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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The economic and employment context

38% of Italians feel that the economic situation will improve over the next twelve months, while 13% think it will worsen and 46% that it will remain unchanged. When looking at the five years to come, the percentage of those who think it will improve is definitely higher (41%), in contrast to only a slight increase in those who believe it will worsen (14%) and a significant decrease of those feel that it will remain unchanged (39%).

48% of the Italian sample thinks that, over the next twelve months, their country's economic situation is likely to worsen, while 17% believe it will improve and 30% that it will remain unchanged. Their views on the jobs market, above all, may be seen as particularly alarming, since 51% of Italians expressed the view that it is fated to worsen over the next twelve months. On the other hand, 16% of Italians foresee an improvement in the employment situation in Italy over the next twelve months, while 27% assess it will remain unchanged (in contrast to an EU average of 31%).

Trust in the national institutions, in the EU and its institutions

The army, the police and the European Union represent the three institutions in which Italians place most confidence. Interestingly, the European Union emerges as the political institution which the Italian sample trusts most (51%). On the other hand, political institutions at national level show remarkably high percentages of lack of trust among the Italian sample, with particular regard to political parties and the government (71% and 62%, respectively).

At least 50% of Italians have heard of the following European institutions: the Parliament, the Commission, the Council, the Court of Justice and the European Central Bank. As to other institutions and bodies, the percentage falls below this threshold. The Parliament, Commission, Council and Court of Justice are the only institutions recording levels of trust exceeding 50%. These institutions, together with the European Central Bank, are also the ones that play an important role according to at least 50% of the Italians surveyed. Overall, the tendency to place more confidence in the institutions in question and to ascribe

importance to the role they play emerges more clearly among the Italian sample compared with the EU average.

77% of Italians have at least heard of the European Commission, a percentage that is slightly lower than the European average (82%). 60% of Italians declare they trust the European Commission, a significantly higher percentage than the European average (52%). 77% of the Italians interviewed share the opinion that the European Commission plays an important role; a similar percentage to that recorded at European level (75%).

Perception and assessment of the EU

57% of the Italian poll sees their country's membership of the European Union positively, in contrast to 14% who consider it as negative. According to 50% of Italians interviewed, Italy has benefited from being a member of the European Union, while 35% feel it has not benefited from it and 15% abstained from answering. The EU evokes a more positive image in Italians compared to the European average: 64% of Italians surveyed have a very positive or fairly positive image of the EU, while 7% have a very negative or fairly negative image. At European level, a very positive or fairly positive image is evoked in 50% of those interviewed, and a very negative or fairly negative image in 33%.

According to 55% of the Italian poll, the fact of being a member of the EU implies greater security. However, this percentage decreases when they are asked to consider the impact of EU membership on economic stability (44%) and political stability (42%). It emerges rather clearly that Italians view the role played by their country within the EU as increasingly more effective and that there has been an increase in its influence in the Union over time. 62% of Italians feel that Italy plays a more influential role now than ten years ago, and 56% believe that Italy's voice counts in the European Union. Furthermore, 56% think that Italy is destined to have a still greater influence within the Union in the future.

The Italian sample ranks among the most favourable within the Union towards the development of a European political Union (69%). At European level, an increase in the percentage of citizens in favour of political integration is recorded – with the average rising from 50% in the autumn of 2003 to the current 59% – which is, in particular, thanks to the high levels recorded in the ten new Member States.

On a scale from 1 to 7 (where 1 stands for standing still and 7 for as fast as possible), according to the Italian poll, the speed at which European integration is proceeding is fairly slow. On average, Italians would like this integration to be accelerated. The data collected indicate that on the same scale from 1 to 7 (where 1 stands for standing still and 7 for as fast as possible), the majority of Italians interviewed (64%) hope that high rates of speed may be reached (levels 5-7).

53% of Italians believe that in five years' time the EU will play a more important role in their everyday life (compared with the EU average of 47%), while 9% consider that its role will be less important (compared with EU average of 7%) and 26% think that it will remain unchanged (compared with the EU average of 38%). In addition, 64% of the Italian poll wants the Union to play a greater role (compared with the EU average of 51%).

Knowledge about the EU

On a scale of 1 to 10 measuring citizens' levels of knowledge about EU issues (where 1 stands for "know nothing at all" and 10 for "know a great deal"), the relative majority of the Italian sample (19%) ranks at level 5. 76% of Italians interviewed are to be found between levels 1 and 5, while 22% place themselves between levels 6 and 10. The Italian sample shows a significant decrease in the average knowledge level about EU issues compared to the data collected in the autumn of 2003. In addition, 46% of Italians admit that they do not understand how the EU functions, compared with 39% of those interviewed who say they do.

The results of a small quiz confirm that, on average, Italian levels of knowledge about EU issues are low. In particular, it should be noted that 38% of those surveyed agree with the statement that the EU is currently made up of twelve Member States and that 23% are unable to give any answer (the combined figures come to 61%). These elements appear to be even more alarming in view of the fact that they were recorded soon after the accession of the ten new Member States, which took place on May 1st. It should also be noted that 38% of Italians endorse the statement that the last European elections took place in 2002 with only 33% responding that this is false. These data were collected only a few months after the June 2004 European elections.

Sources of information and mass media

Television, at 66%, is by far the main source used by Italians to obtain information about the European Union. 39% of the sample get their information from daily newspapers, 21% from magazines, 18% from friends, colleagues and relatives, 13% from the radio, 11% from Internet and 9% from books, brochures and pamphlets. By analysing the sources from which Italians would like to receive information concerning the European Union, in addition to TV and newspapers, it emerges that a considerable number favour specific, more detailed literature on the subject of the EU to be found in brochures and books.

45% of the Italian sample considers that their national media talk the right amount about the EU and 41% say that they talk too little about it. A mere 5% consider that they talk too much about it. The 2004 survey registers an increasingly high demand for supply of information on EU issues on behalf of the Italian press: the percentage of those interviewed who think that the national mass media do not give adequate coverage to the European Union rose by 20 points, while the percentage of those who declare their satisfaction dropped by 8 points.

Italian citizens and the EU

When asked the question *What does the European Union mean to you personally?*, most of Italians answered: ‘freedom to travel, study and work anywhere’ and ‘the Euro’ – both sharing top position – followed by ‘peace’ and ‘a stronger presence in the world’. Only 10% of those interviewed opted for ‘higher unemployment’ and 7% for ‘more bureaucracy’. In fact, the EU arouses enthusiasm, hope or trust in the Italian sample to a larger extent than the European average. Italians appear to associate the EU with the negative concepts of indifference, anxiety, mistrust and rejection more rarely than the European average.

Italians rank slightly below the European average when asked about their satisfaction with the way democracy works in the Union. In particular, 45% of those interviewed declare they are very or fairly satisfied, while 39% are not very or not at all satisfied – the percentages recorded at EU level are 48% and 35%, respectively.

In the near future, 50% of Italians see themselves as both ‘Italian and European’, while 35% view themselves as ‘Italian only’, 11% as ‘European and Italian’ and 2% as only ‘European’. The data collected show that 91% of those interviewed declare they are very proud or fairly proud of being Italian, while a low 8% declare they are not very proud or not proud at all of this. When it comes to the question of being proud of being European,

81% of the Italian sample are very proud or fairly proud, while 19% are not very proud or not proud at all of this.

Priorities of the EU

In the top two positions, Italians cite economic and social priorities such as fighting unemployment and poverty. However, Italians accord less importance to these two issues when compared with citizens in general across the EU (-7 points and -9 points, respectively). On the other hand, Italians record higher percentages than the EU average of those tending to consider that the European Union should be getting closer to its citizens and fighting against illegal immigration as two areas of high priority.

From the Italian sample emerges a positive appraisal of the role played by the EU in the fields of foreign policy (46%), fighting terrorism (45%), defence (43%), fighting crime (39%) and protection of the environment (38%). On the other hand, the majority of the Italian sample expressed a negative view regarding the role played by the EU in almost all economic and employment-related areas, especially with respect to rising prices and inflation, where the European Union's role is judged negatively by the absolute majority of those surveyed (52%). This is an item of information that gives food for thought, especially in the context of the perception of the increase of the cost of living in connection with the introduction of the common currency, a subject that always arouses animated discussions.

On the question of fears associated with the European Union, for Italians the transfer of jobs to the new member countries where production costs are lower comes first. In fact, 65% of those interviewed share this opinion. High figures were also recorded by those citing a fear of an economic crisis, that Italy will have to pay more and more to the EU and that drug trafficking and international organised crime will increase. Among other issues that arouse widespread concern, are that Italian farmers will face more difficulties (51%) and the loss of power for smaller member states.

The euro , enlargement and the European Constitution

With a figure of 62%, the percentage of Italians in favour of European Monetary Union with one single currency, the euro is at its the lowest level since the introduction of the new currency. For the first time, the Italian figure is below the EU average (63%).

As regards the issue of enlargement, Italians are distinctly more in favour than the EU average of granting other countries European Union membership in the next few years. In particular, 61% of Italians support the idea of a further EU enlargement (compared with 53% of the overall European Union sample). In Italy, 22% of those polled expressed their opposition in this regard, in contrast to the higher EU average (35%).

73% of the Italian sample is in favour of a European Constitution, compared with the 68% EU average. In Italy, 14% of those polled did not give their approval to the idea of a European Constitution – lower than the EU average (17%).

Common EU foreign and defence policy

72% of the interviewed sample is in favour of a European common foreign policy among the member states of the European Union towards other countries (compared with an EU average of 69%) and only 14% are against it (compared with the 20% EU average). Also the concept of a common defence and security policy among EU member states is widely supported by the Italian sample: 79% are in favour and only 12% against.

When it comes to the possible ways and options by which to develop these two policies, most Italians (80%) share the opinion that, should an international crisis arise, EU member states should agree on a common stand. High levels of support are also recorded (73%) for the introduction of a European Union Minister for foreign affairs, who could be the spokesperson for a common EU position, as well as for the idea that the EU ought to have a seat of its own in the UN Security Council (71%) and have a rapid military reaction force (69%).

An important aspect that provides food for thought is the 70% figure recorded by the Italian sample of those who consider that the EU's foreign policy should be independent from that of the US. The Italian data are in line with the EU average.

As regards the issues of immigration and asylum, Italians confirm the widely shared view that a European common policy in this area is required. 75% of the poll is in favour of a EU common immigration policy (13% are not in favour), and 71% support the idea of a EU common asylum policy (12% oppose it). The results would appear to clearly indicate that Italians see immigration as a problem that mainly needs to be tackled at European level.

Comparison between the US and the EU

In comparing the role of the US and the EU in major international matters, Italians clearly show higher respect for the latter. The area in which the role played by the US receives the most negative assessment by Italians is the fight against poverty in the world (49%), followed by the safeguard of world peace (48%) and environmental protection (45%). Of particular interest is the assessment of the role played by the US in the fight against terrorism. This was seen to be positive by 50% of the Italian poll in autumn 2003, but now registers a majority of negative responses (42%) with only 37% of the poll giving a positive appraisal.

On the other hand, the role played by the EU on the international scene is much more favourably rated by the absolute majority of those interviewed, both in Italy and throughout the Union. Highest positive assessments are recorded in the case of its role regarding the fight against terrorism and the preservation of peace in the world (47% and 45%, respectively). Positive evaluations also greatly outweigh negative ones regarding the issues of environmental protection, growth of the world economy and the fight against poverty in the world.