This European Commission funded research aims to provide insight, for local, national and European policy makers, into how people feel about ‘being European’ and European citizenship. Men and women aged 18-24 were selected as the subjects, allowing a gender comparison and a focus on young and, therefore, new citizens. Research was conducted in pairs of cities or towns in nations and regions chosen because of their linked but contrasting histories of orientation to Europe: Vienna and the Bregenz area of Vorarlberg in Austria; Madrid and Bilbao in Spain; Chemnitz and Bielefeld, in Germany; Bratislava and Prague in the Slovak and Czech Republics; Edinburgh, Scotland and Manchester, England in the UK. The study sampled both 18-24 year old residents who were more likely to feel European because their study or work was Europe-oriented (target sample) and representative samples of young adults who had lived in the city or town for at least five years. Both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (in-depth interviews) data were gathered.

Interest in the unification of Europe
The participants were asked to rate their personal interest in various social and political issues (figure 1).

Figure 1: Interest in social and political issues all study sites combined (N=3890)

Figure 1: Interest in social and political issues - all study sites combined (% of those interested and very interested), N= 3890.
The unification of Europe proved to be of least personal interest from among all the social issues listed above, when all the study sites were considered together. Looking at the relative importance of these issues for each study site separately, exceptions were found only in Bratislava, Slovak Republic and Prague, Czech Republic where animal rights (both cities), poverty (Prague), public services and facilities (Bratislava) and equality between men and women (Bratislava) were of less personal interest than the unification of Europe. Of the greatest interest in all research sites were job and training opportunities as well as the quality and content of education. Although interest in European unification was low when compared to the interest in other social issues, in all sites but Manchester, Edinburgh and Bilbao, those who were interested significantly outnumbered those with little or no interest.

Impact of the EU membership

Evaluation of the impact of EU membership was predominantly positive overall. The perceived impact was highest in Bratislava and Prague, and lowest in Edinburgh, Scotland and Manchester, England. We believe this reflects positive expectations of the future (as well as the reality of wide scale economic changes from EU membership) in the accession countries. In all of the research sites, more respondents reported that EU membership had an impact on their nation rather than on them personally. This finding was most pronounced in both Spanish (Bilbao and Madrid) and UK (Edinburgh and Manchester) samples, contrasting with both German (Chemnitz and Bielefeld) samples where the assessed impact on self and region were roughly equivalent.

Subjective meanings of the EU enlargement

A wide variety of views on EU enlargement were identified, e.g. ‘inevitable and positive’, ‘a necessary evil’, ‘more and more countries to be included in order to achieve more strength and union’, ‘EU is only complete once all Eastern European countries have become members’, ‘analogy to the unification of Germany’, ‘a duty and act of the solidarity in redistribution of wealth to poorer countries’, or just ‘a given fact of political
These understandings of a new enlarged European Union contributed to the particular categories of hopes and fears, which emerged from the data.

The **hopes** expressed by participants concerned:

1. **Structural changes within the EU** - Expectations of further democratisation of decision-making at the EU level (Bilbao); more transparency (Chemnitz and Bielefeld); improved control of corruption practices at the national level (Bratislava); the creation of functional institutions with more power over national interests and with general legislation competencies (Chemnitz and Bielefeld).

2. **Unity and cooperation among European countries** - More strength and union among EU members (Madrid); intensification of existing connections; more trade between the countries and more cultural exchange (Chemnitz and Bielefeld); strengthening of European identity and togetherness – connected with economic integration and the use of euro currency (Edinburgh, Chemnitz and Bielefeld).

3. **Tolerance and openness towards the Other** - Cultural exchange and openness (Madrid and Edinburgh); thinking in a broader framework (Prague); less xenophobia (Prague); enriching Europe’s cultural diversity and achieving an open and tolerant attitude in Europe’s citizens (Chemnitz and Bielefeld); contact and exchange between different cultures might overcome historical problems of nationalism and conflicts within the EU; although there is a danger of replacing it with a European nationalism (Vienna and Vorarlberg).

4. **Economic benefits** - The ‘old’ member states will benefit with the opening of new markets and fighting unemployment (Chemnitz and Bielefeld, Edinburgh); accession countries will gain economically (Prague, Bratislava).

5. **Global position of Europe** - Common ‘defence’ against mainly US global dominance (Manchester, Chemnitz and Bielefeld, Vienna and Vorarlberg, Bratislava, Prague); security and less risk in case of military conflict (Chemnitz and Bielefeld).

6. **Political culture** - A guarantee of respecting civic rights and hope to benefit from the EU experience with democratic legislation, as well as gaining a higher status in European/global politics (Bratislava, Prague).

7. **Mobility** - Free circulation, work and study mobility (in all the sites of study); appreciation of travelling freely without a passport (Bratislava, Prague).

The **fears** identified by interviewees were:

1. **The dysfunction of the EU institutions** - Obscure bureaucratic structures, excessive centralism within the EU and senseless instructions from Brussels, as well as lack of transparency or democracy in European decision-making (Vienna and Vorarlberg, Edinburgh, Bratislava, Prague).

2. **Lack of European unity** - Fear concerning the *impossibility of reaching understanding in an enlarged Europe* was expressed by some (Madrid). The lack of unity within Europe, quarrelling between European countries and the lack of a ‘European opinion’ were seen as dangers to be avoided in the future (Vienna and Vorarlberg).

3. **Substantial differences between new and old members** - Some participants doubted whether the new member states were prepared for joining the EU, because of their *lack of democratic awareness, different culture and mentality, different historical experience* as well as different *economy* and standard of
living (Chemnitz and Bielefeld). Some respondents in accession countries expressed doubts about whether their EU membership will attenuate these differences, criticizing the fact that in the new member states, citizens are not entitled ‘full EU citizenship rights’ from the very beginning, mainly referring to the free circulation of labour. It was also expressed that there might also be a further deepening of differences between actual EU member states and other European countries, due to a new meaning of ‘being European’ as a category denoting solely the EU membership (Bratislava, Prague).

4. Economic inequalities and labour market - Some participants pointed out a danger of economic weakening due to the transfer of EU subsidies and funds to new member countries (Bilbao and Madrid). Some interviewees explicitly rejected the EU enlargement, mainly for economic reasons: enormous financial restraints on the side of Germany financing the enlargement and transfer of EU support subsidies for Eastern Germany to the accession states (Chemnitz and Bielefeld). Other participants (Vienna and Vorarlberg, Chemnitz and Bielefeld, and Madrid and Bilbao) mentioned danger of competition from both cheap labour and highly qualified experts’ induced by EU enlargement. In Prague competition for Czech enterprises on the national market was mentioned (Prague). Some participants feared that life in their countries (Chemnitz and Bielefeld, Bratislava) would become even more expensive. Finally, the common agricultural policy and its future impact on Czech agriculture was criticized (Prague), as well as the EU regulations on food production.

5. Identity concerns - Possible loss of national and cultural identity and danger of cultural homogenisation were expressed by some (Bratislava, Prague, Chemnitz and Bielefeld, Vienna and Vorarlberg). Several participants from smaller countries (Austria, Czech and Slovak Republics) expressed fears of being dominated by big countries within the EU. Some participants revealed their reluctance to abandon the national currency - a symbol of national identity (Edinburgh, Prague).

Conclusions
A careful comparison of our respondents’ hopes and fears about EU enlargement reveal opposing themes. These indicate that expectations about EU enlargement may rest on the kind of cost-benefit discourse so prevalent in the media and political discussions. This is reflected in the categories detailed above: the dysfunction of the EU and its institutions vs. hope for structural changes, a lack of unity and cooperation within the EU vs. hope for more unity, in/tolerance of differences among countries, and economic dis/advantages resulting from EU enlargement. Specific hopes and fears have been identified which point to particular issues being of high importance for participants in some of our research sites. These concern: a hope for an improvement of political culture and a hope for free work and study mobility – both important in the ‘new’ member states of the Czech and Slovak Republics, as well as a hope for an improved global position of Europe and a fear of loss of national and cultural identity – important both in ‘new’ as well as in ‘old’ EU member states. These hopes and fears can easily be translated into challenges for policy actions: (1) Opening a qualified ‘pan’-European public debate on (a) identity transformation in an enlarged EU, and (b) the global position of EU, its limits and tools. (2) Facilitating the work and study mobility aspirations in the ‘new’ (but also some “old”) member countries. (3) Providing support and empowerment to the democratization of ‘everyday politics’ in the ‘new’ member countries.

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