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Banca del Gottardo Italia: Rocco Benetton acquires a stake in the equity capital. The shareholders' meeting votes to double equity capital

Lugano (ots) -

The general meeting of shareholders of Banca del Gottardo Italia approves a recapitalisation from EUR 25 million to EUR 50 million. Rocco Benetton acquires a 4% stake in the company and is elected to the Board of Directors.

Rocco Benetton, the youngest son of Luciano Benetton, has become a shareholder of Banca del Gottardo Italia, the Italian affiliate of the Banca del Gottardo Group, which has its head office in Lugano. Benetton acquired a 4% stake from Banca del Gottardo, the majority shareholder, which will continue to have a controlling stake of 71% after the sale.

The remaining 25% of the equity capital in Banca del Gottardo Italia is unchanged, distributed among five private shareholders. Each of the five holds a 5% stake in the equity capital. The five shareholders are: Claudio Bombardieri (Co.Pi.Ci), Alberto Bombassei (Brembo), Domenico Bosatelli (Gewiss), Lombardini Holding (Gruppo Lombardini) and J. Capital S.p.a., a company active in the real estate and financing sector and controlled by the Jannone family.

The transaction which facilitated the entry of Rocco Benetton into the group of shareholders of Banca del Gottardo Italia was completed in the past few days. The general meeting of shareholders, in an extraordinary session, approved the increase in the Bank's equity capital from EUR 25 million to EUR 50 million. The ordinary session of the shareholders' meeting then approved an increase in the number of persons on the Board of Directors from eight to nine, and elected Rocco Benetton as a new member of the Board.

The equity capital of Banca del Gottardo Italia will be doubled via a new stock issue for a total of EUR 25 million. There will be an immediate subscription of shares for a total of EUR 10 million, followed by two tranches, one in September 2004 and the second in September 2005, of EUR 10 million and EUR 5 million respectively.

With the new addition to the Board of Directors of Banca del Gottardo Italia, the Board is now composed of the following members: Rocco Benetton, Claudio Bombardieri, Giuseppe Decio, Carlo Jannone, Francesco Joerg, Paolo Moretti, Nicola Mordasini, Henry Peter and Giuseppe Roma.

Rocco Benetton, founder of ZeroRh+, the well-known brand for eyewear and sportswear, official sponsor of Alinghi (the team captained by Ernesto Bertarelli, winner of the most recent America's Cup), is also the chairman of Espotting Media Italia, the largest Pay-Per-Click research network. In the course of his career Rocco Benetton has worked with 21 Investimenti Spa, in the private equity sector, and has worked in private banking in New York, at Alpha Investment Management, as co-director. He was the sole Managing Director of Benetton Formula, the company that managed the Formula One team. In 2000 he successfully managed the sale of the company to the Renault Group for a record amount of USD 120 million.

Benetton's investment in Banca del Gottardo Italia is a testimony to the Bank's strong growth strategy which, thanks to the solid experience gained in the Italian private banking market and to the support of the parent company's international network, today represents a new global benchmark in Italian financial advising.

Banca del Gottardo Italia, which has been in business since November 2001, manages EUR 1,600 million in assets and has a loan portfolio of EUR 80 million. The bank employs 50 people at its head office in Bergamo and at the Milan branch, which was officially opened in June. In addition, the bank has already received approval from the Banca d'Italia to open branches in Turin (by the end of 2003), Rome and Genoa.

Banca del Gottardo Italia has a 10% stake in Gottardo Asset Management SGR Alternative Spa. This company, with its head office in Milan, has been authorised by the Banca d'Italia to set up, manage, promote and distribute hedge funds.

"The addition of Rocco Benetton to the shareholders of Banca del Gottardo Italia," said Marco Netzer, CEO of the Banca del Gottardo Group, "is an important confirmation of the validity of the Banca del Gottardo Group's strategy and results in Italy, less than two years after the first office was opened."

"Once this transaction is complete the Bank will be able to bolster its growth plans, focusing on services and expanding its product range," said Giuseppe Decio, Managing Director of Banca del Gottardo Italia. "The goal is to consolidate our position as one of the main players in the Italian private banking market."

"I am very pleased to become a part of this bank, which has posted excellent results, and work with a group of very talented businesspeople," said Rocco Benetton. "The Italian market needs this type of structural innovation. And for me personally, it means returning to the profession that I have been in for most in my life. I hope that the banking experience I obtained in New York will help us achieve our ambitious targets."

Banca del Gottardo, with head office in Lugano (Switzerland), relies on a well expanded national and international network. Thanks to its highly qualified teams of experts and its affiliates, subsidiaries, branches and representative offices in Zurich, Geneva, Lausanne, Bellinzona, Chiasso, Locarno, Bergamo, Milan, Turin (next opening), Athens, Luxembourg, Monaco, Vienna, Hong Kong, Nassau (Bahamas), as well as an important participation in Paris, the bank offers top level financial services to its local and international clientele.

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