

# MARCHING FOR EUROPE, WHAT A PROGRAM! NEXT QUESTION: TO WHERE?

BY K. KALOMENI & J. RIETVELD

At least, for both of us GEM-STONES fellows present at the event, we were well surrounded in this exploratory quest. At the heart of the movement, we kept debating with our colleagues from LUISS Guido Carli, our host university in Rome, about the future of Europe, and about what this march means for us and for the future. Next to the Young federalists, we ended up helping them carrying an immense European flag despite us all having diverse opinions of what kind of Europe we would like to see.



Compound Europe, multiple-speeds Europe, a Europe more focused on its core competencies or, at the opposite, the development of a social and sustainable pillar... We all exchanged on these various versions of the EU without realizing that we were all properly carrying the same giant flag while debating passionately on our diverse interpretations. An external spectator would have likely found quite amusing this spectacle of students fighting for their own interpretations without being conscious that, at the end, they were all marching in the same direction. Likewise, what a representative allegory of our European continent! Divided like never before, conflicted, worried about the future but at the same time naturally attracted to each other by shared passions, values and beliefs, trumping finally all differences.

Nevertheless, while the march took place under excellent conditions, from the weather to the general organisation, the nice time spent there should not make us forget that, at the same time, counter-marches were taking place in other parts of Rome.

The streets were covered with anti-EU flyers long weeks before, replaced afterwards by pro-Front National ones, supporting Marine Le Pen candidacy during the recently concluded French elections. In the face of such opposition, our academic debates “font pâles figures” and leave themselves open to self-criticism.

How to ensure that our work and engagements reach people feeling disenfranchised and abandoned? How to offer something else than isolationism, protectionism and chauvinism? Furthermore, and more importantly, don't we have a moral duty towards these people to take into consideration their fears, lack of prospects and everyday sufferings, in our research? Is it not what we call working for “l'intérêt public” in the most noble sense of the term? Can we really continue our academic life, and career without looking at them, without feeling any form of compassion and sense of obligation? Can the university simply ignore what is going on outside its walls? Our sense is that no, we would otherwise sacrifice our values to the altar of careerism and pure contemplative narcissism.



Hope is maybe the final and unique word that should emerge from a march like this. Hope of a more just, equal and strong Europe offering opportunities to all, and not just to its most privileged members. Unity in diversity has revealed so far to be more of a weakness than a strength in the face of strong external players, but it is just up to us to make that change. It is the richness of our diverse cultures and opinions that would make us march again and again towards a brighter future for the EU and its citizens.

At the end of the march, we ran into some Belgian journalists who wanted to ask some questions. When I (Jochem) said that was fine, they immediately noted my Dutch accent and insisted on having the interview in Dutch. In the interview, I explained why I decided to join the march and what my perspective was on the European project. My quote that it was good to hear this pro-European message made it to the late night VTM news! Seems like we had our first successful GEM-STONES media outreach ;-)



Jochem and Kevin at the Coliseum in Rome, on 25th March 2017.

Title picture: Online sources  
Other pictures: K.Kalomeni

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