Standard Eurobarometer 88

National report

Public opinion in the European Union

Ireland
Autumn 2017

This survey has been requested and co-ordinated by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication. This report was produced for the European Commission’s Representation in Ireland.

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PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

IRELAND

http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion

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INTRODUCTION

The annual Eurobarometer report for Ireland is one of a series that explores trends in Irish and European public opinion towards the European Union (EU) and political and social issues more generally. The data for this report were gathered in November 2017 as part of the Standard Eurobarometer, now in its 88th edition, and referred to throughout this paper as Standard Eurobarometer 88 (SEB88).1

This national report comes at a time when the Irish economy continues to rebound after the Global Financial Crisis (GFC). Consumer sentiment is improving.2 As of November 2017, unemployment stood at 6.4 per cent, down from 15.9 per cent at the height of the GFC.3 Moreover, the European Commission projects the Irish economy has grown by 7.3 per cent in 2017 (4.9 per cent concerning domestic activity) and forecasts continued growth in 2018 and 2019.4 Meanwhile, on the domestic political front, Leo Varadkar became the youngest ever Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister) in June 2017. While his personal and his government’s popularity had risen by the close of 20175, ongoing controversies concerning the Irish police force, the Gardaí, led to the retirement of the Police Commissioner and the resignation of the Tánaiste (Irish Deputy Prime Minister) Frances Fitzgerald from the government.

However, it was the United Kingdom’s impending exit from the EU (commonly referred to as ‘Brexit’) that dominated the political agenda in 2017, hardly surprising given the potential implications ‘Brexit’ might have for Northern Ireland’s peace process and the Irish economy. Discussions concerning ‘the Border’ between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland were a key pillar of the first phase of negotiations between the UK Government and European Union. A joint report in December 2017 reiterated that neither side wanted a ‘hard border’ on the island of Ireland, with the United Kingdom acknowledging the unique situation on the island of Ireland and making commitments on the avoidance of a hard border, although future negotiations will decide how this goal might be realised.6

‘Fake news’ gained currency in 2017, with allegations that mainstream media deliberately spread misinformation. Such critiques have put into sharp focus how much confidence the general public has in the media and indeed in public institutions more generally.

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1 The Standard Eurobarometer is a cross-sectional study comprising of representative samples of citizens in the 28-Member States of the EU. The member institutes of TNS Opinion & Social carried out the survey with Behaviour and Attitudes administering it in Ireland between 5-13 November 2017. The survey comprised 1,001 respondents aged 15+. There is a margin of error of +/- 3 per cent on each estimate. Full technical details are contained in the EB88 First Results available at: http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKey/2143.


5 See: https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/poll-boost-helps-fine-gael-end-year-on-a-high-h0zndhwq (date accessed: 11 February 2018).

With this context in mind, this national report focuses on three central themes. The first is Irish citizens’ sentiments towards the European Union. The second is to understand Irish people’s current perceptions of the economy and their economic expectations in light of ‘Brexit’. The third is to explore Irish citizens’ trust in political and non-political institutions and the media.

KEY FINDINGS

SENTIMENTS TOWARDS THE EUROPEAN UNION

▪ Fifty-nine per cent of Irish people have a positive image of the EU, the highest levels of positivity recorded since 2009, above the EU average of 40 per cent. Only 9 per cent of Irish people declare a negative image towards the EU, the lowest proportion saying this since 2008.

▪ Sixty-two per cent of Irish people feel some attachment to the EU. This is the highest proportion of Irish citizens expressing attachment towards the EU in 15 years and is above the EU average by 7-points. However, for most Irish people, attachment is ‘soft’.

▪ Most Irish citizens feel that the EU responds to the country’s needs. When asked whether the interests of Ireland are well-taken account of in the EU, 63 per cent of people agreed with the proposition, the third highest level of agreement among Member States. Feelings that the EU responds to the country’s interests have grown steadily since the end of the EU/IMF bailout.

▪ Sixty-six per cent of Irish people disagree with the notion that Ireland could best face the future outside of the EU, maintaining a consistent trend among Irish people over the past 5-years. Only 28 per cent of Irish citizens express agreement with the idea. This is in stark contrast to British public opinion on this subject.

▪ Trust in the EU currently stands at 50 per cent, above the EU average of 41 per cent. However, distrust at 38 per cent remains relatively high in the Irish context and is above the levels observed pre-the Global Financial Crisis.

ECONOMIC PERCEPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

▪ Seventy-two per cent describe the Irish economy as ‘good’, the highest proportion of citizens saying this since 2007. Further, 71 per cent believe the employment situation is ‘good’ and 82 per cent say the financial situation of their household is ‘good’.

▪ Irish people are among the most optimistic regarding their economic expectations in the next twelve months. For example, 45 per cent expect the employment situation to improve while 44 per cent believe the economy will improve. The proportions who expect either to worsen are in the single digits.
TRUST IN THE MEDIA AND INSTITUTIONS

- Trust has risen in most institutions and media during the past five years. Irish people profess more trust in non-political institutions like the Gardaí (police) and media like radio compared with political institutions.

- Radio is the most trusted media (71 per cent trust), followed by television (63 per cent). Few people (16 per cent) profess to trust online social networks. There is little sign of any decline in trust in the mainstream media in 2017 coinciding with debates about “fake news”.

- The Gardaí are the most trusted institution with 62 per cent professing trust in them. However, trust in the Gardaí has fallen by 16-points in the past year.

- Trust in the government and in the Dáil is rising. Forty-five per cent of people say they trust the government, the highest proportion saying so since 2011. Forty-three per cent declare trust in parliament. However, more people distrust these two institutions than trust them.

- Political parties remain the least trusted of all institutions and media with only 20 per cent of Irish people declaring trust in them.
I. SENTIMENTS TOWARDS THE EUROPEAN UNION

Historically, Irish people have been the most positive towards the EU on a whole range of indicators. However, during the GFC, we observed a dampening of enthusiasm towards the EU. More recently, we have seen support begin to recover. Here, we explore current sentiments to the EU in multiple ways. We start with the standard means of tapping feelings towards the EU – that is to see whether respondents have a positive, a neutral, or a negative image of the EU (the image indicator). Figure 1 shows the proportion of citizens in each Member State saying they have a positive image of the EU as of November 2017. We see that Irish people are the most positive towards the EU with 59 per cent having a positive image of the Union. It is substantially above the average EU positive image of 40 per cent. Comparatively speaking, it is also higher compared with other member states that received financial assistance from the IMF and the EU during the GFC. For example, only 39 per cent of Spaniards express a positive image of the EU, while as few as 23 per cent of Greeks say likewise. At the same time, only 9 per cent of Irish people profess to have a negative image of the EU, the lowest proportion of Irish citizens saying this since 2008.

Figure 2 puts Irish sentiments into a longitudinal perspective by tracking Irish responses to the image indicator over time. As we can see, the 59 per cent expressing a positive image of the EU is the highest levels of positivity recorded since 2009. Another consistent feature illustrated by Figure

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9 Question: “In general, does the EU conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image?” (Source in SEB88: QA9).
Figure 1 Positive image of the European Union by Member State: autumn 2017 (%).

Source of data: SEB88. Please note: Countries listed in descending order of positive image of EU.

2 is that Irish people have a more positive image of the EU compared with the average EU citizen. The gap between Irish positivity and the mean EU positivity score is currently 19 points. Figure 2 also shows the growth in positivity towards the EU since the end of the EU/IMF bailout in late 2013. Compared with then, positivity has risen 26 points while the proportion of people saying they have a negative image of the EU has fallen by 14 points. However, the trend data also show that while positivity has increased and is at its highest levels in nearly a decade, they still lag behind the levels of positivity witnessed in the mid-2000s, where positive image peaked at 75 per cent in October 2004, just after Ireland’s spring EU Presidency.
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Another means of tapping feelings about the EU is to ask how attached to the European Union citizens feel (the attachment indicator). Figure 3 tracks Irish levels of attachment to the EU over the past fifteen years. As of November 2017, 62 per cent of Irish people express attachment to the EU. It is 7-points above the EU average of 55 per cent (the yellow circles in Figure 3 represents the mean attachment to the EU among EU citizens). These high and increasing levels of attachment to the EU among Irish people reverse a trend we saw during the GFC, where Irish levels of attachment lagged a little behind the EU average. Figure 3 displays that the current level of attachment is the highest level of attachment towards the EU among Irish people in 15 years. The November 2017 figure also represents a 20-point increase in affinity with the EU since the end of the EU/IMF bailout in late 2013, when only just over two in five citizens professed an attachment. However, we must acknowledge that for three-quarters of those professing an attachment to the EU, the attachment to the EU is ‘soft’ with most people saying they feel ‘fairly attached’ rather than ‘very attached’. Thus, attachment, while plentiful, is not especially strong for most.

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10 Question: “Please tell me how attached you feel to...The European Union” (Source in SEB88: QD1_3).
Figure 3 Levels of attachment to the European Union in Ireland and the EU average 2002-2017 (%). Source of data: SEB57-SEB88.

The Standard Eurobarometer also taps citizens’ external efficacy by asking them how well they feel the interests of their country are taken into account into the EU (the responsiveness indicator). Figure 4 tracks Irish responses to this issue over the past decade. As of November 2017, 63 per cent of Irish people agree with the proposition that the interests of Ireland are well taken account of in the EU. This represents the third highest proportion saying so in the Union behind Germany (72 per cent agreement) and Luxembourg (68 per cent agreement). The current levels of agreement with the idea are the highest we have seen since April 2008.

Since the end of the EU/IMF bailout, Irish people have consistently felt that the EU is more responsive to their country’s interests compared to the mean EU position, with the current level of 63 per cent support for the proposition 14-points ahead of the EU average. Figure 4 also illustrates that having hit a low score of 38 per cent in spring 2011, responsiveness has steadily increased over the past six years, rising 15-points since November 2013. Conversely, the numbers disagreeing with the proposition have fallen from a high of 51 per cent in May 2012 to the current level of 29 per cent.

11 Question: “Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: The interests of (OUR COUNTRY) are well taken into account in the EU” (Source in SEB88: Q18_2).
Our final means of tapping feelings towards the EU is to explore attitudes regarding whether people feel that Ireland’s interests in the future are best served by remaining a member of the EU (the future membership indicator). SEB88 does this by asking respondents whether they agree or disagree with the proposition, “our country could better face the future outside of the EU.”\(^{12}\) This is an interesting metric from an Irish perspective given that some have advocated that Ireland might consider its own position within the EU.\(^{13}\) To explore how people feel about this, Figure 5 displays the responses to the question among Irish people and the proportions of British people and the EU average who agree with statement dating back to 2012 when the question was first asked. The comparison with British attitudes allows us to establish how similar sentiments are between the two countries on this issue given ‘Brexit’.

As of November 2017, 28 per cent of Irish people agreed with the proposition, “our country could better face the future outside of the EU” but a substantial majority, 66 per cent, disagree. As Figure 5 shows, there has been remarkable consistency in the Irish responses to

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\(^{12}\) Source in SEB88: Q18.5.

this question over time with on average two-thirds of citizens against the notion and about one quarter agreeing. **Figure 5** also illustrates that for the most part, fewer Irish people compared to the EU average agree with the proposition. If we contrast this to the British people’s views on the subject (as the orange line does in **Figure 5**), we can see that substantially more Britons than Irish people have consistently agreed with the belief that their country could better face its future outside of the Union. As of November 2017, 49 per cent of Britons say this, 21-points above the corresponding Irish figure saying likewise about their country. In sum, there is little evidence to suggest that we are seeing any sign of Eurosceptic sentiment taking hold in Ireland.

![Figure 5](image)

**Figure 5** Support for the proposition that a country can better face the future outside of the EU: Levels of agreement/disagreement in Ireland, the United Kingdom, and EU average 2012-2017 (%).

*Source of data: SEB78-SEB88.*

II. **ECONOMIC PERCEPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS**

The Standard Eurobarometer does not contain specific questions about ‘Brexit’. However, if this is on the minds of Irish people, we might expect it to influence their opinions on the current economic situation in Ireland, especially the country’s future economic prospects. The top segment of **Figure 6** conveys Irish citizens’ views on the current economic situation on three dimensions: the Irish economy, the employment situation in Ireland, and the financial
The overall message is one of positivity. Seventy-two per cent of Irish people describe the Irish economy as ‘good’, the highest proportion of citizens saying this since 2007. It is significantly above the EU average of 48 per cent and means Ireland ranks eighth among Member States in positivity about the national economy. Strikingly, Ireland is the most positive of the states that received EU/IMF financial assistance. For example, the Irish rating of 72 per cent saying the economy is ‘good’ far outweighs Cyprus, where only 44 per cent of Cypriots rate the economy as ‘good’, Portugal, where only 33 per cent say it is ‘good’, or Greece, where as few as 2 per cent of Greeks rate its country’s economy as ‘good’.

Irish people are also very positive about the employment situation in the country with 71 per cent describing it as ‘good’. Like with the national economy, it is considerably more than the EU average of 42 per cent. Irish people are even more positive when asked about the current financial situation of their household. Eighty-two per cent describe this as ‘good’, 10-points above the EU average. Seventy-one per cent describe the employment situation as ‘good’, while 82 per cent describe the current financial situation of their household as ‘good’.

**Figure 6** Current economic perceptions (upper segment) and future expectations (lower segment) about the Irish economy and personal financial situation among Irish people: November 2017 (%).

*Source of data: SEB88.*

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14 Question: “How would you judge the current situation in each of the following: the situation of the Irish economy; the employment situation in Ireland; the financial situation of your household” (Source in SEB88: QA1_2/5/6).
EU average of 72 per cent. Concerning these two latter measures, Irish people are again more positive compared with citizens of countries that received aid during the GFC. Nevertheless, one thing that we need to acknowledge regarding all three metrics is that most people describe things currently as ‘fairly good’ rather than ‘very good’.

Looking at people’s expectations regarding the next twelve months is where we are possibly more likely to see some ‘Brexit’ concern filter through. However, as the lower segment of Figure 6 shows, there are few signs of economic pessimism for 2018. Forty-five per cent of Irish people believe the Irish economy will improve in the next twelve months, making Irish people the most confident in the EU about their country’s economic prospects. This belief is 17-points above the EU average. Forty-two per cent of Irish people say they expect the Irish economy to remain the same while only 11 per cent expect it to worsen, the fewest people expressing this latter view since 2006.

Meanwhile, 44 per cent assume the country’s employment situation will get better in the next year, the second highest score in the EU, just behind the Netherlands, where 45 per cent of Dutch people expect the Dutch employment situation to get better in 2018. The Irish score is 17-points above the EU average score. Few Irish people (8 per cent) think the Irish employment situation will worsen, with the remaining 45 per cent thinking it will remain the same. While positivity concerning Irish people’s own financial situation is somewhat less in comparison to expectations about the macro-economic situation, 34 per cent still assume it will get better in 2018. This means Irish people are the third most positive in the EU about their future situation in this regard (behind Estonia and Cyprus), and Irish views are 10-points above the EU average. Most Irish citizens’ think the financial situation of the household will remain the same in 2018, while only 6 per cent forecast it will worsen.

### III. TRUST IN THE MEDIA AND INSTITUTIONS

Claim and counterclaim regarding so-called “fake news” brought the issue of citizen confidence in the media to the frontline in 2017. Thus, it is timely for this national report to explore Irish people’s faith in the media, namely people’s confidence in radio, television, the written press, and online social networks, which we do from a longitudinal perspective. The media is often considered the so-called fourth estate of the democratic system along with the legislature, the executive (political institutions), and the judiciary (regulatory institutions). SEB88 affords us the opportunity to examine citizens’ confidence in these institutions too. For these organizations, declarations of trust suggest an expression of support for them. This implies that people see these institutions as reliable, thus conferring greater legitimacy on them, and meaning people will be more likely to comply with them, and less likely to protest.

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15 Question: “What are your expectations for the next twelve months: will the next twelve months be better, worse or the same, when it comes to: the Irish economy; the employment situation in Ireland; the financial situation of your household” (Source in SEB88: QA2_3/4/5).?
against them. More broadly, citizen faith in institutions is thought to represent a bedrock of support for the democratic system, hence distrust is often considered to signify a worsening relationship between citizens and the state. Some commentators and academics have suggested a malaise set in the 1970s where citizen faith in representative institutions began to wane with a more sceptical populace developing. By taking a longitudinal perspective on trust in political and non-political institutions dating back to 2000, we are able to assess Irish feelings towards these institutions over time as see if Ireland conforms to this ‘crisis’ thesis.

We begin however by focusing on the media with Figure 7 detailing trust among Irish people in radio, television, the written press, and online social networks dating back to 2000.\(^\text{16}\) As of November 2017, radio is the most trusted media among Irish people, with 71 per cent professing trust in it. Trust in radio in Ireland is above the EU average of 59 per cent. As the top left quadrant of Figure 7 shows, this is the highest level of trust declared since November 2009, having dropped to a low of 59 per cent in autumn 2012. Since then, we have seen a reversal of the downward trend. The November 2017 score of 71 per cent trust in radio is the first time since 2009 that trust has risen above 70 per cent.

Television is the second most trusted media among Irish citizens. Figure 7 (bottom left quadrant) shows that as of November 2017 63 per cent profess trust in it. This is 12-points above the EU average. Like with the radio, the decline in faith in television exhibited from the mid-2000s has been somewhat arrested in the last few years, with confidence in TV up 10-points compared to five years ago. Nonetheless, trust in television has declined compared with the trust levels exhibited by Irish people at the turn of the century when trust levels regularly exceeded 70 per cent.

Meanwhile, more Irish people today trust the press (50 per cent) than distrust it (45 per cent). Figure 7 (top right quadrant) shows this is the first time this has occurred since March 2004, and thus reverses the dominant longitudinal trend in Ireland whereby fewer people professed trust in the press than claimed they distrusted it. Trust in the press has increased by 17-points in the past

\(^{16}\text{Question: “I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain media and institutions. For each of the following media and institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it: “Radio”;’ “Television”;’ “The written press”;’ “online social networks”. (Source in SE88: Q8_1/2/3/5).}
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Figure 7 Trust in media among Irish people 2000-2017 (%). Source of data: SEB53-SEB88.

five years and is at its highest levels in thirteen years. Nevertheless, we must recognise a significant proportion of people still profess distrust and Irish levels of trust in the press lag far behind other Member States such as the Netherlands, where 71 per cent of Dutch people say they trust the press and Finland where 67 per cent say likewise.

Figure 7 (bottom right quadrant) also shows that most Irish people distrust online social networks. As of November 2017, only 16 per cent of Irish people say they trust these channels, below the EU average of 20 per cent, meaning Irish people are among the most sceptical in the EU about these media. This is a consistent trend since the question was first asked in 2014. Meanwhile, seven out of ten people say they distrust these channels.

We now turn our focus to the trust levels expressed by Irish people in four political institutions namely: the European Union, the national government, the Dáil (the Irish parliament), and political parties. As of November 2017, the most trusted political institution of these four is the European Union, with 50 per cent of Irish people professing trust in it, above the EU average of 41 per cent. As the top left-hand quadrant of Figure 8 shows, there has been a substantial recovery in trust in the EU. Trust has increased by 26-points since 2011 and the recent trend to emerge has been that more Irish people trust the EU than distrust it is mirroring the pattern we saw pre-the GFC. However, distrust levels, which as of November

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17 Trust in online social networks was first asked in 2014.

18 Question: “I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain media and institutions. For each of the following media and institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it: ‘The European Union; ‘The national government’; ‘The national parliament’; “Political parties”. (Source in EB88: Q8.6/12/13/14).
2017 stand at 38 per cent are still high in the Irish context as Figure 8 shows. Thus, while levels of distrust are falling, they have not fallen to the levels observed before the Crisis.

Turning to trust in the Irish government (top right quadrant of Figure 8), it current stands at 45 per cent, the highest since May 2011. Trust in the government has steadily risen since the end of the EU/IMF bailout, and is up 28-points since 2013. Nevertheless, more Irish people still profess distrust in the government (50 per cent) than trust as of November 2017, although Figure 9 shows this has been the dominant trend over the past 17 years, with trust outweighing distrust on only one occasion: October 2001.

Trust in parliament has also increased in the past few years. As of November 2017, 43 per cent of Irish people say they trust the Dáil, the highest level of trust in this institution in six years. Mirroring the pattern of trust in the government, Figure 8 (bottom left quadrant) illustrates trust levels in the Dáil have steeply risen over the past 4-5 years, having hit a low point in autumn 2012, where just 18 per cent of Irish people said they trusted parliament. Although trust in the Dáil is above the EU average of 36 per cent, in a comparative sense Irish people remain much less trusting of their parliament than some of their European counterparts. For example, 73 per cent of Swedes, 67 per cent of Dutch people and 64 per cent of Danes profess to trust their parliaments.

Figure 8 Trust in political institutions among Irish people 2000-2017 (%).

Source of data: SEB53-SEB888.

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19 Trust in the European Union was first asked in 2003.
The bottom right quadrant of Figure 8 shows that political parties are the least trusted political institution among Irish people, a pattern that is consistent across time. As of November 2017, only a fifth of Irish people declared trust in them while 73 per cent said they distrusted them. Irish opinion is much in line with the EU average where only a fifth of people express trust in parties. While Figure 8 illustrates that over the past 17-years there has never been much trust in parties, confidence in them had been rising in recent years, having hit an all-time low in November 2010, when just 9 per cent of Irish people professed faith in parties. However, while there has been some recovery from this low point, we are still some way off the high mark of 32 per cent, which was registered in spring 2006.

Figure 9 takes us beyond political institutions and to non-political ones. Here, our focus is on how much trust people have in the Gardaí and the justice/legal system dating back to 2000. As of November 2017, 62 per cent declare trust in the Gardaí, more than in any political institution, and of the ten organizations we explore in this report, the third most trusted (behind radio and television). As the left segment of Figure 10 shows, continuously, more people have professed trust in the police compared to the proportion who say they distrust them. However, it is notable that trust in the Gardaí is 10-points lower than the EU average, meaning Ireland ranks 19th of Member States in trust levels in the police. Moreover, there has been a decline of 16-points in trust in the Gardaí in the past year, with distrust (which stands at 34 per cent as of November 2017) conversely rising to its highest levels since September 2006.

**Figure 9** Trust in regulatory institutions among Irish people 2000-2017 (%).

*Source of data: SEB53-SEB88.*
The right-hand segment of Figure 9 shows that as of November 2017, 55 per cent of Irish people said they trusted the justice/legal system, just above the EU average of 50 per cent. However, this represents an 8-point drop in the past year with a corresponding 7-point increase in distrust. This retraction follows a period of recovery in trust levels in the legal system, which had dropped during the Global Financial Crisis to 42 per cent in autumn 2010. However, currently, more Irish people declare trust in the justice/legal system than they do in political institutions, suggesting that non-political bodies are held in higher esteem in Ireland compared to political organizations.
CONCLUSION

Throughout the 1990s and early to mid-2000s, there was widespread support for Ireland’s membership of the EU and positivity towards the Union, only for a dampening of this enthusiasm to emerge during the GFC. Since Ireland’s exit from the EU/IMF programme, Irish enthusiasm for the EU has gradually recovered and the message of this national report is that Irish positivity towards the EU is at its highest point in some time. This is evidenced by the fact that Irish people have the most positive image of the EU among Member States, have the highest levels of attachment towards the EU in fifteen years, and the strongest belief we have seen among Irish people that the EU is responsive to Ireland’s interests.

Nevertheless, the evidence from this national report and indeed previous Eurobarometer surveys reveals some qualifications to this optimistic picture. The first is that while positivity has become more widespread today than during the GFC, much of it is ‘soft’. In other words, people are favourably disposed to, but not strongly committed. Second, 2 out of 5 Irish people still profess distrust in the EU, with distrust remaining higher than it was prior to the Crisis. This implies that the levels of enthusiasm for the EU, while growing, have not quite reached the halcyon days of the late 1990s and 2000s and there are segments of the public that remain more cautious in their approach to the EU. Third is that increasing passion for the EU in Ireland has coincided with an upturn in the Irish economy. This suggests that positivity towards the EU is conditional, and thus attitudes towards the EU might be subject to reappraisal depending on economic performance.

Turning to trust, in seven of the ten institutions and media we explored, trust among Irish citizens has grown over the past five years. It contradicts the ‘crisis’ thesis which posits that citizen confidence in institutions and the media has been eroding, and a greater cynicalism is permeating the public consciousness. Certainly, talk of “fake news” has not resulted in a backlash against traditional media. That being said, we must acknowledge that fewer citizens profess trust in television and radio today than they did at the turn of the century, although this decline has not been huge. The more recent increases in trust across most institutions and media have overlapped with increased economic positivity. While it is beyond the scope of this report to examine the underlying causes of trust in these organizations, performance explanations suggest that citizens’ faith in institutions is a rational response to policy effectiveness, especially economic performance. So perhaps we should not be surprised by the relatively optimistic picture regarding trust that this report presents.

But what about ‘Brexit’? Two areas where concerns about this might have filtered through to the public, namely sentiments regarding Ireland’s future in the EU and economic perceptions and expectations suggest that so far, there has not been much impact. On the EU front, a
majority of Irish people continue to disagree with the proposition that Ireland can best face its future outside of the Union, a consistent trend since 2012, and in stark contrast to British sentiments on this issue. Coupled with the positivity towards the EU documented earlier, this implies that there is little sign of escalating Euroscepticism in Ireland. Economically, Irish citizens are confident about the current economic situation but also optimistic, indeed among the most confident in the EU, about their prospects in the next twelve months. However, as the implications of ‘Brexit’ for Ireland remain unclear, it is too soon to conclude that ‘Brexit’ will not influence Irish public opinion in the future. All we can say for now is that there is little evidence to suggest it has shaped Irish attitudes thus far. Nevertheless, this is an issue that needs monitoring as the United Kingdom’s departure from the EU becomes a reality.