

EUROBAROMETER 67

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ITALY

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The national economic situation and Italians' expectations

A majority of Italians (74%) are satisfied with their life, but a significant number of them are open in their criticism of the economic and the employment situation in their country: this is an opinion held by 58% of the sample, although below that recorded in the last poll.

Even if, in general, Italians are not satisfied with the national economic situation, the majority (51%) feel pleased with their personal financial situation. This is confirmed by the widespread ownership of goods, often above the EU average. Italians say more frequently than other Europeans that they own a television (98%), a mobile telephone (86%), a car (79%). Moreover, 58% of the Italian sample claims to own at least one house, whereas the European average is 45%. In contrast, more modern goods like the computer or an Internet connection is less widespread.

In spite of this, a large number of Italians are convinced that, in general, Italy is less 'prosperous' compared to the rest of the EU: 63% of those interviewed consider the national economic conditions to be lower than the European average; 62% see the Italian employment situation as worse than the EU level; 67% deem the cost of living in Italy higher than in the rest of Europe; the same percentage also complains about heavier energy prices.

Italians also believe that the quality of life, in general, is higher in Europe as a whole than in Italy: this opinion is shared by a relative majority (42%) of the sample. However, in all the policy sectors, ranging from education to healthcare, from public transport to pensions, Italians are convinced that Italy has much to learn from the rest of Europe.

The common European currency, the euro, is seen positively by an increased number of Italians: now 67% compared to 64% of the sample recorded in autumn 2006. On the other hand, a larger number of interviewees consider the Italian economic situation worse than five years ago, when the euro started to circulate.

Looking towards the future, Italians show confidence in their own means and, in general, a slight majority thinks that personal conditions will improve. However, the forecasts for the national economy and employment conditions for the next twelve months seem gloomy: 31% are pessimistic and only 25% declare themselves optimistic.

The evaluation and the knowledge of the EU

Italians are increasingly in favour of the European Union: 58% of the sample attributes a positive image to the EU, compared with 56% in the previous poll. At the same time, there is a fall in the number of respondents who consider that Italy has not benefited from EU membership: now they are 32% instead of the previous 38%, while 48% of Italians see advantages from membership. Overall, 51% of the Italian sample sees their country's membership of the EU as a good thing.

The European Union is, for a majority of Italians, firstly, democratic (74%) and, secondly, modern (73%). Conversely, a relative majority (45%) believes that the term 'technocratic' describes the EU well. Only a small minority of Italians consider the EU as inefficient.

Italians trust the European Union more and more. Now, 58% of the total sample trusts it in comparison with only 48% last year. The European Parliament is the institution the Italians trust the most (60%), followed by the European Commission and the European Central Bank. This trend is also seen in the polls regarding the Italian institutions: 39% of the sample, instead of the previous 31%, trusts the Italian Parliament, even if there are 51% who do not. Also, the media inspire greater trust than before and the radio is confirmed as the most trustworthy.

Television is, instead, the most used channel to get information about European Union. 60% of Italians rely on it, while the newspapers, the radio and the Internet continue to be less used. In general, 69% of the Italians confess to not being well-informed about European political affairs. In response to questions assessing the level of knowledge of specific European policies, an average of at least 70% of Italians claim to be not very informed or not informed at all. As a confirmation of this, 55% of Italians do not know how many States are members of the EU, and 59% are not aware that Members of the European Parliament are elected directly by citizens.

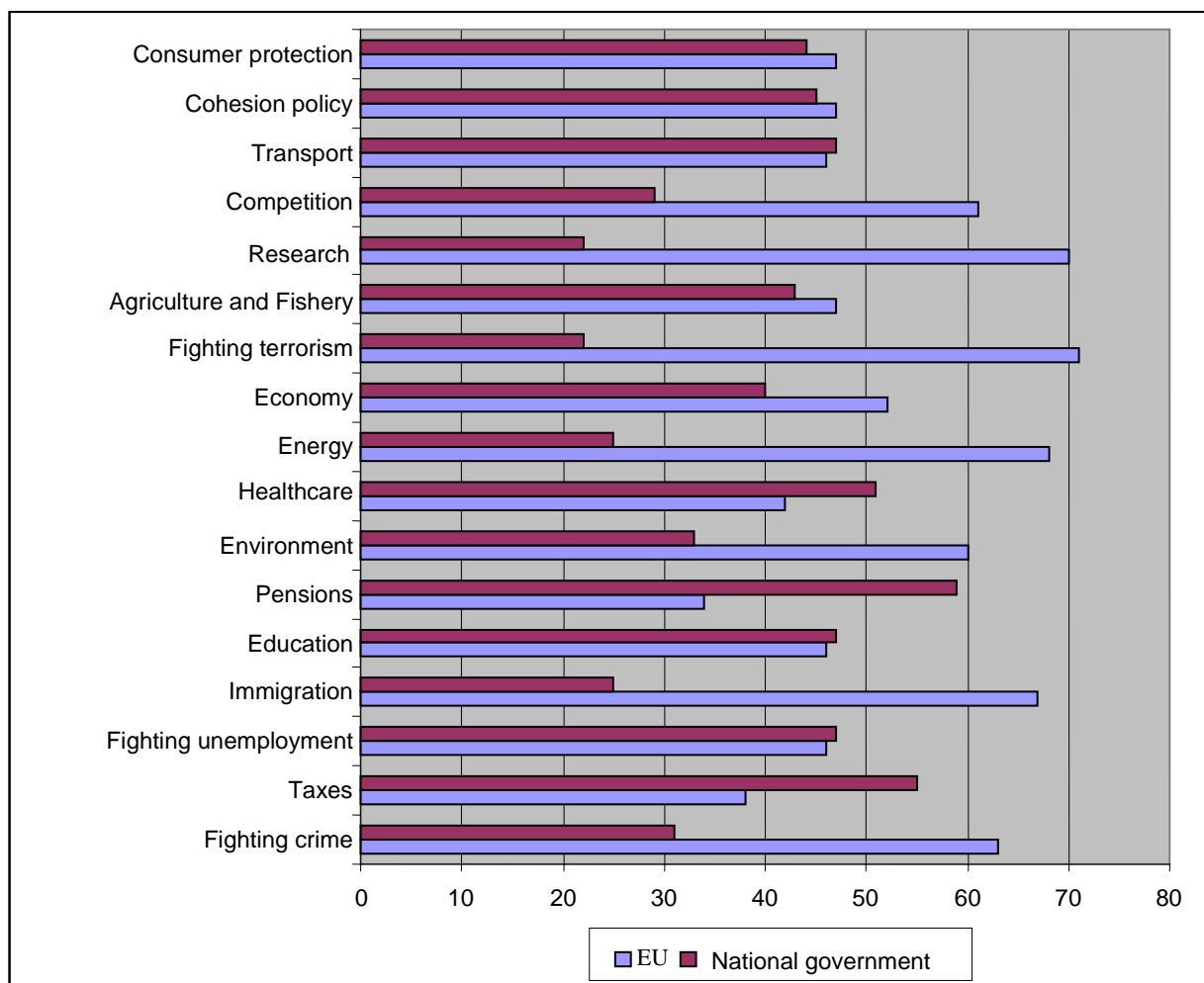
The EU, the States, and enlargement

74% of Italians tend to agree with the notion that every European decision is the subject of negotiations in which the opinions of the national governments of all Member States are taken into account. Moreover, 53% of the sample thinks the voice

of Italy counts in Europe, and 55% forecast that Italian influence in the EU will be even stronger in the future.

Italians are clearly in favour of European management, instead of national, for certain policies such as foreign and defence affairs (67%), energy (68%), immigration (67%), the fight against crime (63%), environment (60%). Conversely, the majority of Italians consider that the decisions on taxes, pensions and healthcare should be taken by the national governments.

In the following sectors who should take the decisions?



89% of Italians claim to be attached to their country, while only 62% say the same about the EU. To improve the functioning of the European institutions, Italians are in favour of the so-called 'Multi-speed Europe' where those countries which are ready to intensify the development of a common European policy in certain important areas could do so without having to wait for the others. In this framework, the enlargement of 2004 has not been judged as a cause of complications for Community life.

Currently, 48% of Italians are in favour of further enlargements, a higher percentage in comparison with the last poll.

The European Constitution and the first 50 years together

Responding a few months before the European leaders decided to abandon the European Constitution, a clear majority of Italians had a positive approach to the Constitutional Treaty (72%). Moreover, after the Slovaks, the Italians are the Europeans who most identify themselves with one of the main EU symbols, the European flag.

In addition, 68% of Italians are optimistic about the future of the EU. The majority believes that the European Union in the next 50 years will have a common army and will be a leading diplomatic power in the world. 55% of the sample thinks the euro will be a more powerful currency than the dollar.

72% believe the European Union should have its own Foreign Minister who plays the role of spokesperson for a common EU position. Italians who prefer a European foreign policy independent from the US foreign policy are still the majority, even if this has slightly decreased.

The 25th of March, the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the signature of the Treaties of Rome provoked mainly a feeling of hope in Italians. In their evaluation of the first half-century of European integration, Italians see as its main success the free movement of people, goods and services within the EU. Fewer Italians instead place peace among the top achievements of the EU (from 35% to the current 31%).

In order to increase the feeling of community among European citizens, the Italians consider values and culture as crucial, and, secondly, history, economy and religion. Also, for this reason, a large majority of the sample supports an improved teaching of subjects related to the EU.

Security and Immigration

Eurobarometer 67 marks the emergence of security among the main concerns of Italians, together with the economy and unemployment. But, while these last two issues provoke a minor preoccupation in comparison with the last poll, security becomes a new primary concern.

Thus, Italians want Europe to play a bigger role in the fight against crime: 63% are in favour of a European, instead of national, management of the problem. Moreover,

security and immigration are the fields where Italians consider the EU should act with more urgency.

With these concerns in mind, Italians are ready to sacrifice some of their privacy: the majority considers as a secondary problem the fact that the authorities could use personal data for the purpose of fighting crime or terrorism. A slight majority believes the current legislation protects these data from possible abuse by private companies. However, 51% of Italians confess to not being well enough informed about the subject.

Globalisation and global warming

The majority of Italians regard globalisation as the reason for the relocation of some companies to countries where labour is cheaper (26%). Nevertheless, there are more and more Italians convinced that the phenomenon is an opportunity for Italian companies (from 18% to 24%).

In addition, half of the interviewees, instead of the previous 44%, say that the term globalisation is a positive one. On the other hand, more Italians are now also in favour of protectionism and trade unions. These apparent contradictions emerge again when the poll indicates that the majority of the sample has a positive opinion both on the welfare state and flexibility, public administration and private companies.

With regard to global warming, 84% of Italians believe the EU has to act urgently. Moreover, the sample is overwhelmingly in favour of European -, instead of national – management of the problem.