

# EUROBAROMETER 64

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

## AUTUMN 2005

### NATIONAL REPORT

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### ITALY

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

38% of Italians expect that over the next twelve months their personal situation will improve while, for 16%, it will worsen and, for 41%, it will remain unchanged. When considering the five years to come, an increase is recorded in the percentage of those who think their personal situation will improve (42%). Expectations expressed regarding the national economic situation and the employment market trend reflects less optimistic views: in fact, 39% of those interviewed think that over the next twelve months the Italian economic situation will worsen; only 23% feel it will improve, while 33% consider it will remain unchanged. The employment market trend, above all, is seen as particularly alarming, since 42% of the Italian sample expects it to worsen over the next twelve months.

The majority of the Italian sample (55%) does not foresee any remarkable change in their family finances over the next twelve months (compared with a European average of 53%). 35% of the Italian sample affirm that their present personal situation has improved compared to five years ago, while it has remained unchanged for 34%, or has worsened for 30%. Expectations for an improved personal situation over the next five years show signs of greater optimism: 42% of the Italian sample is confident that the five years to come will bring improvements.

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

Italians place more confidence in the EU than in their national institutions and the UN. In particular, 55% state they trust the European Union (compared with a European average of 45%). The European Parliament, the Commission and the Central Bank emerge as the three most familiar institutions, while the three institutions in which those interviewed place most confidence are the European Court of Justice, the Parliament and the Commission. In particular, the European institution that is most familiar to Italians is the Parliament which is known by 85% and trusted by 61% of the sample. 74% of Italians have at least heard of the European Commission, and 57% claim to trust this institution. The institution ranking third in terms of familiarity is the European Central Bank: 63% of Italians interviewed have heard of it, and 44% trust it. 61% of the Italian poll is aware of the existence of the European Council of Ministers, but only 54% trust it. The European Court of Justice is familiar to 47% of those surveyed and but 63% trust it (maximum recorded trust level).

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

50% of Italians see their country's membership of the EU positively: the lowest percentage ever recorded in Italy. 17% consider it as negative, while the percentage of those who deem it neither good nor bad is on the increase. It is worthwhile noting that, for the first time, the percentage of Italians who give a positive assessment is not higher than the European average (both percentages are at 50%), and that, for the first time, the percentage of Italians who see it in a negative light is higher than the European average (17% and 16%, respectively).

48% of Italians feel that their country has benefited from being a member of the EU, while 38% are of the opinion that it has not benefited at all, and 13% gave no answer. The average of those who regard EU membership as a positive factor records a decrease of 4 percentage points (from 52% in spring 2005 to the current 48%): data that place Italy, for the very first time, under the threshold of 50%, and below the European average (52%). A slight increase is also registered among the Italians surveyed who express the opinion that their country has not benefited from being a member of the European Union (from 34% last spring to the current 38%). This is another case when, for the very first time, the percentage of disappointment recorded in Italy is higher than the European average (34%).

After a deeper analysis of the assessment concerning EU membership, some interesting positive reactions are recorded when it comes to issues such as security (80%), exports (61%), and lifestyle (57%), while other areas record lower positive assessments: service and industry (50%), agriculture (48%) and employment (40%) – the latter two items showing a decline.

The EU evokes a more positive image in Italians compared to the overall European sample, although a slight decrease is recorded when it comes to 'very positive image' responses, with a rise of 'no firm

opinion on the subject' responses. 56% of the Italians interviewed have a very positive or fairly positive image of the EU, while 11% have a very negative or fairly negative image (the percentages at EU level being 44% and 20%, respectively).

Italians are ranked among the most favourable within the EU toward the development of a European Political Union, with 64% of affirmative replies against a European average of 55%. 21% of Italians are against political integration, while a rise is recorded when it comes to the European average (31%). Data indicate a slight regression for Italy compared to spring 2005, thus recording a new decline in consensus since autumn 2003, when the percentage of Italians surveyed that were in favour of political integration (71%) was the highest among the 15 Member States.

For 40% of the Italians surveyed, the EU represents freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in Europe, followed by the Euro currency (30%) and peace (26%). Among the negative aspects listed in the questionnaire, 'insufficient controls at external borders' is cited by 15% of the Italians interviewed, followed by unemployment and a waste of money (14%), an increase in crime (8%), loss of cultural identity (8%) and bureaucracy (6%).

On the question of fears associated with the European Union, for Italians, the transfer of jobs toward other Member States where production costs are lower comes first. And, in fact, 66% of those interviewed share this fear. 60% of the Italian sample expresses anxiety that there will be an economic crisis and 59% that Italian farmers may have to face greater difficulties. A significant percentage is also reached by the fear that traffic in drugs and criminality may increase (53%). The absolute majority of the surveyed (51%) express concern for the fact that Italy may pay more and more money to the EU.

Generally speaking, Italians tend to express a more positive assessment toward the European Union 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 in general. Italians definitely appear to associate the EU with the concepts of disinterest, anxiety, mistrust and rejection much less frequently compared to the EU sample.

40% of those interviewed state that they sometimes feel themselves to be not only Italians but also Europeans, while 24% of the sample often has this feeling and 33% never see themselves as also Europeans. 53% of the sample see themselves both as Italians and Europeans in the near future, while 37% only Italians, 6% both Europeans and Italians and 2% only Europeans. 91% of the interviewed are proud of being Italians; 7% express the opposite view and 2% give no answer. 77% of the Italians surveyed are proud of being Europeans, compared with 16% of those who do not share this feeling.

The percentage of those who do not think that Italy has enough weight at the European level has risen from 51% (recorded in autumn 2004) to 54% (recorded in spring 2005), and has now reached 67%, a record for the country. Furthermore, only 23% of the sample considers that Italy plays an influential role in the European Union, while this percentage was 36% just six months ago. These data must be nonetheless assessed in the light of the fact that 52% of the Italian sample claim they are not familiar with the mechanisms of how the European Union functions, while only 38% think they have good knowledge in this regard.

Only 34% of the Italian sample considers they feel involved in matters affecting the EU, while the absolute majority (63%) express the opposite view. Nonetheless, 59% of the Italians surveyed express the willingness to deepen their knowledge on European issues, but do not know by which means (only 34% state the contrary). According to 80% of those interviewed in Italy and 78% across Europe, the EU institutions should make a greater effort in order to involve citizens in questions affecting the Union.. On the other hand, this task should be fulfilled by national authorities for 82% of the Italians and 81% of the European sample.

Overall, 57% of the sample wants more information on the EU, and only 16% state they are satisfied with their current level of knowledge. 47% of those polled wish they could receive more details on their rights as European citizens, 36% on EU policies concerning employment and 30% on how the European institutions function. Italians state that the speed at which European integration is proceeding is fairly slow (an average of 3.3 on a scale from 1 to 7 where 1 stands for total lack of motion and 7 for top speed) and hope that this integration might be accelerated. Using the 1 to 7 scale, the data indicate that the

majority of the Italians interviewed (56%) hope that high rates of speed might be reached (levels 5-7). On this question, the percentage across the EU is only 41%.

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

The self-assessment that Italians make regarding their knowledge of the EU shows a fall in familiarity. On a scale of 1 to 10 measuring the level of knowledge with EU issues (where 1 stands for 'I know nothing' and 10 for 'I know a lot'), the Italian average is 3.9, while it is 4.2 across the European sample. In particular, the percentage of the Italians surveyed who consider they have a level of knowledge of EU-related issues higher than the sufficiency threshold (6-10) falls from 30% (recorded last spring) to the present 20%. Moreover, the percentage of those who think they are able to boast a level of knowledge between 1 and 5 rises from 68% to 78%.

63% of those surveyed in Italy avail themselves of television for information on the EU, 35% rely on newspapers, 20% on friends, colleagues and relatives, 16% on magazines, 11% on the radio, 10% on the Internet and 7% on books and brochures. 42% of the Italian sample claims that television does not give sufficient coverage to EU issues. The same perception is recorded when it comes to the radio (39%), while slightly more positive results are found for written press coverage (29%). 45% of those interviewed consider that television coverage of EU issues is fairly good, while the percentage falls to 32% when it comes to radio coverage. The written press records more positive comments, since 46% of the Italian sample considers that Europe is a theme that is often touched upon. The vehicle of information that according to the Italians surveyed features EU issues in the most objective way is the written press (50%), followed by television (45%) and the radio (46%).

The knowledge test confirms that the relative majority of the Italian sample does not have a clear view of the European Union: 69% of those interviewed are not aware of the exact number of Member States, 83% do not know when the last European elections took place and 64% do not know that the EU has its own anthem. A higher percentage of correct answers is nonetheless recorded when it comes to the question concerning the direct election of European Parliamentarians - the only question that obtains an absolute majority of correct answers across the sample (53%).

### **Policies and priorities of the EU**

The EU policy that meets with greatest favour among Italians is the introduction of classes in schools on the functioning of the European Union (83%). However, broad consensus is also reached when it comes to other issues, such as common security and defence policy (75%) common foreign policy (71%), and the proposal for a European Constitution (70%). The percentage of Italians in favour of the Euro currency is definitely on the increase (64%), but consensus is lower when it comes to enlargement (53%) and strengthened cooperation (49%).

The fight against unemployment (36%) and against poverty and social marginalization (35%) are ranked in the two top positions of EU priorities. Both across the Italian and overall European samples, great importance is also given to fight against crime and drug trafficking (22% and 25%, respectively), as well as the safeguarding of peace and security (21% and 28%, respectively). The demand to bring institutions closer to citizens is expressed by 21% of the Italian sample, and 17% of the European average. According to the majority of those surveyed, the two main problems that Italy faces for the time being are the economic situation (37%) and unemployment (36%), followed by inflation/rising prices (32%).

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

40% of the Italians polled assess that the EU should be provided with greater financial resources, while 36% comment that the Union's political objectives do not justify an increase in the EU budget. This is in complete contrast if compared with the data from spring 2005, when the relative majority of the sample (39%) was against an increase in resources while 37% were in favour. The majority of the Italians interviewed are not aware of what most of the budget is spent on. More specifically, a relative majority of the sample asserts that the largest share of EU funds is spent on administrative and staff purposes (26%), while 23% do not give an answer.

## **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 for the Union. 71% of those interviewed are in favour of a European common foreign policy (67% being the European average) and only 16% are against it (21% being the European average). The idea of a defence and security policy common to all the EU Member States is also supported by many of the Italians polled (75% of the Italian sample are in favour of it, while 15% are against it). 57% of the Italians surveyed share the view that decisions on European defence and security matters should be taken by the European Union.

The assessment expressed by the Italians interviewed on the role played by the US and the EU on main international issues is definitely in favour of the latter. More specifically, the area where the assessment of the role played by the US reaches the maximum negative consensus is the safeguard of worldwide peace (40% of Italians see Washington playing a negative role in this issue), followed by the struggle against poverty in the world (40%). The percentage of negative assessments is also higher than positive comments when it comes to environmental protection (39% of criticism compared with 30% of approval). Comments expressed by the Italian sample are testimony to an increase in positive appraisals of the role played by the EU in these same areas (increases of between 8% and 5%). As far as issues such as the fight against terrorism, safeguarding of worldwide peace and environmental protection are concerned, the percentage of positive assessments reaches 55%.

### **Enlargement**

Italians are considerably more favourable towards further enlargement than the average European sample (53% of the Italians surveyed compared with 49% of Europeans as a whole). Nonetheless, Italy registers a lower percentage of favourable comments when it comes to the accession of the Balkan countries and the ex-Yugoslavia. Switzerland, Norway and Iceland are the only three countries that register a percentage higher than 50% of favourable responses. Close to 50% are Ukraine (with 48% of positive assessments) and Croatia (43%). None of the remaining Balkan countries reaches 40% of favourable comments. Albania and Turkey are ranked lowest.

Turkey deserves a chapter of its own, since the most widespread feeling is that cultural differences are still too strong to allow for its membership. The overall results of the survey indicate that the cultural gap is still too wide according to 56% of the Italians interviewed and 55% of the EU25 sample. From the answers given to the questions concerning the possible repercussions that Turkey's membership might entail, it clearly emerges that Italians fear an increase in immigration and do not see any positive outcomes from immigration flows, such as strengthened security in the region or better mutual understanding of European and Muslim values. More specifically, 53% of Italians surveyed share the view that Turkey's accession might encourage immigration towards the more developed countries of the Union; 51% of the sample do not deem that its membership would lead to the construction of a fellowship between European and Muslim values. Furthermore, the relative majority (46%) do not consider that the Turkish EU membership would strengthen security in the region, and 57% do not support the statement that it would favour the rejuvenation of the European population.

### **European Constitution**

When considering three possible options (to proceed with the ratification process, to drop the entire procedure, to renegotiate the present text), the relative majority of the Italian sample (38%), as well as of the European sample (49%) share the opinion that the text of the European Constitution should be renegotiated. The option of proceeding with the ratification process is supported by 31% of the Italians interviewed and 22% of the European sample, while 7% of the Italians surveyed and 13% of the European average would prefer that the entire procedure be dropped and not to move ahead with a European Constitution. A high percentage of those who abstain from answering is recorded (24% in Italy and 15% across Europe). 65% of the Italian sample shares the view that a European Constitution is needed to ensure the good functioning of EU institutions, while this same percentage falls to 60% when it comes to the overall European sample. Furthermore, the adoption of a European Constitution would render the European Union more democratic (for 75% of the Italians surveyed), more socially inclined (74%), more efficient and economically competitive (73%) and more transparent and stronger in the world (71%).