

# Qualitative study on new themes for euro banknotes



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## Executive summary

The Eurosystem has a specific responsibility to preserve public confidence in euro banknotes, to ensure the safe and convenient use of euro banknotes and to further enhance the efficiency of cash. Banknotes are highly sophisticated products that take years to develop and produce. As part of the regular development of future euro banknotes, a process has been launched to consider new themes and designs. This process involves two main steps: first, the development of a new theme<sup>1</sup> (and associated motifs<sup>2</sup>); and second, the development of new designs based on the new theme. To support the first step, the European Central Bank (ECB) commissioned Ipsos to conduct qualitative research aimed at providing insights that could help inform the definition of the new theme.

The objectives of the research were twofold: (1) to understand the public's preferences on the theme of future euro banknotes, with the desired outcome being a list of preferred themes and associated motifs; and (2) to understand public perceptions of the current Europa Series 2 (ES2) common design elements<sup>3</sup> as well as possible new common design elements, again with the aim of establishing a list of preferred common design elements.

The study was conducted between December 2021 and March 2022 via online focus groups in all 19 euro area countries plus Croatia and Bulgaria. Four focus groups were established in each country, giving a total of 84 focus groups overall (or 422 participants). The groups were stratified by age (16-25, 26-40, 41-60, 61+) and configured to be broadly representative of the national populations using other key socio-demographic and attitudinal variables (including gender, education, country of birth, attitudes towards the EU and frequency of banknote usage). Communication within the groups was carried out in the main languages of the participating countries.

Qualitative research aims to identify and explore perspectives and issues relating to the subject in question. The assumption is that perspectives and issues advanced by participants reflect perspectives and issues in the wider population(s) concerned. However, the extent to which they apply to those wider population(s), or specific sub-groups, cannot be quantified. **The value of qualitative research lies rather in identifying the range of relevant perspectives and experiences that exist and the considerations underpinning them.** Accordingly, **the findings reported in this document should not be treated as statistically representative of the perspectives and preferences of the populations concerned.** Similarly, although the report includes commentary on apparent differences in perspectives and preferences based on, for example, age group and geography, these differences too should be seen as indicative only. In other words, they may provide indications that certain perspectives and preferences are more dominant among specific age groups, countries or social groups.

### Overview of the main findings

#### *Conceptions of European-ness*

To provide context for views on themes for future euro banknotes, each focus group began with a discussion of what being European meant to participants. Four main categories of associations were spontaneously identified across the groups:

- **travel and/or the free movement of persons within Europe;**
- **the euro or a single currency within Europe;**
- **liberal values such as freedom, solidarity and equality;**

<sup>1</sup> Theme: the recurrent, underlying central subject or idea that ensures consistency in the design of a range of banknotes.

<sup>2</sup> Motifs: images that develop or represent the theme and that can take different forms for each denomination.

<sup>3</sup> Common design elements: images or symbols that are unrelated to the theme but are present for practical purposes and to display European identity.

- **cultural aspects such as the diversity of languages and cultures within Europe and shared European history.**

In each case, European-ness was predominantly interpreted through the lens of personal values and everyday cultural experiences and interests, rather than via references to European institutions and EU legislation. **Notably, European-ness was associated both with feelings and perceptions of unity, shared values and a common history (i.e. the things that bind Europeans) as well as with an appreciation of the variety of distinctive cultures and languages that Europe represents (i.e. the things that differentiate Europeans).**

### ***Recall and perceptions of the current (Europa) series of euro banknotes***

**Generally, recall of the current series of euro banknotes (including the theme) was limited.** This was especially the case among younger people and participants who favoured card-based or digital payment methods.

Once reminded that the theme of the current series was the “ages and styles of Europe”, **participants had mixed reactions, ranging from very positive to neutral and rather negative.** Those who were positive saw the theme (and associated motifs) as aesthetically appealing and appropriate for euro banknotes as it reflected a key element of Europe’s cultural history and one that was relevant for all Member States. They also referred spontaneously to the “neutrality” of the theme. More negatively, there were participants who found the historical focus “old-fashioned” or “stuffy”, or who felt that the inherent neutrality of the design was “bland” or “boring”. Others felt that the theme and motifs were not “meaningful” or distinctly European.

**Participants rarely felt any sense of identification with or emotional connection to the current banknotes.** Reflecting this, they appeared to generally welcome the idea of changes being made to the notes, seeing this as an opportunity to create more appealing, distinctive notes.

### ***General considerations surrounding possible themes and motifs for future euro banknotes***

When asked to consider possible new themes for future euro banknotes and evaluate them comparatively, participants often referred spontaneously to specific criteria that they felt were important. In particular, they said that **any future theme should have pan-European relevance and resonance, should highlight both unity and diversity among Member States, should be easy to discern and should lend itself to an eye-catching design.** The general acceptability of the theme and the ease with which it could be depicted on banknotes were also considered key. More affective considerations, including the extent to which a theme could instil a sense of pride in citizens, tended to be somewhat less spontaneously prominent.

**When it came to identifying motifs to represent themes, participants generally felt that these should be recognisable and easy to relate to, and that potentially controversial, divisive or offensive motifs – for example, motifs that reflected cultural stereotypes or that were in any way religious, political or ideological – should be avoided.** In addition to these considerations, participants were clearly drawn to the idea of symbolism in motifs, especially as pertaining to EU unity or values. At the same time, they sometimes found it difficult to identify motifs that they felt met the aforementioned criteria or that would be both well-known and widely accepted. As detailed below, this sometimes resulted in them becoming less enthusiastic about certain themes as the discussions progressed.

Participants often said that they would feel **happy or even proud to see a motif from their own country being featured on euro banknotes** to represent a broader, common theme. This often prompted discussion of the fact that there were a limited number of euro banknote denominations and therefore a restricted amount of “space” within which to represent the various Member States,



resulting in the possible need for a different approach, such as the selection of **motifs that were regionally based or that otherwise cut across or transcended national boundaries**. Not all participants were as ready to compromise on the idea of national motifs, however. This was especially the case in Bulgaria and Portugal, where a focus on such motifs was partly tied to a perceived need for these countries to feel more equal to and valued by their EU partners. In this regard, the design of future euro banknotes was seen as a potential vehicle through which Member States could be endowed with greater parity of esteem.

### ***Preferred themes and motifs for future euro banknotes***

A vast array of new themes and associated motifs were suggested by participants. These ranged from themes traditionally associated with banknotes and coinage, including portraits of dignitaries, elements of nature, monuments, historical events, science and forms of transport, to more contemporary themes such as space, modern art, popular food and drinks, and sports tournaments. There was also considerable mention of more abstract or conceptual themes such as values (for example, freedom, equality and democracy), diversity, culture and sustainability.

While some suggestions for new themes were unique to one or two focus groups or individuals, the **overwhelming majority were recurring** or very closely related to other suggestions made. Moreover, there was a **striking degree of consistency across the four age groups and the different countries in the frequency with which different themes were mentioned**.

When participants were asked to choose their preferred themes from those identified and discussed within their respective focus groups, they did so with relative ease. At the all-country level, this process led to a reduction of the initial list of suggested themes, as some themes were entirely rejected or judged to overlap with others. For example, the history and science themes were sometimes seen to overlap with the theme of portraits (or vice versa) and so were not carried forward in isolation. The most commonly preferred themes (as derived through an expressed preference exercise conducted within each focus group) were:

- **nature;**
- **monuments and landmarks;**
- **portraits;**
- **European values;**
- **science and progress;**
- **art.**

Views on these preferred themes evolved somewhat over the course of the discussions, however. There was an increase in the popularity of perceived neutral themes – especially nature and European values – and a slight waning of support for themes that had sparked greater debate, most notably monuments and landmarks and, to a lesser extent, portraits (for reasons outlined below).

#### ***Nature***

Nature-related themes were by far the most suggested themes across the focus groups. Nature was repeatedly described as a **“neutral”, “safe” or “light” topic that was unlikely to cause controversy**. It was also commonly referred to as **“borderless” or “universal”** and so something with which all Europeans could readily identify. In this regard, some participants felt that the topic also carried special symbolic significance, with the EU itself being a shared territory where citizens of all Member States could feel a sense of belonging. A further reason nature themes were so popular concerned the aesthetic value and general “mood” that participants felt these could bring to future banknotes. In several countries, it was also suggested that a nature theme would provide an opportunity to bring an ecological focus to future banknotes. Suggested nature motifs fell into four main categories: landscapes (especially mountains); waterways and basins; flowers, plants and trees; and animals and birds.

### **Monuments and landmarks**

There was a widely held perception that **historical monuments and landmarks represented a core, instantly recognisable element of Europe's cultural identity** and thus would serve as very accessible, relatable themes for banknotes. There was also the repeated suggestion that such monuments and landmarks were symbols not only of Europe's development, but of its resilience and values – aspects that were seen to further unite Europeans. At the same time, in a small number of focus groups, there was spontaneous recognition of the potential challenges involved in choosing motifs to represent the themes. First, it was noted that monuments and landmarks were sometimes associated with past conflicts or tragedies and, as such, could carry negative connotations for or even offend some groups of citizens. Second, reference was made to the possible difficulties involved in choosing monuments or landmarks that would effectively represent all euro area countries. Nonetheless, commonly suggested motifs for the themes of monuments and landmarks were specific historical buildings, castles and landmarks; religious buildings; bridges; museums and galleries; and EU institution buildings in Brussels and Strasbourg.

### **Portraits**

Portraits emerged as **popular themes in their own right and also as motifs associated with several other themes**, especially science and progress, art, history and sport. Specifically, participants were often in favour of banknotes featuring **prominent figures who had played a pivotal role in building or shaping the Europe of today** and who had thus helped forge or inspire European identity. Suggestions for portrait motifs fell into five main categories: musicians and composers; historical figures, including the founders of Europe; scientists; philosophers and writers; and artists. While most of these categories proved relatively uncontroversial, this was not the case when it came to historical figures. Here, there was recognition **that some leaders or political figures, especially, could hold different associations for different groups of citizens and thus may not be universally acceptable as motifs**. Once mentioned, this perspective tended to gain currency within the relevant focus groups, often resulting in agreement that such figures would best be avoided in favour of individuals who were more universally lauded or respected, such as great artists or writers.

### **European values**

Participants who favoured themes within this category typically argued that **Europe was virtually synonymous with values such as unity, peace, democracy, human rights, freedom, equality, and respect for diversity and inclusion**. Further, they contended that these values transcended country borders and social hierarchies, uniting or “bonding” Europeans and providing them with a shared identity. Some participants were also keen to point out that the values had more direct day-to-day relevance for citizens than other popular themes, such as monuments and prominent figures, because values effectively defined how they lived their lives. There was a clear sense that the values discussed had become more salient in participants' minds against the backdrop of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which was building (and then ongoing) at the time of the fieldwork and which was seen as posing a threat to democracy and freedom. Indeed, significantly more focus groups considered shortlisting values than actually went on to do so, ultimately deciding that these themes were too abstract to depict on banknotes.

While participants often found it difficult to translate values into concrete motifs, three main types of motif surfaced: a white dove to symbolise freedom and peace; people holding hands or hugging to represent solidarity, democracy, unity and connectedness; and hands (e.g. circle of hands, outstretched hands, handshake), which were associated with cooperation, solidarity, community and equality. Other value motifs that circulated included Lady Justice and the scales of justice (as motifs of human rights, equality and respect); the peace sign; open borders or barriers (as motifs of freedom); and motifs of togetherness and inclusivity, such as people standing together, the geographical map of Europe and European flags presented together.

### **Science and progress**

Participants who advocated for this theme pointed to the **many inventions, discoveries and technological advancements that had emanated from Europe over the course of history** and

gone on to have global reach and impact. They also suggested that adopting such themes for banknotes could serve an important educational function, raising citizens' awareness of Europe's achievements and encouraging them to learn more. The most suggested category of motifs for the themes was European inventions and discoveries, specifically transport-related technologies, energy-related technologies, space technology and astronomy, medical discoveries and technologies, discoveries in physics, industrial or work-related tools and technologies, and communication technologies. There was also the widespread suggestion that the motifs could comprise specific scientists, inventors or explorers themselves. However, as with the portraits theme, a small number of participants came to question whether specific scientists or inventors should be featured, given the potential for some such individuals to cause division or for the significance ascribed to them (or their inventions and discoveries) to evolve over time or to vary by country.

## **Art**

Art themes were more typically shortlisted in the south and west of Europe than elsewhere. Participants who favoured these themes described **art as among Europe's strongest, most renowned and most unique assets**. As with the themes of nature and monuments and landmarks, there was a perception that featuring art on banknotes could pique citizens' interest and curiosity, encouraging them to discover where great works were created or displayed. On a more practical level, there was also a view that art themes would, almost by definition, lend themselves to a very aesthetically appealing design for banknotes. Specific types of art motifs suggested were great works of art, painters and sculptors, the history of art and different styles, dance and dancers, buildings and architecture, and musical instruments and genres. Participants often approached the discussion of art motifs by looking at them through an inclusive lens and focusing on how the motifs represented and combined different themes or countries. Examples cited were artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, who symbolised both art as well as science and inventions; ancient statues that represented art, history and values of civilisation; landscape paintings that combined art with nature; and art motifs that represented different countries.

## **Other relatively popular themes**

Other relatively popular themes that emerged across the focus groups, albeit less often than those described above, were history or historical events; customs and traditions; food, drink and cuisine; culture; environment and sustainability; maps and geography; sport; languages; Member States' flags; and transportation and travel. Comparatively infrequently preferred themes (that is, in only one or two focus groups) were education, religion, family, public and social services, and messages/text.

## **Common design elements<sup>4</sup>**

As for the theme and motifs of the current euro banknotes, awareness of common design elements was quite low overall. Participants often said that they had never noticed or paid much attention to these elements. Once prompted, they often observed that there were too many common design elements, which contributed to making the banknotes cluttered and "busy" as a whole. This view was reinforced by a perception that there was unnecessary redundancy between some elements, especially between the flag of Europe and the ring of stars.

There was broad consensus that the most essential common design elements were:

- the **ring of stars**;
- the **European flag**;
- the **map of Europe**;
- the **€ currency symbol**;
- the **"euro" currency name in three alphabets**;

<sup>4</sup> Common design elements are images or symbols that are unrelated to the theme but are present for practical purposes and to display European identity.



on the grounds that these elements were easily recognisable, relatable and useful.

**The perceived least important elements were the portrait of Europa, the ECB President's signature and, to a lesser extent, other elements such as the copyright symbol or the ECB acronym in all languages.** The portrait of Europa was not really known by participants, nor linked in their minds with the concept of Europe or European identity. The ECB President's signature and other administrative elements were described as difficult to see and understand, and not especially functional.

When prompted, participants offered some suggestions for **new common design elements**, including adding (portions of) the European Convention on Human Rights or the Anthem of Europe, a picture of the European Parliament or the flags of all EU Member States. There was also the suggestion that the existing map of Europe on the notes could be confined to euro area countries, and that the ECB acronyms could be reduced.

### *Other suggestions for future euro banknotes*

Participants were asked if there were any other considerations that they felt should have an important bearing on the future design of euro banknotes. They were keen to emphasise that the notes should be **simple and uncluttered**, as well as **colourful, vibrant and eye-catching**. Some also emphasised the importance of using contrasting colours to denote the different euro denominations, so that people could easily distinguish between them. In a few focus groups, participants felt it was important to maintain the current contrasting colours, as people had got used to them over time. There was also the suggestion that the notes should incorporate features to make the different denominations more easily recognisable and mutually distinctive for people with visual impairments, such as Braille elements or varying irregular edging.

Alongside these suggestions, there were calls for euro banknotes to be smaller, as well as uniform in size, so that they could be more easily fitted into a wallet. Some participants called for the notes to be made from a plastic-based material to help ensure their durability. Others, by contrast, emphasised the importance of sustainable materials being used.

In several countries, participants called for continued public engagement in decisions around the design of future euro banknotes, to increase the likelihood of the final design being widely accepted.

## **Conclusions**

At the most fundamental level, **the research laid bare the foreseeable challenges involved in arriving at a design that is widely accepted in all Member States and among different groups of citizens.** One such challenge relates to the various (and to an extent conflicting) expectations that were evident in the focus groups. On the one hand, participants called for a design that was underpinned by principles of universality and inclusivity, while on the other, they displayed a strong appetite for the representation of Member States' distinctiveness – whether in terms of physical assets, culture or contribution – albeit within the context of the EU collective.

Still, six themes in particular had clear and widespread resonance for participants of all nationalities and age groups, namely **nature; monuments and landmarks; portraits; European values; science and progress; and art.** Among these themes, nature and European values stood out as appearing to have both very broad appeal and the lowest perceived potential to spark controversy – considerations that also explain why the popularity of these themes strengthened to an extent over the course of the discussions. Other themes, such as monuments and landmarks, portraits and history, though also relatively popular, were seen to carry comparatively greater risks and present more challenges in terms of identifying motifs that would have pan-European resonance and acceptability.

At the same time, the discussion of potential themes, and even more so associated motifs, brought to the fore **clear overlaps between some of the themes**. Indeed, participants themselves sometimes pointed to the possibility of combining different themes within a single design, such as nature with sustainability, portraits with science and/or history, science with history, art with history, art with nature, European values with sustainability, or European values with language.

Participants typically identified numerous and varied motifs for each of their favourite themes, despite finding the task challenging at times for the reasons described above. Common underlying traits of preferred motifs were **beauty or majesty** and **allusions to Europe's greatness** (in terms of its assets or contribution) or **strong character** (in terms of its values and dynamism). The **recognisability** of motifs was also very important for participants and something they appeared to see as almost a prerequisite for being able to identify with the banknotes.

In terms of the second objective of the study – understanding views and preferences on the ES2 **common design elements** – the research identified a clear and consistent preference for certain elements over others, as described above. Equally if not more important than these specific insights, however, was what the research revealed about how participants evaluated common design elements more generally. They clearly placed a premium on elements that they saw as **easily recognisable, relatable** and **functional** – criteria that could therefore potentially serve as partial parameters for the determination of future common design elements.

## Structure of the report

The next section of this report provides a detailed description of the background to the study and the methodology adopted. Section 2 considers participants' general conceptions of European-ness. Section 3 considers their recall and perceptions of the current series of euro banknotes, and Section 4 describes their preferred themes and motifs for future euro banknotes. Section 5 considers participants' preferences regarding common design elements, while Section 6 sets out other considerations that they felt were important for the design of future banknotes. Section 7 sets out the main conclusions of the research. Additional supplementary information is provided in the form of annexes.

# 1 Objectives and method

This report presents the findings of the study “Qualitative research on new themes and designs for future euro banknotes”, conducted by Ipsos on behalf of the ECB.

## 1.1 Background

The Eurosystem has a specific responsibility to preserve public confidence in euro banknotes, to ensure the safe and convenient use of euro banknotes and to further enhance the efficiency of cash. Banknotes are highly sophisticated products that take years to develop and produce. The current Europa Series 2 (ES2) notes were gradually introduced to the public over the course of several years, beginning in 2013.

In 2019 the ECB commissioned a qualitative research study covering ten-euro area countries to better understand how euro area citizens perceived the current series of euro banknotes. The research aimed to provide insights on the overall perception of the Europa series, likes and dislikes and the extent of emotional attachment to the notes, as well as the potential appetite for changes to the theme and design of the currency, in order to enhance engagement with, attachment to and recognition of the symbols of the euro.

The research revealed that although the Europa series was generally positively accepted by the public, many participants felt emotional disconnection from the banknotes. They liked the colour and the “simple” design of the notes, but they did not show much enthusiasm towards the overarching theme of the “ages and styles of Europe”. Their sentiment was that the banknotes did not necessarily evoke a sense of European identity.

Against this backdrop, and as part of the regular development process for future euro banknotes to ensure that these remain a secure and convenient means of payment, a redesign process has been established. This process involves two main steps: first, the development of a new theme (and associated motifs); and second, the development of new designs based on the new theme. To support the first step, the ECB commissioned Ipsos to conduct qualitative research aimed at providing insights that could inform the definition of the new themes and designs.

## 1.2 Study objectives

The objectives of the study were twofold:

- to understand the public’s wishes and preferences on the theme of future euro banknotes, with the desired outcome being a list of preferred themes and associated motifs;
- to understand public perceptions and opinion on the current ES2 common design elements (independent from the theme) as well as on possible new common design elements, again with the aim of establishing a list of preferred common design elements.

In order to fulfil these objectives, the research sought to achieve a better understanding of what is commonly perceived as European (the shared values of European people) and to explore the different subjects that connect Europeans and the visual representations of these shared values and symbols. Additionally, the research considered the emotional connections European citizens shared with existing banknotes in order to better identify imagery that would enhance such connections between European people and future euro banknotes.

## 1.3 Methodology

### 1.3.1 Overview of the study design

The study was conducted via online focus groups in all 19-euro area countries plus Croatia and Bulgaria. A full list of the participating countries is provided in Table 1.1 below. Four focus groups were established in each country, giving a total of 84 focus groups overall (or 422 participants). Within each country, the groups were stratified by age group and configured to be broadly representative of the national populations using other key socio-demographic and attitudinal variables (discussed further in Section 1.3.2 below).

In the light of the ongoing restrictions on movement imposed by national and local governments as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, all focus groups were held online using the platforms Zoom, MS Teams, 3CX and Fieldgood. The online approach allowed for a smaller number of participants in the groups while also making it possible to involve participants from a broad range of geographical locations in the participating countries.

Communication within the focus groups was carried out in the main languages of the participating countries. In the case of bilingual countries such as Belgium, Luxembourg and Malta, two languages were used, with half of the groups communicating in the first language and the other half in the second language. Table 1.1 contains a full list of the languages in which the focus group discussions were conducted in each participating country.

**Table 1.1**  
Participating countries and languages used

Country	Language
<b>Euro area countries</b>	
Austria	German
Belgium	Dutch, French
Cyprus	Greek
Estonia	Estonian
Finland	Finnish
France	French
Germany	German
Greece	Greek
Ireland	English
Italy	Italian
Latvia	Latvian
Lithuania	Lithuanian
Luxembourg	French, German
Malta	Maltese, English
Netherlands	Dutch
Portugal	Portuguese
Slovakia	Slovak
Slovenia	Slovenian
Spain	Spanish
<b>Non-euro area countries</b>	
Bulgaria	Bulgarian
Croatia	Croatian

### 1.3.2 Sampling and recruitment

The target number of participants for each focus group was five.<sup>5</sup> Within each country, the focus groups were stratified by age (described further in Section 1.3.4 below). Within each group, participants were sampled to ensure mixed representation in terms of:

- **key socio-demographic variables** – gender, education and country of birth;
- **attitudes towards the EU** – positive and neutral attitudes;
- **frequency of banknote usage** – no usage, occasional usage and frequent usage.

With regard to **gender**, a balanced mix of male and female participants (roughly 50/50) was recruited to each group.

For **education**, a tripartite banding (“high”, “middle” and “low” education) was used, with pre-primary and primary education included in the “low” category, secondary education in the “middle” category and tertiary education in the “high” category. While the aim was to recruit a roughly equal mix of participants from each of these categories, this was not always possible in practice because of characteristics associated with certain age groups and countries. For example, many people in the youngest age group were still in the process of obtaining their further or higher education degree, thus making it more difficult to recruit participants with a high level of education to these groups.

With regard to **country of birth**, at least four participants per group had to have been born in the country where the focus group was taking place, so that potential differences in views and priorities by nationality could be assessed.

**Attitudes towards the EU** were assessed based on a standard Eurobarometer question that asks respondents whether their image of the EU is “very positive”, “fairly positive”, “neutral”, “fairly negative” or “very negative”. Prospective recruits responding with “fairly negative” or “very negative” were screened out of the recruitment process to minimise the risk of the focus group discussions becoming sidetracked by the expression of anti-EU sentiment.

**Frequency of banknote usage** was assessed via a question that asked participants if they used banknotes often, occasionally or never. A mix of participants was recruited based on their answers to the question.

In addition to the above quota, people who had taken part in a focus group discussion in the previous three months were excluded from the focus groups.

All recruitment was carried out by specialist recruiters in Ipsos’ local qualitative networks. The teams were provided with a bespoke screening questionnaire that enabled them to assess prospective participants’ eligibility for the research against the socio-demographic and attitudinal criteria described above. As is standard in qualitative research, all prospective participants were offered a financial incentive to participate, commensurate with the degree of commitment required. Such incentives are important to ensure a good rate of participation among a cross-section of the public.

### 1.3.3 Discussion guide

The focus groups were structured around a discussion guide designed by Ipsos in close consultation with the ECB. The guide comprised the following eight parts:

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<sup>5</sup> This was reduced from six or seven during the pilot phase of the study, for the reasons described in Section 1.3.4 and Annex A.



- Part 1 – Introduction;
- Part 2 – Context/underlying values and attitudes – What is “European”?;
- Part 3 – Unprompted views on banknotes;
- Part 4 – Deep dive on themes;
- Part 5 – Deep dive on motifs;
- Part 6 – Common design elements;
- Part 7 – Conclusion;
- Part 8 – Questionnaire completion.

Each of these parts comprised a comprehensive list of questions and prompts for the moderator to work through, as well as specific exercises (and associated instructions) to be administered. To accompany the discussion guide, a stimulus pack was prepared for the moderators in the form of a PowerPoint file. The pack contained visual stimulus material that could be displayed to the participants during the focus groups, as well as slides for the moderators to record the results of the exercises (virtual flipcharts).

The topic guide and associated materials were produced in English before being translated into the languages of the countries. The English version of the discussion guide can be found in Annex D, and the English stimulus pack can be found in Annex E.

#### 1.3.4 Fieldwork

All of the focus groups were moderated by experienced qualitative researchers from Ipsos’ local networks. Before the start of the fieldwork, the moderators from all participating countries were required to attend a briefing about the project given by the ECB and the Ipsos central team. During the briefing, they were provided with detailed information about the background and objectives of the study and the recruitment process, before being taken through all sections of the discussion guide in detail.

The study fieldwork was conducted in two phases: a pilot phase and a main phase. The **pilot phase** took place between 1 and 8 December 2021 and comprised four focus groups (a total of 26 people) – one focus group in each of Finland, Germany, Ireland and Italy. Reflecting the intended approach for the mainstage fieldwork, the groups for the pilot were stratified using the following age bands:

- Italy: 16-24 years old;
- Ireland: 25-54 years old;
- Finland: 55 years old and over;
- Germany: mix of the aforementioned age groups.

The main goal of the pilot was to assess the effectiveness of the overall research design, the recruitment process and the discussion guide developed for the study. More details on the pilot outcomes are included in Annex A.

Following the pilot, several adjustments were made to both the broad design of the study and the discussion guide. The main adjustments made to the study design included:

- a change to the age stratification of the focus groups. Instead of the four age groups chosen initially (16-24, 25-54, over 55 and one mixed age group), the decision was taken to adopt the following split to maximise opportunities for age-based analysis of the findings:
  - 16-25 years old;
  - 26-40 years old;
  - 41-60 years old;
  - 61 years old.
- the reduction of the target number of participants for each group from six or seven to five, to ensure that the moderator would be able to maintain an overview of participants' reactions (verbal and physical) and that participants themselves could easily see and interact with one another. Reducing the number of participants was also considered important to ensure that the duration of each focus group remained within the 90 minutes allotted.

The main changes made to the discussion guide following the pilot were as follows:

- the definitions of themes, motifs and common design elements were reiterated more frequently at key points in the guide to facilitate better understanding on the part of respondents and ensure the discussion remained appropriately focused at all times;
- greater emphasis was placed on encouraging participants to reflect on the extent to which themes and motifs they suggested were appropriate for the whole of Europe, not just for a particular regional or national context.

Annex A contains a more detailed description of the pilot findings and adjustments subsequently made to the study design and discussion guide.

The **mainstage fieldwork** took place between 15 February and 23 March 2022.<sup>6</sup> A full list of the dates for all focus groups can be found in Annex B. A total of 80 focus groups were established across the 21 countries in scope (in addition to the four pilot groups, the findings of which were carried forward for use in the final analysis), comprising a total of 396 participants. Annex C provides detailed information on the number of participants in each of the focus groups.

## 1.4 Recordings and analysis

With participants' permission, all of the focus groups were audio and video recorded. Further, on completion of all fieldwork, the moderators were required to attend one of two debriefing sessions to provide feedback on the findings from their groups. They were also required to complete an analysis template, designed by the central Ipsos team to facilitate accurate, consistent and efficient analysis of the focus group findings from across the 21 countries. The data from the templates were collated by the central team and key elements coded to create a thematic map of the preferences, perspectives and considerations arising from the research.

<sup>6</sup> During the fieldwork, on 24 February 2022, Russia began a large-scale military invasion of Ukraine, which was ongoing as the latter half of the focus groups were taking place. The nature and scale of this event may have influenced the thinking of participants in the focus groups that were held after 24 February (and also potentially in the lead-up to this date, when the invasion was a possibility and the subject of extensive media coverage) and thus the responses they gave, especially when asked what being European meant to them.

## 1.5 Interpreting the data

Qualitative research aims to identify and explore themes and issues relating to the subject in question. The assumption is that themes and issues raised by participants reflect themes and issues in the wider population(s) concerned. However, the precise extent to which they apply to those wider population(s), or specific sub-groups, cannot be quantified – for example, in terms of percentages – or generalised beyond participants in the study (as is possible with representative survey research). **The value of qualitative research lies rather in identifying the range of relevant perspectives and experiences that exist, the considerations underpinning them, the ways in which people construct meaning and understand specific issues, and the potential impact or implications of the above.** With regard to focus group research specifically, the dynamics of the discussions can reveal a rich tapestry of viewpoints and understandings among group participants, while at the same time disclosing group norms and consensus.<sup>7</sup>

**For the reasons outlined above, the findings reported in this document should not be treated as statistically representative of the perspectives and preferences of the populations concerned.** Equally, although the report includes commentary on apparent differences in perspectives and preferences based on age group, geography and other socio-demographic characteristics, these differences too should be seen as indicative only. In other words, they may provide indications that certain perspectives and preferences are more dominant among specific age groups, countries or social groups.

In places, the report considers beliefs, perspectives and preferences at the level of the four EU regions – north, south, east and west. The countries included in these four regions are shown in Table 1.2.

**Table 1.2**  
Categorisation of participating countries by EU region

Region	Countries
North	Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland
East	Slovenia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Croatia
South	Malta, Cyprus, Greece, Portugal, Spain, Italy
West	Luxembourg, Ireland, Austria, Belgium, Netherlands, France, Germany

<sup>7</sup> Kitzinger, J. (1994), "The methodology of focus groups: the importance of interaction between research participants", *Sociology of Health & Illness*, Vol. 16, No 1, pp. 104-121.

## 2 Conceptions of European-ness

### Key findings

- Participants spontaneously related the term European-ness to:
  - travel and/or the free movement of persons within Europe;
  - the euro or a single currency within Europe;
  - liberal values such as freedom, solidarity and equality;
  - cultural aspects such as the diversity of languages and cultures within Europe and shared European history.
- In each case, European-ness was predominantly interpreted through the lens of personal values and everyday cultural experiences and interests, rather than via references to European institutions and EU legislation.
- European-ness was associated both with feelings and perceptions of unity, shared values and a common history (i.e. the things that bind Europeans) as well as an appreciation of the variety of cultures and languages that Europe represents (i.e. the things that differentiate Europeans).

### 2.1 Spontaneous associations with European-ness

To provide context for views on the themes of future euro banknotes, each group began with a discussion of what being European meant to participants. To facilitate this discussion, participants were invited, ahead of the focus group, to send in or bring some images that illustrated their thoughts or feelings on the topic. During the group discussion, the moderator showed these images and asked participants to explain why they represented Europe to them, and which specific feelings, if any, they elicited. This was followed by a wider group discussion exploring whether individual thoughts and feelings on European-ness also resonated with other group participants.

**Four broad categories** of associations were identified **across** all **focus groups**:

1. associations related to **travel and/or the free movement of persons**;
2. associations related to the **euro or single currency**;
3. associations related to **liberal values** (e.g. tolerance, freedom, equality, solidarity, democracy, peace and unity);
4. associations related to **cultural aspects of Europe** (e.g. diversity of countries, cultures, languages and a common heritage or history).

What bound these four themes together was their **everyday and personal nature**: associations with European-ness were predominantly grounded in participants' everyday activities and experiences (e.g. travelling across Europe, paying with the euro), political values they personally cared about (e.g. liberal values associated with Europe), or cultural connotations with which they identified (e.g. a common history) or found personally meaningful (e.g. diversity of European cultures and languages). Less prevalent, meanwhile, were connotations with more "distant" or abstract aspects, such as EU institutions and EU legislation and policies. One notable exception was the spontaneous associations with EU migration policy and the EU trade economy, found in particular among participants aged 61 and over.

Furthermore, the above associations with European-ness were often interwoven and also guided by a **double connotation**: on the one hand, participants associated European-ness with feelings and perceptions of **unity, shared values and a common history** (i.e. things that bound them as Europeans), while on the other European-ness was also closely linked to participants' appreciation of the **variety of cultures and languages that Europe represents** (i.e. the things that differentiated Europeans). The discussion revealed that both aspects were key components in how participants thought and felt about what European-ness meant to them personally.

For instance, looking at the most prominent category of associations, the **free movement of persons**, this was often mentioned in close relation to a **variety of advantages**, such as the ease and pleasure of travelling within Europe, feelings of freedom, **the euro as a facilitator of free movement**, opportunities to get to know other cultures, and the overall benefits of a unified Europe in which one can feel "at home". Young people (16-25 years old) sometimes specifically referred to the **Erasmus programme** in this context, while others referred to other **symbols that represented free movement** within Europe for them, such as **the flag of Europe, the EU passport** and, as mentioned earlier, **the euro**. Furthermore, the younger participants often indicated that they did not have a reference point that dated before the introduction of the euro or the opening of borders within Europe, in contrast to the older generations.

**Figure 2.1**

Image shared by a participant to illustrate free movement in Europe



*"One of the EU projects is Erasmus, which builds connections and lets you get to know lots of people."*  
(16-25 years old, Belgium)

*"Ease and freedom. You feel comfortable everywhere you are."*  
(61+ years old, Bulgaria)

*"I'm very happy that there is free movement between countries. Most countries have the same currency, friendly people [...]. We've learnt from Europeans in all ways and we've expanded our horizons in terms of culture, fashion, style, all kinds of things."*  
(41-60 years old, Lithuania)

The second category of associations that participants spontaneously and frequently brought up when discussing what European-ness meant to them was the **euro or single currency**. **Two main associations** surfaced when participants expressed their first thoughts and feelings about the euro: that the euro functioned as a **symbol of a united Europe**, a theme closely associated with the free movement of persons within Europe; and that the euro **represented the economic and social welfare** achieved in many European countries.

*"I thought of the euro because it is good for German trade to avoid exchange rate risks."*  
(16-25 years old, Germany)

*"For me, the euro has been a major achievement and has great economic benefit for us all. Being part of that currency has made us feel more European."*  
(61+ years old, Ireland)

*"The greatest achievement of the European Union is the Single Market, and there would be no Single Market if there were no single currency."*  
(41-60 years old, Spain)

Third, when thinking about European-ness, **liberal values such as individual rights and freedoms, tolerance and openness to diversity** often surfaced in the discussion groups. Most notably, participants referred to the fact that liberal values were **shared across European**



**countries** and thus served as a **common framework of identification and reference** between European citizens, as illustrated in the below images. Fewer associations with political values were observed among the groups aged 61 and over compared with the younger age groups. Furthermore, when looking at differences between regions, liberal values were slightly more often a point of focus for groups in the north and south of Europe compared with those in the east and west.

### Figure 2.2

Images shared by participants to illustrate shared political values and unity within Europe



*“Values of democracy make me feel proud.”*

(61+ years old, Cyprus)

*“For me, European-ness refers to a high level of goals to achieve prosperity, to achieve equality, to achieve democracy, to fight for peace. And this is a union of countries that is doing that, and that is something to be proud of.”*

(61+ years old, Lithuania)

*“Freedom of speech and being able to express your ideas”*

(16-25 years old, Portugal)

Participants also sometimes expressed **feelings of safety, peace and being “at home” within Europe** because of this shared framework of political values across European countries. Furthermore, the themes of **security and EU protection** were repeatedly mentioned (see participant image below). This was especially the case in the group discussions in the south of Europe. It is important to point out that the circulation of these notions across the discussion groups may have been heightened because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which was building during the first half of the fieldwork period and then ongoing during the latter part, and which was the subject of extensive media coverage throughout.

**Figure 2.3**

Image shared by participant to illustrate security and protection within Europe



*“The EU protects us against external aggression. There is a general feeling of security.”*

(41-60 years old, Belgium)

*“[European-ness is] how many different cultures manage to unite and show good will towards each other, cooperate and reach long term peace.”*

(16-25 years old, Bulgaria)

*“The European Union was created so that war would not happen again [...] Europe is characterised by diversity and the aim of preserving this diversity while at the same time finding common ground that connects us.”*

(61+ years old, Croatia)

*“EU stands for togetherness, also in times of crisis, for example, as now in Ukraine. It is good that we do not stand alone.”*

(16-25 years old, Germany)

The final category of associations identified when analysing participants’ associations with European-ness related to **cultural aspects of Europe**. The dichotomy between what binds EU citizens and what differentiates them was again evident in these associations. On the one hand, participants associated European-ness with a **shared cultural heritage and history** between European countries – a socio-cultural blueprint, so to speak, that connects European countries and citizens and serves as a common ground for identification. Older participants were much more knowledgeable about European history compared with younger ones, although young people sometimes referred to the two world wars in this context.

*“Certain events and historical periods such as the First and Second World Wars created strong links between countries.”*

(16-25 years old, France)

At the same time, participants also linked European-ness with the **rich tapestry of different cultures and languages** that Europe encompasses and, as pointed out earlier, the opportunities a unified Europe provides for exploring them. A cultural event that participants felt embodied this cultural diversity, while at the same time creating a shared cultural experience, was the Eurovision Song Contest, for example. This point of reference was brought up across different focus groups, and an associated image was brought to a focus group in Estonia (see right-hand image below). Other images focused more on the diversity of countries and cultures that Europe encompasses (see left-hand image below). Participants in the north and west of Europe were particularly inclined to point out cultural aspects and the variety of cultures and languages they related to Europe. At the same time, the youngest age group (16-25 years old) was oriented towards the benefits of the euro and free movement of persons for the specific purpose of travelling across Europe to explore different countries and cultures.

*“I think it is a valuable asset that each country keeps its distinctiveness and its uniqueness.”*

(41-60 years old, Belgium)

*“Different countries and cultures united under one roof.”*

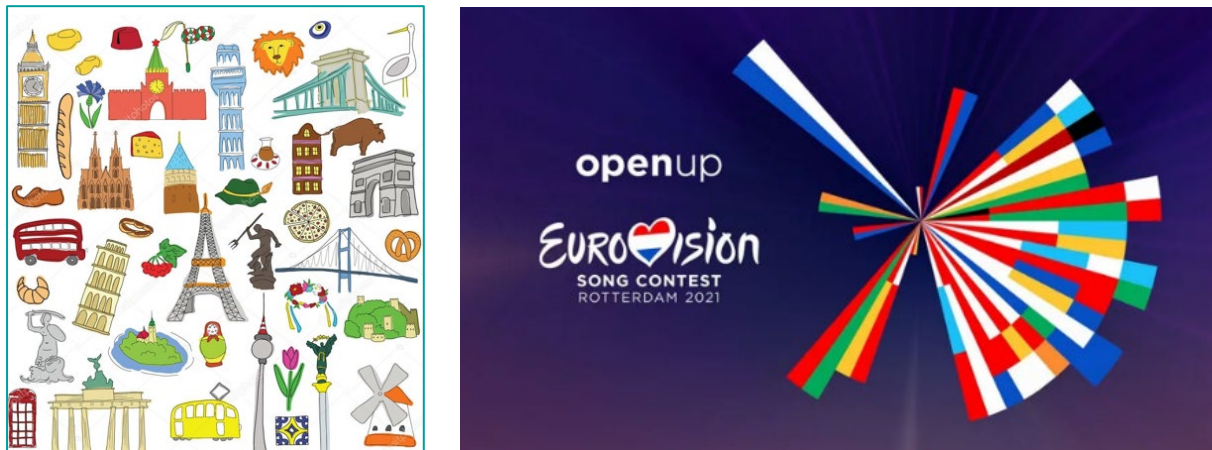
(61+ years old, Germany)

*“I appreciate the different cultures inherent to each EU country. It is part of what I know, and I like that Europe is diverse.”*

(16-25 years old, Luxembourg)

**Figure 2.4**

Images shared by participants to illustrate Europe's cultural diversity



## 2.2 Prompted associations with European-ness

After participants had discussed their spontaneous associations with European-ness, they were also asked to share their thoughts and feelings on **six other possible associations**:

- shared European values;
- science;
- scenery or other elements of nature;
- important events or periods in time;
- cultural or social activities, or customs and traditions;
- famous people.

While some of these associations, such as shared European values and cultural and historical aspects of Europe, had already been covered in the preceding discussion, the prompts resulted in participants sharing further concrete examples for each of these themes.

The following **shared European values** surfaced in many discussions:

- peace and security;
- democracy and democratic values (the European Parliament was mentioned a few times);
- civilisation and education;
- prosperity and wellbeing, including safety;
- equality;
- diversity;
- solidarity;
- preservation of national/regional cultural heritage;
- dialogue and unity within Europe (the example of the unified approach in tackling COVID-19 was mentioned a few times);
- human rights;
- justice system;
- tolerance and respect for other people and views; open-mindedness;
- freedom;
- protection of the environment.

Examples of **cultural or social activities or traditions** that were mentioned in connection with Europe were:

- the Eurovision Song Contest;
- European championships (e.g. sports);
- Christmas and Easter;
- Oktoberfest.

Specific **historical events and periods** that were perceived by focus group participants, in particular those aged 61 and over, as clear hallmarks of European-ness included:

- the First and Second World Wars;
- the Habsburg empire
- the Roman empire;
- colonial periods;
- the fall of the Berlin Wall;
- the introduction of the euro;
- the Schengen Agreement;
- the Maastricht Treaty;
- the abolition of roaming charges within the EU.

Apart from these already identified themes, the other prompted associations that most resonated with participants' conceptions of European-ness were **science**, specific **scenery and nature** as well as certain **famous people**.

In relation to **science**, the following associations were often brought up by participants across focus groups:

- education, including the Erasmus programme and European exchange programs for professors;
- the opportunity to work in other European countries;
- cooperation between scientists and companies;
- cooperation between universities;
- advanced research and technology;
- CERN.

Associations with European **scenery and nature** included:

- the variety of scenery and nature in Europe, e.g. beaches, lakes, mountains, the Mediterranean, the Nordic countries, the Alps – and in relation to the Alps specifically, the fact that these were shared between countries;
- seas and water routes that connect or run through different European countries;
- Greek temples;
- the ban on pesticides and the overall protection of nature.

**Famous people** that participants commonly associated with Europe were:

- **scientists**, including Albert Einstein, Isaac Newton, Nikola Tesla and Sigmund Freud;
- **artists**, including Gustav Klimt, Pablo Picasso, Ludwig van Beethoven and Leonardo da Vinci;
- **politicians**, including Ursula von der Leyen, Angela Merkel, Emmanuel Macron, Napoleon Bonaparte, Robert Schuman and Winston Churchill;
- **sportspeople**, including Michael Schumacher.

The various associations with European-ness discussed in this section, and the ways in which people related to them, all resurfaced to varying extents when participants later turned to consider possible themes for future euro banknotes.

## 3 Recall and perceptions of the current series of euro banknotes

### Key findings

- Recall of the current series of euro banknotes (including the theme) was limited, especially among younger people and participants who favoured card-based or digital payment methods.
- On being informed that the theme was the “ages and styles of Europe”, participants had mixed reactions, ranging from very positive to neutral and rather negative.
- Those who were positive saw the theme (and associated motifs) as aesthetically appealing and appropriate for euro banknotes as it reflected a key element of Europe’s cultural history and one that was relevant for all Member States. They also referred spontaneously to the “neutrality” of the theme.
- More negatively, there were participants who found the historical focus “old-fashioned” or “stuffy”, or who felt that the inherent neutrality of the design was “bland” or “boring”. Others felt that the theme and motifs were not “meaningful” or distinctly European.
- Participants rarely felt a sense of identification with or emotional connection to the current banknotes. Reflecting this, they appeared to generally welcome the idea of changes being made to the design of euro banknotes, seeing this as an opportunity to create more appealing, distinctive notes.

### 3.1 Recall of the current (Europa) series of euro banknotes

Before being invited to consider possible themes and designs for future euro banknotes, participants were asked what, if anything, they could recall about the current (Europa) series. As in the 2019 study, **recall was for the most part quite limited**. This was particularly the case among younger people and participants who favoured card-based or digital payment methods over cash (a trend that appeared to have been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic). Indeed, the latter group often commented that the appearance of banknotes was “irrelevant” to them and something they cared little about.

Notably, recall of banknotes was limited even in focus groups where at least one participant had brought an image of a note as one of their visual representations of European-ness. In other words, even when participants had just seen an image of a euro note, they could often barely remember anything about its appearance.

*“For me, it is not important what is on a banknote. I don’t use them much anymore; certainly not after COVID. I don’t remember what is on the notes.”*

(41-60 years old, Belgium)

*“Design is not important – I don’t use cash in practice, and I think other countries are following this example too.”*

(61+ years old, Lithuania)



Participants who could recall something about the appearance of current euro banknotes tended to refer to the **colours of the different denominations or make relatively vague references to one of the motifs – more often the bridges rather than the doors and windows – or a specific common design element**, usually the map of Europe or the ring of stars. More exceptionally, they referred to specific security features.

*“We have always known the euro [...] but we don’t care about the design, except the colours and sizes to distinguish the amount.”*  
(16-25 years old, Luxembourg)

*“I remember that some banknotes have some buildings like a bridge, no?”*  
(61+ years old, Greece)

*“There’s definitely the euro symbol and somebody’s signature...”*  
(61+ years old, Italy)

A handful of participants knew that the underlying theme of the current series was architectural styles from different periods of Europe’s cultural history, and that this theme was represented via images of windows, doors and bridges. However, even these participants were generally unaware that the structures depicted on the banknotes were not real but rather stylistic representations.

Following this unprompted discussion, participants were shown some images of the current series of euro banknotes and informed that the theme was the “ages and styles of Europe”. They were then asked what they thought of this theme and to what extent (if at all) they identified with it. Overall, reactions were quite mixed, ranging from very positive to neutral and rather negative. Notably, there was no clear pattern in the valence of opinion by age group or geography. Rather, mixed views were evident across the board.

**Participants who were positive** about the current theme (and associated motifs) saw it as aesthetically appealing and appropriate for euro banknotes as it reflected a key element of Europe’s cultural history and one that was relevant for all Member States, not just a selection of countries. They also referred spontaneously to the “neutrality” of the theme – including the fact that it was unlikely to offend or exclude anyone – and to the symbolism inherent in the motifs, especially the bridge motifs, which they recognised as denoting “unity” or “connectedness” between Member States.

*“I guess they put this topic on banknotes because, for example, while the Baroque period lasted it covered the whole of Europe [...]. We can all find our buildings on these banknotes [...] all periods covered all countries.”*  
(61+ years old, Croatia)

*“It makes me think of the bridges of different eras, and I can imagine that the purpose of this is to connect us to the history of the whole of Europe. This is a smart idea – what else could you put on a European banknote?”*  
(41-60 years old, Estonia)

*“It is nicely neutral with such buildings – better than with famous persons because this could set off debate easily.”*  
(26-40 years old, Germany)

*“I just realised why they chose bridges. It’s a unifying symbol, a bridge.”*  
(16-25 years old, Latvia)

**Negative views of the current theme** were often the inverse of the positive perceptions outlined above. Thus, there were participants who found the historical focus (and associated motifs) “old-fashioned” or “stuffy”, or who felt that the inherent neutrality of the design was “bland” or “boring”. Others commented that the theme and motifs were not “meaningful” to them or distinctly European, which in part appeared to be because they could not recognise or identify with the structures depicted. Participants in Portugal and Malta commented specifically that they could not “see” their

countries in the banknotes. People in Estonia meanwhile observed that the theme was more reminiscent of “old Europe” than of the EU in its current configuration.

*“It’s dreadfully boring. They’ve made it as bland as possible so they won’t offend anyone. Considering this is the place that had the Medicis and the Borgias!”*

(41-60 years old, Ireland)

*“Illustrations must remain neutral [...]. That’s probably why the theme is meaningless.”*

(61+ years old, Belgium)

*“I think there could be monuments more easily identified than this one. I don’t even know where it’s from. I don’t identify it with Europe either [...] for all I know it could be a bridge in China.”*

(61+ years old, Portugal)

More **neutral views of the current theme** were typically expressed by low users of cash, who reiterated their indifference to what banknotes looked like and their lack of opinion on the matter. Others whose views were neutral said that this was because they simply took banknotes for granted and paid little if any attention to the design.

Regardless of whether their views on the current theme were neutral, positive or negative, participants rarely felt a sense of emotional connection to or pride in the current banknotes. As reported in the 2019 study and Section 2 of the present study, the perceived value of the notes lay more in the functional benefits they brought, especially the ability to make payments easily across the euro area. In Estonia, Lithuania and Slovakia, as well as in Portugal and France, some participants commented spontaneously that they had felt more emotionally connected to their former national currency than to euro banknotes. Those in Estonia, Lithuania and Slovakia explicitly attributed this to the familiar imagery that the former currency featured and its higher aesthetic appeal more generally.

*“I don’t feel a personal connection to these banknotes. The design of Estonian kroon mattered to me. The pictures and elements mattered to me.”*

(26-40 years old, Estonia)

*“[Euro banknotes] have strange pictures. Slovak money was always more beautiful.”*

(61+ years old, Slovakia)

Reflecting such comments, some participants appeared to generally welcome the idea of changes being made to the design of euro banknotes, seeing this as an opportunity to create more appealing, distinctive notes that Europeans could better identify with. At the same time, a small number of people expressed concern about the potential cost of the exercise. Others questioned whether citizens would ultimately engage with the new design given that the current design was something they and their fellow participants had previously paid little if any attention to.

## 4 Preferred themes and motifs for future euro banknotes

### Key findings

- When considering possible themes for future euro banknotes, participants often referred spontaneously to specific criteria that they felt were important, namely that any theme should have pan-European relevance and resonance, should highlight both unity and diversity among Member States, should be easy to discern, and should have an eye-catching design. The ease with which a theme could be depicted on banknotes was also a prominent consideration.
- A vast array of themes were suggested, ranging from traditional to contemporary and abstract or conceptual. The themes participants most preferred (as derived through an expressed preference exercise conducted within each focus group) fell into six broad categories: nature, monuments and landmarks, portraits, European values, science and progress, and art. Other relatively popular themes were history or historical events, customs and traditions, culture, environment and sustainability.
- When considering motifs to represent these preferred themes, participants generally reflected that these should be recognisable and easy to relate to, and that potentially controversial, divisive or offensive motifs should be avoided. They were also drawn to the idea of symbolism in motifs, especially as pertaining to EU unity or values.
- However, participants sometimes found it difficult to think of motifs that met these criteria and that would be both well-known and widely accepted within all Member States. This was especially the case for the categories of monuments and landmarks and, to a lesser extent, portraits and history or historical events.
- Participants often said that they would feel happy or even proud to see a motif from their own country being featured on euro banknotes to represent a broader, common theme. This commonly prompted discussion of the fact that there were a limited number of euro banknote denominations and therefore a restricted amount of “space” within which to represent the various Member States, resulting in the possible need for a different approach, such as the selection of motifs that were regionally based or that otherwise cut across or transcended national boundaries.
- Preferences for themes and associated motifs evolved somewhat over the course of these discussions. There was an increase in the popularity of perceived neutral themes – especially nature and European values – and a slight waning of support for themes that had sparked greater debate, most notably monuments and landmarks and, to a lesser extent, portraits and history or historical events. In the latter case, participants noted that it could be difficult to find motifs that effectively represented all Member States, and that some motifs could ultimately prove divisive or controversial for other reasons too.

Having reflected on the theme of the current series of euro banknotes, participants were invited to consider potential new themes. The discussions were conducted in two phases. First, the focus group moderators led participants through a series of both unprompted and prompted discussions

designed to encourage expansive and creative thinking on potential themes and to elicit suggestions that went beyond mere top-of-the-head responses. Subsequently, once participants in each group had identified and discussed a list of possible themes, they were invited to vote for their three favourite themes to take forward to the next stage of the discussion, which consisted of identifying possible motifs to represent those themes. The voting was conducted on an individual basis in each group, with the votes then aggregated at the group level to identify the three most popular themes per group.

Following the voting exercise and to help stimulate participants' thinking in respect of possible motifs for their preferred themes, they were reminded of the theme of the current series of euro banknotes and of the associated motifs: windows, doorways and bridges. They were also shown examples of banknotes from other countries – namely the Argentine peso, the Costa Rican colón and the Norwegian krone – to illustrate the diversity of motifs and designs found on current banknotes. This stimulus material is provided in Annex E for reference.

This section presents a detailed analysis of the findings that emerged from these various discussions, including the initial longlist of suggested themes from across the 84 focus groups as well as the preferred themes and associated motifs. First, however, it provides a general overview of the ways in which participants engaged with the exercise, including the criteria they used to evaluate potential themes and motifs, the assumptions they made, the challenges they experienced and the ways in which their preferences evolved over time.

## 4.1 Analytical overview

When considering possible themes for future euro banknotes and comparatively evaluating them, participants often referred spontaneously to the following specific criteria or guiding principles that they felt were important.

- Participants recognised that any future theme should have **pan-European relevance and resonance**, so that citizens of all Member States could readily identify with it. For many, this meant that the theme should be fully **inclusive** and should not lead to some Member States being favoured over others.
- At the same time and reinforcing a recurrent theme of the previous section, there was an appetite for themes that would showcase **Member States' distinctiveness within the context of EU collectivism**, or their "unity in diversity".
- Participants also emphasised that the theme should be **easier to discern or "decode"** than that of the current series in terms of what it said about Europe as a collective entity.
- **Aesthetic considerations** were similarly prominent: potential themes were often evaluated based on whether they would make for eye-catching and visually appealing banknotes. Younger people especially were also keen for any new theme to have a more modern design than that of the current series.
- Younger people also sometimes emphasised the importance of motifs being **"future-focused"** and depicting ideals or objectives that Europe was striving towards, to provide a source of inspiration.

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*"Banknotes are not a place for chauvinism. Banknotes are neutral; they should not be connected to one particular country."*

(61+ years old, Belgium)

*"We have to keep it simple, so you don't have to make an effort to recognise what's on the banknotes."*

(16-25 years old, Netherlands)

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- More implicitly, participants generally felt that **the theme should speak not just to citizens of the euro area themselves, but also to the wider world**, sending a positive, inspirational message about what Europe is and/or has been.

When it came to the identification of favourite themes, additional criteria came to the fore, especially the **general acceptability** of the theme to all Member States, and specific groups within those states, and also the **practical ease with which the theme could be depicted or represented** on banknotes. More affective considerations, including the extent to which a theme could instil a sense of pride in citizens, tended to be somewhat less spontaneously prominent. Indeed, while certain people said (typically when prompted) that some of their favourite themes had the potential to make them feel proud, others were consistently more detached in their evaluations, occasionally commenting explicitly that banknotes were unlikely to ever stimulate such feelings in them or the wider population, no matter how much they might like the design. In fact, they simply did not relate to banknotes in this way but rather viewed them in purely functional terms. For these participants, the broad acceptability of a theme, together with its general aesthetic potential, were much more important considerations than whether the theme generated feelings of pride.

*“It is impossible to talk about pride [...]. The point is that [the theme] does not hinder; that it does not provoke any outrage in people.”*

(41-60 years old, Slovakia)

Overall, participants appeared to have little difficulty in coming up with an initial list of possible themes for banknotes or subsequently choosing between them. However, when they began to consider possible motifs to represent the chosen themes, they sometimes displayed greater uncertainty or ambivalence, or stated explicitly that it was **very challenging to think of motifs that would be both well-known and widely accepted** within all Member States. Such challenges were not always apparent, though. Among the oldest age group in particular, participants sometimes simply did not naturally think beyond the boundaries of their own country, especially when it came to themes such as nature, portraits, buildings, landmarks, and customs and traditions. Indeed, their starting position was sometimes to assume that motifs from their specific country would be featured. In some countries, including France, Portugal, Lithuania and Bulgaria, older participants' suggestions for themes also appeared to be influenced to an extent by their (recollections of) national currency and the theme it embodied. In Lithuania and Bulgaria, for example, older participants were sometimes keen for euro banknotes to feature famous people, like the litas and the lev respectively.

Enthusiasm for national motifs was not limited to older people, however. Indeed, **participants of all ages said that they would feel happy or even proud to see a motif from their own country** being featured on euro banknotes to represent a broader, common theme. This commonly prompted discussion of the fact that there were a limited number of euro banknote denominations and therefore a restricted amount of “space” within which to represent the various Member States, resulting in the possible need for a different approach, such as the selection of **motifs that were regionally based or that otherwise cut across or transcended national boundaries**. Not all participants were as ready to compromise on the idea of national motifs, however. This was especially the case in Bulgaria and Portugal, where a focus on such motifs was partly tied to a perceived need for these countries to feel more equal to and valued by their EU partners. In this regard, the design of future euro banknotes was seen as a potential vehicle through which Member States could be endowed with greater parity of esteem. As discussed in Section 5, this perspective resurfaced to an extent when Bulgarian participants were evaluating common design elements.

Other, more common underlying beliefs and considerations that had a determining influence on how participants thought about and evaluated potential motifs were as follows.

- **Motifs should be recognisable**, particularly if the intention is for citizens to be able to identify with future banknotes. Although a small number of participants were drawn to the idea of abstract or stylised motifs – either because they thought these would be visually



appealing or would provide a solution to the need for an inclusive design – this was not the norm.

- **Motifs should be easy for all citizens to relate to** and not too removed from their day-to-day lives.
- **Potentially controversial, divisive or offensive motifs** – for example, that reflected cultural stereotypes or that were in any way religious, political or ideological – should be avoided.

In addition to these considerations, participants were clearly drawn to the idea of **symbolism in motifs**, i.e. to emblems or imagery that were not only appealing or attractive on a surface level but that also carried an underlying message or significance, particularly in relation to the unity of the EU and shared values. Equally, many participants were drawn to the idea of **motifs serving a practical purpose**, especially in terms of educating citizens or raising their awareness about particular issues, places, people or objects.

As detailed in subsequent sections, on the occasions that participants struggled to identify motifs that met the criteria listed above, they sometimes became less enthusiastic about the theme concerned or relegated it to an extent in their discussions. More exceptionally, there were participants who came to entirely reject a theme that had initially been among their group's three favourites.

## 4.2 Initial longlist of suggested themes

Across the focus groups, participants initially put forward a vast array of suggestions for themes, drawing on the criteria described in the preceding section. These ranged from themes traditionally associated with banknotes and coinage, including portraits of dignitaries, elements of nature, monuments, historical events, science and forms of transport, to more contemporary themes such as sports tournaments, space, modern art, and popular food and drinks. At the same time, there was considerable mention of more abstract or conceptual themes such as values (for example, freedom, equality and democracy), diversity, culture and sustainability.

While some suggestions were unique to one or two focus groups or individuals, this was typically not the case. The overwhelming majority of suggestions were recurring or very closely related to suggestions from other groups. For example, there was various mention of plants, herbs and cereals and of famous landmarks, famous monuments and historical buildings. Accordingly, for the purposes of this analysis, the initial suggestions have been grouped into a number of slightly broader themes representing the main patterns and thoughts that ran throughout the discussions. These are shown in Figure 4.1 below. Themes in **blue** font were mentioned in at least half of the 84 focus groups, while those in **green** font were mentioned in between a quarter and half of the groups. The remaining themes were mentioned less frequently and sometimes in only one or two focus groups. Overall, the various themes mentioned both reflected and built upon those discussed in the initial stage of the focus groups (described in Section 2), participants' spontaneous associations having provided an initial framework to which they then referred in further developing their ideas.

**Figure 4.1**

Initial longlist of possible new themes suggested across the 84 focus groups

NATURE PORTRAITS SCIENCE AND PROGRESS MONUMENTS AND LANDMARKS (OR ELEMENTS THEREOF) EUROPEAN VALUES HISTORY AND HISTORICAL EVENTS	
CULTURE MUSIC/ART CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY	
SPORT FOOD, DRINK AND CUISINE MAPS AND GEOGRAPHY TRANSPORTATION AND TRAVEL UNITY COMMUNITY/SOLIDARITY MESSAGES AND TEXT LANGUAGES MEMBER STATES' FLAGS DIVERSITY EDUCATION LITERATURE FUTURE ACHIEVEMENTS/GOALS	WORK PUBLIC AND SOCIAL SERVICES REGIONAL AND NATIONAL PRODUCTS COOPERATION EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS ECONOMY FAMILY SPACE POLITICS MONEY/CURRENCY RELIGION

There was a striking degree of consistency across the four **age groups** in the frequency with which different types of themes were mentioned. The main exceptions were that mention of history or historical events was more common among the youngest age group and less so among the oldest group, while mention of the environment and sustainability (including inventions and new technologies) was most prevalent among the older groups.

Overall, a high level of consistency was also observed across the **different countries** in terms of the types of themes mentioned. Indeed, even when analysed at the EU region level, there were few notable patterns in the range of themes that emerged and their relative salience. Rather, the frequency with which different types of themes were mentioned was broadly similar across the board.

### 4.3 Preferred themes

When it came to voting for their favourite themes, participants generally did not have difficulty in choosing from among the themes suggested, such that in each focus group a clear set of three preferred themes emerged. At the all-country level, the voting process led to a reduction of the initial list of themes, as some themes were entirely rejected or judged to overlap with others. For example, the history and science themes were sometimes seen to overlap with the portraits theme (or vice versa) and so were not carried forward in isolation.

The shortened list of themes was again analysed using the broader themes listed above, leaving the themes set out in Figure 4.2 below. The themes in **blue** font were favoured by around a quarter of the focus groups or more, while those in **green** font were favoured considerably less frequently.

**Figure 4.2**  
Preferred themes across the 84 focus groups

<p>NATURE</p> <p>MONUMENTS AND LANDMARKS (OR ELEMENTS THEREOF)</p> <p>PORTRAITS</p> <p>EUROPEAN VALUES</p> <p>SCIENCE AND PROGRESS</p> <p>ART</p>
<p>HISTORY AND HISTORICAL EVENTS</p> <p>CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS</p> <p>CULTURE</p> <p>ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY</p> <p>FOOD, DRINK AND CUISINE</p> <p>SPORT</p> <p>MAPS AND GEOGRAPHY</p> <p>UNITY</p> <p>LANGUAGES</p> <p>MEMBER STATES' FLAGS</p> <p>TRANSPORTATION AND TRAVEL</p> <p>DIVERSITY</p> <p>EDUCATION</p> <p>FAMILY</p> <p>PUBLIC AND SOCIAL SERVICES</p> <p>RELIGION</p> <p>MESSAGES AND TEXT</p>

The remainder of this section considers in detail the themes that were shortlisted in at least three focus groups. Taking each of these themes in turn, it describes the relative popularity of the theme among different groups of participants, the reasons the theme was felt appropriate for euro banknotes, any specific reservations participants expressed about it, and the motifs they suggested (or rejected) to represent the theme. At the same time, it highlights instances where participants spontaneously identified commonalities and overlaps among different themes, including the potential for certain themes to be combined or represented simultaneously on banknotes.

Often, the same motif was suggested for multiple different themes. In order to provide a comprehensive account of preferences and perspectives, such motifs are discussed separately for each of the themes concerned.

### 4.3.1 Most commonly preferred themes

#### 4.3.1.1 Nature

Nature-related themes – and landscapes in particular – were by far the most suggested set of themes across the focus groups, their popularity transcending the boundaries of age and geography alike. Nature was repeatedly described as a “neutral”, “safe” or “light” topic that was unlikely to cause controversy or risk offending any particular groups (something that was not seen to be the case for other popular themes, as discussed in later sub-sub-sections). Nature was also commonly referred to as “borderless” or “universal” and so something with which all Europeans could readily identify. In this regard, some



participants also felt that the topic carried special symbolic significance in that the EU itself was a shared territory where citizens of all Member States could feel a sense of belonging.

*“Landscapes are neutral, not political. That’s important on banknotes.”*  
(41-60 years old, the Netherlands)

*“[Nature] makes you feel good. There won’t be conflict. [Elements of nature] are just so beautiful.”*  
(26-40 years old, Estonia)

*“All the countries of the European Union have mountains and meadows. Most of them have a sea. I would like something that represents the common elements of nature throughout Europe.”*  
(61+ years old, Greece)

At the same time, participants were keen to highlight that there was great diversity in European nature, and that it would be important to reflect this diversity in any future design – both to ensure inclusivity and to showcase Europe’s natural riches. As described more fully below, a specific suggestion often put forward in this regard was that particular sub-types of nature could be used to represent the different European regions.

Another reason nature themes were so popular across the focus groups concerned the aesthetic value and general “mood” (for example, “calmness” or “tranquillity”) that participants felt these could bring to future banknotes. They described Europe’s natural assets as beautiful, colourful or awe-inspiring, and commented that this would make for an engaging design. In a similar vein, there was the suggestion that a nature theme would lend itself well to potential abstract depiction, thus further increasing the scope to create new banknotes that were visually appealing and modern.

*“A beautiful mountain, regardless of whether it is from the Alps or elsewhere. A beautiful pasture landscape. A beautiful coast. A beautiful river. Detached from a nation.”*  
(41-60 years old, Luxembourg)

*“The [forest/lake] can even be stylised, not to see which lake it is but to know the beauty of the lake and what it brings with it.”*  
(41-60 years old, Croatia)

In several countries, including Lithuania, Finland, Austria, Germany and Luxembourg, participants felt that a nature theme would also provide an opportunity to bring an ecological focus to future euro banknotes. They pointed out that the preservation of the natural environment was a key concern for the EU and one that should be actively promoted wherever possible. It was for this same reason that environment and sustainability themes were shortlisted in their own right in several other countries, as described more fully in Section 4.3.11.

*“The theme of landscapes reflects a green continent with a lot of nature that is protected. One of the European characteristics is that there is a strong focus on the protection of forests and ecology.”*  
(41-60 years old, Lithuania)

*“Nature should be of daily consideration on this continent, like the usage of money. Landscapes on banknotes would have therefore a real meaning.”*  
(26-40 years old, Germany)

Less commonly, there were participants who felt that adopting a nature theme for future euro banknotes would provide an opportunity to educate and enthuse citizens – both Europeans themselves and visitors alike – about Europe’s natural assets.

#### 4.3.1.1.1 Nature motifs

Suggested nature motifs fell predominantly into four main categories:

- landscapes;
- waterways and basins;
- flowers, plants and trees;
- animals and birds.

**Landscapes** were the most popular of these categories on account of their universality and general aesthetic appeal. The landscape motif that participants suggested most often was mountains, with the Alps, the Dolomites and Mont Blanc receiving particular mention. The popularity of mountains lay in their beauty or majesty, their perceived familiarity, and also the fact that they sometimes straddled country borders, thus conjuring associations of commonality and unity.

*“We need to find what all Europeans know more or less. Everyone recognises the Alps, for example.”*

(61+ years old, Greece)

*“I would love to see mountain pictures; these are shared across countries.”*

(41-60 years old,

France)

Other specific landscape motifs suggested across the focus groups, mainly for the aesthetic value participants felt these could add to banknotes, included forests, national parks, meadows or fields, and vineyards.

**Specific types of waterways and basins** suggested by participants encompassed seas/beaches, rivers, lakes and canals. They commented that all EU countries had rivers and lakes, so these motifs would likely be widely recognised and accepted. As in the case of mountains, they also noted that specific rivers and seas were often shared by more than one country, and so could be seen as symbols of mutual interest or collective identity.

**Various types of flowers, plants and trees** were suggested across the focus groups and in varying combinations. However, a notable commonality in the way participants advocated for such motifs was the emphasis they placed on showcasing native European species, such as the oak, birch and Nordic pine in the case of trees, and the tulip, edelweiss and snowdrop in the case of flowers. A specific design suggestion often put forward was that a selection of species could be chosen to represent the different regions of the EU and in the process highlight the diversity of the continent’s natural heritage. A participant in Ireland had the idea of depicting a bouquet of the various national flowers of Europe so that the countries could be represented as a collective, while retaining their individual identities.

A less common argument expressed in favour of flower and plant motifs was that certain species, such as laurel and edelweiss, could be used to symbolise specific European values or ideals, thus combining two popular themes in a single design. A further perspective was that showcasing different flowers and plants on banknotes would serve an ecological purpose, highlighting Europe’s valuable biodiversity and the importance of preserving it.

**Animals and birds** were discussed in very similar ways to flowers, plants and trees. Thus, there was a focus on depicting species endemic to different parts of Europe. In several countries, participants had the idea of depicting species in their natural habitats – such as a hare in a snowy forest – as a means of combining different types of nature motifs and highlighting Europe’s natural riches. Ecological considerations were prominent again too, with some participants suggesting



motifs of endangered or protected species, such as the lynx or bees, to raise awareness of their plight.

For some participants, animal and bird motifs also carried symbolic significance. Specifically, they noted that birds symbolised peace or freedom (of movement), while certain animals (for example, wolves) symbolised power. In one focus group, there was the suggestion that a motif of animals in a herd could be used to symbolise the unity and collective strength of the EU.

*“Birds are free and don’t know any borders between countries. They symbolise European unity; they visit all the countries they wish to.”*  
(16-25 years old, Estonia)

#### 4.3.1.2 Portraits

In most countries and across the range of age groups, portraits emerged as a popular theme in their own right and as motifs associated with several other themes, especially science and progress, art, history and sport (see Sections 4.3.5, 4.3.6, 4.3.7 and 4.3.13 below). Specifically, participants were often in favour of banknotes featuring prominent figures who had played a pivotal role in building or shaping the Europe of today and who had thus helped forge or inspire European identity. They commonly observed that many such individuals had also often had a defining influence on or changed the course of humanity more generally and so deserved to be recognised or “honoured” accordingly.



*“Without [such figures], we wouldn’t have the EU, and that’s why I think it’s the best symbol to show the identity of the EU.”*  
(16-25 years old, Portugal)

*“Famous people [...] have the power to establish the image of the EU with their achievements.”*  
(61+ years old, Bulgaria)

*“There are so many people who made the world a better place and came from Europe.”*  
(41-60 years old, France)

As is implicit above, there was also a perception that prominent figures would be easy for citizens from the whole of Europe to recognise and thus relate to, not just those who shared a nationality with the figures. Indeed, some participants stated explicitly that they tended not to think of such figures in terms of their nationality but rather recognised them more for their contribution or achievements. Less commonly, there was also a view that including prominent figures on banknotes could provide an ongoing source of pride, inspiration and motivation for citizens.

*“Surely it would be possible to find characters that are universally significant and accepted.”*  
(41-60 years old, Finland)

*“We are proud to see important EU figures that have impacted the whole world in a positive way [...]. The international aura of some figures provides an outstanding ‘business card’.”*  
(41-60 years old, Luxembourg)

At the same time, however, there were participants who thought that portraits of prominent figures could ultimately prove a “risky” choice of theme. Two main issues were raised in this regard: first, that Member States might feel left out if nationals of those states were not included among the

figures selected; and second, that societal values and attitudes tended to evolve over time, a corollary of which was that the associations or meanings ascribed to particular figures and their contributions sometimes changed too. Both considerations were among the main reasons participants in a small number of other focus groups chose not to shortlist the theme of portraits, despite having considered it initially. As discussed more fully below, concern about the potentially divisive nature of prominent figures became stronger and more defined when participants went on to consider specific potential figures (motifs) who could be depicted on banknotes.

#### 4.3.1.2.1 Portrait motifs

Participants' suggestions for portrait motifs fell into five main categories.

- **Musicians and composers** – there were specific suggestions of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Johann Sebastian Bach, Ludwig van Beethoven, Robert Schumann, Antonio Vivaldi, Franz Schubert, Giacomo Puccini and Johann Strauss. In a few focus groups, well-known singers were also suggested, namely Maria Callas, Luciano Pavarotti and Jacques Brel.
- **Historical figures** – these ranged from explorers (Christopher Columbus) to thinkers (Galileo Galilei, Nicolaus Copernicus) and renowned leaders or political figures (Julius Caesar, Napoleon Bonaparte, Franz Joseph, Maria Theresa, Abbé Pierre, Simone Veil and Jacques Delors). In a few focus groups, participants also made the less concrete suggestion of portraits of Nobel Prize winners.
- **Scientists** – these included figures from both the past and present, namely Leonardo da Vinci, Albert Einstein, Georgios Papanikolaou, Charles Darwin, Alfred Nobel, Santiago Ramón y Cajal, Marie Curie and the EU scientists who were involved in developing vaccinations for COVID-19.
- **Philosophers and writers** – these included Socrates, Aristotle, Voltaire, René Descartes, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Simone de Beauvoir. Suggested writers were Victor Hugo, Molière, Émile Zola and Rainis.
- **Artists** – these included Michelangelo, Claude Monet, Eugène Delacroix, Pablo Picasso, Raphael, Vincent van Gogh, Leonardo da Vinci, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Auguste Rodin and Salvador Dalí.

For the most part, participants made a conscious and explicit effort to suggest figures who they felt were “not strongly linked to a certain country” or who would be widely recognised across the EU.

*“It is easy to disassociate these figures from their country of origin. We have studied them, we have heard about them, or we have enjoyed them or are curious about them.”*

(26-40 years old, Portugal)

*“They are all really important people for all of Europe. We look at what they have done, and we think we could do it again.”*

(16-25 years old, Estonia)

However, when it came to the categories of historical figures and writers, participants did tend to fall into referencing compatriots. Thus, for example, Maria Theresa was mentioned only in Austria, Rainis was mentioned only in Latvia, and Abbé Pierre, Simone Veil, Jacques Delors, Victor Hugo, Molière and Émile Zola only in France. This did not appear to reflect a fundamental desire on the part of the participants concerned to include national figures, however. Rather, the figures mentioned were simply those who came to the participants' minds most readily and whom they regarded as being widely recognisable.

While most of the categories of portrait motifs listed above proved relatively uncontroversial, this was not the case when it came to historical figures. There was recognition that some leaders or political figures could hold different associations for different groups of citizens and thus may not be universally acceptable as motifs for euro banknotes. Once mentioned, this perspective tended to gain currency within the relevant focus groups, often resulting in wider agreement that such figures would best be avoided in favour of individuals who were more universally lauded or respected.

*“Famous writers or painters, scientists or Enlightenment artists, Renaissance artists, something we all have in common. It would be a little inconvenient to put politicians because we know the past is too turbulent.”*  
(26-40 years old, Croatia)

#### 4.3.1.3 Monuments and landmarks

There was a widely held perception that historical monuments and landmarks represented a core, instantly recognisable element of Europe’s cultural identity – both for Europeans themselves and for people around the world – and thus would serve as very accessible, relatable themes for banknotes. There was also the repeated suggestion that such monuments and landmarks were symbols not only of Europe’s development, but of its resilience and values, aspects that were seen to further unite Europeans regardless of their nationality.



*“If you see [such monuments/landmarks], you say ‘look, this is in Europe’.”*  
(41-60 years old, Malta)

*“It’s difficult to find themes that bring together what Europe is, and that is why the historical moments of Europe and the history of Europe are what we have in common.”*  
(26-40 years old, Portugal)

*“What better cultural landmarks than European ones? The whole world is familiar with them!”*  
(26-40 years old, Bulgaria)

Another perspective advanced in favour of this theme was that monuments and landmarks often carried special significance in citizens’ personal biographies (for example, because they had visited them at certain points in their lives or had an ambition do so), thus further adding to the potential relatability of the theme. On a similar note, young participants especially contended that featuring monuments and landmarks on euro banknotes could help raise citizens’ awareness of these sites and actively encourage them to visit them.

*“Each building creates a different feeling and a reason to visit the country.”*  
(16-25 years old, Germany)

*“If [a building] was depicted on a banknote, I would read up about it.”*  
(16-25 years old, Latvia)

At the same time, in a small number of focus groups, there was spontaneous recognition of the potential challenges involved in selecting monuments or landmarks (or aspects/elements thereof) to represent the themes. Two specific issues were raised in this regard. First, it was noted that monuments and landmarks were sometimes associated with past conflicts or tragedies and, as such, could carry negative connotations for or even offend particular groups of citizens. Second, there was recognition of the possible difficulties involved in choosing monuments or landmarks that would effectively represent all euro area countries, rather than just a selection, and of the risk of countries feeling excluded or marginalised as a result. Consistent with this perceived risk, as

the discussions progressed, it became clear that some participants' enthusiasm for the theme of monuments and landmarks – and the degree to which they felt it would instil a sense of pride in them – was contingent upon sites from their own country being featured. This was especially noticeable in the eastern European countries and in Portugal.

*“I would be proud if something from Slovakia was [included] as a historically significant building.”*

(16-25 years old, Slovakia)

*“Some countries may not agree that this monument may represent Europe as a whole because it may be linked to a conflict or a war or some invasion.”*

(26-40 years old, Belgium)

*“Putting somewhere like the Eiffel Tower on the banknote would make the countries outside of continental Europe feel more distanced.”*

(16-25 years old,  
Ireland)

#### 4.3.1.3.1 Monument and landmark motifs

Focus group participants mainly referred to buildings or landmarks that they perceived as being famous. Only very rarely were more “ordinary” buildings (or elements thereof) mentioned, such as farming buildings or stables, pubs, doorknobs, windows or letterboxes. Famous buildings or landmarks that circulated widely in the focus group discussions included:

- **historical buildings, castles and landmarks:** the Eiffel Tower, the Brandenburg Gate, the Colosseum, the Circus Maximus, the Acropolis, the Parthenon, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, the Berlin Wall, Notre-Dame, the Arc de Triomphe, the Sagrada Familia and Dutch windmills;
- **other religious buildings:** the Vatican (St. Peter's Basilica), monasteries, cathedrals (e.g. Milan Cathedral);
- **bridges:** the Øresund Bridge (bridge connecting Denmark and Sweden), the Solkan Bridge, Charles Bridge;
- **museums or galleries:** the Prado Museum, the Louvre;
- **EU institution buildings in Brussels and Strasbourg:** the European Parliament received specific mention.

When participants were asked about their reasons for choosing these specific famous monuments or landmarks as motifs, different arguments surfaced. Most importantly and as indicated above, participants mentioned that famous European monuments or landmarks were known by many Europeans and therefore functioned as a symbol of European unity and connectedness. Depending on the type of building or landmark, associations of unity and connectedness varied.

**Historical buildings, castles and landmarks** were primarily associated with a shared history and heritage (e.g. medieval castles across Europe) as well as European values of democracy and civilisation that these monuments were perceived to represent (e.g. monuments from ancient Greece and Rome). Participants expressed a sense of pride in the rich European history these historical monuments and landmarks represented. There was also a reiteration of the view that historical monument and landmark motifs could potentially generate interest in Europe's history.

*“People are united behind these monuments.”*

(41-60 years old, Belgium)

*“The Roman Colosseum should certainly be found on one of the banknotes because Rome is a city where a lot of things took place and it is important for the history of Europe.”*

(16-25 years old, Croatia)

At the same time and as mentioned earlier by participants when discussing this theme, famous historical monuments and landmarks motifs were often linked to personal experiences of visiting these sites and buildings, as well as specific feelings and non-historical connotations these monuments symbolised for participants and which were seen as shared across Europe.

*“A lot of Europeans travel and go to see the Eiffel Tower, and that is all about love... which is the thing that unites us all.”*

(16-25 years old, Latvia)

*“People get the joy of recognition. Oh, this is where I’ve been!”*

(41-60 years old, Estonia)

**Religious buildings** were perceived as representing Europe as a whole, as religions were shared across countries and between people (see Section 4.3.18 on religion). Moreover, it was often mentioned that cathedrals and churches were landmarks that could be found everywhere in Europe.

In terms of **bridges** as motifs, participants emphasised that bridges were by definition a symbol of connection. Furthermore, bridges were seen as non-country-specific (unlike some other monuments that often surfaced in the group discussions) and therefore more encompassing and inclusive as a motif.

*“Bridges are fine because they are not tied to a specific country. They are a symbol of the European Union and connecting countries with each other.”*

(41-60 years old, Croatia)

A similar observation was made in relation to **EU institution buildings** as potential motifs. Participants explained that these buildings functioned as a symbol of unity and connectedness for them because they represented the European Union and its shared values and objectives.

Although a lot of the discussion about monument and landmark motifs centred around famous buildings and shared connotations, parts of the discussion also dealt with lesser-known buildings. There was a view that including such buildings on banknotes would provide opportunities for citizens to get to know new parts of Europe and experience the uniqueness of different countries. Specific examples mentioned in this regard included the Castle of Mystras, the Freedom Monument in Latvia, Neuschwanstein Castle, Fort St. Angelo, the Monument to the Discoveries, the Atomium, the Prague Astronomical Clock, Spiš Castle, Bratislava Castle, the Croatian National Theatre, the Pula Arena, Osijek’s Tvrđa and the Walls of Dubrovnik.

More specifically, it was noted that a focus on lesser-known European monuments and landmarks could possibly spur tourism across Europe. Indeed, travel and freedom of movement were recurring themes throughout different sections of the focus group discussion and also resurfaced here.

*“I would be happy to see nice buildings – even if not that famous. It would raise my interest in visiting them.”*

(16-25 years old, Germany)

Finally, in Slovakia, the need for an encompassing and inclusive approach towards the selection of monuments and landmarks motifs was strongly emphasised.

*“It is hard to expect everyone to feel proud about buildings that are always in one specific country.”*

(16-25 years old, Slovakia)



#### 4.3.1.4 European values (incorporating diversity and unity)

Participants who favoured themes within this category – which included people in almost all countries as well as different age groups within these countries – typically argued that Europe was virtually synonymous with values such as unity, peace, democracy, human rights, freedom, equality, respect for diversity and inclusion. Further, they contended that these values transcended country borders and social hierarchies, uniting or “bonding” Europeans and providing them with a shared identity. Some participants were also keen to point out that the values had more direct day-to-day relevance for citizens than other popular themes, such as monuments and prominent figures, because values effectively defined how they lived their lives. Still others went further, pointing out that the values had an aspirational quality too – in the sense that Europe was perpetually striving to live up to and “propagate” them – making them a particularly fitting theme for banknotes.



*“Values such as the concept of democracy [...] unite all countries.”*  
(16-25 years old,  
Greece)

*“Unity is the main idea behind the EU. And although it is rather abstract, it is also universal, and all citizens of the EU can stand behind it and be proud to be a part of a larger community.”*  
(26-40 years old, Bulgaria)

*“EU values are key because they have allowed us to live the way we have. We don’t need passports, we can study wherever we want in the whole of Europe, live freely. These values have more impact on us than a building or a monument.”*  
(26-40 years old, Luxembourg)

As noted in Section 2, there was a clear sense that the values discussed had become more salient in participants’ minds against the backdrop of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which was building (and then ongoing) at the time of the fieldwork and which was seen as posing a threat to democracy and freedom. Indeed, significantly more focus groups considered shortlisting values than actually did so, ultimately deciding that these themes were too abstract to depict on banknotes.

As the discussions of values progressed, participants in a couple of countries (Belgium and the Netherlands) began to question whether certain values would really have pan-European resonance given the rise of right-wing political parties and policies in some Member States such as Poland and Austria. This consideration also resulted in participants in Germany choosing not to shortlist the theme, despite considering it initially. In Belgium, there were also participants who felt that the values discussed were more universal than just European, which led them to question the appropriateness of the theme for euro banknotes specifically.

*“When I think about peace, I don’t think specifically about Europe. Peace is a universal value.”*  
(41-60 years old,  
Belgium)

##### 4.3.1.4.1 European value motifs

When thinking about concrete motifs to represent the more abstract values of peace, democracy, human rights, freedom, equality, respect for diversity and inclusion, three types of motifs prominently came to the surface across the focus groups concerned:

- **white dove**, symbolising freedom and peace (references to Pablo Picasso's Dove of Peace were made by some participants);
- **people holding hands and hugging**, representing solidarity, democracy, unity and connectedness, as well as freedom and stability;
- **hands in general** (e.g. circle of hands, outstretched hands, handshake), which were associated with cooperation, solidarity, community and equality (people shaking hands as equal partners).

*“Democracy is something that Europe is based on; the power of people, people standing in a circle and holding hands.”*

(16-25 years old, Estonia)

*“I like the original slogan of the EU: “united in diversity”. It would be good to connect this with the idea that we are stronger together [...]. Crossed hands that represent cooperation. Hands are in different colours. This symbol would be really nice.”*

(26-40 years old, Slovenia)

Other value motifs that circulated less prominently but were still often part of participants' discussions included:

- **Lady Justice and the scales of justice** as motifs of human rights, equality and respect;
- **the peace sign** as a motif of peace and love;
- **open borders or barriers** as motifs of freedom;
- **motifs of togetherness and inclusiveness**, including people standing together (people of different backgrounds and ethnicities), the geographical map of Europe and European flags presented together;
- **the rainbow flag**, to represent unity and the fact that everyone was welcome in the community of the EU.

As noted above, participants often found it difficult to translate abstract values into concrete motifs. Because of this, the motif discussion sometimes resulted in an elaboration on the value theme itself, rather than a description of specific motifs that could symbolise these values. For example, participants frequently referred to the depiction of liberal rights, and specifically human rights; freedom of the press, speech, information or education; gender equality; and rights of disabled persons, but often without suggesting specific motifs for these. Notwithstanding this finding, specific motifs were in some cases suggested for these respective values:

- books as a motif for freedom of education and the right to education;
- a newspaper, microphone or speaker's podium as motifs of freedom of the press, speech or information;
- motifs relating more directly to the EU as a unified entity, including the ring of stars, the EU map, the words of the EU anthem and languages of Member States (displaying one word on the banknotes, translated into different EU languages).

In one of the Irish focus groups, participants remarked that abstract values like diversity could also be depicted by “ordinary” things, such as the variety of clothing styles or food found in Europe.

*“These symbols would show that Europe is a place for everybody.”*

(20-54 years old, Ireland)

Additionally, participants in Latvia and Slovenia suggested depicting diversity with slogans such as “Together we are stronger”, “We are all equal Europeans” and “Connected in diversity” in different EU languages.

### 4.3.1.5 Science and progress

Like monuments, landmarks and the common European values discussed above, themes of science and progress were regarded as integral to Europe's story. This was especially the case (though not exclusively so) among people aged 40 and over.



Participants spoke about science and progress themes in very similar ways to the theme of portraits, pointing towards the many inventions, discoveries and technological advancements that had emanated from Europe over the course of history and gone on to have global reach and impact. Relatedly, they suggested that adopting such themes for banknotes could serve an important educational function, raising citizens' awareness of Europe's achievements and encouraging them to learn more. In some focus groups, science and progress themes were further described as providing an opportunity to present a contemporary picture of Europe and Europeans as innovative and forward-looking, in contrast to the more classical, retrospective mood conjured by the ES2 design. Somewhat paradoxically, other groups felt that the themes could be effectively combined with the history theme. Less commonly, there were participants who contended that science and progress themes were "neutral" and so had the potential to unite Europeans, regardless of their nationality.

*"Great discoveries have been made by European citizens that changed the world and Europe."*

(26-40 years old,  
Greece)

*"Technology is something that unites us and makes us proud."*

(41-60 years old,  
Cyprus)

#### 4.3.1.5.1 Science and progress motifs

As is implicit in the foregoing, the most suggested category of motifs for the themes of science and progress was **European inventions and discoveries**<sup>8</sup>, specifically:

- transport-related technologies (automotive – including electric cars – aviation, hot-air balloons, train/railways and submarines);
- energy-related technologies (hydrogen production, nuclear fusion, solar technology and wind turbines);
- space technology and astronomy (spacecraft, satellites, rockets, constellations and planets);
- medical discoveries and technology (pharmaceuticals, vaccines, heart rate monitor, X-rays, early dialysis machines and genetic technology);
- discoveries in physics (the Higgs particle and other atomic discoveries);
- industrial or work-related tools and technologies (farming and fishing tools/machinery, woodworking tools and hydraulics);
- communication technologies (printing press and Skype).

<sup>8</sup> Several of the inventions and discoveries mentioned by participants were in fact British in origin, for example the steam engine, the spindle, penicillin, the light bulb and the structure of DNA. These have been omitted from the list presented given the UK's departure from the EU in 2021.

Participants sometimes put forward specific ideas for how such inventions could be depicted on banknotes. For example, they suggested featuring blueprints or early sketches of inventions, or showing how particular technologies had evolved over time.

*“On one side we could show da Vinci’s invention of a plane and on the other one a picture of an Airbus – how an idea developed into modern time.”*  
(61+ years old, Slovenia)

At the same time, there were widespread suggestions that the motifs could comprise **specific scientists, inventors or explorers themselves**. Here, participants’ ideas significantly overlapped with those put forward during the discussion of possible motifs for the portraits theme (see Section 4.3.2). Thus, there was mention of Albert Einstein, Galileo Galilei, Nicolaus Copernicus, Leonardo da Vinci, Pythagoras, Isaac Newton, Immanuel Kant, Gustave Eiffel, Marie Curie, Sigmund Freud, Ferdinand Magellan, Wernher von Braun, Artturi Virtanen, Louis Pasteur, the Lumière brothers, Nikola Tesla, Giorgio Parisi, Herman Potočnik, Peter Florjančič, Robert Koch, Luc Montagnier as well as several astronauts, including Samantha Cristoforetti, Thomas Pesquet and Luca Parmitano. In several countries, participants were drawn to the idea of such individuals being depicted alongside their achievements.

*“If one side showed the scientist and the other their achievements or technologies, that would be a great way to design banknotes.”*  
(41-60 years old, Latvia)

However, as in the case of the portraits theme, a small number of participants came to question whether specific scientists or inventors should be featured on banknotes, given the potential for such individuals to cause division or for the meanings ascribed to them to evolve over time. This occasionally led back to the suggestion that the focus should be on the invention or discovery, rather than on its originator. Countering this, however, was the view (expressed more exceptionally) that some of the inventions or discoveries mentioned in the focus groups were themselves the subject of a degree of controversy.

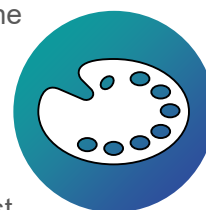
*“Society is divided. Not everyone is proud of atomic energy.”*  
(26-40 years old, Austria)

An alternative set of science and progress motifs suggested in several focus groups was that of **scientific centres or seats of learning**. For example, there was specific mention of CERN, ITER, the European Space Agency and universities. Participants liked the idea of such motifs not just because they felt these appropriately represented the theme per se, but also because they saw such centres as epitomising effective cooperation among different Member States.

A small number of focus groups favoured more **figurative motifs** in the form of scientific objects and symbols, such as medical syringes, research output, scientific formulae and the symbols of important international days like Breast Cancer Day – the latter to highlight the importance of coordinated action to tackle shared challenges.

#### 4.3.1.6 Art

Art themes, including paintings, graphic designs and sculptures, were among the few shortlisted themes that appeared to carry greater resonance among some groups of participants than others. Specifically, these themes were more typically shortlisted in the south and west of Europe than elsewhere. Indeed, they were not shortlisted in any of the four eastern European countries.



Participants who favoured art themes described art as among Europe’s strongest, most renowned and most unique assets. They also regarded it as a truly “pan-European” topic on the basis that different artistic currents that had emerged on the continent had spread rapidly

across country borders (as well as throughout the wider world), becoming widely recognisable in the process. As with the themes of nature, landscapes, and monuments and landmarks, there was a perception that featuring art on banknotes could pique citizens' interest and curiosity, encouraging them to discover where great works were created or displayed.

*“Art and artists represent the common history of Europe.”*  
(41-60 years old, Greece)

*“Art and culture are able to represent in a clear and incontrovertible way all the events and creations recognised throughout Europe, if not the world.”*  
(61+ years old, Italy)

*“It would draw you in further to the history of Europe.”*  
(16-25 years old, Malta)

On a more practical level, advocates of art themes felt these would almost by definition lend themselves to a very aesthetically appealing design for banknotes.

#### 4.3.1.6.1 Art motifs

Seven categories of art motifs were suggested by participants. Great works of art were by far the most often mentioned motif, followed by painters and sculptors. Some of the art motifs – in particular those of painters and sculptors and buildings and architecture – also appeared in the discussions of motifs for the themes of monuments and landmarks, portraits and culture. The seven categories were as follows:

- **great works of art:** the Mona Lisa, ancient statues and sculptures, the Venus de Milo, The Kiss by Gustav Klimt, Las Meninas by Diego Velázquez and Girl with a Pearl Earring by Johannes Vermeer;
- **painters and sculptors:** Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Claude Monet, Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, Auguste Rodin, Raphael, Salvador Dalí and Vilhelms Purvītis;
- **history of art and different styles:** Neoclassical, Baroque, antiquity and modernity, graffiti;
- **dance and dancers:** famous dancers;
- **buildings and architecture:** architectural elements, contemporary buildings, famous buildings (e.g. the Eiffel Tower, the Berlin Wall, the Leaning Tower of Pisa and the Acropolis), ancient theatres (e.g. the Odeon of Herodes Atticus), Renzo Piano's Genoa Bridge and Santiago Calatrava;
- **musical instruments and genres:** opera and classical music;
- **composers:** Ludwig van Beethoven, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Niccolò Paganini.

Although participants in the focus groups could easily come up with different categories of art motifs, they often found it more **difficult to give specific suggestions of motifs** to illustrate a category. Participants often merely referred to “great works of art” or “literature and writers” in general. Interestingly, the range of artists and writers mentioned was narrower than in the discussions of potential motifs for the portraits theme. This may reflect a higher knowledge of art among participants who favoured the portraits theme. Specific art motifs that were mentioned included artists or works of art that were nationally renowned or had international fame.

*“Dalí is so famous, and he is from Europe.”*  
(61+ years old, Latvia)

Another notable finding was that participants often approached the art motifs through an inclusive lens, focusing on how they represented and combined different themes or countries. This applied to:



- artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, who symbolised both art as well as science and inventions;
- ancient statues that represented art, history and values of civilisation;
- landscape paintings that combined art with nature;
- architecture paintings that combined art with buildings;
- art motifs that represented different countries.

*“It would be nice to show the works of artists from outside their own country, just to highlight the idea of interchangeability and sharing.”*

(61+ years old, Italy)

## 4.3.2 Other relatively popular themes

### 4.3.2.1 History and historical events

Themes relating to history or historical events were advocated mainly by participants in the youngest age group (16-25), specifically those in Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Italy and Latvia. The main argument these participants advanced in support of the themes was that key periods or events in history had been fundamental to the formation of Europe and, by extension, to the development of European identity and values, so it was important to commemorate them and simultaneously provide citizens with a constant reminder of their significance.



*“It is certainly important to be and feel European, but what we must not forget are our origins and the history that led us to be Europeans.”*

(16-25 years old, Italy)

While there was a view among some participants that remembering important events from Europe’s history could help to instil a sense of pride in Europeans, young participants in Austria were keen to emphasise that the focus should not be on perceived “positive” periods or events only, but also on “darker times”.

*“One also has to consider the negative aspects, otherwise it will seem as if Europe only wants to present itself well.”*

(16-25 years old, Austria)

This perspective stood in contrast to that of others in Austria, however – as well as participants elsewhere – who chose not to shortlist history-related themes precisely because of the risk of particular periods or events carrying negative connotations for some.

#### 4.3.2.1.1 History and historical event motifs

Historical motifs to which participants predominantly referred fell into four categories:

- **historical events:** the bombing of Berlin (to illustrate the end of the Second World War), key events that were overcome (e.g. financial crises or the COVID-19 pandemic), the First and Second World Wars, the French Revolution (as a motif for democracy), the signing of important European contracts and agreements (events that shaped Europe, e.g. EU treaties), the Edict of Milan, the Treaty of Versailles, the fall of the Berlin Wall, discoveries, the introduction of the euro and reconstruction after the Second World War;
- **historical figures:** figures representing historical ages (e.g. knights for the Middle Ages), Leonardo da Vinci, Galileo Galilei, kings and queens, scientists, philosophers, artists,

writers, athletes, politicians, composers, Albert Einstein and historical figures who shaped Europe;<sup>9</sup>

- **historical buildings/places:** libraries, universities, temples, churches, the Parthenon, the Acropolis, buildings representing Europe's values (buildings from ancient Greece), the Atomium, the Arc de Triomphe, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, the Monument to the Discoveries and European institution buildings;
- **historical periods:** antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the 18th and 19th centuries to today, periods that were important for the rise of Europe's values (e.g. ancient Greece), ancient Rome, and different epochs and how countries were mapped geographically at that time.

When discussing the different historical motifs, participants often remarked that it was a challenge to portray historical events that were influential for the formation of Europe because they often related to difficult periods in Europe's history (e.g. wars and crises). Still, and as noted above, depicting these negative historical events on banknotes was seen by some as important because they represented the struggle and fight for European values that were now taken for granted.

*"Maybe a picture of the French Revolution, because it was a struggle for freedom... well not an easy one, but a path to democracy. There has been a struggle for freedom in every country and we have it in common."*

(16-25 years old, Latvia)

Indeed, other prominent historical motifs, such as buildings from ancient Greece, were often chosen because of their representation of European values. In addition, historical motifs that were specifically linked to the formation of Europe also often included the signing of EU treaties and other European agreements in the aftermath of a war or crisis (e.g. the Treaty of Versailles).

#### 4.3.2.2 Customs and traditions

Themes relating to customs and traditions were favoured by at least one focus group in all of the eastern and northern European countries, apart from Finland and Slovenia, as well as in France, Portugal and Greece. Initially, the specific themes mentioned concerned traditional costumes and crafts, but when it came to the discussion of motifs, a slightly wider range of ideas was put forward, as detailed below.



Customs and traditions were seen as something that spoke to Member States' mutual distinctiveness, while also being a characteristic that they had in common. In this sense, the themes were seen as being easy for citizens to identify with and as having the potential to instil in them a sense of pride. It was notable, however, that references to identification and pride tended to reflect an implicit assumption on the part of the participants concerned that customs and traditions from all countries would be featured on the banknotes, and that citizens would be able to see their heritage represented.

*"A folk culture theme would have an educational value, pointing out that the EU is formed by many different nations and that the representatives of one nation are only one part of all the nations that make up Europe, including Lithuania."*

(61+ years old, Lithuania)

Another argument made in favours of customs and traditions as themes was that these would make for very visually appealing and engaging banknotes, owing to the colours and craftsmanship on display.

<sup>9</sup> Winston Churchill was also mentioned but has been excluded from the list on account of the UK's recent departure from the EU.

*“If folk costumes were on banknotes, I would actually look at the notes more closely.”*

(41-60 years old, Estonia)

*“Craftsmanship and culture would make for beautiful notes.”*

(61+ years old, Croatia)

#### 4.3.2.2.1 Custom and tradition motifs

Traditional costumes were by far the most commonly suggest type of motif for custom and tradition-related themes. Some of the participants suggested depicting groups of people from different nations wearing their traditional costumes. Others suggested more abstract or stylised ways of incorporating the motifs, such as collaging recognisable fragments of patterns or colours.

*“It would be possible to take elements from the national costumes of different nations. [Such costumes] are worn in every European country.”*

(16-25 years old, Latvia)

Other suggested culture and tradition motifs were traditional arts and crafts – including pottery, lacemaking and crocheting – traditional musical instruments (for example, a mandolin, harp or bagpipes), traditional dance and traditional architecture (for example, Alpine housing).

*“I would put some traditional embroideries in the European Union with crocheting, because most countries have their own embroidery.”*

(26-40 years old, Croatia)

#### 4.3.2.3 Food, drink and cuisine

Closely allied to customs and traditions were themes relating to food and cuisine. In particular, participants suggested highlighting the origins of products or dishes that were commonly consumed throughout Europe, as a way of emphasising Member States’ unique contributions to the EU’s common cultural heritage. Food was also seen as a topic that was “close to people’s hearts” and that conjured associations of togetherness and sharing. By extension, it was also seen as a particularly relatable theme and one that held low potential to be exclusionary or offend. That said, some participants questioned whether food, drink or cuisine were sufficiently “serious” or formal themes for banknotes.



*“I like the idea and the concept of origins...They are different, but all the countries have them in common.”*

(41-60 years old, Italy)

*“I wouldn’t be proud to see cheese on a note [...] If I think about the different countries, I think about their dishes, but they don’t give the image of pride.”*

(16-25 years old, Portugal)

##### 4.3.2.3.1 Food, drink and cuisine motifs

Specific food motifs mentioned were typically well-known dishes (including paella, pizza, schnitzel and meatballs) or specific products (cheese, charcuterie, seafood, salmon, bread, wine and whisky). Less commonly, there were suggestions of motifs depicting elements of the broader food

system, including aspects of food production (farming, harvesting and fishing) and farmers' markets.

*"It would help to highlight local artisans and producers, to show the wide variety of food available."*

(26-40 years old, France)

#### 4.3.2.4 Culture

Themes associated with culture were favoured predominantly by a small number of the youngest focus groups. The specific themes mentioned ranged from well-known contemporary cultural events to more specific culture forms, namely music, cinema and art (the latter of which also emerged as a theme in its own right, as described in Section 4.3.6). Like customs, traditions and food, culture was seen as something that reflected Member States' individuality but that was also able to bring people together to participate in shared experiences. In this respect, it was seen as a metaphor for the EU project and therefore an effective theme for banknotes. In one focus group, participants also contended that depicting elements of Europe's rich culture on banknotes would help to capture the imagination of visitors and encourage them to partake in specific activities or events.



##### 4.3.2.4.1 Culture motifs

The main motifs suggested by participants to represent the theme of culture were specific cultural events popular across Europe, including the Carnival of Venice, Oktoberfest, the Eurovision Song Contest and Špancirfest. People were cognisant of the fact that some of these cultural events were organised at the national level but countered that the focus should be on well-recognised events attended and cherished by people from all over Europe.

Participants also suggested different motifs associated with cultural characteristics of European nations, such as famous cultural personalities (including prominent artists and writers) and popular fictional characters (Don Quixote, the Little Prince). All of these were described as uniting European nations in their cultural heritage, while preserving distinct characteristics of Member States and thereby allowing people from different countries to feel proud that such images were visible on euro banknotes.

#### 4.3.2.5 Environment and sustainability

Environment and sustainability-related themes were favoured in Belgium, Cyprus, Malta, the Netherlands, Ireland and Slovenia, and by varying age groups in each case. The participants concerned spoke passionately about the fact that sustainability was a prominent and urgent concern for Member States, and that the EU as a whole had a key role to play in "saving the planet". They saw the choice of environment or sustainability themes for banknotes as a way of both demonstrating Europe's commitment to these causes and keeping them at the forefront of citizens' minds.



*"The EU is a pioneer in the protection of the environment, and this makes me proud."*

(41-60 years old, Cyprus)

*"[The theme of sustainability would be] a good advertisement that this should be the way forward."*

(16-25 years old, Malta)

In a couple of countries, participants also referenced the fact that sustainability was an area in which the different Member States were actively cooperating, both by necessity and choice, thus further rendering the theme an appropriately unifying one for banknotes.

#### 4.3.2.5.1 Environment and sustainability motifs

Environment and sustainability motifs that were brought up by participants related mainly to **renewable and green energy**, in other words to concrete solutions to the climate crisis. These included:

- **windmills and wind turbines:** onshore and offshore wind turbines;
- **solar farms or panels;**
- **more general depictions of green energy:** wave power, water and water sources, hydroelectric stations, big companies embracing green energy, the Sun, geothermal energy (e.g. volcanoes) and biomass.

Other, less frequently mentioned motifs included recycling (recycling arrows around the earth), electric transportation and hands holding the earth.

#### 4.3.2.6 Maps and geography

Most of the small number of focus groups that favoured map-based themes did so because of the direct and equal representation they felt these would give Member States on banknotes. They suggested either a map of the whole EU or groupings of Member States. One of the focus groups that favoured a map of the whole EU contended that this would also serve as a constant reminder of Member States' connectedness.



*“It would show that the more distant parts are also connected, that the smaller states are also connected.”*

(16-25 years old, Croatia)

The only non-map-related theme mentioned was European cities, again on the basis that this would provide a way of directly representing different Member States on banknotes.

##### 4.3.2.6.1 Map and geography motifs

Participants suggested different types of maps as motifs, from a conventional map of the EU to relief maps showing the diverse terrain of Europe. Maps highlighting important places in Europe (such as cities and monuments) and prominent landscapes (the Danube, the Alps, the Carpathians, the Mediterranean Sea, etc.) were also suggested. As discussed under the nature theme, such places epitomised the beauty and diversity of the European continent for participants.

In addition to these motifs, participants also proposed more novel ways of incorporating the EU map on banknotes. One suggestion was that different segments of the map could be included on each of the different denominations, such that when all of the notes were put together, the full map would become visible, much like a jigsaw. Another suggestion was that the map could be superimposed with railway tracks and roads to emphasise connections between Member States.



### 4.3.2.7 Sport

In common with food and cultural events, sport-related themes were typically favoured on the basis that sport was something enjoyable and capable of bringing people together, regardless of their nationality. Further, sport was associated in participants' minds with ambition and achievement, which they saw as important European values and fundamental to its identity. At the same time, there was recognition that Member States were often in competition with each other when it came to sport, so the themes could carry connotations of division rather than unity.



*“I want a theme that brings people together. That’s very important.”*  
(41-60 years old, Netherlands)

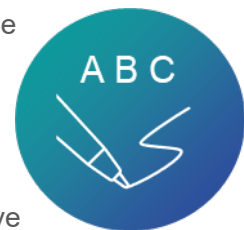
#### 4.3.2.7.1 Sport motifs

Specific sport-related motifs suggested were:

- famous European sportspeople (from both the past and present), on account of their potential to inspire and symbolise ambition or achievement. These included Rafael Nadal, Michael Schumacher, Zinedine Zidane and Guillaume Cizeron;
- typical European sports (football, athletics, ice hockey and snowboarding);
- well-known tournaments or competitions (the European Championships, Roland-Garros, the Tour de France);
- sports equipment;
- more abstract elements such as lines and tracks.

### 4.3.2.8 Languages

Languages were shortlisted in Austria, Lithuania, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, and by the youngest age group of participants in all but one of these countries (Austria being the exception, where languages were favoured by the oldest group). Similarly to culture and customs and traditions, the theme was very closely linked in participants' minds with the concept of EU unity, in the sense that they saw the various European languages as the literal expression of Member States' continued individuality within the EU collective and hence an appropriate focus for euro banknotes.



#### 4.3.2.8.1 Language motifs

Suggested language motifs mainly comprised European alphabets or specific common words and phrases. Participants underscored the importance of the motifs reflecting different EU alphabets and languages in order to signify both common cultural features of Member States and their uniqueness. A specific design suggestion put forward in this regard was for common European values (e.g. freedom, peace and democracy) to be written out in different languages. Participants commented that seeing these words on the banknotes, especially in their own languages, would help evoke a sense of pride in what it meant to be European.

*“The shared values that make you feel proud, you can put in words on the banknotes.”*  
(16-25 years old, Netherlands)

Other words that participants suggested could be displayed on euro banknotes in various languages included basic common expressions such as “thank you” and “welcome.” These words too were associated in participants’ minds with qualities and values shared by all Europeans and thus were seen to be relatable motifs for banknotes. There was also the suggestion of incorporating lyrics from Member States’ national anthems or the names of certain emblematic products from different EU countries, for example the names of wines and food products.

Other, less commonly suggested language motifs were libraries, books and inscriptions from ancient buildings found across Europe.

#### 4.3.2.9 Member States’ flags

In five countries (Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Lithuania and Spain), some participants felt that Member States’ flags would be an effective theme for banknotes because they were immediately recognisable and citizens would be able to see their country directly represented. On a more aesthetic level, they also felt that the abstract, colourful nature of flags would make for a modern and eye-catching design for banknotes.



##### 4.3.2.9.1 Flag motifs

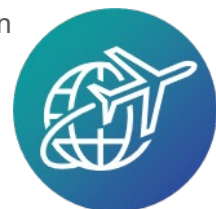
Participants suggested various depictions of flags as possible motifs, from the obvious and straightforward choice of full images of the flags of individual Member States and the European Union to more stylised flag fragments. Further, some participants suggested depicting flags with bridges between them to symbolise connection. Once again, participants were driven by a desire for motifs that highlighted the uniqueness of each Member State within the context of EU unity.

In some of the groups, participants proposed that the flags could be presented in combination with or as a backdrop to other related images such as the map of Europe, country outlines or government buildings from different European countries.

At the same time, some of the participants who favoured the flag theme reflected that it would be difficult to display the flags of all Member States on one banknote. They proposed different solutions to this. One suggestion was that the flags of the first countries to become Member States could be included on the highest denomination notes, and those of states that joined later on lower denominations. Another suggestion was to cluster countries’ flags by region (e.g. Scandinavia, southern Europe, etc.), with different regions featuring on different denominations.

#### 4.3.2.10 Transportation and travel

Participants who favoured transportation and travel themes, all of whom were in the oldest age group, did so mainly because they felt that development and innovation in transport were emblematic of Europe’s technological prowess and influence, and hence of its contribution to the world. There was also a view that transport networks were enablers of the unity and cohesion that participants saw as so central to EU identity.



*“Transport represents a network that extends across Europe and unites us with each other.”*

Spain)

(61+ years old,

#### 4.3.2.10.1 Transportation and travel motifs

When identifying potential motifs to illustrate this theme, participants were mainly driven by a desire to find images that were sufficiently representative of all European countries. Motifs associated with ships proved popular in this regard. Ships were seen as both having considerable historical significance for Europe and as representing the idea of connectedness, given that sea transport connected many European countries. Specific ship motifs suggested included both sea and freshwater ships, old ships made from wood (as they were seen to be more aesthetically pleasing) and comparative images of ancient and modern ships, to symbolise evolution.

*“I think that ships have changed history; they discovered America [...] Now we could say ‘but not all countries in Europe are maritime’, but there are also river ships [...] When you look at a ship, all the technology that exists today is built into it...”*

(61+ years old,

Croatia)

Additional motifs suggested by participants and linked to the historical and technological development of transportation and travel in Europe were bicycles (described as especially important and representative of Europe), cars, trucks, trains, aircraft and even spacecraft. Roads and highways were also suggested, mainly on the grounds that these carried connotations of connectedness and would be easy for citizens to relate to accordingly.

### 4.3.3 Themes favoured less frequently

In addition to the themes discussed above, themes that were favoured comparatively infrequently (that is, in only one or two focus groups) were education, religion, family, public and social services, and messages/text.

**Education** was favoured as a theme in a couple of countries as it was seen as a key European value and one that was inextricably linked with both Europe’s past development and its future success. Motifs associated with this theme included images of colleges, schools, books and the internet. Equally, participants liked the idea of motifs highlighting accessibility and inclusivity in education. Thus, there was the suggestion of a symbol representing the Erasmus programme and of motifs representing the education of vulnerable children and young people, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with disabilities.

**Religion** emerged as a favourite theme only in Slovenia and only among people in the 41-60 age group. These participants felt that religion was something that connected all Europeans. However, they appeared to be referring primarily to the Christian religion and its main denominations, rather than to a wider range of religions (although Islam received fleeting mention). Reflecting this, the motifs they suggested for the theme were denominational symbols, “holiday” motifs (for example, bread, fish and grapes), religious objects and frescoes, religious buildings and bell towers.

**Family** similarly emerged as a favourite theme only in Slovenia (and exclusively among 26-40-year-olds). The participants concerned felt that family was a value everyone shared and that, in the context of euro banknotes, the theme would also have symbolic significance, representing the EU as a family of different countries that cooperate together. At the same time, the participants recognised that conceptions of family could vary significantly, ranging from the traditional to the more unconventional, so the theme could be difficult for all citizens to relate to in a common way. Nonetheless, they continued to like the theme. Motifs they suggested included different family members or roles (mother, father, etc.), traditional family labour (“from grain to bread”), same-sex parent families and other non-traditional family structures, and family mealtimes.

**Public and social services** emerged as a favourite theme only in Belgium (and among people aged 61 and over). The participants referred specifically to Europe’s education services, medical

services, care services and migration services, which they felt epitomised the EU's emphasis on promoting equality of opportunity and security for its citizens. They contrasted these services with equivalent provision elsewhere in the world, especially the United States, which they saw as comparatively lacking. Suggested motifs for the theme were images of the aforementioned services themselves.

**Messages and text** were a favourite theme in one focus group in Ireland. The participants essentially felt the theme could be used to promote another popular theme, namely shared European values. Specific suggested motifs for the theme were therefore common maxims or mottos and inspirational quotes.

#### 4.3.4 Evolving views on themes

Having finished discussing their favourite themes and possible motifs to represent them, participants were asked whether the discussions had led them to change their minds about any of the themes, either in a positive or negative way. **Overall, their responses revealed a strengthening of support for the perceived most neutral themes** and a slight weakening of support for some of the themes that had sparked greater debate or that had been favoured in a relatively low number of focus groups initially.

Thus, in focus groups where a nature-based theme had been favoured, participants tended to comment that the discussions had strengthened their conviction that the theme was a very appropriate choice for banknotes, because it was both neutral and would make for an aesthetically appealing design. For these same reasons, there was also some reinforcement of support for art-based themes.

*"I would like natural beauty [...]. Sites are also beautiful, but they are quite gloomy to me. Natural beauty is still something more cheerful."*

(41-60 years old, Croatia)

Support for value-based themes similarly strengthened to an extent following the discussion of motifs, principally based on the perception that values would have widespread resonance and be unlikely to attract controversy. Conversely, there were also participants who became less supportive of value-based themes over the course of the focus groups, but this was mainly because they had experienced considerable difficulty in coming up with value-related motifs. In one of these groups, participants again also questioned whether the specific types of values discussed could really be considered quintessentially European (and thus an appropriate focus for euro banknotes) as opposed to more universally relevant.

**In terms of themes for which a weakening of support** was observed following the discussion of motifs, the most pre-eminent of these was monuments and landmarks. Participants reiterated the challenges that they felt would be involved in choosing a selection of monuments and/or landmarks that represented all Member States and the perceived "inevitability" of some Member States being left out. One of the Irish focus groups went so far as to abandon the theme completely on this basis, despite having initially been very enthusiastic about it.

*"The discussion highlighted how hard it is to pick a single theme that represents all European countries."*

(16-25 years old, Ireland)

In a few focus groups, support for the themes of portraits and history or historical events similarly waned following the discussion of motifs, mainly on account of the perceived potential for these themes to spark controversy or tension if the "wrong" motifs were chosen – that is, motifs that held negative associations for some Member States or groups of citizens. Environment and sustainability-related themes also became less popular in a few focus groups; again, however, this was mainly because the groups had struggled to come up with motifs to represent these themes.

Indeed, some of these participants were keen to emphasise that they still felt an environment or sustainability theme was a very worthy one for banknotes, owing to the salience of environmental challenges in the world today and the EU's key role in addressing them.

*"I think [sustainability] is an idealistic theme, rather than a realistic one."*  
(16-25 years old, Malta)

Themes that were initially shortlisted in only a small number of the focus groups and that further declined in popularity following the discussion of motifs were religion, sport, food and other contemporary cultural themes (for example, festivals). The theme of religion declined in popularity because it came to be regarded as too controversial. Sport, food and cultural themes became less popular because they were seen as either insufficiently formal for banknotes or potentially lacking in resonance for some citizens.

*"I feel religion is something we shouldn't choose; it would bring too much friction."*  
(41-60 years old, Slovenia)



## 5 Common design elements

### Key findings

- Prior awareness of common design elements was generally quite low in the focus groups. When prompted, participants recognised some of the elements, especially the ring of stars and the map of Europe, but mostly because these symbols were in common use more generally.
- Participants often observed that there were too many common design elements on the banknotes, which contributed to making the notes too cluttered or “busy”.
- There was broad consensus that the most essential common design elements were the ring of stars, the flag of Europe, the map of Europe, the € currency symbol and the “euro” currency name in three scripts.
- The perceived least important elements were the portrait of Europa, the ECB president’s signature and, to a lesser extent, other more administrative elements such as the copyright symbol and the ECB acronym in different languages.
- Suggestions for new common design elements included the addition of (portions of) the European Convention on Human Rights or the Anthem of Europe, a picture of the European Parliament, and the inclusion of the flags of all EU Member States.
- There was also the suggestion that the existing map of Europe on the notes could be confined to euro area countries, and that the ECB acronyms could be reduced.

Part of each focus group was dedicated to the discussion of the **common design elements** of euro banknotes. These are images or symbols that are unrelated to the theme but are present for practical purposes and to display European identity. More specifically, the common design elements can be broadly grouped into three types:

- **elements representing the euro currency:**
  - the € symbol;
  - the “euro” currency name in three different scripts;
- **elements referring to or symbolising Europe, the European Union or European identity:**
  - the flag of Europe;
  - the ring of stars;
  - the map of Europe;
  - the portrait of the Greek mythological figure Europa;
- **administrative elements:**
  - the ECB President’s signature;
  - the banknote’s year of issue;
  - the copyright symbol;
  - the issuer name (ECB) in all euro area languages.

Participants were shown these different common design elements (marked up on a euro banknote), then asked which of them they felt were most essential for inclusion on future euro banknotes and which they felt were less important or even dispensable. In addition, participants

were given the opportunity to propose new common design elements or potential changes to the existing elements.

## 5.1 General attitudes towards the common design elements

Some general attitudes with regard to common design elements were identified consistently across the different countries and age groups. First, prior **awareness of the presence of the design elements was often fairly low overall**, and it was common for participants to say that they had never before noticed or paid much attention to these elements. On being asked to reflect on the elements, participants readily recognised and understood the significance of some of them, especially the ring of stars, the European flag and the map of Europe. This was much less the case for other elements, however, most notably the copyright symbol, the ECB President's signature and the portrait of Europa. Coincidentally, the common design elements participants recognised most were generally also those that were the most prominent on the notes. As is described more fully later in this chapter, differences in the prominence and familiarity of different common design elements seemed to impact how participants viewed the different elements: the less noticeable or immediately understandable elements tended to be those that were seen as relatively less important for inclusion on future euro banknotes.

Second, participants often felt that there were **too many common design elements on the banknotes**, which contributed to making the notes as a whole too cluttered and "busy". This view was reinforced by a perception that there was unnecessary redundancy between some elements, especially between the flag of Europe and the ring of stars.

*"The notes are very busy [with all these design elements]. I'd make it a lot less fussy."*

(41-60 years old, Ireland)

*"[The banknote] looks a bit overloaded."*

(61+ years old, Spain)

*"We have the [ring of stars] already on the flag."*

(61+ years old, Germany)

At the same time, however, many participants assumed that a lot or even all of the common design elements might be there for specific reasons – most commonly, for legal or security reasons – and so perhaps could not be removed. In part, this assumption reflected a tendency for participants to conflate common design elements with security features, despite the former being defined at the outset of the discussions.

*"I guess that [...] it is just mandatory to have the year and the name of the currency."*

(61+ years old, Finland)

*"On each banknote there are security features that cannot be removed."*

(16-25 years old,  
Belgium)

## 5.2 Perceived essential common design elements

Across the various countries and age groups, participants commonly felt that five of the common design elements were particularly essential:

- the elements representing Europe and the European Union, especially **the map of Europe, the EU flag and the ring of stars**;

- the elements related to the euro currency, specifically **the € symbol and the “euro” currency name in the Latin, Greek and Cyrillic alphabets.**

Consistent with findings from the 2019 study, these five elements and especially the EU flag and the € symbol were identified as essential considerably more often than any of the other common design elements.

Participants favoured the common design elements representing Europe and the European Union for two main reasons. First, they found these appropriate images to indicate that the banknotes were European. Several focus groups pointed out that these elements would help users of the notes, particularly non-Europeans, to determine where the banknotes were from and where they could be used.

*“The map [of Europe] is the symbol of the Union. It is the representation of Europe even if not all countries are part of the euro.”*

(26-40 years old, Portugal)

*“For foreigners using euro, it’s crucial to mention euro and to visualise the symbol of currency, like for us when we are using other currencies.”*

(16-25 years old, Luxembourg)

Second, there was a clear consensus that these common design elements should be included because they were strong symbols of European identity and unity to which participants felt many Europeans could easily relate.

*“The flag of Europe is very important on the banknotes. It is the symbol of our unity and needs to be visible.”*

(61+ years old, Greece)

In terms of the other common design elements that participants most often regarded as essential – the € sign and the “euro” name in the three different scripts – these were seen as fundamentals that marked the basic function of the notes as currency and that, as such, made the notes recognisable as euro notes. At the same time, and much like the European flag and the ring of stars, these elements were also recognised as symbols of European identity and unity. This was particularly the case for the “euro” name in three scripts, which was seen as symbolising multiculturalism within the European Union collective – a concept that also proved to be very important to participants when they were evaluating potential themes and motifs for future euro banknotes.

*“The euro, the stars, the writing of the euro in Cyrillic, Greek and Italian: all images that represent the European community and are identifiable by all.”*

(41-60 years old, Italy)

*“The term euro in Greek and Cyrillic must be kept because then all European scripts are shown.”*

(41-60 years old, Germany)

There were very few differences in views across the different age groups and countries when it came to perceived essential (and, indeed, non-essential) common design elements. That said, it was notable that the inclusion of the “euro” name in Greek and Cyrillic scripts was particularly valued in Greece, Cyprus and Bulgaria. This was not only because the scripts were used in these countries (and thus made the notes easier to read for citizens there), but because the feature was seen to provide confirmation that these countries were considered full and valued Member States of the European Union, and that all Member States were equal. Participants in Bulgaria commented, however, that the three scripts could be more equally visible, as the “euro” in Greek and Cyrillic scripts is currently somewhat faded compared to the Latin word.

*"I like the name of the euro as it is also written in Greek and it makes it more close to us Greeks."*

(26-40 years old, Greece)

*"I like the way the name of the currency is written in different languages because it shows multiculturalism."*

(16-25 years old, Bulgaria)

### 5.3 Perceived less important common design elements

As is evident from the foregoing, participants tended to regard common design elements as essential when these were easily recognisable, relatable and useful. Conversely, elements that they saw as less essential or even dispensable were those that they struggled to recognise or understand, or that they saw as lacking an obvious function. At the same time, it was notable that **participants generally identified fewer elements as non-essential than as essential**. Indeed, in several countries, participants were explicit about the fact that they found it hard to identify any elements as potentially less essential, often reiterating an assumption that all of the different elements would have been included for a specific purpose. They were conscious that, even if they personally thought some common design elements were not useful or necessary, there may be good reasons for them being there. This could help explain the higher reluctance among participants to identify specific elements as non-essential, compared to naming elements as essential.

These findings notwithstanding, there were **two common design elements that participants very commonly regarded as less essential: the portrait of Europa and the ECB President's signature**. To a slightly lesser extent, other, more administrative elements were also seen as less essential relative to other elements, namely the name of the issuer (ECB) in multiple languages, the issue date and the copyright symbol.

With regard to **the portrait of Europa**, participants ascribed low importance to this common design element for several reasons. The figure was not at all well-known by participants, nor linked in their minds with the concept of Europe or European identity. Moreover, even after they were informed of the background to and meaning of the portrait, their attitudes towards it remained mixed. While some expressed interest in the information with which they were provided, few subsequently changed their minds about the relative importance of the portrait among the other common design elements. To an extent, this may have related to another perceived shortcoming of the portrait; namely, that the figure was visible only on close inspection of the banknotes (which also appeared to explain in part why awareness of it was so low among participants).

*"The half bust with the woman... What does it represent? I'm just noticing it now and for me it may not even be there."*

(41-60 years old, Italy)

*"I did not even know that the portrait of Europa was there."*

(41-60 years old, Spain)

Turning to the **ECB President's signature and other administrative common design elements**, opinions were more varied. On the one hand and as noted earlier, participants often assumed that these elements may be required on banknotes for legal or security reasons. At the same time however, a common perspective was that the elements were difficult to see or understand, too bureaucratic in appearance and not especially functional. Such objections were most often raised in relation to the ECB President's signature, with participants often reporting that they had difficulty discerning whose signature it was and why it needed to be there. Indeed, some went on to dismiss the signature on the grounds that it did not have a clear association with the concept of Europe.

*“I don’t even know whose signature it is; I have no idea why it’s even signed.”*

(16-25 years old, Portugal)

*“I don’t even know the publisher’s name or what it means. I didn’t notice the signature of who was behind it.”*

(26-40 years old, Slovakia)

*“The signature has nothing to do with Europe – only with the currency.”*

(16-25 years old, Germany)

Many participants similarly questioned the inclusion of the list of ECB acronyms in different languages on the banknotes. Because the acronyms were not spelled out, participants typically did not know what the letters stood for, which in turn meant they did not understand the purpose of the acronyms either. In one focus group, there was the suggestion that the acronyms could be replaced with a single “European Central Bank”, which would both elucidate the meaning and reduce the amount of text on the banknotes.

*“I think I would drop these ‘BCE’, ‘ECB’ [...] I can read what it is on the internet, of course, but if you just look at it – some letters – it doesn’t mean anything.”*

(16-25 years old, Latvia)

As with views on essential common design elements, there was very little notable variation in the findings among the different age groups or in the different countries when it came to non-essential design elements.

## 5.4 Other potential common design elements

When given the opportunity to propose new common design elements for future euro banknotes or changes to existing elements, participants put forward an array of ideas. While most of these ideas were rarely mentioned by more than one participant, some broader themes could be discerned.

A first set of suggestions concerned potential **alternative symbols of Europe and European identity and unity**. Examples – most of which were also suggested as possible motifs for themes discussed in the previous section – included the addition of (portions of) the European Convention on Human Rights or the Anthem of Europe, a picture of the European Parliament, or the inclusion of the flags of all EU Member States.

*“It would be great to add the flags so that we know in which country these banknotes are accepted.”*

(26-40 years old, France)

A second group of potential common design elements mentioned were in fact security features. For instance, suggestions were made to show the banknote serial number, the country in which the note was issued and, more generally, to add more elements to prevent falsification.

*“The more security marks, the better, I think. It helps prevent counterfeiting and is easier to identify visually.”*

(61+ years old, Lithuania)

A smaller number of suggestions were made for potential changes to existing design elements. Several participants proposed possible revisions to the map of Europe, for instance to show only the euro area countries or to remove the United Kingdom following its recent departure from the EU. In Latvia, a participant remarked that the map of Europe should have clearer boundaries,



especially on the eastern side, to avoid giving the impression that Russia was part of the EU. Like other findings discussed in this report, this comment may have been influenced to an extent by the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine and associated commentary on Russia's relationship with Europe.

## 6 Other suggestions for future euro banknotes

### Key findings

- As well as expressing their preferences regarding themes, motifs and common design elements, participants were keen to emphasise that future banknotes should be colourful, vibrant and eye-catching.
- They also emphasised the importance of contrasting colours being used to denote the different euro denominations, so that people could easily distinguish between them.
- Equally, there were calls for euro banknotes to be smaller, as well as uniform in size, so that they could be more easily fitted into a wallet.
- Some participants also called for the notes to be made from a plastic-based material to help ensure their durability. Others, in contrast, emphasised the importance of sustainable materials being used.
- In several countries, participants called for continued public engagement in decisions around the design of future euro banknotes, to increase the likelihood of the final design being widely accepted.

Following the discussion of themes, motifs and design elements, participants were asked if there were any other considerations that they felt should have an important bearing on the future design of euro banknotes. They often took the opportunity to reiterate key criteria that the design should meet, in particular:

- that it should have **pan-European relevance and resonance** so that people of all nationalities could identify with it and none were left feeling in some way excluded;
- that it should **convey a sense of “unity” and “togetherness”** among Member States, to serve as a constant reminder of these defining values of the EU;
- that potentially **controversial, divisive or offensive motifs** – for example, motifs that reflected cultural stereotypes or that were in any way religious, political or ideological – should be avoided;
- that it should be **modern and up-to-date**;
- that, overall, the design should be simple and uncluttered – “less is more” was a common refrain.

Equally, participants were keen to emphasise that future banknotes should be colourful, vibrant and eye-catching, and the Costa Rican banknotes shown earlier in the discussion were sometimes cited as examples of notes that fulfilled these criteria effectively. They also emphasised the importance of contrasting colours being used to denote the different denominations, so that people could easily distinguish between them. In a few groups and as in the 2019 study, participants felt it was important to maintain the current contrasting colours, given that people had gotten used to these over time.

*“We have learned to associate sizes and colours with amounts: red = €10, orange = €50, blue = €20, green = €100...that’s important for us to maintain.”*

(26-40 years old, Luxembourg)

There was also the suggestion that the notes should incorporate features to make the different denominations more easily recognisable and mutually distinct for people with visual impairments. Specific ideas put forward in this regard included the addition of Braille elements and the use of varying irregular edging.

*“The banknotes should be recognised by everyone, including visually impaired citizens. That is the most important thing for me.”*

(41-60 years old, Belgium)

The size of future banknotes was also brought up in a number of the focus groups, with participants contending that the notes should be smaller, as well as uniform in size, so that they could be more easily fitted into a wallet. Another commonly mentioned practical consideration concerned the choice of material for future banknotes. In several countries, there were calls for the notes to be made from a plastic-based material to help ensure their durability. Conversely, participants in a couple of the younger focus groups argued that banknotes should be made from sustainable materials, reflecting the EU’s commitment to environmental protection.

Finally, in several countries, participants stressed the importance of public engagement in the choice of design of future euro banknotes, to increase the likelihood of the final design being widely accepted. For example, it was suggested that votes be held on possible motifs or that mock-ups of possible new designs be produced for the public to choose from. Another suggestion was to hold a competition in which young artists could submit possible designs.

## 7 Conclusions

The research study discussed above sought to provide insights to inform the selection of new themes for future euro banknotes, and to understand the public's preferences regarding a theme and potential associated motifs as well as their perceptions of the current ES2 common design elements. On both counts, the study elicited a range of important findings and reflections that have clear implications for the next stage of the redesign process.

At the most fundamental level, the research reinforced the case for a redesign. **Participants rarely felt any sense of identification with or emotional attachment to the current banknotes** and appeared to generally welcome the idea of changes being made to them.

At the same time, **the research laid bare the challenges involved in arriving at a theme that is widely accepted in all countries that have adopted the euro and among different groups of citizens**. One such challenge relates to the various (and to an extent conflicting) expectations that were evident in the focus groups. On the one hand, participants called for a theme that was underpinned by principles of universality and inclusivity, while on the other, they displayed a strong appetite for the representation of Member States' distinctiveness – whether in terms of physical assets, culture or contribution – albeit within the context of the EU collective. Another potential challenge involves arriving at a theme that can instil a sense of pride in participants. The research suggests that the themes and, more especially, motifs that are most likely to generate pride are often those with which citizens are most readily familiar, which often implies elements within their own country. At the same time, the work raised a broader question as to whether pride is a generally attainable goal for any future design, given the declining use of cash and the way in which citizens appear to relate to banknotes (primarily as a functional good). More important factors for citizens appear to be the broad acceptability of the design and its aesthetic value.

These challenges notwithstanding, the study did identify a shortlist of potential themes for future banknotes that had clear and widespread resonance for participants, including those in different Member States and age groups: **nature, monuments and landmarks, portraits, European values, science and progress, and art**. Among these themes, **nature and European values stood out as appearing to have both very broad appeal and the perceived lowest potential to spark controversy** – considerations that also explain why the popularity of these themes strengthened to an extent over the course of the discussions. Nature, together with art, was also seen to lend itself particularly well to a design with high aesthetic value, something that appeared as important for participants as the choice of theme itself. **Other themes, such as monuments and landmarks, portraits and history, though also relatively popular, were seen to carry comparatively greater risks and present more challenges in terms of identifying motifs that would have pan-European resonance and acceptability.**

At the same time, the discussion of potential themes, and even more so associated motifs, brought to the fore **clear overlaps between some of these themes**. Indeed, participants themselves sometimes pointed to the possibility of combining different themes within a single design, such as nature with sustainability, portraits with science and/or history, science with history, art with nature, art with history, European values with sustainability, or European values with language.

Participants typically identified numerous and varied motifs for each of their favourite themes, despite finding the task challenging at times for the reasons described. Common underlying traits of these motifs, however, were **beauty or majesty** and **allusions to Europe's greatness** (in terms of its assets or contribution) or **strong character** (in terms of its values and dynamism). The **recognisability** of motifs was also very important for participants and something they appeared to see as almost a prerequisite for being able to identify with the banknotes. A corollary of this however, as noted above, was that participants sometimes assumed or even expected that they would be able to see their own nation directly reflected in this design. Still, they usually went on to recognise that it could be practically difficult to represent all Member States on euro banknotes and spontaneously proposed possible solutions such as the selection of **motifs that were**

**regionally based or that otherwise cut across or transcended national boundaries.** There were several motifs – maps and flags being the most obvious examples – that were suggested as motifs for numerous different themes and that may on this basis be worthy of consideration for incorporation into any future design. Notably, maps and flags were also seen as carrying high potential for modern, stylised depiction, thus adding to their potential value as motifs.

In terms of views on **common design elements**, the research identified a clear and consistent preference for certain elements over others. The most preferred elements were those that conferred European identity and denoted the currency, namely **the ring of stars, the flag of Europe, the map of Europe, the € currency symbol and the “euro” currency name** in three scripts. The least preferred elements were the portrait of Europa, the ECB President’s signature and, to a lesser extent, other more administrative elements such as the copyright symbol. Equally if not more important than these specific insights, however, was what the research revealed about how participants evaluated common design elements more generally. They clearly placed a premium on elements that they saw as **easily recognisable, relatable and functional** – criteria that could therefore potentially serve as partial parameters for the determination of future common design elements.

Finally, the research provided a number of more general insights that may usefully inform the redesign process – in particular, participants’ clear preference for banknotes that were **eye-catching, colourful, clean and uncluttered.**



## Annex A: Pilot outcomes

Following the pilot exercise, several adjustments were made to both the broad design of the study and the discussion guide.

The main adjustments made to the study design were as follows.

- The age stratification of the focus groups was altered. Instead of the four age groups chosen initially (16-24, 25-54, over 55 and one mixed age group), the decision was taken to adopt the following split to maximise opportunities for age-based analysis of the findings:
  - 16-25 years old: young people who had only known the euro as their currency and were predominantly not working);
  - 26-40 years old: young to relatively young people who were in the first years of their working life and starting to build a family;
  - 41-60 years old: people who were predominantly in the middle of their working life and usually settled;
  - 61 years old and over: people at the end of their working life and pensioners.
- Given that the pilot focus groups were based on a different age banding, it was necessary to map that banding onto the new schema in order to determine which focus groups still needed to be held in the pilot countries during the main phase. The mapping is presented in Table A.1 below. In Finland, for example, the 55+ age band from the pilot was thus treated as broadly equivalent to the new 41-60 band, so that focus groups in the main phase were structured according to the remaining (new) age bands: 16-25, 26-40 and over 61.

**Table A.1**

Mapping of pilot age bands against main stage age bands

Pilot country	Pilot age group	Corresponding age group in main fieldwork
Finland	55+	41-60
Germany	Mixed age groups	41-60
Ireland	25-54	26-40
Italy	16-24	16-25

- The target number of participants for each group was reduced from six or seven to five, to ensure that the moderator would be able to maintain an overview of participants' reactions (verbal and physical) and that participants themselves could easily see and interact with one another. Reducing the number of participants was also considered important to ensure that the duration of each focus group remained within the 90 minutes allotted.
- Several modifications were also made to the moderator briefing in order to equip all moderators with the necessary knowledge and techniques to navigate the focus group discussion more effectively. These included enhanced explanations of the main concepts addressed in the study (themes, motifs and common design elements) and a description of topics that were out of scope (coins and the option of having country-specific notes).

The main changes made to the discussion guide following the pilot were as follows:

- projective (ranking) exercises designed to elicit participants' priority themes and motifs were removed from the guide, again with a view to reducing the length of the focus groups and to allow greater time for participants to discuss their ideas for themes/motifs/common design elements, especially the thinking underpinning these;
- the definitions of themes, motifs and common design elements were reiterated more frequently at key points in the guide to facilitate better understanding on the part of respondents and ensure the discussion remained appropriately focused at all times;
- greater emphasis was placed on minimising discussion of aspects that were out of scope;
- greater emphasis was placed on encouraging participants to reflect on the extent to which themes and motifs they suggested were appropriate for the whole of Europe, not just for a particular regional or national context.

## Annex B: Fieldwork dates per country and per focus group

Country	Age group	Date
Austria	16-25	15.02.2022
	26-40	15.02.2022
	41-60	16.02.2022
	61+	16.02.2022
Belgium	16-25	17.02.2022
	26-40	16.02.2022
	41-60	16.02.2022
	61+	17.02.2022
Bulgaria	16-25	16.02.2022
	26-40	16.02.2022
	41-60	17.02.2022
	61+	17.02.2022
Croatia	16-25	16.02.2022
	26-40	15.02.2022
	41-60	23.02.2022
	61+	22.02.2022
Cyprus	16-25	02.03.2022
	26-40	03.03.2022
	41-60	28.02.2022
	61+	04.03.2022
Estonia	16-25	22.02.2022
	26-40	18.02.2022
	41-60	23.02.2022
	61+	28.02.2022
Finland	16-25	15.02.2022
	26-40	16.02.2022
	41-60	02.12.2021
	61+	17.02.2022
France	16-25	23.02.2022
	26-40	23.02.2022
	41-60	24.02.2022
	61+	24.02.2022
Germany	16-25	15.02.2022
	26-40	18.02.2022
	41-60	08.12.2021
	61+	01.03.2022
Greece	16-25	17.02.2022
	26-40	16.02.2022
	41-60	15.02.2022
	61+	16.02.2022
Ireland	16-25	22.02.2022
	26-40	07.12.2021
	41-60	23.02.2022
	61+	24.02.2022
Italy	16-25	01.12.2021
	26-40	18.02.2022
	41-60	23.02.2022
	61+	02.03.2022

Country	Age group	Date
Latvia	16-25	16.02.2022
	26-40	17.02.2022
	41-60	22.02.2022
	61+	23.02.2022
Lithuania	16-25	17.02.2022
	26-40	22.02.2022
	41-60	15.02.2022
	61+	23.02.2022
Luxembourg	16-25	01.03.2022
	26-40	22.03.2022
	41-60	23.03.2022
	61+	01.03.2022
Malta	16-25	04.03.2022
	26-40	03.03.2022
	41-60	02.03.2022
	61+	25.02.2022
Netherlands	16-25	24.02.2022
	26-40	18.02.2022
	41-60	24.02.2022
	61+	22.02.2022
Portugal	16-25	23.02.2022
	26-40	22.02.2022
	41-60	17.02.2022
	61+	24.02.2022
Slovakia	16-25	21.02.2022
	26-40	21.02.2022
	41-60	24.02.2022
	61+	24.02.2022
Slovenia	16-25	02.03.2022
	26-40	25.02.2022
	41-60	03.03.2022
	61+	03.03.2022
Spain	16-25	17.02.2022
	26-40	18.02.2022
	41-60	21.02.2022
	61+	22.02.2022

## Annex C: Profile of the achieved sample

The total number of participants in each focus group can be found in the tables in this annex. Full attendance (i.e. five participants) was achieved for almost all of the main phase focus groups. The 61+ groups in Austria, the Netherlands and Luxembourg and the 16-25 group in Luxembourg comprised four participants as a result of a participant experiencing technical issues that could not be resolved at the beginning of the group or a personal emergency that necessitated their leaving the group.

The profile of the achieved sample per country is shown in the tables below. General observations on the profile of the achieved sample are as follows.

1. Recruiting participants with a low level of education (pre-primary and primary education) proved quite challenging across many of the participating groups. This can be explained by the fact that across Europe, primary and most secondary (medium-level) education is compulsory, thus effectively leaving only a very small portion of the population in these countries with a low level of education.
2. In several countries of the study, it was difficult to recruit participants who never used banknotes. This was especially the case in Bulgaria, Croatia and Slovenia, where despite recruiters' best efforts, there were no participants matching this particular profile. Based on the country teams' observations, this was due to the fact that there were many establishments in these countries where cash was the only accepted form of payment, meaning cash usage was high across the population.
3. In a small number of countries, including Malta and Lithuania, the recruitment teams experienced difficulties in finding participants who had neutral attitudes towards the European Union (EU), thus resulting in several focus groups being composed entirely of people who had fairly positive or very positive views of the EU.

Sample characteristic		Target	Achieved profile per age group (Austria)				Achieved profile per age group (Belgium)			
			16-25	26-40	41-60	61+	16-25	26-40	41-60	61+
Total number of participants		5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5
Gender	Men	Balanced mix	3	1	3	2	2	3	3	3
	Women		2	4	2	2	3	2	2	2
Education	Low	Balanced mix	1	-	-	-	2	1	2	-
	Medium		1	3	2	2	2	3	1	3
	High		3	2	3	2	1	1	2	2
Country of birth	Born in the country	At least 4	5	5	4	4	5	4	4	5
Attitude towards the EU	Very positive	Mix (very negative/negative screened out)	-	-	1	-	1	-	1	2
	Fairly positive		4	5	2	2	2	3	3	2
	Neutral		1	-	2	2	2	2	1	1
Frequency of banknote use	Never	Max. 2	-	2	2	-	1	-	-	2
	Occasionally	Mix	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	2
	Often		3	1	1	2	1	2	2	1



Sample characteristic		Target	Achieved profile per age group (Bulgaria)				Achieved profile per age group (Croatia)			
			16-25	26-40	41-60	61+	16-25	26-40	41-60	61+
Total number of participants		5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	
Gender	Men	Balanced mix	2	2	2	3	3	3	2	2
	Women		3	3	3	2	2	2	3	3
Education	Low	Balanced mix	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
	Medium		4	3	-	2	1	1	2	3
	High		-	2	5	2	4	4	3	2
Country of birth	Born in the country	At least 4	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	4
Attitude towards the EU	Very positive	Mix (very negative/negative screened out)	2	3	1	1	-	2	2	1
	Fairly positive		-	2	3	2	5	2	2	3
	Neutral		3	-	1	2	-	1	1	1
Frequency of banknote use	Never	Max. 2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Occasionally	Mix	1	2	3	1	3	3	2	4
	Often		4	3	2	4	2	2	3	1

Sample characteristic		Target	Achieved profile per age group (Cyprus)				Achieved profile per age group (Estonia)			
			16-25	26-40	41-60	61+	16-25	26-40	41-60	61+
Total number of participants		5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	
Gender	Men	Balanced mix	3	2	2	3	3	3	3	2
	Women		2	3	3	2	2	2	2	3
Education	Low	Balanced mix	-	1	1	1	1	1	-	-
	Medium		3	2	3	1	2	1	2	2
	High		2	2	1	3	2	3	3	3
Country of birth	Born in the country	At least 4	5	4	5	4	5	4	5	5
Attitude towards the EU	Very positive	Mix (very negative/negative screened out)	2	-	1	-	1	-	-	2
	Fairly positive		2	3	4	2	4	3	4	2
	Neutral		1	2	-	3	-	2	1	1
Frequency of banknote use	Never	Max. 2	-	-	-	1	3	1	1	-
	Occasionally	Mix	2	3	3	2	1	4	3	5
	Often		3	2	2	2	1	-	1	-

Sample characteristic		Target	Achieved profile per age group (Finland)				Achieved profile per age group (France)			
			16-25	26-40	41-60	61+	16-25	26-40	41-60	61+
Total number of participants		5	5	5	7	5	5	5	5	5
Gender	Men	Balanced mix	2	3	3	3	2	3	2	3
	Women		3	2	4	2	3	2	3	2
Education	Low	Balanced mix	2	1	2	1	-	-	-	-
	Medium		2	2	2	2	4	-	2	3
	High		1	2	3	2	1	5	3	2
Country of birth	Born in the country	At least 4	5	4	7	5	5	5	5	5
Attitude towards the EU	Very positive	Mix (very negative/negative screened out)	2	2	3	1	2	1	2	-
	Fairly positive		2	1	3	2	2	4	2	4
	Neutral		1	2	1	2	1	-	1	1
Frequency of banknote use	Never	Max. 2	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	2
	Occasionally	Mix	2	2	3	2	1	2	1	1
	Often		2	2	2	1	2	1	3	2

Sample characteristic		Target	Achieved profile per age group (Germany)				Achieved profile per age group (Greece)			
			16-25	26-40	41-60	61+	16-25	26-40	41-60	61+
Total number of participants		5	5	5	7	5	5	5	5	5
Gender	Men	Balanced mix	3	3	3	2	2	3	3	2
	Women		2	2	4	3	3	2	2	3
Education	Low	Balanced mix	-	-	2	2	1	1	1	1
	Medium		2	1	2	1	2	2	2	2
	High		3	4	3	2	2	2	2	2
Country of birth	Born in the country	At least 4	5	5	6	5	5	5	4	5
Attitude towards the EU	Very positive	Mix (very negative/negative screened out)	4	2	2	4	-	-	-	-
	Fairly positive		-	3	3	1	3	2	3	3
	Neutral		1	-	2	-	2	3	2	2
Frequency of banknote use	Never	Max. 2	2	-	2	1	2	2	1	2
	Occasionally	Mix	2	3	3	4	1	1	2	1
	Often		1	2	2	-	2	2	2	2

Sample characteristic		Target	Achieved profile per age group (Ireland)				Achieved profile per age group (Italy)			
			16-25	26-40	41-60	61+	16-25	26-40	41-60	61+
Total number of participants		5	5	6	5	5	6	5	5	5
Gender	Men	Balanced mix	2	3	3	2	3	2	3	3
	Women		3	3	2	3	3	3	2	2
Education	Low	Balanced mix	1	0	-	-	1	-	2	2
	Medium		1	3	2	3	5	4	1	2
	High		3	3	3	2		1	2	1
Country of birth	Born in the country	At least 4	5	6	4	4	6	5	5	5
Attitude towards the EU	Very positive	Mix (very negative/negative screened out)	1	2	2	2	1	-	1	1
	Fairly positive		3	3	1	2	4	3	2	3
	Neutral		1	1	2	1	1	2	2	1
Frequency of banknote use	Never	Max. 2	2	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
	Occasionally	Mix	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	1
	Often		1	3	2	1	3	1	2	2

Sample characteristic		Target	Achieved profile per age group (Latvia)				Achieved profile per age group (Lithuania)			
			16-25	26-40	41-60	61+	16-25	26-40	41-60	61+
Total number of participants		5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	
Gender	Men	Balanced mix	3	3	3	2	2	3	2	2
	Women		2	2	2	3	3	2	3	3
Education	Low	Balanced mix	1	1	-	-	2	-	-	1
	Medium		3	2	2	1	2	1	1	1
	High		1	2	3	4	1	4	4	3
Country of birth	Born in the country	At least 4	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	
Attitude towards the EU	Very positive	Mix (very negative/negative screened out)	3	-	-	-	1	-	1	-
	Fairly positive		-	4	1	3	4	4	4	5
	Neutral		2	1	4	2	-	1	-	-
Frequency of banknote use	Never	Max. 2	-	1	-	-	2	1	3	1
	Occasionally	Mix	3	2	2	5	2	3	2	2
	Often		2	2	3	-	1	1	-	2



Sample characteristic		Target	Achieved profile per age group (Luxembourg)				Achieved profile per age group (Malta)			
			16-25	26-40	41-60	61+	16-25	26-40	41-60	61+
Total number of participants		5	4	5	5	4	5	5	5	5
Gender	Men	Balanced mix	1	2	3	2	3	1	2	4
	Women		3	3	2	2	2	4	3	1
Education	Low	Balanced mix	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Medium		1	2	2	3	2	2	4	2
	High		3	3	3	1	3	3	1	3
Country of birth	Born in the country	At least 4	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	5
Attitude towards the EU	Very positive	Mix (very negative/negative screened out)	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-
	Fairly positive		2	3	3	2	4	4	5	4
	Neutral		2	1	2	2	1	-	-	1
Frequency of banknote use	Never	Max. 2	1	2	-	-	1	-	-	-
	Occasionally	Mix	3	2	4	4	4	3	4	3
	Often		-	1	1	-	-	2	1	2

Sample characteristic		Target	Achieved profile per age group (Netherlands)				Achieved profile per age group (Portugal)			
			16-25	26-40	41-60	61+	16-25	26-40	41-60	61+
Total number of participants		5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5
Gender	Men	Balanced mix	3	2	2	2	2	3	3	2
	Women		2	3	3	2	3	2	2	3
Education	Low	Balanced mix	1	2	2	1	1	1	2	2
	Medium		3	2	1	2	1	2	2	2
	High		1	1	2	1	3	2	1	1
Country of birth	Born in the country	At least 4	5	5	4	4	5	5	5	5
Attitude towards the EU	Very positive	Mix (very negative/negative screened out)	1	1	2	-	2	1	-	1
	Fairly positive		4	3	2	2	3	2	4	4
	Neutral		-	1	1	2	-	2	1	-
Frequency of banknote use	Never	Max. 2	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	2
	Occasionally	Mix	3	2	2	1	2	1	2	-
	Often		1	2	1	2	1	2	1	3

Sample characteristic		Target	Achieved profile per age group (Slovakia)				Achieved profile per age group (Slovenia)			
			16-25	26-40	41-60	61+	16-25	26-40	41-60	61+
Total number of participants		5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	
Gender	Men	Balanced mix	2	3	2	2	1	2	3	2
	Women		3	2	3	3	4	3	2	3
Education	Low	Balanced mix	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Medium		2	2	2	2	2	2	3	2
	High		-	3	3	3	3	3	2	3
Country of birth	Born in the country	At least 4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	
Attitude towards the EU	Very positive	Mix (very negative/negative screened out)	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1
	Fairly positive		3	3	4	3	2	3	3	3
	Neutral		1	1	-	1	1	1	1	1
Frequency of banknote use	Never	Max. 2	1	3	1	1	-	-	-	-
	Occasionally	Mix	2	1	3	3	3	2	3	2
	Often		2	1	1	1	2	3	2	3

Sample characteristic		Target	Achieved profile per age group (Spain)			
			16-25	26-40	41-60	61+
Total number of participants		5	5	5	5	5
Gender	Men	Balanced mix	3	2	2	3
	Women		2	3	3	2
Education	Low	Balanced mix	-	1	1	1
	Medium		1	2	2	2
	High		4	2	2	2
Country of birth	Born in the country	At least 4	5	5	4	5
Attitude towards the EU	Very positive	Mix (very negative/negative screened out)	-	2	1	-
	Fairly positive		2	2	2	3
	Neutral		3	1	2	2
Frequency of banknote use	Never	Max. 2	-	1	-	1
	Occasionally	Mix	3	3	2	2
	Often		2	1	3	2

## Annex D: Final discussion guide

### FLOW – 90 MINUTES

1. Introduction (8 mins)
2. Context/underlying values and attitudes – what is “European”? (10 mins)
3. Unprompted views on banknotes (5 mins)
4. Deep dive on themes (25 mins)
5. Deep dive on motifs (25 mins)
6. Common design elements (10 mins)
7. Conclusion (5 mins)
8. Questionnaire completion (2 mins)

### BACKGROUND OF STUDY (INTERNAL INFO FOR THE MODERATOR)

- The principal aim of the study is to provide insights to assist in the identification of possible new themes for future euro banknotes – and specifically to understand:
  - the public’s wishes and preferences on the themes of future euro banknotes – with the desired outcome being a list of preferred themes and motifs (see definitions below);
  - public perceptions and opinion on current common design elements, as well as on possible new common design elements – again, with the aim of establishing a list of preferred elements.
- Achieving these objectives will involve:
  - understanding what is commonly European (shared values);
  - exploring the various subjects that connect Europeans/tie them together for the future;
  - exploring visual representations of shared European values and themes, expressed as symbols, for European citizens;
  - making the connection between the European symbols and values and the extent to which banknotes embody and can communicate them;
  - exploring the emotional connections European citizens share with banknotes – going beyond the economic sphere and extending to broader societal values.
- Important definitions:
 

- *Theme*: the recurrent, underlying subject or a central idea that ensures consistency in the design of a range of banknotes. The theme of the current series of euro banknotes is “ages and styles of Europe” – architectural styles from periods of Europe’s cultural history.
  - *Motifs*: images that develop or represent the theme and which can take different forms for each denomination. The motifs on the current series of euro banknotes are architectural images of windows, doorways and bridges.
  - *Common design elements*: images or symbols which are unrelated to the theme but are present for practical purposes and to display European identity. The design elements on the

current euro banknotes include the name of the currency, the € symbol, the year of first issue, the EU flag and the map of Europe.

### **PARTICIPANT HOMEWORK**

- Ask the recruited participants (**via the confirmation email**):  
Please think about what “European” means to you – specifically, what images or themes pop into your mind when you hear the term “European”, or what images or themes best represent what European means to you?  
Note: you shouldn’t think about it too much, just take note of the first things that come to mind. After thinking about what “European” means to you, please search and download (or take) one or two images on your phone, or cut out images from a magazine, that illustrate what comes to mind and bring these to the group. Please email any digital images to me the day before the focus group.
- Ask the participants to also have a pen and paper with them during the discussion.

### **TO PREPARE IN ADVANCE**

- Set up the focus group links and invites via the online platform.
- Set up dual screens for the moderator.
- Familiarise yourself with the PowerPoint presentation and stimulus materials to show the participants.
- Paste any digital images sent by participants onto PowerPoint slides (a separate slide per participant) and have these ready to show participants at the beginning of the group.



## Part 1: INTRODUCTION (8 mins)

Objective (internal info for the moderator): To introduce participants to the moderator and each other, and to encourage a free-minded and creative discussion.

### 1.1. General information

[MODERATOR: WELCOME RESPONDENTS IN A WARM AND FRIENDLY MANNER. IF AT ANY POINT THE RESPONDENTS ASK ABOUT THE NAME OF THE CLIENT ORGANISATION, SAY YOU CAN SHARE IT WITH THEM AT THE END OF THE FOCUS GROUP.]

[READ OUT THE BELOW TEXT VERBATIM.]

- Hello and thank you for joining online today. My name is [MODERATOR NAME] and I will be moderating the discussion **on behalf of Ipsos**, a global market research company. We are here today to **discuss issues relating to Europe and what connects European citizens**. The discussion will take about 90 minutes, and **at the end I'll ask you to fill out a short two-minute questionnaire, so please do not leave the call before submitting that.**
- There is no need for you to have specific prior knowledge on the topics we'll be discussing today, and there are no right or wrong answers – whatever you think and feel is interesting to us. Feel free to share any ideas you may have. In this group, there is no such thing as a bad idea and out-of-the-box thinking is highly encouraged.
- During the discussion group, I will ask for your opinions on different questions and also display some materials for you to look at. If you would like to say something, please use the hand-raise function to avoid several people speaking at the same time. [DEMONSTRATE THE HAND-RAISE FUNCTION.]
- All personal data and responses will remain confidential and anonymous. With your permission, we will audio- and video-record the discussion for the purposes of transcription and analysis. [REQUEST PERMISSION TO RECORD THE DISCUSSION. ASK PARTICIPANTS TO INDICATE IN UNISON IF THEY ARE OR ARE NOT CONTENT TO PROCEED BY GIVING A THUMBS UP OR DOWN. START RECORDING **AFTER** PARTICIPANT INTRODUCTIONS.]
- GDPR consent [ONCE THE RECORDER IS ON]: Ipsos' legal basis for processing your data and continuing with this discussion is your consent to take part in the research. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You can withdraw your consent for your data to be used at any point before, during or after the discussion. Can I check that you are happy to proceed? [AGAIN ASK RESPONDENTS TO INDICATE THEIR CONSENT BY GIVING A THUMBS UP OR DOWN.]

## 1.2 Respondent introduction exercise

Before we start our discussion, let's get to know each other. I would like to ask each of you:

- Your first name
- Where you live
- Have you worked or lived in other European countries?
- The extent to which you think of yourself as European or not

## Part 2: CONTEXT AND UNDERLYING VALUES/ATTITUDES – WHAT IS “EUROPEAN”? (10 mins)

Objective (internal info for the moderator): To continue warming up participants and begin exploring what (if anything) is commonly seen as European as well as associated visual representations and degrees of emotional attachment (before the discussion is more confined by an explicit focus on banknotes).

### 2.1 Review of participants' images

Before today's discussion, we asked you to think about what the term "European" means to you – specifically, what images or themes come to mind when you hear the term "European" and what images or themes you think best represent the idea of European – and to send or bring some images with you to illustrate this. I'm really interested to discuss these!

Moderator: START BY SHOWING PARTICIPANTS ANY IMAGES SENT IN ADVANCE OF THE GROUP. SHOW THE IMAGES ONE AT A TIME AND ASK THE PERSON WHO SENT THE IMAGE THE QUESTIONS BELOW. THEN ASK ANY RESPONDENTS WHO DID NOT SEND THEIR IMAGE IN ADVANCE TO SHOW THEIR IMAGES TO THE GROUP AND ASK THEM THE SAME QUESTIONS BELOW.

- What is the image of?
- Why does it represent Europe to you?
- How does the image make you feel?
- What about others in the group? Does the image also fit with your idea of European-ness or make you feel this way? Why/why not?

*MODERATOR: AFTER PARTICIPANTS HAVE PRESENTED THEIR IMAGES, SUM UP THE NATURE OF THE IMAGES COVERED IN TERMS OF CATEGORIES, SUCH AS PEOPLE/OBJECTS/PLACES, ETC.*

### 2.2 Other conceptions of European

Apart from these images we have already talked about, **what else** comes to mind when you hear or think of the term "European"? *MODERATOR: LEAVE THE QUESTION OPEN-ENDED INITIALLY, THEN PROBE IN RELATION TO EACH OF:*

- shared European values;
- science;
- scenery or other elements of nature;
- important events or periods in time;
- cultural or social activities, or customs and traditions;
- famous people.

*MODERATOR: **ONLY IF** participants struggle to come up with responses, ask them to think about what comes to mind when they hear the term "American" or "African". Then ask them to apply this thinking*

process to the term "European".

### Part 3: UNPROMPTED VIEWS ON BANKNOTES (5 mins)

Objective (internal info for the moderator): To establish participants' starting points in respect of banknotes, the extent to which they notice the appearance of these, how emotionally attached they are to euro banknotes and why/why not. This will provide a segue into a discussion about what would be desirable on future banknotes.

We've talked a bit about imagery and symbols so far. One place we've often seen some of these sorts of imagery in our day-to-day life is on banknotes.

[FOR BULGARIA AND CROATIA]

Have you used euro banknotes? If so, how often do you use them in your everyday life?

Without looking in your wallet (!), are you able to bring to mind any specific imagery on euro banknotes?

[FOR BULGARIA AND CROATIA: or other banknotes you have used?]

- What can you bring to mind?
- Do you like or dislike these visual aspects of euro/other banknotes? Why?
- [IN RELATION TO EURO BANKNOTES ONLY] What, if anything, do they mean to you? Do they fit with your idea of what is European? Why/why not?
- [IN RELATION TO EURO BANKNOTES ONLY] Does it matter to you what euro banknotes look like? Why/why not?

### Part 4: DEEP DIVE INTO THEMES FOR BANKNOTES (25 mins)

Objective (internal info for the moderator): To arrive at a list of potential themes for euro banknotes and establish the relative popularity of these.

Banknotes usually have a theme that runs across the different denominations – by theme, I mean the underlying subject or central idea that is reflected in the design. So I am not talking about the images or symbols on the notes but rather the broader topic these represent.

The theme of current euro banknotes is the "ages and styles of Europe"; that is, different architectural styles from periods of Europe's cultural history.

**MODERATOR: DISPLAY EXAMPLES OF THE CURRENT EURO DENOMINATIONS.**

- What are your initial thoughts on this theme? And remember, by theme I mean the general topic of the ages and styles of Europe, not the specific images used to represent it, which we will discuss later.
- Do you like or dislike this as a theme? Why/why not?
- What, if anything, does it mean to you? Does it fit with your idea of what is European? Why/why not?
- How does it make you feel?

*Moderator: If necessary, probe for degree of emotional attachment, if any.*

- Is it a theme that represents Europe as a whole and not just particular parts or particular countries? Why/why not?

#### 4.1 Ideas for themes for future banknotes

I'm interested to hear what you think might be a good theme or themes for any future euro banknotes. Do you have any immediate thoughts on this? And, again, I'm not asking you for ideas for specific images or symbols at this stage but for an underlying subject or topic area.

**MODERATOR: LIST ANY THEMES SUGGESTED ON THE POWERPOINT FLIPCHART AND PROBE ON:**

- **Why** do you feel the theme is appropriate for banknotes – especially in terms of how it represents the concept “European”?
- Would the theme make you **proud**? Would you **relate to it**?

**MODERATOR: GIVE PARTICIPANTS THE OPPORTUNITY TO THINK QUITE BROADLY/WITHOUT STIMULUS INITIALLY, THEN ASK (AS NEEDED):**

- Thinking back to the earlier discussion we had about what comes to mind when you think of European-ness, does anything from that give you ideas for themes? *MODERATOR: RECAP ON THE CATEGORIES OF IMAGES COVERED. CONTINUE ADDING PARTICIPANTS' IDEAS TO THE POWERPOINT FLIPCHART AS YOU GO, PROBING CAREFULLY ON THE TWO KEY QUESTIONS IN THE BOX ABOVE FOR EACH SUGGESTION MADE.*
- And what about themes relating to.....*MODERATOR: PROBE FOR EACH OF THE CATEGORIES BELOW, CONTINUING TO ADD PARTICIPANTS' IDEAS TO THE POWERPOINT FLIPCHART AS YOU GO AND PROBING CAREFULLY ON THE TWO KEY QUESTIONS IN THE BOX ABOVE FOR EACH SUGGESTION MADE.*
  - Shared European values?
  - Science?
  - Scenery or other elements of nature?
  - Important events or periods in time?
  - Cultural or social activities, or customs or traditions?
  - Famous people?

So we've got several different ideas for themes here. I'd like to try to establish which of these ideas you think are best and why – though of course you may disagree! I'll go round everyone and ask each of you to say the three themes you like best from our list.

**MODERATOR: RECORD THE NUMBER OF TIMES EACH THEME IS MENTIONED NEXT TO THE LIST IN THE POWERPOINT. SUMMARISE THE RESULTS FOR THE PARTICIPANTS.**

**IF THREE CLEAR WINNING THEMES DO NOT EMERGE, ASK PARTICIPANTS TO DECIDE WHICH THREE THEY WOULD LIKE TO CARRY FORWARD FOR DISCUSSION.**

#### Part 5: DEEP DIVE INTO MOTIFS (25 mins)

Objective (internal info for the moderator): To arrive at a list of potential motifs that might be associated with the most popular themes.

I'd now like us to think about **our favourite themes** in more detail. Specifically, I'd like us to think about possible images or symbols that could be used on future euro banknotes to represent the themes.

**MODERATOR: RE-DISPLAY THE CURRENT EURO BANKNOTES. REMIND PARTICIPANTS THAT THE THEME IS "AGES AND STYLES OF EUROPE". THEN POINT OUT THAT:**

- the symbols and images used to represent the theme are windows, doorways and bridges;
- there are also other visual elements on euro banknotes that are not related to the theme but that are included for practical purposes and to display European identity. These include the name of the currency, the map, the EU flag and the ring of stars. We are not focusing on these for now but will come back to them later in the discussion. For now, we are focusing on symbols and images relating to the theme.

Here are some examples of banknotes from other countries, to further illustrate how images and symbols have been used to represent particular themes.

**MODERATOR: DISPLAY THE IMAGES OF BANKNOTES FROM SELECTED COUNTRIES IN TURN (FAMILIARISE YOURSELF WITH THE RELEVANT INFORMATION; CF. ANNEX OF THIS GUIDE). SHOW ALL THREE OF THEM BRIEFLY, EXPLAINING IN EACH CASE THE THEME AND THE IMAGES USED TO REPRESENT IT. CONCLUDE BY STATING:**

As you can see, monuments, portraits and landscapes are possible examples of images that can be used as a motif.

### 5.1 Popular theme 1

Let's start with our first popular theme, [FIRST THEME]. What images or symbols would most effectively represent this theme for you?

**MODERATOR: FOR EACH IMAGE/SYMBOL MENTIONED, PROBE ON:**

- What does the symbol/image mean to you? How does it fit with your idea of what is European;
- How does it make you feel?
- **IMPORTANT:** Why do you feel it represents Europe as a whole, beyond a specific country?
- Would the symbol(s)/image(s) make you feel proud and would you relate to it?
- Do others agree with this assessment? Why/why not?

**MODERATOR: ON A POWERPOINT SLIDE, JOT DOWN SUGGESTED IMAGES AND SYMBOLS THAT ARE GENERALLY FELT TO REPRESENT EUROPE AS A WHOLE. IF THE DISCUSSION STARTS TO TURN TO HAVING DIFFERENT IMAGES FOR DIFFERENT COUNTRIES, TELL PARTICIPANTS THAT NATIONAL VARIATION IS NOT AN OPTION AND MOVE THE DISCUSSION ON.**

**MODERATOR: ONCE PARTICIPANTS HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE SUGGESTIONS SPONTANEOUSLY, PROBE IN RELATION TO ANY POTENTIALLY RELEVANT IMAGES THAT THEY BROUGHT TO THE GROUP AND DISCUSSED EARLIER (SECTION 2.1).**

## 5.2 Popular theme 2

Repeat above questions for theme 2.

## 5.3 Popular theme 3

Repeat above questions for theme 3.

## 5.4 Summing up

Now that we have come up with different images and symbols for our three favourite themes, I'm interested to know if your views on these themes have changed at all.

- Do you now think one of the themes is better than the others, compared to how you felt before – specifically in terms of how well they represent the concept of “European” and Europe overall?
- Do you feel you personally identify with or feel more attached to this theme? Why/why not?

## Part 6: COMMON DESIGN ELEMENTS (10 mins)

I'd like to move on now and talk about one final possible element of future euro banknotes, namely common design elements. These are images or symbols which are unrelated to the theme but are included on banknotes for practical purposes and to display European identity. They do not change depending on the denomination of a banknote.

**MODERATOR: DISPLAY CURRENT EURO BANKNOTES WITH DESIGN ELEMENTS MARKED UP (= EURO BANKNOTE CLOSE-UP) AND POINT TO THEM:**

*the name of the currency;*  
*the € symbol;*  
*the year of first issue;*  
*the name of the issuer;*  
*the EU flag;*  
*the map of Europe;*  
*the ring of stars;*  
*the portrait of Europa;*  
*the signature;*  
*the copyright symbol.*

- Do you consider any of these elements to be **essential**? Which ones? Why?
- Which of these elements would you keep and why? Which of these elements would you drop and why?
- Are there any other design elements apart from those I've shown that you think would be good to have on euro banknotes for practical purposes or to indicate European identity? Which? Why?



**Part 7: CONCLUSION (5 mins)**

To conclude, let's imagine we met the people in charge of designing future euro banknotes and they gave us the opportunity to give advice or make some recommendations. They ask for honest advice, based on what we feel "European" means, and the considerations and preferences we have discussed today.

- What do we want to tell these people?
- What would we definitely recommend?
- What mistakes should be avoided?

**Part 8: QUESTIONNAIRE COMPLETION (2 mins)**

*MODERATOR: ASK RESPONDENTS TO COMPLETE THE SHORT QUESTIONNAIRE INDICATING THEIR PREFERRED THEMES AND ASSOCIATED SYMBOLS/IMAGES, AND THE COMMON DESIGN ELEMENTS THAT THEY CONSIDER MOST IMPORTANT.*

*SHARE THE LINK TO THE SHORT QUESTIONNAIRE VIA THE CHATBOX, THEN OPEN IT AND DEMONSTRATE TO THE PARTICIPANTS HOW TO COMPLETE IT BY INSERTING SOME EXAMPLE ANSWERS. EMPHASISE THE SUBMIT BUTTON AT THE END AND THE IMPORTANCE OF CLICKING ON THIS WHEN THEY HAVE FINISHED.*

*MODERATOR: After the participants indicate that they have filled out the short questionnaire, proceed with explaining to participants that the study will have another stage in which visuals of the future euro banknotes will be developed:*

"Your contributions to this focus group discussion are very important, but they are not the only thing that will determine what future banknotes will look like. Our clients will also be consulting with other relevant groups and bodies. Based on all of the findings, they will then create mock-ups of different possible options for future banknotes, which will then be tested among additional focus groups. So it will be an ongoing process over the coming months".

**THANK PARTICIPANTS AND WRAP UP.**

**ANNEX (INFO FOR MODERATOR)**

Information concerning **PART 5** (*MODERATOR: PLEASE FAMILIARISE YOURSELF WITH THIS IN ADVANCE*):

Themes and images/symbols on banknotes from different countries

Country	Theme	Images/symbols
Euro banknotes	Ages and styles of Europe (Classical, Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, 19th century iron and glass architecture)	Windows, doorways and bridges associated with the different ages and styles
Norway	The sea	Boats, lighthouse, fish, wave
Argentina	Fauna and flora	Different types of animals and flowers/plants from the country
Costa Rica	Portraits/biodiversity	Portraits of notable individuals Ecosystems and native species

## **Annex E: Stimulus material**



# CURRENT EURO BANKNOTES





# CURRENT EURO BANKNOTES



# NORWAY



Country	Theme	Images/symbols (motifs)
Norway	The sea	Boats, lighthouse, fish, waves



# ARGENTINA



20 Argentine Pesos



50 Argentine Pesos



100 Argentine Pesos



200 Argentine Pesos



500 Argentine Pesos



Country	Theme	Images/symbols (motifs)
Argentina	Fauna and flora	Different types of animals and flowers/plants from the country

# COSTA RICA



Country	Theme	Images/symbols (motifs)
Cost Rica	Portraits/Biodiversity	Portraits of notable individuals; Ecosystems and native species



The year of first issue

The EU flag

2013



*M. Draghi*

Signature

The name of the issuer

© BCE ECB EЦБ EZB EKP EKT EKB BĈE EBC

5

The name of the currency

EURO  
ΕΥΡΩ  
ΕΒΡΟ

Copyright symbol



The Portr Europa





The €-symbol



The Ring of stars



The map of Europe

