

## PRESS RELEASE

**SUBJECT: PRESS RELEASE | The new European Sentiment Compass outcomes presented on 9 May**

**TITLE: Russia, Ukraine, and the fight for the European public**

Russia's war against Ukraine is challenging Europe's commitment to openness, diversity, freedom, and solidarity, according to a new report titled "[The European Sentiment Compass: Russia, Ukraine, and the fight for the European public](#)". This annual study is a partnership initiative of the **European Cultural Foundation (ECF)** and the **European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR)**. Authored by ECFR's senior policy fellow Pawel Zerka, the second edition of the study analyses the European sentiment across all 27 EU member states a year since the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

While European governments and citizens have shown unprecedented support for Ukraine, EU leaders face various dilemmas regarding their approach towards Russian culture, media, and citizens in the context of the ongoing war. The study, which is being released on Europe Day (9 May), suggests that their response will either reinforce or undermine European values, and will also affect the resilience of Europe's solidarity with Ukraine.

The study considers how the EU's cultural sector has responded to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It finds that cultural institutions and artists are consolidated in their solidarity and support for Ukraine and the Ukrainian cultural professionals, as well as for protection of the endangered cultural heritage in Ukraine. However, there is no uniform answer on whether Russian culture and Russian should be restricted or even "cancelled". This, Pawel Zerka argues, has exposed divisions in public perceptions of Russia.

Compared to its already strong performance [last year](#), **European sentiment in the bloc remains strong**, as evidenced by the continent's solidarity and unity in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, among other factors:

- The European public remains strongly attached to Europe and optimistic about the EU's future, as per opinion polls.
- With the exception of Hungary – and, to some extent, Poland and Bulgaria – most EU member state governments are pro-European.
- Governments of four countries (Czechia, Denmark, Slovakia, Slovenia) have grown more attached to Europe over the past year, while Bulgaria has been the only to become increasingly sceptical.
- Twelve out of 27 EU members have dedicated at least 0.5 per cent of their GDP to support Ukraine (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Sweden).
- Denmark is the EU member whose European sentiment displays most strengths in 2023, and Greece – the least.

But there are **serious risks to the European sentiment** too:

- Cost-of-living concerns are strong across much of the EU27 – including in wealthy Austria.

- Political parties that lambasted Europe in the past are worryingly strong in at least ten countries (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Netherlands, France, Romania, Slovakia).
- Some EU countries might prove particularly vulnerable to Russian narratives – for example, because of low media literacy (Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece Hungary, Romania, Slovakia), historical grudges towards Ukraine (Hungary, Poland, Romania), or due to cultural affinity with Russia (Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania).
- Hungary is the only EU country with a Russian friendly government.
- Bulgaria and Hungary are two EU members whose European sentiment is currently exposed to most risks – whereas Denmark, Finland, Ireland, and Luxembourg are the only ones where such risks are minimal.

The study states that how Europe responds to the war will affirm or refute its image. By regaining confidence in liberalism and exhibiting resilience and openness, EU and member state leaders can disarm Russian claims of a weak Europe and reaffirm European values, argues Zerka.

To achieve this, Zerka puts forward the following **recommendations for the EU and member state authorities**:

- **Focus on making disinformation toothless:** When dealing with Russian propaganda, European authorities often focus on defensive solutions that verge on censorship. Instead, they should aim to disarm Russian or Russia-friendly disinformation by investing in strategic communication, awareness-raising, and media literacy. It is also essential to address why people trust in disinformation and to promote alternative narratives on controversial issues such as the growing Ukrainian diaspora in Europe or Ukraine's potential accession to the EU.
- **Do not boycott Russian culture:** As Ukraine steps up its efforts to de-Russify, EU member states may face rising pressure to encourage a boycott of Russian culture. However, they should resist this pressure. Boycotting Russian culture would clash with European values, such as freedom of expression, and could confuse European citizens. It would also prevent European artists and institutions from exploring their own ways of making culture useful in times of war. Rather than focus on such defensive measures, European authorities should actively support the Ukrainian culture.
- **See people as allies:** European leaders need to be cautious in how they frame the responsibility for war in Ukraine, recognizing that not all Russians bear equal responsibility. European media could often do a better job by investigating the role of the Russian citizens in this war – instead of solely reporting on the decisions of Putin and his inner circle. European citizens could also play a more active role in foreign policy by engaging in discussions with Russians they know, not to blame them but to foster a sense of individual responsibility and mutual understanding.

**Commenting on the study, author and senior policy fellow, Pawel Zerka, said:**

*“On their way to rediscover the language of power, Europeans should not forget that their major asset still consists in a significant soft power – including the values that Europe stands for. Therefore, when they respond to the challenge that Russia’s war in Ukraine represents for their culture and values, Europeans should be careful to ensure that their actions align with their words.”*

**ENDS**

**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

**INTERVIEWS:**

The author is available for comment and interview. Please contact ECFR’s communications team ([communications@ecfr.eu](mailto:communications@ecfr.eu)) to arrange this.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

[Pawel Zerka](#) is a senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations. He is a lead ECFR analyst on European public opinion. He contributes to ECFR’s Re:shape Global Europe project, which seeks to develop new strategies for Europeans to understand and engage with the changing international order.

**METHODOLOGY:**

This study utilised ECFR’s research network to distil attitudes across all individual EU countries. To do this, 27 ECFR associate researchers from the respective 27 EU member states analysed the political situation in their countries, studied opinion polls and other research, and interviewed relevant policymakers and policy experts. In March 2023, they responded to a standardised survey, allowing the author to compare the 27 member states. External sources were also used in the analysis.

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The European Sentiment Compass is a joint project and initiative by the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) and the [European Cultural Foundation](#) (ECF).

**ABOUT ECFR:**

The European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) is a pan-European think-tank that aims to conduct cutting-edge independent research in pursuit of a coherent, effective, and values-based European foreign policy. With a network of offices in seven European capitals, over 80 staff from more than 25 different countries and a team of associated researchers in the EU 27 member states, ECFR is uniquely placed to provide pan-European perspectives on the biggest strategic challenges and choices confronting Europeans today. ECFR is an independent charity and funded from a variety of sources. For more details, please visit: [www.ecfr.eu/about/](http://www.ecfr.eu/about/)



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Founded in 1954 and based in Amsterdam, the European Cultural Foundation promotes a European sentiment through developing and supporting cultural initiatives that let people share, experience and imagine Europe. The founders envisioned a united Europe where citizens feel proudly European, a place where they can live, express themselves, work and dream freely, in diversity and harmony. This mission is as urgent now as it was back then. For more details, please visit:

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