

GLOBAL
Q&A

'Would you be supportive of hosting the Olympics in your city?'

Hosting the Olympic Games would be a wonderful step forward to some or a waste of resources to others according to the responses given to The Epoch Times from the Canary Islands to Obala when they asked locals, "Would you be supportive of hosting the Olympics in your city?"

WARSAW, POLAND
JOANNA HOJKA, 27, ECONOMIST



I would rather be for the Olympics. It would have a positive effect on economic progress—more people would be employed; a bigger infusion of cash for the city's infrastructure development. I see more positive sides. For example, in 2012 the UEFA European Football Championships will be in Poland. I definitely see more positive aspects connected with the economic progress and tourism in our country.

CANARY ISLANDS, SPAIN
MARIA LOZANO, 67
RETIRED HISTORY PROFESSOR



No, I wouldn't. The main reason being that I don't think we've got the minimum infrastructure to cope with an event this huge, neither do I think it would be a great idea to invest all that money for a few weeks unless your city may get a significant return from that investment. Maybe the Canary Islands would be a good option for being the center for sailing competitions.

OBALA, CAMEROON
NGA MAYELE JEAN-MARIE, 40, TEACHER



The Olympic Games are a nice thing and I would support it in Cameroon for several reasons. First, we Cameroonians like sport, especially football; our team is top class. Second, it's an opportunity for our country to receive lots of foreigners, which would benefit business people. Third, our government would build many stadiums, develop infrastructure and invest in sport.

Look for the Global Q&A column every week, when Epoch Times correspondents interview people around the world to learn about their lives and perspective on local and global realities.

Next week's global question: Do you feel your country would be prepared to cope with a major natural disaster like an earthquake?

Opposition mounts over French warships sales to Russia

By AURELIEN GIRARD
Epoch Times Staff

PARIS—An official visit by U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates to France on Feb. 8 and 9 was marked by a controversial announcement that France may sell four Mistral warships to Russia in the coming months, a move unwelcomed by the United States, the country of Georgia, and Baltic countries.

"This is no longer just one, but four warships" that Russia is willing to purchase, said Jacques de Lajugie of the French Defense Ministry. "France is examining the request."

Gates said after meeting with his counterpart, French Defense Minister Hervé Morin, that he had discussed the issue in detail with Morin, but Gates initially declined to comment further. However, he finally said after meeting with French President Nicolas Sarkozy that "the issue is a message issue more than a military issue."

A representative of the U.S. government told Agence France-Presse on Tuesday that Washington "had questions to raise."

The warship sales, if finalized, would be a historical first between any NATO country and Russia. In November 2009, France agreed to provide one Mistral to Russia, triggering protests from some U.S. senators and from Georgia officials. Comments made by a Russian navy official were widely publicized to justify the potential threat of having the sophisticated French warships in Russia's fleet, especially in the Black Sea.

The Russian official had said that with Mistral ships, Russian forces could have invaded Georgia in 40 minutes rather than 26 hours during Russian-Georgian war in 2008.

France justified the initiation of military commercial contacts with Russia with the need to remain consistent in its overall diplomatic strategy with Russia.

"We cannot have two kinds of stances," Morin said, adding that it would be incompatible to try to build trust, security, stability, and peace on the one hand and to "maintain business relations and exchanges like with the Russia of before 1991" on the other.

France announced an "agreement of principle to negotiate," and expects to receive a "formal offer" from Russia, according to French newspaper Le Monde. Since Spain and the Netherlands can make comparable offers to Russia, and the contract for the ships could save hundreds of jobs in the French shipbuilding industry, internal pressure is high within the French government.

Mistral ships, considered among the best of their class, can each carry 900 soldiers as well as 15 helicopters and tanks. The official reply to the Russian offer could be formulated by the French government in the coming weeks.

Several Russian media such as Moskovski Komsomolets estimate that the deal—worth 500 million Euros (CA\$730 million)—could be closed during Russian President Dimitri Medvedev's visit to France on March 2.

In lieu of immigration reform, Italy proposes a new set of rules

By DANA BETLEVY
Epoch Times Staff

ROME, Italy—A new set of rules about how immigrants should be integrated into Italian society was proposed on Feb. 5 by Italian Interior Minister Roberto Maroni and Minister of Labor and Social Policy Maurizio Sacconi, but has been criticized as too simplistic a response, and perhaps a roadblock to citizenship.

The decree would require the applicant for residency to sign an "integration agreement." They must agree to fulfill their tax debts, be able to speak Italian, join the national health service, and know the constitution. Immigrants will have to score 30 "points" in a series of exams on similar topics over a period of two years. If by then the individual hasn't accumulated 30 points, they're granted another year to succeed. After that, if they still don't make it, the would-be resident is expelled under the proposed new regulations for "being unwilling to integrate."

"To ensure integration, I suggest things to do to integrate into the community," the Italian Interior Minister said, summing up his case for the system of measures.

Critics see it as a "marathon trial" and more of a hindrance than a help to migrant integration, designed to deter them from the attempt.

Livia Turco, officer for immigration issues of the center-left Democratic Party, believes that the proposed measures are inadequate when Italian language and culture courses for foreigners are usually held by a few church volunteers, rather than robust, formal courses run by the state.

"Italy is, unfortunately, not

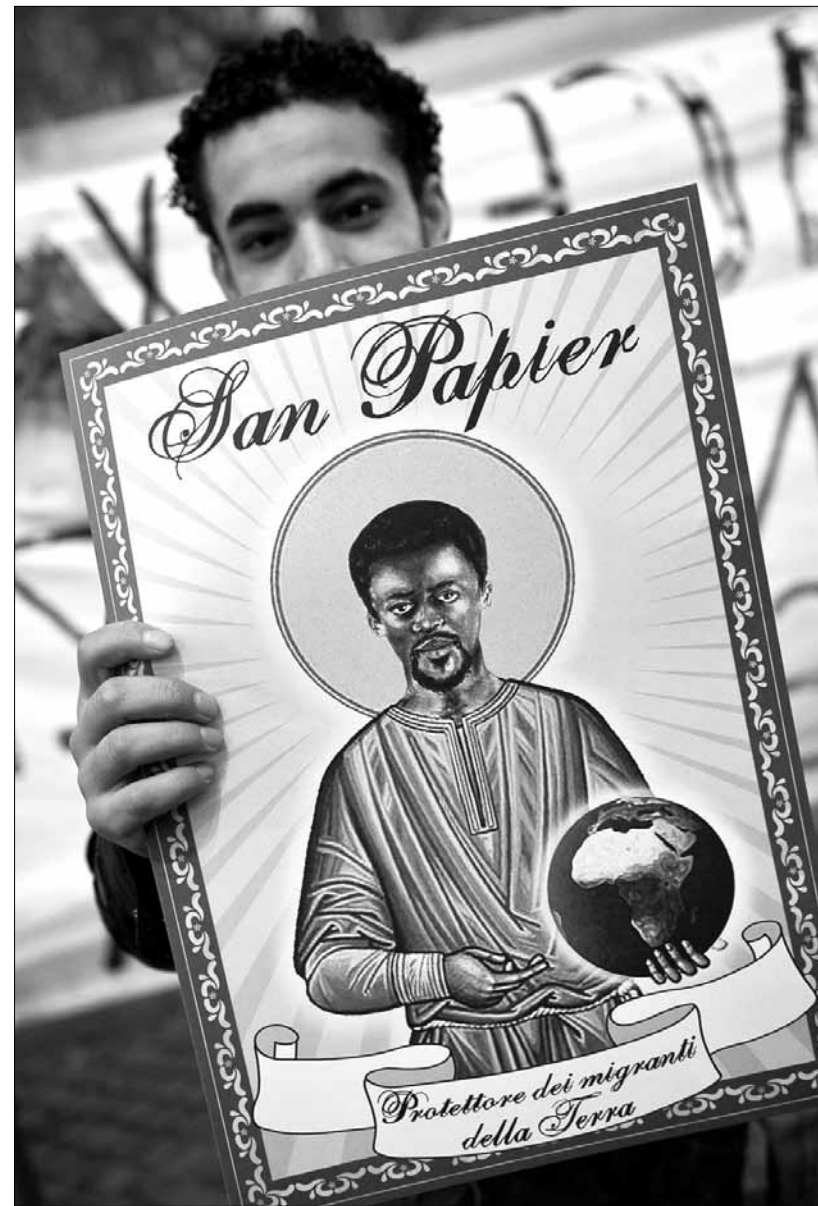
Canada," she said. "If you, Maroni, and Sacconi want to imitate Canada or other countries that have adopted such a system, then first solve these problems and provide times for renewals of permits and courses for language and culture, from public schools," Turco said in an article in an Italian newspaper.

Whether the new rules proposed by Maroni and Sacconi are able to resolve the problem is still unclear. The issue of immigration, either legal or illegal, is one faced not only by Italy but the EU as a whole, according to an op-ed by Sandeep Gopalan in the Wall Street Journal. Mr. Gopalan writes that recent race riots in Italy are only a taste of things to come, and that "Massive illegal immigration and native resentment are inevitable by-products of the European Union's broken immigration system."

Illegal employment is often favored to avoid paying taxes, so immigrants can sometimes be caught in a closed loop—to be officially hired, they need a residence permit, and to get a residence permit, they need the paperwork showing they are renting a house. But taxes on rent income makes landlords prefer to do things under the table. In this scenario, new immigrants to Italian society are at a strong disadvantage, often working in the black, living in squalid conditions in abandoned industrial areas, and hunted by the authorities.

Mr. Gopalan argues that "Italy and other European countries must learn from the American experience that comprehensive immigration reform is essential."

Interior Minister Maroni said the regulation is on the way to being implemented soon, according to an article in the Italian "Adnkronos."



IMMIGRANT POLICY: A demonstrator holds a placard of "San Papier"—the "protector of the migrants of the earth"—during a protest by members of anti-racism associations in solidarity with the immigrant workers of Rosarno in front of the Interior ministry on Jan. 9 in Rome. Italy is changing its immigration policy. Critics are calling the changes a marathon of obstacles for foreigners desiring integration into Italy. ANDREAS SOLARO/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Thousands of secret documents are core of U.K. Iraq inquiry

INQUIRY CONTINUED FROM P1

When Straw said this was not the case "to the best of my recollection" and talked more broadly around the question, Freedman pressed him a few times on the issue.

"I was going to suggest you might want to look through your conversations and check," he said.

"I will go through the records, because I think you are trying to tell me something," said Straw.

Straw also said he had no recollection of Claire Short's accusation that she had been "jeered at" by members of the Cabinet when she challenged the legality of the invasion.

"This was a very serious Cabinet meeting. People weren't, as I recall anyway, going off with that kind of behaviour. We all understood the gravity of the decision," he said.

Short resigned as the U.K.'s International Development secretary two months after the invasion of

Iraq, and has been an outspoken critic of former Prime Minister Tony Blair and the Iraq war.

Straw had denied that the Cabinet discussion on the attorney general's advice on the legality of invasion had been blocked, and said that there was no way the members of Cabinet could be unaware of the finely balanced nature of the legal argument, given its wide attention in the media.

He said that Cabinet comprised strong-minded people.

"None of them were wilting violets; their judgment was that it was not necessary to go into the process by which Peter Goldsmith came to his view," he said. "I don't recall Cabinet as a whole receiving legal advice on the matter. All [Cabinet] wanted to know was: is it lawful or is it not lawful?"

What was required in the end was "essentially a yes or no deci-



INQUIRY: Former British Justice Secretary Jack Straw arrives at the Iraq Inquiry for a second round of questioning on Feb. 8. PETER MACDIARMID/GETTY IMAGES

sion" from the attorney general, he added.

Straw stoutly defended his decision not to act on the advice of the Foreign Office legal adviser, Sir Michael Wood.

"The legal advice he offered, frankly, was contradictory and I think I was entitled to raise that," he said, referring to Wood's comments a few months before the invasion of Iraq that "the UK cannot lawfully use force against Iraq to ensure compliance with its security—council WMD obligations [without UN Security Council authority]."

Chilcott said that the inquiry hoped to meet with veterans from the Iraq war later this year, as well as with more top officials from the Bush administration.

Blair told Fox news on Monday that the succession of probes into the invasion reflected our human inability to agree or disagree.

"There's always got to be a scandal as to why you hold your view. There's got to be some conspiracy behind it, some great deceit that's gone on, and people just find it hard to understand that it's possible for people to have different points of view and hold them ... for genuine reasons. There's a continual desire to sort of uncover some great conspiracy, when actually there's a decision at the heart of it."

Philippines charges clan boss and 196 others over massacre

By STEPHEN JONES
Epoch Times Staff

The patriarch of a powerful clan in the southern Philippines has been charged with authorizing the massacre of 57 of his political rivals.

Another 196, including family members, police, and civilian militia, also face charges for their role in what has become the country's worst election-related violence in recent years.

Andal Ampatuan Sr., whose family has dominated the unruly Maguindanao Province for over a decade, will face 57 counts of murder before a Manila court.

It is alleged that Ampatuan Sr., who has close ties to the country's President Gloria Arroyo, was behind the deaths of a group of supporters of political rival Esmael Mangudadatu.

The victims—among whom were Mangudadatu's wife and pregnant sister—had been travelling to the provincial capital to file election papers for Mangudadatu, who is

They were ambushed and shot by a group of around 100 armed men. Their bodies were found in a mass grave in a mountainous area of the province

running for governor in the May elections.

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Prior to Tuesday's announcement on the mass charges, only the clan leader's son—Datu Andal Ampatuan Jr.—had been charged.

Justice Secretary Agnes Devanadera told reporters that the charges against Ampatuan Jr.—who was the key suspect in the massacre—had been modified.

Witnesses claim that Ampatuan Sr. had told his son "you know what to do" with regard to the convoy of Mangudadatu's supporters.

The 69-year-old clan leader denies the statement, and claims the charges against him have been fabricated.

Twenty-five other members of his family, 65 soldiers and police officers, and 106 members of a civilian militia force are also among those who were charged on Tuesday.

"From the witnesses presented ... it can be deduced that the commission of the crime was planned deliberately by the perpetrators and that, until its consummation, there was an inexorable resolve to kill," the indictment document said. "Consequently, their plan was carried out leading to the mass murder."

Ampatuan Sr. is currently being guarded at an army hospital in Davao

City on the southern Mindanao island. His brother and his three sons are being detained at a police base in another southern city.

Thirty local journalists were among those killed on Nov. 23. Last week, relatives of 14 of the murdered journalists petitioned the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to ensure the suspects do not escape justice.

Lawyer Harry Roque, who represents families of the journalists killed, told the BBC that he was concerned because so many people had been added to the charge.

"The fact that the system is moving does not necessarily mean that the system is, in fact, healthy," he said. "What we need right now are convictions, because the obligation of the state is not just to indict but to successfully prosecute the perpetrators of this act."

The charges come as the country gears up for a national election. Fifty million voters will choose a new president and regional governors on May 10.