



**25 YEARS OF THE FALL OF APARTHEID IN SOUTH AFRICA.**

**INTERVIEW WITH NOMATEMBA TAMBO,  
AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA IN ITALY**

by

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In our opinion, Italy has lost part of its capability of reasoning about and observing the African continent. However, it maintains friendly relations with a significant number of countries and the Italian scientific community is a fertile field for African studies. After the fall of apartheid, South Africa gained a leading role in the continent and all political and socio-economic facts are part of the daily chronicles in the newspapers and on TV. The death of Nelson Mandela has definitely been an event of worldwide resonance, followed by millions of people as well as Heads of State and Government. In opening this monographic number on South African constitutional law and practice, *Federalismi.it* decided to interview Nomatamba Tambo, the Ambassador of the Republic of South Africa in Italy, to better understand some features of contemporary South Africa's internal and foreign situation, not forgetting the recent past of apartheid.

**South Africa is the only African country taking part in the G20 and in the BRICS. What is its role? Is somehow SA representative of the entire continent?**

“The geographical area of BRICS represents roughly 3 billion people and all the BRICS countries are developing countries. South Africa is not the biggest country of Africa, neither does it have the highest population, but it has the largest economy and participates in the international arena for economic development purposes, so affecting the direction of global affairs, which desperately need to be reformed. We think that there is a significant need to

change the way. The importance of South Africa in the BRICS business council, an initiative which came up at the Durban summit, could help promote investments, trade and infrastructure development between members. On the other side, the G20 is a massively important group representing two thirds of global trade and of world population and more than 80% of the global GDP (Gross Domestic Product). South Africa is the only African country in the G20 but aspires to push not just South Africa's position but also the African Agenda.”

**South Africa had a significant economical development while the gap between groups still remains a big challenge. What economic politics has the South African government put forward?**

“Let's take a part the strike season and the miners' strike of Marikana. Anyway, there is a growing gap between working people and the jobless but the government is doing a lot. The New Growth Plan, for instance, has taken on the task of employing the young and the need to offer a better education to the young. Its goal is to assist in job creation and expand an environment to create jobs. But there is also a great need to explain that there are not only professionals or qualified jobs, but also jobs that are needed by the economic system such as manual workers, electricians, artisans and plumbers. One government objective is to encourage young people to have a different mind-set in their approach to work. It took a lot of time to explain to people that you do not always need a university degree to become a relevant member of our society. In the past, there was only the university degree as a means to acquire an education. For women, the only jobs admitted were teacher, social worker or nurse. For men, professions like medicine, law and university teaching. There were no economists, scientists, and engineers. Now there are also technical colleges and others and the issue is to broaden the mind-set of our young people. The job creation problem is not only a South Africa problem but also a whole African continent one. Within five/ten years we will have up to 300 fifty million people less than 25 years old, so we have to answer how to address this point.”

**In what way are economic disparities still linked with socio-economic disparities and unemployment?**

“During apartheid the Black people had no access to capital and to an economic revenue. These days, the Johannesburg Stock Exchange remains a prerogative of white societies and companies, and the Whites still control the majority of the economy. But there is an

expanding black middle class - that there wasn't ten years ago - and you can see it in the changing society (school, travel, habits and consumption). This is an important turning point in recent South African history and socio-economic development which need to be stressed and boosted. This notwithstanding, there are a lot of people still struggling for education, food, and healthcare, that is to say for basic needs and services. We can forget apartheid and past crimes, but we cannot forget the consequences of apartheid. These are the legacy of apartheid and are everywhere in South Africa. My family is a product of apartheid. Even me, I am a product of apartheid. All my country and my people have been denied very basic and fundamental rights and needs. So, the two things are intrinsically linked in my mind. But we have to consider that it is not only a governmental and political problem: in South Africa there is a fair minimum wage legal standard. What is still difficult, for instance, is to find a black entrepreneur or to have access to financial loans from the Bank. One of the most important clauses of the Constitution, section 9, which is about equality and judicial interpretation, is going to foster and to promote its effectiveness. Remember, for instance, that women in the past could not even sign a contract, they were considered on the same level as children.”

**You do not really have any religious issues and conflicts. Could you propose your peaceful example for the other countries of Africa?**

“Our position has been influenced by history. South Africa is the product of its history. In our country there is a high level of religious diversity: Christians of different faiths, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists. We do not have religious issues at all.

But we also have some philosophical basis that drives us. What we call ubuntu – as an example – which means, “I see you because you are” it is impossible to translate into Asian or to any other part of African experiences. It took a lot of time to liberate the country so we have a lot of time to reflect on women equality, child and human rights. The point here is that we were not fighting only for the Black South Africans but also for the Whites. The Whites too were oppressed and we walked together side by side. In the interesting Grootboom law case of 2000, even the constitutional Court stands against the Government saying that “There is no later, there is now in guaranteeing house and shelter for everyone”. There is also a notion of civic responsibilities. The Constitution says that you come first and people are growing used to this idea. From the judicial point of view is all about interpretation.”

**What is the role of South Africa in the on-going process of African regional integration?**

**Could the umbrella of the African Union be effective to achieving this objective?**

“Regional integration is a crucial issue and tells us the regions aspire to work together. It speaks about the desire of Africa to speak together. Let’s remember the COMESA (Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa) based on the idea of the formation of a large economic and trading unit, capable of overcoming some barriers faced by individual states. However, regional integration is not only trade and commerce but is about migration and the free circulation of people around the continent, economic development and sustainability.”

**What do you think about the relations between Italy and South Africa and what are the prospects for the future? How is the situation of the internalisation of foreign enterprises and, in particular, the attraction of Italian companies to South Africa?**

“The dynamics change so much in terms of the economic landscape. There are a lot of Italian initiatives in business and trade, technology, education, health and there are a lot of products that are exported to South Africa from Italy. Italian people are very warm even in business. However, it is not just about economic development or infrastructures, but also education and healthcare to follow a holistic approach. We need someone to teach people how to use these technologies. For Italy, there is a massive role to play in South Africa and we have to decide how we can work together. Economic and trade relations between countries follow a really interesting dynamic. If you look at trade, you are also looking at culture. Culture is not only art and literature, but the way you raise your family and your children, the spirit of service, your curiosity about the rest of the world. All of this comes to defining of economic opportunities and a strong economic foundation. Economics is a way of life and becomes an intrinsic part of everything.”