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Number 80 • February 2022

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## EU biffs Italian racist discrimination of UK lecturers

After ALLSI campaign, state puts 43 mln euros on table to compensate lettori

By JOHN PHILLIPS

ROME - The Italian Universities and Research ministry, seeking to head off EU infringement proceedings, has allocated as much as 43.5 million euros for overdue back salary payments owing to British, Irish and other foreign lecturers who were discriminated against in Italian universities, officials say.



David Petrie

Minister for University and Research Maria Cristina Messa said in a letter that a further 7.8 million euros had been allocated to compensate lettori in 2021 in addition to some 34 million euros already on the table that had not been allocated.

The extra finance was made available and added to Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi's budget after the EU Commission in Brussels formally warned Italy it will face infringement proceedings if it does not carry out promised compensation of lettori.

Prof. Messa in her letter to

the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, Roberto Fico, said she hopes that the extra allocation of funds means "one will be able to carry out the completion of the reconstruction of the career of the ex lettori and the payment of the arrears in emoluments owed to them, so that one can prove to the European Commission that the Italian state has done everything required of it to obviate the censure raised, trusting therefore in a speedy shelving of the infringement proceedings started against the Italian state."

The EU infringement proceedings followed a 25-year campaign by the Association of Foreign Lecturers in Italy ALLSI, spearheaded by its Chair, Scottish lecturer David Petrie, who has tirelessly kept the issue on the agenda of British and European politicians.

Italy put the extra finance on the table after Nicolas Schmit, the European Commissioner for jobs and human rights, told ALLSI that the European Commission will pursue infringement proceedings against Italy for discrimination against foreign lecturers until the Italian universities "fully implement" back payments in compensation due to the lettori.

"The Commission decided in September 2021 to send a letter of formal notice to Italy for failing to comply with EU rules on free movement of workers (Regulation (EU) No 492/2011) for the Lettori," Mr Schmit said in a letter of response to a query by the Irish MEP Maria Walsh.

"Under EU law, EU citizens who exercise their right to free movement must not be discriminated against because of their nationality as regards access to employment and working conditions," Schmit added.

"In its ruling in case C-119/04, the Court of Justice stated that Italian law no. 63 of 2004 provides an ac-



Pope Francis presides over Mass at St. Peter's Basilica on the feast of the Presentation of the Lord. Photo credit: ERIC VANDEVILLE

ceptable framework for the so-called reconstruction of careers of Lettori in Italian universities. This law allows for the adjustment of their salary, seniority and corresponding social security benefits to those of

a researcher under a part-time contract, and it grants them the right to back payments as of the start of their employment."

Continued on page 2

## Beasley peace gambits divide WFP

By JAN FILIPOWICZ

ROME - World Food Programme Executive Director David Beasley's involvement in peace initiatives has divided executives at the UN agency. Some claim the former Republican governor may jeopardise WFP staff safety if seen to take sides in conflicts.



David Beasley. Photo: WFP

Beasley, who collected a Nobel Peace Prize, visited a dozen countries since June including Taliban-controlled Kabul and Sudan to try to get humanitarian relief to Afghanistan and Africa.

One WFP executive commented that "it seems he forgot he's running a food agency, or he's extended its mandate to making peace through food."

"He is now calling us 'peacemakers.' Admirable, but who gave him that role? Has the NPP gone to his head?" He seems to insert himself into various peace talks, himself flying to various places and flying various people to various places with WFP assets. That is all very nice if it works out. But it is often so much more complicated. And if you do get involved and one side sees you as leaning more to the other, what does that do to the safety of your people on the ground while you fly away at 30,000 feet? There is a very good reason why humanitarian work has to be seen as much as possible divorced from politics."

In October UN Special Representative in Khartoum Volker Perthes, asked Beasley to drop an unsanctioned plan to bring together Sudan's military leader and the prime minister he had deposed. "The WFP freelance attempt to engineer a settlement in Sudan have been seen as ham-fisted," Jonas Horner, Sudan analyst for International Crisis Group, said. Diplomats express concern that one of Beasley's aides, Gavin Gramstad, advised Abdelaziz al-Hilu, leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North. Gramstad is a former Republican congressional aide who ran a refugee camp for Christian relief agency Samaritan's Purse. However another WFP manager said Beasley's efforts were welcomed in Khartoum and Kabul.

"It is normal for WFP to work with all parties to ensure access to those in need and try to save lives," she said, cautioning that critics may lambast Mr Beasley since he shortly is due for renewal as Executive Director.

"He is a true humanitarian."

## Doubts grow over Siena banker's 'suicide'

By PHILIP WILLAN

The mystery surrounding the death of the communications director of the world's oldest bank has deepened with the publication of a police report suggesting an email in which David Rossi threatened suicide was written when he was already dead.

Rossi plunged to his death from an office window at the Monte dei Paschi di Siena on the night of March 6, 2013 as the bank struggled to contain huge losses.

An ongoing parliamentary inquiry has exposed blunders in the initial investigation and a report published by the online edition of L'Espresso magazine raises doubts about the authenticity of a key piece of evidence supporting the view of magistrates in Siena that Rossi had taken his own life. In an email ostensibly delivered to the CEO of Monte dei Paschi di Siena, Fabrizio Viola,

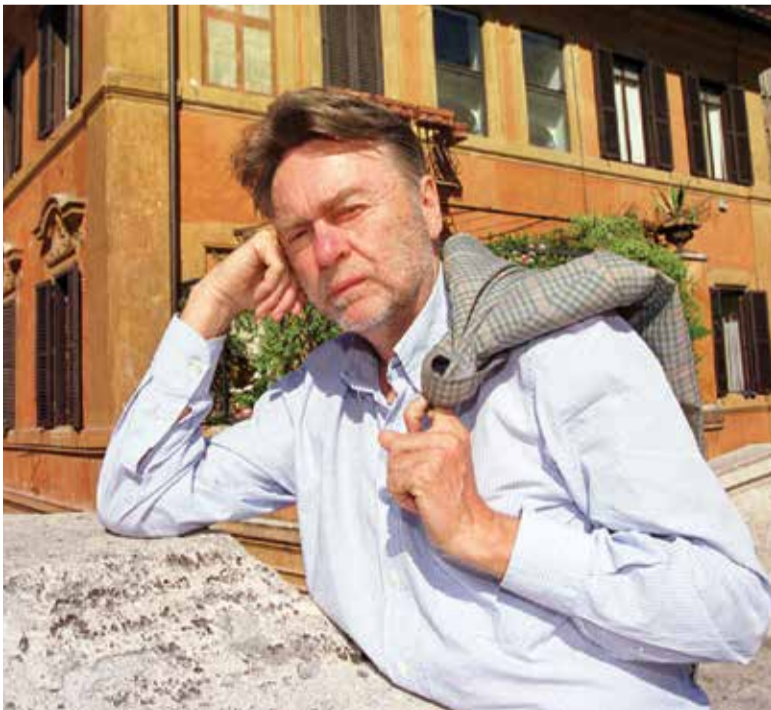


David Rossi, former communications director of Monte dei Paschi di Siena

on the morning of March 4, Rossi wrote: "This evening I will commit suicide, seriously. Help me!!!"

A report by the postal police said two copies of the message had been found on the hard drive of Rossi's computer, with a delivery time of 9.13 a.m. on March 4, two days before his death.

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Australian journalist and author Desmond O'Grady, who reported on Italy for over 50 years, has died age 91. **Obituary page 21**

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## Police identify 12 suspects of New Year's Eve assaults

### INSIDER NEWSDESK

MILAN – Thanks to security camera footage and face-recognition software, police have identified 12 men so far suspected of carrying out sexual assaults on multiple women at New Year's Eve celebrations in the Lombardy capital, authorities announced.

At least nine women have come forward so far to report various forms of injury, sexual assault and robbery at the crowded celebrations. They report having been treated like "rag dolls" and "objects."

The investigators carried out 18 searches on Jan. 11 (nine in Turin, one in Bergamo, one in Rozzano and the remaining seven in Milan) at the homes of young North Africans and Italians of North African origin between the ages of 15 and 21, all with criminal records. The operation was made possible thanks to security camera video footage, face-recognition software, videos and images from social networks and the internet, and testimonies from witnesses and victims. The number of suspects was narrowed down to 12 as victims recognised their attackers from still



New Year celebrations in Piazza Duomo in Milan

images and well as clothing that was found in the searches.

"I hope justice is done for us and for all the other girls who were harassed that evening," commented one of the two German students targeted, while the mayor of Milan Giuseppe Sala apologised on his behalf and that of the city.

The investigation is ongoing and the number of suspects may increase, as may the number of victims. So far it seems like there was no preordained plan or a single direction, but that the attackers may have collaborated on the night.

## Immunologist given police escort

### INSIDER NEWSDESK

PADUA – Immunologist Antonella Viola is currently under police protection after she received a threatening letter from an anonymous 'anti-vaxxer,' which also contained a bullet, said Il Fatto Quotidiano.

"Don't worry, no one will die," read the typed message. "Two .22 calibre bullets in the stomach and knees do not kill, they only do a great deal of harm."

The letter arrived on Viola's desk in her office Padua, where she works at the Pediatric Research Institute of the City of Hope. It was opened the same day, Jan. 5, by a colleague, who immediately reported it to the local Carabinieri.

The letter's demand was for Viola to stop saying that children should be vaccinated and instead say they shouldn't.

"Hands off the children," it read. "If you don't change what you say in interviews, we will gladly target you and your family."

The Padua prosecutor has opened a file for threats against unknown persons and confirmed the contents of the typewritten missive, which has



Antonella Viola is steadfast in her view that children should be vaccinated

been confiscated along with the bullet.

Viola has said she is not intimidated by the threat. "I'm fine, I'm on vacation with my family, I trust the police," she said.

"To those who wrote the message," she added, "I say that you are the one who wants children to be ill, you want to make them sick and suffer."

The expert in her field confirmed she would continue to advocate for parents to vaccinate their children as she believes it is the right thing to do.

## IN BRIEF

### Cocaine stash hidden under bananas seized

REGGIO CALABRIA – As many as 3,128,205 kilos of pure cocaine were seized at the Gioia Tauro port in Calabria, custom authorities said. The drug could have been cut by traffickers up to four times before being sold on the market, earning an estimated revenue of one billion euros.

Authorities at customs collaborated with the finance police to carry out the two operations needed to seize the illegal cargo on Dec. 31. The cocaine was divided over three containers loaded with bananas, bags of peanuts and pepper.



The driver of an articulated lorry, in which 855,690 k.g. of cocaine was hidden, has been arrested and taken to Palmi prison.

Italian media has praised the joint action from Reggio Calabria financial police and the Gioia Tauro customs office to combat international drug trafficking, given the challenge that methods used for the crime are constantly evolving.

### Palermo nurse who sold fake vaccinations arrested

PALERMO – A nurse has been arrested for offering a 'fake vaccine' in exchange for money, secret video footage and recordings by police revealed.



The nurse charged 100 euros for each fake inoculation

Anna Maria Lo Brano, who worked at the Fiera del Mediterraneo civic hospital, allegedly charged 100 euros for each 'vaccine' - an empty syringe - and pretended to inoculate 10 people in total. She recorded the 'vaccinations' in the national health system so that those who received it could obtain a Green Pass.

Filippo Accetta, local leader of the No Vax movement, and Giuseppe Tomasino, a supporter and speaker against the vaccine, were two of the people who paid for the fake vaccine and both men are also under arrest.

Lo Brano, Accetta and Tomasino are being investigated for antecedent corruption, false ideology in public action and embezzlement.

Police used telephone wiretapping and video footage in the vaccination centre to find out what was going on.

The false data that was entered in the national digital green certificate platform of the Ministry of Health has been seized, and consequently the Green Passes of those falsely vaccinated have been blocked.

## Italy's birth rate reached historic low during pandemic

### BY LOUISE NIMMO

ROME – The pandemic has caused Italy's notoriously low birth rate to fall still further amid projections the country will lose a fifth of its population within the next 30 years, according to the Italian Statistical Institute (Istat).

January 2021 saw a 13.6 percent drop in births—around 5,000 less in total—compared to the previous year. The birth rate is expected to fall below 400,000 at the start of this year, marking a 160 year low.

"It seemed that whoever wanted a child around the outbreak of the pandemic moved the date on the calendar forward. But they have not finished waiting yet. This year, in January alone, there was the great-

est drop in births ever, with five thousand fewer," said Gian Carlo Blangiardo, president of Istat.

There were multiple reasons for the downturn. "Think how complicated it could have been to deal with a pregnancy in the middle of a pandemic, with visits to the hospital when there were still no vaccines," Blangiardo said in an interview with La Repubblica. "Or when they arrived, choosing whether to get immunised or not."

Given the birth rate has already been in decline for decades due to economic instability, said Blangiardo, many were hoping that the confinement of lockdown would result in a baby boom. However, the latest data has led to disappointment.

"In just over a decade, births have dropped by one third in Italy, with



Italy's birth rate is projected to fall below 400,000 this year

404,892 babies born in 2020, down from 576,659 in 2008," he said. "Almost all of the decline is attributed to families with two Italian parents."

Blangiardo highlighted that with

an aging population the Italian government would need to provide more incentives to have children, as well as invest in the so-called 'silver economy.'

"We need to invest more in welfare, health care, and finding solutions to reconcile work and family."

He added, "for some time now we have been grappling with services and products intended to improve the quality of life of the elderly. Just look at the advertisements - it is full of offers on hearing aids, cruises with assistance, mobile phones with large numbers, and food supplements."

Blangiardo suggested Italy could lead the way for a strong silver economy when it becomes more prevalent in countries such as China, who in a few decades is projected to have an enormous older population to support.

nical experts to arrive, but had attempted to switch on Rossi's computer, had answered an incoming call on his mobile phone and had tipped the contents of a waste paper basket onto his desk.

The basket contained seven blood-stained paper handkerchiefs, later destroyed, and a series of crumpled up farewell messages, which would have been better processed by forensic experts.

In an open letter to a lawyer representing the three prosecutors in charge of the case, the lawyer for Rossi's family, Carmelo Miceli, listed a series of oversights that, he suggested, had prejudiced the chances of getting to the truth. These included: failure to obtain full video records from a camera that showed Rossi plunging to his death, failure to acquire telephone records, failure to sequester the clothes worn by Rossi on the evening of his death, failure to explain a number of scrapes and bruises found on Rossi's body.

Pierantonio Zanettin, the president of the parliamentary inquiry, said he had ordered consultants to try and clarify the mystery of the dates.

If the email had really been sent after Rossi's death "it would cast an alarming shadow over the entire affair."

### cont. from page 1

Both had a creation date of March 7 at 11.41 a.m., the report said, and no explanation for the anomaly had been found.

Magistrates subsequently concluded that the discrepancy was the result of a software malfunction and were supported in their view by testimony from a secretary, who said she had read the message at midday on March 4, printed it out and taken it to a senior aide to the CEO.

Viola told magistrates, however, that he had never seen the message. Other emails recovered by investigators show Rossi and Viola conducted an email conversation, with each message incorporating previous exchanges, that began in the morning of March 4 and continued until late afternoon, with no mention of a suicide threat.

In his messages Rossi discussed his intention to cooperate with magistrates investigating the bank's financial problems and to help them clarify "political scenarios and connections." He concluded at 5.12 p.m. by apologising for troubling his boss with his anxieties: "Thinking back on it, it seems crazy to have been worrying about these things."

In one of his messages to Viola,

### cont. from page 1

Rossi wrote of the investigating magistrates: "I need to make contact with these gentlemen because I'm afraid they wrongly see me as part of a system and a circle of wrongdoing. I understand that my relationship with certain people might make one think that, but it is not correct. If they had called me to testify, I would have explained."

Carolina Orlandi, Rossi's stepdaughter, said she believed his life was at risk from the moment he signalled a willingness to talk to the magistrates.

"I think people went to the Monte dei Paschi to frighten him, to convince him not to talk. The situation degenerated and those people made a lot of errors," Orlandi told the Florence newspaper La Nazione.

Monte dei Paschi di Siena was founded in 1472 and is based in a 14th-century fortress. It was a dominant force in Siena for centuries, funding the Palio horse race until its near collapse in the 2008 financial crisis. Three former executives at the bank were jailed in 2014 for using high-risk derivative trades to hide losses.

Errors made at the start of the investigation were revealed to the parliamentary inquiry by Pasquale Aglieco, a carabinieri colonel based in Siena at the time. Aglieco said magistrates had not waited for tech-

cont. from page 1

"However, a considerable number of Universities still haven't implemented these provisions. The question of the collective agreement is one of the issues under examination in this infringement procedure."

"The aim of this procedure is to make sure that Italy fully addresses the shortcomings identified by the Commission and fully implements the ruling of the Court of Justice in case C-119/04 for the relevant Lettori," Mr Schmit continued.

Mr Petrie said "Our thanks are due to Irish deputy Maria Walsh MEP and to Commissioner Schmit."

"To suggest that collective contracts is the issue, is at best disingenuous (collective contracts signed, disgracefully, by the Italian trade unions have already been declared illegal by the European Court of Justice). The ECJ ruled that pegging our salaries and pensions to the minimum of that enjoyed by tenured researchers conforms to EU law."

"Italian national tables stipulating remuneration for Italian researchers are automatically applied, year in year out. Applying those tables to the Lettori - a category of non-Italian workers - would be the simplest solution. This would put an end to the illegal discrimination as adjudicated by the ECJ, but it would require funding."

## After 30 month Chinese rule, FAO bureaucrats defy reform

By PHILIP STRINGER

ROME – In an opening statement to the recent FAO Council, Director General Qu Dongyu pledged “to take FAO’s work out of the castles and bring it to the people in the streets.” The fulfilment of this ambitious promise, however, appears to be more remote than ever, FAO watchers say.

Diplomats and senior officials at the UN agency have been assessing the performance of Dr Qu over his past two-and-a-half years as DG. Geopolitical rivalry between the United States and China has nourished suspicion and a loss of interest by Western countries in the Food and Agriculture Organisation, creating a toneless administration without a sense of purpose, observers say. The FAO could be said to have become collateral damage of tensions between China and the United States, the largest donor to the organisation.

With a few notable exceptions, Western capitals no longer are sending high caliber diplomats to represent them at the FAO, dispatching instead mainly agricultural and technical officials who are unable to interact with, and are shunned by, the remaining few fully fledged ambassadors and diplomats accredited to the Rome-based UN food agencies.

FAO is not unique in this. Disengagement by Western countries and their inability to exercise control also



FAO DG Qu Dongyu (centre) on a visit to Campania

is conspicuous at IFAD, FAO’s sister agency, where donors have failed abjectly to act against President Gilbert Houngbo, twice elected to serve the Fund, who remains in office while campaigning to be head of the International Labour Organisation.

The Covid-19 lockdowns have put further distance between the FAO and its Members. The situation is different at the World Food Programme, a more agile and efficient agency, though it remains to be seen whether, despite collecting a Nobel prize for the agency, David Beasley will be renewed for a second term as Executive Director by the UNSG and Dr Qu, diplomatic sources say.

The institutional and programme

reforms that Dr Qu has plotted as DG have failed to convince Western donors. His reforms, essentially involving shifting of units from one department to another, followed 15 years of constant tinkering with division boxes across the organisation by the previous FAO DG, José Graziano da Silva. Under the Brazilian agronomist the communication division was chaotic and there was a heavy reliance on Latin American staff.

Now the communication division is Chinese-led but still somnolent, conveying an insipid and inaudible message recalling the political communiques of a communist state.

A much trumpeted new Innovation Division is really a marketing gim-

mick that fails to bring anything really new to the FAO. It is headed by Khalid Bomba, from Ethiopia, a country that has been a staunch supporter of China, taking the grandiose title Chief Innovation Officer.

Observers see a further attempt to substitute new titles for action with the creation of the Office for Small Island Development States, Less Developed Countries and Less Developed Land Locked Countries,” headed by Angelica Maria Jacome Daza from Panama.

The workings of the new division overlap with the operations of the rest of the Organisation and Regional Offices and it is seen as largely an electoral initiative to ensure the re-election of the DG to a second term in 2023.

Also considered a cosmetic conjuring trick is the Office of Sustainable Development goals, headed by newly recruited Greek wizard Stefanos Fotiou. Hopes that Dr Qu would set up a more efficient senior management team have only partially been realised, albeit partly due to the general slowdown of FAO activities caused by Covid.

The reduction in the number of Assistant Director General posts was seen by observers as a good initiative though done in harsh manner with ADGs moved to makeshift offices and stripped of their functions until they left. In addition to a large number of

positions being occupied by Chinese executives there is still a significant residue of Latin American managers from the previous regime such as Maximo Torero, the ADG Chief Economist, ADG Rene Castro, Marcella Villareal, the Director of Partnerships and UN relations, ADG and former chef de cabinet Mario Lubetkin from Uruguay, Eduardo Mansour from Brazil in charge of the Climate Change Division and Jose Rosero Moncayo, many of whom are considered the antinomy of innovation.

Against this background staff representative bodies are blasé. They are happy that Dr Qu has introduced improved working conditions for surviving staffers but critical of the gerontocratic bias at FAO under which, with the blessing of Dr Qu and DDG Laurent Thomas, a large number of retirees aged well over 70 still are hired to perform work that otherwise would be done by regular staff, combining high stipends with pensions.

Such a situation would not be acceptable in national administrations or the corporate world but is outside the scrutiny of staff bodies, Members and oversight bodies.

The vast and generous bureaucracy of the FAO evidently continues to thrive in its Aventino palazzo, still an end in itself and likely to remain so, far from the public eye and remote from the ultimate aims for which it was set up to strive.

## UN plea to save Afghanistan from full-blown humanitarian crisis

By NAUREEN HOSSAIN

GENEVA (IPS) - UN agencies have asked for a record US dlr 4.4 billion in aid for Afghanistan to avert a full-blown humanitarian crisis that could see hunger, distress, deaths and a mass exodus of people from the country.

The OCHA and UNHCR agencies, along with their non-governmental organisation partners launched their 2022 Humanitarian Response Plans to provide relief for Afghanistan and the region on Jan. 11.

Speaking at a press conference in Geneva to launch the relief plans, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths stated that this is the “largest-ever appeal for a single country for humanitarian aid.”

“Events in Afghanistan over the past year have unfolded with dizzying speed and with profound consequences for the Afghan people,” said Griffiths. “The world is perplexed and looking for the right way to react. Meanwhile, a full-blown humanitarian catastrophe looms.”

These humanitarian and refugee response plans aim to provide vital humanitarian relief to 23 million people in Afghanistan. They will also be provided to 5.7 million Afghans displaced in local communities in five

neighbouring countries: Iran, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

Funding will be required from donors. The Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan has requested US dlr 4.4 billion. If funded, this is expected to support aid organisations to ramp up the delivery and output of health services, education, protection services, food and agriculture support, and access to clean water and sanitation.

The Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan alone will require US dlr 623 million in funding for 40 organisations that provide protection, health and nutrition, shelter and non-food items, livelihoods and resilience, and logistics and telecoms, among other necessary services.

Griffiths was describing the ongoing humanitarian crisis overwhelming Afghanistan. In 2021, it faced increased disruptions to services and struggled to meet its population’s needs.

Its economy has suffered dramatically due to the freezing of assets in central bank reserves, the disruptions in markets, not to mention the sudden pause in international development assistance, upon which many basic social services are dependent. Severe climate-induced problems such as the harsh winter season and one of the worst recorded droughts in the country’s history have only exac-



Afghan refugees in Iran. Photo: UNHCR

erated poverty among its citizens. Twenty-three million people are at risk of acute hunger.

This also accounts for the 700,000 Afghans who have been internally displaced. OCHA’s relief aid plan accounts for these displaced citizens.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi remarked that the international community must take the steps needed to “prevent a catastrophe in Afghanistan, which could not only compound suffering but would drive further displacement both within the country and throughout the region.”

“It is key not to forget that there is a regional dimension to this crisis,” he said. “Not only Afghan refugees but the people who have been involved in hosting.”

Neighbouring countries currently host 5.7 million registered refugees from earlier waves of forced displacement. Iran and Pakistan account for 2.2 million Afghan refugees. While they have implemented inclusive policies in education and healthcare, the COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the countries’ own needs, which presented challenges to these governments to continue their policy of inclusion.

The UNHCR Plan will directly support 40 partner organisations work-

ing in the region to provide emergency relief, health and social services, education, and protection to refugees and host communities. It is also estimated to work closely to improve the livelihood and resilience of the Afghans, particularly to those who are more susceptible to exploitation or abuse when crossing borders.

One of the target goals addressed in the press conference was to ensure the country’s stability by supporting efforts to rebuild the economic and social structures.

“The key here is to stabilise the situation inside Afghanistan, which includes the people who are displaced,” Grandi said.

Griffiths also remarked it was crucial to invest in services and structures so that the country is eventually “secure for those [Afghans] who have been displaced to return to their homes.”

The UN leaders expressed hope that the relief plans would accomplish their target goals with the requested funding.

“With continuing adaptation, continuing adjustment, the plans can improve, and access to services can improve,” said Griffiths.

The Taliban’s takeover in August 2021 contributed to the decline in the economy and the freeze in in-

ternational development assistance. It has threatened to undermine services, further undermining the development gains made in the last two decades. Education has been used as the prime example, with the concern over girls being allowed to return to schools or return to mixed classes with boys.

There is concern about the Taliban’s involvement with the relief plans. However, Griffiths stated that the partner organisations in Afghanistan, almost all NGOs, would “receive the money directly,” including programs that would directly pay frontline workers in the health and education sector.

Grandi remarked that their UN colleagues in the field were in talks every day with the Taliban, who have been open to discussing the scope of these programs, stating, “humanitarian assistance [...] has created a space for dialogue. It’s that space we need to preserve [...] that then can be developed and make room for stabilisation.”

Open dialogue between the international community and the Taliban would be needed to provide immediate relief to Afghanistan and the region, eventually paving the way for stabilising the region and alleviating its dependence on donors. In this spirit and the palpable urgency to protect the people of Afghanistan, UNCHR and OCHA are launching their plans for 2022.

When asked at the conference what would happen to Afghans if they did not receive the required funds, Grandi said that if the country’s humanitarian system collapsed, it would likely result in a mass exodus of people into the neighbouring states and beyond. “We will need that solidarity in those neighbouring countries because they will be the first ones hit.”

Griffiths added apart from seeing “hunger, distress, death, despair, at the family level... we would be robbing the people of Afghanistan of the hope that their home is secure and that they can spend the rest of their lives here.”



Afghan children at a refugee settlement in Pakistan. Photo: UNHCR/Roger Arnold

## Embassy Row

By JOHN PHILLIPS and LOUISE NIMMO

### Ed Llewellyn appointed as UK ambassador in Rome

ROME - **Edward Llewellyn**, a political appointee as the former British Ambassador to France, has been chosen as the UK ambassador to Italy, he announced on Twitter Jan. 19. It is unprecedented for even a career diplomat to be chosen for both top and much-coveted jobs and the appointment of Lord Llewellyn to the Eternal City is sure to revive criticism of government cronyism, observers said.

As was predicted exclusively by The



Edward Llewellyn

Italian Insider just before Christmas, Lord Llewellyn will replace **Jill Morris**, the first woman British Ambassador to Italy, who has concluded her assignment in Rome. Lord Llewellyn was named Britain's man on the Seine in November 2016 after being the Downing Street Chief of Staff under former Prime Minister **David Cameron** from 2010 to 2016 and Cameron's Chief of Staff as Leader of the Opposition from 2005 to 2010. **Menna Rawlings** replaced Llewellyn as ambassador in Paris this summer and the FCDO said at the time only that Llewellyn "will be transferring to another diplomatic appointment."

Llewellyn, an old Etonian, began his career in 1988 in the Research department of the Conservative Party. In 1992, he worked as an adviser to Governor Chris Patten in Hong Kong, and then in the office of the High Representative in Sarajevo in 1997.

He worked with **Chris Patten** again in Brussels from 1999 when the latter was appointed European Commissioner for Foreign Affairs. In 2002, he re-

turned to Sarajevo as Chief of Staff to the High Representative, **Lord Ashdown**.

In 2016, he was appointed Lord Llewellyn and became a member of the House of Lords.

### Roman prince accuses Belorussian girlfriend of 'gold digging'

ROME - **Prince Giacomo Bonanno di Linguaglossa** is accused by his Belorussian girlfriend of stalking her and in turn he has denounced her for only dating him for his money - both parties are under investigation and yet the couple is apparently still together, said the Roman prince in an interview with *Il Messaggero*.

The prince, 52, met tall, blonde **Tanya Yaschenko**, 36, in a restaurant in central Rome in October 2019. He called it "love at first sight."

In April 2021, Yaschenko denounced the prince for "stalking and damages." Di Linguaglossa now feels he was cheated, although he is "still in love with her." The couple spent Christmas and New Year together, despite the ongoing legal battle.

The couple has travelled all over the world together - Milan, San Diego, Beverly Hills, Monte Carlo, Cannes, Switzerland, the Maldives and Dubai. In all these places, Yaschenko "asked to stay in luxury hotels." Di Linguaglossa gifted her a Mercedes, worth 82,000 euros, and between July 6 and July Nov. 13, 2020, she received nine bank transfers, totalling around 37,000 euros. Between Jan. 4 and May 4 2021,



Tanya Yaschenko with Prince Giacomo Bonanno di Linguaglossa

more transfers came into her account, coming to 43,000 euros.

"The manipulative abilities of this person," says the prince's lawyer, **Armando Fergola**, "aimed at a person who is already fragile in character, have allowed her to receive an illegitimate profit through criminal conduct."

Fergola also noted Yaschenko requested and was given a bed and breakfast worth 58,000 euros and apparently spent 42,000 dollars using a credit card in her own name.

In the interview, the prince seemed conflicted. He acknowledged that Yaschenko "may be" with him for money, but when asked if he was her 'sugar daddy' he replied with an assured no.

### Police ban funeral for 'Mafia moll' Pupetta Maresca

CASTELLAMMARE DI STABIA - A funeral for Assunta 'Pupetta' Maresca, credited with being Italy's most notorious woman gangster, has been banned by police because of her status as a Camorra boss, a term her lawyers dispute, police sources say.

Maresca was born Jan. 19 1935 in Castellammare di Stabia in the Bay of Naples. At aged 20 she married Pasquale Simonetti, a mafia boss of the fruit and vegetable markets known as 'Pascalone 'e Nola.' Four months into their marriage Simonetti was killed by hitman Antonio Esposito, and his pregnant widow took her revenge by shooting Esposito dead in broad daylight. "I would do it again," she famously declared in court, to cheers of support. She died Dec. 29.

The story made international headlines and Maresca, known as 'Pupetta' for her doll-like features, was dubbed by one newspaper 'the Diva of Crime.' She was sentenced to 18 years in prison, which was later reduced to 13 years and four months.

Her lawyers, Gennaro and Carlo Pecoraro, have protested the descriptions of 'boss' and 'prima donna' of the Camorra attributed to her by the media.

"Defining Pupetta Maresca as a 'camorrista' or a 'woman boss,' wrote the lawyers, "is in contempt of reality."

The lawyers condemned comments made on social media and by poli-

ticians, who "offended" Maresca's memory with "statements based on assumptions denied in every court."

"Moreover," continued the lawyers' note, "it is painful to see that the defamatory news has actually induced public authorities to ban Pupetta Maresca's funeral - though this is typical of an era in which, even for the State, facts count for less than the suggestions and uninformed slander of the media and social networks."



Wedding photo of 'Pupetta' Maresca and Pasquale Simonetti

"The Maresca family hopes that those responsible for the defamatory conduct rectify the information falsely provided, and refrain in the future from conveying incorrect and offensive information again, thus returning to Pupetta Maresca, at the moment of his death, the right to be remembered according to truth and justice."

Police permitted there to be only a blessing of the body. About 10 women went to the church of Sant'Antonio di Padova in Castellammare di Stabia - where the funeral would have taken place - to recite some prayers on Saturday for her.

### Burns Night celebrated with Italy's love of Scottish seafood

ROME - The annual celebration of the Scottish poet **Robert Burns** was marked at Villa Wolkonsky with an unconventional seafood menu, created by Michelin-star chef **Giuseppe Di Iorio** and resident chef of the British Embassy, **Dario Pizzetti**. On the same day, data revealed that Italy is the world's fourth largest importer

of fish, crustaceans, molluscs, aquatic invertebrates and fish from Scotland, according to HMRC.

At Villa Wolkonsky, the official residence of the British Ambassador to Italy, chefs Pizzetti and Di Iorio dismissed the traditional 'Burns Supper' - haggis, neeps and tatties - in favour of a colourful menu of salmon, scallops, monkfish and scampi. Scotland is the largest producer of scampi in the globe and it exports 43 percent of its catch, earning the country some 90 million pounds every year.

The HMRC data showed that in 2020, Scotland exported 6,231 tons of fish products to Italy, making the peninsula the third largest importer in the European Union. The statistic came to light on the morning of 'Burns Night,' the annual celebration on the evening of Jan. 25, in honour of the Scottish national poet Robert Burns.

Chef Di Iorio, who holds one Michelin star at the Aroma Restaurant in Rome, said, "I am honoured to be able to participate in this event at the British Embassy. Burns Night offers me the opportunity to engage in the search for a different culinary tradition."



Chef Giuseppe Di Iorio

"It was fun and fascinating to compete with new ingredients, blending Mediterranean taste with Scottish customs and fish products, from salmon to scampi, from scallop to monkfish."

The Villa Wolkonsky Burns Night was organised in collaboration with Scottish Development International, the official Scottish government agency that promotes commercial relations between Scotland and foreign markets. As well as a chance to remember the poet, who died in July 1797, the celebration was an opportunity for Scottish gastronomic excellence to shine.

## Traditional mass held to recall Francis II, the last Bourbon King of Naples

### INSIDER NEWSDESK

NAPLES - A mass in recollection of Francis II of Bourbon on the anniversary of his death was held in the church of Santa Maria della Vittoria by the Neo-Bourbon Movement, *Il Mattino* said.

The ceremony, dedicated to the last ruler of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, is now a tradition that has been going on for several years and it is attended by an increasing number of Neapolitans and people from other southern provinces, nostalgic for the era.

The Duke of Castro Carlo di Borbone, current Head of the Royal House of Bourbon of the Two Sicilies, commented that the growing number of attendees is "a sign of the affection still alive towards the sovereign. He loved his land and his subjects, sacrificed himself and left a legacy of memories still alive in his people."

"Today more than ever," added the Duke, "with a global pandemic affecting our lives, may the figure of this great sovereign accompany us and protect us."

In December, 2020, Cardinal Sepe of Naples announced the opening of the



Francis II, the last Bourbon King of Naples

process of beatification and canonisation of Francis II. As such, he can now be recognised with the title, 'Servant of God.'

The President of the Neo-Bourbon Movement Gennaro de Crescenzo said, "this is an important gratification for all of us and recognises a historical truth that we have been fighting for years."

"The few days of his reign," continued de Crescenzo, "were characterised by numerous measures that favoured trade and production. The state of fi-

nances was excellent, the public deficit had been reabsorbed, taxes and fees were not high, public spending was prudent and productive."

Recently, the southern region of Campania was revealed as having the highest rate of depopulation in Italy. According to the latest Svimez report, about one million citizens have left their homeland since 2002 to 'seek their fortune' in the north of the country. Francis II, one of the first southern emigrants, could soon become a symbol for the generation that went to enrich the already wealthy cities of Lombardy, Piedmont, Veneto and Liguria.

De Crescenzo would like to make Francis II a "symbol or protector of all the southern emigrants of yesterday and today."

When Francis II died on Dec. 27 1894 in exile in Arco di Trento, he was known by all simply as 'Signor Fabiani.' Inhabitants of the small village perched on the Trentino mountains knew him as a man with a strange accent who almost always walked alone. He owned the most beautiful kingdom in the world, yet spoke to everyone equally, attended the daily mass and would patiently wait his turn for

the Eucharist. The news of his death at the age of 58 - and after 34 years of exile - soon travelled around Europe. In his former capital, the last King of the Two Sicilies was remembered with an article by Matilde Serao which appeared on the first page of *Il Mattino*.

"Dethroned, impoverished, left without a homeland, he bowed his head under the storm and his resignation took on a character of silent heroism," wrote Serao. "Gentleman as a man and a gentleman as a prince, here is the portrait of Don Francesco di Borbone."

During the Tridentine Mass, held on Dec. 26, there were moments of real emotion among the many present. During the homily officiated in Latin, Don Antonio Luiso read some passages from the "'o Surdato' e Gaeta", a 1919 masterpiece by Ferdinando Russo featuring a former Neapolitan soldier engaged in the siege of Gaeta in 1860.

The commemoration ceremony, officiated by parish priest Don Antonio Luiso, was organised by the Neo-Bourbon Movement and the *Il Giglio* Foundation, with the patronage of the Constantinian Order of San Giorgio.



### The Italian Insider

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**Founder:** Insider Press S.r.l.  
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**Special Correspondent:** Dundar Kesapli  
**Graphic designer:** Filomena Zaccari (mokabranding.com)  
**Printed in:** Centro Offset Meridionale SRL Napoli - Via N. Poggioreale Compl. INAIL Torre 7  
**Web site:** www.italianinsider.it  
**Contact:** info@italianinsider.it Viale delle Mura Aurelie, 15 - Roma 00165 - Tel. 333 207 8259 | Iscrizione a Registro per la Stampa del Tribunale di Roma no. 142/2017 | ISSN NUMBER: 2280-1952

## Europe must 'wake up' to the Abraham accords

By LOUISE NIMMO

ROME – The European Union's "muted response" to what has been called "the most fundamentally transformative event in the Middle East in decades" is based on outdated paradigms and a lack of understanding of the modern Arab world, according to a conference on the Abraham Accords led by the Euro-Gulf Information Centre.

"Cynics have criticised the Accords as a backroom deal between the leaderships of these countries, but that misses the point," said Dan Feferman, director of Global Affairs and Communications at Sharaka, an NGO promoting Israeli-UAE relations. "Anything that adds positive relations and stability, and decreases radicalism, is something that should interest every political bloc and power in the world."

Named after the common patriarch of both Judaism and Islam, the Abraham Accords were reached on Aug. 13, 2020 to normalise relations between Israel and its Arab neighbours, firstly

the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the Kingdom of Bahrain. Morocco and Sudan have since followed suit. As discussed at the conference, which took place Jan. 31 at EGIC's Rome headquarters in a hybrid format, the Accords have been compared to the Good Friday Agreement, yet are largely unheard of in Europe.

"Many saw the Accords as Trump publicity rather than a real change," explained Piercamillo Falasca, Consigliere to the Italian Minister for the South. They were labelled dismissively by some as 'Trump's initiative' and the Biden administration initially distanced itself for this reason, a move which many in the discussion found "immensely disappointing" at the time. A former politician in the audience pointed out, "we shouldn't judge everything by simply sticking a label on it" and was thankful that the Biden administration is now cooperating with the Accords again.

Others have seen the Accords as a betrayal of the Palestine cause. The chair of the discussion, MEP Lars Patrick Berg, posed the question, "would it help if Europe ceased to view the Accords through the prism of the Palestinian issue?"

Mr Feferman answered. "People view what's happening in the Middle East through outdated paradigms or lenses, one of these being the Israel-Palestine conflict. What the Abraham Accords did is legitimise the process of putting the Israel-Palestine conflict back in its proper proportions." Mr Feferman said it is one of many conflicts in the region that undoubtedly needs to be solved, but "it does not need to dictate the relationship between Israel and the Gulf States. or between Israel and Morocco. The Egyptians came to that realisation in 1979."

"Israel is not going anywhere," he said, adding that bravery is needed to realise "Israel can be a part of far more solutions to regional problems than it is a problem."

Various panel members mentioned problems in the region that will re-



Omar Al Busaidy, Dan Feferman, Piercamillo Falasca, Lars Patrick Berg

quire teamwork to overcome. "Youth unemployment, desert issues, water scarcity, food security, the growing threat of Iran and its proxies, radicalisation - Israel can be a major asset on all of these," said Feferman.

The Sharaka director, like other experts in the panel, advocated the need for a new approach. "We need to restructure the region into two camps - one moderate, pragmatic camp that works together and looks forward while not shying away from policy disagreements - and one reactionary, radical, extremist camp, hijacked by Iran and Muslim brotherhood elements."

He emphasised these two "camps" must be put on either side of a clear line and that the region's problems must be put "into their proper proportions," not skewed as propaganda or excuses.

The principle of tolerance was cited by the panel as a key factor in the Accords. Cultural diplomacy will help improve relations "at a grassroots level" before "slowly building up relations between governments as well," said discussion member Omar Al Busaidy, CEO of Sharaka and Economic Affairs Liaison at the UAE Consulate

in New York. He used the examples of two Israeli football players who play for a UAE club as well as Israeli players in the Moroccan basketball team. Mr Al Busaidy noted that Bahrain has the only synagogue in the Arabian Gulf region and lots of religious diversity, including a Jewish community.

"It's up to us to try our best to work together and develop relations, strengthen them. Focus on people to people relations, encourage nations to give peace and stability a chance."

MEP Berg asked Mr Al Busaidy for his opinion on how Europe could strengthen its efforts to reach out to the countries signing the Abraham Accords and how they could be made more popular and effective, including in the EU.

Mr Al Busaidy replied, "number one, there should be an Abraham Accords caucus in the parliament, similar to what was created in the USA." He said the UK has also created an Accords Group and that it's important for the European Parliament to do likewise.

Mr Falasca commented, "many [Europeans] were reading this event through a historical lens, and this is

often a mistake. Another mistake of European governments is to reduce Euro-Gulf relations to the bi-lateral level. So when we talk with the UAE or with Israel about trade, we are focussed on our national agenda and priorities. This makes Europeans important trade partners but insignificant strategic partners."

"Europe is still an economic giant and a political dwarf," said Mr Falasca. "If we try and behave differently and to treat the region as a whole - and the Abraham Accords is the perfect framework - we can be a strategic partner."

The conference was titled 'Peace in Our Times: Examining Developments in the Abraham Accords.' Its aim was to reinforce the importance of the Abraham Accords as a game-changer in regional affairs and speakers were drawn from Bahrain, the UAE and Israel in order to best reflect on the new dynamics at play. The panel was made up of Hamad Alabdulla, Executive Director of the Bahrain Centre for Strategic, International and Energy Studies (Derasat), Omar Al Busaidy, Piercamillo Falasca and Dan Feferman, and chaired by MEP Lars Patrick Berg.



Mitchell Belfer

## Iraq peace prospects threatened by antidemocratic militia

By LOUISE NIMMO

ROME – The current political situation in Iraq post-elections poses a grave threat to the long-term peace and stability in the country due to the continuing power of militias raised to defeat ISIS and while there is scope for hope for the future of the war-torn Gulf nation, there are significant obstacles to be overcome, expert speakers told an EGIC discussion on Iraqi prospects up to 2050.

"Currently, there is a mafia-type organisation holding a sword over the regular functioning of government," explained William Spencer, executive director of the Institute for International Law and Human Rights. "If this coordination centre gets its demands met, it's going to end up with militias, armed groups who are not elected, choosing the next prime

minister."

Mr Spencer, who has over 22 years of experience in international diplomacy, human rights, international law, and crisis management, was referring to the PMU - Popular Mobilisation Units - itself a broad term for many different militia groups, several of whom are loyal to Iran. "They claim to be integrated," said Mr Spencer, "but they're not."

In 2014 when ISIS attacked Iraq, Grand Ayatollah Sistani put out a fatwa to say "rise and defend your country," which the PMU did. This was, at the time, "admirable," but now there are apparently few Daesh fighters left in the country and the armed groups have outgrown their role.

The Iraqi government gave the PMU State legitimacy and a seat at the national security council in 2016. There are approximately 115,000 PMU members on the Iraqi government payroll, although reportedly only 60,000 of these are actually mobilised.

Rife corruption means that tens of thousands of PMU workers are "just cream off the top," says Mr Spencer. He highlighted that the PMU - also known as 'Hashd' - controls several ministries, including that of Labour and Social Affairs, which manages the very money they are paid with.

Mr Spencer highlighted it as "a huge issue that undercuts the credibility of the Hashd as an institution and role they're playing in Iraqi society." After



William Spencer, director of the Institute for International Law and Human Rights

16 years of "quiet, incremental progress," this is a "very dangerous moment" he said.

"They have to be integrated in a real way," stressed Mr Spencer, and if Iraq wants to be a unitary state by 2050, we have to see their "demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration back into established military commands." He added that Grand Ayatollah Sistani could also withdraw the 2014 fatwa, which is still pending.

Concerning as this threat is, 'Iraq should not be considered a country that is inevitably prone to fragmentation.' Journalist Sofia Barbarani made this point in her opening comments as moderator of the press

conference, which was held at the Euro-Gulf Information Centre (EGIC) in Rome on Dec. 15.

The two speakers supported Barbarani's statement, with researcher and writer Maria Rita Corticelli concurring that "the image of Iraqis is too simplified in the media," while Mr Spencer noted that the country's successive elections and peaceful transfer of power since 2006 are often overlooked, and its democracy has been a model for the entire Middle East region.

Mr Spencer further highlighted how demonstrators in Tashmir Square during the 2019-20 protests were not trying to overthrow the government, but were calling to amend the constitution. Ms Barbarani, who was living in Iraq during the protests, said that young Iraqis seemed to be making "a conscious effort to rally underneath the Iraqi flag," rather than aligning primarily with different religions and ethnicities as is the common custom.

Ms Corticelli also noticed a push towards secularism during her time living in the country. She was surprised to hear even a parish priest say to her, "we are tired of being referred to as Christians, we are citizens first."

The education system is still lacking according to Ms Corticelli, who directed courses in studies of genocide and human rights at the University of Urbil. She recalled how her students were "amazed" when she told

them that Europe had also endured centuries of religious wars and that other countries had genocide, such as Rwanda. "They genuinely didn't know," she said. Ms Corticelli said that informing Iraqis of other contexts around the world that are relatable will be very useful for them and that Iraq's isolation is a stark problem.



Journalist Sofia Barbarani

Though there is budding hope for peace and stability in the country's growing appetite for secularism and education, especially from younger generations, Mr Spencer called right now "a scary moment."



Professor and author Maria Rita Corticelli

## Council of State rejects McDonald's appeal to open at Caracalla

By LOUISE NIMMO

ROME – The Council of State has rejected McDonald's appeal to open a 'McDrive' at the Baths of Caracalla, said the Association for Defence of the Environment and User and Consumer Rights (CODACONS), who intervened in court against the American giant to defend the urban landscape and the decisions of the municipal administration. The satisfactory outcome was announced in a CODACONS press release on Dec. 27.

With the appeal before the Council

of State, the company McDonald's Development Italy Llc challenged sentence no. 5757 of 2020 of the Lazio Tribunal, which had blocked construction of the fast food restaurant and the related parking in the areas of Viale Guido Baccelli.

CODACONS intervened in court, arguing that the areas in question were subject to legal constraints preventing the opening of a commercial establishment that could damage the beauty of the Baths of Caracalla, with consequent environmental damage.

The Council of State supported the

CODACONS argument with a ruling issued on Tuesday. It confirmed that the area is protected as a Unesco site, and that it is in the public interest to preserve it.

"In this regard," read the ruling, "art. 150 expressly attributes both the Region and the Ministry the power to order the suspension of works aimed at altering the landscape of the territory, to protect both the assets already bound and areas that are intended to be protected with the imminent adoption of a future landscape restriction."



The Baths of Caracalla, facing Caldarium

## Mayor Gualtieri admits he failed to 'clean Rome by Christmas'

By LOUISE NIMMO

ROME – The city mayor, Roberto Gualtieri, has admitted "the city is not as clean as it deserves" after he allocated 40 million euros to tackle the waste emergency in just three months, he said in a recent press conference. The mayor highlighted that Rome's historic centre is much cleaner, but acknowledged the suburbs are still dirty and lasting improvement for the whole city will require new treatment plants that will take years to install.

The day after he was elected mayor of Rome, Gualtieri announced his "extraordinary" mission to solve the city's waste emergency by Christmas. To carry out the plan, he coordinated with the council's waste removal company AMA, who promised its workers a bonus if they didn't take any days off during the period.

The incentive met controversy when it included in its wording to not take "any days off sick." It later removed the words "off sick" and replaced it with "holiday." The bonus proved to be an effective motivation, with an eight percent increase in those present at work during the first weeks of December compared to the same period last year.

However, the opposition leader Carlo Calenda said, "in my opinion Gualtieri made a mistake in making an unrealisable promise - not even



Roberto Gualtieri vowed to "clean up Rome by Christmas." Photo: European Parliament

Superman could think of cleaning Rome in three months."

Calenda continued, "Gualtieri's mistake is that he tried to do everything with AMA. We wanted to bring in a large company that would support AMA for cleaning the pavements, the drains and around the bins, because AMA often doesn't clean around the bins, it just empties them," he told Omnibus on La7.

Gualtieri defended his plan, saying "without [it] we would be in a much worse situation. This is a starting point, not an arrival point."

Improvements in the cleanliness of the historic centre have been praised by various residents' committees, for example from Trastevere, Esquilina, Prati and Testaccio. They have said they are satisfied while hoping for something more. Photos have been shared on social media of newly tidied streets such as via Andrea Doria

in Prati, via Branca and via Bodoni in Testaccio, and the Gianicolo in Trastevere.

However, there are still serious problems outside of the central area, especially in neighbourhoods of the east quadrant. Here, residents' committees have denounced the piles of waste still on the street and rows of lorries in front of the Rocca Cencia plant, whose daily waste treatment capacity was increased to meet the needs of the "extraordinary cleaning plan."

Marco Manna of the Eastern Rome Suburbs Committee said, "we tried to make politicians understand the need to change course on waste management. The Rocca Cencia waste treatment plant has created immeasurable damage to citizens, yet approval has just been granted for its renovation. Thirteen associations and committees will challenge this decision before the Lazio tribunal." The group has also started a fundraiser to support the cost of the legal proceedings.

In the recent press conference, Gualtieri maintained that "Rome is cleaner than how we found it." However, to make long-term progress, he has a new promise.

"Within five years", he vows to facilitate the construction of the necessary plants "to close the cycle of waste and make Rome self-sufficient."

## Taxi driver suspended for kicking Canadian woman tourist

INSIDER NEWSDESK

FLORENCE – A taxi driver has been suspended after he was filmed delivering a kick and a slap to a Canadian woman tourist, following a dispute over the fare, authorities said. A passer-by, pianist Giulia Mazzoni, filmed the incident her phone and posted the video on Instagram.

The incident took place Jan. 14 at around 1.30 a.m. on the high-end shopping street, via de' Tornabuoni. According to an initial reconstruction, the man, a 53-year-old Florentine, attacked the 33-year-old woman after she deemed the fare excessive.

Mazzoni's video on her public Instagram account clearly captures the taxi driver kick and slap the tourist. Another man present immediately asks, "why?" and the woman asks those present in the street to call the police.

The 33-year-old told the police that the argument had already started inside the vehicle and she claimed the taxi driver broke the anti-Covid divider and spat in her face.

Both the passenger and the taxi driver refused medical treatment and neither has filed a complaint with the police station. To possibly proceed with the opening of an investigation file, police are waiting for the woman to file a complaint.

In the meantime, the taxi driver's



Via de' Tornabuoni during the busy festive period

license has been immediately suspended. The incident was "firmly condemned" by the municipal administration which, pending the procedures for ascertaining what had happened, urgently summoned the municipal taxi commission to conduct a review and take any necessary measures. The commission was due to meet on Jan. 19.

The mayor of Florence, Dario Nardella, condemned the incident via his social media channels.

"The brutal attack of a woman by the taxi driver last night is unprecedented and deplorable. I expect a thorough investigation and punishment for this person, unworthy of carrying out a public service."

"This is not Florence," underlined Nardella.

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## A young man's war diary returns to where it ended

By PHILIP WILLAN

The diary of a young British soldier killed a day after the Allied landings in Salerno has found its way back to Italy some 78 days after his death thanks to the passion for history of a local garage owner.

Kenneth Hawkins was killed in heavy fighting near Salerno on Sept. 10, 1943 after recording his experiences during the landing on the previous day in now partially faded pencil.

The son of Charles and Mary E Hawkins from Kidwelly in Carmarthenshire, Private Hawkins initially joined the Gloucestershire Regiment before moving to the York and Lancasters. His "diary of my military service in the war" began on January 6, 1943 when he embarked for North Africa from Liverpool.

Hawkins saw action in Algeria and Tunisia, where he was involved in guarding 20,000 captured German and Italian soldiers and caught a glimpse of Winston Churchill at a victory parade.

The diary, four service medals and a few photographs were purchased on eBay UK a year ago by Michele Giordano, a garage owner from Salerno who collects memorabilia on the



An old photo that came with the diary and medals

Allied landings, which were known as Operation Avalanche. Giordano and four friends formed a group to study the history of their area during World War II.

After some hesitation he forked out £80 for the collection from someone

ences and the loss of friends in battle. "You can picture exactly what he went through. The most striking part is the last page: a boy of 20 far from home. You could make a film out of that boy's story," he said.

On Sept. 8, the eve of the landings, Hawkins reports in capital letters (ITALY CAPITULATED), and adds, "we came in range of the shore guns and were bombed by German aircraft and it was obvious we had not achieved a surprise attack."

Hawkins' last diary entry, for Sept. 9, shows he has switched from pen to pencil after the landings south of Salerno, which took place alongside American allies and under the command of an American general, Mark W. Clark.

"The majority of the Battalion arrived on Green beach and luckily there was little opposition and we were able to get our transport and move away from the beaches," Hawkins wrote. "To our right flank on

ry of the battle, which states: "On 'Green Beach,' the right-hand one, considerable opposition was met... The unit which landed on 'Red Beach' met virtually no opposition."

The diary of another participant in the landings, Major Robert Elmhirst, backs up Hawkins' account. "The majority of the Battalion arrived on 'Green' beach flight by flight. Fortunately there was little opposition," Elmhirst wrote. "Just 400 yards away to our right on 'Red' beach a dog fight was in progress between Tiger tanks, 88mm and infantry."

The official history seems to have inverted the colours of the beaches but not their location.

The regiment's official war diary records five men killed, four wounded and 57 missing in action on the following day. Hawkins is one of 1,855 soldiers who lost their lives in the Salerno campaign and who are buried in the city's Commonwealth war cemetery.

### Indictment requested for Navy officer 'spying' for Russia

By LOUISE NIMMO

ROME - The city's public and military prosecutors have requested that Italian Navy officer Walter Biot be indicted on charges of spying for Russia, judicial authorities said.



Walter Biot

Biot, now 55, was arrested last March for allegedly giving a USB drive containing confidential documents to a Russian official in exchange for 5000 euros.

The officer is currently accused of espionage, disclosure of state secrets and corruption, however military prosecutors accuse him of also "obtaining secret information for the purpose of espionage," "obtaining and disclosing information of a confidential nature," "taking photographs for the purpose of espionage" and "communication abroad of unsolicited secret or confidential news."

One of Biot's tasks at work was precisely to manage classified dossiers concerning foreign embassies and allied commands, including information about NATO. The frigate captain allegedly photographed classified documents and uploaded the images to the USB stick, which he then handed over to his Russian contact. According to the custodial warrant, the USB contained 181 photos of classified documents, including nine identified as highly confidential, and 47 secret NATO documents.

Biot is currently being held in the military prison of Santa Maria Capua Vetere in Campania.



Michele Giordano overlooking Salerno Bay

he presumed was a professional trader.

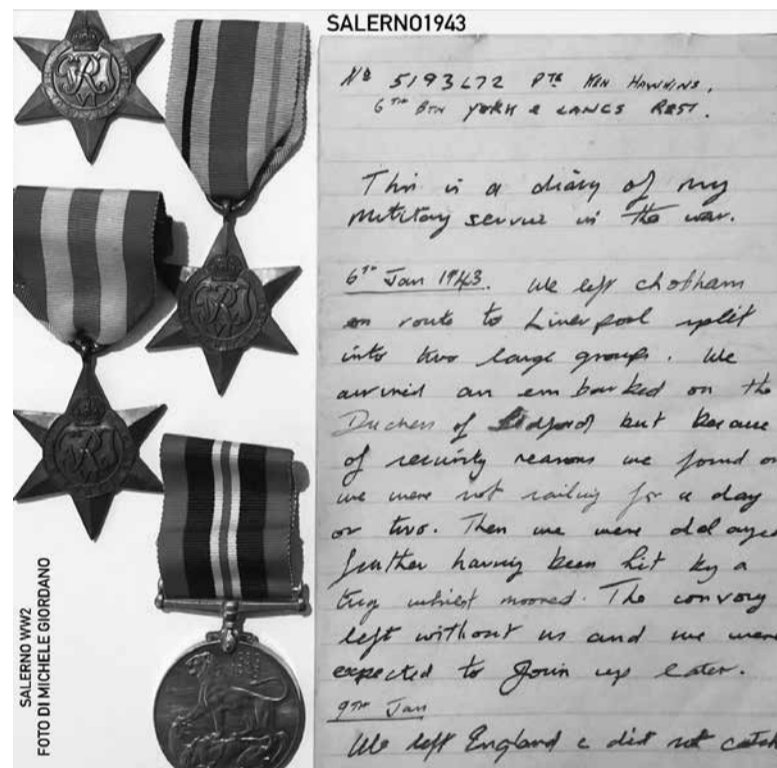
Giordano said he would be happy to share the information in the diary with any surviving members of Hawkins' family but otherwise planned to organise an exhibition of the documents and objects collected with his friends. "If there are no descendants then it is better that it should remain in Salerno," he said.

Giordano said the diary gave a moving account of Hawkins' experi-

Red beach we could hear much gunfire and we knew they were having a tough time. As dark approached we began moving northward along the Avellino [Avellino] road for about five miles and got to some high ground where we bedded down for the night."

Giordano and his friends are working to identify the area where Hawkins may have lost his life.

The young man's diary appears to reveal an error in the official histo-



The young soldier's diary and medals

## War veteran Harry Shindler commemorates Anzio battle

INSIDER NEWSDESK

ANZIO - The centenarian head of British war veterans in Italy, Harry Shindler, has paid tribute to his fallen companions during ceremonies to mark the 78th anniversary of the Battle of Anzio, saying "we must

never forget" the evils of Nazism and Fascism.

During the Second World War, Mr Shindler, due to turn 101 in July, served in North Africa and took part in the allied landings at Anzio and the liberation of Rome.

"Anzio is my second home, I have



Harry Shindler

spent my whole long life passing on information about the atrocities of war to young people and I will continue to do so as long as I have the strength. We must never forget," were the first words spoken by Shindler upon his arrival at the Beachhead War Cemetery in the city 50 km south of Rome.

Mr Shindler was welcomed by the Anzio Councillor for School and Culture, Laura Nolfi and Municipal Councillor, Angelo Mercuri. Representatives of the British Embassy in Italy and the Deputy Mayor of Nettuno, Alessandro Mauro, also attended the commemoration.

At midday on Jan. 23 in front of the war memorial in Piazza Garibaldi, Mr Shindler, together delivered his speech on one of the "founding days" for the City of Anzio. He spoke of the importance of a culture of peace to be handed down every day.

The war veteran continued commemorations of those who lost their lives in the Landing at the Commonwealth Cemetery of Santa Teresa and at the Anzio Civil Cemetery.

As well as being a veteran of the allied landings at Anzio, he is a tireless worker for Anglo-Italian relations. On Feb. 19 2014, he was honoured by HM The Queen with an MBE presented to him by the British Ambassador in Rome. He is also the founder of the Association of British Ex-Pats in Italy.



## Pandemic devastates the poor while world's richest double their wealth

By THALIF DEEN

(IPS) - The world's 10 richest men more than doubled their fortunes from dlr 700 billion to a staggering dlr 1.5 trillion—a rate of dlr 15,000 per second or 1.3 billion a day, according to a new study from Oxfam International.

These phenomenal changes in fortunes took place during the first two years of the Covid-19 pandemic, which saw the incomes of 99 percent of humanity fall, and over 160 million more people forced into poverty—60 million more than the figures released by the World Bank in 2020.

“If these 10 men were to lose 99.999 percent of their wealth tomorrow, they would still be richer than 99 percent of all the people on this planet,” said Oxfam International's Executive Director Gabriela Bucher.

“They now have six times more wealth than the poorest 3.1 billion people.”

“It has never been so important to start righting the violent wrongs of this obscene inequality by clawing back elites' power and extreme wealth including through taxation—getting that money back into the real economy and to save lives,” she said.

According to Forbes magazine, the 10 richest people (as of Nov. 30) who have seen their fortunes grow are Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, Bernard Arnault & family, Bill Gates, Larry Ellison, Larry Page, Sergey Brin, Mark Zuckerberg, Steve Ballmer and Warren Buffet.

The pandemic has hit the poorest people, women and marginalised groups the hardest. For example, in the US, 3.4 million black Americans would be alive today if their life expectancy was the same as white people—this is directly linked to historical racism and colonialism, according to the study titled “Inequality Kills” released Jan. 17, ahead of the World Economic Forum's online Davos Agenda.

The report finds that a new billion-

aire is created every 26 hours while inequality is contributing to the death of at least 21,000 people each day, or one person every four seconds.

Other findings include:

— The pandemic has set gender parity back from 99 years to now 135 years. 252 men have more wealth than all 1 billion women and girls in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean combined.

**“If these 10 men were to lose 99.999 percent of their wealth tomorrow, they would still be richer than 99 percent of all the people on this planet”**

— During the second wave of the pandemic in England, people of Bangladeshi origin were five times more likely to die of COVID-19 than the white British population. Black people in Brazil are 1.5 times more likely to die from COVID-19 than white people.

— Inequality between countries is expected to rise for the first time in a generation. The proportion of people with COVID-19 who die from the virus in developing countries is roughly double that in rich countries.

Asked for his comments, Ben Phillips, author of *How to Fight Inequality*, told IPS the new report “confirms four vital truths about inequality are now proven beyond doubt.

Firstly, inequality kills. Inequality is not just inefficient and unfair. As the data shows, it is deadly.”

“Secondly, inequality is spiralling. The driving cause is neoliberalism, but it has now been supercharged by



Tesla founder and richest man in the world, Elon Musk

the pandemic.”

“Thirdly, inequality is a political choice. The rise in inequality is not inevitable. Governments can reduce inequality if they decide to do so.”

“Fourthly, policy-makers will only shift if we make them do so. A reversal in inequality depends on us, ordinary citizens, organising to push our leaders to make them do their job and put in place the policies that will deliver a fairer, safer, world.”

**“Left to itself, the rigged economy will continue to worsen inequality.”**

Striking a hopeful note, Phillips said, “though the crisis has made inequality even worse and even harder to bear,” he said, “the crisis also, paradoxically, has generated an opportunity for transformational shift to tackle inequality, if we seize this moment.”

“We know the policy mix needed – get the vaccine to everyone by sharing the rights and recipes, drop the debt, expand public services like free health

and education, raise up ordinary people's wages and worker's rights, tackle discrimination, put money in the hands of ordinary people, and properly tax, and restrain the economic and political power, of big corporations and the super-rich.”

Change depends on ordinary people, Phillips said. “The myths of equal opportunity and rising tides have been busted, but the truth alone will not set us free. Left to itself, the rigged economy will continue to worsen inequality. Left to themselves, politicians will allow it, even enable it, to do so.”

“Only pressure from below can secure a reversal of rising inequality. The good news is that around the world, frustration is increasingly being channelled into a resurgence of organising that has potential to shift the balance of power.”

“Unions, community organisations, women's groups, progressive faith organisations and social movements are standing up and standing together. This is the source of hope. This is our chance – if enough people join in. Inequality defines this moment but need not be our fate,” declared Phillips.

According to the Oxfam report, billionaires' wealth has risen more since COVID-19 began than it has in the last 14 years. At dlr 5 trillion, this is the biggest surge in billionaire wealth since records began. A one-off 99 percent tax on the ten richest men's pandemic windfalls, for example, could pay:

— to make enough vaccines for the world;

— to provide universal healthcare and social protection, fund climate adaptation and reduce gender-based violence in over 80 countries;

— All this, while still leaving these men dlr 8 billion better off than they were before the pandemic.

“Billionaires have had a terrific pandemic. Central banks pumped trillions of dollars into financial markets to save the economy, yet much of that

has ended up lining the pockets of billionaires riding a stock market boom. Vaccines were meant to end this pandemic, yet rich governments allowed pharma billionaires and monopolies to cut off the supply to billions of people. The result is that every kind of inequality imaginable risks rising. The predictability of it is sickening. The consequences of it kill,” said Bucher.

Extreme inequality is a form of economic violence, where policies and political decisions that perpetuate the wealth and power of a privileged few results in direct harm to the vast majority of ordinary people across the world and the planet itself.

Oxfam recommends that governments urgently:

— Claw back the gains made by billionaires by taxing this huge new wealth made since the start of the pandemic through permanent wealth and capital taxes.

— Invest the trillions that could be raised by these taxes toward progressive spending on universal healthcare and social protection, climate change adaptation, and gender-based violence prevention and programming.

— Tackle sexist and racist laws that discriminate against women and racialized people and create new gender-equal laws to uproot violence and discrimination. All sectors of society must urgently define policies that will ensure women, racialized and other oppressed groups are represented in all decision-making spaces.

— End laws that undermine the rights of workers to unionise and strike, and set up stronger legal standards to protect them.

— And rich governments must immediately waive intellectual property rules over COVID-19 vaccine technologies to allow more countries to produce safe and effective vaccines to usher in the end of the pandemic.



## Insider View

### A sorry sign

ROME - Many Italians and foreign observers heaved a sigh of relief when Sergio Mattarella was elected to a second term as president at the end of January. The outcome of a cumbersome, week-long election process meant that Italy was in safe hands and the Draghi government could continue to tackle the country's pressing emergencies.

But the spectacle offered by the election process was far from reassuring, raising questions as to whether the procedure and the parties that performed it were fit for purpose. Facing an unprecedented economic and health crisis, with 191 billion euros in European recovery funds to allocate and the threat of war on the eastern edge of Europe, it was time for a show of national cohesion and responsibility.

Instead the parties embarked on a period of divisive political wrangling and horse-trading that threatened to sink the cross-party coalition that supports the prime minister and plunge Italy into chaos at the worst possible time. They arrived unprepared for the moment, as though they hadn't had seven years to prepare for it.

Matteo Salvini took on the role of croupier for the League, insisting it was time for the right to choose the president since it represented a majority in parliament and in the nation. Mathematics said otherwise and the centre-left insisted the solution had to be an impartial figure with wide cross-party support, as it turned out to be at the end of a wasted week.

More time was wasted while Salvini and opposition leader Giorgia Meloni pretended to endorse the candidacy of Silvio Berlusconi,

who in turn refused to declare whether or not he was running. A Berlusconi presidency would have amounted to a shocking revolution at the head of the Italian state, replacing the ultra-respectable Mattarella, whose brother was assassinated by the mafia, with a man known for partying with prostitutes, convicted of tax evasion and declared by the courts to have funded Cosa Nostra to protect his business interests.

While Giorgia Meloni endorsed him as a patriot, Berlusconi was under investigation in Florence for suspected involvement in terrorist bombings.

The political theatre of the election process looked like something from a bygone age, with each ballot passing through seven pairs of hands as the speaker of the Chamber of Deputies read out the names of celebrities and comedians who had been chosen as a protest vote. Thousands of single-use pencils were presumably wasted, for Covid security reasons, as electors left their ballots blank in the early days.

Political tensions were ramped up by Salvini's insistence that the president must be drawn from the right, while adding the risible justification that the left should accept his candidates because some of them were no longer members of a political party. "They do nothing but say no," he complained.

Most of the protagonists of this unappealing charade emerged damaged from the experience. The discredit it attached to the chattering political class made Mario Draghi's customary silence all the more attractive.



## The Munich report and Ratzinger's fight against abuse

By **ANDREA TORNIELLI**

VATICAN CITY - Following the publication of the investigation, the years of the Pope Emeritus' Bavarian episcopate are in the spotlight. It is fair to remember Benedict XVI's fight against clerical paedophilia during his pontificate and his willingness to meet and listen to the victims, asking them for forgiveness.

The words that were used during the press conference to present the report on abuse in the Archdiocese of Munich, as well as the seventy-two pages of the document dedicated to the brief Bavarian episcopate of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, have filled the newspapers in the past week and have triggered some very strong comments.

The Pope emeritus, with the help of his collaborators, did not evade the questions of the law firm commissioned by the Archdiocese of Munich to draw up a report that examines a very long span of time, from the episcopate of Cardinal Michael von Faulhaber to that of the current Cardinal Reinhard Marx. Benedict XVI provided an 82-page response, after having been able to examine some of the documentation in the diocesan archives. Predictably, it was Ratzinger's four and a half years at the helm of the Bavarian diocese that monopolised the attention of commentators.

Some of the accusations have been known for more than 10 years and had already been published by important international media. Today, there are four cases being contested against Ratzinger, and his personal secretary, Archbishop Georg Ganswein, has announced that the Pope Emeritus will issue a detailed statement after he has finished examining the report. In the meantime, however, the reiterated condemnation of these crimes by Benedict XVI can be forcefully repeated, and the steps taken by the Church in recent years, starting



Pope emeritus Benedict XVI

from his pontificate, can be retraced.

Child abuse is a horrendous crime. The abuse committed against minors by clerics is possibly an even more revolting crime, and this has been tirelessly repeated by the last two Popes. It's a sin that cries out vengeance before God that little ones suffer violence on the part of priests or religious to whom their parents have entrusted them to be educated in the faith. It is unacceptable that they become victims of sexual predators hiding in ecclesiastical garb. The most eloquent words on this subject remain those pronounced by Jesus - those who scandalise the little ones would do better to hang a millstone around their necks and throw themselves into the sea.

It cannot be forgotten that Ratzinger, who as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, had already fought the phenomenon

in the last phase of the pontificate of St. John Paul II, with whom he had been a close collaborator, and once he became Pope, promulgated very harsh norms against clerical abusers, special laws to combat paedophilia. What's more, with his concrete example, Benedict XVI testified to the urgency of that change of mentality that is so important to counter the phenomenon of abuse: listening and closeness to the victims to whom forgiveness must always be asked. For too long, abused children and their relatives, instead of being considered wounded persons to be welcomed and accompanied on the path of healing, have been kept at a distance. Unfortunately, they have often been distanced and even pointed to as "enemies" of the Church and its good name.

It was Joseph Ratzinger, the first Pope to meet several times with victims of abuse during his apostolic journeys. It was Benedict XVI, even against the opinion of many self-styled

"Ratzingerians", who upheld, in the midst of the storm of scandals in Ireland and Germany,

**"Abused children and their relatives have been kept at a distance, even pointed to as "enemies" of the Church"**

the face of a penitential Church, which humbles itself in asking for forgiveness, which feels dismay, remorse, pain, compassion and closeness.

It is precisely in this penitential image that the heart of Benedict's message lies. The Church is not a business, it is not saved only by good practices or by the application, even if indispens-

able, of strict and effective norms. The Church needs to ask for forgiveness, help and salvation from the Only One who can give them, from the Crucified One who has always been on the side of the victims and never of the executioners.

With extreme lucidity, on the flight that took him to Lisbon in May 2010, Benedict XVI

recognised that "the sufferings of the Church come precisely from the inside of the Church, from the sin that exists within the Church. We

**"The sufferings of the Church come precisely from the inside of the Church"**

have always been aware of this, but now we do see it in a truly appalling way: that the greatest persecution of the Church does not come from the external enemies, but is born of sin within the Church, and that the Church needs deeply to learn repentance again, to accept purification, to learn forgiveness on one side and the need for justice on the other. Forgiveness does not replace justice." These words were preceded and followed by concrete facts in the fight against the scourge of clerical paedophilia. All this can neither be forgotten nor erased.

The reconstructions contained in the Munich report, which - it must be remembered - is not a judicial inquiry nor a final sentence, will help to combat paedophilia in the Church if they are not reduced to the search for easy scapegoats and summary judgments. Only by avoiding these risks will they be able to contribute to the search for justice in truth and to a collective examination of conscience on the errors of the past.

# Embattled Serie A clubs must change mindset to attract



By JACK MORGAN JONES

ROME – The Italian Insider interviewed Roberto Ciccioli, Head of Tax and Advisory Services at the ‘Consulting Centre’, a consultancy firm that supports football players and clubs in tax, legal, and corporate finance, and he is currently working on the takeover of two Italian football clubs.

**Italian Insider:** The 21st century has seen wealthy individuals, investment funds, and nations all buying top European football clubs. But it seems that Italian football clubs, which in recent years haven’t performed well on the European stage, are not in demand like Premier League clubs. What is the problem with attracting investors to Serie A?

**Roberto Ciccioli:** I think at this moment, the Premier League remains the El Dorado for the investors. But at the same time, Italian football remains better than the other leagues. For example, in Spain, some football clubs – excluding Barcelona, Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid – have less appeal than Italian football clubs on average. This pandemic period has also shown to all the key decision makers that the football system in Spain and France is still fragile. Italian football is and will continue to be attractive for some investors. Is there a problem of attracting investors? It depends on



The Artemio Franchi Stadium has a 230-foot tall ‘Tower of Marathon’. Fiorentina owner Rocco Commisso called the stadium ‘the shittiest thing that’s ever been invented’ (Financial Times)

identifying which position they fall – first, second or third. Maybe we are second after the Premier League, or third after, say, Spain.

**II:** What lies behind the current financial fragility?

**RC:** When the pandemic period started, and broadcasters stopped paying their fee for TV rights, this put several football clubs across different countries in a troubled situation. But this didn’t happen in Italy. We still have financial difficulties of course, but in the end, all the football clubs remained where they were relative to before the pandemic period. So, at this moment, even with the difficulties, Italian football remains attractive for investment. Of course,

each investment depends also on the investor’s goal, if the investor wants to invest in profits, winning trophies, or publicity. But apart from England, Italy remains probably the best in this moment to invest in football. Of course, this point of view refers only to the football club currently playing in the Serie A, and maybe in the Serie B where there is also good interest from foreign investors, because from the third division the clubs are not profitable. From there it is probably better to invest in the UK.

**II:** Are there any differences in the media, the fans, the football culture, that plays into significant differences for investors between the UK and Italy?

**RC:** The Italian football situation is quite different from the UK. Most of the clubs need to be restructured in financial terms and in terms of IT and other managerial areas. This is currently not happening in some cases because the amount that the clubs have available for investing is allocated for investments in football players. We need to have a good level of club managers to reduce the cost for the players and to be able to allocate a part of this saved money to restructure the club. This would make the clubs financially safe, while restructuring TV rights and investing in digital services and new frontiers of the economy like blockchain.

**II:** The businessman Rocco Com-

misso bought Fiorentina for 170 million in 2019. He recently said in an interview with The Financial Times that his club’s future projects had been hamstrung by media expectations and Italian government regulations, such as in the case of upgrading the Fiorentina stadium. Who can engender the necessary structural changes in modern Italian football? Are stadiums important or a distraction? Where does the power lie?

**RC:** Of course stadiums are [important]. Stadiums are assets. Consider that once you can put in place 360 degree cameras you will be able to engage the fans with a totally different vision of the football... Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality, Artificial Intelligence, the Metaverse... there are several more services a stadium can provide the fans. Of course, the bureaucracy and politicians create delays for each football club; but even so, in some cases, the owners who need to understand: if they want to build a stadium, they build a stadium... not an entirely different thing, like real estate, a hotel, or a trading centre.

**II:** How much has the last two years of COVID lockdowns impacted investments in major assets like stadiums and these new technologies?

**RC:** COVID has created financial problems. It has probably reduced revenues from advertising, ticketing, and merchandising by at least 20-30 per cent. But these components aren’t important compared to TV rights. [The problem is] that the clubs are not solid. They are risking too much by taking on too much debt.

Take Inter Milan. They have a huge debt like Juventus. As of Jan. 30, 2021, Juventus financial statements show that they had debts of around

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## investors, Italy's top talent scout Roberto Ciccioli says

400 million and approved a capital increase of 400 million in the summer of 2021. This means they must cover a huge debt with revenues of around 400 million? It's insane. This happens if someone thinks that to increase the value of the club, they must increase player wages because the fans request this as a strategy. But the correct strategy has been taken up by the middle clubs - Atalanta, Sassuolo - they take players for cheap through their scouting departments, invest in them, let them grow in a roster, then sell them. In order to grow steadily, the clubs need to work to identify the best players - three, four, five, six million euros; 10 million euros maximum - this in my opinion is the average amount Italian football clubs can really afford for the transfer fee of any football player. And then, if they are very good in terms of identifying the correct players, they will increase in value according to the results of the football club.



Roberto Ciccioli

What is required is for football clubs to change their mentality. This is crucial and can come from the investors. New technologies and digital services can happen if we improve the base of the football system [via] the club managers, the employees, the players. The Premier League is an example for Italian football. There are several guidelines to increase the level: the first refers to the increase of the TV rights; the second, the need to increase the revenues arising from the stadiums (which is certainly related to the ownership of the stadium); the third refers to the new technologies I mentioned. Three guidelines. This could give the system the opportunity to reduce the gap with the Premier League. In my opinion, we start with the intent of increasing the value but not in terms of values of football players...in terms of the values of the clubs.

**II:** Juventus have once again been in the news for financial misconduct allegations. Gazzetta dello Sport suggested that over 40 transfers are being investigated. What was the mistake they made in their transfer dealings?

**RC:** Take Cristiano Ronaldo. Cristiano was a problem for Juventus. Why? Because his salary cost them 60 million euros plus the purchase... so we are speaking about 85 million

euros for each fiscal year. That's more or less a fourth of the total revenues of Juventus related just to one single player. If Juventus had revenues of more than 500 million, probably they could have had him; but with 350-400 million it's difficult to take these types of players. Same for AC Milan. Same for Inter Milan. This is just our level. At this moment the top Italian clubs can afford players of 12 million euros. 20 million euros maximum. And that's only for the top clubs. Juventus tried to take players for free: paying only the agency fees, so that they have the top players, spending a lot in terms of salary, but saving their money by avoiding the transfer fee. They made a mistake. They signed players with salaries of 10 million, 12 million euros. Some of these players didn't play! Think of how many players they could have taken with the same results.

**II:** What is the main risk now for a club like Juventus?

**RC:** It is not the sporting penalties but the financial penalties that matter. If the criminal court proves an agreement with the other football clubs to put the transferred players at a value to avoid financial losses, that means they provided false financial statements. From here, the stakeholders might ask for the money they gave back, which could put Juventus

in a troubled financial position even close to bankruptcy.

**II:** What does Italian football have to do to make progress in the sport?

**RC:** To increase the revenues, we must increase the level of all the football clubs. But this can happen only with good club managers and good professionals who can identify the good players for the right price -one we can actually afford. We start from this assumption: we are currently not able to take the top players (the likes of De Bruyne, Messi, Halaand, etc) while preserving a solid financial situation. We are just not able to take on that type of player. What we are currently able to do is take good young players (as we did with Salah, Allison, etc). Then, if the whole Italian football system increases its value we will potentially have the opportunity to maintain top players into the rosters. We need to start from the base. If we continue investing in players of 20 or 30 million euros without a criterion, then we will continue to waste time and money. And if we are able to get financially solid, then we will avoid issues like those that arose from the scandals in the last month.



Cristiano Ronaldo

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# Child migrants a challenge for Italian



By PHILIP WILLAN

ROME - "New year, new life," the crew of a German rescue ship tweeted after disembarking 440 migrants in the Sicilian port of Pozzallo at the start of the year. "We wish them all the best."

Plucked from rickety boats in five operations in the central Mediterranean, the migrants were among the first to arrive after the 67,000 who

made it to Italian shores in 2021.

Of those rescued by the Sea-Watch 3, 167 were unaccompanied minors aged between eight and 17. Just as the total number of migrants arriving in Italy doubled in 2021, so did the number of juveniles travelling on their own: growing from 4,687 in 2020 to 9,478 last year, according to figures from the interior ministry.

The youngest to complete the journey was a boy aged around one. Nobody knew for sure because he had been thrust onto a migrant boat that arrived in Lampedusa without his parents.

More normally, children as young as 12 set out on the perilous journey in search of a better life in Europe, their arrival in the thousands creating a particular challenge for Italian institutions.



Libyan rebel fighters in Ras Lanuf. Photo Credit: Nick Cornish



Migrant children in a Greek classroom Photo: UNICEF/Leonidas Papadopoulos

"It's shocking from a western point of view. I've got two children aged 20 and they are still at home," said Enrico Costa, who heads a Catholic charity in Genoa that runs four reception centres hosting around 100 unaccompanied minors.

"These kids are as brave as lions. They set out with a certain degree of madness, but they are full of grit, which is a precious gift. They are the opposite of our Neets (Not in education, employment or training). They are determined to study and to work, and we shouldn't let that go to waste," Costa said.

Costa, who is president of the Ceis

charity, acknowledged that Genoa had had problems in accommodating and integrating its youngest migrants. Some were highly motivated by money and easy prey for criminals who used them for minor crimes and drug dealing, exploiting the legal impunity of children under 14.

Many had been parked in hotels for long periods, had been neglected by social workers and educators, and had drifted into crime and vandalism, Costa said.

"Some centres have had to employ armed guards. If you keep people from the same ethnic background together they can form a mass and

overwhelm the educators. With a little intelligence and planning you can avoid that," Costa said.

Language training and professional skills were vital if the minors were to integrate into Italian society, eventually providing part of the labour force for a country with a declining population.

"If they remain isolated, that breeds anger. When they feel welcomed and helped, able to express themselves, they are good people like anyone else," Costa said.

In the long term, professional skills learned in Italy could be useful for those who return to their country of

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## institutions



A migrant child rescued from the Mediterranean, 2018. Photo: VOA

origin. It's one way of "helping them at home," Costa said. "They would be able to return with their heads held high, something like the Erasmus scheme (for studying abroad in Europe)."

Ejaz Ahmad, who has worked as an intercultural mediator in Rome for the last 20 years, said the young age of the unaccompanied minors was less shocking in their countries of origin, where someone can be considered an adult at the age of 12.

"At that age they are already working, and the girls can get married as soon as they start to menstruate," said Ahmad, who is originally from Pakistan.

The cost of a child's journey to Europe is the same as for an adult, between 7,000 euros and 14,000 euros for the trip from Pakistan for example, and can take up to two years, he said. "The trip is organised by the family and it's not accessible to the poorest. The money amounts to a small fortune back home, and sometimes they have to sell a shop or a

house to finance it."

Ahmad, who has assisted numerous unaccompanied minors in their dealings with the Italian authorities, said they were keen to work because they were often being pressured by their families over the money. And they were determined to succeed because of the sacrifices that underpinned their journeys.

The migrants may have contacts with a support network in Europe and a good idea of the riches that might await them, but they have little notion of the hazards. "They have never seen the desert or the sea. They don't know how to swim. There's a lot of ignorance," he said.

The knowledge that the family is spending a fortune on the journey weighs on them. "They'll sleep in the snow, but they don't want to go back," Ahmad said.

"One boy had his feet in ribbons when he got here because he had been walking for hundreds of miles along railway tracks on the migrant route through the Balkans. The bor-

der guards confiscate people's shoes as a punishment when they catch them and send them back," he said. "There's a charity in Trieste that hands out shoes as soon as they arrive."

Covid-19 has pushed immigration off the front pages of the newspapers and changed public perceptions. A study published by Carta di Roma, an organisation that monitors coverage of immigration in the Italian media, found it was a priority emergency for just six per cent of the population.

Much will depend on the success of efforts to integrate migrants into society and the work force. Mario Draghi, the prime minister, has stressed that migrants are a resource and not enemies, promoting a non-ideological approach to the issue.

"I hear talk of defending our roots, of identity, but you do that by affirming the characteristics of our roots: solidarity and responsibility," he told

parliament recently.



Refugees in a camp in Libya Photo: UNICEF

## Reflections on migrants and migration



By **FRANCESCO TERRONE**

NAPLES - Tired faces, neglected bodies, weak hearts and fragile souls. Men, women and, alas, children, united in the same bitter destiny - to go. But where? The desperation we witness daily through images that slam into us should send us into a broken silence from which we must emerge with a strong and hard awareness.

We are men and, as such, we should be able to reach out to a varied humanity that flees to distant and unknown places, too often at the mercy of no one.

We are beings, however, unable to welcome, to build bridges; let us build walls, as the political choices of some States clearly demonstrate, who believe they're solving a humanitarian problem, such as that of migration, by applying their own atrocious force. I never believed that migration stemmed from the mere need to go. Exploring the causes of migratory flows is a starting point to try to think of and propose effective and de-

cisive solutions. Certainly the causes are various and numerous: the need for security, demographic and climatic needs, the need to affirm human rights, economic and social factors. Faced with this tragedy, what does old Europe do? It is clear that this is the arrival point of an avalanche of people coming from the waves of the sea and beyond. It is true that the European Union is trying to tackle the migration issue through a policy that, as far as I'm concerned, is still too weak, even shirking. What has been done up to now - rules on political asylum, strengthening border control, pacts between the various member countries of Europe, repatriation and so on - has only shown the limits of the European system because it has never managed to harmonise legal and regulatory systems, leaving everything in an unsolvable fragmentation.

The Mediterranean, an open road to legal and illegal migration, a complexity of tears and wounds, must be not only the passage of desperate peoples, but a driving force for development of all the countries from which millions of people emigrate.

Europe is able to adopt and build policies that are not of exploitation and marginalisation. France, Spain, Italy and all the countries involved are capable of acting not only as a crossroads for migratory flows, but build wide-ranging economic, political and social actions by defining strategic



plans that enrich and put poor countries in conditions. debilitated to stem the destruction they are forced to experience every day. The serious thing to do would be to create partnerships between the strong countries of Europe and the countries that suffer. We must not abandon them to their atrocious fate, but stabilise them in their lands, let people forced to migrate find substantial aid in their country, concrete actions to consolidate and strengthen the economy because it is only through it that the political and social bases. Would it be too utopian to transplant a Marshall plan to countries exhausted by economic, financial and humanitarian tragedies?! In my opinion, integration must begin in the countries of origin by initiating a process of structural transformation of the economy allowing for a gradual recovery and development with,

course, a gradual improvement in the living conditions of the populations. Or, with great courage, I would dare to propose the creation of European Villages which, under the aegis of the UN, are safe and protected places of refuge for all those fleeing hunger and torture, especially for women and children. Furthermore, I believe that if we produced and sold fewer weapons to these unfortunate people, we would certainly have fewer migrants.

Enough, I say, to the torture written on people's faces, I say enough to the screams of pain, I say enough to the faces of millions of children who, in vain, beg the dignity of their life. Besides everything and everyone, I say enough, above all because children must not die. They are our brothers. They don't forget. We should learn to look at the world in one sole direction, tracing a single path in each heart.

### LET THE CHILDREN BE

*Be kind to the little ones.  
Be tender with their wounds,  
calm their tears,  
sweep away selfishness  
like the high tide  
that covers everything  
before it  
and stifles the breath.  
Be careful with their dreams.  
Let them walk  
Allow them to arrive freely  
at their own thoughts.  
Let the children be.  
Let the sun caress them,  
let them grow  
under the eaves of life,  
let them grow  
because they are life ...  
For life!*

## Week of prayer opportunity to improve synodal relations



By **CHRISTOPHER LAMB**

VATICAN CITY - It was on Jan. 25, 1959, during the final ceremony of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, that Pope John XXIII announced he would be calling a Second Vatican Council, a historic event that was to decisively “reset” relations between the Christian Churches.

Sixty-three years on and the “week of prayer” is being celebrated within the context of the unprecedented synodal pathway undertaken by Pope Francis, a process with similar potential to the Council to radically shift how Christians see each other and work together. Francis sees the synod process as a chance for the Catholic Church to learn from other Christian Churches and communities about synodality in their traditions, while the Vatican department in charge of Christian unity and the synod office has encouraged local Churches to include other Christian leaders in the synod process. The synod’s aim is to hear from all the “People of God,” defined in the Catechism as all the baptised, which includes all in mainstream denominations.

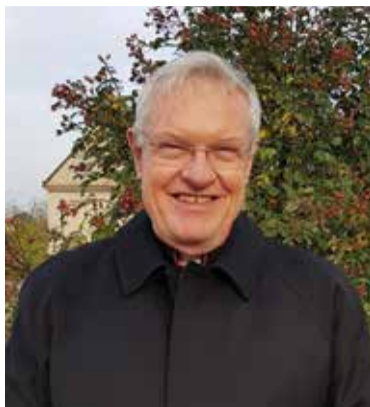
“When will unity be achieved? That is the question, no?” the Pope asked an ecumenical delegation from Finland this week. As he did on the flight back to Rome from Greece in December, he quoted the Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas, who has wryly suggested this would not happen until the eschaton, the end of time. But “what is important is the journey towards unity,” Francis added.

Could this journey include a change in the Catholic Church’s position on Anglican orders, which just over 125 years ago Pope Leo XIII declared to be “absolutely null and utterly void?” That 1896 ruling, *Apostolicae Curae*, continues to cause hurt among some Anglicans and is seen as an obstacle to unity. At the end of last year, an independent group of Catholic and Anglican theologians called for the teaching to be scrapped.

I can report that the issue has been raised directly with the pope in recent months, and he asked for the question to be considered by Vatican officials. While there is no sign that *Apostolicae Curae* will be overturned, for several decades Rome has been moving away from the language of Leo XIII towards a recognition of the fruits of Anglican ministry. During the Francis pontificate there is a very different approach to the one found in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s 1998 document, *Professio Fidei*, which claimed the teaching on Anglican orders was one of the “truths connected to revelation” and was to be held definitively.

The shift draws on the teaching of Vatican II, which recognised the “significant elements” that build up the Church outside of the “visible boundaries” of the Catholic Church, and on the many agreed statements on doctrine that have emerged from the formal dialogues between Anglican and Catholic theologians since the Council. While the ordination of women in the Anglican communion appears to make any blanket recognition of Anglican orders impossible, the blunt language of “null and void” has already been softened at grassroots level.

The recent ordination to the Catholic priesthood of the former Anglican Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali included a prayer that recognised the “fruitfulness for salvation” of his ministry as an Anglican priest. It was originally composed by Cardinal Basil Hume for



Archbishop Charles Balvo, recently chosen as the new papal ambassador to Australia

the ordination as a Catholic priest of the former Anglican Bishop of London, Graham Leonard. (Rome agreed to Hume’s request that Leonard’s ordination be conditional due to “pru-

dent doubt” about the invalidity of his ordination in the Church of England.) During the ordination of Fr Nazir-Ali, Cardinal Vincent Nichols said: “We seek to build on the fruitfulness of the priestly ministry you have faithfully exercised.”

Five years ago I reported that Cardinal Francesco Coccopalmerio, one of the Church’s most respected legal experts, argued that Anglican orders should not be described as “invalid” and called for a less “rigid understanding of validity and invalidity.” The synod process could offer the impetus for a re-appraisal of *Apostolicae Curae* as Christians seek to walk together towards unity.

Archbishop Charles Balvo, a Vatican diplomat from the United States, has been chosen as the new papal ambassador to Australia. Born in Brooklyn, New York, the 70-year-old prelate is highly experienced. His previous

postings as nuncio include New Zealand and the Pacific and South Sudan. While ambassador to Kenya he called on the country to offer gay people “respect, dignity and human rights and not to discriminate against them.”

His appointment is significant given that Australia has been one of the pioneers of the synodal reform process, with the holding of a plenary council that will seek to make crucial decisions on the future of the Church. Unlike the German synodal pathway, the Australian plenary council is more closely tied to the Holy See. Archbishop Balvo will play a part in assisting this process, and in the selection of new bishops. The Australian bishops do not all share the same vision of the direction the Church should take. I would expect the new nuncio’s appointments to shift the majority of the hierarchy in a more synodal direction.



Francis celebrates Mass on the feast of the Presentation of the Lord. Photo credit Eric Vandeville

## Vatican commission member counters Pope over Covid vaccines

By **CHRISTOPHER LAMB**

VATICAN CITY - A UK-based theologian has signed a declaration that calls on the Pope and the entire Church to oppose the “dangerous, under-tested, under-monitored, abortion-tainted Covid-19 injections.”

Dr Caroline Farey serves as a member of the commission examining the female diaconate that was set up following a request from bishops at the Amazon synod 2019 to study the issue.

The Bethlehem Declaration asserts that it is “morally illicit” to accept a Covid vaccination and calls for “massive non-compliance” with “free-

dom-killing” vaccine passports.

Pope Francis has described getting vaccinated against Covid-19 as an “act of love” and only those with a vaccine pass or proof of recent recovery from the virus are permitted to enter the Roman Curia’s offices.

During his annual speech to ambassadors to the Holy See from across the world on Jan. 10, Francis lamented the “baseless information or poorly documented facts” which had swayed some people to refuse the vaccine.

The declaration was published on LifeSiteNews, a Canadian ultraconservative Catholic website consistently hostile to the pope which last year was removed from YouTube,

Facebook and other social media platforms for spreading misinformation about the Covid virus. Other signatories include Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, the former Vatican diplomat who in 2018 called on the pontiff to resign. It comes under the oversight of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith – the same body which in Dec. 2020 ruled that although cell lines from two aborted foetuses had been used in the research and production process of Covid vaccines, their use was “morally licit”.

Dr Farey, a former philosophy lecturer at St Mary’s College, Oscott who was responsible for catechesis at the Maryvale Institute in Birmingham between 1996 and 2013, was asked by *The Tablet* if she intended to continue serving on the Vatican commission, given it has been holding in-person meetings in Rome.

She was also asked if she saw any difficulty about signing a petition which contradicts the Vatican’s position on vaccines, hosted by a website hostile to Francis.

“It seems to me that the Bethlehem Declaration gives sufficiently serious reasons for not receiving one of the experimental Covid vaccines currently available in the UK,” she said. Dr Farey also emphasised that she was not endorsing the views or comments of other signatories.

“Each of the many points made in the Bethlehem Declaration seems to be true, just, well-researched and relevant to the UK (although set partly in the American context). I hope people read the supporting articles so that



Dr Caroline Farey. Photo: In word and Witness

they can judge for themselves.”

Dr Farey went on to explain that she discerns to the “best of my knowledge” whether an article contains “misinformation or not” and does not “use Facebook or any other fact-checker to make that judgement for me, as these may have different criteria for their judgment.”

As to disagreeing with Francis, she said: “During this time of exploration of a synodal way, do you think the pope wants the listening process to be only for those with his own viewpoint?”

The first meeting of the new women deacon’s commission was held in September, and a subsequent meeting had been expected to take place in the coming weeks.

This is the second commission to look at the topic of female deacons after the first one was, according

to the pope, unable to reach agreement. However, although those on that commission presented their evidence, they did not see what was submitted to the pope by Cardinal Luis Ladaria, the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, who had overseen their work.

The Vatican’s doctrine office is understood to have played a critical role in naming the members of the commission and although the bishops from the Amazon requested the work on women deacons to continue, none of the 10-member body comes from Latin America or the Amazon region.

An analysis of the commission members suggests an even split between those for and against female deacons. A number of those serving on the body, including Dr Farey, appear not to have published on the issue of female deacons.

It is significant, however, that the pontiff chose Cardinal Giuseppe Petrotchi, the multi-lingual archbishop of the central Italian archdiocese of L’Aquila and a trusted advisor to Francis, to lead the new commission. Any opening to female deacons will be fiercely resisted by some in Rome, and the CDF is understood to be the centre of resistance to change.

The secretary of the commission is Fr Denis Dupont-Fauville, a relatively new official at the doctrine office, who used to oversee the permanent diaconate for the Archdiocese of Paris. He did not respond to *The Tablet*’s request for comment and has in the past said the commission’s work is covered by pontifical secret.



Pope Francis celebrating Mass in the Basilica of St Peter. Photo Eric Vandeville

## Venice African art space to host Kanku exhibition 'Tricolore 2022'

By **PHILIP STRINGER**  
Photos: **LUIGI KANKU,**  
**AKKA PROJECT**

VENICE – 'Tricolore 2022,' a new, world-touring exhibition by Congolese-Italian artist Luigi Christopher Veggetti Kanku, will start its journey in the City of Canals at The AKKA Project, a dynamic gallery of contemporary African art. The artworks will be there from Jan. 20 until March 10, before moving to the next location.



Lidija Kostic Khachatourian at the Dubai AKKA Project

Kanku, 42, is a painter and sculptor born in Kinshasa, DRC and raised in the Brianza area of Italy, between Milan and Lake Como. No doubt influenced by the artist's multi-cultural background, 'Tricolore 2022' focuses on the sense of belonging and identity beyond ethnicity, birthplace, or religion. It holds the aim of raising national and international public awareness of the shift happening in Italy towards an increasingly multi-ethnic reality.

The artist uses visual narration – four artworks in NFT format (Non-Fungible Tokens, which certify and protect the authenticity of the work) – to denounce the futility of prejudices and emphasise the beauty and power of change.

The exhibition will be shown not only in traditional cultural spaces such as museums, galleries, and art spaces, but also in schools, where debates will be hosted alongside the artwork to engage students and families.

"I like the idea of treating schools like museums and galleries," commented the artist. "If the main purpose of this event is to raise the awareness of the individual, I find it right to start at the foundation, un-hinging the usual dynamics of art and entering places where citizens are just beginning to build their critical sense."

His painting, 'Teenager,' portrays a black girl sticking out an Italian 'tricolore' flag on her tongue. The body part's dual connotation of language and taste allude to the concept of communication and nutrition as the foundations of a nation.

'Le due Madri' is the first work that inspired the entire project and is a contemporary reworking of the famous canvas by Giovanni Segantini, displayed at the Galleria d'Arte Moderna in Milan.

"I am very happy to have reinterpreted the work of one of the greatest Italian masters," says Kanku. "After more than 130 years, this canvas comes to life digitally, impregnated with unexpected social content."

The artist calls it "a gentle work that touches many themes at the same time, without ever being provocative, just a certain point of reflection."

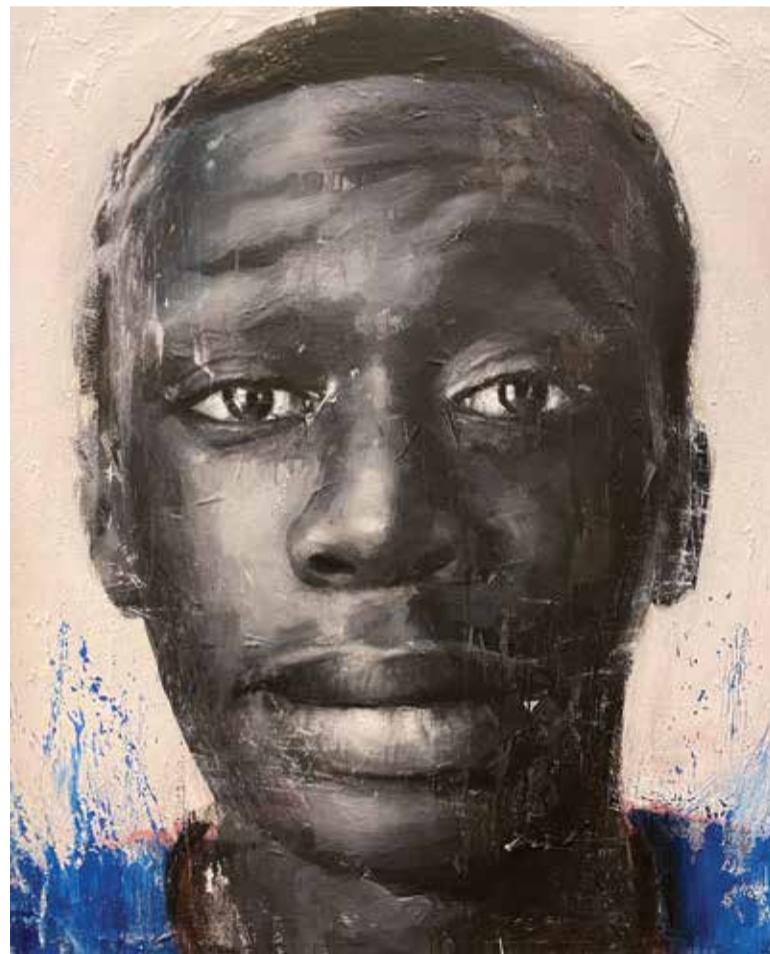
After Venice, the exhibition will tour other Italian locations such as Milan, schools in the province of Monza and Brianza and the Leonardo da Vinci Institute in Bergamo, with the exact schedule still to be confirmed. The artworks will then travel to South Africa, Brazil, and finally the United States where the event will end after 12 months, in Jan. 2023, at the Museum of Fine Arts of Florida State University.

The AKKA Project is a commercial art gallery focused on contemporary art from the African continent, active in Dubai since 2016 and in Venice since 2019.

It was founded by Lidija Kostic Khachatourian who is originally from Serbia. She relocated to Lugano, Switzerland in 1989 and then in 2008 she moved to Dubai with her family. While exploring Sub-Saharan Africa, she started engaging with many artists and building an artwork collec-



Kanku in his studio



'Khaby Lame' by Luigi Christopher Veggetti Kanku, 2021



'Teenager' by Luigi Christopher Veggetti Kanku, 2021

tion. Khachatourian was captivated by the cultural diversity of the African Continent and her passion for contemporary African art rapidly grew over the years.

She began to travel systematically across Africa, looking for emerging artists and organising exhibitions for them in the United Arab Emirates and in Europe.

Nowadays, she is committed to the promotion of contemporary art from Africa through two projects, the first

of which is the AKKA Project, whose objective is to promote artists from Africa and encourage their growth through exhibitions, art fairs, and residencies. Her second is a free online platform called Art And About Africa, which aims to create a cartography of cultural spaces, artists' studios and art institutions on the African continent as well as festivals, biennials and fairs, making the artistic map of the African continent a reality available for everyone.

## Arnulf Rainer art exhibition extended until March

### INSIDER NEWSDESK

FLORENCE – An exhibition of Arnulf Rainer's art at Galleria Poggiali in the Tuscan capital has proven so popular it has been extended until March 5, the organisers announced.

'Colours in the Hands,' curated by Helmut Friedel, presents a large corpus of previously unseen works by the Austrian painter.

On show are examples of Rainer's distinctive styles, spanning from the late seventies to the early 1990s.

One of the artist's standout techniques is that of scooping the paint directly in his hands and applying it, somewhat vehemently, to the surface with his fingers. The resulting aesthetic is textured and highly expressive.

"Between 1981 and 1983 the paintings made with hands and fingers were born," explained Friedel, the exhibition's curator. "Colour is pressed with all strength on cardboard. On his knees, the painter works from

one surface to another, grasps the oil colours, feels the full presence of the material in his bare hands, which he does not protect even with gloves."

"Thus, like a demiurge, he forms expression as representation."

"Some drafts of colour recall hands seeking help that never stop and resemble screams; others, more conciliatory, surround an imaginary object or space and drag other colours with them, thus generating a wild expressive dance, the dance of direct expression."

"The encounter with Arnulf Rainer's work is always a source of surprise."

"His paintings amaze and fascinate for the vivacity of the application of colour, of the chromatic veiling, intense and violent in the structural images whose surfaces are performed in subtle reliefs in order to then be able to absorb the colour even more intensely."

Known to the general public for his abstract and informal art, Arnulf



'Untitled' by Arnulf Rainer, oil on canvas, 1980

Rainer was born in Baden, Austria on Dec. 8 1929. During his early career, he was influenced by Surrealism, then evolved his style towards

the destruction of forms, with the blackening, repainting and masking of illustrations and photographs that dominate his later works. He was

very close to Viennese Actionism, characterised by body art and painting under the influence of drugs.

For a long time, he painted the relationship between life and death focusing extensively on the theme of Hiroshima in relation to the nuclear bombing of the Japanese city and its fallout, both political and physical.

Rainer has exhibited in major international events such as the Venice Biennale (1980 and 2011), the San Paolo Biennale (1996) and Documenta 7 (1982). His works are exhibited in some of the most important museums in the world, such as the MOMA and the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Tate in London and the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

In 1993, the Arnulf Rainer Museum was opened in New York. He also has a museum dedicated to him in Baden.

After a splendid career, and at the age of 92, the Poggiali Gallery brings Arnulf Rainer to Florence for the first time and has dedicated a major exhibition to him.

# Toasting prosecco at the Conegliano wine academy

The Insider explores Italy's oldest and most prestigious oenology and viticulture school

By MARGARET STENHOUSE

CONEGLIANO - A spacious, tree-lined avenue leads into the open courtyard in front of the large and imposing building that houses the Cerletti Campus, Italy's oldest and most prestigious wine academy, situated on the outskirts of Conegliano in the Province of Treviso and gateway to the land of Prosecco DOCG. This is where future vintners, oenologists and wine experts are groomed to contribute to the continuing success of the bubbly that has become one of Italy's greatest exportation success stories, with an output of over 500 million bottles in 2020, 78 per cent of which sold abroad.

A column surmounted by the bust of scientist Antonio Carpené stands in the middle of the courtyard. Carpené, a chemist and agronomist who had fought alongside Garibaldi

**"Bubbly has become one of Italy's greatest exportation success stories"**

in the campaign for the Unification of Italy, was determined to introduce more modern methods of agriculture and wine production to what was then the backward area of the Province of Treviso. In 1876, he founded the Scuola Enologica di Conegliano along with his colleague, agricultural expert Giovanni Battista Celletti, who part funded the project and was the institute's first director.

The Academy was the first of its kind in Italy and prospered up till the first World War and the Italian struggle for independence from the Austro-Hungarian empire. The river Piave, where the Italian army made a last determined stand, winning the decisive "Battle of the Solstice" in June 1918, flows placidly through the countryside less than 50 km. away. The many teachers and students who lost their lives in the conflict are commemorated in the tree-filled Memorial Park in front of the main building.

The Scuola Enologica di Conegliano was also a war victim. Badly damaged during the war, it was rebuilt and re-opened in 1924 in its present



Quaint Cerletti taverna

form as an Istituto Statale Istruzione Secondaria Superiore, (a state school of secondary education), following the regular Italian state education curriculum with specialisation in agriculture, wine production and marketing.

The school is not confined to local pupils, but is much in demand with students from all over Italy and also from abroad, with boarding facilities available if required. Like all other regular Italian state schools, there are no tuition fees. The Institute is part of the European Erasmus system and is in partnership with the University of Padua, where students can go on to obtain degrees, post-graduate and doctorates in their chosen branch of wine technology, business management and promotional activities.

Giorgio Milani, economics and agriculture lecturer at the Institute took us on a tour of the main building, which reflects the elaborate Arte Nouveau tastes of the early part of the 20th century.

The Aula Magna is a gallery of mythological personages linked in some way to the theme of wine's ability to foster friendship, happiness and love, all gathered under a ceiling decorated to create the illusion of a pergola. Nearby, we pass a museum dedicated to Luigi Manzoni, a former principal and pioneer

researcher in vine genetics, who invented the Martinotti method of creating sparkling wine by subjecting the grapes to a second fermentation process under high pressure (also known as the Charmat method after French enologist Eugene Charmat who independently developed the technique and obtained the patent). During his long years at the Institute, Manzoni researched and



The Cerletti Campus wine cellar

cross bred autochthonous Italian vines, creating new grape stocks. His work has been honoured since 2018 with the annual Concorso Internazionale Manzoni contest for the best wines obtained by the Incrocio Manzoni method.

A separate building houses the quaint Tyrolean style Bottega del Vino, described by the 1924 principal Giovanni Dalmaso as an example to be followed by wine shops and national taverns: "to replace rough taverns and messy bottle shops... create new original spaces...as in the Italian tradition." The Celletti wine cellar, in fact, is a cosy retreat with alcoves and columns, with the walls decorated with mottos in praise of wine and good companionship and cornices of painted grapevines and birds. Definitely not a "rough tavern".

The Conegliano wine academy, however, is far from being a simple showcase. It is a working school with its own 25 acres of vineyards immersed in some 52 acres of agri-

cultural land. It possesses a state-of-the-art experimental wine cellar and production plant where students are taken through all the processes involved in the wine-making art. The experimental cellar produces still white wine, red wine and spumante, as well as grappa distilled from single grape varieties.

Prosecco, the star product of the area, is made almost exclusively (85 per cent) from the native Italian Glera grape, which has a long and noble history in wine production. Glera grape wine, in fact, was well known and much appreciated by the Ancient Romans, who called it Puxinum, or Pucino wine, or, in the words of Pliny the Elder, Picinum, and it was exported all over the Roman empire. In the past, however, this wine did not come from the Veneto area, but was produced at a place called Torre di Prosecco, now more commonly known as Moncolano Castle, situated near Trieste.

According to some sources, the first recorded mention of the name Prosecco dates to 1593 when an English traveller called Fynes Moryson mentions it in his travel journal. It was during the 18th and 19th centuries, that the Glera grape began to be planted on the hills of Veneto-Friuli,

highest wine accolade – the coveted D.O.C.G. Certification (Denomination Controlled Origin and Guaranteed). Meanwhile, the Prosecco producers have been quick to tie up all loose ends and guarantee their monopoly

Not everyone is pleased. A few other Italian areas contest Prosecco's exclusivity, claiming the true origins of the Glera vine. In addition, Croatia produces a time-honoured dessert wine called Prošek and has applied to the EU for official recognition of the name, insisting that their wine is totally different from the Italian product. The Prosecco consortium objects that the similarity of the names could confuse consumers. So far, no decision has been made and the matter stands.

Meanwhile, Prosecco land has received a different kind of endorsement. In 2019 its unique man-made landscape of rolling, vine-covered hills was incorporated into the UNESCO World Heritage list, with the following motivation: "the protection of the rural landscape...the conservation of local tradition and the preservation of biodiversity and the associated ecosystem."

A trip along the Conegliano Valdobbiadene Classic Wine Route, laid out



Memorial Wood surrounding Cerletti Campus

where it flourished in what turned out to be its ideal micro-climate. The name Prosecco stuck, however, and by the middle of the 20th century it had become the virtual monopoly of the region, with its most prestigious production centre in one remarkably small area confined between

**"Far from a simple showcase, Conegliano has a state-of-the-art experimental wine cellar and production plant"**

the towns of Conegliano and Valdobbiadene, in the Province of Treviso.

The early producers were quick to see that they had a potentially successful product on their hands. In 1962, they founded the first Consortium to protect the name of Prosecco di Conegliano Valdobbiadene. Seven years later they obtained official recognition from the Italian Ministry of Agriculture and in 2009 the Ministry finally conceded Italy's

in 1966 and the first official Italian wine route, confirms the UNESCO evaluation. The area is, in fact, a unique landscape of rolling hills and steep slopes, where the rows of vines follow the contours of the land in an intricate flowing motion. The gently harmonious pattern is deceptive, however. These vineyards are the result of the hard work and dedication of generations of local vine-growers. The uneven quality of the terrain permits only cultivation and harvesting by hand without the use of mechanical machinery.

A second, more recently created Scenic Wine Route, winds for some 90 kms among the Prosecco hills of Conegliano and Valdobbiadene, passing through fifteen small municipalities, each with its own historic monuments, monasteries and churches, as well as the many small farms and wineries that carry forward the Prosecco legend.

The Prosecco producers, however, are not resting on their laurels. The latest initiative is a rosé version of the celebrated aperitivo. Production was authorised by the Ministry of Agriculture in August 2020 and no time was wasted. 30 million bottles, subsequently produced between January and May 2021, are ready to take a post-pandemic market by storm.



Aula Magna with Art Nouveau frescoes



## Italy envoy to Poland highlights opportunities in 'Central Europe's largest market'

By **ALEKSANDRA KUBACKA**

WARSAW – The Italian Ambassador to Poland, Aldo Amati, highlighted the considerable business potential of the central European country in an interview with Italian financial newspaper, The Economic Tribune.

If foreign investors in Poland are willing to overcome the initial language barrier, said the ambassador, then they will have access to "the largest market in Central and Eastern Europe."

In 2019, Poland received dlns 236.5 billion of international investment, equal to 40 percent of the country's GDP. This makes the Warsaw Stock Exchange (WSE) "probably the largest stock exchange in financial instruments in Central and Eastern Europe and a rapidly growing stock exchange in Europe."

"The value of foreign investment in Polish Special Economic Zones, and in the country in general, has grown steadily over the last decade, making Poland one of the most attractive countries in the EU for foreign direct investment," explained Amati. The Polish Investment Zone program,



View from the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw

which aims to encourage both new international investors and current ones to reinvest has been accelerating the growth of SEZs since 2018.

In 2020, Polish GDP decreased by "only 2.8 percent" over the pandemic. This year, Poland's economy is expected to rebound by around 4.5 percent, if the pandemic doesn't stop it.

Amati emphasised the solid economic cooperation between Italy and Poland. "Over the past three decades we have established ourselves as Warsaw's third largest trading



Italian Ambassador to Poland Aldo Amati, 2019

partner worldwide (behind Germany and China), with an exchange that reached 21.5 billion euros in 2020."

There are more than 2000 Italian firms in Poland and, according to the ambassador, there is still significant potential to be explored in many sectors, such as energy, pharmaceuticals, biomedicine, and infrastruc-

ture.

Products exported from Italy are also highly valued in the Polish market, for example motor vehicles, chemicals, food, and clothing.

However, Amati pointed out that economic cooperation is also subject to the delicate context of international relations and politics.

## One hundred Pfizer redundancies at Sicily plant

### INSIDER NEWSDESK

CATANIA – The Pfizer pharmaceutical group making billions from its Covid-19 vaccines has been criticised for laying off some 100 workers from its east Sicilian site, said Il Fatto Quotidiano.

"At the end of February, 50 Pfizer employees will not have their contract renewed and another 60 positions will be 'frozen' pending the arrival of a new machine, after which the team will be reduced to 30," said trade unions after meeting with the company.

The announcement of the redundancies caused outrage as Pfizer has made billions in revenues and profits from its Covid vaccine, developed with the German company BioNtech using a substantial amount of public aid, and now dominant on the market.

Over the last year, Pfizer has had to repeatedly revise its estimated revenues and profits from selling vaccines as they continue to increase. In the first nine months of 2021, the company recorded revenues of dlns 57 billion (50 billion euros), 91 percent more than in the same period of 2020. The data for the fourth quarter and for the whole of 2021 will be released on Feb. 8.

Over the past year, the company's stock market value has grown by 51 percent to reach dlns 295 billion.

Pfizer has said to the unions that they have allocated 26 million euros to the Catania plant over the next three years. "A derisory figure," the unions said, "only enough for the maintenance of the plants."

The unions have said the plant contains "professionals of undisputed competence." Instead of a relaunch, the multinational has decided to strategically run plants with a thinned-down workforce, depriving itself of highly qualified personnel.

"As part of the usual business processes," the company stated, "Pfizer periodically re-evaluates the activities of its offices around the world in order to ensure continuity in the production of drugs according to high standards of efficiency and safety".

The unions announced that mobilisation will start Monday in view of a strike on March 4.

## Pitti Uomo launches Finnish brand 'redefining masculinity'

Words:

**GIANFRANCO NITTI**

Photos: **ERVIN LATIMER**

FLORENCE - Finnish designer Ervin Latimer picked Pitti Uomo, the men's fashion event held annually in the Renaissance city, to debut his new brand *Latimmier*, which aims to redefine the ways we approach masculinity in fashion and clothing.

Pitti Uomo 101 showcased 600 brands at the Fortezza da Basso. This year also saw the children's edition, Pitti Immagine Bimbo 94, held on the same dates, Jan. 11-13, and at the same location.

Latimmier was due to be launched at Palazzo Pucci on Jan. 12, as part of the "Palazzo Finlandese" series. According to the brand's creator, "the definition of masculinity is narrow. Our new collection is not unisex, nor defined as 'menswear', but rather aimed at anyone who wants to highlight or examine masculinity within themselves."

"Fashion should liberate us, not limit us," he says. "We challenge both who can perform masculinity and what kind of clothing can be used to do that."

"We also expand what Nordic fashion looks like," added the Finnish designer. "Our collection features suits and shirts, but also dresses and skirts. Our design language draws from the history of masculine clothing with a contemporary approach and thought-through, high-quality details."



The word *Latimmier*, as well as alluding to the designer's surname, is an Old French term meaning 'interpreter' or 'translator'.

"In addition to sustainable materials and design," said Latimer, "we also need a deeper purpose for clothing to justify its existence. At the moment, the fashion industry seems to lead with either ecological materials, diversity or strong design vision,

but our objective is to combine all of these in a meaningful way."

The brand aims to bring change in the fashion industry in other ways as well, whether it's the deeper purpose of clothing or the structural ways in which diversity, care and responsibility are approached, for example the company has enacted a four-day

working week.

For Latimer, "the objectives of our company are ambitious. We want to prove that expanding masculinity with clothing is not a niche or a trendy thing that is on the surface only now. Everyone can join us on this journey towards change."

Ervin Latimer is a graduate from Aalto University, Helsinki, with an international career in fashion. His own work has been presented in publications such as *Vogue USA* and *Vogue Italy*, and currently his work is on display at the Helsinki Design Museum. In addition to his work as a designer, he has written and lectured on the intersections of queer-culture, anti-racism, masculinity and fashion.

The launch of *Latimmier* is a part of *SSAW Magazine's* and *Juni Communication's* 'Palazzo Finlandese' series, introducing Finnish designers to the international market. In 2019, the event launched Rolf Ekroth and in 2020, *Fiskars* by Maria Korkeila. Finland was the guest nation of Pitti Uomo in 2018. The launch is supported by *Fashion in Helsinki*, which is an annual event focusing on young designers and new emerging brands. *Fashion in Helsinki* will take place in June in the Finnish capital.



## Most Italian construction companies don't comply with safety regulations

BY **LOUISE NIMMO**

ROME – Following the collapse of a crane that killed three workers in Turin, recent surveillance activity indicates that nine out of 10 construction companies are not in compliance with safety regulations, announced the director of the National Labor Inspectorate Bruno Giordano on TG3. The news comes as the construction industry announced yet another death at work, that of a 50-year-old man who fell from scaffolding in Rome city centre on Dec. 27.

The Councilor for Labour of Rome Capital, Claudia Pratelli, went to the scene of the latest fatal accident - a scaffolding in via Merulana, between Santa Maria Maggiore and San Giovanni areas of the capital. The area around the building has been cordoned off and an investigation is



Via Merulana, where another construction worker died at work

underway to ascertain any violation of safety regulations on the site.

Pratelli expressed her condolences to the man's family and said, "another fatal accident at work on a construction site in our city. The list of victims is unacceptable."

"The number of accidents is dramatically increasing and this is linked to the recovery of the construction sector. We must take concrete and rapid action to ensure that companies implement all the safety measures necessary to protect workers."

Statistics have also shown that the deaths at work in the construction sector make up one tenth of the total in 2021 (98 out of 1017). Transport and logistics have the next highest rates.

Secretary of the Lazio construction workers federation Agostino Calcagno said, "the tragedy of this sector is that the construction contract is not applied in 99 percent of cases." He explained that the hours of safety training required by law - currently 16, but which will soon be increased to 32 - are not there, and that vital safety measures are also absent.



## Parma hands Capital of Culture baton to Procida

### INSIDER NEWSDESK

PARMA – The colourful island of Procida has officially been handed the symbolic baton and deemed Italy's Capital of Culture 2022 in a ceremony



The Corricella marina on Procida

held in the Emilia Romagna city that held the position last year.

The handover event took place Jan. 14 at 3 p.m. in the Teatro Regio in Parma. The event was attended in person by invitation only and live-streamed from the official Procida 2022 Facebook page for millions to see.

National, regional and local institutions were present. The mayor of Procida Dino Ambrosino and the director of Procida 2022, Agostino Riitano, talked with the mayor of Parma, Federico Pizzarotti, the councillor for culture Michele Guerra and representatives of other Italian capitals of culture, past and future.

"We are proud to launch in Parma, in a moment of such great symbolic value, a path in which we will repre-

sent Campania, but also all the smaller islands and small villages of Italy," said Procida mayor Ambrosino.

Procida is one of the Flegrean Islands off the coast of Naples. It has been the setting for several novels, such as *Graziella* by Alphonse de Lamartine and *Arthur's Island* by Elsa Morante.

2022's cultural capital has also been the location of numerous films, including *The Postman* and *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. In 2013, Fabrizio Borgogna launched the Procida Film Festival, an international contest for young movie directors and writers.

Riitano commented, "from Parma, we proudly collect the legacy of a unique experience that will translate, for the island, into a path of cooperation and social innovation."



The island of Procida

## Historic Palermo street flaunts Art Nouveau urban installation

### INSIDER NEWSDESK

PALERMO – A large-scale, shimmering gold artwork named 'Rebirth' has been installed on the façade of the Giglio boutique in Sicily's capital, in celebration of the city's Art Nouveau history.

The building is situated on one of the city's most iconic streets, via della Libertà, an archetypical example of the area's sumptuous architecture.

The installation, called 'Rinascita' in Italian, was commissioned by Giglio and created by Aldo Li Bianchi and Laura Galvano - two Sicilian architects who have already created various installations including 'La follia' and 'Le corde dell'ima' at the Alessandro Scarlatti State Conservatory and an urban installation, 'Green', for which the pair were nominated for the Arte

Laguna Prize in Venice.

The via della Libertà work was created in one night with metallic paper and corrugated paper, two materials handcrafted to create a play of light that recalls the technique used in the creation of Byzantine mosaics - and in more recent times the works of Gustav Klimt - and that thanks to their lightness, fit into the urban space in a soft and harmonious way.

The work symbolically evokes the glories of the Palermo dei Florio, the first city in the South to host the Italian Expo in 1891, which was born - in the words of Li Bianchi and Galvano - from the concept of misrepresentation. Literally, it is a question of making something appear differently from reality, which in the idea of the two architects is transformed into a sensory experience enriched by lights

that shine in the Palermo night.

The installation, visible until Jan. 9, does not end, but - as happens to a work of art - returns and is reborn, in this case thanks to the upcycle of the materials used, which offers the possibility of new uses and leaves room for creative ideas of the future.

The installation is also an opportunity to reconfigure the architecture of a facade for advertising purposes.

The historic Via Libertà building was constructed after 1892, the year in which the national exhibition in Palermo closed. It is located on the spot where Ernesto Basile had created a garden with small pavilions for pleasure at the northern end of the expo. This was an extraordinary era that consecrated Palermo among the most important cities in Europe.

In memory of those places and those glories, which turned the spotlight on the city, the installation represents, on a gold-coloured background, a garden of lilies whose design is clearly Art Nouveau. The new skin, deliberately creased, applied to the ashlar surface of the building, works as a mirror for the reflection of natural light; this way found by the Byzantine tradition becomes contemporary narration in accordance with the mosaics of Monreale and Palermo.

The work, designed to be different, aims to make what we normally have under our nose different and suggests new, possibly fantastic readings of our everyday urban reality.



Giglio's shimmering new façade



Palermo architect Laura Galvano with her installation

## Sicily sets precedent for Elgin Marbles possible return to Greece

### INSIDER NEWSDESK

PALERMO – The Antonio Salina Archaeological Museum in Sicily's capital has agreed to send a valuable fragment of the Parthenon known as the 'Fagan artefact' back to Greece in exchange for two Italian ancient artworks, said the museum. The decision has added fuel to the long-running debate on returning museum items to their country of origin and it may have repercussions for the case of the Elgin Marbles in the British Museum.

The Fagan artefact is a Pentelic marble fragment belonging to the eastern frieze of the Parthenon, and it depicts the foot of a Greek Goddess, either Peitho or Artemis, seated on a throne. The sculpture's nickname comes from the London-born diplomat, painter and archaeologist Robert Fagan who inherited the marble fragment at the turn of the century and sold it to the Royal University of



Regional Councillor Alberto Samonà in front of the Fagan artefact

Palermo in 1820. Fagan spent most of his career in Rome and Sicily. The fragment will now be kept at the Acropolis Museum in Athens. The museum's director Nikolaos Stampo-

lidis called the arrival of the Palermo Frieze "extremely important."

"Our beloved sister Sicily has paved the way for Parthenon friezes kept in other European cities to also be returned to Greece, above all in London and at the British Museum," he said in pointed reference to the Elgin or 'Parthenon Marbles.'

Stampolidis also took the opportunity to highlight the conclusion reached recently by the Intergovernmental Commission of UNESCO for the Promotion of the Restitution of Cultural Heritage to Countries of Origin (ICPRCP). Since 1984, Greece has requested that the British Museum return the Parthenon sculptures to their country of origin. On Sept. 29, the ICPRCP officially recognised the legitimacy of the Greeks' demand and called on "the United Kingdom to reconsider its position and proceed in a dialogue in good faith with Greece."

## Lina Wertmüller Iconic Italian film director

ROME – The first woman in history to be nominated for an Oscar, Lina Wertmüller, died aged 93 at her home in the Italian capital.

Wertmüller was born in Rome in 1928 and although she didn't take to school - as an adolescent she was expelled from multiple different Catholic High Schools - she was enthralled by film and theatre from a young age.

Initially Wertmüller toured Europe with a puppeteering group before turning to cinema in the 1960s. In this decade she produced neo-realist films such as 'The Basilisks' with music by Ennio Morricone as well as musicals.

However, it was in the following decade that Wertmüller shot to international fame. Beginning with her 1972 film 'The Seduction of Mimi' and ending with 'Blood Feud' in 1978, Wertmüller directed seven films which are considered masterpieces of Italian comedy. She was the first woman to be nominated for an Oscar in history as best director for her 1975 film, 'Pasqualino Settebellezze' or in English, 'Seven Beauties.'

Wertmüller favoured long titles for her films and they often had to be shortened for release. She was entered into the Guinness Book of World Records for the longest film title in the world - 'Un fatto di sangue nel comune di Siculiana fra due uomini per causa di una vedova. Si sospettano moventi politici. Amore-Morte-Shimmy. Lugano belle. Tarantelle. Tarallucci e vino.' This became 'Blood Feud' or 'Revenge'.

The cinema of Wertmüller is packed



Lina Wertmüller

with subtexts. She examined social subjects, such as the clash between men and women, with sarcastic humour. Her films are thought to be innovative, never banal, sometimes politically grotesque and at times tragically realistic.

The late director is remembered in Italy for her extraordinary creativity, distinctive white glasses and not least her bold conviction to excel in a male-dominated arena.

She was married to the set and costume designer of many of her films, Enrico Job, who died in 2008.

**Lina Wertmüller, film director**

**Born Aug. 14 1928**

**Died Dec. 9 2021**

**LOUISE NIMMO**

# Covid-19 threatens UN cash crisis

By THALIF DEEN

(IPS) - The 22-month-old coronavirus pandemic – which has claimed over 5.4 million lives worldwide, devastated economies and reduced an additional 100 million people to poverty—has also disrupted the work of a partially locked-down United Nations, triggering a potential cash crisis in the world body.

Addressing the UN's Administrative and Budgetary Committee late last year, a spokesperson for the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) said, "for any organisation to succeed, it must be given adequate financial resources to implement its mandates. However, COVID-19 has disrupted not just the UN's work, but many of our economies."

"It is understandable that countries whose economies have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19 may face difficulties in paying their assessments (namely UN's membership dues). It is therefore all the more important that Member States have the capacity to pay their assessed contributions to do so in full, on time, and without conditions".

"Otherwise, the UN faces a real risk of not having the resources it needs to carry out its mandates," said the spokesman for ASEAN, a group which comprises Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Last year, 11 countries were in arrears under the terms of the UN charter, including Antigua and Barbuda, Comoros, the Republic of Congo, Guinea, Iran, Papua New Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe, Somalia, Sudan, Vanuatu and Venezuela.

Article 19 of the UN charter says, "a Member of the United Nations which is in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions to the Organisation shall have no vote in the General Assembly, if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years. The General Assembly may, nevertheless, permit such a member to vote if it is satisfied that the failure to pay is due to conditions beyond the control of the Member."

Asked about the defaulting member states, Paulina Kubiak, Spokesperson for the President of the UN General Assembly, told reporters on Jan. 12 there were 11 Member States on the list, which is comparable to the numbers in previous years.

She said these Member States are

unable to vote in the General Assembly until they make the minimum payment. But there are a few exceptions. Comoros, Sao Tome and Principe, and Somalia shall be permitted to vote in the GA until the end of the current 76th session, leaving eight



Ambassador Harold Adlai Agyeman of Ghana

countries still in default. The exceptions are based largely on the state of a country's faltering economy.

On Dec. 24, the 193-member UN General Assembly adopted a regular budget of dlr 3.12 billion for 2022 while the annual peacekeeping budget is around dlr 6.5 billion.

The off-and-on lock down of the United Nations since March 2020—with the overwhelming majority of its 9,900 staffers working from home—is beginning to have an impact on the operational services of the world body.

The lockdown, which was partially lifted last month, has been reinstated twice. In a message to New York-based UN staff sent out on Jan. 10, Gilles Michaud, chair of the UN's Occupational Safety and Health Committee, said that after consultation with UN's senior leadership, it was decided staffers would continue to work from home until Jan. 28, at which point the situation will be "reviewed once again."

The decision to extend working from home was prompted largely by the fast-spreading Omicron variant, which last week averaged about 37,000 cases daily and overwhelmed New York city hospitals. There is no official breakdown of the number of virus cases among UN staffers.

Ambassador Boubacar Diallo of Guinea, the outgoing chairman of the Group of 77 plus China, the largest single coalition of developing coun-

tries at the UN, warned late last year that the Group continues to be disappointed that due to security concerns, the Administrative and Budgetary Committee is being deprived of interpretation services (in the UN's six official languages) during informal consultations. This is primarily due to the absence of staff from the UN premises.

"We look forward to the day that multilingualism is fully restored, and we can enjoy interpretation services as we are doing here today. We are committed to a thorough consideration of the agenda items allocated to the Committee, and in this regard, note with disappointment that several reports are still outstanding," he added.

This endemic situation, he pointed out, significantly compromises the Committee's work.

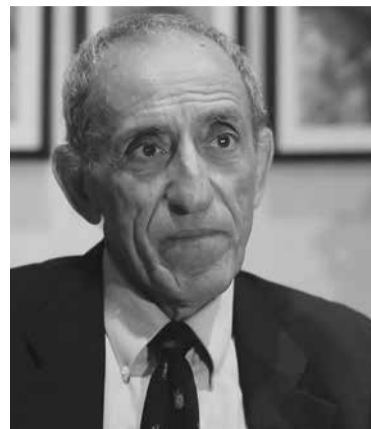
"The global challenges that we face today are becoming far more complex and interconnected, and the solutions require a collective global response. As we have heard from many of our leaders (during the UN General Assembly sessions in September), now is the time for us to double down on multilateralism and reaffirm our commitment to a rules-based multilateral system," said Ambassador Diallo.

With a resolution being adopted by consensus, including the 134 members of the G77, he said, "It is not possible to turn a blind eye to a General Assembly resolution and a deaf ear to the two-thirds majority of the General Membership."

**"The UN faces a real risk of not having the resources it needs to carry out its mandates."**

Speaking on behalf of the 27-member European Union (EU), Thibault Camelli, Counsellor to the delegation of the EU to the United Nations, said, "we call upon all Member States to pay their contributions in full and on time. We remain deeply concerned that the liquidity situation of the United Nations continues to undermine delivery of mandates."

The temporary solutions introduced so far, he warned, have only alleviated the consequences of this crisis, and they corner the Organisation into systemic underperformance. The Member States of the European Union call upon the Committee to rise up to this



Joseph Chamie, former director of the United Nations Population Division

challenge. We will continue to advocate for sustainable solutions to this crisis," he declared.

Joseph Chamie, an international demographer and former director of the United Nations Population Division, told IPS the current crisis should not come as a surprise to Member States as the coronavirus pandemic has greatly impacted the work of the United Nations.

In addition to the large majority of UN staff members working from home, the normal day-to-day operations of the Organisation have been greatly reduced and restricted, he said.

"It's understandable that many Member States are disappointed with the lack of interpretation services. However, with the available technology, interpretation services for the UN languages should be able to be provided without difficulties."

It is also unsurprising, said Chamie, that many of the poorer, less developed Member States are calling on wealthy, more developed countries to increase their financial contributions to the United Nations.

"However, it strikes me as somewhat ironic that many Member States, including less developed countries, say that have difficulties paying their UN assessments but they have few difficulties in paying for their military expenditures."

The UN budget for 2021 was only US dlr 3 billion, a relatively small cost for the international body. In comparison, he pointed out, the UN annual budget amounts to the following: a small percentage of the military expenditures of many countries, including China, India, Russia, the United States and the European Union; four percent of the worldwide pet food market; three percent of U.S. annual spending on soft drinks; and one percent of the wealth of the two

richest Americans.

The relatively small budget of the United Nations is practically a bargain for Member States and the world.

In terms of cost, deaths and injuries, the price of peace is far less than the price of war, Chamie declared.

Meanwhile, US Ambassador Patrick Kennedy, Senior Advisor for UN Management and Reform, told delegates the United States urges budget discipline across the UN system and will closely examine the increasing demands for assessed contributions.

This includes ensuring that only necessary construction is undertaken and that major projects avoid cost over-runs. The UN should also seek to contain increased spending in response to new and expanded mandates by eliminating outdated ones, consolidating duplicative areas of work, and repurposing existing resources.

**"The price of peace is far less than the price of war."**

He said staff entitlements and conditions of service comprise nearly two-thirds of the UN's costs. Reestablishment of a unified salary scale remains a priority for the United States, including through addressing divergent decisions by different administrative tribunals across the UN common system, enhancing transparency on compensation costs including by use of commercially available data, and reaffirming the authority of the ICSC, while improving its methodology.

Speaking on behalf of the African Group, Ambassador Harold Adlai Agyeman of Ghana said, "we insist that, as much as possible, all in-person meetings be held with interpretation services as required by the relevant rules of procedure of the General Assembly and agreed resolutions on multilingualism that is at the core of this organisation."

He said Members of the African Group use, as working languages, four of the six official languages of the United Nations. The Group therefore considers it of utmost importance that Member States should be able to contribute to the deliberations of the Committee in the official language they are optimally effective in.

The UN's six official languages are Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish.

## Ecstasy as Zimbabwe's smallholder farmers secure European pineapple market

By TONDERAYI MUKEREDZI

HARARE (IPS) - In her wildest dreams, smallholder farmer Sarudzai Sithole never imagined that her pineapples could someday stock the produce section of Europe's finest supermarkets.

Now, the 34-year-old mother of five is part of a group of 45 farmers in Rusitu Valley in Chipinge, a district in Zimbabwean eastern province of Manicaland, who from December 2021 would be exporting nearly 50 tonnes of their pineapples to the Netherlands.

"This is the best experience I have heard in the fourteen years that I have been growing pineapples. I have been selling my pineapples locally to buyers from Mutare, Harare and Bulawayo during this period, but it has been for a small profit.

"I will be selling two tonnes, and at the price of 70 cents that we have been promised, the exported crop will greatly improve my life and that of my family," an excited Sithole tells IPS.

She says pineapple farming has enabled her to build a house, buy vari-



Zimbabwe pineapple farmers hope that wealth from European exports will help communities rebuild after Cyclone Idai. Credit: Tonderayi Mukeredzi/IPS

empower her to electrify the family home, among other major home improvements.

When growing the pineapples, Sithole says they do not apply fertilisers or chemicals but manure only.

Dudzai Ndiadzo, the Rusitu Fruit Growers and Marketing Trust admin-

Ecocert Organic Standard, a French quality control body whose certification allows the farmers to send their organic products to international markets. The 45 villagers belong to the trust.

Farmers in Chipinge and most of Zimbabwe's prime farming areas incur heavy post-harvest losses because their produce often rots by the roadside as they struggle to secure markets or transport their produce to the markets.

Chipinge farmers formed Rusitu Fruit Growers and Marketing Trust to market their crops. It represents over 1,300 farmers.

The farmers were victims of Cyclone Idai. This tropical cyclone hit their home area of Chipinge and Chimanimani in 2019, killing over 180 people, destroying 7,000 households and infrastructure, and leaving 4,000 people food insecure, but their pineapple crop was not destroyed.

Ndiadzo said most farmers have been growing pineapples but not on a commercial scale because the market for pineapples wasn't that good.

"We are excited to be exporting because the local market for pineapples

Confronted with market access challenges, Rusitu Fruit Growers and Marketing Trust engaged the country's export promotion body, Zimtrade, which offered training and technical expertise to the farmers on how to grow pineapples organically.

In 2017, the farmers started working with Zimtrade to get organic certification and have been supported in the certification and export quest by organisations such as COLEACP, Embassy of Netherlands in Zimbabwe, and Netherlands based PUM and RVO International.

Zimtrade has a long-standing partnership with PUM, where experts offer technical interventions to Zimbabwean exporters in different sectors to improve their quality and production processes for export. Through the collaboration with PUM, Zimtrade developed links with food companies in the Netherlands that have made it possible for smallholders to export their crops.

Admire Jongwe, Zimtrade's manager for Eastern Region, says the organic certification is a critical milestone in reaching the lucrative organic

fruit market, especially in the United States of America, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Germany and other emerging markets such as the United Arab Emirates.

"The organic certification will enable the farmers to fetch as much as 30 percent premium on their produce in most supermarkets in Europe. This will improve their returns as well as boost their livelihoods from producing the pineapple," he tells IPS.

Jongwe says with organic standards, the smallholder pineapple farmers will access the global pineapple market, which has grown from US dlr 2.3 billion in 2011 to US dlr 2.5 billion in 2020, according to Trade Map.

Zimbabwe averages US dlr 18 million per year in the total trade value of fruit and vegetable exports. Figures from Zimtrade shows that during the first half of 2021, Zimbabwe's horticulture exports topped US dlr 30 million with tea, macadamia nuts, fresh flowers, leguminous vegetables, largely contributing to the revenue.

The country used to be one of Afri-

## Biden claims he wants to end the Yemen war, his actions suggest otherwise

By JOHN KNEFEL

NEW YORK - On Jan. 21, a coalition of forces led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) carried out an airstrike in Yemen that is now confirmed to have killed at least 87 people. As many as 266 were also wounded in the strike, which targeted a detention centre in the northern city of Sa'ada that reportedly housed African migrants. Fragments of the bombs bore a unique manufacturing code for Raytheon, one of the largest U.S. weapons contractors. On the same day, the coalition bombed a telecommunications building in Ho-deidah, a crucial port city that has been the site of several major battles over the course of the conflict. That strike caused a nationwide internet outage that lasted for days, resulting in delays to the limited humanitarian relief that's allowed into the country.

"I'm still trying to process that 24 hours ago, Saudi Arabia, the USA and the UAE disabled an entire country's internet service while committing various massacres around Yemen and this isn't top news everywhere," tweeted Shireen Al-Adeimi, an assistant professor at Michigan State who was born in Yemen.

The strike on the prison was one of the deadliest in recent years but is largely in keeping with the Saudi-UAE coalition's tactics since the beginning of the war, which will soon enter its eighth year. The conflict has resulted in famine, sickness and instability throughout the poorest country in the Middle East, if not the entire world.

The recent strike on the prison was preceded by a Houthi attack on Abu Dhabi, the capital of UAE. Three people were killed and six were wounded in those attacks. The Houthis have controlled the capital, Sana'a, since 2014, and are opposed by Saudi Arabia and UAE. The U.S. Secretary of

State Antony Blinken condemned the Houthi attacks in a statement but declined to comment to The New York Times when asked about the deadly strike on the detention centre.

The war is almost entirely absent from the U.S. mainstream media headlines, despite the USA's evolving role in the conflict since its inception, and



Devasation caused by war in Sana'a, Yemen

its increasingly direct involvement in hostilities. On Jan. 24, the U.S. Air Force intervened to stop a Houthi air attack on UAE, the second in a week. Houthi forces have regularly attacked Saudi targets over the course of the war, but they typically haven't struck inside UAE until recently.

The war in Yemen is often described in the U.S. media as a proxy war of sorts between Saudi Arabia and UAE on one side and Iran on the other, in the form of the Houthi movement. While it is true that the Houthis receive support from Iran, their movement began in northern Yemen in part as a response

to corruption and heavy-handed governing by then-President Ali Abdullah Saleh. He was swept out of power in 2012, during the Arab Revolutions, and succeeded by the hapless Vice President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi. In 2014, the Houthis took control of the capital, Sana'a, and Hadi fled the country the following year, which was



President Joe Biden

to as the legitimate government.

This multifaceted war between local movements and their international sponsors, very much including the United States, remains one of the most intractable conflicts in the world. "Ensuring peace in Yemen necessitates redressing the current balance of power between the Houthi movement and the various forces ranged against it by pressing the former to negotiate a settlement," writes Hussam Radman in a new report from the Sana'a Centre focusing on Saudi's role in southern Yemen. The paper recommends implementing the Riyadh Agreement, with the hope that the "Houthis could be encouraged to soften their stance if an agreement succeeds in addressing corrupt practices and political patronage that opposition groups see in Hadi's government."

At least 15.6 million Yemenis live in extreme poverty and face lasting economic uncertainty. Inflation is rampant, especially in the south, not only as a by-product of the conflict but as a tool of war and control as factions vie for control of the central bank. A recent report from the Frederick S. Pardee Centre for International Futures at the University of Denver found that Yemen had lost out on dlr 126 billion in potential economic growth over the course of the conflict.

President Joe Biden made a commitment to end the conflict in his first major foreign policy speech in office. He cut off some support for the Sau-

di-led coalition in Feb. 2021, breaking with the two prior U.S. administrations. The United States had previously been supplying intelligence and refuelling support for Saudi and UAE air power, which ended under Biden.

Despite those pledges, Biden greenlit a massive dlr 650 million weapons sale to Saudi Arabia last November. The administration justified the sale on the grounds that the air-to-air missiles are categorised as "defensive weapons," an absurd pretext that falls apart on even the slightest scrutiny. Even one of the conflict's most ardent critics in Congress, Sen. Chris Murphy, joined in the administration's circular logic.

Biden is reportedly considering redesignating Houthis as a "foreign terrorist organisation," following their attacks on the UAE. That decision could have disastrous effects on the civilian population, as humanitarian organisations often cease providing aid that could be seen as supporting a State Department-designated "terrorist" group. Matt Duss, foreign policy adviser to Sen. Bernie Sanders, harshly criticised the idea. "There's little evidence that these designations do anything to produce better outcomes," Duss tweeted. "They're just a way to appease DC hawks, hobbling US diplomacy and constraining non-military options in the process."

Unfortunately, for all of Biden's talk about ending the war and isolating Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, his administration has done exactly the opposite. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan met with bin Salman in September, ostensibly to discuss human rights and to further peace in Yemen, but the administration has maintained the status quo regarding Saudi Arabia, bin Salman and the coalition's posture toward Yemen.

The USA doesn't have the capacity or the right to dictate the specific outlines of a durable peace in Yemen, but it has helped to prolong the conflict by disingenuously taking one side even as it pretends to be an honest broker for peace. That's been true for the prior two administrations, and is true for Biden's as well.

## President of European Parliament David Sassoli dies

CONEGLIANO - David Sassoli, politician, journalist and President of the European Parliament, has died at age 65 after battling a serious illness in hospital, his spokesman announced.

In December, Mr Sassoli was hospitalised at the CRO in Aviano for complications with his immune system, after having contracted a severe case of pneumonia back in September. He initially recovered and was back to work in November, but then fell ill again and went to hospital on Boxing Day.

The late politician's spokesman, Roberto Cuillo, announced on Twitter that he died in hospital at 1.15 a.m. on Jan. 11.

Born in Florence in 1956, Mr Sassoli started working at an early age for small newspapers and in press agencies, before moving on to Il Giorno newspaper and then to the TV news channel Rai. During this time he became a familiar face to Italian families.

In 2009, Mr Sassoli decided to devote himself to politics. That year, he was elected into the ranks of the Democratic Party with over 400,000 votes. On the strength of this success, he immediately became the head of the party's delegation in Brussels.

After a decade spent in Brussels and Strasbourg, Sassoli was one of the most experienced MEPs. Between 2014 and 2019 he held the position of Vice President and dealt mainly with transport, Euro-Medi-



David Sassoli's official portrait as President of the European Parliament

terranean policy and the budget.

On July 3 2020, at the beginning of his third term, Mr Sassoli was elected President of the assembly. In his opening address, he highlighted the importance of taking action to combat climate change, the need for a policy that is closer to citizens and their needs, especially young people, and the urgent need to strengthen parliamentary democracy, in line with European values. During the Covid-19 pandemic, he ensured that the European Parliament could continue to operate and very early on, in March 2020, he introduced remote debates and voting.

Mr Sassoli leaves behind his wife and two children, Livia and Giulio. He lived in Rome and had a house in Sutri, a medieval town about thir-

ty kilometres north of the capital, where he would enjoy gardening and reading.

In an interview with Rainews24, Cuillo recalled how Sassoli treated his commitment as President of the European Parliament, and his commitment as a journalist, as "a mission to bring European institutions closer to citizens." He remembers him as a good man and tenacious in his "fight against evil."

The Community of Sant'Egidio sent out a statement, remembering him as a man faithful to the principles of democracy and humanism. On Nov. 30, he participated in Sant'Egidio's International Day Against the Death Penalty, which he called "an indispensable moral duty."

Pope Francis sent blessings to the Sassoli family and described the late politician as "an animated believer of hope and charity, competent journalist and established man of institutions who, in a peaceful and respectful way, worked for the common good with rightness and generous commitment."

There will be a vote to elect his replacement in late January.

**David Sassoli, politician, journalist and President of the European Parliament**

**Born May 30, 1956**

**Died Jan. 11 2022**

## Elizabeth Radue Former Daily American journalist

ROME - Elizabeth Radue, an expatriate from the United States who worked as an editor at the English-language Daily American newspaper in Rome in its heyday in the 1980s, has died at age 82, friends announced.

Elizabeth also worked in publishing and as a tour guide and English language teacher and was active in community groups in Rome, helping countless people with addiction problems.

Having grown up in Washington DC, she travelled to Europe as a young woman and settled in the Eternal City where she lived for 40 years. Well-read and intellectually curious, she worked as a proof reader and copy editor at the bohemian newsroom in the Via Barberini of the Daily American, which was founded by journalists who arrived in Rome at the end of the Second World War with the U.S. army newspaper Stars and Stripes.

Despite being left partially disabled by a street accident some years ago and recent illness, she remained inimitable though always modest and gentle.



Elizabeth Radue's funeral was held at the Basilica of San Lorenzo Dec. 2, 2021

Elizabeth will be remembered and deeply missed by her family in America, by former colleagues, and by a large circle of devoted friends in Italy.

**Elizabeth Radue: born June 9, 1939.**

**Died Nov. 29, 2021.**

**JOHN PHILLIPS**

## Desmond O'Grady Australian foreign correspondent who reported on Italy for over half a century

ROME - Desmond O'Grady, the doyen of Anglo-Saxon reporters in the Eternal City, has died after working as a correspondent for the Sydney Morning Herald and other Australian newspapers for over half a century, his family announced. He was 91.

Desmond was born in Melbourne into a naval family and studied literature at Melbourne University. He first came to Italy in 1957 where he met and fell in love with an Italian girl, Giuseppina Culotta, known as Gegi. They married and he took her back to Australia where he worked as foreign editor and then literary editor of *The Bulletin*. In 1962 Desmond returned to Italy to cover the Second Vatican Council. A devout Roman Catholic, he decided to stay in Rome as a Vaticanista, working



At home on the terrace



Desmond O'Grady meeting Pope John Paul II

for the *National Catholic Reporter* and the *Tablet*, and reporting on Italy for the *SMH* and the *Age*, settling in Italy.

A keen cricketer and tennis player, he played for a number of years in Italy's fledgling national cricket team where he acted as an informal coach for players and continued to represent the Foreign Press Club in international tennis tournaments into his late 70s. Known to his friends as 'force of nature,' Desmond played tennis regularly two or three times a week, frequently with his friend, fellow author and tennis writer Michael Mewshaw. When he was 89 a minor stroke forced him to slow down.

In addition to his work as a correspondent, Desmond was the author of 14 books and literary editor of the English-language *Italian Insider* newspaper from its foundation in 2009. His fiction included *Dinny Going Down*, a novel published in 2007, that took a humorous look at the Australian journalistic scene.

His memoir *A word in Edgeways*

looked back at his meetings and interviews with a constellation of writers with a connection to Italy from Doris Lessing to his countrywoman Shirley Hazzard.

In the book, as Megan Williams wrote in a review for the *Italian In-*

Desmond continued travelling around Italy on reporting trips until the Covid-19 lockdown. He carried on writing until a short time before his death and his last novel about Dante, *The Diviner Comedy*, was published in February 2021.



O'Grady during a visit to Africa

sider, "O'Grady even has fun with interviews that flopped, recounting how he left a drunken and drugged mess of a Tennessee Williams in his hotel room in Rome, as the writer whimpered to his assistant, 'What went gone wrong?'"

Another time an attempt to interview Graham Greene on Capri where Greene had a house, fell through when the British author suspected that Desmond was a spy. His biography of Raffaello Carboni, the 'Australian Garabaldino' and hero of the Eureka Stockade battle, was one of his most successful non-fiction books.

He is survived by his daughter Donatella, born in Italy, and his son Kieran, who was born in Melbourne. His wife Gegi predeceased him in November 1996.

**Desmond O'Grady, Foreign correspondent and author.**

**Born Dec. 11, 1929.**

**Died Nov. 26, 2021.**

**JOHN PHILLIPS**

## Queen of Italian Cinema' Monica Vitti

ROME - The "extraordinary" Italian actress Monica Vitti has died at the age of 90 after a long battle with Alzheimer's, announced the former culture minister Walter Veltroni at the request of her husband, Roberto Russo.

Vitti was born Maria Luisa Ceciarelli in Rome on Nov. 3, 1931 to Adele (née Vittilia) and Angelo Ceciarelli. She was raised in Sicily and love acting from a young age, when she would put shows at home to distract her brothers from the horrors of bombs

was an abbreviation of her mother's maiden name.

Vitti graduated from the Academy of Dramatic Arts in 1953 and made her cinema debut in 1955 with a small role in Guido Salvini's *Adriana Lecouvreur*. Two years later, she met film director Michelangelo Antonioni, her partner for a decade in both love and work.

Vitti played the protagonist in Antonioni's boldly different, landmark film *'L'Avventura'*. When the film was screened at the Cannes International Film Festival in 1960, it polarised audiences, while also launching Vitti to international stardom.

She went on to act in several more of Antonioni's films, all on the theme of alienation, such as *'La Notte'* (1961), *'L'Eclisse'* (1962) and his first colour film, *Red Desert* (1964).

Vitti and Antonioni's relationship ended in 1967. Following this, the actress decided to change direction and start acting in comedies, for which, it turned out, she had substantial talent.

Vitti dominated screens throughout the 1970s and worked with other Italian greats such as Dino Risi, Ettore Scola and Luigi Magni de La Tosca. She met photographer Roberto Russo on the set of *'Flirt'* in 1983. They married in 1995, the same year she won a Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement at the Venice Film Festival.



Vitti playing Giuliana in *Red Desert* (1964). Photo: Marisa Rastellini

After a career that earned her 12 Golden Globe awards, Vitti quite suddenly retired from public life in 2001 due to suffering a form of Alzheimer's disease. Her husband Russo shielded her from the press from that point onwards.

On Feb. 2, Vitti died at the age of 90. Her funeral was held in Piazza del Popolo in central Rome on Feb. 5. The square was decorated with mimosas and yellow roses - the actress's favourite colour.

At her funeral, Rome's mayor Roberto Gualtieri announced that somewhere in the city would be

named after her.

"I didn't know her but I grew up with her films," said Gualtieri. "We want to honour Monica Vitti who was a great actress but also a woman committed on a civic and political level."

The Lazio president Nicola Zingaretti said "she was one of us," while Minister Franceschini said "Vitti was an extraordinary woman and an incredible actress who remained in the hearts of all Italians despite her absence."

**LOUISE NIMMO**



Michelangelo Antonioni and Monica Vitti in 1962 Photo: Robert Frank

"Farewell to Monica Vitti, the Queen of Italian cinema," wrote the current Minister for Culture Dario Franceschini. Prime Minister Mario Draghi, expressed his deep condolences, calling her an "actress of extraordinary talent" who "conquered generations of Italians with her spirit, her skill, her beauty."

in the last years of the war.

She did not speak fondly of her upbringing, saying she was often made to stay at home while her brothers' ambitions were encouraged. When her family emigrated to America she remained in Rome to pursue acting. She changed her name to Monica simply because she liked it and Vitti

## Women increasingly book the majority of wine tourism, report finds

### INSIDER NEWSDESK

MILAN – Women account for 66 percent of people who book wine tourism experiences, according to an early data report from tech company Divinea.

In 2020, women accounted for 54 percent of bookings at a number of participating wine experiences in Italy. In one year, that number has grown by 12 per cent.

The findings emerged from the anticipation of February's annual report on wine tourism and direct-to-consumer sales developed by Divinea, based on the analysis of aggregated data with the Wine Suite software and the online portal. The survey was conducted with partner wineries such as Marchesi Mazzei, Cantina Rainoldi and Cantina Capellini.

"The objective of this research," explains Filippo Galanti, co-founder of Divinea together with Matteo Ranghetti, "is to give the wineries and players involved around the wine tourism market, direct-to-consumer wine sales tools useful to improve the experience in the cellar for visitors."



Poster for 2021's Wine Tech Symposium. Photo: Divinea

"Knowing that the female public is the one who mostly deals with booking visits to the company helps us to understand that Italian wine should focus on this demographic to enhance the experience in the wine cellar. This data offers an opportunity for wineries to make a leap in qual-

ity, by profiling the winelovers and responding with offers and proposals that correlate with their interests."

Among the other findings that emerged from the Divinea report was the difference in purchasing habits between pre-Covid times and the period after lockdown. The data shows the gap between the time of booking and the day of the experience has decreased. Before the pandemic, visitors booked on average 23 days earlier, today it's around 12 days earlier.

Most bookings take place during the week, most commonly on Tuesdays, while the preferred time is early in the morning or around lunchtime. Some 76 percent of visitors prefer to book online and more than 75 percent buy wine after the experience in the cellar.

"This data is invaluable for a winery that wants to design an experience tailored to the consumer," underlines Ranghetti. "Our Wine Suite software was created precisely to help wineries collect and read data, to increase sales and provide the best for their enthusiasts."



In the wineries surveyed, women made 66 percent of bookings. Photo: Divinea

## Very first Slow Wine Fair dates confirmed

### INSIDER NEWSDESK

BOLOGNA – The first edition of the Sana Slow Wine Fair will be held in the Emilia-Romagna capital from March 27 to 29, to allow full participation of operators, professionals and visitors. The event dates were shifted to a month later than originally planned due to potential limitations posed by the latest wave of the pandemic.

The international event, organised by BolognaFiere with the artistic direction of Slow Food and the collaboration of FederBio, is dedicated to wine that is fair, clean and delicious.

Originally scheduled for the end of February, the postponement was agreed upon to facilitate the safe participation of national and international operators who are filled with enthusiasm for the new event.

Wineries from all over Italy and abroad will arrive in Bologna. An impressive 18 wine-producing nations will take part, namely Albania, Argentina, Bosnia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Chile, Croatia, France, Germany, Macedonia, Montenegro, Peru, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and the United States. All participating wineries adhere to the principles of the Slow Wine Coalition and are inspired by the Slow Food Manifesto for good, clean and fair wine, which values environmental sustainability, protection of the landscape and the cultural and social role of wineries in their own territories.

"Sana Slow Wine Fair will be a precious opportunity for discussion about a rapidly expanding sector that blends wine culture with sustainability, ethics in production and biodiversity," said Gianpiero Calzolari, President of BolognaFiere. "These issues are priorities for producers and consumers and the SANA organisation is proud to have thirty years' experience in such fields."

Calzolari said the event will be the most important event dedicated to the world of all things organic and

natural.

The three day fair, dedicated to professionals in the sector, is ideal for restaurateurs, wine merchants, importers, distributors, cooks and sommeliers to meet, discuss and make deals with some of the best Italian wineries and a very select group of international companies.

Enthusiasts will be able to participate in the Sana Slow Wine Fair on Sunday March 27, to taste the thousands of labels proposed and talk to the producers.

There will also be nine masterclasses dedicated to the visitors, which, under the guidance of producers and experts, will allow them to deepen the production philosophies behind the great wines for tasting, confirmed Giancarlo Gariglio, Slow Wine Coalition coordinator.



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## Qatar is ready for the 2022 World Cup

By DUNDAR KESAPLI

DOHA - Qatar has been hosting media representatives from all around the world to show the country's preparations for upcoming World Cup 2022. The government says it has completed all preparations and that Qatar is ready for the 'kickoff' of the event.

Qatar passed its first test after successfully hosting the first edition of the FIFA Arab Cup, a new quadrennial football tournament which Qatar has just hosted over the past three weeks. Now it must prepare to face bigger challenges when, one year from now, more than 1.2 million fans and 32 international teams arrive for the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Qatar will take centre stage in what is likely to be one of the biggest and most watched sporting events in history.

FIFA, the world's football governing body, estimates that more than 3.5 billion people tuned in to the last World Cup held in Russia in 2018, and that a global audience of 1.1 billion watched the final between France and Croatia.

We had an exclusive interview with one of the tournament organisers, the Command Centre Director at Supreme Committee, Mr. Hamad Ahmed Al-Mohannadi, and Qatar Football Association (QFA) General



General Secretary Mansoor Al Ansari with Dundar Kesapli

Secretary, Mansoor Al Ansari.

Al-Mohannadi stated, "as the first country in the Middle East to host World Cup 2022, as you see, we are ready. And all our world cup stadiums for the facilities are officially announced. These facilities are operational now."

Qatar passed its first test after successfully hosting the Arab World Cup. Al-Mohannadi confirmed that it has proven the country's ability to host next winter's tournament.

He said, "we just held the FIFA 2021 Arab Cup which is the first trial

for all these facilities. We had a very good experience with it. So, we can officially announce that we are ready for World Cup 2022."

QFA General Secretary Al Ansari also expressed his enthusiasm and excitement for the upcoming World Cup.

"Everything is ready here," he said. "We look forward to hosting the football teams and fans here in Doha. They will get the chance to experience our culture, hospitality and a compact World Cup as it is."

The 2022 World Cup is scheduled to begin on Nov. 21 and end on Dec. 18. This will be the first World Cup held in the Middle East, as well as the first not to be held in the months of May, June or July to avoid Qatar's searing summertime heat.



## Italian chess prodigy foiled by the bell

By PHILIP WILLAN

CATTOLICA - An Italian child chess prodigy came close to defeating the English grandmaster Nigel Short in a tournament match but was stymied at the last minute when his mobile phone went off in his rucksack.

Instead of pulling off a remarkable upset, 14-year-old schoolboy Lorenzo Candian forfeited the match. He had switched off the phone, which he keeps with him so he can call his father when he finishes, but the alarm on his Huawei P10 Lite went off anyway — to remind him it was time to practice.

Lorenzo started the match badly but recovered and felt he was in a commanding position after two and a half hours.

"At a certain point I hear a ring. At first I didn't realise whose it was. Unfortunately the sound was coming from my rucksack," Candian told La Repubblica. "My opponent got up and went and told the referee, who disqualified me immediately."

Short, 56, who is vice-president of the International Chess Federation, a former world number three player and was a child prodigy himself, posted an ironic comment on social media: "My great triumph today was lasting long enough, in a completely resignable position, against a



Nigel Short

13-year-old, rated a mere 1966, for his mobile phone to go off and for him to be instantly forfeited."

Hospitalised with Covid-19 last month, Short may not have been at his sharpest when he came up against the young challenger at the Vergani Cup in the Adriatic coastal town of Cattolica.

Candian's disappointment was heightened when suggestions emerged on social media that he might have been cheating. "Why would I cheat? What's the joy in that? Even my opponent said it wasn't true, that I never cheated."

Lorenzo began playing chess at the age of eight, keeping up a family tra-

dition that began with his grandfather and includes his four brothers. He is a fan of the American champion Bobby Fischer.

"I taught all my sons to play. I wanted them to have an alternative to the Playstation," said Lorenzo's father Matteo Candian. "When Lorenzo started to beat me I realised there was no excuse and I had to find someone stronger so that he would improve."

At that point his son was enrolled in the Regina Cornaro chess club in the northeastern town of Asolo, and began achieving success in tournaments.

Matteo said his son had been very upset and cried after his disqualification. "The rule is important to prevent cheating, but in this case Lorenzo was very unlucky," he said. "I told him that these episodes help you to grow. Chess teaches you to cope with the hard knocks."

Lorenzo is hoping for a rematch, possibly to be held at the Regina Cornaro club next year. "Lorenzo would like to do it. It would be great if the champion accepted," said his father.

Short might be sympathetic. In 2008 he was disqualified for the same reason at a match in Liverpool. On that occasion it was reported that the phone was off but started beeping to warn the battery was low.

## Polish striker 'the gunslinger' signs contract with Fiorentina

By ALEKSANDRA KUBACKA

FLORENCE - Polish footballer Krzysztof Piatek will return to Italy, this time to play for Fiorentina, sports sources announced. The move is described as an attempt to resuscitate his career after his previously exceptional talent as a striker left him at AC Milan.

talent was also appreciated by AC Milan, which decided to buy him. Called "Robocop" by trainer Gattuso he continued his offensive game. "With Milan he scored nine goals in 18 games, one every two, and even if he failed to keep up the unreal averages he'd had with Genoa, he confirmed that he could also function at a higher level, surrounded by greater pressure."

However, when Giampaolo replaced



Piatek's 'gunslinger' goal celebration

"The gunslinger is back." These were Piatek's words on his return to Italy, reviving the nickname given to him after his style of goal celebration, which involves sliding to his knees with arms crossed and fingers pointing like two guns.

In 2018, Piatek appeared to be the most powerful striker in the world. At that time, he made a positive impression in a soccer community, playing for the Genoa team. He used to be compared with two other valued Polish footballers - Lewandowski and Milik.

During his first match for Genoa, he scored four goals (two with his head) in just 37 minutes. Moreover, at the beginning of the championship, he achieved remarkable success. In each of the first seven Serie A matches he scored a goal, equaling the record set by Enzo Pisciutti. He consequently won the AIC award for best football player of September.

Piatek's goals became more complex with each match, which proved his special football ability. He scored the goal effectively and he can position himself very well on the pitch. His

Gattuso, Piatek had some adaptation problems with his new football strategy, because the Polish footballer preferred a simple style of play. In an interview, Piatek said, "at Milan we play more with the ball on the ground. Sometimes you should think about playing in a simpler way, as a striker I miss those long balls."

In addition, Piatek was under a big pressure to receive the T-shirt with number nine, dedicated to the best strikers and surrounded by kind of a curse. His skill on the pitch began to decrease. He couldn't cope with the responsibility of number nine and lost the rivalry for a place in the squad to Zlatan Ibrahimović, who fit better with Giampaolo's style of play. As a result, Piatek was transferred to Hertha Berlin in Germany.

Now 26 years old, the Polish footballer has come back to Italy to play for Fiorentina. Will this be the team where he can spread his wings again? He will play alongside esteemed Serbian striker Dušan Vlahović. So far, Piatek scored a goal during extra time in a frenetic debut match at Diego Armando Maradona - a promising start.



Krzysztof Piatek with his new Fiorentina shirt

## A puzzle of paintings at 'Three Outsiders' exhibition

By LOUISE NIMMO

ROME – A unique exhibition celebrating three distinctive contemporary Italian painters, Luigi Boille, Lamberto Pignotti and Bruno Aller, is not to be missed before it finishes at the end of March.

"The intention is to investigate, analyse and propose a common link between the three artists," according to the website of Palazzo Merulana, the small but prestigious, museum where the exhibition is being held.

The curator, a university professor named Stefano Gallo, has written an explanation that hangs in the entrance for visitors, encouraging them to examine the "friction" in each work, with the conviction that the differences between them originate from a common point.

A lifelong Roman, Luigi Boille, who died five years ago, was known as "a pioneer of the informal." His paintings are made of marks or gestures,

and it is the very concept of a 'gesture' that he considered to be nothing short of existential - the point where everything can begin.

Lamberto Pignotti, a Florentine now based in Rome, is over 90 years old still in business. He delights in unrestrainedly combining poetry,



'Finalmente adesso c'è qualcosa di nuovo,' 2006, Lamberto Pignotti



'Untitled,' Luigi Boille, 1966



Bruno Aller and Flaminia Cerasi with two exhibited Aller paintings

prose and the stereotypical language of mass communications with the visual arts. Pignotti participated in the creation of the avant-garde group 63, alongside Balestrini, Pagliarini, Guglielmi and Umberto Eco.

Last but not least is 60-year-old Bruno Aller, a Roman artist who critics have described as having "the spirit of an anarchist artist and poet." Aller has managed a small gallery 'Arte e Pensieri' ('Art and Thoughts') near the Colosseum for two decades, which allows him total creative freedom. He has a penchant for symmetry and theatricality, having worked for many years previously as a scenographer.

Palazzo Merulana was restored a few years ago and "Three Outsiders" is set in a bright, spacious, fourth floor room, usually intended for meetings, presentations and debates.

The exhibition consists of some 60 artworks, several of which are very large, such as two double-sided works by Boille from 1958, three banners by Pignotti exhibited in 2019 at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and a secular altarpiece and parable by Aller.

The exhibition has been organised by Palazzo Merulana in cooperation with CoopCulture and the Elena and Claudia Cerasi Foundation. It is open until March 27.

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