



## Giorgio Napolitano's Complete Immersion in New York

L. A. (April 04, 2011)

We briefly discuss the highlights of the President of the Italian Republic's visit to New York City. It was a trip that strengthened Italy's solid ties to the United States and the Italian and Italian-American communities living in New York City

President [Giorgio Napolitano](#) [1]'s trip to New York was short but intense. The political atmosphere was (and still is) is heated in Italy as it is all over the world, especially with the situation in Libya, immigration, and the nuclear disaster in Japan. In our own parliament where current events mostly relate to the trials involving [Premier Berlusconi](#) [2] and justice reform, the climate is no better.

Giorgio Napolitano's visit, as always, was insightful and significant in scope not only for Americans, but also for those Italians who live here as well as those who observe him from Italy.

### [ST. REGIS](#) [3] - MEETING THE COMMUNITY: 150 PEOPLE FOR 150 YEARS

He began his visit on a cold but sunny early spring Sunday in the beautiful dining room at the St. Regis. The occasion was to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Italy's unification with the Italian community.

One hundred and fifty people from institutions and organizations gathered to celebrate 150 years. Maria Bartiromo of [CNBC News](#) [4] acted as emcee for the event. Attendees included former Governor Mario Cuomo and his wife Matilda, [Ambassador Giulio Terzi di Sant'Agata](#) [5], the Apostolic Nuncio to the UN Francis Chullikat, [Consul General Francesco Talò](#) [6], Honorable Amato Berardi, Archdiocese of Brooklyn Bishop Nicholas Di Marzio, New York City Public Advocate Bill De Blasio, Congressman William Pascrell and many others. The luncheon was organized and sponsored by the Italy-America Chamber of Commerce and MSC, Mediterranean Shipping Company.

Following Ambassador Terzi's presentation which recalled the important victory of reintroducing the Italian language in American school curricula, President Napolitano addressed the audience.

Napolitano referred to President Obama's proclamation on March 17 which commemorates the unification of Italy as he began a hard and difficult discussion, but one based on optimism. "Today's world is marked by opportunities, challenges, and contradictions. The coming years will not be easy for anyone, especially for Italy," said President Napolitano reiterating the spirit of Italy's unification.



"It gives me great pleasure to tell you that in recent days, the celebration of our 150th anniversary has brought about the emergence of a renewed national spirit through the passionate and enthusiastic participation in events that have taken place in all regions of Italy. This new spirit of pride and confidence that I mentioned, this is the renewed determination to strengthen our unity and national cohesion: these are the conditions to overcome the difficulties that are ahead of us. Yes, 'we shall overcome.'"

Napolitano also had moving words for Geraldine Ferraro who recently passed away: "As I arrived in New York for a visit that would serve to bring Italians in America together to celebrate the 150th anniversary of national unity, I learned with great sadness about the death of Geraldine Ferraro, a great American and Italian-American. A campaigner for equal rights, in 1984 Geraldine Ferraro became the first woman candidate in history to run for vice president of the United States. Her example has inspired millions of women in America and all over the world. She has left an indelible mark and an enduring political legacy. Geraldine Ferraro will remain in the hearts of Americans and Italian-Americans."

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## **[INDUSTRIA](#) [8]: MEETING ITALIAN ART AND CULTURE IN NEW YORK**

On the same day President Napolitano met with the Italian artistic and intellectual community in New York at Fabrizio Ferri's Industria Superstudio. Ferri, along with a radiant Isabella Rossellini, greeted with him sincere enthusiasm and excitement.

On the 20th anniversary of Industria's foundation and 150th anniversary of Italy's unification, Ferri mounted an exhibit with an impressive number of contemporary Italian artists. Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, Sandro Chia, Carla Accardi, Lucio Pozzi, and Enrico Castellani were among the artists whose work was on display.

Speaking of art, Napolitano recalled with pride that almost two centuries ago Lorenzo Da Ponte introduced our music and Arturo Toscanini to the world.

He concluded by quoting John F. Kennedy in 1961 on the centennial of Italy's unification about the contribution that millions of Italians made to the progress of the United States.

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Courtesy Quirinale.it

## **NAPOLITANO: "MORAL LEADERSHIP" AT THE UN**

On Monday, President Napolitano enthralled the [UN General Assembly](#) [9] after being welcomed as a great and undisputed statesman amid rounds of applause. Before giving Napolitano the floor, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon presented the head of state as "the embodiment of postwar Italian history," who has always played "a decisive role in moral leadership."

The President of the Republic's speech was firm and clear. "Globalized problems require globalized solutions," said Napolitano to the General Assembly of the United Nations, defending and supporting the process of global integration to reduce worldwide poverty and suffering.

He took a strong stance on Libya, condemning Gaddafi's regime and his repression of the civilian population while defending the right to intervene internationally.

"We Italians and Europeans," continued Napolitano, "identify our future with that of the Mediterranean....We could not stand idly by; we intervened even though we do not underestimate



the human costs and risks in any way.”

He also emphasized the legal protection of human rights as central to the UN's role. “Human rights have gradually become a cornerstone in international relations, to the point where a massive violation renders a regime illegitimate and puts it outside the community of nations,” as demonstrated by the 1973 resolution against Libya.

In confirming his confidence in and support for the UN, Napolitano also expressed his hope that there would be a consensus at the Glass House for the full abolition of the death penalty and the elimination of all forms violence against women, particularly female genital mutilation.

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## **ELLIS ISLAND**

Napolitano's trip included a visit to a quintessential New York sight – Ellis Island – on another very cold and but very sunny early spring day.

As an Italian-American publication, we would have liked to report more direct statements from Napolitano than those we were able to cull, along with other media outlets, at the museum's exit. Unfortunately we were not even able to follow, photograph, or film the President of the Republic during his historic visit to the museum that tells so many of our readers' family stories.

Given the opportunity to follow the President, we are sure that we would have collected images and stories that reflected his powerful emotions and thoughtful impressions.

Moreover, we wish to point out that the President was not accompanied by any Italian-American representatives or scholars, such as those from the Calandra Institute whose absence was apparent.

Several statements in recent days had raised hopes for the President's greater openness to the press in New York. In fact, Napolitano had repeatedly recalled the four million Italians who passed through Ellis Island and spoke of the current migration crisis by stating that “the situation in Lampedusa is untenable.”

“Over the past 150 years there have been many periods of Italian emigration,” he quickly told the press. “I would say that it has been one of the formative experiences in our nation's history, and we are a nation that has lived in part outside of our own country, even after Italy's unification. I believe that this massive planting of Italian talent and work force abroad has given enormous fruit not only to the United States but to Italy itself.”

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## **NEW YORK UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW**

It was a very enjoyable evening, one in which the President was interviewed by JHH Weiler, Director of the Jean Monnet Center for International and Regional Economic Law and Justice at [New York University's School of Law](#) [10] in Washington Square.

The event was entitled "The State of the (European) Union" but the discussion was not limited to political and economic themes. The President answered questions of a personal nature about his childhood in Naples, the war, music, and his love of poetry and soccer.

On the bombing in Naples during World War II, he said that "fear made everyone equal" and on his relationship with his father, he said that initially his father did not approve of his political choices. Napolitano even revealed some personal preferences. "On a desert island, I would take Beethoven, Mozart, and Bartok," he said, and his favorite dish: "Spaghetti." Prison Notebooks by Antonio Gramsci is Napolitano's favorite book. This book represents a link between politics and culture, his life's work. "Today, politics is increasingly more detached from culture," said the President. In this response we find the synthesis of Napolitano's rigorous and attentive contribution over the course of his entire political life to date.

Among the responses Napolitano gave the brilliant yet persistent Weiler in reference to the European Union, we refer to one in which he was asked if he was pessimistic or optimistic about the future of the EU.

"In my position I cannot afford to be pessimistic," repeated Napolitano. He confessed, however, that he was "impatient" to see a fast-moving Europe, "but then it's only been 60 years since we changed centuries of history."

As for the continuous landing of immigrants on Lampedusa, he said the following: "Lampedusa borders Italy but it also borders Europe. We need a common policy among the 27 countries within the EU, not 27 national policies." And in terms of the intervention in Libya, he defended the choices of the UN's Security Council and supported President Barack Obama's speech from the night before.

His response to anti-American sentiment in Italy was sharp. "Italians have never been convincing anti-Americans; it's not the same as it is for some other European countries, those with a superiority complex," said Napolitano.

He then recalled the years during the Cold War and the difficulties of that period to close the discussion by saying, "We Italians have so much of our blood in America."

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## **VISIT TO NYU'S CASA ITALIANA ZERILLI-MARIMÒ**



At the end of the interview at the [School of Law](#) [10], Napolitano received New York University's medal of honor. Beside him was Baronessa Mariuccia Zerilli-Marimò, founder and chair of NYU's [Casa Italiana](#) [11].

Before arriving at NYU's historic law school, Giorgio Napolitano briefly visited Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò.

We were among those present, including professors and PhD students as well as several board members who looked forward to Napolitano's visit with great excitement and interest. It was an important event for this cultural institution that celebrates its twentieth anniversary this year.

Napolitano was greeted by Casa's Director [Stefano Albertini](#) [12], and founder and chair Baronessa Mariuccia Zerilli-Marimò. Attendees included the head of the Italian Studies department Professor [Virginia Cox](#) [13], members of Casa Italiana's advisory board, as well as faculty members and graduate students.

Baronessa Zerilli-Marimò reminded everyone about Casa's 20-year history filled with hard work and success, while Professor Albertini explained how students are immersed in the study of Italian literature, history, and art history that covers every historical period. Baronessa Zerilli-Marimò bestowed Casa Italiana's medal of honor on the President to recognize his commitment to supporting the arts, science, and culture.

President Napolitano spoke about the beauty of the history of the Italian unification. "From the unification we must gather a reason to trust each other so that we may carry on the work that awaits us in further consolidating our national unity to allow Italian democracy and society to move forward." This was the first time an Italian president visited 24 West 12th Street.

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