

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

“As a politician I have learned to only prepare for the unexpected, so for now I direct my energy and focus towards what is in front of me, for the European Parliament and - above all - for European citizens.”

Telos: *“Dealing with contingencies doesn't frighten me. After all, I am a mother of four.”* However, not all contingencies have the same degree of seriousness. Which of the many that you had to deal with during your term required the greatest commitment and why?

Roberta Metsola: I've learnt in politics to expect nothing and to only prepare for the unexpected. So, of course when I took office in 2022, I knew that it was not always going to be smooth sailing. But I don't think anything could have really prepared me for the variety of hardships I - alongside my colleagues in Parliament - have had to tackle.

Undoubtedly, the unjustified Russian aggression on Ukraine has been the greatest upheaval we were and still are faced with. This changed everything, challenged everything we stand for and brought unprecedented provocation to the world.

But the European Union's reaction has also been unprecedented. We have come together, like never before, in order to support Ukraine by all possible means, from financial support, to humanitarian aid and multiple sanction packages against Russia - our commitment and solidarity have been and will continue to be unwavering. And in all this the European Parliament has been in the forefront - the first to push for sanctions against Russia and for granting EU candidate status for Ukraine. The war on our doorstep has also made us aware of our own shortcomings. It has directly affected our economies, giving rise to an unprecedented energy crisis, increased inflation and a higher cost of living. This has been a test of our resilience and a very clear sign that we can no longer afford to rely on unreliable actors. We need to make sure that the European Union can stand on its own two feet in key areas, such as energy or security and defence.

Alongside, we are tackling contingencies in various other areas. Migration as well as the climate crisis continue to be two of the most important files we have been dealing with for a while now, and we are making significant progress. The new Pact on Migration and Asylum, for instance, is a pivotal step in dealing with migration in the EU, whereas the Green Deal represents a key tool to make Europe the first carbon neutral continent.

Last but not least, there has been a corruption scandal that has shocked us to the core and that has required us to take immediate action. But this has also given us the momentum to push for reforms that this Parliament needs.

The challenges have been unprecedented but so have the resilience, solidarity and the unity of the European Parliament, and this is something I am extremely proud of. We have delivered.

Europe is now at a turning point. At the Conference on the Future of Europe several new proposals have been put forward. Following the developments and the challenges at the international, European and national levels, do you believe it's time to initiate a reform of the Treaties? If so, what are the major change you deem necessary?

It is undeniable that these past few years have been challenging. We are facing an illegal war in Ukraine that destroys, kills and undermines the political will of a sovereign people. And over the past years, we have experienced a global pandemic, an energy crisis, inflation and cyberwarfare. All while the clock of a climate emergency keeps on ticking.

The world is changing and we must change with it. We cannot be afraid of reform. Take the enlargement process for example which the EU seeks to embark on in the next few years. What worked for 27 member states will not work for 33 or 36. We need to have a serious conversation on how we can evolve.

Let me be clear, the goal is not “treaty change” itself, the goal is better cooperation on defence, the goal is a health union, the goal is joint energy procurement as the norm.

The Conference on the Future of Europe started a conversation. A conversation between citizens, a conversation between institutions and a conversation between citizens and institutions. We should not be afraid to continue this conversation. We should never be afraid of change.

“I hope Italy continues to be at the centre of Europe.” What role do you see for our country in shaping EU policies?

It was in Rome that our fundamental Treaties were signed, *de facto* and *de jure* establishing a European Union of peace that we have built and continue to build together as Europeans.

No decision in the European Parliament is taken without the strenuous work of Italian MEPs.

I am confident that the relations between Italy and the EU will continue to progress on this path of cooperation, solidarity and shared responsibilities. If we do not work together, we will not be able to find adequate solutions to the crucial issues of our time, such as migration, which I know deeply affects Italy. I am convinced that we can find a way that respects borders - and that is fair and humane with those in need of protection, that is firm with those who are not eligible and that is strong against those traffickers who are exploiting the most vulnerable.

Nonetheless, we are less than one year ahead of the 2024 European Elections. And I want to remind Italian citizens that Europe

belongs to you. You are Europe. Your choice matters. Your vote matters. If we all have our say in the elections, we will have the chance to remain at the centre of Europe. And our elected representatives will stand for our fundamental rights and values and fight for the issues we care about. The right to vote is the right to hold to account. If you do not vote, others will and you might not like it.

A long-time politician, you have held many and various positions in your career. What about your future?

I have been very fortunate to have been able to experience the European project from a variety of different viewpoints throughout my career so far. This has been extremely enriching. Right now, we still have almost an entire year ahead of us before the 2024 European elections, so my focus is not on what will happen in the future, after this term, but much rather on continuing to advance on the many important legislative files we still have on the table.

I am also trying to visit all Member States to raise awareness for the elections and talk to people about why voting is so crucial, because at the end of the day it is all about democracy - that is at the very core of all of what we do in the European Parliament. And leading this Parliament is an honour of a lifetime which is precisely why I will give my all until the last minute of my mandate to push European democracy forward. I believe in the Parliament and how important it is for the democratic legitimacy of our project. The future of the Parliament must be a strong one. Like I said previously, as a politician I have learned to only prepare for the unexpected, so for now I direct my energy and focus towards what is in front of me, for the European Parliament and - above all - for European citizens. We will see what happens afterwards.

Marco Sorsini

Editorial

"Expect the unexpected, and be ready for anything." This is the formula that Metsola imparts to the wannabe politician. A formula passed on to her by an illustrious predecessor, Antonio Tajani, as she tells. From this exhortation we have drawn the title of PRIMOPIANOSCALA August interview where the guest of honour is Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament and a long-time politician. Maltese, who was elected President in January 2022, when the Covid wave was still sadly present and tangible, did not miss a thing this year: in addition to the pandemic, she had to deal with a war, an unparalleled energy crisis, a renewed economic crisis topped by a spike in inflation, and a scandal that broke out in the very institution she led. But as she tells us: *"The challenges have been unprecedented but so have the resilience, solidarity and the unity of the European Parliament, and this is something I am extremely proud of."*

She does not forget to mention another severe crisis, now endemic in the EU: the fair management of the flow of migrants and asylum seekers. The good news is that, after years of stalemate, a political agreement on the new Pact on Migration and Asylum was found in the Home Affairs Council, on 8 June. This was a real breakthrough after years of intense negotiations, and it is to be hoped that the new text will be a good basis for negotiations between the European Parliament and the Council.

Her relationship with Italy is close, strengthened by her excellent knowledge of our language, which she is not afraid to speak or even write when suitable. Her visit to our country at the end of June was an auspicious occasion to tweet in Italian. Italy, according to Mme Metsola has a central role in Europe. And Europe still has a lot to do. And she reiterates that Parliament will always listen to citizens and their needs. But she concedes nothing to a profound change of the EU Treaties. She reiterates: *"Let me be clear, the goal is not 'treaty change' itself, the goal is better cooperation on defence, the goal is a health union, the goal is joint energy procurement as the norm."*

We would like to end on an amusing note. Those who missed the skit between Fiorello and Roberta on the sidelines of the Biagio Agnes 2023 Award can relive it [here](#). She is lively, funny and able to respond to the showman's irony in perfect Italian!

The 2023 covers of PRIMOPIANOSCALA were designed to create, with the faces of the contributors, something similar to museum merchandise. Every month we personalise an item with the black and white face of our guest. This way, a t-shirt, magnet or shopper becomes a memory, an experience, a symbol. Our guests become icons, just like museum pieces such as Da Vinci's Vitruvian Man, Van Gogh's sunflowers, Michelangelo's The Creation of Adam in the Sistine Chapel... For Roberta we have chosen a puzzle, a perfect metaphor of all the problems she tries to solve, every day, in her job, where putting the pieces together is a must. Actually, an incomplete puzzle with little idea of what the final picture looks like. By incomplete we mean that Mme. Metsola might not have all the pieces, but starts by fitting together whatever pieces she has, trying to make sense of what kind of (policy/political) picture can be achieved.

With this August issue, all of us at Telos welcome you back to work, after, we hope, a relaxing summer break.

Mariella Palazzolo

Roberta Metsola Tedesco Triccas is the President of the European Parliament. On 11 January 2022, she is acting President, following the loss of David Sassoli; a week later, on 18 January, her birthday, she is elected President of the Assembly. The youngest in history and the third woman after **Simone Veil**- 1979/1982, and **Nicole Fontaine**- 1999/2002. She graduated in Law from the University of Malta and specialised in European Union Law and Policy at the **Collège d'Europe** in Bruges, a forge of European elites. She was Legal and Judicial Cooperation Officer at the Permanent Representation of Malta to the European Union. She began her political activity at a very young age, with militancy in the *Moviment Zghazagh Partit Nazzjonalista*, the youth formation of the Nationalist Party, and in the European Democrat Students, the youth movement of the European People's Party, of which she was also Secretary General. She joined the European Parliament for the first time in 2013, in the Group of the European People's Party, succeeding her party colleague, **Simon Busuttil**, who had meanwhile been elected to the national parliament. The following year, in 2014, she was elected in the European elections, being the highest vote-getter of her party, and was re-elected in 2019. In November 2020, she is elected First Vice-President of the European Parliament - the first Maltese to hold this position.

She speaks four languages: besides Maltese, her mother tongue, she is fluent in English, Finnish (her husband's language) and



Italian.

Roberta was born in San Giljan and lives in Brussels. She loves cooking and has been married to Ukko since 2005. They have four children: Luca (16), Alec (15), Marc (11) and Kristian (7).

Marco Sonsini

Telos Analisi & Strategie srl

telos@telosaes.it - @Telosaes - VAT IT11825701003 - REA Roma 1330388