

Mattarella Embraces the Italians of New York: “You Made America Great!”

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In his first visit to the US as Italy’s President, Sergio Mattarella met with President Barack Obama, made an important appearance at the United Nations, visited the 9/11 memorial, the new Whitney Museum designed by Renzo Piano, the Columbia University, the City Hall of NYC and the Museum of Immigration in Ellis Island. And, above all, he embraced the Italian and Italian-American community at the Guggenheim Museum. “I am also a New Yorker” the Italian President told them in English, flanked by NYS Governor Andrew Cuomo, Italian Ambassador Claudio Bisogniero, and the Consul General in New York Natalia Quintavalle: “New York is the anthology of the world, and Italians have made and continue to make a significant contribution to the America’s progress”. Recap of his visit

President Sergio Mattarella’s first official visit to the United States just ended after six very busy days. “Today I am also a New Yorker”, Mattarella said in English in a public speech at the Guggenheim Museum, where he received a



warm welcome from the hundreds who attended the event. Then he offered his thoughts on the mass presence of Italians in the US, a community of about 18 million people of Italian descent of which 3 million are New Yorkers. “You all represent a bridge between the United States and Italy”, he said, “I look at your faces and see the story of courage and success.” He also recollected with pride the Italians who have given fame to New York: from Giovanni da Verrazzano to Renzo Piano who designed the new Whitney Museum.

To greet him, a happy Andrew Cuomo, his forehead marked with ashes for Ash Wednesday. “New York is the state that has the most Italian-Americans, and we are all very proud of this!” he insisted before leading into an emotional recollection of his father Mario, the first Italian-American Governor of the state of New York.

Signs of emotion also in the speech of the Consul General Natalia Quintavalle, who introduced the guests with few, warm words creating an environment that was at one time institutional and intimate.

In his speech Mattarella listed all the Italian-American associations that supported the event—the NIAF, the Conference of Presidents of Major Italian American Organizations, The Columbus Citizen Foundation, the Order of the Sons of Italy, the American Society of the Italian Legions of Merit, the Italy-America Chamber of Commerce, placing a special emphasis on NOIAW, the National Organization of Italian-American Women. He also made a reference to Italy’s “Giorno del Ricordo” (Memorial Day, February 10), addressing “a particular thought to the Istrian, Fiume and Dalmatian immigrants and their families that have found comfort in this country.” Coincidentally, also present among the crowd was renowned chef Lidia Matticchio Bastianich—who would later prepare a light dinner for the President. Ms Bastianich was born in Pola, the capital of what was then Istria, before the annexation to Yugoslavia, and was witness to a difficult escape.

Mattarella’s first American trip started with a historic meeting with President Barack Obama in Washington. Accompanied by the Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni, the Italian president was received in the White House to discuss the role of Italy in Libya, the migration crisis in Europe, and a business agreement between the US and Europe that could represent “an antidote against a new financial crisis.”

Obama and Mattarella also had some more relaxed exchanges, with a nod to their common experience of teachers of constitutional law—with the American President praising his Italian colleague for his “long and extraordinary career as a jurist and a lawyer,” while Mattarella invited him to Italy.

After his time in Washington, Mattarella flew to the Big Apple where he met the Secretary General of the UN Ban Ki-moon and the President of the General Assembly Mogens Lykketoft. On the table, again were the migration problem in the Mediterranean, the efforts done by Italy to abolish the death penalty everywhere in the world, the war in Libya and Syria, as well as the candidacy of Italy of a non-permanent seat of the Security Council for 2017-2018.

The trip of the president, who was accompanied by his daughter Laura, was characterized not only for the political meetings but also for the great attention paid to the Italian-American community. The day after his meeting at the Guggenheim Museum, Mattarella visited Ellis Island’s museum of immigration where he emphasized that, from the mid-nineteenth century, 4 million Italians arrived in the United States “loaded with difficulty, hope and trust.”

“Millions of people have passed through this island and millions of hopes were fulfilled,” these words represent well the feeling of emotion with which President Mattarella has faced a very cold day on the island at the mouth of the Hudson River—the major gateway for the immigrants who landed in the United States last century.



The Italian President spent his last day in New York in a public conversation at Columbia University, talking with Columbia University president Lee C. Bollinger and Alessandra Casella, professor of economics. The meeting was entitled “Leadership in the Age of Change: Managing Current Developments in The Mediterranean and Throughout”.

After this, Mattarella left New York to fly to Houston, Texas, the final stop of his trip where he visited the headquarters of NASA, where he met the Italian astronauts Nespoli, Cristofretti, Parmitano e Vittori.

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