

# Roman army of 1,000 experts will give crumbling villages a facelift

## Italy

Tom Kington Rome

The task of shoring up Italy's crumbling hamlets, curing corruption and reversing the gradual economic decline often seems like a Sisyphean struggle, but Rome is fighting back by recruiting an army of 1,000 to get the job done.

An unusual taskforce of engineers, architects, lawyers, eco-consultants, geologists and other experts is due to be dispatched across Italy next month to help rebuild after a crippling pandemic and 20 years of stagnation. "I expected 10,000 to 15,000 applicants but in six days 61,000 applied — people who be-



Engineers, architects, lawyers and eco experts will be deployed across Italy

lieve in this adventure," Renato Brunetta, 71, an economist and Italy's public administration minister, said.

The plan is tied to the arrival of €200 billion in EU grants and loans awarded for new rail lines, high-speed internet and green technology. Half of the money will be spent at local level by regional governors and town mayors on matters from new sewage pipes and building repairs to solar panels.

Officials admit that this means putting money in the hands of administrators who often prove incapable of effectively using EU cash. "From 2014 to 2020, just 48 per cent of EU funding sent to Italy was actually spent," Brunetta, a member of Silvio Berlusconi's

Forza Italia party, said. The new recruits — with a brief to help governors and mayors gain authorisation to spend money, cut through red tape and lend expertise — are seen as a linchpin in the rebuilding effort and will create jobs for 1.2 million people.

Brunetta likened the experts to the soldiers of "the thousand", who enrolled with Giuseppe Garibaldi in 1860 to fight to unify Italy. "This thousand must modernise the country and they will be the symbol of that," he said.

One priority is building hundreds of nursery schools across Italy. "It's crucial because we are 20 percentage points below the EU average for women in the workplace and a reason is they have nowhere to put children," Brunetta said.

Another project will create 7,000 digital hubs in villages with shrinking populations, where ageing residents can be helped to go online to pay bills and make hospital appointments. "If you close the post office in these communities, you are dead," Brunetta said.

Since his appointment this year by Mario Draghi, the prime minister, Brunetta has made changes in Rome to accelerate the hiring of government staff by using the online networking site LinkedIn. The ministry can now send alerts to relevant candidates when jobs come up. "We've cut the Italian state hiring process from up to four years to 100 days, and the thousand experts will be at work by January, something that would normally be impossible in Italy," Brunetta said.

The ministry is simplifying or scrapping 600 bureaucratic obstacles to getting permits for infrastructure. Less red tape also means less mafia. "The mafia takes advantage of bureaucracy by offering to simplify things. If you don't have a document because a bureaucrat is slow, you go to a mafioso and he'll solve your problem," Brunetta said.



## Check out at the press of a button in suicide pod

**A** pro-euthanasia activist nicknamed "Dr Death" claims to have invented a suicide capsule that will enable assisted dying at the press of a button (Adam Sage writes).

Philip Nitschke, 74, an Australian, says users will be able to get into his Sarco capsule and release nitrogen, reducing the oxygen level to 1 per cent and leading to death.

"The person will feel a bit disorientated and could feel slightly



The capsule, which gradually reduces the oxygen level until death, is "very comfortable" inside, according to its inventor

euphoric before losing consciousness," he told *Swissinfo*. "It all lasts about 30 seconds." He said the capsule was "very comfortable".

Nitschke, the director of Exit International, a pro-euthanasia group,

wants to make his invention available in Switzerland, where assisted suicides are authorised. Exit International said it had no plans to sell the capsule but would make the design available to be

3D printed. Dignitas, the Swiss assisted suicide association, said the capsule would be unlikely to win public acceptance.

Under Swiss euthanasia law, doctors are not required to be present at the time of death but must prescribe the lethal drug and ensure that the person wanting to die has the capacity to make an enlightened choice.

Nitschke said his aim was to remove medical intervention to let people have total control of their suicide, using artificial intelligence to establish mental capacity. "Of course, there is a lot of scepticism from psychiatrists. But our original conceptual idea is that the person does a test online and receives a code to access the Sarco."

# Napoleon's sword and guns fetch £2m

## France

Charles Bremner Paris

The dress sword carried by Napoleon Bonaparte when he staged the coup that brought him to power in 1799 has been sold with five of his pistols for more than \$2.87 million.

A collector who has not been named won the bidding for the sword, its scabbard and five ornamented pistols via telephone at a sale held by the Rock Island Auction Company in Illinois.

After crowning himself emperor in 1804, Napoleon is believed to have presented the sword, made by the state arms factory in Versailles, to General Jean-Andoche Junot. The general's widow was later forced to sell it to pay debts. A London museum owned it for a time and a US collector who died recently was its last owner, according to the auction house.

"The buyer of the Napoleon Garniture is taking home a very rare piece of history," said Kevin Hogan, the company president. "We are pleased to have

provided the opportunity for them to acquire such a historic object."

Bonaparte staged the bloodless "Coup of 18 Brumaire", as it is known from the French revolutionary calendar, in October 1799 after he returned from victorious campaigns in Egypt and Syria and was greeted as a saviour at a time of political turmoil. The takeover, which put the country under a consulate with Bonaparte as first consul, is seen as marking the end of the revolutionary period that began in 1789.

A craze for Napoleonic memorabilia started more than a decade ago and was given a boost by the bicentenary this year of his death. In 2007,

the sabre that Bonaparte took to the Battle of Marengo in June 1800 was sold at auction for \$6.5 million. In 2010, a lock of the emperor's hair sold for \$13,000 to an anonymous collector in Britain. In September this year a bicorne hat that Bonaparte is said to have worn to an 1807 meeting with Tsar Alexander I of Russia sold for €1.2 million at Sotheby's in Paris.

On Tuesday a pair of "highly rare" tiaras believed to have belonged to Napoleon's wife, Josephine, sold at auction in London for more than £564,000.

The two tiaras — offered from a private British collection — are thought to have been given to Napoleon's wife by his sister Caroline early in the 19th century.



The emperor's sword was auctioned alongside five ornate pistols

# French filmgoers shun the art house for slapstick caper

Adam Sage Paris

France may be known for its arthouse cinema but it is demonstrating a love of anti-heroes famed for limited intelligence, bad jokes and a dislike of work.

Les Tuche are a family of northern losers who are central to slapstick comedies that have acquired cult status to the incredulity of critics brought up on directors such as François Truffaut, Éric Rohmer and Jean-Luc Godard.

The first film was released in 2011 amid expectations that it would be shunned by filmgoers. Instead, Jeff Tuche, the father, played by Jean-Paul Rouve; his wife, Cathy, played by Isabelle Nanty; and their children have become such stars that *Les Tuche 4* was released yesterday in 918 cinemas.

Observers say that the family has come to embody French provincials who often feel scorned by the Parisian elite. The characters are reminiscent in

some respects of those in *Shameless* or *The Royle Family*.

In previous films, the family wins the national lottery and moves to Monaco and then California. But they return to France, where the father enters politics and ends up as president. In *Les Tuche 4*, he resigns to return to Bouzoules, his home village, where he takes on a US-owned e-commerce platform that he accuses of ruining the spirit of Christmas. Amazon is not mentioned, but the reference is obvious. Olivier Baroux, the director, said: "There are two opposite visions of Christmas. For Jeff [Tuche], Christmas is going to the factory to see where the toys are made. Now you order on the telephone and everything arrives at the speed of light."

*Le Parisien* was enthusiastic, saying: "The bottom of French society applauds [the film]." But *Les Inrockuptibles*, a cultural magazine, said the film had "scraped the bottom of the barrel".