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Discriminated UK and foreign lecturers receive 5.4 million euro payout in landmark deal at Milan university

PHILIP STRINGER | 22 NOVEMBER 2023





Allsi chair David Petrie (right) and ALLSI lawyer Lorenzo Picotti at the signing ceremony Monday in Milan

MILAN – The State University of Milan signed landmark compensation agreements with 11 British and other foreign lecturers this week as part of a watershed 5.4 million euros agreement at the campus, brokered by officials of the ALLSI trade union, to end a longstanding dispute over discrimination against foreigners, university officials said. The agreement signed Monday raised hopes for similar deals at other universities affecting hundreds of downtrodden foreign lettori with one such accord under discussion at the troubled Siena University imminently as six lettori prepared to go to court in pursuit of their entitlements.

David Petrie, chair of the Association of Foreign Lecturers in Italy (ALLSI) and ALLSI lawyer Avv. Prof. Lorenzo Picotti, hailed the accord, reached after the European Commission began infraction proceedings against Italy, as a potential harbinger for similar compensation agreements expected imminently at a constellation of universities around Italy.

The first 11 lettori who worked at Milan Università Statale signed agreements in the Rector's office for the hefty payments. They were six Britons, one Belgian, one Austrian, a Spaniard, a French citizen and a Russian. In all the University of Milan has received 5.4 million euros from the state to close the dispute including arrears for those who already have retired. The total number of lettori involved in the deal at the Milan university is 33.

Professor Picotti commented that Nov. 21, at the Rector's Office of the Milan State University marked a significant, not to say historic, milestone in the long dispute between foreign mother-tongue lecturers teaching at Italian universities and the Italian state.

Italy is under the pressure of a further lawsuit brought by the European Commission against Italy with the appeal filed on Aug. 10 before the Court of Justice of the European Union because of illegitimate discrimination for over 30 years against the foreign mother-tongue lecturers and has still not been remedied, despite numerous previous rulings by the same Court of Justice, he added.

There has finally been a tangible recognition of the rights of this category of workers, thanks to the payment of tens of thousands of euros and in many cases more than 100,000 euros for their career reconstruction from the time they were first recruited, on the basis of a non-discriminatory parameter such as that of national workers performing similar teaching duties in Italian universities, i.e. researchers confirmed on a fixed-term basis, he said.

The University of Milan was the first, among those required to make such a payment, that was willing and able to take advantage of the funding made available specifically by the

Ministry of Universities and Research, which had already been allocated by previous laws that had remained unimplemented to date, by entering into a supplementary university contract based on it as from June 2021 and then submitting an analytical reconstruction of the career of each of its lecturer employees, on the basis of which the Ministry finally disbursed the funding provided for by a ministerial decree last June, Picotti continued,

These sums were accepted by each lecturer, with the formal signature today at the Rector's Office, expressing their willingness to put an end to the dispute for the future, in the face of the tangible offer of satisfactory sums (albeit now on the threshold of retirement or in many cases having already taken place), which in any case represented a concrete recognition of their rights and the validity of their long battle in the Italian courts and at European level.

Grateful recognition was therefore expressed not only to the University of Milan, which gave a significant and concrete example of the way in which the long dispute could be settled, but also to the Association of Foreign Language Lecturers in Italy represented by its president David Petrie and their lawyer Lorenzo Picotti who, together with the Association, assisted today in this never-ending dispute.

Prof. Petrie said: "My warm thanks to Director General of the University of Milan, Dr Roberto Conte, and his staff for engaging with ALLSI to ensure that funds allocated by the Italian state will now reach my colleagues in Milan."

"However, most universities have not availed themselves of the government funds leaving dozens more of my colleagues tied up in wasteful ongoing court cases."

"Even this week six of my colleagues in the University of Siena are appearing in the Court of Florence after 12 years of judicial jostling and four stages of different rulings from judges encompassing the Court of Cassation, all because Siena University refuses to recognise the salary as established by the European Court of Justice and to ask the Ministry for the funds available to pay them and close the court case."

John Young paid tribute to Prof. Petrie for persevering in his fight to win the compensation for members over the past 30 years. "Closure, after 38 years, meant looking round a roomful of colleagues, all of whom did the same job in the same university for decades, and realising that, by the terms of this 'reconstruction', some have won, some have won a lot, some have won a little, some have lost, and some - the absent ones who died - never even knew the outcome. Which was not the dispensation of justice, but the lottery of injustice," Dott. Young said.

"I was also very acutely aware that, without David, even the lottery tickets would never have been honoured. Thank you, David, you have made a real difference to our lives, and I for one will never forget it."

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