

## A Letter for Europe

The referendum is approaching, and, as an Italian person studying in England, I would like to share my point of view about this very historic moment. I am focusing on England and not the UK for historical reasons which will become clearer quite soon. And I am focusing on politics, not because English culture lacks her Shakespeares, Newtons and Darwins, but because it is the English political behaviour which actually saved Europe.

Yours is a great country. Its monarchy, which has unified English territory since the times of Alfred the Great and king Athelstan in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, has been an essential and powerful resource. When the Norman dynasty took over, Wales was put under English rule by Edward I. Notwithstanding Mary Tudor's crucial reign and her marriage with Philip II of Spain which could possibly draw England under Spain's hegemony (and the Pope's as well!), nevertheless Elizabeth called the Great (at least this is the usual Italian way to call her) took power. She famously defended the country from Spanish attack and consolidated Protestantism on your island. After she died, the crowns of England and Scotland unified under the Stuart dynasty. Also, Henry VIII, Oliver Cromwell and William III conquered Ireland little by little.

However, England did not conquer just the British Isles. Indeed Elizabeth had already begun building that vast overseas empire, which in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century eventually became the widest world empire ever. Thus, in North America, Indochina, India, Africa, Oceania the English rule together with the English language, spread. Dominions, protectorates and colonies (or ex-colonies like the USA!) bravely joined the Welsh, the Scottish, the Irish and the English, who were already boldly fighting in France, and proved essential in the long and bloody struggle against the Kaiser during WWI.

Even so, till the 1930s English culture was still far from being unrivalled. The massive political power of the German Third Reich was soaring and threatening; the Russian Soviet Union had become a sort of ideal model which was attracting many people all over the world; French culture and language were still the most important and used in diplomacy, arts and humanities.

However, things have changed from 1939 onwards, when Neville Chamberlain repented of the tragic Pact of Munich and WWII began. Winston Churchill's England together with the United Kingdom and her Commonwealth stood up firmly to Hitler, even after France had collapsed, even though Roosevelt's USA had not found yet a general agreement for committing to the war, and Stalin's Soviet Union was still an ally of Hitler. Hitler, after France fell, had proposed peace to England, but Churchill on May 28<sup>th</sup> 1940 had bravely and famously replied: *"Even though large tracts of Europe and many old and famous States have fallen or may fall into the grip of the Gestapo and all the odious apparatus of Nazi rule, we shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, etcetera."*

Therefore, in that finest hour of hers, while alone without any allies, England was not standing only and even mainly for her own freedom, but for the freedom of Europe.

Because of the disastrous choices made by Hitler (firstly he attacked his ally the Soviet Union, and then declared war on the USA), Germany lost the war.

Afterwards, the USA and its allies faced a potentially lethal confrontation with the Soviet Union and her allies, during the decades of the so called "Cold War".

However, eventually Communism collapsed, in 1989. Thus, if I am not wrong with my analysis of the period, the World has been more and more Westernising since then. A Western culture where the

most important component have been the “Anglo-Saxon” one: by the word “Anglo-Saxon”. I mean the USA, the UK and several Commonwealth countries which are spread all around the world, true, but whose universal means of communication is the English language, so called because it comes from England, a language nowadays more and more studied and learned as a global language.

But... there is a “but”, I would say !

This great country did not create itself!

The Roman conquest brought here all those achievements of civilisation which the ancient Mediterranean world had had throughout millennia, including the major contribution of Greece at first, and afterwards Christianity mainly thanks to Augustine of Canterbury.

The Vikings from Sweden and Denmark brought their seafaring skills.

The Norman conquest in the 11<sup>th</sup> century brought from France military craft, diplomatic know-how, a better organisation of aristocracy and bureaucracy, and drew England to a European political system of relationships.

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century the University arrived in England from Italy and France

In the 15<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> century, from Portugal and Spain, seamanship and the colonial empire model, and, in the 17<sup>th</sup>, from Holland the intercontinental trade model were imitated and adopted here.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century England adopted Reformation coming from Martin Luther's Germany and John Calvin's Switzerland.

In the same century visual arts and a new literary movement came here from the Italian Renaissance.

English Enlightenment in part is native, but in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century it was nourished and enhanced by ideas and commitments coming from Voltaire's France, especially about the criticism of religion and other traditions.

Socialist ideas, which eventually influenced the Labour Party came from post-revolutionary France in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

History studies and language studies came from Germany in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

And what about music? Chamber music, orchestral music and opera came here mainly from Germany and Italy throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Freud's psychoanalysis and Wittgenstein's analytical philosophy moved to England from Austria together with their founders themselves..

Sciences – which spread all over the world and here as well – always have had a cosmopolitan origin: Pythagoras, Archimedes and Euclid were Greek, Copernicus Polish, Galileo Italian, Linnaeus Swedish, Lamarck, Cuvier and Curie French, Lorentz Dutch, Einstein, Heisenberg and Planck German, Bohr Danish.

Why did I make this list ? In order to detail how England and her United Kingdom, although they gave so much to Europe, as I said previously, nevertheless also received a lot from Europe !

For me it is marvellous to see how, after so many centuries of continuous wars, now Europe is peaceful and has got a European Union... In my small own way, it is beautiful that I could come to

your country without need of any formality, and, while staying, I could experience how many things we share. As I mentioned previously, it is true and fair that after WWII your country's cultural legacy has continuously even if gradually achieved and increased a sort of cultural primacy. However, it is also true that your country's culture is deeply connected with other cultures: Roman, French, German, Portuguese, Italian, Dutch, Spanish... and Greek!

I believe that, if xenophobic forces do not prevail here – nor prevail in the rest of Europe – a United Europe will be able to keep enriching the power of each and every one of her member States in economics, politics and culture, as it has been for 2000 years.

Sincerely yours

Franco Manni