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THE PROMISE OF THE EU

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Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri
Dipartimento Politiche Europee

Keynote event organised during the Italian Presidency of the Council of the European Union by the Department of the European Policies of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers of the Italian Republic and the European Commission

AT THE MAXXI MUSEUM

In collaboration with

Ministero dello Sviluppo Economico

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AT THE MAXXI MUSEUM

The World economic and financial crisis has triggered, as a side effect in Europe, the most intense debate about the European Union's future in its history, posing the most serious test it has ever faced, and presenting different connected issues and questions. The linkages between the different aspects are expressed as an answer to the following questions:

HOW MUCH UNITY DO CITIZENS WANT AND WHAT ARE THE AREAS IN WHICH INTEGRATION SHOULD TAKE PLACE?

The idea of Single Market - the most important outcome of EU integration - reflects two different concepts of Europe's future. Some Member States are not supportive of going further and pooling sovereignty in key areas such as taxation, immigration policy, budget, or social and labour policy, suggesting that attempts to deepen integration could be met with resistance, given the negative political and public attitudes in various countries. A revival of a wider public support for the EU will depend on its ability to deliver in terms of growth and employment. Strengthening the relationship between the EU institutions and citizens and their understanding of EU actions, will also be a key factor in generating support for the EU. In this context, it is important to consider whether the Digital Agenda could be a means of encouraging support for the EU.

■ Single market vs. Political Union: What kind of Europe do we want?

Supporters of the 'Single Market' idea advocate that most people are not ready for more integration and that public acceptance for the EU would increase only if EU concentrates on its 'core business' - i.e. the Single Market - whose economic and social potential has not been completely tapped. Those opposing are those who advocate that the EU is insufficiently equipped to face current and future challenges, and therefore it needs to take steps towards a fully-fledged economic, fiscal, financial and political union.

1. **Some would say that the general public will more readily support the Union if it is clearly seen to 'deliver' economic prosperity for everyone. Shouldn't we therefore simply go back to basics and focus on the economic underpinnings of the Union first, instead of getting distracted by minor objectives: big on big things, small on small things?**

2. **Do you agree that that a two-speed EU could be a possible solution to current political disagreements among Member States?**

3. **What do you think are the reasons that hold people back from supporting an 'ever closer union' in the EU?**

■ Innovation and Digital revolution: drivers of integration

Open and productive research infrastructures will significantly advance Europe's capacity to generate new ideas and create new jobs, thus achieving the dual result of responding to citizens' needs and fostering growth. Through the direct involvement of institutions, researchers, students, industry and innovation stakeholders, the 'digital' revolution may support economic development; trust and security for digital citizenship; the EU digital service infrastructures, new 'skills', maximising the opportunities of media convergence to foster the creation of digital content, open and big data value chains and the digitalisation of the public sector. These are key enablers for EU competitiveness. With major non-European companies dominating the global digital economy, European champions also need to emerge to further drive innovation.

1. **Do you think it is still time for Europe to play a leadership role in promoting the digital economy? How could this be done? How can it complement actions at national level ?**

2. **What role can the European Union play to support creativity and innovation in a sustainable way?**

3. How can we avoid deeper societal divisions between those with skills and access to new technologies, and those left outside?

4. How has the digital revolution changed the way of communicating Europe towards citizens?
   Can it in turn enable citizens to have a more prominent role in the democratic process?

5. Can European-made digital content strengthen the EU's position in the global digital economy?
   Can Europe tackle the data revolution, reconciling data protection, the trust of citizens and economic interests?

WHAT WOULD MAKE THE EU MORE DEMOCRATIC?

Appropriate measures to boost democratic legitimacy and enhance accountability of EU institutions are needed in order to recover public credibility in the ability of the EU to provide suitable responses: the main challenge will be how to increase citizens' participation and involvement. The ongoing debate on the functioning of the EU Institutions could bring good results in terms of both reinforcing Interinstitutional relations and improving internal proceedings.

■ Recovering citizen's trust in times of crisis

The perception that citizens cannot influence the EU's complex decision-making process needs to be addressed: overall the EU institutions are perceived as too distant and not attentive to peoples' real problems. To this end the role played by communication and media is crucial.

1. Why do you think that many citizens have lost their trust in the EU?

2. How can we re-gain this trust? Is a new narrative for Europe needed?

3. Why is the EU's image so tarnished in some Member States, while it is highly regarded in others?

■ Editorial independence as a democratic value

Editorial independence requires that economic interests do not set the agenda to discuss any topic in a certain way. It has been discussed in many different forms throughout history and it is embedded in democratic values. In the digital era, some have argued that the traditional definition of editorial independence risks being compromised, as editors will be more likely to provide for the interests of online readers and not serve the best quality of information.

1. Can editorial independence be realistically ensured when many mass-media outlets are owned by large, transnational media conglomerates?

2. Is it possible to communicate and inform in a positive way about political actions and Institutions without compromising editorial independence?

3. How does ownership of a mass-media outlet make a difference to the level of editorial freedom?
   Does it influence the quality of the content?

4. Is editorial independence guaranteed on social networks and blogs?

WHAT IS THE OVERALL EXPECTATION OF CITIZENS FROM THE EU?

Europe is generally seen as a promoter of peace: human rights and fundamental freedoms represent the cornerstone of the European construction and the defining element of our shared identity.

■ Setting up a genuine European public space: the role of public service media

With the aim of enhancing democracy and accountability of the EU institutions and improving citizens' understanding of actions at EU level, the public service media can play a major role. They represent an asset in promoting public awareness of the on-going debates and in communicating policy choices that have an impact on peoples' everyday life, thus bringing the EU closer to its citizens. This can be achieved also through the overcoming of the so called 'digital divide', reinforcing a 'European digital citizenship', but also creating transnational public opinions. In order to do so, the European public service media should be able to leap forward and 'tune in' to the new modes of access and usability of contents of the web 2.0 and its successors.

1. What do you understand by the term 'European Public Space'? Does it (already) exist?

2. To which extent can public service media contribute to European values (pluralism, democracy, cultural diversity, social cohesion, etc.)? What are the conditions to reinforce this contribution?

3. What should be the role of intellectual, cultural and scientific figures to create such a genuine European public space?

■ Common values and different expectations?

The discourse regarding human rights and fundamental freedoms needs to be matched with the response to real life necessities: the building of a European 'collective imagination' - as well as a shared set of values - can create a sense of belonging to the European sphere, only if Europe itself is able to match the expectations of finding opportunities for people.

1. What is it that makes us 'European'? What do you think are the 'common values' that we share in this diverse European Union of ours?

2. Are these shared 'common values' really European? Are they not universal?

3. How can the Union accommodate the differing levels of ambition for the future that exists among the Member States, from little more than market integration to full-scale political union?

4. Is there a momentum for developing a new narrative about Europe?

Notes