

Interview with Monica Tommasi, *President of Friends of the Earth Italy*

"WIND? A USELESS SACRIFICE"

The wind turbine debate continues to rage in the city after numerous projects for the Umbrian-Marche Apennines territory of Central Italy have been submitted to the [MASE](#). After our recent conversation with the CEO of RSE, Professor Franco Cotana, we now interview the engineer Monica Tommasi, president of "Friends of the Earth", a historic association that promotes the protection of the environment and sustainable development.



Dr. Tommasi, the issue of renewable energy is activating heated debate in local communities between those who say they are in favour without ifs and buts and those who ask for more protection of the landscape and biodiversity, citing the risk of losing this heritage forever. Is there a point of synthesis between these two sides?

*The point is not to be for or against, but to understand if, with the renewable sources of wind and photovoltaic, it is possible to decarbonise and at what environmental and economic cost. As the data and leading experts tell us, the 2030 energy objectives for decarbonisation, based on the combination of intermittent renewable energies, are unfeasible. The European strategy that aims to drag the world economy on a path of decarbonisation based mainly on renewables, is proving to be unsuccessful: the increase in climate-changing emissions in emerging countries far exceeds the tiring and expensive reductions obtained in Europe at the expense of European economies. Added to this failure is the paradox of favouring technologies such as photovoltaics, whose production chains, from mining to high environmental processing, are the monopoly of countries such as China, responsible for the exponential increase in emissions. But let's reflect and distinguish between wind and photovoltaic - we believe that wind is not suitable for Italy.

There is not a single person in our population that would accept living with the presence of these huge aerogenerators on their land. I challenge anyone to say that the value of their house is not zeroed when located next to a turbine; or that economic and tourist activities, in marginal territories such as the Apennines, are not being consequentially destroyed. Many sites targeted by the energy companies for the installation of these industrial plants often have delicate hydro geological characteristics. The roads that will have to be built on ridges to transport the turbines and the deep foundations dug to avoid the risk of tipping over end up creating fragile soils on our Apennines. We are aware that to catch the little wind that is in Italy, projects are being presented with giant Aerogenerators of between 200 and 290 metres high - almost as tall as the Eiffel tower or 4 times the height of the tower of Pisa. So even if a community were to accept the irreversible damage, it would be a useless sacrifice from the point of view of energy production. In Italy, 15 years of subsidies with huge funds given to the development of intermittent renewable sources were able, in 2022, to cover only 3.8% of final energy consumption (2.2% solar, 1.2% wind). 80% of demand is still generated by fossil sources.

With regard to photovoltaics, there is good reason. Italy has the highest quantity of agricultural land in Europe and already has more areas of anthropized land compared to the rest of Europe. As [ISPRA](#) tells us, there are thousands of industrial warehouses, and at least 86,000 hectares of largely unused roofs available, on which up to 72 GW of photovoltaic could be installed over a few years, avoiding soil consumption, invasive foundations, excavations and earthmoving, weed and plant destruction, support structures that facilitate soil evaporation with long-term hydrogeological consequences and high transport costs. Of course, putting them on roofs means a higher cost for companies, but if we don't want to occupy agricultural land we need to ban on-ground photovoltaics"

In Umbria there is talk of a high concentration of wind projects proposed by private companies at the MASE in the Umbrian-Marchian Apennines region. What are the risks?

"It's true, in recent months there are many wind projects in the Umbrian-Marchian-Apennines but, in other territories of Italy, such as Tuscia, Puglia or Sardinia, the assault on the territories began some years ago with numerous projects filed and now in an advanced stage of technical investigation with thousands of gigantic sized wind turbines. All this has been made possible thanks to regulatory simplification processes put in place by this and previous governments. The only industrial structures that are

enjoying actual *deregulation* - which incidentally contravenes European legislation - are wind turbines and on-ground photovoltaics that do not serve to mitigate the energy damaging the landscape in an irreversible way. The proposing energy company may even proceed with the **expropriation** of the land concerned. Often the rules are interpreted in a questionable way to avoid the few markers in place for safeguarding the territory. Emblematic are the cases of most of the projects currently in the investigation phase at the [MASE](#) where the turbines seem to be excluded from what the law clearly states (see art. 8 c-quater of Legislative Decree 199/2021). Where differences in opinion arise between MASE (the Environmental ministry) and MIC (the cultural ministry). The President of the Council of Ministers (Giorgia Meloni) then makes the final decision, systematically supporting the approval of projects. This happened in the case of PHOBOS, a project of 7 mega wind turbines in the municipalities of Orvieto and Castel Giorgio on the border between Umbria and Lazio, which provoked a series of appeals at the TAR Umbria whose decisions are awaited with extreme interest by all the institutions”

What parameters must be considered in the realisation of a wind turbine project?

“The limits of wind, as well as photovoltaic, are their variability and intermittency that causes greater complexity within electrical systems and the need to adapt the electrical grid accordingly, with all the associated costs passed on to the consumer, as surplus energy produced cannot be stored. Wind power transforms wind energy into electricity and therefore the fundamental parameter is wind. The plant produces electricity when there is enough wind. This variable means that the production of wind energy presents strong variations not only during the year, but also within the month, day and even hourly. A turbine with a capacity factor of 100% means that it produces energy the whole time. There is also talk of 'equivalent hours' (where over the year a turbine's production is assigned with a nominal potential for the total energy actually produced. For wind turbines, there may be days with total absence of production and other days with very strong increasing or decreasing variations ”

The national wind atlas elaborated by [RSE](#) gives a first indication of the persistent presence of wind as a condition for the identification of suitable areas. Is it a valid tool?

"The Atlas is the place for a first indication of wind, even if it is often not taken into consideration by companies that present projects. There is unsuitable landscape for these installations where projects have nevertheless been presented. The reason is

that the energy companies have been using wind data which does not correspond to the Atlas giving a false reality of their viability."

Is there enough awareness among citizens about everything that is happening?

"There is absolutely no national awareness. We have noted some protesting noises from local administrations, as well as from citizens when a giant project arrives on their doorstep which is when people start to understand that the defence of the planet cannot be done by working against the environment and riding roughshod over communities with a tank"

What are the critical issues that, as "Friends of the Earth" recognise in the modus operandi with which we are proceeding, at a national and regional level, towards the construction of wind turbines?

*The complete lack of planning and complete deregulation that these types of plants enjoy"

Which correctives should be used?

*It is unthinkable to industrialise large natural areas of our country without proper planning and public debate"

Is there an alternative route to industrial wind power to meet the [PNIEC's](#) 2030 goals?

*With 35,000 MW of wind and photovoltaic power already installed, large portions of valuable territory have had natural or agricultural characteristics disfigured, mainly in the South, and now also in central Italy. The PNIEC predicts that by 2030 the installations will triple. We absolutely cannot afford it, so the solution for reducing the use of fossil fuels can only be nuclear. We can no longer fake not wanting that when we are already using nuclear power produced by the French."