

THE STATE OF THE UNION: 10-12 May 2018, Florence.

Opening day of The State of the Union: Three heads of state call for ‘Solidarity in Europe’

The European community descended on Florence on 10 May, to mark the opening day of The State of the Union at the European University Institute. Four heads of state are attending this year’s conference, three of whom called for solidarity during a day of dialogue and discussion about the future of Europe.

This year’s event started with a speech from Sergio Mattarella, President of the Italian Republic. Having been introduced by Renaud Dehousse, President of the European University Institute, President Mattarella described the challenges facing the European Union today.

“To even think of a ‘union’ in Europe today is a challenge,” President Mattarella said. “The wind of war is blowing,” he added, and Europe’s foundations are shaking as a result. “Any country thinking it can deal with the many challenges facing Europe on its own is delusional,” President Mattarella concluded, “or worse - deliberately misleading the public.”

President Mattarella was joined by Michael D. Higgins, President of Ireland. President Higgins stressed that Europe’s respect for culture and diversity should be at the heart of its public discourse. “Solidarity in Europe,” President Higgins said, “must be the foundation on which our Union’s action is built. It must be the star which guides our action at home and in the wider world.”

In the evening Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, President of the Portuguese Republic, joined Tony Barber, Europe Editor of the Financial Times, for an on-stage conversation. Addressing recent political divisions within the European Union, President de Sousa said that member states must “stick to our European values without breaking the Union”. Discussing transatlantic relations, President de Sousa said that now is “the moment for Europe to show how important it is.”

Discussions on topics as varied as social investment, defense and foreign policy, migration, climate change and monetary policy also took place on the first day of The State of the Union. Tomorrow, 11 May, proceedings move to Palazzo Vecchio - in the historic heart of Florence - where the likes of Jean-Claude Juncker, Mario Draghi, Antonio Tajani and Federica Mogherini will give their view on the importance of ‘Solidarity in Europe’.