

SPEECH BY THE MINISTER

AT THE SIGNING CEREMONY OF THE PACT FOR EXPORT

Dear Colleagues, Ministers Gualtieri, Bellanova, De Micheli, Manfredi, Franceschini and Pisano, Deputy Ministers and Undersecretaries Manzella, Del Re, Di Stefano and President Bonaccini, Presidents, distinguished signatories of the Pact

We parted after the meeting of March 3, when the COVID-19 outbreak was confined to a small area of our country. So many things have happened since then, some very painful, others that give us hope for the future. We have emerged from the bleakest period of this health crisis and the country can now move on, cautiously but courageously. At long last **the engine that drives Brand Italy, our economic and business powerhouse, can begin to rev-up again.**

We have experienced **an enormously complex and unprecedented period** in our history, which entailed out of the ordinary activities for the Foreign Ministry as well. I would like to go over it briefly with you today. On the one hand, thanks to the exceptional work of the Crisis Unit, our Network abroad and all our staff members, since the beginning of the pandemic we have brought back to Italy over 90,000 Italians stranded in 119 countries and provided constant assistance to many others. We also organised and coordinated the activities that made it possible to find and purchase, around the world, sanitary and personal protective equipment and other necessary tools for tackling the crisis. On the other hand, right from the start here at the Foreign Ministry, we focused on a strategic objective: to restart the economy, as quickly as possible. To look beyond the emergency and start building the future, with awareness and foresight, with humbleness and the desire to get back to business as usual.

This attitude has served us well **to keep constantly in touch with the business community at large and its trade associations**, which represent the beating heart of our economic and manufacturing system, convinced as we are of the enormous importance of listening to the voice and hearkening to the needs of the country in the direst of circumstances. A channel we have strived each day to keep open and alive. By strengthening the emergency response team, the Foreign Ministry was committed to networking and coordinating, as efficiently as possible, the requests coming in from the worlds of business and manufacturing, the Government's strategies and the measures implemented by the export and internationalisation agencies.

As many of you will be aware, from April 14 to 21 Undersecretary Manlio Di Stefano and Ambassador Lorenzo Angeloni chaired **12 virtual meetings** aimed precisely at this purpose, attended by no less than 147 trade associations and over 250 participants from all sectors of the economy: from agri-food to mechanical engineering, from pharmaceuticals to infrastructure, from innovation and services to export and culture and tourism.

We collected many contributions, proposals, ideas to help restart the country's economy in the wake of the emergency. Today the engine of Brand Italy can start running again and we are gathered here precisely to sign a concrete pact, a **Pact for Export**, which binds us in mutual commitment and through which we agree to precise responsibilities. This instrument draws on the inputs from your sources and has inspired a new strategy for internationalising our economy. A strategy that, no doubt, is very ambitious, yet sound and based on **six pillars**.

Firstly, **communication**, to which we have dedicated the largest public call for tenders on the subject. The sectoral meetings and discussions with the various organisations have highlighted the need to rebrand this country, if we want to effectively restart our economy, to build a new and stronger narrative of Italy abroad. A strategic and integrated communication effort in favour of Brand Italy and all our supply chains: a unique "know-how" that combines quality, safety and innovation, onto which we must turn the spotlight through the massive use of digital platforms and the involvement of internationally acclaimed Italian celebrities. A cornerstone of this economic reopening strategy is to promote an even broader and more in-depth knowledge of Italy, the beauty of its land and its features of excellence, in all fields. So, on June 4, we published in the Official Journal of the European Union and the Italian Government public procurement website appaltinnovativi.gov.it, the notice for a transparent, inclusive and fast market consultation for 50 million euros. From now until September, through a "competitive dialogue" procedure, we will select the best proposals to relaunch the image of our economic sectors in 26 countries around the world.

The second pillar is about **training and information**. Two key words for all those SMEs which offer excellence, but which do not yet export and on behalf of which the State must provide a wide range of support tools, beginning with roles such as Temporary Export Managers and Digital Managers, which have become a prerequisite for fostering access to foreign markets by Italian companies. This strategy also includes the proposal, included in the Pact, to create a single government portal providing export support services, customised to priority sectors and markets. I must add here that

the ongoing commitment of the Foreign Ministry will continue, in Italy and abroad, in support of our business community. Embassies and Consulates will increasingly become the "Home of Italian businesses in the World", where to find assistance and information, to make contact and speak with foreign markets and institutions.

The third pillar is **e-commerce**. This was repeated many times at the sectoral meetings, as well as by international analysts and consultants: digital platforms will continue, in the aftermath of the emergency, to play an ever expanding role in boosting global trade. This is the real challenge we are facing, to fully exploit the opportunities that the digital revolution can offer Italy's creativity and industrial strength. Agreements with international e-commerce platforms, access by SMEs to an ever increasing number of digital marketplaces, also through government support, digital trade fairs and events: these must become our new bywords.

The fourth pillar is the **trade fair system**. The Pact being signed today provides several clear and concrete steps: to strengthen SME participation in international trade fairs, both in Italy and abroad; to attract buyers and VIPs with ad hoc tailored regional programmes. We need to consider that the COVID-19 pandemic has obliged us to rethink the whole system of trade fairs, and the digital world can help us achieve this, as yet another challenge that Italy will not back away from, with more and more digital events, virtual B2B, the organisation of "mini-shows" and trade fairs involving the supply chains of complementary sectors.

And this brings me to the fifth pillar, **integrated promotion**. All the excellence of "Brand Italy", in the economic, cultural, scientific and technological fields, will be relaunched as part of a single system. The Foreign Ministry has already adopted this approach with its "Italian Lifestyle" Programme, which has now become even more important. The time has come for a twofold step change: an even greater effort in promoting Italian excellence in innovative and high-tech sectors (such as the aerospace industry, advanced mechanics, but also the green economy and the agri-food industry) and new "vertical integration" projects, promoting Italian business in adjacent supply chains (e.g. fashion and textiles, woodworking machinery and design, tourism, automotive and food and wine). Our Embassies and Consulates will be implementing actions in this direction.

Last but not least, the sixth pillar, **subsidised finance**. This is an essential instrument, especially at this historic moment in time: I am referring to outright grants, low-interest loans, guarantee schemes, access to risk capital, which we are offering with various support measures that meet the needs of more structured companies, but also young entrepreneurs and start-ups. These are the keys to kick-starting a virtuous circle between the internationalisation of our companies and the attraction of quality foreign investment in Italy, thanks also to the new instruments made available by the State.

These are the six pillars that underpin the Pact for Export: a public support strategy for businesses wishing to penetrate the international marketplaces, which will be able to rely on **extraordinary resources** made available by the Government to give the much-needed push to the economy. These extraordinary resources are available thanks to various vehicles: the **Extraordinary Plan for Made in Italy**, the **Integrated Promotion Plan** and the **394/81 Fund, for a never-before-seen amount**. Furthermore, the Government has increased its financial support for exports offering state-backed guarantees for 90% of SACE's commitments in favour of Italian exporting companies.

The Export Pact is a living instrument, which will unfold its effects starting from today and will remain open for new accessions, with the commitment that this project will be able to promptly adapt to the economic and social developments taking place in the country. There are many initiatives for restarting the economy; to mention just a few: expanding agreements with large retailers and international e-commerce platforms and supporting the digitisation of SMEs, thanks to the measures envisaged by the Extraordinary Plan for the promotion of Made in Italy; launching an extraordinary strategic communication plan; launching online business digitisation programmes for SMEs; calls for publishing public recruitment notices for Temporary Export Managers and Digital Export Managers. Furthermore, in view of the requests by the **Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry Policies**, on March 3, and the trade associations, in the coming months we will integrate 6 agriculture experts in our diplomatic-consular network, to optimise the commitment by our Embassies to removing non-tariff barriers and promoting the excellence of the Italian agri-food chain. Many fronts on which we will start working from today: this is our contribution to relaunching the country.

Today we are here to also present a first concrete business support tool: an **e-book** aimed at our SMEs that have not yet opened up to foreign markets, an "instruction manual" prepared with the help and insights of many of you who work with these issues on a daily basis.

This guide aims to assist and empower businesses along the entire path of the internationalisation process, by learning the "language of export" to going that last mile and eventually gaining a foothold on foreign markets, through a number of intermediate stages, such as financing opportunities and support programmes. We are confident that it can be a useful tool for opening up new prospects. The e-book is part of a more complex project aimed at making information on export and internationalization support measures more accessible, user-friendly and transparent. We are currently engaging with ICE, SACE, SIMEST to create a single portal providing an all-round view of the tools that are available to

the central government, the regions and the government agencies. Furthermore, we also intend to roll out a road show, which we would like to build with your inputs and ideas, to ensure that all businesses can be made fully aware of these opportunities.

Six months on from the entry into force of the reform that transferred exports and business internationalisation within the scope of the operations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we are witnessing the first results of a coordinated effort by the Embassies, Consulates, Cultural Institutes, Ice foreign trade offices and trade associations. A virtuous example of how the country's overall economic system has reacted to the health and economic emergency we are still tackling today. If there is one thing that the pandemic has not harmed it is the great demand for Italian expertise and products abroad. And we intend to fulfil this demand. This is the spirit that underlies the Pact for Export, and the spirit with which we will tackle together the challenges ahead of us. So it falls to us as best we can to pool our efforts and strive to ensure the success of this complex and very delicate phase, fraught with enormous challenges, but also vast opportunities.

This Pact for Export, today, is a great way to break new ground to enhance Brand Italy worldwide, a challenge we need to approach with dedication, humility and the spirit of service we owe to our country and our fellow countrymen and women. Thank you all.