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E L'IMPRESA

Speech for the 30th anniversary of the Centre for Europe of the Warsaw University

30 years ago the approval of the Treaty of Maastricht gave a strong impulse to the European integration process. Many aspects of that document proved to be insufficient and others were very much inefficient to create a new era in the history of Europe. The famous – or infamous - Maastricht criteria are now recognized by some of the masterminds of that rules as an artificial instrument that tried to give a sort of rationality to a process that kept many aspects of irrationality. However, many other aspects permitted an effective improvement of the construction of a common house in Europe.

30 years ago a group of young and less young scholars and researchers of the University of Warsaw had a vision. In a country that less than three years before was still a member of the Soviet bloc, speaking about Europe was something like an intellectual provocation; I would add a courageous intellectual provocation and a challenge that testified to the strong belief in the concept of Europe. Something that a few years before was mentioned as if it was just a geographical expression, now was becoming a sort of password that could open many doors, also from the scientific and academic point of view.

Without a vision and a love for intellectual provocation, it is difficult to improve human, social, and cultural conditions. This is what has been done by most of the persons that are gathering here today.

It is a huge privilege and an honour to be here today, to celebrate with you this moment, this small and in the meantime great piece of intellectual and academic history. It is an honour for the University of Florence, which I represent here today, and it is a privilege for me as a professor, but even more as a colleague and a friend. The relations between the two institutions and particularly between the Centre for Europe of the Warsaw University and the Faculty of Political Science of my University are about twenty years old, just a bit less than the anniversary that we celebrate today. Students and professors have been circulating in both directions. It is difficult to say how many, but they have been a lot.



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The students of Florence that came here in the last 15-18 years, when they returned to Italy, reported to me that they had always the feeling to be at home, and sometimes even better than in Florence. Many elements can contribute to explaining this feeling: the quality of the teachers, the place where is located the Centre for European Studies, and the originality of certain topics. Let me just mention my friend and colleague Professor Bogdan Góralczyk, who permits students to understand that diplomacy is too important to be left just to diplomats. I would also add the special human atmosphere they were finding, I would say an atmosphere of mutual comprehension and inclusion, two of the most important values of the European integration process, which today is often so difficult to see and practice.

Many persons contributed to these dimensions, but I would like to mention at least one that because of his institutional role, but paradoxically - I would say - despite it, gave a strong impulse to all I mentioned. I am speaking about Professor Kamil Zajączkowski - but for me, he will remain always just Kamil – the director of the Centre of European Studies. If we were in France, I would say that he has been able to federate the many souls of the Centre, speaking with one voice, a calm one, a voice that wants to listen to - and not only to speak – to the others. I mentioned him because not only he is a friend but also because he represents the whole institution, an institution that despite being 30 years old is still very young. I hope that it will always remain young, not because of the magic of halting the time – this cannot be done even by Superman, not to talk about a professor – but because the qualities I previously mentioned represent the best tools to remain young. To paraphrase Bertold Brecht, I would say, “blessed are the academic centres that do not need heroes”, but that can rely just on normal persons who love their job and inspire others to do the same.

Warsaw, 27.5.2022

Prof. Luciano Segreto