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## Michel (EU Council): a De Gasperi Plan for European recovery

The annual "State of the Union" conference organized by the University Institute of Florence was held online today. First launched in 2011, the event has brought to Fiesole and Florence politicians, scholars and experts from all over Europe. The modality and the theme of the meeting of this "special edition" were obviously shaped by the emergency: "Europe, managing the Covid-19 crisis", is the underlying theme of the three sessions that took place during the day, focusing on health, economy and global cooperation. As always, distinguished speakers took the floor, including the Italian Foreign Minister, Luigi Di Maio, and Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte who delivered a speech at the end of the day.



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. "A quantum leap must be made along with a structural response", that will help Member states overcome the pandemic crisis and "transform the European Union into an organization prepared to respond to the needs of all citizens." Di Maio emphasised Europe's role in confronting the crisis, while not missing the opportunity to remember that Italy " has received aid from non-EU countries first." He commended Europe in its effort to make a vaccine available, and launched the global platform for cooperation. However, Di Maio cautioned,

**"the economic response will inevitably define the future of the Union."**

"Solidarity and cooperation", must be the pillars of the future European project which the Conference on the future of Europe - the flagship of President Von der Leyen's programme that should have started at the beginning of May - is intended to outline. Di Maio said he hoped that the process will be set in motion as soon as possible with "greater involvement of the citizens, who have responded with great responsibility to the measures imposed." **"Something unique."** "We have to turn this unprecedented crisis to our advantage. And to draw from it the lessons and the transformative energy we need to build a better Europe and a better world." In his passionate speech, **Charles Michel**, President of the European Council, set out the future horizon of the European project, that will have to put at the heart of the process "well-being, in terms of quality, rather than quantity", and thus

encompass the objectives of peace and prosperity that have hitherto characterised the way forward. "The quality of our personal, physical, mental, social, economic and cultural lives" can only flourish "in a caring society", "where individual well-being and collective well-being are fundamental to one another." Michel quoted from a 1951 speech by Alcide De Gasperi, when Europeans "united their forces" by "dispelling their rancour" thereby inventing "something unique in the history of humanity: the European Union. He again referred to De Gasperi in the question: "What project will help us draw the right lessons from the test we are facing and help us emerge from it stronger, more resilient and in a better place?" **Practical roadmap.** "A caring society, where individual well-being and collective well-being are fundamental to one another" is, for Charles Michel, "Europe's new horizon, what we direct our energies towards." The meaning ascribed by the President of the European Council to the term "well-being" certainly entails good health ("we are learning just how much this fundamental right depends on high-quality healthcare systems"); but it also means climate well-being– "a less obvious, but even more existential threat than a pandemic" – along with the digital world, the social dimension and finally the global context ("a caring society can only be credible if it also cares about dignity, well-being and progress in the rest of the world.") The "well-being" objective requires "a practical roadmap", a "plan for recovery and transformation", which Michel proposes to name not "Marshall Plan" but rather

**"De Gasperi plan", in memory of the reconstruction effort of this founding father of Europe.**

**The Green Deal and the Digital Agenda must form the backbone of the plan.** According to the President of the European Council, it will once again be necessary to "overcome our differences and see beyond limited short-term interests", coupled by "energy and human resources." Michel said he firmly believes that "Europeans have within them the means necessary to create this better Europe and better world." "They have the capacity for resilience and solidarity. They also have the capacity for the innovation and renewal." Only if Europe will be a "caring society" it will emerge from its current crisis "stronger, more united and with greater solidarity than ever." **Common interest.** Christine Lagarde, President of the European Central Bank, made reference to **Robert Schuman**, and to the idea of the German statesman who 75 years ago said that "Europe needed to become so deeply integrated – and so interdependent – that solidarity would become self-interest." The present circumstances are "testing this thesis." In fact, until now, whenever our "concrete achievements" were threatened, we made them stronger. Now we must meet the challenge of an "unprecedented economic shock" in a way that reflects our fundamental common interest, as in the past. "No one is to blame for this crisis" thus "we must ensure that there are no undue constraints on our policy responses", and for Lagard this is the time for a "common fiscal response." The present crisis is "our generation's Schuman moment", which paradoxically involves a twofold opportunity: to accelerate the transition to a green economy and "to engage citizens in the process of defining our common interest." **Paolo Gentiloni**, Commissioner for the Economy, interviewed by Roula Kahlaf (Financial Times) confirmed the line of the ECB President, albeit with some reservations: "in a short time we reached an agreement on changing the rules and decided on the first measures." However, "unless there is a strong common response, the project will fail." Gentiloni advocates progress towards a common fiscal policy.

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