

Italy relies heavily on oil and gas for its electricity generation. But recently coal has entered the picture. 'It is wise and vital for Italy.'

Italy discovers carboni

| by Maarten Veeger

The demonstrators gathered at the entrance of the Torrevaldaliga power station in Civitavecchia near Rome were deeply disappointed. In spite of the earlier build-up and apparently wary of too much turmoil as it turned out later, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi did not show up to give the official starting signal for the conversion of market leader Enel's oil-fired power station into a coal-fired power station.

So the demonstration was a flop. But despite Berlusconi's nonappearance there was plenty of commotion, as inhabitants of the region are concerned about the largest power station in Italy which is to run on coal as from next year.

According to Enel and the association of coal-fired power stations (Assocarboni), Italy must build up a considerable amount of additional capacity through coal-fired power stations. The energy mix is too reliant on gas (36%) and oil (31%), with coal representing only 8 to 9%. This is far below the European average of 32%. And for Italy, which for the present is opposed to nuclear power since a referendum held in 1987, that percentage is, proportionally speaking, particularly low.

Italy has thirteen power stations divided over various locations that currently run or will soon run on coal. The Enel power station in Civitavecchia, with three units of 650 MW each, is the largest. Enel has a total of eight coal-fired power stations. Edipower (owned by Edison, the Swiss

Atel and distributors from Milan, Turin and Genoa) has two and Tirreno (which includes Electrabel and Acea), Endesa Italia and A2A (distribution company for Milan and Brescia) each have one.

The energy sector seems to be convinced that coal should play a greater role in the production of energy in Italy. The unbalanced energy mix, the supply of raw materials (virtually entirely dependent



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on foreign countries) and the lower price of electricity produced with coal, are put forward as arguments. But for several reasons politicians and environmental organisations are not very keen on coal. Environmental organisations do not believe in the "clean coal" programme and the province of Viterbo bordering on the province of Rome and situated near Civitavecchia's new power stations is fiercely opposed due to concerns for public health. However, Enel says that as compared to oil-fired power stations it can reduce the emission of all hazardous substances

by anything from 18% for CO₂ to 88% for sulphur dioxide. National politicians, too, seem less eager considering the fact that Italy's current Minister of Industry is labouring for the re-introduction of nuclear power.

During an energy conference held last spring in Rome, President Andrea Clavarino of Assocarboni admitted that coal can never be as clean as renewables. 'Of course we are all in favour of renewables and more efficient use of energy. But fossil energy will remain dominant at least until 2030. We are not saying that the European Union's policy is wrong. But let's not create the illusion that renewables are the only solution.' Clavarino fears – as he states in a letter to his members – that Italy will lag further behind with coal, despite Enel's recent effort in Civitavecchia. 'Italy has no energy policy and therefore the market is being dominated by the gas exporters like Russia and Algeria who collaborate and push up the price. Producing energy by means of coal is wise and vital for Italy. The problem will not be solved by more LNG installations because that gas is much more expensive than gas that is brought in via pipelines.' Enel says it is ready for nuclear power but according to Clavarino Italy will not agree to it until the price of oil reaches 300 dollars. 'So the only thing left is coal. All major energy companies in Europe have investment plans for coal-fired power stations. They are equally imperative for Italy.' ■