

## “THE SHOCK OF THE NEW”

A Global Conversation by Christopher Prentice, UK Ambassador in Italy  
(University of Tor Vergata – Rome, October 21, 2015)



The United Kingdom Ambassador in Italy, Mr. Christopher Prentice, held a conference in Tor Vergata University about the relations between Italy and UK in the European context.

The Ambassador started by pointing out what has been in the last times a common feature of United Kingdom, Italy and the European Union: the **shock of the new**.

What shocked United Kingdom was the outcome of the General Elections in May 2015. Despite most opinion polls predicting the Conservatives and

Labour neck and neck, the Conservatives took a working majority of 12. Conservative party leader and incumbent Prime Minister David Cameron subsequently formed a majority single-party government. The just mentioned event can potentially affect Europe, since the Conservative Party promised a “Referendum on EU Membership of UK”, that will take place within 2017.

The reaction by the Labor Party has been the election of Mr. Corbyn as a leader: a second shock to the status quo. Jeremy Corbyn, in fact, is the most left-wing political leader in the last 30 years and his election brought divisions among the Party and “troubles” for the government in foreign policies. This is the policy framework that the Ambassador of the United Kingdom in Italy Christopher Prentice has represented the students of Global Governance at the conference held in UNIDue Tor Vergata last October 21.

Moreover, the British economy is in strong recovery: the defense budget was reduced to 2% of G.D.P and the Development Budget for foreign aid was increased to 0.7%.

To sum up the overview on England, Mr. Prentice said that the State he is representing can be described by those three words: **Reform, Renegotiation, Referendum**.

The Shock of the New in Italy is represented on the one hand by the new economic growth after the crisis, that is estimated +0.6 of PIL in 2015; on the other hand Italy is facing a new crisis: the refugees. In 2015, at least 200.000 are expected to arrive to the peninsula.

Both the sides of the Italian “shock” are closely linked to the **European Turmoil**.

The EU, as well as Italy and UK, suffered several shocks in 2015, summarized in three big facts:

- the attempts of stabilizing Greek Crisis
- the Volkswagen Scandal, as reputational damage
- Migrations emergence with the derived tensions on Schengen Treaty.

In particular Prentice reported that Britain feels a great moral and political responsibility to help the refugees arriving in Europe from the Middle East, the theaters of war, nevertheless pointed out, even in a lively and critical discussion with students, that economic migrants who are not entitled to asylum should be discouraged in a European strategic vision of the problem, leading to act accordingly. Britain responded positively to requests for help migrants and in fact has sent the warship HMS Bulwark in the Mediterranean, helping to save 6700 lives of migrants.

The ambassador finally clarified the argument that these migrations have to be managed with a long-term strategy. It would be important to act in Africa or in the countries of origin of migrants, providing assistance and international cooperation to increase prosperity in the troubled countries. The United Kingdom is the only one that has considerably increased development aid, because “changing the conditions of the countries from which the most desperate come from”, according to the Ambassador, “is the only solution”.

The UK Ambassador, after this brief introduction of facts, wanted to share with us two “paradoxes”: (1) the two Countries more keen in deeper Eurozone integration are Italy and the UK, not France or Germany. Germany in practice has strong elements of reluctance to take the burden if reformation in European economic management do not take place. France sees European Integration jeopardizing French decision-making. Giving up its budget economic management would be an integral contradiction inside France.

Italy, instead, has a strong European tradition since it gave birth to two of the most important EU founders: Mr. Altiero Spinelli and Mr. Alcide De Gasperi. Moreover, it is now relaunching a new European Governance (Sandro Gozi).

Hearing such a strong point of view by the UK Ambassador was unexpected: he brought up new tools of analysis of the European States behavior, not only taking into consideration economic factors, but also an historical perspective.

For what concerns UK commitment in Eurozone Integration, the Ambassador firstly defined the Eurozone as the principal UK economic partner.

Then Mr. Prentice drew a description of UK economic agenda, articulating it in four “issues”. The first he pointed out was “the issue of competitiveness and consequent deregulation”. UK, in his opinion, has to understand that staying with EU is the way to compete in global markets. In this purpose there is an IT- UK Agreement on digital single market.

Then, there is the issue of national sovereignty in legally binding treaties and the power of national parliament in the European Commission. According to the Lisbon Treaty, Parliament can send objections to the European Commission, but it does not really happen because a sufficient number of Parliaments is needed to be heard in the EC. This bring to a Democratic Deficit and to the question: is there a European demos?

The third issue is about a fair integration of Eurozone and Single Market: in the case Eurozone takes decision affecting the Single Markets, S.M., in his opinion, should have a fair share in the decision taken.

The last issue concerns the UK crisis given to internal migration. UK gives to each worker a in-work benefit from the first day of work, are migrants exploiting it? Is Schengen effectively working?

The second “paradoxical statement” (2) concerns the role of UK Ambassador in Italy. The prior objective of UK Ambassador in Rome is Italian Prosperity. To achieve this economic growth Italy needs structural reforms, but a structural reform towards a federal State would not improve Italian growth. UK will support any structural reform in Italy, but not a federal one.

He finally affirmed that Italy is a strategic State and will probably be a future pillar of EU.

The very last part of the Global Conversation the Ambassador went back to United Kingdom steady position about its role in the Single Market: UK will be in first line to promote the European Growth inside the Single Market.



The Ambassador certainly gave us food for thought and some keys to interpret Europe in a constantly changing framework of issues. I would highlight the initial comparison he made on Italy, United Kingdom and European Union for the clear analysis of differences and analogies among the three. The UK economic agenda description should also be underlined, since it opens a window not only on UK issues, but also on Global and European challenges.

*Benedetta Mina and Nicolò Capello*