

SURVEY “What kind of Europe?” ¹

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The results of the survey highlight the disconnection of the citizenry to the European Union (EU thereafter), but also an strong preference for developing the integration process further. Despite of the fact that the connection to a political sphere (v.g. the nation state) does not preclude other attachments (i.e. to the region or to the EU), it is remarkable the low percentage of respondents showing some or a great level of attachment to the EU (65%). In contrast, the percentage reported among those people expressing the same level of attachment to her city rises up to a 91%. Even, the percentage is higher among those attached to the world (76%).

However, respondents exhibit a high level of agreement when asked about whether Spain should be a member of the EU (90%) or whether Spain would be more influential within the EU (70%) than outside the EU (11%). This puzzle may be better understood whether the apparent lack of European identity is not classified as “euroscepticism” but “eurocriticism”. In fact, citizens are prone to further integration in several policy areas (social policy, foreign policy, security policy, or education). Hence, citizens are in favour of the European Union requiring member states to comply with minimum social benefits in terms of health, education, unemployment, pensions, and minimum wage (percentages above 90%). Education and research are the issues most requested as top priorities for the coming Spanish presidency in 2010.

The EU is perceived as a common market (53%) rather than a community of values (19%) or a social model (15%). Despite of this unbalance between the economic and political significance of the EU, respondents consider economic integration as the most needed development in the near future (70% versus 21% supporting political integration). This result is confirmed when a 24% of respondents underline the economy as a pressing issue facing the EU. This result is in line with the rest of European countries. Eurobarometer 70 reports that a 51% of respondents consider that the next European elections should be focus on economic growth (only a 13% maintain that the emphasis should be on the preservation of the European social model)

Nevertheless, economic integration is just one issue on the EU agenda for the future. In this sense, citizens report other pressing issues for the EU: climate change (31%), immigration (22%), and equality (21%).

¹ This document contains a summary of a survey about the preferences of Spanish citizens over the European Union. The document is available at: <http://www.falternativas.org/la-fundacion/documentos/libros-e-informes/informe-que-europa-queremos>

Regarding climate change, respondents show a clear preference for environmental protection even in the case that such a protection would imply economic costs (86%). Furthermore, environmental protection is among the issues that a common foreign policy should entail. Finally up to a 82% of respondents consider renewable energy as the top priority.

A closer look to these results (combining both EB70 and the survey "What kind of Europe") reveal a paradox: the most pressing issue in the political agenda is the economic model (inflation, unemployment, economic growth), but citizens stress the importance of the social model (immigration, equality, European welfare system) in fostering European identity. It seems that the way to strength European identity is to use the social model to meet the challenges of the uncertain economic situation.

Regarding the external dimension of the EU, the referred puzzle becomes more explicit. Despite of the lack of attachment to the EU, the majority of citizens support the creation of a truly common foreign policy (65%) and a European diplomatic service (85%). Besides environmental protection, the common foreign policy should also focus on security and humanitarian interventions. In order to fulfil these objectives, the European foreign policy should be independent from the US foreign policy, and not always in line with the NATO (41%).

The vision on the external dimension of the EU is complemented with a clear preference for the creation of a European army (74%), with a better coordination among countries' military expenditure (66%). This preference is related to the citizens stance in favour of collective mutual defence (87%) and the intervention in international crisis, even with the use of military force (52%). That intervention should always be authorized by UN (85%).

Citizens are aware of the positive impact of the cohesion policy (92%) although the cohesion funds are perceived as insufficient (45%). In this line, citizens back the expansion of these funds to developing countries (64%). Nevertheless, development aid should be conditioned to respect democracy and human rights (70%). In this point, citizens present clear convictions in terms of values no clearly specify when were asked about the EU as a community of values. The solidarity is manifested when respondents are in favour of the expansion of cohesion funds². Besides, the majority of people consider that multiculturalism is an asset (71%) rather than a threat (20%).

Apart from the policy preferences, citizens also report clear opinions in terms of the institutional design. To this regard, citizens consider that they do not have enough mechanisms of participation (44%) and that media do not provide enough information about EU

² The results of this Surrey may further explain the outcomes of the standard Eurobarometer series. In this sense, the prevalence of solidarity and respect of human Rights are pointed as the two main values which the European Parliament should promote (EB 70). The survey "What kind of Europe" provides a deeper insight into these issues.

affairs (65%). The institutional structure and the low coverage of EU affairs by the media may contribute to jeopardize the emergence of political leadership (only a 39% of respondents agree on the fact that there are great political leaders at the European level).

Citizens also argue in favour of (i) political parties endorsing a single list of candidates in the European elections (71%), (ii) being asked through referenda (90%), (iii) direct election of the President of the Commission and Council (iv) a process of integration at one single speed (65%)³. The vision of the institutional system is completed with a preference for expanding direct and indirect suffrage to EU national and legally resident immigrants regarding regional and national elections.

In the light of the previous findings, two aspects deserve special attention. Firstly, the EU faces a puzzle: a lack of identification with the EU but a preference for further development. The lack of attachment to the EU does not constitute an obstacle in order to obtain a clear structure of preferences about what Europe should do. According to the answers, the EU should further define its external dimension and develop a social model internally with education among its top priorities⁴. Secondly, to fill the gap between citizens and the EU seems to depend on substantive improvements along with institutional transformations. Combining both, we could argue that the institutional system should leave room to create a public space of discussion where the preferences revealed could clearly be defined.

³ This latter result may be interpreted as a result of the primacy of solidarity and equality in the mindset of respondents.

⁴ This result confirms the outcomes from the EB70 in which a 39% responded that a European welfare system harmonized between Member States would strengthen European identity. One remarkable result is that European identity is linked to policies rather than institution: a 39% of respondents consider that having an European social welfare would increase European identity whereas a 20% of respondents indicate a President of the EU directly elected by member state citizens.