

GRUPPO SANPAOLO IMI

Comunicato stampa

Press release pursuant to art. 2.6.2 paragraph 10 of Market Rules: S&P raises outlook of SANPAOLO IMI to positive from stable

Turin, 15 December 2004 – SANPAOLO IMI communicates that on the 14th of December the international rating agency Standard & Poor's raised its outlook on SANPAOLO IMI SpA from stable to positive. The rating agency affirmed that it could raise the *rating* on the Group from the current A+/A-1 to AA-/A-1+ if the bank increases its future profitability compared with the levels forecasted for 2004, without deteriorating its risk profile and maintaining its strong asset quality.

The upgrade of the agency reflects the ongoing improvement in the bank's profitability, which has not provoked a deterioration in its risk profile.

The same measure has been adopted for Banca Fideuram, Banca IMI, Banca OPI and Cassa di Risparmio in Bologna.

Standard & Poors' highlights that the ratings reflect the leading role Sanpaolo IMI has in a wide range of business lines, its solid balance sheet, the focused strategy and a contained risk profile.

The adoption of International Financial Reporting Standards, according to Standard & Poors', will have a limited impact on the Group's accounts.

(Enclosed press release of Standard & Poor's)

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PARIS (Standard & Poor's) Dec. 14, 2004-Standard & Poor's Ratings Services said today that it has revised its outlook to positive from stable on Sanpaolo IMI SpA, one of the top three banking groups in Italy. At the same time, the 'A+' long-term and 'A-1' short-term counterparty credit ratings on the bank were affirmed. "The change in outlook reflects the ongoing recovery in the bank's profitability, without a deterioration in its risk profile," said Standard & Poor's credit analyst Bernard de Longevialle. Standard & Poor's took the same rating actions on four Sanpaolo IMI subsidiaries, reflecting their core membership within the group: Banca Fideuram, one of the leading players in the Italian asset management industry; Banca IMI SpA, a midsize Italian investment bank; Banca OPI SpA, a leader in financing Italy's national and local governments and other public entities; and regional savings bank Cassa di Risparmio in Bologna SpA. The ratings on Sanpaolo IMI reflect the group's leading domestic franchise in a wide range of business lines, solid balance sheet, focused strategy, and contained risk profile. The ratings are constrained, however, by the group's only adequate profitability. Sanpaolo IMI had consolidated assets of €212 billion (\$282.1 billion) at Sept. 30, 2004. "We could raise our ratings on Sanpaolo IMI to 'AA-/A-1+' if the bank manages to improve its profitability materially and sustainably compared with the adequate levels expected for year-end 2004, while preserving its low risk profile and strong asset quality," said Mr. de Longevialle. Despite estimates of virtually zero revenue growth for year-end 2004, Sanpaolo IMI should manage to further lower its cost-to-income ratio and post a sharp increase in bottom-line results, thanks to strict cost control and a decline in provisioning charges. Looking ahead, the completion of the internal restructuring process should enable the group to enhance its commercial efficiency, return to revenue growth, and achieve some additional cost savings. "Although the outlook for the operating environment in Italy is still gloomy, a double-digit increase in operating profits and bottom-line results appears achievable in 2005," added Mr. de Longevialle. Asset quality and capital ratios should remain close to their present levels in 2005. The adoption of International Financial Reporting Standards, which will take place in 2005, is likely to have only a very moderate impact on the group's opening balance sheet on Jan. 1, 2005. Ratings information is available to subscribers of RatingsDirect, Standard & Poor's Web-based credit analysis system, at www.ratingsdirect.com. It can also be found on Standard & Poor's public Web site at www.standardandpoors.com; under Credit Ratings in the left navigation bar, select Find a Rating, then Credit Ratings Search.

Alternatively, call one of the following Standard & Poor's numbers:

London Ratings Desk (44) 20-7176-7400;

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Frankfurt (49) 69-33-999-225;

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Members of the media may also contact the European Press Office via e-mail on: media_europe@standardandpoors.com.

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