

NIGERIA/ITALY

## Follow the money

**A leak from Italian prosecutors reveals more details about the recipients of the US\$800 million from the OPL 245 licence sale**

Telephone taps of Italian middlemen in the deal over Oil Prospecting Licence 245 reveal extraordinary detail about the manoeuvring that led to the agreement between the Nigerian government, and ENI SpA and Shell, in April 2011 (AC Vol 55 No 20 & No 7). The leak from an Italian government investigation of ENI (*Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi*) reveals that ENI officials made direct contact with Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan and his then Oil and Petroleum Resources Minister, Diezani Allison-Madueke, to break the logjam over the contentious OPL 245.

The two oil majors ended up paying US\$1.09 billion to Abuja, which then swiftly passed most of the money on to Nigerian private companies and individuals, foremost among them Chief Dan Etete and his shell company Malabu (AC Vol 55 No 10). Investigations into the recipients of the money are ongoing. Milanese prosecutors are investigating whether ENI masked the payment of bribes to Nigerian officials to win rights to the block. The edited transcripts reveal middleman Luigi Bisignani's worry that the contact between ENI top officials and the Nigerian presidency could cut the

middlemen out of the fees they would earn from brokering the deal.

When they talked on the phone, Bisignani and his fellow Italian middleman Gianluca di Nardo assigned code names to the principals in the deal. Jonathan was 'Fortunato' (Lucky), Allison-Madueke was 'Lady', Etete was 'Fatty', Obi (a Nigerian middleman working for Etete) 'the child' and ENI's then Chief Executive Officer, Paulo Scaroni, 'the Number One', while Claudio Descalzi, then Scaroni's deputy and now ENI's CEO, was known as 'the Number Two', 'the good guy' or 'Baldy'. Di Nardo and Bisignani were highly elliptical, as in this extract from an intercepted call at 17.34 on 18 November 2010:

Man [Di Nardo]: Hello.

Bisignani: Eh, so, ahhhhh, tell the chap that Mr Fortunato and the lady...

Man: Yes.

Bisignani: Hell, Mr Fortunato and the lady have said they want to do this tomorrow or the day after.

Man: OK, I'll tell him to ring whatsit so they're invited [as heard] but it comes right from Mr Fortunato and the lady.

Man: I'll tell him straight away.

Bisignani: So... the two that in short...

Man: OK, I'll tell him straight away.

The meaning is unclear and the prosecutors do not explain why Bisignani and Di Nardo felt the need to give code names to the President and Oil Minister.

A document from the prosecutors shows that when they questioned Bisignani on 16 April 2014 in the presence of his lawyer, he talked about Allison-Madueke. Bisignani said, 'As far as the relations of Obi and Etete with the Nigerian environment are concerned, I found out from Di Nardo that, in turn, he had been told by Obi that a lady minister of the Nigerian government of the time was a former assistant of Etete at the time when [he] was Minister of Petroleum. Obi and Di Nardo therefore took the support of the minister for granted.'

Other information from the Italian prosecution reveals, after enquiries at the central bank, the *Banca d'Italia*, and other financial institutions around the world, the destination of much of the \$800 mn. that went to Malabu. Some \$523 mn. of it was to companies and accounts linked to Abubakar Aliyu, an oil man who is close to President Jonathan and his former Oil Minister.

They also mention the payment of \$10 mn. to a former senior law officer in the government of General Olusegun Obasanjo. Some of the payments, the prosecutors said, include 'the purchase of armoured cars and aircraft'. They conclude: 'What can be said with certainty, based on the information so far obtained, is that the money paid by ENI, and already distributed, was the origin of a very high number of opaque and anomalous financial transactions...'. ●