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Trento Festival of Economics 2026 Draws to a Close After a Record Edition on Economic and Social Challenges

As the closing event of the Trento Festival of Economics, the dialogue “Economic Development as a Social Priority” featured Emanuele Orsini (President of Confindustria) and Fabio Tamburini (Director of Il Sole 24 Ore) in a discussion on the central role of economic growth in strengthening social cohesion, competitiveness, and long-term stability. The conversation addressed the challenges facing Italian industry and the wider European economy, focusing on investment, innovation, and the relationship between business development and social responsibility in an increasingly complex global scenario.

The Trento Festival of Economics, titled “From Markets to New Powers. The Hopes of Young People”, held from 20 to 24 May, came to an end after several days of debate. It brought together institutions, academics and experts to discuss key challenges facing contemporary societies - especially in the fields of economics and geopolitics. The programme featured a dense schedule of talks and panels, while the “Fuori Festival” extended the event to entertaining initiatives designed to engage a broader and more diverse audience.

The closing event, “Economic Development as a Social Priority” featured Emanuele Orsini (President of Confindustria) and Fabio Tamburini (Director of Il Sole 24 Ore). The discussion started by highlighting a balance of the past two years of Orsini’s presidency, described as “an energy-taking but beautiful experience”, marked by the effort to bring together and unify Confindustria and its different synergies, and by the broader challenge of protecting Italian companies while supporting the country’s overall system. **Reflecting on the Italian manufacturing sector,** strong concerns emerged about competitiveness, particularly due to energy costs -”we are 27th in Europe”- and taxation, with the argument that Europe must act more decisively to avoid de-industrialisation and strengthen common industrial policies. **A key priority identified was the creation of a European single market for energy,** seen as essential to reduce structural cost disadvantages and ensure a more level playing field for industry across Member States. Attention was also given to **dialogue with trade unions**, described as a necessary step, despite differing positions on several issues. Finally, on strategic sectors such as **automotive and household appliances,** it was stressed that Europe risks falling behind global competitors like China, unless it creates fairer competitive conditions and a true single market for energy and capital.

The discussion on Europe highlighted structural fragmentation as a core problem when it comes to competitivity. **On trade,** attention was given to Italy’s shift from a negative balance 15 years ago to a positive one of around 100 billion euros, while underlining the importance of opening new markets, especially where there are already links, such as Argentina, and strengthening industrial competitiveness, because "creating the conditions for entrepreneurs to compete with other continents is essential". **Positive signals were also noted in Southern Italy’s growth,** now outpacing the North for the first time, supported by simplification and investment policies. **On energy and artificial intelligence**, it was stressed that demand will rise sharply, with the warning that “in 20 years Italy will need double the energy”, calling for faster action on nuclear experimentation, renewable deployment and unlocking stalled authorisations.

The discussion then addressed the "demographic winter" and the emigration of young Italians, highlighting the need to retain talent through faster merit recognition, better salaries and improved housing affordability. It was noted that by 2040 Italy could be short of "5 million workers", making it essential to combine education, training and targeted attraction of foreign talent, including international partnerships. Concerns were also raised about young Italians leaving and not returning, in a context of global competition for skills, particularly in AI. Lastly, the decline in young entrepreneurs and the persistence of NEETs (still around 15%) were linked to the need for stronger integration between schools, universities and businesses, and faster entry pathways into the labour market.

In closing remarks, several institutional representatives expressed their thanks and reflections on the 2026 edition of the Festival. **Maurizio Fugatti** (President, Autonomous Province of Trento) called it a "record-breaking Festival, with 45,000 attendees", highlighting strong organisation and thanking all partners; **Monica Baggia** (Councillor, Municipality of Trento) underlined the high participation across all events, especially among young people; **Flavio De Florian** (Rector, University of Trento) noted the strong youth presence and confirmed the University's commitment to future editions; **Maria Carmela Colaiacovo** (President, Il Sole 24 Ore Group) described it as an "exceptional Festival", stressing cooperation between Il Sole 24 Ore, Confindustria and the territory; **Maurizio Rossini** (CEO, Trentino Marketing) emphasised that work on the next edition would start immediately, with a focus on innovation and young people. **Federico Silvestri** (CEO, Il Sole 24 Ore), announced the 2027 dates (18-22 May) and praised the efficiency of the organisational machine managing "about 360 events in four days". **Fabio Tamburini** (Director, Il Sole 24 Ore) stressed respect and dialogue were the main protagonists throughout the Festival, recalling that despite the difficult times we are facing, courage is greatly needed and "force cannot prevail over reason and law".

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