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European Elections: Higher turnout expected, von der Leyen better known than her predecessors

Gütersloh (ots) -

60 percent of Europeans intend to cast their ballots in the European Elections in June. This would be around 10 percent more than in the last elections five years ago. This is the outcome of the new "eupinions" survey conducted by the Bertelsmann Stiftung. The survey also reveals that 75 percent of the European electorate know Ursula von der Leyen by name and face. This means that the current commission president is considerably better known than her predecessors. At the same time, 70 percent of those surveyed indicated that they felt inadequately informed about the commission president's work.

"Ursula von der Leyen has achieved something that other commission presidents before her have failed to do: A large majority of Europeans know her by name and also know what she looks like. This is worthy of note, as European politicians have difficulty in gaining media recognition in the member states," says Isabell Hoffmann, Bertelsmann Stiftung Europe specialist and co-author of the current eupinions study – "The Von der Leyen Effect: High visibility, low accountability". However, only 30 percent feel themselves sufficiently informed to be able to assess her performance.

More than 13,000 EU citizens were polled for the study. The commission president's handling of the Ukraine conflict is seen as her greatest achievement, followed by her management of the COVID pandemic. Von der Leyen has been able to boost her role on the international stage through her efforts in both crises. Von der Leyen's performance is seen as largely positive by the almost one third of those surveyed who felt themselves sufficiently informed to make an assessment. The lead candidate of the European People's Party (EPP) receives a 6 on average on a rising scale from 1 (worst assessment) to 10 (top value), with Belgians the most positive and her German compatriots the most critical.

Ursula von der Leyen took office in 2019 as the compromise candidate and initially had to battle for recognition and a majority in the EP. Even if she has cleared these hurdles, it is up to the negotiations between the heads of state and government in the European Council whom they nominate to the European Parliament as the new commission president.

The study's authors foresee two possible scenarios for the future. The commission president could either be directly elected by the European Parliament or directly by the citizens at the same time as the parliamentary elections.

"Particularly given that the EU aims to push forward on expansion with new member states, a whole series of reforms are needed to enhance the legitimacy of its leadership and to increase the EU's capacity for action," they say. The time to start out on this is directly after the elections, the authors believe.

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