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**OPENING SPEECH AT THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE  
2021 BALZAN PRIZES  
AT THE FONDAZIONE CORRIERE DELLA SERA**

Distinguished President of the Corriere della Sera Foundation, dear Professor Marchetti. First of all, we renew our thanks for your hospitality, which confirms the bond between the Balzan Foundation and yours.

I would also like to send my warmest thanks to the City of Milan, represented here today by Deputy Mayor Anna Scavuzzo, as an important testimonial of the endorsement that the City has bestowed on our Foundation for this occasion.

In a little while, the Chairman of the General Prize Committee, Professor Luciano Maiani, will announce the 2021 Balzan Prizewinners. Before giving the floor to him, I would like to express a few thoughts.

- 1) In 2021, Italy, Europe and all of humanity have again suffered from the havoc wreaked by the pandemic, but the world of science, through its applications and dedication, has shown that readiness to make great sacrifices and take personal risks has made it possible to save many lives. I convey my deepest admiration to all scientists. Last year, in his *Lectio Magistralis*, “Les pandémies dans l’histoire humaine, à la lumière du COVID-19,” Jules Hoffmann showed

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us how much progress humanity has made with the help of the medical sciences. In a few minutes, we will listen to Werner Seeger (2019 Balzan Prize), who will speak on the subject of the pathophysiology of respiration – from basic research to the bedside, in a talk entitled “The Great Importance of the ‘Small’ (Pulmonary) Circulation,” which surely recalls the skill and dedication shown by the world’s doctors who shared in the suffering of their patients.

- 2) However, we should also not forget the institutions that have known how to react by making difficult, but courageous decisions, thus showing that the common good must be defended when faced with sometimes threatening minorities that deny scientific evidence to their own detriment as well as that of their fellow human beings. In particular, I am referring to Europe, which I know best, in order to underline how collaboration between the worlds of science and the institutions – imperfect but nevertheless positively crucial – has played a great role.

On 1 July 2021, when the Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi won the International Feltrinelli Prize for Monetary Institutions, he explained how democracy and the common good are founded on the concepts of skill, expertise, and responsibility. Moreover, as a university professor who also knows institutions, Draghi has strengthened the collaboration between science and politics in Italy (and in Europe, too).

I would also like to recall two women who have made their mark in European institutional decisions in 2020 and 2021, and not only to stop the pandemic: Chancellor Angela Merkel, who has a degree in physics, and the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, who has a degree in

medicine. Hence, both of them have an educational background in the sciences. We owe a great deal to them if in this crisis Europe is showing institutional solidarity with Next Generation EU (NGEU) and its programmes of eco-sustainability and greater autonomy in the sciences and their final applications. This strategy is strongly supported by Emmanuel Macron, President of France and other heads of state or government. All of the investments in Next Generation EU will be rigorously controlled with respect to their aims, but if this is the case, Europe will strengthen its role as the greatest civil democracy, shared by 27 nations and nearly 500 million people.

3) One might think that none of this has anything to do with the Balzan Prize, but this is not true, because various Balzan Prizewinners have dealt with the world of institutions and politics in a noble, lofty sense. Among them are two women:

- **Rosalyn Higgins** (United Kingdom), 2007 Balzan Prize for International Law since 1945:

*For her outstanding contributions to the development of international law since the Second World War and her role as an academic, judge and Court President; for her clear, constructive as well as innovative and groundbreaking books, writings, articles and court decisions in defence of the rule of law and human rights; for her leading role in strengthening and enlarging modern international law.*

- **Bina Agarwal** (India) 2017 Balzan Prize for Gender Studies with the following motivation:

*For challenging established premises in economics and the social sciences by using an innovative gender perspective; for enhancing the visibility and empowerment of rural women in the Global South; for opening new intellectual and political pathways in key areas of gender and development.*

I need not add anything to such powerful, heartfelt motivations.

- 4) To conclude, in this past year of 2021, our Foundation turned 60, and during these years, it has awarded prizes to exceptional personalities for their highly innovative discoveries and research. Including 2021, 170 individuals have won the Balzan Prize – 81 in the humanities and 73 in the sciences – thus contributing not only to the advancement of knowledge but also of civilization. In Rome, in November, I hope we will be able to present a volume with a collection of the biographical profiles of these individuals, along with the motivations for which they were awarded the Balzan Prize. Thus, the Balzan Foundation not only contributed to “Humanity, Peace and Fraternity among Peoples” with the 11 special prizes thusly named, but also with all of its 181 prizes for the progress of science, civilization and humanity.
  
- 5) The considerable part played by the General Prize Committee in this process should also be recognized, as they are the ones who selected the prizewinners. Composed of scholars and scientists from various European countries, the Committee is a significant example of how any form of sectorialism can be overcome through breadth of knowledge, good judgement skills, and great abilities in discussion and debate – even in widely divergent disciplines. This comes about because all of the members are aware that no single individual possesses the key to universal science in space and time. Moreover, it also explains why committees composed of great scholars and scientists can also face difficult choices that require time to arrive at consensus that all share in with conviction.
  
- 6) Finally, part of the merit should also go to the Boards of the two International Balzan Prize Foundations, that is, the Fund in Zurich, here represented today by President Gisèle Girgis-Musy, whom I warmly welcome, and the Prize of Milan, of which I am President. The two foundations carry out complementary functions: the Fund by administering Eugenio Balzan’s considerable estate,

and the Prize by managing the expenses involved in the academic aspects of the Prizes.

- 7) I now give the floor to the Chairman of the General Prize Committee, Luciano Maiani, who will make the official announcement of the 2021 Balzan Prizewinners. Professor Maiani will then introduce the members of the Committee who will briefly illustrate the careers of the Prizewinners. I thank him for his important contribution to this year's awards.