



**European Committee  
of the Regions**

# Reflecting on the future of the European Union

The view from local and regional authorities



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# Table of Contents

<b>Part I: Introduction and Context – Challenges and Opportunities in the New Reflection on the Future of the EU</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Part II: Analysis of the White Paper</b>	<b>3</b>
Executive Summary	3
Introduction	3
<i>The context: current challenges to local governance within the EU</i>	3
<i>The scenarios in the White Paper and their consequences for local actors</i>	4
What is not in the White Paper, but is relevant to the CoR	8
<b>Part III – Survey Methodology and Procedure</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Part IV: Priorities for Structural Reform, Governance, and the Role of EU Regions</b>	<b>11</b>
Citizens’ perceptions	11
Modes of reform	12
The role of EU regions and of the Committee of the Regions	14
Understanding the contribution of decentralisation	15
Best models of Committee of the Regions supported initiatives	17
The role of EU local and regional authorities in members’ and stakeholders’ own words	17
<b>Part V: The CoR, local and regional authorities, and EU policies</b>	<b>21</b>
Citizens’ perceptions	21
Policy priorities	22
The specific question of migration	23
The evolution of cohesion policy	25
Local and regional authorities and EU solidarity in members’ and stakeholders’ own words	26
<b>Part VI: Representation and Communication</b>	<b>29</b>
Citizens’ perceptions	29
Making EU citizens	30
What should be the focus of EU communication?	31
Who is represented in the EU policy-making process?	33
Current channels of citizens’ representation	35
Communicating EU affairs	36
<b>Part VII: Implications and Conclusion</b>	<b>39</b>
Institutional and policy implications	39
Conclusions	41
<b>Appendix 1: Questionnaire</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Distribution of Respondents</b>	<b>53</b>

# **Part I: Introduction and Context – Challenges and Opportunities in the New Reflection on the Future of the EU**

If there is one thing that everybody seems to agree on, it is that the European Union is at a juncture. What started as a relatively small scale dream after the Second World War is now a largely mature political system of half a billion citizens, spanning much of the continent that it is named after and with competences in a wide range of policies. What emerged as an elite driven process now belongs to citizens who are increasingly demanding about the levels of democracy, transparency, and accountability of the political system which determines or influences so many of their rights and duties. What once seemed unanimous and generic is now open to the traditional debates of all decision making processes, with rife disagreements on conceptions of regulation, solidarity, and efficiency, as well as competition for ideas and power between various people, various parties.

The European Union's complex institutional architecture has been put to the test lately. The so-called "Euro-crisis" of the early 2010s and the refugee challenges that followed from deadly civil wars in much of the Middle East and some of Africa have forced Europeans to question their conceptions of internal and external solidarity. The Brexit spiral – a process that even many Brexit campaigners did not seem to think of as realistic a few hours before the shock results of the 23 June 2016 referendum were announced – led to a crisis of interpretation where politicians and analysts again disagreed deeply on the causes of a result that most saw as a failure, but which "message" (or messages) whilst largely complex and unclear, at least converges on the notion that citizens should never be taken for granted by any political institution and should thus always be put at the heart of political processes and reflections.

This mixture of crises and opportunities, maturation and growth, competition and citizens' expectations has opened the field to a crucial reflection on the future shape that the European Union should embrace and the way in which it could and should evolve to reinvent initiative, citizens' representation, solidarity, and institutional and policy effectiveness with the experience of nearly 70 years of European integration and to prepare for the challenges and opportunities of decades to come.

As the Committee of the Regions (CoR) is preparing to play its full part in the Europe-wide reflection on the future of the European Union, it has contracted LSE Enterprise (LSEE) and a team led by Prof. Michael Bruter, Dr Sarah

Harrison, and Dr Federica Bicchi to evaluate the proposals contained in the White Paper on the Future of Europe published by the European Commission on 1 March 2017. This process formally launches a period of reflection that will aim to propose future paths by the time of the May 2019 European Parliament Elections. Michael Bruter and Sarah Harrison are taking the lead for the survey component and Federica Bicchi for the analysis of the White Paper.

The goal of the study is to understand stakeholders' ideas, preferences, and suggestions when it comes to reinventing EU governance, policy-making and representation.

The work will consist of an analysis of the White Paper and its implications for local and regional organisations as well as the CoR itself, and a survey of the member organisations of the CoR (including local and regional governments and administrations as well as associations of regions) with the aim of synthesising a clear and strong message about the role that they would wish to assume in a bid to make the EU a better and stronger project in terms of governance, policy, and representative link with citizens.

Upon preliminary discussion between the LSEE team and the CoR team, we agreed to focus our analysis on the following three elements:

- Governance
- Policy
- Representation and communication

These three aspects have guided our interpretation of the White Paper and have informed the design, conduct, and analysis of the survey of CoR members. This report presents an in-depth analysis of all three elements.

Our findings lead to a few crucial thoughts on the need to reinvent European solidarity, how local and regional authorities could play a unique articulatory role between citizens and EU institutions and the shape that function could take, and how they can serve as a laboratory of innovation and progress by piloting and developing processes of collaboration between political actors, non-political resources (companies, researchers, civil society), and citizens.

# Part II: Analysis of the White Paper

## Executive Summary

Scenarios that are most relevant for local actors (Scenarios 2 and 4, which centre on a re-thinking of socio-economic policies related to the Single Market) are unlikely to occur in their maximalist version, due to the difficulties in finding a consensus among the 27. A minimalist version of Scenario 4, based on the Task Force on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and “Doing Less More Efficiently,” is the most direct way in which the CoR can exert influence on a redistribution of competences across governance levels.

Scenario 3 (a multi-speed Europe) requires careful consideration by the CoR, to reconcile multi-speed and multi-level governance. The Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) might provide a model for cooperation.

Scenario 1 (carrying on) deserves attention, as it might be a “Scenario 1+” that ultimately prevails.

Scenario 5 (doing much more together) is less likely to happen in a maximalist version.

## Introduction

This brief considers the potential consequences for local actors in Europe, as represented in the Committee of the Regions (CoR), of the White Paper on the “Future of Europe” issued by the European Commission on 1 March 2017, as well as in light of Mr Juncker’s “State of the Union” speech on 13 September 2017. After setting the scene in terms of long-term trends in multilevel governance, it discusses the five scenarios presented in the White Paper, their likelihood and their potential implications for local actors. It will conclude by highlighting the broader significance of the White Paper, which the CoR might want to consider.

### *The context: current challenges to local governance within the EU*

After an ascending trajectory, multilevel governance – a concept that conveys the intimate entanglement between the local, national and EU levels of authority – has encountered a number of challenges, particularly in the aftermath of the economic crisis that started in 2008.

Originally used to highlight how cohesion policies across Europe relied on local and EU actors, discourses about multilevel governance seemed to prevail during the 1990s and early 2000s, when several member states reformed their governance system and decentralised their powers. This provided the opportunity for subnational actors to operate and connect across local, national and supranational arenas. A case in point were Central and Eastern European countries, which underwent significant decentralisation developments as part of their political transformation in response to the fall of communist regimes and of EU membership.

The economic crisis of 2008 has impacted on this landscape, in contradictory ways.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, because of austerity policies, the crisis halted planned reforms and/or severely curtailed governments' capacity to implement them. On the other hand, exactly because of the need to consolidate public finances, the crisis has also acted as a driver of further reforms, which ensued in the following decade. As a result, the current landscape displays complex and contradictory trends, in a situation of uncertainty and fluidity. Volatile results of elections across Europe, at all levels, also contribute to the volatility of the mix.

While local actors remain heavily involved not only in local politics, but also in the delivery of national and EU policies, their role in the definition of those policies is in flux. They do retain, however, a key function as communicators of how the EU multilevel governance system works, as acknowledged by the White Paper: "the EU's positive role in daily life is not visible if the story is not told locally" (p.12).

Developments in the EU governance system in the near future can thus significantly affect the future of local actors in Europe.

### ***The scenarios in the White Paper and their consequences for local actors***

The five scenarios sketched in the White Paper, which vary in focus and likelihood, bear a number of possible consequences for local actors. In his speech on 13 September 2017, Mr Juncker added his personal view as a "sixth scenario," which builds on elements of scenarios 4 and 5.

- Scenario 1 "Carrying on": This scenario is likely, if only because any change to the status quo will require unanimity or at least a very large consensus, which at present is difficult to achieve. It would entail

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<sup>1</sup> OECD, Multi-level Governance Reforms. Overview of OECD Country Experiences, 2017.



continuing to address crises and challenges as they emerge, finding opportunities to cooperate whenever there is a consensus about cooperation, and refraining from launching new initiatives if this is not the case. It does not mean that at the national level there will not be changes, as change could come from below, including from local actors.

Implications for local actors: This is a familiar scenario for local actors, in terms of opportunities and challenges. They could potentially profit from the current EU legitimacy crisis by leading a new political momentum around decentralisation and regionalisation, although this theme has at times been used (and abused) by populist actors and a carefully crafted narrative would need to be developed, in order not to negatively impact on the EU itself.

- Scenario 2 “Nothing but the Single Market”: This scenario is unlikely in the short run. While the Single Market relies on the four freedoms of circulation (goods, capital, services and labour), the last one would be hampered by the current negative discourse about migration. More likely is – especially in light of Mr Juncker’s “State of the Union” speech and political developments in France and Germany – a new emphasis on the euro and the Banking Union as the basis for a relaunched economic unity across Europe.

Implications for local actors: This scenario would be very relevant for local actors, as most socio-economic competences could be repatriated to the national and – potentially – the local level too. It would open the way to a thorough re-thinking of how socio-economic policies are framed, decided and implemented across the continent, with a potentially vast range of variation in the type of solutions embraced. It would entail a high level of uncertainty, which would bring both opportunities and challenges, one of which would be the extent to which cooperation among local actors across borders would survive in a less Europeanised environment. If, as it is more likely, the emphasis is rather on the euro and the Banking Union only, the implications for local actors would be more indirect, though potentially broad.

- Scenario 3 “Those who want more do more”: A multi-speed Europe is likely and it has been happening for a while already. This has two dimensions. One is *political* cooperation between a few like-minded countries (an expression that is being used more and more). This has increasingly been the case, as shown by e.g. the Visegrad 4, the Scandinavian countries, the meetings of ‘big states’ or ‘founding members.’ The other dimension is *legal* cooperation, which has been

much less frequent and has often taken the form of initiatives with opt-outs for some, as in the case of the Eurogroup (which is likely to be strengthened) and Schengen (the future of which is uncertain). The big 4 (France, Germany, Italy and Spain) have come out in favour of this option at their mini-summit on 9 March 2017, but it has raised the objections of smaller / newer / Eastern European countries, which fear exclusion. The main project that is emerging in connection to this scenario is linked to security and defence, namely the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). The project involves 25 member states,<sup>2</sup> but different groups of countries are to take part in different projects, in a ‘multispeed Europe in action.’

Implications for local actors: This scenario presents local actors with the challenge of complexity and fragmentation between ins and outs. In his speech, Mr Juncker de facto discouraged this scenario as not desirable, despite his support for PESCO. Local governance would become more complex and local actors would have to learn to navigate a multi-speed Europe, in which the meaning of equality and inclusion would differ from one place to the next. Local actors would also experience uncertainty, as new governments might aim to reverse exclusion or inclusion. However, some local actors might benefit from this scenario, as long as they were able to create shared understandings with actors at the national level.

- Scenario 4 “Doing less more efficiently”: In a more encompassing interpretation, this scenario is unlikely, while a ‘thin’ administrative version is very likely following Mr Juncker’s setting up of a Subsidiarity and Proportionality Task Force in September 2017, to report in September 2018. In a maximalist interpretation, the choice of priority areas on which to act “much quicker and more decisively” is a big ask, as key differences in terms of political vision remain among the 27 member states (from austerity to relations with Russia). In a more minimalist interpretation, as in a review of competences, this is almost certain to happen, though. The electorate has tended to support anti-establishment parties and the Task Force has been presented as a way to address administrative burdens and repatriate competences to member states where it makes sense.

Implications for local actors: This scenario is very relevant for regional actors, both in its maximalist and its minimalist version. One of the proposed policies to be dropped from the EU portfolio is “regional development”, as well as “parts of employment and social policy not

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<sup>2</sup> Members not participating are Denmark (which has an opt-out on ESDP), Malta and of course the UK.

directly related to the functioning of the Single Market.” State aid control and standards such as health and safety would also be repatriated to national authorities. Among the policies that could be strengthened figure instead border control, counter-terrorism and foreign and security policy, which would have implications for local actors, but mainly in the case of border regions. The more likely minimalist version, however, is less dramatic, but does provide local actors with the opportunity to contribute to the Task Force’s work. As it currently stands, the Task Force includes 3 members of the CoR and this is the perfect opportunity to make the CoR’s voice heard.

- Scenario 5 “Doing much more together”: This scenario is unlikely, regardless of the emphasis that Mr Juncker put on ambitious proposals in his speech. It would entail significantly more cooperation and potentially a treaty change to bring “far greater and quicker decision-making at EU level.” There is however no appetite for treaty changes, and even stronger cooperation across the board and with 27 member states seems to be politically difficult to achieve by 2025, the time frame addressed by the White Paper.

Implications for local actors: This scenario could go in opposite directions. On the one hand, it could revive the type of multilevel governance that the EU contributed to create in the 1990s and early 2000s. Local actors would benefit from more opportunities to engage in the policy process at the EU level, to network across borders and to be part of the change more generally. On the other hand, if the scenario is executed in a narrow way, it could lead to powers being passed to the EU – and EU agencies in particular – with less of an input from local actors.

Scenarios that are most relevant for local actors (Scenarios 2 and 4, which centre on a re-thinking of socio-economic policies related to the Single Market) are unlikely to occur in their maximalist version, due to the difficulties in finding a consensus to support a clear and definite decision in a specific direction. A minimalist version of Scenario 4 provides the CoR with the opportunity to make its voice heard.

Scenario 3, which suggests a multi-speed Europe, needs consideration from the CoR, in order to address how multi-*level* governance could accompany multi-*speed* governance. Despite its focus on defence and its broad inclusivity, PESCO will provide an interesting laboratory.

Scenario 1 (carrying on) also deserves attention, as it might be a “Scenario 1+” (muddling through?) that ultimately prevails: carrying on, with some initiatives involving all or most member states (as in the case of PESCO and possibly a strengthening of the euro area) and some (fewer) initiatives involving only some member states (counter-terrorism, migration?).

## **What is not in the White Paper, but is relevant to the CoR**

The White Paper is an attempt to mobilise legitimacy for European integration by fostering a debate about Europe, to which Mr Juncker’s speech has also contributed. As the often-mentioned EU crisis of legitimacy has come to bear, in the form of Brexit as well as in a general uncertainty about the future of multilateralism and global politics, the Commission is emphasizing the limits of what it can do without a clear leadership provided by member states. Therefore, while the process within the EU is crucial, this should also be seen as an opportunity for local actors to engage with their national governments on a debate about the future of Europe and of multilevel governance, as the ball is squarely in member states’ / national governments’ camp at the moment.

## **Part III – Survey Methodology and Procedure**

The survey has been led by Prof. Michael Bruter and Dr Sarah Harrison in collaboration with the Committee of the Regions. Prof. Bruter and Dr Harrison designed, conducted, and analysed the short survey to capture respondents' perceptions on the Future of the EU. The survey was distributed to CoR members and stakeholders based on the email lists provided by the CoR.

The survey was sent electronically to the list of respondents provided by the CoR with an indication that the CoR had entrusted the LSEE team to survey their members and stakeholders on their views of the future of the EU in matters of governance, policy, and communication in order to echo their voice as effectively as possible.

The survey included 17 questions and took approximately 10 minutes to answer by respondents to maximise response rate. It was comprised of 12 close-ended substantive questions, 2 open-ended questions, and three questions used for the purposes of respondents' classification and sampling validation. In addition, the survey included a few questions relating to information on the respondent's organisation (such as country, regional or local level, political or administrative organisation) in order to provide the best analysis of the close-ended questions.

The close-ended questions have been analysed statistically and tested for significant differences according to the type of country and the type of organisation. The open-ended questions have been examined in the form of word frequency analysis and coding of the open-ended responses for purposes of univariate analysis.

The survey was sent to 1923 email addresses and we achieved a gross response rate of 28.3%. However, we estimate that our effective response rate was in fact most likely in the 40-45% range because the email address list included some people with multiple email addresses or various members of the same institution who chose to send a joint answer.

The key results of the survey are presented in the next three sections of our report.

Note that the contextual information provided throughout the report also refers to several citizens' surveys as well as qualitative research conducted by the ECREP team in electoral psychology for the rest of the team research and to one Eurobarometer survey. All ECREP surveys are based on fully representative samples of national populations, and in each case, we provide the link to the survey reports.

## **Part IV: Priorities for Structural Reform, Governance, and the Role of EU Regions**

Historically, EU reform has taken the form of high level treaty revisions, focusing predominantly on the balance of power between Member States and the EU level, and between the various EU institutions. The process has left little space for either ‘soft reform’ or the involvement of third actors such as EU regions and local governments.

As discussed in Part I, the current reflection on the future of the European Union may offer unique opportunities to try and consider the place of EU local and regional government in the EU institutional architecture as well as possible ‘soft’ structural reform that would go beyond treaty changes.

In that sense, we asked respondents a number of questions about their priorities for future EU reform as well as the future place that regional and local government may ideally play in the governance structure of a reformed European Union.

### **Citizens’ perceptions**

Our ECREP team has conducted several surveys on voters’ psychology and identity perceptions in multiple countries as well as the largest ever panel study surveys of European identity with over 30,000 respondents from 27 Member States<sup>3</sup>. One of the critical findings is that whilst a European identity has significantly emerged amongst citizens, it has particularly taken the form of a ‘civic’ identity, whereby EU citizens associate the European political system with some crucial rights and duties that affect their everyday conditions.

The paradox of that emerging civic identity is that far from making citizens willing to give a ‘blank cheque’ to European institutions, they are critical of any shortcomings in the field of EU democratic organisation. Precisely because they feel that they are citizens of the EU, they are not willing to easily forgive any processes which they find insufficiently democratic or which do not perform as

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<sup>3</sup> Bruter, M. and Harrison, S. Forthcoming 2019. *Inside the Mind of the Voter*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Also see earlier study Bruter, M and Harrison, S with Opinium. [opinium.co.uk/how-european-do-you-feel/](http://opinium.co.uk/how-european-do-you-feel/)

effectively as they would expect and wish<sup>4</sup>. This makes it particularly crucial to consider the governance processes of the EU political system.

An interesting aspect of citizens' perceptions of the EU institutional system is that overall, the key EU institutions benefit from levels of trust that are comparable to those of national equivalents when measured separately<sup>5</sup>. This remained notably the case in the context of the Eurocrisis of the early 2010s, where any decline in the trust in EU institutions was typically accompanied by similar or larger decline in citizens' trust in national equivalents. Even in the highly Eurosceptic UK in the run up to the Brexit referendum, while older generations expressed lower trust in the European Parliament than in Westminster, it was the opposite for young voters who expressed greater trust in the European Parliament than in their national Parliament in terms of both competence and ideological congruence<sup>6</sup>.

In this context, whilst citizens now express a generic sense of trust in the EU political system which is not fundamentally divergent from their perception of national political institutions, they also express a clear demand for greater democracy, transparency, and institutional effectiveness which need to be addressed as part of the reform and open the question of the role that local and regional authorities as well as the Committee of the Regions can play in a reformed EU institutional architecture.

## **Modes of reform**

The first question that we asked respondents pertained to the arbitration between different priorities in EU structural reform. The results are presented in figure 1.

Overall, according to CoR members and stakeholders, the biggest problem of the EU's institutional structure and most significant structural priority in a reflection on the future of the EU is the clarification of the policy prerogatives of the various governance levels along the lines of 'dual' rather than 'collaborative' federalism<sup>7</sup>. That priority is closely followed by a demand for stronger substantive policy power for regional governments.

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<sup>4</sup> Harrison, S. and Bruter, M. 2013. 'Media and identity: the paradox of legitimacy and the making of European citizens' in Risse, T. (ed) *European Public Spheres: Bringing Politics Back in*. Cambridge University Press

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

<sup>6</sup> Bruter, M and Harrison, S,

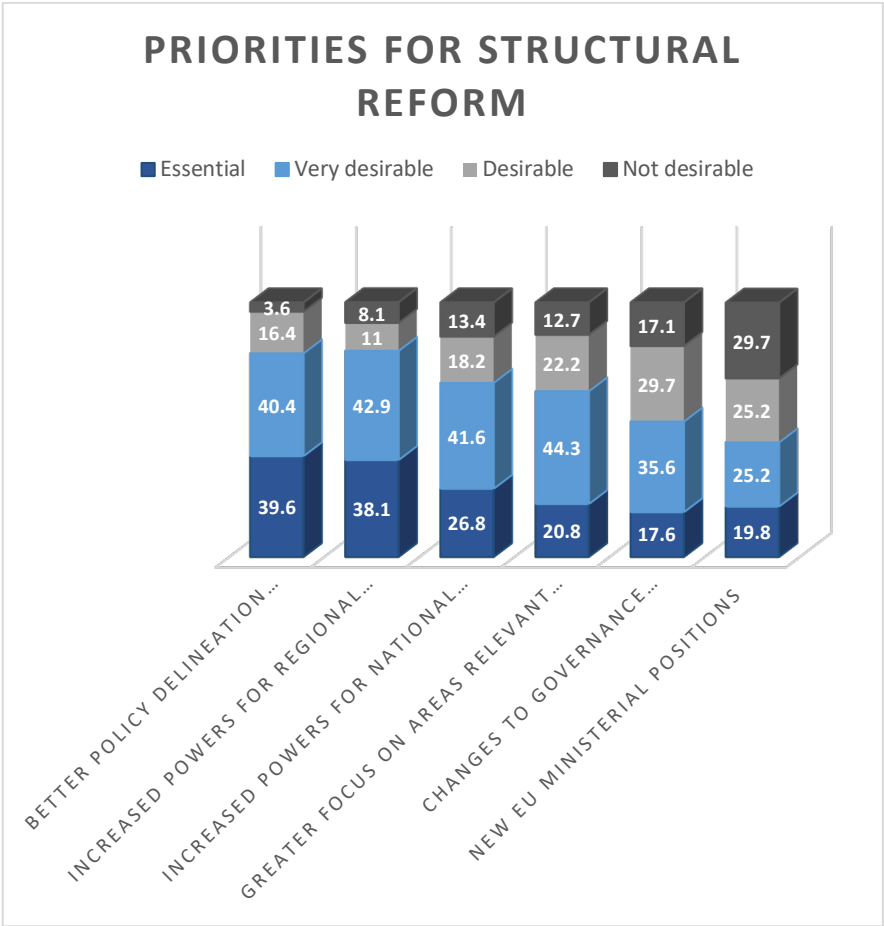
[http://opinium.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/the\\_impact\\_of\\_brexit\\_on\\_consumer\\_behaviour\\_0.pdf](http://opinium.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/the_impact_of_brexit_on_consumer_behaviour_0.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Political science typically distinguishes between 'dual federalism', which typically strictly delineates the competences of the federal and federate levels, exemplified by the US system, and 'collaborative federalism', whereby the various levels of government more frequently need to collaborate to design and enact global policies, as in the case of Germany and most European federal nations.



A second layer of structural priorities includes reinforcing the role of sub-EU (i.e. national and regional) representative institutions, and focusing more on policy areas that are of more direct relevance to EU citizens. Finally, treaty change and EU-level ministerial positions such as a new EU Finance Minister still receive majority support, but they are not seen as essential by respondents, and 3 in 10 respondents even see EU ministerial positions as undesirable.

It is worth noting that respondents’ own circumstances also impact their priority order for the structural reform of the EU. For example, clearer delineation of policy prerogatives is seen as essential by 46.7% of respondents from devolution states and 40.5% of respondents from unitary states, but only 29.3% of respondents from federal states where such delineation might often already be clearer at the national level. Changes to EU treaties are also most strongly supported by respondents from devolution states, but a strengthened role for the regional level is most strongly supported by respondents from unitary states<sup>8</sup>.



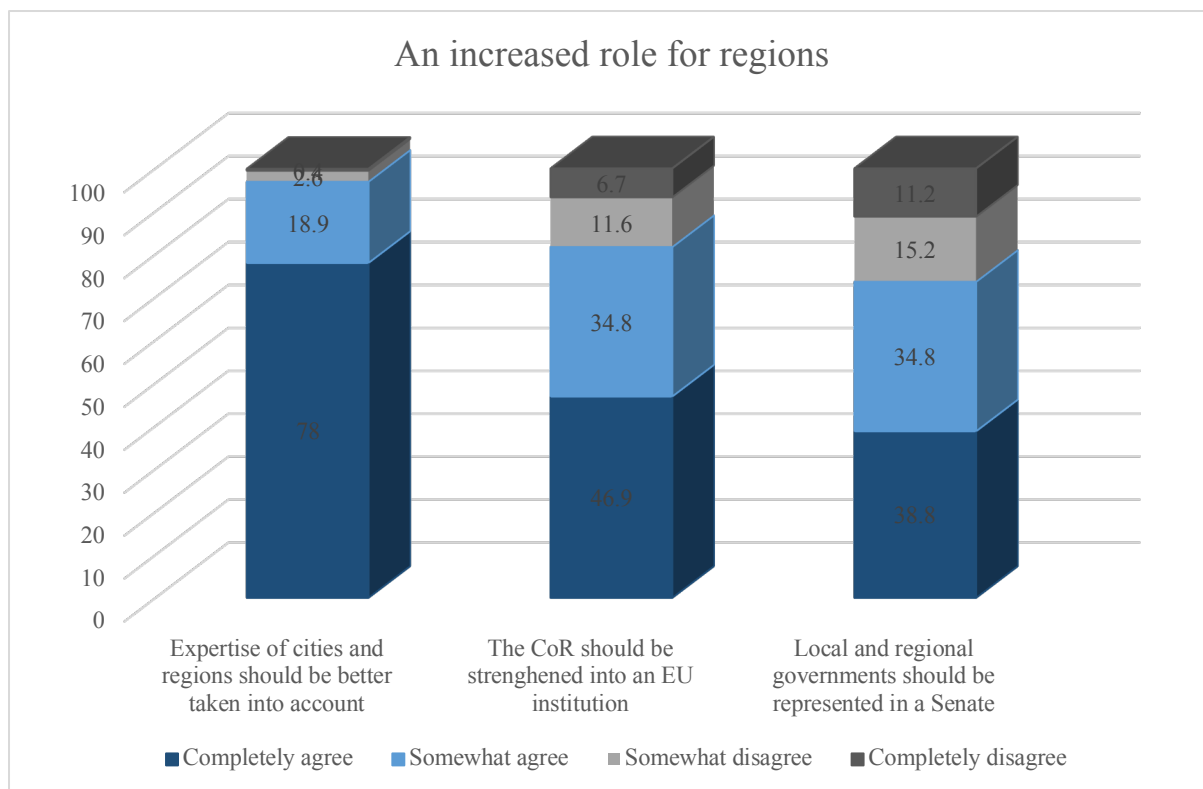
<sup>8</sup> Unitary, Federal, and devolution systems represent key types of territorial organisation. Unitary states typically have a strong central government though they may include local and regional authorities with some policy autonomy. Devolution states are typically organised asymmetrically (such as the UK and Spain) with some local or regional levels of governance having greater autonomy than others.

## **The role of EU regions and of the Committee of the Regions**

One of the crucial questions relating to the transformed institutional architecture of the EU is of course the role that the Committee of the Regions as well as individual local and regional authorities could and should play according to members and stakeholders. Here, several models could be envisaged. When it comes to the CoR itself, one option is to maintain the current system of predominantly consultative and monitoring CoR. A second option would be to propose to reinforce the representative function of the CoR in a context of more strictly codified multilevel governance or replace it altogether by a ‘Senate’ of European regions. A third possibility would be to retain the consultative function of the CoR but formalise a capacity of initiative for the Committee and perhaps transform it into a fully-fledged EU institution.

Conversely, a parallel reflexion could be considered on the role of individual regional and local authorities. At the moment, their status is largely heterogeneous across Member States, but it could be conceived to think of a clearer EU status for local and regional authorities, which would specify rights and roles in the context of EU policy making, or to find alternative ways of better considering their expertise and proximity with citizens in either top down or bottom up processes.

In the context of structural reform, respondents are predictably overwhelmingly keen on a strengthened role for EU regions as well as the Committee of the Regions. All three of the solutions for an increased role for EU regions – to generally better use their expertise in EU policy making, transform the Committee of the Regions into a full EU institution rather than an advisory body, and represent EU cities and regions in a second chamber or Senate all received significant support from respondents. Although clearly, the ‘soft approach’ of better taking their expertise and knowledge into account is supported more unanimously than more formalised changes with 78% strongly agreeing and only 3% disagreeing. Among more formal changes, a strengthened Committee of the Regions receives significantly more support than a new Senate (81.7% vs 75.6%) although both would be seen very positively.

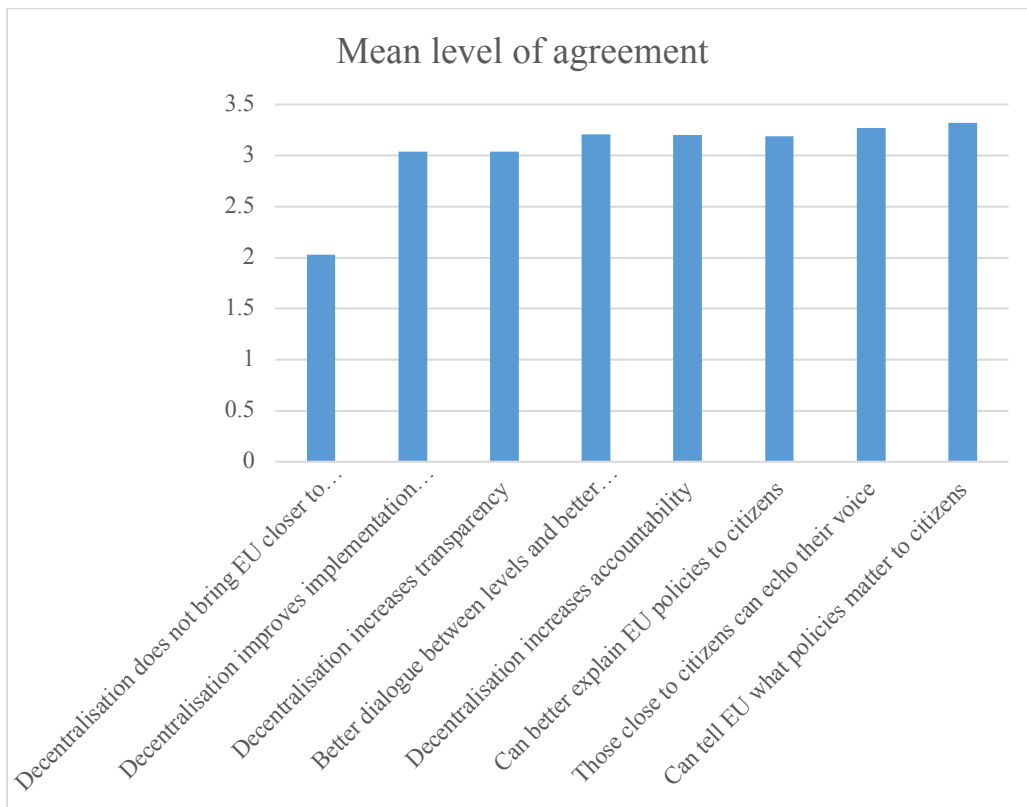
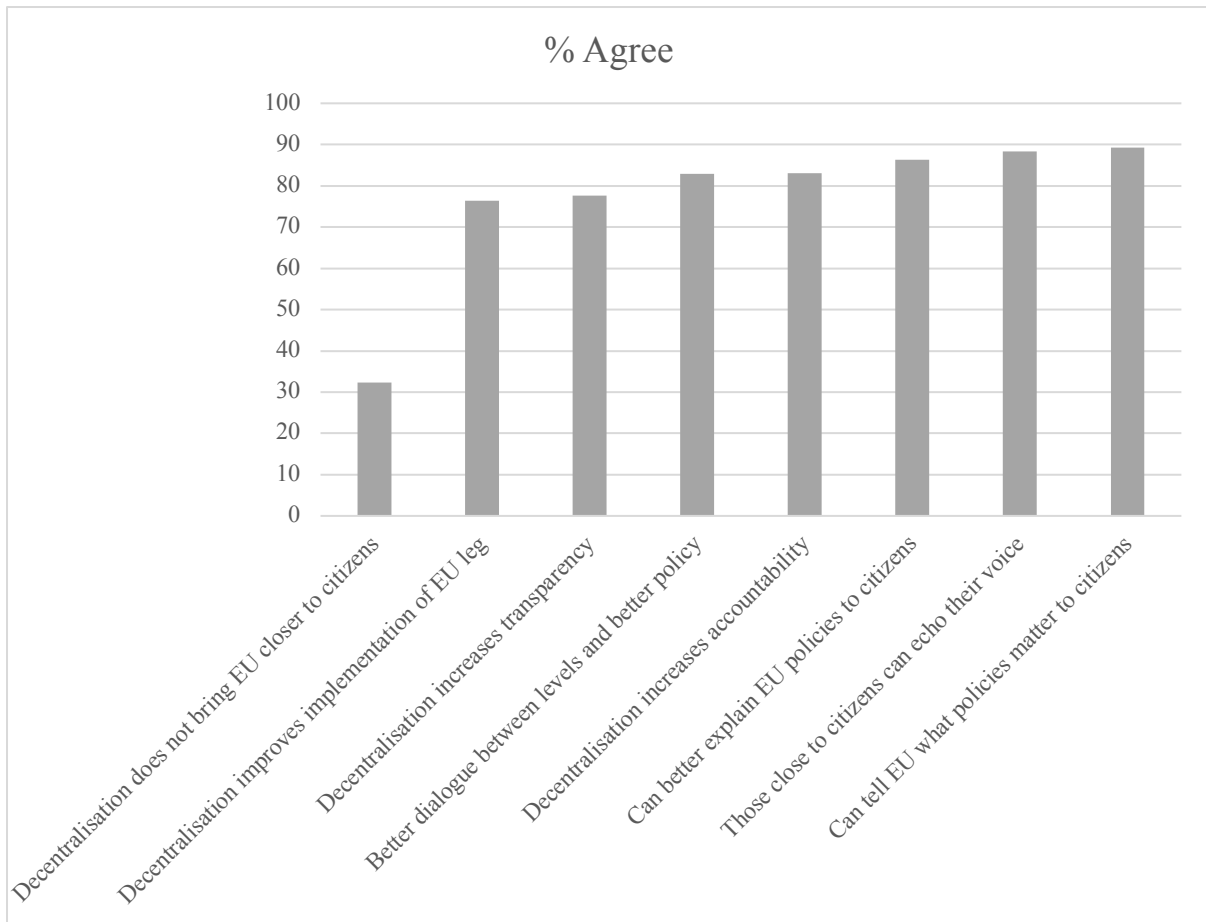


Here again, there is less enthusiasm for a Senate of European regions or making the Committee of the Regions a formal institution of the EU amongst respondents from federal states than from their unitary and devolution countries counterparts.

## Understanding the contribution of decentralisation

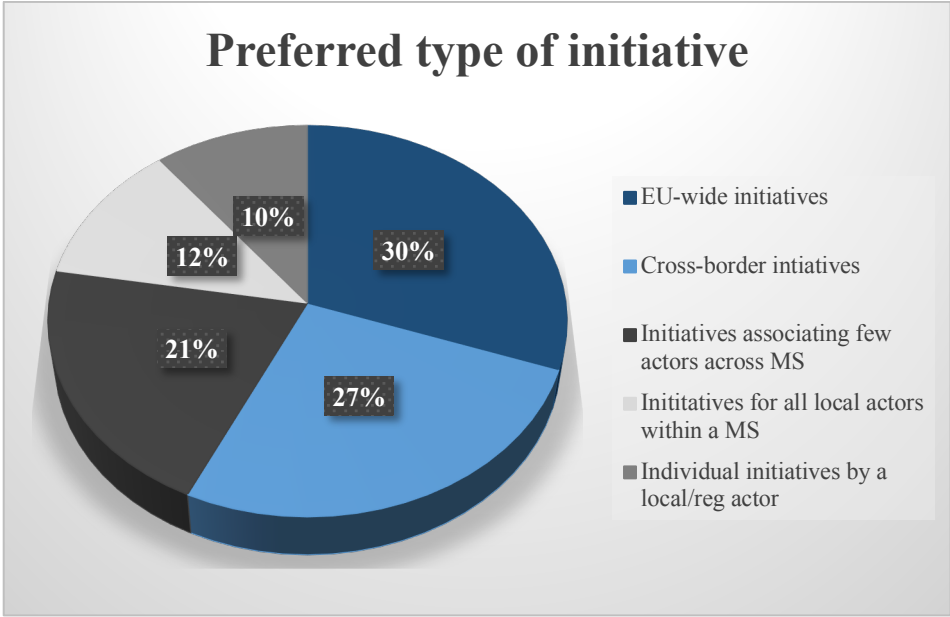
We also asked respondents why they believe that decentralisation may play a positive role in the democratic quality of EU decision-making by asking them the extent to which they agreed with a number of statements.

On the whole, respondents believe that the primary contribution of local and regional government is one of ‘linkage’ and representation, whereby local and regional governments are better placed than most to tell the EU what policies matter to citizens and what their concerns are, and to a lesser extent, in return, better EU policies to citizens themselves. By contrast, a lower (though still significant) proportion of respondents believe that decentralisation increases transparency, accountability, and the quality of policy making.



# Best models of Committee of the Regions supported initiatives

Based on that hope that local and regional government can improve the representation of citizens in the EU and take initiatives that will match their priorities and concerns, we asked respondents what they believe to be the most effective forms of initiatives supported by the Committee of the Regions.



On the whole, respondents are keen for the Committee on the *sine qua non* cross-national nature of CoR-supported institutions. They prefer the CoR to focus on universal EU-wide initiatives involving all local and regional governments in the EU, as well as cross-border initiatives. A third lower priority is given to initiatives assembling *ad hoc* groups of local and regional members from different countries without a trans-border nature. By contrast, support for initiatives taken by local and regional government within specific countries or individual local or regional actors is generally low.

## The role of EU local and regional authorities in members' and stakeholders' own words

Finally, we ask respondents to tell us, in their own words, what should be the role of EU local and regional authorities in a reinvented European Union in their own words. The aim of this question was to understand what contribution local and regional authorities can propose to improve and add new qualities to a reshaped EU institutional structure. Results are summarised below.



Overall, combining both our initial analyses and respondents' answers to the questionnaire, it seems clear that many respondents believe that EU local and regional authorities individually as well as via the CoR should have an important place and role to play in the reshaped EU institutional order that will emerge from the current reflection on the Future of Europe.

The primary argument in favour of such a presence, and the spirit of that inclusion, should be that EU local and regional authorities represent a unique element of representational linkage between citizens and EU level institutions, serving as a thermometer of citizens' priorities and interests on the ground. Additional arguments pertain to the capacity of EU local and regional authorities to enact European integration innovatively and efficiently in practice, notably through global and trans-border cooperation projects. Finally, as the national and sub-national levels of government are both affected by increasing transfers of power to the EU level, their combined presence within the EU institutional order ensures that new EU policies can be organised and developed in a way which, ultimately, will be most effectively implemented at the national and local level.

Organisationally, the priorities of respondents is to have further clarification of the competencies of the EU, national, and local level, and to have the views and interests of EU local and regional authorities represented by the CoR in that process.





## **Part V: The CoR, local and regional authorities, and EU policies**

The second part of our questionnaire is concerned with the specific policy priorities which respondents believe should be the primary focus of the EU in the future. In the context of the previous findings on the importance of a clear delineation between levels of governance, as well as their wish to echo the priorities and preferences of EU citizens, it is crucial to understand what CoR members and stakeholders want EU policy to focus on in coming years.

Much has been made over the years of the ‘wrong’ priorities of EU policy making. Reputations of dealing with the ‘shape of cucumbers’ and highly technical policy areas instead of focusing on citizens’ education and welfare have been frequent, and whilst the competences of the EU were historically based on what Member States were willing to transfer to a supra-national level, the reflection on the future of the EU may be a unique opportunity to refocus EU policy making on areas where citizens can experience the difference that the EU makes in their daily lives.

### **Citizens’ perceptions**

In the work conducted by the ECREP team in electoral psychology<sup>9</sup>, we confirmed important requests from EU citizens for a reinvention of EU policy making.

At a generic level, Eurobarometer data shows there is a global demand for the EU to refocus on policy issues closer to the daily concerns of citizens and further away from purely technical policy areas. For example, the European Parliament’s assessment of the expectation gap between desired and perceived policy making underline the fight against terror, unemployment, the fight against tax fraud, and immigration as the four areas with the greatest desire for more EU policy involvement. By contrast, industrial policy, agriculture, and foreign affairs are the three policy areas where the desire for greater policy involvement is least significant<sup>10</sup>. Note that a number of key policy areas are not mentioned in

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<sup>9</sup> Bruter, M. and Harrison, S. Forthcoming 2019. Op cit.

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/TD\\_ExpectationsGap.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/TD_ExpectationsGap.pdf)

the survey, notably education policy and research which, in our research, appear as frequent candidates for greater EU policy making on the part of citizens.

Beyond the traditional questions on specific policy preferences, however, our ECREP research shows that citizens are in search of *meaning* and values in EU policy and in particular the search for the reinvention of an EU solidarity model. Critically, we find that this is particularly the case for young citizens. We notably conducted a panel study of European identity, which showed that as a result of the ‘Eurocrisis’ of the start of the 2010s, older citizens saw their level of European identity decrease, but younger citizens (who already felt far more European than average) saw their level of European identity increase yet further as a result of the crisis. Relating it to other qualitative answers on European identity, this seems to stem from views that the crisis reinforced the perceived need for stronger European solidarity amongst young citizens<sup>11</sup>.

Moreover, we also found that perhaps due to the absence of an underlying ‘national interest’, compared to the national level, citizens’ expect greater standards of ‘moral’ consensus in EU policy making, which results in critical support for key areas such as solidarity, education and transgenerational transmission, standards of human and environmental protection.

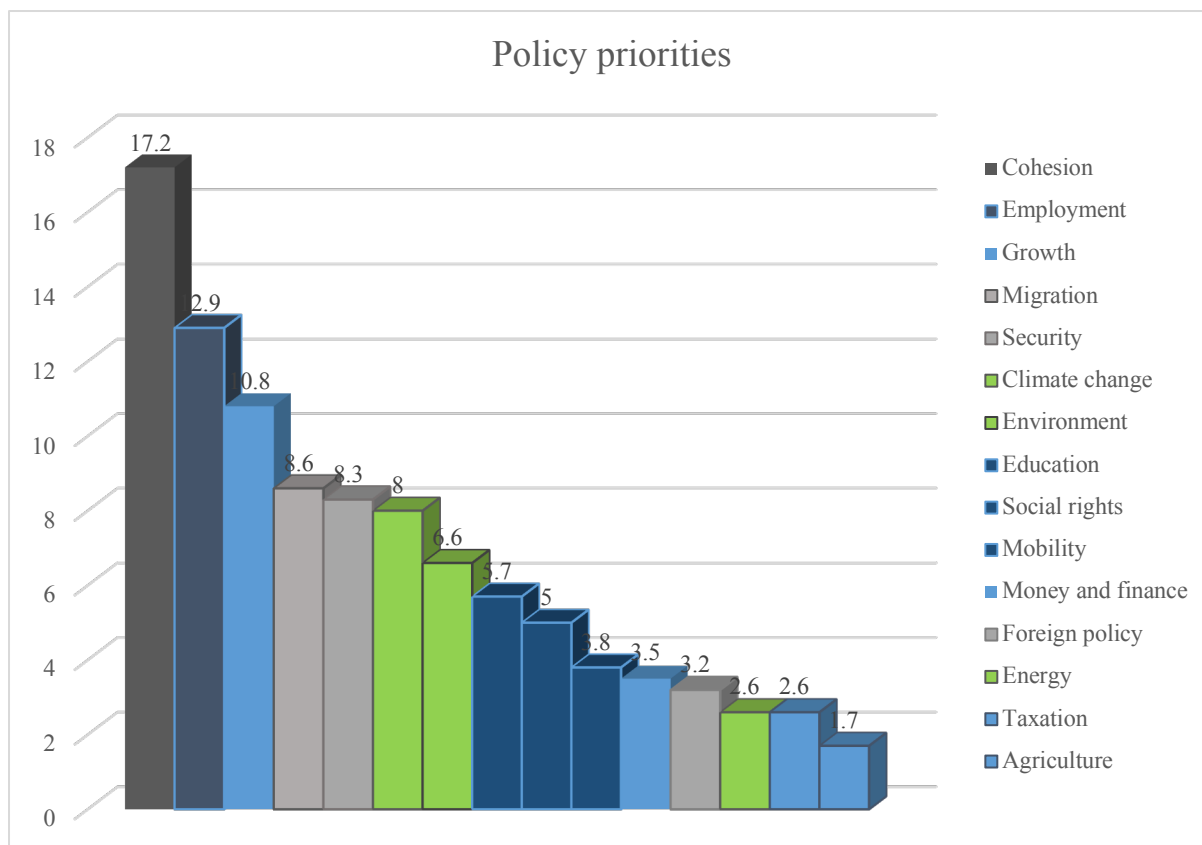
It is against this triple focus of moral consensus, reinvented solidarity, and greater proximity to citizens’ daily preoccupations that we ought to understand local and regional respondents’ own priorities for the reinvention of EU policy making and the extent to which it can be made to match citizens’ own democratic requests.

## **Policy priorities**

Our first question was therefore to ask each member which three policy areas they would prefer the EU to focus on as a policy-maker, offering a list of 15 of the most important policy areas in governance. The results are presented below.

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<sup>11</sup> Bruter, M. and Harrison, S. Forthcoming 2019. Op cit.



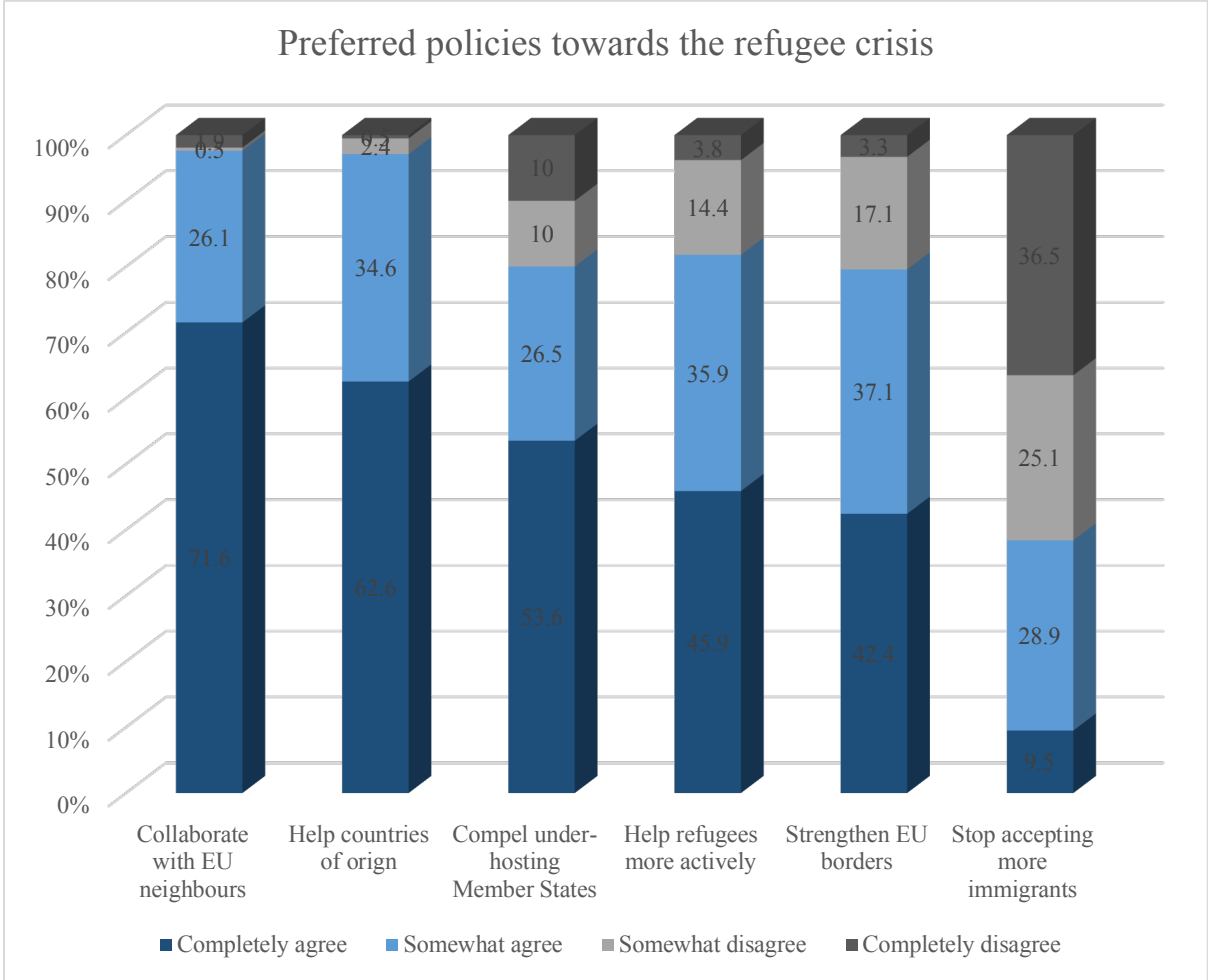
Perhaps unsurprisingly, the single policy that is most frequently mentioned by respondents is cohesion policy. However, the rest of the distribution is equally interesting. In the figure above, we represented social policy (including education and mobility) areas in dark blue, economic policy areas in light blue, ‘regalian’ competencies in light grey, environmental areas in green, and cohesion policy in dark grey.

We find an interesting spread of policy choices. Social policy areas represent 27.4% of total choices, followed by regalian policy areas (20.1%), economic policy areas (18.6%), and the environment (17.2%). Apart from a clear desire to put citizens back at the heart of policy priorities, there is therefore no specific area to be particularly privileged by respondents, and it seems that they would prefer for the EU to become a relevant policy maker in all traditional areas of policy-making on which it has competence.

## The specific question of migration

A particularly sensitive issue since civil war with IS started to terrorise the populations of much of the Middle East resulting in large numbers of civilian refugees aiming to seek asylum in the EU. We asked respondents the extent to

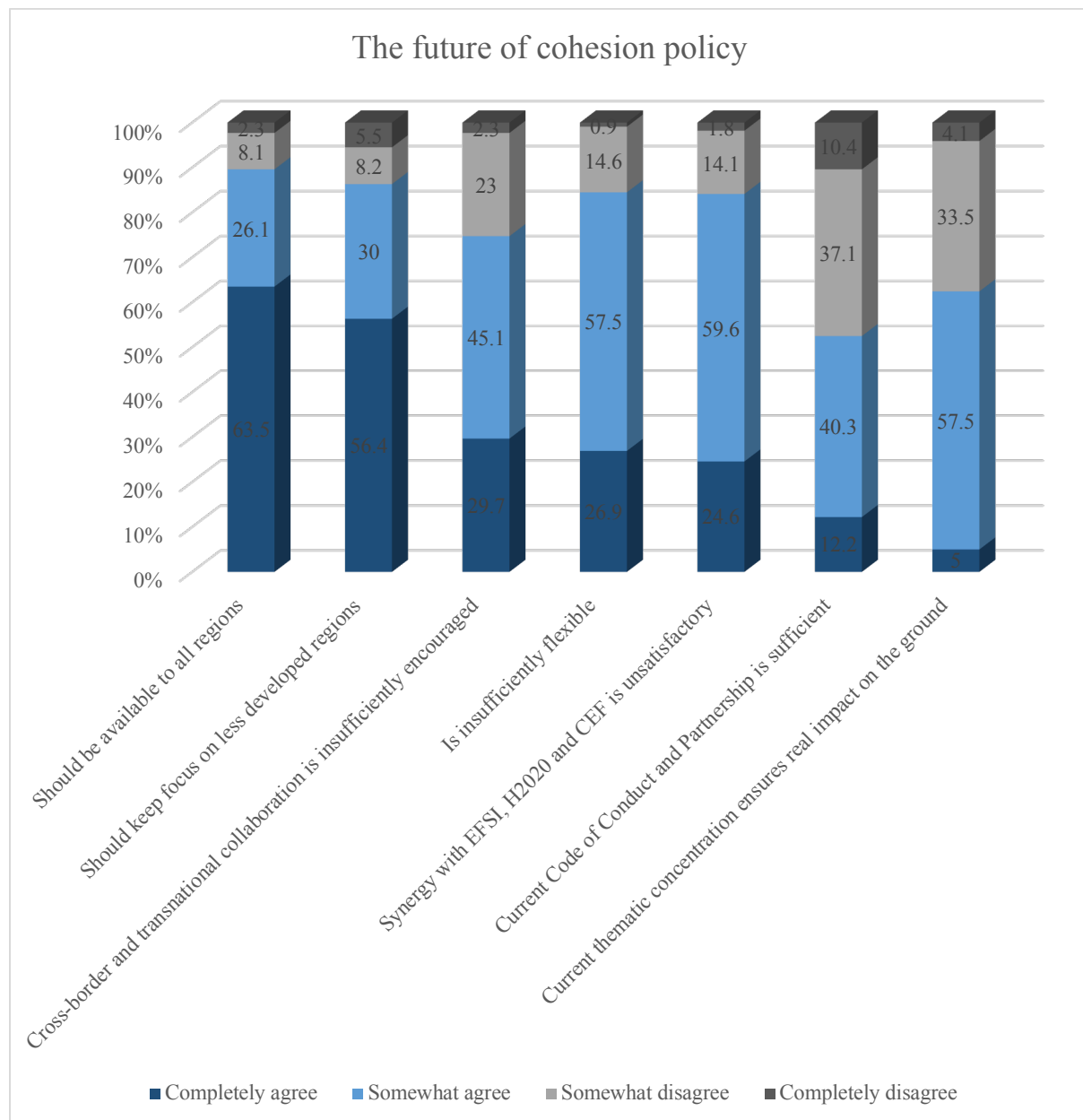
which they would agree with a number of possible approaches to the management of the refugee crisis. Results are presented below.



On the whole, respondents’ preference is for prioritising co-operation with the EU neighbours as well as with the countries of origin of the refugees and a strict implementation of Council decisions on the sharing of refugees who are granted asylum in the European Union, notably by obliging Member States who are not taking their fair share to participate in the collective effort. To a lesser extent, there is also strong support, however, to help refugees more actively and to strengthen the control of EU borders. The suggestion that the EU should stop accepting more immigrants is overwhelmingly rejected by respondents however.

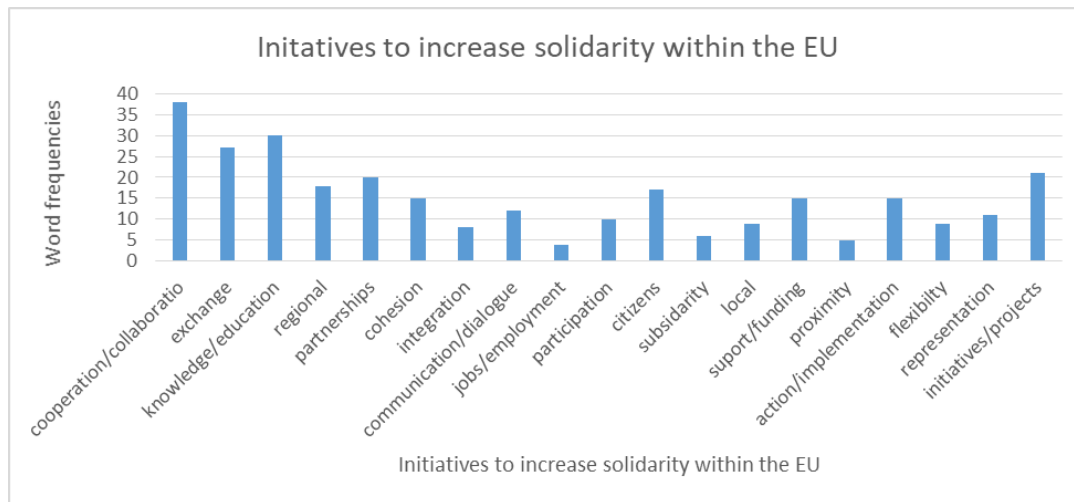
## The evolution of cohesion policy

As previously highlighted, respondents believe that cohesion policy is the single most important policy priority for the future of the European Union. We thus used the survey to ask them for their perceptions of how well cohesion policy currently works and what should be the priority for a future European Union in the field.



Members and stakeholders are clearly attached to all local and regional authorities being eligible to cohesion policy (89.6%) putting it ahead of the other strongly endorsed need to continue favouring less developed regions (86.4%). On the whole, respondents also believe that cross-border and transnational





The offer of members and stakeholders to put local and regional authorities at the heart of European solidarity can be summarised in five words: cooperation, knowledge, exchange, initiative, and partnerships. In effect, respondents want to use transnational cooperation, knowledge exchange, and economic initiative and partnership with the private sector to make the European Union a more equal and more solidary Union.

In other words, respondents are keen to implement the more successful aspects of regional solidarity such as trans-border and cross-national cooperation, public private partnership, and knowledge driven economy to foster more solidary economic and social growth across the European Union.

Overall, members and stakeholders would like the reflection on the future of the European Union to see a policy shift with a greater focus on policies close to citizens notably in social and economic areas, and with a focus on research, solidarity, and cross-national partnership. They see cohesion policy at the heart of this reframing of the EU policy agenda, maintaining the current balance between inclusiveness and solidarity and focusing on a knowledge-driven society and economy which puts citizens at the heart of the EU policy process.

They also believe that local and regional authorities are remarkably well placed to play their role in the drive towards greater solidarity and inclusive growth within the EU by using their current focus on cooperation, knowledge, education, and cross-national exchange and partnerships.





## **Part VI: Representation and Communication**

In the final section of our survey, we tried to understand how members and stakeholders assess the quality of representation and communication between citizens and the EU and how they believe that it could be improved both at the local and regional levels and beyond.

At the heart of the fight against Euroscepticism and disengagement, there is a frequent perception that there is a ‘communication deficit’ stemming from the EU towards citizens. Yet, existing research suggests that this is not the case and that in fact, exposing citizens to more (or more accurate) communication does not really increase either support for the EU or European identity whilst, by contrast, a substantive change in representation and increasing citizens’ experience of their EU citizenship rights and privileges both lead to major increases in levels of European identity (and largely explain why young people typically feel far more European than older generations despite being significantly less exposed to EU communication and messages).

In this third part of the survey, we assess respondents’ preferences when it comes to communication, representation, and the ‘making’ of EU citizens through the strengthening of their experience of the EU in their daily lives.

### **Citizens’ perceptions**

Citizens’ European identity, citizenship preferences, and perceptions of representation at the European level are probably amongst the least well understood by decision makers and commentators alike. A first and fundamental disparity between institutions and citizens lies in the perceptions of the source of the crisis in their relationship. For many institutions, better ‘communicating’ policy and decisions should be a priority, whilst for most citizens, ‘listening’ to them and representing them is instead the issue.

This divergence in views is in fact critical as in our research, we find that frequently, attempts to ‘communicate’ policy to citizens can actually be resented and rejected as an attempt to talk to them instead of listening, to convince them

to accept decision-makers' preferences, instead of decision-makers making a greater effort to listen to them to pass decisions which would be more in line with their preferences.

As mentioned, our large scale panel study survey on European identity shows that a large majority of citizens feel (predominantly civically) European with an average European identity score of 7.15 on a 0-10 scale<sup>12</sup>, but our work on voters' psychology shows that this is associated with very high – and often frustrated – expectations in terms of representation at all levels of government (local, national, and European). Moreover, whilst this is true of citizens in general, it is even more markedly the case of young people<sup>13</sup>.

In many ways (and regardless of whether those perceptions might be unfair), citizens thus feel like the least and last priority of decision makers compared to companies, pressure groups, or even representatives themselves and are thus crying to be put back at the heart of the representative process. In many ways, the Committee of the Regions was originally conceived, in part, to create an institution which would represent proximity with citizens and limit perceptions of distance between decision-makers and the people. There is a question as to how best local and regional authorities, and notably how they might be able to inhabit the articulatory function that could stem from their position between the European polity and potentially remote national and European decisional spheres to strengthen the feelings of identity, representation, and accountability of citizens within the EU.

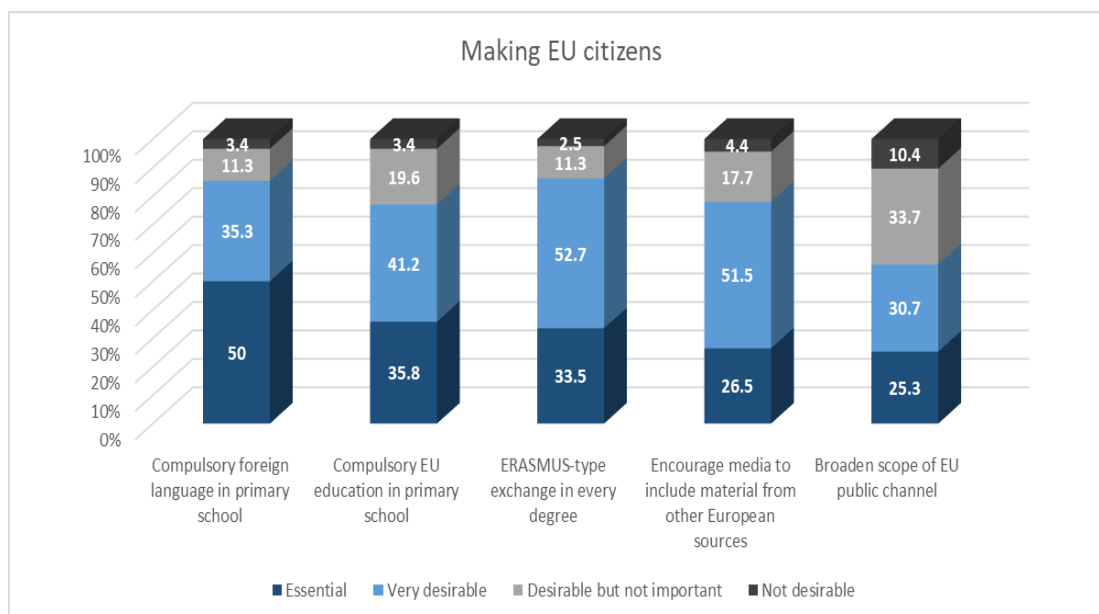
## **Making EU citizens**

The first question that we asked respondents pertains to their preferences when it comes to various ways of 'making' EU citizens through EU civic and cultural education and the strengthening of a European public sphere using both general national and *ad hoc* EU mass media. The results are presented below.

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<sup>12</sup> Bruter, M and Harrison, S 2019 and 2013 op cit.

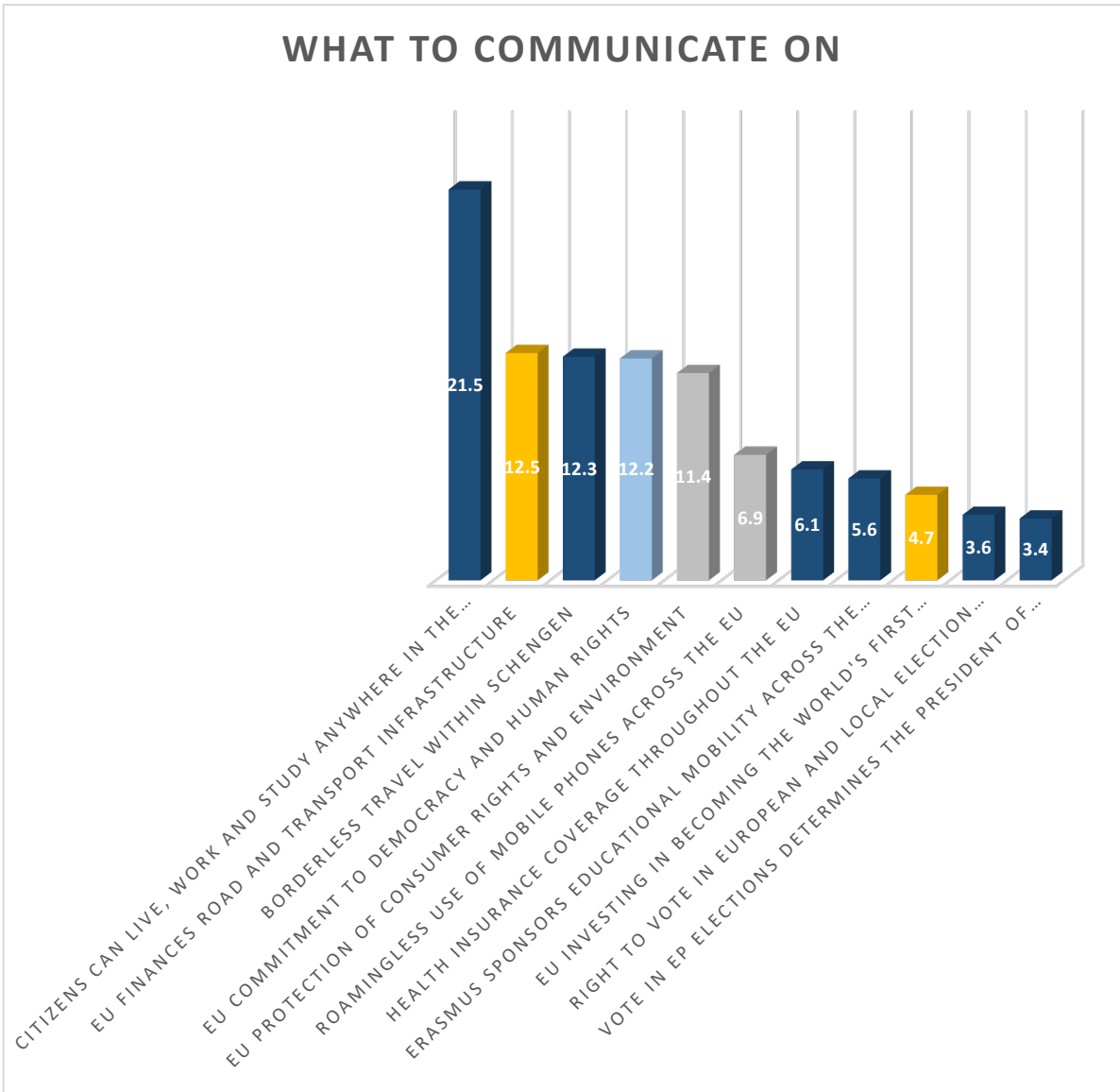
<sup>13</sup> Cammaerts, B., Bruter, M., Banaji, S., Harrison, S. and Anstead, N. 2016: Youth participation in Europe: In between hope and disillusion. (Palgrave)



The verdict of respondents is very clear and fairly unanimous. Whilst in practice, respondents overwhelmingly support almost every opportunity to strengthen EU education and the consolidation of a European public sphere, their opinions could be summarised in two simple statements: 1) education works better than communication, and 2) the earlier the better. In both elements, respondents are incidentally fully in line with extensive research in the field of European identity and EU citizenship. In details, the three highest priorities for respondents include 1) ensuring all EU children learn a first foreign European language as early as primary school (50% find it essential, 96.6% overall find it desirable), 2) including EU civic education in school curricula as early as primary school (essential for 35.8%, desirable for 96.6%), and 3) including Erasmus type exchange as part of every university or vocational degree in Europe (essential for 33.5%, desirable for 97.5%). By contrast, having news contents in national media stemming from other national media sources is only seen as essential by 26.5% of respondents (95.6%, however, still see it as desirable), and strengthening the contents of an EU public channel by 25.3% (desirable for 89.6%).

## What should be the focus of EU communication?

Our second question in this section focuses on the question of what EU communication should focus on, and notably the areas which respondents believe citizens to be most likely to be sensitive to. As seen earlier in this report, respondents consider that they are able to be more directly in touch with citizens' concerns and priorities, so it seemed important to ask respondents what, in practice, they believe that the EU is doing 'wrong' in terms of communicative focus. The results are presented in the figure below.



The top answer provided by respondents relates to the right to live, work, and study anywhere in the EU (21.5%), followed by a trio made of borderless travel within Schengen, EU finances of road and transport infrastructure, and the EU’s commitment to democracy, the rule of law and human rights (about 12% each), the protection of consumer rights (11.4%). All other propositions – from the use of mobile phones without the use of roaming to making the EU the first research area in the world, the right to vote in European and local elections wherever citizens live and health insurance coverage throughout the EU is mentioned by significant minorities of respondents (each between 3 and 7% of total responses).

There are several levels at which these members' and stakeholders' perceptions can be interpreted:

The first level is that there is a clear belief from respondents that citizens will best relate to things the EU does that can be experienced in their daily lives as opposed to the more abstract terms.

At the same time, at a second level, we also note that respondents feel that on the whole, citizens will be most sensitive to their rights as EU citizens (such as the right to live and work anywhere in the EU) than to what the EU brings them as consumers (such as the abolition of roaming charges or consumer rights' protection) or its policy priorities (such as the financing of transport infrastructure and research excellence). Interestingly, on those grounds, we note that respondents do not have much faith in advertising EU civic rights such as the right to vote in European Parliament and local elections wherever they live or their recent ability to influence the choice of the new European Commission President through European Parliament elections. It is worth noting that this is entirely at odds with citizens' own responses which place those elements as some of the most important to them alongside other citizenship rights such as the right to live, work and study anywhere in the EU, borderless and frictionless travel, and having an EU passport. By contrast, in citizens' responses, the EU's financing of local road of transport infrastructure or other policy priorities as well as 'consumer' aspects of integration are ranked far lower by citizens themselves.

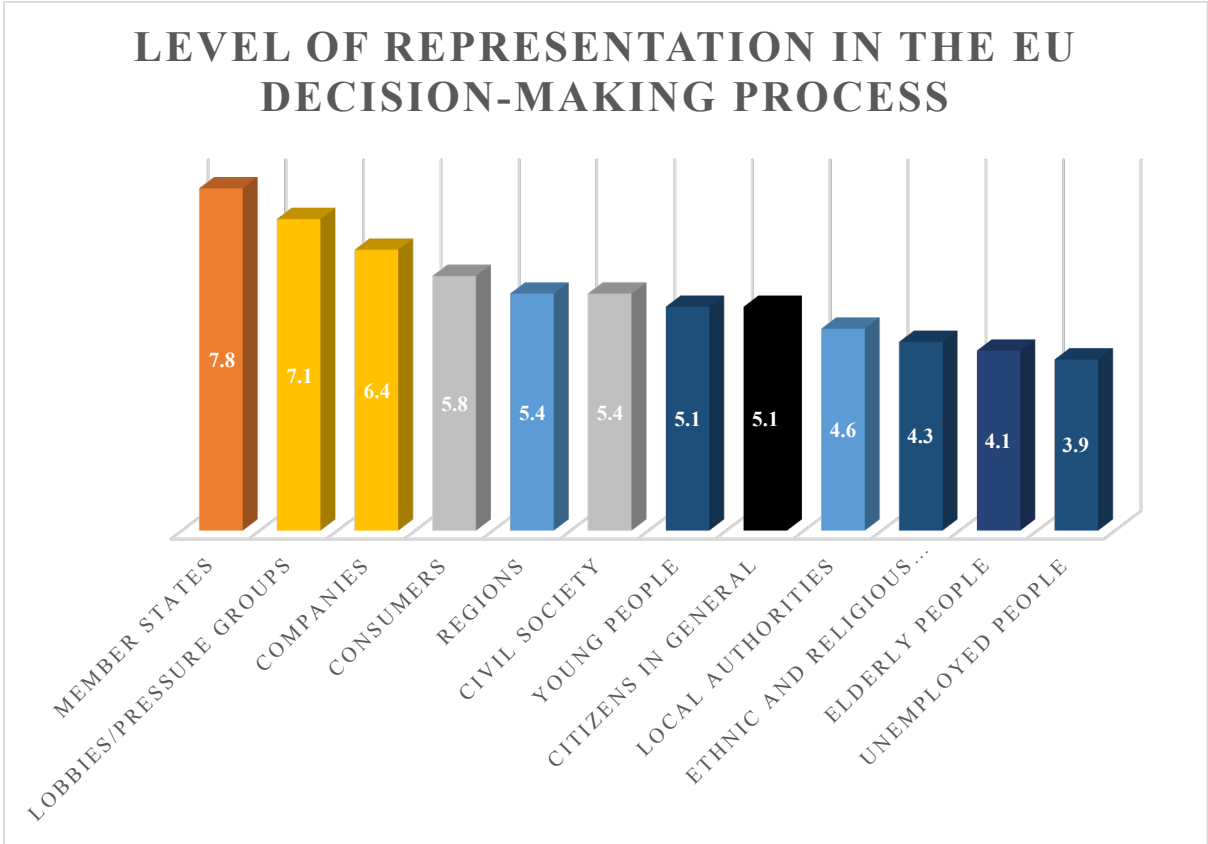
A third and final way to read this list is that respondents believe in a greater emphasis on 'concrete' rights rather than 'abstract' priorities in the future of EU communication

## **Who is represented in the EU policy-making process?**

A particularly sensitive question in the context of EU democracy and representation lies in understanding who is best represented and heard in EU decision-making processes. At the heart of a democratic system, citizens (and arguably specific categories such as young people or vulnerable citizens) should be the greatest representative focus of institutional structures well above special interests, organised groups, or stakeholders, whilst technical and international organisations may have a far greater focus on Member States and interest groups. We thus asked CoR members and stakeholders who they believe to be currently best represented in the EU decision-making process, with mean results on a scale from 0 to 10 presented in the figure below.

On the whole, the clearest message of respondents is that citizens in general and vulnerable citizens in particular are featuring abnormally – many would argue unacceptably – low in the list of the constituencies that are being represented in the EU decision-making process with a chance of having their voice heard. It is particularly noteworthy that beyond institutional stakeholders, the people who ‘claim to speak on behalf of citizens’ (such as civil society or consumer groups) are treated far more favourably than citizens themselves (let alone the most vulnerable of them), which is particularly problematic as we know from citizens that they do not feel that these groups are typically representative or legitimate in speaking in their names. In that sense, CoR members and stakeholders seem to deplore the existence and persistence of an often decried democratic deficit, which suggests that a reinvented European Union will somehow need to create a significantly bigger place for citizens themselves as well as vulnerable citizen groups (such as young people, the elderly and the unemployed in particular).

The differences are striking, with Member States ranked 7.8 on a 0-10 scale, lobbies 7.1, companies 6.4, and regions 5.4, but ordinary citizens only 5.1 and the unemployed only 3.9. Note that local authorities are seen as under-represented at 4.6.



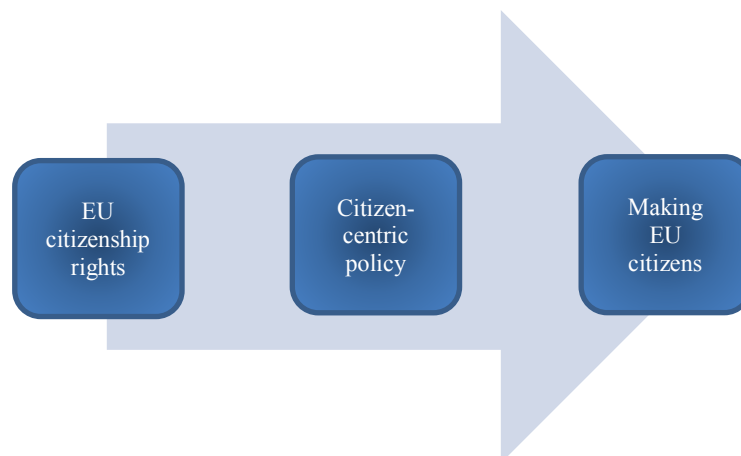
## Current channels of citizens' representation

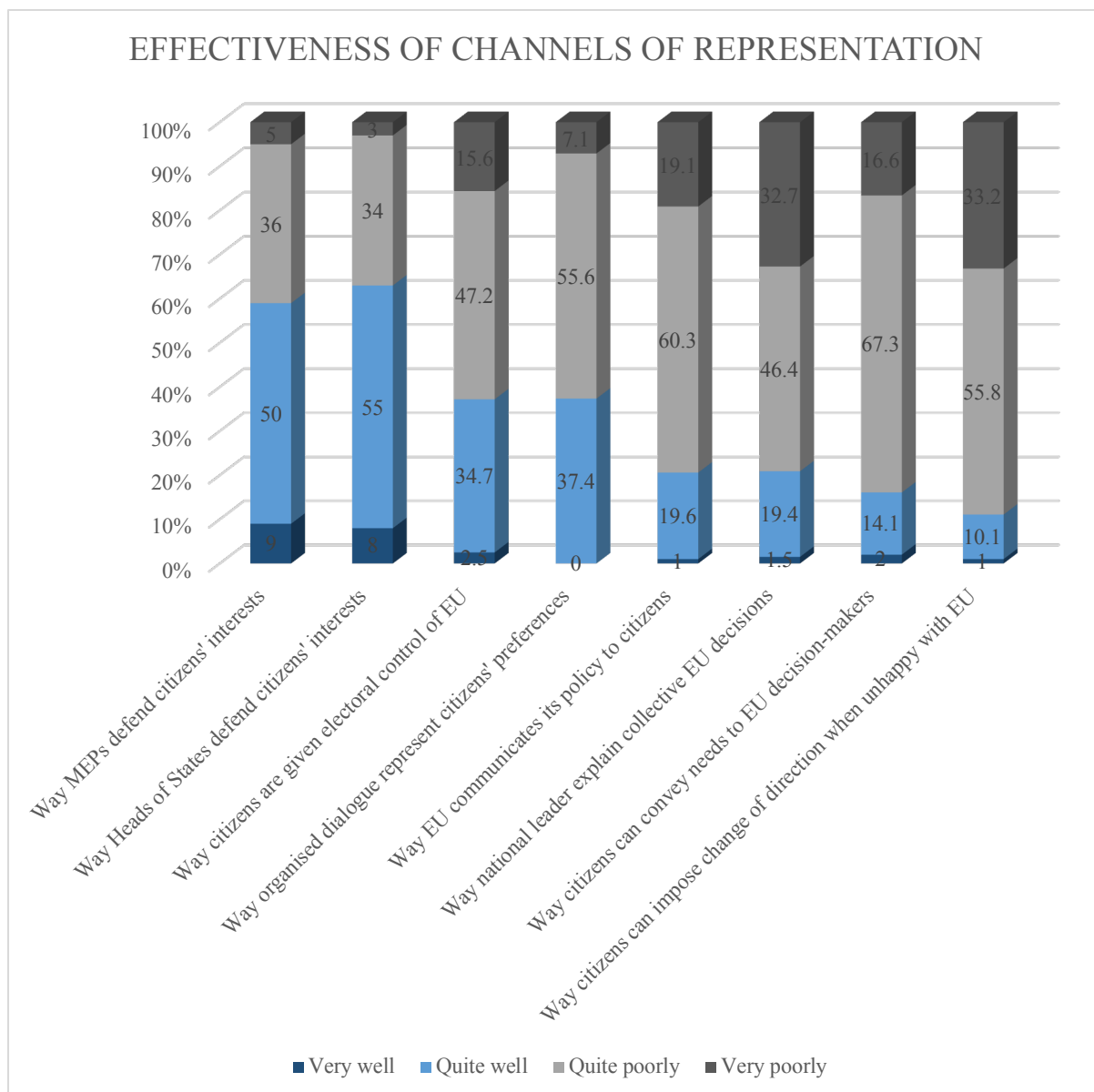
Related to the question of how well citizens are represented in the EU decision-making process is another, equally important, of which channels of their representation work well or poorly according to respondents. Citizens' control and accountability is a crucial foundation of any democratic political system, whether national, sub-national, or supra-national, and a lot of different representational modes can always be introduced. At the EU level, combinations are even more numerous in the sense that direct representational channels (through the European Parliament, or direct interface between EU institutions and citizens) and indirect ones (through national and sub-national representatives and executives) can be combined.

On the whole, it is clear that respondents take a very sceptical view of the quality of representational linkage in the EU and see very little successful representation. Only 9% think that MEPs represent citizens' preferences very well and only 8% say the same for Heads of States and Governments. Both channels, however, are the only two to have over 50% of positive judgements overall. By contrast, only 37.2% think that citizens' electoral control is effective and only 37.4% that organised dialogue represents citizens' preferences.

Far worse, however, only 1 in 6 member believe that citizens can convey their preferences to EU decision makers, and only 1 in 9 believe that citizens have ways of changing the course of EU decision making when they disagree with it.

On the whole, respondents assess the quality of representational linkage within the EU very negatively, and citizens' direct control – notably electoral accountability and their effective ability to channel preferences to the EU executive and to impose a change of direction when they are unhappy needs to be very urgently improved in a redesigned European Union.





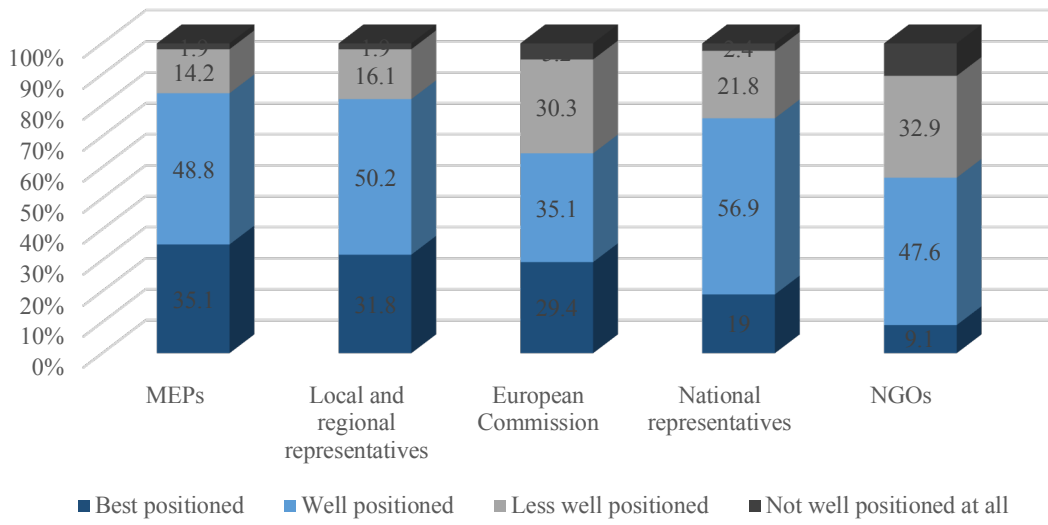
## Communicating EU affairs

Finally, we asked respondents who they perceive to be best placed to communicate to citizens on EU affairs. While respondents recognise the primacy of MEPs as the first logical source of communication of EU policy to citizens, they see local and regional authorities as second best placed to communicate EU policy to citizens ahead of the European Commission and well before national governments and NGOs.

This consolidates our previous findings that members and stakeholders ideally see their role as natural representative articulators between EU decision-makers and citizens.



## WHO TO COMMUNICATE THE EU?





# Part VII: Implications and Conclusion

## Institutional and policy implications

The findings of the consultation of Committee of the Regions stakeholders on the Future of the European Union and the role that local and regional authorities should play as well as the Committee itself leads us to draw a number of policy and institutional messages that the Committee should arguably push for in the context of the reinvention of the EU project.

We will first summarise those specific policy and institutional implications before drawing conclusions on the triple specificity that local and regional authorities should paly upon in order to define their own contribution to new and future models of EU institutional architecture, policy priorities, and improved citizens' representation.

**POLICY IMPLICATION 1: A NEW SOCIAL MODEL** – A first policy implication of our findings is that members and stakeholders want the EU to focus on policies which are closer to citizens' concerns rather than technical and more than other, they want the EU to focus on social policy areas. The responsibility of the Committee and of Local and Regional authorities is therefore in the first instance to push for the definition of a new European social model focused on protection and solidarity. Indeed, **Solidarity** – be it between citizens, between local and regional authorities, between states, or with the rest of the world should become one of the new core values of the EU alongside freedom and unity.

**POLICY IMPLICATION 2: STRENGTHENING EU CITIZENSHIP** – just like citizens, local and regional authorities value the crucial importance of **EU citizenship**. Citizenship rights are at the heart of European identity and of the support of citizens of the European integration process. The current situation is not enough and the EU must continue to arm its citizens with new rights which will be both meaningful in their everyday life (notably in their ability to live, work, study, and travel “at home” anywhere in the EU) but also in critical moments such as shared elections.

**POLICY IMPLICATION 3: YOUTH POLICY** – There is an urgent and critical need to create an ambitious, transversal, and forward looking **European youth policy** which encompasses issues of identity, citizenship, rights, education, work, language, culture, professional training, and more. Local and regional authorities should ensure that young people are at the heart of the EU project as

actors, deciders, and policy targets. The Committee has already sponsored some important initiatives (such as Youth on the move) but more needs to be done.

**POLICY IMPLICATION 4: PROTECT THE VULNERABLE** – much of current expressions of Euroscepticism come from populations which feel left behind by the European integration process. Local and regional authorities seem to unanimously agree that vulnerable populations such as the elderly, the unemployed, ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities, and of course the young are grossly under-represented in current structures. There can be no resolution of the EU democratic deficit without the fixing of this marginalisation. As local and regional authorities are often at the heart of solidarity processes, they may well be the only institutions capable of ensuring that this key agenda goes beyond unfulfilled declarations of intention to become a true fixture of EU institutional organisation of policy making.

**POLICY IMPLICATION 5: IDENTIFY AREAS OF UNANIMITY** – whilst the EU must push its agenda on a number of difficult issues and choices, there are also a number of areas of unanimity and problems identified by all actors across countries. Those include climate change and the protection of the environment, the fight against terrorism, the challenge of ageing populations and its implications on social systems, making the EU the leading world power in the field of research and innovation, and the guarantee of quality health, education, and decent living conditions for all. Those areas can probably lead to the easier definition of common frameworks, respond to critical citizens' concerns and can become iconic symbols of a European Union which addresses the key contemporary social concerns and challenges faced by its citizens.

**POLICY IMPLICATION 6: MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE BETWEEN UNIVERSALITY AND SOLIDARITY** – Local and Regional authorities are unanimously keen on guaranteeing the protection of levels of governance which are geographically close to citizens, and they are strongly attached to stimulating their action in a way which continues to balance the principle of transnational universality and cross-border linkage, and a particular effort towards needier areas. This should lead to a ring-fencing of multi-level governance at the EU level around those two complementary principles.

**POLICY IMPLICATION 7: BALANCING RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS** – no rights without obligations, and no obligations without rights. Stakeholders note that some actors – such as Member States, companies, and lobbies are particularly well represented at the EU level, and this should come with matching obligations. By contrast, citizens in general, and young citizens in particular seem to suffer from a rights-deficit within the European sphere of governance and new rights should be guaranteed to match their growing

obligations. Conversely, the Committee of the Region itself as well as local and regional authorities represent unique opportunities for the EU to reach out to categories of actors which are often ignored by current consultative and communicative processes. That articulatory role should be played by local and regional authorities, but also entitle them to rights of proposal, agenda setting, and policy innovation and control which they do not currently have. For the EU to be stronger, the EU also needs to be fairer.

## Conclusions

The EU has launched an unprecedented open reflection on its future and on how it can put citizens at the heart of a reinvented European dream. Five scenarii are being considered though a broader reflection might encompass further alternative solutions and open the way for stakeholders – including the Committee of the Regions – to propose more creative solutions to redynamise European integration in terms of its governance, policy-making, and representation. In this context, the place of local and regional authorities in this future re-foundation has not been specified, but it is essential – not only for local and regional authorities but also for citizens and the EU themselves – that such a place exists and we asked CoR members and stakeholders what role they envisage for themselves in this process and how they would like to shape the consultation.



In our report, having reviewed both our knowledge of citizens' frustrations and democratic demands, and the evidence based on our survey of members and stakeholders of the Committee of the Regions, we are suggesting that three key messages correspond to a common territory between citizens' priorities, and local and regional authorities' preferences and skills:

- Proximity: becoming available platforms through which citizens can channel preferences and dissatisfaction into the decision making process in between elections to make EU governance and decision-making more democratic and efficient;
- Articulation: playing an articulatory role between citizens, stakeholders (including the private sector, research, civil society) and national and European governance to make EU governance and decision-making more innovative and forward-looking;
- Solidarity: using the experience of local terrains and cohesion policy to reinvent the new forms of solidarity and moral and human-centric policies that citizens are expecting from Europe to make EU governance and decision-making better and fairer.

First, local and regional authorities represent the crucial concept of 'proximity' for citizens. In their absence, the European project would feel more distant, more abstract, and less accountable to citizens. Of course, the European Parliament is the primary arena of citizens' representation in the European Union, but elections only take place every 5 years and have only started to become significantly more salient with the inauguration of *spitzenkandidaten* in the 2014 European Parliament Elections. Moreover, the choice of electoral systems typically based on national or large constituencies means that citizens do not have an obvious element of territorial representation at the EU level despite the traditions of many Member States.

Second, members and stakeholders clearly see their role as 'articulatory' in the EU representational process, channelling citizens' needs and priorities – and if need be dissatisfaction – to EU authorities, and conversely participating in a didactic effort to help citizens understand what the EU does and can change in their daily lives, and the opportunities that it opens to all of them and notably to the younger generation of European citizens. In particular, this articulatory role is one which local and regional authorities tend to enact differently from national and cross-national spheres through a greater daily practice of collaboration with companies, civil societies, researchers, and citizens' groups. The idea is that local and regional authorities can upload this experience of their

daily practice of articulation between various institutions, stakeholders, and citizens' representatives at the EU level either directly or through the Committee of the Regions.

Thirdly, through cohesion policy, local and regional authorities also have a unique take on the daily implementation of EU-wide solidarity that few other actors share. Members and stakeholders consequently want EU local and regional authorities to be at the heart of a renewed model of EU solidarity, which can be summarised in five words: cooperation, knowledge, exchange, initiative, and partnerships.

In that context, respondents want to push for a European Union which is more citizen-centric, primarily focuses on EU citizenship rights (such as the rights to live, work, and study freely anywhere in the EU) but also all of the peripheral rights and protections that make such rights a concrete reality whether one is rich or poor, old or young, protected or vulnerable, and notable social and economic policies.

They also understand the need for the EU to focus on the concrete differences that it makes in citizens' daily lives rather than solely hiding behind general principles and the crucial but no longer sufficient contribution that European integration has already made to peace and prosperity in Europe in the past 70 years. In that context, local and regional authorities can bring in a more concrete, pragmatic, and effective take on the way the European Union wants to continue its essential challenge of 'making' Europeans.

Finally, in that sense, respondents are acutely – and perhaps dramatically – aware that as things stand, citizens are the poor parents of the EU representational process and that this must be an absolute priority of the reinvention of the European dream. Whilst initially, there were good reasons why the EU may have given particular audience to Member States, companies, and representative groups, it cannot fail to primarily listen to citizens in general and vulnerable and young citizens in particular in the next stages of the European integration process.

This should perhaps be the number one reason why local and regional authorities must be given a place in the reinvention of the European project: putting European citizens back into the heart of the European political system.





# Appendix 1: Questionnaire

## **Part 1 - Governance**

First, we would like to ask you 5 questions with regards to the future of European governance.

**1) Proposals to reform the European Union offer several possible directions. On the whole, how desirable do you think that the following options are in helping bring the European Union closer to citizens?**

*[4: Essential, 3: Very Desirable, 2: Desirable but not very important, 1: Not desirable]*

- Changes to the governance structure of the EU, including through changes in the European Union Treaties;
- Increased involvement of National and Regional Parliaments in EU decision-making;
- Increased powers for the regional level;
- Creating new ministerial type positions, such as a Eurozone Finance Minister and/or EU Foreign Minister;
- Focusing on other additional policy areas that pertain to citizens' daily lives;
- Better delineation of the policy areas that should be dealt with at the EU, national, regional, and local levels.

**2) To what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

*[4: Completely agree, 3: Somewhat agree, 2: Somewhat disagree, 1: Completely disagree]*

- Knowledge and expertise of cities and regions should be better taken into account when it comes to EU law-making;
- The role of the CoR should be strengthened and developed from an advisory body into a EU institution;
- Local and regional governments should be represented in a second chamber (or senate) with the right to initiate EU legislation.

**3) Many European Member States have engaged in various forms of decentralisation. On the whole, when you think of the contribution that local and regional authorities can make to bringing the EU closer to citizens, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

*[4: Completely agree, 3: Somewhat agree, 2: Somewhat disagree, 1: Completely disagree]*

- Decentralisation does not really bring the EU closer to citizens;
- Decentralisation can ensure those who are closest to citizens can echo their voice;
- Decentralisation means local and regional organisations can tell the EU what policies matter most to citizens;
- Decentralisation means that representatives of the decentralised levels can better explain EU policies to their citizens;
- Decentralisation improves dialogue between different governance levels resulting in better policy;
- Decentralisation increases transparency;
- Decentralisation increases accountability;
- Decentralisation improves the implementation of EU legislation.

**4) Local and regional authorities throughout the EU use different approaches to take initiatives that benefit citizens with the support of the European Committee of the Regions. In your view, which two types of initiatives should the European Committee of the Regions encourage most?**

*[Choose 2]*

- EU-wide initiatives involving all regional and local actors;
- Individual initiatives by a given regional or local actor;
- Cross-border initiatives involving neighbouring regional or local actors from few Member States;
- National initiatives involving all local or regional actors in a given Member State;
- Associative initiatives involving a small or medium number of regional or local actors across a number of Member States.

**5) More broadly, in your own words, when you think of what should be the role that local and regional authorities should have in a transformed European Union, what are the first three words that come to your mind?**

*[THREE WORDS]*

## **Part 2 - Policy**

Now, we would like to ask you a few questions about EU policy priorities.

**6) If you could only choose THREE policies which the EU should prioritise in coming years, which of the following policies would you choose?**

*[Choose three]*

- Growth;
- Employment;
- Cohesion;
- Agriculture;
- Monetary and Finance;
- Taxation;
- Foreign;
- Mobility;
- Education;
- Environment;
- Migration;
- Social rights;
- Energy;
- Security;
- Climate change.

**7) When it comes to the EU's policy towards immigrants and refugees, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

*[4: Completely agree, 3: Somewhat agree, 2: Somewhat disagree, 1: Completely disagree]*

- The EU has to take a more active role in helping refugees;
- The EU should act more forcefully towards Member States who are not implementing what the European Council has agreed with regard to the reception of immigrants and refugees;
- The EU has already got too many problems and cannot accept more immigrants;
- The EU has to provide further help to countries of origin to foster reconstruction and economic growth so that people do not need to leave;
- The EU should strengthen its external borders;
- The EU should further collaborate with its neighbours to manage migration.

**8) Cohesion policy is one of the most important and comprehensive EU policies. When you think about how it should evolve in the future, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

*[4: Completely agree, 3: Somewhat agree, 2: Somewhat disagree, 1: Completely disagree]*

- Cohesion policy should continue to be available for all regions;
- Particular focus on the less developed regions must be maintained;
- Cohesion policy is insufficiently flexible;
- The current Code of Conduct on Partnership that obliges Member States to involve local and regional authorities in the partnership agreements and operational programmes is sufficient to ensure effective multi-level governance;
- The current thematic concentration ensures real impact on the ground;
- The synergies between cohesion policy and instruments such as EFSI, Horizon 2020 and CEF are currently unsatisfactory;
- Cross-border, transnational, and interregional cooperation is insufficiently encouraged.

**9) When you think of how local and regional authorities can help to increase solidarity within the EU, what are the first three words that come to your mind?**

*[THREE WORDS]*

### **Part 3 – Communication and Representation**

Now, we would like to ask you 3 questions regarding the way the European Union communicates with citizens.

**10) How do you think the sense of belonging of the European citizens to the European Union could be improved?**

*[4: Essential, 3: Very Desirable, 2: Desirable but not very important, 1: Not desirable]*

- Include the study of the EU in school curricula as early as primary school;
- Offer an ERASMUS-type exchange year as an integral part of every university or vocational degree;
- Encourage national and regional/local media to include daily material from other European sources related to EU policy matters;
- Introduction of compulsory learning of a foreign language in primary school;
- Broaden the scope and coverage of the EU wide public TV channel.

**11) Many believe that citizens still find it difficult to understand how the EU makes a difference in their daily lives. When you think of the aspects that citizens of your local or regional area would be most likely to relate to and appreciate, what are the three aspects which you believe the EU should focus its communication on?**

*[Choose three]*

- How the EU finances roads and transport infrastructures in their area;
- How the EU enables them to live, work, and study anywhere they want in the EU;
- How the EU enables them to travel without borders throughout the Schengen area;
- How the EU enables them to be covered by health insurance throughout Europe;
- How the EU is investing in becoming the world's top research area;
- How the EU allows them to use mobile phone roaming contracts throughout the area;
- How European citizens can vote in European and local elections anywhere they live in the EU;
- How the vote of European citizens determines the choice of the new President of the European Commission;
- How Erasmus sponsors students to study in another European country;
- How the EU protects consumers' rights and the environment;
- How the EU is committed to democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

**12) On the whole, using a scale from 0 to 10 how well do you think that the interests of the following people and organisations are represented in EU policy making?**

*[0: not well represented at all to 10: very well represented]*

- Citizens in general;
- Young people;
- Companies;
- Regions;
- Local authorities;
- Member States;
- Elderly people;
- Unemployed people;
- Ethnic and religious minorities;
- Lobbies and pressure groups;
- Civil society;
- Consumers.

**13) When it comes to the way citizens are represented in the EU decision-making process, how well do you think that the following aspects are currently working?**

*[4: very well, 3: quite well, 2: quite poorly, 1: very poorly]*

- The way citizens are given electoral control of the EU;
- The way citizens are able to convey their needs to EU decision makers;
- The way the EU communicates its policy to citizens;
- The way those who participate in organised dialogue represent the preferences of average citizens;
- The way citizens are able to impose a ‘change of direction’ when they disagree with what the EU is doing;
- The way Heads of States and Governments defend the interests of their citizens;
- The way MEPs defend the interests of their citizens;
- The way that national leaders explain the decisions they collectively take at EU level.

**14) In your view, who is best positioned to communicate about EU affairs?**

*[4: Best positioned, 3: Quite well, 2: Less well, 1: Not well positioned at all]*

- Local and regional representatives/elected politicians, such as CoR members;
- National representatives/elected politicians;
- Representatives of the European Commission;
- Members of the European Parliament;
- Non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

**Part 5 – Respondent Information**

Finally, we would like to ask you some very brief questions about the institution/organisation that you work for.

**15) In which country is your organisation based?**

*[Dropdown menu]*

**16) Would you describe your institution/organisation as:**

- Regional
- Local
- An association of multiple regional or local organisations
- Other

**17) Would you say that your institution/organisation is best described as:**

- Elected
- Administrative
- Non-governmental
- Other





## Appendix 2: Distribution of Respondents

### *By type of organisation*

Regional	52.8%
Local	26.6%
Association of regional/local organisations	13.3%
Other	7.3%

Other includes for example: Local government working on a regional scale, Local and regional, EP, ONG, Industry Association, permanent representatives

### *By status*

Elected	51.9%
Administrative	31.3%
Non-governmental	11.2%
Other	5.6%

Other includes for example: elected and administrative, representative, associations, etc.

### *By country*

Italy	9.8	Romania	4.2	Estonia	1.4
Germany	8.8	UK	3.7	Switzerland	1.4
Spain	7.9	Sweden	3.7	Portugal	0.9
Denmark	7	Poland	3.3	Bulgaria	0.9
Hungary	5.6	Ireland	3.3	Cyprus	0.9
Belgium	5.6	Netherlands	2.8	Slovenia	0.9
Czech Republic	5.1	Greece	2.8	Latvia	0.9
France	4.7	Croatia	1.4	Malta	0.9
Austria	4.7	Slovakia	1.4		
Finland	4.7	Lithuania	1.4		

Note: those figures are based on respondents who confirmed a country of affiliation. A large proportion of respondents chose not to answer this question.

## **Appendix 3: Additional segmented data**

### **Introduction**

After considering distributions and numbers, we assessed relevant segmentation of the data by 1) type of territorial organisation (unitary, devolution, or federal) and time of joining (old and new member states) as the North/South/East/West division would have had too few cases in some of the categories to be representative.

In many respects, those forms of segmentation do not make relevant differences with a significant and narratively coherent dimension. However, some specific differences persist in some respects which we highlight below.

Note that those differences come in addition to those already highlighted in the main report.

### **Policy priorities**

One of the key differences pertain to the prioritisation of policies that the EU should focus on. Here, there are important differences both across types of territorial organisation and old and new member states.

First, in terms of territorial organisation, we note that members in Devolution countries are the only ones to put Employment (rather than Cohesion) as their top policy priority. Unitary systems put a strong emphasis on growth, but also on security and climate change, neither of which are in the top four priorities of any other type of regime. By contrast, federal systems insist on migration and social rights, which are again much less salient for members in unitary and devolution systems.

Differences are also important when it comes to old and new Member States. Whilst old Member States put a very strong emphasis on employment, which is cited as a policy priority by many more stakeholders than in new Member States, in new Member States, the emphasis on security is conversely far higher than in the 15 pre-2000 nations. Other relevant differences are that climate change is a far more significant preoccupation for stakeholders from the old Member States whilst on the other hand, education is a far more important issue in the minds of stakeholders located in the ten Member States that joined from 2004 onwards.

*Policy priorities by territorial organisation*

	Unitary		Devolution		Federal	
First	<b>Cohesion</b>	<b>0.55</b>	<b>Employment</b>	<b>0.51</b>	<b>Cohesion</b>	<b>0.50</b>
Second	<b>Growth</b>	<b>0.39</b>	Cohesion	0.47	Employment	0.41
Third	Employment	0.31	Growth	0.36	<b>Migration</b>	<b>0.39</b>
Fourth	<b>Security</b> <b>ClimateChange</b>	<b>0.28</b>	Migration	0.27	<b>Social Rights</b>	<b>0.30</b>

*Policy priorities between old and new Member States*

	Old Member States		New Member States	
<b>First</b>	<b>Cohesion</b>	<b>0.53</b>	<b>Cohesion</b>	<b>0.51</b>
Second	<b>Employment</b>	<b>0.39</b>	<b>Security</b>	<b>0.41</b>
Third	Growth	0.35	Growth Employment	0.32
Fourth	Migration	0.27	Migration	0.25
Fifth	<b>ClimateChange</b>	<b>0.25</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>0.24</b>

Those differences suggest some potentially difficult choices for the European Union. Whilst there is broad agreement on some core issues like cohesion policy, growth, and employment, additional preoccupations vary quite significantly. In particular, security policy appears to be a much bigger concern in Central and Eastern Europe than in the West of the continent, where climate change is seen as a far more pressing priority. Conversely, stakeholders in federal systems see migration and social rights as far more pressing priorities than elsewhere whilst, by contrast, unitary systems would like a much stronger focus on security and climate change.

**The question of immigrants and refugees**

In addition to other policy priorities, a special case ought to be for the burning issue of how the European Union should deal with the current influx of immigrants and refugees from neighbouring areas at war or civil war. The so

called “refugee crisis” which has shaken much of Europe in moral, social, economic, and public opinion terms over the past several years has led to notably diversified assessments of what would constitute the most appropriate and effective reactions to a challenge that remains unprecedented in post-war Europe.

The contrast that we note is particular strong between old and new Member States. One commonality is that stakeholders from both types of Member States rate the need to collaborate with neighbouring countries as their top, unanimous priority. Beyond it, however, the rift between old Member States which prioritise providing asylum to refugees in need and new Member States which are primarily keen on controlling borders and avoiding what they perceive as an excess influx of immigrants is extremely clear.

Looking at the top four priorities for stakeholders from both groups of countries, we therefore note that “strengthening external borders” is the second highest priority of new Member States and saying that we “already have too many problems and cannot accept any more immigrants” their fourth. By contrast, both neither suggestion is part of the old Member States’ top four whilst in the latter case, “helping countries of origin” is the second highest priority followed by “being more forceful with Member States which refuse to accept their share” of immigrants, and “helping immigrants more actively”, which happen to be the two least popular options amongst new Member States. The results are summarised in the table below.

Old Member States Priorities		New Member States Priorities	
Collaborate more with neighbours	3.7	Collaborate more with neighbours	3.8
Help countries of origin	3.6	Strengthen external borders	3.7
Be forceful with non-compliant MS	3.5	Help countries of origin	3.6
Help immigrants more actively	3.5	Cannot accept more immigrants	2.9

**Identity and representation**

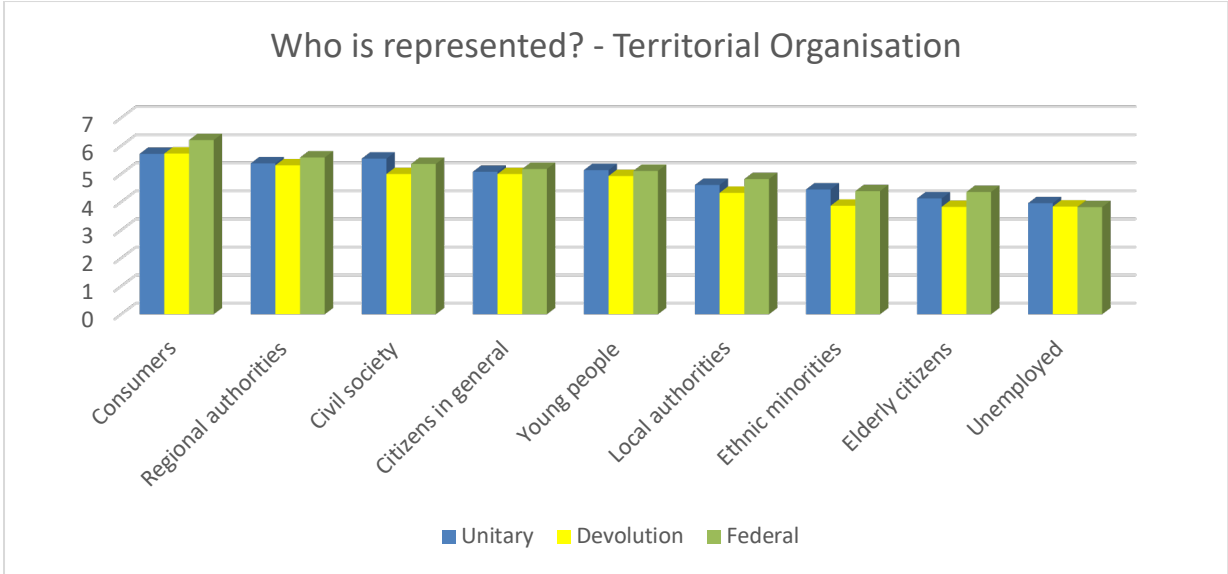
In terms of identity and representation, there are relatively few differences between types of respondents both in terms of territorial organisation and old and new Member States. There are however, a few marginal differences that are worth pointing out.

In terms of initiatives which are more likely to succeed in reinforcing a sense of European identity, whilst educational initiatives – including the compulsory learning of a foreign language, Erasmus type exchange, and a European

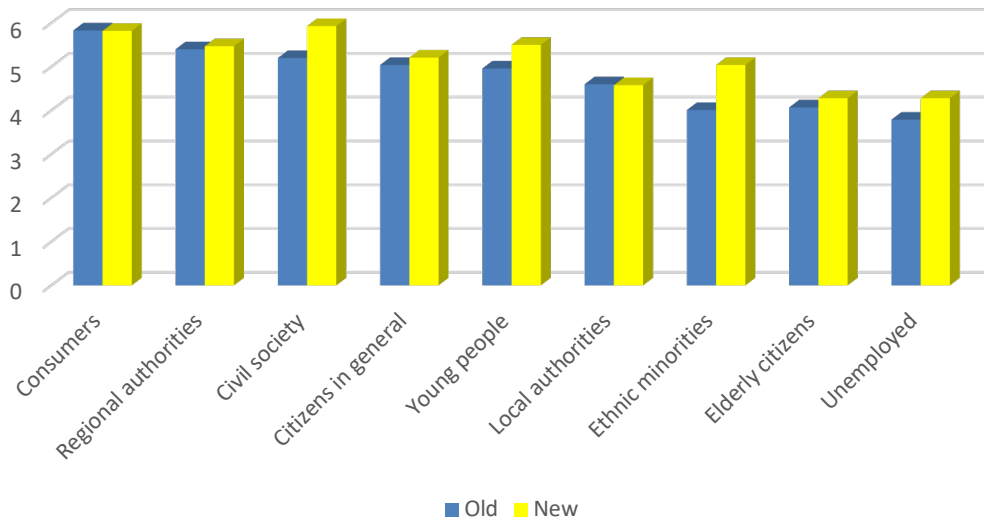
component to school curricula are unanimously favoured by all, we note that media initiatives – such as European contents in national media and the reinforced use of an EU-wide tv channel get significantly stronger support in devolution states than in unitary and federal.

In terms of quality of representation, differences are a little bit more marked. Whilst across all types of territorial organisation there is a clear sense that the only ones represented very satisfactorily in EU decision-making processes are Member States, lobbies, and companies, the rest of the picture is a little bit more contrasted as illustrated in the figure below. It is particularly noteworthy that actors in Devolution nations are particularly worried about the under-representation of young people, elderly people, and ethnic minorities. By contrast, respondents from unitary states are more reassured about the representation of civil society, and those in federal states by the representation of the interests of private companies as well as consumers.

Differences are arguably even more acute when it comes to old and new Member States. In particular, new Member States prove far more optimistic about the representation of young people (and even citizens in general) as well as ethnic minorities, the unemployed, and civil society than old Member States. By contrast, those old Member States are perceiving that companies, Member States, and Lobbies have a lot more of a voice within EU decision making processes than their new Member State counterparts. Everybody agrees that local authorities are significantly under-represented, though the general consensus is that vulnerable citizen categories – such as the unemployed, the elderly and (except according to new Member States) young people and ethnic categories are the biggest representative victims of the current EU decision-making processes and the key ‘location’ of the oft-decried democratic deficit of the European Union.



### Who is represented? - Old vs New Member States



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**European Committee  
of the Regions**

Created in 1994 following the signing of the Maastricht Treaty,  
the European Committee of the Regions is the EU's assembly of 350 regional and  
local representatives from all 28 Member States, representing over 507 million Europeans.

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