

EUROBAROMETER 72

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ITALY

CHAPTER I

The Italians and the EU

49% of Italians consider their country's membership of the EU as positive, compared to 32% of the sample who hold a neutral opinion, and a further 13% who judge it as negative.

This relatively positive view is in contrast with the growing concern about the way national interests are taken into consideration in Brussels. 48% of the Italian sample thinks that not enough is done to protect these interests.

However, trust in the EU remains strong, and has increased in comparison to the last poll. 52% of the interviewees trust the European Union in general, 54% has confidence in the European Parliament, 51% in the Commission, 47% in the Council and 45% in the European Central Bank.

Nevertheless, the majority of Italians, 51% of the sample, acknowledge their ignorance about how the EU functions.

For Italians, the EU mainly represents the freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the European Union. In addition, Italians think that the EU gives Europeans a stronger say in the world and protects common values such as democracy and cultural diversity, as well as economic prosperity. A few interviewees underlined that, for them, the EU also stands for not enough controls at external borders.

Italians complain that the EU is short of ideas to face new challenges, but nevertheless support the idea that the EU should increase its competences compared to national Government in almost all policy areas, ranging from fighting crime to dealing with immigration and from unemployment to research.

A slight majority of the Italian sample (43%) maintains a negative opinion concerning further possible enlargements of the EU. Likewise, the wider EU sample is in favour of new enlargements.

CHAPTER II

Reactions to the economic crisis

The vast majority of the Italian sample believes the state of the national economy is negative. The same opinion is expressed regarding the European and the global economy.

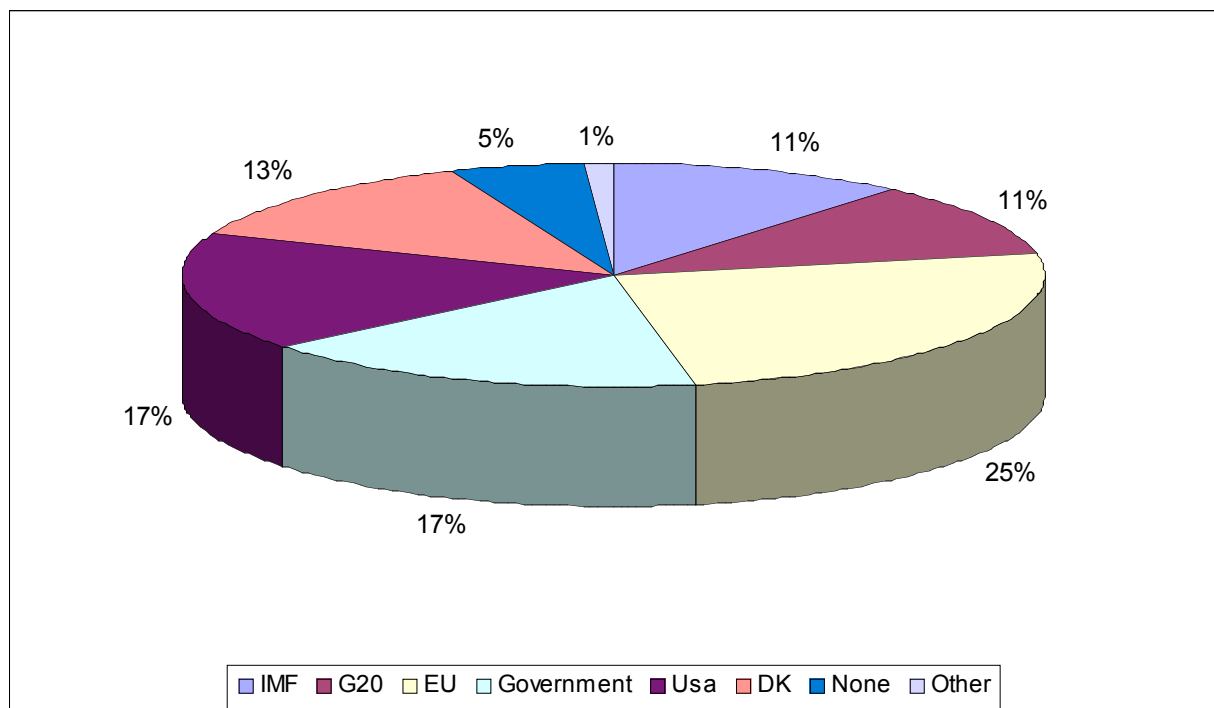
During this crisis, the support for the common European currency has increased. 63% of the Italians currently favour the monetary union and the euro compared to 61% in the previous poll.

The euro is thought to have mitigated the negative effects of the current financial and economic crisis, according to 53% of the interviewees. However, in answering to a different question, 50% of the sample believes that if Italy had kept its old currency, lira, it would have been better protected.

The future looks bleak and only a few expect real improvements, while the relative majority (42%) believes that the economic situation will remain the same for the next twelve months.

The European Union is seen as best suited to face the crisis. It is widely preferred to global bodies, such as the G20 and the International Monetary Fund, with regards to solving the financial and economic problems of the world.

Graph 1: In your opinion, which institution is best able to face the financial and economic crisis? (Italian sample)



According to the majority of the Italian sample, in order to promote economic recovery and to help people overcome the effects of the crisis, the EU should focus on supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Once the worst of the crisis is over, Italians recommend limiting excessive public deficits in order to ensure economic recovery. The Italian sample also suggests giving priority to research and innovation.

Italy needs more reforms, according to 75% of the interviewees. The majority is also convinced that reforms which will benefit future generations should be pursued even if that implies some sacrifices for the present generation.

Concerning the financial services sector, from where the current crisis originated, Italians believe that the EU should have a more important role at an international level in regulating global financial markets. Transparency of costs, risks and benefits should be the fundamental principle guiding the reform of the sector.

CHAPTER III

Unemployment, quality of life and environment

The relative majority of the Italian sample (44%) believes that the negative impact of the economic crisis on the job market has not yet reached its peak. On average, Europeans are even more pessimistic. 54% of them predict that the worst has still to come, even if the unemployment rate in the EU was already close to 9% when the poll was carried out in summer 2009.

If the worst is still to come, the present is far from ideal. 86% of the Italian interviewees judge the employment situation in Italy negatively, while only 14% are satisfied.

It is, therefore, no surprise that the fight against unemployment is considered by Italians as the main challenge for their country in the years to come. It is deemed more important than pursuing the overall economic recovery, guaranteeing security or fighting illegal immigration.

Fear of unemployment grows in an environment already affected by significant social concerns. The majority of the sample admits to living in a precarious condition. 52% of the interviewees claim a drop in their purchasing power in the last five years. Indeed, inflation has become the main personal challenge for the majority of Italian households.

The quality of life in Italy does not satisfy its residents, 55% of whom believe that in the rest of Europe life conditions are better. This evaluation contrasts with the opinion that emerged among the wider EU sample, where, instead, the prevailing opinion is that the quality of life in each respective country is higher than the EU average.

The environment is also a reason of concern among the Italian sample. 73% of the interviewees see the current situation negatively and only a few believe in improvements in the short term.

Italians attribute a growing importance to the protection of the environment which is now considered a priority even if it were to imply negative effects on economic growth.

The EU should tackle these environmental emergencies rather than the Italian Government, according to the majority of the sample. Italians also believe that the global challenge posed by climate change should be addressed, above all, by developing environmentally-friendly industries, services and technologies.

CHAPTER IV

The challenges of a globalised world

The relative majority of the Italian interviewees (50%) sees globalisation as a positive phenomenon, although critical opinions are growing from 37% to 40%. This view is in line with the increased scepticism towards protectionism evoked by the relative majority of the sample, although it was widely supported in the past

Globalisation is seen as an opportunity for economic growth and an incentive to encourage foreign investment in Italy. However, interviewees also acknowledge the negative effects linked to globalisation, notably the increase of social inequalities and the threat to national culture.

Due to these divided opinions, Italians favour common international rules for globalisation. The EU is seen as playing a prominent role since it is thought to be capable of protecting Europe against negative consequences as well as exploiting the advantages of the phenomenon.

The EU is considered as indispensable in facing the big challenges posed by a globalised world, notably terrorism and climate change. However, Italians are also keen to underline the importance of local and regional authorities, which are often neglected at EU level, according to 61% of the sample.