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# Day 1 of loosened lockdown in Italy. A COVID of wishes



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May 4 · 4 min read ★





by C. Flisi

Partly sunny skies, not quite balmy temperatures, more cars than in recent weeks but not a *lot* of traffic, a reduction in the upward curve of cases and deaths due to COVID-19 but not a reduction in *actual* cases and deaths— the first day of loosened lockdown in Italy is a portrait in prevarication.

Still, I'll take what's available. Not bright sunshine but it's not raining. Light sweater weather so a mask can be supported comfortably. Few enough cars that I don't look around anxiously when crossing the street with my dog. Today 63 people died in my region of Lombardia, while 42 had died on Sunday, out of a total of 29,079 deaths in Italy to date, almost half (14,294) in my region.

What I wish for after more than two months of severe social distancing is an extension of what Robert Frost expressed more than a century ago. *Something there is that doesn't love a wall, That wants it down.*

In Phase I everyone had to stay home, with the exception of clearly-defined “essential workers”. That created a wall of

separation between medical requirements for the collective good and economic necessities for the individual good, a barrier that has been a continuing point of negotiation and discussion ever since. Precisely today, more than 4.5 million workers have returned to their places of employment, most of them in manufacturing. Other businesses are scheduled to reopen gradually over the course of this month, with the exception of sports stadiums, cinemas, and the like for which further study is required.

Walls between family members have been dismantled. As of today, “*si considerano necessari gli spostamenti per incontrare i congiunti*” (it’s okay to travel to meet relatives) though the definition of “relatives” was dicey for awhile. Did the government mean only parents and children? That would exclude grandparents, grandchildren, nieces and nephews. Did the government mean only blood relatives? That would exclude in-laws (not that a lot of folks would mind). Did the government mean only relatives recognized by law? That would exclude boyfriends and girlfriends and live-in companions. All these kinds of visits are okay, provided the end result is not more than 15 people.

What about friends? The Decreto del Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri (DPCM, the decree on which these rules are based) says no “*assembramento di persone in luoghi pubblici e privati*” (no gathering of people in public and private places) but “relatives” can include persons with whom one has *affetti stabili* (consistent affection), which sounds like a pretty good definition of friendship.

Walls *within* regions have been lifted. In theory I can move around Lombardia now, perhaps with a new autocertificazione document explaining the reason for my movement. Walls *between* regions still exist. I could travel from Milan to Rome, but, if challenged, I would have to provide a valid explanation for doing so — family, work, or health. The logistics are daunting in both cases. There used to be five trains an hour between my town and Milan center city. Now there are two. There used to be a high-speed train almost every half hour between Milan and Rome. Now there are three a day.

Walls within Europe, and between Italy and the rest of the world, remain high. Robert Frost asked why fences make good neighbors, then answered it himself: *Isn't it where there are cows? But here there are no cows.* At the beginning of the corona crisis, Italy started controlling all flights to and from Wuhan, then cancelling all flights to and from China. When Italy began to experience a rise in deaths, other countries closed their borders to us. Ironically, the situation here is the opposite of Frost's. Shouldn't walls exist to keep the virus out? But COVID is already everywhere.

These days if I want to drive to the neighboring countries of France or Switzerland, Italy won't stop me at the border. But France and Switzerland will request their own autocertificazione documents, attesting to my need to travel for work, family, or health reasons unless I am a French or Swiss citizen. Other countries in Europe may ask for a similar document or insist that I go into quarantine for 14 days at my own expense. If I were to fly to the US on my Italian passport, I

would be denied permission to enter. If I fly on my US passport, I would be allowed to “return home,” but with the Catch-22 that almost no planes are flying between Milan and my preferred US destinations.

One encouraging sign of *frozen-ground-swell* in Europe is a continent-wide effort to find a vaccine and treatments for COVID-19. Leaders from France, Germany, Italy, Norway and the EU supported an online pledging conference today for what is billed as an international alliance against this disease. Border walls did not prevent this collaborative effort among countries, since everyone here recognizes that international cooperation will shorten the time to a cure.

Unfortunately a wall remains in that the US refuses to participate. Leadership in Washington doesn't so much as understand the benefits of collaboration, much less disassemble walls to contribute to such an effort. Frost was prescient in his description of his wall-loving neighbor:

*I see him there*

*Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top*

*In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.*

*He moves in darkness as it seems to me,*

*Not of woods only and the shade of trees.*

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