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“The aerospace industry must continue to grow”

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Giuseppe Orsi, the managing director of AgustaWestland, used a tree metaphor to explain the relationship between the helicopter giant and this region. “Our branches extend all over the world, but our roots are firmly established in Lombardy,” he said, during the visit by the regional councillor for industry and crafts, **Andrea Gibelli**. His message was that the heart of the company is not going to move from where it is now, despite its presence in all continents. The plants in Vergiate opened this morning for the twentieth visit by the Northern League politician to companies in Lombardy, an initiative that has enabled him to meet businessmen and to discover their needs. On this occasion, it was the turn of one of the most important aerospace companies in Lombardy, a large company that a great number of small companies depend on, also in and around Varese.

Growth even in a time of crisis – The AgustaWestland manager explained, “The attention of the authorities is essential at this time, even though our company is an exception. Many companies are still trying to understand how to come out of this extremely difficult period.”

Despite the economic crisis, the company that is part of the Finmeccanica Group has maintained a stable performance. “In 2010, our turnover was €3644 million, with a profit of €413 million and a portfolio of 5982 new orders,” said Orsi. According to the figures provided this morning, 70% of AgustaWestland’s production is for the civilian market, and 30% for the military; however, in terms of turnover, these percentages should be inverted, because of the greater income from the military market. The reference is the world market which takes 91% of the production, while only 9% is destined for Italy.

The strategy of the partnership – “There are a number of strategic factors that have enabled us to keep going during the crisis despite changes in the market and international competition,” Orsi explained. “In particular, we decided to establish local partnerships in a number of countries, which have enabled us to reach markets throughout the world. We established technology and production alliances in exchange for significant slices of the market. It would be futile to compete with giants, such as China or India, differently.”

Agreements with Libya – During his presentation, Orsi also touched on the company’s relations with Libya, describing the situation as “frozen”. In the past, AgustaWestland set up a joint venture with its Libyan partners; so far, the agreements have led to 5 helicopters being supplied for the Red Cross, and 10 for the coast guard.

The growth of young people in the company – “The average age in AgustaWestland is very low. Over the last few years, we have taken on 3500 young engineers. We believe that each of them is an investment for the entire company. They are the greatest asset we have; we have to offer incentives to make them stay and help them to grow. Even the current management, of which I am a member, were schooled by Caporaletti.”

New challenges for small companies – AgustaWestland has a central role in the aerospace industry in Lombardy “Here, we have unique skills,” Orsi explains. “But the industry has only taken its first steps, it still has to grow. The model of small companies feeding off a single large company can’t work any longer. On the one hand, we need to encourage micro-companies to unite, on the other, to make them independent. For this reason, we are trying to share our strategy with our suppliers as much as possible. The suppliers have to be able to export and, in turn, to become suppliers for our competitors throughout the world. We have to give the message that what we produce in this region is something to be proud of, something of great quality in this field. The cluster must maintain the ability to move within the international markets.”

The team’s recipe – The regional councillor said, “AgustaWestland and the aerospace industry are an example of the companies in Lombardy that, together, have created products that are internationally recognised. This company shows that when the people of Lombardy join forces, they succeed, and thereby protect very important international markets that, at times, were monopolies controlled by large international economic powers, such as the United States.”

Andrea Gibelli was accompanied by regional councillors Giangiacomo Longoni and Cesare Bossetti.

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