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*It will be done!*

*Spinelli Group Citizens Dialogue on the Future of Europe*

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Dear Friends,

It is indeed a good news that meeting like this one take place. It would be even better if the academics could leave their campuses, go out and talk with people about Europe. Europe must be talked, discussed, shared in debates.

It is true that the times we live are challenging, not easy. There are governments in Europe that make decisions against democracy. There are uninformed, confusing referenda. However, there is also a lot of strategic thinking about the future of Europe in think tanks, European institutions, reflection groups, meetings like this one.

Even though the history of European integration has been the history of change, what is today at stake is somewhat different. Somewhat bigger. It is about legitimacy, democracy, rule of law, institutional efficiency, good leadership, identity tensions, the participation of citizens in shaping the reality and the future. It is also about helplessness of citizens and their anger exploited by skilful politicians turning people against Europe. This is such a moment when, unlike in the past, the call for change can bring the risk of undermining what has been so far cast in stone, which is European values. In addition, when values will be lost, we will be lost. This is so important because stability of EU construction does not depend only on formal law, Treaties and institutions. It depends on citizens' commitment to values we share.

In 1941, three captives of Italy's fascist regime: Altiero Spinelli, Ernesto Rossi and Eugenio Colorni wrote a manifesto titled *Per un'Europa libera e unita* (For a free and united Europe), known as the Ventotene Manifesto. The last sentence of the Ventotene Manifesto said: "The road to pursue is neither easy nor certain, but it must be followed and it will be done!."

When I think of Europe, I think of the simple dreams it held for me growing up on the other side of the Iron Curtain: human dignity, freedom, democracy. Back then, those dreams were forbidden and we looked West toward a free and unified Europe, sensing that it held the key

to our future. Today this freedom is no longer a dream but an everyday reality for hundreds of millions of citizens.

Of course, the fathers of European integration remembered the atrocities of the first and second world wars. The ashes were still around. However, I believe that when the European community was under construction in the 1950s, young people played a crucial, unifying role. They protested along the Franco-German border to demand the frontier's demise, and in front of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg to push for faster integration among member countries. They were fighting for a new order. They often spoke in terms of life or death for a united Europe.

Today the young people of Europe are far more likely than older citizens to share a European identity across countries. We could see during the British referendum that young Brits have much more in common with their colleagues on the continent than with the older generations of British voters. Polls show young people among the most convinced Europeans.

But at the same time, today, as the EU faces its greatest test of legitimacy since its founding, young people have been largely absent from the fight for Europe. So far, they have not risen up in defence of it.

We, the older generation, often wonder why is that. We tend to perceive it as complacency, a certain taking for granted of something that for us is a great achievement of human spirit and institutional ingenuity. But perhaps we should look at it differently. For our generations, especially for those that came to the EU late, like those from Central and Eastern Europe, Europe was a sort of a realized utopia, something wonderful that we did not expect as happening in our lives.

Nevertheless, for the young people of today EU is just a natural environment in which they grew up. Moreover, in the natural environment you usually find flaws, errors, inconsequence. And thus when young people look at the EU they do not see it as fresh, but rather as stale, corrupted by political compromises. They are unhappy with the current policies, with the underdeveloped social dimension or with the lack of political power to change the world for the better. Their opinion is often not just, because the EU, despite appearances of sometimes being old and slow, is able to show the mobilizing power for initiating and implementing big, good projects, embarking on many initiatives that involve young people. Moreover, it pains me that all the good work does not change all that much the negative perception of the EU. But at the same time I sympathize with the impatience of the young people. They are actually the ones that want more Europe, integrating at higher speed, faster in meeting the real needs of the European citizens.

However, of course Europe is not just happening. It is indeed a miracle but a miracle made by men and women of Europe. Future will not come by itself. It must be created. And for this we need minds and hearts. In addition, it is not about taking care of Europe day by day, a continuation here, a discontinuity there, reacting, being driven by crises. This we cannot afford. Of course we can assume that all those multiple ideas of Europe will merge one day into a vision of democratic Europe. But we do not have time to wait for this to just happen. We have responded to crises with some projects that are factual federalizations (Banking Union). But there are also projects based on international agreements among EU member states (fiscal compact, ESM). Federal Europe which has been in my view on the table since the day one, will become a reality as we see that already today for solutions to many challenges this is the only option to pick up.

Preparing for this meeting I looked at the voices of the young who spoke their opinions under hashtag #New Narrative for Europe. What these engaged young people want from Europe? How do they envision the Europe's future? Let me share some of those expectations and concrete proposals.

*“A lot of people don't even know how the EU works and how it works towards their own interests. There are many misconceptions that could be broken by simply investing on their education, whether directly in schools/Universities that could have volunteers who could be EU ambassadors, regular social media videos similar to TED-ED that explain in very simple terms with very appealing images what is the EU and how it works for people, and training courses or other workshops spread by different countries on how it works and how they can contribute to the discussion.”*

*“We need to make sure every young person knows the basics about the EU: if you don't know how it works, how can you expect to influence EU Policy? Therefore, mandatory civic education about the EU should be recommended to member states (the EU does not have the capacity to influence education). Then, we need to make sure that it is easy to participate in EU politics.”*

*“Preservation of public and private freedoms. Giving young people a greater participation in the formation of political parties that have a role in shaping European policy. Integrating immigrants into European society and take advantage of their abilities promote the presence of the EU in resolving the conflicts in the world by adopting a clear policy bear to see the European Union as a political force and economic in the world.”*

*“Try to make a better democracy. Like a direct democracy. Sure, it's not possible right now but you could do more polls on internet, like you already did a few weeks ago. Maybe use a*

*specific EU app with votes about huge issues. For the moment it'd be consultative but I always dreamt about a direct democracy made possible with actual technologies.”*

There are also some very concrete proposals. For example, the organization Herr & Speer, have proposed the idea of a free Interrail pass given to each European's 18th birthday, as the way to grow a European identity, and to overcome the difference between “being pro-EU in theory and being pro-EU out of experience.” So far, even despite broad popularity of Erasmus program, very few Europeans have access to that kind of interchange. A free rail ticket would make Europe more within the reach of young people with often-limited means for travel. It is worthy of mentioning that the desire to travel and getting to know the unknown was also prevalent in the activist movement from the '50s.

“What we see now with nationalism and xenophobia, those with the least contact with foreigners are the most xenophobic, those who have never felt like a stranger, they have no empathy. I think a lot of Euroskepticism and hatred comes from simply not knowing ‘the other.’ – as I read in one of the comments from young people.

Even from those few comments, and proposals, we can see what really interests young people, who will, I am certain, be future EU leaders: protection of personal freedoms and broadening public expression, increased mobility and making European travel a means for intercultural understanding, adopting new technologies in the cause of direct democracy, instituting a broad European education, better inclusion of young people in mainstream European parties, fighting extremism, social integration of immigrants and taking advantage of their potential for resolving conflicts in other parts of the world, making the EU a force for good in the world.

In other word, new generation want to have an ownership of the European project. And this is the old idea of citizenship. They often express their affinity for the EU differently than preceding generations: the main instrument is the social media, flash mobs, informal networks, spontaneous events. We were used to different way of doing things in Europe: institutionalized practices, developing long-term relationships, effective lobbying for legislation. We were, and are, probably more patient, perhaps our expectations were too low. In this respect I think that actually the young people can push us to faster action, give us a sense of urgency. This would be a return to the spirit expressed in the Ventotene manifesto, which I quoted at the beginning of my speech: “It will be done”.

The EU is responding to many of these desires – perhaps sometimes too slowly and with too little to offer. But let me mention here the European Solidarity Corps for those between 18 and 30 to volunteer abroad, fostering exchange and addressing high youth unemployment at the same time. Erasmus Program is of course one of the most successful in the EU history.

Let me quote Iñigo Cruz, the former president of the Erasmus Student Network at Complutense University in Madrid, who says that he never cared about Europe until he studied abroad. Today he runs a blog and is part of a radio show that tries to explain the EU for young people.

He is not without his criticism of the bloc, but believes its founding ideals are as relevant today as 60 years ago. "I think there's still much to be done," he says, "but I believe this is the only project that will prevent another war in Europe." Perhaps it will be the mission of the young people, of this generation to stem the rise of populism, and to define Europe anew. We need an infusion of a new spirit. The EU has a lot of work to do — both on the emotional and the rational level.

President Juncker said it in his State of the Union Address: we should create Europe that protects, a Europe that empowers and a Europe that defends. In his view, it will be a Union not only based on single market and common currency, but also on common values. And also on reengagement of citizens in the European project, based on dialogue. I think that most concerns of the young generation are very much close to those goals.

And, President Macron was somehow continuing this line of thinking in his memorable speech at the Sorbonne: "Because yes, we cannot allow ourselves to keep the same habits, the same policies, the same vocabulary, the same budgets. We can no longer choose to turn inwards within national borders; this would be a collective disaster. We must not allow ourselves to be intimidated by the illusion of retreat."

Europe needs a stronger narrative — its people need stories that are more common, shared experiences, heroes to love and look up to. The Portuguese should share in Scandinavian jokes, and Latvians should learn to sing French chansons (as it often happens at Erasmus Program!). At a time when our Union faces internal challenges from populist movements and neo-totalitarian regimes, we must not forget that culture and the arts can be forceful weapons and help cultivate an EU identity that reaches deeper than the laws and regulations we share.

On political level, we will know that the beginnings of the Union as real community takes hold, when Italians or the Dutch will care about war in Ukraine, and when Poles and Hungarians will be willing to help Greeks and Italians in their refugee influx problems.

In every historical movement, there was always a need for a critical mass to appear on the scene to change the paradigm of a concrete life form. The EU needs badly such critical mass to advance its citizens-oriented agenda concentrated on tangible results, which should become one the fundamental pillars of the new, institutionally reconstructed Union, which

would combine the enthusiasm of utopia and credibility of a bona fide political project. A question is in order: how to create this critical mass? Where is it to be found?

My response would be that it is to be found in places like here, in Aachen, with its great European tradition, in universities, in conference halls, in cafes of the cities of Europe, in all other places wherever the young people congregate.

In other words, you are the critical mass. Your voice will be the voice of Europe for the next 50 years. Do not let this voice, this ability to speak and to express your convictions, be taken away from you by unscrupulous politicians who do not care about your future.

I hope that 50 years from now, you will be able to look back with pride and say, like president Macron at the Sorbonne: “where chaos could have triumphed, civilization has always won out”. Or, in my little adaptation of the President’s words: “the voices of community of dialogue have triumphed over the voices of decline and disintegration”.