

NEWS

BUSINESS IN BRIEF

ENI and smaller rival ERG said Wednesday they will combine two refineries in Sicily as ENI seeks to reduce domestic refining to focus on crude oil production abroad.

ERG, Italy's biggest oil company with no state participation, will take a majority stake in a new company that combines its Melilli refinery with ENI's nearby Priolo plant. The entity will also include some power stations supplied by the refineries, though not ERG's Isab electricity plant, the companies said.

ENI, 30 percent-owned by the state, refined 39 percent of Italy's oil last year. It has said it wants to shed processing capacity and reduce its share of the national gasoline market to 30 percent by 2003 from more than 40 percent now, investing instead in exploration and production where margins are higher.

ERG had 14 percent of Italy's refining market last year.

Five local utilities in the northwest of Italy have agreed to set up Eurogas, a joint venture to provide a range of utility services in Italy and abroad, *Il Sole/24 Ore* reported, without citing sources.

The combined company will offer clients a range of services including gas, electricity, telecommunications and waste disposal, the newspaper reported. It will have almost half a million clients and sales of about 150 million euros, *Il Sole* said.

The partners in Eurogas are four utilities from the Piedmont cities of Pinerolo, Settimo Torinese, Ivrea and Alba, along with the Lombard town of Montebello. The utilities plan to combine their commercial structures and some businesses, while retaining their independence, *Il Sole* said.

Italian regional utilities have been linking up to boost the number of services they offer and their geographical reach as Italy's energy market opens up. AEM Torino, the city of Turin's electric utility, has an accord with its water counterpart. It is also part of a group formed with Milan's AEM and Rome's ACEA to bid for assets that state-controlled ENEL must sell.

EPlanet, which is building fiber-optic networks in seven Italian cities, said Tuesday it is considering merging with a group of regional telephone companies as it seeks to lure more business customers.

Unprofitable EPlanet said it is discussing the plan with Eritel, which is being formed from several regional telephone companies controlled by a venture-capital fund of Elserino Pini.

Milan-based EPlanet said in July it found new investors to provide 101 million euros it needed to stay in business and avoid bankruptcy. The company, one of more than 100 competing with former monopoly Telecom Italia, has stopped trying to win residential customers and scaled back its network to save money.

An eventual merger "will not draw on EPlanet's cash and will not impact in any way the debt restructuring plan recently approved by the company's management," EPlanet said.

Its shares, down 82 percent since their initial public offering in August 2000, rose as much as 8.3 percent on Tuesday.

EPlanet and Eritel want to combine their units that sell phone services while keeping their networks separate, EPlanet said.

Eritel, which will have 180,000 customers, of which 80,000 are businesses, will seek its own financing.

Gianfilippo Cuneo, the new chairman of EPlanet, said in a July interview with *Corriere della Sera* that the company will have an operating profit in 2005.

OTE, or Hellenic Telecommunications Organization, is considering buying Telecom Italia's 29 percent stake in Serbia's monopoly phone company to gain increased control of the business, Athens daily *Imerisia* reported, without citing sources.

The Greek phone company already owns 20 percent of Serbia Telekom.

The Greek and Italian phone concerns paid \$728 million to Slobodan Milosevic's government in 1997 to buy 49 percent of Serbia Telekom. (Bloomberg)



Italian Racing Comes Back

Ligurian racer Mirko Celestino won top honors for sheer speed at Wednesday's Fausto Coppi race from Milan to Turin. This year's race was especially fast as a tough climbing stretch had been eliminated due to road repair. Celestino, 27, benefited from fine lead work by fellow Saeco racer Eddy Mazzoleni.

Ansa/Sat

Comment

The Road to Damascus

By Dominic Standish
Special to Italy Daily

Silvio Berlusconi's meeting with U.S. President George W. Bush in Washington on Monday signaled the prime minister's public conversion to the new Western etiquette of cultural diversity.

Mr. Berlusconi had been widely condemned for his comments, on Sept. 26 in Berlin, asserting the superiority of Western civilization over Islam. After that, he seemed to have been the only passenger whose flight to the United States has been on "stand-by" while other world leaders have flocked to meet the president. When Mr. Bush telephoned other G8 leaders to personally inform them of the air strikes on Afghanistan, it was Vice President Dick Cheney who called Rome.

Mr. Berlusconi quickly realized that he had violated the new etiquette of cultural diversity. In his statement to the Senate on Sept. 28, he remarked, "I regret that somewhere people have established a supreme tribunal of ideological correctness."

On Oct. 2, he demonstrated his public conversion to the new etiquette of cultural diversity when he met ambassadors from Muslim nations, expressing his "deep respect" for Islam and praising its contributions to human civilization.

This etiquette means that politicians cannot assert the superiority of one culture over another, or as European Commission President Romano Prodi, has stated: "We are equal, we have the same rights."

This relativism of cultural diversity is anti-democratic and incorrect. For example, Italy is more democratic than Kuwait, which lacks universal suffrage.

Cultural relativism is the product of the erosion of traditional forms of Western domination, like colonialism. Since the Nazi Holocaust it has become increasingly unacceptable to use the language of cultural or racial superiority, which countries like Britain felt comfortable promoting beforehand.

Mr. Berlusconi's public conversion represents the fall of the last Western leader to multiculturalism. Mr. Bush made an apology after referring to the war against terrorism as a "crusade," and the U.S. military operation was renamed from "Infinite Justice" to "Enduring Freedom" in acknowledgment that in Islam only God provides infinite justice. Meanwhile, British Prime Minister Tony Blair has broadcast how he studied the Koran on holiday.

The West's conversion to multiculturalism heralds the rejection of earlier policies of assimilation, such as the American melting pot. It demonstrates a lack of confidence to progress

through integration, instead promoting fixed identities associated with ethnicity and religion.

This shift has contributed to the growth of many forms of fundamentalism — including Christian fundamentalism — in the West and had a profound impact on the hijackers who carried out the Sept. 11 attacks.

A generalized fear and the expression of incoherent outbursts against the status quo increasingly characterize Western politics. There is fertile ground for a depoliticized nihilistic zealotry within the West.

In this sense, the attacks on the U.S. have a lot in common with Timothy McVeigh's bombing in Oklahoma, the Branch Davidian sect members who died at Waco, Texas, the man who bombed Soho, Brixton and Brick Lane in London, and the Aum Shinrikyo sect that released Sarin on the Tokyo underground.

The recent letters received containing anthrax in the U.S. and hoaxes in Italy continue this nihilism that has also influenced those in the Islamic world, such as Palestinian suicide bombers.

Indeed, the identification of the hijackers with Islamic culture fails to appreciate how they were more influenced by Western culture. They were not even very devoted to the Koran. The FBI has noted their meetings in bars, Western girlfriends and use of call girls that suggests they were not waiting for 70 virgins in paradise.

FBI investigations have identified how the hijackers did not come straight from Afghanistan. The hijackers qualified as pilots in the West, not in Islamic countries. Although the profiles of the hijackers indicate most of them came from Saudi Arabia or the Gulf States, their formative adult years were spent in the West.

Many of the hijackers were educated at universities in Britain, Germany and the U.S. They benefited from Western multiculturalism that encourages networks of student societies, mosques, charities and government projects.

According to the Sunday Times, one alleged leader in the al Qaida network was a boy from a middle-class family in the eastern suburbs of London who first discovered militant Islam when he became a student at the London School of Economics.

Recently, *El Correo Español*, a Basque daily, ran a feature about a Spanish woman who allegedly had photographs of Osama bin Laden punting a boat, having a picnic in a park and wearing fashionable flared jeans in the 1970s while he was studying English in Oxford. That his later position in Afghanistan was built up through Western backing of anti-Soviet

activities by the U.S. and Britain is well documented.

Mr. Berlusconi's assertion of the superiority of Western civilization over Islam ignored their interdependence.

But his road to Damascus conversion to cultural diversity that led him to Washington represents a failure to defend the gains of democracy.

Multiculturalism combined with nihilistic zealotry has created a decadent Western culture that had a greater influence than Islam on those who carried out the Sept. 11 attacks.

Mr. Standish runs Veneto-based Progress Consulting. Comments to him can be addressed to dstandish@europe.com

Police Nab Calabrian Mob Suspect

By Elisabetta Povoledo
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A man police claim handled the Calabrian Mafia's money in Northern Italy was arrested on Wednesday by tax police. He is accused of being the Italian go-between for a Swiss lawyer who laundered billions of euros for the 'ndrangheta, the Calabrian Mafia.

Giovanni Pozzi, 51, a resident of Brunello, near Varese, was arrested after his name emerged during a police investigation of Francesco Paolo Moretti, an Italian-born Swiss national who has been held in a Swiss prison since Aug. 2000 on charges of corruption, fraud and extortion.

Swiss prosecutors say that Mr. Moretti provided visas for several mobsters from Puglia, including Gerardo Cuomo and Francesco Prudentino. The two men have been accused of drug and arms trafficking, as well as involvement in a cigarette smuggling ring between Switzerland, Montenegro and Italy.

According to the tax police, Mr. Cuomo and Mr. Prudentino laundered at least 39 million euros (76 billion lire) since 1993 through Mr. Moretti in Switzerland, on behalf of two Mafia families from the Locride area in Calabria.

Italian lire was changed into American dollars and transferred to criminal organizations in South America. In some cases police allege that Mr. Moretti himself left Switzerland for Venezuela with suitcases full of cash.

Mr. Pozzi is accused of being the financial point man for the criminal organization in Lombardy and parts of Piedmont.

Travel

The Ridolfi airport at Forlì, near Bologna, will remain closed until next Tuesday by order of ENAC, the civil aviation body, as officials ponder how a television comedy showman had himself filmed as he smuggled a toy pistol through metal detectors and security checks there.

People

Pier Ferdinando Casini, the speaker of Parliament's lower house, reprimanded Ermete Realacci, a fellow deputy, for wearing a Sahara-style jacket, similar to those used by British colonial forces, in the legislative chamber. Casini's dapperly dressed conservative allies applauded the call for proper jackets and ties to be worn to work in what he called "these delicate times." Realacci, a center-left deputy and leader of environmentalist lobby Legambiente, said he hoped the importance of the present extended beyond sartorial matters. The proposed dress code would have bipartisan ramifications — if the left is more often accused of dressing sloppily. Northern League leader Umberto Bossi has certainly challenged official canons of good taste with his bright emerald green shirts. The use of a tie has been suggested since 1976 in Parliament but has not been rigorously enforced. Ushers keep emergency ties on hand.

Where the opposition fails, intellectuals come to the rescue. With the ink not yet dry on the page, a group of leftist intellectuals are supporting an appeal for a referendum to cancel the recently passed law on cross-border investigations criticized by the opposition and many prosecutors for weakening the fight against crime and terrorism. The appeal will be published in the monthly *Micromega*, dedicated to the first laws passed by the conservative government. So far, a number of celebrities have signed the call to popular suffrage including actor Roberto Benigni, authors Andrea Camilleri, Antonio Tabucchi and Dacia Maraini, and Nobel prize winners Rita Levi Montalcini and Dario Fo. The appeal states that the recently passed law hinders rather than helps collaboration between states and its only effect is to help "Silvio Berlusconi's friends and Berlusconi himself" elude prosecution.

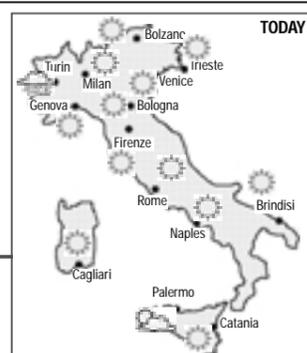
Giuseppe Piarantoni, an Italian priest serving in the southern Philippines, was abducted by unidentified gunmen while he was saying Mass on Wednesday evening at a church in Dimatalong on the island of Zamboanga. Lieut.-Gen. Roy Cimatu, military commander in the province, said the kidnapping occurred while government forces were pursuing members of Abu Sayyaf, a Muslim guerrilla group, who have been holding a U.S. missionary couple and eight Filipinos hostage for months on the nearby island of Basilan. (Reuters)

Weather

temp	min c/f	max c/f
Bologna	12/54	22/72
Bolzano	11/52	21/70
Brindisi	16/61	23/73
Cagliari	19/66	23/73
Catania	13/55	24/75
Florence	14/57	23/73
Genoa	16/61	21/70
Milan	13/55	22/72
Naples	14/57	25/77
Palermo	16/61	23/73
Rome	12/54	22/72
Trieste	9/48	20/68
Turin	12/54	19/66
Venice	9/48	22/72

	SUNNY
	PARTLY CLOUDY
	CLOUDY
	RAIN
	THUNDERSTORMS
	SNOW
	FOG

temp	min c/f	max c/f
Bologna	14/57	22/72
Bolzano	14/57	19/66
Brindisi	11/52	22/72
Cagliari	17/63	23/73
Catania	12/54	23/73
Florence	15/59	22/72
Genoa	19/66	20/68
Milan	16/61	18/64
Naples	13/55	24/75
Palermo	17/63	22/72
Rome	15/59	22/72
Trieste	13/55	19/66
Turin	14/57	16/61
Venice	13/55	20/68



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