



Everyone should respect the rules

Servizio Informazione Religiosa, Sylvie Goulard, 23 mars 2012

“The purpose of politics is not to depend on polls. It should pursue a medium and long term project in the general interest and ultimately be responsive to its constituents”. French MEP Sylvie Goulard is a renowned expert of economic issues with a juridical and political academic formation. She served as political advisor of Romano Prodi at the European Commission. She doesn't disown the dynamics of current politics, marked by attempts to address major global transformations and the quest for immediate answers, which are demanded of the governor of a given territory, a Country and even of Europe. Nonetheless she won't put up with the declamations of many leaders. And being a convinced Europeanist, she views national political action within a continental and global framework. Gianni Borsa met her in Strasbourg for SIR Europe.

As a member of the Committee for Economic and Monetary Affairs of the EU Parliament you have often tackled the situation resulting from the ongoing crisis. Do you believe that the corrective measures adopted by European Countries and by the EU came too late, as many people say?

“I would rather say that when the crisis broke out Europe lacked the specific legislative and financial tools to contain the spin-off of what had already happened in the United States. Member States' public accounts weren't in order... Indeed, every government, seen the seriousness of the situation, immediately sought to limit the damage with national measures. Only with time it became evident that a common, joint response to the challenges triggered by the financial crisis and the economic recession was needed. Finally, a convincing provision for budgetary rigour was taken with a '6 pack' law and a 'fiscal compact' agreement. Now we have the regulations, which must be respected by all stakeholders. And finally, in the last months we started to speak of growth, the true way out of the crisis”.

Indeed, on several occasions you pointed out that the shortcomings of national democracies worsened the crisis by impacting national public accounts. You also highlighted the need to provide answers at European level, which however appear to be lacking full democratic legitimization.

“It's true. Some decisions, like the '6 pack', were reached after a broad and transparent debate, with the decisive contribution of the European Parliament. But most measures, including the 'fiscal compact', were adopted by the European Council and its member state representatives, which operates behind closed doors. It can be said that we have the tools and the rules to combat the crisis, but we haven't made the expected steps in the area of democratic legitimization, that would confer greater strength to the intervention of Europe as a whole”.

Do you believe there is a need for “more Europe”? Are you optimistic to this regard?

“More than being optimistic I think we should be determined. As relates to economic and monetary union, we are called to act together, with indisputable decisions in the defense of the single currency, the creation of the domestic market, in occupational and energy policies, for the reform of pension systems... It should also be remembered that our economies are interdependent and that what happens in a given country has effects on another. The crisis confirms it fully. Thus there is the need for concerted answers, to step up governance. Obviously, it is not a question of renouncing the national sovereignties of the States but rather of practicing them together for everyone’s good”.

There is much talk of liberalization and labour market flexibility in order to boost the competitiveness of the European system. What’s your opinion?

“First of all I think we need investments in the area of research, formation and energy. In matter of principle I am also in favour of provisions aimed at granting greater flexibility to economic sectors, including the labour market. But I believe that Sunday should be left work-free except for essential services, since it negatively impacts the family and thus society as a whole. I also believe we should all be committed in promoting job creation for the youth. A society that doesn’t ensure employment to its youth jeopardizes its own future”.

You are French: how is the campaign for the upcoming presidential elections in your Country proceeding?

“First of all, in my view the campaign is dominated by extremist positions. There is a seemingly unpleasant atmosphere, major problems are not being addressed and candidates don’t explain the complexities of ongoing challenges. I think that every debate is influenced by opinion polls and not by ambitious projects. If Robert Schuman had relied on opinion polls he wouldn’t have undertaken the reconciliation process with Germany in the post-war period. And Kohl and Mitterand wouldn’t have laid the grounds for the adoption of the single currency twenty years later. There is also a return to populism, the cancer of politics. We have to return to think and act big”.