

Rome, 26 February 2019

In December 2018, the much-heralded “Salvini Law”¹ finally came into force in Italy. By connecting “immigration” with “security”, it reinforces the populist message that these issues are directly related. The provisions of the new law are a barometer for the climate of mistrust which has grown since the present government came to power. Without going into detail, key aspects include the following:

- Withdrawal of the possibility of applying for a permit to stay on the basis of “humanitarian protection” (which falls short of refugee status but covers deplorable circumstances which do not meet the criteria within the 1951 Geneva Convention);
- Implementation of a much narrower system of applying for protection;
- Withdrawal of the possibility of “SPRAR” accommodation for all but, essentially, those with refugee status and unaccompanied minors. The Italian SPRAR system has been much praised for providing not only accommodation but a means of integrating migrants within Italian society.



Whilst the Salvini Law was making its way through the Italian legislature, its spirit was already being implemented. The last few months of 2018 saw a number of high profile evictions of informal refugee settlements, including that run by Baobab Experience (about which I blogged in “Defiant Optimism”).

¹ Legge 1 dicembre 2018, n. 132: “Disposizioni urgenti in materia di protezione internazionale e immigrazione, sicurezza pubblica, nonché misure per la funzionalità del Ministero dell’interno e l’organizzazione e il funzionamento dell’Agenzia nazionale per l’amministrazione e la destinazione dei beni sequestrati e confiscati alla criminalità organizzata”

Anecdotally, we hear that those whose permits to stay are based on humanitarian protection and will no longer be renewed are already being asked to vacate reception centres. To compound matters, on 22nd January, a large immigrant reception centre to the north of Rome was closed with only two days' notice.²

The effect of all this: greater numbers of “irregular” migrants, greater numbers of migrants on the streets and a significant increase in anxiety for both migrants and the population at large. On 4th February, 600 Italian psychoanalysts who work regularly with refugees signed a letter to President Mattarella highlighting the negative psychological effect of these measures.³ However, they added, “Another Italy exists and is beginning to express its own profound dissent: we are part of that.”



The existence of this other Italy was very much in evidence on 9th February, when eight mayors gathered in Rome⁴ to form an alliance to counter the policies which result in human rights being trampled. This open meeting was a small but important first step in harnessing the power of cities – and communities – to stand up for an alternative approach. The courage of these individuals in taking steps to combat these policies should not be underestimated. “We have to create a parallel and integrated network of solidarity,” said one mayor. It is their intention to convene an assembly of mayors from across Europe once the EU elections have taken place and, from there, to develop a manifesto and action plan.

This, I would suggest, is the kind of climate change we can live with...

² <https://bit.ly/2EbrWuV>

³ <https://bit.ly/2RNaDWO>

⁴ Present were mayors from Palermo, Florence, Naples, Bologna, Latina, Syracuse, Barcelona, Zaragoza, with support from Milan and Madrid.