

# EUROBAROMETER 63.4

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

SPRING 2005

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**MALTA**

The survey was requested and coordinated by the Directorate General Press and Communication.

This report was produced for the European Commission's Representation in Malta.

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The interpretations and opinions contained in it are solely those of the authors.

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### **Climate of Opinion**

Maltese people tend not be negative in their outlook to life and often focus more on economic matters. As indicated in previous surveys, the Maltese are generally more concerned with the national situation rather than that of their household. Overall expectations have improved. When asked about their expectations of their life in general for the next twelve months 40% of Maltese interviewees said their lives will be better, 13% said it will be worse and 39% said the next twelve months of their life in general will be the same. 46% said that, compared to five years ago, their present situation has improved, 27% said that it has stayed the same and 27% said that the situation got worse. 51% said that in the next five years their personal situation will improve, 23% said their situation will stay the same and 11% said it will get worse.

This confidence as regards the aspects of the personal life of interviewees is not reflected in changes in certain national indicators such as employment or Malta's economic situation whose future is still perceived negatively. When asked about their expectations for the next twelve months regarding the economic situation in their country, 23% of Maltese respondents said that it will get better, 36% said that it will get worse and 28% said that it will stay the same. 46% said that, compared to five years ago, their present situation has improved, 27% said that it has stayed the same and 27% said that the situation had got worse.

### **The main concerns of citizens**

Although citizens are satisfied with their current life and are relatively optimistic about their future, they are more pessimistic about certain areas of the situation of their country, such as the economic situation and employment. Unemployment is the main concern across the whole European continent. Cited by 50% of respondents, it is still the main worry among citizens and the level of concern has grown constantly since 2003.

When asked about what they thought were the most important issues facing Malta, interviewees generally confirmed the worries they expressed in the previous survey. 42% mentioned the economic situation, 17% mentioned illegal immigration and 14% mentioned crime. 20% pointed at pension issues reflecting a national debate about pension reform that has been ongoing. 9% of interviewees mentioned the protection of the environment, while 12% referred to taxation. 23% stated that the rising prices/inflation was an important issue - which is understandable given that the rate of

inflation in Malta has been higher than elsewhere in Europe by close to 3 percentage points. Only 1% mentioned terrorism as a priority issue, 4% housing issues, 4% the healthcare system, 3% the education system and 3% public transport issues.

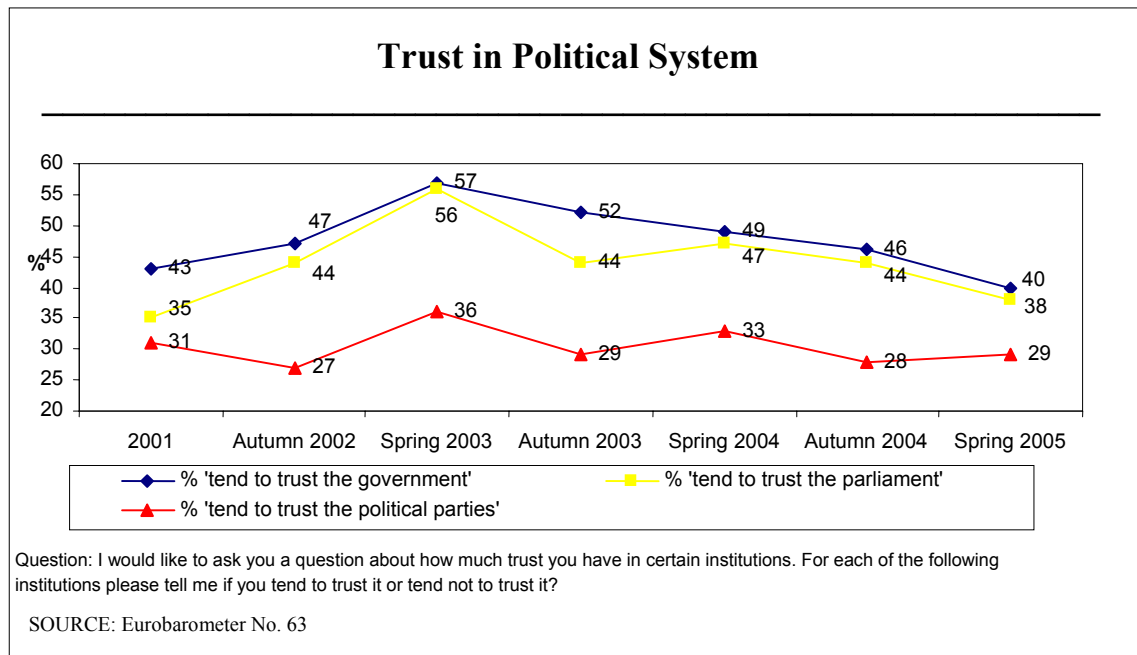
21% judge the current situation of the Maltese economy as positive, whilst 77% say it is negative. Only 1% says the Maltese economy is in a very good state. 20% say it is rather good, 54% say it is rather bad while 23% say it is very bad. 33% view the current situation of the Maltese environment as good and 65% see it as bad. When asked about their financial situation, 68% view the situation as good and 31% as bad.

Overall, the latest Eurobarometer survey suggests an improvement in respondents' short-term expectations. The share of those who expect that their life will be better in the next twelve months increased from 34% in Autumn 2004 to 39%, whereas the share of those who expect the quality of their life to get worse continued to drop. Similarly, although respondents remain on balance pessimistic regarding the country's short-term economic prospects, the share of those who anticipate a deterioration in economic activity, at 36%, fell to its lowest level since Autumn 2002. Perceptions on economic activity in part reflect an underlying recovery in Malta's key tourist industry that has contributed to a considerable drop in the number of gainfully occupied in the first half of the current year.

### **Trust in Institutions**

Politics occupies a central role in Maltese society, with turnout in national elections exceeding 95%. The downward trend in public support for the government persisted, mainly due to negative effects of fiscal austerity measures and public enterprise restructuring on personal disposable incomes. In fact, the share of those who say they trust the government was the lowest recorded in a Eurobarometer survey during the last five years. Trust in the Maltese parliament also fell, possibly reflecting the drop in support for the government that enjoys the support of a clear majority in parliament. On the other hand, trust in political parties remained stable at 29%. Trust in the Maltese government remains high when compared to the results in the 25 EU member countries overall.

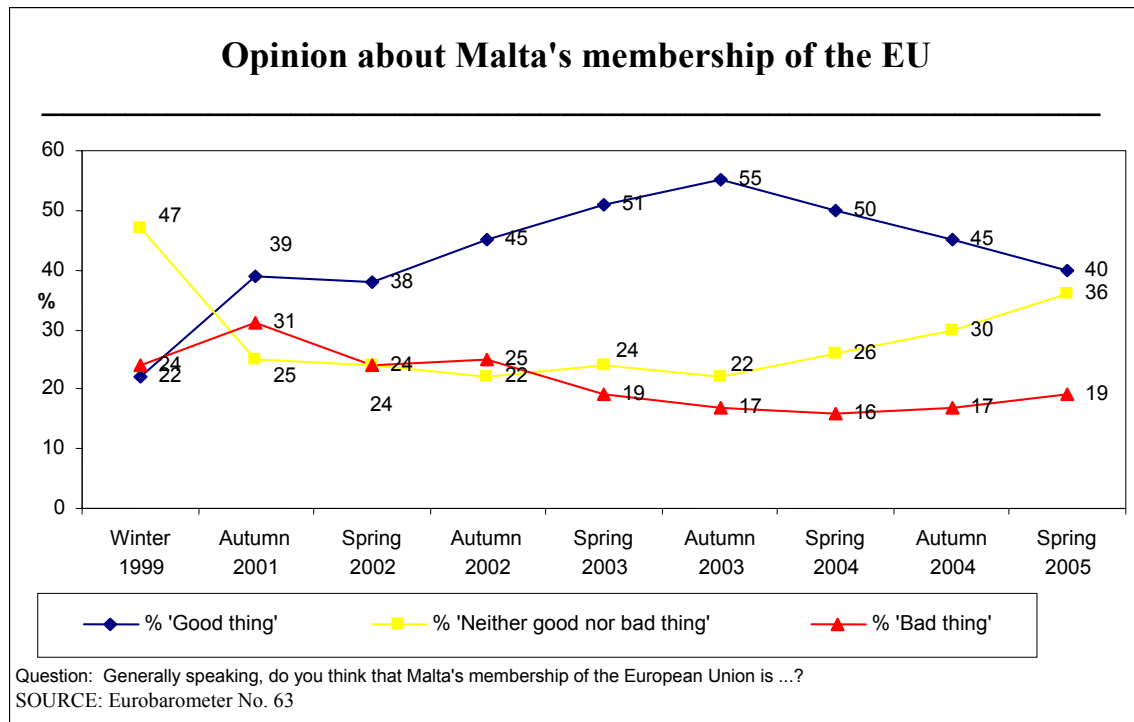
40% said that they trust the government whilst 50% mistrust the government. 38% trust the Maltese parliament whilst 48% do not.



In terms of international institutions, 53% of Maltese citizens tend to trust the European Union whilst 31% mistrust it. 60% tend to trust the United Nations and 18% tend not to. 61% of Maltese respondents are in favour of the development of a European political union while 25% are against.

### Support for European Union membership

The share of respondents who believe that their country's membership of the EU is a positive development for Malta fell further, down to 40% from 45% in the last survey and by 15 points when compared to a year and a half ago. 40% said that membership in the European Union is a good thing, 19% said it is a bad thing and 36% said that it is neither good nor bad. 53% said that they benefited from Malta's membership of the European Union and 30% said that they did not benefit from it. However, the decline in public support for the EU mainly reflects a shift towards the opinion that EU membership will have an overall neutral effect on Malta. Support for Malta's membership of the EU peaked in autumn 2003, shortly after the holding of the EU accession referendum and the general elections, but has followed a downward trend ever since. The latter may reflect increased awareness that the country's challenges, especially those related to public finances and international competitiveness, cannot be solved through EU membership alone.



### The European Union's image

When asked about their impressions of the European Union, 10% of Maltese interviewees said that the EU conveys a very positive image, 38% said that the EU presents a fairly positive image, 27% were neutral, 14% said that the image was fairly negative and 6% said that the image the EU conveys was a negative one.

When asked about what the European Union meant to them, 35% of Maltese respondents said that the EU means peace, 33% economic prosperity, 31% democracy, 23% social protection, 51% the freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the European Union, 25% cultural diversity, 34% a stronger say for Malta in the world, 21% the Euro, 18% unemployment, 12% bureaucracy, 11% waste of money, 15% loss of our cultural identity, 5% more crime while for 7% it means a lack of control of Malta's external frontiers.

When asked what personal feeling they get from the European Union, 14% of Maltese respondents said the EU resonates enthusiasm, 47% said it gives them hope, 33% attributed trust, 12% said they feel indifferent, 12% stated that it made them feel anxious, 15% mistrust the EU and 4% reject it. When asked, 58% of Maltese respondents said they feel safe being part of the EU while 32% do not feel safe. 47% of Maltese respondents said they agree that Malta is more stable economically being a member of

the EU whilst 40% disagree. 48% of Maltese respondents feel Malta is more politically stable as a member state of the EU whilst 39% disagree.

In their opinion, 55% said that in five years' time the European Union will play a more important role in their daily life, 8% said it will play a less important role whilst 30% said the EU will play the same role in their daily life. When asked about what role they would like the European Union to play in their life in 5 years time, 64% said that they would like the European Union to play a more important role, 12% a less important one whilst 18% said they would like it play the same role as currently.

Some people may have fears about European integration. Survey participants were given a list of things and asked whether they were personally afraid of them. 51% said they are afraid of a loss of power for smaller member states whilst 41% said they are not afraid of the EU. 51% said they are currently afraid of an increase in drug trafficking and international organised crime whilst 44% said that they are not. 39% of respondents stated that they are currently afraid of the Maltese language being used less whilst 58% are not. 51% said they are afraid that Malta would have to pay more to the EU whilst 32% think not. 46% are afraid of the loss of social benefits whilst 41% are not. 39% are afraid that Malta will lose its national identity and culture whilst 58% are not. 50% are afraid of an economic crisis whilst 41% think otherwise. 65% are afraid of job transfers to other member states that have lower production costs whilst 24% do not believe so. 50% are afraid that local farmers will have more difficulties whilst 36% disagree. 49% are afraid of the end of the Maltese lira whilst 43% are not.

### **Information on the European Union**

When asked which sources they use when looking for information about the European Union, its policies and institutions, 64% of Maltese interviewees said they get their information from TV, 26% from radio, 6% said they get their information from meetings, 21% from discussions with relatives, friends, colleagues, 30% from daily newspapers, 12% from other magazines, 2% from telephone conversations while 5% said they never look for EU related information.

13% of Maltese respondents feel that there is too much EU related information on Maltese television stations, 43% said there is the right amount and 32% feel that there is too little EU information on TV. 8% feel that there is too much EU information on radio, 34% say there is the right amount while 26% of respondents state there is a lack of EU information on local radio stations. When asked the same question about the press, 10% answered that there is too much EU information, 45% feel that the amount of information is just right while 18% felt there is a lack of EU related information in the printed media.

### **The EU's role in the world**

When asked what the priority actions of the European Union should be, 32% said that a priority for the EU should be fighting illegal immigration. This percentage is higher than the European average - which is understandable given the high media profile of this

summer's regular arrivals of immigrants on Maltese shores. 10% of Maltese respondents said fighting terrorism should be a priority while 4% mentioned welcoming new member states. 18% said that the EU should concentrate on getting closer to European citizens for example by giving them more information about the European Union, its policies and its institutions. 6% said that the successful implementation of the single European currency, the euro, should be a priority. 34% mentioned the fight against poverty and social exclusion while just 1% mentioned the need to assert the EU's political and diplomatic importance globally. 27% referred to maintaining peace and security in Europe as a priority, 18% mentioned the need to guarantee the rights of the individual and respect for the principles of democracy in Europe.

54% of Maltese respondents agree that the European Union should have greater financial means given its political objectives whilst 17% feel that the European Union's political objectives do not justify an increase in the Union's budget. When asked their opinion about what should be prioritised by the EU to improve the performance of the European economy, Maltese respondents suggested the following: 12% said that the legal number of working hours should be increased, 60% mentioned the improvement of education and professional training, 39% investing in research and innovation, 46% mentioned the facilitation of the creation of companies, 35% more efficient use of energy and 21% mentioned the investment in transport infrastructure, such as motorways.

### **Support for Future Enlargements**

When Maltese respondents were asked about the options they favour for the immediate future of the European Union. 51% feel that the European Union should be enlarged to include all the countries wishing to join. 20% feel that the European Union should be enlarged to include only some of the countries wishing to join, 13% feel that the European Union should not be enlarged at all while 13% gave other options.

Maltese interviewees were also asked specifically about the countries they hoped could join the European Union. 77% said they were in favour and 8% against Switzerland becoming part of the European Union in future. 74% were in favour of Norway joining and 9% were against. 61% were in favour and 17% against Bosnia and Herzegovina. 65% were in favour and 14% against Croatia. 61% were in favour and 17% against The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) becoming part of the European Union. 57% were in favour and 20% against Serbia and Montenegro. 70% were in favour of Iceland joining and 9% were against. 58% declared themselves in favour of Albania joining the EU with 22% against. 63% were in favour and 17% against Bulgaria becoming part of the European Union. 61% were in favour of Romania joining with 19% against. 63% were in favour and 16% against Ukraine joining the European Union. 43% said they were in favour of Turkey joining with 39% against the idea.

On whether Turkey belongs to Europe, 17% of Maltese respondents totally agree, 40% tend to agree, 30% tend to disagree and 7% totally disagree that Turkey partly belongs to Europe by its geography. Asked whether they thought Turkey partly belongs to Europe

by its history, 11% totally agree, 34% tend to agree, 18% tend to disagree and 10% totally disagree that. Only 8% totally agree that Turkey's accession to the European Union would strengthen the security in this region, 26% tend to agree, 20% tend to disagree and 18% totally disagree. On whether Turkey's accession to the European Union would favour the mutual comprehension of European and Muslim values, 6% totally agree, 26% tend to agree, 19% tend to disagree and 18% totally disagree that.

### **Support for a European Constitution**

The first half of 2005 has been strongly marked by the ratification process by the member states of the European Constitution, adopted by the Council on 29 October 2004 in Rome, as well as the debates generated by the text. The bulk of this Eurobarometer was carried out before the results of the French and Dutch referenda were known. Over and above the arguments and discussions that followed those two public consultations, this Eurobarometer survey shows that the majority of European Union citizens (61%) still support the idea of a European Constitution. However, that is 7 points lower than the score recorded last autumn. As regards changes, it is noteworthy that the level of support has fallen almost everywhere in the European Union, with particularly pronounced changes in The Netherlands, Austria and the Czech Republic. Support for a European Constitution has increased only in Hungary and Italy compared with autumn 2004.

As in Ireland and Portugal, the results for Malta express a degree of uncertainty amongst the population. 16% of Maltese respondents said that on a general level they know about the contents of the European Constitution while 71% stated that they know very little on the contents of the European Constitution. 10% are totally in favour of a European Constitution, 39% rather in favour, 9% opposed and 7% totally opposed to the EU constitution. Overall, 49% are in favour whilst 16% opposed to the idea of a Constitution. The rest could not express a definite opinion.

The Maltese respondents who opposed the European Constitution were asked for their reasons. Only 1% said that the reason was that the Constitution goes too far. 29% mentioned loss of national sovereignty while 8% said that the EU is too technocratic and over regulated. 15% stated a lack of information as their reason. 10% said it was too complex. Just 1% stated that their opposition to the Constitution is linked to Turkey's EU accession or to further enlargement. 5% said that the European Union is not democratic enough and 13% said they were against European construction and integration. 15% said they do not see anything positive in this Constitution while 7% objected to the lack of reference to the Christian roots of Europe.

Maltese respondents were also asked who they trusted the most to inform them about the European Constitution. 25% mentioned the European Commission as the most trustworthy, 10% mentioned the European Parliament, 18% the Maltese government, 9% political parties, 1% local councils, 2% religious organizations, 12% journalists, 2% trade unions, 2% consumer organizations, 5% personal relatives and friends and 5% mentioned other sources.