

Gusts of Change at the Italy-America Chamber of Commerce

Marina Melchionda (May 14, 2010)



Young businessman Claudio Bozzo, President of Mediterranean Shipping Company, was recently elected President of the IACC. He told us about the numerous changes, modernizations and initiatives he is planning to enact within the oldest bilateral Chamber of Commerce in the United States

When you get an appointment with the President of the [Italy-America Chamber of Commerce](http://iltaly.org), [2]somehow you don't expect to find yourself before a businessman that, aside from a suit and a tie, wears a smile so huge and has eyes so bright that you just can't help but notice them. Claudio Bozzo is a young, brilliant Italian businessman who was just recently assigned to guide the oldest bilateral Chamber of Commerce in the United States, the institution whose purpose is, since 1887, to enrich and enforce economic relationships between this country and Italy.



Claudio, the President and Chief Operating Officer of [Mediterranean Shipping Company](#) [3] (USA), the second largest container company in the world, is just in his early forties, and has been a member of IACC since 1996. He has served as a board member since April 2009 and in May 2009 was nominated as the IACC's representative to the Board of Directors of the European-American Chamber of Commerce in the U.S., Inc. (EACC), an established coalition of the European bi-national chambers of commerce in the United States.

Since his election as President of the Chamber on January 27 2010, Claudio has shown all the enthusiasm that characterizes a prepared, experienced, successful young businessmen of his age not only by carrying on the work and initiatives of his predecessors, but also by proposing and sponsoring many important initiatives that have enhanced the role of the bi-lateral institution as a point of reference for Italian entrepreneurs desiring to enter the American market.

Not only. Under his direction the IACC has increasingly become an active, dynamic institution very much engaged in the mission to support the social and economic growth of its members and young professionals interested in its activities. It does it through a consistent number of networking events and conferences that allow them to meet and learn more about the American economic panorama and the current market contingencies, thus establishing the bases for new, real, business opportunities in this country.

We met Claudio at Columbia University during one of the conferences organized under his auspices, "The Mediterranean: A Market for the Third Millenium" that saw the internationally renowned economist Giancarlo Elia Valori talk before a significant audience of professionals, students, and diplomatic dignitaries, including the Ambassador of Italy to the United States Giulio Terzi di Sant'Agata, and the Consul General of Italy in New York Francesco Maria Talò: an issue that attracted a full range of people and testified once again to the important social work performed by IACC under its new presidency.

Claudio, how does it feel to be president of the oldest bi-lateral Chamber of Commerce in the US?

Being also one of the oldest chambers of commerce worldwide, I look at it as a great honor. I was very impressed that its members elected me to be their President since I am so young, just as much as when I was elected President at the Mediterranean Shipping Company in 2006. Since we all know that in Italy it is much more difficult to be recognized for your merits when you are so young, by covering this mandate I feel responsible not only towards my company and the IACC, but also towards young people like me that are waiting for their occasion to show what they can do. They are left aside for too many years, and when their time comes, it is often a bit late: they should be given a chance when they have the physical and mental capabilities that make them a unique resource. Maybe something is changing, who knows. The "old school mentality" might be leaving its place to the logic of "meritocracy".

And you're fully backing this evolution...

Yes, I created a "gruppo giovani" (Youth Group) composed of young professional and students involved in the field of economics. They are those who are mainly responsible for the wonderful outcome of this conference, and I am very proud of how much they got involved with the IACC's activities.

I also opened a Gruppo Donne (Women's Group), because I believe that they should be given many more opportunities to show how much they are worth. Also as President of Mediterranean Shipping Company, I assigned a good number of managerial roles to our female employees: they are detail-oriented, well-organized, and let me tell you, they often have much better communication skills than their male colleges, and thus better contractual power.

It's a very difficult moment to promote changes, given the harsh economic times. How is IACC supporting its members in these contingencies?

It's a very hard task for us. Italians often come to the United States with an idea of what they want to do and how they want to accomplish it, and sometimes it's very hard to advise them to follow a



different path. The best way to face this crisis is to adapt your needs and aims to the environment you find around you. You just can't bring to another country your business model and want it to work perfectly just as it is.

Once this is clear, we focus on helping Italian enterprises, that are mainly middle and small-sized, to find their niche market in the US, and only afterwards support them in starting a large distribution in the main urban centers and throughout the countryside.

You represent the second largest container company in the world, Mediterranean Shipping Company. What is the key characteristic every company should have to succeed in the United States?

Without a doubt, the correct use of its human resources. A company can have huge possessions and wealth, but it is the people who run it and contribute to its growth through their work that make the difference. We at MSC have a significant number of foreign employees and managers, that we hire because of the outstanding expertise they have and that often comes from their cultural backgrounds. We are very careful in assigning them to the position that exactly fits their competencies, otherwise we would waste the possible contributions they could give to our growth. We are a huge multicultural, global company, but we still maintain the typical Italian family-structure. This was our strategy when we came to the United States, and we believe it's a winning one.

Do you think that Internet could become a useful communication channel between the IACC and its members?

One of the first things I put in my agenda when I was elected President was to create a new website for the Chamber. The one we had before was indeed very elegant, but not too effective. We launched a public contest, and already have a winner. The new website won't be too different from the old one but will feature a much larger data bank accessible to all of our members, as well as papers and documents that will consistently boost and foster their research. Maybe one day we'll also open an online forum, that will increase communications both among members and with our advisers.

What are your other goals as President of the IACC?

I have several changes that I want to make. There are many very valid professionals and experts at IACC that are definitely overwhelmed with day-to-day work, and have little time left to accomplish their mission. So, as a first thing, I will free them from much of their routine assignments and allow them to focus much more on their task to support economic interchanges between Italy and America at various levels.

Second, I want IACC to organize many more networking events so that our members will have more possibilities to contact possible buyers, vendors, and so on. In the last few months we are also welcoming representatives of other Chambers of Commerce to all of our appointments: as an example, we had the Presidents of six foreign Chambers of Commerce at our Spring Luncheon last month. These events can become a great opportunity to enlarge our horizons, and contribute to the growth of our members, of Italian entrepreneurs and, finally, of the Italian economy.

The Italy-America Chamber of Commerce is a private, not-for-profit, membership organization that represents the interests of companies that have, or that are interested in establishing business and commercial relations between the United States and Italy. The IACC brings together businesses - ranging from individual entrepreneurs to large corporations - advancing the interests of its members through contacts and interaction with government agencies, trade associations and leading international organizations. The Italy-America Chamber of Commerce is a member of Assocamerestero, the world association of Italian bi-national chambers, and is affiliated with the United States Chamber of Commerce.

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