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## **Speech by President von der Leyen at the event 'Progettiamo il Rilancio', hosted by Giuseppe Conte, Prime Minister of Italy**

Brussels, 13 June 2020

*Caro Presidente,*

Thank you for inviting the European Commission to the inaugural session of your National Consultation. In these months we have worked very closely together, and this is how things should always work.

Rome and Brussels together, for Italy and for Europe.

Today, Italy is getting back on its feet. The shopping windows on your cities' main streets are lighting up again. Factory gates are reopening. Cafes and restaurants are once again filled with the sound of chatter and the smell of good food. There is still so much to do, but this is already something that warms our hearts.

Italy has been hit before anyone else in Europe, and you have been hit the hardest. Thousands have died – and this is a void that no one can ever fill. My thoughts are with the victims and their families. And also with the doctors, healthcare workers, and every citizen who has helped save lives and deliver essential services.

*Grazie, Italia.*

Your government has taken bold measures, asking people to stay home for long weeks and months. It required courage, but it worked. And you led the way for other Member States.

You have also taken bold measures to secure jobs, protect companies and limit the damage to the Italian economy. And after the deep fall in the past months, economic activity is gradually rebounding.

Yet we all understand that the recovery will be a generational challenge, not only for Italy but for Europe as a whole. Today I can say: The spirit of our founders is back. Europe is back.

*L'Europa s'è desta.*

Today we know that we can only defeat this crisis, if we do it together. Solidarity is not just the most ethical choice. It is the only effective way to deal with a crisis of this magnitude.

This is the core idea behind Next Generation EU, our new recovery plan that will sit on top of a revamped long-term EU budget.

This is Europe's moment.

It is the moment to join forces and react to the pandemic's fall-out across our Member States.

It is the moment to tackle divergences and disparities among different parts of Europe – to leave no country and no region behind.

Next Generation EU is an alliance between generations. We, the EU, are for the first time borrowing money from our children. So our investment today must deliver for our children. We shall not, as sometimes our Member States did, borrow from our children just to spend more today. Today, we invest for Europe's next generation.

Next Generation EU turns the extraordinary challenge we face into an opportunity. As we tackle the current crisis, we are also shaping the Europe of tomorrow.

A more competitive, fair and sustainable Europe.

A greener and more digital Europe.

This means unlocking massive public and private resources to invest in digital technologies, infrastructure and innovation. It also means that no one must be left behind. Solidarity, cohesion and convergence are crucial to succeed.

And as we invest to shape the economy of the future, we must also work on ambitious reforms – to ensure that our investments deliver on the citizens' needs and expectations. Reforms will lead to recovery. And reforms need your leadership and ownership.

I believe that Next Generation EU is a unique opportunity for Italy. The proposals by the Commission, in particular the Recovery and Resilience Facility, envisage unprecedented support for our Member States, including Italy. Next Generation EU can address long-standing challenges affecting the Italian economy. And it will pave the way for a lasting economic recovery.

It is now up to you to make it happen.

I am glad that today you are bringing together the public and the private sector, the entrepreneurs and the workers' organisations. The future of any of our countries can only be built together, listening to all voices and mobilising all the best energies.

Let me thank you, Giuseppe, for the patient work that you are doing in bringing your country together.

And I am grateful for your proposal of a 'Strategic plan' of reforms for Italy's recovery. We all know that Italy's high level of public debt exposes you to the markets' changing moods. But with the right reforms, Italy can make the most out of Next Generation EU.

In your plan, you mention the need to reduce red-tape, to make the public sector more efficient, to ensure that public works are shielded from organised crime. The capacity and quality of Italy's public administration will be essential – so that the new resources from Next Generation EU can be put to good use.

The labour market presents challenges. Female and youth employment is too low – we all know that you cannot build a successful economy without youth and women.

Italy has welcomed enthusiastically the European Green Deal – which as you know, is very close to my heart. We fully agree on the need to keep investing in a more sustainable economy, but also on digitalisation and innovation.

In this twin transition, green and digital, education and skills will be crucial. Our education systems and our research must also adapt to changing times. Our youth demand to be better prepared on the most pressing issues of our times.

You have also mentioned a substantial reform of your tax system and a more effective justice system. And this is crucial for Italy's businesses of all sizes.

Giuseppe, I could not agree more with your words: 'This is the time to raise our heads and cast our eyes to the future.' We should not just aim at restoring the status quo – this never works.

Next Generation EU is a chance for Italy and Europe to decide what our future should look like.

Throughout the years, Italy has always surprised the world. You have re-emerged from the deepest crises. You have preserved your identity and your traditions, while innovating and reinventing yourself. Thanks to this, Italy has today the second largest industrial base in Europe. All around the world, 'Made in Italy' means beauty and top quality.

The decisions you take today will shape the Italy of tomorrow.

This is the moment for you to develop and implement an effective recovery plan.

And the Commission will be there to support you, and accompany you – through reforms, to recovery.

Europe needs a strong Italy at its core.

*Buon lavoro, e viva l'Europa.*

SPEECH/20/1060

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