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Europeans open to Ukraine joining EU, survey shows before key summit

Європейці відкриті для вступу України в ЄС, - показує опитування перед ключовим самітом

Європейський кореспондент «The Guardian» Джон Хенлі знайомить з опитуванням, проведеним Європейською радою з міжнародних відносин (ECFR) в шести країнах-членах ЄС, яке виявило значну підтримку кандидатури України щодо вступу в ЄС і, меншою мірою, Молдови та Чорногорії, але також і глибоку стурбованість економічними проблемами та питаннями безпеки. Опитування показало, що найбільшу підтримку вступу України до ЄС мають Данія (50 %) і Польща (47 %), думки розділилися приблизно порівну в Румунії (32 % - за, 29 % - проти), Німеччині (37 % - за, 39 % - проти) і Франції (29 % - за, 35 % - проти). В Австрії 52 % опитаних висловилися проти. При цьому 45 % респондентів були стурбовані тим, що вступ України негативно вплине на безпеку ЄС, проти 25 %, які вважали, що це її зміцнить, тоді як 39 % вважали, що вступ України негативно вплине на безпеку їхньої країни.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/12/europeans-open-to-ukraine-joining-eu-survey-shows-before-key-summit>

Europeans are generally open to the idea of Ukraine joining the EU, despite the costs and risks, but lukewarm at best about the bloc's prospective enlargement to also take in Georgia and countries in the western Balkans, according to a survey.

The European Commission recommended last month that formal accession talks begin with Ukraine and Moldova. The EU's 27 heads of government are due to discuss the proposal at a Brussels summit this week – although Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orbán, has repeatedly said he opposes opening negotiations with Kyiv.

Long on the back burner, enlargement has become an urgent EU priority since Russia launched its war on Ukraine. The commission in November also backed entry talks with Bosnia and Herzegovina – once Sarajevo is ready – and recommended Georgia be given candidate country status.

Ukraine's foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, said on Monday it would be “devastating” for Kyiv and the EU if the summit did not back the start of accession talks. “I cannot imagine ... I don't even want to talk about the consequences,” Kuleba said.

The polling, of six EU member states for the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), found considerable support for the candidacies of Ukraine and, to a lesser extent, Moldova and Montenegro, but also deep economic and security concerns.

However, there was widespread opposition to the eventual accession of Turkey in particular, as well as a markedly cool response to the prospect of Albania, Bosnia, Georgia, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia joining the union.

While this week's summit would focus on pathways to membership for Ukraine and others, the debate about how exactly to achieve it “has scarcely begun”, said Piotr Buras, a senior ECFR policy fellow, who called for a “concrete timeline” for accession.

“Geopolitical rhetoric from Brussels is masking deep concerns in member states about the potential consequences of enlargement, and widespread scepticism about the EU’s ability to absorb new members,” Buras said.

A timeline would provide space for internal EU reforms, build resilience, and show the public why enlargement was essential, he said. Engjellushe Morina, another ECFR senior fellow, said the summit may be “the most consequential of recent EU history”.

The polling found support for Ukraine’s entry highest in Denmark (50%) and Poland (47%), with opinion roughly divided in Romania (32% for, 29% against), Germany (37% for, 39% against), and France (29% for, 35% against). Austria was 52% opposed.

However, 45% of respondents were concerned Ukraine’s accession would have a negative impact on the EU’s security, against 25% who felt it would enhance it, while 39% believed Kyiv’s entry would negatively affect their country’s security.

Many Europeans saw no economic benefit to Ukrainian membership. While 43% of respondents in Poland and 37% in Romania saw a positive impact for the EU’s economy, 54% in Denmark and 46% in Austria foresaw a cost.

There were also fears about the impact of enlargement on the EU’s political power in the world. Poland and Denmark were the most optimistic about this, with 43% and 35% of citizens believing Ukraine’s accession would have a positive impact.

In Austria (42%) and Germany (32%), however, the most prevalent view was that Ukrainian membership would reduce the EU’s political power in the world, while respondents in France and Romania were more evenly split.

The ECFR identified a clear divide between “old” and “new” EU member states on the broader principle of enlargement. Respondents in Austria (53%), Germany (50%) and France (44%) were the most likely to feel the EU should not admit new members.

By contrast, in Romania a majority (51%), and in Poland a plurality (48%), believed the EU should be looking to expand. Denmark was somewhat of an outlier among the “old” member states, with only 37% opposing any immediate enlargement.

Letting Ukraine into the EU will reinforce, not undermine, Europe’s security

Piotr Buras

The survey found strong opposition to the possibility of Turkey joining the EU, with 51% of those surveyed across the six countries opposing the idea and fewer than one in five respondents supporting any forward movement on Turkish membership.

Europeans also showed themselves cool on Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia becoming member states, with less than 30% support jointly for the eight countries joining.

Support for accession was softest for Kosovo, with 20% saying it should be able to join and 37% saying it should not, Albania (24% for, 35% against), Serbia (25% for, 35% against) and Georgia (25% for, 31% against).

Opinion was more evenly divided on North Macedonia (26% for, 27% against) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (28% for, 29% against), while there was support for Moldova (30% for, 28% against) and Montenegro (30% against 25%) joining the EU.