

# **EUROBAROMETER 66**

**PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION**

## **AUTUMN 2006**

**NATIONAL REPORT**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**MALTA**

This survey was requested and coordinated by Directorate-General Communication.

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## **General Opinion**

The reported level of life satisfaction in Malta remains high - at comparable levels to that reported among citizens of other Member States. The percentage of those who said that they are satisfied with the life they lead stands at 82%, with educational background being a determining factor behind levels of life satisfaction. This figure represents a slight reversal of the downward trend in life satisfaction reported in the past two years.

There is a balanced opinion among the Maltese about general developments in the country: 33% think that things are going in the right direction while 35% think otherwise. This balanced view is probably a reflection of the polarised political opinion among the Maltese. The relatively significant share of those who are either neutral in this respect (25%) or do not know (7%), may suggest a declining interest in the local political scene.

A clearer picture emerges when respondents are asked to judge the current situation in specific areas. When asked about the Maltese economy, the majority (62%) admit that it is in a bad situation, a 14-percentage point drop compared to spring of 2005. Although decreasing substantially, a high percentage of 69% say that the employment situation is bad. A number of factors could be behind the negative sentiment about the local economy. These may include a decline in tourism activity and restructuring in the manufacturing sector.

At 59%, the figure representing those who think that the state of the environment is bad stands at the second highest level in the EU. This negative opinion among the Maltese about the environment may reflect an increased concern of the construction activity taking place particularly in view of recent proposals to increase availability of land for development purposes.

There is also a declining positive perception of the social welfare situation in Malta. 44% (compared to 50% in spring of 2005) agree that it is good but an almost equal share (43%) think that it is bad.

## **Expectations for the next 12 months**

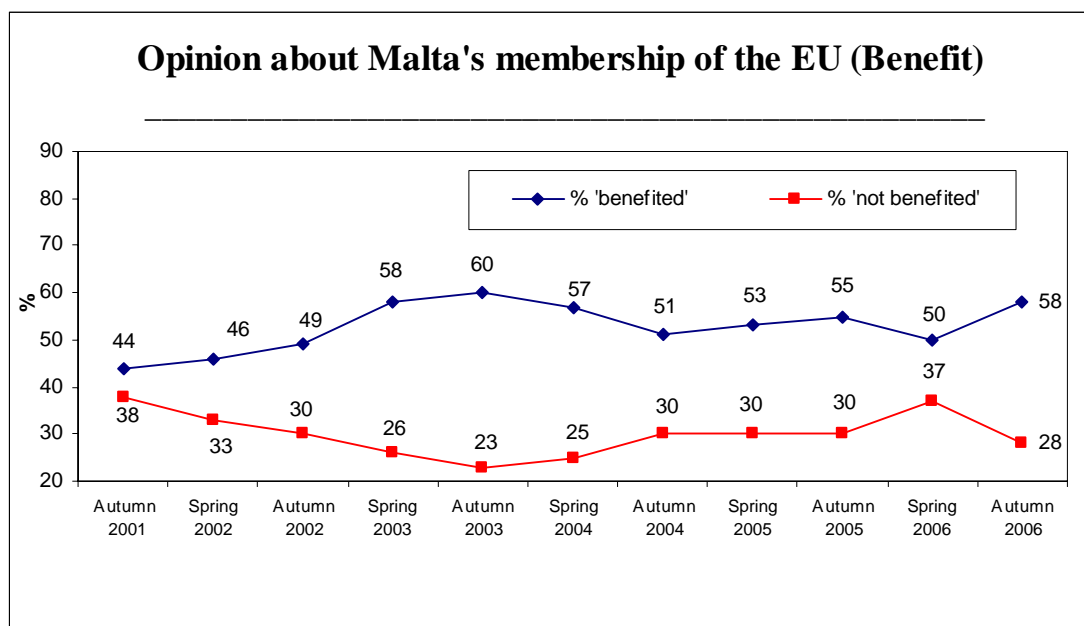
When asked about their life expectation for the next 12 months, a third of Maltese interviewees said that they will be better, 14% said that they will be worse, 46% expect it to remain the same, and 8% do not know.

Pessimism about the economic and employment situation in Malta remains: only 22% think that the economic situation will improve in the next 12 months while 31% think that it will get worse. Only 10% think that their job situation will get better,

compared to 17% and 22% among the new Member States and the euro-zone Member States, respectively.

### Opinion on the European Union and the euro

The Maltese remain in favour of Malta's EU membership, with 45% saying it is a good thing, while the figure for those against fell to 15% from 18% in the last survey. Moreover, when asked whether they have benefited or not from Malta's membership, 58% responded positively and 28% responded negatively.



Maltese respondents who are in favour (55%) of a European Monetary Union - with the euro as a single currency - exceed those against (30%) by a 20 percentage point difference, while those without an opinion stand at 16%. Those in favour of the euro increased substantially from 47% in spring of this year.

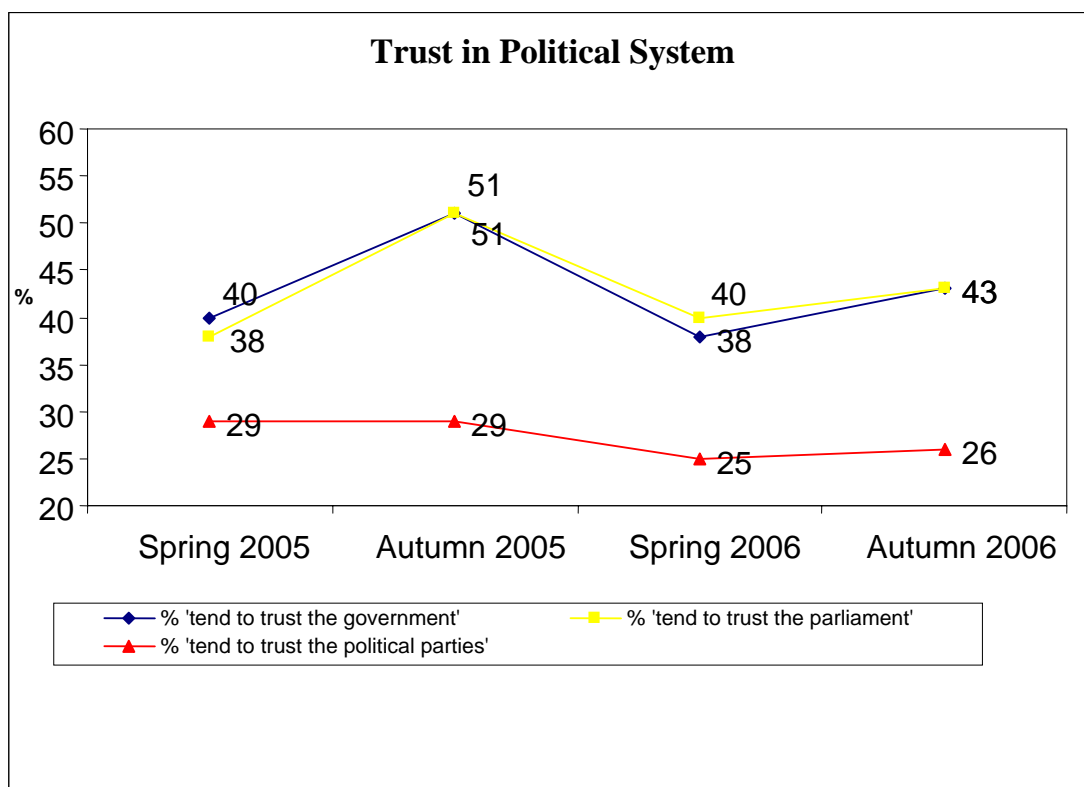
The overwhelming majority of the Maltese (79%) think that the EU plays a positive role in the protection of the environment. In fact, this is the second highest percentage among all Member States.

Almost two-thirds of the Maltese population holds a positive opinion of the EU's role in contributing to peace in the world. On the other hand, only 34% of the Maltese think that the United States tends to play a positive role regarding world peace.

### Trust in institutions

Trust in the Maltese government remained low at 43% of the respondents, but up from 38% in spring of this year. The tendency to trust stands at a high 84% among those who consider themselves to be on the right of the political spectrum, which figure stands at a direct contrast with the 17% of those on the left. 42% of those who

consider themselves to be on the centre say that they trust the government. Meanwhile, the share of those who trust political parties continues to be low at 26%.



A significant percentage of the Maltese (70%) still hold a high level of trust in religious institutions, compared to the 44% in the EU as a whole. Only 45% of the Maltese tend to trust the Maltese justice and the legal system. A high percentage of Maltese respondents (72%) tend to trust the police and a higher proportion (77%) tend to trust the army.

### Most important issues facing the country

For the first time, the issue of immigration ranked first in priority among the most important issues facing the country. Close to half of the local population (45%) puts it as a top priority concern for Malta. This contrasts with the 19% figure in spring of this year. It must be noted that this survey was held in September and October when news of frequent landings of irregular immigrants during summer was still fresh in people's minds.

The increasing energy costs in recent months could be the determinant behind the high concern (28%) of the Maltese with rising prices. Unemployment (27%) and the economic situation (23%) are the third and fourth most important issues, respectively, according to Maltese respondents.

## **The European Economy, Employment and Globalisation**

The general opinion among the Europeans is in favour of the EU single market. Support for the single market is higher in the new Member States (74%) than the former EU-15 (58%). Among the Maltese, two-thirds agree that the ensuing increased competition has a positive effect.

Half of the respondents agree that the single market has actually increased the international competitiveness of local companies compared with that of 10 years ago. However, 51% of respondents also noted that EU membership had a bad effect on employment.

Like their European counterparts, the Maltese recognise the importance of education and professional training as the key to improve the performance of the European economy with 59% putting it as the most important issue.

The efficient use of energy is deemed to be just as important for the European economy by 50% of the local population, which figure is substantially higher than the 36% for the whole of the EU. Evidently, the energy issue seems to be a more urgent issue in Malta compared to the creation of new companies (48%) or investment in research (40%).

The Maltese respondents who think that globalisation represents a good opportunity for companies stand at 47% while 26% say they fear loss of employment and closure of companies. However, 39% of the Maltese think that globalisation has a rather negative effect on employment in the country, with only 32% who think otherwise.

## **European Political Union**

The Maltese public share a fairly strong approval rating (63%) towards closer political union. 60% are in favour of a constitution for the EU - which is believed to make the EU more democratic, efficient and stronger in the world - and even more (64%) are in favour of a common defence and security policy. Possible factors behind these positive percentages may include the consensus around the proposed EU constitution by the main political parties and the illegal immigration issue for which the EU is seen to be providing increased political, financial and technical backing.

Maltese respondents state that they have benefited from several achievements of the EU. There is an overwhelming agreement (85%) on the benefits of having a wider variety of goods from other EU countries. There is also a noticeable understanding of the beneficial aspects of the rights of an EU citizen (65%) and the reduced border controls when travelling (58%).

There is a general tendency among EU citizens that decision making in areas such as taxation, unemployment, pensions, education and health should be taken at the national level. Areas which are deemed to be better dealt with at an EU level include, among others, fighting crime and terrorism, defence, immigration, and the protection of the environment.

In a reflection of the problems posed by illegal immigration, Maltese respondents agree (58%) that tackling this issue should also be of high priority for the whole of the EU. Half of the Maltese public put unemployment as second priority for the EU followed by the need to fight poverty and social exclusion.

### **Enlargement**

The majority of Member States registered an increase in opposition to Turkey's bid to become part of the EU. The percentage of those who oppose Turkey's accession now stands at 59% of European respondents. At the same time, a majority of the Turkish respondents (55%) see the cultural differences between them and the Europeans as a reason not to form part of the bloc.

With an exception for Turkey, the Maltese people are generally in favour of EU accession for all the countries mentioned in the survey. Slightly less than half of the Maltese (46%) are against Turkey's membership of the EU, compared to only 30% who are in favour. Two-thirds of the Maltese see the difference in cultures as a primary reason for not letting Turkey join the EU.

### **Values of European Citizens**

Half of the Maltese believe that their voice counts in the EU, while 35% think otherwise. However, 75% do not feel very much involved in European affairs. When questioned about their understanding of how the EU works, half of the respondents say that they do not know much.

In Malta, the share of those who expressed their interest in local affairs stands at 73%, which, although higher than that for the EU, may still be considered on the low side given that over 90% of the eligible Maltese population votes in the general election. On the other hand, 23% admit that they are not interested at all. Half of the Maltese are interested in European affairs, which is comparable to the EU average.

There are identifiable values or principles which emerge as particularly strong in Malta. People from all political shades agree on the need for more equality and justice (71%). 81% of respondents agree that criminals should be punished more severely while the legalisation of personal consumption of cannabis faces strong opposition in Malta (77%). 18% of Maltese respondents agree with gay marriages while 85% disagree with the idea of homosexual couples adopting children.

Maltese respondents who disagree with the assertion that immigrants contribute a lot to their country stand at 68%. Also in a majority (70%) are those who say that religion in Maltese society is too important.

It emerges from the autumn survey that a highly significant 77% tend to agree with the statement that the protection of the environment should be a priority for Malta, even if it affects the economic growth of the country.

The most important personal values held by the Maltese - and likewise by the Europeans - are peace, respect for human life, human rights and democracy.