

Build the future in Kurdistan

Angelo Caspani and ItalianExpo Iraq: the courage of a man who gambled on Kurdistan and promoted Italian-made products

Angelo Caspani is a 59-year-old entrepreneur who is the president of Axis Fairs & Services, which was established in 1991 to favor cultural and economic exchanges between Italy and emerging countries. For over 10 years, Mr. Caspani has assisted Italian companies and organizations working abroad in developing markets, helping them to understand the needs and to overcome the difficulties deriving from the challenges and new rules of the global market.

His company specializing in trade fairs for start-up markets has been working in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan since 2007. Through activities and services provided to help Italian companies expand on the international market, his ItalianExpo Iraq trade fairs and events organized on-site, and cooperation with Ministries and Universities, Mr. Caspani has promoted Kurdistan in Italy and the rest of Europe, which has helped favor exchanges between Italy and Iraq.

Angelo Caspani introduced Italians to another Kurdistan.

Promoting an informative campaign called "Good news from Kurdistan," which presented the other face of Kurdistan to professionals in the sector (through conferences held at chambers of Commerce and with trade associations) and to public opinion (on the media, in the press, on the web and social networks), Mr. Caspani helped disprove the stereotypes that were associated with Iraqi Kurdistan and its people for many years: stories of persecution, war, crime, refugees, and misery. Few people could relate to such a geographically remote country like Kurdistan. Many considered it a country to avoid because it was unsafe and a place of turmoil and civil strife. Today, Italians and Europeans know that the autonomous region of Kurdistan is a safe and peaceful place. Italian companies, large industrial groups, the national and regional governments—especially the Lombardy Region, followed by the Veneto, Tuscany, and Marche Regions—and several public and private institutions and organizations are very interested in Kurdistan. They follow and are very familiar with the social, cultural, and economic aspects of Kurdistan Region, and they actively

participate in its development and amazing growth. If Italian quality and style are in high demand and very popular on the Kurdish market today, it is in great part due to the courage of Angelo Caspani, his initiative, his managerial skills, and, above all, his personal commitment that encouraged him to anticipate the times and make the most of the opportunities, looking in other directions.

2007 marks first fundamental phase in establishing relations between Italy and Kurdistan.

Angelo Caspani, at the helm of his company, Axis, devised the ItalianExpo trade fair format designed for markets with economies requiring primary and infrastructural intervention and assistance. Being the pioneer that he is, he brought this format to Erbil.

ment for all of Iraq." The trade fair featuring Italian products and technologies satisfied the growing needs of the market and the country's reconstruction projects. It was a real success, and that success would continue to grow and consolidate over time.

The first signs in this direction arrived a few months after the exhibition and indicated Kurdistan's growing interest in Italy. A Kurdish delegation headed by Kurdish Minister of Commerce Mohammad Raouf Mohammad visited Milan in February 2008 and presented the various opportunities of Kurdistan Region during a meeting at the Milan Chamber of Commerce. This meeting laid the bases for the launch of bilateral relations between the Kurdish regional government and the Lombardy Region, and was followed by the sign-

ing of a letter of intent during the 2nd edition of ItalianExpo Iraq 2008 (held in Erbil from June 9-13). One year later, the B2B exhibition, organized by Angelo Caspani's company Axis, confirmed its strategic and intermediary role in the relations between the two countries. The acquired expertise and direct experience gained made it possible to identify and interpret the needs of the country and organize an exhibition

that, unlike the previous edition, focused on growing sectors. Consequently, ItalianExpo Iraq became more important not only on a regional level, but also nationally, and several authoritative figures were invited to the opening ceremony: Mr. Maurizio Melani, the Italian Ambassador in Iraq; Mr. Fawzi F. Hariri, the Iraqi Minister of Industry and Minerals; and Mr. Robi Ronza, the delegate for International Relations of the President of the Lombardy Region. The number of small and mid-sized Italian companies participating also increased: There were 90 exhibitors at ItalianExpo Iraq 2008 who could count on a partner able to profitably and successfully develop the opportunities emerging from the event.

After the first two editions, Axis with Italian-

ment of Kurdistan, whose economy was a driving force for future growth throughout Iraq. Three months later, on February 23, 2009, a Memorandum of Intent was signed between the Regional Government of Kurdistan and the Lombardy Region. Minister Mohammad Raouf Mohammad and President Formigoni signed the protocol to promote bilateral cooperation and to "give prominence and continuity to important partnerships focusing on business, investments, culture, tourism, and healthcare." The agreement was clearly the result of the dialog launched during the 2nd edition of ItalianExpo Iraq 2008, which demonstrates its value as a tool for broader opportunities of cooperation and a possibility for mutual enrichment between Italy and the Autonomous Re-

gion of Kurdistan. All the editions of ItalianExpo Iraq held in Erbil followed the evolution and growth of the Kurdish and Iraqi markets. As a result of the upcoming 4th edition of ItalianExpo Iraq will be the 20.10 version with a decidedly future-forward upgrade. Responding to the demand of the Kurdish market, Axis has specialized the Italian offer and renewed its exhibition concept in which the Italian business system and culture are values that have guided change and led to the creation of two specialized expos held at the same time: Future Building Show (for the construction, energy, environment, and heating and cooling sectors) and Guest & Food Techno Show (hospitality and food sectors). Building the Future is the theme linking the two events: The project revolves around humans and their needs and dreams tied to the evolution of one's individual and collective status.

This new awareness has triggered great interest in quality, especially in terms of product life and reliability, and a request for skills and training. Therefore, cultural and informative moments will play an important role in the 4th edition.

The appointment is in Erbil, from June 12-15, 2010, and Kurdistan is ready to welcome the eagerly awaited event with its excellent Italian products, services, and technologies.

Bakherbey in Kurdish means "welcome." It is a word that represents hospitality and openness towards others.

On the eve of the 4th edition of ItalianExpo Iraq 2010, people familiar with the story of Angelo Caspani and Axis realize that the hospitality that Italy enjoys in Kurdistan is due to the story of this entrepreneur who has personally worked with great tenacity to build the future in this country. The Kurds are tenacious people with great confidence in themselves, and Angelo Caspani has learned much from them.



Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani shakes hands with Angelo Caspani during the ItalianExpo at Erbil Fair Ground.

The 1st edition of ItalianExpo Iraq was held from September 6-10, 2007. It was the first 100% Italian exhibition and the first Western trade fair held in the Kurdish capital. Eighty Italian companies participated. The event was inaugurated by Kurdish President Massoud Barzani, who declared on that occasion: "This event draws us closer to Italy and further boosts the growth in our region, which wants to be a model of develop-

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Expo began promoting informative and educational seminars for Italy. This meant having access to economic opportunities deriving from the reconstruction in Iraq. The first Italian-Kurdish Economic Forum, strongly advocated by Mr. Adolfo Urso, the Italian Minister of Foreign Trade, was held in Erbil in November 2008. During that meeting, Minister Urso publicly invited Italy not to miss the chance to participate in the develop-

ment of Kurdistan. The Italian Ministry of Economic Development's endorsement of the 3rd edition of ItalianExpo Iraq 2009 confirmed Axis's important role as a primary partner on the Kurdish-Iraqi market. The past edition, which took place in Erbil in June, was endorsed by the Ministry. This important recognition by Italian institutions rewarded the organizational skills of Axis and its president Angelo Caspani, for

having launched activities designed to improve the international visibility of Kurdistan and to support Italian enterprise in Iraq, promoting the authenticity of Italian style. There were 130 Italian exhibitors in five specialized sectors at the 3rd edition of ItalianExpo Iraq 2009.