



by Sergio Romano

EDITORIAL

The Americans have built an anti-intruder wall equipped with the best technology on the market on the border along the Rio Grande to face up to illegal immigration from Mexico. However, this does not stop about a million illegals from entering the United States. The fleets of the Mediterranean countries in the European Union are co-operating to counter the emigration trade. However, they are unable to stop several tens of thousands of people landing on their coasts. The numbers are different but the phenomenon is essentially the same, and it is indicative of the schizophrenia with which the governments of Europe and the United States tackle the immigration problem. They have to counter it, because their voters feel threatened by the “barbarian” invasions and demand greater severity. But they are aware of the needs of their economies and they know they cannot do without foreigners, especially for jobs that their own people, whatever their social condition, have turned their backs on. Governments in almost all Western countries have adopted a seesaw policy, albeit at different times, with laws to limit the phenomenon alternating with measures to “regularise” illegal immigrants. Naturally, there are varying tendencies amongst Europe’s political classes and laws passed by the Left are generally more “humanitarian” than right-wing laws. But the strictest Italian law so far (the 2002 Bossi-Fini law) resulted in about 700,000 illegals being “regularised”. Last November, after a serious crime in the suburbs of Rome, Romano Prodi’s government hastily voted a decree empowering prefects to expel undesirable people, including citizens of other EU member States. But a few days later the same government set the quota of foreign workers for the current year: 170,000 open-ended entries including 60,000 caregivers and 80,000 seasonal entries.

The undesirable and the job quota workers belong to two different categories. But if a person considered undesirable today manages to avoid expulsion, he could find a job “on the black” tomorrow and be “regularised” the day after.

The enlargement of the Union to ten new countries in 2004 and two Balkan countries, Romania and Bulgaria, in 2007 has further complicated the framework of European contradictions. During the negotiations leading up to the signature of the agreement, Germany asked for and obtained a safeguarding clause that would allow the application of the rules on free circulation to be delayed for a

“Foreigners respect the rules of good cohabitation”, Romano writes, “all the more when locals respect them”. There are many situations in which Italians themselves break or dodge big and small rules



total period of seven years. Some countries have used the clause while others have preferred not to, perhaps in the hope of better moderating the wage demands of their own population with the arrival of fresh manpower. But the opening of the borders and the hidden economy of some countries, Italy in particular, have in any case made entry easier for the “EU illegal”, a new type of immigrant who certainly has the right to cross the border but not the right to remain freely on the labour market if the host country invokes the clause the Germans requested.

In these circumstances, it would be ridiculous to be surprised that there are problems relating to public order. These problems would probably exist even if governments could programme entries and were in a position to take measures to host the new arrivals in the best possible way. But the schizophrenic policies of the EU countries and their inability to agree on common rules are creating the classic problems of migratory flows all over Europe: small urban ghettos, overcrowded housing, sales of counterfeit goods, bothersome begging, clashes with the locals and the police (e.g. the Chinatown clash in Milan in April 2007), makeshift shacks in city suburbs, prostitution, petty and big crime and the exploitation of immigrants by unscrupulous householders and entrepreneurs. But it is worth remembering that the nature of the menace to public order changes from one country to the next. It is generally more serious in countries where the phenomenon of a hidden economy is more deeply rooted. And it is particularly serious in countries where the authorities cannot and do not want to counter the petty illegalities that are part of everyday life for the locals.

I refer, of course, to Italy. A few days after an immigrant arrives in Italy, he discovers that, while a lot of things are forbidden, bans are rarely enforced. One can sell counterfeit objects on street corners. One can wash car

windows even if the car's owner doesn't want one to. One can spend the night under the arcades on a street and leave unpleasant traces of one's presence. One can go and live in an illegal shack built on the outskirts of the city. One can ride a moped without a helmet, especially in southern Italy. One can importune passers-by and ask them for money. One can double park. One can go through a red light.

One can try and travel without a ticket on public transport. One can dirty the wall of a house. Anyone familiar with the management of a public place (a college, hospital, prison or barracks) knows that its users are more respectful of the environment when it is clean and orderly. The same considerations are true for the rules of good cohabitation. Foreigners respect the rules all the more when locals respect them. 