Patrizio Bianchi Sergio Fabbrini
Luigi Paganetto Vincenzo Paglia
Vincenzo Scotti

FOR A EUROPE THAT LOOKS OUT TO THE WORLD

An appeal to Christians and people of goodwill

This appeal for Europe is addressed to all Europeans and is grounded in the recognition that, without a strong and cohesive European Union, there can be no peace in the world. It seeks to be an invitation to free Europe from the prison of nationalist egocentrism and to give rise to a new reality—one that lives and operates not only for itself, but also for the world.

It is an appeal for the spiritual, economic, and institutional renewal of a Europe capable of rediscovering its roots and, above all, of rekindling the enthusiasm needed to resume the path of integration and unification toward a new Union among all Europeans.

This is the message conveyed by the following pages, the result of a shared effort presented at a series of dedicated meetings.

The message is structured in three parts. The first, by Vincenzo Paglia, is devoted to outlining the paths toward a spiritual renewal of Europe. The second, by Luigi Paganetto, addresses Europe's economic and social renewal. The third, by Sergio Fabbrini, focuses on its institutional renewal. The volume also includes an introduction by Vincenzo Scotti, an afterword by Patrizio Bianchi, and a number of reflections by colleagues and friends with whom we have maintained an open dialogue on this theme.

1. Vincenzo Paglia, Archbishop, President Emeritus of the Pontifical Academy for Life.
2. Luigi Paganetto, economist, Professor Emeritus, lecturer in European economics, coordinator of the "Group of 20".
3. Sergio Fabbrini, Professor Emeritus of Political Science and International Relations.
4. Vincenzo Scotti, politician, former Minister of the Republic on several occasions, lecturer and founder of Link Campus University, President of the cultural association "Progetto Europa Domani".
5. Patrizio Bianchi, economist and politician, Professor of Economics, former Minister of Education.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Rediscovering the Soul of Europe

In a time marked by cultural fragmentation, crises of liberal democracies, climate emergencies, and new technocratic idolatries, Europe appears as a weary continent, struggling and unable to regain a sense of ideal purpose. It seems to have lost awareness of being the beating heart of a civilization rooted in human dignity, in the drive toward universality, and in confidence in progress as an ethical vocation. In this scenario, European Christianity—which was both the architect and matrix of that civilization—finds itself in a condition of marginality, sometimes self-imposed and sometimes endured, increasingly distant from the centre of culture and from the daily life of the societies in which it nonetheless emerged and developed..

Faced with this gigantic, epochal crisis, an indispensable and urgent moral, cultural, and spiritual awakening is required in order to resist the forces now gathering pace. It is necessary to re-establish among European peoples a relationship of *Fides*, that is, mutual trust, respect, and a lasting bond that transcends the logic of a mere *Foedus*—that is, temporary, utilitarian, and often fragile agreements. Without authentic trust, there can be no true political community: only an alliance of interests and expediency, bound to erode over time.

The Appeal for Europe written for this gathering at the Palazzo del Campidoglio in Rome—where the European treaties were signed by the Founding Fathers—is addressed to all Europeans, Christians and men and women of good will, who are aware that without a strong presence of the European Union there can be no peace in the world.

In these sorrowful days, when it proves impossible to bring an end to wars that have dragged on for years and to lay the groundwork for lasting peace in Europe, in the Mediterranean, in Africa, and throughout the world, it becomes necessary to recall that this Union has its roots in the democratic movement born out of the struggle against authoritarianism and racism, which led the whole of Europe to the human catastrophe of the Second World War and which continue to shape the lives of many peoples.

A European Union that seeks to be a point of reference for lasting peace and fully sustainable development must rediscover its original soul: the path traced by the Founding Fathers of a European unity that promised not only peace, but also respect for and protection of the rights of the individual and of communities, necessarily combined with the civic duty of solidarity within and among these communities of citizens.

Article 2 of the Italian Constitution clearly synthesizes these principles: *"The Republic recognizes and guarantees the inviolable rights of the human person, both as an individual and in the social formations where human personality is expressed, and requires the fulfillment of the fundamental duties of political, economic, and social solidarity."*

This solidarity must extend over time, precisely because sustainable development must be defined as the capacity to generate growth today without diminishing the rights and opportunities of future generations. For this reason, equality must be reaffirmed among the constitutional values of Europe, since a globalization driven almost exclusively by market logic has produced levels of inequality incompatible with the principles of inviolable rights and solidarity that constitute the very foundation of democracy.

2. The Europe We Want

Authoritarian impulses have re-emerged even in countries with long-established democratic traditions, and the arrogance of autocrats has intensified. While fully aware of the fragilities of Europe, this appeal calls for a "humanistic, sustainable, and federal" Union, fully conscious that Europe grows—more than any other region of the world—only when it is united and acts jointly in pursuit of integration,

while it condemns itself to economic marginalization and political irrelevance when it pursues increasingly abstract forms of sovereignism and fragments into local contexts no longer capable of addressing the major global challenges before us.

This is therefore an appeal to "free Europe from the prison of nationalist egocentrism and to generate a new reality that lives and operates not only for itself but also for the world," fostering economic, institutional, educational, and spiritual renewal. We envision a Europe capable of rediscovering its roots as well as renewed enthusiasm, resuming the path of integration and unification, with education and research at its core—themselves the foundations of a new Union among all Europeans capable of bringing peace to this troubled "our" world.

Rediscovering the soul of Europe is not a nostalgic exercise, but a historical necessity. Without a humanistic, sustainable, and federal Europe, there can be no lasting peace nor a shared future, for the continent and for the world.

PART I

A NEW EUROPEAN CHRISTIANITY: FROM CULTURAL HEGEMONY TO THE OFFERING OF HUMANISM

1. Emerging from the Abyss

In a time marked by cultural fragmentation, crises of liberal democracies, climate emergencies, and new technocratic idolatries, Europe presents itself as a weary continent, struggling and unable to regain a sense of ideal purpose. It is no longer the beating heart of a civilization rooted in human dignity, in the drive toward universality, and in confidence in progress as an ethical vocation. In this scenario, European Christianity — which was both the architect and matrix of that civilization—finds itself in a condition of marginality, sometimes self-imposed, sometimes endured, increasingly distant from the centre of culture and from the daily life of the societies in which it nonetheless emerged and developed.

We find ourselves at a point in history whose outcome could even be the end of the world as we know it. Faced with this gigantic, epochal challenge, an indispensable and urgent moral, cultural, and spiritual awakening is required in order to resist the forces now gathering pace.

To rekindle passion for a Europe that is a genuine political subject, a shared inspiration is needed: a common project capable of involving all citizens in fostering a constructive, courageous, and enthusiastic spirit, able to generate radical change. A change that sees us participating not merely as inhabitants of a continent, but as active members of a common home founded upon deep and shared values.

It is necessary to re-establish among European peoples a relationship of *Fides*, that is, mutual trust, respect, and a lasting bond that transcends the logic of a mere *Foedus* – that is, of temporary, utilitarian, and often fragile agreements. Without authentic trust, there can be no true political community: only an alliance of interests and expediency, bound to erode over time.

To build this new covenant among European peoples, it is necessary to return to the roots, rediscovering the spiritual and cultural heritage that gave rise to the very idea of Europe. Christian roots must be acknowledged not for confessional purposes, but because they constitute the common ground from which values such as personal dignity, solidarity, justice, respect for life, and freedom have emerged. At the same time, the identity traditions of European peoples must be safeguarded and valued in their richness and diversity.

A united Europe must not be equated with standardization, but rather understood as unity in diversity—an approach capable of integrating cultural plurality within a common political and civic framework. This calls for a renewed commitment to those universal values in which believers and non-believers, secular and Christian communities alike, can find common ground and walk forward together, reaffirming the deeper meaning of European citizenship.

President Sergio Mattarella has warned: "*The world risks sliding into the abyss as it did in 1914.*" The First World War, which began in Sarajevo, was initially a conflict internal to Europe, as was the Second World War, which started in 1939 with Germany's invasion of Poland. Both later became "world" wars, as though any war in Europe has the potential to spread across the globe. It has now been more than three years since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. We are still in Europe. We cannot stand by helplessly. Such inaction would constitute a grave failure of responsibility; it would be unforgivable.

Over the past eighty years, Europe has lived in peace and has also inspired unifying and universal visions around the world, beginning in the immediate postwar period. In Italy, this took shape with the drafting of the Constitution; in Europe, through the commitment to the Union; and at the international level, with the creation of the United Nations in 1945. It is striking to recall that in 1940 there were only two democratic regimes on the planet: the United Kingdom and the United States. The rest was a long succession of despotic regimes, dictatorships, and autocracies. In the decades that followed, Europe and the West promoted democratic visions across the globe. Pope Francis also recalled this in the encyclical

Fratelli tutti: “For decades, it seemed that the world had learned from so many wars and failures and was slowly moving toward various forms of integration. For example, the dream of a united Europe took shape, a Europe capable of recognizing common roots and rejoicing in the diversity that inhabits it. We recall ‘the firm conviction of the Founding Fathers of the European Union, who longed for a future based on the ability to work together to overcome divisions and to foster peace and communion among all the peoples of the continent.’ The aspiration for Latin American integration gained strength, and initial steps were taken. In other countries and regions, there were efforts at reconciliation and rapprochement that bore fruit, and others that appeared promising”.

There was a time when lasting peace seemed possible. It was the night of 9 November 1989, with the fall of the Berlin Wall. Dreams of peace immediately arose across the world. The conditions were in place to realize them, and in some situations this proved possible. A few examples: a negotiating process was launched for the Holy Land with the Oslo Accords (1993). In South Africa, the apartheid regime collapsed. In 1992, peace was achieved in Mozambique. In Northern Ireland, positions drew closer. Peace was also restored internally in Latin America (in Guatemala) and in Central America (in El Salvador).

Yet within the space of three years, all of this was squandered. It began with the outbreak of the Balkan conflict: a fratricidal horror. And yet, in the former Yugoslavia there were more than one and a half million mixed marriages. Coexistence was, clearly, more than possible. War also brought a massacre among relatives themselves. What followed were the conflicts in the Great Lakes region—in Burundi, Uganda, the Congo — continuing to this day without interruption. What a tragic waste of peace there was, and continues to be. Not only was the dream of universal peace gradually dulled; powerful ethno-nationalist passions were reawakened. The speed with which they took over was staggering. And equally striking was the force with which they overturned a historic achievement that had seemed definitive. Hotbeds of hatred were ignited and entrenched hostilities consolidated in various parts of the world and in different spheres, both political and religious. And, inevitably, a new, reckless arms race began immediately.

With the resurgence of nationalism, we have squandered peace. Globalization, which the West (Europe included) has spread to the farthest corners of the earth, has been pursued almost exclusively on the level of the market. The promotion of genuine wealth redistribution has been entirely neglected. Intolerable inequalities, sustained by hyper-individualism (and the resulting hyper-nationalism), have driven individuals and peoples to turn inward upon themselves. The consequences have been bitter: walls and wars have multiplied, causing incalculable damage. Pope Francis has warned: “Every war leaves the world worse than it found it. War is a failure of politics and of humanity, a shameful surrender, a defeat in the face of the forces of evil.”

The decision concerning war, as stated in the Italian Constitution, must not only remain untouched but rather be further deepened. How can one not recall what Luigi Sturzo hoped for? The Sicilian priest closely followed the intense debate among Catholics in the aftermath of the First World War, which Benedict XV sought to stop, describing it as an “useless slaughter.” Faced with such a terrifying war, a debate arose among Catholics that called into question the concept of “just war.” Sturzo proposed the abolition of the “right to war,” identifying alternative means for resolving tensions and conflicts. He took up this idea again after the Second World War. His position remains clear. Why not take it up again today, in the face of the reemergence of the possibility of a tactical nuclear conflict? Catholics cannot fail to treasure the progress of the Church’s magisterium under recent popes with regard to the prospect of moving beyond the framework of “just war.”

2. Restarting from Europe

We are convinced that Europe must rediscover its soul in order to contribute to a new international order, as well as to restore strength to the individual states that compose it. This was the experience of the 1940s, when, in the face of the collapse of Nazism and Fascism, a number of Catholics, together with lay men and women, committed themselves to imagining a new future for Italy, for Europe, and for the international order as a whole.

We believe that the time has come—indeed, that this is the moment—for European Christians to recover the momentum needed to outline the contours of a new “Europe,” one capable of inspiring passion and stirring hearts toward a renewed international order. This is a task that concerns all peoples,

of course, but Europe, by drawing on its own roots, can offer the peoples of the world a precious, and perhaps indispensable, contribution.

The very election of Pope Leo XIV points in this direction. Through his choice of name and the reasons he has given for it, Pope Leo XIV evokes the spirit that led his predecessor Leo XIII, through the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, to offer a vision for addressing the epoch-making transformation that was taking place at the end of the nineteenth century, particularly in the Western world. Today, faced with the *rerum novissimarum* (including emerging and converging technologies) do we, European Christians, not bear a responsibility, together with our secular friends and all men and women of goodwill, to confront the challenges before us in order to help establish a renewed world order, also through a "new" Europe? We must return to our roots—above all the evangelical ones—in order to live a form of Christianity capable of permeating contemporary culture and fostering that universal common good which is the very substance of the Gospel. This is not a Christianity with hegemonic ambitions. The age of Christendom lies behind us, and it will not return. What is needed is a Christianity that is lived and shown as a source of inspiration for a new planetary humanism, through a renewed ordering of both Europe and the world.

The "change of era" in which we are immersed—a theme often emphasized by Pope Francis—could result in the end of the world as we know it. A "change of era" means that, for the first time in history, humanity possesses the capacity to destroy itself and creation itself: since 1945 with the nuclear bomb, then through the disasters caused by climate change, and now through emerging and converging technologies that allow for the radical manipulation of the human itself. And yet, faced with this new horizon—at times bearing apocalyptic traits—no unifying and forward-looking vision seems to emerge. Hence the widespread disorientation and fear, and the resulting retreat into oneself. Pope John Paul II was right when he stated that "man suffers from a lack of vision." This is the central issue of our time, and it is above all a cultural—or, if one prefers, a pre-political—question.

I believe it is fitting for Europe to take the initiative once again. Its history demands it, and today this responsibility is even more pressing. We recall the (rhetorical) question posed by Pope Francis to the European Parliament upon receiving the Charlemagne Prize: "What has happened to you, humanistic Europe, champion of human rights, democracy, and freedom?" He returned to this question more explicitly in *Fratelli tutti*: "For decades it seemed that the world had learned from so many wars and failures and was slowly moving toward various forms of integration. For example, the dream of a united Europe took shape, able to recognize common roots and to rejoice in the diversity dwelling within it. We recall 'the firm conviction of the Founding Fathers of the European Union, who desired a future based on the ability to work together to overcome divisions and to foster peace and communion among all the peoples of the continent.' The aspiration for Latin American integration gained strength and some steps were taken. In other countries and regions, there were attempts at reconciliation and rapprochement that bore fruit, and others that appeared promising." Pope Francis was convinced that "creativity, ingenuity, the ability to rise again and to move beyond one's own limits belong to the soul of Europe." Yet we ask ourselves: where has the soul of Europe gone? How can we overcome the weariness of the European spirit in the face of an uncertain future? Even today, many people look to Europe in the hope of drawing nourishment from a renewed Christianity. Many others—perhaps precisely because they fear its inspirational power—are afraid of it, to the point of wishing for its dissolution. That would be a tragedy not only for Europeans, but for all humanity.

We are convinced that Europe can offer new vitality to the peoples of the earth, and that Christianity can once again warm the soul of Europe, enabling it to rediscover its passion for its universal mission. Peoples must be helped to abandon the logic of economic and military power as the guiding principle of international relations. European Churches, in their diverse organizational forms—must once again become passionately committed to a Europe with a universal heart and universal horizons. No longer a Europe closed in on itself like a fortress, within which an identity-based, minority, residual Christianity is defended. What is urgently needed is a Europe that rediscovers the contagious passion of a humanism worthy of the human person, grounded in a shared passion for humanity itself—a humanity common to all peoples.

The challenge is decisive: a new Europe for a new planetary era. Today we live in a globalized world that shares the same vital problems and the same global threats. No people can live in isolation. The pandemic of 2020 demonstrated this in dramatic fashion. No one can be saved alone. All the great challenges transcend national competencies. And yet, we are witnessing a return to nationalism. Europe must rediscover its universal passion and transmit it to all peoples. Taking up this challenge is crucial

for the future of the planet. And within this horizon, Christianity is indispensable: it can awaken that universal passion for the salvation of all peoples which constitutes the core of its spiritual, social, and even political strength.

European Christians must realize that Europe is the "nearest neighbor," even if—or precisely because—it often appears the most distant. Europe is the field in which Christianity possesses the greatest historical depth, experience, and creative capacity. This is an extraordinary heritage that challenges us, and it would be irresponsible to leave it buried and inert, without reclaiming and investing it for a world that continues to fragment. Pope Francis, in the address cited above, recalled that "in the last century, Europe bore witness to humanity that a new beginning was possible: after years of tragic conflict, culminating in the most devastating war ever known, something entirely new emerged, by the grace of God, unprecedented in history." And he exhorted us: "The Church can and must contribute to the rebirth of a Europe that is weary, yet still rich in energy and potential."

We must therefore bring to an end the season of lamentation that leads to a bleak resignation. Let us instead acknowledge a measure of shame over this constant complaining—including the sterile and disheartening quarrel between conservatives and progressives—which is making us contentious and, at the same time, entirely ineffective. The Gospel—even a single word of it, provided it is truly evangelical—calls us to a new creativity. The European Churches must once again become subjects who look, rather than objects to be looked at, if we wish to inhabit the signs of history while bearing witness to the gaze of Jesus. We look too much inward and worry too much about how others look at us. We look too little at the world, and we listen too little to the cry for help rising above all from the poorest.

3. Returning to the Gospel: Jesus, the Crowd, and the Disciples

Let us reopen the Gospel! There is an emblematic image that the Evangelists suggest to us, one that can become the path to be taken up once again: the icon of "Jesus, the crowd, and the disciples." There are three actors (plus one). The first is Jesus, the one who takes the initiative, sowing the words and signs of the coming of the Kingdom without showing any "partiality." (cf. Acts 10:34). In various ways, Jesus shows particular concern for those who are "separated" from God and for those who are "abandoned" by the community (sinners and the poor, in the language of the Gospel). Through his words and actions, he offers liberation from evil and conversion to hope, in the name of God, who is the Father of all humanity.

The second actor is the crowd that follows him along the way and at times even pursues him so as to get ahead of him. It is to the crowd (to the various crowds, both within and beyond Israel) that Jesus addresses the proclamation of the Gospel. He does not speak only to a few enlightened or chosen individuals. Jesus places the crowd in direct contact with God's gift, which is he himself, often in ways that surprise and at times scandalize the witnesses.

Jesus accepts as interlocutors all those who belong to the crowd: he listens to the passionate protest of the Canaanite woman (Mt 15:21–28), who cannot accept being excluded from the blessing he brings; he enters into dialogue with the Samaritan woman (Jn 4), despite her condition as a woman socially and religiously compromised; he calls forth the free and grateful act of faith of the man born blind (Jn 9), whom official religion had dismissed as lying outside the bounds of grace.

Among those who follow Jesus, a third actor emerges clearly: the apostles and disciples, destined for an authoritative mediation between Jesus and the crowd. Their entry coincides with the call, which is not preceded by a history of healing and conversion. The call of Jesus is itself the foundation of their healing and conversion, of the blessing and communion offered to them. It is not a privilege, but a ministry, a service. Through the gift of the Spirit, they are to safeguard the place of Jesus, without replacing him, so that it remains possible to encounter him.

Jesus, the crowd, the apostles and the disciples: this is the icon to contemplate if the Church of our time is to become ever more what it is at the level of the Gospel. None of these three actors can leave the scene. If Jesus is missing and someone else takes his place, the Church becomes a contract between the apostles and the crowd, whose synodal dialogue will end up following the script of political maneuvering. Without the apostles, authorized by Jesus and instructed by the Spirit, the relationship with evangelical truth is broken, and the crowd remains exposed to a myth or an ideology about Jesus, whether it accepts him or rejects him. Without the crowd, the relationship of the apostles with Jesus

degenerates into a sectarian and self-referential form of religion, and evangelization loses its light, which is the revelation of God addressing everyone directly and offering them salvation.

Into this picture then bursts the "extra" actor: the fourth, the antagonist, who brings onto the stage the diabolical separation of the other three. Faced with the disturbing prospect of the cross, some disciples walk away and crowds change their mood. The snare that divides—and thus obstructs a shared journey—manifests itself indiscriminately in the forms of religious rigor, of moral injunctions that present themselves as more demanding than those of Jesus, and of the seduction of a worldly political wisdom that claims to be more effective than discernment of spirits. To escape the deceptions of the "fourth actor," continuous conversion is required. Emblematic in this regard is the episode of the centurion Cornelius (Acts 10), a precursor of that "council" of Jerusalem (Acts 15) which stands as a crucial point of reference for a synodal Church.

The fundamental question to be posed is simple yet demanding: how can we be with Jesus, with the crowd and with the disciples at this moment in history? In fact, there is no perfect Christianity that once existed and that we must now apply. A perfect Christianity has neither existed nor will it ever exist in history: every Christian community must always convert and humble itself for its inadequacy and measure itself against the Word of God, which never ceases to inspire it. This is the great challenge for every Christian generation—ours included—also amid all the defects and imperfections of the historical realization of the Christian community. One conviction must be reaffirmed: over the course of history, we are not moving away from the purity of the origins to which we should return; rather, with each passing day we are drawing closer to the clarification of our destination, which we understand ever more fully—something that indeed had to await its time in order to be understood and carried out.

We should recover God's own gaze, as John writes: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (Jn 3:16). God loves the world, including that world called Europe—and, through Europe, the whole world. After all, what were the missionary impulses that set out precisely from Europe, despite all the faults committed on the colonial front? Is it not therefore urgent to renew initiative in shaping a European political project adequate to the spiritual humanism of the community—one that, in this historical moment, can take on the weight of an epoch-defining issue? Prevailing policies appear increasingly polarized around a material humanism of society. And in Europe this means, beyond an ethical reductionism of civil coexistence, a blind defense of privileges accumulated over decades of democratic governance. Unfortunately, this advantage, very poorly managed by the culture of human rights and widespread well-being, has been rapidly exhausted.

4. Church and Society: A single shared History

European Christians are called to rediscover their responsibility toward the peoples of Europe. Unfortunately, a dangerous self-referential tendency within Europe's Christian communities must be acknowledged. We know well, of course, that internal problems are not lacking, some of them very serious. Yet focusing on them not only slows the missionary dimension (and thus the planetary horizon intrinsic to Christianity, and not only to it), and therefore the indispensable evangelical leavening of society, but also weakens the very life of the ecclesial community. The result is a double impoverishment, both inwardly and in relation to society. A spiritual and cultural awakening is essential, one that can set in motion a broad and plural movement of reflection on the present and future of Europe and of the world. We European Christians are seriously behind on this front. We must allow ourselves to be challenged by the Gospel in order to give Europe a new soul. Only a renewed Church will be able to help European society become more fraternal and more supportive.

We know well that there are not two histories, one of Christians and another of civil society—just as there are not two cities, a Catholic one and a civil one. There is a single, shared great history that involves everyone. European Christianity must rediscover a new vitality in order to inspire tomorrow's Europe to be a common home for all, as it was in the past. An alliance with other humanisms, with other cultures, with other histories is urgently needed. There is a need for mutual cross-fertilization. Christians, other believers, and secular humanists—within a renewed alliance—can free Europe from the prison of nationalist egocentrism and generate a new reality that lives and operates not only for itself but also for the world.

Signs of growth and rays of light are already present, enabling us to imagine a new way of seeing and living Europe at the beginning of the third millennium. We must emerge from the prison of the *I* in

order to promote the *we*, so as to rekindle that orientation toward the "social" which is in the DNA of Christianity. A careful reading of Scripture and Tradition tells us that Christianity is either social or it is not. Benedict XVI—in the encyclical *Spe Salvi*—asked why, in the modern age, an individualistic Christianity took hold, one that urges the faithful to save their own souls individually, when the entire biblical tradition tells us that either we are saved together as a people or we are not saved at all. We must reflect anew on these words of Benedict XVI: "Henri de Lubac, drawing on the theology of the Fathers in all its breadth, was able to show that salvation has always been considered a communal reality. The Letter to the Hebrews itself speaks of a 'city' (cf. 11:10, 16; 12:22; 13:14) and thus of a communal salvation. Accordingly, sin is understood by the Fathers as the destruction of the unity of the human race, as fragmentation and division. Babel, the place of the confusion of languages and of separation, reveals itself as an expression of what sin is at its root. And thus 'redemption' appears precisely as the restoration of unity, in which we find ourselves once again together in a union that takes shape in the worldwide community of believers" (*Spe Salvi*, 14).

5. A New Political Culture

Here, then, is the crucial question: is it possible to imagine a renewed vocation of European Christianity capable of holding together the worship of God in spirit and in truth—which undeniably passes through responsibility for love of neighbor—with passion for the destiny of civil society, conceived democratically as a culturally composite and politically self-governing subject? Should European Christianity—in all its articulations, including its political dimension—not rediscover a passion for a new future both for the European continent and for the planet itself? This is the question addressed to a Christianity that is called to resume initiative in a context in which prevailing political approaches appear increasingly polarized around a purely material humanism of the collective.

Europe is the field in which Christianity has accumulated the greatest historical depth, experience, and capacity for invention. Precisely this heritage must challenge European Christians today to take once again into their own hands the treasure of faith and humanism, and to awaken a Europe that is fragmenting into sovereigntist egoisms. What must be recovered and reinterpreted is the tension toward universality inherent in the Christian message as lived within the centuries-long European experience. Within the very fabric of European Christianity—despite a long history marked by trials and errors—there remains that profound tension which has led Europe, and humanity itself, toward democracy, human rights, and natural science.

The diffusion of these civilizational traits, in their present forms, displays a paradoxical combination of immense popularity and troubling drama: there are no longer any peoples—whatever their anthropology or religious tradition—who can exempt themselves from the developments of European invention, from the market economy to contractual justice and technical instrumental rationality. In this sense, Europe may be said to be broader than the West itself, and capable of fermenting the entire planet.

It is true that the atmosphere generated by financial capitalism, neoliberal competition, technological substitution, and ethical individualism paradoxically intensifies a "war of all against all" that is emerging everywhere in the world. Countries with noble and millennia-old cultures are being brutalized by trade wars, civil wars, border wars, wars of sovereignty, and wars of prestige. At the same time, within these societies, aggressive impulses increasingly erupt—driven by similar causes—whose emotional apparatus often fails even to register the danger and, frequently, the true horrors of their consequences.

Faced with these disturbing scenarios, European Christianity must rediscover a proactive and prophetic mission, capable of outlining a planetary humanistic horizon that alone can open the way to a peaceful future. It is urgent to resume initiative in fostering the growth of a European political culture adequate to the spiritual humanism of the community, which in the present historical moment can assume the weight of an epochal question.

The increase of material well-being does not distribute itself automatically; on the contrary, inequalities grow exponentially and begin to erode the very foundations of the promises of a form of citizenship supported and regulated by justice. Moreover, the culture of human rights is rapidly evolving toward an obsessive cult of indiscriminate individual freedom, legitimizing arbitrary manipulation of all fundamental bonds: those of eros and generation, of the self and the body, of individual well-being and the common good. This manipulation—carefully encouraged by the neoliberal consumer economy and facilitated by technological performance protocols—generates forms, largely unconscious, of

habituation and mental constraint that the history of the relationship between ideal powers and real freedoms had never before made possible.

A European Christianity that seeks to be equal to the situation must bring to a close the season of lamentation over the weakening of a form of spiritual assistance to citizenship once provided by the state Church and by civil religion. It must even confess, with a sense of shame, a certain embarrassment at this lamentation: while Europeans agonize over how to make Christianity more "attractive" on the market of psycho-physical well-being, many thousands of believers are odiously persecuted and entire communities are violently driven toward extinction.

Equally urgent is the renewed call to Christian unity. Contemporary ecumenism appears to survive mainly in celebration and devotion, and risks being emptied of theological and cultural seriousness. We must seriously ask ourselves whether Christian traditions truly desire reconciliation, and whether Christian communities are fully aware of the marginalization to which the division of faith condemns the proclamation of the Gospel. Europe has been profoundly shaped—in its riches and contradictions—by the three Christian traditions: Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant. Christianity was born outside Europe, yet it was in Europe that it received its most historically effective cultural and intellectual imprint, as Joseph Ratzinger often emphasized. The division of Christians in Europe—and elsewhere—remains a scandal that no longer seems to burn in consciences as it once did. It is striking that the unifying impulses unleashed by the Second Vatican Council, which transformed relationships among both the faithful and Church hierarchies, have cooled so dramatically. How can one fail to recall the words of the great Patriarch Athenagoras: *"Sister Churches, brother peoples"*? A troubling question must be asked: do the divisions and conflicts that run through the European fabric not find a form of complicity in the Churches' lack of unity? In recent times, the *Charta Oecumenica* has been updated, reaffirming a shared commitment among European Christians, and it is to be hoped that this will generate renewed movement. The appeal of Pope Leo XIV and Patriarch Bartholomew to convene, in 2033, a meeting of all Christian Churches—even if only to establish a common date for Easter—could represent a significant step.

Equally decisive is another dimension: that of a Christian–Jewish–secular Europe, more broadly understood, which recognizes its responsibility to weave new relationships with other religions—now deeply present on European soil—and to involve them in a project of planetary fraternity. The three Abrahamic religions are called to rediscover that universal horizon grounded in a common origin in God and a shared destiny in God. Beyond this lies a further frontier: a renewed dialogue between religions and secular reason. In sum, Christian faith (in its three traditions), the faiths of the world's other religions, and Western reason (together with political democracy) can become decisive actors in intercultural and interreligious dialogue, guided by the shared goal of affirming universal human rights. This unprecedented form of disinterested witness by religious experience requires an unavoidable intercultural encounter.

This is the third frontier to be crossed, and it demands a fresh and generative creativity. Those called most directly into question are intellectuals worthy of the name. In the current conjuncture - in which only faint signs have so far emerged, mainly through generous private initiatives - Europe is called to rediscover its vocation to dialogue with other religious and cultural partners in order to identify a rational understanding of nature and, consequently, a renewed foundation for natural law governing humanity's dwelling in the world. The goal is to restore confidence in prophecy as a source of communal creativity and to reinvigorate a humanism that is in precipitous decline. Spiritual quality is nourished by opportunities for dialogue, reflection, intellectual curiosity, aesthetic provocation, and the joy of learning - by exploiting every possible synergy with other intermediate bodies operating within civil society and by creating new ones where necessary.

Young people and adults alike are losing language, capacity, and taste for existential narration, for interior communication, for the metaphorical richness of affections, emotions, and movements of the soul. Cities themselves are losing their humanistic punctuation.

6. A Planetary Humanism

The utopia that animates these pages lies in suggesting to a church-centered Christianity that, at this historical moment, rather than merely following the thread of its institutional crisis - that self-referentiality to which reference has already been made - it must commit itself to deciphering the *kairos*

of the anthropological transformation we are presently experiencing. This historical passage is to be understood as an opportune time for living and communicating the Gospel of the Kingdom. With creativity and urgency, a spiritual, moral, cultural, and political awakening must be promoted, capable of setting in motion what we may call a "new planetary humanism": a world in which peoples rediscover harmony among themselves and with creation. This is the great message bequeathed to us by Pope Francis and taken up anew by Pope Leo. It is an epochal challenge, one that requires men and women of good will - believers and non-believers alike - to unite in imagining, with creative audacity, the new future of which the entire planet is in need.

The cry of desperation - which is also a cry for help - rising from the world and from Europe is deafening: people are becoming accustomed to war, while inequalities grow and passion for ideals is anesthetized. There is a kind of void that is swallowing everything, including the most extraordinary human achievements attained over the centuries. Raw violence is poisoning relationships, and egocentrism is emptying consciences: passions have become sad and devoid of hope. So too have thoughts, now weakened, and sufferings, now fragile. Democracy itself is at risk. Humanism is in danger of extinction under the combined assault of opposing extremes: religious fundamentalism on the one hand and technocratic materialism on the other. In this vacuum, young people are understandably drawn to the promise of security offered by these extremes. Many drift like meteors through space, colliding along random—and often lethal—trajectories. A world fragmenting into individual and collective egoisms touches us directly, because it undermines the Gospel of love and of universal fraternity.

Contemporary "church-centered Christianity"—we repeat—is excessively folded in upon itself and upon the internal problems of the Churches, which certainly exist and are often serious. Yet it is urgent that European Christianity become more proactive and more compelling if it is to encourage Europe to assume the role of a subject actively promoting a new planetary humanism. A repetitive or merely reorganized Christianity is not sufficient. The distance between faith and culture, between Churches and society, is dramatic. While secularization pushes toward doing without religion, increasingly frequent "extreme" political agendas instrumentalize "extreme" believers as their support base. Christians can and must promote a Europe understood as a place in which a broad alliance can be practiced, aimed at building a society that is genuinely human.

Indeed, it is in Europe that the relationship between religion and politics has the longest history. Christianity, together with Enlightenment humanism, originally and positively shaped its relationship with society and with politics itself. This is a legacy that must be reinterpreted and re-proposed in new terms and new forms. Serious errors were committed in the past—this has already been acknowledged—and yet, in the deeper chords of European Christianity, there still lives that tension which led peoples to trust in democracy, to affirm the strength of human rights, and to appreciate science.

In the face of the troubling scenarios confronting humanity as a whole, European Christians bear the responsibility of rediscovering a proactive and prophetic mission. Initiative must be renewed in fostering a political culture adequate to the spiritual humanism of the community. Prevailing political approaches, unfortunately, are increasingly polarized around a purely material humanism of the collective. In Europe, this translates not only into an ethical reductionism of civil coexistence, but also into an obtuse defense of privileges accumulated over decades of democratic governance. This advantage—poorly managed within a culture of human rights and widespread well-being—is rapidly being exhausted. One need only consider the dramatic growth of inequalities despite the overall increase in material prosperity.

Moreover, the culture of human rights is rapidly evolving toward an obsessive cult of individual freedom understood as the arbitrary manipulation of all fundamental bonds: those of eros and generation, of the self and the body, of individual well-being and the common good. This manipulation—carefully encouraged by the neoliberal consumer economy and facilitated by technological performance protocols—generates forms of habituation and mental constraint, largely unconscious, that the history of the relationship between ideal powers and real freedoms had never previously made possible.

7. Non-Ethnic Cultural Roots

In order to grasp adequately the horizon of a new planetary humanism, a more careful reflection is required to reinterpret the meaning of Europe's (Judeo-Christian) roots. Any perspective imbued with ethnic overtones must be decisively excluded. One might say that Europe's most distant—though not least important—roots are not European, but extra-European, indeed Asian. Scholars tell us that

Europeans descend from populations originating in Central Asia who migrated westward, passing through the Mediterranean basin and the Central European plains. It was precisely from this paradox that Nazism drew the distorted impulse to assert the superiority of the "Aryan race" over other "races," adopting as its symbol the swastika—a sign originally created in northern India. It is therefore appropriate to recall that European populations themselves descend from immigrants originating on another continent. This reminds us that migration—which has shaped Europe from its very beginnings—is part of the broader human story. Europeans are not distinguished from other peoples of the earth by any notion of "blood." Indeed, as is now firmly established scientifically, all human populations are profoundly intermingled and cannot be reduced to clearly distinct genetic lineages. History tells us this.

Geography, too, teaches us that migrations from Central Asia are among the consequences of the bond linking Europe to the great Euro–Afro–Asian continental mass, of which Europe is essentially a relatively small appendage. Its earliest history is therefore part of the broader Euro–Afro–Asian *oikoumene*, of which the Silk Road —today once again prominent through China's "One Belt One Road" initiative—constitutes one of the most significant testimonies. In other words, the separation of Europe from Asia—so often emphasized in terms of opposition between civilizational values and social models, such as Western freedom versus Asian despotism—has no "natural" origin. Europe began to exist when someone started to perceive a boundary where none had previously been seen: the boundary that today separates Greece and Turkey, or more precisely European Turkey from Asian Turkey, cutting through the great city of Istanbul. This is a boundary that is far from evident geographically and that emerged for historical reasons, those evoked in the great epic of the Trojan War recounted by Homer.

Not by chance, uncertainty regarding its eastern boundary has marked the entire course of European history. In many later representations, Greece itself—which nonetheless constituted Europe's first nucleus—was placed at the margins, or even outside, depictions of Europe (for example, during the long period of the Ottoman advance, when Vienna came to be regarded as Europe's extreme outpost). A similar fate—even more pronounced—befell Russia, alternately included or excluded in such representations. Europe, in short, has a problem of eastern borders that have never been clearly defined, with its western inhabitants tending to exclude more eastern territories and its eastern inhabitants tending to include them—as John Paul II did when he spoke of a single Europe stretching "from the Atlantic to the Urals," long before the collapse of the Soviet Union. This may well be the clearest sign of an identity that has never been defined so much by geography as by history.

8. Athens, Rome, Jerusalem … and the Megacities

If we wished to outline European identity—in very broad terms—we might gather it around three symbolic cities: Athens, Rome, and Jerusalem (the latter, moreover, not located on European soil). As is well known, Athens embodies the tradition of the *polis* and of European rationality itself, which in the eighteenth century would come to be known as the Enlightenment. Rome, by contrast, is the symbolic city of law and justice: it was in Rome that the maxim *ubi societas, ibi ius* was coined. One need only recall the episode of Saint Paul, who, in response to the sentence imposed upon him by local law, proudly declared: "*civis Romanus sum*." One becomes a citizen of Rome because public institutions recognize the rights of persons. And finally, Jerusalem. Although not situated on European soil, Jerusalem has always been claimed as part of Europe's symbolic space: the Crusades, before proposing the objective of conquest, intended to affirm its belonging to that space. Jerusalem signifies the Christian faith, in close connection with the Jewish tradition and Semitic culture.

The European, then, is one who builds civil coexistence upon law and justice, but also one who believes in the evangelical tradition. To mention these three cities and what they represent does not, however, mean ignoring or excluding other important influences, such as those repeatedly exercised by Arab culture.

The three traditions represented by Athens, Rome, and Jerusalem have traversed difficult moments, such as those constituted by new migratory movements, habitually referred to as the barbarian invasions. Although these were profound upheavals, it was precisely the legacies represented by these three cities that made it possible to weld together old and new. The role played in this regard by the Church—and in particular by Benedictine monasticism—is well known: it brought classical heritage into contact with new immigrant populations, shaping, in a Christian light, the value-based and cultural foundations of

modern Europe. The architectural and urban landscape that still characterizes Europe today was formed through this synthesis of diverse elements fused into a coherent whole.

Today, the different ideal, moral, and cultural traditions represented by these three cities are sometimes perceived as being in opposition to one another. In recent years, in particular, the debate on the Christian roots of Europe has been animated by discussions that have set secular culture against Christian culture. Yet this is a relatively new opposition, one that forgets how Europe's different traditions developed from common roots and in deeply intertwined ways. Even though secularists and Catholics clashed sharply in the nineteenth century over the public role of the Church, their underlying values were, in many respects, similar. If today divisions sometimes appear radical—for example, on major issues such as family and life—this is not because these traditions have suddenly become incompatible, but rather because their deep historical understanding is being lost. Such contrasts often arise from ideological radicalisms on one side or the other, which distort the profound meaning of different traditions that nonetheless share common ethical and anthropological references.

9. The City: Experimentation in a Culture of Gift

A new culture of the "we" requires that Christians place themselves at the service of the *polis* so that it may become a "home for all." This calls for the involvement of all the social "bodies" that compose it, in order to promote a polyarchic social order capable of making democracy more robust. At the foundation of this vision, the intuition of Paul VI regarding the "polyarchic" task of Christian laypeople in the political, economic, and social life of the city has become strikingly relevant once again.

Pope Montini—who in his youth was among the promoters of the Camaldoli Code and of Italy's reconstruction after the fall of Fascism and the tragedy of the Second World War—expressed this magnificently in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*:

"The laity, whose special vocation places them in the midst of the world and in charge of the most varied temporal tasks, must exercise a very special form of evangelization. Their primary and immediate task is not the establishment and development of the ecclesial community—which is the specific role of the Pastors—but the activation of all the Christian and evangelical possibilities that are hidden, yet already present and operative, within the realities of the world. The proper field of their evangelizing activity is the vast and complex world of politics, social life, and the economy; likewise, culture, the sciences and the arts, international life, the mass media; and also other realities particularly open to evangelization, such as love, the family, the education of children and adolescents, professional work, and suffering. The more there are lay people imbued with the evangelical spirit, responsible for these realities and explicitly committed to them, competent in promoting them and aware of the need to develop the full measure of their Christian capacity—often kept hidden and stifled—the more these realities, without losing or sacrificing anything of their human dimension, but rather revealing a transcendent dimension often unknown, will be placed at the service of the building of the Kingdom of God, and thus of salvation in Jesus Christ" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 70).

10. "Gentle Power" and European Universalism

Among the most significant outcomes of Europe's historical and cultural development, two perspectives—two particularly important ideals—may be highlighted.

The first is that of a "gentle power." In Europe, respect for human dignity and the overcoming of the ancient law of the scapegoat matured slowly and laboriously, yet profoundly. Judeo-Christian roots and Enlightenment traditions contributed to desacralizing, taming, and refining the power of human beings over one another—an ineliminable dimension of human coexistence, yet one capable of producing terrible effects. It is no coincidence that in Europe politics was separated from religion (the opposition is not between "Caesar and God," but between "God and Mammon"): sovereignty underwent multiple limitations, the separation of powers gradually asserted itself, liberal principles spread, democracy was conceived and practiced, and so forth. In this way, Europe acquired authority for the entire planet. The recognition of human rights has European roots. Likewise, the link between the exercise of power and the protection of citizens belongs to the European tradition: from medieval thaumaturgic kings to the

modern welfare state, power in Europe has been called to care for the lives of the men and women who inhabit it.

The second ideal perspective of Europe is its innate "universality." One might say that European genius lies in its capacity to relate to other areas of the planet and to "think" the whole world within a universal vision proper to the Judeo-Christian tradition. Christianity is, by its very nature, universal. This is why Europe conceived itself as a historical subject that builds and organizes itself around principles, objectives, and initiatives capable of involving the entire world. This impulse generated a particularly significant project in the history of the last five centuries: the project of the West. Naturally, the ways in which Europeans have practiced universality have often been open to criticism, especially when European hegemony was imposed by force. Yet the opening of horizons that embraces the whole of humanity remains fundamentally valid, and current tendencies toward European self-withdrawal are a matter of serious concern.

11. The Reasons for a United Europe

These roots also ground the contemporary reasons for a united Europe as it has taken shape over the course of the twentieth century. During the twentieth century, the West "left" Europe: the torch of this ideal of universality first passed into American hands and then began to face competition from other projects that matured in regions of the world previously marginal on the global stage. The idea of a united Europe developed within a context of globalization processes no longer attributable to the hegemony of European nation-states, with the aim not only of accompanying their positive developments but also of countering their negative consequences and implications.

Today, Eurosceptical movements accuse European institutions of "stealing" sovereignty from nation-states. This is not the case. Rather, it is certain processes of globalization that erode national sovereignties, while European unity seeks to defend them through closer cooperation. European unity is based on an exchange between independence and sovereignty: European states relinquish portions of their independence to the Community institutions in order to defend their sovereignties collectively.

The Old Continent embarked upon this path as early as the First World War, beginning to dream of a Europe without war and finally united; after the Second World War, it began to realize that dream. The absence of conflict within united Europe from 1945 to the present day is an eloquent novelty that requires no further comment. I would also like to recall another role exercised by the European institutions, already highlighted by Alcide De Gasperi in a famous lecture delivered in Brussels in 1948: a united Europe helps individual European states to defend and to develop democracy. De Gasperi was thinking of Italy, but his insight applies equally to other European countries.

Naturally, this does not mean that the European Union is perfect—far from it. Yet what is needed is not less Europe, but more Europe. Only a more united and more solidary Europe can confront the challenges of globalization. A clear example is that of migrants seeking to reach our continent. It would be inhuman, unjust, and dangerous to ignore their appeals; moreover, migrants constitute a labor resource that Europe needs. At the same time, it is evident that a phenomenon of such extraordinary and epochal proportions can only be addressed by Europeans acting together, drawing not only upon economic and political resources, but also upon ideal and moral ones.

This is also an important initiative for rendering globalization more humane. Attempting to halt it by closing all doors, as new nationalisms would wish, would not only be impossible but also wrong, as demonstrated by the negative effects for all of the trade war between the United States and China. A stronger Europe, by contrast, does not benefit only Europeans: it also represents a powerful impetus toward developing that "globalization of solidarity" of which Pope Leo speaks. Another major arena in which Europe can and must play a fundamental role in realizing such a globalization of solidarity is undoubtedly the climate crisis and sustainable development. Only large groups of states that strongly share common values—such as Europe—can act effectively to bring about the enormous planetary transformation that is becoming ever more urgent. This is a great undertaking in which the role of religions and Churches is fundamental, for the good of European peoples and of the entire world, to counter nationalism and to build peace.

12. Love for Europe and Liberation from the Culture of Debt

It is now widely shared opinion that the creation of a Catholic (or Christian) "party" is no longer possible. At the same time, a merely civil "diaspora" of Christianity—which consigns faith to a purely personal inspiration without the cultural and communal mediation of its humanistic potential—appears of doubtful coherence with the Christian mission.

The formulation of the Church's social doctrine, which nonetheless remains a testimony to the humanistic vocation of Christian faith, cannot be assumed as a political manifesto, nor as a programmatic precondition, of a Christian community identified as a civil actor. The Church as a "perfect society" is a formula laden with ambiguity, both in the historical-juridical sense of public law and in the broader ethical-theological sense. The awareness that a treasure of grace is entrusted to earthen vessels full of cracks is—once again—a shared conviction. This awareness today does not strike only, as in the time of the Reformation, the tenacious defenders of a spiritual worldliness of grace and religious power, superimposed upon and even replacing faith, which had become unbearable to the moderns. Today it also strikes the dark contradictions of many protagonists of contemporary evangelical renewal.

A fraternal participation in the shared destiny of an imperfect humanity thus becomes a constitutive part of Christian witness. The Lord, who is to come to recompose the creation of the world with the Kingdom of God, is the reason for our hope of salvation—a hope upon which all human beings may rely. And it is not we ourselves. This is the key word of Christian witness, which only evangelical faith can confirm: a proclamation that forgets the second part casts an irreparable shadow over the first. We are not the Christ. The irreducible singularity of the Son who becomes human, binding the destiny of eternal generation to that of our temporal birth, lies at the heart of Christian dogma.

Once this purification of dogma is safeguarded, every logic of "dual citizenship" between the City of God and the city of humanity is also overcome. Bringing into play the humanistic potentials of Christian faith in contemporary Europe today requires a special concentration on the production of active leaven, capable of raising the threshold of reflective consciousness. On this front as well, two preparatory moves can be identified for the cultural redemption of Christian witness, which must foster the renewal of European humanism and render it a credible interlocutor for geopolitical pacification.

The "first move" may be identified in the establishment of networks of contact and cultural exchange capable of institutionalizing something akin to "general assemblies" of the relationship between religion and culture, faith and humanism, affectivity and law. Networks of cultural relationships must be promoted that foster encounters and dialogues capable of involving intellectuals who are neither Christian nor believers. Put simply, it is urgent to imagine a kind of synodality in the exercise of thinking generated by faith and interested in faith, one that shares both the urgencies of inquiry and the results of research. The focal points of this exercise of resonance should be identified at different levels of the ecclesial horizon and with a meaningful periodicity. Normally, this process should not result in manifestos or proclamations. Rather, we are operating on a plane that may be described as "trans-political," in the sense of an inspiration broader than that of political parties themselves. The power of this way of navigating the high culture of Christianity lies precisely in its aim to leaven humanistic thought inspired by faith, not to impose the binding ideology of a "party of God," whether conservative or progressive.

The "second move," capable of signaling a renewed initiative of a non-bureaucratic and resilient Christianity, consists in ethical and pedagogical action aimed at countering the narcissistic-competitive dynamics associated with the pursuit of well-being and self-realization—a pillar of the postmodern "ethical" imperative. Contemporary Christianity does not yet possess the cultural sophistication required to dismantle the double bind that today holds democratic freedoms hostage to the common good (the recurring refrain being: "if you wish to expand the rights of individual freedoms, you must impose limits on communal bonds," which are in fact the very branches that make those freedoms possible and sustain them). The Church's social doctrine preserves the ideality of a "common good" that, within today's complexity and fragmentation, lacks an adequate referent.

An effective cultural response to the pressing rhetoric of neoliberal and consumerist discourse must be prepared by the competence of theoretical charisms impeccably focused on the economic and technocratic stratagems of today's mercantile "reason," and sustained by a massive redeployment of ecclesial presence in existential and social peripheries. The "bourgeois" parish should harbor no illusions: either it enthusiastically enters this process with all its resources, or it will soon find itself selling even the church in which it celebrates Mass.

We must not leave the system the satisfaction of abandoning the "center," allowing it to transform cities with impunity into smart cities of capital, flows, luxury, and exclusion. On the contrary, this center must be culturally and creatively inhabited, with the best men and women we have. We must devote greater commitment to the network of schools and academies we have generated, rescuing from oblivion believing men and women who dwell within state universities, public administrations, and local entrepreneurship. We must not become the spiritual ornament of the "limited traffic zones" of the City of Flows, nor the spiritual assistants of the State's welfare policies. Therefore, as Christians, while we struggle to restore public services to the dignity and beauty they deserve, we must fill the peripheries with music, poetry, and theater—and also with hospitable celebrations of the Christian mystery, capable of making the presence of God once again a primary emotion, powerful enough to move even the Roman centurion and the Samaritan woman with her many (non-)husbands. Are we ready to go to the crossroads and invite to Mass—yes, to the Mass where one is "touched" by the Risen Lord—even tax collectors, those in irregular situations, pagans, Zacchaeuses, and Canaanite women?

Meanwhile, this true inter-position and inter-cession of Christianity—whose processes must be shared and refined through an appropriate periodicity of "synodal complicities" of fraternal humanism—can create the conditions for imagining another *oikonomia* and fostering another *koinonia* among peoples. Mammon, the "lord" of money, cannot be expelled from history; but it is possible to prevent him from becoming a "master" to whom we are enslaved.

13. The Kairos of Faith

This time is a *kairos*: an opportune moment for the evangelical mission. The signs are there—seen and unseen, deciphered and neglected, misunderstood and overestimated ("Do you think they were greater sinners?", Lk 13:2). They must be interpreted and, above all, inhabited, lest we remain on the sidelines like those children who watch everything but never decide to join in any game (Lk 7:31–32). This is our point of departure. Yes, church-centered Christianity, well before engaging in debate about its institutional reorganization—which must certainly not be set aside—must give priority to deciphering the *kairos*, the "today" in which the Gospel is to be embodied.

European Christianity has unfortunately lost much of its aptitude for discovering, admiring, and being moved by the proclamation of the Kingdom of God where one least expects it: among tax collectors, prostitutes, Samaritans, Canaanites, centurions. The Gospel overflows with this revelation. The humble people of the "disciples" must learn once again to see the "signs of the times," the signs of God's presence even beyond their own womb, within the crowds of this world. One must never forget that the ultimate destiny of history is the regeneration of the World ("the life of the world to come," as the Creed professes), certainly also through the Church. From this perspective, the group of disciples must indeed gather around the Lord, yet knowing that it exists for the crowd, not for its own self-preservation. I repeat: of course the disciples must also be strengthened—but for the sake of mission. And let it be clear: it is not enough to justify ourselves by saying that God acts beyond our limits—that goes without saying. The disciples—the Church—must make the proclamation of the Kingdom the central theme of the narrative and the emotional core of faith. This, and nothing else, opens up the unprecedented Christian revelation of God and confirms the faith of the Church even in this passage of history. In short, the Church must once again become the subject that looks first to Jesus, not merely the object that is looked at by the crowd.

Today, our Churches look too much inward, and they worry excessively about how they are perceived. The object that must be looked at is the "world," that is, the many crowds who inhabit it, allowing themselves to be overwhelmed by the abyssal affection of God for the world that has been revealed to us: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (Jn 3:16). The Church must place itself on this same wavelength. This was the conviction of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, as testified by the extraordinary opening of *Gaudium et Spes*:"The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts… Therefore the Christian community feels itself truly and intimately linked with humankind and its history" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1).

The paradigmatic parable of love of neighbor—in which a "heretical" Samaritan reopens the path of life for an unknown "anyone" assaulted along the road—is the clearest metaphor of God's revelation.

God—a "God unknown" to religious orthodoxies and philosophical imaginations across the planet—assumes the form of the second great commandment, like the first, to which the Son gives himself radically. The "neighbor," in Jesus' evangelical language, is in fact paradigmatically the most "distant." To become neighbor—that is, the act of love that abolishes all distance—means to enact the very attitude of God in the Son. What distance is greater than that between God and the creature? More still: between God and the hostile creature? And yet, "God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). The Church—Christianity—exists for the sake of this witness, this reference, this shattering discovery. It must once again learn to proclaim the Gospel with serene and unambiguous frankness, and to recognize the good that is present in history.

Indeed, we must be more deeply moved by what God, through Jesus, accomplishes in the world and in the history of the human creature, not only by what he accomplishes within the visible Church, which is *martyria* and *diakonia* of that greater work. What the Lord does in the Church ("the Gospel") illuminates, strengthens, and exalts what the Spirit does in the world ("the Kingdom of God"). The Lord does not limit himself to "making the Church" in history, as though the history of the Church were the entirety of salvation history.

One might say that what we now call the Church must not only free itself from its reduction to hierarchical clergy; it must also go beyond the circle of the baptized and the faithful—not as an alternative, but as an inclusive reality. Paul VI had already grasped this insight with remarkable clarity in his much-neglected encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964). Rediscovering its vision—enriched by the magisterium of Pope Francis—is more timely than ever, precisely because, at this point in history, culture pushes toward division and fragmentation, abandoning the path of dialogue with all. From its opening lines, the universal aspiration of the encyclical is evident. Paul VI proposed "to make ever clearer to all how important, on the one hand, the Church is for the salvation of human society, and how much, on the other, the Church desires that both should meet, know each other, and love one another" (*Ecclesiam Suam*, 3).

This is the "outgoing" and therefore "journeying" Church of Pope Francis and Pope Leo XIV. And let it be noted: if Church and society walk together, they are forced to confront a piercing question: upon what foundation can agreement among all be built? In whose name can social dialogue be undertaken? What makes it possible to renounce one's own interests for the sake of the common good? A passage of *Gaudium et Spes* is extraordinarily relevant: "The People of God and mankind, within which it is inserted, render mutual service to each other, so that the mission of the Church is shown to be religious in nature and, by that very fact, profoundly human" (n. 11). Today, this statement renders the question even more provocative: does faith truly make human beings more human? And is this not precisely the mission that the Church must rediscover and live today?

14. Weaving a Network

European Christians cannot simplistically conceive the world of culture as a deviant interlocutor merely because it stands outside the bonds and languages of faith. Human culture is an expression of the human community, whose desires, expectations, labors, and challenges believers themselves share. When culture is good, it is good—even before believers recognize it and independently of the permission they grant it. Learning "languages" is therefore necessary, in order to learn how to "hold fast to what is good" (1 Thess 5:21). Many elements of ecclesial and theological jargon that we have preserved by inertia—even when they describe aspects of a shareable humanism—are simply unintelligible in the face of more sophisticated reflections within the various fields of knowledge and the languages that integrate new experiences through which the human is apprehended by younger generations. The real issue is the presence of believing protagonists in all these worlds, appreciated precisely because they inhabit them and enhance the affections directed toward the common good.

The concrete Church, the Church of the Lord inaugurated by Jesus, is the indissoluble network of Apostles, Disciples, the Crowd, and the people of our cities who await recognition, healing, and forgiveness.

The Church is not exhausted by the sum of its ministries, nor even by its charisms. The Church is a "place" of the search for meaning and encounter with the Lord for those who guide and animate it, just as much as for those who encounter it—perhaps only occasionally—and nonetheless call upon its attention. The Church—of which the parish is a common icon without exhausting its reality—is the

indissoluble interweaving of the community of disciples and its offering of intercession on behalf of the crowds. A Church that considers as strangers, or as external to communion with Jesus, those who do not identify with the discipline of testimony begins to lose its evangelical icon. This was already made clear in the prophetic—and later abandoned—vision of Paul VI's *Ecclesiam Suam*, with its concentric circles of belonging. When Pope Leo XIV—following Pope Francis—insists on ecclesial synodality, he intends to propose once again a Spirit-led Church that opens an inclusive horizon around Jesus for "all."

Finally, one last prejudice should be abandoned immediately, so as to make room for the joyful passions of faith. This prejudice—which we might ironically formulate as "commit yourselves to maximizing self-enjoyment, and everything else will be given to you as a surplus," an obscene perversion of the evangelical command to seek first the Kingdom of God—is the most serious of all. Its gravity lies precisely in the moral appearance that this impulse, impatient with love of neighbor, has managed to acquire. It has insidiously contaminated the just struggle for human rights, the sacred hope of emancipation for oppressed peoples, and the irreconcilable indignation for all victims.

Thus we ourselves have become weak and somewhat disoriented. We have wondered whether it might be necessary to come to terms with self-love, even when it produces the subordination of all justice to love of self—and who would wish to deny self-love its right to exist? Let us discuss it. But in the meantime, let us firmly resist the tricks of the conjurer who, through the "sacrosanct" right to self-love and the pursuit of happiness, slyly smuggles in every possible corruption of reason—and sometimes of faith as well. Predatory and destructive "war" is not simply an extreme form of competition for property rights; it is their criminal perversion, which annihilates the very profile of law. "Financial speculation" is not a refined specialization of profit-seeking that rewards the investment of a few and ensures wealth for all; it is the nihilistic emptying of the social value of work. The "assignment to the individual of unlimited power over birth and death" is not a civil maturation of the democracy of freedom; it is an expansion of the democracy of arbitrariness, which imposes decisions about which deaths may be deemed dignified and which lives judged unworthy. Countering the exacerbation of the power of the *I*—which appears to be power over oneself but becomes power over *us*—is the positive project of a culture of the "we," a genuine source of illumination regarding what lies at the heart of our shared humanity.

In short, the rehabilitation of pride in having generated something for which "we" may be grateful is evaporating from the grammar of emotions that once made us proud to be human. This aspiration is deep, yet also vulnerable. It is something very close to the "mystery of the people" of which Pope Francis has often spoken and which Pope Leo XIV has taken up again. Does this not evoke a suggestive analogy with the icon of the Crowd that traverses the entire evangelical narrative of Jesus' revelation? Does Jesus not teach his disciples precisely in this way—by looking to the Crowd rather than to themselves—what they must learn and safeguard regarding the way in which God "loves the world"? Is it truly impossible for the immense network of disciples and crowds, who "look with faith to Jesus, the author of salvation and the principle of unity and peace" (*Lumen Gentium*, 9), to bring into focus a guiding reflection—at once academic and testimonial, theological and pastoral, political and popular—on "war," "profit," and "democracy" today, in this changed epoch?

15. A New Passion for Europe—Including a Political One

European Christianity—in all its articulations, including its political dimension—is called to rediscover a passion for a new future for Europe and for the entire planet. Was it not European Christianity that propelled peoples toward a planetary horizon? European Christians must recover their vitality in order to restore strength to Europe and, through Europe, to peace and to the common good of all peoples. The words of Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini are striking in this regard:

"Today, through sophisticated forms of information, we are burdened with global problems without possessing either the strength or the interpretative keys needed to respond. This is a dramatic condition. We do not have global answers… And when I raise such a question, I am told that this is a question typical of the modern mindset, whereas today we are in the postmodern era and no longer seek global solutions."

Martini, however, concluded: "*Yet I remain hungry for global solutions*." He was right—and he is still right. There is no broad, unifying vision. What is lacking is a culture—historical, philosophical, and social—capable of offering an overall interpretation of the processes currently unfolding in the world,

of their characteristics and trajectories, and of proposing innovative responses for politics. Aldo Schiavone notes this incisively in his essay, tellingly entitled *The West Without Thought*, emphasizing that the West has been left orphaned of its own intelligence.

Christianity is called to resume initiative in a context in which prevailing political approaches appear increasingly polarized around a purely material humanism of the collective. European Christians today, by virtue of the extraordinarily rich heritage entrusted to them, must feel themselves addressed by this challenge and awaken a Europe that is fragmenting into sovereigntist egoisms. What must be recovered and reinterpreted is the tension toward universality inherent in the Christian message as lived in the centuries-long European experience. Within the very fabric of European Christianity—despite a long history of trials and errors—there remains that deep tension which has led Europe, and humanity itself, toward democracy, human rights, and natural science.

The dissemination of these civilizational traits, in their present forms, reveals a paradoxical combination of immense popularity and troubling drama: there are no longer any peoples—whatever their anthropology or religious tradition—who can exempt themselves from the developments of European invention, from the market economy to contractual justice and technical instrumental rationality.

Yes, Christianity must awaken a "generative" spirit capable of bringing into being a Europe—and a world—that do not yet exist. How can one not be concerned by the widespread abstention of European citizens (including, certainly, many Catholics) in elections? A more mature sense of responsibility and a bolder creativity are urgently required. Processes of change must be set in motion, involving above all the younger generations, leaving behind the world constructed by the baby-boomer generation and becoming protagonists of a new way of seeing, imagining, and living.

The present situation leads many to believe that the creation of a Catholic (or Christian) "party" is no longer possible—a question that nonetheless deserves discussion and further development. At the same time, a merely civil "diaspora" of Christianity, which consigns faith to a purely personal inspiration without cultural and communal mediation of its humanistic potential, appears of doubtful coherence with Christianity's own mission. There is no doubt, however, that Christians—through appropriate organizational forms—must restore to Europe a passion for a humanism grounded in the defense and promotion of what is human and shared by all peoples. This requires creativity at the level of political culture, capable of proposing unifying visions that inspire commitment and involve the diverse realities of the *polis*. In short, there is need for a new form of thought—"pre-political," if one wishes, but certainly cultural—capable of promoting a polyarchic social order. Institutions, powers, and a wide range of actors, including religions, must enter the process as contributors to the building of society, even as they mutually supervise and limit one another. The more plural and polyarchic a society becomes, the more genuinely civil it is.

The city of tomorrow cannot be one in which doors are shut and walls erected to guard a presumed identity, nor one in which synagogues, churches, mosques, and temples are destroyed in the name of a false secularism. The city of tomorrow is one in which doors open toward the four horizons, walls do not reach the sky, and places of worship are built to foster peace. This is a complex yet inescapable challenge: our cities must become places of peaceful coexistence among people of different faiths and cultures. For this reason, it is wholly inadequate to think of the Church and the City in terms of "inside" and "outside." Each is inexorably within the other. If the Church is deeply bound to the City, so too—as the long history of the West (and not only the West) teaches us—is the City intimately connected to the Churches and to faiths. What matters is not the number of Christians, but their commitment.

Within the Churches, a movement of reflection on the present and future of the nation, of Europe, and of the planet must be fostered—a movement capable of freeing them from excessive self-referentiality while projecting them toward a form of service that promotes a more humane society. Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, speaking of a "European Camaldoli," observed:

"Today we are in a season in which the need for greater civic responsibility is felt—for Italy, for Europe, for the world: everything is incredibly interconnected. A new beginning? Certainly. One cannot remain inert. One cannot remain enclosed within one's own 'I': one must have the courage to commit oneself to the 'we'."

16. Christians and Intercession for the World

Among the tasks of Christian communities is that of interceding for the city in which they live. The Gospel reminds Christians today that even two or three, gathered in the name of the Lord, possess the power to move the very heart of God. A well-known twentieth-century theologian went so far as to speak of the political—that is, historical—power of prayer. The Book of Exodus recounts an extraordinarily bold confrontation in which Moses intercedes for a people guilty of idolatry, whom God intends to abandon (Exod 32:1–14). God says to Moses: *"Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation"* (v. 10).

Asked, in effect, to endorse this new divine plan—born of exasperation at the people's ingratitude and infidelity—Moses quite literally places himself in between. It is as though he were saying to God: "If you truly do this, I will not follow you." The argument he employs to dissuade God from this intention is at once humble and audacious: *"Your good name is at stake, O God."* What will the Egyptians say—and later, everyone else? Will they not speak of the cynicism of a God who freed a people from bondage (where at least, as the people later recall, they had food; cf. Num 11:4–6) only to let them die of hunger and thirst in the desert? The accusation Moses evokes is particularly abhorrent, for it introduces a vein of sadism into the malice of a promise that deceives a people already destined for sacrifice. The power of this intercession is astonishing: it unites humility and *parrhesia*. A God who abandons the people would not be a God who can be followed.

Should we Christians of Europe not assume the posture of Moses as the first task we recognize before God? Christian faith commits believers to intercession. Should we not rediscover its force? And consequently, perhaps becoming somewhat less obsessed with the "construction" of faith, should we not pay greater attention to what faith itself is called to "build"? Not the Kingdom of God, strictly speaking—for that is God's work and continues even while we sleep—but rather a bulwark against every form of idolatry, beginning with idolatry of the self. And thus, should we not rediscover the primacy of intercession that commits us and transform our churches into holy places of intercession for the world—sanctuaries of encounter with God? Abraham himself, even before Moses, entered into humble contention with God for the destiny of a people not even his own (cf. Gen 18:20–32).

The logic of intercession disrupts the dynamics of the archaic, totalizing relationship between Sovereign and Subject, which generates slaves to arbitrary power and victims of narcissistic imitation. In the religious sphere, overcoming this logic requires converting the mission of communicating the truth of God's revelations into the testimony of God's affections. Intercessory prayer is the first step of a "Church that goes forth"—a Church that steps outside itself and opens itself to God in order to present to Him a world in need of salvation. Believers, regardless of their number, are in the world as men and women who live their faith by first standing before God on behalf of the salvation of all.

PART II

EUROPE AND THE CHALLENGE OF A CHANGING WORLD

1. Navigating Global Disorder

The shift in the geopolitical landscape, initiated by the Trump Administration's new tariff policy announced on "Liberation Day", was followed by a series of declarations that marked a substantial change in the relationship between the United States and Europe—one that had prevailed for the past eighty years.

Today, Europe faces a truly daunting task: navigating global disorder while continuing to build itself into the unified entity that was originally envisioned by all, but which now encounters significant resistance to its realization. At the same time, Europe must regain a central role within an international economic and social framework that is undergoing profound transformation.

In the United States, Donald Trump proclaimed his revolution with the "Liberation Day" of tariffs, but in reality, he marked a return to the past, as tariffs were reinstated to levels last seen in 1934.

As Nobel laureate Paul Krugman pointed out, few have noticed that the long and continuous decline in tariffs over the past ninety years, from 1934 to today, was achieved through numerous rounds of international negotiations, during which the United States and other nations "solemnly pledged not to go backward."

Therefore, Krugman says, "Liberation Day is also, among other things, a betrayal of the world with respect to that path."

Tariffs, moreover, are only one part of the changes underway.

One should not be under any illusions about the supposed randomness of the Trump Administration's decisions: the U.S. 'MAGA' policies stem from structural issues—deficits, public debt, the crisis of the Rust Belt, and migratory and ethnic conflicts.

These are choices that are only partially improvised, but largely inspired by the *Project 2025* of the Heritage Foundation, many points of which have already been implemented.

These policies reflect global imbalances tied to demographic, technological, and energy transitions, and thus to the 'polycrisis' that defines the post-globalization era in a multipolar world divided into political and trade blocs.

For this reason, there should be discussion and debate on reforming the international economic order—something that must begin before global tensions escalate into open conflict.

Europe cannot afford to miss the opportunity to look outward in this direction and, in doing so, achieve its own strategic autonomy.

The atmosphere of crisis and uncertainty dominating the global stage has intensified with the release of this year's *National Security Strategy* document, published in December, which confirms an ongoing process leading toward a new configuration of the world order. Beyond the decidedly negative (and arguably debatable) assessments expressed about Europe, the document presents an image of the United States which, while aiming to remain the world's leading economic and military power, is narrowing its direct focus to North and South America—essentially abandoning the post-World War II priority it once placed on maintaining 'Western' ties.

This choice goes hand in hand with the de facto recognition of other superpowers, starting with China and Russia, which are acknowledged as such due to their military and economic strength—regardless of the distinctions that were previously made in terms of democracy and autocracy.

These changes in the U.S. are accompanied, on the domestic front, by a clampdown on immigration, opposition to 'woke' culture, and a marked weakening of the role of the 'countervailing powers' that have traditionally been a defining feature of American democracy.

In the economic sphere, according to a recent insight from Ian Bremmer[1], we are no longer in a multipolar world, but in a 'technopolar' one.

A world in which major high-tech companies are extending their role beyond the digital and economic spheres into politics and national security. It's a scenario where tech leaders are not only shaping stock market trends, but also exerting control over aspects of civil society, politics, and international affairs that, until recently, were traditionally the domain of nation-states.

At the same time, while it may be true that we've returned to an era of American unilateralism (Beckley, 2025)[2], on a global scale we are also witnessing the rise of the "Global South" and emerging countries. These, together with Southeast Asia, India, the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa, now represent about 20% of global GDP and 62% of the world's population (Bharadwaj et al., 2025)[3].

And what about Europe? First and foremost, it must resist the invitation from Trump to the individual nation-states that comprise it to pursue their own self-interests, and instead must strengthen European integration—as is necessary—in order to participate, after this phase of global disorder, in the effort to shape a new international order.

Europe stands at a turning point because, while it faces an extremely difficult challenge, it also has an opportunity that cannot be postponed: to take advantage of the space that has opened up internationally in this context, in order to pursue the strategic autonomy that is essential to continue along the path of *sustainable development*—the guiding star that has long directed its policy choices.

This is all the more significant given that Europe is the region of the world that has most consistently and decisively embraced this approach, which can be summed up in the right of all people to education, health, the fight against inequality, poverty, and hunger, as well as the exercise of civil rights.

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly, by adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, clearly defined the contents of this commitment by setting out a list of 17 goals for 2030 (Sustainable Development Goals – SDGs), which cover all dimensions of human life and the planet. With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, not only was a clear judgment expressed on the unsustainability of the current development model, but the notion that sustainability is solely an environmental issue was also overcome in favor of an integrated vision of the various dimensions of development.

An idea has therefore been embraced—one that envisions a world where environmental, economic, and social aspects are integrated, giving rise to a new way of understanding development.

To make this approach a reality, Europe must set in motion the decisions that can lead to the strategic autonomy necessary to fully achieve these objectives.

It is a difficult choice, because we live in a world at risk of a "polycrisis"—a scenario where multiple ongoing crises (geopolitical, demographic, energy-climate, and technological) may interact, while also driving transitions that must be addressed simultaneously.

We don't pay enough attention to it, but each of these crises—and their combination—is quietly giving birth to a different world, day by day, without us fully realizing it.

In this context, it must be said that for a European Union—first shaken by the financial crisis, then by the pandemic, and now by wars and the resulting uncertainty—it is difficult to define the path toward sustainable development and to ensure its success. This is especially true because citizens, having lost the certainties of the past, no longer feel sufficiently represented or protected.

Contemporary democracies are highly vulnerable to "easy arguments," stereotypes, and emotions that tend to dominate today's discourse and serve as tools for populist consensus. The disappearance of the "grand ideologies" has made it difficult for political parties to maintain voter loyalty, pushing them to rely instead on "techniques of persuasion and marketing that sustain and reproduce strong polarization" (Egidi, 2023)[4]. The result is that today we are facing a widespread sense of *discomfort*, which has sparked a broader confrontation between representative democracy and its *populist* version.

To overcome this challenge, European citizens must be viewed through a *"we"* perspective (Habermas, 2013)[5], that is tied to caring for the interests of the entire European community, not just those of one's own fellow citizens.

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[1] Bremmer I. (2025), "The technopolar paradox", Foreign Affairs, 13 May.

[2] Beckley M. (2025), "The age of American unilateralism", Foregn Affairs, 16 April.

[3] Bharadwaj A., Rodríguez-Chiffelle C., Urbano L., Zdunic S., and Azevedo D. (2025), "In a Multipolar World, the Global South Finds Its Moment", Boston Consulting Group, 22 April.

[4] Egidi M. (2023), "The internal fragility of representative democracy: Was Schumpeter right?", pp. 645-670, Journal of Evolutionary Economics, Vol. 33, Springer, 25 May.

[5] Habermas J. (2013), "Democracy, solidarity and European crisis", Lecture at the Leuven University, 26 April.

But that is not enough. This "we" must also extend its gaze to the rest of the world, to reclaim the historical role Europe has played—a role of dialogue and exchange.

This is the right mindset to revive, at the European level, a spirit of open dialogue—something that is urgently needed at a time like this, when we lack the inspiration so necessary to shape a *European project* capable of meeting the challenges of our time.

2. A New Role for Europe

Europe must not miss the opportunity to look outward to the rest of the world in order to achieve its strategic autonomy.

It has benefited from a long period of growth, prosperity, and attractiveness, largely thanks to the creation of the Single Market, which enabled member states to achieve economies of scale and levels of productivity that were previously unimaginable.

Today, even though there is still significant potential to be tapped in completing this project, the Single Market must now be coupled with a strategy developed in cooperation with the rest of the world.

This is where we must begin: in today's multipolar world, a strategy consistent with the goal of completing the European Union must first and foremost define a new international positioning for the Union.

Europe's history and traditions—a heritage where science, culture, and Christianity are deeply interwoven—point the way forward, highlighting the Union's capacity for dialogue and mediation, which are authentic expressions of Western values. These are the same values that must underpin Europe's resolve when faced with their violation, as in the cases of Ukraine and Gaza.

From this perspective, Europe can present itself not as a new "empire," but as a region capable of offering its aptitude for dialogue in disputes between global blocs, promoting a *new multilateralism*.

Of course, this requires a Europe that can make decisions. Time is short, and if a reform of the unanimity rule cannot be achieved immediately, it will be necessary—at least temporarily—to make use of *enhanced cooperation*.

These can be supported by *passerelle clauses*, allowing the European Council to authorize qualified majority voting on specific issues for willing member states wishing to move forward together. In this way, the European Council can enable decisions by qualified majority on individual matters.

The result would be the shaping of a *Europe of concentric circles*.

Once this course is set, the EU must act with realism and determination in redefining the geography of its international trade, seizing the opportunities left open by U.S. unilateralism.

A Europe engaged with the Global South and committed to international partnerships has many opportunities to pursue, in a world that must confront an ongoing geopolitical crisis while also managing transitions—demographic, technological, and more—alongside urgent efforts to protect the environment and combat climate change.

The ongoing transitions—starting with the geopolitical one—are reshaping relationships between the world's major regions.

Europe is undergoing a long-term transition that has taken it from the days when it held a leading position in financial and technological innovation to a point where it now lags behind in the adoption of new technologies.

Yet it remains the continent that, through its culture, inventions, discoveries, and great geographical explorations, has both influenced and remained closely connected with the rest of the world.

This is the point from which we must begin: Europe's ability to envision its own future and its capacity to engage with others in a constructive and forward-looking way.

Not to create an alternative power bloc between East and West, but to help shape a new multilateral order—one that makes room for the changes that, for some time now, have seen many emerging countries become key players on the global economic and institutional stage.

Just consider the many regions governed by trade agreements, the result of the work of numerous associations. The largest of these agreements—the RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership), also the most recent—brings together fifteen countries from Southeast Asia and the Pacific (including China, Japan, ASEAN countries, Australia, the Philippines, and South Korea), representing around 30% of global GDP.

It is within this context that Europe can rediscover its mission, drawing on its history and tradition as a technological leader ready to share its expertise and position itself as a partner to interested countries. At the same time, Europe can raise the issue of correcting the global imbalances that have worsened in the post-globalization era.

Such an approach would ultimately benefit the United States as well, for whom a long-term strategy of unilateralism—based on tariffs and trade restrictions—is ill-suited.

An initiative of this kind could begin to shift the attitudes that currently fuel the Global South's and China's alignment with Russia. These alignments are rooted in structural imbalances (such as the dominance of the dollar) and growing inequalities—both within and between countries—that accompanied the globalization of the high-growth years.

A rethinking of the international monetary order established in 1943—now being challenged by China, the BRICS countries, and the Global South—would be more timely than ever. Even today, 80% of international transactions are still settled in U.S. dollars, under the rules set at Bretton Woods by the victors of the Second World War. Three-quarters of the total reserves held by central banks are also in dollars.

In the meantime, alternative investment banks have emerged alongside Western development banks—such as China's Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)—highlighting a shift in global financial influence.

And yet, the Bretton Woods framework, along with the institutions that uphold it—the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank—has remained fundamentally unchanged. For some time now, there have been strong signals of dissatisfaction from China, emerging economies, and the Global South, who feel underrepresented in this architecture of the international monetary system.

Europe can take the lead, especially now that the U.S. has stepped back from multilateralism and relinquished the leadership role that allowed it to shape the Bretton Woods system in the first place. To revise these agreements, a patient process of dialogue and coordination is needed—one that bridges the perspectives of major powers with those of emerging and developing countries.

But, of course, this requires a Europe that is capable of making decisions.

The issue is not just about trade imbalances, which the Trump Administration seeks to address through the imposition of tariffs—a measure wholly inadequate to tackle a problem that, while real, requires a deeper response.

In fact, mature economies with trade surpluses typically have above-average shares of manufacturing in their GDP, whereas the opposite is true for the United States. With a low manufacturing share (11%), the U.S. runs a large trade deficit. This is certainly a sign of imbalance, but it cannot be corrected simply by imposing tariffs.

It may well be that Trump has, in effect, acknowledged the outdated nature of the international economic order established at Bretton Woods and is seeking a new and different one. However, this situation can be addressed internationally through agreements on coordinated economic policies, rather than through a tariff war.

Europe can make a significant contribution, starting by examining its own tariff structures and the internal barriers that still limit trade within its borders.

3. A Europe Committed to the South of the World

The ambitious agenda underpinning the work of the new Commission requires a significant leap forward—one that acknowledges the changing world and defines a global role for Europe itself.

This shift has already begun with the 'Global Gateway' initiative, launched in response to China's *Belt and Road* project. The plan aims to mobilize €300 billion in investments by 2027, with €150 billion earmarked for African countries, and the rest directed toward initiatives not only in Ukraine, but also in other parts of the world—particularly selected Asian countries and India.

The *Global Gateway* now takes on particular importance in light of the profound transformation underway at the global level—one that offers significant opportunities for the EU's international engagement.

Speaking of "Africa" as a single entity makes little sense, given that we are dealing with a continent larger than China, India, and the United States combined, with a population of over 1.5 billion people

growing at an annual rate of more than 2.5%, and above all, an enormous diversity from one country to another.

In Africa, alongside areas of poverty, there are now many countries experiencing significant growth, accompanied by rapid urbanization and the rise of a modern and capable leadership class. The EU has launched initiatives starting with countries such as Angola, Gabon, Rwanda, South Africa, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, and Somalia.

These initiatives stem not only from the space left by the suspension of U.S. international cooperation activities, but more importantly from the absence of a global actor capable of meeting the pressing need in emerging countries for investment in infrastructure and technology essential to development.

The international partnership activities under the Global Gateway are carried out through the *Team Europe* approach, which brings together the European Union, EU member states, including their respective implementing agencies and public development banks, as well as the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

The main investment sectors include submarine and digital cable infrastructure for digital connectivity, electricity and clean hydrogen production and distribution lines, agri-food value chain initiatives, healthcare prevention, and education and training programs.

There is also a pressing need to build bridges between established geopolitical blocs of countries that are increasingly unable to communicate outside their own alliances.

Europe, which—let us not forget—accounts for 55% of global trade, can play an important, perhaps even decisive, role in launching an international initiative to foster this kind of dialogue, *provided it can equip itself with a unified foreign policy*.

This is, in fact, a priority, especially considering that global imbalances are accompanied by a growing discontent shared by the Global South, China, and Russia—a discontent that could easily escalate into wider global disorder.

Europe could be not only a beneficiary of such an initiative, but also the region most historically and culturally suited to exercise the *moral suasion* needed to bring parties to the negotiating table—on terms closer to the West than those currently held, including with regard to the war in Ukraine.

It's important to recognize that after the three major crises—the 2008 financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine—we now find ourselves in a multipolar world, divided into political and commercial blocs. This world is vastly different from the bipolar structure of the Cold War era.

There is a rapidly expanding Asian region, not only in economic terms—home to half of the world's population and accounting for nearly 30% of global GDP—but also in terms of its growing financial institutions and trade agreements.

There is also the BRICS bloc, a coalition of countries seeking to assert its global influence through the creation of representative institutions of its own.

From a strictly political standpoint, recent UN resolutions on the Russia–Ukraine war and the condemnation of Hamas's aggression have shown that around fifty countries have chosen *not* to align themselves with the United States and the European Union, instead adopting independent positions.

This must be acknowledged—and action taken to address the root causes of their discontent.

The issue of energy is central here, as are demographics and the fight against climate change. Consider that developed countries are expected to increase their energy consumption, despite having declining populations, while African countries—which will account for 90% of global population growth by 2050—continue to suffer from a severe lack of energy infrastructure, partly due to insufficient investment from the World Bank.

At the same time, there is a major imbalance in the costs and benefits of CO_2 emissions control measures between developed and emerging countries.

4. The Central Role of Energy: A Prerequisite for Development

The sharp rise in energy prices—first triggered by COVID-19 and later by the war in Ukraine—has served as a powerful reminder to both citizens and governments of the central role of energy, the importance of its availability, and the need to ensure secure supply chains.

The path Europe has taken by choosing to invest in green energy is now showing clear advantages, with the declining cost per kWh of solar and wind energy making these not only the cheapest sources of

energy, but also the most suitable for international agreements and partnerships—particularly, though not exclusively, with emerging countries.

Energy availability is a prerequisite for development and for the very quality of life—so much so that per capita energy consumption is often what most clearly distinguishes developed countries from others. One thing is certain: the world is experiencing a growing hunger for energy, and this trend is set to continue.

The largest oil producers globally are United States (19% of total production), Saudi Arabia (13%), and Russia (12%).

When it comes to natural gas, the United States and Russia also lead, producing 24% and 18% of global output, respectively.

It is the vast disparities in fossil fuel availability that drive countries to adopt very different stances on the use of various energy sources. Today, the global energy mix is still largely dominated by coal, oil, and gas, which—according to the International Energy Agency (IEA, 2024)[6]—accounted for over two-thirds of the world's energy demand increase in 2023.

This occurred despite the fact that renewable energy supply grew twice as fast as the previous year.

With Donald Trump returning to the U.S. presidency, there has been a strong reaffirmation of the importance of fossil fuels. Thanks to the exploitation of shale rock (the "mother rock") and the use of advanced drilling technologies, the United States has become the world's largest oil producer, focusing on abundant, low-cost energy.

By contrast, the European Union, which—with the exception of Norway—is poor in fossil fuel resources, has chosen a different path. It has tied its energy policy to a strong push for renewables, even though it continues to meet the majority of its energy demand through fossil fuel imports.

As of 2020, the European Union imported 58% of its energy needs. After the 2022 energy crisis following the war in Ukraine, fossil fuel imports from Russia—which accounted for 24.4% of the EU's total—were replaced by imports from other countries. However, the EU's overall dependence on foreign energy sources has remained unchanged.

Today, it is difficult to be optimistic about climate policies. Scientists gathered under the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) have long warned that if we fail to slow the warming of the planet caused by increasing CO_2 levels from fossil fuel combustion, the consequences will be disastrous—especially if the global average temperature increases by 2°C by 2050. Moreover, each additional 0.1°C will significantly increase the likelihood and intensity of climate-related damage.

And yet, after years of general consensus on the need to limit emissions from fossil fuel use in energy production, we are now witnessing a shift in attitudes—starting with the stance of the new Trump Administration.

While this shift does not directly challenge the scientific conclusions, it effectively disregards the urgency expressed by the scientific community regarding the need to reduce emissions and global warming[7].

The results of the most recent European elections have revealed a growing concern among voters about the costs and impacts of the energy transition undertaken with the goal of phasing out fossil fuels by 2050.

This is happening despite the climate disasters we have already witnessed—events that, according to scientists, are merely previews of the far more severe consequences that could unfold in the future.

It's important to note that the global temperature has already risen by 1.1°C compared to its level at the beginning of this century.

That is why, despite the many different starting points countries have in terms of energy systems, all nations signed the Paris Agreement in 2015[8], committing to limiting global warming and fighting climate change.

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[6] IEA (2024), World Energy Outlook 2024, October

[7] This represents a form of "de facto denialism"—one not based on rejecting the scientific consensus on the need to phase out fossil fuels, but rather on emphasizing the costs, obstacles, and complexities of the transition to the point of questioning its urgency or feasibility. The most significant example of this position is that of Mark P. Mills, who in his 2023 work outlines a skeptical view of the energy transition. In particular, see: Mills, M.P. (2022), *"The 'Energy Transition': A Reality Reset"*, Manhattan Institute, August 30. https://manhattan.institute/article/the-energy-transition-delusion.

[8] The Paris Agreement gave rise to an international treaty established in 2015 among the member states of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, through which the countries committed to keeping

The transition away from fossil fuels is expected to be a long-term process, as fossil energy—particularly natural gas, the least polluting of the three major sources—will continue to play a role for years to come.

Moreover, it is reasonable to expect that the world's two largest economies, the United States and China, if they proceed with their current policy trajectories, will be responsible for a significant increase in CO_2 emissions in the coming years.

Environmental issues and climate change are an absolute priority.

Yet, this commitment remains largely unfulfilled, despite the ambitious goals set by the 2015 Paris Agreement (and subsequent accords) on climate and global warming, the Millennium Development Goals of the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), and the Church's intervention through Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

An important role is played by the COPs (Conference of the Parties)—annual climate conferences held since the 1992 Rio Summit, where the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was adopted.

After a period of strong engagement, culminating in COP26 in Glasgow (2021), doubts and skepticism have started to emerge around these efforts as well.

The COP29, held in Baku in 2024, reviewed but failed to reach consensus on key issues: national emission reduction plans aimed at a 45% cut by 2030, the creation of a compensation fund for climate-related losses in poorer countries, and financial support for countries affected by extreme heat and climate instability.

This is a challenging and complex scenario, but it must be acknowledged that—unlike fossil fuels—the transition to renewable energy requires massive infrastructure investments and transformative improvements, both in energy production and distribution.

Such changes require time—potentially long timelines—making it all the more urgent to act decisively today[9]. Not only that—the profound transformation resulting from the energy shift helps explain the difficulties currently facing the fossil fuel phase-out, which nonetheless remains the core policy direction in Europe, as reaffirmed by President von der Leyen at the end of 2024.

Europe's commitment to an energy transition based on a Green Growth strategy, and therefore aimed at sustainability, can only succeed if it is driven by innovation (Aghion et al., 2009)[10].

This is a crucial point, because energy transition processes demand an epochal transformation, requiring massive investments in both the production and use of energy.

It involves modifying existing infrastructure to eliminate its climate impact caused by CO_2 emissions, and also overhauling the energy distribution system through digital technologies. These allow for the optimal integration of renewables and a decentralized redesign of the relationship between energy production and consumption.

Beyond production, action is needed on energy usage: in transportation (e.g., the shift to electric vehicles), in industry and manufacturing (particularly in sectors where reducing CO_2 is most difficult), and in residential buildings and housing.

These are interventions that imply a major transformation of the production system, entail substantial costs, and bring benefits that will only become apparent over time.

To this, we must add the issue of rising energy costs, which began shortly before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine and surged dramatically afterward. This remains an unresolved challenge, even though advances in renewable energy technologies have made their deployment increasingly cost-effective.

To build the necessary public consensus, it is essential—unlike what has been done so far—that this transformation is communicated clearly, with a transparent explanation of how the transition will be managed, and what steps will be taken to ensure it is both fair and feasible.

The central question is whether climate policies aimed at combating climate change can be implemented without sacrificing economic development.

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global warming below 1.5 degrees and to combating the effects of climate change.

[9] Daniel Yergin et al. (2025) point out that, despite 2024 being a record year for solar and wind energy production (accounting for 15% of the world's energy output) and a 90% reduction in the cost of solar panels, fossil fuels still accounted for around 80% of total energy production. Cfr. Yergin D., Orszag P. e Arya A. (2025), "The troubled energy transition", Public Affairs, 25 February.

[10] Aghion P., Hemous D. e Veugelers R. (2009), "No green growth without innovation", Bruegel Policy Brief, Issue 7, November.

Empirical and theoretical analyses by Daron Acemoglu et al. (2023)[11] show that this is indeed possible, provided that carbon emission taxes and incentives for renewable energy are used effectively to redirect technological change and promote innovation in support of clean technologies.

5. Escaping the Middle-Tech Trap by Cooperating with Emerging Countries

Europe is experiencing a slowdown in growth and productivity that demands decisive action to reposition itself within the international competitive landscape.

This situation is partly due to the predominance of investment in "middle technologies" and a deficit in its balance of payments in the advanced services sector, where it is a net importer from the United States—particularly of software, computing services, telecommunications, and internet-based technologies.

The decline in terms-of-trade advantages traditionally enjoyed in the exchange of energy products, minerals, and manufactured goods has led, not coincidentally, to a crisis in Germany, Europe's largest economy.

This challenge is being felt across the Eurozone, where countries risk being unable to sustain their expensive welfare systems, which are further strained by an aging population.

Europe is undergoing a long-term transition, having moved from a position of global leadership in financial and technological innovation to a delay in adopting high-tech solutions.

To reverse this trend, investing in high-tech alone is not enough.

What is needed is a foreign policy initiative that establishes collaboration with emerging countries in Southeast Asia—notably India and Japan—to build a value chain capable of responding, on a global scale, to the technological challenge posed by China and the United States.

A recent report on EU innovation policy (*Fuest et al., 2024*)[12] highlights that although public investment in R&D in the EU has grown over the past twenty years—reaching the same level as the U.S. (0.7% of GDP)—private sector investment remains significantly lower, at 1.2% of GDP, half that of the United States.

Even more striking is the disparity in software development: U.S. companies allocate 75% of their R&D investment to software, while the EU allocates only 6%, resulting in an almost complete U.S. monopoly in the sector.

Adding to this, as Mario Draghi (2024) pointed out, the European export-led growth model has "tolerated low wage growth to boost external competitiveness […]. But today, this combination of external demand, capital exports, and low wage levels is no longer sustainable."[13]

This brings us back to the issue of economic dynamism in Europe. The European system fails to offer high-return investment opportunities, primarily because it remains heavily focused on medium-tech sectors and underutilizes the potential for international cooperation in high-tech fields, particularly in ICT and AI.

Unlocking this potential is essential if Europe wants to regain competitiveness and break free from the limitations of its current growth model.

6. Technological Change and Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a general-purpose technology that is set to profoundly transform the entire sphere of productive activity.

It holds the potential for extraordinary changes in the years to come, although the magnitude of its effects on productivity and employment remains highly debated.

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[11] Acemoglu D., Aghion P., Barrage L. e Hémous D. (2023), "Green innovation and the transition toward a clean economy", PIIE, Working Paper, no. 23-14, December.

[12] Fuest C., Gros D., Mengel P.-L., Presidente G. e Tirole J. (2024a), "EU innovation policy: How to escape the middle technology trap", A Report by the European Policy Analysis Group, Institute for European Policymaking, Bocconi University.

[13] Thus spoke Mario Draghi in his speech at the CEPR Conference in Brussels. See Draghi, M. (2024), *"Europe: Back to Domestic Growth"*, CEPR Policy Insight, no. 137, CEPR Press, Paris & London.

AI is expected to reshape the boundary between what humans do and what machines do, largely through the development of a specialized language tied to the use and analysis of extremely complex datasets.

Current estimates of its impact on productivity over the next ten years vary widely.

One reason for this uncertainty is that assessments of AI's effects are based on two distinct approaches: the task-based approach (Acemoglu, 2024)[14], which focuses on how AI changes job functions—either by automating tasks, increasing task efficiency, or by creating complementarities between old and new tasks; the historical parallel approach, which draws comparisons with past waves of general-purpose technologies such as electricity and the Internet, analyzing how those technologies reshaped economies and work over time.

Both perspectives offer valuable insights, but also highlight the complexity and unpredictability of AI's long-term impact on economic structures and labor markets[15].

The divergence between estimates is linked above all to the number and breadth of the sectors that are affected, and will be affected, by AI's effects, starting with the productivity gains already visible today in software development, customer services, and business consulting. It is clear that the overall effects of Artificial Intelligence depend on the timing with which different sectors of the economy are touched by its impact. It should also be borne in mind that these effects may be influenced by the so-called "*Baumol disease*", a condition that depends on the differing capacity of sectors to absorb technological change. Concert performers playing a Mozart quartet cannot increase their productivity even in the presence of technological progress. More generally, William Baumol and William Bowen (1965) argue that there are sectors of the economy that fully absorb technological change and others in which this does not happen, or happens much more slowly. The consequence is that, in some sectors, wages and prices will rise as a result of the productivity gains generated by technology—in our case, Artificial Intelligence.

However, this wage increase will sooner or later extend to sectors not directly affected by new technologies, leading to a likely slowdown in the average growth rate of the economy.

Another highly important aspect is the pace of AI adoption, especially when compared with previous major general-purpose technologies such as electricity, personal computers, and the Internet.

This is one of the most difficult dimensions to predict, but one thing is certain: countries that adopt AI earlier and more extensively will gain a competitive advantage—comparable to the one the United States enjoyed through its early and widespread use of the Internet.

A crucial component of the transformation brought about by AI adoption is its impact on the labor market, in terms of both wages and incomes, as well as overall employment levels.

How AI reshapes job structures, task allocation, and income distribution will be central to determining whether it becomes a driver of inclusive growth—or a source of new inequalities and social tensions.

Daron Acemoglu et al. (2023)[16] argue that "over the past 40 years, the spread of digital technologies has significantly increased income inequality," but they also emphasize that "the effects of AI adoption depend on how it is developed and applied."

An approach that focuses primarily on automation and job displacement is likely to exacerbate inequality.

However, a generative AI model that is complementary to human labor and enhances workers' skills—especially when accompanied by policies that upgrade the skills of those without higher education—can act as a counterbalance to inequality.

There is no doubt that the impact of AI adoption and its ability to enhance overall capabilities is strongly influenced by the characteristics of the economic system in which it is implemented.

In advanced economies, particularly in the tertiary sector, there is a high demand for cognitive tasks, making the labor market naturally more exposed to AI's influence.

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[14] Acemoglu D. (2024), "The simple macroeconomic of Artificial Intelligence", NBER Working Paper Series, no. 32487, May.

[15] The comparison between these two different approaches is carried out by Philippe Aghion and Simon Bunel. See Aghion, P. and Bunel, S. (2024), *AI and Growth: Where Do We Stand?*, San Francisco Fed, June: https://www.frbsf.org/ wp-content/uploads/AI-and-Growth-Aghion-Bunel.pdf.

[16] Acemoglu D., Autor D., and Johnson S. (2023b), "Can we have pro-worker AI?, CEPR Policy Insight, no. 123, October.

By contrast, emerging and especially developing economies, where traditional industry still dominates and skilled labor is in shorter supply, are less likely to benefit from AI in the short term.

The result, as Cazzaniga et al. (2024) point out, is that exposure to AI in employment is considerably higher in advanced economies, which may lead to a widening gap in relative competitiveness between developed and developing countries[17].

7. Demographics and Migration

Available estimates show that long-term demographic trends vary significantly across regions and countries. These trends have important implications for development, since a larger population generally means greater available resources, and—more importantly—because in comparing the growth potential of different countries, what matters, all else being equal, is the age composition of the population and its distribution.

Migration plays a critical role, as it can alter population structures and thus becomes a key factor in shifting comparative advantages between countries.

While it's true that the world has always been in motion through migration—a global phenomenon that reflects a fundamental human need: mobility—it is equally true that receiving countries are increasingly resistant to it.

In fact, today, both in the United States and in Europe, citizens are expressing—especially through the ballot box—a strong reluctance to accept immigrants.

This presents a difficult challenge, but one that must be addressed, because in Europe at least, the ability to achieve sustainable development is closely tied to how effectively this issue is managed.

This becomes all the more important when we consider the long-term effects of population aging, which led Larry Summers (2020)[18] to regard as realistic the hypothesis that aging will be increasingly associated with secular stagnation in the coming decades.

Population aging tends to reduce demand for investment goods and lowers their relative prices, especially in information and communication technologies (ICT). As the elderly population increases, government spending on pensions and healthcare rises, putting pressure on public deficits and encouraging precautionary saving in anticipation of possible tax increases.

The outcome is a tendency toward secular stagnation, driven by long-term demographic decline, in which rising savings are not offset by increased investment.

But that's not all. A declining share of young people in the overall population has multiple effects: it reduces demand for new goods, shrinks the labor supply, and contributes to lower productivity.

The consequences of this demographic winter are such that—even if they do not necessarily lead to secular stagnation—governments are increasingly compelled to adopt measures aimed at encouraging higher birth rates, and/or extending working life to maintain economic and social sustainability.

The issue of the contribution of retirees to productive activity affects all OECD countries, which between 2008 and 2018 saw a 79% increase in the share of over-55s in the workforce.

Japan, with the highest life expectancy at birth, stands out as a model when it comes to elderly workforce participation.

There is no doubt that promoting greater labor market participation among the over-55 population depends heavily on the broader context—starting with the structure of pension systems and the availability of healthcare support, as well as the nature of job opportunities available (Scott, 2020)[19].

The use of robots and Artificial Intelligence, when combined with flexible and part-time work, tends to lower wages for lower-skilled jobs, but at the same time it encourages the participation of older workers, who often possess the necessary skills and are more inclined toward these types of work arrangements.

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[17] Cazzaniga M. et al. (2024), "Gen-AI: Artificial Intelligence and the future of work", IMF, Staff Discussion Notes, no. 1, January.

[18] Summers L.H. (2020), "Accepting the reality of secular stagnation", pp. 17-19, IMF, Finance & Development, Vol. 57, Issue 1, 2 March.

[19] Scott A. (2020), "The long, good life", pp. 10-13, IMF, Finance and Development Magazine, Vol. 57, Issue 1, March.

This dynamic, in turn, raises important questions about contractual agreements and benefits for older workers, whose continued activity can be especially valuable—not only for their own productivity, but also for their mentoring role in supporting younger workers.

There are, therefore, many negative consequences associated with population aging, a phenomenon of particular significance in Europe, but also in Japan.

The policies implemented so far to counteract aging and its effects have not been successful. This must be acknowledged, and attention turned to the other side of the equation: immigration.

The stance of governments in developed countries toward migration is increasingly becoming a litmus test of their political and economic foresight.

Effectively integrating migration policies into long-term demographic and labor strategies may prove essential to sustaining growth, preserving welfare systems, and balancing aging populations.

The prevailing responses to immigration in advanced countries are not moving in the right direction.

On the one hand, encouraging anti-immigration sentiment is clearly misguided. But equally ineffective is the approach that attempts to contain public discontent through mere restriction measures, which, in essence, are incapable of addressing a phenomenon of truly historic proportions.

If Europe wishes to demonstrate a genuine forward-looking vision, it must draw on its traditions and values of hospitality and integration.

This means investing in immigrants—recognizing them not as a burden, but as a vital resource—particularly in light of declining birth rates and the shrinking working-age population that accompany Europe's demographic aging.

Migration policy, in this context, is not just a social issue, but a strategic pillar for ensuring the sustainability of Europe's economic and social model in the decades ahead.

8. Equity, Cohesion, and Development

While it is true that investment in new technologies is essential for Europe's competitive recovery, it is equally true that sustainable development cannot take place without the affirmation of inclusion and social equity.

Nobel laureate Edmund Phelps (2022)[20] reminds us of a troubling trend in Western economies, where for decades we have been facing significant social costs associated with the decline in total productivity growth and innovation—starting with stagnant wages and growing dissatisfaction over the lack of meaningful opportunities for workers, beyond mere monetary compensation.

This is why we need a more inclusive and dynamic society—one that creates space for the creativity and innovation needed to ensure both human flourishing ("the good life") and development.

The major challenge we face today is that, in response to the new great transformation—driven by digitalization, emerging technologies, and Artificial Intelligence—we have yet to develop an adequate societal and policy response.

ICT technologies hold the potential to improve health, extend life expectancy, and enhance well-being. But at the same time, they risk becoming key drivers of growing inequality.

The automation of work leads to a declining labor share of income in favor of capital, raising concerns about job displacement and highlighting the need for a long and difficult process of skills retraining and upskilling.

Concerns about AI's impact on inequality stem from the deep transformation it is expected to bring to both the economy and society over the next several years.

This is all the more pressing in light of growing forecasts of a rise in the use of humanoid robots, expected to support—or even replace—human labor in a growing number of sectors (Masera, 2024)[21].

In this context, the need to rethink welfare systems is clear—ensuring the necessary conditions for equity and social inclusion.

This is undoubtedly a difficult task in a world marked by increasingly fierce competition, where many of the traditional market-balancing mechanisms are weakening or disappearing.

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[20] Phelps E.S. (2022), Introduction, in *Equità e sviluppo. Un programma di legislatura in un mondo in cambiamento*, L. Paganetto (ed.), Eurilink University Press, Rome, October.

[21] Masera R. (2024), "L'Intelligenza Artificiale è la fine della scarsità? La riflessione del Prof. Masera", Formiche.net, 23 November.

One need only consider the antitrust systems, originally designed to prevent dominant market positions, which today appear largely ineffective. As a result, the role of the major high-tech companies in the U.S.—Meta, Google, Microsoft, Amazon, OpenAI—has been described as that of a potential "techno-oligarchy".

This concentration of power, paired with the disruptive effects of digital transformation, poses a serious challenge to economic fairness, market diversity, and democratic governance, reinforcing the urgency of reforming social protection systems to meet the realities of the 21st-century economy[22].

Observing the ongoing changes—in terms of both new inequalities and employment shifts—it becomes clear that the welfare state, in its current form, is no longer adequate to address the emerging needs for inclusion and social security.

There are still the protected classes of the industrial era, but alongside them have emerged new excluded groups, shaped by the evolving demand for higher skills in manufacturing—far beyond the average qualifications that were once sufficient.

Moreover, the growing weight of services in national economies is driving demand for new professional profiles, often displacing existing skillsets.

This transformation has led to the rise of a new class: the "precariat" (Standing, 2016)[23]—made up of individuals with low qualifications, unstable employment, and no alternative economic resources. They move in and out of the labor market without any real occupational security.

The critical issue is that, in the absence of inclusive mechanisms, this group is excluded from social mobility. Lacking the necessary resources, they are unable to acquire the skills demanded by a rapidly changing world.

The only viable response is a rethinking of the welfare state—not only at the national level, but also at the level of the European Union.

This is particularly necessary because, in some cases, precarity is driven by business decisions to relocate activities within the EU, moving operations to countries that offer better profitability conditions through localization incentives.

A renewed welfare model must therefore be designed to ensure greater cohesion, support fair transitions, and prevent the fragmentation of social protection across the Union.

It is therefore essential that the European Union, if it wishes to re-establish itself as an attractive global region, takes responsibility for these challenges.

In rethinking the welfare state, it must also consider the growing fiscal pressure caused by population aging, which—as previously discussed—leads to a steady rise in healthcare and pension expenditures.

A necessary condition for welfare systems to meet the new responsibilities brought on by the great transformation we are experiencing is that European economies achieve the productivity gains needed to channel sufficient resources into healthcare, pensions, and education—thus making equity and social inclusion a concrete possibility.

The truth is that greater inclusion and lower social inequality are only achievable through higher total factor productivity. And this, in turn, is deeply tied to investment in education and training, which becomes crucial in a world undergoing extraordinary technological change.

Large-scale phenomena, such as the "skill polarization" that took place in manufacturing during globalization, reveal the pressing need for lifelong learning systems—ones that can adapt to technological transformation and the rising demand for higher-level skills, compared to the intermediate qualifications that were sufficient in traditional factory settings.

Even more profound shifts are to be expected in the digital era and the age of Artificial Intelligence.

The real challenge lies in developing new skills, the ability to generate "good" jobs, sustained GDP growth, and the financial capacity to support an increasingly expensive welfare system, especially as a result of demographic aging.

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[22] It is a risk explicitly highlighted by former President Joe Biden in his speech on January 15, 2025: "An oligarchy is taking shape in America, based on a technological-industrial axis, which threatens our democracy and our fundamental rights and freedoms."

[23] Guy Standing has theorized the emergence of this new class, whose defining feature is the insecurity of their position in the labor market. Cfr. Standing G. (2016) (ed.), *The precariat: The new dangerous class*, Bloomsbury USA Academic, October.

9. Innovation as the Engine of the Social System

Europe needs not only a more inclusive society, but also a more dynamic one.

This is an objective it can achieve by reviving its tradition as a global actor—not only through trade and its contribution to redefining the international economic order, but also by investing in joint research and technology partnerships with emerging countries, which lie at the heart of today's global transformations.

Through such collaboration, Europe can play an active role in initiating and spreading innovation processes around the world.

It must be remembered that innovation is a driving force not only for the economy but for the entire social system. Contrary to what is often claimed, innovation is not necessarily a source of inequality—rather, it is the key to preventing it, by creating new opportunities and pathways for inclusive growth.

In fact, innovation is a powerful mechanism to restart the engine of social mobility.

Where innovation is lacking, inequality tends to rise—due to the absence of new opportunities and a stalled process of development.

This is equally true when it comes to sustainability, where innovation is essential in overcoming the economic and social limits of current climate policies.

In conclusion, the framework that should guide Europe's future choices must be one of development driven by a proactive international role—a role that is increasingly necessary, given the new posture of the United States toward the multilateral system it once helped shape.

Europe's rich historical and cultural heritage gives it the tools to oppose the prevailing logic of conflict by advancing an alternative path: that of cooperation, international integration, and innovation—understood not only in a technological sense, but in the broader sense of the capacity to experiment, to adapt, and to create new opportunities for all.

PART III

A STURDY SHIP IN A STORMY SEA: ELEVEN CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FEDERAL UNION

1. The Politics of Great Powers

When the sea is stormy, sturdy boats are needed to navigate it. That sea is the world, which is undergoing radical change, calling into question the European Union (EU) and its ability to act. The international and national balances that had allowed the EU to consolidate have been swept away by a nationalist cyclone—by the nationalism of the great powers (America, Russia, and China), of the middle powers (India, Turkey), and by the rising nationalism within the EU's own member states. If European integration was launched to tame the aggressiveness of nationalism, nationalism has once again become the central problem of European and international politics. Integrated Europe was the answer to war—a response that succeeded in eliminating it from our continent. However, war has returned, no longer in the form of conflicts between states, but as power politics: such as Russia's aggression against Ukraine or Israel's violence towards the Palestinian population in Gaza. This resurgence of power politics is dismantling the liberal international order within which integrated Europe was able to develop. Law has been replaced by force, negotiation by coercion. Integrated Europe is not prepared to face such a radical transformation of the international system, having entrusted its security to the United States for the past seventy years and having assumed that the world was merely an external projection of its internal multilateralism. Extraordinary times require extraordinary responses; existential challenges demand structural change.

2. Democracy Conditioned by the Europeans

It was convenient (for the Europeans) to entrust their security to others (the Americans). In doing so, the EU was able to redirect resources from warfare to welfare, giving rise to a continent-wide single market—now the most integrated in the world—through which it could promote economic growth and social development among its member states. Peace made development possible; development brought stability to democracy. For the first time, in the post–World War II era, liberal democracies were consolidated in all the countries of Western Europe. A continent that had invented fascism and Nazism was able to create rule-of-law systems capable of protecting individual rights and human dignity. A continent that had massacred millions of Jews, members of religious and sexual minorities, and political opponents—with the support of enthusiastic nationalist majorities—regained a sense of its own fragility, equipping itself with constitutional safeguards and a new political culture. Electoral democracy was embedded within a dual regulatory system, based on internal constitutions and external interstate treaties, giving rise to a model of "constrained democracy" aimed at preventing the emergence of tyranny—whether by majorities or minorities. This model fostered a culture of pluralism and tolerance, of respect and rights, of solidarity and responsibility. After Auschwitz, in Europe, no one can say anymore: "Only my reasons matter," "Only my truth matters," "Only my nation matters."

3. An Ever Closer Union

The integration project was born out of the need to civilize European states through democracy. By creating a larger democracy—a composite democracy—the aim was to balance one faction against another, thus preventing the rise of new authoritarian centralisms. It was a matter of building a system

of liberty and justice, capable of accommodating social, cultural, and religious differences within itself. The EU's progressive enlargement has not only been an expression of its foreign policy, but also—and above all—of the vision of social liberalism that lies at the heart of its founding. A social liberalism that went hand in hand with the internationalist liberalism institutionalized beyond the Union itself. Although the EU treaties sought to define the institutions and procedures of the integration process, the process was fundamentally based on a shared ethos: the commitment of national governments and citizens to the values and goals of integration. This vision became a true teleology—a guiding purpose. It shaped the EU's enlargement processes, seen as necessary to overcome old divisions and stabilize contested regions, but handled as though they did not require institutional change within the EU itself. According to that vision, enlargement would bring differences in the means, but not in the ends, of the integration process. It was assumed that the goal of an "ever closer union" was shared by each country joining the EU. This shared sense of purpose was expected to ease disputes and tensions, allowing integration to move forward. But that did not happen.

4. The Return of Popular Sovereignties

With the Maastricht Treaty, the EU did not limit itself to promoting the single market, but brought onto its agenda issues traditionally tied to national sovereignty—ranging from defense to foreign policy, from taxation to political asylum. These areas were governed through an intergovernmental model of governance, rather than through the supranational governance model used for the single market. While the latter operates by majority vote, the former relies on unanimity. The crises of the past twenty years—emerging in areas still under the competence of member states—have further strengthened intergovernmental governance and its logic of protecting national sovereignty. Nationalism, which had been shown the door with the Treaties of Rome in 1957, came back in through the window with the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. The defense of (newly acquired) national sovereignty was the main concern of the Eastern European countries that joined during the "big bang" enlargement of the 2000s, but also—albeit in more moderate forms—of the Northern European countries that entered during earlier rounds of enlargement. While integrated Europe had originally been conceived to reduce the power of the nation-state, the new entrants—particularly those from the most recent enlargement—interpreted integration instead as an opportunity to *preserve* the nation-state. Once the inviolability of national sovereignty was asserted, so too was the idea that each state had full autonomy in defining its own internal constitutional structure. This autonomy amounted to a refusal to recognize the principles enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union—principles which, nonetheless, had been formally accepted as a condition for joining the EU. Hence the phenomenon of *democratic backsliding*—the slide toward autocracy—that has occurred in some member states from the latest enlargement. Through its distribution of veto powers, intergovernmental governance has thus enabled the protection of national sovereignty, even when that sovereignty has led to illiberal and autocratic outcomes.

5. A New World and Old Paradigms

The result is breath-taking—in the worst sense. The EU has lost its soul, that "NEVER AGAIN" proclaimed by the founding fathers—not just its decision-making capacity. The reasons for integration have been lost. The fundamental principles have been disregarded. Even loyalty among states in the face of the threat of war has been called into question. The pressure to turn the EU into just another international organization has grown stronger and stronger. Trapped by the belief that institutions should follow policies or intergovernmental agreements, the EU has found itself without the tools or resources to defend itself in a world ruled by brute force. It failed to respond adequately to Trump's trade war or to Putin's military aggression, despite the scale of the challenges. It has shown the ability to react (to the pandemic, for example), but not to act in the face of ongoing historic transformations. The rise of nationalist sentiment in almost every member state has made the Union's actions even more uncertain—uncertainty which, in turn, has further fueled those sentiments. Even in the industrial sphere, rather than cooperating, national defense companies have continued to elbow each other aside. At last, the EU has decided to take responsibility for its own security—but it is doing so by nationalizing defense, rather

than creating an effective and accountable supranational system. To the challenges of a new world, the EU is responding with an old mindset. It remains unable to think beyond the framework of nation-states. It continues to rely on them, even though none of them is capable of facing the dramatic changes now underway. New World, Old Paradigms.

6. Europe in Multiple Circles

It is necessary to free integrated Europe from the institutional and cognitive trap that holds it captive. If we want to prevent its regression into a mere international organization—based only on cooperation among diverse political regimes—and if we wish to recover the rationale behind the goal of an ever closer union (and the values that justify it), then we must go beyond the status quo. Given the differences among its member states, the EU should be seen as a starting point, not the endpoint, of the integration process. History matters—it shapes predispositions and expectations. In response to the EU's internal differentiation, we need to pursue positive-sum strategies—those that can accommodate diverse needs without forcing them into conflict. It is unlikely that such needs can be met through Treaty reform, given the unanimity requirement that effectively blocks it. Nor are the strategies internal to the Treaties—such as enhanced cooperation—sufficient. These latter mechanisms are useful for advancing functional integration in specific policy areas, but they are not sufficient to promote political integration—such as the creation of a supranational actor with the resources and capacity to act on the international stage. For this reason, it is necessary to move beyond the Treaties, allowing a pluralist Europe to develop differentiated institutional forms. This differentiation must be constitutional in nature, not merely functional. A Europe of multiple circles or multiple levels: at the center, a federal union; around it, a broader economic community; and beyond that, a confederation inclusive of all European states willing to share responses to common challenges such as security and environmental protection. It is the center—the federal union—that must have its own political subjectivity, so it can act as a unified actor in the crucial areas of security and development, while also setting a standard of social solidarity that all its members must uphold.

7. The Federal Union

The federal union cannot be a replica of existing federations—particularly not of postwar Germany, which has been the most influential model in the European integration process. The German federation emerged from the disaggregation of a previously unitary and *hyper*-centralized state, whereas the European federal union will result from the *aggregation* of previously independent states, demographically asymmetric and culturally diverse. These asymmetries and differences rule out any project of centralization. The goal must be the creation of a *federal union*, not a *federal state*. A federal union is a composite democracy, structured around multiple separations of powers—between the center and the units, and within each level—where every power is balanced by another. The center must have decision-making capacity: a government able to respond effectively to both external and internal threats. But this decision-making power must be strictly limited to issues that states cannot address on their own. It must not extend to policies that individual states are better positioned to handle. In these areas, the competencies of national governments and parliaments must be preserved. The federal union can only emerge from the initiative of the founding states of the integration process—France and Germany in particular—but it must include all old and new member states that share the goal of an "ever closer union."

8. The Government of the Federal Union

The center of the federal union must have a supranational character, independent of national institutions. To carry out the policies assigned to it, it must have access to its own resources—*fiscal* as well as *military*—an independent administrative infrastructure, and specific oversight mechanisms. The center must consist of a *limited government*, kept in check by a bicameral legislature made up of a *citizens' chamber* and a *chamber of states*, both operating under the supervision of a *court of justice*. Because of

demographic asymmetries and cultural differences, the government cannot follow a parliamentary model. If it were to depend on the confidence of the popular chamber, it would inevitably reflect the interests and culture of the largest delegation in that chamber. At the same time, if it were chosen by the chamber of states, it would risk reflecting the interests and culture of the largest and strongest national governments. To ensure equality—*among citizens and among states*—the government must be formed independently of both chambers. The union is an *anti-hierarchical* and *anti-hegemonic* project, uniting different citizens and diverse states. Europe has already experienced imperial forms of unification, led by countries that believed themselves stronger because they were larger. And we know how those ended. We need to come together to face challenges bigger than any one state can manage—but we must do so in full respect of the principles of equality between states and between citizens. We must think outside the box.

9. Centralize and Decentralize

The federal union, organized as a composite democracy, is a project that is neither right-wing nor left-wing. It aims to offer constructive solutions to diverse needs. In a world undergoing radical change, no single state is capable of confronting the threats posed by great-power politics, or the challenges of climate change, monetary instability, or technological innovation. At the same time, federal aggregation among states must not create hierarchies between them—as would be inevitable with the centralization of such an aggregation. We must establish decision-making capacity without encouraging hierarchy or hegemony. Contrary to what happened after Maastricht, the goal is not to bring national governments and parliaments into the center, but to *constitutionally separate* the competences of the center and those of the states—*strengthening both* sets of institutions. Instead of simply centralizing or decentralizing policies and institutions, what is needed is a strategy that *distinguishes* between the policies that must be centralized and those that should remain decentralized—*separating* the institutions responsible for managing the former from those responsible for the latter. This institutional separation makes it possible to clarify responsibilities—unlike the post-Maastricht arrangement, where everyone is responsible, yet no one truly is. The composite democracy of the federal union must be built on *strong democracy* both at the center and within the member states.

10. Plural Identities

The federal union requires the formation of a *composite identity*—both among citizens and among elites. This does not mean replacing national identity with a supranational one, nor does it imply that the former is irreplaceable by the latter. The federal union must break free from the *statist paradigm*, which holds that because political authority must be singular, plural identities cannot exist. But it must also move beyond the approaches that have guided it so far—*functionalism* (which sees integration as a series of technical problems to solve) and *intergovernmentalism* (which sees integration as driven by governments and their interests). Both approaches are rooted in the statist paradigm: the first envisions the Union as evolving into a state, while the second reduces it to mere coordination between states. Functionalism and intergovernmentalism have indeed helped solve problems—but those solutions have created *new* problems that *cannot* be solved if we remain within those frameworks. It is necessary to *replace the statist paradigm with a federalist one*—the only model capable of truly realizing *unity in diversity*.

11. A Sturdy Ship

To be European means to be *more than one person at once*. One can hold an identity as a citizen of a state, as a citizen of supranational institutions, and as a citizen of a federal union. It is *the pluralism of identities* within the Union that ensures civility in the relationships among its members. Multiple identities help prevent non-negotiable conflicts. While state identities are shaped by history, a supranational identity must come from a *constitutional and moral choice*, precisely because the Union is a political project. To safeguard the pluralism that defines it, the Union can only be held together by *political values*, formalized in a constitutional pact. It is *liberal democracy*, with its culture of individual rights and the dignity of every person, that can bind together diverse citizens. The Union is a project that

looks toward *the Europe of tomorrow*, not only to the Europe of yesterday. It is an *inclusive*, not exclusive, project. An *open*, not closed, project. A *generous*, not selfish, project. It is a project that demands *a sense of restraint* from citizens and *a readiness to compromise* from elites. Like all efforts to unite diversity, it is fragile. But the awareness of that fragility can generate strength—*if it is grounded in values, not convenience*. The federal union is the *sturdy ship* for the *stormy sea* of a changing world.

AFTERWORD

1. Europe Must Rediscover the Path to Unification

In today's complex global landscape—so well described in the contributions by Don Vincenzo Paglia, Luigi Paganetto, and Sergio Fabbrini, and so effectively outlined in the introduction by Enzo Scotti—Europe must rediscover the lost path of its unification.

This is a necessary journey, not only for our countries—which would otherwise be condemned to economic stagnation and political irrelevance—but above all to help build lasting peace in the world.

We must indeed avoid the now intolerable risk of falling back into a new division between opposing blocs, while also preventing conflicts from festering along borders drawn by distant colonial powers, whose effects still tear apart large parts of the planet.

As written in the preceding pages, this search for a meaningful role for Europe must begin with the joint construction of a culture of peace—one that places at its core the principles of equality, justice, and freedom that Europe itself has developed after years of internal wars, brutal dictatorships, and, ultimately, a long period of division, symbolized by that "wall" in Berlin, which marked the impassable boundary between two hostile worlds.

After that infamous wall fell, Europe seemed to rediscover its path through bold policies aimed at expanding the Union's borders and, at the same time, by unifying monetary policies through the creation of the euro.

During those years, from 1995 to 2005, the European Union grew faster than any other region in the world—more rapidly than the United States and even China. However, in the face of the 2008 global crisis, Europe once again fragmented: each government within the Union sought national solutions to cushion the economic and social effects on its own territory, without engaging in a joint effort to reorganize the productive system of the entire Union.

This weakening of the ability to act together came precisely at a time when Europe was being confronted with the increasing impact of a technological transformation—one driven by the widespread and ever more pervasive digitalization of the global economy.

The institutional redesign carried out in 2007 formalized, through the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Council of Heads of State and Government (alongside the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union/Council of Ministers, and the European Commission), assigning it executive—but not legislative—functions. Moreover, it operates on the basis of the principle of consensual decision-making: it has become the forum where national interests are asserted. By recognizing each government's power of veto, the groundwork was laid for decision-making paralysis, especially in times of crisis.

Nevertheless, it is from this very context that we must start again to rediscover the lost path, bearing in mind that, in order to profoundly shape the construction of a Europe capable of exercising global leadership, it is essential to work jointly on education and research policies—which are increasingly proving to be the true core of the new industrial strategies.

However, both educational and industrial policies have in recent years remained confined within national boundaries, without aiming for a shared process of transformation of the European Union—which today, and even more so tomorrow, must confront major global challenges: from climate change to the increasingly divergent demographic growth between the North and South of the World.

This Union can only rediscover the lost path of European unification by returning to its core values of democracy and equality—the driving forces behind the development of individual countries in the second half of the twentieth century, and of the entire Union during the turn of the century, when the most identity-defining policies were boldly unified, national currencies were abolished, and the euro was born.

With Trump's second term—closely tied to the narrow oligopoly that dominates new technologies on a global scale—a new phase begins, in which both development and peace as prospects for the entire world are called into question. This is the new arena in which the European Union must assert itself as an essential point of reference for democracy.

2. An Educational Policy for a Europe That Leads in Development

Europe must once again believe in its founding values and move toward a more decisive integration of its educational structures. On June 15, 1987, the Erasmus programme was launched to promote student mobility among European universities.

Forty years after the start of the Erasmus Programme, we have learned how important it is to encourage student exchange—but now it is time to expand this programme by more deeply interweaving the paths of our universities and building a truly European university. This university should certainly be based on institutional autonomy, but also on genuine integration.

A fully European university—open to students from around the world and enabling global mobility—must be capable of attracting researchers from every country, sharing research processes and outcomes, as well as their potential practical applications, in order to spark a new kind of economy: one that is more mindful of the environment and of people, laying the groundwork for truly sustainable development.

This path toward unity must, however, begin at least at the secondary school level, in order to foster a culture of unity that can position Europe—with its values, as well as its productive and innovative capacities—as a global point of reference.

We must now propose a major unified European policy that places education—that is, long-term investment in people—at the heart of a new industrial strategy, in which the EU becomes a key player in a new era of peace and development.

It is time to face the difficult but necessary phase of institutional reconfiguration—one that overcomes the right of veto and the requirement for unanimity—and to establish common institutions that act on behalf of all of Europe, clearly recognizing the existence of different levels of autonomy as the foundation for a new unified state.

The Union must rediscover itself and those constitutional principles of economic integration and political unity that will make it possible to create a truly European educational system—one capable of fulfilling today the same unifying function that the creation of the euro achieved twenty years ago.

3. A Research Policy for a Europe of Development and Peace

In a time so fraught with risks for all of Europe, every opportunity must be seized to restore the Union's central role. Among these, the most significant is joint investment in research and advanced education, creating networks of knowledge aimed at building bonds of peace—and thus promoting the recognition of individual and collective rights—which are essential for making development environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable.

This means forging even stronger links between the major research centers across Europe through a common policy that makes this knowledge platform available to all countries of the Global South. In particular, it is essential that these institutions and their networks become the foundation of a new industry—one capable of tackling the major global challenges and of re-establishing the Union's role as a productive leader.

These research centers must also be connected to their local regions, where significant research activity still exists today, but without the direct impacts needed to drive a new phase of development.

As an example, consider that between Northern Italy, Southern Germany, Southern France, and Switzerland there already exist some of the most advanced research infrastructures in the world. If these were to operate in closer coordination, they could form the backbone of a global platform for building peace.

One starting point could be the Big Data Technopole in Bologna, which hosts the most powerful supercomputing center in Europe and the headquarters of the ECMWF – European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts, the EU agency responsible for medium-range weather forecasting.

In Trieste, the Science Park is home to a world-class international, multidisciplinary research center, specializing in the generation of synchrotron light and high-quality free-electron lasers, and their applications in material and life sciences. Also near Trieste is the Abdus Salam International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP), which promotes the study of physics and mathematics among researchers from the South of the World.

On Lake Maggiore lies the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission in Ispra—one of the main research campuses in Europe—focused on the safety and security of nuclear sites, as well as on research in the space and energy sectors.

Near Geneva is CERN (Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire), the world's largest particle physics laboratory. It is an international center responsible for the construction, operation, and advancement of particle accelerators, including the Large Hadron Collider (LHC).

In Southern Germany, major research infrastructures include the nuclear research center in Garching (near Munich) and the GSI/FAIR heavy-ion laboratory in Darmstadt, which are closely connected with the accelerator research centers at DESY in Hamburg and BESSY in Berlin.

In Southern France, one of the most important infrastructures is the ITER project (International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor), home to the world's largest fusion device.

This immense wealth of knowledge, accumulated in Europe and largely funded by the Union itself, is now crucial to the future of humanity. However, it must be closely coordinated and united under a common vision of peace and sustainable development, while also serving as a driving force for the regions that must build the new European economy.

By linking up with universities and secondary schools across Europe—and thus across the world—we must strengthen transnational cooperation networks, transferring hope for sustainable growth to small and medium-sized enterprises, to currently marginal regions, and to peripheral communities.

These actions are already within Europe's reach, allowing it to position itself as a global reference point for a new era of development and peace, and thus as a force for stability and growth, starting from its foundational values of democracy—values that are needed today more than ever.

The time to act is now.

COMMENTS

Giuliano Amato[*]

The meaning behind the initiative you are undertaking is not so much an exercise in institutional engineering as it is an attempt to recover shared values—an essential element for a true European revival. Otherwise—let's be honest—what would Vincenzo be doing here? It is precisely this recovery of values that must once again become the driving force behind the European project, because, in the end, there is little real disagreement about what Europe should be doing today.

As Luigi reminded us, it's clear that we're lagging behind in high technology; it's clear that we cannot, on our own, rebalance global inequalities; and it's clear that, with the withdrawal of American protection, we must start taking our common defense seriously. But if every country acts on its own, we run the risk of ending up with "heavily armed Germans and Italians in swimsuits." So, from a rational standpoint, the reasons to take further steps in the integration process are all there. And yet, something is missing to actually make it happen.

The original impetus for Europe was driven by values—rooted in the ideal of peace, in the famous motto "never again war among us." As long as the memory of war remained alive in the gut and conscience of those who had lived through it, that ideal worked, managing—at least to some extent—to keep in check the nationalisms that have always marked European history. But with the rejection of the European Defence Community (EDC), that original momentum began to fade. That was when Monnet and Schuman decided to shift from the political to the economic sphere: integration had to proceed on the basis of mutual benefit.

I myself, together with Massimo Salvadori, wrote a book entitled *Europa conviene* ("Europe Is Worth It"). In those years, the process of economic integration worked, but even the founding fathers knew that it would not be enough: in order to reach the political sphere, that economic advantage needed to become a driving force toward broader goals. However, in taking that route, the heart of the *Ventotene Manifesto* was lost—a document that clearly stated: *"If we want peace among ourselves, we must take away from the states the powers that allow them to wage war: defense and foreign policy."* This never came to pass.

It's true that economic integration nonetheless ensured internal peace, but today we realize that to guarantee peace in the world and at our borders, we must return to that original vision: we need a political federalization of Europe. And this leads us to a key question: is the rational perception of mutual benefit enough to overcome the obstacles? My answer is no. Nationalisms always manage to find short-term advantages that block long-term vision.

In the 1950s, it was easy to perceive an immediate benefit from expanding the market; today, when we speak of shared interests in foreign policy or climate action, resistance arises—from those defending the automotive industry, or national agriculture, or those afraid of losing short-term advantages. In this way, nationalisms become the defenders of these *"short-term inconveniences."*

This is why economic logic alone is not enough. What is needed is an emotional and value-driven impulse—something capable of overcoming the fear of losing something today in the name of a shared future. We need a language of values, of peace, of cooperation. Because this world can only survive if human beings learn to cooperate, to recognize one another, and to accept their differences as a source of richness.

This is a realm that economics alone cannot reach. And so, it is right that your work seeks to dig deeper—down to the spiritual roots of European integration. There is nothing wrong in calling it that: a *spiritual root*—without which there will never be a true political Europe.

Thank you very much for this first part, and I now hand over to Monsignor Paglia, who will continue from here with the theme of a new Christianity for a new Europe. Let me just remind everyone that this is not a closed conference: it is meant to spark reflection and to build a path forward. We already have

[*] Politician and jurist, former President of the Council of Ministers and President of the Constitutional Court.

texts and contributions, and we must involve not only economists, but all those who share the vision of going beyond.

Andrea Manzella[*]

The broad agreement with the presentations that have been delivered—particularly that of Sergio Fabbrini—allows me to avoid repetition. So, I will attempt something a bit riskier: to look at what Europe represents *today* as a model for a world in transformation—not what it should or could be, but what it *actually is*, with all its weaknesses and contradictions.

The goal is to understand how the Union can contribute to the "*reason of the world*"—to that new institutional and cultural framework Monsignor Paglia spoke of just moments ago.

I will try to answer three questions: how is the world changing? How is the new nationalism manifesting itself? What kind of federal prospect is possible for Europe?

Let's begin with the first point.

The world is undergoing profound change—not only on the military front, but above all in geopolitical and cultural terms. Trump's divisive policies have severed many of the historical and cultural ties that once bound the United States and Europe, undermining the very foundations of the Western alliance.

Today, Europe finds itself isolated, lacking an autonomous strategy for economic and political alliances—and this represents an existential risk. We have built more economy and more institutions than we are able to politically support in the current global scenario.

And yet, when President Von der Leyen speaks of the "rapid evolution of markets," a new awareness emerges: the possibility for the Union to play an active and creative role. This is the right attitude—not to retreat into a defensive stance, but to offer a model of "*consensual hegemony*", to use a Gramscian expression.

Europe must look at the new world by engaging with its vital structures—modes of production, social customs, healthcare systems, innovation capacity, and political ideologies.

Even in the so-called Global South, which today seems to be rallying around an anti-Western logic, we do not see the emergence of a truly alternative political vision. The recent Beijing declaration is a clear example: rather than expressing a new perspective, it repeats the same principles of the rule of law, international law, freedom, and pluralism—all born of the constitutional tradition of the West.

It's paradoxical, but even aggressive states continue to sign documents that reproduce the political grammar of Europe.

This reveals two things: their inability to create a genuinely alternative world order, and the fact that Europe—whether it wants to or not—remains the universal custodian of those principles. And in certain moments, even a "*paper bridge*" can serve the cause of peace.

Let us now turn to the second topic: the new nationalism.

It is not foreign to European political history: even Lenin was profoundly European when he defended the independence of oppressed nationalities, and Spinelli himself, in the *Ventotene Manifesto*, acknowledged nationalism as a "leaven of progress." However, after the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century, the European constitutional revolution broke the link between absolute sovereignty and nationalism. Article 11 of the Italian Constitution makes this clear: limiting sovereignty in order to build peace.

Today, new nationalism can only exist as a *nationalism of integration*—that is, as a form of shared sovereignty. Even the countries of the Global South, by joining new blocs, ultimately limit their original sovereignty: it is the inevitable logic of interdependence.

Yet, there remains a deeply rooted ethnic and cultural divide—based on religious affiliations and social customs (especially regarding sexual morality)—that can give rise to powerful emotional movements. This is a sensitive terrain, one that can threaten the stability of democratic systems.

For this reason, the European rule of law cannot be conceived as a rigid, one-size-fits-all model, but rather as a "*Corinthian order*"—flexible and elegant, capable of embracing differences.

In this sense, we can also better understand the meaning behind the words of Pope Leo XIV, who said that "democracy is not a perfect solution for everything." This is not a pessimistic statement, but a

[*] Politician and constitutional lawyer.

realistic reminder: for democracy to remain alive, it must also be capable of embracing its own rough edges.

Third point: the federal perspective.

Europe's future cannot be entrusted solely to institutional engineering. What is emerging instead is a form of *implicit federalism*, visible in cohesion funds, in the *Next Generation EU* programme, and most notably in the *conditionality mechanism*, which ties the use of European resources to the respect for the rule of law. This type of light but consistent constraint ensures growing convergence among Member States.

A telling example is Brexit: even after its formal exit, the Union has remained "inside" the United Kingdom—through regulations, technological standards, and shared customs. It is proof that European integration does not live by treaties alone, but also through deep cultural and legal sedimentation—a true *federalism in fact*.

In conclusion, the European Union is stronger than it appears in current political perception. It still represents the most advanced experiment in coexistence and cooperation in the contemporary world. However, its greatest weakness remains its incompleteness.

Unlike unfinished works of art, which captivate through the freedom of interpretation they allow, Europe's incompleteness does not inspire—it is a wound, a source of desolation, a contradiction between the model and its realization.

Yet it is precisely from this contradiction that Europe must—and can—emerge.

Pier-Virgilio Dastoli[*]

On August 19, 1954, Alcide De Gasperi passed away, and many have written that his death is closely tied to the now-certain collapse of the European Defence Community (EDC)—a project initially aimed at the reconstitution of the army of the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), within the framework of a European political union. The alternative would have been its reconstruction under the aegis of the American empire, opposed to the Soviet empire.

The idea was not to create a European pillar of NATO, nor to prepare for a possible war against the Soviet Union—whose brutal dictator, Stalin, had died in March 1953—but rather to build what we would now call *European strategic autonomy*.

We also know that the European Defence Community could only have been realized within a broader political and democratic European framework.

And finally, we know that the EDC collapsed—and with it, that political framework—due to the short-sightedness of both the French right and left, but also because of Italian complacency, as Italy had chosen to postpone the ratification of the EDC treaty.

There is now active discussion around security guarantees for Ukraine—specifically, first, the strengthening of its military, and second, the establishment of European security through naval, land, and air forces ready to respond (that is, to declare war or, using UN terminology, to carry out *peace enforcement* missions) in the event that Russia fails to comply with peace agreements. These guarantees would apply not only to Ukraine but also to its neighboring countries, and would come *after* a peace agreement—not merely after a ceasefire.

Since such European security guarantees will not be provided by NATO—and as this matter primarily concerns European interests, while the coalition of thirty willing states extends far beyond a European framework—it may be worth reflecting on the idea of a *new European Defence Community (EDC)*. This renewed CED could be built around a framework similar to a hypothetical Article "42.7", within which the Ukrainian army would be integrated. Its defense, deterrence, and peace enforcement operations would fall under the binding authority of this new CED.

A crucial corollary would be that military decisions should *not* be left solely to chiefs of staff, but rather entrusted to a *political body* under democratic oversight, financed by a *European budget* rather than a patchwork of national budgets—thus moving beyond the constraints of unanimity and toward a system of *shared sovereignty*.

This new CED—or European Defence and Peace Community (CPE)—could be temporarily entrusted to a *High Authority*, whose top official would report regularly to the European Parliament and

[*] President of Movimento Europeo Italia.

its Defense Committee, much like the President of the European Central Bank engages in monthly dialogue with the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs.

Pier Carlo Padoan[*]

A simple but crucial question: what really drives European institutions and economies? What is the engine of change?

The most immediate answer brings to mind Jean Monnet and the idea that Europe advances primarily through crises. The post–World War II experience seems to confirm this: European integration progresses through successive bursts of acceleration, which stall and only resume when a new crisis provides fresh impetus. This pattern has also held in transatlantic relations: after the collapse of the Bretton Woods system, Europe responded by opting for deeper integration, eventually leading to the single currency and monetary union.

The real question, however, is whether this mechanism still works today. That is far from certain, because today's crises are no longer merely economic—they are also security crises. Bretton Woods wasn't just an economic system; it was also a defense arrangement, based on a trade-off between American protection and the openness of European markets. That balance no longer exists. Trump targeted precisely that point, demanding that Europeans take responsibility for their own defense at a time when security has once again become a central issue.

The result is a twofold problem: a geopolitical and military crisis, along with the realization that Europe has not bridged the gap between what is needed to ensure security and what it actually possesses. European armies appear inadequate, while paradoxically, Ukraine now has the most powerful military force on the continent, engaged in combat against an external military power that directly borders Europe.

This highlights the need to rethink what drives European integration today. Economic growth remains essential, and the Draghi report is useful in that it clarifies already well-known priorities. The real issue, however, is political: how to build consensus to address these priorities, which require new resources.

Returning to Jean Monnet, Europe responds to crises by forming a core group of countries that launches a common mission, which others then join because it is in their interest. This model works well in the economic sphere, where integration is a positive-sum game. But today's crises increasingly concern security, where the logic shifts: in security systems, power is gained by weakening one's neighbor. It's a structural contradiction that could be ignored in the past—but not anymore.

Europe must therefore remember that, above all, it is a model of integration. It is this ability to build alliances that allows it to withstand the pressure of the American and Chinese economies, which are currently more powerful and quicker at turning innovation into value. The challenge is to respond simultaneously to the logic of economic win-win and to that of security—not by denying the latter, but by making it compatible.

This requires a political approach capable of producing European public goods. Defense is the most public of all public goods, and it is also the area where Europe has done the least. There is therefore a vast, unoccupied policy space—often not even discussed, because talking about security is perceived as morally suspect.

The final question remains open and uncomfortable: "*Are we really sure that addressing the issue of security means siding with the devil?*" And even if it did—can we afford to ignore it? The problem, in any case, is still there.

Pasquale Lucio Scandizzo[*]

This meeting touches on two central issues for Europe: the political and the moral.

Europe is highly heterogeneous, and its history reflects that. There is an ongoing tension between the idea of Europe as a nation and the reality of states that only became nations themselves after long and

[*] Economist and politician, former Minister of Economy and Finance.

[*] Economist, academic, and author. Senior Economic Consultant for the World Bank.

difficult journeys. The real question, then, is: how far along are we in building a European nation, and how far do we want to go?

Even if we often don't realize it, a European nation is indeed taking shape—slowly—much like the Italian nation, which emerged from fragmented realities and was only unified after centuries. It is a long process, built on cultural and political accumulation. It can be frustrating, but it works.

No nation has ever consolidated quickly or without contradictions. Just think of the United States, marked by slavery, racism, and conflicts that still weigh heavily today. A nation, in the end, is an ideal community—and the foundations for a European community already exist. Some steps are irreversible: Schengen, the single market, the euro. In the future, a common fiscal policy or a European army may also come—but it will take time.

What is missing, above all, is a stronger ideal drive. The European project has always hovered between dream and compromise: it requires negotiation, agreement—but without losing sight of a broader vision. That's why a political class willing to take risks is essential, because the European project is also a gamble.

Despite everything, the outlook is encouraging. Europe is increasingly seen as a positive horizon, with shared common values. No one seriously talks about leaving it anymore; the debate is rather about how to build it. And that alone is a sign of progress. That's why I believe we are truly at a turning point—one that calls on us to step up and take the lead.

Giulio Prosperetti[*]

I strongly agree with Professor Fabbrini's text. If we truly want to move toward a European federalism, the path inevitably leads through a Europe of concentric circles. The public goods Baldassarri referred to must be placed at the center, and this immediately raises a serious institutional issue.

Today, Europe is living through a clear contradiction. In the United States, federalism is based on taxation, labor, and welfare—areas that foster solidarity and a sense of belonging. In the European Union, these fields do not exist at the federal level. On the contrary, Europe has concentrated its powers on competition, which by definition pits states against one another. And yet we are surprised when Europe feels cold, distant, and unloved.

The absence of a common fiscal, labor, and welfare policy has made competition unsustainable. The ban on state aid prevents countries from protecting themselves against internal social and fiscal dumping within the Union. The result is the relocation of businesses, as shown by the case of Italian companies moving to countries where taxes are significantly lower. In the United States, the opposite happens: solidarity-based rules are federal, while individual states are allowed to support businesses.

If we want a federalism based on concentric circles, then the innermost circle must include precisely those areas rooted in solidarity. Europe has already shown it is capable of this—for example, with the Common Agricultural Policy, which has preserved territories, economies, and landscapes. We also saw it clearly during the Covid crisis: every country needs internal balance; it cannot be reduced to a single productive function. Extreme competition leads only to polarization.

The issue of state aid also needs to be reconsidered. Historically, Italy developed in part thanks to such instruments. Real federalism does not erase national identities—it enhances them. When that doesn't happen, unpopular effects emerge, as with the Bolkestein Directive, which created unregulated competition among professions, fueling frustration and a sense of detachment from Europe.

But the deeper problem is political. Europe lacks a true European politics. European careers are often seen as second-tier; there is no real European public opinion; transnational parties have never truly taken off; and in member states, there is a lack of serious debate on major common choices.

That's why, beyond economic policies, we need real institutional engineering. Without a solid political and democratic structure, Europe cannot have a credible future.

[*] Jurist, judge of the Constitutional Court.

ENDORSING ORGANIZATIONS

GIULIO PASTORE FOUNDATION

The Giulio Pastore Foundation was established in 1971 on the initiative of individuals and institutions—including the CISL and the ACLI—who recognized in Giulio Pastore the embodiment of a lifelong commitment to advancing the world of labor and strengthening the role of trade unions within democratic systems. Pastore was the founder and first secretary of the CISL, the first secretary of the ACLI, and served for a decade as Minister of Labor and of Underdeveloped Areas. He passed away in 1969.

The FGP promotes and carries out multidisciplinary research and studies in the field of the human sciences, focusing on labor and trade union issues in a variety of thematic and contextual settings—local, national, European, and international.

The Foundation houses a library containing 29,500 volumes and 300 periodical titles (125 of which are current). Its main book collections include the Achille Loria Collection, the Vincenzo Saba Collection, the Aris Accornero Collection, and the Pietro Merli Brandini Collection. The Foundation also preserves and provides access to a rich archival heritage, including the CISL Confederation Secretariat Archive (1947–1958), the Giulio Pastore Archive (1946–1969), and the Giulio Pastore Photo Archive (1947–1979).

President: Aldo Carera

CULTURAL ASSOCIATION PROGETTO EUROPA DOMANI

The Cultural Association Progetto Europa Domani was established on September 16, 2025, on the initiative of Patrizio Bianchi, Francesco Bonini, Sergio Fabbrini, Luigi Paganetto, Vincenzo Paglia, and Vincenzo Scotti. Its aim is to promote, support, organize, and disseminate—both nationally and internationally—the Christian-inspired and humanistic values and principles of Europe, which underpin its founding and its cultural and moral heritage, as well as to advance research and knowledge in the economic, political, and social sciences.

The Association is non-profit and independent of governments, political parties, churches, and religious denominations, and it carries out its activities without aligning with any of their specific orientations.

The Association is open to all—European citizens, associations, foundations, and other entities—who are committed to building a humanistic, sustainable, and federal European Union that looks to the world.

President: Vincenzo Scotti