

Italy

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General

- 1** Describe, in general terms, the key commercial aspects of the oil sector in your country.

Lacking any nuclear capacity, Italy has always been highly dependent on conventional energy sources and imports to cover its energy needs. Hence, although Italy is a relatively small producer of crude oil, it has always regarded its domestic oil production as very important for the security of oil supply and to reduce dependence on foreign sources.

Italy is undoubtedly competitive in respect to production costs, which are lower than in other comparable countries. Italy estimates recoverable oil reserves of 758 million barrels which are almost entirely located onshore. According to the data released from the Ministry of Productive Activities, overall oil production for 2007 was 5,838,972 tons.

With a view to increasing domestic production, the Italian government made considerable efforts to simplify the administrative procedures for the installation of oil production units, and had an important role in liaising between the developers and the local authorities (in particular the regions) involved in the granting of permits and authorisations. Other encouraging developments for the promotion of the oil extracting businesses are:

- incentives for the development of secondary fields;
- incentives for geophysical studies; and
- draft regulation on the decommissioning of offshore facilities.

These governmental initiatives have led to a small but important increase of exploration and production activities in Italy.

In this respect, it is worth mentioning two important oil fields that will further support the oil extracting industry: Val D'Agri and Tempa Rossa Concessions, both located in the same area. Val d'Agri is operated by Eni and the co-owner Shell and has a production capacity of 100,000 barrels per day, covering 6 per cent of Italy's demand. The oil fields provide a high-quality product, superior to the Brent standards. Tempa Rossa is another promising oil field, although with a heavier crude, with an expected production capacity of 50,000 barrels per day (plus associated gas). The Tempa Rossa field is still not in the production phase; it is operated by Total together with two other co-owners, Exxon Mobil and Shell.

Another area of interest to upstream operators is Sicily, where Eni, Edison and Anschutz discovered new onshore potential at the beginning of 2004.

Italy has advanced refining facilities with a transformation capacity of 100,000 kilotons per year of crude oil and can guarantee a speedy transportation of the produced and imported

crude over its 30,000km pipelines.

- 2** What percentage of your country's energy needs is covered, directly or indirectly, by oil as opposed to gas, electricity, nuclear or non-conventional sources? What percentage of the petroleum product needs of your country is supplied with domestic production? What are your country's energy demand and supply trends, especially as they affect crude oil usage?

More than 80 per cent of the Italian energy need is covered by traditional oil and gas supplies. The last Italian energy balance disclosed by the Italian Ministry relates to 2006 and shows (expressed in millions of tons of oil equivalent, m/t) a domestic net oil consumption of 69,725m/t against 42,847m/t gas consumption, 4,556m/t solid hydrocarbons and 1,985m/t renewable energy.

Italy has no nuclear plant on its territory, but ENEL and EDF have executed an agreement to boost French nuclear electricity imports.

Italy supplies approximately 6.2 per cent of Italian oil needs with domestic production.

- 3** Does your country have an overarching policy regarding oil-related activities or a general energy policy?

Italy is very attractive to new investors for its high prices resulting from a high demand growth, its dependence on energy imports (16 to 18 per cent) and, in general, the low efficiency of existing generating capacity and high fuel costs. Hence, the government has strengthened its undertaking to attract new energy utilities, to encourage investment and to promote competitive supply by providing a clear and stable institutional framework for the energy sector. The uncertain legal framework, together with the authorisation approval process, has been the main constraint to project finance. The Italian parliament has therefore adopted a number of measures to reorganise the regulatory environment, by adopting a more comprehensive reform of the entire Italian energy sector, providing for a stricter timetable for the public authorities to deal with applications to implement oil development projects (Law No. 239 of 23 August 2004).

Regulation overview

- 4** Describe the key laws and regulations that make up the general legal framework regulating oil activities.

Oil activities are considered to be part of the mineral-extracting industries whose operation and title is regulated by statute. Over the last two decades, the statutory rules in this sector have been significantly affected by European legislation.

The central part of the statutory rules dealing with upstream industry is the regulation on the standards and requirements regarding the prospection, exploration and production of hydrocarbons in Italy. Such regulations were introduced in Italy in 1927, but have been substantially modified by Law No. 6/1957. Furthermore, since the circumstances under which offshore and onshore activities may differ from one another, specific rules were adopted in 1967 for offshore business. These statutory rules were updated in the context of a new domestic energy plan and a more competitive market by means of Law No. 9/1991. In 1996, Italy opened all activities by implementing the European Hydrocarbons Licensing Directive No. 94/22/EC, banning the monopoly of the state-owned incumbent, ENI. Due to a constitutional reform in 2001 (which has been further developed by Law No. 239/2004, also called the Marzano Law), both the regulatory power and the involvement of the regions in the administrative proceedings for the granting of the permits and concessions, have been consistently increased in the oil extracting sector.

The above statutory rules on the requirements for granting the licences go with secondary regulation which lays down, among other things, the standards for the calculation of the royalties for upstream activities.

In relation to all mineral extracting businesses, Italy has had its own health and safety regulations since 1959. These regulations were amended after the implementation of minimum health and safety requirements for workers in the mineral extracting industries (both on the surface and underground), as well as the particular requirements for drilling activities that are laid down in several EU directives.

Depending on the size and the location of an oil extracting project, its development will require either a specific environmental assessment or a preliminary screening by the interested public authorities. The environmental assessment is a procedure introduced by EU regulations in 1985 for projects that have a significant impact on the environment. The environmental assessment procedures, as well as the identification of onshore areas, are mainly administered by the local authorities (regions, provinces and municipalities).

The construction, extension works and operation of an oil production unit and transmission facilities are subject to several permits and authorisations (modification of zoning plans, industrial emission authorisation, environmental, landscape and archaeological restrictions, etc), which are dealt with in special regulations.

Finally, the oil extracting business is included in the list of utility sectors in which works, supply and service contracts exceeding a certain amount are subject to a specific procurement procedure (Directive 2004/17/EC, coordinating the procurement procedures of entities operating in the water, energy, transport and postal services sectors). The current value thresholds, excluding VAT, are:

- work contracts exceeding €5,278 million; and
- service and supply contracts exceeding €422,000.

5 Identify and describe the government regulatory and oversight bodies principally responsible for regulating oil activities.

The regulatory body in the oil industry is the Ministry of Productive Activities (the Ministry), which also issues concessions and authorisations for the exploration and development of oil fields. Other than the electricity and gas sector, there is no independent authority.

Within the Ministry, two internal agencies and a technical

commission deal with the oil extracting industry. The General Office for Energy and Mineral Resources (DGERM) issues the national energy and mineral policy guidelines and liaises with the European Union and other international organisations. Furthermore, the DGERM sees to the implementation of the statutory rules of the oil extracting sector.

Within the DGERM, administrative tasks are carried out by an internal department, the Mineral Hydrocarbon Geothermic National Agency (UNMIG). The UNMIG is responsible for:

- technical oversight of the projects;
- granting the prospection and exploration permits, and the production concessions;
- the upstream management survey;
- the royalties survey;
- planning and statistics;
- safety studies and laying down of the secondary health and safety regulation;
- the onsite health and safety inspection;
- map-making of the titles and the oil transportation system; and
- the following up of expropriation procedures.

Finally, the Ministry must require the opinion of the Technical Commission for Hydrocarbons in relation to:

- the feasibility technical programmes of the permit and concession holders;
- the health and safety survey;
- the location and size of the exploration and production area; and
- all technical issues related to the oil-extracting business.

6 How does your country manage appeals of government regulatory decisions?

Given their administrative character, all decisions of the Ministry and the agencies can be challenged in the local regional administrative tribunal (TAR). Appeals against the decisions of the TAR can be presented to the Italian Council of State. The grounds for appeal are infringement of the law or the ultra vires rule.

7 What standards are employed for oil measurement and oil facility equipment? Are these voluntary or involuntary? Are they established by a government body?

The operator of the exploitation concession is directly liable for accurate oil measurement and must send a monthly report on the extracted oil to the Ministry (UNMIG). The oil measurement must comply with the statutory requirements set down in secondary legislation.

In this respect, the concession holders must install, at their own expense, adequate protected devices at each pit to measure the oil production for the computation of the royalties. UNMIG may accept the installation of a single line of measurement for a pool of pits. Further, the concession holder must set up a data collection centre for daily measurements. All measurement lines and devices require the prior approval of UNMIG.

8 What government body maintains oil production, export and import statistics?

All operators in the oil upstream industries have a statutory duty to provide Italy's National Statistical Institute (ISTAT) with a full report on volumes and prices.

The statistics on the oil business are mainly held within the

different agencies of the Ministry.

The statistics on exploration activities, oil production and reserves are collected by UNMIG and available on the website of the Ministry.

Information on the import, export and the position of the upstream production in respect of the overall energy business is processed and published by the DGERM.

Natural resources

9 Who holds title over oil reservoirs? To what extent are mineral rights on private and public lands involved? Is there a legal distinction between surface rights and subsurface mineral rights?

Whereas landowners are, as a general rule, free to develop the subsurface according to their own private and economic needs, the Italian civil law lays down an exception for mines (including oil fields) and excavations that are state property and cannot be transferred. This inalienability rule is not dependent on whether the oil fields are located on private or public lands.

As a consequence, the development and operation of subsurface and surface mineral rights can only be granted by authorisation (prospection and exploration activities) or concession (production) issued by the Italian state (through the Ministry).

10 What is the general character of oil exploration and production activity conducted in your country? Are any areas off-limits to exploration and production?

In Italy, oil exploration and production activities are carried out both onshore and offshore. The share of onshore production is nevertheless consistently higher than that of offshore production. The Basilicata region is the most important area for the oil extracting business; the Sicily region ranks second.

As of 31 December 2007, Italy counted 81 exploration authorisations (53 onshore and 28 offshore) and 181 production concessions (115 onshore and 66 offshore). These activities are mainly onshore.

Exploration and production activities are prohibited in natural parks and in certain maritime zones.

11 What government body regulates oil exploration and production in your country? What is the character of that regulation?

Currently oil exploration and production is regulated by state legislation with some secondary technical regulation issued by the Ministry. Further, the regions are increasingly using their recently granted regulatory powers to adopt independent regional regulation, in particular, to issue some procedural rules.

The existing regulation provides for three different phases in the oil-extracting business: prospection, exploration and production activities.

All prospection activities (geophysical survey) must be authorised by the Ministry.

The exploration of an area (including drilling activities) is subject to prior authorisation (exploration permit) of the Ministry, following a competitive tender procedure.

Since the operator has no title to the area, production activities can only be carried out on the basis of a concession, issued to the holders of an exploration permit who made a discovery capable of economic development.

All applications must be filed with the UNMIG, who will examine the respective prospection, exploration and production programmes of the operators as a condition to the granting of the permit or concession.

12 If royalties are paid, what are the royalty rates? Are they fixed? Do they differ between onshore and offshore production?

When developing oil resources, a royalty in favour of the Italian state is due from the operators. The royalties are based on the value of the oil actually produced: 7 per cent rate for onshore production, 4 per cent rate for offshore production.

In addition, a small rental payment is to be paid to the Italian state, calculated on the basis of the number of square kilometres occupied for the prospection, exploration and production activities.

13 What is the customary duration of oil leases, concessions or licences?

The prospection permit has a duration of one year.

The exploration permit has a duration of six years and can be renewed for two additional three-year periods if the operator complies with the exploration programme approved by the Ministry.

The production concession has a duration of 20 years and can be renewed for an additional 10-year period if the operator complies with the production programme approved by the Ministry. If, at the end of the concession, the operator has fully complied with the programme he can apply each time for a five yearly extension of the concession.

14 For offshore production, how far seaward does the regulatory regime extend?

Italy applies the criteria set in the 1982 Montego Bay convention on the law of the sea. Hence, Italy has sovereign rights in a 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ) with respect to mineral extracting activities and exercises jurisdiction over environmental protection. Furthermore, Italy has sovereign rights over the continental shelf for exploring and exploiting it. The shelf can extend at least 200 nautical miles from the shore and more under specified circumstances.

Italy ratified several international conventions with Mediterranean states (the former Yugoslavia, Tunisia, Spain, Greece, Albania) to govern the limits of the territorial sea, the exclusive economic zone and the continental shelf.

15 Who may perform exploration and production activities? What criteria and procedures apply in selecting such entities?

Any operator from the EU, or outside it, may apply for a prospection or exploration permit and can be granted production concessions. Non-EU operators may be banned from the upstream market where the statutory rules of the country of origin do not allow Italian operators to carry on oil extracting activities (reciprocity rule). In addition, Italy can refuse an operator (regardless of the country of origin) from carrying out oil extracting activities for reasons justified by public interest.

The applicant must demonstrate that they have sufficient technical and financial capacity and warrant that they will set up an organisation with adequate administrative and technical skills.

Prospection activities

To obtain a non-exclusive prospection permit, the applicant must file a work programme for approval and, in the case of offshore activities, a technical survey of an engineer specifying the environmental risks of the project and the measures adopted to reduce these risks.

The work programme must identify all prospection activities that will be carried out, the methods and equipment used, the timing and possible recovery works.

The prospection permit is granted for a specific area.

Exploration activities

The applicant must file a technical report including information on the geomineral status of the area and the purpose of the exploration, together with the work programme, specifying all activities that will be carried out, the methods and equipment used, the timing, possible recovery works, the development costs and the financial coverage.

Following the filing of an application by an operator, the Ministry will forward a notice to the European Commission inviting applications which shall be published in the official journal of the European communities. Other interested entities shall have a period of at least 90 days after the date of publication to submit an application.

In the event of several applications for a specific exploration permit, the Ministry shall grant the title following a competitive tendering procedure, to the programme that is most efficient and innovating and has the least impact on the environment.

A permit shall give rise to an exclusivity right to explore the relevant geographical area, which may not exceed 750km².

Production concession

If the title holders of an exploration permit discover an oil reservoir during the exploration phase, it may apply for a production concession if the production capacity of the oilfield, based on the geological data and geophysical survey, justifies the technical and economical development of the same. The maximum extension of the production concession is, as a general rule, limited to 150km².

The application must include a technical report that provides documentary evidence of the production capacity of the discovered oil wells as well as a development plan that must mention the time necessary to carry out the development plan, the investments and further exploration activities, etc.

16 What is the legal regime for joint ventures?

Permits and concessions can also be granted to more than one entity, without requiring such entities to create a corporate joint-venture. The share of each co-owner is mentioned in the administrative title.

The co-owners have a joint and several liability towards the Italian authorities and third parties for all duties that may derive from the upstream activities.

The co-owners must appoint an operator that will represent the co-owners in their relationship with public authorities and third parties.

When one of the members of the production concession withdraws from the project, for whatever reason, the other co-owners will subrogate the rights of the withdrawing partner.

Any assignment of the participation interest in a permit or concession requires the prior approval of the Ministry.

17 How does reservoir unitisation apply to domestic and cross-border reservoirs?

If the technical and financial level of the work programme justifies a joint development, the operators may apply for a reservoir 'unitisation'.

The same rule applies in circumstances where the oil field

extends over the continental shield of Italy, as well as the territory of another state; in this case the operator must notify the UNMIG who must take the necessary diplomatic steps to agree upon a joint operation of the cross-border oil field.

The Italian statutory rules also govern different situations in which the operators have conflicting interests, as follows:

- where different operators intend to carry out prospection activities at the same time, the operator that obtained the permit first is given priority;
- the holder of an exclusive licence (exploration permit or production concession) must grant access to his area, in order to allow permit holders of a neighbouring area to carry out prospection activities; and
- where an operator is intending to drill a well that may affect another exploration or concession area, the operator must duly inform the affected operator and invite him to make observations within a fixed term. If the affected operator does not respond, the addressee is deemed to have agreed to the drilling activities.

Transportation

18 How is transportation of crude oil and crude oil products regulated within the country and across national boundaries? Do different government bodies and authorities regulate pipeline, marine vessel and tanker truck transportation?

The transportation, import and export of crude oil and crude oil products are not subject to any specific authorisation (see Law 239/2004). However, maritime transport is governed by regulations that impose port control on the safety of the vessel, classification of societies and the use of double-hull tankers. The control is carried out by the sea and port authorities.

Onshore pipelines and tanker trucks must comply with the safety and environmental requirements which are enforced by the local health and safety authorities.

19 What are the requisites for obtaining a permit or licence for transporting crude oil and crude oil products?

No permit, licence, authorisation or concession is required for the transportation of crude oil and crude oil products. However, these activities must be carried out in compliance with the health, safety and environmental statutory rules.

Health, safety and environment

20 What health, safety and environment requirements apply to oil-related facility operations? What government body is responsible for this regulation; what enforcement authority does it wield? Are permits or other approvals required? What kind of record-keeping is required? What are the penalties for non-compliance?

Besides the standard employers' obligations to safeguard the safety and health of workers in the working place, Italian legislation provides for specific minimum requirements for the mineral extracting business, making a distinction between the requirements applicable to all mineral extracting industries, those related to onshore or offshore activities, and those related to surface and subsurface activities.

The employer must provide a health and safety document (HSD), including an illustration and identification of the operational risks, the safety measures and a long-term health and safety improvement plan. The HSD must comply with the statutory rules applicable for each single issue included in the document. In particular, the HSD must provide a detailed description

of numerous situations and related safety measures, including:

- protection from fire, explosions and health endangering atmospheres;
- escape and rescue facilities;
- communication, warning and alarm systems;
- health surveillance;
- regular review of safety and health measures;
- operation and maintenance programmes for mechanical and electrical equipment;
- maintenance of safety devices;
- use and maintenance of means of transport;
- safety exercises;
- identification of deposits;
- support and ground stability;
- ventilation;
- location of areas within which risk of fire or explosion from ignition of gas, vapour or volatile liquid exists, or is likely to exist;
- outlets and precautions for the withdrawal of workers;
- rescue organisation;
- emergency routes and exits;
- training for emergency situations; and
- utilisation, transport, deposits of explosives and protection from risk of explosion.

The HSD must be consistent with the working plan that the operator has submitted for the granting of the production licence. The HSD is subject to an authorisation by UNMIG.

Further, the employer must appoint staff responsible for the supervision of health and safety requirements, for keeping workers up-to-date and for providing adequate medical inspections. The employer must operate the working place according to the approved HSD and the minimum health and safety requirements laid down in the Italian statutory rules. Further, adequate sanitary installations and services must be available for the workers.

Workers have a general duty to comply with health and safety regulations and must act safely in the workplace, according to the instructions of their superiors.

Health and safety inspections are carried out by the DGERM together with the local offices of the UNMIG and the local health authorities.

The operator must hold daily records of all prospecting, exploration and production activities.

All drilling activities require the prior authorisation of the UNMIG, together with the local authorities. The operator must keep a drilling journal and must keep samples until the end of the drilling activities.

All planned production plants and transportation facilities must take into account health and safety requirements. The same applies to offshore platforms, the planning of which must include a forecast of the worst meteorological conditions for the next 100 years. Specific provisions are laid down for the construction of undersea pipelines with a view to safeguarding the resistance of the installations.

Refineries and service stations are subject to the common health and safety provisions for hazardous activities.

Environmental requirements differ depending on the type of installation. The following activities are subject to an overall environmental assessment:

- the prospecting, exploration and production of hydrocarbons;
- the deposit of hydrocarbons and refineries with a capacity exceeding 40,000 tons per year, as well as refineries; and

- transportation facilities exceeding 20km.

In any case, the above facilities, as well as service stations, must comply with the overall environmental regulations governing the protection of water, air and electromagnetic emissions, noise, and must make specific provisions regarding petrol tanks, transportation of dangerous goods by road, transportation of hard asbestos, decontamination of polluted areas, important environmental incidents, waste disposal, polychlorinated biphenyls, polychlorinated trephines, etc.

Non-compliance with the above health, safety and environmental rules is sanctioned by administrative fines or, in cases of serious infringements, imprisonment.

21 What health, safety and environmental requirements apply to oil and oil product composition? What government body is responsible for this regulation; what enforcement authority does it wield? Is certification or other approval required? What kind of record-keeping is required? What are the penalties for non-compliance?

The quality of petrol and diesel fuels, with a view to safeguarding the air quality, is laid down in different decrees that primarily implement community directives. The EU directives establish the technical and ecological requirements for commercial use. Other regulations relate to the reduction of the sulphur content of liquid fuels used by seagoing ships, marine gas oil, fuels intended for processing prior to final combustion and fuels to be processed in the refining industry. Volatile mineral oil intended for the operation of internal combustion engines used for the propulsion of vehicles must also comply with the lead content prohibitions laid down by the statutory rules.

The quality of the oils and fuels are subject to inspections carried out by the fiscal authorities.

Operators must also comply with the statutory rules on the disposal of mineral-based lubrication or industrial oils which have become unfit for the use for which they were originally intended, and, in particular, used combustion engine oils and gearbox oils, mineral lubricating oils, oils for turbines and hydraulic oils. This means that the operators may no longer discharge waste oils nor process them, as this causes air pollution which exceeds the allowed emission levels. The disposal of waste oils must be adequately recorded. Only duly authorised companies are allowed to dispose of waste oils.

Besides the statutory rules governing air emissions, Italian legislation also provides specific rules on the health and safety of production, refinement, deposit, use, transport and marketing of mineral oils.

Specific fire safety rules apply for services stations.

The inspections are organised by the Ministries of the Environment, Industry, Health, and Finance, each according to their area of competence.

Non-compliance with the above health, safety and environmental rules is sanctioned by administrative fines or, in cases of serious infringements, imprisonment.

Labour

22 What government standards apply to oil industry labour? How is foreign labour regulated? Are there anti-discrimination requirements? What are the penalties for non-compliance?

The selection of the workers must be based on their professional qualifications, experience and training.

There are no restrictions on workers from the EU, although

they still need to apply for a residence permit (*permesso di soggiorno per lavoro*).

Employees from outside the EU must first be employed by an Italian company in order to obtain a work permit. The application must be made by an employer, who must guarantee, among other things, adequate remuneration for the employee. Once the employer has obtained the work permit, the employee may apply for a residence permit, which has a maximum duration of two years. It is worth mentioning that the Italian government has limited the number of non-EU residents allowed to work in Italy. The above limitation does not apply to those directors or to those other highly specialised members of personnel who have been employed for at least 12 months prior to their temporary transfer (eg, posted workers). People with regular residence permits (students, families, etc) may require an alteration to the purpose of their permit in order to work in Italy. Nevertheless legislation in respect to workers from outside the EU is often changing.

Taxation

23 What is the tax regime applicable to oil exploration, production, transportation, and marketing and distribution activities? What government body wields tax authority?

The production of oil products is accountable to a specific excise duty, the rate of which depends on the product. As a general rule, oil products used in the production process are exempt from taxation. As long as the transportation of the taxable products is carried out between fiscal warehouses, the products are exempted. Once the products are marketed and distributed an excise duty is due. Nevertheless, the tax regulation may exempt specific employment and products or apply a more favourable tariff.

The customs administration collects all the excise duties. Distribution and marketing services are subject to VAT.

Commodity price controls

24 Is there a mandatory price-setting regime for crude oil or crude oil products? If so, what are the requirements and penalties for non-compliance?

Since 1994, Italy has abolished all kinds of price-setting regimes for crude oil or crude oil products. However, there is a high degree of price transparency, since the operators must notify all prices of import, export and consumption of crude oil to the Italian National Statistical Institute Programme. These figures are disclosed to the public.

Hence, it is possible to consult the monthly crude oil prices (FOB and CIF) and the average fuel price to customers.

Competition, trade and merger control

25 What government bodies have the authority to prevent or punish anti-competitive practices in connection with the extraction, transportation, refining or marketing of crude oil or crude oil products?

The Italian Competition Authority (the Authority) is an independent government body that assesses whether anti-competitive practices of undertakings in the upstream or downstream market constitute infringements of the Italian Competition Act.

The Italian Competition Act is modelled on the applicable EU regulations and the Authority commonly applies the same guidelines as the EU Commission. Briefly summarised, agreements between undertakings are prohibited if they have as their objective, or where they result in, significant prevention, restriction or distortion of competition within the relevant market, including:

price fixing, market restrictions, market sharing, applying dissimilar conditions for equivalent transactions and tying.

Please note that cooperating joint-ventures in the upstream and infrastructure markets are commonly accepted by the Authority given that the facilities are difficult to divide or duplicate for technical reasons, as well as for reasons of profitability or environmental impact.

Holding a dominant position is not prohibited; however abuse of such a position is. Since the exploration permits are granted by the Ministry, on the basis of a tender system and traditionally separated from the downstream market, the upstream market is not greatly affected by dominant positions. On the other hand, the Authority has already sentenced several cases for abuse of a dominant position in respect of transportation or transmission facilities in the energy sector, where the behaviour of the operators were mainly assessed on the 'essential facilities' theory.

Besides the anti-competitive practices and abuse of dominant position, the Authority also surveys mergers and acquisitions within the up- and downstream market.

A merger control procedure is only commenced if the transaction meets one of the following thresholds during the preceding financial year:

- the combined domestic aggregate turnover of all the undertakings concerned exceeds €440 million; or
- the domestic aggregate turnover of the target exceeds €44 million.

The above thresholds are in force as of 10 May 2007. They are updated annually, to take inflation into account.

The acquisition of a share in an oil permit or concession is subject to merger control when it confers on the acquiring company the possibility of exercising a decisive influence over the activity of the joint venture.

Merger control consists of an assessment of whether the concentration creates or strengthens a dominant position in the relevant market. Since the market for hydrocarbons production is deemed to have a worldwide dimension, concentrations in Italy are likely to be cleared.

In the case of competition infringements, the Authority has the power to fine undertakings that infringe the Competition Act with a penalty amounting to a maximum of 10 per cent of their Italian turnover.

26 What is the process for procuring a government determination that a proposed action does not violate any anti-competitive standards? How long does the process generally take?

Where the operators want to create a cooperative joint-venture (restrictive agreement) for upstream or transportation activities, they can apply for an exemption. The Authority will have to decide upon the filing within 120 days (exemption or opening of an investigation).

Where the Authority deems that the concentration is not likely to affect competition in the relevant market, it will clear the merger within 30 days of the notification.

International

27 To what extent is regulatory policy or activity affected by international treaties or other multinational agreements?

Since the oil extracting industries have been liberalised both for Italian and foreign companies, the weight of international treaties has been considerably reduced. However, international treaties

Update and trends

The Italian oil market is expected to attract more national and international investors willing to explore the country's oil reservoirs, thanks to the following factors: the country's stability; the increase in oil price; the increasing competition among domestic and international companies to be awarded exploration permits; and Italy's strategic role in gas transport activities, in

view of its commercial agreements with North African countries.

As in all EU member states, an increase of the energy from renewable sources is also expected. In fact, as of today, renewable energy still covers a minor portion of the Italian energy requirements.

may still be relevant to govern the limits of the territorial sea, the exclusive economic zone and the continental shelf, and in case an oil operator has difficulties in obtaining market access.

28 Are there special requirements or limitations on the acquisition of oil-related interests by foreign companies or individuals?

The oil upstream market is, as a general rule, open to foreign companies and individuals.

However, where Italian entities encounter difficulties (de jure and de facto) with access to, or the exercise of, the activities of prospecting, exploring for and producing hydrocarbons in non-EU member states, Italy must inform the European Commission. The latter may authorise Italy to refuse to authorise an entity which is effectively controlled by the third country concerned and/or by nationals of that third country.

29 Do special rules apply to cross-border sales or deliveries of crude oil or crude oil products?

Except for the tax regulation, import and export are not subject to any specific permit or licence.

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