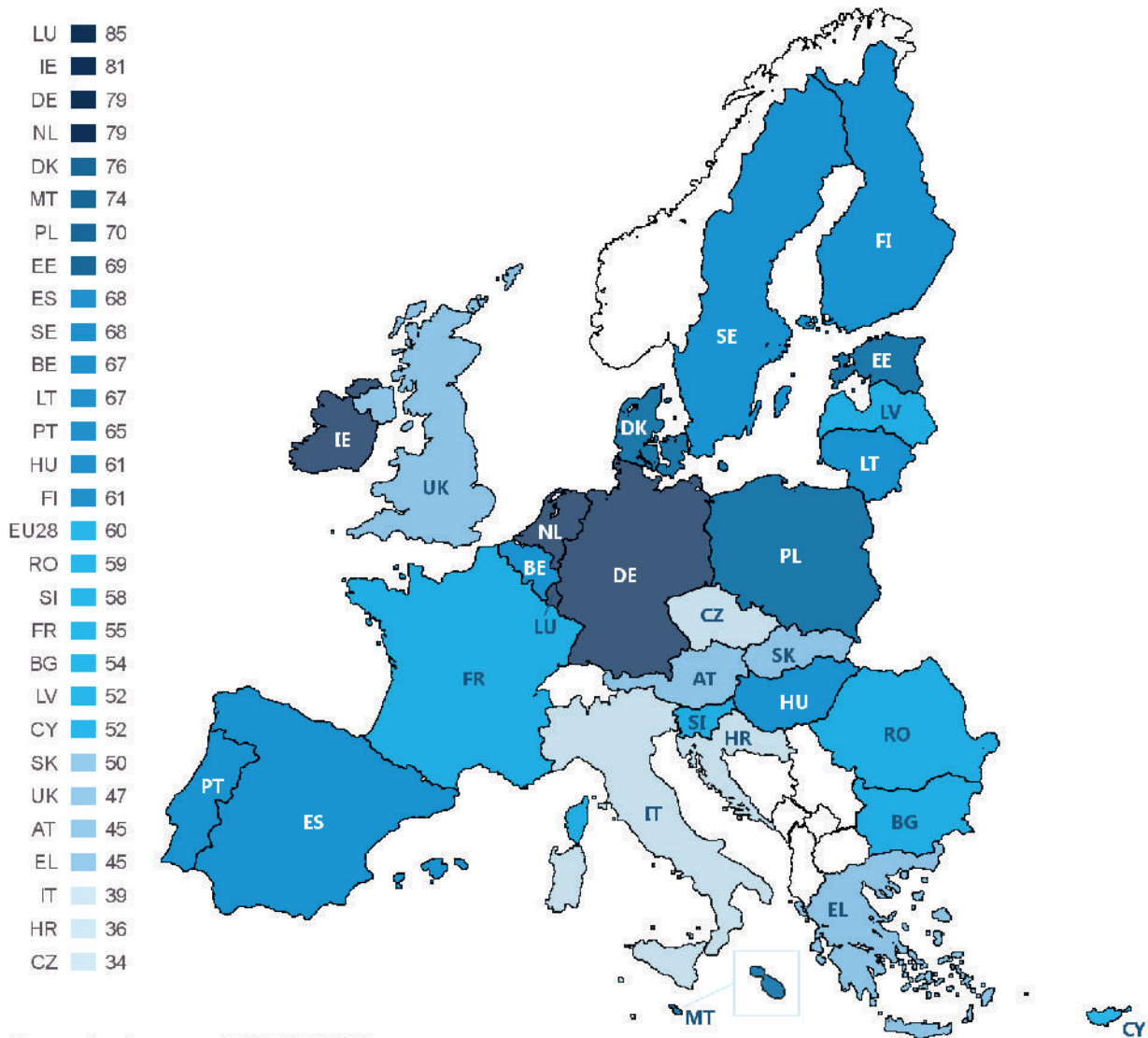


Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA23

A majority of citizens in 26 countries express their support for the EU membership of their country, ranging from 85% in Luxembourg to 39% in Italy. This positive opinion is increasing in 21 countries, up to +17 percentage points in Cyprus (52%). Significant increases are also to be seen in Romania (59%, +11), in Malta (74%, +10) and in Denmark (76%, +9).

A neutral view predominates in the Czech Republic and in Croatia (the youngest EU Member State), where respectively 46% and 49% of respondents think that their European membership is neither a good nor a bad thing. Socio-economic factors actually tend to support these findings. Indeed, on the one hand, figures show that in general, citizens from countries with a higher GDP per capita tend to express a bigger support for EU membership (e.g. Luxembourg, Germany and the Netherlands).

Q Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY)'s membership of the EU is...? (Total 'a good thing' - %)

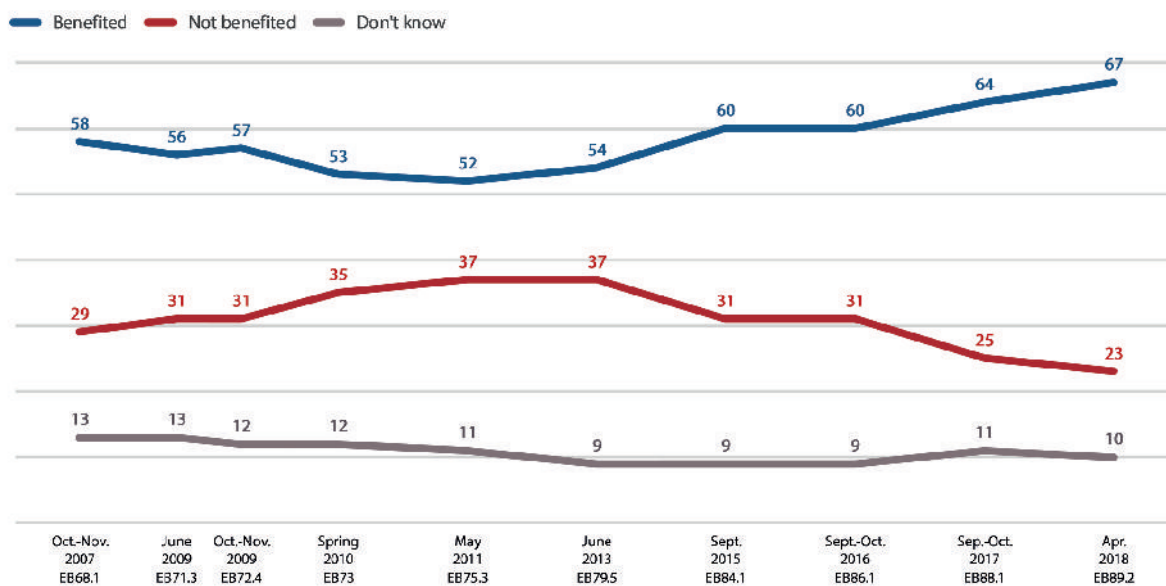


Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA23

Age, education and therefore occupation are further determining factors in this respect. Support for EU membership is most striking amongst the youngest and most educated respondents. Three quarters of managers (75%) and students (74%) think it is a good thing whereas 46% do so among those whose formal education finished at the age of 15 or before, and 46% of the unemployed.

In addition, results on membership show a growing acknowledgment of the fact that being a member of the EU has benefited the individual countries. An unprecedented 67% of respondents declare that their country has on balance benefited from being a member of the EU.

Q Taking everything into account, would you say that (OUR COUNTRY) has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the EU? (%)

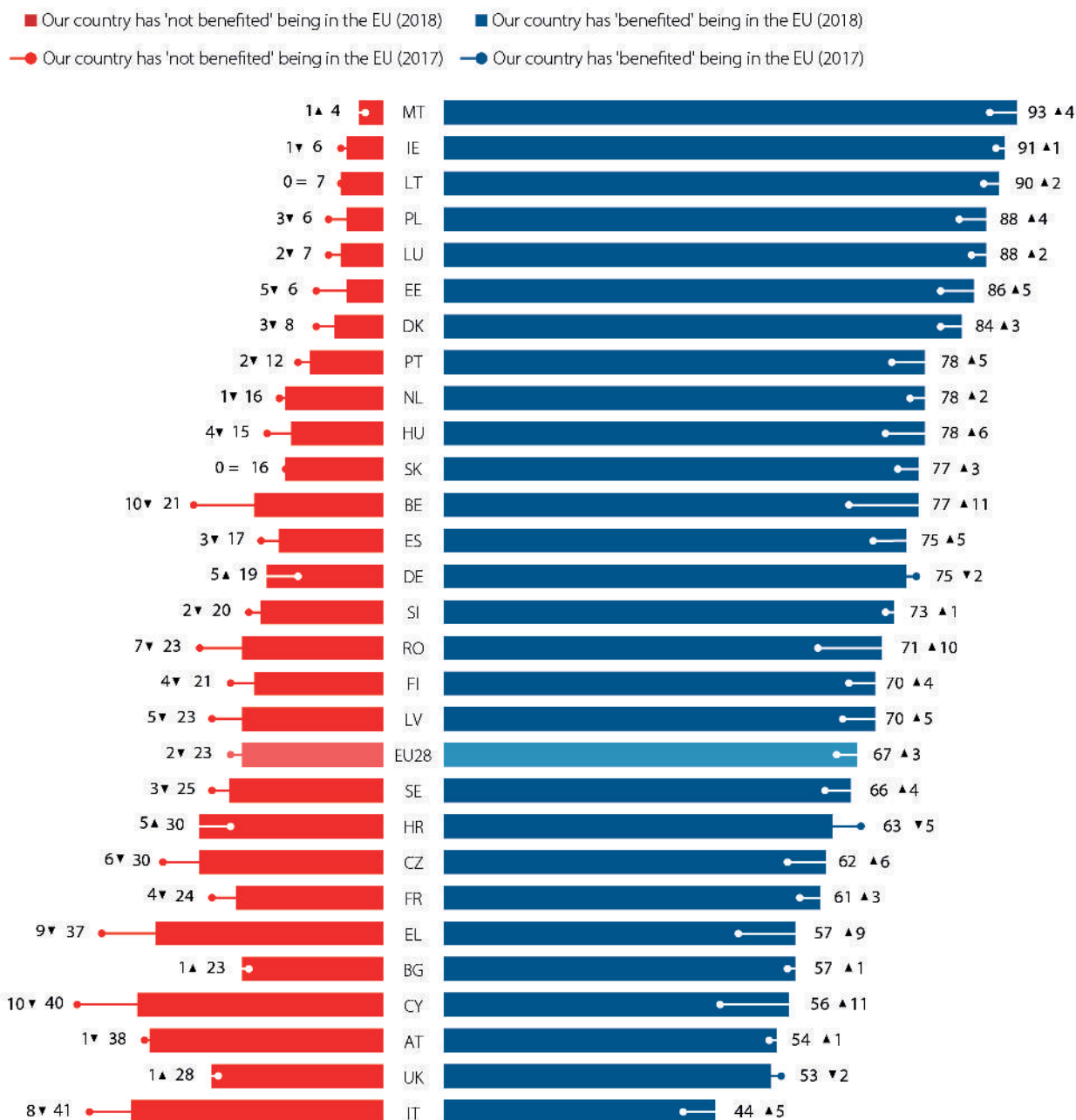


Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA24

This rate increases in 25 Member States, contributing to the highest overall level since 1983. As shown on the next chart, respondents believe their country has the most benefited from its EU membership in Malta (93%), Ireland (91%) and in Lithuania (90%). While the number of citizens believing that their country has benefited is lowest in Austria (54%), the United-Kingdom (53%) and Italy (44%), these figures still remain the majority views. Relevant increases over the past six months¹¹ in this regard should be noted in Cyprus (56%, +11), in Belgium (77%, +11), in Romania (71%, +10) and in Greece (57%, +9).

¹¹ Compared with the Parlemeter carried out in September-October 2017.

Q Taking everything into account, would you say that (OUR COUNTRY) has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the EU? (%)

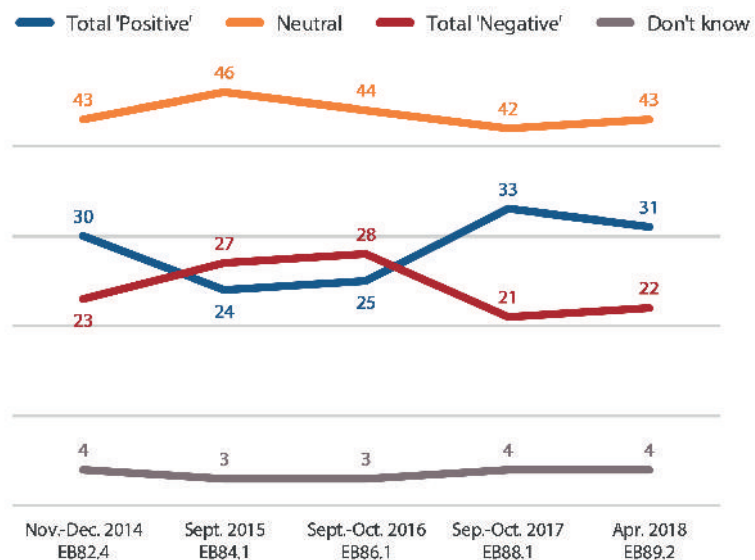


Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA24

Image and role of the European Parliament

The image of the European Parliament remains constant: even though many respondents keep a 'neutral image' of the institution (43%), 31% have positive views and 22% have negative views about it. At national level, some limited evolutions are noted (no more than +8/-7 pp since September 2017 for positive, neutral and negative answers).

Q In general, do you have a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image of the European Parliament? (%)

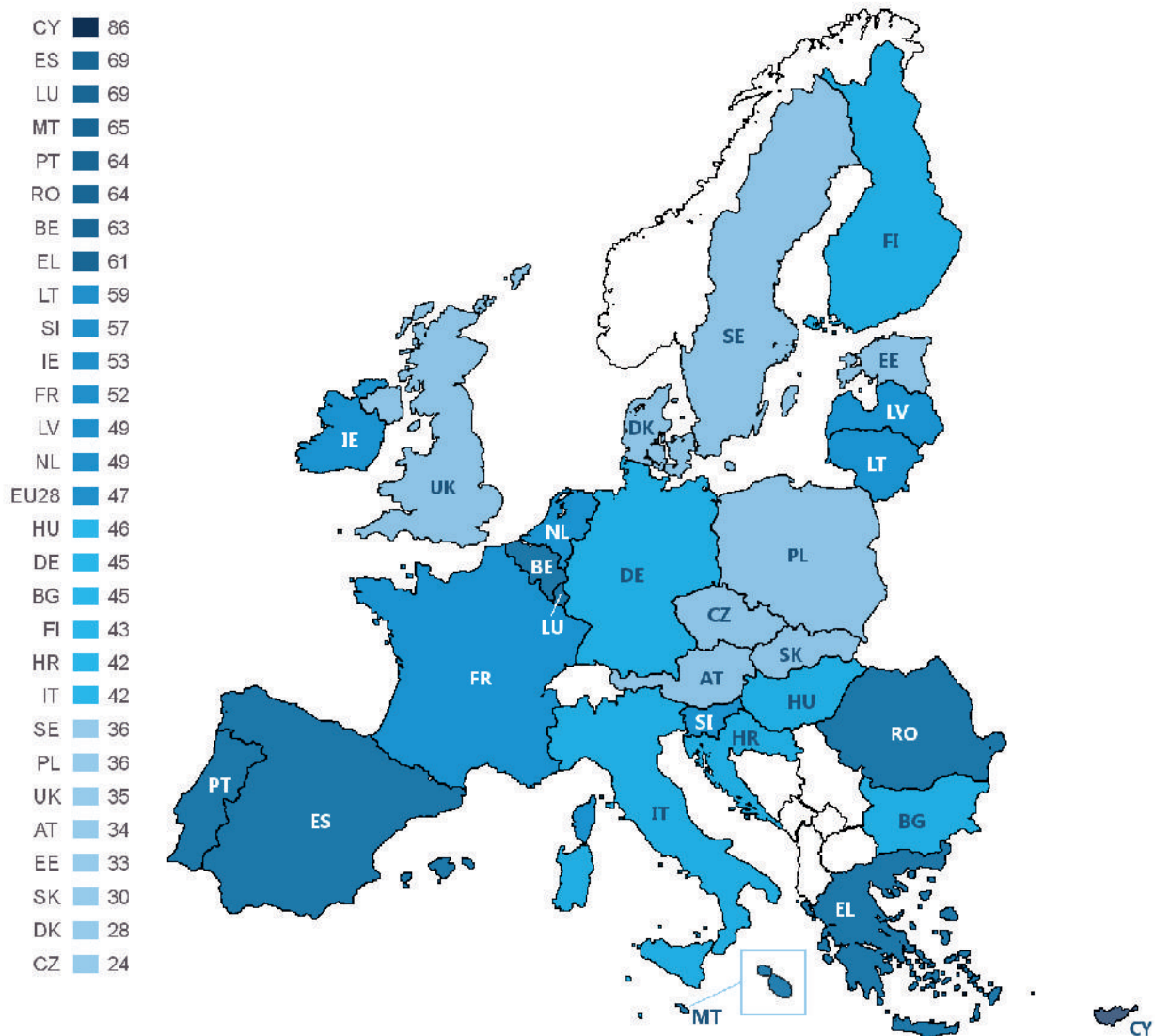


Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA2

Along this line a majority of respondents tend to trust the European Parliament as showed in the European Commission's Standard Eurobarometer. In autumn 2017, 45% of respondents tended to trust the European Parliament and 42% tended not to.

Against this backdrop, Europeans keep supporting a more important role for the European Parliament in the future. One year ahead of the European elections, 47% of respondents would personally like to see the European Parliament play a more important role in the future. This holds true for a majority of respondents in 23 Member States.

Q Would you personally like to see the European Parliament play a more important or less important role? (Total 'more important' - %)



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA3

Further correlations confirm findings also applying to many other background indicators as previously discussed. Indeed, more than just the age group, socio-economic factors have a significant impact on all variables that are related to the general perception of the EU and, as is the case here, on the role of the European Parliament. The more educated respondents are, the more important role they would confer to the European Parliament in the future in line with their higher satisfaction with the way democracy works and their more positive attitude towards the EU in general.

CHAPTER 2: SPITZENKANDIDATEN, CAMPAIGN TOPICS AND DEMOCRACY

The 2014 European Parliament elections marked the first time that Europeans voters had the opportunity to participate indirectly in the process of electing the President of the European Commission. In 2019 this *Spitzenkandidaten* (lead candidates) process is set for a second turn. Asked whether this opportunity would make them more likely to vote than at present, nearly half of EU27 citizens¹² (49%) say that the lead candidates process indeed increases their likelihood to vote.

The Treaty of Lisbon had decisively strengthened the role of the Parliament, empowering it to elect the President of the European Commission, rather than merely approving a candidate nominated exclusively by the European Council. Specifically, Article 17 paragraph 7 of the Treaty on European Union states that a candidate for President of the European Commission is proposed by the European Council to the European Parliament, 'taking into account the elections to the European Parliament and after having held the appropriate consultations'. The European Parliament then elects the candidate with a majority of its component members.

On the basis of these changes, the major European political parties had each nominated a lead candidate for the Commission presidency. In a resolution adopted in March 2014¹³, the European Parliament had expressed its expectation, that the candidate for Commission President put forward by the European political party that wins the most seats in the Parliament will be the first to be considered, with a view to ascertaining his or her ability to secure the support of the necessary absolute majority in Parliament. In the light of the clear and unequivocal position of the European Parliament and its political groups, the outcome of the European elections 2014 saw Jean-Claude Juncker nominated and elected as President of the European Commission.

In a decision by the European Parliament of 7 February 2018¹⁴ Members considered that the lead candidates process of 2014 had proved to be a success and stressed that the 2019 European elections would be the occasion to cement the use of that practice. Parliament also reiterated its stance from 2014 in stating that it would be ready to reject any candidate in the investiture procedure of the President of the Commission who was not appointed as a *Spitzenkandidat* in the run-up to the European elections.

In the last months, the European Parliament has embarked on a series of plenary debates with different EU heads of State or government to debate the future of Europe and the coming European elections. During one of these debates, during April's plenary session in Strasbourg, French President Emmanuel Macron

12 This question was not asked in the UK

13 <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P7-TA-2014-0249&language=EN>

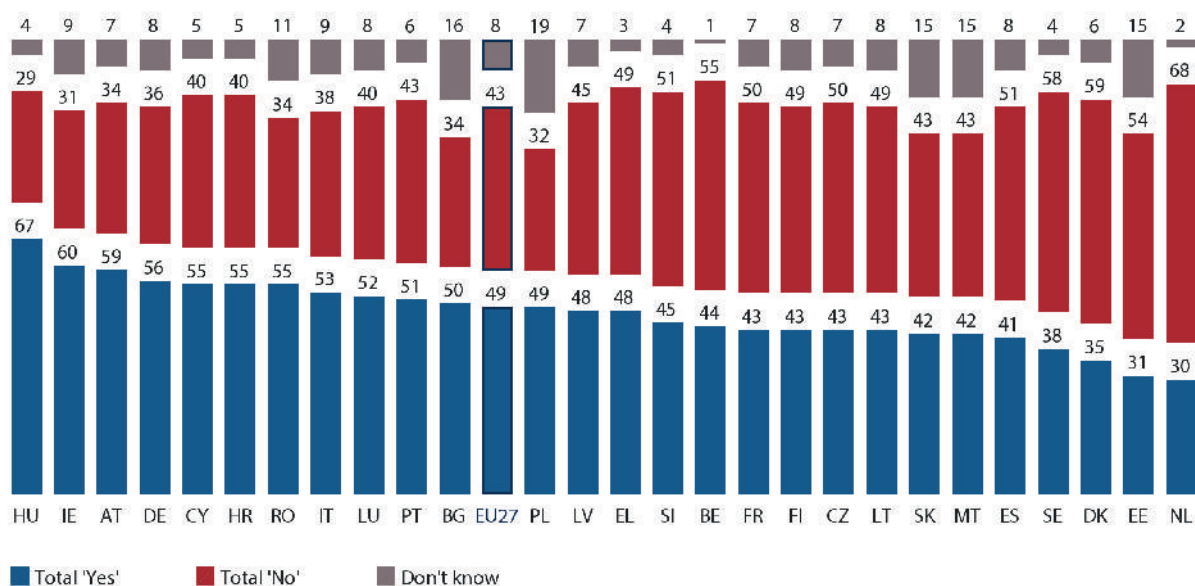
14 EP decision on the revision of the Framework Agreement on relations between Parliament and Commission (2017/2233(ACI)): <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P7-TA-2014-0249&language=EN>

expressed general support for the *Spitzenkandidaten* process and called for real European debates all over the Union to defend the idea of European sovereignty¹⁵.

Citizens were reminded in the present survey that in the 2019 European elections Europeans could again not only vote for who should represent them in the European Parliament, but also take part in the process of electing the President of the European Commission. Asked whether this opportunity would make them more likely to vote than at present, nearly half of EU27 citizens¹⁶ (49%) say that the *Spitzenkandidaten* process indeed increases their likelihood to vote. 43% of respondents said that it would not change their likelihood to vote, while 8% of citizens did not know whether this opportunity would impact on their voting likelihood.

In eleven countries, at least half of citizens declared that the *Spitzenkandidaten* process would make them more likely to go to vote. Topping this list is Hungary, where altogether 67% of respondents feel motivated by this renewed opportunity, followed by 60% of the respondents in Ireland and 59% of those in Austria. At the lower end of the scale, only 30% of respondents in the Netherlands, 31% in Estonia and 35% in Den-

Q In the next European Parliament elections voters would have this opportunity for the second time. Would this make you more likely to vote than at present? (%)



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA12

mark see the *Spitzenkandidaten* process as an additional motivation. Looking at the socio-demographic breakdown, overall this idea resonates best with the most educated respondents. More ready to believe that both the EU and their own country are back on the right track, they declare themselves more likely to go to vote should they feel involved in the *Spitzenkandidaten* process.

15 <http://www.elysee.fr/declarations/article/european-parliament/>

16 This question was not asked in the UK

Casting back an eye to public opinion in the run up to the 2014 European elections, a majority of respondents (55%) in Parliament's Eurobarometer study *One year before the 2014 European election survey* then thought that the 'indirect election of the President of the European Commission' would encourage them to go voting. The impact of this process was also noticeable in the reasons for voting mentioned by a share of respondents when interviewed after the 2014 European ballot¹⁷.

The responses for 'increased likelihood to vote' because of the *Spitzenkandidaten* process must therefore be discussed in conjunction with the question whether this process would be an actual motivator for voting. Interviewed in the 2017 Parlemeter, 14% of respondents thought that people would vote in the European elections because 'they want to participate in the choice of the next President of the European Commission', regardless of how important they thought it was to vote. (Parlemeter 2017). Asking the same question again in April 2018, this answer saw an increase of 3 percentage points to 17% of citizens across the EU28.

The combination of both factors shows that the *Spitzenkandidaten* process has not only overall remained an attractive factor to a large number of Europeans, we can also observe an increase of responses from citizens seeing lead candidates as positive motivation for voting in the European elections.

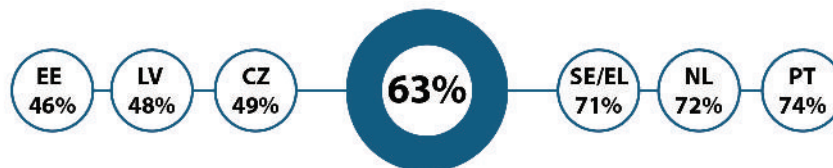
17 European Parliament 2014 post-election survey (<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/atyourservice/en/20150201PVL00053/Post-election-survey-2014>)

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements regarding this process of electing the President of the European Commission depending on the results of the European Parliament elections?

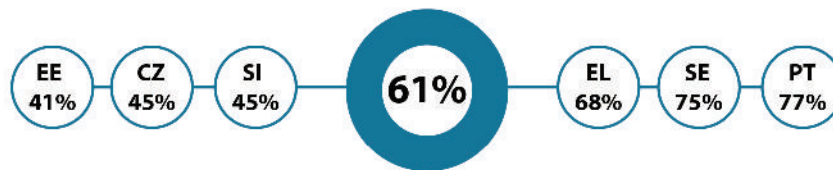
(Total 'agree' - %)



It only makes sense if it is accompanied by a real debate about European issues and the future of the EU



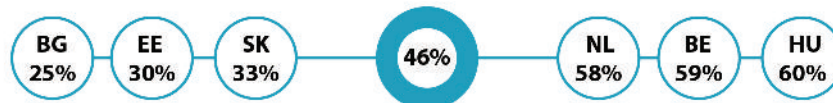
It brings more transparency to the process of electing the President of the European Commission



It represents significant progress for democracy within the EU



It gives more legitimacy to the European Commission



It prevents Member States' governments from choosing the best candidate for the job



It has no real impact, it does not change much

The need for a real European debate

While the process in itself therefore seems well perceived again in the run up to the European elections 2019, citizens also expressed themselves on a range of statements qualifying the process of electing the President of the European Commission. One statement receives by far the biggest support across the European Union: 70% of citizens state that the *Spitzenkandidaten* process only makes sense, if it is accompanied by a real debate about European issues and the future of the EU. By this result, citizens make it clear that the process by itself would not be seen as enough. As this survey in general shows, Europeans want a content-rich political debate on very specific issues, which resonate with their expectations of European action.

This result goes as high as receiving 87% support in Greece, 80% in Germany and 79% in Belgium, whereas on the other end of the scale still 55% of the population in Romania, 58% in Latvia and 59% in Estonia and in Poland would demand such a real European debate to accompany the *Spitzenkandidaten* process.

Indeed, Eurobarometer surveys over the past years have shown that European citizens have understood that the European Union is not touching on their lives just on the fringes, but that major changes being discussed and decided upon at European level directly affect them in a very concrete fashion. Citizens increasingly tend to express their strong expectations from the European Union in general and the European Parliament specifically. Contrary to national elections, where citizens also vote for their national parliament, but in fact might rather be thinking of the government they want to see in office, participation in European Parliament elections until 2014 left it rather unclear as to the European executive that would emerge from the ensuing setting up of the Commission. The Lisbon Treaty has therefore brought about more than just a legal change. It has brought about a clearer understanding of citizens as to the process of electing the President of the European Commission - and with it an increased understanding of the need for transparency, democracy and legitimacy.

This becomes clear when looking at the next three statements: 63% of European citizens say that the *Spitzenkandidaten* process brings more transparency to the process of electing the President of the European Commission. This statement receives an absolute majority of positive answers in 24 countries and a relative majority of positive respondents in all 27 Member States surveyed. Leading the list are Portugal (74%), the Netherlands (72%), and Greece and Sweden (both 71%), while 46% of respondents in Estonia share this view at the opposite end of the scale, preceded by Latvia (48%) and the Czech Republic (49%).

Over six out of ten respondents across the EU (61%) are convinced that this process represents a significant progress for democracy within the EU. Also this statement enjoys support from a majority of the population in the EU27, with 23 Member States showing an absolute majority of their citizens supporting this claim. Portugal (77%), Sweden (75%) and Greece (68%) top this ranking, with Estonia (41%) and Slovenia and the Czech Republic (both 45%) on the other end.

A similar result is enjoyed by the third element in this cluster, where 60% of all European respondents support the statement that the *Spitzenkandidaten* process gives more legitimacy to the European Commission. Three quarters of citizens in Portugal (75%), 68% in Greece and 66% in Ireland agree with this statement, while the three Baltic countries bring up the rear with 50% in Lithuania (the same proportion as in the Czech Republic and in Finland), 39% in Estonia and 35% in Latvia.

One of the arguments often raised against the *Spitzenkandidaten* process was that it would prevent Member States from exercising their traditional prerogative of choosing the best candidate for the job. In contrast to the three statements discussed above, only 46% of Europeans support this claim, in particular in Hungary (60%), Belgium (59%) and the Netherlands (58%). Only one quarter of respondents in Bulgaria, 30% of citizens in Estonia and 33% in Slovakia share this view.

Respondents were also asked whether the *Spitzenkandidaten* process had in their view 'no real impact and does not change much'. Only 45% of all surveyed Europeans shared this view, with the highest levels in Belgium (58%), the Czech Republic (55%) and Austria (54%). In only five countries this statement is shared by an absolute majority of respondents. The above confirms the reasons already emphasised in Europeans' answers in 2013, one year before the European elections of 2014¹⁸: they supported the President of the European Commission being elected directly by the European citizens mainly because 'this would help making the EC decisions more legitimate to the eyes of Europeans' and 'it would reinforce the democracy within the EU.

Compared with these results from 2013, the responses given in the present survey show that the appreciation of reinforced democracy within the EU and more transparency for the process itself have not diminished, rather on the contrary. There is no majority among European citizens believing that the *Spitzenkandidaten* process would not change anything. But at the same time, one year ahead of the European election, citizens issue a clear call for action: a call for a debate on topics, an expectation to put issues above process and procedure.

What to debate? Campaign topics in the eyes of European citizens

Against this background, Europeans citizens have been asked about the topics they would like to see debated as a matter of priority during the European elections campaign. The following graph shows the ranking of the issues by citations on EU average, combined with the three countries in which the respective issue has attracted the highest number of respondents.

On EU average, 49% of Europeans want the fight against terrorism most debated, followed by 'combatting youth unemployment' (48%), immigration (45%), economy and growth (42%). A second tier, mentioned

¹⁸ EP EB One Year Before the 2014 European Elections (EB 79.5), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/atyourservice/en/20150201PVL00058/One-year-to-go-to-the-2014-European-elections>

Q Which of the following themes should be discussed as a matter of priority during the electoral campaign for the next European Parliament elections? (Max. 6 answers) (%)



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA11T

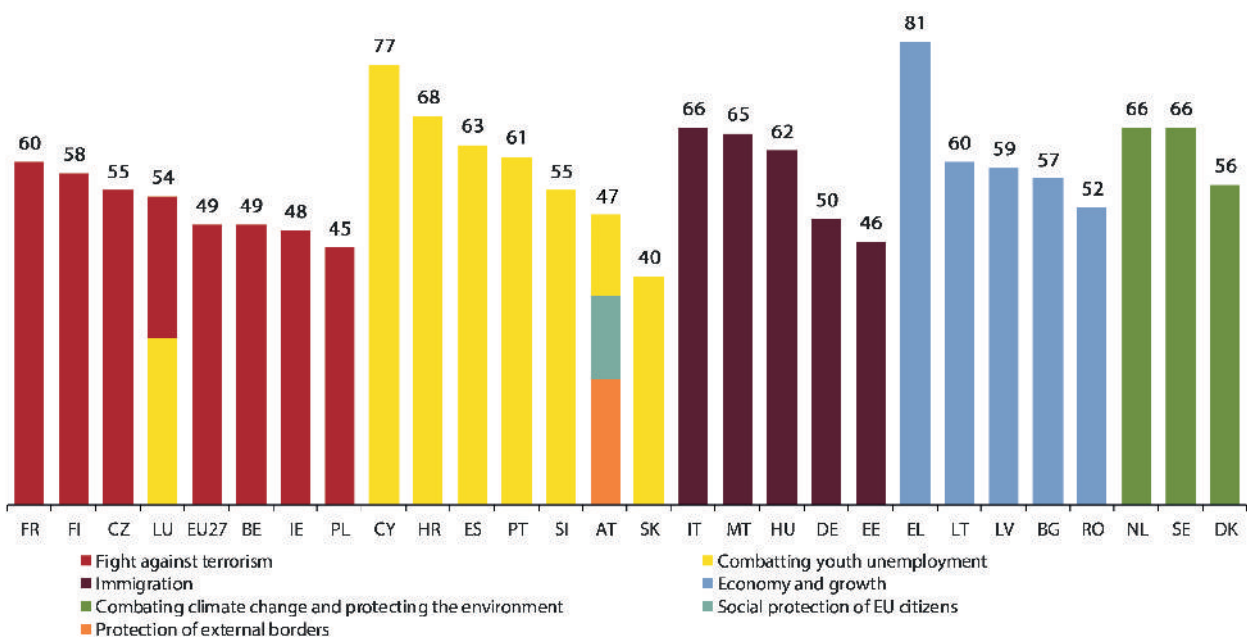
by around one third of Europeans, brings together the fight against climate change and the protection of the environment with 35% of citations, promoting human rights and democracy as well as the social protection of EU citizens equally supported by 32% of respondents.

Less than one third of EU citizens want the security and defence policy (29%), the future working of the EU (27%), consumer protection and food safety (27%) or the protection of the EU's external borders (26%) as campaign topics. The list is closed by 20% of European citizens requesting the protection of personal data to be discussed during the upcoming election campaign.

Two major themes crystallize out of the variety of European issues: on the one hand Europeans want a debate on security in the broadest sense, which for some would also include matters such as the protection of

external borders or immigration, on the other hand themes surrounding personal prosperity and well-being. These two areas can be broken down in a first step to five topics which receive the most attention by citizens across the EU. From the security field the 'fight against terrorism' is cited as top campaign priority by respondents in France (60%), Finland (58%), the Czech Republic (55%), Luxembourg (54%, equally with combatting youth unemployment), Belgium (49%), Ireland (48%) and Poland (45%).

Q Which of the following themes should be discussed as a matter of priority during the electoral campaign for the next European Parliament elections? (Max. 6 answers) (%)



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA11T

Indeed, terrorism has been an issue of major concern during the recent years that has dominated public debates across the European Union. The currently lower number of attacks within the EU compared to previous years does not mean that the threat disappeared. The recent terrorist attacks on 23 March 2018 in the French towns of Carcassonne and Trèbes have shown the continued need for a strong European response to terrorism - and underpin also why France leads the list of countries with 60% of its citizens calling for this issue to receive most attention during the election campaign.

Immigration takes place three in the ranking of campaign priority items. Citizens from five countries have named this issue as their top request for a European debate. Led by Italy, where 66% of respondents see immigration as the most pressing campaign topic, Malta (65%) and Hungary (62%) follow closely, while still 50% of citizens in Germany and 46% in Estonia believe that immigration should be discussed the most in the run up to the 2019 elections.

When it comes to issues surrounding matters of personal prosperity and well-being, the highest overall individual results per country are recorded for 'combatting youth unemployment' as top priority: 77% of respondents in Cyprus want this issue debated, followed by 68% in Croatia and 63% of people in Spain. Portugal (61%), Slovenia (55%), Austria (47%, equally with 'combatting climate change and protecting the environment' and 'protection of external borders') and Slovakia (40%) complete the range of countries where the fight against youth unemployment should be the most debated issue during the upcoming election campaign.

'Economy and growth' is the second cornerstone citizens want for the campaign narrative surrounding prosperity and wellbeing. 81% of respondents in Greece want this topic receive top attention in the public debate, followed by those in Lithuania (60%) Latvia (59%), Bulgaria (59%) and Romania (52%).

Last, but not least, the fight against climate change and the protection of the environment remains a top issue for several countries. The Netherlands and Sweden share top rank in this area with each 66% of their citizens being most interested in hearing about this matter. Also Denmark listed the climate change and the environment as its top priority for 56% of respondents.

Security in all its aspects, immigration as well as prosperity and wellbeing already dominated the ranking of priority concerns for European citizens for a long time, so it comes as no surprise that these issues are also topping the list of matters to be debated during the European elections campaign. It is nevertheless interesting to note specific changes over time.

In Parliament's post-electoral survey 2014, unemployment, economic growth and immigration were the three most-cited issues which made citizens vote in these elections. It is noteworthy that 'terrorism' on the other hand was the least-cited topic with only 7% of European citizens quoting this topic as one of the reasons they participated in the elections.

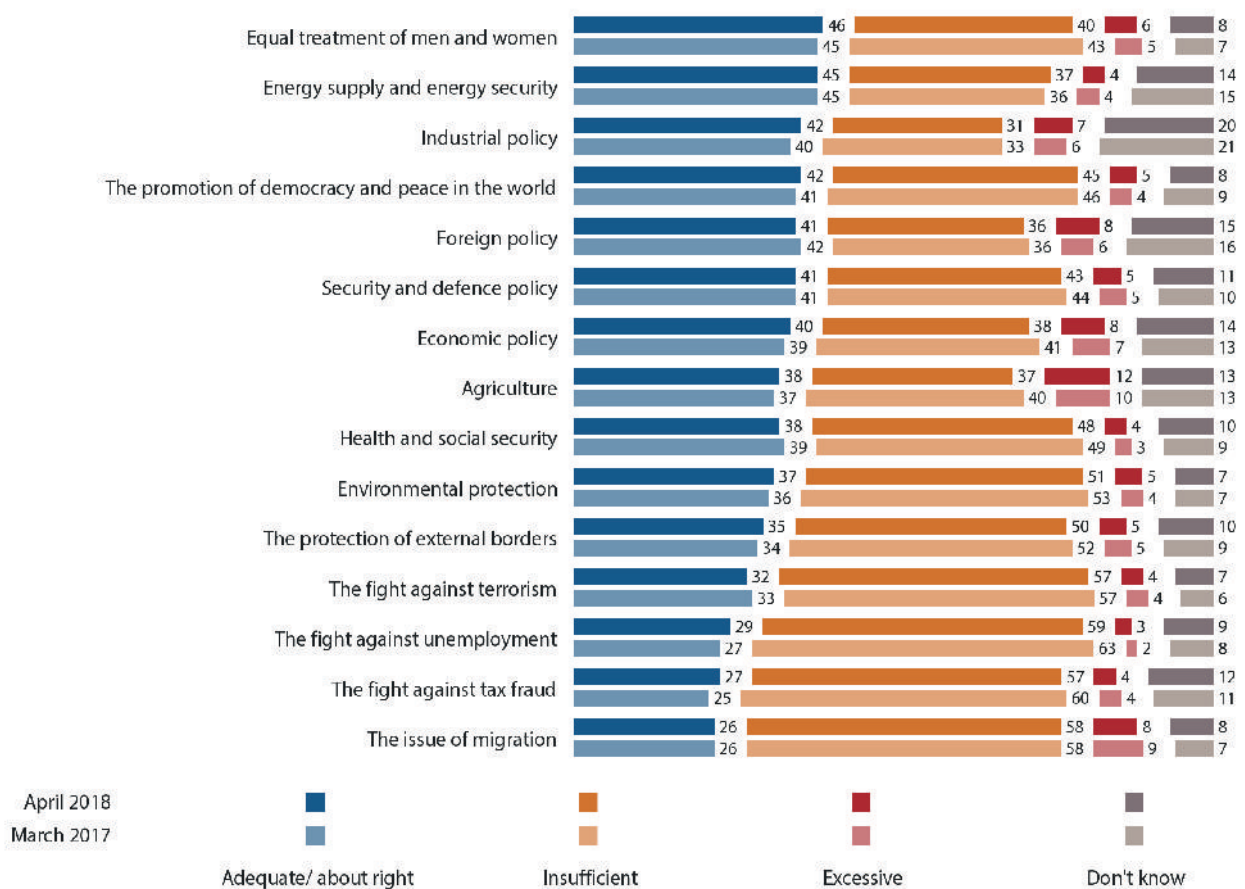
In the 2017 Parlemeter survey¹⁹ citizens primarily called for increased EU action on tackling poverty and social exclusion, on par with fighting terrorism. Combating youth unemployment was the third most cited item on average. These top three topics also broadly circumscribe the continuously expressed concerns of Europeans citizens: they want to live their life in a place that guarantees their chances and protect their freedom from terrorist threats. The issues of migration and 'enabling new ways to boost economy and growth' feature likewise in the present survey's campaign topics list.

19 Parlemeter 2017: A Stronger Voice (PE 608.741), http://www.europarl.europa.eu/external/html/parlemetre/eb88_v2.pdf

Yet there is another way of integrating this ranking into an overall and ongoing European story: citizens are also regularly asked about their perceptions and expectations concerning European Union action.

When asked whether current EU action is excessive, adequate or insufficient, 59% of citizens across the EU say that the EU's fight against unemployment is insufficient. 58% of citizens think that EU action is insufficient when it comes to migration and 57% believe the EU is not doing enough in the fight against tax fraud or, on the same level, the fight against terrorism. A majority of EU citizens also believe that the European Union currently insufficiently tackles environmental protection (51%), the protection of external borders (50%), health and social security (48%), the promotion of democracy and peace in the world (45%), the protection of external borders (50%), health and social security (48%), the promotion of democracy and peace in the world (45%) and security and defence policy (43%).

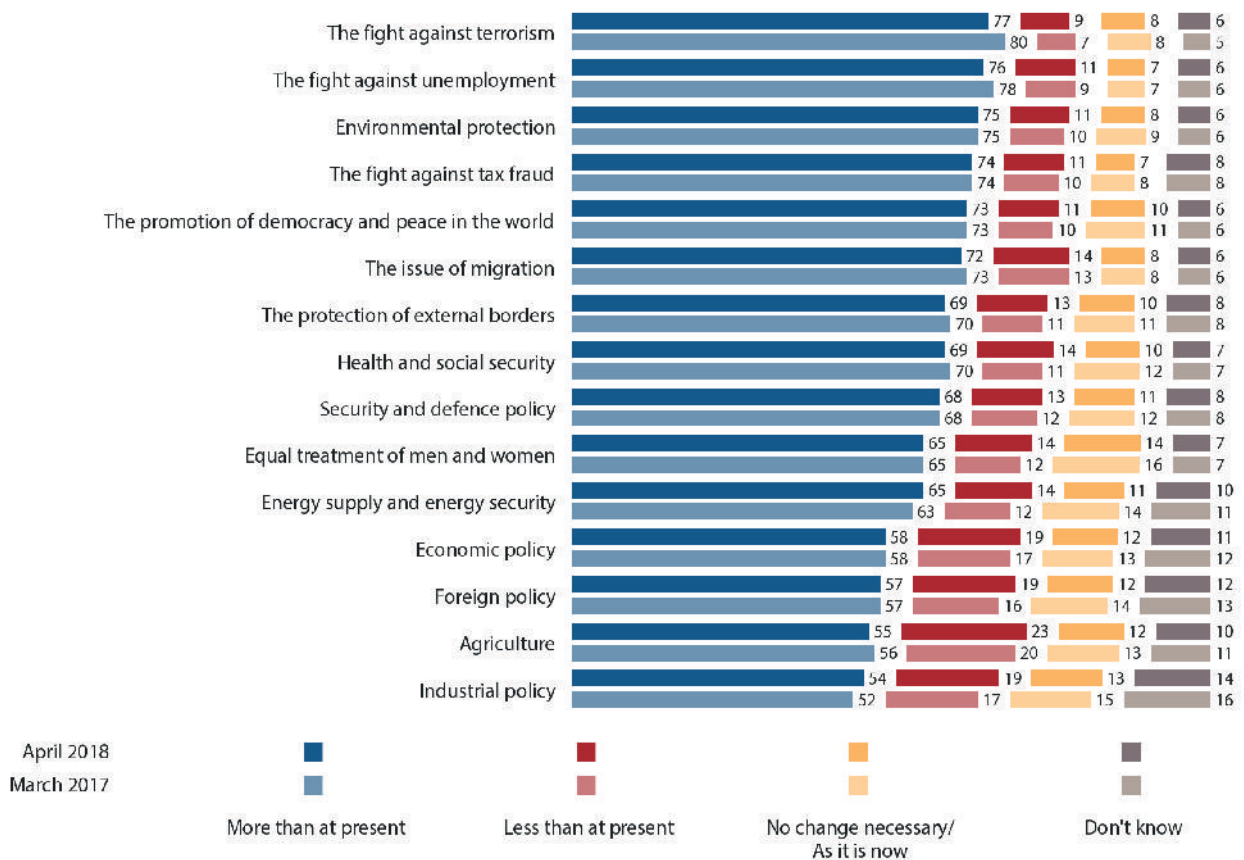
Q For each of the following, would you say that current European Union action is excessive, adequate/ about right or insufficient? (%)



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA4

Looking at citizens' expectations for future EU action in the same policy areas, the ranking as seen with campaign priority issues is largely the same: 77% of Europeans want the EU to intervene more in the fight against terrorism, followed by unemployment (76%), environmental protection (75%), the fight against tax fraud (74%) the promotion of peace and democracy in the world (73%) and the issue of immigration (72%).

Q For each of the following areas, would you like the European Union to intervene less than at present or more than at present? (%)



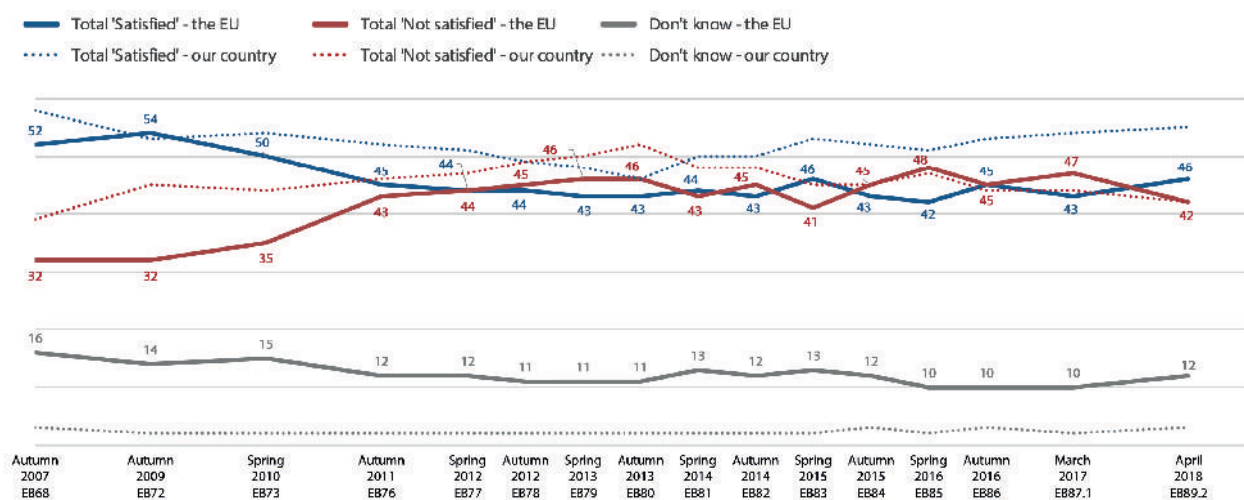
Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA27

Reading the topical priority list for the election campaign in conjunction with the list of political priority topics for the European Parliament and the perception of EU action, the 'big European picture' emerges as quite consistent over time, similarly reflected through whichever prism we choose to look at it. The one item missing from the campaign topics list, but thematically and emotionally fitting with the both the narratives surrounding security and prosperity is the fight against tax fraud. Here the aspect of fairness comes into play, with a clear expectation that this should be an issue for the European Union to tackle. Nevertheless, one cannot paint exactly the same picture in every Member State with the same brush. While on average a clear selection of top issues emerges, the topical palette changes from country to country.

What democracy is all about

The survey takes a closer look at the level of citizens' satisfaction with the way democracy works in their country as well as in the EU. The graphic below compares 'satisfaction with the way democracy works' for both the EU and the respondents' own country since 2007. Several details merit a closer inspection: first of all, one can notice that the trend lines for both satisfaction and dissatisfaction are largely developing in parallel for EU and individual country. At the same time, one can notice the dip in satisfaction levels around the financial and economic crisis. As from 2009 a marked decrease in satisfaction is noticeable, again both for the European level and the domestic situation. Contrary to this development, levels of dissatisfaction with the way democracy works in both EU and one's country are rising. As from mid-2011 values are levelling out and stabilising, albeit on a lower level than before the crisis. Since 2017 results for 'satisfied with the way democracy works in the EU' are finally higher than response rates for dissatisfaction.

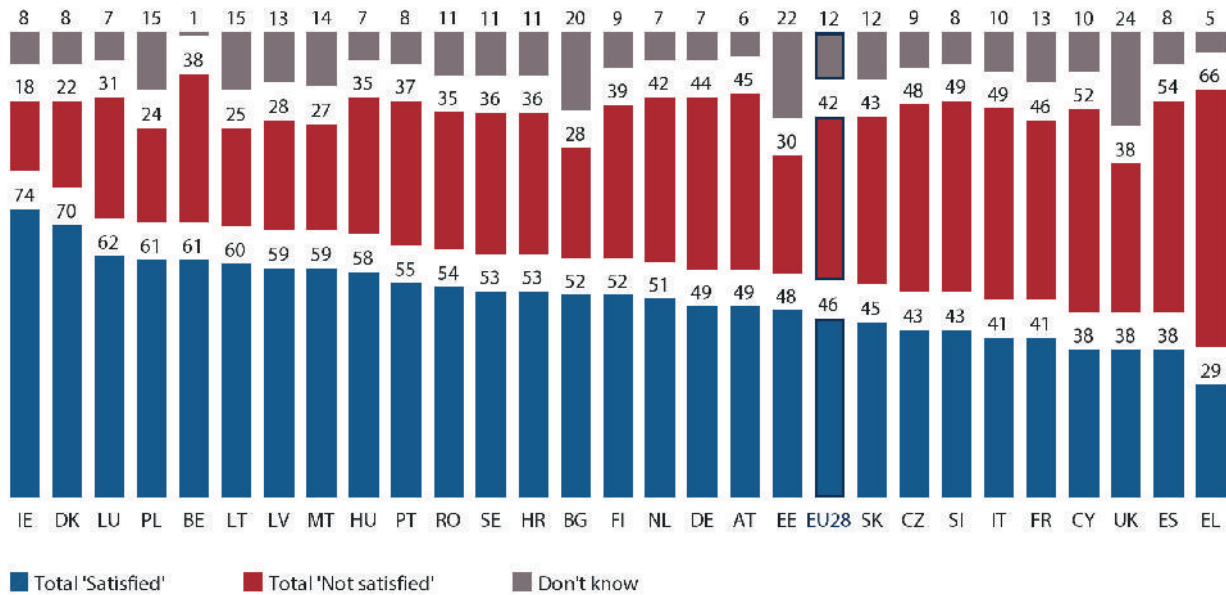
Q On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in (OUR COUNTRY)? And how about the way democracy works in the EU? (%)



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA25

Results from the present Eurobarometer survey show that a majority of respondents continues to be satisfied with the way democracy works in the EU (46%, +3 percentage points since March 2017). On the other hand, 42% of citizens across the EU are not satisfied about the way democracy works in the EU, a decrease of 5 percentage points since March 2017. In 16 countries an absolute majority of citizens expressed themselves satisfied with the way democracy works in the EU, led by Ireland with 74% of respondents, Denmark (70%) and Luxembourg (62%). In total 19 countries returned results above the EU average for this question. The United Kingdom, Cyprus and Spain (all 38%) and Greece (29%) are at the other end of the spectrum with the lowest number of citizens being satisfied with the way democracy works in the EU.

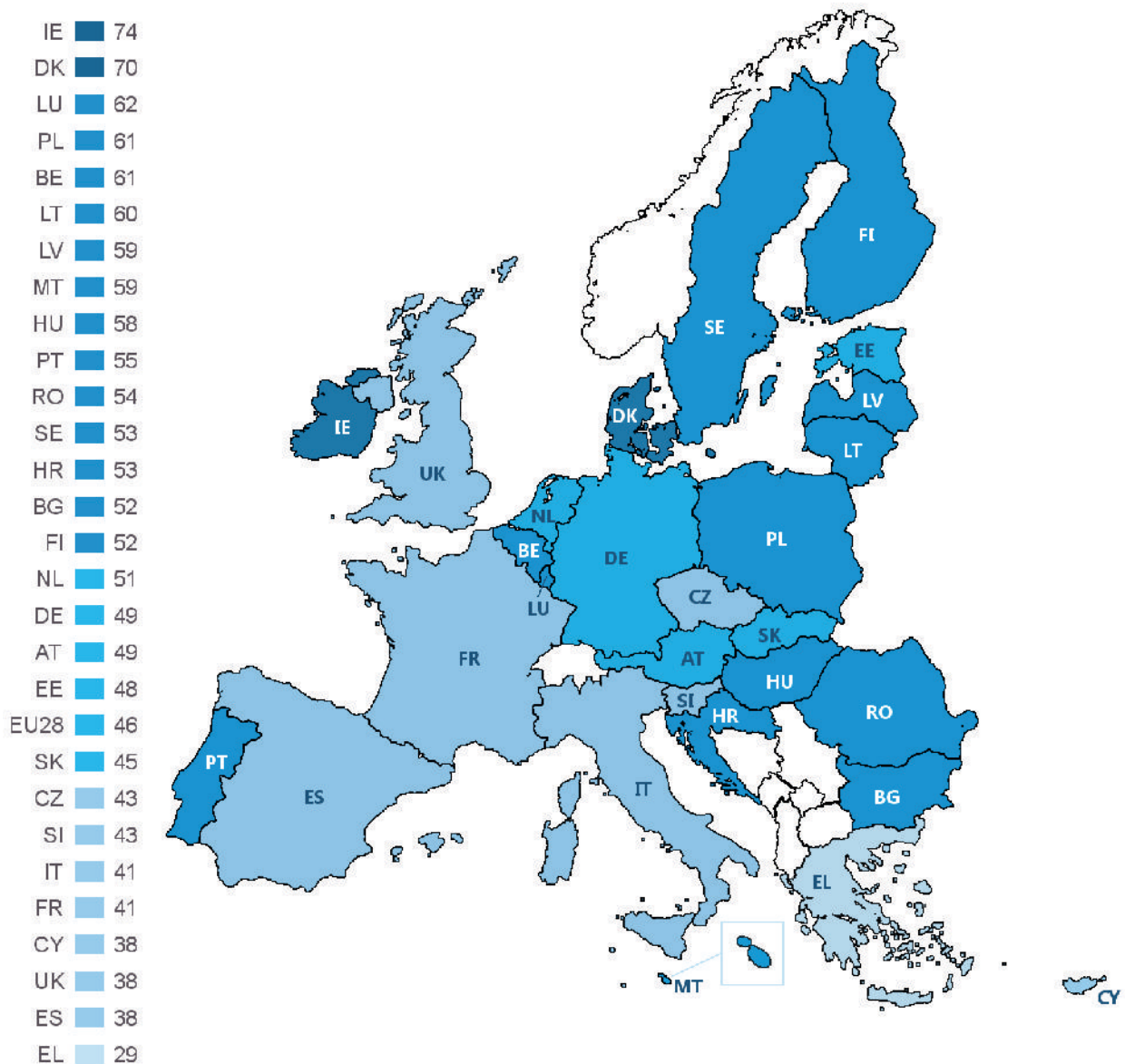
Q How about the way democracy works in the EU? (%)



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA25b

Looking at the distribution from a geographical point of view, one can see that predominantly countries from Central, Eastern and Northern Europe express the highest degree of satisfaction, whereas large parts of Southern and Western European countries show a comparably lower degree of satisfaction. In this North/East - South/West gradient it is striking that citizens from four out of the five larger EU Member States, namely the United Kingdom, France, Spain and Italy are showing a significantly lower degree of satisfaction with the way the democracy works in the EU than the EU average. It is equally interesting to see that Portugal and Ireland are notable exceptions in this geographical distribution, both countries which benefited from EU-steered support action during and after the economic crisis.

Q How about the way democracy works in the EU? (Total 'satisfied' - %)

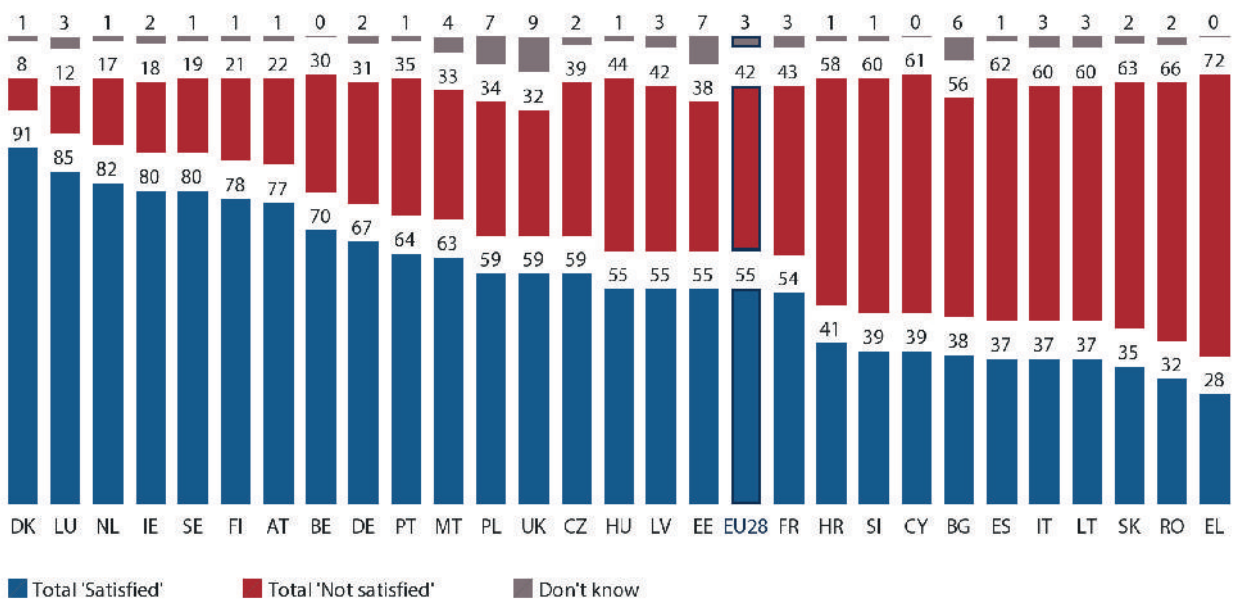


Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA25b

Looking at the responses on the question whether citizens are, overall, satisfied or not satisfied with the way democracy works in their country, we see on average and in general higher figures for satisfaction. On EU average, 55% of citizens declare themselves being satisfied with the way democracy works in their country. This is 9 percentage points more than for the same question regarding the EU, while remaining statistically stable compared to the results from March 2017, where 54% of citizens responded as being satisfied. 42% of respondents on EU average declare themselves as not being satisfied with the way democracy works in their country, a slight decrease of 2 percentage points from March 2017.

Overall, 18 countries returned an absolute majority of citizens who are satisfied with democracy in their country, led by Denmark (91%), Luxembourg (85%) and the Netherlands (82%). In 10 countries, a majority of respondents are not satisfied with the way democracy works in their country. Like with democracy in the EU it is also Greece where citizens show the least satisfaction (28%), preceded by Romania (32%) and Slovakia (35%).

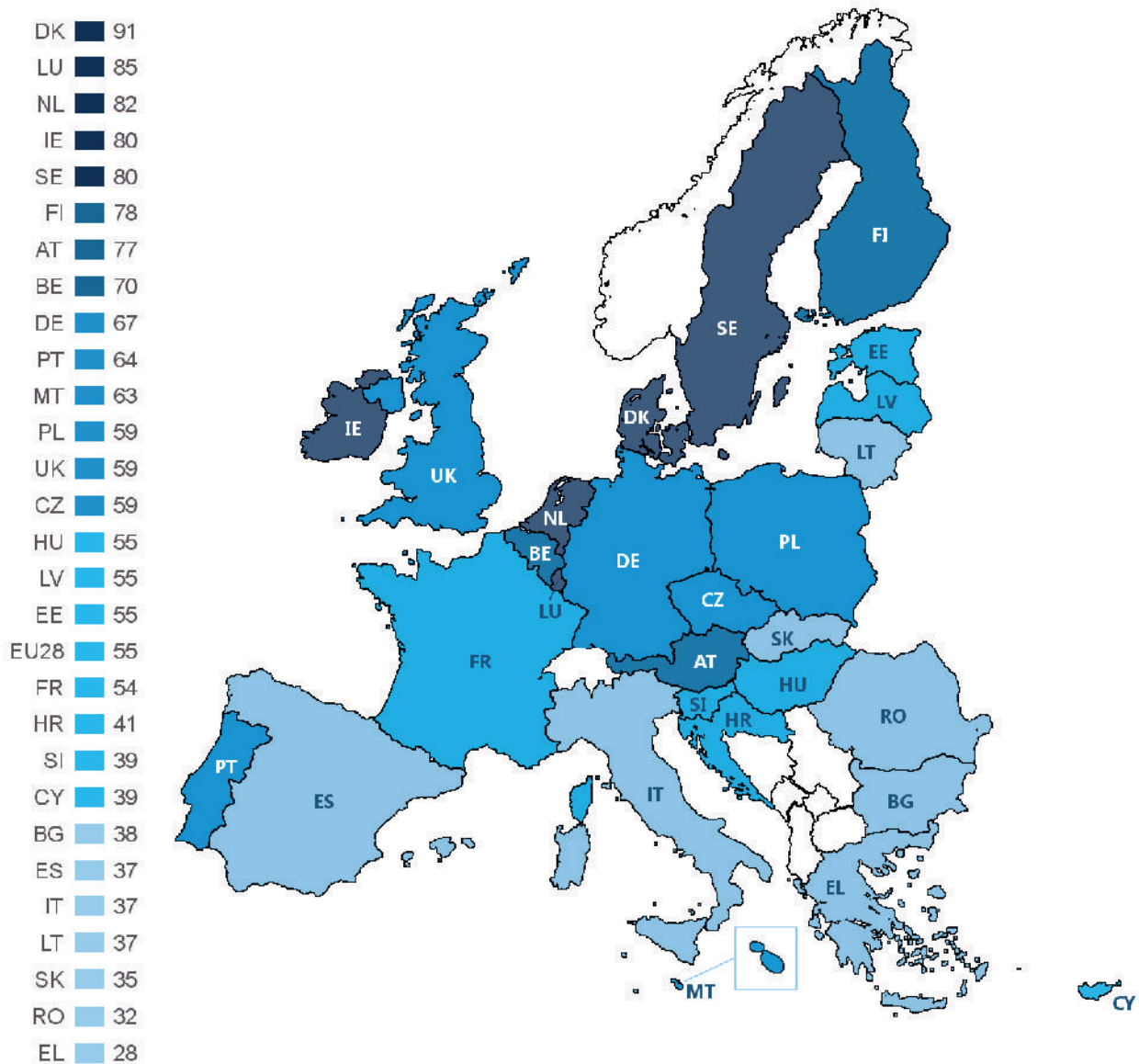
Q On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in (OUR COUNTRY)? (%)



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA25a

If we are now looking again at the geographic representation of satisfaction with the way democracy works in the different EU countries, the gradient rather changes towards a North-South distribution. Nordic countries return the highest degree of satisfaction with their national democracy, while in South and South-East of Europe the degree of satisfaction with the way democracy works in the individual countries is lower (Portugal and Malta being the exceptions in this case).

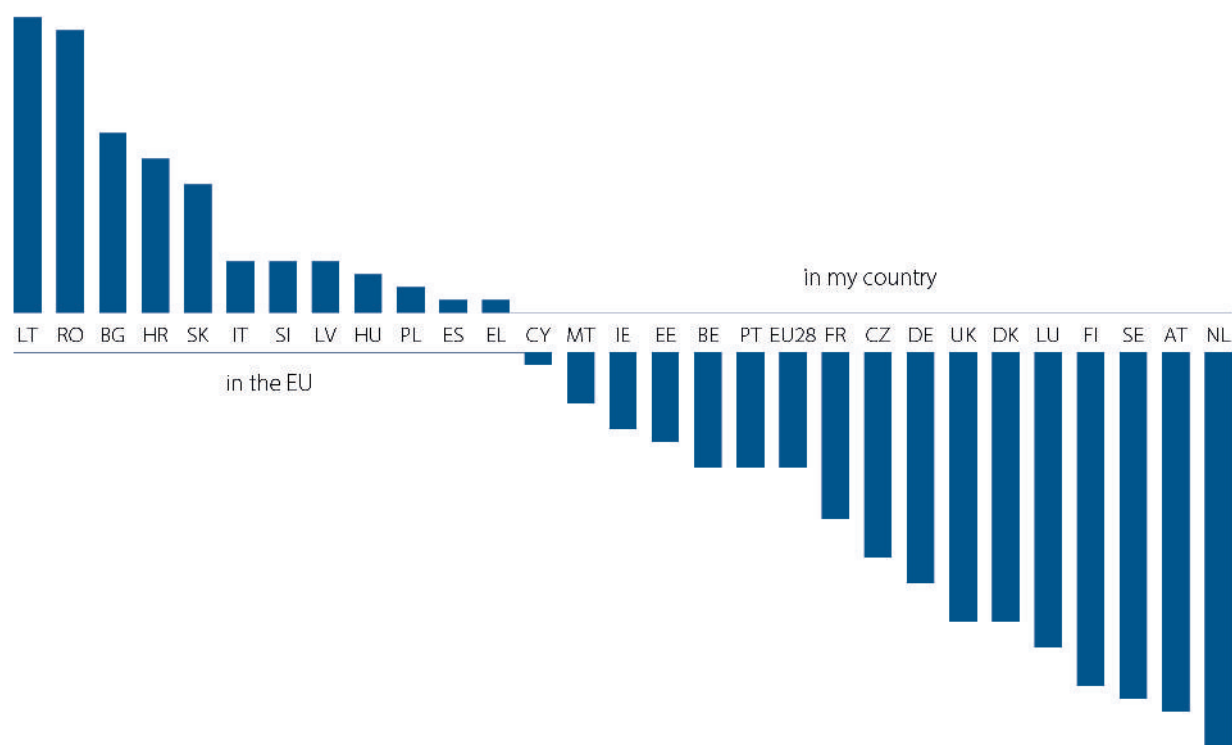
Q On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in (OUR COUNTRY)? (Total 'satisfied' - %)



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA25a

It is furthermore interesting to note that in 12 EU Member States respondents are more satisfied with the way democracy works in the EU than in their own country. This 'surplus' is strongest in Lithuania, Romania and Bulgaria, whereas in the Netherlands, Austria and Sweden citizens are predominantly more satisfied with the democracy in their country compared to the way they see it working in the EU.

Q Satisfaction with the way democracy works in the EU vs in my country



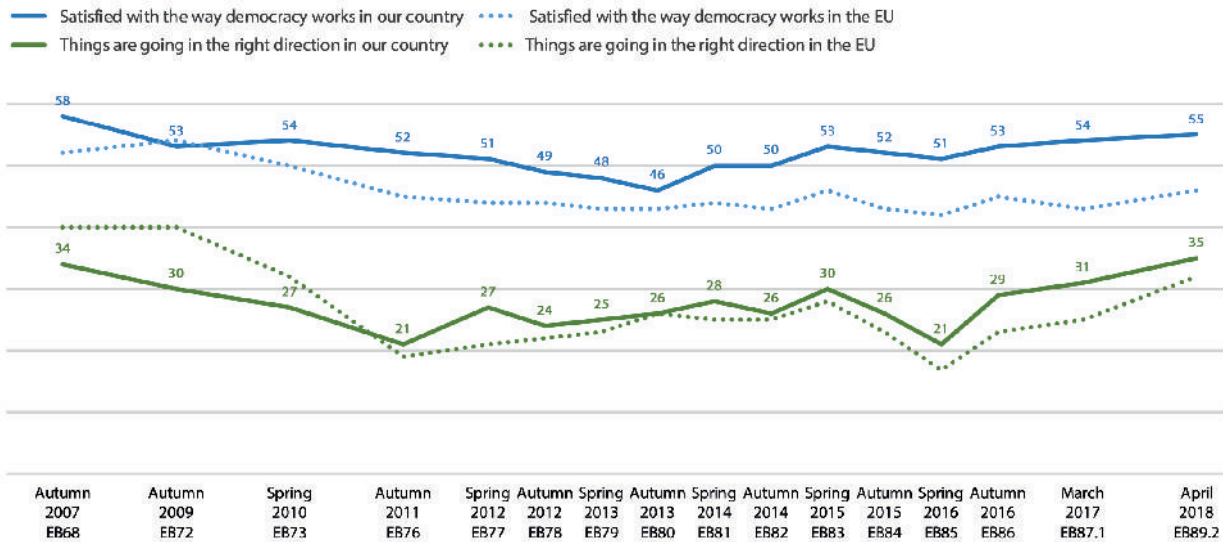
Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA25a and QA25b

While Eurobarometer results on the satisfaction with democracy show a partly reassuring result, especially when seen on a very long-term trend line, there is another potentially aspect that could be highlighted by combining different data sets. Academic research suggests, widely discussed as the 'retrospective economic voting' model, that citizens might become quickly dissatisfied with democracy if their economic expectations are not met. Citizens have high expectations about economic prosperity, and these expectations are strongly reflected in their electoral choices. In times of economic hardship voters often punish the incumbent, and switch to an opposition party or a new political entrepreneur. This effect is known and described for both 'old democracies' and emerging democracies.

Starting from this assumption, the comparison between Eurobarometer responses on 'Satisfied with the way democracy works in the EU/my country' and 'Things are going in the right direction in the EU/my country' shows two sets of clear parallel trends. Lately, the satisfaction with the way democracy works both in the EU and at a national level follows the same upward trend as on whether things are going in the right direction at a European and a national level.

The feeling of whether democracy works or not seems to be coupled to the current economic and political situation in each country and in the EU. The dip of all four trend lines in the above graph after the economic and financial crisis as well as their subsequent improvement might be a further indicator for this theory.

Q Comparative development of 'satisfied with the way democracy works' and 'things are going in the right direction'



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA25 and D73

Looking at these two questions together one might see that Europeans do feel attached to democracy both on EU level and in their own country, but difficulties in succeeding personally on an economic point of view has a direct impact on their views. This becomes even clearer when put into perspective with data on the countries' GDP per capita as well as their current unemployment rates. Four selected countries can illustrate this point: Citizens from Ireland and the Netherlands express high satisfaction with the way democracy works in both the EU and their own country. At the same time, they equally strongly believe that 'things are going in the right direction', again both for the EU and their country. This correlates with a high GDP per capita rate as well as a very low unemployment rate. Contrary, looking at Spain and Greece, both countries are suffering from relatively higher unemployment rates (acerbated even when looking at youth unemployment rates only) and also a comparatively lower GDP. Correlating to these data Spain and Greece's satisfaction with democracy shows as being far lower, with an equally low result for 'things are going in the right direction'.

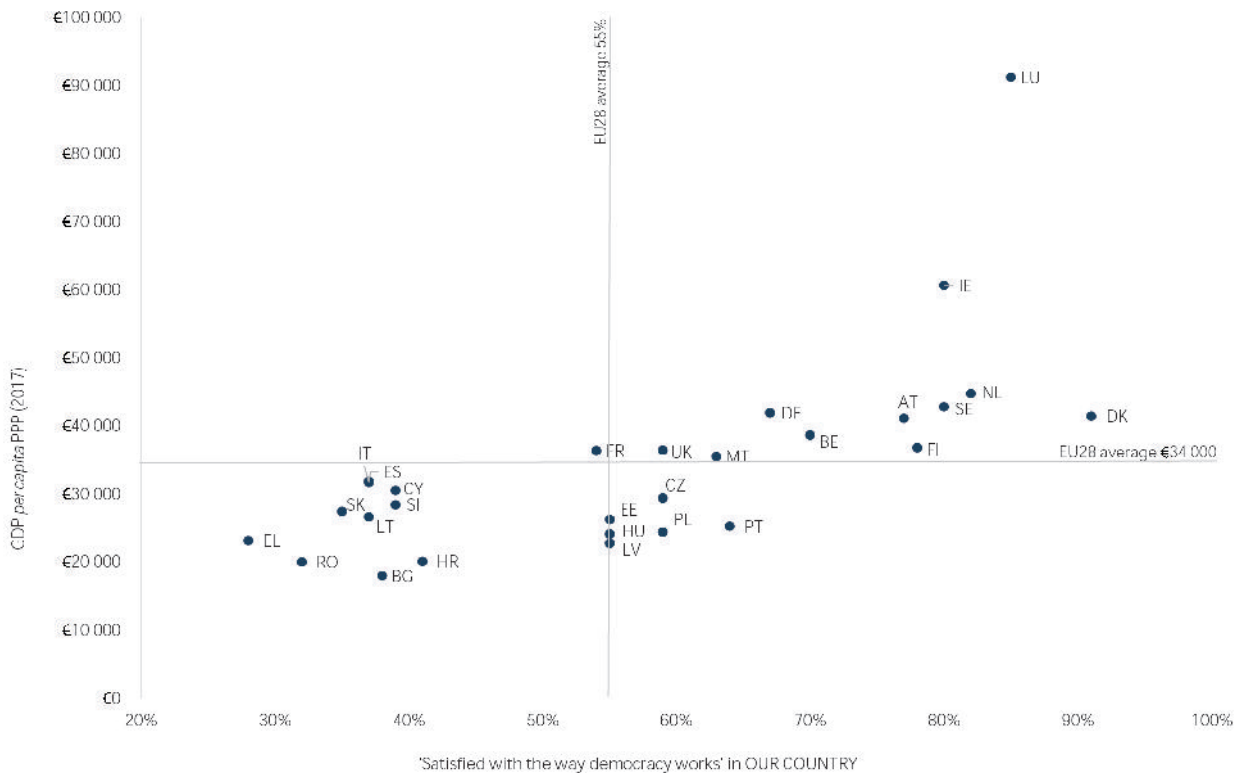
	Satisfied with the way democracy works:		Things are going in the right direction:		GDP per capita PPP 2017*	Unemployment rate 2018**
	in our country	in the EU	in our country	in the EU		
Ireland	80%	74%	74%	62%	€ 60 729	6%
Netherlands	82%	51%	59%	41%	€ 44 801	3,9%
Spain	37%	38%	20%	26%	€ 31 915	16,1%
Greece	28%	29%	9%	15%	€ 23 224	20,8%

* International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Economic Outlook Database. Gross domestic product per capita, current prices. Purchasing power parity; international dollars.

** Eurostat database. Harmonised unemployment rate by sex (ID: teilm020).

<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/teilm020> (retrieved 11/05/2018)

Q Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita and the satisfaction with the way democracy works



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA25a and QA25b

Attitudes towards emerging parties

As already mentioned further above, the emergence of new parties, many of which would experience success by protesting against the political establishment, over the past years was noticeable in several countries of the EU. This has not only manifested itself in the results of the European elections 2014 and, in consequence, in the composition of Parliament and its work, but has also impacted to sometimes a large degree on the political landscape of individual Member States.

Indeed, between 2013 and 2018, more than 70 new parties and alliances emerged in EU Member States. In some cases their success was directly related to approaching legislative elections. In this context it is noteworthy to remember that six EU Member States (Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Slovenia and Sweden) will hold national elections before the 2019 European elections.

Since 2013, in total 43 new parties/alliances secured seats in legislative elections, with Italy, Latvia, Slovenia and Slovakia having the highest number of new parties entering their national parliaments. Among these

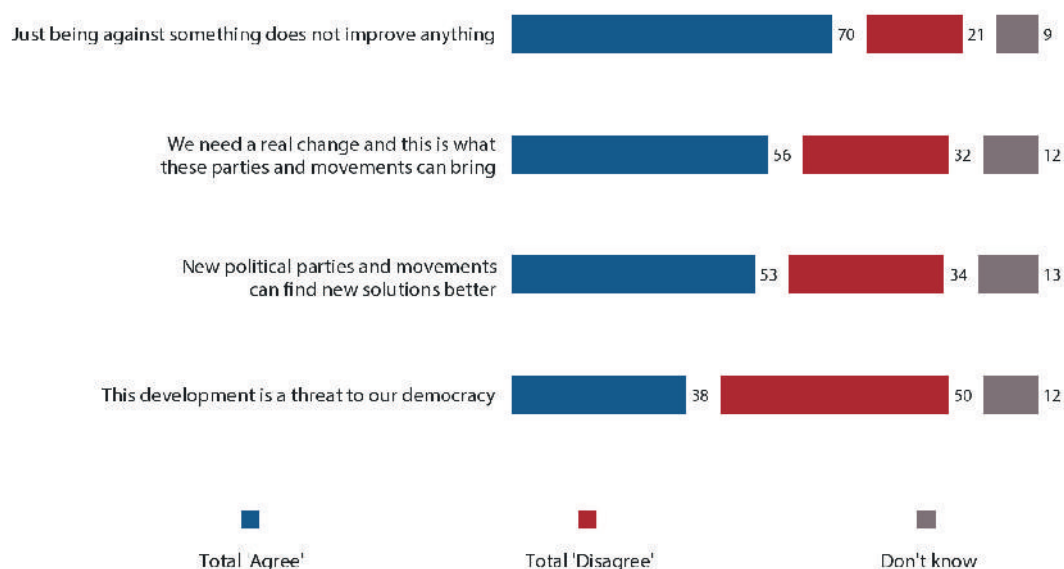
new parties, the particularly high results in France with 308 seats for LREM in the Assemblée Nationale, 71 seats for the Podemos coalition in Spain or 222 seats for the Movimento Cinque Stelle in Italy could be mentioned. Following the crisis, the phenomenon of protest parties or movements gained ground both in nations where democracy seems to be strongly entrenched and in countries looking back to a comparably shorter history as nations under representative democracy.

New parties 2013-2018 with seats in National Parliaments							
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total Parties by MS
BE							0
BG				2	1		3
CZ			1				1
DK		1					1
DE							0
EE		1					1
IE			2				2
EL		1					1
ES		1		1			2
FR				1			1
HR			2				2
IT					3	1	4
CY	1			1			2
LV		2		1	1		4
LT				1			1
LU							0
HU	1						1
MT							0
NL			1	1			2
AT					1		1
PL			2				2
PT							0
RO		1	1	1			3
SI		1	1		1	1	4
SK		1	1		1	1	4
FI					1		1
SE							0
UK							0
Total	2	9	11	9	9	3	43

Source: Data collection of the Public Opinion Monitoring Unit

In the light of recent political developments in European Member States and in view of the upcoming European elections, citizens were asked to position themselves on a range of statements regarding the emergence of new political parties and movements. The fact that new political parties and movements are having electoral success by protesting against the political establishment is overall seen rather positively by a majority of Europeans. Indeed 38% of citizens would see a danger for democracy brought about by protest parties, whereas half of the respondents across the EU do not consider that such parties or movements would represent a threat to democracy.

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the emergence of these new parties and movements? (%)



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA26

In this context, a recent survey by the Pew Research Center²⁰ might be quoted suggesting that public commitment to representative democracy, both globally and within the European Union cannot be taken for granted. In the 10 EU countries surveyed²¹ in their study, a median of 37% of people were classified as 'committed democrats', i.e. supporting a system in which elected representatives govern but not supporting the rule by experts, a strong leader or the military. 42% of respondents said that representative democracy is good but that they could also support at least one other form of government as cited above. Finally, 10% of respondents would not support representative democracy and instead support at least one nondemocratic form of government.

20 Pew Research Center, October, 2017, 'Globally, Broad Support for Representative and Direct Democracy', <http://www.pew-global.org/2017/10/16/globally-broad-support-for-representative-and-direct-democracy/>

21 France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, UK

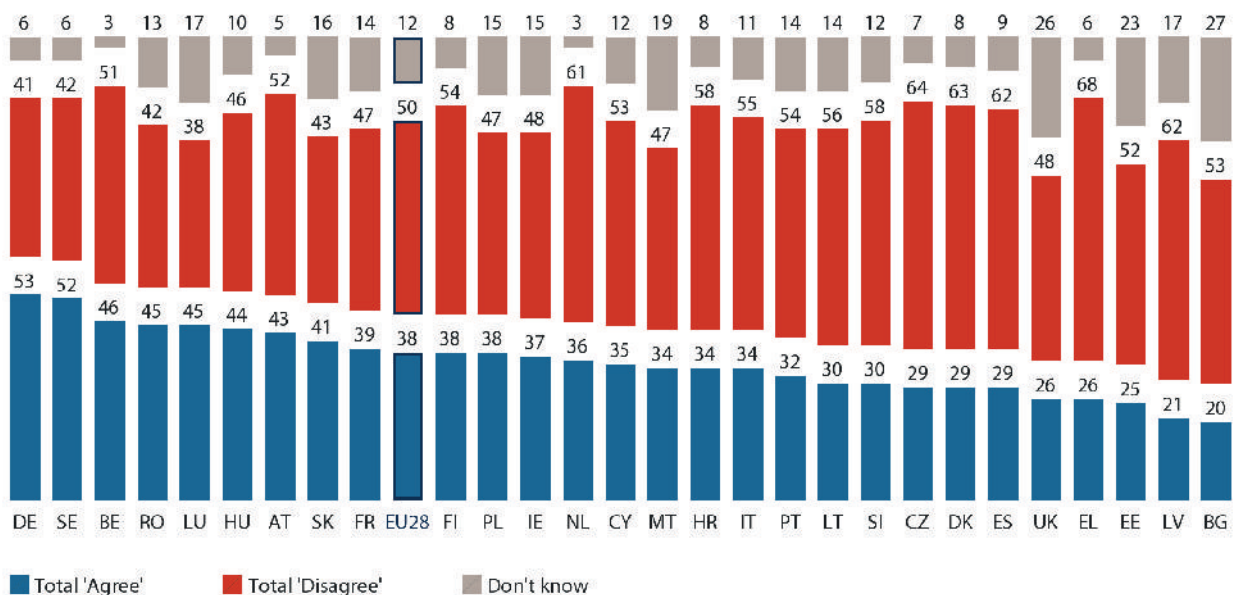
On the other hand, there is also a very clear opinion, shared by seven out of ten citizens, that just being against something would not improve anything. This can be interpreted as a limitation towards political activism acceptable to citizens: opposition per se and as a matter of principle, without offering credible alternative ideas is not seen as attractive political counter offer.

This clear overarching sentiment is supported by a strong support for the next statement: 'We need a real change and this is what these parties and movements can bring', believe 56% of citizens across the EU, while only 32% of respondents do not share this claim. Last, but not least 53% of citizens across the EU believe that new political parties and movements can find new solutions better than the political establishment, whereas only 34% of respondents do not believe new movements would have this ability.

Overall, a picture emerges in which citizens would look for 'real change' in their country and also for those who could fulfil this expectation. Emerging parties and movements are, in general, not seen as threat to democracy, but their public acceptance would seem to be limited by the clear expectation of citizens that solutions and proposals have to be put on the table instead of merely rejecting the status quo. Based on this qualifying factor a majority of EU citizens would expect that new political parties and movements can find new solutions better than the traditional political establishment.

Looking at the results on the four statements in turn, one notices quite interesting differences between individual countries.

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement about the emergence of these new parties and movements? This development is a threat to our democracy (%)

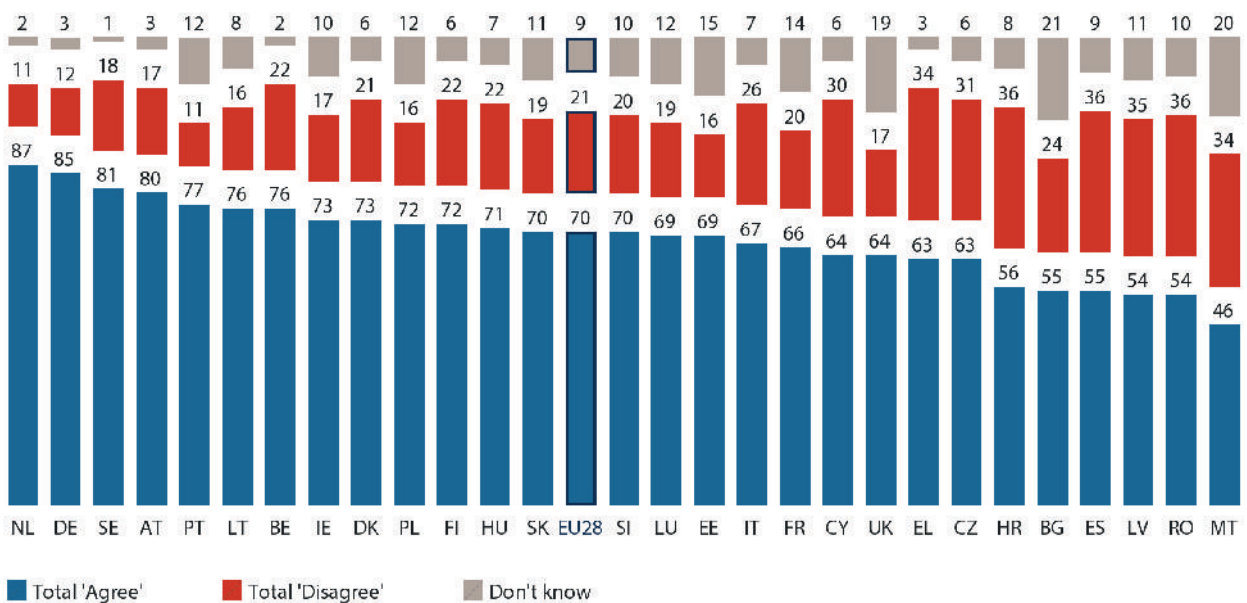


Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA26.1

In only two Member States, namely Germany and Sweden, an absolute majority of citizens would find emerging parties a threat to their democracy. On the other hand, an absolute majority of citizens in 17 EU countries find this not to be the case. Response rates go up as high as 68% of respondents in Greece who would not see a threat in such phenomena, with the Czech Republic (64%), Denmark (63%), Latvia and Spain (both 62%) and the Netherlands (61%) completing the list of countries above 60%.

In the context of recent electoral developments, it is interesting to look at Italy and France. In Italy only 34% see new political movements and parties as a threat for democracy, opposed to 55% of citizens who do not see such a danger. In France, 47% of citizens do not feel a threat, while around four out of ten respondents agree with the statement (39%).

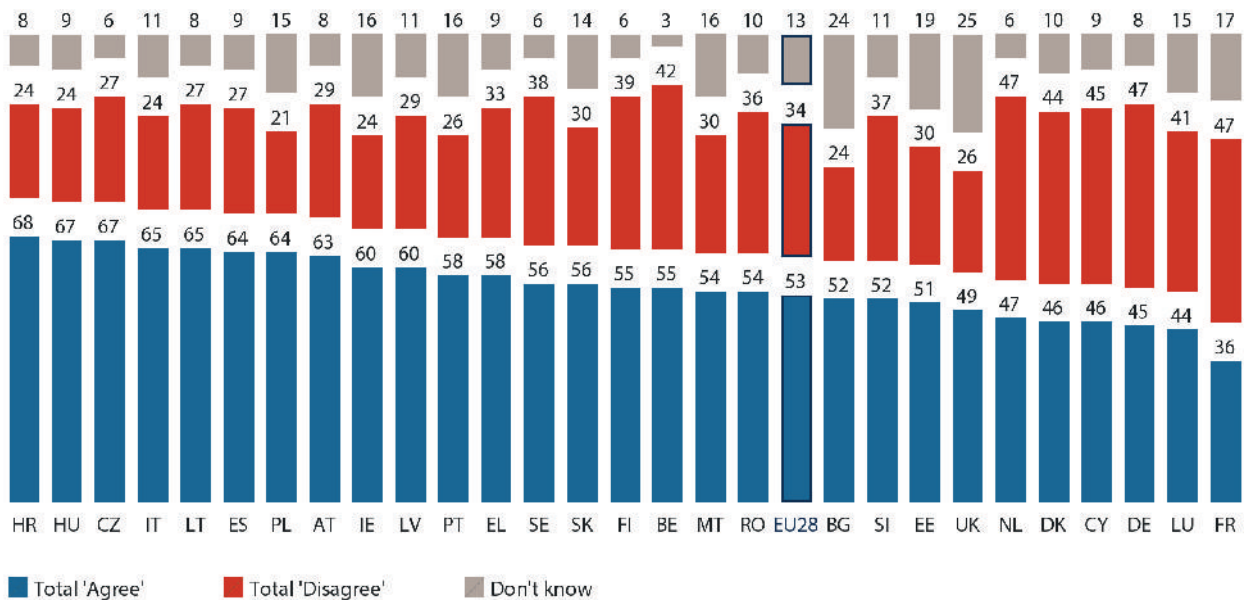
Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement about the emergence of these new parties and movements? Just being against something does not improve anything (%)



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA26.3

The fact that seven out of ten Europeans expect emerging parties to be constructive rather than just rejecting the status quo is also represented in the geographical distribution. Only Malta returned a result below the absolute majority for this statement, with 46% of its citizens agreeing with the claim. All other EU Member States are above the 50% threshold, led by the Netherlands with a support of 87%, Germany (85%) and Sweden (81%).

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement about the emergence of these new parties and movements? New political parties and movements can find new solutions better (%)

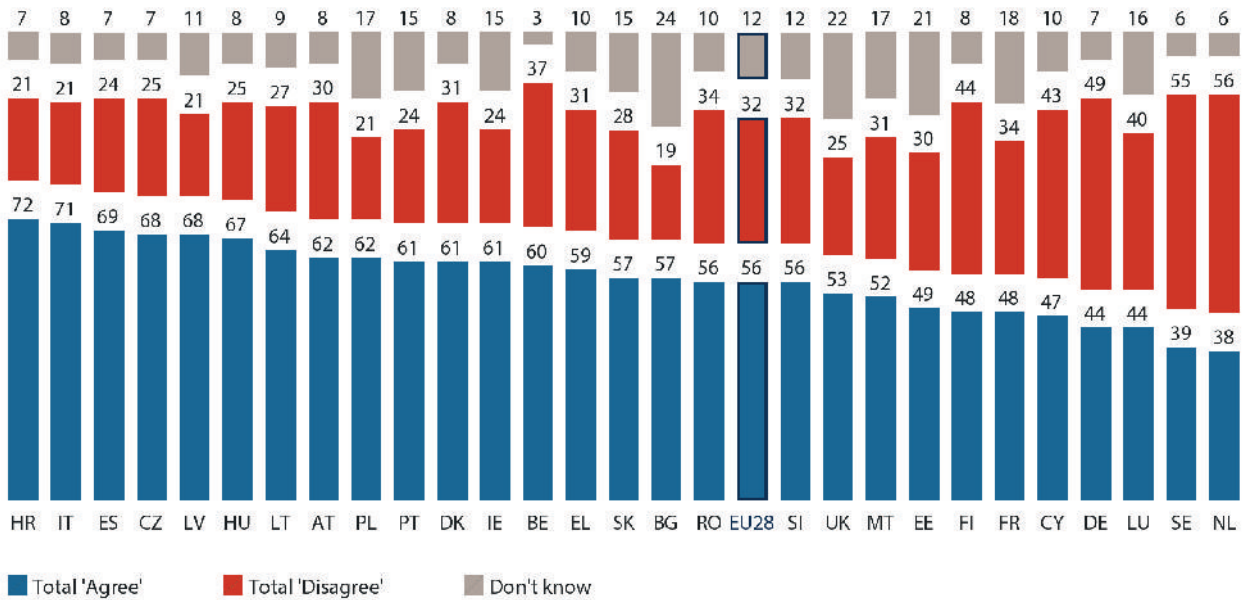


Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA26.2

This statement also shows several interesting results. In only 7 out of the 28 EU Member States less than an absolute majority of citizens would agree with the statement that new political parties and movements can find new solutions better. France ranks last in this statement, where only 36% of citizens believe it to be true. In addition, the UK, the Netherlands, Denmark, Cyprus, Germany and Luxembourg complete the list of countries with no majority for the above claim. On the other side of the spectrum, which is led by Croatia with 68% of approval, we can find countries such as Hungary and the Czech Republic with both 67%, Italy and Lithuania (both 65%) or Spain and Poland (both 64%), each with possibly different explanations.

Last, but not least, a look at the fourth statement reveals a similar distribution. Asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement 'we need a real change and this is what these parties and movements can bring', the lowest support comes from countries such as the Netherlands (38%), Sweden (39%), Luxembourg and Germany (both 44%). The highest support for this statement comes from respondents in Croatia (72%) and Italy (71%), followed by Spain (69%) and the Czech Republic and Latvia (both 68%).

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement about the emergence of these new parties and movements? We need a real change and this is what these parties and movements can bring (%)



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA26.4

CHAPTER 3: EUROPEANS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS VOTING IN THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

This chapter takes a look at how citizens perceive and approach the process of voting, both in general and specifically with regard to the European elections. Analyses on the knowledge of the election dates and on the interest citizens convey today to this ballot shed light on the significant differences among countries and socio-demographic groups.

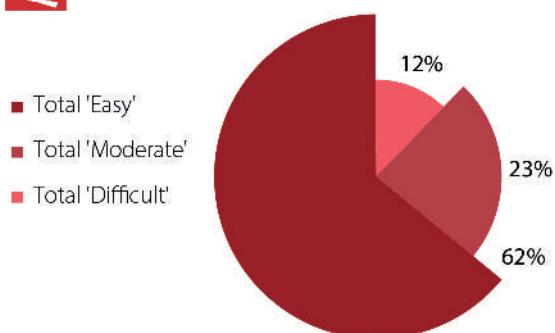
Reasons why people might either vote or abstain in European elections show the broad spectrum of possible motivators, leading to the conclusion that a differentiated and well-targeted approach in terms of communication, information and the attention to technical aspects play a key role in positively addressing voting behaviour.

Going to vote is easy

Respondents were asked to position themselves, using a scale from 1 to 10, on whether they find it easy or difficult to go to vote in the national elections and in European Parliament elections. The results show that for a large majority of citizens going to vote is easy: this does not seem to be a controversial issue neither when talking about national elections nor when referring to the European elections.

Although, intuitively, the national ballot is considered more familiar and thus 'easier' (72%²² of the respondents declare that it is easy to go to vote in the national elections), most Europeans also believe that voting in the European elections is something easy to do (62%)²³.

Q How easy or difficult it is for you personally to go to vote in the European Parliament elections? (%)

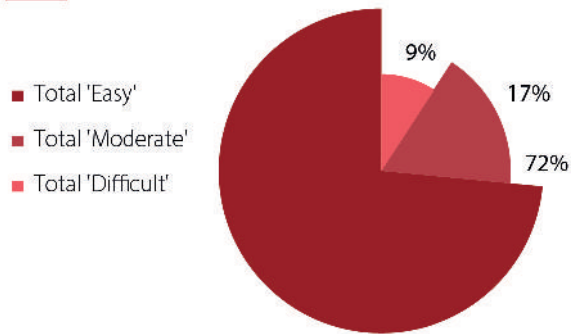


Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA15a

22 Please note that the EU average does not take into account the result for UK (question not asked in the country).

23 Please note that the EU average does not take into account the result for UK (question not asked in the country).

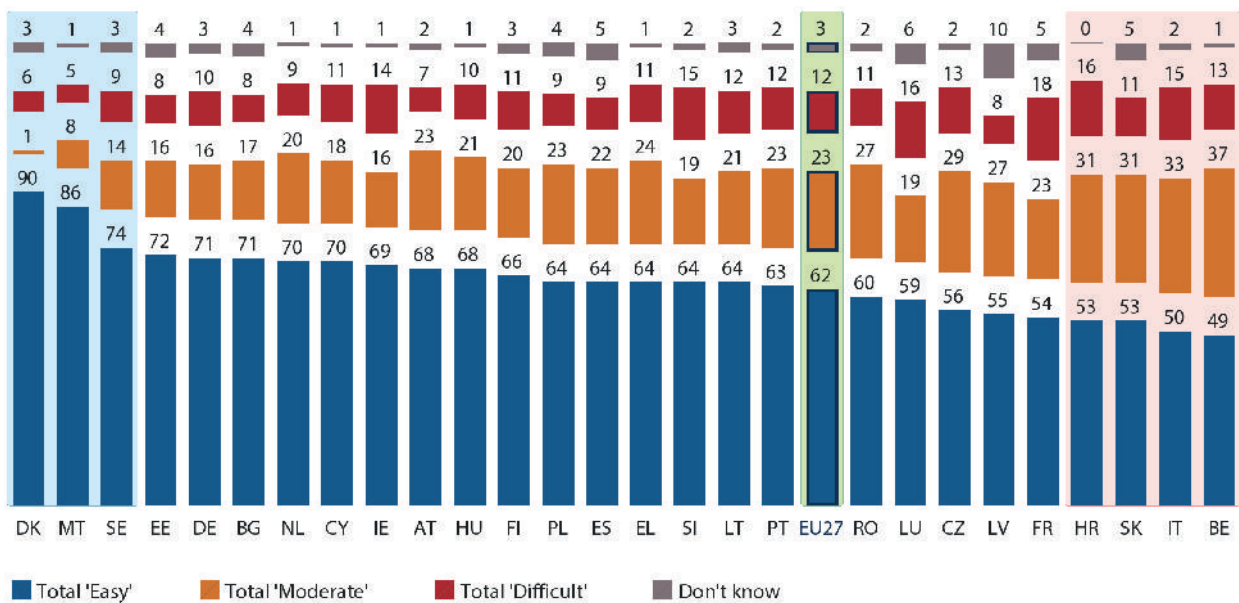
Q How easy or difficult is it for you to go to vote in the national elections in (OUR COUNTRY) (%)



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA15b

Yet, across Member States there are some differences to be noticed in the perceived complexity of 'casting one's ballot'. Results range from 90% of respondents in Denmark, 86% in Malta or 74% in Sweden regarding the feeling that voting is easy in the European Parliament elections, down to 49% in Belgium, 50% in Italy and finally 53% in Slovakia and Croatia.

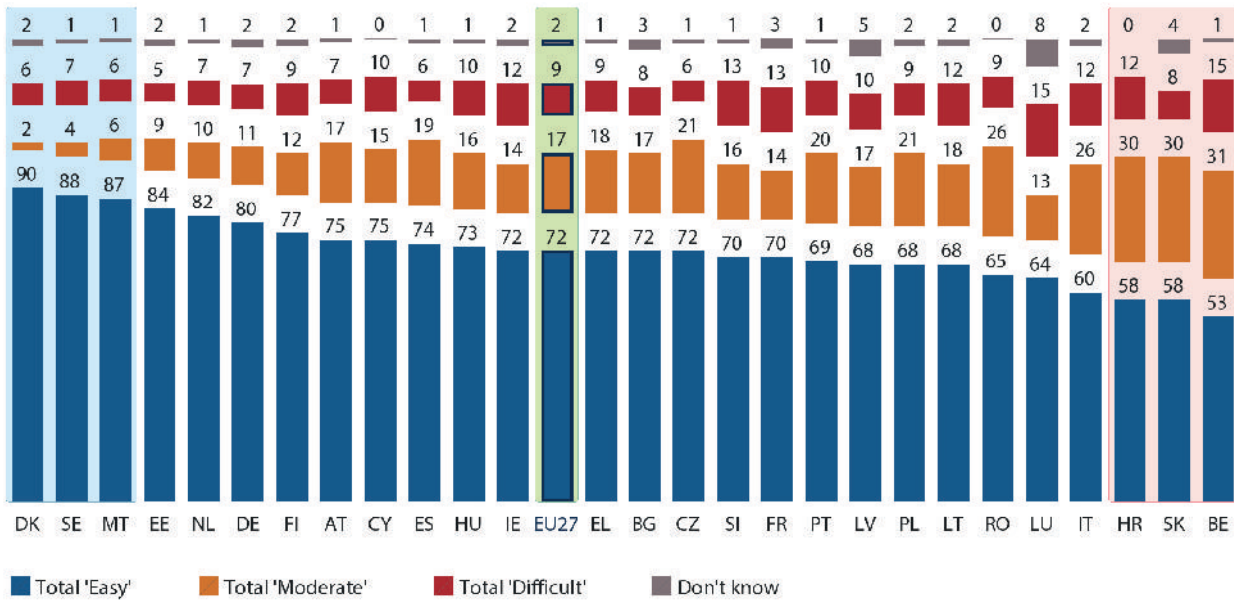
Q How easy or difficult it is for you personally to go to vote in the European Parliament elections? (%)



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA15a

When it comes to 'national elections', a similar multicolored picture of results is replicated: scores vary from 90% in Denmark, 88% in Sweden, 87% in Malta to 53% in Belgium and 58% in Slovakia and Croatia.

Q How easy or difficult is it for you to go to vote in the national elections in (OUR COUNTRY) (%)



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA15b

An interesting spotlight can be put at some Member States' results: looking at Belgium, which are the reasons behind the relatively low level of positive responses both for national and European elections? One explanation might be found in the constitutional structure of Belgium and the possibly resulting complexities for voters to decide.

The results in France and the Czech Republic are also worth mentioning: in these countries citizens register the biggest divergences in opinion regarding national and European ballots. Respectively 70% and 72% of respondents reckon that voting is easy in the national election, whereas only 54% and 56% believe this for the European elections.

Socio demographic analyses disclose that 'going to vote' is particularly easier for respondents with a relatively high interest in politics and in European affairs. Conversely, the perception of complexity is higher among people with a lower level of education as well as among young people who are still studying.

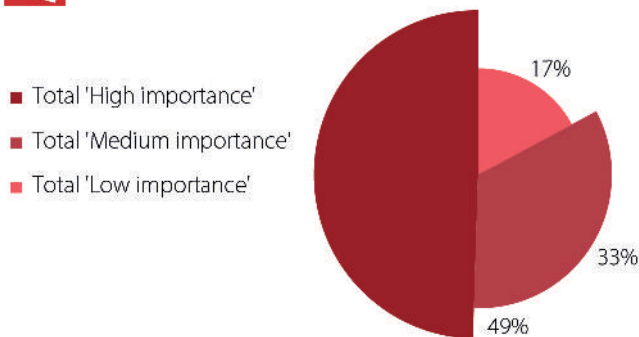
In parallel, casting a ballot seems more complicated for citizens regularly having difficulties in paying their bills and for the ones who believe that things are going in the wrong direction both in their country and in the EU.

Voting is important

Very different findings appear when the issue moves from the perceived difficulty of going to vote to the 'importance' citizens attach to the act of voting in different elections.

As for the previous question, respondents were asked to position themselves on a scale from 1 to 10 on the whether or not it is important to vote in the national elections and in the European Parliament elections.

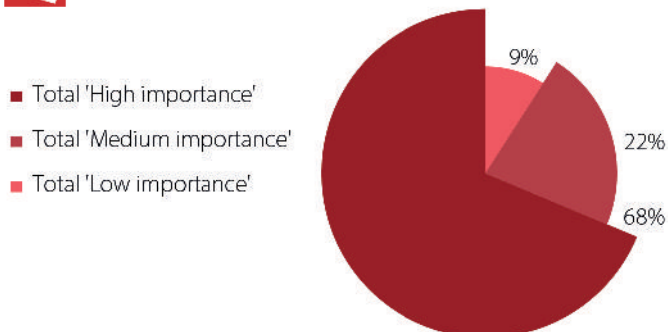
Q How important or not it is for you personally to vote in the European Parliament elections? (%)



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA14a

While 68%²⁴ of Europeans declare that 'voting in national elections' is of high importance (scores 8, 9 and 10), only 49%²⁵ share this opinion with regard to European elections. Although the latter result seems to be low compared to the 'importance' granted to participating in national elections, the room for improvement is potentially significant since there is still one year to go before the European elections.

Q How important or not it is for you to vote in the national elections in (OUR COUNTRY)? (%)



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA14b

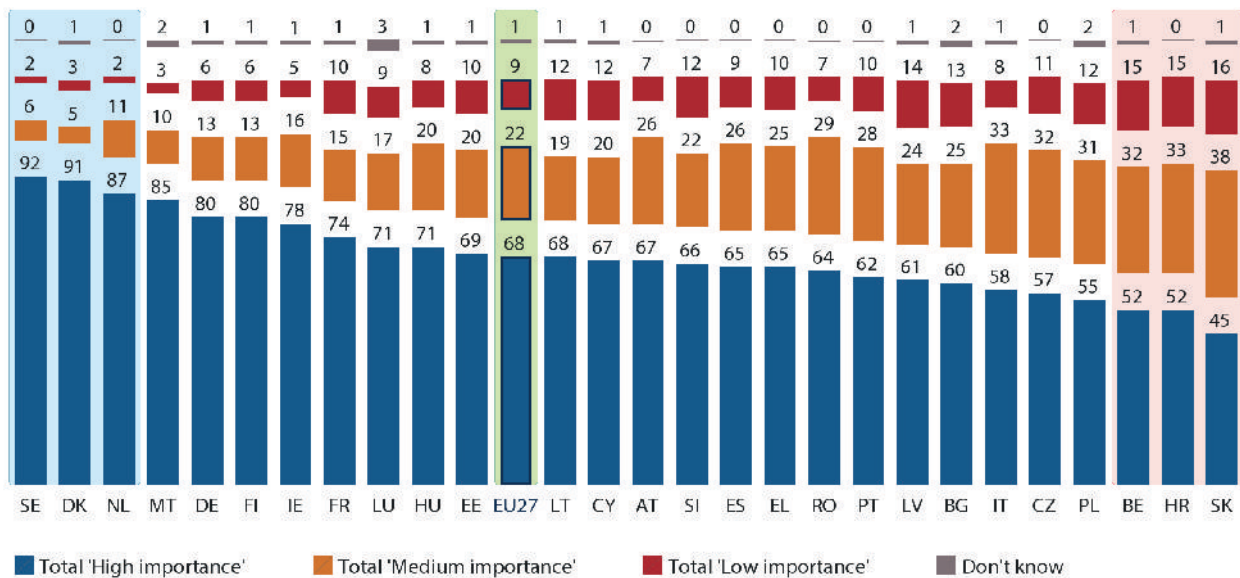
²⁴ Please note that the EU average does not take into account the result for UK (question not asked in the country).

²⁵ Please note that the EU average does not take into account the result for UK (question not asked in the country).

The salience of the national ballot is acknowledged by a majority of citizens in all the Member States although disparities are evident.

From one side, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands and Malta top the list of countries with at least 85% of respondents affirming the high importance of voting in national elections. On the opposite side, in Slovakia, Croatia, Belgium and Poland, this majority view is much lower (55% or less). Slovakia is the only country with less than half of citizens (45%) sharing the opinion that voting in the national elections is of 'high importance'.

Q How important or not is it for you to vote in the national elections in (OUR COUNTRY)? (%)



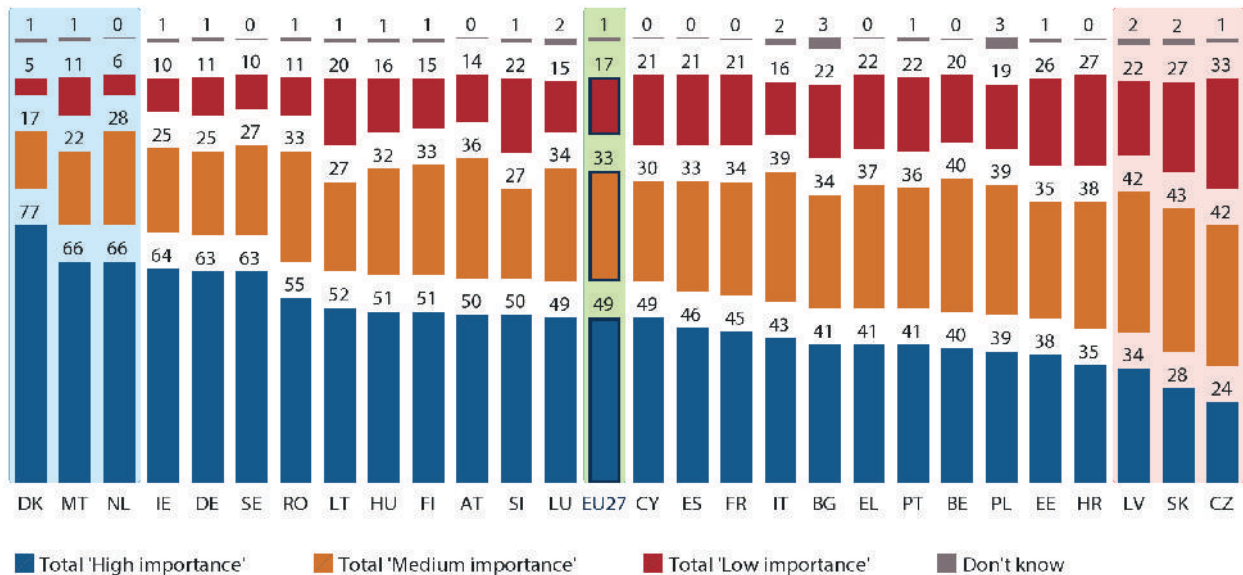
Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA14b

Against this variegated set of answers, the underlying reasons for a stronger or weaker feeling of importance of an election are different and should be assessed taking also the respective national political context into regard.

The range of opinions across the EU is even broader when respondents are asked to assess the importance of the European elections.

While in 12 countries an absolute majority of citizens declare that voting in the European Parliament elections is highly important, in 25 Member States at least a quarter of the respondents confers to this ballot a 'medium importance'. At the same time, in 14 countries at least 20% of them accord a low significance to this kind of election.

Q How important or not it is for you personally to vote in the European Parliament elections? (%)



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA14a

The findings seem to reconfirm the particular low involvement in the European Parliament elections felt by the citizens the Czech Republic (24% of 'high importance') and Slovakia (28%): The 2014 European ballot had already registered an extraordinary low level of turnout in these two countries (18,20% for the Czech Republic and 13,05% for Slovakia).

In contrast, Denmark (77%), Malta (66%) and the Netherlands (66%) are the countries in which citizens assign the highest degree of importance to the European Parliament ballot. Yet this indicator does not directly reflect the reality of participation in European elections, as the turnout level in 2014 was quite different in these countries: 56,32% in Denmark, 74,80% in Malta and 37,32% in the Netherlands.

Importance of voting does not always equal turnout...

One might be tempted to directly link the importance citizens confer to national elections to their active voting behavior and final turnout. While this is a seemingly attractive angle of analysis, it must be born in mind that abstract judgments do not always translate into direct actions, especially if the latter are not close in time to the initial judgment. The same cautionary approach must be applied to translating voter intention into actual voting. As a matter of example, one could compare the similar level of participation in two recent national elections (Italy and Hungary) with the results to the question 'voting in the national elections is very important'. In Italy, turnout in the last legislative elections held on 4 March was 72,93%; in Hungary 70,22% of citizens went to the polls on 8 April.

Despite the similar number of voters in the two ballots the survey data shows quite different reactions to the claim ‘voting to national elections is important’ in the two countries: only 58% of respondents in Italy gave a ‘high importance’ answer compared with 71% of those in Hungary.

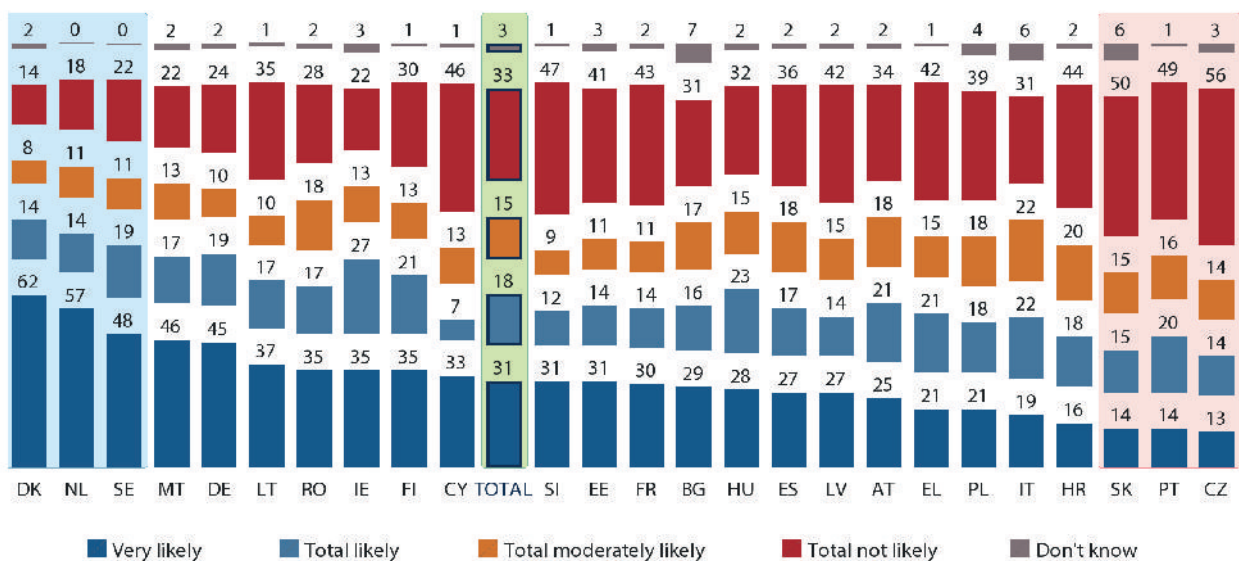
Among the possible reasons for this difference, one may assume that the timing of the legislative elections in Hungary, which overlapped with the period of the fieldwork, has somewhat impacted the Hungarian results. Next to this, the different connotation attributed to the concept of ‘importance’ is playing a role as well as the personal attitude to such questions calling for rather subjective answers.

Likelihood to go voting in the next European elections

In line with the reasoning outlined above, the results for the following question on measuring the likelihood to actually vote in the upcoming European Parliament elections should be treated with the necessary degree of caution.

While the results may well anticipate national trends and give an overview of the wide range of realities across the EU, voting intentions stated one year ahead of the actual ballot may still be far from the final and actual behavior. At the same time it is worth mentioning that the likelihood to vote in 2019 as expressed in this survey is higher than in similar surveys made only a few months ahead of the European elections 2014.

Q The next European Parliament elections will be held in May 2019. How likely are you to vote in these elections? (%)



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA10

This would tie in with the general situation one can observe not only in the results throughout this survey, but in general also in the development of public opinion towards the European Union and the European Parliament over the course of the past two years. The overall trend towards a more positive view on the EU fits in with the increased interest in EU policies, their well perceived impact on people's lives and - in turn - possibly also with an increasing interest in the European elections.







Once more respondents were invited to position themselves on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means 'not at all likely' and 10 means 'very likely' to vote. In April 2018, 31% of citizens on EU average declare that they will very likely (score 10) participate in the next European Parliament ballot.

Unsurprisingly, beyond the European average result, national positions are widely spread with 49 percentage points difference between the highest score in Denmark (62% for very likely to vote) and the lowest percentage in the Czech Republic (13%).

In terms of socio-demographic attitudes, generally the oldest generations and the citizens with a higher level of education are more likely to declare that they will vote in the next European Parliament elections. In addition, the more respondents say to be interested in politics the higher will be their stated probability that they would participate in the next ballot.

With the objective of putting into context the overall results on voting behavior in light of the 2019 EP elections, it is crucial to keep in mind the next key political moments as well as citizens' past attitudes in terms of participation.

The following tables display relevant information on both aspects: from one side by keeping an eye on upcoming national elections which may affect future voting behavior trends for the European elections and, from the other side, by recalling turnouts in recent national and European elections.

National elections and referenda before/after the European elections 2019		
SI		Legislative election: 3 June 2018
SE		Legislative election: 9 September 2018
IE		Presidential election: November 2018 (<i>date tbc</i>)
LV		Legislative election: 6 October 2018
LU		Legislative election: 14 October 2018
EE		Legislative election: 3 March 2019
SK		Presidential election: March 2019
FI		Legislative election: 14 April 2019
LT		Presidential election: May 2019 (<i>date tbc</i>)
BE		Legislative election: 26 May 2019
DK		Legislative election: 17 June 2019
EL		Legislative election: 20 October 2019
PT		Legislative election: October 2019 (<i>date tbc</i>)
PL		Legislative election: November 2019 (<i>date tbc</i>)
RO		Presidential election: November or December 2019 (<i>date tbc</i>)
HR		Presidential election: December 2019/January 2020 (<i>date tbc</i>)

Source: Data collection of the Public Opinion Monitoring Unit

Level of participation in the 2014 European and recent national elections				
	2014 EE turnout		National elections turnout	
	date	%	date	%
BE	May-14	89,64	May-14	89,68
BG	May-14	35,84	Mar-17	54,07
CZ	May-14	18,20	Oct-17	60,84
DK	May-14	56,32	Jun-15	85,89
DE	May-14	48,10	Sep-17	76,20
EE	May-14	36,52	Mar-15	64,20
IE	May-14	52,44	Feb-16	65,10
EL	May-14	59,97	Sep-15	56,16
ES	May-14	43,81	Jun-16	69,84
FR	May-14	42,43	Jun-2017 (1st and 2nd round)	48,70 and 42,64
HR	May-14	25,24	Sep-16	54,35
IT	May-14	57,22	Mar-18	72,93
CY	May-14	43,97	May-16	66,74
LV	May-14	30,24	Oct-14	58,85
LT	May-14	47,35	Oct-2016 (1st and 2nd round)	50,64 and 37,99
LU	May-14	85,55	Oct-13	91,40
HU	May-14	28,97	Apr-18	70,22
MT	May-14	74,80	Jun-17	92,10
NL	May-14	37,32	Mar-17	81,40
AT	May-14	45,39	Oct-17	80,00
PL	May-14	23,83	Oct-15	50,92
PT	May-14	33,67	Oct-15	55,84
RO	May-14	32,44	Dec-16	39,78
SI	May-14	24,55	Jul-14	51,73
SK	May-14	13,05	Mar-16	59,82
FI	May-14	39,10	Apr-15	70,10
SE	May-14	51,07	Sep-14	85,81
UK	May-14	35,60	Jun-17	68,70

Source: Data collection of the Public Opinion Monitoring Unit

Knowledge of the date of the next European elections

The findings presented above have shed a light on the importance that European elections have in the eyes of citizens. Yet, while the importance that Europeans assign to the European elections is lower than the one given to national ballots, other data show that the knowledge about and interest in the next 2019 European elections is already growing.

One year ahead of the ballot, almost a third (32%) of respondents know the date of the European elections: Nearly one in five respondents (19%) answered precisely 'May 2019' and 13% knew that it will take place next year.

Q In your opinion, when will the next European Parliament elections be held here in (OUR COUNTRY)? (%)



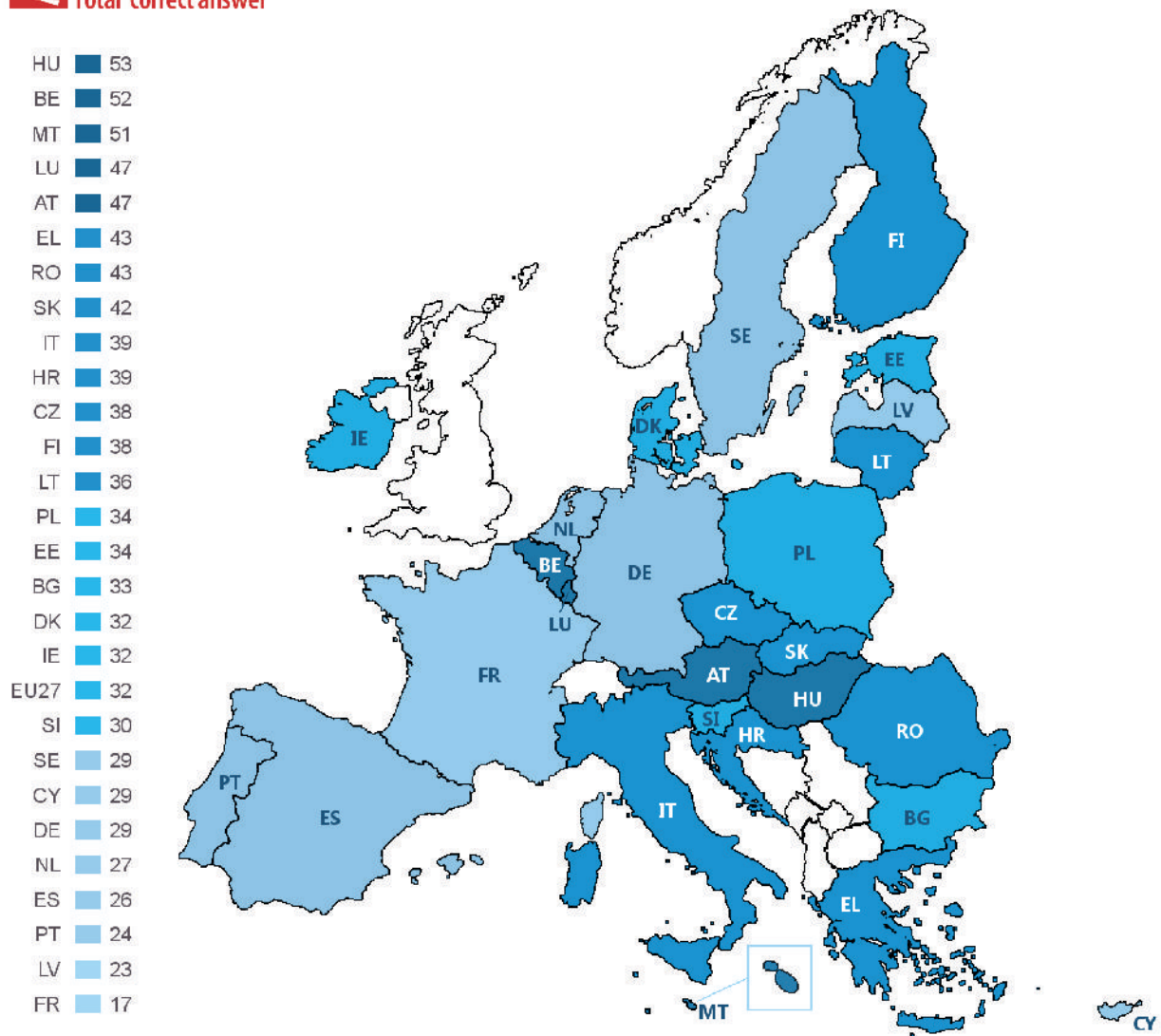
Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA8

These results are in line with previous trends: one year before the 2014 European elections, 34% of Europeans²⁶ knew the date while 20% gave a wrong answer and 46% did not know about the election date then.

As always, the EU average hides national differences which are as high as 36 percentage points between France (17%) and Latvia (23%) on the one hand and Hungary (53%) and Belgium (52%).

²⁶ Please note that the EU average does not take into account the result for UK (question not asked in the country).

Q In your opinion, when will the next European Parliament elections be held here in (OUR COUNTRY)? (%)
Total 'correct answer'

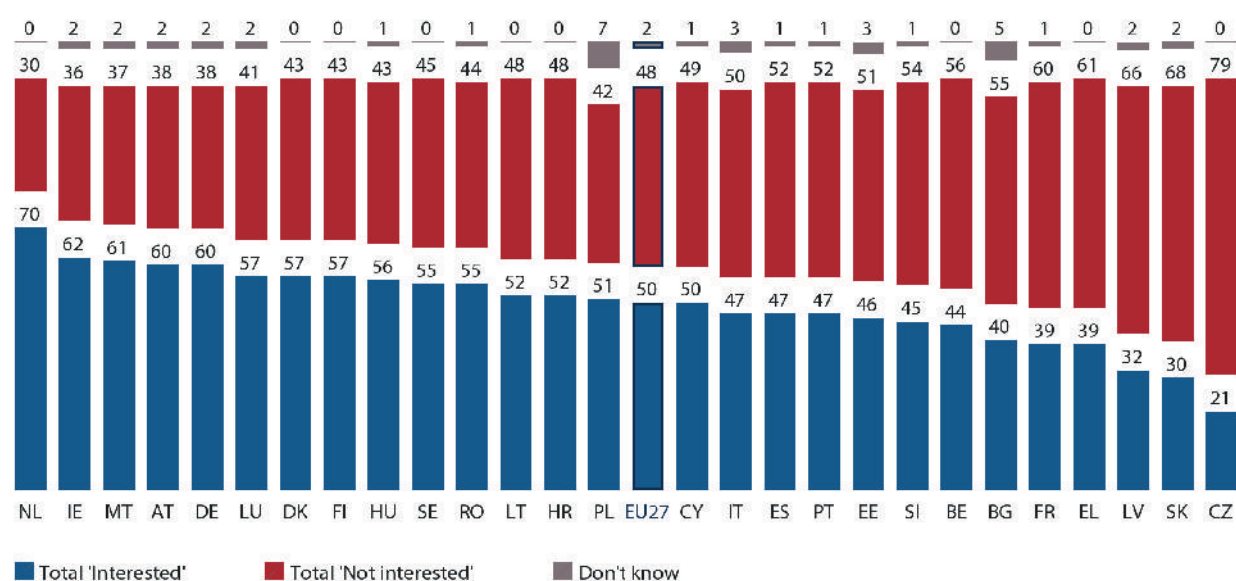


Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA8

Interest in the 2019 European elections

A decidedly positive result comes from asking about the level of interest in the next European elections. While one third of the respondents can indicate the correct date of the next European ballot, already one in two declares to be interested in the forthcoming elections.

Q The next European Parliament elections will be held in May 2019. How interested or not are you in these elections? (%)



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA9

This interest is particularly high in the Netherlands with 70%, followed by Ireland (62%), Malta (61%), Austria and Germany (both with 60%). In some Member States however interest is still limited, such as in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, both countries having had the lowest turnout at the 2014 European elections. Generally, at EU level, citizens who declare to be interested in the next European elections are among the most educated and also the ones enjoying a better economic situation. They are overall interested in European affairs, believe that their voice counts and declare themselves likely to vote in the next European elections.

With a look at the potential need for further information about the elections to be provided to voters, it is interesting to see that there is no strong correlation between the knowledge of the date and the interest in the European elections²⁷. Taking a closer look at those Member States registering the highest level of interest in the European elections, one can observe that their citizens' knowledge of the ballot date is significantly lower.

²⁷ Correlation coefficient at the national level: 0.16.

	Interest in the next EE	Correct knowledge of the date of the next EE
Netherlands	70%	27%
Ireland	62%	32%
Malta	61%	51%
Austria	60%	47%
Germany	60%	29%

Interest in the next European elections is expressed differently not only between Member States, but also within socio-demographic groups: men seem to have a higher interest than women, likewise interest is higher with citizens aged 25 years old and over, with self-employed, managers and other white collars, and citizens who have studied at least until they were 20 years old. Interest in the next European elections is also more widespread among respondents who are satisfied with the way democracy works in their country and in the EU.

These findings seem to confirm that the general interest in an election is directly linked to the educational level of the respondents, but also with their level of satisfaction with the way democracy works in both their country and in the EU.

However, with the increased public debate on the European elections and the start of the different election campaigns in the months to come, the salience of the topics which are being debated become crucial to influence citizens' interest in the ballot: At this stage, it should be kept in mind that demographic, social and economic factors impact on the priorities expressed by citizens, on top of their national contexts.

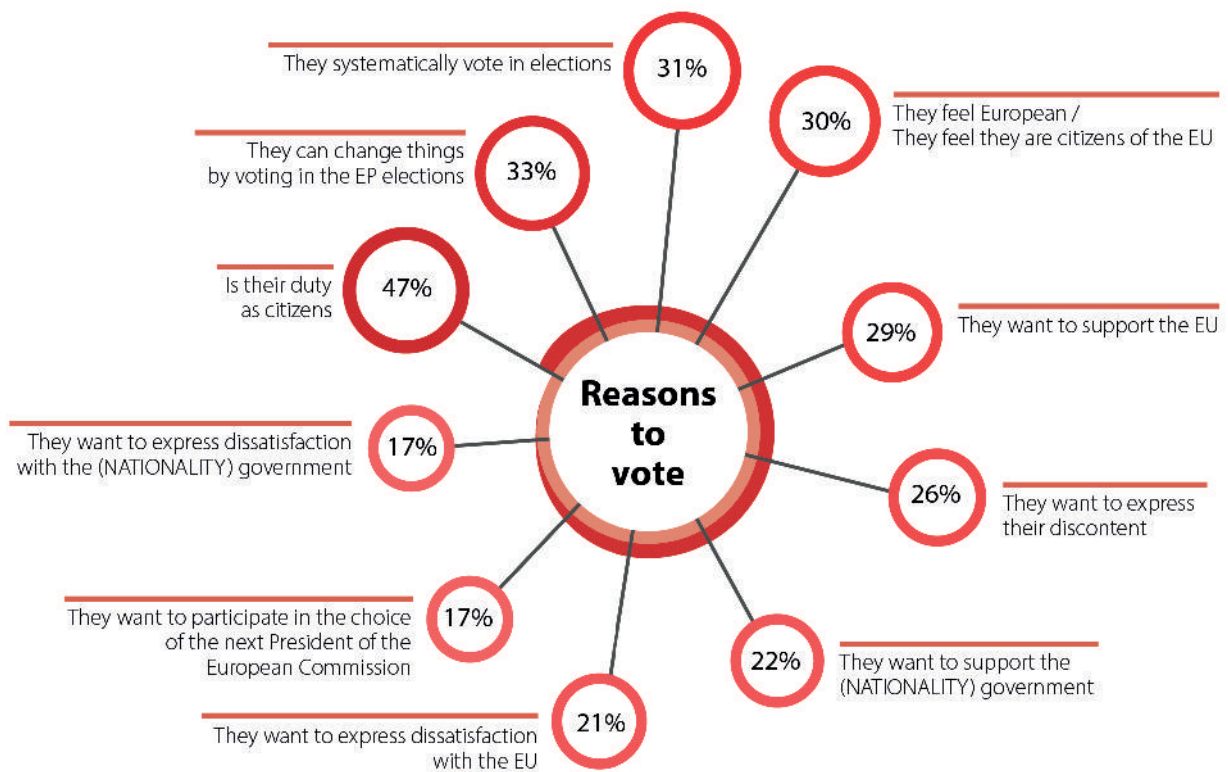
Reasons to vote in the European elections

In line with previous surveys, when asked about the main reasons why people vote in the European elections, the largest individual number of respondents say because '*it is their duty*' (47%). A third of Europeans also believe that 'they can change things by voting in the European Parliament elections' (33%) and 31% of respondents say that 'people systematically vote in elections'.

Two more positive answers fall under the category of 'European reasons' to vote: citizens believe people vote in the European elections because 'they feel European' (30%) and because 'they want to support the EU' (29%).

At the same time, the European ballot is also seen as an occasion to express their general 'discontent' (26%), their 'dissatisfaction with the European Union' (21%) or their 'dissatisfaction with the [nationality] government' (17%), while 22% of citizens say people vote to 'support the [nationality] government' (22%).

Q Regardless of how important you personally think it is to vote, what, in your opinion, are the main reasons why people vote in the European Parliament elections? (Max. 4 answers) (%)



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA16T

Last but not least, 17% of respondents declare that Europeans ‘want to participate in the choice of the next President of the European Commission’. As discussed in the previous chapter, this result gives ground to the assumption that Europeans are becoming more familiar with the process of electing of the President of the European Commission since the entry into force of the Lisbon treaty and indeed might be feeling more involved in this process.

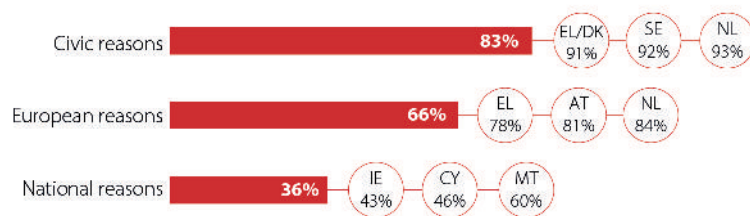
An interesting comparison can be drawn with the reasons why people voted in the previous European elections, according to the 2014 post-electoral Eurobarometer²⁸. In that survey, ‘to influence the choice of President of the European Commission’ was chosen on average by only 5% of the voters in 2014 from among three answers they could give as a reason for voting. The first mentioned in 2014 were, as is the case today, ‘you always vote’ and ‘this is your duty as citizen’. On the contrary, the feeling that voting can change things was cited by a much lower number of respondents in 2014 (12% for ‘you can make things change in voting in the European elections’). In the present survey, 33% of Europeans believe that ‘they can change things by voting in the European Parliament elections’.

28 <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/atyourservice/en/20150201PVL00053/Post-election-survey-2014>

And yet, regrouping all motives for voting in three main categories one can observe that the overall order of importance has not changed since 2014: civic reasons are enjoying the highest number of citations in all Member States, followed by European reasons and finally nationally motivated arguments for voting.

This graphic shows the aggregated number of respondents who mention at least once one of the three types of reasons. The circles to each of the lines in the graphic indicate the countries where these re-grouped motives have gathered the highest accumulated support.

Q Percentage of respondents who mention at least once one of the following aggregated reasons to vote.



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA16T

Casting an eye over the responses by age and socio-professional categories some findings are worth to be mentioned.

'It is their duty as citizens' is the answer that overall enjoys the biggest support among all age and socio-professional categories. In general, house persons return the highest number of citations for this reason.

Managers, students and young people tend to often mention also that 'they can change things by voting the European Parliament elections'. Citizens who suffer from the most difficult economic situations and declare to have regular problems in paying their bills often cite that people would vote 'to express their discontent'.

The detailed differences per Member States are displayed in the next table. While looking at the data, it is important to keep in mind that voting is compulsory in four EU countries: Belgium, Luxembourg, Cyprus and Greece.

Q Regardless of how important you personally think it is to vote, what, in your opinion, are the main reasons why people vote in the European Parliament elections? (Max. 4 answers) (%)

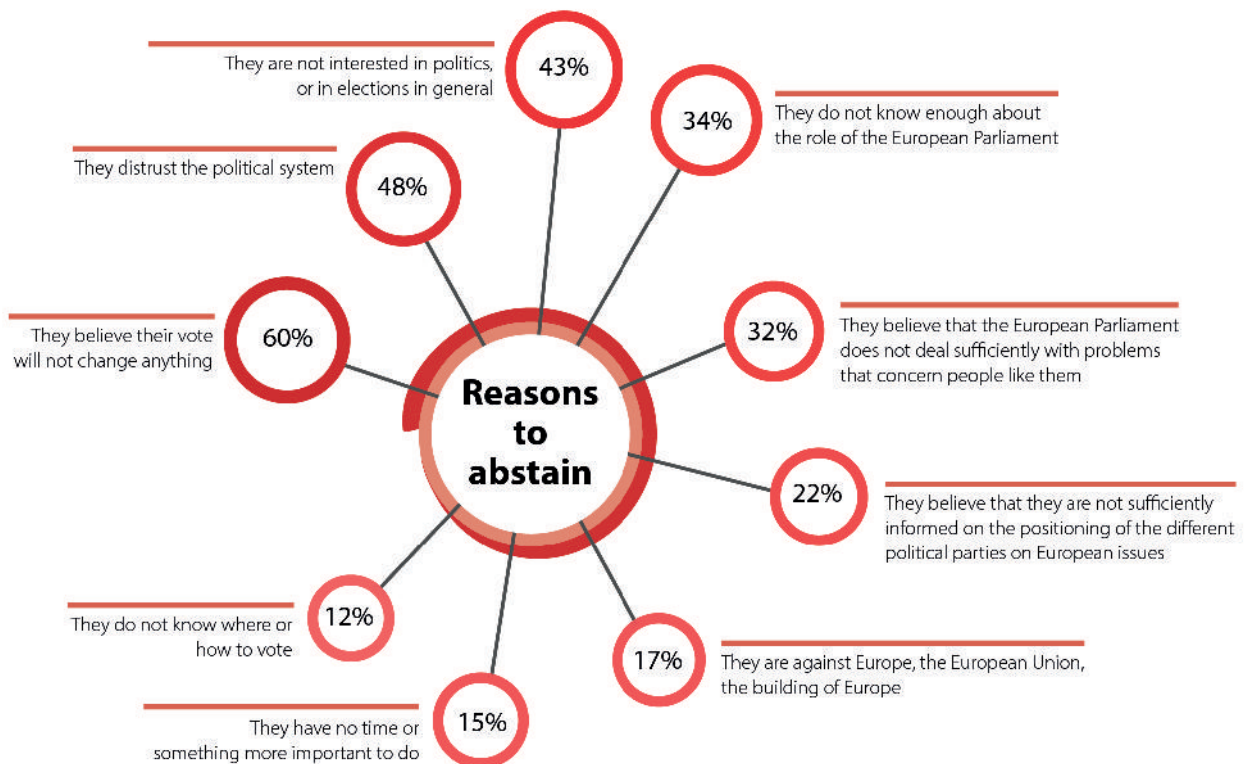
	It is their duty as citizens	They can change things by voting in the European Parliament elections	They systematically vote in elections	They feel European / they feel they are citizens of the European Union	They want to support the EU	They want to express their discontent	They want to support the (NATIONALITY) government	They want to express dissatisfaction with the European Union	They want to participate in the choice of the next President of the European Commission	They want to express dissatisfaction with the (NATIONALITY) government
EU28	47	33	31	30	29	26	22	21	17	17
BE	57	30	34	32	26	27	21	23	19	16
BG	47	28	46	30	36	15	17	8	18	10
CZ	26	29	32	34	30	32	28	28	23	18
DK	63	46	40	30	39	18	23	22	11	5
DE	41	41	28	33	42	22	27	21	15	15
EE	60	26	42	33	25	14	22	10	10	6
IE	55	32	38	29	40	20	31	15	21	15
EL	48	39	50	43	32	24	23	20	24	20
ES	56	33	27	30	24	26	14	12	14	11
FR	53	26	24	33	32	31	16	25	16	19
HR	52	23	45	22	25	33	13	17	19	24
IT	49	29	32	27	20	35	19	28	26	25
CY	66	35	46	36	18	13	38	11	18	10
LV	54	38	27	31	23	19	20	11	7	19
LT	68	26	50	37	39	16	23	8	14	10
LU	57	32	27	40	35	23	22	17	20	10
HU	40	30	42	36	31	19	29	17	22	15
MT	49	29	32	27	20	14	52	11	9	21
NL	48	45	39	43	37	34	24	37	14	18
AT	44	34	39	34	36	26	32	27	31	20
PL	42	27	38	29	23	19	25	9	15	17
PT	52	32	27	29	25	22	33	12	37	12
RO	57	35	37	23	27	24	25	15	22	21
SI	49	31	29	39	34	17	16	13	28	14
SK	38	28	43	30	32	23	19	15	19	13
FI	44	47	30	44	37	26	26	24	13	11
SE	45	58	47	29	38	31	15	26	9	8
UK	37	30	19	16	22	22	19	23	8	14

Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA16T

Reasons not to vote in the European Elections

Next to the reasons to vote, participants in the survey were asked to express themselves on the main reasons why people would not vote in the European ballot.

Q Still regardless of how important you personally think it is to vote, what are the reasons why people do not vote in the European Parliament elections? (Max. 4 answers) (%)



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA17T

A great majority of respondents think that people would abstain because 'they believe that their vote will not change anything' (60%). 48% think that people do not vote in the European Parliament elections because 'they distrust the political system', followed by 'they are not interested in politics or in elections in general' (43%).

Lack of information is also a relevant element to be considered, as 34% of citizens believe that people might abstain as 'they do not know enough about the role of the European Parliament', while 22% think that 'they believe that they are not sufficiently informed on the positioning of the different political parties on European issues'.

These latter two reasons should be read in conjunction with the clearly expressed wish of citizens that the lead candidates process should be accompanied by a real debate on European issues in order to make

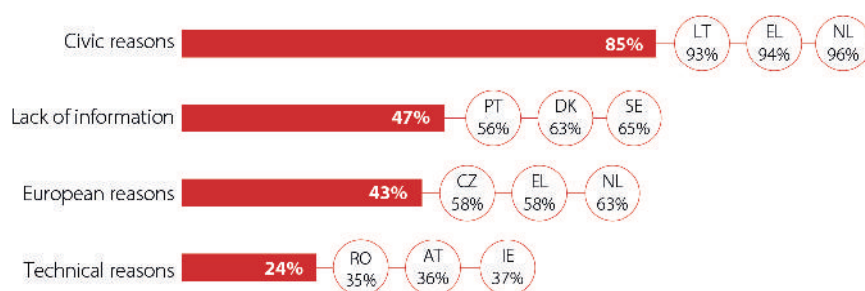
sense. While citizens’ interest in the European Union and its policies is clearly growing over the past time, it is to an equally significant degree coupled with citizens’ expectation to be informed.

When it comes to European reasons, the role of the EP is judged as insufficient by 32% of respondents (‘they believe that the EP does not deal sufficiently with problems that concern people like them’) while 17% believe that potential abstainers are ‘against Europe, the EU, the building of Europe’.

Technical or personal reasons play a considerable role as well, as 15% of respondents believe that people would not vote as they might have ‘no time or something more important to do’, while 12% ‘do not know where or how to vote’.

Taking a look back at the 2014 Post-Election survey it is worth recalling that abstainers, just after the ballot, gave as first reason for not voting their ‘lack of trust in or dissatisfaction with politics in general’ and ‘not interested in politics as such’, followed by their belief that their ‘vote has no consequences or vote does not change anything’.

Q Percentage of respondents who mention at least once one of the following aggregated reasons to abstain.



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA17T

Again, as above, regrouping the individual reasons for abstention, one can see that, as in 2014, reasons for abstention relating to reservations about the EU were not among the most cited answers. Indeed, the cumulative results show that 43% of the respondents mentioned, at least once among the four possible answers, a ‘European reason’, whereas about the double (85%) cited, at least once, a ‘civic motive’.

Detailed national reasons as why people do not vote in the European elections are itemized in the next table.

Q Still regardless of how important you personally think it is to vote, what are the reasons why people do not vote in the European Parliament elections? (Max. 4 answers) (%)

	They believe their vote will not change anything	They distrust the political system	They are not interested in politics, or in elections in general	They do not know enough about the role of the European Parliament	They believe that the European Parliament does not deal sufficiently with problems that concern people like them	They believe that they are not sufficiently informed on the positioning of the different political parties on European issues	They are against Europe, the European Union, the building of Europe	They have no time or something more important to do	They do not know where or how to vote (N)
EU28	60	48	43	34	32	22	17	15	12
BE	66	50	49	32	27	22	18	17	14
BG	56	49	47	25	40	20	17	16	8
CZ	63	45	53	33	41	22	28	18	13
DK	64	39	53	52	36	28	18	15	7
DE	61	41	48	41	40	21	18	13	9
EE	72	46	55	25	32	19	7	18	6
IE	52	44	50	38	30	28	14	25	17
EL	75	66	51	24	45	22	27	16	11
ES	65	63	38	29	21	16	9	13	10
FR	64	49	40	38	33	23	18	9	15
HR	53	54	52	30	31	23	21	25	8
IT	58	59	35	31	31	24	22	15	18
CY	74	60	49	37	38	20	15	8	8
LV	69	52	37	28	32	20	13	13	9
LT	75	55	58	30	27	15	12	20	8
LU	66	48	47	30	34	23	15	14	10
HU	52	39	45	33	38	29	13	17	12
MT	53	47	59	25	32	22	21	6	3
NL	76	50	58	49	46	23	30	12	12
AT	55	48	47	32	38	26	26	27	14
PL	59	48	43	23	23	14	14	19	11
PT	54	59	50	46	22	24	19	14	15
RO	53	55	39	32	32	25	12	23	16
SI	59	54	56	27	34	21	12	18	10
SK	54	47	48	23	33	18	16	24	11
FI	75	42	56	40	37	26	22	15	7
SE	65	34	53	46	42	40	20	17	6
UK	49	32	38	32	22	21	13	12	11

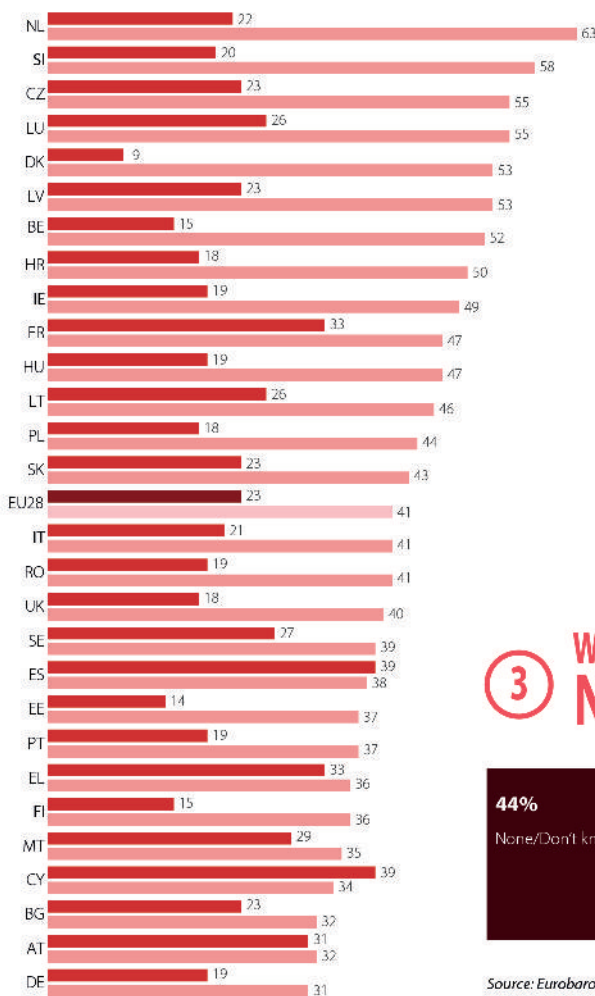
FOCUS ON ABSTENTION

Respondents of voting age were asked about their personal voting behaviour. Results must be read with caution as an over-declaration effect may apply.

Would it be at local or regional, national or European level, 26% of respondents declare they vote "most of the time" and 9% from time to time. Whereas 50% declare they systematically vote, 6% rarely or 5% never do. It is interesting to note that 2% vote only in certain elections.

WHY ABSTAIN?

1 IDEOLOGICAL OR POLITICAL REASONS / TECHNICAL OR PERSONAL REASONS

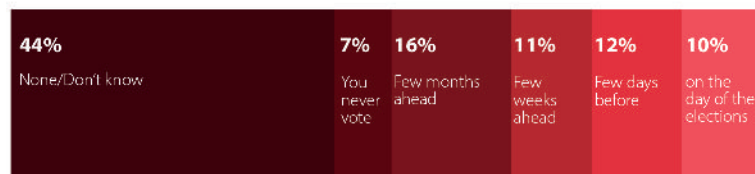


2 TECHNICAL REASONS TO ABSTAIN



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA20 (Question asked only to those who do not vote systematically)

3 WHEN DID YOU DECIDE NOT TO VOTE?



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA21

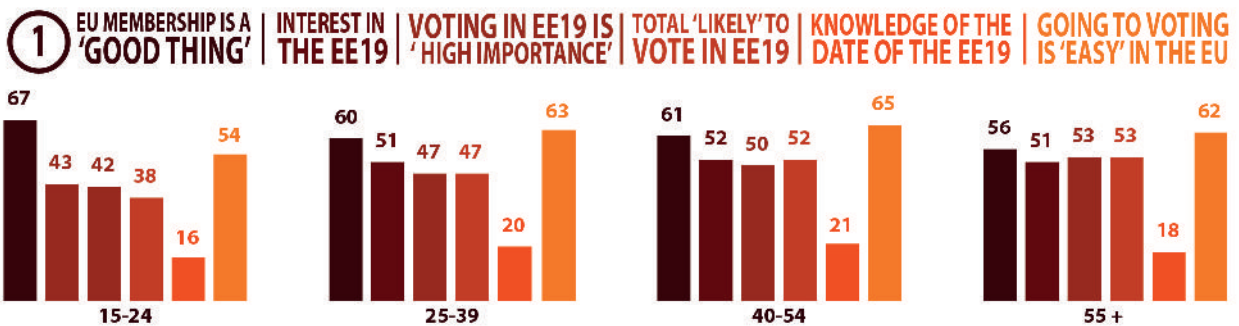
Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, Q19 (Question asked only to those who do not vote systematically)

FOCUS ON YOUTH

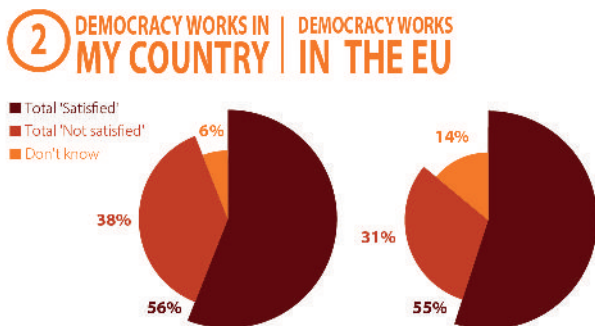
POSITIVE FEELINGS ABOUT THE EU

In the 2014 European elections, young people (aged 18-24) were the largest group of abstainers, despite the fact that this group generally expresses the most positive feelings about the EU.

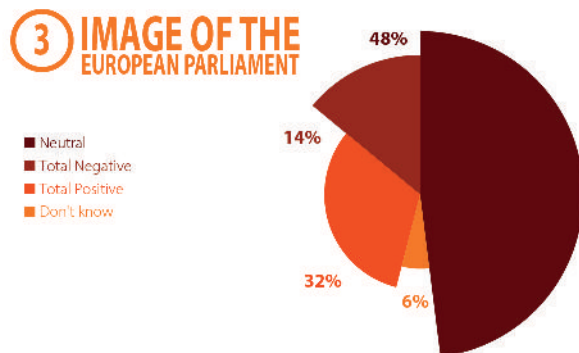
Results from this survey confirm their significantly more positive attitude towards the EU. However, their likelihood to vote remains on average lower to the other age groups.



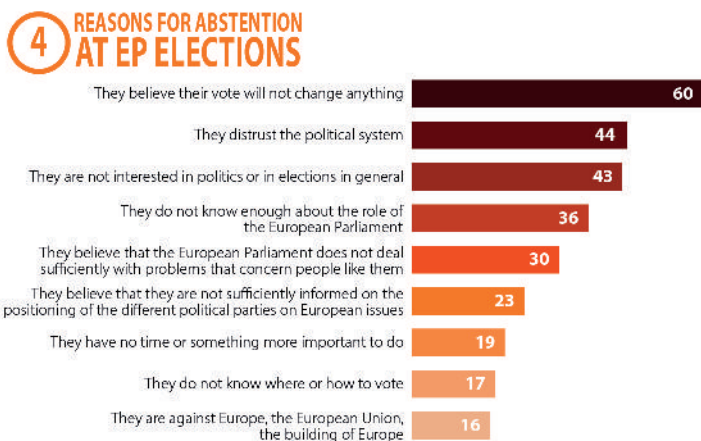
Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA23, QA9, QA14a, QA10, QA8 and QA15a



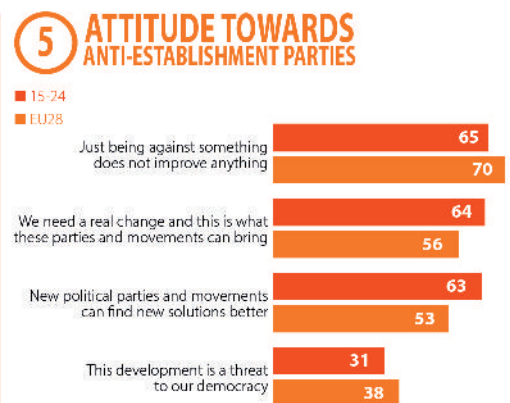
Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA25a and QA25B / 15-24 years old



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA2 / 15-24 years old



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA17T / 15-24 years old



Source: Eurobarometer 2018 89.2, QA26.1-4 / 15-24 years old

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Coverage:	EU28
Interviews:	27.601 Europeans
Population:	General population aged 15 or more
Methodology:	Face-to-face
Fieldwork:	11 to 22 April 2018, survey conducted by Kantar Public

Note

The results of a survey are estimates and their accuracy depends on the sample size and the observed percentage. For around 1000 interviews (sample size generally used at the level of a Member State), the real percentage fluctuates between the following confidence intervals:

Observed percentages	10% or 90%	20% or 80%	30% or 70%	40% or 60%	50%
Margins of error	+/- 1,9 points	+/- 2,5 points	+/- 2,7 points	+/- 3,0 points	+/- 3,1 points

DEMOCRACY ON THE MOVE: ONE YEAR TO GO TO THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

This Eurobarometer survey of the European Parliament (EP/EB 89.2) was carried out in all 28 Member States of the European Union, from 11 until 22 April 2018, by

KANTAR PUBLIC

The EP Eurobarometer monitors European citizens' opinions on the EU membership and its benefits, on their attitudes towards the European Parliament, its priorities, actions and mission. It also sheds light on the role of the EU in tackling major threats and protecting the main achievements cherished by its citizens.

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