



## Report

# Perspectives on the future of Europe from the centre of European societies

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March 11, 2022

## Executive summary

Divisions among member states, although a constant feature of EU policymaking, have become even more visible after a decade of consecutive crises. At the same time the COVID-19 pandemic, which Europe has been facing for nearly two years, has exacerbated economic and social weaknesses in all member states and aggravated divisions and problems that have been simmering within the Union for years. More importantly and urgently, Russia's invasion in Ukraine has – for the first time in decades – brought war back to Europe. In this transformative time, the Conference on the Future of Europe provides an opportunity for European political families and policymakers to reflect how citizens see the EU and what they expect from their elected officials.

Against this backdrop, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, in cooperation with the Egmont Institute and ifok, launched a study to analyse **how citizens at the centre of the political spectrum look at European integration and the challenges the EU faces today**. The study was conducted at the end of 2021, before the Russian invasion of Ukraine started. With the help of a comparative online survey, covering a representative sample of citizens on the centre-right political spectrum in twelve EU member states, the study focused on their general expectations about the future of EU integration as well as their opinions about the EU's potential role concerning specific policy issues and challenges. Member states included in this study are Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and Sweden, with 1500 citizens surveyed in each country.

Overall, the survey shows that **Europe's centre-right citizens are more united** than one might expect. Despite years of crises, no major rifts between citizens within and across member states are found. **The overwhelming majority of centre-right citizens in the surveyed countries consider themselves European and have a rather positive image of the EU.** Although they *perceive* themselves as rather distant from each other, they *do actually share* traditional centre-right values and **expect the EU to play a more active and efficient role** in tackling today's and the future's challenges. They see **the EU in the driver's seat to address many of the pressing issues of our time**, including climate change, economic decline, migration and foreign policy. Digitalisation, however, is not seen by respondents as an urgent matter at EU level.

**These results are in line with other surveys of the general EU population.** For the most part, centre-right citizens' political priorities and views on the future of Europe align with those of other citizens in the EU. **However, there is one notable exception to the overall trend:** centre-right Germans tend to hold a less positive image of the EU. The largest difference emerges concerning economic issues, as German respondents are more negative towards the EU's economic impact, and a large majority are more sceptical towards mutual economic support and joint debt.

Surveyed citizens share numerous **values and political identities**, even if they feel rather distant from each other:

1. **Traditional values still apply.** Centre-right citizens across Europe share the core values of family, security, and democracy. They also have strong national and regional identities. Religion, however, does not rank amongst their top values.
2. **Centre-right citizens consider themselves European and have a rather positive image of the EU.** European, national and regional identities do not exclude, but supplement each other.
3. Although they feel European, **centre-right citizens feel rather distant from each other.** Only in a few member states do centre-right citizens think Europeans are close to each other.

Yet, this feeling of distance is **not backed up in terms of policy priorities, where centre-right citizens have a unified view of many of the challenges facing Europe in the future**, with five key points:

4. **Centre-right citizens have clear priorities for the coming years, and they see the EU in the driver's seat to address them.** Climate change, economic decline and security are seen as key challenges and migration, fundamental rights, and climate change as key responsibilities for the EU.
5. **Centre-right citizens think that the EU should invest more in fighting climate change and protecting the environment.** Many respondents suggest that the EU is not doing enough and that it does not currently take their personal situation into account sufficiently when addressing the issue.
6. **The views of centre-right citizens towards economic solidarity differ widely among member states.** While centre-right citizens in most surveyed member states support economic solidarity and joint debt, in Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden a majority oppose these ideas. However, there is **one constant element among all centre-right citizens: strong support for the principle of austerity.** Germany emerges as the main outlier in questions about economic support.
7. **Centre-right citizens see migration as a major area of EU action** and an urgent issue. They are united in calling for a **better protection of external borders.** Across surveyed countries, they also support a **distribution mechanism** for arriving migrants, with support only slightly higher in western European states than eastern ones.
8. **Centre-right citizens hold that the EU should become stronger on the international level and speak with a more united voice.** Furthermore, they believe that the EU should become more autonomous and politically independent from other global powers in foreign policy.

Based on this, two observations for **the future of EU politics** stand out:

9. **Centre-right citizens would like the EU to play an active role, but without providing it with more competences.** Most centre right citizens think the EU has enough power. For centre-right citizens, being pro-European does not necessarily mean being pro-integrationist – they rather expect a more effective and efficient Union.
10. **Centre-right citizens are looking for more possibilities for participation,** as they perceive that their involvement in EU politics is insufficient. In this context, citizens are especially keen on more direct means of participation on concrete policy issues.

The results of this survey come at a crucial point for Europe, which will ultimately define how the Union moves towards a post-pandemic future. In this context, we see an overall surprisingly unified picture of political priorities across a large spectrum of societies across the European continent. Centre-right citizens' views reflect few of the rifts that have emerged among the political elite throughout the EU's crises. Their shared vision could serve as a basis for a unifying political agenda that emphasises the unanimity among the political centre of European societies to work towards a more responsible European Union, taking joint action in key areas that will determine the future of the continent.

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# Introduction

Europe is currently witnessing tremendous seismic shifts, both in its political and societal fundaments. For the first time in decades, war is back in Europe. Russia's invasion of Ukraine leaves the country and the lives of millions in uncertainty about their future. In the European Union (EU), Russia's war in Ukraine has resulted in changes in both the Union's and member states' foreign policies towards Russia that would have been unimaginable just weeks ago. Member states have reacted with remarkable solidarity and unity to Russia's aggression. In addition to extensive sanctions towards Russia, this includes the unprecedented purchase and delivery of weapons and fighter jets to a third country.<sup>1</sup>

Even beyond the war in Ukraine, however, Europe has been in severe crisis mode for years. Over the past two years, the COVID-19 pandemic confronted the EU with entirely new challenges that went far beyond public health. It exacerbated economic and social weaknesses in all member states and aggravated divisions and problems that have been simmering within the Union for years, as it hit the EU in the middle of its 'permacrisis'.<sup>2</sup> These divisions include rifts among and within member states, such as "between cities and countryside, the old and the young, the East and the West, vaccinated and unvaccinated", as Manfred Weber asserted in January 2022 at a plenary meeting of the Conference on the Future of Europe.<sup>3</sup>

The unprecedented nature of the pandemic has raised new demands and hopes, as the public expects the Union to deliver in spheres where it has never been tested before. The EU will have to rise to these challenges to ensure continuing support from its citizens. Policymakers will have to face the task to deliver on new challenges and expectations – both post-pandemic and in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine. At the same time, the Conference on the Future of Europe provides a timely opportunity for European political families and policymakers to reflect on how citizens see the EU and what they expect from their elected officials.

Against this backdrop, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, in cooperation with the Egmont Institute and ifok, launched a study to analyse how people in the centre of our societies look at European integration and the challenges the EU is facing today. It will therefore help policymakers to understand the issues on which centre-right citizens from twelve member states think alike, and where divides among and within this group still prevail.

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<sup>1</sup> Von der Leyen, Ursula. Statement by President von der Leyen on further measures to respond to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. 27 February 2022. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement\\_22\\_1441](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_22_1441)

<sup>2</sup> Zuleeg, Fabian, Janis A. Emmanouilidis and Ricardo Borges de Castro. 'The Age of Permacrisis.' Euractiv. 13 April 2021. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/future-eu/opinion/the-age-of-permacrisis/>.

<sup>3</sup> Available at: [https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/webstreaming/conference-on-future-of-europe-plenary-2-european-democracy-presentation-of-recommendations-by-europ\\_20220122-0830-SPECIAL-OTHER](https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/webstreaming/conference-on-future-of-europe-plenary-2-european-democracy-presentation-of-recommendations-by-europ_20220122-0830-SPECIAL-OTHER).

Based on a comparative survey of 18,000 citizens in twelve EU member states conducted by the polling agencies Ipsos and Civey,<sup>4</sup> the study assesses centre-right citizens' expectations about the future of EU integration, as well as their opinions and the EU's potential role in specific policy issues and challenges. The goal of this study is to analyse perspectives on the EU from the centre of European societies. As such, the study focuses on the centrist and centre-right leaning population in each member state as the target group for the centre-right political family. The study was conducted at the end of 2021, before the Russian invasion of Ukraine started. It will present ten key findings on how centre-right citizens across Europe see the EU and the future of European integration.

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<sup>4</sup> Member states covered are Bulgaria, Croatia, France, German, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Spain and Sweden.

## Study findings

After more than a decade of ‘permacrisis’ and two years of the COVID-19 pandemic capturing the political agenda of the EU and its member states, this study provides plenty of insights into concrete expectations from the centre of European societies towards policymakers across Europe. Above all, however, it provides one central, overarching message that should serve as a guiding star for the future: **Centre-right citizens across Europe are not so different from each other after all.** In fact, they share many core values and policy priorities – even if they don’t *feel* very close to each other. **Indeed, they do want a more active and more efficient Europe, particularly in their key priority areas.** They see **the EU in the driver’s seat to address many of the pressing issues of our time**, including climate change, economic decline, migration and foreign policy.

To poll the views on the future of Europe of the political centre of European societies, the findings are based on a comparative, quantitative analysis of an online survey. The questionnaire started with a screening question asking the participants to locate themselves on an 11-point left-right scale, representing the political spectrum from left (0) to right (10). Only those respondents who positioned themselves as centrist and centre-right, within the range of 4 to 8, could continue answering the questionnaire.<sup>5</sup>

The following chapter presents the findings of the study in detail, while following ten key messages. Overall, the findings can be clustered in results dealing with questions of values and identity, policy-related issues and centre-right citizens’ views on the future of EU politics.

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<sup>5</sup> For more information on the methodology, see Annex 1. For reasons of simplicity, the following part of the study uses the term ‘centre-right citizens’ when referring to this group of the population.

## **Key messages: Perspectives on the future of Europe from the centre of European societies**

### **VALUES & IDENTITY**

1. Traditional values still apply.
2. Centre-right citizens consider themselves European & have a rather positive image of the EU.
3. Centre-right citizens feel rather distant from each other.

### **POLICIES**

4. Centre-right citizens see the EU in the driver's seat to address many of the pressing issues of our time.
5. Centre-right citizens think that the EU should invest more in fighting climate change and protecting the environment.
6. The views of centre-right citizens towards economic solidarity differ widely among member states, with one constant element: heavy support for the principle of austerity.
7. Centre-right citizens see migration as a major area of action for the EU, calling for a better protection of external borders and a distribution mechanism for arriving migrants.
8. Centre-right citizens believe that the EU should become stronger on the international level and speak with a more united voice.

### **FUTURE OF EU POLITICS**

9. Centre-right citizens would like the EU to play an active role, but without providing it with more powers.
10. Centre-right citizens are looking for more possibilities for participation.

## VALUES & IDENTITY

The survey shows that centre-right citizens across Europe are united by a remarkable degree of consensus as to their core values, how they see each other, the EU and what they expect from the EU in the future. Three key messages stand out:

### 1. Traditional values still apply

Centre-right citizens across Europe share a set of traditional values. When asked to select which values are most important for them, the majority of respondents mention family (59%), security (37%) and democracy (33%).

*Figure 1: Which of these values are most important for you? (up to three choices)*

	Family	67%	74%	53%	50%	66%	66%	62%	76%	64%	74%	61%	67%
Security	37%	22%	43%	33%	39%	34%	40%	33%	55%	13%	55%	34%	49%
Democracy	33%	19%	20%	24%	48%	49%	28%	27%	33%	38%	27%	30%	43%
Individual freedom	29%	28%	29%	16%	40%	38%	30%	29%	24%	42%	25%	23%	33%
Rule of law	22%	19%	23%	9%	47%	24%	16%	10%	12%	20%	21%	15%	15%
Tolerance	21%	21%	26%	25%	22%	2%	16%	13%	27%	26%	25%	23%	11%
Nature and creation	19%	17%	22%	14%	17%	21%	26%	24%	20%	30%	16%	16%	23%
Solidarity	16%	11%	14%	21%	13%	10%	7%	18%	6%	20%	5%	20%	12%
Religion	8%	7%	16%	7%	7%	17%	6%	8%	6%	11%	14%	5%	7%
Total													

**Family** is by far the most important value for centre-right citizens from across all twelve surveyed EU member states, being mentioned most in all of them. With support above 50% in all member states, the value ranks especially high in three Central and Eastern European countries (Croatia, Lithuania and Poland) with more than 70%.

In contradiction to the common impression that traditional values are less important for the younger generation (18-29 years), the values of **family** (65%)<sup>6</sup> and **security** (35%) remain stable among young people and across the age groups. In contrast, the value **democracy** clearly becomes less significant the younger the respondents are (from 39% for the age group 65+ to 25% for the age group 18-29).

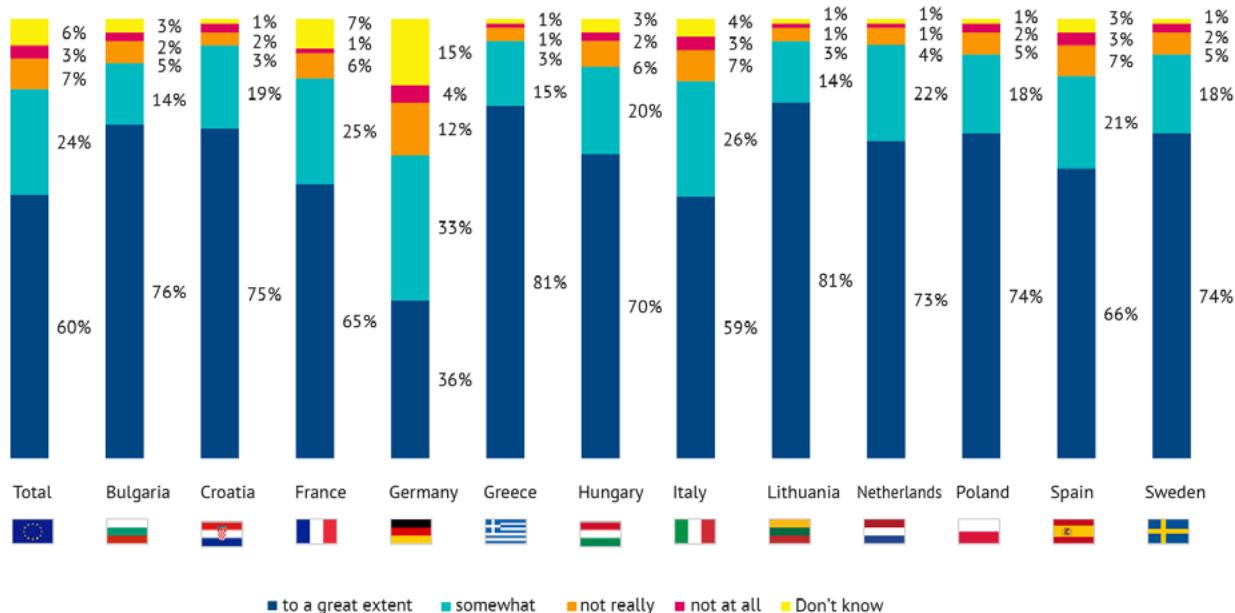
Also, contrary to what usually is deemed typical for the centre-right camp, **religion** as a value polls last (8%) and this result applies almost unchanged across all age groups (8-10%). Only

<sup>6</sup> Numbers mentioning specific demographics in this report do not refer to proportionalised results, but weight every member state evenly at 1,500 respondents.

Greece and Croatia (17% and 16%) poll significantly higher than the average in this respect, but still rather low compared to other values (ranking seventh and eighth respectively).

Asked about how strongly citizens identify towards different levels (as a citizen of Europe, their country, their region, the world), **national identity** ranks high among centre-right citizens. These results are fairly in line with the national identification of the general public.<sup>7</sup> But there is one clear exception: Germany. The average score for identifying to a great extent with the nation state across all countries rank from 59% in Italy to 81% in Greece and Lithuania. In Germany, only 36% of German centre-right citizens identify strongly as German. Even when looking at the general trend (combining identification “to a great extent” and “somewhat”), only 69% in Germany identify themselves as “Germans”. In comparison, 96% of respondents in Greece feel Greek.

*Figure 2: To what extent do you personally feel you are a citizen of your own country?*



Finally, **regional identification** also plays an important role for centre right citizens, albeit less than their nationality. 70% of respondents say they do identify (either to a great extent or somewhat) with their region. Again, regional identification ranges from 59% in Germany to 90% and 91% in Lithuania and Poland respectively.

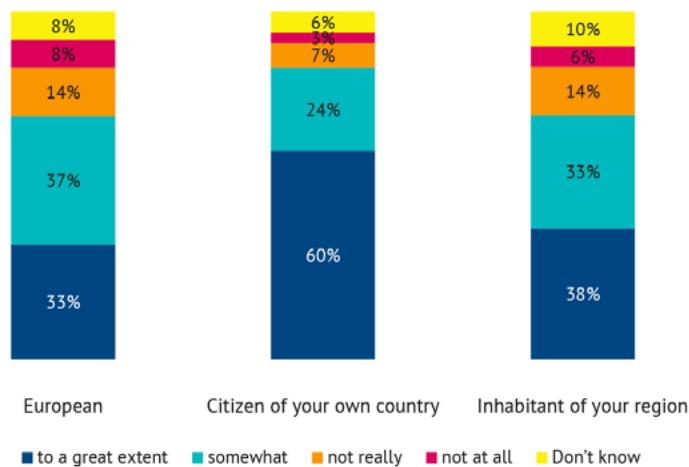
## 2. Centre-right citizens consider themselves European & have a rather positive image of the EU

Yet, a widely perceived national and regional identity does not counteract a European identity. A large majority of centre-right citizens feel a strong sense of **belonging to Europe**: 70% of centre-right citizens feel European (37% somewhat, 33% to a great extent). Centre-right citizens therefore seem to feel more European than the general public

<sup>7</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 95, Spring 2021. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2532>.

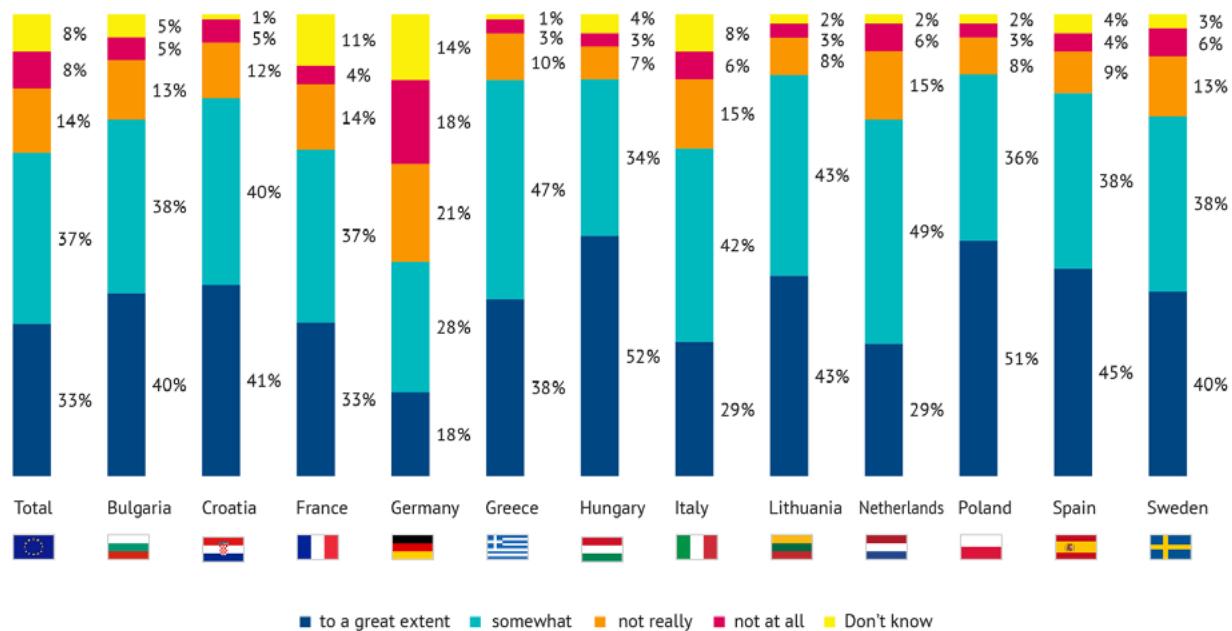
(where 18% feel very and 47% fairly attached to Europe, according to Eurobarometer).<sup>8</sup> Again, Germany is an exception here, with only 46% of centre-right citizens who have a European identity (18% to a great extent and 28% somewhat). These results are stable across age groups.

Figure 3: To what extent do you personally feel you are ...



Strong support for a national *and* European identity indicates that centre-right citizens have a multi-layered identity. Indeed, different identity layers correlate: those who have a stronger national and regional identity also tend to have a stronger feeling of European belonging. Consequently, it seems that European and national identities do not exclude but rather supplement each other.

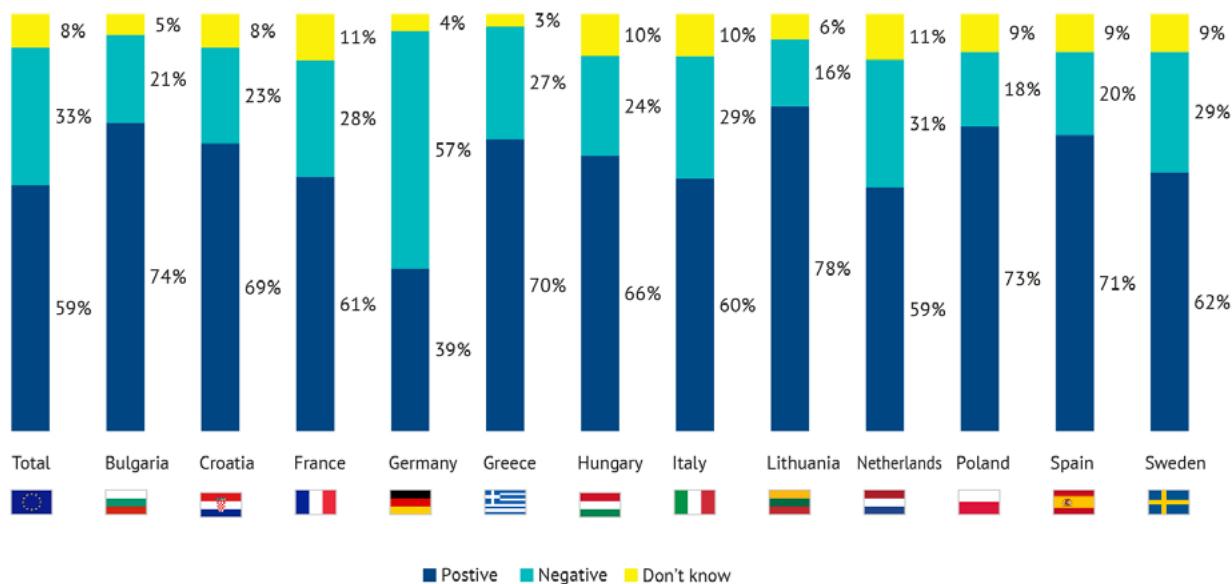
Figure 4: To what extent do you personally feel you are European?



<sup>8</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 95, Spring 2021. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2532>

Centre-right citizens continue to share pro-European sentiments with respect to the **image they have of the EU**. Here 59% of the respondents indicate that they have either a positive or a very positive image, with the younger generation clearly displaying an even more pro-European attitude. Again, sentiments towards the EU of centre-right-citizens (59% positive, 33% negative) are similar to the general public (45% positive, 15% negative).<sup>9</sup>

*Figure 5: What image do you have of the EU?*



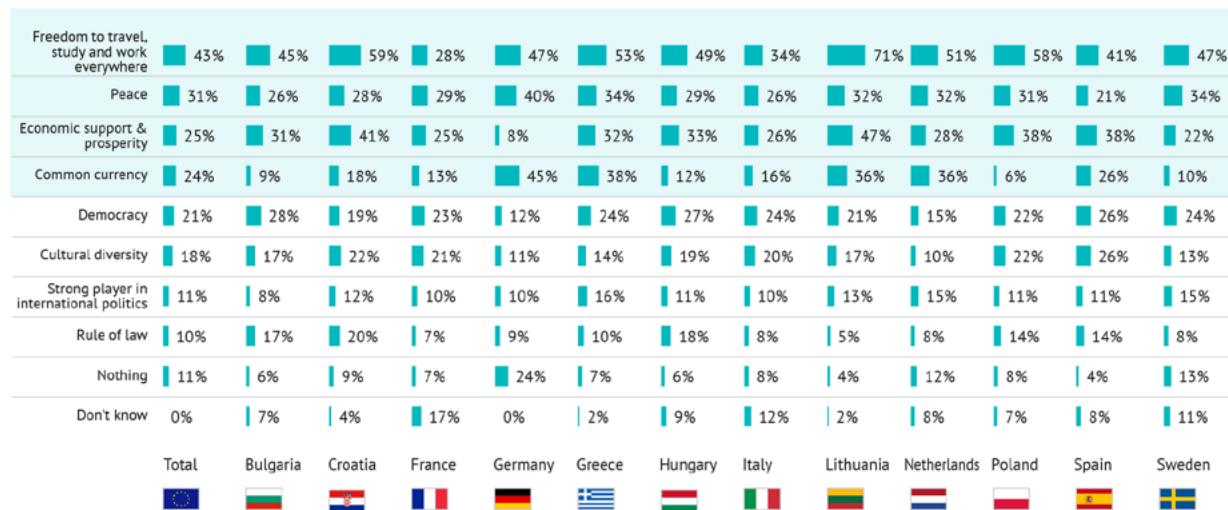
Germany is the only country in which a minority (39%) of centre-right respondents have a positive image of the EU and in which a negative impression prevails (57%). This finding corresponds to previous results by the European Council on Foreign Relations that show Germans' increasingly harsh assessment of the EU and Eurosceptic turn, as well as their widely held sense that "the political system of the EU is broken", particularly in reaction to its performance in handling the pandemic.<sup>10</sup>

To understand reasons for a positive or negative image of the EU, centre-right citizens across Europe were asked in which aspects they think that they personally benefit from the EU. **Freedom of travel/work/study** (43%), **peace** (31%) and **economic prosperity** (25%) are most often highlighted as personal benefits that stem from the EU.

<sup>9</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 95, Spring 2021. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2532>. It should be noted that these numbers are not entirely comparable, as the Eurobarometer includes an additional option for respondents: a neutral perception of the EU (38%).

<sup>10</sup> Dennison, Susi and Jana Puglierin. 2021. Crisis of confidence: how Europeans see their place in the world. <https://ecfr.eu/publication/crisis-of-confidence-how-europeans-see-their-place-in-the-world/>; Leonard, Mark and Jana Puglierin. 2021. How to prevent Germany from becoming Eurosceptic. <https://ecfr.eu/publication/how-to-prevent-germany-from-becoming-eurosceptic/>.

*Figure 6: In which aspects do you think that you personally benefit from the European Union?  
(up to three choices)*



The fact that freedom of movement and peace clearly rank above economic issues illustrates that **centre-right citizens see the EU as more than just an economic project**. These findings are in line with results among the broader EU public, where peace was ranked both as the most important personal value (38%) and the most positive effect of the EU (28%).<sup>11</sup> The importance of peace is highest in Germany, where peace is ranked first with 40%. This is perhaps explained by the role European integration played in post-war Germany for the normalisation of relations with its European neighbours.

The question also reveals that centre-right citizens currently **do not see rule of law as a personal benefit they gain through the EU** – ranking it last (10%) among all values. This is noteworthy in two respects. First, the result suggests that the continuous backsliding of the rule of law in some member states – and the EU's lack of response – clearly undermines the EU's credibility as defender of the rule of law. Second, this trend seems far more pronounced among centre-right citizens compared to the overall population of the EU. Although recent Eurobarometer data shows that “the respect for democracy, human rights and the rule of law” suffered remarkably over the last year (from 32% support in autumn 2020 to 27% in autumn 2021), it is still ranked as the number one EU asset that the general population appreciates.<sup>12</sup>

Although economic prosperity is valued highly among centre-right citizens in most member states, German citizens from the centre-right show reverse patterns of responses when it comes to economic issues: Whereas around one third (33%) of respondents from all the other countries value **economic support** as a benefit of the EU, only 8% of Germans do. This difference may be due to Germany's special position as the largest

<sup>11</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 95, Spring 2021. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2532>

<sup>12</sup> Special Eurobarometer 517 on the Future of Europe, January 2022. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2554>

net contributor to the EU's budget and its role in the different crises faced by the EU (see section on Germany below).

Finally, a generation gap seems to exist regarding the perceived personal benefit of **democracy**: the younger respondents are, the less likely they are to claim that democracy is a personal benefit brought to them by the EU (30% of over-65s ranked it as a benefit, against 21% of 18-29-year-olds).

When asked about their perceptions on the **negative aspects of the EU**, bureaucracy (43%), waste of money (34%) and inefficiency (overall: 29%, but: Germany 50%) are identified. The two largest European economies hold opposite views on whether the EU is a waste of money: while 70% of German respondents see the EU as a waste of money, only 16% of French respondents do so – the lowest of any surveyed state. Economic problems as a negative aspect of the EU also rank highly (23%), mainly featuring in citizens' answers from net-receivers, whereas "waste of money" features especially among net-contributors (see key message six below).

*Figure 7: What are for you the most negative aspects of the European Union?  
(up to three choices)*

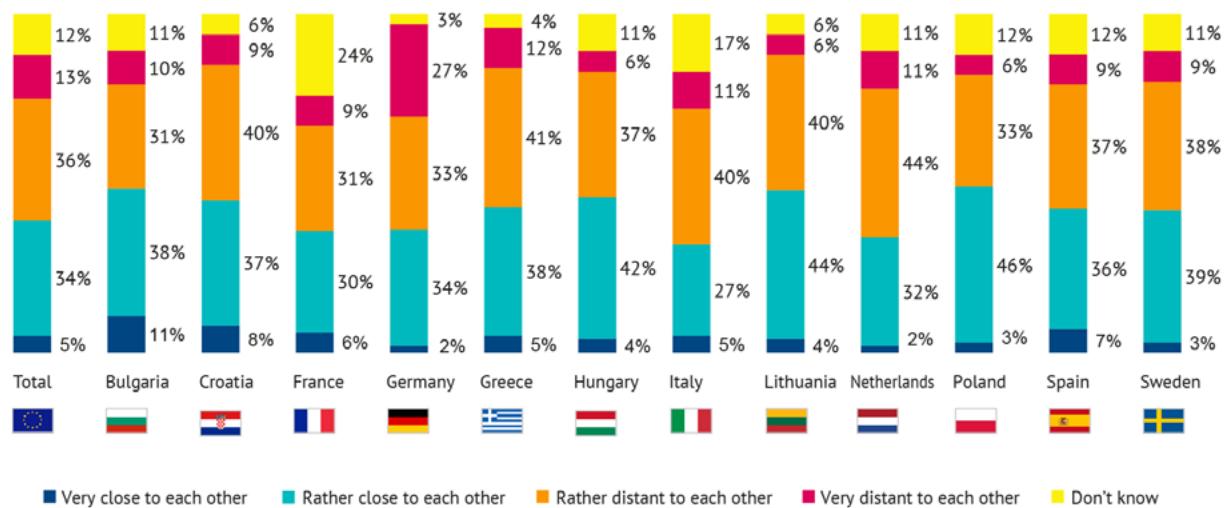
	EU	Bulgaria	Croatia	France	Germany	Greece	Hungary	Italy	Lithuania	Netherlands	Poland	Spain	Sweden
Bureaucracy	43%	29%	37%	32%	66%	25%	34%	33%	53%	43%	44%	37%	40%
Waste of money	34%	24%	25%	16%	70%	22%	22%	20%	35%	47%	23%	20%	40%
Inefficiency	29%	15%	29%	17%	50%	31%	17%	23%	25%	30%	19%	26%	28%
Economic problems	23%	34%	25%	26%	11%	45%	23%	34%	23%	21%	16%	25%	19%
Regional disparities	21%	21%	25%	19%	15%	28%	29%	22%	25%	23%	28%	26%	17%
Loss of control	18%	23%	29%	16%	20%	26%	19%	12%	18%	27%	19%	19%	29%
Loss of identity	16%	23%	33%	14%	18%	25%	19%	13%	24%	20%	18%	12%	10%
Less security	13%	12%	13%	17%	13%	16%	12%	12%	5%	9%	7%	12%	14%
Nothing	4%	5%	5%	5%	3%	4%	9%	4%	4%	3%	9%	4%	3%
Don't know	0%	8%	7%	17%	0%	4%	12%	12%	7%	9%	14%	12%	14%
Total	EU	Bulgaria	Croatia	France	Germany	Greece	Hungary	Italy	Lithuania	Netherlands	Poland	Spain	Sweden

### 3. Centre-right citizens feel rather distant from each other.

Although centre-right citizens feel European, they perceive themselves as being rather separate from each other in terms of shared values. When asked whether Europeans are close to or distant from each other, almost half of the centre-right citizens felt distant (49%, compared to 39% feeling close). Recent Eurobarometer results, on the other hand, show that across the EU's general population 54% agree and 41% disagree with the statement that people in the EU have a lot of things in common; when asked about

closeness in terms of values, 57% say that EU member states are close to each other and 41% disagree.<sup>13</sup> The figures among the centre-right oriented population therefore reveal slightly more scepticism.

*Figure 8: In terms of shared values, do you think Europeans are close or distant to each other?*



German centre-right citizens far exceeded the other countries in the opinion that Europeans are very distant to each other (27% in contrast to 9% on average in all other countries). In Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Lithuania, a relative majority see Europeans as close together. At the same time, very few respondents (across all member states and demographic categories) think that Europeans are very close to each other.

## POLICIES

However, this feeling of distance among survey respondents is not backed up by the numbers. In fact, the survey shows that European centre-right citizens have a unified view of the challenges facing Europe in the future, and see the EU as being responsible for tackling those issues. Five key messages arise:

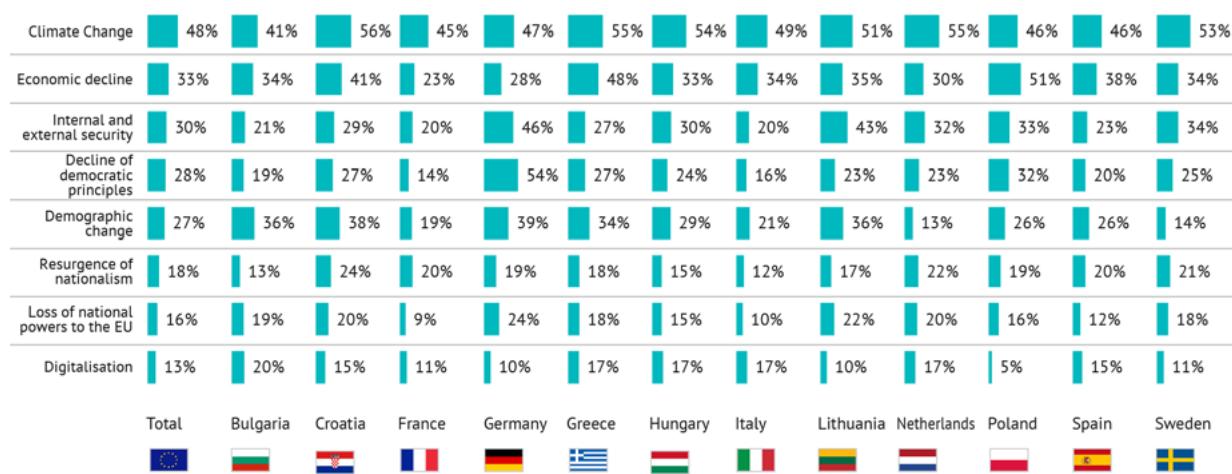
### 4. Centre-right citizens see the EU in the driver's seat to address many of the pressing issues of our time.

Centre-right citizens have clear key priorities for the coming years and generations – and they hold that the EU should be responsible to address them. **Climate change** is raised as the largest challenge for future generations by centre-right citizens overall (48%) and ranks first in all countries except for Germany (third) and Poland (second).

<sup>13</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 95, Spring 2021. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2532>

The recognition of climate change as an important issue demonstrates that this is not just a left-wing issue in these countries, with centre-right citizens placing similar importance on climate change in comparison to EU citizens more generally (see also key message five).<sup>14</sup>

*Figure 9: Where do you see the biggest challenges for future generations?  
(up to three choices)*



Other key issues are also highlighted: **economic decline** (33%) and **internal and external security** (30%) are ranked second and third as long-term future challenges, with security seen to be particularly important in Germany (46%) and Lithuania (43%). **Demographic change** (27%) features highly among the responses, particularly in Germany (39%), Croatia (38%), Bulgaria (36%) and Lithuania (36%). In France, one-fifth (20%) of centre-right citizens see the **resurgence of nationalism** as a key challenge for future generations, ranking the issue second in their responses.

German respondents, in particular, stress the **decline of democratic principles**: 54% see this as an important issue for future generations, making it the country's most highly ranked issue. In most other countries, however, this concern is ranked only in the second half of the eight-item list, indicating that although centre-right citizens see democracy and freedoms as threatened in the short term by the pandemic, they do not necessarily consider this a long-term problem.

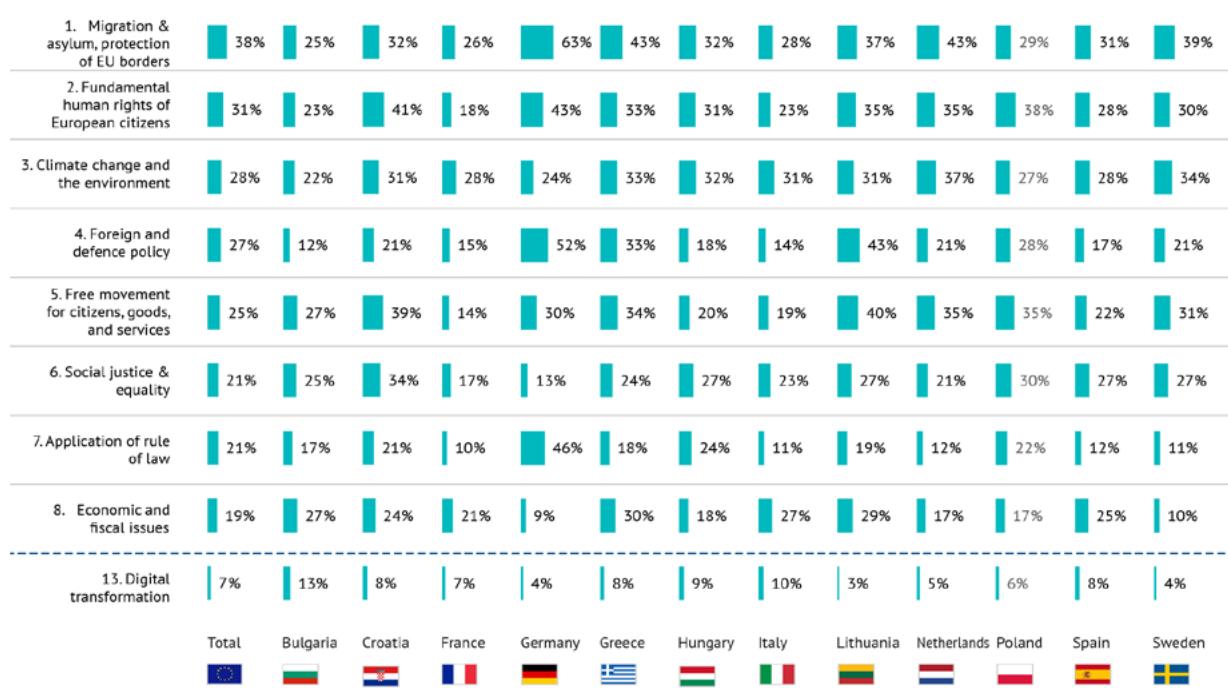
Centre-right respondents' perceptions of long-term challenges for the EU are quite similar to those of the general EU population. The January 2022 Eurobarometer on the Future of Europe found that climate change and the environment were ranked first, followed by economic issues and health. Democratic principles ranked relatively low on the list (seventh of nine issues), but relatively highly in Germany (fourth).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 95, Spring 2021. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2532>

<sup>15</sup> Special Eurobarometer 517 on the Future of Europe, 2022. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2554>

Not only do citizens agree on the challenges, but also on the EU's responsibility: when asked to select up to four issues that the EU should be responsible for, the same challenges arose. The most mentioned issue is **migration, asylum and protection of EU borders**: this issue ranks first with an average of 38% and is one of the top four issues in all member states. German centre-right citizens rank migration particularly highly, with 63% of German respondents selecting this issue. **Fundamental human rights of European citizens** rank second (31%) and are among the top four priorities for all but Bulgarian respondents. **Climate change and the environment** sit in third place overall (28%) and rank in the top four issues in seven countries.

*Figure 10: In your opinion, what are topics the EU should be responsible for? (up to four choices)*



**Foreign and defence policy** received an average of 27% across all surveyed countries and is the leading issue in Lithuania (43%) and second in Germany (52%) – a result which is significant in the context of the evolving Russian military mobilisation towards Ukraine and the tense political situation towards Belarus.<sup>16</sup> This indicates that a significant minority of respondents do think that the EU should be responsible for external representation and security. This level of support from centre-right citizens is consistent with public opinion polls in the EU over the past decade that show that most EU citizens are in favour of a common security and defence policy.<sup>17</sup>

One area where centre-right citizens' priorities show a mismatch with the Commission's current policy agenda is **digitalisation**. Although the EU has clearly set the digital transformation at the heart of its priorities and response to the COVID-19 pandemic, this is

<sup>16</sup> This survey, however, was conducted in November-December 2021 and therefore preceded the Russian mobilisation and invasion against Ukraine. Numbers, especially in former Soviet countries, can be expected to be higher at this point.

<sup>17</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 95, Spring 2021. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2532>

not reflected in the responses to the survey. Centre-right citizens do not see digitalisation as an urgent issue for the European level: only 15% see it as a key issue that emerged from the pandemic, ranking it last among the options. It also ranked last among the long-term challenges facing future generations – only 13% of respondents select it as an important issue, with remarkable consistency across countries and demographic categories, and only 7% see digitalisation as an important EU responsibility.

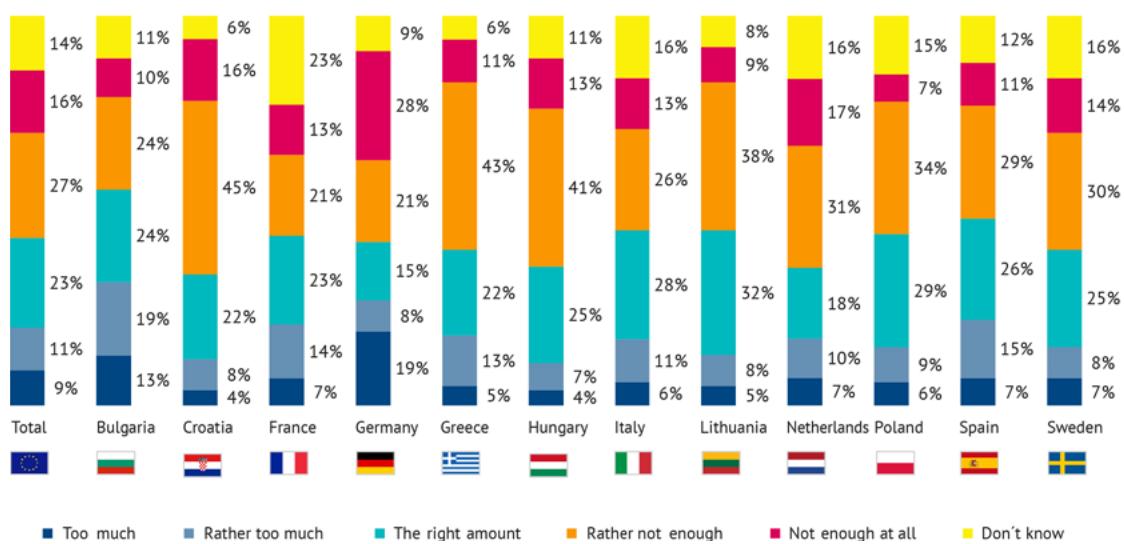
## 5. Centre-right citizens think that the EU should invest more in fighting climate change and protecting the environment

**Climate change** is a clear priority on which centre-right citizens want the EU to act. 67% of all respondents, with majorities in all member states, agree with the statement that fighting climate change and protecting the environment should be a priority in European politics. This ties in with the growing importance of climate change for the general European public.<sup>18</sup>

Surprisingly, the only two countries where fewer than 60% of respondents agree with this statement are also the two largest: Germany (53%) and France (54%). Notably, in Germany, 43% of respondents think that climate change should *not* be a priority for the EU. This is the largest proportion of respondents of any surveyed country by 13 percentage points.

However, centre-right citizens' **satisfaction with the EU's current course** in this policy area is relatively low. One in four respondents (23%) believe that the EU is doing the right amount to tackle climate change: satisfaction ranges from 15% in Germany to 32% in Lithuania. Overall, 43% of centre-right citizens believe that the EU should do more to fight climate change, with a relative majority in every member state wanting more action. There are nevertheless some outliers: one in three Bulgarian respondents (32%) and one in four German respondents (27%) think the EU is doing too much to fight climate change.

Figure 11: Are EU decision makers currently doing too much, the right amount or not enough to protect the environment and fight climate change?

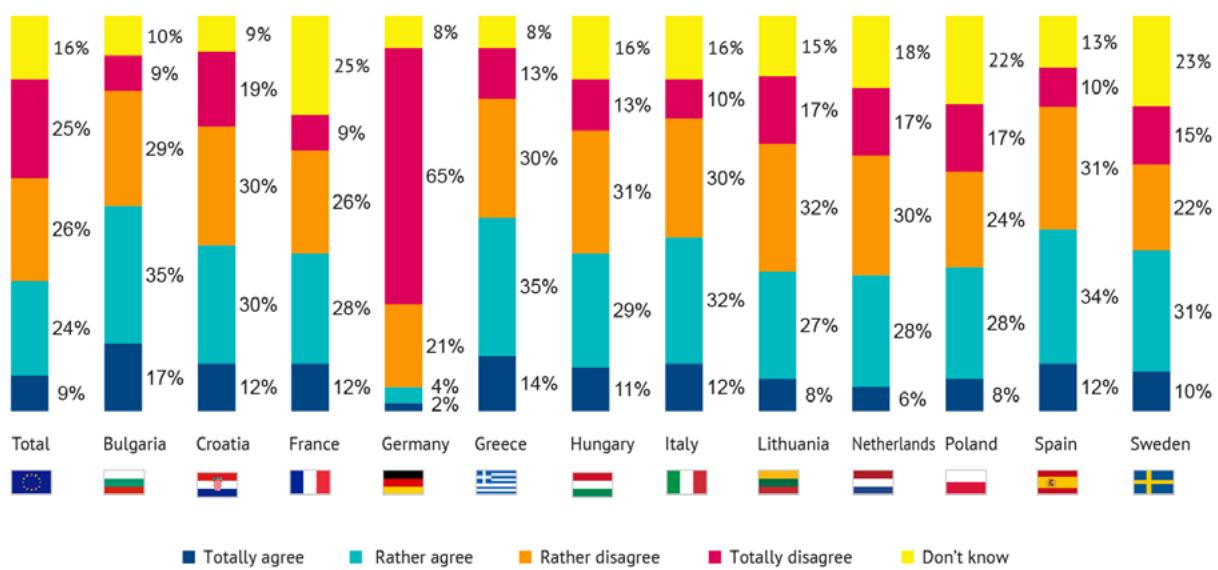


<sup>18</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 95, Spring 2021. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2532>; Special Eurobarometer 517 on the Future of Europe, 2022. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2554>.

Support for the EU's climate policies follows some interesting trends. Older respondents, in particular, think that the EU is not doing enough to tackle climate change: 54% of respondents over 65 years think that the EU is not doing enough compared to 43% of 18–29-year-olds. This runs counter to the common stereotype of a disengaged older generation and an environmentally concerned youth – and also to recent findings that younger citizens were more likely to list climate change as a challenge for the EU.<sup>19</sup> Satisfaction with the EU's current action also relates to respondents' feelings and involvement in the EU in general: a higher proportion of respondents with a negative image of the EU want more action on European level (51%, compared to 44% of those with a positive image), suggesting that part of their dissatisfaction with the EU may be linked to the EU's perceived inactivity.

However, only one in three respondents (33%) think that the **EU takes their personal situation into account** sufficiently, while half (51%) believe that it does not. Younger respondents feel more included than older ones: 49% of 18–29-year-olds feel that the EU takes their personal situation into account, but this falls to 36% for over-65s. Germany was the outlier here: only 6% of German respondents feel that the EU takes their personal situation into account in its climate policy, while 86% feel it does not. This mirrors the debate within Germany on the European Commission's green taxonomy which – according to a recent Ipsos poll – divides the German population.<sup>20</sup>

*Figure 12: EU decision makers take into account your personal situation sufficiently in their approach to fight climate change and protect the environment.*



<sup>19</sup> Special Eurobarometer 517 on the Future of Europe, January 2022. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2554>

<sup>20</sup> See Ipsos. 2021. EU-Pläne zur nachhaltigen Klassifizierung von Atomkraft und Gasenergie spalten deutsche Bevölkerung. <https://www.ipsos.com/de-de/eu-plane-zur-nachhaltigen-klassifizierung-von-atomkraft-und-gasenergie-spalten-deutsche-bevoelkerung>. The German results will be discussed in more detail below.

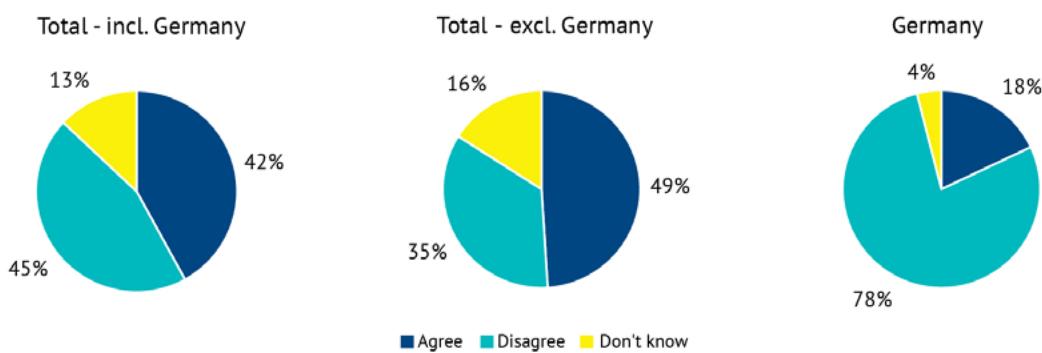
Stronger citizen participation in EU affairs would therefore seem to be an important aspect related to satisfaction with the EU's climate and environmental policy. 67% of centre-right citizens see climate change as a priority and something that the EU should address with its policies. Yet, 42% of them do not feel that the EU takes their personal situation into account in creating this policy. This could be addressed by creating more opportunities for participation and communicating them clearly (see also key message ten).

## 6. The views of centre-right citizens towards economic solidarity differ widely among member states, with one consistent element: strong support for the principle of austerity.

A quarter of surveyed centre-right citizens see **economic support and prosperity** as a personal benefit (25%), but also one of the negative aspects of the EU (23%; see figures 6 and 7). At the same time, they do not see economic and fiscal issues as one of the most important responsibilities for the EU: only 19% of respondents list them as a responsibility the EU should have, ranking them below foreign and defence policy.

Germany emerges as a strong outlier in the responses to economic questions. Results for Germany will therefore be discussed separately below. Across other member states, respondents show relative support for the idea of their country providing money to the EU to support other member states when needed. Centre-right citizens in two thirds of the member states support this **solidarity principle**, and when excluding Germany from the results, the average support is 49% (with 35% opposing this). Only in Germany and the Netherlands (52%) do a relative majority of centre-right citizens oppose the solidarity principle.

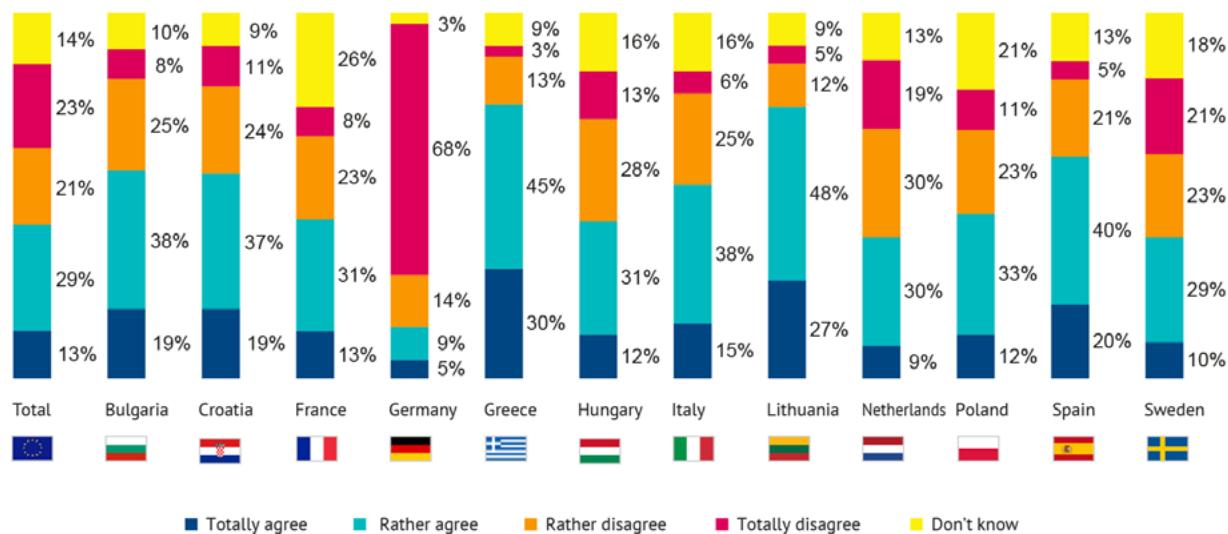
*Figure 13: My country should provide money to the European Union to support other member states when they are in need of it.*



Similarly, when asked whether they support **joint European debts**, the overall figures (excluding Germany) show that – perhaps surprisingly – a majority of centre-right citizens support common European debt (53% in favour, 32% opposed). Only in Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden are a majority of respondents opposed to the idea – and absolute majorities even support it in six surveyed countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Lithuania and Spain).

Some familiar trends can be seen in the opposition to economic solidarity (providing money for member states in need) and joint debt – notably the ‘frugal’ Netherlands and Sweden – but **patterns are not entirely clear across net contributors and net receivers**. Germany, the Netherlands and Poland fit the expected pattern. However, centre-right citizens in Hungary are split on the solidarity principle (41% opposing, 44% supporting), despite the country’s position as the second-largest net receiver of EU funds. Interestingly, a relative majority in France (41%) and Sweden (46%) support economic solidarity, despite being net contributors. In France, a relative majority (44%) are even favourable to the introduction of mutual debts. This contrasts with results from a 2020 study by EUI and YouGov of the general population in 13 member states, which found clear patterns of support for and opposition to economic solidarity among net contributors and net receivers.

*Figure 14: The European Union should create joint debts to support member states.*



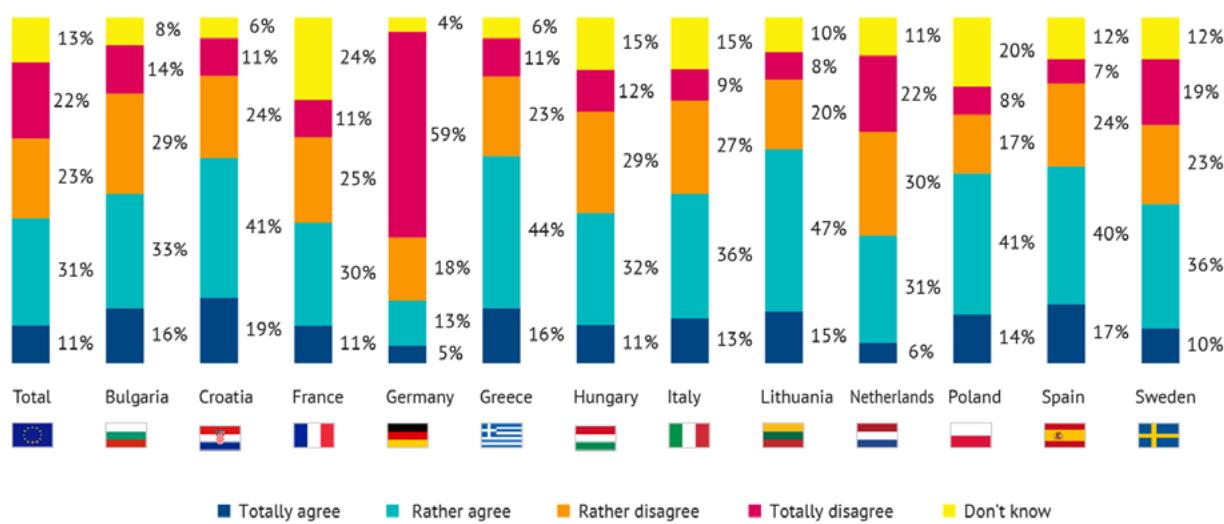
The economic views of centre-right citizens cannot be discussed without highlighting the stark differences between German respondents and those in other countries.

Overall, German respondents have a much more negative view of the EU in economic terms: only 8% of German centre-right citizens rank ‘economic support and prosperity’ as a personal benefit of the EU, compared to the survey average of 25% (see figure 6). This is almost three times fewer than the second most negative result in Sweden (22%). They are the least likely respondents to rank economic problems as one of the main negative aspects of the EU (11%) but are far more likely than other centre-right citizens to feel that the EU is a waste of money. 70% of German respondents feel this way, compared to the average of 34% (see figure 7).

Views on mutual economic support are split in several member states, but Germany shows by far the strongest opposition. Four out of five German centre-right citizens (77%) disagree with the principle of economic solidarity, 26 percentage points higher than the next country, the Netherlands (52%). Moreover, 59% of Germans *strongly* disagree with this statement, indicating the extent of this opposition. Similarly, when

considering joint debts, German respondents are clearly against the idea: only 14% support them, while 82% oppose them. A significant proportion (68%) totally oppose joint European debts – almost 50 percentage points higher than in other countries (21% in Sweden, 19% in the Netherlands).

*Figure 15: My country should provide money to the European Union to support other member states when they are in need of it.*



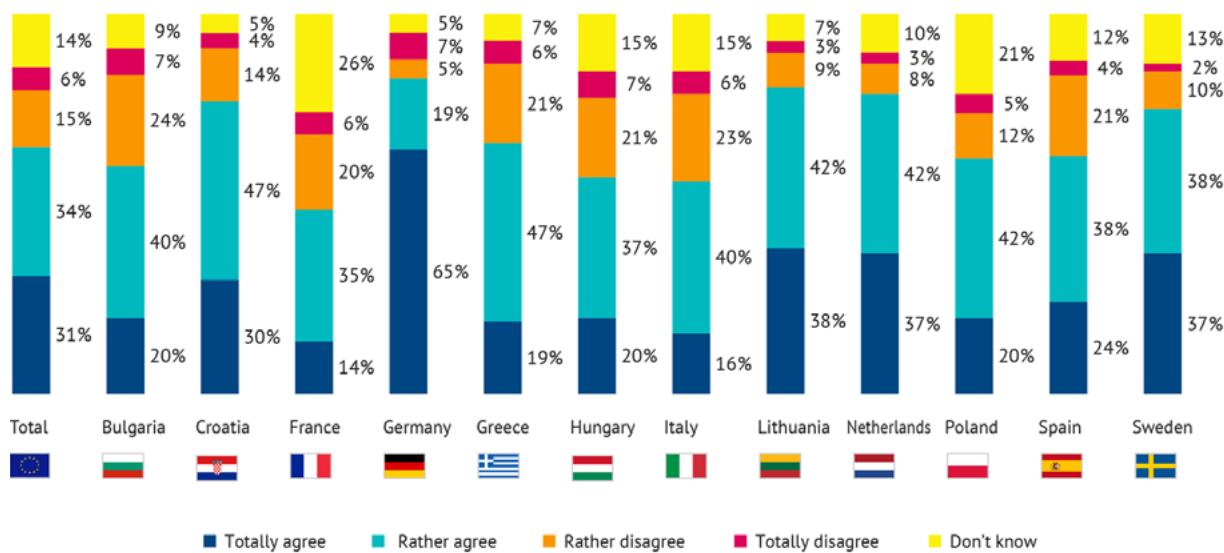
Although centre-right views on economic solidarity and joint debt are relatively divided, a key point that emerges from the survey results is **strong support for the principle of austerity**. Two thirds (65%) of centre-right respondents in all 12 surveyed member states support the idea that a member state in crisis should commit to reforms and cost-cutting before receiving EU support. Even in Greece (66%), Italy (56%) and Spain (62%), where austerity measures have marked politics since the Eurozone crisis, a clear majority of centre-right citizens support the principle.

The most sceptical country regarding austerity is France, where only a relative majority (49%) of surveyed centre-right citizens support the idea. The results for France reflect findings from a 2020 survey of French citizens by Sciences Po, where a majority of respondents supported increased public spending post-pandemic, particularly on health and education.<sup>21</sup> Academic research has also highlighted the lower acceptance of austerity principles in France, attributing this in part to the widespread *gilets jaunes* movement and protests against pension reform that took place in the country from 2018-2020.<sup>22</sup> However, it is surprising that this is also the case among citizens from the centre of the political spectrum.

<sup>21</sup> Sauger, Nicolas et al. 2020. Life after lockdown: Getting back on track or charting a new course? <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3897226>.

<sup>22</sup> Ferragina, Emanuele and Andrew Zola. 2021. The End of Austerity as Common Sense? An Experimental Analysis of Public Opinion Shifts and Class Dynamics During the COVID-19 Crisis. *New Political Economy*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2021.1952560>.

*Figure 16: A member state in crisis should commit to reforms and cost cutting before receiving financial support from the European Union.*



## 7. Centre-right citizens see migration as a major area of action for the EU, calling for a better protection of external borders and a distribution mechanism for arriving migrants.

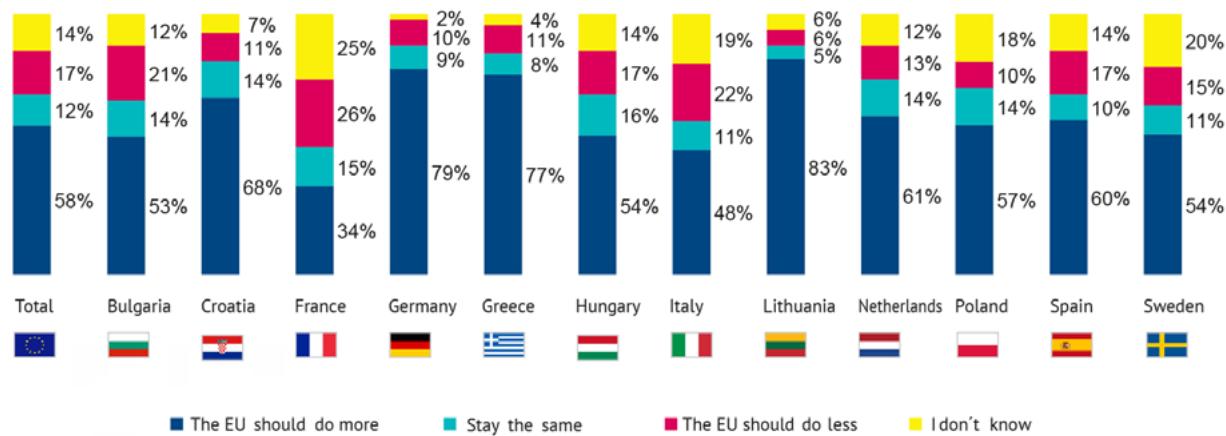
Managing migration and asylum into the European Union has been at the top of the political agenda for years, not only since the migration crisis in 2015. Both the European Council's strategic agenda and the von der Leyen Commission's political guidelines from 2019 mention "a fresh start on migration" prominently. A comprehensive reform of the Common European Asylum System and the Dublin regulation has been discussed for years.

Centre-right citizens across Europe share this **assessment of urgency when it comes to managing migration at the European level**. Asked about the topics the EU should be responsible for, migration and asylum as well as the protection of EU borders emerged the most important issue across Europe with an average of 38%, ranked in the top four for all surveyed member states (see figure 10). German centre-right citizens rank migration particularly highly, with 63% of respondents selecting the issue.

In accordance with this finding, an absolute majority of 58% centre-right respondents think that the EU should do more to manage and respond to migration into the European Union. Only 12% of the respondents believe the EU is currently doing enough, whereas 17% think that the EU should do less on the issue. Support for a stronger European role in migration policies can be observed among all centre-right citizens in the surveyed member states ranging from a small, relative majority of 34% in France to large, absolute majorities in Lithuania (83%), Germany (79%) and Greece (77%). Even in countries where governments currently oppose a stronger European role in migration, such as Hungary (54%) and Poland (57%), absolute majorities of centre-right voters support a more active role from Brussels. The East-West rift among member state governments on the European migration

policy, which currently paralyses the Council on this issue, cannot be observed amongst centre-right citizens – at least not on the simple question of whether the EU should become more active or not.

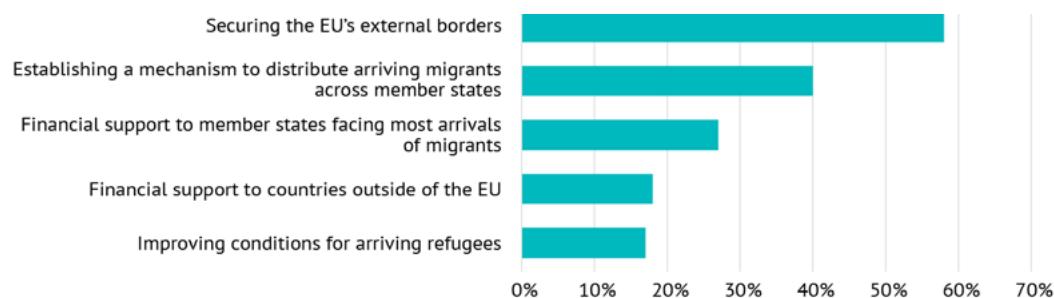
*Figure 17: Should the EU do more or less to manage and respond to migration into EU territory?*



Comparisons with the Eurobarometer indicate that centre-right citizens see migration as a bigger challenge for the EU than the general public. Although the issue receives a rather high response (31%) from the general public, it is only fourth among the key challenges.<sup>23</sup>

But what about the concrete measures that centre-right citizens expect from the EU in this context? Asked to identify the top two objectives the EU should follow when responding to migration, overall, centre-right citizens identified two clear priorities: **securing the EU's external borders (58%) and establishing a mechanism to distribute arriving migrants across member states (40%)**. Both measures are among the most disputed issues when it comes to reforming the migration and asylum system at European level. Financial support for member states facing the most arrivals of migrants came in third, with considerable distance from the top two.

*Figure 18: What should be the EU's main objective when responding to migration?  
(up to two choices; only those respondents who think the EU should do more)*



<sup>23</sup> Special Eurobarometer 517 on the Future of Europe, January 2022. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2554>.

Figure 19: Main objectives when responding to migration.

Member State	First priority	Second priority
Bulgaria	Securing external borders (51%)	Financial support for member states with most arrivals (35%)
Croatia	Securing external borders (61%)	Financial support for member states with most arrivals (42%)
France	Securing external borders (61%)	Distribution mechanism (30%)
Germany	Securing external borders (75%)	Distribution mechanism (46%)
Greece	Securing external borders (52%)	Financial support for member states with most arrivals (47%)
Hungary	Securing external borders (68%)	Financial support for member states with most arrivals (33%)
Italy	Distribution mechanism (55%)	Financial support for member states with most arrivals (34%)
Lithuania	Securing external borders (77%)	Financial support for member states with most arrivals (42%)
Netherlands	Securing external borders (60%)	Distribution mechanism (38%)
Poland	Securing external borders (66%)	Financial support for member states with most arrivals (47%)
Spain	Securing external borders (40%)	Distribution mechanism (39%)
Sweden	Securing external borders (48%)	Distribution mechanism (38%)

Zooming in on these measures, centre-right Europeans are remarkably united in their top priority for migration policy: the **protection of European external borders**. It is noteworthy, however, that in Italy, as a Mediterranean country with many arrivals of refugees over the last years, the issue of border security did not make it to the top for centre-right citizens. A distribution mechanism (55%) and financial support for member states with most arrivals (34%) are seen as more urgent than securing European borders (28%).

Among all other member states, border security is the top issue among centre-right citizens, with support ranging from 40% in Spain to 75% in Germany and 77% in Lithuania. For the latter, the recent border conflict with Belarus was possibly one of the defining drivers for this high level of support.

The establishment of a **permanent mechanism to distribute arriving migrants across member states** is certainly the most controversial issue among member states in the context of reforming the European migration and asylum system. Supported by many western European member states, it is outright rejected by many eastern European governments. It is therefore noteworthy that centre-right citizens do see it as a priority area for European action – even more so, as relocation managed by the supranational level receives high support also among those citizens with a very high national identity. However, an east-west division on this issue is, to some extent, also observable among centre-right citizens. It is supported by many citizens in western, northern and southern Europe, and even voted as top measure among Italian centre-right citizens, but polls lower in Hungary (13%), Poland (21%) and Bulgaria (24%). In these three countries, financial support for those member states facing the highest number of arrivals is seen as a more adequate measure which the EU should pursue.

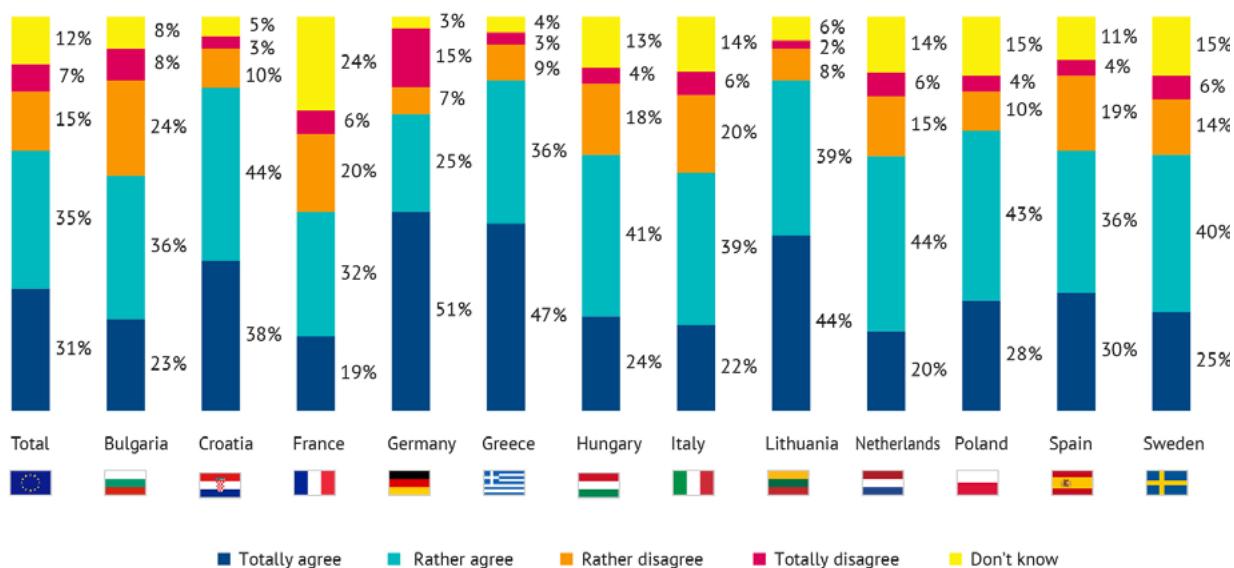
It can be observed that age plays a role in how centre-right voters see this issue. Overall, younger people show much higher support for improving the conditions of arriving migrants and the introduction of a distribution mechanism, whereas older respondents favour support for border security at European level.

## 8. Centre-right citizens believe the EU should become stronger on the international level and speak with a more united voice.

Strategic autonomy and a stronger position on foreign policy issues have been debated at European level for decades. The issue has risen in importance since former US President Donald Trump openly questioned the transatlantic alliance, prompting then German Chancellor Angela Merkel to the assessment that "The times when we [Europeans] could fully rely on others have passed us by a little bit, that's what I've experienced in recent days".<sup>24</sup>

In this context, centre-right citizens want the EU to be a **stronger actor in foreign affairs and speak with a united strong voice at the international level**. 66% of respondents either totally or rather agree to this statement, whereas only 22% disagree. Also individually, support for the statement reaches across all surveyed member states, ranking from 59% in Bulgaria (32% rejecting the statement) and 51% in France (26% rejecting the statement)<sup>25</sup> to 83% in Lithuania and Greece. This level of support from centre-right citizens is consistent with polls of the general EU population over the past decade that show that most EU citizens are in favour of a common security and defence policy.<sup>26</sup>

*Figure 20: The European Union should become a stronger actor in foreign policy areas and speak with a united, strong voice.*



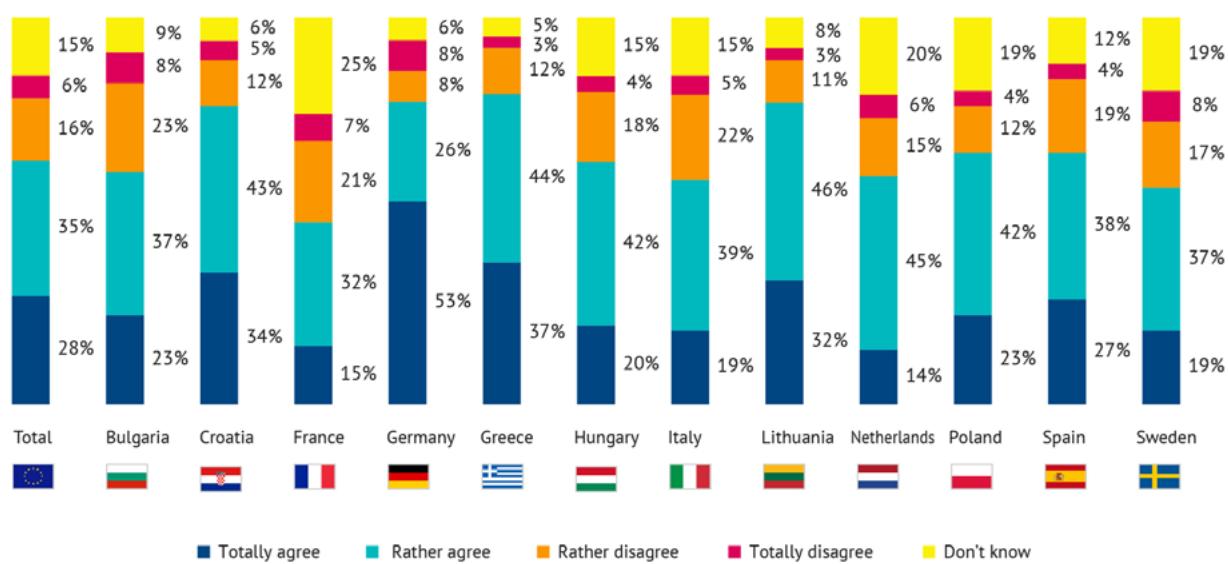
<sup>24</sup> Merkel: Europe can no longer rely on US and Britain. Deutsche Welle. 28 May 2017. <https://p.dw.com/p/2diO9>.

<sup>25</sup> France constituted an outlier in this question, as 24% of citizens did not have an opinion on this question.

<sup>26</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 95, Spring 2021. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2532>.

Centre-right citizens also show strong support for the **pursuit of strategic autonomy**: 63% of polled citizens believe that the EU should become more autonomous and show political independence from other global powers in foreign policy, with an absolute majority supporting the idea in all member states except for France, where only a relative majority support it. Exceptionally high support for strategic autonomy can be observed among citizens in Greece (81%), Lithuania (78%) and Germany (79%).

*Figure 21: The European Union should become more autonomous and demonstrate enough political independence from other global powers in foreign policy issues.*



Especially for Lithuania and Germany, EU foreign policy seems to be of utmost importance for centre-right citizens. In Germany, foreign and defence policy even ranks as the second most important issue for which the EU should have responsibility,<sup>27</sup> in Lithuania, it is centre-right citizens' absolute top priority – a result which should have gained even more importance in Lithuania and many other member states given the latest developments in Ukraine.

Overall, one can see an **overwhelming support for a stronger and more united European foreign and defence policy across centre-right citizens in all member states**, without any regional differences. Although these results precede Russia's invasion of Ukraine, they illustrate that centre-right citizens are looking for a stronger EU in the world, and certainly also in the context of its relations with Russia. The particularly high levels of support for EU action in Lithuania and other central and eastern European countries reinforce this picture. Centre-right Europeans clearly want a stronger EU on the international stage.

<sup>27</sup> Topped only by migration and asylum as well as the protection of EU borders for German respondents.

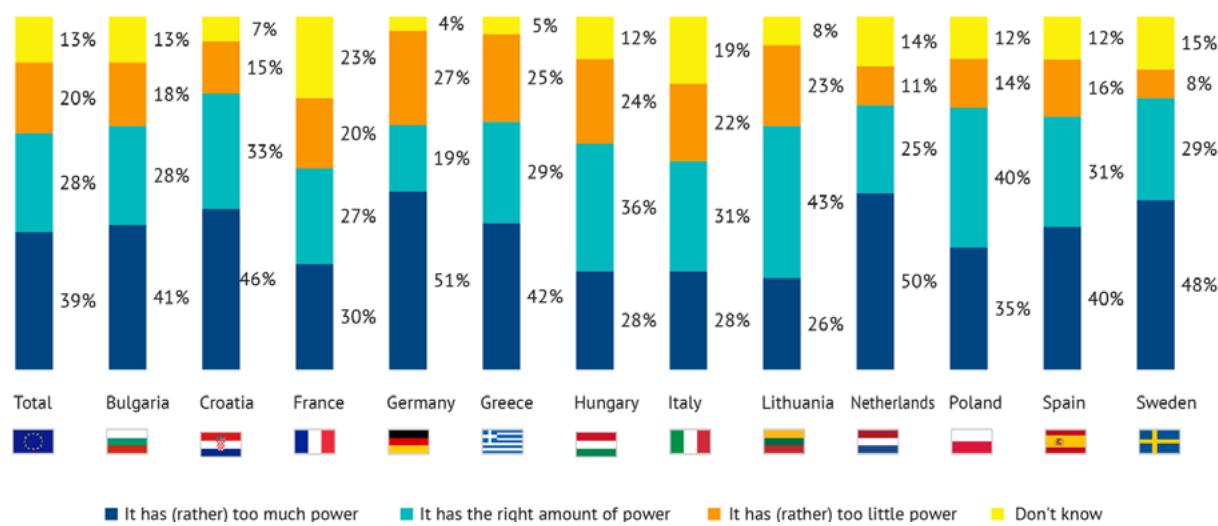
## THE FUTURE OF EU POLITICS

In view of the challenges for the future, the findings above illustrate that centre-right citizens see the EU in the driver's seat to address these priority areas. At the same time, the results above show that they see today's EU action as insufficient. But how can we deal with these issues in a way that meets citizens' expectations? Two observations stand out:

### 9. Centre-right citizens would like the EU to play an active role, but without providing it with more powers.

Although centre-right citizens want the EU to take a stronger role in many areas, they assert that the EU should do so **without receiving more powers from member states**. Only one in five centre-right citizen (21%) thinks the EU should have more powers to address today's policy priorities. 39% even think the EU already has too much power, whereas 28% believe the current level of powers is appropriate.

*Figure 22: From your point of view, has the European Union too much or too little power?*



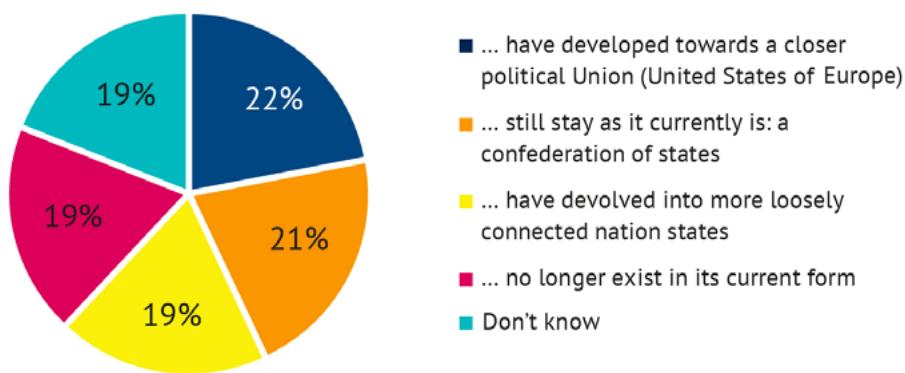
Especially citizens in Germany (51%), the Netherlands (50%) and Sweden (48%) think the EU is currently too powerful. In Hungary, Italy, Lithuania and Poland, relative majorities of citizens believe that the EU currently has enough competences to deal with today's challenges.

It is therefore noteworthy that for centre-right citizens, **being pro-European does not necessarily mean being pro-integrationist**. This message becomes even clearer when looking only at those centre-right citizens who feel very positively about the EU: more pro-European centre-right citizens believe that the EU already has enough powers to face current problems (40% of pro-Europeans), rather than wanting more powers to be transferred to the European level (18%).

One could conclude from this tendency, that many centre-right citizens are not necessarily looking for a deeper, but rather a more effective EU. Here, more effective cooperation among member states in the Council seems crucial – and, in that context, majority voting is viewed positively by majority of centre-right citizens, who believe it should be predominant in EU decision-making.<sup>28</sup>

This picture is confirmed when looking at how Europeans think the Union should develop in the next decades. There is clearly no common vision about the future of Europe. Even though it is the option with most support, only 22% of centre-right Europeans believe the EU should develop towards a closer political Union; this constitutes approximately the same level of support as any other future scenario.

*Figure 23: In 2050, the European Union should...*



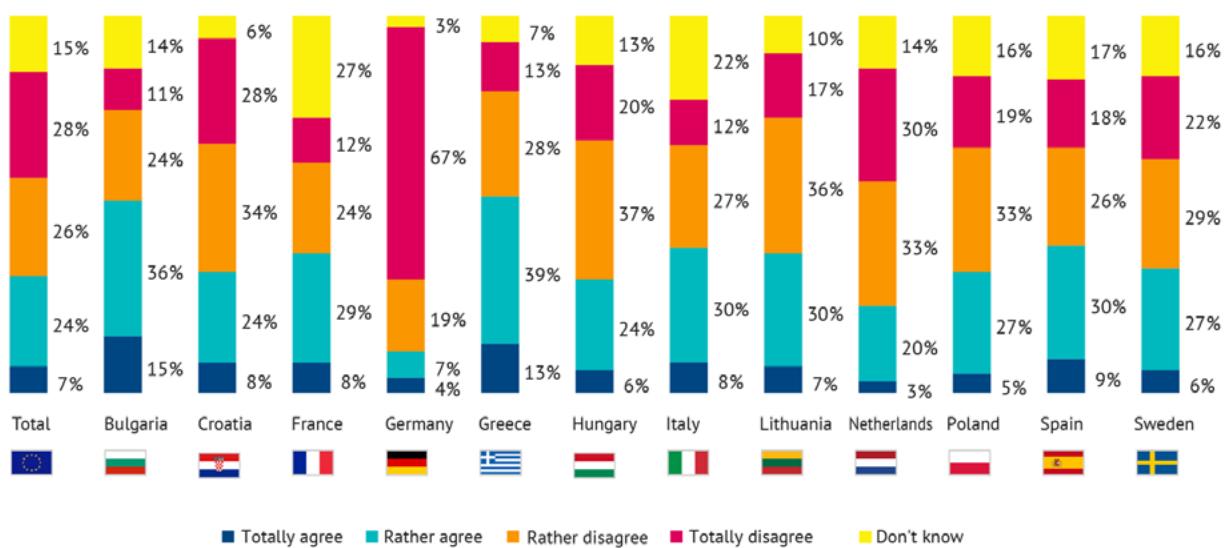
#### **10. Centre-right citizens are looking for more possibilities for participation.**

It seems, however, that centre-right citizens are genuinely interested in contributing to European policymaking. On the one hand, an overall majority (54%) of respondents feel that they do not have enough possibilities to participate in EU politics. Centre-right citizens from nearly all surveyed member states tend to agree with this statement; only in Bulgaria (51%), Greece (52%) and France (37%) do (relative) majorities feel that they are sufficiently involved in EU politics. In France, this feeling might be supported by President Emmanuel Macron's pro-European outlook and the countries prominent position in European politics more generally. The very positive result in Greece is particularly interesting: ten years after the peak of the Eurozone crisis and with Greece's financial fate being under external control of an international troika constituted of European Commission, European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund, centre-right citizens still feel involved and trust that they are well-represented in EU policymaking.

<sup>28</sup> Asked whether "the 27 EU members should be able to decide by majority (possibly overruling your own country) or unanimously when making decisions for the whole EU?", 54% of citizens say the EU should do so mostly (38%) or completely (17%) by majority voting. Only 27% support more (19%) or exclusively (8%) unanimous decisions. 19% do not have an opinion.

In all other countries, however, the majority of **centre-right citizens perceive their involvement in EU politics as insufficient**. This is the case especially in Germany, where only one in ten respondents thinks that German citizens are sufficiently involved in EU policymaking. This is in line with recent Eurobarometer findings, which indicate that 53% of citizens in the EU tend to think that their voice does not count in the EU.<sup>29</sup>

*Figure 24: I feel that as a citizen I have enough possibilities to participate in EU politics.*

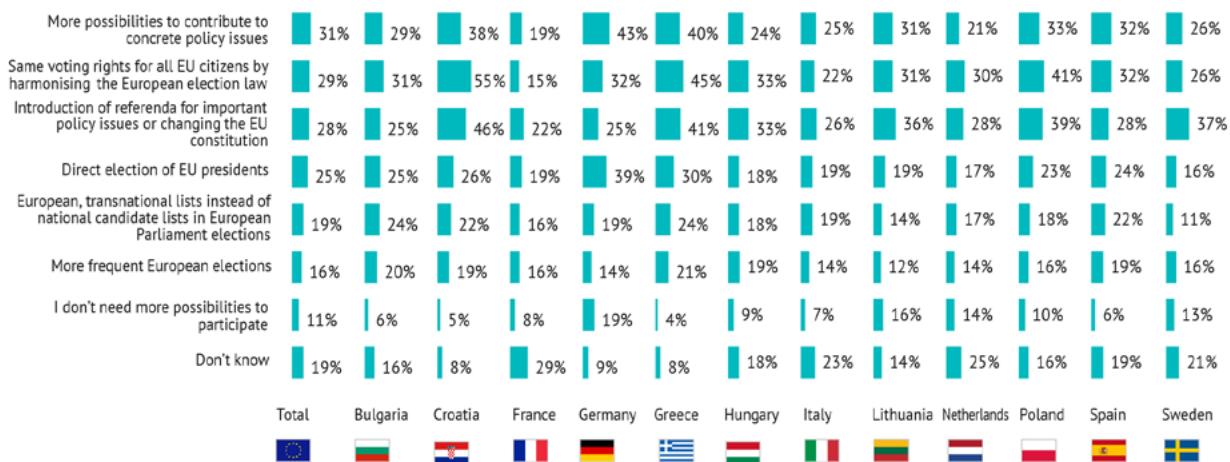


This also goes hand in hand with the results described previously, suggesting that centre-right citizens do not see their voice taken into account within the green transition (see figure 12).

This perception of insufficient possibilities to participate, on the other hand, is coupled with an interest of centre-right citizens in contributing more regularly to political processes at European level. In fact, they do have a clear understanding of how they would like to be involved in the future.

<sup>29</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 95, Spring 2021. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2532>.

*Figure 25: Where would you like to have more possibilities to participate in EU politics?  
(as many choices as preferred)“*



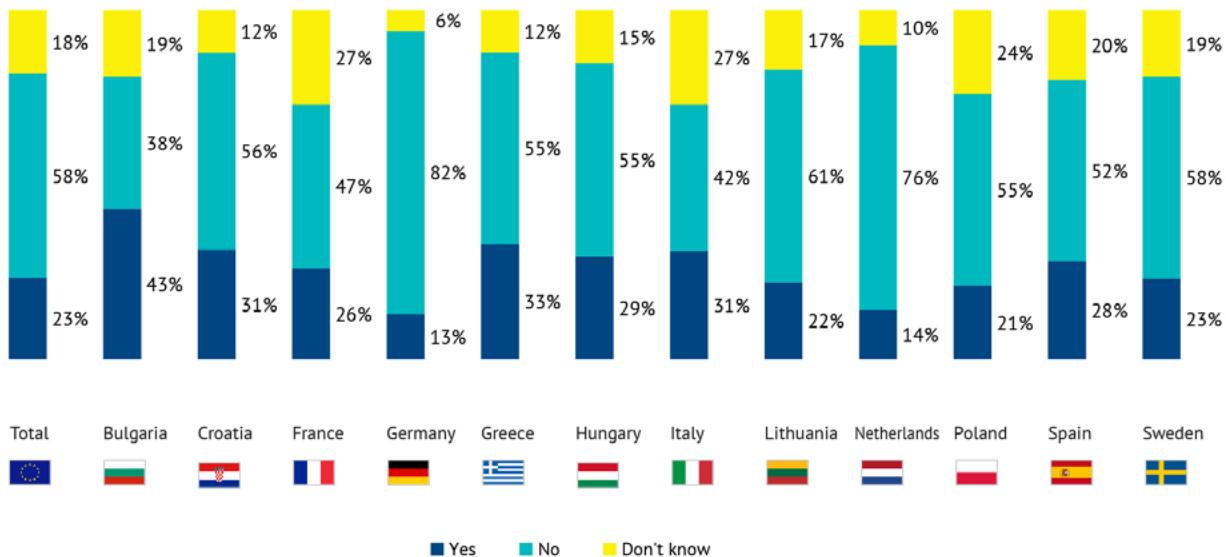
**More direct participation**, especially on concrete policy areas, is the clear number one for centre-right citizens (31%) and is mentioned first by respondents in nearly all surveyed member states. Support for this participatory instrument is especially high in Germany (43%), a country with traditionally rather few means for direct participation on the federal level. Croatians and Greeks also have remarkably high support for this approach, whereas in France (19%) and the Netherlands (21%) support from centre-right citizens for increased direct participation is rather low.

A **reform of the European election law** is also favoured by many centre-right Europeans, resulting in a better harmonisation of voting rights among member states. This is a timely demand, given the European Parliament's current debate of a new election law, which is supposed to be in place by the next European elections. Centre-right citizens in Croatia (55%), Greece (45%) and Poland (41%) show a strong support for this reform.

Participatory elements are seen by the centre-right as a clear way for the better involvement of citizens. Especially younger citizens see participatory democracy as an adequate instrument to gain greater influence in policymaking at European level.

It is symptomatic, however, that despite this support for participatory elements, not many centre-right citizens know about the thus far biggest process of participatory democracy, the **Conference on the Future of Europe**. Fewer than one in four centre-right citizens (23%) have ever heard of the process currently unfolding across Europe. Knowledge about the Conference ranges between 43% in Bulgaria – the only member state where a relative majority has heard of the initiative – to strikingly low 13% in Germany. In Greece (33%), Italy (31%), and Croatia (31%), about one third of centre-right citizens have heard of the process.

*Figure 26: Have you ever heard of the Conference on the Future of Europe, which is currently organised by the European Union?*



# How Germany's centre-right citizens think about Europe

Throughout the report, the results for Germany differ from the overall results on several issues. For this reason, and considering the target audience of this report, this section expands upon and provides preliminary explanations for some of these results. It seems that German respondents have quite different views on the **values** and **policies** of the EU. Their views on the **future of EU politics** are more similar, but German centre-right citizens, more than any other nationality, feel that they lack the means to participate in the EU.

In terms of **values**, German centre-right respondents are **more sceptical of the EU** than other countries surveyed. Over half (57%) of the respondents have a negative image of the EU; Germany is the only country surveyed where this is the majority opinion. Almost one in four Germans surveyed (24%) say that the EU brings them no personal benefits, and over half (51%) say that the EU has too much power. German respondents are also much more likely to believe that Europeans are very distant from each other (27%, compared to the average of 9%). They are particularly unenthusiastic and rather sceptical about economic aspects of the EU: only 8% of German centre-right citizens see economic support as a benefit of the EU, while 70% think it is a waste of money and 50% see it as inefficient. Yet, Germans are also more likely than other respondents to identify peace as a benefit of the EU, with 40% highlighting it as a personal benefit.

These diverging views of the German centre-right contrast with the common image of the country as EU leader and motor of integration, as well as views of the political elite. On the one hand, the results indicate that centre-right citizens are more sceptical than the general German population, as dedicated opinion polls show: a 2019 Pew Research survey found 36% of Germans held a more critical image of the EU, and the most recent Eurobarometer found only 15% holding this view.<sup>30</sup> Yet, they also echo post-COVID-19 findings showing that Germans in particular have a more negative view of the EU. According to previous surveys, 55% of Germans believe the political system of the EU is broken, and 41% of Germans do not trust the EU to make the right decisions after COVID-19.<sup>31</sup>

On the level of **politics**, centre-right Germans not only see the EU's priorities differently, but also have different opinions on key policies. The political priorities highlighted by German centre-right citizens are slightly different to those in other countries, with the emphasis on external relations and home affairs. Migration is ranked first (63%), perhaps reflecting Germany's experience as a destination country not only in the 2015 migrant crisis, but also during the Yugoslav war. This is followed by foreign and defence

<sup>30</sup> Silver, Laura, Moira Fagan and Nicolas Kent. 2020. Majorities in the European Union Have Favorable Views of the Bloc. Pew Research. <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/11/17/majorities-in-the-european-union-have-favorable-views-of-the-bloc/>.

<sup>31</sup> Leonard, Marc and Jana Puglierin. 2021. How to prevent Germany from becoming Eurosceptic. <https://ecfr.eu/publication/how-to-prevent-germany-from-becoming-eurosceptic/>; Standard Eurobarometer 95, Spring 2021. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2532>.

policy (52%), protecting the rule of law (46%) and fundamental human rights (43%). German respondents were much less likely to list economic and fiscal issues (9%), employment and labour market policies (5%) or health policy (4%) than other countries.

This shows that many German respondents do support stronger EU action in key policy areas. Yet, the more traditional areas of EU integration – economic issues – are least popular among them. This seems to support findings from the general population, where Germans were much less likely than those in other countries to highlight unemployment or low economic growth as challenges for the EU.<sup>32</sup>

These different perspectives also seem to lead to differences in policy preferences when it comes to **economic issues**. Germans centre-right citizens show the **strongest opposition to mutual economic support** among EU member states: 78% disagree with the principle of economic solidarity, with 59% strongly disagreeing with it. The creation of European debt is also unpopular among German respondents to the study's survey: only 14% support the idea, with 82% against (including 68% strongly against) it.

German public opposition to mutual economic aid is not new. However, even surveys in the immediate aftermath of the Eurozone crisis found that only a small majority (51%) of the general German population opposed financial assistance to other EU countries.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, previous public opinion surveys found that Germans continued to have a relatively positive view of the EU and thought that their country's membership in the EU had brought positive economic benefits. In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, German leadership has shifted its views on joint debt after long opposition, and a Spiegel/Civey survey in 2020 showed that a majority of German citizens – including a majority of centre-right voters – supported the Franco-German 'Coronabonds' proposal.<sup>34</sup> Yet, the respondents in this study's survey seem to be sceptical of the potential benefits now that the initial economic shock of the pandemic has passed.

Germany's role as largest net contributor in the EU and its perceived role as "*Zahlmeister Europas*" ("paymaster of Europe") during the Eurozone crisis clearly play a role here. German centre-right citizens' more sceptical views on joint debt – and to a lesser extent economic solidarity – are shared by other northern European net contributors such as the Netherlands and Sweden. Yet, such views should also be seen in the context of framing of European policies in general: political and media debates in the years since the economic crisis have often focused on the costs for Germans rather than the economic benefits that Germany has reaped from Eurozone membership.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Special Eurobarometer 517 on the Future of Europe, January 2022. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2554>.

<sup>33</sup> Pew Research Center. 2012. European Unity on the Rocks: Greeks and Germans at Polar Opposites. <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2012/05/29/european-unity-on-the-rocks/>.

<sup>34</sup> Hassenkamp, Milena. Mehrheit der Deutschen für EU-Wiederaufbaufonds. Der Spiegel, 21 May 2020. <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/corona-krise-mehrheit-der-deutschen-fuer-eu-wiederaufbaufonds-a-a51b787a-3845-49cf-9e55-b9eda3ba98fb>.

<sup>35</sup> Henkel, Imke. 2015. German public opinion is caught between scapegoating Greeks and love-bombing them. LSE EUROPP blog. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2015/07/21/german-public-opinion-is-caught-between-scapegoating-greeks-and-love-bombing-them/>.

On **climate change**, another key challenge for the future, centre-right Germans have a significantly different perspective to other respondents. 43% of German respondents think that climate change should *not* be an EU political priority, compared to the overall average of 24%. In fact, over one quarter (27%) think that the EU is doing *too much* to fight climate change, second only to Bulgaria. Germans feel particularly excluded from climate policy – 86% believe that the EU does not sufficiently take their personal situation into account in its climate policy, well above the EU average of 46%. German respondents therefore seem to voice slight dissatisfaction with the course the EU is taking on environmental protection and fighting climate change, which they consider out of touch with their own views. This dissatisfaction is not new, given the most recent polarisation over the European Commission's Green Taxonomy and the role of nuclear energy.

These differing policy priorities may also explain why German respondents have the **lowest levels of identification** with the EU: only 46% of centre-right Germans identify as European, compared to the overall average of 78%. These numbers are much lower than findings among the general population, where 65% of Germans identified as European, above the EU average of 57%.<sup>36</sup>

**Yet, despite this variation between Germans' and other respondents' views, their opinions on the future of EU integration are more alike.** Like all respondents, German centre-right citizens' views on the future of Europe are split. German respondents, however, feel by far the **least able to participate in EU policymaking**; only 10% think that they have enough possibilities to do so. In key policy areas such as climate, only around 5% of Germans believe that the EU takes their personal situation into account. Germans were also least likely to have heard of the Conference on the Future of Europe, with only 13% being aware of the initiative.

The focus of this survey does not allow for a clear assessment of why the results for Germany contrast with the country's pro-EU image and the reasons for centre-right citizens' restraint on European integration. Although the political elite may understand the EU's benefits for Germany, this survey echoes other findings on the messages not being clear for all citizens. It indicates that a key way to improve sentiment towards the EU and rebuild consensus is to clearly frame the EU as a net positive for Germans, and to highlight how German interests are fulfilled through EU membership.<sup>37</sup> Increasing opportunities for citizen participation are also likely to help, especially given that German respondents to this survey show a particular openness to more involvement in EU politics. Fostering citizen involvement – and communication around the opportunities to participate that already exist – may therefore also be an important tool to tackle these negative views of the EU.

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<sup>36</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 95, Spring 2021. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2532>.

<sup>37</sup> Leonard, Marc and Jana Puglierin. 2021. How to prevent Germany from becoming Eurosceptic. <https://ecfr.eu/publication/how-to-prevent-germany-from-becoming-eurosceptic/>

## Conclusions

Overall, the results of this survey show that European centre-right citizens have more in common than perhaps expected: **on most issues, relatively few major divisions show among and within member states.** Expected major rifts – between East and West, South and North – are absent from the results. Although citizens see themselves as quite distant from other European countries, they do not appear to be so. Most centre-right citizens share traditional values. They have a positive view of the EU, consider themselves European, and see the benefits and responsibilities of the EU going beyond economic issues. The surveyed citizens want the EU to tackle many of today's challenges: climate change, migration, and a stronger foreign policy. They also seek more participation in EU policymaking on these issues. Indeed, their views on the most important issues facing the EU today are relatively uniform – with the exception of economic issues, where the views of respondents are more divided among member states.

Centre-right citizens therefore seem to be relatively unified amongst themselves. Interestingly, they also seem to show **more similarities than differences to the general EU population.** Our results are broadly comparable with other surveys of EU citizens, particularly 2021 and 2022 Eurobarometer results. For the most part, centre-right citizens' political priorities and views on the future of Europe align with those of other citizens in the EU.

We are currently at a crucial point in time for all Europeans, which will ultimately define how the Union progresses into the future: in the middle of a war at its borders, the EU is preparing for a post-pandemic future. In the upcoming months, the Conference on the Future of Europe is entering its decisive phase, where it will set out how the Union intends to address the big challenges of our time. Finally, European political families will soon enter an important 'reflection period' ahead of the next European elections in 2024, defining their priorities for the political campaigns leading up to the elections. This political environment sets the stage for lasting political change and policymakers should, therefore, use this opportunity to act upon citizens' priorities.

By creating a **unifying political agenda** and **following up proactively on citizens' expectations,** policymakers can emphasise the similarities among centre-right citizens. Given that many citizens feel they do not share values with other Europeans while they actually do, highlighting a joint approach towards the main challenges of our time may foster greater unity among the centre-right and further improve citizens' opinions of the EU.

## Annex 1: Methodology

The research underlying this report was commissioned by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung to ifok in cooperation with a Belgian think tank, the Egmont Royal Institute for International Relations. The core of the methodology builds on a comparative, quantitative analysis of an online survey (CAWI, Computer Assisted Web Interview) on perspectives on the future of Europe from citizens on the centre-right political spectrum of European societies. The survey consists of 25 questions across a wide range of policy fields (see appendix) and was conducted by the polling agencies Ipsos and Civey.<sup>38</sup> The field work for this analysis was undertaken in November and December 2021 and addressed 1500 individuals in each of the following 12 countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden. These member states were selected to ensure geographical representation within the EU and include smaller, medium, and large member states, as well as eastern, western, northern and southern regions within the EU. The study furthermore selected a balanced sample of member states with centre-right governments and those where centre-right parties are opposition parties.

Figure 27: Member states included in the survey



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<sup>38</sup> Ipsos was in charge of the surveys in Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, whereas Civey focused on the German case study.

The goal of this study was to analyse European perspectives from citizens at the centre of European societies. As such, the study focused on the centrist and centre-right leaning population in each member state as the target group for the centre-right political family.

The online questionnaire started with a screening question asking the participants to locate themselves on an 11-point left-right scale, representing the political spectrum from left (0) to right (10). This was done to limit the surveyed sample, representative of the entire population of a member state, to the "group of centre-right citizens". Only those respondents who positioned themselves as centrist and centre-right, within the range of 4 to 8, could continue answering the questionnaire.

The methods applied by Ipsos and Civey in the implementation of the survey are based on the demographic criteria of age, gender and region/location. Yet, since the study is aimed at the centre-right citizens and not at the the population as a whole, the sample is weighted and thus representative in that it is reflecting the demographic setup of the group of centre-right oriented citizens across Europe, not the general national demographics. Also, for allowing a comparison across the 12 European societies, the results for each country were proportionalised based on the respective number of inhabitants.

## Annex 2: List of figures with title

**Figure 1:**

Which of these values are most important for you (up to three choices)?

**Figure 2:**

To what extent do you personally feel you are a citizen of your own country?

**Figure 3:**

To what extent do you personally feel you are ...

**Figure 4:**

To what extent do you personally feel you are European?

**Figure 5:**

What image do you have of the EU?

**Figure 6:**

In which aspects do you think that you personally benefit from the European Union (up to three choices)?

**Figure 7:**

What are for you the most negative aspects of the European Union (up to three choices)?

**Figure 8:**

In terms of shared values, do you think Europeans are close or distant to each other?

**Figure 9:**

Where do you see the biggest challenges for future generations (up to three choices)?

**Figure 10:**

In your opinion, what are topics the EU should be responsible for (up to four choices)?

**Figure 11:**

Are EU decision makers currently doing too much, the right amount or not enough to protect the environment and fight climate change?

**Figure 12:**

EU decision makers take into account your personal situation sufficiently in their approach to fight climate change and protect the environment.

**Figure 13:**

My country should provide money to the European Union to support other member states when they are in need of it.

**Figure 14:**

The European Union should create joint debts to support member states.

**Figure 15:**

My country should provide money to the European Union to support other member states when they are in need of it.

**Figure 16:**

A member state in crisis should commit to reforms and cost cutting before receiving financial support from the European Union.

**Figure 17:**

Should the EU do more or less to manage and respond to migration into EU territory?

**Figure 18:**

What should be the EU's main objective when responding to migration (up to two choices; only those respondents who think the EU should do more)?

**Figure 19:**

Main objectives when responding to migration.

**Figure 20:**

The European Union should become a stronger actor in foreign policy areas and speak with a united, strong voice.

**Figure 21:**

The European Union should become more autonomous and demonstrate enough political independence from other global powers in foreign policy issues.

**Figure 22:**

From your point of view, has the European Union too much or too little power?

**Figure 23:**

In 2050, the European Union should...

**Figure 24:**

I feel that as a citizen I have enough possibilities to participate in EU politics.

**Figure 25:**

Where would you like to have more possibilities to participate in EU politics?

**Figure 26:**

Have you ever heard of the Conference on the Future of Europe, which is currently organised by the European Union?

**Figure 27:**

Member states included in the survey

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