



EDITORIAL

THE SECOND REPUBLIC OF EUROPE

The celebrated work of Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, opens with a concise yet terse sentence: “(a)ll states and governments that ever ruled over men have been either republics or monarchies”. This blunt sentence summarises, in a nutshell, the two dilemmas of the political thought of the antiquities: the dilemma about the form of government and the dilemma about the holder of the political decision, a tyrant or a demo. Both dilemmas echo in the *Politics* of Aristotle, perhaps the first full-fledged theorisation of political science.

But does this dichotomic alternative apply also to the EU's form of government? The EU assuredly is not a monarchy and, even less a form of tyranny, even though it includes among the heads of State or Government of its Member States a significant number of monarchs and a significant number of would-be tyrants. But, in spite of this disquieting presence, I suspect that, faced with the either/or question of the opening sentence of *The Prince*, many a scholar would opt for a republic, albeit not an orthodox one.

The heterodoxy of the EU as a republic, which for decades was mistaken for a democracy deficit, mainly lies in its form of government, where the political dialectic takes place between its Institutions and not, or not so much, inside them. Since the beginning of the integration process, the main political Institutions – the two Councils, the Parliament and the Commission – exhibited a strong internal cohesion and an equally strong propensity to vindicate their prerogatives *vis-à-vis* the other Institutions. This remark is particularly striking due to the heterogenous composition of these Institutions whose members came from the most diverse political families of the Member States.

The prevailing view suggests that this effect was the logical consequence of the ontological diversity of the political dynamics of the Union from those of its Member States. It was precisely this diversity that accounted for the various peculiarities of the European political system, virtuous for some, vicious for others: the remoteness from its citizens; the complexity of its political rituals, often incomprehensible for the general public; the perception of Europe as a technocratic regime, unrestrained by democratic scrutiny.

These oddities suddenly seem to be a relic of another era. Today, national election campaigns are almost exclusively dominated by European policy issues. Elections in Germany, Poland, Italy and more recently in France, hinged around the role of the Union in solving national problems. This is easy to verify in the Polish elections, which overturned, in the name of Europe, one of the most tenacious and extremist sovereign-



tist regimes. But it is also easy to verify the dominant role of Europe in elections fought and won by sovereigntist parties, which invoked a change of European policies to tackle issues that national policies were chiefly unable to solve: first and foremost, immigration and support for States' public policies.

Most probably a nemesis of the history of the European idea is unfolding under our eyes. The Union and its policies leapt to the centre of the national debate and decisively influenced, albeit in different directions, the minds of the voters, both in the Member States and in the Union. The ontologically political diversity between the Union and its Member States seems to wane. The political dynamics of the Member States are obsessively dominated by the role of the Union and, conversely, the political dynamics of the Union are more and more influenced by the national political forces which bend the European decision to their own benefit.

In turn, the intra-institutional dynamics seems to be doomed to accept a dialectic between majority and minority. This does not necessarily mean that the government of Europe will be expressed by homogeneous majorities in all of its Institutions. The European political system does not have many of the States' constitutional arrangements that would ordinarily allow a sole majority to express a politically cohesive government. The Commission will continue to be populated by Commissioners from the most diverse political backgrounds. The European Council and the Council, whatever the formal majority, will continue to spasmodically seek unanimity among their members. The Parliament will always, and always futilely, try to control the Commission. In short, the Union will retain a bit of its ontological political diversity *vis-à-vis* its Member States, but the presence of a political majority and minority in each of the three Institutions will inevitably mark the path of integration.

In a sense, this is precisely the effect of the prominence that European policy has also acquired in the national debate. Europe is changing its political genome; it is no longer "tucked away" in its technocratic dimension but determines the themes of the political struggle and is part and parcel of it.

If Europe were a republic, the 2024 elections could likely be considered by future historians as the event that changed, perhaps not abruptly and perhaps not permanently, the Union's form of government into a second republic.

E.C.