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## May 9: how can Europe be start anew? From Schuman to the Conference on the Future of Europe

Seventy-one years have passed since May 9, 1950. The scars caused by the Second World War and its devastations were still fresh at the time, and a Christian statesman with strong religious roots, recently proclaimed a Servant of God by the Church, had a vision of how “Europe should be made.”



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In a Declaration that has gone down in history, French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman called upon the peoples of the six founding States, prior to their governments, to take concrete steps to achieve a 'de facto solidarity' between former enemies; a wise peace, based on cooperation and common growth, on gratuitousness rather than competition. The appeal was received by equally wise national leaders, thus laying the foundations for a new chapter in history. Since its inception, the Community approach proved successful in the areas of agriculture and natural resources. *By contrast, today's European Union, its Euro area and its controversial migration policies, is a radical departure from the original vision of its founding fathers.* Notably, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it embraced an ultra-liberal economic and financial model that dramatically distorted the relations between States, businesses and citizens, until it finally manifested symptoms of irreversible crisis. In the 2019 European elections, traditionally pro-European parties with a majority risked being reduced to a minority in the face of growing discontent, as evidenced by rising sovereignist and populist groups, no doubt spurred on by external powers, albeit also the result of well-grounded criticism of Brussels' policies, perceived as increasingly inflexible and unfair, especially after the 2009 crisis, that saw Greece as the most conspicuous victim. *However, COVID-19 seems to have reawakened also the good sentiments characterising that Europe of solidarity and social cohesion, otherwise thought to be gone forever.* Next Generation EU and the Von der Leyen Commission's Recovery Plan occasioned a dramatic departure from the approach adopted over the past few decades, pouring unprecedented amounts of financial resources into supporting economic recovery through public investment. As a result of the pandemic, the paramount right to health and the central role of labour gained a new focus in the political agenda, as have environmental sustainability and human-oriented technological

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development, along with education and research. It's probably too early to say that the sustainable development goals of the United Nations and Pope Francis' Laudato si' have proved successful and that we have entered a new phase of integral human development. However, we can rightly argue that an ideological approach that was a harbinger of divisions in society now appears to be over, and that the course has reversed to the benefit of an initiative inspired by realism and geared to meeting widespread primary needs. *Italy will be among the countries that can potentially benefit most from these new policies, but it must take advantage of the historic opportunity to change course, consistently rejected over the past decades.*



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This is why the Draghi-led government's main objective is to guide the country out of the pandemic, while at the same time initiating structural reforms urgently needed by the political and economic system. However, along with other countries, Italy is facing a marked lack of interest in public life, due to the absence of political awareness in line with the momentous transformation under way. This can be seen, first and foremost, in the political party crisis and in the challenges posed by the lack of authoritative leadership. It will therefore not be easy for public bodies and Italian businesses to properly invest €250 billion earmarked in the Plan in just a few years.

### **Indeed, the greatest challenge is of a cultural nature**

involving the need to move from an understanding of individualistic welfare benefits to becoming proactive players contributing to the implementation of highly innovative common policies. This shift in mentality is bound to be demanding: Europe's future leadership can only be effective if it is widespread and participatory, capable of understanding the fundamental changes under way, with a view to sustainable and proactive initiatives. *It is against this backdrop that the Conference on the Future of Europe kicks off on the symbolic date of May 9 to collect concrete proposals - via a public platform - for rethinking the current role of the EU. Hopefully, the objective will be more than yet another exercise in institutional engineering, and democracy - rather than the participatory method - will be sustained by the creation of new concrete projects designed to connect and enhance the many positive experiences of solidarity, bolstering their potential to create vital human relations and, with these, greater hope for the future. It is also to be hoped that, in this way, the original vision of the founding fathers, its restorative and pacifying vocation, will once again permeate the currently dreary streets of our ancient cities.* (\*)*European policies expert*

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