



**Closing speech by Fiorella Kostoris Padoa Schioppa  
for the 2024/2025 academic year of EMUNA Italia**

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There are many ways to present a summary of the EMUNA Italia 2024/2025 academic year, which is now about to end.

I could tell you about the very interesting EMUNA venues, the places of culture or worship that hosted us, the places that perhaps are known to some of us, but completely unknown to others who had never entered them. For example, the Great Mosque of Rome, the Jewish Temple of Youth on Tiber Island, the Chinese Buddhist Temple, the Soka Gakkai Buddhist Institute, the Waldensian Church, the Orthodox Church of San Teodoro al Palatino, the Dominican Church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, or this same University where we are now.

In addition, I could analyze with you, in terms of content, the 15 seminar days in which we touched upon various important topics, with their relation to religions and other forms of non-confessional belief - from law to economics, from philosophy to art, from science to the environment, from sociology to the psychology of radicalization, from education to bioethics, from professional ethics to geopolitics, from history to the interpretation of sacred texts. These topics are not only relevant for modern humanity, but they form the basis on which the different humanistic or confessional cultures sometimes (at least in theory) converge (for example, on the question of the environment, which is to be protected because it is secularly useful to social well-being or because it is an object of divine property in the unanimous perspective of the religions of the Book), and sometimes diverge profoundly. This happens, for example, in the economic field where, according to Max Weber, for some poverty is a value, while for others capitalist profit is the sign of divine grace and is a beneficial factor for the whole of society, as long as it is obtained in compliance with the laws. In the Jewish approach, even, as recalled by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, 2004, “the very act of market exchange is the supreme incarnation of the dignity of difference ... it transforms difference into a form of blessing ... the market is an arena in which both sides can win.”

These enormous differences, which EMUNA ITALIA has never wanted to ignore - and regrets that some speakers who were “more realistic than the king” sometimes wanted to ignore them, contract them or even verbally eliminate them - have been part of the great richness, in various aspects, of our dialogue, even more so since the heterogeneous points of view were presented by people of high competence and proven experience, real celebrities both in the field and in the reference creed, so that, of the more than 70 speakers present in our 15 seminar days, all, with a few isolated exceptions, were appreciated and recognized for their contribution both to the knowledge of the subject matter and to the diversity in their specific perspective. We often wished we had more time to spend with them and to better understand, among ourselves, the meaning of their presentations. Therefore, taking advantage of what many of you have suggested to us this year, in 2025/2026 we have planned for each EMUNA seminar day, particularly in the fields most foreign to Italian culture, such as economics and science, an additional student Laboratory of one or two hours in which there will be time for an in-depth study of these messages with the help of tutors. Because, although all the ongoing training for the participants in the seminar days (for the Founders included) went very well in this experimental year, we hope to improve it in the next one: our favorite motto, in fact, is *per aspera ad astra*!

I could conclude by telling you all this and nothing else and yet I would have the feeling of summarizing everything but not actually highlighting the main focus and success of this FIRST COURSE of EMUNA ITALIA, a bit like when sexual education is offered in schools by talking at length about the reproductive organs and the mechanical joining of bodies without revealing anything about the profound feelings

underneath, of what the great poet Umberto Saba so effectively described: "I know of no sweeter thing than love in youth, than two lovers in joyful intoxication, of whom one dies in the other."

Therefore, *si parva licet componere magnis*, I allow myself to add (always in prose, however!) to what is indicated above by way of objective conclusions, a final comment of mine, subjective and qualitative, after all very similar to that underlined by the 25 students who took turns on the stage of LUISS today to present their group projects. The target achieved by this FIRST COURSE of EMUNA ITALIA seems to be that of having created a new, rich and significant network of knowledge of the other, with which a relationship of mutual trust has been established, based on the awareness of our unity in diversity, cemented by a better ability to listen, by a deeper respect and mutual recognition, without losing anything in one's essential identity, indeed only strengthening it. And this, mind you, seems to have been the fruit of both our study in the 15 seminar stages, and of the research carried out by each of you, individually or collectively with 5 or 6 other companions, but perhaps even more so of the moments completely detached from study and research, at first glance distant from the objectives of EMUNA (at lunch or in the coffee breaks of the individual seminar days, in the telephone chats, in the zooms between you, in some sporadic collective walks, in the little time that we left you available in our 15 meetings).

The real value added, created by EMUNA ITALIA in its first academic year, was, therefore, in the general opinion, this: empathy and complicity, sympathy and trust between very different people who a year earlier not only did not know each other, but would never have been able to meet, if not in a context of training in intercultural and interreligious dialogue, such as the one offered by EMUNA. I am very proud of it and I am infinitely grateful to you. I believe in fact that, without the contribution of each of the components of this body of ours of about 50 people, almost all gathered here today for a final greeting, which is not a farewell but a see you soon, we would never have been able to achieve such an extraordinary result.

I would therefore like to thank all the stakeholders of EMUNA ITALIA.

1) First of all, the other 9 Founders (Prof. Massimo Egidi, Rabbi Joseph Levi, Jesuit Father Peter Dubovsky, Prof. Daniela Scialabba, Imam Yahya Pallavicini, Dr. Abdellah Redouane now permanently replaced by his agent Imam Nader Akkad, Pastor Luca Negro, Dr. Anna Conti and Prof. Maria Angela Falà, representing the two main components of Italian Buddhism), who deeply believed in this initiative and fought with me so that the idea of EMUNA ITALIA, born before COVID on the proposal of the European EMOUNAs (French, Belgian, Dutch), would be realized with an unparalleled acceleration, if one considers that the EMOUNA sisters from beyond the Alps had already chosen me as President in 2019, but that the first meeting I called among us Italian Founders was held just 18 months ago, in January 2024. And then we could not be certain that this association could have taken off, flying so high already starting from the fall of 2024, when 27 students of different faiths and cultures enrolled in the course, 15 locations, both secular and religious, declared themselves available to host us, 76 famous speakers agreed to speak in a complex and very rich program of 15 seminar days, a dozen Donors and Sponsors offered us the means sufficient to implement this ambitious program of ours, three illustrious female professor colleagues from LUISS generously offered to act as Jury of the collective works carried out by groups of our students. Therefore,

2) I am extremely grateful to the three members of the Jury, Professors Valentina Meliciani, Francesca Corrao and Kristina Stoeckl, who dedicated their time with great professionalism and passion to following and advising the participants in the collective works of EMUNA and had already previously

dealt with the recruitment of LUISS students, as they are now continuing to do for the promotion of the 2025/2026 academic year;

3) my heartfelt thanks naturally go to the Donors of EMUNA, in particular to Belgian Baroness Martine de Bassompierre-Jonet and to my friend Senator Franco De Benedetti, without whose long-term and wide-ranging vision and without whose broad and unconstrained contribution our adventure would have remained a mere utopia;

4) as well as to the Sponsors, who have generously covered all or part of the University fees of our participants coming from various religions (Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox Christians, Conservative-Orthodox or Progressive-Reformed Jews, Muslims, Buddhists of the Soka Gakkai or the Maitreya Foundation) or agnostics (coming mainly from the University world). In this context, I would especially like to thank the RUT Foundation, not so much because it contributed to the cost of enrollment of a large number of students, but above all because it is the only one to have financed people of different faiths (Jewish, Islamic, Catholic) and even non-believers;

5) last but not least, my greatest gratitude goes to the Students, without whose enthusiasm, trust and commitment we would never have been able to transform our tools, our means and our declared objectives into actual results. I would like to mention them individually because each one has given his or her essential contribution, but I do not have the time and I apologize if I limit myself to speaking only of some, distinguished by typology.

5.I) Among the Assistants, I would like to affectionately mention Antoine Guerini, a model student and model collaborator for a two-month period, followed by Erika Martino, equally competent, for another two-month period.

5.II) A special mention concerns those who came from far away and were never absent from even one of our 15 days, not missing even an hour of the EMUNA ITALIA seminars. Among these, the case of Claudio Bernardini is exemplary. He entered the classroom first and left last, as he arrived at dawn on the night train from distant Liguria and returned there that same night.

5.III) An equally special mention goes to those students from Rome who never missed even 1 day or 1 hour of the program: first of all Francesco Sangregorio, now sick with pneumonia, to whom our best wishes go, but also Serge, Federico D., Fabrizio I., Giovanni C., Antoine, but also Noemi Di Carlo, Davide Rocchi and Francesca Cristiano were very rarely absent. In this case, thanks are due, because it is clear that from their continuous presence we have drawn more opportunities for learning and teaching, for dialogue, for mutual empathy.

5.IV) However, I would also like to thank those students who, for understandable reasons, had to be absent more often from our meetings and I would like to illustrate the extreme case of David Dattilo because, despite having soon missed more than three of the seminar days due to work and therefore despite being certain that, by regulation, he would never have been able to obtain the LUISS-EMUNA certificate of attendance, which we have honorably delivered to you today, he demonstrated that he cared about us and not about our piece of paper, continuing to participate in our meetings whenever he managed to avoid his normal activities.

5.V) I really couldn't conclude these notes if I didn't mention three new institutions that we have decided to establish for the next academic year, thanks to the decisive contribution of students of the 2024/2025

year (sometimes working together with other stakeholders): the 5 TUTORS, chosen among the students for their assiduity and for the particular merit demonstrated in EMUNA ITALIA, but also for the ability to represent all the main faiths and genders present in it (Serife Demir, Marika Germini, Francesca Vulcano, Federico D'Agostino, Fabrizio Ioppolo), with the task of assisting the next student promotions both in class during the Laboratory hours, and outside of them in their group and individual work; the COORDINATOR of the ALUMNI ASSOCIATION, who comes into being here today with you, Massimo di Minno, not only because he was one of our most assiduous, balanced and mature students, but also because he seems to possess those organizational skills, which also the entrepreneurial role in his professional life entails. He will be essential to the communication of EMUNA ITALIA, in order to promote externally our central message of dialogue and mutual interreligious and intercultural recognition, while simultaneously bringing internally all the information on those who elsewhere aspire to the same results. Finally, student Giovanni Cannizzaro, who has never been absent even for an hour from the 15 seminar days, joins, with his scientific background as a graduate in physics and his Buddhist beliefs, the newly formed EDITORIAL COMMITTEE of EMUNA ITALIA. The committee is composed of, in addition to myself, three University colleagues, Professors Francesca Corrao, Daniela Scialabba and Kristina Stoeckl, to whom I am very grateful. It has the task of establishing the editorial rules to be applied to the individual writings, that is, our Working Papers and Briefs series, now increasingly numerous. I am pleased that, in this context, we will also collaborate with our ever-present student Serge Tseytlin, whom I thank very much and who will continue to publish the EMUNA papers on the LUISS website.

To all of you, therefore, go my gratitude and my best wishes for an excellent future, in which we hope to continue together, at least for a while, a journey that will deepen our mutual knowledge, respect and sympathy.