EU CITIZENSHIP

How “European” do EU citizens feel?

Most people in the EU see themselves as “European”. This has been the majority view since 1992, with the proportion ranging from 51% to 63% during that time. There are different shades of feeling European: some people feel “national and European”, others “European and national”, and a small minority feel “European only”. But overall, the majority have felt European in some way every time this question has been asked.

However, a substantial minority of Europeans feel “national only”, in proportions varying from 33% to 46% over the last 20 years or so.

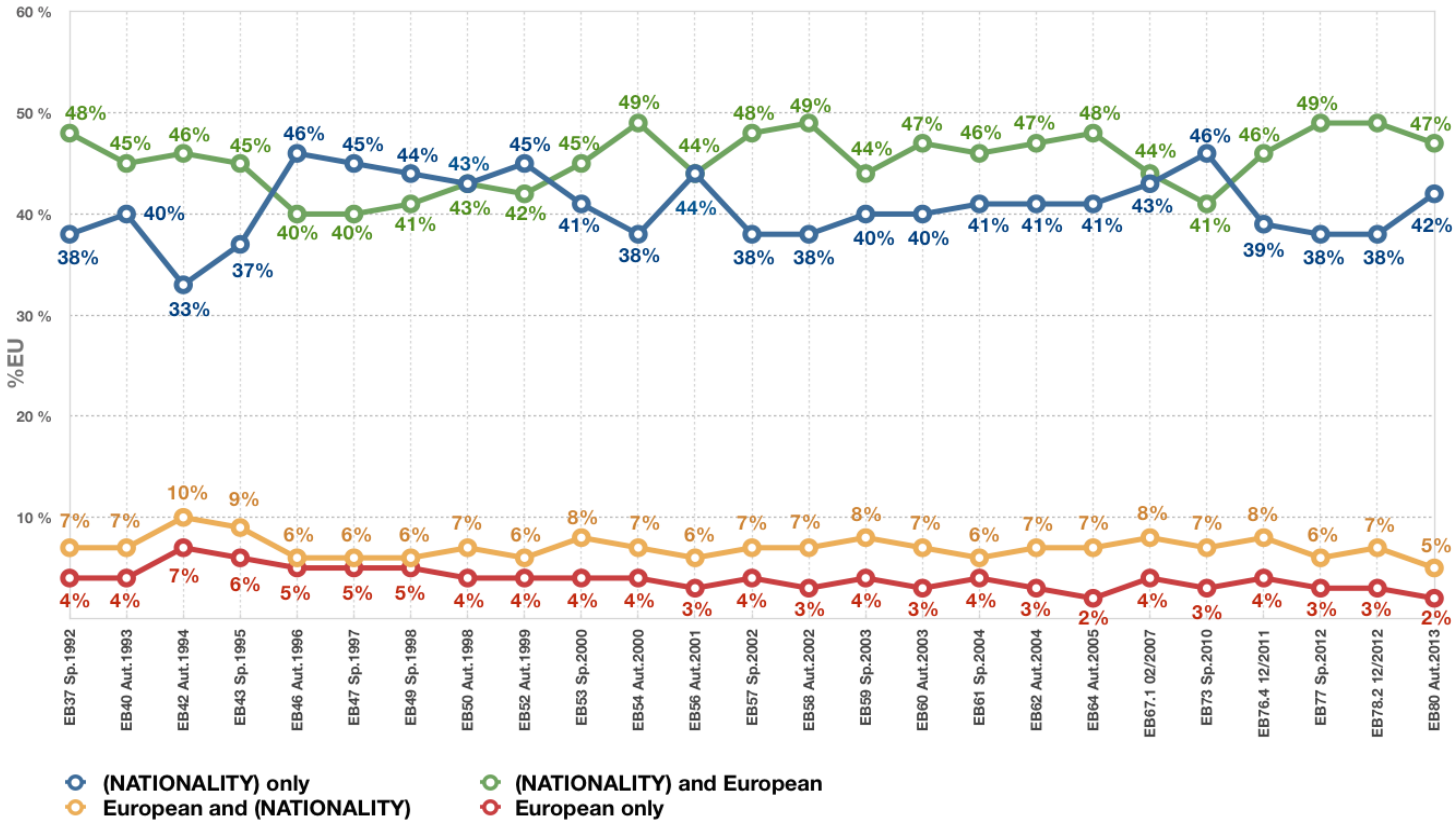
The feeling of being European varies significantly between Member States: 77% of citizens feel European in some way in Luxembourg, and at least two-thirds feel the same in Croatia (70%), Belgium (67%) and Slovakia (66%).

This proportion falls to around a third in the UK (33%) and Ireland (34%), and to less than half in Greece (44%), Romania (46%), Portugal and Bulgaria (both 48%).

Variations also exist between socio-demographic groups: the feeling of being European (in its various forms) is strongest among men, people under 40, and those who stay longer in education.

The majority say they feel European in some way.

Do you see yourself as…?



Eurobarometer has been surveying the views of Europeans since 1973 and gives a unique insight into how opinions and attitudes have changed over time. Surveys are carried out in all Member States of the European Union.

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Do EU citizens know their rights?

Nearly six in ten Europeans say they “feel they are citizens of the EU”. In Luxembourg, 85% of citizens say this, and more than seven in ten say the same in Malta (74%), Finland, Germany (both 73%), Estonia (72%) and Denmark (71%). However, fewer than half of respondents consider themselves to be EU citizens in Greece, the UK (both 42%), Italy (45%), Cyprus (46%) and Bulgaria (49%).

Despite feeling part of the EU, the majority of Europeans say they do not know their rights as an EU citizen. The highest level of awareness is in Finland, where close to two-thirds of respondents know their rights (64%), followed by Cyprus (59%), Austria, Estonia, Denmark and Luxembourg (all 58%).

In contrast, less than 40% of the population know their rights in France (29%), Italy (31%), the UK (34%), Bulgaria and Greece (both 36%).

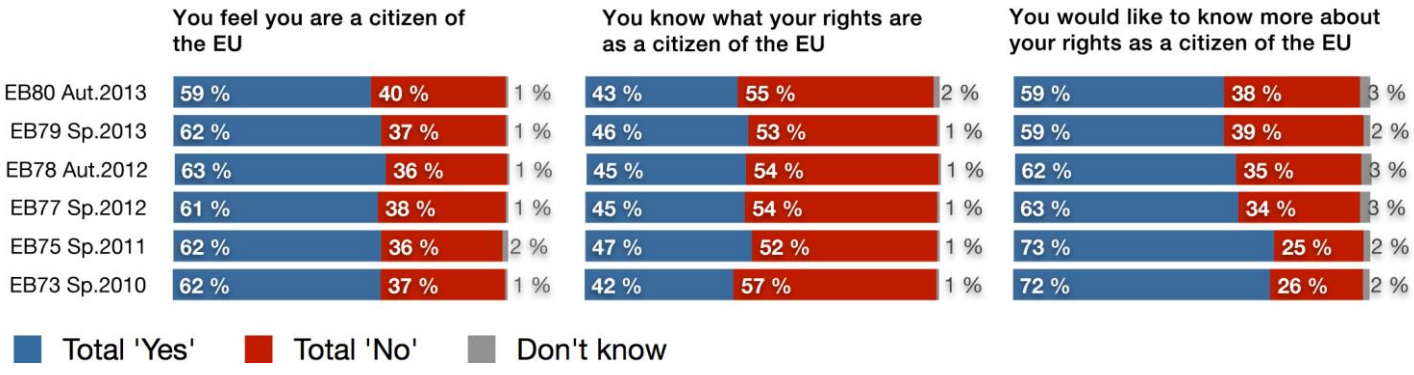
Reflecting this lack of knowledge, most Europeans would like to know more about their rights as EU citizens. However, they have become less interested in knowing their rights over the past few years, with the level falling from 72% in the spring of 2010 to 59% in the autumn of 2013.

Perhaps this issue has become less pressing, with the economic and financial crisis focusing attention on more immediate concerns, such as employment and living standards. Or does it indicate a growing disengagement from the EU and European matters?

People who remain in education for longer are much more likely to say they know their rights as an EU citizen. Conversely, those who left education by the age of 15 know less about their rights but are also less likely to want to know more.

The majority do not know their rights in the EU. Most want to know more, but the overall level of interest is declining.

For each of the following statements, please tell me to what extent it corresponds or not to your own opinion.



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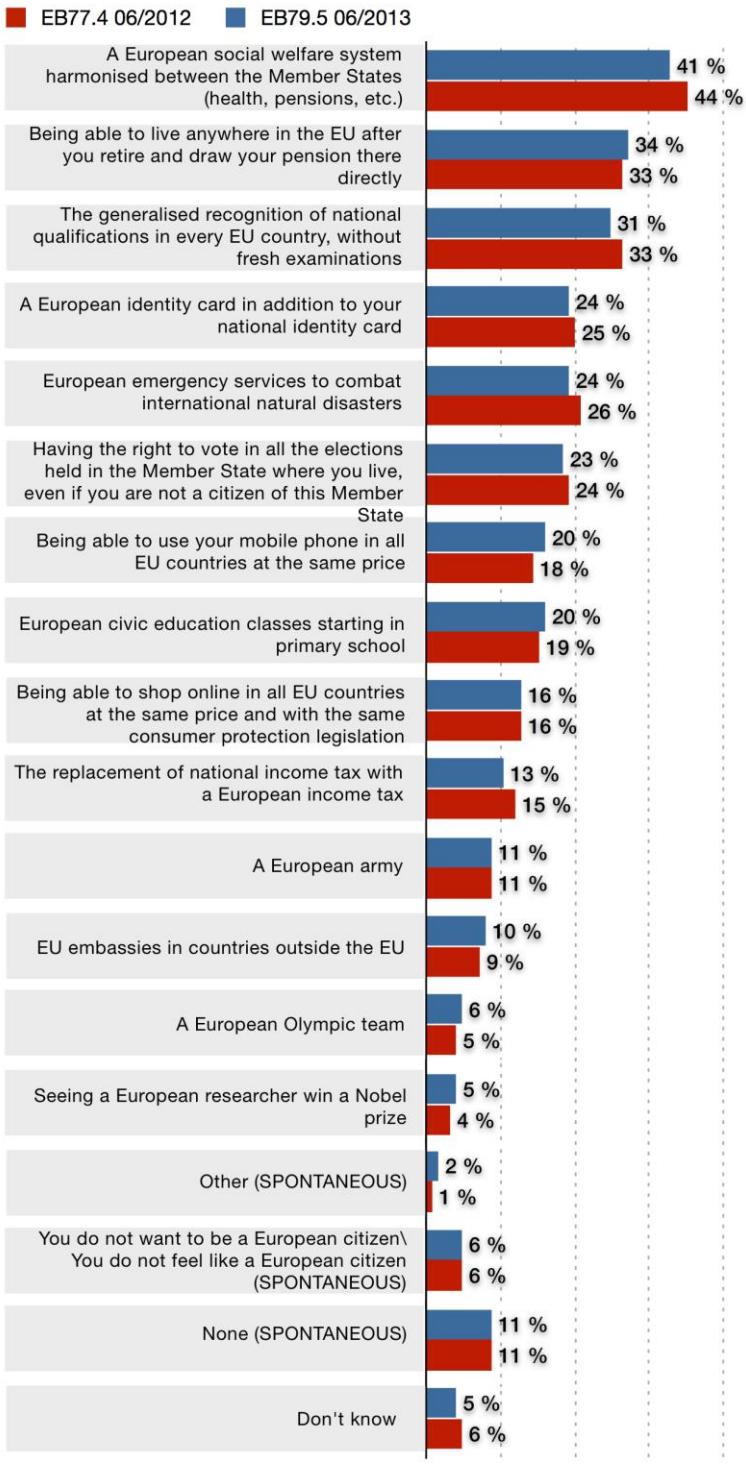
Which of the following things would do most to strengthen your feeling of being a European citizen?



Does more harmonisation lead to a stronger feeling of EU citizenship?

Most Europeans feel that they are “citizens of the EU”, but how can this feeling be strengthened? Many think that the answer lies in greater harmonisation across the EU. The most popular way of increasing the sense of EU citizenship is through a European social welfare system harmonised between the Member States (chosen by 41%). Support for this idea is widespread across the EU, ranking highest in 23 Member States.

Other popular measures include harmonisation of the pension system (being able to live anywhere in the EU after retirement and to draw a pension there directly), chosen by 34%, and harmonisation of national qualifications, mentioned by 31%.

A harmonised pension system is the most popular measure in Denmark (alongside a European social welfare system), Ireland and the Netherlands, while the harmonisation of national qualifications ranks highest in Germany. In Austria, “European emergency services to combat international natural disasters” is the most popular measure. Across the EU as a whole, this hierarchy remained similar between June 2012 and June 2013.

Harmonisation of social welfare systems, pensions and qualifications is key to strengthening European identity.

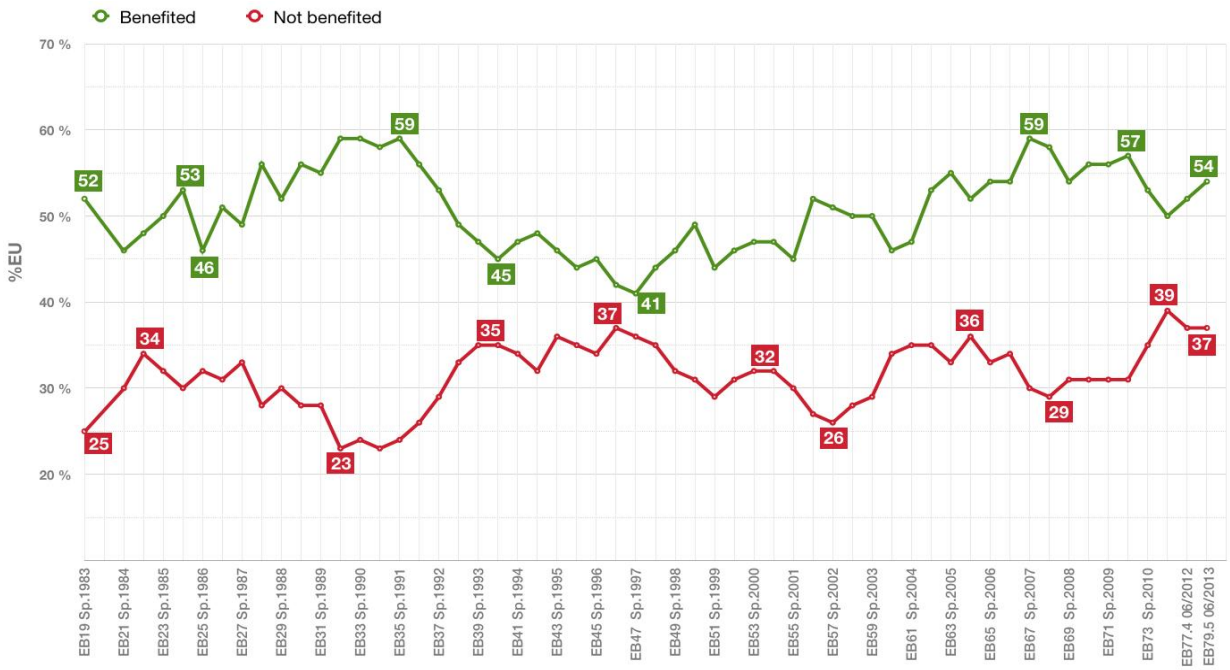
EU CITIZENSHIP

Are the perceived benefits of membership helping to create a sense of EU citizenship?

Europeans are generally inclined to feel that their country has benefited from EU membership: the proportion expressing this view has ranged from 41%, in the spring of 1997, to 59%, between 1989 and 1991, and again in the spring of 2007.

The share of Europeans saying that their country has benefited from EU membership fell below 50% a number of times between 1983 and 2013: for relatively short periods in 1984, the spring of 1986 and 1987, the autumn of 2003 and the spring of 2004, and for a much longer period between the autumn of 1992 and the spring of 2001. Since the 2004 enlargement, however, this proportion has remained consistently above 50%.

Taking everything into account, would you say that (OUR COUNTRY) has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the EU?



There is a positive link between seeing the benefits of EU membership and having a feeling of EU citizenship. In the spring of 2011 – the last time the two questions were asked in the same survey – countries where respondents were most likely to acknowledge the benefits of EU membership also had large proportions of respondents who regarded themselves as EU citizens: Luxembourg (73% and 88%, respectively), Slovakia (72%; 79%), Poland (73%; 72%) and Ireland (78%; 71%).

On the other hand, Member States where less than half thought their country had benefited from EU membership were also those where the fewest respondents felt that they were citizens of the EU: the UK (35%; 41%), Bulgaria (46%; 44%), Greece (47%; 44%) and Latvia (47%; 48%).

Those who see the benefits of EU membership are also more likely to have a feeling of EU citizenship.