

The Duty of Fully Fulfilling One's Duty

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The agenda of the Italian Antimafia Commission during its mission in the United States - from Washington DC to New York - is a busy one. Meetings with the DEA, the FBI, UNDOC, Congress, and the UN. We interviewed Pietro Grasso - former judge and former President of the Senate, member and 'historical memory' of the commission regarding US-Italy relations in the field of the fight against organized crime. We discuss the mission in the US, the Palermo Convention, Falcone, Pizza Connection, but also young generations and the importance of participation, of the 'Sardine' phenomenon - "Legality, freedom, truth, sense of duty and of state are at the core of my actions, even in politics."

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New York - An unexpected snowy afternoon such as only this city can offer. But how could we miss the chance to meet with [Pietro Grasso](#) [3], former magistrate and former President of the Senate, here on an official US visit as a member of the parliamentary commission known as 'antimafia.'



This isn't our first encounter. We met the first time in 2009, when he came to commemorate the anniversary of the death of [Joe Petrosino](#) [4]. With him were [Don Ciotti](#) [5], musician Roy Paci, and other representatives of Sicilian culture. It was one of my first "excellent interviews" for i-Italy, which was still very young but was already involved in the organization of certain events and debates surrounding Pietro Grasso's visit.

So when I ask him whether he can, in a way, be considered this mission's "American guide," he smiles as he recalls, first of all, the important work of the president of the commission, Nicola Morra. But his story tells itself.

"I bring to the commission my experience of many years as a judge, but I had also been a consultant for it when I was younger, when the antimafia commission was presided by Gerardo Chiaromonte and then Luciano Violante. In my various functions I've repeatedly encountered US governmental and institutional representatives. It's always important to exchange information personally, also to update our analyses on the topic of organized crime. And I feel at ease here."

Your very busy schedule also included an encounter with Justice Samuel Alito, one of the 9 members of the Supreme Court, the only one with Italian origins.

"The encounter with Alito was very interesting. He recounted his experiences, highlighting how the Supreme Court is different from our constitutional court. But we also talked about the commonalities between our professional stories. Alito handled part of the "[Pizza Connection Trial](#) [6]" while I was involved in the "[Maxi Trial](#) [7]" against the mafia in Palermo. So - from different points of view - we both learned about the ties between the Sicilian mafia and the American one.

The confluence of "Pizza Connection" and Palermo's "Maxi Trial" was an important step in a long collaboration between the FBI and Italian antimafia investigators, strongly desired by Giovanni Falcone. And, in fact, the Commission also visited the Quantico Military Base in Virginia, which is also the base of the offices of the FBI and DEA. There is a statue of Falcone there and you placed a floral reef at its feet...

"Yes, I've been to Quantico several times. Now I wanted to bring this antimafia commission to witness firsthand the FBI's appreciation for the work done by Giovanni Falcone. There is a broken column, which indicates that Falcone's work was interrupted and then a bust near the entrance. It's important. All the students see it upon entering and learn about a man who sacrificed his life in a path towards justice."

Falcone's work inspired the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the so-called "Palermo Convention." It was the first juridic instrument to set the common basis for contrasting organized crime and it was signed by 188 countries.



“I was the Procurator in Palermo when it was signed, in 2000. I participated in the preparatory and organizational phase, that was also a way of carrying on Falcone’s work after his death. From his assassination in 1992 to the signing of the convention ... it took 8 years to implement what he had illustrated right here at the UN.”

And in fact, you also spoke of it during your meeting at the Permanent Mission of Italy to the UN.

“Certainly, because it is one of the most fundamental juridical tools. It’s extremely complete, simple, workable. Unfortunately, not all the States who signed it then modified their legislation in order to utilize it at its fullest. But now the revision procedure, which should facilitate its actuation, finally started. The Palermo Convention is one of the most important multilateral treaties, along with the one on contrasting corruption and money laundering.”

At the UN, you also visited the Counter-Terrorism Office, the Security Council’s Counter-Terrorism Committee, you met with the UNODC, Interpol...

“We especially tackled the question of financing and organizing counter-terrorism. Italy is considered at the forefront of this field. We are a point of reference in the prevention of terrorism. For our legislation, for the DNAA - Direzione Nazionale Antimafia e Antiterrorismo, - which plays a very important coordinative role; and for the Comitato di Analisi Strategica Antiterrorismo (CASA), which meets every week to exchange information in real time.”

Still in the glass building, you visited the exhibition “The Art of Saving Art,” organized by the Carabinieri Command for the Protection of Cultural Heritage and the Permanent Mission of Italy. Why?

“From the perspective of the antimafia commission, it’s interesting because many criminal activities are tied to the trafficking of artworks, which have been used as investments by the mafia or to recycle capital. But our Carabinieri have carried out a globally relevant initiative: they created a database which gathers all of the world’s stolen artworks and is accessible to all investigators, when they have doubts on purchases. In the exhibition at the UN, there is also a piece that comes from Palmira, which is very important symbolically. It recalls the unfortunately timely issue of how wars can destroy art.”

What will the commission bring back from the visit?

“It has been very useful. We picked up a discussion that dates back to “Pizza Connection” and the mafia wars, to the fact that members of the Inzerillo family - connected to the Gambino family - took refuge in the US to escape death. Around 2005-2006-2007, when I was working on the trial, certain tapped conversations revealed there was the intention to have them come back and take hold of certain activities including drug trafficking. I believe that the new generations of mafias born in



America are no longer interested in this. They are involved in other businesses.”

Yet, people still wonder where the enormous sums of Pizza Connection ended up...

“Some were in Switzerland, but we didn’t find most of them. Some suspect that the Inzerillo’s treasure was only partly invested and that the rest of it is buried in sacks somewhere. They didn’t trust banks!”

How relevant is it to still speak of the mafia today?

“That’s a complex question. The problem is that despite the existence of organs such as the FBI, which are still actively monitoring the phenomenon, today the US looks more towards terrorism and migrant trafficking. After 9/11, strategic resources have been cut from the fight against organized crime or redirected elsewhere. Mafias are less visible, mafia violence is less visible. We have to identify systems and ties between the administration, the government, the mafia, local entities, companies involved in procuring public projects, there are many things to keep under surveillance, even in many American cities.

In Italy and in Europe we also still have the phenomenon of the mafia moving North. There too, organized crime gets buried, it’s less visible. Violence only manifests itself when strictly necessary. It’s a specific strategy that makes the phenomenon hard to identify.”

And this harms the entire country...

“The mafia’s method goes against individual freedom, against the economy. It creates a monopoly and eliminates local businesses. It creates a network of favored businesses, which are advantaged. Rather than facing intimidation, fear, extortion, they pay and reap the benefits of the system. They are colluded with the system even if they aren’t officially part of it. They are not affiliated with Cosa Nostra, but they play its game.”

The 'sense of the State' is very present in your activities. In a time during which it’s always harder to speak of shared values, especially to young people, do you think that we can speak of the sense of State?

“The sense of duty and of the State is fundamental, basic. Even on this matter I had the chance to have masters such as Falcone and Borsellino as reference. Falcone often used a phrase attributed to John Kennedy: ‘We must accomplish our duty fully, no matter the sacrifice, no matter the cost, because that’s where the essence of human dignity lies.’”

Falcone used to cite another JFK quote: “Men come and go, ideas stay and they keep walking on the legs of other men.” Can politics play a role in transmitting all of this to



younger generations?

"I 'married into politics,' looking for what is needed to contrast the criminal economy. What I wasn't able to obtain as a judge. I tried to give my contribution on the themes of justice, of social equality, because organized crime is a social problem. It's not only a criminal phenomenon. There are areas where the mafia manages to give work, not just criminal work but also employment within illegal or seemingly legal businesses. I'm certain that if there were more clean work, young people would be freer to contrast the mafia system.

For this reason I say that I 'married into politics,' instead of 'turning to politics.' I'm always looking for those values of legality, freedom, truth, sense of duty and of the State that are at the basis of my political action as well."

Speaking of young generations with "politician" Pietro Grasso, I can't help but ask for a comment on the new phenomenon in terms of participation that is taking place in Italy, the "Sardine." What do you think about it?

"I meet many young people, I did so as a magistrate and now as a politician. From what I've seen, it seems like a spontaneous and positive phenomenon, not a political one in this phase. When I say 'not political' I mean that it isn't a party, nor a movement, but stems from the need for people to go out into the streets to keep others from taking them. Among them there are many people who had stopped voting, who didn't participate, and participation is always positive."

It's also a concrete response to the resentment and tension that spreads on social media...

"True. Politics can be done positively - better if in person rather than virtually - without insulting, without attacking, without verbal violence. The Sardine's contribution is positive in this sense. We'll see what happens in the future. It's certainly something we shouldn't taint by trying to pull it in one direction or the other, we need to let it evolve how it wants."

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