

eupinions slides

February 16, 2023

# Anxious we stand?

Ukrainians are battling for their survival while European politicians pledge solidarity and offer aid. But as the war continues, just how much do Europeans believe in the cause?

Isabell Hoffmann & Catherine E. de Vries



---

## It's winter, and the war continues...

Russia attacked Ukraine one year ago in an effort to incorporate the country into its own territory. In the early days of the war, most experts and the broader public considered Russia to be the dominant power. But Ukrainian citizens, demonstrating profound courage and determination, and with the support of western states, have managed to stop the incursion. At the same time, fighting continues in the Ukraine's eastern and southeastern regions.

As we enter the second year of the war, Ukraine still continues to require substantial military, financial and humanitarian support. European politicians have pledged to deliver this aid, claiming such measures to be in line with Europe's vital interests and core values.

Do Europeans agree? Do they believe in the cause and their capacity to provide enough support?

The data presented here is split into two parts.

In part one, we present a set of four questions that were designed to test a series of claims and values that are frequently evoked in discussions about the war in Ukraine. To this, we have added two questions about sanctions against Russia and who bears responsibility for the war. In part two, we measure anxiety and nostalgia about the state of the world among Europeans.

We then explore these findings to determine whether those deemed to be “highly anxious” respond differently to our six questions than does the general population.

Finally, we draw some conclusions.

These eupinions slides seek to shed light on these topics by presenting evidence based on a survey conducted in December 2022 in which nearly 13,300 EU citizens were interviewed. Specifically, we rely on two sets of data. One set is aimed at capturing the contours of public opinion in the EU27 as a whole, while the other aims to identify national specifics with a more in-depth focus on respondents in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Spain.

---

## Part One

Here we present a set of questions that were designed to test a series of claims and values that are frequently evoked in discussions about the war in Ukraine.

**We asked Europeans to agree or disagree with the following claims:**

1. *Ukraine will win this war.*
2. *Russia's attack on Ukraine is an attack on all of Europe.*
3. *Ukrainians also defend our freedom and prosperity, not just their own.*
4. *Ukrainians have been attacked and need to defend themselves. Thus, only Ukrainians can decide when to fight and when to negotiate.*

**We also asked them about their opinions regarding sanctions and who they feel is responsible for the war:**

5. *Economic and financial sanctions on Russia are supposed to support Ukraine in its war effort. Do you think these sanctions are: Effective? Ineffective? I don't know.*
6. *Who bears primary responsibility for the war in Ukraine? Russia? Ukraine? NATO? USA? I don't know.*

## Ukrainians will win this war.

■ Agree ■ Disagree

EU27



Belgium



France



Germany



Italy



Netherlands



Poland



Spain



December 2022

eupinions | what do you think?

## A majority of Europeans have faith in a Ukrainian victory

- 61% of Europeans believe Ukraine will win this war.
- The share of those agreeing with this statement in each member state ranges from 51% in Italy to 81% in Poland.
- In most states, support for this claim falls somewhere between 60% and 68% (Belgium 60%, Spain 62%, France 65% and the Netherlands 68%).
- Germany and Italy are the outliers in this regard with only 55% of Germans and 51% of Italians expressing faith in a Ukrainian victory.

## Russia's attack on Ukraine is an attack on all of Europe.

■ Agree ■ Disagree

EU27



Belgium



France



Germany



Italy



Netherlands



Poland



Spain



December 2022

eupinions | what do you think?

**A majority of Europeans believe that the attack on Ukraine is relevant to their lives**

- 68% of Europeans see the attack on Ukraine as an attack on all of Europe.
- The share of those agreeing with this statement in each member state ranges from 64% in Belgium to 79% in Poland.
- In most states, support for this claim is in the mid-to-high 60% range (Belgium 64%, France and Germany 65%, and Italy 66%).
- The Dutch, the Poles and the Spaniards are much more likely to support this claim (the Netherlands 70%, Spain 78% and Poland 79%).

## Ukrainians also defend our freedom and prosperity, not just their own.

■ Agree ■ Disagree

EU27



Belgium



France



Germany



Italy



Netherlands



Poland



Spain



December 2022

eupinions | what do you think?

A majority of Europeans believe that Ukrainians are fighting for our shared values and interests

- 62% of Europeans agree that Ukrainians are fighting for our shared freedom and prosperity.
- The share of those agreeing with this statement in each member state ranges from 59% in Germany and Italy to 72% in Poland.
- In most states, support for this claim is in the low-to-mid 60% range (Belgium 61%, France 62% and the Netherlands 66%).
- Again, Germany and Italy are the outliers in this regard with only 59% in each supporting this claim.
- By contrast, Poland and Spain show the highest shares of support for this claim, with Spain at 71% and Poland at 72%.

## Ukrainians have been attacked and need to defend themselves. Thus, only Ukrainians can decide when to fight and when to negotiate.

■ Agree ■ Disagree

EU27



Belgium



France



Germany



Italy



Netherlands



Poland



Spain



December 2022

eupinions | what do you think?

### A majority of Europeans say it's up to Ukrainians to make the decision to negotiate

- 75% of Europeans agree that only Ukrainians can decide when to negotiate.
- The share of those agreeing with this statement in each member state ranges from a high 65% in Italy to 87% in Poland.
- In most states, support for this claim is in the mid-70% range (Germany 73%, Belgium and the Netherlands 75%, and Spain 77%).
- Only Italy falls below 70% in this regard, with 65% of Italians expressing agreement.
- France and Poland show the highest levels of support, with 81% of the French people and 87% of the Polish agreeing with the claim.



## Economic and financial sanctions on Russia are supposed to support Ukraine in its war effort. Do you think these sanctions are ...

Effective Ineffective Don't know

EU27



Belgium



France



Germany



Italy



Netherlands



Poland



Spain



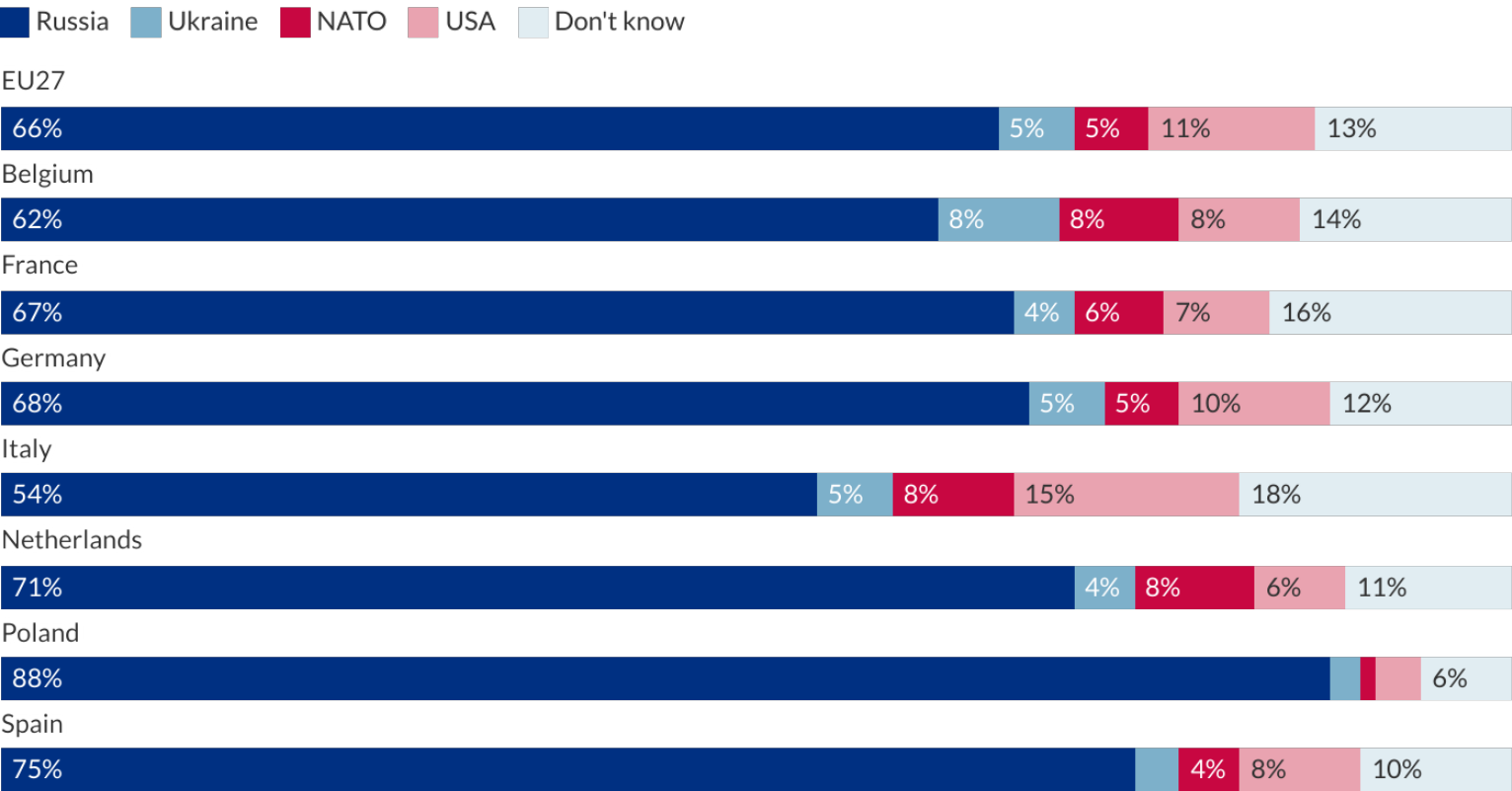
December 2022

eupinions | what do you think?

### Europeans are divided when it comes to sanctions on Russia

- Some 40% of the Europeans believe sanctions are effective; 40% believe they are ineffective; 20% responded with “I don’t know.”
- The share of those who believe in the effectiveness of sanctions ranges from 35% in France to 59% in Poland.
- Among those who consider sanctions to be an ineffective tool, Germans top the list at 48%. Only 25% of Poles express the same view.
- Many Europeans across the EU simply do not know whether sanctions against Russia are effective. The share of respondents expressing this uncertainty is smallest in Germany and Poland (16%) and largest in France (26%).

## Who bears primary responsibility for the war in Ukraine?



December 2022

### A majority of Europeans say Russia bears primary responsibility for the war

- A total of 66% of Europeans believe Russia is to blame for the war. Some 13% say they don't know, while 11% blame the United States, 5% point to NATO, and another 5% see Ukraine at fault.
- The share of those who say Russia bears primary responsibility ranges in the member states from a 54% in Italy to 88% in Poland.
- Those who are unsure of who to blame constitute the second largest group across the EU and in each member state individually (Italy 18%, Poland 6%).
- A total of nearly 20% across the EU and in each member state individually blame the US, NATO or Ukraine for the war. This group is largest in Italy (28%) and smallest in Poland (6%).

---

## Part Two

In part two, we first present data to show that, across Europe, many citizens express considerable anxiety about the state of the world. Respondents deemed to be “highly anxious” are comprised of the following two groups:

1. *Those who believe the world used to be a much better place.*

And:

2. *Those who believe the world is a dangerous place.*

We then place these findings in relation to the findings for our six initial questions about the war in Ukraine to determine the extent to which the responses of the highly anxious differ from the broader population across the EU and those in individual member states.

## Who is highly anxious? Those who agreed that: The world used to be a better place AND the world is a dangerous place.

■ Anxious and nostalgic ■ Anxious or nostalgic ■ Not anxious, not nostalgic

EU27



Belgium



France



Germany



Italy



Netherlands



Poland



Spain



December 2022

eupinions | what do you think?

### A majority of Europeans are highly anxious

To determine the highly anxious we aggregated the (agree/disagree) responses to the following statements:

1. *The world used to be a much better place.*
  2. *The world is a dangerous place.*
- 94% of Europeans are highly anxious or anxious. 6% are not anxious at all.
  - The graph shows: 66% of Europeans are highly anxious. They agree the world is a dangerous place AND the world used to be a much better place. 28% of Europeans are anxious or nostalgic. They agree either the world is a dangerous place OR the world used to be a much better place. Only 6% of Europeans disagree with both statements.
  - A comparison of member states shows that more than 90% of respondents in individual member states are either highly anxious or anxious.
  - These high numbers overwhelmingly suggest a high level of anxiety in Europe.
  - When comparing the highly anxious we do find differences between member states. The share of highly anxious ranges from 60% in Italy to 75% in Spain. In most member states however, the share of highly anxious is in the mid-60%.
  - The following focuses on the highly anxious alone.

## The highly anxious: Ukrainians will win this war.

■ Agree ■ Disagree

EU27



Belgium



France



Germany



Italy



Netherlands



Poland



Spain



December 2022

eupinions | what do you think?

### A majority of the highly anxious in Europe believe Ukraine will win

- 61% of highly anxious Europeans believe that Ukraine will win this war. 39% disagree.
- Among individual member states, the percentage of the highly anxious who share this view ranges from 48% in Italy to 83% in Poland.
- Support for this claim among this group in individual member states ranges from a mid-50% to mid-60% (Germany 54%, Belgium 59%, Spain 64% and France 65%).
- A total of 70% of the highly anxious in the Netherlands support this claim and 83% in Poland.
- Faith in a Ukrainian victory among the highly anxious is lowest in Italy at 48%.



## The highly anxious: Russia's attack on Ukraine is an attack on all of Europe.

■ Agree ■ Disagree

EU27



Belgium



France



Germany



Italy



Netherlands



Poland



Spain



December 2022

eupinions | what do you think?

A majority of highly anxious Europeans believe that the attack on Ukraine is relevant to their lives

- 69% of highly anxious Europeans believe that the attack on Ukraine is an attack on all of Europe.
- Among individual member states, the percentage of the highly anxious who share this view ranges from 64% in Germany to 82% in Poland.
- In most member states, support for this claim among this group ranges from the mid-to-high 60% (Germany 64%, France 66%, Italy 67% and Belgium 68%).
- More than 70% of the highly anxious in the Netherlands (71%), Spain (81%) and Poland (82%) see the attack as relevant to all of Europe.

## The highly anxious: Ukrainians also defend our freedom and prosperity, not just their own.

■ Agree ■ Disagree

EU27



Belgium



France



Germany



Italy



Netherlands



Poland



Spain



December 2022

eupinions | what do you think?

A majority of highly anxious Europeans believe that Ukrainians are fighting for our shared values and interests

- 61% of highly anxious Europeans agree that Ukrainians are fighting for our shared freedom and prosperity.
- Among individual member states, the percentage of the highly anxious who share this view ranges from 57% in Germany to 72% in Spain.
- In most member states, support for this claim among this group ranges from the mid-50% to the mid-60%. (Germany 57%, Italy 58%, France and Belgium 60%, and the Netherlands 65%).
- Only in Poland (71%) and Spain (72%) do we see an above-average high percentage of the highly anxious expressing agreement.

## The highly anxious: Ukrainians have been attacked and need to defend themselves. Thus, only Ukrainians can decide when to fight and when to negotiate.

■ Agree ■ Disagree

EU27



Belgium



France



Germany



Italy



Netherlands



Poland



Spain



December 2022

eupinions | what do you think?

A majority of highly anxious Europeans say it's up to Ukrainians to make the decision to negotiate

- 76% of highly distressed Europeans agree that only Ukrainians can decide when to negotiate.
- Among individual member states, the percentage of the highly anxious who share this view ranges from 66% in Italy to 89% in Poland.
- In most member states, support for this claim among this group is in the mid-70% range (Germany 72%, the Netherlands 75%, and Belgium and Spain 77%).
- Italy is the outlier in this regard, with only 66% of highly anxious Italians expressing agreement with this statement.
- More than 80% of the highly anxious in France (84%) and Poland (89%) feel it's up to the Ukrainians to decide when to fight and when to negotiate.

## The highly anxious: Economic and financial sanctions on Russia are supposed to support Ukraine in its war effort. Do you think these sanctions are ...

Effective Ineffective Don't know

EU27



Belgium



France



Germany



Italy



Netherlands



Poland



Spain



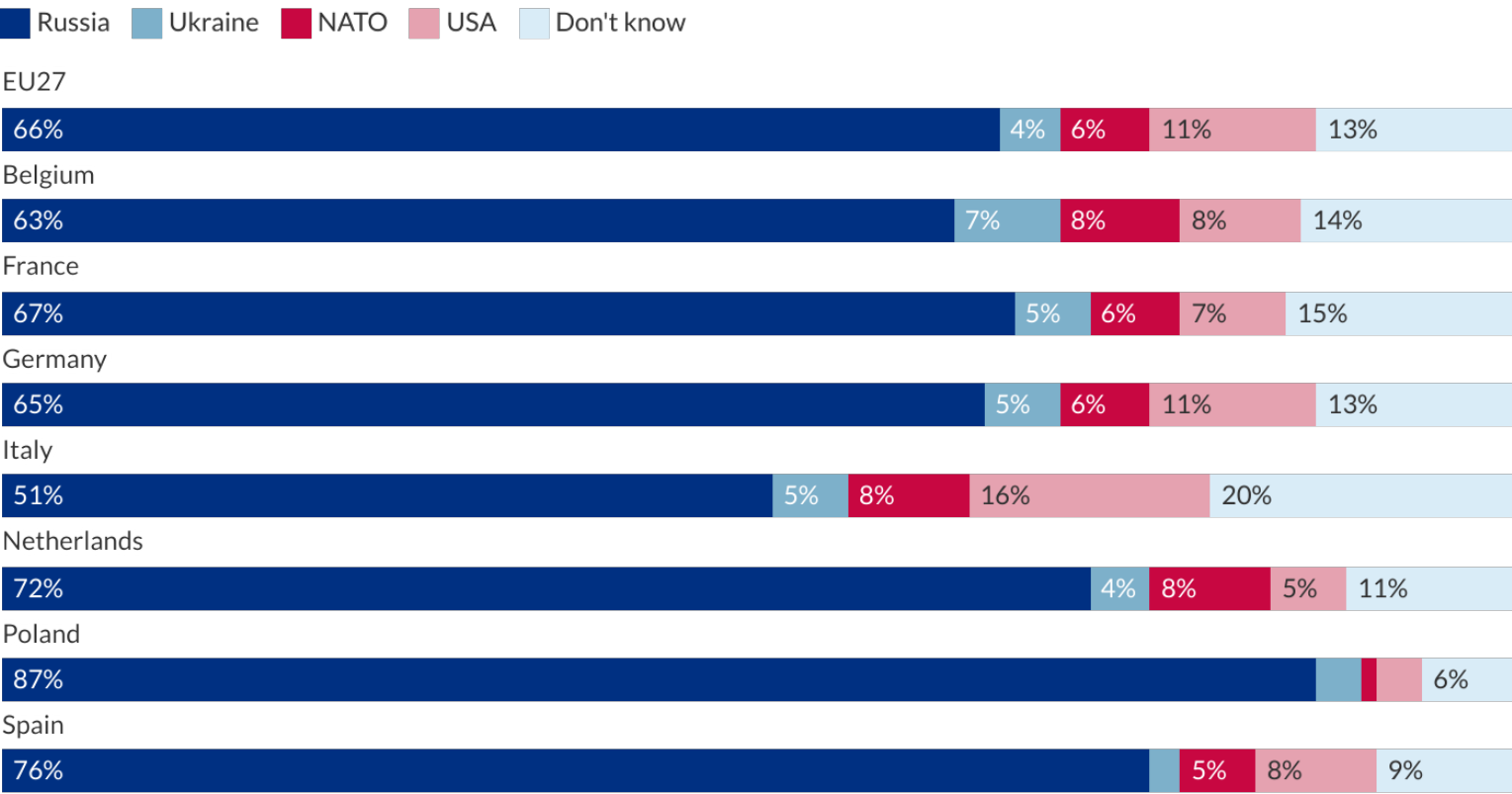
December 2022

eupinions | what do you think?

### The highly anxious in Europe are divided with regard to sanctions against Russia

- 37% of distressed Europeans believe sanctions are an effective instrument; 43% consider them ineffective and 20% say they don't know.
- Among individual member states, the percentage of the highly anxious who believe the sanctions are effective ranges from 28% in Italy to 59% in Poland.
- At 52%, distressed Germans are most likely to express a lack of faith in sanctions while this is true of only 26% of distressed Poles.
- Many anxious Europeans across the EU as a whole and within individual member states are unsure if sanctions against Russia will prove effective; this group is smallest in Poland (15%) and largest in France (25%).

# The highly anxious: Who bears primary responsibility for the war in Ukraine?



December 2022

## A majority of highly anxious Europeans place the blame on Russia

- 66% of highly distressed Europeans state that Russia bears primary responsibility for the war; 13% say they don't know; 11% believe the United States is responsible, while 6% place the blame with NATO and 4% with Ukraine.
- Among individual member states, the percentage of the highly anxious who believe Russia bears responsibility ranges from 51% in Italy to 87% in Poland.
- Those who are unsure of who to blame constitute the second largest group across the EU and in each member state individually (Italy 20%, Poland 6%).
- A total of nearly 20% across the EU and in individual member states blame the either US, NATO, or Ukraine for the war. This group is largest in Italy (29%) and smallest in Poland (7%).



---

## Europeans believe in the cause, but are unsure of the means

Nostalgia and anxiety are powerful political tools. They enable political entrepreneurs with populist tendencies to garner support under the guise of regaining things perceived to have been lost. Nostalgia and anxiety also fuel their ability to reaffirm certain values and identities that are being challenged by the rapid pace of societal change. Bemoaning “the decline of a golden age,” these actors breed divisiveness as they rely on in-group favoritism and ethnocentrism to promise a future that is steeped in a revisionist past.

In politics, anxiety and nostalgia can be feared or hoped for. Crisis situations often offer those in power the opportunity to profit, initially, from effects associated with a “rallying around the flag.” However, as the initial shock of a crisis subsides and its impact deepens and broadens, politicians mostly tend to fear the potential for a radicalization of the public by populist political opponents. This, in turn, risks getting in the way of the leadership and decision-making practices that are needed at critical junctures.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has re-introduced a toxic rhetoric of imperial nostalgia to the international stage, which has been escalated by his invasion of sovereign Ukraine in February 2022. His ongoing territorial war has sent shock waves across the European continent, evoking past traumas of war, displacement and destruction.

Today, Europeans are simultaneously exposed to the siren of the “good old times” and the horrors of the “good old times.”

How does this current state of affairs affect their views and attitudes?

The eupinions figures presented here aim to shed light on the questions as to whether Europeans feel concerned about the war in Ukraine and whether they align with the arguments and claims brought forward in support of the country. In a second step, we explored the extent to which those who are nostalgic and anxious (labeled earlier the highly anxious) respond differently to these claims and arguments than does the general public.

In short, we found the following:

Europeans are highly supportive of the Ukrainian cause. A majority believes that Ukraine will win this war. A majority believes that Russia's attack on Ukraine is of their concern. A majority believes that Ukrainians fight for common values and interests. A majority believes that it is for Ukrainians to decide when to fight and when to negotiate. A majority of respondents also clearly place the blame for the war on Russia's shoulders. In terms of the extent to which economic and financial sanctions are effective tools, however, Europeans are split.

While there are notable differences between member states on these issues, none contravene the overall trend. For example, while 81% of Poles and only 55% of Germans polled believe in a Ukrainian victory, this reflects nonetheless a majority in each.

Given the gravity of the situation and the costs involved, this continued level of support is remarkable.

It is also remarkable that the highly anxious do not waver in their support.

The differences we see between the general sample and the highly anxious group are marginal. Most stay within the margin of error and can thus be neglected. Within the few data points that slightly surpass the margin of error, we see indications of support strengthening as well as weakening.

This data does not allow us to conclude that high levels of anxiety among Europeans will lead to a lessening of support for Ukraine's effort to liberate itself and assert its independence. While a clear majority – 66% – of Europeans are deeply concerned about the state of the world, this does not seem to change their views on who is to blame and who should be supported in this war.

These findings are largely in line with eupinions data published in 2022 showing stable and high levels of support for key policy changes in reaction to the attack on Ukraine (Hoffmann, De Vries: [With a tailwind](#) 05/22, [Under pressure](#) 10/22, [End of summer, End of solidarity?](#) 12/22).

Those who might have hoped for a rapid shift in views among the European population as the war continues will need to reconsider their assessment. Our data suggests that Europeans are far more resilient in the face of threat and adversity than is generally assumed.

European governments and officials can thus continue to demonstrate courage and resolve in their effort to support Ukraine. As they do so, however, they need to remain consistent in communicating their goals and intentions.

Europeans believe in the cause. At the same time, they are not uncritically supportive of every measure taken. When asked to assess the effectiveness of economic and financial sanctions against Russia, they seem to be split. A large percentage of those polled believe that sanctions are useful tools, just as a large number sees the opposite to be the case. A smaller but notable share simply does not know how to assess how effective sanctions are.

These findings underscore the importance of cultivating public trust through a sound messaging strategy that regularly informs the public of the facts, options and reasons that go into the measures taken. As a crisis persists, the ability of a government to assess, adapt or affirm its policies are vital to strengthening its credibility.

One year into this war, European politicians can count on the support of the European public. Bold measures and smart communication will go a long way in anchoring this support.

---

## About eupinions

eupinions is an independent platform for European public opinion. We collect and analyze data on European public opinion and comment on what Europeans think about current political issues and megatrends.

Every quarter, we collect samples from each EU member state in 22 languages. Our data is representative with regard to age, gender, education and country/region.

eupinions is a Bertelsmann Stiftung project. The data is collected by Dalia Research.

Visit [www.eupinions.eu](https://www.eupinions.eu) for further information!



---

## Methodology note

The samples analyzed in this report were drawn by Dalia Research in December 2022 (n=13300) across all 27 EU member states. Our samples take into account current population distributions with regard to age (16–70 years), gender and region/country. In order to obtain census representative results, the data were weighted using the most recent Eurostat statistics.

Any references to differences between countries in the report pertain only to the seven countries with sufficiently large sample sizes: Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Spain. Calculated for a sample of this size and considering the design-effect, the margin of error would be 0.9% at a confidence level of 95%.

---

# Thank you!



Visit us

 eupinions.eu

Follow us

 @eupinions

## Imprint

© February 2023  
Bertelsmann Stiftung  
Carl-Bertelsmann-Straße 256  
33311 Gütersloh  
[www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de](http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de)

## Responsible for content

Isabell Hoffmann  
Phone: +49 30 275 788 126  
[isabell.hoffmann@bertelsmann-stiftung.de](mailto:isabell.hoffmann@bertelsmann-stiftung.de)