

## **The waiting is over, the future is green**

*The tradeshow, scheduled for 5-8 September at the Fiera Milano Rho fairgrounds, is the main event of the year for the plastics and rubber industry with nearly 1,000 Italian and international exhibitors already registered.*

After a 5-year hiatus, the international trade fair PLAST is (finally) back on the starting blocks, with a rich agenda focusing on green innovation.

After an absence of five years, expectations are naturally high. The last edition of PLAST took place in 2018. Following, and inevitably as a consequence of, the well known issue of the COVID-19 pandemic and the forced replanning of the international trade fairs for our industry, we have moved the date to 5-8 September 2023. This is, of course, an unusual period of the year for our event, which had always been held in the spring. However, this choice allows us to avoid any conflict with other major fairs while also taking advantage of the pleasant September weather, which will only help attract visitors from abroad. Not only will they be able to profit from the opportunity to visit the halls and stands at the fair, but they can also enjoy the many beautiful sights in our country.

### **A window on the world**

The initiative already has many different and very clear leitmotifs, the same ones that animate and inspire the work of a large slice of the industry and the business community, both within and outside of the sphere of plastics processing. On the one hand, there is the determination of the companies – which operate in a context characterized by positive numbers, in spite of everything – to act in an increasingly decisive manner as protagonists in international markets. On the other, inevitably, there is the need to pick up the pace of the green transition.

As organizers, we are investing a great deal in communication and internationalization, thanks partly to the collaboration with ICE (agency for the internationalization of Italian businesses and their promotion on foreign markets). The intention is to be able to receive increasingly large and qualified delegations of buyers from some thirty nations.

Looking at the general economic context, and in spite of all the well known current challenges, Italian manufacturers of plastics and rubber processing systems – those who represent the core of the exhibition – will arrive at the fair after a positive 2022. The AMAPLAST (trade association) statistical study centre records revenues of 4.67 billion euros, an improvement not only with respect to 2021 but also, and most importantly, compared to the pre-pandemic period: indeed, this is the second-best result ever. The early part of this year is marked by substantial stability: the hope is that this will continue in the coming months.

### **Under the banner of the circular economy**

Along with energy savings and the circular economy, sustainability represents one of the fundamental themes not only in the plastics industry but for the entire international economy.

Last May we organized GREENPLAST, an exhibition-convention dedicated to sustainability of materials, technologies, and transformation processes for plastics and rubber. PLAST 2023 is preparing to host excellence in innovation in a green hue: from biologically derived, low-impact recycled materials to energy-saving systems to process bio-based and recycled polymers. And again: from innovative processes that make it possible to use a smaller amount of raw materials while maintaining a high level of performance to post-consumer plastics recovery, sorting, and recycling plants. Each section of the fair is strongly focused on these themes, which are certainly key elements in the events programme.

### **The slow return to normal**

However much the industry has recorded, and continues to record, positive results, the existence and persistence of certain critical issues cannot be denied, many of them inherited from the recent past.

These include the sluggishness of the supply chain and, closely related, the scarcity of raw materials and components, associated with price hikes and difficulties in procurement. There is a moderately optimistic yet nevertheless realistic outlook. For a long time the companies had difficulties in procurement and manufacturers of production machinery especially struggled to guarantee delivery by the agreed dates because of the unavailability of components. We can now say that the problem has been partially resolved: suppliers have increased production but they still have an order backlog to process while addressing increased demand. Thus, although we are no longer in an emergency phase, we also cannot deny that this situation is putting the brakes on the market internationally.

Fortunately, however, this slowdown has not affected the desire of companies to meet and exchange ideas and solutions once again after such a long time, and the numbers prove it. Most of the companies that took part in the 2021 edition have confirmed their presence this year as well. There are currently almost one thousand participants registered for PLAST and nearly a third of them are from abroad. A large number of companies are exhibiting for the first time, a fact that is unquestionably worthy of note. Lastly, both the Chinese and the Iranian collectives have confirmed their presence, and we will witness the debut of a French delegation. This makes the content of the exhibition even more complete and exhaustive than it has been in the past. This is partially thanks to a strategic agreement signed with IPACK-IMA to promote PLAST, particularly among operators in the packaging sector, which will further increase the number of visitors. In this regard, the objective is certainly to match or exceed the numbers of the past edition.

### **The agenda: work in progress**

Filled with conferences, workshops, and exhibitor press conferences, the events calendar is still a work in progress but the organizers are working to offer participants many new and significant opportunities.

We have developed a new layout with demo areas equipped with operational processing lines and company presentation spaces. In parallel, The Innovation Alliance, a partnership project between PLAST, IPACK-IMA, PRINT4ALL, and INTRALOGISTICA ITALIA, is working on a new concept. Considering the reworking of the trade fair calendar necessitated by the pandemic, the organizational offices are exploring a possible reinterpretation of the initiative, organizing it into different sections that address current themes and bridge all participating market segments, thus consolidating the message of unified value chain that underpins it.

The organizers have confirmed the three satellite shows – dedicated to rubber (Rubber), additive manufacturing (3D Plast), and innovative polymers (Plast-Mat) – and thanks again to the support of ICE the Start-Up area will be present at the 2023 edition to highlight budding companies in the sector and the innovative solutions they propose.