

# EUROBAROMETER 69

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ITALY

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# **CHAPTER I**

## **The present situation and expectations for the future**

64% of Italians say that they are satisfied with the life they lead; however, the percentage of those satisfied is decreasing. In the last Eurobarometer survey of autumn 2007, 71% of the sample claimed to be satisfied. This trend is evident throughout Europe, where the rate of those satisfied has decreased from 80% to 77%.

In Italy, women are less satisfied than men, and the elderly are less satisfied than young people. The level of education is an important factor: 49% of those who only have a school-leaving certificate show dissatisfaction, while this percentage drops to 27% among those who have university-level education, and, for those who are still studying, the figure is 12%.

Few Italians are optimistic about the future, representing only 27% of the sample. Moreover, the majority predict that life will be harder for young people than it has been for the previous generation. Almost two-thirds of Italians share this opinion.

With regard to the economy, perspectives are also bleak, with approximately half of Italians (48%) forecasting that the economic situation of the country will get worse within a year. Pessimism is also growing concerning personal financial conditions, which are usually seen with greater optimism by the Italians. Again this increased pessimism is also prevalent concerning the European economy.

Despite official statistics, which have recorded significant decreases in the rate of unemployment, Italians do not seem to take this into account. 47% believe that, over the next year, the work situation in their country will get worse, and only 16% are optimistic.

In this far from reassuring picture, the European Union remains a point of reference. 61% of Italians continue to nurture optimism for the future of the EU, even if the positive forecasts show a slight decrease.

# **CHAPTER II**

## **EU membership: scepticism grows**

The relative majority of Italians remain positive about Italy's membership of the EU, although there has been a clear decrease in support (from 50% to 39%).

Over a third of the interviewees (37%) not only consider EU membership in a positive way, but also believe that Italy has benefited from it. Nevertheless, even though this opinion remains the most common among the Italian sample, there has been a 10 percentage point drop in comparison with the last survey.

The growing perception of the distance of Europe, with regard to Italian interests, contributes to this decrease in support. Half of the sample believes that the Italian position is not taken into account at European level and 52% are convinced that the EU imposes its decisions on Italy.

Moreover, only 15% of the interviewees think that MEPs listen to their views and 14% feel the same towards the European Commission.

In these conditions, it is therefore not surprising that the percentage of Italians in favour of national governance rather than European governance is increasing with regard to all policies.

In certain cases, the majority of the sample opts for power to be allocated to the Italian government rather than to the Union. This is particularly the case with areas traditionally seen to have a purely national competence, such as taxation and education, but also with policies, which, up until now, were considered as truly European, such as agriculture and fishing.

However, despite this pro-national wave, for the majority of policies Italians continue to prefer an EU competence, especially for those areas considered to have a greater international importance, like foreign affairs, defence or energy.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **Priorities: first inflation, crime loses importance**

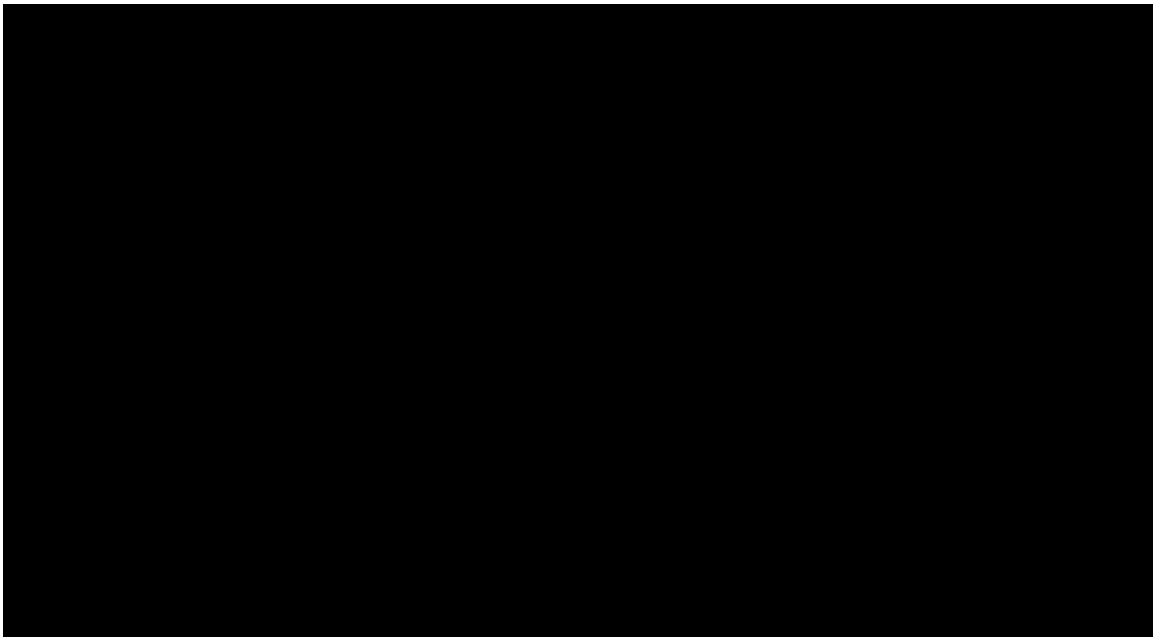
Although the Eurobarometer survey was carried out during the Italian political elections in April 2008 when the issue of security was among the top concerns campaigned by the now elected political parties, the Italians decidedly show less concern on the subject: after a few months, fighting crime dropped from the first to the fifth priority of the country.

Little interest is also shown regarding immigration and to further enlargements of the EU. A small majority of Italians are in favour of extending the EU's borders, but oppose the accession of almost all the candidate or potential candidate countries, with the exception of Norway, Switzerland and Iceland (for Croatia, those opposing its accession equal those in favour).

Currently, the key priority for the Italians is fighting inflation. Approximately two-thirds of Italians claim that they have difficulties in paying bills at the end of the month, and 69% are convinced that their purchasing power has decreased in the last five years.

Nevertheless, only a few respondents blame the Euro for this. Indeed, 58% continue to be in favour of the common European currency and, in the EU as a whole, 60% of citizens support the Euro

**What are Italy's priorities?**



## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Transparency and trust in institutions**

Italians and Europeans assign great importance to the transparency of institutions, but they think that national and European authorities are not sufficiently transparent.

However, Italians believe that there is a higher level of transparency at European level (17%) than at national level (31%). Conversely, national institutions are perceived as not transparent by 78% of the sample, compared to 50% who say the same about the EU.

Although these figures are far from positive, the majority of Italians maintain confidence in the European Union (40%), even though the number of sceptics is growing (now 36%).

Specific institutions gain higher levels of trust, in particular, the European Parliament (51%), the Commission (48%), the European Central Bank (44%) and the Council of the European Union (43%). Since the last Eurobarometer, there has been a surge in support for the ECB, in spite of growing concerns over rising prices.

However, the drop in confidence towards national institutions continues. Only 16% trust the Parliament, and 15% trust the Government. Political parties are considered reliable by only 13% of respondents which equates to the negative peak in terms of confidence. Confidence in the national legal system has also dropped, while the degree of reliability attributed to the army and the police remains high.

There has been a loss in confidence in the media. Radio continues to be seen as the most reliable, while television is confirmed as the least credible. Newspapers project an unusual increase in confidence, while the understanding of the Internet grows in parallel with an increased diffidence.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **Globalisation and the EU**

A relative majority of Italians believe that the main effect of the globalisation of trade is the relocation of certain companies to countries with cheap labour.

Moreover, when a company transfers part of its activities to another country, the predominant judgment of the Italians is that the relocation is spurred by the company's interest to increase its own profits rather than an actual necessity to relocate. Indeed, the sample is widely convinced (59%) that it is big companies rather than citizens who benefit from globalisation.

Consequently, this contributes to the emergence of a predominantly sceptical understanding of the phenomenon of globalisation among the Italian sample. The majority of respondents believe that growth in global trade provokes social imbalances and inflation.

On the other hand, respondents also acknowledge that globalisation represents an important opportunity for economic development, particularly for poor countries. It is also generally believed (42%) that the phenomenon helps to maintain peace in the world, as it ensures the necessity to apply common rules at a global level.

On the cultural side, the view of the Italians is more articulated. A clear majority (59%) believe that globalisation improves cultural exchanges as it encourages people to be more open to different cultures.

At the same time, 41% of respondents emphasise that global trade brings a threat to national culture. This opinion is particularly prevalent among inhabitants of rural areas.

In this nuanced picture, the European Union emerges as a positive power. Italians attribute to Brussels both the role of safeguarding the possible advantages of globalisation, as well as the duty of shielding them from its potentially negative effects.

As for the other big international players, Italians and Europeans look attentively, and also with concern, at the growth of the Eastern Asian powers, namely China and Japan, whose economies are considered to be functioning better than the European market.

Regarding the United States the judgment differs. Italians consider the US as an economic model which functions better than Europe - an opinion that is not shared by the average European citizen.

Moreover, Italian respondents view the US, above all, as an ally when faced with the challenges of globalisation, while the majority of the European sample does not think that EU and American interests converge when it comes to international trade.