

ACADEMIC YEAR OPENING CEREMONY 2020-2021

Prof. Mario Monti, President of Bocconi University

Madam President of the European Commission, sehr geehrte Ursula,
Magnifico Rettore,
Members of Bocconi Faculty and Staff,
Dear Students, Dear Alumni,
Distinguished guests,

It is a great privilege for Bocconi University to have as our guest of honour today, and keynote speaker, the President of the European Commission, Her Excellency Dr Ursula von der Leyen.

As soon as the European Council appointed her in July 2019, I had the pleasure of having a few exchanges of views with President-designate von der Leyen even before her confirmation hearing at the European Parliament. I invited her to Bocconi, she accepted in principle, I added that it would be a special honour for us should her future speech at Bocconi be the first delivered at a University by the new Commission President. We are proud to note, Madam President, that your speech this morning is indeed your first University speech.

Here at Bocconi we consider Europe as an integral part of our DNA. Though proud of our Italian roots, we feel deeply European: we share and endorse the European values and consider the European dimension as a key driver for global competitiveness, which in higher education means mainly ability to attract the best talent: students, faculty, staff.

We thus welcome and encourage the Commission's effort in promoting much deeper cooperation between higher education institutions across the EU, for instance through the "European Universities" initiative, of which Bocconi is already part as a founding member of CIVICA - The European University of the Social Sciences.

The Rector in his speech will expand further on this in a while, highlighting Bocconi's achievements in the last 12 months.

I would like to congratulate Prof. Verona, confirmed in June for his third biennial mandate as Bocconi Rector. Under his guidance, and with the always constructive cooperation of Managing Director Riccardo Taranto, the Bocconi community has faced the challenges posed by the pandemic with determination and resilience.

Despite uncertainty, in the last year-and-a-half, we have also worked hard on our strategic planning process. I am happy to announce that the University Board, last Monday, approved the University's Vision 2030 and the Strategic Plan 2021-2025.

It is quite an ambitious plan: it is consistent with our accomplishments of the last twenty years and at the same time it is very innovative.

Its implementation will require the passionate engagement of all the members of our community and our stakeholders.

Allow me to thank wholeheartedly our Vice President, Andrea Sironi, for having wisely conducted the strategic planning process, with the continuous support of the Executive Committee, the Rector and the Managing Director.

I also would like to express my special gratitude to all the members of the working groups, who have devoted time and energy to the development of the strategic plan on top of their everyday tireless work to carry on during the pandemic.

Finally, I wish to thank Istituto Javotte Bocconi, in the person of its President Prof. Angelo Provasoli, for its continuous support to our University, in the name of the founders and particularly of the first woman President of Bocconi.

Female leadership, dear Ursula, is not new to Bocconi. And women are now leading European institutions.

Ursula von der Leyen took office on 1st December 2019. In February 2020 an unprecedented disruption occurred. Covid-19, in addition to its tragic human toll, was about to break down the European construction, to deepen the fracture between the EU and its citizens, their minds, their hearts.

Today, Signora Presidente, you can tell Bocconi students, all European students, next generations of Europeans that you saved their Europe, that you and the EU institutions saved Europe for them. Because you care about them, you are transforming disruption in construction. You are changing the way in which political choices are made in the EU and, by reflection, in Member States. Narrow-mindedness as regards time (short-termism) or space (nationalism) are no longer an option. Horizons must be widened, decisions must look at the long-term and need multilateral coordination.

These principles inspire the governance model of the EU. They might seem abstract. But it is by revamping them under your leadership that the EU has been able to respond to this unprecedented health and economic crisis in a way that has defied sceptics.

Your speech will, I am sure, take us through your vision and describe where we are in its implementation.

For the EU to work well there must be harmony, although respecting the different roles, between the source of democratic legitimacy (the European Parliament), the engine of integration (the Commission) and the acceptance of integration by Member States (the Council).

During the "annus horribilis" 2020 we have seen a high degree of harmony, at a time of very difficult choices. Particularly in the second semester, with Germany at the rotating presidency of the Council, the leadership provided by two likeminded women, Ursula von der Leyen and Angela Merkel, has played a decisive role. I wish to pay tribute to both of them for their outstanding vision and determination.

Dear Bocconi Students,
the speech by President von der Leyen, which will be delivered shortly, is essentially addressed to you. But, along the same line, I have a surprise for you. Last night I received a message, essentially for you, from the current President of the Council of the EU and Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Angela Merkel.

I will now read the Chancellor's message.

*"Mr President,
Rector,
Students and members of the University,
Ladies and gentlemen,*

The most exciting and perhaps most important part of starting a new academic year is meeting people face to face. This year is an exceptional one, however. Contact with others is for the most part restricted to the virtual sphere. The start of the new academic year will be overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

But as disconcerting as the effects of this crisis may be, they can do nothing to dampen the thirst for knowledge that you have displayed by choosing the internationally renowned Bocconi University.

"Society, Europe and Future" – that is the highly apt theme of this year's opening ceremony. It highlights the extent to which our future depends on cohesion and solidarity in our societies and across Europe in these trying times. Sooner or later, many of you will play a part in shaping this future in positions of great responsibility.

*Today, you are laying the foundations for this as you enter a new phase of your life. Studying at Bocconi University is something you can be very proud of. and I believe that in spite of all the restrictions triggered by the pandemic, you can be confident that traditional university life, with all the proximity that is so important to us as people, will return in due course.
I hope your studies get off to the very best start, and wish you every success! And of course: stay healthy!*

Angela Merkel"

Many thanks to the Chancellor for honouring Bocconi and our students through her kind message. And warm thanks to you, Madam President of the European Commission, dear Ursula, for the invaluable gift of your presence with us to day. And all our wishes of success in your historic mission for Europe.