Major changes in European public opinion regarding the European Union

Exploratory study
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INTRODUCTION

Since 1973 and the birth of the Eurobarometer, the European Union has gone through various defining stages in its history and its institutional and political structure, affecting a wide range of issues: the strengthening of the institutions, the first direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979, successive enlargements, the signing of various European Treaties, the opening of borders between Member States, referendums and the introduction of the single currency. But the evolution of the European Union has also taken place during various periods of economic and political difficulty. It has seen the collapse of the Soviet bloc, international conflicts, several oil crises, periods of monetary instability, and, since 2008, a global financial and economic crisis which has resulted in aid plans being introduced for several Member States faced with very considerable economic difficulties. In 2016, the European Union has still to emerge from the crisis, even if the economy is showing encouraging signs of recovery, particularly as regards the unemployment rate, which has been falling steadily since 2011. On the political level, the major event in the European Union in 2016 was the referendum in the United Kingdom on 23 June, which saw British voters decide to leave the EU.

The Standard Eurobarometer, a survey established in 1973 and conducted twice a year (in spring and autumn), and the special Eurobarometers have ever since enabled changes in European public opinion to be measured among an ever-increasing number of Europeans as the various enlargements have taken place (from nine Member States in 1979 to 28 in 2013). Kantar Public Brussels has carried out an exploratory study for the European Parliament’s Public Opinion Monitoring Unit to analyse changes in European public opinion over time on a number of issues. The first version of this study was carried out in 2013, followed by an update in early 2015, which took into account the surveys conducted in 2013 and 2014. Following the Standard Eurobarometer survey of spring 2016 and the Special ‘Parlemeter’ Eurobarometer survey in September 2016, the analysis should be updated. The Standard Eurobarometer survey of spring 2016 was carried out between 21 and 31 May 2016, right in the middle of the campaign for the British referendum, which was held on 23 June. The ‘Parlemeter’, for which the field work was undertaken between 24 September and 3 October 2016, was the first Eurobarometer survey to be conducted following the vote in favour of Brexit.

The following aspects were studied:

- Changes in European public opinion regarding the European Union and its institutions;
- Democracy in the European Union;
- The economy of the European Union;
- The lives of Europeans;
- Immigration.

Several indicators will be analysed in each of these areas.

This analysis will attempt to take stock of European public opinion concerning these major themes.

Each part starts with a box highlighting the main findings based on changes in the indicators.
This analysis is based on several quantitative Eurobarometer surveys conducted face-to-face by the European Commission or European Parliament (Standard EB and Special EB). It relates mainly to the Eurobarometer surveys conducted since autumn 1989 (EB32), even though in most cases the questions analysed have only been asked more recently, sometimes only in a limited number of waves. On certain questions, the analysis goes back to the first time the question was asked (EB0 in September 1973 in the case of the question on membership of the EU, or EB19 in spring 1983 in the case of the perceived benefits of membership of the European Union).

The analysis is based on the European average of the Member States which made up the European Union at the time the survey was conducted. This average is weighted to reflect the population of each of the Member States.

The reader should take into account the fact that in today's Europe of 28 Member States, the six most populous countries represent 70% of the EU average.

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1 In the case of a Standard EB (a survey conducted twice a year, in spring and autumn), the survey is designated in the graphs by its number and by the period in which it was conducted. For example, we talk about EB78, autumn 2012 when referring to Standard Eurobarometer survey 78, conducted in autumn 2012. In the case of a Special Eurobarometer, the survey is designated by the exact name of the wave in which it was conducted, as well as by the month(s) in which the field work was carried out. So, for example, we talk about EB67.1, February 2007. In the text, each survey will be designated by the month in which it was carried out.
I. THE EUROPEAN UNION, ITS POLICIES AND INSTITUTIONS

THE MAIN FINDINGS

- The impact of the economic context on opinions regarding the European Union follows a complex mechanism.

- The onset of economic crises does not automatically result in a downgrading of opinions regarding the European Union (at least, not at first): we have seen this with the oil crisis in the 1970s, the economic slowdown of the early 2000s when the internet bubble burst, and even with the financial crisis since 2008.

- Initially, the European Union can be seen as a buffer against the crisis. Indicators of support for the EU (opinions on a country’s membership, trust in the EU, image) do not improve, but they hold firm.

- Europeans seem to react more when the effects of these crises appear more ‘tangible’ and likely to affect them directly. Opinions about the European Union fell more significantly in the periods of monetary instability in the 1970s and also in the 1990s; since 2008, when the economic and financial crisis became a debt crisis with a strong rise in unemployment in some Member States, is when negative opinions about the EU start to rise (from 2010).

- In contrast, 2007 was marked not only by the increase to 27 Member States (with the accession of Romania and Bulgaria) but also by a more favourable economic environment in the European Union; and it was a year of record support for and trust in the European Union.

- The major institutional moments in the EU’s history often coincide with a rise in positive opinions about the EU. This has particularly been the case with the enlargements and elections to the European Parliament.

- Before the enlargements there has often been a certain hardening of European public opinion about the EU, probably because European citizens are concerned about the consequences of these new countries joining. This was particularly the case in 2003, ahead of the enlargement from 15 to 25 members in 2004. However, surveys conducted after enlargements have mostly recorded significant improvements in opinion, owing to the enthusiasm of the newcomers, and also to a form of acceptance by other Europeans of this new stage.
➢ **Elections to the European Parliament** are also a time when indicators of support for the European Union improve: these indicators improved significantly after the 2004 vote, for example, but the improvement was less marked after those of 2009 and 2014.

➢ The year 2005, which was marked by the debate over ratification of the Constitutional Treaty, was an exception as far as major institutional moments are concerned, because opinions tended to decline: public perception of EU membership and the image of the EU also went down. Trust in the EU, however, remained stable.

➢ **The impact of the single currency** on the main indicators of opinion regarding the European Union is also not unambiguous:

  - on the eve of the single currency being put into circulation in the first 11 countries of the eurozone, indicators tended to improve (trust in the EU or opinion about a country’s membership).

  - In spring 2002, after the introduction of the euro, the EU’s image improved and opinions on membership held firm, but trust in the EU fell.

➢ Overall in the period under analysis – since 1997 for trust in the EU and spring 2000 for the image of the EU – there has been a significant fall in these two key indicators of support for the European Union. Europeans blame it more for the economic weaknesses and associate it less with the founding principles, such as democracy and influence in the world. Trust in the institutions has also been strongly shaken by the economic crisis.

➢ After a notable decline in autumn 2015, trust in the European Union stabilised in spring 2016. The image which Europeans have of the EU is increasingly less positive, with ‘neutral’ becoming the majority image.

➢ Trust in the EU is higher than in national institutions (governments and parliaments), but the gap has tended to close since the onset of the crisis.

➢ However, despite the crisis Europeans continue to **associate the EU with positive themes**:  

  - benefits of membership at the highest level since 1983;

  - a feeling of both national and European citizenship also remaining at a high level, just below the highest level, which was reached in spring 2015.
1. Membership of the European Union and the benefits it brings

Membership of the European Union: above all, a good thing in the eyes of Europeans from 1973 to 2015.

The opinions expressed by Europeans on their country’s membership of the European Union have remained largely positive throughout the whole of the period under review (1973–2016). Similarly, ‘neutral’ opinions, i.e. deeming one’s country’s membership of the Union to be ‘neither a good thing nor a bad thing’, have remained greater than negative opinions (i.e. classifying membership of the EU as a ‘bad thing’).

\[\text{In general, do you think that the fact that (OUR COUNTRY) is part of the European Union is...?}\]
Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY)’s membership of the European Union is…?

- A good thing
- A bad thing
- Neither good nor bad
- Don’t know

TRENDS IN EUROPEAN PUBLIC OPINION

DESK RESEARCH
Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY)’s membership of the European Union is…?

- A good thing
- A bad thing
- Neither good nor bad
- Don’t know

TRENDS IN EUROPEAN PUBLIC OPINION
Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY)’s membership of the European Union is...?

- A good thing
- A bad thing
- Neither good nor bad
- I don’t know

DESKTOP RESEARCH

TRENDS IN EUROPEAN PUBLIC OPINION
The benefits of membership of the European Union: always a majority over the period, with the highest level ever in 2015 and 2016. The feeling that one’s country has benefited from being a member of the European Union has remained a majority sentiment throughout the period under review, from spring 1983 to September 2016. In the September 2015 and September 2016 surveys it was 60%, which is the highest level ever achieved since 1983. The response ‘has not benefited’ reached its highest ever level in the survey in autumn 2010 (39%), whilst nevertheless remaining at a much lower level than that of the positive responses ‘has benefited’ (50%).

---

1 All things considered, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY) has or has not benefited from EU membership?
Taking everything into account, would you say that (OUR COUNTRY) has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the EU?
Taking everything into account, would you say that (OUR COUNTRY) has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the EU?
2. Trust in the European Union

Europeans’ trust in the European Union was measured between autumn 1997 and spring 2016. After having been in the majority since autumn 2004 and the enlargement to 25 Member States, trust in the EU has fallen back below 50% since the survey in spring 2010. Having stabilised at its lowest level in spring and autumn 2013 and in spring 2014, it recovered slightly in the autumn 2014 and spring 2015 surveys (when it reached 40%, against 46% for ‘tend not to trust’), while nevertheless remaining in the minority. Trust in the European Union fell again in the autumn 2015 survey (32% against 55%) before stabilising at 33% in spring 2016 (against 55% for ‘tend not to trust’).
3. The image of the European Union and what it means to Europeans

For a long time positive, the image of the European Union is fading over time.

The image of the European Union among Europeans⁴ has changed since spring 2000. Positive opinions remained clearly in the majority until autumn 2009, before starting to decline in spring 2010. Since autumn 2010, they have remained below 42% and have been surpassed several times by neutral opinions (people saying that they have a ‘neutral’ image). This was the case in the latest surveys in autumn 2015 and spring 2016.

While over the whole of the period under review (2000-2016), positive opinions have exceeded negative ones, the neutral image has been increasing slowly, and at 38% is the majority image in 2016.

⁴ In general, is your image of the EU very positive, quite positive, neutral, quite negative or very negative?
In general, does the EU conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image

- Total 'Positive'
- Neutral
- Total 'Negative'
- Don't know

* Fieldwork Dates: 21/05 - 30/05 2016
What the European Union means: a trio of positive dimensions

Throughout the survey period (from spring 2002 to spring 2016), ‘freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the EU’ was the principle which Europeans most commonly associated with the European Union. Next came the euro, with the exception of the survey conducted in June 2013, when it was briefly overtaken by peace. Peace occupied third place in most of the surveys analysed. The concepts most frequently associated with the EU are therefore positive.

However, fourth and fifth position are occupied by negative concepts: bureaucracy and wasting money. These have been gradually increasing since 2002.
4. **Trust in the European institutions**

The European institutions have suffered a gradual erosion of trust, closely linked to the onset of the international economic crisis.

**Europeans’ trust in the European institutions** fell significantly between autumn 2004 and spring 2016. Whilst people generally trusted most of the institutions, this pattern started to reverse starting in autumn 2011 (EB76).

Broadly positive in autumn 2004 (57%), there was a gradual reduction in the level of trust in the European Parliament until it fell behind, starting in autumn 2011 (41% trusted the EP as opposed to 45% who tended not to in the autumn 2011 survey). It should be noted that the round of surveys conducted in autumn 2011 showed up a sharp decline in all the indicators. Trust in the EP briefly held the upper hand in the June 2013 (48% as against 43%) and spring 2015 (43% as against 41%) surveys. In the most recent survey (spring 2016), ‘trust’ is again below ‘not trust’ (40% as against 46%).

---

5 For each of the following European institutions, please state whether you trust them or not.
And please tell me if you tend to trust or tend not to trust these European institutions.
- The European Parliament -

- Tend to trust  - Tend not to trust  - Don't know

[Diagram showing trends in European public opinion over time with various events and polls indicated.]
There was a similar trend for trust in the European Commission. The level of trust in this institution steadily fell until it lagged behind starting in autumn 2011 (43% for ‘tend not to trust’ against 36% for ‘tend to trust’). Since then, trust remained dominant until the spring 2016 survey (37% against 45%), apart from the spring 2015 survey, when trust and mistrust were both at the same level (40%).
**TRENDS IN EUROPEAN PUBLIC OPINION**

Trust in the Council of the European Union also diminished and became the lesser-held view starting in autumn 2011. However, people's trust showed an upturn after autumn 2012, reaching 42% the last time this was recorded, in June 2013 (the same figure as for mistrust). The proportion of no replies is high but has been steadily falling since autumn 2011 (16% in the June 2013 survey).

And please tell me if you tend to trust or tend not to trust these European institutions.

- The Council of the European Union -

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Tend to trust</th>
<th>Tend not to trust</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>26%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>29%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>28%</td>
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<td>2009</td>
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<td>2010</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>26%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>16%</td>
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**6th EP elections**

- Constitution Failure
- Subprimes
- Lisbon Treaty

**7th EP elections**

- Effects of the Crisis
Trust in the European Central Bank has followed the same pattern. This is the institution with the highest level of mistrust, even rising above 50% in June 2013 (51%). In the latest measurement in spring 2016, mistrust was at 48% (against 34% for trust).
The Court of Justice of the European Union stands out from the other institutions: trust has remained comfortably ahead throughout the period in question (from autumn 2004 to June 2013). However, mistrust surged ahead starting in spring 2010, reaching 36% in spring 2012. It has since fallen back slightly since then, but is still over 30%.

And please tell me if you tend to trust or tend not to trust these European institutions.
- The Court of Justice of the European Union -

Tend to trust  Tend not to trust  Don’t know

52% 57% 52% 48% 52% 51% 50% 50% 46% 43% 57%

24% 22% 24% 27% 23% 24% 29% 31% 36% 34% 32%


宪章失败

里斯本协定

里斯本条约

6届EP选举

7届EP选举

第25届欧洲议会
5. Knowledge of how the European institutions work

A majority of Europeans seem to know about some of the main workings of the EU.

When asked a ‘true/false’ quiz question on their knowledge of how the European institutions work, Europeans answered quite well, with most choosing the correct answer to the questions posed.

Knowledge of the principle of the election of Members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage in every Member State has been dominant since autumn 2002. It has shown an increase at every European election. The rise was particularly marked before the most recent elections, in May 2014 (71%, an increase of 17 percentage points), after which there was a fall to 58% at the time of the last survey, in spring 2016.

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For each of the following statements about the EU, please state if you think they are true or false.
For each of the following statements about the EU could you please tell me whether you think it is true or false.

- The members of the European Parliament are directly elected by the citizens of each Member State -

- True (correct answer)  - False (wrong answer)  - Don't know
The majority of Europeans know that the Member States do not all have the same number of MEPs. After rising between the January 2009 and January 2010 surveys (an increase of 8 points, from 48% to 56%), Europeans’ level of knowledge about the number of MEPs from each Member State has continued to rise steadily.
In terms of the principle of joint agreement between the European Parliament and the Member States regarding determining the budget of the EU, here again there is a prevalence of correct responses throughout the period in which the question was asked, although there was no increase.
Broadly speaking, a majority of people are aware of the principle of agreement between the European Parliament and the Member States on European directives and regulations: this awareness crept up from January 2009 to autumn 2011 (59%), and has remained at around 60% since.
6. **Trust in national institutions**

A large majority of Europeans do not trust their national government, and trust fell overall between 2004 and 2016. After reaching its lowest level in autumn 2013 (23%), trust in the national government was 27% in the spring 2016 survey (against 68% for ‘tend not to trust’).
Similarly, only a minority of Europeans trust their national parliament. This trust in the national parliament follows the same trends as trust in the national government: it fell overall between 2004 and 2016, reaching its lowest level in autumn 2013. In the latest survey in spring 2016, it was at 28% (against 65% for mistrust). In each of the surveys analysed, trust in the national parliament very slightly exceeded (or was equal to) trust in the national government. However, trust in national institutions is lower than trust in the European Union, even though the gap has tended to reduce since the start of the economic crisis.

For each of the following media and institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it.

- The (NATIONALITY) Parliament -

Tend to trust  Tend not to trust  Don't know
THE MAIN FINDINGS

➢ In 2002, one European in five believed that their voice counted in the EU. In 2016, it was nearly two in five.

➢ Over the same period, the proportion of those believing that their voice did not count fell from almost seven in ten in 2002 to fewer than six in ten in 2016.

➢ In most of the surveys analysed, the majority of European citizens believe that their voice counts in their country, a percentage that has considerably increased since 2008. A little more than six out of ten Europeans believe that their country’s voice counts in the EU, but the number of people who think the opposite has increased since 2002.

➢ The share of people feeling they are European citizens remained stable at above 50%, without being affected by the European Union’s own issues and fluctuations in the economic and political climate. There were no significant changes in this indicator between 1992 and 2016. National identity was at its highest levels in the mid-1990s, on the eve of the introduction of the euro, and again in spring 2010 in the midst of the debt crisis engulfing several Member States. Feelings of European citizenship increased following the adoption of the euro and even in the midst of the economic crisis, in particular in 2012, and in 2016 when it stabilised above 50%.

➢ Feelings of belonging to the European Union split public opinion in two over the period under review: It increased during the slightly contentious debate on the ratification of the Constitutional Treaty, which appeared to have had the effect of making the European Union a more tangible reality in the eyes of Europeans. The 2007 enlargement also had a positive effect on this feeling. It then dropped off, as a result of the financial and debt crisis in the Member States, which also affected all the other indicators, before bouncing back and exceeding 50% in 2015.

➢ Nevertheless, a clear majority of Europeans share the feeling that what unites them in the EU is more important than what divides them. They also identify as forcefully as ever, in spite of the crisis, several European Union identity markers, and in particular democratic values, which prove to be the principal elements constituting European identity.

➢ The feeling of European citizenship remains strong in spite of the turmoil experienced by the European Union in recent years.

➢ Time will tell whether Brexit will have an impact on these opinions. It is not possible to judge from the minor changes detected in the September 2016 Parlemeter survey and we will have to wait for future surveys to see if Brexit will have a significant impact on European public opinion in relation to these questions.
II. DEMOCRACY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

1. The voice of European citizens

Europeans have less and less of a conviction that their voice counts in their own country.

Tested between spring 2008 and September 2016, more than half of Europeans believed that their voice counted in their own country, with two exceptions: autumn 2008 (48% ‘do not agree’, against 46% ‘agree’) and autumn 2013 (50% against 47%), when a small majority of Europeans believed that their voice counted in their own countries. After reaching a record level of 63% in September 2015, there has subsequently been a strong decline in this feeling, to 53% in September 2016.

---

7 To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?
My voice counts in (OUR COUNTRY) -
The majority of Europeans believe that their voice does not count in the EU.

Fewer than half of Europeans consulted between the beginning of 2002 and September 2016 believed that their voice counted in the European Union⁸; at no point in the period did this proportion exceed 50%. As a trend, this feeling has gained traction since 2002, rising from 21% in January 2002 to 37% in September 2016. This conviction spiked in the Standard Eurobarometer surveys taken in the wake of European elections: in October 2004⁹ (+9 points, to 39%), in June 2009 (+8, to 38%), and in May 2014 (+13 to 42%).

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⁸ To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? - My voice counts in the EU -
⁹ Survey EB61 in spring 2004 was conducted prior to the European elections of 2004. Surveys EB71 in spring 2009 and EB81 in spring 2014 were carried out immediately after the European elections.
TRENDS IN EUROPEAN PUBLIC OPINION

Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.
- My voice counts in the EU -

- Tend to agree
- Tend to disagree
- Don't know

Euro

6th EP elections

Constitution Failure

Subsides

Solvency Directive

Ukraine Treaty

Effects of the Crisis

The Ukrainian Crisis

Migration Crisis

Brexit

7th EP elections

6th EP elections

5th EP elections

Election of the Juncker Commission

DESK RESEARCH
More than six out of ten Europeans believe that their country’s voice counts in the EU.

The feeling held by Europeans that their country’s voice counts in the European Union was clearly in the majority over the period from the start of 2002 to September 2015; there were some minor fluctuations but it was always at or above 60%. However, the proportion of people who do not agree with this opinion is trending upwards, from 20% in January 2002 to 34% in September 2015.

---

10 To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?
- (OUR COUNTRY’S) voice counts in the EU -
2. **A feeling of European citizenship which survives the crisis**

In most of the surveys analysed, the majority of Europeans say that they see themselves as national and European (in proportions of between 40% and 52%). In the last three measurements (spring 2015, autumn 2015 and spring 2016), this proportion exceeded 50%, whereas it was below 50% between spring 1992 and spring 2013. A significant proportion of people see themselves solely as national, a view held by the majority between autumn 1996 and spring 1998, in autumn 1999 and in spring 2010.
3. An enduring attachment to the European Union

The attachment of Europeans to their country at around 90% remains very strong and stable over time (around 90% between January 2002 and September 2015).
Europeans are clearly more divided when it comes to their attachment to the European Union: after being in the majority between spring 2006 and March 2010, it once again dipped below 50% between spring 2012 and autumn 2014. This attachment then bounced back, returning to being a majority opinion in September 2015.
4. **The components of an EU identity**

The euro: a less important element for European citizens.

'The values of democracy and freedom' were identified by respondents as the main element underpinning the EU's identity in their eyes\(^1\) (50% in the September 2016 survey). The euro came in second place (33% in September 2016), although it has markedly declined in importance in the last two years. This was followed by culture (32%) and history (28%). Other considerations are cited by fewer than a quarter of Europeans.

The European identity can be composed of several elements. In your opinion, which of the following are the most important elements that go to make up the European identity? (MAX. 3 RESPONSES) - % UE

\(^1\) European identity can be composed of several elements. In your opinion, which of the following are the most important elements that go to make up the European identity? (MAXIMUM 3 POSSIBLE RESPONSES)
More than seven out of ten Europeans agree with the following statement regarding the building of Europe: ‘what unites the citizens of the various countries is more important than what divides them’. This was the case each time this question was asked, on six occasions between autumn 2008 and September 2016.
III. THE ECONOMY IN THE EU

THE MAIN FINDINGS

➢ The economic crisis has had a major impact on how Europeans perceive the economic situation in their countries and in the EU. Both are currently perceived as bad, although this perception has improved in recent surveys.

➢ While prior to the crisis Europeans perceived their national economies to be in worse shape than the EU economy, this has been reversed due to the debt crisis. The EU therefore no longer seems to be a reassuring point of reference in the crisis.

➢ In terms of short-term expectations, the optimism (respondents thinking that the next 12 months would be better) and pessimism ('worse') curves have frequently crossed over from one survey to the next since the one carried out in spring 2014. In the last two surveys however, in autumn 2015 and spring 2016, pessimism was ahead for the various aspects that were examined (national and European economic situation, national employment situation). Over the whole period under review, the predominant sentiment was that things would not change.
1. The European economic situation and that of the national economy

Judgments about the European economy and about the national economy veered wildly towards negative in 2008, after the onset of the economic crisis.

The judgments of Europeans about the economic situation of the European Union\(^\text{12}\), which were positive and on an upward trend from November 2004 until autumn 2007 became negative from autumn 2008. They reached their lowest level in autumn 2011 (18%), right in the midst of the debt crisis. Since then, they have grown almost continuously, reaching 38% in autumn 2016, before falling back again in the latest survey in spring 2016 (35%). Over the same period, negative judgments have fallen from 77% in autumn 2011 to 53% in spring 2016.

\(^{12}\) How would you judge the current situation in each of the following? Situation in (OUR COUNTRY’S) economy/Situation in the European economy/Employment situation in (OUR COUNTRY).
How would you judge the current situation in each of the following?
- The situation of the European economy -

- Total 'Good'
- Total 'Bad'
- Don't know

**Constitution Failure**  
- Lisbon Treaty
- Subprimes
- EU27

**Effects of the Crisis**  
- 7th EP elections

**The Ukrainian Crisis**  
- Migration Crisis
- Brexit

**8th EP elections**  
- Election of the Juncker Commission

**Debt Crisis**  
- 2009-2010
The judgments of Europeans about the situation of the economy in their country follow the same trend: increase from 2004 to 2007, then rapid deterioration in 2008. The main difference in the perception of the European economy was that the judgments were negative in 2004 and remained negative throughout the period under review, with the exception of spring 2007 (52% of the total ‘good’ against 44% ‘bad’). Since 2009, these judgments have gradually improved, rising from 21% in spring 2009 to 39% in spring 2016.
The assessment of the employment situation at national level has seen a similar change over the period, with negative judgments a clear majority, an improvement in 2007 and a significant deterioration in autumn 2008 and spring 2009. Since then, judgments have improved slightly, whilst still remaining broadly negative (65% negative judgements in spring 2016).
2. Economic projections

Economic projections as a whole are fairly gloomy and unchanged for almost half of European citizens.

Projections about the national economic situation for the coming 12 months\textsuperscript{13} are dominated by pessimism, which wins out over optimism across virtually the whole of the period analysed (from autumn 2004 to autumn 2013). Since spring 2014, the optimism and pessimism curves have regularly crossed, but in the latest two surveys in autumn 2015 and spring 2016 pessimism is slightly ahead: in spring 2016, 26% of Europeans thought that the next 12 months would be ‘worse’ against 21% ‘better’.

Nevertheless, it is the response ‘no change’ which takes a clear lead.

\textsuperscript{13} What are your expectations for the year to come: will the next twelve months be better, worse or the same when it comes to...? The economic situation in (OUR COUNTRY)/the economic situation in the EU/the employment situation in (OUR COUNTRY).
What are your expectations for the next twelve months: will the next twelve months be better, worse or the same, when it comes to...?
- The economic situation in (OUR COUNTRY) -
The projections for employment at national level have also, for the most part, remained pessimistic across a large part of the period under review (the spring 2007, autumn 2007 and spring 2015 surveys being the only exceptions).
In the case of the projections for the European economy, the pessimists mostly prevail over the optimists. However, across the whole of the period (from autumn 2006 to spring 2016), the response ‘no change’ is in the majority in most of the surveys analysed.
IV. THE LIVES OF EUROPEANS

THE MAIN FINDINGS

- Europeans’ expectations concerning their personal lives are dominated by the feeling that things will remain the same over the year to come. More respondents viewed the future positively than negatively in most of the surveys reviewed. The crisis had a clear impact on their expectations.

- In their replies concerning ‘life in general’, fewer respondents were optimistic and more became pessimistic: this trend began in autumn 2007 and took off again in autumn 2011. However, positive expectations among the European public increased from autumn 2011, before stabilising from spring 2015.

- In general, the same is true for the career prospects of respondents to surveys between 1998 and 2016. Positive expectations have been relatively stable since spring 2014, at around 20%.

- The area worst affected by the events of recent years has been the financial situation of households, with pessimism concerning the coming months being greater than optimism as early as spring 2008, and markedly so from autumn 2011. It was not until spring 2014 that optimism overtook pessimism again.
Personal outlooks have been consistent over time

Throughout the period from autumn 1995 to spring 2016, a clear majority of Europeans felt their ‘life in general’ was going to remain the ‘same’ over the next 12 months (with percentages ranging from 49% to 59% over the period as a whole)\textsuperscript{14}. Optimism has always won out over pessimism, although the gap between the two shrank significantly with the start of the economic crisis (from a 27-point gap in the autumn 2000 survey to a 1-point gap in the autumn 2011 survey). However, from autumn 2013 the gap between optimists and pessimists widened again slightly, before stabilising since spring 2015, to reach 17 points in the latest survey in spring 2016.

\textsuperscript{14} What are your expectations for the year to come: will the next twelve months be better, worse or the same when it comes to...? Your life in general / The financial situation of your household / Your personal job situation
The findings are quite similar, but even more consistent, when Europeans are asked more specifically about their career prospects: an absolute majority of Europeans, varying very little between 1998 and 2016, think that things will stay the same in the coming year. Over the whole of the period under review, the proportion of Europeans who think that their personal job situation will improve is consistently higher than the proportion expecting it to deteriorate. That gap decreases with the start of the crisis, but not as much as for ‘life in general’.
The same general trends emerge when Europeans are asked how they expect the financial situation of their household to change: a majority expect their situation to remain the same in the coming year (between 50% and 63% over the period from 1998 to 2016 as a whole).
V. IMMIGRATION

THE MAIN FINDINGS

- Since 2015, ‘an immigration policy implemented in consultation with countries of origin’ has become a major political priority in the hierarchy of priority policies which Europeans want to see defended by the EP.

- Immigration is a subject which divides Europeans: a majority of them do not agree that immigrants contribute a lot to their countries. This has been the majority opinion again since spring 2015.

- Almost six out of ten Europeans view immigration of people from other EU Member States positively, while a little over a third view it negatively.

- European public opinion is markedly more critical of immigration of people from outside the EU: only just over a third view it positively, compared with six out of ten who say they have a negative view of it.

- In five Member States a majority of the population have a negative view of immigration, whether from within or outside the EU: Cyprus, Latvia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Italy.
European citizens now rank ‘an immigration policy implemented in consultation with countries of origin’ third among the policies which should be a priority for the European Parliament. Following a period from January 2010 to June 2013 when this aspect was secondary among Europeans’ responses, cited by around 20% of Europeans, it began to increase markedly from December 2014, to reach 38% in the September 2015 survey (coming in second place). In the latest survey in September 2016, ‘an immigration policy implemented in consultation with countries of origin’ lost ground a little, falling back into third place among the priorities with a score of 33%. This hierarchy of policies remains largely dominated by ‘the fight against poverty and social exclusion’ (cited by between 49% and 54% of respondents since August-September 2010).

Over the whole period, another aspect has made very significant gains: ‘combatting terrorism while respecting individual freedom’ rose from 22% in November 2012 to 42% in the latest survey in September 2016 (second place). In that last survey, a ‘security and defence policy that enables the EU to face up to international crises’ (28%), ‘improving consumer and public health protection’ (27%) and ‘coordinating economic, budgetary and taxation policies’ (25%) ranked fourth, fifth and sixth respectively.
The European Parliament promotes the development of certain policies at EU level. In your opinion which of the following policies should be given priority? Firstly? And then? (MAX. 4 RESPONSES) - % EU

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- Tackling poverty and social exclusion
- Coordinating economic, budget and tax policies
- Improving consumer and public health protection
- Combating terrorism while respecting individual freedoms
- A security and defence policy that enables the EU to face up to international crises
- An immigration policy implemented in consultation with countries of origin

[Graph showing trends over time]
For a majority of Europeans, ‘immigration of people from other EU Member States’ evokes something positive (58%, against 35% for whom it evokes something negative). This sentiment increased between autumn 2014 and spring 2016, from 52% to 58%.

Please tell me whether each of the following statements evokes a positive or negative feeling for you.

- Immigration of people from other EU Member States -
  - 'Total 'Positive''
  - 'Total 'Negative''
  - 'Don’t know'

The diagram shows the percentage of responses for each category over the years from EB82 Autumn 2014 to EB85 Spring 2016. The trends indicate an increase in positive views from 52% to 58%, with a corresponding decrease in negative views from 35% to 25%.
The proportion of Europeans for whom ‘immigration of people from non-EU countries’ evokes something negative is predominant, and remained relatively stable over the period under review, from autumn 2014 to spring 2016, ranging from 56% to 59%. Over the same period, the proportion of people for whom immigration from non-EU countries evokes something positive has remained slightly above one-third (ranging from 34% to 35%).
In the latest survey, the immigration of people from other EU Member States elicited positive feelings in a large majority of Member States (23). By contrast, negative feelings were in the majority in Cyprus, Latvia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Italy.
Immigration of people from outside the EU was viewed positively in only four countries in the spring 2016 survey: in Sweden, quite comfortably, but also in Luxembourg, Ireland and Spain. In all other Member States, immigration of people from non-EU countries evoked a negative feeling among a majority of the population.
Europeans are divided as to the contribution of immigration in their country: in the latest survey in spring 2016, more than five out of ten respondents did not agree with the proposition that ‘immigrants contribute a lot to (OUR COUNTRY)’, whereas four out of ten (40%) did agree. These were exactly the same proportions as in the autumn 2006 survey, when the question was asked for the first time. After becoming the majority opinion between the spring 2012 and spring 2015 surveys, the opinion that immigrants contribute a lot to a country has become the minority opinion again since the autumn 2015 survey.
CONCLUSION

The main findings to emerge from this review were as follows:

1/ A number of trends can be detected from an assessment of the changes in European public opinion over the period of more than forty years from 1973 to 2016:

- Since 1973, the feeling that membership of the EU is a good thing has been shared by a clear majority of Europeans.

- Moreover, since 1983 and reaching a peak in 2015 and 2016, a majority of respondents have felt their country has benefited from membership of the EU.

- Despite some fluctuations, economic circumstances and political changes have had little impact on the feeling of attachment to the European Union.

2/ However, the major institutional and political developments affecting the EU, and in particular successive enlargements and the eight European elections held since 1979, have frequently brought about changes in opinion:

- Enlargements have often proved to be occasions on which views on the EU have improved after an initial hardening of opinion. This is particularly true in the case of feelings about membership of the EU, as well as confidence in the EU and the image of the EU.

- In the case of European elections, this swing is less clear. However, in the aftermath of European elections, one sees an increase in the feeling among European citizens that [their] voice counts in the EU. There was a particularly sharp increase in that feeling after the elections in May 2014.

- While the September 2016 Parlemeter survey shows no dramatic changes in support for the European Union, the next surveys will need to be analysed to take into account the impact Brexit may have on European opinion.

3/ Throughout the period under review, economic circumstances have had a determining effect on swings in European public opinion. Economic crises have triggered a serious worsening of opinions about the European Union, especially when those crises are likely to impact directly on the lives of European citizens. This is especially true of the 2008 economic crisis, which produced significant changes in the indicators reflecting support for the European Union:

- There was a significant deterioration of the EU’s image between autumn 2011 and autumn 2013, when the economic crisis became a Member State public debt crisis; from autumn 2013, the number of respondents having a positive image of the EU was gaining ground until spring 2015, before falling back again slightly until spring 2016.

- The crisis also had an adverse impact on the feeling among European citizens that their voices were not taken into account in the European Union.

- Unsurprisingly, the assessment indicators for the economic situation have also deteriorated, sometimes dramatically, since the start of the crisis. Since autumn 2008, the economic situation in Europe has been judged increasingly ‘bad’ by Europeans, and this reached a low point in autumn 2011. Since then, however, the number of respondents viewing the economic situation positively has risen more or less continuously.

- There has also been an impact on outlook indicators: between 2009 and 2011, the proportion of Europeans feeling that the national and European economic situations would improve over the next 12 months fell, before recovering again from 2011 and then losing ground again slightly in autumn 2015 and spring 2016: in these two surveys, negative projections outweigh positive ones.

- The changeover to the euro does not seem to have had a major impact on European public opinion: all that happened was national sentiments peaked very slightly immediately before the launch of the single currency (in 2002). The euro remains a key factor in European identity and an important symbol of what the EU means to Europeans.

- Even though some indicators show support for the EU to have hardened during the crisis, a clear majority of Europeans still feel that there is more that unites the citizens of the Member States than divides them: This has been the case on all six occasions that this question has been asked between 2008 and 2016.

4/ Europeans’ expectations concerning their personal lives are dominated by the feeling that things will remain unchanged in the year to come. More respondents viewed the future positively than negatively in most of the surveys analysed. This was true both for the outlook concerning people’s lives in general and for their job situation.

- The area worst affected by the events of recent years has been the financial situation of households, with pessimism for the coming months being greater than optimism as early as spring 2008, and markedly so from autumn 2011. It was not until spring 2014 that optimism overtook pessimism again.

5/ Europeans are divided over immigration, which became one of their main concerns in 2015 and 2016: in spring 2016, a third of Europeans thought it should be a European Parliament priority. In addition, Europeans make an important distinction between immigration from other EU countries and immigration from non-EU countries.

- For almost six out of ten Europeans, immigration of people from other EU countries evokes a positive feeling, while a little over a third of them have the opposite opinion. In five countries, immigration from other EU countries evokes something negative.

- In contrast, immigration of people from non-EU countries evokes a negative feeling for a clear majority of Europeans and is an opinion shared in 24 Member States.

- Europeans are split when it comes to the proposition that ‘immigrants contribute a lot to (OUR COUNTRY)’. After being the majority opinion between spring 2012 and spring 2015, this became the minority opinion again in the latest two surveys in autumn 2015 and spring 2016.
This exploratory study on major changes in European public opinion (updated in November 2016) was carried out on the basis of the Eurobarometer surveys carried out between 1973 and 2016.

The following aspects were studied: changes in European public opinion regarding the European Union and its institutions; democracy in the European Union; the economy of the European Union; the lives of Europeans; immigration.