

# EUROBAROMETER 60.1

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

## AUTUMN 2003

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ITALY

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## **Satisfaction with the lives they lead and expectations for the future**

76% of Italian citizens claim they are either very or fairly satisfied with the lives they lead, while 24% feel they are either not very or not at all satisfied. In comparison with November 2002, there has been a decrease in terms of general satisfaction levels, especially as far as the male sample is concerned.

Only 15% think that the economic situation in Italy will improve in 2004. In fact, 50% believe that the situation will worsen and 29% expect it will remain the same. Scepticism regarding future improvement of the state of the Italian economy has shown a marked increase. The percentage of 'pessimists' has grown by six percentage points (from 44% to 50%), approaching an absolute majority. People over 55 years of age are the most convinced that the Italian economic situation will get worse in 2004 and this group also includes the fewest optimists. Younger people, aged between 15 and 24, tend to be more confident about the future.

A direct relationship between trust in the economic performance and a positive view of the EU clearly emerges. Among those who assert their trust in the EU, the percentage of optimists regarding improving Italian economic trends reaches 22%, whereas the percentage drops to 13% when the same question is asked to those who said they did not trust in the EU.

## **Trust in national and European institutions**

Generally speaking, Italian citizens place more trust in the European Union than in their own national institutions, their own political parties and their own press organs. It is worthwhile underlining the fact that, compared with the EU average, the Italian sample is one of those with the least confidence in its own national institutions. Furthermore, the percentage of trust in the European Union expressed by Italians is considerably higher than the EU average (57% in Italy compared with an EU average of 41%).

The percentage of trust in the main European institutions rises above 50%, although a significant decrease is observed in comparison with the Autumn 2002 figures.

The operation of democracy at EU level meets greater approval from Italian citizens than its operation in Italy does. As regards the 2003 data, it can be clearly seen that Italians are less satisfied than other EU citizens regarding how democracy works in their own country. In particular, on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 stands for total lack of satisfaction and 10 for a maximum level), the Italian average is 2.15 compared with the European average of 2.53.

However, the Italian average exceeds the European average in relation to satisfaction with the operation of democracy in the EU. In fact, on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 stands for total lack of satisfaction and 10 for a maximum level), the Italian average is 2.47, as opposed to the EU average of 2.43.

### **Knowledge of the EU and sources of information**

On a scale of 1 to 10 measuring the level of familiarity with the EU (where 1 stands for “I know nothing” and 10 for “I know a lot”), the Italian average is 4.7 (EU average 4.36). The Italian relative majority ranks at level 3 (20%) and at level 5 (20%), respectively. The analysis of data shows that 71% of the Italian sample is in the 1-5 range (below the sufficient level of familiarity with the EU), while 29% is placed in the 6-10 range (equal or above the minimum level of familiarity).

Comparing the data collected in November 2003 with those of November 2002, it can be seen that the average level of knowledge regarding the EU dropped from 4.62 to 4.37 in Italy (and from 4.40 to 4.36 in the EU). In comparison with the data collected in April 2003, a slight increase from 4.35 to 4.37 is recorded, but levels remain considerably below those recorded during the two-year period 2001-2002, when the Italian average exceeded 4.60.

Television is the main source that Italians use to obtain information about the European Union: it is used by 63% of the people polled. 41% of those polled get their information from daily newspapers, magazines (23%), friends, colleagues and relatives (20%), radio (18%), Internet (15%) and books, brochures and leaflets (10%). The use of other sources is negligible.

By analysing the sources through which the Italian sample would like to be provided with information about the European Union, in addition to TV and newspapers, it is observed that a considerable number would also be happy to use specific publications on the subject of the EU, particularly more detailed ones, both in the form of pamphlets and books. Leaflets containing generic information are also appreciated and the use of Internet for this purpose is rising on a continual basis.

53% of the Italian sample considers that the national media talk about the right amount about the EU, while 21% say that they talk too little about it. A mere 10% consider that they talk too much about it. On a scale of 1 to 3 (where 1 stands for ‘too little’ and 3 for ‘too much’), the Italian average is 1.86 (compared with the EU average of 1.72).

According to 37% of the Italian sample, the national media present an unbiased view of the EU. It is worthwhile noting that 27% of those polled feel that the Italian mass

media present the European Union in 'too positive' a light, as opposed to 9% who think that it is presented in 'too negative' a light.

### **Assessment of the EU**

The three sectors in which, according to the Italian sample, the EU plays the most positive role are the fight against terrorism, foreign policy and defence. Also ranked highly is the EU's role in the fight against organized crime, the economic situation and the fight against unemployment. Nevertheless, none of these issues receives the support of an absolute majority of those polled.

53% of Italians, on the other hand, believe that the EU plays a negative role as regards rising prices/inflation, and only 15% do not share this opinion. A substantially negative assessment is expressed in Italy regarding the role played by the EU with respect to taxes (37% negative, 15% positive) and pensions (32% negative, 15% positive).

58% of the Italians give a positive assessment to the fact that their country is a member of the European Union, compared with the EU average of 48%. On a scale of 1 to 3 (where 1 stands for negative and 3 for positive assessment), Italy ranks at 2.51 - slightly above the EU average (2.36). Compared to Autumn 2002, the percentages recorded in Italy show a sharp drop in the positive assessment of the country's membership of the Union.

51% of Italians feel that their country has benefited from its membership of the Union, while 35% are of the opposite opinion. It is noteworthy that the share of the latter group has increased markedly (from 27% to 35%) over a period of just twelve months.

On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 stands for a very negative view of the EU and 5 for a very positive view), the Italian sample ranks at 3.63, in comparison with the 3.30 EU15 average. On the basis of the 1-5 scale, data show that compared to November 2002, the positive view of the EU has gone down in Italy from 3.76 to 3.36. Analysing the data, it would appear that, as far as Italy is concerned, the EU conjures up a very positive or fairly positive image for 60% of the sample (compared with 68% recorded the previous year), and a very negative or fairly negative image for 11% of the sample (compared with 6% recorded the previous year).

According to the Italian sample, the speed at which European integration is proceeding is too slow and needs to be accelerated. In particular, on a scale of 1 to 7 (where 1 stands for standstill and 7 for running as fast as possible), Italians think that EU integration is currently taking place at an average speed of 3.43 (against an European average of 3.85).

On the whole, Italians want integration to proceed at 5.50 (against the EU average of 4.73), and, therefore, at a faster speed than that which is currently perceived. It should be noted that the Italians are the European people who consider the present rate of progress as slowest and who, on average, want it to proceed at the highest speed.

Compared to the data collected in November 2002, Italians show a stronger perception both of the slow rate of EU integration and of the need for acceleration. They see the present rate as slower than in the past (from 3.73 to 3.43), and they would opt for a faster speed than the European average, although their rate preference records a slight decrease from 5.61 to 5.50.

With 72% of positive replies, the Italian sample is the most favourable (compared with the EU average of 53%) to the development of a European political Union.

In the near future, 60% of Italians see themselves as 'Italians and Europeans', while 25% of the Italian sample view themselves as 'only Italians', 8% as 'Europeans and Italians' and 4% as only 'Europeans'.

46% of the sample say they are very proud of being Italian, while 47% declare they are fairly proud. A small 4% say they are not very proud and only 1% not proud at all. On a scale of 1 to 4 (where 1 stands for 'not proud at all' and 4 for 'very proud'), the Italian average ranks at 3.40. Cumulative data show that 93% of those polled are very proud or fairly proud of being Italians, while only 5% are not very proud or not proud at all.

22% of Italian citizens are very proud of being Europeans, while 59% are fairly proud. 10% are not very proud of being Europeans and 3% not proud at all. Referring to the above scale of 1 to 4, the Italian sample ranks at 3.06, a significantly higher level than the European average (2.72).

The five areas that most of those interviewed look on as priority for the European Union concern: socio-economic topics (the struggle against unemployment, poverty and social exclusion) and national and international security (fight against terrorism and organized crime, maintenance of peace and security). For the first time since September 11 2001, the fight against terrorism has dropped to second place in order of importance, and the top position is, once again, occupied by the fight against unemployment (92%). At the bottom of the list of priorities can be found the reform of the European institutions and the way they work and the welcoming new Member States.

## **Enlargement**

61% of Italians are in favour of the enlargement of the Union, while 22% oppose it. Compared to November 2001, the most recent data do not show any marked changes in attitude, although there has been a slight increase of those who are not in favour (from 19% to 22%). The EU average of those who are in favour drops to 47%, while the percentage of those who are not rises to 36%.

Nonetheless, only 31% of Italian citizens consider the topic of enlargement a priority for the Union, while 58% of those polled do not see it as such. The EU average ranks at 27% and 62%, respectively.

Overall, Italians think that the EU is well prepared for the enlargement. 54% of the Italian sample considers the actions taken by the Union for the acceptance of new members as very effective or fairly effective, while 28% think these measures are not very effective or not at all effective. On a scale of 1 to 4 (where 1 stands for 'not effective at all' and 4 for 'very effective'), the Italian average ranks at 2.72 (compared with the EU average of 2.66).

Italians are the most in favour (37%) of accepting all the countries that ask to join the Union. 32% are of the opinion that the Union should only take in some of the countries that wish to join, while 14% think that no enlargement at all should take place. Compared to previously available data (e.g. November 2001), there has been a clear increase in Italians willing to accept all the countries that wish to join the Union (+8%), as well as a conspicuous decrease in those who would prefer to restrict enlargement to certain specific countries (-10%).

## **Institutional reforms and the European Constitution**

The reform of the EU institutions and the way they work is deemed a priority by 50% of Italians, although 35% do not share this view. Institutional reforms are at the bottom but one ranking of the topics selected as priorities by the Italian sample - ahead only of the enlargement issue.

74% of Italians feel that the EU needs a Constitution, and only 5% of the interviewed are of the opposite opinion. 21% of those interviewed do not have clear ideas on the matter. In November 2002, 79% of those polled were in favour of a European Constitution, 5% were against it and 16% said they didn't know. The latest data at European level show that 62% of the sample is in favour, 10% oppose it and 28% are uncertain. The Italians, together with the Greeks, are the most favourable.

A relative majority of Italians (34%) would like the President of the Commission to be elected directly by EU citizens. 45% are of the opinion that the term of office of

the Presidency of the Council is too short if significant results are to be achieved and that it should, therefore, be extended. A relative majority of Italians (33%) want the right of veto to remain in force in order to preserve fundamental national interests. 81% of Italians polled are in favour of the post of European Foreign Minister, who can be the spokesperson for a common EU position.

### **Common foreign and defence policy**

The analysis of the replies concerning the main issues of common foreign and defence policy shows that the Italians regard a stronger presence of the European Union on the international political stage as indispensable. In particular, most Italians (89%) share the opinion that, should an international crisis arise, the EU Member States should agree on a common position – and this perhaps reflects the fact that various were positions held by the individual Member States regarding the Iraq crisis. A broad majority (77%) of Italians also support the idea that the EU ought to have a seat of its own in the UN Security Council and have a rapid-action military force to be sent to trouble spots in the event of an international crisis.

Noteworthy (also with regard to the questions asked as to the role of the United States on the international scene, see below) is the fact that 70% Italians are convinced that EU foreign policy should be independent from that of the US, while 15% do not share this view and 15% do not express an opinion.

As regards the topics of immigration and asylum, the Italians polled largely share the view that a European common policy is required, and this confirms findings in previous surveys. In particular, 76% are in favour of a EU common immigration policy (compared with 10% of those not in favour), and 73% support the idea of a EU common asylum policy (12% are of the opposite opinion)

The absolute majority of the Italians want to entrust the EU not only with decision-taking power relating to foreign policy, but also to defence issues. 66% of the Italian sample, in fact, believes the EU should take decisions affecting defence policy, while 12% would prefer that this responsibility be entrusted to NATO and 11% to national governments.

As regards immigration and asylum, most people interviewed share the opinion, once again, that the Union should endorse a common European policy. In particular, 76% of Italians favour a common European immigration policy (as opposed to 10% of people who are unfavourable) and 73% are in favour of a common European asylum policy (compared with 12% who are unfavourable).

When it comes to the assessment of the role played by the United States and the EU in the international arena, the Italian sample is strongly in favour of the European

Union. The only area where the assessment of the role played by the US reaches 50% approval is for the fight against terrorism, while as regards world economic growth, the percentage of approval falls to 43%, but this is still higher than the negative assessment (28%). The percentage of negative assessment is in the majority when it comes to the role played by the US regarding the preservation of world peace, the fight against poverty and environment protection.

The role played by the EU on the international scene is, on the other hand, much more positively appraised by an absolute majority of those interviewed. As regards the preservation of peace in the world and the fight against terrorism, an absolute majority gave a positive assessment (60% and 52%, respectively) and the same applies when it comes to the issues of environment protection, world economic growth and the fight against poverty, for which a positive greatly exceeds a negative assessment.