



What is it like to be a European

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Introduction

During a conversation on the theme "Doing Pan-EU politics is difficult" , a Volt Elected official asked the question: "*Do we know what is it like is to be European?*". The aim of this paper is to contribute to reflections on that question by exploring how respondents to the Eurosense data collection relate to the concepts of Europe, European Union and democracy through word clouds built from the responses to the following open questions of the Eurosense collector :

- 5.1 *For me, the EU is like...*
- 5.2 *For me, Europe is like...*
- 5.3 *For me, democracy is like...*
- 6.1 *Who should hear your story?*
- 6.2 *If you could ask one question to people in power, what would it be?*

See the appendix for a full list of questions used in the collector.

Given the lack of statistical representativeness of the sampled population it is not possible to draw relevant conclusions from a statistical analysis of the data, The aim is rather to offer paths of reflection that can possibly be used as preparation for sensemaking session where participants from different stakeholder groups get together to review the dashboard, the stories and collectively reflect on what can be done to have "more stories like this " and "fewer stories like that".

The data set

The analysis covers 1081 narratives collected between march 2024 and july 2025 using the Eurosense (www.eurosense.org) collector¹. The narratives have been collected in the context of different Volt projects and activities. A substantial fraction of the narratives has been collected through the Volteuropa mailing list.

The full dataset was downloaded in a csv file on july 25th 2025 and uploaded to a google gsheed, where the relevant columns have been translated using the GOOGLETRANSLATE function.

¹ The Eurosense collector is available at <https://collector.sensemaker-suite.com/collector?projectId=d1c06283-3a51-4050-ac6d-ea29ae75f32c>

Before creating the wordclouds the text has been preprocessed after being turned to lower case using the python NLTK natural language toolkit (“NLTK :: Natural Language Toolkit,” n.d.) :

- All sentences have been tokenized
- Stop words have been removed
- All words have been lemmatized

Finally the Python wordcloud module (Mueller [2012] 2023) was used to build the wordclouds presented. The responses have been processed for the entire data sample, and they are also shown for respondents from a single country for those with at least 15 responses,.

Wordclouds from all respondents

This section presents the wordclouds from the answers of all respondents to the 5 questions.

The following words recur across all group

- **People**: Central in all, emphasizing the focus on citizens and community.
- **Future**: Appears in most, indicating a forward-looking perspective.
- **Community** and **Society** Reflect collective identity and shared goals.

Looking at the specific questions :

- **EU is like.** Focuses on unity, shared values, and collective action
- **Europe is like** Emphasizes home, community, diversity, and cultural value. Key
- **Democracy is like.** Highlights freedom, democracy, and the role of government,.
- **Who should hear** Focuses on politicians, policymakers, and government, emphasizing listening to citizens and representing their interests
- **If you had one question question to ask.** Relates to democracy, society, and the future.

It is interesting to note the different tone that emerges from the answers to the question of European Union versus Europe, where Europe elicits more geographical notions, while the European union brings out notions of future, community.

EU is like . . .



Europe is like . .



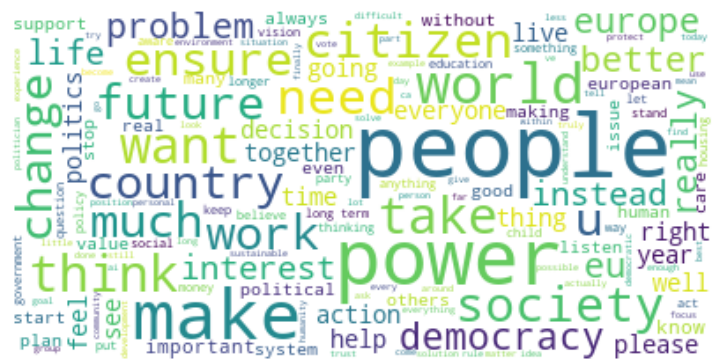
Democracy is like . . .



Who should hear my story.



If you could ask one question to people in power, what would it be



Answers by country

In this section the wordclouds are grouped by country, for countries with at least 15 answers. A generative AI (le chat Mistral) has been used to extract words that are particularly representative of each country. In the text below, italics represent the words identified by the AI in each wordcloud

EU is like...

- **Austria:** *Great, idea, and potential* reflect optimism.
- **Belgium:** *Community, future, and hope* suggest a pragmatic, forward-looking view.
- **Cyprus:** *Family, safety, and hope* reflect a personal, protective perspective.
- **France:** *Project, common, and future* emphasize collaboration.
- **Germany:** *Future, together, and peace* reflect unity and hope.
- **Italy:** *Home, hope, and dream* suggest idealism.
- **Netherlands:** *Together, future, and value* highlight cooperation.
- **Portugal:** *Beacon, law, and pride* reflect idealism and structure.
- **Spain:** *Idea, important, and democracy* suggest a foundational role.

Europe is like...

- **Austria:** *Future, important, and culture* reflect a forward-looking, inclusive view.
- **Belgium:** *Home, continent, and child* suggest a personal, familial connection.
- **Cyprus:** *Home, culture, and heritage* highlight its historical depth.
- **France:** *Home, continent, and economic* reflect a pragmatic, unified view.
- **Germany:** *Home, continent, and diverse* emphasize inclusivity and heritage.
- **Italy:** *Home, continent, and beautiful* reflect a strong cultural identity.
- **Netherlands:** *Home, continent, and together* highlight unity and collaboration.
- **Portugal:** *Home, beautiful, and freedom* suggest idealism.
- **Spain:** *Home, common, and diverse* reflect a collective identity.

Democracy is like...

- **Austria:** *cornerstone, smooth, and protect* suggest a structured, stable view.
- **Belgium:** *Best, important, and healthy* reflect a positive but cautious perspective.
- **Cyprus:** *need, hard, and minority* suggest challenges in upholding democracy.
- **France:** *Opinion, fail, and important* indicate a critical but participatory view
- **Germany:** *Best, air breathe, and work* reflect democracy as essential and active.
- **Italy:** *Best, air, and solution* suggest a vital, life-sustaining role.
- **Netherlands:** *Best, society, and least bad* indicate pragmatism.

- **Portugal:** *Free, equal, and illusion* suggest both idealism and skepticism.
- **Spain:** *Least bad, essential, and political* reflect a critical perspective.

Who should hear your story?

- **Austria:** *People, EU, and government* suggest a top-down approach.
- **Belgium:** *Politician, government, and everyone* reflect broad engagement.
- **Cyprus:** *Cypriot, government, and EU* suggest a focus on representation.
- **France:** *Government, EU, and citizen* point to institutional trust.
- **Germany:** *People, politician, and everyone* suggest inclusive engagement.
- **Italy:** *Politician, everyone, and citizen* reflect broad outreach.
- **Netherlands:** *People, politician, and EU* suggest a collaborative approach.
- **Portugal:** *People, public, and politician* reflect community engagement.
- **Spain:** *Politician, public, and society* suggest institutional and social outreach.

If you could ask one question to people in power...

- **Austria:** *Lie, social, and harm* suggest distrust.
- **Belgium:** *Power, people, and make* reflect a call for change.
- **Cyprus:** *Act, political, and corruption* suggest urgency.
- **France:** *EU, act, and vote* reflect a demand for accountability.
- **Germany:** *Power, make, and change* suggest a proactive stance.
- **Italy:** *Work, care, and country* reflect practical concerns.
- **Netherlands:** *Power, people, and future* suggest a forward-looking demand.
- **Portugal:** *Change, bureaucracy, and plan* reflect systemic concerns.
- **Spain:** *Future, change, and intelligent* suggest a demand for progress.

Austria (15 answers)

EU is like . . .

Europe is like . .

Democracy is like . . .

Who should hear my story.

If you could ask one question to
people in power, what would it be



Italy (98 answers)

EU is like . . .

Europe is like . .

Democracy is like . . .

Who should hear my story.

If you could ask one question to people in power, what would it be



Portugal (15 answers)

EU is like . . .

Europe is like . .

Democracy is like . . .

Who should hear my story.

If you could ask one question to
people in power, what would it be



Spain (18 answers)

EU is like . . .



Europe is like . .



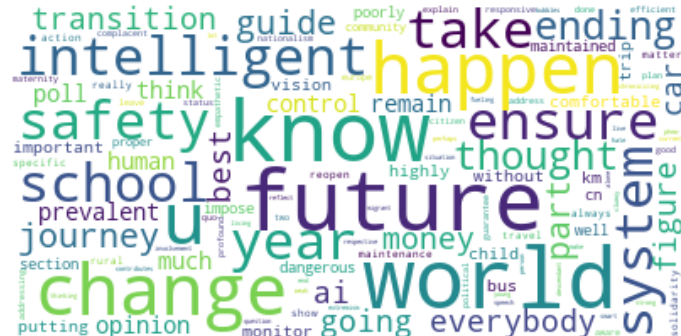
Democracy is like . . .



Who should hear my story.



*If you could ask one question to
people in power, what would it be*



Conclusions

While it is not possible to draw statistically valid conclusions from the data sample, and keeping in mind that the sample of respondents is heavily biased, it is interesting to look at some general trends emerging from the wordclouds. Some specific difference and trends have emerged from the wordclouds and are presented as a starting point for meaningful discussion in the context of semnsemaking sessions within the Eurosense community.

Appendix : Data Collection

After capturing the narrative and its title, participants are required to conduct a self-signification analysis of their narrative. The elements of the self-signification are Multiple-choice questions (MCQ), diads, triads and simple texts questions. We will look for correlations between MCQ, dyads, and triads using the workbench application available on the Cynefin platform.

MCQ: Multiple Choice Questions

1.2 What you described relates mainly to...(pick up to three)

Respondents can select up to three categories among the following, or choose "other" and define their own category

Mobility and transport

Fairness and social justice

Nature and climate

Health and Wellbeing

Migration and Refugees

Work and Occupation

Housing and Living Conditions

Democracy and Governance

Economy and Markets

Living together and Community

Peace and Security

1.3 In general this experience was...

Very positive / Positive Neutral / Negative / Very negative / I don't know Not sure

At the end of the form

6.3 The experience you described was...

a one time occurrence / rare but it happens from time to time / somewhat common /

very common / not sure

6.4 My experience is from...

Country list

6.5 I identify as...

Female / Male / Non-binary / Prefer not to say / Other

6.6 I am ...

Under 16 years old / 16 - 24 / 25 - 34 / 34 - 54 / 55 - 65 / over 65

Diads (Left-right)

2.1 In the experience you shared, what matters most are...:

Values and traditions - Change and innovation

2.2 In the experience you shared, others behave...

As expected - Unusually

2.3 In the experience you shared, everybody is treated ...

The same but it's not ok - Differently but it's not ok

Triads (Top-Left -Right)

3.1 The experience you shared relates to...

The past - The future - The present

3.1 The experience you shared relates to...

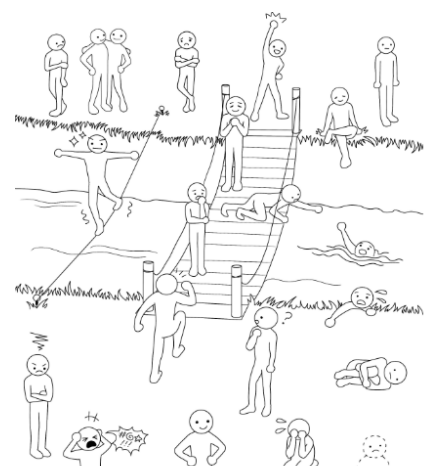
I want to take action - I want politicians to take action - I want to be left alone

3.4 In the experience you shared, your concern is...

Everything is changing - We move backwards - Nothing changes

Stones

4. In the experience you share, where do you see yourself and where do you see the others in the context of your experience above? Please place the dots on the corresponding figures below.



Participants can place a dot representing themselves and one representing the other actors participating in their narrative.

Open text questions

5.1 For me, the EU is like...

5.2 For me, Europe is like...

5.3 For me, democracy is like...

6.1 Who should hear your story?

6.2 If you could ask one question to people in power, what would it be?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Mueller, Andreas C. (2012) 2023. *Wordcloud*. Python. V. 1.9.1. November 4, released April.
<https://github.com/amueller/wordcloud>.

“NLTK :: Natural Language Toolkit.” n.d. Accessed October 10, 2025. <https://www.nltk.org/#>.