

Focus on Romania

European Sovereignty

Ipsos survey on behalf of the Fondation Jean-Jaurès and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

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Survey conducted by Ipsos on behalf of the Fondation Jean-Jaurès and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. Some 8,000 people were interviewed over the internet via Ipsos' Access Panel between 28 December 2020 and 8 January 2021, making up eight samples of 1,000 persons representative of the national population aged 18 and over in France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Spain and Sweden. The sampling was carried out in accordance with the quota method (sex, age, occupation, rural/urban location, region). This summary presents the results on Romania.

SOVEREIGNTY? AN AMBIVALENT TERM IN ROMANIA

Does Romania's turbulent political history colour people's perceptions of sovereignty? After a succession of authoritarian regimes in the twentieth century, Romanians have a positive view of the term. »Sovereignty« spontaneously conjures up »something positive« for 60% of those interviewed, »something negative« for 10% and »neither positive nor negative« for 23%. While falling short of the level observed in Germany (73%), this is above average for the eight countries in the survey (46% positive associations), and almost the opposite of what is found in France (only 29% positive associations) or Italy (21%).

Nevertheless, 37% of Romanians consider the notion »outdated«, which is markedly above the European average (32%), as against only 25% who consider it to be »modern« and 33% »neither one nor the other«. The majority of respondents (62%) do not attribute any political affiliation to sovereignty, although among those who do, it is rather associated with the right (mentioned by 16%) than with the left (9%). These scores place Romanians somewhere in the middle ground in relation to the other countries in the survey. Sovereignty generally has positive connotations for a solid majority of Romanians, although the particular features they attribute to it are rather mixed.

This ambivalence is reflected in the words respondents associate with it. Behind »independence« (mentioned by 55%) and »power« (41%), two terms ranked top overall among the various countries, 32% of Romanians choose »nationalism« and 30% »freedom«. This may seem a minor point, but Romania is the only country in which these two words are ranked at more or less the same level, and, what is more, ranked in third and fourth positions. Elsewhere people opt for one or the other: 61% of Poles, for example, associate sovereignty and freedom, but only 6% link sovereignty and nationalism; by contrast, 58% of Italians choose »nationalism«, but only 13% »freedom«. The 30% of Romanians who associate sovereignty with the word freedom are well distributed among the population, while those who associate it with the word »nationalism« tend to be those under 50 years of age and supporters of the radical right (mentioned by around 40% in each of these categories).

ROMANIANS HAVE A POSITIVE PERCEPTION OF EUROPEAN SOVEREIGNTY, BUT TEND TO OPPOSE IT TO NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY

The relative ambiguity of the term sovereignty in Romania does not adversely affect people's understanding of related expressions. On the contrary, 84 % of Romanians have a good idea of what »national sovereignty« means (as against 71 % on average in the eight countries in the survey), 77 % have a good idea of what »European sovereignty« means (63 % on average) and 79 % understand what is meant by »strategic autonomy« (61 % on average). In each instance, Romania records the highest level of understanding.

The three expressions are also viewed particularly positively in Romania: 76 % have »very« or »fairly« positive assumptions about national sovereignty (as against a 57 % European average, +19 percentage points), 66 % in relation to »European sovereignty« (52 % on average, +14 percentage points) and 70 % with regard to »strategic autonomy« (49 % on average, +21 percentage points). Romanians also stand out in terms of the intensity of their responses, with higher scores for »very positive« for each expression than those observed in the other countries. It's worth noting, however, that European sovereignty evokes less enthusiasm among young Romanians (57 %) than among their elders (77 % among those 60 years of age or above).

The notion of European sovereignty is therefore both well understood across the board and has positive connotations in Romania. Nevertheless, associating the terms sovereignty and Europe raises questions. While a slight majority of those asked (53 %) believe that it is possible to use these words together »because European sovereignty and national sovereignty are complementary«, a similar proportion (47 %) believe rather that »the two terms are contradictory because sovereignty refers above all to the nation«. Opinion is very divided, more so than the European average (58 % consider the two words to be »complementary«, 42 % »contradictory«), and above all a lot more than is observed in the countries in which, as in Romania, there is a positive perception of European sovereignty. In Germany, for example, 73 % of those asked believe that the two words go well together, as against only 27 % who take the opposite view. This difference can perhaps be explained by the ambiguous perception of the notion of sovereignty in Romania. Two-thirds of Romanians associate the expression with »living in accordance with one's own values and preferences«, 60 % with »independence in relation to others«, but only 29 % with »cooperation freely agreed with one's partners«. In Germany, this notion of cooperation is mentioned by just under half (49 %).

VIRTUAL UNANIMITY IN ROMANIA ON STRENGTHENING EUROPEAN SOVEREIGNTY AND NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY

But do people believe that Europe is sovereign today? While on average views are divided among the eight countries in the

survey (51 % / 49 %), Romania is one of the countries in which people are most positive on this point, with 63 % of affirmative responses, as against only 37 % who say »no«.

Romanians are, on the other hand, much more demanding with regard to the conditions that have to be met in order to be able to say that such sovereignty has been attained. For a very large majority, it is thus »essential« that Europe has: »a strong economy« (mentioned by 82 % in Romania, as against a European average of 69 %); »a common security and defence policy« (75 %, 67 % on average); »safeguards on European production in such strategic areas as food and health« (75 %, 65 %); »strong defence of its own values – democracy, rule of law – both internally and externally« (73 %, 61 %); »European energy sources« (72 % / 60 %); »control over the EU's external borders« (68 %, 59 %); »its own tax revenues« (68 %, 53 %); »control over strategic infrastructure (ports, airports, energy ...)« (67 %, 52 %); »common instruments for combating foreign interference« (66 %, 58 %); and »control over digital infrastructure (social networks, cloud, 5G)« (60 %, 46 %). More than in any other country in the sample Romanians consider each of these points to be »essential«.

In any case, for 83 % of Romanians (and 73 % of Europeans in general), European sovereignty should be strengthened. It is not up for question, and support for such strengthening in Romania is almost as massive as for the idea of »strengthening national sovereignty« (91 %). The main reason offered (»the terrorist threat«, mentioned by 44 %) also ranks first on average in the eight countries in the survey. Next comes »the threat to health« (33 % in Romania, with a European average of 31 %) and »their country's lack of clout at international level« (31 %, 27 %). Romanians seem less concerned than their neighbours about »the challenge of climate change« (mentioned by only 16 %, as against a European average of 34 %), while on the contrary they are more alarmed by »Russia's great-power ambitions«: 21 % in Romania and 13 % on average, although this is far below the levels observed in Latvia (31 %) and Poland (30 %).

As in Latvia (41 %), Poland (22 %) and Spain (24 %), the obstacle to strengthening European sovereignty mentioned most often in Romania (36 %) is »pressure from certain foreign countries in whose interest it is that Europe does not become stronger«. This is followed by »the current weakness of the European institutions (Commission, Parliament)« (19 %). »The fact that certain European countries are led by nationalists« (14 %, as against 23 % on average for the eight countries in the survey), »cultural differences between European countries« (11 %), »popular reluctance in different European countries« (10 %) and »pressure from big industrial corporations or digital platforms« (10 %) lag some way behind.

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