

PRESS RELEASE

BETTER FINANCE and DSW Advocate for a Return to In-Person Annual General Meetings in 2025

Brussels, 7 November 2024 – Despite the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, various DAX-listed companies have opted to continue with virtual-only formats for their annual general meetings (AGMs), with no return to in-person meetings. BETTER FINANCE, the European Federation of Investors and Financial Services Users, together with its German member organisation DSW, is taking a strong stand against this trend, advocating for a return to in-person AGMs. In collaboration with Swiss partner Ethos and the Ethos Engagement Pool International, which represent 117 Swiss pension funds, BETTER FINANCE is supporting DSW in urging the ten largest DAX companies by market capitalisation to resume in-person AGMs. These companies, which have consistently upheld virtual-only formats since the end of the pandemic, were contacted by DSW and Ethos on 23 October, with backing from BETTER FINANCE and Shareholders for Change, to request that they hold in-person AGMs in 2025. Should they fail to do so, these organisations will vote against the necessary constitutional amendments to allow the continuation of virtual-only meetings. Together, the campaign’s signatories represent assets under management totalling over 350 billion euros.

“The German government’s coalition agreement includes a commitment to preserving shareholders’ rights in the virtual AGM format,” stated BETTER FINANCE’s Aleksandra Mączyńska. *“However, after nearly two AGM seasons under this framework, investors are clear that this essential objective has not been fully met. In-person AGMs or hybrid formats are crucial for facilitating the direct, constructive exchange between shareholders and management, as well as among shareholders themselves”.* *“These are foundational elements of effective corporate governance,”* said Marc Tüngler of DSW. *“Hybrid formats, in particular, not only allow shareholders who prefer the virtual setting to participate but also give shareholders the choice and freedom to engage in the format that best suits them. As such, in-person and hybrid AGMs are the right and important choices to ensure shareholder rights and freedoms.”*

The law has long provided companies with the option to develop balanced, customised solutions, where all shareholder rights do not necessarily need to be equivalent across formats. In light of this, DSW, BETTER FINANCE, Swiss pension funds involved in the Ethos Engagement Pool International, and Shareholders for Change are calling on the ten targeted companies – Allianz SE, Beiersdorf AG, BMW AG, Deutsche Bank AG, Deutsche Börse AG, E.ON SE, Infineon Technologies AG, Mercedes Benz Group AG, Merck KGaA, Siemens AG – to reconsider their stance on virtual-only AGMs. These organisations will consider each company’s decision regarding meeting format when voting at the 2025 AGMs, beginning with Siemens AG, which is set to hold its meeting in January 2025.

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