

ITALY

## Mario Draghi prime example of EU technocratic leaders' arrogance

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POLITICS

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Mario Draghi, Prime Minister of Italy from 13 February 2021 to 22 October 2022, returned to the Italian Senate on 18 March, and, as usual, he did so with the attitude of someone who has come to teach a lesson, as if he were the sole repository of absolute

truth. In what capacity did he appear? As an advisor to the EU Commission, of course, but the tone and manner in which he addressed the senators once again revealed his professorial style, contemptuous, even mocking at times. His final comment to the parliamentarians present did not go unnoticed: "Listen, I see you're looking at your watches, so thank you very much for your attention. Thank you". A final remark that left a bitter taste in the mouth, as if the former prime minister wanted to emphasise the low esteem in which he holds democratic institutions, the same institutions that decided to turn their backs on him in 2022 and put an end to his time in government.

**Draghi spoke for two and a half hours**, briefing the parliamentary committees on a new report on European competitiveness, an undoubtedly important subject, but one that can't be approached with the arrogance of someone who in recent years has helped to create many of the problems he now claims to be ready to solve.

**Europe, Draghi said, is more alone than it thinks**, threatened by geopolitical instability and economic uncertainty. The former prime minister insisted on the need for internal growth, warning of the dangers of bilateral solutions and emphasising the need to develop the European market rather than maintain the current trade surplus with the rest of the world.

**Nothing unusual so far, except that Draghi seems to have forgotten his own past.** Along with other European technocrats, he promoted the austerity policies that have depressed growth and wages for years, contributing to the economic stagnation he now claims to be fighting. Where was this concern for growth when, at the time of the Greek crisis, Europe imposed draconian cuts in the name of budgetary rigour?

**It is a paradox that was not lost on the League senator Claudio Borghi**, who pointed out that Draghi is now talking about public investment and public debt, whereas in the past he denied the possibility of resorting to them. In the past Draghi said we couldn't go into debt, but now we can go into debt for weapons? "I jokingly said he was a bit like the [Italian comic character] Fonzie, he didn't have the guts to say he was wrong, he should have apologised, but it just wouldn't come out," Borghi said. The reference is to the ReArm Europe plan, a project backed by Draghi to strengthen the military capacity of the European Union by mobilising a whopping 800 billion euros, a colossal sum that, coincidentally, no longer seems to be a problem.

**And then there is the issue of energy**, where the former prime minister highlighted the dramatic rise in gas prices in Europe, especially in Italy, where the tax on electricity is among the highest on the continent. He spoke of the need to reduce the cost of energy

for businesses and families as if he were an outside observer, forgetting that when he was in government bills skyrocketed without his government finding any structural solutions. Draghi has always supported the European line on energy policies, including those that have led to even greater dependence on foreign supplies and unsustainable costs for the Italian production system. Today he is in the Senate talking about competitiveness, but without making the slightest reference to the political responsibility of those who, like him, have contributed to making Europe weaker and more vulnerable.

**But the most questionable aspect of Draghi's speech is his attitude.** It is not just the content, however contradictory some of it may be. It is the way he presents himself, his refusal to question himself, his inability to acknowledge past mistakes. It is the same Draghi who, during the pandemic, made statements such as 'those who don't get vaccinated will die', contributing to an exaggerated narrative that has divided the country. It is the same Draghi who considered Luigi Di Maio a statesman and supported his appointment as EU envoy to the Gulf, a choice that now seems questionable to say the least. It is the same Draghi who, as prime minister, grew impatient with those who dared to question him, and who now returns to appear before the Senate without any self-criticism, without the slightest admission of guilt.

**This hearing was not only an update on European politics,** but also a demonstration of Draghi's approach to politics. He is, of course, a man of the institutions, but also a man who finds it difficult to accept the dynamics of parliamentary democracy. It is no coincidence that when his majority began to crumble in 2022, he chose to leave without negotiating or seeking political solutions.

**It is no coincidence that today, three years later, he is back** with the same superior attitude, giving the impression that politics is just a nuisance, an obstacle in the way of great technocratic strategies. The problem is that politics, however imperfect, is the heart of democracy. And it is also the reason why Mario Draghi, despite his undoubted competence, did not manage to stay in government: because politics requires confrontation, the humility to admit mistakes and the ability to build consensus. Qualities that, once again, Draghi has demonstrated he does not possess.