



FREEDOM LEGALITY AND RIGHTS IN EUROPE

Sarah, against the mafia in Berlin: nein danke!

By Nando Dalla Chiesa – published by *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, February 9th 2014
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“Wait, I'm high on adrenaline.” States of mind count. And Sarah is really excited. Antimafia overseas: they already tried in London. Less people in the audience than among the speakers. A slap. Even if the City is by now one the main hubs of money laundering. Instead, in Berlin the expectations are different, and rightly so. There is *Mafia? Nein Danke!* Here, founded by the Italian MP, Anti-Mafia Committee member, Laura Garavini and by some restaurateurs in 2007, right after Duisburg, the slaughter that (briefly) shocked Germany, happily confident in its immunity from the clans. The Berlin convention is ambitious, two days even. The theme, the confiscation of criminal assets, a bumpy one even in Italy. Germans, Italians and Spanish among the invited. Sarah Mazzenzana is here since last autumn thanks to a European voluntary project. As soon as she learned of the destination she accepted enthusiastically, since she graduated with a thesis on the Russian mafia, “and it was a feat as I didn't read Cyrillic, but now I am seriously considering studying Russian.” She should stay in Berlin until the summer but they are already seeing to how to keep her, because she is one who does things with a passion, or “adrenaline” indeed.

The more you think them over, the more some Italian stories appear beautiful and incredible. Especially these, of the many young people who, as if by some sort of happy historical nemesis, go fight the mafia around the world after the Italians brought it there, and as other Italians still do. “Most money laundering trials initiated in Germany are against Italian organisations,” says Bernd Finger, a brave and wise Berlin police chief, recently retired.

It is encouraging to see these young people, able to fill the halls in a foreign hotel while in the same city a world-renowned cinema festival is ongoing. Sarah follows the organisational details, takes care of the relationships between the attendees, along with Gabriella, with Sandro, and with Luigino, a native of the Marches with a German wife and son, who is *Mafia? Nein Danke!*'s treasurer and secretary. She thoughtfully translates in every language, with every guest. “Where I am from? Barbaiana, near Rho, a place of smog and pollution; in other words” she bursts out laughing “Lombardy's bonbonnière. And I went to high school in Arese, in a school with a name that stuck to me, 'Falcone-Borsellino'. Why do I know German well? Because I came here with Erasmus in 2007-2008, at the Freie Universität, to study International Relationships and History of contemporary thought. Then I came back in 2011 for a stage at the Institute of Cultural Diplomacy, but I ditched it right away and favoured working nights in restaurants. I still do that on weekends, because what I earn with volunteering is not enough, even if Berlin is less expensive than Italian big cities.”

“Actually, in restaurants here one can every so often find some praise to the mafia. The other day I discussed in an Italian joint with the manager, who was Albanian by the way. I asked him, why that menu with the mafia's evocative names. Why that climate of complacency. And he laughed. He was baffled that I was outraged. He was folklore to him, many still think it's folklore down here.”

Sarah wears big square spectacles, often bites her lip, has a heap of hair she dresses on the most disparate ways in a few hours. Her gaze is intense. She explains the effort of calling magistrates and scholars, diplomats and MPs, policemen and volunteer associations. She recommends to keep every ticket and invoice, because the financial statements will not be a joke, you don't play with European projects. She says they were unfortunately unable to break through with the local press for the convention, but something went out, even the RAI came. “The matter of asset confiscation is not very popular here. Here, they confiscate cash, personal property, but not real estate or businesses.” True. A moment later, the invited magistrate, Petra Leister, could not explain





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it better: for her, criminal organisations seem like faded ghosts: we have no time to waste with these things.

“You want to know if I'll stay here? God, I love the sea. But there are great opportunities here. Look, a friend of mine made a documentary about Anita Malavasi, an Emilian partisan, its title is 'Nothing was given to us for free', and he asked me to work on the subtitles for the Latin-American festival. It's an enriching context. And then, above all, the idea of fighting the mafia as an Italian overseas gives me a beautiful sense of utility.”

Sarah the fighter, a passionate reader of Terzani's, will not leave. *Mafia? Nein Danke!* is at the forefront against the “pizzo” (the so-called “protection money”, Editor's note) by Italians against Italians. Awareness raising is needed, there is much to do. “I am doing something that interests me and that opened the world to me.” She only shies away from the last, innocent question: why is she called Sarah with an “H”? “Do you really want to know? It was my mother's choice – she works in aid to the disabled – she wanted me to have a five-letter name. Like 'amore'. But you are not going to write this, are you?”

