

## Opening SOU 2019

### 9<sup>th</sup> Edition of The State of the Union Conference

The role of universities is not limited to teaching and research - it also includes a third mission: to engage fully with society. In order to address growing collective and economic challenges, universities everywhere face an increasing demand to link their research and teaching knowledge to this third *societal* mission.

This is particularly true of the European University Institute. Because of its international nature: after having been established by national governments over 45 years ago, we must imperatively convince them, year after year, of the relevance of our activities. This challenge is compounded by the fact that the society to which we relate, i.e. the European society, is - at best – still in the making. Though all of them are European, our stakeholders have deep roots in their individual national history and cultures. What appeals to some of them might cause others to raise an eyebrow...

The State of the Union Conference is one of our responses to this challenge. This event provides us with a unique opportunity to relate to a diverse audience: academics, of course, but also policy-makers, civil society and business representatives, as well as opinion makers – and to exchange our views on some of the most important challenges our countries face.

The theme of this **9<sup>th</sup> Edition** – Democracy in the 21st Century – will appear as evidence to many of you. On the one hand, the European Union is a unique laboratory, in which we struggle to find replies to one of the great challenges of our times: namely, how can interdependent societies, each with their own distinct identity, be governed democratically? Innovations such as the direct election of a transnational parliament endowed with real powers, or the more recent *Spitzenkandidaten* system, which will feature prominently in today's discussions, are attempts at addressing this question. Whether these attempts suffice is part of an open query. As everyone knows, the question is anything but moot: gone are the days when Europe was considered with "benign neglect" by its citizenry. While the importance of the EU is increasingly acknowledged, its

legitimacy is being increasingly challenged in all its member countries. Devising additional and innovative ways to involve European citizens will have to be envisioned and explored.

Which brings us back to the local dimension. I have stressed that the ambitions of The State of the Union Conference were continental. But our annual conference would not be possible if we were deprived of our strong local roots. I think of our many partners and sponsors that have unfailingly assisted us in the preparation of this 3-day event; they are too many to name now, but I want to extend my warmest thanks to every one of them. I also think of the formidable convening power of the city of Florence whose unwavering support contributes to the growth of the Institute. Let me also take the opportunity of the presence Enzo Moavero Milanesi, the Italian Foreign Minister, to express, once more, our deepest gratitude to the Italian State, whose unanimous parliament approved, just a few weeks ago, the concession of a historic building in downtown Florence to host our new *School of Transnational Governance*. Italy has always been amongst the staunchest supporters of this Institute, to which we reciprocate by acting as an agent of its soft power. But none of this would be possible without the steadfast commitment of the many individuals who work tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure that the right decisions are taken, and duly implemented.

*Grazie, Signor Ministro, a Lei e ai Suoi collaboratori, per il Vostro continuo sostegno a questo Istituto.*

In conclusion, let me say we could not have hoped to welcome a better person to deliver the Opening Address of this Conference. Having served for many years at the European level, both in the European Commission and the European Court of Justice, Enzo Moavero Milanesi has thorough knowledge of EU policy-making arcana. His positions in several Italian governments, with key roles in the world of European and international policy, have provided him with a unique opportunity to analyse the ever more difficult interface between national and European politics.

I wish everyone a very stimulating conference and give the floor to Minister Enzo Moavero Milanesi.