

A CERTAIN IDEA OF EUROPE: HOW THE NEXT FRENCH PRESIDENT CAN LEAD

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SUMMARY

- Europeans are disillusioned with how the global system of international cooperation is handling today's challenges. Seventy-one per cent of them believe that the system is not working on climate change.
- Yet it is at the European level that they see a need to strengthen strategic sovereignty.
- Even in the weeks leading up to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, when ECFR's survey took place, a plurality of respondents said that there was a need for European cooperation to guarantee security at their borders and to tackle future pandemics.
- They are comfortable with the idea of French leadership on such cooperation efforts.
- The next French president should pursue a strong European foreign policy agenda to protect Europeans against the threats they are most concerned about, driving the European Union to engage geopolitically with Russian and Chinese efforts to reshape the international order.
- In doing so, the new French president will cement Europeans' conviction that the EU can face up to today's challenges.

Introduction

In the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the debate over Europe's capacity to protect itself has taken centre stage across the European Union. The debate on the French presidential election, scheduled for 10 April 2022, is no exception. In media interviews, candidates are often asked for their views on the adequacy of European sanctions on Russia, increasing investment in defence, and the resurgence of a nuclear threat in European security and how to handle it. Across the EU, the hard reality is that Russia's threats of military action to rebalance the post-cold war international order were not empty. This is leading European governments to reassess their willingness to invest in sovereignty in a way that years of debate about its theoretical necessity could not.

When French citizens go to the polls, only around 45.5m registered voters will cast ballots to determine who becomes the next French president. But the decision will affect all 400m citizens of the EU. That's because France is one of the two largest EU member states – and because its leader, President Emmanuel Macron, has been one of the most visible and vocal European leaders in responding to all manner of challenges facing Europe, be it the Russia-Ukraine crisis or the effort to handle the covid-19 pandemic at the EU level. France also has the second-largest economy in the EU, and is one of the founding states of the bloc. French leadership matters hugely to the future of the European project.

If a French president with a positive agenda for the EU emerges from the election, he or she will be able to form a strong alliance with the new coalition government in Germany, which has committed to place EU action at the heart of its approach to policy challenges – as underlined by its ground-breaking decisions on defence spending and economic sanctions in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz declared that we were living through a “watershed era” and that “we fully intend[ed] to secure our freedom, our democracy, and our prosperity”. To this end, he announced a special fund of €100 billion for the German army, to make the necessary investments in armaments. The German government will now implement its commitment to spend 2 per cent of GDP on defence.

This momentum provides an opportunity to push back against the growing narrative about a Europe of nation-states, with a demonstration of the importance of European power to defending EU citizens' interests in a highly competitive world. If a French president is elected who is unconvinced about the EU's role in handling global challenges, the alliance of member states willing to invest political capital in building European strategic sovereignty will suddenly begin to look weak. To understand how citizens of EU member states are thinking about these questions ahead of the French election, the European Council on Foreign Relations commissioned Datapaxis, AnalitiQs, Datalyze, SzondaPhone, Turu-uuringute, and YouGov to carry out a survey of 15,000 people across 12 EU member states – Denmark,

Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden – in January and February 2022.

The results show that a large majority of Europeans are disillusioned with the way that the global system of international cooperation is handling the challenges of covid-19 and climate change, which they see as the two biggest threats to Europe. Analysts often assume that most Europeans see international institutions as irrelevant to their lives. But respondents expressed strong views that the international system is not delivering sufficiently. Sixty per cent said that responses to the covid-19 pandemic showed that international cooperation was “broken”, and 71 per cent felt the same on climate change.

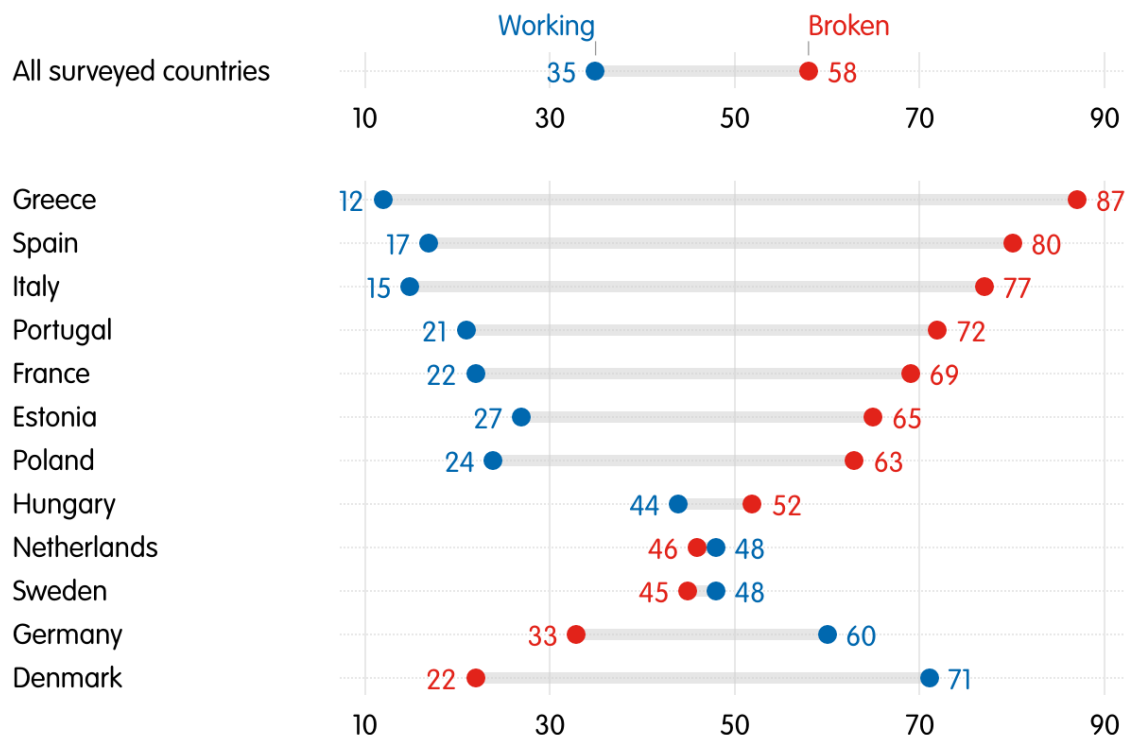
However, the data revealed that there is public support for building stronger sovereignty at the EU level. When it comes to guaranteeing security at European borders, a plurality of those surveyed believed that European cooperation was necessary. They understood that there is a logic to Europeans dealing collectively with the policy challenges that concern them most – and were broadly comfortable with the idea of the French leading such cooperation efforts.

The national and international systems are not addressing the threats that Europeans fear most

Much international coverage of the French election debate focuses on the “sharp turn to the right in French politics”, and the fact that not one but two far-right candidates are standing in this year’s contest. Immigration, security, and falling purchasing power have emerged as central issues in the national debate because French voters feel the current political system is not working in these areas. Our survey supports this impression. When asked whether the French political system worked or was broken, 69 per cent of French respondents said it was either completely or somewhat broken.

But the French are far from alone in this view. Across the 12 EU member states that ECFR surveyed, 58 per cent of respondents felt that their national system was broken. Respondents felt this even more strongly in Portugal (72 per cent), Italy (77 per cent), Spain (80 per cent), and Greece (87 per cent) than in France. Interestingly, French citizens’ frustration with their own national political system is not shared by respondents in the other 11 EU nations. When we asked respondents in other countries whether the French national system worked, a plurality of 35 per cent felt it did. Only 29 per cent responded that it did not – although 36 per cent answered that they did not know on this issue.

Do you think that the political system in your own country is working well or is broken? In per cent.



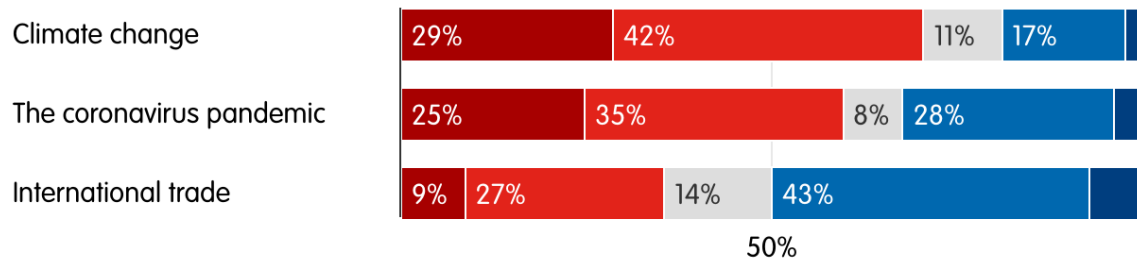
Source: Dataprix, AnalitiQs, Datalyze, Szondaphone, Turu-uuringute, and YouGov, January/February 2022.
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Compounding this picture, when we asked whether respondents agreed with a set of statements about the current political system, 58 per cent of Europeans agreed with the idea that ordinary voters have almost no impact on today's politics. In France, this figure was 63 per cent. Only Italy (66 per cent) and Estonia (67 per cent) came out higher among the countries we covered. This strong sense of *ras-le-bol* and powerlessness among the French electorate gives pause for thought ahead of an election where abstention rates are expected to be high in the second round. This would be consistent with the low voter turnout seen in French elections at all levels in recent years. The presidential election is usually the one where French voters do turn out. In 2017 almost 75 per cent of eligible citizens voted, compared to less than 35 per cent in the regional elections in 2021. Hence, a low turnout in the coming election would send a worrying signal in the face of citizens' increasing disillusionment with the political class.

One of the most unexpected findings in the survey is that Europeans are also deeply disappointed with attempts to resolve problems through international cooperation. This seems to be particularly acute when it comes to the issues that voters are most worried about.

Do you think the global system of international cooperation works well or is broken in the following areas? All surveyed countries.

■ Completely broken
 ■ Somewhat broken
 ■ Don't know
 ■ Works somewhat well
 ■ Works very well



Source: Datapraxix, AnalitiQs, Datalyze, Szondaphone, Turu-uuringute, and YouGov, January/February 2022.
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When we asked voters to rank the threats facing Europe, coronavirus was in first place, and climate change came second (combining the first and second rankings). Clearly, these were the main issues that were keeping Europeans awake at night – at least, before the Russian invasion. It appears that their concern about these threats is compounded by feelings that the system is not delivering. A large majority believe that international cooperation to counter these threats is not working. In the case of climate change, this is as high as 71 per cent. Those who rank climate change among their top two threats are more likely to hold this view. And there are not huge differences on this point between supporters of different political parties. Supporters of far-right parties tend to have a slightly stronger view that international cooperation is not producing results on the coronavirus pandemic, but this is not the case for climate change.

Particularly surprising in these findings is the certainty of Europeans' views. Only around 8 per cent said they did not know whether the international system was working effectively to tackle covid-19, while just 11 per cent said the same of climate change. This suggests that we are living through a moment in which European voters understand the importance of international cooperation on the issues that are shaping their lives.

A public mandate for building sovereignty at the European level

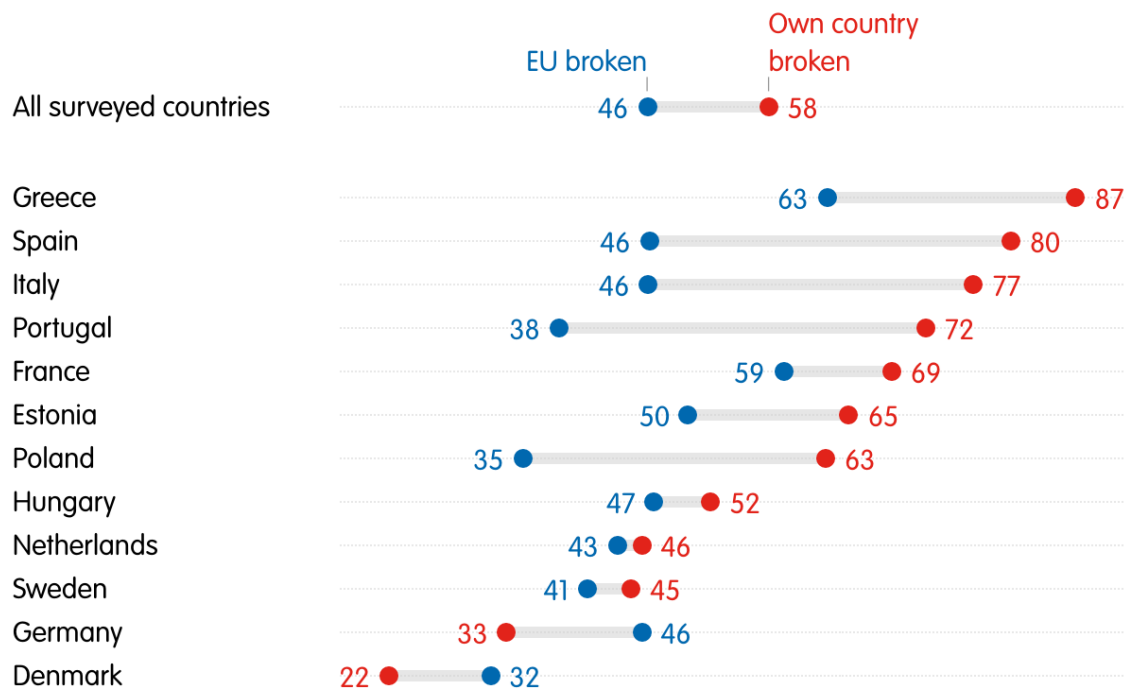
Public understanding of the importance of international cooperation seems to apply particularly to cooperation at the EU level. In recent years, anti-European parties across the EU have largely stopped talking about taking their country out of the union and have instead

focused on telling stories about how they will change it to suit their own vision. This has created a complex battle of narratives around the future of Europe. On one side are political leaders intent on reforming the EU so it responds more effectively to the challenges that worry their electorates (and, in doing so, reinforce support for the European project). On the other side sit political leaders who are intent on reforming the EU to take power back to the national level. Both sides of the argument have a European change agenda but, given their opposing motivations, they need to make a clear distinction between their own agendas and that of the other camp.

Our survey shows why we have ended up in this situation: voters want to be part of the European project. A total of 59 per cent of respondents across the EU still feel it is worth being in the EU. Our survey recorded majorities everywhere except France, Sweden, and Italy. Even in France, Sweden, and Italy, those who support membership hugely outnumber those who do not. (Still, there is no reason for complacency, since 35 per cent responded negatively or were indifferent on this issue.)

There is a broad view that the system works at a European level, particularly when compared with peoples' views of their own countries at the national level. In ten out of 12 countries, higher numbers thought that their national system was broken than those who thought the EU was. Furthermore – and perhaps partly because of this – the EU level is seen as the appropriate one at which to respond to current policy challenges.

Do you think the EU's and/or your country's political system is broken? In per cent.

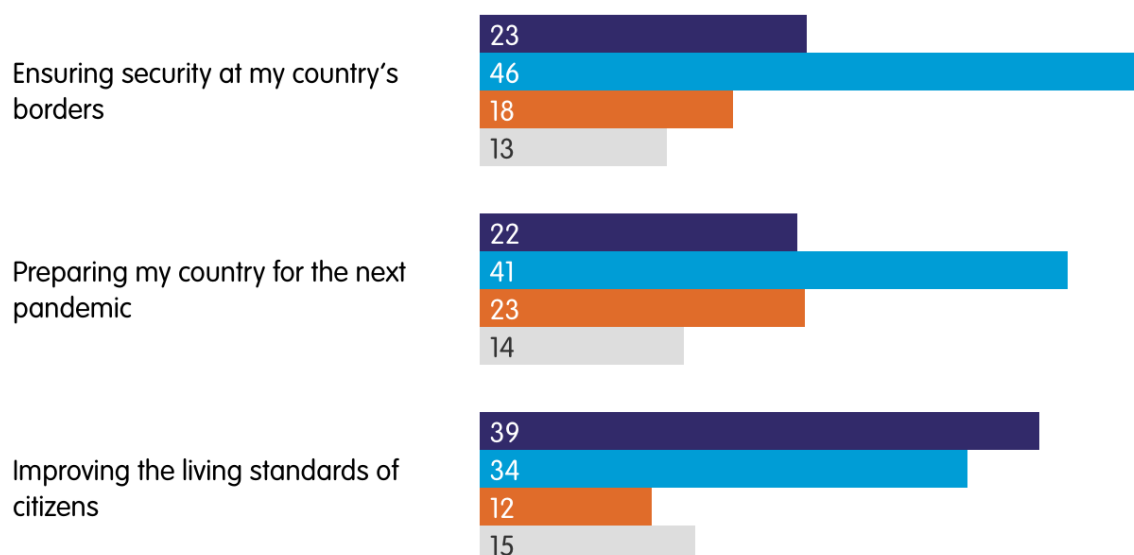


Source: Datapraxis, AnalitiQs, Datalyze, Szondaphone, Turu-uuringute, and YouGov, January/February 2022.
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When we asked respondents how their country should deliver on the high priorities of ensuring security at the border and on preparing for the next pandemic, a plurality of them said that cooperation at the EU level was both necessary and up to the task. This view is broadly held, with a plurality across a range of parties believing that coordination at the EU level is the right one to take on these tasks.

How do you think your country would be able to handle the following challenges? All surveyed countries, in per cent.

- My country would be able to handle it on its own
- My country would need cooperation with the EU only
- This challenge would be beyond both my country and the EU
- Don't know



Source: Datapraxis, AnalitiQs, Datalyze, Szondaphone, Turu-uuringute, and YouGov, January/February 2022.
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Belief in this idea tends to be weakest among those who indicated that they would not vote. In France, support for efforts at the European level on these two files is strongest among both La République En Marche and Les Républicains voters. This speaks not only to supporters of the current president and his pro-EU stance, but also to a broader community.

In the field of health, it is especially striking that 41 per cent of Europeans surveyed believe EU cooperation is the most important forum to prepare for the next pandemic. Indeed, when asked about the EU's current response to the coronavirus pandemic, a majority expressed negative feelings (angry, fearful, or sad). Even perceived underperformance to date does not appear to undermine the conviction that the EU needs to build its health sovereignty.

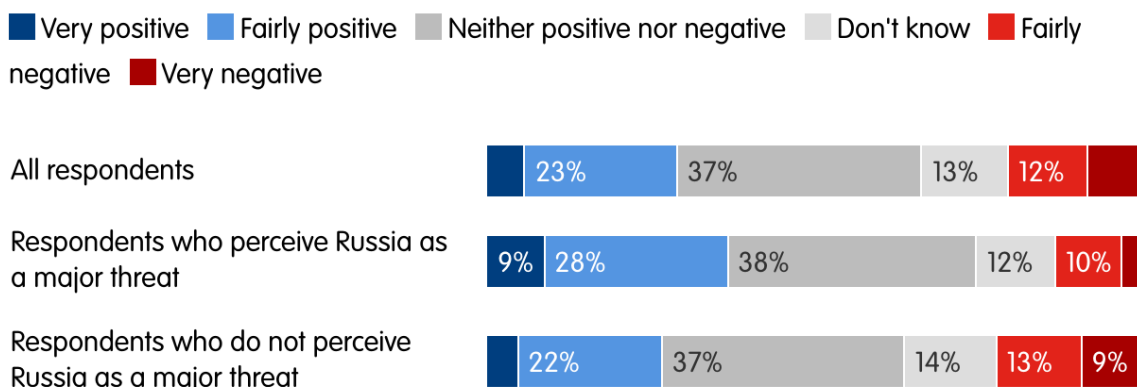
The endorsement of cooperation on security at the EU level is also noteworthy. The Russia threat is a live test of European sovereignty, which has evolved dramatically since our survey took place. During the period in which the survey was conducted, there were hundreds of headlines about how a new European security order was being decided in talks between the US and Russia, without the EU present. European citizens seem to think that this shows there is a need to intensify the effort to build European security cooperation rather than step

back from it. A plurality of respondents said that the EU level was the right one at which to deal with security at the EU's borders. Asked how they felt about the EU's response to Russia's involvement in eastern Europe (Ukraine and Belarus), a majority of respondents had a negative reaction (31 per cent were fearful, 15 per cent were angry, and 11 per cent were sad).

This is consistent with an [ECFR-commissioned survey](#) published last month – which showed that Europeans saw a Russian invasion of Ukraine as highly consequential for the EU, and thought the EU should be part of the response to it. The EU has since implemented far-reaching sanctions on Russia, in coordination with other global players and member states such as Germany, which has sent weapons and aid to the Ukrainian people. Endorsing the use of the EU defence budget to support such efforts appears to be in line with citizens' expectations of Germany in this moment of crisis.

The threat from Russia seems to be reinforcing views on the need for European sovereignty among those who feel it. When we asked Europeans how they felt about the idea of European sovereignty, their responses were far more likely to be positive among those who saw Russia as a key threat (36 per cent versus 29 per cent overall). This pattern is evident in every country in the sample.

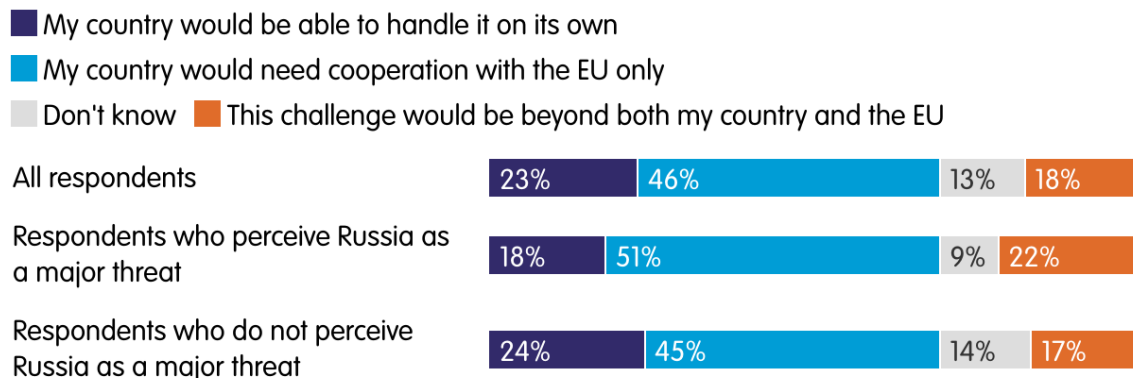
How positive or negative do you feel about European sovereignty? All surveyed countries, by whether respondents consider Russia to be one of two major threats for Europe.



Source: Datapraxis, AnalitiQs, Datalyze, Szondaphone, Turu-uuringute, and YouGov, January/February 2022.
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Respondents were also more likely to think their country needed EU cooperation on security matters if they saw Russia as a key threat. This is the case in every surveyed country except the Netherlands and Denmark.

Do you think your country would be able to ensure security at its borders on its own? All surveyed countries, by whether respondents consider Russia as one of two major threats for Europe.

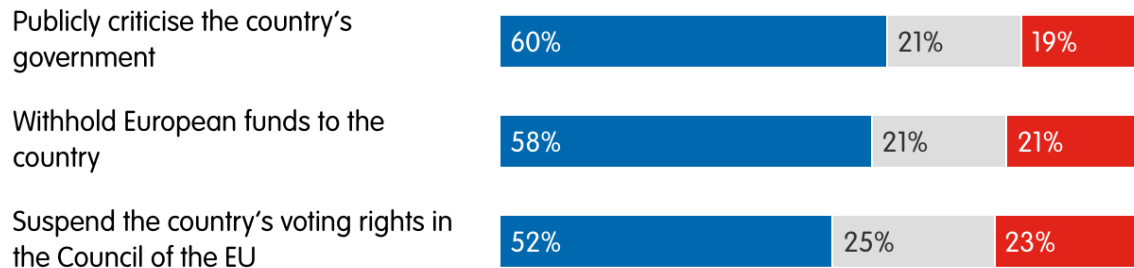


Source: Datapraxis, AnalitiQs, Datalyze, Szondaphone, Turu-uuringute, and YouGov, January/February 2022.
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These data show that respondents' belief in the worth of the European project is strongly linked to the need to defend citizens' security in a broad sense. But they also want the EU to protect their values. Our survey explored whether, in the face of serious and sustained concerns about democracy and the rule of law in a member state, citizens feel that it is legitimate for the EU to act. They wholeheartedly do. Majorities across the EU supported the union criticising member states (61 per cent), withholding EU funds from them (58 per cent), and even restricting their voting rights in the Council of the EU (52 per cent) in response to violations in this area. There are differences between member states here, particularly on withholding of EU funds and restricting voting rights in the Council. But, in every surveyed member state, there was at least a plurality – and usually a majority – of people who supported each potential course of action.

Do you think the EU should apply the following measures when there are concerns that a member state government is corrupt and has taken political control of the courts? All surveyed countries.

■ The EU should be able to do this ■ Don't know ■ The EU should not be able to do this



Source: Datapraxis, AnalitiQs, Datalyze, Szondaphone, Turu-uuringute, and YouGov, January/February 2022.
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For the European public, in spring 2022, the question is clearly not whether to build European sovereignty to withstand security and normative threats, but how to do so.

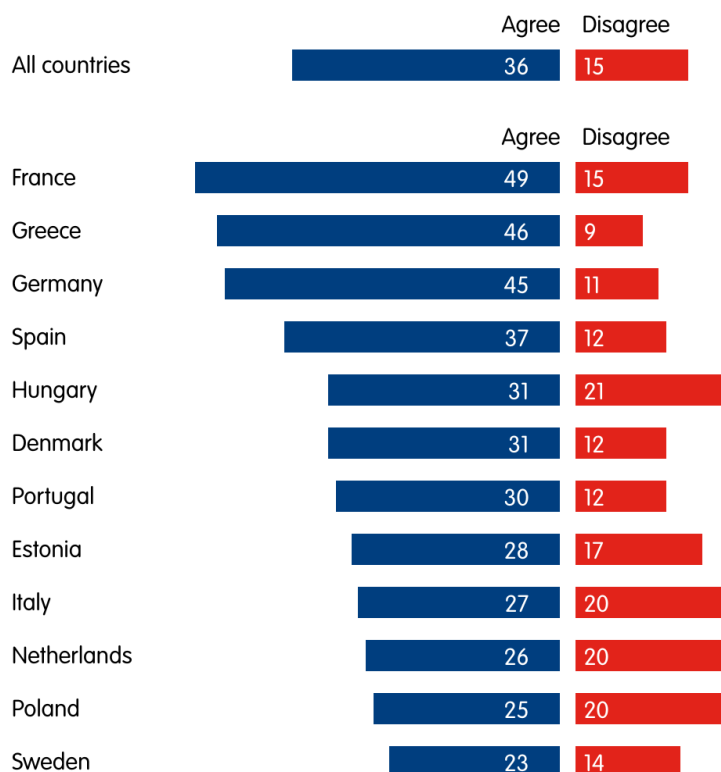
Europeans welcome French leadership.

Enter France. Since the inception of the EU, France has been one of the champions of “ever closer union”. More recently, under Macron, it has held the torch for European sovereignty. However, it is a champion that is often disparagingly referred to among policymakers from other member states and EU institutions as an activist rather than a leader on foreign policy. Macron’s France has been particularly active and forthcoming in putting initiatives on the table. France launched the [European Intervention Initiative](#) in 2018, while Macron tried to deepen dialogue with Russia in [2019](#) – the same year in which, famously, he wondered aloud in an *Economist* [interview](#) about whether NATO was braindead and called for more political coordination inside the organisation. France also launched a regional [conference](#) to stabilise Iraq in 2021, renewed its partnership with African countries in [2021](#), and put an end to the Barkhane operation in Mali in [2022](#), among many other initiatives.

The steady pace of reform that [Macron engaged](#) in left Europeans stunned and even baffled. Rocking the boat only took him so far, which is something he seems to have understood during the Russia-Ukraine crisis. This time, before [going](#) to meet President Vladimir Putin in Moscow, he coordinated and consulted with his American and European partners to ensure he was presenting Europe as a united front. Nevertheless, some Europeans remain suspicious about his ultimate goals in European foreign policy.

With a second presidential mandate, Macron may want to deepen the European project and reforge it according to France's vision. So far, all the indications are that Valérie Pécresse – the presidential candidate of Les Républicains – does not have a radically different approach to this issue. She has outlined a vision in which the EU is the adequate level at which to provide answers to major crises – whether it be tackling covid-19 or launching strategies to influence China and Russia. She wants to renew Europe's partnership with Africa, in close collaboration with Germany. She calls for Europe to fully accept its power and to use it for the greater good. She wants to realise the potential of the European Green Deal and for Europeans to harmonise their health policies. The Macron government can credibly claim to have pushed all these priorities in the past five years. And our survey suggests that Europeans are fine with this in principle. The stereotype of France that European policymakers hold is of an activist player that serves the French national interest rather than the European interest. But this sentiment does not seem to be shared by the European public.

Do you agree France is a partner other EU member states can rely on? In per cent.



The rest of respondents either didn't know, or said they 'neither agreed nor disagreed' with the statement.

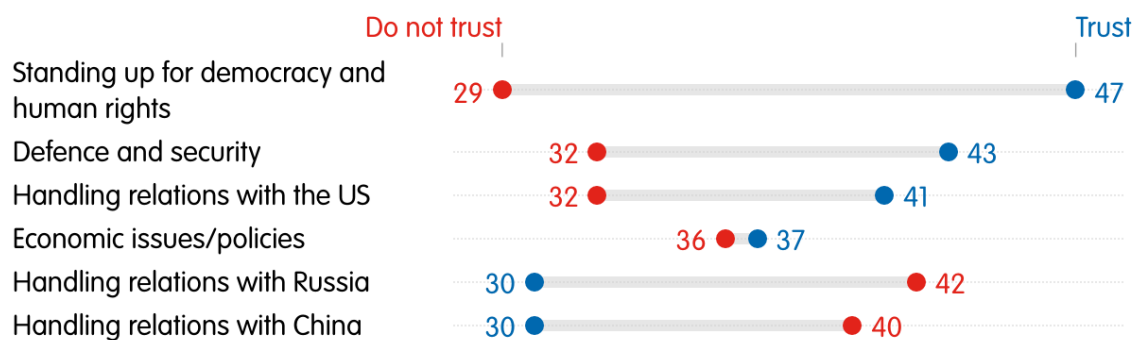
Source: Dataprix, AnalitiQs, DataLyze, Szondaphone, Turu-uuringute, and YouGov, January/February 2022.
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A plurality of Europeans saw France as a reliable partner. And, in each country surveyed, more people felt they could rely on France than felt they could not do so. Interestingly, when

comparing this data point with views on German leadership from an ECFR-commissioned pan-European survey carried out in summer 2021, there seems to be no hesitation around France's efforts to deepen European sovereignty. Quite the reverse. Although the questions asked are different – and although the timing of the January survey that yielded the French data took place in a more geopolitically fraught moment with the Russia crisis – most Europeans appear to be slightly more at ease with the idea of relying on France than on Germany. Respondents in the Netherlands and Hungary are exceptions to this rule in both surveys.

To what extent do you trust France to defend European interests if it plays a leadership role within the EU in each of the following areas?

All surveyed countries except for France, in per cent.



Source: Dataprix, AnalitiQs, Datalyze, Szondaphone, Turu-uuringute, and YouGov, January/February 2022.
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EU member states trust France to protect the union's interests on relations with the US and democracy and defence, albeit less so on economic issues, Russia, and China. This is a very different order from when we asked a similar question regarding how much participants trust Germany to protect EU interests, where economic issues came out top, followed by democracy. We suspect that different issues are mixed in these answers. The economic dimension is less surprising, as France is generally perceived as being part of a coalition of southern EU member states – lacking fiscal responsibility, while calling for increased cooperation and debt mutualisation. The EU has made considerable progress with its China policy in the past three years – particularly with the European Commission labelling the country as a systemic rival – but member states remain unwilling to defer to the union in this area.

Depending on the presidential election result, the test case will be for France to pursue its efforts to strengthen European sovereignty not only in fighting climate change and covid-19, but also in ensuring credible action on traditional foreign policy issues where Europeans are less trusting of them – such as Russia and China. The EU needs to reinforce its investments

in security and defence to complement its commitment to NATO. The undertakings made at the EU level to send €1 billion in aid to Ukraine in the wake of Russia's invasion, and Germany's historic decision to increase military spending by €100 billion, are important steps in the right direction on this front.

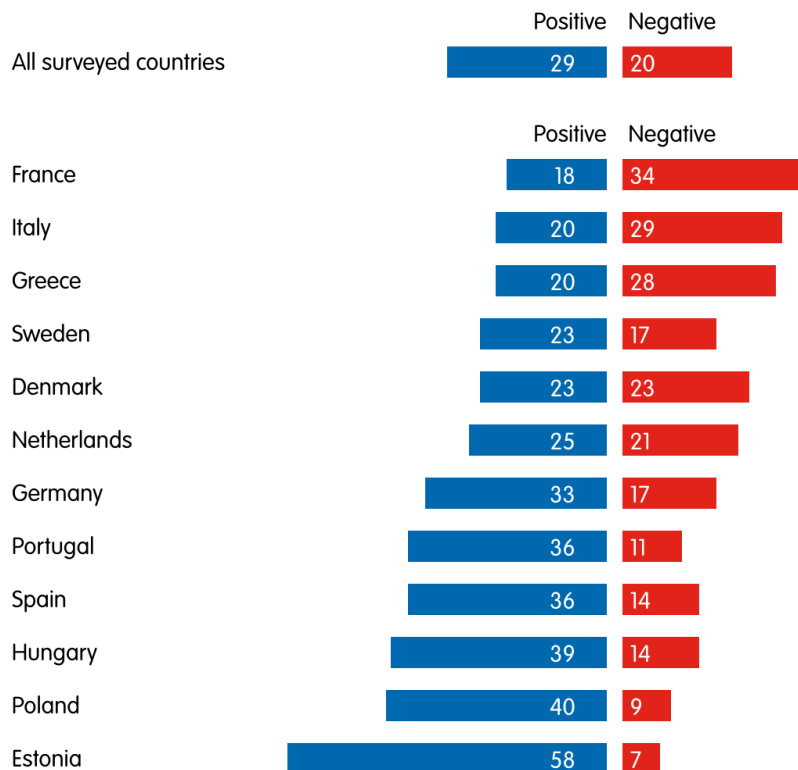
If France is more trusted on security issues in general, one might assume that it should receive more trust on the Russia issue. But our survey shows that this is not the case. The French position, which has consisted in having an open line with the Kremlin, hasn't produced the desired results since 2019. This may have fed into the public having less confidence in France on the Russia file than on security more broadly – even though the Russia threat has now moved to centre stage in terms of security concerns. While Macron's various attempts to engage with Russia were considered until recently to be a liability for European security, they can now be a testament to his willingness to exhaust the diplomatic route before taking another approach.

The US dimension can perhaps be explained through the lens of AUKUS. Following the diplomatic debacle of the AUKUS pact announcement – in which Australia abandoned a major submarine contract with French company Naval Group without notifying its partners beforehand – France put forward a number of demands when it came to cooperation with the US. These included a staunch no-surprise policy and the need to consider the EU as a serious and equal partner on security. This re-energised approach from the French side led to an EU-US dialogue on security and defence, which will begin in 2022. Also, in attempts to de-escalate the situation before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, there was an unprecedented level of coordination between Europeans and Americans – and between Europeans themselves – that stemmed both from the United States' renewed willingness to work with its European allies and from Europeans' desire to ensure that they were still actors in their own security. The effects of France's efforts here perhaps contribute to Europeans' sense that the country will support them in transatlantic relations.

What European agenda should the next French president pursue?

Despite Europeans' surprisingly positive view of French leadership, there remains work to be done at the national level. Our survey has uncovered a French paradox: Although the French government has championed European sovereignty in recent years, the French people are part of a minority of Europeans in our survey – along with Greeks, Italians, and Danes – who have a more negative than positive view of European sovereignty. One explanation for this could be that Macron and his team have been so focused on convincing other Europeans that they did not devote as much energy to defending and embodying the European sovereignty narrative at home.

How positive or negative do you feel about European sovereignty? In per cent.



Source: Dataprix, AnalitiQs, Datalyze, Szondaphone, Turu-uuringute, and YouGov, January/February 2022.
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French citizens have some of the most negative views of the EU among all respondents. Experts have warned against labelling them “Eurosceptics” for several reasons. The French are more supportive of the idea of Europe than of supporting EU institutions and structures. They are relatively sceptical about European integration but also demonstrate a strong attachment to the EU and its openness to others, its adherence to European principles, common policies, and its role in the world.

Ignorance and a lack of awareness of how the EU works is a major element of French mistrust of the union. This well-documented fact is one of the reasons behind the French presidency of the Council’s motto: Recovery, Power, and Belonging (*Relance, Puissance, Appartenance*). The “Recovery” element gained impetus under the German presidency of the EU, which saw EU member states agree in July 2020 to debt mutualisation to tackle the economic fallout from covid-19 – something that had been taboo until then. If re-elected, Macron intends to pursue an economic reform agenda to deliver the “Europe that protects” he has been defending for the past five years. The “Power” element of the motto is a work in progress. The EU is now assuming its geopolitical dimension and ambitions – though there are obstacles ahead, in terms of not just EU cohesion but also the definition and the use of

tools the EU needs to defend itself against the array of weapons wielded by its geopolitical rivals. The “Belonging” element is certainly the hardest to take on. For the first two elements to work, there needs to be a sense of solidarity among member states that ensures they stand together. To achieve this objective, Europeans will need to expand their understanding of their interests and to develop an attachment to a European public space. Overcoming French mistrust of the EU will require French media and school syllabuses to put much more emphasis on European affairs, among other recommendations.

There is also work to be done at the European level. Our survey shows that there is not so much of an issue with the style of French leadership as the substance of what the French are leading on. Our data suggest there is a constituency that supports greater cooperation on security in a broader sense. As discussed, the two biggest threats that Europeans are concerned about are covid-19 and climate change. These are also areas in which EU citizens profoundly feel that the international system is not delivering. The EU needs to step up its role on these issues and build up its ability to deliver through the international system in these areas.

A stronger European response on climate and covid-19 may send a particularly powerful message to younger Europeans about the relevance of the EU to their lives. Among 18-29 year-olds, concerns about these two issues stand out strongly from all other threats to Europe. In contrast, among older age groups, issues such as migration and Islamic radicals are also mixed in. Among French voters, concerns about coronavirus are more pronounced than those about climate in all age groups.

To become a more effective leader in the EU, Paris needs to build up its credibility on economic issues – which, along with the closely linked topic of relations with China, seems to be a key area in which citizens of member states other than France are suspicious of French-led initiatives. In December 2021, in the wake of massive EU investment in response to the covid-19 pandemic, Macron and Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi published an op-ed in the *Financial Times* that advocated reform of the EU’s fiscal rules. They called for a deepening of “the reform agenda” that should accompany “transformations with large-scale investment in research, infrastructure, digitisation and defence”. They added: “we need an EU growth strategy for the next decade, and we must stand ready to implement it through common investments, more suitable rules and better coordination – not only during crises.”

Partnerships will be critical for France in this process. Given Europeans’ relatively low confidence in French leadership around economic issues, it will be important to win the consent of member states who inspire more confidence in this area. In this way, France can strengthen this dimension of its leadership on European sovereignty.

The debate between deepening and enlargement is at the heart of the current European conundrum. Macron believes that the EU needs to deepen and build a closer bond before opening up to others. European leaders in the north and the east tilt towards opening up

first, in the hope that inclusion in the European single market will help other countries develop economically and socially. The starting points of these two views are different but not incompatible. Macron alienated many Europeans when he vetoed opening EU accession negotiations for North Macedonia and Albania in 2019. Some in the Balkans even called his decision a “historic mistake”. A conference on the Western Balkans made its way onto the very end of the French EU Council presidency agenda – underlining the importance Paris now attributes to the issue.

Finally, but crucially, against the backdrop of the Ukraine crisis in which Putin is trying to rewrite the international rulebook, France will need to take a stronger line on rule of law issues. This would help convince Europeans that French leadership protects not only their interests but also their values.

Macron has rarely gone further than speeches in this field – and, clearly, Europeans feel that a stronger line is needed to prevent further backsliding on the rule of law in Europe. Thirty years after the fall of the Berlin wall, a new east-west divide seems to be appearing at the national level within the EU on the rule of law. France will have to lead by example here too. In international relations, France’s president should be careful not to be seen to develop relationships with autocrats in the same way as with democrats. One of Macron’s foreign and domestic trademarks is to develop personal relationships with his interlocutors. He is said to read detailed accounts of descriptions of political personalities sent by embassies around the globe, as well as intelligence reports on them, and then adapt his diplomatic strategy to their personalities. This is probably what other leaders do with their partners too. But it is problematic to treat democrats, partners, and autocrats equally. Diplomacy requires dealing with every sort of actor, but paying special attention to autocrats can boomerang on a leader. Macron’s recent meeting with Putin in Moscow, which came amid mounting tensions on the Ukrainian border and was preceded and followed by phone calls, angered his European partners considerably.

Respondents’ strong support for tackling breaches of the rule of law underlines that to withstand attempts by Russia, China, and other actors to rewrite the rules of the international order, we need to begin with a ‘moral rearmament’ at home. A more robust defence of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law within Europe is a prerequisite of a strategy to shape international standards in any area.

Conclusion

Our data shows that whoever wins the next French presidential election will have a mandate to build European strategic sovereignty. France's leadership in the EU is not as hotly contested as many commentators seem to think. And European citizens recognise the need for EU cooperation on the threats they fear the most. One might speculate that their resolve on this front may even have strengthened with Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

France needs to adjust its method when it comes to defending its European agenda. It should strive for a more inclusive, participatory Europe. This will be a struggle for many reasons – the make-up of the Fifth Republic's political system, a president who believes in verticality, and a parliament that does not play the balancing role the country needs – but it is essential that European governments and European citizens support French leadership. Developing a stronger narrative on the role the EU can play regarding Russia and China will be paramount, as will making European affairs more present in the French debate. The presidential election campaign presents an opportunity to do both.

Methodology

This report is based on a public opinion poll that Datapraxis, AnalitiQs, Datalyze, Szondaphone, Turu-uuringute, and YouGov carried out for the European Council on Foreign Relations in Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden. The survey was conducted in late January and early February 2022, with an overall sample of 15,113 respondents.

This was an online survey in Denmark (n = 1,023), Estonia (n = 502), France (n = 3,019), Germany (n = 2,013), Greece (n = 511), Italy (n = 1,006), Netherlands (n = 1,008), Poland (n = 1,517), Portugal (n = 1,002), Spain (n = 1,011), and Sweden (n = 1,001). In Hungary (n = 1,500) responses were collected online and by phone. The results are nationally representative of basic demographics and past votes in each country. The general margin of error is ± 2 per cent for a sample of 2,000-3,000, ± 3 per cent for a sample of 1,000-1,500, and ± 4 per cent for a sample of 500.

The exact dates of polling were: Denmark (21-31 January), Estonia (2-7 February), France (21 January – 1 February), Germany (25 January – 1 February), Greece (25-31 January), Hungary (21-30 January), Italy (25 January – 4 February), Netherlands (28 January – 3 February), Poland (25-31 January), Portugal (21 January – 2 February), Spain (25 January – 2 February), and Sweden (21-31 January).

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Any mistakes remain the authors’ own.

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