Is this the worst crisis in European public opinion?

Between the spring of 2007 (before the start of the crisis) and the autumn of 2013, the feeling among EU citizens that their country’s membership is a good thing showed a general decrease, but remained above the 46% low point of 1997.

Although attitudes have become less positive in recent years, the changes have tended to be small, except in the Member States most affected by the crisis. The view that membership of the EU is a good thing declined most between 2007 and 2013 in Spain (47%, -26 percentage points), Greece (34%, -21) and Portugal (36%, -19).

In the same period, the most positive increases were in Sweden (64%, +14), Malta (64%, +13) and Finland (53%, +11).

No. Positive views on EU membership were at their lowest levels in the spring of 1997.

Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY)’s membership of the EU is…?
What impact has the crisis had on personal finances?

While general opinions on the state of the national economy may have been strongly affected by the crisis, there has been little overall impact when it comes to Europeans’ perceptions of their personal financial situation. Indeed, the proportion feeling positively about their financial situation increased slightly from 61% in 2007 to 63% in 2013.

Of course, the European picture disguises major differences between Member States – ranging from 93% in Sweden to 27% in Bulgaria – but these are somewhat less extreme than those seen in relation to national economic optimism.

Between 2007 and 2013, positive perceptions increased most in Malta (75%, +19 percentage points), Germany (78%, +14), the Czech Republic (63%, +13) and Hungary (39%, +12). The most significant decreases occurred in Cyprus (42%, -37), Ireland (54%, -20), Greece (29%, -19), Slovenia (53%, -17) and Spain (54%, -13).

People with a higher level of education and those with better-paid jobs are considerably more likely to be positive about their financial situation, and the gap has widened since 2007 between the highest-paid workers and the unemployed. Another trend worth observing is the rise in positive sentiment among students and retirees.

People’s perceptions of their financial situation have remained stable overall, but there are striking differences between Member States.
Has the crisis widened the gap between countries in Europe?

Across Europe as a whole, optimism about the national economic situation decreased noticeably between the autumn of 2008 and the autumn of 2013. Despite minor fluctuations, the view has remained downbeat.

There has been a divergence between Member States ever since this question was first asked in 2004. Then, positive views on the national economy ranged from 93% in Denmark to as low as 5% in Portugal.

This pattern has not changed in the intervening period. The national mood is relatively buoyant in Scandinavian countries (85% in Sweden, 74% in Denmark) and Germany (82%). On the other hand, in the countries worst affected by the crisis positive sentiment is at an all-time low – Greece (2%), Cyprus (3%), Portugal (3%), Croatia (3%) and Spain (4%).

While the overall decline in economic confidence is undeniable, the crisis has not driven Europe further apart. Rather, it has exacerbated differences that were already there.

No. The gap between the most and least positive countries remains largely unchanged.

How would you judge the current situation in each of the following? The situation of the (NATIONALITY) economy
How has the crisis affected the image of the EU?

Before the crisis, around half of Europeans had a positive image of the EU. Since then, there has been a substantial deterioration, and by the autumn of 2013 less than a third of Europeans shared this opinion.

While this appears to mirror the decline in positive views of national economies, the real picture is less clear-cut. The decrease in the positive image has not been uniform, with the European elections in 2009 seeing a notable improvement. So, while the economy is undoubtedly an important factor in attitudes towards the EU, it is not the only one.

There is a correlation between perceptions and levels of information and engagement. Europeans who consider themselves well-informed about European matters are much more likely to view the EU positively (46%, compared with 24% of those who consider themselves less well-informed). This is matched by a similar correlation between people who feel their voice counts in Europe and have a positive view overall.

Dealing with the continuing fallout of the crisis is of course a priority, but issues of communication and democratic participation are also key to restoring faith in the EU.

The crisis is only one of several factors driving public perceptions of the EU.

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.