



# Short Report of PERCEIVE Survey

## Introduction

In the spring of 2017, two of PERCEIVE's researchers from **University of Gothenburg**, **Nicholas Charron** and **Monika Bauhr** (2017), crafted an original public opinion survey that would be used as a means of analysing and testing ideas put forth by individuals in the research project.

This is **the first investigation of public opinion that attempts to directly capture attitudes of EU Cohesion Policy**. While several rounds of Eurobarometer surveys have asked about awareness of EU Cohesion/Regional policy, there has been a lack of attempt in fact gauge the public's actual opinion of this important policy, which make up roughly one third of the EU budget. Therefore, this survey makes a significant contribution to our overall knowledge of public opinion on EU economic integration.

The survey includes over 35 substantive questions as well as seven demographic and background questions of the respondents. In all, **17,147** interviews were carried out in **15 EU member states** (Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and UK), which represent **85% of the total EU28 population**. Countries were selected for purposes of the selected case study reports as well as on the bases of variation with respect to geography, size, and institutional quality.

## Result Highlights

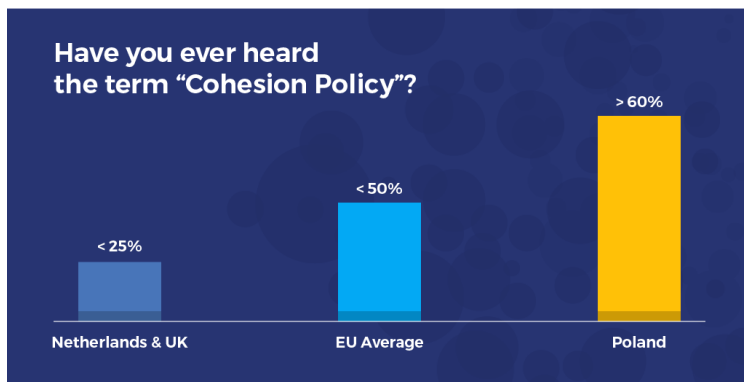
While undoubtedly researchers within and outside of the PERCEIVE group will present more nuanced findings based on the data in this survey, an **early look** at the data point to several interesting findings. The questions included in the survey are grounded in the **academic literature on public support** (and scepticism) for **European Integration**. The majority of these questions are included to provide researchers with as many tools as possible to test various theories about why citizens would support (or not) the idea of Cohesion Policy.

Aside from several demographic questions, the substantive questions are on:

- Awareness of the policy in question;
- Perceptions of the biggest problem facing one's region;

- Voting in EU elections;
- Evaluating one's country's EU membership;
- Citizens' identification Europe, country & region and European values;
- Political policy attitudes and values;
- Perceptions of corruption in governing bodies;
- Evaluations of the economy & one's regional economic standing in the EU;
- Questions measuring support for Cohesion Policy & Brexit (UK only).

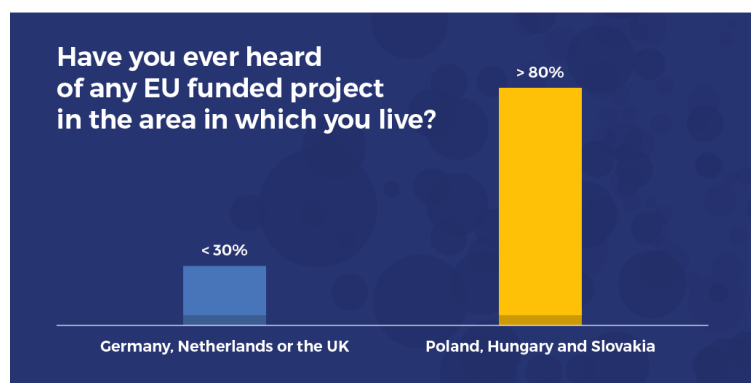
We highlight several results from a select few of these categories above. First, as several Eurobarometer survey prior to this survey, we asked about general **awareness of the EU Cohesion policy**. We find – similar to previous Eurobarometer investigations - that on



average, **just under half of the respondents have heard of the name “Cohesion Policy” or “Structural Funds”, while roughly half have heard the term “Regional Policy”**. Moreover, there is **remarkable country level variation** in this awareness – in countries such as the **UK and Netherlands, less than 25%** have even this superficial level of

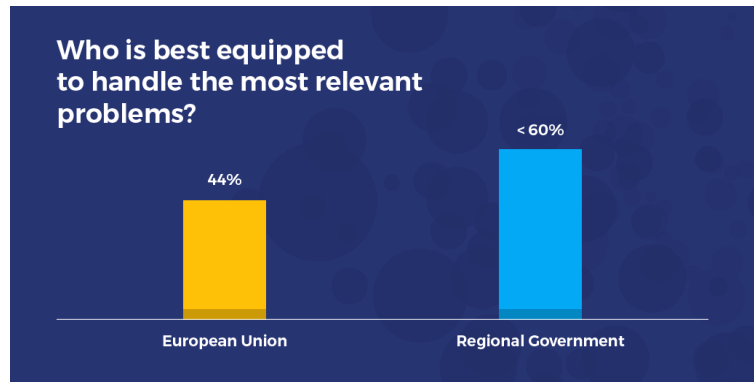
awareness, while in countries such as **Poland, about two thirds (or more) claim they have heard of all three policy names.**

In addition, we also ask whether citizens have ever heard of **any EU funded project in the area in which they live** – and again, remarkable variation. While about **80%** or more said ‘yes’ to this question in places like **Poland, Hungary and Slovakia, less than 30%** said so in **Germany, Netherlands or the UK**. This might be expected however given the skewed distribution of the Structural Funds toward



lesser-developed regions. As far as whether people who **have heard of a project in their area also perceived that they have in fact benefitted from such EU funded projects**, a majority of respondents from **Poland, Estonia, Slovakia and Hungary** claimed ‘yes’, while **less than half of respondents** who have heard of an EU project in their area in all other countries claimed that they personal benefit from such investments. Remarkably, **only 11%** of **Italians** who have **heard of a local EU project** claim that they have **personally benefitted** from it.

Second, we were also interested in the **policy problems** that citizens themselves highlight are most pressing for their area and which level of governance – regional, national or EU – that they have most confidence in in terms of positively dealing with said problems. In most countries, **unemployment** was said to be the most pressing problem facing one’s area, followed by ‘**low wages and poverty**’.



In **Romania**, ‘**corruption**’ was highlighted as the most pressing problem by a plurality of respondents, while in the **UK** it was **poor infrastructure and transportation**. However, **most citizens** believe that **their regional governments** are **best equipped** to handle the problem they highlighted as most pressing, with just **under 60%** saying that the regional level will be “**very effective**” or “**somewhat effective**” in addressing their main concern. On the other hand, **only 44%** say the same about the **EU** – which was the **lowest** rated of the three levels – and **56%** claim that the EU will be ‘**not so effective**’ in addressing their main concern. **Romanians** were **most optimistic** about the **EU’s ability** to address their main concerns, **while a clear majority of Italians, Britons and Swedes** were **sceptical** of the EU’s ability to address theirs.

Third, despite the relative **lack in confidence about the policy capacities of the EU**, most citizens – **63%** - still believe that their country’s **EU membership** is a ‘**good thing**’, while 13% said a ‘**bad thing**’ and 22% said ‘**neither**’.

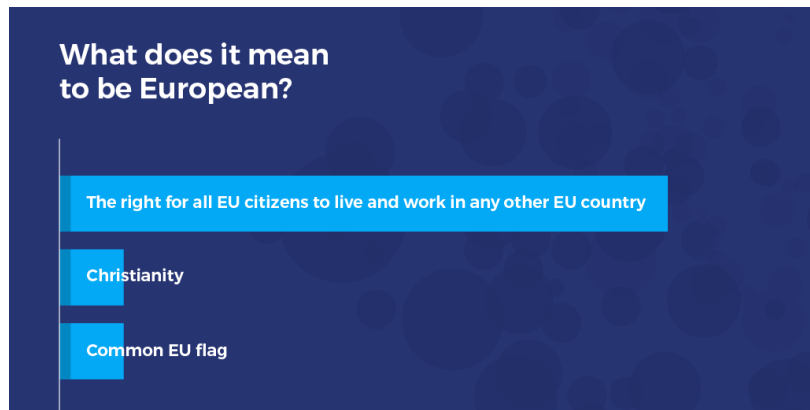


This is **slightly different than a 2017 Eurobarometer<sup>[1]</sup>**, which found that 57% responded ‘good thing’, 14% ‘bad thing’ and 27% ‘neither’ (however, Greece, Croatia and Czech Republic, three of the four most sceptic countries are not included in our sample, which could help explain our higher ‘good thing’ average). Our study finds that this is **more pronounced**

**among people with higher education** and those living in more **urban areas**. Moreover, there are some fairly strong country differences in this response as well, with over **70% of Polish, Romanian and German citizens** claiming that their country’s EU membership is a ‘good thing’ while **less than 40% of Italians say so**.

Fourth, we asked a number of questions about **identity and political values** – accounting for potential explanations as to why certain individuals would be more open to the idea of **Cohesion Policy**; essentially **economic integration and redistribution within the EU**. As Cohesion is about ‘multilevel governance’ (Hooghe and Marks 2009), we asked them about their **attachment to Europe, their own country and their region**. Although there is much variation, we found that **nation state** was still on average the unit with which people **most strongly were attached**, followed by the **region** and then to **Europe**, although the order is

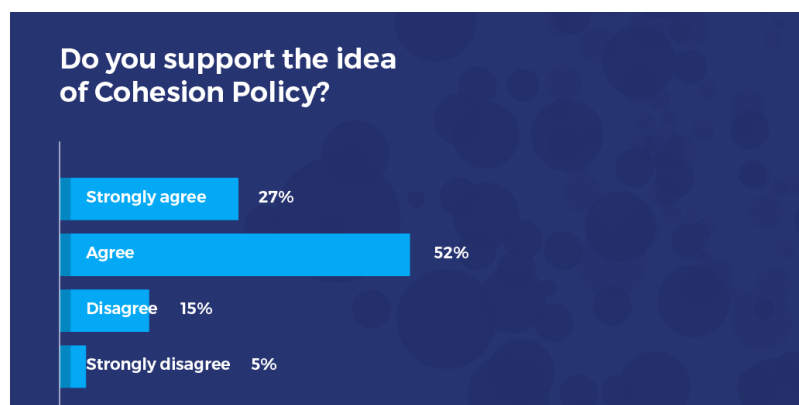
different for some countries, such as Italy, where people on average most strongly identified with their region. In addition, respondents were asked about the extent to which several



items were important to **'being European'**, including the **Euro**, **Christianity**, the **European flag**, having a **common history** and the **right for all EU citizens to live and work in any other EU country**. Our sample-wide results point to 'the right for all EU citizens to live and work in any other EU country' as clearly the **most important aspect** of what it

**means to 'be European' today**, suggesting the positive effects of **common market**, while **'Christianity'** and a **common EU flag** were the **least important** to people in this regard.

Finally, gauging support for the idea of Cohesion Policy presents several challenges. First, as our own and past Eurobarometer surveys have shown, **awareness of this policy is relatively low among most Europeans**, thus any direct question about Cohesion Policy would probably lead to rather invalid results. Second, Cohesion Policy benefits regions in the EU in very different ways, with lesser-developed regions receiving the majority of funds. To assume that all citizens are aware of their region's relative status within the EU is also problematic, as **some might support/not support the idea of Cohesion Policy** simply because they **perceive their region to be more wealthy/poor than it actually is**. We attempted to remedy these two potential pitfalls by first asking respondents to place their region into one of four groups – the wealthiest 25% to the poorest 25% of all EU regions so that we could then take into consideration their perceptions in future analyses. We then randomly gave some respondents the actual correct information, and let other respondents proceed without such information so as to test 'rational' models of support for



redistribution within the EU so as to include an experimental component to the data. Next, we provided all respondents with some basic summary information about Cohesion Policy. Citizens were then asked if they thought that the EU should continue such a policy on a four-point scale – from 'strongly agree to strongly disagree'. Interestingly, we find **fairly widespread support for the idea of Cohesion policy** – about **27%** of respondents **'strongly agree'** with the idea, and **52% agree**, while 15% disagree and roughly 5% strongly disagree. 1% did not know. On average, the **Dutch** were the least supportive, while the **Slovaks** and **Romanians** were the most supportive.

Next, citizens were asked a question that attempted to account for the **'intensity'** of their support for this idea - whether they would like tax money from their own countries to go more, about the same or less toward this policy. The results show that just **under 59%** would like **their country's to spend about the same** toward this policy, while **24%** want their country to **spend less**, and **just 18%** would want their country **to spend more**. The Dutch were most inclined to say that they wanted their country to spend less (39%) and least inclined to say that they wanted their country to spend more (5%), while Romanians were most enthusiastic about this policy - 36% wanted Romania to invest more in Cohesion Policy, while only 6% wanted to spend less. Overall, we might conclude that there is at least **a high degree of at least passive support for the main policy** in question, while we find **about 20-25% (depending on the question) who express opposition to Cohesion Policy**. With this data now available, we leave it to future research to explain why!

## Methodological Background

The design of the survey was somewhat unique, and could be described as semi-stratified in some cases. To aid in research of the PERCEIVE project's pre-selected case study regions, at least **500 randomly drawn respondents** were taken from **each** of the **selected regions**. All other respondents were taken randomly throughout each country. Thus for countries such as Germany or France with no pre-selected regions, the respondents were randomly drawn. In the case of Spain for example, at least 500 would be taken from its pre-selected region (Extremadura) and then the other 1500 respondents would be taken at random (including Extremadura).

The respondents, from **18 years of age or older**, were contacted randomly via the 'next birthday method' by telephone in the local language. Telephone interviews approximately 12-15 minutes in length were conducted via both landlines and mobile phones, with both methods being used in most countries. All interviews were made by employees with at least one year of professional experience and used *Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing* (CATI). The survey was fielded during the summer of 2017 and results were sent back to UGOT in mid-September.

### Sources

Charron, Nicholas and Monika Bauhr. 2017. *"Dataset built from the survey at citizen level for the case-studies regions and report with preliminary qualitative results"* Deliverable 1.2 PERCEIVE project, GA nr. 693529

Hooghe, L., & Marks, G. (2009). A postfunctionalist theory of European integration: From permissive consensus to constraining dissensus. *British Journal of Political Science*, 39(1), 1-23.

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[1] <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20170427IPR72790/belonging-to-the-eu-is-a-good-thing-say-a-growing-number-of-citizens>