



A dialogue between Dr. Sun Yanhong and Prof. Gian Maria FARA



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Dr. Sun: The COVID-19 pandemic has sparked widespread discussion about the prospects of globalization. Some governments and media that once supported globalization began to question it. However, unless the mankind abandons market economy based on exchange as its basic economic form, it is impossible to abandon globalization and resort to the "closed door" policy. To this end, in the future, the governments of all countries should assume more responsibilities in guiding and governing globalization and push globalization to a track of more benign development through coordination, so that the countries can achieve mutual benefits and win-win results more securely in "exchanges" and "cooperation". This particularly depends on cooperation of major powers on the principle of seeking common ground while reserving differences.

Prof. FARA: Globalization is not a "free choice" that someone has decided to implement; on the contrary, it is a global process of economic, social and cultural integration, in continuous evolution and based on precise trends of economic, productive and financial development made possible by a scientific and technological progress with few precedents in human history. A process, it should be stressed, that produces great benefits as well as widespread costs. Globalization, of which we are all directly or indirectly actors, on the one hand has enabled hundreds of millions of women and men to emerge from poverty and hunger, has accelerated the exchange of information and knowledge, has promoted new lifestyles and new social relations as it has brought people closer together. On the other hand, it has caused great imbalances and damage, for example, to the environment. Precisely because of these contradictory aspects and the profound changes in relations between human communities, the leadership of this complex globalization process cannot be left solely to the responsibility of the economy and finance. It is thus necessary that "Politics", in the highest and most positive sense of the word, resumes its leading role, moderating excesses and tackling the contradictions that globalisation generates. Never as in this period "Politics" must perform the task of directing the flows of the economy according to a perspective that makes life acceptable and dignified for individuals, both in our time and for future generations. This must take place within each country, but according to a supranational logic that allows to coordinate interventions in a situation of real international collaboration.

Dr. SUN: The COVID-19 pandemic will become a major event that profoundly changes the course of human history. Faced with such a large-scale disaster, with grief and reflection, can people find new wisdom to "restart life"? What kind of lifestyle is more sustainable? What is the ultimate purpose of human production and exchange activities? Are we too complacent about our old cognitive system? In order to defeat the pandemic and live a better life in the post-epidemic era, we may need to change the old way of thinking.

Prof. FARA: Certainly, this tragic, common universal experience is destined to have a profound effect on people's mentality. We will all be induced to reflect more, for example, on what is essential and what is less in the life of human communities; on the Earth's capacity to withstand human activity. Worthy of note is also the fact that in these terrible months people have rediscovered values that had been overshadowed in recent decades. I am thinking of values such as solidarity and community spirit, fundamental rights such as health, life and work; I am thinking of the importance given to the role of public services such as national health systems, emergency services, assistance, reconstruction.

Dr. SUN: The COVID-19 pandemic severely shocked the world economy, and there are structural differences in the impacts on economic sectors and social groups. The ILO (International Labour Organization) estimated in its early April report that more than 1 billion workers in the world will face high risk of income reduction or losing jobs due to the pandemic, most of them are low-income people employed in service sectors such as catering, hotels, leisure and small retail trade. This will inevitably exacerbate the economic inequality within countries and also broaden the economic gap between developed economies and developing countries, and thus intensify social instability. At present, most governments have introduced measures to rescue bankrupt enterprises and provide subsidies for people who temporarily lose their jobs or have to reduce working time. However, given that it's still uncertain when the pandemic could be under control and the financial situation of governments vary greatly, I am afraid it's difficult to effectively curb the aggravation of rich-poor divide only with these measures. How to alleviate economic inequality and its consequences will be a difficult problem that governments and the international community must take seriously and try to resolve in the post-epidemic era.

Prof. FARA: Just as the health crisis has its origins in globalization (a whirling movement of goods, services and human beings), the exit from the emergency will only be possible if all regional areas of the world operate in a homogeneous way, making the best use of the formal and informal institutions and bodies of international coordination that they have built up in recent years. The risk of a deepening of inequalities within individual states and between different areas of the world is real. This risk can only be fought through the guiding action of a responsible "Policy", able to promote systemic recovery interventions oriented by a system of international relations based on a real and sincere openness and centred on a common view of global issues.

Dr. SUN: The spread of the epidemic and the response of different countries have truly shown that mankind is indeed a community of shared future. However, the pandemic of COVID-19 tells us that our ideas of building a community of shared future for mankind must be transformed into practical actions of the countries as soon as possible. Only by establishing a reasonable and effective coordination mechanism to cope with the situation, can the world get out of the epidemic completely. Blaming each other and trying to politicize the virus will only delay the timing of combating the epidemic and lead to more sacrifice of lives and economic loss.

Prof. FARA: As I have already said, international cooperation is an indispensable tool if we want to get out of the crisis "sooner and better". Attempting to tackle and solve problems such as those generated by the pandemic within national borders or, even worse, with aggressive policies towards the outside world, is a manifestation of short-sighted and inconclusive, as well as dangerous, policies. There is no doubt that the global pandemic has changed the scenario we have had as a reference up until now: we have entered a new phase in which it is imperative to work with more cooperation and less competition; and international coordinating bodies, such as the G20, must adapt their mentalities, their approach to common problems and their plans, in order to truly address the new needs. However, real cooperation implies a confrontation between diversities, a sincere attitude to respect and understanding of each other. In other words, there is the need for a profound change in the attitudes recorded so far in the international sphere with the construction of operational models oriented by cultural, ethical, political values that are the expression of a shared idea of solidarity for a new common path.

Dr. SUN: In the face of difficulties, friendship and solidarity are precious. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, China and Italy have helped each other, and the unity between the two governments and the friendship between the people have been demonstrated.

Prof. FARA: During this period, information on the events in China was provided to us by the mass media and some reports and notes received from Chinese colleagues such as, for example, the Institute of European Studies-CASS in Beijing, the Shanghai Institute for International Studies-SIIS in Shanghai, which we also partly published in the official magazine of our institute Eurispes. From this set of information, we have seen a country, China, which fought the spread of Covid-19 with great energy and came close to winning its battle. It is an example to us all. On the other hand, China has shown important signs of real collaboration and solidarity, in the world and particularly in Italy. This is a fact that has deeply affected us all. I have in mind, for example, the image of the aid ship that arrived from China in the port of Trieste; as I have in mind the great sense of responsibility shown in this occasion by the many Chinese communities living in Italy, in Rome and in Prato-Firenze, the largest communities in Europe, which helped a lot to keep the pandemic attack down.

Dr. SUN: Both China and the EU advocate maintaining the international order of multilateralism, standing for international cooperation, and opposing unilateralism and trade protectionism. After China fully resumed production, most European countries also gradually started to resume production. How to realize economic recovery on the premise of ensuring that the epidemic is not repeated becomes an urgent task of both China and the EU, which creates new opportunities for cooperation between the two sides. The EU is China's largest trading partner and China's fourth largest source of FDI. China is the EU's second largest trading partner. At present, China's investment stock in Europe has exceeded 200 billion euros, making it the EU's eighth largest source of FDI. This makes mutual support essential for the two parties jointly achieving economic recovery. Additionally, in the mid-to-long term, the space for China-EU cooperation in climate change, green economy and digital economy is also very broad.

Prof. FARA: Experts generally distinguish between "hard" and "soft" cooperation. The former concerns the production of economic goods and services; it is a cooperation that should be geared to producing mutual benefits but, this is the point to underline, such benefits should relate not only to quantity but also to the quality of development to be promoted; in this regard, I think, for example, to the importance of shared actions for the circular economy. The second type of cooperation, the "soft" one, concerns the cultural, scientific and social fields as well as relations between communities, territories and cities. The problem still open between China and the EU is to build a real balance between these two forms of cooperation, to promote integrated initiatives, because both have an essential value for constructive, loyal and peaceful relations between the two realities. These issues are the subject of great attention by Eurispes as witnessed, for example, by the collaboration of an expert from our institute with China Foreign Affairs University in Beijing.

Dr. Sun: In recent years, China-Italy relations have been developing fast, and the cooperation in various fields continues to advance steadily. In March 2019, President Xi Jinping successfully visited Italy. During this visit, the two countries issued a joint communiqué to strengthen the comprehensive strategic partnership and signed a memorandum of understanding to promote the construction of the "Belt and Road", which has attracted much attention of the international community. The assignment of the MoU is undoubtedly a high affirmation of the achievements of the "Belt and Road" initiative, and it also shows that Italy has positive expectations for the prospects of the initiative. It is in the national interest of our two countries to continue strengthening cooperation in the post-epidemic era.

Prof. FARA: The "Silk Road" must unite and not divide; for this reason it is important that the project is shared by all countries crossed, particularly by all European countries. It is important that the benefits of this great initiative are equally distributed among all the areas concerned and among the different strata of the population. My opinion, I would add, is that the Silk Road initiative should be enriched with further meanings, cultural first and foremost, to promote a deeper knowledge among peoples. In this regard, between China and Italy there is a precious heritage of experience that sinks into the deep relations built up in past centuries. Centuries in which economic exchanges have always been accompanied by intense scientific and cultural exchanges; indeed, often the exchange of "intangible" values has been the prevailing driving force in relations between China and Italy. Currently the two countries share a common commitment regarding important international platforms, such as the 2030 United Nations Agenda on Sustainable Development. The 50th anniversary of our diplomatic relations should be taken as an opportunity to intensify the work towards common proposals and initiatives in these fora. To this end, the organization and the inauguration of permanent discussion tables between China and Italy on problems related to the sustainability of growth would be a real positive sign that we could all give on this important occasion and project internationally as a shared contribution.

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