

E-PAPER

Executive summary

# European, of course!?

The Mission for the  
Presidency of the Council of  
the European Union 2020

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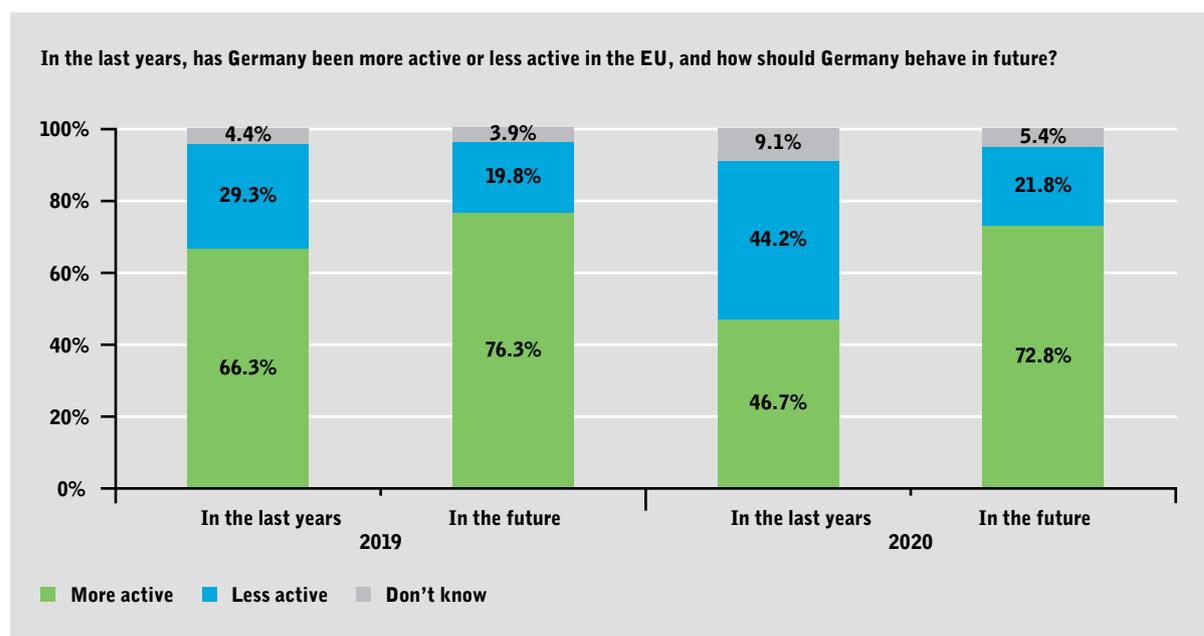
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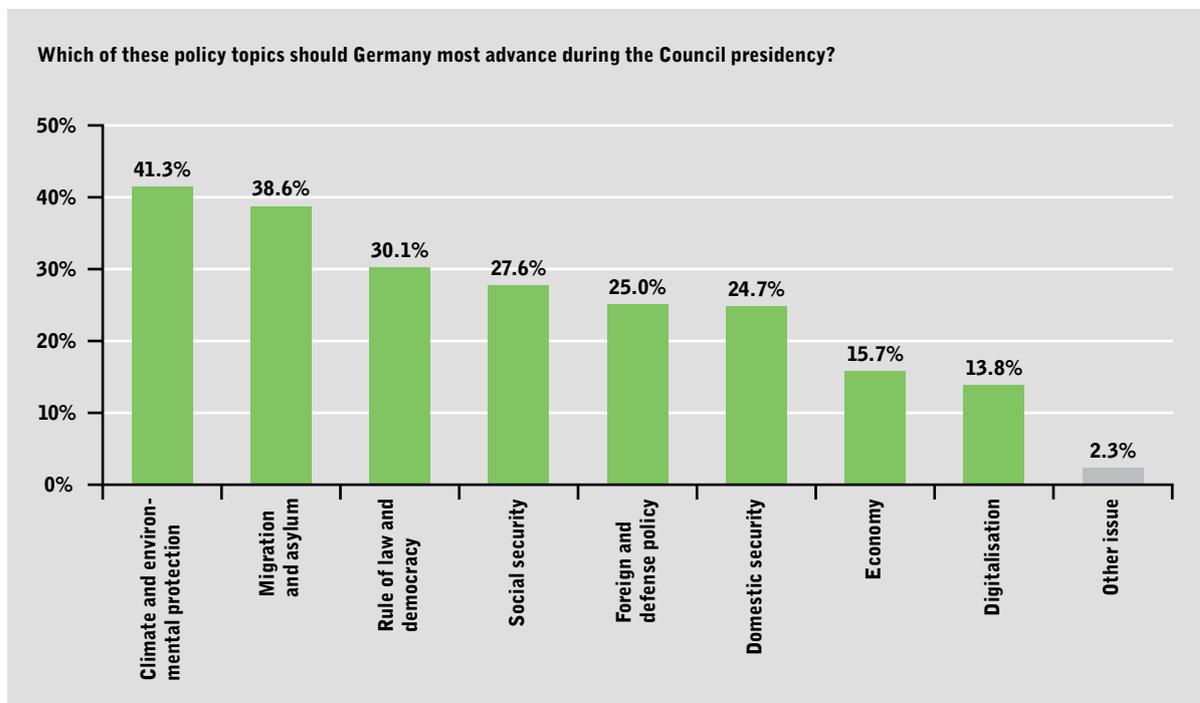
On July 1, 2020, Germany will once again serve as chair of the Council of the European Union since its previous turn thirteen years ago. It thus stands to follow that European politics have become a renewed focus of public debate in the country. Such discussions are continually characterized by the question of the nature of Germany's responsibility in the European Union. Not infrequently does this question serve to allude to myths like that of the «Paymaster of Europe,» which ignores the immense economic benefits and the political advantages of the EU for Germany and looks past similarly high-paying contributions of other EU partners. The following study, now in its second successive year, presently compares these conjectural self-images with the actual outlook of German citizens. This year, the study additionally examines citizens' reported priorities for the German Presidency of the Council of the EU.

## THE TAKEAWAY POINTS FROM THE REPRESENTATIVE SURVEY

- After the euphoria surrounding the European elections in 2019, the EU approval rating has returned to its normal level: 67.3% of Germans see more advantages than disadvantages in EU-membership. In the previous year, 75.1% shared this stance. Germans perceive the advantages afforded by the EU to be primarily political and secondly economic: two-thirds of survey respondents say that Germany is more likely to reach its political goals with the EU than without it. 56.2% are of the opinion that the economic advantages through EU-membership alone outweigh the costs.
- A clear majority of Germans, over 70%, wish for both an active and a cooperative German presence in the EU – only 46.7% of the respondents rate Germany's behavior in the EU over the last years as active.



- For the German Presidency of the Council of the EU, German citizens wish for the government to achieve progress first and foremost in the areas of climate and environmental protection (41.3%), migration and asylum (38.6%), as well as rule of law and democracy (30.1%). With respect to concrete policy goals, the introduction of an EU digital tax comes in first (39%), followed by raising the EU climate goal 2030 (33.2%) and the creation of an EU-wide army (27.1%).



- A slight majority of 50.9% of respondents considers the financial contribution of Germany to the EU’s budget not to be too high. 46.7% feel the opposite. In particular, it is people with little formal education, as well as individuals who live in rural areas or in eastern Germany, who state that Germany’s payments to the EU are too high.
- 95.5% of Germans prefer more collective expenditures from Germany and the EU partners in certain political areas. At the top of citizens’ agendas are the fields of innovations and research (43.8%), climate and environmental policy (40.5%), as well as social safeguarding (34.4%).

## THE MISSION FOR THE PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EU

The Presidency of the Council of the EU is simultaneously both a chance and a responsibility for Germany. In addition to current political topics, the German government can set its own political priorities through the Council chair’s function as agenda-setter and moderator. The survey shows that the Germans are indeed quite prepared to invest more money in

concrete, future-oriented, collaborative projects in Europe. Based upon the survey results, this study forms rationales to the following topics:

- A capable Europe: the decrease in the EU's approval rating must be considered within the context of numerous unresolved questions in both EU domestic politics and foreign policy. Europe's capability to act depends, however, also upon Germany's will to act. Particular criticism from EU partner France grew recently toward the lethargy of the German government. The council presidency offers the chance to fulfill the promise of an «Awakening for Europe, englische as promised by the coalition government. Germany should also not shy away in these six months from thorny political topics, such as asylum policy and rule of law. Not only German citizens, but also the German government's EU partners expect this.
- EU budget with a collective vision: the duties of the EU have greatly increased over the years, as solutions at the national level are no longer tenable. It is therefore that much more dangerous when the «Paymaster» myth is erroneously resurrected in the debate over the multiannual financial framework of the EU. The survey further shows that German citizens do not perceive themselves as the «Paymaster of Europe.» The budgetary debate should be rather determined by the political goals – tasks vital to the future – for which it pays to invest. Numbers, much less expenditures, do not enthuse people; however, concrete visions do.
- Organize transformation collectively and justly: a discrepancy between declaration and action in Germany's EU policy exists most noticeably in consideration of the social-ecological transformation (European Green Deal). In the important fifth year of the Paris Climate Convention, Germany has shown itself to be an impediment for the necessary raise of the EU Climate Goals 2030. The EU climate transition must also be better equipped financially (through budgetary reallocations and supplements), especially the Just Transition Fund, which also supports German coal regions. The survey showed definitively that the belief in the advantages of the EU sinks amongst economically vulnerable groups of the population when the economic condition is generally perceived as pessimistic. A profound transformation can only be built upon a foundation of widespread public acceptance and solidarity.