

Spinelli is alive (and kicking)

On the 30th anniversary of Spinelli's death and the 75th anniversary of the Manifesto, we have been very lucky to visit Island of Ventotene, thanks to the invitation of Pier Virgilio Dastoli, president the Italian Council of the European Movement.

Dastoli was also kind enough to attend as panelist a joint event organized in Madrid just two days later by the Union of European Federalists of Spain and the Spanish Federal Council of the European Movement in remembrance of Spinelli, alongside Josep Borrell, former president of the European Parliament. On this day, we also launched the Spanish version of the Manifesto, including other works by Spinelli.

Now, while we write these lines, come to our mind the images of the Ventotene, its surrounding and waters, and the moving play that we witnessed in Castle Square on the evening of the 21st of May of 2016 in the life and achievement of the main author of the Manifesto.

Certainly, anniversaries and special places are the occasions to remember, in this case Spinelli, but also to merge matter and ideas and to project Altiero's vision into the future. This is why we believe it is important to continue to invest in Ventotene, the birthplace of our European Federation in the making, even before the Schuman Declaration, Spinelli's initial critical stance towards the Common Market notwithstanding.

Indeed, the small and quite Island of Ventotene is the perfect place for reflecting on the future of Europe and federalism, and we can only hope that its role as permanent base for Federalist thinking and training will continue to grow, with the support of the Italian government and the European institutions.

As for the Manifesto, much of its vision is still relevant in our time. First of all, Spinelli and Rossi declared that politics were not only defined by the left-right divide, but more importantly, by the axis nationalists-supranationalists. Thus, progressives were those that worked for the establishment of an European federation, while conservatives wanted to preserve the nation-State.

Unfortunately, 75 years after the writing of the Manifesto, nationalists and populists, eurosceptics from both right and left, and outright anti-Europeans continue to oppose the idea of a united Europe. Then as now, they fail to understand that the division of humankind in nation-states is arbitrary, while most challenges, from economic development to global warming, can only be tackled effectively at the regional and global levels. On the 23rd of June of 2016, a no vote in the referendum on British membership in the European Union could be a major blow for the European construction, and a victory for the anti-European movement.

This fact is in itself a call for action for all the democratic and pro-European political parties. The battle of ideas is still on. But it is not enough with having values and principles shared by an unlighted elite. European federalism should be a mainstream ideology, widely shared by the common people. This is a major challenge for all of us, followers of Spinelli and Federalist activists. We need to enlarge our base at the local level and strengthen the network of pro-European associations that we called European movement.

Secondly, the Manifesto called for a different ideological model in Europe, vis-a-vis US-style capitalism and Soviet communism, under the banner of a "Workers' Europe". This is what we called today the European social model, the equilibrium between market, State and society. This vision has become a reality, admired around the world, even if the excessive focus on fiscal adjustment after the financial crisis has damaged the Welfare State. It is not just by coincidence or geography that

those fleeing war and massive human rights violations seek refuge in Europe. At the same time, regaining the trust of the entire working class in the European project is of utmost importance.

Thirdly, Spinelli and Rossi put forward a list of policy items that will define the European Federation, many of which have been achieved, including the internal market, the freedom of movement of workers and even the single currency (proposed more precisely in Colorni's preface of 1943). As for the unification of foreign and security policy, also envisaged in the Manifesto, it is a work in progress, as it is demonstrated by the role of the High Representative and the launched of a genuine European diplomatic corps.

There is also the constitutional project of 1984, which Spinelli managed to get approved by the first popularly elected European Parliament. There is indeed an important connection between the two documents, since the 1984 project in a way translated into legal articles most of the vision embodied in the Manifesto.

Thus in the Spinelli project one can find an emphasis on a political union that is more than the sum of its parts, vis-à-vis the old economic community; the institutional deepening; the respect of human rights across the entire Union; co-decision between Council and Parliament, and a unified foreign policy. As it is known, the project was rejected by the European Council, but influenced the Single Act and most decisively the Maastricht Treaty and even the Constitutional Treaty.

Furthermore, the article 82 of the 1984 already established that the treaty shall not require unanimity for entering into force. This mechanism is of fundamental importance from a federalist point of view, and it is relevant in view of a future constitutional Convention.

Another important lesson of the 1984 adventure for present-day European federalists is the role of the European Parliament in leading the way for a reform of the Treaties. The chamber of the European citizens thus bears an important responsibility in promoting the deepening of the integration project as the Spinelli project did 32 years ago. This step will allow for the completion of the economic, fiscal and financial union, the preservation of social rights and the promotion of human rights.

As it was said by Pier Virgilio Dastoli during our "semi-clandestine" meeting of European Federalists in the underground room of the Ventotene city council on the late afternoon of Saturday the 21st of May of 2016, Spinelli's story shows that "the worst of times can produce the best projects". We believe so. The Europe Union may survive this multi-faceted crisis, but it is our duty to ensure that it will serve the purpose of achieving the free and fully united Europe that Spinelli, Rossi and Colorni dreamt of in their island, at a time in which the Nazi army was approaching the outskirts of Moscow. Then, the establishment of other regional continental unions in the rest of the world, following the European example, could result in the formation of a global federation, which will put an end to inter-state violence and unite humankind.

In Spinelli's own words, "the road to pursue is neither easy nor certain, but it must be followed and it will be done!".

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