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Italian town outraged over plan for wind turbines four times taller than famous cathedral

Campaigners argue that machines will ruin an unspoilt rural area that spans Umbria and Lazio



Orvieto cathedral is considered one of the finest Gothic buildings in the country Stone RF

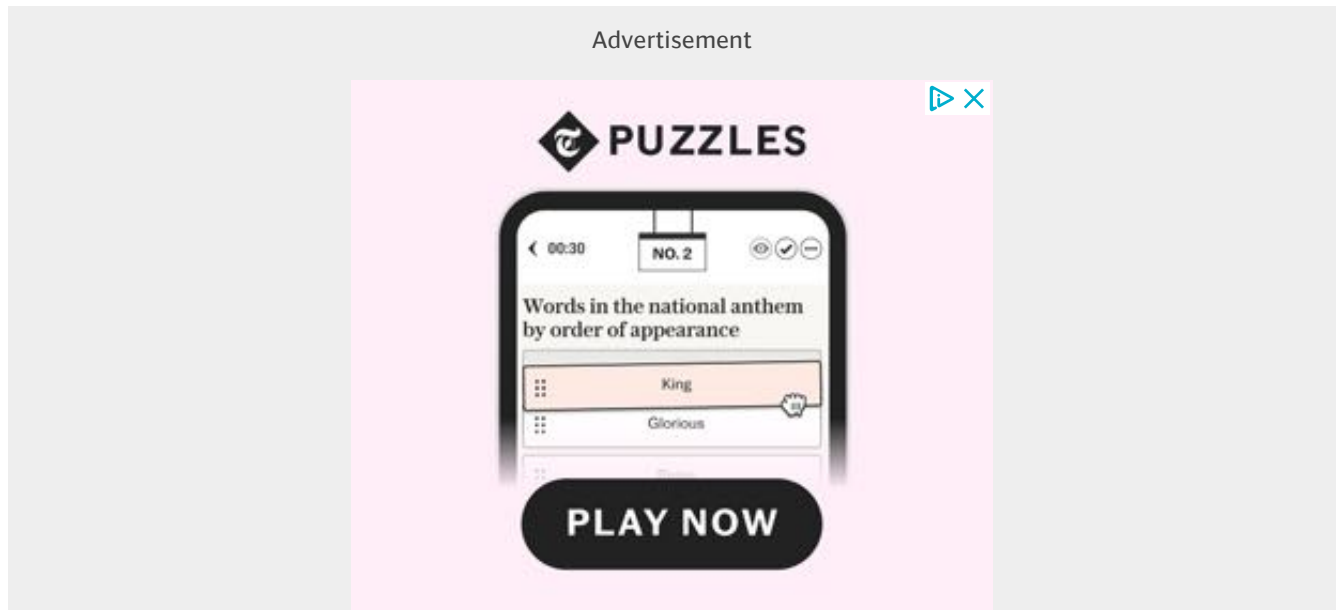
Nick Squires

in Rome

26 September 2024 4:16pm

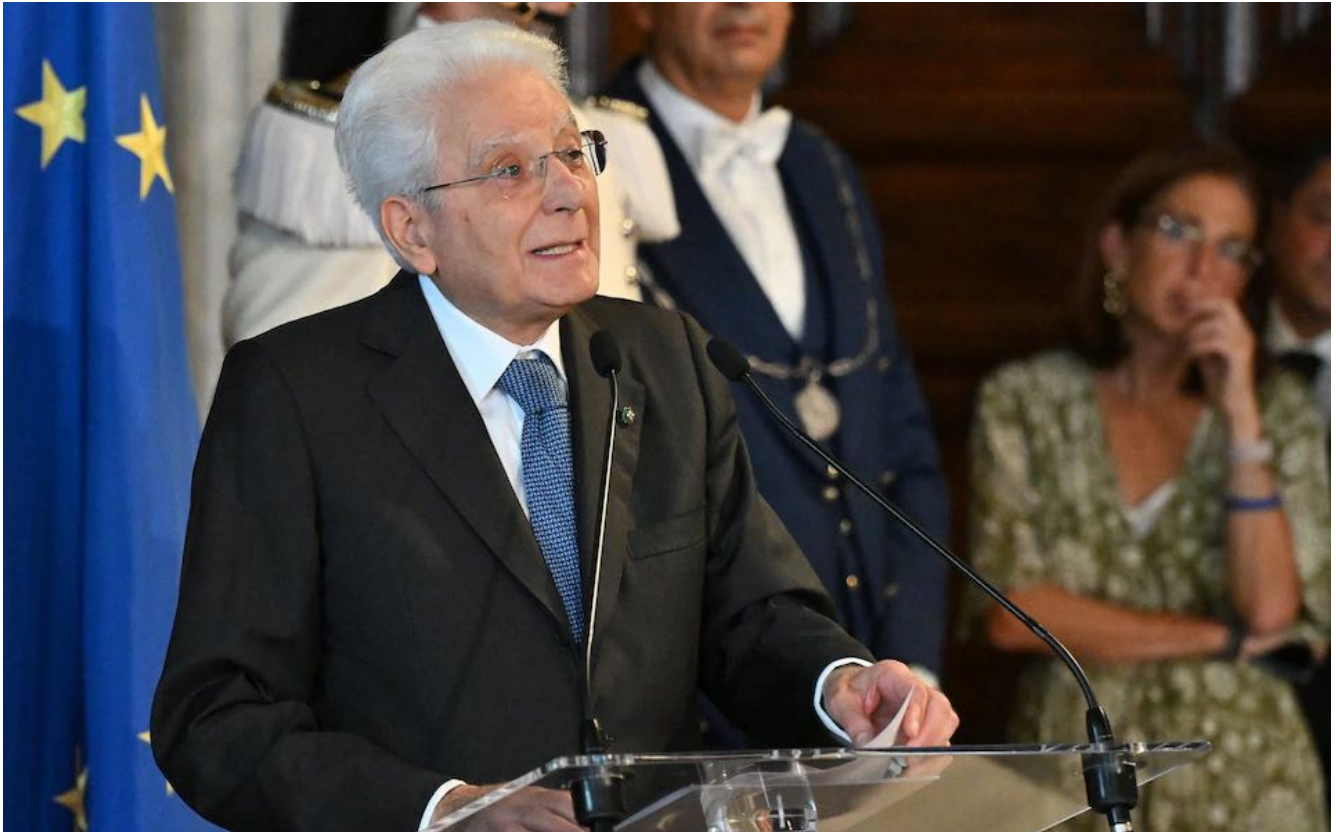
Campaigners are battling the planned construction of giant wind turbines among the olive groves, vineyards and woods of Umbria.

They say that at 200 metres (656ft), the turbines will be four times the height of the 13th-century cathedral or duomo of Orvieto, a medieval hilltop town in the area of Italy where the turbines will be built.



Considered one of the finest Gothic buildings in the country, a pope once said that it was so sublime that, on the Day of Judgment, it would float up to heaven, carried by its beauty.

A group of 100 intellectuals, directors, actors and sustainable environmental experts have signed a petition of protest and sent it to Sergio Mattarella, the president of Italy.



In an open letter to Mr Mattarella, campaigners say the transition to green energy needs to take into account the risk of 'radical and irreversible changes to the landscape' Getty Images

They are adding their voices to the local protest groups and environmental activists who already oppose the project.

Among the signatories are actress Isabella Rossellini, director Alice Rohrwacher and Claudia Cardinale, a major Hollywood star during her heyday, as well as botanists, poets and writers.

While stressing support for renewable energy, they argue that the turbines will ruin an unspoilt rural area that spans the regions of Umbria and Lazio.

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The machines will be visible, for instance, from the celebrated hamlet of Civita di Bagnoregio which sits on a crumbling outcrop of tufa rock and can only be reached by a footbridge.

The seven turbines are set to be built by RWE, a German company, in a stretch of countryside between Orvieto and Lake Bolsena renowned for wine, olive oil, extinct volcanoes and historic sites.




The 13th-century Orvieto cathedral presides over the medieval town David C Tomlinson/The Image Bank RF

The campaigners claim that one of the turbine towers will be built just 500 yards from an ancient Etruscan necropolis.

This breaches a law that stipulates that there must be a distance of at least three kilometres between a wind turbine tower and cultural heritage sites or monuments, they say.

“As we confront the climate crisis, promoting sources of energy other than fossil fuels is certainly an urgent objective, to be pursued with determination,” the campaigners wrote in an open letter to the president.

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But, they wrote, the transition to green energy needs to take into account the risk of “radical and irreversible changes to the landscape”.

They said the German company’s plans would have “a devastating impact on the countryside, putting at risk tourism and the economy of the region”, adding: “We do not believe that the energy transition should be based on the exploitation of the countryside ... we need a change of paradigm.”



Wind turbines erected near Montepo Castle in Tuscany Getty Images

RWE maintains that the project has been approved by all relevant authorities in Italy, including the environment ministry.

“All the requirements, criteria and regulations have been respected,” the company said in a statement.

It pointed out that a local tribunal had also rejected the complaints of local activists.

The Telegraph has contacted RWE.

Environmental groups are calling for the project to be scrutinised by a public inquiry.

Maurizio Conticelli, from a local NGO called Amici della Terra, translated as Friends of the Earth, said wind turbines had already “colonised” large parts of southern Italy, Sardinia and Sicily.



He said energy firms now had their sights set on central Italy, from Lazio and Umbria to Tuscany, adding: “But they did not reckon with local communities which are confounding their plans for industrial wind turbines with huge towers.”

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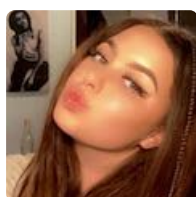
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