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# What danger is there of contagion in the event of a “Brexit”?

## Abstract:

Beyond the economic and strategic amputation implied by an exit of the UK from the European Union, “Brexit” would also boost the Europhobic discourse of certain national political movements, for example in the Netherlands some tabloid newspapers are already raising the issue of a referendum on the country’s EU membership [1]. If the UK did leave the EU might we fear a domino effect amongst other Member States? Which countries are tempted the most by this? This is the question we try to answer here, notably using Eurobarometer data as support focused on three main axes, each matching specific questions being raised in the various Member States: support to the EU, opinion about membership; the feeling that the country would be doing better, or not, if it left the EU.

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## 1. SUPPORT TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

As announced in 2013 David Cameron decided to organise a referendum on 23rd June during which British voters will be called to say whether they want their country to remain or not in the EU. Probably launched to counter Eurosceptic overkill within the Conservative party the British Prime Minister’s initiative could lead to repercussions within all of the EU Member States. As the date approaches Europe and its leaders seem increasingly petrified, as they imagine what the consequences of a “leave” victory might bring, and with this, the first exit by a Member State, because since its creation rising from 6 to 28 members the EU has only grown larger to date. The exit therefore of a country would be a first. Might the “Brexit” have a domino effect, leading to the exit of other Member States from the EU? Just as Euroscepticism is rising within the EU [2], the question is worth asking.

An analysis of European public opinion supported by Eurobarometer data helps identify the countries in which the risk of contagion seems to be the highest. This analysis has been undertaken according to three axes: support to the EU, opinion of membership, the feeling that one’s country would do better if it were not an EU member. It uses the most recent data, i.e. those from the Eurobarometer surveys undertaken in the autumn of 2015.

To gauge support to the EU three indicators are used [3]: confidence in the EU (somewhat confident/not really confident), the image of the EU (positive/neutral/negative), and optimism for the EU’s future (optimist/pessimist). Then the average of the negative items of these three indicators is calculated leading to a ranking amongst the Member States according to their opinions of the EU. Then we apply the quartile method [4] to this average which leads to the identification of four groups of countries. The first group is the one in which the average of negative items, and therefore, where critical opinion of the EU, is the highest. This is made up of 7 countries: Greece, Cyprus, Austria stand out with an average over 50%, then come the Czech Republic, France, Germany and the UK, which is the last country in this first group [5]. A first observation can be made: contrary to what might be expected it is not the UK which has the most evident negative opinions of the EU. The second observation is that this group is quite heterogeneous. Firstly from a geographic point of view, nor is there unity regarding the perception of the economic situation in these countries: it is seen as “good” by most people interviewed in Germany (83%), and by more than one person in two in Austria and the Czech Republic (51% in both countries), public opinion is clearly more negative in France (14%), Cyprus (14%) and especially in Greece (3% only).

1. Servaas van der Laan, *‘Krijgtook Nederland zijn eigen EU-referendum?’*, Elsevier, 23 February 2016

2. See in particular « Euroscepticism and Europhobia: Europe under the test of populism », T. Chopin, <http://www.robert-schuman.eu/fr/questions-d-europe/0375-eurosepticismes-et-europhobie-l-europe-a-l-epreuve-des-populismes;> « Euroscepticisme ou Europhobie : protester ou sortir », Y. Bertoncini et N. Koenig, <http://www.institutdelors.eu/media/eurosepticismeoueurophobie-bertoncini-koenig-ne-jid-nov14.pdf?pdf=ok>

3. <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/PublicOpinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/70152>

4. Member States are ranked in four groups of the same size based on their scores according to the variable analysed. Due to equal scores between some countries, some groups of countries are slightly bigger than others.

5. We should note that “a converse approach” comprising the calculation of the average of these three indicators of positive items (confidence in the EU; positive image of the EU; optimism for the future of the EU), looking at the countries in group 4, i.e. those where opinions about the EU are not as good (rather than like here, the worst) we find exactly the same countries: Greece, Cyprus, Austria, UK, Czech Republic, France and Germany.

TABLE 1

		Tend to trust the EU (%)	Total 'positive' image of the EU (%)	Total 'Optimistic' for the future of the EU (%)	Average positive opinions about the EU (%)	Tend not to trust the EU (%)	Total 'Negative' image of the EU (%)	Total 'Pessimistic' for the future of the EU (%)	Average negative opinions about the EU (%)
EU28		32	37	53	40.7	55	23	41	39.7
EL		18	22	34	24.7	81	38	63	60.7
CY		17	22	37	25.3	72	41	58	57.0
AT		26	23	40	29.7	65	41	56	54.0
CZ		27	27	47	33.7	63	31	51	48.3
FR		26	35	44	35.0	63	25	52	46.7
DE		28	34	46	36.0	63	27	48	46.0
UK		23	30	46	33.0	63	31	44	46.0
SI		30	33	53	38.7	61	21	45	42.3
SK		39	35	51	41.7	51	24	46	40.3
BE		39	39	56	44.7	54	23	41	39.3
HU		41	39	50	43.3	51	20	47	39.3
IT		31	38	52	40.3	52	23	41	38.7
ES		25	33	60	39.3	61	18	33	37.3
NL		42	34	58	44.7	46	25	40	37.0
LV		37	32	51	40.0	47	17	45	36.3
SE		46	39	58	47.7	42	25	40	35.7
LU		45	45	60	50.0	46	20	38	34.7
PT		42	42	57	47.0	48	15	39	34.0
FI		44	32	57	44.3	39	20	40	33.0
DK		47	36	65	49.3	41	18	30	29.7
HR		44	51	69	54.7	46	12	29	29.0
IE		33	54	76	54.3	52	14	20	28.7
BG		44	48	57	49.7	35	17	33	28.3
EE		40	36	56	44.0	29	12	37	26.0
PL		37	55	70	54.0	39	7	21	22.3
MT		46	43	69	52.7	31	10	21	20.7
RO		58	57	73	62.7	29	9	21	19.7
LT		59	53	67	59.7	25	6	28	19.7
									<b>Group 1</b> 60.7
									<b>Group 2</b> 43.3
									<b>Group 3</b> 36.7
									<b>Group 4</b> 28.9

Source: Autumn Standard 2015 (EB84)

## 2. OPINION ABOUT BELONGING TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

The second axis involves opinion about belonging to the EU, a slightly different idea from support to the EU: we might be relatively critical of the EU without challenging one's country's membership of the Union. To do this we use the results of two historic Eurobarometer

indicators in a survey undertaken for the European Parliament in September 2015 [6]: on the one hand the feeling about membership (a good thing/a bad thing/neither good nor bad) which has existed since the start of the Eurobarometer in 1973; on the other hand a question focusing on the perceived benefits of this membership for the country (has benefited/not benefited). In the same way in terms of support to

6. [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/eurobarometre/2015/2015parlemeter/eb84\\_i\\_synthese\\_analytique\\_partie\\_II\\_fr.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/eurobarometre/2015/2015parlemeter/eb84_i_synthese_analytique_partie_II_fr.pdf)

the EU we calculated the average of negative answers to these two indicators, which leads to a ranking of European countries according to negative opinions about membership.

The Eurobarometer surveys highlight several things: firstly a strong majority of Europeans believe that belonging to the EU is a “good thing” (55% against 15% who answer a “bad thing”) and a strong majority (60%) believe that their country has benefited from its membership of the EU (against 31% who believe that this has not been the case).

However there are of course significant national variations which lead to the distinction of several groups of countries.

In the last group, in which criticism to membership is the sharpest, we find Cyprus, very clearly above the others, Austria, Greece, the Czech Republic and the UK, i.e. four countries which were already amongst those where negative opinions about the EU ran the highest. Here they are joined by Italy and Slovenia.

TABLE 2

		A good thing (%)	Has benefited (%)	Average good opinions about membership (%)	A bad thing (%)	Has not benefited (%)	Average bad opinions about membership (%)
EU28		55	60	57.5	15	31	23.0
CY		36	34	35.0	30	62	46.0
AT		36	47	41.5	29	45	37.0
IT		40	44	42.0	23	47	35.0
EL		45	56	50.5	23	41	32.0
CZ		34	60	47.0	24	34	29.0
UK		47	51	49.0	21	36	28.5
SI		44	59	51.5	18	35	26.5
SE		59	58	58.5	17	35	26.0
BG		47	47	47.0	15	36	25.5
FR		52	57	54.5	16	34	25.0
HU		46	61	53.5	15	32	23.5
HR		48	64	56.0	16	29	22.5
FI		56	63	59.5	15	30	22.5
ES		58	63	60.5	13	29	21.0
PT		49	65	57.0	14	27	20.5
LV		48	66	57.0	12	26	19.0
DE		71	62	66.5	9	29	19.0
BE		68	69	68.5	13	25	19.0
SK		48	73	60.5	13	24	18.5
NL		70	66	68.0	9	27	18.0
DK		65	75	70.0	12	17	14.5
RO		64	72	68.0	8	20	14.0
IE		72	82	77.0	9	13	11.0
EE		62	79	70.5	7	13	10.0
PL		62	82	72.0	8	11	9.5
LT		67	85	76.0	7	11	9.0
MT		63	84	73.5	8	8	8.0
LU		82	85	83.5	5	11	8.0
							<b>Group 1</b> 46.0
							<b>Group 2</b> 26.1
							<b>Group 3</b> 20.8
							<b>Group 4</b> 14.4

Source: Parlemeter Survey September 2015

## What danger is there of contagion in the event of a “Brexit”?

This study of two analysis axes leads us to some conclusions: the UK aside, we see quite sharp Euroscepticism in 8 countries; it is especially so in Greece (score of 60.7 on average of negative opinions regarding the EU and 32 on average of criticism regarding membership) against European averages of respectively 39.7 and 23 (see tables 1 and 2). In Cyprus the scores lie at (57; 46), in Austria (54; 37) and in the Czech Republic (48.3; 29). These Member States are in the first group (those in which the averages are the highest) on the first two axes. France (46.7; 25) and Germany (46.0; 19) are in the first group regarding the axis of support to the EU. Finally Slovenia (42.3; 26.5), and Italy (38.7, 35) are in the first group in terms of the membership axis.

In Greece and Cyprus this is not very surprising since these two countries have been struck hard by the economic crisis and the reforms imposed have been, and still are very painful, for the population. The presence of the Czech Republic and Austria, and even possibly Slovenia that lies on the “Balkan Route” taken by migrants, notably since the closure of the border between Serbia and Hungary finds explanation in the refugee issue and the desire to implement national solutions to rise to the migratory crisis.

### 3. WOULD THE SITUATION BE BETTER OUTSIDE OF THE EU?

The third axis looks into the answers to two questions that focus on what would happen – generally – one

the hand area per area, and on the other hand, in the event of an exit of the EU.

The first question has been asked regularly in the Eurobarometer since the spring of 2012 (EB78). Those interviewed are asked whether their “country might do better in the future if it were not an EU member.” This is also the question the British electorate will be answering indirectly on 23rd June [7]. In the second question interviewees are asked whether they think that “their country would do better or worse as today” in a set of 15 areas, if they were outside of the EU. It has been asked twice - in the Parlemeter of December 2014 [8] and September 2015.

#### **a) Most Europeans do not think that their country would do better outside of the EU**

An absolute majority of Europeans do not agree with the proposal stating that their country might do better in the future outside of the EU (55%), but one third think the contrary (34%). When the “agree” indicator [9] is positive this means that most of the population believe that their country would be better equipped to face to the future if it were outside of the EU. With the quartile method applied to this indicator we identify 7 Member States in the first group, where the indicator is the highest: Cyprus (55% total “agree”, against a total 37% for “do not agree” i.e. an index of 18), Slovenia (index 6), UK (5) where it is positive. In Austria it is zero, in Italy and the Czech Republic (-8 in both countries) and Croatia (-11).

7. In the UK the question asked of the electorate will be as follows: “Should the UK remain a member of the European Union or should it leave the European Union?”

8. [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/eurobarometre/2015/2014parlemeter/eb82\\_4\\_parlemeter\\_analytical\\_synthesis\\_fr.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/eurobarometre/2015/2014parlemeter/eb82_4_parlemeter_analytical_synthesis_fr.pdf)

9. Difference between the answers “agree” and “do not agree”.

**TABLE 3**

		Total "agree" (%)	Total "disagree" (%)	Index
EU28		34	55	-21
CY		55	37	18
SI		48	42	6
UK		47	42	5
AT		45	45	0
CZ		39	47	-8
IT		39	47	-8
HR		39	50	-11
PL		35	51	-16
HU		36	54	-18
EL		37	57	-20
BG		27	49	-22
LV		32	54	-22
FR		32	57	-25
RO		29	56	-27
PT		30	59	-29
SE		30	61	-31
DE		30	63	-33
SK		28	61	-33
FI		25	59	-34
ES		24	62	-38
BE		27	66	-39
MT		26	65	-39
IE		25	65	-40
LU		26	68	-42
EE		18	64	-46
DK		22	71	-49
LT		21	72	-51
NL		18	76	-58
<b>Group 1</b>				<b>18</b>
<b>Group 2</b>				<b>-15</b>
<b>Group 3</b>				<b>-28</b>
<b>Group 4</b>				<b>-39</b>

Source: Autumn Standard 2015 (EB84)

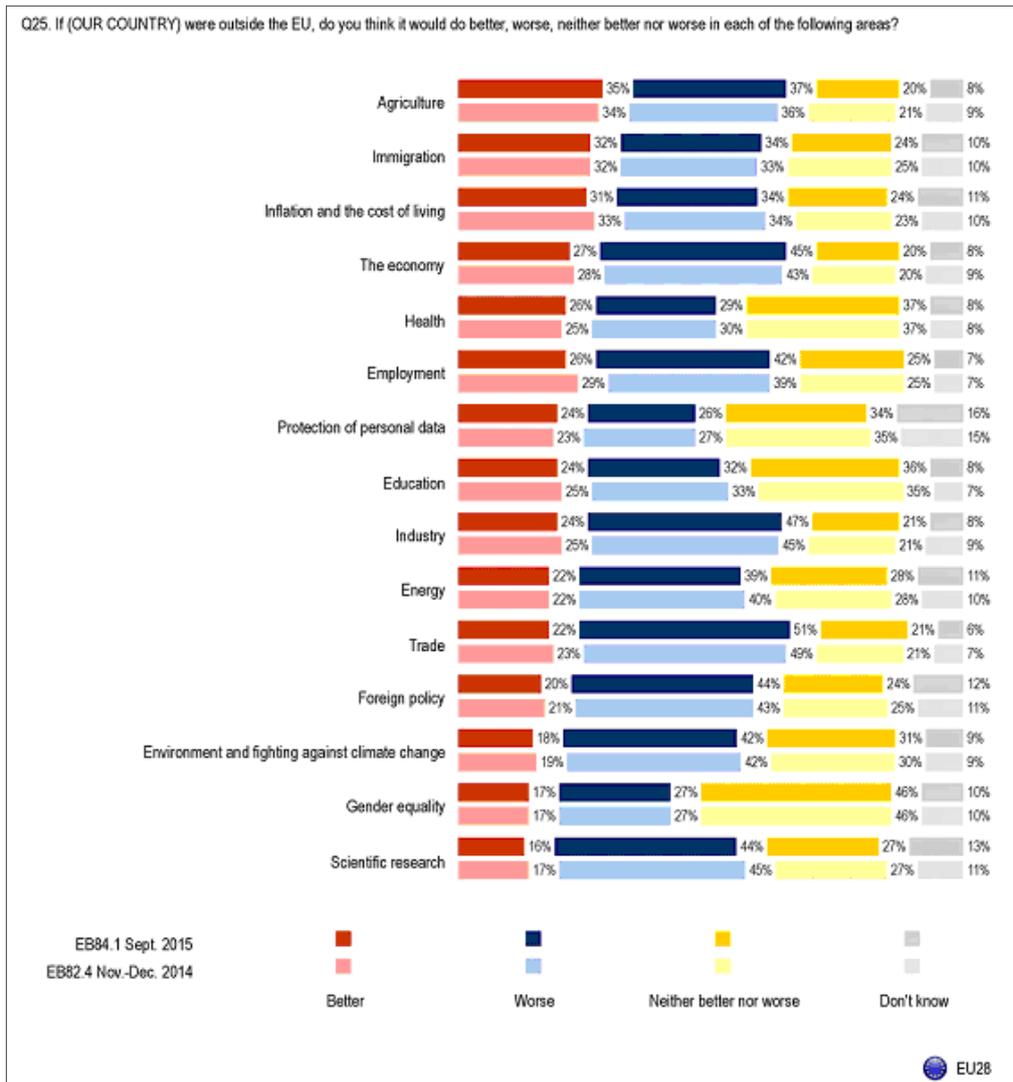
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**b) Area per area results that vary greatly between the different Member States**

At European level a first observation stands out – whatever the area studied the share of Europeans who think that their country would do better if it were not an EU member is lower than those who think the contrary. However European public opinion is divided over several issues: it is notably the case in terms of the protection of personal data (24% of answers "better outside of the EU", 26% answers

"worse", i.e. an index of -2 "of detailed European inefficacy [10]" 2), immigration (-2), agriculture (-3), healthcare (-3), inflation and the cost of living (-3). At the other end of the scale the areas in which the index is the lowest are trade (22% of answers "better outside of the EU" 51% of "worse" answers, i.e. an index of -29), scientific research (index of -28), foreign policy (-24) environment and the fight to counter climate change (-24). Regarding the latter issues Europeans believe that their country would not do as well outside of the EU.



Source: Parlemeter Survey September 2015

10. Difference between the answers "better outside of the EU" and the answers "worse": a positive index means that in the area studied most people interviewed think that their country would do better if it were outside of the EU.

**A national analysis of all areas**

If we calculate the national index average for each of the 15 areas studied and by applying the quartile method to this average we can identify 7

countries where the feeling that the country would do better outside of the EU is higher: Cyprus, Austria, Czech Republic, Italy, UK, which was in group 1 regarding overall perception, as well as France and Bulgaria.

**TABLE 4**

Index of "detailed European inefficacy" "better outside the EU" - "worse outside the EU"																
	Immigration	Agriculture	Protection of personal data	Inflation and cost of living	Energy	Health	Gender equality	Employment	Education	Industry	Trade	Economy	Foreign policy	Environment and fighting climate change	Scientific research	Average index for the 15 areas
EU28	-2	-2	-2	-3	-17	-3	-10	-16	-8	-23	-29	-18	-24	-24	-28	-13.9
CY	33	23	11	43	-3	1	-5	46	-1	18	18	39	-8	-19	-28	11.2
AT	28	24	23	28	8	20	3	14	17	-21	-17	-11	-1	-7	-14	6.3
CZ	33	32	15	6	6	3	1	-4	-5	-5	-13	-10	-10	-13	-26	0.7
IT	-4	16	5	6	-5	3	-1	-3	1	-3	-2	-1	-12	-13	-9	-1.5
UK	21	0	6	5	-10	11	1	-6	3	-16	-27	-5	-3	-18	-18	-3.7
FR	-1	13	1	7	-14	4	-8	3	1	-11	-18	-4	-21	-26	-25	-6.6
BG	-15	-1	-11	-4	4	-5	-8	-16	4	-4	-6	-6	-18	-20	-13	-7.9
EL	-10	13	-5	14	-19	0	-15	9	0	-17	-11	6	-30	-33	-36	-8.9
LV	11	6	-8	2	-15	-11	-10	-19	-20	9	-20	-7	-29	-23	-24	-10.5
FI	12	11	-3	-9	-15	-3	-11	-4	-14	-15	-21	-1	-27	-40	-35	-11.7
SE	-4	26	18	-4	-1	4	17	-22	-17	-45	-56	-11	-27	-18	-40	-12.0
SK	14	20	3	-8	-13	-10	-8	-34	-14	-28	-28	-23	-25	-21	-35	-14.0
DE	9	-7	13	1	-16	2	-6	-26	-10	-36	-49	-35	-25	-15	-31	-15.4
HR	-18	-3	-12	-20	-23	-17	-21	-32	-11	-21	-19	-22	-18	-24	-26	-19.1
NL	-9	-10	14	-2	-27	-4	2	-24	-5	-41	-54	-31	-25	-38	-38	-19.5
PT	-32	7	-16	0	-24	-14	-26	-14	-18	-21	-16	-20	-44	-37	-41	-21.1
EE	19	-12	-4	-5	-24	-19	-15	-32	-21	-27	-40	-36	-38	-25	-41	-21.3
SI	-18	-8	-9	-14	-25	-17	-18	-26	-26	-26	-34	-28	-26	-28	-34	-22.5
BE	-10	-10	-9	-8	-34	-15	-17	-20	-7	-39	-44	-33	-38	-37	-40	-24.1
DK	-8	-29	-2	-23	-21	-7	-4	-29	-21	-44	-56	-28	-39	-19	-40	-24.7
RO	-23	-18	-21	-20	-22	-31	-26	-32	-22	-23	-34	-28	-33	-30	-32	-26.3
HU	-12	-13	-21	-29	-32	-23	-19	-39	-19	-31	-37	-32	-25	-33	-35	-26.7
ES	-22	-18	-27	-12	-36	-17	-28	-19	-23	-36	-38	-27	-45	-39	-41	-28.5
IE	-16	-32	-20	-20	-27	-24	-25	-38	-16	-40	-48	-31	-29	-30	-38	-28.9
PL	-25	-34	-26	-24	-24	-24	-25	-37	-20	-27	-32	-33	-37	-36	-36	-29.3
LU	-27	-26	-10	-20	-47	-26	-18	-43	-23	-59	-60	-46	-52	-38	-57	-36.8
LT	-20	-45	-27	-34	-41	-35	-29	-50	-35	-53	-49	-53	-50	-41	-51	-40.9
MT	-4	-30	-38	-12	-51	-51	-42	-40	-47	-50	-50	-44	-51	-57	-56	-41.5
<b>Group 1</b> 11.2																
<b>Group 2</b> -8.7																
<b>Group 3</b> -19.3																
<b>Group 4</b> -26.4																

Source: Parlemeter Survey September 2015

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From a detailed point of view we see that the areas in which the indices are the most positive, indicating the feeling that the country would “do better” if it were not an EU member, differs sometimes from one country to another:

- In Cyprus they are maximal in the following areas: employment, inflation, living costs, (+43), economy (+39), immigration (+33);
- In Austria: immigration (+28), inflation, living costs (+28), agriculture (+24), protection of personal data (+23);
- In the Czech Republic: immigration (+33), agriculture (+32), protection of personal data (+15);
- In Italy: agriculture (+16); inflation and living costs (+6); protection of personal data (+5);
- In France: agriculture (+13); inflation, living costs (+7); healthcare (+4);
- Finally in Bulgaria: energy (+4), education (+4).

Hence quite logically we find areas in which all Europeans are the most divided: immigration, themes

linked to the economy (notably inflation and living costs), but also the protection of personal data.

**The issue of values, a theme apart**

If we look at the issue of values more in more detail, by calculating the average of indices of two items: the protection of personal data and gender equality. On these issues the feeling that their country “would do better” outside of the EU is highest in Sweden (18), but also in the Netherlands (8), two countries which do not feature in group 1, in the analysis undertaken on all of the 15 areas studied.

In short if we take both the answers to the general question and to the detailed area per area question the result leads to a group of 9 countries in which the feeling that the situation would be better outside of the EU is the sharpest: Cyprus, Austria, Czech Republic, Italy, the UK (in group 1 for each question), but also Slovenia, France, Croatia and Bulgaria.

Average support for the EU: most negative countries		Feeling towards membership: most critical countries		Feeling that the situation would be better outside the EU (overall, and area per area)	
UK		UK		UK	
CY		CY		CY	
AT		AT		AT	
CZ		CZ		CZ	
EL		EL			
FR				FR	
DE					
		IT		IT	
		SI		SI	
				HR	
				BG	

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Just a few weeks before the outcome of the British referendum, which is still extremely uncertain, this study shows that in spite of significant national variations – with some Member States standing out due to very high Euroscepticism, although we might be relatively critical of the EU, without challenging one’s country’s membership of it, most Europeans are optimistic about the EU’s future, and believe that belonging to the EU is a “good thing”, believing that their country has benefited from EU membership. Moreover most Europeans do not think that their country would do better outside of

the EU. In addition to this whatever the area studied the share of Europeans who believe that their country would do better if it were not an EU members is lower than that who think the contrary; in terms of trade, scientific research, foreign and environment policy and the fight to counter climate change, Europeans are convinced that their country would not do as well if it did not belong to the EU.

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