

WRITTEN QUESTION E-6747/08
by Paolo Costa (ALDE)
to the Commission

Subject: EIB financing of Venice's sea defences

On 1 December 2008, Venice was flooded by a tide 156 cm above mean sea level, which covered 95% of its surface area, paralysing all activities and causing serious damage to people and property. This disaster could have been avoided if the system of mobile barriers (MoSE) which is currently under construction had already been completed and in operation. Work on the project, 50% of which has been completed, could be speeded up, the only obstacle being the unavailability of the necessary funding, as the planning was completed long ago. So far, the Italian State has funded the work directly, providing some € 2443 m for the purpose, which should soon be supplemented with the allocation of a further approximately € 800 m from the Interministerial Economic Planning Committee (CIPE). The remainder of the funding, amounting to € 1500 m, is being raised by means of a major Public Private Partnership operation between the EIB and the consortium of enterprises (Consorzio Venezia Nuova, CVN) which is carrying out the project. This is an exemplary operation and of great importance to the EU, because it involves an 'availability' PPP contract, a type of contract which the European Parliament's Committee on Transport and Tourism has called for repeatedly with a view to speeding up the building of the TEN-T networks.

The procedure at the EIB is more or less complete, and all that is awaited is the green light from the Commission, which has brought infringement proceedings relating to the building of the MoSE with the aim of securing better compliance with Directive 74/409/EEC (the Wild Birds Directive). Irrespective of any judgment regarding the doubtful proportionality between the mitigation and compensation measures demanded and the project to be implemented, the accumulated delay in dealing with an issue which could and should have been easily resolved in the nearly 5 years of dialogue between the Commission and the Italian State is increasingly unacceptable.

What will the Commission do to secure reasonable, proportionate and immediate compliance with Directive 74/409/EEC, so that the PPP contract between the EIB and the CVN can be signed with the minimum of delay, thus at last definitively safeguarding Venice from the depredations of the sea, and making it possible to accelerate an exemplary and significant volume of infrastructure expenditure, inter alia for the purposes of the 'European Economic Recovery Plan' (COM(2008)800) drafted by the Commission, which is currently awaiting consideration by the European Council?