



## Italy's Love Affair with the EU: Between Continuity and Change

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### Abstract

Once a renowned Euro-enthusiastic country, Italy has experienced a decrease in public support for European integration. Many are the reasons, including the emergence of a less idealistic vision of the EU, a general disaffection vis-à-vis politics, particularly at the domestic level, and the increasingly more vocal Euroscepticism of some political forces within the centre-right ruling coalition. The current Berlusconi government does not show the same degree of interest for European integration as previous centrist and centre-left governments. This is not to say that Italy's love affair with Europe has come to a bitter end. Italians continue to trust European institutions significantly more than national ones and would like the EU to acquire more competences. In addition, the vocal anti-EU rhetoric of some political forces within the governing coalition, and especially the Northern League, is often not matched by deeds, largely because EU policy-making is generally used as a source of leverage to obtain concessions in other policy domains. Tellingly, the Treaty of Lisbon was speedily ratified by the Italian parliament by unanimous vote - something unthinkable in most EU countries.

**Keywords:** *Italy / European Union / Public opinion / Elites / Euroscepticism / Lisbon Treaty*

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## Italy's Love Affair with the EU: Between Continuity and Change

by Michele Comelli\*

### 1. Introduction

Once amongst the most Europhile people in Europe, Italians - elite and public alike - have apparently become more lukewarm towards European integration as of late. Many are the reasons, including the emergence of a less idealistic vision of the EU, a general disaffection vis-à-vis politics, particularly at the domestic level, and the increasingly more vocal Euroscepticism of some political forces within the centre-right ruling coalition. The current Berlusconi government does not show the same degree of interest for European integration as previous centrist and centre-left governments and some of its components frequently indulge in anti-EU rhetoric.

This is not to say that Italy's love affair with Europe has come to a bitter end. Italians continue to trust European institutions significantly more than national ones and would like the EU to acquire more competences. In addition, the vocal anti-EU rhetoric of some political forces within the governing coalition is often not matched by deeds. Tellingly, the Treaty of Lisbon was speedily ratified by the Italian parliament by unanimous vote - something unthinkable in most EU countries - although it was the target of anti-EU discourse, particularly by the populist and devolutionist Northern League, which is part of the ruling coalition. In fact, the Northern League tends to align itself, albeit grudgingly, with the country's established foreign policy choices in exchange for concessions on domestic issues.

### 2. Italian public attitudes towards the EU

Italy has traditionally been amongst the keenest supporters of European integration, both at the popular and government levels. However, public support for the EU in Italy has fallen in recent years, although this trend does not appear to be irreversible as indicated by the latest figures. Government support for the EU during the so-called Second Republic (since 1993),<sup>1</sup> has also not been constant, particularly within centre-

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<sup>1</sup> The so-called "Second Republic" is the supposedly new political system that emerged in Italy in the early 1990s after the introduction of a mainly first-past-the-post electoral law and the dissolution of the principal parties that ruled the country after World War II (Christian Democrats and Socialists). These events unfolded following a number of anti-corruption investigations, the so-called "Clean Hands" operation. Though welcomed by many citizens as a better functioning and less corrupt political system, it ended up frustrating many expectations. The characteristics of the Second Republic are a mainly bipolar political system, with deep cleavages within both coalitions, and the highly confrontational tone of the political debate, that is often characterized by populism and largely revolves around political leaders themselves, first and foremost Silvio Berlusconi.

right coalition governments, which have included Eurosceptic parties like the Northern League, which has a wide following in Northern Italy.

As far as public support is concerned, Eurobarometer data reveal a drop in Italian support for the EU since 2006, to an unprecedented low of 39% in Spring 2008.<sup>2</sup> (EC Standard Eurobarometer 69, see Table 1). These figures were significantly lower than those during the 2003-2007 period, which varied between 59% and 51%. The record-low figure of 39% in Spring 2008 was lower than the EU average (52%), ranking Italy 22<sup>nd</sup> out of 27 member states, a significant drop for a traditionally pro-European country. This figure is particularly striking when compared to the level of support only two years earlier in Spring 2006, when the percentage of Italians that considered EU positively was as high as 56%. Over the same period, the average EU citizen's positive view of the EU decreased by only three percentage points, from 55% to 52%. Similarly, in Autumn 2008 only 41% of Italians believed that Italy had profited from EU membership as compared with an EU average of 56%. This percentage ranked 25<sup>th</sup> in the EU. Since then, the percentage of Italians believing that their country had benefited from EU membership has risen, reaching 52% in Autumn 2009, 48% in Spring 2010 (EC Standard Eurobarometer 73) and 53% in Autumn 2010 (EC Eurobarometer 74). But these figures remain lower than the average EU percentages.

**Table 1: Support for the EU in Italy and EU-average**

	nr	(%)	(%)
		<b>IT</b>	<b>EU</b>
	60 autumn 03	59	48
EU 15	61 spring 04	54	48
EU 25	62 autumn 04	57	56
	63 spring 05	56	54
	64 autumn 05	50	50
	65 spring 06	56	55
	66 autumn 06	52	53
EU 27	67 spring 07	51	57
	68 autumn 07	50	58
	69 spring 08	39	52
	70 autumn 08	40	53
	71 spring 09	48	53
	72 autumn 09	49	53
	73 spring 10	48	49
	74 autumn 10	<b>53</b>	<b>40</b>

Table 1. Source: Elaboration of the author based on Eurobarometer data.

<sup>2</sup> The question asked was "Do you consider the EU as a good thing?".

**Table 2: Perceived benefits of EU membership in Italy and EU-average**

	nr	(%)	(%)
		<b>IT</b>	<b>EU</b>
	60 autumn 03	49	46
EU 15	61 spring 04	49	47
EU 25	62 autumn 04	50	53
	63 spring 05	52	55
	64 autumn 05	48	52
	65 spring 06	54	54
	66 autumn 06	47	54
EU 27	67 spring 07	48	59
	68 autumn 07	47	58
	69 spring 08	37	54
	70 autumn 08	41	56
	71 spring 09	48	56
	72 autumn 09	52	57
	73 spring 10	n.a.	53
	74 autumn 10	n.a.	50

Table 2. Source: Elaboration of the author based on Eurobarometer data.

Accounting for the decrease in support for the EU since 2006 (despite the marginal rise since then) is not self-evident. Among the reasons that may explain this decline is the fact that the EU has progressively come to play a bigger and more visible role in a rising number of policy areas. As a result, the average Italian citizen tends to consider the EU as less of an abstract political ideal (Greco 2006: 69) and more of a potentially divisive issue, with a tangible impact on their daily life. The disaffection towards the EU may also have been the product of the crisis of European integration following the “no” vote of French and Dutch citizens to the Constitutional Treaty in 2005. The no votes were followed by a long stalemate, officially labelled as a “pause for reflection”, that came to an end only in October 2007, with the approval of the Lisbon Treaty. The EU’s image greatly suffered from the failure to adopt a Constitution, triggering a feeling of disappointment among Italians, who overwhelmingly supported the European Convention and the adoption of the Constitution. Such a step forward in European integration was viewed as essential in consolidating the EU’s role as the prime modernizing force in Italy. In fact, the EU has often been viewed in Italy, at both elite and popular levels, as an anchor to democracy, stability and prosperity, characteristics that Italians traditionally associate to other countries, especially in Northern Europe. The inclusion of Italy among the six founding members of the European Community was read in this way: through the EC, Italy could become part of a democratic and prosperous Europe. This idea was aptly described by Ugo La Malfa, a political leader of post-war Italy, who viewed European integration as a means to “incatenare l’Italia alle Alpi per non farla sprofondare nel Mediterraneo” [“chain Italy to the Alps, in order not to let it sink into the Mediterranean”] (Nucara 2007).

This widespread view has lost sway in recent years for two reasons. First, the entry of Italy into the European Monetary Union and its adoption of the euro have decreased, among the broad public, the idea that Italy needs a European “vincolo esterno”

(external constraint), at least in the monetary domain. Second, today the EU, which includes less prosperous and less consolidated democracies, is no longer necessarily viewed as a prerequisite for democracy and prosperity. While Italians have traditionally been keen supporters of EU enlargement, in the past few years, they have adopted a more lukewarm attitude on the subject. When asked generally about their attitude towards enlargement, Italians remain positive, but when specific countries are mentioned, their scepticism rises, especially if these countries are or are perceived to be less developed (Comelli 2006b: 60-61).

Linked to the issue of enlargement is that of immigration. Traditionally a country of emigrants, Italy has witnessed since the 1990s a massive influx of foreigners, that now amount to around four million,<sup>3</sup> with irregular immigrants estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands. The increasing number of crimes committed by immigrants in past years, especially by irregular ones, amplified by the media and an anti-immigration political discourse by some parties, especially by the Northern League, has triggered a hot and often harsh debate in the country. The EU was brought into this debate in a twofold manner. On the one hand, Italian political leaders have repeatedly claimed that illegal immigration is a European problem, which cannot be solved by southern European countries alone. On the other hand, the fact that EU citizens of Romanian origin have been involved in some crimes has dangerously generated a link between immigration and EU enlargement in political and media discourse.

As the debate over immigration has shown, the current Berlusconi government has not hesitated to strongly criticize the EU when it has thought it was standing in the way of Italian national interests, like on immigration and climate change (see below). While critical and even harsh tones towards the EU are not new and have been used since the mid-1990s, their impact on public opinion is now being felt more heavily. The party that has been most vocal in criticizing the EU has certainly been the Northern League, whose votes overwhelmingly come from Northern Italy, though in the latest European elections (2009) and local elections (2010) it made inroads in Central Italy too. The anti-EU rhetoric of the Northern League may be one of the factors that accounts for the significant decrease in public support for the EU in Italy's northern regions.

The decrease in Italian public support for European integration can thus be partly explained by the less EU-phile attitude of the current governing political class. This said, it would be mistaken to argue that both at public and elite levels, EU-scepticism is inexorably on the rise. In many respects, public and elite attitudes display important features of continuity, and the marginal pick-up of public support for the EU since then testifies to this. While in the past few years Italians have become more disillusioned with the EU, this does not mean they would support a re-nationalization of policy-making. When asked about the euro or CFSP, Italians continue to support strongly supra-national decision-making (see Table 3). Furthermore, Italians continue to trust European institutions more than national ones. For instance, in Autumn 2010, trust in

<sup>3</sup> According to a report released in October 2009 by the Catholic charity Caritas, there are over 4.5 million legal immigrants in Italy, that now account for 7.2% of the population, exceeding the EU average of 6.2% for the first time ever. The National statistics bureau Istat placed the number of foreign residents at the beginning of 2009 at 3.8 million, amounting to 6.5% of the population. See "Immigrants now 7.2 % of the population. Caritas says one in 14 residents is a legal alien", *Ansa.it*, 28 October 2009, [http://www.ansa.it/web/notizie/rubriche/english/2009/10/28/visualizza\\_new.html\\_991467818.html](http://www.ansa.it/web/notizie/rubriche/english/2009/10/28/visualizza_new.html_991467818.html).

EU institutions stood at 47%, but trust in the national government was significantly lower, at 23% (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Trust in EU institutions and national government in Italy and EU-average**

Nr	trust in EU institutions		trust in national government		pro single currency		pro common foreign policy			
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)		
	IT	EU	IT	UE	IT	EU	IT	EU		
60	autumn 03	57	41	27	31	70	59	76	64	
EU 15	61	spring 03	54	41	26	30	69	60	77	66
EU 25	62	autumn 04	56	50	28	34	62	63	72	69
	63	spring 05	56	44	29	31	67	59	74	67
	64	autumn 05	55	45	32	31	64	60	71	68
	65	spring 06	56	48	34	35	66	59	68	67
	66	autumn 06	48	45	29	30	64	61	70	68
EU 27	67	spring 07	58	57	37	41	67	63	73	72
	68	autumn 07	43	48	23	34	63	61	66	70
	69	spring 08	40	50	15	32	58	60	63	68
	70	autumn 08	41	47	26	26	61	61	62	68
	71	spring 09	48	47	25	32	61	61		
	72	autumn 09	52	48	26	29	63	60		
	73	spring 10	42	42	25	29				
	74	autumn 10	47	43	23	28	68	58	n.a.	65

Table 3. Source: Elaboration of the author based on Eurobarometer data.

The declining trust in national institutions is associated with the outbreak of the “anti-politics” (*antipolitica*) trend in the country: a popular reaction against Italian party politics, perceived as being distant and indifferent to citizens’ needs.<sup>4</sup> *Antipolitica* peaked in 2007-2008 and was particularly detrimental to the centre-left Prodi government, which had been already weakened by its wafer-thin majority in the Upper House and its internal divisions (hence the 15% popular trust in it in Spring 2008, see Table 3). Indeed, one of the two best-selling books in Italy in 2007 was *La Casta* (The Caste) by Gian Antonio Stella and Sergio Rizzo,<sup>5</sup> which reported on the deep gap between the political class and ordinary citizens. In 2007, the comedian Beppe Grillo, a long-time critic of Italian politics, was particularly vocal in denouncing Italian politicians through his popular blog.<sup>6</sup> Outbreak of anti-political sentiments is frequent in Italy and co-exists with the politicization of public life (Comelli 2009), which is reflected in high electoral turnouts<sup>7</sup> and in an impressive number of “political” dailies.<sup>8</sup> Antipolitical

<sup>4</sup> *Antipolitica* is associated with what the Italian political lexicon defines as “*qualunquismo*”: a tendency to disregard differences among parties and leaders both in terms of their political values and policy choices.

<sup>5</sup> The other bestseller was *Gomorra* by Roberto Saviano, on the Camorra’s involvement in the economic system of Naples and southern Italy.

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.beppegrillo.it>.

<sup>7</sup> Electoral turnouts in Italy are higher than in most European countries. For example, the turnout at the national elections in April 2006 was over 83%; in 2008 it was over 78%. Turnout at the European elections in June 2009 was lower (65%), but significantly higher than the EU average (43%).

feelings are not directed towards specific parties, but towards the entire political class. These feelings have been fed by the increasingly polarized and populist political debate of the Second Republic, which has seen a dramatic fall in the quality of political participation and debate.

### 3. Italy's European policy during centre-right and centre-left governments

Italians have not grown lukewarm towards European integration in a vacuum. In fact, the change in their attitude has been paralleled with (and partly caused by) a more lukewarm attitude at elite level, particularly amongst some forces within the current Berlusconi government. Aside from the EU-wide decrease in support for the European political project, Italian elite attitudes towards the EU have distinctly shifted between the First and Second Republics, although such a shift has not always been matched by concrete actions.

During the so called First Republic, the centrist and centre-left governments supported unconditionally European integration and Italy's participation in it, although the instability of Italian coalition governments certainly affected relations between Rome and Brussels (Fabbrini and Piattoni 2008: 4-5). In this period political elites generally shared a positive view of European integration and equated Italy's national interest with European integration (Coralluzzo 2000). However, with the advent of the so-called Second Republic, this situation changed. Italian governments have no longer favoured European integration automatically and unconditionally. More accurately, as opposed to the early Second World War period, in which the left (i.e., the Italian Communist Party) had opposed European integration, in the post-Cold War period, euro-scepticism essentially came from the right (i.e., the Northern League plus segments of Berlusconi's Freedom Party - Partito della Libertà - PdL) (Fabbrini and Piattoni 2008: 8). Specifically, in the Second Republic, traditional Italian Europeanism has survived among the parties that originated from the centre and the centre-left: the Christian Democrats, reincarnated into the Margherita (now largely merged into the Democratic Party) and the Union of Centrist Democrats (UDC); and mainstream post-Communists, now mainly within the Democratic Party. Parties to the far left, like the Refounded Communists still view the EU with deep scepticism, considering it as a union of bankers, that fails to account for workers' needs and demands. This rhetoric is partly shared by the Northern League, which remains the most eurosceptic party in Italy. Within the centre-right coalition, other parties challenge some features of the EU. Notably, Berlusconi's Forza Italia (now part of the PdL), has rehabilitated the discourse on the national interest, juxtaposing this, if necessary, to the European project. The newly founded Future and Freedom for Italy (Futuro e Libertà FLI), which comprises dissidents within the PdL, drawn mostly from the post-fascist National Alliance (Alleanza Nazionale), supports the EU,<sup>9</sup> although it also frames foreign policy in terms of national interest. To sum up, unlike the close to unanimous pro-Europeanness of the

<sup>8</sup> The average number of copies sold every day by political dailies in Italy is: *Libero* 120,000; *Il Foglio* 9,000; *La Padania* 7,000; *Il Secolo d'Italia* 3,000 (centre-right leaning newspapers); *L'Unità* 51,000; *Il Manifesto* 25,000; *Liberazione* 8,000; *Europa* 5,000; *Il Riformista* 4,000 (centre-left leaning newspapers).

<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note how the party leader, Gianfranco Fini, that in 2002-2003 was the Italian government's representative at the European Convention, evolved from an intergovernmental to a supranational position (Fabbrini and Piattoni 2008: 9).

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First Republic's political establishment, the picture of the Second Republic is far more mixed: the current centre-right coalition in power is generally more critical of the EU and of European integration than the opposition.

However, when it comes to official positions, most Italian parties support devolving more competences to Brussels and proceeding with European integration.<sup>10</sup> In particular, a bipartisan consensus exists on the need to strengthen the Common European Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and to proceed with enlargement. In particular, most parties - left and right - support Turkey's bid for EU membership, with the only notable exception of the Northern League, in contrast to French and German deep scepticism regarding the question.

Notwithstanding, left-right differences do exist in Italy's European policy (Darnis 2009). Beyond a more EU-sceptic rhetoric, the Berlusconi government, while persisting in a foreign policy traditionally centred around the pillars of Europeanism and Atlanticism, has tended to emphasize more national (economic) interests. This has led to a preference for bilateral relations with specific countries, including the US, Russia, Egypt, Israel and Libya. Moreover, unlike the centre-left, the current centre-right government does not support unconditionally EU-led projects and initiatives. An interesting and paradigmatic example comes from the issue of climate change. The Italian government strongly opposed the EU's climate change-energy package "20-20-20" at the European Council meeting on 15 October 2008, in order to protect national industries from what it viewed as the excessive costs of the plan, which it estimated at USD 18 billion per year. The final decision taken at the European Council meeting on 11-12 December 2008 retained the most salient features of the package, but key concessions were made to countries like Italy. In particular, industries facing competition from countries with less stringent environmental regulations (e.g., iron, glass, ceramics, paper, cement, chemicals and aluminium, etc.) were exempt from most of the costs of buying carbon emissions permits through auction schemes.<sup>11</sup>

On other occasions, the Berlusconi government did not hesitate to criticize the EU, and especially the European Commission. In September 2009 for example, Berlusconi called on the Commission spokesman not to speak out, when the latter had requested explanations for Italy's refusal of entry of a boat transporting around 70 refugees from Libya, without previously ascertaining whether the passengers could be entitled to the status of asylum-seekers (Phillips 2009). In fact, as argued above, immigration is one of the issues on which the Italian government has been most critical - and at the same time more demanding - of the EU. In April 2011 for example, the Italian government launched an unprecedented critique of the EU, going as far as to question Italy's membership of the Union. It strongly complained about the refusal by EU Ministers of the Interior to activate a 2001 directive to grant temporary protection to the over 20,000 migrants who had arrived to Italy as a result of the upheavals in North Africa and the

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<sup>10</sup> For an overview of the positions of Italian political parties towards European integration see Chapter 4 "Parties and Public Opinion regarding Europe", in Bindi 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Specifically, these industries would have to buy no more than 70 % of their carbon emission permits, rather than the 100 % initially put forward by the Commission. Furthermore, the agreement foresaw a progressive rise of auctioning quotas, starting from 20 % in 2013, increasing to 70 % in 2020 and finally reaching 100 % in 2027 (Carbone 2009: 111).

war in Libya, which would have allowed Italy to share with other EU countries the burden of managing such an influx. Prime Minister Berlusconi was blunt: "Either Europe is something concrete, or it would be best to part ways" (Economist 2011). Italian Minister of the Interior, Roberto Maroni, echoed by declaring: "If this is the attitude of the EU, we are better off alone than in bad company" (Ibidem). However, Minister of Foreign Affairs Franco Frattini downplayed this acrimonious rhetoric, as did President Giorgio Napolitano, and stated that "without Europe, Italy would be too small" (Frattini 2011) and that the latter "an extraordinary opportunity" for the former (Ibidem).

Ideology is a factor explaining these left-right differences in Italy's European policy. Beyond that, the personal background of particular political figures also plays a role. The Prodi governments for example included key political and technocratic personalities that had previously been appointed to key EU positions, such as a President of the Commission (Romano Prodi himself), a member of the executive board of the European Central Bank (Tommaso Padoa Schioppa), a Commissioner (Emma Bonino) and the Vice President of the European Convention (Giuliano Amato). Also, both the current and the former President of the Republic, Giorgio Napolitano and Carlo Azeglio Ciampi are committed Europeanists. In this respect however, it should be noted that the current Berlusconi government (in office since May 2008) has stronger EU credentials than the first (1994). For example, current Minister of Foreign Affairs Franco Frattini is a former Vice President of the Commission, who knows the EU machinery well and supports European integration. His predecessor in the first Berlusconi government in 1994, by contrast, was Antonio Martino, a US-educated economist who valued transatlantic ties more than European ones.

The differences that we have just highlighted between the centre-right and the centre-left coalitions get indeed smaller when it comes to concrete policies. Here, one specific trend can be identified. The ruling centre-right coalition indulges in anti-EU rhetoric, but fails to match words with deeds.

A case in point is Italy's parliamentary ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. Italy was not among the first countries to ratify the Treaty. This was because the Prodi government (2006-2008) passed a bill proposing the ratification of the text, but the bill was not approved by parliament in view of the fall of the Prodi government in February 2008 and the subsequent elections, which saw a return of Silvio Berlusconi. Yet once the political dust had settled and the third Berlusconi government sworn in, on 30 May, the Italian Council of Ministers adopted a bill proposing the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. Ratification thus proceeded through parliamentary channels. A few lone voices had called for a popular referendum (Comelli 2006b: 60-61). The Northern League, whose ministers had agreed on the government bill, accepted ratification, but claimed that in view of the loss of national sovereignty that came with the extension of qualified majority voting to new policy areas, the Treaty should have been subject to popular consultation (Caprara 2008). Various parliamentarians and ministers from the Northern League, including party leader Umberto Bossi, expressed satisfaction at the negative result of the Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty on 12 June 2008. However, only a few days later, Bossi declared that his party would vote in favour of the ratification of the Treaty in parliament. In fact, The Senate approved the bill on July 23 unanimously (287 yes votes out of 287 votes cast) and the Chamber of Deputies did likewise on 31 July (517 yes votes out of 517 votes cast), paving the way for the ratification on 2 August. All of the parliamentarians from the Northern League voted yes to the

ratification in both houses of the Parliament, even though they tried to distinguish themselves from the other MPs by remaining seated when the result was announced (Carbone 2009: 104).

The Northern League's vote, that contradicted all its anti-EU rhetoric, may appear paradoxical, but in fact reflected its previous practice (e.g., by voting in favour of the Nice Treaty as well).<sup>12</sup> A negative vote by the League would have exposed cracks within the governing coalition. Furthermore, in the current parliament, in place since 2008, the far-left parties, that could have voted against the Treaty, were not represented. Hence, the League would have been completely isolated had it voted against the Lisbon Treaty. Some of the League's concerns were, at least rhetorically, taken into consideration during the ratification. In his declaration to the parliament, Minister of Foreign Affairs Frattini mentioned issues close to the League's agenda, such as cautioning against an over-bureaucratization and overregulation of European integration (Italian Parliament 2008a).

Despite the unanimous parliamentary support for the Lisbon Treaty, its ratification did not trigger a public debate in the country. The national media did not really cover the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in Italy, while wider coverage was given to the first Irish referendum in June 2008 and to the appointments of the President of the European Council and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in November 2009. In particular, the fact that an Italian politician, Massimo D'Alema, was a candidate for the latter post, aroused some interest among the public. However, even on this occasion, a public debate on Italy's role in Europe did not take place. The campaign for the European Parliament elections in June 2009 were no exception: the focus was solely on the domestic political impact of the EP elections. As rightly lamented by Andrea Romano, at a time when both the European project and the Italian political landscape are undergoing deep change and crisis, such a debate is badly needed (Romano 2009).

#### 4. Conclusions

Once a renowned Euro-enthusiastic country, Italy has experienced a decrease in public support for European integration. This decreasing support, in line with a broader European trend, may be accounted for by various factors, at both national and EU levels. Key reasons are the disillusion with national and EU politics in Italy, as well as the impact of anti-EU rhetoric by politicians particularly on the centre-right, a relatively new phenomenon in Italy. In fact, while both government (Berlusconi 3) and opposition (Democratic Party, CDU and FLI) remain committed to the EU, differences exist regarding both style - the current government does not refrain from publicly criticizing the EU - and substance - the current government has placed greater emphasis on the national (economic) interest in foreign policy-making. However, Eurobarometer data also shows that Italians continue to trust European institutions much more than national ones, and to favour the devolution of powers to the supra-national level in sensitive areas such as foreign policy. In sum, they want more European integration, even though they are less satisfied than in the past about the EU's capacity to deliver.

<sup>12</sup> Although the League voted against the ratification of the Constitutional Treaty.

The anti EU-rhetoric in some sectors of the political elite should not be overemphasized. As shown by the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, when push comes to shove, the Italian political class remains overwhelmingly committed to European integration. Even the Northern League, the most vocal EU-critic in the country voted in favour. This said, the debate that took place on the occasion of the parliamentary ratification of the Lisbon Treaty was neither broad nor articulate. The EP election in June 2009 was another wasted opportunity to trigger a much-needed national debate about Italy's role in the EU.

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