

### Out of the Darkness

Just occasionally, it's worth thinking the unthinkable. This week a minor earthquake occurred in Italy. Happily, this one was entirely metaphorical and the disruption it will cause is almost wholly positive.

Readers of this blog will be aware of the so-called "Security Decrees" or "Salvini Law" introduced by former Italy's former Minister of the Interior, Matteo Salvini, just over two years ago. Salvini's grip on power began to loosen when he lost his cabinet post following his ill-judged bid to collapse the government in August 2019 but his legacy, unsurprisingly, has taken longer to shake.

Regional elections within the last two weeks did not provide the Far Right with quite the lift it was looking for. Perhaps that, more than anything else, confirmed that the climate was right to re-visit the terms of the Salvini Law. And so, at an evening session on 5<sup>th</sup> October 2020, the Italian cabinet approved a wholesale revision of its terms. Over the next sixty days, both legislative chambers will have the opportunity to debate and modify it but the draft is already in force and its eventual endorsement by the President at the end of the sixty day period is fully expected.



The revisions in the new "Immigration Law" do not annul the Salvini Law but they do cut through its worst excesses. Amongst other things:

- "Humanitarian protection", as a basis for justifying a permit to stay in Italy, has all but been restored, under the new name of "special protection";
- Access to Italy's reception system, which had been restricted to minors and those whose refugee status had already been established will now be restored to asylum seekers awaiting a decision;

- The new “Sistema d’accoglienza e integrazione” will include first and second level “services”, the former (such as healthcare, psychological support, language training) focused on reception and the latter (such as support into work and professional training) focused on long-term integration;
- Those seeking citizenship following naturalization will now have to wait only three years rather than four;
- The administrative fines of €1,000,000 which could formerly have been imposed on NGOs carrying out search and rescue work have been reduced to a maximum of €50,000 and can now be imposed only once criminal proceedings have been decided, rather than at the outset. NGOs will no longer be criminalised if certain procedures are followed and boats will no longer be impounded.

As reported by Annalisa Camilli in *Internazionale*<sup>1</sup>, Democratic Party minister Giuseppe Provenzano commented: “When restoring rights or correcting an error, it’s no time to gloat. Cutting out the shame of the Salvini decrees was a necessary act and we have in fact taken too long to do it.”

Those working in the migration sphere would have wished the revisions to go still further. There is, for example, a clear tension between the assertion that people should not be returned to countries where there is systematic abuse of human rights and the continuing arrangements with the Libyan coastguard which appear to create precisely that result. However, there can be no mistaking the significance of this policy shift at a time when hope, for so many, seems so fragile.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.internazionale.it/notizie/annalisa-camilli/2020/10/06/modifiche-decreti-sicurezza-salvini>