

## Italian Excellence at Obama's "State dinner"

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"Patti chiari, amicizia lunga!" (Short reckonings make long friends!) With this proverbial Italian expression, President Barack Obama affirmed the profound diplomatic ties between the United States of America and Italy. The occasion was Obama's extremely elegant, and last, "State dinner." Prime minister Matteo Renzi and a delegation, representative of Italy's finest, attended the event.

"The last State dinner with Obama is, both for me and for Agnese, extremely emotional."

These were the words expressed by the President of the Council of Ministers, [Matteo Renzi](#). [2] during his meeting with the students of John Hopkins University in Washington. This represents one of the most important commitments the prime minister had during the course of his excursion to America. A luncheon with some representatives of Hillary Clinton campaign concluded his trip.

The last "State dinner" of President [Barack Obama](#) [3] met the media's expectations; for days their pre-dinner conjectures had been filling the newspapers, TV, and the Internet. 357 people were invited to a chic and refined atmosphere that illuminated the prominent personalities of the worlds of



art, Italian politics, and American politics. Guests were met with elegance, formality, and freedom from professional commitments.

"Don't worry about how we are dressed; they're only interested in the ladies' dresses," Obama joked. He greeted Renzi who was wearing an Armani tuxedo, an homage to the fashion guru that Renzi invited, as one of Italy's finest, to the dinner. However, the First Ladies were really the ones who stole the spotlight. [Michelle Obama](#) [4] was dressed in a gold and pink Versace gown, Agnese Landini in a silver gown by Scervino, and the paralympic champion Bebe Vio in Dior, an outfit that had already been a topic of discussion on social media and had been shown off in a selfie.

Among the finest in attendance during the illustrious evening was chef [Mario Batali](#) [5] - requested by Barack and Michelle Obama for his exceptional catering: sweet-potato agnolotti with butter and sage, pumpkin salad, and beef braciolo with a horseradish and turnip-green dressing. These plates paid homage to Italian dishes and were revisited thanks to the ingenuity of the Italian-American chef. He prepared the dinner with vegetables from the White House vegetable garden. The star [Gwen Stefani](#) [6] fired-up the guests with her rock performances.

A few days ago Renzi announced the names of the Italian representatives that were invited to the dinner. The guests included the fashion designer Giorgio Armani, the president of the National Anti-corruption Authority Raffaele Cantone, Oscar winners [Roberto Benigni](#) [7] and [Paolo Sorrentino](#) [8], the paralympic champion [Bebe Vio](#) [9], the director of CERN Fabiola Gianotti, the mayor of Lampedusa Giusi Nicolini, and the curator of the department of Architecture and Design of the MOMA [Paola Antonelli](#) [10].

At the gala the ex GP champion Mario Andretti, John Elkann and his wife Lavinia, the CEO of Estee Lauder Fabrizio Freda, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Paolo Gentiloni, and the Italian ambassador in Washington Armando Varricchio also participated. On the American side Vice President Joe Biden and Secretary of State John Kerry were present.

The strong political and diplomatic charge of the evening was reduced by a light hearted atmosphere that was rich in humor. "When I came in I was the young guy -- now he's the young guy. But from the first time we met, I could see that he represented the energy and the optimism, the vision and the values that can carry Italy, and Europe, forward." Obama said during his toast, remembering Renzi's adolescent beginnings on the television show 'Wheel of Fortune.' "Agnese recounted - and the President continued - how big his shirts and his sweaters were, an insult to Italian fashion, Giorgio Armani would be ashamed" and also, "Benigni promised to not jump on the tables."

Prime Minister Renzi also affectionately joked with Michelle Obama, referring to the First Lady's last public speech against Donald Trump's sexism and in support of Hillary Clinton by saying "Your speeches are better than your tomatoes!"

Despite the cheerful mood of the evening, the guests did not forget the reason for this important encounter, to enjoy and to solidify the profound diplomatic ties between the United States and its historic ally, Italy, and to give maximum visibility to the important political events that both nations will be confronting shortly: the presidential election in America and the December 4th constitutional

referendum, which is crucial for the future of Italy.

Obama is clearly one of its supporters: "Good morning, buongiorno, this marks the final official visit and the state dinner of my presidency. We saved the best for last." the President began before he presented the Italian Prime Minister. Matteo represents a new generation of leaders not only in Italy but in the EU and the world. I'm cheering for him, and I think he should stay in politics regardless of the outcome of the December 4th referendum." Referring then to the UE Barack Obama expressed "Now would be a good time, I believe, to refocus attention on growth and making investments. Because one of the reasons that we've been able to cut our deficits by two-thirds is not simply because we cut spending by two-thirds. We disciplined spending, but we also grew fast enough that more revenue came in. Matteo is right, Italy has been true to its word in Europe and met its obligations -- but my hope would be the debate broadens as Europe moves forward around how to grow more quickly, put more people back to work, see incomes rise, create a greater sense of momentum and optimism."

The President of the United States paid several homages to Italy: from the role of the resistance to that of the immigrants, from his love for culture to his love for food, fashion, wine, and Sofia Loren, there's a lot of reasons he considers himself an 'honorary Italian.' "Patti chiari, amicizia lunga" (Short reckonings make long friends!) with this traditional Italian saying, Barack Obama summarized the alliance between the two countries.

Renzi warmly reciprocated Obama's enthusiasm: "It's an incredible honor, it's an incredible gift, this opportunity on this solemn occasion to celebrate the relation between our two nations." "Think about our history," Renzi continues, "We can imagine five centuries ago when a young Italian called Amerigo Vespucci gave his name to America. And 70 years ago, so many young Americans sacrificed their lives to give freedom back to Italy. Thank you again to these people. Italy is ready to build with United States of America a great season of new opportunities, a future -- common future -- based on strengths, civil rights, education, culture, soft power -- the real great bond between the United States and Italy."

The Prime Minister then closed with a grand exclamation: "viva gli Stati Uniti, viva l'Italia, viva la libertà."

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