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Italian Support for EU Is Rock Solid

Although Views Divided On Kosovo, Many Support EU-NATO Ties

The appointment of former Premier Romano Prodi -- who led Italy's entry into the single currency -- to the presidency of the European Commission was seen as a boost for Italy's status in the EU. But some strains have arisen recently over the EU finance ministers' relaxation of Italy's budget deficit target. Italians remain in favor of closer European integration, and more are now aware of the domestic benefits of EU membership.

KEY FINDINGS

- Italians remain strongly in favor of policies to further European integration, including the single currency.
- There is steady backing for the creation of a European foreign policy and defense identity, but not to the exclusion of NATO.
- More Italians now say their country has benefitted from EU membership than in previous years.
- Recent EU-U.S. trade disputes do not arouse concern among Italians for future transatlantic relations.

Euro Euphoria May Have Peaked

Last autumn, a USIA survey showed a surge in support among Italians for the single European currency (Table 1, next page). While current total support (81%) for the euro holds steady from 1998 levels (80%), the proportion who are now *strongly* in favor of a single currency to replace the lira has fallen toward earlier levels (27% *strongly* supported the euro in 1997, 52% in 1998, 35% now).

Proposals for a common European policy on employment standards and wages receive less support now than last autumn. However, support for a common social policy shows a marginal rise over the past two years. For both policies, there has been a rise in the share who are unsure.

Support For An EU Role In Foreign Policy

Italian public support for a common EU foreign policy continues its gradual rise. In 1992, 73 percent favored a common foreign policy profile for the EU. At present, eight in ten are either *somewhat* (46%) or *strongly* (34%) in favor of this proposal.

More than three-quarters of the Italian public also remain in favor of the formation of a common European defense force. *Of those who support a pan-European military, six in*

This report is based on data from face-to-face interviews with a nationally representative sample of 1001 adults age 18 and older in Italy conducted April 30-May 9, 1999. The firm Pragma in Rome conducted the interviews for USIA.

ten (63%) think that such a force should operate *in conjunction with* NATO, broadly consistent with figures from last October. A minority (17%) favor a European defense force which would operate *separately from* NATO. Still fewer (10%) support a European force which would *replace* NATO. Moreover, fewer now (61%) than last autumn (77%) think the EU should “make the most important decisions about the security of Europe in the future,” perhaps reflecting NATO’s leading role in Kosovo. One in five (20%) currently thinks that NATO should retain this role, an increase from last October (13%). More now than last October (16% vs. 3%) do not offer an opinion about which organization should be preeminent in European security matters.

Three in four (76%) Italians agree that EU leadership in global affairs is desirable for the advancement of Italian interests (12% disagree). In contrast, half (50%) consider U.S. world leadership to be undesirable (35% desirable).

Table 1: “There have been a number of proposals for actions the European Union could take in the next several years. For each of the following, please tell me whether you are strongly in favor, somewhat in favor, somewhat opposed, or strongly opposed – or haven’t you heard enough about it to say:”

	1996		1997		1998		1999	
	Support	Oppose	Support	Oppose	Support	Oppose	Support	Oppose
Common European currency	71%	20	75%	18	80%	18	81%	13
Common policy on employment standards & wages	--	--	--	--	82	16	72	16
Common social policy	--	--	74	14	76	17	78	13
Common policy towards immigration	--	--	79	13	74	22	85	8
Common European foreign policy	68	22	76	13	78	18	80	11
Common European defense force	73	19	77	13	81	16	77	13

Support For Kosovo Action Linked To Views On European Security

While support for European foreign and defense policies is widespread, those Italians who approved of NATO airstrikes on Yugoslavia¹ tend to be more favorable toward both the formation of a common European foreign policy and a European defense force. However, those who supported NATO’s intervention in Kosovo are more likely (31%) to say that NATO should play the primary role in European security than are those who opposed the current NATO action (10%). Furthermore, the majority of Italians who prefer a European defense force which would act *in conjunction with* NATO were more likely to support than oppose (62% vs. 29%) the current NATO action in former Yugoslavia. Those who prefer a European military which would *replace* NATO were more likely to oppose (60%, 33% support) the airstrikes. Those who favor a European defense force which would operate *separately from* NATO were divided over the current NATO action (42% support, 47% oppose).

Italians Remain More Pro-Integration Than Other European Publics

Continuing the pattern observed last autumn, the Italian public remains more widely supportive of integration policies than publics in Britain, France, or Germany (Table 2, next page). Overall, while

¹ 47% supported the recent NATO airstrikes against Serbia, 41% were opposed, and 12% do not know.

Table 2: Support for Common European Policy On:

	Italy		Britain		France		Germany	
	1998	1999	1998	1999	1998	1999	1998	1999
<i>Single currency</i>	80%	81%	31%	32%	59%	64%	44%	52%
<i>Employment standards and wages</i>	82	72	58	65	71	64	62	55
<i>Social policy</i>	76	78	44	46	n/a	65	62	52
<i>Immigration</i>	74	85	52	47	75	69	67	60
<i>Foreign policy</i>	78	80	46	47	68	66	74	77
<i>Defense force</i>	81	77	53	57	70	70	68	68

Italians' net approval of EU integration policies has remained stable, Britons have become more favorable and French and Germans less so. In particular, Italians remain much more positive toward the euro than publics in the other countries. While publics in all four countries demonstrate consistent support for a common European foreign policy, the Italian public differs from the other three in the slight decline in those favoring a common defense force. More in Italy now support a common immigration policy than last autumn, whereas support for this policy initiative has fallen in the other three countries.

Italians Confident About Benefits From EU Membership

As in last year's survey, a majority of Italians agree that their country has benefitted from EU membership (Table 3). Urban residents (65%-23%) are more likely to perceive benefits from EU membership than are rural residents (50%-38%). Those with a higher education also tend to be more positive, as are large majorities of declared supporters of the larger political parties on both the left and right. However, there is no apparent relation between opinions on benefits from the EU and either views on the state's role in the economy or evaluations of current economic performance.

Table 3: "Taking everything into consideration, would you say that Italy has on balance benefitted or not benefitted from being a member of the European Union?"

	1996	1997	1998	1999
Benefitted	65%	46%	57%	60%
Not benefitted	17	37	36	28
DK/NA	18	17	7	12

Italians Trust EU To Address European Problems

As in last autumn's survey, most Italians say they are either *somewhat* (58%) or *very* (22%) confident in the EU's ability to deal effectively with European problems (14% not confident). Confidence in NATO (66%-27%) and the UN (75%-17%) is also high, while fewer have confidence in the WEU (57% confident, 21% not) or OSCE (56%-21%).

More agree (47%) than disagree (38%) that "the European Union has too much influence over our country's affairs." Yet most people's views are not strongly held, as most respondents are divided between those who *somewhat* agree (39%) and *somewhat* disagree (31%) with this statement. Fewer than one in ten either *strongly* agree (8%) or *strongly* disagree (7%).

Italians Think Hormone-Boosted Beef Is Unsafe, But Say Consumers Should Still Be Free To Choose

Italians tend to oppose an EU ban on beef raised with additional hormones. Despite the fact that most (84%) Italians agree that beef raised with additional hormones “is harmful to consumer’s health, even if it has been tested and approved as safe by government and industry standards,” six in ten (59%) say that “consumers should have the choice” whether or not to buy such products. Four in ten (41%) support the EU ban since it “is trying to protect consumers.”

Banana Wars Fail To Rouse Italian Public

Like publics in France and Germany,² the Italian public is relatively uninformed about the recent U.S.-EU conflict over the latter’s banana import regime. Half (51%) say they have heard “nothing at all” about this dispute, and another 23 percent have heard “not very much.” Only a small percentage have heard either “a fair amount” (12%) or “a great deal” (2%) about it. Given their lack of awareness, it is not surprising that six in ten (62%) have no opinion on whether this dispute will have any lasting impact on U.S.-EU trade relations. One in five (21%) say it will have “no impact at all,” and another one in five think it will have either “a minor impact” (10%) or “a major impact” (8%).

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² See “Europeans Not Concerned By Banana Dispute,” *European Opinion Alert*, L-31-99, May 17, 1999.

Methodology

This report is based on data from face-to-face interviews conducted April 30-May 9, 1999 with a nationally representative sample of 1001 adults (age 18 or older) in Italy. The research firm Pragma in Rome conducted the interviews for USIA.

Survey questions were prepared by the USIA Office of Research and Media Reaction. The questionnaire was translated by the contractor and reviewed by Office of Research and Media Reaction staff.

In theory, 19 times out of 20, results from samples of this size will differ by no more than about 4 percentage points in either direction from what would be found if it were possible to interview every adult in Italy. Sampling error is larger for subgroups within the population of Italy. In addition to sampling error, the practical difficulties of conducting a survey of public opinion may introduce other sources of error into the results.

For further information, please contact the analyst.
