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PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MALTA

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Life satisfaction

The downward trend in life satisfaction in Malta has continued. The share of Maltese interviewees who say they are satisfied with the life they lead fell to 77%, down by 3 points when compared to the previous survey and by 11 points when compared to that of autumn 2004.

On the other hand, Maltese interviewees expressed greater optimism about the short-term prospects of their own household, as well as those of the country. The improvement in the public mood may have been driven by the announcement of an agreement between the Maltese government and Tecom Investments of Dubai for the construction of the first Internet City in Europe. However, this improvement was not reflected in the respondents' expectations concerning their personal job situation.

When asked about how they would compare their present personal situation with that of five years ago, those saying it has improved were equal in number to those who said it had got worse. On the other hand, respondents were more optimistic about their personal situation in five years' time. 45% (40% in the previous survey) said that in the next five years, their personal situation will improve, 25% (25%) said their situation will stay the same and only 16% believe it will get worse.

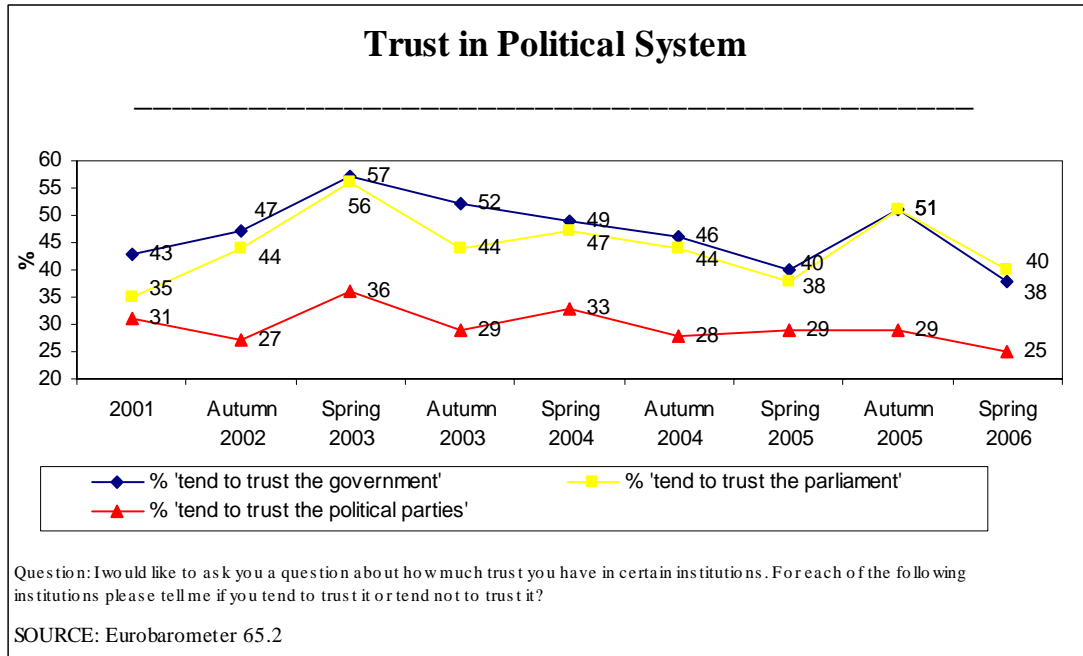
Most important issues facing Malta

Participants in the survey were asked for their opinion on what they considered to be the two most important issues facing the country. Unemployment, rising prices and the state of the economy were identified as the most pressing challenges facing Malta at present. Concern with illegal immigration fell to 20% from 33% in autumn 2005. This probably reflects the seasonal drop in the number of irregular immigrants reaching Malta by sea during the winter months. Actually, concern with this issue is likely to increase since the total number of arrivals from January up to the first week of July was almost twice the number recorded during the same period last year.

When compared with the 25 EU member countries as a whole, Maltese respondents placed much more emphasis on the need for greater price stability, but expressed less concern about the level of criminal activity and the state of the healthcare system.

Trust in institutions

Trust in the Maltese government fell to its lowest level in the last five years. Only 38% of interviewees said they have faith in the government, down from 51% when compared to the previous survey. The low level of support among respondents mirrors the poor showing by the governing party in the local council elections in March 2006. The increase in the surcharge on electricity rates that followed the persistent rise in the international price of fuel oil is likely to have contributed to the drop in support for the government.



Since the party in government holds a majority of seats in parliament, respondents' trust in parliament tends to reflect their trust in the government. In fact, the share of interviewees saying they trusted parliament fell from 51% in the previous survey to 40%.

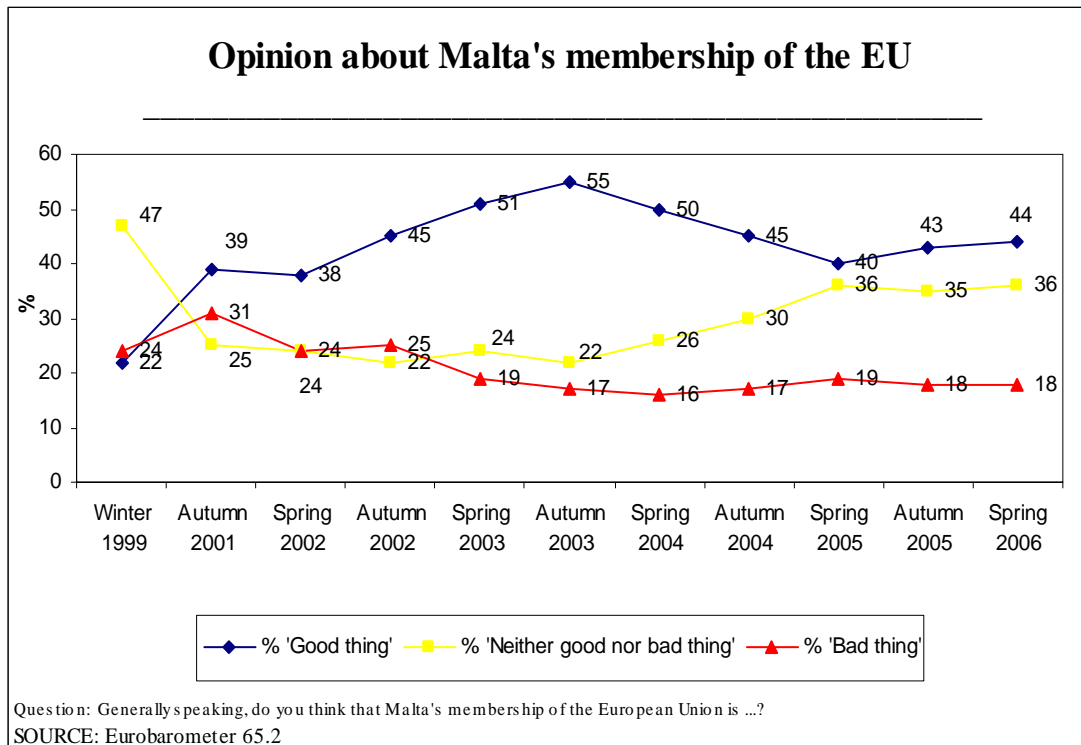
53% (57% in the previous survey) of Maltese interviewees said they trust the European Union, 5 points more than the EU average. 61% (66%) of the interviewees expressed trust in the United Nations.

Judgment on the current situation

Respondents were also asked for their judgment on the current situation in various economic and social spheres. To a large extent the responses confirm a high degree of apprehension regarding the country's economic situation. Almost three out of every four Maltese interviewees said they consider the Maltese economy to be in a bad state. Maltese respondents were also downbeat on the country's employment situation and the state of the environment.

Citizens view on EU

Overall, Maltese confidence in the European institutions was weaker than that expressed in the previous survey, though it remains broadly comparable to the EU average. Support for the country's EU membership among the Maltese interviewees, at 44%, was virtually equal to that in the previous survey. When comparing trends in EU membership support during the last three years it becomes increasingly evident that there has been a shift from the opinion that membership is a good thing for Malta to the belief that membership will have a more neutral effect.



The proportion of Maltese respondents in favour of a Constitution for the EU fell from 60% in the previous survey to 46%. The share of Maltese interviewees against the EU Constitution rose by only 4 points, to 20%, whereas the proportion of those who felt they could not give an answer surged upwards from 24% in autumn 2005 to 34%.

Respondents were also asked whether they support the European Monetary Union with the Euro as its single currency. 47% said they were in favour of it, down by 3 points when compared with the previous survey. On the other hand, those who said they were against EMU rose by 4 points, to 40%.

When asked about what the European Union meant to them, most of the Maltese associate positive connotations with the EU. 43% of Maltese respondents said that the EU gives them freedom of movement to travel, study and work and 30% said the EU means a stronger say in the world.

34% (31% in previous survey) of Maltese respondents feel they understand how the EU works compared to the EU average of 46%. Among Maltese interviewees, the European Parliament is the most renowned EU institution, with 93% saying they have heard of it.

Maltese respondents' self-perceived knowledge about the EU was equal to the EU average. However, when tested on their knowledge of basic EU-related facts, the Maltese respondents performed better than their European counterparts.

The EU institutions about which people have heard most tend to be ranked as the most important by the Maltese interviewees. The European Parliament was perceived by Maltese respondents to be the most important institution in the EU (84%) followed by the European Commission (77%) and the Council of the EU (73%).

EU role in everyday life

When asked about their belief in the role the European Union will play in their daily life in five years' time, 45% of the Maltese interviewees (EU average of 41%) said they thought it will be a more important role, 35% (42%) said it will be the same as at present and 9% (11%) believe it will be a less important role. In addition, 55% of the Maltese would actually like the EU to play a more important role in their daily life in five years' time.

Nevertheless, Maltese respondents expressed mixed feelings on the extent to which the EU has helped the island face its most important challenges. On the issue of unemployment, 39% believe the EU plays a negative role compared to 34% who say it plays a positive one. A majority of the Maltese believe measures taken by the EU are contributing to the increase in prices.

On the general economic situation as well as immigration, respondents are almost equally divided between those who say that the EU plays a positive role and those who say it contributes negatively. On the other hand, the EU is credited with helping Malta protect the environment (66% say the EU plays a positive role), combat crime (47%) and improving healthcare (41%).

Fears over EU integration

Maltese respondents expressed less fears about EU integration than those from other member states with 56% of Maltese respondents supporting future enlargement of the EU. Maltese respondents said that their major fear was the transfer of jobs to countries with lower production costs. However, such concerns exist in virtually all member states, underpinning the harsh competition in international markets. By contrast, the interviewees from Malta were more worried than those in other states about the possibility of a loss of power for smaller member states and the loss of national identity. The Maltese expressed a lower level of concern in relation to the possibility of more difficulties for farmers and the end of the Maltese lira.

Expectations

Almost half the Maltese respondents expect the EU to give top priority to fighting unemployment, the issue which they consider to be the most important challenge facing the country. 43% would like the EU to focus on fighting illegal immigration, compared to just 15% in the other EU countries.

On the other hand, Maltese respondents do not want the EU to concentrate its efforts on asserting the political and diplomatic importance of the EU around the world. The successful implementation of the euro, guaranteeing the quality of food products and further enlargement of the EU were all given low priority by the Maltese.

Energy Consumption

In view of the persistent increase in the price of fuel oil to record high levels, interviewees of this survey were also asked a number of questions on energy consumption habits. The Maltese respondents were overwhelmingly against having to pay more for their energy requirements.

70% of the Maltese said they would not be prepared to pay more for energy produced from renewable sources than for energy produced from other sources, 11 points less than the EU average. 19% (34%) replied that they were ready to pay more. Four-fifths of those who replied in the affirmative are only ready to pay up to 5% more.

When asked about the efforts they are ready to make to meet the new energy challenges 69% (EU average of 49%) said they would agree to reduce their energy consumption but would not be prepared to pay more. When asked about what should be the public authorities' priority to help people reduce consumption, 63% of the Maltese (EU average of 49%) said they should provide more information on the efficient use of energy.

Citizens and the Media

Television remained by far the most popular source for EU-related information among the Maltese. Moreover, the proportion of participants who said they used this medium rose from 62% in autumn 2005 to 76%. Daily newspapers (31%) and the radio (31%) were the next most frequently used sources of information. When compared to respondents in the 25 EU member countries on average, the Maltese made more use of television and books or brochures, but referred to newspapers less often for their EU information needs.

When asked about how often they get the news from different media, the Maltese expressed a marked preference for television news programmes. Moreover, the results suggest that the Maltese are less interested in current affairs than their European counterparts.

Overall, the Maltese feel the Maltese media gives enough coverage to issues concerning the EU. Interviewees were also questioned on whether they thought the Maltese media presents the European Union too positively, objectively or too negatively. The proportion of respondents saying the EU was being presented too positively was considerably above the EU average.