

Maltese Opinion Swings about Malta's Economy from Last Eurobarometer Survey

By Brenda Azzopardi

On 12th February, the European Commission Representation in Malta presented the findings of the national Eurobarometer Report, which analyses a survey carried out between October and November 2008. It shows that up to 84% of the Maltese population feel satisfied with the life they lead. This percentage is above the EU-27 average. However, with the economic crisis being the main driver of Europeans' perceptions, less than a quarter of the Maltese citizens interviewed feel that life in general is expected to improve in the coming months. Specific circumstances, like the announcement that the euro is experiencing an economic slowdown, also led to a decrease in the figure of the Maltese impression in terms of level of life expectations.

Less than half of the Maltese interviewed expect that the Maltese economy will be facing some challenges in the coming year. Compared to the same answer given a year ago, the percentage points for this year almost doubled. As for the financial situation of households, the percentage figure dropped by 10 points. With regard to the local employment scenario, 23% feel that it is bound to improve, while 27% think that it will not change. A negative assessment of the economy was reflected by 57% of the Maltese respondents. A good 84% of the Maltese interviewed stated that the cost of living situation in our country is bad. More than half of those interviewed believe that the environment situation and the affordability of energy locally, fare worse than the European average.

Expectedly, immigration ranked as the topmost concern of the Maltese respondents (by 48%; followed by rising prices, by 41%; and energy-related issues by 28%. On government issues, 58% believe that the Maltese Government is sensitive to issues that concern the Maltese citizens, while almost the same figure goes to those who trust the Maltese Parliament, an increase of 15% from the last Eurobarometer survey. Yet, when it comes to Maltese political parties, only one third find them reliable, while the trust falls to just one fifth when asked about the European political parties.

The Maltese interviewees expressed more trust in the European Commission than the EU-27 average, while the European Parliament is the most trusted institution amongst Maltese respondents. Other questions, to mention a few, concerned local public authorities, the Maltese Legal System and International Organisations. In spite of the fact that other European citizens could have given different answers from their Maltese counterparts, one can establish three common trends that reflect the overall European public opinion in Autumn 2008, namely: the worsening assessment of the economic situation, the increased tendency to trust in the EU to support citizens during the economic downturn, and the 'feel-bad factor' that has now been affecting the personal well-being of Europeans. Notwithstanding this, when compared with the previous Eurobarometer of Spring 2008, the support for EU membership and opinions of the perceived benefits tend to remain stable. For more information one can log onto http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70_en.htm

Ms Azzopardi is Research Analyst at the Malta-EU Steering and Action Committee (MEUSAC)