

NEXA and Eurovisioni

Andrea Cairola, with support from Juan Carlos De Martin, Giacomo Mazzone and Arturo Di Corinto  
nexapolito.it and www.eurovisioni.it

## Introduction

Italy has widespread corruption, estimated at about 60 billion euro by official sources<sup>1</sup>, mostly occurring in the infrastructure sector, public procurement (especially in the health sector), the privatisation of state properties and utilities, licences for public goods and services, and real estate development. Italy is one of the worst performing European Union (EU) countries on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, observers often refer to "legal corruption", that is to say, resources and privileges given to political parties as well as to elected officials without any reasonable requirement for minimum accountability. Such a phenomenon is widely considered by the public as "immoral" and as a hidden form of corruption, although formally it is not illegal<sup>3</sup>.

In this context, over the past three decades all the attempts to eradicate endemic corruption through judiciary actions or popular initiatives have failed. But in recent years the internet seems to have offered a new tool and hope to the popular opposition fighting against corruption – and a unique political and social movement has formed thanks to the potential of new information and communications technologies (ICTs) and the web.

It all started through the unusual partnership between a science-fiction and internet expert and a popular comedian, resulting in the creation of what became the most popular and influential Italian blog: [www.beppegrillo.it](http://www.beppegrillo.it). The blog acted mostly as a powerful catalyst for anti-corruption activism

and street rallies, involving hundreds of thousands of participants; and then as a platform for triggering what we could now call an Italian version of the Pirate Party: the Five Star Movement ("Movimento 5 stelle"). This movement has been created around a programme against corruption, and during the latest administrative elections (May 2012) it became the third-largest political entity in the country.

## Policy and political background

Historically, the massive corruption since World War II (which could count as having important precedents going back all the way to the unification of Italy in 1861) was mainly due to two factors:

... The organised crime rooted in several Italian territories (first of all the Mafia in Sicily, but also Camorra, Ndrangheta and Sacra Corona Unita in other regions of southern Italy, and expanding into a white-collar criminality pervading the more industrialised areas of central and northern Italy). Organised crime's network of power contaminated both politics and the public administration, again, against a historical background of contiguity between the ruling class and criminality that has no parallel in other European countries.

... The lack of political change due to the four-decade-long rule by a centre-right coalition, opposed to one of the strongest Communist parties in Western European democracies.

In the early 1990s, with the end of the Cold War, a wave of judiciary investigations on widespread corruption, named operation "Clean Hands", swept away the previous political setting. However, this political reshuffle did not bring a real improvement in the fight against corruption<sup>4</sup> because the political forces that emerged from the change reinstated the same bad governance practices of their predecessors. They also embarked on a series of legal reforms of crimes against public administration that obstructed the work of the judiciary, guaranteeing de facto impunity to perpetrators of corruption,

1 Corte dei Conti (National Auditors Office) (2012) Declaration by Presidente della Corte dei Conti Luigi Giampaolino, 17 February

2 Italy is ranked 68th out of 183 countries on the index [www.transparencym.org](http://www.transparencym.org)

3 La casta. Così i politici italiani sono diventati intoccabili (The Caste: How Italian Politicians Became Untouchable) is an Italian book written by Sergio Rizzo and Gian Antonio Stella, two journalists from the Italian national newspaper Corriere della Sera, detailing the amount of graft and corruption in Italian politics. It was published in 2007, and became a bestseller with more than 1.3 million copies sold and 28 reprints. The International Herald Tribune described it as a book that "grabs attention by depicting Italian politicians as greedy and self-referential".

4 Garrone, A G (1996) L'Italia corrotta 1895-1996: cento anni di malcostume politico, Editori Riuniti

5 See, e.g., Scarpinato, R with Lodato, S (2008) Il ritorno del Principe, Chiarelettere

6 Della Porta, D. and Vannucci, A (1999) Un paese anormale: come la classe politica ha perso l'occasione di Mani Pulite, Laterza





