

# CONTINENTAL EUROPE

Proxy Voting Guidelines  
Benchmark Policy Recommendations

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## Coverage Universe

The following is a condensed version of the proxy voting recommendations contained in ISS' European Proxy Voting Manual.

ISS' Continental Europe Policy applies to Member States of the European Union (EU) or the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), with the exception of the United Kingdom and Ireland, which are together subject to a standalone voting policy. In both cases, European territories that are politically associated with a given Member State are subject to the same policy as that Member State. Other European territories are subject to either ISS' separate, market-specific policies, or ISS' EMEA Regional Policy.

Specifically, ISS' Continental Europe Policy applies to companies incorporated in the following territories: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, the Faroe Islands, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Greenland, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, and Switzerland.

ISS' approach is not "one-size-fits-all" and takes relevant market-specific factors into account in our research and recommendations. Therefore, this document distinguishes in various places between different markets and on the basis of other differentiating factors. These distinctions are based on different market practices and best practice recommendations throughout Europe.

## Definitions and Explanations

The term "widely held" refers to companies that ISS designates as such based on their membership in a major index and/or the number of ISS clients holding the securities.

For stylistic purposes, this document may use the adjectival form of country names to refer to companies incorporated or listed in a given market.

## 1. Operational Items

### Financial Results/Director and Auditor Reports

- **General Recommendation:** Vote for approval of financial statements and director and auditor reports, unless:
- There are concerns about the accounts presented or audit procedures used; or
  - The company is not responsive to shareholder questions about specific items that should be publicly disclosed.

### Approval of Non-Financial Information Statement/Report

- **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for the approval of mandatory non-financial information statement/report, unless the independent assurance services provider has raised material concerns about the information presented.

### Appointment of Auditors and Auditor Fees

- **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for proposals to (re)appoint auditors and/or proposals authorizing the board to fix auditor fees, unless:
- The name of the proposed auditors has not been published;
  - There are serious concerns about the effectiveness of the auditors;
  - The lead audit partner(s) has been linked with a significant auditing controversy;
  - There is reason to believe that the auditor has rendered an opinion which is neither accurate nor indicative of the company's financial position;
  - The lead audit partner(s) has previously served the company in an executive capacity or can otherwise be considered affiliated with the company;
  - The auditors are being changed without explanation; or
  - Fees for non-audit services exceed either 100 percent of standard audit-related fees or any stricter limit set in local best practice recommendations or law.

In circumstances where fees for non-audit services include fees related to significant one-time capital structure events: initial public offerings, bankruptcy emergence, and spinoffs; and the company makes public disclosure of the amount and nature of those fees which are an exception to the standard "non-audit fee" category, then such fees may be excluded from the non-audit fees considered in determining the ratio of non-audit to audit fees..

For concerns relating to the audit procedures, independence of auditors, and/or name of auditors, ISS will focus on the auditor election. For concerns relating to fees paid to the auditors, ISS will focus on remuneration of auditors if this is a separate voting item, otherwise ISS would focus on the auditor election.

### Appointment of Internal Statutory Auditors

- **General Recommendation:** Vote for the appointment or reelection of statutory auditors, unless:
- There are serious concerns about the statutory reports presented or the audit procedures used; or
  - Questions exist concerning any of the statutory auditors being appointed; or
  - The auditors have previously served the company in an executive capacity or can otherwise be considered affiliated with the company.

### Allocation of Income

- **General Recommendation:** Vote for approval of the allocation of income, unless:
- The dividend payout ratio has been consistently below 30 percent without adequate explanation; or
  - The payout is excessive given the company's financial position.

### Amendments to Articles of Association

- **General Recommendation:** Vote amendments to the articles of association on a case-by-case basis.

### Change in Company Fiscal Term

- **General Recommendation:** Vote for resolutions to change a company's fiscal term unless a company's motivation for the change is to postpone its AGM.

### Lower Disclosure Threshold for Stock Ownership

- **General Recommendation:** Vote against resolutions to lower the stock ownership disclosure threshold below 5 percent unless specific reasons exist to implement a lower threshold.

### Amend Quorum Requirements

- **General Recommendation:** Vote proposals to amend quorum requirements for shareholder meetings on a case-by-case basis.

### Stock (Scrip) Dividend Alternative


- **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on stock (scrip) dividend proposals, considering factors such as:
- Whether the proposal allows for a cash option; and
  - If the proposal is in line with market standards.

### Transact Other Business

- **General Recommendation:** Vote against other business when it appears as a voting item.

## 2. Board of Directors

### Non-Contested Director Elections

 **General Recommendation:** Vote for management nominees in the election of directors, unless:

- Adequate disclosure has not been provided in a timely manner;
- There are clear concerns over questionable finances or restatements;
- There have been questionable transactions with conflicts of interest;
- There are any records of abuses against minority shareholder interests;
- The board fails to meet minimum corporate governance standards;
- There are specific concerns about the individual, such as criminal wrongdoing or breach of fiduciary responsibilities; and
- Repeated absences at board and key committee meetings have not been explained (in countries where this information is disclosed).

In addition to these general factors, ISS may recommend against due to concerns related to at least one of the following specific factors, which are presented below as separate subsections:

- I. Director Terms
- II. Bundling of Proposals to Elect Directors
- III. Board independence
- IV. Disclosure of Names of Nominees
- V. Combined Chair/CEO
- VI. Election of a Former CEO as Chair of the Board
- VII. Overboarded Directors
- VIII. Voto di Lista (Italy)
- IX. One Board Seat per Director
- X. Composition of Committees
- XI. Composition Nominating Committee (Sweden and Norway)
- XII. Election of Censors (France)
- XIII. Diversity
- XIV. Climate Accountability

This policy is distinct from ISS' policy on contested director elections, which is presented as a separate policy item.

Note also that this policy is complemented by three additional policies: "Compensation-Related Voting Sanctions" and "Voting on Directors for Egregious Actions," which both address a comparatively rare set of additional circumstances, and "Committee of Representatives and Corporate Assembly Elections (Denmark and Norway)", which states how ISS applies its director election policy in Norway and Denmark in cases where the board is not directly elected by shareholders.

### **Director Terms**

Generally vote against the election or re-election of any director when his/her term is not disclosed or when it exceeds four years and adequate explanation for non-compliance has not been provided. Under best practice recommendations, companies should shorten the terms for directors when the terms exceed the limits suggested by best practices. The policy will be applied to all companies in these markets, for bundled as well as unbundled items.

Beyond that, as directors should be accountable to shareholders on a more regular basis, ISS may consider moving to maximum board terms of less than four years in the future.

Vote against article amendment proposals to extend board terms. In cases where a company's articles provide for a shorter limit and where the company wishes to extend director terms from three or fewer years to four years, for example, ISS will recommend a vote against, based on the general principle that director accountability is maximized by elections with a short period of renewal.

### **Bundling of Proposal to Elect Directors**

Bundling together proposals that could be presented as separate voting items is not considered good market practice, because bundled resolutions leave shareholders with an all-or-nothing choice, skewing power disproportionately towards the board and away from shareholders. As director elections are one of the most important voting decisions that shareholders make, directors should be elected individually.

For the markets of **Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland\***, **Romania, Slovakia**, and **Slovenia**, vote against the election or reelection of any directors if individual director elections are an established market practice and the company proposes a single slate of directors.

\*Bundled director elections in Poland may be supported for companies that go beyond market practice by disclosing the names of nominees on a timely basis.

### **Board Independence**

Independence will be determined according to [ISS' European Classification of Directors](#). If a nominee cannot be categorized, ISS will consider that person non-independent and include that nominee in the calculation.

#### *Voting policies*

#### **Widely-held companies**

##### Board Independence

###### A. Non-controlled companies

Generally vote against the election or reelection of any non-independent directors (excluding the CEO) if:

1. Fewer than 50 percent of the board members elected by shareholders – excluding, where relevant, employee shareholder representatives – would be independent; or
2. Fewer than one-third of all board members would be independent.

Portugal is excluded from Provision (1.) in the above-mentioned voting policy.

###### B. Controlled companies

Generally vote against the election or reelection of any non-independent directors (excluding the CEO) if less than one-third of the board members are independent.

##### Board Leadership



Given the importance of board leadership, ISS may consider that the chair of the board should be an independent non-executive director according to the ISS' Classification of Directors.

### **Non-widely held companies**

Generally vote against the election or reelection of any non-independent directors (excluding the CEO) if less than one-third of the board members are independent.

#### *Definition of terms*

'Widely-held companies' are determined based on their membership in a major index and/or the number of ISS clients holding the securities. For Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland, this is based on membership on a local blue-chip market index and/or MSCI EAFE companies. For Portugal, it is based on membership in the PSI-20 and/or MSCI EAFE index.

A company is considered to be controlled for the purposes of the above-mentioned voting policies if a shareholder, or multiple shareholders acting in concert, control a majority of the company's equity capital (i.e. 50 percent + one share). If a company is majority-controlled by virtue of a shareholder structure in which shareholders' voting rights do not accrue in accordance with their equity capital commitment (e.g. unequal or multi-class share structures), the company will not be classified as controlled unless the majority shareholder/majority shareholding group also holds a majority of the company's equity capital.

### **Disclosure of Names of Nominees**

Vote against the election or reelection of any and all director nominees when the names of the nominees are not available at the time the ISS analysis is being written. This policy will be applied to all companies in these markets, for bundled and unbundled items.

### **Combined Chair/CEO**

Generally, vote against the (re)election of combined chair/CEOs at widely-held European companies.

When the company provides assurance that the chair/CEO would only serve in the combined role on an interim basis (no more than two years), the vote recommendation would be made on a case-by-case basis.

In the above-mentioned situation, ISS will consider the rationale provided by the company and whether it has set up adequate control mechanisms on the board (such as a lead independent director, a high overall board independence, and a high level of independence on the board's key committees).

This policy will be applied to all widely-held European companies that propose the (re)election of a combined chair/CEO to the board, including cases where the chair/CEO is included in an election by slate.

### **Election of a Former CEO as Chair of the Board**

Generally vote against the (re)election of a former CEO to the supervisory board or board of directors in **Austria, Germany, and the Netherlands** if the former CEO is to be chair of the relevant board. To this end, companies are expected to confirm prior to the general meeting that the former CEO will not be (re)appointed as chair of the relevant board.

Given the importance of board leadership, ISS may consider that the chair of the board should be an independent non-executive director according to the ISS' Classification of Directors.

## Overboarded Directors

In **Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland**, ISS will generally recommend a vote against a candidate when they hold an excessive number of board appointments, as defined by the following guidelines:

- Any person who holds more than five mandates at listed companies will be classified as overboarded. For the purposes of calculating this limit, a non-executive directorship counts as one mandate, a non-executive chair position counts as two mandates, and a position as executive director (or a comparable role) is counted as three mandates.
- Also, any person who holds the position of executive director (or a comparable role) at one company and serves as a non-executive chair at a different company will be classified as overboarded.

## CEOs and Board Chairs

An adverse vote recommendation will not be applied to a director within a company where they serve as CEO; instead, any adverse vote recommendations will be applied to their additional seats on other company boards. For chairs, negative recommendations would first be applied towards non-executive, non-chair positions held, but the chair position itself would be targeted where they are being elected as chair for the first time or, when in aggregate their chair positions are three or more in number, or if the chair holds an outside executive position. ISS will take into account board positions held in global publicly listed companies outside the same group, defined as a group of companies in which a common shareholder controls at least 50 percent + 1 share of equity capital, alone or in concert.

For directors standing for (re)election at French companies, ISS will take into account board appointments as censors in French publicly-listed companies.

Executive directors or those in comparable roles within investment holding companies will generally be treated similar to non-executive directors when applying this policy.

## **Voto di Lista (Italy)**

In **Italy**, director elections generally take place through the *voto di lista* mechanism (similar to slate elections). Since the Italian implementation of the European Shareholder Rights Directive (effective since Nov. 1, 2010), Italian issuers whose shares are listed on the Italian regulated market *Mercato Telematico Azionario* must publish the various lists 21 days in advance of the meeting.

Since shareholders only have the option to support one such list, where lists are published in sufficient time, ISS will recommend a vote on a case-by-case basis, determining which list of nominees it considers is best suited to add value for shareholders based, as applicable, on ISS European policies for Director Elections and for Contested Director Elections.

Those companies that are excluded from the provisions of the European Shareholder Rights Directive generally publish lists of nominees seven days before the meeting. In the case where nominees are not published in sufficient time, ISS will recommend a vote against the director elections before the lists of director nominees are disclosed. Once the various lists of nominees are disclosed, ISS will issue an alert to its clients and, if appropriate, change its vote recommendation to support one particular list.

## One Board Seat per Director

In cases where a director holds more than one board seat on a single board and the corresponding votes, manifested as one seat as a physical person plus an additional seat(s) as a representative of a legal entity, vote against the election/re-election of such legal entities and in favor of the physical person.

However, an exception is made if the representative of the legal entity holds the position of CEO. In such circumstances, ISS will typically recommend a vote in favor of the legal entity and against the election/re-election of the physical person.

While such occurrences are rare, there have been cases where a board member may have multiple board seats and corresponding votes. Holding several board seats concurrently within one board increases this person's direct influence on board decisions and creates an inequality among board members.

This situation has manifested in **Belgium, Luxembourg, and France**. This is not a good corporate governance practice, as it places disproportionate influence and control in one person.

## Composition of Committees

**For widely-held companies**, generally vote against the (re)election of any non-independent members of the audit committee if:

- Fewer than 50 percent of the audit committee members, who are elected by shareholders in such capacity or another – excluding, where relevant, employee shareholder representatives – would be independent; or
- Fewer than one-third of all audit committee members would be independent.

For companies whose boards are legally required to have 50 percent of directors not elected by shareholders, the second criterion is not applicable.

Generally vote against the election or re-election of the non-independent member of the audit committee designated as chair of that committee.

For widely-held companies, generally vote against the (re)election of any non-independent members of the remuneration committee if:

- Fewer than 50 percent of the remuneration committee members, who are elected by shareholders in such capacity or another - excluding, where relevant, employee shareholder representatives - would be independent; or
- Fewer than one-third of all remuneration committee members would be independent.

For companies whose boards are legally required to have 50 percent of directors not elected by shareholders, the second criterion is not applicable.

## For all companies:

Generally vote against the (re)election of executives who serve on the company's audit or remuneration committee. ISS may recommend against if the disclosure is too poor to determine whether an executive serves or

will serve on a committee. If a company does not have an audit or a remuneration committee, ISS may consider that the entire board fulfills the role of a committee. In such case, ISS may recommend against the executives, including the CEO, up for election to the board.

### **Composition Nomination Committee (Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden)**

Vote for proposals in **Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden** to elect or appoint a nominating committee consisting mainly of non-board members.

Vote for shareholder proposals calling for disclosure of the names of the proposed candidates at the meeting, as well as the inclusion of a representative of minority shareholders in the committee.

Vote against proposals where the names of the candidates (in the case of an election) or the principles for the establishment of the committee have not been disclosed in a timely manner.

Vote against proposals in **Sweden** to elect or appoint such a committee if the company is on the MSCI-EAFE or local main index and the following conditions exist:

1. A member of the executive management would be a member of the committee;
2. More than one board member who is dependent on a major shareholder would be on the committee; or
3. The chair of the board would also be the chair of the committee.

In cases where the principles for the establishment of the nominating committee, rather than the election of the committee itself, are being voted on, vote against the adoption of the principles if any of the above conditions are met for the current committee, and there is no publicly available information indicating that this would no longer be the case for the new nominating committee.

### **Election of Censors (France)**

ISS will generally recommend a vote against proposals seeking shareholder approval to elect a censor, to amend bylaws to authorize the appointment of censors, or to extend the maximum number of censors to the board. However, ISS will recommend a vote on a case-by-case basis when the company provides assurance that the censor would serve on a short-term basis (maximum one year) with the intent to retain the nominee before his/her election as director. In this case, consideration shall also be given to the nominee's situation (notably overboarding or other factors of concern).

In consideration of the principle that censors should be appointed on a short-term basis, vote against any proposal to renew the term of a censor or to extend the statutory term of censors.

### **Board Gender Diversity**

In terms of gender diversity, [supervisory] boards should adhere to domestic legal requirements or local best market practices or, in the absence thereof, be in line with European established practice.

Generally vote against the chair of the nomination committee (or other directors on a case-by-case basis) if:

- The underrepresented gender accounts for less than 30 percent (or any higher domestic threshold) of shareholder-elected directors of a widely held company – excluding, where relevant, employee shareholder representatives<sup>1</sup>.
- Both genders are not represented on the board of a non-widely-held company.

Mitigating factors may include:

- Compliance with the relevant standard at the preceding annual meeting and a firm commitment, publicly available, to comply with the relevant standard within a year; or
- Other relevant factors as applicable.

### Climate Accountability

For companies that are significant greenhouse gas (GHG) emitters, through their operations or value chain<sup>2</sup>, generally vote against the responsible incumbent director(s), or any other appropriate item(s) in cases where ISS determines that the company is not taking the minimum steps needed to understand, assess, and mitigate risks related to climate change to the company and the larger economy.

For **2022**, minimum steps to understand and mitigate those risks are considered to be the following. Both minimum criteria will be required to be in compliance:

- Detailed disclosure of climate-related risks, such as according to the framework established by the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD), including:
  - Board governance measures;
  - Corporate strategy;
  - Risk management analyses; and
  - Metrics and targets.
- Appropriate GHG emissions reduction targets.

For **2022**, “appropriate GHG emissions reductions targets” will be any well-defined GHG reduction targets. Targets for Scope 3 emissions will not be required for 2022 but the targets should cover at least a significant portion of the company’s direct emissions. Expectations about what constitutes “minimum steps to mitigate risks related to climate change” will increase over time.

<sup>1</sup> In France, when employees exceed a given shareholding threshold in the company, they must be represented by employee shareholder representative(s) on the [supervisory] board.

<sup>2</sup> For 2022, companies defined as “significant GHG emitters” will be those on the current Climate Action 100+ Focus Group list.

## ISS Classification of Directors - European Policy

### **Executive Director**

- Employee or executive of the company;
- Any director who is classified as a non-executive, but receives salary, fees, bonus, and/or other benefits that are in line with the highest-paid executives of the company.

### **Non-Independent Non-Executive Director (NED)**

- Any director who is attested by the board to be a non-independent NED;
- Any director specifically designated as a representative of a significant shareholder of the company;
- Any director who is also an employee or executive of a significant shareholder of the company;
- Any director who is nominated by a dissenting significant shareholder unless there is a clear lack of material<sup>4</sup> connection with the dissident, either currently or historically;
- Beneficial owner (direct or indirect) of at least 10 percent of the company's stock, either in economic terms or in voting rights (this may be aggregated if voting power is distributed among more than one member of a defined group, e.g., members of a family that beneficially own less than 10 percent individually, but collectively own more than 10 percent), unless market best practice dictates a lower ownership and/or disclosure threshold (and in other special market-specific circumstances);
- Government representative;
- Currently provides (or a relative<sup>1</sup> provides) professional services<sup>2</sup> to the company, to an affiliate of the company, or to an individual officer of the company or of one of its affiliates in excess of \$10,000 per year;
- Represents customer, supplier, creditor, banker, or other entity with which the company maintains a transactional/commercial relationship (unless the company discloses information to apply a materiality test<sup>3</sup>);
- Any director who has cross-directorships with executive directors or those in comparable roles;
- Relative<sup>1</sup> of a current or former executive of the company or its affiliates;
- A new appointee elected other than by a formal process through the general meeting (such as a contractual appointment by a substantial shareholder);
- Founder/co-founder/member of founding family but not currently an employee;
- Former executive (five-year cooling off period);
- Excessive years of service from date of first appointment, as determined by the EC Recommendation 2005/162/EC, local corporate governance codes, or local best practice, is generally a determining factor in evaluating director independence.<sup>4</sup>;
- Any additional relationship or principle considered to compromise independence under local corporate governance best practice guidance.

### **Independent NED**

- Not classified as non-independent by ISS (see above);
- No material<sup>5</sup> connection, either direct or indirect, to the company (other than a board seat) or to a significant shareholder.

### **Employee Representative**

- Represents employees or employee shareholders of the company (classified as "employee representative" and considered a non-independent NED).

### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> "Relative" follows the definition of "immediate family members" which covers spouses, parents, children, stepparents, step-children, siblings, in-laws, and any person (other than a tenant or employee) sharing the household of any director, nominee for director, executive officer, or significant shareholder of the company.

<sup>2</sup> Professional services can be characterized as advisory in nature and generally include the following: investment banking/financial advisory services; commercial banking (beyond deposit services); investment services; insurance services; accounting/audit services; consulting services; marketing services; and legal services. The case of participation in a banking syndicate by a non-lead bank should be considered a transaction (and hence subject to the associated materiality test) rather than a professional relationship.

<sup>3</sup> A business relationship may be material if the transaction value (of all outstanding transactions) entered into between the company and the company or organization with which the director is associated is equivalent to either 1 percent of the company's turnover or 1 percent of the turnover of the company or organization with which the director is associated; or

A business relationship may be material if the transaction value (of all outstanding financing operations) entered into between the company and the company or organization with which the director is associated is more than 10 percent of the company's shareholder equity or the transaction value (of all outstanding financing operations) compared to the company's total assets is more than 5 percent.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the EC recommendation 2005/162/EC's definition of independence provides that in order to remain independent, a non-executive director shall have served on the [supervisory] board for no more than 12 years. For countries governed by ISS' European policy, ISS will follow the EC recommendation and apply stricter tenure limits where recommended by local corporate governance codes or established by local best practice.

<sup>5</sup> For purposes of ISS' director independence classification, "material" will be defined as a standard of relationship (financial, personal, or otherwise) that a reasonable person might conclude could potentially influence one's objectivity in the boardroom in a manner that would have a meaningful impact on an individual's ability to satisfy requisite fiduciary standards on behalf of shareholders.

### Contested Director Elections

➤ **General Recommendation:** For contested elections of directors, e.g. the election of shareholder nominees or the dismissal of incumbent directors, ISS will make its recommendation on a case-by-case basis, determining which directors are considered best suited to add value for shareholders.

The analysis will generally be based on, but not limited to, the following major decision factors:

- Company performance relative to its peers;
- Strategy of the incumbents versus the dissidents;
- Independence of directors/nominees;
- Experience and skills of board candidates;
- Governance profile of the company;
- Evidence of management entrenchment;
- Responsiveness to shareholders;
- Whether a takeover offer has been rebuffed;
- Whether minority or majority representation is being sought.

When analyzing a contested election of directors, ISS will generally focus on two central questions: (1) Have the proponents proved that board change is warranted? And if so, (2) Are the proponent board nominees likely to effect positive change (i.e., maximize long-term shareholder value).

### Voting on Directors for Egregious Actions

➤ **General Recommendation:** Under extraordinary circumstances, vote against or withhold from directors individually, on a committee, or the entire board, due to:

- Material failures of governance, stewardship, risk oversight<sup>3</sup>, or fiduciary responsibilities at the company;
- Failure to replace management as appropriate; or

<sup>3</sup> Examples of failure of risk oversight include but are not limited to: bribery; large or serial fines or sanctions from regulatory bodies; poor risk oversight of environmental and social issues, including climate change; significant adverse legal judgments or settlement; or hedging of company stock.

- Egregious actions related to the director(s)' service on other boards that raise substantial doubt about his or her ability to effectively oversee management and serve the best interests of shareholders at any company.

### Committee of Representatives and Corporate Assembly Elections (Denmark and Norway)

- ▷ **General Recommendation:** For Norwegian and Danish companies where shareholders vote on elections for members of the corporate assembly or committee of representatives, but not directly on the board of directors, vote case-by-case on corporate assembly and committee of representative elections based on the board of directors' compliance with ISS' director election policy.

### Discharge of Directors

- ▷ **General Recommendation:** Vote for the discharge of directors, including members of the management board and/or supervisory board, unless there is reliable information about significant and compelling concerns that the board is not fulfilling its fiduciary duties, warranted on a case-by-case basis, by:
  - A lack of oversight or actions by board members which invoke shareholder distrust related to malfeasance or poor supervision, such as operating in private or company interest rather than in shareholder interest;
  - Any legal issues (e.g. civil/criminal) aiming to hold the board responsible for breach of trust in the past or related to currently alleged action yet to be confirmed (and not only in the fiscal year in question) such as price fixing, insider trading, bribery, fraud, and other illegal actions;
  - Other egregious governance issues where shareholders will bring legal action against the company or its directors.

For markets which do not routinely request discharge resolutions (e.g. common law countries or markets where discharge is not mandatory), analysts may voice concern in other appropriate agenda items, such as approval of the annual accounts or other relevant resolutions, to enable shareholders to express discontent with the board.

### Director, Officer, and Auditor Indemnification and Liability Provisions

- ▷ **General Recommendation:** Vote proposals seeking indemnification and liability protection for directors and officers on a case-by-case basis.

Vote against proposals to indemnify external auditors.

### Board Structure

- ▷ **General Recommendation:** Vote for routine proposals to fix board size.

Vote against the introduction of mandatory retirement ages for directors.

Vote against proposals to alter board structure or size in the context of a fight for control of the company or the board.



## 3. Capital Structure

### Capital Systems


European capital systems can be broadly defined as either authorized or conditional. Both systems provide companies with the means to finance business activities, but they are considerably different in structure. Which system is used by a company is determined by the economic and legal structure of the market in which it operates. However, many capital systems display slight variations on the two systems, and some systems bear features from both systems, if only on a cosmetic level.

Under the conditional capital system, companies seek authorizations for pools of capital, which typically have fixed periods of availability. For example, if a company seeks to establish a pool of capital for general issuance purposes, it requests the creation of a certain number of shares with or without preemptive rights, issuable piecemeal at the discretion of the board, generally for a fixed period of time. This type of authority would be used to carry out a general rights issue or small issuances without preemptive rights.

The authorized capital system sets a limit in a company's articles on the total number of shares that can be issued by the company's board. The system allows companies to issue shares from this preapproved limit, although in many markets shareholder approval must be obtained prior to an issuance. Companies also request shareholder approval for increases in authorization when the amount of shares contained in the articles is inadequate for issuance authorities.

### Share Issuance Requests

#### General Issuances

 **General Recommendation:** Vote for issuance authorities with pre-emptive rights to a maximum of 50 percent over currently issued capital and as long as the share issuance authorities' periods are clearly disclosed (or implied by the application of a legal maximum duration) and in line with market-specific practices and/or recommended guidelines (e.g. issuance periods limited to 18 months for the **Netherlands**).

Vote for issuance authorities without pre-emptive rights to a maximum of 10 percent (or a lower limit if local market best practice recommendations provide) of currently issued capital as long as the share issuance authorities' periods are clearly disclosed (or implied by the application of a legal maximum duration) and in line with market-specific practices and/or recommended guidelines (e.g. issuance periods limited to 18 months for the **Netherlands**).

These thresholds are mutually exclusive.

When calculating the defined limits, all authorized and conditional capital authorizations are considered, including existing authorizations that will remain valid beyond the concerned shareholders' meeting.

For **French** companies:

- Vote for general issuance requests with preemptive rights, or without preemptive rights but with a binding "priority right," for a maximum of 50 percent over currently issued capital.
- Generally vote for general authorities to issue shares without preemptive rights up to a maximum of 10 percent of share capital. When companies are listed on a regulated market, the maximum discount on share

issuance price proposed in the resolution must, in addition, comply with the legal discount for a vote for to be warranted.

### Specific Issuances

- **General Recommendation:** Vote on a case-by-case basis on all requests, with or without preemptive rights.

### Increases in Authorized Capital

- **General Recommendation:** Vote for proposals to increase authorized capital on a case-by-case basis if such proposals do not include the authorization to issue shares from the (pre-)approved limit.

In case the proposals to increase authorized capital include the authorization to issue shares according to the (pre-)approved limit without obtaining separate shareholder approval, the general issuance policy applies.

### Reduction of Capital

- **General Recommendation:** Vote for proposals to reduce capital for routine accounting purposes unless the terms are unfavorable to shareholders.

Vote proposals to reduce capital in connection with corporate restructuring on a case-by-case basis.

### Capital Structures

- **General Recommendation:** Vote for resolutions that seek to maintain, or convert to, a one-share, one-vote capital structure.

Vote against requests for the creation or continuation of dual-class capital structures or the creation of new or additional super voting shares.

### Preferred Stock

- **General Recommendation:** Vote for the creation of a new class of preferred stock or for issuances of preferred stock up to 50 percent of issued capital unless the terms of the preferred stock would adversely affect the rights of existing shareholders.

Vote for the creation/issuance of convertible preferred stock as long as the maximum number of common shares that could be issued upon conversion meets ISS' guidelines on equity issuance requests.

Vote against the creation of a new class of preference shares that would carry superior voting rights to the common shares.

Vote against the creation of blank check preferred stock unless the board clearly states that the authorization will not be used to thwart a takeover bid.

Vote proposals to increase blank check preferred authorizations on a case-by-case basis.

### Debt Issuance Requests

- ▷ **General Recommendation:** Vote non-convertible debt issuance requests on a case-by-case basis, with or without pre-emptive rights.

Vote for the creation/issuance of convertible debt instruments as long as the maximum number of common shares that could be issued upon conversion meets ISS' guidelines on equity issuance requests.

Vote for proposals to restructure existing debt arrangements unless the terms of the restructuring would adversely affect the rights of shareholders.

### Pledging of Assets for Debt

- ▷ **General Recommendation:** Vote proposals to approve the pledging of assets for debt on a case-by-case basis.

### Increase in Borrowing Powers

- ▷ **General Recommendation:** Vote proposals to approve increases in a company's borrowing powers on a case-by-case basis.

### Share Repurchase Plans

- ▷ **General Recommendation:** ISS will generally recommend for market repurchase authorities (share repurchase programs) if the terms comply with the following criteria:

- A repurchase limit of up to 10 percent of issued share capital;
- A holding limit of up to 10 percent of a company's issued share capital in treasury ("on the shelf"); and
- Duration of no more than 5 years, or such lower threshold as may be set by applicable law, regulation, or code of governance best practice.

Authorities to repurchase shares in excess of the 10 percent repurchase limit will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. ISS may support such share repurchase authorities under special circumstances, which are required to be publicly disclosed by the company, provided that, on balance, the proposal is in shareholders' interests. In such cases, the authority must comply with the following criteria:

- A holding limit of up to 10 percent of a company's issued share capital in treasury ("on the shelf"); and
- Duration of no more than 18 months.


In markets where it is normal practice not to provide a repurchase limit, ISS will evaluate the proposal based on the company's historical practice. However, ISS expects companies to disclose such limits and, in the future, may recommend a vote against companies that fail to do so. In such cases, the authority must comply with the following criteria:

- A holding limit of up to 10 percent of a company's issued share capital in treasury ("on the shelf"); and
- Duration of no more than 18 months.


In addition, ISS will recommend against any proposal where:

- The repurchase can be used for takeover defenses;
- There is clear evidence of abuse;
- There is no safeguard against selective buybacks;
- Pricing provisions and safeguards are deemed to be unreasonable in light of market practice.

#### Reissuance of Repurchased Shares

-  **General Recommendation:** Vote for requests to reissue any repurchased shares unless there is clear evidence of abuse of this authority in the past.

#### Capitalization of Reserves for Bonus Issues/Increase in Par Value

-  **General Recommendation:** Vote for requests to capitalize reserves for bonus issues of shares or to increase par value.

## 4. Compensation

### Compensation Guidelines

#### Preamble

The assessment of compensation follows the ISS Global Principles on Executive and Director Compensation which are detailed below. These principles take into account global corporate governance best practice.

The ISS Global Principles on Compensation underlie market-specific policies in all markets:

1. Provide shareholders with clear, comprehensive compensation disclosures;
2. Maintain appropriate pay-for-performance alignment with emphasis on long-term shareholder value;
3. Avoid arrangements that risk “pay for failure;”
4. Maintain an independent and effective compensation committee;
5. Avoid inappropriate pay to non-executive directors.

In line with European Commission Recommendation 2004/913/EC, ISS believes that seeking annual shareholder approval for a company's compensation policy is a positive corporate governance provision.

In applying the Five Global Principles, ISS has formulated European Compensation Guidelines which take into account local codes of governance, market best practice, and the Recommendations published by the European Commission. ISS analyzes compensation-related proposals based on the role of the beneficiaries and has therefore divided its executive and director compensation policy into two domains:

- I. Executive compensation-related proposals; and
- II. Non-executive director compensation-related proposals

### Executive compensation-related proposals

► **General Recommendation:** ISS will evaluate management proposals seeking ratification of a company's executive compensation-related items on a case-by-case basis, and where relevant, will take into account the European Pay for Performance Model<sup>4</sup> outcomes within a qualitative review of a company's remuneration practices. ISS will generally recommend a vote against a company's compensation-related proposal if such proposal fails to comply with one or a combination of several of the global principles and their corresponding rules:

1. Provide shareholders with clear and comprehensive compensation disclosures:
  - 1.1. Information on compensation-related proposals shall be made available to shareholders in a timely manner;
  - 1.2. The level of disclosure of the proposed compensation policy and remuneration report shall be sufficient for shareholders to make an informed decision and shall be in line with what local market best practice standards dictate;
    - 1.2.1. Remuneration report disclosure is expected to include amongst others: amounts paid to executives, alignment between company performance and payout to executives, disclosure of variable incentive targets and according levels of achievement and performance awards made, after the relevant performance period (ex-post), and disclosure and explanation of use of any discretionary authority or derogation clause by the board or remuneration committee to adjust pay outcomes.
    - 1.2.2. Companies are expected to provide meaningful information regarding the average remuneration of employees of the company, in a manner which permits comparison with directors' remuneration.
  - 1.3. Companies shall adequately disclose all elements of the compensation, including:
    - 1.3.1. Any short- or long-term compensation component must include a maximum award limit.
    - 1.3.2. Long-term incentive plans must provide sufficient disclosure of (i) the exercise price/strike price (options); (ii) discount on grant; (iii) grant date/period; (iv) exercise/vesting period; and, if applicable, (v) performance criteria.
    - 1.3.3. Discretionary payments, if applicable.
    - 1.3.4. The derogation policy, if applicable, which shall clearly define and limit any elements (e.g., base salary, STI, LTI, etc.) and extent (e.g., caps, weightings, etc.) to which derogations may apply.
2. Maintain appropriate pay structure with emphasis on long-term shareholder value:
  - 2.1. The structure of the company's short-term incentive plan shall be appropriate.
    - 2.1.1. The compensation policy must notably avoid guaranteed or discretionary compensation.
  - 2.2. The structure of the company's long-term incentives shall be appropriate, including, but not limited to, dilution, vesting period, and, if applicable, performance conditions.
    - 2.2.1. Equity-based plans or awards that are linked to long-term company performance will be evaluated using ISS' general policy for equity-based plans; and
    - 2.2.2. For awards granted to executives, ISS will generally require a clear link between shareholder value and awards, and stringent performance-based elements.
  - 2.3. The balance between short- and long-term variable compensation shall be appropriate

#### <sup>4</sup> Definition of Pay-for-Performance Evaluation:

ISS annually conducts a pay-for-performance analysis to measure the alignment between pay and performance over a sustained period. With respect to companies in the European Main Indices, this analysis considers the following:


- Peer Group Alignment:
  - The degree of alignment between the company's annualized TSR rank and the CEO's annualized total pay rank within a peer group, each measured over a three-year period.
  - The multiple of the CEO's total pay relative to the peer group median.
- Absolute Alignment – the absolute alignment between the trend in CEO pay and company TSR over the prior five fiscal years – i.e., the difference between the trend in annual pay changes and the trend in annualized TSR during the period.

- 2.3.1. The company's executive compensation policy must notably avoid disproportionate focus on short-term variable element(s)
3. Avoid arrangements that risk “pay for failure”:
  - 3.1. The board shall demonstrate good stewardship of investor's interests regarding executive compensation practices (principle being supported by Pay for Performance Evaluation<sup>4</sup>).
    - 3.1.1. There shall be a clear link between the company's performance and variable incentives. Financial and non-financial conditions, including ESG criteria, are relevant as long as they reward an effective performance in line with the purpose, strategy, and objectives adopted by the company.
    - 3.1.2. There shall not be significant discrepancies between the company's performance, financial and non-financial, and real executive payouts.
    - 3.1.3. The level of pay for the CEO and members of executive management should not be excessive relative to peers, company performance, and market practices.
    - 3.1.4. Significant pay increases shall be explained by a detailed and compelling disclosure.
  - 3.2. Termination payments<sup>5</sup> must not be in excess of (i) 24 months' pay or of (ii) any more restrictive provision pursuant to local legal requirements and/or market best practices.
  - 3.3. Arrangements with a company executive regarding pensions and post-mandate exercise of equity-based awards must not result in an adverse impact on shareholders' interests or be misaligned with good market practices.
4. Maintain an independent and effective compensation committee:
  - 4.1. No executives may serve on the compensation committee.
  - 4.2. In certain markets the compensation committee shall be composed of a majority of independent members, as per ISS policies on director election and board or committee composition.
  - 4.3. Compensation committees should use the discretion afforded them by shareholders to ensure that rewards properly reflect business performance.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the above, ISS will generally recommend a vote against a compensation-related proposal if such proposal is in breach of any other supplemental market-specific ISS voting policies.

### Non-Executive Director Compensation

5. Avoid inappropriate pay to non-executive directors.

 **General Recommendation:** ISS will generally recommend a vote for proposals to award cash fees to non-executive directors, and will otherwise:

Recommend a vote against where:

- Documents (including general meeting documents, annual report) provided prior to the general meeting do not mention fees paid to non-executive directors.

<sup>5</sup> 'Termination payments' means any payment linked to early termination of contracts for executive or managing directors, including payments related to the duration of a notice period or a non-competition clause included in the contract.

<sup>6</sup> In cases where a remuneration committee uses its discretion to determine payments, it should provide a clear explanation of its reasons, which are expected to be clearly justified by the financial results and the underlying performance of the company. The remuneration committee should disclose how it has taken into account any relevant environmental, social, and governance (ESG) matters when determining remuneration outcomes. Such factors may include (but are not limited to): workplace fatalities and injuries, significant environmental incidents, large or serial fines or sanctions from regulatory bodies and/or significant adverse legal judgments or settlements.


It is relatively rare that a remuneration committee chooses to amend the targets used for either the annual bonus or the LTIP following the start of the performance period, but where this has occurred, it is good practice for the company to demonstrate how the revised targets are in practice no less challenging than the targets which were originally set.

- Proposed amounts are excessive relative to other companies in the country or industry.
- The company intends to increase the fees excessively in comparison with market/sector practices, without stating compelling reasons that justify the increase.
- Proposals provide for the granting of stock options, performance-based equity compensation (including stock appreciation rights and performance-vesting restricted stock), and performance-based cash to non-executive directors.
- Proposals introduce retirement benefits for non-executive directors.

And recommend a vote on a case-by-case basis where:


- Proposals include both cash and share-based components to non-executive directors.
- Proposals bundle compensation for both non-executive and executive directors into a single resolution.

### Equity-based Compensation Guidelines


 **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for equity-based compensation proposals or the like if the plan(s) is(are) in line with long-term shareholder interests and align the award with shareholder value. This assessment includes, but is not limited to, the following factors:

- The volume of awards (to be) transferred to participants under all outstanding plans must not be excessive: awards must not exceed 5 percent of a company's issued share capital. This number may be up to 10 percent for high-growth companies or particularly well-designed plans (e.g., with challenging performance criteria, extended vesting/performance period, etc.);
- The plan(s) must be sufficiently long-term in nature/structure: the vesting of awards (i) must occur no less than three years from the grant date, and (ii) if applicable, should be conditioned on meeting performance targets that are measured over a period of at least three consecutive years;
- If applicable, performance conditions must be fully disclosed, measurable, quantifiable, and long-term oriented;
- The awards must be granted at market price. Discounts, if any, must be mitigated by performance criteria or other features that justify such discount.

### Employee Share Purchase Plans

 **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for employee stock purchase plans if the number of shares allocated to the plan is 10 percent or less of the company's issued share capital.

### Compensation-Related Voting Sanctions

 **General Recommendation:** Should a company be deemed:


- To have egregious remuneration practices;
- To have failed to follow market practice by not submitting expected resolutions on executive compensation; or
- To have failed to respond to significant shareholder dissent on remuneration-related proposals;

an adverse vote recommendation could be applied to any of the following on a case-by case basis:

1. The reelection of the chair of the remuneration committee or, where relevant, any other members of the remuneration committee;
2. The reelection of the board chair;
3. The discharge of directors; or
4. The annual report and accounts.

This recommendation could be made in addition to other adverse recommendations under existing remuneration proposals (if any).

### **Stock Option Plans – Adjustment for Dividend (Nordic Region)**

 **General Recommendation:** Vote against stock option plans in **Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden** if evidence is found that they contain provisions that may result in a disconnect between shareholder value and employee/executive reward.

This includes one or a combination of the following:

- Adjusting the strike price for future ordinary dividends AND including expected dividend yield above 0 percent when determining the number of options awarded under the plan;
- Having significantly higher expected dividends than actual historical dividends;
- Favorably adjusting the terms of existing options plans without valid reason; and/or
- Any other provisions or performance measures that result in undue award.

This policy applies to both new plans and amendments to introduce the provisions into already existing stock option plans. ISS will make an exception if a company proposes to reduce the strike price by the amount of future special (extraordinary) dividends only.

Generally vote against if the potential increase of share capital amounts to more than 5 percent for mature companies or 10 percent for growth companies or if options may be exercised below the market price of the share at the date of grant, or that employee options do not lapse if employment is terminated.

### **Share Matching Plans (Sweden and Norway)**

 **General Recommendation:** ISS considers the following factors when evaluating share matching plans:

- For every share matching plan, ISS requires a holding period.
- For plans without performance criteria, the shares must be purchased at market price.
- For broad-based share matching plans directed at all employees, ISS accepts an arrangement up to a 1:1 ratio, i.e. no more than one free share is awarded for every share purchased at market value.
- In addition, for plans directed at executives, we require that sufficiently challenging performance criteria be attached to the plan. Higher discounts demand proportionally higher performance criteria.

The dilution of the plan when combined with the dilution from any other proposed or outstanding employee stock purchase/stock matching plans, must comply with ISS' guidelines.



## 5. Environmental and Social Issues

### Voting on Social and Environmental Proposals

Issues covered under the policy include a wide range of topics, including consumer and product safety, environment and energy, labor standards and human rights, workplace and board diversity, and corporate political issues. While a variety of factors goes into each analysis, the overall principle guiding all vote recommendations focuses on how the proposal may enhance or protect shareholder value in either the short-term or long-term.

- ▷ **General Recommendation:** Generally vote case-by-case, examining primarily whether implementation of the proposal is likely to enhance or protect shareholder value. The following factors will be considered:
- If the issues presented in the proposal are more appropriately or effectively dealt with through legislation or government regulation;
  - If the company has already responded in an appropriate and sufficient manner to the issue(s) raised in the proposal;
  - Whether the proposal's request is unduly burdensome (scope or timeframe) or overly prescriptive;
  - The company's approach compared with any industry standard practices for addressing the issue(s) raised by the proposal;
  - Whether there are significant controversies, fines, penalties, or litigation associated with the company's environmental or social practices;
  - If the proposal requests increased disclosure or greater transparency, whether reasonable and sufficient information is currently available to shareholders from the company or from other publicly available sources; and
  - If the proposal requests increased disclosure or greater transparency, whether implementation would reveal proprietary or confidential information that could place the company at a competitive disadvantage.

### Say on Climate (SoC) Management Proposals

- ▷ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on management proposals that request shareholders to approve the company's climate transition action plan<sup>7</sup>, taking into account the completeness and rigor of the plan. Information that will be considered where available includes the following:
- The extent to which the company's climate related disclosures are in line with TCFD recommendations and meet other market standards;
  - Disclosure of its operational and supply chain GHG emissions (Scopes 1, 2, and 3);
  - The completeness and rigor of company's short-, medium-, and long-term targets for reducing operational and supply chain GHG emissions (Scopes 1, 2, and 3 if relevant);
  - Whether the company has sought and approved third-party approval that its targets are science-based;
  - Whether the company has made a commitment to be "net zero" for operational and supply chain emissions (Scopes 1, 2, and 3) by 2050;
  - Whether the company discloses a commitment to report on the implementation of its plan in subsequent years;
  - Whether the company's climate data has received third-party assurance;
  - Disclosure of how the company's lobbying activities and its capital expenditures align with company strategy;
  - Whether there are specific industry decarbonization challenges; and

<sup>7</sup> Variations of this request also include climate transition related ambitions, or commitment to reporting on the implementation of a climate plan.

- The company's related commitment, disclosure, and performance compared to its industry peers.

### Say on Climate (SoC) Shareholder Proposals

➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals that request the company to disclose a report providing its GHG emissions levels and reduction targets and/or its upcoming/approved climate transition action plan and provide shareholders the opportunity to express approval or disapproval of its GHG emissions reduction plan, taking into account information such as the following:

- The completeness and rigor of the company's climate-related disclosure;
- The company's actual GHG emissions performance;
- Whether the company has been the subject of recent, significant violations, fines, litigation, or controversy related to its GHG emissions; and
- Whether the proposal's request is unduly burdensome (scope or timeframe) or overly prescriptive.

## 6. Other Items

### Reorganizations/Restructurings

- **General Recommendation:** Vote reorganizations and restructurings on a case-by-case basis.

### Mergers and Acquisitions

- **General Recommendation:** : Vote case-by-case on mergers and acquisitions taking into account the following:

For every M&A analysis, ISS reviews publicly available information as of the date of the report and evaluates the merits and drawbacks of the proposed transaction, balancing various and sometimes countervailing factors including:

- Valuation - Is the value to be received by the target shareholders (or paid by the acquirer) reasonable? While the fairness opinion may provide an initial starting point for assessing valuation reasonableness, ISS places emphasis on the offer premium, market reaction, and strategic rationale.
- Market reaction - How has the market responded to the proposed deal? A negative market reaction will cause ISS to scrutinize a deal more closely.
- Strategic rationale - Does the deal make sense strategically? From where is the value derived? Cost and revenue synergies should not be overly aggressive or optimistic, but reasonably achievable. Management should also have a favorable track record of successful integration of historical acquisitions.
- Conflicts of interest - Are insiders benefiting from the transaction disproportionately and inappropriately as compared to non-insider shareholders? ISS will consider whether any special interests may have influenced these directors and officers to support or recommend the merger.
- Governance - Will the combined company have a better or worse governance profile than the current governance profiles of the respective parties to the transaction? If the governance profile is to change for the worse, the burden is on the company to prove that other issues (such as valuation) outweigh any deterioration in governance.

Vote against if the companies do not provide sufficient information upon request to allow shareholders to make an informed voting decision.

### Mandatory Takeover Bid Waivers

- **General Recommendation:** Vote proposals to waive mandatory takeover bid requirements on a case-by-case basis.

### Reincorporation Proposals

- **General Recommendation:** Vote reincorporation proposals on a case-by-case basis.

### Expansion of Business Activities

- **General Recommendation:** Vote for resolutions to expand business activities unless the new business takes the company into risky areas.

### Related-Party Transactions

➤ **General Recommendation:** In evaluating resolutions that seek shareholder approval on related-party transactions (RPTs), vote on a case-by-case basis, considering factors including, but not limited to, the following:

- The parties on either side of the transaction;
- The nature of the asset to be transferred/service to be provided;
- The pricing of the transaction (and any associated professional valuation);
- The views of independent directors (where provided);
- The views of an independent financial adviser (where appointed);
- Whether any entities party to the transaction (including advisers) is conflicted; and
- The stated rationale for the transaction, including discussions of timing.

If there is a transaction that ISS deemed problematic and that was not put to a shareholder vote, ISS may recommend against the election of the director involved in the related-party transaction or the full board.

### Antitakeover Mechanisms

➤ **General Recommendation:** Generally vote against all antitakeover proposals, unless they are structured in such a way that they give shareholders the ultimate decision on any proposal or offer.

For the **Netherlands**, vote recommendations regarding management proposals to approve protective preference shares will be determined on a case-by-case basis. In general, ISS will recommend voting for protective preference shares (PPS) only if:

- The supervisory board needs to approve an issuance of shares and the supervisory board is independent within the meaning of ISS' categorization rules ([ISS' European Director Independence Guidelines](#)) and the Dutch Corporate Governance Code (i.e. a maximum of one member can be non-independent);
- No call / put option agreement exists between the company and a foundation for the issuance of PPS;
- The issuance authority is for a maximum of 18 months;
- The board of the company-friendly foundation is fully independent;
- There are no priority shares or other egregious protective or entrenchment tools;
- The company states specifically that the issue of PPS is not meant to block a takeover, but will only be used to investigate alternative bids or to negotiate a better deal;
- The foundation buying the PPS does not have as a statutory goal to block a takeover; and
- The PPS will be outstanding for a period of maximum 6 months (an EGM must be called to determine the continued use of such shares after this period).

Following the Florange act of 2016, for **French** companies listed on a regulated market, generally vote against any general authorities impacting the share capital (i.e. authorities for share repurchase plans and any general share issuances with or without preemptive rights) if they can be used for antitakeover purposes without shareholders' prior explicit approval.

### Shareholder Proposals


➤ **General Recommendation:** Vote all shareholder proposals on a case-by-case basis.

Vote for proposals that would improve the company's corporate governance or business profile at a reasonable cost.

Vote against proposals that limit the company's business activities or capabilities or result in significant costs being incurred with little or no benefit.

Policies dealing with [environmental and social themes](#) are covered by their own dedicated policy, presented separately in this document.


### **Authority to Reduce Minimum Notice Period for Calling a Meeting**

 **General Recommendation:** A recommendation to approve the “enabling” authority proposal would be on the basis that ISS would generally expect companies to call EGMs/GMs using a notice period of less than 21 days only in limited circumstances where a shorter notice period will be to the advantage of shareholders as a whole, for example, to keep a period of uncertainty about the future of the company to a minimum. This is particularly true of capital raising proposals or other price sensitive transactions. By definition, AGMs, being regular meetings of the company, should not merit a notice period of less than 21 days.

In a market where local legislation permits an EGM/GM to be called at no less than 14-days' notice, ISS will generally recommend in favor of a resolution to approve the enabling authority if the company discloses that the shorter notice period of between 20 and 14 days would not be used as a matter of routine for such meetings, but only when the flexibility is merited by the business of the meeting. Where the proposal(s) at a given EGM/GM is (are) not time-sensitive, such as the approval of incentive plans, ISS would not expect a company to invoke the shorter notice notwithstanding any prior approval of the enabling authority proposal by shareholders.

In evaluating an enabling authority proposal, ISS would first require that the company make a clear disclosure of its compliance with any hurdle conditions for the authority imposed by applicable law, such as the provision of an electronic voting facility for shareholders. In addition, with the exception of the first AGM at which approval of the enabling authority is sought following implementation of the European Shareholder Rights Directive, when evaluating an enabling authority proposal ISS will take into consideration the company's use (if any) of shorter notice periods in the preceding year to ensure that such shorter notice periods were invoked solely in connection with genuinely time-sensitive matters. Where the company has not limited its use of the shorter notice periods to such time sensitive-matters and fails to provide a clear explanation for this, ISS will consider a vote against the enabling authority for the coming year.

### **Auditor Report Including Related Party Transactions (France)**

 **General Recommendation:** ISS will review all auditor reports on related-party transactions and screen for and evaluate agreements with respect to the following issues:


- Director Remuneration
- Consulting Services
- Liability Coverage
- Certain Business Transactions

In general, ISS expects companies to provide the following regarding related-party transactions:

- Adequate disclosure of terms under listed transactions (including individual details of any consulting, or other remuneration agreements with directors and for any asset sales and/or acquisitions);
- Sufficient justification on transactions that appear to be unrelated to operations and/or not in shareholders' best interests;
- Fairness opinion (if applicable in special business transactions); and
- Any other relevant information that may affect or impair shareholder value, rights, and/or judgment.

In the event that the company fails to provide an annual report in a timely manner, generally at least 21 days prior to the meeting, ISS will recommend votes against these proposals.

### Virtual Meetings

 **General Recommendation:** Generally vote for proposals allowing for the convening of hybrid\* shareholder meetings if it is clear that it is not the intention to hold virtual-only AGMs.

Generally vote against proposals allowing for the convening of virtual-only\* shareholder meetings.

\* The phrase “virtual-only shareholder meeting” refers to a meeting of shareholders that is held exclusively through the use of online technology without a corresponding in-person meeting. The term “hybrid shareholder meeting” refers to an in-person, or physical, meeting in which shareholders are permitted to participate online.

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