

PRESS RELEASE

## Europeans want environmental protection, but are concerned about their wallets

**The new European Commission is expected to officially take office on December 1. Ursula von der Leyen, the elected President of the Commission, has already set the first priorities, but what do Europeans expect from Europe? The latest edition of “eupinions” shows that protecting the environment is very high on many citizens’ to-do list. However, at a personal level, Europeans are primarily concerned about the rising cost of living and their jobs.**

Gütersloh, 27 November 2019. Which issue will the new EU Commission tackle first? If it were up to Europeans, Brussels would address environmental protection as well as economic and social policy measures. Asked about the issues that they consider to be especially important and worth protecting now, environmental protection ranked very high on Europeans’ agenda (40%). At the same time, roughly half say that at a personal level, the rising cost of living is causing them the most concern at the moment. Those are the findings in the new edition of “eupinions”, the EU-wide opinion poll that the Bertelsmann Stiftung regularly conducts to learn about citizens’ views of current issues across the EU. The opinion poll is representative of the EU and its six largest Member States, including Germany. Over 12,000 people were surveyed in total.

“Europeans must be convinced that common European policy generates added value. Citizens want to see results, but it remains to be seen whether the new Commission will be able to enact everything that Europeans hope for,” said Isabell Hoffmann, author and head of the study “eupinions”

### **Environment, jobs and social security: What Europeans expect**

Environmental protection is by far the most important issue for Europeans (40%). It is followed by “jobs” (34%) and “social security” (23%). However, there are some differences between the large EU states when it comes to their lists of priorities: Protecting the environment is the most important issue in Germany (49%), France (39%) and the Netherlands (35%). By contrast, many Italians find their jobs more important (60%). In Spain (40%) and Poland (36%), people also consider the protection of their jobs to be significantly more important than protecting the environment.

A glimpse at the age distribution shows that environmental protection is popular with young Europeans in particular. This issue is supported most of all by 16- to 25-year olds. Yet another concern for the younger generation is interesting too: loneliness. Concern about loneliness is twice as high for them (up to 25 years old) as for older Europeans (46- to 65-year olds). As respondents’ age increases, the issue of “social security” becomes more of a focus. This issue is important for one third (29%) of Europeans between the ages of 56 and 65, while it is only a concern for 14% of 16- to 25-year olds.

### **Fear of the rising cost of living affects outlook for the future**

At the very top of Europeans’ personal list of worries is “the rising cost of living” (51%). The survey found that these fears are most pronounced in Poland (62%) and France (61%). By

contrast, they are the weakest in Germany, the largest economic power in Europe (44%). In Italy, fear of job loss (46%) assumes the top place among their worries. When looking at the age distribution, we see that younger Europeans are fairly anxious about their career opportunities. Almost one third of Europeans up to the age of 35 worry about labour market uncertainties. However, these fears are somewhat lower for older citizens.

“Environmental protection is important for Europeans, but they are also concerned about the rising cost of living. By no means do all Europeans’ concerns fall within the Commission’s jurisdiction, which makes it all the more important for Brussels to explain how Europe works and provides added value,” said Isabell Hoffmann.

### **The younger they are, the more optimistic their outlook: What future does the EU have?**

Citizens’ view of the EU remains consistently positive, as we have seen in previous “eupinions” surveys. 54% of Europeans support a greater integration of the EU and 50% have an optimistic view of its future. Interestingly, the EU enjoys the greatest support for a strong Europe in states where the citizens are most worried about their jobs. 70% of Italians want more “political and economic integration” in the EU, while 63% of Poles and 61% of Spaniards are optimistic about the future of Europe.

If we compare age groups, we see that younger Europeans are somewhat more optimistic: The strongest champions of EU integration and the group with the most optimistic view of the EU’s future are 16- to 25-year olds, according to the authors of the study. A majority of older Europeans are also still pro-European, but they are somewhat less optimistic than the younger generations.

#### Background

“eupinions” is the Bertelsmann Stiftung’s public opinion research instrument, developed in cooperation with Dalia Research. It is regularly used to question the citizens of all EU Member States on European matters. The opinion poll for this analysis took place in June 2019 and, with a sample size of 12,123 participants, is representative of the EU and its Member States Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Poland. Detailed information on the opinion poll methodology can be found on page 31 of the publication:

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**You will find more information under [www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de](http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de) and at [www.eupinions.eu](http://www.eupinions.eu).**

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