

Italy Under Scrutiny

Letizia Airos Soria (January 07, 2008)



New York Times published an article from the Rome correspondent Ian Fisher that spoke of a stagnant Italy that was in “a collective funk regarding economics, politics and society”. Italian, American and Italian/American commentators discuss...



It was the New York Times that started it all, with an article that weeks after publication still has people talking. It was December 13th and seemingly out of the blue the well-respected and powerful New York paper published an article from the Rome correspondent Ian Fisher that spoke of a stagnant Italy that was in “a collective funk regarding economics, politics and society”.

Actually, it wasn't out of the blue at all. In fact on that same day Repubblica published a long article by sociologist Ilvo Diamanti entitled “Italians Prisoners of Distrust”. The article referenced a study by the Demos, which stated that “distrust has surpassed all previous levels. Distrust of institutions in particular has reached levels that hadn't been seen since 2000”. And the 41st “Report on the social state of the country” had just been released (on December 8th), in which the president of CENSIS, Giuseppe De Rita, coined the famous phrase “mucilage society”: “We no longer have any trust in the development of a country that gave life to the economic boom of the fifties, to the mass industrialization of the seventies, to the fight against terrorism.”

So why then, with all these precedents – certainly not unknown to foreign correspondents – did Fisher's article attract so much attention? Maybe because it was published at the same time that the Italian President was visiting New York? Or maybe because it was a foreigner that aired out our dirty laundry in public, an American to boot? A few days later (December 23rd) it was the Times of London's turn, with an entire page dedicated to Italy which stated that “the living standards are behind those of Spain and that politicians are old and tired” and that Italians “think their future is horrible”. According to the British daily, people in Italy live with “a sense of national agony”. Of course it would be wise to reflect on the fast spreading effect that certain well-amplified news stories can have.

And then came the reactions. From the Italian President Giorgio Napolitano, who brought up “malevolent” foreign observers even in his New Year's message, to the Minister of the Interior Giuliano Amato, to the leader of the new Partito Democratico Italiano (Italian Democratic Party) Walter Veltroni – quoted by Fisher as having said that in Italy “there is more fear than hope” – to the Prime Minister Romano Prodi, who commented from the ski slopes while on vacation: “Spain did not surpass us!”. From the correspondent Vittorio Zucconi who from the pages of Repubblica accused the United States of being a “mucilage”, to the comedian Luciana Littizzetto, who ironically declared on TV that Italians may be depressed, but at least they don't go on shooting sprees in schools like the Americans.

And so the debate grows. On one side are those offended by Fisher's article, on the other those who agree with him – we can see it on the web: Italians, Americans living in Italy, Italians living abroad, have decided to give their opinion. On the New York Times website there is still a blog with dozens of messages, but the same has happened in many other virtual communities.

We would like to present ["Italy Under Scrutiny"](#) [2]our own reportage on the topic, open for discussions, comments, suggestions...please continue to visit our site and share your opinions with us.



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