

CHARTER OF MANTOVA concerning the pollution in the Padana Valley

Final Document of the Conference:

“QUALITY OF THE AIR IN THE PADANA VALLEY: MOVING TOWARDS RECLAIMING?” - MANTOVA, on 18th October 2008.

Introduction

Air pollution in the Padana Valley represents a true national emergency that must be faced decisively and with strength. According to the national statistics, more than 50 % of the pollution in Italy is concentrated in the Padana Valley.

The concentration values in the atmosphere of particulate matter, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, oxides of nitrogen, lead, ozone and other pollutant substances are out of control, as they exceed three times as much as the limit of a calendar year allowed by the European regulations.

The existing system has its own capacities to absorb the pollutant emissions, but it has been far too much exceeded. Now it is high time to find a remedy for this situation, that for sure is beyond the shy political actions that the single Regions put forward.

The greenhouse gas emissions in the Padana Valley area is also quite significant, as well as the dispersion of its heat in the atmosphere. Its effects are already nowadays considerably heavy – but they will certainly get more intensified within short time - climate tropic tender, Alps glaciers disappearing, signs of desertification beginning.

The plain of the Padana Valley has particular weather-climate specifications. Due to this situation there is a strong stagnation of the pollutant substances in that area. But this shouldn't be any excuse to justify a sort of defeatist and fatalistic behaviour towards the existent pollution – as usually various Regions public administrations do. As a matter of fact, such administrations continuously adopt dispensation derogatory clauses towards the pollution situation, instead of facing it as a reason to spur their activity into action, in order to get to an avant-garde environmental politics in this country, which could avail itself of excellent scientific and technical capacities to be used in Italy through coordinating actions and initiatives with high innovation content.

The social and economic structure of the Po Valley is quite well in the position of transforming its present critical environmental situation into new economical opportunities connected to a global environmental qualifying conversion. But courageous decisions are necessary, which are characterized by a sustainable development to cover the whole territory of the Po Valley, and that represent an avant-garde model to be followed by the environmental politics in this country.

The impacts

The pollution emergency situation in the Po Valley is also closely connected with a health emergency: the international authorities assessments indicate that tens of thousands of deaths per year happen in this area, with hundreds of thousands of people that need hospitalization each year because of breathing difficulties, heart and cancer diseases, caused by a constant exposure to impacts of very high pollutants substances.

Other devastating impacts regard the vegetation itself (mainly because of the nitrogen dioxide and the ozone). They cause acidifications and other phytopathological processes, which may reduce up to 20% the farming production of some crops. In this case it is quite difficult to estimate which are the effects on the food quality of the farming foodstuffs.

Last but not least also the landscape suffers seriously under the above impacts, mainly as far as the desertification is concerned, and finally the cultural heritage is attacked by acid layers.

The role of ITALIA NOSTRA in the reclamation process of the Po Valley.

Italia Nostra claims to have an active role as catalytic of the political and institutional energies that are needed for the environmental reclamation work in this area.

In this sense the Association has already submitted some complaints to the Public Prosecutor's Office in order to compel to keep to the limits of the pollutant substances. The Association also intends to promote new initiatives for researching and making aware regarding this topic, both in this country and in the European Community.

The proposals

Italia Nostra has introduced the following proposals for the environmental reclamation of the national emergency in the Po Valley.

Politics and engagement by the Institutions

- Italia Nostra calls the National Government for its responsibility as far as the promotion and coordination of the regional political initiatives are concerned for the environmental clean up in the Po Valley: this work consists in the elaboration and in putting into action one extraordinary plan for the environmental reclamation, in harmony and in collaboration with the Regions themselves. Such plan should be a work organic programme and last several years. As a matter of fact, if the Regions are left alone they are not in the position of facing this emergency effectively, considering that it has now become a problem of national relevance.

- Italia Nostra for this purpose invites the central Authorities to fight against the more and more spreading tendency to weaken the European Regulations and also the National Laws introducing dispensations, cancelling binds and / or suitable fines for the lawbreakers.

In this situation the National Government shall confirm the Kyoto targets as well as the "Climate Kit" established by the European Union (that refer to the reduction of the greenhouse gas emissions up to 20% with 2020). The Government shall not find any excuse trying to free itself from undertakings given.

- Italia Nostra calls for the Regions in order that targets are established that can create a radical and systematic reduction of the pollution. This work shall be carried out in harmony among the European Community, the Italian Government, the Provinces and the Local in order that the pollution remains under the values set by the European Regulations and by the National Laws. This way and through planned actions it is possible to come to accurate comprehensive measures as well as to a joint action plan.

- Italia Nostra invites to consider the foundation of only one ARPA (Agenzia Regionale per la Prevenzione e l' Ambiente – Regional Agency for the Prevention and the Environment) for the whole Po Valley, so that the environmental parameters can be well checked, and also the environmental planning of the territory can be driven in a joint way.

The sustainable transport ways

- Italia Nostra calls the Regions for in order to act in a determined and comprehensive way as for the private and commercial transport in the Po Valley. As a matter of fact it influences of about 37% with the total of particulate matter (PM10, PM 2.5). The change should foresee a sustainable transport politics, influencing the people to desist from using private cars, creating Traffic Urban Plans and Parking Plans, that filter the traffic entering towns, and improve the comprehensive transport means, eventually using also tolls, prohibitions, urban energy efficiency actions also for the transport net.

- Italia Nostra urges and calls for the renewal of the heavy transport means, for the modal shifting of the goods transport from trucks to the railway. In this sense Italia Nostra proposes the introduction of shuttle-trains including the necessary terminals, as well as the activation of “sea highways”. Any eventual action to be introduced regarding the transport net must be thought in terms of total area, as single prohibition or limitation events have actually low effects on the pollutants reduction.

The industrial production

- Italia Nostra invites the central and local authorities to settle eventual economical support for the companies that should be used for the adoption and the adjustment of solutions thought for the most advanced energy and environment sustainability in close collaboration with the technological and scientific research.

- in particular way Italia Nostra urges upon the European Community to identify the best methods for the environment reduction concerning the most important types of production. Such methods should then be compared among them, selecting the best ones, which could then act as reference and target for the others. In collaboration with the National Governments the European Community should proceed with the putting into effect incentives and fines, so that everyone can comply with the rules.

- As far as the procedures regarding the permits for the building and the reinforcement of new polluting plants Italia Nostra urges the institutions in charge to accurately consider the environmental situation in its setting, both at local and in global sense, whereas the corresponding charge limits should be established in collaboration with the European Community.

Italia Nostra proposes that all the corresponding documentation is set free for the public through the net, also in the intermediary proceeding stages.

Italia Nostra invites to make up assessment boards for the appraisal of the environmental impact, also including expert members from the Public Health Service, from the Agricultural production field, from the Landscape Defense supervision.

- Italia Nostra invites to revoke the State Secret – this has recently been introduced in Italy and it concerns “ the civil plants for the energy production as well as any other critical infrastructure” that is connected with the energy production.

- Italia Nostra invites to ride out the procedures regarding the emissions self-statement by the industrial estates – this step would allow ARPA to directly monitor the production processes that cause environmental impacts.

The sustainable energy

- Italia Nostra requests that all the investments in the energy field are used for research, saving and efficiency, for the renewable sources, ignoring the 3rd generation nuclear production and the “clean coal”, as the latter are technologies in the course of being overcome and also controversial from an economical and environmental point of view.

- Italia Nostra requests that no permissions are granted to biomass combustion plants in the following cases:

- * when there is not enough local biomass available;
- * when the plants damage the woodland heritage;
- * when the material used for the combustions is composed of waste products mixed up with toxic substances;
- * when that biomass is potentially useful for other purposes with no need of combustion;
- * when the combustion does not grant the total keeping of high anti-pollution standard levels for a long period.

The defense of the artistic heritage

The reduction of the sulphur dioxide as well as of the nitrogen dioxide in the atmosphere is considered of most importance for the maintaining of the architectural and sculptures heritage located in the open air. Also the reduction of the particulate matter plays a remarkable role to slow down the damaging of the ancient building materials.

- Italia Nostra means therefore that it is necessary to go on strengthening systematic actions concerning the monitoring of the pollutant substances in the old towns centres.

- Italia Nostra urges the access closing to the streets and places in the old towns centres near the main monuments. Also the reduction of car and buses passing in the cities of art is requested.

- Italia Nostra proposes that the central Government starts to put into action a multi-year maintenance programme using suitable financing supports, that should also be precautionary for the artistic heritage that has been assailed by pollution. Such a programme should run under the control of the appropriate General Direction for historical, artistic heritage.

The defense of the Farming

Italia Nostra requests the research development to investigate further about the relationship between pollution and reduction of farming production, and invites to introduce actions fitting the reached results.

The existing laws concerning the vegetation protection foresees only one limit as for nitrogen dioxide. Italia Nostra urges the setting of limits also for the other pollutant substances.

At the present stage Italia Nostra urges that the Regions publish the results connected with the surveys referring to the others nitrogen oxides (not only nitrogen dioxide).

Sustainable building trade

Italia Nostra proposes stricter laws and regulations for the building trade, that compel and motivate those who build to adopt systems that create near zero CO₂, investigating proper decisions for the historic heritage considering the urban setting, and finding technologies with no impact on the landscape.

Urban Forestation

Italia Nostra urges that forestation plans are adopted in the urban and periphery areas in order to reduce the microclimate and the pollution – “green belts” should be created, upkeeping the already existing green areas, limiting the waterproofing the of the ground.

Waste

In the Po Valley there are already about fifty incinerators , which cover 38% of the waste disposal. Italia Nostra requests that the procedures of the waste disposal are changed , mainly those ones based on the waste incineration, replacing it with procedures of recycling, motivating the direct collection from the houses if possible.

MANTOVA, on 18th October 2008.