

Maltese Public Opinion and the European Union

By Henri Caruana

A Eurobarometer survey published last December provides several interesting results concerning public opinion in EU Member States and candidate countries. The survey was carried out in 31 countries between September and November 2007 and covered a number of important themes ranging from public perception of the EU and its institutions to expectations concerning employment and the national economy.

Support for membership across the EU was at its highest levels since Autumn 1994, as 58% of all European citizens supported their country's membership. On the other hand, 54% of the Maltese citizens think that EU membership is a good thing whilst only 15% of the respondents said that EU membership was a bad thing. Furthermore, 64% of Maltese citizens think that Malta has benefitted from EU membership, when compared to the EU average of 58%.

The Maltese citizens also showed substantial amount of trust in the EU institutions since 63% of respondents tend to trust the European Parliament, whilst 60% tend to trust the European Commission. While registering notable decreases in the level of trust in these two institutions, both figures were, nonetheless, higher than the EU average. Furthermore, these statistics somewhat contrast with the levels of trust concerning national institutions, since 45% of Maltese citizens responded that they tend to trust the national government, whilst 42% tend to trust the national parliament.

With respect to the major concerns for Maltese citizens, respondents identified inflation (41%) and immigration (40%) as the two most important issues being faced at the moment. With respect to immigration, there has been a 10% increase in concern when compared to a previous Eurobarometer survey held in Spring 2007. This increase can be somewhat justified by the fact that the latest survey was carried out following the arrivals of illegal immigrants witnessed during the summer months. Furthermore, Malta was the Member State which registered the highest level of concern with respect to immigration, since only an average of 15% of respondents across the EU had identified immigration as a matter of major concern. According to 27% of EU citizens, unemployment is the most important issue being faced by their respective Member States, followed by inflation (26%) and crime (24%).

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