

PRESS RELEASE

Support for Ukraine is declining slightly

A large majority of Europeans continue to support admitting Ukraine to the EU. The willingness to accept refugees also remains strong. However, the level of approval for arms transfers is dropping slightly in all EU states, and in Germany has slipped below the 50% mark for the first time since the war's beginning.

Gütersloh, 1 December 2022. Across Europe, 50% of respondents still say their countries should support Ukraine by providing it with arms shipments, thus allowing it to defend itself against Russian attacks. In March, shortly after the war began, this EU-wide figure was 56%. In Germany, however, the level of public approval for arms transfers fell below 50% in September (to 48%, down from 57% in March). This rate is lowest in Italy, at 36%. By contrast, approval for such activities has remained at a consistently high level of 76% in Poland, Ukraine's direct neighbor. These are the findings of the EU-wide survey conducted by eupinions, the Bertelsmann Stiftung's European opinion-research tool, in September. The survey is representative for the EU as a whole, as well as for the seven member states of Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Spain. It is being published in cooperation with the Belgian King Baudouin Foundation.

There has been great concern that the public's willingness to accept personal sacrifices in order to become independent of Russian energy supplies would collapse over time. However, this effect has occurred to a much lesser extent than feared. Across the EU, a clear majority of 67% still says the EU should become more energy independent even if this means higher costs. In March, this figure was 74%. As in the surveys conducted in March and June, Germany shows the EU's lowest national-level result on this question, at 62%. Overall, eupinions has recorded a decline of 10 percentage points in Germany since March on this issue. At 80%, the willingness to bear additional personal costs in the drive for energy independence is highest in Poland. Belgium recorded the sharpest drop in this area, showing a decline of 12 percentage points (March: 76%, September: 64%). "This development was to be expected in view of the continuation of very high inflation rates and the start of the heating season. It should continue to be monitored, as it holds the potential to generate political conflict," said Isabell Hoffmann, a Europe expert at the Bertelsmann Stiftung and head of eupinions. "However, the end of summer has not meant the end of solidarity with Ukraine."

Rising cost of living is Europeans' main concern

Asked what worries them most at the moment, respondents in the EU additionally showed just how strongly inflation is weighing on their minds today. A total of 49% overall cite the rising cost of living as their main concern, with this figure rising to 51% in Germany. The Spanish have fewer concerns in this respect. On the Iberian peninsula, only 39% say rising costs are their main concern.

More than three-quarters of the Europeans surveyed say they are ready to accept Ukrainian refugees in their own countries. The extent of this openness is greatest in Spain – and has been so consistently since the first survey on the issue in March. A total of 89% say their country should accept refugees. Across the EU, 77% are still of this opinion. In Germany, this

level of willingness has declined since March (86%) to 74% in September. The lowest level can be seen in France, with 72%. The public level of willingness to accept refugees has thus fallen by 12 percentage points in both countries.

Clear majority supports the admission of Ukraine to the European Union

There is still a clear majority in favor of admitting Ukraine to the European Union. Just under two-thirds of respondents in the EU indicated that they are in favor of this step, a share six percentage points lower than in March. The level of support remains highest in Poland (82%), followed by Spain (78%). In contrast, Germany shows the greatest degree of skepticism. Here, the majority in favor of accession has shrunk to just 55% (down from 61% in March).

With levels of support consistently above those seen for any other question on this survey, Europeans agree that the EU needs a common defense policy. Nearly 90% of respondents in the EU agree with this statement. Almost 80% of Europeans also say they are in favor of the EU taking a more active role on the world stage. The levels of support for these statements differ only slightly from one country to another. “Since Russia’s attack on Ukraine, traditional defense policy has once again become very popular,” Hoffmann said. “Europeans recognize the importance of a common strategy to deal with major crises. This applies not just to financial, economic and health crises, but to security crises as well.”

Additional information

eupinions is the Bertelsmann Stiftung’s European opinion-research project, developed jointly with Dalia Research. The program regularly surveys citizens from all EU member states on issues of European importance. The surveys referenced in this analysis took place in March, June and September 2022 across the entire EU. With sample sizes of 13,208 (March), 13,220 (June) and 13,204 (September), they are representative of the EU as a whole as well as of the seven member states of Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Spain. Detailed information on the survey’s methodology can be found in the publication.

For more information, please visit: www.eupinions.eu

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