



Inaugural Address

Massimo D'Alema

President

General Assembly

Foundation for European Progressive Studies

Brussels, 30 June, 2010

Dear friends,

First and foremost, please allow me to say what a pleasure it is to find myself here, and to behold at one glance the progressive European political family to which I belong, gathered together and representing its diverse elements.

If FEPS is to act as a platform for those who wish to work for the future of the progressive project in Europe; if, as its statutes indicate, it is to act as an interface which facilitates exchange and dialogue, I think that we have in this room a beautiful illustration of that capacity.

The strength and added value of the Foundation as a policy instrument can be found in its ability to provide a realm where the connection between national and European debates takes place, where people's experiences can inspire and enrich one another, and where intellectual synergies can be fulfilled.

I have always been convinced of the importance of intellectual inquiry and I have always supported European integration in terms of policy, programme and vision for the future. Therefore, it is no coincidence that, over the past decade, I have been head of the Fondazione Italianeuropei, a cultural foundation of Italian citizens who identify equally with European citizenship. It is therefore a great honour to assume, with your generous and invaluable support, the responsibility of presiding over such a European forum for debate, especially at a time when the struggle for ideas and the search for new ideas have never been so relevant.

That is precisely what we are talking about: the fight today for the ideas of tomorrow. Since the beginning of this terrible economic, financial and social crisis, we progressive Europeans have thought that social democracy would emerge strengthened from what seemed like the end of an era dominated by ultra-liberalism, with its illusions of the infallibility of the markets and money. We rehabilitated our values of transparency, regulation, democratic control and social justice – the values in which we have always believed.

Yet it is clear today that the majority of our continent is still governed by conservatives and that the decline of neo-liberalism has, incongruously, been to the benefit of right wing forces which are – dare I say - populist and nationalist and which are using reactionary rhetoric, indeed racist.

We are facing turbulent times ahead in global politics. The election of Barack Obama heralded a new multi-lateral approach towards international relations in the United States, something long-awaited in Europe. With the sometimes explosive emergence of new actors on the international scene, (such

as China, Brazil, India), there is a risk that multilateralism could take a different turn which will consign Europe inexorably to the margins due to its lack of unity. Recently we have witnessed the hesitant response to the speculative crisis which has gripped Greece. European governments have not been very inclined to consider this as a common problem that concerns everybody. On the contrary, faced with such a crisis in a fellow EU member state, their actions went so far as to throw doubt on the entire existence of the Euro, our greatest common achievement.

It is clear to the rest of the world that Europe continues to operate as a sum of its national governments and not as a unified political body. The inadequacy of its political and economic instruments has become apparent. The Union has once again lacked clear political will to confront the crisis together and the stock market has worsened the situation by immediately responding to every little sign of hesitation. What has been lacking throughout this crisis is a European Union with a coherent framework for growth, innovation and employment.

The risk today is that our continent is witnessing an economic decline which could eventually become political, civil and cultural. Fear is a powerful instrument and in several countries, the right has come to power by using the vocabulary and language of fear. With a reductionist vision of Europe reduced to the individual interests of the Member States the right has fostered the “re-nationalisation” debate and policy against which the left has not been able to fight strongly enough.

For over two years now, the work of FEPS has already explored several ways to try to provide answers to these questions. It has also been successful in positioning itself in the progressive European political landscape and is now recognised as a place of reference for thought, reflection and intellectual research.

First of all, thanks to the committed team, led by our Secretary General, Ernst Stetter, who have worked steadfastly, regardless of the time involved. Thanks to the board, the Bureau, from whose wise guidance the work of the foundation has benefitted greatly since its creation. Finally thanks to all of you, the members, in particular the national political foundations and think-tanks, without whom, this European political adventure would not have been so successful.

The added value of an institution such as FEPS resides in its ability to put together an engine, a catalyst for political research which is able to put into place the work and deep reflection carried out by its members. In this respect FEPS should, in my opinion, articulate and amplify its research in two domains: a project for **Europe** and **our worldview**.

For the first – a project for Europe – it seems that a loss of confidence among EU citizens should force us to rethink our project for a progressive Europe. It is necessary to reflect on the bases of this European crisis. The financial, economic and social crisis and its several aftershocks have shown us the urgency of building in sustainable and durable terms. But beyond the economic and financial dimensions, it is essential today that this reflection on the economic crisis takes place on the basis of sound analysis of society in terms of work, social inclusion, identity and migration. These are all complex themes, which contribute to the formation of the public opinion. Study in these fields should support the economic research carried out by FEPS thus far.

Questions of our values and their formulation are therefore fundamental as we have become too accustomed to the language of capitalist globalisation. This has hampered us in our efforts to mitigate the growing inequalities caused by capitalism and, for some citizens, has made us also seem responsible for this crisis and its consequences.

It might be worthwhile to revisit the days when we had the support of Europeans and reflect on our political experiences of the last twenty years. In this light, it seems to me that we do not yet really comprehend the opportunities of European political integration and that we have remained trapped within our national democratic boundaries.

For the second – our worldview – we should begin by looking at the world not through a Eurocentric prism but to note that we can learn a lot from progressives and democrats who are now in control in countries which have emerged as major global players and forces for change in the world.

We must develop and enlarge the FEPS network of contacts in research centres and think tanks in these countries which are emerging on the international scene and which are governed by progressive forces of different kinds. We are well aware that innovation is often borne of shared experience – this is, I believe, a particular 'raison d'être' of our Foundation. I believe that a dialogue of this nature can be a major asset to our work of political reflection in the service of a reformist programme.

If the stakes are high in terms of ideas, this is equally so in terms of resources. It is not sufficient just to have good ideas. We must also win the battle of explaining what these ideas mean. To this end, the Foundation possesses the precious advantage of the reciprocity of its members: progressive intellectual reflection on the one hand, embodied by the foundations and think-tanks; and on the other hand, political action, embodied by the parties and the political groups.

This process shall involve the foundations clearing the way in the medium and long term, through the combined efforts of those in the spheres of politics, culture, academia, civil society and trade unions. In tandem with this, the parties shall bring a political proposal to the citizens as in the great traditions of democratic mobilisation.

The experience of the first two years of joint work, based on the privileged relationship of mutual trust, has proven that it is possible to speak differently of Europe. It is possible to Europeanise public debate and, furthermore, to convince Europeans that critical thinking is still alive and in need of open dialogue.

Our foundation offers a great opportunity for cooperation, partnership and synergy. It should be used to this end because it is a laboratory which, because of its complimentary resources, can act as an open space for the renovation of thought. It offers a refuge for curiosity, listening and attentiveness while clearly reaffirming the progressive basis of its actions. It brings the added value of a network that does not compete with others, but is rather a centre that promotes and encourages the joint work of the various progressive centres of research in Europe.

In this work of ours, I am convinced that we should pay special attention to the younger generation who, for the most part, abstained from the last European elections. These young people were born in to an already unified Europe, taking for granted opportunities that were unthinkable a few decades before. They pass freely across the borders over which millions of lives were lost in earlier generations, noticing only when their mobile phone operator changes. They make use of the Europe into which they were born, learning new languages, studying and working across the 27 member states.

Therefore, we must learn how to speak to them about this reality to which they are so much more attuned for the reasons just mentioned. It is they who hold the destiny of this great wealth that is Europe while we often forget its value.

My firm belief is that a strong Europe can bring great benefits to Europeans, just as it will bring benefits to the equilibrium of global governance. The Europe of tomorrow will be judged on its ability to meet the global challenges of today. So this must be our roadmap for the future: the creation of a new model of society which is not merely a repetition of the old experience of the welfare state, but one which transcends the boundaries of nationally based reformism. This implies to go beyond the social democratic thinking of the last century, and to be capable of overcoming the fears which feed the growth of right wing groups in Europe and giving the people hope for a better future and ownership of their modes of governance.

So FEPS should continue to act as a pioneer, as a laboratory which paves the way in supporting new ideas which will lead to the development of this new model. I am convinced that the productive intellectual work of FEPS will continue with the same momentum to sharpen our thinking on policy formation. As in the past two years, this will be done in true synergy with the PES and the S&D group in the European Parliament. - I would like to take this opportunity to greet and thank their respective presidents – Poul Nyrup Rasmussen and Martin Schulz. – Finally, this (collective) work will also proceed with the advice of the Scientific Council.

This work, I have no doubt, aims not only to enrich policy development among progressive parties at both European and national level, but also to give European citizens confidence in our ability not only to embody an alternative but to put it into practice in everyday life. So it is with this conviction that today I put my political experience to use in assuming the presidency of this organisation. I commit myself – fully and actively, with curiosity and an open mind – to those who also wish to broaden reflection and debate. I commit to the project of broadening discussion and giving it more depth so that FEPS can position itself as a political crossroads, enriched by the diversity of actors that it brings together.

I am extremely grateful for your trust and I would like to wish each one of you the very best for the work on which we embark together. I proceed with the conviction that we can meet the challenge of this great enterprise: the renewal of progressive thought and the struggle to affirm our values, which are based on democracy, the rights of the individuals and social justice.

Thank you very much.