

AN INTERVIEW WITH FRANCESCA LA MARCA MEMBER OF THE PARLIAMENT OF ITALY (NORTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA)

You don't have the typical background for a politician—it must have been a steep learning curve to go from teaching literature to sitting in the famously contentious Italian Parliament. What was the most difficult part of the transition? What was the most pleasurable?

This is true! It is one thing to watch politics from the sidelines, quite another to be an active participant. The greatest challenge in this process was no doubt having to learn Parliamentary Procedure, as the Italian political system is extremely complex and very different from the Canadian one. As far as the most pleasurable aspects of the transition, there are almost too many to count. Having the privilege of getting to know the various Italian communities throughout North America is certainly at the top.

You represent such a wide geographical area in the Italian Parliament with a constituency that lives in North America and Central America. What issues do your constituents have in common and what issues set them apart?

All Italians, regardless of where they reside, share the desire to see Italy overcome its current economic

troubles and promote a positive image of the country internationally. My constituents seek greater promotion of the Italian language and culture, want to strengthen the "Made in Italy" brand, access consular services at home that are effective and efficient, and be guaranteed adequate health care services while vacationing in Italy. The differences between my constituents lie in the differences between the communities themselves. For example, Italian immigration to Canada is more recent as compared with the U.S., so identity issues facing younger generations of Italian-Canadians seem to be of greater importance. In the U.S., there tend to be more young Italian professionals, for example, researchers, bankers, etc. who belong to this new wave of "Italian mobility" or "brain drain," if you will. In Mexico, our community tends to be made up of business professionals and entrepreneurs who are contributing to the great social and economic revolution currently taking place in that country.

Thanks to the recession the Italian government has been forced to close consular offices and to scale back their contributions to cultural activities outside of Italy. What challenges face Italians abroad?

I strongly oppose the cuts you make mention of and actually contested them, along with my colleagues elected abroad. The Italian government offers its consular services, not only to its citizens, but to the international community. Maintaining an effective consular network is in the best interest of Italy, not just its citizens around the world. The same argument applies to the promotion of Italian language and culture outside of Italy—it is an investment Italy makes in itself as this ultimately provides a boost to its economy.

Canada and the EU has signed an historic Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) in principle. Do you feel Italy is well positioned to take advantage of the new opportunities that will come?

I believe that CETA could be very advantageous for both Canada and Italy. In a context of market globalization and increased competition, CETA will facilitate trade and reduce technical barriers for Canadian and Italian businesses of all sizes. Expert economists argue that the agreement will remove over 99% of tariffs between the two economies and create sizeable new market access opportunities in services and investment.

Do you anticipate our trade relationship changing as a result of the implementation of CETA?

CETA stands to expand what constitutes \$7 billion in bilateral trade between the two countries—making Italy Canada's 10th largest trading partner. In 2012, Canada exported \$1.7 billion worth of goods to Italy (cereals, machinery, mineral fuels and oils, etc.). For its part, Italy sent more than \$5 billion in exports to Canada, including machinery, wine, and pharmaceuticals. In Europe, many Italian food products like Prosciutto di Parma meat or Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese have protected origin status. With the implementation of CETA, it will become easier to preserve the reputation of Italian regional food products.



When Italians comes to Canada looking for investment opportunities they have many organizations, from local chambers of commerce, to Invest Toronto, to the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service, who are all able to provide advice on opportunities and regulations in Canada. Does Italy have this same level of information infrastructure available for Canadians looking to invest in Italy?

Italy has an open attitude toward foreign investment and there are a number of development agencies on both the national and regional levels, as well as numerous trade associations that provide help in approaching potential Italian partners. "Destinazione Italia" is a recently approved national investment plan with the aim of drastically reducing bureaucratic inefficiencies, encouraging foreign investments and Italian entrepreneurship with more modern regulation, efficient administration and communication strategies.

What role do you see for organizations like the ICCO?

The role is a very important one and can only continue to grow as CETA takes effect. There are at least three aspects to the role which the ICCO will continue to play in the future. The first is that of providing a forum for local businesses created or run by Italian-Canadians. The second is that of guiding Italian companies that want to explore the possibility of expanding into the Canadian market or assisting local or regional institutions in promoting their products in a dynamic environment where there is a significant Italian population. The third is assisting Canadian entrepreneurs who wish to explore the possibility of investing in Europe and especially in Italy, which requires the guidance of experts, such as the ICCO, in navigating complex laws and bureaucratic procedures. The project "Destinazione Italia," which I made reference to earlier, was presented for the first time by former Prime Minister Letta right here in Toronto and promises to simplify procedures for investing in Italy.

What are the initiatives or elements of the political landscape that give you optimism for the future?

Matteo Renzi, Italy's dynamic new Prime Minister, is taking significant steps toward creating job growth, especially among youth, and to stimulating the economy, as well as promising greater transparency with respect to public spending. Another positive element is that the interest paid on the national debt has decreased considerably and, as a result, Italy is saving a considerable amount on financing its debt. Also, important constitutional reforms have begun to take place, such as Senate reform and a new electoral law is in the process of being passed with the aim of streamlining the political/electoral system. All of these contribute to making this a tumultuous but exciting time in the political history of the country and there is renewed hope for the future among Italians, in spite of the great challenges they continue to face.