
Interview: Roberto Formigoni

End the embargo against Iraq

Roberto Formigoni is president of the Lombardy region in Italy, one of the most important industrial regions in Europe. In April, Formigoni had an official meeting with Chinese President Jiang Zemin, when Jiang visited the region. On April 21, Formigoni sent greetings to the EIR conference in Bonn, and endorsed Lyndon LaRouche's proposed reconstruction plan for the Balkans and his proposal for a New Bretton Woods global financial system.

On May 19, Formigoni returned from an official visit to Iraq, which was aimed at ending the embargo against that nation. He granted the following interview to Liliana Celani upon his return.

EIR: When you recently returned from Iraq, you officially demanded an end to the policy of economic sanctions. What effect has this policy had on Iraq in the last eight years?

Formigoni: A devastating one. Eight years after the beginning of the embargo, despite the fact that Iraq had complied with all UN requests, economic sanctions are just a cruelty against the population. Recent reports from the World Health Organization demonstrate that it has caused malnutrition and disease. An entire new generation has been affected by it. The average height of children apparently shrunk by 3 centimeters as a result of it. You have the phenomenon of increasing starvation and begging, and a large proportion of the population sees no hope for the future. A figure which is significant: child mortality increased from 3.7% before the Gulf War to 12% today. In hospitals, essential medicines are lacking, equipment is obsolete. This is the situation, despite the fact that Baghdad rebuilt many of the structures that had been destroyed by the war: bridges, roads, buildings.

EIR: According to a report on your trip published by the Italian Catholic daily *Avvenire*, the report of UN chief inspector Richard Butler, which was used as a pretext for the recent attacks, is a fake, and this has been confirmed even by other UN inspectors.

Formigoni: In Baghdad, I had the opportunity to meet some international representatives, including from the UN, who confirmed for me that the recent attack was not justified. I hope that Richard Butler will be replaced very soon. Every

person with good sense inside the UN knows that UN inspectors had already checked every corner of the country, and demanding new controls was looking for a *casus belli*.

EIR: Pope John Paul II has been invited to Iraq. What are the concrete perspectives for his visit, and how do Iraqis see his recent interventions against the war in Kosovo?

Formigoni: There is great anticipation regarding the Pope's visit, including among the people. They all know that the Pope wishes to come to Iraq, and they await him with joy. Iraq is one of the few Islamic countries which allows total religious freedom. There is a Christian community, whose churches publicly display crosses. I would add a little provocation: I could visit Catholic and Protestant kindergartens and elementary schools, which are financed there by the state, in contrast to Italy!

In the Chaldean Church, they are preparing for the Pope. [Catholic Archbishop] Monsignor Dadah was here in Milan, and I also met [Chaldean] Patriarch Bidawid in Baghdad. The Pope has completed the preparations for his visit to Iraq, whose timing depends pretty much on the international situation.

EIR: Recently, the Pope spoke of "very precise, unnamable interests behind this war" in the Balkans. What do you think he was referring to?

Formigoni: It is difficult to interpret the words of the Pope, but there is no doubt that there are specific international interests behind the war in the Balkans, countries which always thought of having privileged relations with Serbia, financial and economic interests, which first supported [Serbian President Slobodan] Milosevic, and are now leading the bombing attacks.

EIR: Lyndon LaRouche recently proposed a reconstruction plan not only for the Balkans but for all of southeastern Europe, as President Clinton had already envisaged in his speech in San Francisco. It was proposed as a Ron Brown Memorial Plan, in memory of the Secretary of Commerce who died in Bosnia in 1996. What do you think about such a new Marshall Plan proposal?

Formigoni: I fully endorse this plan. I hope it will be realized very soon, because the world economy needs to be revived very urgently. There are ethical reasons for this, but also reasons of economic convenience for all of us.

EIR: Before you go, I have a last question on the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, since you recently met with President Jiang Zemin in Milan. Are you among those who say that the attack was not a mistake?

Formigoni: Let's put it diplomatically this way: I hope that it was only a mistake, because had it been otherwise, it would be very bad.