

# Actually European!? 2023

## Citizen Expectations towards German EU Policy in the Context of Crisis and Transformation

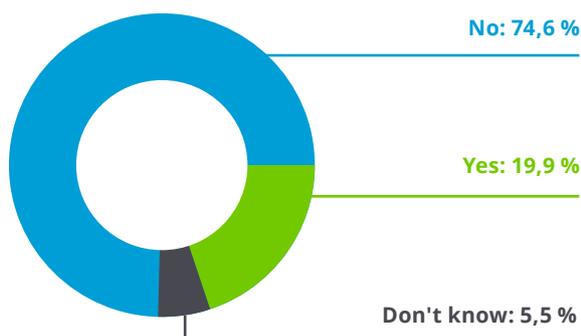
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In its coalition agreement, Germany's current government committed itself to an "active EU policy" and promised to shape Europe in a "constructive" way. The past year however was dominated by crisis management in the wake of Russia's war of aggression. The EU, in its support of Ukraine or in the area of energy policy, proved to be capable of fast and common action, though its room for manoeuvre was often limited to the crises. Its defence capabilities and decarbonization of the economy still present enormous challenges. Against this political backdrop, the fifth edition of the long-term study *Actually European!?* analyzes how German citizens assess their country's role in the EU and what they expect from their government.

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

- **Promise to constructively shape Europe not yet fulfilled:** 74.6 % of German citizens believe that their government has not yet fulfilled its promise to constructively shape EU policy. 19.9 % say this promise is being kept (see Fig. 1).

Fig. 1: Is the German government fulfilling its promise to constructively shape EU policy?



- **Germany should be more active in the EU:** 51.6 % of Germans perceive their government as being recently "less active" in the EU, 37.1 % perceive it as being active – a decrease of 12 % compared to the previous year. For the future, 66.6 % would like to see Germany assume a more active role. In addition, 69.8 % support the German government pursuing a cooperative, rather than a dominating, approach to politics on the EU level.
- **Defence and energy policy are top priorities:** When asked about the three most important priorities for the EU today, respondents most often chose common defence capabilities (54.6 %) and energy independence (50.6 %). Other pressing issues include fighting inflation, strengthening the rule of law, fighting climate change and strengthening social security.
- **Majority in favor of EU fund for green industry:** 55.8 % of Germans are in favor of a joint EU investment fund to promote climate-neutral industries. 35.4 % are against

<sup>1</sup> The opinion research company Civey conducted an online survey of 5.000 people for this study in February 2023. 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.

this idea. Apart from AfD voters, a cross-party majority supports the fund, although approval rates vary greatly (see Fig. 2).

Fig. 2: Should EU member states establish a joint green industry investment fund? Total and by party

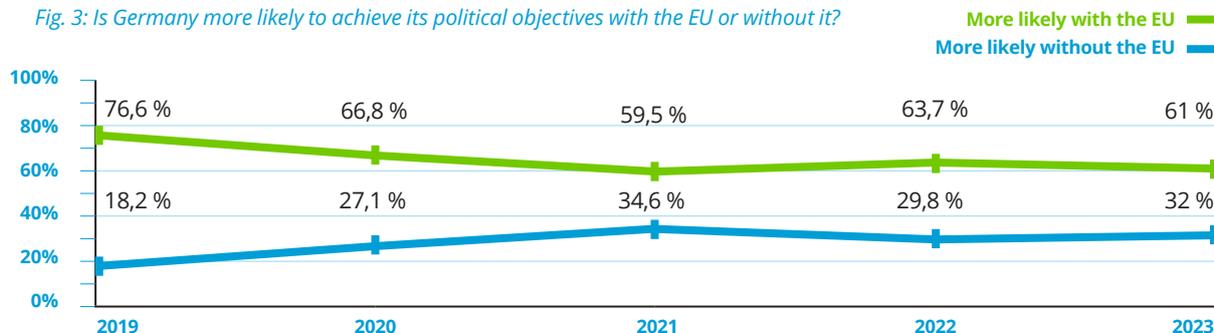
	Yes	No
Total Population	55,8 %	34,4 %
SPD	72,2 %	18,8 %
CDU/CSU	50,1 %	40,6 %
Green Party	89,9 %	5,5 %
FDP	45,3 %	40,6 %
Left Party	61,6 %	26,7 %
AfD	18 %	70,6 %

- Advantages of EU membership greater than disadvantages:** As in previous years, a majority (58.7 %) believes that the advantages of Germany's EU membership outweigh the disadvantages. However, 37.7 % see more disadvantages – an increase of 7 % compared to 2022. More specifically, respondents are convinced of the political benefits of the EU: 61 % say that Germany is more likely to achieve its political objectives with the EU than without it (see Fig. 3). However, only 46.2 % of respondents currently see the economic benefits of the Union. This number went down by 2.6 %, which could be explained by the current general economic uncertainty.

TRENDS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Shaping Europe in the midst of crisis:** The survey results can be seen as a strong plea by German citizens for their country to take on an active and cooperative role in EU politics, combining both short-term crisis management and long-term projects to shape Europe's future. The German government's own commitment can be achieved by strengthening European sovereignty in energy, economic and defence issues, as well as a coherent climate policy and institutional reforms at the EU level.
- Delivering on Europe's social promise:** Germans see the political strength of the EU, but their belief in its economic benefits has declined. This trend correlates with a general feeling of crisis and increased anxiety about the future. It is, therefore, crucial to strengthen Europe as a common economic and social project and guarantee security in these areas, too.
- Investing together:** As in previous years, German citizens are, by a large majority, in favor of joint investments by the EU member states (e.g. in energy, defence, and climate action). A majority specifically supports an EU-wide investment fund to promote a climate-neutral industry in Europe. This would allow the EU to respond to similar programmes of its largest trading partners in the competition for climate-neutral technologies, boost the "European Green Deal" and advance the implementation of a just transformation.

Fig. 3: Is Germany more likely to achieve its political objectives with the EU or without it?



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