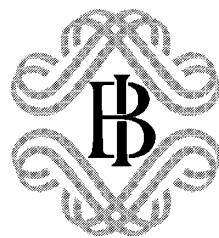


BANCA D'ITALIA

**Supplementi al Bollettino Statistico
Note metodologiche e informazioni statistiche**

**Statistiche di finanza pubblica
nei paesi dell'Unione europea**

**Public Finance Statistics
in the European Union**



Nuova serie

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Public Finance Statistics in the European Union

New series

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SYMBOLS AND CONVENTIONS

- the phenomenon in question does not occur;
- the phenomenon occurs but its value is not known;
- .. the value is known but less than the minimum considered significant.

Unless indicated otherwise, figures have been computed by the Bank of Italy.

PUBLIC FINANCE STATISTICS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION (1980-1997)¹

Introductory note

This edition of the Supplement to the Statistical Bulletin is designed to help the public, institutions and research centres to follow developments in the public finances in the European Union (EU). The document reports data on the general government economic accounts of the EU countries and compares them with data on the other leading industrial countries. The importance of the general government accounts has been enhanced by the Treaty of Maastricht, which provides for the balance to be one of the reference parameters for evaluating the sustainability of the public finances.

The series cover the period from 1980 to 1997. The figures for individual items of the accounts refer not only to the EU countries but also to the non-European G-7 countries (the United States, Japan and Canada). Thanks to the cooperation of the European Commission, it has been possible to reclassify some of the items referring to EU countries,² while the data for the non-EU countries have been processed to increase their comparability with those of the EU countries (see the Methodological Notes).

The first part of the publication contains the series of the economic accounts balances and of public debt and the second contains data on revenue and expenditure.

The figures given in the Supplement make it possible to examine the consolidation of the public finances undertaken by many European countries in the last ten years. In particular, the acceleration in the convergence of EU countries' public finances in the period following the approval of the Maastricht Treaty permitted 11 of the 15 EU countries to adopt the single currency in 1999 (see the chapter on The Public Finances in the Annual Report of the Bank of Italy, published in May 1998).

Between 1993 and 1997 the ratio of general government net borrowing to GDP in the European Union as a whole declined by 3.7 percentage points (from 6.1 to 2.4 per cent; Figure 1). The countries where the ratio fell most were Sweden (11.5 points), Greece (9.8), Finland (6.9) and Italy (6.8). In 1997, when the adjustment process was subject to examination by the European Commission, the ratio fell by 4 points in Italy, 3.5 in Greece and 2.1 in Spain. Between 1993 and 1997 the fall in interest payments accounted for 0.5 points of the reduction from 5.4 to 4.9 per cent in the ratio of net borrowing to GDP in the EU area, with the remainder deriving from improvements in the primary balance, which is more directly influenced by budgetary policy (Figure 2). Notwithstanding the marked improvement in budget outturns, the ratio of debt to GDP in the European Union in 1997 was 6 points higher than in 1993 and 18.4 points higher than in 1985.

The economic nature of the readjustment policies implemented in the member states can be seen by examining the changes in the ratios of primary expenditure and total

1 Prepared by Daniela Monacelli, Alessandra Staderini, Paola Umaldi and Stefania Zötteri. We thank the DGII of the European Commission, Eurostat and the OECD for having agreed to the use of their data in this publication.

2 The figures given in this Supplement for total revenue and expenditure are consequently different from those reported in earlier publications by the Bank of Italy.

revenue to GDP. One way of representing the adjustment process graphically is to take these two indicators as Cartesian coordinates and show the various countries as points in a plane. According to the quadrant in which each country falls, it is possible to group the member states on the basis of the budgetary policies they implemented.

Figure 3 shows, for the periods 1993-1997 and 1985-1997, the changes in primary expenditure on the vertical axis and in total revenue on the horizontal axis; the changes are calculated as the difference between the ratio to GDP at the beginning and the end of each period. The points lying in the top right-hand quadrant indicate countries in which the primary expenditure and revenue ratios both rose in the period considered, those in the top left-hand quadrant indicate countries in which the primary expenditure ratio rose and the revenue ratio fell, and so on.³ By construction, the dotted diagonal line passing through the origin identifies the points corresponding to identical changes in revenue and primary expenditure that leave the primary balance unchanged; the points below the diagonal line indicate an improvement in the primary balance, those above indicate a deterioration.

It can be seen that all the countries recorded an improvement in their primary balances in the period 1993-1997 (all the points are below the dotted line). This improvement was based mainly on a reduction in the primary expenditure ratio (only Portugal is above the horizontal axis). By contrast the revenue ratio rose only for Belgium, France, Italy, Portugal, the United Kingdom and Sweden (which lie to the right of the vertical axis). This tendency is confirmed by the analysis of the ratio of tax and social security revenue to GDP (Figure 4).

The adjustment process has nonetheless been problematic in some respects. In particular, much of the progress was the result of a slowdown in public capital formation. This is reflected in the fall from 2.7 to 2.2 per cent in the ratio for the European Union of public direct investment to GDP between 1993 and 1997 (Figure 5).

Lastly, the fall in the ratio of current primary expenditure to GDP between 1993 and 1997 (by 2.3 percentage points in both the European Union and Italy) only offset part of the increases recorded in earlier years. In fact, between 1985 and 1993 the ratio rose by 2.7 points in the European Union and by 3.5 points in Italy (Figure 6). This was accompanied by an increase in the ratio of revenue to GDP of 2.2 points in the European Union and of nearly 10 points in Italy. In this respect it is worth noting that the revenue ratio was basically stable between 1993 and 1997.

³ The points in the bottom left-hand quadrant indicate countries in which the primary expenditure and revenue ratios both fell and those in the bottom right-hand quadrant indicate countries in which the primary expenditure ratio fell and the revenue ratio rose.

Figure 1

**Net borrowing in the leading EU countries
(as a percentage of GDP)**

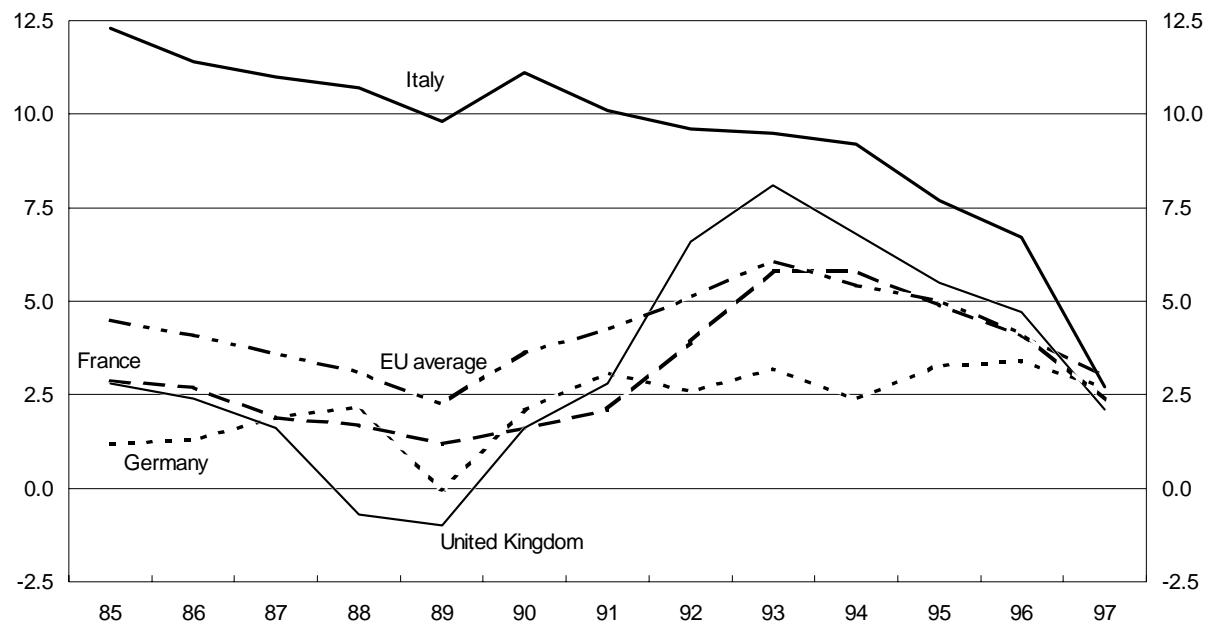


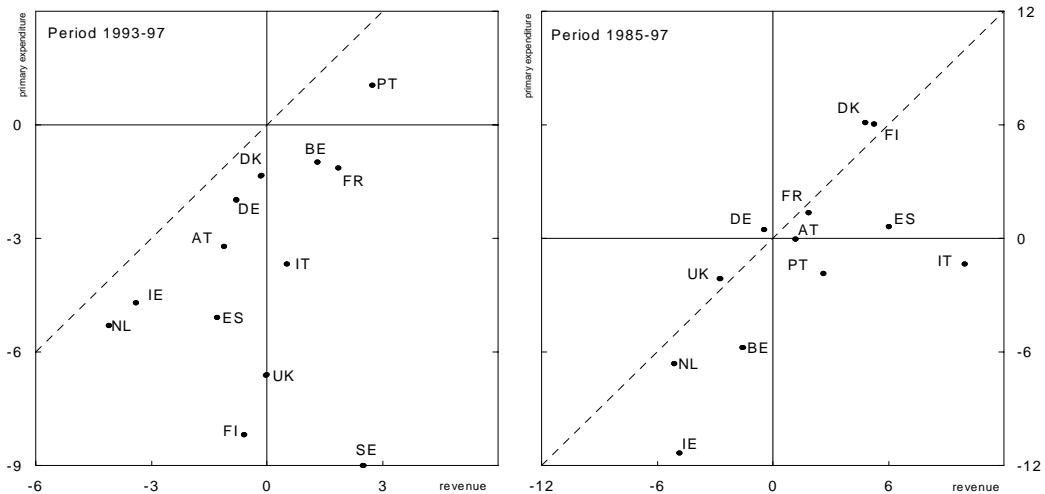
Figure 2

**Primary net borrowing in the leading EU countries
(as a percentage of GDP)**



Figure 3

**Changes in primary expenditure
and total revenue in the EU countries (*)
(as a percentage of GDP)**



(*) BE stands for Belgium; DK for Denmark; DE for Germany; ES for Spain; FR for France; IE for Ireland; IT for Italy; NL for Netherlands; AT for Austria; PT for Portugal; FI for Finland; SE for Sweden; UK for United Kingdom.

Figure 4

**Taxes and social security contributions in the leading EU countries
(as a percentage of GDP)**

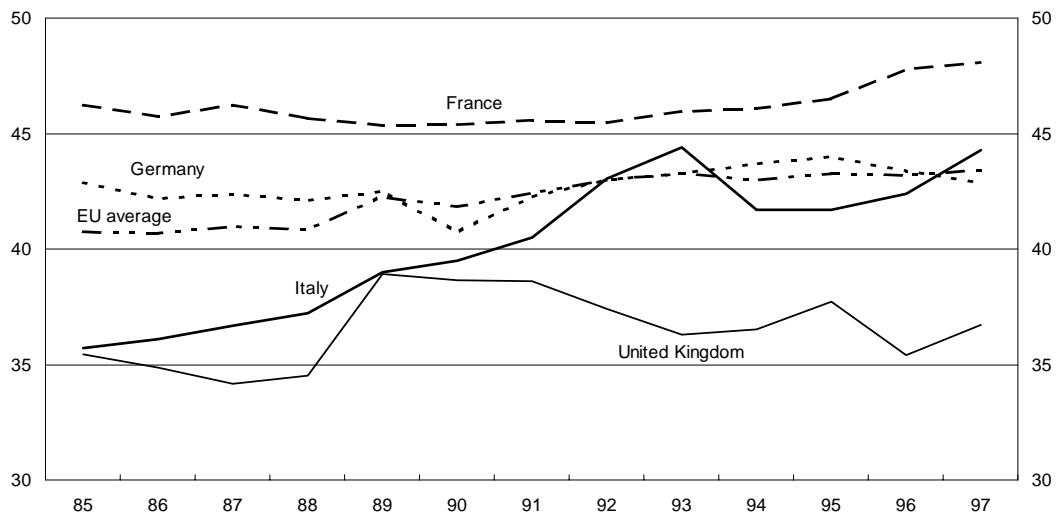


Figure 5

**Public investment in the leading EU countries
(as a percentage of GDP)**

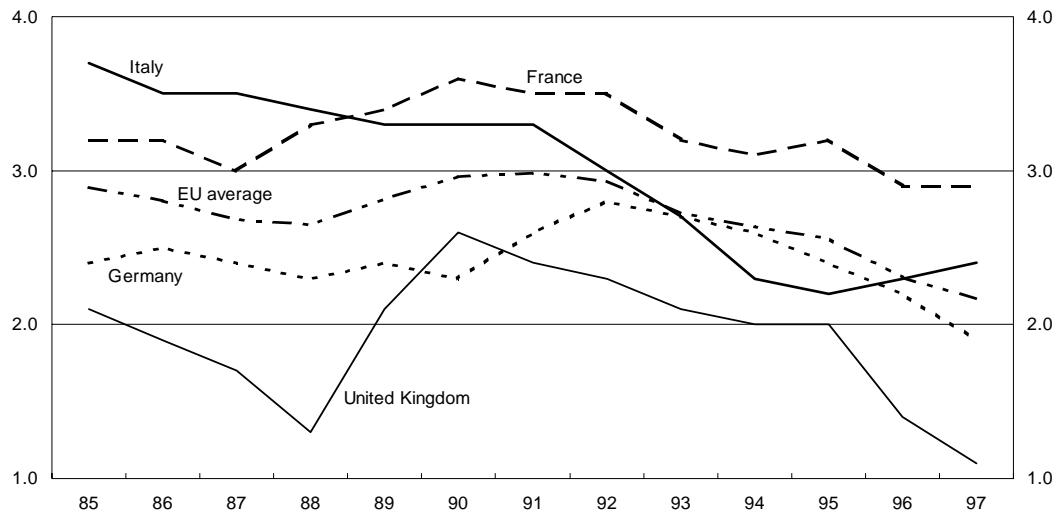
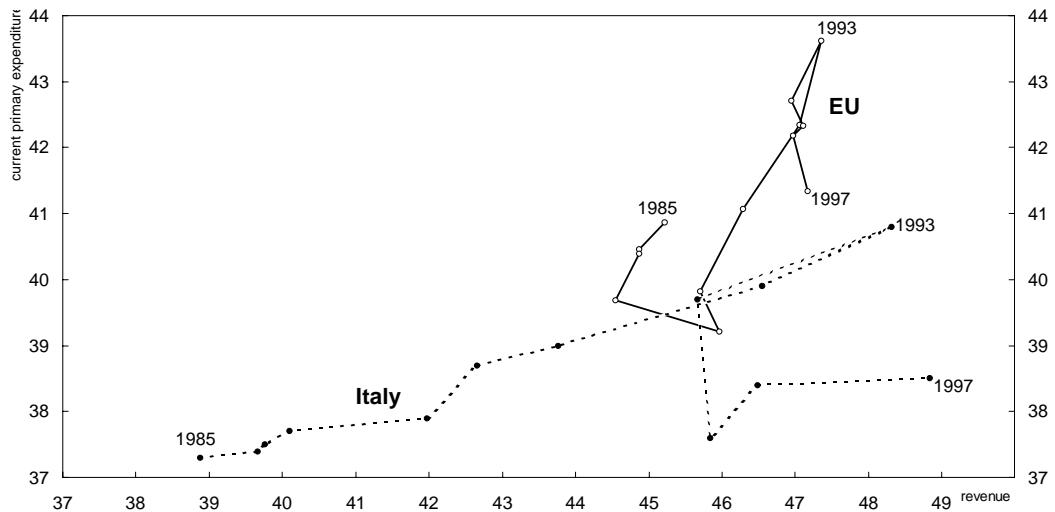


Figure 6

**Current primary expenditure and total revenue in the period 1985-97
(as a percentage of GDP)**



STATISTICAL TABLES

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Methodological notes

The statistical series refer to the general government consolidated economic accounts of the EU countries (Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom) and the other G-7 countries (the United States, Japan and Canada).

According to the rules of the system of economic accounts currently in force for the EU countries (ESA-79), the sector of general government includes all institutional units which are principally engaged in the production of non-market services and in the redistribution of national income and wealth.

The following are the sources used:

- European Commission, DG II Economic and Financial Affairs, *General Government Data*, November 1998, and Eurostat, *General Government Accounts and Statistics 1980-95*, November 1997, supplemented by data on the EU countries supplied directly by the Commission;
- OECD, *National Accounts*, volume II, 1996, and *Economic Outlook*, June 1997, for the United States, Japan and Canada.

Owing to the differences in the methods used by the two sources in constructing the national accounts, the single items are strictly comparable only for the EU countries.

Some of the Commission data on the EU countries are adjusted. In particular, the Commission disaggregation does not show total capital revenue and total capital expenditure separately, but shows only the balance, i.e. *net* capital expenditure. Here, in order to obtain the separate items, the Commission data have been supplemented by other data provided by Eurostat and the Commission itself, and by Bank of Italy estimates where these were not available.

As a first step series were constructed for capital revenue. These were then used together with the Commission series for net expenditure to obtain series for capital expenditure. In this way it was possible to construct the series for total revenue and total expenditure.¹

In addition, series were constructed for capital taxes that were then used to obtain the ratios to GDP of "tax revenue and social security contributions, including capital taxes" and "tax revenue, including capital taxes".

For the individual items of the economic accounts averages were calculated for the EU as a whole and for the countries that are participating in EMU (Belgium, Germany, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal and Finland) - both including and excluding Italy - and for the three leading countries apart from Italy (France, Germany and the United Kingdom). The averages were weighted using the ratios of the GDP of each country at current market prices and expressed in ecus to the GDP of the group of countries in question. Where a figure is missing for a country, the average was calculated omitting that country.

¹ The figures for the latter differ from those used by the EU Commission. In particular, they are not obtained by adding capital expenditure net of capital revenue to current expenditure, as the Commission does, but by adding total capital expenditure.

The figures for Germany up to and including 1990 refer to the country's western regions.

Rounding may cause discrepancies in totals.

Table 1

The balance of the economic accounts (excluding financial transactions). Transactions are recorded on a cash or an accruals basis according to their economic significance. The item corresponds to the net resources that general government makes available to the other sectors.

Table 2

Net borrowing or lending excluding interest payments (see note to Table 19).

Table 3

Difference between current expenditure and current revenue (see notes to Tables 7 and 17).

Table 4

Difference between capital expenditure and capital revenue.

Table 5

The definition is that adopted for the excessive deficit procedure provided for in the Treaty on the European Union (on the basis of the methods specified in Council Regulation 3605/93). The aggregate refers to the total gross debt at nominal value outstanding at the end of the year of the sector of general government, with the exception of those liabilities of which the corresponding financial assets are held by the sector of general government.

Table 6

The sum of current revenue and capital revenue.

Table 7

The sum of direct taxes, indirect taxes, social security contributions and other current revenue. Current revenue does not include current transfers from the rest of the world.

Table 8

Ratio to GDP of the sum of direct and indirect taxes, social security contributions and capital taxes (see the notes to Tables 12, 13 and 14).

Table 9

Ratio to GDP of the sum of direct and indirect taxes and social security contributions (see the notes to Tables 12, 13 and 14).

Table 10

Ratio to GDP of the sum of direct and indirect taxes and capital taxes (see the notes to Tables 12 and 13).

Table 11

Ratio to GDP of the sum of direct and indirect taxes (see the notes to Tables 12 and 13).

Table 12

Taxes on income and wealth due to general government or the rest of the world.

Table 13

Taxes linked to the production and importation of goods and services due to general government or the institutions of the European Union (including taxes on the production of agricultural products and sugar and customs duties).

Table 14

Sum of actual social security contributions paid by workers and employers (directly or through ad hoc agencies) and imputed social security contributions.

Table 15

Sum of current and capital expenditure.

Table 16

Difference between total expenditure and interest expenditure (see the note to Table 19).

Table 17

Sum of current transfers, interest expenditure and general government consumption.

Table 18

Difference between current expenditure and interest expenditure (see the note to Table 19).

Table 19

Interest payments and other borrowing costs.

Table 20

Compensation of employees, purchases of goods and services and consumption of fixed capital.

Table 21

General government payments in cash or kind to employees, including net earnings and actual and imputed social security contributions.

Table 22

This item is stated net of sales of goods and services and does not include the consumption of fixed capital.

Table 23

Sum of current transfers to enterprises and households (including private non-profit institutions), net transfers to the rest of the world and other current transfers (e.g. net accident insurance premiums).

Table 24

Social benefits, including all current transfers to households serving to insure against certain types of risks and necessities; current transfers to private non-profit institutions include all voluntary contributions and membership fees.

Table 25

Production and import subsidies that general government or the institutions of the European Union pay to resident units producing goods and services.

Table 26

The item includes both net fixed capital formation, consisting of the value of purchases of durable goods (other than for military purposes) to be used for a period of at least one year, and net purchases of land and intangible assets.

