

Recap - President Mattarella's US Visit From DC to SF

Roberta Cutillo (October 21, 2019)



Accompanied by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Luigi Di Maio, and the Minister of Technological Innovation Paola Pisano, the Italian President travelled to DC, where he met with Trump, as well as the leadership of the Italian American Congressional Delegation, and Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi. He then went to San Francisco to visit startup companies Kong and Nozomi Networks, participate in the Italy-US Innovation Forum, and meet with the Mayor of San Francisco and the Governor of California.

The first stop on President Sergio Mattarella's official visit to the United States was a bilateral meeting with President Donald Trump in the White House's Oval Office on October 16th. Trump opened their press conference by paying homage to Italian culture and heritage, including one of its icons, Christopher Columbus. "For me it will always be Columbus Day, even if some people don't like it," he said referring to growing protests calling for it to be replaced by Indigenous Nations Day.



The two leaders then talked about the [tariffs the US government recently imposed on a variety of EU goods](#). [2] Mattarella told Trump that he hoped they could cooperate on trade issues and avoid retaliatory tariffs, which he stated would be to the benefit of no one. According to US Trade Ambassador Dennis Shea, the US also hopes to achieve a negotiated solution but said the EU needed to end subsidies to Airbus and ensure they were not revived under another name. For the time being, US officials maintain they are still waiting for specific proposals from Brussels.

President Trump praised the investments that Italy and the US have made in each other (he was particularly pleased about the country agreeing to purchase 90 "brand-new, beautiful F-35s" fighter jets produced by Lockheed Martin) but also asked Italy to increase its defense spending, citing the fact that it is currently only spending 1.1% of its gross domestic product on defense, short of a goal set by NATO allies of spending 2%. To which Mattarella responded that Italy is the second biggest contributor to NATO missions and the fifth biggest contributor in funding, then adding that the country is and will be very careful on 5G looking after national security in response to US concerns.

The two presidents also discussed the situation in Syria, where Turkey began attacking Kurdish fighters and civilians after Trump announced he was moving US troops out of harm's way. "Italy has condemned and it condemns the ongoing operation by Turkey," Mattarella said during the press conference. The US President defended his decision and distanced the United States from the conflict between Turkey and America's Kurdish allies in Syria, saying that the battle "has nothing to do with us."

Their encounter ended with a reception organized by President Trump to celebrate Italian-American heritage.

The following day, October 17th, the President of Italy met the leadership of the Italian American Congressional Delegation and the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi on Capitol Hill.

"I don't know if you have any idea what a joy it is for me, as the first Italian-American Speaker of the House," Pelosi claimed, "to welcome the President of Italy to the Capitol of the United States." She also stated that "Italy is our very best and strongest friend in NATO and so we look forward to continuing, strengthening that relationship, as well as increasing economic ties and strengthening the economies of both of our countries."

On the 18th, President Mattarella travelled to San Francisco to visit startup companies [Kong](#) [3] and [Nozomi Networks](#) [4] (both founded by Italians) and succeedingly went out to Stanford University to participate in the Italy-US Innovation Forum, before meeting with the Mayor of San Francisco, [London Breed](#) [5], and the city's Italian community. Finally, on his last day, he met with the Governor of California, [Gavin Newsom](#) [6].

Overall an important and dense visit, aimed at celebrating and consolidating the longstanding relationship between the two nations, and recognizing the achievements and contributions of Italians in America, in this case with a particular focus on the field of technology and innovation. But this



was also an occasion to discuss some of the most pressing issues of the moment. Important topics were indeed brought up, particularly during the encounter with the President and, while the friendship between the two countries is not in question, it remains to be seen whether they will reach agreements regarding certain international issues.

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