

The future of the Union and the challenge of the pandemic crisis: between uncertainty and hope

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As a result of a survey commissioned by the European Parliament, a “majority (56 %)” of EU citizens are of the opinion that *“the EU should have more financial means to overcome the impact of the pandemic”,* and *“Public health tops the priority list, with economic recovery and climate change”* ([News European Parliament, Press Room/Citizens call for a bigger EU budget to tackle Citizens call for a bigger EU budget to tackle crisis](#)).

The survey ([Uncertainty | EU | Hope, A Public Opinion Survey” commissioned by the European Parliament, First Results - 14 July 2020](#)), while recording this significant result of a large majority of European public opinion well aware of the consequences of the pandemic crisis in the health sector and economy, with “over two thirds (68%) of respondents” who are favourable to a stronger role for the Union (“the EU should have more competences to deal with crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic”) as well as to greater financial means (56% of respondents supporting a “bigger budget”) for tackling and overcoming such consequences, it seems however to be in contrast with divisions and resistances inside the European Council with a minority of member states opposing (some of) the extraordinary measures and powers envisaged by the proposal of a EU recovery fund (“Next Generation EU”) presented by the President of the EU Commission Ursula von der Leyen in her [Speech at the European Parliament Plenary on the EU Recovery Package](#) (warning inter alia that *“This is an urgent and exceptional necessity for an urgent and exceptional crisis”*).

Indeed, this timely published survey on the eve of the special meeting of the European Council on 17-18 July, the first to take place in person since the coronavirus outbreak, considering the need to find a political agreement on the EU recovery fund and the multiannual financial framework (MFF) for the seven-year financing period 2021-2027, it highlights what the stakes are.

Not by chance, commenting on the results of the survey, the President of the European Parliament David Sassoli points out that they *“clearly show that EU citizens expect the EU to show more solidarity and take more action to assist the recovery”,* therefore affirming: *“In the context of the current budget negotiations, Parliament stands by the citizens in their call for a more effective and ambitious EU.”*

Taking stance on the side of European citizens, the European Parliament not only makes clear its role as the only EU institution where *“citizens are directly represented at Union level”* according to the principle enshrined in the Union Treaty (art. 10) that the *“functioning of the Union shall be founded on representative*

democracy,” but also seems to be sending a message either to the European Commission, in support of its proposal for a recovery plan that lives up to an extraordinary critical moment, and to the EU Heads of State or Government gathered in the European Council to take on the political responsibility of ‘courageous’ choices required at this decisive moment – that falls in the celebratory year of the 70 anniversary of the Schuman Declaration – for the sake of the European unity and its future.

With regard to these choices, in terms of solidarity, credibility and effectiveness of the Union capacity to respond to the pandemic crisis, the real issue at stake in the negotiations about the recovery fund and the EU budget, it is also shown by the other face of the survey results on two diverging prospects. Something that, along with the right institutional balance of power between EU institutions in the light of a democratic decisional process pursuing the Union interests and needs, implies and affects European citizens expectations and feelings.

The two diverging prospects evidenced by the survey results that stand at the core of that issue are about the ‘uncertainty’, on one side, and the ‘hope’, on the other, surrounding the future of the Union and which, by keeping it suspended in between, make this step a decisive one.

This stalemate situation is shown in the chart below, in which these two opposite directions of the path of European unity, marked by the feelings respectively of uncertainty and hope, are equally divided into two groups of 14 EU Member States for each direction.

Q - What feeling best describes your current emotional status? (MAX. 3 ANSWERS)
(% - THE MOST MENTIONED ANSWER BY COUNTRY)

