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Foreign lecturers lambast 'utterly ineffectual' decree on discrimination

Only ECJ proceedings can force Italy to pay British lecturers long due back wages

By JOHN PHILLIPS

ROME - A decree law promulgated by the Italian government this month, purportedly to resolve the plight of foreign lecturers owed back pay and pensions for decades, "adds another chapter in the twin dark arts of evading laws and legislating others in order to evade them at a later date" says the Association of Foreign Lecturers in Italy (ALLSI) chair, Prof. David Petrie.

The decree law issued May 4 by the cabinet of the Italian Prime Min-

ister faced with EU court proceedings, ALLSI legal experts say.

"We are issuing a detailed analysis of the decree," Prof. Petrie said, "but this can only be understood in the context of the 35 years of skulduggery in the wait for justice, the six previous judgements of the European Court of Justice and a 'Bleak House' of ongoing court cases in Italy, with conflicting and contradictory outcomes, many in clear conflict with the Court of Justice's legally binding

ruling of June 21, 2001 - which is yet to be implemented."

"For this failure, the European Commission took Italy back to the ECJ in 2006, but the Court refused to impose daily fines of 265.500 euros, as recommended by its Advocate General Poiares Maduro. Italy, at the eleventh hour, beat the rap."

The sole new provision in the law decree (48/2023), of limited effect but clearly intended to convince the European Commission that Italy is

committed to redressing the ongoing discrimination criticized in the reasoned opinion, is the introduction of a financial deterrent for Italian universities failing to take part in the required co-financing procedures, as and when these have been defined by the ministerial decree referred to above -- the working funds awarded annually to these Universities by the Ministry will be reduced by 1 per cent.

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When in Rome, a king scoffs mashed spuds

By CATHERINE WHITE

ROME - Dario Pizzetti, who has been the head chef at the British Embassy in Rome for almost 20 years, has recalled his memories of King Charles on the occasion of his coronation, in an interview with La Repubblica.



British Embassy chef, Dario Pizzetti, meeting Charles at Villa Wolkonsky

Pizzetti explained that he met Charles and his consort Camilla at Villa Wolkonsky, the residence of the British Ambassador to Italy, on several occasions and recalls their meetings with pride.

"We have hosted him several times in residence, as Prince of Wales. In my years he came four times, twice alone and twice with his wife Camilla," Pizzetti said.

When asked about how he decides what to cook for Charles when he is in residence, Pizzetti revealed that it takes a lot of work beforehand and behind the scenes.

"In the run-up to a visit of the Royal Household, we start preparations several months beforehand. When Charles visited us as the Prince of Wales, I had direct contact with Clarence House and now as King, I will have to be in contact with Buckingham Palace in order to send menu proposals."

Pizzetti also disclosed that there is a list of foods that Charles does not like and must be avoided.

"The King does not eat garlic and onion, not even goat's cheese. He prefers fish to meat and simple cooking methods such as grilling and steaming."

"On his last visit," Pizzetti continued, "I prepared fresh pasta for lunch: ravioli with pecorino mousse and broad beans. For the main course, I had planned English spinach and boiled potatoes, but at the last minute we learned that he would prefer mashed potatoes. Everything must be possible!"

In this context, Pizzetti noted that last minute changes are rather common and says that he is proud to be able to cater to the wishes of Charles and Camilla.

"We send the proposals and then the butler replies with their actual choices - whether they are on the menu or not!"

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David Petrie



Pope Francis' robes billow in a windy St. Peter's Square during a weekly general audience. Photo credit: ERIC VANDEVILLE

ister Giorgia Meloni was in response to a European Commission threat, Jan. 26, to take Italy before the Court of Justice of the European Union if the money was not paid to the lecturers. The decree is unlikely to force universities to make the payments and Italy evidently only will take action

Former Roman journalist killed in rocket fire in Ukraine

By CATHERINE WHITE

ROME - Arman Soldin, 32, was killed whilst reporting from the warzone in eastern Ukraine after being hit by rocket fire near Chasiv Yar, just west of Bakhmut. Soldin had previously been based in Rome where he worked as a journalist for Agence France Presse (AFP).

The Rome-based AFP editorial office has extended its condolences to Soldin's family on the loss of their former colleague who "From the very beginning of the war wanted to report from the front line."

"Arman before being a colleague was a friend to me. It was right here in Rome that he started doing our job, the video journalist, learning all the basics and bringing the enthusiasm typical of his young age. Always smiling and positive, he had accompanied me to Lampedusa and other Italian stories," said Giovanni Grezzi, trustee of the Rome-based AFP editorial office.

"He had come back to see us many times after being hired in London. He had covered the 2018 elections



AFP journalist Arman Soldin

and the outbreak of the pandemic in our country. Because he loved Italy and felt he was one of us and at the same time a citizen of the world. From Sarajevo, where he was born shortly before the outbreak of another infamous war, he had managed to escape to France with his mother. Welcomed by the Paris government, he honoured his adopted homeland. Brilliant and intelligent with great humanity he leaves a void in our hearts. May the earth be soft to you little great Arman," Grezzi's statement concluded.

Saudi tourist indicted for driving Maserati down Spanish Steps

By SARA ZAAT

ROME - A Saudi tourist, Fahad Ghazi Hassoubah, who wildly revved a Maserati four wheel drive jeep down the Spanish Steps last May has been ordered to stand trial on charges of running up at least 46,000 euros of restoration costs by damaging the historic monument and risks spending five years in prison.

The Municipality of Rome has filed a civil suit against Hassoubah through the lawyer Enrico Maggioro, accusing him of destruction, dispersion, deterioration, and disfigurement, and with the soiling and illicit use of cultural or landscape assets.

The trial date is set for the Jan 25, 2025, as the engineer initially promised to compensate for the damage telling the local police: "I didn't do it on purpose, it was a mistake. If there's a need, I'll pay what there is to pay," however, he has apparently since changed his mind and returned to Saudi Arabia.



His lawyer defended him in court saying that the incident was the fault of the Municipality because "the presence of the staircase, which the engineer would have found himself climbing by surprise, was not clearly indicated" and that the "Municipality could have installed a bollard or barrier that would catch the driver's attention."

Hassoubah has even gone as far as to say that he is the one who is entitled to the 46,000 euros in addition to defamation charges because the municipality released the video of him driving on the Trinita dei Monti which then went viral.



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Lake Garda at lowest water level since 1953

By ELENA BUCCISANO

ROME - Italy's largest lake, has reached its lowest water level in 70 years, new satellite data has shown. This compares to an average of 109 cm over the past 70 years.

The lake, the largest in Italy and bordering with the regions of Lombardy and Veneto and the autonomous province of Trento, has fallen to just 45.8 cm above the hydrometric zero, the elevation above mean sea level established as a conventional reference for this basin.

The data comes from the Sentinel-2 satellite in the framework of the Copernicus European Drought Observatory run by the European Commission and the European Space Agency.

Lake Garda is a crucial freshwater reservoir and its current capacity threatens its ability to sustain agriculture, local communities, tourism and navigation. The average water level of Lake Garda, which is about



Lake Garda

65 metres above sea level, undergoes rather limited seasonal variations, particularly when compared to the other large pre-alpine lakes: this makes the recent lowering even more worrying.

The new satellite images of the lake corroborate other images testifying to the drought that is gripping Italy and Europe, including the recent image of the Po River processed by the Cosmo-SkyMed constellation of the Italian Space Agency and Ministry of

Defense.

Similarly, images from the European Space Agency's Smos satellite show that soil moisture is below average in much of southwestern Europe due to a winter that was not only particularly dry but also the second warmest on record.

In addition to Lake Garda, all the large lakes in northern Italy, such as Lake Maggiore and Lake Como, are seeing their levels drop due to the drought. Measurements also come

from the hydrometric stations scattered throughout the territory of Irsa-Cnr, which collect climatic and meteorological data, as well as those relating to the impact on ecosystems.

"We must remember, in fact, that the problem of drought also concerns aquatic ecosystems, which support human activities," stresses Marzia Ciampittello. "For this reason, perhaps the whole system connected to agriculture, which has a considerable impact, should be reviewed: we cannot fight climate change," she adds, "we must necessarily find ways to adapt to it. Over the past two years, the lack of rain has been compounded by high temperatures, which cause increased evaporation from both reservoirs and the soil."

"It is essential to learn how to manage water better," Ciampittello concludes, "by avoiding waste and improving the efficiency of the distribution network, I am thinking of aqueducts, for example."

IN BRIEF

Anarchist ends six-month hunger strike

MILAN - Alfredo Cospito, an anarchist who was facing a life sentence for terrorist charges, has ended his six-month hunger strike which he started in protest against the judge's decision to place him in a maximum security prison, *Il Fatto Quotidiano* reported.

"The decision to end the strike was made by Cospito himself by means of a pre-printed form available to inmates, in which he wrote, 'I declare that I am interrupting my hunger strike,' therefore notifying the heads of the Department of Prison Administration and the Milan Court of Supervision."

In the past few days, it had emerged that Cospito, who had been transferred to the prison ward of the San Paolo hospital due to his weakening condition, had resumed taking some foodstuffs, in particular sachets of parmesan cheese, as well as supplements.



Alfredo Cospito, at his trial

In addition, he had already eaten pasta with broth and had also asked doctors to allow him to ingest more elaborate food, which, however, given his long fast, he cannot digest at this time.

The resumption of eating, which must be gradual, is being monitored by doctors and for now, Cospito remains under observation at San Paolo to rule out the development of serious cardiac and neurological problems due to lack of nutrition.

When his physical condition improves, he will be transferred back to prison.

The Constitutional Court ruled that it is unconstitutional not to recognise mitigating circumstances for the crime of political massacre with aggravated recidivism for which Cospito is on trial.

Woman killed in 'Ndrangheta crime

CASSANO ALLO IONIO - The fatal shooting of Antonella Lopardo, 49, in Calabria on Tuesday evening is being investigated as a suspected 'Ndrangheta crime, police said.

Lopardo was allegedly killed with a long gun but it is also thought that a Kalashnikov rifle may have also been used.

According to an initial reconstruction, the victim was at home with her husband, already known to police, when someone rang the doorbell.

Lopardo went to answer it and as soon as she opened the door, she was hit by several bullets.

At the moment, investigators are not ruling any motives out, including that of a 'Ndrangheta crime.

Far-right Casapound militant shot and killed

GENOA - Manuel Di Palo, 38, a member of the far-right, fascist inspired Casapound movement, was shot and killed by a leading figure of an anti-vaccine association, Filippo Giribaldi, 43, who has since been arrested, local police said.

Di Palo was fatally shot in Via Polleri, in Genoa's central Carmine district, after an argument with Giribaldi.

From an initial reconstruction, the quarrel, apparently linked to

drug-related reasons involving Giribaldi's partner, began in Salita San Bartolomeo del Carmine.

A few shots were fired, after which the two chased each other until the fatal bullet was fired and hit Di Palo.

Within minutes, local police had located and arrested Giribaldi who had taken refuge in the nearby Santissima Annunziata church.

"Call the police, I killed a man, I killed a man," Giribaldi said in a state of confusion to the sacristan, Jean

Pascal Coli, who immediately alerted the police.

The murder weapon was found under a car not far from the crime scene, in Piazza Bandiera, and taken into custody by forensic investigators.

The man killed had been sentenced in 2020 to eight months on probation for a stabbing in 2018 of an anti-fascist who was putting up posters not far from the Genoese Casapound headquarters.

hands were bound by these procedural rules.

"The Court has to have the courage to change its procedural rules and if you compare it with the rules of French administrative law, you see that in French administrative law things have developed. The Court in that sense are like immigrants: it's very, very hard to change the basic procedure of the Court. The litigants must have been very, very disappointed."

Eminent jurist and MEP, the late Professor Neil MacCormick, who in his academic career taught several ECJ judges, was less kind about what he termed a "snake at the heart of the EU."

"It is a scandal that Italy has been yet again found in breach of its Community obligations to a group of European citizens, but yet again suffers no sanction," he said. "What trust can we citizens place in our rights under the treaties if a cosy club of Commission, Court and member state can agree that wrong has been done yet fail to ensure the wrong is righted. The Commission in this case failed to put forward a sufficient case to show that Italy's default continued up to the time of the hearing. Did the Commission really try to win its case? If the Court needed further evidence from the Commission, why did it not direct the Commission to adduce such evidence before proceeding to final judgment?"

It is in this context that Art. 38 of the latest weasel worded decree must be analysed in detail, ALLSI experts say.

The provision introduced by the government through the so-called employment law decree, No. 48 of 4.5.2023, is restricted to the amendment or addition of several paragraphs of Art. 11 of the so-called European Law, No. 167 of 2017. That law was issued six years previously with the identical purpose of making it appear to the European Union that the Italian State intended to comply with

its obligations under European law in respect of the treatment of university foreign-language lecturers or *Lettori*, later re-categorized as *Collaboratori ed Esperti Linguistici* (CEL). Since 1989 European law has required that Italy put an end to the ongoing discrimination against *Lettori/CEL* as compared to Italian university teachers performing similar duties, in terms of salary, career reconstruction and payment of pension contributions.

Article 11 of Law 167 placed - and, as amended, continues to place - the task of putting an end to the current situation, viewed by the European Commission as one of continuing discrimination, in the hands of individual Universities, once a ministerial decree of implementation has been issued within the scheduled period of 90 days (which term may, however, be postponed by months, as is common practice in Italy).

This very complicated mechanism, however, as introduced by Art 11 of Law 167/2017 and now reiterated by law decree 48/2023, has already shown itself to be utterly ineffectual, as well as creating a source of further discrimination between different local situations.

It places no real obligation on the Universities, let alone on the Ministry, to proceed in the manner required, notwithstanding the unequivocal obligation incumbent upon the Italian State, as identified both by the European Commission in its reasoned opinion of 26.1.2023 and, previously, by the Court of Justice of the EU in multiple condemnatory judgments, to redress the situation of *Lettori* by applying the minimum parameter for career reconstruction of part-time tenured researcher (or more favourable parameter as decided by the courts or recognized in individual cases) - in other words, the solution theoretically introduced by law decree No. 2/2004, later converted into Law 63/2004, which allowed Italy to avoid the heavy daily fines sought by the European Commission

cont. from page 1 (King Charles)

He revealed that there is always a "direct line" between the kitchen and the royals to ensure that meal times fit around their schedules.

"During their last visit together, the royals ate separately, a quarter of an hour apart, nothing strange, just staggered schedules which we had to adhere to."

"Camilla wants half an avocado at every meal, while in the morning she eats papaya," Pizzetti revealed. "But we don't know anything about their breakfast. The valet brings to the room after preparing it himself. Although we are colleagues, there is secrecy about what happens in the room."

Reflecting on his own personal interactions with Charles, Pizzetti disclosed that Charles regularly calls Villa Wolkonsky to check up on the staff and after having eaten at the residence, Charles always makes appreciations and leaves gifts.

"The last time it was a box of chocolates from his production, the previous time he gave us a wallet with the symbol of the Prince of Wales."

"To the royals, you have to kneel slightly and give your hand if they offer theirs," Pizzetti revealed. "Charles always offers his. The last time he was here, when greeting me he also patted me on the shoulder."

"He is a person of great courtesy and we hope he will come back soon."

in 2004.

The most serious aspect of the new legislation, however, according to ALLSI experts, is that it "wilfully ignores the subversive impact of the so-called Gelmini Law (Art. 26 of Law 240/2010), which continues to remain fully in force."

The Gelmini Law offers a retroactive 'authentic interpretation' of the provisions of Law 63/2004, whereby the salary reconstruction which that law provided for is in practice rendered null and void or reduced to a mere sham, in particular by terminating the career reconstruction of *Lettori* in 1994 with no further incremental progression of salary class or seniority thereafter, given that from that year onwards their remuneration is determined by the Collective contracts for administrative and technical personnel, which do not contain salary increments or provide for seniority-based progression.

Insider View

A victory for 'true' southern Italy

Even before they secured the "Scudetto," Napoli was triumphant. The city streets were lined with flags and banners celebrating the success of S.S.C. Napoli even before it was confirmed after a long wait of 33 years since their last Serie A win. Restaurants and shops shut early to watch the games and the city was electric.

Napoli's triumph truly matters for several reasons – it is not only a victory for the city but a victory for southern Italy against its northern rivals. For a city and a football club that had often been looked down upon by its northern rivals, that run of success was an opportunity for the region to proudly express its time on top.

For many, this "scudetto" is the first time the "true" South has won the Serie A league, the first time the "true" South has been able to prove that they can do it. That they can assemble a smart squad that is worthy of winning the most important league in Italian football, and can compete against the richer, northern Italian teams.

The worry is however, that these glory days for Napoli are only temporary – much like what happened post their 1990 title success – the Napoli team began to unwind with players

departing, leading to a drop in performances. The headline departure came when Maradona failed a drug test and he left Italy in disgrace after being handed a 15-month ban.

Following years of steady decline, the club was relegated from Serie A after claiming a miserable 14 points from 34 games. Only eight years after being crowned Italian champion, Napoli found itself in the second tier. When no saviour was in sight, Aurelio de Laurentiis took over and reshaped the club step-by-step.

In the 16 years since the club's return to Serie A, Napoli fans have seen some of Europe's best players grace the Maradona Stadium pitch – from Edinson Cavani and Higuain to Dries Mertens and Marek Hamšík – as well as rotating cast of elite managers – Walter Mazzarri, Rafael Benítez, Maurizio Sarri and Carlo Ancelotti have all had stints in the Naples dugout.

The 2023 "scudetto" win, for a city that breathes football, has added to the cultural phenomenon of the sport, and confirmed to Neapolitans that they had always been right to hope. For a city like Naples, one that has been subjugated for years socially, it is a story for the ages.



Lackadaisical let-down for Lettori

The ongoing unlawful, racist discrimination of non-Italian lecturers has been going on for 35 years. Despite 13 different prime ministers being told to intervene by the European Commission, the Lettori are still waiting for justice.

A slight glimmer of hope appeared earlier in the year when the EU commission issued a deadline for the payment of arrears in wages and the Lettori finally had a clear stance in the face of evasive behaviour.

However, there was no response from Palazzo Chigi.

The latest half-hearted attempt by the Meloni government to put an end to the issue has clearly only been im-

plemented in response to the threat of a seventh EU Court of Justice case.

The decree law issued this month is very unlikely to drive any change and force Italian universities to make the requested payments and can only be described as an attempt to convince the European Commission of Italy's commitment to addressing the situation.

The Italian response is an insult to the valuable contribution that Lettori have had on educational exchange and the longstanding relationship between Italy and the UK.

The Lettori are facing many more agonising months and even years of waiting for justice to be served.



Media freedom is vital but have we passed peak press?

By FARHANA HAQUE RAHMAN

TORONTO, Canada, Apr 30 2023 (IPS) – Peak oil was first up, followed by peak gas, gold and others, as if the world was draining natural resources like toilet roll panic buying in a lockdown supermarket. But should we now be worried about Peak Press?

Shifting and even intangible is it possible that we are already sliding downhill, and that moment of peak media freedom is disappearing in the rear-view mirror?

World Press Freedom Day, child of the UN General Assembly, marks its 30th birthday on May 3 – still relatively young, but definitely showing signs of wear and tear.

Measuring the state of its vital organs is not an exact science. The Paris-based non-profit media watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF) compiles an annual and thorough medical bulletin, and the latest check-up, country-by-country, makes for mostly alarming reading.

There are common denominators in all the ailments afflicting press freedom around the world, but with each region or continent seeming to specialise in certain characteristics.

Asia is particularly worrying, with the common theme of muscle-flexing autocrats vying for absolute control of information and exercising what RSF calls a dramatic deterioration of press freedom. Post-coup Myanmar

and China are the world's biggest jailers of journalists. Afghanistan back under the Taliban is brutally repressive. North Korea brings up the rear of the rankings, again.

Hong Kong, under China's imposition of the draconian national security law, fell 68 places in the RSF league table. Vietnam and Singapore also tightened their grip on the media.

Anuradha Bhasin, executive editor of The Kashmir Times recently wrote in The New York Times that his newspaper "may not survive Mr. Modi. His repressive media policies are destroying Kashmiri journalism, intimidating media outlets into serving as government mouthpieces and creating an information vacuum in our region of about 13 million people."

This year Pakistan was placed at 157 among 180 countries on RSF's World Press Freedom Index list. The country has been ruled by the military for more than half of its 75 years of independence since 1947. In a report last year, along with a list of global leaders who suppressed opposing voices, RSF named former Prime Minister Imran Khan as one of the "predators of press freedom."

Repression is dressed up in legislation as seen in Bangladesh's Digital Security Act, passed in 2018 and applied to journalists, activists and others. Two days after a journalist with Prothom Alo was detained, the UN Human Rights Chief Volker Turk called on Bangladesh to suspend ap-



Farhana Haque Rahman

plication of the DSA immediately.

Where Asia can be ruthless and draconian, it is lawlessness and societal fragmentation that make parts of Latin America the most dangerous place for journalists. Mexico and Haiti lead the way. At least 67 journalists and media workers were killed in 2022, an increase of almost 50 percent on 2021, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. Research published by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism found that 30 to 42 media workers were killed in Latin America in the line of duty.

Rocío Gallegos, a journalist and co-founder of La Verdad Juárez, an investigative journalism outlet in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, was quoted as saying the situation is desperate and

complex, not just due to growing conditions for violence, but because there is "less and less support from society towards journalists and journalism."

Courageous reporters like Gallegos and the underground citizen journalists covering Myanmar's horrific civil war inspire us, and lend hope to the survival of the ideals of a free press.

But it is in the West, the cradle of a free media, that we can feel most cynicism over the frightening erosion of media credibility led by its very own moguls and conglomerates.

The wanton and deliberate peddling of conspiracy theories over the 2020 US election results by Fox News (among others) was laid bare by the defamation case brought by Dominion Voting Systems. Fox settled out of court for \$787 million in damages. Its lies were not trivial as we know. Five people died as a result of the January 2021 storming of the US Capitol by a mob of Donald Trump's supporters.

Democracies need truth-telling media to flourish, and it was telling that much of the media coverage focused instead on 92-year-old Rupert Murdoch and his family succession machinations.

Fox News was – and quite possibly will remain – the ultimate mainstream player in the theatre of performance media, where facts don't get in the way of a good conspiracy.

The recent demise of BuzzFeed News and its Pulitzer-prize winning department can also be seen as mark-

ing the end of an era. The suggestion by its founder, Jonah Peretti, that there may not be a sustainable business model for high-quality online news should be ringing alarm bells everywhere.

To add to this potentially toxic mix, where social media platforms become a blurry cauldron of conspiracy theories and state-sponsored disinformation, we now have to contend with the new disruptive age of ChatGPT.

The polarisation of the press in the West and its weaponisation in superpower conflicts are highly damaging trends. Russia's arrest of Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich and China's detention of Taiwan publisher Li Yanhe are the most recent examples. A possible Biden-Trump rematch in the 2024 US elections, and the dangerous deterioration in Sino-US relations threaten to exacerbate both polarisation and weaponisation of the media.

As for Peak Oil – the world may have passed that point already, and economists are debating whether 2019 was when overall fossil fuel demand reached its zenith. There are many reasons for this historic shift, not least that the alternatives, such as renewable energy, are becoming cheaper.

But what is the substitute for a free and healthy press – the lifeblood of free and healthy societies? The alternatives are clearly on view all around us and they don't look good.