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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ITALY

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Future Perspectives

Seventy-six percent of those interviewed in Italy are satisfied with their life, while 23% are dissatisfied. Of that sample, 47% feel that their life will not change over the next 12 months, 34% maintain that it will improve and 16% feel that it will worsen. The relative majority of the sample (39%) maintains that, in the next 12 months, Italy's economic situation is destined to remain practically unchanged, while for a high percentage of those interviewed (31%) the situation is likely to worsen. Of those interviewed, 24% think that the country's economic situation will improve while 6% abstained from answering the question.

With regard to the economic situation of their own family, 54% feel that it will remain the same over the next twelve months, 25% feel it will improve and 18% feel that it will worsen. For the greater proportion of the Italian sample (38%), employment on a national level will remain stable. On the other hand, 30% think that it will get worse and 25% that it will improve. With regard to their personal work situation, 62% of those interviewed maintain that it will remain unchanged over the next twelve months. Twenty-three percent are of the opinion that it will improve and 11% that it is destined to worsen.

A comparison with the data collected in autumn of 2005 indicates that the Italians interviewed tend to be less pessimistic about the way the economy is going. In fact, in spring 2005, a relative majority of the sample (39%) expected the country's economic situation to worsen (as against the current 31%). This decrease in pessimism was in relation to employment as well. 42% of those polled were expecting things to worsen (as opposed to the current 30%).

For 29% of the Italian sample, their present personal situation is better than five years ago. For 39% it has remained the same and for 29% it has worsened. If the data from spring 2005 are compared with the current data, it emerges that the percentage of those interviewed who think that their personal situation has improved has decreased markedly (from 35% to 29%).

If we consider the next five years, 43% of those interviewed maintain that their personal situation is destined to remain unchanged. For 35%, it will improve and 15% think it will worsen; and 8% abstain from answering. Comparing these data with those of spring 2005, a net fall is seen in the percentage of those interviewed who feel that their own personal situation will improve (from 42% to 35%) and a net increase in those who think it will remain the same (from 37% to 43%).

Support for the Euro has seen a marked comeback in Italy. The percentage of those interviewed who speak favourably about the single currency is at 60%, while 24% state the contrary and 10% abstain from answering.

Current data confirm the marked comeback with regard to the Euro beginning in the spring of 2005 (67%), confirmed by data from autumn 2005 (64%), which had followed the abrupt decline in autumn 2004, when the lowest level of support for the Euro was recorded since its introduction. Even if this is far from the record levels of 2002 (87% in favour that then went to 76%), the percentage of 66% represents, in any case, one of the highest levels in the last two years.

The European Flag

Eighty-five percent of Italians have seen the European flag. Of those, 95% know that it represents Europe or the European Union. Overall, the attitude of Italians towards the flag is positive. For 81% the present European Union flag is a good symbol for Europe. For 78% it represents something positive (EU average is 71%), while 68% identify themselves with the European flag (EU average is 51%). Seventy-seven percent of the Italian sample considers that the European flag should be in place next to the national flag on all public buildings. All in all, comparing the Italian data with the EU average, it clearly emerges that in Italy the attitude toward the European flag is much more positive.

Knowledge of and Trust in National Institutions, in the EU and European Institutions

The Italians trust the European Union and the United Nations more than they trust national institutions. In particular, 56% affirm their faith in the EU. This is followed by the United Nations (with 52%), while national institutions and political parties do not enjoy the trust of the majority of the sample. The lowest levels of trust are registered for political parties (26% trust, 64% do not) and for the Italian government (34% trust, 53% do not). It should be pointed out that the level of mistrust that emerges in Italy for national institutions is in line with the average at EU level.

The Parliament, Commission and the Central Bank are the most well known European institutions and are the three EU institutions in which those interviewed place most trust and consider most important.

Of the Italian sample, 70% have heard of the European Commission, a slightly lower percentage with respect to the EU25 level which was 74%. Sixty percent of Italians affirm their trust in the European Commission. For 77% of Italians, the European Commission has an important role. Compared to the data from spring 2005, the Commission seems to have lost a little ground in the area of notoriety (down 4 percentage points) and the value given to the importance of its role, which has gone from 77% to 69%.

Perception and Assessment of the EU

The positive appraisal of Italy's membership of the EU is on the rise after the decreases reported in previous editions. Fifty-six percent of the Italian sample considers that for Italy to be part of the EU is a good thing. Compared to the data of autumn 2005, there has been a considerable comeback in the support of Italians for the EU (from 50% to the current 56%). The assertion that being part of the EU is a negative thing for Italy is represented by 11% of the Italian sample (compared to the 13% EU average). Even in this case, there is a net reduction in the negative view of the EU among those Italians polled (from 17% to 11%).

For 54% of the sample, Italy has received advantages by belonging to the EU, although for 30% it has not and 17% don't know. Also, in this case, the Italians interviewed register a clear tendency to appraise the EU in a more positive manner than in the previous Eurobarometer edition, with a net increase in positive appraisals (+6 percentage points) and a fall in negative appraisals (-9 percentage points).

The Italians' substantially positive approach towards the EU, compared to the average European sample, is mirrored also in their appraisal of the consequences of EU membership. Most of all, the Italian sample tends to consider positively the security aspect and, in a less marked manner, the impact on political and economic stability. In particular, 59% of the sample feel secure because Italy is a member of the EU. Fifty-three percent maintain that their country is more stable economically thanks to EU membership and 44% feel more stable politically because of EU membership.

Generally speaking, the EU evokes a positive image for 68% of the Italian sample, and a negative one for 5%. At European level, the corresponding figures are 50% and 15%.

For the majority of the sample (42%), the European Union represents the freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the EU, followed by the Euro (37%) and by a more important voice in the world (28%). For 25% of Italians interviewed the EU represents peace, for 21% democracy, and for 15% economic prosperity. Among the positive aspects, 13% mention cultural diversity and 10% social security. Among negative aspects, 10% mention insufficient controls at external borders, 9% indicate that the EU represents unemployment, 8% a waste of money, 7% increase in crime, 6% the loss of cultural identity, and 3% bureaucracy.

The concern that jobs will be relocated to other member countries that have lower production costs (so-called delocalisation) is represented by 69% of the interviewed. Among the concerns related to EU integration, a high percentage is also recorded when it comes to the fear of an increase of drug traffic and organized crime (54%).

Eighty-nine percent of Italians feel very or fairly tied to their country, 84% to their city and 85% to their region. If ties to Europe are considered, the percentage falls to 68%, but this is, at any rate, higher than the average European sample percentage recorded (63%).

Nevertheless, regardless of the strong ties with the EU, the majority of the sample does not feel that the voice of their country counts in the European Union. In particular, 51% believe it false that their voice counts in the European Union, while 33% believe it to be true. To this fact it should be added that 48% of the Italian sample maintain they are not familiar with the mechanisms of how the European Union functions, while 37% believe they do know.

The fact that the Italians do not thoroughly understand the functioning mechanisms of the European Union institutions is confirmed by a brief test on two basic aspects of the EU: on the whole, 60% of the Italian sample do not know that at the moment there are 25 Member States in the EU and 45% do not know that Members of the European Parliament are elected directly by European Union citizens.

Knowledge of the EU and Sources of Information

With regard to knowledge about EU issues, on a scale from 1 to 10 (where 1 stands for 'I know nothing' and 10 for 'I know a lot'), the relative majority of the Italian sample (18%) positions itself at level 5, followed by levels 3 and 6 (15%). The analysis of the cumulative data indicates that 68% of the interviewed are situated at levels between 1 and 5 (or rather, below the level of sufficient knowledge). From the weighed average, data emerge that the average Italian attests to 4.3, an increase with respect to the previous autumn (3.9).

Sixty-eight percent of the Italian sample turns to television to obtain information on the European Union. Thirty-six percent of the sample turns to newspapers, 12% to periodicals, and 29% to discussions with friends, colleagues and family, 14% to the radio, 10% to Internet and 11% to books, brochures and leaflets. Overall, present trends are in line with those recorded in autumn 2005.

For 51% of the Italian sample, television talks enough about the European Union, while the same percentage falls to 33% for radio. The press gets better reviews: in fact, for 52% of the sample, it covers enough European issues. For the majority of Italians (57%), television is the means of national information that presents the EU in the most objective manner. The press (55%) and, lastly, radio (46%) follow.

It should be highlighted that, with respect to the data of autumn 2005, television has increased as the medium that talks enough about the EU and does so in the most objective manner. In particular, when it comes to the perception of objectivity in reference to EU related issues, television has by now overtaken the press and has become, in fact, the media instrument that, according to Italians, talks about the EU most objectively.

Policies and Priorities of the EU According to the Italians

Among the policies undertaken by the EU, the Italians are above all in favour of a common security and defence policy (74%). This is followed by the EU Constitution (71%) and the common foreign policy (68%). The Euro also recuperates consensus (66%), while the hypothesis of the greater speed of construction of the EU in some countries finds favour with 54% of the Italian sample. The only policy where the percentage of respondents in favour did not reach 50% is the enlargement of the European Union (49% in favour, 26% against and 25% don't know).

The main priorities of the EU are the fight against unemployment (32%) and against poverty and social exclusion (31%). Italians tend to consider also the increasing closeness of institutions to European citizens as a priority (29%), as well as the safeguard of peace and security in Europe (19%).

For the absolute majority of Italians (53%), the European Union, on the national scene, plays a positive role in the area of fight against terrorism and in foreign policy. The role played by the EU in Italy is substantially positive also in the area of the fight against crime (47%), of the economic situation (37%) and immigration (35%). On the other hand, the role played by the EU in Italy is judged as neutral by the relative majority of the sample in relation to pensions (49%), housing (48%), public transportation (47%), education (45%), health care (43%), and the fight against unemployment (38%). The appraisal of the role played by the European Union in Italy is, conversely, substantially negative for the majority of the Italian sample with regard to prices and inflation (46%), and taxes (35%). It should be said that, with respect to the data from autumn 2005, a net improvement is observed in the appraisal of EU activity in Italy.

Common Foreign and Defence Policy of the EU

Sixty-eight percent of Italians are in favour of a common foreign policy of Member States with other countries (EU average 67%) and only 16% are against (EU average 21%). Even the hypothesis of a common security and defence policy of Member States is given ample favour: 74% declare themselves favourable, while 13% hold the opposite view. One of the most widely shared opinions by the Italians in EU foreign policy issue is the creation of a European Foreign Minister who would be the spokesperson for common European positions. It should be underlined that 71% of the Italian sample are convinced that European Union foreign policy should be independent from that of the US and only 15% are of the contrary opinion. Italians appear to need a common European policy on the issues of immigration and asylum. In particular, 74% of Italians support a common EU immigration policy (12%) and 14% abstain from answering. On average, in the EU, 75% are favourable, 14% against and 11% abstain from answering.

The EU Constitution

Seventy-eight percent of the Italian sample do not know the entirety of the contents of the European Constitution, or have never heard of the Constitution itself, but, even though the average level of knowledge of the contents of the Constitution is rather low, the Italians do not seem to doubt the fact that its adoption by Member States would have positive effects for the European Union.

For 78% of the sample, the adoption of the Constitution would make the EU more democratic, for 76% more efficient, and for 76% more transparent. Moreover, for 77% of those interviewed, the EU would be more socially oriented, for 75% it would be stronger in the world and for 73% it would be more economically competitive.

After France and Holland's "no" to the referendum on the ratification of the European Constitution, the relative majority of the Italian sample (37%) maintains that EU Member States should at any rate continue the ratification process of the European Constitution. For 33% of those interviewed in Italy, the European Constitution should be renegotiated. Only 6% of Italians think that the European Constitution should be abandoned. The percentage of Italians who abstain from answering is fairly high (23%).