

Sicilian Struggle to protect Environment and Peace

by the No M.U.O.S. Movement



Demonstration on March 13, 2013, Source: Flickr

The M.U.O.S. (Mobile User Objective System) is a military telecommunication system of the USA Navy. The ground system relies on four ground stations, located in Virginia (USA), Hawaii, Australia and Niscemi, Italy. Each M.U.O.S. station has three parabolic antennas with a diameter of 18.4 meters, using the Ka band (microwave) and two helical antennas, 149 meters high, in the UHF band. Five geostationary satellites (four plus one spare) will connect the ground stations to mobile users.

The Italian M.U.O.S. ground station is located in the USA military base NRTF-8 (Naval Radio Transmitter Facility) in Niscemi, Sicily. Here, 41 antennas in the UHF band and one in the LF band are already active since 1991. The LF antenna, about 140m high and radiates at 500-2000 KW, is used to communicate with submarines. From the results of a few monitoring campaigns by the Sicilian environment pro-

tection agency (ARPAS) the concern that this installation already exceeds the limits of the Italian law on electromagnetic radiations has strong scientific grounds.

Obviously, the scope of this complex infrastructure is the control and coordination of USA military systems around the world. The system will provide communication capabilities to the so-called mobile users, especially drones, the unmanned aircrafts the are already used in the USA military base in Sigonella, Sicily.

As far as we know, three out of four ground stations have been completed. The station in Niscemi, Sicily, has been completed and is undergoing a test phase. The first satellite has been launched in February 24th 2012 and tested until July 24th 2012. The last satellite launch is scheduled before the end of 2015. Then, the system will be fully functional. Although it has been said otherwise by institutions, the M.U.O.S. will not substitute the existing system in the NRTF-8 base (i.e., the 46 antennas). Most likely, the old system will work in parallel to M.U.O.S. for several years to come.

The NRTF-8 military base is located inside the natural reserve Sughereta di Niscemi, one of the few natural cork-oak parks in Italy. The park is protected by strict rules, enforced by law, that forbid any human intervention inside the park area. The park was established in 1997 and has been declared Community Interest Site from 2000, as one of the protected natural sites of the European Community. In 2008, the territorial plan of the Provincia di Caltanissetta, decreed that in the Sughereta building infrastructures is forbidden, as well ad building cables or trellises. Violating these prohibitions, a large part of a hill has been cleared and razed to the ground to make room for the M.U.O.S. station.

Risks of M.U.O.S. and NRTF-8 technologies

The effects on the ecosystem of the Sughereta and Bosco di Santo Pietro natural parks are difficult to predict. Nonetheless, it is widely known that bees, which activity is fundamental for the biological equilibrium of that ecosystem, are particularly sensitive to strong electromagnetic fields. The radiations might also have an impact on agriculture, since EM fields influence plant growth.

The EM field induced by the transmission systems in the base could interfere with electronic devices, especially with wearable medical devices and electronic devices in hospitals. Moreover, the microwave beam generated by the MUOS system can interfere with flight instruments. The beam would pass at about 6500 m over the Comiso airport, well below the cruising altitude of civil aviation. This would impose a no-fly zone of about 35 Km from the MUOS station, during transmission. This would also affect routes from and to the Catania airport, with consequences on tourism and local economy and on the right to mobility, especially on

a prolonged crisis scenario. A similar scenario happened during the war on Lybia, when civil traffic was banned from the Trapani-Birgi airport.

The beam can also cross the skies over the Gela Gulf, which is a common route for migratory birds. Hence, MUOS can impact migration of several bird species.

The No MUOS movement

We aim at the revocation of authorisation to build and activate the MUOS station in Niscemi, Sicily. We pursue this objective at the political level, in court-rooms, in workshops, in the street.

We act on different levels: safeguarding the ecosystem of the Sughereta park, protecting the health of Sicilian citizens, especially of those who live close to the military base, independent monitoring of radiations, information campaigns and petitions, political lobbying, legal actions.

The No MUOS movement is a group of people brought together by spirit of service towards our community. We are people who feel strong responsibility towards our fellow citizens who, freely and with enthusiasm, joined our cause. Hence, we feel obliged to be free from political influence. Our movement is a complex and colourful body, where different groups work together or independently. There are town-level committees, most of which organised into a uniquely-coordinated group (coordinamento regionale dei comitati), the Movimento No MUOS Sicilia, a legally-recognised association, the committees of the well-known No MUOS Mothers, anti-mafia associations, cultural groups.

Here we report the most important initiatives.

Monitoring of EM radiation

Although MUOS has not been activated yet, 41 antennas are already active since 1991 in the NRTF-8 military base in Niscemi, Sicily. A number of experts warned against risks of EM radiation from those antennas, both for human health and for the equilibrium of the ecosystem of the Sughereta park in Niscemi. Those experts highlighted that the monitoring campaign, run from 2008 to 2009 by the Sicilian environment protection agency (ARPAS), does not conform to international standards and to the Italian law. That is why we are trying to run an independent electromagnetic monitoring campaign, looking for funding if necessary.

Collecting data on health impacts

We want to demonstrate the antennas in the military base of Niscemi, Sicily, are dangerous for human health and for the natural habitat of the Sughereta park in Niscemi. Hence, we need more than just simple data on EM emissions. We also

need information on health effects already present in the population of Niscemi. We are collecting data about the incidence of cancer and other diseases directly connected to EM radiations, in the district including Niscemi.

Spreading the word

Our demonstrations as well as our petitions have known a great success. Nonetheless, we know that our message has not reached most of our fellow citizens, yet. Still, lots of people do not have access to correct or complete information about MUOS. Our information campaign still goes on in real as well as virtual public spaces, in schools, in the institutions, through the press, and it will be boosted by producing brochures, movies, informative reports.



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