
Europe and the rest of the world facing the coronavirus challenge.

Caracciolo (Limes): "Struck by the pandemic, it's time to envision a different future"

Globally, the coronavirus has been tackled with "utter, unjustifiable unpreparedness. The risk of a pandemic had been reported by the competent experts, for a long time already. But since government structures were insufficiently prepared to respond to emergencies, we were all caught off guard." **Lucio Caracciolo**, journalist, academic, expert in geopolitics, is the editor-in-chief of "Limes", Italian Review of geopolitics. He discussed these topical issues with Sir, addressing a number scientific, political and socio-economic aspects. **Mr. Caracciolo, the coronavirus tsunami has swept across the globe, undermining scientific and medical certainties, health systems, economies, even political institutions... Is that correct?** The country that saw the origin of this pandemic, China, was able to tackle it more rapidly, at least in its initial stages, thanks to a semi-military structure that operates with great efficiency in situations such as this. Countries like ours, which lack adequate health facilities, had to struggle harder. *Quite strikingly, the first world power, the United States, is reporting the highest number of victims today, amounting to approximately one third of the global death toll.* The United States had all the time to prepare in advance, also because of what was happening in countries first hit by Covid-19, and yet they were completely unprepared: they did not capitalize on what was happening in the rest of the world. From Trump's point of view this was something unimaginable. Trump lacked the mental preparation to face challenges of this kind and this will also pose a problem for his re-election. Moreover, considering the American health care system, it is not exactly optimal for dealing with a pandemic crisis. **Italy was the first country to be hit in Europe and has tried to respond on different levels: obviously health, then welfare (aid to families, redundancy fund, bonuses...) along with economic support to save businesses. But national institutions seemed to proceed with inadequate coordination...** I believe that the question of Italian Regions must be addressed seriously. Indeed, the reform of Title V of the Constitution resulted in widespread chaos thereby sparking off latent conflicts, which subsequently emerged in this crisis, not only between the national administration and the regions, but also among the regions themselves, evidencing poor cooperation. I think that a country like Italy needs to rethink its institutional structure, also in terms of a centralization of powers and responsibilities. In short, if we were to do without the Regions, it would prove beneficial. **Has the pandemic highlighted an inadequate governance framework to meet the challenges?** The opposite would be odd. At least in the early emergency stages, when life-boats are lowered, there is a fight over who should be the first to be saved, and perhaps even good manners are disregarded. What worries me is that in the second phase we are in, concerted action is still missing. *For example, the vaccine issue is being dealt with unsystematically, with an uncoordinated competition.* I am curious to see which use will be made of it by the Country who will develop it first: whether all-inclusive or strategic. **Europe, hardly hit by the pandemic, is struggling to find mutually agreed solutions. Crises recur (financial, terrorist, migratory...), problems extending far beyond national borders (climate, energy, security, stability and international peace) are growing: what does the EU need in order to intervene in circumstances like these?** As it is currently structured, the European Union is a braking mechanism, not one of cooperation. When a solution is proposed, a group of countries intervene and propose a different one, either contrary or alternative to the first proposal. This is what happened recently in the Merkel-Macron story. They reached a compromise solution and put forward a proposal for the Recovery Plan, but it was met by the resistance of extremists in northern Europe (Holland, Denmark, Austria, Sweden) who blocked everything. On the other hand, European mechanisms are dysfunctional: they require the approval of 27 governments and 27 parliaments, the opposite of what is needed to decide. Four months after the outbreak of the health crisis, the EU is still debating "primordial" issues, failing to deliver practical responses to the economic crisis that is

unfolding alongside the health crisis. We are left to ourselves or to agreements between countries. EU institutions have not been put in a position to provide a response to this pandemic. Europe also lacks cultural unity, that is somewhat anthropological, which would allow for effective political action. Europe today is an assembly of States, quite vociferous and undisciplined, whose governments adjust to the desires their of citizens-voters. **What can be done?** As I see it, we need to overcome the present situation: States should seek additional forms of selective cooperation in certain areas. But pursuing large-scale strategic action will get us nowhere, and if anything, it will have the opposite effect: people see the EU more as a problem than as a resource. This is reflected in surveys conducted in a typically Europhile country like ours. On top of this, a disruptive trend, manifested in the Brexit, is growing stronger inside the EU. *I can't recall one single crisis, starting from the migratory crisis, in which we shared a common vision.* Nor is there a "European" public opinion. Ultimately, I think it is necessary to envisage alternative responses. **Will less fortunate countries and peoples once again pay the highest price for this crisis?** I see conflicting elements. In Italy the heaviest toll was paid by the richest regions, in the United States New York was hit the hardest compared to the Country's rural areas. Due to its specific nature, this virus affects the most interconnected, the most developed and the most globalised regions. In this respect, Africa is - so to speak - favoured. However, I believe that the most serious and worrying factor for Africa is not so much its strictly sanitary aspect (on which, for that matter, we will never have precise data), but its economic and social dimension. The world-wide industrial and business crisis will have an even greater impact on Africa. Especially in those countries and regions that live on informal economy, "street" economy, and where social protection is virtually non-existent. **How will we manage to overcome this? Do you have any hope?** I have many hopes. The first hope is that we will overcome, culturally and in terms of communication, the most critical and emotional phase, moving on to a more rational one, that brings together all the various aspects of the crisis. So far we have understandably focused on the health aspect, with daily bulletins on the number of cases, deaths, recovered... Now we need to look ahead and try to imagine solutions that will allow us to improve our social life just a little bit more than in the last few months, to recover a basic degree of socialization, of interaction, starting, for example, with the reopening of schools - I don't see why restaurants should be opened before schools - and by defining, from an economic perspective, public investment in infrastructure, including highly motivating and symbolic ones, thereby offering guidance on future planning with a project that enhances the community spirit that characterized the past few months.

Gianni Borsa