

Last Monday the Consiglio di Stato, Italy's high administrative court, struck down the Polytechnic plan on constitutional grounds. While a triumph for the 98 professors who challenged it back in 2012, it raises a number of questions on the trade-offs that universities in Italy and beyond make as they race towards English in the name of internationalisation and global competition. Those trade-offs have become ever more salient in recent years in light of rising nationalism and a growing backlash against the progressive spread of English taught courses. In striking down the plan, the Consiglio di Stato applied principles laid down by the Constitutional Court last year to affirm an earlier decision of the regional administrative court. In the interim the court had asked for the university to provide documentation on the number of programmes offered in English, Italian or in both languages. The opinion, largely a compilation of quotes from the Constitutional Court with little additional rationale, affirms three principles that the goal of internationalisation cannot jeopardise: the primacy of the Italian language, the freedom of students to learn and the freedom of professors to teach. The Italian language, the court says, is a "fundamental element of cultural identity", not only essential to transmitting the country's heritage but a cultural asset in itself. Teaching courses solely in a foreign language would remove Italian from "complete branches of knowledge". Moreover, it would deny students, without adequate language support, the freedom to choose their own training and future and prevent them from reaching "the highest grades in their studies". Finally, it would affect how professors communicate with students and would discriminate against them in the assignment of courses based on criteria that have nothing to do with their competence in the subject matter they have been hired to teach. The university must now find a solution that maintains the institution's competitiveness in both retaining Italian students and attracting foreign students who understand the value of an English-based degree in the global job market. The question now is whether the controversy fades from sight or the implications push to the boiling point a simmering debate over the proper place of English in academia. (Fonte: R. Salomone, <http://www.universityworldnews.com> 03-02-18)