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Europe's Gentle Power

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Europa, forza gentile / Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa. – Bologna : il Mulino, 2001. – 192 p. (Contemporanea). – ISBN 88-15-08185-2

Institutions exercise "power" both internally, that is, towards their constituents – citizens and intermediate institutions – and externally, that is, towards analogous institutions based on other constituents. The kind of power that Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa refers to in his book *Europa, forza gentile,* which deals with the institution of the European Union, this hybrid between a state and a coalition of states, is mainly internal and is "gentle" – gentle in the sense that it has been and still is exercised in both the ongoing constituent phase and in the operational phase without the violence of military and police instruments, but rather through the rule of law and democracy.

The author combines extraordinary experience in the field of public institutions (at the Bank of Italy, the European Commission in Brussels and now the European Central Bank) with a great sensitivity for the economic, as well as the political, social and cultural components of relations between citizens and institutions. To these he adds a mixture of pride, at times somewhat indulgent, for what has been achieved and apprehension for what remains to be done in the field of European integration. This attitude, rather like that of a teacher towards a promising pupil, is particularly perceptible in this book, the chapters of which (originally essays or lectures) are dedicated to the history of European institutions, the relationship between nation and culture (originally drafted for a Scottish audience), the case of Italy in Europe, the role of institutions in the economy and, finally, the potential validity of the EU model for other areas of the world.

The collection offers a wealth of stimuli. In the "gentle power" diptych lies the substance of the author's pride/apprehension: pride in the historical novelty of a new almost state-like institution which unites without conquering (after so many tragic conquests in European history) and organises without subjugating; apprehension for the fragility of the construction, subjected to the dual pressure of the new competences and the new members to come.

"The European construction is a revolution", writes the author who considers himself one of its protagonists, together with an elite made up of "employees, officials, bankers, professionals" rather than conspirators. The revolutionary aspect lies in the establishment of "elements typical of an *internal* economic order in what was previously a system of *international* relations". The process has been gradual; the constitutional order built by modules. "The European macroeconomic constitution appears to be uniquely advanced and enlightened." And now we have the single currency, the importance of which "transcends the economic and institutional sphere and profoundly touches interpersonal relations, identification with the society to which one belongs, individual and collective psychology". Other modules lag behind, some even rather far behind. But an initial internal power has been acquired, in a gentleman ner.

But what about external power? Actually, the author reminds us, the integration adventure started with the project for a defence community, which derailed in 1954 after it was rejected by the French parliament. With it were derailed the ideas of a federal Europe (in the traditional sense of the term), Europe as a third power and, paradoxically, Europe shaped after the French model. The adventure started again some years later with the single market and continued along the road of economic integration to return to the idea of political integration only years later, basically after the end of the Cold War. In other words, the context in which the gentle power developed was anything but gentle, on the contrary, the "balance of terror" at that time involved the most widespread international tension and highest level of risk the world has ever known. This apparent contradiction is due largely to the effect of the foreign policy of the United States, which played the role of guarantor of European security but at the same time did not hinder the process of European integration, thereby facilitating it while serving its own interests.

The author's thesis is implicitly very close to that of Europe as a "civil power", which gained currency during the seventies and eighties, that is, of a Europe which, on the one hand, contributed to the East- West balance with its active, albeit subordinated, participation in the Atlantic Alliance, but on the other brought stability to some European Mediterranean countries by means of enlargement, or encouraged world trade or macroeconomic coordination with civilian – or if you will, gentle – instruments. The "victory" in the Cold War was not only the result of Western, especially US, military superiority, but also of the growing attraction exerted by the affluence and unity of the then European Community – an affluence and unity that the East Germans were the first to see on the other side of the wall and on their television screens at home. This was the beginning of the fall of the Soviet system.

Europe as a pole of attraction, but also as a model, on one condition. Padoa-Schioppa writes: "Europe has taken the new road of limiting sovereign powers. This is the road that the world will also have to take if it doesn't want to destroy itself. Europe can contribute to pushing the world system of states in this direction only if it learns how to walk that road, internally, down to the very end." A challenge

that is all the more complex given that the external context could be adverse, though in a dif fer ent way. In fact, while there are no longer two op pos ing blocs, the world is still full of con flict and ten sion and the in cli na tion of the United States to take re spon si bil ity for sta bil ity and to fa vour the de vel op ment and ac tion of in ternational institutions seems to have decreased considerably, especially with the ad vent of the Bush ad mini stra tion. This calls for a more ac tive role on the part of the Euro pean Un ion, a power that may not con tinue to be just gen tle.

An other po liti cal change to take into ac count is the one that has taken place in It aly, in the light of which we read the in ter est ing chap ter on the re la tions be tween Italy and Europe during the past half century.

Padoa-Schioppa defends the widespread Italian consensus for integration, of ten scorned both at home and abroad, and explains it by referring back to the Roman- Christian roots of Ital ian cul ture and its uni ver sal ist in spi ra tion, which has been a shared char ac ter is tic of "Ital ian con tri bu tions to ar tis tic, sci en tific and economic activity" in the world, but which has also "mitigated the natural quarrelsomeness of peoples and favoured assimilation and integration". Nev ertheless, "this uni ver sal ism has also been one of the ob sta cles to the emer gence of a mod ern uni tary state" which only came into be ing in the nine teenth cen tury – late with re spect to the re al ity of the na tion. This de lay was to have a last ing nega tive ef fect on the "ad min is tra tive skill in the han dling of state af fairs, a trained in stinct for the perception of the national interest, a capacity to overcome internal di visions and ri val ries". Not long af ter uni fi ca tion, "hav ing be come a na tion state, It aly discovered and practised aggressive nationalism. (...) Suffering swift defeat [in World War II], for two years Italy was partially occupied by its former enemies, par tially con trolled by its Ger man former ally". And na tion al ism lost sup port among Italians for the rest of the century.

On the ba sis of this leg acy and un der the thrust of think ers such as Luigi Einaudi, Altiero Spinelli and Mario Albertini, who influenced a number of political lead ers through the years, "Ita ly's Euro pean strat egy con sis tently fol lowed a few clear guidelines". Consequently, "Italy played a positive role in all the crucial phases of the (Euro pean) con struc tion. In the same way, the Euro pean fac tor had a de ci sive in flu ence on Ita ly's eco nomic, so cial and po liti cal trans for ma tion in the last fifty years". Less and slower was its in flu ence on Ita ly's ad min is tra tive ca pacity, where "Italy's bad reputation in implementing European norms", has only re cently im proved slightly. To these con sid era tions, I would add that in the same pe riod Ital ian for eign pol icy was able to rec on cile – or rather in te grate – its pri or ity for Europe with its pro- Atlantic in cli na tion, thus avoid ing the kind of anti- American Eu ro pe an ism to be found in France or the pro- American and of ten anti- European lean ings of the UK.

With the advent of the Berlusconi government, nu mer ous Ital ian and for eign commentators have wondered whether this fruitful relationship between Europe and It aly will con tinue or whether there will be some re sur gence of that re cur rent though till now hardly in flu en tial con trast be tween the so- called *par tito ameri cano* and *partitoeuropeo*. It aly is also wit ness ing a re turn of "na tional in ter est" rheto ric,

which may be in keep ing with the re- emerging *Realpolitik* now in vogue in the US, but tends to over look the fact that the na tional in ter est has never been served as well as it has in the last fifty years. The risk is that the re mark able Ital ian in flu ence on Euro pean af fairs, de scribed by Pa doa-Schioppa, would de crease; on the other hand, draw ing closer to the United States, in Brit ish style, would ob vi ously not offer comparable influence. The debate over continuity in Italy's European and foreign policy was already reflected in the new government's choice of foreign min is ter, clearly nomi nated by the prime min is ter to re as sure. But the is sue pops up again at any im por tant Euro pean or in ter na tional pas sage. Pa doa-Schiop pa's reflections shed a very use ful light on this de bate.