

Premiazione Concorso: Croce e l'Europa 2016-17

Willem Vermeltfoort
University of Groningen
14 april 2017.



Nell'occasione del 150° dalla nascita all'IISS in Via Benedetto Croce a Napoli, in quel Palazzo Filomarino poco distante dalla Chiesa di Santa Chiara, i Presidenti della Repubblica e della Regione con il Sindaco di Napoli celebrarono l'occasione con un importante convegno sull'internazionalità di Croce, dando notizia e commento delle traduzioni e della fortuna del suo pensiero nel mondo.

Oscom lanciò allora un Concorso per le scuole che ha suscitato interesse ma non troppa partecipazione, per il sovrappollarsi ormai di simili iniziative nella vita quotidiana degli studenti.

Giovedì 8 giugno alle ore 11 nella Chiesa di Sant'Aniello a Caponapoli, vicino a Piazza Cavour e al vecchio Policlinico (una volta quel Largo delle Pigne traversato dai conquistatori) si terrà la premiazione del Concorso. Ecco il tema vincente.

Come si nota, le citazioni si riferiscono a libri recenti, perché Croce è stato tra coloro che rifiutarono il primo populismo, il fascismo, nonché il Qualunquismo di Giannini del primo dopoguerra, che pure raccolse molto consenso prima di essere sconfitto dalla politica. È questa una delle ragioni per cui all'estero si torna a leggere il suo storicismo: è la visione della storia, l'argomentazione e la capacità di dimostrazione, che differenziano la politica dalla pura demagogia, che oggi costringe anche i veri politici a sforzarsi di urlare più forte.

Croce's Storia d'Europa in a time of Euroscepticism.

"Per intanto, già in ogni parte d'Europa si assiste al germinare di una nuova coscienza, di una nuova nazionalità (perché, come già si è avvertito, le nazioni non sono dati naturali, ma stati di coscienza e formazioni storiche); e a quel modo che, or sono settant'anni, un napoletano dell'antico Regno o un piemontese del regno subalpino si fecero italiani, non rinnegando l'esser loro anteriore ma innalzandolo e risolvendolo in quel nuovo essere, così e francesi e tedeschi e italiani e tutti gli altri s'innalzeranno a europei e i loro pensieri indirizzeranno all'Europa e i loro cuori batteranno per lei come prima per le patrie più piccole, non dimenticate ma meglio amate."¹ In his world famous book *Storia d'Europa Nel Secolo Decimonono* Benedetto Croce noted the above citation. Croce described the beginning of an European nationality and predicted a start of an European super state. Now, 85 years later, this European super state faces problems it did not

¹ Benedetto Croce, *Storia D'Europa nel Secolo Decimonono*. (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1932). 360.

have before. The rise of populism, the flood of refugees and the Brexit as absolute low point made the existence of Europe uncertain. All the recent events combined created a crisis in and debate about the European nationality, in which Benedetto Croce would have been a welcome participant.

Croce used history as the mirror for his own, troubled, time. The rise of fascism made life in Italy harder and the future more uncertain than it had ever been before. Croce's idea of liberty clashed with Mussolini's fascism. As Rosario Forlenza and Björn Thomassen wrote in their book *Italian Modernities*: "Liberty in effect was the continued object of attack by Fascism and by Mussolini himself."² The fascist ideology made the state more important than the liberty of human beings. A true liberal will always have the opinion that the rights of individuals are to be protected against the state. For Mussolini this was the other way around: the state is to be the biggest factor that needs protection. The individual is subservient to the state. Croce struggled with this idea and used his *Storia d'Europa* as a protest. The religion of liberty was in this book defended in the light of history.

Nowadays, looking at the rise of populism, Croce's struggle with fascism is more relevant than ever. A lot of aspects are the same. European politicians like Marine Le Pen, Norbert Hofer and Geert Wilders turn themselves to the mass with political ideas about the exclusion of people and Euroscepticism. Especially this Euroscepticism is what should frighten people the most. Croce hoped for the growth of the European nation. Now we see this European nation slowly fall apart. Politicians like Nigel Farage criticized the European Union and this has led to the Brexit. An important member of the European Union turned her back towards it and now the crisis of the Union is bigger than ever. Questions about the existence of the Union rise up in the political debate. What if the Brexit was the first domino? Will other countries follow the example of leaving the union? What will the future hold for the European nation?

To fight the skepticism towards the European Union nowadays intellectuals need to reflect their time in the same way Croce did back in 1932. Use the course of history to search for answers on questions of your own time. To use Croce's famous motto: "ogni vera storia è storia contemporanea". We should appreciate what the Union has brought us. War seems to be banned in Europe and peace has dominated the past generations. Freedom and liberty are basic morals in nowadays society. This has been different in European history, like in Croce's own time.

Despite this growing feeling of freedom and peace, the growth of Euroscepticism is not a strange reaction to the problems of modern times. The enormous wave of refugees tests the European ideology in finding a solution for housing and dealing with new people. For a while it looked like the European society failed this test horribly. Recent attacks on Brussels and Paris by so-called refugees fed the growth of Euroscepticism.

² Rosario Forlenza, & Björn Thomassen. *Italian Modernities: Competing Narratives of Nationhood*. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016). 122.

But if we look at the course of the European history, this Euroscepticism has no valid foundation. Since the introduction of the super state in 1957 with the Treaty of Rome, more peace has dominated the European world. Instead of picking up the weapons the European countries try to keep the peace and look for other solutions to problems. This is what Croce hoped for. Of course the problems with refugees asks a lot of European politicians, but instead of fighting each other, they work together.

The lack of Croce's theory would have been the existence of an European nationality. Despite the big step forward in history in building a super state, the European nationality seems to lack. Many Europeans do not consider themselves as such. They consider themselves primarily as Italian or German, and second as European. Croce predicted this would happen, just like it happened in Italy: "un napoletano dell'antico Regno o un piemontese del regno subalpino si fecero italiani". This has not, unfortunately, happened.

This lack of European nationality is the first problem that needs to be faced in the Union. If many people would feel themselves European, Euroscepticism would be defeated. This can be done by taking history as an example to make people proud of the Union. What we have accomplished in the last 60 years is something to be proud of. Like the Italians mostly left the feeling of *Campanilismo* to a bigger, geographical state, the Europeans should do this the same way. Building a bigger nation goes hand in hand with building a bigger nationality. This is what Croce wrote about, and it is nowadays more relevant than ever.