

To: Profs. Robert C. Allen, Stephen Broadberry, Gregory Clark, Nicholas Crafts, Jane Humphries, Deirdre McCloskey, Joel Mokyr, Douglass North, Kevin O'Rourke, Leandro Prados de la Escosura, Jan Luiten Van Zanden, and Jeffrey G. Williamson

April 7, 2014

Re: Abilitazione Scientifica Nazionale 2012, Storia Economica (13 C/1)

Dear Colleagues,

As members of the Boards of the Italian Associations of Economic History (SISE) and the History of Economic Thought (AISPE), it was with surprise and dismay that we read the letter you sent to the Prime Minister and other Italian authorities regarding the results of the qualifying examination for the certification of professor of Economic History.

It is not for us to dispute the choices made by the Commission responsible for the certification procedure, the minutes of which are available online for consultation and which we assume you read carefully prior to sending the letter. Your observations presume that the evaluation criteria adopted were arbitrary and inadequate. However, it must be remembered that Italian university professors are employed by the State and that the selection procedure is regulated by specific Government regulations which, while they may seem anachronistic, must be adhered to.

Moreover, as representatives of Italian academics of Economic History and the History of Economic Thought, whose reputation has been compromised by your intervention, we feel it is our duty to clarify some points.

The summary judgement which you pronounced is based exclusively on the criteria of international visibility as an indicator of the quality of an academic. While this is certainly an important factor, it is not the only one to be taken into consideration when evaluating a researcher. Economic Historians in Italy have widely discussed the scientific statute of the discipline and the methods for evaluating research and agree on the fact that only the careful, critical reading of a book, paper or article can allow us to express a valid judgement, in other words "the proof of the pudding is in the eating". It is well-known that the widespread use of bibliometric criteria is a more immediate application tool, but it is also true that these methodologies are subject to severe criticism. The fact that most of our scientific production is in Italian obviously makes an international comparison difficult, but this does not give the right to make superficial judgements on a historiographic tradition such as the Italian one which has contributed to the general progress of Economic History and the History of Economic Thought not only with publications in Italian but also in French, Spanish, German and English.

We are in no doubt that your letter was based on a misunderstanding and that collaboration and mutual respect between Economic Historians in Italy and colleagues in other countries will continue to be fruitful.

Yours sincerely

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Francesco Asso, Università di Palermo

Massimo Augello, Presidente Associazione Italiani Storici del Pensiero Economico e Rettore
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Giuseppe Di Taranto, Università LUISS – Roma

Antonio Di Vittorio, Presidente della Società Italiana degli Storici Economici e Professore Emerito
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Paolo Frascani, Università di Napoli L'Orientale

Andrea Leonardi, Università di Trento

Luca Michelini, Università di Pisa

Giampiero Nigro, Università di Firenze

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