

POLITICS AND GEOPOLITICS. LIFETIME PASSIONS

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Telos: This year, after over 20 years in government, you left the Parliament to become President of Leonardo's newly formed Med-Or foundation. Could you tell us something more about this new challenge and how the Foundation is important to Leonardo's strategies?

Marco Minniti: Assuming that there are times when it is good to make a change in your life, honestly, I did it without any recrimination and also with a certain enthusiasm. It met with the desire of Leonardo's management to compete with a deeply evolving and deeply changing world. This is what inspired the idea of a Foundation to address a specific area of the planet: the greater Mediterranean, the Arab states and the Middle East up to India, naturally aware that this rationale has an indelible focus, which is Africa. In these years this area has undergone some of the most incredible, deep change. Naturally, a group like Leonardo, which has some long-time and prospective partners in this area, wanted to be a key player. The Foundation's aim is multifaceted. On the one hand, to work on more in-depth geopolitical analysis that may be used by our Country. The Med-Or Foundation is obviously an expression of a large group like Leonardo. However, its ambition is to be at the service of the Country System. There have been experiences like this throughout the world, from the USA to France, passing through the UK.

This also makes it necessary to liaise with various areas that are natural partners when it comes to geopolitics, international relations and international partnership building. The Foundation's slogan is emblematic: "The distance that unites". Just because there is distance does not mean this distance is a separation. Actually, the more respect there is for the countries' autonomy, for their traditions, for this distance, the better the conditions are for unity. In fact, unity does not mean cancelling differences. Actually, differences can be a reference. If this is generally true for the planet, it is even more true when it comes to the specific area of interest of the Foundation. The second aspect it will focus on is building relations that go beyond the strictly commercial nature of the Leonardo group's activities. The group is a big world player when it comes to security, defence and cyber-security, but it wants to go further. Through the Foundation it wants to carry out two big projects.

The first is linked to higher education. Med-Or wants to build relations with Countries in its area of interest in order to give young men and women, together with their systems of government and with local university systems, the opportunity to do their university studies in Italy.

So, we are going to work on creating a network where Med-Or will function as the point guard between the Italian and foreign universities, starting in the Mediterranean. There will only be one condition for the young men and women coming to study in Italy: they have to go back to their own country. This is the best way to make this type of relationship productive. The objective is not to create brain drain, but to build a class of local leaders. This will also be an investment in the future of our Country: having authoritative leaders in those countries who even have a sentimental attachment to Italy will create a lasting bond.

The third aspect is to compete in terms of safeguarding health. This issue is also valid for the whole planet, but it is valid in a very unique way for the Foundation's areas of interest. Here, Med-Or will have to face two large facets. The first is treatment. Treatment is still a problem, even for many advanced countries. It is for Italy and for Europe, just imagine for the Mediterranean area and North Africa. The second is prevention, which needs to be addressed through three broader issues.

Two of these are typically linked to activities that can also be carried out by the Leonardo group. The first is health intelligence, an area where Leonardo has the know-how to engage. The other is health surveillance, or rather, monitoring the evolution of the pandemic.

We know how complicated this is even in very developed countries - even just to manage the data on the pandemic - imagine the countries without the IT infrastructure we have. The third is the issue of vaccines, which is still a big question in terms of prevention. Med-Or also wants to work in this area. If you want to have an ambition, you always need to have especially demanding programmes, then, only in the future will we be able to achieve them.

In light of this last decade of radical change, instability in Libya and Turkey taking centre stage, in your opinion, can we say that Italy's role in the Mediterranean has weakened considerably? And are there any margins for recovery, especially in relations with countries on the south shore of the Mediterranean?

The truth is that the world has changed. The Mediterranean is one of the places where global change is happening fastest, which was kind of surprising for everyone. For a while, it was common knowledge that the true challenge for the security of the planet was the Pacific. The Mediterranean was secondary in the global balance. The events of the last year and the last months have radically changed how people perceive reality, which has undergone significant transformation. The changes were epoch-making. Someone once said that in some decades nothing happens, whereas in just a few weeks some things happen that

are worth decades. There are two key players in these epoch-making changes in the Mediterranean: Turkey and Russia. Just a few years ago, if someone has said Syria would be divided into zones of influence between Russia and Turkey, that Turkey and Russia would be present in Libya and that there are two totally new players in the central and eastern Mediterranean, no one would have ever believed us. If someone had said that Russian-trained officials would lead a coup d'état in the Sahel, no one would have believed us. But that's what happened. It's the truth, pure and simple. These are long-term changes, which actually achieve two of these countries' historic aspirations, two ambitions we can define as "dreams of imperialism". Just over 100 years after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Turkey has realized a crucial part of what was once the dream of the Ottoman Empire. And Russia is doing the same thing. For Russia, the Mediterranean has always been a strategic quadrant, since the time of the Tsar. If you look at it this way, there is a link between the Tsar, the Soviet Union and Putin. There is an area of absolute continuity. It proves that sometimes world history is more complex and sometimes it is simpler, you just need to follow it. But you cannot superimpose an ideological viewpoint on it. We all interpret reality in terms of what we would like it to be, not what it is. This is called putting on ideological glasses, but these glasses are distorted. The fact that two big key players like Russia and Turkey have entered the Mediterranean poses the problem of size. To measure up to Russia and Turkey the worst choice would be for Europe to react randomly, or with each country thinking it can engage on its own. And this would be nothing new. In the past Europe has often engaged in crises separately. Instead, we need to engage as Europe for two reasons. First, because of their size. In order to confront Russia and Turkey you need to be a little bigger, and the only one who is a little bigger is Europe. Second, because something more important than geopolitics is clearly at stake. We all know that Turkey and Russia - putting this as carefully as possible - are incomplete democracies. Even with all its contradictions, Europe is the heart of the world democracies and there is clearly a challenge regarding the model its state system is built upon, a model that has come under even greater strain with the pandemic. During this time, how many times have we heard, "Maybe it would be better if there were only one person in charge," or "It's better to be quick when tough decisions need to be made." It seems some have been irritated at having to accept procedures that are specific to democracy. Then we have seen that the game is not that easy. There are places with only one person in charge that have handled the pandemic terribly and others, where all democratic steps were made, that have handled it better. We are perfectly aware that this involves popular sentiment.

So, this involves a challenge with stakes that are much higher than just geopolitics. Finally, in the background, there is the relationship between Europe, the Mediterranean and Africa. Europe has to convince itself of a few things: some processes are inevitable and Europe has to either lead them or be led by them. Other large communities have also had to submit to history. Although other times they have been leaders, and today Europe has to decide if it wants to lead on this path. After 1989, after the fall of the Berlin wall, Europe thought its biggest challenge was the east. Its goal was to build friendship between the enemies of the past. The big issue of its relationship with Russia, a very delicate relationship. The crisis in Ukraine made it clear there was a problem and that it wasn't just something someone was making up. However, while we were dealing with the east, the east slipped into the Mediterranean. Meaning that the problem, which seemed restricted to trying to control of the Baltic skies - where there are European and NATO missions - shifted into the Mediterranean, with two eastern powers whose presence goes as far as the central Mediterranean. In all this, two things need to be considered. The first is that Europe is a little late in figuring out that the Sahel is Europe's true southern border. This is all the clearer now that there is a European mission in the Sahel, even though it was even already clear a few years ago. If we continue in our failure to grasp this, it will make us weaker, more fragile. In the next 20 years, Europe's relationship with Africa will be crucial and Europe has to make up for lost time. It needs to ask itself why today China has such a strong presence in Africa and why Russia and Turkey are also starting to be present there. Europe needs to let go of its outdated plans for colonisation, which are over forever, and understand that a part of Europe's future will be played out in Africa. The three games that are crucial to Europe's future will be played out there. The first regards energy, raw materials, which is right there for everyone to see every day. New technologies depend on raw materials from Africa, there is a direct connection between Cupertino and the heart of Africa. The second is the issue of demographic balance. Demographic growth in Europe is low or even zero or below zero, while in Africa it is sharply increasing. These things have to be steered, if they are not steered, they will be an element of permanent destabilisation. Since we say that governing means not being subjected to processes, Europe needs to make governing large demographic imbalances a goal. Third, the issue of terrorism. Just hours ago, there was an attack in Burkina Faso. The head of Boko Haram killed himself. Africa has become the new incubator of international terrorism along with Al Qaeda and the Islamic State.

Preventing and fighting international terrorism is a problem. All of this has to be done in Africa. It's no longer Italy's problem, Germany's problem or France's problem. If these countries fool themselves into believing they have political autonomy - and can sometimes even compete in Mediterranean relations - they will end up being dramatically disappointed.

In the Democratic Party, you were one of the staunchest opponents of what you called "the non-government of the migration issue". The issue of controlling migration flows is, naturally, on-going and topical, and you have defined it as "threatening the Country's democratic stability". How do you see Europe's role?

I already feel like it is very important that, in the Covid crisis, the stance Europe has taken is much different from the one it took in the 2008-2009 crisis. For example, I think Europe should engage on the overarching issue of controlling migratory flows with the same spirit it had when it was facing the issue of solidarity in economic reconstruction after the Covid collapse. In light of this, I continue to think that democracies have been challenged and must be defended and relaunched. I think it is essential for Europe to be a large democratic power. In the coming years there will be changes in the global economic balance. Today, the key players in the world are the USA, Russia, China, Europe and India. Right now the balance between democracies and incomplete democracies is on thin ice. If we were to count populations we would have already lost. Europe has to be a bit bolder, the time has come for Europe to implement a plan for Africa, a plan for the Mediterranean, a plan for investments and for quality of life.

We need to start right away with a plan for interventions in the central Mediterranean and Northern Africa, an economic, social and healthcare plan in Libya and also begin looking towards Tunisia. We need to start with Libya because it is the most complicated situation there is, and we need to look towards Tunisia because it is the only country that emerged from the Arab

Spring as a democratic state. Besides the fact that it could trigger a huge domino effect, it is unacceptable that the only democracy that came out of the Arab Spring could collapse. This is why all the large democracies have to get involved. If this is what we are seeing, one thing is clear, once again: the Mediterranean is not a secondary area. Actually, it is where the future of the planet is at stake.

Around 2000 there were discussions of how the death of ideology had distanced the new generations from political activism, but post-ideological parties, little-structured parties and liquid parties were still talked about in positive terms. Today, we get the impression that more and more citizens have difficulty even understanding whether politicians are useful professional figures. In your way of seeing things, does politics as a profession have a future? Is it realistic to think of the rebirth of solid, structured parties that are rooted in society and in local communities or has the future of politics as a profession relinquished its ties to the party form?

I am one of those people who was happy to wave good-bye to ideologies construed as false consciousness, as a smokescreen leading you to see reality differently from how it effectively was. But losing ideologies is one thing, losing principles is another. These are two very different things and we have kind of confused them. There is no politics without values and principles.

People cannot be indifferent to values, because clearly indifference to values is what has allowed so-called populist orientations to prevail. I don't think what we are seeing is a populist eclipse. I think it would be dramatically bad judgement to think that the game is over. Instead, the challenge is systematically open and depends on how democracies react. It is very important for politics to show it is capable of renewal, because the only thing we cannot do is react to the political crisis with policy that is immobile or backward-thinking. We cannot be immobile and we cannot go back to what we were. Something new needs to be done, with the awareness that these years have taught us one simple thing: that the principle where one equals one isn't true.

One doesn't equal one. If there is a healthcare crisis you can't just call the first person you see. Politics must help to select a part of the ruling class. There is a crisis in the political system that can only be overcome if we do not shut ourselves up in a stronghold. The "Bastiani Fortress" doesn't work. It is clear that we need political professionals, but not ones who live off politics, ones who have two things: first, interpersonal relationships, with politicians who know how to relate to the people. It is impossible to think that the people are always wrong. The people count even when they say things that look wrong to us. We can engage politically, culturally and intellectually to fight these things, but these things count because people are the root of democracy. We need to take care of the people even though it is harder. They are constantly getting second-guessed and politicians have to be up to the challenge. Politics must have both of these things: it must have value, it must have values and it must measure its value and values with the people who are the ultimate judge in a democracy. Values that are self-referencing don't work. We are rather self-indulgent and tend to glorify ourselves. When we start to glorify ourselves too much, that is the first step towards ruin.

Marco Sonsini

Editorial

PRIMOPIANOSCALA^c enjoys the great privilege of having a very special proofreader who, in addition to pointing out typos and other small mistakes, provides some preliminary remarks on our interviews. I must admit, his feedback is always in line with what our other readers think. Interviews that we think are interesting and great are not always received with the same enthusiasm by our readers. Instead, our *proofreader* is always on the same wavelength as our readers, and is never wrong in his predictions. However, this time our proofreader's unquestionable judgement reflects our own thoughts about our July interview: "*Compelling, interesting, cultured and at the same time clear. When you get to the last line, you want to know even more, you want to continue to ask questions.*"

We hope Marco Minniti, this month's interviewee, is pleased by this reaction. For us, there was no doubt what his reaction would be.

Minniti just recently abandoned his active role in politics, and "*without any recrimination and also with a certain enthusiasm.*" Now, he is the president of the Med-Or Foundation, conceived by the industrial group Leonardo last 3 June.

The Foundation will be working in areas that are strategic to our Country, and according to Minniti it will be a platform that will serve the Country System in extremely important key areas like the Mediterranean, which reflect not just Italy but all of Europe, as well as the Sahel, the Middle East, and up to India. These are some of the most complex, troubled areas in the world, though they are also key to the future development and security not only of Italy but of all of Europe. Moving on to talk about geopolitical issues was almost natural, and our interviewee didn't hesitate to give us his *political* viewpoint on the very recent, and to some unforeseen, developments in the balances of power right here in the Mediterranean. He quotes Lenin, though without naming him, and sums up the latest events in this area of the world with the well-known phrase used to describe the Russian Revolution: "*There are decades when nothing happens, and there are weeks when decades happen.*" However, he reminds us that nothing happens by chance, and that there is always an "*area of continuity*" with the past. He is referring to Russia and Turkey, which have always seen the Mediterranean as a strategic quadrant and that "*actually achieve two of these countries' historic aspirations, two ambitions we can define as dreams of imperialism.*" Another hot button Minniti touched upon is politics. He reminds us that he is one of those people who waved "*good-bye to ideologies construed as false consciousness, as a smokescreen leading you to see reality differently from how it effectively was.*" But politics without values, without a competent ruling class, that locks itself inside a stronghold, losing its relationship with reality and people, is a losing class. He draws an analogy with Il deserto dei Tartari by Italian writer Dino Buzzati and the Bastiani Fortress, high up on a solitary mountaintop and no longer of strategic importance, where people spend their lives trying to flee time.

And politics is running the risk of cutting itself off and becoming self-absorbed. According to Minniti, "*Values that are self-referencing don't work. We are rather self-indulgent and tend to glorify ourselves. When we start to glorify ourselves too much, that is the first step towards ruin.*" These are just a few of the highlights in this important interview, and I'm certain they'll make you eager to dive into it!

PRIMOPIANOSCALA's July cover has the same graphics of the white page torn to reveal a swathe of the interview in Italian and in English, with an insect looking up at the words. We have dedicated the emperor moth or giant silk moth to Minniti. At the end of their larval stage, these beautiful Lepidopteras of the Saturniidae family produce a strong protein filament that, when exposed to air, becomes a strong, solid fibre that can be worked: silk. Moths, like butterflies, undergo metamorphosis, transforming into completely different beings.

What better image to indicate renewal, regeneration, transformation into a new self?

Then, the **Luna Moth** on the cover is especially sophisticated, with its wings decorated with eye-like markings, which also sort of resemble the shape of the waning and crescent moon, and long curved tails.

They are lime green with purple around the edges. They have a white body and yellow antennae. They are considered to be some of the most beautiful moths in the world. A Luna Moth is even featured on a series of collectors' stamps. Yes to renewal and change, but with class!



Marco Minniti is President of the Med-Or Foundation, established by Leonardo last February. Before that, since 2001 and for five legislatures, Minniti had been elected first to the Senate, then to the Chamber of Deputies. From 2016 to 2018 he was the Minister of the Interior during the Gentiloni Government. In 2013, during the Letta government, he was appointed Undersecretary to the Prime Minister – Delegated Authority for the Security of the Republic and was re-appointed during the following Renzi government in 2014. He was Vice Minister of the Interior during the second Prodi Government from 2006 to 2008, Undersecretary to the Ministry of Defence during the second Amato government from 2000 to 2001 and Undersecretary to the Prime Minister during the first and second D'Alema government from 1998 to 2000. He first became active in politics at 17 when he became a member of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and joined the Italian Communist Youth Federation (FGCI). From 1986 to 1988 he was on the PCI's Problems in Labour and the Economy Commission. After the breakup of the PCI, Minniti joined the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS). In 1994 he was appointed Head of the Party Problems Department and in 1996 he became Coordinator of the National Office of the Secretary. In 1998, when the Democratic Party of the Left was created, with Massimo D'Alema as party secretary, Minniti took office as the Organisational Secretary. In 2007 he was appointed Head of Security for the National Office of the Secretary under Walter

Veltroni. In 2008 he became the shadow-Minister of the Interior for the shadow-PD government. In 2009 PD secretary Dario Franceschini appointed him National President of the Security Forum of the Democratic Party. That same year he founded and served as president of **Fondazione ICESA** (Intelligence Culture and Strategic Analysis). In 2021 PD secretary Pier Luigi Bersani appointed him to be the PD representative in verifying the implementation of the Monti government's programme. Minniti has a degree in philosophy. He is married to Mariangela and has two daughters, Bianca and Serena. He loves dogs, free diving and underwater fishing. He is a fan of the Reggio Calabria football team "Reggina" and of Inter and follows the basketball team from his hometown, the "Viola" of Reggio Calabria. He is 65 years old and lives in a lighthouse...