



JOINT NEWS RELEASE

COLLABORATION BETWEEN BANCO POPOLARE DI VERONA E NOVARA AND CATTOLICA ASSICURAZIONI GROWS FURTHER: FROM NOW TOGETHER IN THE NON-LIFE BUSINESS

BPVN purchase Cattolica's share in Credito Bergamasco in excess of 1%

Verona, 9 July 2004. Banco Popolare di Verona e Novara Group (BPVN Group) and Cattolica Assicurazioni Group have launched a joint initiative in the non-life bancassurance business through the equity participation in a non-life company of Cattolica Group which is currently still under review. The operation, which remains subject to the recovery of the necessary authorisations, envisages, on the side of BPVN, the purchase of an equal stake in the vehicle company in question which is set to focus on this business area.

Recent studies have highlighted that in Italy the bancassurance business in the non-life sector is poorly developed, with a share of just 1%, whilst the market share turns out to be clearly higher in other European countries: in Germany the share is equal to 5%; in the Netherlands and France it is even higher, with a share of 8%. Therefore, the new joint initiative enjoys significant growth potential which is set to unfold in various categories of the non-life insurance business: motor vehicle, fire, theft, third-party liability, accidental events and health insurance policies which shall be offered exclusively to the retail market with a high level of assistance and personalised customer attention which are characteristics of the banking and insurance partners' business approach. The industrial and distribution synergies that Cattolica and BPVN Group are able to guarantee bode well indeed for the success of an initiative which focuses on the target segments of private individuals and families and is aimed at satisfying the growing demand for insurance coverage of most various types of risks and unexpected circumstances.

The **General Manager** of Cattolica, **Ezio Paolo Reggia**, has noted that "the excellent business experience which has been developed together with Banco Popolare di Verona e Novara (BPVN) in BPV Vita in more than five years of profitable collaboration represents the best guarantee that such positive experience may be replicated in a favourable way also in this new initiative, on the grounds of the consolidated collaboration among the two groups".

In addition, as part of the more general process of rationalisation of its shareholdings, Cattolica, in agreement with BPVN, has also decided to downsize its equity stake in Credito Bergamasco to 1%, selling to BPVN the part in excess of this limit, i.e. 3,940,878 shares, at a price of 18.28258 euro per share, for a total amount of 72,049,404 euro. Consequently, BPVN's total stake in Credito Bergamasco increases to 87.72%.

The **CEO** of BPVN, **Fabio Innocenzi**, notes that "these two recent operations are the best confirmation of the quality of the relationship with the Cattolica Group which finds reflection not only in the form of business agreements realised from time to time but above all in such joint initiatives of strategic nature".