Offending the Tricolor is Offending the Republic: The Short Memory of Respect

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There is a limit that should never be crossed, and that is the respect for the symbols of the Republic. Yet, in South Tyrol, for decades there are those who persist in considering the Italian flag an imposition, a foreign body, instead of what it represents: the sovereignty of the State, national identity, the shared memory of a people. Twenty-five years ago, it was President Carlo Azeglio Ciampi – a statesman, patriot, guarantor of the Constitution – who had to sign a decree imposing the presence of the Tricolor on all public buildings in South Tyrol. An act of civility and legality, yet met with disdain by those who, even in 2000, refused the idea of being Italian.

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The Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP) arrogantly rebelled, speaking of an “attack on autonomy.” Deputy Karl Zeller threatened appeals and raised the specter of discrimination, as if the display of the national flag – in a sovereign State – could be considered a hostile act. He even complained about the costs of raising, lowering, and washing the Tricolor, as if the dignity of the Republic had a price.

This is the measure of the paradox: in an Italy that guarantees autonomy, bilingualism, and respect for minorities, there are those who consider a simple call to common identity an affront. In certain areas bordering Austria, the white and red of Tyrol and the Tyrolean eagle stood undisturbed on town halls, while the green, white, and red were ignored, if not despised. It was a challenge to the heart of the State, disguised as cultural protection.

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Tricolor Sash Refused: The Latest Institutional Offense

And today, a quarter of a century later, history repeats itself. Katharina Zeller, newly elected mayor of Merano, chose to refuse the tricolor sash during the inauguration ceremony. **“Let's put it away, come on”**, she said to her predecessor who offered it to her with due respect. An unworthy gesture, especially for someone about to lead an Italian city, in a municipality that receives funds, services, and legitimacy from the Italian State.

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Zeller – daughter of the aforementioned Karl – tried to justify herself by talking about “provocation,” “local practices,” and “city medallion.” But no local custom can override legality and the sense of institutions. The Tricolor is not an option, it is not folklore, it is not an optional tradition: it is the symbol of national unity and must be respected. Period.

Those who represent the institutions have the duty to honor those symbols that sanction their legitimacy. Those who shirk this duty, who minimize, who laugh or refuse it in public, send a devastating message: that being Italian can be optional, that national identity is a jersey to wear only when convenient. It is unacceptable.

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The Complicit Silence and the Moral Obligation to React

Many were rightly outraged. The **senator of Fratelli d'Italia Matteo Gelmetti** spoke of " **outrage to the Republic**" and filed a parliamentary question. Provincial councilor Christian Bianchi denounced "a serious act towards all Italians of Merano." Yet there are also those who tried to downplay, to smooth over, to attribute the incident to a simple misunderstanding. This is the case of SVP president Dieter Steger, who spoke of a "bad joke" and former mayor of Bolzano Luigi Spagnolli, who excluded intentions of insult.

But this is not about interpretations or sensitivities. It is about a political and symbolic gesture, which speaks clearly: there are still those in South Tyrol who do not accept the sovereignty of the Italian State. And every time this happens without a firm reaction, it reinforces the idea that Italy is a tolerated guest, not the shared homeland.

It must be said clearly: those who do not respect the Tricolor do not respect the Republic. And those who represent the institutions have the duty to bow, at least symbolically, before that banner that accompanied our fathers in freedom, in war, in democratic construction. Without the Tricolor, there would be no Merano, no autonomy, no SVP.

Italy is a patient State, perhaps too much so. But national unity cannot be negotiable. And respect for the flag is not a courtesy: it is a constitutional duty.

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