

Solving Italy's Immigration Crisis

Europe must join forces to govern immigration—supporting development in impacted African countries and integration in the most dynamic economies—because one country alone cannot end this problem, writes Attilio Moro.

By Attilio Moro
in Brussels

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Look at Via Merulana, in the center of Rome, between the two basilicas of Santa Maria Maggiore and San Giovanni. On the street and the surrounding area, up to Stazione Termini (Rome's central train station), groups of young Africans sell various trinkets. Others lay on the sidewalk, half asleep.

One in three stores in the area are run by Bangladeshis. They sell to tourists small reproductions of the Colosseum, statues of Madonnas, religious calendars, and big pictures of the pope.

Bangladeshis, of course, are Muslim. Some of them are just employees. Some others have even taken this business over from Romans.

On one side of the street is Chinatown.

On the other, the posh neighborhood of Colle Oppio, overlooking the Colosseum.

The Bangladeshi and Chinese are established immigrants in this area. Africans are not. Most of them have just arrived. So newly arrived African immigrants and the Roman bourgeoisie live side by side—the former on the street, the latter in their villas.

Of course, the bourgeoisie of Colle Oppio are among the staunchest supporters of the hard line on immigration of the new Luigi Di Maio-Matteo Salvini government. But so are the inhabitants of the most deprived neighborhoods of Rome, where immigrants tend to concentrate, resulting in a sordid fight among poor.

This picture is typical in most Italian cities. Most of the young Africans here have arrived recently, rescued at sea by the marines of "Operazione Sofia," or Operation Sophia, an Italian naval mission on the Mediterranean Sea, sponsored and paid for by the European Union.

Sophia was intended to destroy the smugglers' vessels and rescue migrants in distress. In three years since it was launched, Sophia has destroyed 500 hundred small boats, which were meant to be lost any way by smugglers, who typically

charge migrants 2,000-3,000 euros (\$2,320-\$3,480) just to take them to the nearest Sophia sea cruiser. Sophia also has left hundreds of thousands of migrants in Italian ports.

The Italian government at the time of the Sophia negotiations in 2015 agreed that the immigrants would be accepted exclusively in Italian processing centers (hotspots), considered to be the nearest from the Libyan coast, as established by maritime international law. Although for most vessels coming from Libya, the nearest ports are in Malta. Or sometimes in Spain.

The Result of Fiscal Irresponsibility

But why did the former government welcome all of them to the Italian ports of Pozzallo, Catania or Lampedusa? The answer is simple: Italy is the most indebted EU country after Greece, and has openly and persistently violated the Maastricht criteria—the rules that determine whether a country is ready to adopt the euro as its national currency—with a public debt at more than 130 percent of the GDP. (The limit, in order to remain in the euro, should be 60 percent). This means that Italy needs “understanding” from its European partners in order to keep running a high deficit and remain in the eurozone.

From their side, the European partners are happy to condone illegal fiscal excesses on the condition that Italy keeps migrants from Libya within Italian borders. The agreement is similar to that between the EU and Turkey. For keeping migrants from Syria, Ankara is rewarded by the EU with 6 billion euros per year, or \$6.9 billion. But while Turkey keeps them in refugee camps, Italy leaves them free, hoping that most will make their way to their final destination: Germany or France. But since both countries closed their borders, they remain stuck in Italy.

Instead of cooperating, European countries fight among themselves over immigration. In general, the EU still considers the mass immigration from Africa an Italian problem. Timid relocation schemes from Italy to other European countries have totally failed.

Germany and France now are only interested in keeping new immigrants out of the country. As a result, Italy is swelling with migrants and refugees, in an economy which has experienced little, if any, growth, reducing chances of decent integration to zero.

Needless to say, the failure of the European immigration policy has been a powerful boost for the so-called “populist” parties, who accuse former Italian governments of selling out political autonomy to Germany and the EU “elites” and for being responsible for this colossal failure, while blaming the traditional

left for the current state.

The Future of the European Left

For the Italian (and most of the European) left, the question is: How do they react to this loss of political and cultural ground? How do they deal with such a complex (and epochal) problem? At stake is the destiny of the Italian and European left.

After years of passive orthodoxy, some people of the Italian left (among them Nicola Zingaretti, the probable next leader of the Democratic Party, the bulk of which is made up by former communists) are now trying a new, less ideological and more realistic approach. Pushing the issue of immigration onto the European agenda and making clear that no one, especially Italy, can cope with this problem alone. Not even if the EU shows some leniency for Italian fiscal profligacy.

The time of instrumental compromises over immigration is over. No more dubious deals can be made based on money. Europe should join forces to govern immigration, intervening to wind down African and Middle Eastern wars that create refugees and support development in impacted African countries, while offering real chances of integration in the most dynamic economies.

This will not happen in Rome, which is dealing with one of the worst crises of its (recent) history.

The solution is just common sense. But letting common sense prevail is difficult.

Attilio Moro is a veteran Italian journalist who was a correspondent for the daily *Il Giorno* from New York and worked earlier in both radio (Italia Radio) and TV. He has travelled extensively, covering the first Iraq war, the first elections in Cambodia and South Africa, and has reported from Pakistan, Lebanon, Jordan and several Latin American countries, including Cuba, Ecuador and Argentina. Presently, he is a correspondent on European affairs based in Brussels.

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On the Brink with Russia in Syria Again,

5 Years Later

It's deja-vu all over again in Syria, with the U.S. on the verge of a confrontation with Russia as Donald Trump faces his biggest decision yet as president, comments Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Special to Consortium News



The New York Times, on September 11, 2013, accommodated Russian President Vladimir V. Putin's desire "to speak directly to the American people and their political leaders" about "recent events surrounding Syria."

Putin's op-ed in the *Times* appeared under the title: "A Plea for Caution From Russia." In it, he warned that a military "strike by the United States against Syria will result in more innocent victims and escalation, potentially spreading the conflict far beyond Syria's borders ... and unleash a new wave of terrorism. ... It could throw the entire system of international law and order out of balance."

Three weeks before Putin's piece, on August 21, there had been a chemical attack in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad was immediately blamed. There soon emerged, however, ample evidence that the incident was a provocation to bring direct U.S. military involvement against Assad, lest Syrian government forces retain their momentum and defeat the jihadist rebels.

In a Memorandum for President Barack Obama five days before Putin's article, on September 6, the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPs) had warned President Barack Obama of the likelihood that the incident in Ghouta was a false-flag attack.

Despite his concern of a U.S. attack, Putin's main message in his op-ed was positive, talking of a growing mutual trust:

"A new opportunity to avoid military action has emerged in the past few days. The United States, Russia and all members of the international community must take advantage of the Syrian government's willingness to place its chemical arsenal under international control for subsequent destruction. Judging by the statements of President Obama, the United States sees this as an alternative to military action. [Syria's chemical weapons were in fact destroyed under UN supervision the following year.]

"I welcome the president's interest in continuing the dialogue with Russia on Syria. We must work together to keep this hope alive ... and steer the discussion back toward negotiations. If we can avoid force against Syria, this will improve the atmosphere in international affairs and strengthen mutual trust ... and open the door to cooperation on other critical issues."

Obama Refuses to Strike

In a lengthy interview with journalist Jeffrey Goldberg published in *The Atlantic* much later, in March 2016, Obama showed considerable pride in having refused to act according to what he called the "Washington playbook."

He added a telling vignette that escaped appropriate attention in Establishment media. Obama confided to Goldberg that, during the crucial last week of August 2013, National Intelligence Director James Clapper paid the President an unannounced visit to caution him that the allegation that Assad was responsible for the chemical attack in Ghouta was "not a slam dunk."

Clapper's reference was to the very words used by former CIA Director George Tenet when he characterized, falsely, the nature of the evidence on WMD in Iraq while briefing President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney in December 2002. Additional evidence that Ghouta was a false flag came in December 2016 parliamentary testimony in Turkey.

In early September 2013, around the time of Putin's op-ed, Obama resisted the pressure of virtually all his advisers to launch cruise missiles on Syria and accepted the Russian-brokered deal for Syria give up its chemical weapons. Obama follow public opinion but had to endure public outrage from those lusting for the U.S. to get involved militarily. From neoconservatives, in particular, there was hell to pay.

Atop the CNN building in Washington, DC, on the evening of September 9, two days before Putin's piece, I had a fortuitous up-close-and-personal opportunity to watch the bitterness and disdain with which Paul Wolfowitz and Joe Lieberman heaped abuse on Obama for being too "cowardly" to attack.

Five Years Later

In his appeal for cooperation with the U.S., Putin had written these words reportedly by himself:

"My working and personal relationship with President Obama is marked by growing trust. I appreciate this. I carefully studied his address to the nation on Tuesday. And I would rather disagree with a case he made on American

exceptionalism, stating that the United States' policy is 'what makes America different. It's what makes us exceptional.' It is extremely dangerous to encourage people to see themselves as exceptional, whatever the motivation. There are big countries and small countries, rich and poor, those with long democratic traditions and those still finding their way to democracy. Their policies differ, too. We are all different, but when we ask for the Lord's blessings, we must not forget that God created us equal."

In recent days, President Donald Trump's national security adviser, John Bolton, has left no doubt that he is the mascot of American exceptionalism. Its corollary is Washington's "right" to send its forces, uninvited, into countries like Syria.

"We've tried to convey the message in recent days that if there's a third use of chemical weapons, the response will be much stronger," Bolton said on Monday. "I can say we've been in consultations with the British and the French who have joined us in the second strike and they also agree that another use of chemical weapons will result in a much stronger response."

As was the case in September 2013, Syrian government forces, with Russian support, have the rebels on the defensive, this time in Idlib province where most of the remaining jihadists have been driven. On Sunday began what could be the final showdown of the five-year war. Bolton's warning of a chemical attack by Assad makes little sense as Damascus is clearly winning and the last thing Assad would do is invite U.S. retaliation.

U.S. Ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, with remarkable prescience, has already blamed Damascus for whatever chemical attack might take place. The warnings of direct U.S. military involvement, greater than Trump's two previous pin-prick attacks, is an invitation for the cornered jihadists to launch another false-flag attack to exactly bring that about.

Sadly, not only has the growing trust recorded by Putin five years ago evaporated, but the likelihood of a U.S.-Russian military clash in the region is as perilously high as ever.

Seven days before Putin's piece appeared, citizen Donald Trump had tweeted: "Many Syrian 'rebels' are radical Jihadis. Not our friends & supporting them doesn't serve our national interest. Stay out of Syria!"



Donald J. Trump ✓

@realDonaldTrump

Many Syrian 'rebels' are radical Jihadis. Not our friends & supporting them doesn't serve our national interest. Stay out of Syria!

1:20 PM · 04 Sep 13

3,716 Retweets **4,277** Likes

In September 2015 Trump accused his Republican primary opponents of wanting to “start World War III over Syria. Give me a break. You know, Russia wants to get ISIS, right? We want to get ISIS. Russia is in Syria – maybe we should let them do it? Let them do it.”

Last week Trump warned Russia and Syria not to attack Idlib. Trump faces perhaps his biggest test as president: whether he can resist his neocon advisers and not massively attack Syria, as Obama chose not to, or risk the wider war he accused his Republican opponents of fomenting.

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