

Europe: beware of the Berlusconi Culture Leoluca Orlando – June 28, 2003

Autumn 2001

“For the sake of business we can co-exist alongside the Mafia”: these are the words of Pietro Lunardi, the Berlusconi Government Minister for Infrastructure and the man responsible for the main public works in Italy.

Spring 2003

“The magistrates are intent on undermining the stability of the State”, so said the Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, when a court in Milan sentenced Cesare Previti, Minister of Defence in the previous Berlusconi government, to 11 years in jail for corruption.

This same Prime Minister then proposes a bill and has a law pushed through to have the corruption case against him, now being heard by the courts, suspended. This law modifies the Italian Constitution and is subject to criticism by a number of illustrious jurists.

And so ends Italy’s leadership in the field of justice. A terrible blow is being levied against the people who had managed to built up a culture and economy of legality during the 1990s.

In the wake of the 1992 massacres, when the judge Giovanni Falconi, his wife Francesca and the three members of their escort were killed on 23 May and on 19 July the judge Paolo Borsellino and his escort suffered a similar fate, Italy had become a model of statehood, esteemed by all for the steps it had taken in fighting crime. This new ideological stance had the driving force of both the people themselves and the State’s response behind it and led to the prevailing of a new culture of legality.

The human chains, the women of Palermo and their initiative in hanging sheets from their balconies all over the city to say “**basta**” (enough), the anti-Mafia demonstrations speaking out against crime and corruption, the activities undertaken by the school children of Palermo and the emergence of a new style of citizenship, all constituted a string of initiatives that without any doubt were to inspire similar initiatives in other European countries.

The role played by the judiciary, the police and the anti-Mafia, anti-corruption legislation in Italy have become a model of good practice. As a Member of the European Parliament, I have presented a number of proposals in Strasburg to extend the Italian crime-fighting experience to the 15 countries of the Union. These proposals have been met with virtually unanimous approval (the only opposition coming from members of *Forza Italia*, representatives of the Hon. Silvio Berlusconi’s party).

Between Autumn 2001 and the Spring of 2003 a cycle has come to an end: Italy has lost the leadership that issued from the profound commitment of millions of its people and the sacrifice of the lives of many of its statesmen, not to mention that of ordinary citizens, including journalists and men of the church. It is no longer a secret that democracy in Italy is now felt to be jeopardized. Fortunately, however, this is not entirely the case! Or, rather, it is our duty to discredit this notion, putting our faith in our many resources. Of foremost importance, belonging as we do to a State where democracy still reigns and which is ruled by law, our first resource are the people of Italy.

Today our Head of State finds he is increasingly embarrassed and obliged to establish his distance from a government that condones a culture of illegality. Today millions of citizens, including those who held on to a belief in change and voted for Berlusconi, now say “**enough**”, following in the footsteps of the women and children of Palermo in the 1990s. Today the Magistrates’ Governing Council (*CSM*) has taken sides in the fight to uphold legality and the independence and autonomy

of the judiciary body. This alignment has the support not only of a considerable number of churchmen, but also of workers' and entrepreneurs' professional associations.

I have chosen not to speak of political alignments, as involving the different political parties would be in disregard of the widespread protest underway by those who initially voted for the Hon. Silvio Berlusconi and *Forza Italia*.

A second resource, and one that must not be undermined, is that of European integration. Had Italy not become part of a European Union, democracy today would be jeopardized even further and Italy would closely resemble Argentina, a country adrift, that has lost its solid international moorings. If this be so, the hope of democracy in Italy inevitably has its roots in its electors, but not only: the children of Palermo and the bankers from Frankfurt all play a fundamentally important role. When both these children and bankers learn to have a shared dream, a shared project and a similar approach, not only Italy and Europe, but the whole world will become a better place to live in.

Now, not only in Europe do we find bankers who no longer consider money to be odourless, indeed a number of the most important Swiss banks have finally changed their tune in this respect. Today European banks are becoming alarmed at the huge amounts of 'dirty' money being paid in that could eventually allow the customer responsible to become a decision-making stakeholder in the bank itself.

Fortunately, in Europe today, considerable numbers of those involved in the world of finance do not consider that "For the sake of business we can co-exist alongside the Mafia".

Italy is shortly to take over the presidency of the European Union and the question we ask ourselves is: are the other fourteen Members going to pay heed to the alarm felt by millions of Italians? Are they too going to contribute their support and efforts to defending not alone Italy, but also Europe, against this insidious culture of lawlessness.

The problem is, alas, only too-clearly defined, as has been that of the Mafia and of corruption since the 1990s. Indeed, not only is the problem clearly-defined but also European in its reach. Since the introduction of the Euro and the Schengen Treaty, the effects of illegality in one European country create ripples in all the other Members of the Union. In a nutshell, to focus on the central theme of my concern, we only need to remember that whoever has 'dirty' money in his pocket in Rome or Berlin (whether it be that of the Mafia, or bribery or any other illicit dealings), can spend it, untrammelled by any cross-border money laundering controls, in Madrid or Paris