

EUROBAROMETER 72

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

AUTUMN 2009

NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MALTA

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This report was produced for the European Commission's Representation in Malta

This document does not represent the point of view of the European Commission.
The interpretations and opinions contained in it are solely those of the authors.

INTRODUCTION

The report covers the results from Wave 72 of the Standard Eurobarometer. The fieldwork was carried out between 30 October 2009 and 15 November 2009. During this period, the Finance Minister published the 2010 Budget which may have had some impact on the participants' responses. The report covers a number of topics that reflect the current state of affairs in Malta and the other 26 member states of the European Union. These include socio-economic indicator questions, the general perception on the European Union, globalisation, the financial and economic crisis, values, innovation and the European Union's main priorities.

1. STATE OF OPINION

The majority of the Maltese are generally satisfied with their life (72 per cent - 5 percentage points lower than the EU27¹ average). Life satisfaction in Malta has been higher than the European average for a number of years. However, this autumn's results have been an exception – 12 percentage points lower when compared to autumn 2008 and 10 percentage points lower than in spring 2009.

Three out of four Maltese consider the local economic situation to be bad. This is at the same level as that prevalent in the rest of the EU. The Maltese also perceive the European economy not to be any better than the local economy. The financial situation of Maltese households is considered to be worse than the average across Europe; however, the Maltese are more optimistic than the EU average on the local employment situation.

The Maltese generally consider the local scenario to be worse than the European one on all the aspects especially on the cost of living in Malta, energy prices and the environmental situation. There is just one exception where perceptions are not as negative and this relates to the employment situation.

According to this survey, the expectations of the Maltese are that things are going to remain unchanged in the next twelve months, especially life in general, the financial situation in the household and personal job situation. The Maltese are concerned mainly with the perception that the national economic situation will not improve in the next twelve months.

¹ The 27 European Member States

Inflation is still considered as a major national issue, together with immigration, the economic situation and energy. Rising prices, inflation and immigration have always been a major concern to Maltese citizens. However, one can note that the percentage of Maltese citing immigration went down by 14 percentage points when compared to the same time last year.

2. THE EUROPEAN UNION

45 per cent of respondents feel that Malta's membership was a move in the right direction. Over the past six months, there was a significant drop of 12 percentage points (from 57 per cent to 45 per cent) of people who are positive about Malta joining the EU. Nonetheless, the majority of the participants (59 per cent) believe that Malta has benefited from being a member of the European Union.

3. THE EU, THE WORLD AND GLOBALISATION

A significant percentage of Maltese (32 per cent) do not fully comprehend the impact of globalisation. This can be observed from the large share of Maltese who were unable to answer the questions on globalisation. However, in general, the Maltese feel that globalisation is more of an opportunity for economic growth whereas the general view within the EU is that globalisation requires common global rules.

Another analysis shows that 47 per cent of the Maltese respondents (compared to 43 per cent within the EU27) believe that globalisation represents a good opportunity for local companies through the opening-up of markets. On the other hand, only 27 per cent of Maltese respondents (compared to 42 per cent within the EU27) think that globalisation represents a threat to employment and companies in Malta.

4. THE FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC CRISIS

The household situation for most of the Maltese citizens (59 per cent), does not allow them to make any plans for the future. However, the majority of Maltese respondents tend to disagree with the statement that Malta would have been better protected from the current financial and economic crisis if the Maltese Lira were retained (55 per cent compared to 33 per cent who think the opposite). In fact, the majority of the Maltese (54 per cent) believe that the Euro has mitigated the negative effects of the current financial and economic crisis.

A number of factors were presented to the respondents and they were asked to indicate the top three priorities to improve the performance of the European economy. The top three factors selected by the Maltese were increasing energy efficiency (54 per cent), improving education and professional training (51 per cent), and facilitating the creation of companies (38 per cent).

The top two priorities which, according to the Maltese, the European Union should prioritise in assisting and supporting people in overcoming the effects of the financial and economic crisis are support to the unemployed (36 per cent) and investment in education, training and research (33 per cent).

5. VALUES OF EUROPEANS

According to Maltese citizens, the values that best represent the European Union are human rights (37 per cent), democracy (36 per cent), peace (35 per cent) and the rule of law (34 per cent). EU27 average respondents view the European Union as an institution which represents democracy (39 per cent), human rights (37 per cent) and peace (36 per cent).

6. INNOVATION

Maltese citizens and Europeans in general mostly view innovation as a positive aspect of their daily life. 43 per cent of the Maltese and 42 per cent of the Europeans believe that a company which does not innovate is a company that will not survive. Moreover, Europeans also believe that innovative products or services often simplify everyday life (38 per cent of the Maltese

compared to 34 per cent of the EU27 average) and innovation is essential for improving economic growth (35 per cent of the Maltese compared to 45 per cent of the EU27 average).

7. THE EUROPEAN UNION'S MAIN PRIORITIES

The Maltese and Europeans in general would like the European Union to focus its efforts particularly on economic recovery and fighting climate change. Respondents gave their opinion on a number of global threats and challenges that the European Union should focus its attention upon in view of its relations with the rest of the world. Almost half of the Maltese gave priority to poverty (46 per cent), followed by peace keeping (42 per cent) and climate change (32 per cent).