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■ **The Emilia-Romagna Region and the Comunidad Valenciana meet the Ceramic Industry for a sustainable energy transition**

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The two ceramics districts of Sassuolo (Italy) and Castellón de la Plana (Spain) are the most important sites in the European ceramics supply chain and generate a turnover of around 9 billion euros, directly employing over 35,000 people.

On March 16, a meeting was held with the representatives of the regional institutions and the ceramic industry associations, respectively Confindustria Ceramica and ASCER. During the meeting were discussed the values of ceramic, in particular regarding its hygienic properties and its durability for sustainable construction, and the challenges that await ceramic companies in the facing the objectives of the European Green Deal, while continuing to uphold international competitiveness and employment in the area.

The President of the Emilia-Romagna Region **Stefano Bonaccini** stated that "In Emilia-Romagna, the manufacturing sector represents an excellence at the international level, and the ceramic sector is pivotal. Spain is a very important partner for us, we have solid relationships that we want to maintain. Our hope is that we can work as a team, to safeguard a sector that otherwise risks seeing its competitiveness and ability to invest compromised, thus putting in danger the jobs involved. These are consequences that we cannot afford in an already dramatic context because of the ongoing pandemic".

**Ximo Puig**, President of the Comunidad Valenciana, stressed "the importance of working together to achieve an effective sustainable energy transition". Maintaining, that even though "the ceramic industry is a sector that has always worked for sustainability, it is necessary to take a step forward in the name of competitiveness, without forgetting to further increase the productivity of the industry. I'm in favor of creating an alliance among the regions and their ceramic industries, with the aim of better representing our requests in Europe, while safeguarding employment".

"Our sector exports over 85% of its turnover and European standards are by far the strictest in the world," said **Giovanni Savorani**, Chairman of Confindustria Ceramica. "In order to maintain international competitiveness, it is essential that our companies are not penalized by the costs of the Emissions Trading Directive, which only benefits financial speculation. Equally important in this phase is the inclusion of our sector in the list of sectors eligible for compensation for indirect costs, from which it was unfairly excluded by the Commission. Today we know that we can count on the support of our regional institutions, in order to be able to face the energy transition challenges, avoiding favoring ceramic products made in other areas of the world, with higher CO<sub>2</sub> emissions".

An even closer relationship with Europe was the focus of ASCER President **Vicente Nomdedeu's** speech. "It is good to remember that all ceramic imports produced outside the European Union are not subject to an ETS system, thus benefitting from an improper competitive advantage. The ETS system should take into consideration the current economic situation, going so far as to be reduced or suspended if companies find themselves in a situation of extraordinary

difficulty. It is also necessary for decarbonisation to take place within the right timeframe, considering the level of maturity of available technologies; in fact, if it cannot be further improved, the ETS becomes a tax on production. Finally, the implementation of an incentive plan, that allows companies to offset carbon dioxide rights, is crucial: energy policies should go hand in hand with industrial strategies".

"On our part - said **Vincenzo Colla**, Regional Councilor for Productive Activities, Labor and Green – we are willing to collaborate and work as a team. It is necessary to safeguard a strategic sector, which also represents a hub of technological innovation for the respective territories. In this scenario it is necessary that the EU gives merit to those who have made large investments, such as the ceramic industry, and those who have the strength to invest in sustainable projects, to avoid losing strategic sectors".

**Joan Calabuig**, Regional Councilor for Europe and International Relations, recalled how the Italian and Spanish ceramic industries share the goal of climate neutrality, but are still trying to understand what can realistically be implemented. He stated: "The protocol between the Comunidad Valenciana and the Emilia-Romagna Region has been signed thirty years ago; a testimony to the willingness to work together, both in the past and in the near future. We believe that the two regions, supported by their respective industries, can liaise with the European Commission in order to achieve the desired results".