



**SECOND TAORMINA/MESSINA CONFERENCE<sup>1</sup>**  
**18<sup>TH</sup> – 21<sup>ST</sup> JUNE 2021**  
**THE FUTURE OF EUROPE IN A POST PANDEMIC WORLD**  
**(ORGANIZED BY VISION AND TAOBUK FESTIVAL)**  
**LA METAMORFOSI DI EUROPA<sup>2</sup>**  
**THE MANIFESTO AND CONFERENCE FOLLOW UP**



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<sup>1</sup> The first day of the three days conference was hosted by the University of Messina. We thank the Rector, Professor Salvatore Cuzzocrea, the Pro Rector, Professor Giovanni Moschella, the faculty and the staff for the support.

<sup>2</sup> Europa is the mythological Phoenician princess whose seduction from JOVIS gave birth to the kingdom of CRETE and to the idea of the WEST as civilization.

## MANIFESTO AND CONCLUSIONS FOR FURTHER DEBATES

The Second Messina/Taormina Conference “THE METAMORFOSI OF EUROPE” co-organized by Vision (the Think Tank) and Taobuk (The Taormina Book Festival) has taken place in the very days while the continent was trying to achieve a new form of normality with a strong acceleration of the vaccination campaign to mitigate the still-ongoing pandemic.

The COVID19 had triggered the greatest crisis since 1945. And yet, like all previous global crises, it is not only greatly accelerating pre-existing technology-driven mutations, but it has also created the opportunity of a radical rethinking of how we govern complex societies, the world and the European Union itself.

The European Union is, indeed, changing at a pace which has never been experienced before: the European Central Bank has gone even beyond the unconventional measures experimented at the time of the sovereign debt crisis in 2015 by pumping into the financial markets more than 1 Trillion euro in the 9 months from April to December 2020 and this pushed interest rates so low to help member States easily to finance extraordinary financial rescue packages<sup>3</sup>; political priorities were drastically twisted towards an ambitious “green deal” and bold targets to reduce EU CO2 emissions of 55% vis-à-vis by 2030 (and this result may, indeed, have been accelerated by the increased awareness that much threatened global disasters can indeed happen and touch everybody’s life); the decision to finance with the European Commission’s own resources the 750 billion euro “Next Generation EU” is being increasingly seen as permanent change which will affect the nature of the Union and this will eventually modify the stability and growth pact that constrains national fiscal policies.

However, we still see the glass as half full when talking with whoever is still preaching nationalism, but also as half empty when debating amongst the ones who really care about the greatest political project of the twentieth century. A lot is being achieved and yet the EU needs more: it needs objectives and decision-making mechanisms which can bring a great 20<sup>th</sup> century project into the new century.

Moreover, the pandemic has exposed fundamental weaknesses in what Europeans thought was their main strength. Despite believing that they live in the portion of the globe that enjoys the highest quality of life, the most developed welfare and some of the best health-care systems, in fact many European countries – notably Italy, Spain, France, Belgium, Sweden, Hungary and the Netherlands – have been amongst the worst hit in terms of casualties and cases, and now have to face a huge welfare burden with weakened public finances.

History teaches that after the global wars of the twentieth century, new “world orders” have been crafted. We believe that the time has similarly come for a new start. Sixty-five years ago it was a conference in Messina to decide the creation of the institutions (the EEC and the EURATOM) which paved the way to the Rome treaty. In June 2021, the think-tank Vision, TAObUK and University of Messina convened a three-days’ problem solving event in Messina and Taormina where thirty intellectuals, policy makers, journalists, historians and visionaries gathered to generate and discuss bold ideas which could feed the parallel and official “conference on the future of Europe” and provide a contribution to “crafting the future” (as for the Vision logo).

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<sup>3</sup> The de facto permanent change into ECB’s policies was eventually formalized with Christine Lagarde’s recommendation to change the policy targets of ECB.

The conference is meant to be the second of a series (begun in October 2020) which will feed institutions with fresh ideas on how to renew the European Union. The ten propositions which we believe are worthwhile to be developed and pushed forward are:

1. The Messina-Taormina conference warmly welcomed the great advancement that the European Union has achieved in less than one year since the agreement at the European Council in July 2020 on Next Generation EU. Old taboos have thereby been thrown away and new visions have been created. However, we need to complete the awakening by establishing new priorities, defining more efficient decision-making processes, completing the many half-way integrations (single market, free circulation of people, monetary union) which create instabilities especially during crises.
2. Amongst the priorities which will define the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one must be the setting of clear, decisive European policies on global digital platforms. The working group which was convened to discuss a Vision concept paper believes that European policy makers, like the US or Chinese ones, are still facing a conceptual issue of how to better define the problem, which is crucial if the right regulation instruments are themselves to be defined. Antitrust tools may be technically not adequate to tackle a question which is mostly about control and access to data. GDPR is seen as a very interesting example of an innovative EU policy tool; however an effort must be made to make individuals and small firms instrumental in its reinforcement.
3. The conference also recommends that – alongside the regulation of existing digital platforms – policies should be pursued to unleash the creative and entrepreneurial potential of European existing firms and start-ups. This implies a number of strategic choices: to push forward towards a more streamlined common market where competition can select innovators capable to reach a global scale; to reduce burden which protect incumbents and prevent new actors to emerge (for instance in Fintech); to use public – private partnerships to promote new kind of platforms, whereas decentralization, interoperability, open standard can become competitive advantages.
4. The Messina/ Taormina conference thinks it is already time to take a stance on how the Next Generation EU and individual national recovery and resilience plans are being designed. The entire initiative will be successful only if it will transform itself into a permanent capacity of the European Commission to issue common debt which will finance a European autonomous financial capacity to respond to crises.
5. The conference urges that mechanisms of the next NGEU be reviewed so that future successor “recovery and resilience” plans achieve a much greater involvement of civil society (so that the plans become proper projects meant to reform entire societies) and mobilize much more private funds. Instruments that realize public – private partnerships may also work as a mean to solve the problem public administrations have in effective execution of such plans.
6. The pandemic suddenly reminded the Europeans that the healthcare and welfare systems they have been very proud of are fragile vis-à-vis modern challenges such as

global pandemics. The working group on healthcare believes that the European member states need to urgently tackle review the case for giving the European Commission an institutionalized role in coordinating healthcare systems or at least coordinating responses when pandemic outbreak. An area of free circulation of people without such a co-ordination may make it more difficult to contain the damage from health threats that are borderless.

7. European healthcare systems need, however, an organization overhaul even when assessed on national basis. On one hand, we need much more capability to be close to individuals and families so that more diseases can be prevented rather than treated; on the other, hospitals may need to move from a “one-fit-all” model to a more specialized one. Technologies enable both tendencies and the European Commission is encouraged to continue to provide added value in terms of promoting the change and benchmarking examples to be followed. New and mounting inequalities must be closely monitored so that the pillar of universal coverage is enhanced.
8. One of the plenary sessions of the conference provided the opportunity to attempt a link between the NGEU intervention logic and cohesion policies. Regional aids account for almost one-third of the EC budget and yet their impact appears to be not as strong as it used to be. The extension to cohesion policies of the NGEU principle of paying Member States (or Regions) only upon “fulfilment of targets and milestones” may be considered.
9. The conference also dedicated two plenary sessions to what promised to be a permanent feature of the Messina / Taormina conference: drafting new or strengthening existing positive actions to develop a European demos: these include the possibility to make Erasmus free for all students at secondary and tertiary education level; deliberate policies to increase the quality and quantity of Europe wide debates; and new mechanisms to encourage EU wide mechanisms of participatory democracy will become more specific proposals for the conference on the future of Europe (and partnerships with other think tanks and universities will be pursued).
10. Africa will also be a distinctive focus of the next edition of the Messina/ Taormina conference. It is for Africa after all where pragmatically European foreign common policy patterns must be most urgently found.

*The Messina/Taormina conference was the opportunity to discuss and generate some bold ideas on the Future of Europe. Participants in the conference believe that the conclusions of the Manifesto are worthy of further development and for proposal to the European institutions, though they do not necessarily agree with every finding and recommendation. Participants join the Vision series of conferences on Europe in their individual, not institutional, capacities.*

The conference participants included: Francesco Grillo (Director Vision think tank), Bill Emmott (Author of “The fate of the West” and former editor of The Economist), Stefania Giannini (Assistant Director for Education, UNESCO and former Minister for Universities, Research and Education in Italy), Antonella Ferrara (President and Founder Taobuk - Taormina International Book Festival), Alberto Bramanti (Professor of Regional Economics, Bocconi University), Alexandra Borchardt (Head of Digital Journalism Fellowship Hamburg Media School, Senior Research Associate, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford), Alexandra Geese (MEP, Alliance 90/ The Greens), Alfio Puglisi (King’s College London), Angela Giuffrida (Rome correspondent for The Guardian and The Observer), Antonio Nicita (Principal Adviser European Commission, Member of the Regulatory Scrutiny Board), Antonio Parenti (Capo della rappresentanza della Commissione Europea in Italia), Antonio Tajani (President of the Constitutional Affairs Committee of the European Parliament), Cosimo Pacciani (Senior Advisory Board Member, International Research Centre on Artificial Intelligence, UNESCO and former Chief Risk Officer at European Stability Mechanism), Demir Murat Seyrek (European Foundation for Democracy), Elvira Amata (Presidente Commissione Statuto ARS), Enrico Giovannini (Minister of sustainable infrastructures and mobility), Ernest Wilson (Former Dean of Annenberg School of Communication in LA and Director of the USC center for Third Space thinking), Fabio Masini (Jean Monnet Chair for European Economic Governance, Roma Tre, Secretary of the European Federalist Movement), Francesca Pellegrino (Università degli Studi di Messina – docente di Diritto della Navigazione), Francesco Bonfiglio (Chief Executive Officer GAIA-X), Francesco Lapenta (Institute of Future and Innovation Studies. John Cabot University, Rome), Gavin Hewitt (Former Chief Correspondent for Europe, BBC), Giacomo D’Amico (Università degli Studi di Messina - Docente di Diritto Costituzionale), Giorgia Meloni (President of the European Conservatives and Reformists Party), Hannah Lucinda Smith (Times, Correspondent for Turkey and the Balkans), Jan Piotrowski (Business Editor The Economist), John Hooper (Italy and Vatican correspondent of The Economist), John F. Ryan (Director Public Health, Commissione Europea, DG Health and Food Safety), Kalypso Nikolaidis (St Antony’s College, University of Oxford), Kelly Falconer (Asia Literary Agency), Koert Debeuf (Director of the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy Europe and Editor in Chief, EUobserver), Laura Silvia Battaglia (Journalist, freelance contributor The Washington Post), Lorenzo Fioramonti (Italy’s MP and Former Minister of Universities, Schools and Research), Luca Jahier (Former President of the European Economic and Social Committee), Lucrezia Reichlin (Professor London Business School), Marco Berlinguer (Researcher Institut de govern i polítiques públiques (IGOP), Manuel Vilas (Columnist El Mundo and El PAIS), Maria Cristina Messa (Italy’s Minister for Universities and Research), Maria Letizia Giorgetti (Professore Associato Università degli Studi di Milano), Michele Geraci (Professore di pratica della politica economica alla Nottingham University di Ningbo), Michele Messina (Professore Associato Diritto dell’Unione Europea Università degli Studi di Messina), Mikel Landabaso (Director of Growth and Innovation at the Joint Research Center of the European Commission), Nicola Saldutti (Corriere della Sera), Paolo Gentiloni (European Commissioner for Economy), Paul Nemitz (Data Ethics Commission, Global Council on Extended Intelligence), Raffaele Stancanelli (Eurodeputato Gruppo ECR, Vicepresidente Commissione Iuri), Roberto Castaldi (Associate Professors Università Ecampus and General Editor Euractiv Italia), Romano Prodi (Former Prime Minister of Italy and Former President of the European Commission), Ruggero Aricò (Vice Presidente di Confindustria Assafrica & Mediterraneo), Sandro Gozi (Former Prime Minister of Italy and Former President of the European Commission), Stefania Baroncelli (Professor Public and European Union Law at Free

University of Bozen-Bolzano), Stefano Campostrini (Professore ordinario Università Ca' Foscari Venezia), Steven Everts (Senior Advisor on strategy and communications at the European External Action Service), Viviana Mazza (Journalist, Corriere della Sera), Yang Lin (WHO European Office for Investment for Health and Development).