

PRESS RELEASE

NEW Chatham House study: *The Future of Europe: Comparing Public and Elite Attitudes*

- **Major European survey sheds new light on leaders' thoughts and public mood**
- **Findings reveal what divides and unites Europeans**
- **Debate on EU future must recognise diversity of views**

A major Chatham House study examining European attitudes on issues from identity and integration to the future of the EU has been released – a year on from Britain's vote to leave.

Based on a unique survey of more than 10,000 members of the public and 1,800 'influencers' from politics, the media, business and civil society, the study compares these 'public' and 'elite' attitudes within and across 10 EU countries.

The Future of Europe: Comparing Public and Elite Attitudes reveals both significant divisions and threads of commonality across the continent. Importantly, it shows a lack of consensus among the elite over future EU integration - and a pronounced divide within the public on issues of identity. It highlights the split in attitudes between elites and the public over Europe's future, but also reveals a surprising alignment in their attitudes in areas such as European solidarity and the EU's successes and failures.

Its authors argue that Europe's leaders must 'engage frankly with political realities' and do more to address the gap between their own attitudes and those of the public on deep social challenges around integration and identity. They add that the study contains 'important implications' for the debate over Europe's future, which should be reframed to reflect the 'profoundly different outlooks' across the continent.

Some key findings from the survey reveal:*

- **The elite are split on whether the EU should have more powers.** 37% think the EU should get more powers, 28% support the status quo, while 31% think the EU should return powers to member states
- **The public are much less likely to feel they have benefited from the EU.** Only 34% of the public feel they have benefited from the EU, compared with 71% of the elite. A majority of Europeans (54%) think their country was a better place to live 20 years ago
- **48% of the public and 62% of the elite think Germany plays a positive role in the EU.** 28% of the public and 23% of the elite disagree
- **Elite respondents were most likely to identify peace as the EU's greatest achievement, while for the public it was freedom of movement** - but both groups identified the same top five achievements: peace, the Schengen area, freedom of movement, the single market and the single currency

- **At majority of the public (55%) and a plurality of the elite (43%) thought another member state will leave the EU within a decade.** Among the elite sample, politicians are the only sub-group where a plurality disagree with this
- **The public and elite are committed to an EU based on solidarity.** 77% of the elite and 50% of the public think that richer member states should support poorer member states. Only 18% of the public and 12% of the elite disagree

Thomas Raines, co-author, and Research Fellow on the Europe Programme at Chatham House,

said: *'With the improving economy and relative political stability that could follow this year's elections we could see a once-in-a-generation opportunity for genuine political and economic renewal in the EU. But to move towards that, leaders will first have to step beyond a one-dimensional debate over 'more' or 'less' Europe. Our data reveals a broad diversity of perspectives among Europeans, across the continent as a whole and between states, that goes beyond a binary split. The debate over Europe's future should be reframed to reflect the breadth of views across the continent and give space to critics – delegitimizing opposing voices and values may only serve to bolster anti-EU sentiment.'*

Co-author, Professor Matthew Goodwin said: *'More than ever, it's essential to understand how those wielding influence across Europe think about its key challenges, how their views differ from the wider public, and how points of disagreement between the two sides could possibly be addressed. The survey contains unique data with important implications for the debate over Europe's future. It reveals the extent of divisions between the general public and this 'elite'. To move from crisis management to political and economic renewal, European leaders can't ignore the fact that they'll need to do more to address the gap between their own attitudes and those of the public, particularly when it comes to solving deep social challenges. Likewise any attempt at progress towards deeper EU integration will be undermined if it fails to rest upon broad public consent as well as having the support of the elite.'*

The findings:

- **Reveal a continent split along three dimensions. First, between the 'elite' (individuals in positions of influence across the media, business and civil society) and the wider public:** despite alignment between the two groups on EU solidarity, EU democracy and the EU's past achievements and failures, the data also shows pronounced differences in political values, feelings towards the EU, and attitudes to diversity and immigration. **Second, a pronounced divide within the public:** particularly on issues of identity. The political challenges resulting from these diverging values are pulling Europe in two different directions and likely to persist for many years, even after economic growth is restored and sustained. **Third, among the elite: with a lack of consensus on important questions about the EU's direction.** While the influencers overwhelmingly feel they have benefited from the EU, they are far from united in their attitudes to further integration.

- **Have important implications for the debate on Europe's future.** The absence of a clear majority view on the way forward brings home the need for a discussion that recognizes the diversity of perspectives over Europe's future, and moves beyond crude binary notions of 'more' or 'less' Europe. Genuine political renewal in Europe will require a more open, imaginative and, even, a more conflictual debate.
- **Suggest divides among publics across states are as significant as divides between states.** Ideas for a 'multi-speed' Europe do not reflect this fault line, which cuts across the continent. This suggests the need for an approach to future integration that is built on more than an EU 'core' of closely integrated states and a looser 'periphery'.
- **Suggest that fixing the European economy will not fix the challenges of EU integration:** those wishing to bolster public support for the EU cannot focus only on strengthening its role in improving the economic welfare of EU citizens. **Those who lead EU institutions, as much as national politics, need to invest greater effort into closing the gap between their own attitudes and those of their citizens towards deeper social challenges,** such as fears over the loss of national identity, the pressures of immigration and the perceived unequal access to opportunity. **Debates over the future direction of the EU need to be reframed** so that they address concerns of a perceived threat to national traditions and cultures, as much as to economic performance.

ENDS

National Data Belgium

- Belgians are the least likely to feel they have benefited from being in the EU (only 21% of the public sample thinks they have benefitted from membership). More than twice as many (47%) feel they have not benefited.
- 44% of Belgians would like to see powers returned from the EU to member states, close to an EU average for the public sample of 48%. 26% would like the EU to have more powers, and 30% prefer the status quo. Support for returning powers to member states is highest in Greece (66%) and lowest in Spain (39%).
- A plurality of Belgians (40%) think richer member states should financially support poorer member states, slightly below the average in the EU, while 25% disagree. Support for this is highest in Greece (72%) and lowest in France (35%) though in every country surveyed, more support this than oppose it.
- Belgians are split on how to respond to the refugee crisis: 38% support mandatory quotas for countries based on their size, 25% think individual states should decide how many to accept, and 37% think no EU member state should have to accept any refugees. 68% in Greece, 66% in Italy, 62% in Germany, 52% in Spain, 35% in France, 19% in Hungary and 15% in Poland accept mandatory quotas.
- Belgians are most likely to think the Euro currency is the greatest achievement of the EU. France is the only other country where the Euro has top place. Germans and Austrians are

most likely to choose peace, Spaniards and Greeks are most likely to choose free movement, and Poles, Italians and Hungarians most likely to choose the Schengen area.

- In Belgium, more people feel more positively than negatively about Germany's role in the EU (49% feel positively, while 22% feel negatively). In comparison, in Italy, 50% of the public feel negatively about Germany's EU role, and in Greece it is 80%.

Notes to Editors:

For more information, or to arrange an interview, please email Sabine Deboosere at DEBOOSERE.S@Kbs-frb.be or phone +32 (0) 2 549 02 41

The report examines the political trends shaping politics across Europe and outlines what the survey data demonstrate about attitudes to the EU, as well as the state of domestic and European politics and society. The final chapter considers the implications of these results for the future of the EU.

The survey was conducted in between December 2016 and February 2017 across 10 countries: **Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom.**

***EU averages are calculated with the UK data excluded.**

The paper is authored by Professor [David Cutts](#), Associate Fellow, [Matthew Goodwin](#), Visiting Senior Fellow, and [Thomas Raines](#), Research Fellow, with the Chatham House Europe Programme.

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Methodology:

Kantar Public, on behalf of Chatham House, conducted two surveys. Fieldwork for the **general public** survey was conducted using online panels between December 2016 and January 2017 among a representative sample of the population in 10 European countries (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom), with a sample size of at least 1,000 per country. Quotas were applied on age, gender and region, and deviations were corrected with post-stratification weights. The total sample size was 10,195.

The **elite** survey was conducted between January 2017 and February 2017 in the same 10 countries. They were identified using four broad categories: politicians (local, national, European), news journalists, business leaders (from a range of small, medium and large companies) and civil society leaders (NGOs, associations, trade unions or universities). The survey was conducted predominantly by phone. In some countries, some interviews were conducted face-to-face or online. The total sample size was 1,823 (between 160 to 205 per country).