

"Not a woman in politics, but a political woman. Politics means breaking the mould, building social consensus, taking up responsibilities. A political woman knows what politics is, doesn't despise it nor glorify it. She is aware of its limits and tries to break open and overcome them. That's the reason of her commitment, irrespective of any career advancement." We picked some of the words, used by the Italian political thinker Gianfranco Pasquino, to describe Emma Bonino back in 1999, and made the headlines of our interview out of them. Those words, even at more than a decade apart, remain simply perfect. The same Bonino, main character of a different way of engaging in politics who, in her lifelong battle in defense of Rights, among victories and losses, has undoubtedly changed some of the rules of the game and some of the mores of Italy. The same Bonino that we recognise, once again, in her recent statement *freedom is shaped by rights and duties give firmness to it, actually rights and*

duties are the two faces of the same coin. A message as simple as rather unusual. Primo Piano Scala c interview tangibly witnesses the truthfulness of Pasquino's description as Emma Bonino replies, with her very personal and sober style, to the questions we asked her on 4 different themes: institutional renewal, EU integration, welfare, besides women and power (*the institutional power of course*). After almost 40 years of public life, Bonino believes that in Italy, in all 4 areas, only few steps ahead have been made. The main difference compared to other *negative voices* who criticise the Italian and European *status quo*, lies in the fact that Bonino doesn't simply show their limits and shortcomings, but for each one of the themes we tackled, she indicates a possible way out. *Proposals appreciated or not* - to quote a passage of the interview - *but if you say no, please show me a possible alternative!* Censor of the Italian system which she defines as being rooted in a philosophy of Government control, Bonino is equally severe with the EU

Member States that try to move ahead by *short and wavering* steps. We need courage and responsibility, these are the words that run through the entire interview. Her language shows her profound knowledge of the history of politics, and not just of current affairs. To quote Spinelli, Monnet, Adenauer today is an act of courage *per se*, intertwined with the hope, actually certainty, that things can be changed, sure they can. *One should never say "too late" In politics, too, it is never too late. There is always time for a new beginning* (Adenauer), but *the union of Europe cannot be based on goodwill alone, rules are needed* (Monnet) and even if *the path to follow is neither easy nor safe, it has to be followed and it will be* (Ventotene Manifesto, 1941). And Primo Piano Scala c decided to dare as well!

Mariella Palazzolo

Telos is a member of the FIPRA network

BONINO

A POLITICAL WOMAN WHO KNOWS POLITICS.

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Telos: The so-called Second Republic was originally inspired by the project of a deep reform of national Institutions. Twenty years after, our Parliamentary system still follows the principle of egalitarian bicameralism, our local autonomies are inefficient and their competences are still not well defined, our voting system makes it almost pointless for citizens to cast their vote. Assuming that the next legislature will provide a better framework for institutional reforms, which ones should be regarded as priorities in your view?

Emma Bonino: Your assumption is optimistic. In 2008, at the beginning of the current legislature, there was a widespread consensus, in principle, that the reform of the voting system should be a priority. In the end, however, the party system that systematically hijacks the Institutions has managed to preserve a voting system undermining democracy and legality. Who is going to pay for it? Obviously nobody! We Radicals have advocated for decades in favour of a uninominal voting system inspired by the Anglo-Saxon model; we promoted the 1993 referendum which obtained a landslide success throughout the Country, but the popular will was betrayed by the parties. We still believe that such a voting system is the one best reflecting the principles that in our view should inspire democracy: majority, 2-party system, direct relationship between MPs and their constituency. Debating on the opportunity to cut the number of MPs by half or on semi-presidentialism is simply pointless until we reach a consensus on which voting system we want to adopt.

The financial crisis posed a threat to European integration. Are Austerity policies a step ahead towards an economic Union or will they have the effect of exacerbating the competitiveness gap between creditor and debtor Countries within the Eurozone?

First of all, I would like to stress that the crisis is not over and is still our n.1 issue. On the one hand, a way to break the vicious circle in Southern Countries is yet to be found: the downward trend of their economies makes it hard to reduce the debt and stimulate growth. On the other hand, European banks remain weak and, thus, vulnerable. Moreover, we have to go on funding the bailout of Greece, hoping that we are able to prevent the contagion from spreading any further. But what is blatantly clear to me is that we will fall short of finding a way out of the crisis until we establish a sovereign federal Authority at the EU level. Implementing Austerity and making short unsteady steps towards enhanced integration, like we did recently in the field of banking supervision, will



Emma Bonino is currently Vice President of the Italian Senate. During the II Prodi Government (2006-2008) she served as Minister for International Commerce and EU Policies. In January 2004, together with the NGO "No Peace without Justice" and in collaboration with the Government of Yemen, she organised the first Regional Inter-Governmental Conference ever held in the Arab world on Democracy, Human Rights and the role of the International Criminal Court (ICC), during which the Joint Meeting Parties (JMPs) expressed their support for Yemen's contribution to humanitarian values and its steps ahead towards the recognition of the ICC. Emma Bonino's engagement in politics dates far back. In 1976 (when, for the first time in its twenty year history, the Radical Party presented its own lists in the Italian legislative election) she was elected MP along with Marco Pannella, Adele Faccio and Mauro Mellini. She was only 28 years old. Her presence in the Italian Parliament, has been almost uninterrupted since then, and marked by initiatives, not merely parliamentary ones, on which she build a large political and human reputation. Thus, in March 1999, during an Assembly of the Radicals *for a liberal revolution and the United States of Europe* she was in the capacity to accept a surprising informal candidacy as President of the Republic. At the EU elections held in June the same year she led the *Lista Bonino*, obtaining 8.5% of the votes and electing 7 MEPs. Bonino had been elected as political secretary of the Radical Party in 1993. From 1995 to 1999 she was European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid, Fisheries, Consumer Policy, Consumer Health Protection and Food Safety. In February 1997, Emma Bonino was appointed as *European Personality 1996* one year after Helmut Kohl, by a jury chaired by Jacques Delors, in recognition of her humanitarian courage and her faith in the future of European integration. And then... we have too little room to write about Emma Bonino's commitment, therefore we advise you to read her fascinating biography [here](#). Only a personal annotation. Her ideal Sunday is hanging around her apartment, wearing her pijama!

not bail us out in the medium and long run. Indeed, if we go on this way all we will obtain is to catch ourselves in a trap. We can only find a way out of the crisis if we start thinking about the Eurozone as a bloc: the mutual intrusions into one another's national policies will wear us out, if we do not provide this bloc with institutional framework relying on a democratic legitimacy. The decisions on which we should cement a popular consensus are well-known: a federal budget and a unified treasury, a true banking Union (including regulation and surveillance, deposit guarantees and resolution schemes), the establishment of the United States of Europe. Should we take any step ahead on one of these fields ignoring the other ones, with no comprehensive vision, no rationale and no deadlines, we would only create new gaps, new uncertainties for the real economy, we would make Europe more vulnerable compared to the rest of the world, we would pass new burdens to the future generations... I have long since disclose the options that I deem as preferable. I have long advocated for a light federation, inspired by the ideas of Spinelli, Monnet, Adenauer, but updated to take into account the current state of affairs. This means a federal budget, absorbing not more than 5% of the European GDP for the supply of fundamental public goods, such as security and defense, foreign policy, major scientific research programmes, trans-European infrastructure networks, free movement of persons and goods. Thus, by entrusting the Union with a tax and spending task, we would achieve both macro-economic stability and redistribution. My proposal may be appreciated or not, but who does not take my view should indicate a sustainable alternative option!

Let us talk about the consequences of Austerity. The technocratic Cabinet expressed its concerns about the sustainability of public welfare programmes (public healthcare in particular) that was interpreted by many as a first step towards a privatisation of welfare. As representative of the only party in Italy that have proudly maintained a libertarian approach to political and economic matters, though at the same time campaigning in defense of the universality of rights in any field, how do you think the Welfare State should be reformed?

As a libertarian, I do not subscribe to the view that the State should assist citizens *from the cradle to the grave*. It is a form of paternalism which goes to the detriment of individual responsibility. Moreover, it is an expensive mechanism that absorbs collective resources and lubricates the bureaucracy. If this kind of welfare is not even efficient - if the high national security contributions and the high taxes paid by the citizens do not fund accessible and effective public services, but rather encourage influence peddling and corruption - then it is worth leaving some money in the citizens' pockets, allowing them to pay for professional services of their own choice. If our country was a truly liberal democracy - which is not, because of its heritage of Government control - we would have on the one hand the universality of basic services - particularly those addressed to women and dependent persons - and equality of opportunity, on the other hand we would promote business initiative, on both an individual and a collective scale, which is an essential condition to encourage economic growth. Above all, our welfare model is not sustainable any longer, because of the demographic trends and the impressive financial burden. We should shift to a more rational, innovation-oriented model, not only because the EU is urging us to do so. Personally, I would start by implementing schemes emphasizing the role of women, a shockingly underutilised capital so far.

In nearly 40 years of institutional activity in Italy and the EU, you have held several charges, both elective and non elective. You are one of the few women who could credibly be proposed as President of the Republic. Is it plausible to imagine having a female political leader in Italy?

We have had female political leaders in Italy. The problem is that some institutional charges are still regarded as reserved for men: Minister of Defense, just to give an example, or Minister of the Economy, Governor of the Bank of Italy, surely President of the Council of Ministers and President of the Republic. We still have a tendency to tell women *please come forward*, upon condition that they *don't talk to the driver*. The same happens in political parties: there may be gender quotas, but the Secretary - the one who takes decisions - is nearly always a man. Women must come forward, impose themselves by their own efforts and they should not be proud of being co-opted by men.