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# ITALIAN IMMIGRATION: THE ALBANIAN PRECEDENT

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*The arrival of immigrants from Albania highlights growing political sentiment in favor of keeping non-EC nationals out of Italy while it also stresses the need to address solutions to this problem at both the national and community levels. Lucantonio Salvi examines the political, cultural, and social dimensions to Italian immigration policy.*

As the net exporter of labor, Italy was once a champion of immigrants' rights; now faced with an influx of illegal arrivals it is taking the lead in seeking tougher visa policies at the [European] Community level.<sup>1</sup> Italy was forced to tighten its previously liberal immigration policies once it decided to join the Common Market of the European Communities. In an attempt to meet domestic economic demands as well as stringent economic criteria for European Monetary Union (EMU), and in response to growing EC pressure against outside immigration, Italy is trying to end its reputation as the gateway to Europe. Although Italy's management of the arrival of large numbers of Albanian immigrants was widely criticized, it merely reflected the 1989 policy shift. Forcing the immigrants to return to Albania was intended to set a precedent and deter a potential exodus of citizens from Yugoslavia. The salience of the issue increased as a result of the hesitation and uncertainty displayed by the Italian government and the empathy for the refugees based upon the perception of a common European heritage. The large influx of immigrants in 1991 compelled Italy to enforce strict rules, affecting the migrants from Turkey and North Africa. Finding the job awkward, Italy is both taking the initiative domestically and turning to the European Community in the hope that it will form a common immigration policy.

Between the second half of the nineteenth century and the early 1950s, twelve million Italians emigrated to the United States and South America in search of work and a better life.<sup>2</sup> Of the original European Community members, Italy was the only country that had an out-migration, similar to that in Spain, Yugoslavia, and Morocco. It was a transit point to Europe rather than a final destination for immigrants. In the last decade the outflow of emigrants has

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1. "Europe's Soft Underbelly," *Economist*, 19 May 1990, 54.

2. Judith Miller, "Strangers at the Gate," *The New York Times Magazine*, 15 September 1991, 51.

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declined, and within the last few years a large numbers of settlers have arrived in Italy. As a result of Italy's historical experience as a country from which individuals emigrated, until recently it had one of Europe's least restrictive policies regarding freedom of movement.

The experience of being a country which is a net recipient of immigrants is a new one for Italy. EC Commission experts suggest that of the more than eleven million immigrants in the entire European Community up to one million could be in Italy.<sup>3</sup> Altogether, migrants from non-EC countries today account for 2 percent of the Italian population.<sup>4</sup>

Immigration has moved to the forefront of the issues facing Italy. In fact, Italians feel more strongly than their Community partners about the immigration issue: 63 percent claim that there were too many non-EC people living in their country, compared to 55 percent on average for Britain, France, Germany, and Belgium.<sup>5</sup> While currently trying to adjust to large numbers of immigrants from lands bordering the Mediterranean, Italians are now expecting massive immigration from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

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The asymmetry in both wealth and population between Western Europe and its neighboring countries is destined to grow during the forthcoming decades, with the greatest imbalance seen between Europe and Africa. The real average standard of living (measured by using purchasing power parities) is four times greater in Italy than it is in Egypt; for many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the ratio is as high as 1:10.<sup>6</sup> Whereas the annual ratio of the birth rate to the mortality rate in Africa reaches 15 million, the cumulative birth deficit in the European Community is close to 1.2 million per year. In the extreme case of Liguria in northwest Italy, deaths are 2.5 times more numerous than births. This disparity is translating into massive transfers of young people from south to north in Italy, thus reducing both the burden of demographic aging in the north and that of unemployment in the south.

The recent influx of Albanians into Italy suggests that the next group of immigrants will come from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. These

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3. "The Other Fortress Europe," *Economist*, 1 June 1991, 45.

4. John Navone, "Fortress Europe Faces Immigration," *America*, 7 December 1991, 433.

5. These figures are taken from a 1992 opinion poll conducted for *Eurostat*, the European Commission's organization for statistics.

6. Jean-Claude Chesnais, "The Africanization of Europe?" *The American Enterprise*, May/June 1990, 24.

individuals raise problems in defining political asylum seekers and refugees. As a result of political change in the former communist countries, refugee status—as determined by the Geneva Convention—is now more difficult to ascertain. The refugee status issue masks the wider concern over long-term immigration pressures, for which no European country has a solution.<sup>7</sup> Italy is now seeking answers with other European states, which have all felt the political impact of increased levels of immigration this year. The choice to be made is whether Europe will close its door completely or leave it open; try to work with the mosaic concept of different cultures or attempt to integrate into an American style melting pot.

The turmoil in a crumbling Yugoslavia and Soviet Union, the continued economic stagnation of the Eastern European countries, and the limited economic prospects in many of the lands bordering the Mediterranean suggests potential problems in Italy, which has relatively high levels of unemployment. Jean-Claude Chesnais, director of the Demography and Social Department at the Institut Nationale des Études Demographiques in Paris suggested that “If wealth does not go where people are, people naturally go where wealth is.”<sup>8</sup> As a result of Italy’s reputation, geographical position, and long coast-line, immigration has important social, political, and economic ramifications.

In Italy, immigrants from the North African countries are more controversial than those from the east. The *Economist* described the situation well—“Rightly or wrongly, the Community is less in a panic over immigrants from the east. They are, after all, fellow Europeans.”<sup>9</sup> Europeans feel threatened by the arrival of large numbers of people with a different skin color, habits, and religion.<sup>10</sup> East Europeans see the ramparts of a Fortress Europe rising while North Africans face additional hostility from Italians who perceive them as competition for jobs and homes. Immigration, with all its uncomfortable baggage of racism and nationalism, is set to become one of the hardest issues to handle because the preference for an open-door welcome is not going to work anymore.<sup>11</sup>

This xenophobia has been magnified by a lack of reliable information. The study of migratory movements presents many difficulties. Diverse data, incomplete statistics, and invalid methods contribute to the lack of sufficient resources for a reliable study.<sup>12</sup> As the new Immigration Minister Margherita Boniver has stated, “We don’t know how many illegal immigrants there are in Italy. People are only counted in, not counted out.” What is needed is more information and less inflammatory language. Close and continuing collaboration between countries to ensure regular and reliable flows of information is essential to improve the present situation.<sup>13</sup>

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7. “Immigration Challenge,” *Oxford Analytica Daily Brief*, 31 October 1991, 12.

8. Chesnais, “The Africanization of Europe,” 24.

9. “The Other Fortress Europe,” 46.

10. “The Would-be Europeans,” *Economist*, 4 August 1990, 14, 15.

11. “Poor Men at the Gate,” *Economist*, 16 March 1991, 32.

12. Giampiero Martinotti, “Cosi Terzo Mondo ed Est assediano la ricca Europa,” *La Repubblica*, 14 August 1991.

### Racism: A Political Force?

Throughout Europe, nationalism has translated politically into support for the "New Right" (or Extreme Right) and is illustrated by frequent headlines regarding growing racist and violent attacks against immigrants. In Italy, anti-immigrant incidents rose in 1990, with attacks against Africans taking place on the streets of Naples and Florence. Italians are not, as they once believed, immune to the racist overtones implicit in tension between locals and immigrants.

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As a natural bridge between the poorer southern and the richer northern shores of the Mediterranean, pressure to limit immigration has been rising within the Italian government—in part as a result of racial conflict. Hints of racism arise in Italian cities where they might not otherwise exist due to late and often impotent solutions to rising tensions. While a national backlash against immigrants has not yet occurred, the threat exists as long as the government is unwilling to take necessary precautions to address the problem which is largely an economic one. With 15 percent of Italy's prison population made up of immigrants, and 52 percent of that number from North Africa, Italians witness the precarious lives of many immigrants who have no steady work or place to live.<sup>14</sup> Although until now violence has been attributed to isolated incidents rather than a national trend, the challenge for Italy is to address the current problems before they unleash a tide of anger against immigrants.

Racism is not a political force in Italy today. Even the rise of nationalism in local elections, such as the Lombard League in northern Italy, is mainly directed at fellow Italians from the south and not at the "foreign worker" issue. There is no national party campaigning on race in Italy, such as the National Front in France. The quasi neo-fascist Social Movement remains largely irrelevant, despite it being Italy's fourth largest party. Although the existence and growth of extreme right-wing parties is disturbing, democracy is not about to be overthrown.<sup>15</sup> For historical reasons, Italy has constitutional provisions which pre-

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13. Conference of Ministers on the Movement of Persons Coming from Central and Eastern European Countries, "Main Findings and Conclusions: An Overview" (Geneva: International Organization for Migration, October 1990), iv.

14. Alexander Stille, "No Blacks Need Apply," *Atlantic Magazine*, February 1992, 34.

vent the re-establishment of fascism. The non-communist parties can easily form a coalition government without the neo-fascists. In short, racism—while alive in Italy—does not account adequately for the shift in Italian immigration policy. Instead, the new policy is better explained by the Italian domestic agenda and its EC membership.

### The New Italian Policy

On December 30, 1989, Italy promulgated law no. 416/1989 as its new immigration policy. This law marked the first serious attempt to control demand-led immigration and to bring policies closer to those of the other European Community members. In addition to instituting visa requirements for visitors from Turkey and the Maghreb countries, the law offered amnesty and renewable two-year permits to illegal immigrants who could prove that they had arrived in Italy before the end of 1989. Although foreign nationals were obliged to register or risk expulsion, the new permit-holders were allowed to compete for jobs equally with Italians. The intent was to facilitate an orderly departure program back to the countries believed to be the origin of most of the immigrants—Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria.<sup>16</sup> Although the new law ignored the question of quotas by country, it asserted that Italy would accept political asylum-seekers from farther afield than Eastern Europe so as not to discriminate against non-Europeans.

Italy is reluctant to impose unilateral limitations on arrivals because of how it might impact its relations with its North African neighbors. Instead, Italy has been advocating for a common integration policy within the European Community. By refusing to change the policy of admitting short stay visitors from Turkey and North Africa, Italy has fostered fears throughout Europe that the "back door" of the European Community will be opened to unwanted settlers. Italy is therefore under pressure as French and German ministers complain that illegal immigrants try to enter other nations of Western Europe through Italy.

Italian Deputy Prime Minister Claudio Martelli has been the main proponent of the immigration law instituted in December 1989. He has confirmed the government's intention to impose entry visas to limit arrivals from certain "high risk" countries. At his request, the government examined the possibility of using naval and military units to patrol Italy's porous borders. The new Martelli law has further tightened Italy's borders by instituting intensive patrols of its 3,200 kilometer shoreline. The aim is to prevent future illegal immigration, however the difficulties in doing so are compounded because each beach is a potential port of entry.

In April 1991, a new Immigration Ministry was created in order to deal with the tangle of new immigration policies. Recognizing that rigidities in existing

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15. Geoffrey Harris, *The Dark Side of Europe: The Extreme Right Today* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), 160, 170.

16. "Huddled Masses," *Economist*, 13 January 1990, 47.

labor law encourage employment of immigrants, the ministry is considering a policy to grant temporary work permits.<sup>17</sup> Working with a meager budget, the ministry is also directing its efforts toward the construction of hostels. In light of the immigration problems in Italy, the ministry has its work cut out for it.

### Why the Shift to Conservative? The Italian Concerns

The Italian domestic agenda continues to be plagued by economic troubles. Pressure for policy reform in Italy has been growing in an effort to avoid becoming a permanent member of the "second division" in Europe. Italy is burdened by serious structural weaknesses which are rooted deep in the nature of Italian industry.<sup>18</sup> The budget deficit, high inflation, labor market rigidities, and an antiquated banking system contribute to high levels of frustration in Italy. Unemployment stands at 10.5 percent; this would be considerably higher were not for Italy's protective employment laws. Furthermore, affordable housing poses a problem for Italians competing in the labor force. Consequently, after months of growing hostility, native Italians have staged numerous protests regarding perceived injustices favoring immigrants such as hiring nurses from outside the European Community and the existence of migrant encampments.<sup>19</sup>

As a result of the structural problems in the Italian economy, the expectations of increased growth in 1992 among the main Organization for Economic Coordination and Development (OECD) countries will not necessarily be sufficient for Italy. It has one of the highest rates of EC inflation and unemployment in the European Community, as well as high levels of public debt and deficit. Room for maneuver has been restricted as a result of Italy's decision to enter the narrow 2.25 per cent margin of fluctuation band of the EC's exchange rate mechanism. According to Carlo Ciampi, Governor of the Bank of Italy:

[the country's] structures and economic policies continue to reflect the difficulties it is having in raising the overall quality of the system to the level required by the commitment to Europe... Time is running out. There is an urgent need for results... There is a real risk that hard-won successes may be minimized.<sup>20</sup>

As the fifth largest economy in the world, Italy has sought to play a greater role in the European Community and to acquire an international voice commensurate with its G-7 status. This call for greater influence is illustrated by attempts to establish a permanent seat for Italy in the United Nations' Security Council;

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17. Robert Graham, "Italy ceases to be a soft touch for immigrants," *Financial Times*, 5 November 1991, 3.

18. Robert Graham, "Italian Industry," *Financial Times*, 29 October 1991, sec. 3.

19. Economist Intelligence Unit Country Report No. 3, *Italy* (London, 1991), 13.

20. Carlo Ciampi, "Italy's Economy and Its Role in the Europe of 1993," *Italian Journal* Vol. 5 (1991): 4.

calls for broad international support for the establishment of a Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean and the Middle East; Prime Minister Andreotti's assertion that Italy would seek to play an integral role in the creation of a new international UN intervention force; and most recently through Italy's advocacy with Britain of a defense proposal for the European Community.

All of these factors—the economy, European integration, and Italy's leadership vision—are variables which affect the Italian response to increased immigration. Although national immigration policy is set by each EC country, the increasing number of legal immigrants to the Community mandates a solution on the Community level. A mass movement of population into the European Community would certainly provoke the receiving country into demanding a burden-sharing approach to the problem.<sup>21</sup>

The arrival of immigrants from Albania in 1991 highlights growing political sentiment in favor of keeping non-EC nationals out of Italy while it also stresses the need to address the growing problem and finding alternative solutions. Although there will be strong xenophobic and racist pressure to close the borders of Europe, individuals will continue to migrate—legally or not. Italy's current challenge is to develop a viable policy to address the potential flow of immigrants.

### The Albanian Precedent

Motivated by growing disillusionment with the process of reform in what was once one of Europe's most oppressive communist dictatorships, more than 24,000 refugees from Albania arrived in Italy within one week in March 1991. Following the arrival of the Albanian refugees, the Italian authorities decided against deporting the 10,000 remaining Albanians—only 1,250 of whom were granted asylum. This was followed in June by the militarily supervised return of 800 Albanian refugees dotted along the Adriatic coast in small boats, but disallowed to land by the Italian government. This situation was further complicated by the arrival of an additional 20,544 refugees, attempting to find a safe haven in Bari and Brindisi, during the second week of August. The number of immigrants caught ministers off guard, and the Italian government's hesitation and uncertainty was compounded by the fact that all of Italy and its leaders were enjoying their traditional August vacation.

Once the authorities let the Albanians land, they sought to confine them to a stadium, and, as a deterrent to potential refugees, made the physical conditions in the stadium memorably intolerable.<sup>22</sup> Since the 1990 reforms of the legal system in Albania, defection is no longer considered a major political crime. Prime Minister Andreotti argued that the Albanians were not eligible for refugee status since they would not suffer administrative or legal consequences

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21. "Immigration Challenge," *Oxford Analytica Daily Brief*, 30 October 1991, 10.

22. Carlo Marini, "Italy Turns Back New Tide," *Voce Italiana*, August/September 1991, 1.

upon their return. In "Operation Sardinia", Italy set up an aerial bridge to the Albanian capital of Tirana over which virtually all Albanians who did not meet the criteria for asylum, including some 500 deserters from the Albanian armed forces, were repatriated. In order to round up the Albanians, the authorities misled the refugees into thinking they would be allowed to stay, a tactic widely criticized both in Italy and abroad.<sup>23</sup>

In response to the Albanian crisis, Italy enforced tougher measures to stop the flow of illegal migrants. The fear of the Italian government, that a warm welcome for Albanians would encourage more to attempt the journey, resulted in a stronger enforcement of immigration policy. Since the European Community was caught off guard, it considered Albanian refugees an Italian problem not of concern to the Community<sup>24</sup> (to the surprise of the Andreotti government) and Italy was forced to take concrete action on its own. Though disappointed by the lack of EC support, Italy chose to demonstrate that it is no longer an open gateway to Europe. Its domestic agenda as well as the need to set a precedent for the future precluded any other choice.

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To calm the public criticism against turning back migrants from Albania, Italy changed its tactics by offering clothing and small sums of money to encourage Albanians to return home. Claudio Martelli travelled to Albania, offering food and medical aid in return for halting the refugee flow. In addition, Italy is providing the new multi-party government in Albania with \$85 million in aid,<sup>25</sup> in hopes of preventing future flows of refugees while encouraging other EC countries to do the same. On August 13, President Francesco Cossiga flew to Tirana—the first Western head of state to do so since World War II—to participate in talks with President Ramiz Alia of Albania and his prime minister.

According to Giulio Andreotti, the Italian Prime Minister, most of the Albanian refugees were not political asylum seekers, but economic refugees. Thus, they were sent home, with the help of the International Red Cross and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). The government even called on the press and television to help persuade Italy's eastern neighbors that Italy is not a paradise of affluence. However, when the government threatened to use its navy to stop refugee ships and escort them back to Albanian waters, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees appealed to Italy to let the

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23. The UN High Commission for Refugees called the strategies used by the Italian government "reprehensible."

24. Graham, "Italy ceases to be soft touch."

25. Marini, "Italy Turns Back New Tide of Albanians."



Albanians land. The Italian position on immigration, though, was made clear.

The Albanian crisis forced Italy to make a decision on the leniency of its immigration policy. Until the crisis, there had been little political will to enforce immigration laws. Taking into account domestic concerns as well as EC obligations, Italy opted to strictly enforce its rules, setting a precedent and asserting a turning point in its attitude towards immigrants. Although there were strong humanitarian reasons not to expel the Albanians from Bari, Italy did not want to confirm its long held reputation as an entry into Europe for refugees.

The arrival of the Albanians prompted Italy to establish a large emergency aid program inside Albania—the forerunner of long-term development aid programs to stabilize the Albanian economy. This marks a significant change in immigration policy from short-term economic aid, used to entice immigrants to return home, to one of long-term development assistance. This trend also applies to the Community in Eastern Europe and North Africa, where increased packages of aid are seen as part of the overall solution to curb migratory pressures.

### A European Phenomenon in Italy

The demand for imported labor in Italy will be substantial.<sup>26</sup> Population growth is constant but without immigration the work force is expected to shrink by two million within the next twenty years.<sup>27</sup> However, the public visibility of asylum seekers and the predominant public opinion against migration have led to a pervasive anti-immigrant attitude. The irony, therefore, is that Italians object to immigrants as residents yet they appreciate them as performers of cheap services shunned by nationals. Whereas immigration was the topic least frequently cited in surveys of voters' worries until 1989, it is now the second most frequently cited problem after unemployment.<sup>28</sup> Professor Anthony Messina noted that:

In no West European country can politicians or political parties can gain votes by favoring new immigration and in virtually every country thousands, and of ten millions, of voters could be and probably would be alienated... In short, almost universal public opposition in Western Europe to new immigration combines with high visibility and salience of the issue to obstruct liberal change in public policy.<sup>29</sup>

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26. Although Italy currently has a relatively high unemployment rate of 10.5 percent, and the immigration problem in part is a result of competition for the same jobs, it is generally agreed that there will be a huge demand for migrant labor in the coming decade to take unskilled jobs unattractive to most Europeans.

27. Stille, "No Blacks Need Apply," 34.

28. "Immigration Challenge," *Oxford Analytica Daily Brief*, 1 November 1991, 14.

29. Anthony Messina, "Political Impediments to the Resumption of Migration in Western Europe," *West European Politics* Vol. 13, No. 1 (1990): 619.

The opponents of immigration have the political advantage. The support of the "New Right" both in Italy and in Europe restricts the established parties of the right from supporting liberal immigration policies. In addition, the acceptance of these policies by the left has shifted public debate so far to the right that liberal alternatives are not promoted. According to Messina, the conservative forces have appealed deliberately to racist and xenophobic sentiment within the electorate in order to rally popular support for their goals. The problem with this trend, however, is that this illiberalism inherently contradicts free movement within a borderless European Community by simultaneously fueling xenophobic political forces. This European phenomenon, while finding its roots in nationalism, poses political impediments to labor migration and in some ways threatens the stability of the entire Community.

### Proposals

In keeping with the goal of establishing a "frontier-free Europe" by the end of 1992, the central issue for the Community becomes strengthening the external frontier while dismantling internal border controls. Coordination of immigration policies among the EC countries is improving. Whereas refugees used to be able to file for asylum in every EC country, now they are allowed to file in only one EC state. By deciding in principle to recognize each other's visas, the member states have put themselves on the road to a common visa policy.<sup>30</sup>

#### *Schengen Agreement*

One of the solutions proposed to alleviate the immigration problem is the Schengen Convention,<sup>31</sup> whose objective is the removal of frontiers, inter alia eliminating borders and border controls by the end of 1992. It establishes uniform practices for the police and judicial cooperation, dissemination of information, controlling frontiers, and extradition. The Schengen Accord is seen as an acceleration of the processes toward the elimination of internal frontiers.

Although the agreement has only been ratified by the French, opposition to the Schengen Convention is waning. Greece has applied for observer status and Denmark and Ireland may do the same shortly, leaving the United Kingdom alone to oppose it.<sup>32</sup>

Some individuals however believe that the Schengen group is not the answer to the problem. Charge de Mission Patrick Weil of the Foundation Nationale des Sciences Politiques argued that the Schengen Agreement will fail as a result of Italy's participation.<sup>33</sup> The Italian coastline is too porous to keep out would-be

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30. David Buchan, "Immigration Accord Begins to Take Shape," *Financial Times*, 27 November 1991, sec. 1.

31. The 1990 Schengen free-travel agreement has been signed by France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and the Benelux countries.

32. "Immigration Challenge," *Oxford Analytica Daily Brief*, 30 October 1991, 14.

33. Patrick Weil, "French Immigration Policy and the Rise of Racism in France," public lecture at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Mass., 4 November 1991.

immigrants which will result in reinforced border check points where European-looking people will be let in and non-European looking people will not. Weil's forecast implicitly suggests that the difficulties inherent in patrolling the coastline renders all the southern seaboard countries unprotected. This raises larger questions for the future of the European Community.

The success of the Schengen Convention requires that all members trust each other to police their own borders. An ineffective system will arouse renewed nationalism, especially if the immigrants are entering mostly through some other EC country's door. At present, the Schengen group seems to be the best alternative to a unanimous common policy on immigration. Only the future will determine its success.

#### *External Frontiers Convention*

In June 1991, the External Frontiers Convention was adopted. This agreement created a list of countries whose nationals would require visas to enter the European Community. The convention would allow non-EC visitors to travel throughout the Community with a single visa, and would abolish internal visa requirements for legally resident non-EC nationals. The final date for the elimination of frontier controls has been deferred to January 1, 1995. Final agreement, however, has been delayed because of a bilateral dispute between Spain and the United Kingdom over the status of Gibraltar.

#### *Time Restricted Visas*

Another possible solution is to impose time-restricted visas on migrant laborers. Given the demand for increased foreign labor in the coming decade, Italy would be able to capitalize on needed persons while not committing itself to a permanent population of non-EC nationals. While permits will not eradicate illegal immigration, they can limit it and usefully control the flow of economic migration from the south and the east.<sup>34</sup> Immigration Minister Margherita Boniver is currently working on granting temporary work permits. Rigidities in existing labor laws encourage employment of immigrants because they can be hired cheaply without countless legal stipulations, and this solution seems to offer benefits for all sides involved.

In addition, time-restricted visas could also be beneficial for the countries of origin of immigration. While the immigrants would be able to earn money in European countries they would also be able to acquire skills which they could apply on their return home. Time restricted visas are consistent with the larger aim of setting up long term financial aid programs for developing countries in the hope of stimulating growth and countering migratory pressures.

#### *The Quota Solution*

There is currently concern, both in Italy and in the Community, about the lack of integration of existing immigrant communities and the resulting poten-

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34. "The Would-Be Europeans," 15.

tial for social deprivation and conflict. One possible solution is to set limits on immigration. Many Italians are promoting America's quota system as a partial solution, but the goal of assimilation holds little appeal in most countries where it is doubted that the newcomers can be assimilated and where many do not want them to be.

### *An EC Solution?*

Immigration has threatened the talks on political union in the European Community. Entangled in the complex negotiations inside the Inter-Governmental Conference (IGC), immigration was an important issue at the Maastricht Summit in December 1991. Fearful of delegating power to supranational EC institutions, the member states decided to rely on an intergovernmental approach to immigration, slowly drawing the European Commission into their discussions. In fact, the Commission has already issued a communication outlining a feasible EC policy approach. Although the IGC is still the preferred method of developing a concerted EC policy response, this may not last due to increasing political pressure to reach consensus. So far, no solution has been acceptable.

Elimination of internal frontiers between the European Community member states and free movement across national borders within the Community is central to the realization of a 'single market' within the Community after 1992.<sup>35</sup> It is argued, therefore, that a common EC policy should be sought under the auspices of Community institutions. As of March 1992, the supranational EC had not been given the power to make any binding decisions. At the Maastricht summit, the twelve EC states agreed to create a joint list of countries whose citizens would need visas to enter the Community. Permanent immigration and right of asylum, however, are still left to national governments—the forging of common admission rules left for the future.

An EC solution would be a significant change for Italy as it finds the job of coordinating immigration unpleasant and would therefore welcome a deferral of power and responsibility to the European Community. An acceptance of a common policy would also presumably give greater legitimacy to increased levels of aid from a unified Europe, relieving Italy of financial burdens in the name of community responsibility.

In January 1991, in their final communiqué, the European Council reaffirmed the principle of solidarity between participating states with the aim of harmonization of policies and continued dialogue. In June, the Ad Hoc Group on Immigration issued a public statement which delineated broad areas of agreement among the ministers with the aim of continuing such contacts in the future.

More recently, the European Commission, in their communication dated October 7, 1991, set out a feasible EC policy approach. The Commission suggested using EC external policies, including increased trade and market access, financial aid, and temporary work contracts and exchanges, as a first step

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35. Gil Loescher, "The European Community and Refugees," *International Affairs* Vol. 65 (August 1989): 617.

toward their objective. The Commission advocated increased monitoring, a coordinated policy against illegal immigration and asylum seekers, a common criteria for reuniting families, and a common framework for temporary work contracts in order to control the flow of migrants across the external frontier. Finally, the proposal advocated more effective integration of legally resident immigrants, the lack of which may result in social deprivation and conflict.

William Pfaff, a syndicated columnist for the *International Herald Tribune*, has observed that anyone looking at the origins of World War II or the current civil war in Yugoslavia will not underestimate the danger which cultural differences can create. These as well as similar tensions suggest the irresponsibility of immigration policies that promise new confrontations between peoples whose cultures are diverse. These potential complications highlight what must be overcome in order to construct a common integration policy.

Proportionally, Europe accepts and employs a greater number of legal immigrants than does the United States or the Arab oil-producing states. "Despite our rhetoric, Europe has become the real immigration continent," says Francois Heisbourg, director of the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies. In addition, the Europeans face a demographic time bomb because of the added factor of political asylum, which judging by current trends, is likely to be heightened in the future. International law, crafted to handle trickles of cold-war refugees from the communist bloc, requires each case of political asylum to be reviewed individually—a long and expensive procedure.<sup>36</sup>

### Conclusion

Italy is going to find more people knocking at its door than it thinks it can comfortably admit. The Italian response to the Albanian influx was the only alternative available, given domestic concerns, political pressures, the Yugoslav threat, and EC membership. The numerical dimension of the massive influx has been described as a phenomenon of collective hysteria: it was the first time the Albanians were allowed to have their own passport, and the number of people who demanded to go back to Albania after arriving in Italy is significant and supports such an argument.<sup>37</sup>

While the influx of Albanian refugees may have been unique, it served as a catalyst in Italy to curb other migratory movements. The arrival of the Albanians has also illustrated the need to address the immigration problem and to search for a workable solution, either internally, through intergovernmental agreement, or at the supranational Community level. As a coastal border of the European Community, Italy may face the difficult task of guarding its coastline and turning away growing numbers of people. The Italian government, how-

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36. Miller, "Strangers at the Gate," 49.

37. On March 15, the Albanian news service reported that 530 refugees asked to be returned to Albania the day before (as reported by FBIS, 18 March 1991).

ever, is uncomfortable making the politically difficult decisions which result from the paradox of growing domestic irritation in Italy and its proximity and relationship with the out-migration countries. Therefore, Italy is seeking to transfer responsibility to the European Community in an effort to alleviate internal domestic conflict and external international pressure.

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The Albanian crisis has solidified the Italian position and made clear the implications for the future: Italy will no longer be an open gateway for refugees.

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The absorptive capacity of West European countries is still greater than many analysts think.<sup>38</sup> The temptations for Italy to lobby for more generous aid to North Africa, Yugoslavia, and Albania is strong. Money alone, however, is seldom used efficiently and will rarely reduce the flow of immigrants. A wise and efficient compromise should be sought whereby Italy and Europe can capitalize on immigrant resources, give immigrants important skills which can be used at home, and institute long-term programs intended to stimulate, educate, and produce jobs in out-migration countries. It will take many years to rebuild countries which have been deprived of democracy and may suffer from overpopulation, and endure an underdeveloped economy. The problem will not be eliminated soon, and short-term solutions, while politically attractive, are unrealistic.

It is difficult to speculate on which direction Italy will take in the future. The work of the Immigration Ministry and the effects of the new Martelli law are probably a realistic measure of things to come. Immigration within the European Community brings with it the baggage of Community responsibility and the need for a common policy, while domestic concerns necessarily take into account economic considerations and political pressures. The Albanian crisis has solidified the Italian position and made clear the implications for the future: Italy will no longer be an open gateway for refugees. The decision to repatriate most refugees has become a precedent, not just for Italy but for Europe as well.

A viable proposal still needs to be advanced. Whether from Italy or from the European Community, a solution to the immigration problem can only entail long term aid to out-migration countries coupled with educational and exchange programs. An efficient solution will also seek ways of ensuring the collection of reliable information within and between countries and the streamlining of asylum applications and control procedures. The accumulated experience, findings, and conclusions of relevant organizations, such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), should be taken into account. A wise

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38. "The Would-Be Europeans," 15.

solution will not neglect checks and balances for addressing and dealing with illegal migration. Only in this way can the hope of enticing migrants to return home and of making them want to remain be realized. The immigration challenge will remain on the political agenda for some time. Propelled by economic considerations and aggravated by political tensions and conflicts, future migration is assured from both the south and the east.

Italy, however, must realize that immigration is not a bad thing. It is the life blood of most nations because it invigorates the stock, brings enterprise, energy, and a variety to society.<sup>39</sup> The Italians can benefit greatly from immigrants just as many nations already have. Through integration and assimilation, Italian society can continue to move forward into the future. Immigration in moderation will not threaten old cultures and customs, but it will promote revitalization and education. Italians should welcome migrants just as they were welcomed through the last century and they should set an example as leaders for the rest of a xenophobic Europe. Italy and Western Europe cannot slam the door shut on the rest of the world without losing part of its soul.<sup>40</sup>

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39. "Racism's Back," *Economist*, 16 November 1991, 16.

40. Conference of Ministers on the Movement of Persons, Introduction, i.



