

30 April 2015
To the President European Commission
Mr. Jean Claude Juncker

To the President of the European Investment Bank (EIB)
Mr. Werner Hoyer

To the President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)
Sir Suma Chakrabarti

Subject: Trans Adriatic Pipeline and Southern Gas Corridor

Your Excellencies, Presidents,

The Municipality of Melendugno, and about 40 other Municipalities in the Province of Lecce, expressed their firm and reasoned opposition to the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), through decisions of related Municipal Councils. The landing point is planned on the seaside village of San Foca, belonging to the territory of the Municipality of Melendugno, on the coast of one of the most beautiful places in the Salento area and in Italy, that has a very high landscape and nature value.

The seaside village of Melendugno, since 2010, has been awarded the European Blue Flag, that is an acknowledgment for the Foundation for Environmental Education. It received this because of the areas conservation of unspoilt nature and the beauty of the environment, and for the untouched landscape of the cliffs, the beaches, the dunes, and the pinewood.

The above-mentioned areas have no big industrial infrastructure, and they are clearly oriented toward tourism, leisure, fishing, best agricultural practices, that are actual resources for our territory and not compatible with the realization of industrial and energetic mega constructions.

As the Mayor of Melendugno, together with many other local mayors of Salento area, and supported by the Administration of the Province of Lecce and by the Regional Government of Regione Puglia, I have been fighting on the front line together with many associations, committees, people belonging to the world of art and culture, and many citizens, in order to expose the clear and total INCOMPATIBILITY of the TAP project with the planned places for its landing in the Municipality of Melendugno. Moreover the project will adversely affect the tourism and agricultural nature of our territory and its economy, both during the construction and in the operation period.

TAP is part of the Southern Gas Corridor - a colossal project that is meant to transport gas from the gas fields in the Caspian Sea and, crossing Turkey, Greece, Albania, Adriatic Sea, to land in Italy and then in Europe.

The mega pipeline is planned to land in the wonderful beach of San Foca, well known seaside village of Melendugno (Lecce), and it would bring limitations to the bathing activities and to the fishing. The TAP gas pipeline will cross sandy dunes, pinewood, rural trails and state roads during its route, with a negative impact on the high-value agricultural areas and on the whole countryside rich in centuries-old olive trees. It will end with the construction of the gas pressure reduction plant, about 12 hectares in size, in the proximity of Melendugno and three other municipalities (Vernole, Castrì and Calimera).

The Municipality of Melendugno provided negative assessment on the TAP project in all its versions from 2012 until today, as well as the Regional Government (Regione Puglia) expressed its technical and political opposition. Also the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Tourism expressed its contrary and reasoned position, considering the landing point of San Foca not adequate in comparison to the others proposed by the TAP-AG company itself.

In addition to the issues related to the environmental incompatibility of the project (at the beginning the size will be 10 billions of cubic meters of gas per year, with a possible extension till 20 billion cubic meters per year), there is also a serious risk of accidents related to the Pressure Reduction Plant of the gas pipeline (plant cd REMI, where there are polluting substances, pressure reduction plant, two mega gas boilers, two electric ones, etc.) and to the significant issue of the appliance of specific procedures and conditions specified by the European and National relevant law.

The part of the pipeline that connects the Pressure Reduction Plant in Melendugno, in the Province of Lecce, to the connection point to the national gas network, located in Mesagne, in the province of Brindisi, more than fifty kilometers far from Melendugno currently lacks planning permission. Not even the process for the Environmental Impact Assessment and the related Authorization has been started. The criticality of the mentioned aspects, together with other reasons of illegitimacy raised in the authorization process of the project, should be solved in court seat where many appeals were already submitted.

Since 2012 we used all the tools provided by the Italian Constitution to express opposition to the TAP project and explain why such a big piece of infrastructure would be incompatible with the landscape of Melendugno and would affect the life of the communities that we represent, exploiting the economic and social background, and imposing a strong mark on the future of a whole territory of Salento, that for many years based its development on the tourism industry and that now is finally profiting the expected results, both at national and international level.

According to us, two issues must be taken into account when infrastructures to be built that have a high impact on the territory,: the technical and environmental validation and the democratic assessment by the people involved.

We studied in details all the versions of the project submitted to the Ministry of Environment for the Environmental Impact Assessment, supported by excellent professionals and experts.

We highlighted why the authorization process was illegitimate, and we informed the relevant Authority.

We asked to have an open debate with the Government where local communities could express the reasons they were against the project. From this debate, held in December 2013, seated by the Under Secretary of the Ministry of Economic Development, Claudio De Vincenti, clearly emerged the reasoned and detailed, firm and informed OPPOSITION by our citizens. But in the months after the debate, no actions were taken by the Government in order to consider the contrary position to the project, clearly expressed during the debate and in the observations submitted.

It is noticeable, indeed, how the Italian Government is not properly listening to our lawful requests and is not facing this issue as absolutely IMPORTANT AND FUNDAMENTAL for the future of our territory. Our requests for legitimacy are not simple procedural aspects to be solved by administrative courts.

We need an open debate on alternatives to the TAP project that will involve the participation of the citizens. Such debate have not taken place yet and it hasn't been even considered..

The improper behavior of the Italian Government, potentially not in compliance with European regulations, affects also European Institutions that, financing the project, will be responsible for the related violations if the project will go ahead on this basis.

For all the criticalities expressed, dealing both with democratic lack in the decision process and with technical-environmental issues, we ask to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and to the European Investment Bank, and to all the Italian, European and International Institutions, to refuse to finance the Trans Adriatic Pipeline and also none of the other parts of the "Southern Gas Corridor" .

We ask to the European Commission to review the procedure to define the so called "projects of common interest" that now exclude from decision those who should be the main beneficiaries from the same projects, that are the residents in the involved territories, the European citizens, but also other populations that provide Europe with the fundamental energetic resources.

In addition, in compliance with the article 21 of the Treaty of Lisbon, that is a foundation of the European Union, European Institutions are responsible to guarantee the respect for environment, human rights and to fight against climate changes.

Can this priority goal of the EU foreign policy be reached in countries like the Azerbaijan where citizens' voice is not listened and where authoritarian government prevent the freedom of expression and any kind of opposition?

Is it fair to reduce the discussion space and pass over the opposition of the people living in the places crossed by the project, and acting through choices from on high.

Is it reasonable continue to finance rigid energetic infrastructure, subject to geopolitical changes and that exploit limited sources of fossil fuels that negatively influence the climate changes?

Is it admissible to favor private companies that internalize profits and externalize environmental and economic costs on citizens who should benefit from "Project of Common Interest"?

In the places crossed by TAP, among which the municipality I govern, we chose to bet on sustainable energetic model both from an environmental and a social point of view. There are many projects aiming at reducing CO2 emissions (like electric buses for urban transport) and linking energy production to consumption, in order to create a flexible, mutual and independent system from countries in which basic civil and democratic rights are not respected.

This is what should be meant as a "Project of Common Interest" as it positively affects citizens' life.

For this reason the resistance to TAP is now, and it will be in future, determined and committed: it is a resistance for the protection of the territory, for the common good!

Yours sincerely,

The Mayor of Melendugno(Le)

Engr. Marco Potì