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Gabriele Lanzi: new developments on Italian visa for foreign investors.

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***Gabriele Lanzi** is a member of the Senate of the Republic for the Five Star Movement, elected following the 2018 general election. Before his political involvement, he worked in the ceramics sector for a long time. In 1994, he was appointed Knight of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic.*

THE INTERVIEW

Investorvisa.it: Senator, this is your first parliamentary appointment. What was your approach to the Senate and what do you think you have brought from your previous experiences to the institution?

Lanzi: The sum of my life experiences, accumulated during forty-three years of work, is what I bring to the Parliament. Essential expertise built with effort and that brought me great professional satisfaction. My career in the ceramics sector allowed me to gain an in-depth knowledge of the sector, which is a central part, both on the internal market and on the global one, of the Italian industrial reality. I entered the Parliament with the humility of someone who is always trying to increase their knowledge but with the firm conviction of having broad enough shoulders, forged by many years of work.

The work of the 10th Permanent Commission (Industry, Commerce, Tourism) involves different subjects, however closely intertwined between themselves. With which of these domains have you engaged the most, and to what extent?

I have been dealing with many themes and topics associated with the 10th Commission. Obviously, given the background developed in my previous work, I am closely following the subjects of foreign trade and of investment attraction. However, I did not limit myself to those because I entered the Parliament to address issues relating to the circular economy in its most varied connotations. For this reason, I follow issues linked to the recycling industry and the End of Waste, the state of SIN's (Sites of National Interest) reclamation and denuclearization efforts, renewable energy and, in particular, the electrification of the automotive sector.

In November, you presented a parliamentary question about the procedure to obtain a visa to enter Italy as non-European investor or entrepreneur. The Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs Ricardo Antonio Merlo hypothesized, on that occasion, the use of "white lists" to further streamline visa procedures: have there been developments in this regard or further contacts with the Ministry on this matter?

We are still interested in what emerged from my question, and I have a constant dialogue and excellent relations with our government representatives at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We are sure that "white lists" may be a very useful tool if used correctly and, above all, if they are regularly updated. Even the best tool, if not constantly up to date, ends up becoming an obstacle to the goal I intended to reach when asking my question: the attraction of foreign capitals and investments. It is for this reason that I hope that the Ministry is always checking the use of this tool, collecting reliable data on its actual usefulness and on what it can be done to improve it.

You are the first signatory of the 1056 Bill, "Amendments to article 26-bis of the 25 July 1998 legislative decree, n. 286, on the subject of the entry and stay for investors", to propose a better formulation of the regulation concerning the entry and stay of non-EU investors. How could this initiative be included in the broader framework of government policies aimed at attracting foreign investment in the country?
What the Vice Premier and Economic Development Minister, Luigi Di Maio, is doing to build bridges with all the major global players is under everyone's eyes. The signing of the Memorandum of Understanding with Xi Jinping's China and subsequent talks with Donald Trump's United States show that Italy is a major player in the global market and that it is our priority to interact equally with the great markets that drive our exports. My bill is part of this macroeconomic planning framework by adding a small but substantial piece. The marketing effort carried out by the Government to attract large foreign capitals would be partly vitiated by bureaucratic constraints persisting inside our national borders that do nothing but frighten foreign investors. As members of Parliament, I believe that our task is precisely this: act decisively and de-bureaucratize the state system by streamlining all these gargantuan apparatus of laws, by now obsolete, born in the First Republic.

The signing of the Memorandum of Understanding with China is a matter of current relevance. Do you expect the Government to conclude similar commercial or economic agreements with other countries, in a framework of greater Italian international integration?
As I have already mentioned, China and the United States are just the first two pieces of a mosaic that sees Italy as a protagonist in the global market. In the past, left or right governments may have operated according to a "friend or foe" logic, but now such reasoning will no longer be valid. I am constantly in contact with the ICE, which is at the centre of this commercial expansion project due to their great expertise, built over decades of activity, on the subject of internationalization. The revitalization of the Institute's role is central to our commercial expansion policy. This government builds bridges, not walls or barriers.

What do you think will be the parliamentary road map of the bill? Are you expecting short-term developments or the matter - albeit very technical and circumscribed, still related to a controversial area such as immigration - could it bring the discussion to strike some strictly political chords?
Once assigned to the relevant Commission, it will be the duty of the President of this Commission to begin working on the proposed text. I hope that parliamentary works on this text will be swift because talking about "immigration" in its traditional sense can be misleading. This is a matter related to the growth of the country. It means looking at the future with an eye of regard for Italy

and its vast and diverse traditions, from culture to industry, just to name two, as the fulcrum around which investments from all over the world will revolve.

The first modification proposed in your bill concerns the possibility of granting an entry visa for investors also to legal representatives of legal persons, a possibility currently excluded by the Ministry of Economic Development, which, due to the unclear wording of the law, deemed appropriate to adopt a restrictive interpretation. You believe that the extension of the entry visa benefit to the legal representatives of non-EU companies, therefore allowing not only natural persons but also legal entities to make investments, with the "reward" of the visa and a residence permit also available to them, can improve Italy's attractiveness?

This element is necessary to attract more investment. Major international groups, foundations, and multinationals are clamouring for this adjustment. Be aware that we are not devising anything new with this norm, which finds precedents in many countries all over the world. We are just de-bureaucratizing a rusty procedure, which, if Italy wants to be truly open to the global market, must necessarily be updated.

Another critical facet of the current legislation is the obligation, for the foreign investor, to sign an integration agreement. This is a fact that, without apparent reason, considerably reduces the attractiveness of the visa. Should we forego this demand?

I hope that my proposal on this part of the law, in particular, will be implemented quickly because equating those who bring capitals to Italy to make investments, which must be maintained over time, to regular immigrants is a bureaucratic device of our own. Asking a patron or entrepreneur to learn Italian or learn about our history has nothing to do with our commitment to attracting capitals. I hope, for this reason, that there is a broad political convergence among the majority on this issue.

Those who wish to make philanthropic donations towards the preservation of the Italian cultural heritage can also apply for the visa. It is obviously more difficult to attract patrons rather than entrepreneurs: from this point of view what could be done to increase the former's interest in Italy and its cultural heritage?

Italy has a cultural heritage envied by the whole world that makes Foundations and patrons want to invest in it. In the past, we could always count on donations, especially on occasion, unfortunately, of natural disasters that plagued our territory. These donations were important, for example, during the reconstruction efforts after the last tragic earthquakes in central Italy. Instead, we have to focus on developing a marketing campaign to stimulate capital investments on the already existing cultural heritage for redevelopment, restructuring and to improve the yet-to-exploit attractiveness of some monuments and areas. For an international investor, identifying with the Made in Italy cultural brand is a tremendous boost. We must exploit this predilection to our advantage.

How do the SMEs that would benefit the most from such an influx of capital see this opportunity to internationalize their business or access additional liquidity?

SMEs and the business world, in general, can only look with great hope at any initiative that can boost their presence in the global market. In recent years, export is the factor that has allowed many Italian companies to survive; now is the time that exports themselves help them to grow and establish themselves thanks to the intrinsic quality that the "Made in Italy" brings with it.