

Renzi Meets the Italian Community of NYC

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Despite his pressing calendar, Italy's PM Matteo Renzi found the time to address the Italian community at a presentation held at the Consulate General of Italy that followed a private meeting with New York City's mayor Bill DeBlasio. Introduced by Consul General Natalia Quintavalle, who was accompanied by the Governor of the State of New York, Andrew Cuomo, the premier touched several hot topics in a speech directed specifically to the community.

Italy's Prime Minister [Matteo Renzi](#) [2] has been in New York for a few days now. He has attended his first General Assembly at the United Nations where, after [Ban Ki-Moon](#) [3]'s and Obama's speeches, he has discussed burning international issues and national emergencies.

Despite his pressing calendar, he has found the time to address the Italian community at a presentation held at the Consulate General of Italy, that followed a private meeting with New York City's mayor [Bill de Blasio](#) [4].



Representing the Italian American community himself, De Blasio expressed his pride for the young PM, who embodies “a new kind of leadership that gives a lot of hope for the future of Italy.”

Introduced by Consul General [Natalia Quintavalle](#) [5], who was accompanied by the Governor of the State of New York, [Andrew Cuomo](#) [6], the premier touched several hot topics in a speech directed specifically to the community. The American dream, globalization, the future, opportunities, the pride of being Italian, the uniqueness of being Italian are just a few points presented in his motivational words.

“Let me speak directly to the community, the Italian people who are here tonight,” he stated after a brief intro, “I know that many of you live in this city, the most important city in the world, with the spirit of those who have made their dreams come true. It's simply amazing that New York has welcomed, through the years, decades to be exact, all sorts of dreams and has turned them into fascinating projects. According to old tales, our grandparents, our great grandparents, came here with a dream as they admired the shape of the Statue of Liberty from afar. Now we get here by plane but still we know how difficult it is to build a future here, with determination and courage. The Italian community in this country is rich with history and has done a lot for this city. We have learned a lot from NYC and at the same time we have given much to this city, we have helped it become what it is, the biggest city in the world. I am addressing you not as new Yorkers or residents of this global city but as Italian citizens or even people who love Italy and see it as home to their affections. I believe that Italy can and must do more. And that we must not look at the world as a menace or something dangerous.”

“If you've been following what's happening back in Italy you know that globalization is being perceived as a great and scary unknown. It's been said that in the past Italy was a medium country in a small world, that's why we were important. Now that the world has broken any sort of barriers and has become flat there is no more room for Italy. Let's defend ourselves, what are we afraid of? This perception cannot be more incorrect. Globalization is the greatest opportunity, and just a few, people like you, are aware of that.”

At this point Renzi introduced the concept of Made in Italy, a concept that is dear to the Italian institution here in the US as they are working hard at promoting all that Italy is and can offer.

“Just a few know that the expression Made in Italy is not applicable only to a dress, or a bottle of wine. Made in Italy represents a life style, a way of living and relating to everyday life. In a world that has 800 million of new consumers we have to stop thinking that globalization is a problem. Globalization is our greatest opportunity to move forward. The global world asks for beauty, for excellence and we can fulfill that request. Maybe in the past years we have not been able to fulfill it completely. We all have to work together in showing that we love our past and that we are proud and jealous of what we have accomplished. Being jealous of something or someone is beautiful, and let's be jealous of our future too. Let's look at it without thinking that Italy has already done everything it could.”

“In order to do this we have to change, I believe there is plenty of room for us, but first of all we have to work hard at it. The great lesson that this City teaches us is that if you want to stay afloat you have to run. Italy has to do the same. If you stand still nothing happens, if you move or even accelerate you stay afloat. My goal is to really bring some change, and I ask for your help. Even though you are not in Italy there's a lot you can do, and not limited to just voting. I'm not asking for your consent or your electoral support, I'm asking for a lot more, and that is to be citizens. Let's not stop believing that Italy's future is a great opportunity, let's be aware that we have problems and things don't work. But our country has an extraordinary strength. We have a high public debt, true but we also have businesses that keep growing despite politics.”

As he approached the end of his speech, Renzi was able to transform the negative connotation of a common Italian expression into something inspirational. Not an easy feat but definitely something that is worth thinking about.

“There is an expression that makes me think “Non facciamo all'Italiana” (Let's not act Italian). What



does it mean. At the airport your son runs away and cuts in front of the line so you tell him not to act Italian. Or when we don't ask for a receipt when we pay for something. Why? Cause we are used to thinking badly about ourselves. We think that acting Italian means being a bit sneaky. You know, in the whole world acting Italian means something else: it means that we have built the grandest works of art, it means that we have created systems that projected us into the future. It means that we are the custodians of endless and unparalleled beauty that needs to be let free."

"Our objective is to be protective of our past and of our future, and if in order to accomplish this we have to fight in Parliament, we will do it. If we have to challenge a strong opposition, we'll do so. I ask for your help. Be Italian, and that does not mean cut to the front of the line but it means to cherish the great beauty we are here to represent. If we all do this I believe we will go back to being proud of a country that has an extraordinary past and the great opportunity to go back to being what it was."

The PM's speech was followed by a statement by Governor Cuomo. This was the first visit of the Italian American politician to the Consulate and that made the day even more special. Cuomo really wanted to be present to speak to the community and show his support for the Italian premier.

"The state of New York has the second largest Italian population outside of Italy" he started, "We cherish Italian American culture here. I have the pleasure of being an Italian American governor, and I come from what I call a mixed marriage. My father's family was from Napoli, my mother's from Sicily, that's why I call it a mixed marriage. My father was governor from 1982 to 1994 and he worked really hard to strengthen the bonds with Italy and I want to start where he left off. There is a special connection between New York and Italy and I want to make it even stronger."

How many stories of this city involve Italian immigrants, our ancestors who came here (like Renzi mentioned) with a suitcase and a dream? And how many of these stories portray them unjustly for a reason or another? Governor Cuomo had something to say about that.

"The truth is that the Italian American community in this country has never been given its just due. The story of the Italian American people is not a fair story and it hasn't been communicated. The Italian American community is portrayed in movies and in books as a crude community. The truth is the exact opposite. The Italian community is the most sophisticated: think of Italian culture, Italian artists, Italian musicians. I want that message to radiate in this state and I want this country to know the truth of the Italian American people, because they deserve it."

"Secondly as the prime minister was pointing out; the world is shrinking on us. It's getting smaller and smaller every day and the distance between Italy and the United States has gotten smaller. Our ability to reach out across the ocean and help one another has gotten easier and more necessary than ever before. We can help each other immensely in terms of economic development, in terms of energy issues, public health issues. One country's issues are now global issues and our ability to do things together is more important than ever before. It would be my honor and my pleasure to build stronger relations with Italy during my tenure."

Lastly, the Governor decided to express his support for Renzi and his desire of collaborating with him in facing the challenges of our uncertain times.

"We are excited about the Prime Minister, everybody is. He's a young star, everybody sees it already and the reports are that he is forte and bravo, which is important. Now is a very tough time to be in government whether it's in Italy or in New York, the challenges are very real. The economy is bad everywhere, the challenges of terrorism we are dealing with in this country are very real, we have to be strong. In politics it's a tough choice because people resist change. Change is hard but it is necessary for the future, because if you do not change you do not grow. So it takes a strong leader to take a government and the people through these times and I believe you have that leader is this PM and it's going to be my intention to do as much as I can, in friendship, in association in helping each other and working together in both a cultural and an economic phase."



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- [6] <http://www.governor.ny.gov/>