

TOGETHER IN TRAUMA: EUROPEANS AND THE WORLD AFTER COVID-19

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June 2020

SUMMARY

- A new pan-European survey conducted by ECFR shows that, after the onset of the covid-19 crisis, there has been a rise in public support for unified EU action to tackle global threats.
- This is grounded in Europeans' realisation that they are alone in the world – with their perceptions of the United States, China, and Russia worsening overall.
- The pandemic has made European voters keenly aware of the need to prepare for the next crisis.
- There is growing support for the fulfilment of climate change commitments in every surveyed country.
- Respondents still believe in the value of European cooperation, but generally feel that EU institutions have not helped them enough during the crisis.
- Policymakers need to elicit voters' support for a strong European voice on the global stage by building coalitions and identifying areas in which there is either a consensus or a bridgeable divide.

Introduction

In the aftermath of the second world war, Europe was deeply traumatised. Up to 20 million Europeans had died, countless more lives had been destroyed, there were severe shortages of goods everywhere, and the pre-war international order had been burnt to ashes. The trauma lasted for generations and made a profound contribution to the construction of the European project – organised around the vision of EU founding father Jean Monnet that “it is better to fight around the table than on a battlefield”. Member states of what would become the European Union committed to binding themselves together so tightly that such an experience could never happen again.

After the outbreak of covid-19, Europe faces a new moment of trauma, *toutes proportions gardées*. Our sense of security – which began to slip away after peaking around the turn of the century – is now gone. We can no longer labour under the illusion that, despite living in an interconnected world, we are somehow immune to the impact of disease, conflict, and other such risks that originate far from our homes. Fortunately, far fewer lives have been lost in the coronavirus crisis than in the second world war. But our sense of vulnerability is keen once more. Europeans now have to live with the knowledge that, despite all the structures we have put in place to protect ourselves at the EU and global level, our continent can move from complacency to full economic and social shutdown in a matter of weeks. This realisation may have profound consequences for the way that Europe engages with the rest of the world.

As the first wave of the pandemic recedes in Europe, its societies are left with many questions. What is the purpose of international relations – and, indeed, European integration – if not to make us more resilient against shocks such as this one? How much solidarity can we expect from other states and actors, in Europe and elsewhere, and how much will we provide? Which partners, and which systems of governance, are most likely to protect us at the national and international levels? If collective memory forms the building blocks of collective identity, the differences in Europeans’ answers to these questions will matter just as much for the future of the European project as will the similarities.

To explore how Europeans think about these issues, the European Council on Foreign Relations commissioned YouGov and Datapraxis to conduct a survey in nine EU member states, which collectively account for around two-thirds of both its population and its GDP. The poll took place in the last week of April 2020 in Germany, France, Italy, Spain,

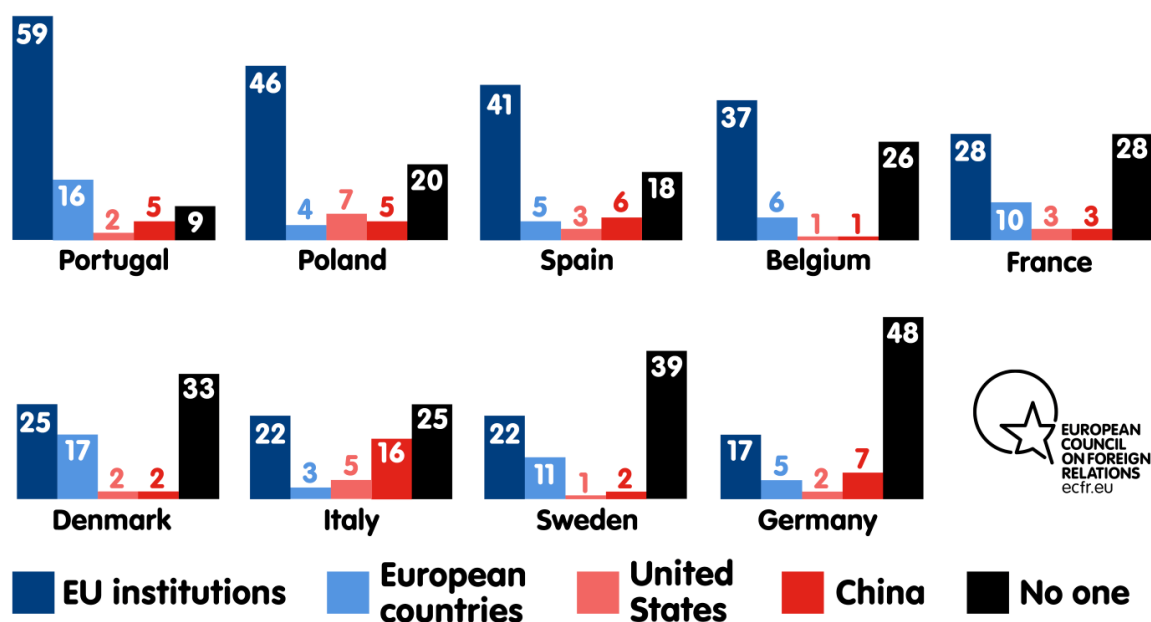
Poland, Sweden, Portugal, Bulgaria, and Denmark. This paper explores the insights from that study.

Traumatised Europeans

The covid-19 crisis has shown the European public a reality that European leaders have glimpsed for years: Europe is, ultimately, alone and vulnerable. ECFR's survey data reveal that there are at least three levels to this reality.

Firstly, there is a powerful sense among citizens of almost all surveyed member states that their country was largely left to fend for itself in dealing with the pandemic. This was the most common response to a question about who the most helpful ally of their country was during the crisis (excluding those who did not know). However, the uniformity of responses to questions about allies stopped there. In Spain, Denmark, and Sweden, more than 20 per cent of respondents pointed to the World Health Organisation as their country's greatest ally. Germany was the second-most-common response among the French, but this was not reciprocated – very few Germans identified France as their most helpful ally. The EU came in second place in this measure only in Poland. Strikingly, in Italy, the second most common response was China – presumably reflecting the fact that, while EU member states equivocated in the early days of the coronavirus crisis, Italy received high-profile Chinese assistance in the form of medical equipment, expertise, and research support.

Which powers will provide your country with the most support during the recovery from the coronavirus crisis? (%)



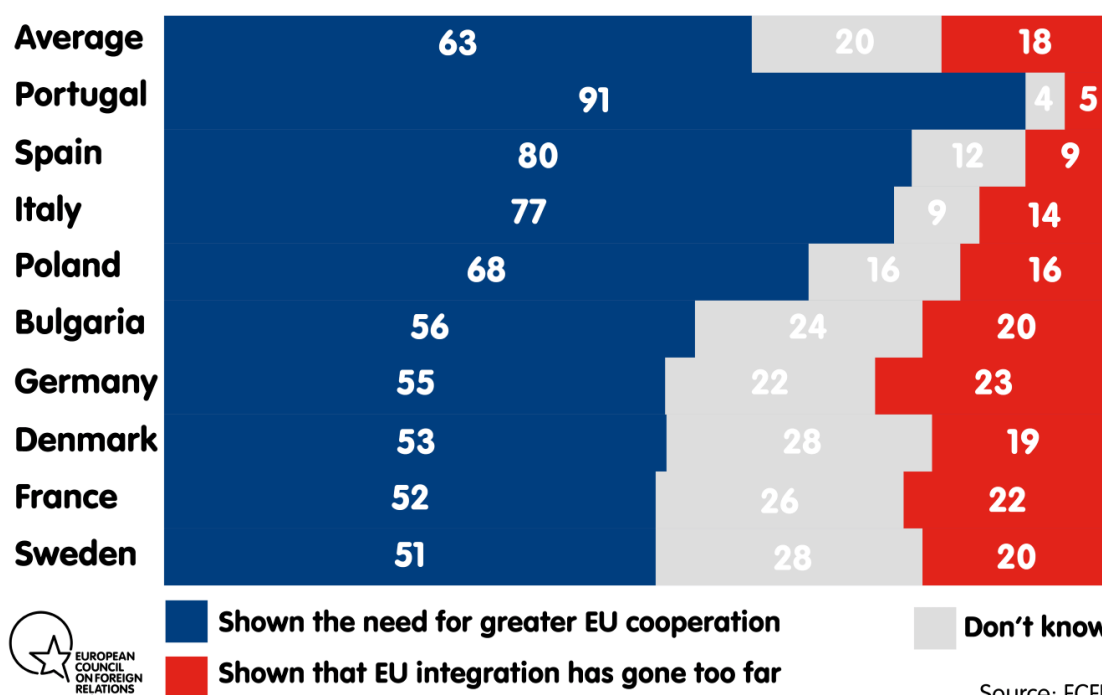
However, not all respondents who believed that their country largely fended for itself saw this as the optimal situation. Their perceptions of national governments' performance vary considerably. In Denmark, Portugal, Bulgaria, Sweden, and Germany, more than 60 per cent of respondents said that their government had lived up to its responsibilities in its response to coronavirus. In contrast, society is deeply divided on this issue in Poland and Italy, while those who criticise the government's response outnumber those who approve of it by two to one in Spain and France. Moreover, in the latter two countries, more than 50 per cent of respondents say that their perception of the government has deteriorated during the crisis – and just one-sixth of them say that it has improved.

To be sure, party affiliation has a significant bearing on this picture: supporters of ruling parties are much less likely than average to criticise their performance during the crisis. It is, therefore, all the more surprising to see that one-third of those who voted for Spanish Socialist Workers' Party in Spain in 2019 or for Emmanuel Macron in the first round of the French 2017 presidential election – and one-fifth of those who voted for the Law and Justice (PiS) party in Poland in 2019 – say that their perception of the government has worsened during the crisis. Overall, among people who felt disappointed with the government's performance or reported a drop in their approval of the government, the crisis has compounded their sense of isolation and vulnerability. At

a critical moment, they were left in the hands of a national government that, in their view, failed to look after them.

The second sense of vulnerability emerges at the European level. As ECFR's data show, there is strong support for greater cooperation within the EU. In all surveyed countries, most respondents thought that the preliminary European response to the coronavirus crisis showed that there was a need for more such cooperation. The share of respondents who held this belief was as high as 91 per cent in Portugal and 80 per cent in Spain. But perhaps even more noteworthy was the response in less Europhile member states. In France, Sweden, and Denmark, more than half of respondents approved of greater cooperation at the European level. In Italy, 77 per cent did.

How has the coronavirus changed your attitudes towards the EU? (%)



Yet few respondents to the survey had a positive view of the EU's coronavirus response. In no surveyed country do a majority of them see a positive change in the performance of EU institutions during the crisis. In all these countries, people who reported that their perception of EU institutions has deteriorated outnumber those who said it had improved. (Although, in all surveyed countries apart from Italy, France, and Spain, more than 40 per cent said that their view of these institutions "stayed the same".) In every surveyed country, at least one-quarter of respondents said that their perception of the EU had worsened. While negative views of EU institutions have grown in Italy and France in recent years, it increasingly appears that Spain – which is historically

Europhile – may now be living through a moment of disillusionment with the EU. Exactly half of Spain’s respondents declared that their view of EU institutions had deteriorated.

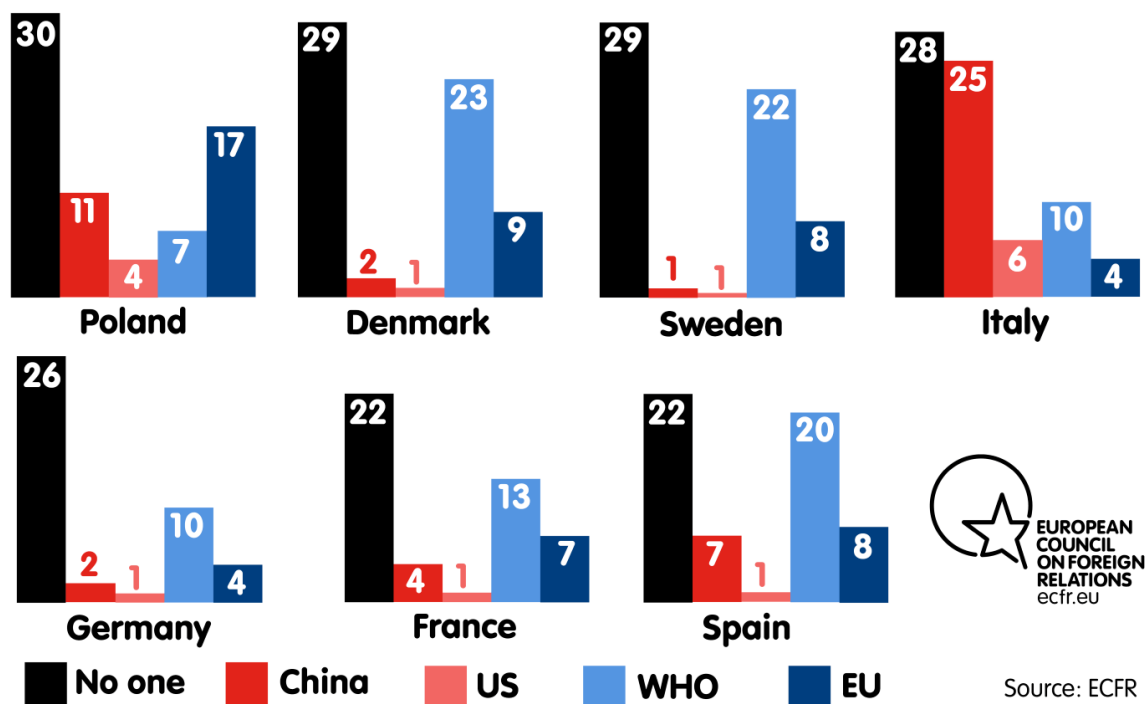
On a related question, 63 per cent of Italians, 61 per cent of French people, and 52 per cent of Spaniards said that the EU has not lived up to its responsibilities. Finally, and perhaps most damningly of all, a large plurality (and, in some cases, a majority) in every surveyed member state described the EU as having slipped into irrelevance in the coronavirus crisis. In France, Spain, Germany, and Bulgaria, respondents who say that national or global responses to the crisis are more important than EU ones outnumber those who think they are less important by three to one.

As a consequence, European voters now face a reality in which, though they still believe in Europe’s potential for cooperation, they largely feel that current EU institutions have not done enough to help them address the crisis. This experience is somewhat like being let down by one’s family at a critical time. This does not imply a lasting separation – especially given that family members are impossible to replace – but rather that there has been a shock to a central pillar of one’s support system.

There are some signs that Europeans are beginning to react to this uncertain environment by turning inwards. Across Europe, there is a rising belief that, in the long term, member states need to implement greater border controls. A substantial share of the population in surveyed countries – ranging from 48 per cent in Denmark to 73 per cent in Portugal – supports stricter border controls. This is a powerful signal of Europeans’ current sense of vulnerability.

But European blood may be thicker than water. Respondents to ECFR’s survey generally appear to be willing to give EU institutions the benefit of the doubt on the planned economic recovery, despite feeling disappointed with these institutions’ response to the health crisis. In Portugal, Poland, Spain, Bulgaria, and even France, more respondents expected economic assistance to come from the EU than any other source. At the same time, however, this trend is much less apparent in Germany, Sweden, and Denmark – for which the pandemic has largely strengthened the perception that they can handle crises alone. This reflects a dangerous divergence in EU member states’ experiences of, and conclusions from, covid-19.

Who has been your country's greatest ally in the coronavirus crisis? (%)



Europeans' coronavirus-induced sense of vulnerability also extends to the global level. They understand that they live in an unstable, globalised environment in which risks that begin far beyond Europe's borders can quickly have an impact at home. Having lived through the 2008 financial crisis, and seen the heightened inflows of refugees spurred by the Syrian conflict in 2015, Europeans see the coronavirus crisis as yet more evidence of this vulnerability. And covid-19 has shown them that the impact of global events on their daily lives can go beyond the economic sphere or the changing character of Europe's neighbourhood: this time, it has come into their homes and changed their ways of living.

In a frightening world, one looks around for friends. But Europeans are uncertain who they can rely on. As a pan-European poll ECFR carried out in 2019 showed, Europeans preferred the idea of an EU that was strong enough not to be forced to choose sides in a conflict but, ultimately, would usually side with the United States over any other ally. Now, Europeans' trust in the US is gone. Many of them have been appalled by the country's chaotic response to covid-19; the lack of solidarity it showed with Europeans in the 12 March closure of its border to members of the Schengen area; and its lack of leadership in tackling the coronavirus crisis at the global level – or even engagement with the issue (beyond a war of words with the World Health Organisation).

Only a vanishingly small number of respondents to this year's survey feel that the US has been the key ally for their country in the crisis – the highest share being in Italy, at just 6 per cent. In seven of nine surveyed member states, overall perceptions of the US deteriorated (only a plurality of respondents in Poland and Bulgaria said that there had been no change in this). In Denmark, Portugal, France, Germany, and Spain, more than two-thirds of respondents said that their view of the US has worsened during the crisis.

This shift is particularly marked in France and Germany – the two states at the centre of European policymaking. Forty-six per cent of French respondents, and 42 per cent of Germans, said their view of the US had worsened “a lot” as a result of the coronavirus crisis (the highest results among all surveyed countries). As Germany is set to take over the presidency of the EU in July, this change in public opinion may push European governments to pursue a more independent line from the US as they try to rebuild the international order.

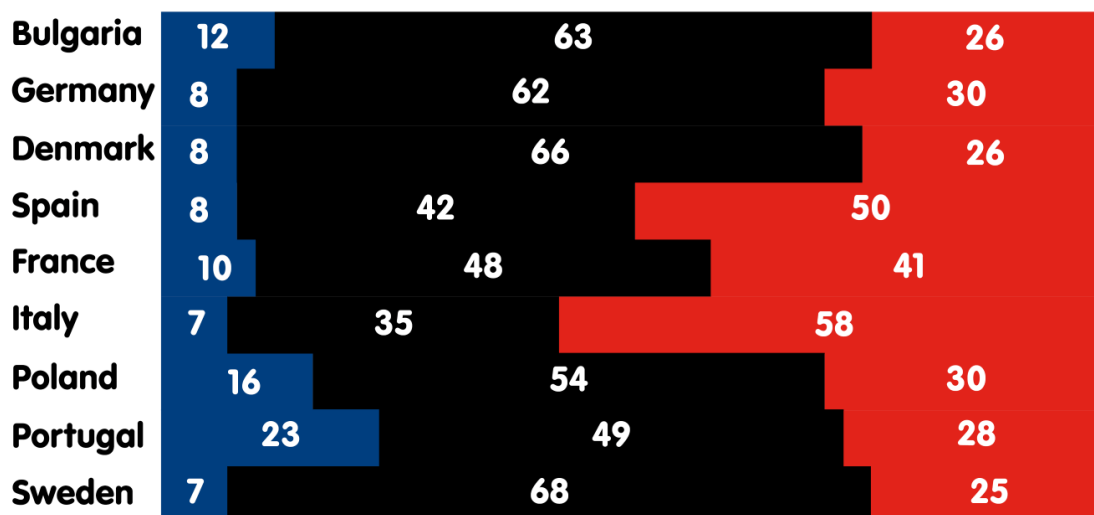
China has also made an overwhelmingly negative impression on Europeans during the crisis. More than 60 per cent of respondents in France and Denmark reported that their view of China had worsened. In eight of nine surveyed countries, the share of respondents who have adopted a more negative view of China in the past year has increased by between a factor of two and a factor of ten. Only in Bulgaria does the share of respondents who say their perception of China has improved equal the share of those who say it has declined (22 per cent).

Perceptions of Russia have not declined so sharply – probably because the country has played a less vocal international role in the crisis. In every surveyed country, a plurality or a majority of voters report no change in their perception of Russia. Still, in seven surveyed countries, those who say that their view of Russia had become more negative outnumber those who say it has improved. This is especially apparent in Denmark, Sweden, Germany, and Poland. The exceptions are Bulgaria and Italy, where one-quarter of the population reports an improved perception of Russia, outnumbering those who say they view it more negatively.

In most countries, an improved perception of China or Russia is limited to supporters of right-wing populist parties. But, in Bulgaria and Italy, it is not as simple as that. Supporters of not only the League and the Brothers of Italy but also of the Five Star Movement say that their perception of Russia has improved. And supporters of the Five Star Movement are more likely than those of any other party to report that their perception of China has improved. Similarly, in Bulgaria, many supporters of the

Bulgarian Socialist Party (one of the country's two mainstream political groupings) say that their views of China and Russia have improved.

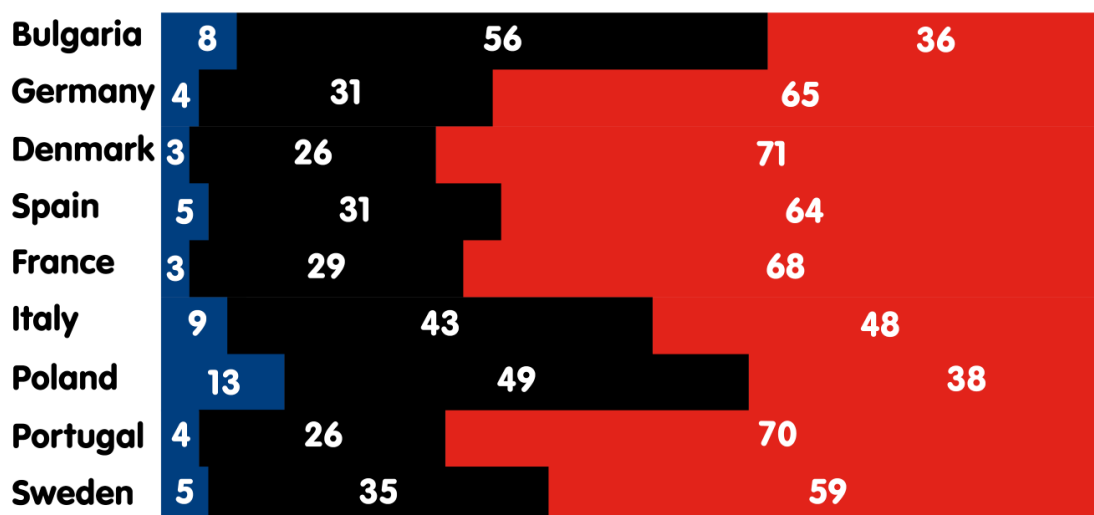
How has your view of the EU changed during the coronavirus crisis? (%)



Improved Stayed the same Worsened

Source: ECFR

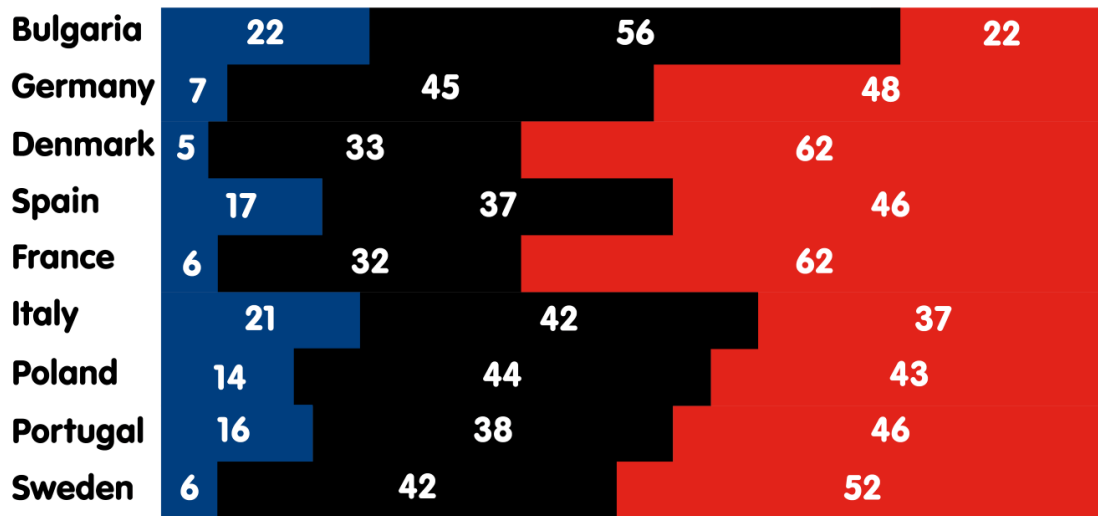
How has your view of the US changed during the coronavirus crisis? (%)



Improved Stayed the same Worsened

Source: ECFR

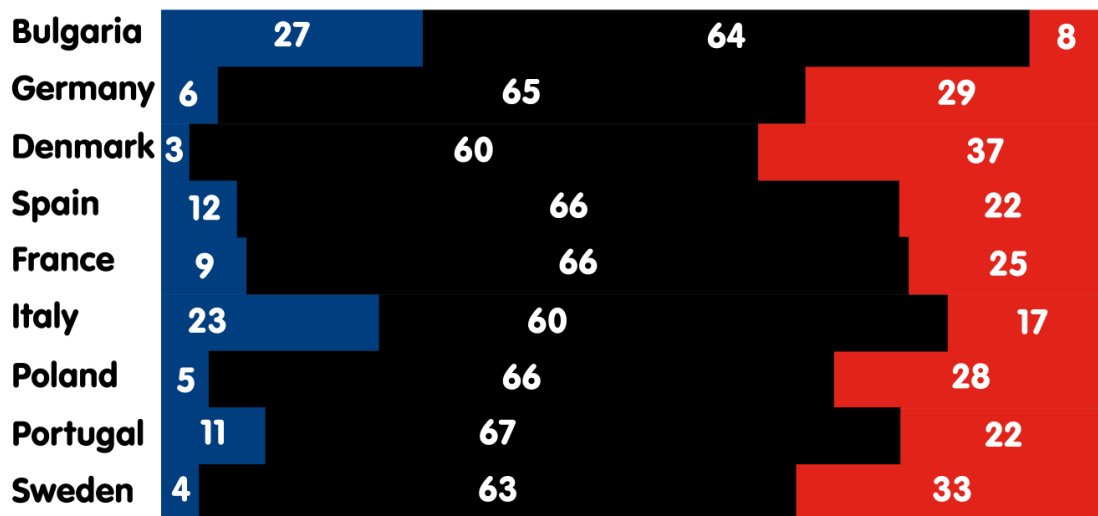
How has your view of China changed during the coronavirus crisis? (%)



Improved Stayed the same Worsened

Source: ECFR

How has your view of Russia changed during the coronavirus crisis? (%)



Improved Stayed the same Worsened

Source: ECFR

European policymakers and analysts have much to explore in this data on the extent to which Europeans' current worldview has been affected by the coronavirus. But, for most European voters, this question is immaterial. They see a US that is, at best, a fair-

weather friend; a China that remains a systemic rival; and a Russia that seems to be relatively marginal to many EU citizens. This is the reality they perceive themselves as living in – and that will determine whether they support or tolerate European foreign policy in a range of areas.

The meaning of internationalism for Europeans

The covid-19 crisis has increased Europeans' sensitivity to future shocks. There are significant reported increases in European support for action on climate change – an issue on which, as ECFR's 2019 poll showed, they firmly believe in the potential for efforts at the EU level. This year, more than 40 per cent of respondents in Bulgaria, Germany, Italy, Poland, Portugal, and Spain said that their support for the EU's fulfilment of its climate commitments increased during the covid-19 crisis. The relative lack of change on this score in Denmark, France, and Sweden may be mostly due to the fact that large proportions of respondents already strongly supported such action.

The global nature of the pandemic has brought home to voters not only the importance of international cooperation but also the economies of scale in responding to challenges collectively. In Germany and France, more than 50 per cent of respondents want governments to encourage companies to relocate the production of medical supplies, and around 40 per cent the production of non-medical goods, to Europe.

As outlined above, Europeans have accepted the fact that the US is not necessarily a friend of Europe in a time of need. The severe deterioration of the country's image among Europeans may indicate that they regard it as vulnerable and no longer a force for good. The US withdrawal from international leadership could reinforce European voters' belief that their governments should take on this role. They see a stark difference between Washington's absence in recent months and its past leadership on international health crises ranging from Ebola to AIDS, as well as its historical role as a builder of coalitions and a shaper of global institutions. Many Europeans may still believe that there is a need for an actor to take on the role formerly played by the US by leading international institutions. In every surveyed country, respondents who say they have become more supportive of the rule of law, human rights, and democracy since the covid-19 crisis outnumber those who say they have become less supportive.

The EU's development as an actor that responds to global threats and challenges strategically – realising its ambition to become more geopolitical, as Ursula Von der Leyen set out at the beginning of her mandate as president of the European Commission

– could allow it to make a comeback in the eyes of voters. As ECFR showed last year in “Give the people what they want: Popular demand for an EU foreign policy”, there is strong public support for the union as a global actor. Data from ECFR’s 2020 survey show that the experience of covid-19 has strengthened this view. Respondents believe that the coronavirus should push the EU into, above all, forging a more unified response to global threats – followed by sharing the financial burden of the crisis, and controlling the bloc’s external borders.

Certain ideas about what should change after the crisis appear to be linked with one another. For example, calls for a more unified EU response to global challenges correlate with those for support for sharing the financial burden of the crisis among member states. Similarly, calls for greater internal border controls correlate with those for greater external border controls, and with a return of governmental powers from the EU to the national level. These links are especially apparent in Denmark, Sweden, Italy, France, and Bulgaria.

Crucially, however, they are not clear everywhere. Forty-two per cent of respondents in Sweden and Italy who call for a more unified EU response to global challenges also support stronger controls on external borders. In Bulgaria, on the other end of the scale, this figure is 76 per cent. Nonetheless, many voters who advocate the closure of internal or external borders, or the return of powers to the national level, recognise the value of developing a more unified EU response to global challenges and of relocating production to Europe.

Thus, if handled carefully, Europeans’ current trauma could develop into support for a greater international role for the EU. It would be beneficial for European voters if the EU emerged from the crisis as a stronger global actor – one that provided not only a useful framework for practical cooperation between states, but also shaped the international order in line with European values and interests. To take advantage of this opportunity, European leaders will need to understand the diversity of experiences, and the lessons of the covid-19 crisis, within and between countries.

Europe at a crossroads

If their citizens are to support a strong role for Europe on the global stage, European countries will need to build coalitions with one another by identifying areas in which there is a consensus, or in which disagreements between them are surmountable. They must also account for the fact that citizens’ views are likely to change as the continent

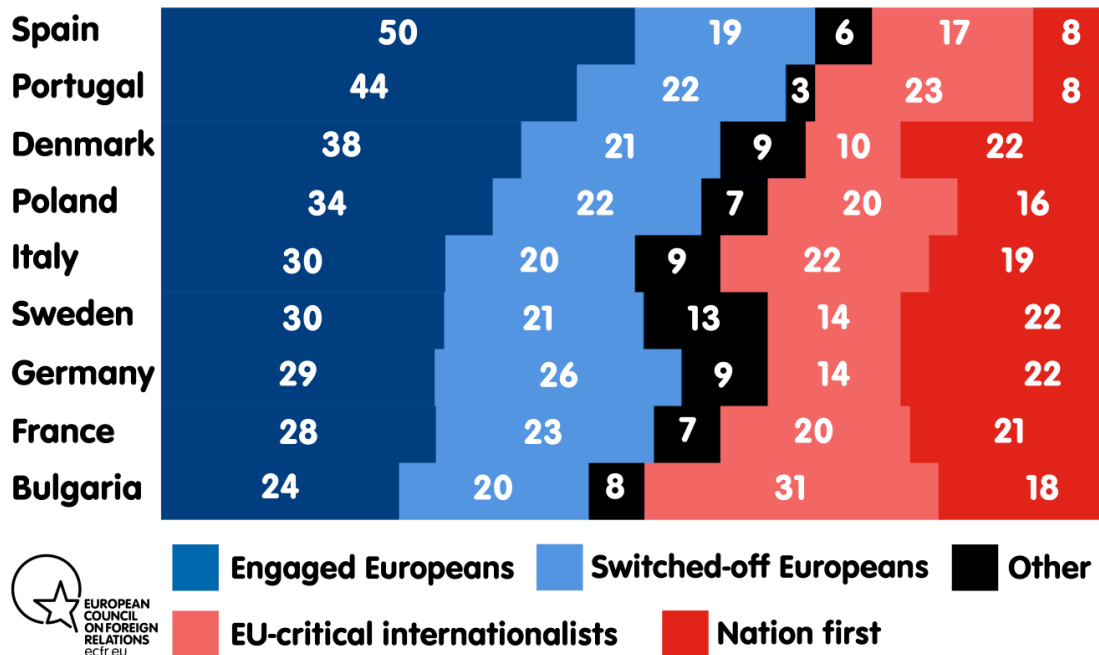
moves out of emergency response mode and turns its attention to the economic hardship created by the pandemic. In this sense, member states have an opportunity to reframe existing divides within the EU.

As discussed above, at least half of respondents in each surveyed country believe that the crisis shows the need for greater cooperation within the EU. There is much less of a sense among voters that EU integration has gone too far. However, not all those who want “more Europe” agree that this should involve a more unified EU approach to addressing global threats and challenges.

The table below categorises respondents in surveyed countries according to their response to two questions.

	<i>The EU should develop a more common response to global threats and challenges</i>	<i>The EU should not develop a more common response to global threats and challenges</i>
<i>The coronavirus crisis has shown that there is a need for more cooperation at the EU level</i>	Engaged internationalists	Switched-off Europeans
<i>The coronavirus crisis has shown that EU integration has gone too far</i>	EU-critical internationalists	Nation first

Voters' broad attitudes towards the EU (%)



Source: ECFR

Overall, ECFR's study shows that there are large groups of “engaged internationalists” in every surveyed country – ranging from 24 per cent of respondents in Bulgaria to 50 per cent in Spain. These are the natural supporters of the EU's international ambitions. The group is dominated by supporters of the Democratic Party in Italy, La République en Marche! in France, and Civic Coalition in Poland (and also includes a plurality of PiS voters). But, as they are not sufficient to form a strong coalition alone, they will also need to find less obvious partners – who, in turn, might require them to fulfil certain conditions.

Engaged internationalists might win the support of “EU-critical internationalists” by engaging in practical projects that would make Europe stronger, less vulnerable, and more united overall – so long as this does not involve a significant build-up of the EU's institutional capacity. EU-critical internationalists and engaged internationalists are the two groups most likely to support greater financial solidarity between member states, and the most likely to say that the covid-19 crisis has increased their support for the fulfilment of EU climate commitments. Similarly, EU-critical internationalists and (in Germany, France, and Denmark) engaged internationalists are the groups most likely to push for greater European economic sovereignty.

Like engaged internationalists, EU-critical internationalists have strong views and are supportive of many cooperation initiatives. However, they disagree with the basic

conclusion that these initiatives should necessarily entail more EU integration. In no surveyed country are they a dominant group of voters – but, in each, they account for at least one-fifth of the electorate. Supporters of the Free Democratic Party in Germany are often EU-critical internationalists, as are those of Podemos in Spain, and of the Brothers of Italy. Some supporters of traditionally mainstream parties fall into this category.

Engaged internationalists should also pay close attention to “switched-off Europeans”. Members of the former group are twice as likely as switched-off Europeans to hold strong views on the questions included in ECFR’s survey. The latter generally do not want to share the financial burden of the recovery from the pandemic between EU member states. If the coronavirus crisis has had any impact on the outlook of switched-off Europeans, it has been on their increased support for stricter border controls, the promotion of human rights and democracy, health surveillance, and – in Spain and Italy – efforts to address climate change. Nonetheless, switched-off Europeans express a fundamental attachment to the EU and are not radically opposed to any given area of European cooperation. This quality should make it possible to switch many of them on.

They represent the largest group of voters in Bulgaria (31 per cent), and the second-largest in Portugal (23 per cent) and Italy (22 per cent). Only in Germany, Sweden, and Denmark are there relatively few switched-off Europeans (partly because the “nation first” group is bigger in these three countries than it is elsewhere). Switched-off Europeans are often the most politically diverse of the four groups. In France, they include supporters of *La République en Marche!*, *Rassemblement National*, *Les Républicains*, and the Greens – collectively accounting for one-quarter of the electorate. Poland’s switched-off Europeans are supporters of *PiS* and *Civic Coalition* in equal proportions.

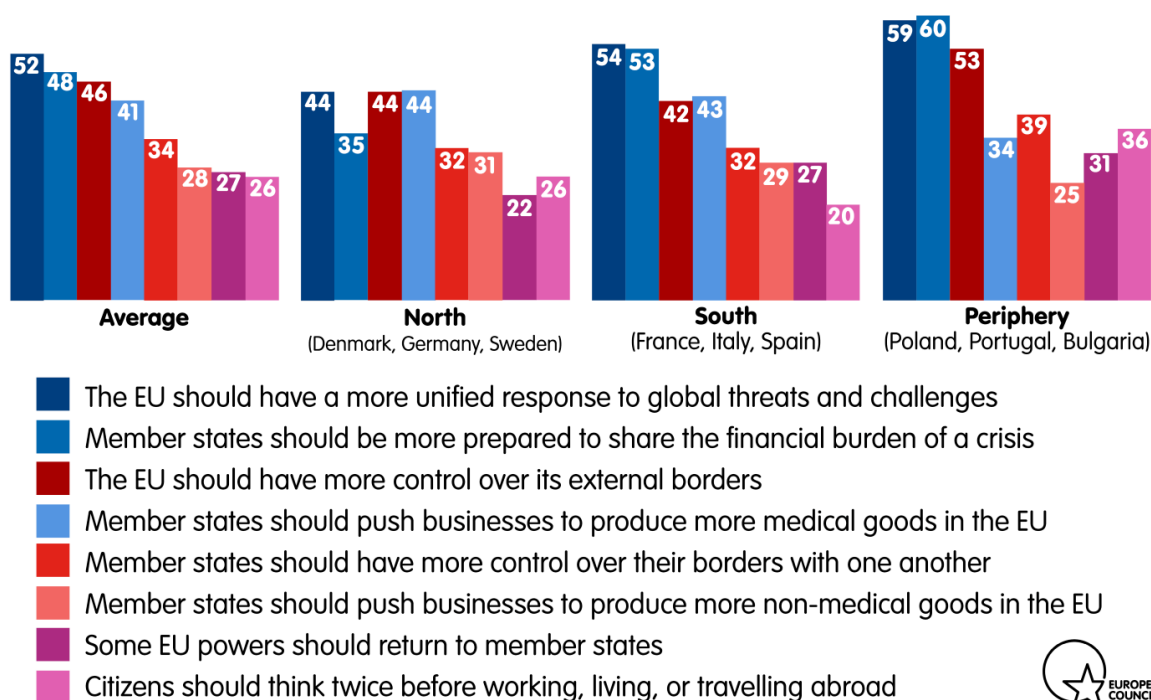
By contrast, the nation first group is dominated by supporters of populist or nationalist parties such as the *League*, *PiS*, *Vox* in Spain, the *Sweden Democrats*, and *Rassemblement National* – although, interestingly, it includes as many supporters of *Alternative for Germany* as it does supporters of the *Christian Democratic Union* and the *Christian Social Union* combined. Accordingly, the nation first group includes few natural allies for those who advocate projects related to the EU’s global role. But engaged internationalists can build bridges even here, as members of the nation first group often have the same anxieties about the pandemic as the rest of the society. In Germany, France, and Denmark, one-third of people in the nation first group want to

relocate some supply chains to Europe (even if they may see this as a matter of national rather than European sovereignty). And, in six of nine surveyed countries, one-third of people in the nation first group support greater efforts to share the financial burden of dealing with the crisis in Europe.

Still, on several issues, there are bigger differences between countries than between specific groups within countries. This is particularly true of financial burden-sharing – a topic on which Denmark and Sweden are on the fiscally conservative end of the scale, and Portugal and Spain are on the other. Therefore, engaged internationalists will have to build coalitions between not only groups but also governments.

In doing so, they can benefit from ECFR's [Coalition Explorer](#), which provides a detailed picture of patterns of cooperation between EU27 governments. And all these governments are at the mercy of voters whose preferences – and responses to the crisis – could change in unpredictable ways.

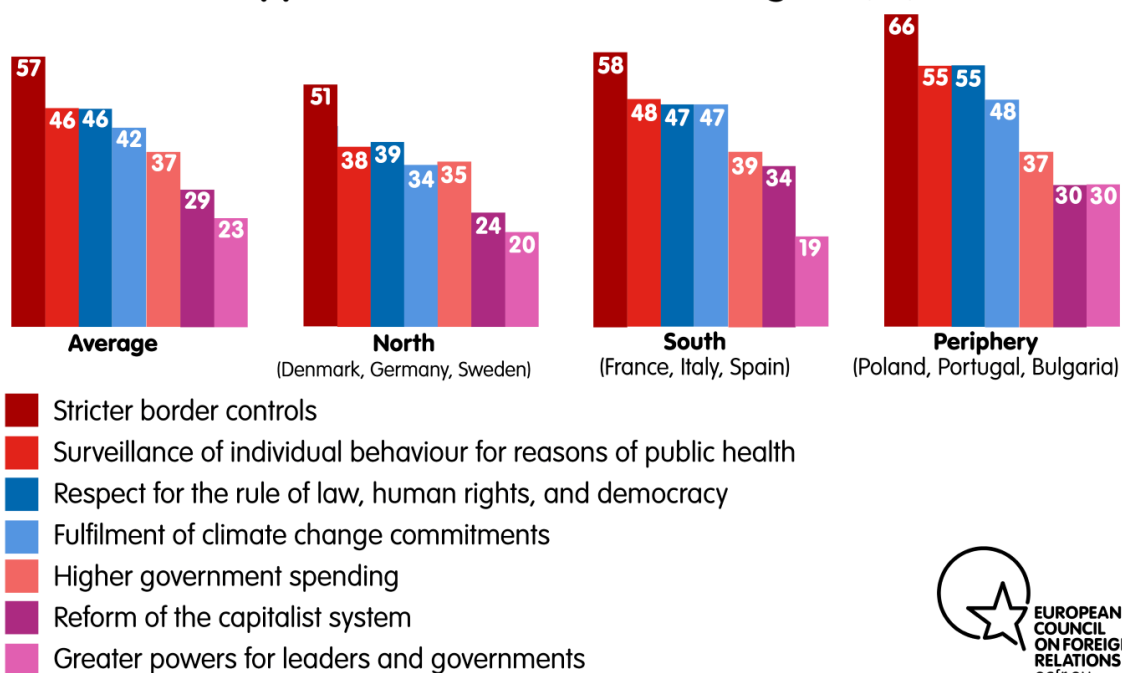
How should the coronavirus crisis change Europe? (%)



Source: ECFR



Which measures have you become more supportive of since the crisis began? (%)



Source: ECFR



Probably the greatest obstacle to the EU's rise as a global power is the divergence of experiences and views between northern Europe and the rest of the continent. In comparison to other Europeans (especially those in the south), citizens of Germany, Sweden, and Denmark are less likely to see the coronavirus crisis as having brought their country to the brink of disaster. As a result, they have drawn much more cautious and moderate conclusions from the pandemic.

Northern European countries are much more likely than other member states to believe that they can handle the crisis alone. This may imply that they feel prepared to face future threats and challenges independently, without the need for coordination with other Europeans.

Nonetheless, all European countries share the belief that they should tighten border controls, and that the EU should act as a unifier in responses to global threats and challenges. The northern societies of Germany and Denmark are relatively keen to relocate production of critical medical goods to Europe – as is that of France. This should provide another opening to convince them to support efforts to strengthen the EU as a global actor after the crisis has passed.

The way forward

European leaders in Brussels and national capitals need to listen carefully to what citizens are saying – and to interpret and translate this into concrete policies. They need to speak to European voters in a new language that recognises the extent to which their world may have permanently changed. It may be vital to restore Europeans' belief in a predictable and safe future in the coming months. After the trauma, they need to rediscover a sense of home in Europe – since, in recent months, the crisis has taken away much of what they took for granted. To contribute to this, European leaders should construct a post-coronavirus narrative on the purpose of the European project – a narrative grounded in an understanding of the way citizens feel, not in a promise of values and abstract projects. A dialogue about decency, fairness, safety, and hope will speak more directly to Europeans than one about security, democracy, and sovereignty, even if ECFR's survey suggests that policymakers will need to provide all these things.

In doing so, they should account for the fact that any shifts in opinion have come at a deeply traumatic time for many people. For example, although many Europeans want stricter border controls, this does not necessarily mean that they want their countries to become more closed to immigration, or to withdraw from the Schengen area. Rather, European leaders need to reassure the public that, in a future crisis, they will have in place border procedures that allow for a controlled, coordinated response – to avoid a repeat of the chaos and cacophony of spring 2020.

Similarly, given that a plurality of Europeans say that they would welcome the relocation of medical (and some non-medical) production to Europe, this does not have to mean a return to protectionism or roll-back of globalisation. Instead, European leaders need to convince the public that globalisation need not necessarily result in heightened vulnerability. They can frame this as a call for strategic sovereignty that involves greater care in the organisation of supply chains rather than compromises on Europe's commitment to free trade.

Finally, while many Europeans feel they have been abandoned in the covid-19 crisis but still want the EU to become more unified in its response to global threats and challenges, this does not necessarily mean that they want to build a Fortress Europe. On the contrary, they seem to realise that Europe should ramp up its efforts to create global public goods and institutions (especially in the absence of US leadership).

As a careful analysis of public views shows, European leaders have an opportunity to build a Europe that protects – economically and in physical security – and that has an influential voice on the international scene. Such a Europe would advocate greater global preparedness for the next crisis, be it one involving the climate challenge or other problems. There is rising public support for an EU that can shape a new international order – defending European values such as the rule of law, human rights, and democracy, while showing the type of leadership within the international system displayed by the US in times gone by.

Above all, European leaders need to generate and communicate substantive ideas about the benefits of international cooperation rather than make abstract calls for “more Europe”, which could alienate many citizens by failing to address their practical concerns. Despite their diverging experiences and views, member states can find the common ground Europe needs to build up its resilience against future challenges of all types. Though it may not appear so at first glance, they have plenty of opportunities to achieve this.

Methodology

This paper is based on a public opinion poll in nine EU countries carried out for ECFR by YouGov (and, in the case of Bulgaria, by Alpha Research) in late April and early May 2020.

YouGov conducted an online survey in eight countries: Denmark (sample size: 1,000), France (2,000), Germany (2,000), Italy (1,000), Poland (1,000), Portugal (1,000), Spain (1,000), and Sweden (1,000). YouGov used the Active Sampling method, which is explained in more detail on YouGov’s website. The results from YouGov are politically and nationally representative samples.

Alpha Research conducted the survey in Bulgaria (sample size: 1,000) using a mixed model of CAWI and CATI to reach the intended nationally representative sample. This is because some relatively poor Bulgarians do not consistently have internet access. Both YouGov and Alpha weighted the results accordingly, to optimise them.

The exact dates of polling were: Bulgaria (23 April–5 May); Denmark (23–28 April); France (24–28 April); Germany (24–28 April); Italy (23–28 April); Poland (24 April–3 May); Portugal (27 April–9 May); Spain (24 April–4 May); and Sweden (24–29 April).

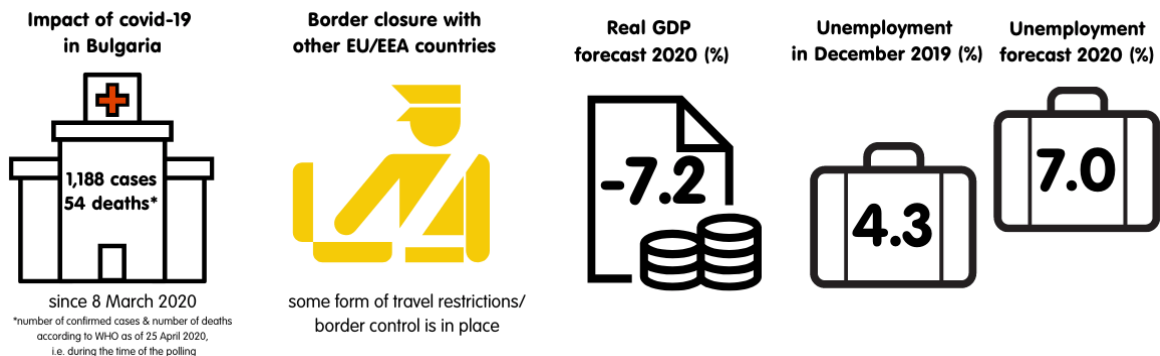
The survey identified parties' supporters based on voting intention in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Sweden, and based on past votes in Bulgaria (2017), Denmark (2019), Poland (2019), and Portugal (2019).

The survey identified four categories of voters according to how they responded to two statements: whether they agreed that “the EU should develop a more common response to global threats and challenges”; and whether they believed that “the coronavirus crisis has shown that there is a need for more cooperation at the EU level” or that “the coronavirus crisis has shown that EU integration has gone too far”. Those who responded “don’t know” to the second question were allocated to relevant groups based on how they answered other questions in the survey. If they agreed that “there should be more financial burden-sharing in the EU”, they fell into one of the “more cooperation” groups (engaged internationalists or switched-off Europeans). Anyone that agreed that “more competencies should be brought back from the EU to the national level” fell into one of the “less cooperation” groups (EU-critical internationalists or nation first). The process excluded respondents who answered “don’t know” to all relevant questions.

The regional aggregation in the final section of this paper treats each individual respondent equally. Therefore, country weight in each of the three regional groups (the north, the south, and the periphery) corresponds to the size of country samples.

Analysis by country

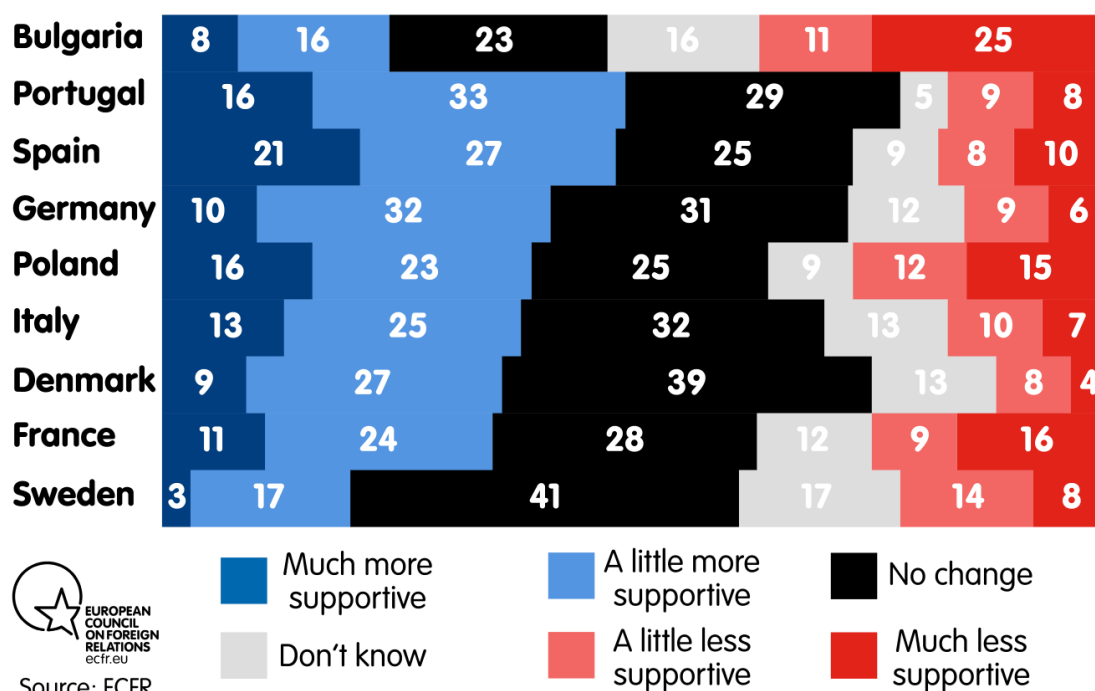
Bulgaria (Vessela Tcherneva)



Traditionally pro-European, Bulgarians also remain optimistic about the European Union in the coronavirus crisis. Despite their disappointment with the initial EU reaction to the pandemic and their expectations that Brussels would be more assertive, most Bulgarian respondents to a survey conducted by the European Council on Foreign Relations and YouGov called for greater EU-led cooperation in response to the pandemic. Although Bulgarians express some sympathy towards Russia – and, to a lesser extent, China – they primarily look to the EU as the major source of progress. Fifty-six per cent of Bulgarians say that the coronavirus has shown the need for greater cooperation at the EU level, while only 20 per cent say that it has shown that EU integration has gone too far. Bulgarians have moderate attitudes towards most issues – despite stereotypes about Bulgaria as an outlier within the EU.

The country is a natural ally of other net beneficiaries of the EU budget, such as Poland and Portugal, which place their hopes for economic recovery in the bloc. However, Bulgarians prefer to limit spending by the government – probably because they do not trust it to do the right thing with the money. Nonetheless, it would be difficult for Brussels to circumvent Bulgaria’s government and elite to provide direct assistance to citizens. For this to succeed, the European Commission would need to clearly explain the functions, goals, and criteria of EU recovery instruments to the Bulgarian public.

Has your attitude towards higher government spending changed since the coronavirus crisis began? (%)



The shortcomings in the EU's initial reaction to crises have led Bulgarians to demand greater border controls. Indeed, many of them vividly remember that, in 2015, tens of thousands of migrants crossed the EU's border before the bloc responded. Such experiences explain why 61 per cent of Bulgarians (and 60 per cent of Portuguese citizens) want more control over the EU's external borders after the coronavirus crisis comes to an end – compared less than 50 per cent of citizens in all other surveyed countries.

So far, Bulgaria has coped well with the pandemic, even experiencing a mortality rate that is lower than average for the same months in previous years. Due to the authorities' relative success in fighting covid-19, around 60 per cent of citizens in Bulgaria say their government has risen to the challenge – a similar proportion to that in Germany, Denmark, Sweden, and Portugal.

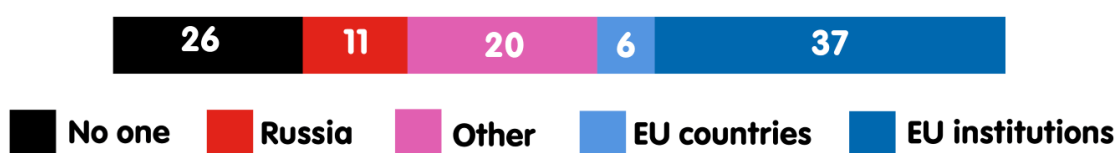
Yet it seems that the crisis has not increased nationalism but rather underlined the need for a balance between the European and national levels of government. Sheer enthusiasm for the EU may no longer be enough to strike this balance. Bulgarians would be open to the EU taking care of stocks of masks and critical medicine, while also supporting the reform and modernisation of key sectors in their country such as healthcare. Fifty-four per cent of them would also be happy for the bloc to take on a

more assertive international role – by developing common responses to global threats and challenges.

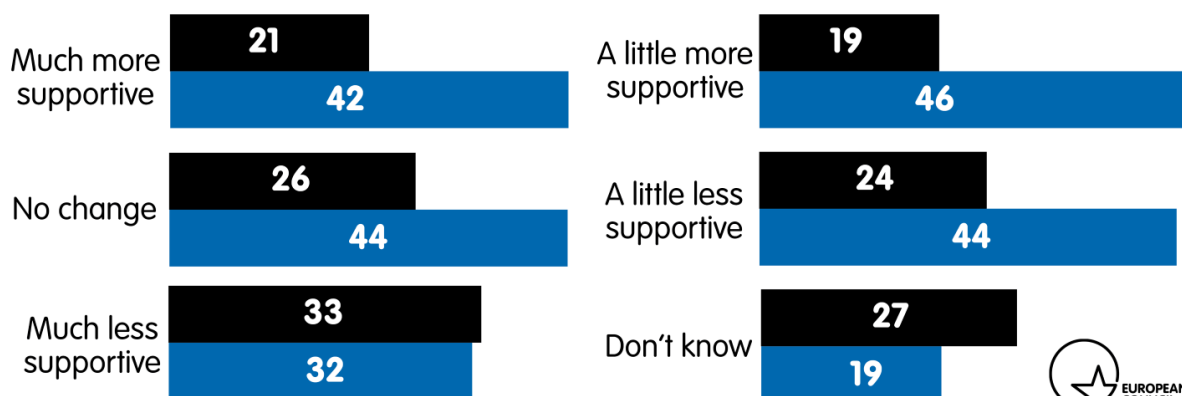
The coronavirus crisis has not brought about radicalism in Bulgaria. The country's citizens do not want to reform the capitalist system or seek consolation in populist parties. Given that public finances and the economy will have a growing role in the months to come, most Bulgarians support efforts to relocate the production of medical goods to Europe (Chinese imports currently account for around 90 per cent of the country's purchases of antibiotics). But they will likely continue to tolerate Chinese products in other areas.

Russia continues to have a privileged position in the hearts of many Bulgarians – even if this trend is in decline, judging by some surveys. It is traditionally popular among both the post-communist left and nationalists who support the Attack Party, as well as some supporters of the centre-right GERB. China's mask diplomacy has led to a surprising rise in its popularity among 22 per cent of Bulgarian respondents – an increase matched only by Italian respondents. It is unclear whether this is a one-off event or part of a longer-term trend, but it reflects the weakness of Bulgarian media (which ranks in 111th place for press freedom in Reporters Without Borders' ranking). This provides China with ample opportunity to boost its image through propaganda, despite the fact that the country has made relatively few direct investments in Bulgaria.

Which powers will provide your country with the most support during the recovery from the coronavirus crisis? (Percentage of Bulgarian respondents)



By change in support for higher government spending



Source: ECFR

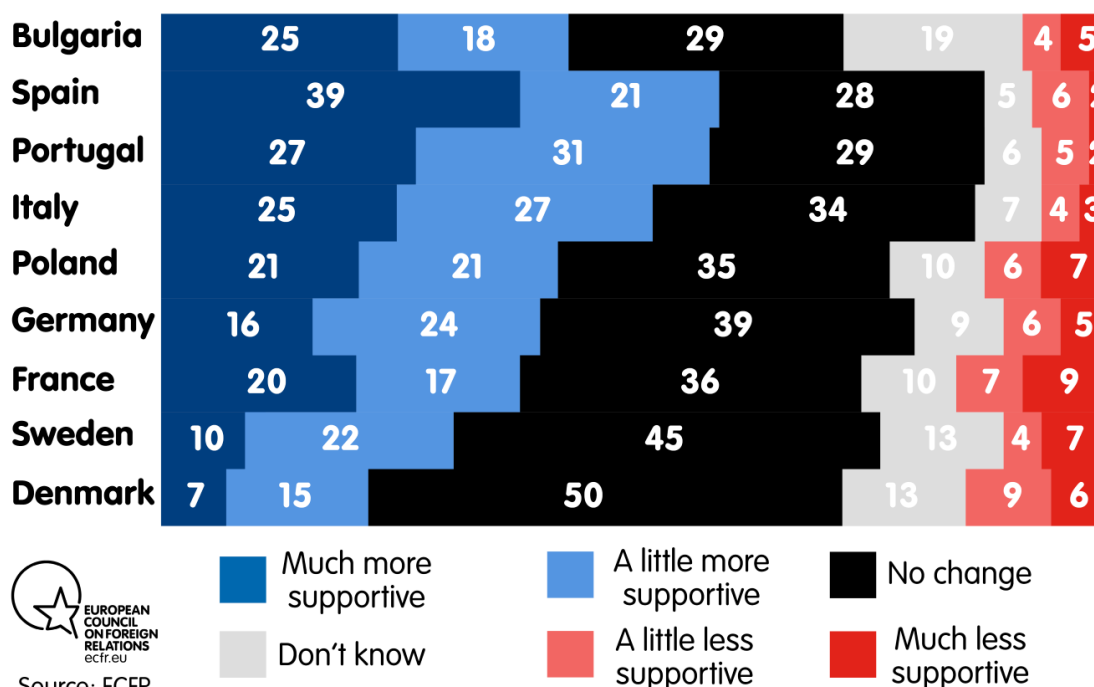


In Bulgaria, as elsewhere in Europe, the image of the United States has deteriorated by a remarkably large margin. Thirty-five per cent of Bulgarian respondents say that their view of the US has worsened during the crisis – a level comparable with that among citizens in Poland, albeit lower than those in other surveyed countries.

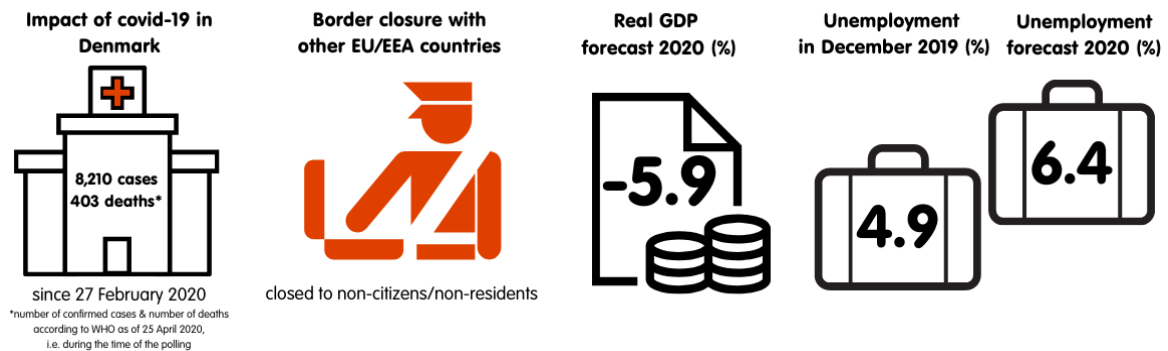
Contrary to speculation by local pundits, many Bulgarians – around half of them – would be willing to sacrifice some of their freedom in exchange for health surveillance during the crisis. But Bulgaria is far from being an outlier among surveyed countries on this measure. Meanwhile, 61 per cent of Bulgarians declare they are now more supportive of the rule of law, democracy, and human rights than before the pandemic began. Their attitudes on this score are comparable to those of Italians, Spaniards, Portuguese, and Poles.

Lastly, 43 per cent of Bulgarian respondents say that the crisis has made them more supportive of the EU's efforts to fulfil its commitments on climate change – a level that is not especially high in comparison to respondents elsewhere but still notable for Bulgaria. Against the background of the government's rigid, unimaginative, and reactive stance on the issue, there is a chance that this shift in public attitudes could affect policy and create momentum within efforts to implement the European Green Deal.

Has your attitude towards the fulfilment of climate change commitments changed since the coronavirus crisis began? (%)



Denmark (Catharina Sørensen)



Denmark was among the first European countries to implement a lockdown and close its borders in response to covid-19 but, so far, the emergency has not intensified to the extent it feared. The country is yet to use more than 138 of its 875 ventilators for coronavirus patients at any given time.

The first lockdown, which started on 13 March, applied to all public sector workers not employed in critical areas, as well as schools, institutions, and municipal services. The social democratic government led by Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen introduced emergency legislation to ban groups of more than 100 people and to enable it to enforce civilian health checks and limit access to public institutions and transport. According to one leading law professor, these steps are easily the most extreme encroachments on personal freedom in Denmark since the second world war.

The government also introduced support packages to mitigate the financial impact of the lockdown, including a prompt tripartite agreement with unions on temporary wage compensation. Five days into the lockdown, it implemented further restrictions on shops and restaurants, banning groups of more than ten people.

As the rise in covid-19 cases appeared to stabilise in early April, the government announced measures to gradually ease the lockdown. On 15 April, facilities for children in nurseries, kindergartens, and lower school grades reopened, followed the week after by some small businesses, including hairdressers. By mid-May, all schools and restaurants were permitted to reopen (the ban on large public gatherings is likely to remain in place until the end of August).

While Danish society reopened sooner than that of many other EU countries, the government's approach to borders has been among the most restrictive in Europe. On 29 May, it announced that only citizens from Germany, Iceland, and Norway could re-enter Denmark from 15 June, provided they had accommodation for a minimum of six

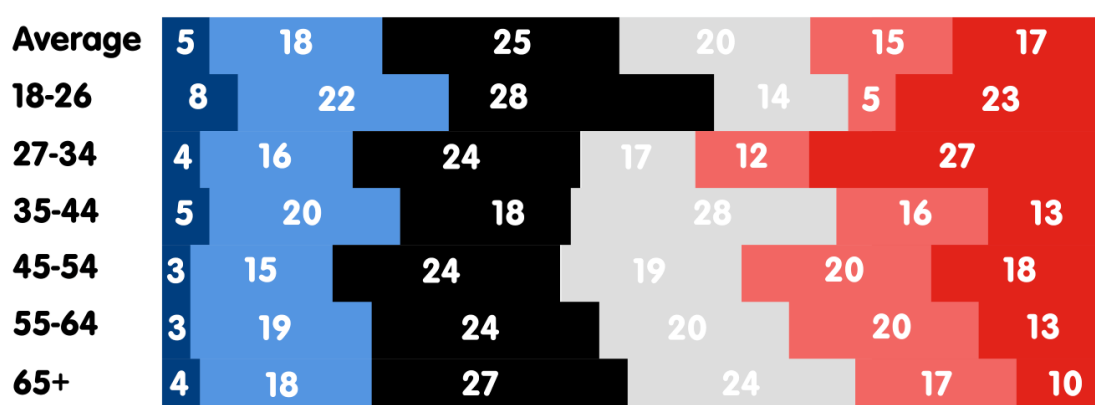
nights in a place outside Copenhagen. On 19 June, the government announced that, as of 27 June, it would extend this offer to citizens from any EU country with a low number of new covid-19 cases.

Relief that they had avoided the catastrophic scenes elsewhere in the world appears to inform Danes' broad approval of the government's response to covid-19 – and to have reinforced their trust in experts and the authorities. According to a recent survey by the European Council on Foreign Relations and YouGov, 79 per cent of Danish respondents say that the government responded well to the challenge. The majority, 51 per cent, “strongly agree” – easily the greatest support across the nine countries surveyed. Even a plurality of supporters of the main opposition party, the Liberals, approve of the government's response, while none of the ten parties represented in Parliament have a plurality of respondents that disapprove of this response. While such support is evenly spread across Denmark's five regions and educational groups, it is more prevalent among women and older respondents.

Denmark also distinguishes itself from other surveyed countries in other ways. Fifty-six per cent of Danish respondents said that the crisis increased their confidence in experts and the authorities, while 55 per cent said it had enhanced their faith in the government to manage the issues that affect their lives (a figure that is 20 percentage points higher than that in the two second-most-confident countries: Sweden and Portugal). These figures are consistent with Danes' traditional levels of trust in political and societal institutions – which, according to Eurobarometer surveys, are often among the highest in the European Union.

However, the EU has not emerged similarly unscathed. Thirty-five per cent of Danish respondents say that the bloc did not rise to the challenge, while just 23 per cent say that it did. There are significant differences in these perceptions across political and demographic groups. Most notable is the generational divide. For instance, 30 per cent of the youngest group of respondents (those under the age of 26) say that the EU handled the crisis well, while 19 per cent state that it did not.

Has the EU risen to the challenge of the coronavirus crisis? (Percentage of Danish respondents by age)



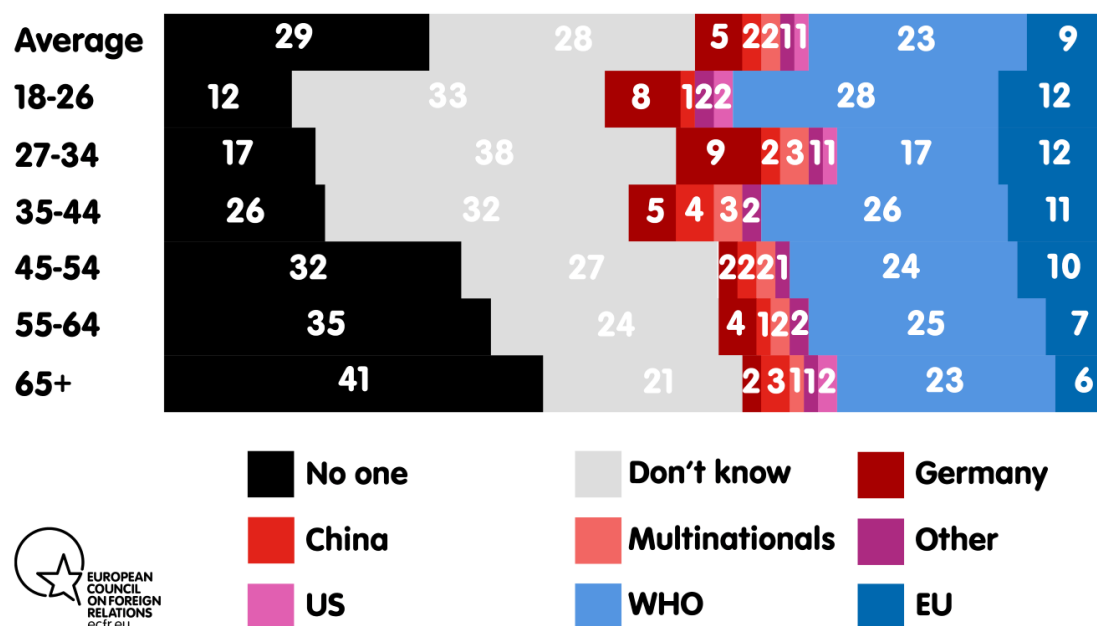
■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree
■ Don't know ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree

Source: ECFR

Nonetheless, for many Danes, the EU's early efforts were too little, too late. For example, Denmark closed its borders three days before the European Commission issued guidelines on the issue. Moreover, stories about China having been quicker to provide medical supplies to Italy were widely cited in Denmark as an example of weak solidarity within the EU. However, the Danish authorities made few official references to EU cooperation in communications on the crisis. Measures at the national level were always much more visible to citizens than those at the European level.

Perhaps as a result of all this, Danes join other EU respondents in believing that their country has primarily relied on itself in handling covid-19. Twenty-nine per cent of Danish respondents hold this view, while 23 per cent see the World Health Organisation as their country's greatest ally in the crisis, and just 9 per cent view the EU as having this role. However, in view of Danes' long history of saying "no" to deeper European integration, many are unlikely to have expected, let alone demanded, a common EU approach to, for instance, healthcare issues and border closures. Again, there is a striking generational divide: whereas just 12 per cent of the youngest respondents felt that Denmark had to handle the situation alone, 41 per cent of the oldest respondents held this view.

Which actors have been your country's most valuable ally during the coronavirus crisis? (Percentage of Danish respondents by age)



Source: ECFR

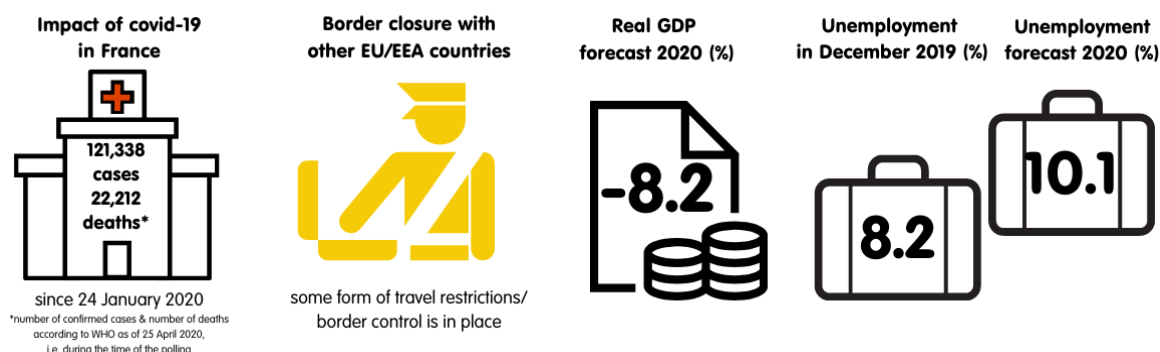
And there are other reasons to believe that the coronavirus crisis has not significantly altered long-standing Danish perceptions of the EU, which revolve around the bloc's economic utility rather than its potential to develop into a federal organisation. Fifty-three per cent of Danish respondents state that there is a need for greater cooperation within the EU, while only 19 per cent say that integration has gone too far. Forty-eight per cent of them believe that the EU should develop a more common response to global threats and challenges in response to the crisis. Yet just 24 per cent of Danish respondents say they are prepared to share the financial burden of a crisis – the lowest figure among the nine surveyed countries.

At the same time, there are important minority opinions that stand out as a pointer that the coronavirus crisis may be spurring some Danes to pull up the drawbridge. In a small, open economy, where traditionally the EU's principle of free movement is cherished, it is notable when one in four respondents think that the crisis should make citizens reconsider working, living, and travelling abroad. One in three Danish respondents say that they have become more accepting of the surveillance of individuals' behaviour for reasons of public health. Forty-eight per cent of them now support stricter border controls. And 40 per cent think that businesses should be pushed to produce more medical supplies in the EU. Typically, these views are spread out rather evenly across

regions, as well as educational and gender divides, and are held most strongly by older respondents.

In Denmark, as in other surveyed countries, public perceptions of the US have dramatically deteriorated. Seventy-one per cent of Danish respondents say their view of the US has worsened during the coronavirus crisis – the sharpest decline in any country. The traditional transatlanticism of Danish governments, and the fact that Denmark has an opt-out from EU defence cooperation, makes this trend all the more noteworthy. The worsened perception of the US is somewhat less widespread among those below the age of 35, but it is shared by more than 60 per cent of even this group. For Danish respondents, as for their counterparts elsewhere in the EU, the crisis has heightened their sense of vulnerability at the global level.

France (Mathilde Ciulla)

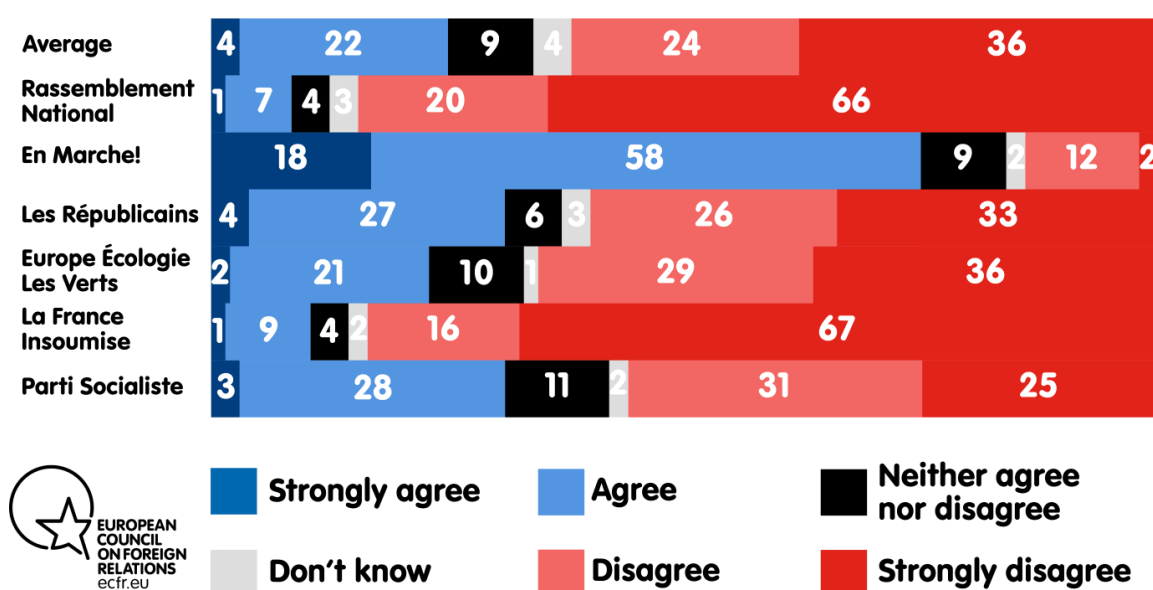


Emotions are of the utmost importance in times of crisis – and leaders who understand this are likely to be the best crisis managers. Many in France have compared the coronavirus crisis to the period that followed the December 2015 terrorist attacks on Paris, when President François Hollande claimed that the country was at war with terrorism. In the early stages of the pandemic, President Emmanuel Macron also used a martial narrative to describe France’s response. Acknowledging fear and suspicion among French citizens, mitigating these sentiments, and turning them into constructive public policy are the biggest challenges that the country has faced during both situations – after ensuring the safety of every citizen, of course.

If French citizens, as well as their European neighbours, feel vulnerable, this might be partly because their leaders have not managed their emotions properly. The French government’s decision to hold the first round of mayoral elections while simultaneously asking voters to stay at home created confusion and fear among them. This was detrimental to the vision French citizens had of their government at the beginning of the crisis: the initial lack of clarity in its recommendations for handling the coronavirus, and the confusion that seemed to abound at the highest levels of the state, caused many voters to believe that their leaders were trying to buy time in the face of an unprecedented event. In times of crisis, there is a strong temptation to use rhetoric designed to rally everyone behind the flag – a temptation that Macron momentarily gave in to when he compared the health crisis to a war, thereby exacerbating citizens’ fears rather than reassuring them. Macron’s martial tone seems to have increased public adherence to lockdown rules but also left a bitter taste in the mouths of many French people, who feel that the government has condescended to them in restricting their freedom.

These sentiments, and French leaders' failure to account for them at times, might explain the striking findings of the survey the European Council on Foreign Relations and YouGov recently conducted in France, along with eight other EU member states. One-third of the French respondents feel that France has had to face the crisis alone, and 55 per cent of them say that the pandemic has damaged their perception of their government. The crisis has also reinforced a pre-existing trend in French public opinion towards mistrust of EU institutions.

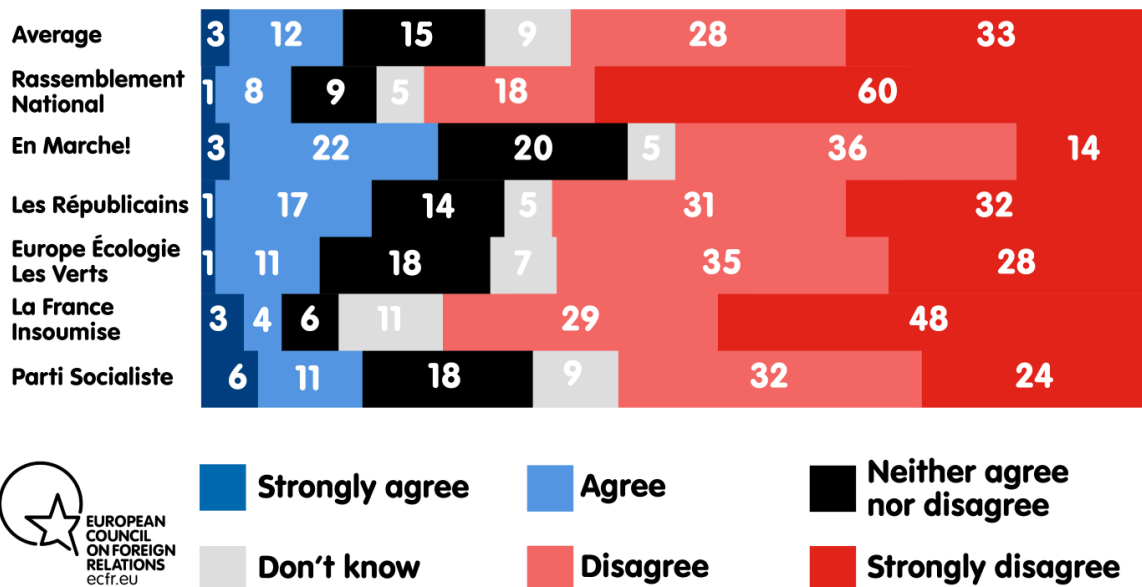
Has your government risen to the challenge of the coronavirus crisis? (Percentage of French respondents by party)



Source: ECFR

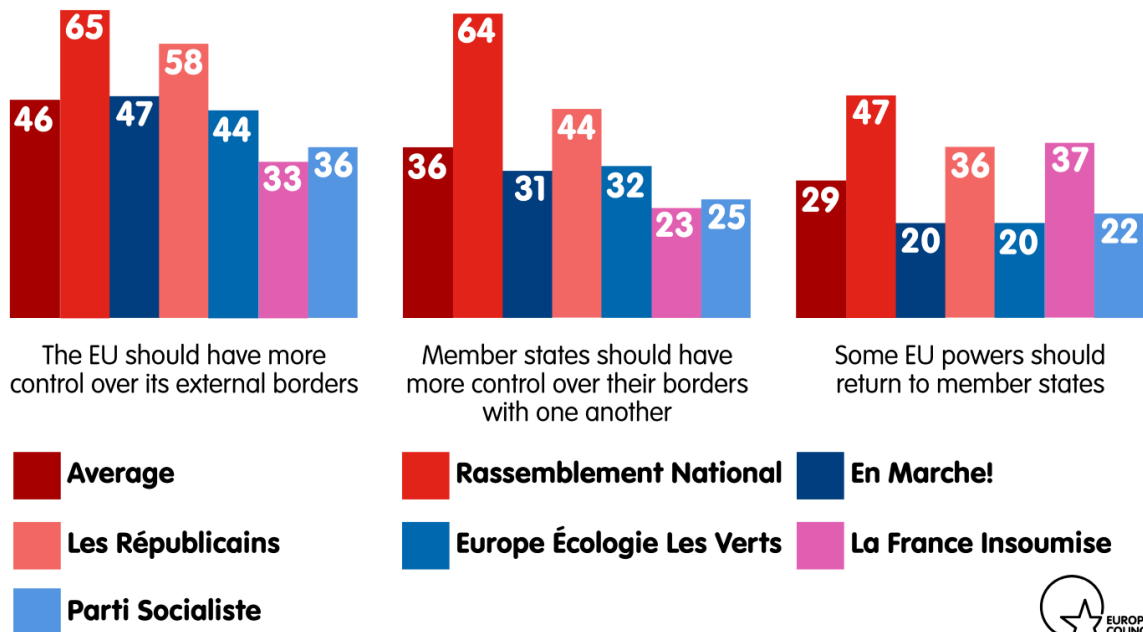
As ECFR's 2019 survey of European voters' perceptions showed, France is the only EU member state in which the vast majority of the population – nearly 70 per cent – think that both the national and the European systems are broken. In this year's survey, only half of French respondents say that there is a need for more cooperation at the EU level, a share lower than that in any other surveyed country aside from Sweden. And 61 per cent of French respondents think that the European Union has not lived up to its responsibilities during the crisis – roughly as many as say this of the French government (60 per cent). French people's sense of vulnerability seems to be prolonging the general distrust in elites they have felt for years: 42 per cent of French respondents believe that there is too much that experts and the authorities hide from them.

Has the EU risen to the challenge of the coronavirus crisis? (Percentage of French respondents by party)



The pandemic has reinforced French citizens' sense of alienation from intellectual and political elites, as well as the feeling that they have been left alone to deal with the crisis and that their leaders do not understand them. And, for once, there does not seem to be a political force able to capitalise on this distrust, as Marine Le Pen's far-right Rassemblement National has done until now. Indeed, 23 per cent of the French respondents say that they do not know who they would vote for if there was an election tomorrow. For nearly half of the French population, there has been no change in support for Rassemblement National during the pandemic. And only 10 per cent of French respondents (almost exclusively those who previously voted for far-right parties) say that their perception of Rassemblement National has improved during the pandemic, suggesting that the crisis has not generated a rise in nationalist or anti-EU sentiment. The two political parties that made it to the second round of the presidential election of 2017 – Macron's La République en Marche! and Rassemblement National – have experienced a decline in support since then: according to ECFR's survey, only 70 per cent of the supporters of both parties would vote for them again if there was an election tomorrow.

What has the coronavirus crisis shown? (Percentage of French respondents by party)



Source: ECFR



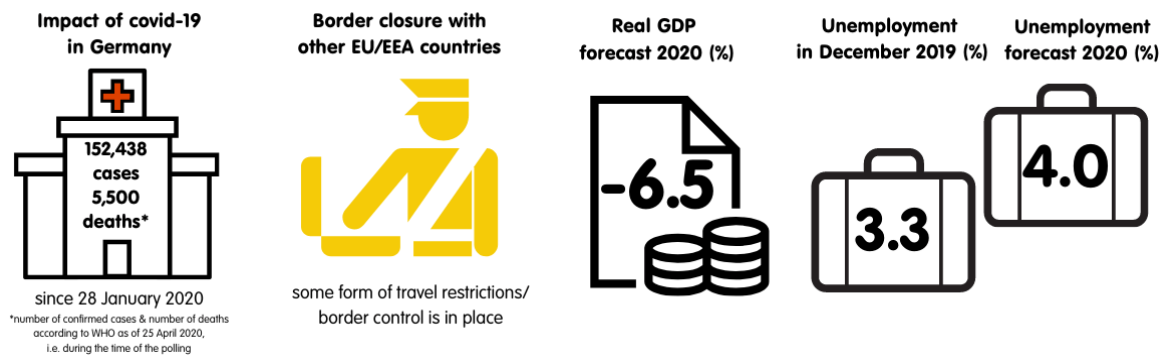
A particularly interesting finding from this year's survey is that, in a global crisis to which the great powers have responded in markedly different ways, French people do not seem to think that the solution lies in another country's political system. Their perceptions of the United States, China, and Russia have all worsened during the crisis. This is true of 68 per cent, 62 per cent, and 25 per cent of French respondents respectively. And 38 per cent think that support for France's economic recovery will primarily come from either other European countries or EU institutions, 28 per cent from France itself, and less than 5 per cent each from the US, China, or Russia.

As French voters expect more recovery assistance to come from the EU than from France itself, this suggests that their disillusionment with the EU could apply to immediate crisis management but that they are more optimistic about the bloc's role in the long term. Many French citizens still have vivid memories of the 2008 financial crisis, and are wary of the conditions that the EU attached to financial assistance at the time. But given that France does not seem able to compete with the US and China by itself – economically and, perhaps more importantly, in the promotion of values and principles – French citizens grasp the extent to which they need to cooperate with their European neighbours, within a supranational entity that can deal with great powers as an equal in multilateral forums.

The pandemic has exacted a particularly high death toll in large southern European countries: France, Italy, and Spain. Aiming to position France as a leader of this group, Macron was relatively quick to ask EU institutions to strengthen financial solidarity between member states, first with debt mutualisation through the issuance of “coronabonds” – a proposition that was met with fierce opposition from fiscally conservative EU member states, led by Germany. He then asked for an EU recovery fund that would lend money to the countries that had been hit hardest, a proposal he put forward alongside German Chancellor Angela Merkel. This latter effort shows why 16 per cent of French respondents regard Germany as their closest ally – double the share that see the EU in this role (second only to the share who believe that France can rely on itself). French people will never forget that German hospitals took in patients that French intensive care units were unable to manage. European solidarity has to produce concrete measures if it is to gain an emotional hold on citizens. Such solidarity needs to be at both the European level – managed by EU institutions – and at the bilateral level.

French citizens really will regard the next few months as a make-or-break moment for the EU. The fate of the recovery fund at the European Council – and the stance EU institutions take on the global stage on issues such as the climate, multilateralism, and the liberal order – will capture the attention of a disillusioned French population eager for decisive action.

Germany (Jana Puglierin)



Germany has handled the coronavirus crisis with greater ease than most countries in the European Union so far. However, Berlin's initial reaction was rather slow. Despite the growing number of covid-19 cases in Italy in early March, it took Germany much longer than other European countries to implement a lockdown and social distancing regulations. This was mainly due to German federalism, in which responsibility for decisions on infection control, school closures, and curfews lies entirely with the German *Länder*, or even with municipalities and administrative districts, rather than the federal government in Berlin. Initially, this led to a very uncoordinated and sometimes quite chaotic response.

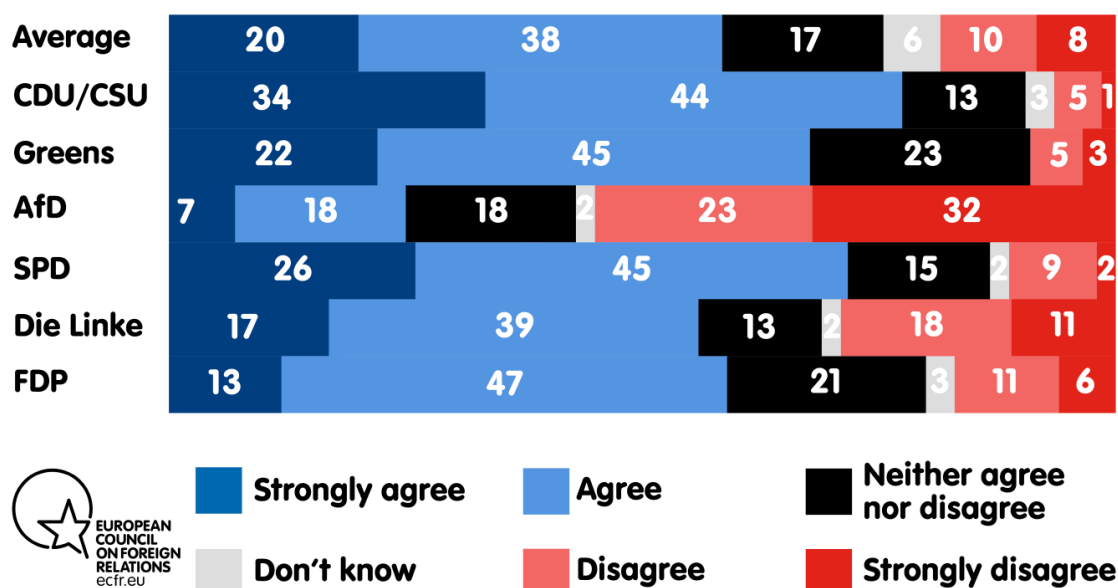
Germany only developed a coordinated approach after minister-presidents of the *Länder* and Chancellor Angela Merkel met in mid-March. She brought coherence and focus to the diverse strands of the crisis response. In contrast to previous crises, in which she was accused of lacking empathy and communication skills, Merkel was keen to make the federal government's measures transparent and to ask for the people's support. On 16 March, she announced the most drastic restrictions on daily life the country has known in its post-war history. But although schools, non-essential shops, restaurants, and most other public venues were closed for weeks, there was never a complete lockdown. Germany was lucky. Contrary to early concerns, the German healthcare system never came under more pressure than it could handle. The average age of those infected by the virus early was lower than in many other countries, which kept hospitalisation and death rates low. Thus, Germany gained time that it used to implement preventative measures, expand its intensive care capacity, and thereby to "flatten the curve" of new infections.

In light of what is expected to become the biggest economic recession in post-war Germany, the grand coalition between Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU), its

sister party the Christian Social Union (CSU), and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) quickly promised to “do whatever it takes” to mitigate the economic fallout from the crisis. A decade of sustained economic growth and record surpluses enabled the federal government to launch a multibillion-euro “protection shield” – the largest financial assistance package in the history of the federal republic. In early June, the government also announced a post-coronavirus stimulus package designed to restart the German economy, worth €130 billion. The tremendous scale of German financial aid prompted Margrethe Vestager, vice-president of the European Commission and competition commissioner, to express her concern about the “big differences” in such assistance, noting that Germany accounts for half of such funding already approved by the EU.

In light of all this, and despite its bumpy start, the German government has gained widespread public approval for its crisis. According to a survey by the European Council on Foreign Relations and YouGov, 58 per cent of German respondents feel that the German government has risen to the challenge of coronavirus, while only 14.3 per cent feel that it has failed to do so. Approval ratings for the government’s work are particularly high among supporters of the governing coalition (78 per cent for the CDU/CSU; 71 per cent for the SPD), but 67 per cent of supporters of the Greens, and 60 per cent of supporters of the Free Democratic Party (FDP), also believe that the government has done well. However, 55 per cent of the supporters of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) think that the government has done poorly. Only 6 per cent of these voters believe that they can benefit from the knowledge of experts and the authorities, while 88 per cent are very distrustful of them.

Has your government risen to the challenge of the coronavirus crisis? (Percentage of German respondents by party)



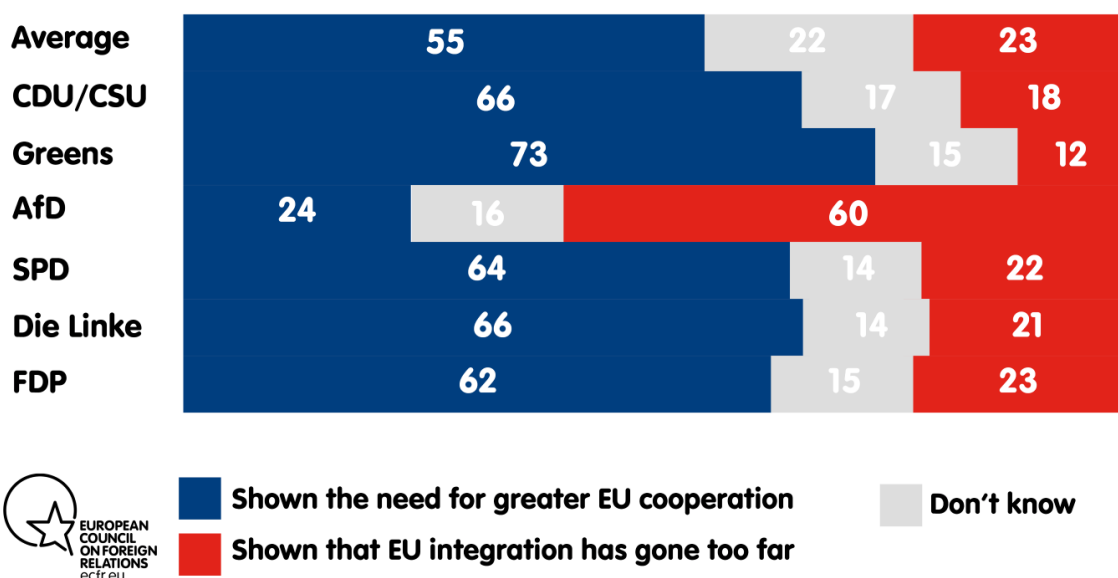
Forty-three per cent of all German respondents say that their perception of the federal government has improved during the crisis. Alongside 67 per cent of CDU/CSU supporters and 50 per cent of SPD supporters, 58 per cent of Green voters hold this view. This shows that the government has succeeded, beyond its own party base, in conveying security, stability, and trust among citizens – even if 55 per cent of AfD supporters say that their impression of the government’s work has worsened during the crisis. ECFR’s data shows that, with the exception of AfD supporters, Germans have largely closed ranks in response to the pandemic. The biggest beneficiaries of this are the CDU/CSU and Merkel personally, while the SPD has so far been unable to benefit politically from its role in government. Prior to the outbreak of covid-19, the chancellor was widely considered to be a lame duck, and the conservatives were polling at around 26 per cent. Yet Merkel is now at a new zenith of her power and support for the CDU/CSU has risen to 40 per cent.

Forty-seven per cent of German respondents attribute the fact that they have dealt with the crisis well so far primarily to their own efficiency and self-reliance. And 48 per cent of them say that Germany can rely on itself in recovering from the crisis, while only 17 per cent pin their hopes on the EU in this. While Germans generally do not feel that they have been left alone in their hour of need, they have become strikingly disillusioned with the state of the transatlantic relationship. Only 2 per cent of German respondents hope

to receive support from the United States, and only 1 per cent regard the US their most valuable ally in the crisis. Sixty-five per cent of respondents say that their perception of the US has worsened during the pandemic, and 42 per cent that it has massively deteriorated. Three and a half years of Donald Trump in the White House have left an enormous mark in Germany. The German public looks to Washington with a mix of dismay and bewilderment.

Their assessment of the EU is much less gloomy, but still very mixed. Thirty per cent of German respondents say that their perception of the EU institutions has worsened during the crisis, and 40 per cent that the EU has not lived up to its responsibilities. And 44 per cent of German respondents felt that the EU has been irrelevant in the crisis – a group that includes absolute majorities of supporters of the AfD, Die Linke, and the FDP, and pluralities of supporters of the CDU/CSU, the SPD, and even the Green Party. Only 15 per cent of German respondents say that the EU played a significant role. Overall, as many as 23 per cent of German respondents see the coronavirus crisis as proof that European integration has gone too far. These are worrying figures for a strongly pro-EU country such as Germany.

How has the coronavirus changed your attitudes towards the EU? (Percentage of German respondents by party)



Source: ECFR

These perceptions are undoubtedly due to the fact that, in the first weeks of the crisis, there was a widespread sense that each country was primarily fending for itself. Germany was no exception to this. The country unilaterally closed its borders with

Austria, Switzerland, France, Luxembourg, and Denmark in mid-March. In a televised address to the nation around this time, Merkel failed to mention the struggles of other Europeans – although the death rate in Italy was already sky-rocketing. And Berlin initially banned exports of medical equipment, such as face masks and ventilators, to its EU partners. Only after it became aware that the cohesion of the EU was at stake did Berlin begin to communicate the need for European solidarity to the German public – and to act accordingly.

On a positive note, 55 per cent of all German respondents say that the coronavirus crisis has revealed a need for greater European cooperation. Supporters of the Green Party (73 per cent) are most strongly convinced of this, followed by those of the CDU/CDU (66 per cent), Die Linke (66 per cent), the SPD (64 per cent), and the FDP (62 per cent). However, only 24 per cent of AfD voters hold this view. The desire for greater EU cooperation is particularly strong among the youngest (under 26) and oldest (65+) Germans, at 57 per cent and 67 per cent respectively. However, fewer than 50 per cent of Germans aged between 35 and 54 hold this view.

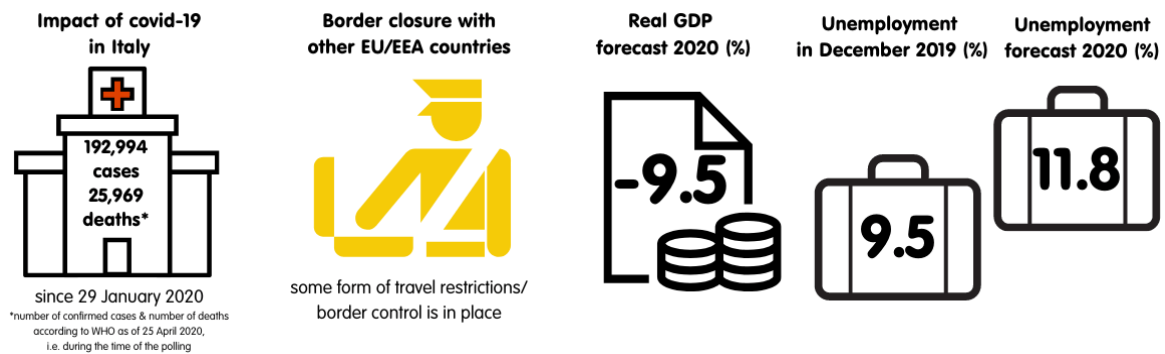
Germans' general support for greater EU cooperation notwithstanding, it is unclear what form they think this support should take. Forty-six per cent of German respondents – including absolute majorities of AfD, FDP, and CDU supporters – think that the EU should strengthen its external border controls. Yet, strikingly, support for such controls correlates with age. While just 22 per cent of Germans aged between 18 and 26 support such measures, 61 per cent of those aged 65 or older do so. This age difference is also apparent on other issues. Forty per cent of German respondents say that the EU should have a more unified response to global threats and challenges, and that its members should be more willing to share the financial burden of a crisis such as the pandemic.

Combined with the fact that 52 per cent of Germans want to relocate the production of critical medical goods to Europe, this suggests that there is support in Germany for a “Europe that protects”. However, people aged 65 or older are much more likely than the average to support all these ideas. Fifty-six per cent of Germans in this age group want the EU to have a more united response to global threats and challenges; 50 per cent support greater financial burden-sharing; and 72 per cent favour the relocation of production facilities for medical goods (and 53 per cent non-medical ones) to Europe – even if this means higher prices. In contrast, 37 per cent of Germans aged between 18 and 26 want the EU to have a more united response to global threats and challenges,

and 30 per cent and 29 per cent favour the relocation of production of medical and non-medical goods to Europe respectively. At the same time, just 10 per cent of Germans in this age group want to return EU powers to the national level, and only 15 per cent of them say that European integration has gone too far (the lowest level in any age group).

Taken together, these perceptions suggest that Germany could see the emergence of a lost generation who do not want to return to a Europe of stronger nation states and who support open borders, but do not necessarily see a constructive role for the EU in this.

Italy (Teresa Coratella)



Since the covid-19 pandemic began, Italy has been through several phases of crisis management led by its governing coalition, comprising the Five Star Movement and the Democratic Party. Under Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, the government implemented emergency health measures that had the support of almost all parties aside from Eurosceptic ones. After beginning a full lockdown, Italy entered a second phase during which much of the government's attention was concentrated on the search for urgent medical support. Accordingly, public discourse was largely monopolised by Chinese mask diplomacy and Russian gestures of friendship, with the European Union and other traditional allies, such as the United States, receiving strong criticism for their alleged lack of assistance. Both of these phases were shaped by the fact that Italy was the first European country to be severely affected by the virus – hospitalising its first patient in late February and recording some of the highest infection and mortality rates in the world.

Italy's game of narratives has now returned to politics as usual, with the League and the Brothers of Italy in a fully anti-European and anti-government mood. It is unclear how long this phase will last and what its main characteristics will be. Yet, as shown by a recent poll conducted by the European Council on Foreign Relations and YouGov, the pandemic has had significant effects on the way that Italian citizens perceive the EU and great powers.

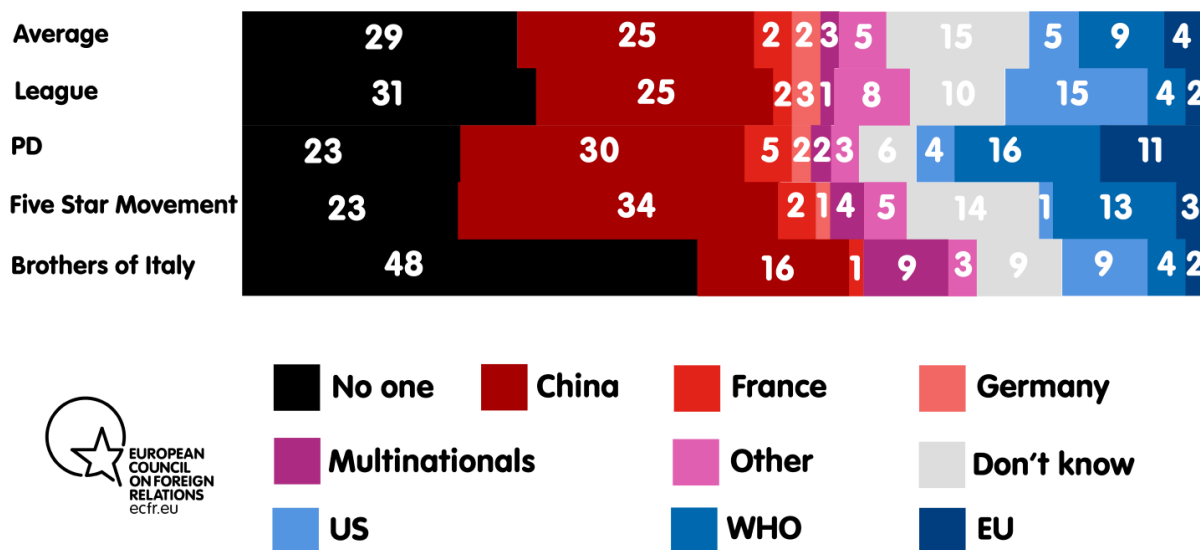
This shift has two distinctive features. The first is that Italy has become stuck in a blame game between northern and southern EU member states, putting it on the opposite side of the argument from Germany and other fiscally conservative countries – just as it did during the euro crisis. The most visible consequence of this is the negative impact on Italians' views of the value of EU membership. In ECFR's survey, 63 per cent of Italian respondents say that the EU has not lived up to its responsibilities during the pandemic

and 40 per cent that the bloc has been irrelevant in the crisis. Fifty-eight per cent say that their view of EU institutions has worsened during the crisis.

The reason for this is almost certainly Italians' emotional response to the weak initial reaction to the crisis in Italy from European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde and European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen. Italians are unlikely to forget von der Leyen's subsequent apology that the EU was "not there on time when Italy needed a helping hand". One part of the problem has been that, at least in the beginning, the EU lacked an effective communications strategy for the crisis. Another factor has been the strong anti-European campaign pushed by the League and the Brothers of Italy, which collectively poll at around 40 per cent.

Another key feature of the shift in public opinion relates to Italians' apparent preference for China and Russia as their interlocutors among the great powers. This could have important consequences for how Italy positions itself within both Europe and multilateral institutions.

Which actors have been your country's most valuable ally during the coronavirus crisis? (Percentage of Italian respondents by party)



Source: ECFR

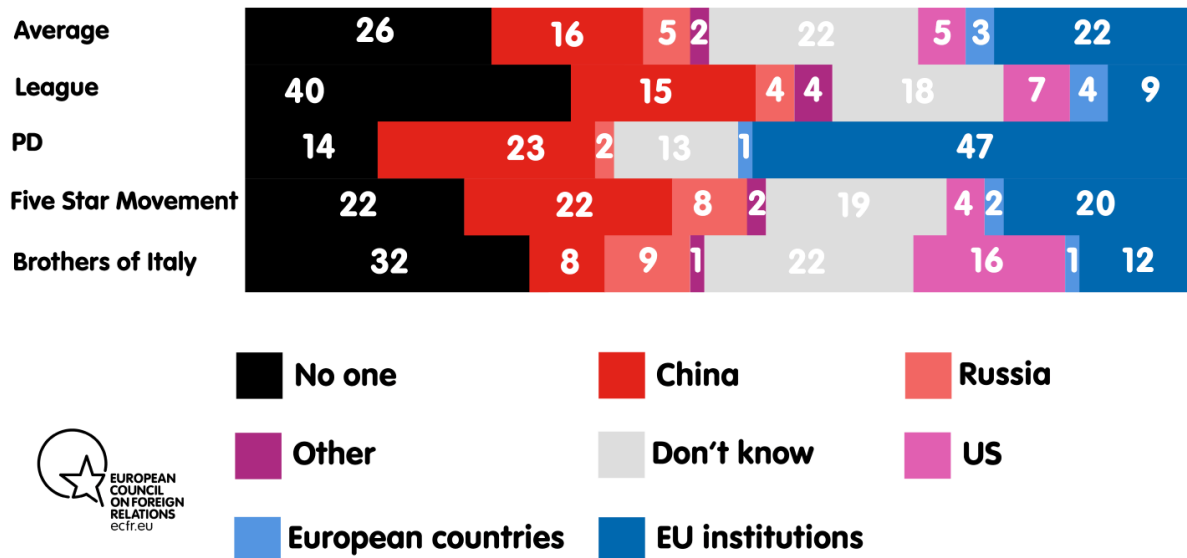
Twenty-five per cent of Italians regard China as having been their country's most useful ally in the coronavirus crisis – a higher share than that for any other actor, including the World Health Organisation at 9 per cent, the United States at 5 per cent, and the EU at just 4 per cent. China gained most of this backing from supporters of the Five Star

Movement and the Democratic Party, followed by the League. The negative perception of China among Brothers of Italy voters is mainly due to their strongly nationalist views. The US has a relatively positive image among supporters of the League and the Brothers of Italy, but a surprisingly negative one among those of the Democratic Party – which has traditionally viewed Washington as a vital partner, having made transatlantic relations a founding pillar of the Italian Republic following the end of the second world war. This result could be explained by left-leaning Italians' dislike of President Donald Trump and his domestic and international policies (in contrast with his Democrat predecessor, Barack Obama). The US also has a poor image among supporters of the Five Star Movement – which has had a strong anti-American bent since its foundation.

China's popularity in Italy, which exceeds that in all other surveyed countries, also stems from the strategic choices of the Five Star Movement, reflected in its attitude towards the Belt and Road Initiative. Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio, the party's head, has heaped praise on China for providing medical aid to Italy during the initial phase of the covid-19 emergency. At that stage, neither the US nor any European country had offered similar support to Italy.

One could have concluded that, after the initial emergency, Italians might still see China and Russia as their main interlocutors as they look for support. However, this is not the case. According to ECFR's survey, 22 per cent of Italians expect to receive more support from EU institutions than any other source during the economic recovery from the pandemic, compared to 16 per cent for China.

Which actors will support your country most during the recovery from the coronavirus crisis? (Percentage of Italian respondents by party)



Source: ECFR

Forty-seven per cent of supporters of the Democratic Party view the EU in this way, in line with their traditional enthusiasm for the bloc. This is a higher share than that for any other party. By contrast, 23 per cent of supporters of the Democratic Party say that China will be Italy's greatest source of support in the economic recovery, compared to 22 per cent among those of the Five Star Movement, and only 15 per cent and 8 per cent of those of the League and the Brothers of Italy respectively. Supporters of the Brothers of Italy saw both the US and Russia as more likely to fulfil this role, likely due to their enthusiasm for so-called strongmen such as Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

And, as ECFR's survey shows, Italians still believe that the EU has a major role to play beyond the economic recovery. Seventy-seven per cent of them say that the crisis has shown the need for greater cooperation at the EU level, while just 33 per cent favour efforts to return the bloc's powers to national governments. Although Italians may have been dazzled by Chinese and Russian lights in a moment of desperation, they still believe in the European project.

Poland (Andrzej Mendel-Nykorowycz)

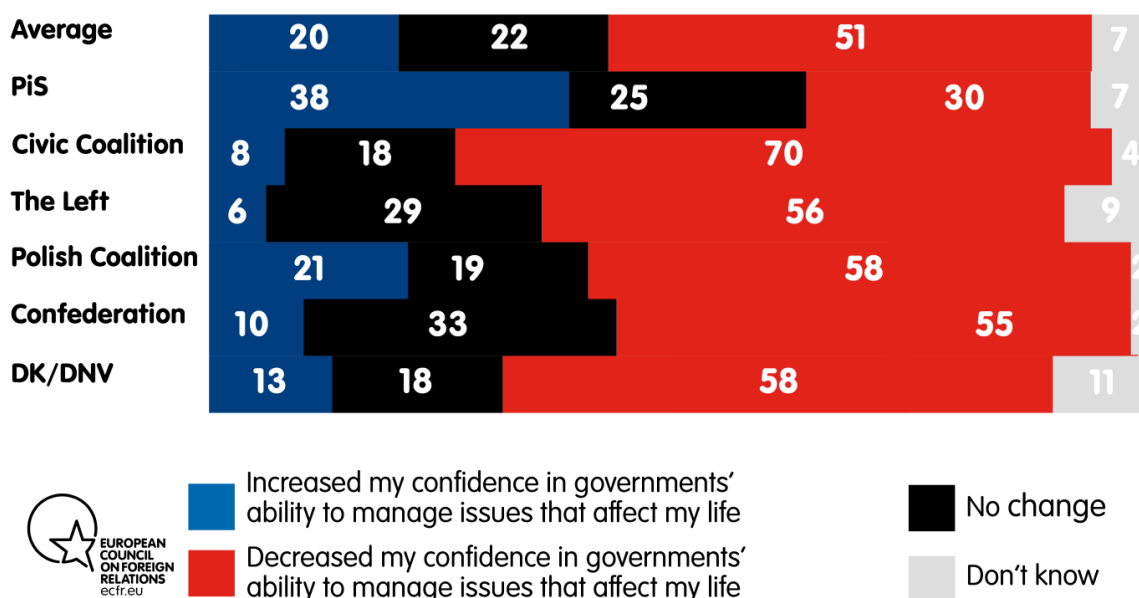


Poland weathered the first wave of the pandemic well. The country has experienced less trauma there than in most other EU member states but, due to their limited trust in the government, Polish voters now look to the European Union for reassurance and coordination in fighting both viral and economic contagion. The crisis could recalibrate Polish views on Europe, but only if the EU acts decisively.

Poland confirmed its first case of covid-19 shortly after intensive care units in Lombardy became overcrowded. Lessons from Italy were quickly learned by both Poland's government, which was forceful to the point of repressiveness in implementing a lockdown, and its populace, which complied with the measures. The ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party attempted to take credit for the response, but did not experience a rise in support. This is likely due to the fracas over an election planned for 10 May – in the middle of the outbreak – corruption scandals, and the sorry state of the public health service.

As shown by a poll the European Council Foreign Relations conducted in Poland in early April 2020, only 19 per cent of Polish voters trust the government, while 60 per cent do not trust it. The opposition fares little better, at 20 per cent and 48 per cent respectively. Meanwhile, 30 per cent of Polish voters trust the European Commission, and 37 per cent do not trust it. (Most Poles do not trust the Catholic Church or the judiciary either.) ECFR's latest poll, conducted with YouGov in late April, shows a similar lack of trust. Only 18 per cent of Polish voters believe that the coronavirus crisis shows they can benefit from the knowledge of experts and the authorities. As the economic pain mounts, and a second wave of cases looms, the EU has an opportunity to fill this vacuum.

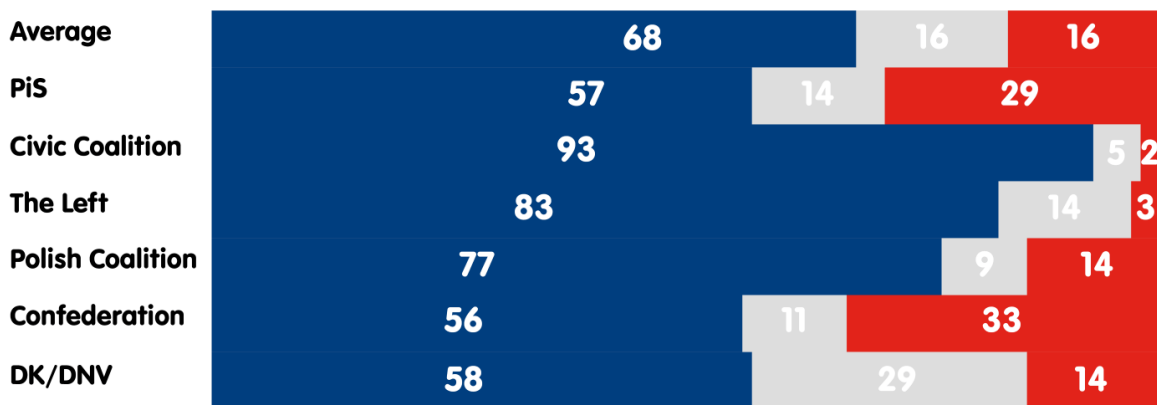
Has the coronavirus changed your attitudes towards governments? (Percentage of Polish respondents by party)



Source: ECFR

The bloc is well-positioned to take on this role, given that 46 per cent of Polish voters expect EU institutions to be Poland's primary source of support in the recovery phase, while just 20 per cent believe the country will be forced to rely on itself. Fifty-five per cent of Polish respondents, and majorities among voters of all parties, see a greater role for the EU in responding to global challenges. And most Poles seek greater cooperation at the EU level, and want member states to share more of the financial burden of the crisis. On these issues, Poles exhibit remarkably similar views to those of Italians, Spaniards, and, to some extent, the French. This is reflected in Poland's efforts to position itself close to southern member states, including Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki's recent call for greater financial solidarity in *La Repubblica*.

How has the coronavirus changed your attitudes towards the EU? (Percentage of Polish respondents by party)



■ Shown the need for greater European cooperation
 ■ Don't know
 ■ Shown that EU integration has gone too far

Source: ECFR

However, there is at least one important difference between Poland and southern member states in their perceptions of the EU. Poles are significantly less harsh in their assessment of the EU's reaction to the crisis, while 17 per cent of them view the EU as having been their country's most useful ally in the crisis so far – a higher proportion than that in any other surveyed member state. Even many supporters of the openly anti-EU Confederation party expect the bloc to act more quickly and decisively.

Polish voters also have little appetite for a retreat to the nation state. Only 29 per cent of Polish respondents support the return of some EU powers to national governments. Just 28 per cent of Poles want to strengthen the power of the prime minister and the government, while 44 per cent are against this. Despite voters' moderately positive view of the Polish government's response – 42 per cent voters believe it has lived up to its responsibilities, while 40 per cent think it has not – almost a half of them say that their view of the government has worsened during the crisis and only 23 per cent that it has improved.

Therefore, in the absence of alternatives, a demand for greater EU support and action seems to unify many Poles. This could seem difficult to reconcile with [earlier analysis](#) that suggests that perceptions of the EU have become the key divide in Polish politics. Yet a desire for greater EU involvement can have radically different sources, be it genuine belief in the bloc's institutions, resentment, fear, or pure financial interest.

Should Brussels and national capitals live up to these expectations by implementing an effective strategy on the coronavirus and its aftermath, they could gain the legitimacy they need to defend the rule of law and strengthen the hand of pro-EU voters in Poland. The converse is also true, as both PiS and Confederation will rail against the EU if it fails to aid member states in this trial.

There is much to suggest that Poles can become advocates for openness in Europe after the crisis passes. To be sure, they have overwhelmingly welcomed border closures during the pandemic. But they do not support efforts to increase control over the EU's internal and external borders in its aftermath. Well-managed border opening, balancing freedom with security, will be crucial to maintaining Poles' support for freedom of movement. And 70 per cent of Polish respondents oppose efforts to relocate medical supply chains to Europe, while 80 per cent oppose this for non-medical supply chains. It is likely that Poles blame the chronic underfunding of public healthcare, rather than globalisation and outsourcing, for their shortages of personal protective equipment.

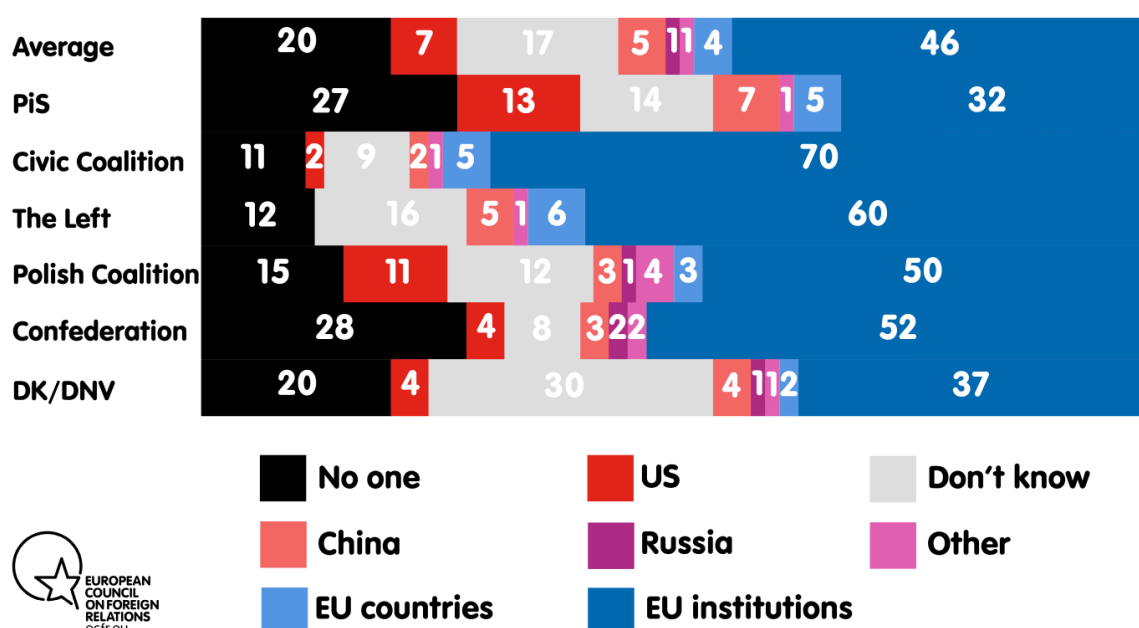
It also seems that the direct threat of coronavirus has not crowded out long-term challenges in the minds of voters. Forty-two per cent of Poles say that, during the crisis, they have become more supportive of efforts to fulfil climate change commitments, compared to just 13 per cent who have become less supportive. In contrast to, for example, Germany and France, even far-right voters form part of the consensus on this issue in Poland (on average).

Thirty-six per cent of Polish respondents say that the crisis has increased the need to respect the rule of law, human rights, and democracy. This figure is at 48 per cent among PiS voters, despite the fact that their party of choice has moved to undermine the rule of law and democratic institutions in Poland. While this might be partially attributable to the disparity between general principles and the complex set of considerations behind support for a specific party, it chimes with the fact that a significant number of PiS voters are worried about the state of democracy in Poland and would welcome the European Commission's help in defending the rule of law there.

The lack of alternative sources of support is evident in Polish voters' attitudes towards the superpowers – just 7 per cent of them expect the United States to be Poland's main source of assistance in responding to the crisis, and only 5 per cent believe China will take on this role. Poles have an exceptionally bleak view of China, with 43 per cent of respondents stating that their perception of the country has worsened during the crisis and only 14 per cent saying that it has improved. The US fares a little better, at 37 per

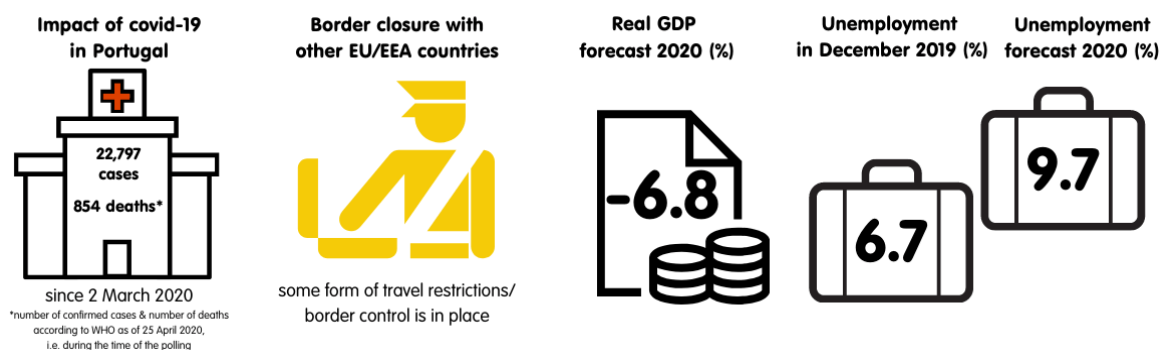
cent and 14 per cent respectively (which is still among the country's best results among surveyed member states). This trend is apparent even among supporters of PiS, 30 per cent of whom say that their perception of the US has worsened – compared to 21 per cent who say that it has improved – despite the party's traditional alignment with Washington. Twenty-seven per cent supporters of the ruling party say that Poland should “rely on itself” in the crisis, compared to 20 per cent of all Polish respondents. But, even among PiS supporters, a plurality (32 per cent) of respondents expect the EU to step in to assist Poland.

Which powers will provide your country with the most support during the coronavirus crisis? (Percentage of Polish respondents by party)



Accordingly, Poles look to the EU with remarkable hope and expectation. They are potential supporters of a more unified response to the crises and challenges Europe faces, and they have little inclination to turn inwards or towards other global powers. This puts them at odds with the rhetoric of their government, which emphasises the virtues of national solutions, plays down the role of the EU, and gladly exploits the bloc's failures to reorientate voters towards a vision of a closed nation state.

Portugal (Lívia Franco)



Portugal's response to the covid-19 pandemic seems to have been markedly more effective than that of larger southern European countries. In comparison to Spain and Italy, Portugal has recorded a relatively modest number of coronavirus infections and deaths. Despite the fact that it has a relatively old population (around 22 per cent of its 10.2 million citizens are over the age of 65) and a fragile national health system (which is chronically underfunded and poorly equipped), Portugal seemed to efficaciously control the worst community transmission effects of the virus.

Four main factors appear to explain this achievement. Firstly, Portugal acted quickly to control the pandemic, adopting containment and mitigation measures at a much earlier stage of the cycle than many other European countries. The authorities closed schools and universities only one week after identifying the first infection. At the time, there had been no fatalities. One week later, with only 62 cases per million citizens and two deaths, the president declared a state of emergency and ordered a full lockdown that would last for 47 days.

Secondly, Portugal was able to react this quickly because the virus arrived relatively late in the country – one month after it reached Italy and Spain. Regardless of whether this was a consequence of geography or sheer luck, Portugal used the additional time well. By learning from other countries' errors and successes, it took steps to prepare, such as initiating a 35 per cent increase in intensive care beds and doubling its stock of mechanical ventilators (so far, the health system is yet to reach full capacity).

Thirdly, Portugal's centralised institutional and governmental system allowed for the rapid nationwide application of containment measures. This is in contrast to the piecemeal regional measures adopted in countries such as Belgium, which is roughly the same size as Portugal (in population and geography) but has had far more infections and deaths.

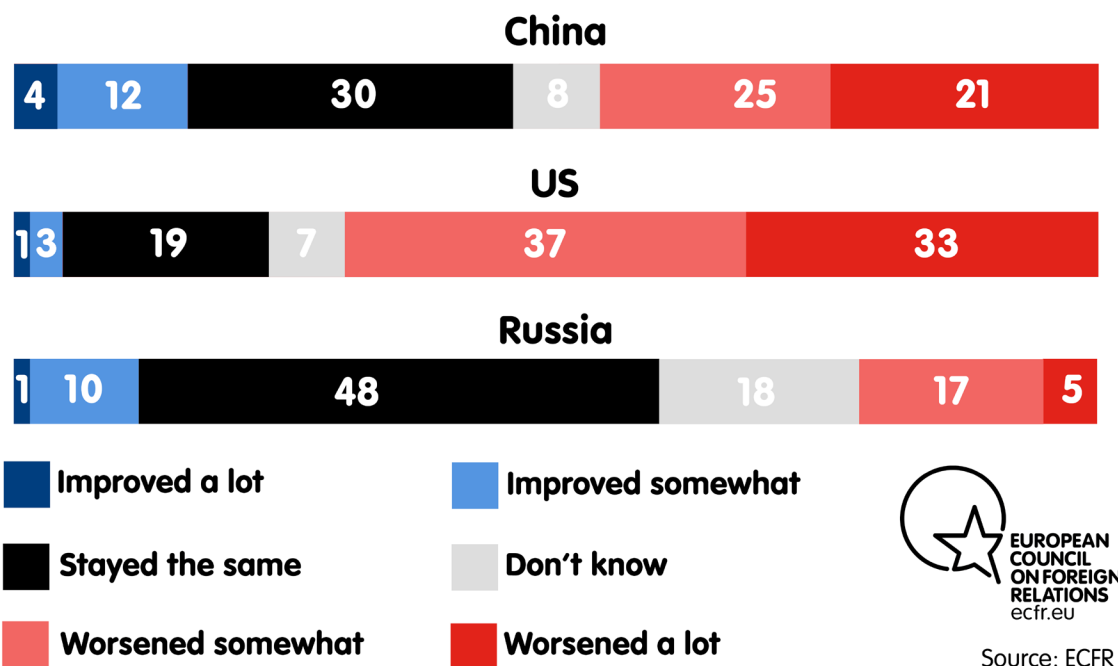
Finally, Portuguese citizens quickly abided by containment and mitigation procedures, drastically reducing their mobility. According to one Portuguese covid-19 barometer, ten days after lockdown began, they had reduced their use of retail and leisure facilities by 83 per cent, parks and similar locations by 80 per cent, and public transport by 79 per cent.

An effective governmental response

Three months after covid-19 arrived in Portugal – and with a mortality rate of around 4.5 per cent – a survey conducted by YouGov and ECFR shows that 74 per cent of Portuguese approve of the way that the minority socialist government led by Antonio Costa has responded to the pandemic. This approval extends across the political spectrum to include many supporters of the Social Democratic Party, the main opposition group. According to the survey, Portuguese are among the European citizens most willing to respond to the pandemic by strengthening the power of the government and political leaders (38 per cent), supporting higher government spending (49 per cent), and even allowing surveillance for public health reasons (71 per cent). Indeed, during this initial period of the crisis, the national authorities in Portugal created strong social and political cohesion around the policies they implemented. This has caught the attention of leaders in other European countries to the extent that, in neighbouring Spain, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez asked the opposition to follow Portugal's example.

The government in Lisbon – unlike those in Madrid and Rome – has strengthened its position during the first phase of the pandemic. As ECFR's survey shows, 61 per cent of Portuguese now have a more positive view of the government than they did when the crisis began. However, in June, the number of infections in the greater Lisbon area began rising and the health authorities were failing to control contagion chains. This situation seemed to be altering the public's initially positive perception of the government. In addition, some European countries show little desire to open their borders to Portugal.

Have your views of China, Russia, and the US changed during the coronavirus crisis? (Percentage of Portuguese respondents)



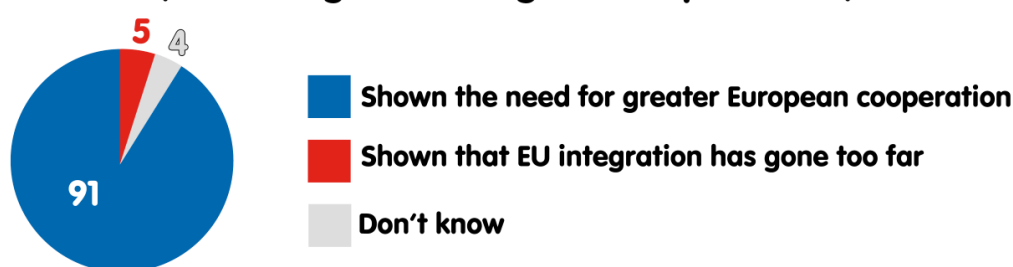
European cooperation is crucial

According to ECFR's survey, 53 per cent of respondents in Portugal regard EU institutions as irrelevant to the crisis but, at the same time, 91 per cent believe that the coronavirus has demonstrated that there is a need for greater cooperation at the EU level. This apparent contradiction may be because, according to one national poll, 57 per cent of Portuguese citizens believe that the worst of the pandemic is yet to come. And 75 per cent of them are concerned about the economic effects of measures to contain the virus (a sentiment that has perhaps been exacerbated by the sense of economic fragility they have felt since the onset of the euro crisis in 2011).

Portuguese citizens view the crisis as comprising two different phases: the first, focused on healthcare, is ending with the gradual removal of confinement measures; the second will come when they begin to feel the heaviest economic and social effects of the emergency. While the first phase primarily required domestic solutions, the second period will predominantly demand economic measures designed to stimulate growth and prevent a recession. The socialist government excelled in the first phase, but the public appear to believe that it will require help to do so in the second phase. According to ECFR's survey, just 9 per cent of Portuguese citizens believe in their country's

capacity for self-reliance (one of the lowest levels in the EU) while 75 per cent of them expect to receive support from either European institutions or other member states. This expectation explains why Costa described the Dutch finance minister's objections to "coronabonds" as "repugnant".

How has the coronavirus crisis changed your view of the EU? (Percentage of Portuguese respondents)



Which actors will support your country most during the recovery from the coronavirus crisis? (Percentage of Portuguese respondents)



Source: ECFR



Uncertain transatlanticism

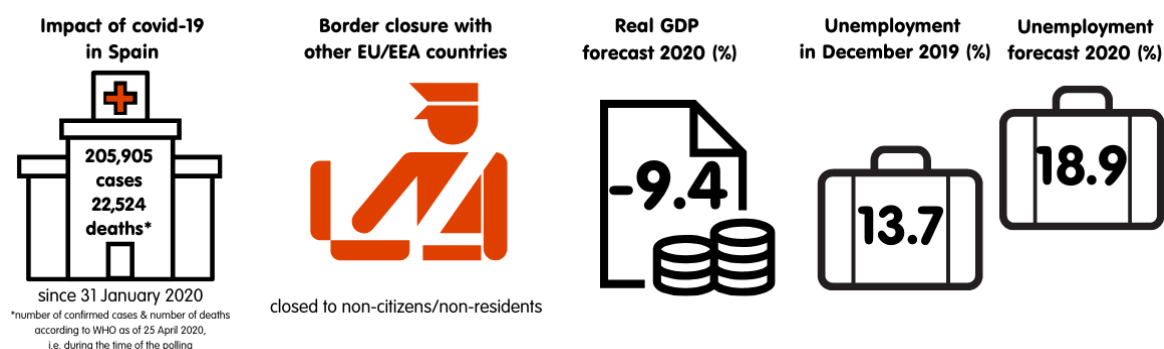
Sixty-seven per cent of Portuguese respondents say that, in the fight against the virus, Europe must become more united, and 70 per cent that member states should share the financial burden of the crisis. Portugal is clearly a country that trusts in Europe. While 60 per cent of the country's citizens want to reinforce the EU's external borders, they continue to be instinctive multilateralists. They favour international cooperation – rather than national solutions – in response to global challenges, including those related to climate policy. For instance, since the onset of the crisis, 58 per cent of Portuguese respondents have become more supportive of Europe's efforts to fulfil its climate change commitments. Furthermore, even when confronted with the pandemic's implications for global interdependency, they continue to value free movement: just 37 per cent of them say that, as a consequence of the crisis, people should rethink their need to work, live, and travel abroad.

Strategically, ECFR's survey is perhaps most striking for Portugal in what it reveals about the pandemic's effect on perceptions of the United States. Historically, Portugal has balanced its strategic position between Europe and the US. Yet 70 per cent of Portuguese respondents say that their view of the US has worsened during the crisis, while only 4 per cent say it improved. Of course, this is largely in line with the shift in public opinion in other EU countries. Nevertheless, for more than half a century, a close relationship with the US (and with the United Kingdom, another traditional ally) has formed the Atlantic axis of Portugal's foreign policy.

There are reasons to believe that the rise in Portuguese scepticism of the US may have long-term effects. Among them is Portugal's growing openness to China, including to Chinese diplomacy during the health emergency. While 46 per cent of Portuguese respondents said that their view of China had worsened during the crisis and 16 per cent said that it had improved, these figures are much better than those for the US. This is especially significant given that 27 per cent of Portuguese respondents saw China as most responsible for the pandemic due to its initial response to the outbreak of the coronavirus. In contrast, 48 per cent of Portuguese respondents said that their views of Russia had not changed during the pandemic.

Portugal's apparent drift from its traditional strategic position may be temporary. It could be a consequence of the current US administration's contentious approach to politics or of China's recent diplomatic manoeuvres. But there is no doubt that the virus could have a lasting impact on Portugal's approach to the transatlantic relationship.

Spain (Carla Hobbs and José Ignacio Torreblanca)



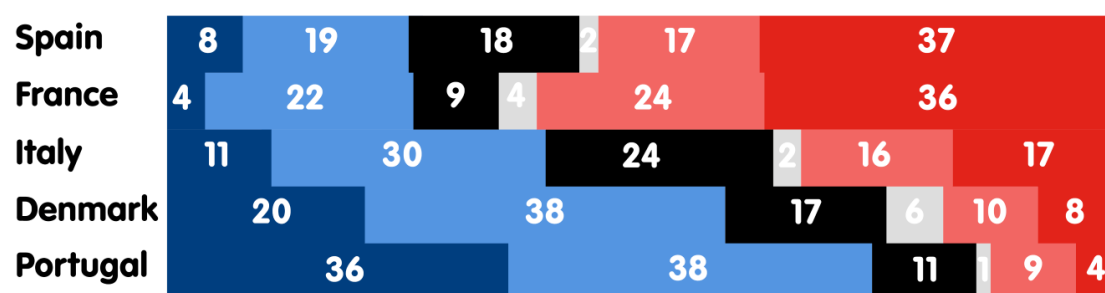
Spain was badly hit by the coronavirus, recording some of the highest numbers of infections and deaths in the world. This is despite the country's imposition of a strict lockdown and entry ban on non-citizens.

The pandemic has deepened political divisions in Spain, driving yet another wedge between the left and the right. At the helm of a coalition government made up of the centre-left Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) and the left-wing Podemos, Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez has navigated the health crisis amid sustained criticism from the centre-right People's Party and the far-right Vox. The issue of secessionism has served to deepen political division and polarisation even further throughout the pandemic. It remains to be seen whether the precarious patchwork of parties that voted the current government into power in January will provide it with the support it needs to steer Spain's economic recovery effectively.

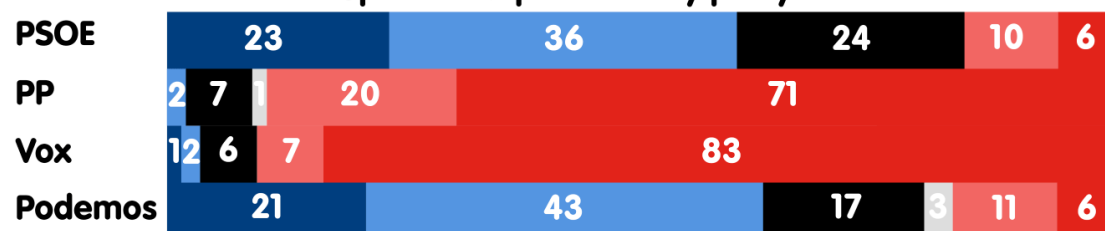
Spanish voters, like their French counterparts, are generally critical of their government's response to the crisis. In a recent poll conducted by the European Council Foreign Relations and YouGov, only 27 per cent of Spanish respondents said they approved of the way the government has handled the situation – in stark contrast to their Danish and Portuguese counterparts (80 per cent and 75 per cent of whom approve of their government's response respectively).

However, on this issue, Spaniards are deeply divided along party lines. Sixty per cent of PSOE supporters, and 64 per cent Podemos supporters, have a positive view of the government. In contrast, 91 per cent of People's Party supporters, and 90 per cent of Vox supporters, have a negative view of the government. Still, it is telling that the 29 per cent of Spaniards who voted for the PSOE in 2019 say their perception of the government has deteriorated during the coronavirus crisis.

Has your government risen to the challenge of the coronavirus crisis? (%)



Spanish respondents by party

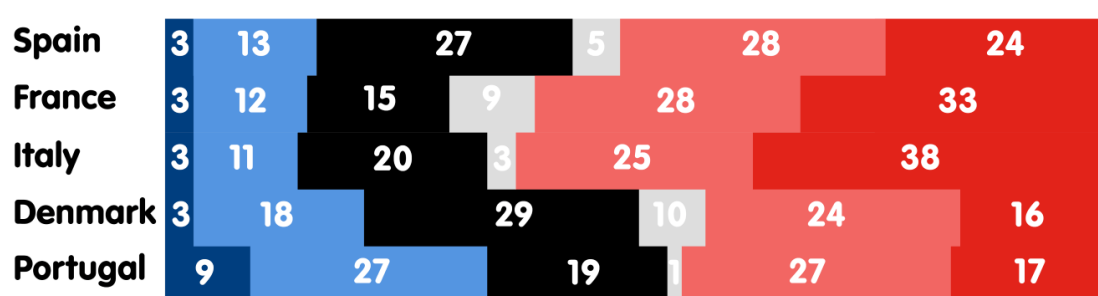


Source: ECFR

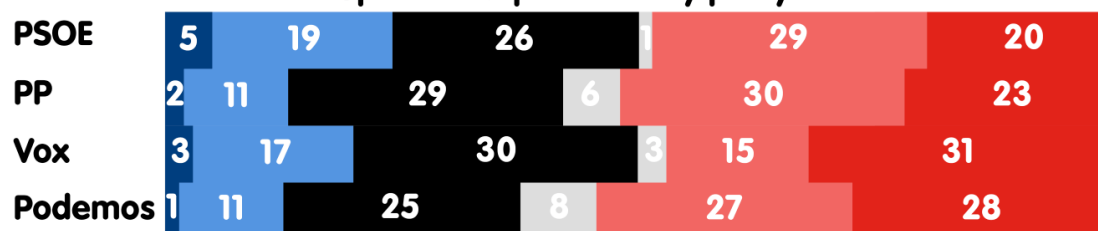


In Spain, as in other southern European countries, most voters are critical of the way that the European Union initially handled the crisis. (The fieldwork for this poll was conducted between 20–29 April, coinciding with the peak of deaths in Spain; 22 April had the highest death rate of any single day.) Fifty-two per cent of Spaniards believe the EU did not rise to the challenge. Only the Italians and the French are more critical of the bloc's performance. Meanwhile, only 8 per cent of Spanish respondents say that the EU has been their country's most useful ally in the pandemic – just ahead of China, at 7 per cent, but significantly behind the World Health Organisation, at 20 per cent. And 50 per cent of them state that their perception of the EU institutions has deteriorated during this crisis (a figure only exceeded in Italy).

Has the EU risen to the challenge of the coronavirus crisis? (%)



Spanish respondents by party



Source: ECFR



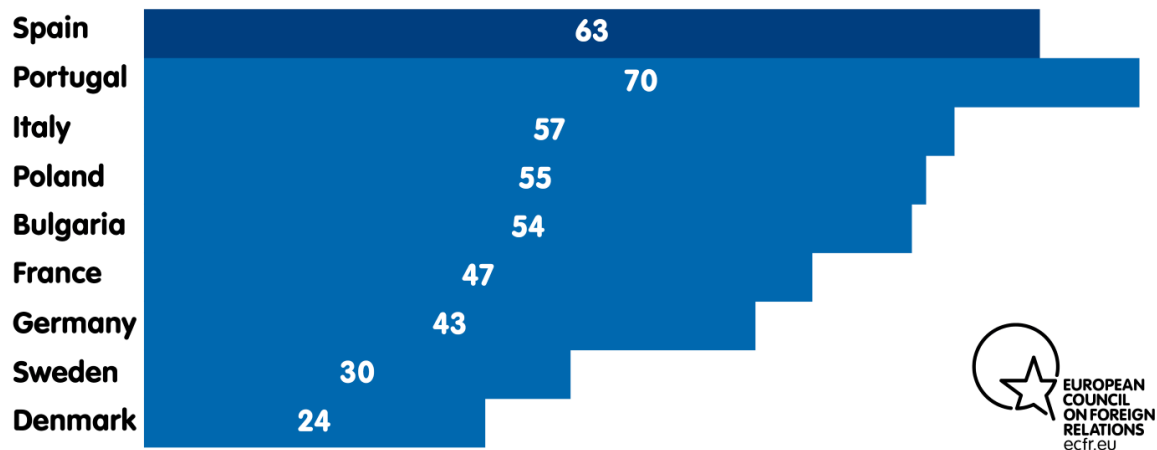
Spaniards' condemnation of the EU's late initial reaction has not, however, caused them to demand "less Europe". A staggering 80 per cent of Spanish respondents believe that the coronavirus crisis has shown that there is a need for more cooperation at the EU level, while just 9 per cent believe that the crisis has revealed that EU integration has gone too far.

Clearly, the EU's initial reaction to the crisis has not corroded the deeply pro-EU tendencies of Spanish society. José Ortega y Gasset's dictum that "Spain is the problem, Europe is the solution" – which went on to become the leitmotif of Spain's integration into the EU – still seems to hold. Forty-one per cent of Spanish respondents say that they expect EU institutions to be Spain's key supporter during the economic recovery from the crisis (only Portugal and Poland registered a higher share on this point). And just 18 per cent of Spanish respondents say that, given the crisis, some of the EU's powers should be returned to national governments – the smallest share in all surveyed countries.

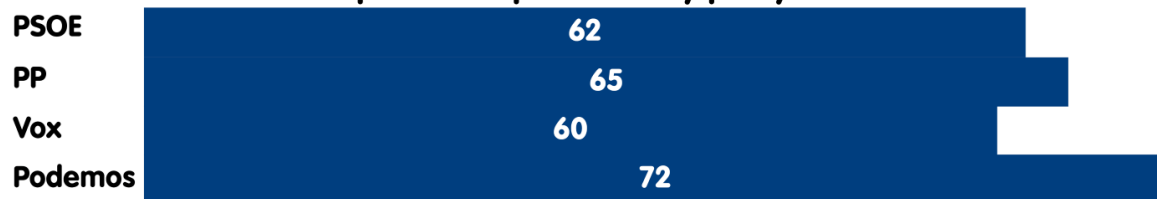
At the same time, polarisation between political parties seems to stop at the border. Sixty-three per cent of Spaniards support more financial burden-sharing in the EU (the second-largest level of support in any surveyed country after Portugal). And there is little variation by voting intention: the share of affiliated voters who support such burden-sharing is 67 per cent for the PSOE, 73 per cent for the People's Party, 62 per

cent for Vox, and 71 per cent for Podemos. Therefore, whereas Spaniards evaluate their government's handling of the crisis according to ideology and are deeply divided about it, they are united on many issues concerning Europe.

Support for EU countries sharing the financial burden of a crisis (%)



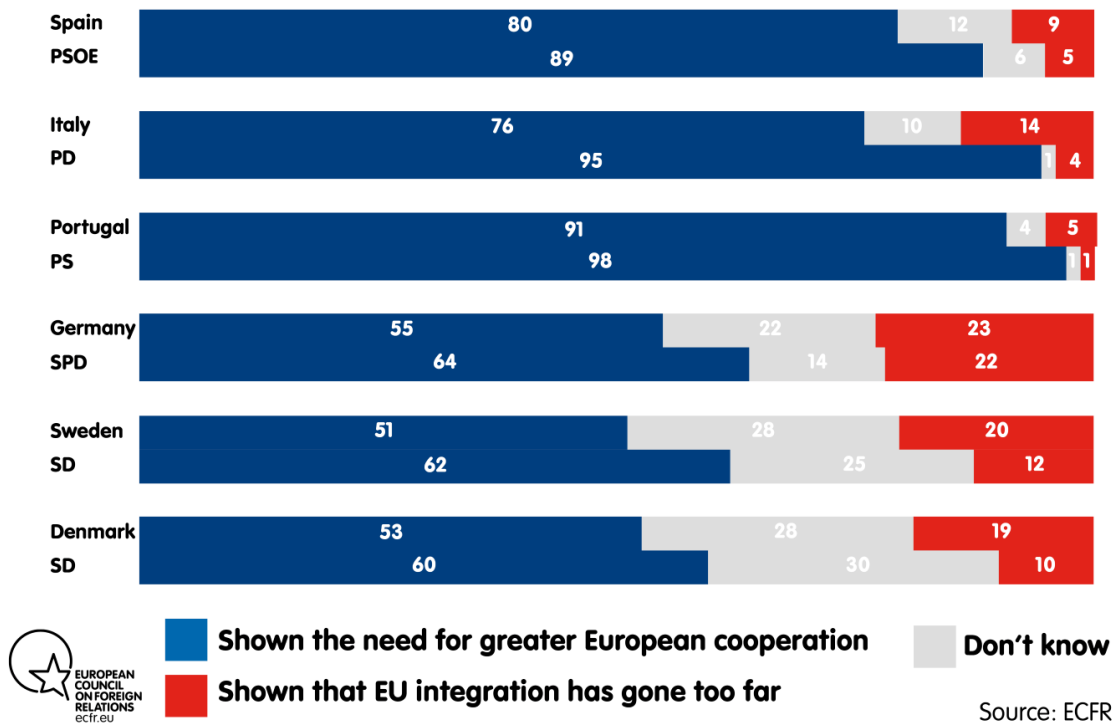
Spanish respondents by party



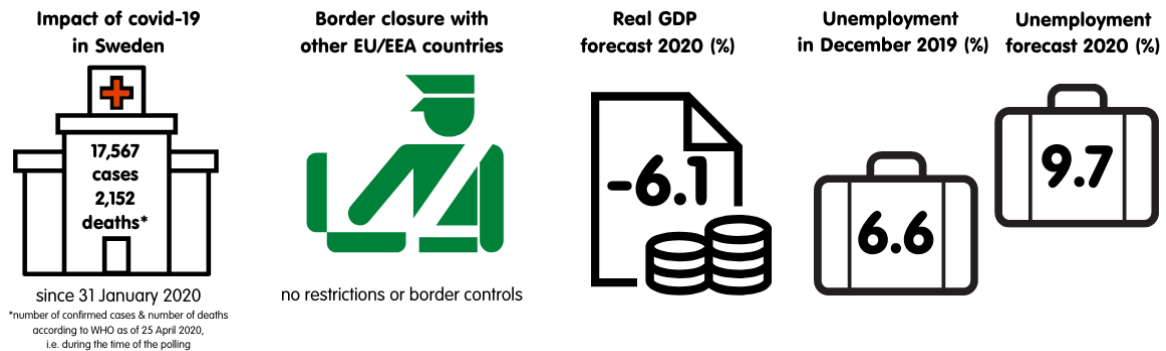
Source: ECFR

Even Vox, which became the third-largest party in Parliament last year, largely avoids criticism of the EU as it seeks to boost its voter base (instead advocating moral conservatism and a sense of national pride in the face of Catalan separatism). As it stands, Spain's voters and political parties are united in their support for the EU.

How has the coronavirus changed your attitudes towards the EU? (%)



Sweden (Marlene Riedel and Jenny Söderström)



Sweden's unconventional approach to countering the covid-19 pandemic has made it the focus of media attention across the world. In contrast to other EU member states, the Swedish government implemented not a total lockdown but relatively soft measures and made an appeal to common sense and individual responsibility. In practice, this meant that the government allowed schools, restaurants, cafés, bars, and nightclubs to remain open, while asking citizens to work from home if possible, practise social distancing, and observe basic hygiene rules. The government has not made masks obligatory in public spaces but has limited the size of gatherings, as well as the number of customers allowed into shops, bars, and restaurants at any one time.

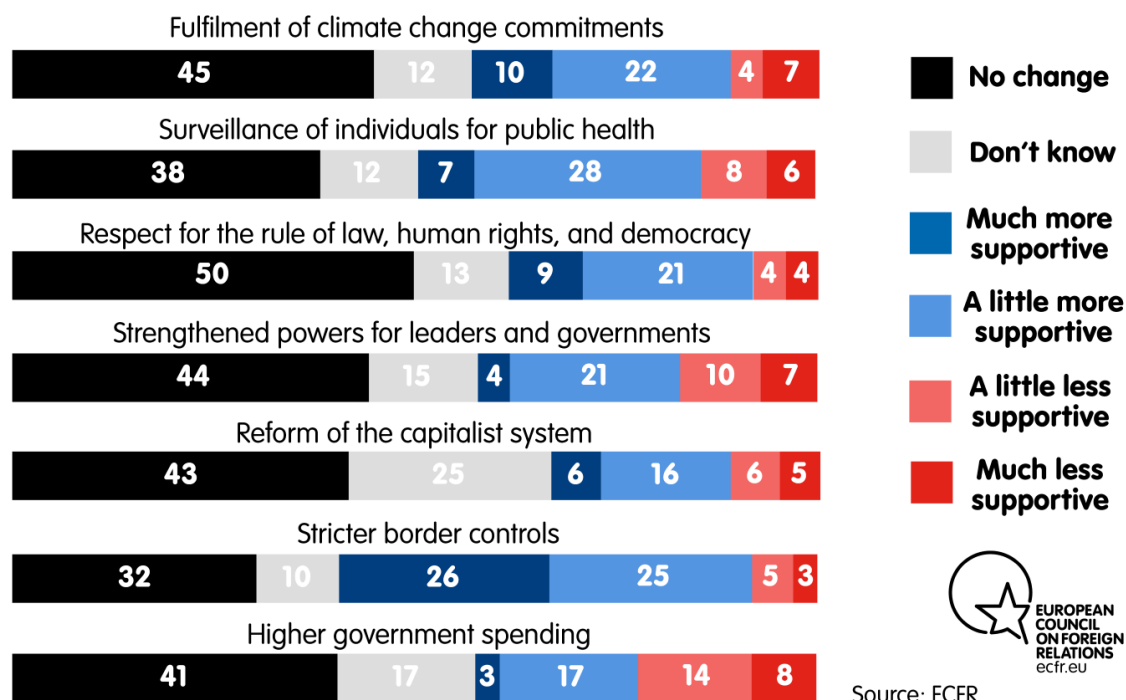
Sweden does not seem to mind the storm of criticism of its approach from other EU member states and countries further afield, holding to a strategy that has the broad approval of the population. This approval likely stems from Swedes' high levels of trust in the government, experts, and institutions. Such trust is evident in a recent survey by the European Council on Foreign Relations and YouGov, in which 45 per cent of Swedish respondents said that their perception of the government had improved during the coronavirus crisis (among surveyed countries, only Portugal and Denmark have seen sharper rises on this point).

It seems that, having watched the crisis unfold in other European countries, Sweden has tried to replicate its traditional neutrality policy by "staying out of it". Even though Sweden has been hit hard in numbers of infections and fatalities from covid-19, as well as in the economic effects of the crisis, ECFR's survey suggests that the pandemic has not greatly altered Swedes' worldview or perceptions of their country's place in Europe.

Given Swedes' broad approval of the government's coronavirus strategy, it is unsurprising that there has also been little change in their view of national and domestic issues, including respect for the rule of law, reform of the capitalist system, and

measures to stop climate change. Indeed, 65 per cent of Swedish respondents say that the crisis has not changed their view of the country's main populist party, the Sweden Democrats (or that they have no opinion on this issue).

Changes in attitudes since the coronavirus crisis began (Percentage of Swedish respondents)



One of the few topics on which the pandemic has affected public opinion is in perceptions of great powers. Fifty-nine per cent of Swedish respondents say that their view of the US has worsened during the crisis (in line with shifts in opinion in other countries), while 52 per cent say that it has created a more negative perception of China (the highest share in any surveyed country aside from France and Denmark). Meanwhile, 33 per cent of Swedes report that their view of Russia has deteriorated (the highest proportion in any surveyed country other than Denmark).

Still, this has not translated into a corresponding rise in support for the EU. Sixty-eight per cent of Swedish respondents say their perception of the role of EU institutions has not changed (or were indifferent on the topic). Swedes have continued to be half-hearted EU members throughout the coronavirus crisis. Together with France and Denmark, they are among the group of surveyed countries that are most sceptical about the proposition that the crisis has shown the need for increased EU cooperation: 51 per cent of Swedish respondents are in favour of this, compared to around 80 per cent of Spanish and Italian counterparts. A mere 8 per cent of Swedish respondents regard the EU as having been their most useful ally in addressing the crisis, while just 22 per cent

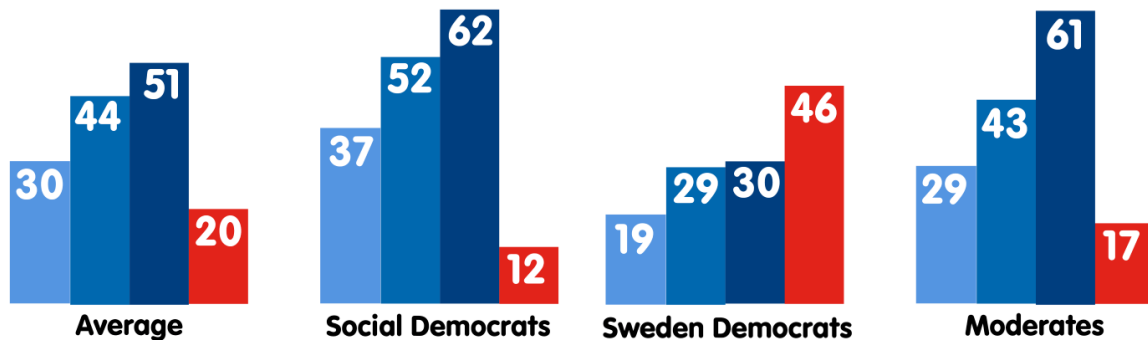
see the bloc as their key partner in the subsequent recovery. And only 16 per cent of them say that the EU has lived up to its responsibilities in the pandemic, while 34 per cent state that it has not done so.

Despite this, Swedes do not appear to be greatly disappointed with, or feel abandoned by, the EU. Rather, they seem to expect the EU to stay out of national issues such as healthcare. Swedes also do not expect much support from others in recovering from the crisis: 39 per cent of them think that the country will manage on its own (only Germans registered a higher share, at 48 per cent). This sense of self-reliance is perhaps a luxury of being a citizen of a relatively wealthy country with an extensive welfare system.

However, such perceptions may limit Sweden's willingness to support other EU member states that have had much worse experiences of the crisis – economically and otherwise. The views of Swedish respondents reflect the country's fiscally conservative status: only 30 per cent of them say that EU member states should share the financial burden of the crisis. Most of them either do not expect to receive support from the EU in recovering from the crisis or believe that other countries should have such expectations. Swedes are also less keen than average for the EU to forge a more unified response to global threats and challenges or to establish greater controls on its external borders. Forty-four per cent and 37 per cent of them support such moves respectively.

Party affiliations correlate with significant differences between Swedish voters on the role of the EU. Around 60 per cent of supporters of the ruling Social Democrats and the opposition Moderates favour greater EU cooperation, compared to just 30 per cent for the Sweden Democrats. Similarly, 52 per cent and 43 per cent of supporters of the Social Democrats and the Moderates say that the EU should create a more unified response to global threats and challenges, compared to just 29 per cent for the Sweden Democrats. Nineteen per cent of supporters of the Sweden Democrats are prepared to share the financial burden of the crisis, in contrast to 37 per cent for the Social Democrats and 29 per cent for the Moderates. And while 26 per cent of supporters of the Social Democrats and 27 per cent of those of the Moderates see a role for the EU in the recovery from the crisis, just 11 per cent of supporters of the Sweden Democrats do so.

What has the coronavirus crisis shown? (Percentage of Swedish respondents by party)



- Member states should be more prepared to share the financial burden of a crisis
- The EU should have a more unified response to global threats and challenges
- There should be greater cooperation between EU member states
- EU integration has gone too far



Source: ECFR

In all, supporters of the Sweden Democrats aside, there seems to be some popular support for greater EU cooperation in response to the crisis. But it is half-hearted. Accordingly, Swedes have stayed true to their somewhat critical view of the EU during the pandemic. And while their perceptions of other global actors have also deteriorated, this has not become a reason for them to seriously reconsider the bloc's international role.

Acknowledgements

This report draws extensively on conversations with, and insights from, many individuals across the wider ECFR family. In particular, we would like to thank ECFR Council Member Adam Lury for his comments on drafts, and for his inspiration for the ‘trauma’ framing in this piece. We would also like to thank the team at Datapraxis for their ongoing collaboration with us in developing and analysing the pan-European surveys, and YouGov for carrying out the fieldwork. We are grateful to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and Think Tank EUROPA for funding the research on Portugal and Denmark respectively. Despite all these many and varied forms of input, any errors in the report remain the authors’ own.

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