



IL CONSOLE GENERALE D'ITALIA

Year-end Message from His Excellency Sergio Vento
Ambassador of Italy to the United States of America

Dear Italians and dear Americans of Italian descent, it is the time of year that we exchange greetings for Christmas and for a Happy and Prosperous New Year.

As this year draws to a close, our country is pursuing, with firmness and resolve, the solemn and unstinting commitment assumed by our Armed Forces in the operations under way to restore peace and security in Afghanistan, the Balkans, and Iraq. Italy also remains at the forefront in marshalling the forces of law and order, the financial system and even of civil society in the war on terrorism, whose success is an absolute priority to guarantee coming generations hope for a future marked by progress in security.

In these missions aimed at the pursuit of universally shared values of freedom, democracy, justice and social progress in security, Italy stands firmly shoulder to shoulder with the United States of America, a country to which we have been loyal and committed allies for 60 years. The strength of these bonds and the excellent state of the current relations between Italy and the United States was reconfirmed this past December 15 during the visit to Washington by Prime Minister Berlusconi, the first after the re-election of President Bush.

In line with this outlook, the visit to Brussels by the President of the United States that is planned for this coming February and the political meetings that he will have at NATO and with the institutions of the European Union hold promise for a re-soldering of the transatlantic bond that for over half a century served as a geo-strategic formula of extraordinary success to guarantee peace and stability in the bipolar scenario of the Cold War. This formula of vigorous solidarity between the two shores of the Atlantic appears equally indispensable in scenarios, both actual and potential, marked by new threats and insecurity introduced by a possible terrorist use of weapons of mass destruction.

Bilateral economic and trade relations reflect the excellent climate of relations between Italy and the United States notwithstanding the erosion to the competitiveness of our exports caused by the ongoing weakness of the dollar against the euro. At this delicate juncture, the undisputed quality--in style, design, creativity and technology--of Italian products and services worldwide must be emphasized and cultivated, making the best use of promotional activities and initiatives undertaken by numerous public and private operators aimed at globalizing enterprise. From this standpoint, a first step meriting a hearty reception is the opening in the United States of the first "one-stop shops" established by agreements between



IL CONSOLE GENERALE D'ITALIA

the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and offices of the Ministry of Production Activities, mainly those involved in foreign trade. It is now left to move ahead by systematically undertaking appropriate synergies with the external activities conducted by the Regions, Autonomous Provinces, and also by the initiatives of the Chambers of Commerce network.

As I had opportunity to note during my visits to various States across the USA, a fundamental instrument giving substance and depth to our relations with this country remains culture, and by consequence, the Italian language. The intensive program of impressive and prestigious cultural presentations held in the major cities of the United States inevitably cultivates and over time expands the demand for Italy, and the evolution of the melting pot concept into models of multiculturalism and multilingualism imposed by globalization on this country and the rest of the world opens a precious window of opportunity to significantly promote the teaching of Italian language and culture in the U.s. educational system from kindergarten all the way through college: this will directly affect the children of Italians and Americans of Italian descent.

It is no coincidence that 2005 was designated the Year of Foreign Languages in the United States. There is global competition where the very survival of cultural identity is at play. It is fundamental to recognize that knowing Italian is not only the key to knowledge about our civilization and our traditions, for our youth the knowledge of Italian is also a means for professional accomplishment in sectors where Italy excels and which are so widely admired in the United States. This coming September, 630 high schools will have an Advanced Placement Program in Italian language and culture: the College Board of New York recently defined the curricula and the examinations. Now that the objective of bringing Italian on equal footing with other major European languages (preceding Chinese by one year) has been achieved, every effort must be concentrated on making the program successful, in terms of both the number of students registering for AP-Italian courses this coming Fall, which requires the support of everyone, and the number of students passing the first Italian AP examinations scheduled for May-June 2006, which counts on the quality of the instruction.

In addition to the commitment of the Italian institutional network in the United States, represented first and foremost by the Consular Office and the Italian Cultural Institutes, as well as by the Foreign Trade Commission (ICE) and the Italian Tourism Board (ENIT), the affirmation of our language in this country relies greatly on the extraordinary resource represented by Americans of Italian descent and by their organizations. The three major organizations, the National Italian American Foundation (NIAF), the Order of Sons of Italy (OSIA), and UNICO, joined with the Italian Government in funding the AP program. In a



IL CONSOLE GENERALE D'ITALIA

communications-based global society, competition in the sector of foreign language teaching is very high. To prevail, it is necessary to rely on the resolve and organized commitment of all Italians and Americans of Italian descent, as well as on those with ties to Italy in the realms of culture and the arts and with the professional, scientific and business worlds.

Before closing, let me bring you back to the December 11 meeting in Washington of the 11 Presidents of the Committees of Italians Abroad (Comites), representative bodies in Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Newark, San Francisco and Washington, that were established for the purpose of giving you, dear Italian friends, a voice in your relations with diplomatic and consular authorities. The meeting, attended also by the 5 counselors designated in the United States to the General Council of Italians Abroad (CGIE), was dedicated to topics of special interest to all of you: first, synchronization of the Consular Registries with AIRE records and City lists of registered voters, a task essential to guaranteeing citizens the right to vote in the next elections; the reacquisition of Italian citizenship; the activities of supervisory entities to promote the teaching of Italian language and culture in the U.S. educational system; health assistance to Italian citizens residing abroad; pensions under international conventions; and lastly, the media, especially as concerns the role of RAI international. The harmonious and constructive spirit that marked the work of December 18 here in Washington offers hope for an increasingly productive level of interaction and collaboration among institutions, organisms, representatives and various social entities pledged to guarantee the best possible service to each and every citizen.

I close Dear Italian Friends and Dear American Friends of Italian descent, with a warm wish to all of you and your families for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.