

Introduction

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The title of this Special Event “Fraternity, Integral Ecology and Covid-19. The role of Diplomacy and Science” evokes the main themes of the two last encyclicals of Pope Francis. Focusing on a buffer zone where religion, ethics, science and diplomacy meet encourages us to reflect on and identify the respective role that science and diplomacy play in finding sustainable responses to challenges such as the Covid pandemic – but not only – that we have to face in today’s world.

The relationship between Diplomacy and Science is a dilemma that we diplomats have faced since the beginning of our career. It is a dilemma which we used to address as almost a joke: is it better to be a diplomat who, being a diplomat, knows nothing about everything, or a scientist who, being a scientist, knows everything about nothing? Globalization and the interdependence of everything has proven that today more than ever we need a merging of diplomacy and science, a *science diplomacy*, as suggested by the title of the *Colloquia*. It is clear that the existing interrelation of crises, the need to address all their aspects and all their causes, and the unlimited consequences of different remedies introduced, require global responsibility based on a common understanding and on the knowledge, as deep as possible, of the direction we should take. I would suggest “scientific knowledge” as the background and the basis on which political decisions have to be honestly taken.

Through the lens of Aristotle, the scientist and the diplomat are both philosophers: one cultivating theoretical science, the other political science. Their activities revolve around three main objectives: dialogue, truth and the common good.

Scientists and diplomats have been able to foster dialogue between human beings coming from very different personal and national backgrounds, providing a shared language. Dialogue is the merging of two concepts. The concept of “logos” derives from the Greek verb λέγω (*légo*), which means to choose, tell, enumerate, speak, and think, as opposed to the term “mythos”. In this opposition, mythos corresponds to mythical thought, based on images,

on the authority of the archaic tradition, on principles accepted and shared uncritically, while logos corresponds to critical, rational and objective thought, capable of submitting beliefs and prejudices to scrutiny. “Dia-” (from gr. διά, δια-) is a prefix that mostly means “between” or “by means of”, or indicates separation, diversity.

Dialogue is the search for the logos, the truth. It is therefore a process that allows us to acquire the elements needed for the adoption of a decision after an exchange between all those that have deep knowledge of the essence of the problem in need of addressing. This process allows to reach the core of human coexistence, the identification of the common good, based on profound knowledge and respect for differences, thus overcoming any individualistic approach.

Moreover, theoretical science and political science are both seeking the truth, the logos again. For the former, truth could be an end in itself, the main goal of scientific discovery, while for the latter it is a means to change reality in order to achieve the common good of the polis, the community where the human being thrives. Only by understanding how things really are can we negotiate and find a sustainable compromise.

I think that diplomats and scientists – of course those who interpret their mission according to the highest values based on knowledge – are answering a calling in their life, a calling that requires a strong spirit of service to humankind.

Our work has become more complex than ever in the 21st century.

We are living in the age of interdependence. The phenomenon known as globalization has been at the core of the prosperity of our planet ever since Second World War and technology has widened its scope over the last twenty-five years. The boost of international trade, communication and knowledge sharing has driven one of the most impressive periods of wealth creation in the history of humankind. In 2015, an estimated 736 million people were living in conditions of extreme poverty, from a baseline of 1.9 billion in 1990. Therefore, over the course of a quarter-century, 1.1 billion people have escaped poverty and improved their standard of living.

However, this positive development was accompanied by a worrisome growth of inequality and by an unprecedented stress on the resources of our planet. We have witnessed a spike in the planet’s average temperature. The loss of 20% of its biodiversity is driving the deterioration of our ecosystems to a point where, if we do not take action, desertification, lack of water and conflict over other natural resources could lead to a dangerous wave of instability.

Covid-19 has shown how this interdependence can also make the world more fragile. The pandemic has proven that we are all

equally vulnerable in our fragility, but at the same time it has deepened inequality (for instance, can everybody afford treatment for Coronavirus or for the vaccine?). It is true that, thanks to our technology, we are continuously connected to each other, even in the isolation of lockdown. But this does not necessarily make us stronger. The fragility of the individual (who is more and more isolated in spite of our technological connectivity) is actually, somehow, amplified.

The pandemic, including its socio-economic impact, is a major tragedy. But it could also open the opportunity for a new age, similar to the one we saw 75 years ago, with the end of the Second World War, the creation of the United Nations, and the rise of a new world order which granted an era of unprecedented peace and growth.

We will be confronted with serious challenges in the coming decade: post-Covid recovery; climate change; energy transition; growing inequalities and polarization within our societies; artificial intelligence; and many others.

It is clear that we need a new compass.

I truly hope that the next generation will identify a turning point in 2015, the year when Diplomacy gave us the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Science proved the unquestioned evidence upon which the Paris Agreement was negotiated, and Pope Francis offered all of us the encyclical *Laudato si'*.

The interconnection between economic, social and environmental welfare is at the core of these three documents. There is need for a multidisciplinary approach based on a profound knowledge of nature as well as on the respect for what others can offer or need. This means the revitalization of a new multilateral approach at the global level that abandons individualism in favour of a constructive solidarity. A new world order, which should establish an alliance among states and other subjects of the international community committed to safeguarding the common good.

The great challenges of our time can be tackled only if scientists and diplomats join in their efforts and are able to hold their work to the highest standards, seeking for knowledge and using it to drive toward the common good. To do this effectively, strong investment in education and culture is needed.

The time for healing and reconstruction is now. Italy will play a leading role by taking over the G20 Presidency next week and setting an agenda that will revolve around three words: People, Planet and Prosperity, to remind the world that sustainability and equality are the main objectives to protect our interests.