Inauguration of the aeronautics and space engineering faculty

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I am delighted to be here today to take part in the inauguration of the aeronautics and space engineering faculty of La Sapienza university – the first of its kind in Italy.

This is another major step in the consolidation of Italy's presence in a sector where this country's industry has always played a leading role.

It should be remembered that a century ago, in 1907 – just four years after the Wright Brothers' first flight – Count Giovanni Agusta took off in a biplane of his own construction, thus starting Italy's long tradition in aeronautics.

In the inter-war years, Agusta continued building aeroplanes with great success, before going on to manufacture helicopters, first under licence from US companies and then of its own design.

In the meantime, other companies were formed in the aeronautics sector, such as SIAI-Marchetti, Caproni, and Aeronautica Macchi (later AerMacchi).

Over time all these companies, one after the other, became part of Finmeccanica, contributing with their successful products to the group's growth:

- Agusta – thanks also to its acquisition of the British company Westland – has become the world leader we all know;

- Alenia Aeronautica, thanks to the excellence it achieved from the 1980s onwards in producing composite materials for aerostructures, has become a leading player in the manufacture of aircraft;

- With the M346, AleniaAermacchi produced the best advanced trainer in the world, capable of effectively simulating all the latest generation fighter aircraft.

As regards space, not only did Italy launch its first satellite just seven years after Sputnik, but it developed its own highly respected industry – both in manufacturing, with Alenia Spazio (now part of Thales Alenia Space) and in satellite services, with Telespazio.

The level of excellence achieved by our space industry is borne out by a whole series of firsts, including:

- Sirio, the first high-frequency geostationary satellite;
- Italsat, the first regenerative satellite, which conducted the first experiments at 40 and 50 GHz;

- Sicral, the first dedicated military telecommunications satellite exclusive to Italy, compliant with NATO standards;

- Iris, the only launch system now being used to put a satellite from the space shuttle into orbit;

- CosmoSkyMed, the best remote sensing system now in orbit, thanks to SAR technology;

- More than 40% of the international space station’s living quarters was built in Italy.

These impressive business results could never have been achieved if an equally strong tradition had not developed, over the years, in the academic field.

This year saw the publication of a book, *Lo spazio tricolore* (“Flying the Italian Flag in Space”), by the journalist Dario Laruffa, which clearly emphasises this constant collaboration – albeit one sometimes difficult and fraught with conflict – between the world of industry and that of research.

Indeed, the history of Italy in space has been written by eminent scientists such as Giuseppe Occhialini, Bruno Rossi, Edoardo Amaldi, and Roberto Giacconi, by industrialists such as Antonio Rodotà, Franco Bardelli, Alessandro Bellini, and Ernesto Vallerani, and also by eclectic characters such as Luigi Broglio, who was able to combine both these aspects in an original but effective way.

For this reason too, today’s inauguration marks an important moment, because this is the setting up of a new entity that will be able to hold an ever closer dialogue with Italy’s aerospace industry.

Indeed, the new aeronautics and space engineering faculty, with its 1,500 students, together with the Sapienza aerospace research centre, which employs about 300 researchers, will contribute not only to training young specialists, which the sector’s industry urgently needs in order to compete, but also to collaborating with the industry in a beneficial co-operation between the state and the private sector, which can combine resources, experience, and ideas.

A further possible development might be the setting up an aerospace centre at Guidonia airport, where training, research, experiments and industrial testing could be brought together. Collaboration with space agencies and small, medium-sized, and large companies, a complete and structured range of courses, and training placements in industry as an integral part of the curriculum – all these factors put this faculty at the forefront among Italy’s universities.

Thank you.