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WHAT IS THE EUROPEAN DREAM?

SURVEY ON EUROPEAN DREAMS FOR
THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

WHAT IS THE EUROPEAN DREAM?

**Survey on European Dreams
for the Future of Europe**





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This report does not represent the European Parliament's views but only of the respective authors.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As leaders determine the Future of Europe, our research suggests they would do well to look to the past. The EU14 showed a longing for the idea of Europe as it was three to four decades ago. A democratic Europe. A Europe of welfare states. A Europe of prosperity and opportunity for all. A stable and safe Europe. This is the European dream - unique to this continent and its history - that should inform and inspire the Future of Europe.



CHAPTER 1. DREAMS FOR THE BEST LIFE

Assessed on a global scale, our survey shows that Europe is still the best place to live. The most popular country was the respondents' own. Residents of wealthy EU14 countries were roughly twice as likely to select their own country than their poorer counterparts. The single most popular European country was Switzerland, followed by Germany and Nordic countries. Non-European countries to top the list included the United States, Canada and Australia.



CHAPTER 2. DREAMS FOR HAPPINESS

Greater financial security and free time were the keys to happiness. Although the majority chose more financial security, the relative importance of this choice appears influenced by their country's macroeconomic status. Instead of the rate of growth, living standards appear to explain citizen's level of satisfaction with their financial security. The EU14 also showed a preference for spending more free time with their families.



CHAPTER 3. DREAMS FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

The EU14 have a surprisingly bleak view of quality of life for future generations. Only one in four believe that future generations will have a better life than their own. One third believe that quality of life will be worse. The optimists are more likely to be young, religious, pro-European Union, a resident of their country's capital and male. Citizens from founding European Union countries emerged as the most pessimistic.



CHAPTER 4. DREAMS FOR ACHIEVEMENT

The survey indicated alarmingly low faith in hard work and entrepreneurship. Instead, luck appeared to play an outsized role in making or breaking the European dream. Central and Eastern European countries with high gross domestic product (GDP) growth appear far more positive about the promise of work and entrepreneurship than Europe's historically rich economies such as Germany or the United Kingdom.



CHAPTER 5. DREAMS FOR SUPPORT

In the pursuit of their dreams, where do the EU14 look for support? A clear majority rely on themselves. Very few presume to receive help from the government and even less from trade unions, multinational companies, political parties or NGOs. Central and Eastern Europeans appeared more self-empowered than the EU14 average. Residents of capital cities tend to perceive the European Union as more important than residents of smaller municipalities.



CHAPTER 6. DREAMS FOR DEMOCRACY

The founders dreamed of a democratic Europe, united around fundamental values from freedom and dignity to equality and rule of law. Is this a dream that still resonates with the EU14? Overall, our survey shows yes. Democracy won by knockout. Solidarity and equality were also far more popular than competition and performance. Europe's family-friendly character was readily apparent. Yet the preference - however slight - for homogeneity over diversity and security over freedom are worrying trends for Europe's liberal values.



CHAPTER 7. DREAMS UNDER THREAT

The EU14 believe that climate change and migration are the biggest issues for Europe over the next 10 years, threatening their dreams for a brighter tomorrow. There was no country in our survey where climate change was not amongst the most important concerns. Whilst low levels of pay and pensions primarily concerned the Spanish and the Hungarians, growing social inequality was most worrisome to those living in Southern Europe.



CHAPTER 8. DREAMS FOR LEADERSHIP

The EU14 are highly divided on whether European institutions or national governments should determine the Future of Europe. The share of those who support the European Union in a leadership role was just as high as the ratio of respondents who thought the same about their national governments. Whilst there were no decisive winners or losers, respondents did appear to agree on giving citizens greater say in political decision-making. In comparison, very few respondents wanted political parties, trade unions or NGOs to lead on their behalf.



CHAPTER 9. DREAMS FOR TAXPAYER MONEY

Where do citizens want to see their national governments invest more taxpayer money? The short answer is social policy, especially healthcare, pensions and education. There is near universal consensus in Central and Eastern European countries that their respective healthcare systems need public investment. The majority of Swedish and German citizens want their government to spend more on pensions. This shows that

even in more secure welfare states, pensions are a key concern. The issue of education and environmental protection also figured prominently.

CHAPTER 10. DREAMS FOR UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME



The economic and political turbulence that has rocked Europe in recent years has brought the idea of establishing a taxpayer funded universal basic income (UBI) to the fore. Our poll shows that this policy has a plurality of support in the EU14. Given UBI's significant unpopularity in Eastern and Southern Europe, however, it is unlikely to become part of European social policy in the near future. One of every fourth respondent did not have an opinion about UBI, which suggests the public still has much to learn about this idea.

CHAPTER 11. DREAMS FOR SALARY



What is the dream salary for the EU14? It turns out that citizens in rich and poor countries answer this question very differently. No matter what, they all dream for more - about twice their minimum wage according to our survey. The average dream salary across the EU14 ranged from a net of 900 euros in Central and Eastern Europe to 2,200 euros in Western European countries. In Southern Europe, the dream net salary is between 1,200 euros and 1,800 euros per month.

CHAPTER 12. DREAMS FOR RETIREMENT AGE



Even though Europeans live longer, they hope not to work longer. On this, the EU14 are united. Their dream retirement age is 60. Even in the countries where the retirement age is already high, respondents would prefer to stop work around age 60 to 61. In countries where the retirement age is under 65, respondents would prefer to stop working before the age of 60.

CHAPTER 13. DEFINING THE EUROPEAN DREAM



Our survey reveals that the European dream is... Europe itself. Citizens do not long to move to another continent or outside the European Union. They do not want to give up their democracies or individual liberties. Rather than weaken the European welfare model, they want to strengthen it.



CONCLUSION

THE EUROPEAN DREAM IS... EUROPE ITSELF

Our survey reveals that the European dream is... Europe itself. Citizens do not long to move to another continent or outside the European Union. They do not want to give up their democracies or individual liberties. Rather than weaken the European welfare model, they want to strengthen it.

Wealth and prosperity matter, but not at the expense of quality of life. As the famed economist, Jeremy Rifkin has said, "The American dream may be worth dying for. The new European dream is worth living for".³³

Whilst the European dream is Europe itself, it is not necessarily Europe as it is today. Respondents were pessimistic about the life chances for future generations and showed diminishing faith in the promise of hard work to achieve prosperity. These are clearly not aspirational sentiments, and should raise concern amongst policymakers.

Values also appear to be changing, we suspect in response to the migration crisis and nationalist movements that have surged in recent years. Security and homogeneity were values almost as important to respondents as freedom and diversity. At the same time, the role of the family has increased in this unpredictable world. In the Future of Europe debates, these are the issues that also warrant attention.

Europeans showed a longing for the idea of Europe as it was three to four decades ago. A democratic Europe. A Europe of welfare states. A Europe of prosperity and opportunity for all. A stable and safe Europe. This is the European dream - unique to this continent and its history - that should inform and inspire the Future of Europe.

³³ Rifkin, J. (2005). *The European Dream: How Europe's Vision of the Future Is Quietly Eclipsing the American Dream*. New York: Tarcher/Penguin

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The Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) is the think tank of the social democratic political family at the European level. Our mission is to develop innovative research, policy advice, training and debates to inspire and inform progressive politics and policies across Europe. We operate as hub for thinking to facilitate the emergence of progressive answers to the challenges that Europe faces today.

FEPS works in close partnership with its members and partners, forging connections and boosting coherence amongst stakeholders from the world of politics, academia and civil society at local, regional, national, European and global levels.

Our ambition is to undertake intellectual reflection for the benefit of the progressive movement, and to promote the founding principles of the European Union – freedom, equality, solidarity, democracy, respect of human rights, fundamental freedoms and human dignity, and respect for the rule of law.

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POLICY SOLUTIONS

Policy Solutions is a progressive political research institute based in Budapest. It is committed to the values of liberal democracy, solidarity, equal opportunity and European integration. Amongst the pre-eminent areas of its research are the investigation of how the quality of democracy evolves, the analysis of factors driving euro-scepticism and the far-right, and election research.

Policy Solutions considers it important that political research should not be intelligible or of interest to only a narrow professional audience. Therefore, Policy Solutions shares its research results in conferences, seminars and interactive websites with journalists, NGOs, international organisations, members of the diplomatic corps, leading politicians and corporate executives.

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What is the European Dream?

Survey on European Dreams for the Future of Europe

The founders of the European project were dreamers. They dreamed of a united Europe: a continent of peace, solidarity, and shared prosperity. A Europe without borders and divisions that celebrates the continent's incredible diversity. A Europe evolving towards an ever-closer union, inspired by the notion that Europe will always be stronger together.

Do Europeans today share the founders' dream?

Together, **FEPS** and **Policy Solutions** set out to reply to this question with a landmark survey covering the 14 most populous Member States. Our research defines the European dream by providing insights on the hopes and expectations EU citizens have for Europe as a shared project.

As policymakers debate the Future of Europe, hoping to make the EU more responsive to the views and needs of citizens, this research takes on especially strong importance. Democracy works best when everyone is heard. This survey shares the people's voice. We all need to hear it.

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