



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on June 22, 2015

Rome: Hundreds of Thousands Protest Against Same-sex Unions

A crowd estimated in the hundreds of thousands gathered in Rome's San Giovanni Square on June 20 to engage in a Family Day protest against a bill backed by Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi that would create civil unions for same-sex couples. The square, adjacent to the Basilica of St. John Lateran, can hold an estimated 300,000 people, but the crowd of protesters overflowed beyond its boundaries, an AFP photographer said.



The bill that Renzi has attempted to push through Parliament would, in addition to establishing civil unions for homosexuals, provide for the teaching of “gender theories” in Italian schools. It passed the Chamber of Deputies (the lower house of Parliament) on June 10 and must now be approved by the Senate. Renzi seeks a Senate vote on the legislation during the next few weeks, with the aim of it being enacted before the end of July. The prime minister is a member of Italy's Democratic Party, which is often described as being “center-left,” but has inherited a legacy of socialism from its predecessors.

Italian Democrats were energized in their push for civil unions after voters in Ireland — which like Italy, has a large majority of Catholics — approved a referendum on May 23 legalizing same-sex “marriage by a 62.1-percent affirmative vote. Following that vote, Renzi said: “Civil unions [in Italy] cannot be delayed any longer.”

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And Italy's Democratic Party leader Roberto Speranza called the Irish vote a “joy,” adding that “now it is Italy's turn.” Another party leader, Laura Boldrini, the president of the Chamber of Deputies, tweeted an approving message on the day of the Irish referendum that translates as: “being European means recognizing rights.”

While the Democrats may be the strongest political party in Italy, with a large plurality in both houses of parliament, they still face formidable opposition to passage of their civil unions bill — particularly from the Catholic Church, which seems to have a stronger influence on Italian society than it does in Ireland, where most Catholic voters ignored a statement published by the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference in opposition to its passage.

The presence of the Vatican in Italy may be responsible for that added clout. Following the passage of the Irish referendum, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican secretary of state, issued a statement on May 26 expressing his dismay:

I am very sad because of this result — the Church needs to strengthen its efforts to spread its message. I really think we should not just speak of this as a defeat for Christian principles but also a defeat for humanity.

The Catholic Church's teaching concerning the nature of marriage as an institution reserved for



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heterosexual couples is reflected in paragraph 1603 of the Church's Catechism: "God himself is the author of marriage.... *The vocation to marriage is written in the very nature of man and woman as they came from the hand of the Creator.*" [Emphasis added.]

Opposition to the civil unions and "gender theory" education bill has been led by lay Italian leaders, however. Among them is Massimo Gandolfini, spokesman for the "Defend our children!" committee, who told the press during the June 20 rally:

We are asking for families based on marriage [to] be respected, and stressing the central role parents play. We forcefully reject the attempt to sneak into the curriculum projects which aim to destroy children's sexual identities.

Matteo Salvini, the federal secretary of the Lega Nord (Northern League) party and a member of the European Parliament, sent a Facebook "hug for all the mummies and daddies protesting peacefully in Rome to defend their children's future."

Another demonstrator interviewed by AFP identifying himself as Dr. Giuseppe Ripa said: "In my children's schools they are talking about families made up of two fathers or two mothers, without asking parents' permission. It's dangerous and wrong."

Italy is the only Western European country that does not allow same-sex marriages or civil unions. The constitutions of several Eastern European nations — including Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and the Ukraine — ban same-sex "marriage."

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