

## Francesco Saverio Nitti and the United States of Europe

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This essay is based on Francesco Saverio Nitti's pro-European production during and after the Great War. I need to give before some brief and certainly not exhaustive biographical hints about Nitti in order to favor a better contextualization<sup>1</sup>.

Nitti was born in Melfi, Basilicata, on July 19, 1868. His father volunteered in Garibaldi's troops and in his political growth Mazzini's democratic republican culture found full internalization<sup>2</sup>. In 1882 he moved with his family to Naples, where he completed his high school studies in 1890 and then graduated in Law. Just in Naples he had the opportunity to know Giustino Fortunato<sup>3</sup>, another great exponent of the Italian Southern Question. He started an intense journalistic activity collaborating with several papers including the «Corriere di Napoli», founded by Edoardo Scarfoglio<sup>4</sup>.

In 1894 he founded «La Riforma Sociale» where, next to the strong interest in the economic problems of his country, he particularly focused on the development of his South<sup>5</sup>. After obtaining the teaching of Science of Finance at the University of Naples, in 1904 Nitti was elected deputy for the Radical Party in the College of Muro Lucano.

In 1911 he became Minister of Industry and Trade in Giolitti's government. Nitti would become later in June, 1919, at the end of the conflict, President of the Council, a position he held until June of the following year. Staunch anti-fascist, Nitti was forced in 1924 to move with his family to Zurich and the following year to Paris. In August 1943 he was arrested by the Gestapo and he regained freedom only in May 1945, after twenty months in jail. Elected to the Constituent Assembly in the Italian Democratic Group, he remained consistently true to his pro-European political project and his ideas on Southern Italy Question until the end of his life in February 1953. In November 1916, Francesco Saverio Nitti published *La guerra e la pace*<sup>6</sup> that is the speech he delivered on October 25 of the same year, marking his return to active politics after two years, pointed precisely to Muro Lucano voters. From his exchange of letters with the publisher Giuseppe Laterza who will publish his writings, Nitti full knowledge of the consequences of his words clearly emerged.

In a letter, in fact, sent to Laterza on September 30, 1916 he stated: «Questo sarà il libro più discusso sulla guerra tanto in Italia quanto fuori d'Italia»<sup>7</sup>. In addition to this discourse Nitti published, in the same volume, fourteen notes, the result of his reflections on the war and its conduct. It was the first work in which Nitti began to shape his European project.

<sup>1</sup> Cfr. G. Vetrutto, *Francesco Saverio Nitti: un profilo, con una piccola antologia di scritti*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2013; S. Berardi, *Francesco Saverio Nitti. Dall'Unione Sovietica agli Stati Uniti d'Europa*, Roma, Anicia, 2009; F. Barbagallo, *Francesco Saverio Nitti*, Torino, Utet, 1984.

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. F.S. Nitti, *La libertà*, in Id., *Scritti politici*, vol. XI, edited by G. De Rosa, Bari, Laterza, 1961, p. 243 ss.

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. V. Claps (edited by), *Fortunato, Nitti e il collegio di Muro Lucano (lettere inedite)*, Rionero in Vulture, Calice, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. R. Giglio, *L'invincibile penna: Edoardo Scarfoglio tra letteratura e giornalismo*, Napoli, Loffredo, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> Cfr. I. Magnani, *La riforma sociale nella formazione di Nitti economista*, in «Storia del pensiero economico», n. 1, 2009, pp. 22-44.

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. F.S. Nitti, *La guerra e la pace. Discorso pronunziato in Muro Lucano il 25 ottobre 1916*, Bari, Laterza, 1916. Cfr. also G. De Rosa, *Nitti e la pace*, Roma, Istituto grafico tiberino, 1961.

<sup>7</sup> F.S. Nitti, *Letter to G. Laterza*, September 30, 1916, in State Archive of Bari, Section Giuseppe Laterza, Envelope 14, A-Z, Year 1916, Correspondence 353-356.

If in fact this project found a clear development in the works following the first post war - and here I would like to mention as well as *L'Europa senza pace* (1921)<sup>8</sup>, *La decadenza dell'Europa* (1922)<sup>9</sup>, *La tragedia dell'Europa* (1924)<sup>10</sup> and, above all, *La pace* (1925)<sup>11</sup> - already with his essay of 1916, the Lucan politician stressed the need to establish closer ties between peoples not only in the economic field, but able to favour a political integration of the European states.

Moreover, one of Nitti thoughts leading scholars such as Francesco Barbagallo, pointed out that if until the outbreak of hostilities Nitti interest in the European political integration was almost absent, from the Great War on, he matured a sincere interest in the overcoming of the nineteenth-national dimension of the Europe of homelands, unfit to cope with the mass society growing needs<sup>12</sup>.

Alberto Monticone shared the same view, ready to recognize a change in Nitti policy guidelines caused by the conflict and the belief that the balance prior to 1914 would not have been able to provide Europe with future peace and prosperity<sup>13</sup>. Nitti European projects ended up very early to be of interest to the international public opinion: no coincidence that many of his works were translated not only into English and that the same Nitti, from November 1920 until February of 1923, had an interesting collaboration with the United Press: his articles, which obviously did not hide his European perspective, obtained such a large public approval in America, that in August 1921 his editorial agent Camillo Cianfarra informed him: «Ella è diventato, automaticamente, un redattore della United Press con lo stipendio di 150 dollari per settimana»<sup>14</sup>. But let us return to 1914.

Convinced neutralist at the beginning of hostilities, Nitti strongly supported the decision to enter the war on the side of the Entente countries. His initial support for the neutralist cause resided in the belief that Italy could exploit this position to recover the economic gap that separated it from the main European countries. And besides, Nitti shared Giolitti view, which identified in neutrality the best card to get the Austrian unredeemed lands, still missing to complete the national unity. Going back to those moments and taking care of the preface of *Eredità della guerra* (1948) by Enrico Flores, Nitti firmly stated: «Essere contrario alla guerra non è essere timidi. Vi sono uomini coraggiosi e anime eroiche che odiano la guerra e vi sono vanitosi e fatui che manifestano propositi bellicosi e patriottici e poi speculano sulla guerra e si sottraggono a tutti i pericoli di essa»<sup>15</sup>. In 1915, however, about a year after the outbreak of hostilities, his political realism had convinced him that this neutrality didn't bring about, even in territorial terms, any benefits to his country; on the contrary war would produce serious damage on its trade balance. In fact, he stated: «Ma quale speranza di mantenere la neutralità poteva esservi in un paese come il nostro che non ha ferro, non ha carbone, che non ha un naviglio mercantile che possa trasportare oltre la terza parte delle merci che sono indispensabili alla vita della nazione?»<sup>16</sup>.

Endowed with a positivist formation, Nitti was sincere admirer of Carlo Cattaneo and believed that people's economic welfare could be favored by profitable synergies between nations<sup>17</sup>. If it is true that, just until 1914, Nitti was a convinced unitarian and the idea of a federalist project was far from his scientific production, the outbreak of the war led him to a profound reflection harbinger of a new political strategy. The war represented, on the other hand, the symbol of spiritual involution of the peoples themselves, the event able to stop all forms of cooperation among nations.

Nitti however, had clear ideas about the causes of the conflict: «[...] sopra tutto l'osservazione della realtà mi ha sempre più rafforzato due convincimenti: che la guerra è stata voluta dalla Germania e che era impossibile all'Italia sottrarsi»<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Cfr. F.S. Nitti, *L'Europa senza pace*, Firenze, Bemporad, 1921.

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. F.S. Nitti, *La decadenza dell'Europa: le vie della ricostruzione*, Firenze, Bemporad, 1922.

<sup>10</sup> Cfr. F.S. Nitti, *La tragedia dell'Europa: che farà l'America?*, Torino, Gobetti, 1924.

<sup>11</sup> Cfr. F.S. Nitti, *La pace*, Torino, Gobetti, 1925. Cfr. also Id., *La disgregazione dell'Europa: saggio su alcune verità impopolari*, Roma, Faro, 1945.

<sup>12</sup> Cfr. F. Barbagallo, *Francesco Saverio Nitti*, cit., p. 347 ss.

<sup>13</sup> Cfr. A. Monticone, *Nitti e la grande guerra (1914-1918)*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1961, p. 328 ss.

<sup>14</sup> C. Cianfarra, *Letter to F.S. Nitti*, August 22, 1921, in Archive of the Einaudi's Foundation, Section Francesco Saverio Nitti, Correspondence *Cianfarra*.

<sup>15</sup> F.S. Nitti, *Preface* to E. Flores, *Eredità di guerra*, Roma, Edizioni di Politica, 1948, p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> F.S. Nitti, *La guerra e la pace*, cit., p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Cfr. C. Cattaneo, *Stati Uniti d'Italia*, edited by N. Bobbio, Torino, Chiantore, 1945.

<sup>18</sup> F.S. Nitti, *La guerra e la pace*, cit., p. 27.

The preparation of the German conflict originated, according with Nitti, since the formation of the German Empire, in the aftermath of 1870. Since that time, the Lucan politician said, its military activity had not known any limit. In fact, Nitti stressed: «L'esercito, che la costituzione germanica considera come appartenente all'Imperatore, è stato sempre guardato con venerazione dal popolo tedesco. La flotta da guerra è stata l'orgoglio nazionale»<sup>19</sup>. So, for Nitti, the bloody crisis of the summer 1914 was the direct result of the German willingness to dominate, aiming to get hegemony over all of Europe.

It would be simplistic to say that, for Nitti, only Germany had the direct responsibility for the outbreak of the conflict: in fact, after the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by Austria-Hungary, after the Italian expansion in Libya and especially after the two Balkan wars, Nitti foresaw the development of several enzymes in the whole of Europe that foreshadowed possible new clashes. Each country, therefore, had its responsibilities. Over the past 50 years, in fact, Nitti discerned that the development of wealth and culture had favored the formation or the resurgence of ancient national rivalries.

He bluntly stated: «Ogni paese ha oramai, sia pure in diversa misura, il suo nazionalismo, la tendenza cioè ad affermarsi di forze che sono in contrasto con altre forze interne od esterne»<sup>20</sup>. Europe, therefore, was standing on a very unstable balance. If until 1914 nationalist tendencies were directed outside the continent, to the conquest of new markets or the formation of colonial empires, these trends still existed within the continent, feeding a general unwell that will lead to the new conflict.

Nitti thought that the most serious aspect of the conflict was the absence of any guiding ideal. The Lucan statesman, who in 1917 became the minister of Finance under the Orlando cabinet, taking as an example the campaigns of Napoleon Bonaparte said: «Quando Napoleone portava la guerra in Europa, portava anche con se l'ideale della rivoluzione e dovunque tutto un mondo cadeva insieme alla feudalità, alle monarchie di diritto divino, al quietismo servile in cui era l'Europa intera»<sup>21</sup>. Conversely, recalling the brutalities committed by the Germans in Belgium, Nitti emphasized that the conduct of hostilities by Germany was centered on a free and cruel violence, without any guiding principle. In fact, to move the German action was, for him, a mere desire to dominate, and above all a clear intention to impose the German model, without complying with the requests coming from other countries.

At the end of the conflict, then, as stated by Danilo Veneruso, according with Nitti, it was necessary «proclamare apertamente e diffondere la parola d'ordine di un ordinamento continentale insieme federalistico e democratico, anche e soprattutto per evitare i pericoli del passato»<sup>22</sup>.

But already in 1916, when the victory of the Entente was still far away, even when the United States of America had not made their decision to enter the conflict, Nitti was ready to imagine a future in which the peoples of Europe would have been able to put their national self-interest aside, cause of the outbreak of hostilities, in order to seek the common matrix binding them: this matrix was to be found in the Christian civilization (the concept we will find in Benedetto Croce, a clear admirer<sup>23</sup>) understood as moral and spiritual unity, that same moral unity which, according with Nitti, would bring Germany to lose the war.

Those resistances, which in 1916 had prevented Germany to gain a quick victory would, in fact, Nitti fancied, prevail: «Così tutti i calcoli accurati e minuziosi, che assicuravano la vittoria alla Germania, tutto l'insieme di armi, di cannoni, di munizioni che doveano trionfare rapidamente, si fransero di fronte all'imprevisto, o per dir meglio, tutta la preparazione materiale si urtò contro forze morali, che non erano entrate nel calcolo germanico»<sup>24</sup>.

In his campaign speech, Nitti highlighted as the primary goal was to achieve a lasting peace: it was essential then to the defeat of the Central Powers. Only in this case a sincere cooperation between peoples could be based. An equilibrium in which the Member would have been able to put the common interest first, the welfare policy, aiming at perfecting political peoples spiritually first.

<sup>19</sup> Ivi, p. 10.

<sup>20</sup> Ivi, p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> Ivi, pp. 17-18.

<sup>22</sup> D. Veneruso, *L'Europa dopo la prima guerra mondiale nella riflessione di Francesco Saverio Nitti*, in F. Barbagallo (et al.), *Francesco Saverio Nitti meridionalismo e europeismo. Atti del Convegno di Potenza 27-28 settembre 1984*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1985, p. 161.

<sup>23</sup> Cfr. S. Palmieri, *Lettere di Francesco Saverio Nitti a Benedetto Croce (1888-1904)*, Napoli, Bibliopolis, 2000.

<sup>24</sup> F.S. Nitti, *La guerra e la pace*, cit., p. 25.

On the other hand, in the construction of the new Europe, in the aftermath of the conflict, Germany would occupy for Nitti, a major role. In fact, the Lucan politician thought that German reality, however, was an expression of great civilization. Peremptorily he argued: «[...] ma chi può concepire che la Germania studiosa, lavoratrice, fertile di attività e di energia non deva vivere e prosperare?»<sup>25</sup>.

Nitti was confident in order to speed up the conclusion of hostilities, that the role played by peace movements in most European nations was a warning against the continuation of the war. These movements were, for Nitti, capable of expressing the desire for peace of the peoples of Europe, to build a new order to eliminate imperialism, considered by the Lucan statesman the most dangerous tool within Member States relations. Italy had to play a leading role on the European chessboard in the aftermath of the end of the conflict<sup>26</sup>.

Indeed, it was necessary for the country to create a system of alliances, capable of safekeeping by the outbreak of new wars. While from one side, he considered lawful for Italy to obtain the territories necessary for its territorial unity, on the other hand he did not judge the Treaty of London positively, considered work of secret diplomacy and not the result of a previous parliamentary discussion. Still Nitti just remarked that Italy «non ebbe mai mire imperialiste; per la sua indole, per la sua mitezza, per il fatto stesso che essa non concepisce, come paese di vecchia civiltà, la ruvida violenza, l'Italia non sarà mai un pericolo in Europa»<sup>27</sup>.

Nitti hoped that, at the end of the conflict, the principle of self-determination would find implementation: the war was to ensure the independence of the peoples who were still under the yoke of foreign occupiers and stimulate their process of political emancipation. This premise would lead to the creation of a system of alliances between all European nations, a system where winners and losers of the conflict had to be placed on a plan of strict equality. This system became indispensable, argued the Lucan politician, «per garantirci l'avvenire»<sup>28</sup> and, therefore, to prevent those instances of hatred and resentment, that had triggered the conflict, could tragically return.

Nitti argued that, at the end of the conflict, every European country had to set a clear plan of industrial development: the growth was, in fact, for him, functional to well-being. Industrial development created jobs and ended up improving the conditions of the weaker layers of the population. In this perspective, therefore, Nitti pro-European political project moved from instances of economic integration while supranational integration had as primary purpose the acceleration of the growth process of the nations in an attempt to become accomplished modern democracies. In this perspective, the thought of Nitti deeply resented the influence of Carlo Cattaneo.

Already in 1843, in fact, the Milan patriot had said: «Se più vasto è il campo della produzione e dello smercio, più varia, più grande, più poderosa, più audace è l'industria. Se si dividesse l'Inghilterra in otto o dieci o più recinti doganali e si desse pure a ciascuno proporzionata parte del presente commercio britannico, tutta quella prepotenza industriale rimarrebbe nulla di meno triturrata ed esanimata. La somma delle nuove parti non equivarrebbe al tutto precedente»<sup>29</sup>. European economic integration was already present in this statement. Nitti perfectly internalized these lessons: he thought essential to move towards rapid forms of economic cooperation. Yet his political realism led him to emphasize, however, that at least in the short term, a possibly genuine commercial synergy between winners and losers was impossible. In fact, he pointed out that: «I rapporti tra paesi ora belligeranti non potranno essere ripresi rapidamente, per la immensità dei danni e delle morti che lascerà dietro di sé la immensità del rancore»<sup>30</sup>.

Therefore Nitti stressed the importance of establishing in the meantime close trade relations between the countries of the Entente in order to stimulate the circulation of goods and persons within the territory of their States. So in fact, he stated: «Le nazioni che fanno parte dell'Intesa devono preliminarmente risolvere il problema di togliere le barriere che chiudono l'accesso ai rispettivi mercati. Senza forse arrivare a stabilire una completa unione doganale, il miglior modo di risolvere il problema del dopo guerra è togliere le barriere attuali»<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Ivi, p. 34.

<sup>26</sup> Cfr. P. Alatri, *Nitti, D'Annunzio e la questione adriatica*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1976, p. 388 ss.

<sup>27</sup> F.S. Nitti, *La guerra e la pace*, cit., p. 39.

<sup>28</sup> Ivi, p. 40.

<sup>29</sup> L. Ambrosoli (edited by), *Carlo Cattaneo e il federalismo*, Roma, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1999, p. 317.

<sup>30</sup> F.S. Nitti, *La guerra e la pace*, cit., p. 47.

<sup>31</sup> Ivi, p. 48.

The American capital was of outstanding importance: Nitti deeply admired the United States and believed that the whole of Europe, at the end of the war, had to tighten close trade relations with the Americans. It was therefore necessary to facilitate the movement of American capital in the continent to provide it with, and I quote Nitti again, «la più larga accoglienza, perché diventerà una forza viva e una ragione di sviluppo»<sup>32</sup>. The work *La guerra e la pace*, previously mentioned, must be considered a real watershed in Nitti's thought. It isn't a discrepancy between Nitti before and after 1914, but an evolution or maturation in his political perspective. Cattaneo federalism, that Nitti studied even if not enthusiastically since his youth, became now the element able to complete his political plan. Cattaneo's statement concluding the work dedicated to insurrection in Milano in 1848, «Avremo pace vera quando avremo li Stati Uniti d'Europa»<sup>33</sup>, now was also for Nitti a point of reference in tracing the lines of the future geopolitical map of Europe. Even without stifling the individual identity of peoples, Nitti advocated as early as 1916, an overcoming of the ties of the national states, in order to build a Europe in which the principle of solidarity and mutual assistance will replace that of power abuse. Nitti's European integration process, however, was gradual: further successive stages were necessary to reach the perfect economic cooperation between all states and only at a later stage the political cooperation would have been possible.

On the other hand, Nitti European borders were very broad and went beyond those of the current European Union. As Enrico Serra clearly shown in his text *Nitti e la Russia*, the Lucan politician thought it was essential to consider Russia an integral part of the European project, linked to Europe by the Christian civilization, starting point of his plan<sup>34</sup>. Although contrary to the Bolshevik regime, Nitti recognized the positive aspects and progress brought to the community. For example, Nitti stated: «Nessun paese ha fatto tanti sforzi per la diffusione della istruzione: vi sono in Russia tanti popoli che non solo non avevano istruzione, ma non possedevano grammatica e nemmeno alfabeto. Il progresso compiuto in questo campo è quasi senza precedenti nella storia»<sup>35</sup>.

Even Turkey was regarded by Nitti as another important part of the European project and, especially after the victory of Mustafa Kemal against Greece in 1922, Nitti bluntly stated Turkey's right to return to Europe<sup>36</sup>. And in a letter addressed just to Mustafa Kemal on August 2, 1923 he stated: «io sono stato sempre il solo dei capi politici dell'Intesa e anche il primo che ha difeso sempre la causa dei turchi [...] Io ho sempre creduto e sostenuto nei miei libri che la Turchia sia accessibile a ogni forma di civiltà morale e credo i turchi fundamentalmente buoni e onesti. Non ritengo nemmeno che l'Islam sia contrario al progresso»<sup>37</sup>.

And in this perspective, therefore, although convinced of the Christian Europe array, he thought possible a peaceful coexistence with the Islamic religion, considered compatible in the building a supra-continental project. Nitti interpreted the peace treaties unfair, as if under a democratic peace was instead hidden a clear punitive purpose, especially by France in respect of Germany. Nitti, with a sincere optimism, believed that the European civil society would be able to start a new course aimed at genuine economic and political integration while the building of these United States of Europe was necessary to prevent new wars and maintain peace on the continent. Nitti, in fact, in *La tragedia dell'Europa*, wrote: «Ma gli uomini di pensiero, che hanno affrontata la impopolarità, gli uomini di sentimento, che hanno con loro sacrificio reagito all'errore, trovano ora un'eco immensa e crescente negli operai delle officine, nei lavoratori dei campi. È la grande massa che entra in movimento e che salverà la civiltà europea; è la grande massa anonima che comincia ad avere l'orrore della violenza e del sangue e che prepara la grande opera degli Stati Uniti d'Europa»<sup>38</sup>. Economic conditions in Europe in the aftermath of the conflict fueled the Federal-European emergency plan: the United States of Europe became so for Nitti, «una condizione di sviluppo e di vita. Fortunati coloro, che con la loro intelligenza e con la loro fede potranno concorrere a quest'opera! Ma quanti sforzi occorrono ancora per propagare le verità fondamentali e quali energie per resistere ai pregiudizi!»<sup>39</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> Ivi, p. 52.

<sup>33</sup> C. Cattaneo, *Dell'insurrezione di Milano nel 1848 e della successiva guerra*, Lugano, Tipografia della Svizzera italiana, 1849, p. 306.

<sup>34</sup> E. Serra, *Nitti e la Russia*, Bari, Dedalo, 1975, p. 173 ss.

<sup>35</sup> F.S. Nitti, *La disgregazione dell'Europa*, cit., p. 401.

<sup>36</sup> Cfr. Nitti, *La decadenza dell'Europa*, cit., p. 375.

<sup>37</sup> F.S. Nitti, *Letter to M. Kemal*, August 2, 1923, in Archive of the Einaudi's Foundation, Section Francesco Saverio Nitti, Correspondence *Kemal*.

<sup>38</sup> F.S. Nitti, *La tragedia dell'Europa*, cit., p. 693.

<sup>39</sup> F.S. Nitti, *La pace*, cit., pp. 214-215.