

Intercultural dialogue in Europe

Summary

Fieldwork: November 2007

Report: December 2007

This survey was requested by Directorate General Education and Culture and coordinated by Directorate General Communication

This document does not represent the point of view of the European Commission. The interpretations and opinions contained in it are solely those of the authors.

Flash EB Series #217

Intercultural dialogue in Europe

Conducted by
The Gallup Organization Hungary
upon the request of DG Education and Culture



Survey coordinated by the Directorate-General
Communication

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THE GALLUP ORGANIZATION

Introduction

2008 will be the Year of Intercultural Dialogue in the European Union.

This idea was initially put forward by Ján Figel', the European Commissioner for education, training, culture and youth, during his hearing before the European Parliament in September 2004. The European Year will draw on the wealth and diversity of a series of specific projects to be implemented during 2008 through programmes and other Community actions. Culture, education, youth, religion, minorities, migration, multilingualism, the media and the workplace will be the main areas concerned.

This Flash Eurobarometer survey on Intercultural Dialogue in Europe (N° 217), commissioned by the European Commission DG Education and Culture, asked citizens to report their patterns of interaction with people of different cultural backgrounds, and to inquire about their general attitude towards cultural diversity and specifically, the upcoming events of the of the Year of Intercultural Dialogue in the EU.

The survey's fieldwork was carried out between 13 and 17 of November, 2007. Over 27,000 randomly selected citizens aged 15 years and above were interviewed in the twenty-seven Member States of the European Union. Interviews were predominantly carried out via fixed telephone, approximately 1,000 in each country. Part of the interviews in Finland and Austria were carried out over mobile telephones. Due to the relatively low fixed telephone coverage in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, we sampled and interviewed 300 persons face to face as well.

To correct for sampling disparities, a post-stratification weighting of the results was implemented, based on important socio-demographic variables. More details on survey methodology are included in the Annex of the full report.

Main findings

- **Almost three-quarters of EU citizens believe that people with a different background (ethnic, religious or national) enrich the cultural life of their country;** 49% stated that representatives of non-mainstream cultures rather enrich their own country; and 23% indicated that such cultural diversity even highly enriched their country's cultural life. Irish and the Luxembourgish respondents agreed most that the presence of people from various backgrounds enriched the cultural life of their nation; followed by the French; the German and the Finnish. The highest levels of disagreement with this assumption were found in Malta, Cyprus, Bulgaria and Romania. However, even in those countries, more than half of the citizens think that people with different cultural backgrounds (ranging from 52% to 57%) do bring benefits to everyday life.
- **Day-to-day interaction among people belonging to different cultures is a reality in Europe.** Two-thirds (65%) of respondents in the 27 EU Member States were able to recall any interaction with at least one person either of a different religion, ethnic background or nationality (either EU or non-EU) than their own in the seven days prior to being questioned. Out of the 27 Member States, there were only four countries where less than the half of the citizens reported such interaction with people from different cultures (Bulgaria, Poland, Romania and Estonia).
- **Europeans mostly encounter people with a different ethnicity (48%).** Interacting with people of a different religion was mentioned by 44%; while almost as many (42%) were aware of having contact with someone from a different EU Member State. About a third of EU citizens (36%) had dealings with someone from a country outside the EU.
- **The dominant sentiment in the EU is intercultural dialogue is beneficial, but for many, carrying on the cultural traditions is equally important.** A remarkably high number (83%) of EU citizens that agreed about the benefits of intercultural contacts, and two-thirds were of the opinion that family (cultural) traditions should be kept by the young generations. Combining the two, 55% expressed an attitude that suggests a preference towards cultural diversity with a strong preference towards keeping the cultural roots alive as well, while 25% (especially the youngest Europeans) have an attitude where cultural openness does not go hand-in-hand with the need of consciously maintaining one's own traditions. The rest either do not appreciate the benefits of intercultural contacts, or have no clear opinion in this question.
- **European attribute a variety of meanings to the expression "Intercultural dialogue in Europe" most of these being closely related to the core concept, and positive.** Among the meanings frequently expressed by respondents, one finds: "conversation", "cooperation", "exchange" and "mutual understanding" across all nations, religions and cultures. In response to the survey's opening question, that searched for a reaction to the phrase "Intercultural dialogue in Europe", a large minority (36%) could not attribute any particular meaning.
- **2008 will be the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue,** during which there will be a series of events taking place where people with different cultural, ethnic or religious backgrounds can learn about, and meet, each other. According to the survey, almost two-thirds of the EU-27 citizens have some interest in these events; but only one-fifth (20%) admitted to having a great interest.

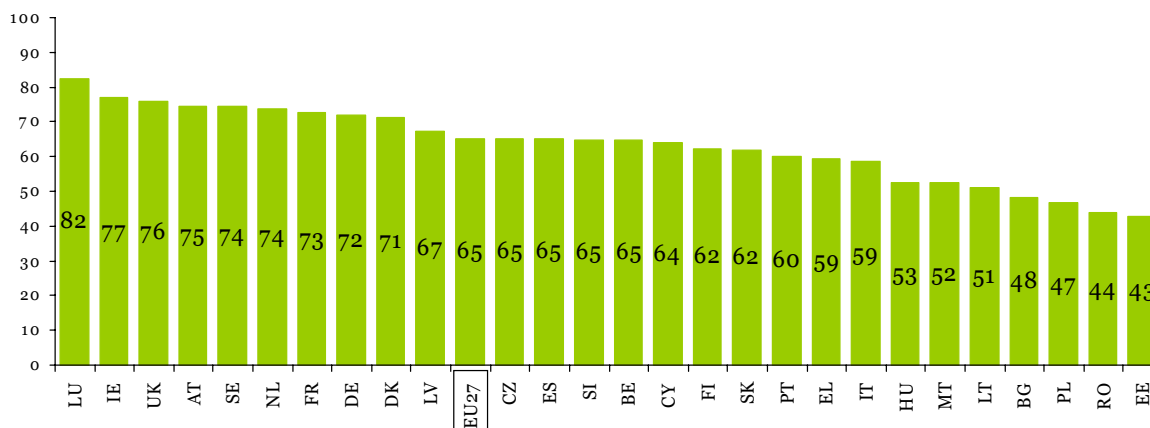
Interaction with different cultures

Two-thirds (65%) of respondents in the 27 EU Member States were able to recall any interaction with at least one person either of a different religion, ethnic background or nationality (either EU or non-EU) than their own in the seven days prior to being interviewed, making day-to-day interaction among

people belonging to different cultures a reality in Europe. That left 35% of respondents that could not recollect any meeting with a person of a different background in the week before.

The Member States that had the highest ratios of citizens having contacts were found to be: Luxembourg (82%); followed by Ireland (77%); the UK (76%); and Austria (75%). The countries reporting the lowest level of interaction were Estonia (43%) and Romania (44%). Out of the 27 Member States, there were only four countries where less than the half of the citizens reported such interaction with people from different cultures.

Any interaction with different group of people (% of those who mentioned any interaction)



Q2. Thinking back to the LAST 7 DAYS, did you have any interaction - either personally or virtually - with the following group of people I will read to you.
%, Base: all respondents

The survey found a direct relation between interaction with people of different backgrounds and the respondent's age, level of education and level of urbanization – with the amount of contact increasing with education and size of settlement; and decreasing with age. The young had most contacts (while only half of those older than 55 could recall any contact with a person of a different national, ethnic or religious background in the “past week”). Respondents with the highest levels of education; city dwellers; and employees reported the most intercultural encounters.

Europeans mostly encountered people with a different ethnicity in the week prior to the interview (48%). Interacting with people of a different religion was mentioned by 44%; while almost as many (42%) were aware of having contact with someone from a different EU Member State. About a third of EU citizens (36%) had dealings with someone from a country outside the EU.

While the definitions are overlapping (someone of a different ethnic group can at the same time be from another EU or other country and might have different religion) therefore the particular country differences are probably just results of different, country-specific framings how immigrants and other minorities are defined (by ethnicity, religion, or country of origin). Still, in most Member States, respondents indicate people of different ethnic origin most often as those they interact with. Austrian, Irish, Luxembourgish, Maltese and Polish respondents are most likely to encounter someone from another EU country. People of other religion top the list of intercultural encounters in Germany and Slovakia, and people from outside the EU are most frequent subjects of such encounters among the four groups in Portugal only.

Socio-demographically, the general trend shows that it is men; younger age groups; those with higher levels of education; city-dwellers; and those who study or work that are most likely to report some contact with someone of a different ethnicity, religion or nationality. Respondents with an open attitude towards diversity are also the most likely to interact with members of the various groups, while those of a more ‘isolationist’ nature are the least likely to have met with someone from a different background.

When a respondent recalled any contact, during the previous week, with a person of a different religious, ethnic or national background, they were also **asked about the circumstances under which this meeting (physical or virtual) took place.**

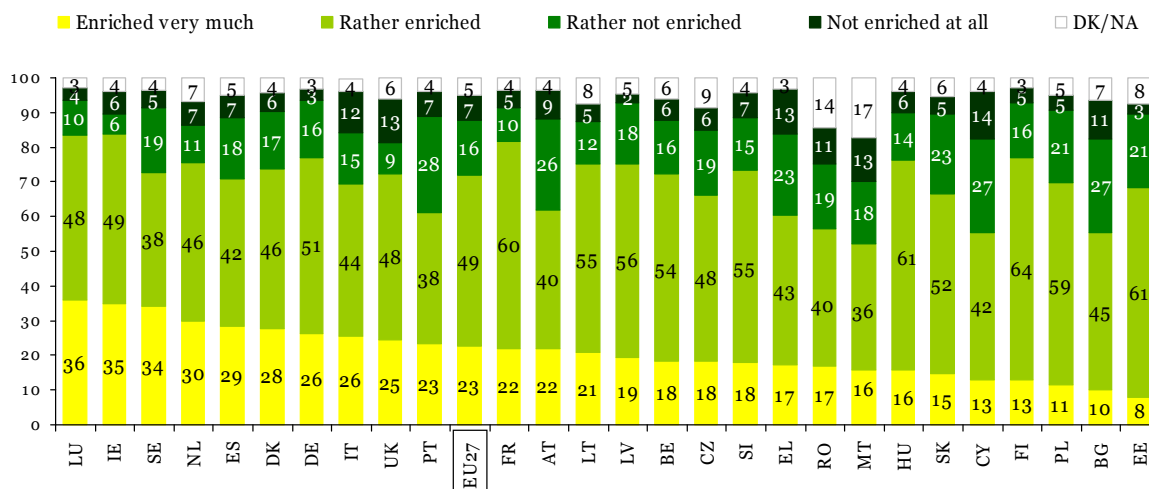
Random encounters in public are most typical. The survey showed that over half (53%) of the intercultural exchanges took place in a public space (e.g. while out walking in the street, while shopping, etc.) After those meetings, most encounters with people from different cultures took place at the respondent workplace (49%). Slightly over a third, 36%, of respondents reported that meetings took place while they were attending some kind of cultural activity or entertainment, and 25% of contacts were at an educational establishment.

Attitudes towards cultural diversity

Almost three-quarters (72%) of EU citizens believe that people with a different background (ethnic, religious or national) enrich the cultural life of their country; while a quarter (23%) of citizens disagree with that idea. The relative majority of respondents (49%) stated that representatives of non-mainstream cultures *rather enrich* their own country; and 23% indicated that such cultural diversity highly enriched their country's cultural life.

Agreement to this question is dependent to some extent on the number of people with different cultural backgrounds in a given society, the experience of living together with minorities while it also reflects a general attitude towards cultural diversity. Member States where most such contacts have been reported (Luxembourg, Sweden, Ireland, the Netherlands and the UK), are among those where citizens say with an increased likelihood that such contacts enrich a country's cultural life.

Diversity's impact on cultural life



Q4. Would you say that [COUNTRY]'s cultural life is enriched by people with different cultural background than the majority?
%, Base: all respondents, by country

The Irish and the Luxembourgish agreed most that the presence of people from various backgrounds enriched the cultural life of their nation (both 84%); followed by the French (82%); the German (77%); and the Finnish (77%). The highest levels of disagreement with this assumption were found in Malta, Cyprus, Bulgaria and Romania. However, even in those countries, more than half of the citizens think that people with different cultural backgrounds (ranging from 52% to 57%) do bring benefits to everyday life.

A further confirmation that interaction with different groups increases one's appreciation of a multicultural society is seen when the amount of such interaction is reviewed; those EU citizens, that had contacts – in the week prior to the interview – with people of different backgrounds are more

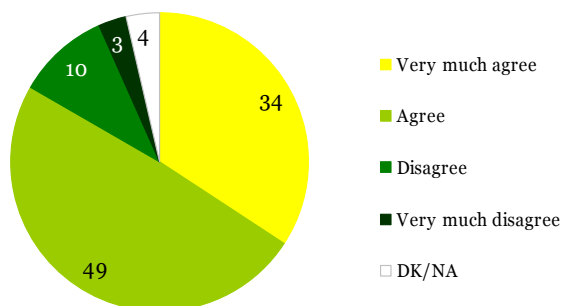
likely to acknowledge intercultural benefits than those who had no such contacts (77% vs. 62%). Those who think that such diversity *highly* enriches the culture of their own country are *far more* highly represented among those that have had a “cultural exchange” than among those that have had no such contact (27% vs. 15%).

The variations based on socio-economic characteristics are similar to those found in the previous analyses: the youngest, those with the highest levels of education and those living in a city are more likely to think that cultural diversity is an asset to a country’s cultural life.

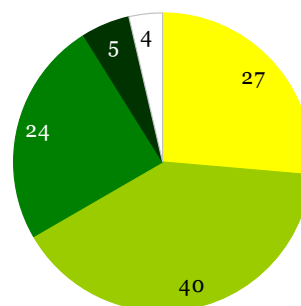
Regarding the attractiveness and **potential benefits of multicultural dialogue**, and in comparison with the **preservation of cultural traditions**, the survey asked two questions in regard to young people and, hence, impacting future generations. These were - *whether or not young people benefit from being in contact with their peers of other origins or beliefs?* and *whether or not young people should stick to their family traditions?*”

Openness to diversity (EU27)

Young people benefit from being in contact with their peers of other origins/ beliefs



Young people should stick to the family traditions



Q5. I will now read out opinions that are sometimes heard. Please tell me if you agree very much, agree, disagree, or very much disagree with them.
%. Base: all respondents

Both questions were answered positively by the vast majority of EU citizens. Overall, however, there was more agreement about the benefits of intercultural contacts than on the need to preserve own cultural traditions.

A third of European citizens (34%) agreed *very much* that young people could benefit from being in contact with people of other cultural backgrounds, and another 49% moderately agreed with that premise. This gave a remarkably high figure (83%) of EU citizens that agreed about the benefits of intercultural contacts (83%). The contrary view was held by 13% of citizens, with just 3% of them disagreeing *very much* with the statement.

Regarding the importance of continuing the family (cultural) traditions, the level of disagreement was significantly higher. A quarter (24%) of Europeans *rather* disagreed that young people should stick to their family traditions, and 5% *completely* disagreed. This meant that, to some extent, three in 10 European citizens disagreed that young people should preserve family traditions. However, a very significant majority, exactly two-thirds (67%), were of the opinion that such family traditions should be kept (27% agreed *very much* and 40% agreed *to a lesser extent*).

Interaction with people of different ethnic, national or religious backgrounds increases the likelihood of seeing the benefit from the young being with contact with peers of different beliefs (87% of those having had such recent contacts having favourable views about such exchanges vs. 76% of those who had no such contact). On the other side, respondents having more frequent contacts are less likely to believe that a family’s culture and traditions should be preserved (62% of those reporting contacts vs. 75% not reporting contact agreeing with the statement).

(Looking at it in the various Member States, intercultural dialogue was seen as particularly beneficial (at least for future generations) in Sweden and Denmark (both 91% overall agreement); Ireland (90%); Hungary, Luxembourg and Portugal (all 89%). Outright enthusiasm (expressed by selecting the “*very much agree*” response category) was the highest in Sweden, and also prominent among the Irish, Austrian (both 45%), German (43%) and Czech (40%) respondents. Even in the countries where the general agreement levels were the lowest, most people agreed that such exchanges could be beneficial for young people (Romania 63%; Malta and Bulgaria: both 70%).)

Bulgarian respondents were the most likely to agree, by far, that young people should continue to **respect family traditions** (74% were in *total agreement* and another 21% agreed *more modestly*, 95% overall). About nine out of 10 respondents in Poland, Cyprus and Lithuania (all 90%) and in Italy (88%) were also keen that young people should keep family traditions. On the other hand, most respondents in the Netherlands (61% overall) and a similar proportion of Danes (60%), together with 53% of Swedes did not agree with this proposition. In every other Member State, those citizens that preferred the new generations to carry on cultural traditions were in the – at least relative – majority.

In order to look deeper than the basic socio-demographic characteristics, we created an additional background variable that examines *intercultural openness versus traditional values*. Using the respondents’ various insights, it shows whether in their view the young people of their country: (i) does benefit from exposure to different groups (religious, ethnic, national) and (ii) should keep hold of traditional values (see section 2.2 for a detailed analysis of intercultural openness).

Categories of intercultural openness / attitudes toward diversity

Young people do benefit from an increase in intercultural dialogue	Young people should retain traditional values	Description	Resulting attitude
+	+	Young people benefit from intercultural interaction, but family traditions are emphasised at the same time	Pro diversity and keep roots
+	–	Young people benefit from intercultural interaction, and family traditions are not emphasised	Cosmopolitan
–	+	Young people do not benefit from intercultural interaction, and family traditions are emphasised OR young people do not benefit from intercultural interaction, and family traditions are not emphasised either	Not in favour of diversity
–	–		

Overall, **combining the two opinions**, 55% on EU-level expressed an attitude that suggests a preference towards cultural diversity, being open to other cultures but preserving their own as well (“*pro diversity and keep roots*”), while 25% have an attitude where cultural openness does not go hand-in-hand with the need of consciously maintaining one’s own traditions (i.e. a *cosmopolitan* attitude to diversity). The segment that was not open to intercultural dialogue – referred to as those “*not in favour of diversity*” – comprised of 13% of all EU citizens.

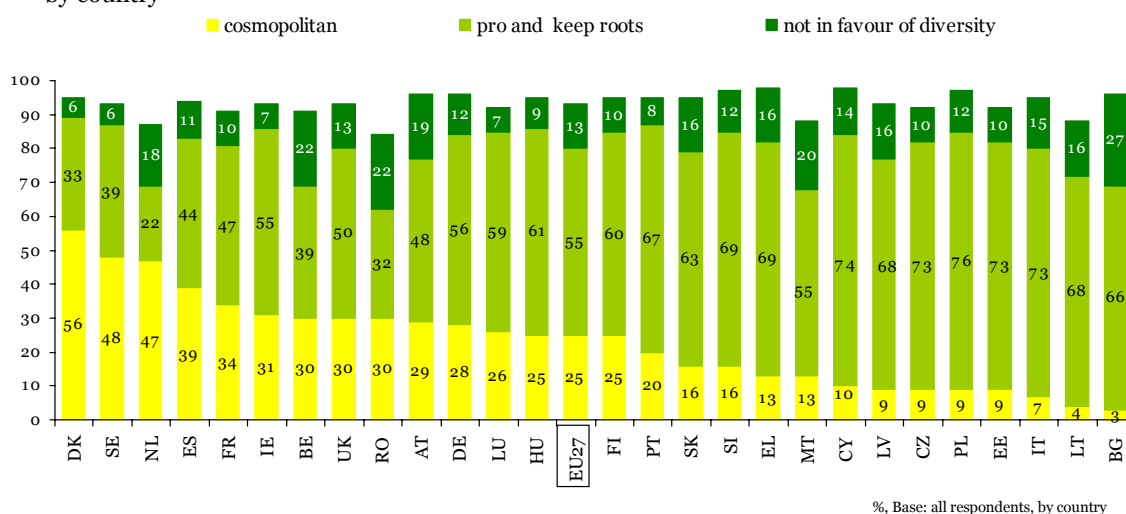
Analysing these attitudes according to socio-demographic parameters of the respondents confirms that at the EU-27 level in each segment, those favouring cultural diversity (considering intercultural dialogue as beneficial, but wanting to preserve their cultural heritage in parallel) is the most widely held attitude. Certainly that is the case among the elderly (over the age of 55, 59%), but even among the youngest respondents (15-24 years of age, 51%) this is by far the most widespread attitude.

Cultural isolation is – relatively speaking – mainly the choice of respondents with the lowest levels of education (20% belong to the *against diversity* group), and least popular among those with the highest level of educational attainment (with only 8% having such a view).

“Cosmopolitan” attitudes increase with the level of educational attainment, mostly at the expense of the isolationist attitude. On the other hand, the younger the respondent the more likely he, or she, (there are no gender differences in this regard) is to present a “cosmopolitan” view, mostly at the expense of the “*pro diversity, and keep roots*” attitude. Overall, the youngest respondents (and consequently, those still at school) are the most favourable towards intercultural openness without too much emphasis being placed on cultural and family traditions (35%).

Those respondents that reported recent contact with a representative of a non-mainstream culture are twice as likely to express “cosmopolitan” views as those who did not report such a contact (30% vs. 16%).

Attitudes towards intercultural dialogue by country



Looking at this attitudinal typology, that combines responses for the two propositions, across all EU Member States, we find that the *cosmopolitan* mindset is more typical of the EU-15 (and especially in: Denmark 56%; Sweden 48%; and the Netherlands 47%). On the other hand, citizens of the new Member States tend to be less cosmopolitan and more pro diversity in their attitudes, this being most characteristic of the Polish (76%), and Cypriot (74%) respondents.

Those who do not see a value in having young people interacting with their peers of differing cultural background are very high in Belgium (22%), Austria (19%) and in the Netherlands (18%) in the old Member States. Similar levels can be found in a number of new Member States as well, where Bulgaria have the highest levels (27%) followed by Romania (22%) and Malta (20%).

European Year of Intercultural Dialogue

The survey tested respondents’ fundamental interest in the events that will take place in 2008 under the framework of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. Respondents were also asked to provide their view on the expression of intercultural dialogue as well, in order to better understand how they relate to the phenomenon as well as the whether the meanings the attribute to the phrase resonate with the fundamental goals of the EU event series.

At the beginning of the survey, all respondents were asked to **react spontaneously to the phrase “Intercultural dialogue in Europe”**. This allowed us to gauge the level of understanding about the concept across the EU.

An important finding has been that many EU citizens – irrespective of whether or not they actually interact with people of other backgrounds – are not (yet) familiar with the term that the Commission selected to describe next year's campaign. The expression "*Intercultural dialogue in Europe*" cannot be associated with a specific meaning by about a third of EU citizens (34%), and in several Member States, that number was extended to about half of the population: Hungary (54%), Estonia (52%), Romania (50%), Malta, Cyprus (both 47%). On the other hand, the term was less problematic in Slovenia (where only 19% had a problem in answering the question) in Luxembourg and Portugal (both 20%), and in Spain (21%).

The ability to make sense of the expression varied according to socio-demographic segments, too. Obviously, those with higher education levels, were the most able to relate to the expression (with a quarter not being able to provide a meaningful response: 23%) and those who left school at or before the age of 15 were the most puzzled as to the meaning of *Intercultural dialogue in Europe*.

Besides the rather obvious differences across socio-demographic segments, one can also see clear patterns according to intercultural exposure and attitudes. Those who have actually engaged in intercultural dialogue (those who recently interacted with people of different cultural backgrounds) were much more familiar with the term (but 29% were still not sure about how to answer the question), compared to those who did not report such encounters (45% not sure). Those with a *cosmopolitan* or *pro diversity* attitude were close to the EU average in their ability to make sense of the statement (30% and 32%, respectively), while those who did not see benefits of young people being in contact with other cultures were also much less able to share top-of-mind associations or meanings related to the expression of intercultural dialogue (48%).

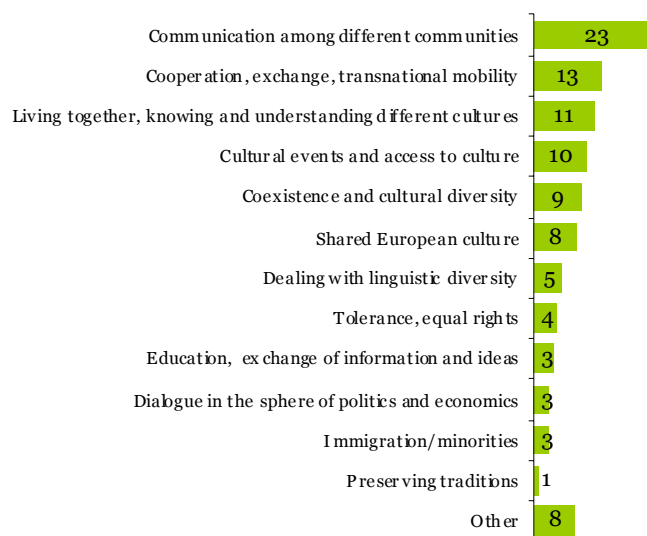
From the 27,000 respondents, we recorded roughly 17,000 verbatim answers as to what came to people's minds when hearing the expression "Intercultural dialogue in Europe". Sixty-six percent of EU citizens could provide the interviewer with a meaningful response to the question. In an iterative process, these answers were categorised, first at a national level (using several hundred different code categories), which were then combined in an EU level category scheme.

Overwhelmingly, respondents provided associations that were neutral or positive in their connotation. A very small proportion of the responses could be considered as having negative connotations; with most of those referring to minority / immigration problems. But most of those who referred to ethnic tensions or immigration issues associated the expression with an attempt to improve such relations.

The graph to the right shows the frequencies of responses in each major category for those that gave a meaningful answer to the question.

In the full report, each of these categories are discussed in detail, we advise the interested reader to refer to that document for a more in-depth understanding of the concepts and categories used, as well as their prevalence in the various Member States and in the different social segments.

"Intercultural dialogue in Europe" – what does this mean to people (EU27)



Q1. When you hear the expression "Intercultural dialogue in Europe", what comes FIRST to your mind?

%, Base: among those who gave a meaningful answer to the question, DK/NA excluded

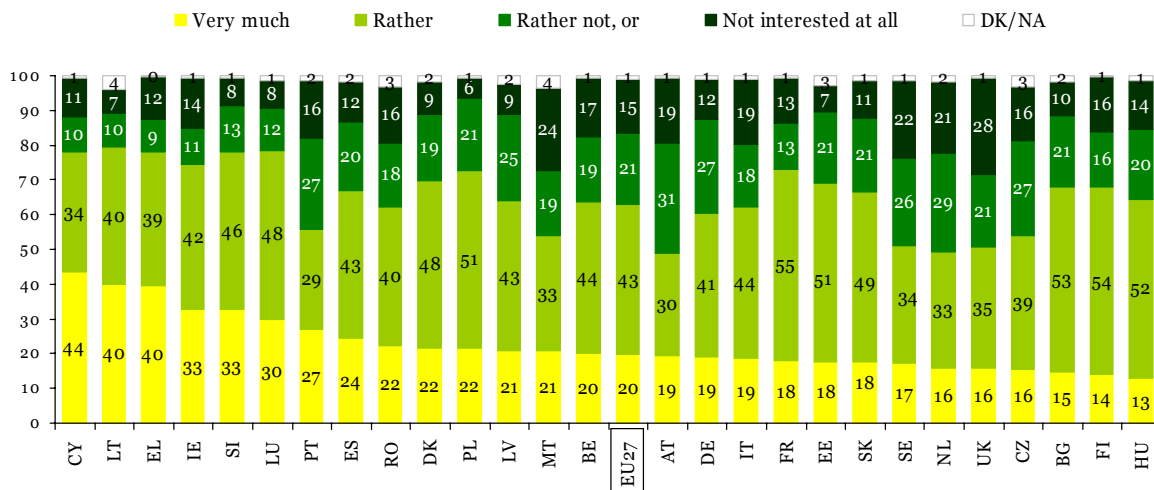
2008 will be the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, during which there will be a series of events taking place where people with different cultural, ethnic or religious backgrounds can learn about, and meet, each other.

According to the survey results, almost two-thirds (63%) of the EU-27 citizens have some interest in these events; but only one-fifth (20%) admitted to having a *great interest*. Taking a somewhat opposite view, 36% said they had *rather no interest* and 15% were *not interested at all*.

The proportion of those who are generally *interested* (to any extent) was higher than of those generally *not interested* throughout the EU except in the Netherlands and in Austria. These two societies are much divided on this issue – about equal numbers of respondents who are interest and not interested. Nominally speaking, those showing a lack of interest were even marginally higher then the ones who would be interested in both countries (50% vs. 49%).

The highest interest concerning the *Intercultural Dialogue* events were seen in Lithuania (80%; “*very interested*” and “*rather interested*”), Luxemburg, Slovenia, Greece and Cyprus (78%); with the least “excited” being Austria and the Netherlands (both 49%). When we only look at the proportions of the “*very interested*” among respondents, then Cyprus came top of the list (44%), followed by Lithuania and Greece (both 40%). The lowest proportions of “*very interested*” citizens were seen among the Hungarians (13%) and the Finns (14%).

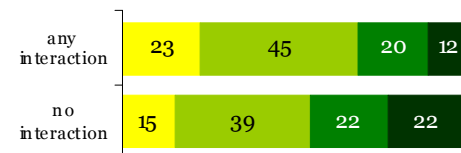
Interest in the intercultural events of 2008



Interest in the intercultural events of 2008

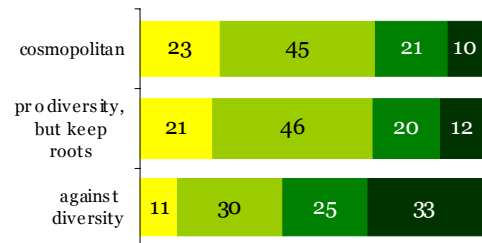
Among the countries, with the highest interest in a 2008 European Year of Intercultural Dialogue – we have found Slovenia, where the population is already aware of the Slovenian presidency in the first half of the year. Cyprus and Greece are also among the most supporting countries.

Have/have not interaction



A well articulated minority in a number of countries (mostly in the old member countries) have a very outspoken view on the potential benefits of the year dedicated to intercultural dialogue. A totally sceptic viewpoint (i.e. those not interested at all) was provided by 28% of UK respondents; 24% of the Maltese; 22% of the Swedes and 21% of the Dutch.

Attitudes toward openness and traditions



Very much (yellow), Rather (light green), Rather not, or (medium green), Not interested at all (dark green), DK/NA (white)

We found that those who had encounters with representatives of different cultures in the preceding week showed more interest in the events of the year dedicated to intercultural dialogue than those who had had no such encounters in that timeframe.

When it comes to openness and respect for traditions, the *cosmopolitans* and the *pro diversity* group were rather more interested than those *against diversity* – one-third of whom said that they were not at all interested in events linked to the *Year of Intercultural Dialogue*. But even in that group, 41% expressed some interest in such events.

Talking about the classical socio-demographic segments of the societies, women were seen to be generally more interested in such events than men; those between 25-39 years-of-age were the most interested and the eldest (over 55) the least; in terms of education, those with the highest levels of attainment were more interested in such events; in addition, city dwellers showed more enthusiasm than the rural population, as did employees compared to blue-collar workers. But other than the lowest educated (among whom 47% were interested and 51% not) in each segment, the predominant majority was at least *somewhat interested* in such events; ranging from 57% (among blue-collar workers) to 75% (those with highest levels of educational attainment).