

Worst summer for Italy

The only energy left in politics is the energy of national assertion, which Italians will not be able to vent on the soccer field this year



TIM PARKS

Things can change. In the 37 years that I have been living in Italy, I have watched nine World Cup tournaments. The Italian team was always there. In 1982 and 2006 it won. In 1994, in the United States, it lost the final on penalties to Brazil. In 1990, as host, it crashed out in the semifinals to Argentina. True, on other occasions it failed abjectly in the group stages. True, some years it left qualification for the competition to the very last game. But no one doubted it would win that game. No one doubted that a country that invests so much money and emotional energy in soccer, a country with so much flare, talent and sheer devilish cunning, would come good when it counts. But we were wrong. Italy's national soccer team is not in Russia for this year's World Cup. "The worst summer ever for Italian men," a recent head-

line in Corriere della Sera declared: no World Cup and nothing to do on the beach but talk politics.

Because here, too, something has changed. Along with nine World Cups, in my time in Italy I have seen 26 governments form and dissolve. Some were theoretically a little right-wing and some hypothetically a little left, but all were essentially moderate, centrist and proudly European, falling into line with NATO and the European Union and the World Bank and, God bless us, Uncle Sam, on every major issue: sending troops here and there, as required — not many, but some — allowing their territory to be used to house missiles and launch military strikes, dutifully struggling to meet the endless conditions laid down by Brussels for membership in the euro club.

True, some prime ministers resisted more than others; one thinks of Bettino Craxi's objections to nuclear warheads in Sicily in the mid-1980s. True, there has been plenty of gamesmanship on display, Italy being one of the countries most frequently reprimanded for breaches of European regulations. Still, no one doubted that in the

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end, Italy would always straighten up and behave. Again we were wrong. The 27th government of my life here has declared war on a range of fronts: Russian sanctions, European immigration regulations and fiscal austerity. "Italy first" is the slogan of Matteo Salvini, the head of the nationalist Lega party and the undisputed strongman of the new administration.

So, are the causes that led Italy's national team to fail and Italy's people to abandon their traditional po-

litical parties the same? No. Italy's soccer players were unlucky to find themselves in a qualifying group with the exceptional Spain, and unlucky again to be drawn against a tough, determinedly physical Sweden in a playoff where absolutely nothing went right. It was not a particularly talented team, but there are many worse playing in Russia.

Italian voters opted for Salvini's Lega and Beppe Grillo's utopistic 5-Star Movement — its central policy is to guarantee a "citizenship income" to all — after nearly 20 years of frustrating economic decline and rising unemployment, a period more or less concurrent with membership of the euro and made all the more dramatic by the arrival of waves of African migrants on the country's southern shores. The overwhelming perception is that the European Union has done very little to alleviate this specifically Italian difficulty.

But however different the underlying causes of the sporting "catastrophe," as Italians like to call it, and the installation of an aggressively nationalist government, it is hard not to see disquieting connections. For a well-behaved member country of the supposedly

benevolent, politically correct European Union, international sport, and particularly soccer, offers a rare occasion for the unrestrained expression of national identity. One can say what one likes about fragile Italian nationhood, but when the national team wins a World Cup game, the celebrations are extraordinary. There are hordes of scooters streaming flags, little girls and old ladies mad with joy, rivers of wine and grappa, revelers blaring horns into the early hours, wives and their mothers-in-law reconciled, southerners and northerners united in triumphant embrace. And all the better when the victim of Italian success is a dominant neighbour. To beat West Germany in the final in 1982 and France in 2006, those were moments of collective jubilation. Any notion that national feeling is a thing of the past was revealed as pious wishful thinking.

Meantime, the rhetoric of European Union politics moves insistently in the opposite direction. Responsible leaders of the Union's less powerful member states must constantly remind their electorates that the major fiscal decisions are made elsewhere; their hands



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CIVILIAN'S TRIBUNE

Need new antibiotics



A failing supply chain along with a lack of investment in new antibiotics is already causing major health problems across the world, and this will only get worse. With new viruses like Nipah causing deaths, the medical community should step up research on developing new antibiotics.

We need greater investment in early-stage drug research, and market-entry rewards that pay researchers based on the quality of the drug.

WHO has published its first ever list of antibiotic-resistant "priority pathogens" — a catalogue of 12 families of bacteria that pose the greatest threat to human health.

The list was drawn up in a bid to guide

and promote research and development (R&D) of new antibiotics, as part of WHO's efforts to address growing global resistance to antimicrobial medicines.

The list highlights in particular the threat of gram-negative bacteria that are resistant to multiple antibiotics. These bacteria have built-in abilities to find new ways to resist treatment and can pass along genetic material that allows other bacteria to become drug-resistant as well.

It is high time the medical communities across the world, from China to the US, get together and work on developing new antibiotics capable of dealing with new set of dangerous bacterias.

VM Alex

Tackling our planet's pro

As of today, space is a big business and last year the glo



SIMONETTA DI PIPPO

In the sixty years since the space age began with the launch of Sputnik-1, the first artificial satellite, humankind has achieved remarkable progress in the exploration and use of outer space. This would not have been possible without international cooperation.

With more and more countries, organisations and companies accessing space and its economic and societal benefits, international cooperation to ensure the safe, secure and sustainable use of outer space now and in the future is more crucial today than ever before. That is why diplomatic efforts at the United Nations to drive forward such cooperation are so vital.

From 18 to 21 June, the world will gather in Vienna for UNISPACE+50, the first United Nations global space summit of the twenty-first century, organised by the United Nations Office for

Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA).

This will be only the fourth time in history that government representatives join heads of space agencies, policy-makers, industry representatives and other stakeholders at the United Nations on a large scale. Our top priority will be to look for ways to use space to improve lives around the world and protect our planet.

A lot has changed since the first UNISPACE conference was held in 1968. Today, space is big business. Last year the global space sector was estimated to be worth \$330 billion. Access to space is also growing rapidly. Over 70 United Nations Member States now have established government space agencies.

This is complemented by an ever-increasing number of private companies and industry. In 2017, a year in which the world placed over 450 new satellites — a record number — in orbit, commercial entities conducted just under half of all launches.

All this activity is being fuelled by the fact that space is now a cornerstone of our modern society. We rely on space science and technology in a number of



A view of the USSR exhibit organized at the Outer Space Conference.