Speech by the President of the Italian Republic,

Sergio Mattarella

“Sweden, Italy, Europe: together for the future”

University of Lund, November 15th 2018

Your Majesties,

Rector,

Academic and civil authorities,

Distinguished Professors,

Dear students,

I would like to thank the Rector for giving me the opportunity to give my speech at this historic University, one of the oldest in Northern Europe and one of the most prestigious, and not only on our Continent.

Allow me to express my heartfelt gratitude to Their Majesties for being here today.

I consider it a significant and cordial testimony of the exceptional harmony that animates the bilateral relationship between Sweden and Italy, which represented the leitmotif of the State Visit which is ending today.

I renew my thanks to their Majesties for the hospitality and attention they have given to me, to my daughter and to the delegation that came with me.

The ancient and prestigious institution that is hosting us has been for over 350 years one of the pillars of academic education in Sweden.

I address a warm greeting to the entire teaching staff and to the researchers of this institution, as well as to all of its staff and, above all, to the students who attend it, coming from over 170 countries and also from Italy.

A reality so profoundly and authentically open to different cultural expressions represents the best terrain – the one that every University Institution would like to cultivate - for the development of knowledge and its transmission to the younger generations.

The relationship between memory and future generations is precisely one of the themes that marked the year that is coming to an end.

A year in which Europe commemorated the centenary of the end of the First World War, a war that left an indelible mark, especially on our Continent, made of pain, griefs and deep divisions among populations.
The inability to learn lessons from that immense tragedy that has recorded more than ten million deaths just in Europe, led, in just a little more than twenty years, to the Second World War.

At the end of the two wars, the Continent which had based its development on the trust in knowledge and its diffusion in the world, on the scientific-technological advances and on the ambition to possess a culture capable of being able to indicate models of society, well, that Continent seemed to have started on a trajectory of inescapable decline, exacerbated by political fractures and enormous economic crises that deeply marked its territories.

A situation that even countries like Sweden lived - although still unrelated to the two world wars - with a serious mortgage on the future.

If a word could summarize the common sentiment in Europe in the mid-forties, the term would probably be "bewilderment".

Bewilderment from defeat for the expunged but also as a feeling of widespread collapse for the winners, faced with a situation in which nothing allowed us to think of being able to return to pre-war situations and the remaining resources that escaped the curse of war could run out quickly, with a future of serious difficulties for the European populations.

In this scenario the course of continental integration begins, of which Sweden was a participant and a close observer.

Attempts were disparate, sometimes contradictory, sometimes doomed to fail.

Much progress has been made from the Marshall Plan to the experiences of collaboration between the Scandinavian countries, from the proposal of a European Defense Community, to the path that has led to the development of the European Community experience.

The process that led today to the European Union is due to the farsightedness of the founding fathers, who managed to look more ahead than others.

A process that was born, first of all, from an observation and a will: no more war; no longer oppositions, but unity to grow, together, just starting from the same resources, coal and steel, which had been disputed in many conflicts.

However, assuring a horizon of peace and of growing and widespread prosperity to future generations, such as the one that has marked European history since the post-war period, means being aware that, in history, steps backwards are possible. Means that it is necessary to never forget the lessons of the monstrosity of a certain past.

On the contrary, it requires keeping alive the memory of extraordinary and courageous founding moments.

Remember that we managed to lift our Continent, to overcome the deep divisions that had continued to hurt it, to return to being producers of ideas, culture, rights and progress, in every field; it must be remembered that all this happened because we have acquired the awareness of belonging to a unique cultural heritage and chosen to plan together the future of our populations.
To increase our being "together" in the future, means - to each generation – to embrace the past, to feel it in collective memory, to develop the antibodies necessary to not relive the conflicts that crossed the Continent for centuries.

The contribution of the Kingdom of Sweden, which will celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of its membership of the Union next year, has been remarkable.

University – which was born and developed in Europe - has always fulfilled a dominant role in this context.

The unity of European culture finds its foundation in the values of freedom of research and openness to intellectual environments, characteristic of the universities, at least since the time of medieval studies and of *clerici vagantes*.

University - the place where challenges and study become growth and progress - by definition accumulates knowledge, preserves history, the fundamentals for the next steps.

Memory is like the living work of canals, like foundation for buildings.

We don't see it, but without it the ship sinks or the building, at the first solicitation, collapses.

Your Majesty,

Europe today is experiencing a complicated phase. A situation in which stresses and shakes that the common building must absorb are intense.

None of the founding fathers ever denied that the pathway to integration could be hard and, actually, one of the founders, Jean Monnet himself, theorized how the progress of European construction was linked precisely to its ability to overcome crises.

If this is the spirit, then an introspective clarification on the direction that European populations intend to follow is decisive: the Treaty of Lisbon, in its preamble, sets explicitly the goal of "creating an ever closer union among the populations of Europe", whose decisions "are taken as close as possible to the citizens, according to the principle of subsidiarity".

That means that we are not a simple customs union, we are not a sort of business committee.

We are much more, even considering only an economic-commercial approach: a single market, an economic space with global power responsibility, which reverberates on many aspects, closely linked to the free movement of people. From sustainable growth to the social model, to the international redistribution of resources, to the guarantee of being able to exercise these freedoms in a framework of security and stability.

The economic-financial crisis characterized the past decade, with heavy repercussions on the populations.

It was superimposed by a wave of migration to Europe of enormous dimensions, while, within the Union, the United Kingdom decided to abandon the process of integration.

Differences in sensitivity, accentuated among the members of the Union, have seen the emergence of feelings of distance between European citizens and Community institutions.
A distance for which the European design, with its meaning, its institutions, its policies, its rules and procedures, is sometimes perceived by a part of European citizens as foreign if not adverse and, at most, as a sort of fair of opportunities to draw from according to individual conveniences, without any soul or purpose.

A line of thought of short breath and which fails to consider carefully not what we face in a moment of crisis, but rather - and it is a lot - what has been achieved and is now taken for granted, for acquired once and for all.

Together with the exercise of memory, it is therefore necessary to work, every day, for the Europe of the citizens formula to be put into practice.

Just a few kilometers from here, in Gothenburg, exactly one year ago, the Union took a very important step.

On that occasion, European leaders signed a document defining specific guidelines for a renewed attention of the Union and the Member States to the social dimension, to education, to culture and to policies for the youngest.

The fundamental progress made in recent years with regard to the single market - with the choice of some countries to immediately join the Monetary Union - is in fact essential but must be accompanied by other results, equally valid, capable to keep alive the identification between European citizens and Common Institutions.

It is the role of the Union as creator, guardian and guarantor of rights that protect our citizens in a uniform way, always and everywhere, which must be emphasized. A role solemnly supported by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

It is no coincidence that the first of the twenty principles enshrined in the Gothenburg document is dedicated to education, training and lifelong learning, with the aim of allowing everyone to be able to remain, throughout their working life, active part of the society.

Access to the labor market, gender equality, equal wages and conditions for equal jobs, social dialogue, long-term care, are the cornerstones of our living together and which, together, we must try to develop further, for the benefit of our citizens.

Gothenburg marked a significant moment in the life of the Union by defining the characteristics of a genuine "social pillar".

A moment in which Europe has resumed to travel, with determination, that path of promotion and dissemination of rights characteristic of the most significant and high moments of its history.

It is the path of European citizenship that must be followed with courage.

The Gothenburg Charter - and above all the concrete efforts for its concrete implementation - helps to reconcile disparities and dissociations within our continent, questions the validity of the concept of "multi-speed Europe" applied to the principles of the Union, consolidates the perspective of a cohesive, efficient Europe, close to its citizens and ready to defend its rights, including social rights.

A Europe that aims to offer its children - wherever they are born - the same opportunities.
A Europe where the "Erasmus Generation" and the "Generation of the Euro" itself - so well represented in this University - can increasingly take the lead of their own destinies and strengthen the deep sense of European design for those who will come after them.

It is a shared responsibility to ensure that the implementation of the principles developed in Gothenburg is part of the agenda that will animate the debate in view of the imminent beginning of the next institutional cycle, with the elections for the European Parliament.

Dear students,

I have just mentioned the sense of responsibility incumbent on us as part of a major project that has guided our collective action for over sixty years.

It is a responsibility that we share with the young generations that constitute the future of Europe.

My invitation today, my hope, is that you can continue to travel, to study, to know the cultures of the places where you will go and learn their languages, to learn lifestyles, traditions and identities, enriching and enhancing them, together with your colleagues, sharing with them dreams and aspirations.

The culture that has united us and unites us, makes us proud of our being Europeans.

Sons of Dante, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Descartes, Goethe, Andersen, Joyce, Strindberg and Bergman and, at the same time, children of an era in which the notions of space and time have radically changed.

Thanks to institutions like the one that is hosting us today, I am convinced that we will be able to transmit this immense and precious "humanity of values" to those who will come after us and, at the same time, propose it to the world as an experience of peaceful coexistence, from which we can always and constantly draw.