

EU 2020 - the View of the Europeans

Results of a representative survey in selected member states of the European Union

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Editors:

Armando Garcia-Schmidt
armando.garciaschmidt@bertelsmann.de

Dr. Dominik Hierlemann
dominik.hierlemann@bertelsmann.de

Bertelsmann Stiftung, Gütersloh

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Europe searching for itself

Opinion poll researchers tend to think of fatigue, incomprehension and displeasure in connection with the electorates of the European Union when it comes to the future of the integration project. More optimistic individuals view the constitutional and enlargement debates or the contentious issue of which competences should be assigned to Brussels as elements in a recurring cycle specific to the integration process—something the electorate, however, perceives to be a crisis.

Moods of this kind can have an influence on policymaking. Thus, European policymakers currently seem cautious and hesitant as they approach the future of the European Union. Opinion polls make up the referential framework for this, most of which seek to elucidate the views of the electorate. Hitherto the debate has not been based on empirical data (if one disregards indices of wishes and feelings) about what the electorate believes are plausible scenarios for European policymaking.

The present Bertelsmann Stiftung study seeks to fill this gap. To this end, TNS Emnid conducted a representative poll for the foundation in 13 selected member states of the European Union. The survey sought to ascertain how the EU electorate imagines the form and structure of the European system will be in the year 2020. Starting with this question, the interviewees were presented with various scenarios that depicted the future legal basis of the political system, focused on the enlargement of the European Union, and probed the feasibility of specific joint projects.

The survey was conducted in the following 13 countries: Belgium, Germany, Finland, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Slovakia, Spain and Hungary. The inhabitants of the states selected constitute 88 percent of the total population of the EU. Of the 730 votes in the European Council, 573 belong to states covered by the survey. Nine of the thirteen states will be incumbents of the council presidency between 2006 and

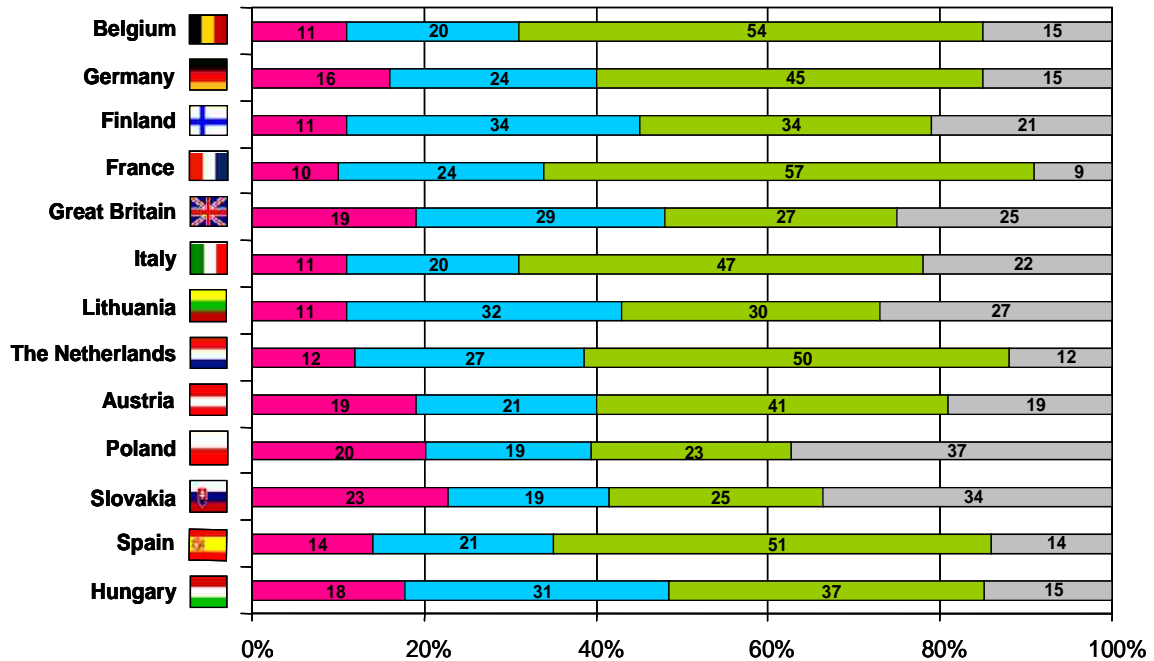
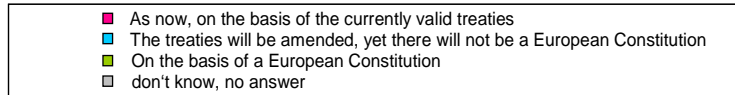
2011. Nine states had ratified the European constitution at the time of the survey; four had not ratified it or were proposing to ratify it. Nine states were members of the EU before 2004; four belong to the “new members” group. Five founding states (Belgium, Germany, France, Italy and the Netherlands) were included in the selection. Eight states are net contributors to the EU budget, and five net recipients. Seven states have a per capita GDP above the EU average, and five beneath it. Finally, the survey covers all of the geographical areas within the EU.

The survey was conducted in the form of telephone or face-to-face representative interviews, with a total of more than 12,000 people queried. The interviews were conducted between 1 August and 4 September 2006.

There is no alternative to deepening

The future of the European constitution currently seems more uncertain than ever. Despite a phase of intense reflection, nothing has as yet emerged from the discussions between the politicians of the EU member states on how to proceed with the constitutional process. However, the survey results demonstrate that a relative majority of the interviewees (40 percent on average across countries) now believes that a European constitution will be introduced by the year 2020. If one adds the 25 percent who believe in a revision of the basic treaties, though not in a constitution, then we have an overwhelming majority that believes the institutional foundations of the European Union will be revised. On the whole the respondents believe that the kind of integration that has obtained hitherto will continue with steps towards institutional reform. Only a small minority believes in the preservation of the status quo on the basis of the basic treaties currently in force.

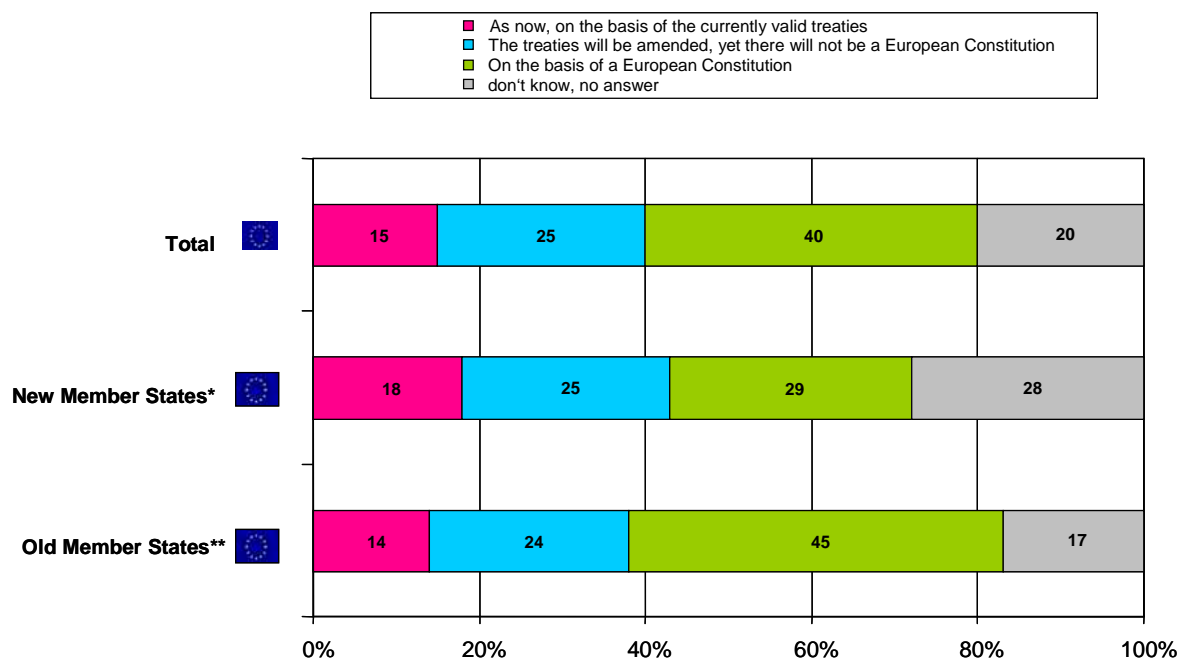
Interviewees from...



Interestingly enough, expectations that the EU will in future be governed on the basis of a constitution are highest in France and the Netherlands, that is, in the countries in which the draft European constitution was rejected in two referendums a year ago. In France and the Netherlands, furthermore, the number of people who believe that doing nothing with regard to the development of the basic treaties is a realistic option is very small indeed.

Apart from the United Kingdom, there is widespread scepticism about the introduction of a European constitution by 2020 in, above all, Finland, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia. When compared with the overall European results, the Central and Eastern European countries consider the introduction of a constitution to be fairly improbable. In the new member states, with the exception of Hungary, the proportion of those who do not wish to or cannot respond to this question is very noticeable.

It is currently fashionable in public debate to speak in general terms about the crisis surrounding the concept of European unification within the founding states. However, the survey results suggest that the population has already prepared itself mentally for further steps towards greater integration. A glance at the overall European picture shows that the electorate in the core European integration countries entertains the greatest expectations.



* New Member States = Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary

**Old Member States = Belgium, Germany, Finland, France, Great Britain, Italy, The Netherlands, Austria, Spain



Whereas the data do not provide information about how much approval the European integration process enjoys in the countries covered by the survey, they point nonetheless to the fact that further steps leading to more institutional deepening are expected among the classical proponents of the unification process, in contrast to the United Kingdom, the new member states, or even Finland.

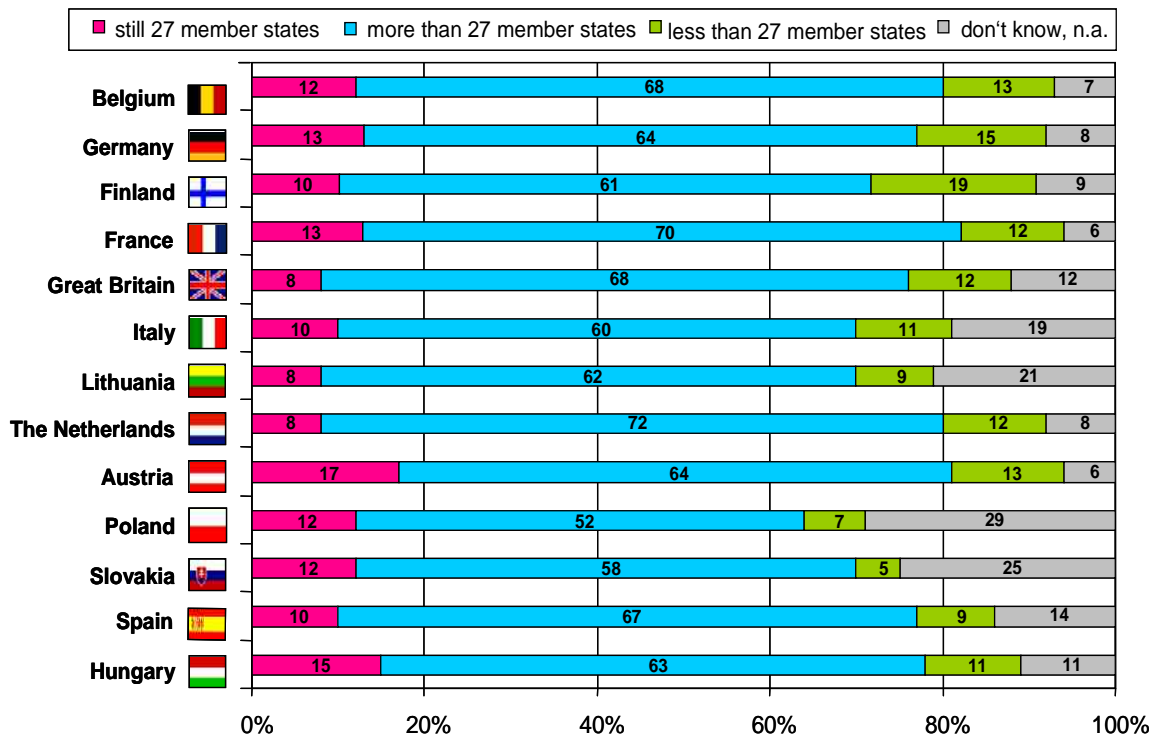
France and the Netherlands are of interest for another reason. The two countries had the lowest proportion of interviewees who were unable or unwilling to respond to the questions. The intensive debate before and after the referendums seems in fact to have led to a state of affairs in which opinions about

European issues in these countries have reached an advanced stage. The rejection of the European constitution was seen by French and Dutch proponents of integration as a disgraceful European debacle. However, in the long term it may have had a very positive effect—the politicization of the European issue and a more pronounced emotional identification with Europe, something which is normally found on the level of national policymaking.

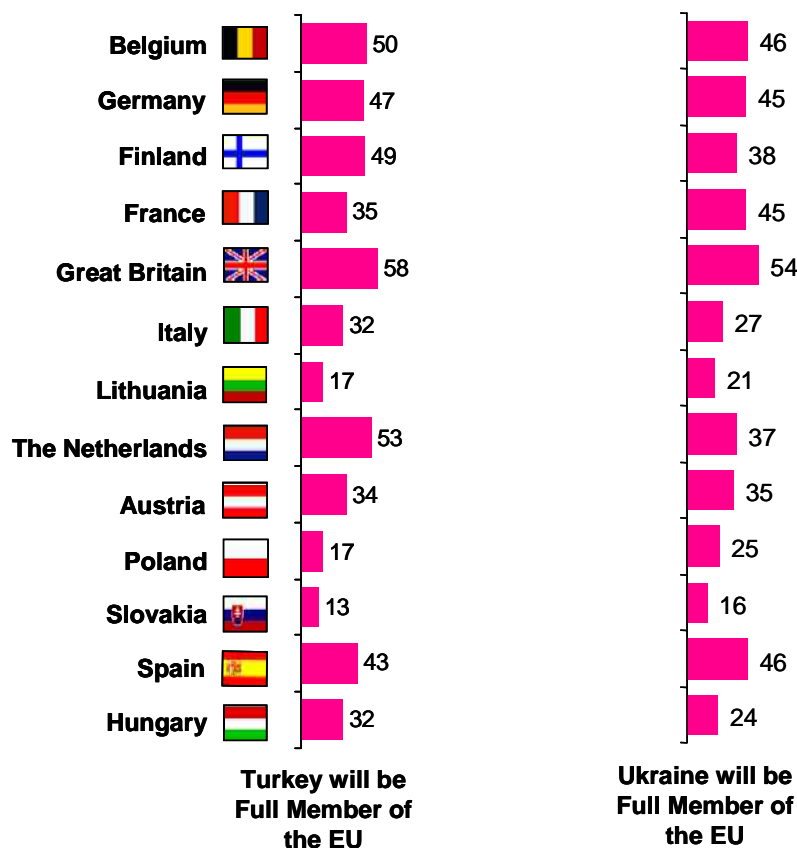
The EU continues to grow. Where will it end?

In all of the states included in the survey, a large majority is of the opinion that the EU, even after the accession of Romania and Bulgaria, will have more members in 2020. This assumption is especially pronounced among the Dutch and the French, followed by the British and the Belgians, and least in evidence in Poland, even if more than half of the population assumes that the Union will continue to expand.

Interviewees from...

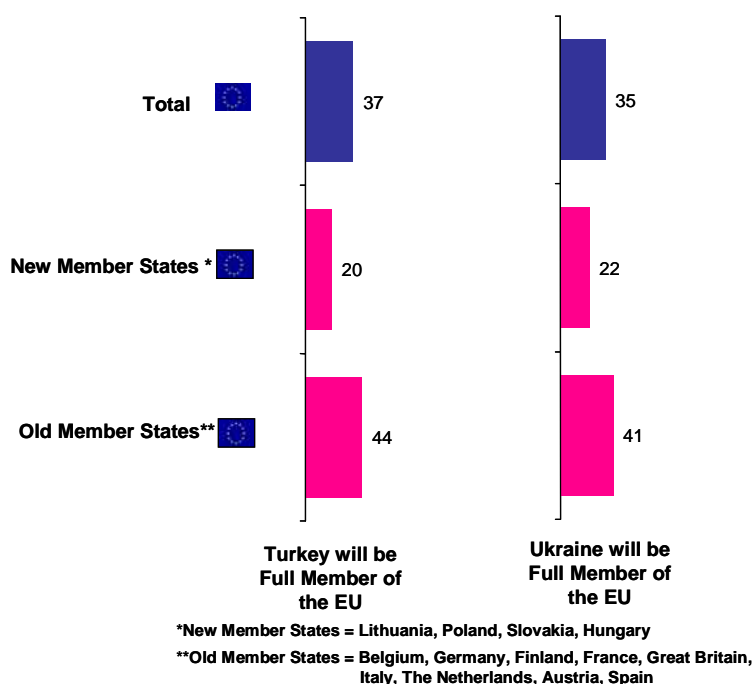


The picture changed when interviewees were asked to comment on the possibility of Turkey or Ukraine joining the Union by the year 2020. The majority of the electorate believes that they will not have joined the Union in the intervening period. Exceptions are the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, where far more than half of the population believes that Turkey will have joined the Union by the year 2020. One out of two Britons believes that Ukraine will also be in the Union by that time. On the other hand, only a handful of the interviewees in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are able to envisage Turkey or Ukraine as EU members in fifteen years' time.



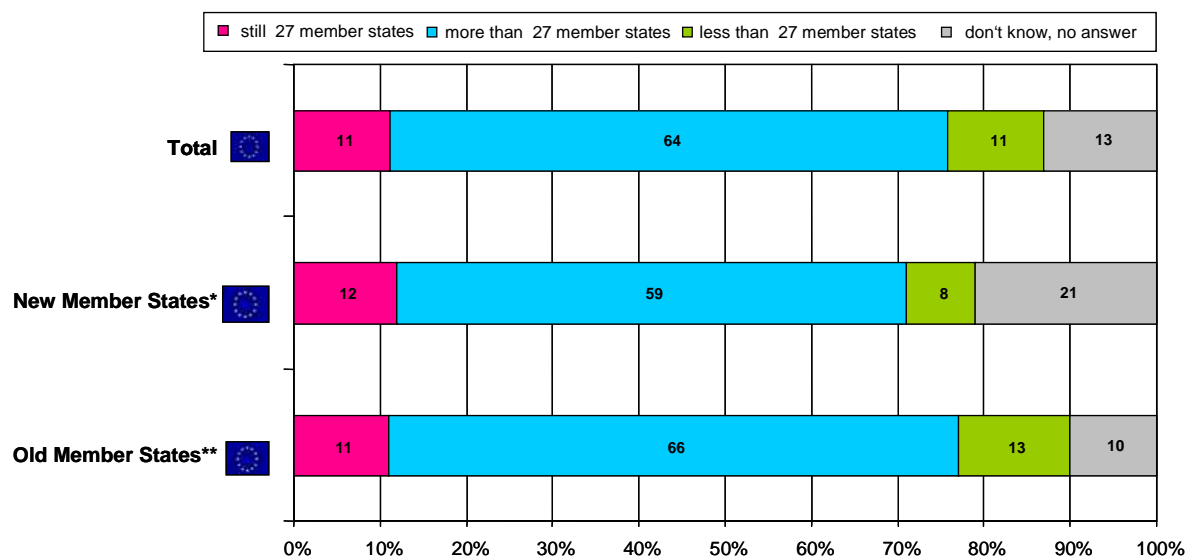
It is noticeable that the younger generation in Europe in particular is prepared for more expansion. Three out of four interviewees under the age of 29 assume that there will be further enlargement before 2020. On the other hand, there is no generational difference when it comes to the possible accession of Turkey or Ukraine. Younger people also do not believe that these two countries will have joined the EU by the year 2020.

A noticeably large proportion of the interviewees in the new member states of Poland, Lithuania and Slovakia —but also Italy, a founding member of the EU—refused to answer the question about the future size of the Union and also refused to make any kind of prediction concerning the accession of Turkey and Ukraine. On the other hand, interestingly enough, hardly any of the interviewees in France and the Netherlands refused to answer these questions.



Of the nations included in the survey, the Poles and the Slovaks are least able to imagine the Union breaking up or going into reverse gear. In Finland, conversely, one in five of the interviewees believes that the European Union will be smaller in 2020 than it is today.

No matter whether EU citizens are in favour of or against an increase in the size of the Union, they consider it to be a logical and foreseeable part of its development. European integration continues to be perceived as a project open on all sides and as yet incomplete within its borders, and if one takes into account the attitudes of the younger generation, this view will be even more pronounced in the years to come. Debates about artificial boundaries, the purpose of which is to exclude central parts of the European continent such as the western Balkans from the common project, will simply come to nothing.



*New Member States = Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary

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After a realistic assessment of the situation, only a minority of Europeans assumes that the process has come to a halt. However, most EU citizens see membership for states such as Turkey or Ukraine as a Herculean undertaking which cannot be completed within a period of fifteen years

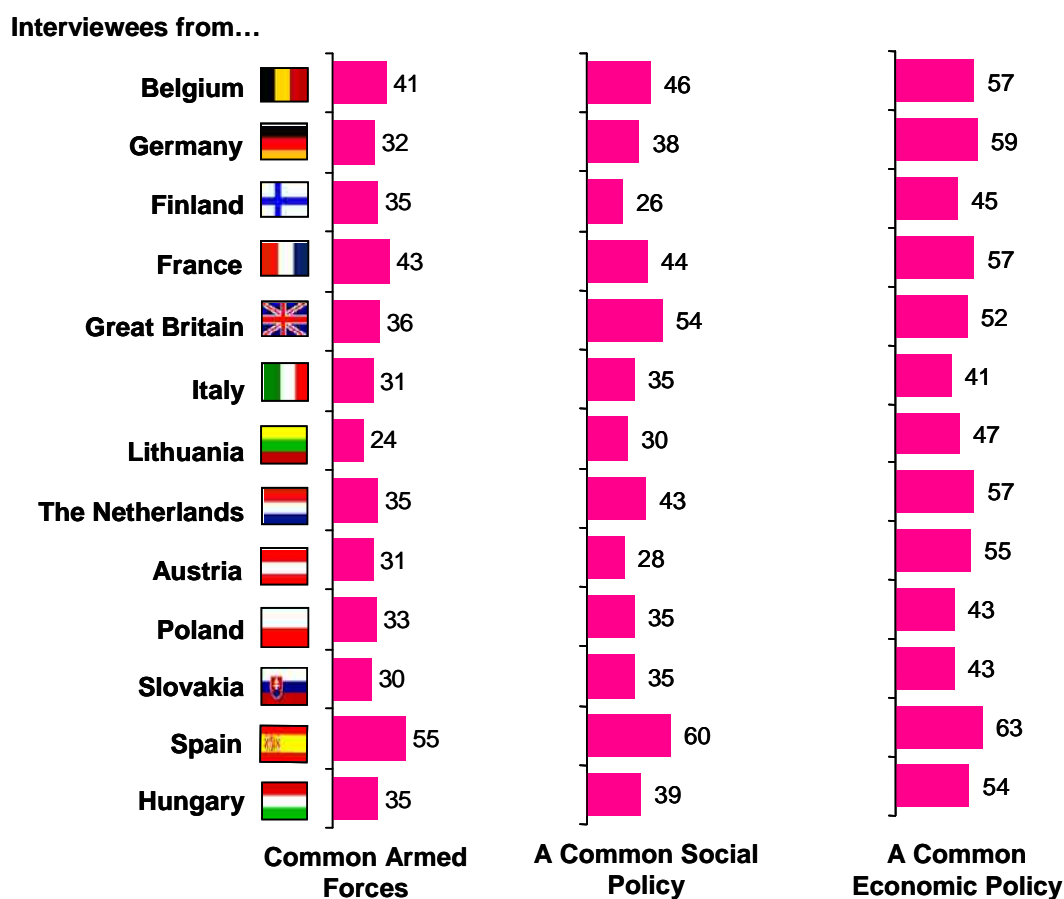
New European large-scale projects?

In certain policy areas the majority of the interviewees expects a common European policy by the year 2020. Economic policy and its corollary, a European government for the economy, is the project that seems feasible within the next fifteen years—more so than social policy or a common army. With the exception of Finland and Italy, more than half of the population in all the old member states believes in a common economic policy. A noticeable feature in the case of Italy is the high proportion (20 percent) of those who were unable to comment on potential common policy areas.

The numbers for a common social policy and a European army are clearly lower than those for economic policy. Any other result would have been remarkable, since using existing economic integration as a point of departure seems to make far more sense than using European social policy, which exists

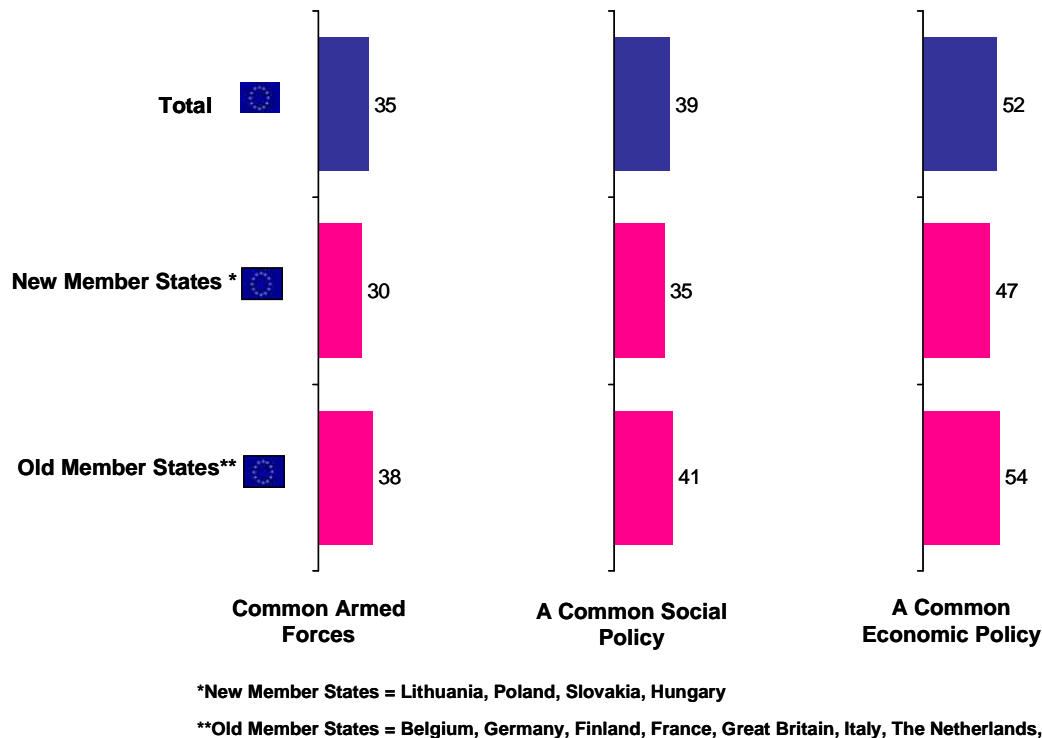
only in rudimentary form, not to mention an army. Social policy and control over one's own army are, in fact, two of the last remaining bastions of national policymaking.

On average, more than a third of the interviewees in all countries believes that within the next fifteen years these policy areas will probably have been transferred completely to the European level. A large section of the population is evidently convinced that there will be greater acceleration in the integration process, and not deadlock.



In Spain, far more than half of the population expects common European policies in the year 2020 in all three areas—the army, social policy and economic policy. What is more, with the exception of Italy the citizens of the EU core states—Belgium, Germany, France and the Netherlands—believe that progress will be made towards greater integration.

The majority of the British consider a common social policy to be realistic. This seems rather surprising, though it might be due to the fact that they have a concept of social policy that differs from that which is the norm in the rest of the EU. It might also be that the British are afraid of being steamrolled by the social policy demands made by many states on the Continent.



All in all, the proportion of those who expect neither a common social policy, a common economic policy, nor a European army—in other words, who do not believe in the implementation of any of these projects—is small. The majority of Europeans is convinced that there will be another new European project, even if it has not as yet been clearly defined.

Consequences for European policymakers

The survey focused on the topics of deepening and enlargement as well as the question of large-scale political projects. Respondents voiced their views about possible scenarios and the shape of the European Union in the year 2020. What may be deduced from the data and what are the consequences for European policymakers?

The vast majority of the citizens of the countries covered by the survey—and thus of about 90 percent of the EU—are convinced by the traditional vision of the Union and the associated greater political deepening and geographical expansion. The data on the constitutional question suggest that in certain areas EU citizens have moved ahead of the policymakers. In the eyes of the general public, many of today's contentious issues have already been resolved. Whilst policymakers continue to work on the political and technical implementation of the European constitution or at least its contents, EU citizens have actually got there first. In those countries that used to be considered the reformist engines of the EU, the electorate, contrary to popular opinion, actually still believes in the fundamental mode of European integration.

The data pertaining to enlargement underscore the need for a societal debate about issues relating to future EU expansion strategy. Whilst it is true that the belief in increased EU membership is widespread, especially among younger people, the chances of membership for specific countries are judged more sceptically by the populations of the EU states covered by the survey. This assessment highlights the dilemma currently facing European policymakers: The EU does not wish to rob the states of Southeast Europe, Turkey or Ukraine of the prospect of EU membership in the foreseeable future. Yet at the same time it cannot guarantee early membership, on account of the political and economic situation of the applicants and the inability of the EU system to absorb more states. In their differentiated assessment, EU citizens seem to be implying that there is a need for a more sophisticated EU expansion strategy, one that ought to incorporate concepts of differentiated integration and derive support from a broad public debate.

In addition to Europe's future institutional structure and geographical limits, the debates on European policy currently revolve around the questions of new large-scale projects. Even if the majority of the population in the countries covered by the survey merely believes that in 2020 there will be a common approach in the area of economic policy, the numbers pertaining to social policy

and a common army actually point to the potential for new large-scale projects. It is remarkable that far more than a third of the interviewees believes in the complete Europeanization of these policy areas within the next fifteen years, since they are closely bound up with national traditions and self-esteem. For European policymakers, this constitutes an opportunity to demonstrate to its citizens (with the help of new large-scale projects) how useful the EU can actually be. However, this presupposes a fundamental decision about whether to implement new large-scale projects or numerous smaller projects over the medium term.

The development of the European idea does not absolve the EU from pursuing the deeper integration of the societies of Central and Eastern Europe. The survey data not only demonstrate a high degree of political abstinence on the part of large sections of the populations in Poland, Lithuania and Slovakia, but also point implicitly to a fear of being overrun by the EU's dynamic development. These countries in particular find it impossible to imagine EU membership for Turkey or Ukraine, or a break-up of the EU. The debate over the past two years about the consequences of enlargement for the old member states has led to a situation where the internal societal development of the younger member states has been ignored. Despite the impressive and dynamic economies these countries evince, many social groups have still to find their rightful place in the centre of Europe.

The politicization of Europe seems a distinct possibility in the years ahead. Once a wide-ranging public debate about the European constitution and the aims and future course of European integration has taken place, there will be a greater willingness to provide information, with the net result that more will be known about specific topics. Thus the current constitutional debate demonstrates that the European Union can create a culture of interchange and dissent that, as is the norm on the nation-state level, is based on wide-ranging public debate on competing policy proposals.

Address | Contact

Armando Garcia-Schmidt

Projektmanager

Bertelsmann Stiftung

Carl-Bertelsmann-Straße 256

D- 33311 Gütersloh

Phone 0049 5241 81-81543

Telefax 0049 5241 81 681543

Email armando.garciaschmidt@bertelsmann.de

Dr. Dominik Hierlemann

Projektmanager

Bertelsmann Stiftung

Carl-Bertelsmann-Straße 256

D-33311 Gütersloh

Phone 0049 5241 81-81537

Telefax 0049 5241 81 681537

Email dominik.hierlemann@bertelsmann.de