



# Flash Eurobarometer 528

## Citizenship and democracy

Summary



Fieldwork:

**April-May 2023**

Publication:

**December 2023**

Survey requested by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers and coordinated by the Directorate-General for Communication

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Flash Eurobarometer 528 – Ipsos European Public Affairs





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(DG COMM “Media Monitoring and Eurobarometer” Unit)

Project title	Flash Eurobarometer 528 Citizenship and Democracy – April-May 2023 Summary
Linguistic version	EN
Catalogue number	DS-03-23-161-EN-N
ISBN	978-92-68-03272-5 doi:10.2838/062
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<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer>

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## Introduction

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**2023 marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the entry into force of the Maastricht Treaty, which established the citizenship of the European Union.** EU citizenship and the rights it confers lie at the heart of the EU. Any person who holds the nationality of a Member State is automatically also an EU citizen. EU citizenship is additional to and does not replace national citizenship of a Member State. In line with Article 25 of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union, the European Commission reports every three years on progress towards effective EU citizenship. This year's report will take stock of developments in the area of EU citizenship since the last report was published in 2020.

**Securing free and fair elections and protecting democratic processes** has also been a priority for the Commission's actions for years. The Commission President's new push for European democracy led in 2020 to the **European Democracy Action Plan**. In the 2022 State of the Union address, President von der Leyen announced **a Defence of Democracy Package**.

The Flash Eurobarometer survey on EU citizenship and democracy builds on the work of previous Eurobarometer surveys, such as Flash Eurobarometer 485 (conducted in 2020).<sup>1</sup> On behalf of the European Commission, Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, Ipsos European Public Affairs interviewed a representative sample of citizens, aged 15 and over, in each of the 27 Member States of the European Union. Between 24 April 2023 and 9 May 2023, 25 722 interviews were conducted over the telephone (landline and mobile phones).

Survey data are weighted to known population proportions. The EU27 averages are weighted according to the size of the 15+ population of each EU Member State. Due to rounding, the percentages shown in the charts and tables do not always exactly add up to the totals mentioned in the text.

The country abbreviations used in this report correspond to:

BE  Belgium	FR  France	NL  Netherlands
BG  Bulgaria	HR  Croatia	AT  Austria
CZ  Czechia	IT  Italy	PL  Poland
DK  Denmark	CY  Rep. of Cyprus*	PT  Portugal
DE  Germany	LV  Latvia	RO  Romania
EE  Estonia	LT  Lithuania	SI  Slovenia
IE  Ireland	LU  Luxembourg	SK  Slovakia
EL  Greece	HU  Hungary	FI  Finland
ES  Spain	MT  Malta	SE  Sweden

\* Cyprus as a whole is one of the 27 EU MS. However, the 'acquis communautaire' has been suspended in the part of the country not controlled by the government of the Republic of Cyprus. For practical reasons, interviews are only carried out in the part of the country controlled by the government of the Republic of Cyprus.

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<sup>1</sup> See: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2260>

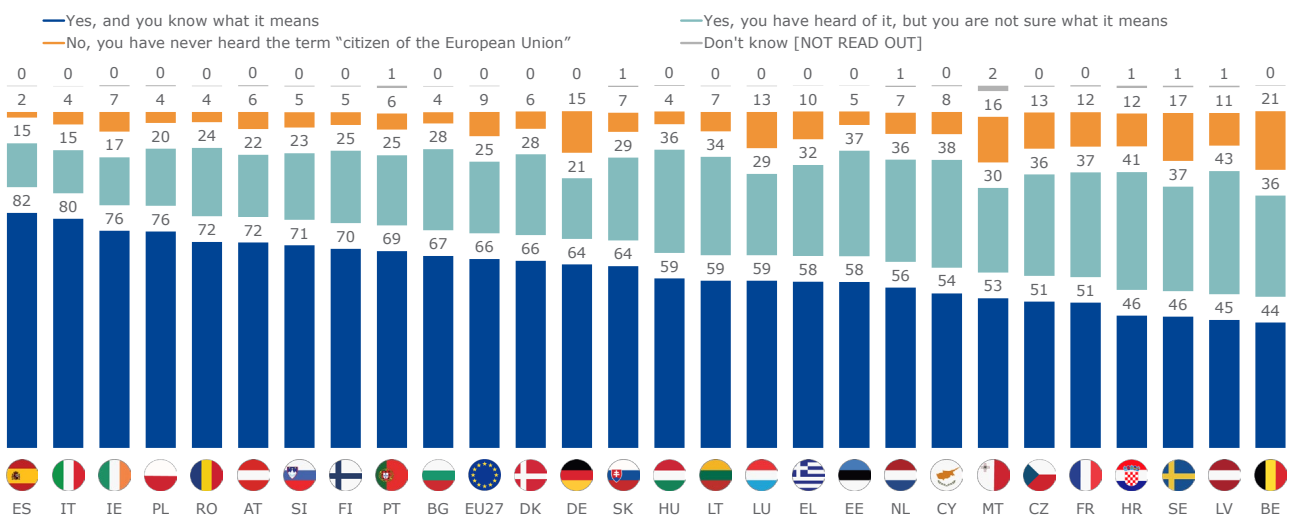
## Section 1. Awareness and understanding of EU citizenship

### 1.1. Familiarity with the term “citizen of the European Union”

**Two-thirds (66%) of respondents have heard of the term “citizen of the European Union” and know what it means.** A further 25% have heard of the term but are unsure what it means, while 9% have not heard of the term at all.

**There is considerable variation in familiarity with the term “citizen of the European Union” across the different EU Member States:** The proportion saying they have heard of it and know what it means ranges from fewer than 50% in Croatia (46%), Sweden (46%), Latvia (45%) and Belgium (44%), to around the 80% mark in Spain (82%), Italy (80%), Ireland (76%) and Poland (76%).

**Q1** Are you familiar with the term “citizen of the European Union”? (% by country)



Base: all respondents (n=25 722)

### 1.2. Understanding of how citizenship is obtained

**An overwhelming majority (93%) of respondents know that they are simultaneously citizens of the EU and their country of residence.** Somewhat lower majorities are aware that citizens of Member States do not need to apply to become EU citizens (74%) or that they cannot opt out of being EU citizens (67%).

**Analysis by Member State** reveals that awareness that **they are simultaneously citizens of the EU and their country of residence** holds at between 80% and 97% in all countries. Awareness that **citizens of Member States do not need to apply to become EU citizens** varies greatly by country. It is lowest in Romania (48%), Estonia (57%) and Greece (58%), and highest in Denmark (85%), Austria (85%) and Poland (84%). Similar country-based variation emerges for awareness that **citizens of Member States cannot opt out of being EU citizens**. The figure falls short of 50% in Latvia (43%), Romania (45%), Estonia (41%) and Greece (46%), whilst being highest in Austria (85%), Italy (84%) and Denmark (78%).



## Section 2. Awareness of rights associated with EU citizenship

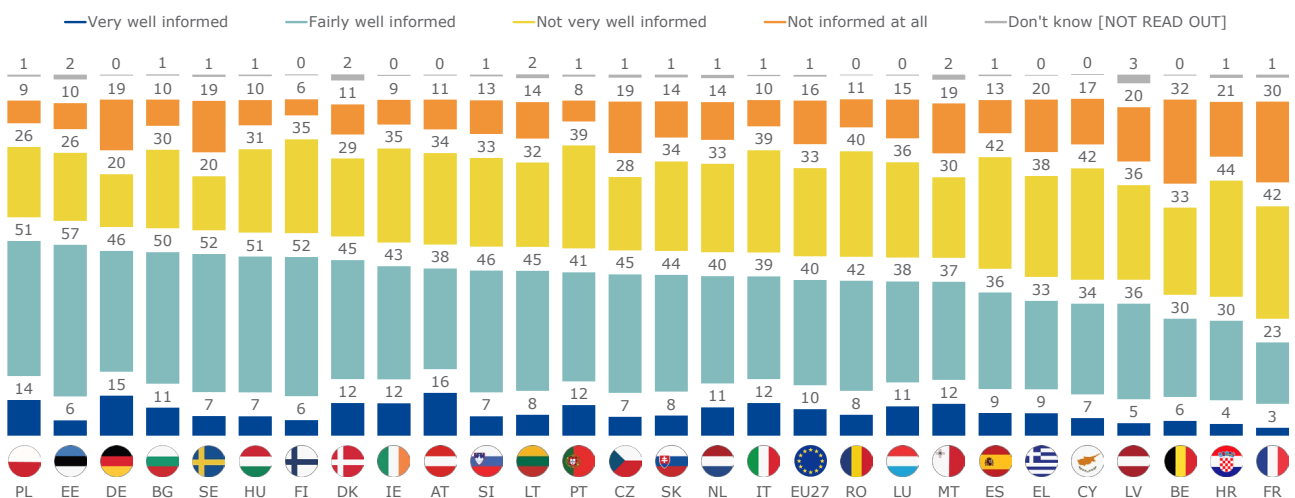
### 2.1. Overall awareness of rights as an EU citizen

Exactly half of respondents (50%) say they feel well informed about their rights as a citizen of the EU, while a third (33%) say they do not feel very well informed and 16% do not feel at all informed.<sup>2</sup>

At the Member State level, the proportion of respondents who feel well informed about their rights as an EU citizen ranges from a low of 26% in France, to just over 60% in Germany (61%), Estonia (63%) and Poland (64%)<sup>3</sup> – though in the majority of countries it lies at between around a third and half.

The average results show that just 10% of respondents feel **very well informed about their rights as a citizen of the EU**. In addition, the figure remains below the 20% mark in all Member States.

**Q2** How well informed do you feel about your rights as a citizen of the European Union?  
(% by country)



Base: all respondents (n=25 722)

<sup>2</sup> This question was only asked to those familiar with the term “Citizen of the European Union”. In the analysis, those not familiar with the term are included in the group that is not informed at all about their rights.

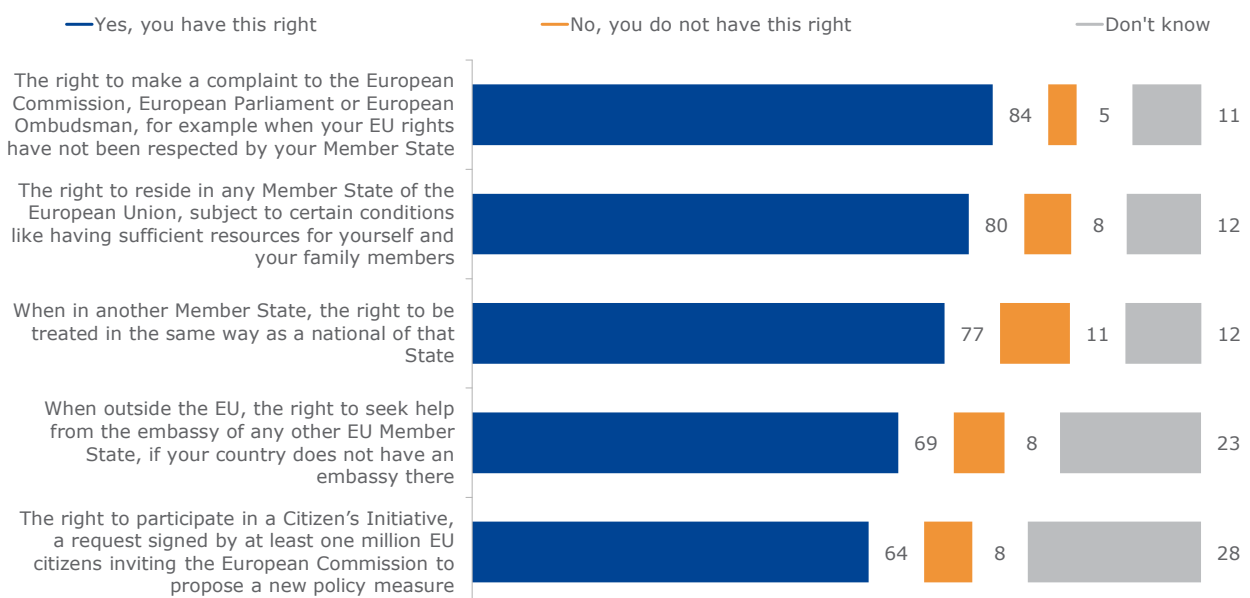
<sup>3</sup> Due to rounding, percentages for separate response options shown in the charts do not always exactly add up to the totals shown in charts and tables, or mentioned in the text.

## 2.2. Awareness of specific rights conferred by EU citizenship

**Respondents were presented with a list of specific rights conferred by EU citizenship and asked whether or not they thought each of these applied to them. While the proportion aware of each right consistently reached a majority, there is notable variation in the size of the majority.**

Around eight in ten are aware that they have the right to make a complaint to the European Commission, the European Parliament or the European Ombudsman (84%), and the right to reside in any Member State subject to certain conditions being fulfilled (80%). A slightly lower proportion (77%) recognise that, when in another EU Member State, they have the right to be treated in the same way as a national of that State. A lower proportion recognise that, when outside the EU, they have the right to seek help from the embassy of any other EU Member State (69%). More than six in ten respondents (64%) are aware of their right to participate in a European Citizens' Initiative, which was introduced by the Lisbon Treaty and became operational in 2012.

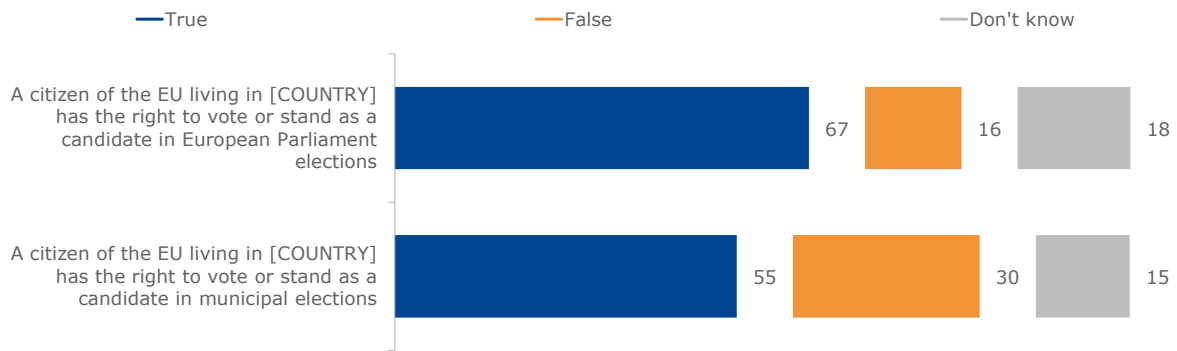
**Q4** In fact, all citizens of the EU Member States are “citizens of the European Union” since 1993. Do you know if, as an EU citizen, you have the following rights? (% EU27)



Base: all respondents (n=25 722)

About two-thirds of respondents (67%) correctly identify that a citizen of the EU living in their country has the right to vote or stand as a candidate in *European Parliament elections*. An appreciably lower majority – 55% – correctly identify that such a citizen has the right to vote or stand as a candidate in *municipal elections*. Indeed, almost a third (30%) believe this to be *untrue*, while a further 15% are unsure.

**Q5** I have two more statements to read out. Please tell me whether you think they are true or false. If you don't know, please say so. (% EU27)



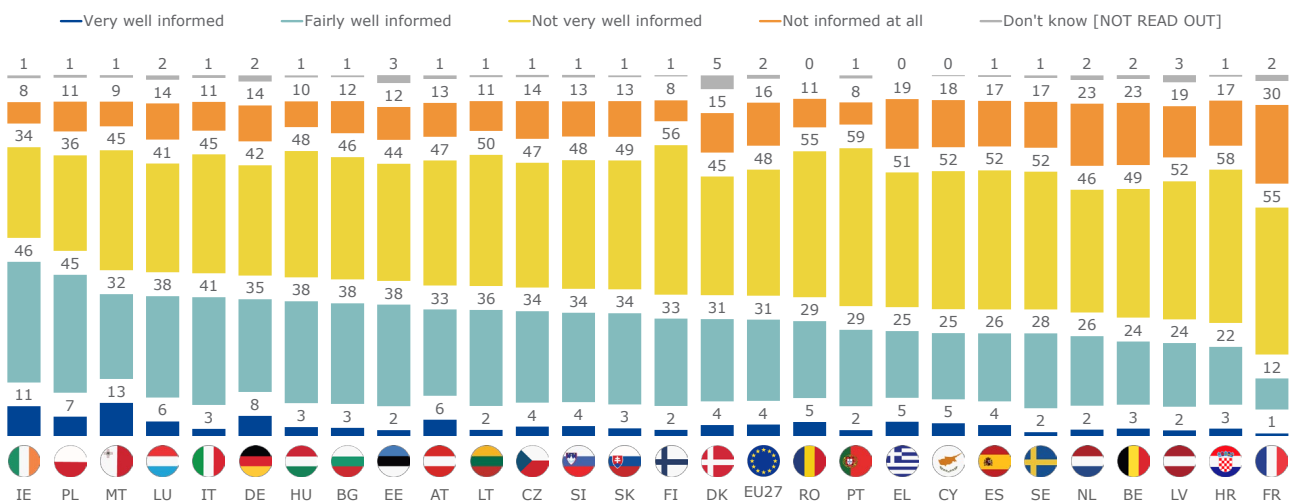
Base: all respondents (n=25 722)

### 2.3. Awareness of what to do if rights are not respected

**Approaching two-thirds of respondents in total (64%) do not feel well informed about what to do if their rights as an EU citizen are not respected.** Meanwhile, just over a third feel either fairly well informed (31%) or very well informed (4%).

**The proportion not feeling well informed rises to two-thirds or higher in nearly half of Member States,** namely Romania (66%), Portugal (68%), Greece (69%), Sweden (69%), Cyprus (70%), the Netherlands (70%), Spain (70%), Latvia (71%), Belgium (72%), Croatia (75%) and France (85%). In contrast, Ireland and Poland stand out as the only Member States where a (slim) majority of respondents feel well informed (57% and 52% respectively) – though even in these countries, only relatively small minorities feel *very* well informed (11% and 7% respectively).

**Q6** How well informed do you feel about what you can do when your rights as an EU citizen are not respected? (% by country)



Base: all respondents (n=25 722)

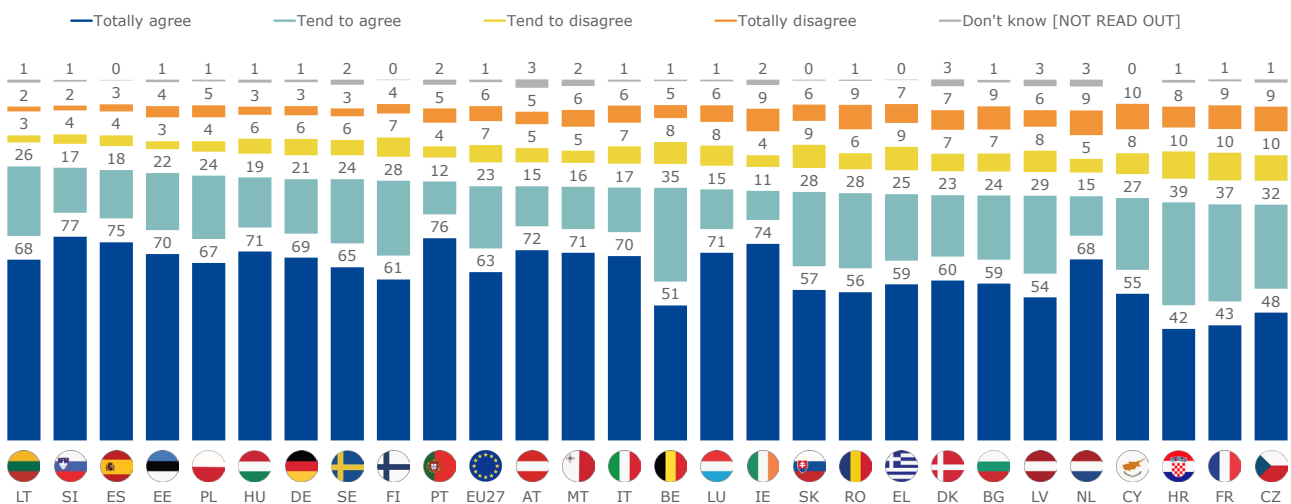
## Section 3. Attitudes towards EU citizenship

### 3.1. Self-identification as a citizen of the EU

Almost nine in ten respondents (87%) agree that they feel they are citizens of the European Union, with over six in ten (63%) *totally* agreeing. Just 12% disagree with the statement.

The proportion who feel they are citizens of the EU holds at least 80% in all Member States and, indeed, rises to 90% or higher in seven – Germany (90%), Hungary (90%), Poland (91%), Estonia (92%), Spain (93%), Lithuania (94%) and Slovenia (94%).

**Q8** Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements:  
**You feel that you are a citizen of the European Union** (% by country)



Base: all respondents (n=25 722)

### 3.2. Attitudes towards the free movement of citizens within the EU

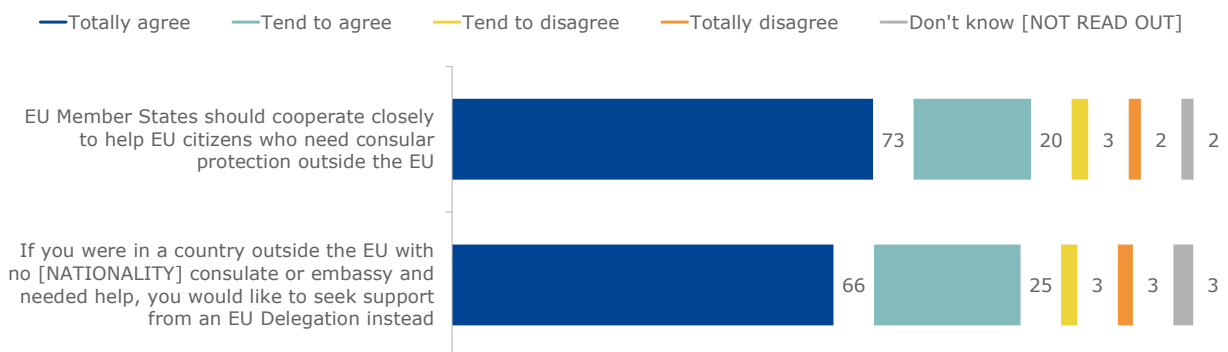
A large majority of respondents hold positive attitudes towards the free movement of EU citizens within the EU. About nine in ten (89%) agree that the policy personally benefits them, with about seven in ten (69%) *strongly* agreeing. Similarly, over eight in ten (83%) agree that the free movement of EU citizens benefits the economy, with about half (51%) *strongly* agreeing.

Again, this predominantly positive picture is reflected in virtually all Member States. The proportion agreeing that they **personally benefit from the free movement of EU citizens** stands at over 80% in all but one country (Cyprus, where it stands at 78%), and rises to over 90% in nine countries. The proportion agreeing that the **free movement of EU citizens benefits the economy** exceeds 80% in all but four Member States – Belgium (80%), Czechia (78%), Latvia (77%) and France (73%) – and reaches 90% in Ireland, Luxembourg, Poland and Portugal.

### 3.3. Views on means of supporting and protecting EU citizens outside of the EU

**A large majority of respondents – 93% – agree that EU Member States should cooperate closely to help EU citizens who need consular protection outside the EU. A similar proportion (91%) agree that, if they were in a non-EU country where their national government had no consulate or embassy and they needed help, they would seek support from an EU Delegation instead.**

**Q8** Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements:  
(% EU27)



Base: all respondents (n=25 722)

Agreement with the statement that **EU Member States should cooperate closely to help EU citizens who need consular protection outside the EU** holds at over 90% in all but two Members States, Denmark and France, where it is only marginally lower at 88%.

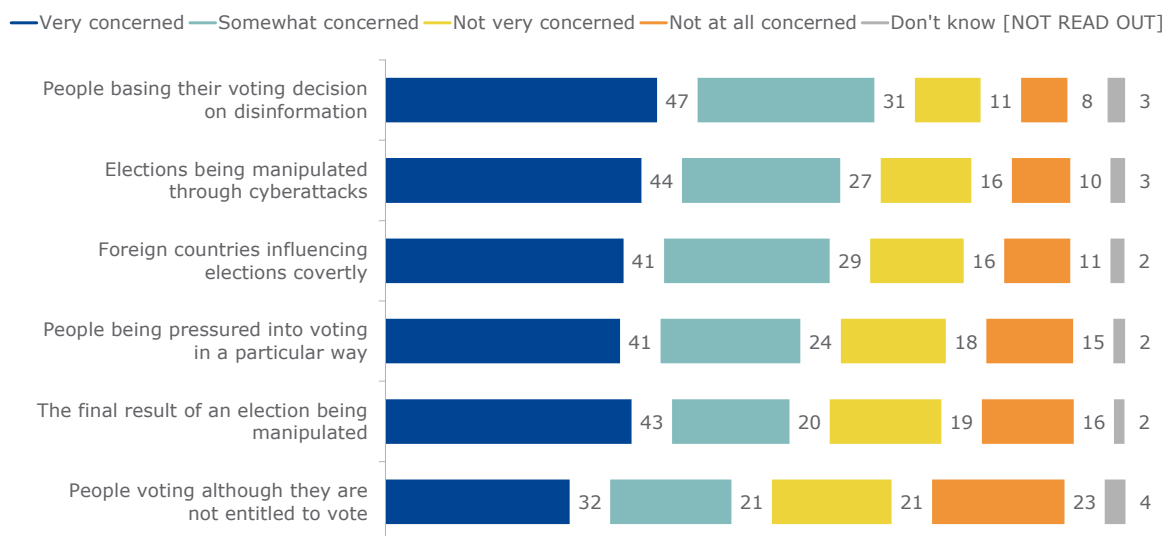
For the statement that, **if they were in a non-EU country where their national government had no consulate or embassy and they needed help, they would seek support from an EU Delegation instead**, slightly more varying levels of agreement are found across the Member States, ranging from 81% (in Latvia) to 98% (in Spain). Still, in more than half of the countries the figure remains above the 90% mark.

## Section 4. Attitudes towards electoral issues and foreign interference

### 4.1. Concerns about electoral issues

**The survey uncovers a high level of concern about various forms of interference in EU elections.** Indeed, almost eight in ten respondents (78%) are concerned about disinformation influencing people’s voting decisions, with almost half (47%) *very* concerned about this. Around seven in ten are concerned about elections being manipulated through cyberattacks (72%) and about foreign countries influencing elections covertly (70%). Alongside these concerns, more than six in ten respondents are also worried about being pressured into voting a particular way (65%), and about the final results of an election being manipulated (63%). A slimmer majority (53%) express concern about people voting when they are not entitled to.

**Q9** In the context of elections in Europe, how concerned or not are you about the possibility of each of the following events? (% EU27)



Base: all respondents (n=25 722)

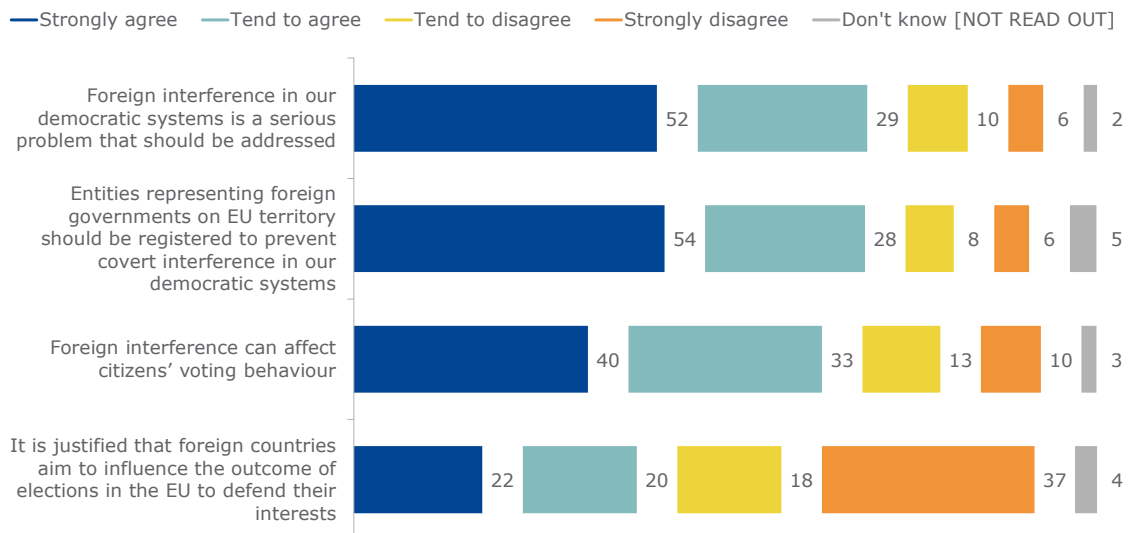
**Concern about people basing their vote on disinformation, about elections being manipulated through cyberattacks, and about covert foreign influence holds at a majority level in all countries.** For the other forms of interference, more widely varying levels of concern are found. For example, the proportion of respondents concerned about the manipulation of final election results ranges from 31% to 79%. Similarly, the proportion concerned about people voting when they are not entitled to do so ranges from 17% to 70%.

## 4.2. Attitudes towards foreign interference in democratic system

About eight in ten respondents (81%) agree that foreign interference in our democratic system is a serious problem that should be addressed, and over seven in ten (74%) agree that such interference can affect citizens' voting behaviour. Views are somewhat more divided on the question of whether foreign countries are justified in aiming to influence EU election outcomes to defend their interests: 42% agree that they are justified, while 55% disagree.

Still, there is strong majority support for tackling such covert interference in our democratic systems. About eight in ten respondents (81%) agree that entities representing foreign governments should be registered to prevent the problem.

**Q10** The following statements are about interference by foreign countries in the politics and democracy of the European Union and its Member States. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the statements? (% EU27)



Base: all respondents (n=25 722)

The proportion agreeing that **foreign interference in our democratic system is a serious problem** holds at over eight in ten in all Member States with the exception of the Scandinavian countries, and Hungary and Romania, where it ranges from 69% (in Finland) to 75% (in Sweden). The proportion agreeing that **foreign interference can affect citizens' voting behaviour** similarly holds at a majority level in all countries and, indeed, is notably higher than average in Slovakia (80%), Croatia (82%), Slovenia (83%), Sweden (83%) Cyprus (84%) and Czechia (85%).

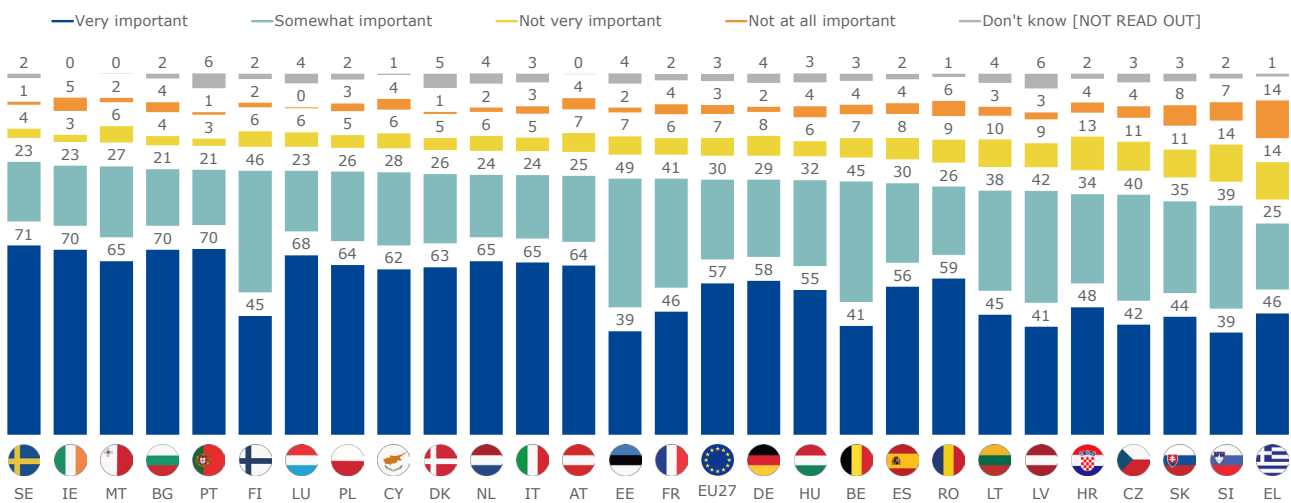
## Section 5. Views on the role of civil society

### 5.1. Perceived importance of civil society in democratic debate

Almost nine in ten respondents (87%) think the role of civil society (associations, NGOs) is important in promoting and protecting democracy and common values, including in terms of fostering a well-informed and pluralistic democratic debate. Almost six in ten (57%) think the role of civil society in this regard is *very* important.

The proportion who see the role of civil society as important remains above the 80% level in all but three Member States – Greece (71%), Slovenia (77%) and Slovakia (79%), where it is only a little lower. In nine Member States, the proportion rises to 90% or higher, those being Cyprus (90%), Luxembourg (90%), Poland (90%), Finland (90%), Bulgaria (91%), Portugal (91%), Ireland (92%), Malta (92%) and Sweden (94%).

**Q11** How important is the role of civil society (associations, NGOs) in promoting and protecting democracy and common values, including in terms of fostering a well-informed and pluralistic democratic debate? (% by country)



Base: all respondents (n=25 722)

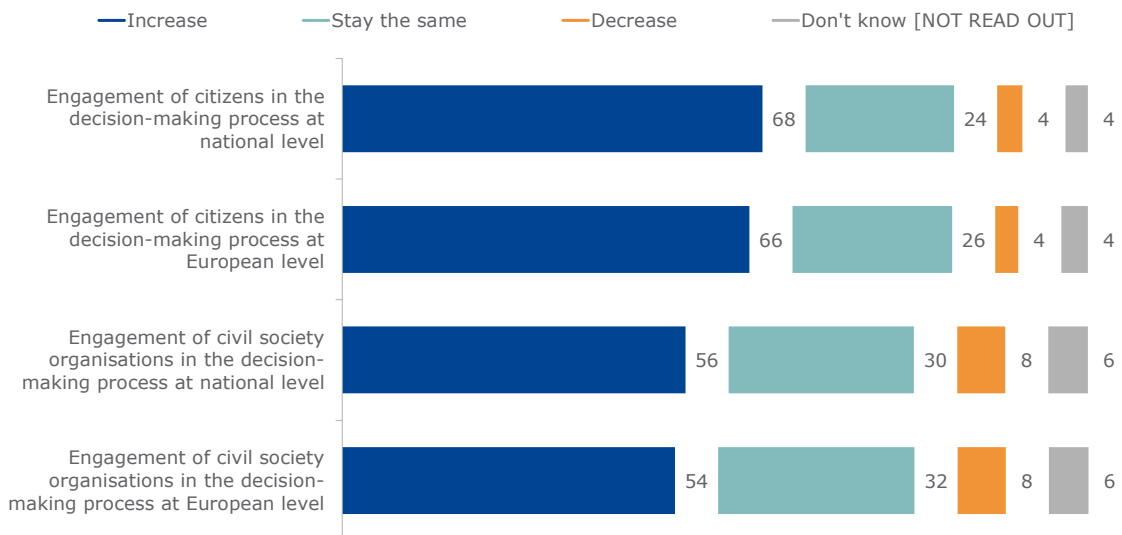


## 5.2. Views on the future role of civil society & citizen engagement

**More than half of respondents think there is a need to increase the engagement of *civil society organisations* in the decision-making process at the national level (56%) and the European level (54%).** Meanwhile, around a third feel the extent of organisations' engagement should remain the same as at present (30% for the national level, and 32% for the EU level), and around one in ten think it should decrease (8% in each case).

**There is a greater appetite still for the increased engagement of *citizens* in the decision-making process at the national and European level.** Around two-thirds of respondents are in favour of this (68% for the national level, 66% for the EU level), while around a quarter favour a continuation of the status quo (24% for the national level, 26% for the EU level). Only a small minority feel citizen engagement should be decreased at either level (4% in each case).

**Q12** Do you think there is a need to increase or decrease each of the following? (% EU27)



Base: all respondents (n=25 722)



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