



# Border Protection and Freedom of Movement

What people expect of European  
asylum and migration policies



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Catherine de Vries & Isabell Hoffmann

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**Description**

The Eurozone crisis has pushed reform of the European Union (EU) to the forefront of political debate. How can a Union of 28 states with a population of over half a billion be reformed to weather future economic crises and political challenges? Finding an answer to this question is extremely difficult not only because current reform proposals are so varied, but even more so because we lack insights into the preferences for reform amongst national elites and publics. Although EU support has interested scholars for over three decades now, we virtually know nothing about public support for EU reform. Current research focuses almost exclusively on the causes of support for the current project and fails to provide a sufficient basis for effective reform decisions. Surely, the feasibility and sustainability of EU reform crucially hinges on the support amongst national publics. *eupinions* examines public support for EU reform by developing a theoretical model and employing cutting-edge data collection techniques. Our findings will aid policy makers to craft EU reform proposals that can secure widespread public support.

# Executive Summary

The majority of Europeans would like to see European asylum and migration policies that have been given the go-ahead by both the EU and the member states. They are especially interested in preserving the right to travel and in protecting the EU's external borders, and they think that member states should work together to help the new arrivals. Furthermore, the majority of Europeans believe that states which refuse to bear their share of the burden should have to pay the price. This is demonstrated by the Bertelsmann Stiftung's latest eupinions survey. eupinions conducts regular polls in all European member states designed to ascertain what European citizens think about current political issues. The present survey is devoted to their views on asylum and migration policies.

The results are more or less unequivocal.

- 79 percent of European citizens believe that the European Union should have a common European policy on migration. 52 percent believe that the EU should be primarily responsible for this issue. 27 percent say that the responsibility should be shared by the EU and the member states. 79 percent of Europeans also consider the freedom of movement to be of great importance, and believe that it should be defended at all costs.
- 87 percent believe that the EU has a common duty to protect its external borders.
- 79 percent of European interviewees believe that asylum-seekers should be distributed fairly among the member states of the European Union.
- 69 percent of the interviewees believe that EU financial support should be reduced if member states refuse to accept their fair share of refugees.

A closer look at the data reveals a divide between public opinion in the old and in the new member states (2004 Eastern Enlargement of the EU).

- Only 54 percent of the citizens in the new member states think that asylum-seekers should be fairly distributed (versus 85 percent in the old member states).
- And only 41 percent of the interviewees in the new member states think that countries which do not want to take in their fair share of asylum-seekers should have to pay a financial penalty (versus 77 percent in the old member states).

Defending the rights of EU citizens; organizing burden-sharing; protecting the external borders; and devising a common European approach to asylum-seekers and migration. This is what the majority of Europeans think policymakers should be doing. A clear majority of the interviewees believe that Europeans are going to have to enhance the level of cooperation in order to meet these demands. 60 percent are convinced that we are going to need more political and economic integration. That is 2 percent more than in July 2015.



*In Focus*

# Asylum and Migration Policies

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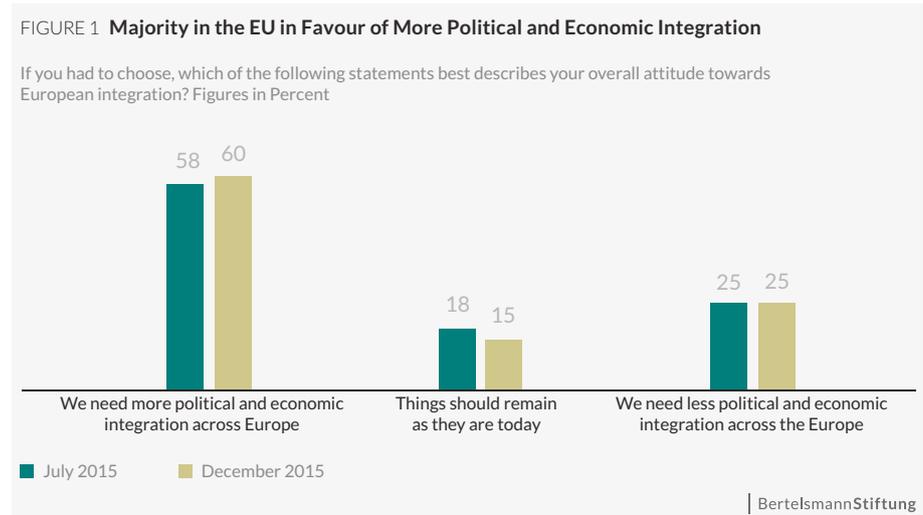
The refugee crisis first began to dominate the European policy debate in the late summer of 2015, although for many years it has been gaining momentum in the southern Mediterranean. Countries such as Spain and Italy have had to grapple with the fact that thousands of people are willing to risk their lives in dangerous sea crossings in order to reach the European Union. Unfortunately, many die in the attempt. In recent years, the Italian government in particular has repeatedly attempted, in the European Council, to persuade the heads of state and government to treat the situation as a pan-European problem. In the public perception the situation in the southern Mediterranean only became newsworthy whenever there were large shipwrecks, harrowing images, and numerous casualties. The situation changed completely as a result of the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Syrians who moved in the general direction of central Europe via Turkey, the Mediterranean, Greece, and various Balkan countries. The sheer number of the new arrivals and indeed the large amount of people who followed their example, make it clear that individual countries very quickly reach their political and organizational limits as they attempt to deal with the situation internally and externally. A joint approach would seem to be the best solution. However, in the European Union months of bitter wrangling once again lie between understanding an issue and doing something about it. At least that is true when we consider the political actors. But is it also true of the citizens of Europe?

In eupinions #2016/01 we interviewed European citizens in order to ascertain their views on asylum and migration policies. Their answers are unequivocal. In so many words they want to retain freedom of movement and to protect the external borders. And if they could, they would assign the responsibility for this to the European Union.

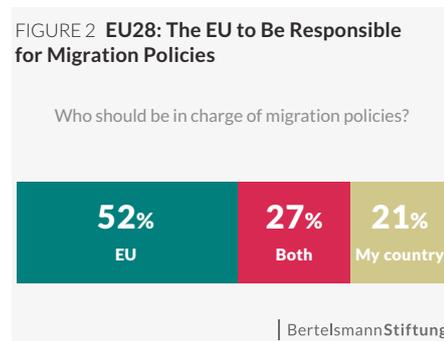
Several times a year eupinions conducts representative surveys of European public opinion on current political topics. In eupinions #2016/01 we interviewed 11,410 European citizens in all parts of the EU. The survey was conducted in December 2015.

In what follows we look at the data in greater detail. We first evaluate a set of five questions on asylum and migration policies, with especial emphasis on political responsibilities, goals and the distribution of tasks. Then we examine the attitude of Europeans to new arrivals in the EU.

In eupinions #2015/01 we were able to demonstrate that the majority of the citizens of the European Union are of the opinion that in future European integration will have to be deepened. When asked to define their general attitude to European integration in July 2015, 58 percent answered, “We need more political and economic integration in Europe.” In December 2015 60 percent were of this opinion, a rise of 2 percent. (Figure 01)



But what happens to such convictions when we start to talk about a specific policy area? We attempted to find out by asking, “Who should be responsible for migration policy?” Possible answers were 1) The European Union, 2) the EU and my country, and 3) my country. Figure 2 shows that a small majority, namely 52 percent, believes that the EU should be in charge of and responsible for migration policy; that 27 percent say that the EU and the member states should share the responsibility for migration policy; and that 21 percent would prefer their country to have sole responsibility for migration policy.



If one examines the data in greater detail, one notices that there is a fairly high degree of consensus on this question, even if one analyses the results on a country-by-country basis, or in terms of old and new member states. In all of the six largest member states of the EU (Germany, France, the UK, Poland, Italy and Spain) there is a majority in favour of assigning responsibility for migration issues to the EU. The UK is the big exception. The British were the least willing to assign

responsibility to the EU (35 percent), and the most willing to assign it to their government (41 percent). The Italians (61 percent) were the strongest supporters of the EU being in charge. In Spain those who want to assign sole responsibility

to their government form the smallest cohort (9 percent). (Figure 03)

If one differentiates the results on the basis of old and new member states (going by the 2004 Eastern Enlargement of the EU), one comes to the conclusion that the responses to this issue are rather similar. In the new member states slightly more interviewees would like to assign responsibility for migration policy to the EU (56 percent versus 50 percent). On the other hand, slightly more interviewees in the old member states are in favour of divided responsibility (28 percent versus 21 percent). In both segments 22 percent are in favour of sole responsibility for their countries. (Figure 04)

79 percent of Europeans would like to see the EU playing a responsible role in migration policy. So let us look at two factors which are of crucial importance in this regard, i.e. freedom of movement and border protection.

First of all there is the question about freedom of movement. It refers to one of the central pillars of the European Union, the Schengen area, and seeks to elucidate its importance for Europeans. It reads as follows. “The right for people and goods to move freely within the European Union is important and needs to be protected. Do you or do you not agree with this statement?”

The answer is unequivocal. Europeans consider freedom of movement to be of exceptional significance. 79 percent say that it is important and needs to be protected. (Figure 05) However one looks at the data, the picture remains the same. Sometimes the majority is unambiguous, as in the case of the United Kingdom with its 60 percent approval rate, and sometimes the majority is overwhelming, as in the case of Poland with its 90 percent approval rate. (Figure 06) The picture does not change if we look at the responses from the old and new member states. 77 percent of the interviewees in the old member states want to preserve and protect the Schengen area, and in the new member states the figure is as high

FIGURE 3 **Lowest Approval Rate for EU Responsibility in the UK**

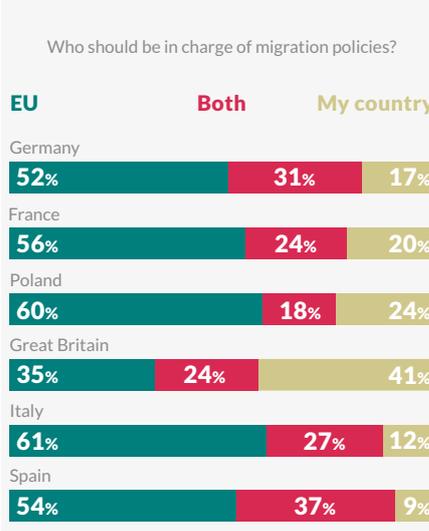


FIGURE 4 **Even Greater Approval for EU Responsibility in the New Member States**

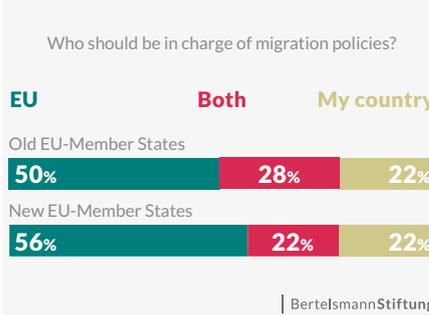
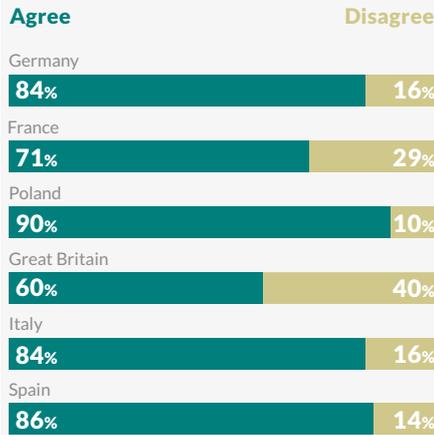


FIGURE 5 **EU28: Freedom of Movement to Be Protected**



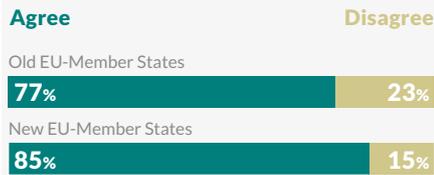
**FIGURE 6 Highest Approval Rate in Poland, Lowest in UK**

The right for everyone and everything to move freely in the European Union is essential and should be protected.



**FIGURE 7 Freedom of Movement Even More Popular in New Member States**

The right for everyone and everything to move freely in the European Union is essential and should be protected.



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as 85 percent. (Figure 07) This means that citizens whose states are not members of the Schengen area (United Kingdom, Bulgaria, Romania, etc.) regard its protection and the associated freedom of movement to be of great importance.

Does the picture change when one asks Europeans to say what they think about joint border protection? No. In fact, if anything it becomes even clearer. 87 percent of European Union citizens are convinced that the EU needs joint border protection. (Figure 08) On a country-by-country basis the numbers fluctuate between an 82 percent approval rate (Germany) and a 91 percent approval rate (Italy). (Figure 09) 91 percent of the interviewees in the new member states want joint border protection, as do 87 percent in the old member states. (Figure 10) European citizens believe that there is a self-evident need for joint border protection. This is also true of citizens whose nation-states border on non-EU states and which would thus have to accept this kind of joint border protection on their territory, e.g. Italy (91 percent), Spain (87 percent) and Poland (91 percent).

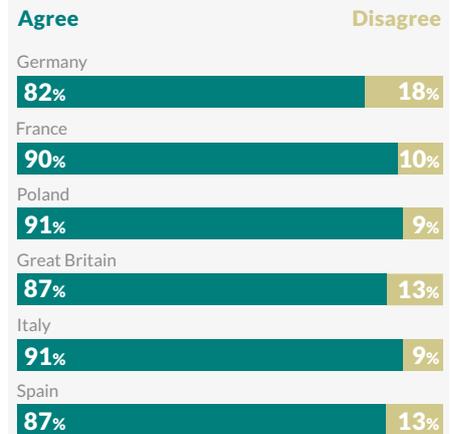
**FIGURE 8 EU28: EU Needs Joint Control of the External Border**

The European Union needs a common border control regime.



**FIGURE 9 High Support For Joint Border Controls in the Member States**

The European Union needs a common border control regime.



**FIGURE 10 Very High Support For Joint Border Controls in the New Member States**

The European Union needs a common border control regime.



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But joint border protection is not going to stop people from asking the European Union to protect them. How should we deal with them? Should they be the sole responsibility of the member states in which they arrive? Or should the EU member states deal with them jointly?

79 percent of European citizens believe that asylum-seekers should be distributed fairly among the EU member states. (Figure 11) In western Europe the views on this subject are fairly consistent. However, significant differences emerge from a comparison of east and west, and in the country-by-country analysis there is an outlier, Poland. (Figure 12)

In the new member states there is still a slender majority (54 percent) in favour of burden-sharing. However, this does not include the responses from Poland. Only 46 percent support burden-sharing, whereas 54 percent reject it. (Figure 13)

The responses to the next question, which examines the possible consequences of a refusal to accept burden-sharing, are very clearly differentiated. “Member states which do not accept their fair share of migrants should receive less European funding. Do you or do you not agree with this statement?”

69 percent of EU citizens are of the opinion that a denial of solidarity should lead to a reduction in financial assistance. (Figure 14) However, both the country-by-country analysis and the comparison of east and west reveal that there are profound discrepancies. The Italians (87 percent), the Germans (84 percent) and the Spaniards (76 percent) are most obviously in favour of the idea that there should be negative consequences if there is a denial of solidarity. The Poles, on the other hand, are most clearly opposed to it. 64 percent reject the idea that financial support ought to be reduced if member states refuse

FIGURE 11 **EU28: Asylum-seekers Should Be Distributed Fairly**

The number of asylum seekers should be distributed among all EU Member states in a fair manner.



FIGURE 12 **Lowest Support for Burden-sharing in Poland, Highest in Italy, Germany and Spain**

The number of asylum seekers should be distributed among all EU Member states in a fair manner.

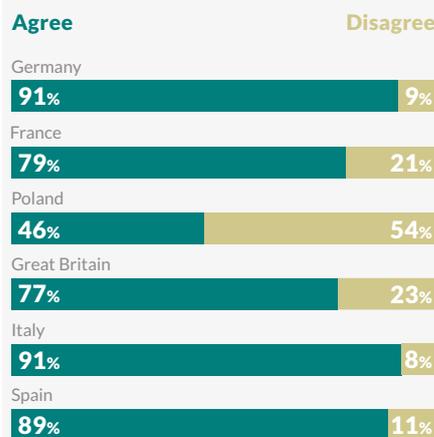


FIGURE 13 **Lower Support for Burden-sharing in the New Member States**

The number of asylum seekers should be distributed among all EU Member states in a fair manner.

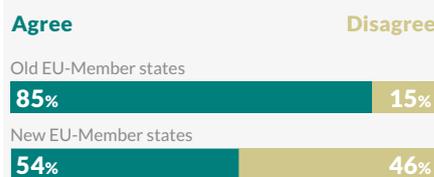


FIGURE 14 **EU28: No Burden-sharing, Fewer Subsidies**

Member states that do not accept a fair share of migrants should receive less European funding.



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to admit migrants. (Figure 15) In the comparison of east and west the figures are 77 percent and 41 percent. 77 percent of the citizens in the old member states believe that a denial of solidarity should have financial consequences. Only 41 percent of citizens in the new member states are of this opinion. (Figure 16)

Thus we can say that there is a general consensus among Europeans when one asks them about European migration policy, the preservation of freedom of movement, and the protection of external borders. Furthermore, a majority support the principle of solidarity and burden-sharing, even if there are countries in which national public opinion constitutes an exception to this rule. When it comes to the consequences, the views expressed in the old member states do not coincide with those of the new member states.

Does this mean that the Europeans are particularly open-minded with regard to migration? We asked three questions in order to ascertain their views. One of them is about the criteria which govern the asylum process, one is about the impact of migration on the welfare state, and one is about the feelings of alienation that are generated by the waves of immigration.

A different picture emerges. A majority of the Europeans believe that the criteria which govern the asylum process should be strictly applied. 54 percent disagree with the statement that “The state should grant asylum in a generous manner.” (Figure 17) The country-by-country analysis reveals that disagreement ranges from 32 percent (in Spain) to 63 percent (in Germany). However, the Spanish result is a downward outlier that paints a particularly magnanimous picture. (Figure 19)

When all is said and done, a majority of EU citizens do not believe that the foreigners in their country are exactly among the top performers. Most of them

FIGURE 15 **Clear Majority of Poles Against Reduction in EU Subsidies**

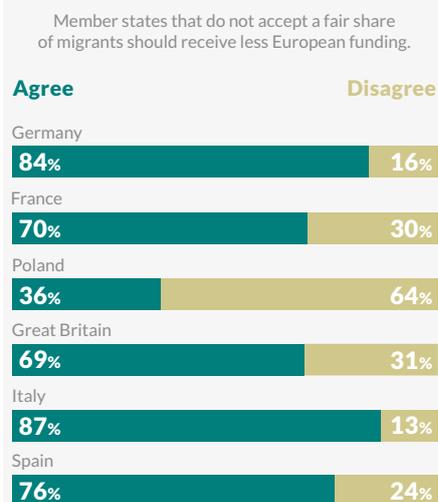


FIGURE 16 **Little support for “Fewer Subsidies If Burden-sharing Is Rejected” in the New Member States**



FIGURE 17 **EU 28: Majority Against Generous Asylum Rules**

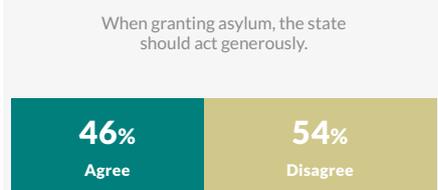


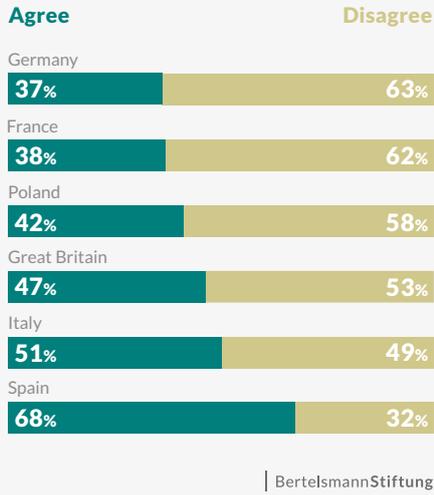
FIGURE 18 **EU28: Majority Believe that Foreigners Are a Burden On the Welfare System**



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FIGURE 19 **Spain Most Generous, Germany Least Generous Attitude to Asylum Issues**

When granting asylum, the state should act generously.



(58 percent) believe that foreigners in their country constitute a burden for the social security systems. (Figure 18) The country-by-country comparison paints a very uniform picture. Only the Poles and the Spaniards deviate from the mean. In Poland 71 percent of the interviewees believed that foreigners constituted a burden, whereas only 46 percent were of this opinion in Spain. (Figure 20)

Half of the Europeans suffer from feelings of alienation. Exactly 50 percent agree with the following statement. “There are so many foreigners in my country. Sometimes I feel like a foreigner myself.” (Figure 21) In the country-by-country analysis the Italian and Polish responses are conspicuously different. 70 percent of the Italian interviewees and no more than 29 percent of the Poles agree with this statement. (Figure 22) That should not (or perhaps it should) come as a surprise, inasmuch as Poland, when compared with other European countries, has a low percentage of foreigners. In 2014 the number of foreigners in the EU had reached 6.7 percent, but in Poland it had reached only 0.3 percent. Thus Poland has the lowest percentage of foreigners in the EU.

FIGURE 20 **Poles Especially Anxious About Impact of Foreigners on Welfare System**

Foreigners are a burden on my country's system.

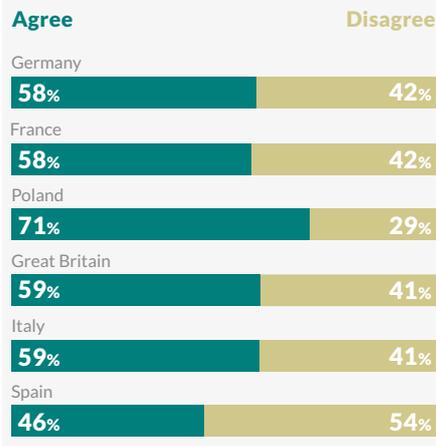


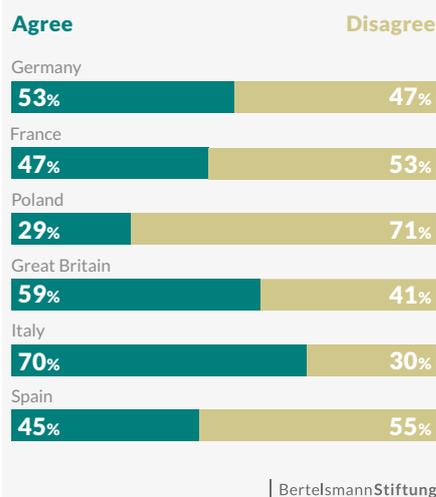
FIGURE 21 **EU28: Half of Europeans Have Feelings of Alienation**

There are so many foreigners in my country, sometimes I feel like a stranger in my own country.



FIGURE 22 **Italians Feel Most Alienated, Poles Least Alienated**

There are so many foreigners in my country, sometimes I feel like a stranger in my country.





# Summary

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Europe's politicians are once again confronted with political realities which they can no longer ignore, even though they do not seem to have the energy to jointly deal with them. Once again the European electorate is witnessing a protracted and bitter struggle. The reason that is often put forward to explain this incapacity to jointly face a common problem is the electorate, which supposedly cannot bear this kind of burden. Interestingly enough our data shows that the electorate is a long way ahead of the politicians who keep referring to it. Citizens have expressed what they see as necessary with the utmost clarity. With regard to both the contentious issue of freedom of movement and the contentious issue of border protection, they want protection, and not procrastination.

Protecting achievements and securing borders: Is that a fundamental European attitude on display, or merely a way of holding on to what one has acquired in the past, as long as it does not cost anything? The figures demonstrate that it is not only unjust but indeed wrong to suspect EU citizens of being no more than fair-weather Europeans. A clear majority of Europeans can understand the principles of solidarity and burden-sharing among the member states of the European Union. There is even a clear majority in the EU for sanctions as a response to a denial of solidarity. It is not surprising that this majority approval is not popular in the new EU member states. When all is said and done, they are the largest recipients of EU subsidies and have most to lose if such a principle were to become the rule. For this reason it is perhaps less surprising that 59 percent are against it, and more surprising that 41 percent of the citizens of the new member states are in favour of it, despite the possible setbacks.

The question of joint border controls also shows that the idea that joint action is going to have certain consequences will not necessarily transform passionate Europeans into recalcitrant Europeans. An EU-wide approval rating of 87 percent is impressive. If one follows the debate on the governmental level, one might be forgiven for thinking that approval is inevitable within the internal EU states, whereas the population of states with EU external borders is rather sceptical about proposals of this kind. The opposite happens to be true. The new member states have the largest share of the EU's external borders. 91 percent of their inhabitants support joint border controls. So do the Italians (also 91 percent) and the Spaniards (87 percent).

Of course there are contentious issues and contradictions. Poland is a good case in point. The Poles want freedom of movement and border protection come what may, but they do not want to take in asylum-seekers, and they certainly do

not want to give up subsidies. Moreover, an inexplicably large number of Poles are worried about the burden of foreigners on their welfare state. However, the percentage of foreigners in Poland is only 0.3 percent.

This may seem rather odd, but it merely masks a really interesting fact. In the case of Poland, the inhabitants of the new EU member states, and all others who view the principle of burden-sharing with suspicion, it is true to say that their love of freedom of movement clearly exceeds their dislike of burden-sharing.

It is also an interesting fact that the Europeans attach so much importance to freedom of movement, although most of them do not like immigration. They make no bones about the need for border protection. Nor about their cautious attitude to migration and the possible consequences (social security system, feelings of alienation in daily life). However, they do not seem to have such reservations when it comes to citizens of other EU countries. And if they do have such reservations, it does not stop them from saying that freedom of movement is more important than their craving for splendid isolation.

2016 is still in its infancy, but it seems clear that it is going to be a fateful European year. What is at stake is not the common currency. It is the Schengen area and freedom of movement. European citizens are not the unknown factor in this process. The political elites are the unknown factor. The message sent out by European citizens is loud and clear. They want efficient European solutions. They want the EU to be responsible for these solutions. They want to keep the Schengen area and freedom of movement. They want common protection for the common border. And they are not afraid of the consequences of joint action.

The politicians of Europe should see this as a challenge and an incentive. The citizens have shown that there is a will, and it is now up to the policymakers to show that there is a way.

# Method

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**T**his report presents an overview of a study conducted in December 2015 on public opinion across 28 EU Member States. The sample of n=11.410 was drawn across all 28 EU Member States, taking into account current population distributions with regard to age (14-65 years), gender and region/country. To obtain census representative results, the data were weighted on the above demographics based on Eurostat statistics. An Iterative Proportional Fitting ('Raking') algorithm was applied to adjust the marginal distributions of the sample to those obtained from the official demographics along the relevant weighting variables. The weights were not capped/trimmed by the procedure. The resulting minimum and maximum weights were 0.4761 and 1.8860. An estimation of the overall design effect based on the distribution of weights was calculated at 1.08 resulting in an effective sample size of approximately 10,565. Calculated for a sample of this size, the margin of error would be +/-0.95 percent at a confidence level of 95 percent.



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