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NATIONAL REPORT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ITALY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Future Perspectives

Seventy-six percent of those interviewed in Italy are satisfied with their life, while 23% are dissatisfied. With regard to future prospects, the percentage of optimists records a marked fall: only 34% of the sample feels that their overall lifestyle will improve.

Sixty-nine percent of Italians consider that the current national economic situation is negative. However, this percentage has recorded a fall compared with data collected for the spring 2006 survey, when 76% of those interviewed held this opinion.

Looking to the future, 37% of the sample believes that the Italian economic situation is doomed to worsen over the next twelve months. The relative majority of the sample (39%) asserts that the situation will remain stable.

Thirty-six percent of Italians are sceptical about employment: they are of the opinion that employment on a national level will get worse over the next twelve months. Twenty percent are of the opposite view, i.e. employment will improve, while a relative majority (38%) thinks that the situation will remain the same.

Overall, the relative majority of Italians is convinced that things in Italy are going in the wrong direction: this view is shared by 44% of those interviewed, while 23% are more inclined towards a positive assessment of the Italian situation.

Knowledge and Assessment of the EU

Fifty-four percent of the Italians interviewed assert they do not understand the mechanisms of how the European Union functions well, as against 36% of those who claim that they do. In particular, 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 (17%) is rated at level 3.

The relative majority of the Italians interviewed (39%) still believes that the EU is made up of fifteen Member States. Fifty-three percent are not aware that Members of the European Parliament are elected by direct universal suffrage. A notable lack of knowledge is also recorded in regard to the six-month term of office of the EU presidency, thus demonstrating an overall low level of acquaintance with European relevant issues.

The most familiar European institutions are the Parliament (85% of Italians interviewed have at least heard of it) and the Commission (76% of the Italian

poll). Furthermore, these are the only institutions in which the absolute majority of the Italian sample places its trust.

Fifty-seven percent of the Italian sample is not interested in seeking information on the European Union. Forty-three percent of those interviewed admit that they often, or only occasionally, enquire about EU-related issues. However, 47% of the sample complains about difficulties encountered in finding exhaustive data, while 42% are satisfied with the existing means of information.

Fifty-nine percent of Italians interviewed state they are not interested in EU political issues, as opposed to 39% who are of the opposite view. Interest shown in national political issues is definitely greater with 50% of positive responses.

Fifty-eight percent of Italians polled want greater EU political integration to be achieved.

The EU still evokes a positive image for 56% of the Italian sample, although a fall is recorded compared with the spring survey (68%). On the other hand, a rise in the percentage of Italians who associate the EU with a negative image is recorded (11% compared with 5% before).

An absolute majority of the sample (52%) still believes that EU membership entails a positive factor for Italy, while 14% are of the opposite view. 29% express a neutral position.

For the very first time, a lower than 50% figure is recorded for the question as to whether or not Italy has benefited from being a member of the EU, with a score of 47%. This is a marked fall, especially in comparison with data gathered in spring 2006, when the figure recorded was 54%.

Other data indicate that the European Union has lost some of the Italians' trust. According to the spring survey, an absolute majority of the sample (56%) trusted the EU, but now only a relative majority (48%) is recorded. The percentage of sceptics has risen from 28% to 36%.

Policies and Priorities of the EU According to the Italians

Italians believe that the main problems their country has to face at present are a difficult economic situation (according to 33% of those interviewed) and unemployment (30%). The basic request submitted to the UE is to promptly intervene in the fight against poverty (34%) and unemployment (34%).

Nearly three out of four Italians express a desire for joint European action on foreign policy and the fight against terrorism. Seventy percent consider that a common foreign policy is necessary, and 74% are in favour of a common defence and security policy.

In other policy areas touched upon by the survey, Italians are in favour of actions undertaken jointly by the EU and the various Member States on immigration (69%), energy (64%), fight against crime (64%), scientific research (63%), environmental protection (57%), competition (55%), and support to regions with economic difficulties (51%).

Italians state that the speed at which the development of the Union is proceeding is rated at 3.9 on a scale from 1 to 7 (where 1 stands for 'total lack of motion' and 7 for 'top speed'). When asked to reply at which rate European integration should proceed, Italians desire an average speed of 5, using the same scale of values.

When asked to give a suggestion as to the most useful element for the future of the EU, the majority of the Italians interviewed (33%) cite the harmonization of living standards amongst the various European regions, while 31% propose the introduction of a European Constitution and 28% maintain that the use of a common language should be fostered.

The majority of the Italians strongly believes that the most important values are peace (46%), respect for human life (41%) and human rights (37%), followed by the rule of law (26%), democracy (24%) and individual freedom (21%).

When it comes to the values that the EU embodies, according to Italians, peace (32%), democracy (30%) and human rights (29%) are the most important. Moreover, the great majority of the Italians (55%) believes that the Member States closely share these fundamental values.

A Comparison between the EU and the USA

The relative majority of the Italian sample (38%) is of the opinion that the US plays a negative role in the safeguarding of world peace. Unfavourable views are also expressed when it comes to issues such as the struggle against poverty in the world (41% of the Italians interviewed do not agree with the attitude taken by Washington), or environmental protection (43%). Nonetheless, the relative majority of Italians underlines that the US plays a positive role in terms of world economic growth (39% of the sample) and the fight against terrorism (39%). The majority of the Italians interviewed maintains that the European Union is positively active in taking up the gauntlet regarding all the main challenges that the present world has to face. The EU promotes world peace (55% of the sample); it actively fights terrorism (52%); and it protects the environment (50%). However, Italians observe that the EU is lagging behind the US in seven of the ten policy areas surveyed by the Eurobarometer, including education, health care and the fight against unemployment. On the other hand, the EU is seen to be at the forefront compared with the US when it comes to issues such as the fight against social disparities and discrimination.

The Euro Currency, Single Market and Globalization

Sixty-three percent of Italians are in favour of the single currency, although a fall in positive comments is recorded in comparison with the survey of last spring, when this percentage touched 66%. Despite the wide acceptance of the Euro currency by Italians, only 26% of the national sample believes that they have benefited from the single currency, while 69% are of the opposite opinion.

Sixty percent of Italians interviewed express favourable comments towards increased competition in sectors such as transportation, telecommunications, banking and insurance, arising from the European Single Market. A relative majority of the Italian sample (37%) maintains that the common market has had a negative impact on the international competitiveness of Italian enterprises, as against 32% who believe in the benefits brought about for national companies.

Fifty-one percent of the Italian sample claims they have benefited from lower or no controls at national borders for travel across Europe. EU membership is acknowledged as being beneficial by 46% of the Italians in regard to the possibility it offers to study or work in another Member State.

Italians and Globalisation

The relative majority (40%) of the Italian sample considers that globalisation has had a negative impact on their country's economic development. Also, when it comes to employment, Italians feel that globalisation has not benefited them (41%). Nevertheless, in the field of scientific and technological progress, globalisation is seen more positively (51% of positive comments), as well as in relation to topics such as the spread of democracy at a worldwide level (44%), the strengthened solidarity between countries (43%), and the improvement in the quality of public services and facilities (37%).

However, 40% of Italians interviewed assert that the globalisation phenomenon does not stand as a good opportunity for national enterprises because of the opening of markets that globalization entails. Moreover, 39% of the national sample sees globalisation as a threat for employment and enterprises in Italy. Fifty-two percent of Italians believe that the European Union could permit the better exploitation of the positive effects of globalisation. When asked whether the EU helps citizens against the negative consequences of this phenomenon, 42% of the Italians respond in the affirmative.

Enlargement and Turkey

Forty-seven percent of the Italians are in favour of the further enlargement of the European Union that could embrace other countries in the years ahead, while 36% of the poll considers that European borders should not be further extended. However, enlargement is seen positively when it comes to countries such as Switzerland, Norway and Iceland: the majority of favourable views is

determined by a positive attitude toward the possible accession of countries that already belong to the EEA, i.e. Switzerland, Norway and Iceland.

Otherwise, the overall opinion expressed by Italians remains sceptical when the issue of enlargement concerns all other candidates or potential candidates, including Romania and Bulgaria, who will be official members of the EU as of 1 January 2007.

Only 37% of the Italian sample claims they are in favor of Bulgarian membership, while 48% are of the opposite view. A low percentage of positive responses is also recorded in regard to Romania: a relatively low 33%, as against 53% of those who are against.

The issue of Turkish membership still records a high percentage of unfavourable responses on behalf of Italians (60%), thus recording a rise compared with the spring 2006 survey (57%). The European average on the issue of Turkey's membership scores a percentage of 59% of negative responses. Furthermore, 64% of Italians interviewed maintain that cultural differences between Europe and Turkey are still too strong to permit Turkey's EU membership.

Turkey's membership is seen by 60% of the Italian poll as constituting a risk of increased immigration towards the more developed countries of the Union. The great majority of those interviewed, both in Italy (75%) and across the European Union (85%), maintains that Turkey could join the UE in the next ten years provided that human rights are systematically respected in that country. Another fundamental requirement that Turkey should meet if it wants to access EU membership is the improvement of its economic situation: the country's overall well-being should significantly increase, according to 74% of those interviewed in Italy and 77% of in the EU as a whole.

The European Constitution

Sixty-nine percent of Italians claim that they are in favour of a European Constitution. Furthermore, 65% of the Italian sample believes that a Constitution is necessary to ensure the good functioning of the European institutions. A net majority of the sample feels that that the approval of the Constitutional Treaty would make the EU more democratic (77% of those interviewed), or more transparent (73%), or stronger on social issues (76%). When faced with the uncertainty arising from the negative vote expressed by the French and the Dutch on the occasion the referenda on the ratification of the EU Constitution, the relative majority of Italians (40%) deems that the best way to proceed is via a renegotiation of the Treaty. 37% of Italians consider that the ratification process should, in any case, be continued.