

NEWS

BUSINESS IN BRIEF

Merloni Elettrodomestici said second-quarter pre-tax profit rose 61 percent to 36.3 billion lire as Europe's third-largest maker of household appliances gained market share by offering products with more sophisticated functions. "In the second quarter of this year Merloni Elettrodomestici had the fastest growth at a world level among all the publicly traded companies in the industry," the Fabriano-based company said. Merloni has improved profitability by focusing on the software in the dishwashers, refrigerators and cookers it makes under brand names such as Indesit and Ariston. That's because it's quicker to upgrade a product by downloading a new washing cycle or additional cooking functions than inserting mechanical parts.

Italian consumer optimism fell for the first month in six in July on concern unemployment will rise, the ISE research institute said Wednesday. The consumer confidence index declined to a seasonally adjusted 124.3, from 125.6 in June, the highest score in 11 years.

Alitalia's board on Wednesday approved accords with Air France and Delta Air Lines that will allow Italy's flag-ship airline to join its former rivals' SkyTeam alliance. Alitalia's commercial partnership with Air France will last until 2011, after which it can be renewed every five years, the airline said. On Tuesday, Alitalia said passenger traffic fell 3.9 percent on the year in June as the number of people traveling on domestic flights and to the Middle East declined. Unprofitable Alitalia's shares are down more than 30 percent this year but have clawed back more than 4 percent in the last two trading sessions.

Esprinet shares advanced 0.9 percent in their market debut on Wednesday, becoming the only third Italian initial offering this year to make money for investors on their first day of trading. The computer-products distributor lost as much as 2.8 percent after the opening but came back.

Fiat sold 831 million euros of asset-backed bonds on Tuesday, with their dividends funded by repackaged auto loans to individuals and small businesses. The bonds, payable in 2006, pay yields of the three-month Euribor rate plus 27 basis points.

Benetton Group bought a department store and adjacent buildings in central Moscow and will use the site for a shopping mall with one of the Treviso-based clothing retailer's largest European stores, the Moscow Times reported.

Scottish Widows Investment Partnership will manage 25 million euros of Japanese stocks for Italian land surveyors, or geometri. The company said the Italian contract, its first, "is part of a new trend."

Snia announced a joint venture this week with Tel Aviv-based Card Guard Scientific Survival to tap into the market for cardiac monitoring services. Sorin LifeWatch will set up initial operations in the province of Milan, and allows patients that suffer from arrhythmias, have heart attacks or wear pacemakers or defibrillators to call in for advice or heart rhythm monitoring and therapy by telephone.

Plaggio, the maker of Vespa motor scooters, said on Tuesday it had agreed to buy 20 percent of MV Augusta, helping the maker of Cagiva- and Husqvarna-badged bikes to survive. Varese-based MV Augusta has been struggling to pay suppliers to continue production after spending too much on new production facilities and on marketing new models. New helmet rules have reduced the appeal of scooters, analysts say. MV Augusta's flagship model is the 175 miles-per-hour, 750cc F4, which costs about \$20,000 and was part of the Guggenheim Museum's "The Art of the Motorcycle" exhibition, and also makes off-road bikes, thus complementing Plaggio's range, which focuses on smaller machines. (Bloomberg)

Forest Fires Are Down by Half this Year

By Christopher Emsden
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Forest fires in the first seven months of the year have burned less than half the acreage charred in the same period last year, Agriculture Minister Giovanni Alemanno, in charge of the nation's forest rangers, said on Wednesday.

Fortuitous rainfall was one reason for the improvement he said, but so was an effective crackdown by forest rangers, who this year operate with tougher sanctions against arsonists who set blazes to clear land or create jobs for fire fighters. "The best way to stop this plague is to intervene before they start," Mr. Alemanno said of the forest fires that strain state resources each summer.

Alluding to the civic consciousness rhet-

oric also popular appealed to by those fighting organized crime, he called for an "awareness" campaign aimed at educating younger generations in "forest and general environmental problems." State-sponsored television commercials will be aired next month.

Some 2,942 fires have been spotted in Italy through July 22, burning more than 58,000 acres, including some 20,000 acres of woodlands, according to ministry figures. Last year, there were 3,740 fires and 120,000 acres burned at this time.

More than half the fires and acreage burned this year have been in Sardinia, Calabria and Sicily, Tuscany, Puglia and Basilicata have also been hit hard.

But the best news, statistically, was that the average fire was put out after burning 20 acres, down from 32 acres last year.

One reason is that rangers are beginning to use satellites and global positioning devices, and to tap the volunteer resources of ham radio operators.

The Italian chapter of the World Wildlife Fund called for more patrolling of at-risk areas.

In a novel bid for aid, the head of a farmers' lobby proposed that his members were "multi-functional" entrepreneurs who could provide collaboration in the spotting of fires as well as loaning tractors and other equipment to put them out.

Legambiente, the nation's largest environmental lobby, praised the rangers but warned that municipal administrations needed to boost their census recording of burned acreage in order to combat land use speculators it says deliberately set many fires.

After the Disaster

On Wednesday, Francesco Colucci, chief of police in Genoa, denied reports that a second protester, a woman injured during the weekend riots, had died. Directors of the city's three largest hospitals also denied the persistent rumor.

Mr. Colucci also said that 221 remained under arrest after the riots, and that nine of them are in local hospitals. He said consulates of all foreign nationals had been alerted and that the families of the Italians detained had also been contacted unless they asked for that not to happen.

Fifty-four center-left senators presented a motion of no confidence in Interior Minister Claudio Scajola. A similar motion was passed on Tuesday in the lower house.

Greece's Parliament will investigate reports that its National Intelligence Service handed Italy a list of riot suspects before the G-8 summit. Some 3,000 Greeks joined the international demonstrations in Genoa last weekend and 140 were barred from entering the country.

A group of youths smashed bank windows and hurled stones at riot police on the sidelines of an anti-globalization rally in central Athens late Tuesday.

A small group of French anarchists staged a sit-in at the Italian Consulate in Dijon on Wednesday to protest the "bloody repression" by police and demand the "immediate release of all demonstrators arrested in Genoa."

A dozen Slovakian activists complaining they had been mistreated in Genoa protested peacefully outside the Italian Embassy in Bratislava.

Travel

Reservations are required on all Eurostar trains until Aug. 20.

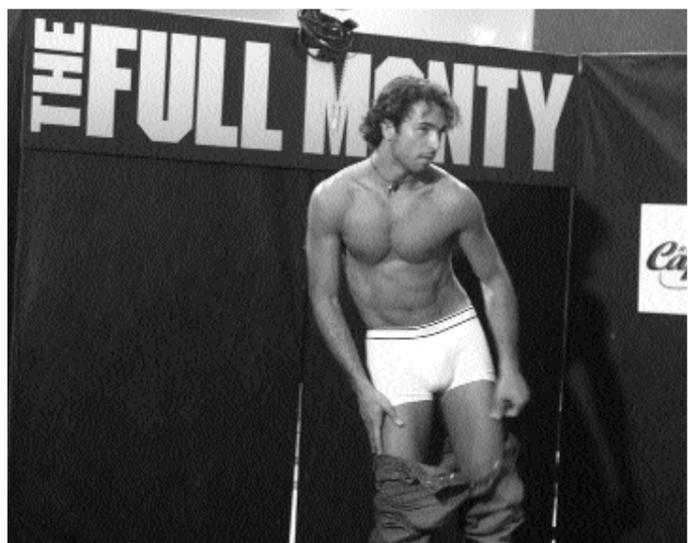
People

Italian jazz artists have reappeared in the Down Beat International Jazz Critics Poll for the first time since Milan-based Black Saint-Soul Note Records founder **Giovanni Bonandrini** won the producer's category more than a decade ago. The results of the 49th annual poll, published in the August issue of the noted U.S. magazine, gave kudos to the Italian Instabile Orchestra, the nation's freewheeling entry in the international jazz big band sweepstakes, and Rome-based singer **Maria Pia De Vito**. De Vito was cited in the "Beyond" category for artists whose work doesn't fit into any convenient stylistic classification. The Instabile scored in the "Big Band Deserving Wider Recognition" category. An 18-piece cooperative organized in 1990 by the Puglia-born trumpeter **Pino Minafra**, it includes some of Italy's most visionary improvisers, composers and musical rebels who have created a sound inspired as much by **Toto** as by Duke Ellington. In January, the Instabile was named Jazz Band of the Year by Italy's Musica Jazz for the sixth time since 1992, but the accolade from Down Beat is a major coup. The orchestra won positive reviews in Down Beat for its North American tour last year and its latest CD, "Litanias Sibillante."

Brazilian ace **Ronaldo**, out for nearly two years with a twice-injured knee, said he was pleased with his performance in scoring two goals in a friendly between star-studded Inter of Milan and a local club in Bormio, a ski resort in northern Lombardy. Inter won 17-0. Ronaldo went on to play a round of golf. (AP)

Tough times for **Fiorenza Fioravanti**, a former lieutenant in the tax police. The man who investigated the books of Cardinal **Michele Giordano**, the Archbishop of Naples, during a high-profile usury investigation that ended in the prelate's acquittal last year, has been ordered to stand trial on multiple bribery charges. The indictment came Wednesday from the court in Lagonegro, Basilicata, where prosecutors first launched their case against Giordano.

Guido Lo Porto, a senator for the right-wing National Alliance party since 1972, said he will abandon Rome in order to take up the presidency of the Sicilian regional legislature, to which he was elected for the first time last month. A former editor-in-chief of the formerly neo-Fascist party's daily, Il Secolo d'Italia, his seat in the Senate will be taken up by **Giampiero Cannella**.



Taking Most Of It Off

Giuseppe Angrisani of Naples was one of 300 hopefuls at Rome's Brancaccio theater on Wednesday, where first casting calls for Luigi Proietti's musical version of "Full Monty" were held. Although jobless men were sought, most aspirants were employed. And few took off all their clothes, as asked, preferring to sport what casting directors Fabrizio Celestini and Rossella Lo Bundo described as their fanciest undergarments.

Comment

Putting Police Actions on Trial

Dominic Standish
Special to Italy Daily

The post-G8 protests have focused on police brutality, with a gaggle of demonstrators amassing outside Parliament on Monday, tens of thousands gathered in cities around the country on Tuesday, and hundreds more again at the funeral services for the slain protestor in Genoa on Wednesday.

These followed calls by the leader of the Genoa Social Forum, Vittorio Agnoletto, who has claimed that the government has tried "to institute a police state."

Is this statement justified? During the G-8 summit, I repeatedly crossed the barricades between the top security "red zone" and the now infamous "yellow zone," reporting from inside the summit and also interviewing protestors and local residents. This inevitably meant I also had a great deal of contact with the police as they checked my credentials.

As television images confirmed, the security forces routinely charged protestors and attacked peaceful demonstrators, residents, journalists and others.

People I spoke to were angry, called the police "fascists" and stated that Mussolini-style policing had returned. Despite condemning the violence of some protestors, there was a consensus that the police had overreacted.

This is in contrast with the views of 60 percent of Italians surveyed by Datamedia who stated that they thought the police were too "tolerant."

In this case, being there was a significant factor. In particular, the killing of Carlo Giuliani was extreme.

In addition, no one has criticized the authorities for their initial attempt to cover up this incident. For several hours after the shooting the authorities tried to argue Giuliani had been killed by something thrown by a protestor, even though they had a corpse with a bullet wound.

A statement issued by the G-8 leaders expressed sorrow and regret after the killing, but failed to condemn the police shooting.

The excellent photography of Dylan Martinez, covering the event for Reuters, showing a pistol pointing

at Giuliani as he threw the fire extinguisher at the Carabinieri jeep helped expose what had happened and should go down as a key moment in photographic journalism.

The cover-up failed as the state lacks the level of censorship imposed under Mussolini after 1925 when newspapers carrying criticisms of the government risked being impounded.

However, we should also understand the context that led to this murder. Throughout the demonstrations, I could see that the police and armed forces were extremely tense.

The shooting was a panic reaction by a 20-year-old officer under attack, not a conscious armed shooting with the full backing of the state.

The high level of tension that influenced both the security forces and protestors was partly the consequence of the pre-summit build-up. Politicians, protestors, the police and sections of the media widely predicted and prepared for clashes that became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In this light, the violence and Giuliani's death were, unfortunately, not surprising. The shooting by Mario Placania was a panic reaction by an inexperienced, isolated 20-year-old conscript officer under attack. It was not a conscious armed shooting with the full backing of the state. In this sense, the claims that the police actions were part of a turn towards a new police state are unjustified.

Conscious killings are ordered by the state against a real threat, such as in Italy during the late 1890s. At least 80 rioters were shot dead by the army in Milan 1898. This followed Martial Law imposed by King Umberto, who subsequently decorated the general that headed the operations.

The authorities also prevented protestors from getting to Genoa. Some 2,000 people before and during the summit were denied entry into Italy as the country suspended the Schengen Agreement on open bor-

ders within the EU signatory countries.

This was an infringement of civil liberties. But it cannot be compared to Mussolini's actions. Following the Public Safety Law of 1926, police could arrest people and confine them for five years simply on suspicion of intending to engage in subversive activities.

However, police raids during Saturday night on two schools in Genoa where protestors were staying have raised legitimate questions about the authoritarian actions of the security forces. The raids were undoubtedly heavy handed, with more than 40 people taken to hospital afterwards and 93 arrests. It has been suggested that many of the injuries were sustained during the day's demonstrations, but the pools of blood and protestors carried away on stretchers indicate otherwise.

Police apparently found two sledgehammers, a pickaxe, 12 penknives and two petrol bombs. Protestors have stated that they used the knives to open cans of food, that workmen left the tools in the building and that the petrol bombs were planted.

There were 30 arrests during raids on Monday with no casualties reported and further raids on Tuesday.

The Italian police actions have been heavily criticized by Peter Hain, Britain's minister for Europe, and Amnesty International has demanded an investigation.

But it should be noted that such policing is not exceptional to Italy. Police often attack peaceful demonstrators and arrest them for no reason, as I witnessed during many Poll Tax demonstrations and during the coal miners' strike in Margaret Thatcher's Britain. Britain has witnessed repressive policing again during recent riots in the cities of Bradford, Oldham and Burnley.

The reality is that formally democratic countries frequently use excessive force. While the repression at the G-8 summit does not signal a return to a police or fascist state, it does fit into a tendency towards authoritarianism across the western world.

Placing the police under popular scrutiny in the period ahead is vital to challenge this trend.

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