

EXIT, VOICE OR LOYALTY? YOUNG PEOPLE ON EUROPE AND DEMOCRACY

CASE STUDIES FROM AUSTRIA, CZECH REPUBLIC,
GERMANY, HUNGARY, POLAND AND SLOVAKIA

edited by:
Jacek Kucharczyk
Agnieszka Łada
Gabriele Schöler



INSTITUTE OF
PUBLIC AFFAIRS

| BertelsmannStiftung

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INTRODUCTION



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Introduction

According to the conventional wisdom about European integration, what is now the European Union is the result of developments following a series of crises, each of which shook the political class from its complacency and forced reforms which eventually deepened integration and made Europe stronger. It is, however, also part of the same conventional wisdom that the current state of the Union – often described as a “poly-crisis” – is different. The global financial crisis of 2008 had a spillover effect on the economies of some of the members of the Currency Union and has radically affected the public trust in a crucial part of the integration project, namely, the common currency. This crisis of trust has not been limited to the most affected economies of Southern Europe, but has also affected countries which have remained outside the Eurozone, such as Poland or the United Kingdom. Then came the crisis of the European Neighbourhood. This policy, which aimed at surrounding the EU with a “circle of friends”, that is, countries sharing EU values of democracy, rule of law and human rights, has gone from the high hopes of the “Arab Spring” in the East and the Ukrainian Euromaidan to the eruption of violent conflicts in many of the countries concerned, with no end in sight. While it was the ordinary people of countries such as Ukraine or Syria who suffered the most from these conflicts, the EU member states have also been affected in multiple ways, from the upsurge of terrorism and increased inflows of refugees to the “propaganda warfare” orchestrated and funded by the Kremlin and aiming to further undermine European integration and democratic values.

Sixty years after the signing of the Treaty of Rome, the sense of euphoria has been dampened. The EU’s old formula for success of peace, freedom and prosperity is no longer winning people over. Instead, growing nationalist populism and anti-migrant xenophobia have become crucial topics of any conversation about the state of the European Union. How does this situation affect what young people think of Europe? A survey of young Central and Eastern Europeans by the Bertelsmann

Stiftung looked at whether young people see the EU as a way forward or a dead end.

Immediately after the Brexit vote in the UK in June 2015, there were plentiful explanations claiming that the elder and middle-aged generations had outvoted the younger, that they had voted against the interests of British youth, etc. An opinion poll carried out in Poland at the same time showed that in Poland the situation was different: whereas 77% of Poles wanted to stay in the EU and only 16% would opt for leaving the Community, among youth (18 – 29 years old), 27% would opt for leaving.¹

We found this Euroscepticism astonishing, given that the youngest generations seemed to reap the most benefits from their country's integration into the European Union. And this poll, together with the observation that several of the four Visegrad states, in particular, are currently governed by EU-critical, nationalist governments, begged the question – “Is this a new trend among youth in this part of Europe?” And if so, what does that mean for the future when this generation indeed goes to the polls in their countries? Is this a trend that should and could be changed?

Once we were at that point, we started to rethink our choice of countries. How is the situation in Austria, where, at the time of our initial considerations, two candidates were campaigning for the federal presidency, one of them a staunch representative of the right-wing populist and national-conservative Freedom Party of Austria? And what about young Germans? Do they, as we all without doubt would have been willing to wager, believe in European integration in times where Europe has to cope with one crisis after another, from the Euro crisis to the refugee crisis of 2015?

These observations and considerations led us to carry out a special youth poll in six EU member states in what is geographically central and eastern Europe: Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Poland and the Slovak Republic. Our aim was to find out to what extent the youth in these countries are indeed Eurosceptic, and, if this is so, find a set of reasons why that might be the case. To help us to find the answers to these questions, we engaged well known think tanks and research

¹ Polexit? Nie! 77 proc. Polek i Polaków wolałoby zostać w Unii, <https://oko.press/polexit-nie/>, access 1.09.2017

institutes from the other four countries: the Institute for Human Sciences, Vienna; the IVO Institute for Public Affairs, Bratislava; the STEM Institute, Prague; and Political Capital, Budapest.

In our survey, we wanted to get a deeper understanding of the younger generations' way of thinking. That is why we asked not only about their general assessment of EU integration, its benefits and costs, but also about their opinions on some specific topics, such as migration processes. Furthermore, we asked about their support for democracy and the globalisation processes that are a substantial part of the developments in European integration.

The representative survey, commissioned by the Bertelsmann Stiftung in cooperation with the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA, Warsaw), was carried out by Kantar Public and conducted through on-line interviews (Computer Assisted Web Interviews – CAWI) in 6 countries: Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia. In each country, a nationwide representative sample of 500 inhabitants ages 15-24 was interviewed between 30 January and 13 February 2017. The sample design was based on official EU statistics (Eurostat).

To better understand the results and gather additional insights, we invited practitioners – people working with young people on regular basis: teachers, NGO activists, experts and representatives of the EU delegations – to share their opinion about the results during round tables organised in all six countries in March 2017. Each meeting gathered around 15-20 people. Conclusions from the meetings were analysed by project partners and incorporated into the national chapters. At this time, the partners would like to thank all the round table participants for their time and important comments.

The publication consists of three main parts. First, we describe the general results from all six countries, stressing the similarities and differences among them and drafting some general conclusions. We also try to draft a “picture of a Eurosceptic”, answering the questions of how a young Eurosceptic person thinks and what opinions does he or she have concerning European policies, democracy and globalisation. After this broader look, the authors from each country present and comment on their respective national results, searching for connections between the responses, looking at socio-demographic data and reflecting on other surveys conducted in the given field. Each

part starts with key findings, being a summary of the research results. At the end of each country chapter, we formulate recommendations as to what can be done to help young Europeans to better understand EU integration.



Youth from six member states. Similarities and differences in their approach to the common European future

Key findings

- ▶ Among the six states, there are both major similarities and differences when it comes to their traditions, histories, politics, economies and cultures. These differences influence the opinions of the young people from these countries.
- ▶ Young people from Berlin to Budapest and from Warsaw to Vienna have positive opinions on the EU. They not only want to remain in the EU, but they also would like to see it reformed. The polled societies differ, however, when it comes to their approach towards immigration and refugees. Smaller differences can be found in their understanding of democracy.
- ▶ Although youth from the Visegrad countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) quite often responded similarly and in contrast to young Austrians and Germans, there are also differences within this group.
- ▶ Well over two-thirds (77%) of those polled in all six countries view their country's EU membership positively.
- ▶ Young people in those six countries not only want to remain in the EU, but also want to reform it (67%).
- ▶ Along with the peaceful coexistence of nations (78%), the opportunities to study (62%), live and work (66%) in other EU member states are seen by the majority as the main benefits of EU integration.

- ▶ Only every fourth respondent from the entire group believes that immigrants contribute to their country's economic growth and general prosperity (24%) or that they are needed to improve their country's demographic prospects to balance the retirement pension system (23%). At the same time, 59% say immigrants are a burden for the social welfare system, and 53% consider them a threat to the public safety and security of their country.
- ▶ When asked if their country should provide safe haven to refugees from areas of military conflict or to victims of political persecution in accordance with internationally agreed rules and standards, only 40% of young people from the six countries responded affirmatively.
- ▶ Young people from the six countries generally have a rather positive approach towards democracy: 58% claim democracy is the best possible political system, and for 67%, it matters whether the government is democratic or not.
- ▶ There is a direct correlation between supporting exit from the EU and the opinion that EU membership is bad for the respondent's country.
- ▶ Eurosceptic youth have negative attitudes towards the globalization processes and negative perceptions of immigrants. They are unwilling to support refugees and more likely to support far-right politics and authoritarianism.

Foreword

Although all six countries – Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia – are situated in Central Europe, their histories, traditions, politics, economies and cultures are not the same. In the decades after 1945, they belonged to different parts of Europe. When the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia joined the European Union in 2004, Austria and Germany had already been long-standing members. In Germany, however, the eastern and western regions had vastly different post-war experiences. Nevertheless, there are also many

similarities among these countries. These differences and similarities obviously influence their citizens' perceptions and attitudes, including the perceptions of the 17 million young people between the ages of 15 and 24 years living in these countries.

These younger generations will be deciding about the future of Europe in the upcoming decades. Even though they will do this mostly by making decisions at the national level, it is useful to know what they think as a group. That is why the average of their answers are described below and national perspectives compared. Detailed explanations concerning the situation in each country and possible explanations for the young people's opinions are presented in the national chapters.

Country/Number of young people	From 15 to 19 years	From 20 to 24 years	TOTAL
Austria	460 546	554 380	1 014 926
Czech Republic	458 003	590 522	1 048 525
Germany	4 189 964	4 587 878	8 777 842
Hungary	505 193	614 937	1 120 130
Poland	1 963 253	2 398 531	4 361 784
Slovakia	285 969	349 965	635 934
TOTAL	7 862 928	9 096 213	16 959 141

Table 1.
Number of people ages 15 – 24 living in the six polled countries

Source: Eurostat 2017

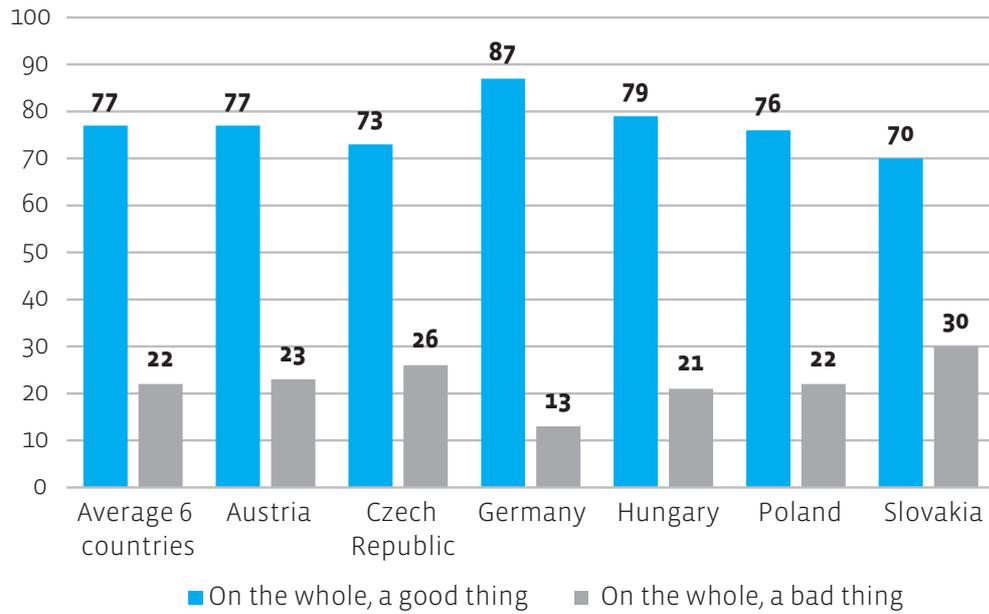
At the end of this chapter, we offer a sketch of a young Eurosceptic. Using the poll's data, we looked at the survey answers of the young people wishing to leave the European Union in order to see if there are trends and tendencies.

European integration: benefits, problems, future

Assessment of integration

Well over two-thirds (77%) of those polled in all the countries see their country's EU membership as positive. Germany is home to the highest percentage of young EU fans – more than three-quarters of them (87%) consider the EU “a good thing”, followed by Austria (77%). Yet, even in the Visegrad countries, which to some degree have a track record of anti-EU rhetoric from government representatives, the EU has many young supporters. Slovakia has the largest number of young sceptics (30%).

Diagram 1.
Generally speaking, do you think that your country's membership in the EU is...? (in %)
Figures do not always add up to 100% because the responses "don't know/hard to say" are not included.

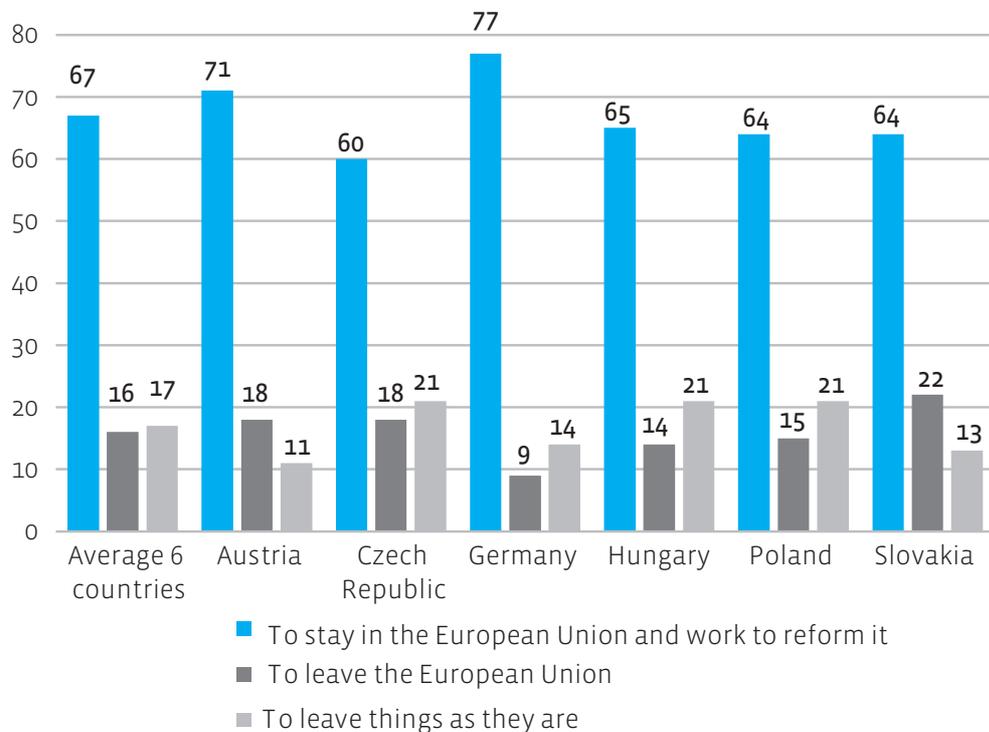


Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

Remain, but reform

Young people want to remain in the EU, but they also want to see it reformed. Germany and Austria expressed the strongest support for remaining in the EU and working on reforming it (Germany – 77%; Austria

Diagram 2.
Do you think that the best thing for your country would be...? (in %)
Figures do not always add up to 100% because responses of "don't know/hard to say" are not included.



Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

– 71%). But the idea of exiting the bloc doesn't sit well with young people in the Visegrad countries, either. Even in Hungary, the approval ratings are very high: 65% of young Hungarians, 64% of young Poles and Slovaks, and 60% of young Czechs would vote to remain in the EU and work together on reforming it.

Benefits of EU integration

Assessing the personal importance of given benefits of European integration, young people from the six countries ranked peace as most important – it averaged 4.2 on a scale from zero (not important at all) to five (very important). This benefit is followed by the opportunity to work and settle in another European country (3.8), common European efforts to prevent climate change (3.7) and the opportunity to study abroad (3.7).

When analysing the percentages of those asked, peace is the number one choice in all national groups and scores the highest in Austria (81%) and Germany (80%). But while young Germans and Hungarians chose the common European efforts to prevent climate change as the second most important benefit (70% and 67%, respectively), Poles, Slovaks and Austrians emphasise the importance of the free movement of people to live or work abroad (72%, 64% and 67%, respectively). It is not surprising that the transfer of EU funds, ranking quite high on the Polish list (58%), is not seen so significantly in the net-payer country Germany (44%). It is surprising, however, that the Czechs and Slovaks assign it even less importance (37% and 39%).

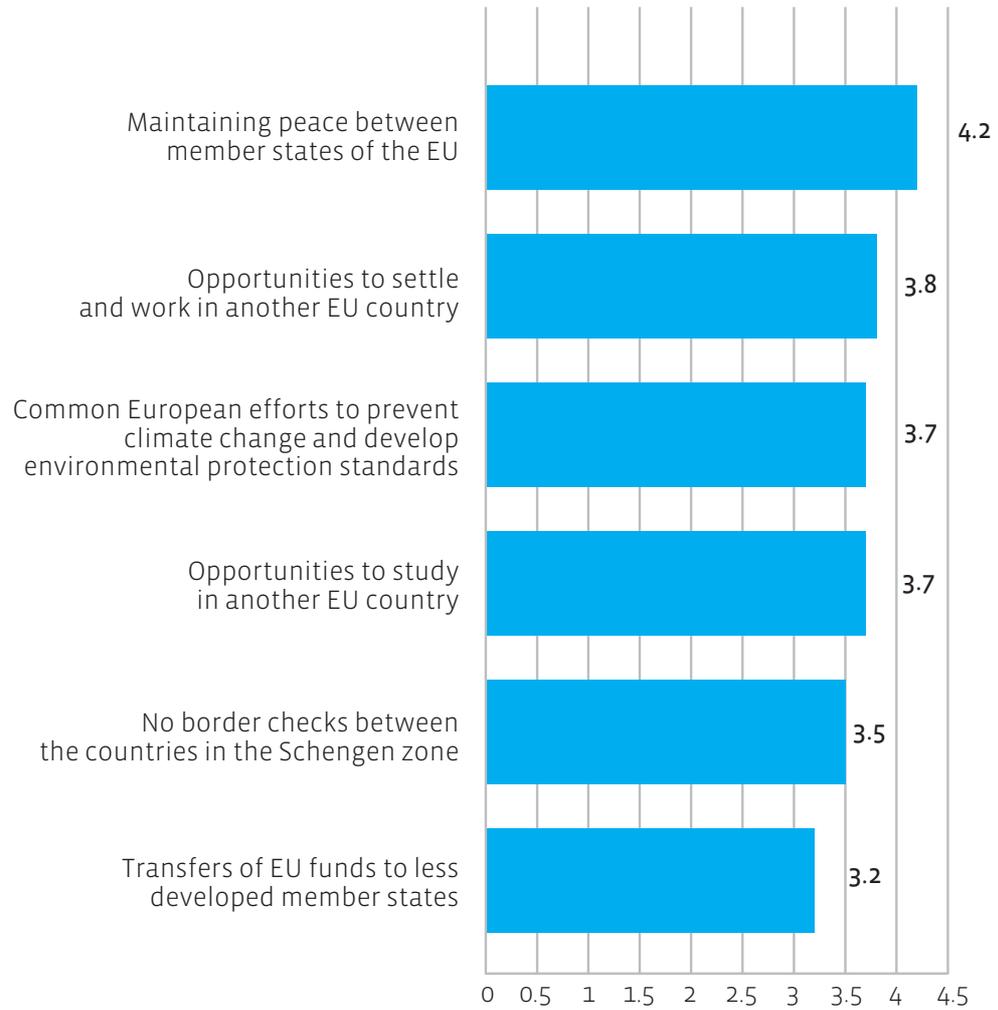


Diagram 3. How important for you personally are the following benefits of European integration? In the graph, the mean answers are shown numerically, where 5 means “very important” and 0 means “not important at all” (average for the six countries).

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

The responses given by the young Europeans we surveyed do not differ greatly from the general European population. When asked in the latest Eurobarometer survey, Europeans of all ages also stressed the importance of peace and the free mobility of people.¹

¹ Standard Eurobarometer 86, November 2016. As the questions were different, no direct comparison is possible.

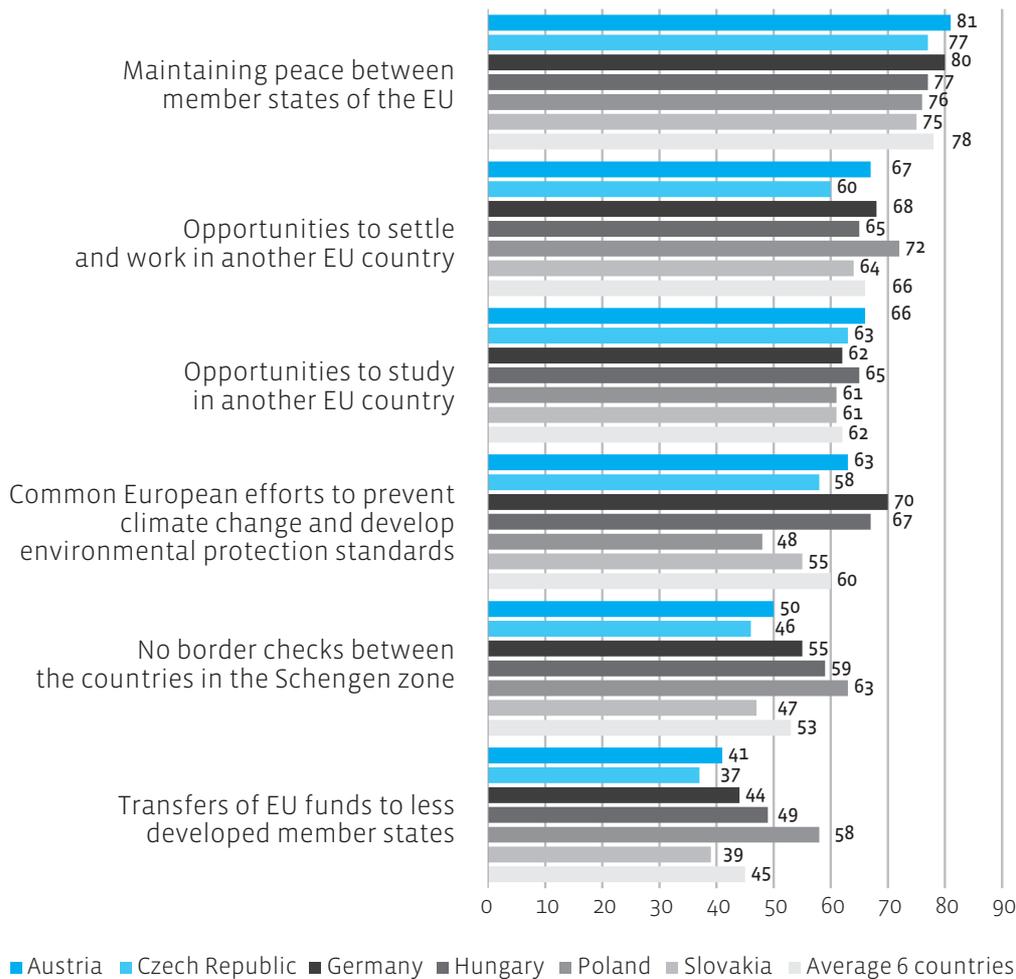


Diagram 4. How important for you personally are the following benefits of European integration. Responses of "very important" and "important" are summarized in the graph (in %).

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

Problems the EU faces

Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism is considered the main problem that the EU faces (average 4.2 on a scale from 0 to 5), followed by immigration (4.0), job insecurity (3.8) and environmental pollution (3.8).

Of the six countries surveyed, young people in Poland have the greatest fear of Islamic terrorism (83%) and immigration (79%). Young Germans also see terrorism as the biggest threat (64%). However, for young people in Germany, environmental pollution, climate change and their associated ecological disasters (63%) and growing nationalism and xenophobia in European societies (60%) are considered almost equally major problems. The two problems that ranked highest among the young people surveyed were also ranked highest among the general European population in the Eurobarometer study,² albeit in reverse order.

2 Standard Eurobarometer 86, November 2016.

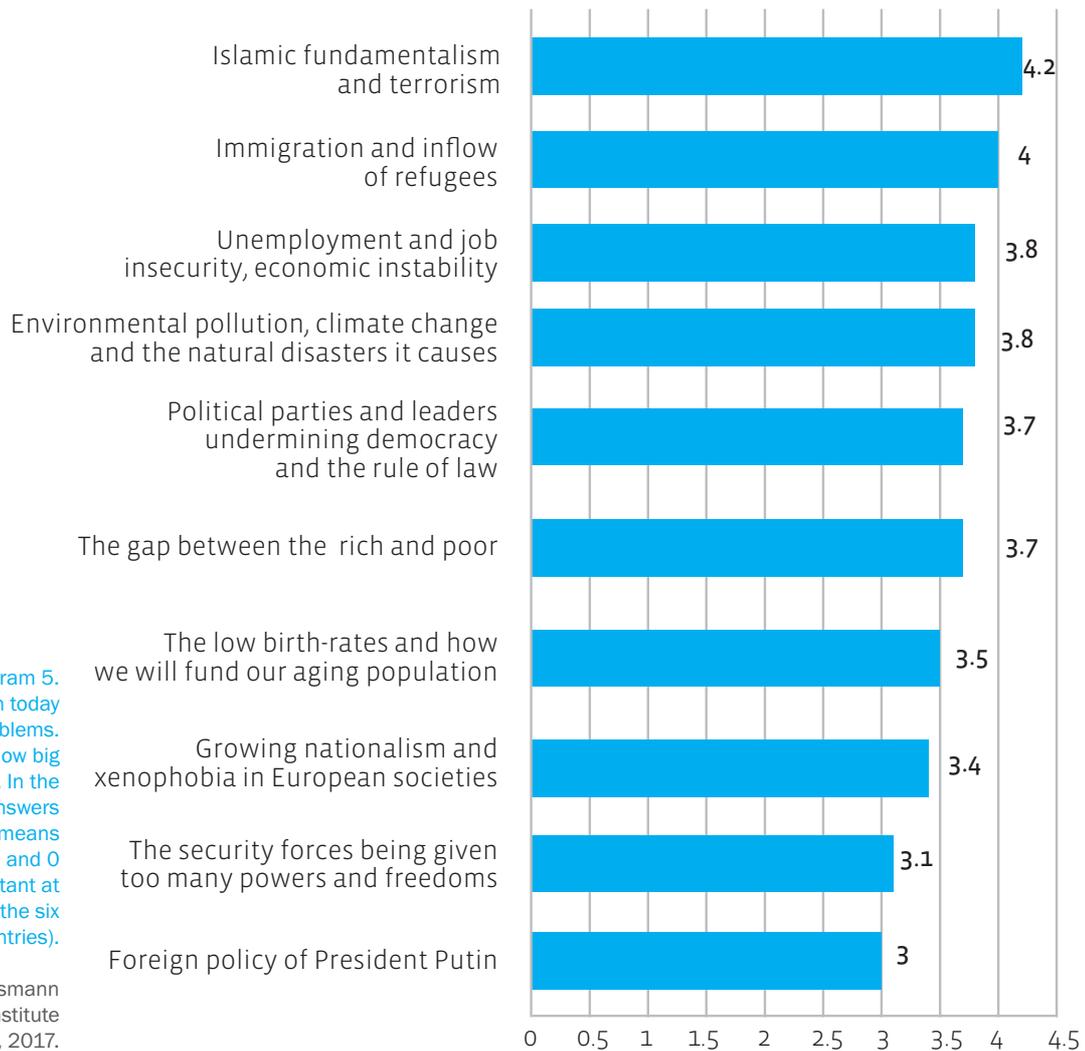


Diagram 5. The European Union today is facing many problems. Please assess how big these problems are. In the graph, the mean answers are shown, where 5 means "very important" and 0 means "not important at all" (average for the six countries).

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

The young representatives of the six countries differ, however, in their prioritisation of the perceived problems. While Poles, Czechs, Austrians and Germans mention terrorism as the main problem (83%, 77%, 68% and 64%, respectively), young Hungarians and Slovaks see the inflow of immigrants as a bigger issue (77% and 76%). It is worth noting that young Slovaks rate this problem as equally important as the problem of unemployment and economic instability. The lowest ranked problems were the foreign policy of Russia's Vladimir Putin (37%) and the granting of too much power to security forces. Here, the question of the latter might be considered too complicated to answer for the youngest respondents. Young Poles were much more likely to perceive Putin's policy as a problem (53%) than youth from the other countries. When looking at the issue of immigration, it is interesting to note that the Germans –

whose society has been most affected by the recent flow of immigrants – ranked this issue as less of a problem than all of the other polled groups.

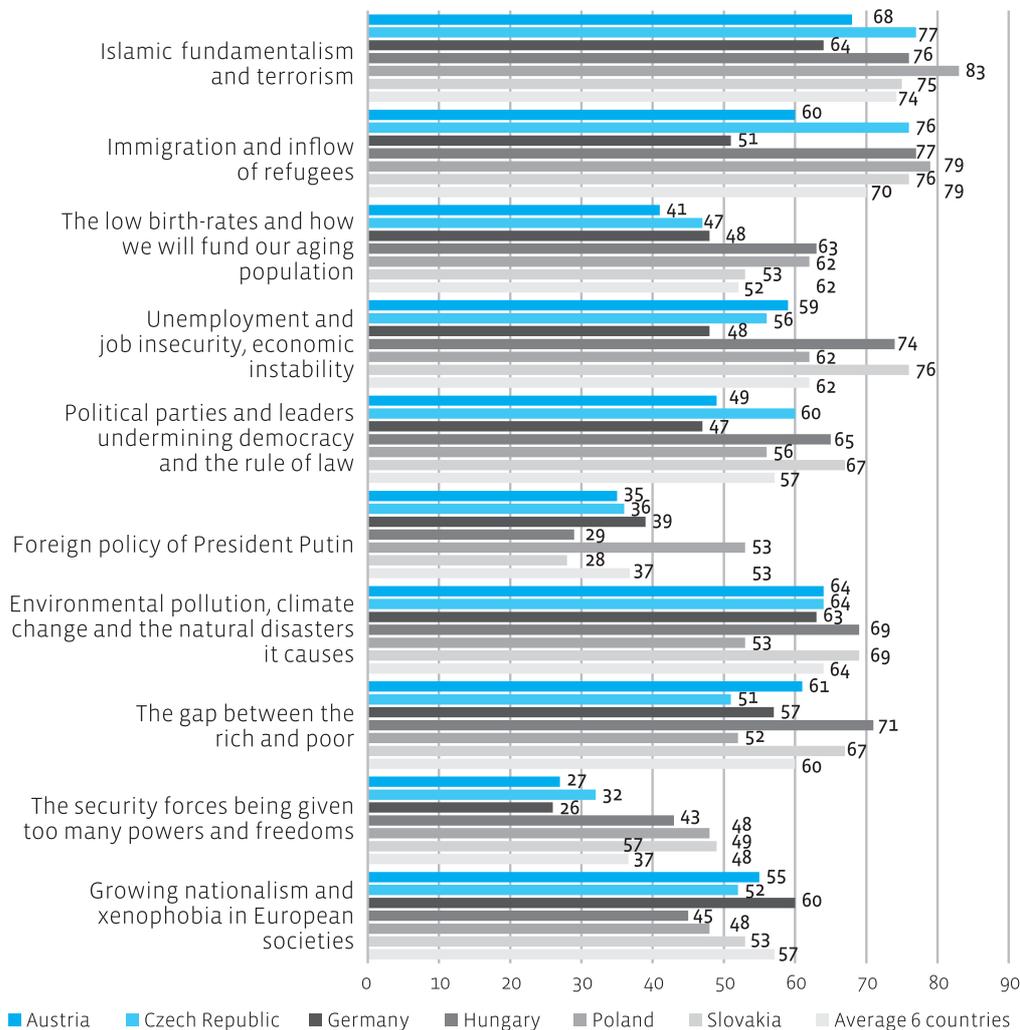


Diagram 6. The European Union today is facing many problems. Please assess how big these problems are. Answers “very big” and “big” are summarized in the graph (in %).

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

Perception of immigration

Opinions on immigration

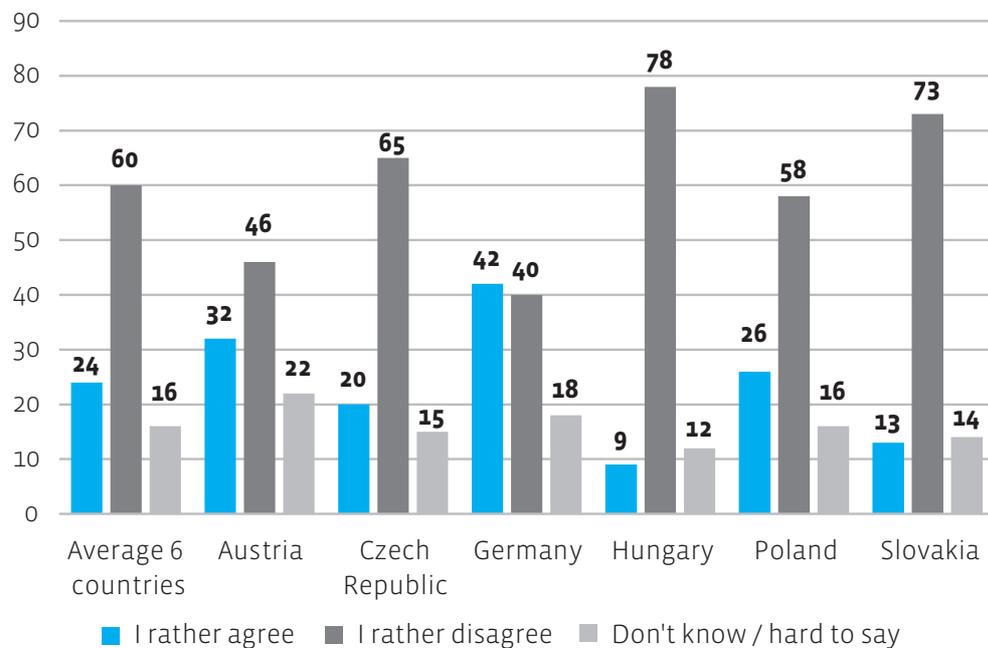
Many more differences are to be found in the opinions of young people from the six countries concerning their attitudes towards immigration. Generally, youth from the Visegrad countries are much more sceptical of any benefits immigration might have for their country than their peers from Austria and, even more so, Germany.

Only every fourth respondent of all those surveyed believes that immigrants contribute to their country’s economic growth

and general prosperity. German youth, who have the most experience with immigrants, were the most likely to see the positive effects of immigration (42%). They were followed by the Austrians (32%) and the Poles (26%) who gave a positive response twice as often as the Slovaks (13%) and nearly three times more often than the Hungarians (9%).

Diagram 7. Immigrants contribute to your country's economic growth and general prosperity (in %)

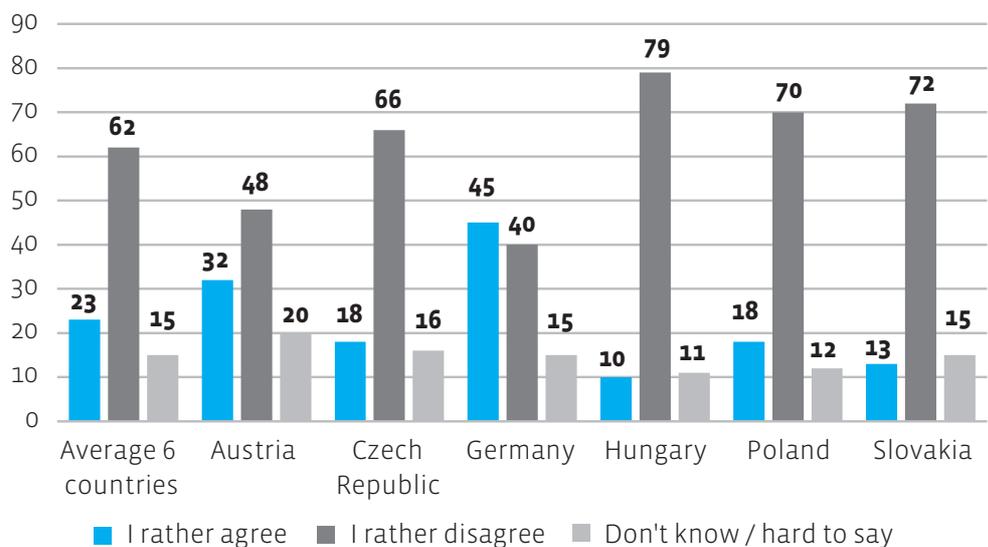
Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.



Only in Germany were more positive opinions than negative ones expressed regarding immigrants' potential to improve the country's demographic prospects and balance the retirement pension system, although not by much (45% to 40%). Young Hungarians (79%), Slovaks (72%) and Poles (70%) decidedly do not see a positive influence in this respect.

Diagram 8. Immigrants are needed to improve your country's demographic prospects and to balance the retirement pension system (in %).

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.



The young citizens of the Visegrad Group see immigrants as a burden for the social welfare system – the Hungarians (74%) and Slovaks (73%) are especially convinced, while the Austrians are more evenly split on this question (44% to 39%). At the same time, more than half of the young Germans surveyed (52%) do not share this negative view.

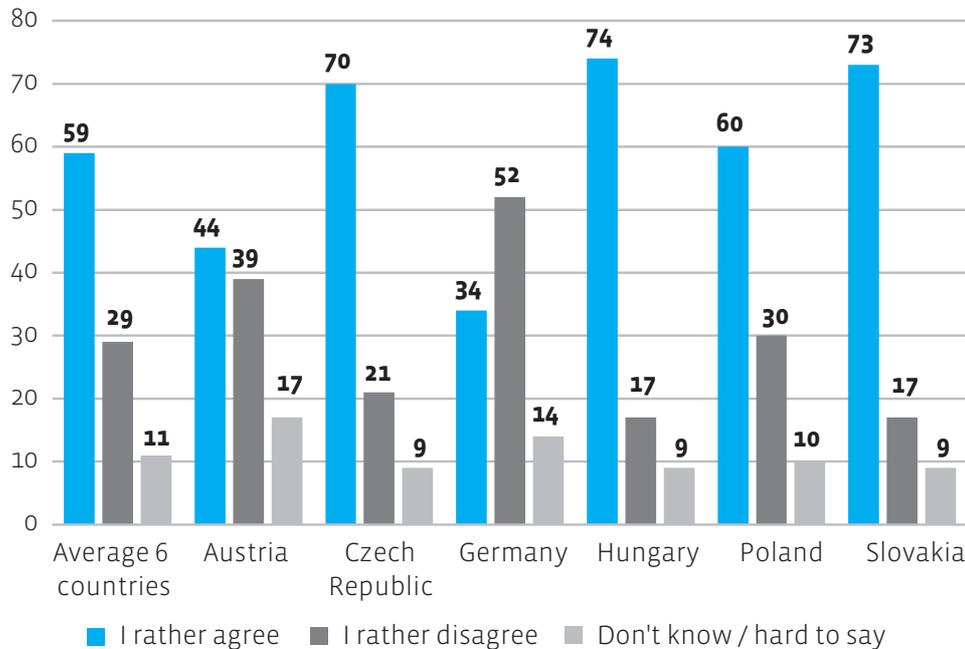


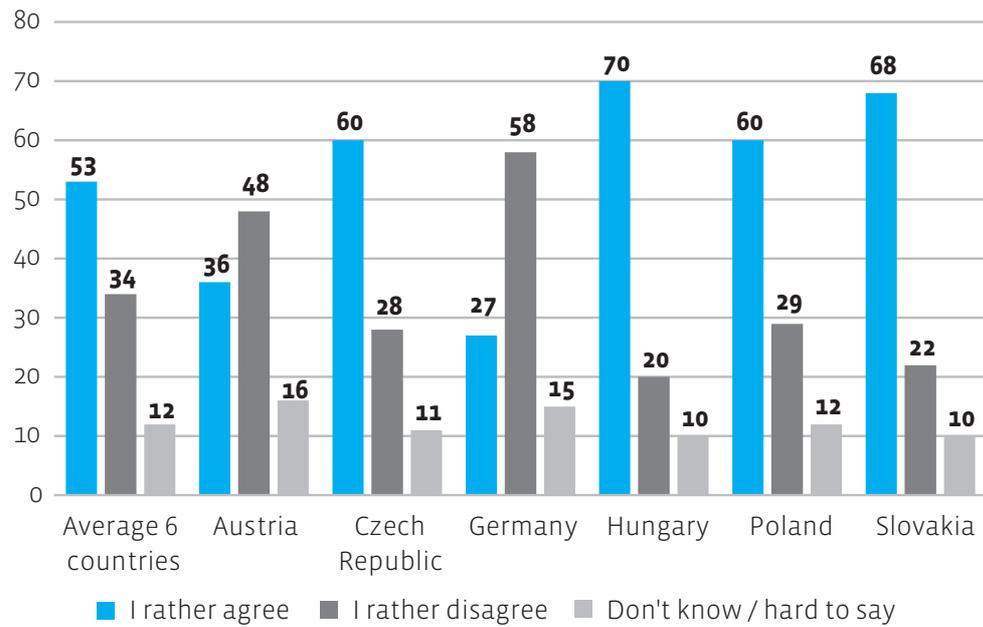
Diagram 9. Immigrants are a burden for the social welfare system (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

We found similar results when we asked about whether immigrants are a threat to the country’s public safety and security. The most negative opinions were expressed by the Hungarians (70%) and Slovaks (68%), followed by the Poles and Czechs (both 60%). In Germany, a majority of young people do not see such a threat (58%), while in Austria youth are, as with the previous issues, somewhat split in their opinions, with nearly half not seeing immigrants as posing a threat (48%).

Diagram 10.
Immigrants are a threat to
your country's public safety
and security (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann
Stiftung and Institute
of Public Affairs, 2017.



Refugees (not) welcome

The above attitudes towards immigration are in line with the general rejection of refugees by the young citizens of the Visegrad countries. When asked if their country should provide safe haven to refugees from areas of military conflict or to victims of political persecution in accordance with internationally agreed rules and standards, only in Germany and Austria did a majority respond in the affirmative (73% and 61%, respectively). The highest resistance was expressed by the Slovaks (75%) and Poles (73%), however, they were all too closely followed by the Hungarians (72%) and Czechs (70%).

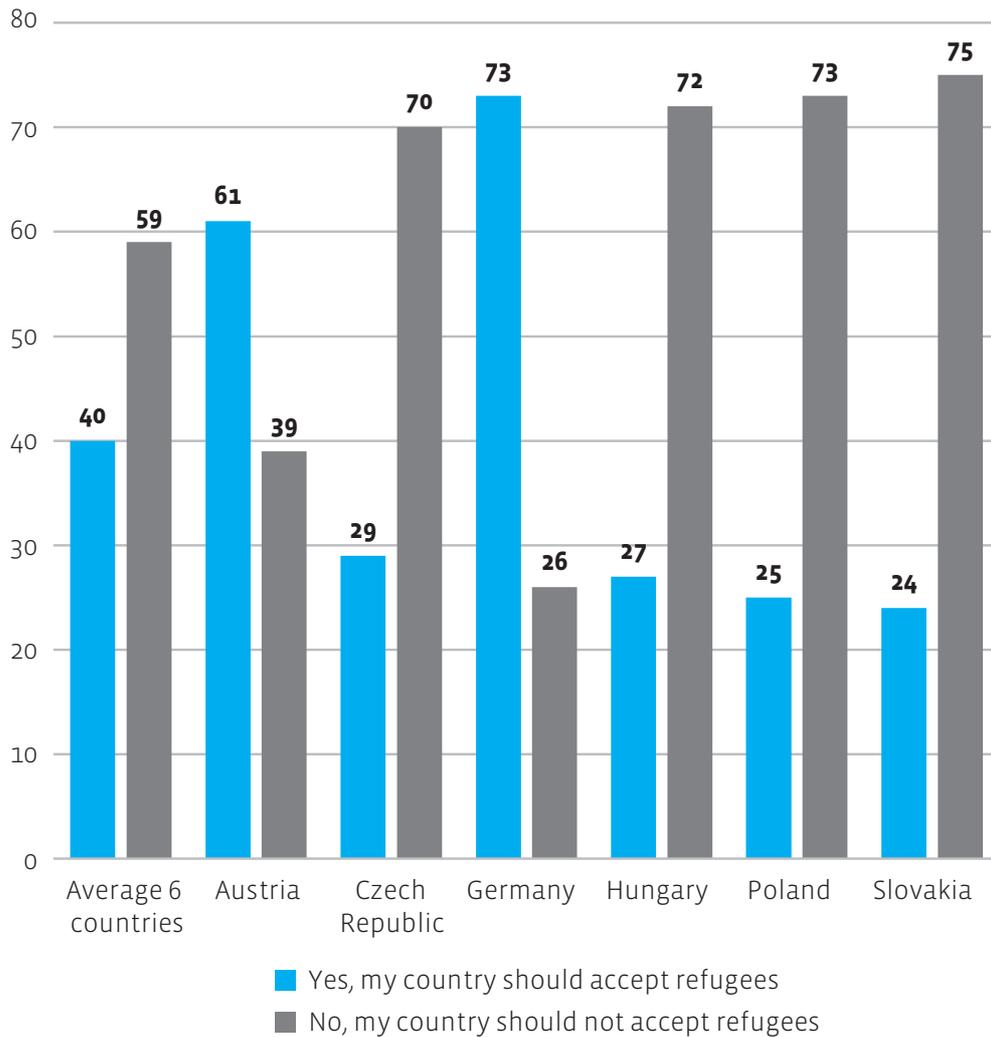


Diagram 11. Should your country provide safe haven to refugees from areas of military conflict or to victims of political persecution in accordance with internationally agreed rules and standards? (in %) Figures do not always add up to 100% because responses of “don't know/hard to say” are not included.

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

Attitudes toward democracy and political affiliations

Democracy no longer the best game in town?

Young people from the six countries generally have rather positive opinions about democracy. There are no significant differences between the respondents from Germany and Austria and the Visegrad Group. In all six countries, however, there is also a relatively large number of respondents who did not answer the questions regarding democracy – much larger than in the case of the questions on European integration (from 12% to 26% of respondents were not able to give a response to these

questions, depending on the question and country). This shows that issues relating to democracy are difficult for young people to assess.

The biggest differences in the responses of young Germans and Austrians, as opposed to the Poles, Czechs, Slovaks and Hungarians, are in their assessment of democracy as the best possible political system. While 71% of Germans and Austrians agree with the statement that democracy is the best possible system, only 60% of Czechs and close to half of Poles (50%), Slovaks (51%) and Hungarians (48%) agree with it. Young Poles were the most likely to disagree with this statement (29%).

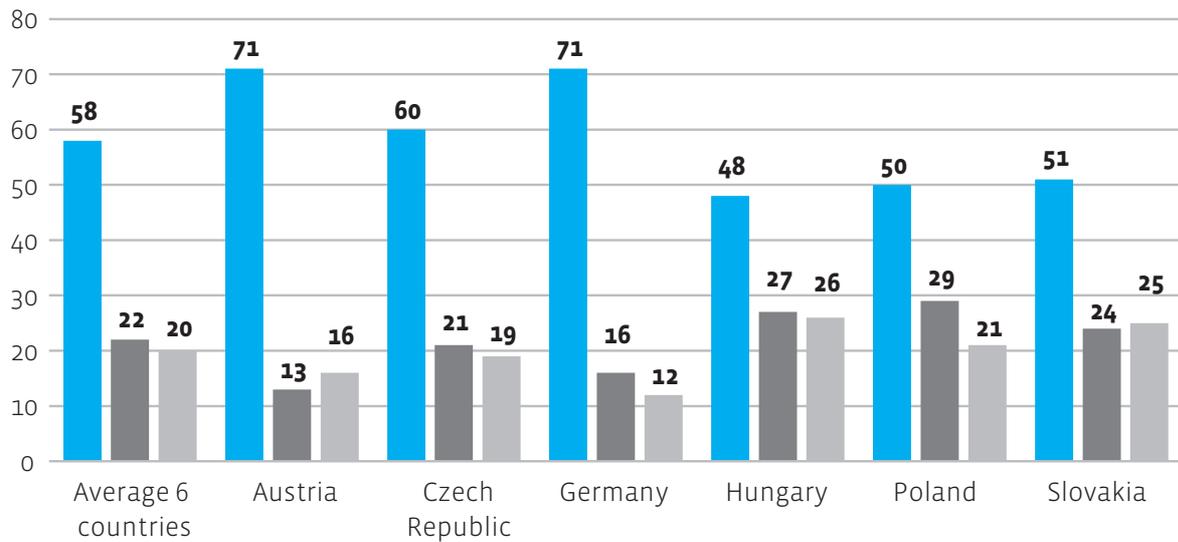


Diagram 12.
Democracy is the best possible political system (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

Austrians, Germans and Poles are united in the opinion that it does matter whether the government is democratic (73%, 72% and 71%, respectively). In the other three countries, the percentages are also high, although around 10 percentage points lower.

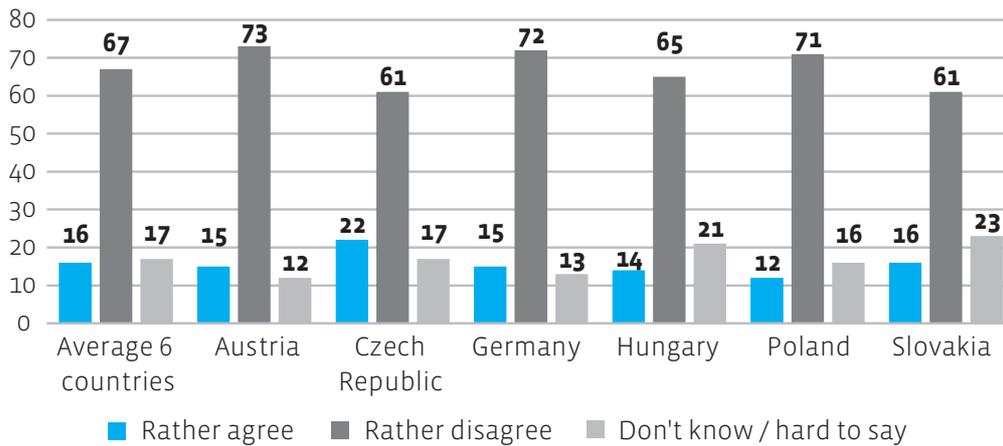


Diagram 13. It does not matter whether the government is democratic or not democratic (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

The young Europeans are generally divided on the question of whether human rights and civil liberties should sometimes be restricted to better protect people from terrorism (on average, 41% would agree to restrictions, while 40% reject them). Young Austrians (48%), Germans (46%) and Poles (43%) relatively more often reject this approach. Half of the surveyed Hungarians (51%) and nearly half of the Czechs (47%) would support such restrictions.

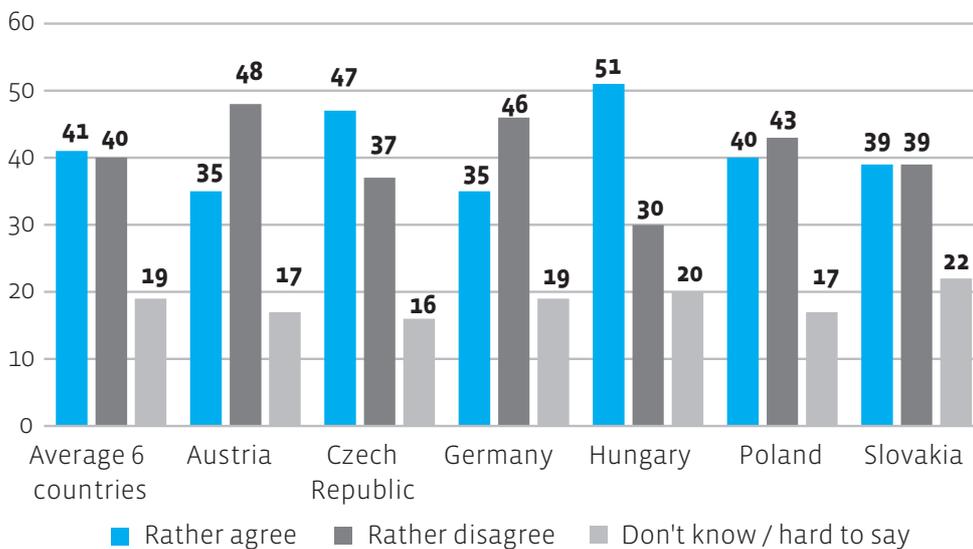
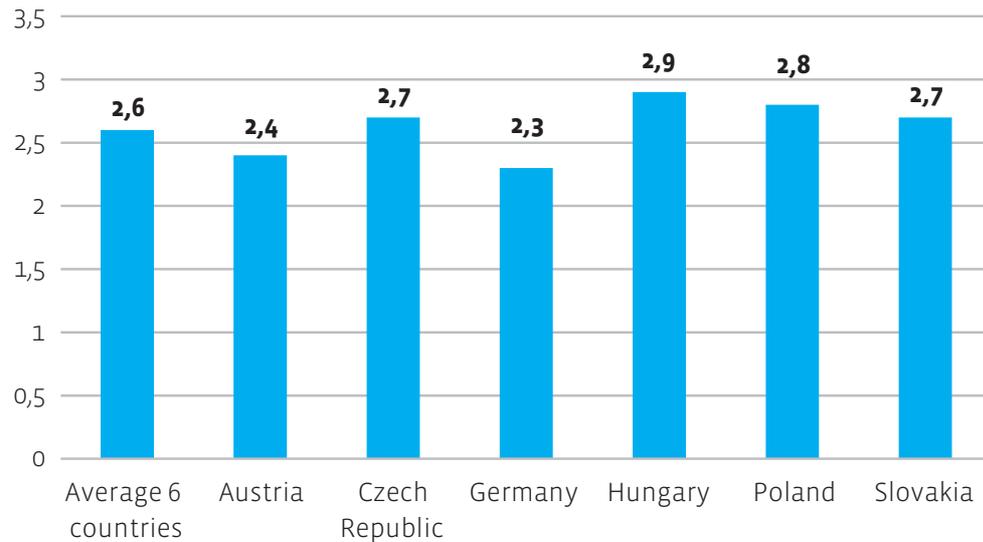


Diagram 14. Sometimes human rights and civil liberties should be restricted in order to better protect people from terrorism (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

Young people in the six countries see themselves in the center of the political spectrum (2.6 – on a scale of 0-5). Choosing between extreme left (0) and extreme right (5) political views, Hungarians and Poles tend to be a bit more to the right, while the Germans and Austrians declare themselves a bit more to the left.

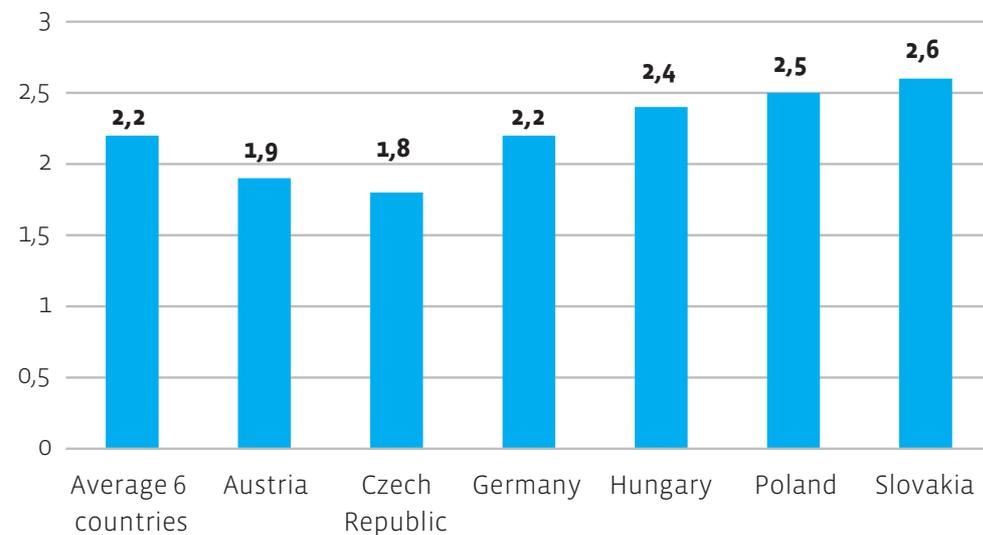
Diagram 15.
How would you describe your political views on the left-right spectrum? In the graph, mean data are shown numerically, where 0 means extreme left and 5 - extreme right (average six countries).



Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

The young people in the six countries have different opinions regarding the role of religion in the contemporary world. Young Slovaks (2.6) and Poles (2.5) were the most likely to see a positive role for religion, while the Czechs (1.8) and Austrians (1.9) were the most sceptical (on a scale of 0 to 5).

Diagram 16.
What do you think about the role of religion in the contemporary world? In the graph, mean data are shown, where 0 means "The world would be a better place without religion" and 5 - "Religion makes the world a better place" (average six countries).



Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

Portrait of a young Eurosceptic

A clear majority of the young people from the six countries present broadly pro-European attitudes and declare a willingness to remain in the European Union, mostly with the intention of reforming it.

Nevertheless, negative opinions about the EU in general and about specific EU policies have also been identified. More criticism directed towards the EU was observed among young people from the Visegrad countries, whereas youth from Germany and Austria tended to be more positive about Europe. But even in these last two countries, a significant number of the respondents expressed negative opinions about the EU and its policies. People who promulgate such opinions can be considered Eurosceptics, as they tend to see their country's EU membership as a bad thing and consider leaving the EU to be the best possible option for their country.

In this section, we attempt to identify the specific opinions, attitudes and values characteristic of young Eurosceptics. Our point of departure (the dependent variable) was the response to the question regarding the preferred future relationship of their country with the European Union (leaving the EU, working to reform it or maintaining the status quo). In what follows, the Eurosceptics are defined as "exiters", that is, those indicating that their preferred policy would be for their country to leave the EU. Using statistical analysis, we have identified which views, opinions and values expressed in the survey were linked with an increased likelihood of such a choice.³ This allowed us to distinguish the views and attitudes that make up a "portrait" of the young Eurosceptic in the countries under consideration.

Firstly, we can observe a direct relationship between support for leaving the EU and the opinion that the EU membership is bad for the respondent's country. In a similar vein, appreciation of the benefits of EU integration makes it less likely that the respondent would support the "exit" option. In other words, awareness of the concrete benefits

³ In the analysis, a Multinomial logistic regression was used to find the relation between one's attitude toward the future of the European Union and different attitudes concerning the political, social and economic issues of functioning within the European Union. Multinomial regression was used because the dependent variable offered the respondent three options: one category has been chosen as reference category for respondents to get to another two categories. Multinomial regression shows significance of dependency between dependent and independent variables, and an odds ratio that could be interpreted as the probability to get to the one of the categories of the dependent variable while taking into account the set of independent variables.

In our case, we checked the probability of being in the groups "Leave the EU" and "definitely stay in the EU" in comparison to the group "We should stay in EU, but work to reform it."

We ran the regression model for each independent variable separately other than the education variable, which was chosen as the controlling variable (primary education was chosen as reference category). Interpreting the results, we can say if the independent variable tested can increase/decrease the likelihood to fall in the groups "Leave the EU" or "Stay in the EU, but work to reform it" taking into the account the respondent's level of education.

of membership can be demonstrated to reduce the likelihood of one's turning Eurosceptic.

The results of data analysis allow us to describe three general characteristics of Eurosceptic youth. The first is a negative attitude towards the globalization processes. Young people who negatively perceive globalization, defined as the free movement of both goods and values around the world, are more likely to support leaving the European Union than the young in general. This correlation has been established both for those who believe that globalization has a negative impact on their respective countries as well as for those who believe it has a negative impact on young people like themselves.

Another feature that unites Eurosceptic youth is a negative perception of immigrants and the unwillingness to support refugees. Young people who are against providing safe haven for refugees in their own countries are also more likely to favor exit from the EU than other respondents. This correlation has been established in five of the six countries, with Hungary being the only exception. A correlation between greater support for leaving the EU and the belief that immigrants are a threat to national safety was noted in Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany and Poland. Young Austrians, Germans and Poles who think that immigrants are a burden for the social welfare system and have a negative impact on the economy are, again, more likely to favor exit from the EU than the respondents in general in these countries.

The third major characteristic of young Eurosceptics is their support for far-right politics and authoritarianism. People who consider themselves as being on the far right of the political spectrum are more likely to support leaving the EU than youth in general. The same is true regarding respondents who do not consider democracy to be "the only game in town," that is, those who disagree with the statement that democracy is the best political system. Such links have been established in all six countries. Furthermore, in Austria, Germany and Poland, there is a significant correlation of an anti-EU attitude with the opinion that it does not matter if the government is democratic or not.

Comparison of the data shows that the pattern of these three general characteristics perfectly reflects the young Eurosceptics in Austria, Germany and Poland. Anti-globalization and anti-migrant attitudes as well as questioning the role of democracy are all features

that describe youth who are more likely than the general population of young people in these three countries to choose leaving the EU over other options. Nine questions were used to portray Eurosceptic attitudes, and in Austria, Germany and Poland the correlation between responses that are perceived as voices against globalism, migration and democracy and anti-EU attitudes can be observed in every single case. With regards to the Czech Republic, the correlation was relevant in six out of nine answers, which also allows us to consider the three general traits as a valid indicator of Euroscepticism among young Czechs.

Hungary and Slovakia are on the opposite side. It is more difficult to present a consistent image of young Eurosceptic Hungarians or Slovaks, based on the three general features formulated after data analysis. In the case of Hungary, only two features – a negative view of globalization's influence on people's lives and disagreement with the statement that democracy is the best political system – correlate with increased willingness to leave the EU. With regards to Slovakia, the number of correlations rises to four, but it is still less than 50% of all the questions included in the analysis.

We might reiterate these findings by saying that when it comes to EU integration, values and social attitudes seem to have a stronger impact than a cost-benefit calculation. This conclusion would be further strengthened by the fact that the young people who appreciate the recent social changes in European societies, such as the advancement of women, more rights for sexual minorities or greater ethnic and religious diversity, are less likely to become Eurosceptics.

To make this picture of a young Eurosceptic complete, it should be noted that recognition of the main problems facing the EU does not necessarily motivate the young respondents to choose the exit option. Those respondents who see a stagnant economy, unemployment and inequality as key challenges facing the EU are less likely to support the European status quo, but tend to opt for either reforming the EU or exit from it.⁴ Youth who perceive threats from rising xenophobia or populist parties are more likely to choose a reformed EU or (in the case of Poland) are less likely to choose exit. Likewise, the recognition that President Putin's foreign policy is a challenge for Europe makes it less

⁴ Poland seems to be somewhat exceptional here: the more the respondents perceive unemployment as a key EU challenge, the more likely they are to opt for either reform or the status quo as opposed to leaving the EU.

	More likely to choose “leave the EU” than young people in general					
	Austria	Czech Republic	Germany	Poland	Slovakia	Hungary
Globalization has a negative impact on my country	√	√	√	√	√	
Globalization has a negative impact on people like me	√	√	√	√	√	√
Disagree with the statement that immigrants contribute to the economic growth of the country	√		√	√		
Immigrants are a threat to national security	√	√	√	√		
Immigrants are a burden for the social welfare system	√		√	√		
Against providing safe haven to refugees	√	√	√	√	√	
Right-wing political views	√	√	√	√		
Disagree with the statement than democracy is the best political system	√	√	√	√	√	√
It does not matter whether or not the government is democratic	√		√	√		

Table 2.
Correlations between readiness to leave the EU and other responses given in the survey

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

likely for the respondents in most cases to support exit from the EU. Only in the case of the respondents who perceive immigration and refugees as a key problem can one establish a link between these views and the likelihood of supporting exit from the EU, which is consistent with our earlier characterization of the young Eurosceptic.⁵ To sum up, recognizing that Europe faces many problems on the whole does not necessarily make young people more Eurosceptic. More often than not, it motivates them to reject the status quo and demand reforms.

Conclusions

Young Europeans do not allow themselves to be influenced by anti-EU rhetoric. Their good approval ratings for the EU are an encouraging sign on its 60th birthday. They ranked peace as the top benefit of integration, which contradicts the opinion that young people are more interested in economic issues than in moral values. Young Europeans were

⁵ However, in some cases the perception that Islamic terrorism and inflow of refugees are an important problem increases the likelihood of choosing the voice, while it makes it less likely for them to support the status quo.

somewhat less likely to see the benefit of open borders in the Schengen area. This can be explained by the age factor, as these generations do not remember what queuing at the border means and so, might not really understand the difference it makes. For them, travelling through Europe without being stopped is taken for granted. However, it is surprising that the perception of this issue divides the youth in the Visegrad countries, with young Poles and Hungarians answering differently from their Czech and Slovak peers.

While young people from the Visegrad region do see peace as an important benefit, the majority of them do not share the opinion that one should help those who are escaping from war or oppression. Young people from the countries that have refused to accept refugees and do not have much experience with immigrants are much more sceptical towards them than the Austrians and Germans, who have much more experience with foreigners in their countries. Moreover, youth in the Visegrad countries are the most worried about terrorism, even though their countries have not been witness to the latest attacks.

On a more positive note: the youth surveyed are generally convinced that democracy is a good system, although not all to the same degree. It is important to note, and equally a positive sign, that support for European integration is directly correlated with a positive approach towards democracy in all six countries.



Austria

Key findings

- ▶ A clear majority (77%) of young Austrians hold a positive view of their country's membership in the EU.
- ▶ Maintaining peace among EU member states is considered the biggest benefit of European integration, followed by the ability to settle and work in another country.
- ▶ The transfer of funds from richer to poorer EU countries is ranked the least important from the list of ten benefits of European integration.
- ▶ The threat posed by Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism is perceived to be the biggest problem the EU now faces, followed by environmental pollution and climate change. Migration and the influx of immigrants were only the fourth most often named threat to the EU.
- ▶ Young Austrians have mixed views on immigration – 46% do not think that immigrants contribute to Austria's welfare, a number significantly lower than in the case of the Visegrad countries. Furthermore, 36% believe that immigrants are a threat to their country's public safety – again, significantly less than in the Visegrad countries – and 48% do not think that immigrants are essential to improving their country's demographic prospects.
- ▶ A majority of young Austrians (61%) think that their country should accept refugees.
- ▶ Young Austrians have mixed views regarding changes in their society. A majority (64%) think that the greater acceptance of same-

sex relationships is a positive development. Enthusiasm about the increasing number of women in leadership positions is declared less often – 48%, and increasing ethnic and religious diversity seems to be the most polarizing of the three issues – 34% view it as a positive development, 32% as negative.

- ▶ Regarding democracy, 71% of young Austrians think that it is the best political system and 73% believe it matters whether a country is democratic or not.
- ▶ Nearly half of young Austrians disagree that civil liberties can be restricted in the name of protection from terrorism (48%); 35% agreed.
- ▶ The majority of young Austrians describe their political views as rather centrist (69%).
- ▶ The primary source of information for young Austrians are the social media (82%). Television clearly lags behind, and public television (46%) seems to be slightly more popular than private.
- ▶ Half of young Austrians declare they do not use social media – their preferred source of information – as a platform for political discussion (53%).

Foreword

The Austrian general public has a complex and somewhat paradoxical relationship with the EU. On the one hand, as the results of the most recent edition of the Eurobarometer from May 2016 show, the majority of Austrians value the practical benefits of their country's membership in the Union. With 69% in favor of the common European currency, the euro was most often indicated when Austrians were asked about the personal significance of their country's EU membership. Moreover, 51% said that their voice counts in the EU. However, Austrian society is certainly not immune to Euroscepticism and anti-EU populism. In the same study, 47% of respondents claimed that their country would be better off outside the EU, and 53% said they are unsatisfied with the way democracy works

in the Union. This curious mix of attitudes was probably best summed up by Armin Thurnher, a political commentator and editor-in-chief of the Viennese magazine *Falter*, who wrote during the last presidential campaign in Austria in 2016 that Austrians are not willing to leave the EU, but do not want to hear any praises of it. Austrian youth is certainly more Euro-enthusiastic when compared with the general population. Correlation between age and enthusiasm about the EU still applies to the direction that until recently was assumed in the Visegrad countries as well – the younger a person is, the more optimistic they are about the EU and more ready they are to embrace the potential personal advantages of their country’s EU membership. Recent elections in Poland, in which a majority of young voters supported right-wing and Eurosceptic parties, call this trend into question. But even in Austria, where the correlation still seems to be working, there are some symptoms that a “Euro-enthusiastic consensus” no longer rests on solid foundations.

According to a study published in 2016 by the Austrian Association for European Politics, a majority of young Austrians (60%) believe that their country’s membership in the EU is a good thing, but this number drops significantly among young people who are 19 or older. In this age group, only 49% believe that Austria’s EU membership is a good thing.¹ This data suggests that pessimism and disillusionment with the promise of the EU start to creep in much earlier than expected – upon the completion of secondary school and entering the job market or beginning one’s studies. Moreover, 63% of Austrian youth believe that the most important political decisions are made at the national level. Only 18% said that decisions at the EU level are the most important, a number even lower than the percentage of respondents who pointed to the regional level as the most important (19%).

Young Austrians, just like the general population, associate the EU first and foremost with practical aspects of their everyday lives, not necessarily with certain values they hold dear. As data from the Eurobarometer survey conducted in Austria in May 2016 suggests, the most personally notable aspect of the EU is the euro, indicated by 53% of all Austrians and 56% in the age group 15-24. The euro is followed by the ability to travel, work and study abroad in the general population (51%), while in the age group 15-

1 Jugendumfrage “EUROPA#wasistjetzt”, Österreichische Gesellschaft für Europapolitik, 2016, <http://oegfe.at/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Grafiken-Jugendumfrage-16.pdf>. [last access: 19.07.2017]

24, it takes unquestioned first place with 68%. Young Austrians still are more likely to value the cultural diversity associated with the EU than their older fellow citizens (48% in the age group 15-24, compared to 34% in the general population). They are also less concerned about supposedly insufficient controls at the external borders (30%, compared to 50%). However, in the age group of people over 25 these concerns grow much stronger (46%) and become almost as important as in the general population.

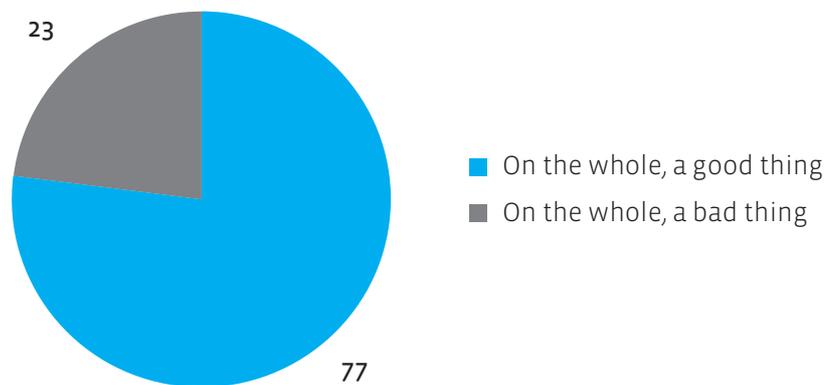
It is high time to address these worrying tendencies. Consensus over “European values” needs to be renewed and reinvigorated among Austrian youth. Otherwise, young Austrians will soon adopt their elders’ ambiguous attitudes towards the EU; ambiguous attitudes which could easily turn into Euroscepticism.

European integration: benefits, problems, possible developments

Three-quarters of young Austrians believe that their country’s membership in the EU is, on the whole, a good thing (77%). The result for Austria is exactly the same as the average for all six of the countries in which the survey was conducted and locates Austrian youth behind the most euro enthusiastic German youth and closer to the more Eurosceptic Visegrad countries.

Diagram 1.
Generally speaking,
do you think Austria’s
membership in the EU
is...? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann
Stiftung and the Institute
of Public Affairs 2017



More young women (82%) than men (73%) declare that they believe Austria’s EU membership is a good thing. There are also more enthusiasts of Austria’s EU membership among younger Austrians, ages 15-19 (81%), than among their slightly older colleagues, ages 20-24 (74%). Favorable views of Austria’s EU membership are also more widespread in large cities and mid-sized towns (80% and 79%, respectively) than in villages and rural

areas (74%), but the difference is smaller than between genders and age groups.

Young Austrians are significantly more enthusiastic about their country's EU membership in comparison to the general population. According to the Eurobarometer survey from May 2016, only 32% of Austrians had a positive assessment of the EU, with 30% stating they were neutral.

Asked about the most important benefits of EU membership, 81% of young Austrians, slightly more than the average 78% for all six countries surveyed, pointed to "maintaining peace between member countries of the EU." Opportunities to settle and work in another EU country were indicated as a major advantage by 67% of respondents, followed by common European efforts to prevent climate change and develop environmental protection standards (66%). Common European environmental policies were more important to young Austrians than opportunities to study in another EU country (63%) – a reverse order in comparison to the average indications from the six countries under scrutiny. The least important (41%) for Austrian youth are transfers of EU funds to less developed member countries. Interestingly, the number of respondents who pointed to the transfers of funds as important, albeit low, is still slightly higher than in the Czech Republic (37%) and Slovakia (39%). The biggest fans of EU transfers are young people from the main recipient country, Poland (58%). To put these results into perspective, it is worth remembering that Austria was allocated 4.92 billion euro from ESI funds for the years 2014-2020 and will combine this sum with 5.73 billion from national budget. To compare – Poland will receive 86 billion euro, combined with an 18.6 billion national contribution.

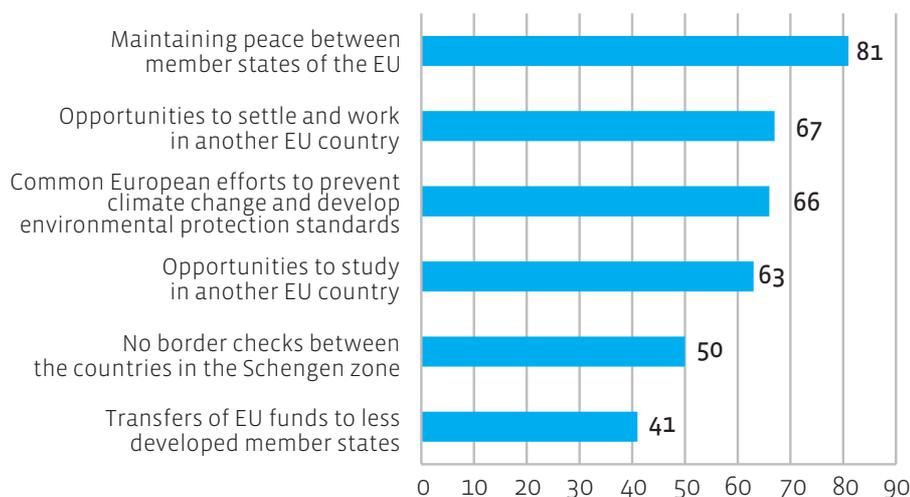


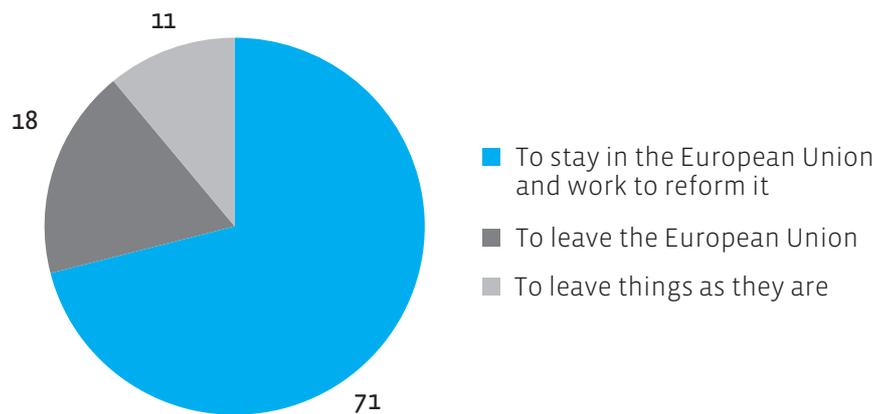
Diagram 2.
How important for you personally are the following benefits of European integration? Responses of "very big" and "big" are summarized in the graph (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

Young Austrians may be less enthusiastic about their country's EU membership than their German counterparts, but when asked about Austria's future in the EU, they respond similarly to young Germans. 71% of Austrian youth would like their country to remain in the Union and work to reform it, 77% of young Germans were of the same opinion, a number clearly higher than in the Visegrad countries. Young Austrians and Germans were also less often inclined to leave things as they are than young Czechs, Hungarians or Poles.

Diagram 3.
Do you think that the best
thing for Austria would
be...? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann
Stiftung and the Institute
of Public Affairs 2017



More women (75%) than men (66%) declared that they would like Austria to stay in the EU and work to reform it. This view was also more widespread in large cities (75%) and mid-sized towns (72%) than in the countryside (66%). The difference between younger Austrians, ages 15-19, and slightly older ones, ages 20-24, was marginal – 71% in the former group wanted Austria to stay in the EU and reform it, compared to 70% in the latter group.

The majority of young Austrians do not describe themselves as holding extreme political views, only 17% adhere to extreme left and 13% to extreme right labels. And interestingly, these labels do not seem to be a decisive factor influencing views on EU membership. For example, among those who said they would like Austria to leave the EU, 33% held extreme right political positions, but 57% considered themselves to be closer to the political center.

Views on interconnectedness and social diversity in the contemporary world seem to be a much stronger factor influencing attitudes toward EU membership than the more abstract (or perhaps outdated) left/right divisions.

Among young Austrians who would like their country to leave the EU, 49% declared that the fact that the world has become more interconnected is a rather negative development for Austria. Moreover, 45% of young Austrian Eurosceptics were also of the opinion that an interconnected world is a rather negative development for young people. Only 14% of young Austrians who wanted Austria to stay in the EU and reform it saw global interconnectedness as a negative development – both with respect to their country and themselves.

Less than half (43%) of young Austrians who would like their country to leave the EU think that a growing religious and ethnic diversity has changed society for the worse, whereas only 10% view it as something positive. Interestingly, the Euroscepticism of Austrian youth does not seem to automatically go hand in hand with widespread unfavorable views about gender equality and same-sex relationships. Only 24% of respondents who want Austria to leave the EU think that a growing number of women in leadership positions has a negative impact on society (27% thought it is a positive development), and only 12% believe that a growing acceptance for same-sex relationships is changing society for the worse.

The sheer fact of having contact with people from cities and regions other than one's own seems to incline young Austrians to view their country's future in the EU more favorably. Significantly more young Austrians who declare that they have been in contact with people from other cities or regions would like Austria to remain in the EU – 73.1% among those who had contacts with people from other cities (as opposed to 56.9% who had not) and 72.7% among those who had contact with people from other regions (as opposed to 64.1% who had not).

When asked about the main problems facing the EU today, 68% of young Austrians point to Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism, 64% indicate environmental pollution and climate change, 61% are concerned about the gap between the rich and poor and 60% mention immigration and the inflow of refugees. Granting too much power to security forces is the least concern, only 27% name it as a major threat to the EU.

The fear of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism correlates with reluctance to accept refugees – 78% of young Austrians who think that their country should not accept refugees also declared that Islamic

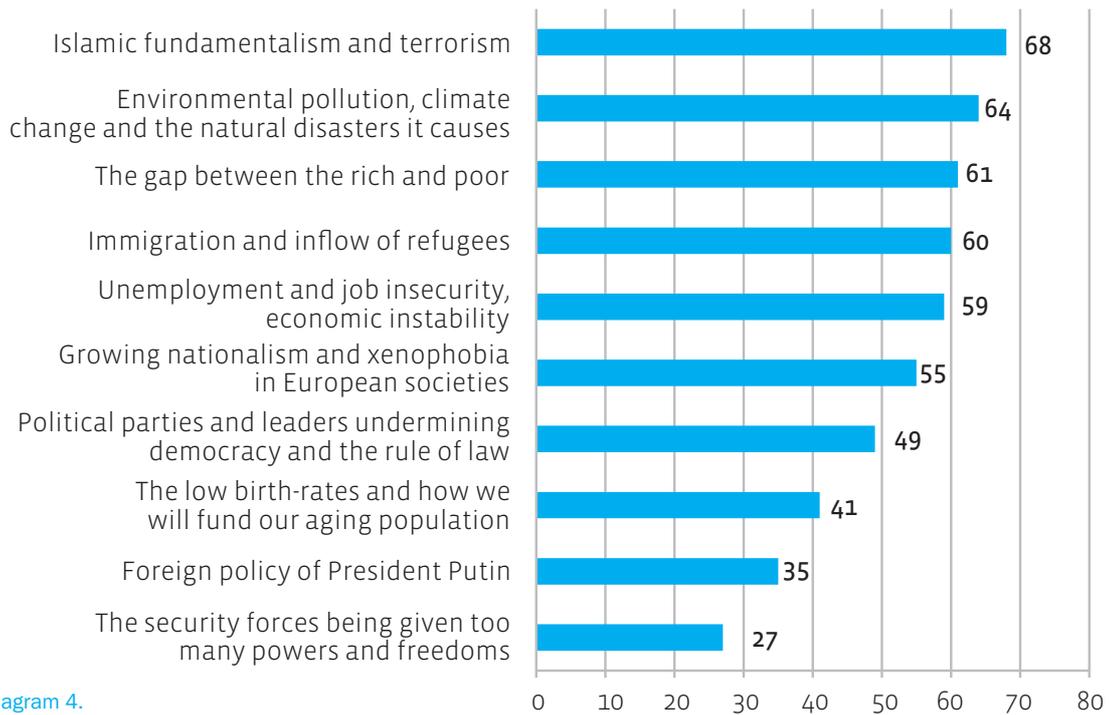


Diagram 4.
The European Union today is facing many problems. Please assess how big these problems are. Responses of “very big” and “big” are summarized in the graph (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Institute of Public Affairs 2017

fundamentalism and terrorism is a major threat to the EU, compared with 62% of respondents who believe that Austria should take in refugees.

Young women also indicate Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism as a major problem more often (71%) than young men (65%). Moreover, fear of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism is more widespread among the youth in the countryside – 73% believe it is a major problem, compared with 68% in mid-sized towns and 62% in large cities. Apparently in more homogeneous communities, where meeting Muslims is not an everyday occurrence, fear of them is also greater.

Perception of immigration

Germany and Austria are the only countries surveyed where the majority of young people did not oppose the statement that immigrants contribute to the growth and general prosperity of their respective countries. Forty-six percent of young Austrians do not think that immigrants have a positive economic impact on their country, compared to 40% of young Germans. Negative views about the economic impact of immigration are much more widespread in the Visegrad countries, especially in Hungary (78%) and Slovakia (73%).

Nearly half of young Austrians disagree that immigrants are needed to improve Austria’s demographic prospects and balance the retirement pension system (48%). Those who disagree prevail over those who agree (32%) – a clear difference with Germany. Contrary to other questions, when it comes to immigration and demography, the trend in Austria seems to be similar to the Visegrad countries.

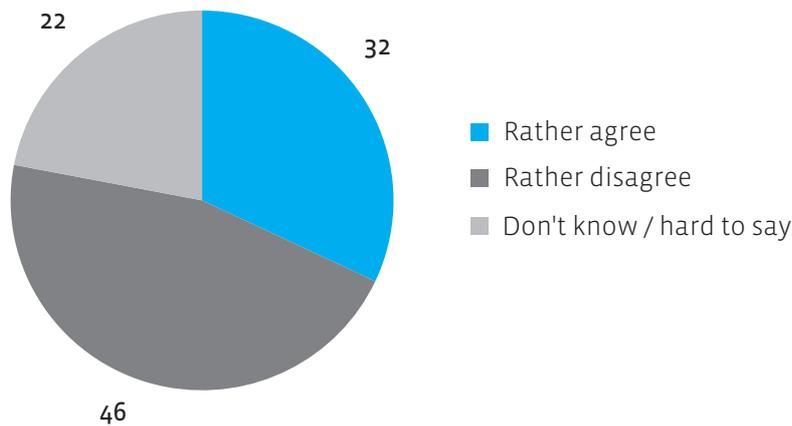


Diagram 5. Immigrants contribute to your country's growth and general prosperity (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Institute of Public Affairs 2017

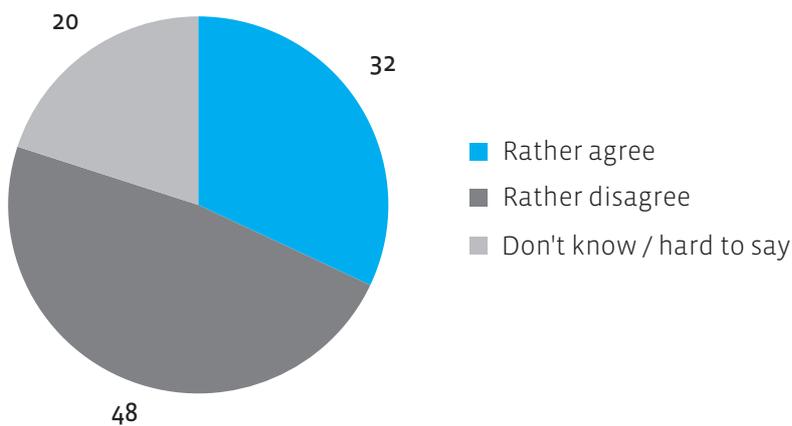


Diagram 6. Immigrants are needed to improve your country's demographic prospects and to balance the retirement pension system (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Institute of Public Affairs 2017

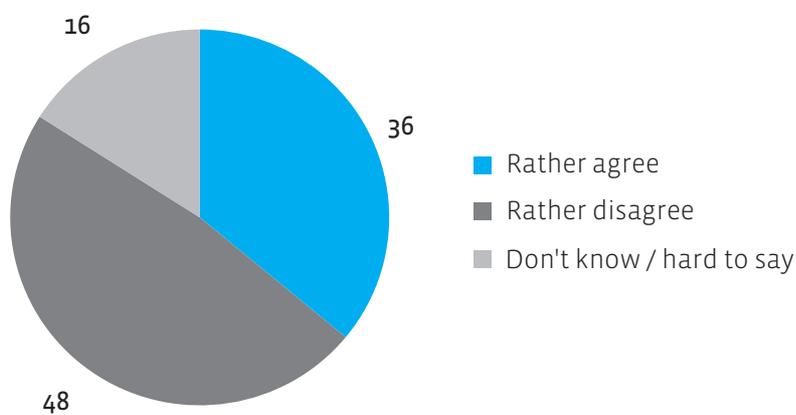


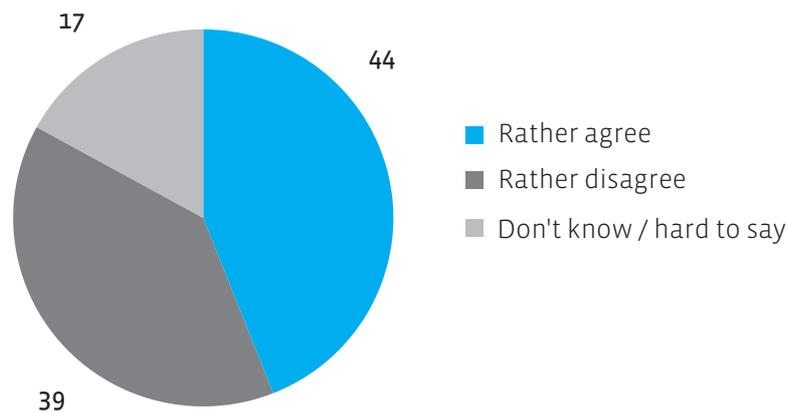
Diagram 7. Immigrants are a threat to your country's public safety and security (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Institute of Public Affairs 2017

More young Austrians (44%) agree that immigrants are a burden for the social welfare system than disagree (39%). The percentage who see immigrants as a burden is not as big as in the case of Visegrad countries, but is still a significant indication that young Austrians are closer to their Central European peers than to young Germans when it comes to assessing the impact of immigration on the welfare system.

Diagram 8.
Immigrants are a burden
for the social welfare
system (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann
Stiftung and the Institute
of Public Affairs 2017



Young Austrian women have generally a more favorable view of immigrants than their male counterparts, but at the same time, they are more likely to declare that they do not have a view on the matter. For example, 30% of women think that immigrants are a threat to public safety and security, compared with 41% of men. But 21% of the young women claim not to have an opinion, as opposed to only 12% of the men.

Young Austrians from the countryside generally hold a more negative view of immigrants than their peers from mid-sized towns or large cities. Only 21% of them think that immigrants contribute to Austria's economic prosperity, as opposed to 38% in mid-sized towns and 41% in big cities. The view that immigrants are a threat to public safety is also more widespread in the countryside – 41% agreed that they pose a threat, as opposed to 33% in mid-sized towns and 30% in large cities.

The majority of respondents declared that they have met an immigrant in their neighborhood, workplace, school or in general, at a place they routinely visit (62%). As expected, views on the economic and social role of immigrants of young Austrians who declare that they have met an immigrant in one of the places they routinely visit are different from those who have not had any contact. While 42% of young Austrians who have met an immigrant disagree with the statement that they contribute

to the economic prosperity of their country, 52% of young Austrians who declare they have never met an immigrant hold the same view.

Moreover, 54% of young Austrians who have met an immigrant disagree that immigrants are a threat to public safety. In the case of those who have never met an immigrant, this number drops to 37%. Again, 44% of young Austrians who have met an immigrant disagree that immigrants are a burden to the social welfare system, while among those who have not met an immigrant, this number is significantly lower – 29%. Meeting an immigrant, however, does not seem to influence views regarding the supposed positive role of immigrants in improving Austria’s demographic prospects and balancing the retirement pensions system – 47% of young Austrians who have met an immigrant, compared with 48% of those who have not, do not see a positive role for immigrants in this respect.

Not only meeting an immigrant in person, but also keeping in touch with residents of other countries and travelling outside of Austria inclines young Austrians more favorably towards immigrants. Among respondents who declared that in the last six months they have been in touch with someone living in a different country, 40.4% agreed that immigrants contribute to Austria’s prosperity (compared to 21.5% of those who were not in touch) and 32.3% agreed that immigrants are a threat to public safety (among those who were not in touch with anyone, this number was significantly higher – 40.5%). Young Austrians who travelled abroad in the last six months were also less likely to declare that they consider immigrants a threat – 31.5%, as opposed to 43% among those who did not travel anywhere outside Austria.

Almost two-thirds of young Austrians think that their country should accept refugees (61%). On that question, young Austrians are definitely closer to their German peers than to their Visegrad counterparts.

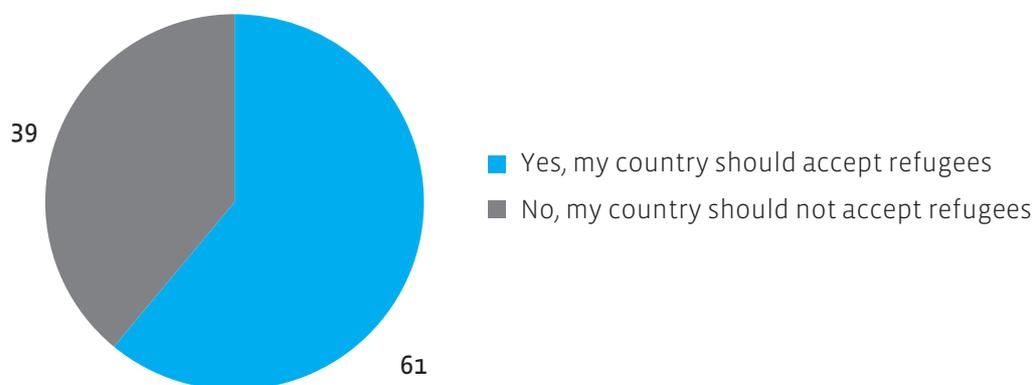


Diagram 9.
Should your country provide safe haven to refugees from areas of military conflicts or to victims of political persecution in accordance with internationally agreed rules and standards? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Institute of Public Affairs 2017

Women were more likely than men to respond that Austria should accept refugees (67%, as opposed to 55%). This view is also significantly more widespread in large cities (75%) than in the countryside (52%). Younger Austrians, ages 15-19, are also more likely to believe that their country should accept refugees (65%) than their peers ages 20-24 (59%).

Among young Austrians who think that Austria should accept refugees, 87% pointed to maintaining peace as a very important task of the EU. Among respondents who are against accepting refugees, 70% believed that maintaining peace is crucial for the Union.

Young Austrians who believe that their country should accept refugees are not predominantly leftist – 72% of the respondents who favor accepting refugees considered themselves closer to the political center. A similar pattern can be observed among opponents of accepting refugees – 66% of them described themselves as rather centrist.

The concerns of young Austrians about the impact of immigration on their society seems to be part of a general trend in Austrian society. According to the “Integrationsbarometer 2017”, a study conducted by the Austrian Integration Fund, 51% of Austrians had a negative view of living together with newcomers to their country and 58% had a negative view of living together with refugees.²

Opinions on globalization

The increase in global interconnectedness is considered a positive development for Austria by 63% of the young respondents, while only 21% view it negatively.

Views on interconnectedness correlate with opinions about EU membership – 71% of those who think that Austria’s EU membership is, on the whole, a good thing consider this a positive development. Among Eurosceptics, only 39% responded that it is a rather positive development. Moreover, 72% of young Austrians who believe that Austria should stay in the EU and work to reform it view interconnectedness as something positive. Among those who think that Austria should leave the EU, this number is only 35%.

² Integrationsbarometer 2017, Österreichische Integrationsfonds, 2017 <http://www.integrationsfonds.at/themen/publikationen/integrationsbarometer/> [last access: 19.07.2017]

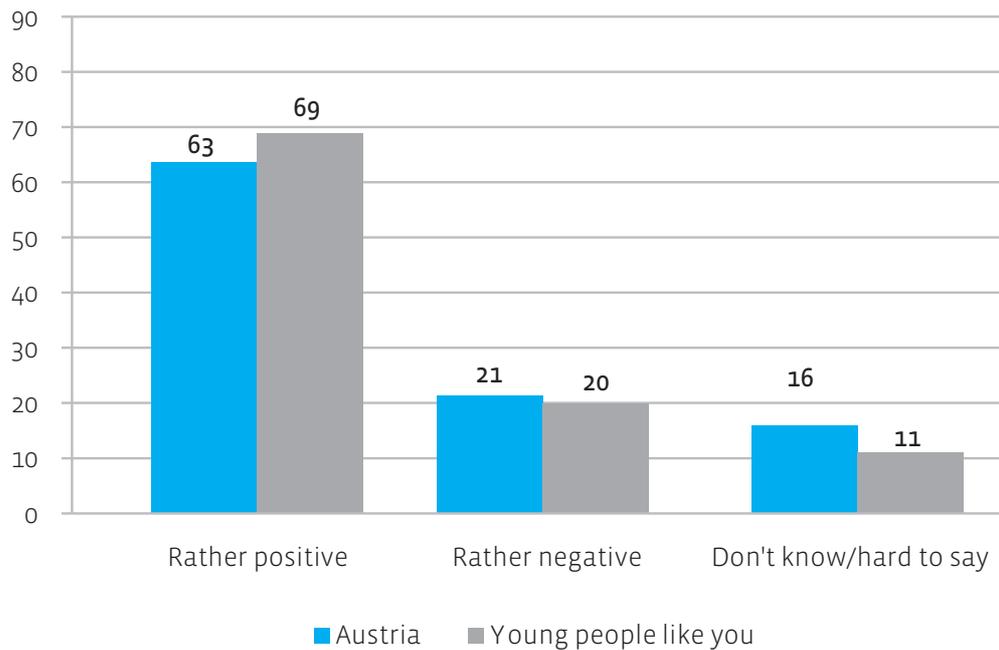


Diagram 10. Over recent decades, the world has become more interconnected. There is greater free trade between countries and easier communication across the globe. Money, people, cultures, jobs and industries all move more easily between countries. Generally speaking, do you think this has had a rather positive or rather negative effect on...? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Institute of Public Affairs 2017

A majority of young Austrians think that global interconnectedness has had a positive effect for young people like themselves (69%). Globalization is viewed positively more often when young people's personal perspectives are in question than when the perspectives for Austria are being assessed.

Among young Austrians who think that their country's membership in the EU is a good thing, 75% also think that globalization is a rather positive development for young people. Interestingly, many young Austrian Eurosceptics also think that globalization has had a positive effect for young people – 47%. When asked about the effect of globalization on their country, only 35% said it has been positive.

Three-quarters of young Austrians who would like their country to stay in the EU have a favorable view of globalization's impact on youth (76%). Among those who would like Austria to leave, only 42% viewed globalization as positive for young people.

A more favorable view of global interconnectedness is also more widespread among young Austrians who have had contact with people from abroad and among those who have traveled outside their home country – 73.3% of the former and 73.9% of the latter stated that globalization has had a rather positive effect on young people like themselves. Among young Austrians who had no contact with people

from outside their home country, this number was 62.8%, and even lower in the case of those who have not traveled in the past six months – 60.2%.

Regarding other recent societal developments, 64% of young Austrians think that greater acceptance for same-sex relationships has changed society for the better, and 48% that the growing number of women in leadership positions has had a positive effect on society. However, the growth of ethnic and religious diversity is viewed much less favorably than either of these developments – only 34% think it has a positive impact on society, 32% are of the opposite opinion, and 26% are neutral on the topic.

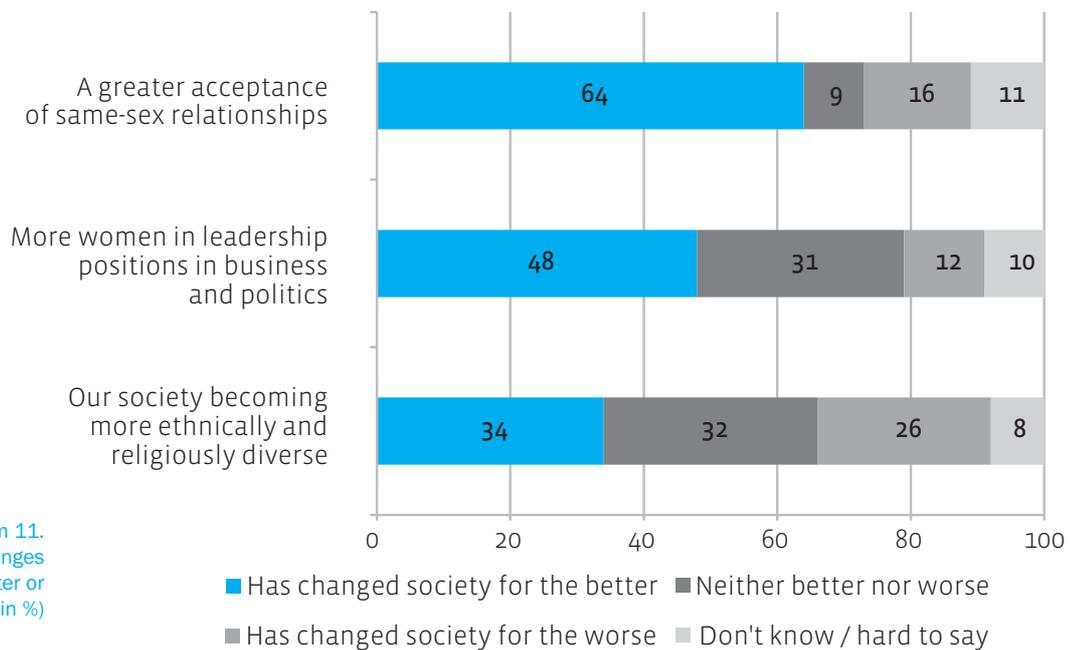


Diagram 11.
Do the following changes
make society better or
worse? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann
Stiftung and the Institute
of Public Affairs 2017

Young women generally have a more favorable view of recent societal changes – 75% think that greater acceptance for same-sex relationships has changed society for the better, compared to only 54% of men. Furthermore, 59% appreciate more women in leadership positions (only 37% of male respondents perceive this as a positive development) and 40% think that more ethnic and religious diversity has changed society for the better (compared to only 29% of men).

Opinions about social changes correlate with opinions about EU membership and about the future of the Union. Among young Austrians who think that belonging to the EU is good for their country, 41% think that ethnic and religious diversity are good for society. Among those who think EU membership is bad for Austria, only 13% think that increased ethnic and religious diversity is a positive development. Forty percent

of those who would like Austria to stay in the EU and reform it think that diversity has a positive effect on society, as opposed to only 10% of those who would like Austria to leave.

Among those who think that EU membership is good for Austria, 53% think that having more women in leadership positions has changed society for the better, while among those who think that EU membership is bad for Austria, this number drops to 30%. A majority (54%) of those who think Austria should stay in the EU see the growing number of women in leadership positions as a positive development, while only 27% of those who think Austria should leave consider it a positive societal change.

The number of young Austrians who think that a growing acceptance of same-sex marriages is a positive development is also lower among those who believe EU membership is bad for Austria (43%) and among those who would like Austria to leave the EU (46%). Among those who think Austria has benefited from EU membership, this number is 71%. Among those who think the country should stay in the EU and reform it, 72% view acceptance of same-sex marriages as positive.

When asked about the role of religion in the contemporary world, 28% of young Austrians said that the world would be a better place without religion. Only 8% believe that religion makes the world a better place.

Attitudes toward democracy

When it comes to their political views, the majority of young Austrians consider themselves to be rather in the center of the political spectrum. Only 17% describe their political views as extreme left or close to extreme left, and only 13% consider themselves on the extreme or close to extreme right.

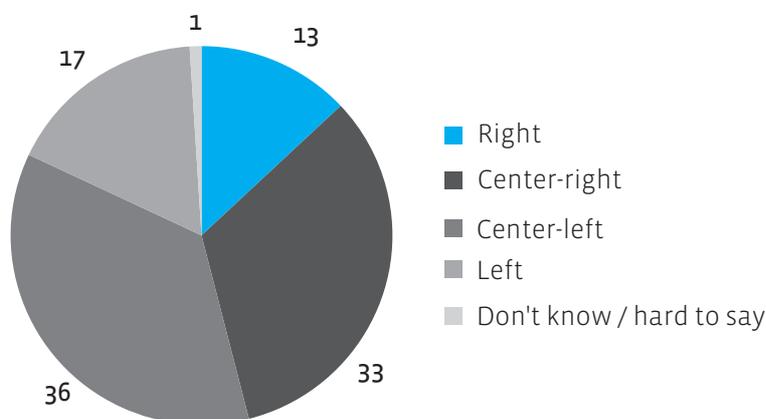


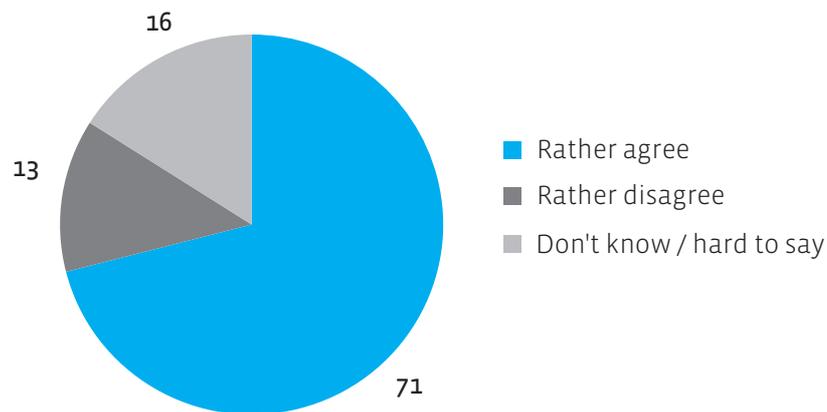
Diagram 12.
How would you describe your political views on the left-right spectrum? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Institute of Public Affairs 2017

A majority of young Austrians agree that democracy is the best possible political system (71%). This is the same as the result that was seen in Germany. The belief that democracy is the best possible system is much less widespread among the youth in the Visegrad countries – only 48% of young Hungarians, 50% of young Poles, 51% of young Slovaks and 60% of young Czechs share this opinion.

Diagram 13.
Democracy is the best
political system (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann
Stiftung and the Institute
of Public Affairs 2017



Among those who think that Austria benefits from EU membership, this number is 76%, while among those who think the opposite, it is clearly lower – 54%. The same goes for opinions about the future of Austria in the EU – among those who would like the country to stay and reform the Union, 78% think that democracy is the best possible political system, while among those who think Austria should leave the EU, only 51% share this view.

Nearly three-quarters of young Austrians disagreed that it does not matter if the government is democratic or not democratic (73%), the highest number in all of the six countries where the survey was conducted. While 72% of young Germans and 71% of young Poles are of the same opinion, the numbers for Hungary, Slovakia and Czech Republic were lower – 65%, 61%, and 61%, respectively.

Among those who think Austria's membership in the EU is a good thing, 78% disagreed, compared to 55% of those who think that the country's membership in the EU is a bad thing. Among those who think Austria should remain in the EU and reform it, 81% disagree, while among those who would like the country to leave, it is 51%.

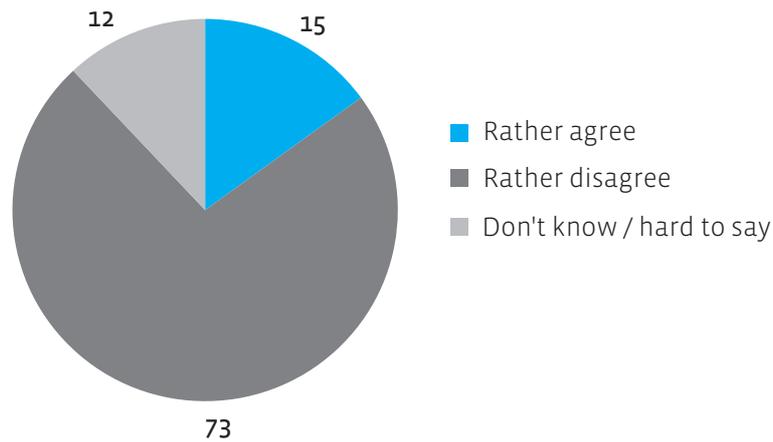


Diagram 14.
It does not matter if the
government is democratic
or not democratic (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann
Stiftung and the Institute
of Public Affairs 2017

Views on democracy correlate with the Euroscepticism of Austrian youth. Those who believe that EU membership is a bad thing for their country more often declare that democracy is not the best political system (25% of sceptics, as opposed to 10% of enthusiasts) and that it does not matter if the government is democratic or not (26%, as opposed to 12%). Moreover, young Austrians critical of their country's EU membership were also more likely to declare that they do not have an opinion whether democracy is the best possible system (21%, compared to 14%) or whether it matters if the government is democratic or not (19%, as opposed to 10%). As questions about democracy are a rather sensitive topic, the significantly higher numbers of undecided respondents among the Eurosceptics may indicate that lack of faith in democracy is actually more widespread than the responses suggest.

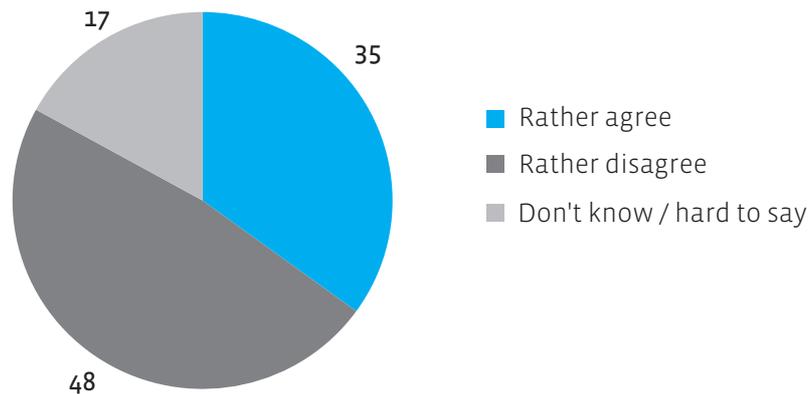
Support for democracy among young Austrians is strong, but slightly weaker than among Austrians in general. According to a study conducted by the Austrian institute SORA in April 2017, 78% of Austrians think that democracy is the best possible political system, despite its flaws and shortcomings. But the same study showed that even though democracy is still embraced by a majority of Austrians as the best political system, the acceptance for authoritarian rule is increasing and feelings of powerlessness and insecurity are becoming more widespread – 41% of respondents declared that they feel powerless (32% in 2007), and 52% declared that they have no influence on the government's actions (42% in 2007).³

³ Schon 43% für „starken Mann“, SORA 2017, <http://www.sora.at/nc/news-presse/news/news-einzelansicht/news/schon-43-fuer-starken-mann-776.html> [last access: 19.07.2017]

Nearly half of young Austrians disagree with the statement that human rights and civil liberties should sometimes be suspended for the sake of better protection from terrorism (48%). In Germany and Poland, the numbers were a bit lower – 46% and 43%, respectively. In Hungary and the Czech Republic, more young people agree that human rights and civil liberties should sometimes be suspended to better protect citizens from terrorism – 51% and 47%, respectively. In Slovakia, the percentage of those who agree and disagree is the same – 39%.

Diagram 15.
Sometimes human rights
and civil liberties should
be restricted in order to
better protect people from
terrorism (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann
Stiftung and the Institute
of Public Affairs 2017



Among those who think Austria benefits from EU membership, 51% are not ready to accept the suspension of human rights and civil liberties for the sake of better protection from terrorism. Among those who think that EU membership is bad for Austria, this number drops to 39%. Also, 51% of those who are in favor of Austria staying in the EU and reforming it disagree with this proposition, while only 37% of those who would like Austria to leave disagree with this statement.

Sources of information about the EU

The most popular source of information among young Austrians are the social media – 82% use platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube on a regular basis. Social media are the most popular source of information for the young people in all the countries surveyed, in fact, young Austrians declared they use such services slightly less often than their counterparts in other countries – 90% of young Poles use them on a regular basis, followed by 89% of Slovaks, 86% of Czechs, 84% of Hungarians and 83% of Germans.

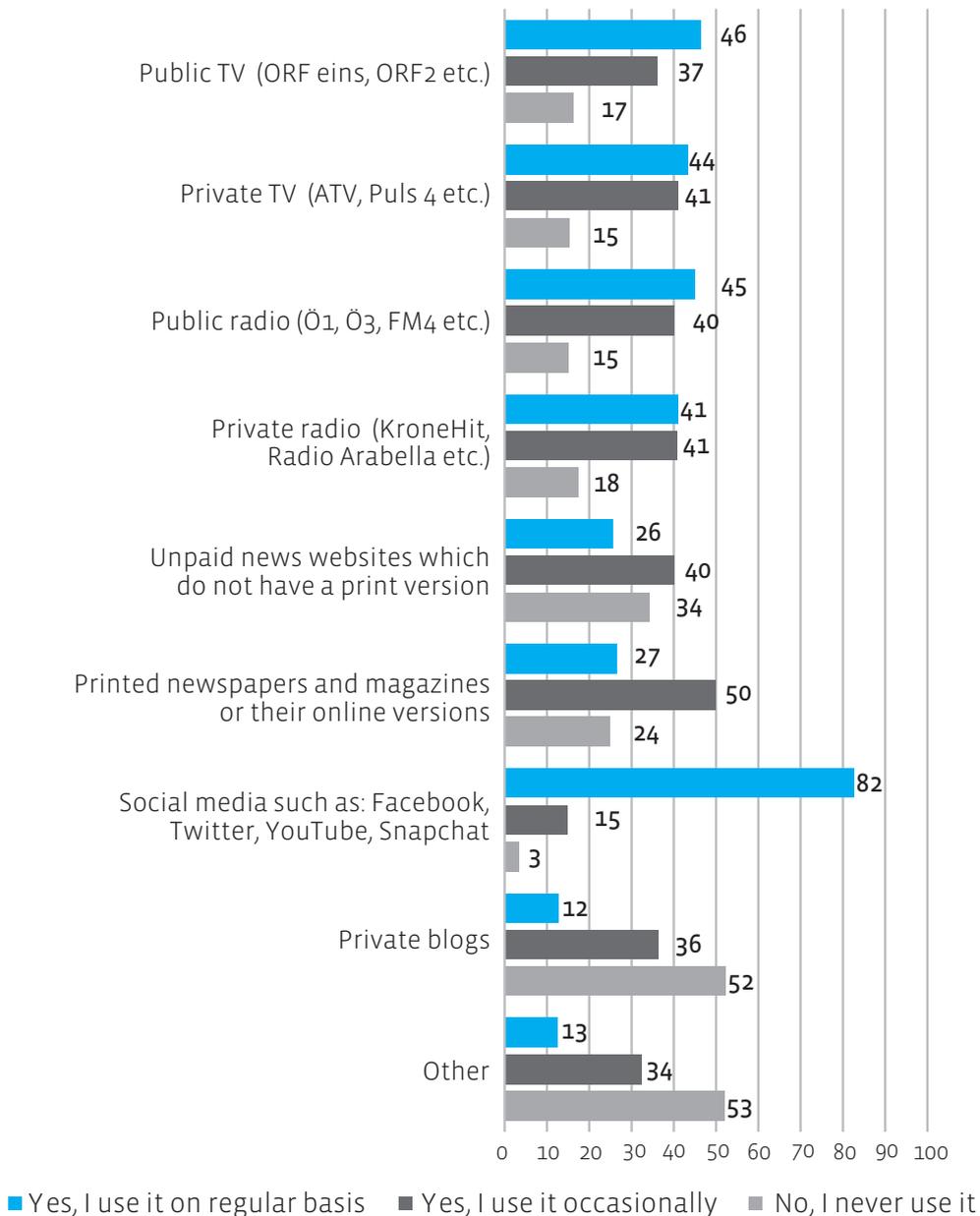


Diagram 16.
Do you use the following sources of information? (in %)

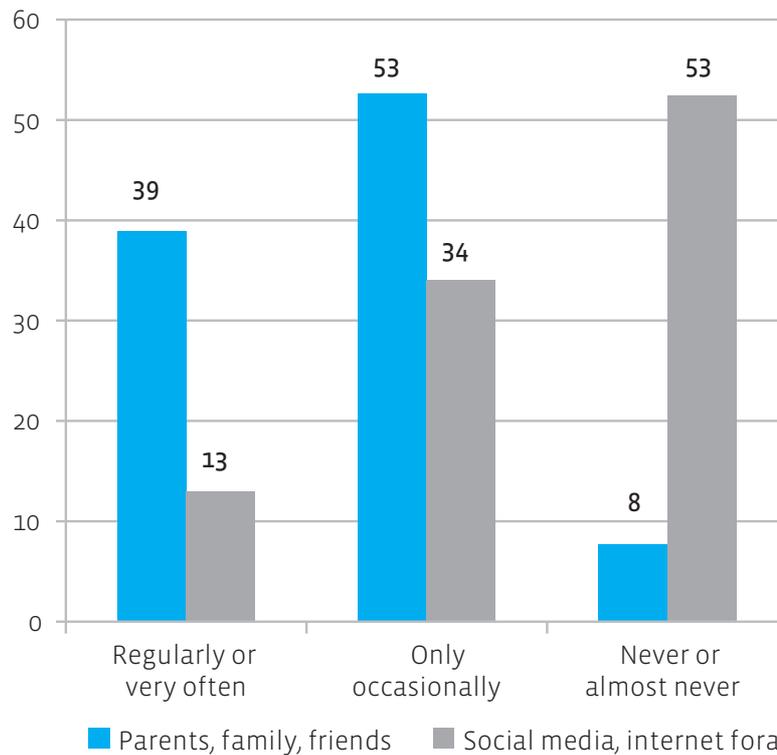
Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Institute of Public Affairs 2017

Interestingly, more young Austrians use public TV (46%) and radio (45%) than their counterparts in the other countries where the survey was conducted – while 45% of young Germans declare they use public TV on regular basis, the numbers for the Visegrad countries are lower. Public TV is the least popular among young Hungarians – only 17% declare they watch it on regular basis. When it comes to listening to public radio, 32% of young Germans say they use it on regular basis. Again, numbers for the Visegrad countries are lower. Public radio is the least popular among young Czechs, where only 9% listen to it on a regular basis.

The majority of young Austrians (53%) talk about politics with their families and friends only occasionally; 39% say they discuss it regularly. Germany is the country where the most youth declare they discuss politics with people they know on regular basis (48%), followed by Poland (40%). The country with the highest number of young people who declare they never discuss politics with their family and friends is Hungary (28%).

Diagram 17.
How often do you talk about politics with your parents, other family members, friends or on social media and internet fora? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Institute of Public Affairs 2017



The majority of young Austrians (53%) do not discuss politics on the Internet. The only two countries where less than 50% of young people declared they never discuss politics online were Germany (40%) and Poland (46%) – in both countries, 41% said they do it occasionally. The country where the most youth declared they never discuss politics in social media and internet fora was Hungary – 60% of young Hungarians declared they do not conduct political discussions online. In general, young people are reluctant to discuss politics on the internet.

Recommendations

- ▶ An informational and educational campaign associating the practical everyday benefits of Austria's EU membership (like the euro or ability

to travel, study or work abroad) with the more abstract European values could help in clearing ambiguities and uncertainties about the EU among young Austrians.

- ▶ Young Austrians should learn more about the EU's concrete efforts to tackle important problems like climate change or wage inequalities. Such a campaign should also bring the threat of Islamic terrorism into a more balanced perspective.
- ▶ The negative perception of immigrants is significantly lower among young Austrians who declare they have met an immigrant in a place they visit frequently. If the simple fact of meeting an immigrant proves to have such an effect, it would be advisable to organize diversity awareness training, during which young Austrians, especially from the countryside or small towns with smaller immigrant populations, could meet immigrants and learn about their lives. A similar project was initiated in the past by the State Secretary of Integration, but it is now being perceived as partisan by some immigrants who agreed to act as "ambassadors" in the program. Therefore, a campaign like this should be organized by reputable NGOs rather than by state institutions.
- ▶ Young Austrians associate the EU with globalization – a clear majority of those who think that increased global interconnectedness is something positive also have a positive view of the EU, while a majority of Eurosceptics perceive globalization negatively. An educational campaign aimed at disentangling these two views and showing how the EU acts to protect and represent the interests of its member states could be beneficial.
- ▶ Young Austrians tend to use public TV and radio more often than their counterparts in the other countries under study. However, just like the youth in the other countries, young Austrians tend not to use the internet as a platform for political exchanges very often. Therefore, campaigns aimed at raising awareness about immigrants or expanding information about the EU should be organized not only by making use of the new media, but also with the inclusion of traditional methods – face-to-face contact or public media.



Czech Republic

Key findings

- ▶ The level of support for EU membership among young Czechs (73%) is among the lowest of the countries surveyed. It corresponds to other surveys and to the latest Eurobarometer data.
- ▶ Like the young people from the other countries surveyed, young Czechs had a positive attitude towards the opportunity to study in other EU countries (63%) when assessing the benefits of European integration. However, they were less enthusiastic about the opportunity to reside and work (60%) in other EU countries than young people from other member states. Again, this lack of enthusiasm as far as mobility is concerned, both inside and outside of the country, is a prominent feature in surveys of Czechs.
- ▶ Young Czechs who have been in contact with someone outside their family from a different city, region, or country are also more likely to be in favour of the Czech Republic remaining in the EU and working to reform it. Such human contacts reinforce the likelihood that an individual will embrace the EU as a place to live.
- ▶ The large majorities of youth who consider the impact of globalization on the Czech Republic and the younger generation to be positive are in favour of the country remaining in the EU (67% and 68%, respectively). This proportion is significantly lower among those who regard the impact of globalization on the country and themselves as negative (46% and 39%, respectively). This survey confirms the link between opinions on globalization and attitudes towards the EU.
- ▶ Young Czechs described Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism as the biggest problem the EU faces (61%). They consider immigration

and the influx of refugees to be the second most serious problem for the EU (57%). While some 29% of young Czechs pointed to unemployment, the same number indicated growing nationalism and xenophobia as a major problem for the EU.

- ▶ Young Czechs consider maintaining peace in Europe to be the most important achievement of the EU (77%). This view is slightly more frequently held by those who are also in favour of the Czech Republic accepting refugees to the country.
- ▶ Willingness to accept refugees into the country is higher among those who consider the role of religion important.
- ▶ People who consider the EU to be a good thing overall and who are in favour of remaining in the EU are more likely have positive opinions about democracy.

Foreword

Some 1,049,000 people between the ages of 15 and 24 currently live in the Czech Republic, representing 9.9% of the total Czech population.¹ The Czech Republic has a population of 10,579,000 inhabitants, with people ages 35 to 45 years being the largest group. The average age of a Czech citizen is 42 years.

According to a recent study, when compared to NATO or the UN, the European Union enjoys the weakest support among Czech citizens.² Support for NATO remains rather high (52%), most probably due to the wider security context, while support for the United Nations is even stronger (55%). In the same survey (March 2016), the European Union as an institution enjoyed the support of less than one-third of the respondents (29%).

Trust in the EU is currently at its lowest level since 1994. In the past, figures fluctuated between 50 and 60% with a peak in 2009 when the Czech Republic chaired the European Council's rotating presidency. In 2016, only 29% of respondents expressed their trust in the EU, as opposed to 71% who did not.

¹ Data as of 1 January 2016 according to the Czech National Statistics Office.

² Trust in the European Parliament has significantly declined since last year, press release, STEM, 14 March 2016.

The level of trust in the European Parliament follows a similar trend. At the beginning, there was a period of high expectation. Having peaked in 2009, the level of trust recorded in 2016 was at its lowest. In 2016, only 24% of respondents expressed trust in the European Parliament, compared to 76% who did not. It is lower than for both chambers of the Czech Parliament (33% and 34% positive answers in 2016).

The Eurobarometer survey (March 2015) shows that age is clearly an important indicator when it comes to measuring Czech attitudes towards the EU. The youngest groups of respondents are most likely to have a positive opinion: 49% of people ages 15-24, followed by 42% of people ages 25-39, 38% of those ages 40-54 years and less than one-third of people ages 55 and over (29%) are likely to have a positive image of the EU.

One year later (May 2016), a STEM survey provided similar findings. More than half of respondents ages 18-29 and 30-44 (51%) considered the Czech Republic's EU membership to be a good thing. The older age groups were less positive about the EU: only 44% of respondents ages 45-59 and 48% of those 60 and over had a positive opinion.

European integration: benefits, problems, future

European integration is a good thing

A three-fifths majority of young Czechs consider EU membership a good thing. Sex, age, education, location and political orientation have no major influence. Those who are already employed are not as likely to believe that EU membership is a good thing (59%).

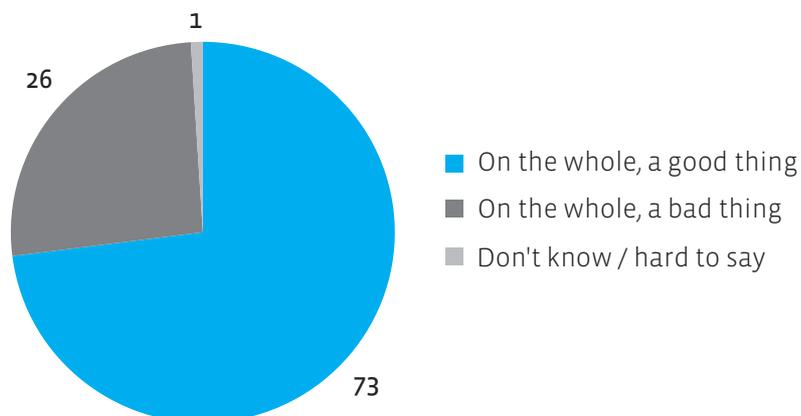


Diagram 1.
Generally speaking, do you think that the Czech Republic's membership in the EU is...? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

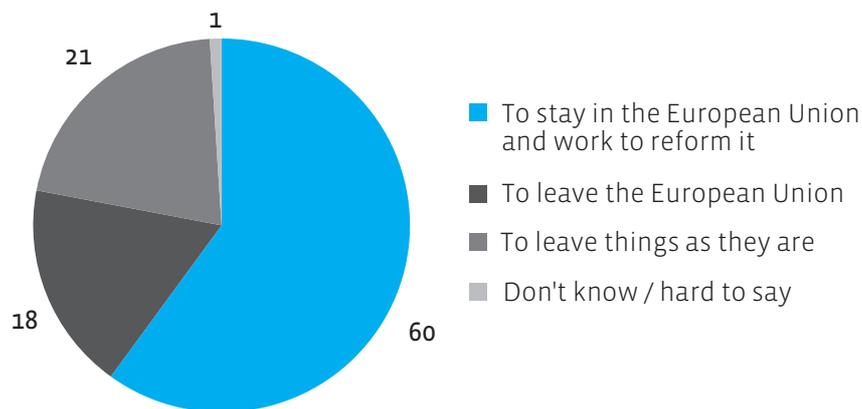
Staying and working to reform the EU

Most young Czech respondents believe that the country should stay in the European Union and work to reform it (60%). Respondents who would prefer to leave the European Union make up less than a fifth of the total (18%), while 21% would prefer to leave things as they are. Those who are already employed are less enthusiastic about supporting membership in the EU and reforming the institution (51%).

How should the lack of enthusiasm towards European integration be interpreted? The debate on European integration was hijacked by the Eurosceptics. President Vaclav Klaus succeeded in monopolizing this topic; his role as a vocal critic was crucial. In this respect, his successor as president, Miloš Zeman, did not bring about any substantial changes for the better.

Diagram 2.
Do you think that the
best thing for the Czech
Republic would be...? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann
Stiftung and Institute of
Public Affairs, 2017.



Peace as a major benefit

When asked to consider a list of benefits of the EU, peace in Europe was most commonly chosen by the Czech respondents to be highly important. Young Czechs have got used to taking European integration for granted and look on it as an entitlement. Peace is part of that achievement.

The fact that peace is rated remarkably high (77%) among young people can be considered to be a very positive outcome of the survey.

Peace in Europe is thanks to the efforts made in reconciling former enemies after the Second World War. Were the European efforts adopted by the Czech society as a whole? What about the bilateral relations

of Germany and the Czech republic? According to long-term surveys, we find that bilateral relations with Germany today are seen in fairly positive terms.³ These findings correlate with the outcomes of a joint survey conducted in Germany and in the Czech republic by Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach and STEM, according to which, two-fifths of Germans consider relations between the two countries to be good. Germans from the former East Germany and from neighbouring Bavaria and Saxony rate mutual relations even more positively than those from other regions. And as far as the Czech republic is concerned, four-fifths of Czechs consider relations between the two countries to be good.⁴

Among other benefits of EU integration with a high degree of consensus, we can add the possibility of “studying in a different country.” Almost two-thirds of the respondents (63%) chose this as an important or very important benefit.

Young Czechs do not avail themselves of all the opportunities open to them. They are slightly less keen about the opportunity to work and settle abroad (60%). A majority of young Czechs (57%) also praise European efforts to prevent climate change and develop environmental protection standards.

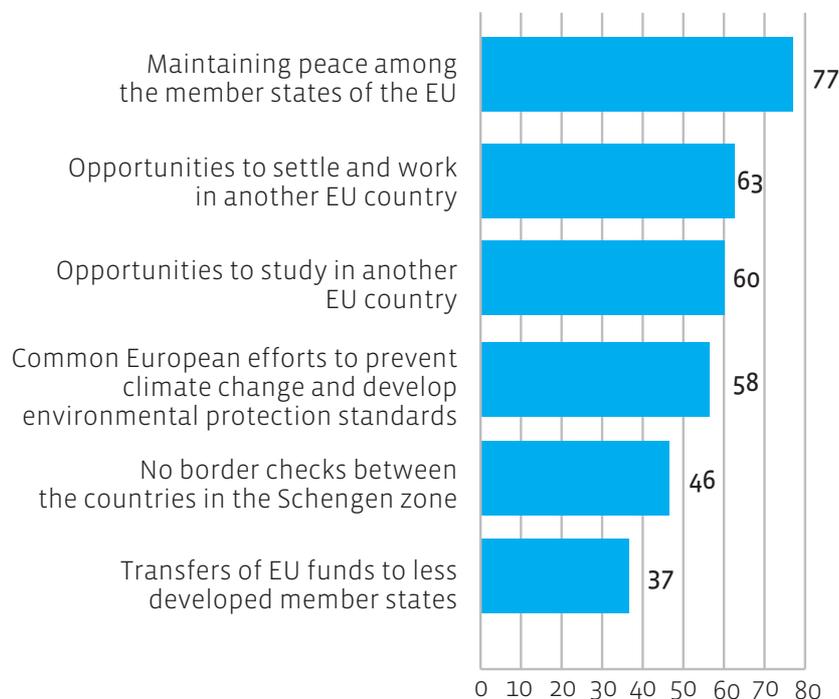


Diagram 3.
How important for you personally are the following benefits of European integration? Responses of “very big” and “big” are summarized in the graph (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017. Respondents could choose answers from 0 (“not important at all”) to 5 (“very important”).

3 “What attitudes do Czech citizens have towards various nationalities and ethnic groups?” STEM, press release, 13 April, 2016.

4 Public attitudes in the Czech Republic and Germany towards Czech-German relations, Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, Germany and STEM, press release, 8 February 2017.

Solidarity among member states not appreciated?

On the opposite side of the benefits spectrum, young people are not convinced (only 37%) that “resource transfers from the EU budget to less developed member states” is one of the benefits of European integration. Their responses indicate that they do not see the benefit of such transfers or do not want to stand in solidarity with others.

This attitude may not be exclusively based on such a premise. It could also be reinforced by several major corruption cases linked to the distribution of EU funds. These cases have received significant coverage in major media outlets in recent years. In this context, young Czechs may be associating the Czech administration in charge of managing EU subsidies with major corruption scandals.

No border checks between the Schengen countries is positively rated by less than half of young Czechs (46%). It is difficult to explain why the number is not higher, and other studies do not provide any clear explanation. Do young Czechs take free movement within the Schengen zone for granted? Or is there a correlation with the lack of enthusiasm we see when the question of work and study abroad is raised in our survey?

Opinions regarding the benefits of EU integration are not for the most part influenced by socio-demographic factors. The only exception is climate change – which is considered a priority more often by women (65%) than by men (53%). Moreover, for most university educated respondents, the EU’s efforts to prevent climate change are the most significant benefit (75%).

The EU faces major challenges

According to the Czech youth in our survey, Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism (76%) and the influx of refugees (66%) are the main challenges facing the EU. Environmental pollution and climate change (64%) and political parties which undermine democracy (61%) are also regarded as relatively important issues. The problem of unemployment and job insecurity (56%) comes next down the list.

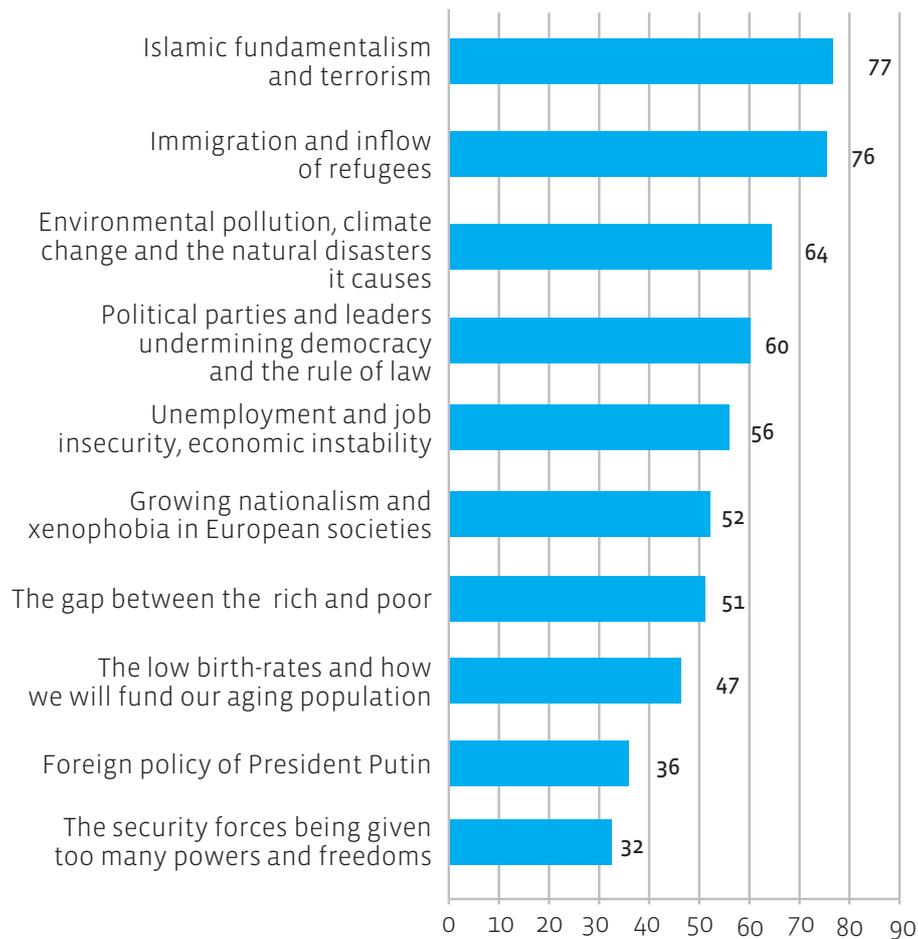


Diagram 4.
The European Union today is facing many problems. Please assess how big these problems are. Responses of “very big” and “big” are summarized in the graph (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017. Respondents could choose answers from 0 (“not important at all”) to 5 (“very important”).

On the opposite end of the scale, we see that young people consider granting excessive powers to the security forces (32%) and President Putin’s foreign policy (36%) to be least important, in relative terms. Women are more likely to consider the problem of unemployment to be important (61%), as are people living in rural areas (63%). Among the other problems, women are more inclined than men to consider the issues of environmental pollution, the differences between rich and poor, President Putin’s foreign policy, the growth in nationalism and xenophobia and the powers of the security forces as important.

Respondents ages 20-24 years are significantly more likely to consider environmental pollution an important challenge (69%, as opposed to 57% of youth ages 15-19) and President Putin’s foreign policy (40%, as opposed to 31%). In relation to the gap between rich and poor, left-wing voters⁵ are more likely to be sensitive to this issue.

5 More about the political preferences of those surveyed below.

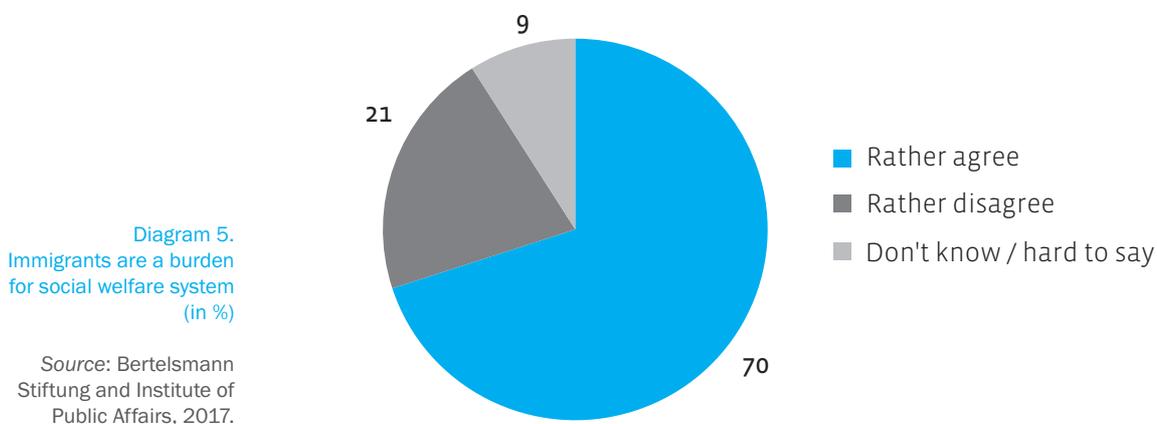
Immigration and the influx of refugees was found to be an issue of deep concern among young people. The hysteria surrounding this topic is surprising. People have strong opinions on these issues and are less likely to choose a response of “don’t know/hard to say.” We see a divide in the society.

Such superficial emotionality is inconsistent with past Czech public opinion regarding foreigners. After all, the integration of refugees from the Balkans during the wars in the early 90s proved successful, and Ukrainians and Vietnamese have been accepted in Czech society. But in the light of the current survey, should we continue to speak in terms of real tolerance? Or is it simply indifference?

Perception of immigration

A burden on society

More than two-thirds of young Czechs (70%) see immigrants as a burden for the social welfare system rather than as beneficial. A little more than one-fifth (21%) think the opposite, while 9% remain undecided.



Nearly two-thirds (60%) of the young people surveyed are of the general opinion that immigrants pose a threat to public safety and security in the Czech Republic, while only slightly over one-quarter (28%) do not see such a threat.

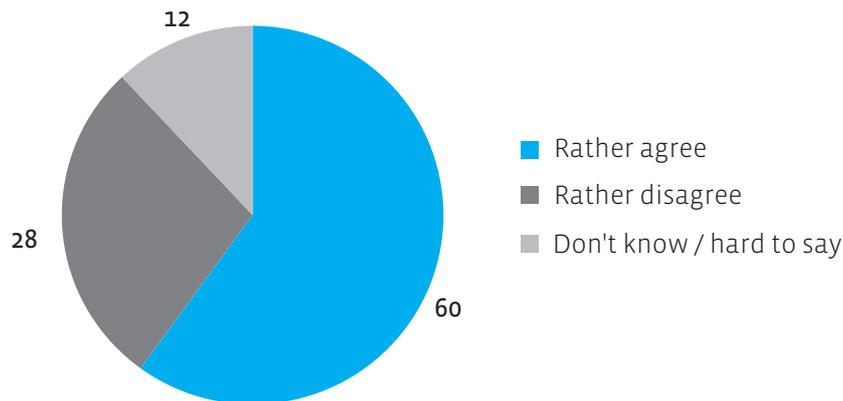


Diagram 6.
Immigrants are a threat to
your country's public safety
and security (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann
Stiftung and Institute
of Public Affairs, 2017.

Although young Czechs are aware of the issue of the Czech Republic's aging population, less than one-fifth (18%) are of the opinion that immigrants are needed to improve the Czech Republic's demographic prospects. On the contrary, two-thirds (66%) are convinced the country does not need them.

Similarly, respondents tend to reject the notion that immigrants contribute to economic growth (65% disagree), while only one-fifth (20%) think the opposite. This is regardless of the fact that the Czech labour market needs to hire people from abroad. While foreigners on the labour market have been perceived as a longer term solution for many years, young Czechs do not link immigrants or refugees with any potential contribution to their country's economic prosperity.

Young people from cities are somewhat more likely to agree with the statement that immigrants contribute to economic growth and less often consider them a threat to public safety or a burden on the social welfare system.

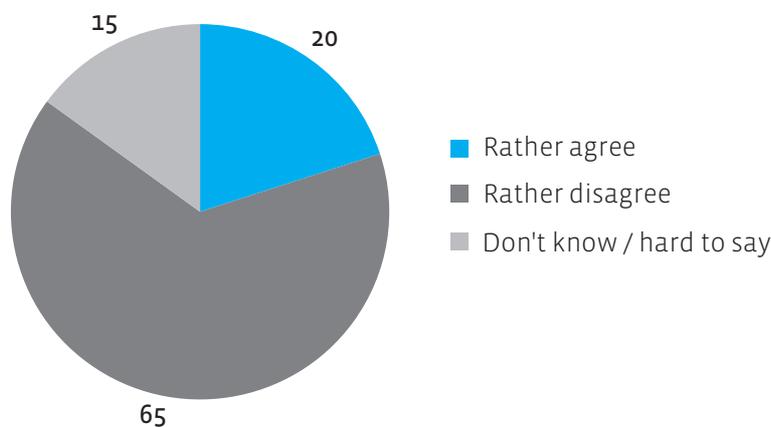
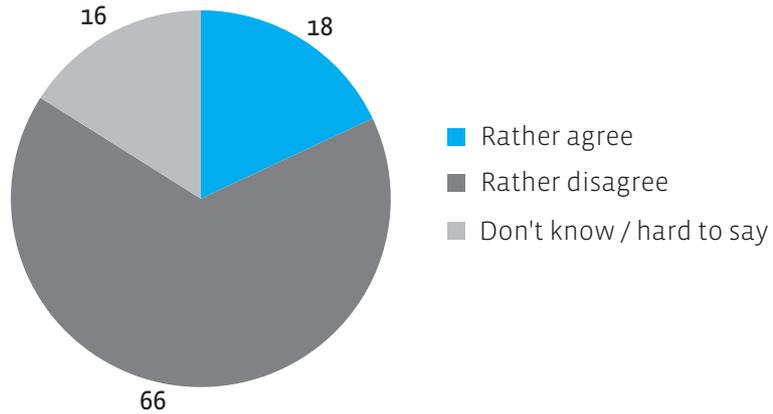


Diagram 7.
Immigrants contribute to
your country's economic
growth and general
prosperity (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann
Stiftung and Institute
of Public Affairs, 2017.

Diagram 8. Immigrants are needed to improve your country's demographic prospects and to balance the retirement pension system (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.



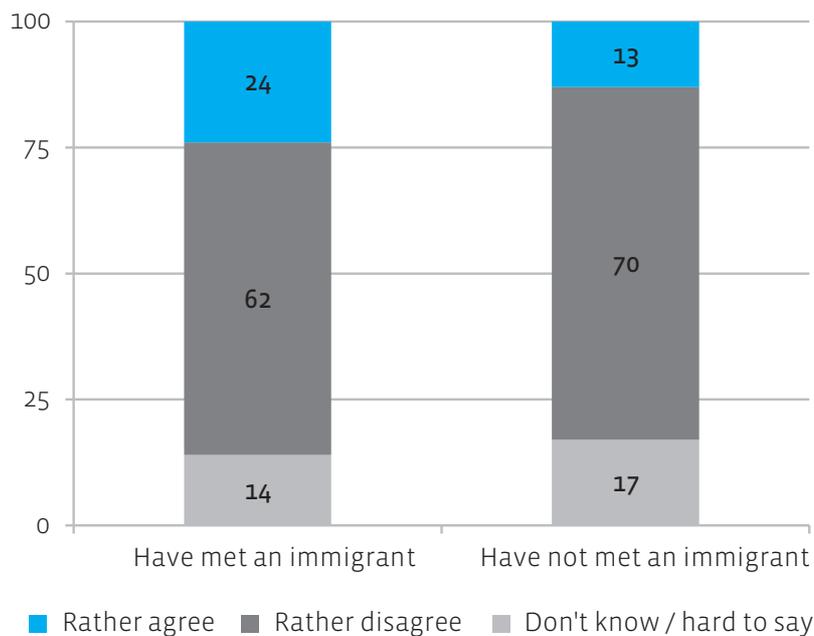
In terms of attitudes towards migrants, the analysis shows that young people who are interested in politics and who speak on the subject with their parents and friends are more likely to have a more favourable attitude towards immigrants than those who never or only occasionally engage in political discussions.

Personal experience with immigrants matters

Apprehension surrounding immigration can change with personal experience. Young people who already have had personal contact with an immigrant are more likely to concede that immigrants contribute to the economic growth of the country.

Diagram 9. Responses to the statement that immigrants contribute to the country's economic growth and general prosperity in correlation with the experience of having met an immigrant (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.



The difference between those who have met an immigrant and those who have not is noteworthy – 24% of the former and only 13% of the latter agree that immigration is needed to contribute the economic growth and general prosperity. Nevertheless, it doesn't change the overall scepticism of young Czechs regarding these issues (correlation of two questions⁶).

Refugees not welcome?

The overwhelming opinion among young people is that the Czech Republic should not accept refugees from war zones or victims of political persecution (70%). This opinion is slightly more likely to be voiced among employed respondents (80%) than students (66%) or those in training (74%).

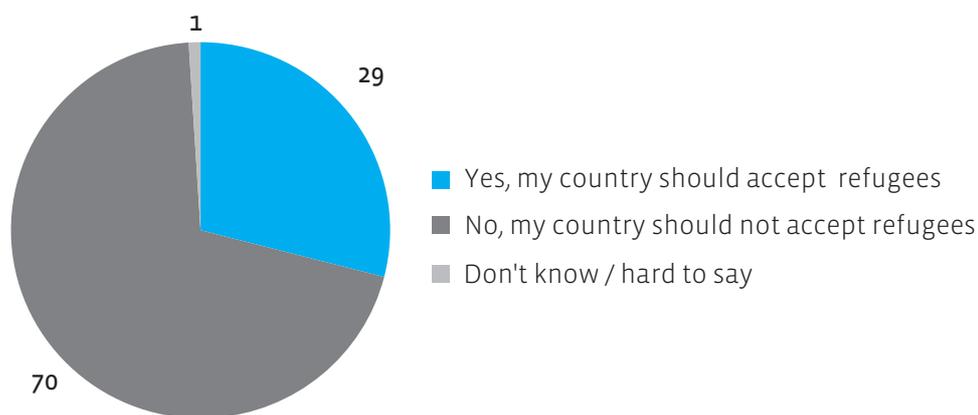


Diagram 10.
Should your country provide safe haven to refugees from areas of military conflicts or to victims of political persecution in accordance with internationally agreed rules and standards? (in %)

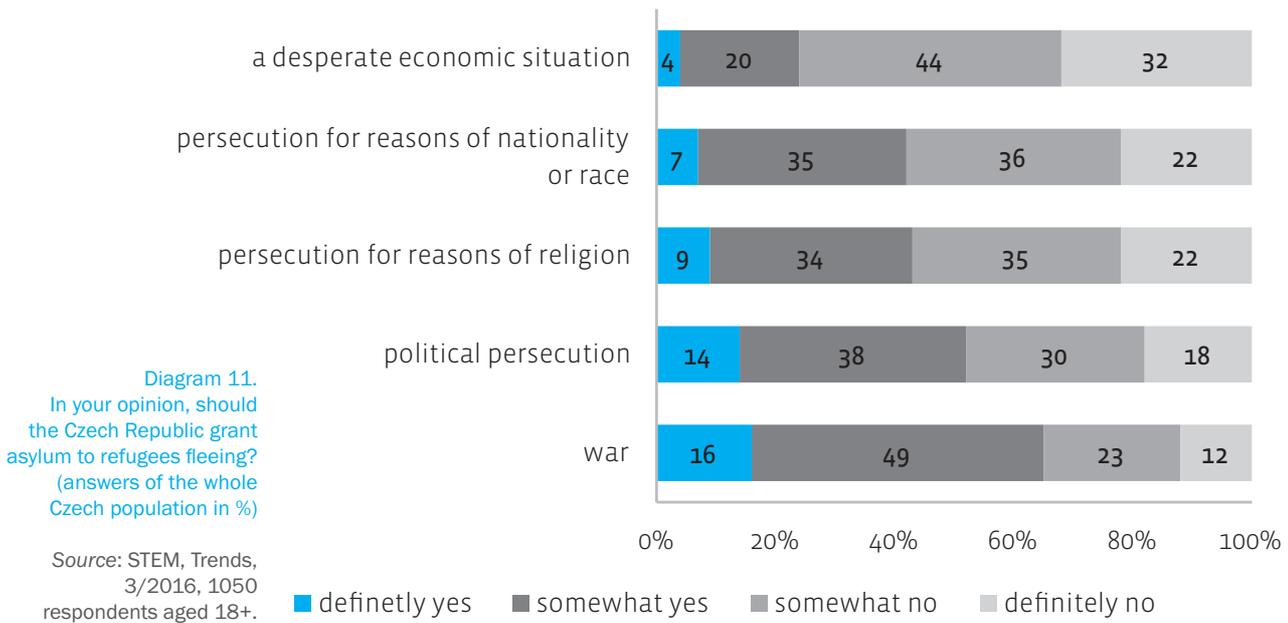
Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

The number of young Czechs stating that their country should not accept refugees from areas of military conflicts or victims of political persecution is impressive (more than two-thirds, or 70%, as can be seen in the diagram above).

Further analysis might raise a question here. This strong negative attitude toward refugees among young people may indicate an estrangement from their own history, which has been marked by decades of political persecution and dissidents who have fled the country seeking asylum abroad.

⁶ Questions combined: "Have you ever met an immigrant in your neighbourhood, workplace, school or other places that you routinely visit?" and "Immigrants contribute to your country's economic growth and general prosperity".

Nevertheless, this point is not confirmed by the findings of a previous STEM survey.⁷ According to the survey from March 2016 conducted among the general population, 65% of Czechs would be in favour of granting asylum to refugees from war zones. Could the difference of the scope (young people vs. the general population) and the year's delay (2016 to 2017) explain such a major dissimilarity? Here, additional analysis is needed since the surveys yielded contrasting results.



It is interesting to note the different responses to the various circumstances of the refugees. Czechs were not keen on granting asylum to those fleeing a desperate economic situation, with only one-quarter giving a positive response (24%). Nevertheless, political persecution was higher on the scale, with a majority willing to offer support (52%). On the top of the list, refugees fleeing war would be welcomed by two-thirds of the respondents (65%).

Opinions on globalization and social changes

Young Czechs consider globalization to be a positive development. What is interesting to note is the difference between whether they see

⁷ Willingness to grant asylum has declined; nonetheless, a majority would still grant asylum to refugees fleeing warzones”, STEM Trends, 3/2016.

it as being positive for their country (61%) or for people like themselves (71%). This difference might indicate that their generation is aware that globalization is more beneficial for the young. We apparently have a younger generation of Czechs who are not afraid of globalization and approach it with self-confidence.

The interconnected world is our home

Young Czechs feel fine in an interconnected world. As far as the Czech Republic is concerned, they assess the effects of globalization as being fairly positive: almost two-thirds (61%) are of the opinion that it has a rather positive effect and nearly a quarter (24%) are of the opposite opinion.

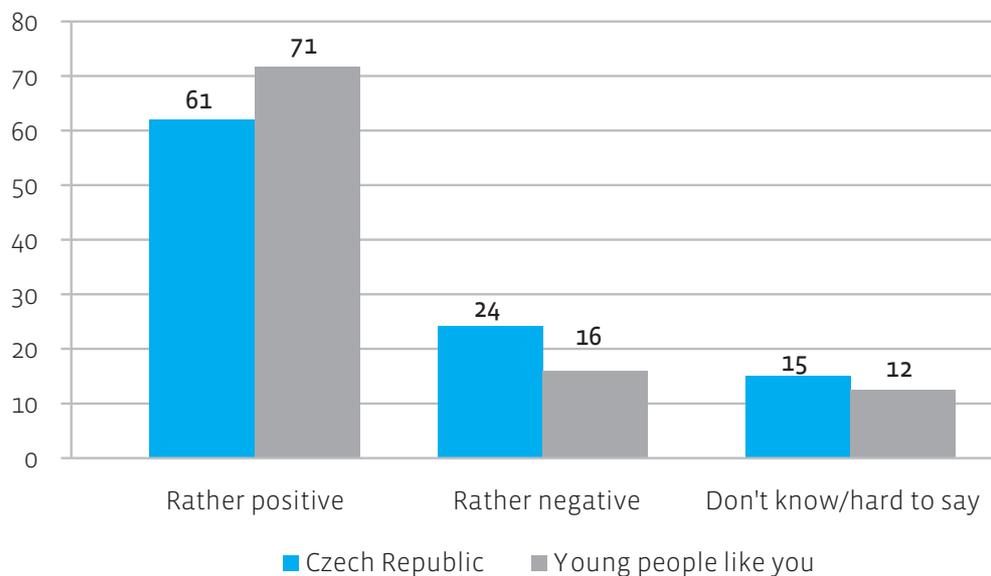


Diagram 12. Over recent decades the world has become more interconnected. There is greater free trade between countries and easier communication across the globe. Money, people, cultures, jobs and industries all move more easily between countries. Generally speaking, do you think this has had a rather positive or rather negative effect on...? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

As far as their own generation is concerned, the young Czechs surveyed tend to be even more positive: more than two-thirds (71%) stated that the interconnected world has a positive effect on young people, while less than one-fifth (16%) expressed the opposite opinion.

People who rate globalization negatively are more likely to opt to leave the EU

Those young Czechs who are satisfied with the interconnected world of today believe the Czech Republic should stay in the European Union and work to reform it. By contrast, those who rate globalization as being

somewhat negative for their generation identify much more with the idea of leaving the European Union (33%) and are less likely to be in favour of remaining and reforming it (40%).

In other words, there is a significant correlation between a positive attitude toward globalization and acceptance of membership in the EU. Those who see globalization positively, both for themselves and for the Czech Republic, tend to be more willing to stay in the European Union and reform it, while on the other hand, people who see more interconnection in the contemporary world as a negative phenomenon more frequently endorse leaving the EU.

The attitudes towards globalization of those who would chose to leave things as they are as regards the Czech Republic's membership in the EU are also worth looking at. One-fifth (20%) of those who consider globalization a positive development for young people are ready to leave things as they are, while more than one-quarter (27%) of those who perceive globalization negatively would choose this option. What does this attitude reflect? We hypothesise that opposition towards the EU is not fully articulated, at least for the time being.

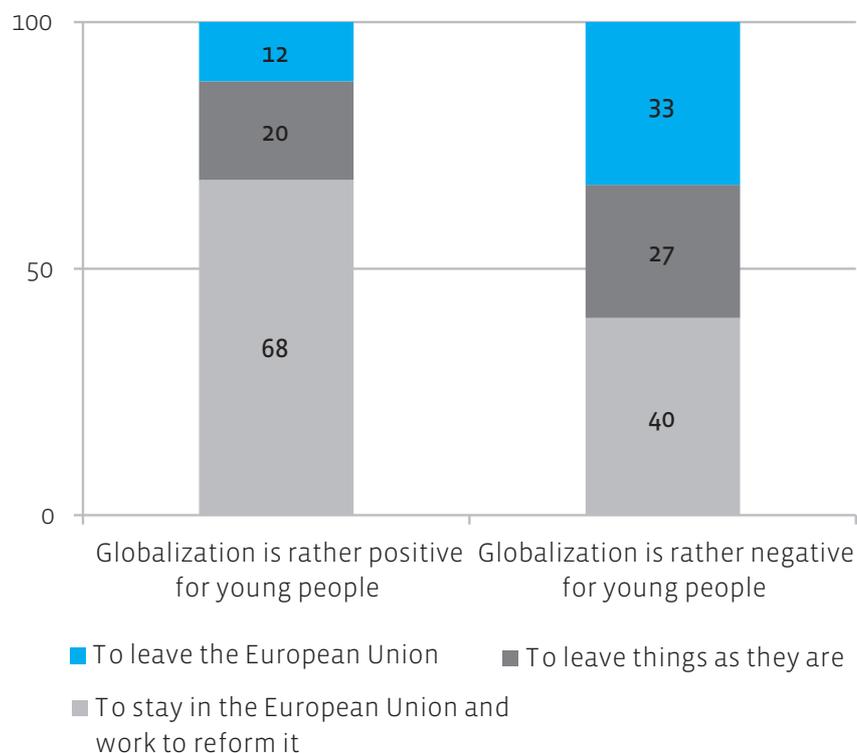


Diagram 13.
Correlations of attitudes
towards globalization and
options for the country's
future in the EU (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann
Stiftung and Institute of
Public Affairs, 2017.

Same-sex marriage tolerated, but ethnic diversity much less so

Ethnic diversity is not a relevant issue for Czechs when it comes to speaking about changes for the better. People are happy with their own linguistic, ethnic and religious *milieu*. Only one-fifth (20%) are of the opinion that ethnic and religious diversity has changed society for the better over the recent decades. Almost one-third (31%) believe it has changed society for the worse. It is important to note the proportion of young people who do not have a definitive opinion on this issue: more than one-third (39%) chose the option “neither better nor worse.” The additional 10% who chose “don’t know/hard to say” brings the proportion of those not expressing an opinion to almost one-half (49%). This might signify that ethnic and religious diversity is not as important as refugees.



Diagram 14.
Do the following changes
make society better or
worse? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann
Stiftung and Institute
of Public Affairs, 2017.

As far as gender balance is concerned, almost one-half (some 46%) of young people view the growing number of women in leadership positions in positive terms. The proportion of those who believe more

women in leadership positions has changed society for the worse is only at the level of about one-tenth (12%). An indifferent opinion (neither better nor worse) is shared by one-third of respondents (34%).

The acceptance of same-sex relationships seems fairly high: more than half of young Czechs believe that greater acceptance of same-sex relationships has changed society for the better (51%). The voice of those who believe the opposite is rather weak – less than one in five respondents (16%). If we add those who are indifferent and those who do not know, we see that one-third (33%) prefer not to make a choice.

If we correlate support for the European Union with attitudes towards ethnic and religious diversity, it should be noted that respondents who are comfortable with ethnic and religious diversity and believe that it has changed society for the better are also more frequently in favour of staying in the European Union and working to reform it (67%).

By contrast, those who are not comfortable with ethnic and religious diversity are less likely to favour remaining in the EU and working to reform it (55%). They are also more likely to be of the opinion that it would be best to leave the EU (24%), compared to one-tenth (10%) of those expressing a positive opinion of ethnic and religious diversity.

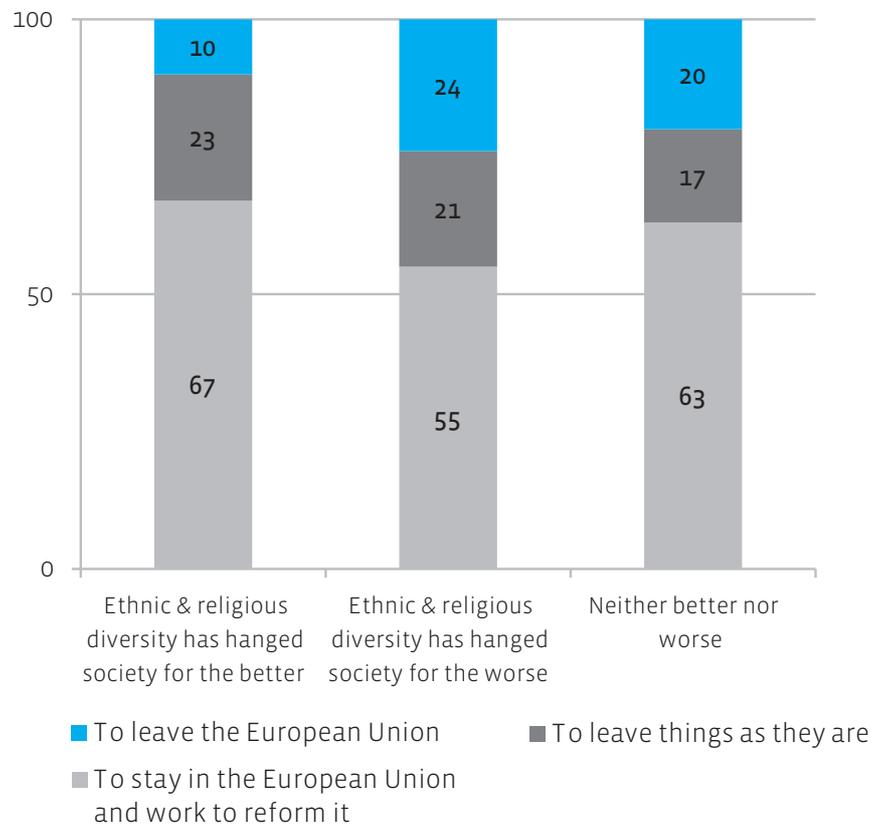


Diagram 15.
Correlations of attitudes
towards ethnic and
religious diversity and
options for the country's
future in the EU (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann
Stiftung and Institute of
Public Affairs, 2017.

Religion has only little importance

Young Czechs are rather sceptical about the role of religion in the world. While those who rate religion's role as positive (4 and 5 on a scale of 0-5) are very much in the minority and represent less than one-tenth (with a combined total of 9%) of those surveyed, almost two-thirds of young Czechs (65%) see no or little importance of the role of religion (0, 1 or 2). One-quarter of those surveyed (25%) chose the middle/neutral option (3 on the 0-5 scale). In other words, young Czechs are somewhat disinclined about the role of religion, with more than 65% considering it not important (0-2 on the scale).

There is a correlation between attitudes regarding religion and the issue of refugees. The willingness to accept refugees into the country is higher among those who appreciate the importance of religion.

Attitudes toward democracy and political affiliations

Almost two-thirds of young Czechs (60%) see democracy as the best political system, whereas about one-fifth (21%) disagree with this opinion. At the same time, 19% of Czech youth opted not to give a clear answer to the question of whether democracy is the best political system.

There was a similar pattern in reactions to the statement that it doesn't matter if the government is democratic or not – almost two-thirds of the young people surveyed disagreed (61%) contending that it does matter, whereas only one-fifth (22%) agreed that it does not matter.

Opinions regarding democracy are significantly influenced by respondents' political alignment. The level of agreement with the statement that democracy is the best political system is lower among those who consider themselves on the left of the political spectrum.

Views about democracy are somehow linked with readiness to support the EU. There is evidence of a correlation demonstrating that people who have doubts about democracy are less likely to support EU membership. The difference is of 23%: more than three-quarters of respondents are of the opinion the democracy is the best possible political system and consider EU membership a good thing (80%), while only 57% of those who do not favour democracy are prepared to support EU membership. Last

but not least, those who do not have a strong opinion about democracy are still in favour of EU membership by a two-thirds majority (67%).

Diagram 16.
Do you rather agree or rather disagree with the following statements? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

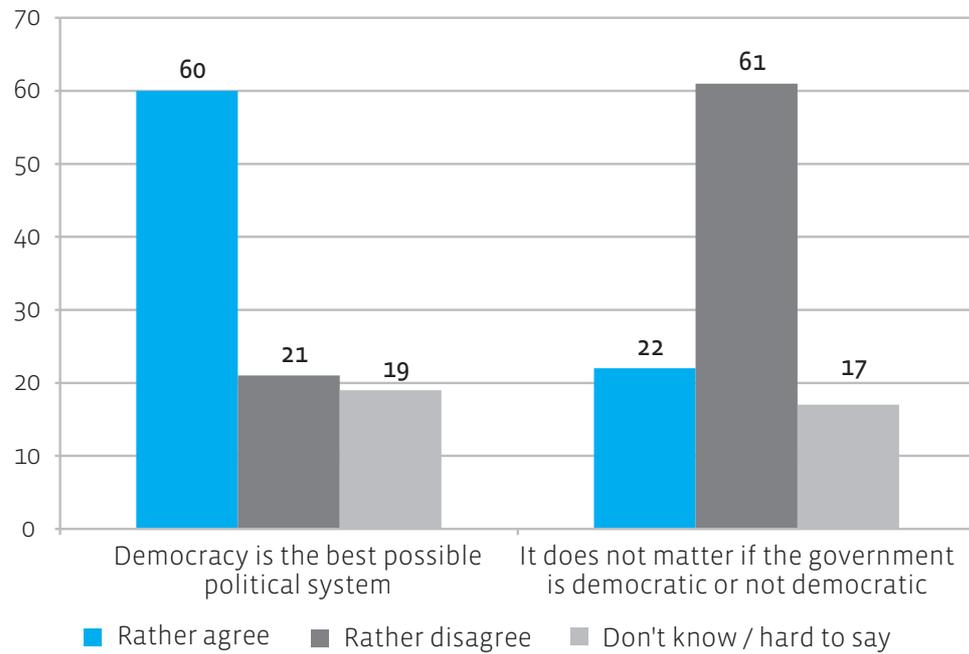
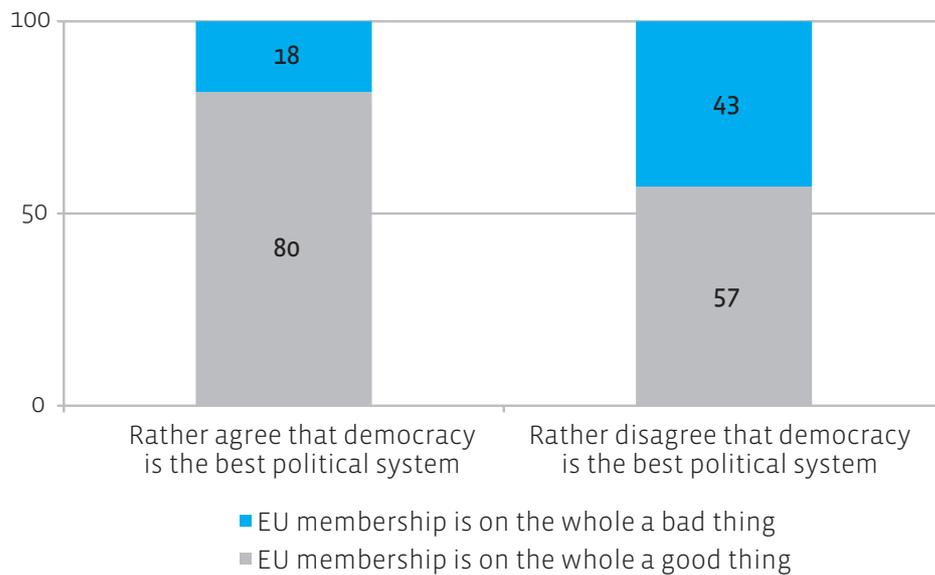


Diagram 17.
Democracy is the best possible political system (in %), responses according opinions about EU membership

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.



Democracy and human rights

Young Czechs are divided regarding the issue of restricting human rights and civil liberties to better protect citizens from terrorism. While almost half (47%) agree that in some circumstances rights and liberties

may be restricted, 37% disagree with this statement. Almost one-fifth (16%) find it difficult to say.

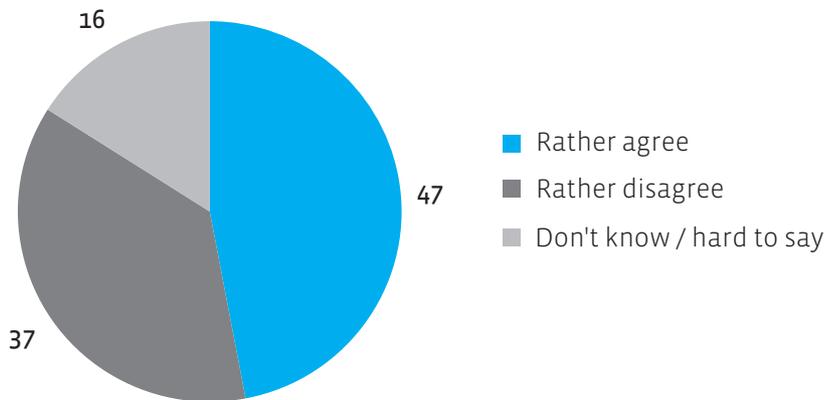


Diagram 18. Sometimes human rights and civil liberties should be restricted in order to better protect people from terrorism (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

Political orientation of young Czechs

In general terms, the political orientation of the young Czechs we surveyed is predominantly centrist. About 6% support left-wing political parties, and only 10% declare their preference for the political right.

This result is most probably influenced by three factors. First, the left and right distinction is becoming more and more obsolete while speaking about the political debate in the Czech Republic. Second, the right-wing political parties, being in the opposition for more than three years, have met with difficulties in reaffirming their leadership and challenging the government coalition. Third, the political center has become very interesting for political leadership of a new kind with considerable potential. Even though it is not labeled as a standard political party (its official label being a “movement”), ANO, the current government coalition partner, has succeeded in attracting voters from both the right and the left.

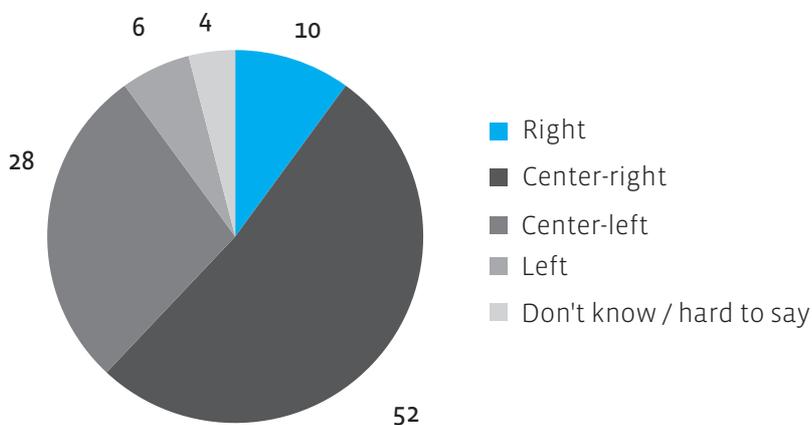


Diagram 19. How would you describe your political views on the left-right political spectrum? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

Social media the main source of information

Social media are the primary source of information for young people (97% declare using them regularly or occasionally). Websites with no print version and no paywall are the second most popular source (90%). Public radio is on the opposite end of the scale, with only one-tenth of respondents saying they are regular listeners (9%).

As far as the print media is concerned (with 67% claiming regular or occasional use), a second, related question should concern the type of print media. Among them, there might be the free daily *Metro* or similar free daily publications which are based on pre-paid advertisements and minimal information content. It is also important to note that those who consider themselves “regular readers” are fairly low in number (only 14%). These numbers correspond to the general situation in the Czech Republic where the print media has lost a great deal of importance. Young Czechs are growing up with low exposure to print.

The fact that Czech public radio enjoys such a low level of popularity among young people merits attention. Despite having top-quality regional radio programmes and even a good radio station for young people for many years, the popularity of radio has fallen. In this sense, looking at world-wide trends in radio popularity, we do not see any specifics in the case of young Czechs.

It is noteworthy that there are no significant differences for the figures for Germany and Austria, on one hand, and the Visegrad countries on the other, when it comes to the use of the Facebook and social media. However, in the context of the survey as a whole, this represents the one exception where there is a level of consistency amongst the societies surveyed.

What people post on the web and on social networks is their own thoughts and is no reflection of what they have heard or read. The data show that today’s young people are not interested in engaging in discussions under the articles they read, nor are they interested in engaging in political discussion on line.

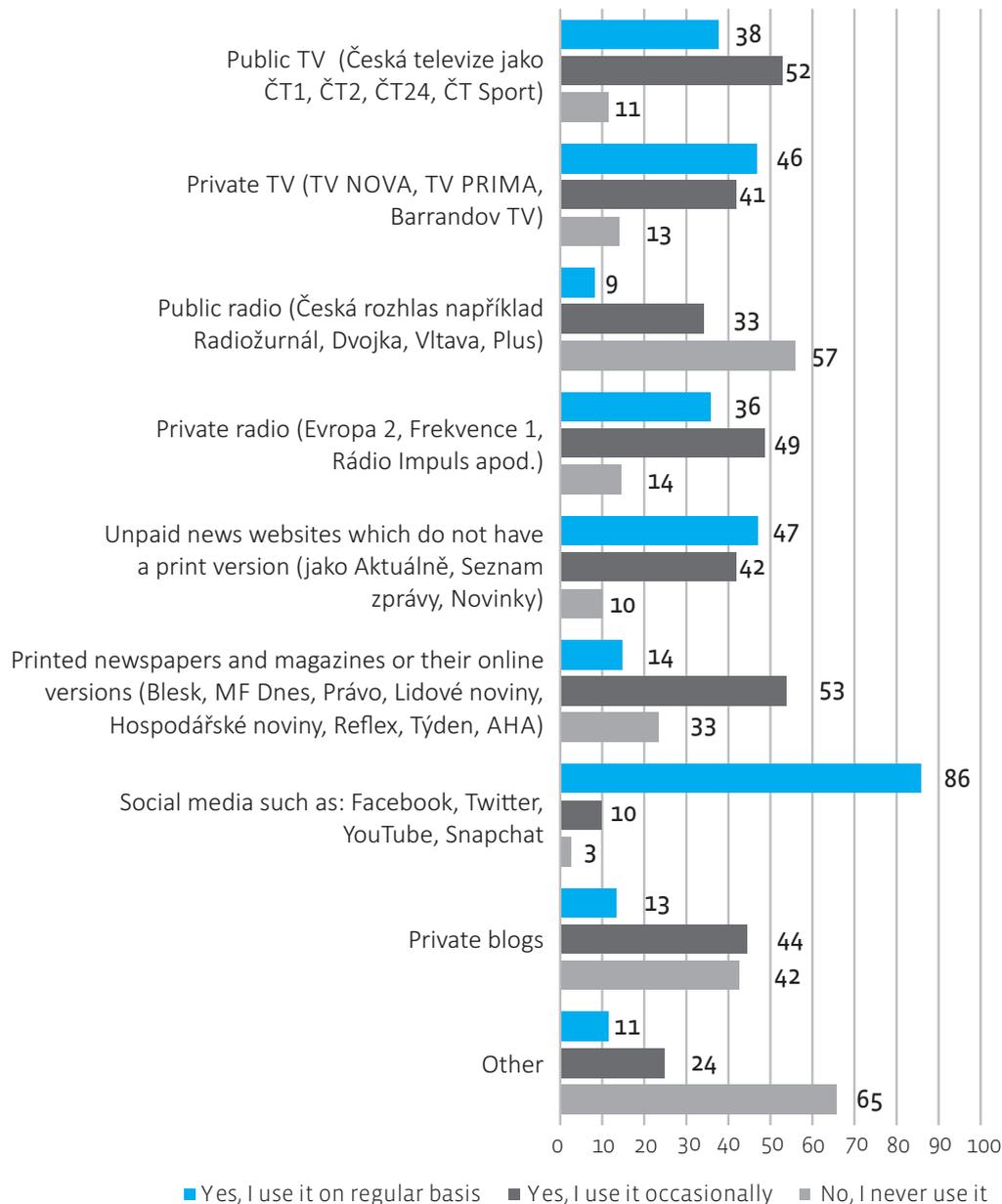


Diagram 20.
Do you use the following
sources of information?
(in %)

Source: Bertelsmann
Stiftung and Institute of
Public Affairs, 2017.

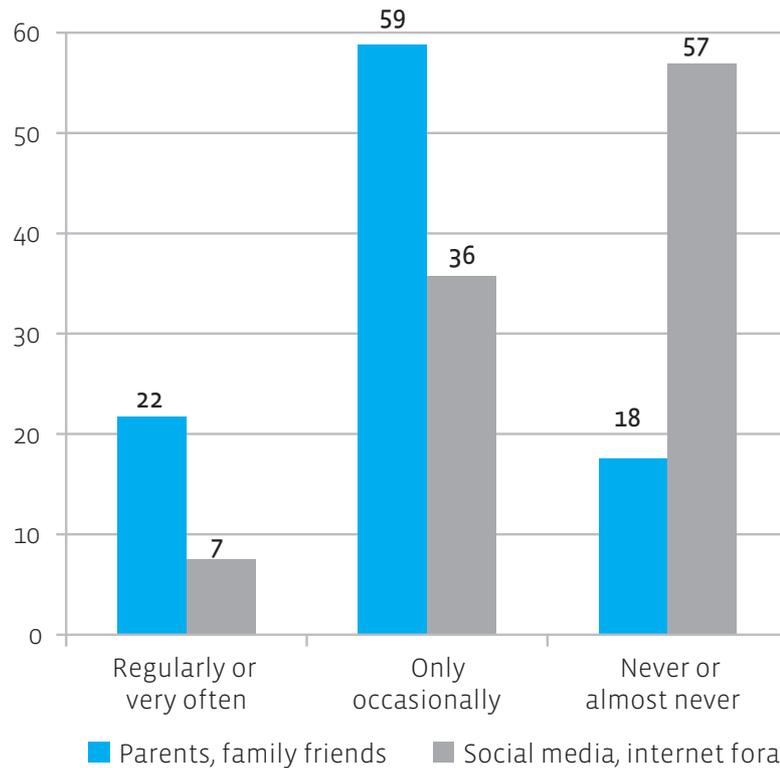
Talking about politics with parents and on the internet is rare

Only one-fifth (22%) of young people in the Czech Republic talk about politics very often or regularly. But where do young people build their political preferences? Is it at school, where “politics has no place”? Or in the media? But if they primarily consume social media, what is the quality of the content they get?

Their peers play a decisive role in influencing them. The role of peers is not widely discussed, as it is not easy to examine. And yet it is crucial.

Nowadays, social networks represent another way that young people find peers to relate with. By doing so, they strengthen their own identity through these networks. People often take positions. Therefore, school has the task of fulfilling the role of a community, where members of this community can come face to face with others outside the bubble of their own social network.

Diagram 21.
How often do you talk about politics with your parents, other family members, friends or on social media and internet fora? (in %)



Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

The hysteria of young people on the subject of refugees most likely might have originated at home, because opinions on this issue in the public domain have been essentially balanced, at least at the very beginning of the crisis. Public actors, with only some exceptions, have dealt rather fairly with the issue.

Respondents admit they almost never use internet comments fora for discussions about politics: the majority of respondents (57%) say that they were totally absent from such fora. By contrast, even if we add up all the positive answers (regularly or only occasionally), the result (43%) is scarcely compelling.

Perhaps the culture of “liking things on the internet” is so widespread that there is no longer any desire to write longer texts. Or perhaps they have no interest in politics at all.

Conclusions

In conclusion, if there is one single challenge to be highlighted, it is that there is a growing gap that needs to be bridged by the younger generations.

During the roundtable discussions, several subjects were underscored. In Czech society, the topic of democracy has for many years remained on the sidelines. The Czechs are most probably not convinced in their hearts and minds that one could define democracy in a positive, creative and deliberate manner.

In the 1990s, liberal democracy was not sufficiently and pro-actively taught in the education system. It was looked on as an achievement and taken for granted. Teaching on the subject was neither very creative nor clever. Therefore, today, when “liberal democracy” is under threat and has become a *terminus technicus* with political connotations, teaching on the subject will be even more complicated. This is because “liberal” democracy has a certain political label which is not necessarily seen as positive.

On one hand, social media help young people to be connected and have instant information at hand. But this information, often emotionally biased due to the widespread use of photos, video or audio support, comes to them out of context.

The ability of young people to be connected to their network is truly impressive. Nevertheless, their own self-expression is limited. Students’ vocabulary is often limited to the word “good”. They are unable to formulate their arguments in a more nuanced fashion, not to mention giving their line of argument a logical structure that can be followed.

The need to teach young people how to speak on various topics might seem obvious. Nevertheless, it is not the norm for children to be taught how to formulate their thoughts and opinions. When they become adults, they will not know how to get their opinions across and argue intelligibly with others, or how to answer others’ questions and react to their objections with counter-arguments.

In this regard, not only the art of speaking is required. History, geopolitics, political context, as well as psychological ramifications are simply missing from the educational curricula and thus missing in the educational background of young people. Without the proper

capacity to think critically, helping them to unlock what is behind the flow of emotional context and how they could address it as citizens, young people face trouble and hardship. Moreover, without proper reflection, they can be easily manipulated.

It would be a mistake to expect schools to be able to find a solution to everything. At times, too much emphasis is put on the teacher, at least in terms of general expectations. A new problem raises its head (for instance, debt), and the first reaction is to introduce it into schools as a new subject called financial literacy. But this cannot go on indefinitely.

This has put the potential goodwill and creative responsibility of teachers to the test. The parents' slogan that "politics does not belong in schools" or that "the school has the responsibility to educate our children" are often heard, but can in fact limit teachers in their educational programs.

The complexity of the current state of play within societies, and within the European Union as a whole, merits a proper space in which it can be explained and interpreted. The latest technical gadgets cannot provide an appropriate solution. There is a growing need for conceptual and pedagogical work, and for sound political leadership.

Therefore, if there is to be a European experience to be lived and shared in order to address the challenges of our times and raise empowered young citizens who are receptive, responsive and open to others, an appropriate place to start would be with civic education.

We consider the first step to be identifying best practices. The second step might involve sharing know-how across Europe. A third step could, perhaps, be creating programs that cross borders both within and without respective societies.

Bridging the gap is of paramount importance in the world we live in today.

Recommendations

- ▶ Provided they have the necessary language skills, teachers should be encouraged to travel abroad. Specifically, a program with Germany, where the system of civic education is well established, should be considered. There, Czech teachers could twin with German social science colleagues. Such an experience would help in understanding

how political and social themes can be explained in the context of history lessons.

- ▶ Young people need to experience mobility. Promoting programs and exchanges with institutions and organizations in various countries and establishing sound educational programs within such partnerships at the youngest ages possible should be seriously considered.
- ▶ Assuming that intergenerational educational projects could bridge the gap of perception of current on-line youth, it is recommended to consider cross-border programs whereby young people would visit a neighbouring country and ask the residents about their own personal plight or hopes associated with the history of the twentieth century.
- ▶ The education system should consider increased subsidies for the social sciences for teachers and educators in the Czech Republic. Too much space is currently dedicated to the natural sciences.
- ▶ We recommend organizing competitions at local editorial offices of the print media in the regions, sometimes in remote places far away from the capital, which might be focused on the theme of “My Europe” or similar topics.
- ▶ Provided they are very comfortable with the use of technology, it would be worthwhile to consider creating innovative gaming simulations for schools that would help to reinforce the scope of civic education and provide young people with real-life based simulations.
- ▶ Promoting programs that enable meetings with actual people, as opposed to concepts on a screen or Facebook accounts, should be considered.
- ▶ Given the growing need for skills in critical thinking, programs for teaching and training those skills are recommended.



Germany

Key findings

- ▶ The vast majority of young Germans (87%) consider the EU “a good thing.” Among all the national groups surveyed, they also express the strongest support for remaining in the EU and working on reforming it (77%).
- ▶ The peaceful coexistence of nations (80%), joint European efforts in the fight against climate change (70%) and the opportunity to live and work (68%) or study (62%) in other EU member states are seen by the majority as being the most important benefits of EU integration.
- ▶ According to the young Germans surveyed, Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism (64%), the challenges connected with climate change (63%) and the growing nationalism and xenophobia in European societies (60%) are the greatest challenges faced by Europe.
- ▶ Asked about the effects of immigration on their country, young Germans have generally positive opinions, claiming that immigrants contribute to Germany’s prosperity (42%) and improve its demographic prospects (45%). At the same time, more than half of the respondents do not notice negative aspects of immigration, such as its being a burden for the social welfare system (52%) or a threat to public safety (58%).
- ▶ Three-quarters of those asked believe that Germany should provide safe haven for refugees (73%). One-quarter do not share this view (26%).

- ▶ Those surveyed share the opinion that globalization has had, generally speaking, a positive influence, both on their country (70%) and on themselves (75%).
- ▶ Young Germans share the conviction that democracy is the best possible political system (71%) and that it does matter if the government is democratic (72%).

Foreword

The relationship between Germany and the European Union has always been a special one. The historical circumstances are, in this context, a major reason for the uniqueness of the German attitude towards the EU. After the Second World War, the integration of West Germany into European and Western structures and alliances was an overarching principle of the international and European community of states. This was equally important for Germany. With the acceptance of the European Community's instruments of supranationality consolidated in the German constitutional system, Germany had the opportunity to regain recognition among the other European states. The importance of the European Community as well as Germany's full membership in NATO were drivers during the Cold War – representing a truly alternative concept to the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union. After 1989, the belief that European integration and co-operation are the cornerstones of German foreign policy became part of the German political DNA. This idea is now taught in schools and through the very well developed out-of-school German political education system.

That is why the idea of European integration has had such a great significance for German society. This fact reveals the reasons behind the German attitude towards the EU. The Treaty of Lisbon was signed in 2007, and 67% of Germans were happy with Germany's EU membership by the end of that year.¹ Over recent years, support for the EU has been quite stable. A recent survey on support for European membership shows evidence of this continuity: in 2015, at least 68% of the respondents would

1 Standard Eurobarometer 69, May 2008. The question was: "Germany's membership of the European Union is/would be a good thing."

not favor withdrawal from EU membership.² Although the situation was aggravated after the Brexit vote, 58% of the German people still consider themselves attached to the EU.³

This leads inevitably to the current state of the European Union and its perception, despite the “polycrisis”,⁴ as Jean-Claude Juncker used to say. It can be said that the support of the total population for the EU is still a given. For example, the incident of Merkel’s refugee policy in the summer of 2015 still presents a majority of Germans (on an average over 80%) with a positive opinion on the European Union in various policy areas (e.g., support for common foreign policy, common defense and security policy or monetary union). In general, 48% of the German population is optimistic that the EU will succeed in managing the global challenges it faces.⁵ As the “eupinions” survey conducted by the Bertelsmann Stiftung shows, 59% of Germans claim there should be deeper political and economic integration in the EU.⁶ Two-thirds of those surveyed, when discussing the European Union with a friend or colleague, would consider it a very or mostly positive conversation (August 2016, in July 2015 - 54%). The youngest generation (18-25 years old) is especially pro-European, with 72% claiming the conversation would be a positive one.⁷ Moreover, young Germans definitely belong to the group of Euro-optimists and even value the performance of the EU higher than that of their national government.⁸ Their support for the EU, furthermore, stands out in comparison to their peer groups in neighboring countries.

Despite this positive attitude towards the EU, there is, however, a political disinterest of German youth when compared with the 1990s or earlier decades. However, some positive signs can be recently noted; in 2002, 30% of young people aged 12-25 years stated that they are interested in politics, while in 2015 this percentage was 41%. Three-

2 Standard Eurobarometer 84, November 2015. The question was: “Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statement: Germany could better face the future outside the EU.”

3 Standard Eurobarometer 86, November 2016. The question was: “Please tell me how attached you feel to the European Union.”

4 Press release of the European Commission (21.06.2016), http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-16-2293_de.htm [last access: 19.07.2017]

5 Standard Eurobarometer 86, November 2016.

6 *Keep calm and carry on. What Europeans think about a possible Brexit*, eupinions #2016 / 2, Bertelsmann Stiftung, Gütersloh 2016, p.10.

7 *Supportive but wary. How Europeans feel about the EU 60 years after the Treaty of Rome*, eupinions #2017 /1, Bertelsmann Stiftung 2017, p. 32.

8 TUI Stiftung, *Junges Europa 2017 – Die Jugendstudie der TUI Stiftung*, <https://www.tui-stiftung.de/media/junges-europa-2017-die-jugendstudie-der-tui-stiftung/> [last access: 19.07.2017].

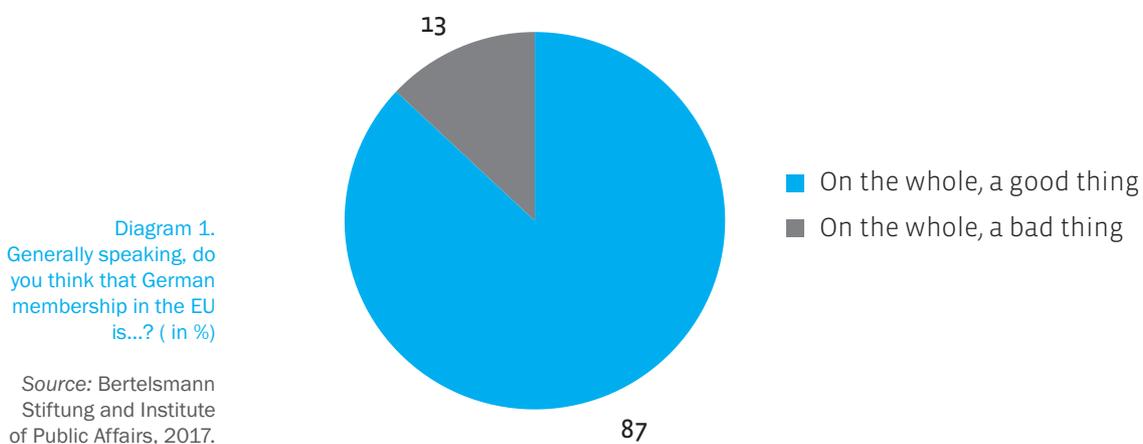
quarters of young people claim it is a civic duty to participate in elections (72%). Their political behavior is undergoing, however, a shift from party participation to autonomous, solidarity and society oriented actions. If they are politically engaged, they prefer to sign petitions or boycott some goods rather than be a member of a political party.⁹ At the same time, civil society organizations enjoy high popularity, and there are specific examples of numerous voluntary associations acting in the field of refugee assistance (e.g., language courses or legal assistance).¹⁰

European integration: benefits, problems, the future

Assessment of integration

Young Germans see their country's EU membership as positive and are in this respect the most EU-enthusiastic group of the six polled countries – a very large majority of them (87%) consider the EU “a good thing” (followed by the Austrians – 77%).

Among the young Germans surveyed, respondents from larger towns and students shared an especially strong belief that integration is good for their country.



Only 50% of the general German population are in favor of the European Union. Among the younger respondents (from 18-34

⁹ Shell Jugendstudie 2015, <http://www.shell.de/ueber-uns/die-shell-jugendstudie/jugend-und-politik.html> [last access: 19.07.2017]

¹⁰ Peter Maxwill, Miriam Olbrisch, *Jugend und Politik Engagement ja, Partei nein*, <http://www.spiegel.de/lebenundlernen/job/studenten-interessieren-sich-fuer-politik-aber-nicht-fuer-parteien-a-1094493.html> [last access: 19.07.2017]

years), 60% support the EU, while only 52% of those aged 35-49 support it. In the group of 50+, only 46% have a favorable view of the EU. Therefore, there is clear indication of a generation gap in Germany on this issue.¹¹

Remain, but reform

With their positive opinions on integration, young people in Germany are strongly in favor of remaining in the EU, but they also think it needs to be reformed. Young Germans, followed by young Austrians, express the strongest support for remaining in the EU and working on reforming it (Germany – 77%, Austria – 71%). They might mainly understand “reforming” the EU as bringing more transparency and clarity to Community rules – which generally could be seen as enabling it to work better and deliver more. Only 9% want to leave the EU. This group has many more respondents from rural areas than from urban ones and greater numbers of men than women. Women, on the other hand, are more often the supporters of reforming the EU, as are students. Those who believe EU integration is something good are also more often in favor of reforming it.

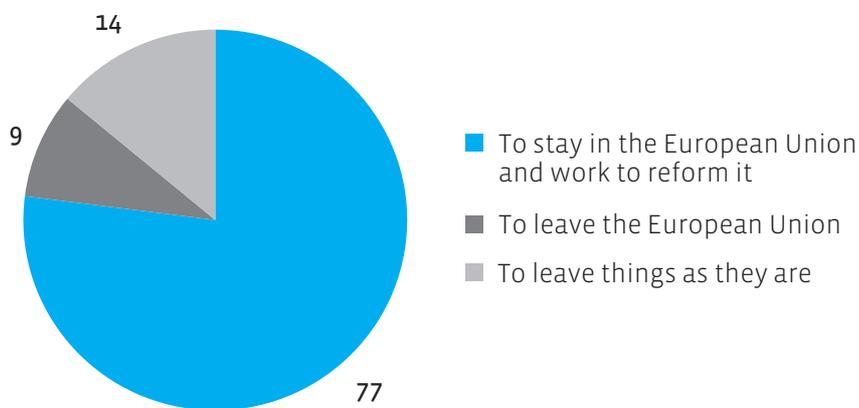


Diagram 2.
Do you think that the best thing for Germany would be...? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

Benefits of EU integration

According to young Germans, the most important benefits of EU integration are the peaceful coexistence of nations (80%), joint European efforts in the fight against climate change (70%) and the opportunity to live and work (68%) and study (62%) in other EU member states. The list

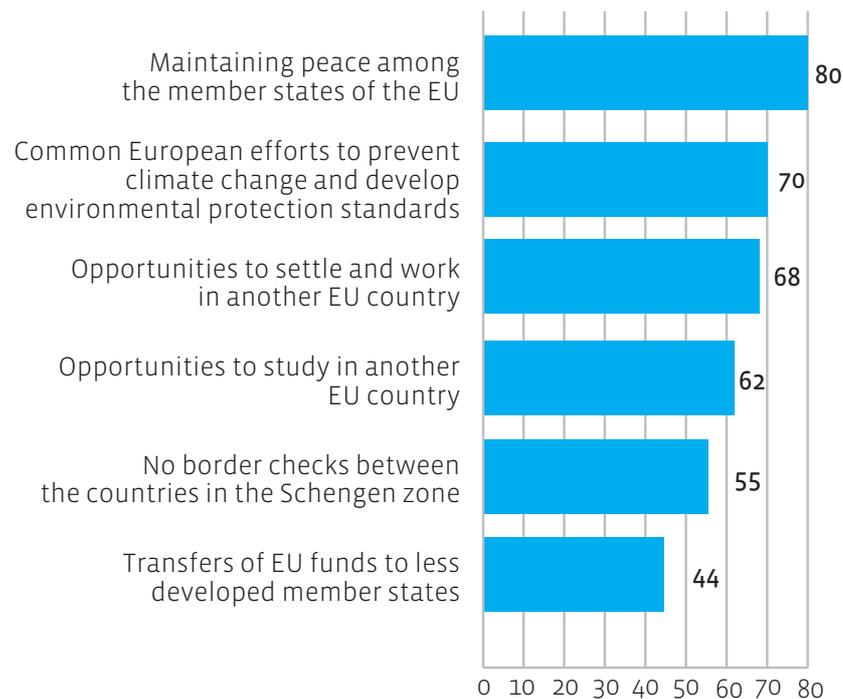
11 PEW Research Center, Euroskepticism Beyond Brexit. Significant opposition in key European countries to an ever closer EU, 07.June 2016, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/06/07/euroskepticism-beyond-brexite/> [less access: 19.07.2017]

of priorities for young Germans differs from that of the other countries surveyed in that they ranked EU activities in climate policy in second place on the list of integration's advantages. This clear difference reflects young Germans' strong awareness of climate change. It comes as no surprise that structural funds were ranked last. Germany is a net payer in the EU-budget and does not really benefit from such funds, although the eastern regions of the country are beneficiaries of them.

Looking at the general population, 71% of Germans also highly value peace among the member states and rank freedom of movement within the European Union as the second most important benefit (63%). In a country-wide survey, 64% of Germans ages 15-24 years valued keeping the peace and 45% free movement in Europe. However, it should be noted that in this survey, the respondents were asked to choose three issues from a given list and not score every issue, as in the study described in this publication.¹²

Diagram 3.
How important for you personally are the following benefits of European integration? Responses of "very big" and "big" are summarized in the graph (in%).

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017. Respondents could choose answers from 0 ("not important at all") to 5 ("very important").



Problems the EU faces

Issues related to climate change are also seen by young Germans as one of the biggest challenges Europe faces (63%), closely

12 Standard Eurobarometer 85, May 2016.

following the number one problem in the hierarchy, namely, Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism (64%). Young Germans ranked growing nationalism and xenophobia in European societies as the third most important challenge (60%). This is the highest percentage of the five countries surveyed. It is interesting to note that in the country with the biggest influx of immigrants in recent years and months, immigration was perceived as less of a problem than in the other countries (51%).

With the foreign policy of President Putin ranked in the second to last place (39%), young Germans seem not to be very worried about it, although this number is the second highest among the six countries surveyed (after young Poles – 53%). The relatively remote position of unemployment and job insecurity can be explained by the generally good economic situation and low unemployment rates in Germany. Young people appear to not be afraid of the future in this respect.

As the Eurobarometer study asked respondents to choose only two answers from a list of issues (slightly different from the list in this survey), the results of the general German population are only partly comparable. Some similarities and differences, however, can be noticed. The majority (57%) of the Germans surveyed in the Eurobarometer study consider immigration an important issue to focus on. The second problem German adults find most pressing is terrorism (40%), while just about 23% of the population find the financial condition of other member states to be a reason for concern. When it came to the dangers perceived by Germans ages 15-24, immigration is also seen as the most significant problem (56%), followed by the problem of terrorism (38%) and concerns about economic instability (15%). At the same time, only 7% of the general population in Germany perceive climate change as a crucial problem for the EU, with 12% of youth seeing it as a problem.¹³

13 Standard Eurobarometer 85, May 2016.

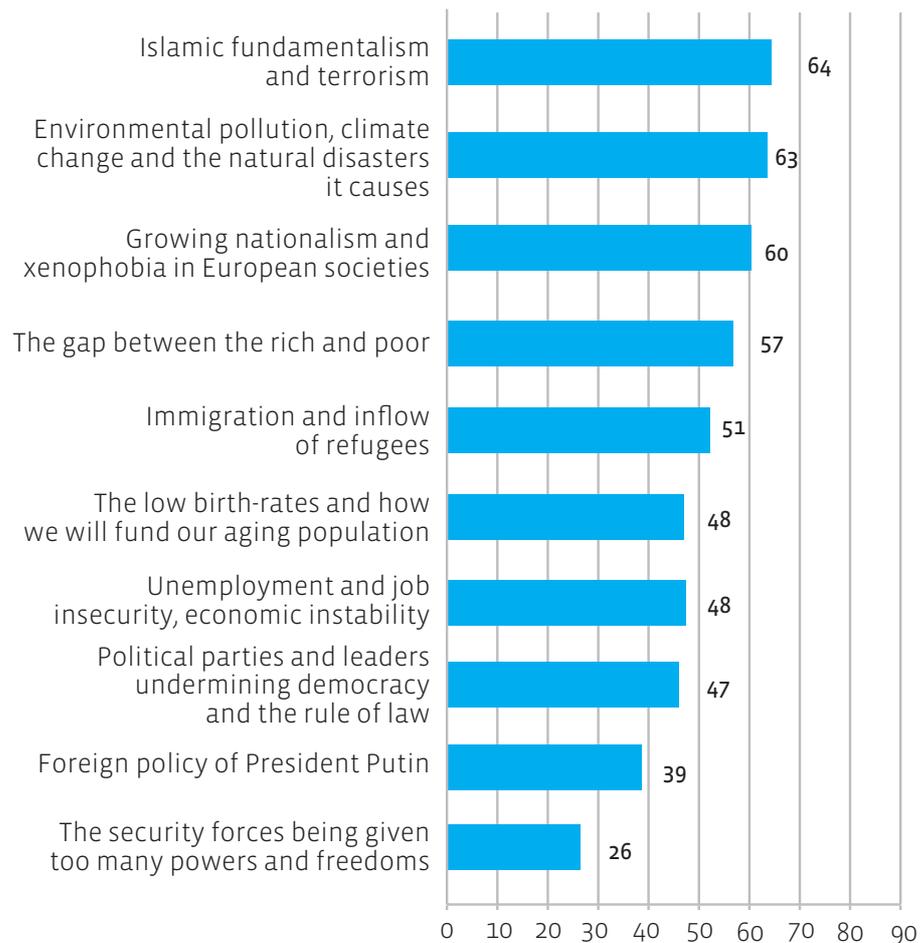


Diagram 4. The European Union is facing many problems today. Please assess how big these problems are. Responses of "very big" and "big" are summarized in the graph (in %).

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017. Respondents could choose answers from 0 ("no problem") to 5 (a "very big problem").

Perception of immigration

German youth, in comparison to their peers (especially from the Visegrad countries), might have much more experience with immigration and its results. Indeed, when asked if they had ever met an immigrant in their neighborhood, workplace, school or other places that they routinely visit, 72% responded in the affirmative. Also, the topic of the future of the immigration process and its influence on the country, its development and challenges are much more often and deeply debated in Germany than in other countries. Therefore, the opinions of young Germans could be based more on facts and experience than the opinions of the other groups in this study. Furthermore, there could have also been young Germans of immigrant origin among those surveyed.

Positive opinions on the effects of immigration

Asked about the effects of immigration on their country, young Germans generally express positive opinions, claiming that immigrants contribute to Germany's prosperity (42%) and improve its demographic prospects (45%). However, the group disagreeing with these positions is also relatively large, scoring in both cases 40%. The inhabitants of rural areas are more sceptical in both cases, as well as those who claim EU integration is generally a bad thing. Those who have met an immigrant tend to assess immigration positively. Also, those who have contacts with people outside their town or region have a more positive opinion on the issue of immigration than those who do not. However, similar contacts with people outside Germany did not influence the responses. The same correlations apply to travelling outside one's town or region but not the country itself.

This somewhat positive opinion of the youth surveyed contrasts with the rather negative attitudes expressed by the Eurobarometer participants of the entire population. Only 35% of them state that the current state of immigration development is positive/constructive. Conversely, immigration was negatively perceived by 58%, with a significant division of eastern (7%) and western Germany (55%). Furthermore, 51% of German adults disagreed with the statement that immigrants contribute to the general situation in their country. The approval rating of the effects of immigration is 41%.¹⁴

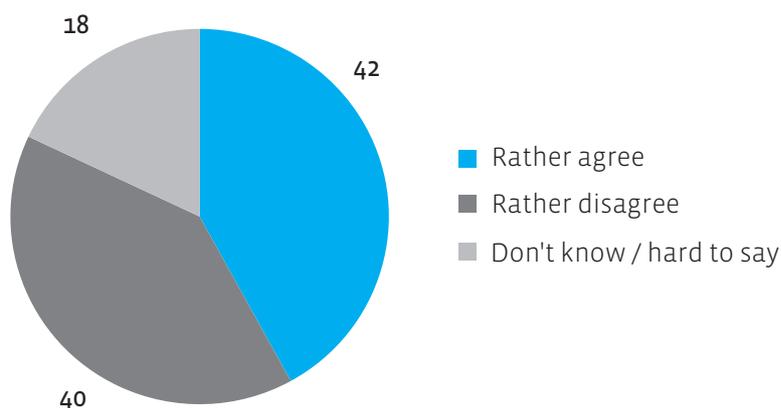


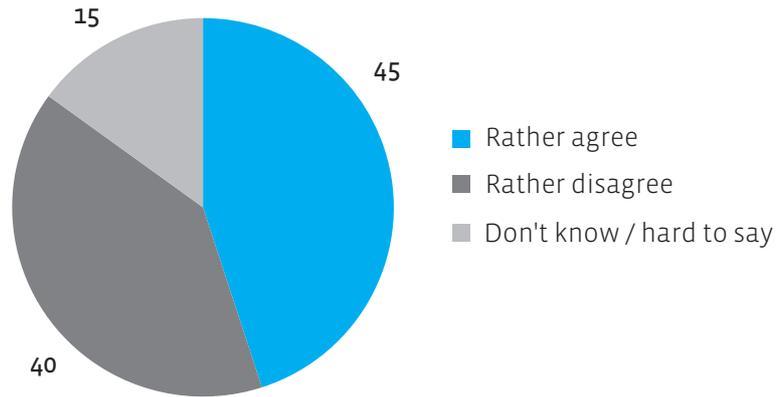
Diagram 5.
Immigrants contribute
to Germany's growth
and general prosperity
(in %)

Source: Bertelsmann
Stiftung and Institute
of Public Affairs, 2017.

14 Standard Eurobarometer 85, May 2016.

Diagram 6.
Immigrants are needed
to improve Germany's
demographic prospects
and to balance the
retirement pension system
(in %)

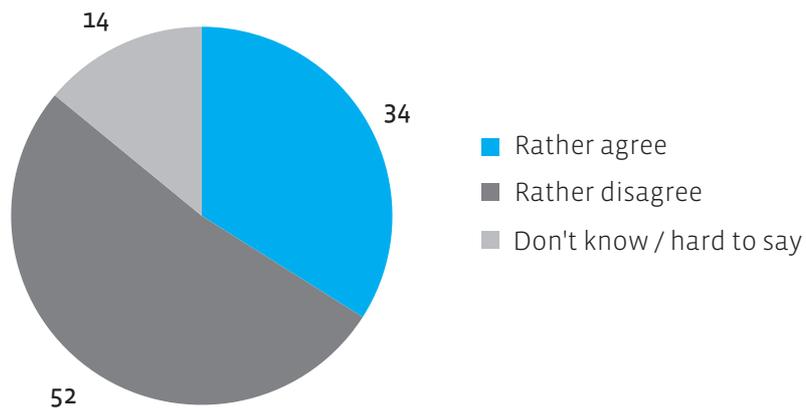
Source: Bertelsmann
Stiftung and Institute
of Public Affairs, 2017.



At the same time, more than half of the young respondents do not consider immigration a burden for the social welfare system (52%) or a threat to public safety (58%). In these cases, the groups disagreeing are smaller – 34 and 27%, respectively. Young people do not seem to be affected much by the anti-immigrant narrative spread by the Alternative for Germany party or some vocal commentators in the media. However, summing up the groups of respondents who share worries or fears and the undecided yields a rather large group with mixed feelings. Among them, those with doubts about the positive results of EU integration and preferring Germany to leave the EU are especially well represented. It is worth noting that a significant portion of these young Germans admit that they have never met an immigrant.

Diagram 7.
Immigrants are a burden
for the social welfare
system (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann
Stiftung and Institute
of Public Affairs, 2017.



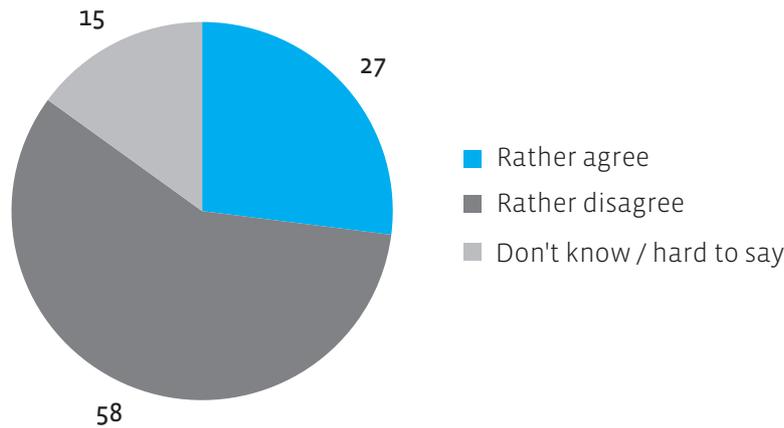


Diagram 8.
Immigrants are a threat
to Germany's public safety
and security (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann
Stiftung and Institute
of Public Affairs, 2017.

Refugees welcome

The over one million refugees who have come to Germany in recent years have influenced this country much more than the other countries where this survey was conducted. After the initial very warm welcome of the refugees, the public debate in Germany concerning willingness to accept refugees has become more diverse. Concerning the refugee crisis, three-quarters of the young Germans surveyed take a very clear position – Germany should provide safe haven for those in danger (73%). This view is especially strong among youth in education and students. One-quarter of the respondents do not agree (26%) with this opinion. With these numbers, the Germans are the most open society towards refugees, while the young people in the Visegrad countries gave responses that were diametrically opposed. When the general population was polled in May 2016, there was also a broad agreement with the statement that Germany should help refugees (82%), while only 14% disagreed.¹⁵ The different timing of the two studies might have played a role in the responses. At the same time, according to a PEW study, 67% of Germans were not happy with the government's approach towards the refugee crisis in June 2016.¹⁶

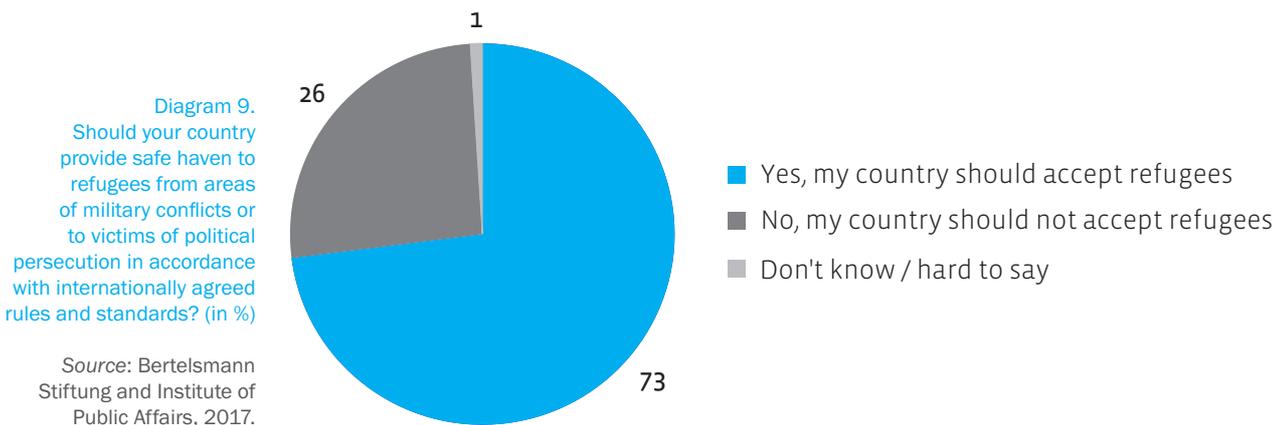
Young Germans who claim EU integration is generally a good thing and that Germany should stay in the EU and work on reforming it are more often in favor of accepting refugees. Respondents who are in touch with people outside their hometowns or who have travelled outside

¹⁵ Standard Eurobarometer 85, May 2016.

¹⁶ PEW Research Center, Euroskepticism Beyond Brexit. Significant opposition in key European countries to an ever closer EU, 07.June 2016, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/06/07/euroskepticism-beyond-brexite/> [less access: 19.07.2017]

their region in the past six months are also much more willing to accept refugees. Moreover, there is a clear correlation between meeting an immigrant and openness towards refugees, a positive assessment of immigration and its effects on Germany.

The positive attitude towards refugees – especially in comparison to their peers in the other countries – comes from the history of the country. There are millions of people in Germany who themselves have a background as refugee or internally displaced people (IDPs). Shortly after the Second World War thousands of Germans were displaced from the earlier German territories in Eastern Europe. In the following decades, the so-called “Spätaussiedler” from Eastern Europe were also treated as people who needed help, and safe haven was given to them. Furthermore, in the sixties and seventies guest workers from mainly Turkey, Greece, Italy and Spain came to Germany, followed by boat people from Vietnam in the eighties. Finally in the nineties Balkan war refugees came, however, many of them have in the meantime left.



Opinions on globalization and social changes

More interconnectivity - better for whom?

The young Germans in the survey share the opinion that globalization has had, generally speaking, a positive influence both on their country (70%) and on themselves (75%). Their positive attitudes are only a little bit behind their Polish peers (74% and 81%, respectively).

The positive opinions on globalization are shared more often by young people in education and students and those who have

travelled abroad. There is also a positive correlation with the opinion that EU integration is generally a good thing and that Germany should remain in the EU and reform it. This group is also more open to accepting refugees. Contacts with people from abroad, however, did not influence opinions on globalization.

Regarding the general population of Germany surveyed in the Eurobarometer study, globalization was also assessed as a positive development (50%), with 40% expressing a negative sentiment.¹⁷ In this study, the term “globalization” was, however, used without any explanation – and so, differently from the study described in this publication.

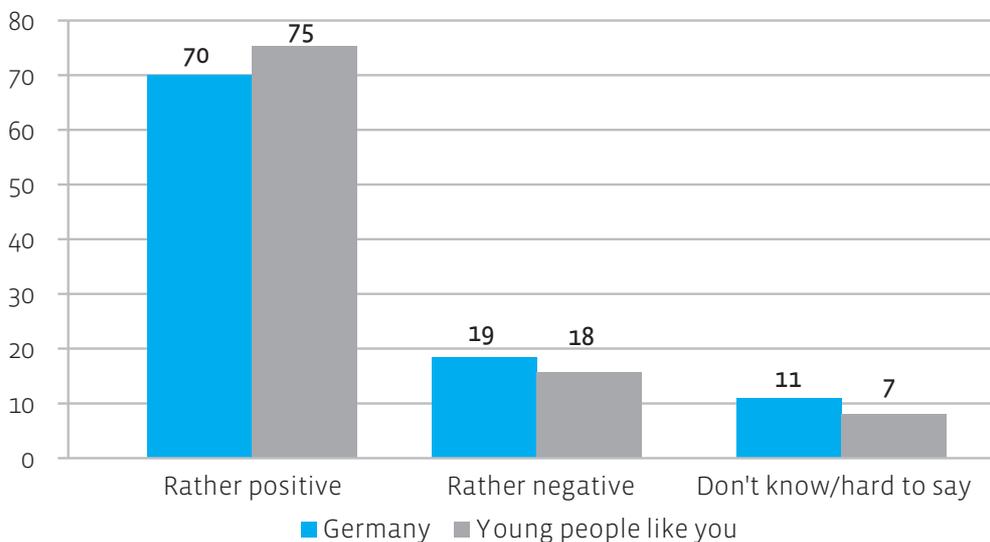


Diagram 10. Over recent decades the world has become more interconnected. There is greater free trade between countries and easier communication across the globe. Money, people, cultures, jobs and industries all move more easily between countries. Generally speaking, do you think this has had a rather positive or rather negative effect on...? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

Confusion over changes

Young Germans have more doubts concerning the social changes. While nearly two-thirds share the opinion that the greater acceptance of same-sex relationships has changed society for the better (63%), a positive opinion on the influence of more women in leadership positions is shared by only half of the respondents (50%). The polled youth are even more divided concerning the effects of a more ethnically and religiously diverse society, with 40% seeing the effects as positive, 25% as negative and 30% as neither positive nor negative.

¹⁷ Standard Eurobarometer 86, May 2016.

In all of these questions, young women claim that these social changes are positive more often than men do. Also, people who have had contacts abroad have more positive opinions of these changes than those who have not. There is also a correlation between positive perceptions of EU integration and the opinion that these changes are a good thing.

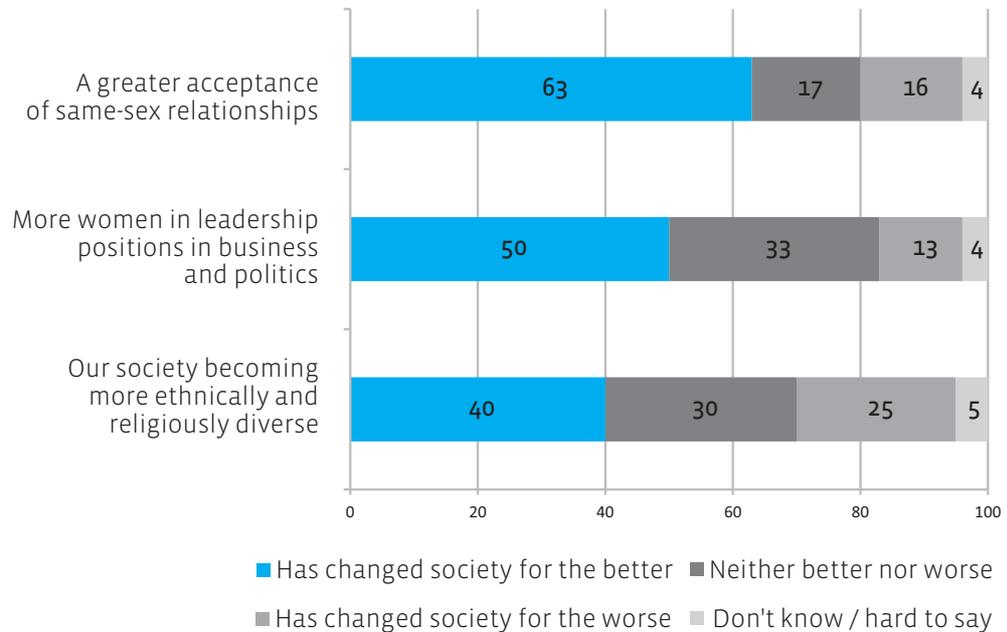


Diagram 11.
Do the following changes
make society better or
worse? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann
Stiftung and Institute of
Public Affairs, 2017.

Attitudes toward democracy and political affiliations

Democracy – the most appreciated political system

Young Germans are convinced democracy is the best possible political system (71%) and that it does matter whether or not the government is democratic or not (72%).

A much more divisive question was whether sometimes human rights and civil liberties should be restricted in order to better protect people from terrorism. While nearly half (46%) disagree with such a statement, more than a third (35%) share this opinion and nearly every fifth respondent finds it difficult to answer the question (19%).

Young men are more willing to doubt democracy than young women. Those in education and students care much more about a democratically elected government. In both cases, there is a positive correlation between

positive attitudes towards EU integration, as well as remaining in the EU and reforming it, and supporting democracy.

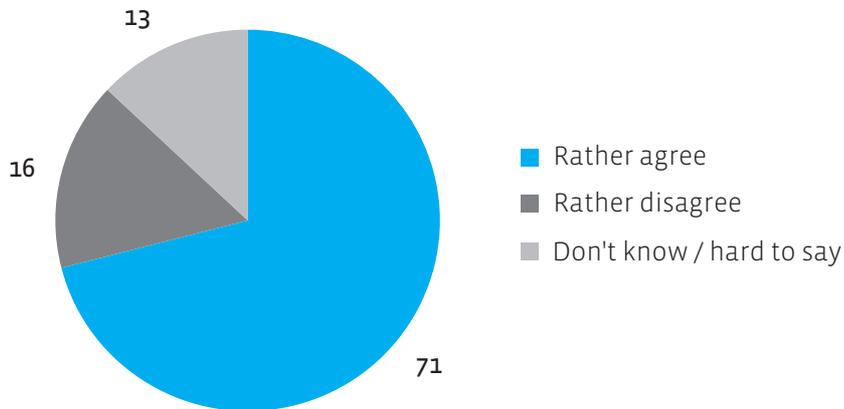


Diagram 12. Democracy is the best possible political system (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

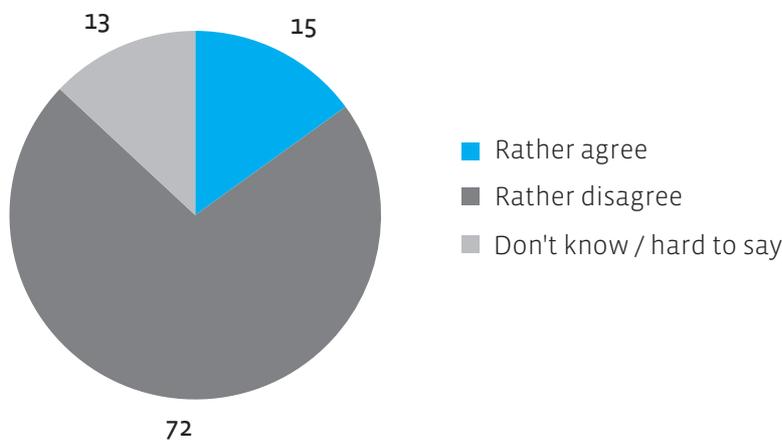


Diagram 13. It does not matter if the government is democratic or not democratic (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

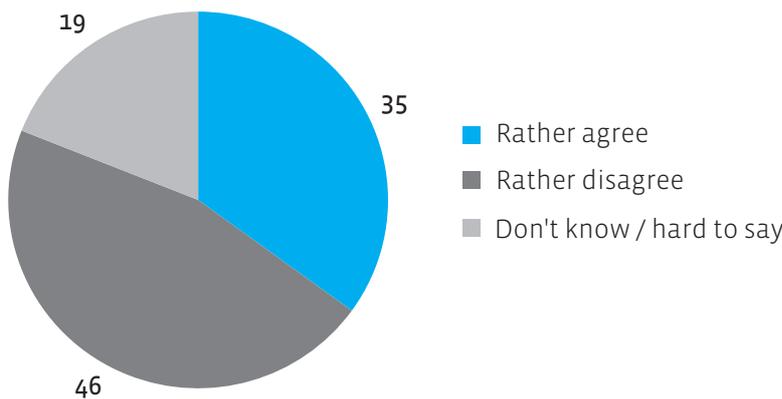


Diagram 14. Sometimes human rights and civil liberties should be restricted in order to better protect people from terrorism (in %)

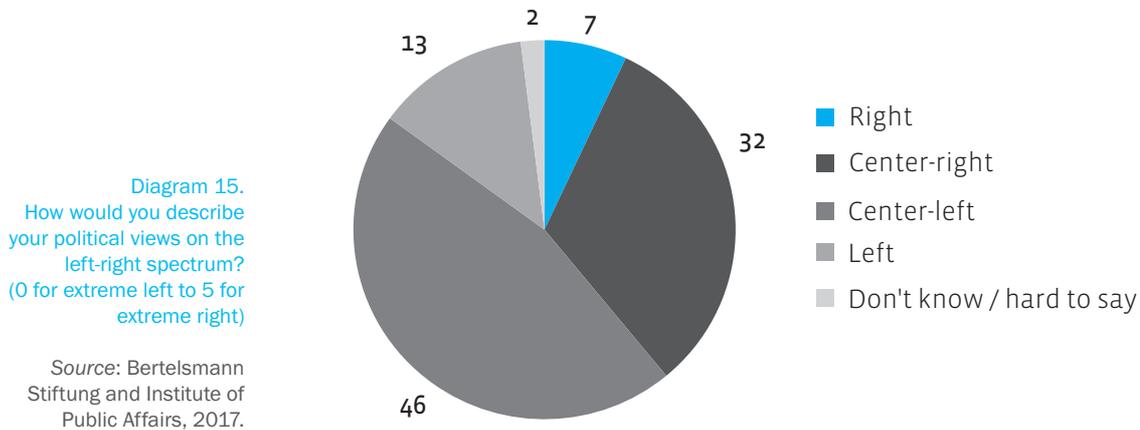
Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

The political orientation of young Germans

The large majority of young people in Germany see themselves in the middle of the right-left political spectrum (78%), with only three

percent positioning themselves at its extremes. Among those who are in the middle, the biggest group is rather center-left oriented (46%), with 32% perceiving themselves as center-right.

Young Germans claiming to be rather on the right are more willing to leave the European Union.



Sources of information on the EU

Social media domination

It is not surprising that social media are easily the number one source of information used by young Germans on a regular basis (83%). This is followed by private and public television (59% and 45%, respectively), while radio, news websites, printed press and blogs are also occasionally used.

Besides traditional and online media, an important source of information can be other people with whom one might discuss political issues. Young Germans overwhelmingly admit that they do discuss politics, with about half of them claiming to do so on a regular basis (48%) and nearly the same number claiming to do so only occasionally (47%). With only 5% of those surveyed claiming never to discuss politics, young Germans have significantly more political discussions than their peers in other countries. In comparison, the percentages of young people claiming never to discuss political issues in the other polled countries ranged from 8% in Austria to 26% in Hungary.

Those who talk about politics regularly are more willing to leave the EU than the rest of the respondents. On the other hand, those who do

not discuss politics at all prefer to leave things as they are. They also more often share the opinion that Germany should accept refugees.

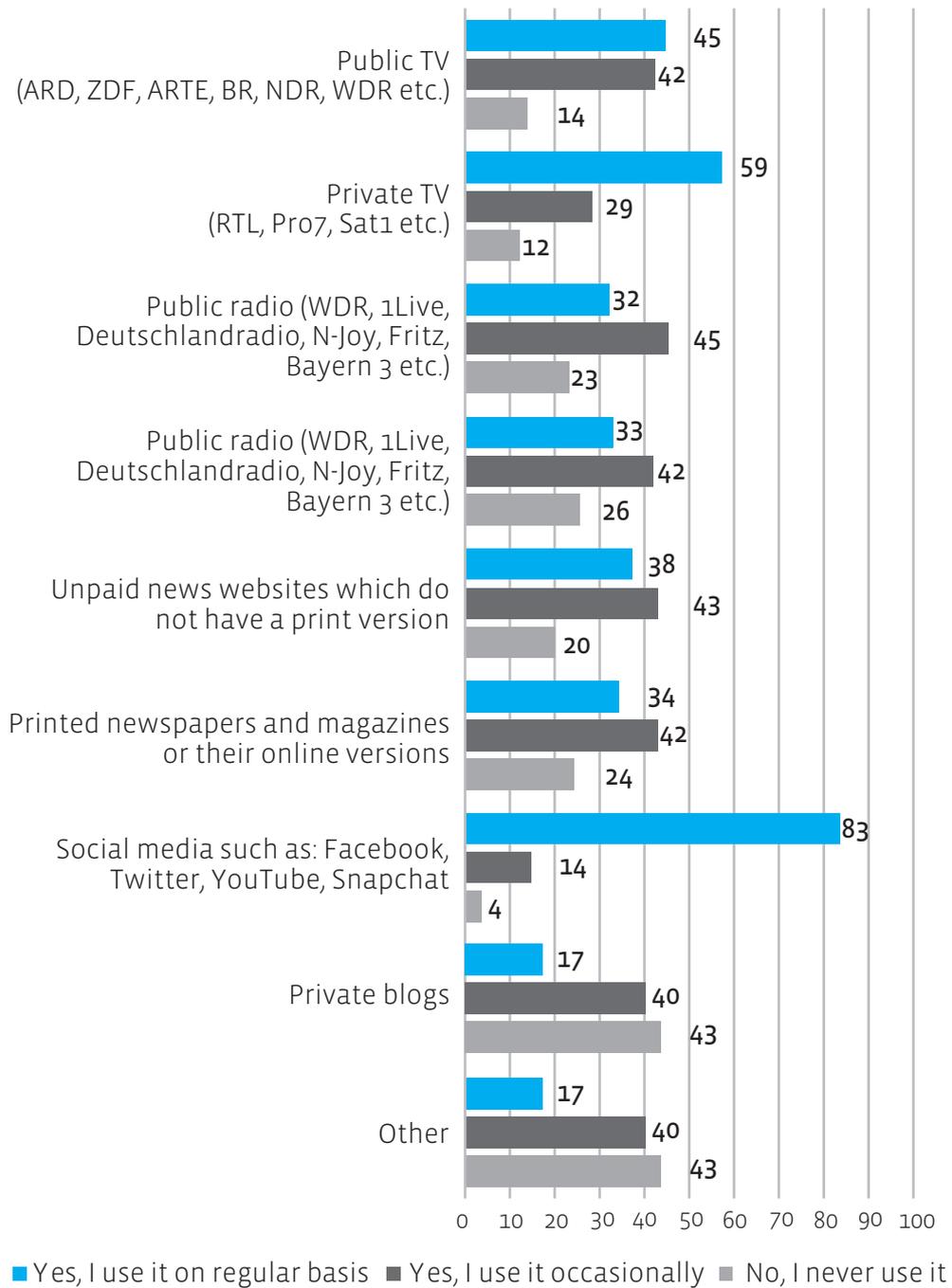
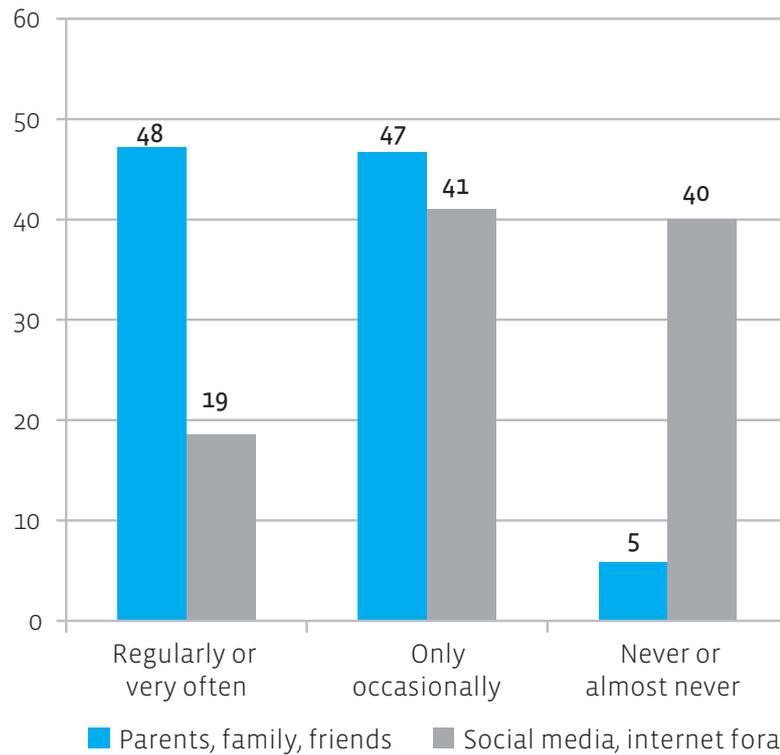


Diagram 16. Do you use the following sources of information? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

Diagram 17.
How often do you talk about politics with your parents, other family members, friends or on social media and internet fora? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.



It seems, however, that the German respondents carry out these discussions in person rather than in the social media, since 40% (more often women) claim they do not take part in political discussions on the internet and 41% do this only occasionally. Only every fifth young German, especially those in the older age group (20-24 years), uses the internet for political discussions (19%).

Recommendations

In Germany, the general opinions of young people towards Europe and European integration are positive. This does not mean, however, that there is no need for work on European education.

General recommendations

- ▶ It is easy to reduce the European Union to facts and figures. That is why the positive influence of EU integration on daily life must be particularly stressed in Germany – the country that is the largest

net payer to the EU budget and a country where many refugees have found a safe haven.

- ▶ Especially in Germany, the wider European perspective must be presented and explained. Not only Germany's specific position, but also the opinions of other societies, their worries, fears and hopes need to be described and taken into consideration.
- ▶ The culture of discourse needs to be strengthened, so that one knows how to argue and fight with post facts – young people need to know how to recognize them and avoid manipulation.
- ▶ The eurosceptics use emotions as a tool for winning supporters. One can effectively appeal to emotions to explain why the EU does matter, although not to the point of manipulation.
- ▶ Trainings how to make use of the media, especially how to recognize fake news online should be made available both for teachers and people working with young people as well as for the young people themselves.

Recommendations for education in the schools

- ▶ Although European issues are included in educational programs, their position should be strengthened, especially taking into consideration the growing number of pupils and students coming from outside Europe.
- ▶ More internationalism at schools is needed. Every school student should at least once take part in an international project abroad or in Germany to learn how to communicate with other cultures and nations and discover what Europe symbolizes.
- ▶ The European Parliaments' simulation games and similar exercises are good instruments. Projects that teach what compromise, cooperation and different interests mean should be organized in every school.

Recommendations for the out-of-school education

While Germany has, in comparison to the other researched countries, a very well-developed system of out-of-school political education, it can still be developed.

- ▶ Taking part in one out-of-school political-educational activity should be obligatory. However, the organizations in charge of these projects need to ensure that they are interesting and demanding. Otherwise, it is merely one more obligation to fulfill. Regarding financing such activities, it is not so much a question of money, but rather, that funds should be granted on a 5-year basis (and not annually, leaving the organizers in anticipation). Only in this way can good, ambitious programs be prepared.
- ▶ Out-of-school activities allow for the discussion of more emotional and controversial topics. Europe should be considered as something that matters to young people on an emotional level.
- ▶ An interesting tool that can be used to explain the role, importance and functioning of the EU-institutions are computer games. They could be also promoted on the market.



Hungary

Key findings

- ▶ The survey responses clearly demonstrate a strong commitment to the European Union. A majority of the respondents think that the country should stay in the EU, but that problems need to be fixed. The young respondents apparently have very limited knowledge about the EU and how it operates, which is indicated by some of the inconsistencies in their answers.
- ▶ Studying and working abroad are considered some of the most important benefits of Hungary's membership in the EU. The efforts of the EU to prevent climate change and develop environmental protection standards are also seen to be an important benefit for the respondents.
- ▶ The respondents from the two most developed regions of Hungary (Nyugat-Dunántúl and Közép-Magyarország) see the efforts of the EU to fund less developed regions as a more important benefit than those living in less developed regions.
- ▶ The problems of immigration and terrorism are the most outstanding concerns for young Hungarians, and anti-immigration sentiment is very strong among them. In this regard, they hold similar views to the general population.
- ▶ A majority of the respondents (72%) don't believe that Hungary should accept refugees fleeing from military conflict zones.
- ▶ Young Hungarians don't seem to be very concerned about Russia's foreign policy. With only 29% considering it a problem, it was ranked the least worrisome of the problems listed.

- ▶ A low degree of political interest is a common feature of the respondents. Only 22% of young Hungarians talk about politics regularly with their relatives or friends, and 25% never or almost never discuss political issues. A majority see themselves as either center right or center left.
- ▶ Young Hungarians' commitment to democracy is not unequivocal. A majority of the respondents (51%) believe that the limitation of fundamental freedoms is acceptable in certain cases. Furthermore, only 48% think that democracy is the best political system.
- ▶ Public media do not reach 40% of the youth at all. This is an interesting figure, given that the public media in Hungary are completely under the control of the government and reflect solely the government's positions.

Introduction

According to the 2011 census, 12.2 % of the Hungarian population belongs to the 15-24 age group. The young people of Hungary display a growing political disinterest and disengagement. According to the country's biggest annual report on youth, interest is at its lowest point since 2000, with only 10% of those between 15 and 29 years old claiming to be interested in political topics.¹ With interest so low, one would expect participation in elections to be low. A 2016 survey further points to this issue, revealing that only 60% of respondents ages 15-24 envision voting in upcoming elections. The main reason they would refrain from voting is their lack of trust in politicians.² Nonetheless, despite the fact that many would decline to exercise their voting rights, the majority is in favor of democracy over other political systems.³ In general, young people in Hungary are more right-wing, paradoxically

1 Béla Bauer, et al., Magyar Ifjúság Kutatás, 2016, http://www.ujnemzedek.hu/sites/default/files/magyar_ifjusag_2016_a4_web.pdf [last access: 19.07.2017].

2 The Foundation for European Progressive Studies and Center for American Progress, The Millennial Dialogue Report, Hungary, 2016, <https://www.millennialdialogue.com/media/1062/millennial-dialogue-hungary-report-v3.pdf> [last access: 19.07.2017].

3 Béla Bauer, et al., *ibidem*.

with clearly liberal inclinations, although radical views have become more prevalent during the last decade.⁴

The disengagement of young Hungarians is also apparent in their lack of participation in civic life, democratic activity and daily encounters about politics. Only one-quarter of young people have some form of organizational affiliation, with sports clubs the key element of their network. Student organizations are second in popularity. Only 1-2% of young Hungarians are affiliated with an organization that is political or related to public affairs⁵ – a reflection of the apathetic and disillusioned nature of their relationship with politics. Participation in direct democratic activities is also low – according to a 2016 survey, only 3% have attended a political meeting and only 5% have taken part in a demonstration.⁶ More than one-third of young people claim to never talk about politics with their friends,⁷ which is a detrimental factor when it comes to strategies on how to get youth more engaged with public affairs or EU issues.

The number one media platform for young people is the internet. The great majority have access to the internet at home and a large percentage use it daily, while one-quarter of the respondents claim to be online non-stop. Nearly four out of five are registered on a social media platform (of which Facebook is the most popular). Even though young Hungarians mostly use it for “fun”, the internet is also a source of general (22%) and local information (16%) for many.⁸ Despite of its popularity, the news that appears on Facebook is regarded by young Hungarians ages 18-29 as the least credible when compared to other sources of information, according to Transparency International Hungary’s report.⁹

The attitudes of Hungarian youth towards the EU show an upward trend in the last four years, which might be due to the higher number of students taking advantage of their mobility and opportunities in the EU.¹⁰ Despite their more positive attitude towards the EU, they take a neutral standpoint regarding people from different cultures or of a

4 Ibidem.

5 Ibidem.

6 The Foundation for European Progressive Studies and Center for American Progress, *ibidem*.

7 Béla Bauer, et al., *ibidem*.

8 Ibidem.

9 Transparency International Magyarország, *Korrupcióérzékelés És Médiahasználat a Magyar Fiatalok Körében*, 2016, https://transparency.hu/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Korrupcioerzekeles_es_mediahasznalat.pdf [last access: 19.07.2017].

10 Béla Bauer, et al., *ibidem*.

different religion.¹¹ As for the importance of equality in gender and sexual orientation in society, 65% think that it is an important issue.¹²

According to Eurobarometer results, half of the young people ages 16-30 in Hungary claim to live comfortably, but at the same time a little more than half of young people feel that they have been marginalised and excluded from economic and social life because of the economic crisis.¹³

The reason for the younger generation's attitudes can be traced back to several factors such as the historical background of the country or the structure and system of education. The latter should be particularly taken into account when analysing the survey results.

Teachers in Hungary face many difficulties in their work. The education system is outdated and does not reflect the emerging challenges to European societies. Teachers are trapped in a false principle that was established after the regime change in Hungary – namely, that politics should be completely banned from schools and classroom discussions. Furthermore, teachers are generally not trusted by students, so it's also hard for them to initiate meaningful discussions. The definition of politics is understood in the broadest way possible by many schools, and moreover nowadays, the way one perceives minorities is also connected to party politics. Therefore, questions related to human rights, morality, the exclusion of ethnic groups or the European Union are missing from both the official and unofficial curriculum. Most teachers are unequipped to deal with racist statements and don't know how to tackle prejudices and stereotypes. It comes as no surprise that xenophobic sentiment is dominant among teenagers in Hungary, since they have never really had a chance to talk about these feelings and be confronted with strong counter arguments. Students haven't been taught how to question generalizations and understand a problem's complexity.¹⁴

11 Az Ifjúsági Strukturált Párbeszéd, Strukturált Párbeszéd – V. Konzultációs Ciklus Magyarország, 2016.

12 The Foundation for European Progressive Studies and Center for American Progress, *ibidem*.

13 Nancy Jacques, *European Youth in 2016 – Special Eurobarometer of the European Parliament*, May 2016, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/eurobarometre/2016/eye2016/eb85_1_eye_2016_analytical_overview_en.pdf [last access: 19.07.2017].

14 Bulcsú Hunyadi, Veszna Wessenauer, *Hatalmpolitikai Célok Mentén Zajlik 2010 Óta a Közoktatás Szervezése*, Political Capital, Budapest 2016, http://politicalcapital.hu/konyvtar.php?article_read=1&article_id=268 [last access: 19.07.2017].

In the following sections, the results of the Hungarian survey will be presented and analysed. Before that, however, a few remarks should be made regarding the interpretation of the results.

Firstly, it should be emphasized that Hungarian youth operate with a limited vocabulary that is not necessarily accurate when it comes to immigration. According to Luca Váradi's research, it is not possible to know what respondents usually mean by immigrants or refugees; allegedly, they do not make a significant distinction between the two terms.¹⁵

Secondly, the low level of political consciousness and lack of active democratic citizenship of young Hungarians should not be underestimated. Political Capital's research¹⁶ has shown that the absence of democracy education in schools significantly hinders the emergence of a democratic and politically conscious younger generation.

Thirdly, based on the survey results, there is a strong level of commitment towards the European Union, and the EU is perceived as positive and beneficial. Even though Hungarian young people are generally not well informed about the EU and how it works, they are very attracted to the Western democracies and the way people live there.

European integration: benefits, problems and the future

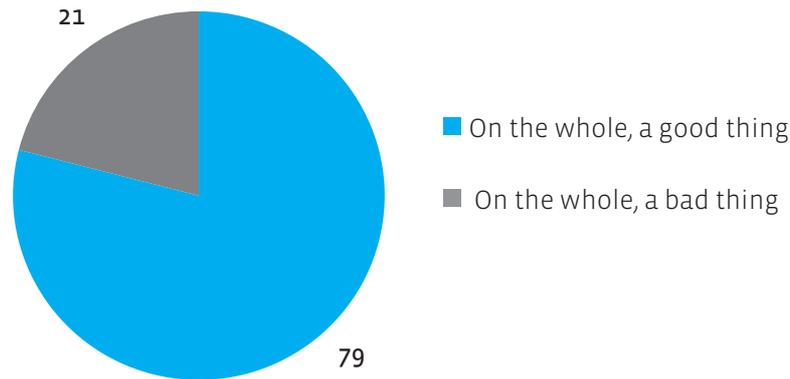
Young people in Hungary firmly support their country's EU membership, with 79% believing that, on the whole, it is a good thing, and 21% holding the opposing view. There are no major discrepancies among the youth of the Visegrad countries regarding this question. Being a member of the EU is supported by a great majority everywhere in the region. Hungary is the most supportive of EU membership among the Visegrad countries, while Slovakia is the least, with 70% seeing it as a good thing and 30% thinking that, on the whole, it is a bad thing.

15 Previous research reveals that the Hungarian media was inconsistent in the terminology used when describing the 2015 refugee crisis. With the exception of a few media outlets, media reports mixed up terms such as *refugees*, *migrants*, *asylum seekers*, *economic immigrants*, *illegal immigrants*, etc. Therefore, the public discourse was also strongly defined by the inconsistent terminology in this regard. See the report for more information: Gábor Bernáth, Vera Messing, Infiltration of Political Meaning production: Security Threat or Humanitarian Crisis? – The Coverage of the Refugee 'crisis' in the Austrian and Hungarian Media in Early Autumn 2015, Center for Media, Data and Society (CMDS), 2016, <https://cmds.ceu.edu/sites/cmcs.ceu.hu/files/attachment/article/1041/infiltrationofpoliticalmeaningfinalizedweb.pdf> [last access; 19.07.2017].

16 Bulcsú Hunyadi, Veszna Wessenauer, *ibidem*.

Diagram 1.
Generally speaking, do
you think that Hungarian
membership in the EU
is...? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann
Stiftung and Institute
of Public Affairs, 2017.



In this study, we were also interested in what benefits young people see in European integration. The most important benefit was maintaining peace between the member countries of the EU (77%), which was followed by the common European efforts to prevent climate change and develop environmental protection standards (67%). The third most important benefit was a draw between the opportunity to work in another country and the opportunity to study in another country (both at 65%). More young women rated these opportunities as important than young men. Meanwhile, studying was more important for the younger age group (15-19 years old), and the opportunity to work was more relevant for the older age group (20-24).

The least important overall was the transfer of EU funds to less developed member countries (only 23% of the respondents find this very important). This may be explained by the fact that on the one hand, this age group is quite uninformed about the more detailed issues regarding the EU, and on the other, they do not perceive that EU funds are helping Hungary catch up with the wealthier member states.

The European Union today is facing many problems. The Hungarian youth believe that the biggest problems are immigration and the inflow of refugees and Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism. Three-quarters of the participants rated these threats as 4 or 5 on a scale of 0-5, where the larger value stands for the bigger problem. Unemployment, job insecurity and economic instability were recognized as the third biggest challenge (51%). The adult population is of a similar opinion – they also identify these as the three biggest issues of the EU. In the Standard Eurobarometer study conducted in November 2016, people were asked about the two most important issues faced by the EU at the moment.

Immigration was mentioned by 65% of the Hungarian participants, terrorism by 40%, and the economic situation by 15%.¹⁷

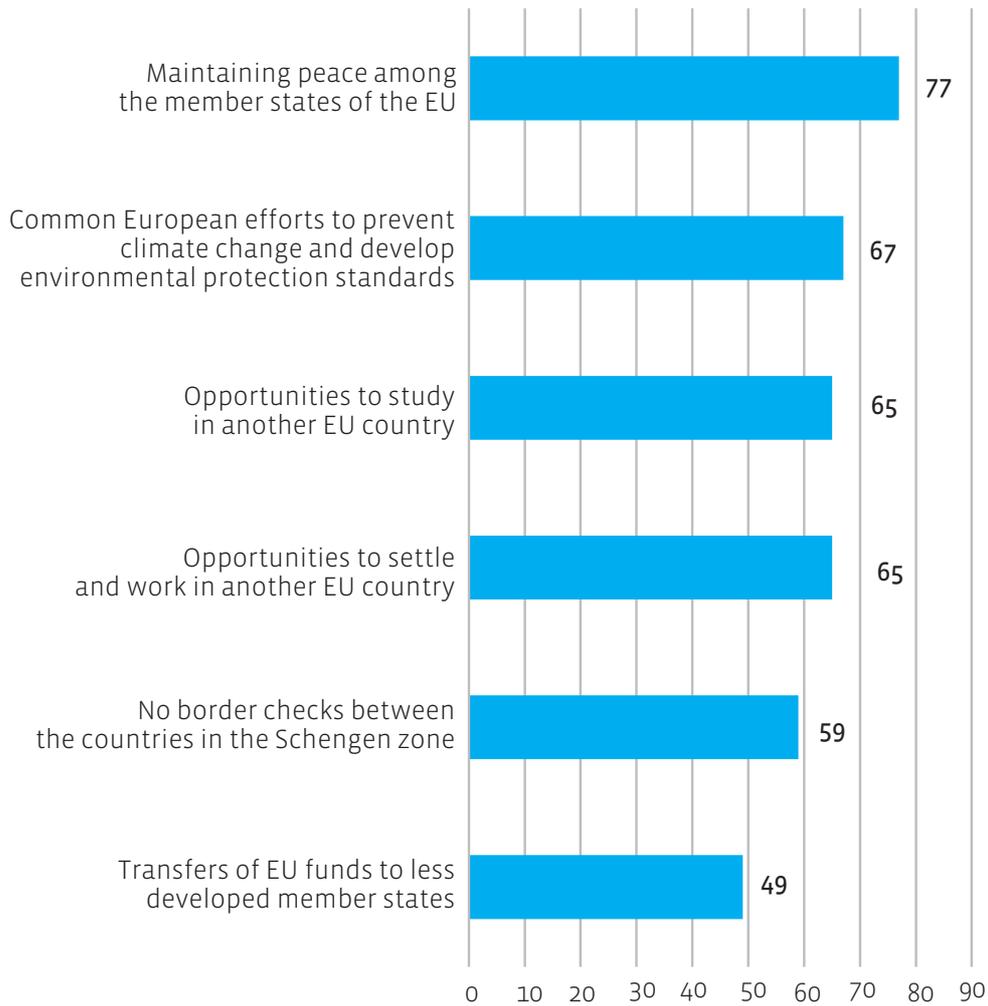


Diagram 2.
How important for you personally are the following benefits of European integration? Responses of "very big" and "big" are summarized in the graph (in %)

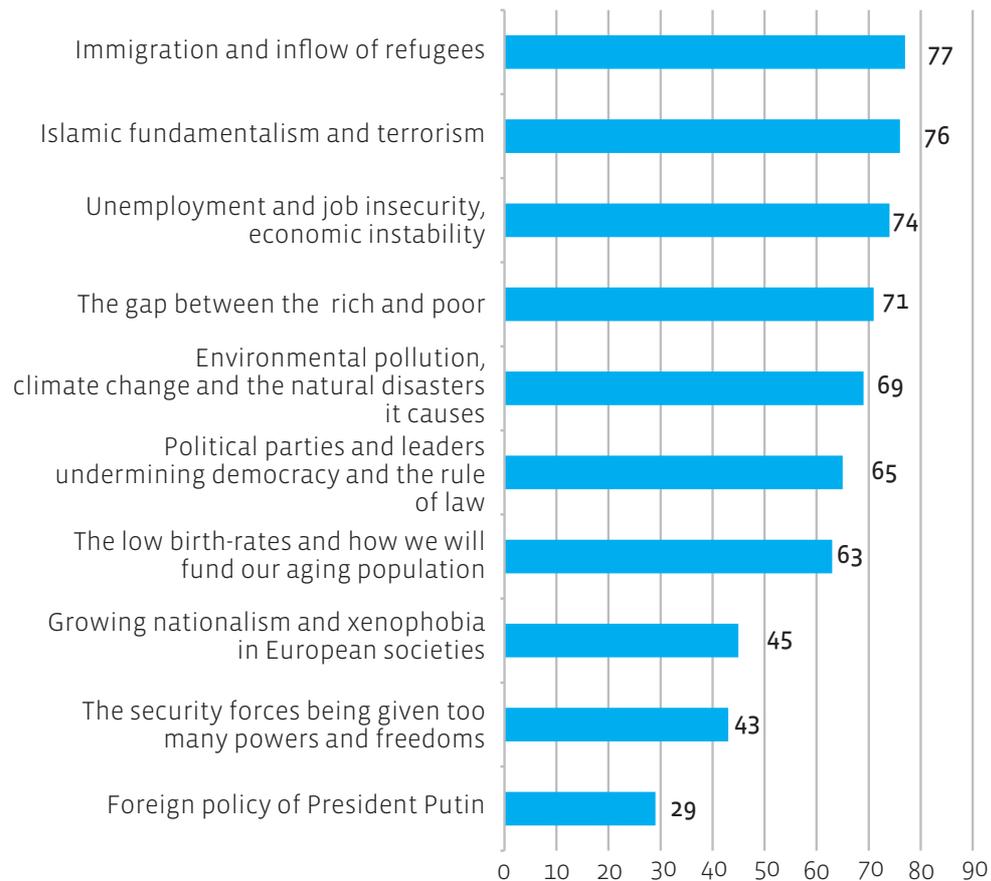
Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017. Respondents could choose answers from 0 ("not important at all") to 5 ("very important").

After the abovementioned problems, the next important issues were the gap between rich and poor, environmental pollution and climate change, and political parties and leaders undermining democracy and the rule of law. The issue of growing nationalism and xenophobia is identified as a greater problem by those who think that Hungary should provide safe haven to refugees from areas of military conflicts. This could be a sign of a more conscious and coherent style of thinking.

17 Standard Eurobarometer 86, November 2016.

Diagram 3.
The European Union today
is facing many problems.
Please assess how big
these problems are.
Responses of “very big”
and “big” are summarized
in the graph (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann
Stiftung and Institute of
Public Affairs, 2017.
Respondents could choose
answers from 0 (“no
problem”) to 5 (“very big
problem”).



Regarding the future of the EU and Hungary’s membership, two-thirds of Hungarian youth surveyed think that the country shouldn’t leave the EU, but should stay and work to reform it. A future with Hungary outside the EU can be imagined by 14% of the participants. This means that those in favor of quitting are a relatively small proportion. This is the second smallest percentage among the surveyed countries after the 9% measured in Germany. Leaving the EU is supported the most by Slovaks (22%). Hungarian youth living in smaller cities or villages are more supportive of leaving the EU than those who live in larger cities. Half of those who see Hungary’s EU membership as a bad thing would like to leave the EU, while “Huxit” support is very limited (only 4%) among respondents with a positive opinion on the membership.

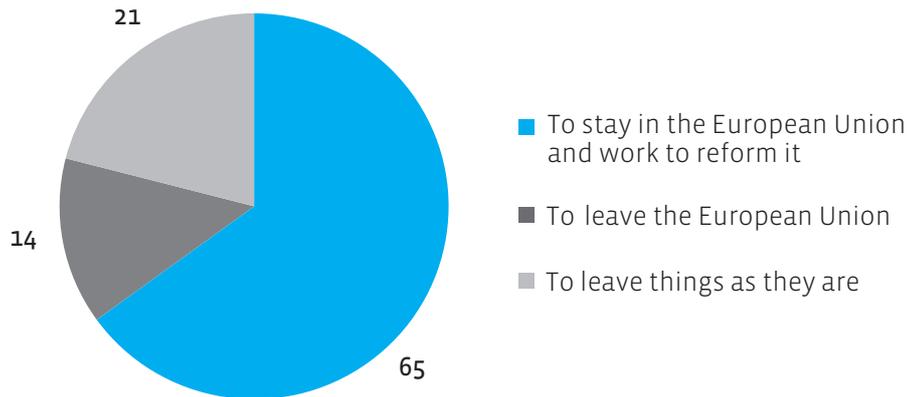


Diagram 4. One hears many opinions of politicians and commentators about the most desirable future of European integration. What is your opinion? Do you think that the best thing for Hungary would be...? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

Perception of immigration

When asked about their attitude towards immigration, it seems that young people in Hungary see immigration as a dangerous and negative phenomenon and have the most radical viewpoint among the V4 countries. An overwhelming 70% of the participants agree that immigrants are a threat to their country's public safety, while only a small minority (10%) agree that immigrants are needed to improve the country's demographic prospects and to balance the retirement pension system.

Only 9% believe that immigrants contribute to Hungary's economic growth and general prosperity. Not only are immigrants perceived as not contributing to society, but 74% believe that immigrants are a burden for the social welfare system. In contrast, 52% of young Germans disagree with this opinion.

Another study – conducted in January 2016 among the Hungarian general population – showed that xenophobia had reached an all-time high (53%), while xenophilia (1%) practically disappeared. The data also showed that young people are less prone to xenophilia.¹⁸

This trend is also seen in this study. Only 27% of young Hungarians agree with the statement that Hungary should provide a safe haven to refugees from areas of military conflict or to victims of political persecution in accordance with internationally agreed rules and standards, while almost two-thirds (72%) think that Hungary should not accept refugees. This view is shared by youth in all the V4 countries and is the opposite of the German attitude, where 73% think that they

¹⁸ Sik Endre (Tárki), Csúcsot döntött az idegenellenesség, és elfogyott az idegenbarátság, 2016, http://www.tarki.hu/hu/news/2016/kitekint/20160404_idegen.html [last access; 19.07.2017].

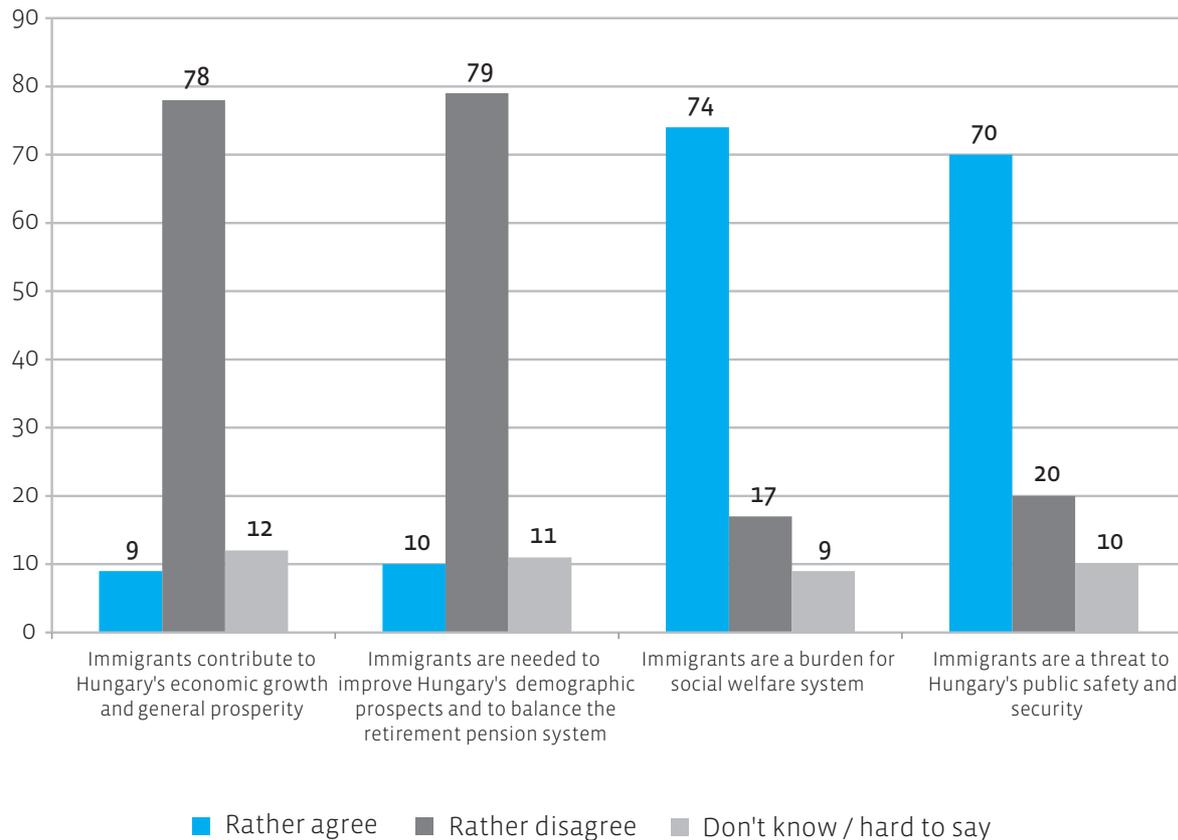


Diagram 5.
Do you agree with the following statements about the possible costs and benefits of immigration to Hungary? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

should help refugees in such situations and seem to be more focused on the benefits of immigration. Regarding personal experience, 55% of respondents claim that they have met an immigrant at places they routinely visit, although this experience does not seem to have had an effect on their acceptance of refugees. Those who are still studying are more tolerant towards immigrants, with 30% willing to accept refugees, while those who are already employed are less open, with only 21% thinking that Hungary should provide safe haven. There is a correlation regarding the assessment of EU membership and willingness to accept refugees – 30% of those who are in favor of membership would accept refugees, while this figure is only 16% among those who consider EU membership a bad thing. Those who are against accepting refugees tend to be right-leaning (25%), only 6% consider themselves on the left end of the political spectrum.

Opinions on globalization

Globalization and its impact on communication, free trade and movement are considered rather positive for Hungary as a whole by 59% of the survey respondents. This number is higher (66%) when respondents consider the same question regarding themselves. Of those who talk about politics regularly or very often, 77% consider the benefits of globalization as rather positive, while 54% of those who are critical towards the European Union find the impacts of globalization beneficial. Regarding questions related to globalization, we can see that young people in the six countries have a similar stance and there are no significant differences between them.

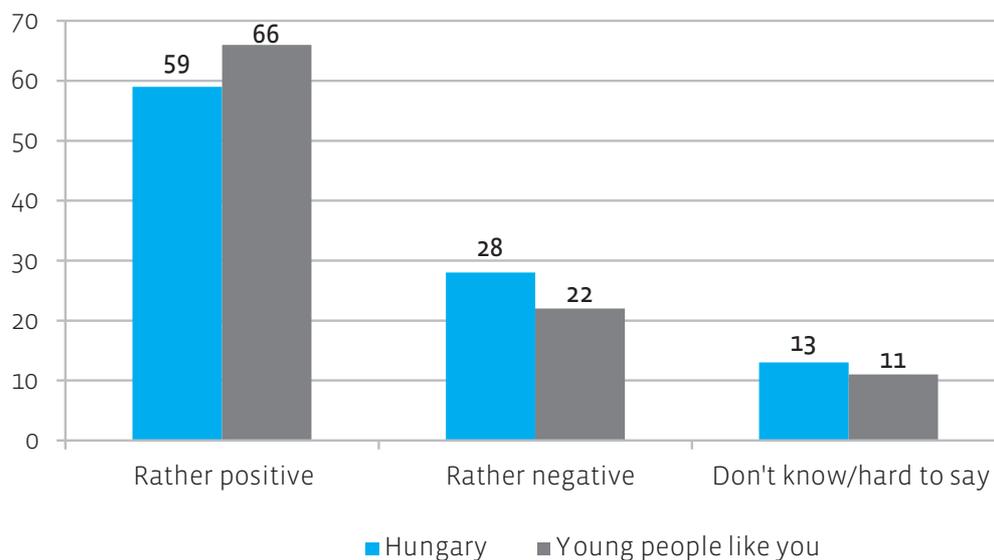


Diagram 6. Over recent decades the world has become more interconnected. There is greater free trade between countries and easier communication across the globe. Money, people, cultures, jobs and industries all move more easily between countries. Generally speaking, do you think this has had a rather positive or rather negative effect on...? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

When it comes to gender issues, 49% of respondents (37% of the men and 63% of the women) indicated that having more women in leadership positions in business and politics is a positive development for society.

The impact of same-sex relationships on society was deemed rather positive by only 39% of the respondents, with 26% believing that this has changed society for the worse. There is a significant difference between male and female respondents on this matter – 50% of female respondents think that same-sex relationships have changed society for the better and only 17% of female respondents think they have changed society for the worse. In case of male respondents, 29% consider this as a positive development, while 35% think it has changed society for the worse.



Of the young Hungarians surveyed, 35% were of the opinion that ethnic and religious diversity has changed society for the worse. In a report on the social impact of the refugee crisis, it was stated that in 2016 xenophobia reached an all-time high in Hungarian society, which can serve as an explanation of our survey results as well.

Religion seems to be one of the least divisive issues among respondents; 19% of the respondents think that without religion the world would be a better place and only 10% consider religion as something that makes the world a better place. There is no difference on this matter among those respondents who think Hungary should accept refugees coming from conflict zones and those who think it should not.

Those who evaluate Hungary's EU membership poorly tend to worry more about the abovementioned changes – 37% think the greater acceptance of same-sex relationships has changed the society for the worse, while this number is only 24% among those having a positive opinion on EU membership. Similar differences appear when it comes to the effects of an ethnically and religiously more diverse society or the increasing number of women in leadership positions.

Attitudes toward democracy

Hungarian youth are rather uncertain regarding their political attitudes. A majority of the Hungarian respondents (67%) position themselves in the center-right or center-left of the political spectrum. This is indicative of their lack of political consciousness and interest which has been demonstrated in numerous previous studies.^{19,20} Hungarian youth are strongly disillusioned with politics as such and have a low level of interest in political matters. According to the biggest annual report on youth in Hungary,²¹ 44% of young Hungarians are not interested in politics at all.²²

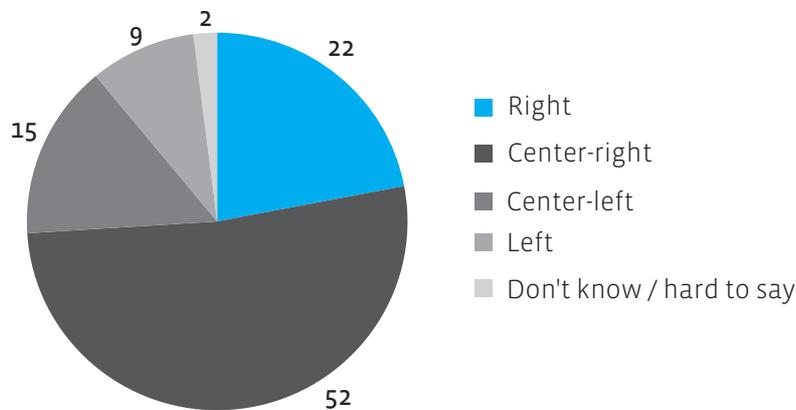


Diagram 8.
How would you describe your political views on the left-right spectrum? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017. Respondents could choose answers from 0 ("extreme left") to 5 ("extreme right").

Democracy is generally viewed as the best political system by 48% of the respondents – less than half of the analysed respondents. This demonstrates well that the experience of young Hungarians with democracy is very limited and therefore their perception is uncertain.

An even more concerning result was that 27% of the young people surveyed do not find democracy to be the best political system. Another comprehensive survey on Hungarian youth reached similar conclusions, namely, that 55% consider democracy the best possible political system, while 8% think that, under certain circumstances, dictatorship is better

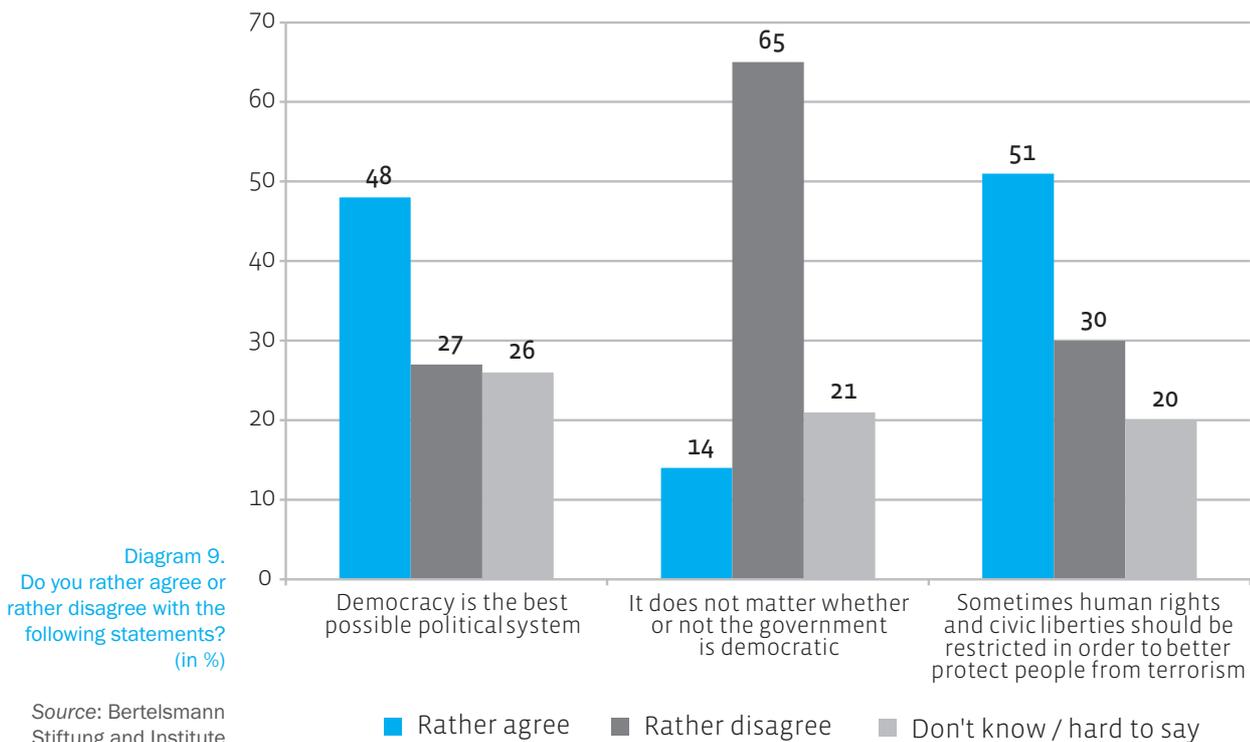
19 Andrea Szabó, *Az Egyetemisták És Főiskolások Magyarországon*, 2015, *Belvedere Meridionale*, 2015, http://real.mtak.hu/32809/1/gyorsjelentes_v20150507_final_web.pdf [last access: 19.07.2017].

20 Levente Székely, Andrea Szabó, *Magyar Ifjúság Kutatás 2016*, Új Nemzedék Központ Nonprofit Kft., 2016, http://www.ujnemzedek.hu/sites/default/files/atoms/files/magyar_ifjusag_2016_a4_web_0.pdf [last access: 19.07.2017].

21 Ibidem.

22 Ibidem.

than democracy.²³ In our survey, respondents having a negative opinion on Hungary's EU membership are much more critical of democracy, with 44% of them disagreeing with the statement that democracy is the best possible political system. This is twice as many as the percentage giving this response among those who evaluate Hungary's EU membership as good.



According to our survey results, there is a critical stance among youth towards democracy and human rights in Hungary. Every second respondent thinks that human rights and civil liberties should be limited in case of national security and terrorist threats to better protect citizens. On the basis of the survey results, it might be concluded that youth in Hungary have little knowledge of and limited experience with democratic institutions and human rights.

Sources of information on the EU

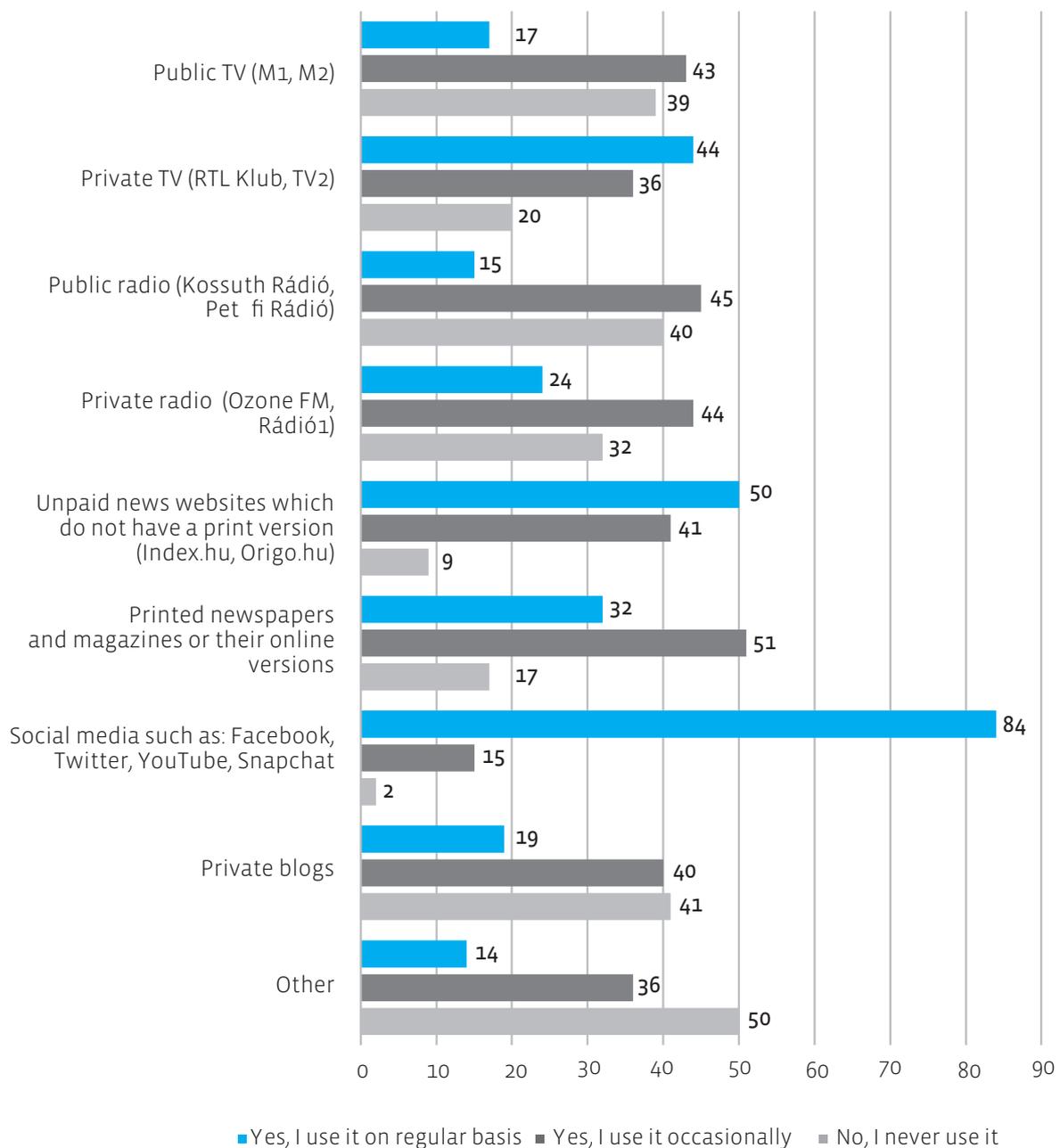
The majority of the participants (84%) use social media on a regular basis (in Hungary, Facebook has the most users). It should be added,

²³ Ibidem.

however, that social media is not only a source of information, but it is also a platform for daily encounters and interactions with others. Because of this, it is not surprising that other, more traditional forms of media which were mentioned in the questionnaire are used by less people. The most popular sources other than social media are freely available news websites which do not have a print version. Every second participant regularly visits index.hu, origo.hu or a similar site. Watching private TV channels is also favored, with 80% of young people regularly

Diagram 10.
Do you use the following sources of information? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.



or occasionally watching television. This means that at least one-fifth of Hungarian young people don't watch private TV channels or probably any other kind of television. The least preferred sources of information for the respondents are public television and public radio. Only 15% and 17%, respectively, watch or listen to these channels on a regular basis, four out of ten participants can't be reached through these channels.

One-quarter of young people don't talk about political topics, neither with their family nor among their friends. The proportion of politically inactive respondents in Hungary makes it even an outlier among the Visegrad Four. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, this number is 18%, while in Poland it is 13%. In the Austrian and German samples, even smaller values were registered, 8% and 5%, respectively.

Young Hungarians who are interested in politics and actively engage in conversation about such topics make up 22% of those surveyed, which is similar to the proportions in the Czech and Slovak samples. It is remarkable that in Poland, the remaining V4 country, this proportion is almost double (40%).

Even though 84% of Hungarian young people use social media as a source of information, they do not typically take part in discussions about politics in social media or in internet comments fora – 60% of the participants of the study answered that they never or almost never participate in such discussions. One-third engage occasionally, while only every tenth person comments regularly or very often on some social media platform.

These results are in accordance with the results of a large-scale study on Hungarian youth (conducted among 8,000 Hungarian residents, ages 15-29 years), where 44% claimed that they were not at all interested in politics and another 22% were hardly interested. This is the lowest level of interest since 2000.²⁴

24 Levente Székely, Andrea Szabó, *ibidem*.

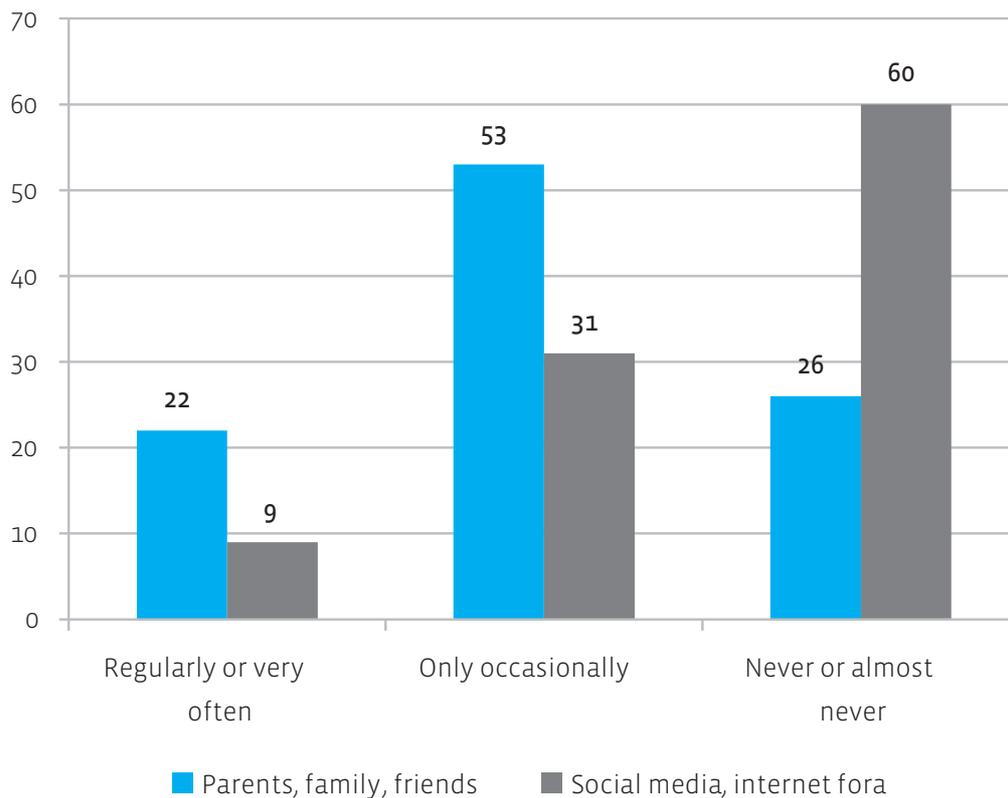


Diagram 11.
How often do you talk about politics with your parents, other family members, friends or on social media and internet fora? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

Recommendations

- ▶ “Nothing about us without us” – there should be more opportunity given to youth organizations to found civic initiatives and start mobilizing themselves. This would require very close cooperation with youth organizations instead of centrally defined youth policies without the involvement of young people.
- ▶ It is important to improve the level of democracy education to enable young Hungarians to have a better political understanding and encourage interest. Youth should be equipped with the techniques and tools for democratic debates.
- ▶ The work of civil society actors operating in the field of active citizenship should be supported, endorsed and presented by public institutions.
- ▶ There should be more space given within the education structure for human rights and democracy education.
- ▶ Curriculum vs. Practice – It is important to monitor and evaluate how existing elements of the curriculum that deal with human rights, democracy and the EU are being implemented in practice.

- ▶ Teacher trainings and curriculums should be reviewed, monitored and evaluated to figure out whether they reflect and incorporate current societal and political challenges.
- ▶ Teachers should be equipped with the adequate skills, materials, and knowledge to enable them to talk with students and youngsters about controversial issues.
- ▶ There should be more attempts initiated by schools and civil society organizations, as well as the European Union, to counter the anti-immigration narrative and mitigate the damage caused by its negative message among youth (e.g., fear, stereotyping, lack of solidarity and trust).
- ▶ The promotion of narratives/rhetoric regarding the topic of refugees and immigration that are less politically biased and more accurate should be developed and encouraged.
- ▶ Research and surveys should be conducted to find out what youth think should be fixed within the EU; they should be better informed and educated about the tools at stake they can use to address those problems.



Poland

Key findings

- ▶ A majority of young Poles hold positive views on European integration (76%). They also agree that the most preferable scenario for Poland is to stay in the EU and work to reform it (64%). Only 21% would support a Pol-exit.
- ▶ A strong majority of young Poles appreciate the many concrete benefits of European integration. Maintaining peace in Europe is considered the greatest benefit, followed by the ability to settle and work in another country.
- ▶ The transfer of funds from richer to poorer EU countries is mentioned relatively less often as a key benefit of EU membership, although it is still appreciated by a majority of young respondents.
- ▶ Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism, immigration and the influx of refugees are considered the biggest problems the EU now faces.
- ▶ Half of young Poles see the foreign policy of Russia's President Putin as a problem for the EU.
- ▶ Polish youth have negative opinions about immigration. A majority do not believe that immigrants contribute to Poland's economy (58%) or that they are needed to improve the country's demographic prospects (70%), while 60% think that immigrants constitute a threat to public safety in Poland and place a burden on the social welfare system.

- ▶ Young Poles are strongly opposed to accepting any refugees in Poland in accordance with internationally agreed rules and standards.
- ▶ Polish youth have ambiguous views regarding the changes taking place in contemporary society. A majority (55%) see the trend of more women in leadership positions as a positive social change (while one-third think this change is neither good nor bad). Young Poles are divided, however, when it comes to acceptance of same-sex relations (one-third think this is a positive change, while a similar percentage disagree). Cultural and religious diversity are negatively perceived by almost half of all respondents (47%).
- ▶ Half of respondents consider democracy the best political system. For almost three-quarters, it matters whether or not the government is democratic.
- ▶ A majority of young Poles (68%) identify their political views as either centrist, center-right or center-left. One in five declare themselves on the far right, while only 8% see themselves on the far left. Self-declared rightists are usually young men from small or mid-size towns.
- ▶ Social media are the primary source of information for nearly all young Poles (90%). Television is a source for only 47% (private stations) and 32% (public television).
- ▶ The right-wing Eurosceptic discourse tends to dominate conversations about the EU, while pro-EU voices and arguments are not made with the same forcefulness. Once a conversation about the EU begins, the voices of Eurosceptics are louder and carry more conviction than the voices of the pro-EU majority.

Foreword

Poland's membership in the European Community and, later, the European Union was one of the few goals uniting the Polish political scene after 1989 during the transition from communism to democracy. This political vision has enjoyed broad support among the general

public. Polish society considered EU accession a positive development for Poland already in the first years of the 1990's. According to research conducted by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) in June 1994, 50% of respondents claimed that Poland's EU membership would bring the country more benefits than drawbacks. Only 6% were of the opposite opinion.¹ However, during the difficult accession process, Poles also had their moments of doubt. In early 2004, the number of people claiming that integration with the EU would bring Poland more benefits (39%) was almost equal to those voices saying the opposite (38%).² This pessimism was fuelled by people's fear that Poland was still too poor to meet the conditions of membership and to withstand the pressure of competition from the more advanced EU economies. The atmosphere of uncertainty was encouraged by the nascent Polish Eurosceptics who tried to build political capital by spreading fear about the impact of integration on the economy and society, resulting in people's declining trust for integration. After the accession, the initial concerns receded and support for the EU and its positive image skyrocketed, with young Poles being even more pro-European than the rest of the society. Poland has since been seen as a stronghold of EU support, a stance which is well grounded in economic data, as the country has been progressing vigorously in socio-economic terms thanks to the inflow of structural funds as well as forging strong economic links with EU partners.

The politics regarding Poland's EU membership have recently entered a new phase following the 2015 parliamentary elections. The victorious Law and Justice party (PiS), although still supporting Poland's membership in the EU, reshuffled Poland's priorities in Europe. The Law and Justice government rejected the EU's refugee policy, a move which has been met with strong criticisms in EU institutions and some Member States. The Polish government has also started to demand a general re-thinking of the future of the EU, putting emphasis on reducing power on the side of EU institutions and empowering intergovernmental cooperation. At the same time, there have been growing concerns about the state of democracy and rule of law in Poland. In particular, the ruling party's actions towards the Constitutional Court have led to the European Commission's initiation of proceedings to ascertain whether Poland has

1 CBOS, Poparcie dla członkostwa Polski w UE, CBOS 14/2013, <http://www.cbos.pl/PL/publikacje/news/2013/14/newsletter.php> [last access: 19.07.2017].

2 Ibidem.

breached the values and principles enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty of the European Union. This, in turn, has led to angry rhetoric in Warsaw, with politicians accusing Brussels of infringing on Poland's sovereignty.

Thus far, the tensions between Warsaw and Brussels seem not to have had a negative influence on the perception of the EU among the general public. On the contrary, CBOS's latest research shows some increase of EU support in Poland – EU support reached 88% in April 2017, compared to 85% in February 2017 and 81% in February 2016.³ At the same time, other surveys show large sceptical majorities on some policy issues, such as refugee quotas or the adoption of the euro.

Although support for the EU is generally considered to be fairly stable, diverging tendencies can be observed among the youngest group of Poles. Young adults (18-24) are nowadays more sceptical towards Europe than they were a few years ago. Whereas in 2008, support for the EU was the highest in this age group (93%, compared to 88% of the general public),⁴ and in 2012, young Poles also favored the EU more than the general population (88%, compared to 83%),⁵ the situation has changed with the current generation of Poles reaching adulthood. Today's young Poles seem to be less pro-European than the rest of society. CBOS research shows that 74% of Poles aged 18-24 support Poland's EU membership, which is significantly less than the general population (88%).

The older generation remembers the realities of pre-1989 Poland, as well as the early transition period and post-2004 development, and can try to assess the pros and cons of European integration on the basis of their own experiences. The younger generation's direct experience, however, does not reach beyond membership. Some experts think that Polish young people are "acclimated" to the benefits of membership and thus take them for granted. At the same time, they are exposed to eurosceptics' critical opinions on some aspects of integration, often amplified by their preferred means of communication, that is, the social media. The rise of the xenophobic and ultraconservative "alternative right" is a phenomenon that could be observed in Poland well before its presence was acknowledged in Western

3 CBOS, Preferred model of the European Union, CBOS 50/2017, http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2017/K_050_17.PDF [last access 19.07.2017].

4 CBOS, Bilans czterech lat integracji Polski z Unią Europejską, CBOS BS/66/2008, http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2008/K_066_08.PDF [last access 19.07.2017].

5 CBOS, Siedem lat obecności Polski w Unii Europejskiej, CBOS BS/52/2011, http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2011/K_052_11.PDF [last access 19.07.2017].

Europe and the US. The “alt-right” (as it is euphemistically called) targets the young and casts a shadow of political radicalism over the entire generation. It is also presumed to have had an impact on their attitudes towards European integration. The present study surveyed the attitudes of young Poles towards the EU in the context of the broader socio-political and cultural changes affecting the generation that will decide Poland’s place in Europe in the coming years and decades.

European integration: benefits, problems, future

Assessment of integration

The majority of Polish youth positively assess Poland’s EU membership: 76% of young Poles generally consider membership in the EU a good thing, whereas 22% think the opposite. Polish women are more pro-European than men, the research reveals, as 84% of women see EU membership positively, while the same opinion is shared by only 69% of men.

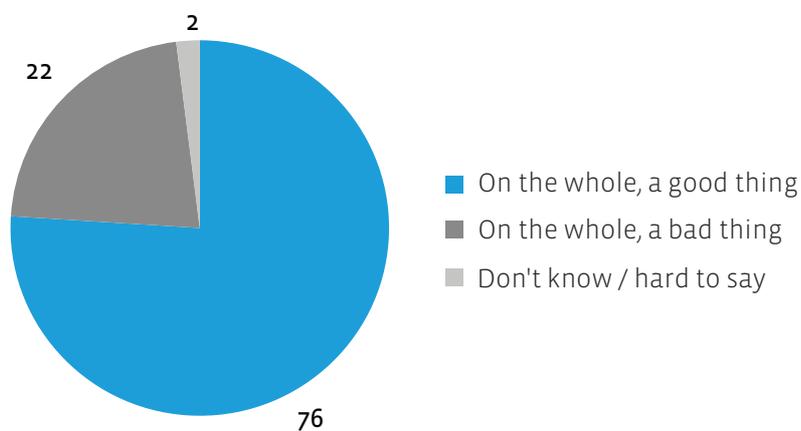


Diagram 1.
Generally speaking, do you think that Polish membership in the EU is...? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

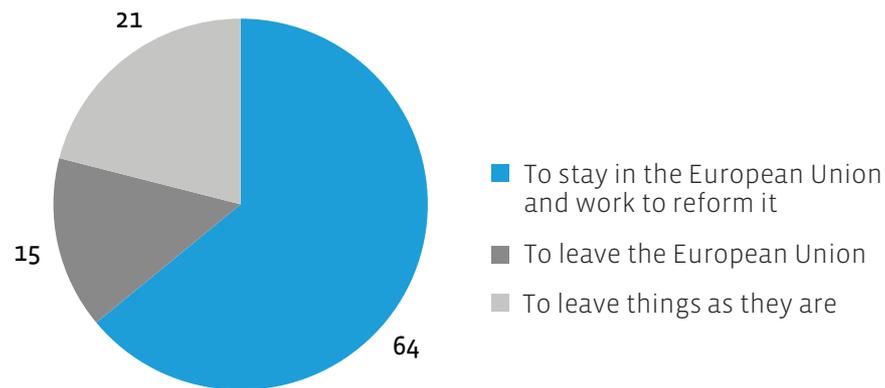
Remain, but reform

Although young Poles in general see EU membership in a positive light, a majority also believe that reforming the EU is the most desirable scenario for the future. Almost two-thirds of Polish youth (64%) confirm that the best option for Poland is to stay in the EU and work to reform it. One-fifth (21%) are ready to remain in the EU and leave things as they are. Only 15% of young Poles would opt to leave the community.

There are no statistically important divisions on how people answered this question that could be related to gender or other socio-demographic features of Polish youth. There is, however, a clear connection between appreciating integration and readiness to stay in the EU. Those respondents who claim EU-integration is a good thing are much more willing to remain and reform the EU or leave things as they are than they are to leave.

Diagram 2.
Do you think that the best
thing for Poland would
be...? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann
Stiftung and Institute of
Public Affairs, 2017.



These answers do not significantly differ from a similar opinion poll conducted a few months ago, where also 15% of young people (18-24 years old) were for leaving the EU, while 51% opted for staying in the EU and reforming it and 15% for leaving things as they are (20% gave no opinion). The results of the entire surveyed population in this poll were, respectively, 8%, 56% and 21%, with 15% responding “don’t know.”⁶ Regularly conducted opinion polls in Poland also show that Polish support for European integration has never fallen below 70% over the last decade, reaching a peak of 89% in 2014,⁷ and amounting to 81% in 2016 (76% among Poles 18-24 years old).⁸ In the most recent poll published by CBOS in April 2017, 88% of Poles declared support for the EU, as opposed to 8% against. Among young Poles (18-24), support for the EU dropped to 74%, while opposition to it grew to 22%. These data clearly show that Polish youth are more Eurosceptic than the general population in Poland.⁹

6 Jacek Kucharczyk, Małgorzata Druciarek, Aleksander Fuksiewicz, Dominik Owczarek, *When fear wins: causes and consequences of Poland’s populism turn*, at: *Nothing to fear, but fear itself*, Demos, London 2017.

7 CBOS, *Wybory do Parlamentu Europejskiego*, CBOS 40/2014, http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2014/K_040_14.PDF [last access 19.07.2017].

8 CBOS, *Polska w Unii Europejskiej*, CBOS 31/2016, http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2016/K_031_16.PDF [last access 19.07.2017].

9 CBOS, *Preferred model of the European Union*, CBOS 50/2017, http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2017/K_050_17.PDF [last access 19.07.2017].

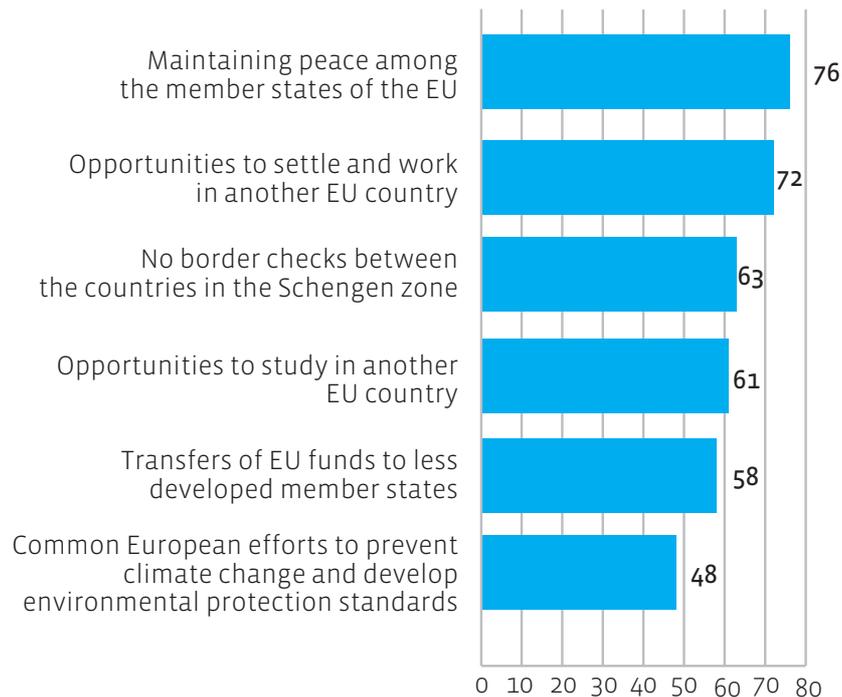
Benefits of EU integration

Young Poles see maintaining peace among the European countries as the greatest benefit of EU integration. This statement is supported by 76% of respondents. Another key benefit (with a 72% approval rate) is the possibility of working and living in another EU country. Travel without border checks and the possibility to study abroad are recognized as important benefits by 63% and 61%, respectively. Somewhat surprisingly, only 58% of Polish youth consider the transfer of EU funds to less developed member countries to be an important benefit of EU membership. Poland is the biggest recipient of EU funds (82 billion euro for the years 2015-2020), and yet, the responses of young Poles placed this benefit second to last among the other benefits of European integration. A similar tendency can be observed in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia. Although these countries contribute less to the EU budget than they receive, less than half of young Czechs, Hungarians and Slovaks see EU funds as an important benefit for their respective countries. On one hand, this might be explained by the fact that the question asked about personal benefit and not benefit to the given country. On the other hand, the availability and use of these funds is so broad that even “normal citizens” using the new motorways, buses, bike paths and renovated bridges benefit directly from these funds.

Of all the listed benefits of EU integration, Poles rank common efforts to prevent climate change as having, relatively, the least importance, with just 48% of young people seeing it as positive from their personal perspective. This seems to reflect Poles’ generally low interest in environmental issues.

Diagram 3.
How important for you personally are the following benefits of European integration? Responses of “very big” and “big” are summarized in the graph (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017. Respondents could choose answers from 0 (“not important at all”) to 5 (“very important”).



Problems the EU faces

Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism (83%), as well as immigration and the influx of refugees (79%), are perceived by young Poles as the two biggest problems the EU now faces. Young Poles do not differ much in this respect from other Visegrad youth.

Other problems relate to economic insecurity (including unemployment) and negative demographic trends resulting in the difficulties of financing an aging population. Both of these issues are recognized as problems by 62% of young Poles.

Roughly half (53%) of Polish youth think that the foreign policy of Russian President Putin poses a problem for Europe. This percentage is significantly higher than in the other analyzed countries, ranging from 28% in Slovakia to 39% in Germany.

Finally, growing nationalism and xenophobia in Europe, as well as too much power being given to security forces (both 48%), rank lowest among Polish young people on the list of problems that Europe now faces.

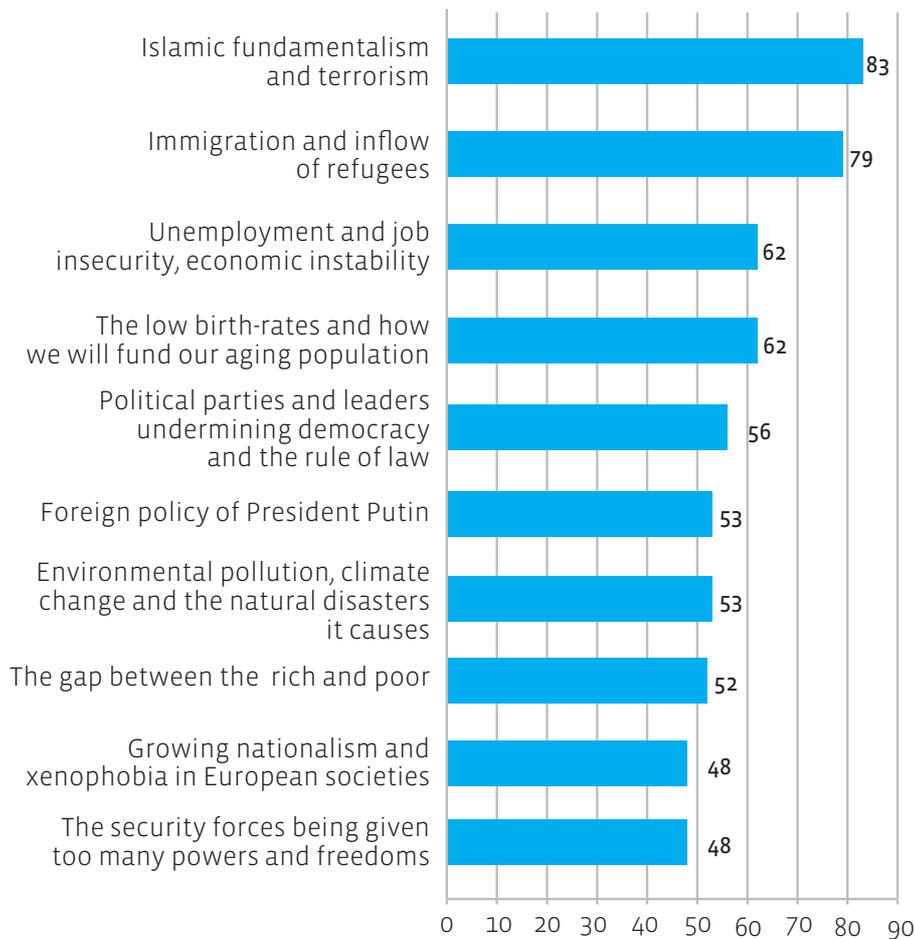


Diagram 4. The European Union today is facing many problems. Please assess how big these problems are. Responses of “very big” and “big” are summarized in the graph (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017. Respondents could choose answers from 0 (“not important at all”) to 5 (“very important”).

The hierarchy of problems seen in this study is much in line with the results of Eurobarometer studies which also show that terrorism and immigration were seen by young Poles (ages 15-24 years) as the most critical issues facing the EU at the moment. We should also note that young people in this study did not differ significantly from the general Polish population.¹⁰

Perception of immigration

Opinions on immigration

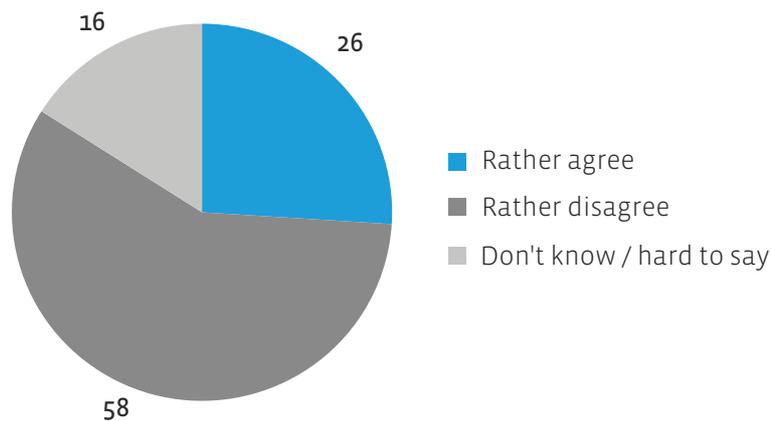
Young Poles see immigration as one of the burning issues of the European Union. Polish youth also perceive immigration as a burden for their country and rarely notice its positive aspects.

10 Standards Eurobarometer 85, May 2016.

When asked about immigrants' contributions to their country's prosperity and general growth, only one-quarter (26%) responded positively, whereas a majority of Polish youth (58%) responded unfavorably. Poles who say they have met an immigrant in their neighbourhood or workplace at least once in their life tend to agree that immigrants have a positive influence on Polish economic growth twice as often (31% to 16%) as those who claim they have never met an immigrant in their everyday life.

Diagram 5.
Immigrants contribute to
your country's economic
growth and general
prosperity (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann
Stiftung and Institute
of Public Affairs, 2017.



Although young Poles are aware of the issue of Poland's aging population (62%), they don't see immigration as a possible mitigation of its potential negative implications for the national budget. Seventy percent of young Poles do not agree with the statement that immigrants are needed to improve demographics and balance the retirement pension system; less than one-fifth (18%) are of the opposite opinion.

The differences between those who have met an immigrant and those who have not are visible here as well, as 21% of the former and only 12% of the latter agree that immigration is needed to secure the pension fund and counter negative demography. Nevertheless, it doesn't change the overall scepticism of young Poles towards these solutions.

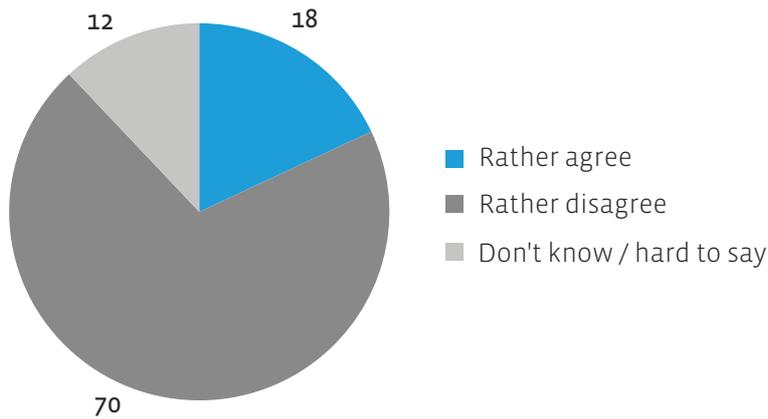


Diagram 6. Immigrants are needed to improve your country's demographic prospects and to balance the retirement pension system (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

Rather than as beneficial, the majority of young Poles (60%) see immigrants as a burden for the social welfare system. A little less than one-third (30%) think the opposite.

Again, youth who have had the opportunity to meet an immigrant express this negative attitude less often than those who claim never to have met one in their neighbourhood or workplace (53%, as opposed to 76%).

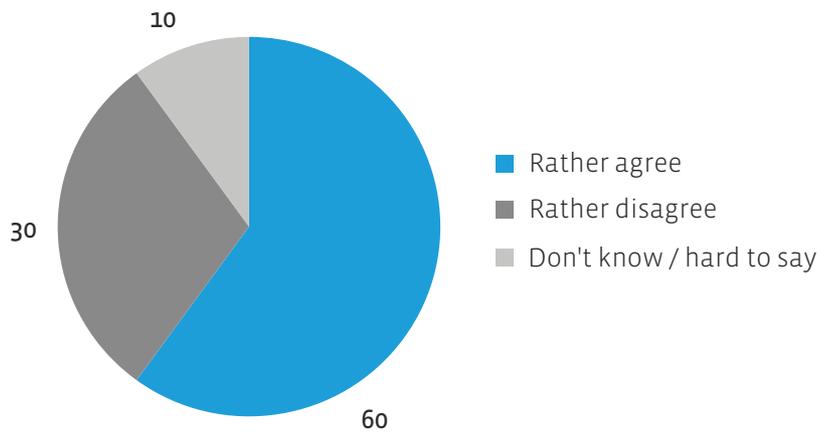


Diagram 7. Immigrants are a burden for the social welfare system (in %)

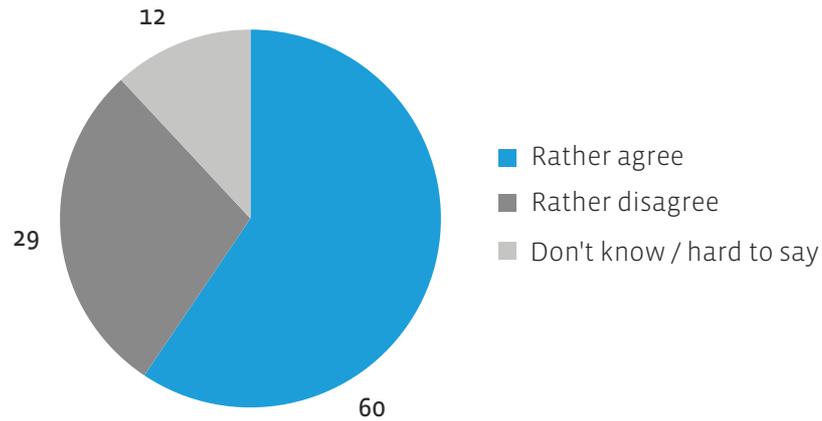
Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

Not only do Poles consider immigrants to be a burden for the social welfare system, but they see immigrants as a threat to national security and public safety. This opinion is expressed by 60% of Polish youth, whereas 29% disagree.

Half of young Poles (51%) who have met an immigrant in the past see immigration as a threat to public safety. This number surges to 77% in the case of people who claim to have never encountered an immigrant in their neighbourhood or workplace.

Diagram 8. Immigrants are a threat to your country's public safety and security (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.



In general, respondents having positive opinions about the effects of immigration are more likely to agree that EU-integration is a good thing.

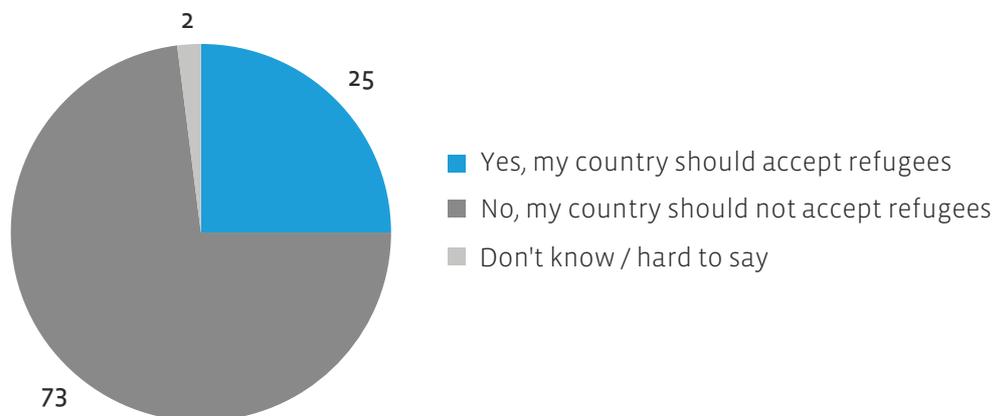
When asked the general question in spring 2016 of whether immigrants contribute much to Poland, 32% of Poles aged 18-24 years agreed or tended to agree (compared with 26% of the general population).¹¹

Refugees (not) welcome

Young Poles are not only reluctant towards immigrants in general, but also strongly oppose accepting refugees in Poland. Almost three-quarters (73%) of youth do not believe Poland should provide safe haven for refugees, even if they are fleeing from areas of ongoing military conflicts and the process of accepting follows internationally agreed rules and standards. Only one-quarter of young Poles are willing to accept refugees.

Diagram 9. Should your country provide safe haven to refugees from areas of military conflicts or to victims of political persecution in accordance with internationally agreed rules and standards? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.



11 Ibidem.

Analysis indicates no important differences among respondents correlating to socio-demographic features. What is evident, again, is that Poles who consider EU integration a good thing are more willing to accept refugees than people who see it as a bad thing. Another correlation is also noticeable – respondents who are in favor of accepting refugees more frequently see integration as a good thing. Similarly, those who are for accepting refugees are more likely to choose the option to stay and reform the EU.

One might ask why these young people who see peace as the most important benefit of European integration are so set against accepting refugees from war-torn countries. Probably, they do not see this contradiction, thinking in categories of security rather than compassion. Seeing immigrants as a threat, they are more reluctant towards accepting them than willing to help others in distress. Having said this, one should note that there is a clear statistical correlation between the claim that peace is a very important benefit and support for the acceptance of refugees by Poland.

Once more, the survey shows here the value of personal experience. Those respondents who claim to have been in touch with somebody from outside their own town or country or travelled outside the country or Europe are more willing to accept refugees.

Other attitudes are also correlated with the willingness (or its lack) to accept refugees. Those who claim the world would be better off without religion are more open to accepting refugees in Poland than those claiming religion makes the world a better place. The same counts for young people who describe themselves on the left side of the political spectrum.

Comparing these results with other Polish opinion polls, one can observe that the youngest generation is also the most sceptical towards accepting refugees in Poland. While around 53-55% of respondents from the general population opposed accepting refugees, among those between the ages of 18 and 24, these numbers are 66-68%.¹²

Another study of young Poles reveals an abundance of anti-refugee attitudes. One motive is dominant for the majority of respondents – anxiety, or even the fear of refugees and what may happen if they are

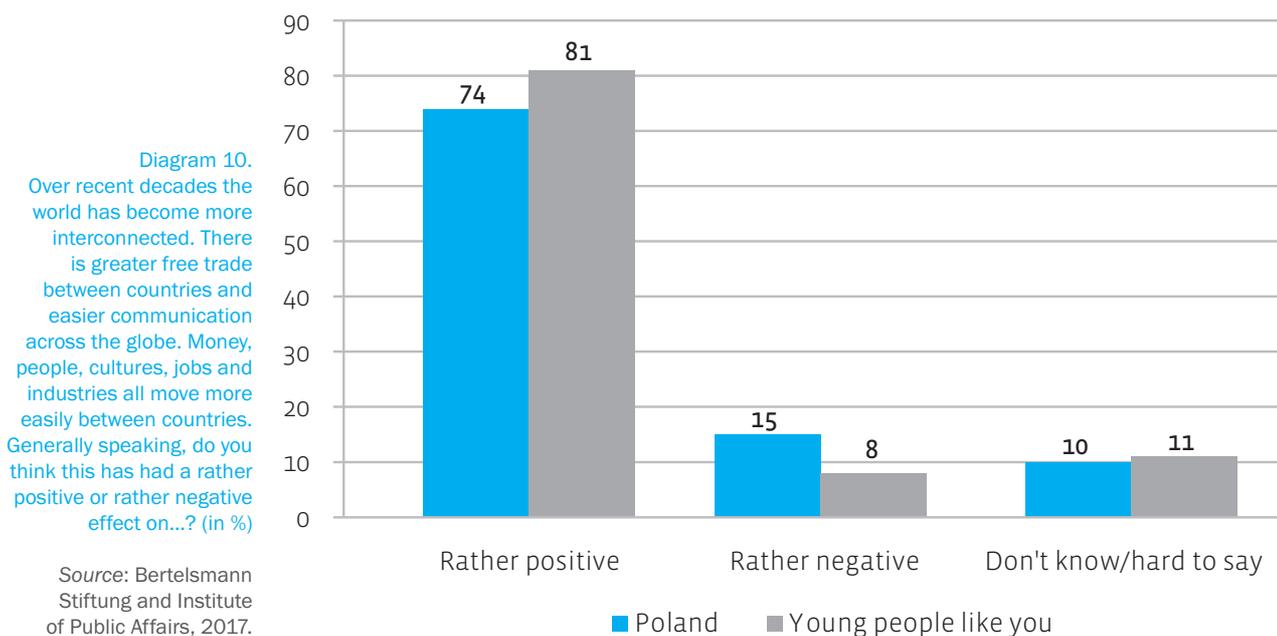
12 CBOS, Stosunek do przyjmowania uchodźców po ogłoszeniu nowej propozycji Komisji Europejskiej dotyczącej reformy polityki azylowej, CBOS 79/2016, http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2016/K_079_16.PDF [last access 19.07.2017].

accepted in Poland. Young Poles use various arguments to explain the source of their fear. Usually, they portray refugees as Islamic terrorists, ruthless villains and even rapists. Based on those projections, young Poles see their resistance to accepting refugees as protecting their country and its citizens.¹³

Opinions on globalisation and social changes

More interconnectivity – better for whom?

Young Poles are happy with the world becoming more and more interconnected. They appreciate these changes both in regards to their country and their peers. Three-quarters of the respondents (74%) see it as a positive influence for Poland. Even more – 81% – claim the interconnected world is something positive for young people like themselves.



Young Poles who claim that European integration is a bad thing also tend to more frequently see global interconnection as a negative phenomenon than those with a positive attitude towards the EU. Furthermore, there is a significant correlation between globalisation

13 Dorota Hall, Agnieszka Mikulska-Jolles, *Uprzedzenia, strach czy niewiedza? Młodzi Polacy o powodach niechęci do przyjmowania uchodźców*, Warszawa 2016, <http://interwencjaprawna.pl/docs/ARE-116-upzedzenia-mlodych-polakow.pdf> [last access: 19.07.2017]

and membership in the EU. Those who see globalisation positively, both for Poland and for themselves, tend to be more willing to stay in the European Union and reform it. Conversely, people who see more interconnection in the contemporary world as a negative phenomenon more frequently opt for leaving the EU.

Similar results were obtained in the study conducted in autumn 2016, when 73% of 18-24 year olds expressed positive attitudes towards an interconnected world for Poland (compared to 80% of the general Polish population) and 72% for their own lives (compared to 83% of the general population).¹⁴ This clearly shows that young Poles are happy with the effects of globalisation. In comparison with their peers from the other countries, these numbers are above average.

Confusion over changes

Young Poles express serious reservations in response to the social changes influencing society today. Among the changes many European societies have witnessed in recent decades, only the acceptance of more women in leadership positions in business and politics is perceived by a majority of respondents as a positive change for society (55%). Women share this opinion more often than men (76% to 43%). Also, young Poles who claim EU-integration is a good thing are more willing to accept women in leadership positions than those who see European integration in negative terms. Respondents who believe that the social advancement of women has changed society for the worse are much more likely to opt for leaving the EU than people who see the strengthened position of women as a positive change. In the former, 30% of Polish youth are in favor of leaving the EU; in the latter, the figure decreases to 10%.

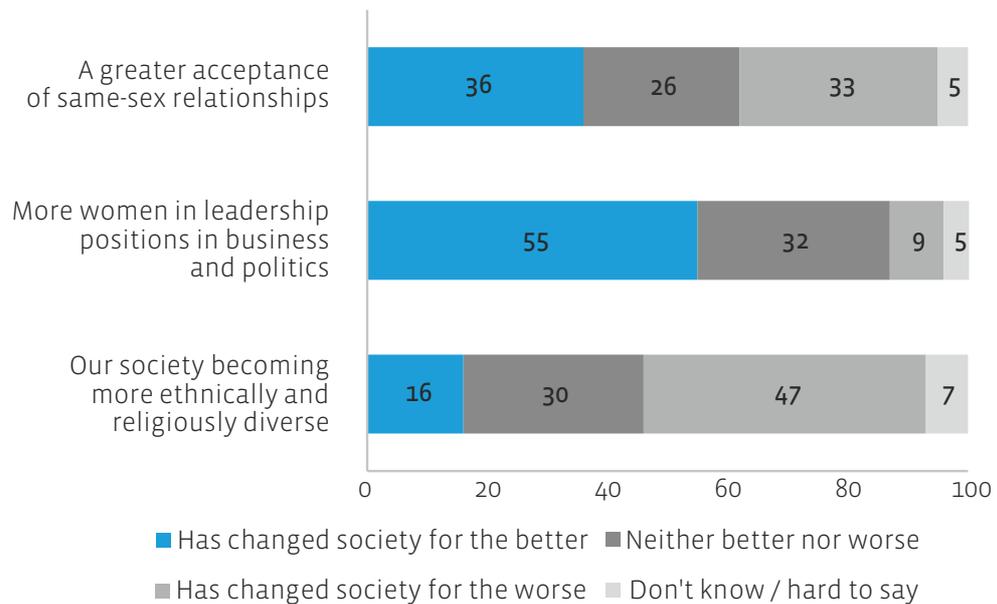
Young Poles are divided in their assessment of social changes regarding same-sex relationships. More than one-third (36%) claim that greater acceptance for same-sex relationships is a positive change. But nearly the same percentage of respondents (33%) see it negatively. Young Polish women are generally more positive about this change than their male counterparts. The parallel between the acceptance of same sex relations and perception of the EU is again evident. Among respondents

¹⁴ Jacek Kucharczyk, Małgorzata, Druciarek, Aleksander Fuksiewicz, Dominik Owczarek, *When fear wins: causes and consequences of Poland's populism turn*, at: *Nothing to fear, but fear itself*, Demos, London 2017.

who confirm that greater acceptance of same-sex relations is a positive societal development, only 6% want to leave the EU. This figure surges to 25% for the group holding negative opinions about the debated societal change.

Greater ethnic and religious diversity in society is perceived as a negative change by nearly every second young Polish respondent (47%), while only 16% see it is a positive trend. Again, people who accept diversity are more reluctant to leave the EU (8%) than people who oppose this contemporary societal development (22% favouring exit from the EU).

Diagram 11.
Do the following changes
make society better or
worse? (in %)



Source: Bertelsmann
Stiftung and Institute
of Public Affairs, 2017.

Respondents who negatively perceive European integration more frequently agree with the opinions that ethnic and religious diversity and the greater acceptance of same-sex relationships represent negative changes in society. Another correlation shows that those who are willing to accept refugees are also more likely to see both greater ethnic and religious diversity and the higher acceptance of same-sex relationships as positive social changes.

Statistical analysis reveals that Poles who had the opportunity to travel in the last six months and people who have been in contact with someone from another country have generally more favourable opinions about globalisation and more positively assess these social changes.

Attitudes toward democracy and political affiliations

Democracy no longer the only game in town?

Half of young Poles see democracy as the best political system, whereas almost one-third (29%) disagree with this opinion. At the same time, more than one-fifth (21%) of Polish youth decided not to give a clear answer to the question of whether democracy is the best political system, which means that many respondents found this question challenging.

Young Polish women responded that democracy is the best political system more frequently than Polish men. Democracy is also more valued by young Poles who believe that European integration is a good thing, as well as by those who believe that Poland should remain a member of the EU. The data show striking differences in the perception of the EU between Poles who value democracy as the best political system and those who think the opposite. In the former group, 88% of respondents claim that the European integration is generally a good thing, while in the latter, the number drops to 55%. Also, young people open to accepting refugees agreed that “democracy is the best political system” more frequently than the ones who are unwilling to allow refugees in Poland.

Comparing the answers of Poles and youth from other countries, it becomes clear that the responses of young people from the Visegrad countries are fairly uniform and differ from those of the Germans and Austrians. While 48% of Hungarians, 51% of Slovaks and 60% of Czechs agree that democracy is the best possible system, the same opinion is stated by 71% of German and Austrian youth.

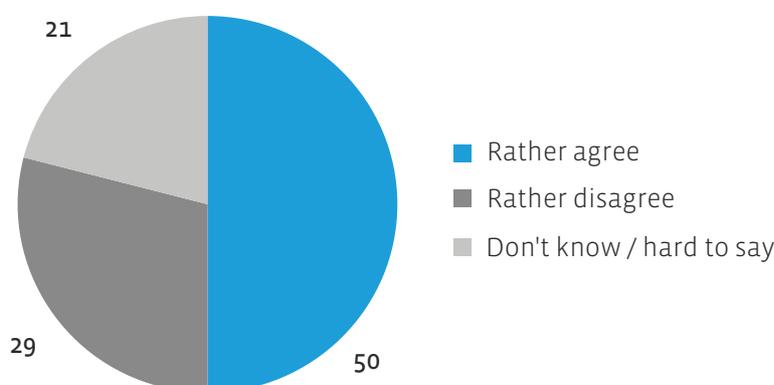


Diagram 12.
Democracy is the best possible political system (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

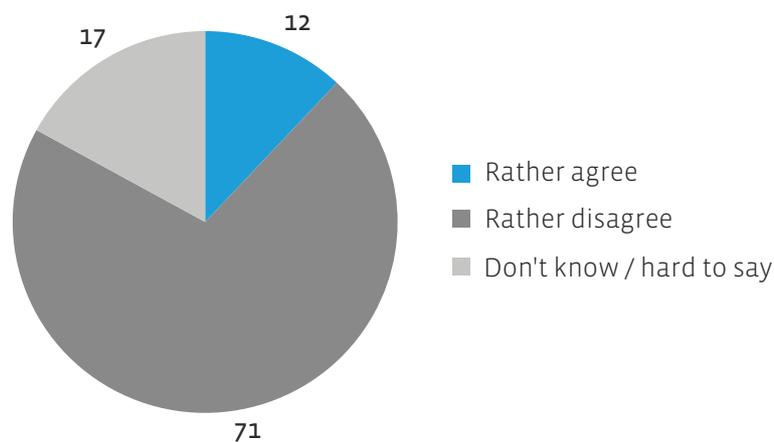
Comparing these data to other Polish opinion polls, some differences arise. In February 2016, 66% of young Poles shared the opinion that democracy has advantages over other forms (70% of the Polish general population shared this opinion).¹⁵

While “only” 50% of young Poles consider democracy the best political system, many more see a democratic government as a preferable choice: among Polish youth, 71% disagree with the statement “it does not matter if the government is democratic or not,” 12% agree with it, and 16% find it difficult to answer the question. The issue of democratic government is relatively more significant for women than for men. Respondents who see European integration as a bad thing and would prefer to leave the EU tend to care less about democratic government.

With the number of people for whom it matters whether the government is democratic or not reaching almost three-quarters of all respondents (71%), Polish youth responded similarly to their counterparts in Germany (72%) and Austria (73%). Hungary (65%), Slovakia and the Czech Republic (both 61%) fall short in this respect.

Diagram 13.
It does not matter whether
or not the government is
democratic (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann
Stiftung and Institute
of Public Affairs, 2017.



In previous opinion polls, a similar number of young respondents claimed it does play a role if the government is democratic or not (68% of those aged 18-24 years in February 2016).¹⁶

Survey results reveal that the issue of potentially restricting human rights and civil liberties in order to better protect people from terrorism deeply divides Polish youth. While 40% agree that in some circumstances rights and liberties may be restricted, 43% disagree with this statement.

¹⁵ CBOS, *Opinie o demokracji*, CBOS 17/2016, http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2016/K_017_16.PDF [last access: 19.07.2017].

¹⁶ Ibidem.

Almost one-fifth (17%) find it difficult to say if potential restrictions would be acceptable or not. Young men more often disagree with the given statement than young women.

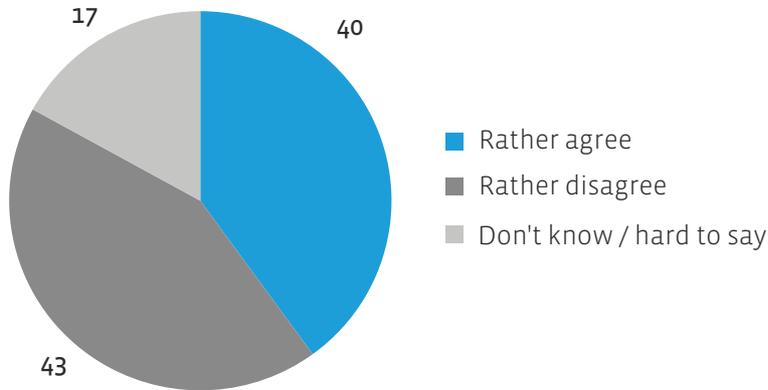


Diagram 14. Sometimes human rights and civil liberties should be restricted in order to better protect people from terrorism (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

Political orientation of young Poles

The majority of Poles consider themselves to be in the middle of the political spectrum (68%). More than one in five describe themselves as right-wing (22%), while only 8% see themselves as left-wing.

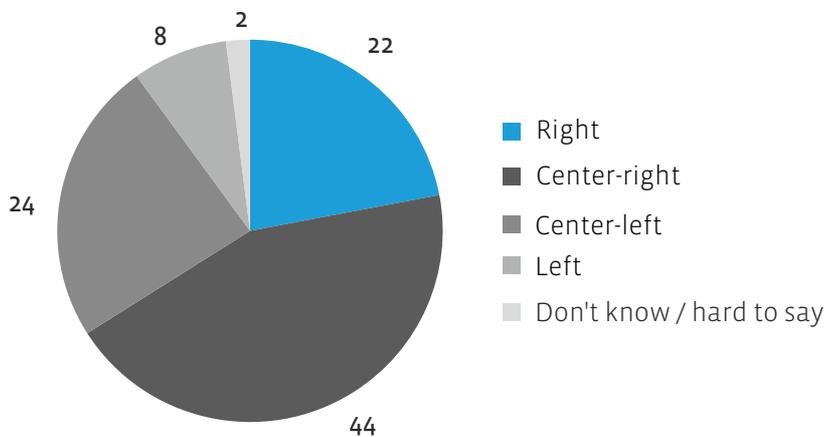


Diagram 15. How would you describe your political views on the left-right political spectrum? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017. Respondents could choose answers from 0 ("extreme left") to 5 ("extreme right").

Social-demographic data shows that right-wing political views are especially popular among young men and among people from small and mid-size towns. Women are more likely to declare themselves as political centrists.

There is a correlation between opting for leaving the EU and refusing to accept refugees and right-wing political views of the respondents. Data show striking differences between how people on the right

(4 and 5 on the scale) and left (0 and 1) perceive EU integration. While only 6% of people leaning far left (0) and 14% leaning left (1) support exit from the EU, on the right (4) and far right (5) side this option is preferred by 32% and 43%, respectively. At the same time, 54% of respondents leaning right and 47% leaning far right would like to stay in the EU and work to reform it. The percentages are higher among people voting left (73%) and far left (67%).

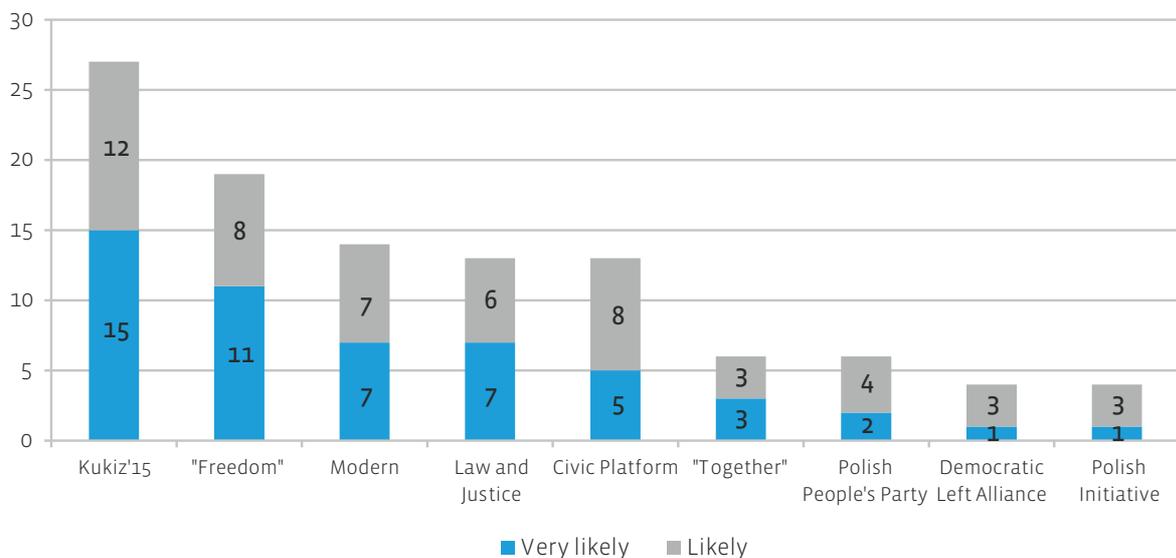
Research results show that young Poles support anti-establishment parties. The radical language used by those parties seems to be very compelling to Polish youth. Kukiz' 15, the eclectic political power established by Polish rock and pop singer Paweł Kukiz, is the most popular political party among young Poles. This party attracts adherents from different sides of the political spectrum – nationalists, economic liberals, businessmen and local activists – and is supported by 27% of respondents. One-fifth (19%) are considering voting for the “Freedom” party, a political party established by Janusz Korwin-Mikke, a Polish member of the European Parliament who declares that his mission there is to destroy the EU. He praises Vladimir Putin and Ramzan Kadyrov (leader of Chechnya) and is also known for his sexist comments.

Law and Justice, the current ruling party, is not popular among Polish youth. Only 13% of respondents support them. The situation of Civic Platform, the former ruling party, is not any better, as 13% of young Poles also claim to support this party.

Looking at socio-demographic variables, one can see differences between the answers of women and men. Young women are less likely

Diagram 16.
How likely are you to cast your vote for the following parties in parliamentary elections? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.



to vote for the anti-establishment parties Kukiz'15 and "Freedom". Nonetheless, both men and women indicate their support for the two anti-system parties more often than for the other political groupings.

The correlation of voting preferences with attitudes toward European integration and the refugee crisis provides interesting, yet unsurprising results. Among the respondents who see the European Union as a bad thing, opt for leaving the EU and believe that refugees should not be accepted, the responses of likely or very likely to vote for Law and Justice, Kukiz 15 and "Freedom" is higher than the average readiness to support the other mentioned parties. While 13% young Poles declare themselves likely to vote for Law and Justice, the support among those who want to leave the EU rises to 19%. Whereas overall 27% support Kukiz, 39% of those who think that European integration is a bad thing would consider voting for him. With Korwin-Mikke's party the correlation is even higher – 43% of young Poles who would like to see Poland leave the EU support "Freedom", as opposed to 19% of all young Poles.

The supporters of Civil Platform and the Modern party manifest the opposite tendency. Their support increases among youth who see European integration as a good thing, want to stay in the EU and are willing to accept refugees.

Sources of information on the EU

Social media domination

Social media are the primary source of information for young Poles. Nine out of ten respondents use social media on a regular basis, with 9% using it occasionally. Other information sources are much less popular among youth, with the groups of declared regular users much smaller than those relying on social media. Almost half of respondents (47%) frequently watch private television channels and read unpaid online websites, and more than 40% use both sources on an occasional basis. Radio is a regular source of information for 41% of respondents, while one-third (32%) regularly watch public television. Other outlets, such as printed newspapers, public radio and private blogs are used regularly by one-fifth or less of the respondents.

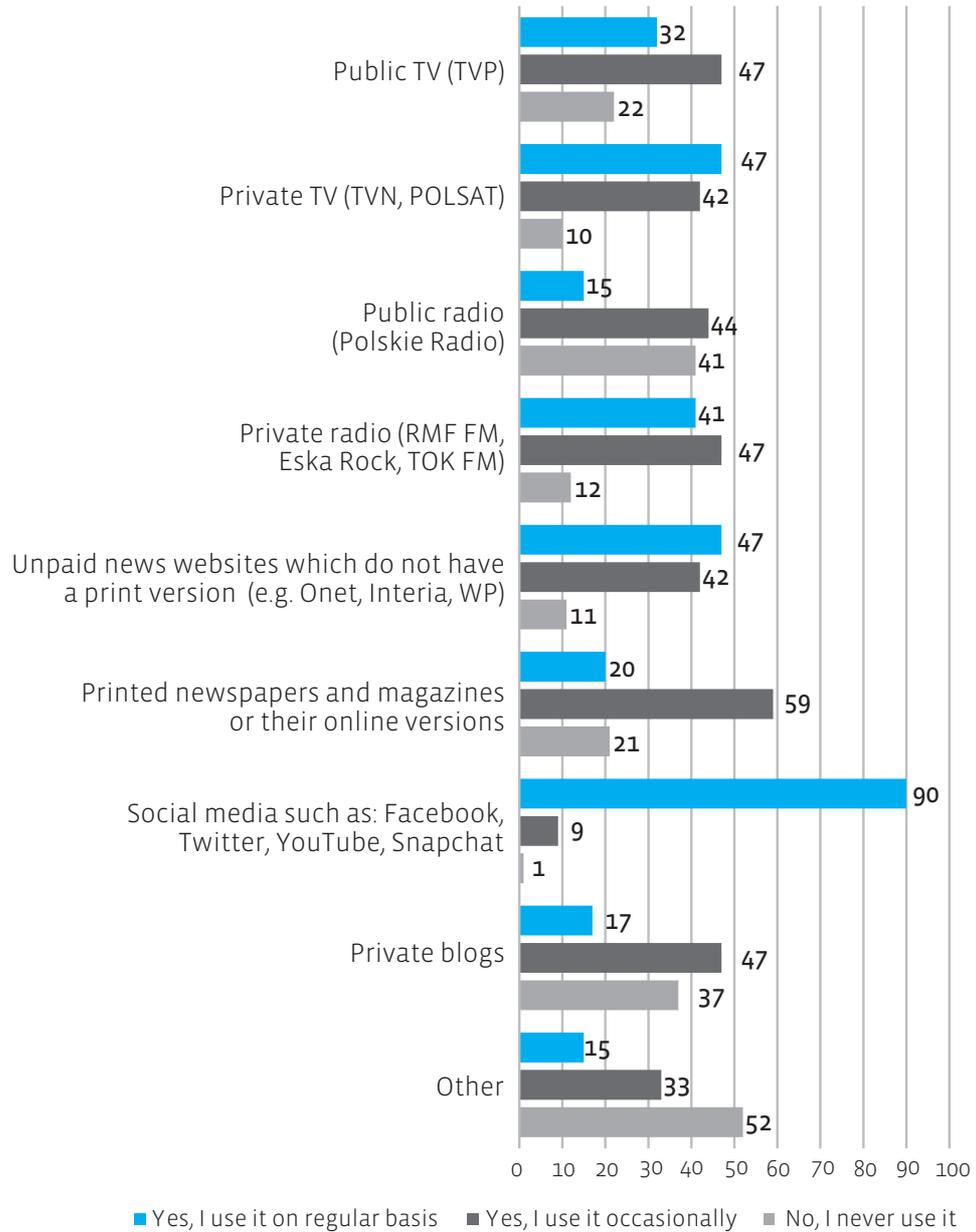


Diagram 17.
Do you use the following sources of information? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

Further analysis indicates that people who state that Islamic terrorism, immigration and refugees are Europe’s main problems tend to use social media as a source of information significantly more often than the overall average, while they less frequently declare that they read newspapers on a regular basis. A similar tendency can be observed among the respondents who claim that the foreign policy of Russia’s President Putin is a key problem for Europe.

A majority of young Poles engage to some extent in conversations about politics with parents, other family members, friends or other

people. Two-fifths (40%) regularly discuss politics and nearly half (48%) do it on an occasional basis.

Interestingly enough, young people who claim to only occasionally, almost never or never talk about politics with family and friends are more likely to declare that European integration is, all in all, a good thing than those who regularly talk about politics. Moreover, those who discuss politics less frequently are in general more willing to stay in the EU and leave things as they are. Conversely, those discussing politics on a regular basis are more willing to leave the community. Additionally, young people who claim to talk about politics regularly are more likely to describe their political views as closer to the right of the political spectrum. These statistical correlations seem to support the more general observation that the right-wing Eurosceptic discourse tends to dominate conversations about the EU, while pro-EU voices and arguments are not made with the same forcefulness. In other words, once a conversation about the EU begins, the voices of Eurosceptics are louder and carry more conviction than the voices of the pro-EU majority.

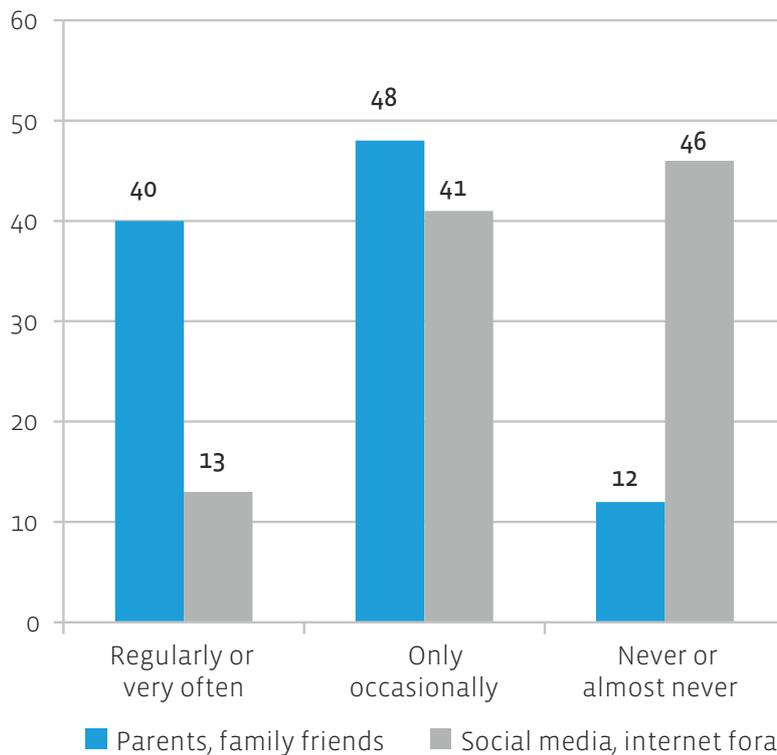


Diagram 18.
How often do you talk about politics with your parents, other family members, friends or on social media and internet fora? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

The percentage of young Poles who engage in discussion about politics on social media or internet fora differs greatly from

the percentage of people who regularly, occasionally or never talk about politics “offline” with family and friends. Almost half (46%) of respondents claim to never or almost never participate in discussions about politics on social media. Among the 54% who declare their engagement in such conversations, 41% do it occasionally, while only 13% participate on a regular basis.

The European Commission’s Eurobarometer shows that young Poles can be considered as more interested in talking about politics than the Polish population in general, with 21% of Poles stating they talk frequently about national politics, 18% about local matters and only 13% claiming to regularly discuss European issues. The percentage of Poles who discuss politics only occasionally varies from 54% (European matters) to 56% (local issues) and 60% (national affairs).¹⁷

Recommendations

▶ **Make wise use of the remaining time before the European elections in 2019**

The short-term activities in Poland should concentrate on preparing and conducting a well-drawn information and voter turn-out campaign prior to the elections to the European Parliament. It should explain the role of the European Parliament and European Union for common citizens and emphasize their importance. The message and tools used for this campaign should take the specific needs and worries of Polish society into account.

▶ **European narratives and myth-busting are urgently needed**

Young people in Poland do not have many opportunities to participate in substantive debates on European integration. The formal school curriculum delivers little knowledge and offers no narrative about integration. Such a narrative or narratives could help young people to not merely understand the EU as such and the processes connected with integration, but to form emotional bonds with Europe and build up their European identity. At the same time, Polish youth are constantly

17 Standard Eurobarometer 84, Autumn 2015.

exposed (through both traditional and social media) to populist Eurosceptic messages, voicing myths and “alternative facts” about the EU. While countering myths and untruths about the EU seems more urgent, the young equally need coherent positive messages about integration, which would make them less susceptible to Eurosceptic propaganda. This positive narrative, however, must be based on dialogue, providing a space to exchange views, listening to different stories how EU integration affects our lives.

▶ **The European Union is not Santa Claus**

Even though young Poles put peace at the top of the EU-integration benefits list, they still need to be reminded that the European Union is not just a source of monetary transfers to Poland. EU citizenship endows young people with certain rights (to travel, work and live abroad) but with these rights come duties and responsibilities. Creating such attitudes requires developing a broader sense of civic responsibility whereby each citizen should feel obliged to be more engaged in local, national and European public affairs.

▶ **Focusing on national experience by bridging it with current facts**

Our research indicates that immigration and refugees are the most controversial issues dominating the current debates on European integration. In Poland, the lack of experience with immigrants is the widely used argument for people opposing the fulfilment of EU-related obligations in this matter. Throughout Polish history, however, we can find numerous examples of how Poles themselves were immigrants and refugees in other countries. Also, in recent years, many Poles who chose to move to other EU countries experienced the difficulties of an immigrant’s life. All these stories should be recalled and linked with the current discussions on immigration policy and Polish attitudes towards it. A good exercise would be to encourage young people to find people with immigration experience among their friends and family members and interview them or invite them to visit their class.

The strong concerns that immigrants do not bring benefits their host country and are only a burden for social services should be countered

with both data debunking such misconceptions but also through specific stories of how migrants contribute to making the country richer and to maintaining the quality of social services such as healthcare.

▶ **Personal experience matters**

The thousands of young Poles attending exchange programs and spending holidays abroad still do not represent a substantive majority of the younger population. Very many young people have not experienced any personal contact with people from abroad or have ever travelled outside of Poland. Our study indicates that such experiences influence the opinions and attitudes of young people, making them more open to foreigners and ethnic and religious diversity. Opportunities to participate in exchange projects, to visit EU institutions, etc., should be extended to all those who do not usually spend their holidays abroad, for example, to young people from smaller towns and villages and those attending vocational schools. To develop people-to-people contacts between young Poles and their European peers, exchange programs should be targeted at high-school students. Six- or twelve-month exchange programs to other countries are rare and often unaffordable to inhabitants of smaller towns and rural areas. Therefore, the problem of limited exchange opportunities in those places should be mitigated by special national and local scholarship programs. Reaching these groups is a task for the funding institutions as well as for the Polish education system. Furthermore, it should not be taken for granted that the benefits of taking part in such programs are clear to these groups. Young people and their parents should receive information about such opportunities in a way that is both interesting and convincing. Last, but not least, the lack of knowledge of foreign languages can be a problem for young people, especially for those from smaller towns and rural areas. Therefore, special efforts should be made in foreign language education in the early stages of schooling.

▶ **Civic education is the key**

Poland has yet to develop a good model of civic education within the school curriculum or in the out-of-school dimension. Nevertheless,

substantive and effective civic education is absolutely essential today. In addition to normal school subjects, out-of-school initiatives should be supported. In the mid-term perspective, every student should be obliged to take part in an exchange or out-of-school program that lets him/her experience what cooperation and responsibility mean. Students should be also given the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to know how to obtain reliable information and be resistant to stereotypes, fake news and myths in the public discourse (skills not currently taught at school). Also, teachers should be trained in this respect.

▶ **The education system in charge**

This is all only possible, however, in an education system that promotes open thinking and a readiness to act critically, and develops not just hard knowledge but also soft competencies. The Polish school system, which is currently built on hierarchy, should be reformed according to the best Western standards in line with such values as democracy, tolerance, cooperation and participation. School program should accentuate group work, simulation games, developing questions and searching for answers through dialogue and critical thinking. Students should be taught to understand social and political processes. Visits to public institutions, including EU institutions, to get to know how do they work and inviting outside experts to interact with students should be part of the standard school curricula. School headmasters and teachers need to be given sufficient time and motivation to develop and implement such activities. They also need to be given the tools necessary to do so.

To understand the process of European integration, a sound knowledge of most recent history is required. The history of Poland should be taught as part of the history of Europe. European issues should be, however, also raised as part of other school subjects. For example, climate change should be discussed during biology or geography lessons in connection with respective EU regulations.

Such a model of school education can be effective only if and when parents cooperate and support such activities. While it should be acknowledged that not all teachers and parents are equally open to such initiatives, they should be offered workshops on how to talk with young people about European integration. Involving the parents can also be

achieved by giving students an assignment to interview them about, for example, the EU-accession referendum or similar pre-membership experiences.



Slovakia

Key findings

- ▶ All in all, young people in Slovakia are positive about European integration – a relatively high percentage think that EU membership is a good thing and the vast majority value its benefits. On the other hand, however, a significant minority are of quite a different opinion – 30% think EU membership is a bad thing. Moreover, 22% are in favour of leaving the EU.
- ▶ Refugees and Islamic fundamentalism/terrorism are seen as two of the biggest problems the EU faces. These two issues are considered equally as urgent as the key social challenge of unemployment, job security and economic instability (roughly three-quarters of young people see these three issues as threats).
- ▶ The perception of refugees is extremely negative; these views are widespread in spite of the fact that there are practically no refugees in Slovakia. The anti-immigrant/refugee attitudes demonstrate the strength of the political discourse which was extremely anti-immigration in 2015 and during the campaign before the 2016 general elections (March 2016). On the other hand, Putin's politics are not seen as a major problem, with only 28% of respondents considering them a threat.
- ▶ In general, young people see the positive effects of globalization on their lives. Nevertheless, they do not welcome the accompanying increase in ethnic and religious diversity so eagerly, nor other social changes, such as the increasing representation of women in society and greater tolerance for same-sex partnerships.

- ▶ As many as 24% of the young Slovaks surveyed disagree with the statement that democracy is the best possible political system. Moreover, 39% rather agree with the statement that “Sometimes human rights and civil liberties should be restricted in order to better protect people from terrorism and other threats.”
- ▶ The survey asked about the likelihood of casting a vote for the various political parties in Slovakia. The “winner” of the hypothetical election, that is, the party with highest probability to be elected, is the radical right-wing People’s Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS) – 27% of respondents said it was likely or very likely they would vote for this party. This was the highest percentage of any of the ten parties listed in the survey.

Foreword – Slovakia’s youth narrative

The young generation of today is already politically visible and more than relevant. Above all, the results of the 2016 general election, with the young voters’ massive electoral support of the radical right party, marked a milestone in generational change. This generation grew up under democracy, without the direct experience of the totalitarian regime or its legacy, and has lived in the best possible times in terms of the country’s economic performance, enjoying open borders and the opportunity to study, work and settle anywhere in the European Union.

Yes, the majority of those surveyed (age cohort 15-24 years) value democracy and have positive attitudes towards Slovakia’s EU membership. However, there are significant minorities (and they are more numerous than in Austria and Germany) who have opposing views. Moreover, young Slovaks harbour strong anti-immigrant sentiments, they ignore humanity and solidarity and are not clearly persuaded about the benefits of globalization even though are objectively winners in the globalized world. What has gone wrong? This is a question for these young people’s democratically minded parents – the generation who defeated Husak’s communism and later, in the 1990s, PM Mečiar’s rule, to ensure that Slovakia would become part of the Western world. For the older generation, “back to Europe” – “back to the West” was the ultimate objective and life dream. Today’s young generation lacks

the experience of the ethos of 1989, of the 1998 election which saw the defeat of an authoritarian prime minister, or of the hard-earned EU accession in 2004. What present-day Slovakia has to offer largely amounts to pragmatic and rather passive strategies of public involvement, unconvincing visions and a lack of idealism.

For many young Slovaks today, an escape strategy rather than making themselves heard is the option. Based on recent statistics (2016) and according to an analysis by the Finance Policy Institute (IFP), Slovakia is facing a demographic crisis that is exacerbated by an increasing brain drain factor. The report concludes that the country has lost about five percent of its population since 2000.¹ This process affects, above all, the younger generation.

All in all, much more attention should be given to education, social inclusion and improvement of the quality of democracy and good governance in order to gain the minds and hearts of the youth.

European integration: benefits, problems, future prospects

Assessment of membership

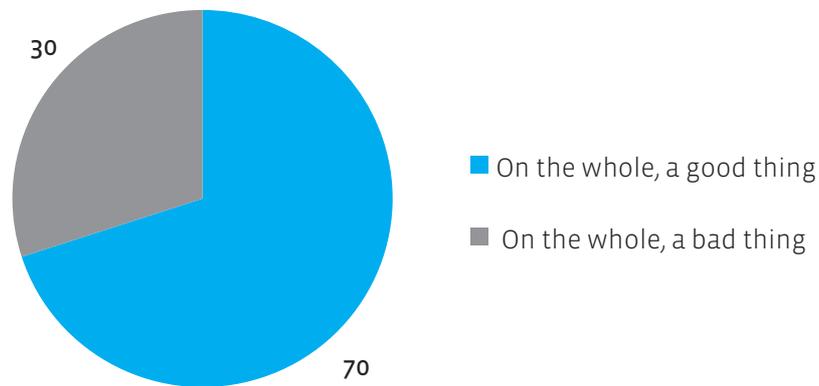
A majority of young people in Slovakia think that Slovakia's EU membership is a good thing (70%). A significant minority (30%), however, hold the opposite view. This percentage is the highest among the surveyed countries (followed by Czech Republic, with 23% expressing Eurosceptic views). The negative opinion on EU membership is expressed, above all, by those who would vote for the far right People's Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS), which is clearly and openly Eurosceptic; moreover, this party initiated a petition for announcing a referendum on EU (and NATO) membership. The initiative was symbolically launched on July 1, 2016, on exactly the same day that Slovakia assumed the Presidency of the Council of the EU (for the first time since its accession to the EU in 2004). Slovak law requires a petition to collect 350,000 signatures in order to be considered, and a referendum is legally binding only if the turnout exceeds 50% of all eligible voters. This means the referendum has very little chance of being announced. On the other

1 Slovak brain drain on the rise. Radio Slovakia International. 10. 01. 2017. <https://enrsi.rtvs.sk/articles/topical-issue/124159/slovak-brain-drain-on-the-rise> [last access: 19.07.2017].

hand, the LSNS initiative creates a certain atmosphere and could have an effect on the public discourse.

Diagram 1. Generally speaking, do you think that Slovakia's membership in the EU is...? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.



Social and demographic factors also play quite a significant role. The response of “yes” to EU membership is more strongly supported among the younger respondents ages 15-19 than among those 20-24 years old (77% and 65%, respectively), and also supported among urban youth (77%) and students (in contrast to those already employed). Young men are more in favour than young women (75% and 66%, respectively), whereas the level of education is a not significant factor.

In regard to Slovakia’s most desirable future in the EU, the alternative “stay in the European Union and work to reform it” enjoys the highest support (64%). A much lower percentage opted for “leave the EU” (22%) and finally, only 13% agreed with the option “to leave the things as they are.” Similarly to the question about the benefits of EU membership, this question also received the highest number of Eurosceptic responses among the six countries surveyed (followed by Czech Republic and Austria). The socio-demographic profile of those opting for “stay” and “leave” are similar to those noted above in the previous question regarding positive or negative attitudes toward the EU. These questions are interconnected – of those who think EU membership is a good thing, 79% would opt to stay, whereas of those who think it is a bad thing, 59% would opt to leave. On the other hand, we see that not all of the critical respondents are automatically in favour of “leaving.” Therefore, in the future, we should listen carefully to voices critical of the EU and see in them potential for reform rather than automatically labelling them as Eurosceptical or EU-refusal.

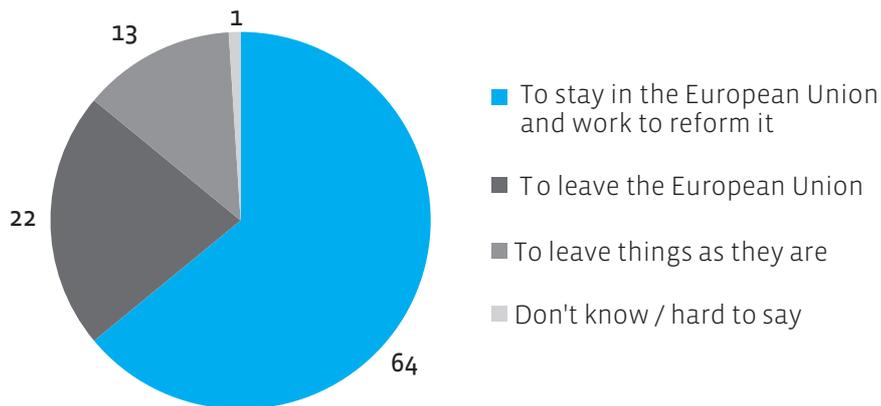


Diagram 2.
Do you think that the best thing for Slovakia would be...? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

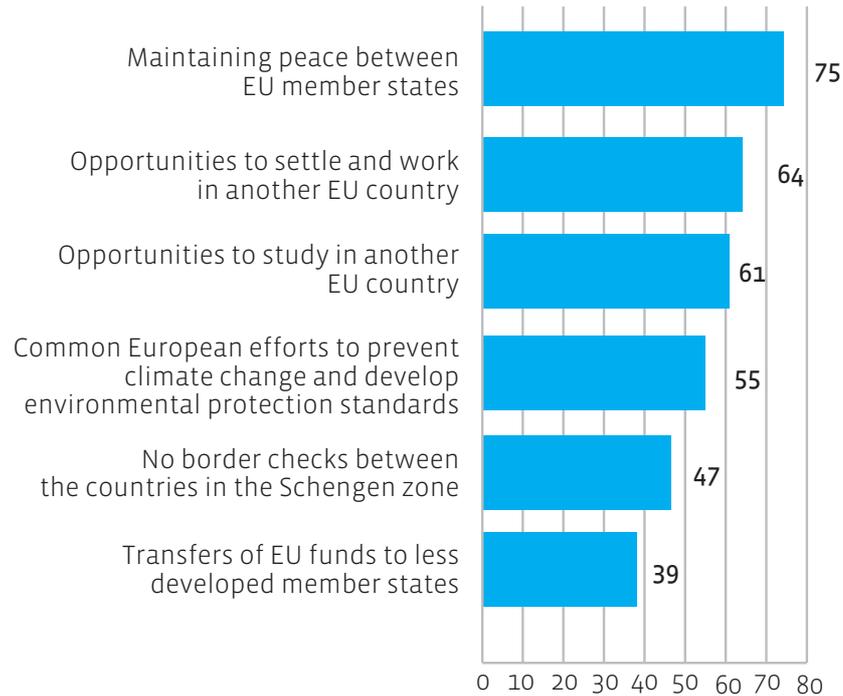
Benefits of EU integration

What are the most important benefits of European integration? Respondents evaluated a list of six different benefits on a five-point scale of importance. Similarly to other countries, Slovak respondents value “peace” the most (75%).

Youth are also focused on the economic and social benefits Slovakia enjoys. However, we should bear in mind that high school students have only one class about the EU, and the key message of this very insufficiently spare course is: EU=peace. After peace, benefits related to freedom of movement and the opportunities enabled by open borders to settle, work and/or study in another EU country come in second (64%) and third (61%) place. Young people also assessed “common European efforts to prevent climate change and develop environmental protection” relatively high. The “green agenda” is not very present in Slovakia’s political discourse, however, the findings show that the younger generation is more sensitive on this issue. “No border checks between the countries in the Schengen zone” has been assessed as fifth, and the comparatively lowest ranked benefit was “transfers of EU funds to less developed member countries.” This could be explained by the fact that the young Slovak respondents – much like the rest of the population – still have not fully managed to understand the change of mentality from that of a recipient to that of a donor.

Diagram 3.
How important for you personally are the following benefits of European integration? Responses of “very big” and “big” are summarized in the graph (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017. Respondents could choose answers from 0 (“not important at all”) to 5 (“very important”).



Problems the EU faces

What problems are considered the most pressing? When asked to rank ten problems according to their importance, the respondents placed “unemployment and job insecurity, economic instability” and “immigration and the inflow of refugees” (both 76%) at the top of the list, closely followed by “Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism” (75%). These priorities reflect a twofold understanding: firstly, the prominence given to the issues of immigration and security and secondly, the fact that issues which are predominant at the national level – social and economic issues – are seen as European problems. In other words, EU membership is associated strongly with the domestic agenda, much more strongly than with pan-European issues or the challenges of the EU’s future. In this respect, the younger generation seems to remain “in the shadow” of the country’s current political and public discourse. As for the views on immigration, it should be stressed that such opinions are widespread despite the fact that there are practically no refugees and only a very limited number of immigrants in Slovakia.

Less urgent – but still very relevant – are the problems of environmental pollution, the gap between poor and rich, political parties and leaders undermining democracy and the rule of law, the low

birthrate, growing nationalism and xenophobia in European societies and security forces being given too many powers and freedoms. Among Slovak youth, the foreign policy of Russian President Putin was seen as the least pressing issue. Slovakian young people are less aware of the potential threat that Russia represents, reflecting the general geo-political indifference, or what could even be called the “geo-political blindness”, that is widespread in Slovakia. While, for example, in Poland the distrust towards Russia is deeply rooted in historical experience and encouraged by the current political discourse, Slovaks perceive Russia in a more positive way despite their bad experience – most notably, the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact armies in August 1968 and the subsequent twenty-year Soviet occupation and devastating “normalization” that cut short the reform processes launched by the Prague Spring and brought the political repression of a considerable part of the population. Based on the findings of other surveys, however, one can state that Slovak society does not include a

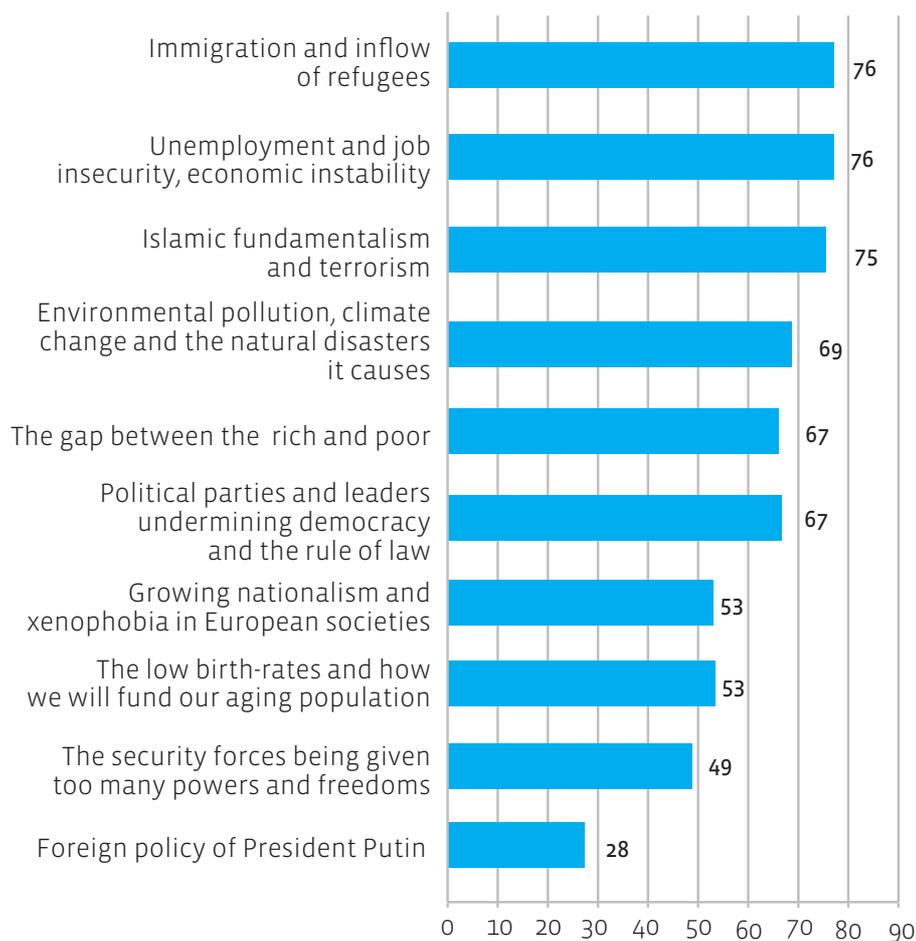


Diagram 4.
The European Union today is facing many problems. Please, assess how big these problems are. Responses of “very big” and “big” are summarized in the graph (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017. Respondents could choose answers from 0 (“not important at all”) to 5 (“very important”).

substantial number of people supporting the current policy of Putin's Russia,² even though it is not perceived as a threat.

Perception of immigrants

The survey asks four different questions about immigrants, the responses to which reflect the most widespread stereotypes: a) immigrants do not contribute to economic growth and general prosperity; b) they do not improve demographic prospects and can't help balance the retirement pension system; c) they are a threat to public safety and security and d) they are a burden for the social welfare system. On all attitudinal dimensions, the views of the young Slovak respondents are largely very critical and exclusionary, in other words, negatively stereotyped. Taking into consideration that in Slovakia there are practically no immigrants, this means that these opinions are mostly based on second- (and eventually third-) hand information and not on what is practically experienced. This stereotypical perception is even stronger than their own experience; even those who have had contact share very negative opinions. This means that the "contact hypothesis" which usually works for personal experience with minorities (be it ethnic, sexual, etc.) does not work in this case. The social climate has a strong negative impact on opinions.

The public image of immigrants is mostly associated with refugees from the Middle East and North Africa – Moslems. Moreover, the public image – constructed mostly by politicians – equates them with terrorists.³ The public debate scarcely mentions the migrant-labourers from other countries – mostly Serbia and Ukraine. Their numbers are relatively small, and their work is not publicly visible (in construction, companies such as Samsung and the like). In 2016, the number of foreigners with residence permits in Slovakia was 93,000, representing 1.72% of the total population. Although the number of foreigners legally living in Slovakia has increased

2 Olga Gyarfášová, Grigorij Mesežnikov, *25 Years of the V4 as Seen by the Public*, Institute for Public Affairs, Bratislava 2016, http://www.ivo.sk/buxus/docs//publikacie/subory/25_Years_of_the_V4_as_Seen_by_the_Public.pdf [last access" 19.07.2017].

3 The survey commissioned by the Globsec Policy Institute in spring 2016 clearly shows that immigration is perceived as the most relevant threat, and that in the public opinion (entire adult population), security threats are connected with immigrants dominated by fundamentalists. Source: Public Opinion Poll, April 2016. manuscript)

more than four times since Slovakia's accession to the EU in 2004, Slovakia still has the sixth lowest proportion of foreigners of all the EU countries.⁴

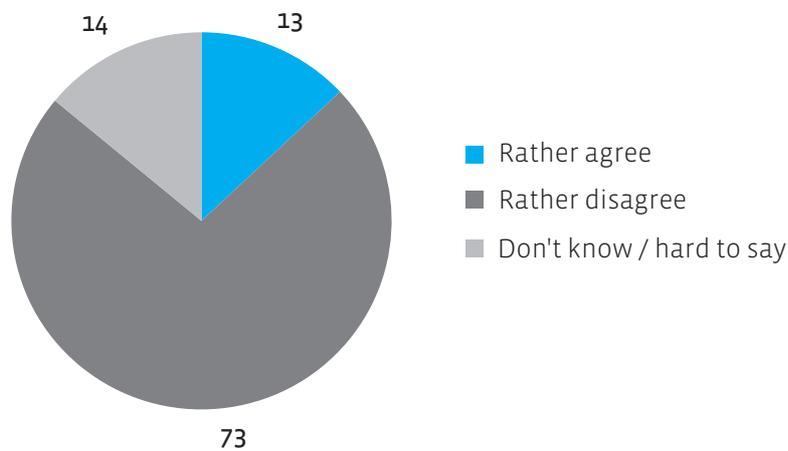


Diagram 5. Immigrants contribute to your country's economic growth and general prosperity (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

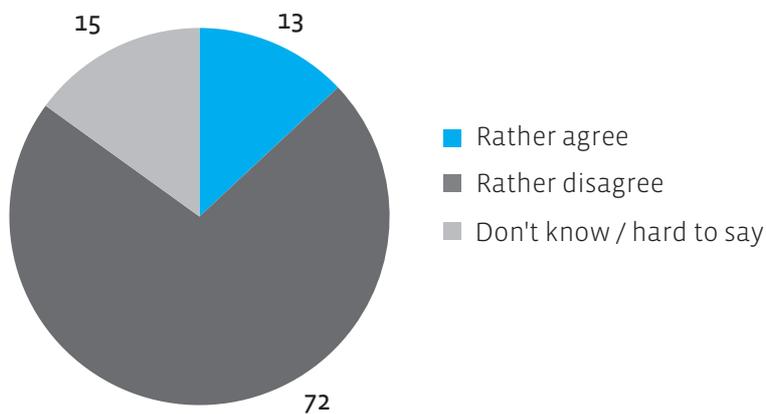


Diagram 6. Immigrants are needed to improve your country's demographic prospects and to balance the retirement pension system (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

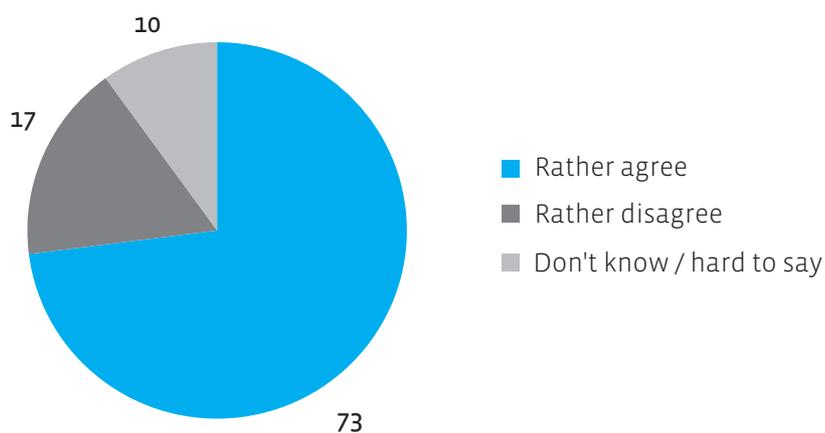


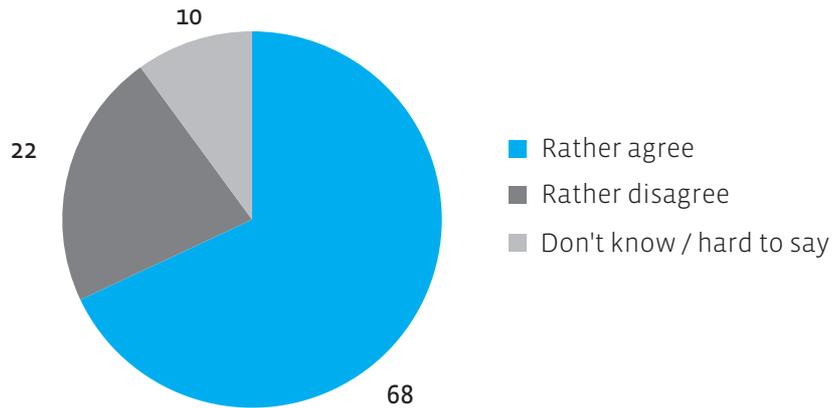
Diagram 7. Immigrants are a burden for the social welfare system (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

⁴ For more details, see the IOM report "Migration in Slovakia" available at: <http://www.iom.sk/en/about-migration/migration-in-slovakia>.

Diagram 8. Immigrants are a threat to your country's public safety and security (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.



Refugees (not) welcome

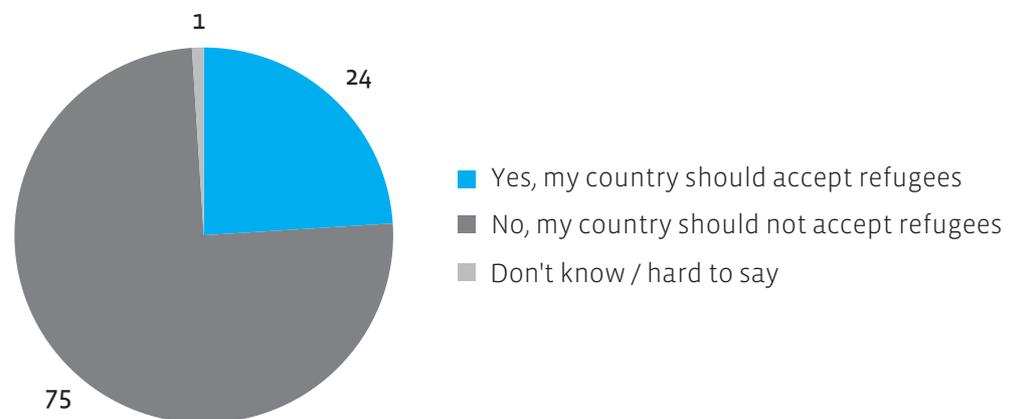
Immigrants, often popularly depicted as purely economic migrants, young, healthy, strong males – not refugees – are one matter, but another survey question asked explicitly about “refugees from areas of military conflicts or victims of political persecution.” Even here, young people in Slovakia do not express solidarity and empathy – 75% responded “Slovakia should not accept refugees and provide them safe haven,” while only 24% gave the opposite response.

Respondents who are already employed were more likely to be against accepting refugees (more than 80%); the younger age cohort (15-19) and males (as opposed to female respondents) were more likely to show sensitivity.

The lack of solidarity among young people indicates a worrying lack of responsibility and a selfish, inward looking mentality. Similarly to other findings, these opinions also reflect the overall social atmosphere. Why should we think that our youth would be different than the rest of society?!

Diagram 9. Should your country provide safe haven to refugees from areas of military conflicts or to victims of political persecution in accordance with internationally agreed rules and standards? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.



Opinions on globalisation and social changes

More interconnectivity, better for whom?

One would expect that young people would overwhelmingly welcome all the effects of a more interconnected world and the free movement of money, people, cultures, jobs, etc., since they are the greatest beneficiaries of all these changes. Nevertheless, the survey shows that only a slight majority (52%) see rather positive effects for the country as the whole, whereas 32% see negative effects. When it comes to globalisation's effects on young people themselves, the numbers are slightly more in favour of positive effects (64%, as opposed to 25%), but still, their openness to and belief in the positive effects of globalisation are rather lukewarm.

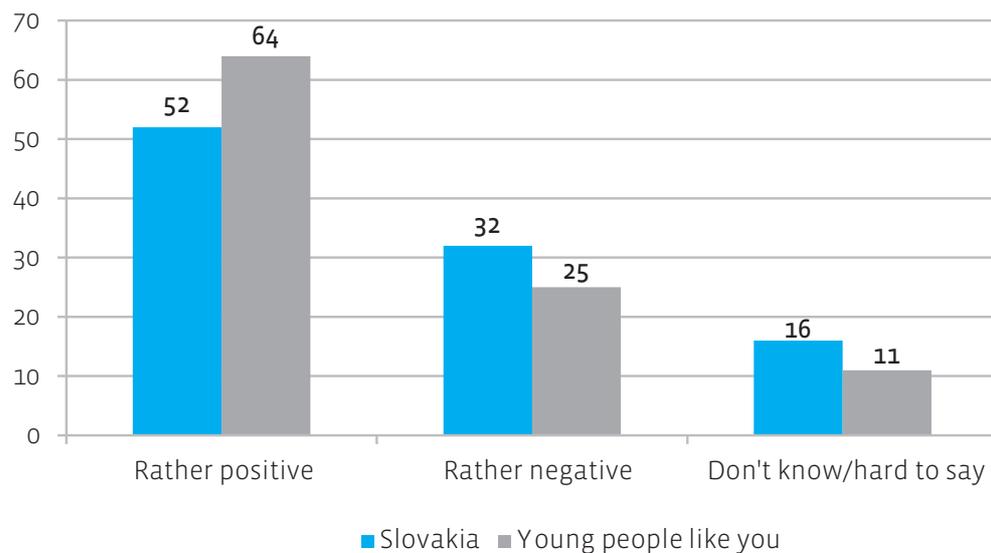


Diagram 10. Over recent decades the world has become more interconnected. There is greater free trade between countries and easier communication across the globe. Money, people, cultures, jobs and industries all move more easily between countries. Generally speaking, do you think this has had a rather positive or rather negative effect on...? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

The responses were similar when we asked about more concrete changes and their impact on society. Only 15% of respondents agreed that increased ethnic and religious diversity has changed society for the better, while 38% said it has made it worse (37% opted for the ambiguous response of “neither better nor worse” and one-tenth responded “don’t know”). When it comes to “more women in leadership positions in business and politics,” 42% said it is a change for the better (49% among women and 35% among men – a statistically significant difference).

Finally, the “greater acceptance of same-sex relationships” is considered a positive change by only about a quarter of the respondents (24%).

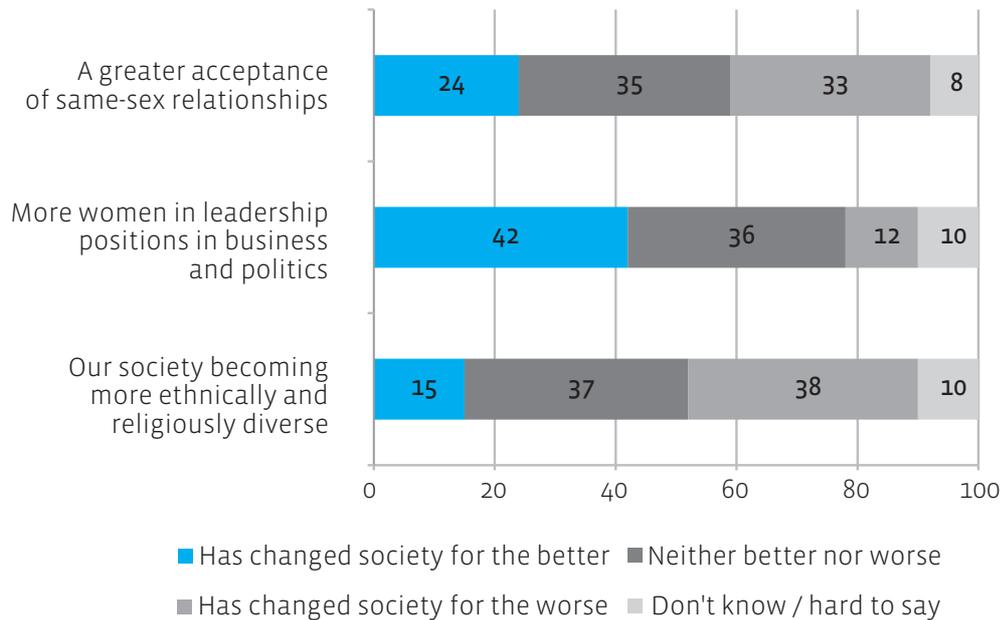


Diagram 11
Do the following changes make society better or worse? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

Attitudes toward democracy and political affiliations

The best system, but with reservations

A weak majority of the young Slovakian respondents (51%) see democracy as the best possible political system, while a significant minority do not agree with that statement (24%) and moreover, one in four have no opinion on the matter. This reflects a relatively high degree of ambiguity on the issue, especially when compared to young Germans and Austrians. The current younger generation grew up under a democratic regime and evidently takes democracy for granted. This is demonstrated by other indicators as well – only 61% disagreed with the statement “it does not matter if the government is democratic or not democratic.” This means that a large part of youth are not very firm in their opinion on democracy. Finally, the findings show that human rights and civil liberties are in tough competition with security issues. Responses to the statement “sometimes human rights and civil liberties should be restricted in order to better protect people from terrorism and other threats” are clearly polarized with 39% agreeing with the statement, the same percentage disagreeing, and the remaining

22% having no opinion on the subject. This shows that security threats and the recent terrorist attacks in several EU countries (although not in Slovakia) have led to a situation where human rights could be traded off, at least by significant number of young people, opening the door for politicians who would use such proposals to appeal to the public.

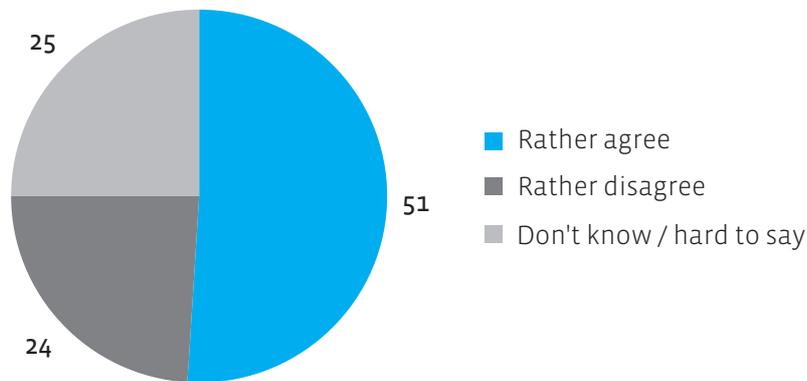


Diagram 12.
Democracy is the best possible political system (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

As for social and demographic factors, we see differences between men and women – it is noteworthy that women responded “don’t know/hard to say” much more often (29%, compared to 17% of men), with a higher degree of ambiguity among young women being a general pattern. We also see again a contrast between students on the one hand and the employed on the other (55% vs. 40% in favour of democracy as the best political system) as well as between residents of mid-size towns/ cities and those living in villages or rural areas (55% vs. 47%).

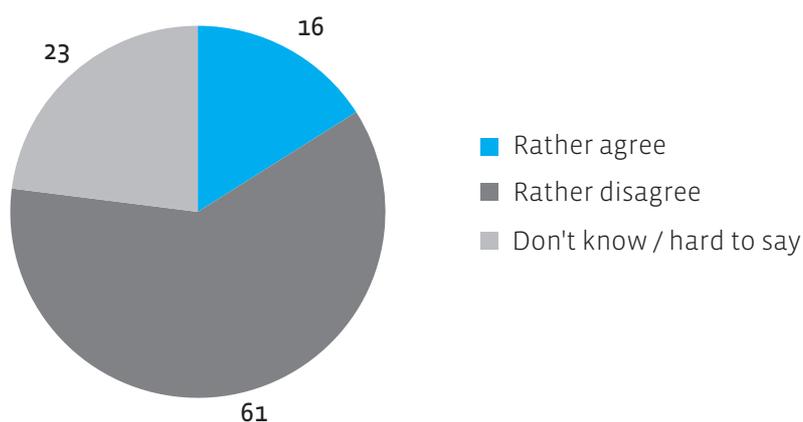
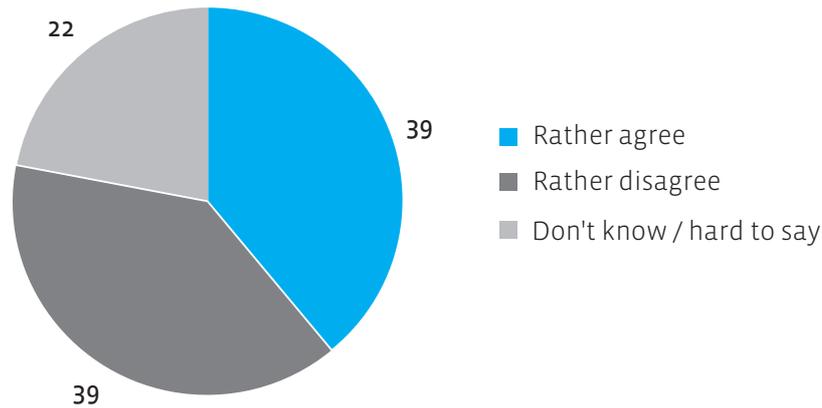


Diagram 13.
It does not matter if the government is democratic or not democratic (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

Diagram 14. Sometimes human rights and civil liberties should be restricted in order to better protect people from terrorism (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

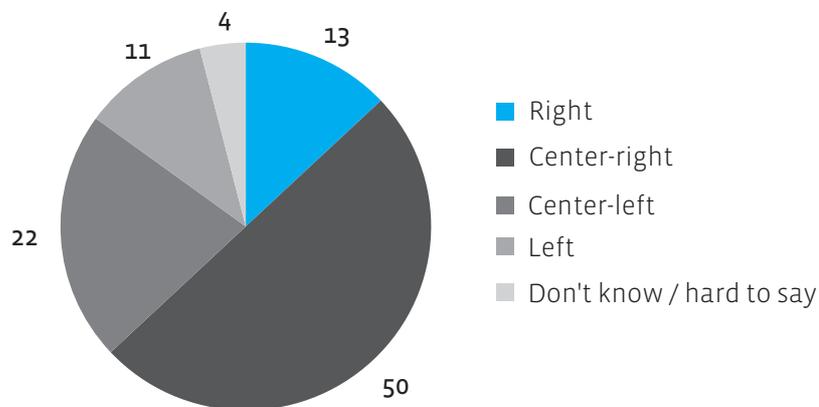


Political orientation of young Slovaks

The survey asked about political orientations and inclinations. On the left-right ideological spectrum, most of the respondents (72%) positioned themselves in the broad political centre.⁵ This is in line with the general tendency among the entire population. The clear leftist and clear rightist orientations are marginal in number. Even the party inclinations expressed in the question about potential voting are not clearly profiled on the standard left-right political spectrum.

Diagram 15. How would you describe your political views on the left-right scale? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017. Respondents could choose answers from 0 (“extreme left”) to 5 (“extreme right”).



In regard to political party preferences, the survey asked about the likelihood of casting one’s vote for the various political parties. Respondents who were still not eligible to vote were also asked to give their preference. The findings offer a “cold shower”, although no one should have expected anything different after the 2016 general election,

⁵ For more details see: Olga Gyárfášová, Vladimír Krivý, Vzorce voličského správania, in: Krivý V. (ed.): Ako sa mení slovenská spoločnosť, Sociologický ústav SAV, Bratislava 2013, pp. 257-342.

when about 22% of first-time voters voted for the radical right People's Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS). This party is also the winner of the hypothetical election in our survey – more than 27% of respondents were likely or very likely to vote for this party.

The social and demographic profile of the ĽSNS adherent is clear – it is more popular among men than women (30%, as opposed to 24%), in rural areas and smaller towns (27% and 29% respectively) as opposed to big cities (18%), as well as among those in vocational training (46%) as opposed to students (25%). ĽSNS adherents are the only group in which Eurosceptic views (“EU membership is a bad thing”) prevail. The extreme right party is very polarizing – 36% of respondents said it is not likely at all (0 on a 5-point scale) they would vote for this party and another 8% said it is very unlikely (1 point). The clear refusal of extremism is above-average among women (42%), in large cities (49%) and in the Bratislava region (52%), also among those who think EU membership on the whole is a good thing (44%).

The second most popular party is the liberal Freedom and Solidarity party, which also came in second in the 2016 general election, both in the overall results and among first-time voters.

An earlier survey conducted by the Institute for Public Affairs among 18-39 year-olds in September 2016⁶ also revealed that the younger generation displays strong tendencies towards two political camps – the “liberals” and the “radicals.” The liberal camp is represented by supporters of the Freedom and Solidarity party (SaS), and the radical by supporters of ĽSNS. Both camps are similar in political strength, and most of those who voted for one of these two parties in the past would repeat their vote, indicating a high degree of loyalty and satisfaction with the parties' (both in the opposition) performance.

The relatively anti-establishment party – Ordinary People and Independent Personalities – received similar support to SaS. It is followed by a newly established protest party Sme Rodina (We are a family). Other parties – above all, those which represent the mainstream and are currently in the government coalition (Smer-SD, SNS, Most-Hid) – would enjoy much less support among young voters. The pattern clearly shows that young voters are more likely to vote for extreme,

6 Marián Velšic, *Mladí ľudia v kyberpriestore: šance a riziká pre demokraciu*, Inštitút pre verejné otázky, Bratislava 2016, http://www.ivo.sk/buxus/docs//publikacie/subory/Mladi_v_kyberpriestore.pdf [last access: 19.07.2017].

protest or anti-establishment parties which are in the opposition, not the mainstream coalition ones.

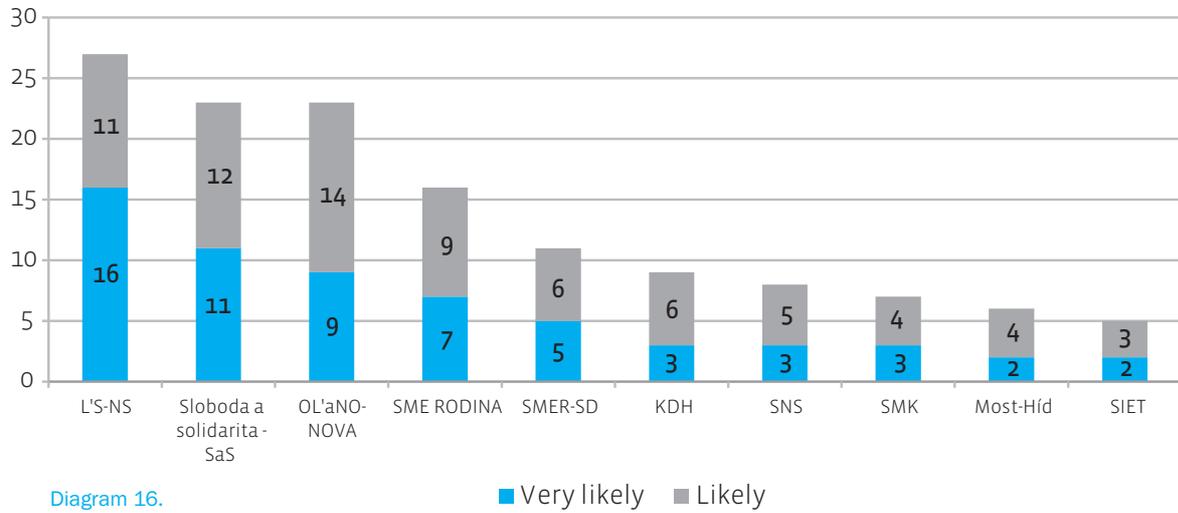


Diagram 16. How likely is it that you would cast your vote for the following parties in the parliamentary elections? (in %)

Sources of information

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017. The response options "likely" and "very likely" (4 and 5 on a scale of 0-5) are included

As one could expect, the dominant source of information for young people is the internet, with nine of ten respondents indicating social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat etc. Other sources of information trail far behind, with around half of the respondents indicating private media – TV and radio. More serious and balanced news sources are used by relatively small shares of respondents. The dominance of social media comes with all the negative features of this form of communication – polarization, the echo-chamber effect, limited outreach of more balanced and serious coverage, etc.

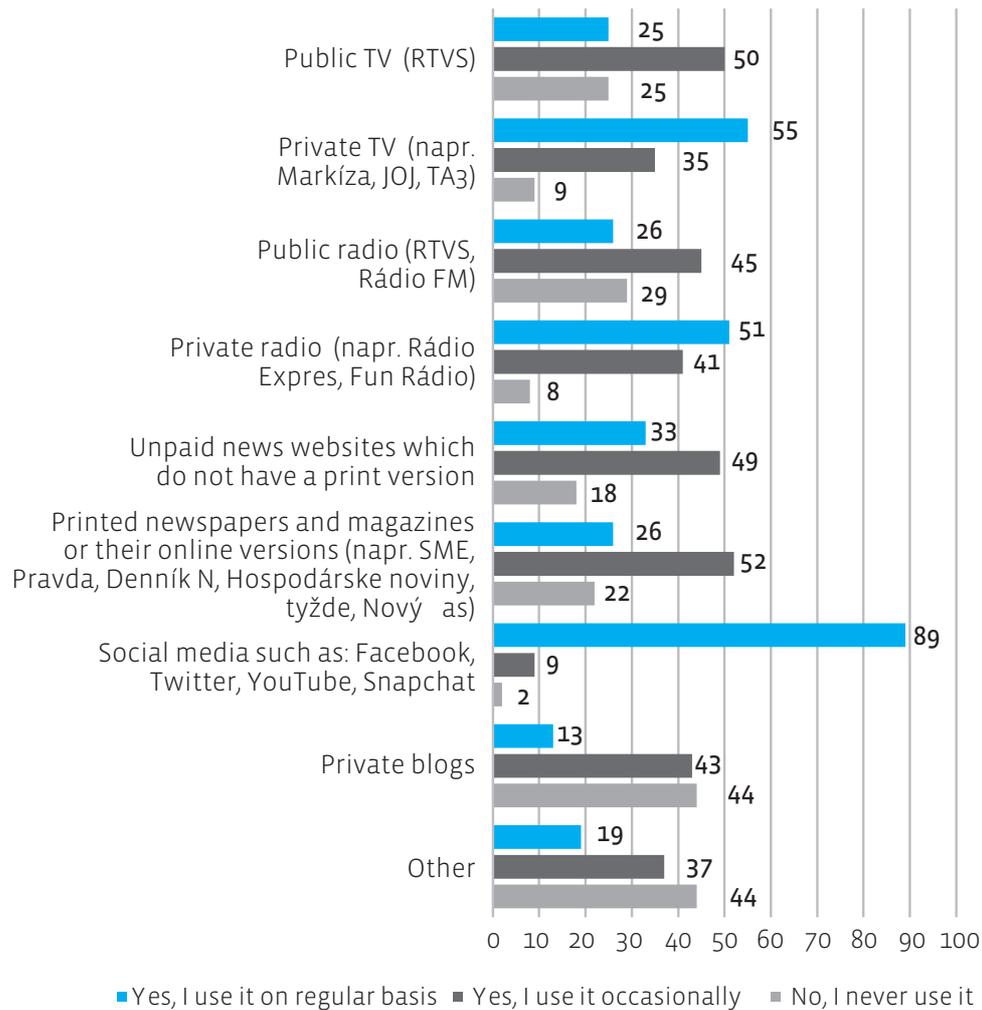


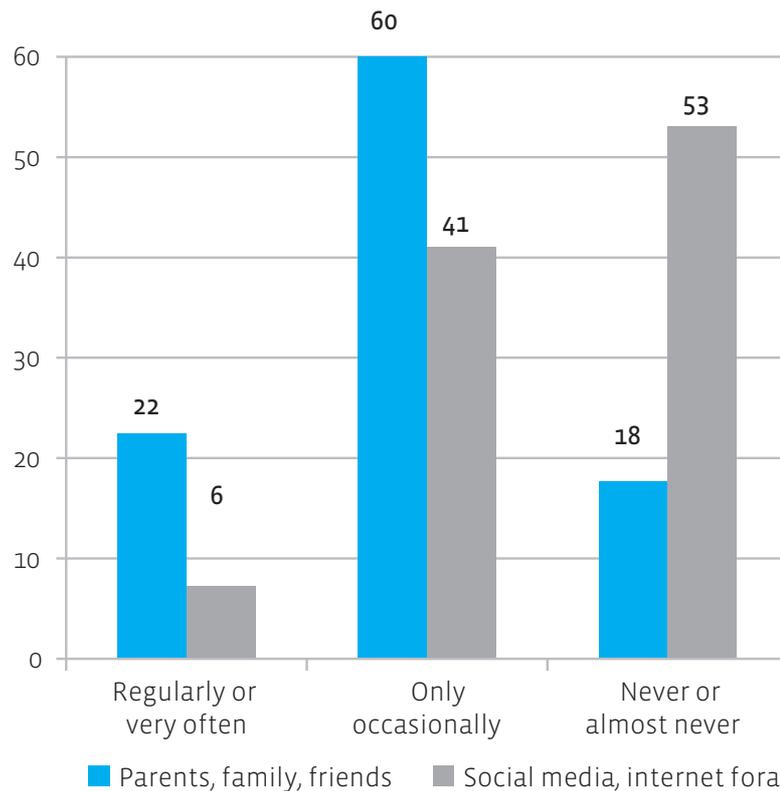
Diagram 17
Do you use the following sources of information? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.

Furthermore, findings reveal that most social media consumption is very passive in character; most young people never or almost never take part in discussions about politics in social media or on the internet – only 6% do so regularly or very often. Moreover, political discussion with parents, other family members and friends is also relatively rare, with only 22% responding that they talk about politics regularly or very often. If we add that politics and public affairs are very seldom a topic for discussion in school, we are faced with the fact that young people have a relatively low awareness of politics, which leaves them more vulnerable to tabloid news, hate speech and other kinds of “post-truth” propaganda.

Diagram 18
How often do you talk about politics with your parents, other family members, friends or on social media and internet fora? (in %)

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs, 2017.



Conclusions and recommendations

The survey results allow us to come to the following conclusions:

- ▶ The role of school and systematic education is crucial in civic education of the youth. We – the democratic, pro-EU membership community – should pressure the responsible authorities and insist on a more active approach and reforms. The results of last year’s elections have prompted a discussion about the place of politics in schools. In this respect, Slovakia has thrown out the “baby with the bathwater,” as the strict rejection of what is political as regards party affiliation has also resulted in banishing what is political in the civic sense or public good. There are exceptions, of course, but generally speaking, schools don’t provide education in human rights, tolerance and non-discrimination. Young people lack a sense of responsibility and solidarity with others who are weaker.
- ▶ Of course, education is not an isolated system. The broader social and political environment also needs to be examined. Political corruption, scandals involving politicians, the interconnections between political and economic power and the “oligarchisation”

of democracy have dominated the headlines over the past few years. Many suspicions have been raised, but the number of prosecutions and convictions has been close to zero. Quite naturally, in such an atmosphere, public confidence in established institutions and the mainstream political parties has declined and radical parties that oppose the democratic system are on the rise, in particular among young voters.

- ▶ Young people are a reflection of the entire society and the dominant public and political discourse. It has been reflecting, above all, on the views on immigrants and refugees. The anti-immigration rhetoric of the government is recently on the decline, so it is time to step into the debate with more balanced, rational arguments which could point out the potential benefits of immigrants and lead to less biased and less stereotyped thinking.
- ▶ The defenders of democracy should be more present on social networks with attractive content and an appealing message (89% of respondents said they regularly use social media as a source of information).
- ▶ Alliances should be built including a wide variety of actors – schools, NGOs, the media, the arts, local politicians and the like – to facilitate more intensive communication with young people. However, the key responsibility for civic education is on the state; it cannot (and should not) be delegated to any other actors.
- ▶ The debate should be open and respectful to other opinions – disrespecting other views would have the opposite effect.
- ▶ It would be useful to encourage celebrities who young people find credible to communicate, or at least present, pro-EU, pro-democracy appeals (including youtubers, musicians, sports(wo)men, etc.).
- ▶ Teachers, parents, public figures and politicians are important models for behaviour. This should not be underestimated – bad practices are replicated.
- ▶ Changes in the school system – should they be bottom-up or top-down – pose a difficult to resolve dilemma. The two approaches are complementary, and both should be conducted and supported.

Technical assistance: *Jan Bartos*



- ▶ **Do not take it for granted that youth know what the benefits of European integration are**

While our research shows that the appreciation of specific benefits of integration is strongly correlated with overall support for EU membership, experts point out that many young people struggle to spontaneously name such benefits. Therefore, it is necessary to make sure that the awareness of these benefits, especially among young people, is not taken for granted. The different benefits of integration, from peace in Europe, through the free movement of people and Schengen, to better environmental regulations, should be constantly present in the public discourse, as well as in school programs, and the young audiences need to be reminded of what is at stake and what would be lost, should the integration project fail or be reversed. For example, simulation games or other formats, ideally with easy access and little preparation needed, could be developed, where players would face a number of everyday situations in an alternative Europe without the EU, Schengen, Erasmus, etc.

- ▶ **Promote democracy and diversity as key values underpinning the European integration project**

Our research demonstrates that anti-EU attitudes are rooted in opposition to some of the key values enshrined in the European treaties – issues such as democracy, gender equality, cultural and political pluralism, tolerance and the protection of minority rights. By strengthening young people’s adherence to such values, we can create stronger foundations for the European project than on the simple calculus of profit and loss. One potential venue for such hands-on education on the importance of tolerance and human rights is the European Solidarity Corps.

▶ **Make European democracy a living experience, not just a slogan**

In the entire region of Central Europe, there is still a need to cultivate and support a democratic political culture and democratic values. It is important to let young people have the experience of democracy as a way of life so they can understand why it is the best system to live in. One way of doing this is to further promote the European Citizens' Initiative. More initiatives led and supported by young people and, especially, more successful initiatives would show young people that their voice in Europe matters and that their efforts could make a difference.

▶ **Make people-to-people contacts a reality for as many young Europeans as possible**

Meeting and engaging with people from other EU countries and regions has been shown to enhance support for integration and lower the prejudices and fears of the “other”, which is often the source of anti-EU sentiments. Creating more opportunities for such contacts, especially for those young people who have relatively fewer opportunities for substantive engagement with their peers in other EU countries (e.g., those living outside of the big cities), would be a great way to enhance their experience of European integration as something positive that enriches their life experiences. A dedicated scholarship fund enabling young people from rural areas and small towns to attend European summer schools where they could improve their language and communication skills and meet peers from across the EU would be one way of creating such opportunities. Also twinning programs could be organized in local libraries with broadband internet access to enable contacts with peers in other European towns or villages. In that respect, the many already existing town-twinning initiatives might be helpful and open new fields for action. Addressing the younger generation with attractive offers might also be fruitful for those initiatives themselves.

▶ **Acknowledge and discuss the concerns of young people**

Our research shows that refugees, migration and multiculturalism create strong, often negative, perceptions of the EU among a significant

number of young Europeans. These concerns should not be dismissed as unfounded and should be sincerely addressed during debates at schools. At the same time, hate speech, racism and xenophobia should be actively opposed and stigmatized, and those using such language should be excluded from discussions.

▶ **Choose the right communication channels**

While a minority of young people still get information from traditional media (whose importance should not be neglected), their overwhelming reliance on social media and internet-based means of communication should be fully utilized to communicate pro-EU messages and engage youth in the informed discussions on Europe. Politicians should make themselves regularly available to the hosts of popular YouTube channels and bloggers, as was the case with Angela Merkel and Martin Schulz in the recent electoral campaign to the Bundestag. Similarly, the hosts of television and radio programs that are popular among young people should be encouraged to promote the practical benefits of integration, such as free roaming.

▶ **Fight fake news and stand up to “alternative facts” about the EU**

Never let facts get in the way of a good story seems to be the motto of many unscrupulous journalists and media personalities, who distort the truth and mislead the public about EU affairs in order to better sell their stories in both the traditional and “new” media. The proliferation of fake news has become an almost existential threat to European integration, as can be seen from the Brexit referendum campaign. EU communication services, as well as European civil society, should be actively engaged in myth busting and exposing false information concerning the EU. Even more importantly, young people should be provided with the necessary skills to help them critically approach different sources of information and generally improve their media literacy. This can be done, for example, through introducing media literacy and critical thinking courses into the high school curricula – with a strong emphasis on the new internet-based media and the threats they may pose.

▶ **Support the emergence of young opinion leaders**

Reaching young people could be effective by engaging their leaders and authorities. YouTubers, actors and pop-singers have the channels and tools to explain issues to young people that they would otherwise not be interested in. At the same time, new voices, especially of young people, should be amplified through, for instance, competitions for the best YouTube video explaining EU affairs or debunking myths about the EU.

▶ **Inform, but also entertain**

Many young people are not directly interested in politics or EU affairs, but they are susceptible to anti-EU messages in the form of “infotainment.” This method of reaching out to young audiences has been successfully practiced by a number of anti-EU politicians and opinion leaders, who managed to build up their popularity through what the young perceived as their “entertainment” value. While such disguised misinformation should be actively confronted, positive news and stories about the European project should be communicated in a way that is both substantive and entertaining.

▶ **Admit mistakes and learn from them**

Young people are especially cautious when they notice mistakes that are not acknowledged. If we want to motivate them to search for facts and reject fake news, we cannot allow them to distrust us as ones who also make mistakes and pretend they didn’t happen. That is why it is important to admit past failures and recognize the need for a different course of action. The same should be said about past failures of EU communication campaigns, for instance on the European elections.

▶ **Put your money where your mouth is**

Last, but not least, effective communication and the creation of platforms for dialogue require significant resources, and the EU is best placed to provide such funds for all sorts of civil society initiatives and also to enhance the efficiency and outreach of its own communication

activities. A bold step in this direction would be to create European public media (TV, radio and website) worthy of its name. Fully funded from the EU budget, yet protected from political and other undue influence through statutory regulations and maintaining the highest standards of journalistic quality and integrity, such media would inform, educate and entertain the audiences in line with shared European values.



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This publication presents the results of an in-depth analysis of the attitudes of young Europeans from Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia towards the European Union. The study is based on a representative opinion poll of respondents aged 15-24 years, giving them the opportunity to share their views on the current state of the European integration process and its key challenges and questions.

The majority of youth see many benefits of EU membership and opt for staying in the EU and working to reform it.

However, there is also a strong ambiguity in the respondents' views on societal trends and values, such as democracy and multiculturalism or globalization and migration.

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