

# EUROBAROMETER 63.4

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

SPRING 2005

NATIONAL REPORT

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**ITALY**

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## **The economic and employment trend, future perspectives**

- Most Italians expect that over the next twelve months, and for the future five years, their personal condition will improve

37% assess that over the next twelve months their personal situation will improve while, for 14%, it will worsen and for 44% it will remain unchanged. When thinking about the following five years, an increase is recorded in the percentage of those who think it will improve (40%), against only a slight increase in those who believe it will worsen (15%) and a significant decrease in the number of Italians who predict that it will remain unchanged (36%).

- However, for the majority of the Italian sample, the overall national economic and employment context is doomed to worsen over the next twelve months

43% of the Italian sample expects that, over the next twelve months, the national economic situation is likely to worsen. The labour market, above all, is seen as particularly alarming, since 46% of the Italian sample expresses the view that it will deteriorate over the next twelve months.

- Nonetheless, there are optimistic expectations for a positive future evolution of the national economic situation

Data seem to suggest a greater trust in the Italian economy improving over the next twelve years compared to Autumn 2004. 19% of the poll share optimistic expectations, against a 5 percentage point decrease in pessimistic outlooks (from 48% to 43%).

- Favourable comments regarding the Euro currency are on the rise in Italy.

67% of those polled are in favour of the common currency, while 26% are of the opposite opinion. The current data indicate a slight increase in favourable comments expressed regarding the Euro, after the sharp drop recorded in Autumn 2004.

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

- Italians definitely trust the EU more than their main national institutions

Italians place more confidence in the EU than in their national institutions and the UN. In particular, 56% state they trust the European Union, against 33% of those who express the opposite opinion. The United Nations is second in the 'trust' ranking (with 50% expressing their trust, compared with 39% holding the opposite opinion), while national institutions and political parties do not have the trust of the majority of the sample.

- The European Parliament, the Commission and the Central Bank emerge as the most familiar institutions.

The majority of the Italian sample has heard of the European Parliament, Commission, Council, Court of Justice and European Central Bank. The European Parliament, the Commission and the European Central Bank represent the three institutions that are most familiar to Italians and in which Italians place most confidence and importance.

74% of the Italian sample has heard of the European Commission. 60% state they trust the European Commission, thus recording a slight increase compared to the overall European

average (46%). 77% of Italians surveyed consider that the European Commission plays an important role – a higher percentage than the overall European average (72%).

### **Perception and assessment of the EU**

- Positive assessments regarding Italy's membership of the EU are still declining; nonetheless the decrease is less marked than in previous surveys

56% of the Italian sample attributes a positive assessment to Italy's membership of the European Union (the European average is 54%). Only 16% of Italians surveyed consider it as negative (15% being the European average), while 24% deem Italian membership to be neither good nor bad. Compared to the 2004 survey, a further decrease is recorded, although less marked, in the percentage of those that assess Italian membership to the Union positively.

- The percentage of those who consider that Italy has benefited from being a member of the Union is on the rise

52% of the Italian sample feels that their country has benefited from being a member of the EU (compared with 55% at the European level), while 34% are of the opinion that it has not benefited at all (compared with 33% of Europeans) and 14% abstain from answering. The data suggest a slight increase compared to the 2004 survey.

- The EU evokes a more positive image in Italians compared to the European average

The EU evokes a more positive image in Italians compared to the overall European sample. When considering data altogether, 63% of the Italians interviewed have a very positive or fairly positive image of the EU (this percentage was 63% last year), while 10% have a very negative or fairly negative image.

- Italians are ranked among the most favourable within the Union towards European political integration

The Italian sample (69%) ranks among the most favourable within the Union towards the development of a European political Union, compared with 58% at European level.

- The EU mainly represents free movement, peace and the Euro currency.

For most of the Italians surveyed (44%), the EU represents freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in Europe, followed by peace (31%) and the Euro currency (30%). For 25% of the Italian sample, it also represents economic prosperity, democracy and a stronger voice in the world. Among the positive aspects, cultural diversity is also mentioned (19% of those interviewed), followed by welfare (13%). Among the negative aspects with which the EU is associated are unemployment (13% of those interviewed), a waste of money (11%), insufficient controls at external borders (9%), increase in crime (8%), loss of cultural identity (6%) and bureaucracy (5%).

- 'Delocalisation' is seen as one of the main fears associated with the European Union

On the question of fears associated with the European Union, for Italians the transfer of jobs to other Member States where production costs are lower (the so-called delocalisation process) comes first. In fact, 70% of those polled share this fear. 60% of the Italian sample expresses concern that Italian farmers may have to face greater difficulties, and 58% regarding an

economic crisis. Significant numbers also express the fear that drugs trafficking and crime may increase (57%).

- However, the overall perception that Italians have of the EU is definitely more positive than the European average

Generally speaking, Italians express a more positive assessment toward the European Union and its main aspects compared to the European average. In fact, the EU arouses enthusiasm, hope or trust in the Italian sample to a larger extent than across Europe overall. Italians definitely appear to associate the EU with the concepts of disinterest, anxiety, mistrust and rejection to a lesser degree than the European sample. Among the elements associated with the EU, Italians tend to assess the aspect of security more positively, as well as the repercussions on political and economic stability, although the latter to a minor extent.

- Italians feel more linked to the European Union than the European average

92% of the Italians surveyed are much or fairly much linked to their country, 88% to their city and 88% to their region. When considering the bond that links them to the EU, this percentage falls to 75%, which is, in any case, somewhat higher than the European average (66%).

- Nonetheless, most Italians do not think that the voice of their country has enough weight at European level

The percentage of those who think that Italy does not play an influential role in the European Union rises from 51%, recorded in 2004, to 54% (53% being the European average). Only 36% of the Italian sample shares the opinion that the voice of Italy is influential within the Union (38% being the European average). These data must be nonetheless assessed in the light of the fact that 46% of the Italian sample declare that they are not familiar with the mechanisms of how the European Union functions.

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

- The self-assessment that Italians make as to their knowledge of the EU indicates an increase in familiarity, although the actual level of knowledge still remains below the sufficiency threshold

On a scale of 1 to 10 measuring the level of acquaintance with EU issues (where 1 stands for 'I know nothing' and 10 for 'I know a lot'), the relative majority of the Italian sample (16%) is ranked at level 5, followed by level 6 (15%). The analysis of collected data indicates that 68% of Italians are at levels between 1 and 5 (below the sufficiency threshold), while 30% place themselves between levels 6 and 10. The Italian sample shows a significant increase in the level of self-assessment of overall knowledge of European issues compared to the 2004 survey.

- Television continues to be the main source of information that Italians rely on to obtain information on the European Union

67% of those surveyed in Italy use television for information on the EU. 36% of those interviewed rely on newspapers, 16% on magazines, 17% on friends, colleagues and relatives, 13% on the radio, 11% on the Internet and 8% on books and brochures.

- Italians see television as the main vehicle for the spreading of information on the EU, but regard the written press as the most objective medium.

48% of the Italian sample considers that television covers the issues related to the European Union in a satisfactory way; this percentage falls to 33% where radio is concerned. Written press coverage is deemed adequate by 49% of those interviewed. However, the press represents the national media that features EU issues in the most objective way for the absolute majority of the Italian sample (53%), followed by television (52%) and radio (44%).

- A relative majority of the Italian sample is not aware of the exact number of Member States and when the last European elections took place

41% of the Italian poll agrees with the statement that the EU is currently made up of fifteen Member States and 28% are unable to give any answer (the combined figures come to 69%). It should also be noted that 47% of the Italian sample endorses the statement that the last European elections took place in 2002, and 31% are unable to give any answer. Thus only 22% actually know when the most recent European elections took place.

### **Policies and priorities of the EU according to Italians**

The policy proposal associated with the activity carried out by the European Union that meets with greatest favour among Italians is the introduction of classes in schools on how the EU functions (85%). However, considerable consensus is also reached when it comes to other issues, such as common foreign policy (78%), common security and defence policy (74%) and the proposal for a European Constitution (74%). The percentage of Italians in favour of the Euro currency is definitely on the rise (67%), but consensus is lower – although with percentages higher than 50% - when it comes to issues such as strengthened cooperation (54%) and enlargement (53%).

- The combat against unemployment and poverty are ranked in the two top positions of EU priorities

According to the Italian sample, the main priorities of the EU should be the fight against unemployment (38%) and against poverty and social exclusion (31%). Across Europe, these two items reach 47% and 44%, respectively. The safeguarding of peace and security in Europe is regarded as key by Italians (25%), together with the establishment of closer links between European institutions and its citizens (25%). The Italian figures are higher than the European average.

### **EU budget and financial resources**

- The majority of Italians interviewed do not consider that an increase in the size of the EU budget is justified

39% of the Italian sample considers that the Union's political objectives do not justify an increase in the EU budget. 37% of those interviewed assess that the EU should be provided with greater financial resources in view of its political objectives. A noticeable growth in the percentage of those who are against any increase in budget is recorded across Europe (50%), with a consequent decrease of those who are in favour of such an increase (32%).

### **Common foreign and defence policy of the EU**

- Italians are ranked among the most favourable of European countries to a common foreign and defence policy of the Union

74% of the interviewed sample is in favour of a European common foreign policy toward outside countries (67% being the European average) and only 13% are against it (21% being the European average). The idea of a defence and security policy common to all the EU member States is supported by 78% of the Italian sample, while 10% are against it. An important element is the recorded 78% of the Italian sample, convinced that EU foreign policy should be independent from the US; only 13% do not share this view. 76% of the Italians surveyed are in favour of a common EU immigration policy (against 12% of those not in favour), and 72% support the idea of a common EU asylum policy (13% are of the opposite opinion).

- Assessments expressed on the role played by the US and the EU on main international issues indicate a higher consideration for the latter

Views expressed by the Italian sample on the role played by the US and the EU on main international issues indicate a higher consideration for the latter. In particular, the topic where the US reaches the highest percentage of negative assessments is the safeguard of worldwide peace (44% of the Italians interviewed see Washington playing a negative role in this issue), followed by the combat against poverty in the world (42% of the Italian sample), and environmental protection (40% of the Italian sample). On the contrary, the role played by the European Union in the international scenario, whatever issue is concerned, is much more positively appraised by the absolute majority of those interviewed both in Italy and across Europe.

### **Enlargement and Turkey**

- Italians are ranked among the most favourable of European countries to further enlargement of the Union

Italians are definitely more in favour toward further enlargements of the Union than the European average. In fact, 59% of the Italians interviewed share this view compared with 50% of the overall European sample. 31% of those surveyed in Italy assess that enlargement should encompass all countries that wish to apply for adhesion, against 23% of the European sample. Percentages are similar in Italy and across Europe when it comes to the question of restricting adhesion to a few countries (41% in Italy and 42% across Europe). Opposition to any kind of enlargement is 15% in Italy and 25% across Europe overall.

- However, Italy records a lower percentage of agreement when it comes to enlargement involving the Balkan countries and the area of ex-Yugoslavia

The list of countries that meet the favour of the Italian sample for a possible future enlargement of the Union is led by Switzerland (73% of those in favour; 17% of those against), followed by Norway (72%; 16%) and Iceland (67%; 18%). Croatia reaches 49% of favourable comments and 35% of opposition, followed by Bulgaria and Romania (45% and 43% of favourable comments and 39% and 41% of opposition, respectively). None of the other countries included in the list – notably, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia-Montenegro, Macedonia, Albania and Turkey reaches 40% of favourable views, except for Ukraine. On the contrary, in all cases those opposing it exceed those in favour of it.

- Italians feel that Turkey is relatively close to the EU for history and geography, but the gap between the two is still too wide to allow for its accession.

Turkey is seen as a part of Europe for its history (54% of the Italians surveyed, against 55% of the European average) or for its geography (45% of the Italians surveyed, against 42% of the

European average). Nonetheless, cultural differences that divide Turkey from the current Member States of the Union are still too strong to allow for its accession.

Among the less positive factors that determine the opposition to Turkey's adhesion we find the fear of increased immigration toward the more developed countries of the Union (expressed by 57% of the Italians interviewed). If Turkey wants to become a member of the Union in ten years' time, it should systematically respect human rights, according to 76% of the Italian sample, or significantly improve its economic level, according to 73%.

### **European Constitution**

63% of Italians have heard of the European Constitution but are not familiar with its content. Furthermore, 22% are not aware of the existence of a European Constitution, and only 15% had heard of its existence and claimed to know its overall content. When considering these data, it emerges that 85% of the Italian sample overall are not familiar with the content of the European Constitution, or never heard of the existence of such a Constitution.

The low level of familiarity of the contents of the European Constitution on the part of Italians is confirmed by the results of the short knowledge test focusing on the provisions of the Constitutional text that was submitted to the Italians interviewed.

The analysis of the average results of the knowledge test completed by the Italian sample on the contents of the Constitutional text clearly shows a majority of 'I don't know' answers (44%). The average of correct answers reaches 35% - a percentage that is in any case higher than wrong answers (21%). Even though the average level of acquaintance with the contents of the European Constitution is quite low, Italians appear not to have many doubts on the fact that the adoption of the EU Charter on behalf of all Member States would have a positive impact on the Union. The results of the survey suggest that the adoption of the Constitution would render the European Union more efficient (78% of the Italian sample), or more democratic (77%), or more transparent (75%). Moreover, 74% of the Italians surveyed share the opinion that through the adoption of the Constitution the EU would become more socially minded, or would acquire a stronger role in the world (73% of the Italian sample), or greater economic competitiveness (72% of the Italian sample).