

LOCAL PETITION LAUNCHED VIA AVAAZ - FEBRUARY 2015

GET BIG SHIPS OUT OF THE VENICE LAGOON – SAY NO TO DREDGING THE CONTORTA CANAL

To the Italian Prime Minister MATTEO RENZI

To resolve the problem of the large cruiseships passing close to St Mark's and through the heart of Venice, the successive Government configurations since the 2012 Island of Giglio tragedy, including the present one, have concentrated on a single plan, promoted by the Port Authority: the dredging of a new channel in the Lagoon that straightens, deepens to 10.50 metres and stretches up to 200 metres wide the tiny lagoon Contorta Sant'Angelo canal, that is a few tens of metres wide and barely two metres deep. By doing this, cruiseships would no longer come to Venice through the Lido inlet but from the Malamocco inlet, along the Malamocco-Marghera Industrial Channel and branch off about two-thirds along its length into the new channel to reach the Marittima Passenger Terminal where the ships currently dock.

This means bringing the Industrial Channel, also known as the Canale dei Petroli, into the heart of the city. The same Industrial Channel recognised by the entire scientific community as being responsible for destruction of the central Lagoon that, as we well know, is the only defence buffer Venice has from the fury of the sea. Due to the Canale dei Petroli, Venice loses something like a million cubic metres of sediment per year, which get resuspended by ship traffic, resulting in deepening of the lagoon bottom from an average of 40cm a century ago to nearly 2m now - and in 50 years depth may be 2.5m. This will no longer be a lagoon but what is already becoming a bay of the sea.

To save Venice and the Lagoon without losing the economic returns and jobs associated with cruise business, the ships of dimensions that are incompatible with safeguarding the environment and the safety of the unique city must be kept outside of the inlets to the sea. Plans for offshore ports have already been proposed to the various institutions involved in making the decision that can be built relatively quickly and at a lower cost than the dredging of a new channel.

It is odd that the same Port Authority that is currently rooting for an offshore terminal for container ships and petrol tankers refuses to consider an analogous option for cruise ships, and the only explanation for this contradiction is the fact that the Port and Venice Passenger Terminal, the company that manages the Marittima cruiseship docks, harvest millions of euro from State-owned land that was allocated without any tendering process, although one day they will have to face European tenders and open competition.

Prime Minister Renzi, would you really sacrifice safeguarding the Lagoon and the safety of Venice for the sake of the Port's profits and Venice Passenger Terminal, earnings that scarcely benefit the city?

Someone like you, Prime Minister, or your Minister for the Environment Gian Luca Galletti and Infrastructure Minister Maurizio Lupi, may say we needn't worry since the plan for dredging the Contorta canal is being considered by the national Commission for Environmental Impact Assessment and therefore the proposal will not be passed if indeed the impacts are so hugely destructive. But the 27 pages of integrations requested by the Environment Ministry's EIA Commission are so serious that the proposal should already have been turned down and any genuine attempt by the Port Authority engineers to address the issues raised would require years of further investigations, sampling campaigns and modelling studies - not the 30 days assigned by the Commission. This indicates that the Commission might have already decided to pass the dredging plan, albeit with a series of prescriptions. This is almost common practise for the Commission!

Considering all this, President Renzi, and following on from other petitions that have gathered over a hundred thousand signatures, both written and on-line (Comitato NO Grandi Navi - Laguna Bene Comune, Gruppo 25 Aprile, Gabriele Muccino) we are asking you not to recognise the strategic importance of the project and to make the Port Authority withdraw their plan.