

Laudatory Speech for Addiopizzo

Speaker: Beate Löwe-Navarro



Dear Francesca Vannini, dear Alessandra Perrone, dear Guests,

I am very honoured to make the laudatory speech for the Sicilian organisation Addiopizzo, the recipient of the Bremen Peace Award, for their commitment against the payment of mafia protection money. Christiane Mache made the award proposal.

Addiopizzo is a non-government organisation that explicitly does not follow any party-political interests; it is, however, politically active and supports the democratic participation of its citizens – a true grassroots movement.

“Un intero popolo che paga il pizzo e un popolo senza dignità.”

“An entire nation which pays protection money is a nation without dignity.”

This sentence appeared on hundreds of small posters resembling obituaries in the city centre of Palermo in the night of the 29th June 2004. This campaign gave rise to Addiopizzo.

Originally, seven young people had planned to open a café in Palermo. The question quickly arose as to how to deal with the very likely demands made by the mafia to pay protection money. Discussions within the group spontaneously sparked off the idea to take action against the Pizzo, the protection money payments.

The poster campaign received an overwhelming response. La Repubblica, one of the leading Italian newspapers, printed an open letter from Addiopizzo to the people of Palermo in its local section. At the beginning of the letter, they could read: “Are we truly aware that when we do our daily shopping, we are actually paying money to the mafia? We are all affected, but each and every one of us can contribute to changing the situation”.

Local radio and television stations also reported on the campaign, people started to discuss the unusual initiative at work, in school, within the family and with friends. Thus, Addiopizzo had achieved its first goal: the silence had been broken and the subject of protection money was no longer taboo.

Only two months later on the 29th August, large banners with the words “An entire nation which opposes protection money is a free nation” hung from the pedestrian bridges of the bypass in Palermo. The date had been chosen carefully. It was the 13th anniversary of the death of Libero Grassi, an Italian businessman murdered by the mafia because he had refused to pay the Pizzo.

This was the beginning of a very committed citizens’ movement that takes action against the mafia through imaginative campaigns. In May 2005, Addiopizzo published a consumer manifesto with the title “Against protection money – change your consumer behaviour”. Three thousand five hundred

people had soon signed the appeal. The campaign is based on the solidarity between tradespeople and consumers.

The idea is actually quite simple, but demands great courage. At the time of the first campaigns carried out by Addiopizzo, 70% of all shop and restaurant owners in the region of Sicily paid the Pizzo. Individuals who refuse face possible retaliation by the mafia, risk the destruction or the boycotting of their shops and, at the worst, their own lives.

This is the starting point for critical consumer behaviour. According to the motto “Pago chi non paga” (I pay where no one is forced to pay), consumers make a conscious decision to buy products from mafia-free shops. Businesses that have joined the movement draw attention to this via the Addiopizzo sticker in their shop windows.

When the mafia threatens these shop owners, they receive comprehensive legal support through Addiopizzo. This legal aid is free of charge.

Addiopizzo has published an alternative map of the city of Palermo showing all shops that are free from protection money. Information is also readily available on the Internet. Thus far, over 1,000 tradespeople and freelancers have signed the Addiopizzo agreement, and in doing so, have committed themselves to the non-payment of protection money and to report cases of attempted blackmail. Over 13,000 consumers have signed the Addiopizzo manifesto.

Meanwhile, they have also created their own quality label called “Certificato Addiopizzo” with which companies from the areas of farming, trade and industry can mark their products as long as they fulfil three conditions:

- a) Legality
- b) Excellent quality
- c) Sustainability

Once a year, Addiopizzo organises a “Festival of critical consumption” to which all of Palermo’s citizens are invited to try out the mafia-free products, inform themselves about the organisation’s activities and create networks.

Representatives from Addiopizzo regularly visit schools in order to sensitize children and young people to the problem of the Pizzo and to show them that they can do something to oppose it. The school activities end every year with a “Pizzo-Free” school party.

Since 2009, the idea of the critical consumer has been expanded to include critical tourism: a young team organises alternative guided tours in Palermo, Corleone and Cinisi as well as other events to promote a gentle and critical kind of tourism in the region, including bicycle tours and hiking routes. In addition to the holiday aspect, it is always important to give background information on political and social situations. The hotels, guesthouses and restaurants working together with Addiopizzo all belong to the campaign’s network.

Details of the projects run by Addiopizzo can all be found on their informative website, which is also available in English. The website additionally serves to raise funds through the sale of T-shirts and food products. A significant part of the budget is financed through donations. Tax payers in Italy can decide on an annual basis to which non-profit organisation they wish to donate 0.5% of their taxable income. As it is an officially recognised organisation, Addiopizzo is also able to receive these donations.

The initiative did not only affect the area around Palermo. In 2006, Addiopizzo Catania was founded, and the organisation has been represented in Messina since 2010. Citizens have joined forces against the mafia beyond Sicily, and even in Germany. After a massacre between rival “Ndrangheta” clans in Duisburg in 2007 and attempted racketeering in Berlin, proprietors in Berlin founded the association “Mafia? No thank you!”

Thus, the phenomenon of the mafia is by no way only limited to Sicily or Southern Italy. In the same way as legal companies are globally active today, mafia organisations have long since established themselves in Northern Italy and abroad, and even in Germany. The picture described by Roberto Saviano in his book “Gomorrha”, which is well known far beyond Italy and which describes the international activities of the Camorra, is also true in a similar form to the Sicilian Cosa Nostra. The German Bundestag assumes that the number of Cosa Nostra members in Germany has risen from 20 in 2007 to 124 today, whereby there is naturally a large number of unreported cases.

In Germany in particular, the mafia have had an easy time of doing business as the legislation is not nearly as strict as in Italy and also because there are relatively few controls and investigations. This year at least, the regulations regarding money laundering have been tightened according to EU specifications. Since 2017, investigations into money laundering are no longer dealt with by the police but by the customs office. A significant increase in personnel is also planned.

Members of Addiopizzo are often asked: “Are you not afraid that you also may become victims of the mafia?” The organisation is well aware of the risk involved in opposing the archaic structures of the Pizzo. A movement like Addiopizzo is still inconceivable in many rural areas of Sicily today. And yet, the stronger the movement becomes, the greater the protection for all of those involved; the mafia fears publicity most of all. According to the chief witness of the judicial system, the mafia meanwhile refrains from demanding protection money from shops with the Addiopizzo sticker as it fears legal consequences.

The members of Addiopizzo consciously accept the risks involved in opposing the mafia as they are convinced that a change in Sicilian society cannot simply be brought about by a change in the laws, but has to come from the citizens and has to consider the entire social framework.

These courageous actions have obviously also convinced the donors of the Threshold Foundation. They have chosen Addiopizzo as the award winner for the category “The donors’ award”. We are delighted that Francesca Vannini and Alessandra Perrone are here with us this evening to represent Addiopizzo in receiving the award.

The citizens of Sicily have shown that every single one of us can contribute to a non-violent conflict against the mafia and that together we are strong. For the future, I also wish Addiopizzo great energy and power in their campaign to end the silence with an ever-increasing number of allies – in favour of an honest and peaceful society.

Thank you very much.
Beate Löwe-Navarro

