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FLASH EUROBAROMETER 550

EU challenges and priorities

EUROBAROMETER REPORT
JUNE-JULY 2024



Survey conducted by Ipsos European Public Affairs at the request of the European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication

Survey coordinated by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM “Media Monitoring and Eurobarometer” Unit)

This document does not represent the point of view of the European Commission. The interpretations and opinions contained in it are solely those of the authors.

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Introduction

This Flash Eurobarometer survey provides an overview of EU citizens' perceptions and expectations regarding the future of the European Union (EU). It examines key themes, such as: (1) optimism about the EU's future, (2) perceived strengths and challenges of the EU, (3) priority areas for the EU, (4) global challenges impacting the EU, (5) the state of democracy in the EU, and (6) values best embodied by the EU – compared to other countries in the world. The study also explores EU citizens' confidence in the EU's economic performance and their concerns about the EU's security in the next five years.

On behalf of the European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, Ipsos European Public Affairs interviewed a representative sample of EU citizens, aged 15 and over, in each of the 27 Member States of the EU. Between 25 June and 2 July 2024, 25 658 interviews were conducted via computer-assisted web interviewing (CAWI), using Ipsos online panels and their partner network.

Notes

- Survey results are subject to sampling tolerances meaning that not all apparent differences between countries and socio-demographic groups may be statistically

significant. Thus, only differences that are statistically significant (at the 5% confidence level) – i.e. where it can be reasonably certain that they are unlikely to have occurred by chance – are highlighted in the text.

- Survey data are weighted to marginal age by gender population distributions using post-stratification weighting. The EU27 are weighted according to the size of the 15+ population of each country.
- Percentages may not add up to 100%, as they are rounded to the nearest percent. Due to rounding, it may also happen that the percentages for separate response options do not exactly add up to the totals mentioned in the text. Response percentages exceed 100% if the question allowed respondents to select multiple responses.
- The graphs for Q3 include differences in percentage points compared to Flash Eurobarometer 533 (conducted in August 2023).¹ Trend differences are calculated from percentages with one decimal and are then rounded to the nearest integer.
- In this report, countries are referred to by their official abbreviation. The abbreviations used in this report are indicated below.

BE  Belgium	FR  France	NL  Netherlands
BG  Bulgaria	HR  Croatia	AT  Austria
CZ  Czechia	IT  Italy	PL  Poland
DK  Denmark	CY  Rep. of Cyprus*	PT  Portugal
DE  Germany	LV  Latvia	RO  Romania
EE  Estonia	LT  Lithuania	SI  Slovenia
IE  Ireland	LU  Luxembourg	SK  Slovakia
EL  Greece	HU  Hungary	FI  Finland
ES  Spain	MT  Malta	SE  Sweden

* Cyprus as a whole is one of the 27 EU Member States. For practical reasons, interviews are only carried out in the part of the country controlled by the government of the Republic of Cyprus.

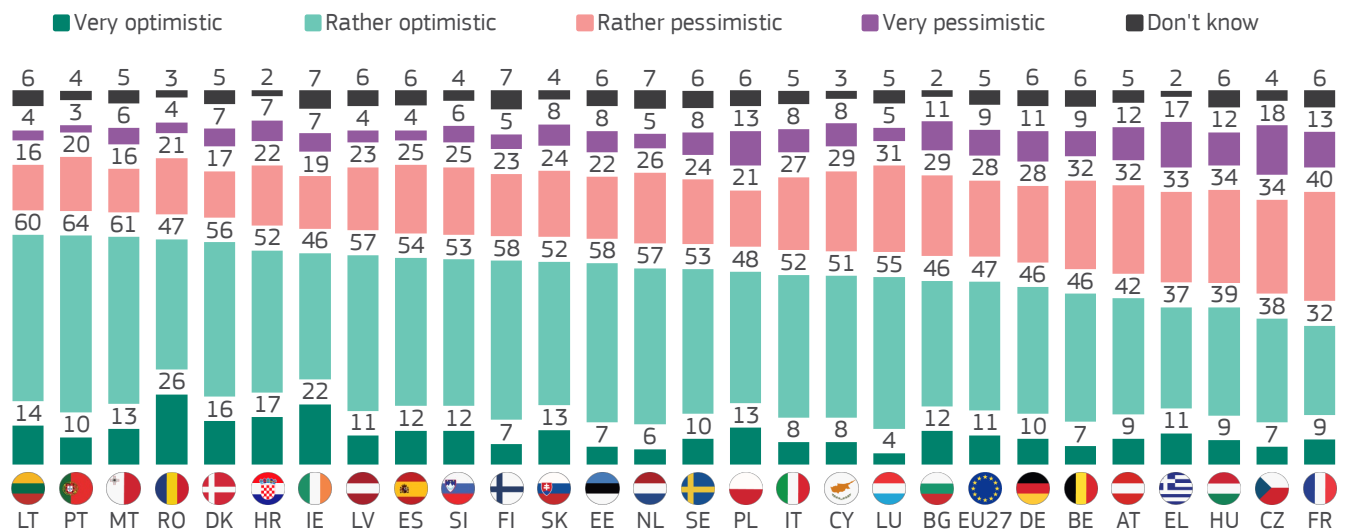
¹ See: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3092>

1. Optimism about the future of the EU

At the EU level, close to six in ten respondents (58%) are optimistic about the future of the EU, with 11% replying they are 'very optimistic' and 47% 'rather optimistic'. Fewer respondents report being pessimistic about the future of the EU: 9% are 'very pessimistic' and 28% 'rather pessimistic'.

In 23 Member States, more than 50% of respondents are 'very' or 'rather' optimistic about the future of the EU. At the highest end of the country ranking, in Lithuania, three-quarters of respondents are optimistic about the future of the EU (14% are 'very optimistic' and 60% 'rather optimistic'). At the lowest end of the country ranking, in France, the total share being optimistic about the future of the EU is just 42%.

Q1 Please tell me if you are very optimistic, rather optimistic, rather pessimistic or very pessimistic regarding the future of the European Union (EU)?



(%) Base: n=25 658 – All respondents

2. Strengths, challenges, and priorities of the EU

2.1. Perceptions about the strengths of the EU

Presented with a list of ten strengths, the largest shares of respondents select **the EU's respect for democracy, human rights and the rule of law** (38%), **the economic, industrial and trading power of the EU** (34%) and **the good relationships and solidarity between the EU's Member States** (28%) as main strengths of the EU.

Another three strengths are each selected by more than one in five respondents: **the standard of living of EU citizens** (23%), **the EU's commitment to protecting the climate and the environment** (23%) and **the EU's ability to promote peace and democracy outside its borders** (21%).

Smaller shares of under one in six select the social protection systems in the Member States (16%) and the EU's technological advancements

and digital infrastructure (15%). One in ten respondents mention the EU's ability to deal with irregular migration and integration issues (11%) and a similar share refer to the skills and talents of EU citizens (10%).

Just one in ten respondents reply that none of the strengths listed in the survey are strengths of the EU.

In 15 Member States, **the EU's respect for democracy, human rights and the rule of law** is the (joint) most-selected strength of the EU. The share indicating respect for democracy, human rights and the rule of law as one of the main strengths of the EU ranges from 26% in Czechia to 55% in Portugal.

In 11 Member States, the (joint) most-frequently cited strength of the EU is **its economic, industrial and trading power**. The share selecting this strength ranges from 26% in Finland, Greece, and Sweden to 43% in Slovenia.

Q2 In your opinion, which of the following do you think are the main strengths of the EU? Please select up to three answers. [MULTIPLE ANSWERS]



(%) Base: n=25 658 – All respondents

2.2. Opinions about the EU's current main challenges

Half of respondents across the EU (50%) think that **the war in Ukraine is one of the current main challenges the EU is facing**. This challenge is the top-ranking one out of the ten challenges presented to respondents. **Irregular migration** (selected by 41%) and **environmental issues and climate change** (35%) complete the top-three of current main challenges for the EU.

About one in three respondents (32%) think that one of the main challenges of the EU is **the cost of living** and about three in ten (29%) mention **terrorism and security issues**.

Four challenges are each selected by about one in five respondents: social inequalities (21%), the conflict in the Middle East (20%), insufficient economic growth (19%) and disinformation and information manipulation (19%). Less than one in ten respondents (8%) select the impact of digital technologies on the society as one of the main challenges for the EU.

In all but three Member States, **the war in Ukraine** is the (joint) most-mentioned challenge currently being faced by the EU. The share of respondents indicating the war in Ukraine as one of the main challenges being faced by the EU varies between 28% in Cyprus and 74% in Lithuania.

In two Member States, respondents are most likely to select **irregular migration** as one of the main challenges being faced by the EU; this applies to Cyprus (64%) and Austria (48%). In Czechia (54%) and Slovenia (52%), equal shares select irregular migration and the war in Ukraine. The share of respondents indicating irregular migration as one of the main challenges being faced by the EU varies between 23% in Finland and 64% in Cyprus.

Environmental issues and climate change – the third-ranking challenge at EU level – is selected by between 16% of respondents in Estonia and Latvia, and 48% of respondents in the Netherlands.

Q4 Which of the following do you think are the current main challenges the EU is facing?
 Please select up to three answers. [MULTIPLE ANSWERS]



(%) Base: n=25 658 – All respondents

2.3. Views about areas the EU should address as a priority

EU citizens were also asked **which areas they think the EU should address as a priority** (they could select up to three responses from a list of 15).

In the joint first place come **environment and climate change** and **irregular migration**, both selected by 33% of respondents. About three in ten respondents (29%) think the EU should address **security and defence** as a priority. A quarter of respondents (25%) answer that the EU should prioritise **the war in Ukraine**. **Public health** (21%), and **jobs, social equality and skills** (20%) are each selected as a priority for the EU by about one in five respondents.

Respondents are less likely to think the EU should prioritise democracy and the rule of law (18%), agriculture and food security (18%), energy (17%), economy and public finances (15%), education and training (13%), industry and competitiveness (11%). Finally, the smallest

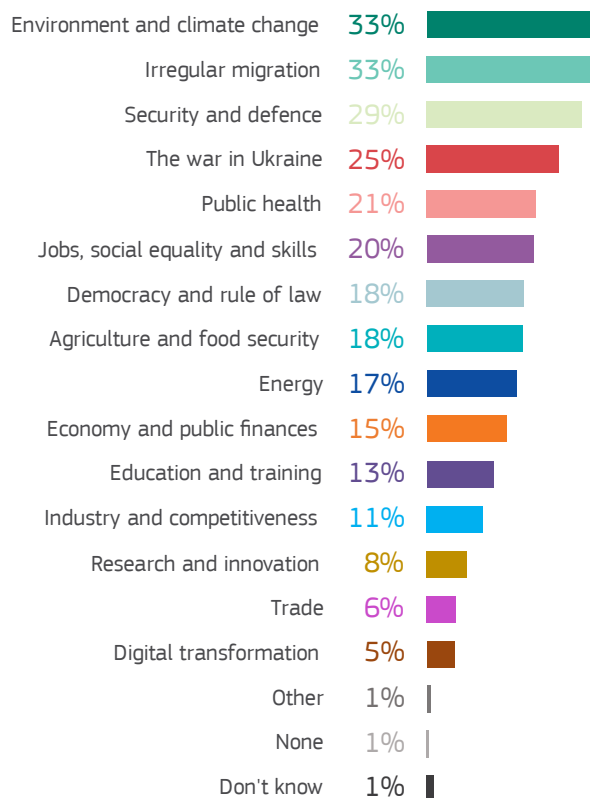
shares think the EU should prioritise research and innovation (8%), trade (6%) and the digital transformation (5%).

In nine Member States, **environment and climate change** is selected by the (joint) largest share of respondents as one of the area the EU should prioritise. The share of respondents thinking that environment and climate change should be prioritised by the EU ranges from 11% in Estonia and 12% in Latvia to 48% in Malta.

In another nine Member States, the largest share of respondents think that the EU should prioritise **irregular migration**. In Spain, irregular migration, and environment and climate change are selected by equal shares (35%). The proportion selecting irregular migration as an EU priority ranges from 17% in both Finland and Romania, to 50% in Cyprus.

In six Member States, **security and defence** is the top-ranking priority. This applies, for instance, to Estonia (52%) and Lithuania (51%). In contrast, just 20% of respondents see this as a priority in Italy.

Q6 Which of the following areas do you think the EU should address as a priority? Please select up to three answers. [MULTIPLE ANSWERS]



(%) Base: n=25 658 – All respondents

3. Perceived global challenges for the future of the EU

More than four in ten respondents (44%) consider **conflicts in the world to be one of the main global challenges for the future of the EU**. This is closely followed by **climate change and environmental issues** (selected by 42% of respondents) and **irregular migration** (40%).

Between one in five and one in four respondents think that the main global challenges for the future of the EU are **terrorism** (27%), **breakdown in global relations between countries** (25%), **cyber and hybrid threats and new forms of conflicts** (23%) and **risk that the EU will lose its economic independence** (22%).

Small shares select organised crime (17%), the decline of the proportion of the European population in the world (14%) and the risks arising from new technologies (11%) as main global challenges for the future of the EU.

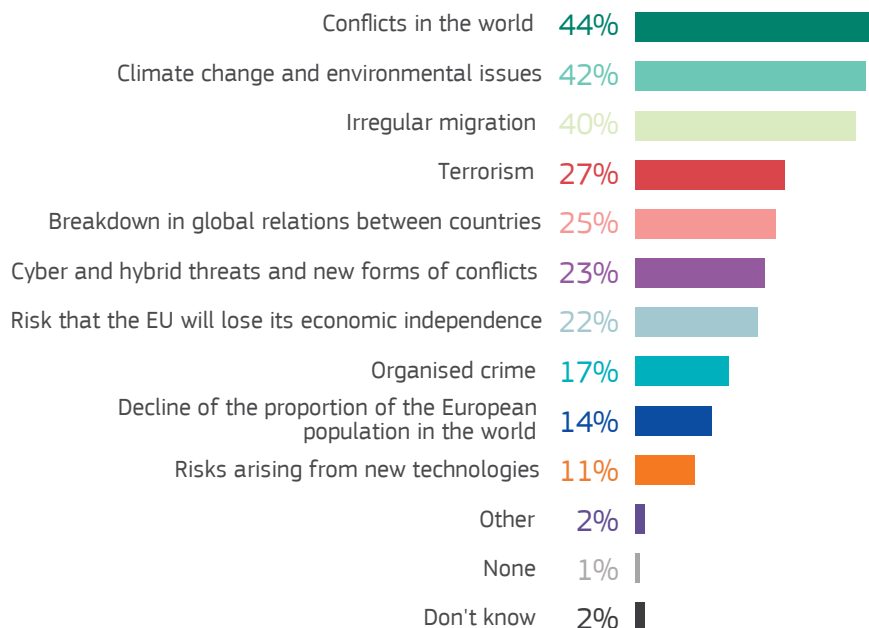
In 14 Member States, **conflicts in the world** is the (joint) most-selected global challenge for the future of the EU. Conflicts in the world is selected

by more than half of respondents in Lithuania and Portugal (both 55%), as well as in Finland and Luxembourg (both 52%). In contrast, 37% of respondents identify this challenge in Czechia and Bulgaria.

In six Member States, respondents are most likely to consider **climate change and environmental issues** as one of the main global challenges for the future of the EU. In France and Spain, this is the joint top-ranking challenge. At least half of respondents select this challenge in Malta (59%), Italy (51%) and the Netherlands (50%), compared to just about one in four respondents in Latvia (24%) and Estonia (26%).

In ten Member States, **irregular migration** is the (joint) most-selected global challenge for the future of the EU. Cyprus (60%) has the highest share of respondents selecting irregular migration, followed – at a distance – by Malta (52%), Czechia (52%) and Poland (50%). Finland is found at the bottom of the country ranking, with 23% of respondents selecting this challenge.

Q5 Which of the following do you think are the main global challenges for the future of the EU? Please select up to three answers. [MULTIPLE ANSWERS]



(%) Base: n=25 658 – All respondents

4. Democracy in the EU

4.1. Perceived threats to democracy in the EU

Out of a list of ten threats to democracy, **growing distrust and scepticism towards democratic institutions** (36%) and **false and/or misleading information in general circulating online and offline** (34%) are the two most-selected ones. These threats are followed by **propaganda and false and/or misleading information from a non-democratic foreign source** (31%), **covert foreign interference in the politics and economy of [their] country, including through financing of domestic actors** (30%) and **lack of engagement and interest in politics and elections among regular citizens** (27%).

Lack of opportunities for citizens to voice their opinions (20%) and lack of knowledge among voters about the functioning of democratic processes (19%) are each cited by about one in five respondents. The smallest shares mention as threats the destabilisation of electoral

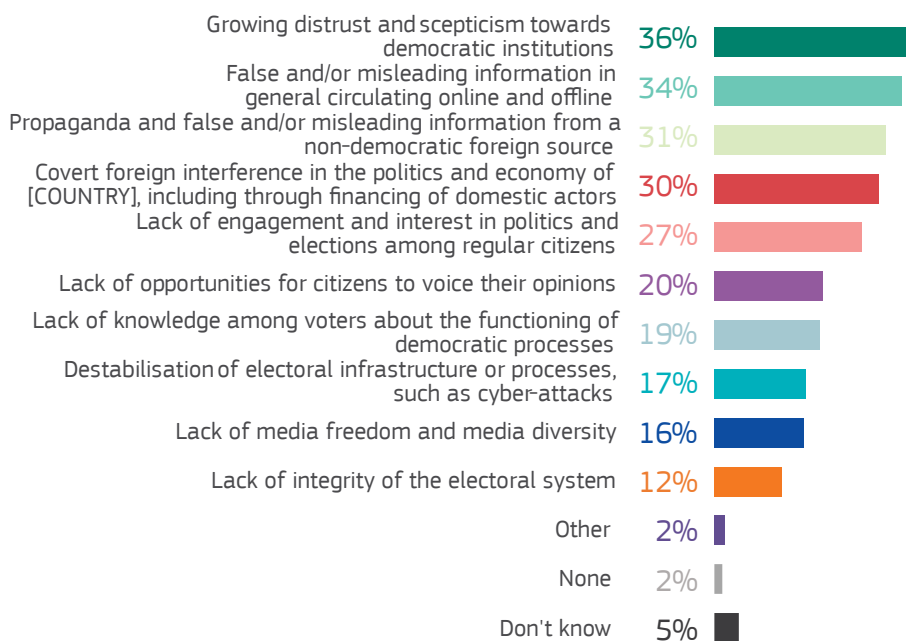
infrastructure or processes, such as via cyber-attacks (17%), lack of media freedom and media diversity (16%) and lack of integrity of the electoral system (12%).

Just a handful of respondents (2%) reply that none of the threats listed in the survey constitute a serious threat to democracy in the EU.

Growing distrust and scepticism towards democratic institutions ranks first as one of the most serious threats to democracy in the EU in ten Member States. In Estonia and the Netherlands, it is the joint highest-ranking threat. In Luxembourg, close to half of respondents (47%) cite this threat, in contrast with about a quarter of respondents in Hungary (24%) and Sweden (26%).

False and/or misleading information in general circulating online and offline is the (joint) most-selected threat to democracy in the EU in 11 Member States. The share of respondents choosing this threat is the highest in Malta (46%), Slovakia (45%) and Ireland (43%) and the lowest in Italy (25%) and Bulgaria (26%).

Q7 In your view, which of the following are the most serious threats to democracy in the EU? Please select up to three answers. [MULTIPLE ANSWERS]



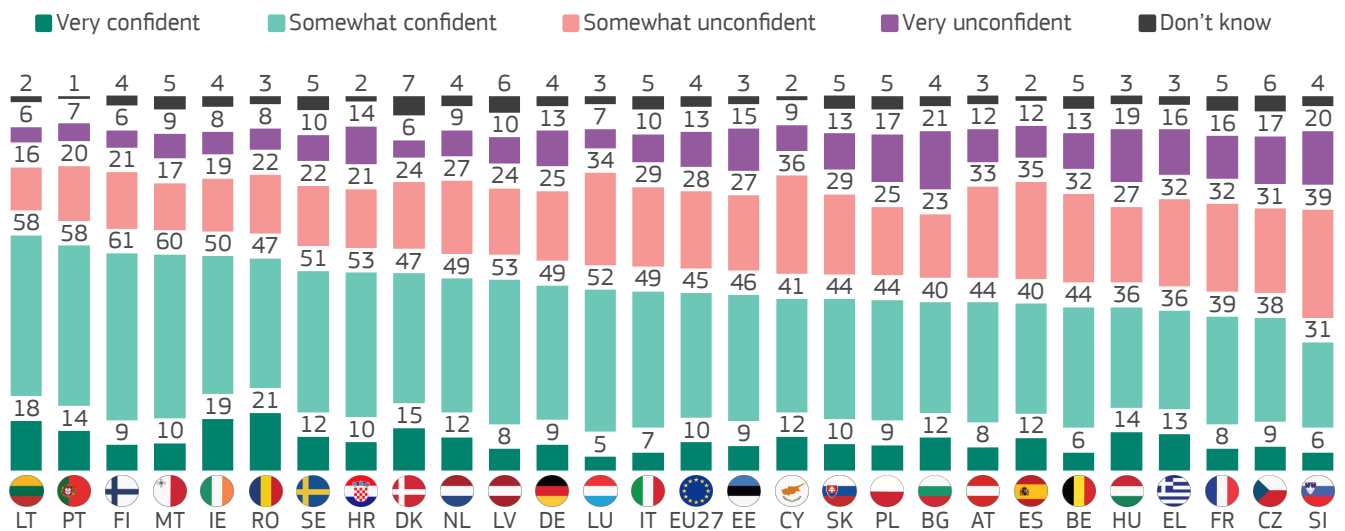
(%) Base: n=25 658 – All respondents

4.2. Expected strength of the EU's democracy

Over half of respondents (55%) express confidence in the strength of the EU's democracy in the next five years (10% feel 'very confident' and 45% 'somewhat confident'). In contrast, about four in ten respondents answer that they are not confident about the strength of the EU's democracy (28% are 'somewhat unconfident' and 13% 'very unconfident').

There is a large variation across the Member States in the proportion of respondents having confidence in the strength of the EU's democracy in the next five years. In Lithuania, more than three-quarters of respondents report being confident (18% are 'very confident' and 58% 'somewhat confident'). In Slovenia, on the other hand, only about half as many respondents (37%) express confidence in the EU's democracy.

Q8 How confident are you in the strength of the EU's democracy in the next five years?



(%) Base: n=25 658 – All respondents

5. Outlook for the EU: economy and security

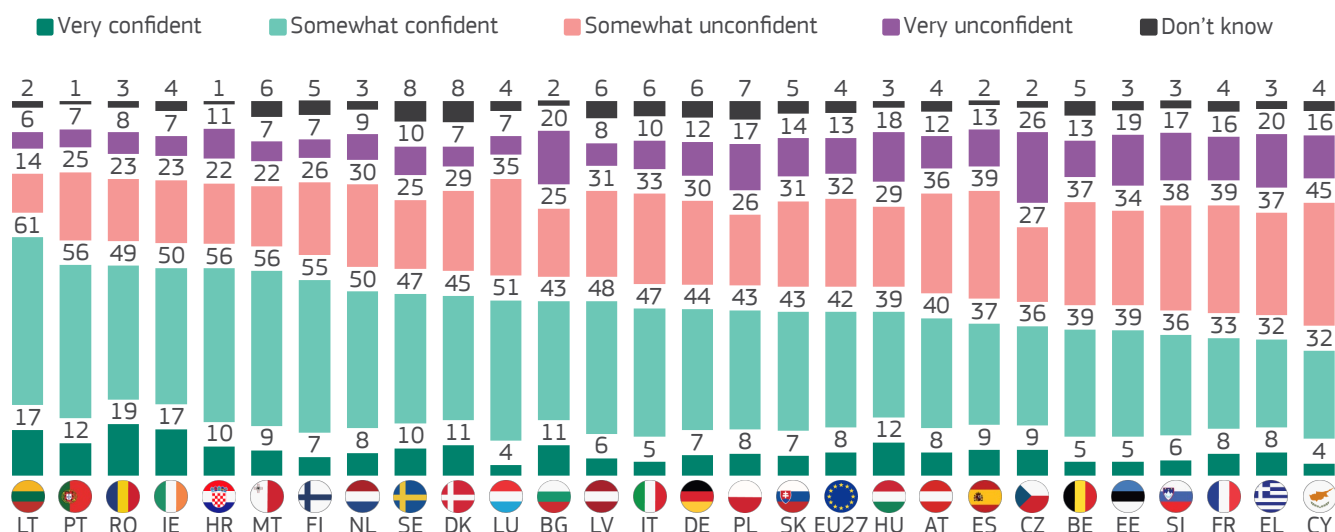
5.1. Confidence in the EU's economy

One in two respondents feel confident about the performance of the EU's economy in the next five years (8% feel 'very confident' and 42% 'somewhat confident').

More than four in ten respondents, on the other hand, do not feel confident about the EU's economic performance (32% are 'somewhat unconfident' and 13% 'very unconfident').

In 18 Member States, at least half of respondents feel 'very' or 'somewhat' confident about the performance of the EU's economy in the next five years. Lithuania stands out with more than three-quarters of respondents being confident about the EU's economy (17% are 'very confident' and 61% 'somewhat confident'). In contrast, confidence about the performance of the EU's economy is lowest in Cyprus (36%). Other Member States at the lower end of the country ranking include Greece (40%), France (41%) and Slovenia (42%).

Q9 How confident are you in the performance of the EU's economy in the next five years?



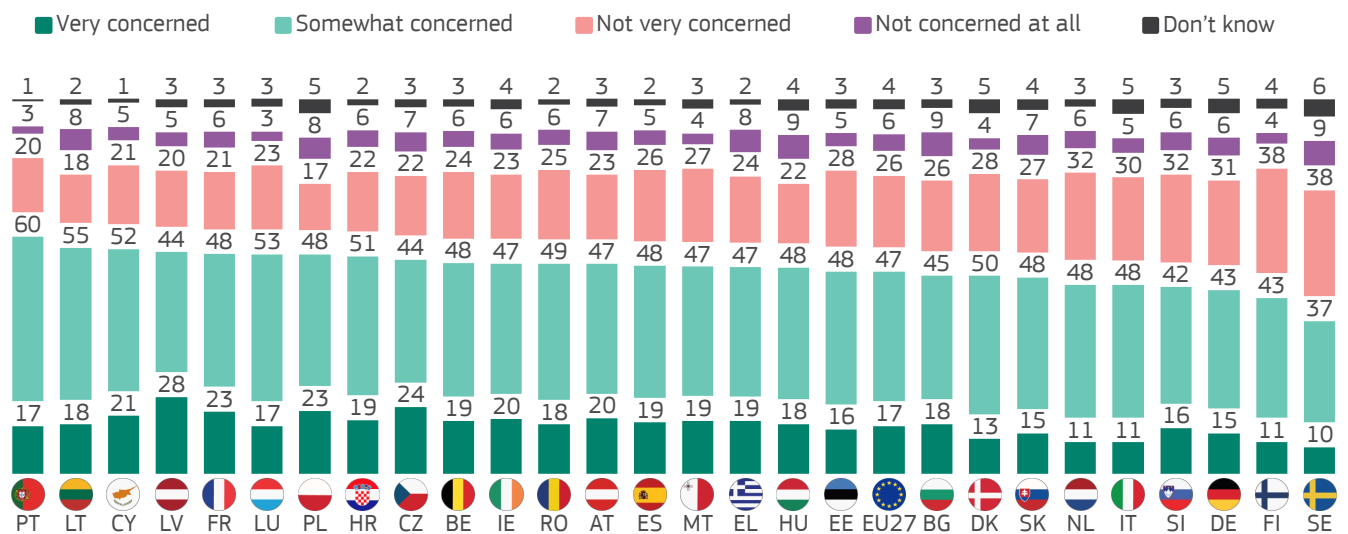
(%) Base: n=25 658 – All respondents

5.2. Concerns about the EU's security

More than six in ten respondents (64%) are concerned about the EU's security in the next five years (17% are 'very concerned' and 47% 'somewhat concerned'). On the other hand, about one in three respondents indicate they are not concerned about the EU's security in the next five years (26% are 'not very concerned' and 6% 'not concerned at all').

In all but one Member State (Sweden), more than half of respondents are 'very' or 'somewhat' concerned about the EU's security in the next five years. The overall highest level of concern is observed in Portugal (77%). In Sweden, on the other hand, less than half of respondents express concern (10% are 'very concerned' and 37% 'somewhat concerned').

Q10 How concerned are you about the EU's security in the next five years?



(%) Base: n=25 658 – All respondents

6. Values best embodied by the EU

Respondents were asked to consider whether certain values are best embodied by the EU, other countries in the world, or both equally. A majority reply that **respect for fundamental rights and values** (53%) and **freedom of speech and expression** (53%) are values best embodied by the EU – in comparison with other countries. Moreover, about one in two respondents select this response for **social equality and welfare** (49%), **tolerance and openness to others** (48%) and **solidarity with countries within and outside the EU** (48%).

More than four in ten respondents answer that **respect for nature and protection of climate and the environment** (45%) and **peace** (45%) are best embodied by the EU in comparison with other countries. Lower proportions are observed for **respect for history and its lessons** (37% 'best embodied by the EU') and **representing citizens' economic and trade interests in the world** (35%). When it comes to **progress and**

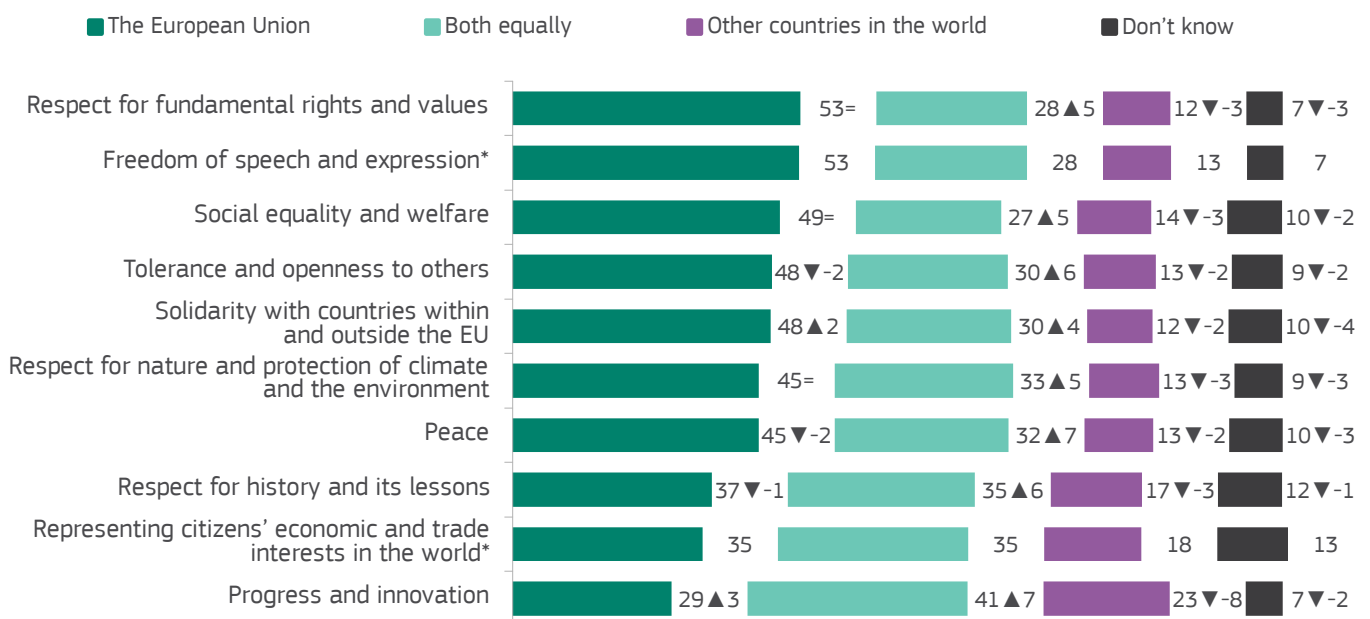
innovation, just 29% of respondents answer that the EU best embodies this value.

Compared to August 2023 (Flash Eurobarometer 533), the perception of the EU best embodying solidarity has increased, indicating a positive trend. Additionally, there is an increase in those who view the EU as best representing progress and innovation.

In 17 Member States, at least 50% of respondents share the view that **respect for fundamental rights and values** is best embodied by the EU. This view is most frequently expressed in Luxembourg (75%) and Finland (68%), while the lowest shares are seen in Bulgaria (36%) and Hungary (38%).

Similarly, in 17 Member States, more than 50% of respondents believe that the EU best embodies the value of **freedom of speech and expression**, from 51% in Croatia and Denmark to 72% in Luxembourg.

Q3 For each of these values, do you think they are best embodied by the EU, by other countries (or groups of countries) in the world or by both equally?



(%) Base: n=25 658 – All respondents

▼ ▲ Evolution 2024-2023

* Item not asked in 2023

