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EUROPEANS AND THE ECONOMIC CRISIS Standard Eurobarometer (EB 71)

Population: EU 15+
Coverage: EU 27 (27 218 European citizens)
Fieldwork: mid January - mid February 2009

Analytical Summary

On the eve of the European elections, it was important to measure Europeans' perceptions of the EU's actions in the face of the economic and financial crisis.

This survey, conducted via face to face interviews with 27,218 EU citizens, shows a collective concern to the crisis, a demand for more coordinated actions at an EU level and also by strikingly different national interpretations of the role of the euro. It also shows very clear variations on a socio-demographic level: women are more worried and more critical of the euro, along with citizens who left school at 15 years of age or before. There are a number of significant points to note:

⇒ **Europeans are very worried about the repercussions of the crisis.**

This anxiety, which is felt very strongly in all countries (between 80 and 90%) affects all levels of the economy: global, European and national. This relates as much to the present situation as to the future. This anxiety is not as predominant at the personal level (58% today, 56% tomorrow).

⇒ **Europeans are in favour of coordinated action to fight the crisis.**

Their diagnosis is clear: 44% of them believe that Member States reacted in an individual manner, while 39% believe they acted in a coordinated manner.

On the other hand, 61% believe that Europeans would be better protected if the Member States adopted a coordinated approach. This kind of approach is urgently called for by the EP who has taken a stand to this effect on numerous occasions.

⇒ **What is the most effective level at which to fight the crisis?**

This question stands out, even more than the others, due to the significant differences evident between Member States. This may be dependent on whether or not a country belongs to the G8 or on the extent of the seriousness of the economic crisis in their national territory. On average, 25% choose the G8 and 17% the EU, 15% say the USA and 14% cite the national government.

⇒ **What actions should be taken at EU level?**

The European Parliament has repeatedly declared itself in favour of different measures at Union level. These are largely supported by Europeans in the percentage points which vary from 66 to 71%: coordination of economic and financial politics; supervision by the EU in cases where public money is used to rescue financial institutions; surveillance of the activities of the most important international financial groups; the role of the EU at international level in regulating financial services.

⇒ **The euro: a protector?**

This question on the role of the euro in mitigating the negative effects of the crisis was posed in all of the member countries of the Union. On average at a European level, the response proved negative. In fact, 44% of Europeans think that the euro has not mitigated the crisis as opposed to 39% who think that it has effectively mitigated this crisis, 17% did not know.

Indeed, the results show that the perception of the euro varies considerably from one country to another. The detailed table (see p. 15) shows that 17 countries responded positively to the question, among which 13 are countries in the euro zone, 3 are countries which are obliged to adopt it and 1 country which refused to adopt it.

On the other hand, 8 Member States, 2 of which are founding members of the euro, are more inclined towards a negative response, and a last country regards both options as equal.

Finally, it is shown that the last two countries to join the European Union in 2007 give a significant number of "don't know" answers, 51% for Bulgaria and 41% for Romania.

We note that the perception of the role of the euro as a buffer in the crisis is the object of nuanced perspectives within the 27 countries, even within 13 members of the euro zone itself. Thus, do the countries in the euro zone believe that their former currency would have protected them more than the euro?

⇒ **The former national currency, a better protector than the euro?**

Again, the overall results should be analysed in relation to the national results. In the euro zone countries, 45% of Europeans respond positively to this question and 45% negatively.

At the same time, the table (see p. 17) on this question clearly shows that the citizens of 12 of the 16 countries in the euro zone believe that their former national currency would not have protected them better than the euro in this crisis. Among these, the previously mentioned two founding Member States of the single currency are figured.

The citizens of four of the sixteen countries, of which two are founding Member States think, on the contrary, that their national currency would have protected them more than the euro.

⇒ **The euro, a better means of protection than the current national currency?**

This question was posed in the eleven countries which have not yet adopted the single currency. The average in the EU shows 46% negative responses and 36% positive.

In the three countries which have refused to adopt the euro, a very clear majority (from 54% to 61%) respond negatively to the question.

Amongst the eight countries who are required to adopt the euro in accordance with the accession treaty, four responded positively (from 39% to 61%) to the question and four negatively (from 43% to 58%).

⇒ **Adoption of the euro: accelerate, slow down, maintain or stop the process?**

Posed in the eight countries which are required to adopt the euro, the response is as follows: 29% think it should be accelerated, 29% think it should be slowed down, 19% think it should go ahead as planned and 6% think it should be stopped.

The note below treats, in detail, the questionnaire in its entirety. It is divided into three parts:

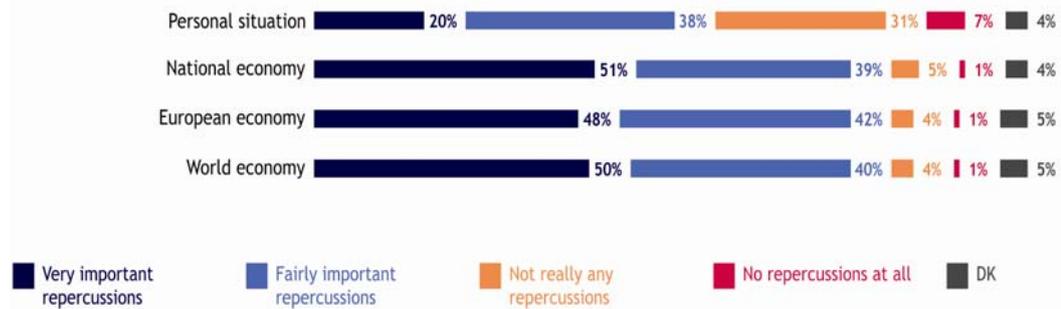
- I. The impact of the crisis: present and future.
- II. The most appropriate level at which to deal with the crisis and the means of doing so.
- III. The role of the euro in the financial crisis.

I. The impact of the crisis - Today and in the future

a. Today:

QD1 *To what extent do you consider that the current economic and financial crisis is or is not having repercussions on each of the following?*

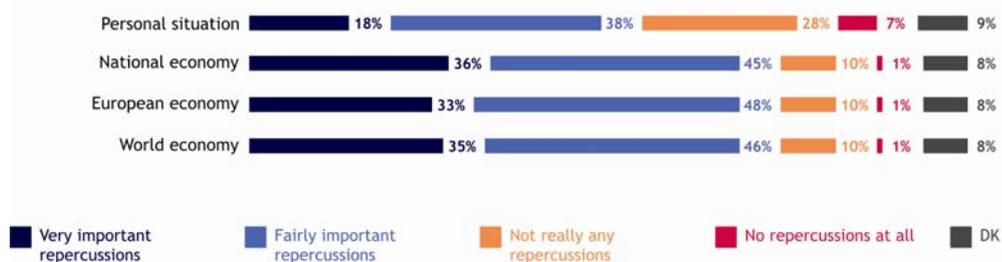
Question: QD1 Repercussions of the financial and economic crisis: today



b. In the future:

QD2 *And when you think about the future, do you think that the current economic and financial crisis will have, over the next five years, repercussions on each of the following?*

Question: QD2 Repercussions of the financial and economic crisis: future



A. Repercussions on the world economy

a. Today

⇒ At EU level:

90% of respondents declare they find the repercussions of the crisis in the world economy important (very important and fairly important):

- Half of all Europeans (50%) believe that the current financial crisis has **very important repercussions** for the world economy.
- 40% estimate its consequences as **fairly important**.
- Only 5% of Europeans think that there will be no or hardly any repercussions.
- The share of "don't know" answers is relatively low (5%).

⇒ **Member State variations:**

National variations on this question are extremely small.

- The share of people who believe there will be important consequences is **largest** in Greece and Slovakia (98%), Cyprus and the Netherlands (97%).
- It is **lowest** in Portugal (80%), Latvia and Italy (85%).

b. In the future

⇒ **At EU level:**

A big majority of respondents (**81%**) estimate that the current economic and financial crisis will have **important repercussions for the world economy in the next five years** (35% believe they will be very important, 46% that they will be fairly important).

⇒ **Member State variations:**

- Again, the pessimism regarding the consequences in the future is **most widespread** in Greece and Slovakia (93%), but also in Luxembourg (90%).
- The share of citizens who believe this is **lowest** is in Denmark (53%), Bulgaria (70%), Finland and Latvia (74%).

B. Repercussions on the European economy

a. Today

⇒ **At EU level:**

90% of respondents believe that the financial crisis has **important repercussions** for the European economy.

- The share of answers "very important repercussions" is 48%, with another 42% of respondents saying that the current crisis has "fairly important repercussions" on the European economy.
- Only 5% respond with "don't know".

⇒ **Member State variations:**

The variations are again small (13 per cent) and the level of anxiety high:

- It is **highest** in Greece (99%), Belgium and Slovakia (96%).
- It is **lowest** in Portugal (81%), Romania, Poland, Italy and Bulgaria (86%).

b. In the future

⇒ At EU level:

- **On average, 81%** of respondents believe the crisis will have important repercussions on the European economy in the next five years (33% of respondents think the crisis will have very important repercussions, 48% judge them to be fairly important)
- The share of "don't know" answers is 8%.

⇒ Member State variations:

- The three **most "pessimistic"** Member States on this point remain Greece (92% judge the consequences as important), Slovakia (91%) and Hungary (90%).
- The **lowest share** of respondents are in Denmark (50%), followed by Bulgaria (71%) and Finland (72%).

C. Repercussions on the national economy

a. Today

⇒ At EU level:

Again, 90% of respondents in the EU think the financial crisis **already has important consequences** for their country's economy (51% "very important" and 39% "fairly important").

⇒ Member State variations:

- Estonia, Greece and Hungary are the Member States where the share of citizens judging the repercussions for the national economy is the **highest** (97% in all three countries).
- The share of such respondents is **lowest** in Denmark (77%), Poland (82%), Portugal and Austria (83%).

b. In the future

⇒ At EU level:

81% of Europeans consider the consequences for their national economy in the next five years as **important** (36% "very important" and 45% "fairly important").

⇒ Member State variations:

- The share of answers is **highest** in Greece (93%), Hungary (93%) and Slovakia (91%).
- Once again, it is by far the **lowest** in Denmark (45%), followed by Finland (70%) and Germany (73%).

D. Repercussions at the personal level

The results show that although many Europeans are worried about the effects of the crisis on their personal situation, they seem to be more concerned about its effects at other levels.

a. Today

⇒ **At EU level:**

More than half of respondents (58%) already personally feel the consequences of the crisis in their life, out of which:

- 20% say it has **very important repercussions** for them personally,
- 38% say these repercussions are **fairly important**.

⇒ **Member State variations**

The variations between Member States are larger than those to be found when evaluating the consequences at different levels of the economy. The difference can be as much as 61%.

- The share of citizens who say the repercussions are important for them personally is largest in Greece and Hungary (88%) and Estonia (82%)
- It is smallest in three of the Scandinavian countries: Denmark (22%), Sweden (24%) and Finland (27%).

b. In the future

⇒ **At EU level**

56% of Europeans expect the repercussions of the economic and financial crisis for them personally will be important in the next five years (out of which 18% on average say they will be "very important" and 38% "fairly important").

⇒ **Member State variations:**

There are important variations amongst Member States, reaching a difference of 51%.

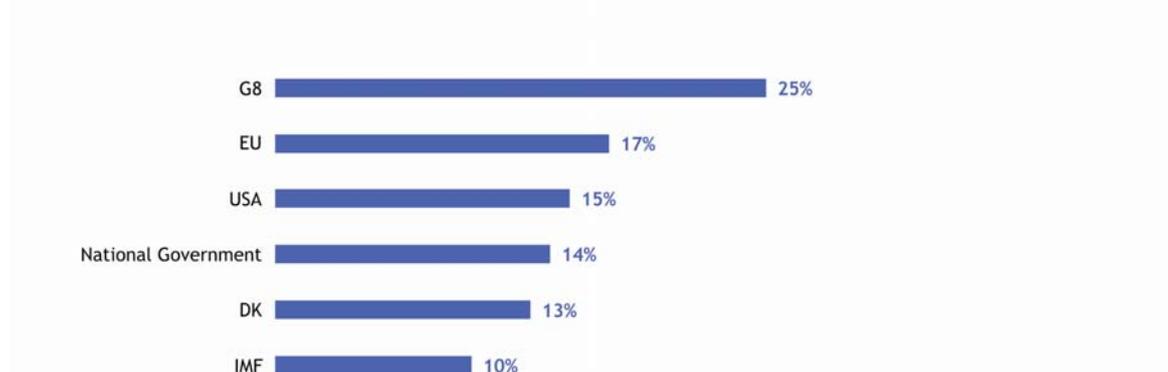
- Pessimism regarding the consequences of the crisis at a personal level is highest in Greece (89%), Hungary (86%) and Lithuania (77%).
- It is lowest in Denmark (15%), in Finland (27%) and the Netherlands (28%).

II. Actors who are most capable of dealing with the financial crisis and the means they should employ to do so

A. The actors

QD3 *In your opinion, which of these actors is capable of dealing the most effectively with the repercussions of the financial and economic crisis?*

Question: QD3 Actors, who can react most efficiently to the consequences of the financial crisis



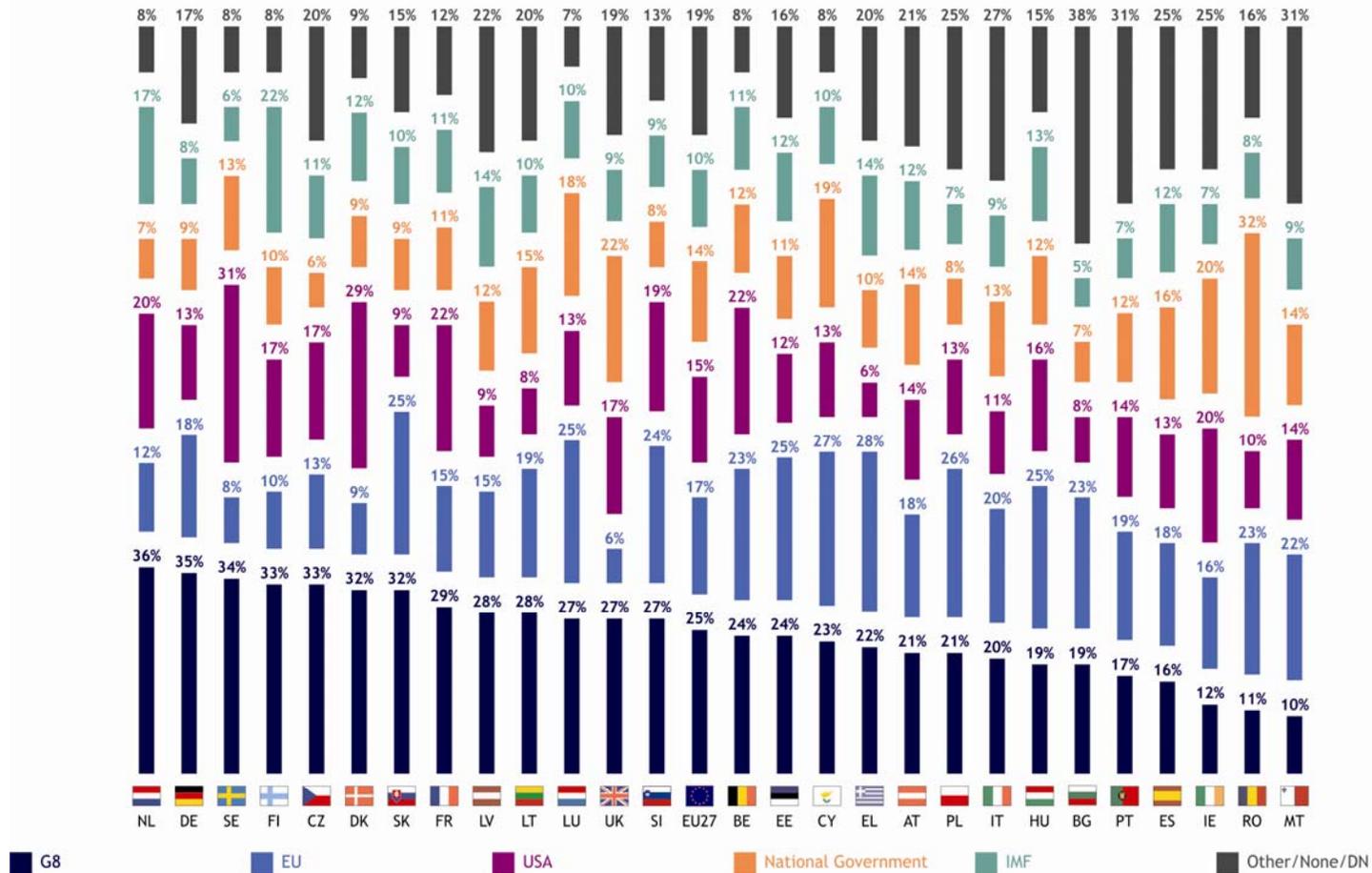
⇒ At EU level:

- 25% of respondents think the **G8** is the most capable of fulfilling this role,
- 17% the **European Union**,
- 15% the **United States**,
- 14% their **national government**,
- 10% the **International Monetary Fund**.



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Question: QD3 Most capable actors - by country



⇒ **Member State variations:**

The perception of who is most capable of dealing effectively with the crisis varies largely amongst the EU member states.

➤ **The G8:**

- is seen as most capable by the largest number of respondents in the Netherlands (36%), Germany (35%) and Sweden (34%).
- It is seen as least capable in Malta (10%), Romania (11%) and Ireland (12%).

➤ **The European Union:**

- Is seen as the most capable actor in dealing with the economic and financial crisis by the largest share of respondents in Greece (28%), Cyprus (27%) and Poland (26%).
- It is seen as least capable in the UK (6%), Sweden (8%) and Denmark (9%).

➤ **The United States:**

- Is perceived as the most effective actor by the largest share of citizens in Sweden (31%), Denmark (29%), France and Belgium (22%).
- It obtained the lowest share of responses in Greece (6%), Bulgaria and Lithuania (8%).

➤ **The national government:**

- Is regarded as the most effective actor by the **largest share** of respondents in Romania (32%), the UK (20%) and Ireland (20%).
- It is chosen by the **smallest share** of citizens in the Czech Republic (6%), the Netherlands and Bulgaria (7%).

➤ **The IMF:**

- Is chosen most often in Finland (22%), the Netherlands (17%), Latvia and Greece (14%).
- It obtained the smallest share of responses in Bulgaria (5%), Sweden (6%), Poland, Portugal and Ireland (7%).

⇒ **Socio-demographic variations:**

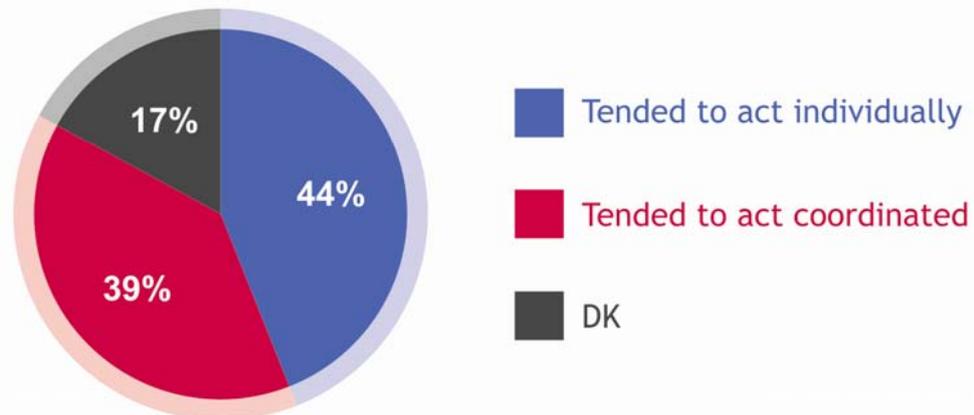
- Younger respondents and those with higher levels of education place more trust in the G8 than average.
- People staying at home (housewives/men) are less likely to see the European Union as the most capable actor.

B. To react individually or collectively?

a. The perception :

QD4 *Would you say that up until now, to face the financial and economic crisis, the various European Union Member States have reacted rather individually or collectively?*

Question: QD4 Acting individually or co-ordinated on the crisis: perceptions



The respondents were first asked about their perception of how the various Member States acted in the face of the financial and economic crisis **up to now**.

⇒ **At EU level**

- 44% of Europeans believe that the Member States **tended to act individually**
- 39% say that Member States **tended to act in a coordinated way with other EU countries**
- A large share (17%) responded "don't know" to this question.

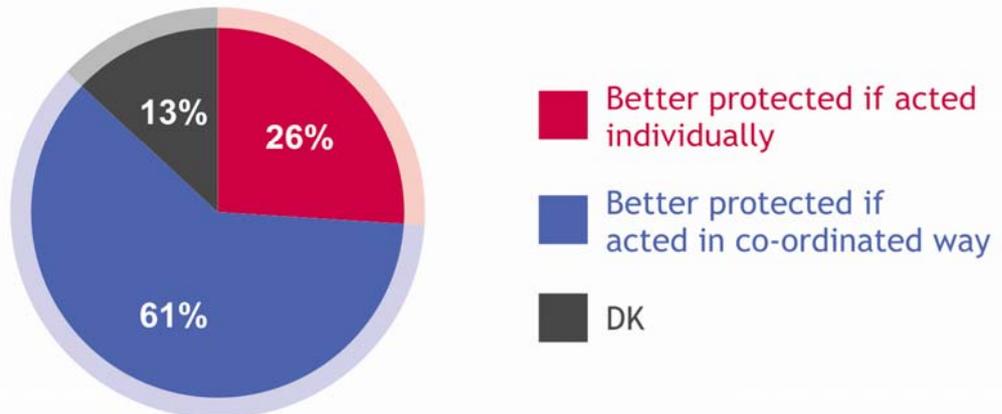
⇒ **Member State variations:**

- The opinion that Member States have acted individually is most widespread in Denmark (71%), the Netherlands (66%) and Belgium (58%).
- The opinion that this action was a coordinated effort is highest in Finland (55%), the Czech Republic (53%) and Latvia (50%).
- In some countries a majority of respondents chose "don't know", notably in the two newest Member States Romania (43%) and Bulgaria (41%).

b. The preference

QD5 *As a citizen would you say that you would be better protected (in the face of the current financial and economic crisis) if (OUR COUNTRY) adopted measures and applied them individually or in a coordinated way with the other EU countries?*

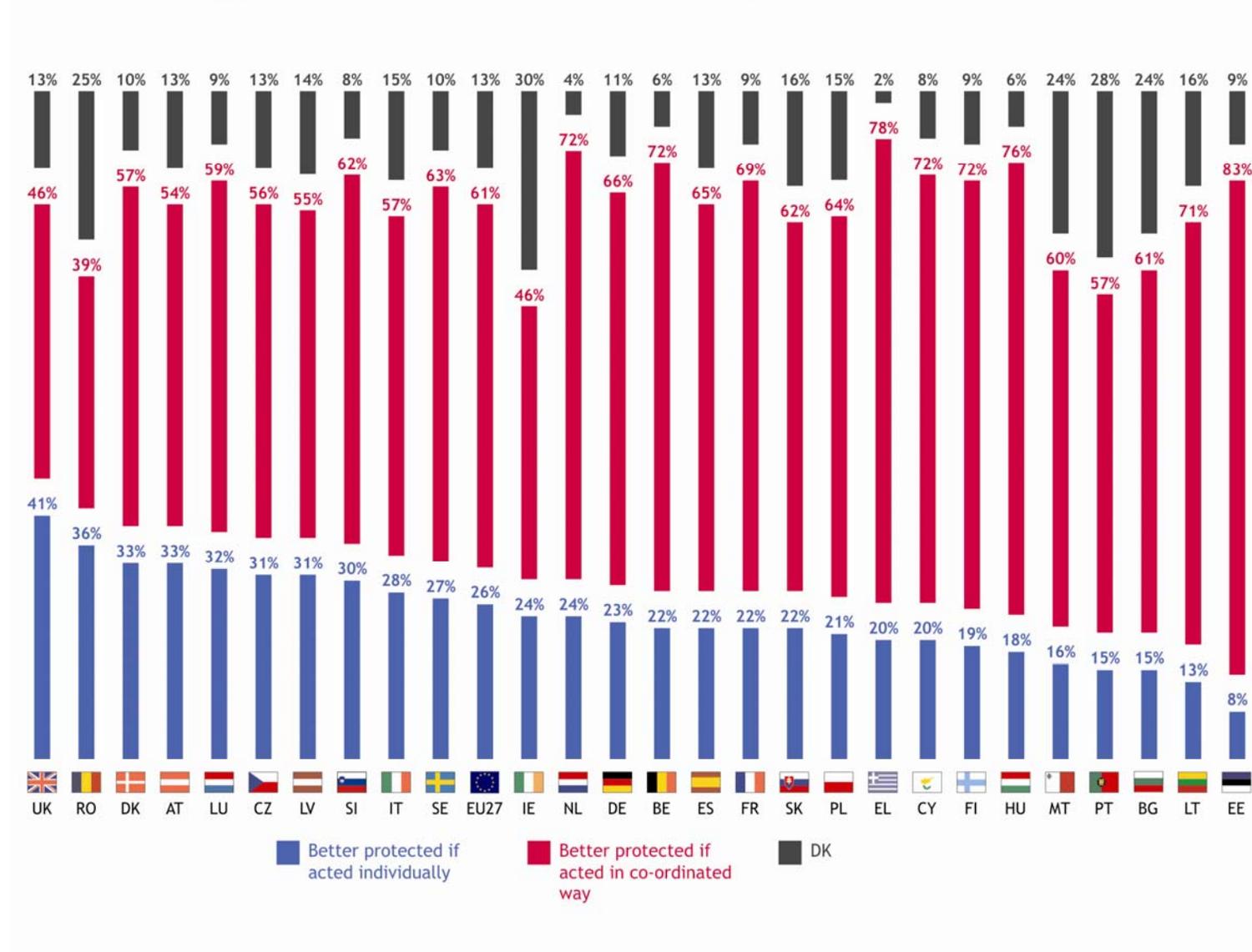
Question: QD5 Acting individually or co-ordinated on the crisis: preferences



⇒ At EU level

- **61%** of Europeans say they would feel **better protected if their country adopted measures and applied them in a coordinated way** with the other EU countries.
- **26%** would feel **better protected if their country adopted measures and applied them individually**.
- 13% answered "don't know" to this question.

Question: QD5 Acting individually or co-ordinated on the crisis: preferences



⇒ **Member State variations:**

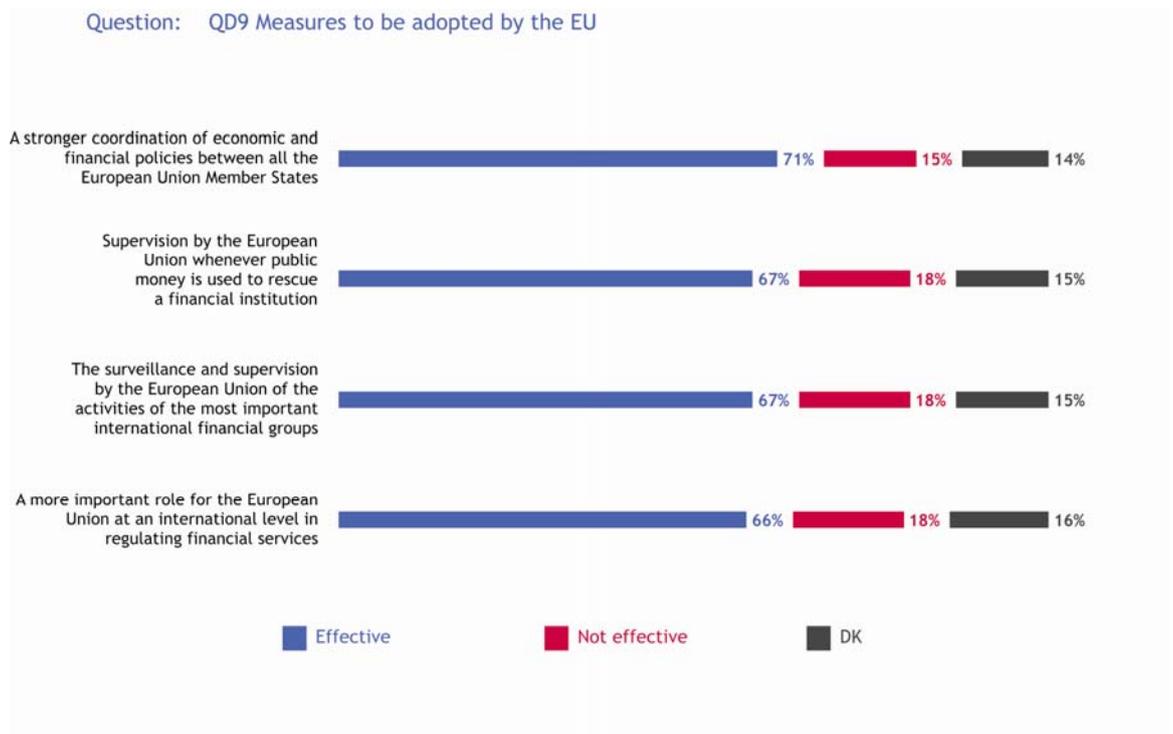
- **Coordinated measures with other EU countries obtain the largest support** in Estonia (83%), Greece (78%) and Hungary (76%).
- **The adoption of individual measures obtains most support** in the UK (41%), Romania (36%), Denmark and Austria (33%). However, it must be pointed out that in these countries, the share of respondents who support collective action is still higher than support for individual measures.
- The number of "don't know" responses is quite large in three countries: Ireland (30%), Portugal (28%) and Romania (25%).

⇒ **Socio-demographic variations:**

- People who finished education after the age of 20 and respondents in managerial positions would feel more protected if actions were made in a coordinated way.
- Housewives/men would feel better protected if states acted individually.

C. Most effective measures to be taken by the EU

QD9 *Certain measures intended to combat the current economic and financial crisis are currently being discussed within the European institutions. For each of these measures, could you tell me whether you think that it would be effective or ineffective in combating the crisis?*



The results show that all four measures being discussed in the European Parliament are supported by a majority of the respondents.

a. **A stronger coordination of economic and financial policies** between all the European Union Member States is judged as very or fairly efficient by 71% of Europeans.

⇒ **Member State variations:**

- It is seen as efficient by the largest shares of respondents in Greece (89%), Cyprus (87%) and Belgium (85%).
- The smallest shares of respondents that evaluate it as such are in the UK and Latvia (57%), and in Portugal (58%).

b. **The surveillance and supervision by the European Union of the activities of the most important international financial groups** is seen as an effective measure in the fight against the economic and financial crisis by 67% of the EU respondents.

⇒ **Member State variations:**

- **Most** respondents who evaluate this measure as effective are in Greece and Cyprus (83%) and Slovakia (82%).
- **The smallest shares of respondents** with such an opinion are in the UK, Estonia (52%) and Latvia (54%).

c. **Supervision by the European Union whenever public money is used to rescue a financial institution** is also judged as an effective measure by 67% of respondents throughout the EU.

⇒ **Member State variations:**

- This is seen as effective by the **largest shares** of citizens in Greece (85%), Slovakia (83%) and Cyprus (82%)
- And by the **smallest shares** in the UK and Denmark (49%) and Estonia (52%).

d. **A more important role for the EU at an international level in regulating financial services** is seen as an effective measure by 66% of Europeans (17% see it as "very effective" and 49% as "fairly effective").

⇒ **Member State variations:**

- This measure is most supported by respondents in Greece (86%), Cyprus (85%) and Slovakia (81%).
- It is the least supported in Latvia (46%), the UK (51%) and Estonia (54%).

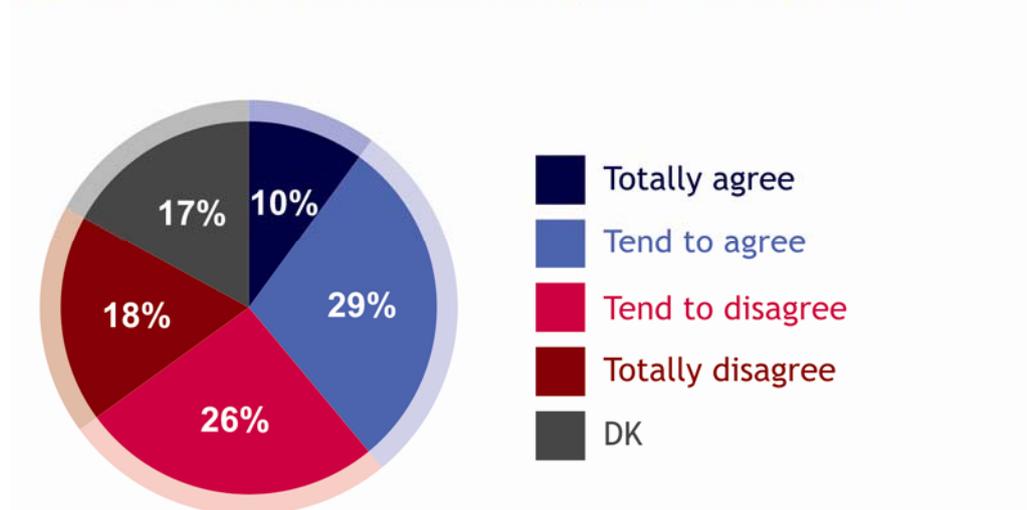
III. Role of the euro in the financial crisis

A. Protective role of the euro in the 27 MS

⇒ At EU level:

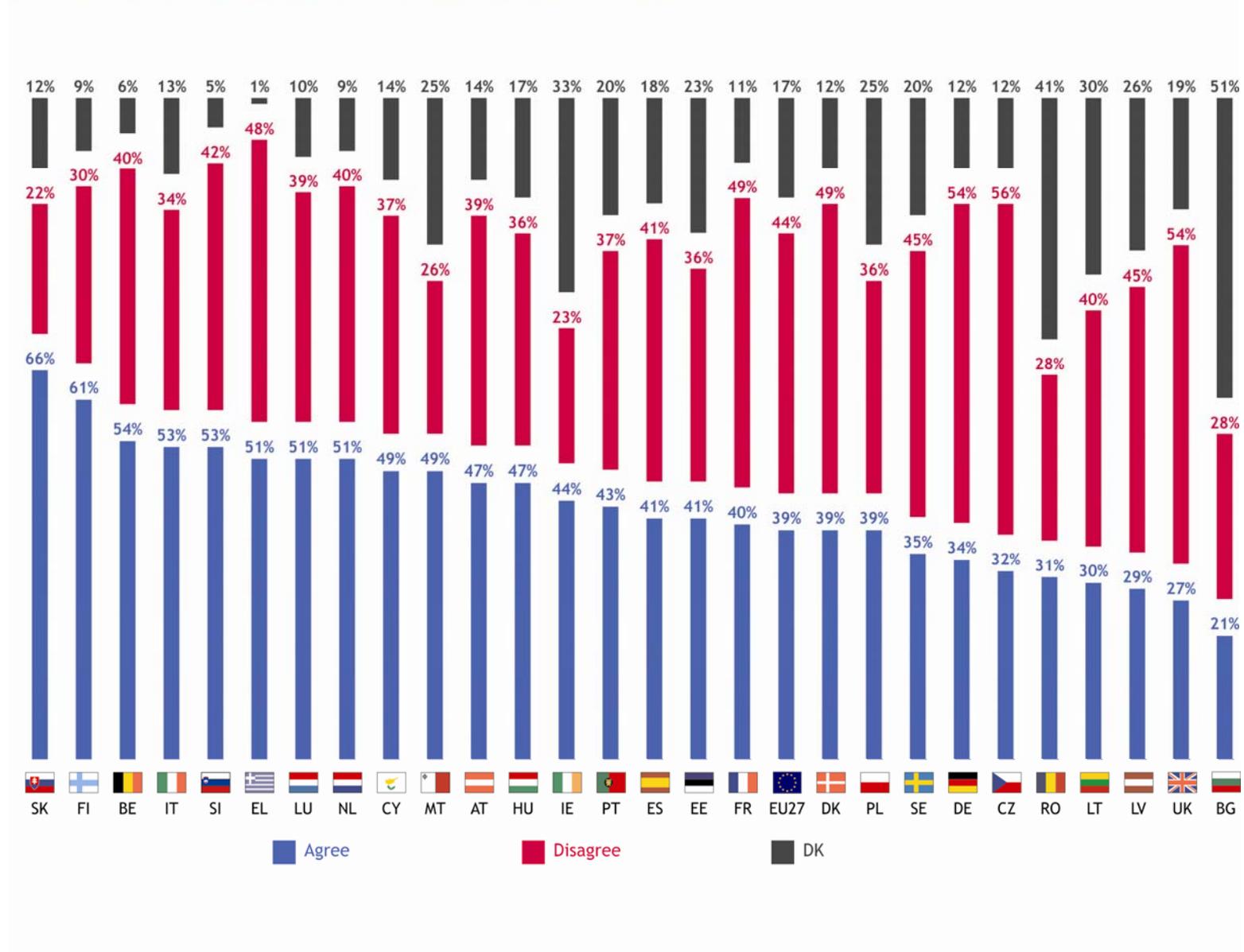
QD8 Overall the Euro has mitigated the negative effects of the current financial and economic crisis.

Question: QD8 Has the euro mitigated the negative effects of the crisis?



- 44% of citizens believe that the euro **did not mitigate the negative effects of the financial and economic crisis** (18% totally disagree, 26% tend to disagree).
- 39% of respondents **believe that the euro did mitigate the negative effects** (10% totally agree, 29% tend to agree).
- A relatively large share (17%) **did not give an answer** to this question.

Question: QD8 Has the euro mitigated the negative effects of the crisis?



⇒ **Member State variations:**

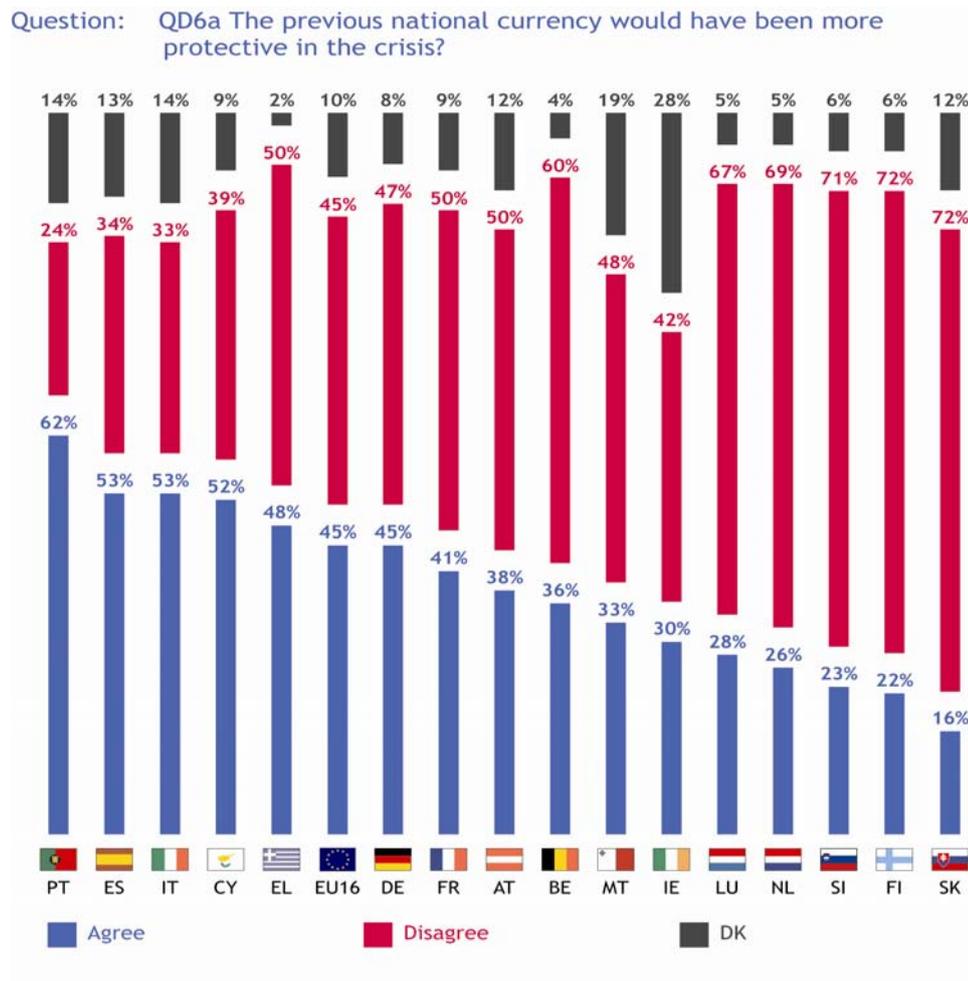
The table shows the following results:

- The shares of respondents who agree about the positive role of euro are highest in Slovakia (66%), Finland (61%) and Belgium (54%).
- The belief that the **euro did not help** against the negative effects of the crisis is least present in Czech Republic (56% think so), Germany and the UK (54%).
- There are **17 countries where the share of respondents who thinks that the euro had a positive role in mitigating the effects of the crisis is bigger** than the share of those with the opposite opinion (SK, FI, BE, SI, IT, EL, NL, LU, CY, MT, AT, HU, IE, PT, EE, PL, RO)
- There are **9 countries where a relative majority thinks that the euro has not mitigated the effects of the crisis** (BG, UK, LV, LT, CZ, DE, SE, DK, FR).
- In Spain **opinions are perfectly split** (41% vs. 41%).
- In the two countries that became members most recently (BG, RO) the share of "don't know" answers is very high: Bulgaria 51% and Romania 41%.

B. Feeling of being protected: the euro zone countries

Citizens in the euro zone countries were asked if they agreed with the following statement:

QD6a *(OUR COUNTRY) would have been better protected in the face of the current financial and economic crisis if we had kept the (FORMER NATIONAL CURRENCY).*



The responses to this question are equally split at the EU level but show strong national variations.

⇒ At EU level

- 45% of respondents **agree** with the statement (22% totally agree, 23% tend to agree).
- 45% of respondents **disagree** (24% totally disagree, 21% tend to disagree).
- 10% of respondents gave a "don't know" answer.

⇒ **Member State variations:**

- The agreement with the presumption that their country would be better off with their previous national currency is **highest** in Portugal (62%), Italy and Spain (53%).
- It is **lowest** in Slovakia and Finland (72%), as well as in Slovenia (71%), Slovakia and Slovenia being amongst the most recent to adopt the euro.
- **In 12 out of 16 countries, a majority of people think they were better protected with the euro** (SK, FI, SI, NL, LU, IE, MT, BE, AT, FR, DE, EL).
- The opinion that they would have been better protected by their former national currency than the euro is only higher in 4 countries (PT, IT, ES and CY)

⇒ **Socio-demographic variations:**

- **Women** are more likely to believe their country would be better protected with the former national currency than men (49% vs. 41%). This is also the case for respondents who **terminated their education at age 15 or younger** (59% vs. 45% EU average) and people staying at home (56%).
- The feeling of being protected due to the euro is more widespread amongst professionals. While the EU average is 45%, it is 67% for **managers, 51% for the self-employed**, 64% for people who finished their **education aged 20 or more** and 53% **for those who are still studying**.

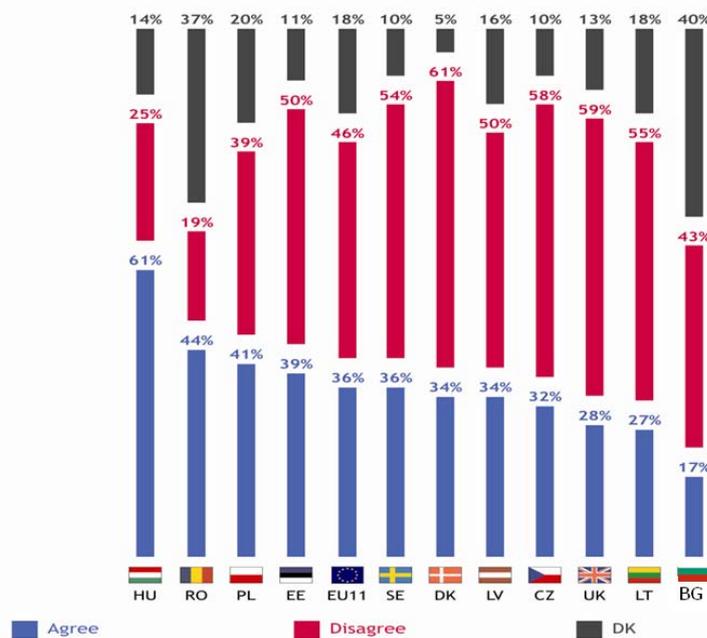
C. The feeling of being better protected: Countries who are not part of the euro-zone

Three countries have rejected the euro. Eight countries are obliged to adopt it.

The following question was posed to them:

QD6b (OUR COUNTRY) would have been better protected in the face of the current financial and economic crisis if we had adopted the European single currency, the euro.

Question: QD6b The euro, a better protection in the crisis than the national currency?



If the average response among those in the euro zone shows that they do not feel better protected with the euro than their former national currency, there are large variations to note between Member States who have rejected the euro and those who are obliged to adopt it.

⇒ Outside the euro zone

- **46%** on average disagree that they would be better protected with the euro (23% totally disagree and 23% tend to disagree).
- **36%** of respondents agree (11% totally agree, 25% tend to agree).
- Again the average **share of "don't know" answers is high** at 18%.

⇒ **Variations amongst states required to adopt the euro:**

The respondents who are most convinced that they would be better protected from the financial and economic crisis if they had the euro are to be found in Hungary (61%), Romania (44%) and Poland (41%). These three countries are obliged to adopt the euro in the future.

- Apart from the three countries that have already rejected the euro (see the next paragraph), the feeling that the euro would not have protected them more than the national currency is high in: the Czech Republic (58%), Lithuania (55%) and Latvia (50%).
- In the three countries that have already rejected the adoption of the euro, disagreement stands at 61% in Denmark, 59% in the UK and 54% in Sweden.
- In the two countries which joined in 2007, the share of "don't know" answers is high: in Bulgaria it is 40% and in Romania it is 37%.

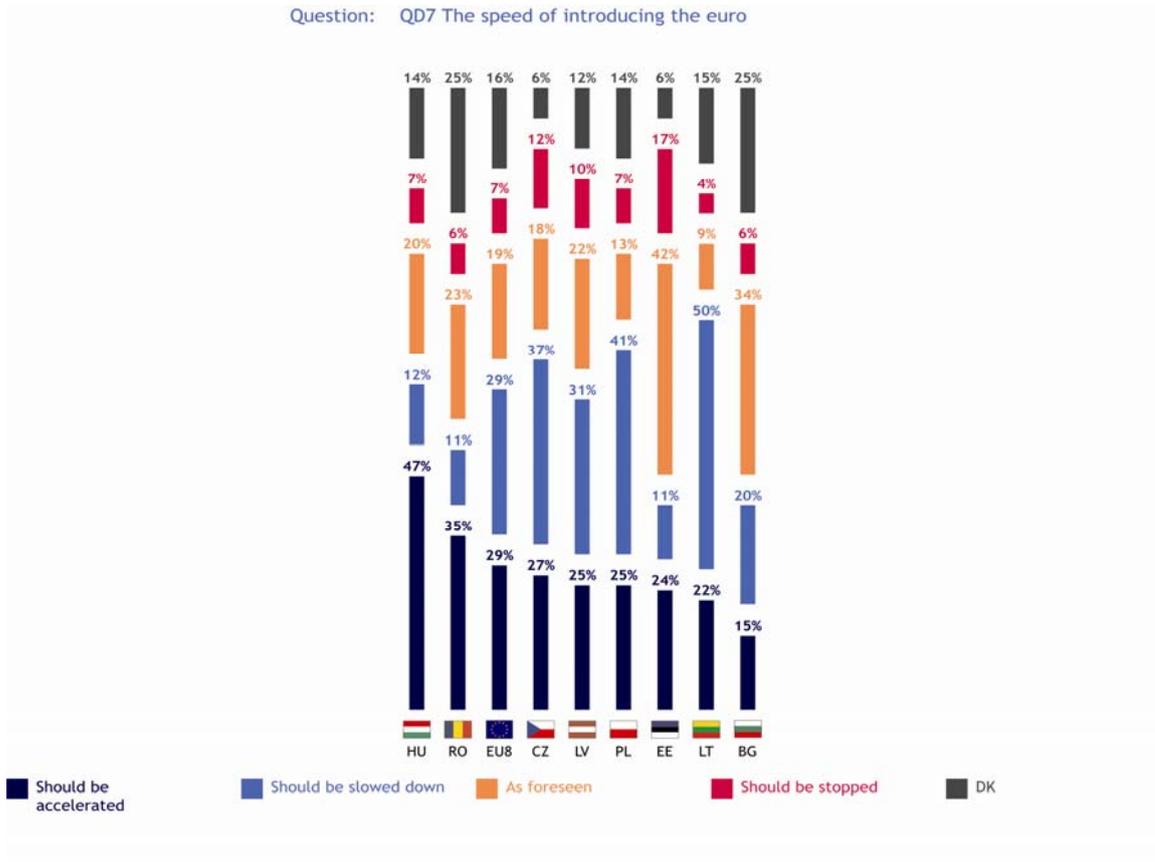
⇒ **Socio-demographic variations:**

- **Men (40%) believe more than women (31%)** that their country would be better protected with the euro. The same trend can be seen with regard to level of education. While the average is 36%, the response in favour of the euro giving better protection stands at 43%. This belief increases with the level of **education**, students also show support above the average (43% compared to 36%).
- The opposite is true for respondents who terminated **education aged 15 or less** where 51% disagree with the statement, and those who are **retired** at 50%.

D. Countries obliged to adopt the euro: To accelerate or not its adoption

This question was asked in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and Romania; countries that are obliged to adopt the euro in the following years:

QD7 *As you are aware, (OUR COUNTRY) is due to adopt the European single currency, the Euro, in the coming years. Personally, would you like...?*



⇒ **In countries obliged to adopt the euro:**

- **29%** of respondents are in favour of **speeding up** the process;
- **29%** are in favour of **slowing down** the process;
- **19%** of respondents say the process should go ahead as planned without any change of the speed.
- Only **7%** say it should be **stopped completely**.
- **16%** answered "don't know".

⇒ **Member State variations:**

- Support for **speeding up the process is highest** in Hungary (47%) and Romania (35%).
- **The desire to slow down the process is strongest** in Lithuania (50%) and Poland (41%).
- In Estonia, 42% of respondents think the process should continue as planned. This is also the case for 34% in Bulgaria.

⇒ **Socio-demographic variations:**

- **Men** are more likely to think the process should be sped up than **women** (34% vs. 24%).
- This opinion decreases with the **age** of respondents, increases with their level of **education** and is more widespread amongst the **self-employed** (36%) and **managers** (35%);
- People aged 55 or more, **retired** respondents and those who terminated **education aged 15 or less** are the most in favour of stopping the process (all 10%).

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