

The European Union is doomed to fail. This is what we hear ever more often in public debates. Weakened by years of economic crisis and austerity policies, European voters now refuse to give governments carte blanche to seek further market integration, a stronger monetary union and more powers to Brussels. The recent comeback of souverainist temptations, we are told, is just the tip of a wider Eurosceptic iceberg opposed to any prospect of further integration and even calling for the end of the euro. We should be lucky enough if we will manage to deal with all that without incurring major disruptions.

If there is anything missing in European politics, this is not a pro-European electoral and social bedrock, but rather political leaders able to give a voice to this silent majority.

Although popular, this analysis is too simplistic. Can we really say that Europeans deeply dislike the EU? Or is there a chance that a pro-European majority is silently hiding under the Eurosceptic blanket? A [recent poll conducted by the REScEU project](#) in seven European countries—Spain, Italy, France, Germany, Poland, the UK and Sweden—between September and November 2016 points exactly in this direction. If we look at empirical data, there is no such thing as a major Eurosceptic iceberg below the water. Quite to the contrary, the survey reveals a much less gloomy picture than commonly thought. This note overviews the main results of the survey and the ten key messages that can be drawn from them. The survey results will be examined in greater detail over the next few weeks through a series of infographics and articles to be published on this website.

Public opinion polls need to be taken with a pinch of salt. Yet, the general indication is clear: a majority of citizens living in core EU member states still believes in the Union. To make the point even clearer, data show that even a majority of German citizens backs EU-wide solidarity mechanisms. How, then, is it possible that Eurosceptic minorities keep making the headlines all over the continent? Why have the solidaristic attitudes revealed by the survey been ignored over the past years of crisis management?

European leaders should care about these results. If there is anything missing in European

politics, this is not a pro-European electoral and social bedrock, but rather political leaders able to give a voice to this silent majority. The political groups that have driven the process of European integration until now—liberals, Christian democrats and social democrats—are faced with a historical failure. If the EU is on the brink of collapse, it is simply because its elites are unable to suggest an alternative to souverainism, on the one hand, and fiscal austerity on the other—an alternative capable of reassuring worried voters that the EU does have a “caring face”, and that it is not a threat for jobs, democracy and national cultures. If there is any deficit in this Union, it comes in the form of a lack of ideas, initiatives, and ultimately acceptance of responsibility on the part of the political class. If things do not change rapidly, we all shall pay for it, and condemn our children to live in a divided and impoverished Europe, with little or no influence at all on the global stage.

Reconciling Economic and Social Europe - Ten messages

Message #1: **Voters believe that the EU should be more social.** A majority of respondents (61%) think that the top priority for the EU should be ensuring social protection, whereas 39% of respondents are in favour of ensuring fiscal stability and competitiveness.

Message #2: Despite a slight plurality of voters (36,5%) supporting the current “conditionality regime” of EU inter-state assistance, **a large share of respondents (35%) support the idea of more cross-national solidarity.**

Message #3: **The support for open labour markets remains high** (49,2%), even if a sizeable share of voters (20,2%) would like to make intra-EU mobility conditional on an employment contract.

Message #4: **The vast majority of respondents support foreigners’ access to domestic welfare benefits** (81,4%). Among these, a sizeable share would reserve this right only to EU nationals (38,5%). In addition, a vast majority (65,7%) is in favour of shifting the competence on immigration policy to the EU level.

Message #5: **Large majorities would welcome EU-funded schemes** for, respectively, economic and social investments (75,9%), the fight against poverty (75,6%), insuring mobile workers (67,7%), helping member states cope with unemployment surges (77,7%), and compensating national governments and local communities for the costs of extra-EU immigration (71,2%).

Message #6: **A majority of respondents have a positive image of the EU as a neighborhood community**, i.e. as a “shared home” (23,8%) or an “apartment building” (30,1%). Conversely, 25,8% of voters consider the EU as just a “playground for economic exchanges” and a minority (20,3%) sees the EU as a “sinking ship”.

Message #7: **In a referendum on EU membership, the exit option would be rejected by the majority of voters** in Germany (75%), France (57%), Italy (63%), Poland (72%), Spain (74%) and Sweden (57%).

Message #8: **Were a Brexit referendum to be held again, the majority (53%) of UK respondents would vote to remain in the EU.**

Message #9: **The majority of British respondents (51%) would favor a new trade agreement with the EU, even if it implied accepting free movement of workers**, while 36,9% would welcome a new agreement only if it excluded free movement. Only a small minority (12,1%) would be against a free trade agreement no matter what.

Message #10: **Substantial majorities of respondents remain worried about European integration** harming employment (64,5%), national identity (52,8%), and national democracy (60,3%).

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