

Attitudes toward European Integration and Voting Choices: the Italian Case in a Comparative Perspective

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How much do Europe-related issues count in voting behaviour? Do they count more in Italy, or less than in other European countries? In the last few years the decisions made in the Union have taken on increasing importance in the social and economic life of the member states. A public sphere and a complex system of governance are in fact spreading throughout the continent. Voting choices to elect representatives from each country to the European Parliament are however considered as an opportunity to measure consensus for national political parties. In Italy recent attendance at the polls in the European elections increased compared with 1999, from 70.8% to 73.1%. But this result, which appears a counter trend compared with other EU countries, depends above all on the intense mobilisation campaign carried out by the centre-right government and its leader, rather than on a growth in interest in European political issues¹. The research studies carried out before and after the European elections on the issues seen as most important by voters have provided only a few indices explicitly related to the Union². But since the introduction of the Eurocurrency an awareness has grown in all social areas that the Union's decisions and policies may considerably affect aspects of everyday life. In the last few years European institutions have become increasingly a source of trans-national conflicts on various issues. The attention of the media and public opinion has consequently grown regarding questions debated in the Union. A potential European political arena has thus been formed: "The growth of integration has proceeded in step with the rise in conflicts. Europe is now a "real" political arena"³. Not only the new developments of the process of integration, but also the roles to be attributed to European institutions and the contents of their policies are being questioned, in a world scenario which is profoundly marked by the effects of globalisation and the decisions of the American super-power. This process obliges the political forces to redefine their political proposals in relation to projects, alliances and prospects concerning the whole of Europe. Rather than representing an autonomous factor which influences the voter's decisions, European issues are thus picked up and re-processed by political players as a component of their own identity and their own political platform in the national context. In Italy studies made in the last year have shown not only a relative downsizing of pro-European attitudes, but also a growing differentiation in attitudes to the Union in relation to the political choices of voters. In this paper we set out to analyse the trends recorded in the Italian context, comparing them with those which may be found in the leading European states: Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Spain⁴.

¹ The relative increase in voters' attendance in Italy is also due to certain "technical" factors, such as the opening of polling stations over two days (Saturday and Sunday) and the incorporation of European elections with numerous local provincial and council elections (Feltrin 2004, 12).

² In the most important issues reported in Italy by the European Elections Study 2004, only a very small share (0.6%) of those interviewed spontaneously mentioned issues related to the process of European integration. Mention of issues linked to the introduction of the Eurocurrency were instead much more numerous (2.9). And complaints about price increases (20.7%) and the inadequacy of salaries and wages may at least in part be considered linked to these problems.

³ Angelo Panebianco, editorial printed in the "Corriere della Sera" on 25 October 2004.

⁴ Together with Italy, the four countries have two thirds (66%) of the EU population. An accurate comparison would be impossible in practical terms if extended to all the EU member states.

1. The multiple meanings of Europeanism

Europeanism has always been very popular in Italy since the Second World War. For many decades public opinion in Italy showed far greater approval for European unification than was seen on average in other countries. The relevance and values attributed to Europeanism have changed considerably over the years. The relationships between positions favourable to integration in Europe and political and voting choices have consequently been transformed. After the Second World War, Europeanism was seen by Italians as a noble ideal which, in continuity with the ideals of the Risorgimento, could contain the frustrated energies of defeated nationalism. It was however the context of the Cold War which established the most profound significance of the commitment to the unity of Europe: "Behind the façade of Europeanism the determining choice was that of the American alliance, and it remained so for many years" (Romano, 1995, p. 466). A united Western Europe allied to the United States appeared to many Italians as the most solid guarantee for defence against the Communist Bloc.

During the sixties, in a phase of major transformation and modernisation in the country, Italian Europeanism also took on another valence. Its possible compensatory function also emerged: the integration of Italy in Europe was desirable to put an end to the traditional backwardness and anomalies which marked Italian political life and public administration. The high level of consensus for European integration periodically recorded by the *Eurobarometro* surveys were regularly accompanied by negative assessments of the functioning of the Italian political system. (Martinotti and Stefanizzi 1995). The widespread Europeanism in Italian public opinion also reflected the attitudes of most political players and almost all the media.

After the end of the Cold War and the development of the process of globalisation in the economy, European integration took on even more different meanings. The unification of Europe appeared as the condition necessary to deal with the new issues emerging at world level which were increasingly creating difficulties for the single national states. The different stages in the construction process of European institutions - from the Maastricht Treaty (1992) to the introduction of the Eurocurrency and the signing of the first draft Constitution (2004) - and the extension of the boundaries of the Union have however aroused debate and harsh conflicts. The polarisation between convinced Europeanists and Euro-sceptics and the divergences between the national interests of the member states were not only heightened, but very different ideas - in Italy and in other European countries - also emerged on the significance and the future prospects of the project for unification.

- A) For some people the construction of a European regional bloc is essentially an instrument to extend and liberalise markets, to deal with growing economic competition at world level. In this perspective all measures of a *laissez faire* type are favoured to increase the productivity of the economic system, without too much concern for the dismantling of the Welfare State and the growth of unemployment.
- B) In other cases the need is emphasised to tackle the pressure of migration from Third World and former Soviet Union countries. Europe, considered as a "besieged fortress" should be concerned above all with strengthening the Union's security

structures to deal with illegal immigration from countries outside the EU, considered the source of crime. Additional to and often an integral part of this perspective are the commitment to the defence of values and Christian roots in Europe against Islam and, naturally, a strong opposition to the possibility of Turkey's joining the Union.

- C) Other opinions on the process of community integration are related to the possibility that European institutions may regulate the capitalist market and extend citizens' rights. This idea inspired Jacques Delors' presidency of the European Commission (1985-94). European political unification might create more favourable conditions for the achievement of civil and social rights in our time. Community institutions ought to be concerned above all with the defence of individual rights, the fight against unemployment, social solidarity and a stronger protection of the natural environment and quality of life.
- D) In the last few years, above all after the Iraq War, a vision of the process of European integration has acquired greater importance, based on the need to contain and counter the supremacy of the United States. An international policy based above all on military power in the last few years is countered by the management of international relations and the global problems of humankind founded on international law, drawing inspiration from European values, culture and democratic traditions. This view radically overturns the value of the integration process in the Cold War period and tends to link it to the spread of anti-Americanism.

The different perspectives from which the development of the European Union may be viewed brings about the emergence of uncertainties and ambivalences in voters' attitudes. What idea of Europe do those in favour of the integration process intend to uphold? And what development plan for the Union do those opposing the launch of the European constitution intend to put forward?

2. Growing perplexity on the process of European integration

During the nineties Italian public opinion had maintained its traditional attitudes in favour of European integration. Consensus for the Union slightly decreased at the end of the decade, but remained at high levels, markedly higher than that for the representative institutions in Italy (Biorcio 1998). The frame has significantly changed in the last few years, after the introduction of the Eurocurrency which has made the effects of integration more evident and concrete. The idea of Europe, cultivated for decades in political circles but of slight importance in the everyday life of Italians, has been increasingly linked to the rise in prices, the containment of the public deficit accumulated in the past and the redistribution of relative costs. The majority of Italians assesses Italy's membership to the Union as positive, but more uncertain and contradictory opinions emerge on the effects of integration. Surveys carried out in the *European Election Study* record a slight weakening of Europeanist attitudes among Italians and highlight significant divergences on the prospects of the unification process. In 1999 almost two thirds of those interviewed in Italy viewed its membership of the Union as positive. In 2004 this opinion was shared by just over one in two interviewees (see

Table 1). The opinion that Union membership would not bring significant advantages to Italy increased, and the percentage of interviewees seeing above all the negative effects of the integration process doubled (from 4.2% to 8.1%). These trends were also seen in all leading European countries. Between 1999 and 2004 the drop in positive opinions regarding EU membership was much more accentuated in France and Great Britain, lower in Germany and Spain. The same trends were also confirmed by other indices. A considerable number of Italians interviewed consider that the process of European unification has now gone too far (22.1% in 2004); 10.2% in 1999). This opinion is also more widespread in other countries (with the exception of Spain) and is shared by over a quarter of French interviewees, a third of Germans and almost half of the British (see Table 2).

Table 1

EU membership is good or bad thing?

		good thing	bad thing	neither good nor bad	nr
Italy	1999	65,5	4,2	17,2	13,1
	2004	53,5	8,0	26,8	11,7
Britain	1999	46,4	17,6	30,0	6,0
	2004	37,6	25,4	31,3	5,8
France	1999	74,4	7,7	14,5	3,4
	2004	55,8	10,7	33,0	0,5
Germany	1999	71,4	4,1	23,4	1,2
	2004	64,4	7,6	23,8	4,2
Spain	1999	70,7	3,8	21,0	4,5
	2004	66,5	4,9	24,0	4,7

Table 2

Respondent's attitude to European unification

		unification has already gone too far (1-4)	5/6	unification should be pushed further (7-10)	nr
Italy	1999	10,2	27,4	39,6	22,8
	2004	22,7	27,2	37,2	12,9
Britain	1999	40,6	28,9	22,8	7,7
	2004	48,4	25,9	20,9	4,9
France	1999	15,1	27,2	45,3	12,3
	2004	27,5	35,0	37,1	0,4
Germany	1999	19,8	31,0	47,8	1,5
	2004	33,0	26,4	37,0	3,6
Spain	1999	16,3	28,3	48,4	7,0
	2004	15,3	38,8	45,8	0,0

On the other hand, support for further development of the integration process has fallen. In Italy it decreased by two percentage points between 1999 and 2004. An even more marked drop was recorded in Germany and France.

The decrease in confidence in the European integration process is not spread homogeneously in all the segments of the population, but concerns above all particular social and political areas. In Italy it has been recorded in those sections of the population least involved in politics (see Table 3). Europeanist attitudes remain much more widespread among interviewees who are relatively more attentive to and involved in political life, and their views have not revealed significant changes in the last five years. In Germany and France positive opinions of European Union membership have radically fallen, above all in the sectors of the population who are little or un-interested in politics.

Analogous trends may also be seen in the views on the developments of the integration process. In Italy, as in France and Germany, the drop in support for the European integration process is seen above all among interviewees who are little or un-interested in politics (see Table 4).

Table 3 - EU membership is good

		All	Interested in politics?		
			very/somewhat	a little	not at all
Italy	1999	65,5	80,6	69,5	53,5
	2004	53,5	76,2	49,7	38,5
Britain	1999	46,4	56,2	39,8	28,9
	2004	37,6	45,6	31,4	24,7
France	1999	74,4	78,5	74,7	57,2
	2004	55,8	69,0	46,6	30,6
Germany	1999	71,4	77,6	59,3	46,3
	2004	64,4	75,2	53,9	17,2
Spain	1999	70,7	84,0	71,2	52,5
	2004	66,5	84,9	68,5	48,5

Table 4 - Unification should be pushed further

		All	Interested in politics?		
			very/somewhat	a little	not at all
Italy	1999	39,6	58,6	41,1	29,3
	2004	37,2	54,7	29,2	29,1
Britain	1999	22,8	27,0	18,6	18,5
	2004	20,9	24,2	18,2	15,5
France	1999	45,3	49,8	44,2	30,9
	2004	37,1	47,0	29,9	19,1
Germany	1999	47,8	53,6	37,4	18,6
	2004	37,0	42,4	30,6	6,9
Spain	1999	48,4	60,9	47,2	34,3
	2004	45,8	53,8	41,9	43,7

The social profile of the population area appearing most sceptical to the process of European integration may be easily identified. All the indices of Europeanist attitudes show very different values according to the education level of the respondents (see Tables 5 and 8). In

Italy, as in France, Germany and Spain, positive views on EU membership remain much more widespread among interviewees with further education. Interviewees with a lower education instead have many more doubts.

Table 5 EU membership is good

	All	How old were you when stopped full-time education?			
		less than 15 years	15-20 years	more than 20 years	
Italy	1999	66,0	57,3	65,4	76,1
	2004	54,1	48,0	53,5	76,1
Britain	1999	47,0	36,7	41,5	63,3
	2004	37,0	28,8	31,2	55,1
France	1999	74,1	71,5	68,9	81,4
	2004	55,8	45,4	50,0	70,7
Germany	1999	71,6	63,7	67,7	82,5
	2004	64,9	72,2	56,2	73,0
Spain	1999	72,6	63,4	72,9	83,3
	2004	66,8	62,8	67,0	74,9

Table 6- Unification should be pushed further

	All	How old were you when stopped full-time education?			
		less than 15 years	15-20 years	more than 20 years	
Italy	1999	41,5	34,7	40,7	49,0
	2004	37,1	36,3	38,1	42,1
Britain	1999	22,9	19,6	18,3	35,8
	2004	20,4	14,2	18,4	26,4
France	1999	44,9	32,3	40,8	53,8
	2004	37,1	29,2	31,8	47,8
Germany	1999	47,6	35,9	42,3	61,5
	2004	37,0	36,1	30,0	47,7
Spain	1999	50,2	39,2	48,7	61,2
	2004	45,7	34,9	45,6	53,7

In the countries considered a potential polarisation of positions on the European integration process and therefore, presumably, of its values and consequences, seems to be taking shape. Europeanism remains a very widespread attitude above all among citizens more interested in politics and, in general, among those with higher education levels. In the less educated sections of the population, further removed from politics, the integration process and its real or imagined consequences inspire more diffidence and a growing scepticism. Partial exceptions to these trends are recorded in Great Britain and Spain. Support for the development of the integration process was very weak in Great Britain, and has further decreased in the last few years even in the more educated, politically-conscious sectors of the

population. In Spain on the other hand Europeanist attitudes have remained high in almost all social sectors.

3. Europeanism and national political choices

In European countries support for the European integration process was high for many years in parties occupying central positions in the national party systems (Christian-democrats, liberals, social-democrats and conservatives), while it had encountered opposition both in right-wing and left-wing parties (Hix and Lord 1997; Aspinwall 2002; Marks, Wilson and Ray 2002). In Italy criticism to Community treaties and institutions had been particularly expressed by the Communist Party in the Cold War period. Until the eighties there had been largely a majority support for Italy's European Community membership, but it obtained less consensus among left-wing voters (Biorcio 1998). The association between European Community and the Atlantic Alliance, the equation between the European Common Market and the values of capitalist economy survived in these political areas.

The situation changed radically during the nineties, after the break-up of the Communist bloc and the end of the Cold War. Almost all the main Italian political parties were in favour of the European integration process, and approved of Italy's membership of the European Economic and Monetary Union. Only the Northern League was strongly critical of Community policies and voted against the Eurocurrency in the European Parliament. The party led by Bossi sought to take a position as the main political contractor of opposition to the Union, ready to exploit and increase apprehension, disappointment, the problems and contradictions caused brought about by the European integration process. The chances of success of Euro-sceptical positions in Italy have grown because critical positions to the integration process have considerably increased in the last five years. This trend has developed above all in certain political areas (see Table 7).

Table 7 - EU membership is good

	All	Left / Right self-placement						dk/na
		Left	Centre-left	Centre	Centre-Right	Right		
Italy	1999	65,5	64,6	77,7	72,2	69,0	69,0	47,5
	2004	53,5	64,3	72,0	51,0	54,3	43,9	37,7
Britain	1999	46,4	50,9	67,7	45,3	42,1	40,2	27,8
	2004	37,6	47,9	58,7	34,7	34,5	27,1	22,9
France	1999	74,4	81,4	80,5	71,2	79,4	65,7	65,3
	2004	55,8	50,2	66,7	50,8	62,1	57,1	40,7
Germany	1999	71,4	62,1	77,9	70,3	70,4	62,2	78,3
	2004	64,4	56,5	77,0	60,6	67,8	65,5	50,8
Spain	1999	70,7	66,2	72,7	73,3	81,6	77,1	55,6
	2004	66,5	70,6	70,9	63,1	72,9	86,7	54,3

The view that membership of the European Union is a good thing for Italy is now shared by less than half of right-wing interviewees, and just over half of those in the centre and centre-right: a very sharp drop compared to 1999. Support for further developments in European unification has greatly fallen in these political areas. For over a quarter of right-wing and centre-right voters a downsizing in the integration process would be desirable. Europeanist tendencies among left-wing and centre-left voters have not shown a notable decrease in the last five years.

Europeanist attitudes are sharply differentiated in relationship to the voting choice of those interviewed. The Italians tending to vote for centre-left and left-wing parties – and above all Ulivo voters – have more confidence in the developments of the integration process and generally in the EU and its policies (see table 8). Centre-right party voters (Forza Italia, Alleanza Nazionale and the Northern League) are instead much more diffident. An exception are the voters of the Udc (Demo-Christian Union), who at least in part are faithful to the traditional Europeanist opinions of the old Christian Democrat party. The lowest levels of support for the European integration process are seen among voters for the small extreme-right parties or abstainers.

In other European countries the drop in support for European integration has been expressed in a partially different way. In France and Germany there has been a marked fall in Europeanist attitudes both among left-wing and centre voters or those who do not choose a definite political position. In the United Kingdom positive views of Union membership have sharply decreased in all political areas, particularly among voters who are politically to the right.

In general, we may see a significant relationship between voting choices during European Parliament elections and attitudes to European integration. As may have been easily expected, the choice of abstaining from voting has often been linked to a negative view of Union membership and diffidence concerning further developments in the integration process. These attitudes are in many cases linked to low interest and attention for politics. The more favourable opinions regarding the integration process come instead from voters for the leading centre-left or centre-right parties in the five countries considered: the parties currently in power or aspiring to be so. Voters of the British Conservative Party prove to be an exception, as they show a sharp aversion to the integration process. The most hostile positions towards the Union are found among the voters of certain parties strongly committed to polemics against Brussels: such as the Front National in France, voters of the UK Independence Party and the British National Party, Alternative Sociale and Fiamma Tricolore in Italy

Table 8 - Attitudes toward European Integration and Voting Choices

	Vote in European Elections 2004	EU membership is good	Unification should be pushed further	N.
Italy	Ulivo	78,6	56,0	321
	Forza Italia	56,8	37,0	217
	Alleanza nazionale	56,4	37,6	119
	Rifondazione Comunista	62,1	37,9	63
	UDC	60,6	36,6	61
	Lega	50,7	30,4	52
	Verdi	48,1	25,9	26
	Comunisti Italiani	63,6	63,6	25
	Italis dei Valori	72,9	54,2	22
	Nuovo Psi	60,0	50,0	21
	Radicali	72,0	36,0	24
	Alternativa Sociale/Fiamma Tric.	21,2	14,2	12
	no, did not vote	45,8	29,0	413
	Britain	Labour	60,2	44,3
Conservative		27,5	8,8	140
Liberal Democrats		63,5	35,0	77
UK Independence party		10,6	6,8	86
Green Party		54,7	22,6	32
British National Party		6,3	6,3	18
no, did not vote		36,1	18,0	821
France	EXTG	40,0	48,0	7
	PCF	41,2	29,4	28
	PS+DIVG	63,2	44,8	154
	VERTS	80,3	52,6	39
	UDF	83,3	56,0	64
	UMP+DVD	72,5	41,2	88
	MPF+RPF	59,3	33,3	36
	FN+MNR	17,2	13,8	52
	no, did not vote	46,5	31,8	701
Germany	CDU/CSU	69,6	35,6	97
	SPD	78,4	54,9	47
	Green Party	80,0	57,1	26
	PDS	76,9	38,5	13
	FDP	82,6	52,2	13
	no, did not vote	54,3	29,9	271
Spain	PP (Partido Popular)	68,2	29,2	208
	PSOE	72,8	31,6	220
	IU (Izquierda Unida)	73,3	46,7	21
	PNV	80,0	10,0	17
	no, did not vote	60,8	28,9	570

4 Political choices and confidence in European institutions

Notable differences can also be seen between the political and electoral areas in Italy in relation to attitudes to the European institutions. Left and centre-left interviewees express a much higher level of confidence in the main EU institutions, the European Parliament and Commission (see table 9). Decidedly more critical positions are instead expressed by right and centre-right interviewees, and in general they show more confidence in the Italian parliament. Expectations regarding the consequences of the Union's political decisions concerning Italy are consequently very different.

Table 9 - Trust in EU institution and left/right self placement

		Trust in European Parliament	Trust in European Commission	Trust in national parliament	EU decision are in the interest of my country	N.
Italy	left	55,8	55,6	40,1	62,2	201
	centre-left	53,9	54,7	44,5	54,4	291
	centre	43,1	38,1	38,9	36,7	387
	centre-right	40,3	40,9	51,5	32,4	243
	right	42,2	40,4	55,5	38,6	160
	D.K.	23,6	21,9	23,6	26,4	271
Britain	left	23,4	19,4	33,4	38,3	115
	centre-left	32,8	23,1	53,0	39,8	234
	centre	14,4	14,7	34,0	22,1	625
	centre-right	17,7	19,8	45,5	20,4	212
	right	21,7	23,1	39,9	19,8	107
	D.K.	12,5	9,6	23,5	22,4	205
France	left	27,5	25,8	32,2	42,5	304
	centre-left	35,4	29,4	38,9	51,2	250
	centre	26,0	24,9	41,5	45,1	472
	centre-right	36,0	33,9	59,8	48,0	201
	right	40,4	29,6	56,9	50,3	149
	D.K.	13,6	10,0	27,6	29,3	28
Germany	left	23,9	19,2	27,0	29,6	48
	centre-left	34,9	27,4	42,6	33,9	137
	centre	27,9	22,0	39,2	33,4	235
	centre-right	35,7	23,8	41,4	38,9	81
	right	30,5	35,5	18,6	37,3	29
	D.K.	23,3	19,9	31,0	25,1	63
Spain	left	48,5	41,1	47,4	75,9	157
	centre-left	45,6	45,0	44,0	62,9	325
	centre	35,8	32,8	33,7	48,7	285
	centre-right	41,6	40,0	40,6	69,4	126
	right	56,1	52,2	55,4	59,5	34
	D.K.	28,2	24,5	30,1	37,5	270

Among voters for the Ulivo and Rifondazione Comunista parties, and among left and centre-left interviewees in general, there is a prevalent trust that the decisions of the European institutions are positive for Italy (see Table 10)..

Table 10 - Trust in EU institution and voting choices

		Trust in European Parliament	Trust in European Commission	Trust in national parliament	EU decision are in the interest of my country	N.
Italy	Ulivo	63,7	62,2	47,4	62,0	321
	Forza Italia	49,4	46,5	63,0	43,2	217
	Alleanza nazionale	40,3	43,6	56,4	42,3	119
	Rif. Comunista	50,0	42,4	31,8	53,0	63
	UDC	45,1	40,8	56,3	39,4	61
	Lega	40,6	47,8	44,9	27,5	52
	Verdi	44,4	40,7	44,4	33,3	26
	Comunisti Italiani	72,7	72,7	54,5	63,6	25
	Italia dei Valori	56,3	52,1	27,1	58,3	22
	Nuovo Psi	50,0	40,0	40,0	10,0	21
	Radicali	40,0	40,0	28,0	36,0	24
	Alternativa Sociale/Fiamma T.	35,3	38,3	37,4	38,3	19
	no, did not vote	24,4	22,9	24,4	29,8	413
Britain	Labour	39,8	34,1	65,3	48,3	114
	Conservative	12,5	12,5	41,3	13,1	140
	Liberal Democrats	31,4	26,3	40,9	48,2	77
	UK Independence party	7,5	8,7	24,8	6,2	86
	Green Party	35,8	22,6	41,5	50,9	32
	British National Party	6,3	6,3	25,0	6,3	18
	no, did not vote	16,4	16,2	33,4	24,5	821
France	EXTG	32,0	28,0	32,0	32,0	7
	PCF	32,4	29,4	44,1	47,1	28
	PS+DIVG	39,2	33,6	46,8	58,0	154
	VERTS	46,1	39,5	39,5	52,6	39
	UDF	56,0	42,9	71,4	61,9	64
	UMP+DVD	49,6	44,3	77,1	61,1	88
	MPF+RPF	33,3	22,2	63,0	37,0	36
	FN+MNR	20,7	17,2	37,9	34,5	52
	no, did not vote	26,0	23,3	38,9	42,5	701
Germany	CDU/CSU	42,2	29,6	51,1	45,9	97
	SPD	37,3	29,4	49,0	47,1	47
	Green Party	34,3	45,7	54,3	57,1	26
	PDS	15,4	53,8	23,1	38,5	13
	FDP	39,1	30,4	39,1	34,8	13
	no, did not vote	27,6	19,9	32,1	27,6	271
Spain	PP (Partido Popular)	37,5	35,9	39,6	59,4	208
	PSOE	49,2	44,8	52,8	68,4	220
	IU (Izquierda Unida)	43,3	36,7	33,3	73,3	21
	PNV	30,0	40,0	20,0	80,0	17
	no, did not vote	36,8	32,6	33,3	49,2	570

Those interviewed who place themselves between the centre and right wing, and in general voters who do not know or do not want to declare their political position, are much more doubtful and critical of decisions taken in Brussels. Among the Northern League voters, opinions on the policies decided by the Union are much more pessimistic. The lowest level of confidence in European institutions is stated by interviewees who did not vote. In these cases, mistrust in the national democratic representative institutions extends to European institutions and their policies.

In the other European countries the relationships between national political positions and confidence in the European institutions appears very different. In Germany and France, interviewees placing themselves on left-wing positions have the least confidence in Union institutions. In Great Britain and Spain, the most critical positions are found among citizens placing themselves between the centre and centre-right.

Voting choices for the election of the European Parliament in the various countries have shown a significant relation with the indices of confidence in European institutions. Those interviewed who did not vote obviously have a limited confidence in community institutions. But even more critical positions are recorded among the voters of certain parties in the United Kingdom, among voters for the Conservative Party, the UK Independence Party and the British National Party, and among voters for the National Front in France and the PDS in Germany.

5. Feelings of belonging and recognition of the rights of European citizenship

The formation of a political community at European level goes beyond the mere attribution of power and democratic legitimacy to the Union's institutions. We may ask ourselves whether feelings of belonging to Europe may be found in Italy, and whether a willingness exists in public opinion to extend the rights of citizenship existing within national states to the entire population of the Union.

Europe was perceived for a long time by Italians as a positive, but relatively abstract entity, which involved them only slightly on the level of deeper motivations and feelings. Feelings of belonging to Europe have always been widespread in Italy, but have in general given little prominence to other reference fields. Few Italians denied this type of belonging, but this feeling was much lower than other types of local, regional and national identification (Diamanti 1997). In many European countries, the greatest resistance to the processes of European integration have often been founded on positions of a marked nationalism. In Italy feelings of belonging to the nation have always, since the Second World War, been relatively weak and have not created obstacles to the integration processes. It was not difficult for Italians to simultaneously embrace feelings of belonging to the national community, local communities and the European Union. The situation has not changed greatly in the last few years. But a wide area is emerging among more right-wing oriented voters which tends to identify exclusively with the national community, excluding any reference to Europe. This position is very widespread among people who are wholly uninterested in politics and in general among interviewees with a lower level of education.

The spread of feelings of belonging to the Union may be seen in some indices proposed in the *European Election Study 2004*. We constructed an index of feelings of belonging to Europe, by using the responses to two questions a) “Do you ever think of yourself not only as an Italian citizen, but also as a citizen of the European Union?”, and b) “Are you personally proud or not to be a citizen of the European Union?”

A second index was constructed to assess willingness to extend the rights of citizenship to all citizens of the Union. The negative responses to two statements were used: “When jobs are scarce, employers should give priority to Italian people over citizens from other EU member-countries who want to work here”; “Citizens from other EU member-countries who live in Italy should not be entitled to social security or unemployment benefits”; and positive responses to the statement “Citizens from other EU member-countries who live in Italy should be entitled to vote in local elections”.

The majority of Italians consider themselves at least occasionally as European and tend to feel proud of belonging to Europe. These attitudes are more shared by left and centre-left voters. A broad sector of right-wing voters however declares that they have never thought of themselves as citizens of the Union, and to feel no pride in this status (see Table 11 and 12).

Table 11 - Feelings of belonging to Europe and left/right self placement

		Index of feelings of belonging to Europe	Index of willingness to extend the right of citizenship	N.
Italy	left	59,1	65,6	201
	centre-left	56,7	59,5	291
	centre	53,0	50,9	387
	centre-right	54,9	45,9	243
	right	48,8	36,2	160
	D.K.	49,4	43,2	271
Britain	left	42,8	53,4	115
	centre-left	48,4	57,0	234
	centre	39,3	48,0	625
	centre-right	39,5	46,3	212
	right	37,2	44,4	107
	D.K.	35,4	47,3	205
France	left	50,7	56,1	304
	centre-left	55,5	60,6	250
	centre	53,7	52,0	472
	centre-right	54,6	49,8	201
	right	54,6	46,2	149
	D.K.	43,9	53,5	28
Germany	left	48,0	50,6	48
	centre-left	53,3	47,2	137
	centre	47,3	48,3	235
	centre-right	48,3	46,6	81
	right	43,2	41,4	29
	D.K.	45,3	45,7	63
Spain	left	50,9	59,5	157
	centre-left	48,1	55,7	325
	centre	44,8	51,0	285
	centre-right	40,8	49,8	126
	right	50,4	48,3	34
	D.K.	39,8	54,2	270

Table 12 - Feelings of belonging to Europe and voting choices

		Index of feelings of belonging to Europe	Index of willingness to extend the right of citizenship	N.
Italy	Ulivo	58,6	60,4	321
	Forza Italia	52,4	43,4	217
	Alleanza nazionale	53,8	45,6	119
	Rifondazione Comunista	55,8	60,4	63
	UDC	53,9	47,8	61
	Lega	50,6	36,8	52
	Verdi	54,8	65,7	26
	Comunisti Italiani	62,0	76,3	25
	Italia dei Valori	60,2	58,4	22
	Nuovo Psi	49,9	56,7	21
	Radicali	58,5	60,0	24
	Alternativa Sociale/Fiamma Tric.	45,8	32,4	19
	no, did not vote	43,9	54,5	570
	Britain	Labour	45,5	52,9
Conservative		37,7	43,9	140
Liberal Democrats		53,1	56,4	77
UK Independence party		32,3	40,9	86
Green Party		52,6	60,1	32
British National Party		28,1	22,9	18
no, did not vote		39,0	49,8	821
France	EXTG	50,9	56,6	7
	PCF	53,8	60,4	28
	PS+DIVG	58,9	62,3	154
	VERTS	60,8	67,2	39
	UDF	63,5	58,8	64
	UMP+DVD	60,6	49,8	88
	MPF+RPF	59,1	46,8	36
	FN+MNR	43,3	33,8	52
	no, did not vote	50,5	52,9	701
	Germany	CDU/CSU	50,5	44,1
SPD		52,0	48,5	47
Green Party		58,4	60,6	26
PDS		49,2	55,6	13
FDP		60,3	50,3	13
no, did not vote		44,7	47,2	271
Spain		PP (Partido Popular)	43,7	49,7
	PSOE	48,0	52,6	220
	IU (Izquierda Unida)	45,1	58,2	21
	PNV	46,5	56,8	17
	no, did not vote	43,9	54,5	570

An analogous gap between centre-right on the one hand and centre-left voters on the other also emerges on the question of the extension of citizenship rights to all members of the Union. Right-wing interviewees more often give precedence to Italians in the allocation of jobs, and are less willing to extend voting rights and welfare benefits to European citizens living in Italy. Opposite trends are more widespread among left and centre-left voters. In the other European countries, the relationship between feelings of belonging and political positions is more complex. There is however a much clearer willingness on the part of those interviewed who place themselves on left and centre-left positions to extend citizenship

rights to all Union citizens. A greater resistance to this development of European citizenship rights is seen among interviewees placing themselves politically to the right.

6. Conclusions

The frame emerging from the various analyses carried out shows not only a weakening of the traditional Europeanist attitude of Italians, but the appearance of potential tensions and conflicting views on Union-related issues which may significantly affect Italian politics. Very clear connections may in fact be seen between political positions and voters' choices and Europeanist attitudes. The polarisation between the Italian political coalitions which since 1994 has marked Italian politics is reflected and intertwined with attitudes to Europe. The divergences between the voters of the *Casa della Libertà* (centre-right coalition) and the *Ulivo* (centre-left coalition) appear more profound than declared by their leaders. Among left and centre-left voters Europeanism remains a value which is on the whole positive. The critical attitudes to the integration process which were typical of the Cold War period and the view of the Union as a mere extension of the free market therefore seem to have been largely overcome.

In right-wing and centre-right areas, critical positions on Community institutions and sceptical opinions on economic and monetary union have instead become much more widespread. The Northern League has managed and is still managing the polemics against the extension of power of European institutions and against the entry of new states in the Union in a very aggressive manner. League propaganda has also spread to other political areas, above all among *Forza Italia* voters.

In the last five years, a drop has been recorded in all the leading European countries in opinions in favour of the development of the process of European integration. The emerging trends have been partly analogous, and in part different from those we have recorded in Italy. All the countries considered show a common weakening of Europeanist attitudes, especially in the lower social classes, who have fewer cognitive and economic resources or a low interest in politics. And, on the other hand, the trend to exclude feelings of belonging to the Union and the recognition of European citizenship rights is in general more widespread among interviewees with a lower education who are less involved in politics. Disappointment or scepticism concerning the Union, often linked to the development of feelings of belonging to Europe, appear more frequently in some countries in the right-wing area, in others in the left. These differences depend on the different ways in which the Union is represented and on the different negative effects which it may arouse. A free trade Europe, dismantling the protection of national welfare systems, may be feared, as may a Europe which is too open and multi-cultural, extending the rights of citizenship to all. In the European countries we have taken into consideration, these concerns are perceived differently, and have been interpreted both by nationalist and populist parties (Taggart 1998), and by some movements of the radical left. The likelihood of success of the positions critical to the integration process is greater in lower-class areas and in general among less educated citizens uninterested in politics. In these social areas, populist propaganda may

more easily find consensus and attention unless it is countered by other projects and reference values for the construction of a new European political community.

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