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**Agriculture: key sector for the Mediterranean economy**

***A press conference was held on the opening day of Agrilevante by Undersecretary for Agriculture Patrizio Giacomo La Pietra and ICE president Matteo Zoppas on the theme "Agriculture and cooperation: a policy for the Mediterranean". During the meeting, the central role of mechanisation in enhancing the agricultural economies of North Africa and the Balkans, areas of growing interest for Italian industries in the sector, was stressed.***

The Mediterranean represents an area of great potential from an economic and commercial point of view, both for the growth of the Gross Domestic Product of many countries and for the overall improvement of agricultural productivity. The countries of North Africa, in particular, are registering a significant increase in GDP, and the data reported in the Internationalia/FederUnacoma surveys forecast in 2023 a growth in Egypt of 4.4%, in Libya of 17.9%, in Algeria of 3.1%, in Morocco of 3.3% and in Tunisia of 1.9%. A driving role is being played in these economies by the agricultural sector, which is registering increasing investment in the purchase of machinery and equipment for the region's typical supply chains. This was discussed at the Fiera di Bari, during the press conference that followed the inauguration of Agrilevante, the exhibition of agricultural machinery for the Mediterranean, being held until Sunday 8 October.

The agricultural technology market - it was noted during the meeting attended by FederUnacoma President Mariateresa Maschio, Undersecretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forestry Giacomo La Pietra, and ICE Agency President Matteo Zoppas - is growing throughout the area, where investments in advanced mechanical equipment are becoming increasingly strategic to cope with climate change and ensure that food requirements are met.

In this perspective, the Italian industry can boast positions of excellence - stressed president Mariateresa Maschio - for the wide range of technologies produced, capable of meeting the needs of every model of agriculture. The agro-mechanical sector - added Zoppas - is weighing ever more heavily on our export performance, despite uncertainties relating to the geopolitical landscape, high raw material prices, and growing competition from emerging countries. In addition to consolidating on traditional reference markets, agricultural machinery must focus on the new strategic areas of North Africa and the Balkans, which, the ICE president stressed, are investing in latest-generation technologies to improve standards of quality, sustainability and productivity in their respective agricultural economies.

Agriculture is called upon to play a leading role not only in emerging realities, for which food safety is a priority issue, but also for a country like Italy that has always been characterised by the excellence of its production. Our agricultural system - Patrizio Giacomo La Pietra commented - can raise its quality standards even higher through a 'system strategy', with long-term collaboration between all the players in the supply chain. In this perspective, it is necessary to strengthen the incentive tools aimed at renewing and modernising the machinery fleet, whose advanced age does not meet the production requirements of modern agriculture. For this reason - concluded the undersecretary - a strong and pragmatic interlocution is necessary at all levels of governance, European, national, and regional.

**Bari, 5 October 2023**