Essay from Italy

ESSAY 9

Since the dawn of centuries, many different peoples have tried to conquer Europe.
The Romans, the Franks, the Ostrogoths, the Normans, Alexander the Great, Charlemagne, the Habsburg Empire, Napoleon, Hitler. They all tried to build a unique country, all in the same way: with battles and subduing local populations. None of these empires lasted long.

Oh no, with the brute force you will never convince people to stay together, to reach a common agreement. Together. By just adding one letter, the magical word becomes "to get there": in order to get there, somewhere, anywhere, we need to be together.

How can that happen if the will of one has more power than people's will?

Years, centuries, millenniums have been necessary to understand that the *vox populi* must be listened to.
The first democratic states were founded, then democracy spread all over Europe helped by the "revolutions". I find the way the revolution made people rise in the same direction very charming: People claimed more rights, along with duties.
There were other wars, and after the last one, a new difficult beginning.
It was a little more than half a century ago: two World Wars and thousands of deaths were necessary to let folk, and their government, understand that, maybe, some economic and politic agreements would make things better in our continent.

The idea of a supra-national union was conceived in 1958, when six European nations decided to sign a treaty which gave life to EEC (European Economic Community), the common market.
After this treaty, other agreements followed: The European Monetary System, which gave the first idea of the coming euro and the Schengen Treaty, no more borders and checks.
 Now the skeleton of the EU was forming. In 1992, thanks to the Maastricht Treaty, EU became a reality.
Over the years more and more countries joined the EU and from the six founding nations in 1956, there are twenty-seven now.

"And how is it going?" you may ask, "I don't know" will be my answer. Now there is a bit of mess all around, the crisis has been deeply affecting us and the governments are confused. People are confused.
Someone says that joining the EU has not been a great idea: it is drowning us, it has taken away our power. Others are hopeful. I really don't know who to listen to.

I think that EU has brought many advantages such as travelling without checks at the borders, cheaper flights, consumer protection, student exchanges and other things.

I feel European especially when I travel, it is when I understand that it means moving around freely.
Where are you from? From Europe!

I'm not saying that now we must all have the same culture, the same tastes, the same habits.
We should only accept the others like some nice neighbors.
If Europe lasts, we will demonstrate that peace is more powerful than war, because with war all the ancient empires didn't last for long.
As the European motto says: "United in diversity"!

In these last two years I've joined a Comenius project.

This was a completely new experience for me, which enabled me to meet new people from different countries, and know new cultures, from the neighboring states of France and Germany, to the "far away" United Kingdom and Norway.
When we worked together it was good fun, sometimes it was difficult, but eventually we worked it out. We were like a little Europe.
It all started with the idea of few people and then, slowly, it involved more.
We could say that years of European history were summed up in just a few days during our five "mobilities".

The first day you were there, with all your prejudices and distrustful. As time went by the ice broke and you started talking with the "foreigner" and then you noticed that at bottom they are not so different from your compatriots, they just have some different habits, but they are like you. They are people who want to know more about the world.
The last day, finally, you got used to having them around and it was difficult to say "goodbye", because you knew that it might be the last time you saw them.

We were Europe in those days, we were together, trying to find out something that would be nice for all, we made decisions together, we built something together.

Europe is growing up: no more borders, no more checks, no more prejudices. At the bottom we are all the same.

I think that we will become European when we decide that we shouldn't split people according to which European country a person comes from and when we are ready to sit at the same table to make decisions, as good friends do.

Young people are the future of Europe. We must broaden up our minds by travelling and knowing the others, because knowledge is the key to understanding the world and to letting people work well together and in peace.

I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Antonella