

EUROPEAN YOUTH 2017: Europe is about economics, not culture/ Cautious support for European project

Hannover/Berlin, 04. Mai 2017 - For three out of four young Europeans, the core of the European Union (EU) is not its shared values, but rather economic cooperation. More than one in three want the EU to return political power to national governments. One in every five thinks that their country should leave the EU. And only half of young Europeans regard democracy as the best form of government.

These are among the findings of the European Youth Study, commissioned by Germany's **TUI Foundation**, conducted by YouGov and launched in Berlin today, Thursday 4 May. The survey, which polled 6,000 young people aged between 16 and 26 in seven EU countries – France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain and the UK – provides new insights into how the younger generation feels about Europe.

Economics, not culture

More than three quarters (76%) of respondents regard the EU as an economic alliance, and only 30% see it as an alliance of countries with common cultural values.

Only 18% of young Europeans attribute a common cultural basis to the EU, while only 7% mention the value 'religion and Christian culture'.

Too much administration, too little participation

Young people find that the political possibilities for action at the European level are too vague. The EU is seen as being an administrative apparatus rather than as a community in which things can be shaped and changed.

More than a third (37%) of respondents criticise concrete policy objectives and plans of the EU; while over a quarter (27%) are disturbed by the basic organisation and operating method of the European institutions.

Views on democracy

Overall, only just over half (52%) of young Europeans regard democracy as the best form of government. Democracy convinces young people least of all in France (42%), Italy (45%) and Poland (42%). In all three countries, populist movements that are critical of democracy have grown up in recent years.

In Germany, approval of democracy as the best form of government is higher (62%), but top of the list is the 'cradle of democracy' Greece with 66%.

National sovereignty

Many young people are concerned about the influence that their governments hand over to the EU. More than a third (38%) want the EU to return power to national governments. This trend is particularly pronounced in Greece (60%) and the UK (44%).

In contrast, young Germans have more trust in the EU than respondents in the other countries: only 22% want the EU to return more power to national governments.

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A cautiously positive outlook on the future

Young people have very different assessments of the current economic situation in the countries. While a total of 29% of young people assess their current financial situation as relatively good, 32% judge it as rather poor.

Young people in Spain, France and Greece are particularly negative, while the assessment from Germany, Poland and the UK is above average.

But young people's expectations of a better future are quite modest: overall, only just over a quarter (26%) believe that their generation will achieve living standards above those of their parents. Over a half (52%) is not optimistic about this or expects a deterioration.

One in every five young Europeans advocates EU exit

In no country is there a majority among young Europeans in favour of leaving the EU. But one in every five (21%) advocates the withdrawal of their country.

Particularly critical are young people in Greece (31% for EU exit), with French and Polish young people more in the middle (20% for EU exit). The EU is rated most positively in Germany and Spain: only 12% of young people in these countries would vote against in a referendum on staying in the EU.

EU sceptics and EU supporters

The young people who are EU sceptics are (economically) more under pressure than EU supporters and are generally more pessimistic about the future. EU supporters look rather optimistic about the future (74%); with advocates of exit, the figure is only 66%.

The EU sceptics estimate their own economic situation worse than EU supporters, but the strongest EU sceptics are no worse off than the EU supporters, as their data on disposable income show.

Globalisation, digitisation and open borders in the EU are perceived as a threat in different ways by EU supporters and sceptics: 53% of EU supporters perceive globalisation as an opportunity, while for the sceptics it is 28%; and with open borders, it is 63% to 34%.

Reactions to the survey findings

At the launch of the study in Berlin on Thursday, **Thomas Ellerbeck**, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the TUI Foundation commented as follows:

'The value-based European cohesive forces have for a long time been taken for granted. The European Youth Study shows that this apparently self-evident condition no longer applies.'

'A Europe whose value is seen, above all, in the advantages of the common market threatens to become interchangeable and arbitrary. It is therefore important to discuss the shared values of Europe. Here all social actors are required, not just politicians.'

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With the work of the TUI Foundation, Thomas Ellerbeck wants to help young people to think more about Europe once again:

‘As a foundation, in the future we want to be a catalyst for the important debate in society about what Europe can represent for the young generation. And we want to promote this dialogue about Europe really practically with our projects.’

Marcus Spittler of the WZB Berlin Science Research Center has looked at the results of the TUI Foundation's youth study in the context of scientific research. He sees parallels with the population as a whole:

‘The TUI study clearly points to the dilemma of the EU. On the one hand, young Europeans argue with a large majority for the fate of their country in the EU. At the same time, they are largely in favour of a transfer of competences back to the national level, but they themselves demand more direct co-linguistic possibilities at the European level.’

‘In principle, young adults support the European idea, but they are increasingly suspicious when it comes to concrete measures and short-term projects. They can be called critical Europeans. They are critical because they question specific policies and institutional arrangements.’

‘Your satisfaction with the EU is limited, it is not based on a common set of values. Accordingly, their fragility remains the same for the European project.’

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Notes for editors:

In order to better understand the life environment, identity (s) and attitudes towards Europe of young Europeans in 2017, the TUI Foundation commissioned YouGov with a survey of young people in France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain and the UK.

A total of 6,000 young people between the ages of 16 and 26 years were interviewed by online surveys from 16 February to 3 March 2017.

In each country the participants were represented according to the age and gender characteristics according to the actual distribution per country. For the analysis, the results were additionally weighted according to age and sex to compensate for slight deviations. Results that are reported across all countries have also been weighted so that each country has the same weight.

About TUI Foundation:

The TUI Foundation supports and implements projects around the topic of ‘Young Europe’. Its aim is to foster European exchange and dialogue by establishing partnerships that address issues of regional, national and international relevance. Based in Hanover, Germany, it is an independent and unaffiliated foundation that serves the public good. The TUI Foundation was established by Preussag, now TUI Group, the world’s leading tourism company.

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All results of the study as well as a summary of the most important results can be found here:

<https://www.tui-stiftung.de/en/media/young-europe-2017-the-youth-study-of-tui-foundation/>

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