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Italy: Two human rights defenders in Pesaro face SLAPP case of two million euros by Fox Petroli S.p.A.

Human rights defenders **Roberto Malini** and **Lisetta Sperindei** are facing a defamation lawsuit filed by Fox Petroli S.p.A for speaking up about the environmental and health risks presented by the gas and fuel company, as well as the potential harm of the planned liquified natural gas (LNG) plant close to a residential area in Pesaro. Fox Petroli S.p.A. has requested a minimum of two million euros in damages in a lawsuit that carries the characteristics of a Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation (SLAPP) case. On 29 September 2025, the two human rights defenders will attend a mediation session with the company.

[Roberto Malini](#) is an environmental and human rights defender, author and artist. He is the co-founder of EveryOne Group, an international organisation protecting vulnerable groups such as Roma, refugees, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and victims of environmental injustice. He co-founded the PESARO: NO GNL civic initiative to oppose the construction of a liquified natural gas terminal in a high-risk residential and ecological area. Despite being subjected to threats, legal and administrative harassment, and anonymous threats, he has not ceased to work for social justice and dignity. His work has been recognised with several awards including the Rotondi Award for Art Rescuers and the Phralipé Prize.

[Lisetta Sperindei](#) is an environmental and human rights defender and a former city councillor in Pesaro. She is a key member of the civic initiative *PESARO: NO GNL*, actively engaged in raising public awareness on environmental risks, promoting civic participation, and defending the right to health, transparency and ecological justice. Alongside Roberto Malini, she played a vital role in the mobilisation and legal action that led to the suspension of the LNG terminal project proposed by Fox Petroli S.p.A. She has also supported environmental journalism and public access to environmental information.

On 29 September 2025, environmental rights defenders Roberto Malini and Lisetta Sperindei will attend the mediation session related to the lawsuit filed by Fox Petroli S.p.A. at the Court of Pesaro. The mediation process is a mandatory preliminary step in disputes before the legal proceedings commence. In the case of non-settlement, the lawsuit will be taken to court.

On 30 June 2025, the District Court of Pesaro issued a subpoena to the two human rights defenders regarding the legal complaint filed by Fox Petroli S.p.A. who alleged that they “have been causing alarm among the population by spreading false and defamatory news about the company and its functioning facilities” since May 2025. The company claimed that the human rights defenders “ran a denigrating and persecutory campaign against the company and that its good name, reliability and credibility were harmed” and demanded two million euros for damages.

The lawsuit appears to have been initiated after the Regional Technical Committee (RTC) of the Fire Brigade [issued a negative decision](#) on the planned construction of the new LNG facility of Fox

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Petroli S.p.A, deeming it would be classified as a high-level major accident risk and a class one unhealthy environment. Subsequently, the Ministry of Environment [announced](#) that the initial positive Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) automatically lapsed after the binding negative opinion of the RTC.

Roberto Malini and Lisetta Sperindei have been advocating to stop the proposed LNG plant and draw attention to the potential environmental and health risks of the Fox Petroli S.p.A facility through legal appeals, press statements and public awareness actions under the PESARO: NO LNG initiative.

On 8 May 2025, the human rights defenders issued a press statement announcing that they filed an environmental complaint with the Public Prosecutor's Office of Pesaro and other local and national institutions regarding the Fox Petroli S.p.A. industrial site in Pesaro. The complaint drew attention to the degradation and possible contamination of the air, soil and aquifers at the site in the Tombaccia district of Pesaro, and the potential health risks it would cause to the workers as well as residents in the area.

In addition to the existing issues, the complaint submitted by the human rights defenders focuses on the potential threats posed by the planned LNG project, linked to the existence of explosive gases and the dispersion of methane. They requested an urgent environmental investigation which would analyse the ground, water, and soil, inspect the safety plans, and stop any authorisations for the LNG project until the investigation is completed.

Although the human rights defenders based their claims on the technical documents, including the environmental assessments released by Fox Petroli S.p.A. analysis and the legal instruments such as the [Consolidated Law on Occupational Health and Safety](#) and [EU Seveso III Directive](#), the oil company stated that the claims made by the defenders were “totally non-existent and the result of invention” and that they spread unfounded news “accusing the company and its directors of having committed serious environmental crimes” which seriously undermines its reputation and image.

Front Line Defenders believes that the human rights defenders Roberto Malini and Lisetta Sperindei are being targeted for peacefully exercising their freedom of expression and acting in the public's interest. The SLAPP case, with a compensation request of a minimum of two million euros is a clear attempt to silence the human rights defenders for standing up for the environment and the people of Pesaro and retaliating against the negative decisions taken regarding the planned LNG facility which, in effect, might stop the implementation of the project.

Front Line Defenders calls on the Fox Petroli S.p.A to:

1. Immediately withdraw the defamation lawsuit initiated against the human rights defenders, which appears to be an act of reprisal against the legal complaint;
2. Avoid any further actions against any human rights defender who addresses any irregularities or potential risks that its facilities and projects may pose and cooperate with them to address any issue.

Front Line Defenders calls on the authorities in Italy to:

1. Dismiss the mediation process and the legal proceedings against the human rights defenders Roberto Malini and Lisetta Sperindei, as the defamation lawsuit bears the characteristics of SLAPP and targets the defenders for their legitimate and peaceful human rights work;

2. Promptly transpose the EU anti-SLAPPs Directive into the national legislation and ensure that the judiciary review the defamation complaints favouring the freedom of expression and the public interest;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders and their organisations in Italy are able to carry out their human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, in line with Italy's regional and international human rights obligations and commitments.