



What holds Europe together? The EU in the wake of Brexit

A representative eight-country study of
the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung,
conducted by policy matters

politik für europa
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CONTENT

2	In brief
3	Introductory remarks
3	Design of the study
4	1 Attitudes towards the EU following Brexit
5	2 Basic attitudes towards the EU
10	3 The most important tasks of the EU
13	4 Acceptance of measures promoting integration
14	5 National or European domain of responsibility
17	6 Acceptance of EU rules
18	7 Trust and confidence in Member States
19	8 Trust and confidence in political parties to represent the interests of one's own country
20	9 Right-wing populist tendencies in Europe
22	Conclusion
23	Bibliography

IN BRIEF

- This report is based on findings from a representative eight-country study carried out by policy matters in May/June upon the commission of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. In a random selection of persons eligible to vote in Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the Czech and Slovakian Republics, persons were surveyed about their perceptions of the European Community and their expectations of the EU.
- The decision by the United Kingdom to leave the European Union is apparently contributing to a strengthening of cohesion among the remaining Member States. Six out of ten persons surveyed in all the countries taken together expressed an opinion in favour of strengthening cooperation between EU States, with even eight out of ten voicing this preference in Germany. A comparison of study results with the findings of a survey conducted in 2015 moreover indicates that sensitivity to the advantages of the EU has surged since Brexit. The number of those persons who believe that EU membership is associated with advantages for their own country has risen in all eight countries. Two out of three persons surveyed in Germany at present share this conviction, while two years ago only one in every three expressed this opinion. In contrast to as recently as 2015, a majority of citizens at present once again associate the EU with the notions of »opportunities« instead of »risks« as well as »growing prosperity« instead of »declining prosperity«.
- While the upcoming departure of the British from the EU is cause for concern, it has not triggered any panic. A relative majority of the persons surveyed do not expect any negative impact from Brexit, or they even believe that it will strengthen the EU.
- To improve European integration, more restrictive measures tend to receive the greatest support – for instance, securing external borders more effectively, or stricter checks and controls on budgetary discipline in the Member States. An expansion of the EU's defence capabilities and a growth offensive for Southern and Eastern Europe are supported by a majority. The latter also meets with a majority in what would probably be the »net donor« countries of Germany, France and Sweden, with solely the Netherlands opposing this. The adoption of the principle of solidarity at the inter-state level along the lines of financial support of poorer countries by prosperous countries remains controversial, however.
- In all countries, the willingness to shift competencies and powers from the national to the European level has grown. A shift in competencies and powers to the EU is above all supported in the areas of foreign and security policy, in the determination of tax rates for multinational enterprises and data privacy. In the view of the majority, the recent controversial trade negotiations with the USA should also remain the domain of the Commission. Responsibility for arrangements regarding the acceptance and allocation of refugees remains highly controversial. While clear majorities of citizens in Germany and Italy, the countries most affected by immigration, would like to see a European solution, the Visegrád States of Slovakia and the Czech Republic are just as vociferously in favour of national responsibility.
- Agreement with the expansion of EU competencies runs up against constraints, however. Citizens largely agree that budget policy as well as labour-market and pension policy should remain the domains of the various Member States. Moreover, a general double veto right against EU resolutions is held to be a good idea: for national parliaments as well as citizens by means of referendums on fundamental decisions.
- This no doubt applies to the refugee issue. Although it has lost its explosiveness since autumn 2015, citizens of all eight States continue to regard resolution of this problem to constitute the most important task of the EU by far. This is followed by combatting unemployment, the fight against terrorism and stimulation of the economy. There is an interesting detail from Germany here: a strengthening of the cohesion in the EU is also considered by this country – and only by this country – to be the most pressing task facing the EU.
- Cohesion within the EU is based not least on trust and confidence between EU Member States. Trust and confidence in the two leading nations of Germany and France is fairly pronounced among the populations of the eight countries surveyed, while confidence in France has even risen considerably in comparison to 2015. Above all the French have a restored confidence in their country since the election of Emmanuel Macron as President.
- There continue to be marked deficits in trust and confidence between individual Member States, however, as the examples of Italy and Poland demonstrate. Although the relationship to Italy has improved significantly since 2015, a majority of citizens in the other seven countries continue to be sceptical about the Italian Republic. This applies even more so to Poland, whose current policies are even meeting with reservations by majorities of the populations of the Visegrád partners, the Czech and Slovakian Republics.
- The role which citizens' own country plays within the EU is assessed differently. While the populations of Slovakia, the Czech Republic and above all Italy have less trust and confidence in their own countries, citizens of the other five countries view the role played by their countries as extremely positive. The greatest trust by far is expressed by Germans, whose country is confronted with growing expectations from partner countries as a result of its strong economy. From the perspective of the persons surveyed, Germany appears to fulfil this role admirably, as nine out of ten citizens state that they have very great or great trust and confidence in their own country.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The European Union has always been a guarantee for peace, democracy and prosperity for its Member States. It has accordingly always been very attractive: The European Economic Community (EEC) of the six founding members has turned into an EU that since the accession of Croatia in 2013 is now composed of 28 members. Seven more countries are involved in concrete negotiations to accede to the EU, among them a number of Balkan countries and Turkey. Association agreements are being negotiated with three former members of the Community of Independent States (CIS states), including Ukraine.

The last ten years have been characterised less by successes and more by crises, however: financial, economic, Euro, Ukraine and refugee crises. A certain climax, as it were, to this »cruel decade for Europe« – as the new French President Emmanuel Macron put it – was the decision by Great Britain in a referendum to leave the EU. Such an exit is not only a novelty in the history of the EU, which up until that point in time had only had to deal with applications from countries wanting to join the EU. Brexit constitutes a watershed event in the history of the EU, and it above all faces the remaining members with new challenges. Great Britain, the third biggest member and the second biggest net contributor to the EU, is leaving, facing the EU with a budgetary crunch that must be taken seriously. And losing the nuclear power Great Britain means that the EU is also losing a permanent seat on the UN Security Council and hence influence in the world. With Brexit, the question as to the purpose and meaning of European integration is being posed once again in a new light, as the aim and objective as well as basic direction of the process of European integration has been somewhat lost sight of – in the view of French President Macron – in the flurry of efforts to cope with the crisis.

It would appear, however, that preparations for the exit negotiations with the British have already led to a new spirit of togetherness among the remaining Member Countries. But the question remains as to the extent to which they can expect support from their respective populations. This question is of key importance if only because it was British *citizens* who voted to leave the EU. In the referendum, a slender majority expressed their opinion that EU membership means more disadvantages for Great Britain than advantages. The result was not least a vote against the fundamental principles of the EU such as free movement of workers, and a vote in favour of re-establishing national control, above all over national borders, in order to be able to steer and guide immigration more effectively and more autonomously.

These themes have also played a dominant role in other EU countries in the recent past, as a representative survey carried out in eight EU countries in autumn 2015 upon the commission of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung has demonstrated. It therefore appeared to make good sense to repeat this study in order to determine how citizens in other EU states were reacting to the Brexit. To be able to directly register these changes, a large number of the main questions on the EU from the first study were repeated with the same wording. In addition, new questions were included in order to determine

whether Brexit was having more of a negative impact on European integration or whether it might even contribute to an improvement in the image of the EU and strengthen the will and resolve to integrate.

The most important results produced by the study are presented in this report. Considerable attention is devoted at the same time to a comparison of findings with the preceding study.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The design of the survey is identical to that of the previous study. Just like back in 2015, the surveys were carried out in the four founding states of Germany, France, Italy and the Netherlands as well as in countries that acceded later – Spain, Sweden, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Over 500 interviews were conducted in each of the latter two countries, while over 1,000 interviews were respectively carried out in the other six countries. The target group in the surveys was in each case persons eligible to vote in these eight countries.

The interviews were conducted in the form of computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI). Telephone numbers were selected in a random manner based on the random-digit-dialling procedure. In this procedure, the last two digits of telephone numbers are randomly generated in order to include households that are not listed in public telephone directories in the survey in a representative manner. In the second step, the persons to be surveyed were selected in the respective household on the basis of the so-called last-birthday selection.

In addition to land-line numbers, in the selection of telephone numbers mobile numbers were also taken into account in a fixed proportion (dual-frame approach) in order to also be able to include persons without any fixed line in the random sample. This guarantees that young mobile groups of the population are also sufficiently taken into account. In five out of the eight countries, 70 per cent of the interviews were carried out via land-line numbers and 30 per cent via cell phone numbers, while in France, Italy and Spain 40 per cent of the interviews were conducted via cell phone numbers as a result of the greater dissemination of these devices there.

To compensate for distortions of the result due to households that were not reached, the results were then in the final step weighted in socio-demographic terms according to age, gender and region. This weighting was performed on the basis of data from current official statistics of the respective country.

The interviews in the first study took place from the beginning of September until 12 December 2015, while the surveys in this second study were performed in Germany between 5 and 22 May, and in the remaining countries over the period from 17 May to 10 June 2017 – i.e. following the second round of the French presidential election.

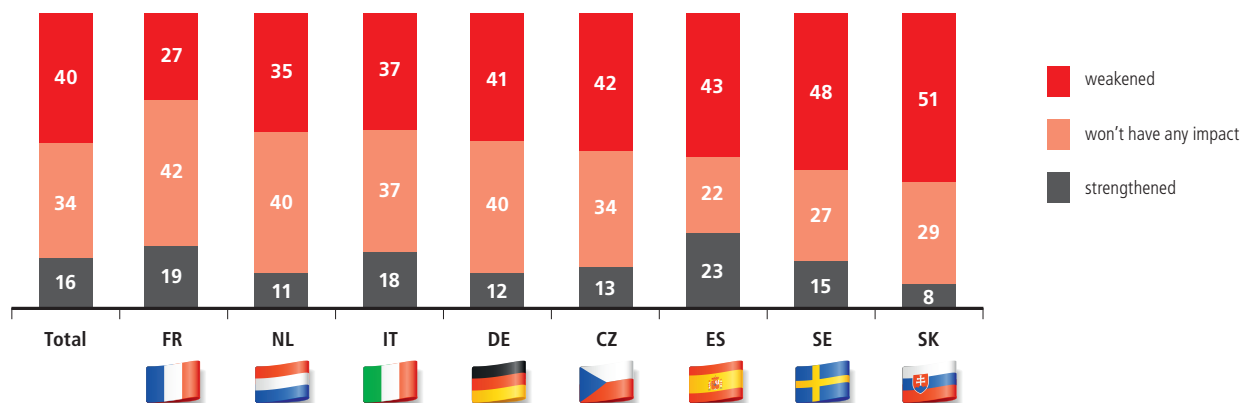
1 ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EU FOLLOWING BREXIT

The accession of Great Britain to the EU was a rocky road. The first application for accession was rejected in 1963 at the behest of France. Conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath successfully negotiated and achieved ratification in 1973, but after the Labour Party came to power it initiated renewed negotiations in 1975, leading to a reduction in the UK's contributions to the EU. In the 45 years in which it has been a member of the EU, the British have repeatedly proven to be an unpleasant partner. Many associate this membership down to the present day with the legendary demand voiced by British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to the other EU Member States: »I want my money back«.

do not expect a major impact in either direction (40 per cent), however, the reaction in Germany, with 52 per cent not expecting any disadvantages, turns out to be relatively optimistic. The Dutch are reacting in a remarkably serene manner to the planned exit of the U.K., traditionally a close ally and »partner in the liberal spirit« of the Netherlands. Here as well, a cautious optimism prevails that the impact of Brexit will be limited (40 per cent) or that it will even be to the advantage of the EU (eleven per cent).

In all eight countries citizens are exhibiting a remarkable equanimity: although four out of ten persons surveyed believe that Brexit will weaken the EU, one in every two think that the impact will be rather limited (34 per cent) or even expect it to strengthen the EU (16 per cent), while one in every ten felt unable to venture an assessment. (See fig. 1)

Figure 1
The EU after »Brexit«
Strengthening or Weakening?



Question: The British decided to leave the EU. What would you say: Will the EU be strengthened, weakened or will the leaving of Britain not have any considerable impact?

Figures in per cent | Gap between figures shown and 100 percent is the equivalent of categories »do not know«, »prefer not to say«
Basis: Eligible voters in the individual countries

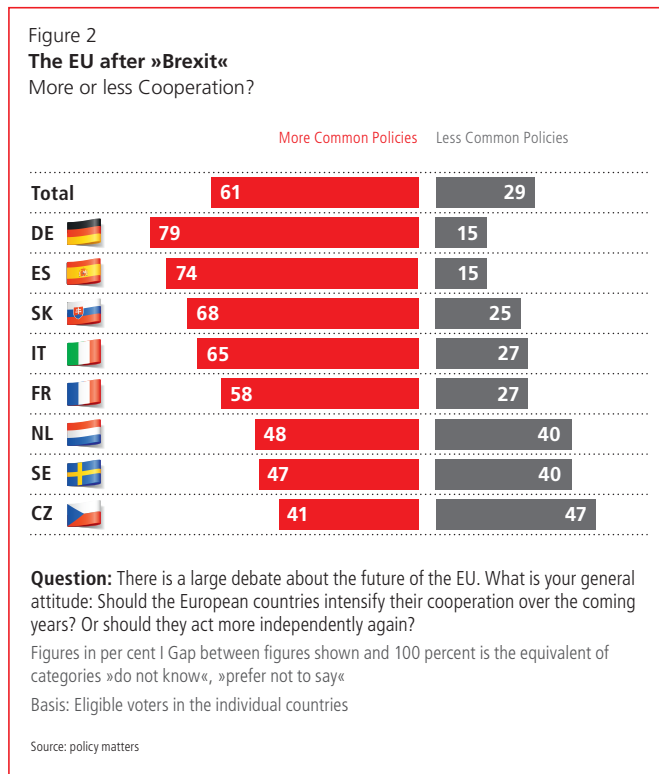
Source: policy matters

For this reason, it is perhaps not surprising that some EU citizens were relieved by Great Britain leaving the Community, even viewing it as strengthening the EU. This optimistic perspective is widespread in the southern countries of Spain (23 per cent), France (19 per cent) and Italy (18 per cent). These countries, which have been struggling to cope with continuing economic woes by means of government intervention or subsidies, have been repeatedly pressed to meet the debt cap – and this not only by the U.K., although this country was particularly relentless in its insistence on fiscal discipline. But in these countries as well – just like in the other five – a majority of persons surveyed fear that the exit of the United Kingdom will tend to weaken the EU. This more pessimistic – and probably also realistic – assessment is shared above all by citizens of Slovakia (51 per cent) and Sweden (48 per cent). Germany assumes a position in the middle here: 41 per cent believe that Brexit will turn out to be more negative, with only a minority of twelve per cent expecting positive effects. If one includes those persons who

In addition to the Brexit, the EU is also being confronted with new challenges, some of which have been around for some time, some of which are new. Among the latter is the new positioning of the USA under Donald Trump. His main slogan, »America first«, has a very direct impact on the European states, for instance with regard to trade relations, climate protection and the role of NATO. Also the manner in which the USA is dealing with crises that have very weighty consequences for Europe has revealed fundamental uncertainties with respect to the behaviour of the USA.

The EU Commission and the EU Parliament have been reacting to this by calling upon the Member States to show more cohesion. Some countries, including above all the two leading nations of France and Germany, have responded to this call and are confronting these new uncertainties emanating from the behaviour of the USA with a stronger reaffirmation of the EU. In this, they have the majority of their respective populations on their side: eight out of ten Germans and six out of ten French are in favour of strengthening

cooperation between EU countries. Only a minority in both countries would like to return to more autonomous national action, although this minority is greater in France than in Germany (27 versus 15 per cent). In both countries, there is a broad consensus encompassing a wide part of the political party spectrum that more cooperation is desirable – with one respective exception in each country: a clear majority of the constituencies of the Front National (FN) and Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) would welcome a return to a more nationalist approach. (See fig. 2)



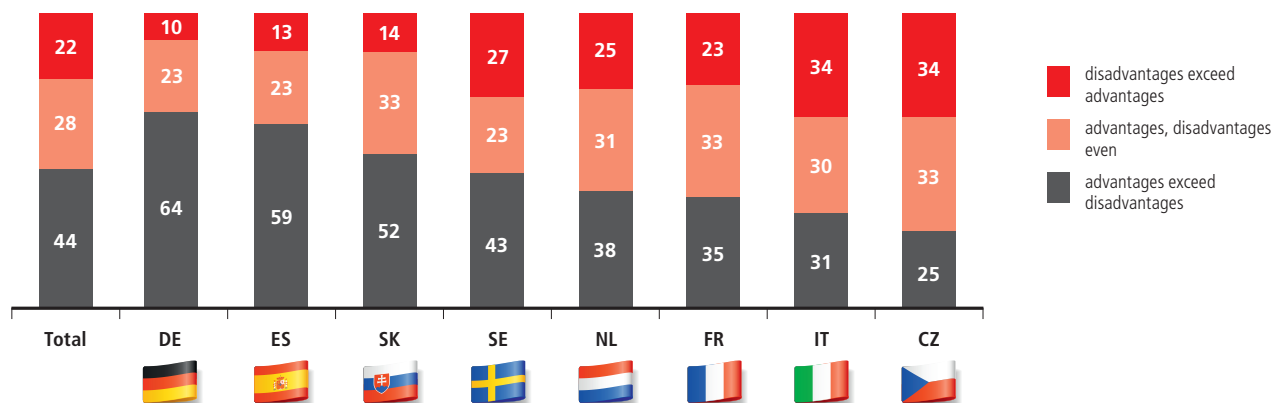
The tremendous willingness of the French and Germans to cooperate more closely is also shared by clear majorities in Spain, Italy and Slovakia. Support for this in the Netherlands and Sweden is already significantly more restrained, however. This willingness among the Czech population, already markedly more reserved in the preceding study, is cooler by comparison. More Czechs at present as well are in favour of greater national autonomy than more cooperation (47 to 40 per cent). On the whole, however, it would appear that in the wake of Brexit willingness to cooperate more closely is very pronounced in all eight countries (61 per cent). In the group discussions carried out in Germany parallel to the representative survey, it was very evident that especially Great Britain's exit has opened the eyes of many citizens to how important the EU is for their own country, for the export-oriented economy and to cope with current crises, which an economy even as strong as Germany's cannot shoulder alone.

2 BASIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EU

In the autumn of 2015, as the first major wave of refugees broke over the Balkans, basic attitudes towards the EU were pretty sceptical on the whole: Only somewhat more than one-fourth (28 per cent) of citizens in the eight countries surveyed believed that it was to the advantage of their country to be a Member State. One-third associated this more with disadvantages – possibly a result of the loss in control over their own borders during the major waves of refugees – in Great Britain a not insignificant reason for the growing distance to the EU. Another third was of the opinion that the advantages and disadvantages were roughly in balance. Attitudes in individual countries differed greatly, however. In five countries – France, the Netherlands, Italy, Sweden and the Czech Republic – a majority of citizens assumed that the EU membership of their country was associated more with negative effects. This sceptical attitude was particularly salient in the Czech Republic at 44 per cent, where by comparison only 13 per cent were of the view that the advantages outweighed the disadvantages. In its »sister« country Slovakia, which it used to be joined together with in Czechoslovakia, positive and negative views on EU membership were roughly equal. Solely the attitudes of Germans and Spaniards were more marked by more optimism than pessimism back then, while the margin between the two attitudes was rather narrow in Germany (34 versus 25 per cent), yet relatively pronounced in Spain (44 versus 22 per cent).

In early 2017, only one and a half years later, a completely different picture emerges: EU membership of individual countries is assessed as significantly more positive compared to only one and a half years before. The percentage of those who consider EU membership to be more advantageous has risen from 28 to 44 per cent, with only 22 per cent now fearing disadvantages (2015: 34 per cent). There is probably not only a temporal, but also a causal link between this mood swing and Brexit. Until recently the coveted access to the EU seemed to be tantamount to membership with no option to leave. Now, for the first time, a country surprisingly opted for exit, making membership more precarious. This not least because in a host of Member States primarily right-wing parties are making an exit of their country an issue or even downright clamouring for it. These discussions and Brexit have apparently led to a more focused analysis of the balance of advantages and disadvantages offered by membership in the EU. The result is reassuringly positive. In all eight countries, there has been a significant increase in the number of citizens who view the membership of their country to be advantageous. At present, six of the eight countries consider membership to be more positive than negative. This was only the case in three countries in 2015. Views differ considerably between individual countries, however. The most positive balance is displayed by the Germans: here the percentage of optimists has doubled from 34 to 64 per cent, while the share of sceptics has been marginalised from 25 to ten per cent. This sea change in attitudes on a remarkable scale in favour of the European Union is to be witnessed in all regions and in all parts of the population. Even the traditionally more critical stance towards the EU among constituents of the Left Party

Figure 3
Overall Attitudes toward the EU
 Advantages / Disadvantages of EU-Membership of one's own Country



Question: When thinking of your country's EU membership, would you say that advantages outweigh disadvantages, or that disadvantages outweigh advantages, or that advantages and disadvantages are even?

Figures in per cent | Gap between figures shown and 100 percent is the equivalent of categories »do not know«, »prefer not to say«
 Basis: Eligible voters in the individual countries

Source: policy matters

has given way to a significant majority expressing positive basic attitudes (67 versus 11 per cent). Only one single group has stubbornly retained its distance to the European Community: just like back in 2015, a majority of AfD voters (52 per cent) are of the conviction that EU membership is more harmful than it is beneficial to Germany.

A comparably positive development can also be witnessed in Slovakia. Here as well, the share of supporters of the membership has surged from 26 to 52 per cent, with the percentage of sceptics dwindling from 28 to 14 per cent. Attitudes in Spain, where six out of ten citizens hold the view that the benefits of EU membership outweigh the disadvantages, are even more marked. The citizens of Sweden, the Netherlands and France now also see significantly greater advantages than disadvantages in EU membership. (See fig. 3)

Discernible doubt remains in Italy, which had exhibited a pronounced pro-European attitude for decades. In this country limping along with economic problems, citizens see the advantages and disadvantages of EU membership of their country on even keel, with this basic view scarcely changing since autumn 2015. Indeed, Italy is at present the EU country where most refugees are arriving and which as a result has to struggle the most with the negative consequences of the Schengen and Dublin Agreements. Current doubts regarding the benefits of membership do not mean fundamental doubts as to EU membership as such, however, as two-thirds of Italians at the same time call for a strengthening of integration. The Czech Republic is the only country at present which views EU membership as more disadvantageous. But even in this country that has traditionally been sceptical about the EU, a slight improvement in opinion can be perceived: the share of those who have a positive attitude has doubled from 13 to 25 per cent.

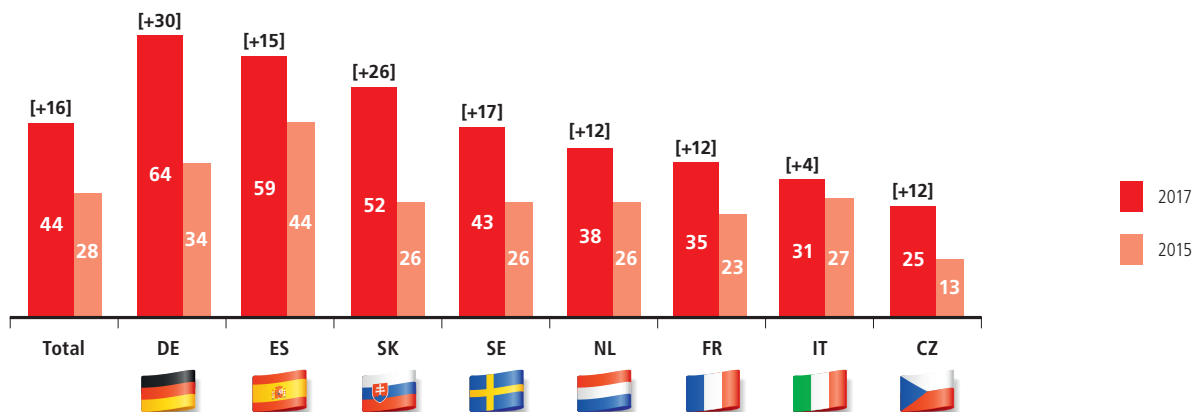
There is a widespread image of the EU as being an elite project from which the lower classes profit little, resulting in these strata being indifferent to rejectionist with regard to the process of integration. The findings in this study confirm in principle the discrepancies between different strata of the population: persons who feel like they are part of the upper strata are significantly more pro-EU than members of the lower classes of society. They are much more likely to see advantages in EU membership of their country and they speak out more strongly for an intensification of cooperation. This discrepancy in class attitudes could already be seen in the first study, but there are indications that these contrasting assessments of the EU in the upper and lower strata have abated somewhat. This is suggested by the fact that the basic attitude towards the EU has not only changed to the positive in upper classes in all eight countries since 2015, but among the lower classes as well. In some countries, like Germany and France, the improvement in image among the lower classes is greater than in higher strata – in Germany even a majority of underprivileged persons (54 per cent) are convinced of the advantages of EU membership. And in almost all countries – with the exception of the Czech Republic – a majority of members of the lower strata favour greater cooperation and oppose a return to nationalism. There is hope that the project for European integration will increasingly also be seen as a project for those on the margins of society. (See fig. 4)

As rich in facets as this change in the image of the EU to the positive would appear, it is also underscored by associations people have with the EU at present. One of the most problematic findings in the 2015 survey was that a majority of citizens in all eight of the countries covered by the survey no longer associated the EU with growing, but rather declining, prosperity. This was problematic because growing

Figure 4

Overall Attitudes toward the EU

Advantages of EU-Membership of one's own Country – Compared with 2015



Question: When thinking of your country's EU membership, would you say that advantages outweigh disadvantages, or that disadvantages outweigh advantages, or that advantages and disadvantages are even?

Figures in per cent | Gap between figures shown and 100 percent is the equivalent of categories »Advantages, Disadvantages Even«, »Disadvantages Exceed Advantages« and »do not know | prefer not to say« | Basis: Eligible voters in the individual countries

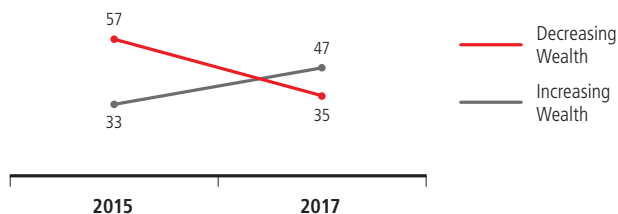
Information in brackets: Comparison to FES 8-Country Study Autumn 2015

Source: policy matters

Figure 5

Overall Attitudes toward the EU

Associations about EU: Increasing vs. Decreasing Wealth? – Compared with 2015



Question: Question: I am going to read pairs of opposite terms to you. Please tell me which of the terms you would rather associate with the EU.

Figures in per cent | Gap between figures shown and 100 percent is the equivalent of categories »do not know«, »prefer not to say«

Basis: Eligible voters

Source: policy matters

prosperity is one of the most important achievements that the EU stands for. This negative assessment has now fundamentally changed: A majority of citizens in the eight countries (47 per cent) associate the EU with rising prosperity once again, while only 35 link it to declining prosperity (this figure was still 58 per cent in 2015). (See fig. 5)

This change in mood has been registered in all eight countries, although once again on significantly differing scales. The EU once again stands for mounting prosperity for more or less clear majorities of the population in Slovakia (68 per cent/up 32 per cent over the previous year), in Spain (62 per cent/up 24 per cent) and in Germany (53 per cent/up 22 per cent). But in Sweden, the Netherlands and France as well, the notion of Community once again conjures up

associations of rising rather than decreasing prosperity. Even in the Czech Republic, the two views are roughly in balance. Only in Italy does the majority continue to associate the EU with a drop in prosperity. This is understandable, as of all these eight countries Italy has probably faced the greatest economic problems over the last few years. What is worse: the view is widespread there that other Member States – above all Germany – are even profiting at least indirectly from Italy's problems¹. (See fig. 6)

Membership in the EU is also now perceived much more as an opportunity than risk than was the case back in autumn 2015 (61 compared to 46 per cent). Back then four countries – the Netherlands, France, Sweden and the Czech Republic – tended to associate the Community with the term »risk«. Now majorities in all countries (once again) agree that membership offers these EU countries more of an opportunity for betterment. (See fig. 7)

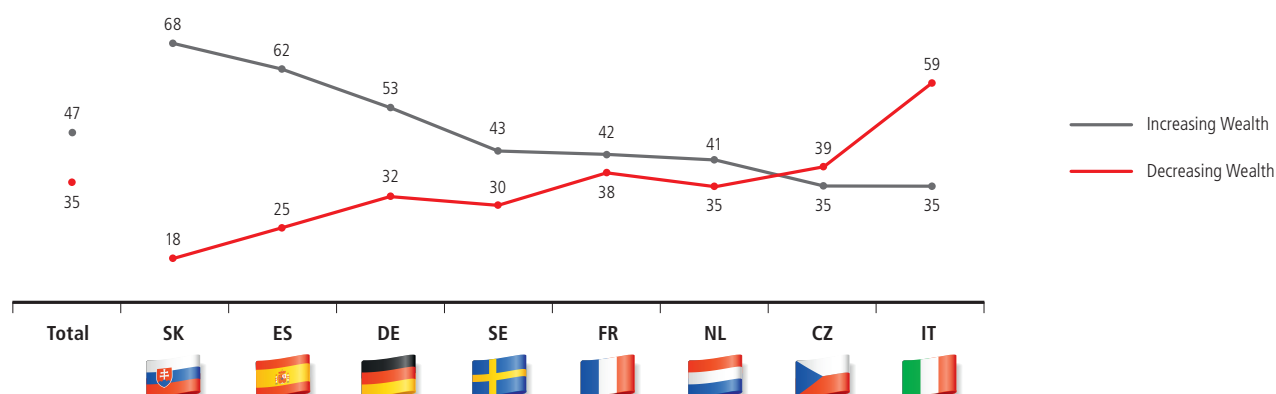
At the same time, opinions over the security of the Euro remain divided, with opinions in the eight countries regarding this topic diverging even more than in the 2015 survey. Majorities trust and believe in the Euro in Germany, France and Spain, with confidence in the security of the European currency having risen significantly in Germany and France. Trust in the European currency has eroded, on the other hand, in the Euro states of Slovakia, the Netherlands and Italy, in which doubts surrounding the common currency are particularly salient. This development has also diverged in countries outside the Euro zone. While the assessment of the Euro has improved somewhat in Sweden, confidence in a common European currency in the Czech Republic has further plunged from 29 to 21 per cent. (See fig. 8)

¹ cf. the FES study »Fremde Freunde«, 2017

Figure 6

Overall Attitudes toward the EU

Associations about EU: Increasing vs. Decreasing Wealth?



Question: I am going to read pairs of opposite terms to you. Please tell me which of the terms you would rather associate with the EU.

Figures in per cent | Gap between figures shown and 100 percent is the equivalent of categories »do not know«, »prefer not to say«

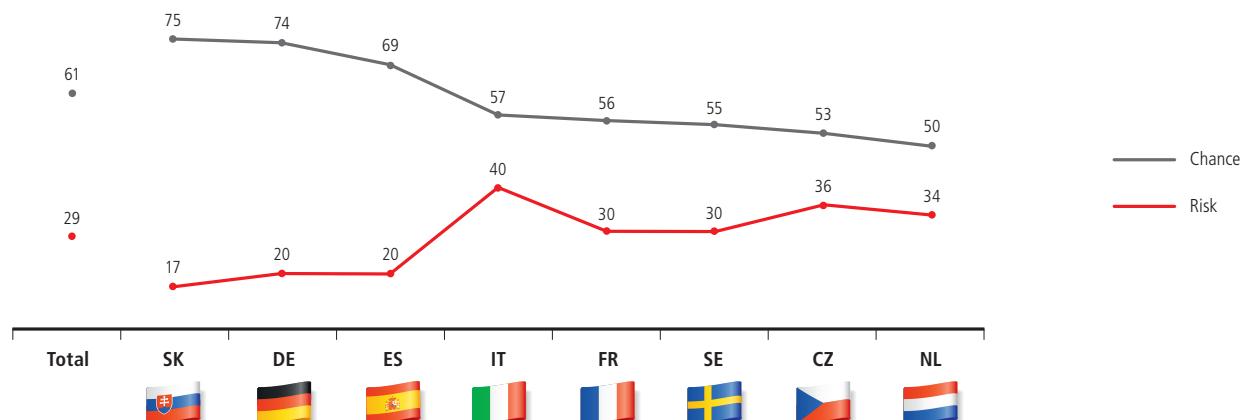
Basis: Eligible voters in the individual countries

Source: policy matters

Figure 7

Overall Attitudes toward the EU

Association about EU: Chance or Risk?



Question: I am going to read pairs of opposite terms to you. Please tell me which of the terms you would rather associate with the EU.

Figures in per cent | Gap between figures shown and 100 percent is the equivalent of categories »do not know«, »prefer not to say«

Basis: Eligible voters in the individual countries

Source: policy matters

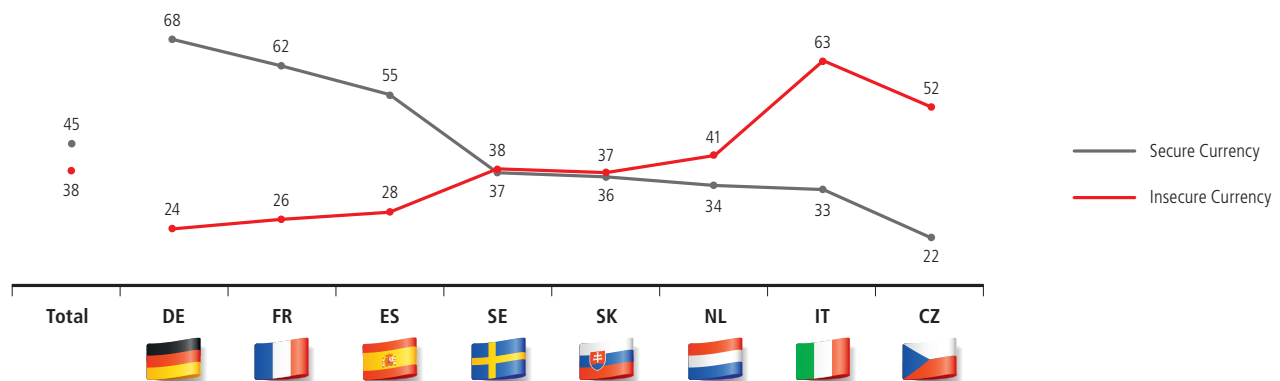
In five countries – Spain, Germany, Slovakia, the Netherlands and Sweden – the EU also tends to stand more for justice than injustice. Opinions diverge in Italy, France and the Czech Republic regarding whether the EU stands more for justice or injustice. With regard to the notion of justice, a virulent

distrust of the EU continues to be expressed not least by lower strata of the population. In six of the eight countries, members of the lower classes tend to associate the EU more with injustices. (See fig. 9)

Figure 8

Overall Attitudes toward the EU

Associations about EU: Secure or Insecure Currency?



Question: Question: I am going to read pairs of opposite terms to you. Please tell me which of the terms you would rather associate with the EU.

Figures in per cent | Gap between figures shown and 100 percent is the equivalent of categories »do not know«, »prefer not to say«

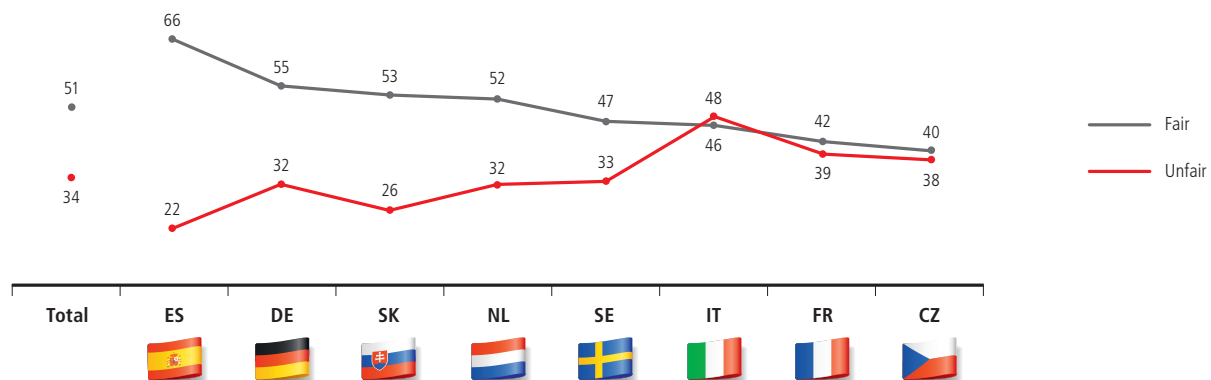
Basis: Eligible voters in the individual countries

Source: policy matters

Figure 9

Overall Attitudes toward the EU

Associations about EU: Fair or Unfair?



Question: I am going to read pairs of opposite terms to you. Please tell me which of the terms you would rather associate with the EU.

Figures in per cent | Gap between figures shown and 100 percent is the equivalent of categories »do not know«, »prefer not to say«

Basis: Eligible voters in the individual countries

Source: policy matters

3 THE MOST IMPORTANT TASKS OF THE EU

In September 2015, with images of waves of refugees dominating the media, coping with this influx was considered by citizens to be by far the most important task that the EU had to surmount. Since then the number of refugees has dropped significantly, but the issue still stands at the top of the list of tasks. In the current study as well – once again in response to the same open-ended question – 43 per cent of those surveyed across all countries viewed a solution to immigration to be the most important task facing the EU, while another eleven per cent held this to be the second most important task. Thus, the topical field of »migration« remains at the top of the European agenda even if it has lost its explosiveness somewhat. Combatting unemployment has also lost its sense of urgency, but at 28 per cent (down 9 percentage points) of mentions remains in second place on the European agenda of problems. On the list of priorities, the topics of »strengthening the economy« and »reducing debt« have also dropped in importance somewhat (respectively losing 3 percentage points).

Above all two tasks have gained importance in the last two years: first of all, fighting terrorism (up 9 per cent), which the persons surveyed moved to third place on the agenda following terrorist attacks in France, Britain and Germany. Secondly, a reduction in social injustice (up 8 per cent), which played scarcely any role at all in the past study, is now in seventh place with regard to the frequency in which it was mentioned. (See fig. 10)

There are some commonalities, but also significant differences in the importance those surveyed attached to individual tasks, across national borders, however. There is wide agreement that coming to terms with immigration continues to have the highest priority: it is held to be the most important problem facing the EU in seven of the eight

countries, whereby the connotation of mentions of this problem in 2015 clearly went in the direction of »containing the flow of refugees«. The different frequency of mentions in the individual countries reveals significant differences in perception of the urgency of this topic. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, three out of four citizens place refugee policy in first place on the list of urgencies, far above all other problem complexes. This result is remarkable because neither country has accepted hardly any refugees to date and are also – together with other eastern European countries – resisting the allocation of migrants decreed by EU institutions in any manner whatsoever. The results of the survey show that the governments of both countries can bank on the support of an overwhelming majority of their populations.

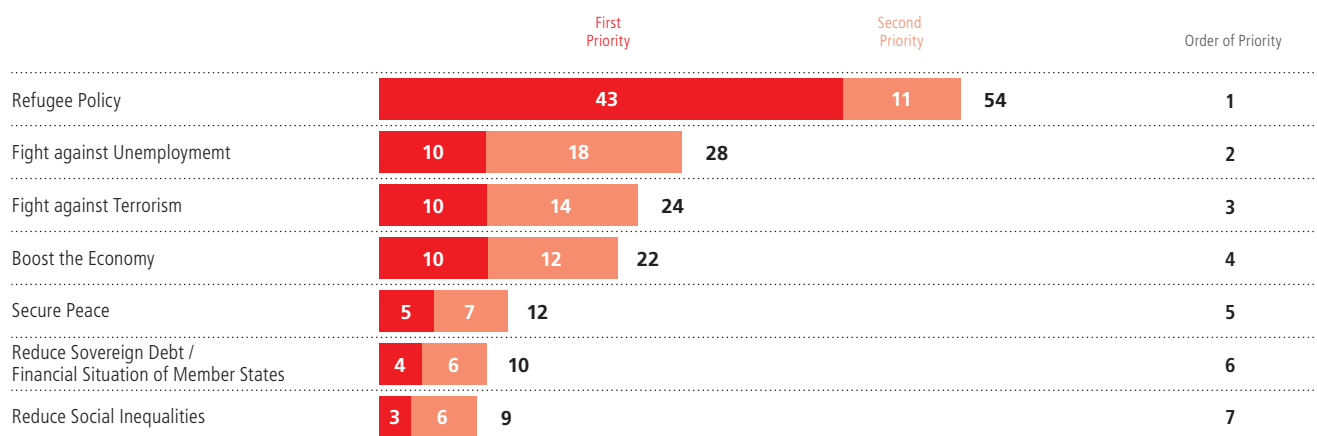
The two Visegrád states are followed by Sweden in third place. There, more than half of persons surveyed assign top priority, and another 18 per cent second highest priority, to the topic of migration. Sweden is the only country where this topic has gained in importance (up 6 per cent), suggesting that this topic is being discussed in an increasingly controversial manner in this country so exceptionally open to refugees. Italy, which at present has to cope with the largest number of refugees, is only in fifth place, which is probably primarily due to the fact that Rome is at present struggling with a whole host of serious problems, among which dealing with the constantly high influx of refugees is only the most paramount one. (See fig. 11)

The topic of »refugees« has lost significantly in terms of salience in four out of the eight countries, among them France (down 10 per cent), the Netherlands (down 16 per cent) and above all in Germany, where the majority of refugees who have fled to Europe since autumn 2015 have sought refuge. Tensions have apparently receded considerably in the perception of citizens, as the portion of those citing the acceptance and integration of refugees to be one of the most

Figure 10

Policy Priorities of the EU

Policy Priorities of the EU: Spontaneous Naming



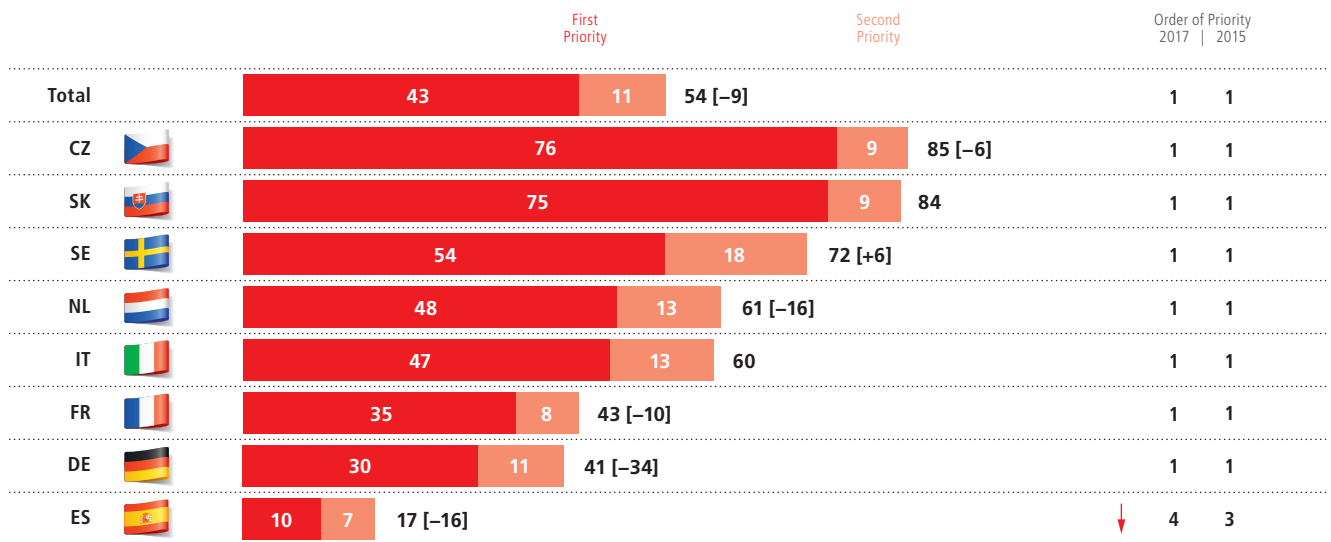
Question: Which tasks should the European Union tackle most urgently?

Figures in per cent | multiple responses

Basis: Eligible voters

Source: policy matters

Figure 11

Priority Policies of the EUPolity Priorities of EU: *Refugee Policy* – Compared with 2015**Question:** Which tasks should the European Union tackle most urgently?

Figures in per cent | multiple responses

Basis: Eligible voters in the individual countries

Information in brackets: Comparison to FES 8-Country Study Autumn 2015 (Differences are shown when exceeding ± 3 percentage points)

Source: policy matters

important tasks of the EU at present has declined almost by half from 75 to 41 per cent.

Spain assumes a special position just like back in 2015. Then and now it is the only one of the eight countries in which refugee policy does not dominate the agenda: The topic only occupies fourth place there. Interestingly enough, Spain has had to struggle significantly less than the EU's other Mediterranean countries with immigration even though its distance from the African continent is much less than, for instance, that of Italy or Greece, and even though Spain in Ceuta and Melilla has two enclaves on the African continent. This combination of openness and rigour characterising Spain's immigration policy is probably the decisive factor explaining why the topic of »refugees« does not have the same explosiveness there as in other EU countries.

The Spanish primarily expect support from the EU in solving internal Spanish problems – such as, for instance, combatting unemployment. The Spanish considered this to be the most important task by far already in 2015. Since then its explosiveness has tapered off (down 14 per cent), but with 46 per cent of mentions is still in first place. Comparable importance is assigned to the demand for the creation of new jobs in the two other Mediterranean countries – Italy and France. In both countries, this topic ranges behind refugee policy in second place, tendency declining. In the other five states as well, labour market policy has lost some of its urgency; in Germany and the Czech Republic this task is only in fifth place now. (See fig. 12)

The issue of »combatting terrorism« has developed diametrically opposed to »unemployment«. Citizens in all eight countries of the EU believe that the EU is called upon

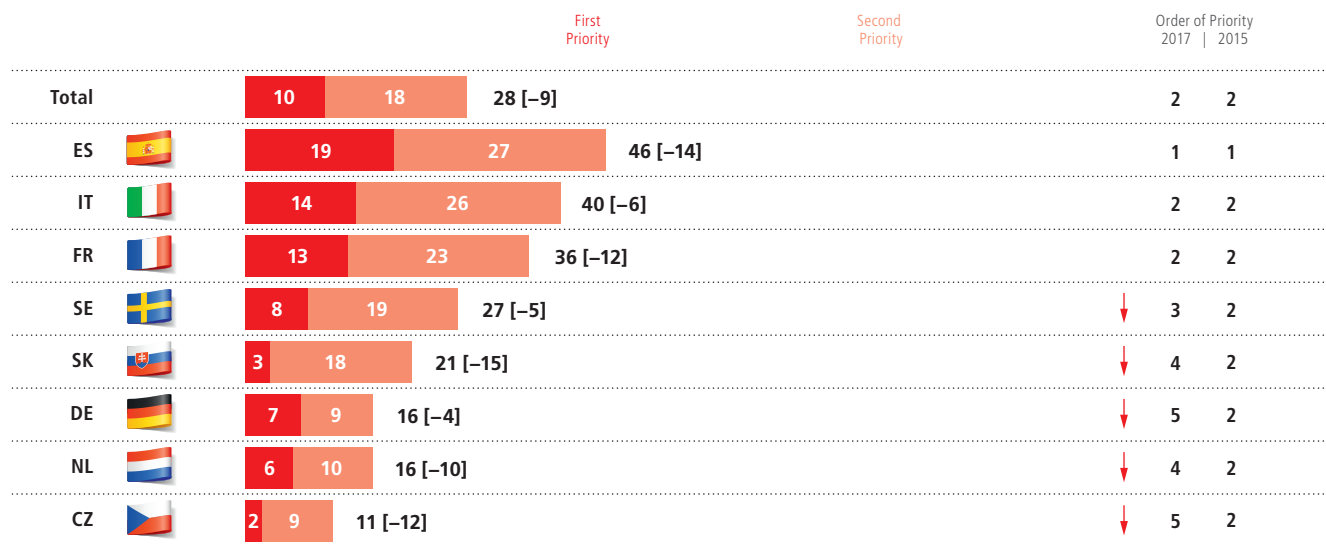
to act more here than in 2015. The fight against terrorism is held to be the second most important task facing the EU in the Czech Republic, the Netherlands and Sweden. The fact that the population in France, the European country most frequently affected by terrorist attacks, has relatively restrained expectations of the EU may appear surprising. This attitude is probably linked to the fact that assistance of other EU states in combatting terrorism is welcome, but it is primarily considered to be the task of national security forces. Germans, who in this regard have relatively great trust and confidence in the national security forces in charge, probably view things similarly. (See fig. 13)

In addition to the seven tasks which are mentioned as the most important in all the countries, there are some aspects specific to certain countries. Especially remarkable, for instance, is that in Germany the open-ended question about the most important and second most important task of the EU prompted the response of »strengthening cohesion in the EU« as the third most frequently mentioned issue.

This topic was assigned the greatest importance in a prompted survey of selected fields of tasks exclusively posed in the survey conducted in Germany. This underscores the rise in importance of the EU from the German perspective mentioned at the outset. The view was forwarded many times in group discussions that Germany owes its strong economic standing and its stability not least to its membership in the European Union, which Germany is seen to profit from more than other states.

In Germany, and above all in Sweden, however, initiatives supported by the EU in the areas of environmental protection and combatting climate change are expected. In France, Italy,

Figure 12

Priority Policies of the EUPriority Policies of the EU: *Fight against Unemployment* – Compared with 2015**Question:** Which tasks should the European Union tackle most urgently?

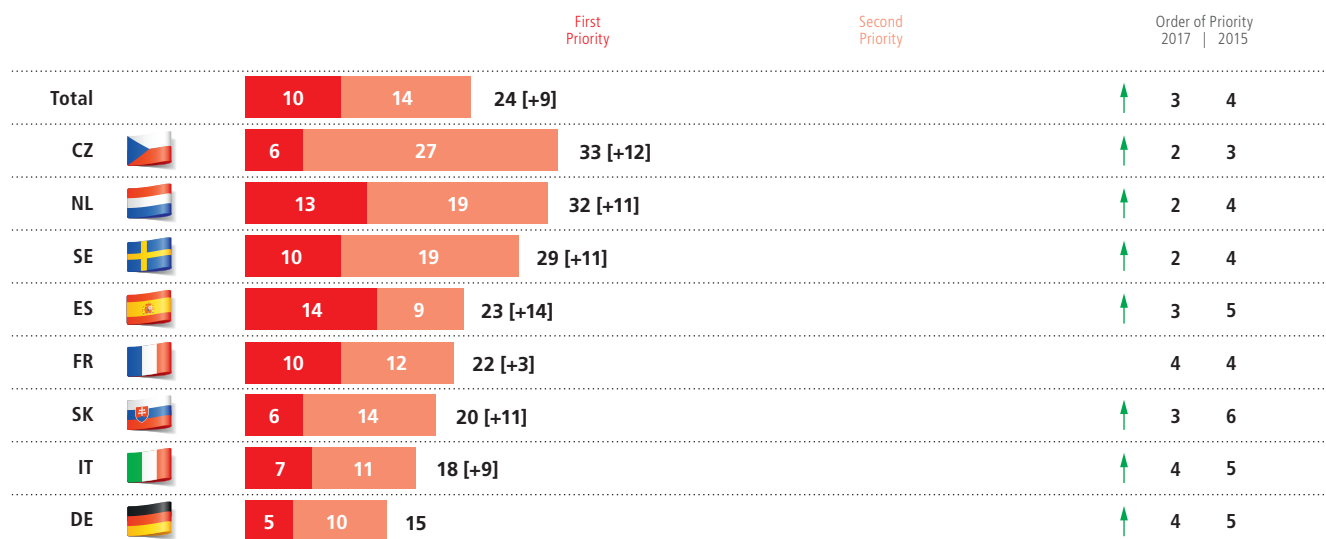
Figures in per cent | multiple responses

Basis: Eligible voters in the individual countries

Information in brackets: Comparison to FES 8-Country Study Autumn 2015 (Differences are shown when exceeding ±3 percentage points)

Source: policy matters

Figure 13

Priority Policies of the EUPriority Policies of the EU: *Fight against Terrorism* – Compared with 2015**Question:** Which tasks should the European Union tackle most urgently?

Figures in per cent | multiple responses

Basis: Eligible voters in the individual countries

Information in brackets: Comparison to FES 8-Country Study Autumn 2015 (Differences are shown when exceeding ±3 percentage points)

Source: policy matters

Spain and France, tax reductions and combatting inflation are stated more frequently than elsewhere as the most important challenges, for the solution of which these countries expect the support of the Community.

4 ACCEPTANCE OF MEASURES PROMOTING INTEGRATION

In view of the growing sensitivity of citizens in all eight countries to the importance of the EU, the question arises as to how this cohesion can be strengthened and how integration of the remaining 27 Member States can be encouraged. Here as well, the persons surveyed in 2017 were read a list of measures in order to determine their acceptance. The greatest agreement is gained by the encouragement of stronger efforts on the part of all EU states to secure external borders (79 per cent), which almost one out of every two persons agreed with »wholeheartedly«, and another third with »tend to agree«. This is followed in second place by a desire for greater monitoring of budgetary discipline of the Member States, more of a restrictive measure supported »wholeheartedly« by three out of four persons surveyed (35 per cent) or »tend to agree«. The launch of minimum wages throughout the EU, the amount of which is based on the economic power of the respective country – a measure that has already been instituted in 21 out of the 28 countries (including Great Britain) – meets with comparable agreement. (See fig. 14)

Two proposals which would grant EU citizens a greater say also met with considerable agreement: the introduction of pan-European referendums on fundamental issues (69 per cent) as well as the direct election of the EU President (59 per cent) as well as the direct election of the EU President (59 per

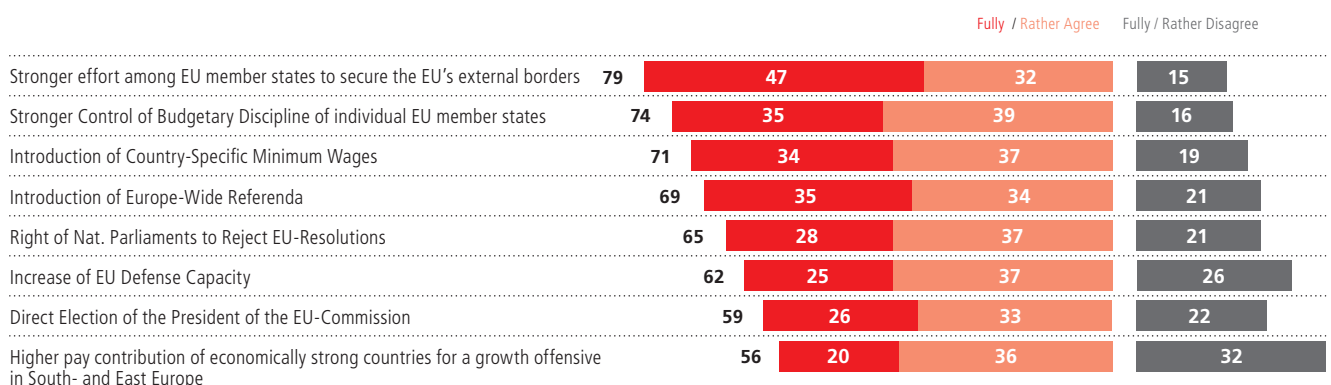
cent) – an initial step was taken in this direction with the nomination of lead candidates of the party families in the last European election. A majority of respondents also welcomed the step-by-step expansion of military capabilities of the EU (62 per cent) as well as higher contributions for a »growth offensive« in southern and eastern Europe being paid by the countries with the strongest economies (56 per cent). The fact that there is a limit to this desire for more competencies to be assigned to the EU is clearly illustrated by another result: two-thirds of those surveyed favoured a right on the part of national parliaments to object to and appeal EU decisions.

Almost all measures receive support from a majority in all the countries – with one exception: An increase in EU contributions exclusively by economically potent countries to promote investment in the poorer countries of southern and eastern Europe tends to be rejected in the Netherlands (49 per cent) rather than meet with approval (35 per cent). There is greater opposition in Germany (42 per cent) and Sweden (39 per cent) as well – three countries with comparatively strong economies, which would be forced to pay greater contributions if this measure were implemented. It should be noted in addition, however, that in spite of this, narrow majorities in Germany, Sweden and incidentally in France as well support this proposal voiced by the French President. (See fig. 15)

Agreement with this is significantly greater, however, in the countries that would probably benefit from such a measure: Spain (78 per cent), Italy (75 per cent) and Slovakia (69 per cent). The survey results for a right on the part of national parliaments to object to and appeal EU decisions, on the other hand, do not follow the pattern of net contributing/net recipient countries. Agreement with this is

Figure 14

Acceptance of Measures to Promote EU-Integration



Question: There are regular discussions about how to improve European integration. I name you several suggestions, please tell me if you fully agree, rather agree, rather disagree or fully disagree.

Figures in per cent | Gap between figures shown and 100 percent is the equivalent of categories »do not know«, »prefer not to say«
Basis: Eligible voters

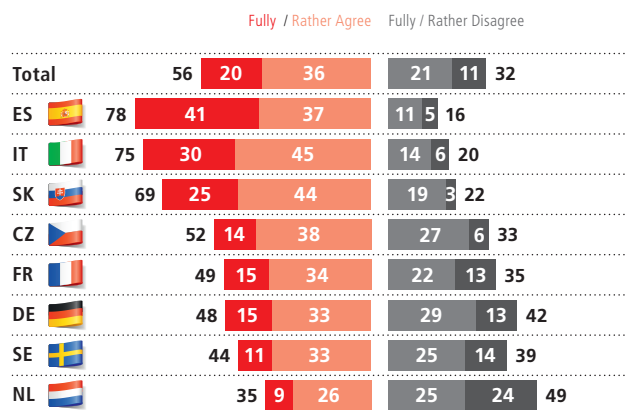
Source: policy matters

greatest in the two eastern European countries, with Slovakia already currently making use of this right with regard to the allocation of refugees.

Figure 15

Acceptance of Measures to Promote EU-Integration

Higher pay contribution of economically strong countries for a growth offensive in South- and East Europe



Question: There are regular discussions about how to improve European integration. I name you several suggestions, please tell me if you fully agree, rather agree, rather disagree or fully disagree.

Figures in per cent | Gap between figures shown and 100 percent is the equivalent of categories »do not know«, »prefer not to say«
Basis: Eligible voters in the individual countries

Source: policy matters

5 NATIONAL OR EUROPEAN DOMAIN OF RESPONSIBILITY

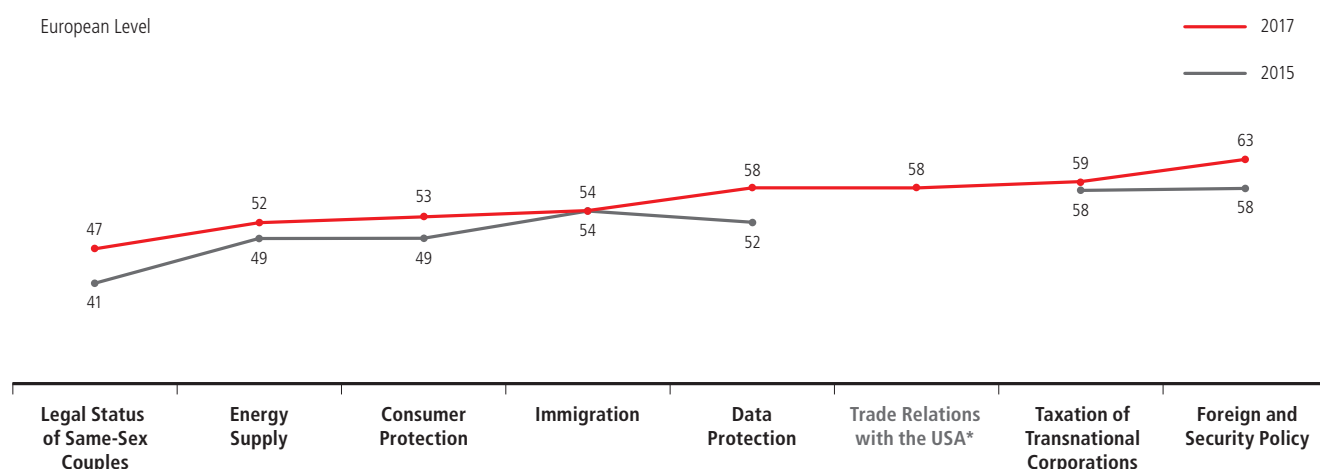
Already in the 2015 study it was explored in what domains of policy citizens tend to support control by their own governments and which domains they tend to think the EU should be in charge of. The result was a balance of policy areas more centred on national and areas more centred on EU control. Current findings on this question corroborate a more positive basic attitude towards the EU at present. All in all, twelve fields of policy were enquired about in 2017. Citizens tend to call for European responsibility in eight fields: In foreign and security policy, taxation of multinational corporations, the structure and design of trade relations with the USA, data and consumer protection, coping with immigration, the field of energy supply and the legal status of same-sex domestic partnerships. With the exception of trade relations with the USA, opinions were surveyed for all of these areas back in 2015. A comparison of both studies indicates a slight increase in willingness to shift competencies in the direction of Brussels in five cases. (See fig. 16)

In some cases, there is largely agreement across all eight countries that issues like these should be dealt with more at the European level. This especially goes for security and defence policy. Two-thirds of persons surveyed favoured a shift in competencies in the direction of the EU, with only three out of ten being opposed to this. Even a majority of citizens of the proud Grande Nation of France desire more responsibility to be assigned to the Community for their foreign and security policy in the future. One can interpret the high level of approval for the new French President, whose government platform calls for greater cooperation

Figure 16

National or European Competences

Policy Areas to Be Rather Dealt with at European Level – Compared with 2015



Question: I am going to name a number of policy issues. Please tell me for each issue whether, in your opinion, it should rather be dealt with at the European or at the national level.

Figures in per cent | Gap between figures shown and 100 percent is the equivalent of categories »do not know« and »prefer not to say«
Basis: Eligible voters

* no comparison value, owing to no data collection for this category in 2015

Source: policy matters

among EU states in the area of foreign and defence policy, as one sign of the seriousness of this »declaration of intent«. The greatest opposition to it, on the other hand, is to be found in neutral Sweden. Apparently, many Swedes do not want to give up their neutral status. With regard to data and consumer protection as well, only in Sweden was a majority – albeit a slender one – in favour of maintaining primarily national responsibility. With regard to the question as to responsibility for negotiations between the USA and EU States regarding their future trade relations, almost half of the Swedes expressed no opinion. In the other States, the standpoint of the EU Commission meets with approval by the majority, who desire negotiations over TTIP to fall within the domain of EU responsibility.

In other fields of policy as well, there are significant differences between the citizens of the individual States, whereby the lines of conflict usually run between Eastern and Western Europe. Opinions differ most profoundly in the area of refugee policy. In five of the six western countries, citizens call with large majorities in each country for overall European solutions in the acceptance and integration of refugees. There are different opinions on this issue in France. The call for a European solution with respect to refugee issues is forwarded most vehemently by Germans and Italians, i.e. the citizens of those countries that are bearing the main burden of immigration at present. In Italy, however, above all the Lega Nord has recently been propagating a departure from the liberal refugee policy of the EU, as it is reflected in a perceptible increase in support for national solutions. In the Visegrád States of Slovakia and the Czech Republic, opposition to a Europeanisation of refugee policy is clearly the majority stance. There around seven out of ten citizens

are in favour of retaining national responsibility in the area of migration policy and continuing to keep borders closed to refugees. Opposition to a European solution has even risen somewhat compared to 2015. (See fig. 17) ²

With regard to arrangements regarding same-sex domestic partnerships as well, a majority of persons surveyed in Slovakia and the Czech Republic favour national responsibility – evidence of the continuing cultural differences between eastern and western European EMU States. With regard to energy issues, clear majorities of citizens in both countries prefer national arrangements even though both are highly dependent in terms of energy supply and both would tend to benefit from an expansion of the European energy network. Especially Spain (67 per cent) and Italy (64 per cent) speak out in favour of a greater coordination of energy policy within the EU, but also considerable majorities in the Netherlands (54 per cent), France (53 per cent) and Germany (52 per cent).

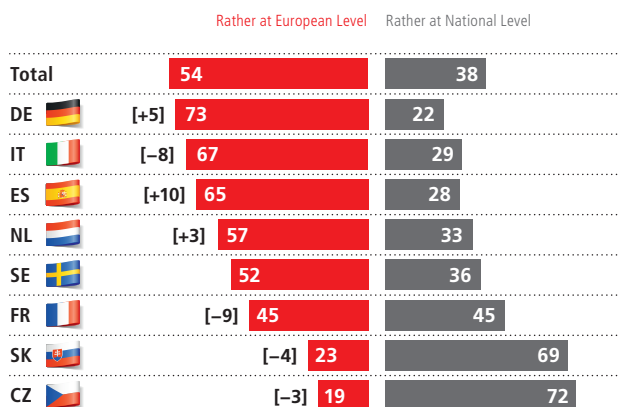
Responsibility in the area of combatting unemployment remains controversial, especially among the young generation – the lines of conflict run in a different direction here. In the countries where youth unemployment is most prevalent – Spain and Italy – majorities are in favour of European solutions, while the French, whose youth also face serious problems in finding a job, tend to view this as a national task. Citizens in the Netherlands, Sweden and the Czech Republic – countries in which this topic scarcely plays a role – also consider this to primarily be a task of respective national governments. In Germany and Slovakia, on the other hand – both of which are scarcely affected by youth unemployment – support for the countries plagued by youth unemployment is advocated. Above all Germans are probably aware that it is Germany that would have to bear the brunt of any support. The fact that Germans nevertheless support this view can be interpreted as an awareness that their own economic strength, which is heavily based on exports, cannot be maintained over the long haul if important partner states are suffering.

Agreement to an expansion of EU competencies is not supported in some areas, however, especially with budget sovereignty and the structuring and design of social systems. Two-thirds of persons surveyed in all the countries together advocate preserving national control over budget policy. No majority is in favour of an integration of financial policy in any of the eight countries. Reservations are greatest in the Czech Republic (80 per cent), Slovakia, Germany and France (each with over 70 per cent). Willingness to shift competencies is relatively pronounced in Italy (36 per cent) and above all in Spain (44 per cent). A shift in competencies in the direction of the EU in determining the amount and design of unemployment benefits would also meet with little support. Those for and against such a move are roughly balanced in Italy; with a narrow majority being able to imagine a European solution for unemployment insurance solely in Spain – in contrast to autumn 2015. (See fig. 18)

Figure 17

National or European Competences

Regulating and Distributing Immigration – Compared with 2015



Question: I am going to name a number of policy issues. Please tell me for each issue whether, in your opinion, it should rather be dealt with at the European or at the national level.

Figures in per cent | Gap between figures shown and 100 percent is the equivalent of categories »do not know«, »prefer not to say

Basis: Eligible voters in the individual countries

Information in brackets: Comparison to FES 8-Country Study Autumn 2015

(Differences are shown when exceeding ± 3 percentage points)²

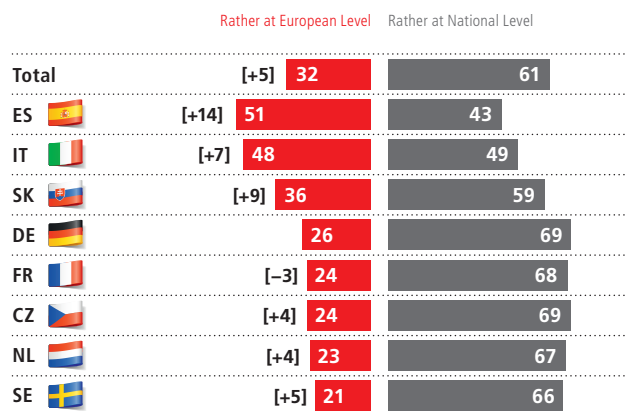
Source: policy matters

² For the sake of clarity, only changes in the direction of pro-European and integration-promoting actions are given below

Figure 18

National or European Competences

Defining the Level and Duration of Unemployment Benefits – Compared with 2015



Question: I am going to name a number of policy issues. Please tell me for each issue whether, in your opinion, it should rather be dealt with at the European or at the national level.

Figures in per cent | Gap between figures shown and 100 percent is the equivalent of categories »do not know«, »prefer not to say« Basis: Eligible voters in the individual countries

Information in brackets: Comparison to FES 8-Country Study Autumn 2015 (Differences are shown when exceeding ± 3 percentage points)

Source: policy matters

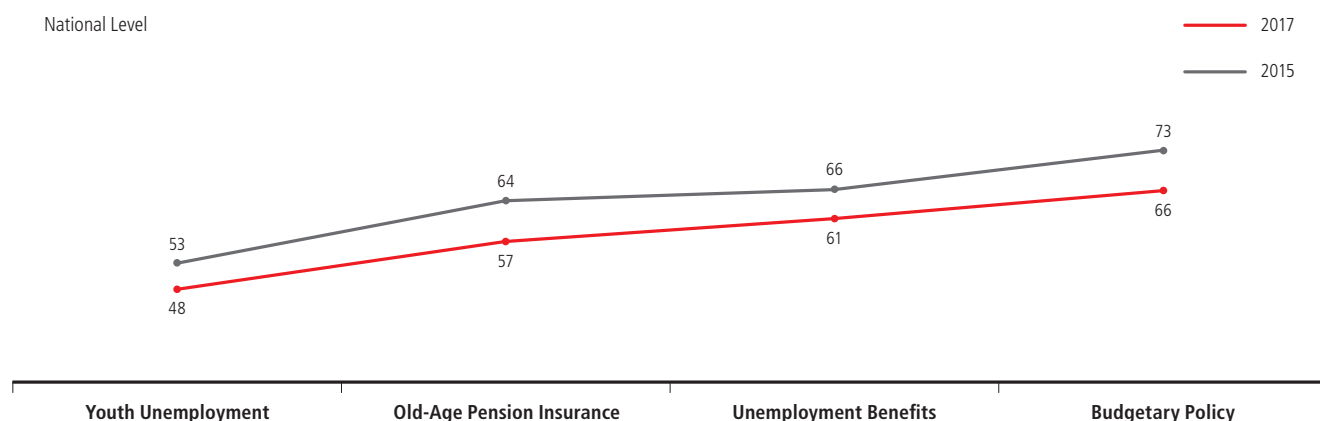
There are similar findings with regard to pension policy as well. A clear majority are in favour of leaving pension age and pension benefits in the domain of responsibility of national governments in six countries (between 58 and 67 per cent). Only majorities in Spain and Italy (at 53 per cent, respectively) can conceive of a transfer of competencies in this area to the EU. (See fig. 19)

The diagram above shows, however, that even in the area of budgetary and social policy the willingness to seek European solutions at the EU level has grown slightly in all the countries. This explicitly does not apply to Germany, however, where opposition to a shift in competencies is greater and undiminished. In spite of all the euphoria over Europe that has been rekindled, financial and social policy appear to still form the borderlines when it comes to preserving one's own prosperity.

Figure 19

National or European Competences

Policy Areas to Be Rather Dealt with at National Level – Compared with 2015



Question: I am going to name a number of policy issues. Please tell me for each issue whether, in your opinion, it should rather be dealt with at the European or at the national level.

Figures in per cent | Gap between figures shown and 100 percent is the equivalent of categories »do not know« and »prefer not to say«

Basis: Eligible voters

Source: policy matters

6 ACCEPTANCE OF EU RULES

Cohesion of the EU is not least based on the various rules accepted by all the Member States. At the heart of these are democracy, rule of law and adherence to human rights. This set of rules also includes free movement of persons, goods and labour, however. The latter has repeatedly been at focus in debates that have taken on a new importance with Brexit. The right of each and every EU citizen to look for a job in any and all EU States was reason for many persons in Great Britain to vote to leave the EU.

Reassuringly, this example did not have a copycat effect in other EU States: At 57 per cent, the percentage of citizens in the eight countries in the survey that agreed with freedom of movement for workers remained constant compared to autumn 2015. Still, one-third stated that the EU Member States should in principle be allowed to restrict the influx of workers from other EU States. Opinions differed significantly here, however, whereby the line of opposition – as was perhaps to be expected – does not run precisely between the countries of origin and countries of destination for workers. The preservation of free movement of workers meets with majority support in Spain and Italy, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, but also a clear majority in Germany, the main destination for EU employees seeking work, offering support for continued free choice of place to work within the EU. (See fig. 20)

The high level of agreement with the free movement of workers does not at the same time mean that free access

to social services in the country of destination is supported, however. A majority in all countries (56 per cent) is in favour of having the drawing of benefits made contingent upon whether beneficiaries have worked for a longer period of time in the respective country. Over one in every three persons surveyed is not willing to accept this restriction. A clear majority in Italy (71 per cent) is even in favour of each and every EU citizen in any country in which they live being allowed to receive social benefits regardless of whether they have worked there for a longer period of time or not. Over half of all Spaniards surveyed (53 per cent) also share this view.

In the other six countries, a clear majority is respectively in favour of linking social benefits to regular work being performed in the country. This attitude is particular prevalent in Germany and in the Netherlands. This is by no doubt influenced by the fear that persons from poorer EU countries would not come in search of work, but rather to receive relatively high social benefits – a fear that has apparently not lost any explosiveness in comparison to autumn 2015. (See fig. 21)

The demand for a common minimum social standard to apply throughout the EU³ is repeatedly heard not least in order to mitigate the incentive for migration within the EU due to different assessments and levels of social benefits. Opinions on this in the eight countries covered by the survey differ considerably. The introduction of such minimum standards meets with considerable agreement in Italy (74 per cent), Spain (71 per cent) and Slovakia (60 per

Figure 20

Acceptance of Rules

Worker Mobility – Compared with 2015

Should Workers Have the Unconditional Right to Seek Employment within Other Countries?

Should Workers Have the Unconditional Right to Seek Employment within Other Countries?

Total		57	34
ES	[+9]	75	17
SK		74	19
DE	[+11]	70	26
IT	[−4]	69	24
CZ	[−3]	61	30
SE		46	42
FR	[−7]	38	49
NL	[−9]	31	56

Question: There are several highly debated issues in the EU at the moment. We would like to hear your opinion to them.

Figures in per cent | Gap between figures shown and 100 percent is the equivalent of categories »do not know«, »prefer not to say

Basis: Eligible voters in the individual countries

Information in brackets: Comparison to FES 8-Country Study Autumn 2015

(Differences are shown when exceeding ±3 percentage points)

Source: policy matters

Figure 21

Acceptance of Rules

Welfare Entitlements – compared with 2015

Should EU Citizens Be Entitled to Social Benefits in Any Member Country They Currently Live in?

Or Should such an Entitlement Depend Upon whether They Have Worked in that Country for a Certain Period of Time?

Total		35	56
IT		71	22
ES	[+7]	53	41
SK	[+3]	34	61
FR	[−3]	30	57
DE	[+5]	25	71
CZ		24	64
SE	[−3]	22	66
NL		15	73

Question: There are several highly debated issues in the EU at the moment. We would like to hear your opinion to them.

Figures in per cent | Gap between figures shown and 100 percent is the equivalent of categories »do not know«, »prefer not to say

Basis: Eligible voters in the individual countries

Information in brackets: Comparison to FES 8-Country Study Autumn 2015

(Differences are shown when exceeding ±3 percentage points)

Source: policy matters

³ This demand was most recently tabled by Federal Minister of Labour Andrea Nahles in an article for the FAZ.

cent). This initiative meets with little enthusiasm in the Czech Republic (41 per cent), the Netherlands (38 per cent) and Sweden (33 per cent). A slight majority is in favour of keeping social policy in the domain of the Member States in principle in these three countries. Opinions are split on this issue in France and Germany. Half of the persons surveyed advocate minimum standards to respectively apply throughout Europe, among them especially supporters of leftist parties. The other half, which include above all constituents of right-wing parties, reject this.

Among the unwritten and highly controversial rules of the EU is the imperative to show solidarity not only for the members of the respective countries, but also between the Member Countries, which also implies a financial transfer between prosperous and poorer countries. Here as well, views in the various countries diverge, and this time as well the line of conflict does not run between the poorer and richer, or economically strong and economically weak countries. Majorities in countries facing economic problems like Spain (60 per cent), Slovakia (59 per cent) and Italy (53 per cent) advocate financial support of poorer countries by richer ones. But a clear majority is also in favour of this in Germany, where there seems to be an awareness that Germany would have to bear the greatest share of these benefits by far. One-third of German citizens consider it to be appropriate for each country to be responsible for its finances. Clear majorities in the Czech Republic and the Netherlands (61 and 65 per cent, respectively) also voice this harsh attitude. Opinions on this issue in Sweden and France are divided.

7 TRUST AND CONFIDENCE IN MEMBER STATES

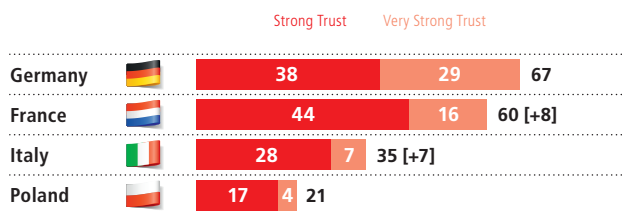
The strength of the EU depends not least on relations between its Member States, above all on whether and to what extent they trust each other. This goes not only for governments, but populations as well. In the EU a special role is played at the same time by trust in the two leading nations of France and Germany and their bilateral relations as well as people's assessment of the role of their own respective country in the EU. For this reason, trust of partner countries in these two nations, but also in their own country, was surveyed in 2015 – and in the very same way this time again in 2017. For reasons of comparison, trust and confidence in two additional important EU countries was ascertained – just like in 2015: in Italy and Poland, whose role following the upcoming Brexit will probably become more important.

The findings produced in the autumn of 2015 were very satisfactory on the whole from the perspective of Germans: trust and confidence in Germany was relatively great in all seven countries (65 per cent) in autumn 2015, while trust and confidence of Germans in their close ally France was also very pronounced (59 per cent) as was trust and confidence in the role that one's own country plays in the EU. France did not do so well. Although the French had roughly the same trust in the rising neighbour Germany as the Germans have in France (60 per cent), trust of the seven partner countries in France turned out to be rather modest at 52 per cent. Attitudes of the French towards their own country were also marked by self-doubt: Only around half had a great deal of trust (14 per cent) or at least much trust (39 per cent) in their own country.

Both figures improved significantly following the election of Emmanuel Macron as French President. Now six out of ten citizens from the seven partner countries state that they have trust and confidence in France, up eight percentage points. Only the Czech Republic registered a drop in trust (down 5 percentage points). The greatest trust and confidence is placed in France by Germans: 74 per cent (up 15 percentage points). This increase in trust and confidence is only surpassed by the Swedes (up 16 per cent), although at a significantly lower level (59 per cent). From the French perspective, the fact that its own citizens have restored faith in their own country (64 per cent/up 11 per cent) is probably even more important.

The increased esteem in which France is held is not at the expense of Germany, in which two out of three citizens continue to have trust and confidence in the seven partner states. The relationship of the French to their neighbouring country has even improved somewhat (65 per cent/up five per cent). Above all, the self-image of Germans has improved, as the role of Germany in the EU, which has grown in the meantime, is assessed as positive by 88 per cent of Germany's own citizens. Apparently, the country is largely living up to its growing importance in the EU in the view of its own population. So much self-confidence can also arouse distrust. This appears to be the case among the Czech population for instance, whose trust and confidence in their powerful neighbour has eroded perceptively (down 7 per cent). Germany has made few friends in the Czech

Figure 22
Trust in EU Member States
 Compared with 2015



Question: When you think of ... in its role as an EU member states: Is your trust in that country very strong, strong, weak or do you not trust it at all?

Figures in per cent | multiple responses | Gap between figures shown and 100 percent is the equivalent of categories »weak trust«, »no trust at all«, »do not know«, »prefer not to say«

Basis: Eligible voters

Information in brackets: Comparison to FES 8-Country Study Autumn 2015
 (Differences are shown when exceeding ± 3 percentage points)

Quelle: policy matters

population with its refugee policy, regarding which Czechs are relatively sceptical. On the whole, however, no noticeable decline in trust and confidence in Germany is to be witnessed in its relations with partner countries. (See fig. 22)

With the announced departure of Great Britain, Italy, in terms of population and economic power the third largest EU country, will automatically gain influence and importance in the future. Against this background, the message is probably of importance that substantially more trust and confidence is placed in the country now than back in 2015 (up 7 per cent). The improvement in the image of Rome is particularly salient in Germany (up 14 per cent) and Spain (up 10 per cent). At 35 per cent, the affirmation of faith across all countries is at a significantly lower level than in the cases of Germany and France, however. The distrust prevailing in other countries appears to be mirrored by Italians themselves: barely four out of ten Italians are positive about the role that their own country plays in the EU – the lowest level of self-perception out of all eight EU countries in the survey.

Poland displays even worse results with regard to its perception in other countries. Just like back in 2015, only one in every five persons in the countries in the EU surveyed have a positive view of the role of Poland, by far the biggest eastern European partner country. Nor does Poland have a good image even among its eastern European partner countries: Only one out of four respective persons in Slovakia and the Czech Republic trust their neighbouring country. Trust and confidence in Poland has eroded in four out of the six western countries since the last parliamentary elections, from which the conservative rightist party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) (in English: law and justice) emerged with an absolute majority.

8 TRUST AND CONFIDENCE IN POLITICAL PARTIES TO REPRESENT THE INTERESTS OF ONE'S OWN COUNTRY

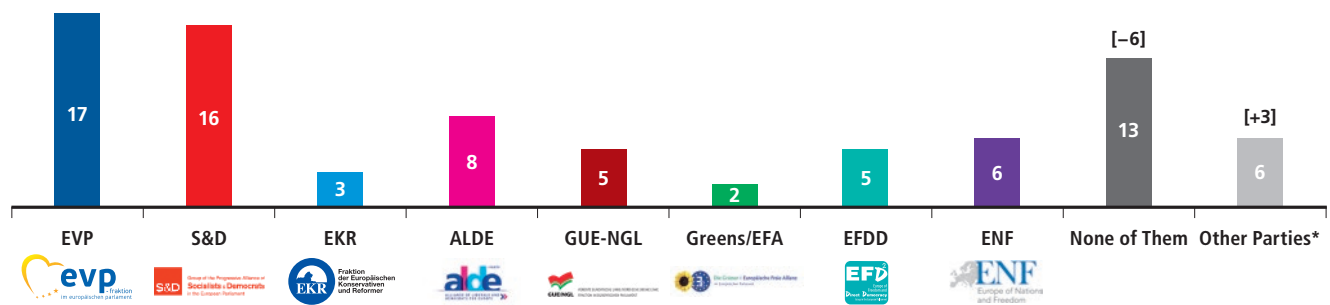
Trust and confidence in the EU depends not least on how well or poorly one considers the interest of one's own country to be represented in the Community. Here political parties and their leaders play a major role. Just like back in 2015, it was enquired in the current study once again which party the persons surveyed believed to best represent the interests of their own country.

Viewed across all eight countries, the wide distribution of trust in the various parties is striking. The previous dominance of the two major blocs, the Conservatives and Social Democrats, appears to be a thing of the past. 17 per cent of persons surveyed across all countries in the study place their trust and confidence in the parliamentary party group dominated by conservative/Christian Democratic parties, the European People's Party (EPP), when the representation of their national interests in the EU is concerned. Social Democratic parties obtain 16 per cent in the parliamentary party group of the Socialists & Democrats (S&D) – which means that these two traditional blocs taken together are only supported by one-third of citizens surveyed. Eight per cent place their trust more in liberal parties, five per cent in parties along the left part of the spectrum, three per cent in parties from the parliamentary party group of European Conservatives and Reformers (ECR) dominated by British Conservatives, and two per cent in parties in the green area of the spectrum. The competence ascribed to other parties that are not part of the large party families is remarkably great at six per cent. Most mentions were for Macron's newly founded party La République en Marche (LREM). It is not represented in the European Parliament and for this reason it has not had any reason thus far to join any parliamentary party group.

It is interesting to note the large share of the populist or right-wing populist parties in the parliamentary party group Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) and the party group European of Nations and Freedom (ENF), which a total of eleven per cent of the persons surveyed vest their trust in when it comes to Europe. Compared to 2015 this after all means a growth of two per cent – not necessarily a »thumbs-up« for the stepped-up efforts of EU States to close ranks more tightly. One positive finding countering this is that the share of persons who do not place their trust and confidence in any party in Europe has fallen from 19 to 13 per cent since 2015. (See fig. 23)

Trust and confidence in parties to be able to represent national interests in an adequate manner varies significantly from country to country. At the same time, it would appear that they all have one thing in common: most citizens in almost all countries place their hopes in the party from which the head of government comes in the respective country. In Germany this is the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) (45 per cent), in France it is Macron's La République en Marche (LREM), in Italy Partito Democratico (PD) (20 per cent), in Spain Partido Popular (PP) (24 per cent), in Sweden Socialdemokraterna (25 per cent), in the Netherlands Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD) (16 per cent),

Figure 23
Trust in European Policy
 Competence: Representation of National Interest with the EU – Compared with 2015



Question: Which party does, in your opinion, best represent your country's national interest with the EU?

Figures in per cent | Gap between figures shown and 100 percent is the equivalent of categories »do not know«, »prefer not to say«

Basis: Eligible voters

Information in brackets: Comparison to FES 8-Country Study Autumn 2015 (Differences are shown when exceeding ± 3 percentage points)

* incl. French Party »La République en Marche!«, which do not belongs to any European group so far (Status 24.7.2017)

Source: policy matters

and in Slovakia Sociálna Demokracia (SMER) (25 per cent). Solely in the Czech Republic is it not the party of the Social Democratic head of government in whom most trust is placed, but rather the liberal ANO 2011 (akce nespokojených občanů) (in English: Action of Dissatisfied Citizens) (23 per cent), which is, however, part of the coalition government.

9 RIGHT-WING POPULIST TENDENCIES IN EUROPE

One – if not *the* – main threat to the continued political existence of the European Union continues to lie in the strong appeal of right-wing populist parties in numerous Member States. Their common notorious demand to stop or even roll back European integration hangs like a Damocles sword over the heads of pro-European forces from election to election. Moreover, in countries like Poland and Hungary, in which national conservatives with authoritarian-populist tendencies govern at present, it can be seen how quickly respective constitutional systems stray from rule-of-law principles enshrined in the European community of values and can be moulded onto new, often anti-liberal standards.

In the first half of 2017, the European public awaited with bated breath the outcome of the Dutch parliamentary and French presidential elections: Above all the latter race held out the potential in the event of a victory by Marine Le Pen of wrecking the process of integration and moving the rise of right-wing authoritarian forces to a new level in western Europe as well.

Even if the French Front National (FN) as well as the Dutch Partij voor de vrijheid (PVV) of Geert Wilders ultimately failed to attain their electoral goals, the momentum of right-wing populist forces in Europe remains unbroken. This is demonstrated by the results of the study relating to voting intentions in favour of nationalistic, right-wing parties. (See fig. 24)

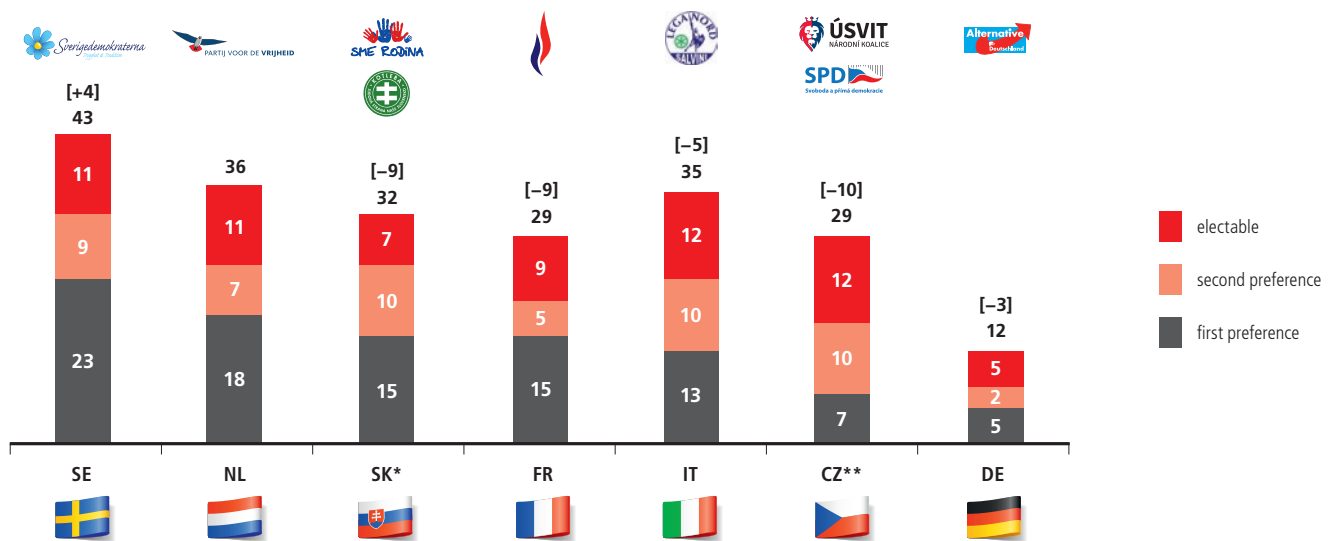
With the exception of Spain, where no party along these lines has been able to gain a foothold, right-wing populist or radical right-wing parties are key actors in the party landscape in seven out of the eight countries in the study. In two out of the eight countries examined, they are even in front of or share nose to nose with their competitors in terms of voters' intentions. In the Netherlands, for example, the party of Geert Wilders has once again captured the fancy of voters only a few months after its unexpectedly poor showing in parliamentary elections (13 per cent): at 19 per cent it is six percentage points ahead of the liberal-right-wing Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD) and Socialistische Partij (SP), each of which would currently receive 13 per cent. In Sweden Sverigedemokraterna (23 per cent) is only one percentage point behind the ruling Social Democrats (24 per cent) – unchanged in comparison to 2015.

Following its poor showing in parliamentary elections (13.2 per cent, eight seats), in France the Front National (FN), although trailing significantly behind the President's party, La République En Marche (LREM) (28 per cent), is still in front of the Conservative-Gaullist Les Républicains (LR) (ten per cent).

In the context of the continuing influx of refugees and a correspondingly tense situation, the Italian Lega Nord – in spite of its regional power base in northern Italy – would currently manage to win 13 per cent at the national level, i.e. six points less than the Partito Democratico (PD) of Prime Minister Gentiloni. This performance would probably have been even better were it not for another populist party, Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S) (in English: Five Star Movement), far ahead of the pack at present with 28 per cent.

The Slovakian right-wing populists' share of the electorate has more than doubled since 2015 (from seven to 15 per cent). This rise has gone hand in hand with a revamping of the party system, however, which is moreover characterised by a division into two parties: instead of Ľudová strana – Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko (HZDS) (in English: Movement for a Democratic Slovakia) and Slovenská národná

Figure 24
Eurosceptic Parties
 Electability of Right-Wing Populist Parties – compared with 2015



Question: Party preference: Which party would you be most willing to vote for?
Electability: Could you theoretically imagine voting for ...?

Figures in per cent | multiple responses | Gap between figures shown and 100 percent is the equivalent of categories »do not know«, »prefer not to say« and »No, impossible«

Basis: Eligible voters in the individual countries

Information in brackets: Comparison to FES 8-Country Study Autumn 2015 (Differences are shown when exceeding ± 3 percentage points)

* 2015: »Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko« & »Slovenská národná strana« | 2017: Kotleba – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko & »Sme Rodina«

** 2015: »Úsvit přímé demokracie« | 2017: »Úsvit – Národní Koalice« & »Svoboda a přímá demokracie«

Source: policy matters

strana (SNS) (in English: Slovakian National Party), it is at present Kotleba – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko (ĽS Naše Slovensko) (in English: Our Slovakia People's Party) and Sme Rodina (SR) (in English: We are Family) that stand for a Slovakian version of rightist populism/right-wing nationalism.

Support for right-wing nationalist parties in the Czech Republic (seven per cent) remains unchanged, however, and has moreover now split into two parties: Úsvit – Národní Koalice (in English: Dawn – National Coalition) und Svoboda a přímá demokracie (SPD) (in English: Freedom and Direct Democracy).

By comparison, in the wake of the latest peak in the refugee crisis in Germany at the end of 2015/beginning of 2016, backing for the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) has returned to the same level as in autumn 2015: five per cent of persons surveyed would vote for this party in the Bundestag elections – a relatively low figure in the European context.

In spite of the unabated surge in support for right-wing populist parties in the direct voting intentions of citizens, there is a certain waning tendency to be witnessed with regard to the voter potential⁴ of these parties – at a high

level. Although these parties can place their hopes in a total potential of 30 to over 40 per cent in six out of eight countries, with the exception of the head of this list, Sweden (43 per cent, up 4 percentage points) and the Netherlands (36 per cent, unchanged) the overall voter potential of the respective parties in the other five countries has experienced a more or less steep drop. This is most pronounced in France (29 per cent, down 9 points) and in the two Visegrád States of the Czech Republic (29 per cent, down 10 points) and Slovakia (32 per cent, down 9 points). The right-wing populist potential in Italy and Germany has also contracted by five percentage points in each State since 2015.

This can be interpreted as an indication that after being confronted with the effects of actual victories of right-wing populists (Brexit, the election of Donald Trump as US President) and near victories of rightists (Marine Le Pen in the French presidential elections), their overall attractiveness in European States has begun to fade.

Nevertheless, it would appear eminently plausible that backing for right-wing nationalist parties could soar once more if the situation comes to a head again with regard to various »trigger topics«: A renewed increase in numbers of refugees or further internal European conflicts could cause a renewed upwelling of right-wing populist potential. Even in Spain, which has thus far been spared right-wing populist parties, this security is dissipating. One out of three Spanish voters after all state that they could imagine at least in principle that they could vote for such a party if one threw its hat into the ring.

⁴ The potential is composed of two groups: persons eligible to vote who, although the name another party as their first preference, but list right-wing populist parties as their second preference if the former to not stand for election, and persons voting for other parties, undecided and non-voters, who in principle would not cast their vote for any right-wing party (named).

On the whole, it is apparent that – analogously to voter topography in the Brexit – right-wing populism has its cradle in rural areas. With the exception of Germany and Sweden, where the first preferences stated for AfD and Sweden Democrats are relatively speaking roughly equal in rural and urban areas, a significant disparity can be seen between rural and urban areas. The biggest disparity at the same time is to be found in Slovakia, where right-wing populists in the countryside garner 20 per cent, while in urban centres they only receive nine per cent of first preferences. This gap is six percentage points in France and the Netherlands, while in Italy and the Czech Republic it is still three percentage points.

CONCLUSION

The EU has gone through probably the most difficult decade since its inception. It has been marked by external crises such as the financial and economic crisis, the Ukraine conflict and conflicts in the Middle East, which for their part triggered the refugee crisis. On top of all this, there have been problems within the Community: the Euro crisis, following in the heels of the Greek crisis. The effects of these crises have not yet been fully dealt with – and already the EU sees itself confronted with new challenges. In part, these are exogenous, such as increasingly critical relations with Turkey and relations with the USA, which have become more difficult under the new US President Trump. In part, they affect the European Community directly: the first exit of a Member State and authoritarian tendencies in some eastern European States are casting serious doubts on the cohesion of the EU for the first time.

These challenges are also reflected in the current opinion of the population of eight European States. Coping with the refugee crisis continues to be seen as the most important task of the European Union, while in addition combatting terrorism and the preservation of peace are considered the most urgent tasks at hand. Large sections of the population fear that Brexit could have a negative impact on the European Union. Anti-EU tendencies that can still be perceived in populations, in part manifested in the broad support for right-wing populist parties, give further cause for concern.

On the whole, however, the findings offer grounds for hope. As a consequence of a Member State leaving for the first time, majorities in seven out of the eight countries advocate tighter cooperation among the remaining Member States. And in all countries at present significantly more citizens are convinced that EU membership is positive for their country. Membership in the EU community is today being viewed once again as more of an opportunity than risk, and a majority believe that the EU meets its main purpose – bringing about prosperity. As recently as 2015, a majority associated the EU more with declining prosperity. Apparently, not least the new challenges have made citizens more aware of the value that cooperation between European States has to offer for their country, but also for them personally.

From a German perspective, the fact that above all Germans have developed a new sensitivity to the benefits which the country derives from its membership in the EU is especially heartening. The conviction that it is time for more

and not less common action is nowhere as pronounced as in the German population. And above all the realisation that Germany in many respects profits from the European Community more than other States has grown.

The willingness to shift more competencies from the national to the European level in order to strengthen the Community has also risen in all countries. This goes in particular for foreign and security policy, but also for arrangements governing the taxation of multinational corporations as well as the structure and design of trade relations of EU countries with third countries. Significant differences remain, however, with regard to responsibility for refugee policy: The insistence of citizens for a pan-EU allocation of refugees in those States that are currently bearing the brunt of immigration contrasts with the marked resolve of the two eastern European States to keep this competence in the domain of their own countries in order not to have to take on any, or only a few refugees.

With all the willingness to shift competencies to the EU, clear constraints can also be seen. This applies especially to budgetary sovereignty, but also to pension and unemployment insurance, with regard to which large majorities continue to favour their own governments' responsibility. Majorities in all eight countries furthermore call for the introduction of a right for their national parliaments to object to and appeal decisions of the EU. Another »emergency brake« against unpopular decisions in Brussels is also being voiced – more say for citizens: In all eight countries clear majorities speak out in favour of referendums on important decisions.

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