

Letter

# Policies Supporting Renewable Energies Uses: The Next Big Challenge

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The question in the referendum on 17 April is: “At the end of the concessions presently authorized for extraction plants in the sea, at a distance within 12 km from the coast of Italy, are you in favor of stopping the extraction, even if there is still some methane or oil to be extracted?”. The individuals are required to express their opinion on the intention to renew the authorizations to extract fossil fuels from sites from which they are presently extracted, in Italian territorial sea waters. Even if the deposits are not exhausted and can provide further fuels, at the deadline of the authorizations we will stop extracting fossil fuels. The question does not touch future authorizations, but only the renewal of the existent ones.

An argument in favor of No, *i.e.*, to continue to extract fossil fuels, touches a widespread position: if other countries are doing it, why can't we?

Environmentalists have been often accused (sometimes with good reason) of suffering the NIMBY (Not In My BackYard) syndrome: why do it here? Do it elsewhere!

On the opposite side is the “If They Are Doing It, Let's Do It Too” (ITADILDIT) syndrome: other countries are extracting and we are the only ones who will not?

However, 198 countries, including Italy, have signed the COP 21 agreements in which they commit themselves to reducing the use of fossil fuels, eventually ending their use, and to increase the use of renewable energies.

There is a need for new technologies favoring natural resources, without sacrificing them in the name of economic growth and development. All the agreements among countries are in the direction of ending the use of fossil fuels. However, at the same time, governments push in the opposite direction, to continue to extract them.

In summary, on one side there is a promise to become virtuous, and on the other side we plan to continue to search for, extract and use fuels without any limit. The referendum, technically, is not against these underground decisions. If Yes receives the majority of votes, however, it will stop the renewal of old authorizations. This refusal, if Yes prevails, will have a political impact. If Yes does not prevail, the signal will be: the present situation is Ok, please continue to do as you like, the majority of the country is with you, do not take in consideration those NIMBY fanatics, we support the ITADILDIT.

There is a lack of serious energy policy in Italy (in addition to the lack of solid environmental culture). The history of Italian policies on energy issues started in 1974, with the oil scandal: the oil lobby paid the government to not develop nuclear power. The energy plants were running on oil and diesel, and those who were selling it would have lost huge incomes if the country had transitioned to nuclear energy. A way of convincing politicians can, apparently, always be found. Eventually, governments take decisions in the interest of lobbies, oil companies, banks, and the like.

Citizens have the power to influence our policies with their vote.

It is sad to see there are two opposed sides, NIMBY and ITADILDIT, each convinced of being on the right side. My opinion is clear, as a Marine Biologist. I also say ITADILDIT, in the sense of: If they are doing it (to leave the use of fossil fuels and move to renewable energies), let's do it too. I have to say that NIMBY have always been unpleasant (I don't like them). I bet that, when it is time to decide where to store nuclear wastes, they will push to move them to other regions (not theirs). So, the stronger regions in Italy will decide that wastes will be stored in the weaker regions by majority decision, not to mention that they will accuse this region of being NIMBY.

We are a wealthy country; we are part of the G7. We need to be an example for other countries. Let's start to act reasonably. Fortunately, we voted in the 2011 referendum against nuclear reactors, so today let's say yes to this referendum and no to fossil fuels. We can keep them up to the end of the authorizations, and at the same time we can start to efficiently produce clean energy. We have signed agreements, we need to respect them, and to sustain our common home. I am optimistic: commonsense will prevail. Moreover, I am rational: it is rational thinking to say that continuing along this route is irrational. Say YES to progress, to say NO to the rush towards the exhaustion of the natural capital.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.



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