Public attitude and European integration in Liechtenstein

Liechtenstein joined the European Economic Area (EEA) on 1 May 1995. The EEA Agreement is still by far the most important agreement for Liechtenstein in shaping its relations with the European Union (EU) and is therefore at the centre of Liechtenstein's European policy. The experiences gained from EEA membership therefore have a decisive influence on public opinion in Liechtenstein on European integration. The analysis shows that EEA membership enjoyed great support in Liechtenstein, but that the Liechtenstein population as a whole remains Eurosceptic, which manifests itself above all in a strong rejection of EU membership.

EEA membership enjoys strong support in Liechtenstein. The support rate has been rather stable over the last ten years.

Explanations for high political and public support for EEA membership

- Favourable economic development after EEA accession
- High flexibility of the EU (derogations, adaptations etc.)
- No strongly negative effects on Liechtenstein's relations with Switzerland (so far)
- Little politicization of EEA membership (but slightly increasing)
- Lack of alternative options
- EEA membership has been "feasible" / efficient administration
- Pragmatic handling of institutional questions (monism; experiences with Customs Union Treaty)
- Narrative 1: EEA as a gain of sovereignty
- Narrative 2: EEA is economic integration and therefore the essence of European integration

84 % of the Liechtstein people evaluated the EEA Agreement as a **good agreement** for Liechtenstein. Only 5 % rated it as a **bad agreement** for Liechtenstein. (January 2020)

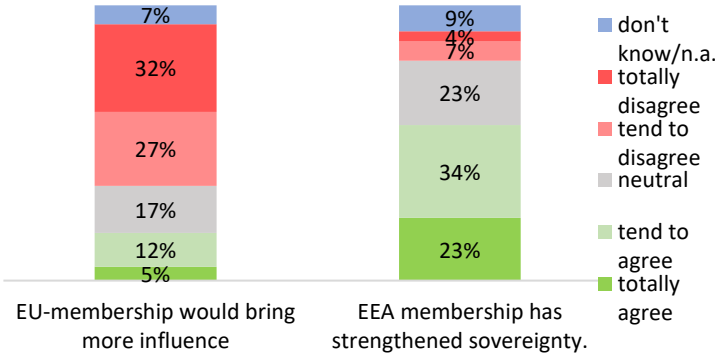
79 % of the Liechtenstein people think that the EEA Agreement is **important** for Liechtenstein. (June 2022)

69 % of the Liechtenstein people call the **EEA a model of success**.

By referring to the EEA/EFTA states' lack of voting rights in the EU decision-making process on EEA-relevant EU law, EEA membership is often linked with a loss of sovereignty. In Liechtenstein, however, the EEA is seen as a gain in sovereignty. How can we explain this?

EEA membership as a gain of sovereignty – the very specific perspective of a very small state

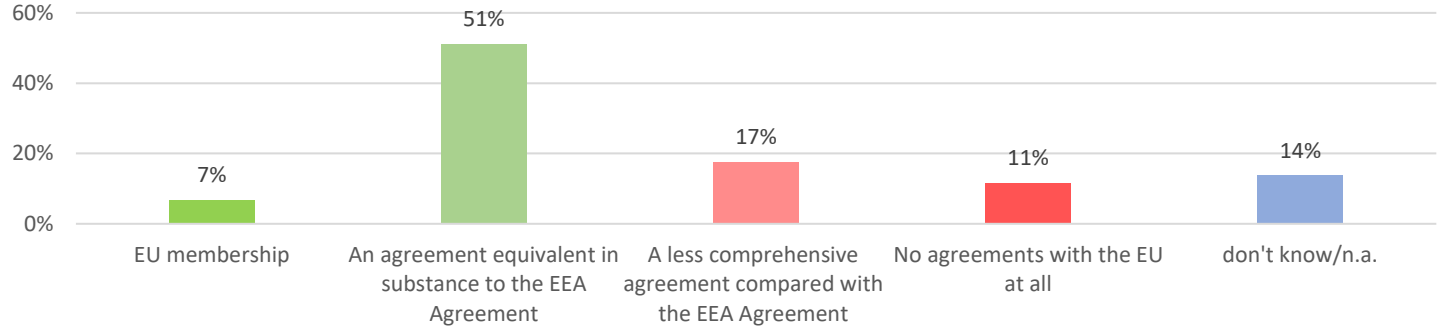
- EEA has strengthened international recognition of Liechtenstein as a sovereign state.
- EEA has given access to European decision-making bodies.
- Through the EEA Liechtenstein could demonstrate its ability to implement international requirements and thus its state capacity.
- EEA membership has detached Liechtenstein from Switzerland and diversified its dependency on other states.
- EEA membership led to a professionalization of the administration and strengthening of Liechtenstein's legal order.
- Liechtenstein gain legal certainty in cross-border economic activity.



Despite the positive perception of the EEA, Liechtenstein citizens remain very sceptical about EU membership.

Many of the reservations that were voiced at the beginning of the 1990s about EEA membership are now being voiced about EU membership. These include the fear of high costs, a restriction of direct democracy, a loss of autonomy or more bureaucracy. Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that Liechtenstein citizens tend to favour less rather than more integration in the event of the EEA being dissolved. Scepticism towards more integration comes from both the right and the left, with scepticism being even more pronounced on the right side of the political spectrum.

In case the EEA Agreement would be dissolved, which of the following option would you prefer for Liechtenstein?



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