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CREW: What will be the impact of Brexit on the European Union? What will be the impact on Britain, itself? Will Europe come together to form a policy to face the migration crisis? And what effect is the Trump presidency having on Europe? Join us today as Watson Faculty Fellow David Kertzer puts these questions and more to Romano Prodi, former prime minister of Italy, past president of the European Commission, and an adjunct professor of International and Public Affairs at the Watson Institute.

DAVID KERTZER: Well, there are no lack of topics to discuss, speaking with a two-time former prime minister of Italy and head of the European Commission, so between Europe and Europe's relations with the United States, and Italy, and the Italian political situation. But let's start with Europe. You'll be talking later today at the Watson Institute about Brexit and its impact on Europe, including the European Union. I'm wondering, are you concerned that other countries are tempted to follow the example of Britain and seriously consider leaving the EU?

ROMANO PRODI: No. I don't think it, you know, because for several reasons. First of all, UK-- in the UK thought there was an alternative, there is in alternative. It's the link with United States. There is no similar alternative in Poland or other countries, you know?

Secondly, you could also say that these countries depend heavily upon European resources for development. And they understand that it's not convenient to split. But there is some deeper reason.

You know, when we analyze people in all of that Visegrád countries or Poland or-- they will blame Europe. Or they will say, look, we don't like it here. But when the last question is, do you think opportune for your country to get out of Europe, the absolute majority, the almost the totality say, no.

And so there is complain. There are complaints. there is blame, so on. But when you go to the yes or no, it's a totally different situation from the British one.

DAVID KERTZER: Is the-- so, of course, there's not complete overlap of the eurozone and the European Union. But there, perhaps, is greater opposition or political groups that have been criticizing the adoption of the euro. Is this a major threat at the moment to countries actually considering

dropping the euro?

ROMANO PRODI: No one is considering dropping euro in this moment. You know, clearly, it was-- there was this risk during the Greek case, when-- especially on the German side. But in some of the European groups, there was the idea that it was time to put the country out of the currency in order not to create incident.

But after this problem was decided was solved with the alternative choice of, let's say working together in order to avoid the worst consequence of the financial collapse, everybody is convinced that there will be-- that split of the monetary union is not feasible for the-- at least for all the time you can conceive.

DAVID KERTZER: Mm-hm. What impact do you think Brexit will have on Britain, itself?

ROMANO PRODI: In the beginning, it was almost positive or indifferent. Now, it's becoming heavier and heavier every day. You know, it's because not-- nobody thinks that there will be a, let's say, trade war between the UK and Europe, you know? But all the choices in which it's preferred to be member of European Union, they will damage Britain, for example, headquarters, banking, branch specialized in euro currency, even if UK was not inside the euro. They are moving from the city, not in enormous amount, but enough to create some problem in terms of growth.

DAVID KERTZER: And what impact do you think Brexit's going to have on the rest of the European Union? Does it significantly damage the European Union?

ROMANO PRODI: Well, I am, as I told before, UK is a great country. It was one of the biggest European country even in terms of population, more than 60 million people. Fairly [? weighty, ?] industrially important. Military very important. They are living in the European Union.

And so the consequence are clearly-- and even more, you know. Quite a few countries in the world, quite a few people in the world, they will look, I think, at India, I think at many African countries, think Australia and New Zealand. They were looking at Europe with some sort of European, of British glasses. And this is a big, big loss. This is a big loss, you know?

But I don't think, as I told before, I don't think that will be repeated, you know.

DAVID KERTZER: Elsewhere. Well, one of the issues that's created tensions in Europe and the European Union, of course, is migration. And one thing that strikes me is that so much of the migration discussion seems so limited in time scope. We have a pressing problem. What are we going to

do today, tomorrow?

But isn't the-- and there are certain hot spots-- the Syrian situation. But more generally, if one thinks of migration, for example, from Africa, Africa demographically is expanding rapidly. Poverty there, although there are some bright spots, is still great. Shouldn't there be a longer-term set of policies dealing with migration from Africa in particular in Europe? And is anything being done about a longer-term policy that's going to make sense?

ROMANO PRODI: There must be. But to be very objective, I don't see an imminent collective decision on migration. You know, this is a horrible mistake on long term, because if you think that median age in Italy is now 47, and in sub-Saharan Africa it's between 17 and 18, and the population of sub-Saharan Africa will double in a couple of generations, yeah, you understand that an intervention is necessary.

There is no agreement now. But the German chancellor, she proposed a Marshall Plan. Then nothing has been done till now. But we must do it, because the growth of Africa is necessary to moderate the migration process. You not-- well, you can object that you need a century.

But look, migration stops not when a country become more wealthier, but when there are new hopes of development. You know, as it happened in Italy, you know, migration stopped not when we had the huge wealth and, let's say, shared high income, but when we started to move. And the idea in this moment would be an international cooperation for African develop in Europe, China, and US. But I don't see nothing similar on the horizon.

DAVID KERTZER: Well, one of the impacts of migration to Europe has been the rise of both populist and right-wing movements. We have the results of the recent German elections. And there are so many other examples. Do you see these movements as a real threat to Europe right now?

ROMANO PRODI: Well, you link migration and the populist. Yes, it's true. The first issue that is frightening Europeans is migration in this moment.

I don't see the German action so different from normal European action, because as Germany was exception in Italy, France, Spain, all the traditional political parties, they have decreased the votes. And new parties are in majority now. Germany was the only country in which you had still the strength of the traditional parties. So I have not been surprised.

But the problem concern all Europe. If we don't tackle together the problem of migration, the

anti-European tension will increase certainly. And, of course, you know, we need migrants.

The problem with that, our demography is terrible, except France. You have such a negative demography that-- but you must control them. You must run them, distribute the negative aspect of it among the different counties. And this is not politically possible in this moment.

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DAVID KERTZER: Well, speaking of populist movements and new political formations, we have Trump in the United States. And we know he's casting a large shadow beyond our borders, including Europe. I wonder if you could say something about what impact the Trump presidency is having on Europe.

ROMANO PRODI: Well, not easy because the big-- the characteristic that is felt in the political European environment is unpredictability. When we discuss in meetings or among analysts, the problem is, how can we predict an unpredictable leader, you know? And this make the consequence that we cannot trust any more United State by definition, as we did in the past, you know.

And probably, this will have the consequence of speeding up the idea of having a common defense policy. You know, it's when you have not anymore absolutely safe American umbrella, you have to build your umbrella. And this could be the moment, because Macron has put this as a priority. Not being any more UK inside Europe, France is the only country having the nuclear armament and the veto right in the Security Council.

So you have a-- it's convenient for France to go back to its former situation, which was a real balancing counterpart of Germany. And is also German interest in this uncertainty to give more attention to the army without being a European linked with the other European countries. So you will not arise the all the problems concern the German strength, the German defense, German army. So I do think that there is a wind of opportunity for that. So in the end of the story, we could conclude that Trump is-- maybe that he's-- will help the European unity.

DAVID KERTZER: That would be an ironic result of [INAUDIBLE].

ROMANO PRODI: [CHUCKLES]

DAVID KERTZER: Let's turn to Italy. I want to be sure we get to Italy. Italy has national elections, parliamentary elections scheduled sometime in the next few months. Haven't been held for almost five years

now. Yet the situation seems to be extremely unstable.

There has been attempts to reform the electoral law. You represent, and you're the L'Ulivo, or Olive Tree Movement. You've founded, represented an attempt to create a more transparent bipolar political system in Italy. But a lot of people are lamenting, moving away from that, increasing fractionalization and lack of governability. I wonder, is this how you see the situation?

ROMANO PRODI: In the present situation of political pluralists that say, you have not anymore the two traditional parties dominating Italy, the old Christian democratic [INAUDIBLE] don't exist anymore. The situation is similar to France and Spain. But in Italy, you have an electoral law that makes much more difficult to shape, to form a new-- a strong government, let's say, who have a almost proportional law.

And so in the present situation, with three or four groups equally strong, will not be easy to form a government. You will need alliance. In theory, impossible alliance because Five Star Democratic Party and Berlusconi group are incompatible each other.

But I don't think that there will be the day after the election some-- create some alliance. Uncertain now. Maybe unexpected after the election. Otherwise, there will be impossibility to have a government like it was for a long time in Spain. But [? literally, ?] this could have deeper consequence because the traditional difficulties of long-lasting governments.

DAVID KERTZER: The most recent polls that I've seen show a slight lead from the Five Star Movement, which is, of course, this new political anti-party, anti-politics movement with a not terribly clear program, drawing people from left to right. And the fact that they have, to date, been unwilling to form alliances with anyone means you have a situation where 30%, potentially, of the parliamentarians are not up for bidding. And one has to make an alliance among the others, which is, as you mentioned, going to be very difficult.

But one of the problems, one of the reasons that the Five Stars is the number one political grouping right now is that the Democratic Party that you've been closely associated with keeps splitting. And people keep trying to form their own little mini parties on the left. Is this some pathology of the left in Italy? Or is there a good explanation for it?

ROMANO PRODI: First of all, I don't think that Five Star Movement will be impossible to make alliance. They say it now to gain votes. But they have no doctrine. They have some left-wing and some right-wing

proposals.

So I do think that they are very, very free to move. And, well, they are not out of the game in shaping the government, you know.

DAVID KERTZER: But which-- I mean, can one, for example, imagine the Democratic Party forming an alliance with Cinque Stelle-- with Five Stars-- in forming a government together?

ROMANO PRODI: Well, in [? rational ?] terms, no. But I do expect everything, you know, in the sense that I repeat, if Five Stars, they are the first party, they would be asked to wake-- to shape a so-called, let's say, temporary government or experimental government. And I do think that in that moment, they can-- they will find alliance with everybody. Now, in this moment, probably more with the right-wing parties, but I cannot exclude anything, you know.

DAVID KERTZER: The-- when we talk about right-wing parties, the largest one, perhaps, is the Northern League, with new leadership in the last couple of years, and seems to have gotten a new lease on life. Are you concerned about the impact of the Northern League in an election and in parliament?

ROMANO PRODI: Yes. They are strong, equally strong than Berlusconi. The dilemma is will they go together or not to the elections? If they go together, clearly, they are stronger. But the Northern League must give up to a lot of, let's say, tough proposals.

So I'd say that the next term will diminish. If they stay alone, they are weaker, but they are more extremist. But certainly, they are now a strong player, because they are around 15%. And in the [? traditional ?] situation, 15% is, you know, is a lot.

DAVID KERTZER: Yeah. Well, even, I mean, beyond their 15%, it would seem that their anti-immigrant position that seemed to have attracted a lot of support has had an impact on the other parties, not just in the right, but even in the Democratic Party. And, for example, there have been attempts to allow citizenship for children born of non-Italians in Italy and who have lived all their life in Italy. But that now seems-- and which has been backed by the majority of the Democratic Party but doesn't seem to be able to get through. And even the Democratic Party, Renzi, the most-- the party leader, seems to be backing off a strong pro-immigrant kind of position. So do you see this larger influence of the Northern League beyond its own borders?

ROMANO PRODI: Certainly, yes, but not because of Northern League but because the anti-migration. This has become popular over all Europe. And this has been, you know, the instrument for the populist party and non-traditional parties to grow.

DAVID KERTZER: We have very little time left. Let me-- we talked about Trump in Europe. But let's talk, just for a final comment on Trump in Italy, how is Trump viewed in Italy? And how has it affected views of America?

ROMANO PRODI: America is a little more far away from the country. You know, it's a-- give lots of people, not only intellectuals, you know, but also common people, that they not anymore trust-- share, by definition, the American, [? this ?] [? surety ?] it was in the past. And this worries me because now, for example, a lot of people consider the American policy vis-a-vis Russia as heavily damaging Italy. And so there is an increasing idea that interests between Italy and US can diverge. But it was not the case before.

DAVID KERTZER: Well, I think we've reached the end of our time. But thanks very much for being with us here at Watson Institute.

ROMANO PRODI: No, thank you.

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