

THE MAYOR OF MAYORS

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Telos: Every time there is talk of the direct election of the Prime Minister, the evocative expression "The Mayor of Italy" is used. Is it true that today Mayors, in administering their cities, have more power than the Prime Minister?

Enzo Bianco: Unfortunately, no. The direct election of the Mayor, which was adopted into the Italian system in 1993 as a result of pressure by the Referendum Movement of Mario Segni (*I was his vice president*) was one of the institutional reforms that worked best in our country. Just think that the average lifespan of a city administration in Italy was 11 months (in my city, Catania, only six!). Many citizens hardly even had time to learn their mayor's name. Direct election also helped reconcile the relationship between citizens and institutions after the deep crisis brought on by *Mani Pulite*, the 1990s investigation into Italian political corruption. However, it mainly helped give city governments planning ability and vision. Today, our cities – all of them, regardless of the political party they have been led by – look totally different from how they did 25 years ago. Unfortunately, however, directly elected mayors do not enjoy an autonomy that is equal to the responsibilities citizens have entrusted to them. Too many restrictions, too much bureaucracy, too much paperwork! Many projects get mired over nothing. The first reform that needs to happen is to give autonomy to those with responsibility.

The breakdown in the party system has likely been the source of people's widespread anti-political sentiment. And yet this gap between citizens and politics is not nearly as wide when it comes to the Mayor. Are the people you meet still *passionate* about politics?

Many are always passionate about politics. In recent years, and not just here, this passion has been "disturbed" by irrational emotions: fear and resentment, and this has also heavily influenced people's election choices. But in Cities, when it comes to concrete problems, this relationship is much more direct. In both small municipalities and large cities, the day after a decision gets adopted, you can immediately tell how the citizens have taken it.

Even just from how the waitress looks at you at the café while you're having coffee. This is the politics of concrete things. And people are indeed passionate about this!

You've had an intense political career: Deputy to the Sicilian Regional Assembly and the Italian Parliament, Senator, the Interior Minister. One thing that really stands out is that you served as Mayor of Catania for four terms and even as metropolitan mayor of Catania from 2016 to 2018. What are the similarities and differences between these different roles?

The biggest difference is the immediacy, the instant feedback, the sense of concreteness.

Obviously, as the head of the Ministry of the Interior, as the President of the Parliamentary Committee for Intelligence Agencies, as the President of the Senate Committee for Constitutional Affairs, in the international appointments I have had, there has been an equal amount of satisfaction and bitterness.

And I think experience in local administration helps those who have to govern the country. Actually, it helps a lot! I'd say, it should be almost mandatory...

President of the ANCI National Council, re-elected in 2019, an Association you helped relaunch way back in 1995. And since 1994 you have been the representative for Italy on the European Committee of the Regions, an advisory body to the EU made up of locally and regionally elected representatives from all 27 Member States. What can you tell us about these experiences?

The thing I am most proud of is that in both cases I tried to build team spirit. Of course, political differences are important. But when you are part of a government body, team spirit is essential, and I am convinced this is why I was unanimously elected for these offices. Every time.

I even had the loyalty of my political opponents. I come from the school of Ugo La Malfa, Bruno Visentini, Giovanni Spadolini. It's in my DNA. When you work with this spirit, sooner or later, you get results. I might even suggest that holders of government office must have this inclination. For example, ANCI's unity, demonstrated by the unitary conclusion of the last 2019 Congress, was and will be an extraordinary source of strength for the Association.

It gave us the compactness we needed to ask the Government and Parliament to give more attention and consideration to the Autonomies of Mayors.

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We eliminate traffic if we all decide that it's wrong to double park or not follow the basic rules of peaceful coexistence. The

city is clean if we all help keep it clean.

And I'd like to tell you about something that happened that may seem small, but for me, it's huge. In the last year of my term, we were caught up in the waste separation revolution.

Yet in the village of Santa Maria Goretti, *i.e.* the outskirts of town, can you believe we managed to separate 60% of the waste?! It seemed like a miracle, but it was true.

This result was achieved thanks to the awareness raising efforts of the headmistress at the Fontanarossa Institute, Patrizia Tumminia, and the parish priest, Paolo Riccioli. It proves that when you all work together, like a community should do, anything is possible.

With teamwork we have won impossible battles. Even freed whole neighbourhoods of the Mafia in my city by collaborating with other national institutions. And these are experiences you never forget.

Marco Sonsini

Editorial

Initially, this interview was supposed to be called "*The President of the Mayors*", a tribute to the office of ANCI National Council President, which our guest, Enzo Bianco, has twice been unanimously elected to serve as by the Mayors of Italy.

But this would have been trivialising, if not misleading. Bianco – who in his life has worn political, government and even business hats of every kind – is and will always be the historic Mayor of Catania.

He served as Mayor for four terms, both before and after the 1993 Law ushering in the direct election of the mayor, a reform he helped to architect along with Mario Segni.

And he is still glowing from this experience as mayor. You can see it in the way the eyes of this kind, cultured, calm man sparkle when he talks about those experiences.

This is why we changed the title to "*The Mayor of Mayors*". His interview is both deep and funny, and for him each mandate is an opportunity to serve his community or country – not just something to brag about.

He tells us about how he went from being seen as the somewhat folkloristic "*Enzo the flower seller*", as he was warmly called by some during his first terms – *i.e.* the mayor who only attended to the superficial aspects of the city, something he still sees as valid and that he would do over because "*in those years Catania was so beautiful*" – to being seen as a more concrete mayor.

A sort of youthful effervescence that later blossomed into maturity, allowing him to reach unimaginable goals, like "*liberating, along with the other institutions, entire areas of the city from the Mafia*."

His commitment to legality and his defence of rights are what also led to his being appointed Minister of the Interior, when he launched the '**Community policing**' project.

Bianco stresses the importance of remaining close to people when he defines Mayors the "*guardians of the community*". Especially during the Covid emergency, in Bianco's view Mayors have become more "*guardians of social cohesion, bringing aid to millions of citizens brought to their knees by the lockdown*", something that will be crucial to the management of funds arriving locally from the Recovery and Resilience Fund.

His motto is "teamwork", which is why in his speech at the last ANCI National Assembly he recalled his role in "founding" this moment of meeting, when "*administrators of every political colour, inspired by the same sentiment*" could share their experiences and "*imitate good practices*".

On the December cover, where as usual the first letter of the city merges with the animal that represents it – albeit genetically modified – there is an elephant, the mythical "*liotru*", symbol of the city of Catania.

This delightful elephant may be found atop the Vaccarini fountain in the piazza of Catania's main cathedral, on the coat of arms of the city, province and university, decorating the outside of the city hall (called the *Elephant Palace*) and in the name given to Catania by the Moors "*Balad-el-fil*" or "*Medinat-elfil*", the city of the elephant.

It has become such a significant symbol of what it means to be Catanian that the locals say they are of the "*marca liotru*" (the "elephant brand"). With this December issue, all of us at Telos A&S would like to wish you a merry and cosy Christmas and a peaceful 2021. Let's hope it's better than 2020... though it wouldn't take much!

Mariella Palazzolo



Enzo Bianco has been the President of the ANCI (National Association of Italian Municipalities) since 2014, when he was first elected. He was then unanimously re-elected in 2019.

In 2015 he was appointed head of the Italian delegation to the European Committee of the Regions and now, from 2020-2025, he will be working in the Office of the President of this same institution. Since 2018 he has been a City councilman in Catania.

Bianco served his first term as Mayor of Catania from 1988 to 1989, a short stint that has however been defined the "Catanian Spring".

In 1991 he became part of the Sicilian Regional Assembly and in 1992, of the Chamber of Deputies on the lists of the Republican Party.

That year, he worked on the Law regarding the direct election of the Mayor (**L. 81/1993**) in collaboration with Mario Segni's Referendum Movement, which he was the vice president of. In 1993 he was elected Mayor of Catania, and in 1997 he was re-elected in the first round. In the meantime, from 1995 to 1999 he was the President of ANCI.

In 1999 he was appointed Interior Minister during Massimo D'Alema's second government and was re-appointed in 2000 during the second government of Giuliano

Amato.

In 2001 he returned to the Chamber of Deputies after being elected with the lists of the Margherita party, and from 2001 to 2006 he was the President of the Parliamentary Committee for Information and Security Systems for State Secrets (COPACO). In 2006 he was elected to the Senate and was the President of the Constitutional Affairs Committee. He was re-elected in 2008. In 2013 he served as Mayor of Catania for the fourth time and in June 2016 became the first Mayor of the Metropolitan City of Catania.

Enzo Bianco is a lawyer and expert in international finance.

Over the course of his career, he has received numerous accolades, including: the Grand Federal Cross of the German Republic, Officer of the Legion of Honour of the French Republic and Grand Officer of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic.

He also won the National Brail Award for his efforts for the blind.

He loves cooking and collecting old family recipes, especially recipes for traditional Sicilian dishes. He is a huge fan of classical music, with a penchant for Mozart, as well as an extensive traveller: he has visited/worked in over 70 countries.

He was born in Aidone (EN) but has lived in Catania since he was nine years old. He is 69.

Marco Sonsini

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