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'Europa Nostra' has decided to declare the Venice Lagoon as the most endangered site in Europe because the many interventions that have been planned or are in the process of being planned in the area, as well as the way in which the Lagoon is currently being used, risk destroying its specific and unique features irreparably and definitely.

The greatest danger comes from the very authorities which should stand in the Lagoon's defence, namely the Government, the Region, the Municipality, the Port Authority and the Airport which, in this period of ongoing economic crisis, see Venice and the Lagoon exclusively as a source of wealth for an unfettered economic development, to the detriment of that very source.

### **PROJECTS AND INTERVENTION OF THE PORT AUTHORITY**

**Terminal Ro-Ro.** The Ro-Ro Ferry terminal was constructed near Fusina in 2014. Prior to this date, the terminal was located at the Stazione Marittima (the Maritime Station, located in Tronchetto), which meant that ferries used to enter the port via the Lido, navigating through the San Marco Basin and the Giudecca Canal, in order to reach Tronchetto. Since 2014, the ferries enter from the Malamocco port and navigate through the Canale dei Petroli in order to reach Fusina. Thus, there has been a substantial increase of traffic in the Canale dei Petroli, whereas the freeing up of the docks at the Stazione Marittima has made space for a greater number of cruise ships, which now dock there.

**Off-shore Terminal.** The Port Authority has a further plan for the realisation of an off shore terminal for large container ships. At this terminal, off the coast at the level of Malamocco, the containers will be loaded onto barges which will enter the Lagoon via the Canale dei Petroli. With the construction of this off-shore terminal, the volume of container traffic is due to increase substantially, and with it there will be a notable increase in wave motion and erosion.

Indeed, it has been shown by numerous scientific studies that the waves generated by the passage of ships through the Canale dei Petroli (a large-scale navigation canal which connects the Malamocco port to the industrial area of Marghera) cause the erosion of the shallows. Over the course of five decades the activity in the canal has caused the formation of a crater in the central Lagoon, at the same time as it has led to the atrophy of the natural canals. The Lagoon is becoming a flat marine bay.

### **PROJECTS AND INTERVENTIONS OF THE PORT AUTHORITY AND THE MAYOR**

**Canale Tresse Nuovo.** In 2015 the Port Authority, in agreement with the Mayor of Venice, presented a new project designed to maintain the presence of cruise ships inside the Venice Lagoon. The project was outlined only in broad and vague terms to the citizens (no project plans or designs are currently available to be viewed). According to the project, cruise ships would enter the Lagoon via the Malamocco port (just like cargo ships and ferries), they too would transit through the Canale dei Petroli, they would then enter a new canal which the Port Authority intends to dig as a means to link the Canale dei Petroli with Canale Vittorio Emanuele, which leads to the Stazione Marittima. The new canal (which is to be called Tresse Nuovo) would pass through Tresse Island, a new landfill island recently created (in contravention of the *Leggi Speciali* in order to stock the toxic muds extracted from the Lagoon.

This project, as well as causing devastation to the Lagoon (the *Leggi Speciali per Venezia* have as their aim the safeguarding of Venice and its Lagoon, and among other provisions they explicitly ban the excavating of any new canals) and creating a confined area lacking any through-flow and therefore at high risk of anoxiation, would lead to a very significant increase of traffic on the already highly congested Canale dei Petroli, and would further maintain the presence of polluting emissions from the ships close to the homes of venetian residents of the Santa Marta quarter. Moreover, it is clear that digging a canal which passes through a highly toxic mud landfill would provoke an environmental disaster, with the dispersion of pollutants into the water and atmosphere.

### **PROJECT BY VENETO REGION**

**Idrovia Padova-Venezia.** In May 2016 Veneto Regional President Zaia declared that the Padova-Venezia Hydroway (*Idrovia*) was «immediately ready for construction» («immediatamente cantierabile»). The Hydroway is a navigable canal partly constructed in the Sixties (in the years of the construction of the large industrial area) which was intended to connect Padova and Venice. Its construction was interrupted with the fortunate halting of the works to create another industrial zone South of Fusina, where the Hydroway was to flow into the sea. Now, however, a number of Municipalities are urging the Region to reinstate the works for the completing of the artificial canal, in order to ensure the hydraulic security and stability of the territory around Padova.

This would involve a number of problems and risks. Firstly, the Hydroway would flush the polluted waters of the Veneto rivers into the Lagoon. This would cause the sea level to rise by ca. 12 cm, a phenomenon most likely to occur in the autumnal season, when the river beds are likely to overflow and pour their polluted waters into the Lagoon concomitantly with the *acque alte* phenomenon.

Furthermore, in order to connect the mouth of the Hydroway to the Canale dei Petroli, it would be necessary to dig another large navigation canal in the area South of Fusina, an area rich in salt marshes (*barene*) which would thus disappear.

And finally, the Hydroway would of course cause a further increase of shipping traffic on the Canale dei Petroli: coming from Padova, river barges would enter the Lagoon and they would enter into the sea through the Malamocco port. There are much better and safer solutions for the hydraulic securitisation of the Padova territories, which would avoid endangering Venice and the Lagoon: the prevention of flooding of the rivers can be realised with dry detention basins also on the low plain. Furthermore and crucially, the Padova Interport does not see the completion of the canal as economically viable nor convenient. Thus it is clear that the Hydroway, as well as being extremely damaging, is actually not deemed useful; nevertheless it is a real threat, a danger looming over Venice and the Lagoon for reasons strictly tied to political and electoral interests.

### **RESPONSIBILITY OF THE VENICE MUNICIPALITY (COMUNE DI VENEZIA)**

**Wave motion.** Since the instalment of the current municipal committee, one year ago, the problem of wave motion has become more and more serious and no provisions have been made for the situation to be brought under control. It is sufficient to transit through the Canal Grande to realise that all kinds of vessels travel along it at such speed as to endanger the stability of the buildings and the safety of their inhabitants. Many national and civic associations have been planning demonstrations on this issue.

**Pollution from naval traffic.** The Mayor (who is the highest civic authority in matter of public health and hygiene) has failed to establish any form of control to evaluate the risks

linked to pollution. Although there is no car traffic, the city of Venice has a very high incidence of lung cancers; besides this, the marble of the monuments are sulfated and are thus disappearing day by day. In the spring of 2016, German environmental association Nabu returned to Venice and carried out a new test of the levels of fine particle emissions from ships, ferries and motor boats, which it found to be extremely high. Incredibly, there are no monitoring stations in Venice which would allow for the rigorous measurement of such emissions.

**Population decrease and Tourism.** Although the city is losing its inhabitants at an astonishing pace, no provisions have been made in order to contain the influx of tourists nor to reinstate the old Planning Regulations (*Piani regolatori*) which made the change of use of apartments very difficult or even impossible. Conversely, Venice is becoming one enormous Bed&Breakfast, devoid of inhabitants. The municipal committee, while preparing the new Municipal building and development regulations (*Regolamento edilizio comunale*) which are about to be approved, has received numerous solicitations on behalf of property-owners and Confedilizia who want to see the property market further liberalised: indeed, very small B&Bs are soon to be regularised (including in Mestre) «in order to facilitate such activities» («agevolare questo tipo di attività»), in the words of assessore De Martin. On the other hand, there is a strong demand for habitable property in Venice: many young people who come to study in Venice are interested in remaining in the city after their studies. However, the housing market is inaccessible due to prohibitive costs, and the job market is also languishing, as the only jobs available are in the touristic sector (usually as unqualified work). Similar problems are of course common in other European historic towns and cities, but Venice is a particularly serious case given that it is not the historic centre of a larger city, but a city which, as a whole, is on the path to extinction. Italia Nostra has repeatedly written to the City councillor for tourism in order to offer and explain its proposals for the containment of tourist flows and support of the city's inhabitants, but no response has ever been received.

**Tessera City and airport.** The Mayor of Venice, as well as being fully on board with the Port Authority inasmuch as concerns the developments discussed above, is also in agreement with the Airport Authorities which intend to expand the airport, with plans for a second runway (thanks to tourists attracted to the city, Marco Polo Airport is the second largest in Italy) and, what's worse, with plans for further construction developments surrounding the Lagoon, to include hotels, tourist accommodation and reception structures etc.

**Venetian forts.** Recently Italia Nostra won the appeal it had brought before the regional Administrative Courts of Veneto against Venice Municipality's project for the "valorisation" of the Forte di Sant'Andrea, the most important fort in the Venice area (for a short period Giacomo Casanova was held prisoner here), designed by Sanmicheli in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. According to the project, behind the Fort and the Port of Lido a «collection of notable new buildings» («compendio di notevole nuova edificazione») was to be constructed, including hotels, spas, guesthouses and even an infinity pool along the Lagoon! The project, now cleansed of its patently illegal elements at an administrative level, which caused it to be rejected by the Administrative Courts, will undoubtedly be proposed again by the Municipality. The fear is that we will witness the severe tampering with an area of high artistic and historic significance, facing the entrance in the port mouth of Lido, for the purpose of the construction of new hotels. All the most important national and local cultural associations have complained about the absence from this project of any strategic "cultural valorisation" plan (as prescribed by Italy's Law on the Cultural Heritage and Landscape (*Codice dei Beni Culturali e del Paesaggio*) for the Venetian forts. Indeed, they risk being handed over to the highest bidder for the creating of new luxury tourist accommodation or, in the case of the Arsenale, the danger is that it will

be portioned out and ceded building by building to single firms, fashion brands etc., with no overall vision or plan. Cultural associations and citizens are instead pressing for a comprehensive plan for the restoration and regeneration of the Arsenale, which alongside the traditional activities of small-scale shipbuilding might include a museum complex for study, research and maritime and navigation activities. Furthermore, they are pressing for a comprehensive plan for the “cultural valorisation” of the Venetian forts as a whole, also in the light of the fact that the Forts – together with all the forts of the *Stato da Mar e da Terra* of the ancient Venetian Republic - are seeking nomination to become the second UNESCO World Heritage site of the city of Venice.

**Misguided economic development prospects.** The Mayor of Venice has recently stated that «il futuro di questo Comune non è Venezia ma è Mestre dove sta la gente che lavora» («the future of this Municipality is not Venice but Mestre, where working people are to be found»). He has asked Prime Minister Renzi for investments in new business linked to export and the port area and for fees on tourist arrivals (trains and hotels). His proposal is thus to incentivise tourism and the earnings deriving from it as well as from the port. This is the exact opposite of what would be required in order to give a prospect of future - and of future survival - to Venice and its Lagoon. It is perhaps not a surprise that this is the proposal coming from a Mayor and a Municipal Committee who are (all bar one single City Councillor) not Venetian, and who therefore probably ignore the measures required for the safeguarding of the Lagoon and for the protection of a fragile city like Venice.

## RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT

**Large Ships.** Four years after the promulgation of the Clini-Passera Decree, whose aim was to block the transit of large cruise ships through the Lagoon, nothing has happened. And paradoxically we must say that this is fortunate, given that the Government had already expressed a favourable view with regard to the project of digging the Contorta canal, which had preliminarily been rejected by the Via Commission (*Valutazione Impatto Ambientale*) and which has now been replaced by the Port Authority and the Mayor with the equally disastrous “Tresse nuovo” described above.

The Government should instead have set up an international competition in order to resolve the Large Ships problem. The aim should not be to plan a terminal inside the Lagoon or the port mouths, but to convert the current Stazione Marittima so as to enable it to deal with a sustainable volume of quality and non-polluting traffic, preserving work places.

Indeed, if on the one hand the projects aimed at maintaining the presence of cruise ships (and also cargo ships) inside the Lagoon (whether with access through the Lido or the Malamocco harbours) are the trigger for erosion, the projects which concentrate on the area outside the port (*avamposto*) at the entrance of Lido also aim to intervene on an area of high naturalistic interest. Of the out-of-port (*avamposto*) projects, the most advanced in terms of planning (Duferco project) consists in constructing a kilometre-long cement dock, on two stories, held up by semi-submersible pylons, close by the Cavallino pine grove. This project would require excavation works for the laying of these structures and periodic excavations to prevent such structures from being buried by the sands brought downstream by the river Piave. The second project, the work of a team of academics from Iuav University in Venice, has lower levels of criticality, as it is centred on the construction of light floating docks, which would thus be easily removable, to be docked in turn at the Mose artificial island, situated at the centre of the canal, where it is naturally deepest, and would therefore not require any digging works. The architects of this project have declared themselves ready to make a gift of this project to the Italian State, but have as yet received no reply from Minister Delrio (Italian Minister for Transport and Infrastructures).

**Arsenale.** Two years on from the discovery of the extremely severe corruption linked to the Mose project (a public work for which it was only possible to obtain approval by means of the corruption of the highest ranking decision-makers, as the project was both riddled with errors in terms of engineering and planning and contained a host of potentially explosive unknowns), the Government's commissioners tasked with the job of finishing it are on the verge of committing yet another colossal mistake. Consorzio Venezia had planned for the maintenance of the Mose's enormous bulkheads to take place in the Arsenale. That is, the world's most ancient navy yard, mentioned by Dante among others. As well as being extremely vast, the bulkheads are also extremely polluted because, having been made not out of steel but – in order to contain costs – out of tinsplate, they require a special protection with sacrificial zinc anodes, which release pollutants. Furthermore, the operations to remove marine fouling, which will be deposited in vast quantities on the bulkheads, will require large size industrial warehouses and a purifier to deal with the pollution. According to the project, such buildings are to be constructed inside the Arsenale, a historic monument of unique value. What's worse is that they will be constructed in the Northern area of the Arsenale (Arsenale Nord), adjacent to the historic Istrian stone dry docks, which are unique in the Mediterranean and are still in use and productive in the small-scale ship-building industry. The last *arsenalotti* (specialised naval workers) were dismissed from their jobs last year and, after centuries of uninterrupted shipbuilding activity, the Arsenale will cease to exist, to be transformed from a shipbuilding establishment to an industrial establishment.

The appeals were made to the President of the Republic, the President of the Veneto Region etc. by the Forum Futuro Arsenale, a forum of all Venetian cultural associations which joined forces with the purpose of saving the Arsenale and turn it into an opportunity for an economic and cultural relaunch for Venice. Unfortunately the appeals have fallen on deaf ears. The commissioners are determined to complete the Mose as soon as possible - such is the plan of the Government - and the search of a new location would only prolong this period. The appeal by the Forum, which has already identified a suitable location in an abandoned industrial area in Marghera, has gone unheeded. The political will is clearly lacking. The Forum has, furthermore, recently written - this too as yet unanswered - to the Government's anti-corruption commissioner Raffaele Cantone due to the fact that no tender notice has been published for the maintenance of Mose and the assignation is about to take place in contravention of Italian and EU norms.

**Mose.** Following the discovery of the grave corruption case surrounding Mose, Italia Nostra had asked Prime Minister Renzi for a moratorium period in order to re-evaluate the operation and, potentially, to reconvert it. Italia Nostra expressed its belief that it was a mistake to draw a line of separation between the Mose operation and the corruption, and that the project itself had actually only been possible thanks to and by means of the corruption. The Government has decided to see the project through nevertheless. At present, even before its conclusion, its deleterious effects on the Lagoon are already visible: indeed, in these very days the publication of a CNR (Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, Italian National Research Council) study is awaited, which has been ascertaining how the Mose has been the cause of the lowering of the sea-level by up to 8 mm in the Lagoon!

### **DESIRABLE ACTIONS ON THE PART OF THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT**

The Italian government should put in place vigorous provisions for the safeguarding of Venice and the Lagoon. In order to protect the health of the inhabitants and the preservation of the monuments it is imperative that anti-particulate filters be installed on the ships entering the city (as is already the case for the Baltic Sea ports) and on all other polluting vessels.

Furthermore, an international public tender should be held in order to find a solution to the Large Ships problem. The aim should not be to find a new way of planning a terminal inside the Lagoon or the inlets, but to reconvert the current Stazione Marittima in order for it to be able to deal with a sustainable volume of quality, non-polluting traffic, while preserving workplaces.

Furthermore, the Government should promulgate a special law in support of residents with a form of tax relief for property-owners who rent to residents and penalties for those who make a profit from short-term tourist rent. A new special law should also introduce tax breaks to allow traditional productive activities, also not linked to tourism, to return and flourish in Venice.

Recently Europa Nostra has launched the proposal - to which Italia Nostra has readily lent its support - to involve the EU directly in making Venice the third Capital of Europe. This would allow monumental palaces which are currently in the process of being given over to privates by the Municipality, the Region and the Government for the creation of new hotels, to find an ideal destination and function.

Furthermore, Italia Nostra is currently working together with the Società di Storia Naturale on a project for the morphological and functional recovery of the Lagoon beginning from the Central Lagoon: the plan is to restore to their original state and function the network of canals currently condemned to atrophy by the Canale dei Petroli, which has also altered the regime of the currents in the area. Once again, we can say that not all is lost in and for the Lagoon, if only the political will can be found.

For all the reasons exposed and explained above, Italia Nostra views the possibility of the site of Venice and its Lagoon being entered on the Danger List as a little window of hope, also in consideration of the attention which the head of the Italian government has always shown towards Europe. If UNESCO were to decide not to proceed with this plan, the authorities which has so far been responsible for the gradual destruction of the Outstanding Values of the site would find legitimation as to their actions and conduct.



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