

*The presentation delivered by Hon. Giuseppe Drago at the event and date indicated below differed in some respects from the following draft address, upon which the presentation was based.*

**DRAFT ADDRESS BY HON. GIUSEPPE DRAGO  
AT THE INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE ON MIGRATION 2005<sup>1</sup>**

**(Geneva-IOM, 29 November 2005)**

I am very happy to be taking part in this Dialogue on consistency between migration policies.

I would like to thank the Director-General, Mr McKinley, for having invited me.

First of all, may I express my appreciation of the subject that has been chosen for the meeting and of the working paper prepared by the IOM.

The management of migration, from every point of view and with all the often dramatic aspects it entails is a priority for my country in terms of both home affairs and foreign policy.

Consistency is the need towards which all our work must be directed, particularly when trying to implement policies affecting the living conditions of large numbers of individuals.

I would like briefly to set out the Italian position, to offer our experience as input for the debate, and to compare ours with the experiences and opinions of the other speakers.

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Consistency between migration policies is quite rightly referred to as a fundamental means of guaranteeing the necessary synergies between different, but related policies and of attaining the objectives set for them, avoiding the risks of adopting contradictory measures. This is a need which the Italian government had clearly in mind when drafting its immigration policy, and which underlay the 2002 Immigration Act.

In the introductory working paper for this Conference, particular stress was laid on the need for consistency between two fundamental aspects of migration policy: policies to control migration flows, and policies to facilitate them through appropriate regulatory measures, ensuring that these two aspects are complementary and not contradictory.

By analysing the approach adopted by Italian law one can see that it is the need for complementarity that lies at the heart of the legislator's concerns. For the law was based on the twofold need both to curb illegal immigration more effectively in view of all its negative repercussions - especially on the immigrants themselves - and to guarantee other legal access routes, thereby encouraging immigration consistently with the demands of the employment market, so that the immigrants themselves can be guaranteed the best possible conditions for their reception and integration in Italy.

For the great challenge is how to establish and maintain a balance between combating illegal immigration, because of all the upheavals it causes and because vicious criminal organisations operate within it, and integrating the immigrants by applying intelligence, realism, and a farsighted sense of humanity.

By way of introduction I feel that I should offer a few figures on the Italian situation. In just over two decades, Italy has ceased to be a migrant sending country to become a host country for immigrants. According to reliable Ministry of Home Affairs estimates, about 2.8 million foreign nationals live in Italy, accounting for some 4.8% of the total population, which

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from Italian.

is in line with the European average. Italy therefore has Europe's fourth largest immigrant population in terms of numbers after Germany and France, and on a par with Spain and the United Kingdom.

Integration, however, does not mean that immigrants should deny their roots or have to be assimilated, but that they should be incorporated into an environment of civil coexistence with rules that must be respected. This is what underpins the whole rationale of Italian immigration law, placing employment at the heart of the system, such that foreign nationals may only enter and stay in Italy if they have a job, so that they can be integrated into the world of labour and hence into society. At the same time, Italy is encouraging family reunions because the reconstitution of stable families is also a crucial factor in the integration process.

To meet these integration requirements, the main focus has been on guaranteeing consistency between Italy's domestic measures with heightened co-operation between national and local government authorities (the Regions, the Provinces, the Municipalities and Associations of various kinds). The Regions and the local authorities, in other words, must be able to interact with central government to guarantee that immigration is properly controlled throughout the country, according to the needs and particular features of each individual locality. For this reason, every three years the government draws up a policy and programme document for submission to Parliament, laying down the priorities for action under Italy's integration policies during the next three years of implementation, to promote a culture of outreach and integration for the benefit of immigrants: healthcare, education, access to housing, welfare and equal opportunities. In the document approved last year for the period 2004-2006, special emphasis was placed on the role of the local Immigration Councils instituted in each Prefecture to analyse immigrants' needs and encourage measures for local implementation. These Councils are intended to be bodies on which government officials and non-governmental member organisations can meet and debate the issues.

Another aspect is to strengthen cooperation as far as possible between all the parties involved in international migration. We have instituted permanent dialogue with the countries of origin and transit, both to keep illegal immigration at bay and to encourage the orderly and regular flow of immigrants to meet the needs of the Italian labour market consistently with its absorption capacity. The central position that employment occupies in Italian immigration legislation is also of international relevance, because it contributes to give consistency to every aspect of Italian policy. It is this rationale, as I just mentioned, that underlies the annual programme for non-EU worker admissions. For the inflow is kept within the maximum limits laid down every year in the "Inflow Decree", which takes account of the demands of the Italian labour market and the level of cooperation by the home states to help combat illegal immigration. Reserved quotas are therefore set for immigrants from the countries that cooperate closely with Italy, particularly under bilateral repatriation agreements. This is also proving to be a particularly effective instrument for ensuring consistency between policies to control immigration and policies to facilitate emigration, as mentioned earlier.

We have also introduced an important amendment to the influx programming policy, giving preferential rights to foreign nationals who have attended specific educational and vocational training courses in their own countries approved by the Italian Ministry of Work and Ministry of Education. This mechanism has obvious advantages, and it will be fully used by the local government authorities, base as it is on filling specific job vacancies, for which education and vocational training activities are designed. The employees will be able to provide adequate occupational and personal guarantees of their reliability, and this will

consequently facilitate recruitment by Italian companies. A number of pilot projects have been implemented this year with Tunisia, Sri Lanka and Moldavia, and an agreement has also been initialled with Romania.

This is a sign of the importance of migration as a factor for the development of the immigrants' home countries. Regardless of, and despite, the human costs of migration, it can also be both a resource and an opportunity for the growth of not only the host countries but also of the home countries. Migration can be a factor of development for these countries, and the policies implemented by the host countries can therefore become "co-development" instruments. For by acquiring solid occupational skills, foreign nationals can return to their homelands taking with them all their technical expertise, entrepreneurial skills and contacts which will contribute to the development of their own countries. According to statistics from the Milan Chamber of Commerce, the number of companies owned or managed by immigrants resident in Italy rose steeply in the first nine months of 2003 at an annual rate of over 16% to reach 140, 000, which is more than 4% of Italy's total businesses (in the same period, native-born Italians only created 0.2% of new businesses).

Suffice it to recall the part played by immigrants' remittances as an important source of financing and a GDP growth factor in their home countries. One only has to consider that these remittances are estimated to far exceed international aid figures to appreciate their importance. According to official data, remittances from Italy totalled over EUR2 billion in 2004, but the actual remittances are thought to be about twice that figure.

As part of the debate involving the G-7, the IFIs, the European Commission and United Nations, Italy has worked particularly hard to guarantee that immigrants' remittances are used to their best advantage. I would merely mention here the project with Morocco, and as an example of decentralised cooperation, the agreement to be concluded shortly under the auspices of the Sicilian Regional government with a leading Tunisian bank.

The need for closer international cooperation on migration policies is of particular importance to Italy, in her European dimension. Italy has always been actively committed to pursuing a common immigration policy within the EU, advocating permanent dialogue with the home countries and the transit countries, particularly in the Balkans and the Mediterranean. The purpose is to set out consistent, balanced and jointly agreed avenues and forms of cooperation. Under the Italian EU Presidency in particular, the Regulation was adopted setting up a specific programme (Aeneas) to provide financial and technical assistance to third countries in the matter of immigration and asylum, together with a mechanism for monitoring cooperation by those countries to combat illegal immigration.

It is against this background that we have to view the question of the linkages between migration and development for which the European Union and the EU Member States are aiming at drawing up a comprehensive strategy for intervention with the home and transit countries (in relation to poverty reduction, fostering economic development, upholding the rule of law and democratic institutions, providing assistance to combat illegal immigration, integrating migrants into the EU host countries), to create better conditions *in loco* for development and prosperity, thereby contributing to orderly migratory movements.

Unfortunately – I would add in passing – the European Union still gives greater attention to immigration from the Eastern European countries while neglecting the Mediterranean whose people are far poorer, and therefore far more prone to exploitation.

Sharing a fear expressed by our own Minister of Home Affairs, I sincerely hope that this attitude does not conceal new, unavowed, racist reservations.

We must be ceaselessly committed to targeting the scourge of people trafficking, a horrific trade that is an outrage against human dignity, working to increasingly improve

coordination and share the burdens and the responsibilities. People trafficking must awaken our consciences and drive us to a far greater commitment to preventing illegal immigration, knowing that organised crime is always behind it. Combating illegal immigration must therefore be viewed primarily as being in the interests of those who fall victim to this trafficking.

Infiltration by terrorists is also a threat that should not be underestimated. We know, for example, that a wide swathe of the Sahel has become an area for re-establishing safe havens and training camps for terrorist organisations. It is from there, through Libya, that people are migrating and being trafficked illegally who can also be used by these terror organisations.

Another phenomenon that we have also unfortunately detected it is the instrumental use of political asylum, as evidenced from the cases of those who have illegally entered Italy claiming political asylum, and have then absconded from the reception centres, evading controls.

In conclusion, I should like to thank the international organisations, such as the IOM, UNHCR, UNICRI, the International Committee of the Red Cross, who coordinate their work and cooperate with us in tackling the problems raised by migration.

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The media show us the dramatic scenes of death and drowning, and the desperate conditions of the lurid exploitation to which immigrants are subjected seeking to enter Italy, or being forced to live here underground. Let me just give you one figure: this year, at Lampedusa alone, a small island off Sicily, over 500 unaccompanied children have been picked up by the authorities. These problems exist, and we have been asking for everyone's help. But I felt it important here to make it clear how much Italy is doing, with such great commitment, to ensure that, with our heads held high, Italy and Europe can take up the political challenge and the challenge of civilisation posed by the economic and demographic imbalances and by the unbridled immigration resulting from them.

These are, in broad outline, our experiences which I am delighted to be able to share with you, looking forward with great interest to the output of our debate, in order to find fresh ideas and encouragement for my own government.

I should also be very happy to continue this discussion at a meeting which Italy could organise in the near future.

Thank you.