# commEUnication

## How much do we know about the EU? A survey about communication and disinformation

## Survey report

### Introduction

In the last few years, disinformation in and outside the European Union became an issue with defined consequences. National populisms and polarisation of opinions are posing a real threat to the EU. Fake news and disinformation spread quickly, undermining our confidence in the very concepts of truth, facts, and reality. We have recently witnessed how disinformation was one of the main characters of Brexit and how, since the outbreak of COVID-19, misinformation and fake news have spread worldwide dividing the public opinion while increasing distrust in our institutions. A consortium composed of seven civil society organisations across Europe – the Italian Federation for Human Rights (Italy – lead organisation), TASC Europe Studies Company (Ireland), the European Centre for Economic and Policy Analysis and Affairs (Belgium), the Foundation for Entrepreneurship, Culture and Education (Bulgaria), the Youth Center of Epirus (Greece), the Associação Social Recreativa Cultural e Bem Fazer Vai Avante (Portugal) and Eurasia Net (France) – is implementing the project "CommEUnication – Youth Engagement for Communicating the EU". The project is funded by the Europe for Citizens Programme of the European Union and aims to counter euroscepticism through the construction of a new strategy of communication able to respond to the needs of the European community as well as to promote a deeper understanding of the EU, specifically its values and its

benefits, in order to encourage citizens to increase their engagement as EU citizens and to tackle disinformation.

In order to acknowledge the extent of disinformation in the EU and to get a broader understanding of how much the EU citizens know about the European Union, the consortium conducted the online survey "How much do we know about the EU? A survey about communication and disinformation". The questions of the survey focused on the policy areas that represent a priority in the EU agenda, but which are also more susceptible to disinformation. The data collected will be used to understand how to promote more information and to better recognise the actual needs of European citizens. The subsequent activities of the project, including trainings for young people, will be shaped on the analysis of such results.

The survey was addressed to EU citizens and was distributed through the partners' networks. The results of the survey are published in the present report.

**Survey results**

This report is based on the replies to the mentioned survey from 989 respondents covering 7 project participating countries (Italy, Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Greece, Portugal, Ireland) plus other EU countries (specifically 38 respondents from Cipro, Luxemburg, Spain, Croatia, Poland, Spain, Czech Republic, Netherlands, Latvia, Slovenia, Hungary) and 23 respondents from non-EU countries and territories (United States, Senegal, Afghanistan, Palestine, Brazil, China, Byelorussia, Macedonia, UK, Hong Kong, South Africa, Canada, Mexico, Angola, Ethiopia).

# Personal data and background

- Total number of respondents: 989;
- Age: From 17 to 71 y.o. (56.93% of the respondents born between 1986 and 2001 with an average age of 26 years old);
- Gender: 43% males, 55% females, and 2% preferred not to say;
- Location: 83% from urban areas, 17% from rural ones;
- Education: 40% bachelor degree or professional diploma; 28% Master's degree; 26% secondary school; 3.5% PhD or DPhil; 2% none of the above;
- Current work and education: 42.67% employed, 13.55% self-employed, 25.28% University students, almost 6% unemployed, 8% others with 18 people out of 89 (22%) retired.

# Understanding of the EU

**Questions 8 and 9**
- Primary and secondary school: between 27% and 40% had no information at all about the EU;
- Higher education: Between 26% and 31% had no information at all about the EU.

**Questions 10 and 11**
- Familiarity with European institutions: 53.44% is aware of the division of responsibility between the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of the EU.

Q11 Are you aware of the division of responsibilities between the European Parliament, European Commission, and Council of the EU (=Council of Ministers)?

Answered: 844    Skipped: 145
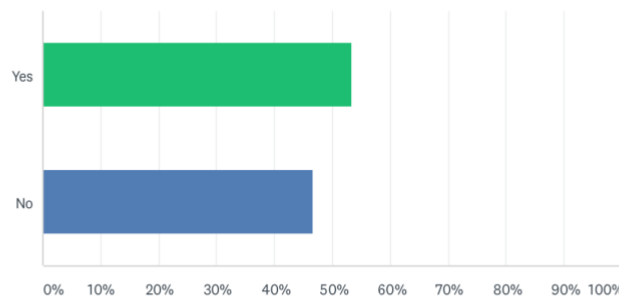
| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 53.44% | 451 |
| No | 46.56% | 393 |
| TOTAL | | 844 |

Figure 1: Familiarity with European Institutions

**Questions 12 and 13**
- Participation in the last European parliamentary election: 55.21% voted, 32.82% did not vote, 4.27% was not interested and almost 8% was not eligible;
- Knowledge of European parliamentary groups: 24% know all parliamentary groups and 39% know some of them.

## Did you vote in the last European parliamentary election?
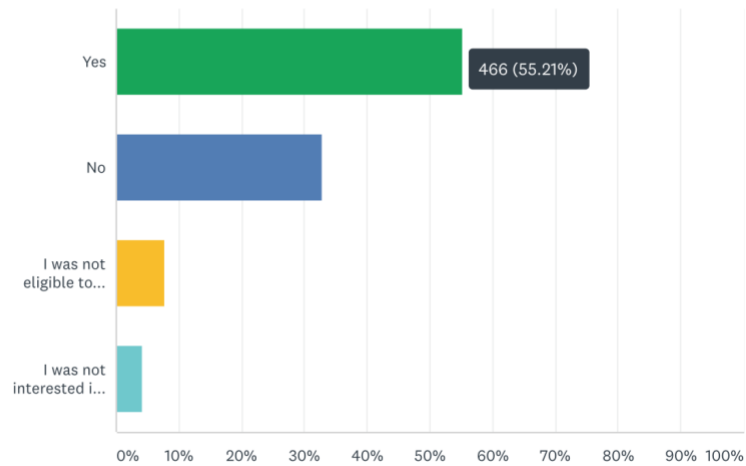
Answered: 844    Skipped: 145



Figure 2: Participation in the last European parliamentary election

# EU policies

## Question 14
Familiarity with the Commission's current priorities:
- 43.38% ignore "Promoting our European way of life";
- 40.46% ignore "An economy that works for the people";
- 39.50% ignore "A stronger Europe in the world";
- 39.35% ignore "A new push for European democracy";
- 34.80% ignore "A European Green Deal" and "A Europe fit with the digital age";
- <10% know the priorities well;
- More than 10% know well "A European Green Deal".
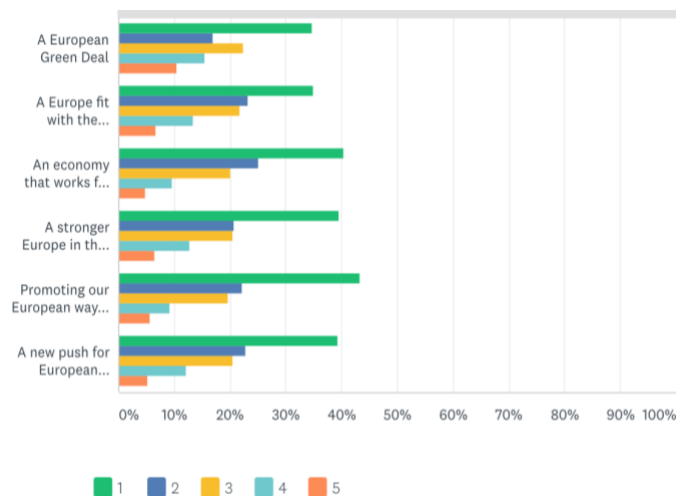


Figure 3: Familiarity with the Commission's current priorities

## Question 15
Opinion about the European Green Deal is neither negative nor positive.

4

**Question 16**
Impact of the EU:
- 56% positive;
- 25% both positive and negative;
- 8% negative;
- 6% ignore it or have no impact.

**Question 17**
Are you an active EU Citizen?
- 47% yes;
- 20% do not know;
- 33% inactive.

**Question 18**
Ways of participation (multiple answers):

| | |
|---|---|
| Studying in other EU countries through EU educational programmes | 25.47% |
| Volunteering or working in other EU countries | 18.72% |
| Voting in the European Parliamentary elections | 48.22% |
| Staying aware of political and policy debates taking place within EU institutions | 38.27% |
| Being involved in the political life (e.g. political campaigns, political parties) of the EU | 10.90% |
| Becoming more engaged with social issues, like migration or rural poverty, which are relevant to the EU | 25.24% |
| Learning about your rights and responsibilities as an EU citizen | 42.89% |
| Learning about other EU member countries | 49.29% |
| Studying EU history | 42.30% |
| None of the above | 15.52% |
| Other (please specify) | 2.61% |
| Total Respondents: 844 | |

Figure 4: Ways of participation

# Access to information

**Question 19** (multiple answers)
Regular use of Media:
- Facebook: 68.15%
- Digital newspapers: 67.67%
- Television: 61.28%
- Instagram: 60.31%
- YouTube: 56.45%
- Radio: 40.41%
- Podcast: 28.11%
- Twitter: 25.69%
- LinkedIn: 24%
- Online Blogs: 15.32%
- TikTok: 13.99%

- Print Newspaper: 11.46%
- Snapchat: 11.22%
- Online forum such as Reddit: 8.44%
- Other: 1.33%

**Question 20** (multiple answers)
Media platforms vulnerable to disinformation and fake news:

Q20 Which of the following media platforms do you believe have a problem with disinformation or fake news? (Tick all that apply)
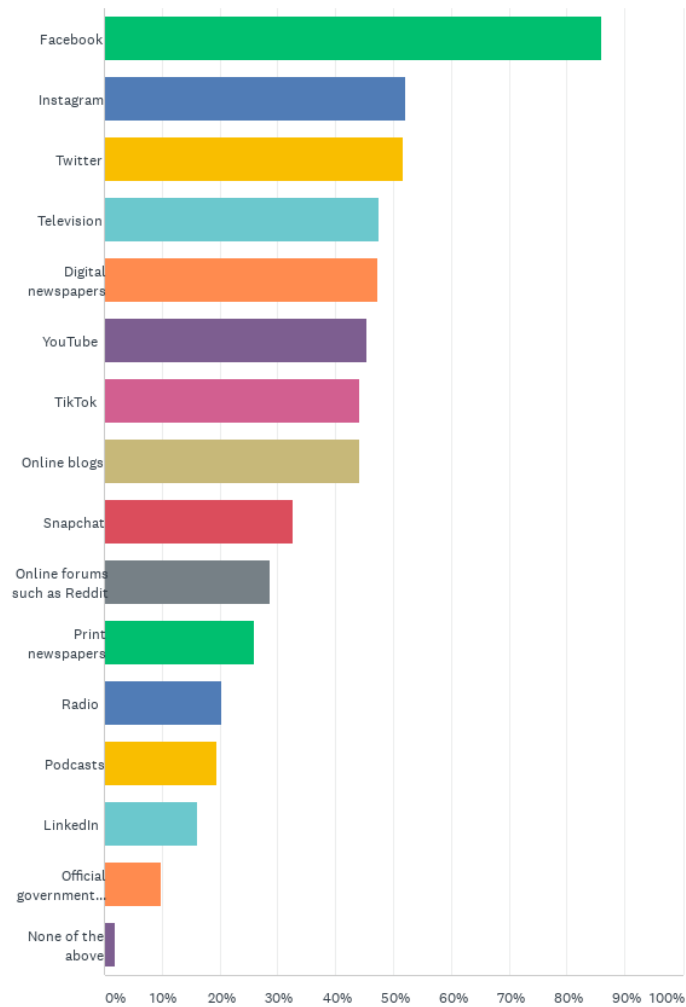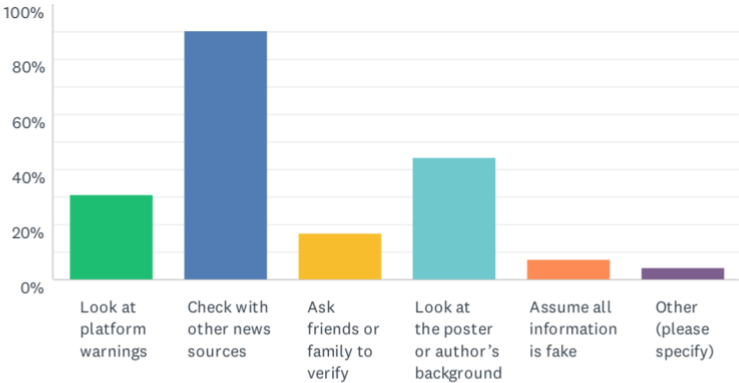


Figure 5: Media platforms vulnerable to disinformation and fake news

**Question 21** (multiple answers)
Strategies to identify disinformation and fake news:



| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES |
|---|---|
| Look at platform warnings | 31.12% |
| Check with other news sources | 90.47% |
| Ask friends or family to verify | 17.13% |
| Look at the poster or author's background | 44.27% |
| Assume all information is fake | 7.48% |
| Other (please specify) | 4.46% |

Figure 6: Strategies to identify disinformation and fake news

**Question 22**
The average impact of disinformation is 4 on a scale of 1 to 5 where 5 is a significant impact.

# Access to Information about the EU

**Question 23**
Hearing national politicians about EU decisions:
- 31.07% once or more per month;
- 21.58% once or less per week;
- 17.14% more seldom;
- 12.33% once or more per year;
- 10.23 don't follow politics;
- 7.64% never/less than a year.
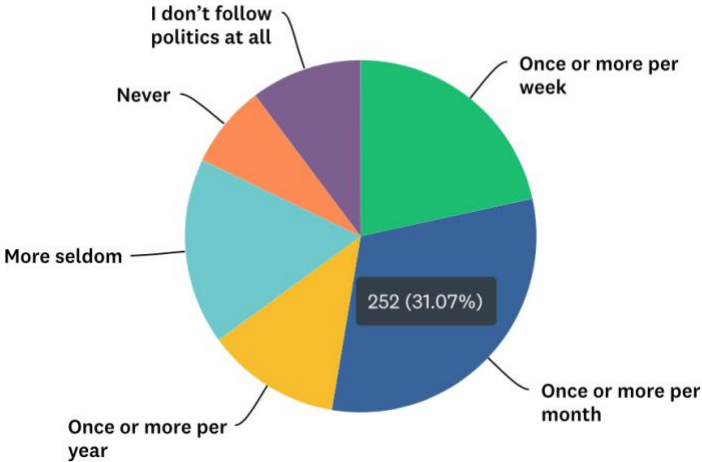


Figure 7: Hearing national politicians about EU decisions

**Question 24** (multiple answers)
Media where you hear or read about the EU:
Once or more per day
- Television: 27.01%
- Facebook: 26.17%
- Digital or print newspaper: 23.36%

Once or more per week
- Digital or print newspaper: 34.25%
- Television: 31.38%
- Radio: 22.29%

Once or more per month
- Digital or print newspaper: 17.06%
- Television: 17.60%
- Youtube: 16.67%

# Future of the EU

**Question 25**
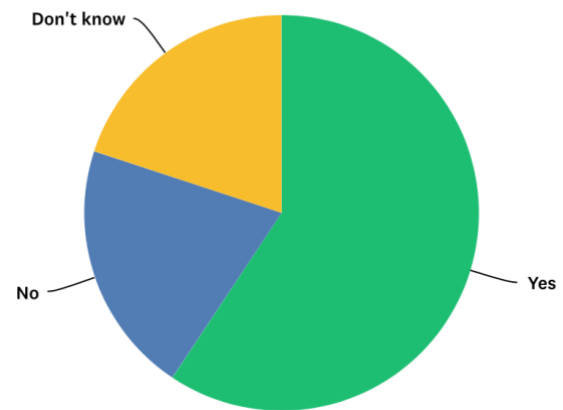Is the EU threatened today?
- Yes: 59.34%
- No: 20.71%
- Don't know: 19.95%



Figure 8: Is the EU threatened today?

**Question 26**
Main danger the EU is facing:
- 29.66% nationalism and detachment from European institutions;
- 14.54% climate change;
- 12.63% social problems such as inequality and poverty;
- 9.69% terrorism and insecurity in general;
- 9.40% immigration;
- 8.81% democratic deficit of the European institutions;
- 7.34% disinformation and fake news;
- 3.82% tensions with foreign states such as Russia or China.

**Question 27**
Trust in the EU leadership
after the pandemic:
- 51.01% same as before;
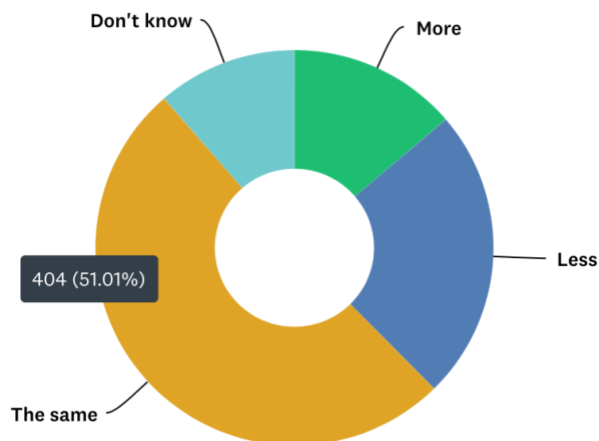- 13.76% increased;
- 23.86% decreased;
- 11.36% don't know.



Figure 9: Trust in the EU leadership after the pandemic

**Question 28**
There is satisfactory legal protection for underrepresented/disadvantaged populations:
- 49.49% no;
- 20.33% yes;
- 30.18% do not know.

**Question 29**
Is the national government informing enough about the decisions it is making in the EU?
- 73.11% no;
- 11.74% yes;
- 15.15% do not know.

**Question 30**
Awareness about the services provided by the Europe Direct Information Centres:
- 86.87% not aware about.

**Question 31** (multiple answers)
What would make people more connected to the EU:
- 65.15% more education about the EU within schools;
- 64.65% more information about the EU available publicly;
- 44.82% more citizen consultations on policy;
- 36.96% different ways of participating other than MEP elections;
- 9.47% change in EU policies or other:
  o being represented by younger politicians, European federalism, information posters around the city, direct election of the President of the Commission, a common social policy, more programmes like Erasmus for disadvantaged people, making petitions require less than 1.000.000 signatures, EU becoming more democratic, more controls on countries showing undemocratic signs, EU TV channel run in collaboration with national broadcasters and the Commission, a stronger climate action, a stronger Europe on the diplomatic level, stronger multilinguism policy, more effective funds, educational initiatives for schools, affirming its values and principles in practice, closing national parliaments.
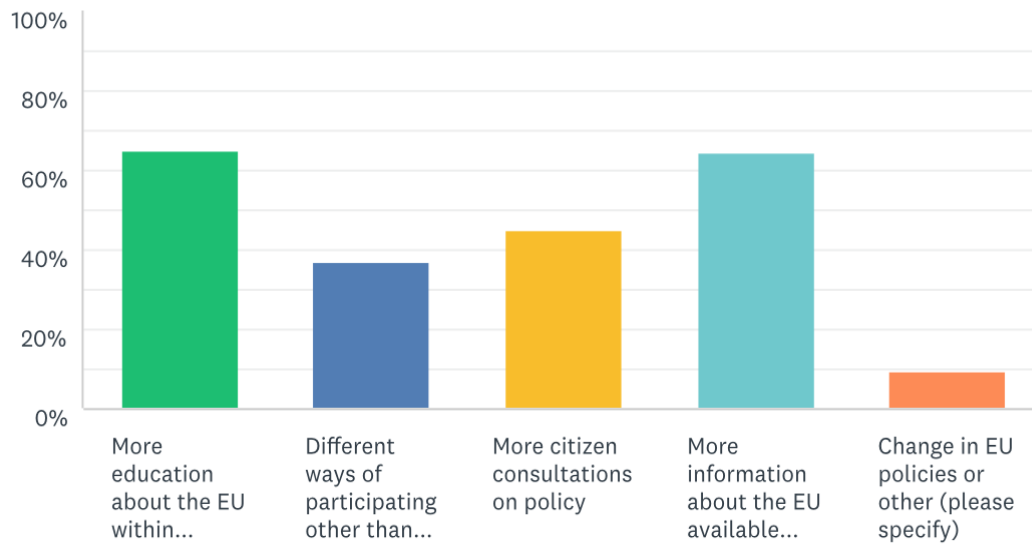
Figure 10: What would make people more connected to the EU

**Question 32**
Do you feel privileged being a citizen of the EU?
- 73.61% yes;
- 17.55% no.

# Participating countries' insights

Q13
Do you know the parliamentary groups within the European Parliament?

| Country | Some of them | NO | YES |
|---------|--------------|-----|-----|
| Belgium | 29% | 18% | 53% |
| Bulgaria | 30% | 34% | 36% |
| France | 16% | 45% | 39% |
| Greece | 36% | 44% | 20% |
| Ireland | 33% | 32% | 35% |
| Italy | 44% | 28% | 28% |
| Portugal | 38% | 41% | 21% |
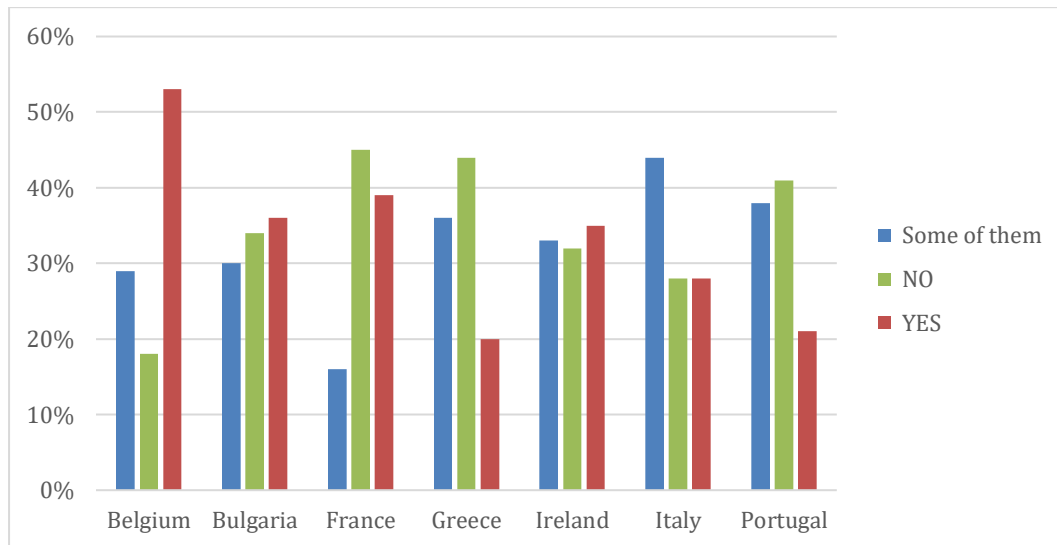


Figure 11

Q14

How familiar are you with the current European Commission priorities? (please rate the following items on a scale from 1 [nothing at all] to 5 [a lot]):

BELGIUM
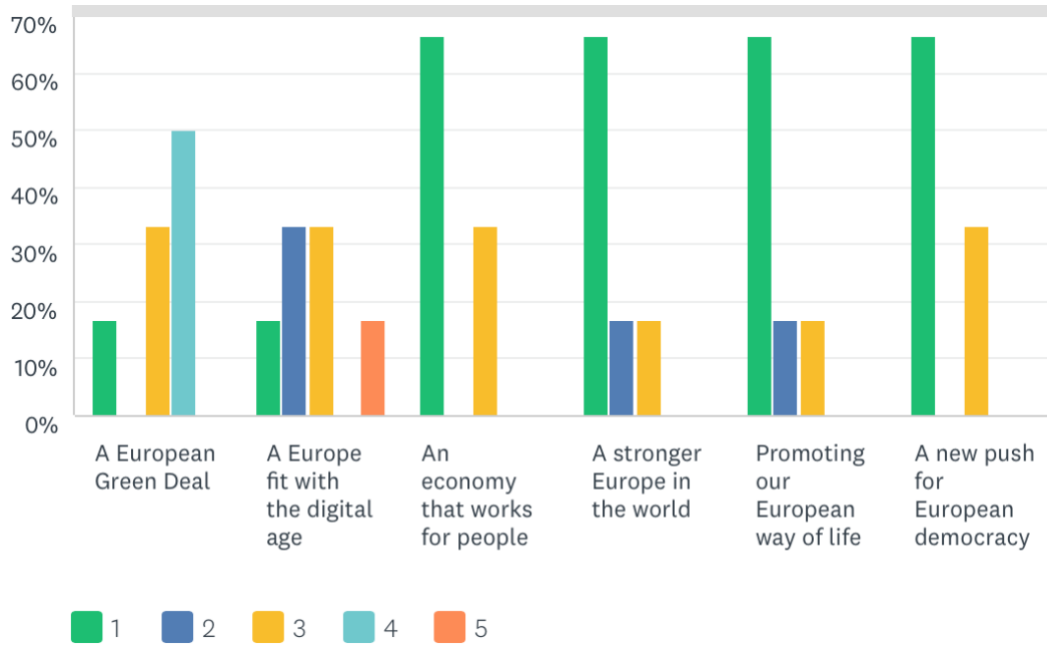


Figure 12
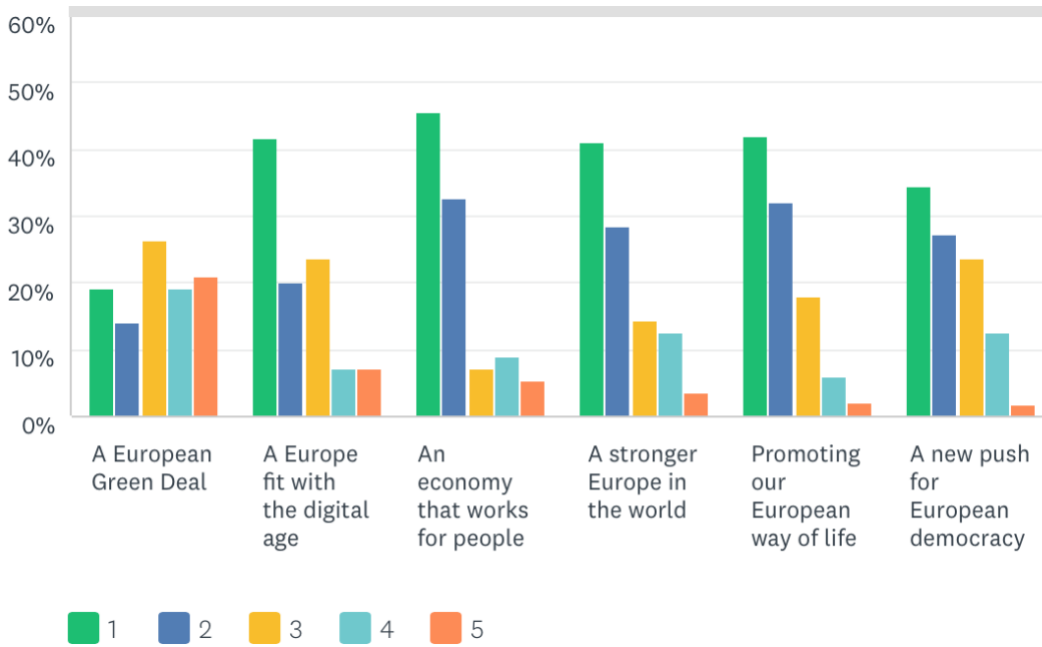
BULGARIA
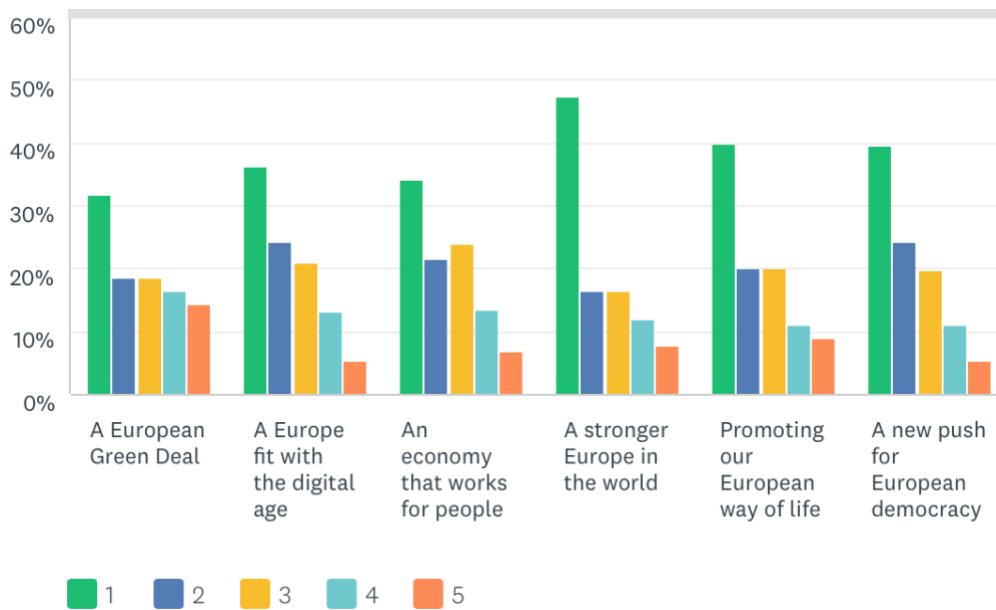


Figure 13

FRANCE
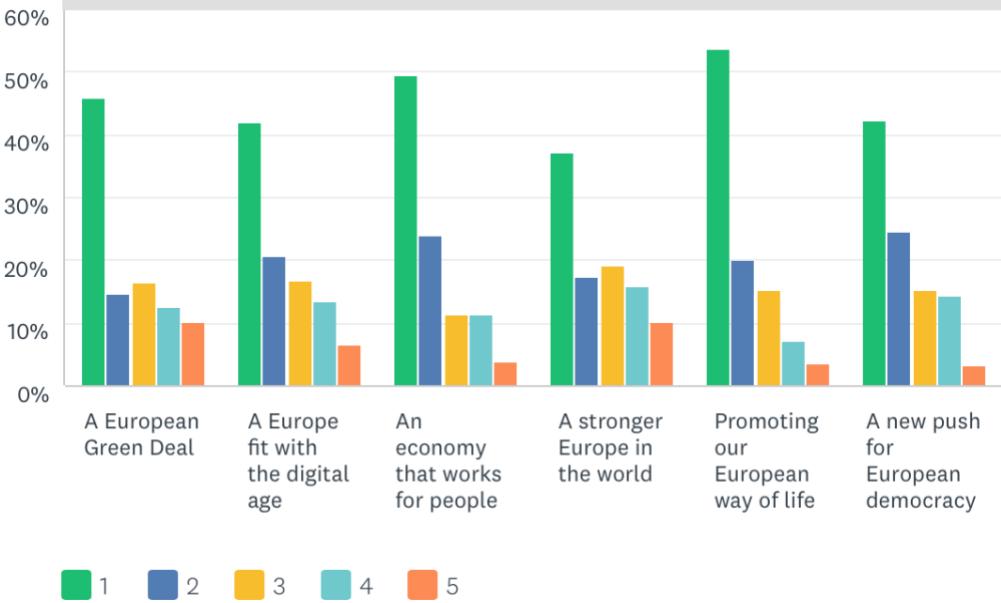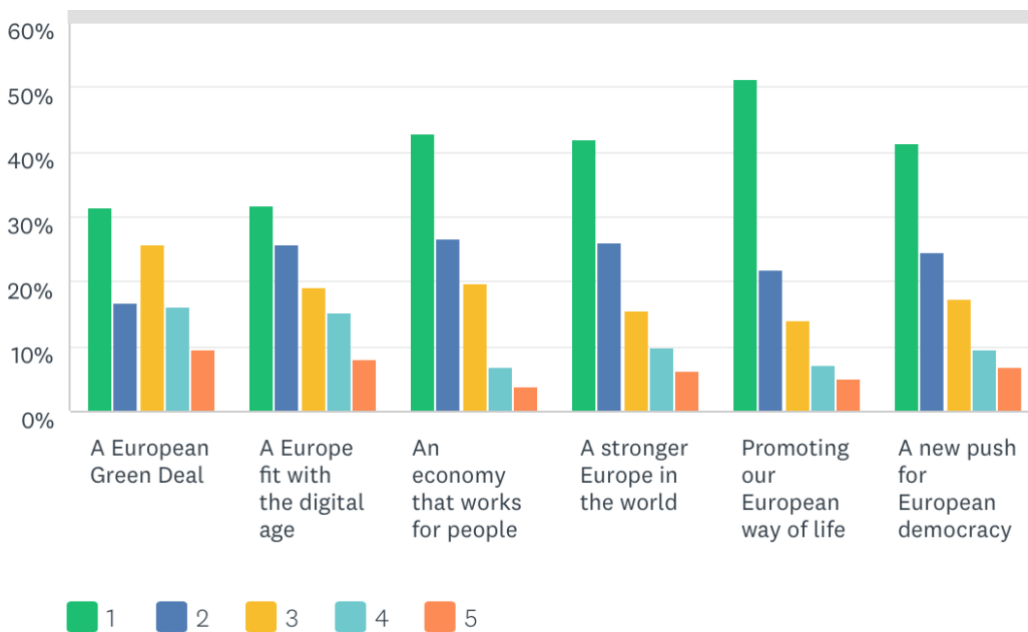


Figure 14


GREECE
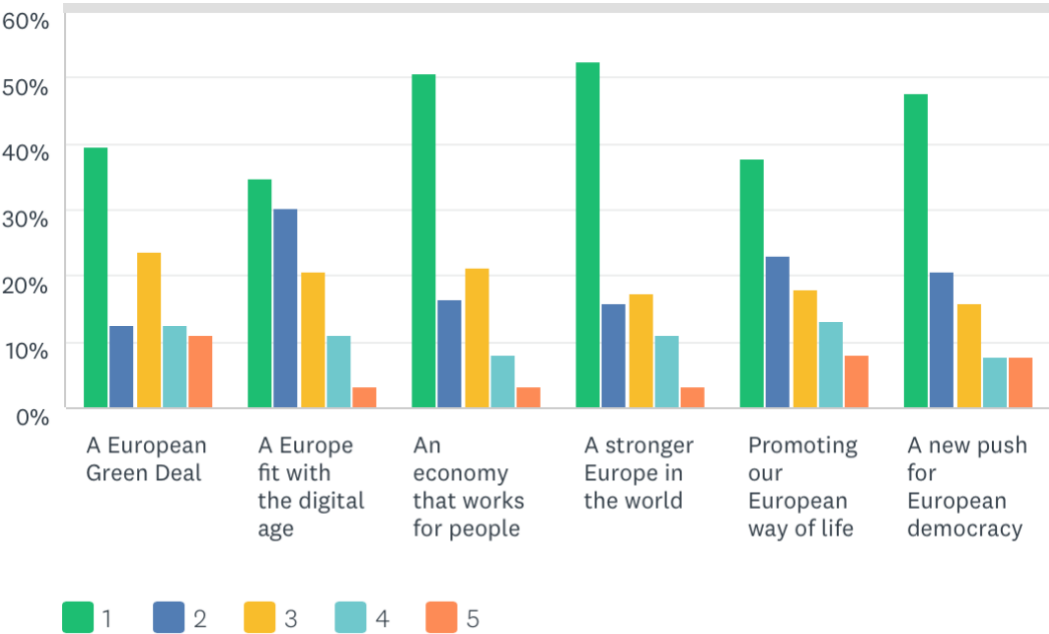


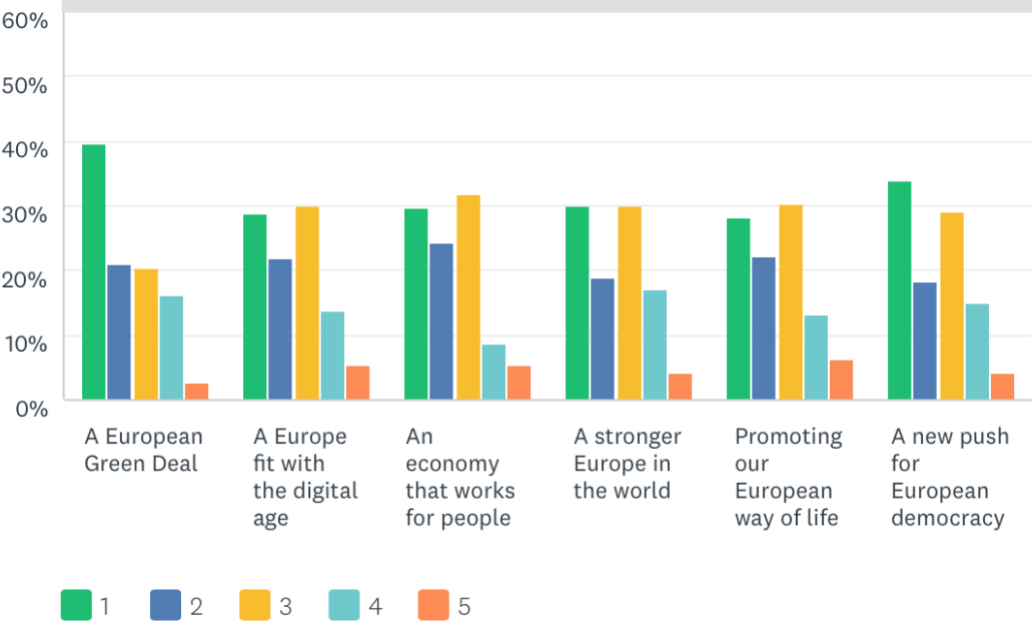Figure 15

IRELAND



Figure 16

ITALY



Figure 17

PORTUGAL



Figure 18

Q16

What impact do you think EU membership has had on your country?

| Country | Negative | Positive | Both p/n | Not p/n | Don't know |
|---------|----------|----------|----------|---------|------------|
| Belgium | 0,0% | 83,3% | 16,7% | 0,0% | 0,0% |
| Bulgaria | 8,7% | 50,0% | 32,6% | 8,0% | 1,1% |
| France | 8,9% | 49,0% | 29,0% | 6,5% | 6,5% |
| Greece | 10,0% | 40,0% | 37,0% | 11,1% | 1,6% |
| Ireland | 1,8% | 75,4% | 21,1% | 1,8% | 0,0% |
| Italy | 10,0% | 61,0% | 20,0% | 5,5% | 3,8% |
| Portugal | 5,0% | 56,1% | 24,3% | 6,8% | 7,4% |



Figure 19