

Preface

ANTONIO LOPRIENO

From the Rule of Ideologies to the Rule of Identities

“We live in difficult times in which Europe is undergoing a great deal of transformation.” What is sometimes missed in this statement is that Europe has always been a sort of work in progress, a kind of *Baustelle* as Germans say, a Utopia under construction. As such, it always entails very hard work that includes constant setbacks, endless discussion, and ceaseless renegotiations on what it stands for. These can be perceived as incentives to a dialectic between Europe as an idea, a form of identity, and Europe in the political form it assumes and acquires. ALLEA, the European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities, was founded along these lines twenty-five years ago, with the idea of actively promoting and participating in the debate on Europe, on constructing a form of European Union, and on giving faith to this utopia. All of this is achieved through collaboration between the most genuine representatives of sciences in European countries.

At ALLEA our mission is to provide a platform to force the ongoing dialogue on European issues. But this dialogue in the present circumstances needs to go well beyond the close circle of the academy. For in this way, all our institutions become bridges between science, what we do professionally, and the translation of this scholarship into what we call knowledge societies in the Europe around us.

In this respect, ALLEA has adopted a strategy that is formulated in the ALLEA Strategic Priorities 2019–2024 booklet and also featured on our website. In recent years we have given what we call science advice at the European level. We work with other academic networks to provide such advice to European policymakers on issues pertaining to global challenges that concern all of us. To a certain extent, the series of conferences ‘Europe on Test: Narratives of Union and Disunion’ is to be seen among these endeavours.

The inspiration for this activity comes from a British Academy conference organized back in November 2016. Since then ALLEA has helped organize its successors and related events in Göttingen, Germany, in Rome, Italy, in Helsinki, Finland, as well as in Warsaw. The idea behind the conference series is to address historical projections of the recent past and future cultural, economic, and political developments that are relevant for the future of Europe.

A brief remark is necessary on a couple historical observations that might be important. The discussion on European integration and the European Union within the last 30 years, the period in which ALLEA has been active, can be seen as the child of the era of ideologies in European political discourse.

The three large political families – social democratic, Christian democratic, and liberal – shared to some extent common views as to where the trajectories of Europe should lead. This is because the values shared by these large political families can be tracked back to the Age of Enlightenment.

After the emergence of what we now call globalization in our economic, but also social and political life, the era of ideologies seems to have been replaced by the era of identities in this new millennium. No longer is it an issue of right vs. left or of more state or less state in economic decisions; rather, the issue is of global identity or global orientation. The sociologist David Goodhardt has differentiated between two perspectives: “somewheres” and “anywheres”. While the perspective of “somewheres” is applicable to those seeking refuge in the localistic identity base of reality, the “anywheres” are those who tend to opt for more globalist perspectives.

This time of change from the rule of ideologies to the rule of identities has also been accompanied by a transformation in the models of communication. We now have communication that is far more rapid, and which tends to privilege simplification over complex realities.

The populist drifts that we observe in Europe and beyond are also magnified by the newfound easiness in – mostly digital – communication and social types of transmission that tend to privilege emotional and sensationalized messages over information and knowledge that is science-based, values-based, and thus necessarily more complex.

This is something that is observed at the level of science advice in Europe. The principle aim is to be able to convey scientific messages to European policymakers – and more importantly, translate issues that are more complex and multi-layered. Thus, the work of the European Academies is needed in this respect precisely to bridge the two wholes: pure science on the one hand and policy issues and social decisions on the other. Within this dialogue and dialectic, made available by this conference series, scholars have been invited to discuss the significance of EU integration, the past and the future from a variety of angles, the public sector, policy-making, media, sciences, and international as well as national conflicts.

It is a delight that this conference series has given the opportunity to talk about these issues in Poland against the entire cultural backdrop in which the country has operated over recent decades. The Polish Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology have developed a truly praise-worthy programme for the occasion.

The conference series has not ended with this conference in Warsaw. It will continue next month in Turin, Italy, where the European forms of ‘work in progress’ from the point of view of the role of the academies will be discussed, as well as the role of academies in sustaining the European knowledge society in times of crises. A letter from the President of the Royal Society of Edinburgh has also been warmly received, with an invitation to examine as a part as our conference series the British perspective on the developments in Europe.