

PIETRO SALINI

The Italian contractor becomes the lord of the bridge

Webuild's CEO, the company that built the Genoa bridge in record time, is concerned about Italy's infrastructures. Pietro Salini asks for an investment plan from the government.



Pietro Salini

"Vedo che il governo, in questa situazione straordinaria, è pronto a fare qualcosa per tutti ."
(Foto: PAOLO TRE/A3/CONTRASTO/laif)

Rome He was the first to do so - he deserved this privilege, being at the helm of the construction company that met the challenge. A couple of days ago Pietro Salini drove over the new bridge in Genoa. The time-lapse film shows his trip on the net. The road surface has just been paved and works are still under way on the edges. The bridge will reopen in August, with a record construction time of ten months. It has been built thanks to the collaboration between Salini Webuild and the state-owned group Fincantieri.

"It was a fantastic moment, I was very proud", this is how the 62-year-old manager describes his emotions during the first crossing on the bridge. He is proud of the whole team and even more so of having managed to do it well and so quickly, despite the bad weather in Genoa and despite the pandemic. "We worked non-stop."

The construction of the bridge after it collapsed in 2018 - an unacceptable tragedy in the country where the Romans, two thousand years ago built works that still stand and function today - was also an act of charity on the part of his company, he explains.

In Italy, the new bridge designed by architect Renzo Piano is considered "The miracle of Genoa", because, from the first sketch, through all the permits down to the execution, everything happened in the name of efficiency and speed, something not taken for granted in the country of overwhelming red tape.

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Salini is already concentrating on new projects. These are always heavily trafficked roads and large infrastructure projects in Europe such as the TEN-T corridor from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean. In Italy, for

example, his company is working on the Naples-Bari high-speed railway line, the Genoa-Milan link, and in Paris Webuild is involved in the Grand Paris Express, the extended metro ring. In 2019 it built a new metro line in Copenhagen and currently it is replicating in Oslo.



Giuseppe Conte celebrates the construction of the bridge

A model for the whole of Italy.

(Photo: via REUTERS)

The numbers presented by the company are astonishing. 257 dams, 7250 kilometres of railway lines, over 400 kilometres of metro lines, 52,000 kilometres of roads, and 350 kilometres of bridges, viaducts and other infrastructure works.

Pietro Salini with his international perspective is an outstanding manager for Italy. Webuild is active in 50 countries and, including all suppliers, has a total of 110,000 employees. In 2019 the company achieved an annual turnover of 5.3 billion Euros.

He does not yet want to give figures for this year. "We don't know yet what the impact of the pandemic will be, but our industry operates in an inverse cycle, our contracts last many years and take place in many countries, so we are less affected," he says. Salini does 18% of its business in Italy. In the last month alone, the share price has risen over eleven per cent on the stock exchange.

Its roots are in Rome, he comes from a family business. His grandfather, from whom he took the name Pietro, founded a construction company in

the 1930s, which passed on to his father. Pietro Salini joined Salini Costruttori SpA in 1987, after studying economics at "La Sapienza" University in Rome.

Gradually he expanded the business. In the meantime, the company also acquired Lane Industries of the USA. The most important step was the merger of Salini and Impregilo in 2014 - that was the name of the company until mid-May. Then the shareholders decided on the new name Webuild. "The name is an emblem of our DNA," says Salini. "We build, and do so with a great team and the best skills".

A call to action to the political class

The next merger is now being finalised: Webuild is to acquire its Italian competitor Astaldi. "The acquisition is virtually complete", says Salini. "From then on, the competences will be very well distributed."

Analysts at Equita Sim Broker give him and his company a positive assessment. They predict an increase in orders from €36.2 billion at the end of 2019 to €42.5 billion after the merger. "The assumption is that the government will decide quickly on the planned infrastructure planning and that work can begin". The Italian government wants to invest €200 billion over the next 15 years to modernise infrastructure in Italy. However, no decision has been made as yet.



April 2020

The bridge just before completion.

(Foto: dpa)

In Italy everyone knows this entrepreneur. He describes his managerial style as quick in making decisions and underlines the close interaction with his management. He became famous above all for a phrase that, in April, in the midst of the coronavirus crisis, at the launch of the last span, he addressed to the head of the government Giuseppe Conte, who was present there: "Mr President, I would put myself down on my knees and ask you this, for the good of the country: let's think about the future".

"I dream of a great plan, the Conte government's plan to restart the country as with a new Marshall Plan". Salini said today that the sentence came to him spontaneously and that he believes the message was received.

"I see that the government, in this extraordinary situation, is ready to do something for everyone. After this pandemic it is absolutely necessary for

Italy," he said. "Italy is only investing about one percent of its gross domestic product in infrastructure. Now is the time to change things, because we can't waste a single minute."

The country needs a real boss like him – somebody who strives in order to make things work – this is how Marco Palmisano, former Mediaset executive and president of the Santa Chiara Communication Club describes Salini. If he manages so well so many employees around the world, he can do the same with 60 million Italians.



August 2018

Piles of after the bridge collapsed

(Foto: dpa)

However, when asked if he can imagine entering politics, Salini smiles. "I try to do my best for the country in doing my work", he says. This is all he commented on the issue.

His worry, though, at the moment, and it is a constant concern, is the situation of youth in Italy. "This applies to succession in the company when I will no longer be at the top. I feel personally responsible and this

applies to the whole country," he says. "Hence my prayer to the Prime Minister: we need work." After all, there are so many intelligent and capable youth who cannot plan their future because of the crisis. There must be a future for them in Italy. "We all need to work for this," Salini claims.

Other: Rebuilt in record time: a bridge to give Italy new courage