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Pius XI and America

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ROMANO PRODI

Foreword

1. The Two Europes

The object of research of the scholars gathered here for this congress, and in the newly created network linking Bologna, Münster, and Rome, is Europe between the two World Wars, the Europe of Pius XI and his diplomacy, and the Europe of the generations shaped by the ferocity of totalitarian regimes. It is vital to know the historical events and great policy directions of that Europe since it was in the total reversal of those directions that the other Europe was born, the one that, from the Second World War to the fall of the Berlin Wall, has fortunately gone in the opposite direction.

During the period between 1918 and 1938, the twenty years between the two World Wars, Europe saw the logic of rearmament as a means of emerging from an economic crisis and experienced the tragic development of nationalisms. This convergence of rearmament and nationalism saw nations as protagonists, and often cultures and ideologies as well, each becoming armed identities facing off against one another.

This giant convergence led to a conflict which no politician and no politics was able to govern. Evidently, neither totalitarianisms nor democracies understood where Europe was headed; neither France nor Great Britain had a political class capable of interpreting the climate. There was a lack of common intentions, which are the force that allows politics to fight against degenerative processes. Europe was kept prisoner by a framework which, from the end of World War One to the crisis of 1929, laid the foundations for those policies of public and military spending which in Germany and Italy became the tools par excellence of the formation of an ill-conceived and violent consensus.

The Europe that emerged from the rubble of that world, the Europe we would like to see today as an active participant on the international scene,

* Opening lecture given in Münster and Brown as forewords to the Pius XI research.