



Italians and Foreign Policy

Research Report by
CIRCaP/LAPS (University of Siena) and IAI

METHODOLOGY

LAPS (Laboratory on Social and Political Analysis), the Survey Research Center at the University of Siena was commissioned to conduct the survey. A random sample of 1,003 nationals, 18 years of age and older, was interviewed by professional interviewers using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing. Interviews were carried out between September 16 and November 21, 2013. The sample was selected via *Random Digit Dialling* (RDD) choosing the respondent based on the last birthday. The sample is representative of the target population, stratified by sex, age, education and area of residence.

The response rate computed on the number of actual telephone numbers was 12.3%. The average duration of an interview was 15 minutes and 47 seconds. For results based on the national sample and distributions the largest margin of error attributable to sampling is ± 3 percentage points, with a level of confidence of 95%.

The results have been weighted based on gender, age, education and region.

They will be hereinafter referred to as "*IAI Survey 2013*".

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FOREWORD*

Mindful of events occurring in the world outside, yet mainly concerned about global issues that affect the interests of the nation and about Italy's scant influence on the international scene; aware of the bonds that tie them to Europe, but uncertain and sceptical about the future of Union; pacifists and, in principle, multilateralists, but little inclined to shoulder onerous international commitments. The relationship between Italians and international relations appears complex and hardly free of difficulties and contradictions. This is what comes to light, in sum, from the survey conducted by the Political and Social Analysis Laboratory (Laboratorio di Analisi Politiche e Sociali, LAPS) of the University of Siena on behalf of the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI).

The questions were submitted to a sample of 1,003 people, chosen at random among citizens of 18 and over. They aimed to take a bearing on Italians' attitudes towards foreign policy between 16 September and 21 November 2013.

The present report summarizes the main findings of the survey by means of a descriptive analysis of the frequency distributions and a preliminary interpretation of the results, subdivided into five thematic areas.

Italians and Foreign Policy

Italians pay attention to foreign policy, but global issues occupy a subordinate position in the scale of their priorities. The issues become relevant to them only when they affect the country's interests directly, as in the case of immigration and border security. Italians also see their country as a weak actor in the international arena.

Italians and Europe

The cultural differences between Europeans are seen as an obstacle to European integration; nevertheless for the new generations European diversity is no longer equivalent with division.

Ten years after the adoption of the Euro, the common currency appears to have become a well-established fact of life, but Italians are not willing to make sacrifices to remain part of the Eurozone. At the same time, they do not question their obligations with respect to the budget restrictions, but are unwilling to

bear the costs to keep the economic commitments made in Brussels. The mutual economic support among member states is hardly taken for granted by the Italians; specifically, the option to assist troubled countries with funds that could be used for domestic concerns is disliked.

Italians and Germany

The establishment of Germany as de facto leader of Europe's economic policy is viewed in Italy with uneasiness. Italians would prefer to keep a wider margin of freedom or even establish a coalition of states with an anti-German slant. Chancellor Angela Merkel's austerity policy meets with scant sympathy from Italians who are not inclined to accept the management of the economic crisis as dictated by Berlin.

Italians, the United States, and International Cooperation

Italians appear to believe in the value of cooperation among states to confront global challenges. Furthermore they still have trust in the Atlantic Alliance, but they do not consider the United States as the principal ally that will defend the fundamental interests of the nation. The US military bases on our territory are not considered to be untouchable: their presence is questioned and there is no lack of demands to close them.

Italians, the Use of Force, and the Middle East

Italians are, in general, opposed to the use of force and to sending their military to participate in international missions. The Arab world, geographically close and recently wracked by uprisings whose outcome remains uncertain, is a matter of concern, particularly for the consequences that political and social upheavals in the area have on migration flows to Italy.

Rather than being "citizens of the world", Italians tend to feel as "Italian citizens of the world"; a people increasingly aware of the prospects as well as the risks of regional and global integration, but who have trouble appreciating its related opportunities.

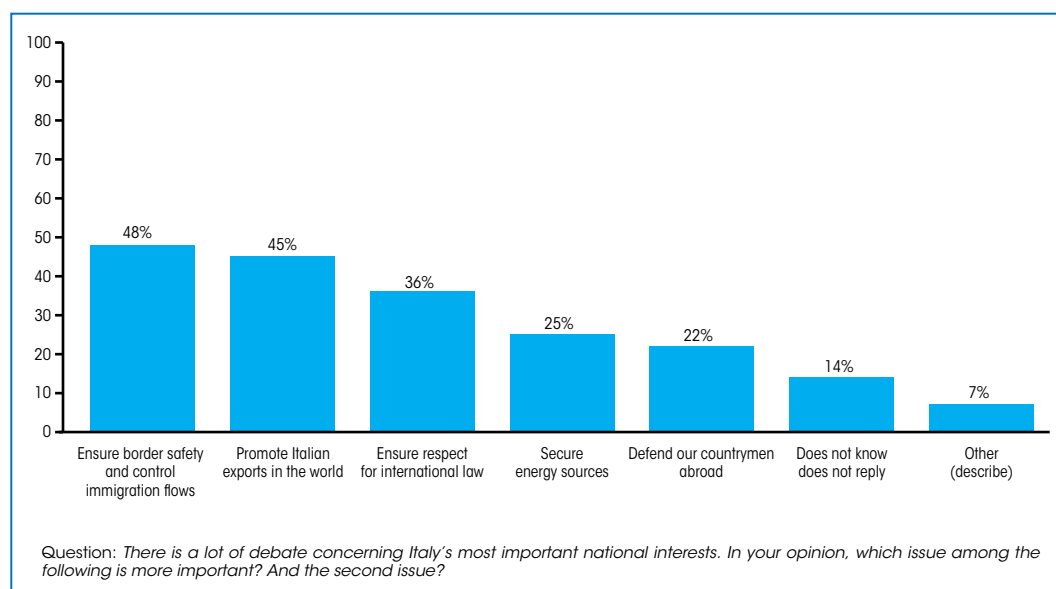
*This report was drafted by a researcher group from the Interdepartmental Research Centre on Political Change (CIRCaP), made up of Linda Basile, Pierangelo Isernia and Francesco Olmastroni.

MAIN RESULTS

1. Italians and Foreign Policy: Global and Domestic Issues

In a world that is growingly interconnected and globalized, Italians are mostly concerned with domestic issues. The sample was asked to indicate the national interests that took precedence out of five foreign policy topics (Figure 1). According to 48% of the responses, the main issues that Italy should tackle are border security and immigration control. In second place, we find the promotion of Italian exports in the world (45%). Nevertheless, a growing consideration for global issues is starting to emerge; nearly four times out of ten, the respect for international law is considered among the most important interests of the country.

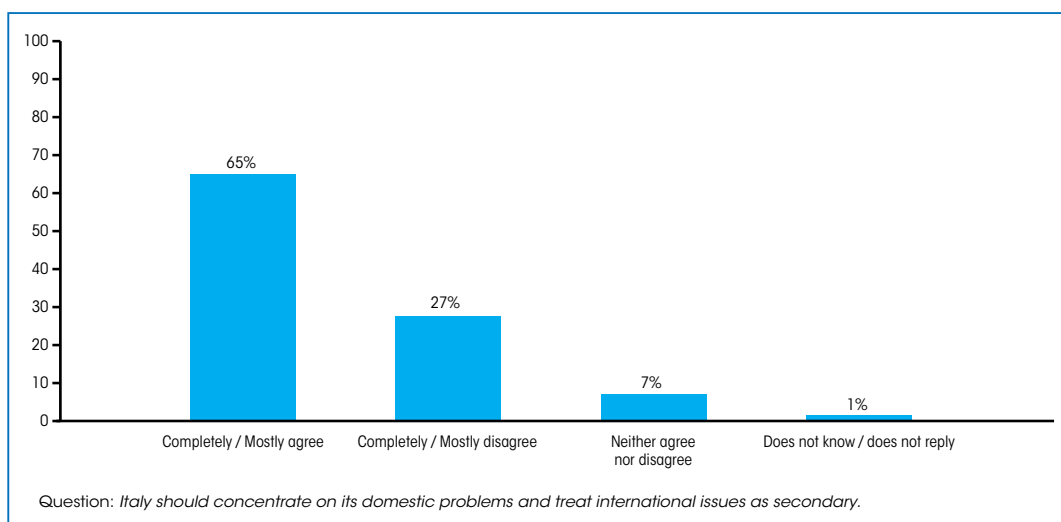
■ Figure 1. Most important national interests (% of cases)



Note: Frequency distribution to questions with multiple responses; the sum of the percentages is higher than 100 as more than one response was allowed. Source: LAPS, IAI Survey 2013.

This inward looking attitude is confirmed by the replies given to the question of priorities. 65% of the sample agree with the statement according to which "Italy should concentrate on its domestic problems, and put international issues in the background", while only 27% prefer to assign pre-eminence to international matters (Figure 2).

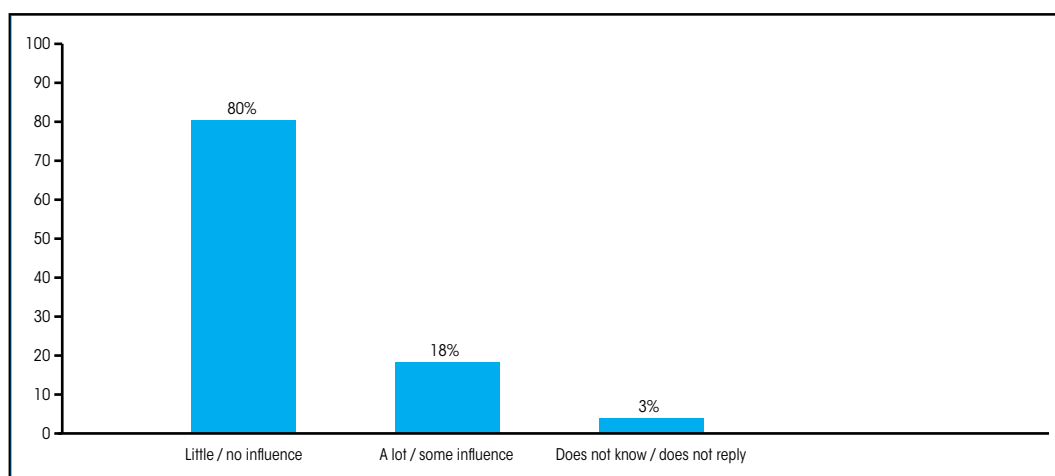
■ Figure 2. Prime concerns (%)



Source: LAPS, IAI Survey 2013.

Besides the pre-eminence of domestic interests, we find the perception of Italy as a weak actor on the international scene. About 80% of the interviewees feel that the country is very little or not at all influential on a global level (Figure 3).

■ Figure 3. Italy's influence in international politics (%)



QUESTION: *In your opinion, how much influence does Italy have in international politics today?*

Source: LAPS, IAI Survey 2013.

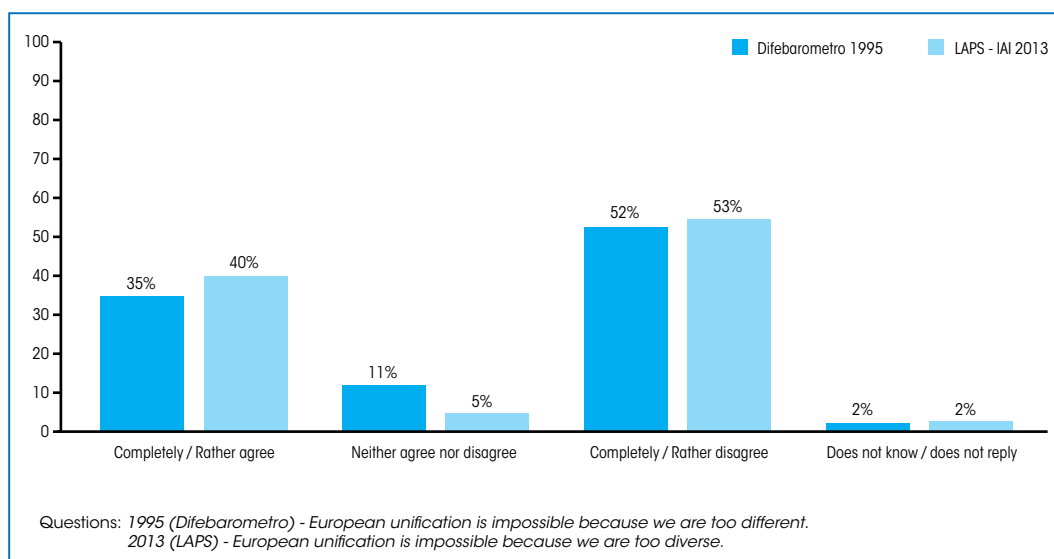
Furthermore, according to 44% of the sample, the country's international influence has declined in the last two years, while according to 39% it has remained unchanged and only 14% believe it has actually increased.¹

2. Italians and Europe: The Eurosceptic Wind Blows over Italy?

2.1 Identity, Integration and Political Unification

"United in diversity" is the motto of the European Union. It defines Europe's aim to combine integration and cultural differences. These, however, appear to represent an important hindrance to unification for a consistent number of Italians. Forty per cent of interviewees declare to agree with the statement that "unification is impossible because we are different" compared to 53% of Italians who appear to be less pessimistic concerning the prospects of real integration in a heterogeneous context such as the 28 states of the Union (Figure 4).

■ Figure 4. European unification and diversity (%)

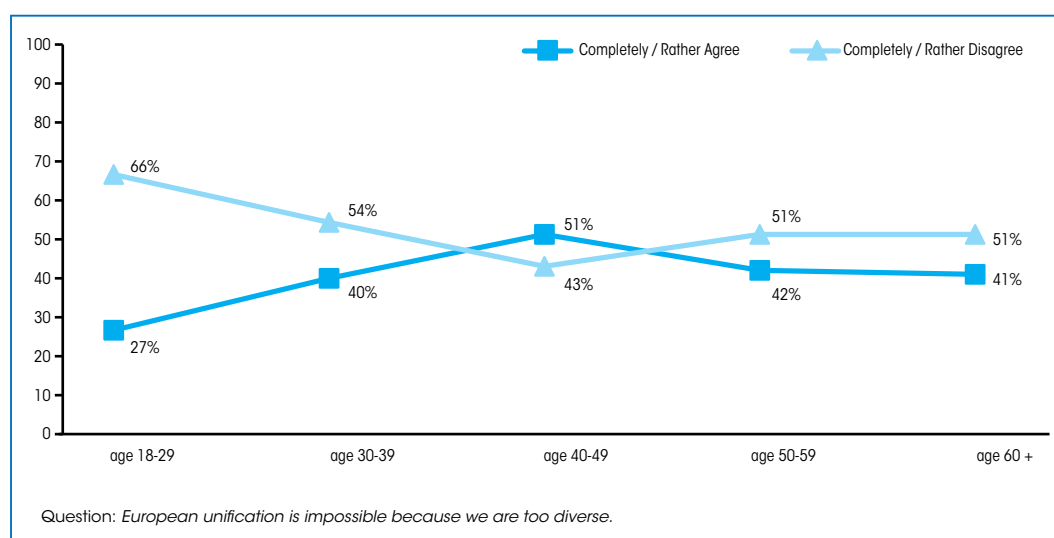


Sources: Archivio Disarmo-Swg, *Difebarometro* n. 2, 1995; LAPS, IAI Survey 2013.

¹ The wording of the question was: "Overall, do you believe that in the past 2 years, the influence of Italy in international affairs has increased, decreased or remained the same?"

Nevertheless, the most encouraging numbers come from the younger generation: 66% of young people between the ages of 18 and 29 believe that it is possible to unite different realities within the European Union. Such faith in the integration process decreases among the older age groups and, in particular, among Italians born in the 60s and 70s (Figure 5).

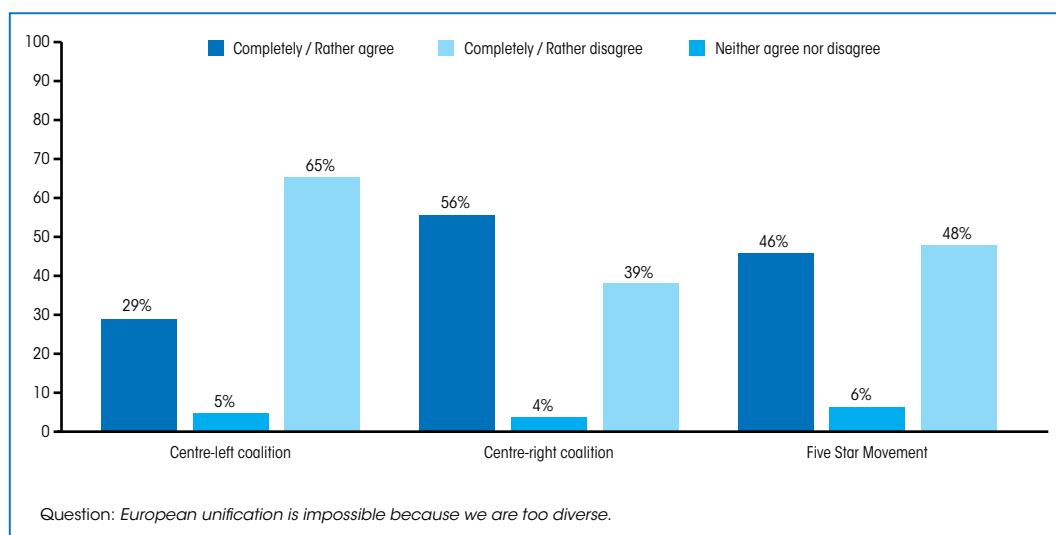
■ Figure 5. European unification and diversity, by age groups (%)



Source: LAPS, IAI Survey 2013.

Looking at the party preferences, it appears that the majority of the pessimists are concentrated on the right of the political spectrum. Within the centre-left coalition there is greater support for the European integration process. The voters of the popular *Movimento 5 Stelle* (Five Star Movement, M5S) are in effect divided between Eurosceptic and pro-European positions (Figure 6).

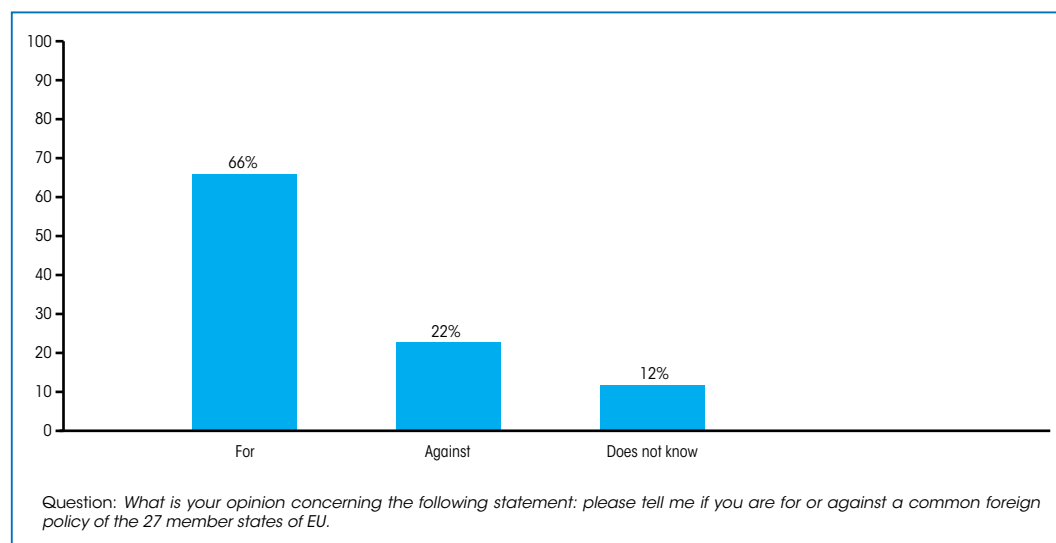
■ Figure 6. European unification and diversity, by political coalition voted at the last elections (%)



Source: LAPS, IAI Survey 2013.

The European Union must tackle the challenge of complete political unification, which includes, among other aspects, the building of a common foreign policy. According to a recent Eurobarometer study, 66% of Italians supports a common EU foreign policy (Figure 7). However, when national interests

■ Figure 7. Common foreign policy of the European Union (%)



Source: Eurobarometer 79.3, 2013

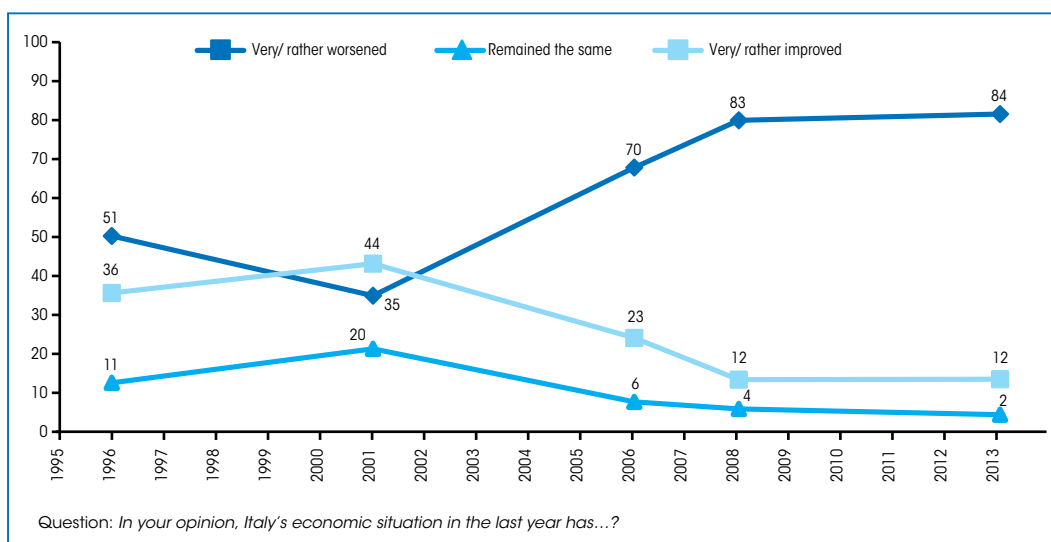
are at stake, there appears to be a greater caution concerning the prospect of strengthening the external powers of the Union. In the ambit of the present survey, 55% of the interviewees consider that Italy, if necessary, should always pursue its own interests, even if they turn out to be in conflict with those of the European Union. On the contrary 35% of the sample declare to be ready to sacrifice the country's interests to a common foreign policy.

2.2 The Euro, Brussels and the economic crisis

The European economic and monetary union is the most important reality of the integration process. However, in the face of the most serious economic crisis of the post-War period, the relationship between Italians and Brussels, on this point, appears to be burdened with uncertainties and contradictions.

The country's economic situation worries the majority of Italians. Since 2001, there is a growing perception of a constant decline in the national economy, a fact that is confirmed by 84% of the interviewees in this opinion poll (Figure 8).

■ Figure 8. Italy's economic situation in the last year (%)



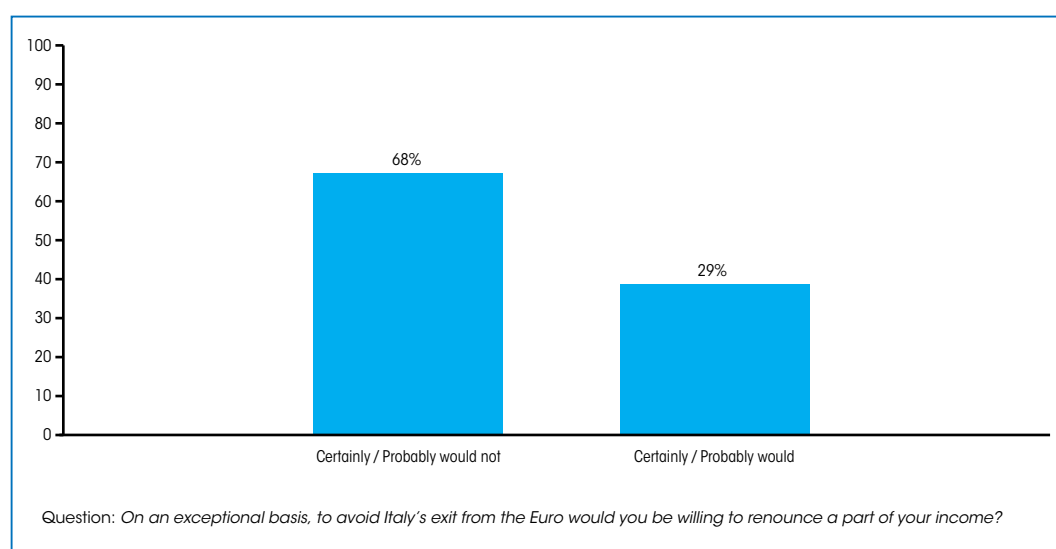
Sources: 1996-2008: ITANES; 1996, 2001, 2006, 2008; 2013: LAPS, IAI Survey 2013.

In this general context of economic insecurity, Italians consider the common currency as a well-established fact, but they do not appear to fully appreciate the opportunities it provides. Furthermore, they do not appear willing to make sacrifices in order to remain in the Eurozone. According to Eurobaro-

meter data, six Italians out ten support the economic and monetary union,² yet the *Transatlantic Trends Survey* in 2013 shows that according to 56% of Italians the use of the Euro in Italy has been a negative experience, while 38% has a positive opinion of the currency.³ However only 39% of the interviewees believes that Italy should leave the Eurozone and return to the Lira, while according to 53% Italy should continue using the euro.⁴

This survey appears to confirm these results, by looking at the question from a different angle: are Italians willing to make sacrifices for the euro and how much? Only 29% of interviewees declare to be willing to give up a part of their income to prevent an exit from the Euro, compared to 68% who refuse such possibility (Figure 9).

■ Figure 9. Willingness to make sacrifices for the euro (%)



Source: LAPS, IAI Survey 2013.

With the economic crisis, Brussels has introduced special initiatives to keep a stricter oversight of economic plans made by member states with excessive deficits. The increased oversight of national budgets by the European institutions is seen in a positive light by 42% of Italians, against 30% who deems it detrimental, while 22% remain indifferent.⁵

² Standard EB 79.3 2013. The wording of the question was: *What is your opinion regarding the following statement: please tell me whether you are for or against the economic and monetary union with the euro as a single currency.* Results: 60% for, 31% against.

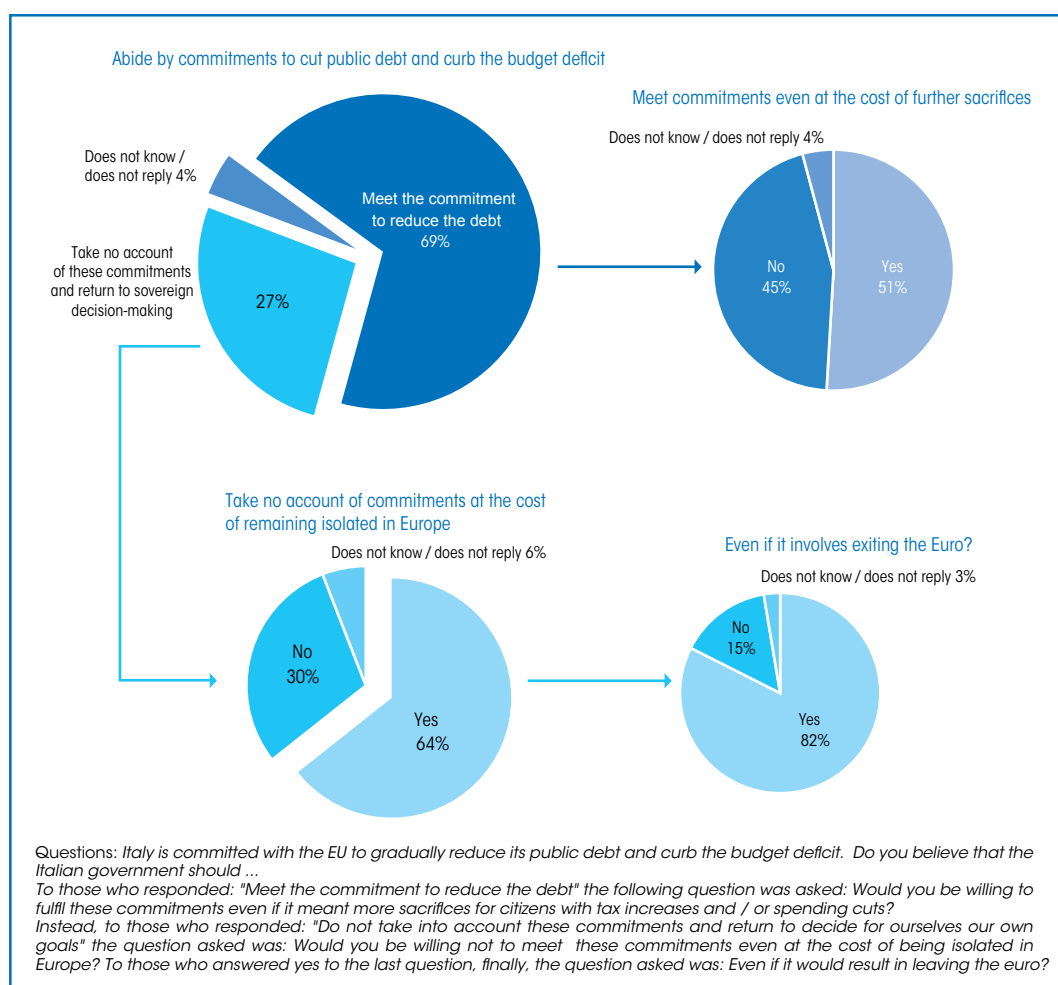
³ Transatlantic Trends Surveys of 2013. The wording of the question was: *Do you think that use the euro in Italy it was a good or bad thing?*

⁴ Transatlantic Trends Surveys of 2013. The wording of the question was: *Some believe that Italy should leave the Eurozone and return to use our previous currency, while others say that Italy should continue to use the euro. Which of these statements comes closest to your view?*

⁵ The text of the question is: *In recent years the control of the European Union on national budgets of the member countries has increased. Do you consider this good, bad or indifferent?*

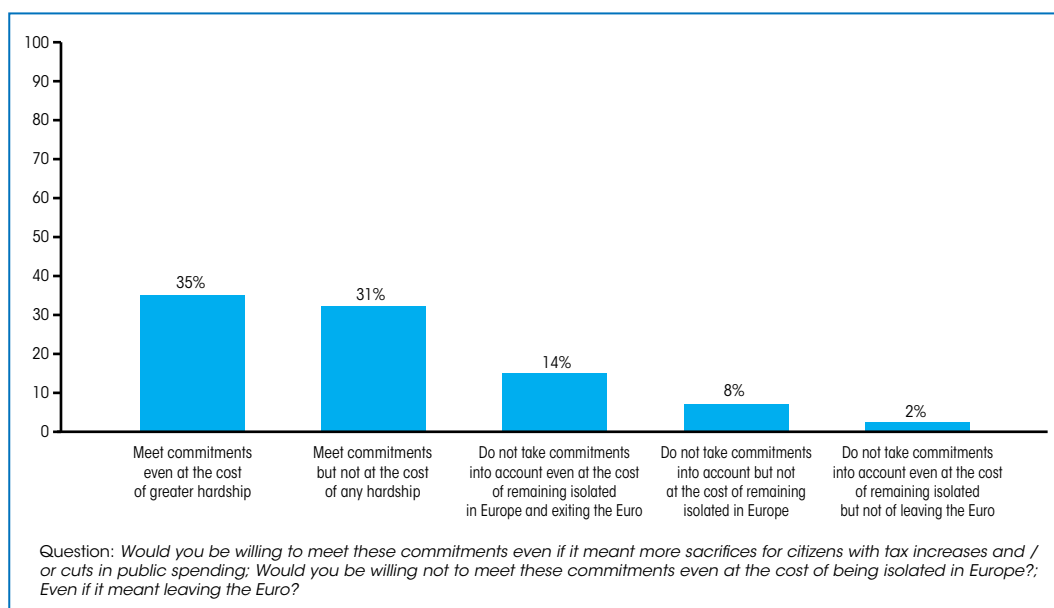
Furthermore, 69% of Italians think that Italy should respect the commitment to decrease the public debt and contain the budget deficit. This front is divided, however. About half would be ready to give something up to abide by these commitments (51%), while the other half (45%) rules out such a possibility. Finally a smaller, but not negligible percentage, of persons interviewed (26%) consider that the Italian government should not respect budgetary restraints. Among them, 64%, would be willing to pay the price of isolation in Europe or even an exit from the Eurozone (Figure 10).

■ Figure 10. Respect of budgetary constraints (%)



Source: LAPS, IAI Survey 2013.

■ Figure 11. Respect for budget constraints: conditions and costs (%)



Source: LAPS, IAI Survey 2013.

Percentage calculated by aggregating replies to the questions (see Figure 12).

Although these opinions represent a minority with respect to the total sample (Figure 11), the fact that a quarter of responses are critical of the commitments dictated by the European economic and monetary union is a sign of a consistent euroscepticism.

The economic crisis has called into question the cohesion and solidarity among member states of the European Union. Only 19% of respondents believe that Italy's contribution of € 43 billion to the European fund that was created to help states in serious financial straits, was impossible to elude. According to 37% of the respondents, the Italian government should have granted these funds only in exchange for a re-negotiation of the budget agreements signed with Brussels, while 38% of Italians believe that the country should have used these funds to address domestic problems (Table 1).

■ Table 1. European stability fund (%)

	%
Should have used these funds to address domestic issues	38%
Could not elude this commitment to European solidarity	18%
Should have provided these funds only in exchange for greater flexibility on the budget agreements signed in Brussels	37%
Does not know/ does not reply	6%
Total	100
(N)	(1000)

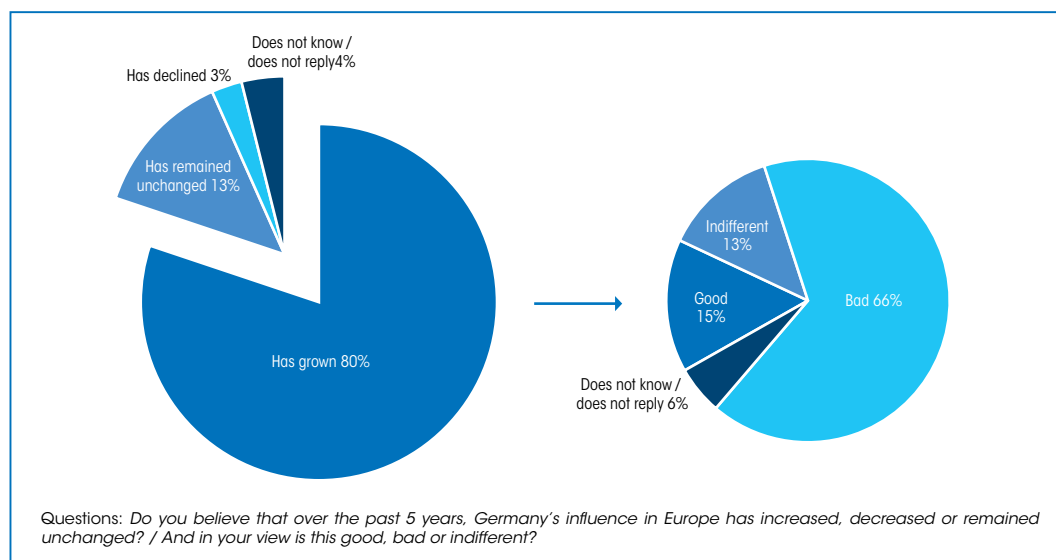
QUESTION: *Italy has provided approximately € 43 billion to the fund created by the European Union to help states with serious financial difficulties. So far Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and Cyprus, have benefited but not Italy. Do you believe that Italy ...*

Source: LAPS, IAI Survey 2013.

3. Italians and Germany: The “Merkel effect” as a Threat or Opportunity for Europe?

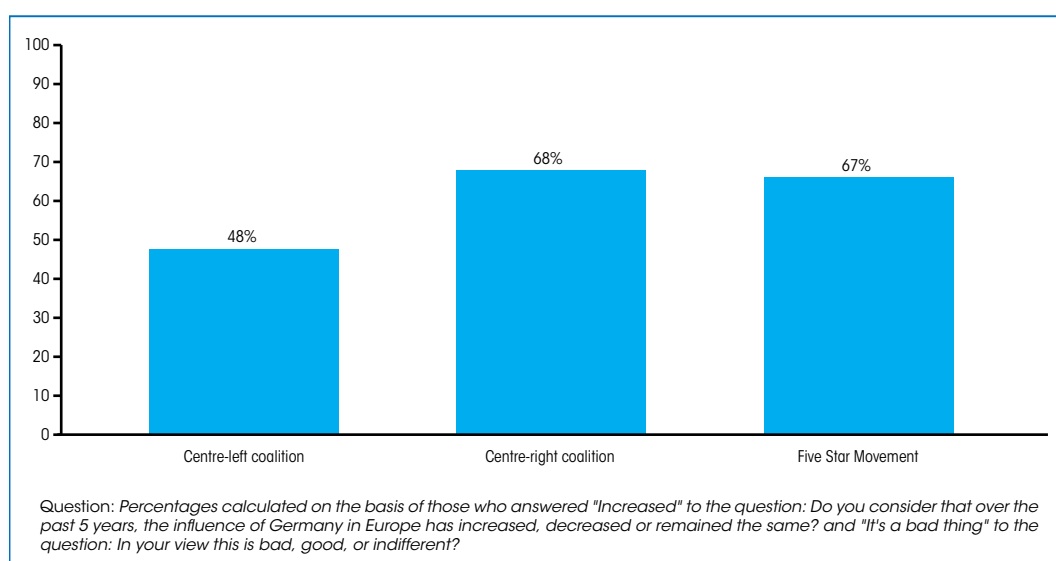
Led by Chancellor Angela Merkel, firmly at the helm of the country since 2005, Germany has established itself as the leader of European politics in the midst of the economic crisis. In line with this, 80% of Italians believe that, over the past five years, Germany’s influence in Europe has grown. Among them, 66% (53% of the total sample) has a negative opinion of this growing dominance (Figure 12). In particular, Germany’s leadership of the European economy is perceived as a threat, mainly within the electorate of the centre-right and the M5S (Figure 13).

■ Figure 12. Germany's Influence in Europe (%)



Source: LAPS, IAI Survey 2013.

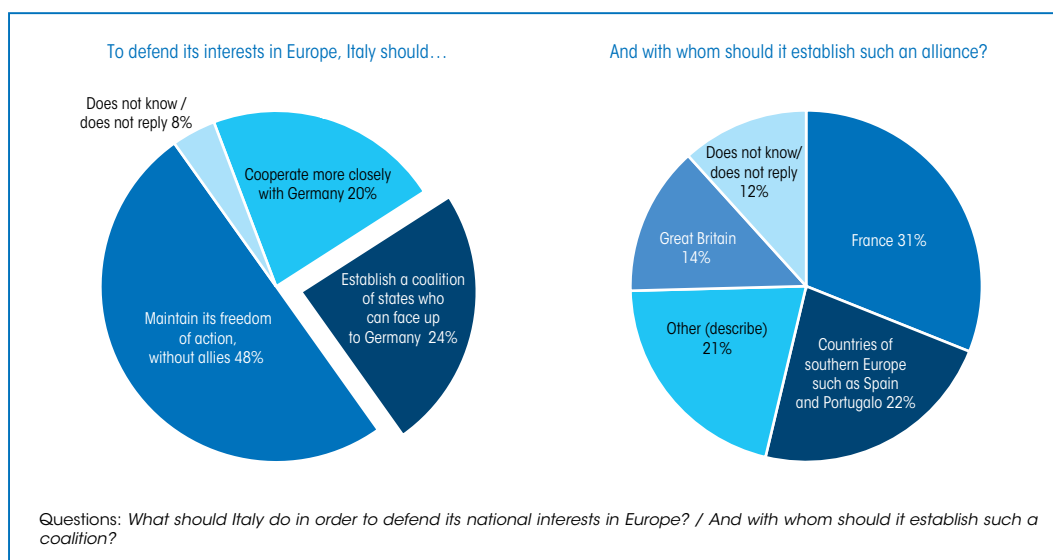
■ Figure 13. The growth of Germany's influence in the last 5 years is a negative: according to political preferences at the last elections (%)



Source: LAPS, IAI Survey 2013.

Finally, when asked to identify the state or group of states with whom Italy should cooperate in order to better defend its interests in Europe, only 20% of respondents point to Germany. On the contrary, 48% of Italians believe that Italy should not be allied with anyone, while 24% support the establishment of a coalition of states to counterbalance Germany's power. Potential partners in this anti-German front are, in order of preference, France, the United Kingdom and the countries of southern Europe (Figure 14).

■ Figure 14. Cooperation with Germany v. anti-German alliance (%)



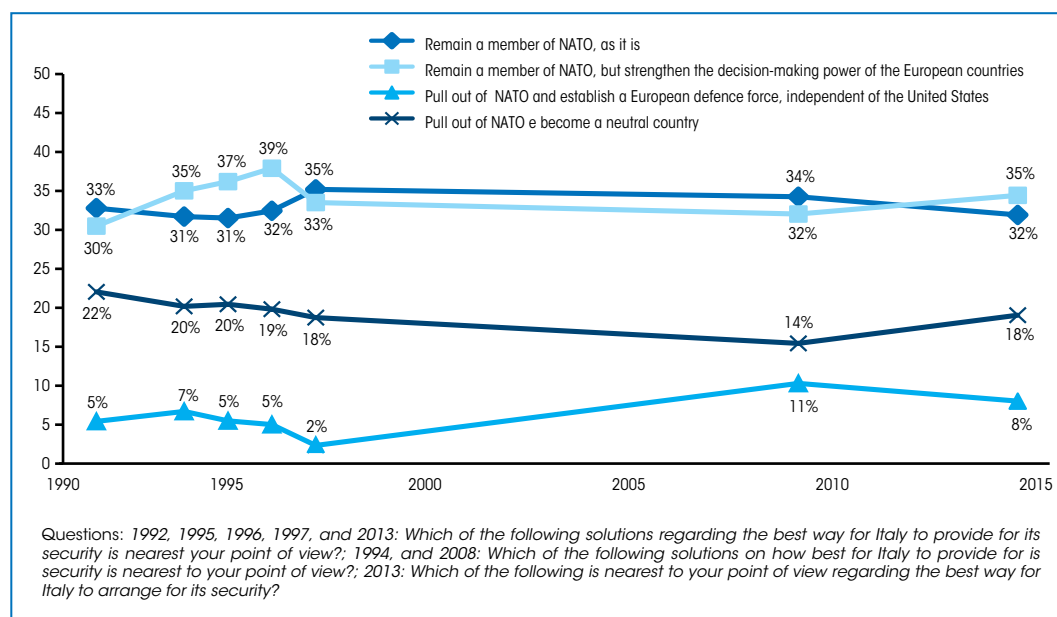
NOTE: Percentage calculated on the basis of those who answered "Establish a coalition of states who are able to face up to Germany" to the question: *What should Italy do to ensure the defence of its own national interests in Europe?*

Source: LAPS, IAI Survey 2013.

4. Italians and the USA: Italy's Security between Atlanticism and Europeanism

Over the past twenty-five years, the international context in which the Atlantic Alliance was born has deeply changed. The conflict between the two superpowers has been replaced by one involving a more complex constellation of global and regional powers. Nevertheless, only 18% of Italians believe that a withdrawal from NATO would meet the country's security needs. On the contrary, the majority of the sample, in line with a trend that has been almost constant for the last twenty years, reaffirms its confidence in the alliance, while 35% of the respondents believe that, within NATO, the decision-making power of the countries of Europe should be strengthened (Figure 15).

■ Figure 15. Best for Italy, 1992-2103 (%)

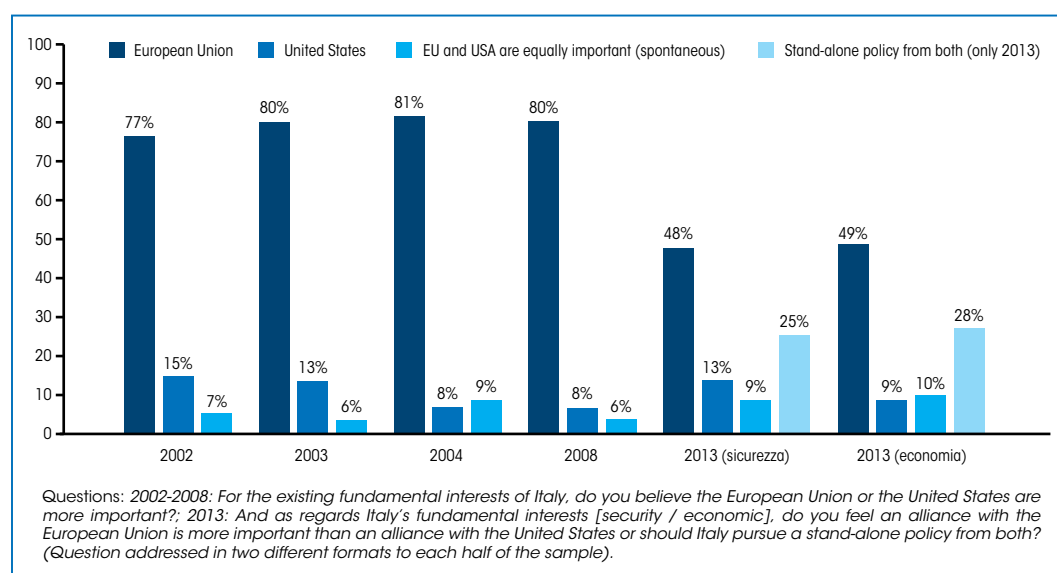


Sources: 1992: *Ricerca Vespri Siciliani* (AD); 1994: Archivio Disarmo - Swg *Ricerca Cemiss-Isernia* (CMS); 1995: Archivio Disarmo-Swg Difebarometro n. 2; 1996: Archivio Disarmo-Swg, *Difebarometro* n. 3; 1997: Archivio Disarmo-Swg, *Difebarometro* n. 5; 2008: LAPS, *Survey Ministry of Foreign Affairs* 2008; 2013: LAPS, *IAI Survey* 2013.

Although the United States, is the cornerstone of the Atlantic alliance, it is not considered the main ally for the economic and military security of the country. In line with the data of the *Transatlantic Trends Survey* for the years 2002, 2003 and 2004, and the LAPS Survey for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of 2008, the majority of Italians believe that the defence of Italy's fundamental economic interests and security is better served by an alliance with the European Union than with the United States. Compared to previous polls, this survey offered an additional option, that of a "stand-alone policy separate from both the U.S. and the EU". This possibility draws about a quarter of the population, highlighting a significant component that would want Italy to be free of the constraints of its traditional alliances.

What is more, in the course of this investigation, an experiment was conducted: half the sample was asked to indicate the most important ally for the *economic* interests of Italy, while the remaining half was asked the same questions about the *security* interests. The results reveal that, regardless of the nature of the interests at stake, Italians' prefer to fall back on the European partner, respectively by 48% of respondents in matters of security and 49% for the economy (Figure 16).

■ Figure 16. Alliance with the USA or the EU to defend Italy's fundamental interests, 2002-2013 (%)

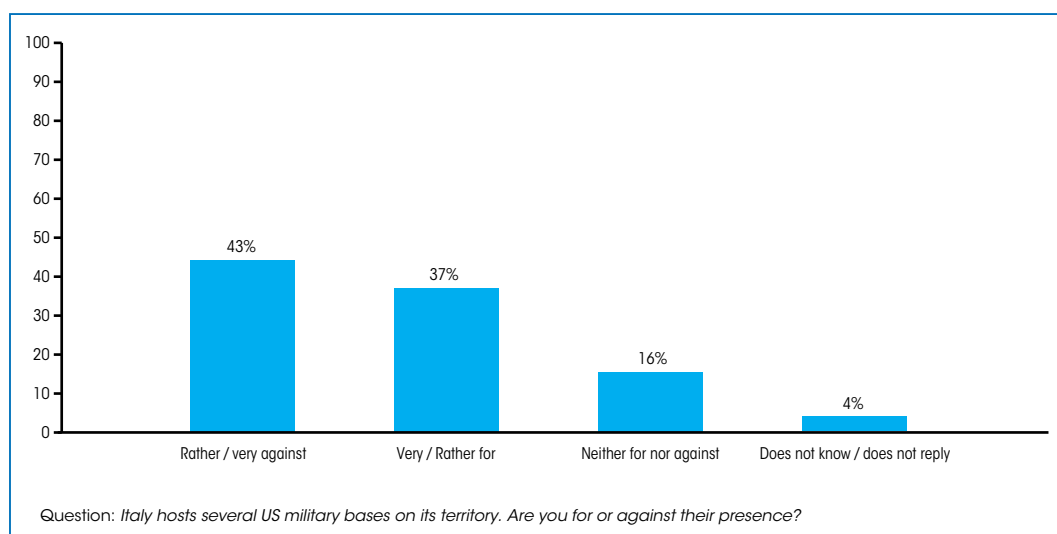


Sources: 2002-2004: Transatlantic Trends Surveys (TTS) 2002, 2003, 2004, 2008: LAPS, Survey Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2008; 2013: LAPS, IAI Survey 2013.

The "stand-alone policy from both" question is present only in 2013.

There is also a certain impatience with the military presence of the Atlantic ally on the national territory. In fact, 43% of respondents declare to be opposed to the military bases, against 37% who are in favour (Figure 17).

■ Figure 17. For or against American military bases on Italian territory



Source: LAPS, IAI Survey 2013.

In addition, 23% of the sample call for their closure, against 38% who would favour a renegotiation of their use, to increase the Italian government's control (Table 2).

■ Table 2. Perspectives on the future of U.S. military bases on Italian territory (%)

	%
Renegotiate the use of the bases with United States in order to increase government authority over these installations	38%
Demand the closure of as many bases as possible	23%
Keeping the same number of bases	21%
Increase the number of bases in exchange for greater economic and political benefits	10%
Does not know/ does not reply	8%
Other (describe)	0%
Total	100
(N)	(1000)

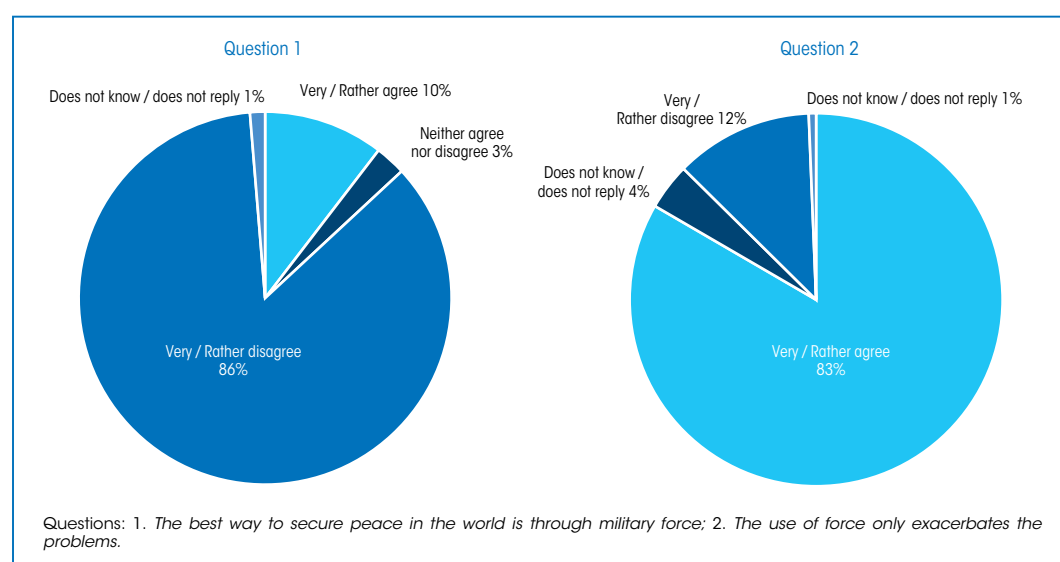
QUESTION: *What should the Italian government do in this matter?*

Source: LAPS, IAI Survey 2013.

5. Italians, the Middle East, and the Use of Force

The survey shows that Italians do not believe in the use of military force in international relations: 86% of respondents are opposed to the use of force to secure peace in the world, compared with 10% who see potential benefits in military interventions. Similarly, 83% of the sample believe that the use of force does nothing but exacerbate the problems (Figure 18).

■ Figure 18. Use of force (%)



Source: LAPS, IAI Survey 2013.

Italians display an attitude which is hostile to sending military units to participate in international missions abroad. About six out of ten Italians, in fact, are opposed to sending Italian soldiers into harms way, while only 29% support the Italian army's involvement in war situations outside the country. The response rates remain almost identical, both when the sample was told about the number of military currently engaged in missions abroad (about 6,500), and in the case in which this fact was omitted (Table 3).

■ Table 3. Italian contribution to international missions with Italian soldiers (%)

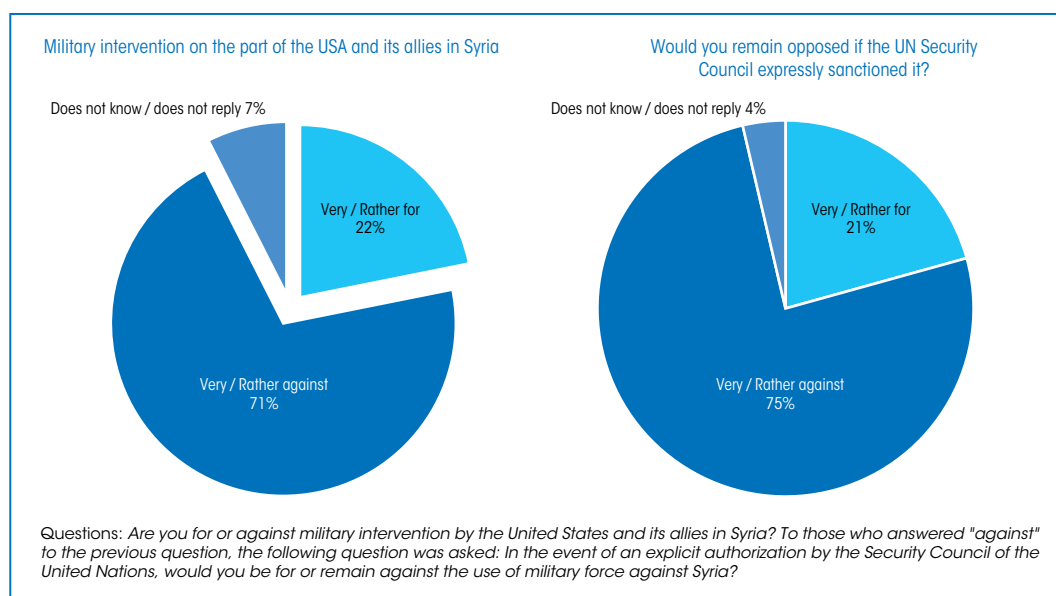
	Sample 1 - %	Sample 2 - %
Very/Rather for	29%	31%
Neither for nor against	10%	10%
Very/ Rather against	60%	57%
Does not know/ does not reply	1%	2%
Total	100	100
(N)	(488)	(512)

QUESTION: (Sample 1) Currently, about 6,500 Italian soldiers are engaged in different missions abroad under the UN, the EU or NATO. Are you for or against Italian involvement in international missions with Italian soldiers?; (Sample 2): In general, are you for or against the Italian involvement in international missions with Italian soldiers?

Source: LAPS, IAI Survey 2013.

The aversion to the use of force is further confirmed by the opposition displayed by Italians to a hypothetical military intervention in Syria by the United States and its allies (including Italy). Seven out of ten Italians (71%) reject the involvement in the Middle East, as against 22% who are in favour of a possible attack. Among those who make known their aversion to military operations in Syria, 75% say they would remain against it even if the operation were authorized by the Security Council of the UN, while only 21% say they are willing to change their minds in the event of a UN go-ahead (Figure 19).

■ Figure 19. Military intervention in Syria

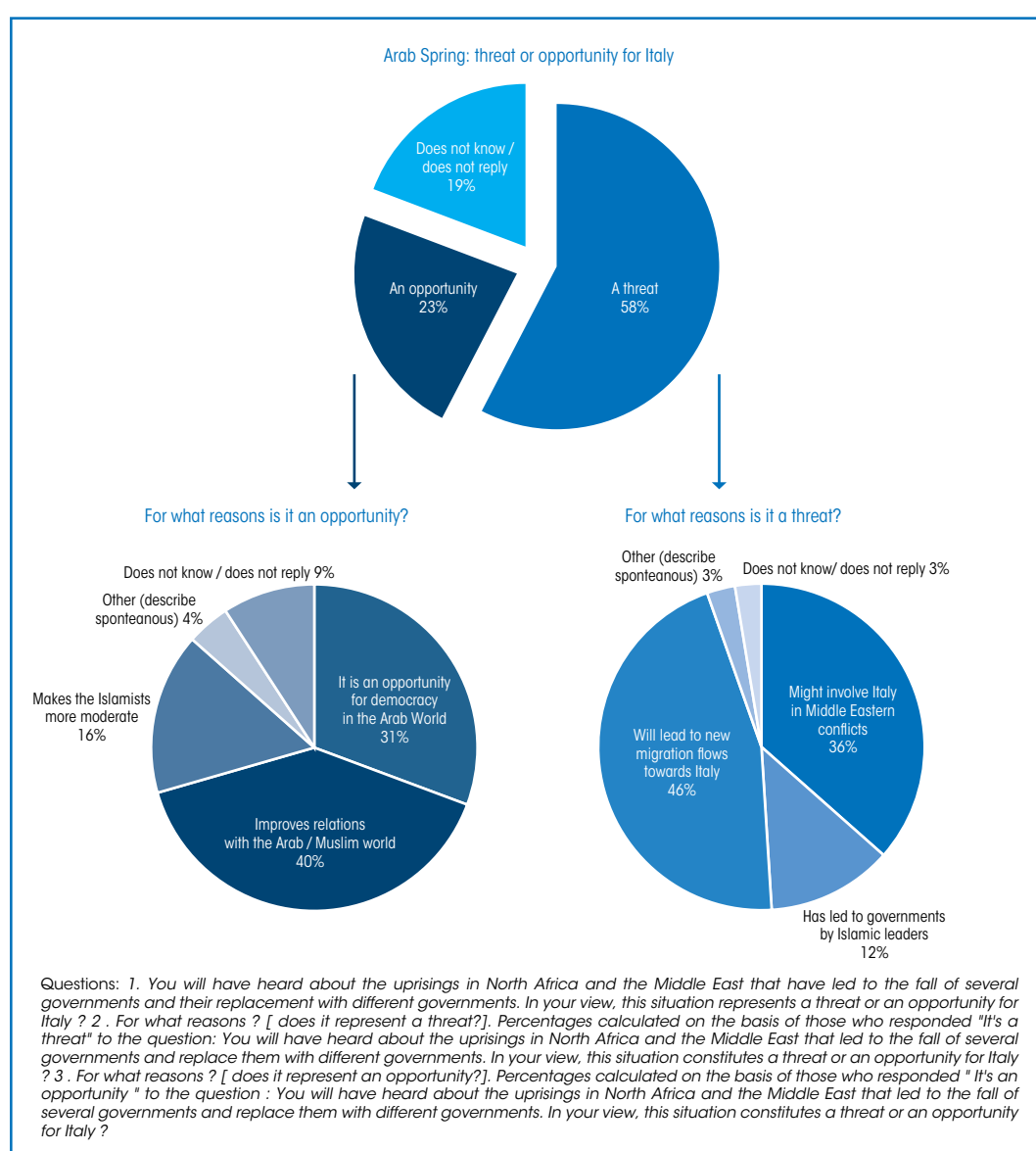


Source: LAPS, IAI Survey 2013.

Regardless of the specific case of Syria, the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East and the political instability in the region give rise to concern in more than half of the respondents. In fact, 58% of the sample see the so-called "Arab Spring" as a threat to Italy, particularly because of the risk of further migration flows and involvement in Middle East conflicts. This answer, however, is consistent with the domestic priorities of the Italians, described at the beginning of this report. Once again, the Italians give proof that they pay attention to what happens outside the borders of their country, but mainly in light of the consequences these may have for their domestic interests.

Among those who see the Arab Spring as an opportunity, on the other hand, 40% believe in a possible improvement in relations with the Arab world, followed by those who hope for greater democratization in the countries involved in these riots (Figure 20).

■ Figure 20. Arab Spring (%)



Source: LAPS, IAI Survey 2013.

*The “Italians and Foreign Policy” Research Project
was supported by*

