



## **The 7 Most Endangered 2016**

Programme run by **Europa Nostra (EN)**,  
the Voice of Cultural Heritage in Europe,  
in partnership with the **European Investment Bank Institute (EIBI)**

### **City of Venice and its Lagoon, Italy**

#### **Main Conclusions of the EN/EIBI Task Force mission to Venice on 29-30 March 2017**

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Luxembourg, July 2017

## 1. Venice and its Lagoon – an inter-linked and inter-dependent system. Its history and current status

On the occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in Istanbul in July 2016, Plácido Domingo, President of Europa Nostra and UNESCO ‘Good Will Ambassador’ wrote to the Director General of UNESCO, recalling that Europa Nostra and the European Investment Bank Institute declared on 16 March 2016 that the Venice Lagoon is ‘*The Most Endangered Site in Europe*’ as part of the 7 Most Endangered programme and asked for the inclusion of Venice and its Lagoon on the List of World Heritage in Danger<sup>1</sup>. The World Heritage Committee made a number of recommendations and asked that Italy report on its actions before 1 February 2017<sup>2</sup>. The main purpose of the recent EN/EIBI mission was to assess the current situation and to prepare recommendations from Europa Nostra regarding Venice and the Lagoon.

Venice and its Lagoon constitute a highly complex system of major historical, artistic and environmental interests currently passing through a delicate phase in the permanent search for a balance between social/economic considerations, the restoration and conservation of the environmental system, and the care of the World Heritage Site.

The history of Venice and its Lagoon provides evidence of the interdependency of all these systems, as parts of a living body that can survive only if they are managed simultaneously and in a **sustainable way**. The livelihood and well-being of the population living in the historic centre and in surrounding urban areas is fundamental to ensuring the long-term sustainability of the cultural heritage of Venice and the hydrological and morphological stability of the lagoon. This is a dynamic balance in which all components are constantly subject to change:

- i) In recent decades economic activity has altered substantially in response to both human desires and new technology; the region has seen a shift from industrial activity, for instance at Marghera, to tourism. These changes have frequently been driven by external forces, hard for national, regional or local authorities to influence. New technology, concentration and economies of scale in the chemical industry led to the phasing-out of the petro-chemical industry whereas “low-cost” air transport, residential tourist accommodation based on internet technology and larger cruise ships have stimulated mass tourism as the dominant economic activity of the city centre but mostly characterised by low *per-capita* expenditure;
- ii) the hydro-morphology of the Lagoon is influenced by water flows and sediments coming from inland, the tide and water from the sea, the circulation of both water and sediments within the Lagoon, the physical form of the canals and salt marshes (the “barene”), wave action generated by maritime transport, the future operation of the MOSE, etc. Moreover, climate change will introduce additional uncertainty requiring the adaptation of both the urban and natural environments to long-term change.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1 for the full text of the letter dated 1.07.2016 from Plácido Domingo, President of Europa Nostra, to Mrs Irina Bokova, Director General of UNESCO

<sup>2</sup> See appendix 2 for the decisions Report of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee at its 40th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in Istanbul.

## **2. Risks and conflicts, current visions and long-term objectives**

Both Venice and the Lagoon are compelled to adapt constantly to external factors and uncertainties by adopting solutions, either *hard* (physical infrastructure) or *soft* (governance, operational framework), responsive to known and as yet unknown threats, in order to keep the balance and maximise benefits for the livelihood of the inhabitants of Venice and the preservation of the Lagoon. In short, **adaptability and sustainability** are key concepts in the approach to be recommended. The depopulation of the historic centre is another severe and negative consequence of incorrect policies adopted and of the incapacity to adapt to external factors. The weakening of traditional territorial communities, the gentrification (desertification of the historic centre), and suburbanisation of Venetian urban areas are also taking place. Mass tourism also involves a deep impact on the historic, social and environmental tissue. Among the adverse consequences, this provokes the exodus of vernacular population and competition for resources and scarce infrastructure investment.

Keeping the balance has been difficult. Historically, Venetians used the Lagoon as a defence against invasion, to develop commerce and trading, creating a port, an industrial site, and more recently, a tourist attraction. These social/economic objectives were achieved at the same time as managing inflows of water and sediments into the Lagoon by diverting rivers and protecting the coastal area and controlling flooding from the Terra Firma and the sea. The Lagoon is a space that has been used and managed for centuries to serve Venice, and in so doing inherently unstable conditions have been created which need continuous management. Excessive sedimentation in the past coming from inland could have turned the Lagoon to a flat dry (non-humid) area/environment, in the absence of human intervention – such as river diversion around the Lagoon. However, this action plus the acceptance of heavy maritime traffic in the Lagoon (large commercial and cruise ships, enormous traffic of smaller boats) has led more recently to excessive erosion due to natural subsidence, the lack of river sediments, dredging of large maritime canals inside the Lagoon and wave erosion from ships that could transform the Lagoon into a stretch of open sea. This is an actual threat that should be reversed as soon as possible; otherwise it will be beyond the capacity of human intervention to control it.

## **3. Low resilience of the site, risk of loss of human control, unsatisfactory current situation. Need for analysis, adaptation and long-term sustainability**

This dichotomy and the tendency to favour economic activity/livelihood over the preservation of nature is currently dictating people's perception and opinions about the future of Venice and the Lagoon and the best solutions to support long term objectives. During the mission, contradictory opinions and visions were expressed:

- (i) either protecting the Lagoon and its preservation as a natural asset with no human intervention, i.e. letting nature take its course and re-establish natural conditions, though ignoring the Lagoon's anthropogenic character modified in the past by measures taken – the opinions about the artificial “barene” are an example; or
- (ii) to consider economic activity and short-term revenue as the predominant concern.

The governance, planning and decision-making process over the last decades has suffered from these conflicting opinions and interests. The special law of 1973 on the safeguarding of Venice and the Lagoon was unanimously approved but conditions – industrial and tourism development, the Lagoon's hydro-morphology, climate change, and related external factors mentioned before - are substantially different four decades later. The 1992 Plan started to take account of these opposing visions, but the updating of the Plan undertaken in 2016 and the several observations

expressed during the public consultation show that these opposing visions/opinions are still present.

A number of proposed solutions are hostage to this deadlock, e.g. the MOSE, the preferred location for the cruise-ship terminal, the maritime canal or banning cruise ships from the Lagoon altogether, the type and size of touristic activity, expansion of the airport, new container terminal, raising the level of Venice to complement the MOSE, etc.

#### **4. Need for a change in governance**

The current governance framework seems inadequate to cope with the context and thus fails to contribute to the definition of a **new way forward** that should be based on the following:

- (i) recognise the strong link, inter-action and inter-dependency between the two parts of the same living body;
- (ii) recognise the need to guarantee the long-term sustainability of both the city of Venice and its Lagoon in a balanced way;
- (iii) identify the current threats to both parts of the “living body”, i.e. on the one hand, the stagnation of overall economic activity, depopulation and the increase of unemployment, and on the other side the negative impact on the hydro-morphology and preservation of the Lagoon;
- (iv) identify “smart” and sustainable solutions creating the conditions for a consensus and “win-win” approach, promote transparency of the decision-making process and public interest as a priority.

#### **5. Search for consensus, building a “win-win” approach, a possible way forward**

During the mission, there were signs that it might be possible to move in this direction. One example was the view expressed by the recently appointed President of the North Adriatic Sea Port Authority in favour of solutions that could preserve the above-mentioned balance, e.g. in relation to large cruise ships:

- i) moving the terminal of the large cruise ships to a new port area to be developed on the Marghera site;
- ii) access by the Canale dei Petroli;
- iii) increase transport capacity from the airport to the area across the mainland;
- iv) enhance corporate social responsibility of cruise-ship companies through a voluntary commitment on emission reductions to a “Blue Flag” programme (fuel with less than 0.1% sulphur content) and the conversion to LNG.

The location of the terminal in Marghera could have multiple advantages:

- i) initiate the decontamination of the industrial zone;
- ii) create a pole of new activities including a scientific and new technology park and/or complementary tourism of a different nature to reduce the burden on the city centre and to increase the number of overnight stays in Venice;
- iii) link to activities in the mainland with a potential for diversification and creation of employment;
- iv) Reduce the tourist intensive occupation of the means of transport in the Lagoon, and in the streets, public and private spaces of the historic city, and consequently, the commercial monocultural threat.

The current mass mono-tourism focused on a narrow type of activity and income is unsustainable and highly vulnerable to external factors. Diversifying the offer and the demand is key to **increasing the resilience** of this activity. The current situation demonstrates that the current approach and vision ignore the need to connect Venice organically with its Lagoon and the historically linked surrounding areas. The historic city and the other municipalities have turned their back on the Lagoon, by considering it merely as a means to transport tourists to the centre either through large ships as close as possible to the city centre, or from the airport – an example is the excessive speed of water-taxis where the priority is on shortening travel times with little regard to the impact on the Lagoon’s morphology. Economic activity in the Lagoon is limited to fishing using practices that again show an unbalanced perspective. Tourism directly related to the Lagoon is almost non-existent, thus failing to create any economic, cultural and social value for either tourists or residents.

The current situation is unsatisfactory threatening both urban Venice and the Lagoon; the underlying causes need to be removed in accordance with the Task Force’s recommendations. It is far from certain that the conditions to move to a new approach based on consensus are already in place. However, there are signs of likely change encouraged by significant entities such as the North Adriatic Port Authority, which is preparing proposals to address those issues under its responsibility (see above). The Municipality of Venice intends also shortly to submit a programme based on its views.

The current governance framework is complex with a large number of different local, regional and national entities involved in the decision-making process with different and sometimes competing interests that do not favour efficient, balanced solutions or consensus.

## **6. Reversing the situation, potential for consensual solutions, keeping the balance**

In the short-term, the most important goal is to reverse the current unsustainable situation; external entities such as Europa Nostra and UNESCO should contribute to this change of course. That said, adopting a negative or backward-looking approach will not help and could contribute to reinforcing the conflictual context. During the mission the Task Force confirmed some of the threats to the city and Lagoon but also saw the potential for consensual and sustainable solutions. However, that potential is not yet a reality and needs to be turned into concrete proposals. In these circumstances the Task Force feels that the choice for the UNESCO World Heritage Committee lies between:

- putting the Lagoon on the List of Endangered Sites at the 2017 meeting of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee; or
- deferring a decision and placing the site “on hold” or probation for a period to allow the authorities the opportunity to confirm that that the situation will be reversed.

In the opinion of the EN/EIBI Task Force either option might enable a more consensual approach but on balance the Task Force feels that placing the Venice lagoon on the List of World Heritage in Danger is most likely to concentrate minds on finding a solution sooner rather than later. Subsequent to the Task Force Mission and the letter dated 10/04/2017 from Mrs Sneška Quaedvlieg-Mihailović, Secretary General, Europa Nostra to Dr Mechtild Rössler, Director UNESCO World Heritage Centre<sup>3</sup>, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee at its 41st session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in Krakow recognised the efforts of the Italian national, regional and local authorities to mitigate the threats to the potentially Endangered Site and has deferred a review until 2019<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 3 for the full text of the letter dated 10.04.2017 from Mrs Sneška Quaedvlieg-Mihailović, Secretary General of Europa Nostra to Dr Mechtild Rössler, Director UNESCO World Heritage Centre.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 4 for the Decisions Report of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee at its 41st session of the

## 7. Recommendations

The EN/EIBI Task Force suggests that any policy for the future of Venice and its Lagoon should recognise that the issues facing the city include the problems of:

- Pollution
- Erosion
- Ecological degradation
- Unacceptable change to the hydro-morphology
- De-population
- Adverse effects of tourism

And that any policy for the future should therefore seek to:

- Reduce pollution to acceptable levels
- Significantly reduce erosion
- Re-establish ecological balance
- Re-balance hydrology and develop resilience to morphological change
- Halt and if possible reverse the decline in population
- Mitigate the adverse effects of tourism

In order to meet these objectives, and recognising that a sustainable future for Venice depends on a holistic approach taking into account cultural, social, environmental and economic factors as recommended in the report 'Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe', the Task Force recommends:

- The establishment of a new and more adequate governance framework to facilitate the achievement of these objectives by promoting consensus, seeking a balance between human livelihood/economic activity and the preservation of the Lagoon with greater transparency in the decision-making process to ensure that the public interest is fully served;
- That a monitoring programme for the morphology of the Lagoon is set up based on a common multi-dimensional model used by all local and regional authorities involved, run by an independent body with the obligation of publishing the information with an agreed frequency that can be used as a basis for solutions that meet the required objectives and as a means of measuring their effectiveness;
- The development of a sustainable tourism strategy diversifying the offer and which gives full consideration to the development of tourism linked to the Lagoon and the Veneto region as a whole;
- That all tourists should contribute to running, conserving and developing the city by paying a daily charge for access to the city across the lagoon. These revenues could be used to build an urban renewal fund to support community projects;
- The value of tourism for the city should be measured by its overall economic impact rather than by simply recording visitor numbers
- In the short term the environmental and aesthetic damage caused by large cruise ships should be mitigated by restricting the number of passengers disembarking at any one time and by restrictions on the size and number of vessels entering the lagoon and making use

of the Giudecca Canal. Similarly to Barcelona, the other major Mediterranean port of cruise passenger (dis)embarkation, cruise ship operators, have recognised that the visitor experience for their passengers is a concern to them as is the impact that a large number of simultaneous arrivals has on the experience of other visitors to the city and on its inhabitants.

- For environmental reasons a complete exclusion of large ships from the Lagoon is desirable and this should be the long-term ambition; however such an exclusion could have a significant impact on the activity of the Port, on employment, both direct and indirect and possibly on maintaining Venice as an economically active community. A study looking at all these impacts, and investigating alternatives to the present arrangements, is urgently needed.
- Enforce short-term strict measures requiring minor investment (e.g. GPS in boats) to eliminate or at least mitigate the negative impacts on the morphology of the Lagoon caused by traffic, including speeding, and fishing;
- Continue to support eco-investment programmes (e.g. as Life Vimine) to re-establish the morphology of the Lagoon;
- Consider measures to reduce air and water pollution in the historic city and Lagoon for example from the diesel engines of vaporetti and through the Port Authority Blue Flag commitment to reduce emissions from large ships;
- Using the monitoring data, the operational mode of the MOSE should be subordinated to the need to keep the balance between the preservation of the Lagoon, the city's heritage and sustainable economic activity ensuring the livelihood of Venetians.
- All solutions should be adaptable to changes caused by external factors, increasing the resilience of both the city and the Lagoon and ensuring their long-term sustainability

## Appendix 1

### **Letter dated dated 11.07.2016 from Plácido Domingo, President of Europa Nostra, to Mrs Irina Bokova Director General of UNESCO**

The Hague, 11 July 2016

Mrs Irina Bokova Director General UNESCO

Dear Madam Director General,

I am writing to you as President of Europa Nostra as well as UNESCO ‘Good Will Ambassador’, on the occasion of the 40th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in Istanbul.

First of all, I wish to convey to you and to the Staff of the World Heritage Centre as well as to the member states of the World Heritage Committee, the best wishes of Europa Nostra for a successful meeting in Istanbul. I also wish to congratulate you for your impressive leadership and dedication in promoting the cause of heritage, both in times of peace and - alas - increasingly in times of conflicts. I was particularly pleased to hear about your much appreciated Europe Lecture which you delivered, upon the invitation of Europa Nostra, on 13 June in The Hague, the city where the headquarters of our organisation are located. I very much hope that UNESCO and Europa Nostra will continue to intensify their dialogue and partnership, especially as we are preparing for the European Year of Cultural Heritage in 2018.

More specifically, I wish to draw your special attention to one specific World Heritage Site which is of priceless value for Europe and the World but continues to face serious threats for its present and its future: the city of Venice and its Lagoon. As you know, Europa Nostra, together with the European Investment Bank Institute, declared on 16 March 2016 that the Venice Lagoon is ‘The Most Endangered Site in Europe’. Consequently, I am pleased to forward to you a document prepared by our founding member organisation, Italia Nostra, summarizing the many threats and challenges with which the Venice Lagoon is confronted today. For all these reasons we are convinced that also UNESCO should urgently put Venice and its Lagoon on the List of World Heritage in Danger.

However, Europa Nostra, together with its Italian member organisations Italia Nostra and Fondo Ambiente Italiano (FAI), wishes to express its understanding for and support to the considerations and recommendations contained in the Report on the State of Conservation of Venice and its Lagoon prepared by the World Heritage Centre for the meeting of the World Heritage Committee in Istanbul. Together with UNESCO, we wish to launch a renewed appeal to Italian authorities to urgently adopt the necessary measures for the safeguard of the City and its Lagoon. We indeed keep the hope that Italian authorities at all levels, with



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due involvement of civil society, will adopt - without further delay - a bold and radical plan for the safeguard of the most beautiful City in the world.

I am convinced that Italy - with the collaboration of EU and UN Institutions -, is ready to live up to this historical responsibility. We also urge the President of the Council of Ministers of Italy, Matteo Renzi, to extend his full support to our appeal.

Europa Nostra, and other international and national heritage and environmental NGOs concerned, stand at the entire disposal of UNESCO and the Italian authorities to engage in a thorough consultation process for the sake of ensuring a more promising and sustainable future for Venice and its Lagoon.

Looking forward to hearing about your deliberations in Istanbul, and more generally to the continuation of our important cooperation for the benefit of cultural heritage which constitute such a strategic resource for Europe and indeed the entire world,

Respectfully & cordially yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Plácido Domingo', with a large, stylized flourish above the name.

Plácido Domingo  
President of Europa Nostra

## Appendix 2

### **Decisions Report of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee at its 40th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in Istanbul, 10 – 20 July 2016**

#### Venice and its lagoon (Italy) (C 394)

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Document WHC/16/40.COM/7B.Add,
2. Recalling Decision 38 COM 7B.27, adopted at its 38th session (Doha, 2014),
3. Expresses its extreme concern that the combination of previous developments, ongoing transformations and proposed projects within the property which are threatening serious deterioration of the eco and cultural systems of the Lagoon and irreversible changes to the overall relationship between the City and its Lagoon, as well as the loss of architectural and town-planning coherence of the historic city, all of which would lead to substantive and irreversible loss of authenticity and integrity;
4. Considers that the property requires an immediate improvement to the planning tools available through the creation of:
  1. an integrated strategy for all on-going and planned developments within the property,
  2. a three-dimensional morphological model and
  3. a sustainable tourism strategy, all of which should be reflected in an updated Management Plan for the property; this revised planning approach should also be founded on a shared vision of authorities and stakeholders which affords priority to sustaining the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property and its landscape and seascape setting;
5. Reiterates its request to the State Party to enforce speed limits and regulate the number and type of boats in the Lagoon and in the canals;
6. Also reiterates its request to the State Party to adopt, as a matter of urgency, a legal document introducing prohibition of the largest ships and tankers to enter the Lagoon and requests the State Party to put in place all necessary strategic, planning and management frameworks to this end;
7. Also requests the State Party to halt all new projects within the property, prior to the mid-term assessment of the Management Plan, and the submission of details of proposed developments, together with Heritage Impact Assessments (HIAs) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), to the World Heritage Centre, in conformity with Paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines, for review by the Advisory Bodies;
8. Endorses the recommendations of the 2015 mission and further requests the State Party to fully implement these recommendations;
9. Requests furthermore the State Party to revise the proposed buffer zone for the property in line with the ICOMOS technical review and submit it to the World Heritage Centre as a

minor boundary modification, by **1 December 2016**, for examination by the Committee at its 41st session in 2017;

10. Finally requests that the State Party implement all urgent measures highlighted in the mission report and submit to the World Heritage Committee a detailed report on the state of conservation of the property and the implementation of the above, by **1 February 2017** for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 41st session in 2017, **with a view, if no substantial progress is accomplished by the State Party until then, to consider inscribing the property on the List of the World Heritage in Danger.**

## Appendix 3

**Letter dated 10.04.2017 from Mrs Sneška Quaedvlieg-Mihailović,  
Secretary General of Europa Nostra, to Dr Mechtild Rössler,  
Director UNESCO World Heritage Centre**

The Hague, 10 April 2017

Dr Mechtild Rössler  
Director World Heritage Centre UNESCO

Subject: Venice Lagoon – THE Most Endangered Site in Europe

Dear Mrs Rössler,

I am writing to you on behalf of Europa Nostra, the Voice of Cultural Heritage in Europe, to communicate to you some preliminary conclusions following the recent mission conducted on 29-30 March 2017 by the Europa Nostra taskforce to Venice and its Lagoon<sup>1</sup>. Firstly, let me stress that in view of the limited time available, the preliminary nature of these conclusions should be underlined. Moreover, during the course of its conversations, our taskforce was made aware that certain of its interlocutors were in the final stages of preparing replies to the World Heritage Centre on the issues raised last July by the World Heritage Committee. For obvious reasons, these additional considerations could not be shared with us at this point. Nevertheless, our taskforce could identify several aspects requiring further attention, enquiry and development.

As we all know, the Venice Lagoon is - in itself - a very complex and fragile environmental and anthropogenic system. The historic city of Venice is of comparable complexity and fragility, even if for different, though interconnected, reasons. When the two “systems” are combined, as they must be - if only because of their proximity and interaction -, their combined complexity and sensitivity are probably unequalled elsewhere in the world, and have also contributed to their combined listing by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. Accordingly, any measure or action taken in one “system” inevitably affects the other and therefore should not be seen in isolation. In addition, any such measure or action (or inaction) has considerable consequences within the single system, even if the impact on the other system is disregarded.

<sup>1</sup> Please see below a list of the organisations and their representatives whom the taskforce were able to meet during its mission to Venice on 29-30/3/2017.



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Without wishing to divert attention from the huge challenges in themselves related to the conservation and revival of the Venice Lagoon, we acknowledge that the task of the principal public actors is further complicated by the diversity of opinions, and even sometimes contradictory advice, from a variety of stakeholders and sources: scientific, academic, citizen, heritage, commercial/economic, institutional etc. Hence, any proposal or initiative is likely to engender an equal and opposite reaction from interested parties, highly committed to the Lagoon's destiny but with a divergent view of the appropriate response.

In the light of the above, we are of the opinion that one of the key tasks of the public authorities concerned should be to build an inclusive governance framework based on due consultation with a broad spectrum of stakeholders, both public and private, and transparent and complete communication on related decision-making processes and agreements. The past and present controversies are illustrative of the need for such a framework, in the absence of which the adoption of urgent measures will be further postponed or will become entangled in administrative/judicial procedures far lengthier than if an inclusive governance framework had been applied from the outset, however time consuming the setting-up of such a framework may *a priori* seem to be.

The outline of the challenges identified by our task-force may be divided into two categories, namely the socio-economic challenges as well as the natural and environmental challenges. Like the relationship between the Lagoon and the City these challenges are interlinked; so the taxonomy below is artificial rather than presenting a physical reality.

#### Socio-Economic Challenges: Initial Observations by our Task-Force

The de-population of the Historic City of Venice has had an inverse relationship with the growth of mass tourism. The two phenomena may not be directly connected, correlation doesn't imply causality, but the gradual displacement of the local population may be in part due to the erosion of neighbourhood amenities in favour of those required by mass tourism as well as the reduction in employment opportunities for the same reason. The disappearance of the previous heavy industrial activity (e.g. at Marghera), while beneficial for the natural environment, has been detrimental to the human "ecology", a process which in turn has adversely affected the historic city's built fabric.

In considering mass tourism, the traffic generated by cruise liners should be distinguished from that generated by day-trippers or brief visitors. It is estimated that the wider Lagoon area, with primarily the historic city, attracts nearly 25 million visitors p.a. Of that total about 1,8 million or 7% are cruise liner passengers. Thus, the impact of cruise liner traffic in terms of numbers is, for the time being, limited. However, the impact of the cruise liners in environmental terms on the Lagoon and in economic terms on the City, is substantial, as a clear case of the inter-linking and opposition of the two zones.

Though employment directly related to the cruise activity may be relatively small (possibly less than 2k), the indirect employment in providing services to cruise tourism is a multiple of the direct employment (possibly over 10k). Therefore, any measures to limit Venice as a cruise liner departure port risk aggravating unemployment and the depopulation of the historic city and consequently, imperilling its built environment. That is not to suggest that

measures to divert cruise traffic from vulnerable areas of the Lagoon (e.g. the Bacino S. Marco/Giudecca) and to limit harmful air pollution (through banning high sulphur bunker) shouldn't be taken. They are indispensable to ensure a sustainable future both for the Lagoon and the historic city of Venice.

We welcome the efforts undertaken by Italian public authorities (both at national and local level) to find the best alternative to the current traffic/itinerary of cruiseliners in the Lagoon. However, we are aware that no decision has yet been taken on such an alternative plan which reinforces our view that the Venice Lagoon remains an endangered World Heritage Site.

The challenge posed by the surge in mass tourism in recent years is to increase the spend (or duration of stay), to diversify both its demand and offer including sustainable touristic activities enhancing the role of the Lagoon, and to limit the negative externalities on the historic city and its Lagoon or at least to make short stay visitors pay a proper price for the cost burden imposed on both. We feel encouraged by some measures which the City of Venice and the Italian government are currently considering to introduce and urge them to make a final decision – in due consultation with public and private stakeholders concerned, including the local inhabitants - and implement those measures without further delay.

#### Natural and Environmental Challenges: Initial Observations by our Task-Force

The deterioration of the Lagoon may be attributable partly to direct anthropogenic activity (the dredging of canals, the inadequate enforcement of speed limits, water pollution, erosion/insufficient maintenance of sandbanks and shoals (“barene” and “velme”) and partly to indirect effects (such as “acque alte” stemming from rising sea levels). In regarding the future of the Lagoon, the task-force has spoken to some stakeholders who have the tendency of judging the present actors by the errors of the past, whether by their predecessors' inaction or allegedly misplaced massive infrastructure investments (e.g. the MOSE barrier). While the past may teach protagonists the errors to avoid, regarding the past shouldn't be an instrument to imply bad faith on their part but should serve as lessons to be learned to guide the way forward.

At this stage, in view of the ever-changing character of the Lagoon, today we need a baseline in the form of a current hydro-morphological analysis using one single model accepted by all parties, against which restorative actions can be measured and proposed in a consensual manner. It is important to underline that, for this reason, the baseline should be a contemporary “photograph” of the Lagoon today and not a view of how the Lagoon was at some past date. It is obvious that a return to the past is unconceivable as the Lagoon itself is changing or has undergone irreversible man-made interventions or will shortly experience them (e.g. MOSE, reorientating of navigable maritime channels).

#### Preliminary Recommendation by Europa Nostra

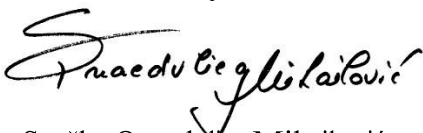
While recognising some most recent encouraging developments as presented by the Italian public authorities to UNESCO last January, our taskforce concluded that under the current circumstances both the City and the Lagoon of Venice remain at a serious risk. Therefore,

there is a need to urgently reverse the ongoing worrying situation by taking actions - at all levels of governance - to guarantee that there is a proper balance between the economic activity and the preservation of heritage and environment, and also that any future development plans for Venice and its Lagoon will be inclusive and sustainable in the long term. These alternative plans seem to be under preparation and will be submitted soon but have not yet been formulated in concrete terms nor discussed/approved in a consensual manner. These efforts need to be pursued in dialogue with civil society and other non-governmental stakeholders. They also must be prepared on the basis of proper environment impact assessments as required by Italian and European laws and regulations.

In the light of the above, Europa Nostra considers that the current situation requires the placement of Venice and its Lagoon on the World Heritage List in Danger. We believe that, in this way, UNESCO would fully recognise the gravity and complexity of the situation related to state of conservation of one of the world's most iconic World Heritage Sites. In our view, this should not be perceived as undue criticism of Italian authorities concerned, but rather as a forceful appeal for largescale mobilisation and concerted action by all stakeholders, public and private, at all levels of governance: local, regional, national, European and global.

Please note that we will transmit to you a more complete note of the taskforce's recommendations and conclusions in the next few weeks. Nonetheless, conscious of your forthcoming meeting with ICOMOS on the preparation of the State of Conservation Reports ahead of the 41<sup>st</sup> meeting of the WHC in Krakow, we wanted to make sure that you were, already at this stage, made aware of the Europa Nostra current standpoint on the highly-charged case related to the safeguard of the World Heritage Site of Venice and its Lagoon.

Yours sincerely,



Sneška Quaedvlieg-Mihailović  
Secretary General

## ANNEX:

### List of interlocutors during taskforce's visit to Venice and the Lagoon on 29-30/3/2017

#### Wednesday, 29.03.2017

- **Andrea Giovanni Martini**, President of the Municipality of Venice, Murano and Burano - Welcome
- **Lidia Fersuoch**, President Italia Nostra Venice, Introduction
- **Marco Veronese**, Vice Mayor of Chioggia, *The protection of the southern part of the Lagoon in relation to the construction of a propane gas storage facility and the consequent increase of oil traffic in the lagoon, in contrast to the special legislation for Venice*
- **Lorenzo Bonometto**, Società Veneziana di Scienze Naturali – Observations by Italia Nostra Venice and the Venetian Society of Natural Sciences on the Updated Plan for the Lagoon Morphology
- **Luciano Claut**, Councillor for Urban development, Mira city council – Observations of the Updated Plan for the Lagoon Morphology by Mira City Council.
- **Stefano Boato**, Ministero dell'Ambiente e della Tutela del Territorio e del Mare in Commissione di Salvaguardia all'Aggiornamento del Piano Morfologico della Laguna - Observations to the Updated Plan for the Lagoon Morphology
- **Giuseppe Tattara**, Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia – *The pollution of Venice and its Lagoon*
- **Andrea Grigoletto**, representative of Italia Nostra, committee for the evaluation of the environmental mitigations for the realisation of the 2021 Masterplan – *Plan for the expansion of the airport and the 2021 -2030 Masterplan*
- **Carlo Giacomini**, IUAV (Istituto Universitario Architettura Venezia) - *Urban logistics*
- **Jane Da Mosto**, We are here, Venice – *The Arsenal and the problem with the maintenance of Mose*

#### Thursday, 30.03.2017

- **Roberto Linetti**, Superintendent, and **Valerio Volpe**, Ingeneer, Provveditorato alle acque and **Elena Zambardi**, communication and external relations Consorzio Venezia Nuova
- **Massimiliano De Martin**, Assessore Urbanism, Sustainable Cities, Built and Natural Environment; **Paola Mar**, Assessore, Tourism, Streetnaming, Comune di Venezia
- **Pino Musolino**, President, **Federica Bosello**, Head of promotion, communication and institutional relations, North Adriatic Sea Port Authority

#### Composition of the EN Taskforce on Venice and its Lagoon:

- **John Sell**, Architect, Vice Executive President of Europa Nostra
- **Rossana Bettinelli**, Architect, Board Member of Europa Nostra
- **Pedro Ponce de Leon**, Architect, Vice-President of the Scientific Council of Europa Nostra
- **José Tomás Frade**, consultant EIB Institute
- **Thomas Hackett**, consultant EIB Institute



## Appendix 4

### **Decisions Report of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee at its 41st session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in Krakow, 2-12 July 2017**

#### Decision : 41 COM 7B.48 Venice and its lagoon (Italy) (C 394)

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Document WHC/17/41.COM/7B.Add,
2. Recalling Decisions **38 COM 7B.27** and **40 COM 7B.52**, adopted at its 38th (Doha, 2014) and 40th (Istanbul/UNESCO, 2016) sessions respectively,
3. Notes with appreciation that the State Party and all the institutions involved, having recognized the major risks to the property, are working collaboratively and in an engaged manner to protect the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property;
4. Notes that progress has been made towards the implementation of some of the 2015 Reactive Monitoring mission recommendations endorsed by the Committee and reiterates its request that the State Party continue to implement all the recommendations put forward in the Decision **40 COM 7B.52**, including immediate, short, medium and long-term measures;
5. Acknowledges the drafting of the Climate Plan and encourages the State Party to take into account the “Policy on the Impacts of Climate Change on World Heritage Properties” in the development of the plan, considering that ‘Venice and its Lagoon’ is in a privileged position and might have the potential to influence monitoring and adaptation processes that can be applied elsewhere;
6. Welcomes the details submitted regarding the new sustainable tourism strategy that will make use of the consultative model proposed by the UNESCO Sustainable Tourism Programme;
7. Also notes that the State Party is exploring an option of using existing port channel (Canale Vittorio Emanuele III) with a view to halt the passage of large ships through the San Marco basin and the Giudecca canal, and to avoid the excavation of new ones and requests the State Party to submit detailed plans and a detailed timeframe for the implementation of the selected solution;
8. Also reiterates its request that the State Party submit, in conformity with Paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines*, details of any newly proposed projects, together with all relevant cumulative Heritage Impact Assessments (HIAs) and Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA), with a specific section focusing on their potential impact on the OUV of the property;

9. Also acknowledges progress made towards the completion of the MOSE defence system and also requests the State Party to provide detailed and updated information on this project, including its management and maintenance systems;
10. Further reiterates its request that the State Party update the Management Plan and revise its planning approach in order to sustain in the long term the OUV of the property, its landscape and seascape;
11. Further requests the State Party to provide a much clearer detailed road map for the way forward, with measurable benchmarks and a detailed Action Plan to deliver what is needed, commensurate with the major threats to the property;
12. Requests furthermore the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Committee a detailed report on the state of conservation of the property and the implementation of the above, including a detailed road map on the way forward, by **1 December 2018** for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 43rd session in 2019, **with a view to considering, if adequate progress in the implementation of the above recommendations has not been made, the inscription of the property on the List of the World Heritage in Danger.**