**THE FOOTWEAR AND ACCESSORIES SECTOR HAS NOT STOPPED:**

**EXPO RIVA SCHUH & GARDABAGS,**

**THE KEY INTERNATIONAL TRADE SHOW FOR THE SECTOR, CLOSED YESTERDAY**

**3500 visitors from 86 countries and 430 exhibitors from more than 30 countries meet over four days, amid internationalisation, new exhibition formats, digitisation, innovation and sustainability**

*Riva del Garda, 19 January 2022***. The 96th edition of Expo Riva Schuh & Gardabags closed yesterday in Riva del Garda.** With*“a true act of strength and courage”*, as Chairman of Riva del Garda Fierecongressi **Roberto Pellegrini** described it during the opening ceremony, the show succeeded in providing continuity to the sector's business with services increasingly tailored to the needs of exhibiting companies and buyers.

The confirmation of this event despite the complexities experienced during this period has been a strong message for the whole Footwear and Accessories sector. The positive response from the operators that took part in this winter Edition has also been an indicator that the Industry is motivated and ready for the restart, encouraged by a firm safety protocol that allows them to experience the Exhibition more comfortably.

**3500 buyers, 70% of which came from abroad** -amongst others **Germany, France, Poland, Spain, Turkey, Belgium, Netherlands, Greece, Great Britain, Portugal** but also **Jordan, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Canada, USA and Australia**- had the opportunity to discover the A/W 2023 collections showcased by 430 Exhibitors. They closed the first commercial agreements for the next season over four days (January 15-18,2022) which were characterised by a strong international feeling, new exhibition formats, digitization, innovation, sustainability and strategic partnerships.

*“Innovation in the fashion sector is about having the intuition, ability and determination to imagine something new, optimise processes or reinvent existing ones”,* said **Alessandra Albarelli**, General Manager of Riva del Garda Fierecongressi. Initiatives moving in this direction include the implementation of **Digital Connection**, a digital platform based on an efficient Artificial Intelligence system, and the activation of **“hybrid” exhibition solutions**, which ensured that companies unable to attend could physically exhibit their samples at the show and manage business negotiations remotely.

*“Virtual meetings combined with live product presentations through the hybrid stand proved an extremely effective way of maintaining relations between exhibitors and buyers not attending in person. Through this solution, we managed to speed up meetings and conclude important negotiations, achieving better than expected results that confirmed how important it was to go ahead with this trade show despite the difficult situation”,* commented **Adriana Miori**, Sales Representative of Chinese company Jinjiang Lideng Import And Export Trading Co.Ltd.

Numerous collaborations with **national and international consortia and trade associations** were also key to the event’s success. Together with the organisers, these entities backed the idea of holding this important B2B event in person and in complete safety.

*“Despite doubts relating to the current situation, we decided to attend Expo Riva Schuh & Gardabags to send out a signal of confidence and confirm the strong link that, as a trade association, we have with this show that we have been attending for many years. Of our 52 registered members, more than two-thirds were actually present in person and were able to enjoy the trade show experience in peace and safety, exceeding initial expectations and achieving positive success, giving us greater confidence in the future”,* said **Lino Mattiozzi**, Chairman of Italy’s Association of Footwear Sales Promoters (Assoprov).

*“More than 60 exhibitors from Turkey and representatives of the Aegean Exporters' Association decided to ensure continuous service for buyers who want to see their products live, all the more so at a time when so many other trade shows have been cancelled. Despite the restrictions due to the current situation, the regular updates received by the organisation on regulations and the support provided for transport and accommodation services made it easy for companies to come to Riva del Garda”,* confirmed **Matteo Bigon**, Export Manager at Bline Shoes.

The focus on the theme of innovation was the key, and was reflected in scouting activity aimed at identifying the best start-ups to be encouraged, incubated and accelerated; **Future Fashion** was the winner of the first edition of **Innovation Village Retail**, the project implemented with the coordination of **Alberto Mattiello**, a member of Expo Riva Schuh & Gardabags’ Scientific Committee.

*“The debut of Innovation Village brought together start-ups, fast and innovative by definition, with more traditional fashion and footwear companies. For us, this new initiative proved an excellent opportunity to make ourselves known, to gain validation for our innovative idea and its usefulness for the sector by talking directly to exhibitors and buyers. Many showed interest in our activity and gave us the opportunity to consider useful ideas for improving our product”,* explained **Andrea Carpineti**, CEO & Co-founder of Future Fashion.

With an increasing focus on innovation and sustainability, Expo Riva Schuh & Gardabags, in cooperation with Brazilian group JBS Couros (the global leader in leather production) and the magazine Foto Shoe 30, presented **"Design Kind Leather"**, the contest aimed at the sector’s professional designers and devised to promote values such as sustainability, the recycling of materials and better resource management. Registration for the competition, which will be held annually, is expected to open in the next few days. Candidates will be selected by a jury of experts and the projects of the three winners created and exhibited at the **next edition** of the show, due to be held from **11 to 14 June 2022** in the **Riva del Garda** Exhibition Centre.

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