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New Europe Center  
Kyiv, Ukraine

# PUBLIC OPINION IN GERMANY, FRANCE, ITALY, THE NETHERLANDS, AND THE USA

**HOW DO THESE COUNTRIES  
SUPPORT UKRAINE  
AND ITS NATO ASPIRATIONS?**

Leonid Litra

May, 2023



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**Leonid Litra,**  
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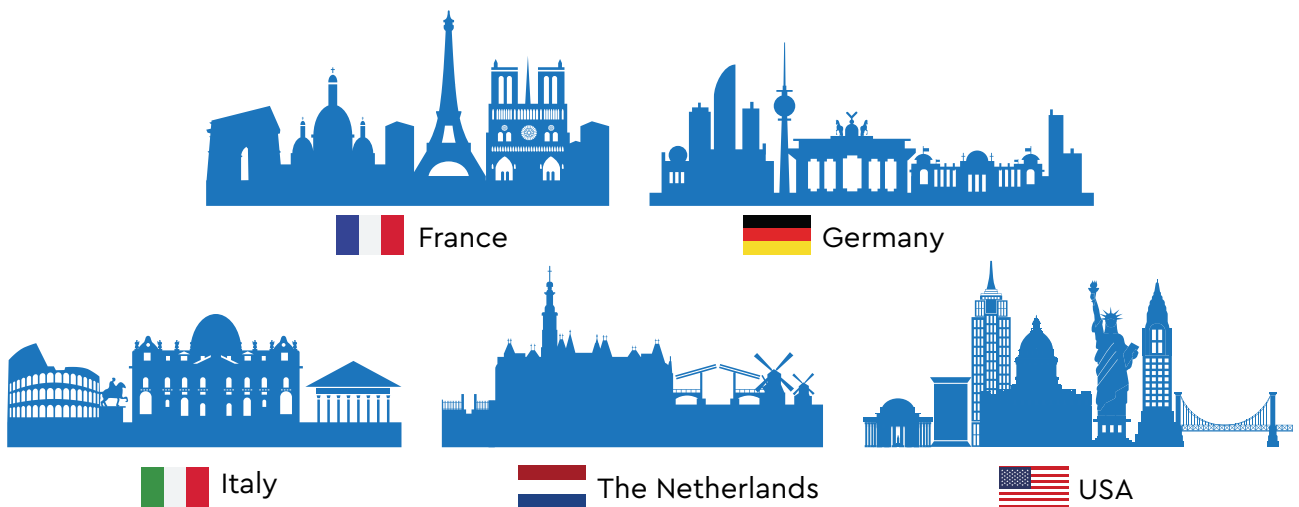
*The opinion poll and the paper was prepared with the support of the International Renaissance Foundation. The material reflects the position of the authors and does not necessarily coincide with the position of the International Renaissance Foundation.*

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## METHODOLOGY

The opinion poll was conducted in France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and the US by Kantar company at the request of the New Europe Center. Overall, over 5256 respondents aged between 18 and 64 answered three questions. Respondents represent their countries proportionally based on gender, age, and region. All the answers were collected on an internet-based survey taking place on April 27–May 2 2023. Given the higher than usual amount of people who don't know what to answer, we focused mainly on the responses of the people who already made up their minds and have a clear perception of the given answer.



5256

18

...

64



April 27–May 2 2023

## INTRODUCTION AND MAIN FINDINGS

Public opinion is a central element of decision-making in democratic societies. The Russian war against Ukraine made the West revise its policy on Ukraine and have incremental support to fight back as the aggression continues. For more than a year, the full-scale Russian war against Ukraine is forcing us to answer not only the question of when the war could end but also how to ensure a lasting peace for decades to come. Also, we aimed to learn from partner societies their perception of how long and how consistent should be the military and financial support to Ukraine. One of the other aims of the opinion poll was to determine the level of support for Ukraine's NATO aspirations at the upcoming NATO Vilnius Summit and to see whether the society in France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the US are in favor of accepting new members.

The data obtained should help France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the US to develop a fact-based policy agenda towards Ukraine in what concerns Kyiv's bid for NATO membership and fighting back Russian aggression as well as calibrating the military and financial support. Aside from this, it should also help Ukraine to feel better the mood in the surveyed societies and adjust its policy accordingly.

At a glance, this survey shows us that the overall support for Ukraine has a solid majority in all the countries participating in the current opinion poll. At the same time, there are countries whose societies' opinion overlaps greater with the "common sense" opinion in Ukraine. One could generically divide the countries into three groups: the US and France as the most supporting, the Netherlands close to the leaders however slightly different and Germany and Italy where certain narratives promoted by Russia are still traceable in their public discourse.

However, despite the varying support, the majority of people in all five countries want their leaders to support Ukraine until it regains control of all the territories, including Crimea. The fact that many think Putin should be sued by the ICC might make it difficult for the leaders of surveyed countries to pressure Ukraine to hold negotiations with Putin, which we suspect could happen somewhere in the future.

Despite the overall commitment to supporting Ukraine, certain fatigue is felt especially in Germany and the US where the percent of people wishing to stop military and financial support to Ukraine is significant. But this also portrays an existing public discourse of certain political forces with higher traction in the society that shapes the discourse, the so-called "vocal minority."

At the same time, in every country, there is a massive support for lasting peace in Ukraine, given that only an insignificant part of population thinks that peace won't be restored. Regime change in Russia is the most preferred option that respondents perceive as able to ensure lasting peace in Ukraine, which again means that Putin is the person leading the current aggression, which again makes it difficult to envisage negotiations but also partially answers the question why Russia still continues its war against Ukraine.

In all 5 countries people want to see Ukraine starting the accession process to NATO at the Vilnius summit. The support varies from 50% to 70% depending on the country, however out of these some think the process should start in Vilnius irrespective of the state of war while others would prefer to invite Ukraine to join NATO in Vilnius but start the actual accession after the war ends.

## QUESTIONS

### Q.1 HOW LONG SHOULD YOUR COUNTRY CONTINUE TO SUPPORT UKRAINE MILITARILY AND FINANCIALLY?

- a) Until Ukraine regains all lost territories and Vladimir Putin is sued by the International Criminal Court in The Hague
- b) Until Ukraine regains control over all territories (including Crimea)
- c) Until Ukraine regains control over the territories which were occupied after February 24, 2022 – the rest of the territories should remain under Russian control
- d) We should stop supporting Ukraine
- e) Don't know / prefer not to answer

### Q.2 HOW DO YOU THINK A LASTING PEACE WILL BE RESTORED TO UKRAINE? (MULTIPLE OPTIONS)

- a) Defeat of Russia on the battlefield
- b) Membership of Ukraine in NATO
- c) Provision of bilateral security guarantees to Ukraine (obligation of certain NATO states to defend Ukraine)
- d) Surrender part of the already occupied Ukrainian territories to Russia
- e) Regime change in Russia
- f) Peace won't be restored
- g) Don't know / prefer not to answer

### Q.3 IN JULY THIS YEAR, THERE WILL BE A NATO SUMMIT IN VILNIUS. ON THIS OCCASION, UKRAINE IS EXPECTING TO RECEIVE AN INVITATION TO BECOME A NATO MEMBER IN THE NEAR FUTURE. DO YOU THINK NATO SHOULD....

- a) Invite Ukraine to become a NATO member as soon as possible, even if the war with Russia is ongoing
- b) Invite Ukraine to become a NATO member but with its actual accession to NATO to happen after the war with Russia is over
- c) Wait with the invitation to Ukraine until the war with Russia is over
- d) Never invite Ukraine to become a NATO member
- f) Don't know / I prefer not to say

## ANALYSIS OF THE ANSWERS



### HOW LONG SHOULD YOUR COUNTRY CONTINUE TO SUPPORT UKRAINE MILITARILY AND FINANCIALLY?

Q.1

Western leaders have declared many times that their support for Ukraine will be there for "as long as it takes". Although the declared formula sounds like a firm commitment able to ensure the victory of Ukraine, this "formula" has also been disadvantageous. Often, from Kyiv's perspective, "as long as it takes" could mean years given that Russia is not depleted of its military and the existing sanctions are not able to curb its military strength in the short term. Therefore, Kyiv needs support not only "as long as it takes", but also "as much as it takes" and "as fast as it takes". That is why public perception of the question of support for Ukraine is important as there are certain opinions in the partner countries that sometimes show a certain degree of "Ukraine fatigue". But how to know when "as long as it takes" ends? Is it when Ukraine is in control of its all territories or when it liberates all the territories and Putin is in jail? Or rather is it when Ukraine gets control over the territories occupied after February 24, 2022? Some could say that Ukraine should not be supported at all, and this is also an option to watch.

Analyzing the perceptions from the five surveyed countries, one could say that the most preferred options are (1) to get back control over all Ukrainian internationally recognized territories, including Crimea but with Putin sued by the ICC; and (2) to stop supporting Ukraine. The first option that involves the return of control of the territories is the most preferred in France with 43% and Italy at 33% and one can add here the Netherlands at 27% (although in the case of the Netherlands, the most preferred is regaining control of all territories, including Crimea but not necessarily with Putin sued by the ICC – 31%). On the opposite side are Germany and the US where the most preferred option as

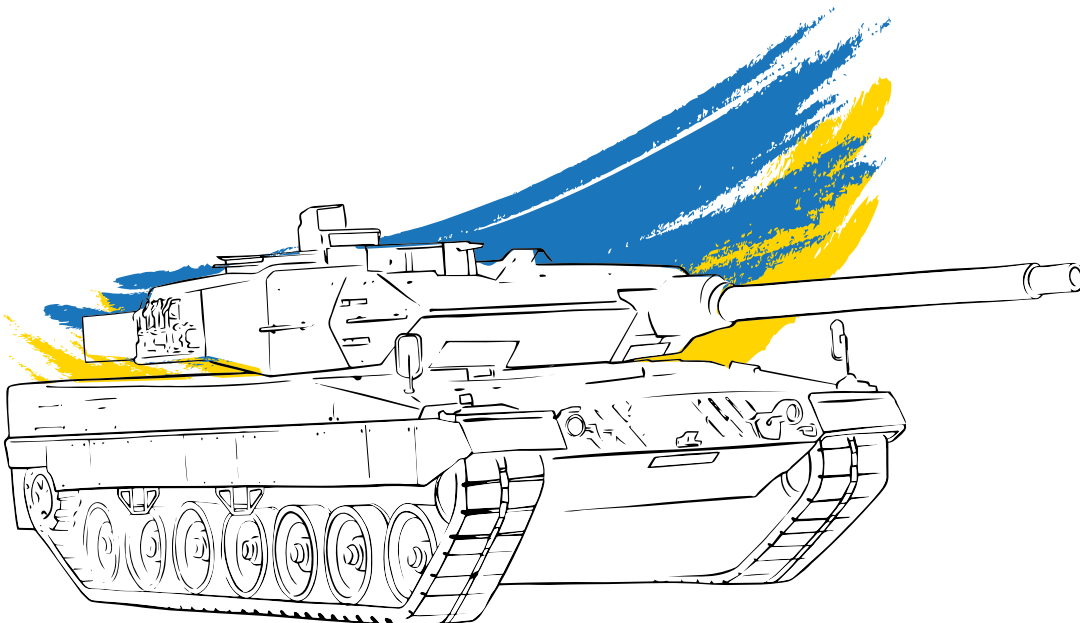


How do these countries support Ukraine and its NATO aspirations?

a single answer is to stop supporting Ukraine: Germany with 35% and the US with 33%.

However, judging each answer separately is misleading and incorrect since both, the first and second option involves the return of full control of the territories to Ukraine, except that the first option also requires that Putin is sued by the ICC. Thus, uniting the two options that involve the return of full control over the internationally recognized territory of Ukraine is by far the most preferred option. The ranking is led by France with 64%, the Netherlands with 58%, Germany with 52%, the US with 52%, and Italy with 50%. We see that the scenario in which Ukraine should be supported until it regains control over all its territories, including Crimea is by far the most preferred and has a majority in all the surveyed countries. The fact there is an important group of people who think Putin should be sued by the ICC should make it difficult for their leaders to put pressure on Ukraine to accept negotiations with Putin.

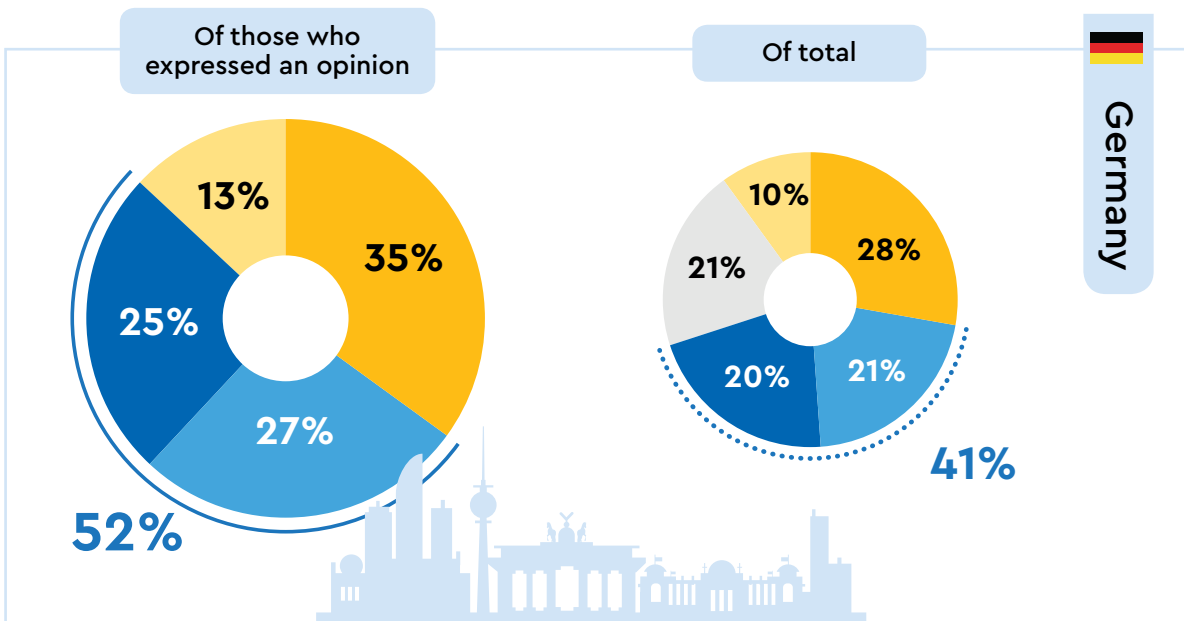
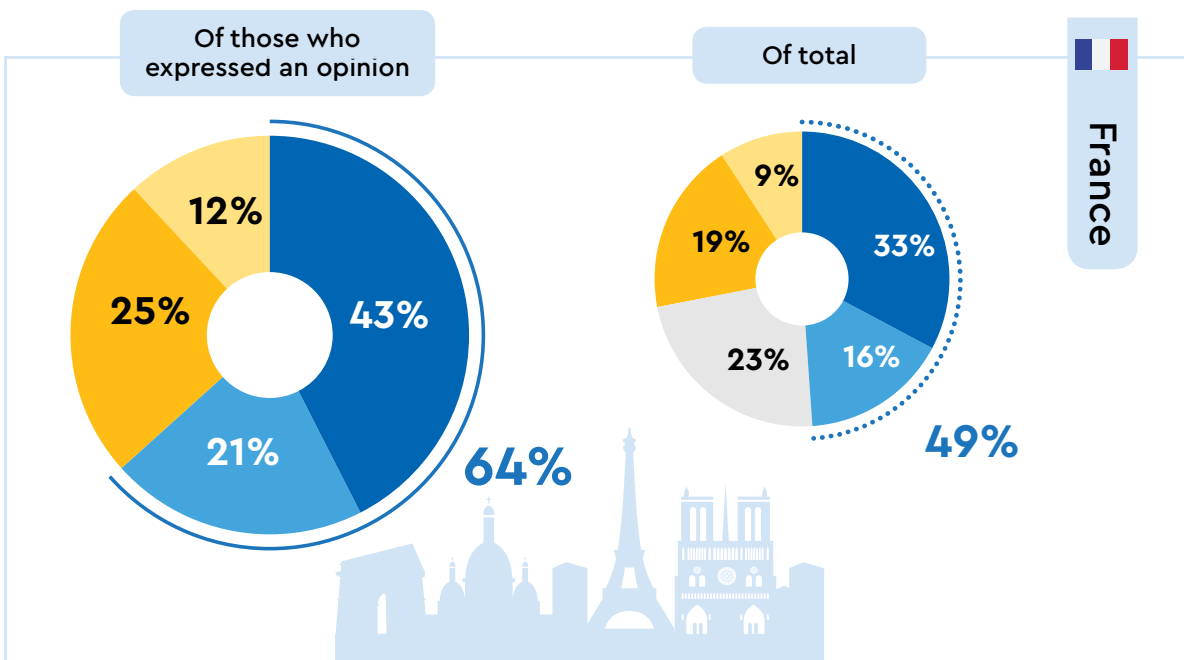
One option that was also offered as an option for the respondents was the one in which the support should last until Kyiv regains control of the territories which were occupied after February 24, 2022, and the rest should remain under Russian control. This option does not gather too many supporters, however, such a category exists and varies from country to country. In France, the option is the least preferred with 12%, followed by Germany with 13%, then by the US with 14%, Italy with 19%, and last the Netherlands with 21%.



How do these countries support Ukraine and its NATO aspirations?

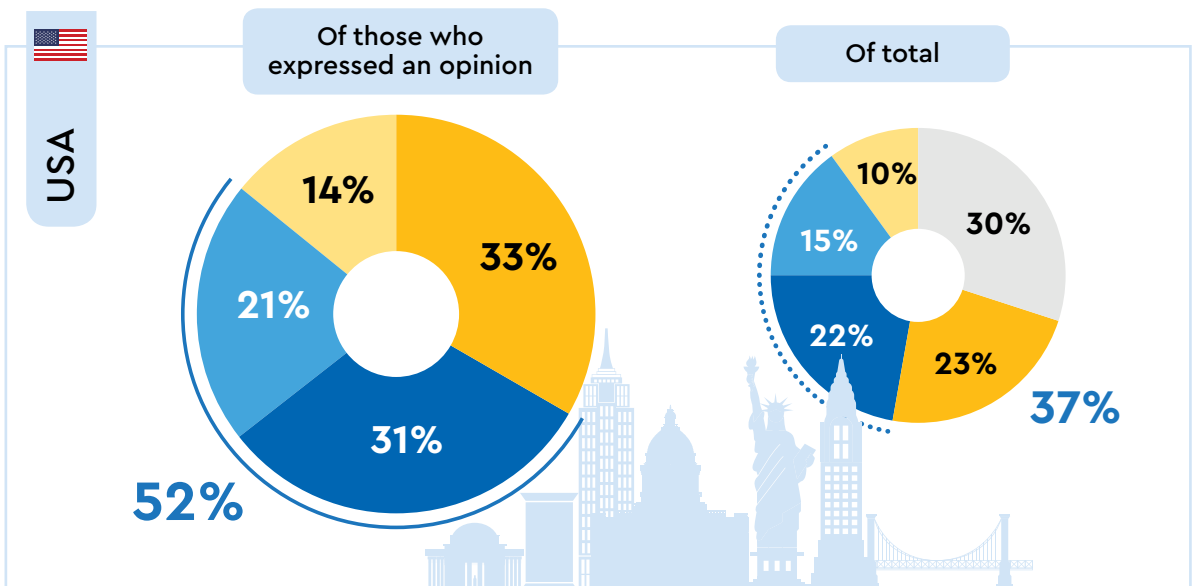
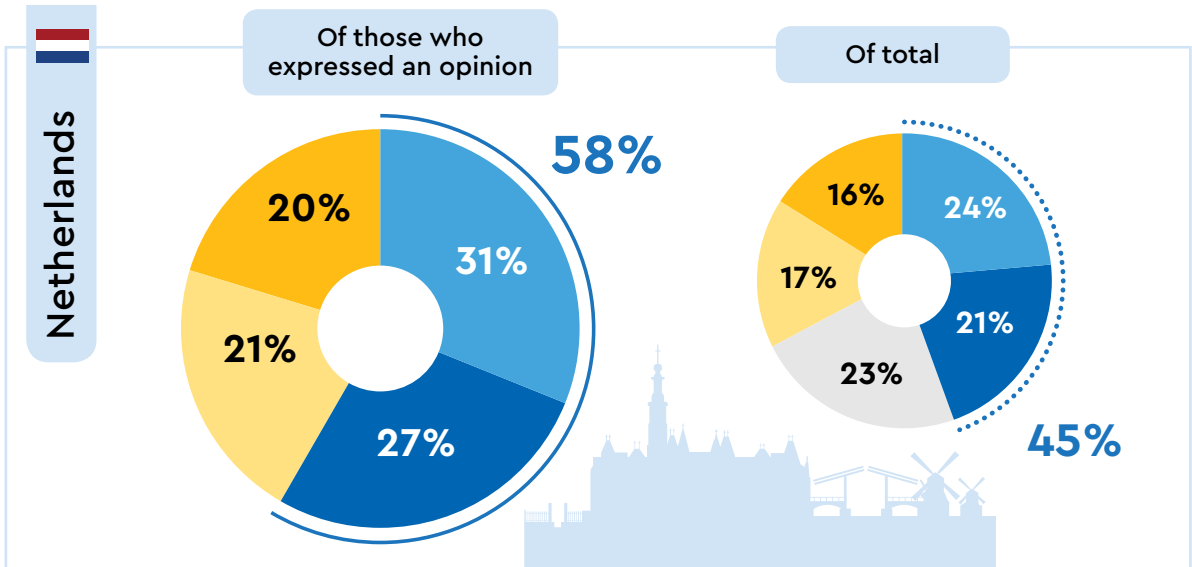
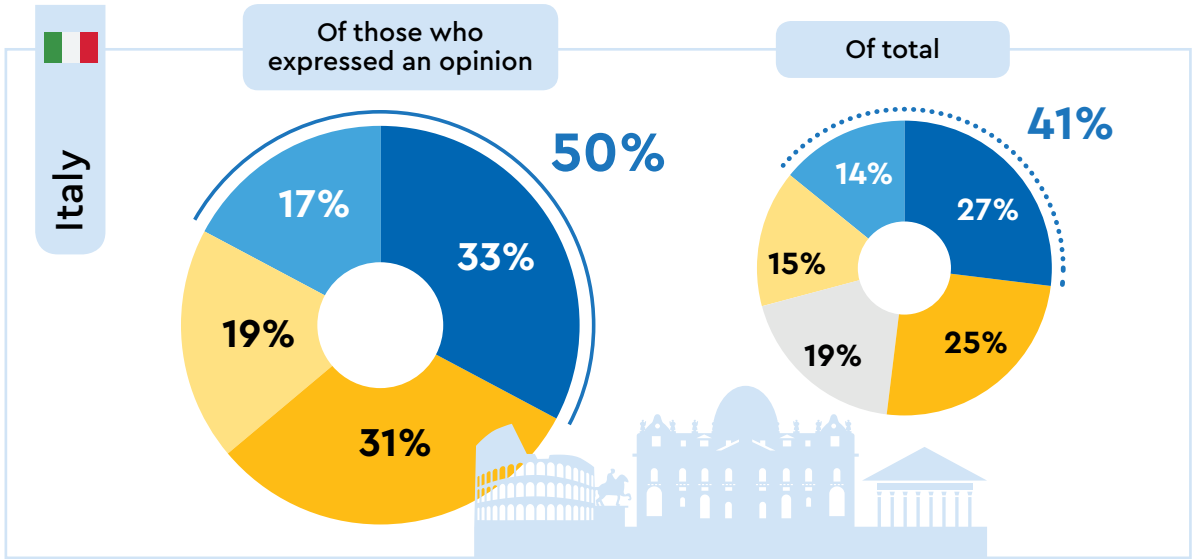
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- Until Ukraine regains all lost territories and Vladimir Putin is sued by the International Criminal Court in The Hague
- Until Ukraine regains control over all territories (including Crimea)
- Until Ukraine regains control over the territories which were occupied after February 24, 2022 – the rest of the territories should remain under Russian control
- We should stop supporting Ukraine
- Don't know / prefer not to answer



Q.1

How do these countries support Ukraine and its NATO aspirations?



Q.1



## HOW DO YOU THINK A LASTING PEACE WILL BE RESTORED TO UKRAINE?

## Q.2

Finding a solution for lasting peace is probably the second most popular question after the question about when the war will end. In all five countries there is a strong feeling that lasting peace is possible, even if the views on how to ensure lasting peace varies. What is encouraging is that only a minority thinks peace won't be restored. In the surveyed EU countries, the percentage of those who think peace won't be restored is quite uniform, varying from 13% to 17%, and slightly contrasts with the US where 1 in 4 consider peace won't be restored (26%). The most preferred option for lasting peace is the regime change in Russia, which tops the preferences in all the surveyed countries, although to a different degree. In the US, 32% of respondents believe regime change is the right option for lasting peace, while in Germany 57% consider regime change as the most effective way for a durable peace. The other three countries are in between with the Netherlands at 48%, France at 40% and Italy at 39%.

The second most preferred option among all countries is the defeat of Russia on the battlefield and then the membership of Ukraine in NATO. From a Ukrainian perspective, the algorithm which is more sympathetic and logical is the defeat of Russia on the battlefield, which would lead to Ukraine's membership in NATO and thus to the collapse of the current regime and Russia, including the regime change. As noted above, the second most preferred option among all countries is the defeat of Russia on the battlefield: France 30%, Germany 24%, Netherlands 30%, and the US 29%, with the notable exception of Italy where only 16% believe in the option of the Russian defeat on the battlefield. The second most preferred option (27%) after regime change in Russia for Italian respondents is to surrender occupied territories to Russia.

## How do these countries support Ukraine and its NATO aspirations?

This data confirms the reports that the Russian narratives in Italy are fairly strong compared to other countries in Western Europe and more communication with the Italian public shall take place. In contrast to Italy, in the Netherlands (14%), the US (14%), and France (15%) this is the least preferred option among the respondents. Somewhere in between is Germany where surrendering the occupied territories to Russia is preferred by 22%.

Quite interesting data are revealed by the options "NATO membership for Ukraine" (varying from 21% to 27%) and "bilateral security guarantees" (varying from 16% to 22%). From the "good options" for Ukraine, these are the least preferred options if taken apart. However, in essence, both options are pretty much the same, just that the guarantor is in the first case wearing a NATO hat, and in the second its own hat – this shows that the idea finds support among the respondents although the ways to achieve this are divided.

For the US, the Netherlands, and France, surrendering the occupied territories is the least preferred option. Only in Italy is the second preferred option with 27% and the fourth preferred option in Germany with 22%.

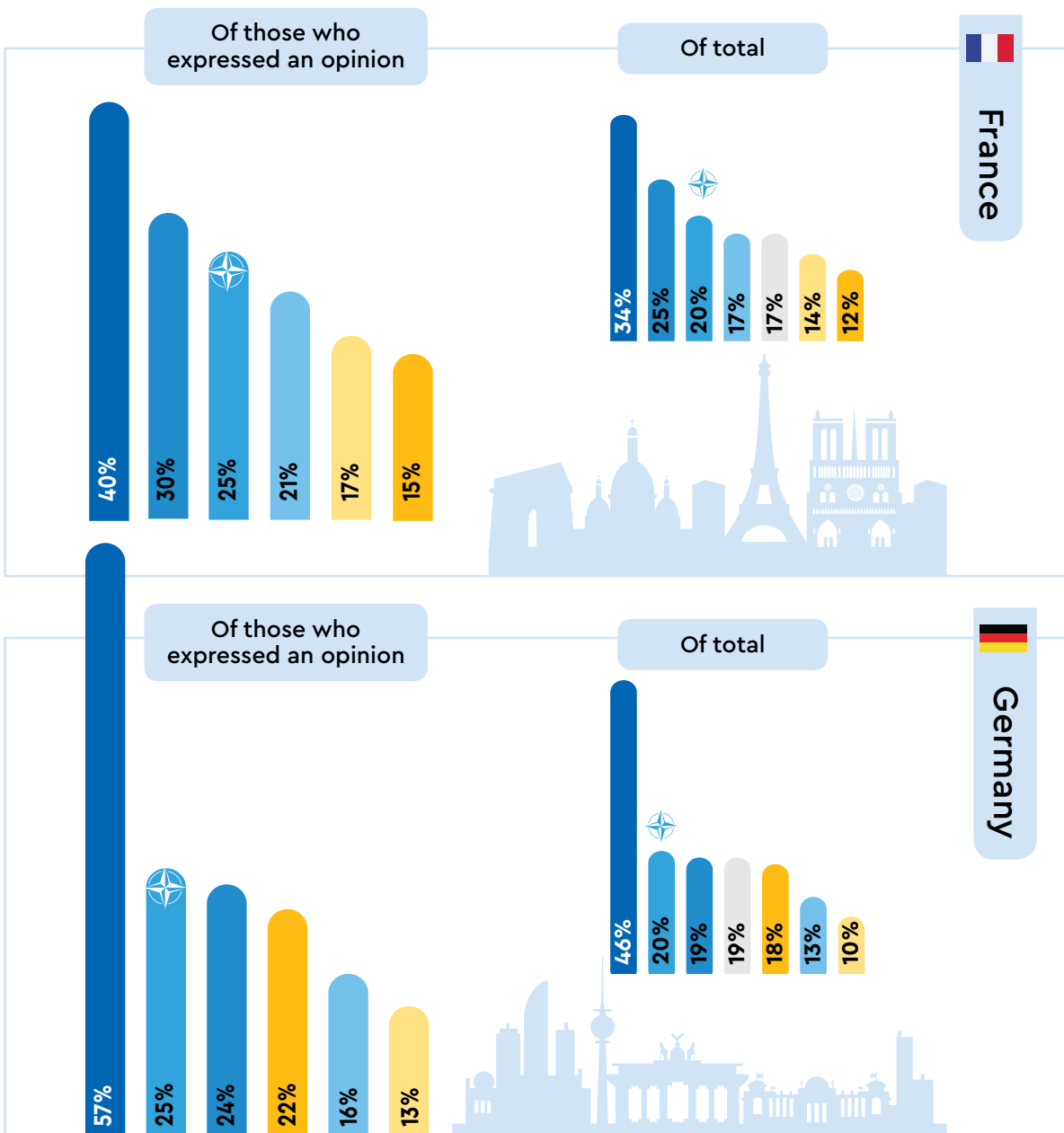
As per country divides, the preferences are widely distributed evenly. One element which stands apart is the option "regime change" which is mostly lifted by the baby boomer generation, widely by people in the category 55–64 years old.



How do these countries support Ukraine and its NATO aspirations?

## Q.2 HOW DO YOU THINK A LASTING PEACE WILL BE RESTORED TO UKRAINE? (MULTIPLE OPTIONS)

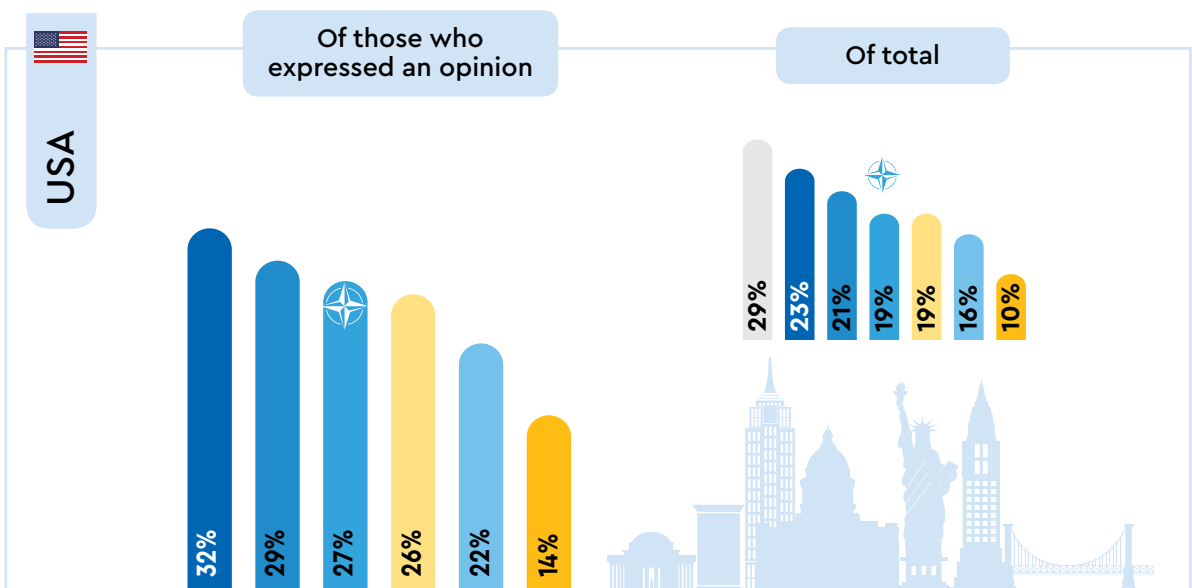
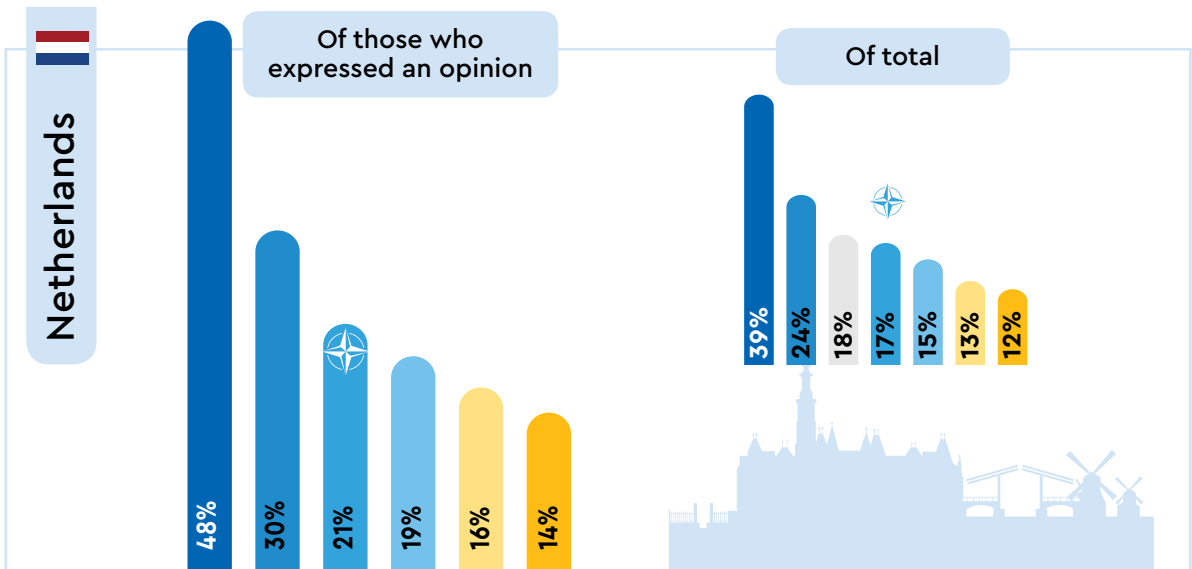
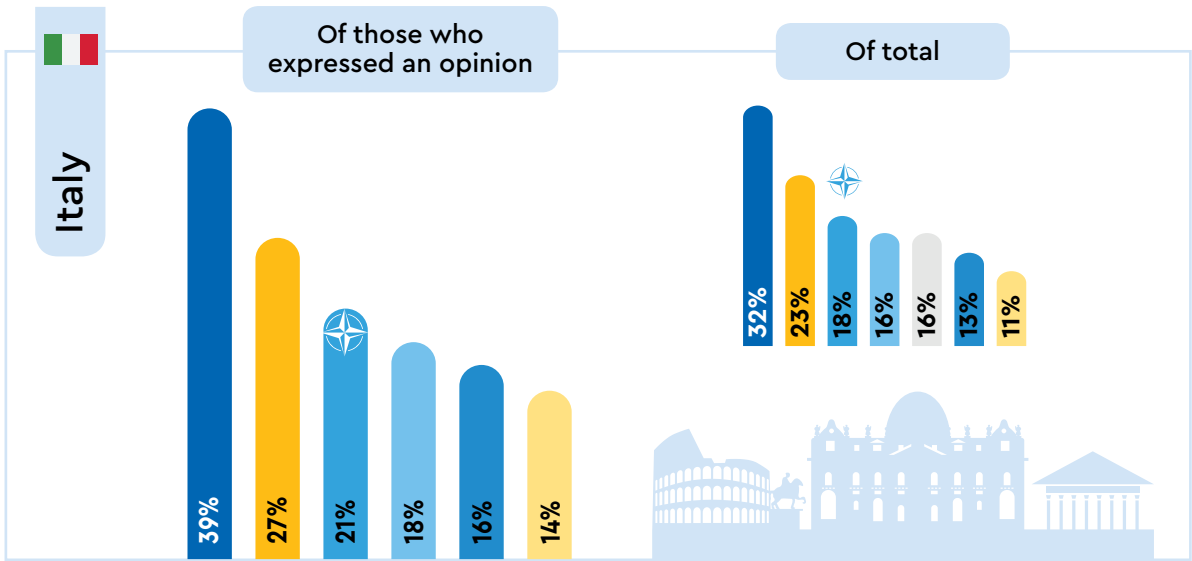
- Regime change in Russia
- Defeat of Russia on the battlefield
- Membership of Ukraine in NATO
- Provision of bilateral security guarantees to Ukraine (obligation of certain NATO states to defend Ukraine)
- Peace won't be restored
- Surrender part of the already occupied Ukrainian territories to Russia
- Don't know / prefer not to answer



Q.2

How do these countries support Ukraine and its NATO aspirations?

Q.2





**IN JULY THIS YEAR, THERE WILL BE A NATO SUMMIT IN VILNIUS. ON THIS OCCASION, UKRAINE IS EXPECTING TO RECEIVE AN INVITATION TO BECOME A NATO MEMBER IN THE NEAR FUTURE. DO YOU THINK NATO SHOULD...**

Q.3

The question of NATO membership has been in the public debate for quite a while. In some cases, such as the early war negotiations between Ukraine and Russia in Turkey it was portrayed as a crucial question on which a peace agreement could depend on. However, the recent membership of Finland in NATO and the weak Russian reaction shows that the NATO enlargement issue was rather a propaganda scarecrow rather than something substantial. There are plenty of surveys that measure the support for Ukraine's NATO membership, but as the NATO summit in Vilnius is approaching, it was interesting to get a perception on how the question of NATO membership of Ukraine is viewed in the context of the summit and what kind of options are preferred by the public.

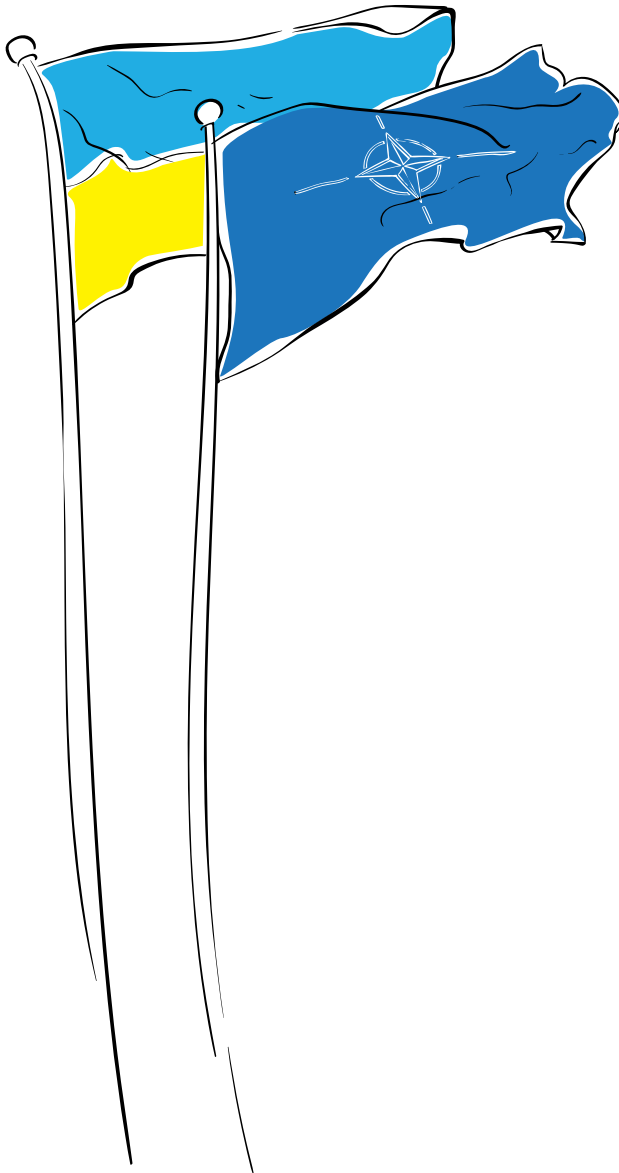
It is interesting to notice that in all the 5 survey countries there is support for Ukraine's starting its accession process. If one considers the two options to "invite Ukraine to become a member of NATO despite the war" and "invite Ukraine to become a NATO member but with actual accession after the war is over", we could see the support of the majority in all-surveyed countries. The two options combined varies in EU-surveyed countries from 50% to 56%, while in the US this option is preferred by 70% of respondents who made up their mind. This perception is quite important since the Vilnius summit is fast approaching, and the political leaders of the surveyed countries are rather timid in respect of their ambitions. Although, as the NATO Secretary General mention that all NATO countries agree that Ukraine must become a member after the war is over, none of the leading NATO nations, and especially the US, is willing yet to publicly commit at the Vilnius summit to start the process.



How do these countries support Ukraine and its NATO aspirations?

For the sake of balance, one needs to look also at the percentage of the people who think that Ukraine should never be invited to NATO. The highest opposition to Ukraine's NATO membership is in Germany with 22% of people opposing while the lowest is in the US with only 12% opposing. The remaining three countries are in between with 17% in France, 19% in Italy, and 16% in the Netherlands.

There was one more option in the survey, for the most cautious supporters of Ukraine's NATO accession, to "wait with the invitation until the war is over". The option proved to be preferred by roughly a quarter of respondents with the highest support in the Netherlands (29%) and the lowest in the US (19%).

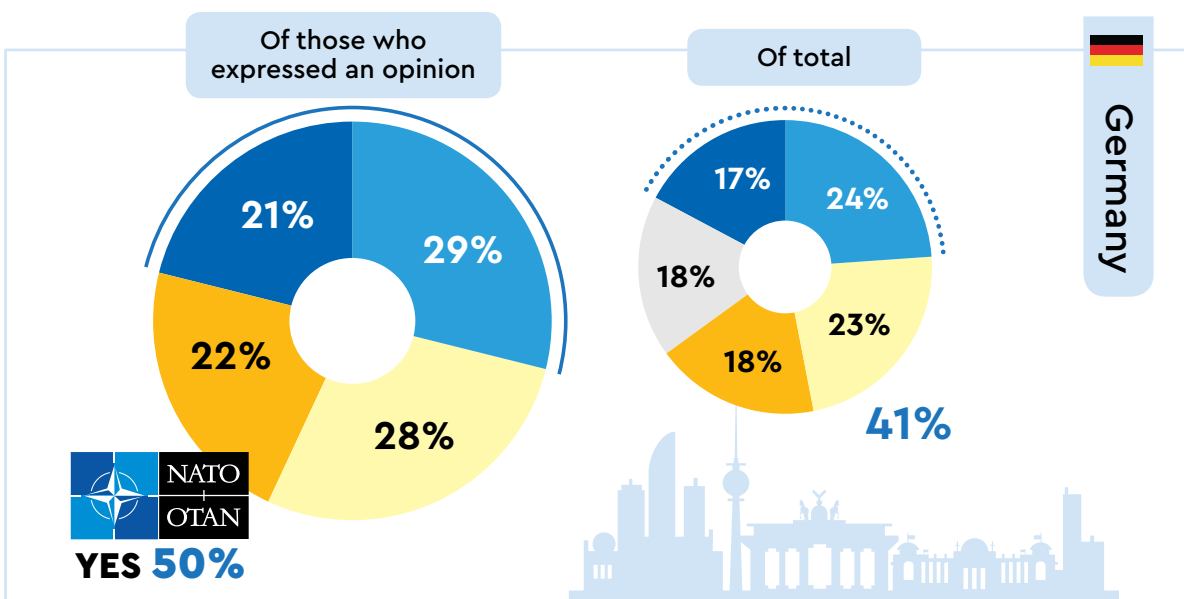
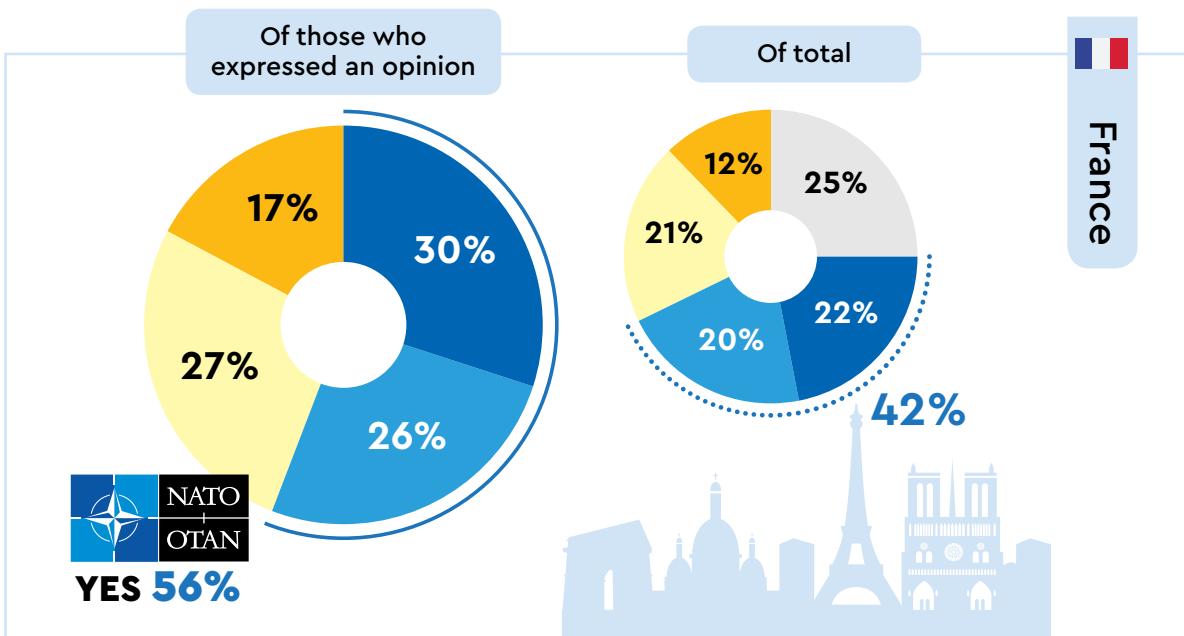


Q.3

How do these countries support Ukraine and its NATO aspirations?

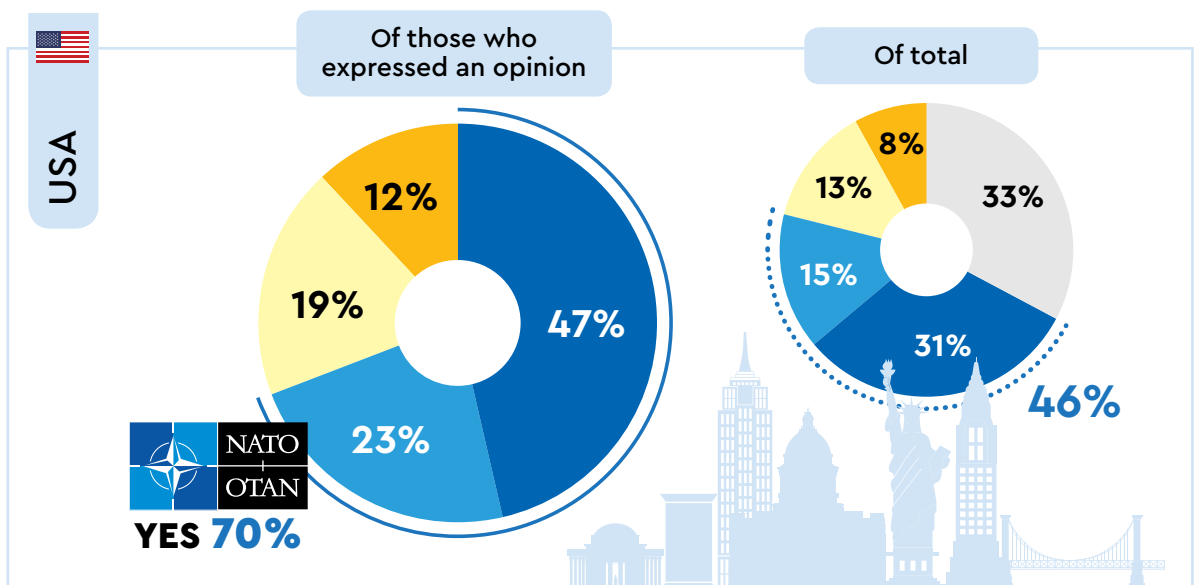
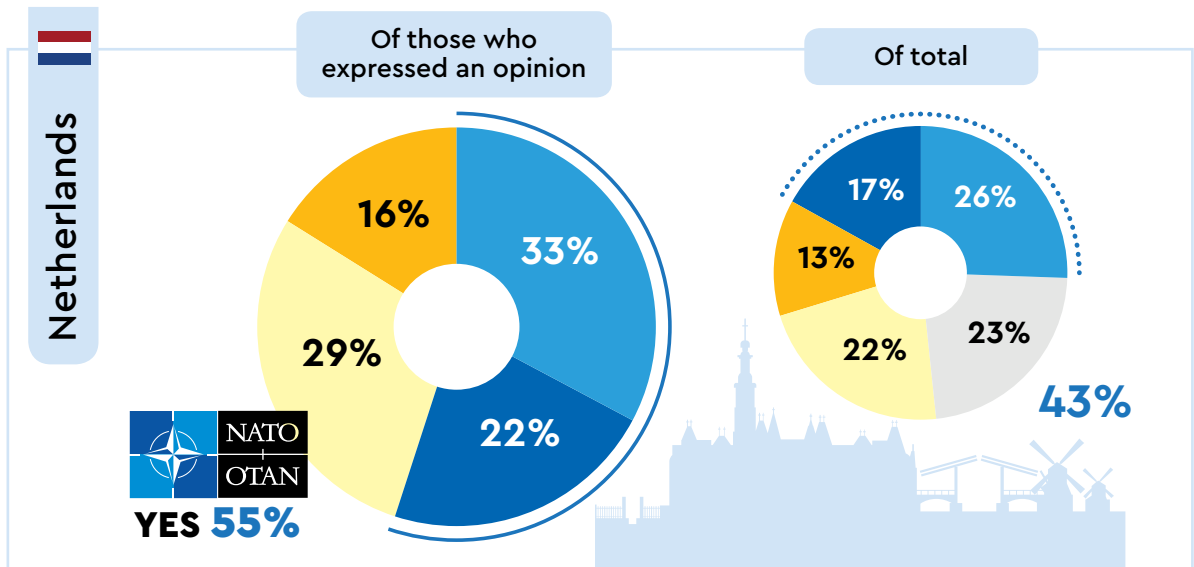
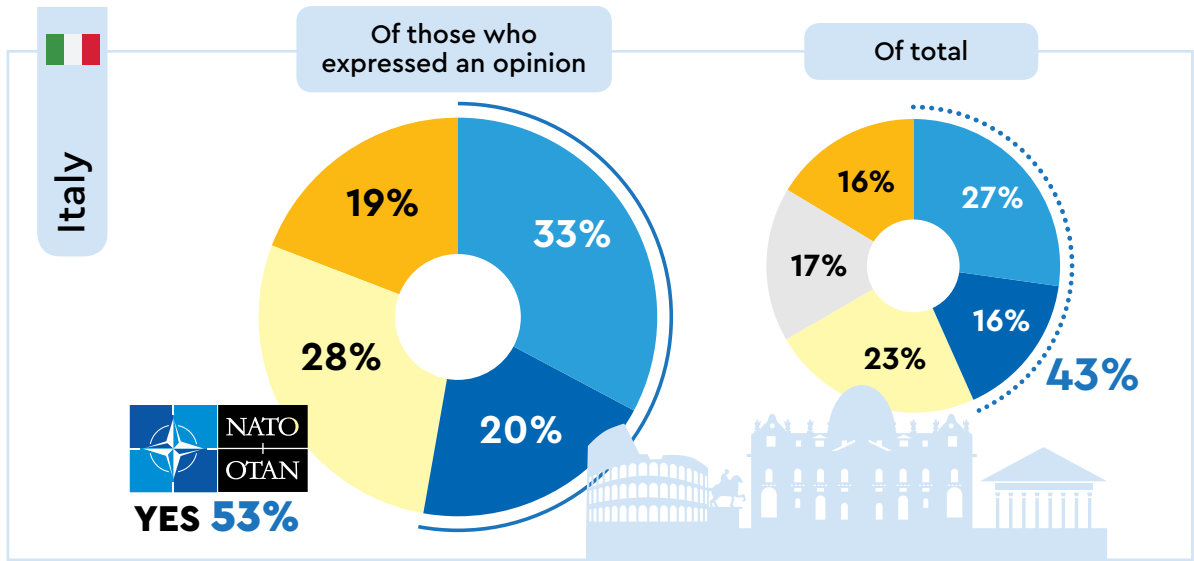
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- Invite Ukraine to become a NATO member as soon as possible, even if the war with Russia is ongoing
- Invite Ukraine to become a NATO member but with its actual accession to NATO to happen after the war with Russia is over
- Wait with the invitation to Ukraine until the war with Russia is over
- Never invite Ukraine to become a NATO member
- Don't know / prefer not to answer



Q.3

How do these countries support Ukraine and its NATO aspirations?



Q.3



## ABOUT NEW EUROPE CENTER

The New Europe Center was founded in 2017 as an independent think-tank. Despite its new brand, it is based on a research team that has been working together since 2009, at the Institute for World Policy. The New Europe Center became recognized by offering high-quality analysis on foreign policy issues in Ukraine and regional security by combining active, effective work with advocacy.

The New Europe Center's vision is very much in line with the views of the majority of Ukrainians about the future of their country: Ukraine should be integrated into the European Union and NATO. By integration, we understand not so much formal membership as the adoption of the best standards and practices for Ukraine to properly belong to the Euroatlantic value system.

More about New Europe Center: [neweurope.org.ua](http://neweurope.org.ua)



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