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Why Europe?

**Conversation with a Young Voter
in the European Elections**

English translation, Anne Parry ed.

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Preface

Televised debates, the press and messages sent via the Internet almost always give a distorted picture of what the European Union is today and what it could be in the future.

Numerous praiseworthy and informative books are published every year on the subject of Europe; these are often aimed at a limited number of specialist readers. There are few texts written for non-specialists, particularly for young readers, which truly give the idea of the magnificence of the European Union. In this book the EU is presented as a majestic but unfinished and therefore precarious cathedral. The author represents the multiple facets of European integration in the form of an exchange of questions and answers with a young voter who is going to take part in elections for the European Parliament for the first time in 2019. The decisive role these elections will have for the future of the Union is by now clear to all.

This book is meant to be read through, either from beginning to end or chapter by chapter, rather than as a reference work. It may be used in classrooms to stimulate discussion. The selective bibliography and the links to websites may be useful for those who would like to learn more about the vast number of interdisciplinary subjects underlying the European project, including economics, law, political science and history.

Some of the issues considered in the book are the problems and challenges of today's world (including the dangerous situation in Italy), the great conquests of the European Union and the institutions that have made these possible, the steps still to be taken, and the risks and opportunities beyond the borders of Europe. Any attempt at an overview should cover at least three main areas: an understanding of

what Europe has built up over three quarters of a century, how much more needs to be done to complete the great aim of union, and the concrete risk of regression.

I have talked about Europe for many years with young and older people, with students and colleagues, as well as with friends, and I am grateful to them all. I discussed the Conversation with Marco Aliano, who is now a philosophy student in Venice. Marco has agreed to be represented in conversation with me, the elderly APS and has contributed with his own questions and comments. Many friends (including in particular Anna Tempia) kindly read parts of, or the whole Conversation and provided useful suggestions and comments. The author alone is responsible for any remaining shortcomings or errors.

The text is available as an e-book. It can also be found on websites that wish to include it among their links and in particular on the site: <http://www.euwiki.it/> set up by Andrea Guadagni, who I thank for his invaluable support for the project.

Anne Parry and her team of collaborators have translated the Conversation into English in record time. My sincere thanks to them all.

Antonio Padoa-Schioppa.

The Conversation has been translated into English by British volunteers living in Italy who have been affected in many ways by the consequences of Brexit (although at the time of writing we are still hopeful that it may never happen). We are grateful to Professor Padoa Schioppa for allowing us to translate the book, which will be published and available free of charge so that people voting in the 2019 elections can be better informed of the value of the

EU. We hope the book will be read by all those who care about the future of Europe, which is where we have made our lives, set up businesses, worked in companies, schools and universities, and have brought up our children as British, Italian and European citizens of the world.

The translation of the book is dedicated to Diana and all the other children whose future will depend on us working together in Europe, in particular to limit the effects of climate change and other disasters which can only be dealt with by a united European Union.

Anne Parry.

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I. Risks and opportunities

First things first

Marco If we young people realised that our future and that of our country really depends on the choices we make about Europe, we would be much less tempted not to vote in the European elections in May 2019, as I've heard a lot of people suggest. We would be more motivated to go to the polling booth and vote on the basis of well-considered choices.

APS There are lots of reasons why young people (and also older people) don't go to vote. Perhaps the main reason is a general lack of trust in politics and politicians who are often seen as distant or sometimes corrupt but above all as incapable of solving the problems people have to deal with every day, such as tax and other administrative issues. or in the case of young people, the search for work and being turned down for jobs.

I hope we can talk about these problems and about the crisis of the democratic system later in our discussion. But for now, I'd like to try to explain why it is important to vote in the European elections.

Marco So, I'd like to start by asking you for a quick summary of the reasons why it is not only worth voting but also worth voting for and not against Europe. Why should we focus on the European Union for the future of this generation and the future generations?

APS I'll try. The main reason is that the quality of our lives depends on a number of things: our health, family, primary needs such as food and a place to live, friends and relationships, social life, the quality and security of our jobs, relationships with others, entertainment and more. Some of these things depend on us: on our individual choices and behaviour; others are already fixed at birth (for better or for worse) and we can't change them; yet more others are the result of good or bad luck. But there are also aspects of life and outcomes that depend on the quality and effectiveness of our social, economic and political institutions for satisfactory results.

However, it is in these institutions that we organise our lives together into a community, and that is what we mean by politics. It is easy to see how our national governments are unable to provide for the satisfactory organisation of certain

basic aspects of our individual and collective lives, however good their policies and politicians.

Marco What are these basic issues?

APS I'll list the most important ones: peace in Europe; defence against the risk of wars with countries outside Europe; the rational regulation of migration from nearby countries and in particular from Africa; employment, particularly of young people; sustainable economic growth (i.e. growth that is not destructive of our planet); the protection of employment levels in a globalised world; the development and availability of renewable energy sources which do not put the climate at risk, and the government of the new digital world. Only a politically united Europe can guarantee that the citizens of our countries achieve and maintain these goals and rights which are essential for our wellbeing, for the security of individuals and the community, now and more so in the future.

Marco Why do you say 'only Europe'?

APS I'll explain later but let me just give you one fact. In tomorrow's world many important choices will be made by a small number of large states, from the USA to China, India, Brazil and Russia. No European state will be involved, they are all too small. Even now the European population is less than 7% of the world population, there are fewer than 500 million men and women in Europe compared to 7 billion on our planet. In a few decades the percentage of Europeans will fall to 4%. However today the euro is the second most important currency in the world. The European marketplace is number one in the world and the European quality of life and our social model are the best. For this reason, Europe can play an important role in the future. But only if it is politically united

Marco The list of areas in which Europe should work as one is certainly impressive. But, is that really the case? Can we really only achieve these goals with a united Europe? If that were the case would our nation states lose their *raison d'être*?

APS It is the case and I hope to explain it one point at a time. But let's be clear, nation states would not disappear in a European political union; they would still retain many important roles and that is the way it should be. Countries wouldn't lose their historical and cultural identities: that would mean trouble. Europe should only take care of challenges that cannot be dealt with at national level. That is the basic principle of a federal union.

Marco Young people like us belong to many different worlds; because of our personalities as well as our family, social and cultural environments. We grow up and become adults with very different backgrounds and ideals. Who do you aim to speak to during our conversation?

APS You're right to ask. I'd say I'm hoping to speak to several different groups of young people, who have very different approaches to politics and Europe. There are young people like you Marco, who are, in principle, in favour of Europe (surveys and statistics show that in Europe you're in the majority!), and who would like to know more about what the Union really is, how it's organised, how it works and how to respond to the criticisms which have been widely reported in the media and papers, particularly recently. Then there are young people who have no time for politics and think that what counts in life is achieving personal success through one's own efforts – Roberto thinks this. Other young people think that politics and even democracy itself are a prerogative of the nation state alone – Matteo thinks this. Others aspire to dedicate part of their time to the wellbeing of others by doing voluntary work, not by getting involved in politics – Luisa thinks this. Others

consider the idea of a united Europe a utopia which will never see the light – Luca thinks this. Others think that only a cultural revolution which overthrows the consumer capitalist model, can save us from the anarchy of financial globalisation. They distrust not only the economic and financial system of capitalism but also the public institutions we have at present whether they be national or international – Elena thinks this. Finally, there are others who have a global vision of the world today, who are open to the needs of third world countries. They are cosmopolitan, in favour of associations like Amnesty International or Doctors without Borders. They are pacifists and globalists and consider that the goal of political union in Europe is already out of date – Mario thinks this. So, as well as talking to you, I'd like to talk to all of them. I'll try to convince Roberto and Matteo that they are wrong and show the others that the European dream is not in contrast but is complementary to and an integral functional part of what they rightly believe in.

Some objections

Marco I'd like to quote some of the objections, some critical remarks that I've heard friends repeat when talking about Europe – negative judgments that I think we need to consider and that I'd like you to comment on.

If you agree, I'll tell you some of them.

'Members of the European Parliament are distant from the people'.

'Europe imposes its rules from above without any concern for the citizens of the different countries.'

'At school they teach us about the European Union and its values with lots of fine words but as far as I'm concerned it's a fairy tale which doesn't work.'

'Europe only looks after the interests of the banks and high finance.'

'European rules are made for those in power, who look after their own interests.'

'It's not enough for Europe to guarantee peace. That was its role in the past. Now we have to look to the future. It seems to me that it is incapable of responding to new problems.'

'The question of the reception of migrants should be in second place after the problems of local people.'

'The euro has been a disaster.'

'I think European institutions are a waste of money.'

'National and European MPs only look after themselves. They don't care about the problems of the people. I don't feel represented by my own state, much less by Europe.'

'European countries are too different from each other – their history, economics, culture and foreign affairs policies are different. If there are countries that are better off on their own, it isn't right to make them take responsibility for the problems of weaker countries. A united Europe can never exist.'

'I didn't choose to be born in this country and in the world I live in. I don't want to be part of a world which makes the rich richer and allows millions of people to die in poverty, a world which is increasingly full of wars and suffering.'

APS That is an impressive list of criticisms and objections. They all deserve our attention. Some are the result of

prejudice, or of incorrect information. Others have a basis in fact. I'll try to answer them all. But first of all, I'd like to point out that in general it is contradictory to refuse to take part in the elections. By refusing to vote, we let others decide about things that affect our lives. Before we refuse to accept the Union, we need to understand the consequences of a return to national barriers, to the nationalism and protectionism which Europe has experienced for centuries with tragic results. Even though in some circumstances it is useful, or even necessary initially, for a country to protect its own industries and production, experience has shown that isolation and closedness bring about impoverishment and loss of skills, damaging consumers. It's possible to criticise an institution (which is what the EU is) for the mistakes that it has made and is still making, but the idea of abolishing it completely is something else – it would be a fatal error. We can show that the security and economic and social status of European citizens would be worse rather than better if the Union were to fail.

No to Europe, to the euro, to migrants? Yes to the Nation?

Marco I'd like to tell you some of the things that the populist nationalists repeat all the time, using the names of one of the people you mentioned at the start of this conversation, and ask you to give a quick reply. My idea is that we can then take up each of these points in more detail.

APS Let's try.

Marco Matteo would say the interests of the Italians come first, then all the others. We say yes to our nation – this is what our governments have not accepted in the past. Now at last the wind has changed!

APS That's exactly the point; what is best for the Italian people, and for the people of all the Member States? Sovereignism is the idea that there should be no authority above that of national sovereignty. It prioritises goals which appear to be in the interests of the people and that respond to insecurities and the reactions of public opinion to issues like unemployment and the migration crisis, which have been underestimated so far. Closing borders and going back to self-sufficiency may appear to be in the interests of our people at first sight, but in the medium and long term it is in the interests of Italians and other European populations to find the right balance between autonomy, free trade and shared policies at a European level.

Marco That's enough of going along with European rules. Let's go back to being masters in our own home – lots of people are saying this.

APS If every country in the Union adopted this principle, it wouldn't solve the challenges that go beyond the national level. It would recreate the ideology that our neighbour is potentially our enemy. Sovereignism is a recipe that goes against the interests of our people.

Marco We want to get our lost sovereignty back.

APS The answer is that no European country is sovereign any more. They can't be in a globalised, multi-polar world where there are states the size of continents. The European Union is the only way to get back the sovereignty that has been lost. This doesn't detract from national identity and sovereignty in those areas where this can and must be upheld.

Marco And yet there are people who say that today Italy is ahead in this process of regaining its own sovereignty.

APS I too recently read an interview with Steve Bannon, the man who is considered to be the ideologist of this point of view, someone who our present rulers listen to a lot, the ex-advisor to Trump who is now very active in Europe. When he was asked to explain this new doctrine, which the present Italian government is promoting, Bannon replied, ‘France and Germany want a “United States of Europe” [if only this were true...], while Italy wants a Europe of coordinated national sovereign states’ (Fubini, *Corriere della Sera*, October 2018). Is that it? No, this isn’t a new doctrine, it is the Europe of the past, the Europe of the Grand Alliance of 1815, the Europe which leads to war when the agreement between states falls apart. This is the old Europe!

Marco We’ve had enough immigration, Matteo would say. Immigrants take jobs away from the local people, they only create problems. We need to send them back!

APS We really need immigrants, carers, labourers, farm and construction workers. Without immigrants it would be a disaster. If there were no new immigration for 40 years, Italy would lose half of its GDP (as demonstrated by the Banca d’Italia).

Marco But aren’t there too many of them? One for every four Italians?

APS This is untrue, it’s the figure that a sample of Italians believe to be the number of immigrants; it’s the perceived rate of immigration, not the real figure. The actual situation is very different. The percentage of immigrants today is 8.5% of the Italian population. It is below that of France, Germany, Belgium and other countries in the Union.

Marco Isn’t it time to stop any more coming?

APS The number arriving in Italy has gone down by 80% in the last year, thanks to the actions of the last government. But the media aren't telling us about this.

Marco Immigrants cost a lot. They use our health service and they attend our schools free of charge.

APS But bear in mind that the taxes paid by immigrants to the Italian authorities every year add up to nine billion euros.

Marco For geographical reasons, Italy has much higher rates of immigration than other European countries. That is not right.

APS True, it isn't right. We really need a European authority and shared responsibility on the question of immigration, not the lockdown that the Eastern European countries would prefer. Legal immigrants should be educated and integrated into the employment market.

Marco The country is full of illegal immigrants.

APS Illegal immigrants are less than 1 % of the population. There are still too many of them. Illegal immigrants should be sent away following the correct procedure but at European level not national. There must be an external border to the Union, appropriately organised and financed by the Union. And access should be limited by effective intervention in the countries of origin of the migrants, again at European level, not national.

Marco Italy gives the EU 20 billion euros a year, we were told by the Government.

APS That is not true, we pay in 14 billion and get 12 billion back, which we often don't manage to spend because of excessive bureaucracy and incompetence.

Marco If it's good for Italy, as Matteo says, we can – and should – disobey the European rules.

APS To start with, we too approved the European rules. They can be changed, in accordance with agreed procedures, but not contravened by individual Member States. And be careful: if we create obstacles to the free circulation of goods and capital, our whole national economy will go into crisis. Without the European rules on the Single Market which we signed and which are written into our Constitution, Italy would not be able to export hundreds of billions of euros worth of goods and services every year. Is that what we want? The collapse of our economy?

Marco I've heard that to lower our national debt we need the economy to grow, and for it to grow we need to invest even if it means increasing this debt.

APS Almost all economists, and independent international and European institutions agree on the first two points. But they flatly deny the third point. The economy does not grow by increasing public debt. For real growth the economy needs two things: public investment with real resources (and not with an increase in debt) and more private national and foreign investment, both of which depend on the level of trust in our country. But that trust is diminishing, and this is unacceptable when we consider how much healthy and positive energy there is in Italy.

Marco So, it isn't budgetary constraints that impede growth?

APS Keeping our accounts under control, both the debt and the deficit, is essential for us, and more so for our children, for their future, so that they won't have to sacrifice most of their income in the future to look after their parents and grandparents. We don't have to do this because it's what Europe's asking us to do. If the national debt is high, we

need to increase taxes to pay the interest on it. So the resources for investments, public services and pensions all decrease.

What has the European Union given us?

Marco The press, media and social networks constantly put out negative and critical messages about Europe and the European Union. Even those who oppose the sovereignists are quick to add that “this” Europe isn’t going well. So what I’d like to know from you is whether it’s possible to briefly formulate a message to the contrary that shows what – if any – results have been achieved by Europe since the integration project started.

APS Yes, that’s possible and, indeed, necessary. I hope that during this conversation we can take a closer look at both the positive aspects of the European Union as well as at the unresolved issues. I’d like to go back to the idea of the unfinished cathedral to highlight the fact that an impressive structure already exists. This needs to be recognised and appreciated much more than it is today. In my opinion, there are three main aisles in this structure, but there are also a lot of side chapels, as there are in large Romanesque and Gothic churches. And there’s a base – a common foundation of rules and rights. Furthermore, the prospect of becoming part of the European Union has been a determining factor in the transition towards democracy of European countries which were still ruled by authoritarian regimes after World War II, from the Greece of the Colonels to Franco’s Spain and Salazar’s Portugal. The aisles are peace, wealth and well-being, and solidarity.

Marco But I think we sometimes take peace in Europe for granted anyway.

APS The chance of a war between European countries today is remote; it might even seem that it's gone away forever. We have seventy years of peace behind us, something that we've not had since the end of the Roman Empire, more than 15 centuries ago. This is extraordinary, something which anyone who has seen war up close or lived through the horror of war can fully appreciate. Luckily, this is not the case for our generation. There's no doubt that the process of European integration has been a determining factor in this. And not only that. The European Union has even been a driver of peace outside its own borders – just think about all of the peace missions it takes an active part in throughout the world. However, only the realisation of a real common defence system will, eventually, make an intra-European war impossible, guaranteeing conditions within the European Union for its own defence and security as well as its independence with respect to the major powers of today and tomorrow. Especially in a world where resources are increasingly scarce and where we face climatic conditions never seen before.

In a rapidly changing world, if integration is not completed or is even reversed, war between the European states might return and freedom and independence might vanish, since the national states could easily become prey to global powers. And only a united Europe can encourage sustainable growth.

Marco Is it really the case that the European Union has created wealth? After all, it seems to me that there's no lack of critics.

APS The facts speak for themselves. Since the creation of the Common Market in 1957, the wealth of the countries in the European Economic Community (EEC), and subsequently the European Union, has increased dramatically. For example in Italy the per capita income

increased fivefold over the decades from the 1950s to 2010. It changed from a poor country from which emigration to the Americas and Australia was common after World War II to one of the most prosperous countries on the planet. The free movement of goods and capital has driven competition that is no longer hindered by borders and duties, which has allowed better products in terms of both quality and price to reach shops and supermarkets throughout Europe and meant that the more successful businesses have been able to export freely, thus benefiting customers: we experience this every day. It's certainly not a coincidence that the European Economic Community, which initially consisted only of six founding nations (France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg), has progressively grown from 1972 to 2013 to nine, then 12, then 15, then 25, and finally 28 countries (27 after the withdrawal of the United Kingdom).

Marco Have Eastern European countries also achieved this prosperity?

APS In the Eastern European countries, which had escaped from the yoke of subordination to the USSR after half a century, competition and the free movement of people and capital, together with the support of the EU, played an important role in encouraging the growth of the level of economic welfare. For example, in the brief period from 2006 to 2008, right after they joined the EU, the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita rose by 27.4% in Hungary, by 26.3% in Poland and by as much as 73.9%¹ in Romania. And it continued to increase until just before the economic crisis in the other countries, too. There's no doubt that the growth of Europe and the wealth derived from it over almost seventy years have been greatly encouraged by economic integration.

¹ <http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=SNAAMA&f=qrid:103;currid:USD;pcFlag:1>

Marco Does this wealth and well-being have other dimensions, too?

APS Yes. Someone who hasn't experienced the drama of galloping inflation – described by Luigi Einaudi as the most unfair of taxes – might not be able to understand the importance of monetary stability, which protects savings and allows citizens to plan their own futures; this has been ensured by our single currency, the euro. In international trade, Europe acts as a single entity when entering into commercial agreements and treaties. This gives much more weight to the demands of the individual countries vis-à-vis today's big powers, from the USA to China, India, and Russia, when trying to protect their own products against unfair forms of competition from third countries. It is also a form of wealth to be able to move freely, as if you were at home, throughout the countries of the EU, as young people who've benefited from the Erasmus programme (and others) are well aware. The forward-thinking policies that Europe pursues at an international level with regard to renewable energies and the protection of the environment against climatic risks are also investments for our future well-being – both for the Member States of the European Union and for the world in general.

So we have an impressive set of results which have only been made possible by progressive European integration, with Europe acting and speaking with a single voice. It's absolutely true that there have been problems, critical moments, and failures, and we'll talk about those in a moment. But in no case has it been proven that a better solution lies in retreating towards the national sovereignty of the past.

Marco The third aisle – solidarity – seems to be facing a serious crisis, though. Or am I wrong?

APS Unfortunately, this is true today. Every day, we hear demands from governments that focus on their own national interest (or what the governments believe is in their national interest!). It's a kind of debit versus credit balancing act that's not in the spirit of European integration. It's a trend that could strip the European Union of its significance. The principle of solidarity is clearly set out in the Treaties, and it is fully operational in EU policies. In a while, we'll look at some data, but for now, suffice it to say that the EU has allocated 352 billion euros from its budget for the seven year period from 2014 to 2020 for the cohesion policy in support of the less prosperous regions of Europe. Cohesion policies simply put into practice the principle of solidarity in the field of economics. In addition, there are measures for emergencies and natural disasters. If the EU budget allowed it, more could and should be done, but the European Union is doing a lot, even if this is rarely publicised.

Marco I'd like to have a better understanding of the extent to which the three vectors, which you metaphorically called the aisles of the European Union, are built on solid cornerstones.

APS I can see that you, too, know how to use metaphors. Well, you only need to read the first ten Articles of the Treaty of Lisbon of the European Union of 2009 to find really clear commitments to the objectives of peace, prosperity, and solidarity alongside the fundamental rights of liberty and democracy.

Marco You also mentioned a common foundation of rules and rights within the European Union.

APS To be precise, these are the fundamental rights specified in the European Treaties and in the EU's Charter of Rights approved in the year 2000: the right to freedom, citizenship, justice, and democracy, and the principle of separation and balance between the powers. These rights,

which form the pillars of all truly modern constitutions, apply at both European Union level and within each Member State.

These positive foundations – peace, well-being, solidarity, and fundamental rights – must not be forgotten or undervalued.

Risks for Italy, risks for Europe

Marco Precisely because the 2019 European elections are going to be so important, can you tell me more about Italy's current positions regarding Europe?

APS Yes, but I want to say right away, to remove all doubt, that my position is not impartial but partisan. This should already be clear, but I want to explicitly reassert it here. I'm partisan not in the sense of referring to a party or individual political figures, but in the sense that my stance can be summarised as stressing the absolute necessity of Italy fully supporting the objective of political union as a goal of European integration. In my opinion, everything that puts this process at risk is destructive for Italy and for its future, so for the future of generations to come. But it's more than this: if Italy were to back away from a pro-European stance, the entire European Union project would be at risk.

Marco In your opinion, what risks is the current government exposing Italy to?

APS Italy has a larger deficit than was agreed with the Union, with the national debt running at more than 130% of the GDP, making it the highest in Europe after Greece. The main risk is that failing to contain this debt by reducing it slowly but surely brings about a lack of confidence in our treasury bonds on the part of potential investors – banks, Italian and foreign investment funds, and private investors.

Faced with the risk, they would demand much higher interest rates and these are unsustainable for our public finances: otherwise there would be no uptake for these securities. But in Italy public spending requires us to issue securities for around 400 billion euro each year to renew the ones that expire and to cover commitments made in the budget, which naturally include resources for public services, the salaries of the forces of order and public-sector employees, for health, schools and other essential public goods and services. If interest rates were to increase beyond the those of other European countries – I’m referring to the much-cited ‘spread’ – not only would the cost of loans from banks to private individuals and mortgages go up accordingly and the tax burden increase to levels that would be unsustainable for tax payers, but the state would quickly be unable to repay its debts, which could lead to default. To this scenario we must add the serious risk run by the Italian banking system and therefore the entire economy.

Marco You know that some economists have written entire books arguing against the euro. And I can say that some young people have read these books. Can it be that anti-euro and anti-Europe exponents have perhaps been more persuasive than their opponents?

APS I am not an economist, nor do I claim to be one. I have also read what anti-euro and pro-euro economists have written, and the latter have convinced me more than the former. Let me try to summarise the reasons for my convictions in a few statements:

- a) The euro was and is necessary for the proper functioning of the Single Market.
- b) That it was a necessary but insufficient instrument for the purposes of economic and political integration has been claimed since 1992, precisely by those who planned the single currency: it was clear even then that the Union should

also have been endowed with powers over economic and fiscal policy, that is, with the governance of the economy with the necessary resources, which it still does not have; this was not possible back then because of the opposition of some governments, above all the French government.

c) So the creation of the euro was one step on an as-yet unfinished path. The great politician Helmut Kohl introduced it despite its unpopularity in his native Germany, which today benefits from the euro. At the time the Germans were strongly opposed to abandoning the mark but Kohl had very clearly in mind the objective of the economic and political union of a federal Europe.

d) Over the years, the euro has in any case ensured the very important result of a stable currency and therefore it has also safeguarded savings, objectives that were particularly important during the years of economic crisis such as in the decade 2008-2017.

e) The euro is now the world's second strongest currency and the main source of European authority in the context of international – and not only economic – relations.

We therefore need to achieve complete European economic and monetary union and not risk destroying it by leaving the euro. It should be added that some distinguished scholars as well as authoritative, (and even critical) observers of the euro, agree that in the event of a crisis the risks could be faced and overcome if – and only if – fiscal policy and economic governance at a European level were adequately strengthened in the context of clear progress towards political union. This is the opinion of Paul Krugman, Joseph Stiglitz and Paul De Grauwe.

Marco Those who share this view are naturally worried at the moment, because they believe that leaving the euro

would be disastrous for Italy. But is this a real risk in your opinion? Could we be forced out of the euro?

APS Allow me first to say that we should not be content with statements made by the parties in government and the government itself, whose aim is to provide reassurance that Italy wants to remain in the EU and wants to keep the euro. It is the actions of the government and the votes taken in Parliament that have to be evaluated for their consistency with these statements. If the actions and decisions are such as to put our public finances and the stability of the banking system at risk, we could really find ourselves “one step away from leaving the euro” (Guido Tabellini, ‘Il Foglio’, 3 October 2018). Some people want this to happen, asserting that the country would indeed benefit from it. I share the opinion of most economists that the consequences would be disastrous. Leaving the euro is not provided for in the treaties and would mean leaving the European Union; nor is it conceivable to reject the union and remain in the euro, as a part of public opinion seems to want. This is simply impossible. As Lorenzo Bini Smaghi recently wrote (*La tentazione di andarsene* [The temptation to leave] p. 184), leaving the euro and going back to Italy’s national currency would result in depositors rushing to withdraw their funds from banks, the government would have to prohibit deposits abroad, interest rates on securities would rocket to very high levels, the banking system and many companies indebted in foreign currency would risk collapse, and the rapid devaluation of the new lira compared to the euro would also drastically increase the burden of repaying the debt contracted by the Bank of Italy with the other central banks, and so on. The economy would lurch into crisis mode with a massive loss of jobs. Leaving the euro, if it were to occur, would therefore have very serious consequences for Italy: for our well-being, our savings and our growth – and therefore for our future.

Marco In your opinion, do Italians want to leave the European Union?

APS I'm convinced Italians don't want this. Among other things, no party has put it in their manifesto, not even the parties currently in power. We could be out of the euro without even having wanted that! But if the crisis were to occur, the downward slide would be rapid – and probably irreversible.

Marco Why is Italy running this huge risk right now?

APS Although they had not decisively tackled the need to reduce the public debt in relation to GDP, successive governments during the last decade had initiated policies for gradual reform which promised to improve growth by starting to reduce the debt and the deficit, an approach that had been acknowledged and appreciated by the European Union and by the markets. The implementation of the government 'contract' between the Lega and the M5S launched in 2018 would entail – based on the estimates available to date, October 2018 – a steady burden for public finances of over 100 billion euro: 50 billion for the Flat Tax, 20-30 billion for the 'citizens' basic income' and tens of billions for changes to the Fornero law on pensions. What we know now is that of this increase in expenditure of around 37-38 billion euro for 2019, 22 would be in deficit, while 15-16 billion euro would be covered with revenue that is not completely reliable. (Bordignon, 'La Voce', 9 October 2018). If you want to avoid increasing the tax burden, if you can't reduce public spending sufficiently right now, if the war on tax evasion has not been won and still requires many more years, if economic growth is slow and poor due to factors that can't be tackled in the short term (bureaucracy, regulatory confusion, a slow justice system, corruption, mafia, privileges), if all this is the case, then there's only one conclusion: we simply don't have the

resources required by this new government for its economic and fiscal programme, unless the country withdraws from commitments already made, thereby further damaging our accounts.

Marco So regarding the amount the government has said it wants to spend, is it too much?

APS Yes, it's too much, and the money would be badly spent. It would be too much because the resources needed are just not there: there would be no alternative but to increase our enormous public debt even more. Already today, with taxes, we pay 65 billion a year just to service the interest on the debt. Furthermore, these increased rates already threaten to push our economy into recession. This is why the government's programme, as announced (October 2018), is not sustainable.

Marco And why would this money, in any case, be badly spent?

APS Well, this is my personal opinion, of course, but it is shared by most observers. Flat taxes of 15% and 20% would mean benefitting the rich at the expense of the less well-off, because the progressiveness of the tax would be reduced to a minimum, which among other things is a fundamental principle and obligation sanctioned by the Italian Constitution. Revising the Fornero law, which entails lowering the retirement age, would increase the burden for those who are in work now. To grant today's retirees a few years' less work would place an additional burden on tomorrow's retirees, who are the youth of today: a seriously unfair move, an injustice in the relationship between the generations. As for the [so-called] 'citizens' basic income', it could make sense, but only if it's a temporary remedy that subsequently leads to employment. Our unemployment offices are fragile structures; they would be asked to guarantee three job offers in a limited area of 50-80

kilometres from the unemployed person's home. But if there are no jobs in that area, the employment office can't create them; in reality, the country lacks a widespread organisation over the entire national territory and the structured network needed to bring together demand for work and the – already small – supply. The promise of an income regardless of work would push tens of thousands of people into working in the black economy. This is therefore a programme that can't be implemented and that would in any case be socially unfair.

Marco I've read, however, that the Government claims the increase in the deficit, compared to the previous agreements, would have the effect of increasing growth, on which the reduction of the public debt also depends. And that would compensate for the losses.

APS According to independent observers (International Monetary Fund, Bank of Italy, European Commission and others who have given their views up to now October 2018) the main flaw in the programme lies precisely here: the increase in expenditure is not devoted to investments but to a redistribution of resources that is essentially insignificant (if not negative²) with respect to objectives for growth. This is the obstacle that has led to negative judgments by observers. And if there is no growth, the imbalance in our accounts will also worsen, with the consequences we have already mentioned.

Marco Why did you say that even the banking system would be at risk?

APS Because a further increase in the public debt – with the risks we talked about – entails, with the increase in the

² <https://piie.com/publications/policy-briefs/impact-italys-draft-budget-growth-and-fiscal-solvency>

spread, the depreciation of the public securities that Italian banks possess, to a total value already of some hundreds of billions of euro. Their capital and financial stability would therefore decrease. And at the same time, the share of resources available for credit as well as business and private borrowing would be reduced, and these are an essential source for a country's economy. A crisis in public finances as well as in the banking system is a prospect that could lead to our leaving the euro.

Marco The arguments you have put forward seem persuasive to me. But when I listened to an interview with Minister Salvini on television a few days ago, his way of talking to his listeners really impressed me: it was the almost defiant tone of someone who seems sure he's acting in the interest of Italians. According to him, the current government wants a more effective Europe that is closer to its citizens, with more powers for the European Parliament and fewer powers of intervention by 'bureaucrats' in the economies of individual states. For him, the repatriation of hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants is possible. And he thinks the retirement age must go down again, because you can't go on till you break your back [as if especially heavy jobs were not already exempt...]. Therefore, the Italian government's programme will go ahead and not backwards even "by a millimetre". Whoever was listening to him was led to the conclusion: perhaps these people are right, credit where it's due, let's trust them and see...

APS I saw that TV show too. The speech was undoubtedly very effective. Finally, here's someone who knows what he wants and knows how to make himself heard – that's what you were led to think. But then you realise that no objection or criticism was put to him by the presenter or by the other participants. Why are independent national and international institutions unanimous in believing that the government's programme will not increase growth? Is it possible that

everyone's wrong? Why not point out that the increase in the spread has already led to substantial losses for savers and that in 2019 it will just get worse? Why not ask what would happen if the interest rate on the new treasury bills were to double or triple because otherwise they wouldn't be bought? Why not argue that early retirement will affect today's young people who will be tomorrow's retirees, as all experts say? Why not mention the ongoing increase in life expectancy, which means that pensioners live for twenty or thirty years after retirement to the obvious detriment of those who work and have to pay for those who don't work because they are retired, either directly or indirectly through taxes,? Why declare that you want a stronger Europe and at the same time rail against its institutions, allying yourself with those who want to weaken them? Why isolate Italy from Europe even in international politics, precisely at a time when American protection is becoming weaker? These and other questions have not been answered because the questions were never posed. And this is another disturbing element. However, the speech was undoubtedly effective. If this were not the case, the polls would not be attributing to the government the support it currently enjoys.

Marco I was surprised to hear that even exponents of sovereignism all claim to want Europe, but a different kind of Europe. And so, I thought: if there are elections in 2019 and everyone says they want there to be Europe, how does the voter choose?

APS Above all, it's striking that those who are striving for a return to sovereign nations immediately claim that the battle will be fought at the European elections, and thereby they fully recognise the role of the elections and of the European parliament. As for declarations, Altiero Spinelli said that there is one sure criterion for understanding who is really in favour of a federal political union and who is against, even if they declare themselves pro-European: in

the first case, their proposals go in the direction of attributing to the supra-national institutions of the Union – that is, the Commission, European Parliament, Court of Justice – the powers of a real federation, while in the latter case, the hope is for coordination between governments which, however, give individual states the last word. Perhaps it's better to have an outspoken opponent than a false friend of the EU.

Marco Are there also external opponents of the European Union?

APS Yes, and there always have been. The European project is of such magnitude that it cannot fail to arouse political, economic and cultural resistance, both inside and outside Europe. Many would like to see the European Union fail. Powerful political, financial and economic interests are militating against the EU. The risks of crisis are also due to these adverse forces.

Marco This scenario is really dramatic. But could the European Union really do nothing to intervene in the event of a crisis in our public finances?

APS The tools do exist today. In 2012 – with the agreement and underwriting of all 19 Eurozone countries – a new and important instrument was created, called the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), with an initial capital injection of 700 billion euros, which is authorised to intervene in support of a Eurozone state in difficulty which must, however, guarantee strict management of public finances accompanied by a commitment to implement structural reforms, with severe and automatic sanctions if the commitment is not respected. This is based on assessments made fundamentally by the other governments, i.e. via an intergovernmental method. Furthermore, another recent tool, called OMT (Outright Monetary Transaction), allows the European Central Bank to purchase the public debt

securities of a country in difficulty if the need arises, but only if the assessment of the country's financial reliability is positive and, in any case, even in this event, only after the country has agreed a duly guaranteed and monitored recovery programme with the other governments in the Eurogroup.

Marco [If there were such guarantees, would the risks be shared at a European-wide level?](#)

APS Yes, this sharing is of fundamental importance not only in the interests of weak countries but also in those of the stronger European countries. Only then will the economic and financial union and the single currency be able to withstand the challenges of the future. But this will require the completion of the banking union and also the modification of the rules of the ESM.

Marco [If leaving the euro entails leaving the European Union, what should we expect?](#)

APS This would be a catastrophe for Italy, as we have already said. We would go back half a century. Among other things, we would cut ourselves off from a network of vital economic and commercial relationships that have also been secured for our country by the European Union through hundreds of trade agreements that would have to be renegotiated by Italy in its weakened position.

Marco [Can Europe afford Italy's exit?](#)

APS That is a fair question. In fact, Italy is the third largest economy in the Union after the exit of the United Kingdom, which however was not in the euro. The Italian case would be far more serious even than the case of Greece. And it would also undermine the banking system of the Eurozone countries: they all possess our securities, which they are, however, prudently reducing as a precaution (70 billion euro

less just in the last few months, as of October 2018). However, faced with the risk of an Italian default sinking the euro, the other Eurozone countries and the Union as a whole would still react to save it, and with it the Single Market and therefore the European Union itself.

Marco [And Italy?](#)

APS Italy could remain outside these rescue operations. This is because if its reliability was assessed to be below international standards, the European Central Bank would not be able to intervene to purchase our treasury bonds via the OMT nor would it be able to activate the ESM unless Italy accepted a binding commitment to reorganisation and the adoption of structural reforms. This would constitute a much more onerous commitment, also because at this point it would be imposed from the outside, with respect to the policies that Italy could put in place in agreement with Europe, to start a gradual but structural reduction in its exorbitant public debt.

Marco [Would Italy's exit mark the end of the Union as we know it today?](#)

APS In a certain sense yes because Italy has been for two thirds of a century, and from the beginning, a founding nation that has always believed in the European project and has made a hugely important contribution to it, even if this is almost never remembered. To abolish the single market, the free movement of goods, people, capital and services from Italy and towards Italy would be very serious even for the other EU countries, and they know this very well. But the crisis could come about if Italy abandons the European rules that it has signed up to. Let me be clear, though: it is by far better that the process towards union does not stop, even if Italy has to remain on the side-lines (and I say this with great sadness, hoping to be contradicted by the facts).

The European project is of global importance; everything is preferable to the prospect of seeing it fail.

Marco *Is the sinking of the European Union not just possible but also probable?*

APS It is impossible to say today. History is never predictable. There are some negative signs right across the whole of Europe, and they are serious, irrespectively of Italy's responsibilities. The banking union has not yet been completed. The migration phenomenon is addressed in a random fashion, with strong differences between countries in the EU. Progress has been made in sharing intelligence data on terrorism and mafia-type organisations between EU countries but much remains to be done. Nationalism is on the increase almost everywhere, including Germany, fuelling emotional and irrational attitudes. On the subject of Africa, there is no unity of intent among European governments for the development of that great continent, which should be the ideal arena for European investments, and also as a means to control migration flows. It's true that there is still a widespread conviction that political union is the right perspective for the future of European states and of Europe as a whole, but this is not sufficiently supported by the political class and by governments, and often not even by the officials who prepare the intergovernmental decisions in individual Member States: in these people too, the perspective of the (supposed) national interest, the logic of negotiation, often prevails. This approach is profoundly different from the strategy adopted by those who, faced with a common problem, focus their efforts on creating a communal project. All too often nowadays, EU decision-making results predominantly in choices that sacrifice the future.

Marco *Who has made mistakes, then, if we are at this point now?*

APS Governments and pro-European parties have failed to understand that it was necessary to take into account the instincts and fears of public opinion: they should have been acknowledged and contained via an effective policy. The European Union— first and foremost the European Council, and thus once again, governments – was wrong not to give courageous answers, adopting a common policy on this front and equipping itself in time with a shared government of the economy, a European tax system and a common policy on migrants. The media were wrong to focus on scaremongering and slogans rather than the facts, which are often much less alarming than they seem. And now our government is also in the wrong when it seems unaware of the risk to which it is exposing the country.

Marco [So is it a mistake to attribute the Italian crisis to Europe, as many Italians seem to believe?](#)

APS Yes, it's a mistake. The Union has not been fully up to its tasks, but now the other European countries have emerged from the crisis thanks to the measures that Europe put in place. Only Italy did not emerge, because although successive governments from 2011 onwards tried to reverse the trend of an increasing national debt, productivity has increased little compared to other countries. Italy is also held back by overwhelming structural burdens, which go back in time and prevent it from growing, such as an abnormal level of tax evasion, mafia-type criminal organisations, crippling bureaucracy, an incredibly slow justice system, regulatory uncertainty. In just a few months the Lega – M5S government exposed Italy to serious risks with the 'DEF' (document on economic and financial policy) voted through by the Italian Parliament in October 2018. And this happened just a few weeks after the Italian Prime Minister and the Minister for the Economy had made a commitment to the European Council and the Commission to respect parameters that were compatible with a slow

structural downsizing of Italy's public debt. Breaking these commitments has seriously undermined confidence in Italy. And the markets are reacting as we now know, with the consequences we now fear.

Marco And yet we hear time and time again that our crisis, our lack of growth, are due to Europe; and that we must stop submitting to the Brussels bureaucracy.

APS Attributing our problems to Europe is an extraordinarily effective political and media operation. But it is the opposite of the truth. Europe cannot be used as a scapegoat for our problems. First of all, we have joint responsibility for the decisions of the EU, we have shared them in European Council sessions, and we have voted for them in our Parliament. But above all, the solidity of Italy's balance sheet is a requirement that is actually in our own interests, as we have already said; and it is not true that Europe demands we cut back on our essential services. The commitment is to gradually reduce the public debt and the deficit. But it is up to us to decide how to achieve this. We could save on waste, or increase productivity via appropriate reforms, or fight tax evasion, or do all these things together step by step, or take the easiest option and reject the commitments we have made and then lay the blame on Europe. The Brexit debacle, with the serious drawbacks that the British are only now beginning to see, should also teach us something!

Marco If the choices of the pro-sovereignty exponents are so risky for Italy, won't the time come when the voters, the citizens, will realise?

APS If the promises made by the ruling parties don't change then that moment will undoubtedly come, but by then it might be too late.

Marco To sum up, is the prognosis poor for Europe?

APS Despite the many negative signals, which we have mentioned above and to which others could be added, and despite the serious risks that Italy and Europe are running, the game is not over. Building a structure like the European Union has been a difficult task. Institutions are difficult to create, but they are also difficult to destroy. Furthermore, as I mentioned, the bottom line is that citizens know perfectly well that for the world of tomorrow (and actually already today) there will be no adequate role for small nation states, for any of the European states, including Germany. An ambitious project for the evolution of the European Union has been announced by the presidents of the most important EU institutions. The most serious economic crisis since the 1930s was addressed with a firm hand. Some important steps forward have been taken in recent years, from increasing the role of the European Parliament to the decisive role played by the European Central Bank, from recent initiatives for a common defence policy to the introduction of a supranational supervision of banks. Last but not least, a highly-respected and distinguished group of European intellectuals has been expressing its faith in the European ideal over recent months, even publicly. A superb contribution, for example, was made in a recent appeal by one of the greatest living philosophers, Jürgen Habermas, together with some of Germany's most influential politicians, in support of a united Europe that can defend itself and act effectively in terms of development against social inequalities and unemployment (We are deeply concerned about the future of Europe and Germany, 'Handelsblatt', 25 October 2018). It is significant that in Germany there are those who have understood and openly declare that the future of Germany also depends on the future of the European Union. Pro-European appeals are multiplying. In any case, for the EU, the 2019 European elections will be decisive.

The European Parliament, a crucial deadline in 2019

Marco I'd like to get a clearer idea of why it's important to vote in the EU elections as we are asked to do in May 2019.

APS The European elections, which are held every five years, are always important. But the 2019 elections will be the most important of all those held so far, for various reasons. Europe is in a difficult situation, in the middle of both a security and an economic crisis, neither of which have been resolved – we need only think of the level of unemployment, particularly among young people, and the extraordinary phenomenon of migration from the Mediterranean and Africa. What's more, national elections, particularly in France with the nomination of Emmanuel Macron as President of the Republic, have created a new situation, with a relaunch of the European idea, which is finding consensus in the European institutions, starting with the European Parliament. In May this year, the result of the vote will indicate, perhaps irreversibly, the future of the European Union. In all the countries in the EU we will be facing two very different, if not completely opposite, views of the future: that of those who wish to dismantle the Union and return to national governments the functions that have been taken over by the EU, and that of those who wish to take the Union and as a result Europe and all its member countries to a higher and more satisfactory level of functionality and democracy, following the letter and the spirit of “an ever closer union”.

Marco So far who are the most obvious representatives of the two positions?

APS It's a simple question to answer. First of all, Macron on one side, Salvini, Le Pen and Orban on the other. But as well as France, the pro-European side is also supported to

differing degrees by Angela Merkel's Germany, Spain, Portugal, Benelux, Ireland and others.

Marco [And Italy?](#)

APS Italy, which has been an active promoter of European integration for the last 60 years, and has been recognised as such everywhere, now has a more sceptical and negative position. Obviously I hope that this step backwards will turn out to be only a parenthesis.

Marco [Are there really no points in common between these two different or opposing views?](#)

APS That's a fair question. While it's true that with the prospect of these coming elections the political battle takes place on the basis of distinct and opposing programmes, it is also true that both at the level of parliament and of government it is almost always necessary to reach compromise agreements which blunt the contrasts. The main thing is that the quality of the agreements is not affected, given that there are compromises which raise the level and those which lower it. For example, the European Commission has developed a high level of ability to find compromises between the positions of individual national governments which were originally far apart or in the co-decision procedure between the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers, which we will discuss later. And the same thing happens too in different ways, in the European Parliament.

Marco [Why do the 2019 elections have these novel features compared to the last elections?](#)

APS The 2019 elections will also be in a way the first real European elections, and not as has happened in the past an extension of national politics. As Mario Albertini said 40 years ago, the European Union will take root the day that its

government becomes the subject of a political battle, a basic requirement in any democracy. This process, which started with the EU elections in 2014, is taking a much more decisive step forward now.

Marco Let's go back to talking about the 2019 elections then. How will the political groups and the majority be formed in the new European Parliament?

APS The party programmes and the electoral alliances agreed before the vote will be the deciding factors. We will have to see which parties in each country – Italy included – will form alliances with each other in order to build a majority in the newly elected European Parliament, which will be responsible for the President of the Commission, the Commissioners and above all the legislative and budgetary choices of the Union for the 5 years from 2019 to 2024. The role of the Members of the European Parliament elected in Italy may be decisive.

Marco It seems to me that the European Parliament still counts for very little.

APS It's true that so far it doesn't count enough. But it's absolutely not true that it doesn't count at all. For several reasons; firstly because the treaties provide it with substantial powers: in the legislative process, in deciding the budget of the Union and in electing the Commission. If European Parliament were not an active force, the EU would not be a democratic organization. Moreover, since citizens first cast their votes in 1979, it has certainly become more and more important. The first point is clear: in modern democracies the laws must be voted on by an organ elected by the citizens, who alone are sovereign; and the basic policies have to be made by a government which has the confidence of the elected parliament, unless, as in the USA, there is a presidential constitution which provides for the direct election of the president. The European model instead

has the characteristics of a parliamentary federal democracy, with its democratic legitimacy deriving from both the European Parliament and the European Councils, which represent the Member States of the Union.

Marco [So the European vote is essential for the democratic functioning of the Union?](#)

APS Yes, the EU is not a state, so far it is not even a real federation of states, but it has economic, social and political competencies which are so important that they cannot function democratically without a basis of popular legitimacy. This is the purpose of the elections. As we have said, the importance of the EU elections has increased. The national laws governing the economy which are in force in the various countries in the Union are largely derived from EU laws as voted for by the European Parliament, with a co-decision procedure with the European Council of Ministers appropriate to a federal model. This is not well-known by the general public; the press and television (and also the Internet) ignore it. In their turn the national political forces tend to play up their own role and to devalue the role of the EU, although they will often attribute unpopular or questionable decisions to the EU even though the governments themselves have requested them.

Marco [But the recent double vote of the European Parliament of 12 September 2018 on Orbán's Hungary and on the question of copyright has been given ample coverage.](#)

APS That's absolutely right. I consider this to be an historic date, because it's the first time the decisions of the European Parliament have been highlighted in the pages of all the European newspapers and on TV news since 1979. Perhaps the press and TV are finally waking up to the political and democratic role of the European Parliament. The vote on Hungary showed that when the principles of democracy, of the balance of powers and freedom of

thought are called into question, the representatives of the European citizens are resolute in their defence of the basic rights: the proposal to sanction the violation of these rights by Orbán's government passed with over two thirds of the votes. Also the European Parliament vote on copyright was a turning point, defending authors' rights and countering the fiscal and other privileges of the great world-wide circuits, from Google to Facebook.

Marco Now it's clearer to me that the European Parliament is a real parliament and not a simple discussion forum as many believe.

APS Yes, in the areas over which the treaties have established its authority that is right. Although there are still fundamental gaps in the competencies assigned to the European Parliament, for example in tax and budgetary questions. I'll add a point which seems important to me. Nowadays we often see that national parliaments don't work well, they are the scene of altercations and rigid doctrinaire conflicts dictated by political parties and forced onto MPs. Whereas the discussions and decisions in the European Parliament take place in a very different climate, which is effective and avoids rigid side-taking. This can be very lively, as is natural when a political assembly is discussing its choices. This is how a real parliament should work.

Marco So we're going to vote for the European Parliament in May 2019. Can you explain how the electoral system works?

APS The treaties provide for a common electoral law, but this does not exist yet in Europe, although the basic principle is of proportional representation in both senses: the number of members elected is more or less proportional to the population of each member state (with a degree of over-representation for the smaller states) and the number of

members elected is proportional to the number of votes obtained by each of the national lists.

Marco [How does the voting take place?](#)

APS Italian voters – and those of the other European countries obviously – vote by choosing from the lists of the various parties and in most cases expressing preferences for the names of the candidates. The parties in Italy are the usual ones but the main ones are also connected at European level with related parties. The three largest groups at European level are the European Popular Party (moderate right wing), the European Socialists (including the Italian Partito Democratico) and the Liberals. Then there are the groups of the European left and the anti-European parties, including la Lega in Italy and the followers of Marine Le Pen in France. These connections at European level are very important because each group prepares a common European programme for the elections of the new Parliament. How to choose? Well naturally on the basis of the programmes and candidates announced before the vote.



II. The European crisis

The economic crisis and Europe

Marco For ten years now Italy has been suffering from an economic crisis; young people cannot find work, the economy is not growing, public debt continues to rise. What has caused this situation?

APS Not only Italy, but the whole European Union has gone through the most serious economic crisis that the world has known since the 1930s. It is a crisis that Europe imported from the United States, where, between 2007 and 2008, a gigantic real estate bubble burst (mortgages for the purchase of houses were granted to purchasers without guarantees and yet the value of the properties rose unabatedly, until the bubble burst). Then the bankruptcy of the great merchant bank Lehmann Brothers threw US finance and its economy into a profound crisis: there was a noticeable decline in employment and a sharp drop in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The crisis spread rapidly into Europe, given the very close links between the American and European economies and financial sectors.

Marco [How did the United States react?](#)

APS The United States reacted immediately and decisively, and massive investments into the economy were made by the federal government, to the order of 800 billion dollars. They also intervened to restore and recapitalise the banks' balance sheets. Within a couple of years they had reversed the trend, growth resumed and unemployment started to decline.

It is certainly no coincidence that in the US, production soon reached a growth rate of more than 3% of GDP, while in Europe it remained under half of that value for a long time; and unemployment, which in the US soon returned to the rate of 4%, is on average still at 10% in Europe, with much higher figures for youth unemployment.

The Union was not able to operate within the Eurozone in a similar way to the US because it did not have any real direct power over the economy, it did not have an adequate common budget and it lacked the necessary resources. The recognition of these limitations has prompted EU institutions to introduce multiple reforms to the monetary

union in recent years. Despite this, the EU has been anything but passive in the face of the crisis.

Marco [How did the European Union act?](#)

APS The EU reacted to the crisis with an impressive series of measures, adopted mainly between 2010 and 2013. They essentially aimed to regulate those national budgets that were deviating from the parameters set down by the Maastricht Treaty, which were established to prevent the financial or banking crisis of an EU country, particularly within the Eurozone, putting the economy, finance, the banking system and the currency of the EU as a whole at risk. But in many cases these measures have unfortunately led to procyclical fiscal policies rather than to stimulating the growth and employment that the crisis had blocked. The recent crisis in Europe has been very difficult to manage also because although it originated as a financial crisis imported from the USA, it has become a banking, economic and social crisis. The EU intervened in support of the countries in difficulty by creating the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF, May 2010), soon replaced by the European Stability Mechanism (ESM, January 2012), which is still in force. At the same time, the EU significantly strengthened measures aimed at coordinating the budget policies of member countries towards compliance with the Maastricht parameters. This was done to help countries with high public debt, which are therefore more exposed to speculative attacks, to undertake policies of gradual debt reduction (“Six pack”, December 2011, the Fiscal Compact (October 2012)), and “Two pack”, May 2013). All these EU initiatives have involved the Commission, the European Council, and ECOFIN, which includes the finance ministers of the EU Member States, and the Eurogroup now made up of 19 countries that have adopted the Euro.

Marco [What is the Fiscal Compact?](#)

APS The procedure for strengthening the control of Member States' budgets culminated in the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance (effective 3 October 2012), known as the Fiscal Compact, voted by all Member States except Great Britain and the Czech Republic (the latter, however, joined later). Among other things, it was decided to include the rule of balancing the budget in the respective national legislation; Italy enacted this, reinforcing a principle that was already included in its Constitution, with a very large majority of its Parliament. However, the Fiscal Compact has the character of an agreement between governments, with the limits of democratic legitimacy that this entails.

Marco [Why have such stringent rules on national budgets, deficits and public debt been necessary?](#)

APS When the creation of the single currency was decided in 1992 in Maastricht, this choice obviously implied the transfer of monetary sovereignty from the Member States to the EU through the European Central Bank (ECB). Until the birth of the euro, the Member States, despite complex agreed procedures, could cope with economic and financial crises through the exchange rate of their respective currencies, primarily with competitive devaluations. Italy had done this repeatedly. With the single currency, this was no longer possible for individual EU member States: the Central Bank has sole responsibility for the monetary policy of the countries that use the euro and given its role as the guarantor of monetary stability, it must take into account the whole Eurozone when making decisions. The Maastricht Treaty also established the strict rule that the creation of new currency by the European Central Bank cannot be used to write off the excessive debt – such as would make it insolvent – of a Member State. If this were to happen, it would eventually lead to shifting the weight of an unhealthy economic policy practised by the state in question onto the

taxpayers in the other Member States. In fact it could have happened (and can still happen) that a State the public finances of which are running out of control would be unable to cope if the interest burden rose too high, to the point of making the consequent commitment unsustainable; in this case not only would the public finances of the insolvent state be plunged into crisis, but so would the entire banking system, and not only that of the indebted country. It is therefore necessary to guide the State that is struggling with its finances towards better management of its budget, in tandem with supporting measures to bring it out of crisis. This is the reason why the crisis that began in 2008 led the EU to adopt the measures we have just discussed, with the aim of making the rules introduced at Maastricht mandatory.

Marco But wouldn't it be possible for the European Central Bank to print money to intervene in support of an insolvent State?

APS This is what some euro and single currency critics would like to see and what they demand repeatedly. However, this request is baseless. No central bank – not even the US Federal Reserve – acts as the lender of last resort to a State that is indebted to such an extent as to put its solvency at risk. Italy actually did this until 1981, which increasingly generated highly damaging inflation. After that, the principle that a central bank should be independent was also introduced in Italy. This is the cardinal principle that was also adopted by the European Central Bank under the Maastricht Treaty, precisely to prevent it from fulfilling the function of a State's lender of last resort, because this “would eliminate any incentive for governments to keep public finances under control” (Bini Smaghi, 2014, p. 93), with the consequences we know.

Marco What was the role of the European Central Bank in the management of the crisis?

APS The role of the ECB was fundamental in guaranteeing the stability of the currency and stabilising the money and financial markets. At the height of the turmoil in the summer of 2012, Draghi made a speech that succeeded in calming the markets, which attested to the ECB's authority and credibility. The famous phrase pronounced went: "within our mandate, the European Central Bank is ready to do whatever it takes to preserve the euro; and believe me, it will be enough." The intervention of the Central Bank was thoroughgoing and covered various areas; it included a Long-Term Refinancing Operation through loans to banks (LTRO, 2011-2012), the purchase of government bonds on the secondary market (SMP, 2012) as well as, in the short term, the possible direct purchase by the ECB of government bonds issued by countries in serious and overt macroeconomic difficulties, on condition that the public accounts of the State in question were under control: this is the Outright Monetary Transaction (OMT, September 2012) that the European Court of Justice declared legitimate in 2014, after an appeal from the German Constitutional Court. On two occasions, in 2014 and 2016, loans were extended to credit institutions for up to four years at particularly favourable conditions (TLTRO). The very serious risk of deflation has induced the ECB to undertake Quantitative Easing (QE) in order to make credit more convenient and more fluid: for some years the European Central Bank has placed a very huge volume of liquidity in the credit circuit, 60 billion euros a month and even more, with the aim of allowing the banks to operate without restrictions and to avoid any looming deflation. This was done also to bring inflation back to the level laid down by the treaties, close to 2%. QE was initiated in March 2015, but now seems to be ending. Unfortunately it didn't increase employment with public and private investments, which would have

eventually been possible had it been used longer (Fubini, *Corriere della Sera*, 27/12/2018). The OMT remains one of the instruments that can be activated by the ECB, although only under the conditions that have already been mentioned, that is, only in the face of a recovery policy (verifiable and monitored) by the State or Member States that intend to use it.

Marco [Have all these measures been enough to overcome the economic and financial crisis?](#)

APS They have gradually brought back a great deal of order into the national budgets of some countries (in particular Spain, Portugal and Ireland), although sometimes with serious consequences, as can be seen in Greece. The crisis is now largely over. But recovery has been slow and difficult, which has also been due to the adverse international context. We were very close to a real economic recession that would have had devastating consequences on employment.

Marco [So has the euro weathered the storm?](#)

APS Yes, we have now come out of the crisis. The role of the European Central Bank was decisive, through the measures we have just mentioned. What have been particularly important are the interventions adopted to stabilise the banking system, strengthening its capital and centralising the supervision of larger banks at the ECB. This is the project to achieve a banking union, which however is still incomplete.

Marco [Does this mean we can now rest assured for the future?](#)

APS Unfortunately, no, for several reasons: because not all States have put their accounts in order, starting with, which is the most exposed front of the entire Eurozone at the

moment; because the financial system and the markets are unpredictable and are always on the verge of succumbing to a new crisis; and because the banking union has not been completed yet.

Marco [Do we need a reform of the banking system in Europe?](#)

APS We certainly do, due to the close interconnection between the economies and financial affairs of the various EU countries, without which the single market could not function. The EU, under the pressure of the crisis, has set itself a fundamental objective, which is to create an operative banking union. This decision came from the European Council at the end of June 2012 and incorporated the so-called Document of the Four Presidents, a sort of roadmap for the future of the EU, in which the four unions to be implemented progressively were envisaged: banking, fiscal, economic and political. The banking union, which had been necessary for some time, has finally taken off at European level. The banking union project has three main objectives: the establishment of a supranational supervisory power, given that the big banks are active simultaneously in several countries; a shared mechanism for intervening in the event of the default of one or more banks; and a common guarantee on bank deposits. To date, supranational supervision has been completed and the mechanism for resolving bank crises, although incomplete, has started, while an agreement on the European deposit mechanism is still lacking. This delay leaves the national banking systems still exposed to the risk of instability and can produce negative consequences for banks, for savers and for the development of the economy and the single market.

Marco [It is often said that Europe is responsible for the high unemployment rate and lack of growth. Are these accusations justified against the European Union?](#)

APS We must not think that Europe has not done anything to overcome the crisis nor that it can do everything. We have just mentioned the measures taken by the EU. The support to the European currency has been a success and the measures to persuade countries with high debts and high deficits to adopt policies that will make the situation return to normal are important goals: not because a Treaty prescribes it but because a country that is exceedingly indebted puts its own future at risk and places too heavy a burden on the shoulders of its young people; and because debts must be paid and – although we must keep in mind the principle of solidarity, to which we will return – it is not right that tax payers in countries who have their budget in order have to constantly remedy the shortcomings of countries that are too indebted. However, when to restart growth and combat unemployment massive public investments are required, the highly indebted countries have their hands tied because there is very little room for manoeuvre concerning increases in public spending.

Marco [Is this where Europe should intervene?](#)

APS Yes, but it did not do enough. In 2010, Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa, in a brief and meaningful phrase, expressed a strategy to effectively counter the crisis: “budget stabilisation is up to the States, Europe should intervene for growth”. On this front the Union has not succeeded. It was only with the Commission formed after the European elections in 2014 that a plan was promoted by President Juncker which led to the creation of the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI). For the three-year period from 2015 to 2018, 315 billion euros were budgeted, rising to 500 billion by 2020, and this allowed the EU to raise a capital of 335 billion euros for investments that had already been activated (Juncker, State of the EU Address, 12 September 2018). For Italy, 8 billion euros are allocated by the plan, which, with the contribution of investors

encouraged by European guarantees, could reach as much as 50 billion euros. Much is being done with this money, but it is still not enough. Action would be possible, as the EU could make use of its own new resources, and not having a single euro of debt so far, it could also issue quotas of bonds destined for investments and keep the balance sheet safe. This however is not merely spending more money for the sake of growth. The single market is the great economic success of the European Union and it should be strengthened with regard to services, especially network services, and with regard to the creation of a genuine single market for digital services. Large private investments could be mobilised and jobs in the fields of new technologies would then be created.

Marco How can we explain this lack of vision, this short-sightedness of the European Union that has prevented us from recovering earlier and better from the crisis of the last decade?

APS As so often happens when it comes to human affairs, it was largely the outcome of a cultural deficit. An economic doctrine that has its roots in Weimar Germany and which still dominates the conduct of German governments has prevailed in recent years. It is the “keeping the house in order” doctrine: in other words, the conviction that the necessary and sufficient condition for a stable international order, to avoid systemic crises even in the field of finance, is that each State should ensure its budget is balanced. This approach is as much an illusion as the nineteenth century idea that led us to believe that war would be avoided in Europe once the State and Nation became one.

At the same time, an alternative thesis gained ground according to which the best policy is to give the market free rein because the market understands how the economy is

behaving and is able, by itself, to self-correct; public intervention would therefore be neither necessary nor appropriate. This approach has been the dominant doctrine for about forty years, from the years of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, and has been theorised by authoritative intellectuals, such as the influential Chicago School that was dominated by Milton Friedman. In fact, it is precisely the recent crisis which has shown that different instruments are needed to counter the most serious crises, which can always rear their ugly heads again. The market does not always self-correct, mainly because it is the victim of speculative waves produced from within.

Marco So what are the remedies against these market failures?

APS We must consider two elements: if it is true that the market can only function within a framework of rules because it is not a force of nature, at the same time it is necessary to allow politics – when it is necessary or opportune to intervene, therefore for the Union at the supranational level – to exercise, when required, an effective governing and fiscal power and also to act with a degree of discretion and intervention. The market, although governed by rules, is not capable of ensuring this, especially when facing a crisis. The great crisis of the 1930s was overcome by Roosevelt with a far-sighted policy of public investments. The European Union did not do this, or at least not sufficiently as we have seen, and certainly not at the supranational level. And the results were negative. This is the consequence of that lack of a federal government for the economy which we have already discussed.

The immigration crisis and Europe

Marco Even before the concern for the economy, there is a strong feeling of insecurity, indeed often even of fear and

hostility, due to the presence of a minority of EU and non-EU immigrants in our country. And Europe is often blamed for this situation: it does not defend us, it does not help us, it does not intervene. Is this correct?

APS Immigration has become a hot topic in all the EU countries in recent years, and it is keenly felt in Italy, perhaps even more than elsewhere. Therefore I would like to summarise some information concerning Italy, taken from ISTAT statistics. In 2018, the foreigners in Italy amounted to 5,144,440, which is equal to 8.5% of the Italian population. Of these, 51% come from Europe, in most cases from other EU countries. 21% come from Africa, 20.5% from Asia, 7% from the Americas. There are fewer immigrants who are men and Muslims make up less than a third of the total. Those coming from another EU state have, by virtue of the European treaties, free right of movement; for the remaining immigrants, three categories are distinguished: those who have a regular residence permit; those who entered asking for the right to asylum and refugee status, provided by the treaties for those persecuted in their country of origin (1951 Geneva Convention); and finally the irregular immigrants, who are people who have illegally entered without declaring themselves refugees, people whose residence permit has expired, but above all people who have had their asylum application rejected since they do not originate from countries considered to engage in persecution.

There are currently about 500,000 irregular migrants in Italy; in 2003 there were 250,000 more than there are today. This group of migrants should by law be expelled, but this measure is very difficult to carry out and also very expensive: it has been calculated that it amounts to about 4,000 euros per person, and this is also because the individuals to be expelled would have to be found and identified wherever they are in the country. Asylum seekers

are often housed in special facilities, awaiting the costly bureaucratic process that can require months and often years to verify their identity and origin. The data concerning their identity and origin are often missing or fictitious, because many economic migrants declare they are at risk of persecution so they can obtain the right to asylum, even though they are actually from countries that do not persecute their citizens. All this gives us an idea of the difficulties and costs associated with these situations.

Marco The proposal of the “populist” parties is that we must close the borders and stop any further migrants. Is it really conceivable to close a country’s borders to stop immigration?

APS A fundamental point must be made clear. The whole of Europe has a vital need for immigrants to combat the demographic crisis – at least one million per year, and probably even more, according to some calculations. We Europeans are becoming a population of elderly people, with fewer young people and no longer with a sufficient number of people who are of working age; this could have unsustainable consequences, both for currently active workers and for tomorrow’s retirees. An adequate and well-regulated quota of immigrants – who, among other things, have a higher birth rate than ours – is indispensable today and will also be necessary in the future for our economy and for our well-being.

Marco How much impact does the migration phenomenon have on the birth rate?

APS It has a lot. Immigrants generally have a much more pronounced tendency to give birth to children, often for cultural reasons but also due to the relief of having escaped from often tragic situations of persecution and misery.

Marco However the flow of immigrants continues to cause concern, alarm, and negative reactions.

APS We also need to know the real data about this situation. In 2015 there was a peak in immigration in Europe and also in Italy, caused largely by the war in Syria. The European Union's agreement with Turkey, which has been lavishly rewarded for its cooperation, has almost arrested this flow in the eastern Mediterranean. The landings in Italy, mainly from Libya, which acts as a bridge for the regions south of the Sahel, have fallen from 181,000 in 2016 to 119,000 in 2017 and to only 17,000 in the first six months of 2018, which is a decrease of 80%. Let's face it: today this obsessive preoccupation with a few hundred migrants awaiting entry into Italian ports is just a pretext. It is a deplorable media phenomenon, used by some politicians for demagogic purposes, and unfortunately it has been very successful. Currently the real problem is not the arrival of immigrants but the management of those already present in Italy. Since the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of migrants is impractical, more effective active integration policies must be implemented.

Marco [At the beginning I was talking about insecurity and hostility towards immigrants: how can we face these fears since they are so deeply rooted?](#)

APS These fears must be understood and faced, certainly not evaded or scorned. We need to act on several fronts regarding the flow of immigrants; their distribution across the European Union; their integration into the labour market; their civic education. But we must also take into consideration how we can better educate Italian and European citizens; not only is there a proliferation of inaccurate news stories on the numbers circulating, but there are very dangerous ideological views which seek to condemn some foreign minorities as a whole, especially Muslims. All this is creating a drift towards overt racism. On these different fronts, alongside policies enacted by individual European countries, a series of common EU

policies is indispensable, but has so far been almost totally lacking. It is also necessary that the news is reported accurately because countless surveys have demonstrated that the immigration rate that is perceived is actually three times that of real immigration: Italians, for example, believe that immigrants make up 25% of the population, not the 8.5% that is the real figure.

Marco But surely the source of many of these fears is immigrants' cultural distance, as well as the foreignness of their language and their lifestyles compared to that of the local population. Isn't that so?

APS The cultural distance is there, and that is undeniable. But it only becomes dangerous when it creates conflicts with the local population. And it only becomes unacceptable when it becomes concrete in the form of behaviour – even within immigrant families – which contrasts with the principles of our law and our Constitution: those who come to Europe must accept our Charters of Rights and our national Constitutions, whose principles are also clearly outlined in the European Charter. We cannot and must not compromise on this.

Marco Acts of violence provoke reactions, and the threat of terrorism even more so.

APS Yes, the media highlight the crimes committed by foreigners, which also generates perceptions that do not always correspond to reality, but of course this does not detract from the seriousness of such behaviours. As for Islamic terrorism, which manages to terrify us with its bloody manifestations against innocents, there are two ways to counter it that complement each other: on the one hand Muslim immigrants must be integrated socially and culturally and not confined to ghettos, which unfortunately has often happened in some countries; on the other hand it is essential to share intelligence data at the European and

international level, because terrorism is international. This has not happened so far, or at least not to a sufficient degree, because every police force tends to be jealous of its own databases. Furthermore, the fact that in most cases the terrible terrorist massacres have been the work of individuals who have European citizenship – in the UK, Belgium, France – and have often been second-or even third generation immigrants must be considered. This shows how difficult it is to combat risk.

Marco Many people are convinced that crime is largely the work of immigrants.

APS It's true that we must be tough on all crime. But let's not forget that by far the most widespread and most dangerous crime in Italy is perpetrated by the four organised criminal groups. The praiseworthy denunciations of associations such as Libera and the widely recognised work of courageous magistrates are indisputable. Dozens of magistrates in the past decades have paid with their lives for their commitment to defeating crime perpetrated by the different mafia-type organisations. And yet, even today, Italy is widely polluted, even in the North, by smaller, more regional organised crime groupings and above all by the Calabrian Ndrangheta. It is a deadly virus for society and the economy.

Marco A few days ago I had to go to a health clinic and was struck by the fact that the vast majority of patients waiting there were immigrants. I felt a strong reaction in the other Italians there, even if they didn't say anything ...

APS We have just talked about the percentages of immigrants in Italy. If there are situations like the one you described, this is due to the unregulated way of managing immigrants. A different and more balanced distribution, particularly with reference to schools and the health service, is possible and indeed necessary. In other EU countries this

is already happening. Accepting immigrants does not mean depriving yourself of any form of regulation, obviously without discrimination on fundamental rights. If this does not happen, the responsibility is ours and not Europe's, although we tend to make people believe the opposite.

Marco Italy has also proved to be welcoming to immigrants, or am I wrong?

APS In recent years Italy has been generous, both in aiding immigrants fleeing Africa, particularly through Libya, and in welcoming them to the country; and these merits, for once, have been recognised: “Italy has saved the honour of Europe”, Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission, has stated several times.

Marco How is the migration phenomenon connected with the globalisation of the world's economy?

APS Some large developing or recently developed countries – China, India, South East Asia – produce many traditional goods at such low costs that they make competition unsustainable, causing Europe to lose millions of jobs. In this case the World Trade Organisation (WTO) – in which the European Union has a decisive weight – has effectively intervened and can still operate to obtain certain conditions concerning, for example, working hours and child labour and the re-establishment of healthy competition. It then has the power to penalise those who do not respect these conditions, even with customs protection measures at the borders. However, as a result of the information revolution, Europe can and must change so as to develop not only the cutting-edge technologies for tomorrow's world, but also to intervene in the growth process of developing countries, which involves the creation and / or the transformation of jobs. In this far-from-easy process, investing in Africa (as China is already doing to an impressive degree) will allow Europe, with the development

of a large-scale development plan, to continue even on traditional production fronts, at the same time favouring the economic development of this great continent and persuading Africans to stay in their own countries.

Marco However, I have seen that they predict very high numbers – more than a billion births in Nigeria alone in the coming decades. Europe will never be able to cope.

APS Yes, but be careful here. Even today the vast majority of African migrants are moving within Africa itself. It is estimated that out of the 69 million people who want to migrate globally, less than a tenth are looking at coming to Europe (Forum Villa Vigoni 2018). And this number will remain within reasonable limits if Europe implements the appropriate investment policies in Africa, which will be advantageous for both continents. Moreover, it is well known that when an underdeveloped country reaches a sufficient level of wellbeing, the birth rate starts to decrease dramatically.

Marco You've just spoken about European policies for the development of Africa. But I read recently that China is investing 70 billion in Africa alone. Will there be any space left for the European Union?

APS China is carrying out a global policy of economic, and not only economic, assertion of its power with huge resources and great determination. What's more, it is acting with no hesitation and at a great pace without the constraints (let's call them that) of western democracies, which not only have more complex decision-taking processes on account of their being democratic, but also cannot and must not disregard human rights, even in countries they are dealing with.

Marco So is the game already lost for Europe?

APS I don't think so. Firstly, there are already a string of interventions organised; I'll refer to a recent summary (Olimpia Fontana and Andrea Cofelice, *La nuova alleanza tra Africa ed Europa*, Centro Studi sul Federalismo, March 2019), from which we can clearly see not only how extensive the range of European initiatives is, how complex and imperfect the investment procedures are, while still remaining viable, but also how profoundly different the European approach is to that of China. The EU is looking to intervene in the context of the African Union, with a view to a far-sighted economic and political union for the whole continent, rather than bilateral agreements with single African states. Of course, it's a long road, and there is still most of the work to do; in this sense, the EU is still behind. However, I maintain that the European method — one of continental proportions and with a federal and democratic approach — is a smart move when dealing with Africa.

Marco [Has Europe already done something about migration?](#)

APS We have to dispel some false perceptions on this point as well. It is not true that the EU has not done anything. The Schengen agreement of 1990, which has been integrated into European Treaties since 1997, provides a Border Code that regulates the entry of third-country nationals, i.e. non-EU nationals, and has established certain conditions and some controls based on uniform rules. Furthermore, it establishes the commitment to progressively install an integrated management system of external borders, through the establishment, first of all, of a common Agency (Frontex), then of a new European Border and Coast Guard Agency (2016), which to date is not yet equipped with the necessary resources. As for the right of asylum, a more recent reformulation of the Dublin Agreement (Dublin III, 2013) assigns the task of examining the asylum seeker's application for protection to the State of first reception, but this is a long and problematic procedure as we already have

seen. In 2015 an emergency plan was temporarily adopted, which coincided with the immigration peak that we have already discussed. However, the implementation of the plan was entrusted to the EU Member States on a voluntary basis only and was largely not implemented, despite the fact that the European Court of Justice in February 2017 rejected an appeal by the Visegrád group against the decisions of 2015. But the principle that the distribution of migrants among EU countries was only voluntary and non-binding was unfortunately reaffirmed at the European summit of 27 June 2018.

Marco [So how should Europe intervene more effectively?](#)

APS What should be regulated at European level is above all the flow of immigration. There is a need to establish an external border to the Union, governed by common legislation that should be not merely voluntary but mandatory. We need common rules on reception criteria. Some observers believe that the distinction between the right to asylum (for those who are discriminated against or persecuted in their country of origin) and those who flee for reasons of war or for reasons of subsistence, famine, hunger and thirst should no longer be made, thus reshaping the Geneva Convention of 1951. Uniform assessment criteria and rules are needed to agree on what would be deemed an acceptable number to receive in terms of employment opportunities, based on objective data provided by the individual countries. Agreement is also needed in order to establish the criteria for receiving and assimilating the immigrants, which would need to be carried out in the countries of origin but also in transit countries, as well as of course in the European countries where they first enter. It takes resources to do all this and the European Commission must be given the necessary executive powers to do it. Finally, after a certain period of stable residence and at the

end of an adequate process of integration and civic training, immigrants should be granted the right to gain citizenship.

Marco What tasks would the migrants' host countries have?

APS Every country in the EU should plan how many immigrants it can host and how many jobs and of what type it can and needs to put on the market, targeting them both to workers from other EU states and to immigrants from outside the EU. Naturally, it is imperative to make sure that the demand for immigrants is no longer due to the lower costs associated with an exploited, underpaid workforce, who are often paid in cash and pay no taxes, because this creates unfair competition with those who offer regular employment and those who are not willing to work for cash. This is not a theoretical risk, it is a destructive reality, at least in Italy. It should also be said, although we don't like to be explicit about it but everyone knows it – that there are jobs in Italy and in many other countries for which there is no local workforce available, or it is insufficient, because these jobs are seen as being undesirable. Think of carers for old people, of some agricultural jobs, of cleaning or catering services. Just imagine what we'd do if we didn't have immigrants!

Marco For legal immigrants, however, how do you allow everyone to go where they want if the needs of the different EU countries are so different?

APS In fact this should not be possible, at least in the first placement of migrants within the EU. And in part this is already the case: regular migrants admitted to an EU country cannot move to another EU country for five years. So what can be done? There could also be a series of incentives and disincentives: if you have been admitted to the EU in a certain country, based on the planning of that country, you will not be able to take advantage of full health coverage except within that country. Only afterwards could

you then move around by applying for a job in another country. Obviously the situation is different for EU citizens moving between EU countries, provided that there are no abuses, which has happened in the past, however.

Marco It seems important to modify the rule which requires that the first EU state where the asylum-seeking migrants arrive should provide for their reception. This obviously penalises countries like Italy, given their geographical position.

APS Certainly. It is necessary to modify the Dublin regulation of 1990 which sanctioned this rule, which has now been shown to be unacceptable: it must be established that whoever enters any EU country enters Europe, every national frontier of entry for non-EU citizens must be considered a European border. The European Parliament has already voted on a draft reform of the Dublin Regulation, in order to establish an equitable distribution of migrants across EU countries. But even this measure has been blocked by the European Council, which has so far not been able to decide, since it is paralysed by the power of veto.

Marco Aren't these commitments disproportionate to the resources available? Where can resources be found?

APS The EU budget must grow through the development of a vast programme of sustainable development that simultaneously benefits both Europe and Africa. It should be added that it will also be necessary to develop new technologies, for example for the storage and transport of solar energy from Africa. The costs of electrification and water extraction for the whole of Africa have been calculated and can be tackled in perhaps ten years, with costs that are certainly within the reach of the European Union. The EU budget will obviously have to be strengthened. Projects and work of this magnitude are technically very advanced but also vulnerable, and so they

should be defended and guaranteed, for security purposes, with adequate military equipment. This could be managed by the African Union – the embryo of a future union of the continent, on the model of the European Union – and also by the UN, with the financial and operational support of the EU.

Marco [Isn't this happening already?](#)

APS No, it isn't. To put it in a very general way, it has not been understood by governments – or rather, they have not wanted to understand – that coordinating does not mean governing. Moreover, even this coordination has not taken place adequately, because the intergovernmental method is founded on unanimity; it is blocked if there is a veto and cuts out the European Parliament. At the European level the migration phenomenon must be managed with common rules and must be governed, not simply coordinated. The current crisis, which is still not resolved, is also the consequence of this shortsightedness.

Defence and security

Marco [In the southern Mediterranean there are numerous military conflicts and even where there isn't one, peace is at high risk: from Syria to Iran to Egypt to Libya, not to mention the never-ending crisis in the relations between Israel and the Palestinian people. And then there's the Ukraine crisis. All this concerns us, it is happening on our borders, yet it does not seem that Europe has a voice. Isn't the source of our insecurity here as well?](#)

APS Certainly, it is. For the first time in decades, peace is at risk, even in Europe. Not in the sense that there is the threat of an internal war between the EU member states, as happened constantly in the past and twice with terrible consequences during the twentieth century; but because

when there are wars or threats of war on the borders, contagion can happen even when a war is not wanted. The anomaly that has occurred for decades and that has not been remedied is this: the security of Europe, its military defence from possible external threats are entrusted to a power, which is our friend and ally, and which saved us from Nazism: the United States. This protection was also necessary at the end of the Second World War to defend Europe from the threat of the Soviet Union. However, while the alliance with the great power across the Atlantic is still natural for Europe, permanent dependence on the US for our long-term security can no longer be viewed as admissible.

Every political community must provide for its own security without depending on others, even if alliances are possible and desirable. It is the European Union itself that must be the one to defend its own people and this should be in the form of a true federal union. Individual national states do not have the necessary size to do this anymore. I would like to say more: a political community that is not able to provide its own security will sooner or later risk losing its freedom as well. History is full of such examples.

Marco [So should we spend more to build a true European defence?](#)

APS It has been shown that if the expenditure for the defence of the 27 EU member States (then also excluding the United Kingdom) is managed together, the military effectiveness would be far greater (The Cost of non-Europe in Security and Defence, European Parliament 2017). An autonomous defence strategy would require further investments, which (as the US example demonstrates) would have very important repercussions also on non-military technologies and on scientific seminal researches itself.

Marco It is not clear to me if a common European defence strategy would mean dismantling national armies that would be replaced by a European army.

APS The creation of a European defence strategy, necessary for the reasons we have said, would be progressively implemented and would not involve the abolition of national military forces in the short or medium-term. These would remain, but the standardisation of armaments would make them much less expensive, and above all, these military bodies would be managed at a European level, both for defence and peace missions: peace enforcement, to implement peace between warring countries, or peace keeping, in order to maintain the peace stipulated in territories that had been at war. Such a double level – national and European – may seem contradictory; but it is at present the only possible one. The example that can be recalled is that of the United States, where two military levels – that of the States and that of the Federation – remained alive in the nineteenth century (Domenico Moro, 2018).

For the European Union, the principle of subsidiarity will apply, which we will talk about: the European level will only be used when necessary. Furthermore, it must be clear that the federal level can also use the national military forces to avert external threats or impede acts of war committed by a single Member State towards others, but this should only be in extreme cases with due guarantees of democratic legitimacy. Once again, the US model could be considered. On the other hand, it is clear that an army that is not subject to political authority cannot exist in a democracy, and this means that the defence staff and the European army would have to act under the control of the European Council and the European Parliament.

Marco The EU's past policy regarding common defence and security, however, seems to have been viewed relatively negatively...

APS Yes, because this crucial aspect regarding the security of European citizens should have been dealt with decades ago, and should not have remained blocked after the rejection in 1954 of a Treaty which aimed to establish a European Defence Community (EDC). However, in the past two years there have been some promising signs of improvement. Trump's critical stance towards the European Union has contributed substantially to this change. The political will has finally emerged to equip the EU with common tools for peace missions and for the standardisation of armaments. Both in Germany and in France the creation of a European army has been expressly called for. The recent declarations of Emmanuel Macron and Angela Merkel (November 2018) are explicit, since both spoke of the need to create a "European army", not with the intention of opposing the United States but with the aim of acquiring autonomy in the management of the EU's own security and defence. This had no longer happened for sixty years. On 11 December 2017, the European Council decided to set up a Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) to promote common defence and security. In turn, the European Parliament approved the European Defence Industrial Development Programme (EDIDP) on 3 July 2018. Today the EU's resources for these purposes, which come from different origins, are close to 10 billion euros (Domenico Moro, 2018). Still too little, certainly, but the road finally seems to have reopened. The European Galileo and Copernicus satellite systems, already in force, will make the Union autonomous on this crucial security front.

Marco Will all the States of the Union take part in these military functions?

APS Not necessarily. The Lisbon Treaty provides for a formula (called “structured cooperation”) which allows even a small group of countries to organise forms of integration for defence purposes. The European forces would then be formed by soldiers from those EU countries that want it; in the last few months important steps have been taken in this direction: the governments of Germany, France, Italy, Spain and other EU countries have expressed their commitment to making progress in this area, in which Europe can play a very important role even at the international level. I would like to add that it would be serious if Italy pulled back on this front.

Marco You spoke about a possible international role for any future European defence force. But shouldn't world peace be guaranteed by the United Nations?

APS Certainly, the United Nations (UN) is the most ambitious attempt ever undertaken in history to create a global structure capable of guaranteeing peace. In many cases in the past years the UN has been undeniably successful, both in terms of human rights and through its many peace missions. But it still lacks adequate powers. The European Union, on the other hand, aims to unite the nation States of our continent with a federal bond, permanently guaranteeing peace inside Europe. It constitutes a model for the other continents and, if united politically, it could give the UN a much needed support. The military strength of the European Union could become an operational instrument of order and peace precisely within the framework of the UN. The ideal of a political Europe has had, right from its very beginnings, a clear cosmopolitan vocation.



III. The structures, politics and history of the Union

European Union institutions, laws, decisions, positions and procedures

Marco At this point I would like to gain a better understanding of how the Union is structured and how it works, with its successes and its failures. Who dictates the rules, who governs, who adjudicates?

APS You asked me three crucial questions Marco, it seems that you may have read Montesquieu (and perhaps you have, am I right?) Let me briefly describe the fundamental institutions of the European Union. There are five: the two Councils (the European Council and the Council of Ministers), the European Parliament, the Commission, and the Court of Justice. There's also the European Central Bank and the Court of Auditors, which have competence respectively for the monetary union and for the European accounts. But before talking about them, we need to remind ourselves of the source of all the institutions and all the basic regulations of the European Union. These all derive from the founding Treaties of the European Union, which were unanimously decided on by the governments of the Union and ratified by all the Member States. Together with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, they may be considered to form the Constitution of the European Union. Today the primary sources of Union law are the two Treaties signed in Lisbon in 2007 which came into force in January 2009: the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). We will talk later about the history that preceded this legislation, from 1951 to 2007.

Marco [What are the two Councils and what do they do?](#)

APS The European Council (EC) is a periodic meeting, held several times a year, under the leadership of an elected president, of the heads of state or government (depending on their various constitutional structures, so for the UK, for example, the Prime Minister, for France the President) of the countries of the Union along with the President of the Commission. It is the body from which the main political initiatives of the Union have come in recent years and decades: so, for example, in 2011 it produced the European Fiscal Compact and other measures to deal with the financial crisis, and also the banking union initiative, which

is still in progress. It must currently be considered the most important and authoritative strategic governing body of the European Union. The EC normally approves measures “by consensus”, i.e. unanimously, with unanimity being presumed if no one rejects the summary of the proposals and discussions made by its president at the end of the meeting. Since 2009, the president has been elected by the members of the Council, and remains in power for two and a half years. The mandate can be renewed only once and the president is chosen from among major European figures, particularly former prime ministers. The first two presidents of the EC after Lisbon were the Belgian Herman Van Rompuy and the Pole Donald Tusk, who is still in office.

Marco [And the Council of Ministers?](#)

APS The Council of Ministers (now renamed the Council of the European Union or simply the Council) is made up of the appropriate ministers of the countries of the Union – primarily, the ministers for the economy, foreign affairs, home affairs, agriculture and so on, depending on the issues to be dealt with. The presidency is renewed every six months in rotation, between the countries of the Union. The Council exercises not only powers of decision but also, and above all, legislative powers in matters within the competence of the Union. The Council acts by a simple or qualified majority, in co-decision with the European Parliament. However, for a series of particularly important matters specified in the treaties – pertaining to taxation, excessive national deficits, certain aspects of social policy and numerous other matters – a unanimous vote is required from the Council. The European Parliament (EP) almost always exercises only an advisory function in these matters, and so has no legislative power. The ministers for the economy and finance of the Union form the “Ecofin” configuration of meetings of the Council, and those among them who are from the countries that have adopted the euro

form the “Eurogroup”, with a president elected from among the ministers for a term of two and a half years.

Marco [Aren't all these presidents too many?](#)

APS With regard to the finance ministers, it is right that the countries of the euro have a president of the “Eurogroup”, because the specific nature of the monetary union is important. It is also not hard to understand why the treaties made a distinction between the President of the European Council and the President of the Commission. However, the treaties do not prohibit the two offices from being held by the same person. And several observers would actually prefer this, since such a president would then be the primary spokesperson for the European Union at an international level, in an era like ours in which the personalisation of politics at the top is an established reality in almost all countries.

Marco [Is the exclusion of the European Parliament from matters that are so important to the Union not strange?](#)

APS The principle of co-decision between the EP and the Council of Ministers makes sense in the context of a federation between states, as distinct from a non-federal organisation. In this case, a Chamber of States must exist alongside a Chamber of the People (the European Parliament). In the EU, the Member States are represented by the two Councils which, as we have seen, have differentiated functions. In the history of Europe, parliaments were created, first of all in England, precisely in order to govern the legislative process and to deliberate on tax matters (“no taxation without representation”). The treaties themselves have established that the European Union is to be based on representative democracy. And it is therefore contradictory that for some of the most important matters within the competence of the Union, the European Parliament, which represents European citizens, is excluded

from legislative power. Equally unjustified is the absence of a fiscal power at European level. Here, the European Parliament should be the decision-maker together with the Council representing the States. We must also add that over the course of nearly forty years, ever since the EP was first elected by universal suffrage, its powers have steadily increased, in the sense that each of the treaties has increased the number of matters for which co-decision applies. But there are still exceptions, and these are very significant.

Marco What other powers does the European Parliament have?

APS In addition to the power of legislative co-decision (where this is envisaged by the treaties), the EP has a fundamental role in the appointment of the President of the Commission and of the individual commissioners. It can also vote on a motion of censure that forces the entire Commission to leave office. Furthermore, it has the task of discussing and approving the annual budget and the multi-annual budget of the Union. In the former case, it can block the process until an agreement is reached with the Council. It has the power to propose amendments to the treaties and to adopt non-binding resolutions on all matters within the competence of the Union. The motions and resolutions of the EP – admirably prepared in terms of completeness and depth by committees of parliamentarians from all parties and then voted on in a plenary meeting – have paved the way for many innovations and reforms on rights, the environment, work and social conditions and so on.

Marco Press and television often talk about the Commission. The main commissioners are now considered to be “super-ministers” to whom national governments must be held accountable. Why does this happen?

APS The European Council (made up of members of the governments of member states) makes a decisive

contribution, together with the European Parliament, to the appointment of the President of the Commission and the commissioners, so it is not a matter of individuals remote from the process of political consensus involving the Member States. Furthermore the single market, the monetary union and the other functions of the Union all require coordination among the Member States with regard to the economy, as well as the observance of constraints that have been agreed to by individual governments, which must be monitored to avoid putting the EU economy and finances at risk, as we have already seen. This is why the Lisbon Treaty requires the Commission to “supervise” the application of EU law by Member States.

Marco [Who appoints the Commission?](#)

APS The European Council nominates candidates for the Commission presidency, acting by a qualified majority and taking into account the outcome of the elections for the European Parliament. In agreement with the president-elect, the Council then adopts a list of candidates for the rest of the Commission. The full Commission, including the Commission President, is then appointed by the European Council after a vote of consent by the European Parliament. This procedure is the result of an evolution that, through the appointment of the president and commissioners, has brought about, from the Treaty of Maastricht onwards, an increase in the power of the European Parliament and the overcoming of the requirement of unanimity by the European Council. This evolution is very important because it indicates a progressive movement by the Union towards the constitutional model of a representative democracy in which both the legislative power and the executive power have their primary source in popular sovereignty. However, since it is a federal model, both powers are exercised in conjunction with a “chamber of states”, thus with the two Councils: for the nomination of the Commission and its

president, the European Council has the decisive role, and when it comes to legislative power, the Council legislates by co-decision with the EP, where it does not act alone, as provided for by the EU treaties; and as already stated, the power to govern is in practice also predominantly exercised by the European Council in relation to general policy direction

Marco [What are the tasks of the Commission?](#)

APS The European Commission, which includes a commissioner for each country of the Union, basically exercises the functions of governing the Union through the work of the president, the individual commissioners and the Commission as a whole. The administrative structure of the Union is based on the Commission and the individual commissioners. This structure comprises about twenty directorates-general, each of which works for a sector within the Union's competence, from the budget to the economy and finance, from competition to agriculture, from trade to social policy and so on. However, the Commission does not have all the powers of a government, as the role of driving and defining general guidelines belongs to the European Council. Furthermore, the governing power of the Commission is countered by the fact that the Council has significant management prerogatives in certain areas (e.g. the excessive deficit procedure). But the Commission has kept the exclusive right under the EU treaties to initiate legislation within the Union. Furthermore, the Commission performs another very important function which is not typical of a government: it acts as the "guardian of the Treaties" in the sense that it evaluates, keeps a check on and – if necessary – sanctions any behaviour on the part of the Member States and other public and private entities which deviate from EU regulations.

Marco [Who is responsible for foreign policy?](#)

APS Primarily, the European Council as a whole, its president and the president of the Commission. But the Lisbon Treaty also created the office of the “High Representative of the Union in international relations”. The current representative is the Italian Federica Mogherini. This personage is appointed by the European Council, and acts at the same time as Vice-President of the Commission. The High Representative chairs the Council when it meets in its foreign affairs composition, so comprising the foreign ministers of the countries of the Union.

Marco [We still need to talk about the functions of the Court of Justice.](#)

APS The Court of Justice, which is based in Luxembourg, is made up of judges and advocates-general. Each of the judges comes from one of the EU countries. Since 1988 there has also been a subordinate General Court (the ‘European General Court’). The fundamental task of the Court is to decide, at the request of governments, private individuals or even a European institution, whether a law or government provision of the Union is compliant with the provisions of the European treaties. At the request of the Commission, the Court ascertains violations by Member States and orders them to pay fines. It can also decide, at the request of a national judge and in the form of a preliminary ruling, upon the interpretation of Union law. Here, the Court often pronounces upon the compatibility of a national measure with the EU law which it is called upon to interpret. This means that any national judge (and therefore any party that brings a dispute before that judge) has the power to obtain control over acts of States that violate EU law. These are very important functions: some fundamental principles of European law have been introduced on the basis of decisions of the Court of Justice, such as the principle of the direct applicability of EU law within a Member State and that of the predominance of EU law over

national laws in matters within the competence of the Union itself. But the cases and issues where historically important verdicts have been pronounced by the Court of Justice are far more numerous than this.

Marco [Can you give me some examples?](#)

APS I will just mention two famous cases. In the Van Gend & Loos case of 1963 the European Court of Justice established that the provisions of the European Treaties have a direct effect to the advantage of the citizens of the Member States even if they are contrary to national laws (Belgium had introduced a duty that contravened the treaties); at that time it was the EEC (European Economic Community) Treaty of 1957, but the principle sanctioned by the Court is still valid today, as the legislation is still in force. In 1964, in the verdict concerning the Costa/Enel case, this principle was reaffirmed on the grounds that the Member States, having approved the 1957 Treaty, definitively renounced a part of their sovereignty relating to the matters governed by the said Treaty. I could mention many other equally important decisions of the Court.

Marco [What is the relationship between the Court of Justice and the Court of Human Rights?](#)

APS The latter, which resides in Strasbourg, is not a body of the European Union but of the Council of Europe, an institution founded in 1948 which includes over 40 countries, including some that do not form part of the European Union. The task of the European Court of Human Rights is to rule on matters concerning respect for human rights on appeal from individuals or public and private bodies – rights that are listed in the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR) of 1950 and in its numerous protocols. There is a partial overlap with the Court of Justice of the Union and with the national constitutional courts because the former

(the Luxembourg court) now also plays a role, after the Treaty of Lisbon, with reference to the interpretation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Union, whose provisions are in many cases inspired by the norms and jurisprudence of the ECHR.

Marco Are there other EU institutions?

APS Yes, other institutions of the Union are the Court of Auditors and the European Central Bank, as already said. There are also two important advisory bodies, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

Marco I would like to understand what the laws of the European Union are.

APS The two basic secondary sources of EU legislation are regulations and directives. These can only relate to issues within the limits of the competencies and functions that the treaties assign to the Union. Since these competencies, which can be exclusive or shared, cover multiple areas, the range of European legislation is also very wide. The regulations are mandatory and directly applicable within the Union, whereas the directives are take the form of principles which must be translated into national laws applying the directives in ways that may not be identical in the various countries. This formula is very important because it leaves the way open to different national choices, as long as these are not in conflict with the basic rules established at European level. Regulations and directives can be adopted, when the TFEU provides for this, by means of what is known as the ordinary legislative procedure, which provides for co-decision between the Council and the European Parliament. For this reason they can be termed legislative acts of the European Union.

Marco How do these two legislative models come about and how is a European law formed?

APS The legislative procedure of the Union takes two different forms. The first is the “ordinary legislative procedure”, whereby a bill prepared by the Commission is discussed both by the European Parliament and by the Council; in order to become law, the text, which is voted on by the Parliament and the Council, must in the end be identical. This result is often reached only at the end of a series of meetings between the three bodies. In order to do this a working party composed of an equal number of delegates from the three institutions (the ‘Trilogue’) may be set up in order to facilitate reaching an agreement. The second procedure is called the “special legislative procedure”; in certain matters specifically provided for by the Treaties, the establishment of a regulation, a directive or a decision is, in principle, the prerogative of the Council alone, which after having approved it unanimously submits it to the European Parliament, in most cases, for a non-binding consultation.

Marco It can't be easy to arrive at a shared text when there are so many different institutions working on it.

APS It's true, the path within each of the four institutions (the Commission, the two Councils, the Parliament), and the interaction between them is not easy. We have just spoken of the Trilogue. But I would like to highlight another aspect: the Council of Ministers has to reach agreement between the governments; this agreement has to be unanimous when the treaties require it as part of the special legislative procedure and reached by majority in the ordinary legislative procedure. To achieve this – as well as in general to prepare the resolutions of the two Councils – the activity of the Committee of Permanent Representatives of governments (Coreper), which is generally made up of diplomats, is fundamental; it prepares the draft resolutions which the Councils will then be asked to discuss and to approve. It is often a very difficult job of negotiation – because

representatives on the Committee tend to support the positions that they consider most advantageous for their own government and Member State – but essential to reach a common position. The Commission prepares its proposals internally and the European Parliament develops its positions through the work of parliamentary committees.

Marco Are there other legal acts of the Union, other than regulations and directives?

APS Yes. The Lisbon Treaty also provides for decisions, recommendations and opinions (Art. 288 TFEU) alongside regulations and directives. Decisions can be of two types: mandatory for the recipient or recipients, or without a specific recipient, but still mandatory for all concerned (decisions on institutional issues). In the latter case, they can be decided on by the ordinary legislative procedure. Recommendations and opinions can be issued ex-officio or upon request and express non-binding opinions of the European institutions on particular subjects. There are also numerous non-legislative acts (autonomous acts) which are approved by a single institution, the Commission or the Council, based on their respective competencies and functions, without the need for intervention by the other institutions of the Union. But this is not all: the Union also acts through numerous other channels. These have in common the fact that they are not binding measures, but only acts of address and proposal (e.g. communications). And yet they have often been and still are of great importance.

Marco You won't be surprised if I ask you to tell me something more about this wide range of legal acts.

APS The terminology is varied, as is the nature of these acts. There are the resolutions by which an institution of the Union expresses its intentions for future action, manifesting in this way a shared political will. There are declarations

that prefigure further developments of the Union or interpret decisions taken previously. And then there are communications, which are often of great interpretative value and therefore an important source of guidance for stakeholders. And also White Papers, in which the Commission publishes dossiers containing the result of laborious preliminary investigations into important chapters of the future development of the Union: for example the 1985 White Paper on the internal market, that of 2004 on services of general interest, that of 2006 on communications, and recently the White Paper of 2017 on the future of Europe. And many others.

Marco Isn't all this proliferation of documents excessive? Especially as they are non-binding?

APS In contrast to what happens in the national states, the European Union, perhaps because it is still 'work in progress', has generally developed policies with a medium and long term vision. It is not a victim of the short-sightedness which afflicts many national policies, where the focus is on the daily polls and the upcoming elections. Yet the Union does not neglect to consult public opinion: the regular Eurobarometer surveys on what citizens think of Europe are well known. These "non-binding" acts also serve to prepare the ground for future binding legislation.

Marco I find this long-term perspective, not focused only on the present, very convincing. However, I wonder if non-binding instruments actually have an effective role in European Union policies.

APS Certainly their effectiveness is indirect. Jurists speak of soft law, to indicate this type of non-binding act. However, an important point must be taken into consideration: the process of European integration is an unprecedented undertaking, among other reasons because it aims to achieve a high level of integration without

sacrificing the sovereignty of the Member States, whenever this is not indispensable. So the EU tries, in agreement with governments, to promote cooperation between the institutions of the Union (the two Councils and the Commission) and national governments. The procedure known as “open coordination”, has this purpose: the Commission organises meetings in which the national governments concerned participate in order to compare their respective experiences and develop best practices for the fine-tuning of projects. In particular in the area of culture and the enhancement of cultural heritage, the non-binding nature of these instruments has proved useful for accessing European funding.

Marco In matters of shared competence how does the European legislative level combine with the national level?

APS For the attainment of the aims of the single market, when a competence is shared, that is to say a competence both of the Member States and of the Union, the European Union will intervene with its own rules when the objective is more easily attainable through legislation at European level, rather than with many national regulations. Obviously, in this case the European directive or regulation will prevail over national laws. Over time there has been an evolution, upheld initially by judgments of the Court of Justice, of the characteristics of products allowed to be placed on the market. On the one hand, the principle of mutual recognition by one Member State of the legal requirements of another Member State has been affirmed; on the other hand, Member States are obliged not to depart from the minimum criteria relating to health and safety established at European level. This does not, however, prevent States from imposing a national law with more restrictive requirements for its own products (and only for these, not for imported goods) than those required by European legislation.

Marco So I understand why many people complain about the complexity of procedures in the European Union.

APS Yes, such criticisms are frequently heard. However, it should be borne in mind that European procedures are often considerably more transparent than many national procedures; and that close cooperation with the Member States is an advantage, because it avoids creating a huge European bureaucracy, and also because it involves the Member States in the implementation of shared policies.

Marco If we want to modify the Treaties, how should we proceed?

APS The procedure for reforming the treaties is regulated by Art. 48 of the TEU (as amended by the Lisbon Treaty). Any government of the Union, or the European Parliament or the Commission can propose draft amendments to the Treaties. The European Council (EC), having consulted the EP, decides by simple majority whether to convene a Convention composed of national parliamentarians, European parliamentarians, representatives of the governments and representatives of the Commission. The Convention examines the projects and adopts the proposal for an intergovernmental conference by consensus. After that, a Conference of representatives of the Member States agree together on the amendments to the treaties, which come into force only after they have been ratified by all the Member States of the Union.

This procedure is certainly complex and difficult to implement, above all because unanimity is required both for the final deliberation of the Intergovernmental Conference and for ratification by the Member States. There is also a simplified procedure for changes to a part of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, which can be carried out without the convocation of the Convention and without the participation of the EP, by a unanimous decision of the

European Council. But here too ratification by all the Member States of the Union is required. It is clear that these procedures make it difficult to implement changes. But to remove these obstacles, it would be necessary first of all to modify Art. 48 itself, and to do that it would be necessary to follow precisely the procedure I have just described! It is a tight knot, very difficult to disentangle. For this reason too, the Lisbon Treaty stipulates that a group of Member States can still make progress in the process of integration via special procedures, known as “enhanced cooperation” and “structured cooperation”. We will come to that later.

Marco The European Union is often accused of not being democratic. Comparison is made with “true” democracies, which are apparently national ones. Is this accusation justified?

APS It is justified only with regard to decisions in which the European Parliament has no say under the treaties. In cases where European laws are passed under the ordinary legislative procedure (that is by co-decision) between Parliament and the Council on the basis of proposals by the Commission, this criticism is unfounded because the Union fully satisfies the constitutional requirements of a federal parliamentary democracy. As for decisions by the government of the Union, everything that is decided by the Commission has the same basis of democratic legitimacy. As set down in the treaties, the Commission is nominated by the European Parliament on the basis of the results of a popular vote and can be dismissed by a vote in the Parliament itself. Those who accuse the Commission of not being elected disregard a basic principle: in parliamentary democracies the government is legitimised by parliament, not by direct election. Furthermore, both the designated President and the candidates for the role of Commissioner are questioned by the European Parliament before their appointment to ascertain their suitability for the post, in a

procedure which is often even more stringent than that operating for the national ministers within their own state.

Marco This construction seems to me simple and complex at the same time. But why did you wonder if I had read Montesquieu?

APS Because when I tried to answer your questions – “Who rules? Who governs? Who judges? “- you will have noticed that the European institutions fit well into the structure of the three powers (legislative, executive and judicial) as described by Montesquieu. Two important clarifications must be made, however. Firstly, European legislative power is exercised, on the initiative of the Commission, in co-decision by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers following the logic of a federal state; but in matters of great political sensitivity Parliament is excluded, as we have said, and the Council decides unanimously; secondly, the power of government is shared between the European Council and the Commission, as we have specified. These are two anomalies with respect to the theory of the separation of powers. Therefore, rather than a separation of powers we can say that there is a balance of powers in the institutional system of the Union.

Marco Should what you have called anomalies be corrected?

APS The exclusion of the European Parliament from an important part of the legislative function is unjustifiable in a democratic system; as is the power of veto in the Council. In two thousand five hundred years the only system that we have identified for taking joint decisions on human affairs, other than drawing straws, is counting the consensus. The Catholic Church itself, a master among institutions, established in 1179 that the pope would be elected if he obtained at least two thirds of the cardinals' votes. As for the second anomaly, in my opinion it is acceptable: in almost all legal systems, certain government functions are

exercised by other bodies, for example by the President of the Republic or by the Second Chamber, as in the case of the American Senate. It is fine for the European Council to continue to have the right to make political proposals as at present; provided that it does not claim that this is an exclusive right and as long as it does not create a second bureaucracy dependent on the European Council and the Council of Ministers in addition to that of the Commission.

European Union policies

Marco The crises that worry us today – above all youth unemployment, lack of growth and immigration – cannot be resolved by rejecting Europe, but by strengthening it, as you have said before. But I wonder if we can trust the European Union to promote wise policies; if there are really things we can give it credit for.

APS We can find an answer by looking at what the Union has done over the years and decades. The number of policies implemented by the EU is impressive. I'll just keep to a short list, which will not even be complete. Over a period of thirty years the EU has created the single market, and through an articulated process achieved the goal of free movement of people, goods, services and capital within the Union. To achieve this goal it was necessary to adopt shared legislation and a single currency, so as to guarantee competition and monetary stability. With the policy of actively promoting free competition, the Union has provided consumers with better products at competitive prices and at the same time promoted the growth of the economies of the Member States by encouraging and protecting entrepreneurial initiative. In this regard, the Union prohibits companies from fixing prices or dividing up markets and from taking advantage of their dominant position in a given market to exclude less influential

competitors. The Commission also exerts controls over the concentration of companies to prevent this affecting competition in the market; where a company already has a dominant position in the market, it is forbidden to abuse it.

The Single Act of 1986, and also in particular the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 extended the Union's competencies to the social dimension and to solidarity, allocating important resources to rural development, to the training of human resources, to maritime affairs and fisheries, innovation and education, and above all cohesion policies, which aim to reduce economic and social disparities between the different regions of Europe. This is not all. From Maastricht onwards the Union has pursued policies of environmental and territorial protection, training policies for young people and workers, policies of investment in research, consumer protection policies, interventions in favour of the European cultural heritage, rationalisation of the transport system, promotion of a common energy policy, common lines on public health and more.

Marco *Is this range of competencies not too wide?*

APS No, because in these fields the competence of the Union does not derive from an exclusive competence and often not even from a shared competence, but it is the result of interventions in support of national policies, and this by virtue of the fundamental principle of subsidiarity, which we'll come back to. The Union, under the Lisbon Treaty (Article 3 TFUE), has exclusive competence only in a few fundamental matters, for which a single and centralised discipline is indispensable for the proper functioning of the single market: that is to say the customs union, rules on competition, the monetary policy of the countries that adopt the euro, the conservation of the biological resources of the sea and the common commercial policy.

Marco But then in the matters in which the Union has exclusive competence, everything is done in Brussels and then orders are passed down from above? Are the Member States excluded in these matters?

APS First of all it must be said that these matters are identified in the founding treaties as areas in which the Member States have agreed that the Union has exclusive competence. But the Union exercises these powers in collaboration with the Member States. Let's take some examples. The monetary union, which gave birth to the euro, established the European Central Bank; the ECB is governed by a Council which takes the most important decisions on monetary policy. The governors of the central banks of the Member States that have adopted the euro have seats on the Council, and have voting rights. Competition policy in some areas has also been partially decentralised, and is implemented in part by national authorities.

Marco Are there common characteristics underlying the different policies of the European Union?

APS The thread that holds the policies together has been built around the three macro objectives we mentioned earlier: growth, cohesion and stability. After the Maastricht Treaty, extensive plans for intervention, known as "strategies", were drawn up to indicate how decisions would be taken and implemented. Among these we may mention the European Employment Strategy (EES, from 1997), and the 2010 Lisbon Strategy which has now merged into the Europe 2020 Strategy. The latter indicates the priorities for growth and focuses on employment, scientific research and technological development, climate change and energy, education and the fight against poverty and social exclusion. It is to be implemented in partnership with the Member States.

Many of these programmes identify some key thematic objectives which are to be realised with the support of funding from the European budget. It is important to note that a lot of them also relate to “European public assets” (for example defence, the environment and energy) which are also beneficial for Italy. Other strategies are more specific. For example, in December 2008 the Small Business Act was approved by the Union governments for the purpose of supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) at European level, thus making it possible to allocate large quantities of European funds; since 2013 European professionals have been placed on an equal footing with SMEs in terms of access to funds. Significant funding is also underway for digital development, as on many other fronts (EU funding for business, 2018). To combat youth unemployment, the “Youth Guarantee” programme has been set up (on the recommendation of the European Council of April 2013), providing funding for Member States and initiatives for youth employment.

Marco How are all these policies implemented?

APS The implementation of the policies takes place partly with direct funding, provided directly by the Commission, and partly with indirect funding provided to Member States and regions, which allocate it to the territory. One of the most important examples of direct funding is the 2020 Horizon Programme for research, innovation and technological development, with a total funding of €80 billion for the period 2014-2020. A key example of indirect funding is the European Social Fund for social inclusion and education, which has been in place since 1957, and has been allocated €90 billion for the period 2014-2020. The Cohesion Fund, which was established by the Single Act of 1986 and the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, promotes the development of disadvantaged regions and has funding of €63.4 billion for the period 2014-2020, which, when added

to the Regional Fund and the Social Fund, makes a total of €352 billion. Then there is the European Regional Development Fund and the Agricultural Guarantee Fund, which encourages the production of safe, high quality food whilst respecting the environment, and is endowed with €100 billion for the period 2014-2020.

Marco Are the recurrent accusations against the Brussels' bureaucracy founded?

APS These accusations are groundless, for several reasons. First of all, one must bear in mind that the administrative structure of the Brussels Commission which regulates such a vast market has in absolute terms fewer officials and employees than a large city such as Milan or Rotterdam. This is possible as a result of the fact that the European Union is not built as a capillary structure throughout the territory, because it entrusts national and even local administrations with the task of implementing the common directives. Furthermore, when Europe is accused, sometimes rightly, of an excess of minute regulations, it is never explained that national governments are almost always responsible for imposing these rules in Europe by rightly or wrongly insisting on identifiable characteristics for the purpose of making them exclusive, in order to protect the traditional products of their own country. Then these same governments at home complain about the effects of what they themselves demanded in Brussels.

Marco How are European resources allocated?

APS The budget is programmed following two different procedures. Every seven years the Union establishes the total amount of its resources (Multi-annual Financial Framework) based on a proposal from the Commission, in agreement with all the Member States and with the vote of the European Parliament. Within this multi-annual framework, the Union sets its annual budget.

Marco What does the multi-annual framework consist of?

APS The Union plans its development in terms of objectives and resources. Since these come mostly from Member States, the seven-year plan takes place with the active participation of governments. The European Commission draws up a proposal, which is discussed, voted on by the Council of Ministers unanimously and then approved if there is the assent of the European Parliament.

Marco Do we already know how the next multi-annual framework will be composed?

APS The next multi-annual Framework will cover the years from 2021 to 2027 and will be decisive for the future development of the Union. The European Parliament has dealt with the preliminary phase and has issued an articulated opinion, voted for on 18 March 2018³, which proposes an overall increase in resources from the current 1.04 % to 1.3 % of the Gross Domestic Product of the 27 countries of the Union; and above all, it has identified objectives which are in line with the basic needs of Europe, from environmental protection to migration, from new technologies to energy. The Commission in turn presented a detailed proposal on 2 May 2018⁴.

Marco I would like to have a better understanding of what the main objectives of the Union's multi-annual framework are.

³ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P8-TA-2018-0075+0+DOC+XML+V0//IT>

⁴ See http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-3570_it.htm

APS For the seven years from 2014 to 2020 the current budget⁵ includes €371.4 billion for economic, social and territorial cohesion (research and innovation, environment, natural resources, employment, social inclusion, small and medium-sized enterprises etc.), €420 billion for agriculture, fishing, rural development and the environment, €142.1 billion for growth and employment (research, education, energy, small and medium-sized enterprises, telematic networks and transport), €66.3 billion for international cooperation and humanitarian expenses, €17.7 billion for security policies, citizenship, health and justice, and €69.6 billion for administrative expenses.

Marco [Is this a lot or not enough?](#)

APS It is a lot if you look at the multiplicity of interventions, all rigorously selected and monitored. It is not enough if we think of how much remains to be done for sustainable growth, for employment, especially youth employment, for energy, new technologies, common defence: all objectives that require European policies and not only national ones. Only 1% of the Union's total gross national product is currently dedicated to the European budget, while the US federal budget exceeds 20% of GDP. The Union's annual budget, which involves over 400 million citizens through the policies I have mentioned, is now in the order of €140 billion, lower than that of some of the major European banking or industrial companies!

Marco [Where do the revenues of the Union come from?](#)

APS The revenues of the Union which are assigned to it on the basis of a unanimous regulatory decision of the governments are known as 'own resources', for example a

⁵ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/where-does-the-money-go_en.pdf

proportion of the revenue from VAT, that is to say the proceeds from duties levied at European borders. Revenue deriving from the transfer of a portion of the Gross National Product that each Member State confers annually to the Union also constitutes ‘own resources’; currently this source accounts for about three quarters of the Union’s budget; it varies obviously according to the size and the level of wealth of the individual states; it is in any case less than 1% of the national GDP.

Marco How could the EU budget be increased?

APS This can be done through recourse to new ‘own resources’ by levying taxes at a European level: for example the carbon tax, or taxes on financial transactions or on the Web. In the future such taxes may be essential to provide the resources necessary to develop Union policies. The carbon tax alone, which discourages carbon-producing energy sources and encourages the production of clean energy, could provide revenues of €75-90 billion a year, which could rise to €150 billion (Alberto Majocchi, 2018) with the added advantage that it would favour protection of the environment from climate risk. It has been calculated that it would not be difficult to increase the annual budget of the Union from the current 1% to 2.5% of European GDP, including defence costs.

Marco Can you give me an idea of how an annual Union budget is made up?

APS Let’s take the budget for the year 2017, which amounts to a total of €157.8 billion⁶.

The main items of expenditure are the following: €74.8 billion for smart and inclusive growth (including €53.5 billion for economic, social and territorial cohesion, for the

⁶ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/it/policies/eu-annual-budget/2017>

environment, for small and medium-sized enterprises and others; €21.3 billion for growth and employment); €58.5 billion for sustainable growth, agriculture and land conservation; €4.2 billion for security and citizenship; €10.1 billion for Global Europe, international cooperation and humanitarian spending; €9.3 billion for administrative expenses.

Marco Can you give me an idea of how much Italy paid in and how much it got back in a recent year?

APS Of course, this data is also easily available on the europa.eu portal. For example, in 2016, Italy paid €14 billion to the Union and received € 11.5 billion, of which 44% went to agriculture, 39% to regional policies, 11% to research and development, 2% to citizenship security and justice.

Marco Why does Italy get back less than it pays in to the Union?

APS Because despite crisis factors, Italy is still one of the richest countries in Europe. On the basis of the principle of solidarity, which is fundamental for the Union, a share of the resources of the European budget goes to support the development of the less well-off countries, including the countries of Eastern Europe. And it is not just a question of solidarity but also an economic calculation: as these countries grow, they will increase their consumption, to the benefit of even the most prosperous producer countries.

Marco In some regions and in some countries the European funds which are allocated are not fully used, and these countries include Italy, according to the newspapers.

APS This failure to use allocated funds is a very serious matter, which is often due to the approximation policy of the public and private beneficiaries: it is necessary to have

stable and competent organisational structures which on the one hand identify the needs and the correct procedures, on the other hand allow the allocated funds to be used effectively. The stability of the governments and the continuity of government policies play a fundamental role in creating the frameworks favourable for the use of these resources.

Marco How much weight do the lobbies, the interests of large companies, have in the policies of the European Union?

APS It is true that private interests are now often “stronger” than the general interest to which both parliaments and governments should respond. But lobbies should not necessarily be demonised, in some cases they contribute to the development of regulations more effectively than politicians or administrators could do on their own. However, there must be transparency, hence the creation of the European register of lobbies. When the circuit of the Commission to Council to European Parliament works properly, the Union is strong and effective. For example, it has imposed and is still imposing its authority on the very powerful US multinationals, Google, Apple and Amazon. Where it has the necessary powers the European Union is already a force to be reckoned with. A peaceful force, of course.

Marco You have just described many positive policies of the European Union, which we have seen intertwined with the critical points arising from the financial crisis. But I would like to tell you that there are some things that we young people all agree on: one is the abolition of borders, another is the Erasmus programme – the opportunity to carry out part of our university studies in another EU country. None of my friends, not even the anti-Europeans, argue against this.

APS It's true. I can tell you, indeed I must confess, that when the Erasmus programme started out, I was a university professor and I wasn't sure about it. Well, I was wrong. The opportunity to study for a year in another European country has proved to be a winning card, one of the greatest successes of the Union. I believe that one of the reasons why – as recent surveys show – young people all over Europe nowadays are much more positive about the European Union than other age groups is because of this. It is also possible to do work experience in Europe now and engage with other young people when planning new business initiatives. Europe itself has really become home for many people and this is wonderful.

Marco I understand that in spite of the limits you have mentioned, the economic policy of the Union also has other objectives, not only the stability of the currency and the sustainability of national budgets; is that so?

APS Yes. We can see this clearly if we recall classical economic theory. There are three objectives: stability, which keeps the value of money stable, avoiding the disastrous consequences of high inflation which destroys savings and the serious risk of deflation; sustainable growth – compatible with environmental protection and community development – which is the result of the rigorous discipline of free competition and the implementation of the single market; and equity, such as the cohesion policy, through which the states redistribute a share of the resources for the benefit of the poorest states and regions: solidarity is clearly present in European policies.

Despite the limits of the resources at its disposal, the Union pursues all these objectives, which are enshrined in the European Treaties. The single currency, competition, development and cohesion all have these goals. I'd like to add a consideration: if we look closely, these three

objectives, which are the basis of economic and social integration, correspond with what we have called the naves and the aisles of the cathedral of the Union: peace is a basic factor of stability, well-being is linked to growth, solidarity is achieved on the basis of social equity. There is a basic consistency in the design of this cathedral.

Marco If we wanted to summarise the most urgent imperatives for the present and the near future, what would be the priority for the EU's policies?

APS If it is true, as it is, that we must avoid the risk of recession, tackle globalization without imposing damaging barriers, increase sustainable development and combat the high level of unemployment, particularly among young people, the answer is very clear. Large-scale public investment by the EU is needed, targeted first and foremost at European public infrastructure, from higher education to research in land conservation, from alternative energy sources to artificial intelligence, to welfare and healthcare, from defence to the development of Africa. This is no longer a marginal opinion; it's now gaining tract even among economists. I need only cite the important project carried out by the high-level group led by Romano Prodi and Christian Sautter, who estimated the sum required to make the necessary investments in the period 2018–2030 at 100–150 million euros (Boosting Investment in Social Infrastructure in Europe, January 2018). “It makes no sense that public investment in Europe is stuck below the average in the rest of the world” (Fubini, *Corriere della Sera*, 20 February 2019).

The Member States cannot provide the necessary resources, to do so would jeopardise their budgets and further increase the public debt. And focusing only on exports (which often play a very important role and in which for instance Italy is very well placed, just after Germany) is not enough to

support growth and employment. The instruments we need to move in the right direction are available and we have already discussed them: from carbon tax to web tax to European bonds. This is the real priority. Naturally, we'll need to be sure that such resources are used in the correct way by both public and private operators, without diversions or inefficiency, under the control of specialised agencies which are themselves held responsible by the institutions of the EU.

A brief history of the Union, 1948-2017

Marco [When was the idea of the European Union first conceived?](#)

APS If we wanted to give even a brief history of the European Union we would need a whole book. Suffice to say that for centuries, visionary thinkers had imagined a political union of Europe, sometimes of the whole of Christianity, or even of the entire human race. In very different ways and in different contexts, Dante Alighieri and Immanuel Kant both wrote significant texts on this subject. Dante wrote that only an empire capable of settling a dispute between kingdoms and cities with the force of law would lead to peace (c.a. 1312, *Monarchia*, 1.10). Kant proposed the founding of a planetary federation between states as an instrument for perpetual peace (1784 and 1795). On a very different level and at different times, sovereigns from Charlemagne to Frederick II, from Charles V to Napoleon have tried to unify Europe, but have operated from the perspective of a military conquest which would have created a single state under one sovereign; and have been stopped by other states, by other sovereigns, by France, by England, by the Habsburgs, by Prussia. The last to use this method was Hitler: he wanted to bring the continent to servitude under Germanic rule. The idea of a true political union, however, matured later, at the height of

the terrible war against Nazism, which at that time seemed unstoppable. In 1941, from the internment camp to which he had been sent by fascists after ten-years in jail, Altiero Spinelli, with Ernesto Rossi and Eugenio Colorni, wrote the Manifest of Ventotene in which they proposed ideas which are still largely current in terms of a true federal political union which would have made intra-European wars finally impossible. It might have seemed like an unrealistic dream at a time when Europe had almost entirely fallen under Nazi rule.

Marco Did European integration only begin after the defeat of Nazism and fascism?

APS Its genesis and development are fascinating. In May 1948, an important congress, organized in The Hague, brought together forces which were favourable to the prospect of a political union of Europe, with the intervention of leading political and cultural figures from the countries of Western Europe. The first important goal was reached with the 1951 Treaty on the Coal and Steel Community (the ECSC). The Frenchman Jean Monnet was the architect of this development. He successfully proposed to the governments of France and Germany, who had just emerged from the Second World War, that they reform the coal and steel industries, removing control from national sovereignty. Coal and steel had for a century been the foundation of the industrial economy. At that time, production was still concentrated in the Ruhr area, which the two countries had fought over in three wars between 1870 and 1939. Monnet proposed entrusting the industry's management to a High Authority which would be independent of the governments, who would however be represented in a Council. A Parliamentary Assembly would be consulted on the rules together with the Council; and disputes would be settled by a Court of Justice. It is easy to see that here we already have a model for the basic

institutions of the current European Union with many of the characteristics of a federal and democratic state.

Monnet had very clear ideas: he wanted to lay the foundations for a wider union starting with coal and steel. His ultimate goal was expressed by the association he founded, which was unequivocally entitled: “Association for the United States of Europe”.

Marco Is there a specific cultural blueprint, an easily identifiable political ideology that led to the idea of the European Union?

APS This is an important point. And the answer is no. The idea of the European federation was arrived at by parallel routes, but independently, by political thinkers with different, sometimes even opposite, political ideologies. It’s worth noting that the Manifest of Ventotene was the outcome of discussions between Altiero Spinelli (a Marxist and ex-communist), Ernesto Rossi (a liberal) and Eugenio Colorni (a socialist). And if we look at the initial phase of the EU, we see that the three politicians who played decisive roles – Robert Schumann, Konrad Adenauer and Alcide De Gasperi – were Catholics; furthermore it was no coincidence that all three had lived in border regions in Europe: Alsace, the Rhineland and Trentino, at that time in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The European ideal unites different ideologies: liberalism, socialism and modern democracy; it brings together those of no religious faith with Catholics and Protestants; those of conservative and also of progressive views. It is within the context of this new supranational structure that majorities and minorities will form again on single policies, as it is natural that they should (and as already occurs today in the European Parliament). Before all this, and even now, as the European elections are approaching, the true division is between those who believe in the federal approach and those who oppose

it. The history of the European Union shows this clearly, right from the beginning.

Marco So the aim was political, not economic?

APS Indeed! Today we often forget that European integration was created with a political purpose in mind: to bring about the political unification of our continent, a federal unification. The aim was to permanently prevent the risk of new European wars, which had devastated our countries and the whole world, and for which Europe had been responsible twice in a few decades.

Marco What were the next steps?

APS In the early fifties, the federation was nearly achieved with the Treaty for the European Defense Community (EDC, 1952). This treaty, however, was not ratified in 1954 by the French Assembly. Then Monnet with others, started the project of the Common Market whose treaty was signed by the governments of France, Germany, Italy and Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg in 1957: the European Economic Community (EEC), originally six countries. But over time, due to the extraordinary success achieved by the economy of the six countries of the common market in a few years, the EEC expanded first to nine countries, then twelve, then to fifteen countries between 1973 and 1995, and finally to twenty-eight countries between 2004 and 2013. At the same time, in 1957, Euratom was also formed. Unfortunately, this treaty for the common management of nuclear energy, was rendered ineffective after De Gaulle's France acquired its own nuclear weapons. However, Euratom is still in force and could be updated to include renewable energy.

Marco How would you explain the success of the Common Market and the European Economic Community (EEC)?

APS An underlying reason for the success of the great project devised by Jean Monnet lies in the brilliant intuition that it was possible to unify two different aspects of life and planning that are very often divergent, or even in conflict, in one objective: interests and values. European integration constituted and constitutes a widely shared value because it enables lasting peace between our states and our peoples, who for centuries have fought each other. In the economic field, improving the quality of products and containing their prices is a value but also an interest, both for the previous reason, and because the most dynamic and healthiest companies in European countries have an interest in the abolition of border duties and the establishment of rules that guarantee free competition. The task was not simple: in the years after 1986, three hundred European directives were required for the development of the single market. Convergence of values and interests: this is perhaps the secret of the success of the common market, which later became the single market.

Marco [Have European institutions been transformed in these sixty years?](#)

APS I would summarise the fundamental stages of their development as follows: in 1976, on the initiative of the French president Giscard d'Estaing, what had previously been a parliamentary assembly composed of national deputies became the European Parliament elected by universal suffrage every five years by European citizens from 1979 onwards. This was a turning point of crucial importance because only a directly elected parliament has the political and institutional legitimacy necessary at Union level to represent European citizens who are represented at national level by national parliamentarians. Meanwhile, the practice of holding regular meetings of the Heads of State and Government was introduced, then formalized, giving life to the European Council which gradually became a

fundamental body for developing the political guidelines of the Union, as we have seen. In 1986, on the basis of the White Paper developed by Jacques Delors in 1985, the Single Act was launched. This treaty established the ambitious goal of the single market and accompanied it with the provision of a policy of economic support from Europe to the less wealthy regions of the Continent, namely, the Cohesion policy. It was the response to the political unification project launched by the European Parliament at the end of its first legislature in 1984, known as “Project Spinelli” because it was promoted by the great federalist of the Ventotene Manifest.

Marco And then we come to the Maastricht Treaty, if I’m not mistaken.

APS Certainly, this was signed in 1992. The Maastricht Treaty set two central objectives: it dictated the rules for the single currency, the euro, which was introduced in 1999. This had become necessary to guarantee the positive and competitive development of the single market which had previously been disrupted by competitive monetary devaluations. It also extended the competence of what has since become The European Union to foreign and security policy, as well as to internal politics and justice, two groups of competencies which became the second and third pillar of the Union, in addition to that of economic and monetary union (first pillar), all three being essential to the development of a future federal political union. Moreover, the 1992 Treaty introduced the fundamental principle of European citizenship, which every citizen of a Member State of the Union possesses alongside his or her own national citizenship; regulated the Cohesion policy (the previously mentioned solidarity); set out the principle of subsidiarity, a true pillar of the Union which we will return to shortly; allowed the launch of a Social policy of the Union; and brought under the competencies of the Union a

whole range of subjects, from transport to research, employment, youth policies and energy, as we have already seen with regard to Union policies. An impressive reform complex and the most important to date after the founding treaties of 1950 and 1957.

Marco [What other steps have been taken?](#)

APS The two subsequent treaties of Amsterdam (1997) and Nice (2000) introduced significant changes by extending the cases of majority decision in the Council of Ministers and making the codecision procedure between the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers more functional. The Charter of Rights of the Union was also approved in Nice and since 2009 has been an integral part of the treaties, a very important step forward. It should be emphasized that a Charter of Rights is an essential element of all modern constitutions.

Marco [And the innovations of these initial years of the third millennium?](#)

APS In 2004, the European Convention, composed of representatives of the European Parliament, national parliaments, governments and the Commission was concluded. It prepared a Constitution (called the Constitutional Treaty) which introduced new elements into the discipline of the treaties and rationalised the entire system of European legislation. But the Project failed because two referendums on ratification, in France and in the Netherlands, had negative outcomes in 2005. However, a new intergovernmental Conference took up the project again almost in its entirety in 2007, albeit in a less organic form and no longer using the term constitution, and so the Lisbon Treaty was approved. It consists of two connected treaties, the Treaty on European Union (TUE) which outlines the fundamental profiles of the Union, and the

Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFUE), which specifies the objectives and procedures of the Union.

Marco [Why talk about a constitution if there isn't one?](#)

APS It's true, the Lisbon treaty is a treaty, not a constitution, but in reality, the Union already has a constitution: the five basic institutions we have mentioned, the decisional rules, the established competencies, the Charter of Rights, which is now an integral part of EU law, all this has the characteristics that are essential to a constitutional public political body. It is therefore correct to believe that the European Union already has a constitution, even if imperfect and incomplete.

Marco [What are the innovations of the Lisbon Treaty?](#)

APS In addition to the inclusion of the Charter of Rights, this treaty furthered what had already been started in Nice in 2000 by introducing the principle that when the Council of Ministers decide by qualified majority, this requires a vote that has a majority of at least 55% of governments, representing at least 65% of the population of the Union. It made explicit the principle by which the Union is based on representative democracy. Furthermore, the Lisbon Treaty also regulated two procedures in a new way that allows for the launch of defense and innovation policies within the Union, even if not all governments share them: they are the procedures for Structured Cooperation and Enhanced Cooperation which have so far been rarely used, but which are potentially very promising as they allow the paralyzing requirement of unanimity to be overcome..

Marco [There are those who think that the Christian roots of Europe should be mentioned in a European constitution. Do you agree?](#)

APS I don't think it's necessary and I'll explain why. First of all, to deny these roots would be impossible as they are already well represented in the law of the Union as established in the treaties: in fact, what are the principles of Cohesion and Solidarity if not institutional embodiments of the concept of charity? What does the principle of dignity written into the European Charter of Rights represent if not the juridical expression of the concept in the Gospels of the equal dignity of every human being? These supreme principles have become part of the heritage of European civilization (even in places where and at times when they were and still are being violated ...), they have religious roots, but they are shared values – and a constitutionally binding force – even for those who are not believers, or belong to another religion. So it would be pointless to mention Christian roots, on the one hand because these are already well represented in the law of the Union, and on the other because this might alienate those who are not practising Christians from the European Constitution, whereas it is right that every citizen of every Member State of the Union should feel that they are a European citizen.

Marco [Have there been other important changes to the institutional structure of the Union since the Lisbon Treaty?](#)

APS The most important innovations took place in 2011 and 2012, to deal with the crisis that exploded in 2008. This seriously endangered the survival of the euro, and with it the entire European economic and monetary union, as we have seen. The European Central Bank has successfully implemented incisive policies to save the euro in recent years. The Governments, in turn, have agreed a set of measures to keep those national budgets (firstly Greece and secondly Italy – for which public debt risked bringing the banking system, the economy of the country and the European economic union itself to bankruptcy) under surveillance. The European Stability Mechanism (ESM), the

Fiscal Compact and other complex measures served this purpose as did the other tools that we mentioned regarding the risks that the Union can take. The austerity policy, sponsored primarily by Germany, has had merits and demerits. Today the crisis is being overcome with the sole exception of Italy, unfortunately, and development policies which are still not sufficient, as we have already seen, have been initiated. The institutional framework has remained that of Lisbon in 2009.

Marco After what I've heard I'm beginning to realize how complex the European project is but, above all, how ambitious the original concept was. Who can we consider the blue fathers of the union project to be?

APS The roots go back to the distant past and extend from ancient cosmopolitanism to the medieval period of Dante and then to the modern age with Kant, but if we want to limit ourselves to the European Union as it exists today, two people are really fundamental and can be considered the "fathers" of Europe. We have already mentioned them: Altiero Spinelli and Jean Monnet. I'll answer your question by giving a very short profile of both: Altiero Spinelli, born in 1907, committed himself to the fight against fascism within the new Communist Party as a teenager. At the age of just 21, he was sentenced by the Special Court to ten years in prison (1928-1937). During these years he passionately devoted himself to study. Due to the influence also of Ernesto Rossi (imprisoned by fascists), the great economist Luigi Einaudi and the English federalists (Strachey, Robbins, Lord Lothian), he came to the conviction that the way forward was not Soviet communism but the construction of a European federation. This was why he was harshly ostracized by his own communist prison mates. Later, during his reclusion on Ventotene with Ernesto Rossi and Eugenio Colorni, he wrote the famous Manifesto of 1941, which we mentioned previously.

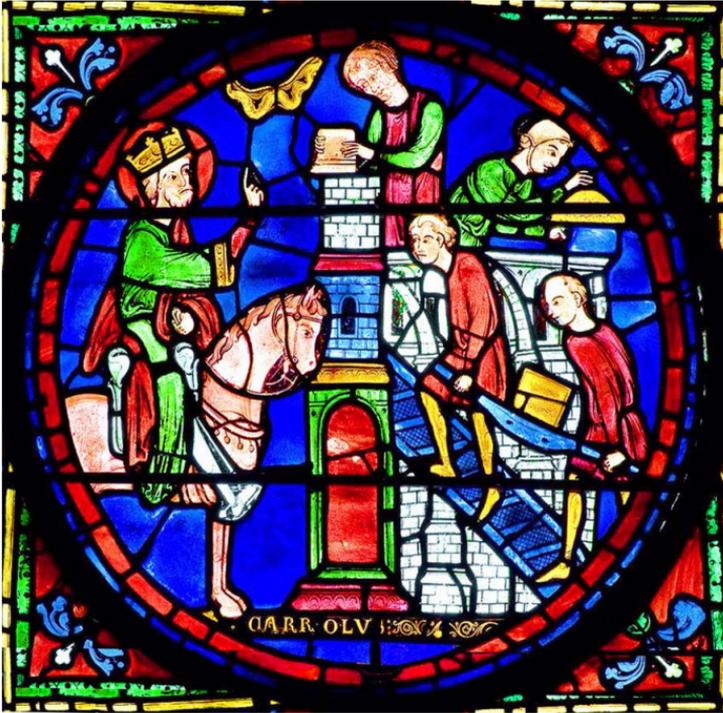
In 1943 he founded the European Federalist Movement. In 1953-54 he played a fundamental role in designing the Treaty of the European Defence Community (EDC) that would lead directly to the federation. Some years after the failure of this project, he resumed his battle; he became first a European commissioner and then was elected to the first legislature of the European Parliament and in 1984 he managed to gather a majority on a Project (Project Spinelli) which outlined a profound reform of the treaties. The Project was not accepted by the governments, but indirectly generated the Single Act of 1986 and then the Treaty of Maastricht of 1992. Spinelli wrote fundamental essays on the politics of Europe and also an impressive autobiography (How I tried to become wise, 1984) . He died in 1986.

Marco [And Jean Monnet?](#)

APS The European Union as founded in 1951, as developed from 1957 onwards and as exists today, is the fruit of Jean Monnet's thought and action in its institutional and operational foundations, as we have seen. This man, who was descended from a family of Cognac producers, developed a so-called "cosmopolitan vocation" from a young age that led him to the Secretariat of the League of Nations between the two wars, and then to successfully initiate tight integration between the United States, Great Britain and France in the fight against Nazism, from 1940 to the end of the Second World War. He was the creator of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) of 1951 and was its first president. When the EDC failed, he sensed that the battle for a European political union could resume with the establishment of a large common European market: the fundamental treaty of 1957, as well as the contemporary one on Euratom, were prepared by him with the help of a few enlightened officials, in particular the Frenchmen Bernard Clappier and Pierre Uri.

The institutional structure of the Union of today is still substantially the one he designed in the 1950s, with the four institutions we have described. He also wrote a fascinating autobiography (*Mémoires*, 1976), which everyone should read, along with that of Altiero Spinelli. Several ideas formed the base: that ideals and interests could join in giving life to the European union; that only institutions, not people, can “become wiser”; that difficulties and crises could be the matrices of progress towards the European union; that “we do not join states, we unite people”; and that the European Union “is only a step towards the forms of organizing the world of tomorrow”. A giant.

Of course, the European Union is not just the creation of these two men. Many others have had central roles, from the first great politicians of the second post-war period (Schumann, De Gasperi, Adenauer, Spaak) to Giscard d’Estaing, promoter of the direct election of the European Parliament in 1976, from Mario Albertini to Jacques Delors, the greatest President of the Commission, in office from 1984 to 1995, the years of the Single Act and the Maastricht Treaty). And many others...



IV. The Future of the Union

A Europe of concentric circles

Marco Today the Union has 28 Member States; there will be 27 when the UK leaves. Are they all in agreement? Are they all really in favour of a more advanced Union? Where should the borders of Europe be?

APS Britain's decision to leave the Union has been a dramatic, partly emotional choice, which in my opinion will be damaging to the UK; only the future will tell. We must

not forget however that the UK has played a fundamental role in the history of Europe. The modern constitutional democracies, founded on the separation of the three powers, grew out of the English 17th century model. The Industrial Revolution began in England. Few people know that the first to theorise federalism were British, among these J. R. Seeley in the second half of the 19th century and Lord Lothian in the 1930s. England, like Scotland, will always be an integral part of Europe and European civilisation, even after Brexit.

Marco [And the East European countries?](#)

APS The extension of the Union to the Eastern European countries was necessary after the fall of communism; they are an essential part of Europe and its history. However today different countries have very varied positions on the future of the Union. Some of these – for instance Poland and Hungary, which with neighbouring countries are part of the so-called Visegrad group – have political positions of closure towards a future political union, towards respect for the principles of democracy as established by the treaties and the Charter of Rights, as well as towards any acceptance of migrants, other than on a voluntary basis. We will see where these positions lead. A revival of nationalism is under way, today renamed ‘sovereignism’, and not only in Eastern Europe, as we know ...

Marco [At this point I wonder whether a differentiated European Union is possible? A Europe, so to speak, of concentric circles, with a nucleus of countries that form a true federation of states, plus other peripheral countries which are nevertheless part of the single market?](#)

APS This is a really basic question. In Europe it has been discussed for decades. I wrote about this subject exactly 30 years ago in 1988, before Maastricht. Well, the answer is yes, but only under certain conditions. Firstly we need a

tight nucleus including both France and Germany, because the heart of this political union, its original inspiration and its genetic code have arisen from the ashes of two World Wars. It is possible because so far European integration has indeed been differentiated. The Schengen agreement which established the free movement of citizens between EU countries began with a group of Member States and is still not shared by all today. The social policy of the Union, established in Maastricht, was initially rejected by the UK. And above all, 19 countries have adopted the single currency, the Euro, while others are preparing to do so and yet others do not want to.

Marco [But how can concentric circles in the Union coexist?](#)

APS In principle, all the countries that have ratified the European treaties – and therefore have recognised that the competencies of the Union are those established by the treaties – should accept decisions on all the issues approved by the majority of governments and by the European Parliament, naturally respecting the principle of subsidiarity¹. But history, as Supreme Court Judge Oliver Wendell Holmes said regarding the origins of law, ‘has not been logic; it has been experience’. And experience of European integration shows that in many circumstances it is necessary to accept a differentiated level of integration. Certain policies can be shared by some EU governments but not by others, at least initially as shown by the examples I mentioned.

Marco [How would EU institutions work in these cases?](#)

APS The real crux of the problem lies here. While a differentiated geometry for single policies is relatively simple, things get complicated if the differences concern the functioning of the institutions, which belong to everyone. Since 1997, the European Treaties, in particular the Lisbon Treaty currently in force, have allowed for the possibility of

deciding on “reinforced cooperation” for innovative policies, provided they are shared by at least eight EU countries; and there is also a more restricted “structured cooperation” for defence. In the Council, only governments that decide to proceed would vote, after having proposed the initiative to everyone. Moreover, the Eurogroup which brings together representatives of the individual Eurozone governments already exists.

Marco Would the European Parliament and Commission participate?

APS The Commission undoubtedly would, as it already does now. As for Parliament, the treaties don't mention this point. It is true that the regulations in the Lisbon Treaty on the cooperation between the two refer only to governments and the Parliament seems to be excluded. But it is also true that an article of the treaty (Article 333 TFEU) provides for governments of “enhanced cooperation” to decide to adopt the ordinary legislative procedure; that is, to decide also by majority, in a joint decision with the European Parliament. Certainly, for this to take place an initial unanimous vote from the countries that want “enhanced cooperation” is necessary. This is an obstacle, but perhaps not insuperable after the departure of the UK, which never would have agreed to what is called the “passerelle clause”. We can imagine that in future the discussion on these innovative policies will be open to all in the European Parliament, but the vote will be limited only to the MEPs elected by the countries that have embraced the “reinforced” cooperation. This route is therefore viable.

Marco In this case there would be economic union between all 27 countries and political union only for those who want it, provided (as you said) it included at least France and Germany?

APS Yes but these things are never as easy as they seem. In fact the single market isn't only a market, as we've already said. It includes support for poorer areas, solidarity, common commercial policies and protection of basic rights. It's obvious that these are not only economic but also political competencies. So even the idea of concentric circles is beset with obstacles. Only the future will tell whether and how these can be overcome,

Marco Thinking again of the future, where should the boundaries of a united Europe be?

APS Among the countries to be included in the Union are the Balkan states (Serbia, Montenegro, Albania and Bosnia). They are engaged in long and complex negotiations, which are different for each country. We hope that they will soon be concluded. Then there are other countries on the borders of Europe – to the east Ukraine, Armenia and others, including Russia itself, and then the Mediterranean countries – with which the European Union could and should form economic and also security agreements, without them being part of the Union and its institutions. Finally, there is Turkey, with which negotiations for entry into the Union were in progress. This was very difficult given the size of the country and its cultural and religious differences with the rest of Europe. Public opinion in Europe is mainly opposed to its entry, although in my opinion, in principle, religion shouldn't be an impediment. But entry into the Union, which divides the Turks themselves, is now impossible because of the authoritarian trend in Turkey which is incompatible with the principles of the European Union.

Extent of the challenge and levels of government

Marco All the problems, all the challenges that have emerged from our conversation lead us to expect an angry reaction that in its intensity could put pressure on the world of politics to take action, to find better solutions to these problems than it has done so far. Instead the reaction is an increase in abstention from voting, the consensus gained by populist movements, and even a vote to reject the Union, as we saw with the British (Brexit) referendum. Aren't these forms of reaction from citizens alarming?

APS They certainly are. We have already spoken of the serious risks we would run if we were to adopt the simplistic recipes of populists and neo-nationalists. But we often forget how positive joining the EU has been over the decades for a country like Italy. From the 1950s to the '90s, per capita income in Italy increased fivefold and exports of our most valuable products expanded enormously. Italy owes these results, and others, largely to the fact that we accepted the challenge of Europe.

Marco But why then this high level of abstention?

APS Unfortunately, this is a widespread evil today, not only in Europe. For decades, only half of the electorate has voted in the US. It is an aspect of the crisis of democracies which must be examined in depth, something which we cannot do here; in regard to this though, there are many diagnoses, many suggested remedies. Democracy, and in particular representative democracy, is a value that is appreciated above all when we lose it; like the air we breathe, like political freedom, like health. However, I would like to remind you of an essential point: many deficiencies in politics that are at the root of the growing disaffection of citizens with representative democracy and

voting are actually the consequence of the fact that these problems cannot be solved at national level; this is certainly not the only reason for the crisis of confidence in politics, but it is an important component, albeit mostly undervalued.

Marco Is there a link between abstention in national elections and that in the European elections?

APS I think so. In a sense, the two phenomena derive from symmetrically opposed deficiencies. Many people do not vote in European elections because they believe that the EU is not responding adequately to the need for security and growth; and this is largely true, as we have already seen. In national elections many of those who abstain are equally disillusioned, but here the crisis of the national state depends to a large extent on the lack of a supranational level. In key sectors such as security and development, investment and defence, immigration and new technologies, this is the only way to change the condition of our people and ensure a future for our countries. People understand that this is a problem and see that it is not being dealt with, or the solutions offered are only empty words, and react accordingly. So the real responsibility lies with national political classes, which refuse to entrust Europe with the powers and instruments it needs to resolve such problems. To put it bluntly and in general terms; if a problem cannot be dealt with at national level because it is beyond the reach of the national state, it will remain unresolved unless it is entrusted to a higher level of government, which in many cases will be the European level.

Marco But there are also global challenges that go beyond the European level, from global warming to wars, nuclear threats and the extreme poverty of over a billion people, from genocide to epidemic diseases and the reduction of biodiversity, just to name a few.

APS These are huge global challenges that can only be solved (perhaps ...) at global level. But even here I would like to stress that Europe has an important, indeed essential, role to play. Or rather, it could have, if it were politically united. On these issues, Europeans have a more mature, more advanced global political vision, than all, or almost all, other countries and continents. However, this always depends on the same condition. Without a federal political union, this potential will never be realised, it will not have the necessary impact on world politics, which will be increasingly dominated by the larger states.

Marco If I understand correctly, you are saying this: the challenges and the problems that cannot be solved at a political level are a determining factor in the negative reaction that the electorate show by voting for populists and rejecting the existing order, or by abstaining in elections.

APS That's right. I would like to put this in more general terms. Every problem, every goal, every obstacle in the field of collective decisions – and therefore in the field of politics – must be approached and if possible resolved using appropriate instruments, with the support of institutions capable of achieving the aims. If a goal is attainable at local level (for example, a public garden or park), it should be addressed at that level; at regional level (for example, the local transport network), the same applies; questions such as healthcare and education, social security, craftsmanship, the protection of the territory and many other issues should be decided on at national level; if issues can only be resolved at continental level, for example matters relating to the single market and defence, it will not be the individual Member State but the European Union that will be able to deal with it, as we have already seen; finally, in the case of a global level problem, global institutions are needed. This choice of the right level must of course be justified according to the principle of subsidiarity, that is at the lowest possible level,

the closest to the citizens. So we have to determine the institutional level on the basis of the nature of the problems to be addressed. If we insist on arguing that the individual Member State can and must do everything, we will run up against hard reality. And the result is the reaction to politics that we are experiencing not only in Italy, but everywhere in Europe.

Marco But don't different levels have to interact with each other?

APS Certainly, this happens very often with matters of shared competence, of which we have already spoken. And rightly so. The European Union develops programmes and funding in cooperation with individual Member States. And at each level, including in cases of cooperation, the principles of democracy must be respected, which means that the power of government is legitimised by Parliament and the balance of powers,

Marco If all this is true, then we have to conclude that national level politicians bear the main responsibility for not leading us in the right direction. A very serious level of responsibility!

APS It is human nature that when a sovereign or government holds a position of power, they are not willing to spontaneously strip themselves of that power. Our small nation states are actually no longer sovereign in the global world, politicians know this well. But they do not want to acknowledge it and refuse to grant the EU those powers it does not yet possess.

Marco Why do you insist so much on the need to adopt the principle of majority decisions?

APS There are two reasons. Firstly, there is the question of efficiency; as we have already mentioned, centuries of

experience have taught us that when we want to decide together as equals on questions of common interest, and there is disagreement, we have to make a head-count, otherwise nothing gets decided. The second reason is a question of principle; since the competences and objectives of the Union are established by the treaties, with the agreement of all the Member States, if a decision is to be taken it is necessary that in case of dissent the minority accepts the choice of the majority, as long as that choice has been legitimately adopted; a union exists only if in matters of common interest, each member is willing to accept the opinion of the majority, simple or qualified as the case may be. When this does not happen, when the treaties impose the unanimity rule even where the matter falls within the competence of the Union, it can be assumed that there the union simply does not exist.

Marco We are then, as the French say, “au pied du mur!” – up against the wall. Are we facing an obstacle that cannot be overcome?

APS No. The path of union that is behind us is long and full of great results which are recognised throughout the world. Also, some of the choices that the Union has made on institutional questions are truly enlightened, innovative. What is lacking is the momentum to take the last decisive steps on the same path. The wind of pessimism and mistrust, accentuated by the sovereignist drift, could change direction, and some significant signals have already been noted, above all among young people. The great speech by Emmanuel Macron at the Sorbonne on 26 September 2017 marked a real and positive turning point. Once again, I repeat that the 2019 European election will be decisive. History, which is always unpredictable, takes unexpected turns. But we must beware of thinking that the road is an easy one...

Marco What do you mean when you talk about enlightened institutional choices?

APS I'll give just one example. We have already said that in a federal model, democratic legitimacy is based on two pillars; a representative chamber, elected by universal suffrage on a proportional basis, and a chamber of states. In the United States, the Constitution of 1787 established that in the Senate (chamber of States), there are two senators for each of the States of the Federation, regardless of the number of inhabitants of each State. This was the "great compromise" that paved the way to the American federation. But, as we have seen recently, one possible result is that in this way the majority in the Senate is made up of senators elected by a majority of States (for example 51 senators out of 100) who have nevertheless overall received a significantly lower number of votes, millions of votes fewer than those of the other party. For the EU's present system of government, another criterion was adopted, as we have already mentioned when we talked about the Lisbon Treaty. When a law or a decision must be taken by the Council of Ministers by qualified majority, this is achieved only if the resolution receives the vote of 55% of ministers representing at least 65% of the population of the Union. Thus, the two criteria of representation are combined in a harmonious way. And this is important, because implicitly, while taking into account the overall European population, it is implicitly acknowledged that the Union constitutes the institutional structure of a single people.

Marco And yet, from what you have said it seems to me that "completing the cathedral" is not at all easy, if the obstacle to it is the fierce resistance of national governments.

APS Yes, the resistance is fierce, sometimes explicit but often muted and under the radar. Nicolò Machiavelli

explained five centuries ago why the goal is so difficult to achieve: giving life to “a new order of things” is a difficult task because those who promote it are weak and they lack the necessary powers while those who defend the old order do so by any means. The media tend to believe and to aim to make us believe that what matters is the existing power and that the new order is just a utopia.

Marco I’m inclined to describe the situation we are in as “the banality of evil”. We still do not have a “new order” capable of governing globalisation, and as a result, national powers use this impotence as an alibi to reduce their policies to individualism, careerism and privileges, without realising that this irresponsible attitude in itself becomes the reason for the impasse. Perhaps: if we as citizens became more aware of this irresponsibility this could be the key to a solution?

APS It’s true. In a certain sense, the federalist ideal stems precisely from the “banality of evil”; it is the fruit of twentieth century totalitarian ideologies.

Marco What are the main things that could mark a turning-point towards a federal structure of the Union?

APS We can approach this in two ways: on the one hand with the strength of reason and with civil and moral passion, two factors whose strength is never to be underestimated; on the other with the contribution of three determining factors, which are effective above all if they work together. These are: crises in the old order, which force us to identify new ways forward; the leadership of one or more politicians who realise the potential of the new order and link their political fortunes to it; finally, “pressure from the bottom up”, that is the pressure of public opinion favourable to the basic prospect of integration. The European Union as it exists today was built with the contribution of all three of these factors. And it is possible that this is how it will be

completed, because the three factors are still essential to continue the journey.

The unfinished cathedral

Marco You said earlier that a European constitution already exists, you compared the Union to a large cathedral. I would like to understand better why you chose this image.

APS I'll try to summarise the reason for the metaphor in a few sentences. A number of sovereign states and political orders, which had developed over the course of fifteen centuries in a constant relationship of cultural exchange, of civilised competition yet also of incessant armed conflicts, culminating in two ruinous world wars, embarked on a path that had as its goal the construction of a federal political union. Over the course of two thirds of a century this project has led to a profound economic integration, achieved by means of a new and original institutional structure. The European Union of today has many characteristics of a federal constitution: it has a Parliament, a Chamber of States (the two Councils), a Government authority (the Commission); it has a Charter of Rights and a Court of Justice; it has a single currency, a procedure for approving laws inspired by the principles of democracy, it possesses specific competences, some of which are exclusive, while many others are shared with the Member States. What has happened in Europe has no comparable precedent in history.

Marco So why describe the cathedral as incomplete?

APS Because there are matters for which, despite being within the competence of the Union, legislative and governmental decisions are not consistent with democracy as Parliament is excluded, and also because the veto of one government can block everything. Because the Commission's powers of government are insufficient.

Furthermore, the treaties do not give the Union and its Parliament the competence to levy taxes autonomously, in coordination with the governments. Now, without its own adequate, democratically managed resources, the policies the Union needs are often impossible. Finally, the procedure for amending the treaties should also change, dropping the requirement for the unanimity of governments and national ratification; the most ancient and glorious Constitution, that of the United States, would never have come into being if there had not been the clause under which the approval vote of nine out of thirteen Colonies was sufficient to bring it into force. This is why I chose the metaphor of the cathedral: the European Union can be seen as a grandiose, welcoming building which nevertheless still lacks the protection of a vaulted roof, without which it not only runs the risk of damage from the weather but may even collapse.

Marco From what we have said so far, I conclude that the main mistake, the main shortcoming of the Union, as it has been realised so far, consists in not having been able to adopt the right strategies to tackle fundamental issues for European citizens, from migration to sustainable development, from new technologies to security and defence. And this is because on these issues it has continued to move in a national perspective and not at European level; therefore, without an effective European government equipped with the necessary resources and controlled by a European Parliament. Is that right?

APS It is. The proof is in the fact that in the areas in which these conditions exist, because the treaties have established them – so for the single market, for competition, for the European currency, for international trade, for support for poor regions, for agriculture – the Union has been and is absolutely effective. Indeed, it has often established itself as a world power and leader. The national governments and parliaments are responsible for this fundamental flaw,

which threatens the very survival of the Union because it makes it incapable of dealing with the challenges. In particular French governments blocked the route leading to a federal Union structure on several occasions (as in 1954, in 1992 and in 2005).

Marco But are there specific responsibilities of individual EU countries?

APS Each EU Member State has its own responsibility for what the Union could be but (still) is not. To summarise quickly; France has failed to put its military strength and its role as a founding member of the United Nations at the service of the Union; Germany has failed to counterbalance the advantages that the single currency has given it (without the euro, the mark would have been significantly overvalued, harming its exports) adopting an economic policy that would lower the excessive surplus of its balance of payments, which damaged other member countries; and so far it has opposed increasing the EU budget. The Visegrad countries of Eastern Europe are moving in the opposite direction to some of the key principles of the EU Charter of Rights, putting the rights and powers of their democracies at risk.

Marco What about Italy?

APS Italy has failed on many fronts. Its exorbitant public debt puts at risk not only the Italian budget but also the single currency: we talked about this at the beginning. The administration of justice in Italy is too slow, and, like our other weaknesses, this discourages investments from abroad, despite our very efficient system of production for export. Italy has an unacceptable rate of tax evasion of more than 100 billion euros a year; it would be enough to recover half of this to solve the country's investment and welfare problems; Italy has four mafias that paralyse entire regions of the country. And I'll stop here ... It is clear that

all this is seriously damaging both within the country and within the framework of the European Union. And only Italy can correct these defects, certainly not Europe, as we have already said.

Marco I am surprised that in your replies I find a mixture of positive judgments for the European Union, and of critical assessments. I don't know which way the scales tip ...

APS You're right. One fact should not be forgotten, especially in moments of crisis like this.

The European Union is no longer a plan dreamed up by enlightened thinkers over the centuries nor a project like those attempted in the past by powerful and ambitious conquerors and sovereigns. Today it is more than just an economic, peaceful and democratic reality, it is a political reality which has allowed our people to democratically achieve unprecedented goals of peace, well-being and solidarity; it is an original model of world importance. This is why I would like our conversation not to lose sight of the metaphor of the cathedral. An unfinished cathedral, however. And therefore at risk, as is the case with even grandiose buildings, when they are still without a roof to protect them from storms. By this I mean that the European Union is at risk because the national political forces have been hesitating for too long to intervene with the basic construction work necessary to complete it.

Marco Is there any real hope that these obstacles can be overcome?

APS History, as I repeat, is never predictable. For the Greeks, Hope was the last divinity left at the bottom of Pandora's box. Well, there is hope. Mutual trust and solidarity could be rekindled. I want to reiterate that the European election of May 2019 may prove decisive if a pro-European majority prevails in the newly elected Parliament.

The European Parliament itself approved two very important motions in February 2017. Firstly, it clarified what initiatives could already be taken under the terms of the Lisbon Treaty (we talked about this when discussing concentric circles); this is the Bresso-Brok Project. And it also declared which reforms should be introduced if the treaties are changed; this is the Verhofstadt Project.⁷

At the heart of the changes proposed by Parliament we find, in my opinion, some institutional reforms which maintain continuity. These involve making co-decision with the European Parliament a general rule for all legislative decisions of the Union; endowing the EU with its own fiscal powers; giving the Commission the necessary governmental powers for all the competences of the Union; eliminating the right of veto in the two Councils; and allowing changes to the treaties by qualified or super-qualified majority of national governments and parliaments. Nothing less, nothing more than this. These are the last steps, but they are perhaps the most difficult. This is the dome of the cathedral.

⁷ EP project on reforming the Treaties, 15 February 2017 <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P8-TA-2017-0049+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>



V. Europe's lights and shadows

Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, sovereignty, democracy, principle of subsidiarity

Marco You spoke of the principles on which the European Union building (sorry, cathedral) is built. Can you tell us about them in a nutshell?

APS The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (signed in 2000) divides those rights into six categories, namely dignity, freedoms, equality, solidarity, citizens' rights and justice. Proclaiming the dignity of every single human being is the legacy of Europe's Christian heritage. The right to freedoms (personal freedom from arbitrary actions by the powers that be, freedom of thought, association and religion) has arisen from the culture of the Age of Enlightenment in Europe. But the right to freedom also includes the four freedoms on which the economic union is based, i.e. the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital. The principle of equality of rights and opportunity is the product of modern history, from the eighteenth to the twentieth century; as is also the requirement to respect principals of justice, including social justice as well as personal and collective justice. European citizenship is an expression of that aspect of the Union which relates to political rights. And solidarity prescribes the aim to achieve a dimension of the Union which is not merely economic, in order to create progressively less unequal conditions among European regions as we have previously mentioned with regard to "cohesion" policies. These are fundamental principles which the Charter of Rights should guarantee and the implementation of which is now being discussed by the European Parliament.⁸

Marco Among the four freedoms laid out in the Union's treaties is indeed the free movement of capital. Our virtual conversation partner Elena, whom we mentioned at the beginning, would counter that it's precisely this free movement of capital which causes disasters like the one we experienced recently in the form of the financial crisis.

APS First of all, we mustn't forget that one of the fundamental requirements for the sustainable growth of an

⁸ <http://barbara-spinelli.it/author/redazione/> (December 2018)

economy, essential for progress, is the contribution of private investment both into the country and outward to other countries, and only the free movement of capital can guarantee this. It's undoubtedly true, however, that there have been, and continue to be, risks involved and we've seen the serious harm that can be done. It must therefore be clear that the free movement of capital does not mean we should give carte blanche to those who have capital to invest or move around without limits. Nor should we believe that the marketplace, even the capital market, is always able to self-correct, as many in financial and academic circles persist in believing.

We also need to put together a set of rules for finance and make sure they're adhered to, together with a system of government instruments which allow for a margin of discretion.

It's a complicated issue because finance nowadays moves huge amounts of money around in a very short space of time. However, rules do exist and we must undoubtedly put others in place. For example, there should be a certain degree of fiscal harmonisation across the countries of the Union so that in future it becomes impossible to distort competition between companies by unfairly facilitating capital movements from abroad, attracted by excessively low tax on profits. Similarly, we need to take action on the transparency of transactions, on the abuse of dominant market positions and on the possible abuses perpetrated by multinationals. I would like to point out once more that it's been possible to force multinationals to respect the rules only when and because the European Union has taken action and used its powers. The Member States of the Union acting individually don't have the necessary clout. And of course, this also applies to the rules governing capital within the Union.

Marco So, would you mind finishing the list of the Union's fundamental principles?

APS I'll just talk about two which are clearly set out in the treaties, as well as in the Charter of Rights itself. The first is the principle of democracy, which can of course be expressed in different constitutional forms of representative democracy in each Member State: parliamentary or presidential, with parliaments elected on proportional representation or on a ballot system, with single member constituencies or nationwide lists of candidates and so on. All these constitutional models are democratically legitimate as they are based on universal suffrage, that is on the sovereignty of the people. Moreover, the Union also provides for forms of direct democracy.

Another of the Union's fundamental principles is subsidiarity, which lays down that only issues and needs that can be dealt with and resolved satisfactorily at a European level shall be referred to the Union, which will act within the framework of the Union's competences as laid down in the EU treaties. When a matter can be resolved at national level, this must prevail. The rationale behind subsidiarity is that political decisions should preferably be taken at the lowest possible level. This is the level which is the closest to the individual, who is the source of all sovereignty. So, depending on the issues involved, decisions should be made by the municipality, the region, the nation State, the European Union and international organisations, the latter being first and foremost the United Nations.

Marco But how do you decide on the right level of subsidiarity for each issue?

APS Some competencies are reserved by the Treaties for the European level only. The Union has exclusive competence for only a few areas, which we've spoken about: in particular, the rules on competition, international

trade and monetary union. The single market could never work if there were many different national legislations on these matters. Many of the Union's other competencies, which are also laid down in the Treaties, are called "shared", because both the individual Member States and the Union can legislate and adopt regulations on the issues covered by the competency. When the Union adopts its own regulations or directives, these prevail over national legislation. But if any State or other subjects consider that the Union has exceeded its mandate, thereby violating the principle of subsidiarity, they can oppose the decision and ask the European Court of Justice to intervene. The decision to legislate or act at the European level on a certain issue belonging to the shared competencies of the Union is of course a political one, taken as such by the institutions of the Union, namely the Commission, the Councils and the European Parliament.

Marco *Is the principle of subsidiarity consistently applied?*

APS This principle is far from being applied consistently. It should work in both directions, from the top down and the bottom up depending on the situation, whereas often more attention is paid to avoiding an excess of European rules rather than the other way around. There are choices to be made that should quite clearly be referred to a higher level, but often this doesn't happen, for example with regard to European public goods such as alternative energy, avant-garde technology, artificial intelligence, environmental policies, as well as security and defence, which we've already mentioned. A lot remains to be done before this principle can be said to be properly applied.

Marco *Managing these policies at a European rather than just a national level means acknowledging that the Union has its own sovereignty. But isn't sovereignty the prerogative of a nation state?*

APS Many still share the idea that sovereignty is an exclusive attribute of the nation state, even at the level of political and legal theory. But this idea is wrong for historic, theoretical and factual reasons. Historically, the doctrine of the identity of a people, a nation and a state is a recent one, dating back to the romantic culture of the early nineteenth century which subsequently degenerated in the twentieth century, ending up in nationalist and racist ideologies that have led to the two world wars. Before then, “fatherland”, “nation” and “state” were distinct entities. In principle, although the roots date back much further, modern political theory since Rousseau has attributed sovereignty to the people and consequently to each individual who can exercise it either directly or – more often than not – via political representation, by voting. Finally, in actual fact, nation states are no longer sovereign today because they no longer have real power in the globalised world. The European Union is the answer to this situation; it is the only way for states to regain their lost sovereignty.

For these reasons, we must adopt a different understanding of sovereignty. If the people as individuals are sovereign, then sovereignty can be exercised at various levels depending on the issues and the needs of individuals and the community. In terms of territory, there are five main levels: the municipality (village or town), the region, the nation state, the continent (Europe for us) and the world. People are citizens (and sovereign) in each one of these communities. The monolithic concept of national sovereignty is, therefore, unfounded.

Nations, regions, Europe: a plurality of identities and the European identity

Marco I think that one of the underlying reasons for hostility towards Europe is the fact that it plays on another fear I often

hear people mention: the fear that the Union forces everyone to align themselves to a single model, thereby sacrificing national identities and making people feel less Italian, French, Spanish and so on.

APS From the very beginning and even now, the strongest opposition to the project of a federal union has been a result of these fears,. So, we need to look and see if there are any real grounds for them. And the answer is no.

Marco Why not?

APS National identities are the result of centuries of cultural and political history. In some cases, the State came into being before the nation, as happened for example in France and England from the Middle Ages onwards. Conversely, in other cases the nation existed before the state, such as in Italy and Germany where the “nation”, which had its roots in culture and customs, preceded political union by centuries. In any case, a national identity exists today in every nation state in Europe. This is an essential part of our collective identity. But it should be clear that the purpose of the European Union is not, and never has been, to cancel out national identities. Instead, it is to pool that which unites us in terms of values and those things it makes sense to manage together in order to defend and promote our interests. Nothing more, nothing less. This is the basis of the Common Market, of the European Charter of Rights, and of a common military defence.

Marco But is it true what they say, that Europe will never be politically united under a federal constitution because there's no “common feeling”, no sense of a common identity, of the existence of a European people, of a European “demos”.

APS There's nothing to justify this criticism either. For three reasons. The first is that you don't necessarily need to have the same opinion about everything to decide whether

or not to take decisions and act together. People just need to find ways of solving problems they have in common that would otherwise be impossible to face individually. This applies at every level, from condominiums to nations; and it's the same for Europe when it comes to issues and objectives, which the European states are unable (or no longer able) to address alone.

Then, contrary to what is often said, the European countries already have a number of important values in common. There is a European model of welfare state – including healthcare, social services, measures to counter unemployment, state schools, public funding – which varies from country to country in Europe but is basically different from, say, the US model. Europeans have a strong aversion to war, whether between countries within the Union (of which we still have vivid memories and deep scars) or as a means of promoting democracy throughout the world, as was evident during the Iraqi and other wars. We have a cosmopolitical view of the world of today and of the future, the roots of which date back to Greece, to the Middle Ages and the Age of Enlightenment. And I could go on.

Marco [And the third reason?](#)

APS The third reason is that several opinion polls, some of which are very recent, have shown that there is a greater difference of opinions to be found within the confines of each individual country of the European Union than when taking a representative sample of the overall population of the various states: we Italians, Germans, French, Spaniards are not as different as we may think.

Marco [But when it comes to the idea of a collective identity, others hold views that in a certain sense are the opposite of the concept of national sovereignty. They are not against the idea of a united Europe but against the nation state and wish to assert the historic and modern identities of the various](#)

regions. So, they are also against the European Union of today as based mainly on national governments and nation states. How true is this?

APS The point is that each and every one of us has a multiple sense of belonging: we identify with more than one lifestyle, with many tastes, traditions and behavioural patterns. Each of these is generally compatible with the others. For example, if you just think of where we live, each of us is at the same time a citizen of his town or city, a citizen of his region, a citizen of his country, a European citizen and a citizen of the world. These are different and complementary identities, each of which is more evident when observed from the outside. When they're at home, the citizens of Siena identify as 'contradioli' as the Sienese call the inhabitants of a neighbourhood in their own city. When they're in Florence they feel Sienese, when they're in Milan or Naples they feel Tuscan, in London they're Italian, in San Francisco or Beijing, European.

Marco So, why is regional identity such a big political issue?

APS Regional identity is very strong because it is the legacy of centuries of history. Not only are the language, the dialects and the local pronunciation of a country's language very recognisable because they differ even within the same region, but also a person's temperament is often different. It's not a coincidence that, when we want to describe the personality of someone who others listening are not acquainted with, we often just say where that person comes from: "you know, he's Sicilian", "you have to understand – he's from Piemonte" and so on. Anyone listening understands (or think they understand) a bit more. The same applies to France (someone from Brittany is very different to someone from Provence, not just as regards language), to Germany, to Spain and so on. Which doesn't in any way do

away with the traits of their national identity, faults included, of course.

Marco So, if the regions have such a strong historical and current identity, should we still dismiss the idea of replacing the states with regions?

APS I think so. For several reasons. First of all, the states are still a cornerstone not only of collective life and politics, but also of international relations and the balance (or imbalance) of forces throughout Europe. The European Union itself was founded as, and continues to be, a union of states. France and Germany (and not only they) would never agree to dissolve the state and replace it with their historical regions. Secondly, we don't only have regions that were created for historical reasons, but also ones that are very similar to each other due to their geographical and economic locations but belong to different states. Just think of the alpine regions of Italy, France and Austria or the European regions which have vast expanses of forests, or the coastal regions and islands that prosper thanks to the resources produced by the sea and tourism. Europe can (and already does, in part) adopt policies to give ad hoc support to each of these regions, which are transnational and do not coincide with the historical and national regions. Thirdly, the push by some regional macro-areas to become states not only disregards all the factors which contribute to the unity of a nation and which are the result of centuries of history, but would also result in a series of microstates within which the pressure of internal minorities to obtain autonomy would be replicated. The federal political model means that all these different levels can co-exist without conflict.

Marco However many European regions are vocally campaigning for more autonomy or even independence. What should Europe do about it?

APS We cannot but disagree with the demands for political independence, for the reasons already mentioned. It would be a new form of nationalism with all the disadvantages and risks that we are all too aware of and which history has shown can happen. Yet the push for more regional autonomy is undoubtedly legitimate. But we should remember that within the European Union the Member States have different organisation models and sets of rules within the framework of their national constitutions. In Spain, the historical regions have a high level of autonomy and not just in Catalonia. In Germany, the Länder have ample powers, starting with Bavaria, and there is a second Chamber, the Bundesrat, that represents them on a national level. In Italy, the regions also have the power to legislate and were given even more power under the constitutional reform of 2001. There are regions in Italy to which, for historical reasons peculiar to each region, the constitution has accorded a special status and a privileged tax system. Those regions are Sicily, Sardinia, Val d'Aosta, Trentino-Alto Adige and Friuli-Venezia Giulia. France, on the other hand, has maintained a much more centralised system, a legacy of the Revolution and Napoleonic models. The level of efficiency of the regional administrations also differs greatly from country to country.

Marco [So what should the Union do?](#)

APS The underlying principle is that each nation state should establish the level of autonomy it intends to grant its regions in its constitution. A federal Europe can work just as well even if the systems enshrined in the constitutions of the different countries are not the same. That goes for municipalities and metropolitan cities too. This does not detract in any way from what I consider to be a healthy and positive need to grant autonomy to the regions. But on two conditions. Firstly that a sufficient margin of powers and resources is left to the state so that it can guarantee a

standard level of basic services (such as education, the health service, transport, protection of the environment and other public services) across the entire country, of course even in the poorer regions. Secondly, there shouldn't be a plethora of contrasting rules and regulations, for example relating to the health service, tourism, enterprises or education, because the risk of this (which is very tangible, at least in Italy) is that it can have an adverse effect on safeguarding health, on the equal treatment of citizens and on investments.

Religious and ethnic pluralism

Marco Besides local and regional identities we also have different religious identities. Can they co-exist?

APS They can. There are different “spirits” even within the same religion. Christianity has known a lot of them in two thousand years and all have deep-rooted differences even if they all have in common the same values as proclaimed by the Gospels, values and precepts that the religious and civic history of Europe have however often belied. You just need to think back to the ferocious persecutions of heretics, the Crusades, the Inquisition, the religious wars, the intolerance for any opinion which did not coincide with the orthodoxy laid down by the Councils and the Church in Rome.

Marco Is it true then that religious differences can be compatible?

APS Diversity is a real treasure to be valued, both in the difference between the traditional religions and within the same religion: think, for example, how profoundly different the spirituality of each monastic order is! And how many cultural, religious and civic variations there are in the history of Islam! At last we have come to understand that all can co-exist if we accept each other and respect the

principle of freedom guaranteed by the various constitutions. One of the greatest men of the twentieth century, Mahatma Gandhi, said as much and admirably bore witness to it. But it took many centuries of history and suffering to get to the point of acknowledging this and the process is still incomplete and imperfect.

Marco There's also the problem, which I think is indeed acute, of the compatibility of different ethnic groups with the various states and the European Union. Will Muslims, Chinese and Africans ever be really able to be fully integrate into the European countries they live in?

APS It's a serious matter, certainly not to be taken lightly. It has to be said that it concerns not primarily the Union as such but rather the individual Member States of the European Union in which millions of people from other countries and continents have settled and worked for decades. There is a tradition of having different ethnic groups within the same national order which goes back a long time and has been structured differently throughout the ages, especially in the Middle Ages – but I can't discuss it here. If I think of modern democratic constitutions, I believe that fundamentally the peaceful co-existence of ethnic groups which have their own specific traditions and identifying features, such as their everyday language, their family model, their social relationships and their religion, is possible as long as there are common basic rules which everyone has to respect. These include the language of the host country, civic education, and the fundamental rights of the individual and associations as guaranteed by the national constitutions.

Marco What do you suggest we do about the ethnic groups that live inside several European states and who ask to be protected?

APS Sardinians, Corsicans, Catalans, Basques and others... There are ethnic minorities in many States, such as the Hungarians in Romania, the Istrians in Croatia, Turks in Greece, Algerians in France, Chinese in Italy and elsewhere, not to mention the Welsh and the Scots. In this case also, as with the different religious or denominational creeds which these minority groups often follow, the right approach should be to allow them the maximum possible level of autonomy, provided it is compatible with the principles and rights laid down in the national constitutions of the host country. For example, Spain allows different practices in the various regions in matters relating to family, inheritance and even contract law and has done so for some time now. We should also remember that we often have ethnic minorities living within regions and they also need to be guaranteed protection. “Ethnic cleansing” as a drastic solution is a cruelly hard fact of centuries and even millennia past and it is unfortunately a recent, even very recent, reality in other continents and in Europe itself. Just think of the tragedy that followed the breakup of Yugoslavia. A union based on federalism, which ensures a political union married with a level of autonomy and which together take the form of a mutually agreed relationship, is the only valid alternative.

Marco [Can Muslims live in peace with Christian nations?](#)

APS I think so. If I look at the religious aspect, historically this was often the case, for example in 11th century Spain but also elsewhere. It works today in many Muslim-majority states outside of Europe, even where Muslims are the majority (not everywhere of course, as we all know); and within Europe itself, for example in Germany, France, Italy and elsewhere, the vast majority of Muslim immigrants live alongside the local population without any particular problems and where they've acquired the citizenship of their host country, they take an active part in the democratic life of that country. Of course I can't deny that the problem

does exist, as there is a long Islamic tradition of hostility toward other religions, Christianity in particular, dating to way back when.

Marco Does Islam believe that a religious war is not only legitimate but an outright duty?

APS The idea of jihad (the Holy war) is in the Qur'an, albeit not as clearly stated, nor as lacking in alternatives as we are often led to believe. This tradition is still very much alive in many parts of the planet. We should remember that Europe itself has not been immune to holy wars in the past. The crusades of the Middle Ages and the destruction of the pre-Columbian civilisations and religions are proof of that. Religious intolerance towards non-Christians, starting with the Jews, was the cause of centuries of bloody persecutions. The Europe of the Age of Enlightenment only adopted the principle of religious liberties as its own two and a half centuries ago; and the Church even more recently, in the middle of the twentieth century, thanks to Vatican Council II. I'm quoting these precedents to underline that freedom of religion is a fundamental principle which each European State and the European Union as a whole must ensure is respected, by Muslims also. It's an achievement that is now irreversible.

Marco But what future do the principles of freedom and democracy have in the authoritarian Islamic states?

APS For many Muslim countries, as well as for other countries with different traditions and religions, the road to both these freedoms is a long one fraught with obstacles. They cannot be forced upon them, least of all by the use of weapons. A vital push can come from the women of those countries. I think that women will play a decisive part in the transition when they stand up to all violence, authoritarianism and discrimination and fight (peacefully) for freedom and democracy.

Treasures of European civilisation

Marco We Europeans often tend to think of ourselves as the heirs of the most developed civilisation on the planet. We think (or have done in the past) that compared with European civilisation – from which the US one also stems – all other civilisations are inferior, including the noble and ancient ones of China, India and classical Islam. I think that this attitude is not justified, that it is wrong. What do you think?

APS I agree with you Marco. Every civilisation is precious, has its own “charisma” and the world is beautiful also because there is such a wide variety of experiences and cultures. Even the so-called primitive civilisations, or what’s left of them, have surprisingly high qualities, as expressed in their art, respect for the environment, interpersonal relationships, even in their religions. Studies conducted on these civilisations, mostly in the twentieth century and mainly by European scholars, have provided ample proof of this. I should add that European culture can be credited with having established the criteria for developing a method of historical analysis which has made it possible to reconstruct with great rigour the history of the other civilisations: from China to India, from the Americas to Islam and including, naturally, the ancient civilisations of the eastern Mediterranean, from Mesopotamia to Egypt. We know much more about them now than we did in the past.

Marco So if we were to give some examples of the merits of our European civilisation, which would they be? And before you answer that, does a European civilisation exist or is it essentially an ensemble of national civilisations?

APS I don’t have any doubts about the answer to the second question. I’ve dedicated my life as a scholar to the history of law and I can say that there is a legal civilisation

that has been European since the Middle Ages. Not because it has been the same everywhere, since every state, nation and city has always had its own distinctive aspects, but because they have points in common. There has been an uninterrupted exchange of models, ideas and experiences between them. The culture, philosophy and art of Ancient Greece, the legislative system of ancient Rome and Christianity are three fundamental roots which have been and are ever present in European history over the last two millennia. Beside legal history, that common European civilisation is witnessed in many other fields. Just think of the Romanesque architectural style, then the Gothic architecture of the churches from the 11th to the 15th century which can be found from England to Sicily, from the Iberian Peninsula to Germany and Eastern Europe. Think of the various genres and styles of music, literature and poetry, and of the scientific and medical advances from the 17th to the 20th century. There has always been a constant exchange of ideas and experiences within Europe, even though every country – and often every region – developed and adapted common models in a style peculiar to themselves, especially in the arts. Different countries excelled and had their own golden ages at different times and centuries: Italy in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Spain in the 16th century, the Netherlands and France in the 17th century, Britain in the modern age, and Germany in the 19th century. The same applies to other countries. Uniformity and diversity are two interlinked and indivisible aspects of European civilisation.

Marco So can European cultural and civic history be considered to be the history of a common civilisation?

APS Yes, that's true, as we said, for the arts, music, law, philosophy and science. But also feudalism, the communes, the new political sciences developed in the universities of the 12th and 13th centuries, humanism, political absolutism,

natural law, modern constitutionalism, 19th century codifications of civil law and positivism are all historical movements which are to be found throughout the whole of Europe, including Britain.

Marco Even though it's wrong to compare civilisations, does European culture have any particular "treasure" that we can be proud of, not because we created them but because we are the descendents of those who did?

APS European civilisation, which I want to emphasise is a shared civilisation albeit with its differences, has extraordinary treasures in every field of human knowledge. This is true for the Middle Ages, the modern era and the present. Not only are the greatest painters, sculptors, architects and musicians mostly European but also the outstanding scholars of theology, philosophy, mathematics, medicine, natural sciences, physics, chemistry, law, economics and history, who spanned the centuries from the Middle Ages to the 20th century. As we said, the civilisation of classical Greece, which is the basis of rational thought as well as of art and poetry, is one of the pillars of European civilisation, as is the Christian message, but they are to be revisited and appreciated by every generation because they are "a possession for all time", as Thucydides hoped his "History of the Peloponnesian War" would be.

It is surprising that immortal works such as those of Dante Alighieri, Giotto, Michelangelo, Molière, Shakespeare, Rembrandt, Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and the list goes on and on, were conceived in social and political contexts that were very different and very far removed from our contemporary society. Yet they are works that still resonate throughout the world with people and civilisations that are sometimes even far removed from ours. This is of course true not just for social sciences but also for physics, biology, natural sciences, medicine, psychology and all the other

forms of science. For example, I'd like to draw your attention to the fact that not only the theories of Galileo, Newton and the other great names of science from the 17th to the 19th century but also the two greatest discoveries of early 20th century physics – relativity and quantum theory – are European discoveries. Most of the great mathematicians from the 16th to the 20th century were French, English, German, Italian, Scandinavian and Swiss or came from other European countries. The treasures of European culture which are the cultural heritage of the entire planet are really incalculable.

Responsibilities, errors and horrors of European history

Marco The history of Europe undoubtedly has a wealth of treasures as you say. But the same history is responsible for errors, torts and I would go so far as to say also real horrors. I'm not sure we can set ourselves up as a model for different, far-away civilisations which Europeans often ignored, when they weren't repressing and eradicating them.

APS This is certainly true. Heaven forbid that we should deny, forget or underestimate all that. For almost twenty centuries, within Europe there were almost endless wars between European states, ferocious religious and ethnic persecutions, the relentless suppression of heresies, cultural and civic intolerance. Wars of conquest on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean during the Crusades, devastation even of Christian lands by Christians, for example during the Crusaders' savage attack on Constantinople in 1204 when irreplaceable treasures of antiquity still preserved in the Byzantine Empire's capital were destroyed. And above all, from the 16th to the 20th century, the colonisation which dominated the entire planet from Africa to the two Americas, India, Indonesia and

Australia. For centuries the whole planet became a field of conquest for European states which plundered them and imposed a political, religious and cultural domination which had no respect for noble and ancient cultures which were still flourishing there, albeit very different to our civilisation.

It took two world wars in the 20th century, started by European countries, the horror beyond belief of the Shoah perpetrated by the Nazis and the mass murder of millions of human beings by the Soviet Communist regime (also a product of Europe and its culture) before colonial domination and European genocides were terminated within a few decades of the second half of the 20th century. In other words, just yesterday. In the meantime there have been other genocides for which we cannot be blamed: in Africa, China, Indonesia but also in former Yugoslavia. We should never forget this when we put forward new models of individual and collective life-styles.

Marco I recently saw two films that really struck me deeply. One was based on Eric Remarque's book "All Quiet on the Western Front". The second was a documentary by Ermanno Olmi "I Recuperanti" ("the Scavengers") about the places and dreadful remnants of the first World War – cannons, unexploded bombs, hand grenades, caves carved out of the mountains, hundreds of kilometres of trenches – which can still be found a hundred years later in our Alps. They seem to be wounds that still have not healed.

APS You're quite right. These two films and other documents are sadly very enlightening. Nowadays it seems absurd that European countries massacred each other from 1914 to 1918 in a trench war in which thousands of men were sent to their death in a single day just to conquer a few fields; poor and humble people from all four corners of Europe, for whom the war was inexplicable and yet they

were resigned to it and gave their lives, just as you are resigned to a natural disaster. There were more than 15 million human beings killed in the 1. The nationalist ideologies proclaimed at the time now ring false and tragically menacing. That is why the original pact on which the European Union is based is very clear and explicit: no more wars, no more fratricidal massacre. Never again!

Marco Nowadays Europe doesn't seem to run that risk and many think this call to think about the value of peace is outdated.

APS That's a mistake that can have serious consequences. We will only be able to consider that there is no longer any risk of war within Europe if – and only if – the Union becomes a federation, a political union. And not before then. Let's not forget that 1913, just a few months before the Great War broke out, no-one in Europe would have expected it. No-one expected that the peace that the continent had known for almost half a century would have been broken in just a week triggered by a single bullet fired in Sarajevo. This is beautifully described in Stefan Zweig's autobiography "The World of Yesterday", written in 1942, at the height of World War II.

Marco How is it possible that no-one was expecting it? And who opposed the war?

APS A not insignificant number of members of the European élite was against the war and if the population at large had been asked the opposition would have been overwhelming. But when war broke out, only a very few intellectuals had the courage to condemn the horrors of the conflict. One of these was French, Romain Rolland, who in 1914 published a pamphlet called "Au dessus de la mêlée" ("Above the Battle") which sold tens of thousands of copies but was fiercely attacked by the press as being anti-patriotic. Years earlier Rolland had written the great novel called

“Jean- Christophe” which revolves around the ideal of a deep rapport between France and Germany. In 1914 he was forced to leave France for thirty years. A kind of mass fire had inflamed spirits and had become a relentless phenomenon. That’s why it’s essential that we explain the harsh reality of war unequivocally, especially to you young people who, fortunately, have not experienced it. The European Union was born of, and is still inextricably tied to, an ideal of peace. Anyone who doesn’t know this – and there are many these days – hasn’t understood the idea that lies behind the whole European Union project. Or at the very least they haven’t understood the basics.

Marco And yet we still commemorate the end of the war and the victory in 1918.

APS Yes, it’s right to commemorate those who died in the wars. And it’s also right to remember that many young, and not so young, men knowingly sacrificed their lives. In the case of World War II the reasons behind the resistance against the Nazi barbarity is very obvious. Whereas for World War I it’s more difficult to understand (as nevertheless we must) that there were some individuals of a very high level of culture and integrity that genuinely thought that the war was a way to overcome the injustice and hypocrisy of a bourgeois society that was not without its shadows. However none of them had foreseen the massacre of trench warfare. Now we know that any future war, started perhaps even by mistake, could result in the death within a space of hours or minutes of millions or even billions of human beings. Apart from this apocalyptic scenario, let’s not forget that even in recent years and decades millions of people have died as a result of genocide and ethnic cleansing. Even just outside the borders of Europe.

Marco Would it have been possible to avoid the more recent tragedies along the borders of the European Union if Europe had already been a political union decades ago?

APS In some cases, almost certainly. Think of former Yugoslavia. The ethnic cleansing which wiped out entire populations that had lived peacefully side by side until then would have been stopped by a superior public authority with the strength to use it. Think too of the Middle East where not only the interests but also the values we share have been unable to affirm themselves because Europe doesn't carry the weight that it would only have if it were a political union. People often speak of the "price of non-Europe" and that applies not just to the economy (the enormous spending benefits of presenting a united front on energy and defence have been calculated many times) but also to international relations. I would add that the situation is even worse: Europe, or rather some of the EU states including Italy, bear some responsibility for having helped to create the conditions which have forced millions of migrants to flee their countries. I'm referring to Libya, Syria and Iraq but there are other cases. A politically united and pro-active Europe would probably have behaved very differently by protecting the interests of those populations and our own.

Marco So if we were to carry out an historical appraisal of the relationship between Europe and the rest of the world, would it be all negative?

APS I'm not saying that. It is indeed true to say that mistakes have been made which are irreparable and for which we are responsible; but we have already spoken about those. Ever since antiquity the history of mankind has been marked by terrible violence. The golden age evoked by many European myths never existed. Genocides, deportations, the massacre of entire peoples, the usage of enslaving enemies conquered in war have almost always

been the norm, all over the world, for millennia. Europe has been no better. It was only a very few decades ago that we started to think that these age-old methods are not just ethically but also politically unacceptable in relationships between different peoples and States. Europe has played a not insignificant role in this change of mindset.

Marco Many people think that only a pro-active and shared belief in peace and fellowship can prevent violence and war. Luisa, our virtual conversation partner whom you mentioned at the beginning of our conversation, believes this. Voluntary service is well respected by, and common among, young people. It feels far removed from politics and consequently from the European ideal.

APS When we look at how many thousands of men and women freely dedicate their life, or a part of it, to volunteer work in health care, education, improving the living conditions of the poorest on the planet – in Africa in particular but not only there – and when we see how many Europeans take part in these missions, I think we can be proud that we come from the Old Continent. Caring for others is an essential aspect of life and the religious and Christian thinking at the root of this are obvious. That doesn't however mean that it's enough to prevent the tragedy of war. No, peace is only possible if organisations are created which make it impossible to start a war. And this is also true to achieve structural reforms against discrimination, inequality, private and public violence.

Marco That reminds me of the correspondence between Einstein and Freud between the two world wars (1932) in which both reflected on war. Both came to the conclusion that in order to end war once and for all, it was necessary on the one hand to have federal institutions and on the other to nurture the lust for life, or – as Freud preferred to call it – of Eros as a counter-agent to Thanatos, or the death instinct. But

it was the awareness that these two conflicts are innate in human beings that led them to see the necessity of legislative and judicial bodies and that these had to nurture the instinct for Eros. So on the one hand we need to keep pedalling to prevent the bicycle (civilisation) from toppling over and on the other, it is important to have a horizon in view and to avoid losing sight of it.

APS Very true. The exchange of letters between these two giants of culture is still very relevant.

Original characteristics of European civilisation

Marco If we look at European civilisation, through its past history up to the present day, is it possible to identify some features that distinguish it from other civilisations?

APS I think it is. I already mentioned some aspects when I spoke about European identity. There is no need to go back to the question of the immense heritage of art, culture and science shaped in Europe. It is a heritage that is open to the whole of humanity, now and in the future. But there is more. I will just point out a few aspects. The first concerns the distinction between the spiritual sphere and the secular sphere, which springs from the passage in the Gospels “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s”. State and Church, temporal institutions and religious institutions, have coexisted in Europe for two thousand years. The borders between them have varied, with continuous encroachments in both directions, with intense disputes which frequently led to violence. But the principle according to which the secular sphere of temporal relations and the spiritual sphere of religion each has its own autonomous ethical and institutional foundation holds firm. It constitutes a mainstay, a distinctive characteristic of European civilisation. In this it differs from civilisations like those (for example) of Mesopotamia, ancient Egypt, Israel, China, India, Japan,

Islam and of Byzantium itself. Even though, of course, each of these civilisations has recognised and variously mapped out the religious sphere and the sphere of civil relations with their respective powers.

Marco In Christian Europe have there been “overflows”, exchanges between the two spheres?

APS Of course. There is the influence that the institutions of the secular world have brought to bear on the inner organisation of the Catholic Church, starting with its hierarchical structure (lay people, priests, bishops, popes), which has clear links to the hierarchical structure of the late Roman empire, even in the names used (for instance, “diocesis” was an administrative district). The same can be said for the institutions of feudalism, partially adopted also inside the Church. And in much more recent times the acceptance of the principle of religious freedom, born of modern secular culture and, in the twentieth century, also adopted by the Church. The “revolution” of the Enlightenment was an outstanding intellectual movement and it had multiple roots, both religious and lay. The idea became established that human institutions and the rules of law can be reformed on the basis of rational principles which can and should be shared. The modern debate between religious and lay positions regarding divorce and abortion, as well as discussions on current themes of bioethics today, is also part of this way of thinking.

Marco And in the opposite direction, has the Church influenced the field of secular reality?

APS There are countless examples in the opposite direction. The Church has not only acted as an institution but above all through the values of Christianity, expressed and transmitted in the Gospels. One of these examples consists of the complex phenomenon of “secularisation”: the transfer of values, rules and institutions from the setting

of Christian religion to the temporal setting. It is sufficient to mention the fundamental principles of the equal dignity of every human being, of active solidarity, of care by society for the less fortunate, of power as service. All sprung from religious soil, they have been adopted by secular powers and States, in ways and to degrees that vary greatly from one time and place to another. And there is also the transmission of models of canon law in almost every field of secular rights, in legal proceedings, in contracts, in the hierarchy of public offices, in criminal law.

Marco Could you mention some other “original characteristics” of European civilisation?

APS I will simply list a few, but of course this chapter would deserve far more space. We can call them original characteristics in the sense that they arose in Europe but many of them were then transmitted to other parts of the world, to other countries and continents, and have become common heritage of all humanity. One example is universities as structures that nurture political and economic élites where teaching is carried out by those who have demonstrated the ability to carry out original research. The principle of the separation/distinction between legislative, executive and judicial power, the linchpin of the modern constitutional State, is a European model that was transmitted from seventeenth century Britain to Europe, to the United States and then to many other states outside Europe. The doctrine of the rights of man – rights of freedom, rights to protection from the abuse of power – also has European origins that developed from the Middle Ages to the Declaration of 1789, to the Bills of Rights and to modern Constitutions. And since 1948 they have been written in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations, with dissemination and approval that extend in range (at least potentially) to the whole planet. The principle of popular sovereignty, the institutions of

representative democracy, the universal suffrage: these are also European models, accepted in various forms over time and place well beyond Europe. The reforms that from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards emancipated the proletariat from the oppression and the poverty induced by early industrialisation were an arduous European achievement, starting in Britain which had provided the mould for the industrial revolution. The precepts of social welfare have also been reaffirmed beyond the bounds of Europe. A similar story with the creation of the welfare state, conceived by Lord Beveridge during the second world war and later transformed into the “European social model”. Even the great revolution that over the twentieth century and in this century has brought and is progressively expanding, female emancipation, had its main fountainhead in Europe.



VI. Tomorrow's world

Federal Europe: a global project

Marco At this point, I'd like to ask a few questions relating to some objections raised by Mario, one of our virtual interlocutors we talked about earlier. Today's world is already global, and tomorrow's will be even more so. Environmental protection, the use of energy and renewable energy sources, the information and data transmission revolution, scientific work, new technologies, population growth and mass migration, even epidemics and natural disasters already occur

on a global scale. So, don't you think Europe and its political union has already been superseded? Wouldn't it be better for those who are concerned about the future and want to begin preparing for it to think in more global terms, and not only in the context of Europe?

APS I've wondered about this myself on several occasions and I've come up with a twofold answer. On the one hand, we need to understand Europe's current position on these major issues, while on the other, it is possible to imagine that, once the European Union is up to speed, it will be able to operate on a global scale. For the sake of clarity when I say 'globalisation' I mean two different things: firstly, the increasingly close and intense interdependence between the economies and financial systems of the countries of all five continents, the scale of which has never seen before; and secondly, the existence of institutions which operate at a global level, some of which are sponsored by states – such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the International Court of Justice – while others are private, often voluntary groups or organisations promoted by businesses and interest groups, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Marco Might it be that a lot of young people today feel so distant from national and European politics precisely because the world is now globalised and they feel more like citizens of the world?

APS It's important to feel you are a citizen of the world, it's wonderful. But this should not take the place of our sense of belonging to other more limited circles, from our village or town to our region, our country and also to Europe, as these are all perfectly compatible, as we've already said. I would add that perhaps there's nothing like being European to create the conditions for political action as a citizen of the world.

On that point, I'd like to quote Kant where he says, "the ... community of the peoples of the earth has developed so far that a violation of rights in one place is felt throughout the world" (Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch, Third Article) written in 1795 before our contemporary communication channels came into existence, bringing the whole world right into our homes.

Marco That is an extraordinarily prophetic thought! Nevertheless, if it's true that we are now part of a globalised world, we might ask whether it's really so important to worry about Europe and its political union. You have already reminded us that the population of Europe is only 7% of the world's population, and that percentage is set to fall further over the next few decades.

APS First of all, we are part of this 7%, as will be our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. It's reasonable and right to want to make our voices heard and have some influence in a dramatically changing world, in a future which is fascinating, but seriously risky. What's more, on many issues, most European citizens tend to be forward-looking and to favour a future of peaceful coexistence, balanced prosperity, protection of the less fortunate, systems of social welfare and healthcare provision and the respect of human rights and democracy. Why should we not play our part in these issues alongside the great states of the future? Europeans also tend to have a more advanced approach to the powers of the UN, with a cosmopolitan outlook. The first to coin this expression was the philosopher Diogenes. When Alexander the Great asked him which city he was from, Diogenes answered, "I am cosmopolitan", in other words, "I am a citizen of the world".

Marco What is the role of today's Europe in this context?

APS Europe already plays an essential role in the ongoing process of globalisation. It makes up the largest market, not by number of inhabitants but by volume of trade. The euro is the second currency in the world after the US dollar. Europe is ahead of every other large country in the protection of the environment. It's taking a decisive line on alternative energy sources. Its welfare systems, even if they vary from country to country, are the most advanced in the world, ahead of the US and China, India and South America. We need only consider the national health service systems, which by the way cost much less in Europe than in the USA. The average level of well-being and the quality of life are higher than those in the other continents.

Besides, European integration has given Europe three quarters of a century of internal peace, an achievement without parallel in 1500 years of history. Please note that these outstanding results are all, to different extents, connected with the process of integration, they are achievements of the European Union. This is hardly ever mentioned by anyone, not only by opponents of the political union. As Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa wrote in 2008, "only the European Union has managed to come up with the right formula for governing the process of internationalisation [...]; therefore the Union has the right and the strength to demand that this formula be applied to globalisation, as long as it completes the construction of the Union with a government capable of deciding and taking action both inside and outside the Union". (Id., *The Ghost of Bancor*, 2016, p. 125)

Marco So, if that's the case, would you say most of the work has been done?

APS I wouldn't say so, for two reasons. Firstly because the construction of Europe is still unfinished and therefore it is at risk, as we saw earlier. And also because the challenges

that globalisation poses not only for the world of tomorrow, but also for present-day reality, have not been overcome. To name but a few, there is the terrible risk of war – including the possibility of nuclear war, – the destruction of the environment, problems relating to energy, poverty and the loss of traditional jobs as a result of technological innovation, then there are the risks of global finance and international crime. These and other challenges can only be addressed on a global scale. But if the European Union manages to complete its political union, it will (or may be) at the forefront in promoting successful solutions. Not only is Europe well ahead in numerous areas but it is far more cosmopolitan than other parts of the world.

Marco It is not clear to me what that means.

APS It means three things. Firstly, as we said before, European civilisation from the time of the Greeks to the present day has developed a current of thought that considers the unity of mankind as the supreme political goal, to be achieved with respect for freedom and democracy. Also, the European Union is moving ahead with a federal-based model of political union which, if achieved, will be a model (which in part it already is) for other continents, from Africa to South America. In the past, Europe was responsible for the spread of the model of the national state whose tragic effects were experienced in the twentieth century and are still evident today in places like Africa and the Middle East. In the future it could promote a federal model.

Marco You said there were three reasons for the cosmopolitan European model, but you have only mentioned two...

APS The third, and perhaps the most important, is this: the federal political union of Europe was from the start – from Kant to the founders of the Union, such as Altiero Spinelli,

Jean Monnet and others – a project open to the prospect of global political union. The memoirs of these important figures are clear on this. ‘Unite Europe in order to unite the world,’ as another great federalist, Mario Albertini, expressed it in 1980. Only a united Europe can play an innovative role in promoting current international institutions, ranging from the International Court of Justice to the World Trade Organisation and in particular at the highest level, the United Nations, which was set up in 1945 to maintain peace in the world. This is what I meant when I spoke about the cosmopolitan vocation of Europe. Europe is the best hope for those who believe in the political union of mankind. And those who fight for the European Union fight at the same time for a goal which goes beyond Europe and applies to the whole world. If a federal Europe does not see the light, this ideal may remain a utopia for centuries to come, even forever.

Marco You often speak about a federal Europe and have already explained which institutions the Union has set up, based on the principles of federalism. But can we come back to this point, since I suspect that not many people can distinguish between a “political union” and a “federal union”?

APS This distinction is of fundamental importance. Today’s European Union and the unfinished cathedral we have spoken about are based on a political model of federalism. This means that the Union is not and never will be a single state, a super-state, a Leviathan that absorbs and supplants national states, but rather a federation of states that effectively and democratically pool certain competencies for goals which cannot be achieved at national level, as we have seen. This is what ‘federation’ means. I can even say that the political doctrine of federalism constitutes a culmination of the great political and institutional revolutions of the modern age, liberalism,

socialism and democracy. It incorporates all of these, with an added supranational dimension that they do not have.

The institutional boundaries of a federation are of two kinds. The lower territorial levels, such as national states, preserve their powers, while at a higher level, the federation has the characteristics of a democratic constitutional order since its legislative, governmental and judicial power are exercised exclusively or jointly by different bodies, which in the case of Europe are the two Councils, the Commission, the elected Parliament, and the Court of Justice. Federalism, which is the political model for the construction of the European Union, is a model for the political institutions of the future as it combines autonomy and interdependence, it avoids autocracies based on centralisation and lack of balance between powers and it has the double democratic legitimacy of the popular vote and the Chamber of States. Furthermore, the concept of a federation implies the acceptance of lower and higher territorial levels, up to a global level; that is, it implies a non-exclusive concept of sovereignty.

Marco You have explained the territorial dimension of political federalism. But if today's world is global, has territory not lost its importance as an element of aggregation?

APS This is a very important point. We can't go into it in detail but I'll just mention a few points. When we discuss the need to regulate competition, to reduce mounting inequalities not only at a social level but also between companies, to counter the establishment of powerful monopolies and oligopolies in certain sectors of the economy, to curtail any aberrations by the media, to intervene beyond national or continental borders in the defence of rights, to fight international crime, to regulate the soft law of transnational negotiation practices, all this (and a lot more besides) requires the development of new

strategies and institutions which are, to a large extent, still to be researched and established. This is a vast and complex aspect of globalisation which is widely studied (see e.g. Cassese, 2016; Economist, 17 November 2018, but the bibliography is huge), and a few possible future options have already been outlined. Forms of democratic legitimation that are different from those of traditional democracies and representative democracies must also be put in place.

This being so, it should be clear that developing efficacious responses to the problems and risks arising from the ongoing transversal process of globalisation also requires – and in future will require even more – the active presence of government authorities and entities for supranational lawmaking, both at European and at world level. Which means public powers taking inspiration from the political federalism model. It is no accident that, as we have seen, in those fields where the European Union has the powers to act, such as in competition policy, even the strongest multinational corporations have had to comply with the public interest of our citizens.

Marco I have just read a book written by Edward Wilson: 'Half-Earth: Our Planet's Fight for Life', 2016. The picture he paints is striking. If it's true that two of the greatest challenges that today's world has to face are the irreversible changes in the climate and the decline of biodiversity which may lead to the extinction of the species, it is not surprising that young people who are interested in the future of humanity are strongly concerned with these challenges and how they can try to change the apocalyptic scenario that scientists have revealed. I'm not surprised, then, that the European ideal fades into the background for some of them. Or is there a link between the two?

APS Yes, it is precisely this link that I tried to highlight earlier. The moment in which the effects of climate change caused by an excess of carbon dioxide will become irreversible is very near, a few decades away. The moment when the rate of extinction of species will also become irreversible, leading to destruction of nature, is again just a few decades away. Both of these approaching catastrophes will have been caused to a large extent by the human species. Both could still be avoided. But it is necessary to intervene immediately, using measures that are much more drastic, while being at the same time effective and non-destructive, than those we have already undertaken. A biocompatible economy that respects the planet's resources is certainly possible, but this is made much more difficult by economic interests and by powerful and well-organised politicians and lobbies; to achieve this we have to go far beyond the short-term view and limited scope of national politics.

It is precisely here that, once again, the active presence of the European Union is critical, provided that Europe is truly united. Europe is ahead on these issues, but it needs to be able to make its weight felt, to talk on a par with other powers. In other words a globalist commitment, as well as a federalist commitment, centred on Europe but with a global reach, can and must coexist. They are, so to speak, two complementary forms of activist idealism. And the activism of those who fight for the European Union also has political and democratic consequences, as European citizens already have the power to vote.

Marco Are there other challenges too (as if these were not enough ...)?

APS The challenges are not just in the fields of climate and biodiversity. We must at least mention artificial intelligence and how it may interfere with individual and collective

choices; genetic manipulation, which is not just therapeutic but also potentially disruptive for future generations; the enormous possibilities (and the associated risks) that are opening up in neuroscientific research; the mechanisms of communication via the internet and the very real threat of far-reaching control over the lives and preferences of individuals, through access to enormous data bases....

Marco [Is there also a link to Europe in these areas?](#)

APS All of these issues are important because of the benefits they offer for the future but also because of the immense risks they may pose for individual and collective freedom. The challenge lies in being able to dominate the field, in conducting independent research and implementing strategies of governance and defence against the risks. And Europe should not depend on others. It is no coincidence that today China and the US are investing vast resources in artificial intelligence, for example. The European Union can and must invest in each of these domains. Once again, our individual nation states are unable to do so.

Marco [As you pointed out at the beginning, the contrast between sovereignists and those in favour of Europe will be the decisive front in the 2019 European elections. I have noticed a basic difference not only in their programmes but also in how they present them. The sovereignists or nationalists seem to be driven by an emotional tension that precludes any rational discussion of solutions that are not merely destructive. Doesn't this risk jeopardising the European cause?](#)

APS You are right to mention this issue. The sovereignists appeal to emotions and arouse reactions that go beyond (or rather don't go as far as) rational discussion. And this is happening not only in Italy; we only need to think of Bavaria, Hungary and Austria. Those in favour of Europe argue back one point at a time, but their reasoning is not

challenged in a rational way. However, voters are always strongly influenced by emotions, and politics as well as political choices are certainly not just reason, they are also the fruit of passion and therefore emotion. What made the creation of Europe possible was moral revolt against the wars of the twentieth century; it was a genuine intensity of feeling. We must beware of thinking that the danger of war has definitely disappeared. However now there are other fears, such as those of insecurity, uncontrolled immigration and concern for the future of work and employment. Whoever fans the flames of these feelings will gain attention and may win. We really need to make citizens – voters – understand that Europe is a powerful source of security and peace for the future. We need to arouse positive emotions towards the European ideal. I would ask everyone reading this conversation to watch a short video made in Nuremberg in 2014⁹ which is really moving and beautiful.

We must awaken a new passion for a united Europe. Our conversation is also an attempt to bring this passion to life.

Politics, young people and education

Marco You spoke of serious risks that will affect the world in the future. What were you referring to?

APS Progress made by scientific research, from genetics to advanced technologies, means that it will soon be possible to attain extraordinary goals, which were unthinkable until recently, in fields such as the length of human life, the success of the battle against famine, disease, physical fatigue and much of the suffering that has plagued humanity for millennia. But at the same time, this progress threatens the survival of the human species and life on earth itself, as

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a23945btJYw>

we have said. Risks include the genetic manipulation and the digital and telecommunications revolution which may lead to forms of hidden domination over the lives of individuals and social groups and abnormal forms of artificial intelligence that would be damaging to freedom of all kinds. These dangers are not inevitable, but can only be countered with the tools of correct information and democracy. That is, with the tools of politics; which is why politics remains essential.

Marco Nowadays, production, trade, finance and crime already operate at a global level. What else needs to work globally?

APS Politics does. Not in the sense of the creation of a worldwide State. As Kant acutely observed, the risk of a global dictatorship would be terrifying. No, what we need, and what is developing in an embryonic way through the UN and other international organisations, is a federal political system made up of large states and federations of states, such as the European Union. The most important decisions (those that deal with the challenges of war and peace, the environment and the world economy) should be taken democratically, within the institutional framework of a political federation.

Marco Why do you think globalisation is also necessary at the political level?

APS Because otherwise it would be impossible to counteract the negative effects, the excesses, the abuse and violence that societies inevitably generate if there is no institutional system with a balance of powers able to counter these all too real problems. This is also true for trade, production and finance. Today, public authorities have become weaker, partly as a result of globalisation. And there is a need for a rebalancing of society, which is still not possible at the global level, precisely because of the

weakness of the international institutions, which need democratic legitimacy. This is why I spoke of a failure of politics that must be corrected. The strengthening of the United Nations, for example, with at its centre the reform of the Security Council, can only be achieved if it is carried out at a political level by the great powers, and one of these should be the European Union ...

Marco So the scope of politics goes far beyond the national framework. How, in your opinion, can a young person get involved in politics?

APS There must and will be a small minority of young people who feel a calling to get involved in politics. Yes, I would describe it as a calling, in the same way someone might feel a calling to be a doctor, a teacher or even a priest. Max Weber wrote an essay on “politics as a vocation”. This is politics in the grander sense, as in a calling to legitimately conquer power in order to contribute to “changing the world” in the direction of one’s ideals. A few others will choose to dedicate part of their time voluntarily to an ideal of political activism, for example in the field of federalism. And then there are the other young people, the great majority.

They will all find their path in different fields of human activity. But they should also nurture their “political spirit” in the noble and high sense of the term, which means assuming their responsibility as a “citizen” in each of the circles to which they belong, from their own town to the world. Every citizen must also be “political”, in the sense of a guardian of society at both civic and world level. Democracy can only survive in this way.

Europe plays a vital part in this. As I have tried to explain during our conversation, the road towards a safer and more just world goes via Europe. The political unity of Europe in a federal union, not a state that stifles autonomy, is a goal

not only for the Europeans of today and tomorrow, but for the entire planet.

Marco I can sense an idealism in your words that really appeals to me; it's exciting. And yet I also have friends who think like the people you mentioned before. They think that it's all just fine words, wild dreams, because power and vested interests have been and always will be the only things that count, what matters is only practical politics (I think the Germans call it Realpolitik). So, maybe those who believe in a federal Europe live in a dreamworld?

APS You see, Marco, I don't deny the great importance of vested interests, nor that of Realpolitik. As a law historian, I would be foolish if I did. History is also an accumulation of collective tragedies. Many of them are the work of humans: wars, genocides, slavery and the servitude of entire peoples, fierce dictatorships and more. It would be wrong and unrealistic to imagine that pain and aggressive instincts will disappear from human history. But history is not just that. It includes milestones that would once have seemed (and were indeed considered) unattainable, because they were opposed by powerful forces and interests. They seemed like unrealistic utopias, but they have become reality.

Marco Could you give me some examples of this?

APS I'll just give a few examples; there are too many to mention. The Christianisation of the late Roman Empire was an extraordinary and impressive phenomenon, if we consider the depth of the religious and political roots out of which the Empire had arisen and expanded. In the second half of the eighteenth century, a Hapsburg sovereign of the highest European nobility, Maria Theresa of Austria, and her son Joseph II, took just forty years to dismantle the monopoly of the two most formidable centres of power, the patriciate and the Church, which had dominated Europe for centuries, not without some important and at times excellent

consequences. Between 1789 and 1791, using a voting system inspired by the principle of democracy, the French Constituent Assembly introduced a series of several hundred laws that marked the first steps taken by France, and later Europe, towards a political system founded on the equality of rights, and civil and economic freedom. And it must be noted that in both cases the intervention of the aristocracy was crucial, even before that of the nascent bourgeoisie. The principle of progressive taxation, essential for reducing inequalities, was still considered taboo in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century, while two decades later it was accepted to a degree that today seems unattainable – up to over 70% for higher incomes.

And then we have the abolition of slavery and personal servitude; freedom of thought, expression and religion; the rule of law with the separation of powers; popular sovereignty; the protection of workers and those who cannot pay for medical treatment; equality between men and women; the charter of rights throughout the world; and last but not least, European integration. Nobody, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, or even during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, foresaw that it would be possible to achieve these goals.

Do you think that all these historical results were achieved without resistance, obstacles, or shrewd and powerful strategies designed to sabotage them?

Marco So how, then, was all of this possible?

APS In history, there are many forces at play, including moral force and the force of reason. I am convinced that in a human society, anywhere in the world, unless society is in the acute stage of an emotional and aggressive crisis, most people are in favour of peace and civil coexistence. Most are also respectful of others and ready to help those in need.

Certainly, there are also competing impulses, which as you pointed out Freud knew and expressed so well. But the model of a federal international order exorcises the risk of war without claiming to change human nature, with its ineluctable animal ancestry. Killing each other is one thing, while competing in economic affairs, politics and culture, as well as in sport, is another thing entirely.

Morality and reason can override the forces of power and self-interest, especially when there is also an element of self-interest moving in the same direction. We have seen how Jean Monnet believed that the project of European integration required a combination of interests and values: this was the key to the success of the single market. Monnet also said that Europe was created and would be built as a result of the ways in which it responded to crises. It was Spinelli who observed that the European ideal has risen up every time after its defeats, like a phoenix rising from the ashes.

Marco This answer gives us hope. Not least because we are certainly not short of crises!

APS A united Europe may be another achievable utopia. In fact this goal is within reach because to a large extent the utopia of union has already been accomplished! I deliberately used the metaphor of the unfinished cathedral before, but we have to really want to finish it. In the nineteenth century, many young people were ready to die to see the ideal of national unity achieved. We do not need to die for Europe, but the ideal is no less noble.

Marco Staying on the subject of politics, I would like to know what you think of the left-right divide and how Europeanism fits in here.

APS On the question of the contrast between left and right, in my opinion, there are three key points:

1. The traditional contrast between 'real socialism' and liberalism disappeared with the fall of the former, which proved to be a failure, and therefore imploded.
2. The contrast between right and left is still fundamental, nowadays it takes the form of political dialectic between those who believe that the rules of competition and the market are best because they ensure the maximum possible well-being to every political community, and those who, while clearly recognising the essential function of the market and free competition, consider that the active presence of public economic and political instruments based on political democracy is also essential. These are necessary not only to regulate the market, since it cannot live without rules, but also: a) to provide for investment in public assets which individuals cannot back because there are no immediate returns in terms of profit (education, health, protection of the territory, defence, security and basic research); and b) for interventions to reduce poverty, first of all through a fiscal system based on progressive taxation.
3. As for the contrast between a national approach and a supranational approach to issues of economic policy and security, which every modern state has to consider, the question actually splits both sides, the right and the left, as the Ventotene Manifesto clearly predicted. In fact, on both sides there are those who believe that it is up to the national state alone to adopt appropriate strategies and those who recognise the need to give a role to supranational institutions (such as the European Union, the UN or the WTO for international trade) where the national level is inadequate.

Marco But what we discussed at the beginning still remains true: many young people don't think it is important to vote; they even claim that they are not interested in politics. Such a

high rate of abstentionism among citizens of all ages raises many questions. How can we explain it?

APS Explaining this would take a whole new debate, and even then it would not be enough ... I'll keep my points concise. Today abstentionism affects all democracies, even the oldest and most advanced; in the United States it is approaching 50%. This could be for several reasons, and I'll explain a few of them in no particular order. There is a feeling of rejection towards many of those who have made successful careers in politics without any respect for fairness or honesty, often through corrupt or dodgy practices, who have been rewarded with privileges which are now considered inadmissible. Then many voters are disenchanted with politics and parties, which promise a lot before the elections and then disappoint voters by not meeting their expectations.

Marco That is quite a picture!

APS The complexity of problems, and the fact that they are so closely connected, makes it impossible to find simple solutions. As a result people who are disappointed with those who suggested that there were easy answers may end up rejecting politics outright. There is no transparency in how choices are made, and parliamentary discussions often turn into a battle ground between drastic and unconvincing statements. The jungle of never-ending rules and regulations is exasperating. Both the press and television, in different ways, emphasise only the negative aspects of politics – the scandals, the controversies, the personal questions – and citizens believe that there is nothing else to it, and that all politicians are the same, which is untrue. Messages shared on the Internet all too often convey vulgar insults and opinions that are both high-handed and unfounded.

But above all, the mistake almost all politicians make is to focus on the short term, ignoring the broader perspective of

intergenerational relationships, which young people find particularly disappointing. Finally (but the list could go on), surveys and polls carried out almost on a daily basis distract the government and parliament from medium-term action, the only way to obtain valid results. It is this approach that Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa defined in 2009 as the politics of the “short-term view”.

Marco But isn't politics forced to act in the short term for electoral reasons?

APS Politicians certainly act this way, but they are not necessarily forced to do so. This is because unpopular measures adopted for example at the beginning of a legislature can come to be seen positively by public opinion even before the end of the same legislature (this has happened several times in the past), and also because in some circumstances, for certain decisions, a high profile politician (they are rare, it's true) can even consciously run the risk of unpopularity. When Helmut Kohl backed the creation of the euro in 1990, he knew perfectly well how attached Germans were to the mark, and their attachment was fully justified because of the past. But after making sure that the Treaty guaranteed full autonomy for the European Central Bank, Kohl fought for the European currency, because, as he said then, political union, of which the euro was a pillar, would be “a matter of war or peace” for European citizens of the twenty-first century. These words still make a profound impression today.

Marco It seems to me that the “short-term view” is not just for politicians. Television also focuses on the immediate future: it always appears to be chasing sensationalism and strong emotions. And what's more, it seems to me to be anything but neutral.

APS Unfortunately there is no doubt about the way the media and internet deform communication, as we have

already said. And solutions to this are not easy to find, because we need to avoid all forms of censorship, but at the same time we have to establish ways of countering false information. This is an arduous task, but essential to ensure a future for representative democracies.

Marco [So there is nothing to be done then?](#)

APS Some solutions do exist, and are widely discussed by those who study political reality. Institutions that are not strictly political have been set up, such as the constitutional Courts, which in some countries have also legislative powers, which are often crucial at a political level. A large group of independent and unelected agencies are now operating in many countries. There are agencies to promote competition, to fight corruption, for the stock exchange and for the media. There are forms of “participatory democracy” such as working groups, study commissions and countless conferences that elaborate often far-sighted analyses and strategies, even if they are mostly neglected by those who have the power to decide. There are also forms of direct democracy, including referendums, which are however flawed in many cases by extraneous aims, ill-posed questions and instrumental political pressure. One very serious problem is the need to educate citizens adequately; this would be the most effective remedy. And this leads us to the subject of education.

Marco [Politics is increasingly associated with corruption, careerism and individualistic interests. The few young people I know who are involved in politics often aspire above all to personal success. Others tell me: “It feels more political, and therefore more effective, to get involved with the social media than with Parliament, we feel closer to Facebook groups than to the Chamber of Deputies”.](#)

APS Is this lack of interest really so common among young people?

Marco To give you an idea, let me tell you about something that happened to me recently. I live on the Lido, a small island in Venice, well-known for its famous Film Festival. The Lido is a little jewel in Venice, not only because of the Festival, but also for some important historical sites. Recently there was a demonstration in favour of one of these places because it had been allowed to fall into a state of neglect and disrepair. I was struck by the civic sense shown by the older inhabitants of the island but also how there was no youth turnout. I suggested to one of my coursemates from another town that we go along, but she replied that she did not feel close to the cause because she did not live on the Lido. I tried to provoke her by asking which town she felt she was an active citizen of, but she couldn't give me an answer.

APS This story really explains a lot. It is clearly essential to learn about civics at school, starting very early on, even in kindergarten. Civic education is essential. The ideals and the vision of the world that an individual carries through life almost always stem from their early youth or adolescence.

Marco Do you think there is the opportunity to make oneself heard by young people?

APS There are communicators who know how to do this: for example, in Italy, journalists like Rumiz, singers and actors like Bono from U2 and Benigni. Recently they have spoken and written about how young people get excited when they talk about Europe. And my experience over many years, indeed over decades, makes me think the same thing. Today I find it easier to explain the importance of the European ideal than it was ten or fifteen years ago; and not just among young people. Perhaps because the opponents of the European Union have become so numerous and have adopted a high-handed tone. Then there is a very important fact; recent surveys confirm that in Italy 60% of young

people believe in Europe; and even in Great Britain, the majority of young people voted in favour of Europe.

Marco At school and university there is very little space given to Europe; the teachers who talk about the topics we have discussed are few and far between. Why is this, in your opinion?

APS It partly depends on the school curricula, which don't focus enough on civic education. This is very serious. School is about teaching students, but it is, (or should be), about education in a wider sense, education for civil life, for respect of rights, including knowledge of the basic principles of the constitution. More generally, the role of schools should be education in the worship (I have chosen this challenging term on purpose) of truth, goodness and beauty. The commitment to civic education should apply not only to those who come from abroad and know nothing about our history, but to all young people who should feel that they are citizens of their own country and at the same time also European citizens and citizens of the world, as we have said before.

Perhaps, at least in part, the reluctance of many teachers to talk about these issues is due to the fear of appearing politically aligned, and being accused of bias when working with unsuspecting young people. This fear is understandable and even to be sympathised with. But on the one hand it is true that young people almost always sense the basic attitude of a teacher even when this is not explicitly stated; on the other hand it is not a question of subjecting students to political propaganda in the strict sense of the term, definitely not, but rather of helping them to think about what is going on in the world, about how this can be communicated and how it is often distorted by media and press. We need to provide students with the tools to assess both what the European Union actually stands for now and

what it can mean for the future of the world: for our ambitions, our choices, our culture, in the context of a globalised world. It is right and necessary to think about these issues at school.

Conclusion

Marco I think I know what to say now to those friends who say “I’m not interested in politics”; “I’m not going to vote in the 2019 European elections”; and to those who tell me that they are going to vote “against Europe”. Let me ask you one last thing: how can we put into a few words the reasons why everyone, but in particular young people, need to make a commitment to politics and Europe?

APS We should all identify as individuals trying to make the most of our life and work, but also as citizens of our country, of Europe and of the world; in other words “cosmopolitan”, although the vast majority of us have not chosen and will not choose to make politics our profession. Within Europe there are cultural and strategic ideas that are moving in the direction of a future of peace and well-being. These may be decisive at a global level, but only if there is a federal political union in our own continent. Never before has there been an attempt to create a peaceful union of nation-states that have been at war for centuries, even though part of the same civilisation. The point of arrival is now close. Even the supreme ideal of a political union of mankind characterised by freedom and democracy is no longer just a remote dream, which fades away as you wake up. There are signs of a constructive process now underway. Europe can be instrumental in attempts to transform the utopia into a concrete reality.

Marco So, an achievable utopia?

APS Whether we fail, as has happened to so many glorious civilisations of the past, or we succeed and complete the cathedral – and let's not forget, the cathedral already exists – this will depend largely on you young people, on your generation. To succeed, it will require not only the pressure of pro-European interests, not only the strength of reason, but the passion of those who believe that a future of peace and well-being for all, in Europe and in the world, are ideals which can be achieved, which it is worth believing in and working towards.

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A short list of sites which deal with the European Union (some of which have already been included in the text of the Conversation)

Official EU sites

The portal is available in all the languages of the Union, many documents are only in English:

https://europa.eu/european-union/index_en

Main areas of the site cover:

- Essential information on the EU;
- EU law (treaties, legislation, jurisprudence);
- Documents and publications (Official documents, statistics, open data)

EU 2017 Budget

http://ec.europa.eu/budget/annual/index_en.cfm?year=2017

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