



"I Don't Recognize My Italy Anymore"

George De Stefano (June 02, 2008)



Viewing from abroad the growing anti-foreigner sentiment in Italy, an Italian woman appeals to President Napolitano



Recent media coverage of Italy has been overwhelmingly negative, focusing on the constellation of political, economic, and social crises plaguing the nation. These include the return to power of corrupt tycoon Silvio Berlusconi in alliance with the far right, rising inflation, Naples drowning in garbage, the depredations of organized crime and growing anti-immigrant sentiment that has led to violence against foreigners.

How does all this look to Italians living abroad?

One, a 34-year old woman from Puglia named Maria Vinci, wrote to President Giorgio Napolitano to decry the growing xenophobia and racism in her homeland. Vinci, who lives in Great Britain, where she works as a cancer researcher, said that she is "ashamed of the Italy portrayed these days on the front pages of national and international newspapers."

"Is it really possible that the strongest feeling among the [Italian] population is the fear of the stranger, the migrant, the immigrant?"

"Security certainly is a serious problem," she noted, "but I don't think that the right way to deal with it is to feed fear and intolerance...rather I think that a stronger political effort at social integration is the solution to the problem of immigration that in my opinion does not coincide, as the government wants to make us believe, with the problem of security."

Vinci goes on to note that she lives in England, a country with both many legal and undocumented immigrants. She describes going to Easter Mass in Oxford and marveling at how "there was the whole world represented in that little Catholic church."

"I was struck by and moved by the diversity of skin colors, attire, but at the same time the likeness and unanimity of all these people. I ask myself, when in Italy will it be possible to breathe this same atmosphere of integration that one by now finds in the rest of Europe?"

Vinci appealed to President Napolitano to oppose those inciting anti-immigrant bigotry and violence and to be a spokesman for a policy of social integration.

La Repubblica opened a forum at its web site for readers to comment on Vinci's letter. The last time I looked, there were more than 40 pages of responses. Many agreed with Vinci, adding that the Right was stoking the fires of racism and intolerance. Others claimed that the hospitality and generosity she recalled had never really characterized the way Italy receives foreigners. [2]

[2]

[To read Vinci's letter and the responses of Repubblica readers, click here](#) [2].



Much of the press coverage of the immigration issue has focused on Romanians and Rom, the latter also known as gypsies. In Italian media, the nationality of these immigrants is always mentioned when one is accused of a crime. In her letter Vinci wondered why there was a need to do this. "We are in EUROPE [capital letters hers] and I believe it is absurd to still read newspaper headlines like 'Italian girl raped by a Romanian.' I don't want to downplay at all the brutality of the crime, I only hope that justice takes its course independently of whoever committed it."

What, one wonders, do Romanians think of the negative coverage in Italian media? My friend Paul just returned from Romania, where he was visiting friends. He says Romanians are very upset about what they see as defamatory portrayals of themselves in Italian media. And in their view the worst part is that the coverage links them, the Romanians, to a people unloved by them and often persecuted throughout Europe, the Rom.

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