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Analyst Conference Call Q4/FY 2018
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Contents

1 BASF Group

Thomas Wrigglesworth (Citigroup): Looking at the fourth quarter, I was wondering if you could just define for me the one-time effects. Obviously, you have identified the 200 million euros from the Rhine. Is that both from the lower utilization rate and logistics? Are there any insurance payments that have been received that are included in that fourth quarter EBIT number?

Dr. Martin Brudermüller: With regard to the Rhine impact: Yes, most of what these 200 million euros made up in Q4 are in fact the two things you mentioned. It is the reduced utilization rate of the plants and with this the EBIT we could not capture, and it is definitely also the higher transportation costs because we could only switch about one third of the volumes that are normally coming in by ship to road transport. That has significantly higher transportation costs. These are the two major effects.

Dr. Hans-Ulrich Engel: I think, if I got this correctly, Thomas, your question was on insurance and other types of special items or special effects that we have in Q4. On the insurance payments let me make the statement that what we received during the course of 2018 equals the damages that we had in the course of 2018. I hope that helps.

As you have seen in the special items in particular, there is a significant ramp-up there. That’s all related to the integration costs that we have for the businesses that we acquired from Bayer.

Thomas Wrigglesworth (Citigroup): Just a follow-up: The current utilization rate at Ludwigshafen, is that back up to full rate?

Dr. Martin Brudermüller: I would not say, to full rates, but it certainly recovered from the lows of the fourth quarter. It has also to do with the current business development which is slower than the average that we have. With this, it is on a reasonable level, but not on the highest level possible.

Markus Mayer (Baader Helvea): On net working capital: Can you quantify what was here the effect from the low Rhine water levels? I think there might have been higher inventories than at year end due to this effect. What do you expect how your inventories will develop then in the first quarter or in 2019? How do you see the inventory levels at your customers? Do you think that the destocking of the second half of last year brought your customers to levels where it might be now hard to destock further?

Dr. Martin Brudermüller: With regard to inventories: If you have a slowdown in the economy and also with your sales, that is also a time when you might run into higher inventories. There was also an inventory build-up on our side. With regard to customer inventories, I don’t think that we have over-pronounced effects here. It is common practice towards the end of the year that customers try to go into the new year with lower inventories. Let’s also see now what the overall sentiment on our customers’ side is.

If the economic activities go up, we will see a more positive side on inventories. Certainly, in a period when it's a little bit slower, I think everyone is cautious. We will certainly work on the inventories. We also had to deal with some reliability topics in the past. With cleaning that up, we can also operate with a little bit lower inventory. This, I think, goes hand in hand between our own operations and the overall sentiment on the market.

Christian Faitz (Kepler Cheuvreux): In your chemical activities, do you see any sign of a demand revival in China after the end of the New Year celebrations and sequentially?

Dr. Martin Brudermüller: With respect to China, I think it's a little bit too early. We just crawl out of the Chinese New Year break. The business started relatively slow in China in January. But let me also tell you: I have been living there for ten years. Certainly, as Easter holidays and everything, timing of Chinese New Year is always shifting a little bit. Every time when it's early in the year, normally the period between year change and Chinese New Year is a relatively lousy, slow-moving period. This was also the case this year.

So I think it's a little bit too early because we have to compare it also with last year when Chinese New Year was later. I would say, I don't see a vigorous revitalization of the business. But let's give it a little bit more time, so we can compare the two periods for a longer time.

Thomas Wrigglesworth (Citigroup): On the announcement that you divest pigments and perhaps are wrapping up with Construction chemicals as well. Can you give us an update on where you are in the decision process around construction chemicals?

In pigments, can we assume, if you are looking for a sale, that attempts to potentially put this into a JV are now behind us and that a sale is the only route?

Could you provide some framework on these divestitures, about how you are going to define value realization for shareholders? Are there going to be price levels at which you just won't sell and you'll keep? Can you give us some framework?

Dr. Martin Brudermüller: Thomas, a status update on where we stand with the construction chemicals process: We are currently preparing the documents in the data room and then we will go into an open and clear auction process. We assume that towards the end of 2019 we come to a conclusion and know where we go. A straight sale of this business is clearly an option.

The pigments part: What we announced today is certainly an early step. We now have to prepare all the documents. I think the timing is right for that. You are right: We have looked into different options. We came to the conclusion that a straight divestiture is the best option for this business. We are going forward with the portfolio pruning that is part of our new strategy. It's very clear that this is no longer an innovation-driven business, the market grows rather slowly, and it is not that deeply embedded in the Verbund. So with this, very clearly, we think there could be better owners and environments to bring this business forward.

2 Outlook 2019

Tony Jones (Redburn): I have a question back on guidance. Martin, what gives you the conviction for this improved trading to develop over the year, apart from the economic forecasts? Is it something more tangible like improved visibility or some big new customer contracts? So my question there is: What underpins that guidance to recover strongly in the second half?

The second question, a little bit related: Martin, you also sound much more positive on the outlook for US growth and China tariffs and trade compared to when we met in December. Can you help us understand a little bit about what's changed since then?

Dr. Martin Brudermüller: Tony, I think the two things are a little bit connected. First of all, let me really say: We saw a slowdown in the Chinese market environment and very specifically in automotive, not only connected to China, but also globally, whereas many of the other markets we are in don't really look depressing or pessimistic. So it very much was China and automotive.

I also have to say that in January the business with automotive customers was still negative. We talked about Chinese New Year already. But I think if we look forward and we analyze all the data we have today, we come to the conclusion that the chemical market growth is about the same as last year.

For example, in the automotive market you had a global 8% decline in January in numbers of cars produced. The projection for 2019 is a slight increase to 0.9%. If that does not materialize over the next months, then certainly the assumptions are not true. In that respect, we clearly have a kind of back-loaded budget or planning and in the second half, we have to clearly see, let's say, an uplift in the business activities.

Why is this the case? I think, first of all, it really has to do a lot with the trade issues between the US and China, but also the US and Europe. What you can see, I think, both on the side of the Trump administration as well as on the Chinese side: They feel the pain of a slowdown in the economy. And it looks like both countries at least try to deescalate and find some solution for the most pressing trade issues .

It looks at least like – and this is factored into our planning – this is going to improve over the next months. I don't think – with this, I am still consistent with what I said earlier – that there will be some easing of economic problems. It does not solve the issues between the US and China as such, because, I think, the problems the two have as two superpowers and how they deal with each other in the future, is not settled and will not be settled over the next months.

We also had, as part of our guidance, still the belief that the Brexit will not happen in a very disruptive way. I think there will be, at the last minute, some easing in the sense that they might postpone it or whatever.

So there are some assumptions which give us, with all what we hear from people we talk to, a little bit more optimism for 2019. But as we said, not only for the base effects, the first two quarters will be comparably weak because isocyanate pricing will compare against very, very high levels and good quarters in the prior year. But we will see whether this holds true on the economic side in the second half.

So with all talking to our customers, also besides the automotive industry, the outlook is not really super-pessimistic. It slows, yes, but it's not falling off the cliff. This is why we present this outlook. You always say, we are super-conservative. We are a little bit more optimistic for 2019.

By the way, it comes along with the US growth where I think we still have a very positive consumer confidence level and we still see high industrial activities. Certainly a little less activity because the effects from the tax reform are vanishing a little bit, but overall, the expectation for the US is still very positive.

Chetan Udeshi (J.P. Morgan): To come back to the guidance: I understand the optimism on the second half. But would it be fair to say that you probably dampened some of that optimism in terms of your internal forecast for the second half? Clearly, you might not want to have a situation where it proves to be too optimistic?

Dr. Martin Brudermüller: Chetan, on the guidance again: We are always blamed to be so conservative. Now we are really a little bit more optimistic. I think I mentioned it. So, why are we positive? We expect from the macroeconomic environment that we have a relief on some of the critical items like Brexit and like trade conflicts, which, I think, is also psychologically most probably bringing some of the markets in a little bit better dynamics. Then you should not underestimate what I said earlier: We do not have the turnarounds from the first half any longer in the second half. We have some of the cost savings kicking in. So it is basically coming from both sides. It is coming from the market side that we are optimistic, but it is also coming from our own clean-up and restructuring work which is showing fruits. This is why we are optimistic about the second half. These are our estimates from today's point of view and this is why we gave this guidance.

Sebastian Bray (Berenberg): On the potential difference between adjusted EBIT and EBIT in 2019. Could you please give an overview of what exactly the special charges will be? In particular, I am interested in how much of the roughly 500 million euros of restructuring cost that was mentioned is actually going to be absorbed there. Are all of the integration costs going to be booked as special items? Related to this is: What were they for 2018? Are there any other areas we should be aware of? That's my first question.

My second question is on the Other segment: Given that the profit growth is guided to be quite marginal at EBIT-adjusted level for 2019, the moving parts from this could potentially make the difference between flat and modestly up for the year.

Could you talk about how much Oil & Gas contribution you have built into Other for 2019 and the other moving parts that could move the Other contribution up or down?

Dr. Hans-Ulrich Engel: I'll start with your first question on the special items. What do we expect there? You have seen our figure for 2018. What we expect is roughly special items doubling in 2019. The big contributors to that will be the integration costs from the Bayer acquisition. And the other big piece will be the costs that we have related to the excellence program and that, in combination, should lead to what I called doubling of special items in 2019 compared to 2018.

On Other: Yes, you are right. From the point in time on that the Wintershall Dea joint venture is established, we will show our part of the net profit of the joint venture in Other, as part of the equity consolidation that we are doing there.

Be careful when you look at the income of Wintershall in 2018 and please be mindful of the fact that 2019 will be the year of integration and also restructuring.

You may have seen the announcement that Wintershall made last week with respect to a reduction of positions, particularly in Germany and in Norway. So please factor that in. Please also understand that I can't give you a specific number on what the Oil & Gas contribution is expected to be, not the least because it certainly depends on the point in time when we close the transaction.

As you know, in Other we have a lot of moving pieces in there. We had a significant positive contribution, in other words "income", coming from our long-term incentive program, unfortunately for, as we all think, the wrong reasons. It's share price-related, as you know. That provided significant income that obviously we do not foresee for 2019. We also had FX-related positive effects which we just can't forecast or estimate that way in 2019. So, unfortunately, Other will remain an area where also we at times need a little longer to fully grasp what has happened. We tend to grasp it quickly, but sometimes the development, such as in the area of share price and/or currency, is extremely difficult to forecast or to predict.

Georgina Iwamoto (Goldman Sachs): Just a follow-up on Sebastian's question on the Oil & Gas EBIT contribution: I appreciate that you can't give us a number, but is it fair to assume a six-month EBIT contribution for whatever our own forecasts are for the Oil & Gas business and then strip out some costs associated with the restructuring?

Dr. Hans-Ulrich Engel: On your Oil & Gas question. I can tell you that this is what we are doing internally: six months. We are using the expected net income and in the expected net income we are fully reflecting the kind of restructuring and integration cost that I have already addressed.

Andreas Heine (MainFirst): On the cost savings: You will get 500 million euros, you stated, on the EBITDA level. How does that compare with the inflation of costs you have in the opex line?

Dr. Hans-Ulrich Engel: What we work with are very broad, in general terms, inflation figures in the order of magnitude of 2 to 3% per year, offset by a number of efficiency measures and in this year an additional significant contribution coming from the excellence program.

Chetan Udeshi (J.P. Morgan): When you talked about 260 million euros of integration costs, can you just clarify how much of that is part of EBIT before special items or are all of those costs part of special items?

The same is the question for other special items associated with the 2-billion-euro excellence program: How much of those costs will actually be part of EBIT before special items? That would be useful.

Dr. Hans-Ulrich Engel: Chetan, on your question with respect to one-time effects: How much of that is actually special items, how much do we see in the underlying performance? – I tend to work there with a rule of thumb and that is about 75% that goes into special items and 25% you will find in the underlying performance also.

In other words, 25% roughly hit the EBIT before special items and 75% go to special items.

Peter Clark (Société Générale): Just to clarify: You haven't put a number – have you? – on the maintenance shutdowns – because another of the big plants is going down this year –, the year-on-year effect on that, please.

Dr. Hans-Ulrich Engel: That is correct, Peter, we have not put a number on that. But starting end of Q1 and then in particular in Q2, the turnaround costs will be significantly higher than what we have experienced in the first half of 2018.

Peter Clark (Société Générale): On the free cash flow, I presume, you are looking at 2019 free cash flow being at least the level of 2018, given your dividend is climbing up to the 3-billion mark in terms of payout.

Dr. Hans-Ulrich Engel: Peter, as you know, we don't give specific guidance there. But you know BASF as a good, solid, strong free cash flow provider. Martin and I, looking at each other, are nodding and saying: That is what we want to be in 2019, also.

Peter Spengler (DZ Bank): On the Rhine water levels. If they reach similarly low levels in H2 2019, comparable to 2018, is this fully covered by the 2019 EBIT guidance? Do you have plans at hand when we face a similar situation?

Dr. Martin Brudermüller: Peter, very clearly, there is nothing in the budget with regard to low water levels on the Rhine. We expect to have ongoing operations for twelve months in the year. Normally, in the past, we always had a few days or a week or something like that where we could not take out the full amount of cooling water from the river or where we had maybe a few days where ships could not go. That is normally what we can buffer by our inventories. It was really very, very exceptional in last year's summer, in all the 153 years of history of BASF. So I think this is nothing which you have to factor in.

Markus Mayer (Baader Helvea): On the guidance again. Last year you also gave guidance on reported EBIT. This year, this was not in the guidance or at least I have not found it in the presentation and the other material. Maybe a word on this. And also an indication for capex for 2019 would be very helpful.

Dr. Martin Brudermüller: Markus, the first point: We never guided on reported EBIT in detail by segment. Basically, we do it on the EBIT before special items level.

Dr. Hans-Ulrich Engel: Capex guidance for 2019 is 3.8 billion euros and for the time period 2019 through 2023 it is 21.3 billion euros. You will find that hidden in the outlook.

3 Segments

3.1 Chemicals

Andrew Stott (UBS): Your guidance on Chemicals. I am just slightly surprised that you are guiding up for the Chemicals division, obviously not the monomer part. Is there something specific about 2019 for BASF? I just heard some fairly downbeat comments from Ineos/Dow two weeks ago, particularly around cracker margins. So is it the intermediates business that gives you confidence, something specific in your particular sites?

Dr. Martin Brudermüller: Andrew, about the guidance for Chemicals: Just be aware that the new segment Chemicals, which we formed on January 1, does not include Monomers anymore. The isocyanate business is now in the Materials segment.

Indeed, cracker margins are stressed at the moment in all regions, particularly in the US, which has to do with the additional ethylene capacities coming on stream over there. However, the other businesses look rather well. You are right: The amines business, I think, is a very strong one. But also, the BDO business is something which ought to improve margins. So, overall, I think we have a good situation here, except the cracker margins. I think all other parts of the portfolio are relatively stable.

Georgina Iwamoto (Goldman Sachs): On the outlook for the Chemicals segment. I am sure everybody on the line would appreciate a little bit more convincing on how you see that segment growing. Your comments earlier indicated that cracker margins were currently depressed and that the other components of the kind of new segment would be more stable. Can you just help me figure out how that ends up being a net positive impact for 2019?

Dr. Martin Brudermüller: On the guidance for the Chemicals segment, I think, yes, the cracker margin situation, particularly in the US, is something on the really negative side. I think the volume side is positive. The BDO margin, as I mentioned, is positive. I think, also the acrylic value chain, which is a very important one for BASF, has a better outlook. Then don't forget: We have a lot of specialty businesses which are also contributing significantly. They have rather good perspectives for the future. Also, I should maybe say: Oxo alcohols is a very stable part of the business.

That is why we come to the conclusion: This is rather a positive picture for Chemicals than a negative one, by adding up negative and positive effects.

3.2 Performance Products

Peter Spengler (DZ Bank): On your joint venture in the paper and water business. Could you provide us with historic net income figures of this business which would help us to model the equity contribution in 2019? Are the sales and earnings of the water and paper chem still part of the group in 2018, so in the Report, or are they already in the disposal group? That was not clear to me so far.

Dr. Hans-Ulrich Engel: On the business that went to Solenis. I fear that we will not be able to provide you with coms on a net-income basis. We have our water and paper treatment business in the disposal group. But you still find that it is different than the type of accounting that we have to do for Oil & Gas because Oil & Gas is discontinued business. So that disappears but for the net profit. In the case of our water and paper chemicals business, you still see this in the regular P&L, despite the fact that it's part of a disposal group. But I think I can tell you that the profit contribution is not overwhelmingly high.

3.3 Functional Materials & Solutions

Charlie Webb (Morgan Stanley): First on the cathode business: You talked quite positively in terms of its contribution to the end of the year and also about – I saw a few headlines – getting approvals in that business. So perhaps you could just give us a quick update where you are in that approval process. When would you expect to be on platforms? Kind of the outlook for that business going forward.

Dr. Martin Brudermüller: Overall, the battery materials business developed nicely in 2018. We don't publish single numbers for that business. But we just have to make this very clear again: We are an established commercial player in this business. We have lower triple-digit million-euro sales in this business. Particularly in high-energy materials, so in NCA in particular, we are a very well-established player. We have our own capacities in the US and we have the TODA JV capacities in the US as well as in Japan. We are producing and delivering these materials to customers.

What is the next step now you may be talking about is our European investment which is a very important one in stepping up this business. It is also a very important commitment to the European value chain which you see a lot in the newspapers, also with a lot of political support, I would say, to build this up. We will bring our contribution to this.

We are now preparing our investments in a first step in Finland. So we are very well on track with this business.

Markus Mayer (Baader Helvea): On your catalyst business which was, at least in revenue terms, up 18% in Q4: Could you split up this very strong growth into the PGM effect and also the organic growth?

Dr. Hans-Ulrich Engel: You had a question on the sales development in our catalyst division and there in particular on the precious metals trading sales. We have experienced significant increases there, both in Q4 and also in the full year 2018. The full-year 2018 figure: Sales increased from 2.5 to roughly 3.2 billion euros and roundabout 300 million of that increase was in Q4. That's not so much related to volumes, it's more related to the price developments that we have seen in precious metals and there in particular to palladium which, I think, had a new record this week at more than US$1,500 per ounce. So quite a development there! That clearly pushes up then also the sales.

3.4 Agricultural Solutions

Andrew Stott (UBS): A question on ag, it's sort of two-fold. Can you give me the one-off costs of integration in 2019 and also what you saw in Q4?

Dr. Hans-Ulrich Engel: On the one-time cost: I give you a rough order of magnitude: In Q4 for the ag business roughly 100 million euros. Total integration cost in 2018, order of magnitude: 160 million euros. We are expecting in 2019 an order of magnitude of 100 million more than that.

Christian Faitz (Kepler Cheuvreux): On ag again, partly covering Andrew's question: Can you give us an idea how the activities acquired from Bayer have developed in the course of Q4? How do you see agrochemical demand picking up, heading into the application season in the northern hemisphere right now?

Dr. Hans-Ulrich Engel: On the development of the Bayer business in Q4: fully in line with our expectations. We had expected a negative contribution from that business. We had a negative contribution from that business. That should not be a surprise. It's the slower part of the two halves of the year, much slower, much more cost in that part of the year.

Then going into 2019 – it's building on the answer that I already gave to Andrew – figures for January were actually a bit better than what we had expected, but as you and I know from following the ag business over many, many years, you can't judge it on the basis of one month. You cannot even judge it on the basis of one quarter. For the northern hemisphere, we have to see how business will develop in Q1 and in Q2. That will give us a full and fair view on the development. But so far, so good, I want to say.

Andreas Heine (MainFirst): Could you give any update what you might have earned with Bayer being consolidated for a full year? The last number we had was from 2016. Could you add anything how that business has developed from 2016 to 2018, please?

Dr. Hans-Ulrich Engel: What I can give you on Bayer is unfortunately not more than saying: That business overall had a positive development. I just can't say more for relatively obvious reasons which have to do with the contracts.

Charlie Webb (Morgan Stanley): Coming back to the acquisitions, included in guidance: You helped us in Oil & Gas. Perhaps just on the Bayer business: I remember you suggesting previously that EBITDA was on a stand-alone basis for that business historically around 550 million euros. Accounting to the PPA, the amortization, is it right to think that we are going to get a low triple-digit million contribution in 2019? Is that a right way to think about it?

Dr. Hans-Ulrich Engel: On the EBIT contribution before special items of the Bayer business, I keep this very short and I say, what you assumed sounds more or less correct.

Laurence Alexander (Jefferies): Can you give some perspective on your R&D pipeline in ag? Can you frame it in terms of what level of peak sales you like to have in the R&D pipeline to match or to sustain the new ag business, given the step-up in size?

Dr. Martin Brudermüller: If you read the press release of this morning, I think, basically all the information is in there. I think, our ag pipeline shows a very impressive peak sales of more than 6 billion euros; it almost doubled, from 3.5 to 6. This is not only from our own products, but it certainly includes now all the businesses we acquired from Bayer. I think this is a very impressive number here.

On the other hand, I have also to say: It is very impressive what we invest in R&D because the Agricultural Solutions segment is projected to spend around 900 million euros in R&D. I think this shows very clearly, first of all, our commitment to this business, but it also shows how innovative this business is. This was actually also the driver for the acquisition.

We have a very good mix of traditional crop protection products now also the seed products. I think what is also very important: We have also businesses and innovations from the digital part in there. I think that shows how comprehensive and fully-fledged our segment is. We are very proud and happy about this because I think this is what fuels the segment and gives you a perspective about the future of that business. I think BASF is here very, very well positioned in terms of innovation.

Laurence Alexander (Jefferies): Just to be clear: Is that pipeline, the 6 billion, enough for BASF to outgrow the markets it operates in? Is it really the right level to sustain the business?

Dr. Martin Brudermüller: You could already see it during the last years: On our traditional or legacy business we had a very, very strong pipeline on the chemical side, which is actually one of the strongest in this industry.

Now you see that this is basically more comprehensive by having also the seed and traits and the digital part over there. I think this is a full set of tools to be very aggressive in this market.

I think we have a very good position here. That was always what we said. I think with the size of the business we don’t have any disadvantage, e.g., that we could not reach any regional or local market. I think we always made this clear also in the past. You might have a little bit higher sales cost compared to one of the bigger competitors, but the main determining factor in this business is always your innovation power; how much new stuff you can bring to the market. I think, in that respect, we absolutely do not have to hide in front of any of the other big merged competitors here.

Patrick Lambert (MainFirst): Quick questions, again on ag, a question on prices. I see that you had a positive price at 6%, I think, in Q4. I just wanted to check that. Is it prices or is it mix? Could you talk about the regional development of prices in crop protection?

Dr. Hans-Ulrich Engel: On ag price development: Overall, we had positive developments in all regions when it comes to prices, obviously offset significantly by FX effects in South America, but the price development overall looked pretty satisfying.

Andrew Stott (UBS): On glufosinate: It looks like glufosinate as a product has completely recovered in the last twelve months – I guess, partly helped by the glyphosate-resistance issues. I just wondered if you can confirm that's what you are seeing as sort of data that we are relying on into Brazil. So I'd love to hear your thoughts on glufosinate as you look into 2019 and generally across the ag business.

Dr. Hans-Ulrich Engel: Your question on glufosinate: All I can tell you is that, based on what we have seen there so far, we were quite satisfied with the business that we generated in Q4. I can also tell you that the start in the new year, in January, was pretty good.

4 Discontinued oil and gas business

Patrick Lambert (MainFirst): A question regarding Oil & Gas in your Annual Report: I see that the reserves in Europe, in the North Sea were pretty sharply down. Can you comment on that? Is that a worry? Or do you have enough with Achimov to continue the growth of production there?

Dr. Hans-Ulrich Engel: On your reserves question in Oil & Gas: Overall, we expanded the R/P ratio from ten years to eleven years. That gives you an indication on what's happening overall in the portfolio. And we had an adjustment to reserves in the North Sea, in fact in one of our Norwegian fields. That had an impact on that specific region. But overall, as I said, the reserves picture looks pretty good. Our R/P ratio is up by roughly 10%.

Patrick Lambert (MainFirst): And you continue the same type of production growth that you presented to us a few years ago? It should be the same type of production growth?

Dr. Hans-Ulrich Engel: It should be the same type of production growth. I cannot exclude that, once we formed the joint venture with Dea – and if you look in particular then at Dea's portfolio and what's coming on stream there – that production will grow at a higher rate. If I followed things correctly, Wintershall and Dea put out press releases last week with respect to their expectations on production growth. And if I compare that to, let's say, the order of magnitude of 3 to 4% in volume growth that we targeted on an annual basis, that is more and goes to the range of 750,000 to 800,000 barrels per day in the relatively near future.