

Turin Forum on Social Rights in Europe

Turin, 18 March 2016

Transcription of the intervention of Mr Angelo Farrugia, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Malta

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Thank you Mr President. I have listened to the keynote speakers, Jean-Paul Fitoussi and Olivier De Schutter and I would like to make some observations about what you stated. With special reference to of course the European Community, European Union, we as Europeans; I'd like to put things straight.

With regards to the idea of having a European Government, you (Mr Fitoussi) were very angry when you were expressing yourself, and I am a little bit angrier now because if we are going to say that the problems we have today in the European Union, and the members of the Council of Europe, is because we don't have a European Union Government, I think that would be a little bit adventurous.

I'm saying this because, in order to go for a federal government, we are 28 in the European Union, and I would say that we would end up by 10 or 15 if that would be a modest number for those who would go for a total federal government.

So I think we should think differently. We should think about other alternatives. What's happening in the European Union? Well, you mentioned Greece, I mentioned Cyprus, I come from a different country, and I remember very well when I was addressing the Cypriot Parliament earlier last year, in the celebration of the democratic process after the *coup d'état* against President Makarios, after 40 years.

One thing which I noticed among all the people in Cyprus, and I spoke with the people in the streets, I spoke with the Parliamentarians, there is one simple question: why were we treated discriminately within the EU with regards to the Cyprus bailout? I'll just give you an example. They were treated differently from other countries. Is that right? No. The EU was, of course, sending a wrong message to the people. Now, you can continue onwards. You mentioned Cyprus. The people voted for Cyprus, but they did not have the right information from the EU. So you have also here something which is not properly working.

One thing you have to do, I think – what we are doing in our small countries – that in order to have good governance, you have to have good governance throughout all the institutions. It is not good governance only in political authorities. But you have to have good governance across. So the right to be informed, and the people have the right to be informed, so that when it comes to experience democracy, we are talking about democracy, you don't think about democracy only because you go and cast your vote. You think about democracy because you have all the information in order to have a proper decision, to have the right people to govern with full transparency.

Now, what is happening in Europe? You mentioned, God forbid, Le Pen, Trump in the States. Well, we could be too late. Because what we should have done before, we are now thinking again that we should do it. This is the concept of writing politics, not revisit politics. Because what is happening within the political parties is that they want more for the economy growing to address the numbers, because the pressure was on the numbers, on the debt, on the figures, but they were not addressing the rights of the people.

If you say I want a bigger economy in my country, I want to address the debt, the fiscal debt, and you close your eyes to the rights of the workers, you can do it for 5 years, you might do it for 10 years, but then you will lose your value as a party and you will lose everything. And the people have no choice. You don't talk about them *blasé*, they will be extreme. Either on the left side or the right side. And that is what is happening here. Unfortunately. Because you have a series of problems that accumulated through the years.

I spoke about this when President Juncker came to Malta recently, and we had also the President of the European Council Donald Tusk. We did talk about the Lisbon treaty, which was a good treaty, the role of the national parliaments to have more power in the EU institutions. Is it now correct to say that this is not working? It is not working enough. We can realise that. And the state of the union itself which will have to have more power to the national parliaments.

Because how can you address the problem of democracy if you do not communicate all the time with the people? It is usual that we are the experts or that we are the ones who are in the upper hierarchy of the institutions and we don't have the ground with us. So I proposed that for example we should have a pilot project, because if you revisit the Lisbon Treaty it will take another 5 years, and the problem is going to accumulate.

There must be emergency plans for the address of these problems. We are talking about social rights; the Social Charter. Even the question of the economy: and you have ignorance of the economy, like yesterday when I was addressing the Conference, and no one is bothered. Any government knows about it. And the unions are silenced. Some of the unions are afraid to just put their hands up and say 'what's happening?' These are not the same unions that their behaviour was as it was in the 70s or perhaps the 80s. Now we are passing through a time where some people want to say something but they are afraid. Because the pressure of addressing the numbers is greater than addressing the problem of the rights of the workers, of those who come from the lower strata. Now, if anybody thinks that things should be different I will ask one question: In any population in the world, Europe, 70% are workers, 20% might be middle class and then the upper 5-10% who take all the bites.

I think we have to revisit our policies, the political parties have to revisit their moral values, and I think as the European Union, we have to re-shape our direction. We don't even agree on one particular thing. You mentioned today the question of immigration. We are also disturbing our morality in such an important issue. If you look at the issue of immigration as something negative then you are missing the bus. You cannot have a stronger European Union if you don't have a collective answer for such a big, important issue.

One thing which we did in Malta is we are going to have a constitutional convention. We said that you cannot discuss constitutional issues, including values which are in the Social Charter, if you don't discuss what is in the constitution? How can you discuss a constitutional article if the people don't know that it exists as a written value? Or that it should be written down? We go to the schools, we talk with the children, we go to the factories, we talk with the workers, we go to the youth, NGOs and we discuss. Because democracy is about people. The Social Charter is about the rights of the people.

So I think we have to do a lot more.

Thank you very much.