

Newark. A Meeting Between Italy and Portugal

Letizia Airos Soria (May 27, 2009)



The roundtable organized by the Consulate General of Portugal and the Consulate of Italy in Newark was an important occasion of dialogue for the two European countries that have been and still are important protagonists of the history and present of the capital of New Jersey. We interviewed the Italian Consul Andrea Barbaria

The Italian community in Newark is no longer in the shadow of New York. Up until a few months ago, the Italian Consulate of New Jersey's capital was recognized by the Italian government only as a Vice Consulate. Today the Italian Consulate of New Jersey is making a name for itself by planning interesting and original initiatives as a result its newfound autonomy. One of these noteworthy programs is a round table discussion organized by Consul Andrea Barbaria along with his Portuguese colleague, Francisco Carlos Duarte De Azevedo, as a part of a larger program of celebrations



honoring the European Union.

We asked the young Italian diplomat about this event as well as the day's other activities at the Consulate. Newark is an important and strategic part of the consular network within the United States, but it seems that only a few are familiar with its activities.

How did the idea of an Italian-Portuguese round table come about?

After the Consulate's inauguration ceremony we solidified our relationship with the Portuguese Consul General of Newark. We soon realized that we share the same point of view on many subjects because we frequently deal with similar issues and we both belong to the same European group. We met and came up with the idea to organize a joint event. We decided that the best thing would be to approach it from an economic-commercial point of view, one of financial investment, as it would be easier to attract speakers on this topic from local agencies. We then decided to have the event twenty-four hours before the celebration dedicated to the European Union.

Is this the first Italian-Portuguese collaboration?

Yes. The Portuguese Consul General told me that over the course of his tenure he had never thought of doing something like this with the Italian Vice Consul because the territorial jurisdiction would have created compatibility problems. He had to avoid misunderstandings and overlap from his Portuguese colleagues since we both depended on New York. He wanted to wait for the promotion.

We would like to give a snapshot of the current Italian community in Newark, a neighborhood with a large Portuguese presence....

Let's start with the Italian Consulate in Newark. We have about 16,000 people on the consular registry. This statistic includes Italians along with the many facets of the Italian- American community, most of whom are the third or fourth generation descendents of Italian immigrants.

Certainly in terms of the number of Italian Americans, New Jersey is very strong. With a population of 8,000,000 or so, nearly more than 1,500,000 are of Italian origin.

The Portuguese community is equally significant, but obviously less so from a historical point of view.

The last great wave of Italian immigration occurred in the '50s and '60s. The Portuguese, on the other hand, arrived in the '60s and especially in the '70s. I would say that this phenomena is directly related to the democratic transition in Portugal, decolonization, and their gradual quest for independence.

And now in Newark their presence is very much felt....

There are 70,000 who are registered with Portuguese Consulate General. In some ways it can be said that the Portuguese community has taken the place of the Italian community, in the sense that that the Italians who used to live in Newark have now moved to the more residential surrounding areas.

For the most part, the Portuguese live in the Ironbound neighborhood close to Penn Station. It was once inhabited by Italians who have since left the neighborhood, when it was still called "Old First Ward."

In recent years, Ironbound has seen an influx of Brazilians and other Latin Americans. Today it is characterized as a neighborhood with a strong, primarily Portuguese imprint along with various other influences.

So the two communities are connected in several ways, but the round table discussion focuses on business relations....

After deciding to devote part of the celebration to honor the European institution, we considered several possibilities. For example, we discussed investing in New Jersey and New Jersey investing in Italy and Portugal. We also discussed tourism a great deal....



There was a significant American presence....

Yes, representatives from local agencies at various levels, such as Jack Donnelly (Governor Corzine's Deputy Chief of Economic Growth), Steven Pryor (Deputy Mayor of Newark), and Philip Alagi (Essex County Executive). There were also representatives from various Italian institutions, along with their Portuguese counterparts, such as the Italy-America Chamber of Commerce, ENIT, ICE, etc.

They all hoped to highlight the significant Italian and Portuguese presence in New Jersey. Above all, the American speakers emphasized the anticipated incentives that will encourage investment, as well as the transportation system, the airport, the highways, the state's proximity to Manhattan, and its large university presence.

New Jersey is also a main center for technology....

Yes, especially for environmental technology. We also learned that the government wants to invest in these sectors here.

So it was an important discussion....

Yes, I would also like to say that last month sen. Alfredo Mantica, on behalf of Italy, signed an agreement in Lisbon to strengthen talks with Italy, and we expect to collaborate with the diplomatic and consular networks of both countries. What can we say? This panel discussion can be seen as a small example, a corollary to this intention, and a program designed to have a larger impact on a local level.

We would like to take this opportunity to discuss the Consulate's current activities. It's a very challenging time with several institutional events going on at once....

Yes, we are planning for the celebration during a busy time. We are working on the European elections for so-called "temporary voters," but we are also involved in the organizational structure for the referendum which is much more complicated.

With the Consulate's promotion, your responsibilities have increased along with its autonomy....

Yes, and from a financial point of view as well. But we remain connected to New York and our instructions come directly from the Embassy.

So you are planning the June 2 celebrations within this context?

Yes. I would also like to add that we are also monitoring the fundraising activities to benefit the victims of the earthquake in Abruzzi, which is an important and sensitive undertaking. The celebrations for the national festival here are different from those in New York; we would never even think of competing with the events there. It is, first and foremost, an official celebration that commemorates the birth of the Italian Republic. Our intention is to increase participation as much as possible, especially within the Italian-American community which perhaps has not yet had an opportunity to connect with the Italian Consulate in Newark, and to clearly demonstrate the Consulate's presence in the area.

It's the first national holiday since the Consulate in Newark was "promoted."

It has been a long process and a particularly difficult one that has finally led to the Consulate's promotion. It will be our first June 2nd holiday as the autonomous Consulate of Newark. Another message that we want to share, along with the institution's message, is the rediscovery of the Italian community's history in Newark. Although the progressive movement of Italians began here, their historically significant presence sometimes seems hidden. On June 2 a series of photographs will be on display which will remind us how important our presence has been here. Sandra S. Lee collected these images for the book *Italian Americans of Newark, Belleville* and in October they will be on display at the Museum of Art, Casa Colombo. We hope that dipping into the past also means opening up to the future.



italy-and-portugal

Links

[1] <http://newsite.ility.org/files/9439downtown-newark1243452853jpg>