

Brussels, 27 October 2022

Letter on the environmental impact of oil and gas extraction in the South of Italy

Dear President von der Leyen,

At the end of October, a trial on allegations of water pollution caused by oil and gas extraction in the South of Italy will begin¹. The defendant is the Italian energy company Eni. This trial will assess whether the damage caused was so severe as to qualify for the crime of environmental disaster, as recognised under Italian law. In a connected trial², several Eni executives were already found guilty at first instance on grounds of illegal disposal of waste from oil extraction³.

These two trials concern the quality of drinking water and water for field irrigation in the Basilicata and Puglia regions, as the waters in question come from the Pertusillo reservoir, which reaches the Puglia region through the Apulian Aqueduct.

Local authorities and activists have been fighting a civil battle to end pollution caused by oil and gas extraction for about 12 years.

On 3 February 2017, Eni announced that it had identified the presence of oil and gas within the perimeter of the Oil Processing Centre in Val d'Agri (COVA) at a depth of 6 metres, traceable to a leak from a crude oil tank of the plant. Eni added that it had also identified a 'plume' of dark anomalous liquid similar to mineral oil in the waters of the Pertusillo artificial lake, downstream of the COVA.

In another instance, the Basilicata Regional Agency for Environmental Protection (ARPAB), while confirming that it had not detected oil in the waters of the Pertusillo basin, admitted that there are traces in the sediments at various points sampled. According to ARPAB, these are downward values compared to previous analyses and there is no limit indicated in the relevant legislation.

On top of oil and gas, the analyses also found traces of heavy metals (boron, aluminium, iron, vanadium and zinc), pesticides, plant protection products and organohalogen compounds (chlorinated solvents) in the lake's waters. Most of the pollutants do not exceed the limits set by the law, but their sum creates a bioaccumulation that damages water quality.

In the past years, the Commission was asked several times to comment on the situation. The Commission replied that the Italian authorities had indicated that a detailed monitoring report was

¹ R.g.t. no.426/2022 before the Court of Potenza in the Basilicata Region.

² R.g.t. n.856/2020 Potenza Court - r.g.n.r. n.4542/2010 Potenza Public Prosecutor's Office

³ Sentence n.326 /2021

submitted in March 2017 and that all water quality parameters fully comply with the legislation in force.

However, despite these claims, in 2021, the oil companies were condemned at first instance for illegal waste disposal in the Basilicata region and a second trial for environmental disaster will begin on 31 October or shortly after.

The picture is even more shocking if we consider that Eni had also sued a local University Professor who conducted a study demonstrating the presence of oil and gas in the same area. Luckily, Eni's suit was rejected.

To further aggravate the situation, many environmentally exposed areas do not have up-to-date data on the National Cancer Registry, including the Basilicata Region, while a recent study has painted a worrying picture with regards to the rate of cancer and other diseases in two adjacent Sites of National Interest⁴.

An update of the Cancer Registry is thus of utmost importance as it would make it possible to understand whether there is a link between excess mortality and oil and gas-related activities.

In light of the above premise, can the European Commission answer the following questions?

1. Has Italy submitted up-to-date reports on the state of the water in the Pertusillo reservoir and the quality of drinking water in the Lucanian and Apulian aqueducts?
2. Does the extraction of oil and gas in the proximity of a drinking-water reservoir constitute a violation of Directive 2000/60/EC?
3. Italy has not assessed the environmental damage and the health impact of these installations. How does the Commission intend to ensure that Italy carries out such assessment to ensure compliance with EU legislation?

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⁴ Among others, the study identified, in one of the sites, a high mortality rate due to colon-rectum cancer among women and a high rate of respiratory diseases among men, with an excess for perinatal mortality. In the other site, the study registered excess of mortality from all causes, for both men and women from respiratory tract cancers.



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