

President Napolitano: Italian Citizenship for Children of Immigrants

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Meeting some new citizens Napolitano said the main reform should concern minors and young people in the country. Children born in Italy of immigrant parents should get citizenship.

In this moment of economic crisis, recognizing the important role immigrants play in the national economy, Italian President Giorgio Napolitano has addressed a delegation of the new citizens at Quirinale, the official residence of the President of the Italian Republic, and said that without their contribution to the economy, it would be difficult for the country to pay off its debts.



"I hope that Parliament can address the issue of citizenship for children born to foreign immigrants in Italy," Italian President Giorgio Napolitano said. "Denying it," he added, "is a true folly, an absurdity. The children themselves have this wish." But not just the children's... the President's wish was welcomed by an avalanche of consents, from Casini, the extremely religious Co-President of Centrist Democrat International, to Vendola, left wing politician who is the president of the Apulia region, Save the Children and Anci (Associazione nazionale comuni italiani, National association of Italian communes). Recognizing the important role immigrants play in the national economy, Napolitano said on November 15 that without their contribution it would be difficult for the country to pay off its debts.

After this appeal, Ignazio Marino, senator of the PD party, has presented a proposal signed by 113 senators that modifies a law established in 1992 and grants Italian citizenship to any child born in Italy regardless of the parents' citizenship.

Marino declared that "there is an incomprehensible discrimination against the children of immigrants. A child with no citizenship will always feel like an alien in a country that he/she actually sees as his/her own. Multiculturalism and the confrontation between different cultural identities are resources we should rely on. Discrimination against a child, thus compromising his/her balanced development, is uncivilized. Our country cannot allow intolerance and cultural backwardness." House Speaker Gianfranco Fini has been campaigning for years for such a law change, and to give immigrants the vote.

Talking in numbers, there are about 572.000 children of foreign descent born in Italy and, overall, there is almost a million (932.000 to be exact) children who are regularly recorded at the registry. In average, there is one child of foreign descent every ten Italian children. This happens in some areas more than in others: the congregation of foreigners is 20% higher in Prato, Piacenza, Mantova and Brescia. This data is supplied by the international organization Save the Children, in response to the President's appeal.

Raffaella Milano, director of the Italy-Europe program of Save the Children Italia declared "It is now time for the Italian Parliament to do something against discrimination: this is the only way Italy will be able to capitalize on that great resource children and adolescents who live in our country are."

Save the Children, in respect of non discrimination and recognition of children's rights, as established by the Convention on the rights of the Child, hopes that the Italian Parliament will act as soon as possible in order to give minors of foreign descent raised in Italy the status of Italian citizens because they indeed are already living as such.

"The plea of President Napolitano should be an invitation to our legislators to promptly work on this matter, evolve with times and leave behind some of Europe's most obsolete and restrictive laws," she added.

"The idea of granting Italian citizenship to whoever was born in Italy is a bastardization of the principles of the Italian Constitution," Roberto Maroni, former Interior Minister and member of the Northern League movement, said on Radio Padania Libera. "The League," he added, "is drastically against it. This means that the next wave of immigrants from North Africa will be empowered. We will have thousands of new Italian citizens just because they were born here... it will be a real calamity." He continues to say that he is not criticizing the President's work, but he simply does not approve of this latest statement.

At present migrants and their children acquire citizenship after 10 years of residence in Italy. In



many other countries, being born there is enough to become a citizen. Birthright citizenship in the United States, for example, refers to a person's acquisition of US by virtue of the circumstances of his/her birth.

But, as it is happening in Italy, in the US conservative groups are fighting to revoke birthright citizenship against children of parents who immigrated illegally. The so-called “anchor babies” (pejorative term for a child born in the US to immigrant parents) are not welcome by all. Back in January 2011 the New York Times, in an article titled Birthright Citizenship Looms as Next Immigration Battle, reports on the fight of some who want to change the law. “This is not a far-out, extremist position,” said John Kavanagh, one of the Arizona legislators who is leading an effort that has been called just that. “Only a handful of countries in the world grant citizenship based on the GPS location of the birth.”

It looks like the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.

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