

Do the Europeans still believe in the EU?

Analysis of attitudes and expectations of EU public opinions over the past quarter century

Daniel DEBOMY

Preface by António Vitorino

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Daniel Debomy is the founder and managing director of the opinion research institute OPTEM. For 25 years, together with his network of partners across Europe, he has carried out numerous qualitative studies on behalf of the European Commission and other organisations, aiming to understand the citizens' perceptions, attitudes and expectations vis-a-vis the European Union and EU policies, in the 27 Member States and beyond. He also lectures on EU-related issues at several schools and universities.



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Preface

The evolution of public opinion in relation to the European Union has for a long time been the focus of special attention from the European institutions. I was given the opportunity to assess the contribution and the relevance of the quantitative and qualitative survey tools available at EU level, since I had authority over opinion monitoring services when I was member of the European Commission.

At that time, I made good use of the qualitative studies that Daniel Debomy and the OPTEM network were commissioned to carry out over several years. Since conducting these studies, Daniel Debomy has become one of the main European experts in analysis of the relationship between public opinion and European integration.

His work has given him the ability to put these evolutions into perspective in a particularly enlightening manner, which permeates the study being published by *Notre Europe*.

Putting things into perspective from a temporal viewpoint, firstly, is all the more necessary in the current context of crisis: it is confirmed throughout his study that the 'Delors period' constitutes an important milestone in positive public opinion

towards a European project that was clearly identified and embodied by great national and European political leaders; and it is also clear, with the hindsight of a quarter century, that the decrease in this enthusiasm is not necessarily synonymous with deep-rooted defiance towards the EU, and that this relative decline is not irrevocable.

Putting things into perspective from a spatial viewpoint also is especially important: Daniel Debomy's study also underlines the existence of strong contrasts between citizens and countries that are "united in diversity", and whose relationship with the EU is structured by dissimilar backgrounds and mentalities.

In this respect, the Portuguese citizen that I am can of course only confirm that my country's view of the European perspective has sometimes wavered over the past three decades. At the same time, this view seems to me to be characterised by rather consistent dominant features since Portugal's accession to the 'EEC', and for which it is difficult to say at this point if these will be deeply modified by the current crisis.

Readers of this study will undoubtedly find much food for their thoughts and answers to their questions on what unites or divides public opinion in the various countries of Europe.

It is my wish that from their reading they come to the belief that it is more vital than ever to be attentive to how European citizens view their EU membership, especially at a time when more and more crucial decisions are being made in their name.

António Vitorino, President of Notre Europe

Executive Summary

1. The evolution of quantitative opinion indicators concerning the European Union, such as those measured in Standard Eurobarometer sample surveys, enables identification of the following points of analysis.

1.1. After several years of crisis, these indicators highlight half-hearted attitudes.

On average, one out of every two EU citizens gives a positive response to the questions asked on their country's membership of the EU and the ensuing benefits obtained. Although less than one in five declares this membership as something negative, one in three abstains from adopting a position, and over one in three considers that their country has not benefited from the EU.

These results are of course far from the summits of 'Eurofavour' that had welcomed the Delors project of relaunching European Integration over two decades ago, but they do not mark a sudden collapse either: the current level, despite its significant drop since 2008, is not the lowest that has been recorded in the past 25 years.

1.2. Examination of the curves marking the 25-year evolution of the average EU score of the two indicators allows to discern **four major successive periods**:

- A **first period of strong increase** in positive opinion to reach the **record levels of spring 1991**.
- A **second period of strong decrease** to reach an **all-time low in spring 1997**.
- A **third period, up to 2007**, which saw a **partial, slow and saw-tooth rise** in opinion indicators.
- A **fourth period** with a **further drop, since 2008**.

In relation to the all-time maximum levels recorded over the past quarter century, the decrease is quite significant – 22 points for the positive score on the ‘membership’ indicator when last measured in spring 2010 (49%, versus 18% of negative opinions) and approximately 10 points for the ‘benefits’ indicator when measured in 2010-2011. **The decrease in ‘Euroenthusiasm’ does not date back to the crisis**, it is already a long-standing reality.

1.3. The climate of public opinion appears more or less Eurofavourable in the different Member States, both old and new.

Among the old Member States, the citizens from the Benelux countries, Ireland and Denmark show they are the most accommodating (contrary to the British followed by the Austrians); **among the new Members are the Poles, Slovaks and Estonians, followed by Romanians and Lithuanians** (Hungarians, followed by Latvians and Cypriots being, on the contrary, currently the most dismal).

1.4. This current situation stems from contrasting evolutions. Although the curves often evolve in the same direction for the same time periods in most countries, the extent of the evolutions can vary, and there are even some counter-examples.

During this quarter century:

- **Among the 12 oldest Member States**, those with the largest decline in relation to all-time maximum levels are **Greece, Portugal, Italy and France**. Conversely, the Danish scores are close to their maximum levels and the drop is relatively small in Luxembourg and Belgium.
- **For the 3 countries that entered the EU in 1995**, a marked improvement in **Sweden is noted** in particular, which contrasts with a **deterioration in Austria** since the time of accession.

- **Among the new Member States, the trend has been downward** since 2004 (especially since the crisis), albeit with some **remarkable exceptions: a net increase in Poland, Slovakia and Estonia** (and no deterioration in Lithuania and Malta).

It can be seen that a real improvement in perceptions of the EU can take place in once highly-reserved countries, and that citizens from traditionally Europhile countries can succumb to 'Eurogloom'.

2. Elucidating the meaning of quantified responses to sample survey questions, and more broadly, **deeply analysing citizens' attitudes requires the use of another investigative technique, that of qualitative studies** – which **helps to provide findings that are useful for a sound understanding of opinion.**

A widely understood need for a strong and cohesive Europe can be observed, despite the contrasting evolutions in perceptions of the EU.

This sound understanding was already evident in the studies carried out at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s – with exceptions in some of the then Member States. This continued and was also expressed in the 2000s in the candidate countries and then in the new EU Member States. **And yet a recognised need does not prevent the possibility of Euroscepticism. It can be seen how the divide between such an attitude and the contrary attitude of Eurofavour evolves over the years.**

3. In most countries there is a clear awareness of a historic and cultural European bond and of strong common values: a necessary Europe that does not boil down to a Europe of necessity.

All throughout the quarter century under study, the qualitative investigations have highlighted **the broadly widespread feeling among EU citizens of a historic and cultural community between the European countries.** They are aware of a European model based on cultural and humanistic values, specific to Europe and differentiating it very clearly from the United States. The citizens of several countries have or

had a tendency to remain somewhat distant from this feeling of membership, but developments have also taken place in this area.

At the same time, **fears of moving away from this model and of losing sight of the original philosophy in the policies of Member States** have been growing among a number of EU citizens in recent years.

4. In a context of growing concern linked to the abuses of economic liberalism, the existence of mindsets that are mainly in favour of a European Union with broad scope, and of the development of common policies in most areas, stands out in all the qualitative studies conducted over the past 25 years.

These expectations for European action seem to remain more or less consistent, whereas concerns are increasing among citizens of several countries.

5. Despite real convergences noted in citizens' expectations, Europe in the making is still of course perceived through national prisms. These could constitute **factors of disillusionment** that are more or less serious depending on the cases: the study highlights national characteristics that may come into play.

The Europe to which its citizens aspire remains a Europe inspired by the value of solidarity. But it has lost some of its visibility; it must reaffirm itself as such, without which the present 'Eurogloom' could transform into strong and long-lasting disillusionment.

Table of Contents

Introduction	p. 1
1. From Eurofavour to Eurogloom: the evolution of membership and benefits indicators	p. 3
1.1. The recent climate of opinion according to two basic indicators: lameness of pro-European attitudes in general	p. 3
1.2. The current situation compared with evolutions over the past quarter century: just another moment of Eurogloom or the start of heightened deterioration?	p. 5
1.3. The climate of opinion in the different Member States: significant disparities, in both the old and the new	p. 8
1.3.1. Disparities in the old Member States	p. 8
1.3.2. Disparities in the new Member States	p. 9
1.4. The evolution of opinion indicators in the different Member States: similarities and differences	p. 11
1.4.1. Spring 1985-Spring 1991: universal improvement	p. 11
1.4.2. Spring 1991-Spring 1997: a more or less strong decline	p. 12
1.4.3. Spring 1997-Autumn 2007: less similar evolutions	p. 13
1.4.4. Since 2008: an overall decrease	p. 15
1.4.5. The trend observed over the entire past quarter century	p. 17
2. The widely understood need for a strong and closely-knit Europe, despite fluctuations in perceptions of the Union	p. 19
2.1. The imperative necessity for European unification	p. 19
2.2. Broad and staunch support for Delors' proposal to relaunch Europe	p. 20
2.3. Strong expectations despite the beginning of dissatisfaction at the time of the Maastricht Treaty	p. 21
2.4. Increasing reticence in the 1990s	p. 22
2.5. 2001: The climate of attitudes in the EU15 and in candidate countries	p. 23
2.5.1. In the Member States	p. 23
2.5.2. In the candidate countries	p. 25
2.6. The divide between Eurofavour and Euroscepticism: some noticeable changes at the beginning of the 2000s	p. 27

2.7. Before the crisis, a certain improvement in public feelings toward the EU	p. 29
2.8. Continued high expectations of the EU, but also worrying cracks	p. 29
3. A necessary Europe that does not boil down to a Europe of necessity	p. 31
3.1. Historic bonds and a common heritage	p. 31
3.2. Europe, a historic and cultural community:	
a clear concept in most Member States	p. 32
3.2.1. Widespread European empathy	p. 33
3.2.2. More distant attitudes in a few countries	p. 33
3.2.3. Differences that can be explained from a historical point of view	p. 34
3.3. A core set of shared values that make Europe unique	p. 35
4. The call for a European Union with a broad scope of action in a context of growing concern linked to the abuses of economic liberalism	p. 39
4.1. A long standing fact	p. 39
4.2. An observation that remains in the enlarged EU	p. 40
4.3. Expectations regarding European action seemed to remain more or less constant, whereas concerns were growing among citizens of several countries.	p. 41
4.3.1. Widespread confidence 25 years ago	p. 41
4.3.2. The appearance of a number of uncertainties	p. 42
4.3.3. Deepening gloom...	p. 43
4.3.4. ... extending into so far preserved countries	p. 46
4.3.5. In the last years, strong similar concerns everywhere in the EU	p. 48
4.4. Fears of a liberal economy going wrong	p. 48
5. Factors of disillusionment linked to national collective mentalities	p. 51
5.1. Founding Member States	p. 51
5.2. Member States that joined the Union in the 1970s	p. 53
5.3. Member States that joined the Union in the 1980s	p. 54
5.4. Member States that joined the Union in the 1990s	p. 56
5.5. Member States that joined the Union in 2004	p. 57
5.6. Member States that joined the Union in 2007	p. 60
Conclusion	p. 61
Selected related publications by <i>Notre Europe</i>	p. 63

Introduction

This study is based mainly on qualitative studies carried out over the past 25 years by the research institute OPTEM, headed by Daniel Debomy, and its partner network in all Member States¹.

Most of these studies were carried out at the request of various Directorates-General of the European Commission² or other EU institutions or agencies – other work on questions linked to European issues was conducted on behalf of public and private national bodies.

These studies focused on various themes: some examined the general climate of opinion towards Europe and the European Union, others centred around more

1. The network partner institutes in the Member States that contributed to these studies were: Karmasin Motivforschung (Austria), EADC Yellow Window (Belgium), Alpha Research (Bulgaria), Synovate Cyprus (Cyprus), KADEM (Turkish-speaking part of Cyprus), Mareco (Czech Republic), Ulveman Explorative (Denmark), Saarpoll (Estonia), Marketing Radar (Finland), CSA (France), Echanges Marktforschung (Germany), Focus Bari (Greece), Ad Hoc Plus (Hungary), Behaviour and Attitudes Marketing Research (Ireland), Periscope (Italy), Latvian Facts (Latvia), Baltic Surveys (Lithuania), Quest (Luxembourg), Misco (Malta), PQR (Netherlands), BSM (Poland), Consulmark (Portugal), Data Media (Romania), Psmareco (Slovakia), RM Plus (Slovenia), Advira (Spain), Kommunikera (Sweden) and AIMR (United Kingdom). Also participating: Capacent (Iceland), Synovate Norway (Norway), Créalyse (Switzerland), and Alfa Market Research and Consultancy (Turkey).
2. OPTEM carried out initial work for the Commission in 1986, and from 1997 to 2008 it held a Eurobarometer Framework Contract “Qualitative Studies”, managed by the Directorate-General Communication, and it has continued to work with the Commission ever since. Almost 100 studies in total have been entrusted to OPTEM by the Commission.

specific areas of EU policy. The former were systematically reanalysed, the latter provided useful complementary elements of information as part of their precise areas of investigation.

Depending on the circumstances, the studies concerned all or nearly all Member States (varying in number according to the period) or a selection of European countries.

In this document, reanalysis of these studies is preceded by that of the evolution of two quantitative indicators that were regularly monitored in Standard Eurobarometer³ surveys all throughout the period under consideration: feelings concerning a country's membership of the Union (formerly of the Community) and opinions relative to the benefits that the country has or has not obtained from it.

Sample surveys allow the quantitative measurement of opinions or behaviours, but by nature they are limited to measuring the responses of interviewees to the pre-established questions that they are asked. When the objective pursued is that of thoroughly understanding existing attitudes, of detecting types of underlying or emerging attitudes, of explaining the more or less conscious factors underpinning them, of analysing the structure of perceptions, etc., qualitative techniques must be used, through individual open interviews or group discussions.

The points of analysis and insight in this study have been obtained on the basis of a combination of complementary quantitative and qualitative survey techniques.

3. The [website for the public opinion analysis sector of the European Commission](#) ("Eurobarometer") publishes quantitative but also qualitative studies.

1. From Eurofavour to Eurogloom: the evolution of membership and benefits indicators



1.1. The recent climate of opinion according to two basic indicators: lameness of pro-European attitudes in general

The Standard Eurobarometer surveys conducted in spring and autumn each year among representative samples of EU citizens, include questions, of which some have been asked more or less regularly at different periods.

Among these, two questions have been systematically repeated every six months all throughout the 25-year period under study – the first question being asked up until spring 2010, the second up until the wave of surveys of spring 2011⁴:

4. The European Commission seems to have abandoned the first of these questions since then, for reasons that are not explained. The second question does not seem to have been asked in the last wave of surveys in autumn 2011, in light of the results published. We believe that the discontinuation of these questions, if it is confirmed, would be extremely harmful, as it would mean doing without indicators which have provided uninterrupted series for several decades.

(Membership Indicator)

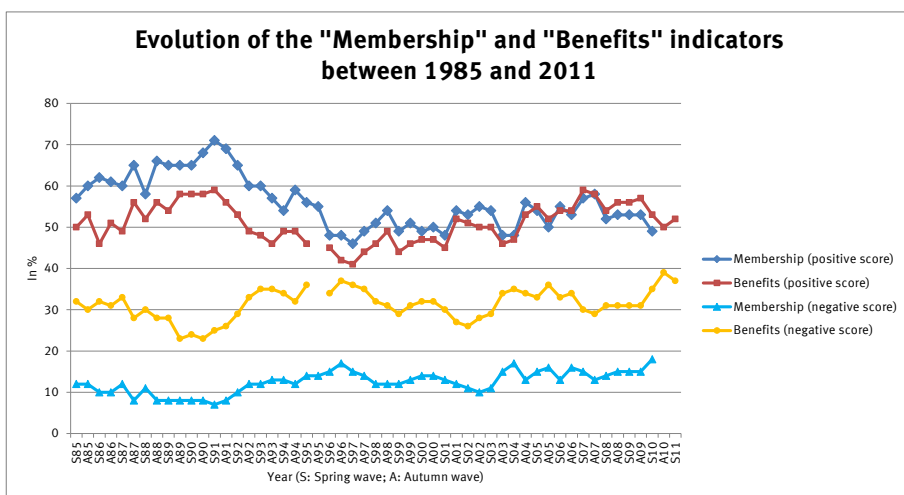
Generally speaking, do you think that (our country's) membership of the European Community is...?

- A good thing
- A bad thing
- Neither good nor bad
- (DK - Don't know)

(Benefits Indicator)

Taking everything into consideration, would you say that (our country) has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the European Community?

- Benefited
- Not benefited
- (DK – Don't know)



NB:

EU10 UP UNTIL AUTUMN 1985

EU12 FROM SPRING 1986

EU15 FROM SPRING 1995

EU25 FROM AUTUMN 2004

EU27 FROM SPRING 2007

THE MOVE TO A LARGER NUMBER OF MEMBER STATES AT THE TIME OF EACH SUCCESSIVE ENLARGEMENT HAD LITTLE OR NO EFFECT ON THE AVERAGE EUROPEAN SCORES, EXCEPT FOR THE ENTRY OF SPAIN AND PORTUGAL FOR THE BENEFITS INDICATOR: IN SPRING 1986, THE SCORE FOR THE EU12 WAS 46, AS OPPOSED TO 51 FOR THE EU10, DUE TO INITIAL HESITANCY (THAT CONTINUED THROUGHOUT SEVERAL WAVES) OF THE CITIZENS OF THESE NEW MEMBER COUNTRIES TO COMMENT ON THE IMPACT FOR THEIR COUNTRY, WITH A LARGE NUMBER OF NON RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION.

In spring 2010 – last date on which the first indicator was measured – **49% of Europeans interviewed felt that their country's membership of the EU was a good thing as opposed to 18% for a bad thing.** 29% did not adopt a position either way (neither good nor bad) in addition to 4% of non responses. **In the same wave of surveys, 53% believed that their country had benefited from membership, as opposed to 35% of opposite opinions** and 11% of non responses. **This indicator dropped by 3 points some six months later (50%, versus 39%) before returning to 52% (versus 37%) in the spring wave of 2011.** Globally, half of citizens express a positive opinion towards the European Union; a substantial minority of the population however are inclined to be negative, another part remaining reserved or ambivalent.

1.2. The current situation compared with evolutions over the past quarter century: just another moment of Eurogloom or the start of heightened deterioration?

Examination of the curves marking the 25-year evolution of the average EU score of these two indicators⁵ allow to discern four major successive periods.

A first period from spring 1985 to spring 1991, during which positive opinion towards the Union markedly progressed: from 57% to 71% for the membership indicator; from 50% to 59% for the benefits indicator⁶. This period corresponds to the creation and implementation of Jacques Delors' proposal to relaunch Europe after his nomination as President of the Commission. This proposal, which was highly publicised of course in France, but also beyond its boundaries, was undoubtedly the first time a European project had received such attention since the time of the Founding Fathers, and it "brought Europe (back) into the picture", as it were. A once-off drop can be noted during this six-year period in the spring wave of 1988 – perhaps a reflection of the deep discord that had arisen between Member States

5. The questions concerned have been formulated in an identical manner from one survey wave to the next, with the exception of the change in name of the Community entity (European Community, European Union). They were asked in the conditional tense in countries or territories that had not yet joined the Union at the time of the surveys.

6. And yet progression of the second was diminished for several years by lower scores among the Spanish and Portuguese who were not yet in a position to assess the benefits gained by their country, and several interviewees did not comment. (It should be noted that this phenomenon did not happen, or only to a limited extent, for the following enlargements).

over the previous months and of the major difficulties in adopting the ‘Delors I package’ at the extraordinary summit in Brussels in February.

A second period of very strong decline, to reach the all-time low in spring 1997:

minus 25 points for the first indicator, minus 18 points for the second. The start of this decline, at the end of 1991 and in 1992, coincides with the controversy and the confused nature of debates about the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty. The first years of the decade also saw a slump in economic growth. All throughout this period, certain events may also have helped raise doubts about the EU’s ability to act in a unified and effective manner – including the mad cow crisis, at an internal level, and that in former Yugoslavia, at border level. A slight improvement can be observed towards the end of 1994 and in 1995: an upsurge in growth, the accession of three new Member States without any noteworthy problems, and the completion and entry into service of the Channel Tunnel may have contributed to this.

A third period, up until 2007, in which a partial, slow and uncertain recovery of the two indicators took place. The first gained 12 points in the autumn of that year in relation to the extremely low level of spring 1997; the second progressed by 18 points up until spring 2007. It can be noted that the first years of this period saw more sustained economic activity in Europe. **The evolution of opinion during these 10 years was nevertheless saw-toothed in nature, punctuated by periods of relapse or decline:**

- Between spring 1999, marked by the forced resignation of the Santer Commission and the associated discredit to the European institution, and spring 2001 (in the meantime with the Danish ‘No’ to the Euro in autumn 2000) – whereas 1998 had been a year of progress towards the single currency (qualification of 11 Member States, establishment of the European Central Bank).
- In autumn 2003 and in spring 2004: dates of survey waves that followed the disclosure of disagreements between European governments on whether or not to support US military action in Iraq; where criticism of the ‘expensive’ Euro developed in certain countries (after the initial warm welcome given to the arrival of the ‘physical’ Euro on 1 January 2002); and where concerns relating to the entry of 10 new Member States heightened, in a context of sluggish growth.

- In autumn 2005, after the ‘No’ vote in the French and Dutch referenda on the European Constitution (conversely the perspective of signing the Draft Treaty in autumn 2004 could have helped reach the temporary peak observed in the previous 12 months).
- This was followed by an improvement up until the survey waves of 2007 (just before the signing of the Lisbon Treaty).

A fourth period with a further drop in both indicators. In spring 2010, with 49% of positive responses to membership, it had dropped by 9 points in relation to its 2007 peak; the benefits indicator losing 6 points and then a further 3 six months later, before regaining 2 points to reach 52% of positive responses in spring 2011. **The impact of the financial and economic crisis on opinions relating to the European Union was analysed in a previous Policy Paper by the author of this report, published by *Notre Europe* in November 2011⁷. In this, one could observe the relatively moderate nature of the decrease of both indicators in relation to 2007 – which had already experienced similar or even worse periods of decline.** Overall, citizens had been rather forbearing with the European Union since the start of the crisis. **Analysis based on the qualitative methods accompanying the results highlighted, however, the risk of greater deterioration regarding confidence in the Union and the underlying feeling of community.**

With respect to the entire past quarter century, it can be noted that the positive score of the membership indicator is, in spring 2010, 8 points lower than its spring 1985 level, and 22 points lower than its all-time peak of spring 1991.

Concerning the benefits indicator, in the midst of the survey waves of 2010 and 2011, it is roughly at the same level as in 1985 – its drop in relation to the 1991 peak being slightly less than 10 points. The juxtaposition of evolution curves for both indicators on the same graph highlights the relative ‘better health’ of the second, and both curves cross each other in recent years. One could optimistically consider that this is a sign of the ability of Europeans to recognise the benefits of their country’s membership of the Union, even in difficult times. But one could also see the simple admission of past benefits (“...our country **benefited** from...”) in

7. Daniel Debomy, “[The Citizens of Europe and the European Union in the Current Crisis](#)”, Policy Paper No. 47, *Notre Europe/Fondation Jean Jaurès*, November 2011.

conjunction with greater gloominess concerning the present and the future (“...our country’s membership of the European Union **is** a good thing...”). Nevertheless, **the situations prevailing in the various Member States are contrasted.**

1.3. The climate of opinion in the different Member States: significant disparities, in both the old and the new

1.3.1. Disparities in the old Member States

Among the old Member States, those whose citizens regarded their country’s membership as a good thing in spring 2010 were Luxembourg (70% versus 12%), the Netherlands (69% vs 11%), Ireland (66% vs 10%), Denmark (66% vs 12%) and Belgium (64% vs 12%), followed by Spain and then Sweden. Those where opinion was on the contrary, least positive were the United Kingdom (29% vs 33% – negative balance of 4 points with 4 interviewees out of 10 refusing to adopt a position) and Austria (36% vs 23% – with a similar proportion of unexpressed opinions).

The benefits indicator gives a country order that is similar to that of the other indicator. By taking into account the average of the last three measurements (spring and autumn 2010, spring 2011), **the highest scores can be found in Ireland (75% versus 15%, despite a dip during the autumn wave 2010), Denmark (72% vs 21%, with a slight decrease since spring 2010), Luxembourg (72% vs 21%, with, on the contrary a rally of several points), the Netherlands (67% vs 26%, the indicator remaining stable during these three survey waves) and Belgium (66% vs 30%, with a slight temporary dip in autumn 2010).** Next came Spain, Sweden, Finland, then Portugal and Greece – with an extremely clear downward trend in this last country. **The average lowest scores for this indicator as for the first, were recorded in the United Kingdom (33% vs 55%) and then in Austria (43% vs 48%).**

1.3.2. Disparities in the new Member States

As regards the new Member States, in spring 2010 the citizens who were most inclined to view their country's membership of the Union as a good thing were the **Poles** (62% versus 8%), **Slovaks** (59% vs 7%), then **Romanians** (55% vs 11%) and **Estonians** (52% vs 7%). The most reticent on this issue were the **Latvians** (26% vs 19%), followed by the **Czechs** (31% vs 16%), **Cypriots** (33% vs 29%)⁸, **Hungarians** (38% vs 15%) and **Slovenians** (39% vs 16%). In these countries, although the perception of membership as a bad thing was clearly in a minority position, the rate of indecisiveness was extremely high.

Concerning the benefits indicator (by taking the average of the last three measurements) the **Poles top the list** (76% vs 15%), followed by the **Slovaks** (76% vs 19%), **Estonians** (70% vs 23%), then the **Lithuanians** (68% vs 19%), with particularly high scores (despite a drop of several points from spring 2010 to spring 2011 in the first three countries). In three of the new Member States, the **overall difference between positive and negative responses was in the red**: **Cyprus** (43% vs 51% – but with a net improvement in the last wave)⁹, **Latvia** (44% vs 49% – also with a recent trend towards improvement), and **Hungary** (43% vs 47% – here, on the contrary, with an increase in the number of negative opinions).

The following table presents the 27 Member States in descending order of positive scores towards the Union expressed by its citizens in response to the question of membership in spring 2010 (column A), beside the negative responses to this question (column B). The table also features the average scores, obtained in the last three survey waves available, for the positive (column C) and negative responses (column D) to the question of benefits for the country.

8. Score recorded among Greek Cypriots. A strong majority of Turkish Cypriots (61% vs 12%) believed that their membership of the Union would be a good thing.

9. For Greek Cypriots. The overall score was positive in the northern part of the island (60% vs 25%) when considering the possible benefits of membership.

MEMBERSHIP AND BENEFITS INDICATORS AT THE END OF THE PERIOD STUDIED				
	MEMBERSHIP INDICATOR		BENEFITS INDICATOR	
	A - POSITIVE SCORES	B - NEGATIVE SCORES	C - POSITIVE SCORES	D - NEGATIVE SCORES
EQUAL TO OR HIGHER THAN 60%				
LUXEMBOURG	70%	12%	71%	21%
NETHERLANDS	69%	11%	67%	26%
IRELAND	66%	10%	75%	15%
DENMARK	66%	12%	72%	21%
BELGIUM	64%	12%	66%	30%
POLAND	62%	8%	76%	15%
BETWEEN 55% AND 59%				
SLOVAKIA	59%	7%	76%	19%
SPAIN	59%	12%	57%	31%
ROMANIA	55%	11%	57%	29%
BETWEEN 50% AND 54%				
SWEDEN	54%	20%	53%	35%
ESTONIA	52%	7%	70%	23%
GERMANY	50%	20%	48%	42%
BETWEEN 45% AND 49%				
LITHUANIA	48%	14%	68%	19%
ITALY	48%	17%	44%	39%
BULGARIA	47%	8%	47%	29%
MALTA	47%	21%	58%	32%
FINLAND	45%	23%	55%	38%
BETWEEN 40% AND 44%				
GREECE	44%	21%	54%	42%
FRANCE	44%	24%	50%	38%
PORTUGAL	43%	21%	52%	37%
BETWEEN 35% AND 39%				
SLOVENIA	39%	16%	54%	41%
HUNGARY	38%	15%	43%	47%
AUSTRIA	36%	23%	43%	48%
BETWEEN 30% AND 34%				
CYPRUS	33%	29%	43%	51%
TURKISH CYPRIOTS	61%	12%	60%	25%
CZECH REPUBLIC	31%	16%	55%	38%
LESS THAN 30%				
UNITED KINGDOM	29%	33%	33%	55%
LATVIA	26%	19%	44%	49%
EU AVERAGE	49%	18%	52%	37%

Comparison between the respective scores of both indicators shows that **the countries that are most inclined to recognise the benefit obtained by their country's membership of the European Union, in relation to their membership score, are mostly citizens from the new Member States**; with the exception of Bulgarians and Romanians (with a difference close to zero between the two scores) who are undoubtedly awaiting the still not visible enough effect of EU aid. **In the old Member States, the greatest differences in this regard can be seen in Greece, Ireland, Portugal** (countries that greatly benefited from the cohesion policy for many years), as well as Finland. **These disparities are the result of both varied starting points and of contrasting evolutions.**

1.4. The evolution of opinion indicators in the different Member States: similarities and differences

The opinions expressed with regard to the European Union differ greatly between the various Member States. It can be noted that, in most countries, the curves evolve in the same direction for the same time periods, the highs and lows of the indicators are often situated at the same periods. In short, **although public opinion is not the same, at least the citizens of the different countries seem to be sensitive to the same events. But there are some noteworthy counter-examples, and even when the evolutions are in the same direction, their extent is not identical.**

1.4.1. Spring 1985-Spring 1991: universal improvement

Improvement in both indicators could be observed in all 12 Member States of that time – with the relative exception of Luxembourg, which was coming from an already extremely high level in spring 1985.

The highest peak for the membership indicator (also with a high level, if not always the highest, for the benefits indicator) was reached during the same survey wave in spring 1991 in seven of these countries (Belgium, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Greece, Spain and Portugal), and almost at the same time in another country (autumn 1990 in Germany, coinciding with the country's reunification).

In the other countries, a peak was also observed in spring 1991, even though the highest point had been reached earlier (in autumn 1987 in France, which undoubtedly had been permeated more quickly with the diffusion of Delors' proposal, and in Luxembourg; in autumn 1988 in Italy) or it would be a little bit later (in autumn 1992 in Denmark, which was coming from a particularly low starting point for both indicators).

During this first period, it can also be noted that 8 countries out of 12 were simultaneously affected by the temporary trough of spring 1988, and another (the United Kingdom) for one of the two indicators (benefits). This wave had also marked the start of a more persistent decline in Germany (until spring 1989) and in Luxembourg (until spring 1990). In Spain, this drop had begun earlier (spring 1987).

1.4.2. Spring 1991-Spring 1997: a more or less strong decline

The level of both indicators then declined to varying degrees and with varying regularity for several years in all these countries, bar one – Ireland, where the 'miracle of the Celtic Tiger' gave rise to great optimism, which continued at least until autumn 2001 (with, in the meantime, several peaks higher than that of spring 1991). The low-water mark was reached in eight countries in 1996 (in spring in Luxembourg, Denmark and Greece; in autumn in France; during the year in the United Kingdom) or in spring 1997 (in Germany, Italy and Belgium). It was reached shortly before in Spain (in the 1995 spring wave) and in Portugal (in this same wave and that of the following spring). In the Netherlands, the decline observed from spring 1991 to spring 1997 continued to spring 2001 after a recovery that lasted for several waves. The Irish scores (always high) marked a certain dip during 1996.

In the middle of this period, a temporary rally could be noted (lasting for two waves and in some cases a little longer) in the indicators from autumn 1994 (in France, Germany, Italy, Belgium and Luxembourg) or in spring 1995 (in the Netherlands), or at least there was a lull in the downward trend (in Denmark, Portugal, as well as the United Kingdom and Greece where a peak in 1993 was followed by a further drop). Both indicators were at the same time at a particularly high level in Ireland. Spanish scores, however, were at their lowest in spring 1995, before beginning to edge upwards in the following half-year period.

In the three new countries that entered the EU in 1995, the first survey waves after their accession marked a sharp fall, the lowest levels being observed in spring 1996 in Austria, in autumn of that year and the following spring in Sweden, with a longer-lasting effect in Finland, from early 1996 to early 1998.

1.4.3. Spring 1997-Autumn 2007: less similar evolutions

The irregular growth in the number of positive opinions noted for the EU average up until autumn 2007 reflected evolutions of the same nature in a large number of old Member States:

- It could thus be noted that there was a sharp increase in Spain up until spring 2007, in Denmark, Germany and Belgium up until autumn of the same year, in Sweden until 2008 and even 2009 (coming from low levels at the start of this period in the last three countries), and quite sharp in the Netherlands until autumn 2008 (since the trough reached in this country in spring 2001).
- A more moderate improvement appeared globally between the start and the end of the period, with some ups and downs, in the United Kingdom until 2006 and early 2007, in France and Luxembourg until autumn 2007, in Finland until spring 2009 and in Austria until autumn of the same year.

Four of the old Member States had distinctive evolution patterns:

- In Greece, there was a relatively short increase until spring 2004, followed by a sharp fall and only a partial rise until autumn 2007.
- In Portugal, a marked but even shorter improvement was observed until autumn 1999, followed by a downward trend that was only partially compensated by an upturn between 2006 and autumn 2007.
- In Ireland, where the period of high levels for the indicators continued until autumn 2001, a significant fall was noted until spring 2004 ('mini-recession' in 2003), before a rise until autumn 2006.
- Lastly, in Italy, the clear downward trend in the second period continued to reach an all-time low in spring 2008.

In the new Member States the situations were contrasted:

- There was a strong and constant improvement in Poland until autumn 2007, it was irregular but also strong in Estonia until spring of the same year (coming

from a very low level), it was in fits and starts but also marked in Slovakia until autumn 2009 and more moderate in Slovenia until autumn 2008. This improvement only lasted until autumn 2006 in Latvia (and with low scores).

In Slovakia, the peak took place in the year it entered the Eurozone. In Slovenia, a high point was observable on entering the Eurozone in spring 2007, followed by a drop that was probably linked to inflationary fears.

- In Malta, there was a significant decrease in the first post-accession year, followed by a strong and regular improvement to reach in spring 2008 (after adoption of the Euro) a level that was significantly higher than the initial level; in Lithuania, after a strong increase in the first six months, a strong drop ensued in the year that followed, then with an increase until autumn 2007 to reach a level that was clearly higher than its initial level (due to very fast economic development); the Czech Republic saw a moderate increase until 2006 (the reality of development attenuating the criticism of Eurosceptics), followed by a drop, then a slight improvement in spring 2008, also above initial scores.
- The Republic of Cyprus saw a very spasmodic evolution to reach in spring 2008 a level that was slightly higher than the starting point (but among Turkish Cypriots there was a drop until autumn 2007, with a slight improvement six months later).
- In Hungary, the evolution was very saw-toothed but with a clear overall downward trend until spring 2007, and a very slight rally in the autumn.
- Bulgaria experienced a net decline in 2004 and 2005, with a slight improvement up until the moment of accession, then, a further drop until autumn 2008; in Romania, this was also the case but with less of a drop, the increase observed in 2007 bringing the membership indicator (but not the benefit one) back to a level comparable to that of spring 2004.

During these ten years and despite differences, respective periods of progression and regression of the indicators that were common to most countries taken into account could be observed:

- Peaks that were more or less sharp in spring and autumn 1998 in 12 of the 15 Member States of that time, and continuing increases in the three others (Belgium, Luxembourg and Sweden).

- Temporary or more long-lasting troughs in all these countries towards the year 2000 and/or spring 2001.
- Peaks (often small) in one or other of the survey waves between autumn 2001 and spring 2003.
- More significant troughs in most old Member States, in autumn 2003 and spring 2004 (from autumn 2002 in Greece, spring 2003 in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Spain and Austria).
- New peaks in most of these countries in autumn 2004 (spring in Greece), continuing for one or two waves in some countries (Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Portugal and Finland) – Italy being excluded although experiencing a slowdown in the downward trend of the indicators at this time.
- Dips that were more or less marked in autumn 2005 (or in some cases six months earlier or six months later) in all Member States, both old and new, with the single exception of Poland.

1.4.4. Since 2008: an overall decrease

The decrease in the indicators observed in the EU average affected almost all Member States, although not at the same time or to the same extent. Among the countries – the majority – where an underlying upward trend was recorded during the third period (or at least in the final years of this period), it was starting to become apparent especially:

- From 2007 in the United Kingdom (where a trough had already appeared late in 2006), Spain, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia and Bulgaria.
- From spring 2008 in France, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg (where the autumn 2007 peak had preceded others during the third period), Denmark, Poland, Lithuania and Romania.
- In autumn 2008 in Malta and the Republic of Cyprus (following a series of highs and lows since Cyprus entered the EU)¹⁰.
- In spring 2009 in the Netherlands, Sweden and Slovenia.
- In 2010 in Finland and Slovakia (following a relatively sustained improvement in these countries that was only interrupted in autumn 2007 and spring

10. Among Turkish Cypriots, the indicators, which overall had been in decline since 2005, began an upward trend from autumn 2009 onwards.

2008), as well as in Austria (after a four-year improvement that followed ups and downs over the previous years).

The decrease observed was more or less regular depending on the country. It was temporarily interrupted or lessened in many countries by a period of calm or of remission. Signs of improvement in the benefits indicator at the end of the period can also be noted in a number of countries (in the spring wave of 2011 in France, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Finland, Malta, Cyprus, Slovenia, and already a little earlier in Luxembourg, Spain, Latvia and Romania). This phenomenon is perhaps temporary, however.

In several Member States with a specific evolution in the third period, one can also observe a downward movement due to the crisis:

- In Ireland, since 2007 (with however an increase of several points for the benefits indicator in spring 2011).
- In Portugal, where after a peak in autumn 2007 a first drop occurred in spring 2008, followed by a stable period lasting for three survey waves, then a further slump that in fact followed the overall downward trend that had prevailed since the year 2000.
- In Greece, where the saw-tooth evolution over several years was succeeded by a sharp drop in 2008 and in spring 2009, with an improvement six months later, followed by a further equally marked drop in both indicators in 2010 (and also in the benefits indicator in 2011).

Two countries experienced a very specific evolution:

- In Italy, following a more or less constant decrease over 20 years, both indicators picked up significantly in 2009 and early 2010 (the second one losing several points again in spring 2011).
- In Hungary, after declining until spring 2008 (only temporarily interrupted by a slight rally in autumn 2007), there was stabilisation and then an improvement from 2009 onwards (but perhaps short-lived, as the benefits indicator once again took a fall of several points in spring 2011).

As regards the extent of the decrease since the beginning of the last period, it was particularly marked in the old Member States, in Greece, Portugal, Spain

and then Ireland, and, in the new ones, in Slovenia, Latvia and the Republic of Cyprus. Conversely, the least pronounced decreases that can be noted until now, since the beginning of the crisis are¹¹ those in Sweden, Denmark, Luxembourg, Finland, Slovakia, Poland and Bulgaria (for the last country, the decrease followed a previous and already large drop) – in addition to the very specific cases of Italy and Hungary.

1.4.5. The trend observed over the entire past quarter century

Among the 12 older Member States, in relation to the maximum values reached by both indicators (in most cases during the first period), those which saw the sharpest deterioration were, along with Greece and Portugal, two of the founding countries, Italy and France. Conversely, the Danish scores were close to their all-time high, and the decline was relatively weak in Belgium and Luxembourg (especially for the benefits indicator). For the three countries that entered the EU in 1995, a clear and regular improvement can be noted for Sweden (coming from serious initial reservations) and an improvement in the benefits indicator for Finland – whereas the Austrians also proved in 2010-2011, just as ‘Eurodismal’, if not more, than when they joined.

For the new Member States, a more or less emphasised deterioration of the indicator has been noted in seven of them since 2004. There are three noteworthy exceptions, with scores increasing significantly: Poland, Slovakia and Estonia. Furthermore, in Lithuania, although the first indicator is in slight decline, the second is progressing substantially. In Malta, the level of both indicators is close to that of 2004.

11. Classification by order starting with the least affected country.

2. The widely understood need for a strong and closely-knit Europe, despite fluctuations in perceptions of the Union



2.1. The imperative necessity for European unification

In a first qualitative study undertaken in spring 1986¹², which included 8 of the then 12 Member States, the sound understanding by most citizens for the imperative need to unify Europe was highlighted.

Fundamentally, they recognised that no European country, including their own, was now important enough to truly bear weight alone against the dominant powers: the obviously adversarial USSR, and the United States, undoubtedly an ally but also the main competitor. This country appeared to a large extent as having interests and pursuing goals that were different to those of Europeans.

12. Study conducted by the author of the present study in conjunction with the Presidency of the Commission. It included a qualitative phase among 25-45 year-old adults and young people aged 17-23 in 8 of the 12 Member States (excluded were: Luxembourg, Ireland, Greece and Portugal), and in Finland and Switzerland. An additional quantitative survey was conducted in the same countries (except Denmark) and then Austria, Sweden and Norway. Field surveys were conducted in collaboration with institutes from the IRIS network.

There were however some exceptions: the Dutch, who were very Atlanticist, scarcely felt any European/US opposition; the British were also inclined to consider the US with affability having, in addition, a narrower and more pragmatic vision of Europe as a market and a simple economic driving force; and the Italians who showed an affinity for the American image of dynamism and success – while they themselves showed a strong attachment to further European integration.

Outside the EU of that time, the Finns, who were also interviewed for this study, also demonstrated a strong desire for closer ties with the other countries of Europe.

2.2. Broad and staunch support for Delors' proposal to relaunch Europe

Over the following years, several studies were conducted by OPTEM in France, at the request of Community or national public authorities.

In these studies, the positive predispositions mentioned above transformed into broad and staunch support for Delors' proposal to relaunch Europe. The majority of citizens viewed positively, or at least sensed the nature of the overall political aim beyond the most visible economic components of the Single Market **and** – extreme electorates aside – **marked their approval of such a direction**, considered healthy for their country as well as for Europe in its entirety.

More limited investigations in several other countries highlighted a similar craze (especially in Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece).

2.3. Strong expectations despite the beginning of dissatisfaction at the time of the Maastricht Treaty

A study conducted at the very beginning of 1993 provided the opportunity to examine the state of play in a comparative manner within the 12 Member States¹³.

The idea of a Community, or of a European Union, going well beyond the opening up of trade borders and of the economy, was always clearly understood by the citizens of most countries as the objective being pursued. This objective remained largely endorsed in 9 of the 12 Member States: 5 of the founding States, despite fears and tensions in several of them affected by a wave of pessimism (France, Belgium, Luxembourg); Spain where, besides the recognition of the positive nature of EU membership, some dissatisfaction and frustration were also developing (slowness in catching up with the more advanced States, the feeling of not being recognised by them as an important Member State); and Ireland, Greece and Portugal, who very concretely felt the positive effects of solidarity policies and saw Europe to a very large extent as a synonym for the future.

In two Member States, the citizens displayed more reticence: the Netherlands and Denmark, attached to a national identity that was strongly vindicated and embodied by a model of economic efficiency and social harmony that they intended to defend against possible encroachment by 'Brussels'. As for the British, they remained on the sidelines and scarcely envisaged more than the free-trade component of European integration.

At the same time, a certain dissatisfaction was developing in relation to the Community process (except in the three small countries that had greatly benefited from contributions from the Structural Funds). The cause was mainly the difficulty for ordinary people to see how Europe influenced their own existence as citizens, consumers or workers, contrary to the positive macroeconomic effects that were recognised but rather abstract, or benefiting companies or the elite rather than basic citizens. Fears in relation especially to unemployment and insecurity, which were on the increase in most countries, played a certain role and permeated

13. Qualitative study on the image of the European Community, conducted among adult citizens by OPTEM at the request of the Presidency of the Commission.

attitudes with regard to Europe; but also the muddled debate on the Maastricht Treaty had obviously created uncertainty. Expectations remained high, but the European message was starting to get blurred.

2.4. Increasing reticence in the 1990s

Between the mid-1990s and 2001, several studies focusing on more specific themes¹⁴ nevertheless **provided elements of information that confirmed, specified or completed certain prior observations. In countries that previously were the most open to a strong and ambitious Europe** – including Finland, who was now a stakeholder in the Union – **this type of attitude persisted; but the eagerness of the European sentiment seemed to be crumbling in some of them. This was notably the case in France** – a phenomenon that was visible among other things in the lame support shown for the Euro up until its introduction, as it remained something abstract. **This was also the case in Germany**, with much stronger reticence towards the Euro, which only started to abate in 2001 (nostalgia at the prospect of abandoning the DM, symbol of German post-war success, strong concerns about the strength of a common currency encumbered by the participation of ‘Southern’ countries in low economic and monetary stability), and in addition, a growing psychological distance in relation to the Community institutions – but with continued underlying pro-European sentiment. **The Austrians displayed ambivalence**, with similar reactions to those in Germany concerning the Euro, doubts on Community action in different fields and fears of downward harmonisation particularly marked in the most economically fragile categories of the population, going hand in hand with real expectations for positive developments.

The existence of clear reservations was confirmed in the Netherlands and Denmark, joined (though to a lesser extent) **by Sweden**: with regard to the Euro (very strong emotional rejection by the Dutch, more moderate reservations by the Danes and the Swedes, admittedly less directly concerned), widespread distrust of the Union’s institutions, deep-rooted fears of lower standards under the effect

14. About a dozen studies focusing respectively on the prospect of introducing the Euro, globalisation, energy issues, consumer information and various issues relating to culture: studies carried out by OPTEM for the Commission’s Directorates-General for Information, Communication, Culture and Audiovisual Media, Education and Culture, Health and Consumer Protection, Trade, Energy and Transport, and Agriculture and Rural Development.

of European unification. **British attitudes remained at best distant and reticent, at worst firmly opposed** to anything that might appear as a threat to sovereignty, identity or national habits, with the massive rejection of the Euro being the most visible example.

2.5. 2001: The climate of attitudes in the EU15 and in candidate countries

A study conducted in 2001 as part of the work of the Commission's Governance Task Force¹⁵ provided an overall and more complete viewpoint of the climate of attitudes with regard to Europe and the European Union in the 15 Member States, and allowed analysis of those of citizens in most candidate countries for the first time.

2.5.1. In the Member States

The citizens of countries in the South remained generally very favourable towards the idea of a strong European Union, bringing together Europe's nations and States at every or almost every level, above and beyond merely economic issues, with the clear objective of asserting itself as a great power vis-à-vis its major global competitors and adversaries, prime among them the United States. **The Irish also endorsed this idea of a close-knit Europe** (even though the feeling of opposition to the United States was less in evidence there). In all these countries, there was a clear **awareness of the benefits** gained from belonging to the Union, and of its major contribution to economic and also social development. **Support for Europe** was very strong with **virtually no reservations in Portugal and Ireland**. It was **tempered in Spain** due to the aforementioned continuing frustrations, **as well as in Greece; and in Italy** there was a certain distance with regard to any kind of institution, which, although it expressed its opinion first and foremost about national institutions, also touched on Community level.

15. "Perceptions of the European Union. A Qualitative Study of the Public's Attitudes to and Expectations of the European Union in the 15 Member States and 9 Candidate Countries". Study by OPTEM for the European Commission – Governance Task Force; Secretariat-General, Dialogue on Europe Unit; DG Education and Culture; DG Enlargement.

The citizens of Belgium and Luxembourg are traditionally pro-Community and also had a vision of the European Union as a kind of melting-pot, and a broad conception of its legitimate scope – in addition to the fact that they were clearly aware that, for small countries, belonging to this kind of group was an unavoidable necessity if they were to have a place on the international stage with regard to the United States and other powers.

The Finns but also the Austrians came out as open to a Union with broad powers beyond the economy. The former, made less isolated by their accession to the Union, **were particularly keen on contacts with the others,** and their accession also gave them security against their huge neighbour with its history of dangerously protective tendencies. **The latter,** also sensitive to the still recent presence of the Eastern Bloc on their doorstep, and also with the memory of the rifts of the Second World War still alive, **valued the ideal of peace and cooperation, at the same time as recognising the EU's contribution on the economic front – even though they also expressed concern about certain implications of accession for their country, or about its lack of clout in Community decisions.** In both cases, there was also strong awareness that it was impossible for countries of this size to remain isolated.

The French and the Germans – both aware of the original political aim behind the construction of Europe (developing cooperation to avoid the risk of new wars) – **also clearly supported the ideal of a European integration process heading in the direction of a united Europe** and a closer alignment of its countries in all spheres. The French were quick to point out the obvious aim of mutual reinforcement as a counterweight to the United States, which is no surprise; but it could be seen that the Germans too had become very aware of the fact that Americans' interests and viewpoints are quite different from our own. **However, in these two countries there is a serious discrepancy between what the Union should do and the image it projected,** which showed it as being too confined to the field of the economy, weakened by disagreements between (the governments of) its Member States, devoid of vision, complex and impenetrable. **It was in dire need of a clearly formulated plan, a strategy, a guiding thread that would enable people to understand it and fully endorse it.** As far as the French were concerned, this guiding thread, which, for them was as clear as daylight in the days when the Commission

was presided over by one of their own, who proposed and explained the overall plan to them, was no longer perceptible. The Germans expressed the same feeling, and, what is more, it could be seen that they had very strong prejudices against an institution perceived as ponderous, bureaucratic, only interested in details while neglecting core issues, and financially burdensome – with the ever-present idea of Germany as a milch-cow: it was not opposed to the notion of solidarity, but believed that it was paying more than its fair share. It was also clear that the ‘Cresson Affair’ had exacerbated the Germans’ suspicions about the integrity of the Community institution in general.

In the four countries whose citizens had a tendency to focus mainly on their own models and values, these attitudes translated into a desire to contain the European Union’s scope for action, or even a strong distrust of it. It could be seen, rationally and pragmatically, that belonging to the European Union was useful for the economic interests of the country, (its businesses, its exports), but in all other fields it appeared to be more of a threat: interventionist, potentially undermining the national values and traditions or damaging the model of society: any ‘harmonisation’ tended to be perceived as a downward harmonisation, to the lowest common denominator, or as contrary to the interests of the country. It was these countries that had the most widespread caricatures of the Community being only concerned with pointless, absurd even freedom-infringing measures (how curved a banana should be, what shape a cucumber should be, what grade strawberries should be, banning snus (oral chewing tobacco), imposing the metric system, etc.), a perception of a sprawling, inefficient, spendthrift bureaucracy, and a general suspicion of the existence of undue benefits and payments, and corruption. **‘Eurodistrust’ remained particularly virulent in the United Kingdom.** Conversely, the Swedes appeared to be rather moderate in their criticisms.

2.5.2. In the candidate countries

The citizens of the countries applying for accession generally had a broad, and fairly clear, view of what the European Union was and what it aimed to do. It seemed to most to be **a union in the strongest sense of the word**, both economic and political (and from now on or at least potentially, military), **with the aim of mutual strengthening in a whole array of fields**, by developing cooperation and putting in

place common rules, **and affirming Europe as a power vis-à-vis the United States and the other major countries or groupings in the world.** This objective, of putting Europe in a position of strength with regard to the US, was also often perceived as having been the main aim when the EU was created, alongside the objective, at that time, of standing up to the Soviet-dominated Eastern Bloc and COMECON. Implicitly, or even sometimes very explicitly (such as in Slovenia, where people were familiar with the concept), the EU was indeed perceived as a federal grouping or one with federal aspirations.

Attitudes towards the European Union appeared to be the most open in Slovenia (where people already felt close to it), **Romania** (where accession was seen by everyone as a historical necessity, an opportunity and a pressing obligation), **then in Cyprus and the Slovak Republic and in Hungary in a more ambiguous manner.**

The citizens of four of the candidate countries, however, tended to have a more restrictive vision of it. This was the case for the Czechs (who were not unaware of the larger scale of the general plan, but who believed they could observe a marked gap between it and reality, and who remained somewhat in the background, sometimes expressing criticisms of the German type), **the Estonians** (who are somewhat Scandinavian in their sensibilities), **the Latvians** (who were very caught up in their fears and whose attention was focused on the economic problems afflicting their country), **and the Poles** (who aspired to a Europe with a broad scope of action, but who saw it primarily as a club of rich countries looking to mutually reinforce each other and among whom they were afraid of always being the poor relations, ignored or looked down on).

Generally, attitudes were more positive (or least hedged about with questions and doubts) **in the most dynamic categories of the population** (the middle or upper social strata, the youngest, the best educated), but there were exceptions to this general rule.

2.6. The divide between Eurofavour and Euroscepticism: some noticeable changes at the beginning of the 2000s

Between 2001 and the 2004 enlargement, several studies conducted for different EU institutions¹⁶, while confirming the aspirations of citizens in many countries for a strong and ambitious European Union in its goals, highlighted certain evolutions in the divide between Eurofavour and Euroscepticism.

Among the old Member States that were traditionally the most reserved as regards the Union, the Dutch, the Danes and the Swedes showed that despite their reservations, they were at least well aware of a necessary Europe – whereas the British mostly declared themselves clearly hostile or at best indifferent. Among the Dutch, notably, increased distance was noticed with regard to the United States, whose policies deemed aggressive and domineering acted with a repelling effect (a phenomenon that was also visible in other Member States including those traditionally pro-American such as Germany and Ireland).

Conversely, in other countries that were more Eurofavourable at the outset, attachment to the Union dwindled to a certain extent at the same time. In the Member States, this was the case for Spain and Portugal, who were expressing their frustration with the slow pace of catching up, Luxembourg was affected by a wave of gloom, and Finland, where Scandinavian-style stereotypes on the functioning of the Union or EU bureaucracy were starting to appear. **These countries nevertheless remained those where aspirations for a consolidated Europe remained high, but where, just as in France, Germany or Austria, there was a stronger feeling than before of a gap between the ideal Europe that was desired and that which it was revealing of itself.**

Among the candidate countries, added to those already showing positive attitudes towards the Union were Malta (not included within the scope of the 2001 study, as well as **Lithuania and Bulgaria** whose citizens were cautiously favourable). **The Poles and Latvians remained, along with the Estonians, among the most reserved.**

16. Studies on the image of the institutions, European citizenship and the sense of belonging, and Europe's communication as well as on public economic policies, policies on freedom, security and justice as well as the European Union's external action. Work conducted by OPTeM at the request of the Commission's Directorates-General Press and Communication, Economic and Financial Affairs, Justice and Home Affairs, and External Relations, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament.

In 2005 and early 2006, the results of several new studies¹⁷ witnessed the rise of Euroscepticism in a large number of countries (where economic and social concerns were also growing): scepticism (mainly in old Member States) linked to the idea of an over-hasty and poorly-planned enlargement, the impact of the failure of the draft Constitution, the appearance of questions about the possible collapse and failure of the Union (assumption made for the first time in comments from a limited yet symptomatic number of citizens interviewed), concern also about the preservation of national identity in small countries fearing that they would be ‘watered down’ in too broad an entity...

The ideal of European unification was still broadly supported, but the perceived gap between this ideal and the reality of the Union seemed to be widening particularly in France and the Netherlands (countries voting ‘No’ in the referenda), Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, Austria and Portugal – British wariness remained just as strong or even stronger than ever.

The general attitudes in Denmark, however, became more open, where citizens now saw, more than ever, EU processes as positive developments and no longer simply as risks of downward harmonisation, **as well as in Sweden.**

In the new Member States, signs of improvement were starting to show with the first tangible effects of membership of the EU. This trend was **particularly noteworthy in two countries with initial strong reservations, Estonia and Poland. It also affected the Slovaks and the Lithuanians.**

17. Studies relating to institutional issues, to information actions about the EU, to perceptions of the future of Europe, to the Lisbon Strategy, to prospects of adopting the Euro in the new Member States, to certain dimensions of the EU's external relations, and to culture and European cultural values. Work commissioned to OPTEM by the Directorates-General Press and Communication, Economic and Financial Affairs, Enlargement, Education and Culture and the Bureau of European Policy Advisers (BEPA), and by the King Baudouin Foundation.

2.7. Before the crisis, a certain improvement in public feelings toward the EU

The years 2007 and 2008, the last period before the crisis was suddenly exposed, seemed marked by a certain improvement in public feelings towards the EU¹⁸. In any event, **greater confidence (or less mediocre, at least) was displayed in the European Union than in national public authorities in the vast majority of Member States** (or at worst similar or not much worse confidence).

Concerning the trends specific to the different countries, confirmation was indicated of the already-observed tendency towards a better vision of the Union in the Netherlands (after ‘digesting’ the ‘No’ vote) and in the Scandinavian countries, among the once-reticent old Member States, as well as in Poland. On the other hand, a certain Eurogloom persisted in France and Austria at the same time as concerns increased in Greece and signs of erosion were appearing in Ireland and Slovenia.

2.8. Continued high expectations of the EU, but also worrying cracks

In the most recent period (analysed in the Policy Paper published by *Notre Europe* in November 2011), **Europeans’ feelings remained globally characterised by continuing high expectations of the European Union.**

In mid-2011, it was largely perceived as being the only place where it was hoped that remedies would appear – whereas one could have believed that Europe would be blamed a great deal more for its slowness, its procrastination and its lack of cohesion in dealing with the crisis.

18. In particular through a 2007 study in 12 of the Member States on institutional issues and a 2008 study in all Member States on citizens’ perceptions of the EU, commissioned by the DG Communication – in addition to components of more specific studies on the agricultural policy, on that of research and on various aspects of consumer protection, for the Commission’s Directorates-General Agriculture and Rural Development, Research, and Internal Market and Services. Studies also conducted by OPTEM.

But one could simultaneously observe the development of dangerous cracks in the understanding of the principle of solidarity. In the Eurozone countries worst hit by the crisis (Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain) there was growing bitterness and resentment. At the same time a ‘Deutsche Mark Area’ could be seen to re-form psychologically with prejudice concerning Southern countries being revived: in Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and Finland. And, in the new Member States in the Eurozone (Slovenia, Slovakia, Estonia) or not (Czech Republic) resistance was obvious to the idea of ‘reverse solidarity’ that would bring them to financially support the most developed and richest countries that had placed themselves in a vulnerable position.

3. A necessary Europe that does not boil down to a Europe of necessity



In most countries, the clear awareness of a historic and cultural European bond and strong common values could be seen.

3.1. Historic bonds and a common heritage

The initial qualitative surveys of 1986 already highlighted, in the countries covered, the feeling of historic and cultural bonds between the European countries: a history based on agreements and conflicts over the centuries, but in this way, generating exchanges and proximity; common cultural roots, humanist values and democratic political systems of which Europe was the birthplace.

These elements distinguished Europe not only from the USSR with a totally opposite political system, or from a country like Japan which has other cultural references, but also from the United States whose culture, lifestyle, mentality – and not only interests – were a priori perceived by many as being very different from those of Europeans.

In this common heritage, **cultural diversity was strongly emphasised**, the citizens of the various countries displaying strong attachment to their own identity while at the same time affirming openness towards their neighbours. (Among the Northern Europeans however, some ambivalent attitudes were noted in relation to their Southern counterparts, who were appealing because of their more flexible lifestyle and their more spontaneous interpersonal relations, but suspected of insufficient rigour in their behaviour).

The fact that the destiny of European countries appeared to be linked in the eyes of their citizens, as appeared from previous developments, **was not only the result of the material necessity for reinforcement against other powerful countries or groupings, but reflected a much deeper European *affectio societatis*.**

Over the following years, complementary contributions from various studies helped to reinforce this observation, while underlining the specificities of **Euroreluctant Member States**. In the 1993 study in particular, the **Dutch** and the **Danes**, while recognising the existence of a common historic and cultural base, displayed very little spontaneous affinities with other Europeans. As for the **British**, they appeared to be virtually impervious to this common heritage, and correspondingly, to European integration as an ideal.

3.2. Europe, a historic and cultural community: a clear concept in most Member States

In 2001, the study launched by the Commission's Governance Task Force provided the opportunity to pursue investigations on these points – by extending them to most (24) of the current Member States.

Europe appeared in the spontaneous responses of interviewees as having of course a geographic definition, but this definition was of secondary importance: **what makes Europe was in fact mainly its history and culture** in their mind. **When perceptions of its identity and of the feeling of being European were analysed, it was clear that there was a main dividing line running between the large majority of European countries and a limited number of countries situated in the Northern part of the continent.**

3.2.1. Widespread European empathy

The first included Member States and candidate countries, geographically mostly in the South, Centre or East, whose citizens, who were strongly aware of the existence of cultural ties, saw in Europe first and foremost a historical entity, a quintessential land of culture, a place of constant intermingling and exchange over the centuries between diverse peoples but with common roots.

These relations may have loosened in certain periods of history and degenerated into conflict, but their existence down the ages was undeniable. Citizens of all these countries felt, more or less spontaneously, that this model, built on the **foundations of cultural and humanistic values, was unique**. In their opinion, **it set Europe in opposition to the United States**, whose collective mentality was broadly perceived as very different, and which was lampooned as a people without a history, materialist, bereft of these values, and which also prompted reactions of keen antagonism; this was the case in France (whose Gaullist tradition of distrust in the Americans is well known), and in Germany (whose citizens seem to have undergone a sea-change on this front in ten years), and even more so in Member States such as Spain or Greece, and in many of the candidate countries.

There was more or less spontaneous **empathy** for other Europeans – even if people were not very familiar with them, or attributed flaws of different ways of seeing to them. The force of cultural ties was felt with particular intensity in the Latin countries, Belgium and Luxembourg, and in most Central European countries. It had less of a pull for the Germans (who aspired to Europeaness but at the same time were sensitive to disparities), the Irish (rather cut off from the others by virtue of being an island and the fact that many of them lacked knowledge of the languages of the other countries, but who were open to new ideas) and the Finns (also somewhat isolated in their corner of the far northeast of the continent, but very curious and contact-friendly).

3.2.2. More distant attitudes in a few countries

Conversely, in a few countries located in the Northern part of Europe, the concepts of roots and cultural proximity were given much less prominence, and the sense of common historical and cultural ties was much less present in people's minds.

Of the **Member States, this applied to the UK** – many of whose citizens, when asked, refused point-blank to regard themselves as Europeans, **the Netherlands, Denmark** and (less strongly) **Sweden**: in these countries there was a deep-seated conviction of the superiority or specificity of the model of society that the country had developed with its own values, and a weak propensity to share with others, who tended to be seen as a threat. These countries had only weak empathy with other Europeans, particularly with those from the South, whose mentality was seen as very different, and who were even quite overtly despised (for not being responsible, hard-working, orderly, etc.).

In the candidate countries, some Estonians and also some Czechs had a similar stance, restricting the Europe for which they felt an affinity to the most highly developed, most organised countries of the Northwest of the continent – even if they also strongly asserted their awareness of both historical and cultural values and the contrast between Europe as a whole and the US. **The Latvians interviewed seemed rather to be more inward-looking**, but this may have been for reasons linked to their feeling of great vulnerability.

3.2.3. Differences that can be explained from a historical point of view

The countries in the first group, which make up by far the majority, are roughly those which, over the course of their history, had belonged to larger entities in which they mixed with others: the Roman or Byzantine Empires, the Holy Roman Empire, the Hapsburg Empire, and even the Napoleonic Empire by virtue of the influence it has had on legal systems in spite of being short-lived and autocratic. Furthermore, **the countries in the second group are characterised by the predominance of strict Protestant values**, whereas the others are imbued, at least in part, with a culture rooted in Catholicism (or Orthodoxy).

Lastly, another possible viewpoint is that proposed by the French demographer Emmanuel Todd in his work “The Invention of Europe” which distinguishes four basic family types in Europe: one of them, the ‘absolute nuclear’ family, characterised by the significance of the values of freedom and of non-equality, is typical of the populations of England (except for the West), the Netherlands and Denmark (as well as the south of Norway, which was long under Danish influence); and he

also considers this to be the geographical area with **the greatest reservations about a conception of Europe as a strong community**.

These hypotheses about historical explanations suggest that the distances seen here are not circumstantial, but based on age-old, lasting foundations – even though the feeling of closeness or distance between European nations may, of course, vary over time. Compared with similar studies carried out 15 years earlier (at least among Western European countries), this North-South divide seemed to have deepened. The feeling of Europeanness has been diluted in the Northern countries mentioned above, and in the countries of Southern Europe which had recently joined the European Union (at a time when accession meant joining the modern age, as incarnated by more northerly countries), the attraction for the Northern values of modernity and organisation had faded: there was a clearer distancing from more Northern lifestyles and character traits, which were perceived as austere, lifeless, and lacking in colour and imagination.

3.3. A core set of shared values that make Europe unique

The results of studies conducted during the decade 2000-2009, before and after enlargement of the Union¹⁹, once again highlighted the strong importance placed by many Europeans on their historic and cultural kinship, allowing to distinguish a core set of shared values stemming from it.

The age and the wealth of European History was underscored by the citizens interviewed, with shared roots in Ancient Greece and Rome being highly present in their mind; many (more in fact among the new entrants than among the old Member States) also recalled the adherence of European peoples to the same historic and political ensembles throughout the centuries. The Christian roots of Europe were also sometimes mentioned – but less than the ideas of the Enlightenment philosophers, of freedom, of non-submission to the precepts of religions and the non-intervention of the latter in the public sphere. Along with the age-old History was **cultural wealth**, considered as very characteristic of Europe – to the extent

19. In particular: studies on European citizenship and the sense of belonging, on culture and cultural values, and on the Union's communication angle, conducted by OPTEM at the request of the Commission's Directorates-General Education and Culture, and Press and Communication.

of sometimes suggesting the idea of a particular form of European refinement or intellectual superiority.

Europe was willingly seen as a **civilisation-creating entity, or even the cradle of civilisation, united by shared values which mainly included:**

- **Commitment to peace**, undeniably recognised as a shared value, Europeans having learned the lessons of their eventful History to create a community aimed at preventing the return of all armed conflict between each other; a value that also differentiates Europe from the belligerent or aggressive behaviour of many countries throughout the world – beginning with the United States, by and large criticised for their military action in Iraq and their claim to ‘police’ the world.
- **Freedom**: a value shared by all democratic States for some, but a particularly European value for others, who doubted for example, whether real freedom of thought could be ensured in an American society under the stranglehold of its Churches – **European secularism appearing as a pre-condition for complete freedom.**

Central and Eastern European citizens logically displayed enormous sensitivity to the value of freedom, for whom freedom of movement and of establishment was extremely symbolic, and who also underpinned the importance of the rule of law, with the strict legal standards of the European Union as guarantor of freedoms.

Along with these citizens, those of Western Member States who had known dictatorships up until the 1970s kept the memory of this old order (at least those who were old enough to remember).

- **Cultural diversity**, a value also considered as very European, and perceived as **bearer of intellectual curiosity, open-mindedness and tolerance.**
- **Equality and solidarity**, unquestionably European values in two respects: through the existence of social safety in each European country, even when insufficient and different in their conditions from one State to another, and, due to the EU cohesion policies; these were fully appreciated particularly in countries that were the main beneficiaries or that were about to become them. In this area too there was clear opposition with the United States, viewed as practically devoid of social policies and indifferent to the fate of the most deprived.
- **Beyond the notion of solidarity, the greater notion of respect for mankind,**

which was better ensured in Europe than elsewhere (including through abolition of the death penalty), strongly influenced comments.

- **Respect for the earth**, unanimously recognised as a value borne by Europe more than anyone else with its leading-edge environmental policy and standards.

Of course, the full application and the full respect of these values could be questioned, but as shared moral standards they met with broad consensus.

Again, as previously mentioned in this document, the role of the mirror effect could be seen in the comparison with third countries helping make Europeans aware of what they share, in this instance the third country being primarily the United States – admittedly a Western country just like European countries and sharing similarities, but also with major differences that meant they were largely considered as an anti-model rather than an example to follow. In these surveys, many European citizens questioned in a caricatural tone the interventionism of a nation perceived as fundamentally ignorant of the rest of the world and indifferent to it, devoid of History and culture, and thus lacking the critical sense that the stranglehold of a Puritan religiosity cannot help to develop – materialistic and in substance little concerned with mankind –, whether it concern the lack of social concern in this instance, or the integration of violence into American society.

It could be observed that this fact was at least just as true for the new entrants to the European Union (after, perhaps, a brief attraction towards the American mirage in the early 1990s) as it was for the old Member States; in other terms, that the temptation of the then American leaders to divide Europeans by distinguishing between a ‘new Europe’ and an ‘old Europe’ bore no resemblance to reality.

Among Western Europeans, only the British showed greater empathy towards the United States (but even among them it was not without ambivalence or questioning) and also remained somewhat distant from the feeling of cultural community that was being felt elsewhere. In Central Europe, the Poles also marked their links with the United States, but they also strongly adhered to the idea of a shared European culture.

In the final years of the decade, the European citizens' attachment to these values and to the resulting model of society was clearly visible from several more general studies but at the same time there was a growing impression among them that some European countries were drifting from these values and were losing sight of the original philosophy in their policy choices.

4. The call for a European Union with a broad scope of action in a context of growing concern linked to the abuses of economic liberalism



4.1. A long standing fact

The existence among numerous citizens in most Member States of mindsets that are in favour of a European Union with broad scope, stands out in all the qualitative studies conducted over the past quarter century on general themes relating to Europe: on the attitudes and expectations of the public or the image that it has of the Union, or focused on institutional issues but also including questions on the content of EU actions, or concerning different aspects of Europe's communication policy.

The results of more specific studies also conducted on extremely diverse European policies **were also along these lines:** studies focusing on, among other things, public economic policies, the single currency, agricultural policy, energy issues, research, trade policy, the implementation of the single market in different fields, services of general interest, information and consumer protection, public health, employment, support for cultural actions, the policy on freedom, security and justice, the European Union's external action, its enlargement, etc. Those interviewed often knew very little about the content of these policies at the outset (or

even about their mere existence), but they generally showed strong interest in what they learned about them, most of them expressing approval for what was being done, and often calling for more initiatives at European level.

4.2. An observation that remains in the enlarged EU

This observation, first made around 1990 in the then countries of the European Community, was still confirmed towards the end of the decade 2000-2009 in the enlarged Union.

In this way, **a 2006 study** on the citizens' perceptions of the future of Europe²⁰ **highlighted, in a climate still dominated by uncertainty and concern, the common tendency for people to speak in positive terms about the European Union spontaneously** as a protective entity, a factor of peace, stability and security, capable of having an impact on other large countries or groupings, and continuing its unification through solidarity at internal level. **Admittedly, a discrepancy to a greater or lesser extent was often seen between ideal and reality, but that did not undermine the overall acceptance of the project.** And when questioned more particularly on major policy areas, the majority of citizens shared the view that there should be more common European action in almost all of these.

In 2008, a new study brought to light in the 27 Member States the dominant opinion that things were nonetheless going in the right direction in the European Union, unlike the opposite opinion given concerning their own country. The few exceptions to national pessimism came from countries that traditionally were particularly confident about their future (Nordic countries, Ireland, Romania despite the extent of problems to be resolved) or tending to be optimistic given their recent progress (particularly economic) (Poland, Estonia). **Admittedly, it was moderate confidence, not without reservations and questioning that was expressed concerning the European Union, but it contrasted with citizens' deep distrust in their national public authorities in most Member States.**

20. "The European citizens and the future of Europe. Qualitative study in the 25 Member States". Conducted by OPTEM at the request of the Commission's DG Communication.

This study examined a series of about 20 areas covering practically all policy fields, and for each field whether or not it was preferable that decisions were made by the national government or jointly within the EU – a subject dealt with in the quantitative Eurobarometer surveys but that was important to clarify here. **A strong inclination was noted towards judging joint decisions necessary and desirable in two out of three of these fields, the citizens** – including a noteworthy share of those with a tendency for Euroscepticism – **feeling that the scale of the issues at stake went beyond the national framework.**

This especially applied to consumer protection, support for disadvantaged areas, competition, scientific and technological research, the environment and energy, the fight against terrorism and against insecurity, and defence and foreign policy – an area which is nevertheless one of sovereignty, par excellence. All citizens were also leaning in the same direction, although to a lesser extent as regards the economy (an extremely broad theme that needs to be sub-divided), the fight against inflation, transport, immigration – opinions being divided on agriculture and fishing. National decision-making was however predominantly desired for the various components of social policy in the broad sense (social security, pensions, education, tackling unemployment) and taxation: areas for which national specificities were perceived as being very important – and to which people were particularly attached, fearing downward harmonisation – but which however did not exclude openness towards cooperation. **In 2011, as seen above it was still the European Union that was expected to provide solutions to the crisis.**

4.3. Expectations regarding European action seemed to remain more or less constant, whereas concerns were growing among citizens of several countries.

4.3.1. Widespread confidence 25 years ago

In the first study of 1986, the Europeans generally appeared quite confident.

Optimism dominated in Italy and Spain (now considering themselves as ‘really’ European following their accession and inclined to see in it a starting point for rapid progress), and even more so in the Netherlands and Denmark where the

interviewees displayed confidence in the solidity of a greatly valued economic and social model (quantitative indications recorded in Sweden were along the same lines). In the other countries studied there was relative confidence in the future despite admitting to various problems.

Some clearer concerns were nevertheless starting to grow in three of the largest European countries: the Germans (wondering about Germany's economic and technological competitiveness faced with global competition), and among the French and the British (concerned, more broadly, of the diminished power of their country in the world).

4.3.2. The appearance of a number of uncertainties

In the 1993 study, growing concern was noted in most countries covered in the previous study.

The French displayed particular concern about the future of their country fallen prey to economic difficulties and increasing unemployment, a concern shared by the Belgians who also deplored the 'breakdown' of the State and its political structures.

Comments recorded in the United Kingdom also bore witness to increased gloom (along with a certain level of resignation) in the face of the same economic and social problems, the perceived decline of national industry, and the perceived absence of long-term prospects for their country.

In Germany, economic concerns that were starting to emerge in 1986 did not worsen to a large extent (except among the more economically-fragile individuals) but they were at least confirmed – the idea of structural evolution where the maximum possible growth had been reached. Added to this was a new factor of incomprehension and dread regarding increasing violence and the re-emergence of the extreme right.

In Italy, without becoming alarmist, the citizens interviewed also seemed to be significantly more pessimistic, expressing themselves on the necessary 'radical' change for their country, delayed for far too long.

In Spain, influenced by a period of stagnation, the positive visions of the future mainly displayed six years earlier were giving way to disillusionment, a rather bitter observation that they had ‘dreamt too quickly’ in their hopes to rapidly catch up with the more advanced European countries, and that they were still a ‘Southern’ country.

In the two Northwestern European countries that previously had been very serene about their future as the economic prospects were considered to very positive, concerns were starting to emerge regarding the sustainability of the social benefits and of the model of social harmony that had been created there: the Netherlands (fears of increasing unemployment, but especially of the consequences on the integration of young immigrants, delinquency, and as a result, intolerance and xenophobia) and Denmark (there again, unemployment but even more so risks of deterioration of the social system and of the societal model, anxiety regarding immigration, risks of violence...).

In Luxembourg, (not studied in 1986) similar perceptions prevailed among citizens, aware of the privileged situation in their country in relation to many others, but seeming suddenly to discover that maintaining the future of its prosperity was not necessarily a foregone conclusion. A divide became apparent between those who were relatively serene and others who were much more pessimistic in their vision of their country’s economic well-being and its social cohesion.

In the three other Member States (not covered either by the 1986 study) however, optimism dominated: Ireland (despite concerns linked to monetary difficulties and increasing unemployment), Portugal (significant signs of improvement and modernisation) and Greece (major dissatisfaction regarding the state of the country but optimism for the future). The benefits of EU membership were very spontaneously mentioned there.

4.3.3. Deepening gloom...

At the beginning of the 2000-2009 decade, the 2001 study for the Governance Task Force revealed in most Member States the impression of deepening gloom, with pessimistic visions and disarray at three main levels:

- **The speed of current change** (technological and economic) **and great uncertainty as to its consequences:** The new information and communication technologies open up a broad array of opportunities for those who master them, but disorientate many others; there are ever fewer points of reference for understanding an economy that is increasingly virtual and volatile, businesses that used to be stable and familiar that are cut off from their roots or borders; widespread impressions that mankind is playing at the sorcerer's apprentice (mad cow disease, genetically modified organisms, alleged effects of depleted uranium shells, whose use was recently discovered in former Yugoslavia...).
- **The perceived excesses and abuses of economic liberalism:** deterioration (or fear of deterioration) of essential public services, the growing gap between rich and poor, the increasing influence of money on people's mentality...
- **The widespread feeling of a loss of values and a once-cohesive social fabric** – partly stemming from the previous factor: pockets of poverty in supposedly advanced countries, a dilution of the values of solidarity and community, isolation of young people, drug use, increasing crime and insecurity and fear of destabilisation of society by 'uncontrollable' immigration...

At the same period, corroborating observations from studies with more specific objectives were also available: more or less underlying concerns in several countries; questioning of economic development based ever more on the pursuit of the greatest financial gain; widespread dissatisfaction with the viewed deterioration of public services and State disengagement from managing them. **Partial exceptions to this climate of doom and gloom were:**

- **The Netherlands** (no deterioration in relation to previous observations), **Sweden** to a lesser extent (growing divide here between a high level of confidence in the middle to higher socio-professional categories and more widespread fears of for the Swedish model in the middle to lower socio-professional categories) **and Finland** (just emerging from serious economic difficulties and with a tendency towards reasonable optimism, with nevertheless some greater social and societal concerns regarding those from less privileged backgrounds).
- **Ireland, Portugal and to a certain extent Greece** (for the latter, at least in the middle to higher socio-professional categories), where positive visions

persisted, due in particular to economic and social progress achieved over the past 10 or 20 years – for the same reasons, **as Spain**, recovering from its disillusionment.

In the candidate countries studied, the same themes were globally present in comments, with an often more profound anxiety. In most of these countries, the general impression that prevailed – and was felt particularly painfully by those in middle to lower socio-professional categories – was not only of an unequal distribution of the economic cake or a vaguely threatening future, but actually of a real deterioration over the last 10 years: a gap between the privileged few and the great mass of the population without the existence of an intermediate middle class, crumbling public services, the disappearance of the safety net of the State, and growing uncertainty about the future.

The citizens of these countries **also noted the dissolution of social ties, the disintegration of the social fabric**, the rise in crime – while commenting more explicitly on the mediocrity of politicians and political leaders, who were sometimes even described as being at the core of the corruption poisoning the country. The observation of a gap between them and the countries of Western Europe, and the idea that this has not been narrowed at all, also added to the pessimism.

It is true that in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc the freedom acquired through the establishment of democratic government was welcomed by all, but in economic terms the tangible advantages of liberalism were scarcely in evidence except for the fact that there was a greater variety of consumer goods in the shops – which not everyone could afford. **Whilst many recognised that the new situation was likely to open up opportunities that did not previously exist for the youngest, most dynamic and best educated, most people did not fit this description.**

However there were differences between the candidate countries:

- **Among the most pessimistic were the Poles** (strong anxiety marked by fatalism), **the Hungarians** (feelings of real deterioration, expression of several causes of frustration), **the Slovaks** (a certain disillusionment in contrast to the hopes raised ten years earlier), **and the Latvians** (more optimistic about the future, however, in the middle to higher socio-professional categories).

- **The situations appeared more contrasted in the countries that had achieved a relatively high level of development, where recognition of the progress made and a measured optimism could be seen at least in the middle and upper categories:** Slovenia, Estonia, the Czech Republic (with a certain correlation in these countries between positive visions and young people) and Cyprus (in this case, concerns were less economic and more about the deterioration of the social fabric).
- **A last country stood out with its display of optimism:** Romania, where, despite negative observations about everything, or almost, of the situation at that time (economic, social and political) of their country, the majority of citizens surveyed displayed confidence in its resources, its potential and its ability to eventually overcome these numerous difficulties.

4.3.4. ... extending into so far preserved countries

A 2003 study on issues of public economic policy²¹ highlighted a further surge of gloom in several Member States, including in those that had seemed relatively safe from it two years earlier.

In the Southern countries where, until then, perceptions had been imbued with the progress achieved (Spain, Portugal, Greece to a lesser extent), as well as in Ireland, this progress now seemed to be moving into the background and giving way either to frustration at the gap that existed between them and the more developed Northern Member States, or to fears of recession (in Ireland). In Sweden, growing concern was noted in the middle to lower socio-professional categories – and real pessimism in these same groups was seen to be emerging in the Netherlands and Finland.

A more contrasted situation was noted in the candidate countries (all of which were included in the study for the first time). From an economic viewpoint, **rather positive opinions prevailed** on recent developments and the country's situation in Cyprus (despite a period of stagnation), in the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Estonia. Despite the existence of some negative points, the prevailing impression

21. "Citizens and public economic policies. A Qualitative Study in 15 Member States and the 13 future Member States and candidate countries". Study conducted by OPTEM for the Commission's DG Economic and Financial Affairs.

was that the economy was about to take off. The Hungarians were also seen to be (temporarily) less gloomy than before. In other candidate countries, the **vision of the situation at the time was quite or very negative, but a varying degree of optimism for the medium-term future** was emerging: it was very clear in Romania, and moderate in Malta, Slovakia and Lithuania. Despite serious problems, citizens could discern some first encouraging signs.

Uncertainty was greatest in three countries: Poland (fears of a shattered national economy due to the shock of enlargement, the risk of seeing the national market simply exploited by foreign businesses, continuing low standard of living leading to major frustration, hopes, of course, but also anxieties regarding membership of the European Union), Latvia (similar fears, hopes mingled with doubts about the future within the EU) and Bulgaria, in several respects (awareness of an inadequate base for economic take-off, little improvement in the lives of the people, greater hopes despite reservations about the prospect of joining the EU, but in the long term rather than in the short term).

Everywhere in Europe, in both Member States and candidate countries, despite very different starting points, concerns about economic and social factors were in reality of the same nature: they focused on employment, job insecurity, the deterioration of social protection and State services, the growing gap between the privileged few and the great mass of the population.

Also discovered – in this study as in another also including all these countries²² – **the growing malaise identified in 2001 at a societal level:** impressions of deterioration of values, of civic duty and respect for others, perceived increase in delinquency and insecurity (which was however, lower on average in the candidate countries), concerns relating to immigration (also to a lesser extent overall in the candidate countries than in the Member States, but with some exceptions: heightened concerns in Hungary, and also noteworthy in Poland, Malta, and Cyprus – in both parts of the country). **Everywhere, or almost, once again lack of confidence in the national public authorities in facing and resolving these problems was revealed.**

22. European Citizens and Freedom, Security and Justice. Qualitative Survey of Citizens of the 15 Member States and the 13 Applicant Countries, conducted by OPTEM for the Commission's DG Justice and Home Affairs.

4.3.5. In the last years, strong similar concerns everywhere in the EU

After enlargement, several qualitative studies conducted between 2005²³ and 2008²⁴, and then the most recent observations of OPTEM's partner institutes in 2011, confirmed the prominence of these concerns and their fairly high degree of homogeneity throughout the EU – in short, fears relating to the economic future of the country (and in many old Member States increased fears of competition from countries with low labour costs and more generally of the 'opening of borders'), to economic insecurity, unemployment and increasing stress at work, to the lack of prospects for young people, to threats to social benefits, to the disengagement of public authorities from their missions.

Among the old Member States, the Nordic countries remained overall least affected by general gloom, whereas conversely, morale deteriorated particularly in France, Austria, Italy, Portugal and Greece.

Among the new Member States, there was a greater trend towards optimism, at least until the crisis erupted, in Malta, Slovenia, Romania (despite a decline in relation to its once fabulous hopes) and Estonia, and most remarkably, there was a quite substantial positive trend in Poland. The Slovaks also displayed an improvement in morale. The citizens of most of the other new Member States remained distant – and the Hungarians wallowed in their concerns and frustrations.

4.4. Fears of a liberal economy going wrong

Whether or not they express it in these terms, the large majority of European citizens are in reality concerned about the excesses of a liberal economy that seems to them to be ever more indifferent to the conditions of mankind, and disconnected from the values embodied in the original philosophy of European integration. It can be seen that **this questioning does not date back to the advent of**

23. In 2005: "The Attitudes of the Citizens of the European Union Towards the Renewed Plan to Relaunch the Lisbon Strategy", conducted by OPTEM in the 25 Member States for the European Commission, Bureau of European Policy Advisers, Directorate General for Press and Communication.

24. In 2006: "The European Citizens and the Future of Europe. Qualitative Study in the 25 Member States" by OPTEM, at the request of the European Commission's DG Communication.

the economic crisis, as the increased anxiety in this respect has been detectable for two decades and became quite evident at the turn of the millennium.

In short, when one analyses citizens' expectations of Europe, it can be said that they remain consistent with the intention of the founding fathers, or with the triptych of President Delors: "competition that stimulates, cooperation that strengthens, and solidarity that unites". This Europe, whether referred to as Social Democrat, Christian Democrat (within the framework of clearly understood secularism) or whether it is known under another name, **has not disappeared from their field of vision. But, faced with an ever darkening horizon, Europe will have to reaffirm itself as such, for fear of betraying expectations that remain and seeing the present 'Eurogloom' transform into strong and long-lasting disillusionment.**

5. Factors of disillusionment linked to national collective mentalities

Despite real convergences noted in citizens' expectations, Europe in the making is still of course perceived through national prisms – that could constitute factors of disillusionment (already existing or possible) that are more or less serious depending on each case. Here, an attempt will be made to highlight the important characteristics of the different Member States – each one briefly presented in order of their joining the EU.

5.1. Founding Member States

Regarding **the French**, qualitative investigations conducted 25 years ago already showed their concern for the weakening power of their country, but they inclined to attribute it a form of cultural and intellectual supremacy for which Europe would be the 'natural' parade ground, in place of its global role of the past. It is quite clear that the growing unpopularity of the EU observed among them goes hand in hand with the end of the illusions of a 'French-style Europe' and the gradual loss of their country's influence within the Union and elsewhere over the past two decades. It is

difficult to see how this trend could be reversed in the foreseeable future, given the deep-rooted pessimism about the future in which they seem to be sinking.

For **the Germans**, in addition to being an economic factor of undeniable progress, membership of the European Community gave them some sort of identity of substitution for a German identity that people were reluctant to express 25 years ago, as it was still burdened by memories of the Nazi period. Considering themselves as loyal Europeans par excellence, paying their share on the nail without claiming domination, they nevertheless expressed some irritation towards the ‘less bright pupils’ of the European classroom and the subsistence of national selfishness. Today – and for the past fifteen years now – having freed themselves of the stigma of the past and now having to play a leading role, at least for economic reasons, they intend to make their presence felt in order to convert to their values of rigour the peoples and States who in their mind have remained insufficiently virtuous in this regard. The difficulty in doing so certainly inspires their current attitudes.

Another founding nation, **the Italians** had high expectations of a European integration that they envisioned as being very consolidated and that they hoped would quickly influence their lives in many respects. Without wanting in any way (or thinking they could) dominate it, and while they were irritated by the tendencies of other large European countries who wanted too much for themselves, they wanted to blend in with the others into a same Community, which, in their mind was being called upon to remedy the shortcomings of the national institutions which they felt were failing in their duty. Their disillusionment seemed to be linked to the slow pace of European unification in general and to the gap in relation to the major hopes they had placed in it to bring their country to a better running order.

The Dutch – in addition to recognising the obvious economic soundness of EU integration – saw in the European dimension a sort of ‘sounding board’ of the moral and humanistic values that to their mind their country embodied, and of which they claimed to be the guardians and defenders, allowing their message to be expressed more loudly and to be heard. A muffled frustration was also detected in the face of the domineering temptations of the large neighbours (French, German and British) constantly suspected of not acting ‘as good Europeans’ in the same way as the Dutch. Still claiming to be in favour of the principle of European unification (with

scores amongst the highest in the quantitative opinion indicators) but, as seen in several qualitative studies, in reality highly distrustful of a European harmonisation that would impose on them things that they refuse, they have over the past few years significantly improved their vision of the Union and their position within it. At this point should be mentioned their awareness of their closeness with their European neighbours, through the mirror effect of comparison with the United States of the Bush era. How this reactivated feeling of closeness can endure, in a period of crisis where Calvinist Puritanism seems once again to be very reluctant to accept the lax behaviour of others, seems to be a central question in the years to come.

The attitudes of their **Belgian** neighbours seemed to run a lower risk of disconnection in relation to the Union. They have once again become (admittedly after several years of a sharp drop in morale at the end of the 1990s) one of the countries displaying the most constant support. Citizens of a recent and fragile entity, as a State, having traded continuously with the neighbouring peoples throughout the centuries, they want a Europe with a broad sphere of responsibilities in which they could fit without any serious soul-searching. Undoubtedly, because of the delays and setbacks of European integration, they are less involved emotionally than in the past, but they remain unambiguously Europhile.

The same can be said of the **Luxembourgers**, and even more so undoubtedly for the citizens of a country that knows it is very small, but which is at the same time to a certain extent a European centre of gravity, immersed in both the Latin and Germanic cultures and able to play a role within the EU that exceeds by far the size of its population. This undoubtedly is enough to 'immunise' against the risk of serious frustration (and encourages consistent extremely positive opinions that are reflected in the scores of the quantitative indicators).

5.2. Member States that joined the Union in the 1970s

Quite the opposite of the last aforementioned countries, **the British** continue to a very great extent to feel uninvolved in Europe and to view the EU simple from a purely practical angle regarding the material advantages that it could possibly provide them. General de Gaulle's statement "Britain is an island" seems no less

true today than when he said it; and although its relationship with the “open sea” as mentioned by Winston Churchill is undoubtedly extending somewhat, there is still no sign that it is moving closer, psychologically “to Europe”. It is true that neither politicians nor the media are encouraging it.

In addition to being the source of real benefits that are widely recognised, **the Irish** have seen in their membership of the Union the means to escape a relationship that admittedly was pacified but still too exclusive with the former British coloniser. Their support for the European Union has globally continued. This, however, did not prevent a negative vote in the two referenda to ratify European Treaties. These negative votes were undoubtedly mainly provoked by the impression (whether it was justified or not) that they would be imposed new measures that they did not want, or at least that they did not want to approve without explanation. The memory of the struggles that they had to face to gain their independence is still very present in the collective mentality of the Irish, and they did not intend to sell out. In the context of crisis, the behaviour of the European Union or of some of their leaders towards them (welcome rescue measures, but pressure for higher taxation on businesses dismissed in the name of national independence) will affect the level of future Eurofavour – which should remain high.

The Danes, admittedly aware 25 years ago of the advantages of membership of the Community and of European cooperation for a country their size, then shifted to major reservations towards an entity that they felt jeopardised their social gains and their national model in which they took great pride. Progressively, but in a very real way, they left behind their ‘Eurodistrust’ – probably as their fears of standardisation were unfounded and they saw the actions of the Union draw inspiration from their own successes.

5.3. Member States that joined the Union in the 1980s

The first qualitative surveys that included **Greece**, in the early 1990s, highlighted among the citizens of this country a very widespread acceptance of the idea of European unification, once they had erased their persistent timidity in affirming themselves as (really) European (rather than ‘Eastern’), and despite some fears of

seeing themselves bound by collective decisions in which they have little weight. The importance of the European Union's contribution to the development of the country – the EU being a symbol of both democracy and modernity to accede to – was also largely recognised, even more so in the years that followed. The admission of the country into the Eurozone was at the time a very important symbolic event. The discovery of the suspicious circumstances in which this had occurred, then the ensuing economic catastrophe and the brutal nature of the conditions laid down for rescue measures, which seemed to have plunged the country even more into the doldrums, have caused deep distress to the Greeks and the painful questioning of their once very pro-European feeling. It is obvious that the evolution of their attitudes towards Europe in the future will depend on whether or not a solution is found to the crisis in which the country is currently sinking.

For the Spanish, their very recent accession to the Community was, in 1986, a fundamental historic step, a symbol of the recognition of Spain as a democratic State and a developed nation after 40 years of the Franco regime, and an open door to the future. Being aware of the efforts their country would have to make from this starting point, they saw Europe as the condition so that these efforts would be crowned with success. Always inclined to having globally positive attitudes (and aware of the benefits of the Union), they nevertheless alternated over the following decades between moments of great Eurofavour and others where frustrations re-emerged, linked to both the slow rate of catching up with more advanced countries and the lesser role played on the Community game board by Spain – a great country that had once reigned over a vast part of the world. The current situation of crisis and Spanish perceptions of the behaviour of dominant Member States towards them strongly reactivated these frustrations.

Even more favourably inclined for a long time were **the Portuguese**, extremely united in their understanding of the European purpose, at first experiencing their accession to the Community just like their Spanish neighbours, as a strong symbol of recognition, then extremely aware of the importance of support from the cohesion policy, and free of the nostalgia of a former great power that their neighbours had. Portuguese fears of continuing to 'lag behind' slowly started to spread, however, and the treatment they were given at the start of the crisis exacerbated feelings of injustice and indignation that had once been totally absent among them.

5.4. Member States that joined the Union in the 1990s

Following the example of the Danes, **the Swedes**, after their majority 'Yes' vote for their country's accession, displayed serious reservations concerning the EU, suspected of undermining the model of society that they had developed (although with less vigorous criticism). Having slowly realised that their fears scarcely founded, and even seeing their example being followed (i.e. for the environmental policy, at the time led by a Swedish Commissioner), they abandoned a lot of their reservations progressively to adopt a more positive position – undoubtedly without a lot of emotional investment, but in any case leading to reasoned support today.

The Finns were described above as being open to knowing and frequenting other Europeans 25 years ago, their accession to the Union almost 10 years later leading to the (psychological) opening up to which they aspired. Favourable to the Union without over-expressing their enthusiasm, yet with a real appetite, they partly succumbed to Scandinavian-style reservations (whereas the Scandinavian Member States were doing the opposite) by questioning, in particular, elements of the Union's governance and functioning. The recent spectacular progression of the 'True Finns' political party is the sign of a certain withdrawal and isolation – without however seeing extreme opposition to the Union from the majority of the population.

Austria gives the example of country that apparently entered the Union merrily (given the strong majority of 'Yes' votes to the ratification referendum) but where frustrations rapidly appeared. In caricaturing, it could be said that the Austrians joined the EU with the nostalgia of the splendours of the Hapsburg Empire, and of the relations that existed then with neighbouring nations, to find themselves with a country of less than 10 million inhabitants and lacking experience on the Community game board. Admittedly European expectations of Austria were and remain great, but they are bound to be quashed as long as this perception remains biased. Parochial tendencies are currently clear, both concerning solidarity towards the most affected Eurozone countries as well as extremely closed attitudes towards immigration. One might be tempted to think that attitudes relating to Europe will continue to waver while remaining imprinted with muted dissatisfaction.

5.5. Member States that joined the Union in 2004

Citizens of one of the largest new Member States, **the Poles**, in 2001, just a few years before entering the EU, were particularly anxious about not being able to overcome the shock of the transition, of finding themselves dominated by Western European countries or their businesses, of being treated as ‘second class’ Europeans, etc. The painful past of Poland, tossed between the neighbouring powers for so long, obviously had a strong bearing on the development of these attitudes. Positive expectations of the EU were indeed present, but the Poles were hesitant in expressing them, so to speak, for fear of being cruelly disappointed. The Poles remained in this attitude of distrust for several years after their accession, only to slowly emerge as the tangible positive effects of EU membership came to light, to find themselves among the most Eurofavourable of Europeans some 10 years after joining.

Initially with reservations, **the Czechs** remained so despite an improvement in their visions of the Union over several years, as the reality and the rapidity of progress since their accession to the EU did not appear to them with the same clarity. Perhaps they had been too optimistic in their aspirations to see their country very quickly recover the status it had had in the first part of the 20th century, that of a highly advanced industrial and technological country in Europe, the furthest East of Western countries, more than the furthest West of Eastern countries.

On the contrary, **the Slovaks**, after experiencing a period of relative disappointment several years after joining, in relation to the strong expectations generated after the end of the Communist Bloc, became more and more Eurofavourable (at least until new concerns were raised linked to the economic crisis and to the assistance requested of them for rescue operations, whose legitimacy they contest). Clearly playing a major role in this evolution was the feeling of being recognised by the other European countries and by the EU institutions: firstly by being taken in the first wave of enlargements even though it was initially planned for the second round, secondly by joining the Eurozone – before their closest neighbours.

The Hungarians took an opposite direction, initially driven by positive feelings about the idea of ‘regaining’ a Europe of which they had been at the heart as co-manager or administrator of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, they now seemed to

be sinking deeper into frustrations of old: in this instance the Treaty of Trianon that reduced them to the status of minor country in which parts of its own territory had been amputated, and which has not yet been totally 'digested'. More recently, the fact of having been, of all the Communist Bloc countries, the most advanced towards the West and of finding itself since accession in growing economic difficulty, then seeing nearby Slovakia joining the Eurozone, and witnessing some progress in Romania (which had been somewhat disregarded) awakened and exacerbated these frustrations. At the same time, there was the widespread idea that enlargement towards Hungary was only desired to reduce the country to the status of a mere market for Western products, often of a lower value and less authentic than national products. In short, a sort of conspiracy theory in which the country would be the prime victim – thus undoubtedly helping to explain the currently observed nationalist excesses.

It can be said of the **Baltic States** that the prospect of entering the European Union was subject to concerns and questions, at the same time as positive expectations (including that of safeguarding against the powerful neighbour that had kept them under its heel for half a century): those of small countries, far from the heart of Europe, quite uncertain of their potential place, worried about only having marginal influence, of putting their national culture in danger or even of having managed to free themselves from one enslaving 'Union' to find themselves out of their depth in another, admittedly pacific, but feeling just as hemmed in in another one.

Concerns were strongest **in Latvia**, with particularly heightened fears that the country would be unable to resist the shock of integration and of facing a Western-style market economy. **The Estonians**, already shifted towards new technologies following the example of their Finnish neighbours, showed more confidence in the ability of their country to achieve economic progress. At the same time, convinced of having a certain superiority, they had a tendency to keep their distance somewhat from the Union and other Member States, not unlike the Scandinavians. **In Lithuania**, initial expectations seemed to be relatively more serene and less streaked with reservations. Perhaps the fact of being a slightly larger country, of touching the borders with the great neighbouring Poland, with whom it once witnessed a union reigning over a vast territory spanning from the Baltic to the Black Sea, gave the Lithuanians more self-assurance.

Since their accession, the fears of finding themselves ‘colonised’ by this new Union have to a large extent been erased in those countries, but differences between them have also become more marked: sharp increase in Eurofavour coming from strong initial reservations in Estonia; sustained fears among Latvians of not ‘being up to scratch’; still quite open attitudes in Lithuania but with growing economic concerns these past years.

In Slovenia, a country of similar size, attitudes towards membership of the EU were originally among the most favourable – although never independent in their history, the Slovenians had quite a lot of confidence in their experience acquired over the centuries in dealing with neighbouring peoples and in sharing their destiny with them, and optimism – which was however less shared in the lower social classes and among young people – faded distinctly with the onset of the crisis which greatly dampened the enthusiasm of more recent years.

In Malta the idea could be put forward that joining the Union was fundamentally quite natural given that it was extending to almost all the continent, and that Maltese fears of not being able to adapt were limited – already having a market economy and a Western-style democratic political system, and having forgotten the temptations of the privileged relations with Russia and Libya of the Mintoffian era. The tangible benefits of membership of the Union – very directly visible undoubtedly on such a small territory – were quickly identified.

As for the **Cypriots** – who obviously have always regarded themselves as Europeans (or even as the very cradle of European civilisation for thousands of years) – the same factors helped their integration into the Union to take place without any major jolts and without creating resistance. But another element comes into play in the development of attitudes and explains the jerky evolution recorded, that of non-resolution of the ‘Cypriot issue’, for which the Greek Cypriots were expecting much of the EU. As for the Turkish Cypriots, they strongly desire to be full stakeholders in a Union seen as a guarantee of development and greater prosperity at the same time as a hope to resolve conflicts – and even the end of the stranglehold of Turkey, of its army and of the police forces linked to it. The eventful initiatives aimed at reunifying the country have also affected their attitudes.

5.6. Member States that joined the Union in 2007

It was said of the **Romanians**, in the first qualitative study that included their country in 2001, that they were passionately Euroenthusiastic. Aware of course of the numerous and serious problems that their country was struggling with, they displayed unwavering confidence in its ability to resolve them in the future, and in membership of the EU that was unanimously perceived as a historic opportunity and a pressing obligation. More deeply, this eminently favourable disposition also reflected the desire to re-establish the relations of the past with the rest of the continent, first of all with France and Italy: Bucharest being traditionally known as ‘Little Paris’, Romania’s former inclusion in the Roman Empire being still highly valued, the country gladly considering itself as a ‘an island of Latinness in a Slavic ocean’, etc. These attitudes remain even if favourable attitudes are no longer reaching the peaks of a few years ago, particularly since the shocks due to the crisis.

Since the first surveys conducted among **Bulgarians**, they have expressed more moderate cautious expectations of their membership of the EU: hopes firstly for economic improvement that is somewhat slow in coming about, for survival and then renewal of the weak business sector, but also of consolidation of the rule of law and of democratic structures. Aware of the fact that bringing these hopes to fruition would require time, they would like to see this happening more quickly and they are of course concerned about not seeing progress, as it has been undermined by the crisis. Emotionally close to the other Slavic countries (including Russia, to which their culture is close, and still held in high esteem for having helped to free them from Ottoman domination), but more open to the other European countries on the whole, the Bulgarians should continue to express realistic support for European integration.

Needless to say, reconciling reticent, concerned or disillusioned citizens with the European Union, or reinforcing the more favourable attitudes of others, means taking into account the deep-rooted feelings that the people of different Member States express about the Union, beyond rational arguments, however necessary they are, particularly during a difficult period where risks of withdrawal and isolation can increase.

Conclusion

It is not surprising that in the midst of economic and monetary crisis the opinion indicators concerning the European Union are in decline; it is in fact astonishing that they have not declined even further since the beginning of the crisis.

We are of course far from the summits of the Eurofavour of two decades ago, but only a minority of citizens display open hostility towards the EU, and expectations of it remain high.

Having widely understood the need to act together for countries that today are small or medium on a global scale, aware of their historic and cultural kinship, sharing the same values, the European citizens, on the whole, aspire to the same Europe.

In short, when one analyses citizens' expectations of Europe, it can be said that they remain consistent with the intention of the Founding Fathers, or with the triptych of President Delors: "competition that stimulates, cooperation that strengthens, and solidarity that unites".

This Europe is still a desired Europe, going against the excesses of unbridled economic liberalism.

But, faced with an ever darkening horizon, Europe will have to reaffirm itself as such, for fear of betraying expectations and seeing the present 'Eurogloom' transform into strong and long-lasting disillusionment.

The evolutions that have been observed recently in several countries, on the occasion of elections or government moves in that direction, may be the early signs of a wider policy reorientation possibly taking place at European level.

But it will also be necessary to put an end to the intergovernmental dissonance at work these past years to help heal the rifts that have appeared in public opinion in this respect, and reduce the temptations to withdraw into isolation.

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European Democracy in Action

Do the Europeans still believe in the EU?

Analysis of attitudes and expectations of EU public opinions over the past quarter century

Daniel Debomy's study is based on quantitative and qualitative surveys carried out at European level in order to measure the evolution of public opinions in relation to the EU.

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The study is mostly based on qualitative analyses, from which highly enlightening lessons emerge. For example, it indicates that Europeans as a whole have understood the need for a strong and closely-knit Europe and are predominantly aware of the existence of a historic and cultural community, with a core set of shared values, even if some of these values have distinguishing characteristics at times. In a context of concern linked to the abuses of economic liberalism, the Europeans also appear favourable towards a European Union with a broad scope of action. Factors of disillusionment do exist, however, and these vary depending on the Member States.

This study recalls that European integration cannot sustainably continue without taking public opinion into consideration, in order to avoid any attempts of inward-looking that could only be damaging, at a time when the EU more than ever needs to be united in a global context.

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