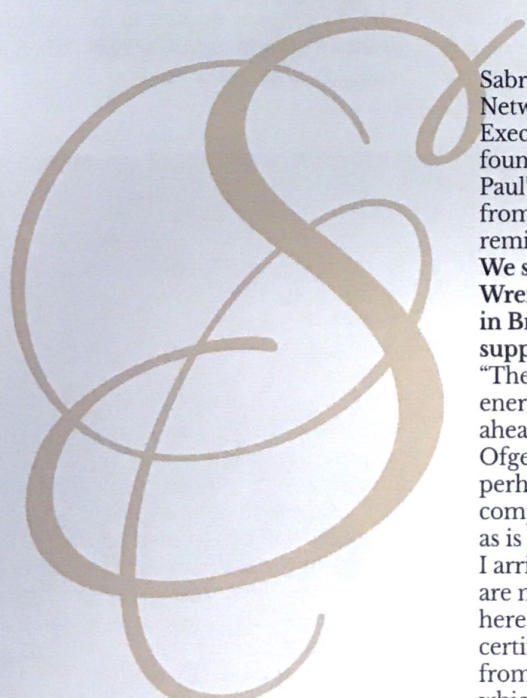




Sabrina Corbo



Sabrina Corbo welcomes us into the offices of Green Network Energy, the energy supplier for which she is the Executive Vice-President. In the heart of the City, she found, if not St Peter's, at least a dome, the dome of St Paul's Cathedral, which stands solemnly a short distance from her office and which, when she's feeling nostalgic, reminds her of her home-city, Rome.

We start by asking what drove her to bring Christopher Wren and Michelangelo together, to do business in Britain, after many years operating as an energy supplier in Italy.

"The United Kingdom liberalised the electricity and gas energy sector ten years before Italy did. So it's ten years ahead. Thanks to a clearly political decision made by Ofgem, the energy authority, the market is competitive, perhaps more complicated, but much more open to competition than it is in Italy. Competition is genuine, as is typically the case in the British market. As soon as I arrived, I studied the rules for energy suppliers, which are more complex than they are in Italy. For example, here even the licence is regulated. Whereas in Italy self-certification is accepted, here there is a process lasting from 9 to 12 months to be allowed to provide energy, which obviously involves significant operations and investments, and which ends with the authority auditing the company. But it doesn't end there, because after the audit, there is a testing period of around three months,

— by the Editorial Team



during which you are inspected. After that, depending on whether the authority is satisfied, the licence may be issued. Even after the licence has been granted, the inspections continue and in some cases licences have been withdrawn. Therefore, the procedure is more complicated, but also more rigorous, if I may say so.”

Too many rules?

“I welcome rules, provided they are fixed and applicable to everyone, that they demonstrate to the public that the sector is made up not only of the energy giants and that the market is open, so the customer can benefit and save money. We made a large investment and nine months on from the first *switch* (which was at my house in November 2016), we already have 150,000 customers. I experienced that sense of satisfaction in Italy when my house and office were switched over, but I didn’t think I would ever have the same opportunity in another country. On 1 November 2017, we started supplying SMEs and from next January, we will be supplying industry as a whole. In Italy, we did the opposite: we supplied only businesses for the first ten years and then the domestic market. We will be among the few independent suppliers that supply all three sectors. So we are expanding and I’m very happy, because we are exceeding the forecasts made in our business plan. I’m also happy with the decision we made, even though logistically complicated, and with my family.”

Let’s talk about the city in which you live. Is there a place in the English capital that you find magical?

“A bench in Hyde Park, where, sitting with my husband and surrounded by my two golden retrievers, we decided to take on this adventure in Britain. I took out a scrap of paper with some figures. My husband looked at them and asked me, “But why didn’t we do it sooner?” Then we had to tell our children, aged eight, seven and five. Once we received their approval, we didn’t hesitate.”

What do you miss about Britain when you are in Italy and vice versa?

“I am the daughter of a General in the Carabinieri and I adore rules. Without a doubt, in Italy, I miss certain rules, the meritocracy and the fairness of the British in recognising skills, which also represent an added value for their businesses. In London, they recognise my role. At the British Chamber of Commerce they know that I’ve created jobs and they ask how they can help me, so that I stay here. I definitely miss the Italian weather. I don’t like the grey British sky. Then, of course, I miss my family.”

Let’s return to Green Network Energy. What differentiates you from other energy suppliers?

“Maybe what distinguishes us most is that we are traders even more so than energy suppliers. We understand commodities. Desk trading in London is used for sourcing and hedging for both Green Network companies, here and in Italy, and it operates in almost ten national markets.”

Which three aspects of your company are you most proud of?

“The first is that it is Italian: I really want to promote Italy abroad. I always tell my children to work harder, because we have to distinguish ourselves through our achievements. The second is that the company was created and developed by my husband and I, and here in Britain the trait of being a family company is considered an added value. If in Italy I perhaps tended to hide this aspect, here I really make it part of our brand. The third aspect is perfectionism: imperfection doesn’t work in business. I’m a perfectionist and I tend to control everything. I would also say that I’m determined, fair and have a great desire to do good.”

On 27 November 2017, Sabrina Corbo was awarded the Order of the Star of Italy, the second civilian honour of the State. Congratulations to her from *Il Club!* ■