

Toasts of the President and President Saragat of Italy.

February 27, 1969

Mr. President, Your Excellencies:

It is a very great honor for me to be in this magnificent room and to be received in such an eloquent way by the President of this Nation.

I should like to respond to your remarks in both personal terms and then also in the broader terms that you have used in describing the relationship between our two nations.

It was 22 years ago when I first came to this country as a freshman Congressman, and freshmen Congressmen are seldom listened to and seldom survive. I learned much on that journey about this country and our relationship. And when I returned in 1957, as Vice President of the United States, I spoke to you then in the capacity you held as Vice Premier of this country.

When I returned again to this country in 1963, you were President of the Republic and I was a private citizen.

And so it seemed to me, since you had set the example of going from Vice Premier to President, that I should do likewise.

Mr. President, our relationship and my relationship with the other distinguished guests at this table, many of whom I have met on my previous visits, goes far beyond these personal recollections. It is traditional when an American comes to this country, and particularly when an American President comes and is honored as I am being honored tonight, to speak as you have of what contribution--the magnificent contribution--has been made to the American Nation by the Americans of Italian descent.

We are proud of that tradition--the fact that 20 million Americans are proud to claim their Italian background. And we are proud that going clear back to the days of the American Revolution, Americans of Italian descent have played a very significant part in our history.

It would also be appropriate on an occasion like this for an American President to refer, as I do refer now, to the great debt we owe to this nation and to this people for the history that we feel in this room in which we now meet.

Not just this "Eternal City," but other cities in this country, have an historical background that has a meaning far beyond the relationship between our two countries and which deeply enriches our culture.

But I do not speak today primarily of those usual gracious terms and references that are always appropriate, of our common ties in blood, insofar as our national heritage is concerned, of our history and our culture. I speak, as you do, of not just the past, but primarily of what we can do together in the future.

You have spoken very eloquently, Mr. President, about the dream of a united Europe, a dream which many of us in the United States have also supported.

And while we know that this country, as its productivity increases, is now producing approximately \$70 billion in gross national product per year, we also realize that the 300 million people who live in Western Europe produce a total of over \$500 billion per year.

We stand here, in other words, in one of the most productive areas of the entire world. But as we think of that, and as I declare again, as I did in my earlier meetings with you and with members of this government, our adherence to and our support of NATO and the Atlantic Alliance, let us also look to how we can further strengthen not only that Alliance, but strengthen the cause of peace in which we are all interested.

There are several pillars in the "Temple of Peace" which we are now constructing. The first is to maintain the strength of the NATO Alliance; the second is to work toward greater unity, not only in military but in other ways for Europe; and, third, we recognize that in this era in which we are now entering, it will be necessary for the United States of America to conduct bilateral negotiations with the Soviet Union, negotiations that will have a massive effect on whether peace survives in the world.

We will enter into those negotiations whenever we think it is appropriate and whenever we think they will serve the cause of peace. But we will remember that before we talk to the other side, it is essential that we consult with and get the advice of our friends on our side.

I indicated, as you pointed out, in my Inaugural Address, that we were entering a new era of negotiation rather than confrontation.

What this trip that I have taken only 6 weeks after being inaugurated as President of the United States means is that we are also entering a new era of full consultation with our allies on all of the matters that may affect the peace of the world.

And I say that, Mr. President, for this reason: We admire this nation and this people for its magnificent cultural background and tradition. We admire this nation for its tremendous economic progress in so many fields. We admire this nation because of the contribution you have made to our Nation in terms of those Americans of Italian descent who have done so much for us.

But there is another reason that we admire and respect this nation. It is one that I can speak personally about because of my own personal experience going back over 22 years.

I have talked to Italian statesmen--to De Gasperi and those who have followed him--and to the men here at this table, not only you, Mr. President, but President Gronchi ¹ before you and the many others who are represented around this table.

¹Giovanni Gronchi, President of Italy 1955-1962.

And I value what each of you has been able to contribute in terms of your experience and background and judgment with regard to the great issues with which the world is confronted.

Speaking quite candidly, Mr. President, it is true that the United States in the free world is the strongest of the free nations. It is true that we are the richest of the free nations. But I would be the last to claim that the United States had a monopoly on the brains and the wisdom in the free nations.

And so I do not visualize an era in which the leader of the United States, with his advisers, alone makes the great decisions that determine the future of Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America, but I envision an era in which the leader of the United States talking with, consulting with, getting the best advice of the other leaders in our great alliance, will develop the decisions that will serve our common purpose.

And so, Mr. President, I ask all of your guests tonight to rise and raise their glasses with me, not only to Italian-American friendship, but to the Western civilization which we share together and to the good health of the President of this republic and what he symbolizes in terms of world leadership and cooperation with the United States in the years ahead.

Note: The President spoke at approximately 10:30 p.m. in response to a toast proposed by President Giuseppe Saragat at a state dinner in the Quirinale Palace in Rome.

President Saragat spoke in Italian. A translation follows:

Mr. President, it is with a feeling of deep satisfaction and great pleasure that we welcome you today in Rome, only a few months after your election to the Presidency of the United States of America.

Addressing myself to you, the leader of the American Nation, to which we are bound by ties of friendship and alliance, it is gratifying for me to speak first of all of your great country, remembering the hospitality I received there less than 2 years ago and the unforgettable images it has left in my mind.

The Italian Government and the Italian people are indeed keenly aware of the significance of your journey which finds us deeply and spontaneously responsive. Italy, particularly alive and open to the motivations which prompted it, and to the message it conveys, welcomes it, therefore, as a singularly felicitous omen for the future of the relations between the old and the new continent and for the dialogue of peace between East and West.

The Atlantic Alliance unites us in a commitment for defense which guarantees our security and it foreshadows the European-American community, envisaged by the late President Kennedy and outlined recently by you. To the extent to which defense problems are matched by constant initiatives toward detente and peace, we are indeed profoundly convinced that the consolidation and development of such fruitful and freely contracted ties among the peoples who have joined the Atlantic Alliance, far from running counter to the parallel efforts of our countries in order to improve the atmosphere of international relations, and particularly with the East, are a prerequisite for their success. Both, indeed, are complementary factors of a single strategy for peace.

You know well how my country has constantly aimed at a united Europe. We have relentlessly striven and continue to strive toward it, and we do not allow the inevitable obstacles to discourage us in our pursuit.

European unity represents an ever more pressing need in a world where the dimensions and the structures of the past fall short of the demands of the future. Only a united Europe can provide the peoples of our continent with that institution and framework which is indispensable if they are effectively to master their own destiny.

The people of Europe expect to find the friendly American Nation by their side on this road to unity, just as it was by their side in the first hard years following the war when the United States, with generous impulse in the social and economic field and acute political foresight enabled Europe to rise rapidly from the ruins in which war had plunged it.

In your Inaugural Address, Mr. President, you have pointed out that after a period of confrontation we are entering an era of negotiations. This statement cannot but find the full support of my country whose action has always aimed at making such development easier.

We gave a clear proof of this just recently when we signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty prompted by the fervent hope that this decision would contribute to the consolidation of peace, to the reduction of the existing causes for tension, and to the strengthening of mutual trust among nations.

We are firmly committed to make also in the near future every endeavor so that this trust which implies strict respect by one and all for the territorial integrity and the independence of each shall find new sources of encouragement and plan in a renewed effort on the part of all of us, so that this community of nations may proceed on a course leading to the ban of the use of force and armaments from international political life.

This is an aim which can be reached only by giving authority and strength to the organization of the United Nations.

Mr. President, we know you are a true friend of Italy and we know you have already had the opportunity of visiting it. We feel sure that returning today to our country you will have readily recognized the face of a nation which in recent years has come through profound changes, but has consistently maintained its loyalty to the ideals of liberty, democracy, and social justice indelibly engraved in its political and social structures.

They are the very same ideals which have always inspired the great American Nation, those which it has defended, as history shows, with generous impulse; those of which America and Europe, in harmonious collaboration, are the prominent bearers in the world today.

The fruitful friendship between the United States and Italy which has its roots in the bonds of common origin and civilization, of which the existence of 20 million American citizens of Italian extraction is one eloquent proof, is a pledge and a guarantee that this historic duty will not be eschewed and its accomplishment will blossom into prosperity and peace for all the nations of the world.

In this belief and with this wish I raise my glass to the success of your mission of peace, to your personal well-being, to that of your family and of the distinguished personalities who accompany you, and to the good fortunes of the noble American Nation and to the future of the friendship between our two peoples.

Richard Nixon, Toasts of the President and President Saragat of Italy. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/240753>