

PARLEMETER 2018

TAKING UP THE CHALLENGE: FROM (SILENT) SUPPORT TO ACTUAL VOTE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With seven months to go, the Parlemeter 2018 shows a growing appreciation of the EU by Europeans and an improved awareness on the forthcoming EP elections. This well-founded optimism expressed by a silent majority can be the core of a positive European narrative that connects its citizens. One that a broad majority of its citizens could back in a broad majority of Member States, delivering a contrasting narrative to a populist clamour. The Parlemeter 2018 presents the results of the survey as an opportunity to take up the challenge: From (silent) support to actual vote.

More than ever, European citizens see their country's membership to the EU as a good thing. Not since the peak recorded between the fall of the Berlin Wall 1989 and the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty 1992 has this indicator reached as high a level as in the present survey: 62% of respondents on EU average believe that their country's membership to the EU is a good thing. A majority of respondents in all 28 Member States also considers that their country has benefitted from its EU membership. This opinion grew since the last survey in April 2018 by one percentage point and now registers at 68%, the highest result ever measured since 1983. Asked for the reasons why their country had benefited, on EU average economic factors top the list, together with the belief that the EU helps to maintain secure relationships with other countries.

Brexit, not the best choice

Nearly all general indicators measuring support for the European Union showed a significant firming up in the aftermath of the UK referendum to leave the EU and the still ongoing negotiations between the EU and the UK on both the withdrawal agreement and the framework of the future relation. The Parlemeter 2018 takes stock of citizens' opinions should a similar referendum to leave the EU be held in their own country. The positive attitude towards the European Union is clearly reflected there: With a convincingly broad majority of 66% Europeans would vote for their country to remain a member of the EU. Only 17% would vote to leave, with 17 % showing as undecided.

A more ambivalent picture

Trends over time also show a reinforcement of the Europeans' level of satisfaction with the way democracy works in the EU (49%, +3 since April) - but also in their own country (58%, +3). This result comes together with a strengthened view by respondents that their voice counts in the EU. For the second time after April 2018, on EU average 48% of respondents agree with the statement that their voice counts in the EU. However, this stability at EU average is hiding a decreasing trend affecting more than half of EU Member States.

In this vein and in contrast to the positive results from the above-mentioned indicators, other results from the Parlemeter 2018 also paint a more ambivalent picture. In spite of their significant support for their membership to the European Union in general, half of respondents find that things in the EU are going in the wrong direction. In a reversal of the trend after its upturn in spring 2018, 33% of respondents believe that things are going in the right direction in their country, 28% believe the same for the EU. On the other hand, the share of respondents believing that things in the EU are going in the wrong direction is increasing to 50% (+8pp), while 52% (+4pp) believe that their own country is taking the wrong direction. On the other hand, 33% of respondents believe that things are going in the right direction in their country, 28% believe the same for the EU.

Just over half a year ahead of the 2019 European elections, the image of the European Parliament remains stable. While 32% of respondents hold a positive view of the European Parliament, a relative majority of citizens remain neutral with 43%. A negative view towards the EP is held only by 21% of respondents. Equally stable are results on the question whether citizens would like to see a stronger role for the EP in the future. After rather significant moves between 2015 and 2017 calling for a stronger role of the EP, opinions are stabilising on EU average: Today, 48% of respondents would like a more important role for the EP in the future while 27% would prefer a less important role and 15% see no need for a change.

Against this backdrop, the Parlemeter 2018 returns the highest support for the Euro as common currency recorded since 2004. On the eve of its 20th anniversary, Europeans confirmed their broad and constant support for the Euro: 61% on average across all EU countries are in favour of the Euro. This level increases to even 77% in the euro area itself, a plus of three percentage points since March 2018. The lowest level of support is recorded in seven countries all outside the euro area.

Bigger awareness about the European elections

The 2018 Parlemeter also takes a closer look at citizens' views on the upcoming European Parliament elections, showing an overall increased awareness about the next ballot while painting a multi-coloured picture of opinions and attitudes about the elections. In September 2018, 41% of Europeans could call the correct date for the European elections in 2019, an unprecedented 9 point-increase over the last six months on EU average, boosted by two-digit improvements in ten Member States. It must be noted - and seen as wake-up call, that at the same time on average 44% (-6 pp) of Europeans could still not say when the next European elections would take place. In addition, the expressed likelihood to vote in the next European elections remains extremely stable since April 2018. In September 2018, 31% say they would certainly do (scoring 10 on a scale from 1 to 10) and another 18% would be likely to do so

(scoring 8 or 9). Conversely, 33% say that they will most likely not participate in the ballot (scoring between 1 to 5).

In September 2018, 51% of the citizens declare to be interested in the forthcoming European elections, overall stable in a majority of Member States yet within a very wide range of expressed levels of interest. Citizens' campaign priorities, on the other hand, have evolved over the past six-month period. Today, immigration (50%), economy and growth (47%) as well as combatting youth unemployment (47%) top the list of Europeans' most salient campaign topics. Terrorism moves down the list from first to fourth at 44% (-5 points). Here again, it is indispensable to look behind the European average figures at the national results, as the order of topics not only changes subject according to international context but even more so in the context of the various national settings.

Asked about policy topics citizens would want the European Parliament to give priority to, economic and social issues come out top, together with the fight against terrorism. With a stable 41% of citations, combating poverty and social exclusion is the first most cited item, followed by youth unemployment (33%, +2). The results are thus quite in line with the campaign priority topics as expressed by respondents. When it comes to the values to be defended by Parliament as matter of priority, 46% of Europeans choose protection of human rights worldwide, followed by equality between men and women (40%), freedom of speech (38%) and solidarity between Member States (30%).

Further information:

The EP Special Eurobarometer 90.1 was carried out in all 28 Member States of the European Union, from 8 to 26 September 2018, for the European Parliament by Kantar Public. The full report, including national factsheets, data annexes and results volumes can be found online on <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/en/be-heard/eurobarometer/>

Contact:

Public Opinion Monitoring Unit, DG Communication

public.opinion.monitoring@europarl.europa.eu

Philipp Schulmeister, Head of Unit

philipp.schulmeister@ep.europa.eu