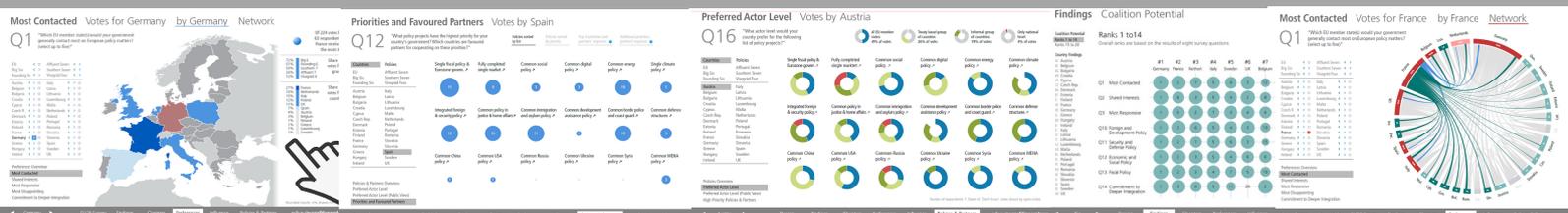


EU COALITION EXPLORER



The EU Coalition Explorer is an interactive data tool helping to understand the interactions, perceptions and chemistry between the 28 EU member states.

The data is based on the EU28 Survey, a bi-annual expert poll developed by the Rethink: Europe project at the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR). In 2018, over 800 European policymakers and professionals responded to an online questionnaire on their perceptions and experiences of interactions between EU governments.

Why does it matter?

Cooperation between member states is key to a functioning EU. But despite decades of practice, ECFR's research reveals that EU capitals are not very good at building coalitions to achieve common goals. ECFR's EU Coalition Explorer identifies the unused potential for European governments to become more skilful at coalition building. Moreover, it shows the current cooperation patterns, policy priorities of governments, and their partnership preferences for the coming years. In that, this set of data is of practical relevance to those crafting partnership strategies in capitals across the EU.



KEY FINDINGS

Partners and coalition building preferences

- In the current EU there is no 'natural coalition of the willing' working to deepen EU integration and consistently for 'more Europe'.
- Just four member states are seen as clearly committed to deeper integration: France, Germany, Belgium, and Luxembourg. Paris has now overtaken Berlin and Brussels in this ranking compared to the 2016 survey edition.
- Interaction between member states is shaped by several strong and balanced bilateral partnerships.
- Though the Franco-German tandem remains the core coalition, its relative weight has diminished considerably.
- In the south, the triangle formed by France, Spain, and Italy is strong, but has little creative potential to advance EU integration. Italy and Spain do not have strong relationships with the EU's north or east.
- Other triangles, such as the Benelux or the Nordic countries, do not show balanced relationships. The 'Weimar Triangle' of France, Germany, and Poland is a mere rhetorical formation: Franco-Polish references rarely appear in the data.
- The affluent small member states do not interact strategically among themselves. Their collective potential is underused.
- The Visegrad group (Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia) appears to be the strongest veto coalition, but the dominance of Budapest and Warsaw is rejected by the other two members.

KEY FINDINGS

Influence

- Germany and France are generally considered to be most influential, with some significant differences when it comes to their impact on foreign, security, and defence policy.
- Many governments in the EU have an inflated view of their own influence on European policy; a view not equally held by their peers.
- Among the smaller and affluent member states, the Netherlands is regarded as most influential by most governments in the EU. Sweden also has visible impact, while Austria has risen compared to 2016.
- Hungary, the United Kingdom, and Poland are widely seen as most disappointing to other member-state governments.

Policy priorities

- EU policy professionals prioritise EU-internal topics such as immigration and asylum policy and economic issues over traditional foreign policy. Over the next five years, common immigration and asylum policy ranks first overall from a list of priorities in all member state governments.
- The strategic consensus among EU capitals appears to be rather low, as priorities and preferences differ strongly depending on the exposure of individual member states to the respective topic.
- At the same time, majorities of respondents tend to favour deeper integration and taking decisions commonly at the EU level with notable exceptions such as Eurozone governance or common defence structures. The group in favour of moving ahead in coalitions has slightly shrunk to just less than a third of the overall sample.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- EU member states, both big and small, need to step up coordination with their likeminded partners. The EU Coalition Explorer allows the identification of these partnerships for each country.
- This is particularly relevant for those governments politically close to France and Germany, in order to build a likeminded ring of friends around the essential core of the EU28. Nurturing tri- and quadrilateral relationships, and trying new initiatives independently of Germany and France, are most obvious steps.
- Geography remains a major hurdle for broadening many relationships in the EU. Governments across the continent need to work on better mechanisms to increase their day-to-day cooperation beyond their immediate neighborhoods.
- In order to counteract current centrifugal forces, Germany and France need to create a new centre of gravity with a group of integration-friendly EU member states. This group should undertake concrete projects strengthening economic cohesion, linking immigration and asylum policy with common border protection and financial burden-sharing, or a credible European defence policy.
- Coalition-building strategies designed to broaden participation in EU policy initiatives will only be effective if they adequately address gaps in reciprocity. By integrating member states into existing coalitions, these strategies could help such countries overcome their frustrations and lend new momentum to the European project.

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