

voting rights changes by 5% or more between two annual ordinary general meetings, we are required to publish in the BALO, within 15 calendar days of such change, the number of voting rights outstanding and provide the AMF with written notice of such information. The AMF publishes the total number of voting rights so notified by all listed companies in a weekly notice, noting the date each such number was last updated.

If any person fails to comply with the legal notification requirement, the shares that exceed the relevant threshold will be deprived of voting rights for all shareholders' meetings until the end of a two-year period following the date on which their owner complies with the notification requirements. In addition, any shareholder who fails to comply with these requirements may have all or part of its voting rights suspended for up to five years by the Commercial Court at the request of the chairman, any shareholder or the COB, and may be subject to a fine.

Under AMF regulations, and subject to limited exemptions granted by the AMF, any person or persons acting in concert that own in excess of one-third of the share capital or voting rights of a French listed company must initiate a public tender offer for the remaining outstanding share capital of such company.

In addition, a number of provisions of the French commercial code allow corporations to adopt *statuts* that have anti-takeover effects, including provisions that allow:

- shares with double voting rights;
- a company's board of directors to increase the company's share capital during a tender offer; and
- limitations on the voting power of shareholders.

MATERIAL CONTRACTS

In view of the size and scope of our operations, we have not entered into any contracts in the last two fiscal years that could be considered material to our company.

EXCHANGE CONTROLS

The French commercial code currently does not limit the right of nonresidents of France or non-French persons to own and vote shares. However, nonresidents of France must file an administrative notice with French authorities in connection with the acquisition of a controlling interest in our company. Under existing administrative rulings, ownership of 20% or more of our share capital or voting rights is regarded as a controlling interest, but a lower percentage might be held to be a controlling interest in some circumstances depending upon factors such as:

- the acquiring party's intentions; and
- the acquiring party's ability to elect directors, and financial reliance by us on the acquiring party.

French exchange control regulations currently do not limit the amount of payments that we may remit to nonresidents of France. Laws and regulations concerning foreign exchange controls do require, however, that all payments or transfers of funds made by a French resident to a nonresident be handled by an accredited intermediary. In France, all registered banks and most credit establishments are accredited intermediaries.

TAXATION

French Taxation

The following generally summarizes the material French tax consequences of purchasing, owning and disposing of our shares or ADSs. The statements relating to French tax laws set forth below are based on the laws in force as of the date hereof, and are subject to any changes in applicable laws and tax treaties after such date.

This discussion is intended only as a descriptive summary and does not purport to be a complete analysis or listing of all potential tax effects of the purchase, ownership or disposition of our shares or ADSs.

The following summary does not address the treatment of shares or ADSs that are held by a resident of France (except for purposes of describing related tax consequences for other holders) or in connection with a permanent establishment or fixed base through which a holder carries on business or performs personal services in France, or by a person that owns, directly or indirectly, 5% or more of the stock of our company.

There are currently no procedures available for holders that are not U.S. residents to claim tax treaty benefits in respect of dividends received on ADSs or shares registered in the name of a nominee. Such holders should consult their own tax adviser about the consequences of owning and disposing of ADSs.

Taxation of Dividends on Shares

In France, dividends are paid out of after-tax income. Dividends paid to non-residents normally are subject to a 25% French withholding tax. However, non-resident holders that are entitled to and comply with the procedures for claiming benefits under an applicable tax treaty may be subject to a reduced rate (generally 15%) of French withholding tax. If a non-resident holder establishes its entitlement to treaty benefits prior to the payment of a dividend, then French tax generally will be withheld at the reduced rate provided under the treaty.

The French Finance Law of 2004 includes a reform of the French tax treatment of distributions implementing a new mechanism to avoid double taxation of dividends and the elimination of the former *avoir fiscal* and *précompte* mechanisms as explained below.

Avoir Fiscal – Tax Credit

Prior to enactment of the reform, French resident shareholders were entitled to a tax credit, known as the *avoir fiscal*, on dividends received from French companies. The *avoir fiscal* was equal to 50% of the dividend received for individuals and, generally, equal to 10% of the dividend received for other investors, although the 10% rate was generally increased by 80% of any *précompte* actually paid in cash by the distributing corporation.

As a result of the reform:

- French resident individuals will still benefit from the *avoir fiscal* with respect to dividend distributions made during 2004 but will not be entitled to the *avoir fiscal* with respect to dividend distributions made from 2005 on. Instead, from 2005 on, French resident individuals will only be taxed on half of dividends received and, in addition to the annual allowance which is already applicable, will be entitled to a tax credit equal to 50% of the dividend (the “Tax Credit”). The Tax Credit will have a cap of €230 for married couples and members of a union agreement subject to joint taxation and €115 for single persons, widows or widowers, divorcees or married persons subject to separate taxation.
- French resident shareholders other than individuals will lose the benefit of the *avoir fiscal* for tax credits that they would otherwise have been able to use from 2005 on; thus French corporate shareholders with a fiscal year corresponding to the calendar year will not be entitled to the *avoir fiscal* with respect to dividends received in 2004.

Dividends paid to non-residents are not normally eligible for the benefit of the *avoir fiscal* and, from 2005 on, will not be eligible for the Tax Credit described above. However, France has entered into tax treaties with certain countries under which qualifying residents complying with the procedures for claiming benefits under an applicable tax treaty may be entitled to benefit from a refund of the *avoir fiscal* (net of applicable withholding tax), in addition to a reduced rate of withholding tax. Certain of these treaties impose additional conditions for the entitlement of corporate entities to the *avoir fiscal* and under certain treaties only individual residents are entitled to the *avoir fiscal*.

As a result of the French Finance Law of 2004 reform:

- qualifying non-resident individuals who hold shares directly will be entitled to a refund of the *avoir fiscal* with respect to dividends received in 2004 but will not be entitled to *avoir fiscal* refunds with respect to distributions made from 2005. Instead, qualifying non-resident individuals who were previously entitled to a refund of the *avoir fiscal* may benefit, under the same conditions as for the *avoir fiscal*, from a refund of the Tax Credit (net of applicable withholding tax); the French tax authorities have not yet issued any guidance with regard to the refund of the Tax Credit to non-resident individuals, but claiming such refund may likely entail compliance with cumbersome formalities,
- non-resident shareholders other than individuals are no longer entitled to a refund of the *avoir fiscal* with respect to dividend distributions made from 2004.

Précompte - 25% Equalization Tax

Dividends paid out of profits that have not been taxed at the ordinary corporate rate, or were earned and taxed more than five years before the distribution, are subject to an equalization tax called the *précompte*, which is payable by the distributing corporation to the French tax authorities. The *précompte* generally is equal to one-half of the amount of the dividend paid to shareholders prior to deduction of withholding tax. When a tax treaty does not provide for a refund of the *avoir fiscal*, or when a non-resident shareholder is not entitled to such a refund but is otherwise entitled to the benefits of the tax treaty, then a qualifying shareholder may generally obtain from the French tax authorities a payment equal to 100% of the *précompte* actually paid in cash by the distributing corporation, net of applicable withholding tax. These rules will be applicable to distributions made through December 31, 2004.

Distributions made by French companies from 2005 on will no longer be subject to *précompte*. However, an equalization tax will apply to distributions made in 2005 out of profits that have not been taxed at the ordinary corporate tax rate, or which were earned and taxed more than five years before the distribution. This equalization tax will be equal to 25% of the amount of the dividends paid to the shareholder. Unlike *précompte*, this equalization tax will not be refundable to non-resident shareholders, as it will be refunded to the distributing corporation in three installments of one third each with respect to the three fiscal years closed after the distribution, either as a credit against its corporate tax liability or in cash, if the corporate tax liability is insufficient to offset the entire tax credit.

Distributions made as from 2006 will not give rise to *précompte* or equalization tax liability.

Taxation on Sale or Disposition of Shares

Subject to the more favorable provisions of a relevant tax treaty, holders that are not residents of France for tax purposes, do not hold shares or ADSs in connection with the conduct of a business or profession in France, and have not held more than 25% of our dividend rights (*droits aux bénéfices sociaux*), directly or indirectly, at any time during the preceding five years, are not subject to French income tax or capital gains tax on the sale or disposition of shares or ADSs.

A 1% *ad valorem* registration duty (subject to a maximum of €3,049 per transfer) applies to certain transfers of shares or ADSs in French companies. This duty does not apply to transfers of shares or ADSs in listed companies that are not evidenced by a written agreement, or if any such agreement is executed outside France.

Estate and Gift Tax

France imposes estate and gift tax on shares or ADSs of a French corporation that are acquired by inheritance or gift. The tax applies without regard to the tax residence of the transferor. However, France has entered into estate and gift tax treaties with a number of countries pursuant to which, assuming certain conditions are met, residents of the treaty country may be exempted from such tax or obtain a tax credit.

Wealth Tax

Individuals who are not residents of France for purposes of French taxation are not subject to a wealth tax (*impôt de solidarité sur la fortune*) in France as a result of owning an interest in the share capital of a French corporation, provided that such ownership interest is less than 10% of the corporation's share capital and does not enable the shareholder to exercise influence over the corporation. Double taxation treaties may provide for a more favorable tax treatment.

Taxation of U.S. Investors

The following is a summary of the material French and U.S. federal income tax consequences of the purchase, ownership and disposition of our shares or ADSs if you are a holder that is a resident of the United States for purposes of the income tax convention between the United States and France (the "Treaty") and are fully eligible for benefits under the Treaty (a "U.S. holder"). You generally will be entitled to Treaty benefits in respect of our shares or ADSs if you are:

- the beneficial owner of the shares or ADSs (and the dividends paid with respect thereto);
- an individual resident of the United States, a U.S. corporation, or a partnership, estate or trust to the extent its income is subject to taxation in the United States in its hands or in the hands of its partners or beneficiaries;
- not also a resident of France for French tax purposes; and
- not subject to an anti-treaty shopping article that applies in limited circumstances.

Special rules apply to pension funds and certain other tax-exempt investors.

For U.S. federal income tax purposes, a U.S. holder's ownership of the company's ADSs will be treated as ownership of the company's underlying shares.

This summary does not purport to be a comprehensive description of all of the tax considerations that may be relevant to any particular investor, and does not discuss tax considerations that arise from rules of general application or that are generally assumed to be known by investors. In particular, the summary does not deal with shares that are not held as capital assets, and does not address the tax treatment of holders that are subject to special rules, such as banks, insurance companies, dealers in securities or currencies, regulated investment companies, persons that elect mark-to-market treatment, persons holding shares as a position in a synthetic security, straddle or conversion transaction, persons that own, directly or indirectly, 5% or more of our voting stock or 10% or more of our outstanding capital and persons whose functional currency is not the U.S. dollar. The summary is based on laws, treaties, regulatory interpretations and judicial decisions in effect on the date hereof, all of which are subject to change.

This summary does not discuss the treatment of shares or ADSs that are held in connection with a permanent establishment or fixed base through which a holder carries on business or performs personal services in France.

You should consult your own tax advisers regarding the tax consequences of the purchase, ownership and disposition of shares or ADSs in the light of your particular circumstances, including the effect of any state, local or other national laws.

Dividends

As discussed in more detail above, the French Finance Law of 2004 includes a reform of the French tax treatment of distributions and dividends paid by French companies to non-residents of France. Generally, non-residents of France are subject to French withholding tax at a 25% rate and are not eligible for the benefit of the *avoir fiscal*. In addition, as of 2005, non-residents generally will not be eligible for the benefit of the Tax Credit available to French resident individuals, as described above.

However, under the Treaty, you can claim the benefit of a reduced dividend withholding tax rate of 15%.

If you are an individual U.S. holder, you will also be entitled to a payment from the French tax authorities equal to the *avoir fiscal* with respect to dividends distributed in 2004 at a 50% rate, less a 15% withholding tax. Because of the 2004 French tax reform you will no longer be entitled to the *avoir fiscal* refund with respect to dividend distributions made from 2005 on. Instead, under the same conditions as for the *avoir fiscal*, you may be entitled to a refund of the Tax Credit less a 15% withholding tax. You generally will be entitled to receive a refund of the *avoir fiscal* or the Tax Credit only if you are subject to U.S. federal income tax on the *avoir fiscal* payment (or the Tax Credit) and the dividend to which it relates. The refund of the *avoir fiscal* (or the Tax Credit) will not be made available before January 15 following the end of the calendar year in which the dividend is paid. The French tax authorities have not yet issued any guidance with regard to the refund of the Tax Credit to non-resident individuals, which may entail compliance with cumbersome formalities.

As a result of the 2004 French tax reform, U.S. holders that are legal entities, pension funds or other tax-exempt holders are no longer entitled to tax credit payments from the French Treasury in respect of dividends paid from 2004.

French withholding tax will be withheld at the 15% Treaty rate if you have established before the date of payment that you are a resident of the United States under the Treaty and, if you are not an individual, that you are the owner of all the rights relating to the full ownership of the shares or ADSs (including, but not limited to, dividend rights).

With respect to distributions of dividends made during 2004, U.S. holders that are not entitled to a refund of the *avoir fiscal* (e.g., corporations, pension funds and other tax-exempt U.S. holders) may generally obtain from the French tax authorities a refund of the entire *précompte* equalization tax (discussed under “– French Taxation,” above) we actually pay in cash in respect of a dividend, less a 15% French withholding tax.

Thus, for example, if we pay a dividend of 100 to an individual U.S. holder in 2004, the holder initially will receive 85, but will be entitled to an additional payment of 42.50, consisting of the *avoir fiscal* of 50 less a 15% withholding tax. If we pay a dividend of 100 to a corporate U.S. holder, such U.S. holder will receive 85, and will not be entitled to any *avoir fiscal*; in the event that the dividend distribution triggers payment by us of the *précompte*, such U.S. holder generally may also obtain from the French tax authorities a refund of the *précompte* that we pay in cash, less a 15% withholding tax.

The gross amount of dividend, *avoir fiscal* (or Tax Credit) and *précompte* payments that you receive (prior to deduction of French withholding tax) generally will be subject to U.S. federal income taxation as foreign source dividend income. Such dividends will not be eligible for the dividends received deduction generally allowed to U.S. corporations. French withholding tax at the 15% Treaty rate will be treated as a foreign income tax that, subject to applicable limitations under U.S. law, is eligible for credit against your U.S. federal income tax liability or, at your election, may be deducted in computing taxable income. Foreign tax credits will not be allowed for withholding taxes imposed in respect of certain short-term or hedged positions in securities. You should consult your own tax advisers concerning the implications of these rules in the light of your particular circumstances.

Subject to certain exceptions for short-term and hedged positions, the U.S. dollar amount of dividends received by an individual prior to January 1, 2009 with respect to our shares or ADSs will be subject to taxation at a maximum rate of 15% if the dividends are “qualified dividends.” Dividends paid on our shares or ADSs will be treated as qualified dividends if we were not, in the year prior to the year in which the dividend was paid, and are not, in the year in which the dividend is paid, a passive foreign investment company (“PFIC”), foreign personal holding company (“FPHC”) or foreign investment company (“FIC”). Based on our audited financial statements and relevant market and shareholder data, we believe that we were not treated as a PFIC, FPHC or FIC for U.S. federal income tax purposes with respect to our 2003 taxable year. In addition, based on our audited

financial statements and our current expectations regarding the value and nature of our assets, the sources and nature of our income, and relevant market and shareholder data, we do not anticipate becoming a PFIC, FPHC or FIC for our 2004 taxable year.

Dividends paid in euro will be included in your income in a U.S. dollar amount calculated by reference to the exchange rate in effect on the date you receive the dividend (or the date the depository receives the dividend, in the case of the ADSs), regardless of whether the payment is in fact converted into U.S. dollars. If such a dividend is converted into U.S. dollars on the date of receipt, you generally should not be required to recognize foreign currency gain or loss in respect of the dividend income.

Procedures for Claiming Treaty Benefits

In order to claim Treaty benefits with respect to distributions made in 2004, if you are an individual U.S. holder, you must complete and deliver to the French tax authorities either:

- the simplified certificate described below; or
- an application for refund on French Treasury Form RF 1A EU-No. 5052.

A simplified certificate must state that:

- you are a U.S. resident within the meaning of the Treaty;
- you do not maintain a permanent establishment or fixed base in France with which the holding giving rise to the dividend is effectively connected;
- you own all the rights attached to the full ownership of the shares (including dividend rights); and
- you meet all the requirements of the Treaty for obtaining the benefit of the reduced rate of withholding tax and the refund of the *avoir fiscal*.

Copies of the simplified certificate and the application for refund are available from the U.S. Internal Revenue Service and from the *Centre des Impôts des Non-Résidents* (9, rue d'Uzès, 75094 Paris Cedex 2).

If the certificate or application is not filed prior to a dividend payment, then holders may claim withholding tax and *avoir fiscal* refunds by filing an application for refund at the latest by December 31 of the second year following the year in which the withholding tax is paid.

The *avoir fiscal* and any French withholding tax refund will not be paid before January 15 following the end of the calendar year in which the dividend is paid.

As noted above, the French tax authorities have not yet issued any guidance with regard to the refund of the Tax Credit to non-resident individuals, which may entail compliance with cumbersome formalities.

If you are a U.S. holder not entitled to a refund of the *avoir fiscal*, in order to claim Treaty benefits (including reduced withholding tax rate and, as the case may be, refund of the *précompte*) with respect to distributions made in 2004, you must file with the French tax authorities either the simplified certificate described above or French Treasury Form RF 1B EU-No. 5053 before the end of the second year following the year in which the dividend was paid. Copies of the simplified certificate and of the form, together with instructions, are available from the U.S. Internal Revenue Service or at the *Centre des Impôts des Non-Résidents* (9, rue d'Uzès, 75094 Paris Cedex 2). If the simplified certificate or the form are filed prior to the dividend payment, then the French withholding tax generally will be withheld at the reduced rate.

The French tax authorities are expected to issue new guidelines setting out formalities to be complied with by U.S. holders in order to obtain the reduced withholding tax rate on distributions made from 2005. You should nevertheless be entitled to benefit from the application of the reduced rate of withholding tax of 15% provided

that you complete and file with the French tax authorities Form RF 1B EU-No. 5053 before the payment of the dividend. If the form is not filed prior to the dividend payment, withholding tax will be levied at the 25% rate, and you would have to claim a refund for the excess by filing an application in this respect.

Capital Gains

Under the Treaty, you will not be subject to French tax on any gain derived from the sale or exchange of shares or ADSs, unless the gain is effectively connected with a permanent establishment or fixed base maintained by you in France.

For U.S. federal income tax purposes, gain or loss you realize on the sale or other disposition of the shares or ADSs will be capital gain or loss, and will be long-term capital gain or loss if the shares were held for more than one year. The net amount of long-term capital gain recognized by an individual U.S. holder generally is subject to taxation at a maximum rate of 20%; however, net long-term capital gain recognized by an individual U.S. holder after May 5, 2003 and before January 1, 2009 generally is subject to taxation at a maximum rate of 15%. Your ability to offset capital losses against ordinary income is limited.

French Estate and Gift Tax

Under the estate and gift tax convention between the United States and France, a transfer of shares or ADSs by gift or by reason of the death of a U.S. holder entitled to benefits under that convention will not be subject to French gift or inheritance tax, so long as the donor or decedent was not domiciled in France at the time of the transfer, and the shares or ADSs were not used or held for use in the conduct of a business or profession through a permanent establishment or fixed base in France.

French Wealth Tax

The French wealth tax does not generally apply to shares or ADSs of a U.S. Holder if the holder is a resident of the United States for purposes of the Treaty.

U.S. Information Reporting and Backup Withholding Rules

Payments of dividends and sales proceeds that are made within the United States or through certain U.S.-related financial intermediaries are subject to information reporting and may be subject to backup withholding unless the holder (i) is a corporation or other exempt recipient or (ii) provides a taxpayer identification number and certifies that no loss of exemption from backup withholding has occurred. Holders that are not U.S. persons generally are not subject to information reporting or backup withholding. However, such a holder may be required to provide a certification of its non-U.S. status in connection with payments received within the United States or through a U.S.-related financial intermediary.

DOCUMENTS ON DISPLAY

Certain documents referred to in this document can be inspected at our offices at 36/38, avenue Kléber, 75116 Paris, France.

We are subject to the periodic reporting and other informational requirements of the Exchange Act. Under the Exchange Act, we are required to file reports and other information with the SEC. Specifically, we are required to file annually a Form 20-F no later than six months after the close of each fiscal year. Copies of reports and other information, when so filed, may be inspected without charge and may be obtained at prescribed rates at the public reference facilities maintained by the SEC at Judiciary Plaza, 450 Fifth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20549. The public may obtain information regarding the SEC's Public Reference Rooms by

calling the SEC at 1-800-SEC-0330. As a foreign private issuer, we are exempt from the rules under the Exchange Act prescribing the furnishing and content of quarterly reports and proxy statements, and officers, directors and principal shareholders are exempt from the reporting and short-swing profit recovery provisions in Section 16 of the Exchange Act.

ENFORCEABILITY OF CIVIL LIABILITIES AGAINST FOREIGN PERSONS

Our company is a corporation organized under the laws of France. The majority of our directors are citizens and residents of countries other than the United States, and the majority of our assets are located outside of the United States. Accordingly, it may be difficult for investors:

- to obtain jurisdiction over our company or our directors in courts in the United States in actions predicated on the civil liability provisions of the U.S. federal securities laws;
- to enforce judgments obtained in such actions against us or our directors;
- to obtain judgments against us or our directors in original actions in non-U.S. courts predicated solely upon the U.S. federal securities laws; or
- to enforce against us or our directors in non-U.S. courts judgments of courts in the United States predicated upon the civil liability provisions of the U.S. federal securities laws.

Actions brought in France for enforcement of judgments of U.S. courts rendered against French persons, including some directors of our company, would require those persons to waive their right to be sued in France under Article 15 of the French Civil Code. In addition, actions in the United States under the U.S. federal securities laws could be affected under certain circumstances by the French law of July 16, 1980, which may preclude or restrict the obtaining of evidence in France or from French persons in connection with those actions. Each of the foregoing statements applies to our auditors as well.