

EUROBAROMETER 71

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NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ITALY

CHAPTER I

The Italians and the EU

48% of Italians consider their country's EU membership as positive, compared to 30% of the sample who hold a neutral opinion, and a further 16% who judge it as negative.

Support for EU membership is growing, most likely due to the belief that Italy plays a more influential role in Brussels. Indeed, the majority of the interviewees think now that Italy's interests are taken into account in EU decisions.

Trust in the European institutions is also growing. 48% of the Italian sample are confident in the EU as a whole. 53% trust the European Parliament, 50% the European Commission and 46% the European Central Bank.

Trust levels shown by Italians have risen strongly in comparison to former polls, and outperform the EU average. On the other hand, national institutions continue to be viewed with low confidence, with trust levels in the Italian Parliament and the Government falling still further.

Although highly trusted, the EU institutions remain a strange animal for the majority of Italians. 56% of the interviewees admit to not knowing how the EU functions.

Nevertheless, their small understanding does not hamper Italians from supporting a further increase in EU competences in all the policy fields they have been asked about.

Therefore, the clear majority of Italians are in favour of greater power for Brussels not only in the sectors where traditionally a common European approach is regarded as most appropriate, such as Foreign Affairs or the fight against terrorism, but also in those fields where national management had usually been favoured, like the fight against unemployment and the protection of social rights.

However, Italians are concerned by the perceived low involvement of local authorities in the EU decision-making process. Notably, 52% of the sample believes that regional and local institutions are not taken sufficiently into account when deciding policies in the European Union.

This concern is worrying since Italians believe that local authorities are closer to citizens and can have a greater influence on their daily life.

In general, both Italians and Europeans are optimistic about the future of the EU and would like more emphasis on economic, social and immigration-related issues, in order to strengthen the European Union in the coming years.

This is confirmed by the fact that Italians consider solving economic problems as the top priority for the country at the moment and in the future. Unemployment, inflation and crime follow suit in the list of priorities highlighted by the Italian sample.

CHAPTER II

Reactions to the economic crisis

81% of Italian respondents believe that the national economic situation is negative, although critics are fewer in comparison to the beginning of the year when 87% had a sceptical opinion on the economy. The same critical view prevails among EU citizens representing 78% of the overall sample.

Scepticism about the Italian economic situation is also reflected in their view regarding the European economy as a whole, judged in bad shape by 78% of Italians. Pessimism also prevails in forecasts, and not only in assessments of the current situation. Just 26% of Italians are optimistic about the recovery of the national and European economy in the 12 months to come.

Nevertheless, the first signs of a changing trend are emerging and seem to support the idea that Italians are gradually acknowledging that the worst phase of the economic crisis is over. Those who show pessimism about a short-term recovery of the EU and Italian economy, although more numerous, are in fact decreasing.

In addition, a small relative majority of Italians sees the financial condition of their households as positive in the next year, while pessimistic views were dominant just a few months ago.

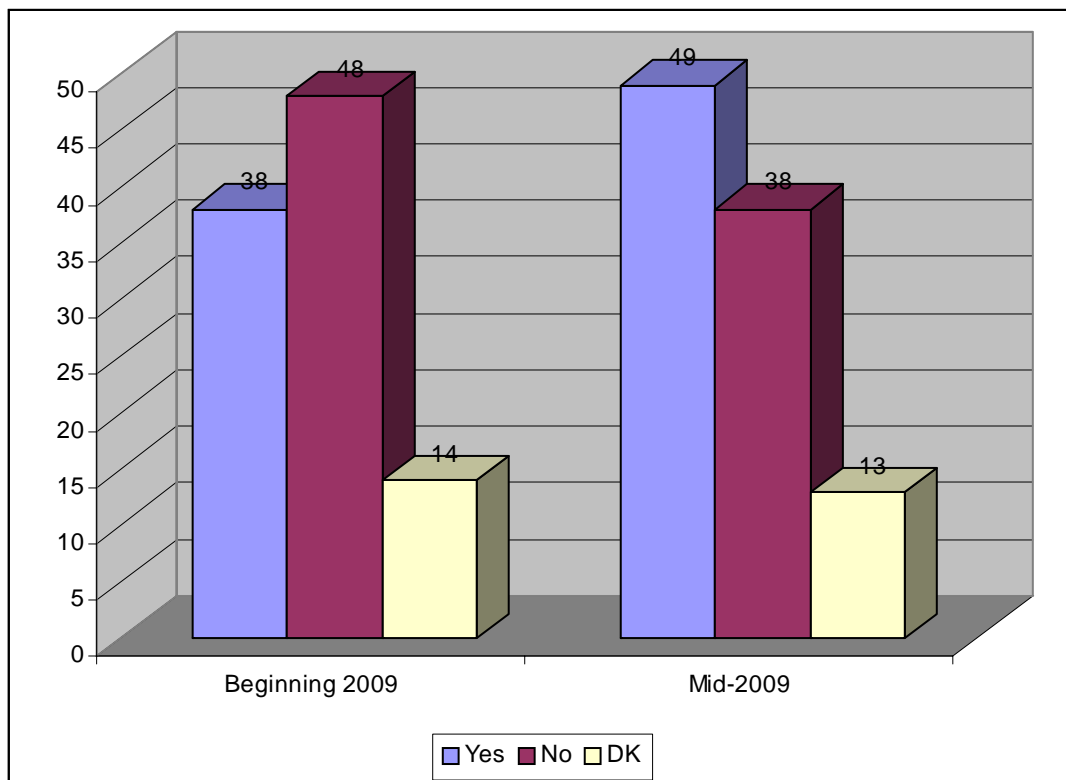
The new trend is further confirmed by the fact that Italians are mostly convinced that the EU is the best positioned to take effective actions against the effects of the financial and economic crisis.

European institutions are preferred in this task in comparison to the G20 or the International Monetary Fund. The EU is also considered more suited to tackling the crisis than the Italian government or the United States of America.

Another sign of a possible new, less pessimistic mood towards the EU's ability to face the economic crisis is given by the unusual support Italians show for the euro, which is usually the object of criticism among Italians.

The majority of the sample (49%) believes that the euro zone membership enabled Italy to be more stable economically. 61% of the interviewees are in favour of the European Monetary Union, and a further majority (52%) maintain that in 2030 the euro will be a stronger currency than the dollar.

**Tab. 1.1: Do you feel Italy is more stable economically
Because it is a member of the euro area?**



Italians also show a new positive approach towards technological innovation and market economy. The sample considers the development of new technologies one of the key drivers of the economy. Therefore, Italians firmly support innovation although they underline that any relevant change should take place in a gradual rather than a radical manner.

The market economy is again favoured by the majority of Italians. 69% of the interviewees consider that free competition is the best way to guarantee economic prosperity. At the same time, 65% of the sample agrees that the State intervenes too much in their daily lives.

This pro-market attitude is coupled with a renewed warning about the risks of individualism. Many Italians support indeed the idea of a society where more importance will be given to solidarity.

Globalisation is now seen more as an opportunity for national companies rather than a threat to workers. However, Italians agree that there is a need for global governance of the phenomenon.

In this context, the EU is regarded as extremely important, since it is considered very useful both in benefiting from the positive effects of globalisation, and in protecting from its negative consequences.

CHAPTER III

Social issues

Employment remains a big concern among Italians, with 86% of the interviewees being sceptical about the current national situation, while a further 88% are convinced that it will be difficult to find a good job in Italy even with high qualifications.

This opinion is shared by 80% of EU citizens when asked about the situation in their respective countries.

As a result, Italians admit that they would prefer secure employment rather than a good salary or an interesting job. To shed unemployment, Italians would also accept to change job regularly.

The difficulties concerning employment are amplified by a social protection system which is widely criticised for its poor performance.

42% of the Italian sample says that social security does not sufficiently cover citizens' needs. In contrast, many European citizens consider their national models so effective that they would recommend their adoption elsewhere.

Italians are also doubtful about their retirement. 54% of the interviewees are not confident about the future of their pensions.

In contrast, Italians seem to trust their national healthcare system. 47% of the sample believes that, in the future, they will be provided with adequate help and long-term care, if needed. 36% are, instead, sceptical.

CHAPTER IV

Identity and immigration

68% of Italians say they feel European, but this percentage, although high, is dwarfed by those who root their identity in their country and in their region. In both cases, this represents 92% of the sample.

As for the European identity, Italians believe that it is mainly based on democratic values, and, secondarily, on a common culture, high levels of social protection, a common history, geography and entrepreneurship.

The common religious heritage is regarded as far less important to define a European identity. Only 10% of Italians and 8% of Europeans look at it as a relevant factor.

Their strong national and regional identity sometimes results in the growing disaffection of Italians against immigrants, especially when they belong to different ethnic groups.

The majority of the sample believes immigrants cause insecurity, are a threat to employment and a burden on the social security system.

In addition to that, Italians do not consider immigrants useful for tackling demographic imbalances, such as the progressive ageing of the population. The sample is equally split in considering the cultural advantages of a multi-ethnic society.

The only positive remarks regarding immigration concern the acknowledgement of the important role of immigrants as workers in certain economic sectors, and their contribution to increasing tolerance and understanding with other parts of the world.

As a result of this scepticism about immigration, the idea of further enlarging the borders of the European Union does not fare well. Italians opposing new enlargements represent the majority of the sample and have grown to 45% of the total. The same critical trend emerges among the European sample.

Nevertheless, both Italians and Europeans agree that, in 2030, the EU will go far beyond the limits of the European continent.