



SEMINARIO “DEMOCRAZIA E CITTADINANZA EUROPEA”

*CICLO DI SEMINARI AESI DI STUDI EUROPEI PREPARATORI ALLE CARRIERE INTERNAZIONALI E COMUNITARIE
“EUROPA, COMUNITÀ SOLIDALE - IDENTITÀ, DEMOCRAZIA, INNOVAZIONE, COOPERAZIONE”*

Messaggio del Direttore Generale per l'Unione Europea –Vincenzo Celeste

Dear Professor Caneva, dear students,

I would have loved to be in presence with you today to welcome your participation in the cycle of AESI seminars "Europe, community of solidarity - Identity, democracy, innovation, cooperation". But I regret that the pandemic has prevented me to be physically with you.

As you are training for diplomatic careers or other international careers, you have probably already appreciated that the European Union represents an essential field of academic study, in the same way in which it constitutes a central element of our daily reality, as Italian and European citizens.

And I am also sure that you have realised that the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic - and the restrictions that followed - have clearly shown what a serious loss it would be for us Europeans to lose the benefits stemming from the mere fact of belonging to the largest area of freedom in the world. For example, we have been affected by restrictions on the free movement of people, one of the most tangible signs of successful integration for the benefit of hundreds of millions of citizens.

The first days of lockdown have been chaotic: for the first time since more than 60 years we were confronted with obstacles to the free movement of people and goods, strict checks and long queues at the borders, which were virtually closed, except for cross-border workers. The limitations to this and other freedoms, which are at the very foundation of the single market, had a very serious impact on the socio-economic fabric of the Member States.

The coordinated actions we have been able to take at European level can only try to limit this impact and prepare our economies for re-launch, once the sanitary emergency has passed. Despite the achievements of decades of progress in the integration project - just a few weeks ago we celebrated the 70th anniversary of the cd. Schuman Declaration - precisely the on-going emergency remembers us that there is still much to be done to transform the European Union into an organization ready to understand and meet the needs of all its citizens. Hence the importance of

dedicating an entire meeting within this cycle of seminars to two key concepts to understand the reality of the EU: "Democracy and European citizenship".

I would like to start from a sketchy reconstruction of the development of the concept of European citizenship: from the "mercantilist" paradigm of the free movement of workers enshrined in the 1957 Treaty of Rome, to the institutionalization of the European citizenship with the Treaties of Maastricht and Lisbon. These Treaties gave us a citizenship "sui generis", a unique example of how you may overcome the paradigm that connects citizenship to nationality and to the individual national State. The great step forward of the new concept of European citizenship lies in considering the individual not only as an economically active person, but also as a political actor, a dynamic participant and conscious protagonist of the European integration process. In fact, connecting an increasingly extensive series of rights, including civil and political rights, to possessing European citizenship consolidates the exit from the previous "mercantilist" paradigm that linked the exercise of freedoms to the conduct of economic activity.

Alongside the successes, however, several unsolved problems remain. First of all, the content of EU citizenship remains too weak, one of the consequences of the wider issue of the democratic representation of the Union (so-called democratic deficit). An issue connected with the European Parliament's ability to influence decision-making processes and with the still incomplete representativeness of the European Parliament. Furthermore, the very fact of the coexistence of two nationalities - the national and the European one (as we know, the citizenship of the Union is not a substitute for the national ones, but an additional one to the latter (art.20 (1) TFEU) causes European citizenship to suffer the "competition" of the national citizenship, which continue to be the first point of reference for citizens.

A dichotomy similar to that created by the simultaneous presence of two citizenships also arises in terms of political responsibility for the decisions taken. In fact, with the progressive increase of EU competences, citizens perceive that the Union has an ever-greater impact on their lives, but they do not understand its mechanisms. So, it is often (or always?) not clear to them on whom, ultimately, the political responsibility for the decisions taken falls: whether on governments or on European institutions. With the consequence that, on the one hand, Member States become inclined to "appropriate" the benefits generated by belonging to the EU, presenting them to their citizens as a result of national policies, while on the other, the EU becomes easy to be criticized, as the COVID-19 crisis has clearly shown.

Another interesting chapter might be the possibility of developing further the concept of European citizenship, including as a way for citizens to be protected by choices made by their own government: I am thinking of cases where some Member States' governments are accused of violating some fundamental values enshrined in the Treaties, including democratic values, or the rumours of a possible (and legally uncertain...) challenge that could be launched at the Court of Justice by UK citizens to determine whether EU citizenship is a permanent status, going beyond Brexit.

In any case, I am convinced that a resolute European response to the current crisis has to pass through the restart of a broad-based discussion on the future of Europe and on its still incomplete institutional architecture. An essential contribution to this discussion may come from the Conference on the Future of Europe, whose purpose is exactly to engage citizens in evaluating concrete reform proposals to make the EU more efficient and responsive to citizens' needs. The preparatory work for the conference was abruptly interrupted by the outbreak of the epidemic. But it is also picking up, thanks to the attention paid by our country. Already last February the Italian government published a "non paper", prepared by the MAECI Directorate-General for the European Union with the contribution of other interested Administrations. The non-paper (which is available on the Farnesina website) is a national contribution of ideas to the Conference. It contains proposals that, inter alia, touch on profiles that directly have to do with European citizenship: from harmonizing the rules for European elections, to the introduction of a European electoral district, from attributing a legislative initiative power to the European Parliament, to the strengthening of the European citizens' initiative; and many other proposals that go in the direction of a more democratic Union.

Hoping to be soon able to discuss directly and in-depth with you on these issues in the beautiful setting of the headquarters of the MAECI Training Unit in Villa Madama, I would like to renew my best wishes and encourage you to continue to deepen your studies on the European Union.

Buon lavoro!

Vincenzo Celeste

Roma, 16 maggio 2020