

# Actually European!? 2022

## Citizen Expectations towards German EU Policy at the "Zeitenwende"

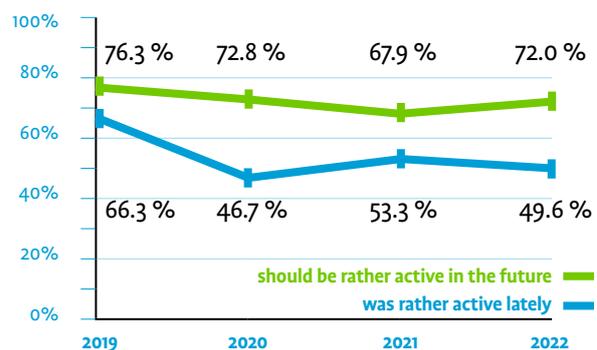
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Russia's invasion of Ukraine marks a "Zeitenwende", a watershed moment, for Europe as a whole and it demands an adjustment of German European policy specifically. The European Union's initial reaction to Russia's war was as fast, substantial and united as never before in the history of the bloc. However, disagreements between the member states (e.g. on energy embargos) have emerged since then. In this context, this year's *Actually European!?* study examines how German citizens evaluate the actions of the German government and the EU and what expectations they have of Germany's role in Europe. The long-term study also surveys what Germans perceive to be the country's role within the EU for the fourth year in a row.

### THE MOST RELEVANT FINDINGS OF THE REPRESENTATIVE SURVEY<sup>1</sup>

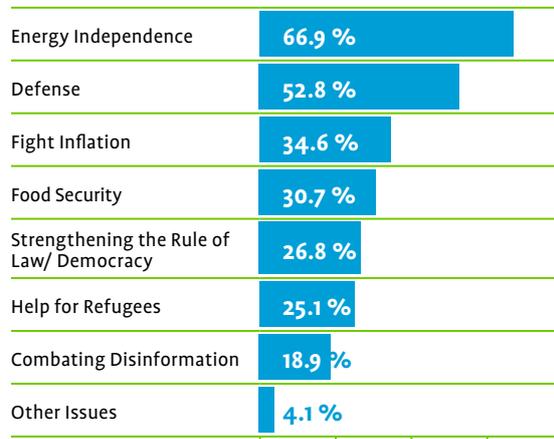
- Germany should be more active in the EU:** Less than half of German citizens (49.6%) currently perceive their government as being active in the EU, while 40% regard their government as less so. For the future, 72% of respondents would like to see Germany assume a more active role. In addition, 68.3% support the German government pursuing a cooperative, rather than a dominating, approach to politics in Europe.
- Independent energy supply is top priority after Russia's invasion:** The EU's prompt joint response to Russia's war of aggression is met with high approval among the German population: 72.1% say that the EU's reaction is appropriate. For the near future, Germans believe that independence from Russian energy imports is the most urgent issue (66.9%) within the EU. Other high-priority areas include the defense capabilities of EU member states (52.8%), fighting inflation in the EU (34.6%), food safety (30.7%), and defending the rule of law and democracy (26.8%).

Rating Germany's role in the EU over time, 2019-2022



<sup>1</sup> The opinion research company Civey conducted an online survey of 5,000 people for this study in April 2022. The findings are representative of the German population aged 18 and over. The questionnaire was developed, among other things, on the basis of feedback from focus groups held in 2019 and 2021. The statistical error is 2.5%.

Following Russia's attack on Ukraine, what are the most urgent issues facing the EU? (Max. 3 answers)



- Majority in favor of new EU investments:** A total 85.2% of Germans would welcome the introduction of a new EU investment fund. Among them, 37.6% prefer a fund for energy independence; 37.5% would like to see funds for energy independence as well as defense; and 10.1% prefer a fund to finance defense capacities alone. Only 11.4% oppose a new common investment instrument. As a source of funding, 49.4% favor the introduction of EU taxes (e.g. digital tax); 47% prefer contributions from member states. Moreover, 48.1% of Germans favor more flexibility for future-oriented investments on the national level, while 33.4% prefer strict budgetary discipline in the EU and 18.5% are undecided.
- Steady approval of EU membership:** Similar to the previous year, two-thirds of German citizens (66.2%) see more advantages than disadvantages in their country's EU membership. Compared to 2021, appreciation for the political benefits of the EU has increased: 63.7% (+ 4.2%) of respondents believe that Germany can better achieve its political goals with the EU than without. By contrast, approval of the economic benefits of EU membership has slightly decreased: 48.8% (- 4.5%) believe that in purely economic terms, the benefits of an EU membership outweigh the costs. 46.4% (+ 3.8%) believe that the costs outweigh the benefits, which can be attributed in part to the overall surge in economic uncertainty among the German population.

## EXPECTATIONS TOWARDS GERMAN EUROPEAN POLICY AT THE "ZEITENWENDE"

Based on the survey's results, the study identifies the following three areas as main avenues for future German EU policy:

- More active role in the EU:** Not only German citizens expect their country to play an active role in shaping the EU, many EU partners are also demanding Germany to live up to its responsibility. A proactive role means clearly more than just being a mediator between different positions. Initiatives are now needed especially to foster an independent energy supply (embedded in the European Green Deal) and rebuild Europe's security architecture.
- Strengthening Europe's ability to act:** Only an EU that is able to act will master current and future threats and challenges. On the one hand, this means increasing European sovereignty in areas such as energy supply, the economy and defense. On the other hand, the EU's ability to act can be strengthened by introducing more efficient decision-making processes, such as the expansion of majority voting in the European Council (this is also a demand of the Conference on the Future of Europe). A third important prerequisite is a strong commitment to the EU's core values: the rule of law and democracy. Both must be defended and strengthened in all member states.
- Investing in Europe's future:** The ability to act also depends on fiscal means and tools available and the current challenges facing the EU, gaining more independence in the energy sector and expanding defense capabilities, require further financial investments. Germany's citizens approve of new common investment measures. The EU should therefore establish more own sources of revenue, such as a CO2 border tax, digital service tax or plastic tax. Member states must also be given more flexibility to make future-oriented investments at the national level. The Stability and Growth Pact should, for example, be adjusted to treat investments in decarbonization separately (e.g. via a "Green Golden Rule") instead of treating them in the same way as other less forward-looking expenditures.