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THREE MONTHS BEFORE THE EP ELECTIONS: WHICH SIGNS SHOULD WE BELIEVE? THE ENCOURAGING ONES, OR THE WORRYING ONES?

Perceptions of the EU at their best, while the context is constantly described as unfavourable

There is a discrepancy between the way the European Union and the coming European Parliament elections are often discussed in the media, and the most recent polling evidence regarding the way the EU is perceived by the Europeans. This is largely due to the never-ending story of the Brexit, which continues to dominate the media, but also because of the electoral success of parties that express critical views on Europe that have made the highlights in national media. Is this because there is always more to say about trains that are not on time (and the Brexit psychodrama is clearly a train not on time)?

In any case, the latest Eurobarometer figures show than three months before the next European elections, more than six Europeans in ten say their country's membership is a good thing (61%)[1]. Even more strikingly, more than two-thirds think that on balance their country has benefited from membership (68%). These are better results than were observed before the last European elections (50% and 54% respectively) in June 2013. But they are also better than they were in 2009, 2004, 1999 and 1994! **Only in 1989**, before the third EP elections, did a higher proportion of Europeans say that their country's membership was a good thing (65% in the spring 1989 Standard Eurobarometer, in March-April 1989).

And the benefits of membership? At 68%, the proportions who think their country has benefited have now reached their highest level ever since the question was first asked, in 1983. Similarly, a large majority would like the EP to play a more important role, the highest result since 2012.

Some other results and recent evolutions require caution

However, all the signals are not green. First, just over a quarter of Europeans believe that things in the EU are going in the right direction (28%), while 50% think they are going in the wrong direction, the same results as in September 2018. Moreover, recent evolutions show some slight downward trends that, just few months ahead of the elections, are a little alarming. If, as we have seen, support for membership is at a very high level, it has nevertheless significantly decreased in some countries since September (-7 pp in

[1] EU27 (without the UK).

France, -6 in Czechia and Italy, -5 in Germany and -4 in Croatia). As a consequence, the EU average has slightly decreased (-1 pp): it is the end of the continuous upward trend observed since September 2016 that is problematic rather than this tiny decline in itself. This is also the case for interest in the EP elections: while in September 2018 half of Europeans said they were interested in the next EP elections, this has fallen slightly to 49% (-2 pp), whereas at the same time, 50% (+3) say they are not interested, which is now the majority view. Though the evolution is not of great importance, the fact that interest has decreased as we get closer to the election is alarming, in particular when a majority of Europeans consequently now say that they are not interested in the EP elections.

Overall, these changes are minor, but they do somewhat undermine the promising results outlined above.

Declining interest is not mirrored in voting likelihood

Interestingly, and somewhat surprisingly, the likelihood that respondents will take part in the next European elections has increased significantly since September 2018: 35% of Europeans of voting age[2] say they are **very likely** to participate in the next EP elections (score 10 on a scale from 1 to 10): a 4-point increase since September 2018. The proportion who will probably vote (scores 8 and 9) has remained unchanged (18%), and who are *moderately likely* to vote (6-7) has fallen by two points to 14% (probably because some of these respondents are now certain to vote). This rise in the probability of voting contrasts with falling interest in the elections (and, to a lesser extent, of the feeling that membership is a good thing), or the continued low level of approval for the EU's direction. **But it is consistent with the growing belief that the EP should play a more important role**.

Could this disconnection between satisfaction with the situation in the EU and the willingness to vote suggest that, for some EU citizens, the EP elections are not seen as a way to express their opinion, whether positive or negative, of the EU, but more as a *means*, an opportunity to impact future decisions in the EU? This might reflect a progress toward a more mature perspective on the European debate: going beyond the question of membership and the Europhile and Eurosceptic divide, and discussing what policies should be adopted, and what decisions taken. Therefore, if the EP elections are no longer seen as an opportunity to express support for or discontent towards the European Union, what are they for?

What are the EP elections for?

The questions about the reasons why people would vote or abstain (regardless of what they will do on 23-26 May 2019) suggest some of the answers. When we start with reasons why people will vote, the main reason advanced is that voting a civic duty (44%). However, in fourth position, around a quarter of Europeans answer that *they can change things by voting in the European Parliament elections* (23%). This opinion increases with the likelihood of voting (24% for those *moderately likely* to vote, 26% for those *likely*, and 30% for those *very likely* to vote). It is even the first answer given in Sweden (61%) and the third in the Netherlands (48%). The share of Europeans who believe in the purpose and usefulness of the European Parliament elections is significant.

The analysis of the themes EU citizens would like to be discussed as a matter of priority during the campaign also supports the idea that voters believe the election is likely to affect the future policies, hence their daily lives of EU citizens. Indeed, the themes they mention are very concrete topics that coincide with their main concerns[3]. In first place, 50% of Europeans mention economy and growth by (+3 pp since September 2018), while 49% mention combatting youth unemployment (+2), and 44%

[2] 18+ in 24 EU Member States, but 17+ in Greece and 16+ in Malta and Austria.

[3] In the most recent Standard Eurobarometer, EU citizens' most important concerns at the national level were unemployment (23%), rising prices and inflation (21%), and immigration (21%).

immigration (-6). In fourth position, combatting climate change and protecting the environment is mentioned by 43% of respondents (+3 pp). In several Member States, Green parties often do quite well in EP elections (compared with national elections), probably because the environment is perceived as a global topic that cannot be adequately addressed at the national level. We can expect this to be the case again in the coming elections, in particular **since combatting climate change and protecting the environment is the first topic mentioned by those EU citizens *very likely* to vote (55%)**, before economy and growth (50%), combatting youth unemployment (48%), immigration and promoting human rights and democracy (both 43%).

What campaign topics for those "on the edge"?

The question on reasons why people would *not* vote in the EP elections also gives us interesting information. These reasons can be classified in four categories: **1/ Voting is useless** ("you believe your vote won't change anything" (33%); "you believe that the European Parliament does not deal sufficiently with problems that concern people like you" (23%)); **2/ Lack of information** ("you believe that you are not sufficiently informed to go and vote" (19%); "you do not know enough about the role of the European Parliament" (19%)); **3/ Technical reasons – soft abstention** ("you do not know where or how to vote" (6%); "you have no time or have something more important to do" (11%)); **4/ Hostility toward politics** ("you distrust the political system" (30%); "you are not interested in politics, or in elections in general" (15%); "you are against Europe, the European Union, the building of Europe" (6%); "you usually don't vote in political elections" (8%)).

Among these four groups, it is particularly interesting to look more closely at those Europeans that are likely to vote (codes 8 and 9 on the scale of likelihood to vote) who are soft abstainers, or who explain they will not vote because of their lack of information. Indeed, these can be considered as respondents who are "on the edge", who can probably become voters if they are sufficiently and effectively motivated. And it is quite likely that this switch could occur should the themes discussed during the electoral campaign be of greater interest to them.

Soft abstainers likely to vote would like the campaign for the next European Parliament elections to focus first on **"economy and growth"** (52%). In second position, 45% mention **"combating climate change and protecting the environment"** and **"combating youth unemployment"** equally. **"Immigration"** is in fourth place **(**43%), while **"fight against terrorism"** and **"promoting human rights and democracy"** (both 40%) share the fifth place.

Respondents with insufficient information who are likely to vote would also like **"economy and growth"** to be the main theme discussed during the campaign (55%). Close to half of them cite **"combating youth unemployment"** (49%), ahead of **"immigration"** (47%)**.** In fourth position, 45% cite **"combating climate change and protecting the environment"** while more than four in ten respondents in this group (43%) also mention the **"fight against terrorism".**

What can we conclude from this exercise? That people "on the edge" who will determine the turnout might be persuaded to take part on two conditions: if the campaign focuses on those topics that are relevant to them and if the EP's impact on these areas is highlighted and illustrated by meaningful examples. While the differences between the answers given by these two interesting groups and the general public are not major, we can nevertheless stress that "economy and growth" is more mentioned by these two groups than by the public at large. This aspect should be borne in mind, although it will not be enough to remind citizens during the electoral debates of the impact the EU has on the economies of its Member States and the living standards of EU citizens. Making soft abstainers or insufficiently informed citizens go to the polling station will also require them to understand that important decisions regarding the economy will shortly be taken or influenced, in the near future, by the members of the European Parliament (MEPs). "Combating climate change and protecting the environment", also mentioned more by these two groups than by the general public[4] represents another opportunity: as in the case for immigration, the environment is seen as a "global priority" on which more decisions should be taken at EU level[5]: the simple fact that people see Europe as the appropriate level for addressing some hot topics is a powerful springboard for turnout, provided that EU citizens understand how their vote could lead to concrete actions. Effective communication about the EU's role in fighting climate change and protecting the environment could potentially bring hesitant voters to the ballot box.

The Brexit debate focused on an existential question: to be or not to be part of the EU. The Brexiters' victory is a wake-up call to the other 27 Member States, one that should inspire them move to another level, where the EU membership ceases to be a matter of arguing, and the Union starts to be understood as a political space where critical issues are discussed. Between good and bad signs, both are to **be considered. But the first ones give actionable opportunities.**

DISCLAIMER

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[4] This is also the case for: "Promoting human rights and democracy" (40% for soft abstainers likely to vote; 37% for those not informed enough and likely to vote, for 36% of the general public); "The way the EU should be working in the future" (35% for both the soft abstainers likely to vote and those not enough informed and likely to vote, for 30% of the general public); Security and defence policy (34% for both the soft abstainers likely to vote and those not enough informed and likely to vote, for 30% of the general public) and "protection of personal data" (20% for the soft abstainers likely to vote; 22% for those not enough informed and likely to vote, for 19% of the general public)

[5] In the Standard Eurobarometer of Spring 2018, 79% of EU citizens say that more decision-making should take place at a European level for protecting the environment, 72% answered the same about "dealing with migration issues from outside the EU"

FOCUS ON FRANCE, GERMANY, HUNGARY, ITALY, POLAND AND SPAIN

FRANCE

Although the date of the next European elections is approaching, respondents in France remain first and foremost concerned by the particularly rich and explosive national news: the Yellow Vests movement and the Great National Debate, which has been proposed by the Government in order to find a solution to this conflict. **In this climate, only a third (34%) know the date of the next European elections** (compared with 38% at the European level).

Answers of respondents of voting age suggest, for the time being, that the turnout will be close to the 2014 result, when 42.4% of voters went to the polls. Indeed, 44% say that they will most likely vote in the next European elections (score 10 on a scale of likelihood to vote from 1 to 10). This level is higher than the European average (+9 percentage points). Forecasting the future turnout is tricky. On the one hand, one particular circumstance could increase participation: for the first time ever, the European election will come as the first electoral test for a newly elected President. Not only a test for Emmanuel Macron, but also for the new President of *Les Républicains*, Laurent Wauquiez, and an occasion for the divided left to measure its strengths, and compare between old and new parties. For this reason, these elections are starting to attract media attention. A first TV debate between the candidates was organised on 4 April, much earlier than in 2014. On the other hand, although the vote is organised in a single national constituency (as it was up until and including 1999), French voters may be surprised by the lack of prominence of the current heads of list, which they could interpret as a sign that French politicians see these elections as of low importance. There is another difference in the background to this election compared with 2014: whereas the last elections were heavily influenced by the popularity of the then *Front National*, resulting in an increase in turnout, it is likely that some voters who are sociologically potential abstainers find the *Rassemblement national* less attractive than in 2014. Not only because the far-right party has less support than it had 5 years ago[6], but also because protesters may have found a better (and extra-electoral) outlet for expressing their feelings with the Yellow Jacket movement. Overall, with the approaching conclusion of the Great Debate it is hard to predict whether these EP elections will be overshadowed by the particular context, or boosted by the intensity of the political tensions.

In any case, these elections are a clear opportunity to address some worrying issues. Respondents in France want this election campaign to focus first and foremost on combating youth unemployment (57%), which remains as last autumn the main concern, followed by **combating climate change and protecting the environment** (52%) and the **fight against terrorism** (50%).
This trio of top priorities is maintained, in parallel with a sharp decline in immigration-related concerns (32%, down 7 points since the autumn) and the **persistence of a high level of environmental concerns, which emerged strongly last autumn**, against a background of growing mobilisation in France and in Europe, in particular with the Climate March.

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[6] https://fr.kantar.com/opinion-publique/politique/2019/barometre-d-image-du-rassemblement-national-2019/

GERMANY

An upbeat German balance sheet for the coming European Parliament election

With about two months left until the European Parliament (EP) elections the German balance sheet for this election, as reflected in the recent Special Eurobarometer "few months to the European Parliament elections", is decidedly upbeat. A **vast majority of respondents in Germany** say that **membership** of the EU is a **good thing** (76% compared with 61% in EU27), that Germany has **benefited from it** (76% vs 68% in EU27) and that they would vote to **remain in the EU** if there were a national referendum (80% vs 68% in EU27). Despite this high approval of the EU, it should be remembered that people from lower social classes in Germany are significantly less likely to share this positive attitude.

Although about half of respondents of voting age in Germany are **very likely to vote** in the next EP election (48% vs 35% in EU27) this share is much lower among people from lower social classes (38% among those who consider themselves to belong to the lower middle class, and 26% to the working class). And while only about **one third** (37%) of respondents knew the **date of this May's election** (similar to the EU27 average, 38%), this will very likely change in mid-April when eligible voters receive their polling cards. This has always been the tipping point in attention to upcoming elections.

Two months ahead of the European Parliament elections there is no single dominant **topic** in Germany for the **electoral campaign** ahead. Three multilateral topics beside immigration are very present in the German media: **the influence of the timing of Brexit on this election**, the international climate change protests by pupils ("Fridays for Future") and most recently the EU directive on copyright in the Digital Single Market (upload filter). It is no surprise that **climate change** is now the top priority among respondents in Germany (55% to 43% in EU27), relegating **immigration** to second place (48% vs 44% in EU27), whereas in the EU27, economy and growth (50% in EU27 vs 34% in Germany) and combating youth unemployment (49% in EU27 vs 38% in Germany) are the two most relevant topics. This reflects the diverse economic circumstances of EU27 countries. A campaign focus on the social protection of EU citizens (47% of the respondents who consider they belong to the working-class vs 42% of the German average) and combating youth unemployment (44% vs 38%) could give people from lower social classes an incentive to vote, as they rank these topics higher than respondents in Germany overall.

Ingo Leven, Kantar Public Germany

HUNGARY

Hungary: a long-standing anti-immigration campaign

The attitude of respondents in Hungary to the European Union regarding most issues is the same as or more positive than the EU27 average, even though the Hungarian government, which enjoys huge public support, is in conflict on multiple topics with the European Union and also with its own political group, the EPP (cf. the recent suspension of the government party, Fidesz, in the EPP as a compromise solution instead of exclusion). One of the main reasons for this phenomenon is that for respondents in Hungary EU membership is closely linked to the sense of freedom provided by being able to travel, study and work anywhere in the EU. Furthermore, the Orbán government's critical attitude to the EU never goes so far as to question Hungary's EU membership.

In Hungary, participation in the European Union elections is usually significantly lower than in the Hungarian parliamentary elections, but the 2014 turnout was particularly low (28.97%), because it took place immediately after the Hungarian general elections, which overshadowed it. Right now, the situation is reversed: the European elections will be followed by local municipal elections in the autumn, which increases the political importance of the EP elections internally. Currently, 28% of respondents in Hungary aged 18 and over say they are very likely to vote in the next EP elections. Though this is below the EU average (35%), it could mean that turnout will be better than in 2014, should this figure increase during the electoral campaign.

Nevertheless, we cannot expect a high turnout, partly because half of all citizens have not been interested in the EP elections recently (50%). Another reason is that the public generally regards the EP elections as a competition between political parties. The opposition parties' campaign can only be weak, partly due to their limited funding and partly due to the media dominance of the governing party. Opposition parties are also likely to fail in mobilising both their supporters and the masses without party preference, because of the fragmented nature of the opposition and their mostly failed attempts to cooperate, which erodes and unsettles their existing and potential voters. The ruling parties have a much better opportunity for mobilisation, and from a local political perspective their EPP membership suspension may even be helpful for mobilising their supporters. According to a recent opinion poll by Publicus Research, the great majority of Fidesz supporters (85%) regarded the suspension as outrageous. In the total population, 44% regard it unjust while only 34% think it legitimate[7]. In an interview shortly after the suspension of Fidesz, Viktor Orbán called on his supporters to vote in the EP elections.[8]

Fidesz always frames this issue within the context of its belligerent politics to defend the country from "someone". Since 2015, they have been "fighting" the migrants and the so-called pro-immigration Brussels political elite for – supposedly – the sake of Hungary's national interests. The fight against migrants and the security challenges that they would presumably represent have been a part of the government's daily message for a long time now, so it is not surprising that immigration (HU: 55%, EU27: 44%), protection of external borders (HU: 39% vs EU27: 24%) and security and defence policy (HU: 38% vs EU27: 30%) are particularly important topics in the European Parliament elections for respondents in Hungary.

Those who say that they are 'likely', but not certain, to vote (scores 8-9 on the voting likelihood scale) might decide to do so if the following themes are given priority during the electoral campaign: economy and growth (52% vs 51% of all respondents in Hungary), immigration (49% vs 55%) and promoting human rights and democracy (41% in third position, vs 36%, in seventh place for respondents in Hungary on average).

Márta Szénay, Kantar Hoffman

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[7] https://publicus.hu/blog/eu-ugyek-es-fidesz-vs-epp/

[8] https://www.kormany.hu/hu/a-miniszterelnok/beszedek-publikaciok-interjuk/orban-viktor-interjuja-a-kossuth-radio-vasarnapi-ujsag-cimu-musoraban-20190324

ITALY

Italians and the EP elections: Between disenchantment and desire to voice concerns

A year after the March 2018 elections that brought them to power, a growing dissonance between the two parties in the Italian coalition government, *Lega* and *Movimento 5 Stelle*, has started to emerge in recent months. Divergences related to specific issues (such as the construction of the Turin-Lyon high-speed railway, or Lega's support for a gathering of anti-feminist and anti-abortionist organisations in Verona), as well as the slow decline in support for the M5S and the simultaneous rise of Lega in the polls and regional elections, have brought all the tensions and the underlying differences between the two allies to the fore. At present, their anti-establishment stance and their disparaging attitude towards the EU, which both contributed to their electoral success and cemented them in a common front against the European Commission during the draft budget negotiations, increasingly appear to be the only glue holding them together.

With only three months to go before the 2019 European elections, these political developments set the stage for the results of the Eurobarometer 91.1, which highlight the fact that, although 51% of respondents in Italy know that the elections will be held in May (though only 7% know the exact date), only 16% of respondents aged 18+ say they are very likely to vote[9], much lower than the EU27 average (35%). These results can be read in the context of a **long-term trend of declining participation** in European elections[10], which is in line with a more general feeling of public disillusion in Italy with the EU and a growing scepticism towards politics and the political system.

However, this disenchantment, far from resulting in outright 'Euroscepticism', translates more into a **'critical Europeanist'** stance. While only 36% think Italy's membership of the EU is a 'good thing' – a 6-point decline since September 2018, and the second lowest proportion among all Member States – a relative majority (48%) would like the European Parliament to play a more important role, a 7-point increase.

Looking at the themes to be discussed during the campaign for the European elections, the most mentioned priorities in Italy are **immigration** (62%, -9 pp since September 2018), **economy and growth** (62%, stable) and **combating youth unemployment** (62%, +3 pp). This choice of priorities is not surprising: first, immigration has been at the centre of the public debate in Italy at least since the number of arrivals started to increase in 2013 and 2014[11].

Today, this is still one of the focal points of discussion, particularly following the March 2018 elections (when the topic of immigration dominated the electoral campaign) and the recent decisions and reforms adopted by the Italian government, often accompanied by a belligerent stance against the EU institutions and other Member States. Second, the state of the economy has again become a source of concern amidst recent projections predicting a recession in 2019, after sluggish growth in 2018[12]. Lastly, youth unemployment remains well above 30% (and close to 50% in the South)[13] and, worryingly, has started to increase again in 2019[14].

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[9] Those answering 10 using a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means 'not at all likely' and 10 means 'very likely'.

[10] Although Italy has always enjoyed high turnout rates relative to the other EU Member States, turnout in 2014 was almost 30 points lower than in 1979 and around 14 points lower than in 2004 (http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/turnout.html).

[11] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/irregular-migration-mediterranian-strategic_note_issue_22_0_en.pdf

[12] http://www.oecd.org/eco/outlook/economic-outlook/

[13] http://dati.istat.it/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=DCCV_TAXDISOCCU1

[14] https://www.istat.it/it/files//2019/03/CS_Occupati-e-disoccupati_GENNAIO_2019.pdf

It is worth noting that, in the eyes of Italian public opinion, these themes are all ultimately linked to the European dimension, with the view that Italy has been 'left alone' by the EU to deal with immigration and the reform of the EU budgetary rules and economic governance periodically resurfacing in the debate. Thus, raising the likelihood of voting (and the turnout) will ultimately depend on whether the will to 'voice' these concerns will have the upper hand over the growing disenchantment with the EU and scepticism towards politics.

Davide Monaco, Kantar Public Brussels

POLAND

A public more euro-enthusiast than its government

In 2015 Law and Justice (PiS) won the national elections in Poland. The party has introduced many controversial reforms, including a reform of the judiciary that increases political control. This contributed to doubts as to whether the rule of law is maintained in Poland. PiS has presented a Eurosceptic stance from the beginning of its term. They highlight the importance of national values and claim that, thanks to them, "Poland will rise from its knees". The opposition claims that PiS will even lead Poland to Polexit. However, respondents in Poland see European issues rather differently than the ruling party.

The vast majority of respondents (68%) support Poland's membership of the European Union. They are more than twice as likely to want the European Parliament to play a bigger role (42%) than a smaller role (18%). In a possible referendum, the majority would vote to remain in the EU (76%). However, this healthy climate around Poland's EU membership does not guarantee interest in European Parliament elections. Although more than half of respondents in Poland (52%) say they are interested in elections, only 38% know the polling dates (8% give the exact date, and 30% answer "May 2019"). Only 25% of respondents of voting age are sure that they will take part (score 10 on a scale of likelihood to vote from 1 to 10), and this percentage reflects the actual turnout in previous European elections (23.83% in 2014). This year, we can hope for a slightly higher turnout if opposition supporters are mobilised in the same numbers as in the autumn local elections.

In Poland, the campaign is just starting to gain momentum – the majority of respondents (68%) have not yet heard any media reports encouraging them to vote. It is worth noting that this year in Poland, in addition to the European elections, there will be national parliamentary elections in the autumn. It appears that Polish political parties are treating the European elections as a trial run for the national poll. The most important topics raised in Poland in connection with the EP campaign concern national rather than European affairs. Though security issues are also often cited, themes most mentioned by respondents in Poland are related to the economy, living standards and social issues: economy and growth comes first (48%), before fight against terrorism (38%), security and defence policy (36%), combating youth unemployment (34%) and social protection of EU citizens (31%).

Urszula Krassowska, Kantar Public Poland

SPAIN

An EP election overshadowed by national and local elections?

After the unexpected vote of no confidence on 1 June 2018, resulting in the PP´s ejection from government and the appointment of PSOE leader Pedro Sanchez as Prime Minister, Spain's political agenda has mainly focused on national political issues. These include the opposition parties' pressure for a Prime Minister legitimised by the electorate and their call for fresh elections, and, more particularly, the institutional instability in Catalonia with the trial of the leaders of the 1 October Catalonian referendum ("El Procés"). This has significant implications at both social and political levels. Additionally, four elections will practically overlap, taking place within less than a month of each other: the national poll on 28 April 2019, followed by regional, local and European Parliament elections on 26 May.

This background explains why the strategy and agenda of the main Spanish parties are closely focused on national political issues and, to a lesser extent, on the regional and local elections. Accordingly, these are the topics that frame discussions in the news media.

The European Parliament elections therefore have a marginal presence in the media (Brexit still grabs the majority of headlines regarding the EU) so these elections are not at the forefront of the electorate's mind. Some of the most important political parties, including Podemos, have still not officially confirmed their heads of list, only two months ahead of the European elections[15]. European Parliament elections are placed fourth in importance behind the national, regional and local polls, both on party agendas and in the media. This seems to be evidenced by the results of the Special Eurobarometer for the European Parliament: "few months to the European Parliament elections".

As an example, only a token 4% of respondents in Spain are able to give the exact date of the European elections, while an additional 24% know they will take place in May 2019. Less than 30% have a real or estimated idea of the date of these elections, which is 10 points below the European average (28% compared to 38% at EU level).

Additionally, the proportion of respondents in Spain who say they are interested in the European election is 39% vs. 60% who are uninterested; this compares unfavourably with the ratio for Europeans in general: 49% interested vs 50% uninterested.

Respondents in Spain are also less likely to vote: only 31% of respondents of voting age are certain to vote (choosing 10 on a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 means "not at all likely to vote" and 10 means "very likely"). However, because polling day in the EP elections coincides with the regional and local elections (26th May), this may benefit the turnout, despite the adverse influence on awareness and interest. This is because normally over 60% of the electorate turns out in regional and local elections in Spain, and it is probable that a high proportion will vote for the European Parliament at the same time.

In order to engage the electorate with these European Parliament elections, the themes addressed by the parties as matter of priority during the election campaign are particularly important. Respondents in Spain call for a focus on the main internal issues in our country. These are *combating youth unemployment*, mentioned by 69% of respondents, and *economy and growth* (second, with 64%). Questions related to European institutions or issues affecting the European Union are clearly less important in Spain. These results are in line with the European average, but show a significantly higher level of concern: these two items are the most mentioned at EU level, by respectively 49% and 50%.

[15] The PP just appointed their head of list Dolors Montserrat Monday 1 April.

At this moment, it is difficult to know if after the national elections on 28 April the national political agenda and the Spanish news media will focus more on the European Parliament elections, with a consequent impact on awareness, interest and likelihood to vote. However, the fact that regional and local elections are held on the same day as the EP elections, and particularly, in our view, the probable party wrangling over the appointment of the Prime Minister (no party is expected to gain an absolute majority in the national elections) means that these issues are sure to dominate the media, again distracting attention from the European Parliament elections.

Víctor Sobrino & Jorge Alarcón, Kantar TNS Spain