

Focus on Latvia

European Sovereignty

Ipsos survey on behalf of the Fondation Jean-Jaurès and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

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Survey conducted by Ipsos on behalf of the Fondation Jean-Jaurès and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. Some 8,000 people were interviewed over the internet via Ipsos' Access Panel between 28 December 2020 and 8 January 2021, making up eight samples of 1,000 persons representative of the national population aged 18 and over in France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Spain and Sweden. The sampling was carried out in accordance with the quota method (sex, age, occupation, rural/urban location, region). This summary presents the results on Latvia.

SOVEREIGNTY: A POSITIVE BUT DIVIDED VIEW

Despite a highly unusual political history – creation of the first Republic of Latvia in 1920, loss of independence in 1940 and regained only recently in 1991 – Latvia does not stand out as much as some other countries in the survey. Overall, the results for Latvia are fairly close to those of countries that have a positive view of sovereignty and European sovereignty, such as Germany and Poland.

Latvians thus react favourably to the word »sovereignty«, which conjures up »something positive« for 61 per cent of them (2 per cent have a negative view, 29 per cent have a view that is »neither positive nor negative«). This score is 15 percentage points higher than the average among the eight countries in the sur-

vey (46 per cent), while falling short of the scores registered in Germany (73 per cent) and Poland (69 per cent). Latvia sets itself apart in terms of its sharp generational divide: sovereignty evokes »something positive« for 45 per cent of 18–34-year-olds, 60 per cent of 35–49-year-olds, 64 per cent of 50–59-year-olds and 74 per cent of those 60 years of age and over. The social divide is almost as clear: 76 per cent among the most highly educated have a »positive« view, 50 per cent among the less educated, 73 per cent among the most affluent and 58 per cent among the least affluent.

Going into more detail, one in three Latvians (33 per cent) consider the word »sovereignty« to be »modern«, 17 per cent find it »outdated«, while the majority (42 per cent) opt for »neither one nor the other«. A large majority (60 per cent) do not attach a political affiliation to it: below one in five Latvians (18 per cent) consider sovereignty to be a »right-wing« idea, as against 5 per cent who regard it as »on the left«. In Latvia, sovereignty mainly evokes the notion of »independence« (mentioned by 72 per cent), and to a somewhat lesser extent »freedom« (45 per cent) and »self-determination« (42 per cent). This trio is also found in Germany and Poland (and to a lesser extent in neighbouring Sweden), a far cry from France and Italy, where the words »power«, »nationalism« and »protectionism« take the top three places. None of these words are mentioned by more than 15 per cent of respondents in Latvia.

Finally, turning from words to ideas associated with sovereignty, Latvians are perfectly in line with the average in the eight countries in the survey. »Independence in relation to others« is

mentioned by 60 per cent (with a 58 per cent European average), »living in accordance with one's own values and preferences« by 56 per cent (57 per cent on average), »the ability to assert one's own interests« by 49 per cent (51 per cent) and »cooperation freely agreed with one's partners« is mentioned by 36 per cent (35 per cent).

SOME 44 PER CENT OF LATVIANS CONSIDER IT CONTRADICTIONARY TO ASSOCIATE SOVEREIGNTY AND EUROPE, SOMEWHERE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE EIGHT COUNTRIES IN THE SURVEY

As was observed in the other countries in the survey, a favourable view of sovereignty goes hand in hand with a good understanding and a clear perception of various expressions associated with it. Latvia does not deviate from the rule. Just under eight out of ten Latvians (78 per cent) have a »good« understanding of the expression »national sovereignty«, which conjures up »something positive« for three out of four people (75 per cent). This is clearly above the European average (57 per cent have a favourable view of this expression), at the same level as observed in Poland and Romania (76 per cent).

At a somewhat lower level, two-thirds of those interviewed (67 per cent, as against 63 per cent on average) have a good understanding of what European sovereignty means, and 68 per cent have a favourable view of it. Again, this is well above average (52 per cent positive views), again in line with Poland (69 per cent) and Romania (66). In more detail, as in the case of »sovereignty« the notion of European sovereignty is more valued by older people (74 per cent) than by young people (58 per cent), and more by the higher qualified (73 per cent) than by the least qualified (62 per cent). Political affiliation is only a marginal consideration in relation to this idea, across the board.

Nevertheless, people remain fairly divided on the association between the terms sovereignty and Europe. The majority of Latvians (56 per cent) see no problem with linking the two words »because European sovereignty and national sovereignty are complementary«, but a substantial minority of 44 per cent (with 42 per cent on average among the eight countries in the survey) consider the two words to be contradictory »because sovereignty refers above all to the nation«.

As in Sweden, and in contrast to the other countries in the survey, Latvians have a poor understanding of the concept of »strategic autonomy«. The majority (57 per cent) of those interviewed lack understanding of the term. Even so, it conjures up »something positive« for 45 per cent of respondents, as against 19 per cent who take the opposite view and 36 per cent whose view is »neither positive nor negative«.

LATVIANS ARE DIVIDED ON THE REALITY OF EUROPEAN SOVEREIGNTY

But is Europe sovereign today? Opinion is divided: 56 per cent in fact believe that it is, while 44 per cent take the contrary view. This is still above the European average (51 per cent / 49

per cent), although some way below the levels observed in Poland (65 per cent »yes«) and Romania (63 per cent).

If Latvians are more sceptical concerning the reality of European sovereignty, it may be because a larger proportion of them believe that it is »essential« that Europe has certain features, without which one cannot really talk of having sovereignty. These include: »a strong economy«, which 71 per cent of Latvians consider essential; »a common security and defence policy« (essential for 70 per cent); »strong defence of its own values – democracy, rule of law – both internally and externally« (65 per cent); »safeguards on European production in such strategic areas as food and health« (64 per cent); »common instruments for combating foreign interference (to combat disinformation campaigns, foreign funding of political parties and so on)« (60 per cent); »its own energy sources« (59 per cent); »control over the EU's external borders« (59 per cent); »its own tax revenues« (54 per cent); and »control over strategic infrastructure (ports, airports, energy ...)« (52 per cent).

It is thus understandable that a higher proportion of Latvians (84 per cent, of whom 35 per cent answered »yes, absolutely!«) would like to strengthen European sovereignty. This score is almost as high as for strengthening national sovereignty, which is not far from unanimity (90 per cent). Many – and diverse – reasons are offered for deepening European sovereignty. Latvians most often mention »the terrorist threat« (38 per cent), in common with many countries, but almost at the same level as »their country's lack of clout at international level«, more specifically (37 per cent). They are also the only country, along with Poland, that puts »Russia's great-power ambitions« in the top three (mentioned by 31 per cent – 73 per cent of whom are close to the nationalist Nacionālā Apvienība – as against a 13 per cent European average). This is followed by »the threat to health« (30 per cent), »US great-power ambitions« (21 per cent) and »the challenge of climate change« (18 per cent). Support for the other reasons mentioned falls below 15 per cent. Concerning the obstacles delaying the implementation of European sovereignty, Latvians cite one above all: »pressure from certain foreign countries in whose interest it is that Europe does not become stronger«, mentioned by 41 per cent (52 per cent of them older people). Far behind this comes »the current weakness of the European institutions (Commission, Parliament)« at 15 per cent, with everything else below it.

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