Presentation of Half Year 2019 Earnings

Press Conference
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Introduction

Thomas BUBERL
CEO, AXA Group

Hello everyone and welcome to the presentation of the AXA Group's earnings for the first half of 2019.

2018 was a year marked by action; it was a decisive year in our transformation process. As you can see in Slide 5, the first half of 2019 accentuated the very positive trend we had established. The results for the first half of this year confirm that the execution is going well. We are performing well and the strategy is paying off.

In the first half, organic growth momentum was confirmed. Our revenues increased by 4%, to 58 billion euros, driven by our preferred segments. This growth is very profitable: our underlying earnings show strong growth of 7%, reaching 3.6 billion euros. Earnings per share, which is one of the key indicators of our Ambition 2020 plan, increased by 10%, to 1.46 euros. These results were achieved thanks to our preferred segments and geographies, but also thanks to the very good first half of AXA XL, as you will see later. Our balance sheet remains strong and our solvency ratio is 190%, which is within our target range.

Overall, these good numbers show that we are implementing a relevant strategy with discipline, that it is bearing fruit, and that we are focusing on our priorities with determination.

On Slide 6, you can see that the growth momentum which started last year continued into the first half of this year. Our revenues are up by 4%, reaching 58 billion euros. Revenue growth was driven by the dynamic performance of the preferred segments we have chosen to develop as part of our strategic plan:

- +6% in P&C commercial lines. This segment currently accounts for 32% of the Group's total revenues. As we can see, the acquisition of XL has enabled us to accelerate the transformation of our business mix.
- The health segment increased by 5%, pursuing its organic growth dynamic.
- Protection revenues rose by 3%.

For AXA, as you can see on Slide 7, this transformation has been positive for profitability. Our combined ratios are at good levels. These strong performances show that we have made substantial strides towards transformation since we presented our strategic plan in June of 2016. They also attest to AXA's ability to focus on its priorities and deliver. That's what we did again in the first half of this year, as you can see on Slide 8.

In February, I announced that the integration of AXA XL was a priority. For AXA XL, the sales dynamic has been very positive, with revenue growth of 9% in the first half. The upward trend in prices has intensified for most business lines and the growth momentum has been profitable: AXA XL's contribution to AXA's underlying earnings was 502 million euros for the period. The complementarity between AXA XL's expertise and the distribution power of AXA is a real asset, as we can already see in terms of revenue synergies. Together, we are winning business and serving our customers better. Continuing with the integration of AXA XL was one of our stated priorities. As you can see, we have made substantial progress.

We have also made good progress on our other priorities, as you can see on Slide 9. For example, we continued to reduce our ownership stake in AXA Equitable Holdings. After the sell-downs in March and June, our ownership has been reduced to 30%, compared with 59% at the end of 2018. Also, as expected, we continued the Group's deleveraging. Our gearing ratio will drop to 30.2% by the end of the summer. And we maintain our objective of bringing it down to a range of 25 and 28% by the end of 2020.

Finally, we have extended our Payer to Partner strategy, as you can see on Slide 10. In health, we have created an innovative ecosystem in emerging countries that combines healthcare centers and health insurance solutions. Our ambition is clearly to provide everyone with access to health care. Our strength lies in knowing how to adapt to the specific needs of our customers everywhere.

In P&C commercial lines, AXA XL has developed risk management advisory services. Risks are becoming increasingly large and increasingly complex. Our corporate clients want effective coverage. Our size and expertise allow us to bring that to them. But they also want advice that will help them better understand their risks and better prepare for them. That's the essence of our Payer to Partner strategy: supporting our customers and better meeting their needs.

As you can see from Slide 11, we are also sharing the unique expertise that we are developing with society as a whole. Large companies have a role to play in society. The best way to get things done and be effective is to share your expertise. That's why we are very committed to the fight against climate change, a risk we are very familiar with. For years, we have taken decisive action in this area and we intend to continue. This year, we have expanded our work to encompass protecting biodiversity, because it’s an important component of climate protection. We are also very involved in health care, a sector that will undergo an unprecedented transformation due to the combined impact of the technological revolution and demographic aging. We need to think about how to optimize the use of these technologies, so we can better protect vulnerable populations through greater inclusion. This was our aim in the ‘Hauts-de-France’ region, where we helped public policymakers fight against the growing problem of medical deserts.

As you can see on Slide 12, AXA is once again proving its ability to transform itself. Excluding AXA Equitable Holdings, we can see that 82% of our earnings come from P&C, health, and protection, versus 66% just 2 years ago. We are continuing our development from positions of strength and we are on the right track in our transformation process. We are also on track for the goals of our Ambition 2020 strategic plan, as Slide 13 shows.

You are familiar with the financial goals of our plan. I’d just like to note the increase in our adjusted earnings per share by 10%. I will now give the floor to Gerald Harlin.

Group businesses

Gérald HARLIN

Deputy CEO & Group CFO, AXA Group

Hello everyone. I propose we start on Slide 15 with France. France once again turned in a very good performance, with revenues up 3%, driven in particular by health (+6%) and protection (+3%). Note the excellent profitability of operations in France, particularly in the P&C segment, with a combined ratio of 90.8%, down 2.9 points. Also note the decrease in the combined ratio in health. This allowed us to increase underlying earnings by 7%, reaching 873 million euros.

Now let's move on to Europe, Slide 16, where AXA also had a good first half. Revenues rose by 2%, driven by P&C, with strong growth in commercial insurance lines for all countries (+4%), as well as in health insurance (+3%). This sales dynamic, accompanied by an improvement in the profitability of our P&C businesses (where the combined ratio fell by 1.1 points) and health (where the combined ratio fell by 0.8 points), allowed Europe, despite a lower investment margin, to generate a 4% increase in underlying earnings, to 1.3 billion euros.

Moving on to Asia, Slide 17, revenues increased by 5%, driven by all segments and accompanied by a technical improvement. Underlying earnings rose by 8%, to 620 million euros.

For the international zone, Slide 18, revenues rose by 6%, driven by growth in countries such as Mexico (+12%), Turkey (+22%), and Colombia (+10%). Underwriting profitability improved steadily, supported by the combined ratio down 1.5 percentage points. The combination of strong growth in revenues and an improvement in technical ratios contributed to the excellent performance of the international geography, with underlying earnings up by 16%, to 240 million euros.

For AXA IM, Slide 19, net inflows were 4 billion euros, thanks in particular to the integration of AXA XL. Assets under management increased by 27 billion euros, to 757 billion euros. Revenues were down by 8% due to lower performance fees, management fees, and transaction fees. Lower expenses partly offset the decrease in fee income and underlying earnings were down by 16 million euros, to 123 million euros.

Let's go to Slide 20 with AXA XL, which had a very good first half. Revenues increased by 9%, driven by P&C insurance (+15%), specialty (+6%), and P&C reinsurance (+2%). Note the rate increases on renewals, +5% in insurance and +2.4% in reinsurance. This positive trend is ongoing for most of our businesses. These broad-based price increases, volume growth, and the early delivery of synergies enabled AXA XL to generate underlying earnings of 502 million euros.

In the United States, Slide 21, we continued to reduce our equity interest in AXA Equitable Holdings, from 60 to 39%, after two additional sell-downs in March and in June of 2019, at higher prices than for the initial offering. Earnings are now accounted for using the equity method. The decrease in underlying earnings, from 465 million euros to 283 million euros, reflects our reduced ownership. On a constant ownership basis, AXA Equitable Holdings underlying earnings increased by 1%.

Let's turn now to the earnings summary and financial strength indicators. AXA's operating performance in the first half was very good. Underlying earnings rose by 7%, to 3.620 billion euros, driven by all our geographies. Note the good performance of AXA XL, which contributed 502 million euros to Group earnings.

Adjusted earnings, which as a reminder serve as a reference for calculating the dividend, increased by 8%, to 4 billion euros, thanks to the 7% increase in underlying earnings and net capital gains during the first half of 386 million euros, mainly on equities.

As shown in Slide 25, net income decreased by 19% to 2.3 billion euros, mainly due to two technical factors. The first is the adverse change in the fair value of derivatives (-767 million euros). The second is the impact of the deconsolidation of AXA Equitable Holdings (-705 million euros). This reflects the application of accounting rules that require fair value fluctuations to be recognized in the income statement, and these items have no impact on cash or dividends. Lastly, shareholders' equity, which reflects the value of the company, rose by 4.3 billion euros, to 66.7 billion euros. In fact, the positive market value asset variations are recorded net, hence +4.3 billion euros, and do not pass through the income statement, unlike derivatives.

I would like to highlight the strength of our Solvency II ratio which, at 190%, is at the heart of our target range of between 170% and 220%. We have a very strong financial strength rating from Standard & Poor's, Moody's and Fitch, all three of which have returned us to the levels pre-XL acquisition. This is a very positive indicator of our financial strength.

Lastly, Slide 27 shows that our General Account invested assets amount to 547 billion euros. They are mainly invested in bonds. Government bonds, which represent 43% of assets, have an average AA rating. Corporate bonds, which represent 31% of assets, have an average rating of A. In the first half, we invested 28 billion euros in fixed income products, at an average reinvestment yield of 2%. I would like to stress the importance for the Group of having privileged access through AXA IM to a range of alternative assets such as ABS, which are asset-backed securities, and real estate assets or loans. With 123 billion euros under alternative management, AXA IM is a European leader in alternative management.

And with that, back to Thomas for the conclusion.

Conclusion

Thomas BUBERL
CEO, AXA Group

As you have seen, the first half of 2019 is a testament to the relevance of AXA's strategy and its disciplined execution. These results reveal dynamic growth in all preferred segments and geographies, a very good operational performance, and a very good half-year for AXA XL, which made a significant contribution to the Group's earnings.

AXA is on track on its transformation process and the objectives set forth in the 2020 ambition plan.

Q&A session

Catrin SHI, *Insurance Insider*

Could you elaborate on the significant non-natural disaster related losses revealed in AXA XL's results? What is their impact on the combined ratio? What was the impact of natural disasters like Typhoon Jebi? Have you suffered losses comparable to some of your competitors?

Gérald HARLIN

The impact of Jebi came after the first consolidation of AXA XL, which was in Q4 2018. In the first half of 2019, we recorded a high level of losses related to disasters, but the negative effect was offset by reversing provisions that were made in the context Q4 2018 natural disasters (Hurricane Michael, the forest fires in California). In the end, the effect is more or less neutral. In addition, we are starting to benefit from significant increases in all lines, including insurance and reinsurance.

Muriel BREIMAN, *Investir*

The second half of 2018 was particularly intense in terms of natural disasters, which weighed heavily on AXA XL. In comparison, how did the first half of 2019 go?

Alban de MAILLY NESLE

The first half was neither particularly light nor particularly difficult. It falls within the average.

Muriel BREIMAN, *Investir*

How do you explain the decrease in fee income for AXA IM?

Gérald HARLIN

All asset management companies suffered during the first half of the year from a less favorable product mix, with fewer equity products and more bond products. As a result, fees were lower. This is the main reason for the 16 million euro decline in earnings. But let's not forget that the strength of AXA IM is also based on alternative products, which generated positive cash flows and significant margins. It is precisely in periods where rates are very low that the demand for alternative products is high.

Julien MARION, *Dow Jones*

Can you remind us what the combined ratio was for property-casualty in 2018? What are your views on the second half of 2019? Do you expect a milder second half than last year?

Gérald HARLIN

Last year, AXA XL was not included in the first half reporting. For the Group as a whole, excluding AXA XL, our combined ratio was 94.9% in 2018. This year, it stands at 93.3%. It has therefore improved significantly. The second half will depend on the level of natural disasters, which we obviously cannot predict. As we were just saying, for AXA XL this first half is in line with previous years. This positive trend is expected to continue and we are very confident in our ability to continue improving combined ratios in 2019.

Thierry GOUBY, *News Assurances Pro*

How do you explain the stagnation in property-casualty in France, despite the improvement in the combined ratio?

With regard to health, is it individual or group business that is behind the good performances?

Jacques de PERETTI

In P&C, our combined ratio improved by 3 points, which is a significant performance, while revenues did not increase. The reason for that is we did not want to participate in the price war being waged between bancassurers and mutuals in the auto market, preferring instead to maintain our profitability, which we improved. However, we intend to return to this market in the coming months, as illustrated by our automotive net business, which went from -44,000 for the same period last year to -4,000 this year.

As for commercial lines, our revenues were also flat but here we must distinguish between property, motor, construction and civil liability, which grew by 3%, and the Credit & Lifestyle & Protection portfolio, which continues to recover, and which decreased by 15%. This explains the overall stagnation in commercial lines revenue.

In sum, our commercial lines revenues were flat, and our combined ratio is improving. This improvement is mainly related to three factors: natural disasters, an improvement in our attritional technical result, and a more favorable prior year loss development.

Laurent THEVENIN, *Les Echos*

How do you explain the rise in serious claims at AXA XL? Are these man-made claims? Are you exposed to the Ethiopian Airlines crash and the Boeing 737 debacle?

Do you expect a declining phenomenon in France in the coming months due to the drought?

What is the claims impact for AXA France related to the yellow vest movement?

Gérald HARLIN

We are not in the habit of commenting on specific claims. Nevertheless, as the world's leading insurer of corporate risks, it is normal that we have a share of exposure. The key for us is diversification, which is why we put very strict limits on exposure levels

The level of man-made claims is a little higher than usual, but it's not something that worries us. In fact, the earnings of AXA XL for the first half are quite good. In the long term, our goal is for AXA XL to contribute 1.4 billion euros to Group earnings by 2020. Today, we can confirm this objective.

Jacques de PERETTI

It’s still a bit too early to make any assessment of a possible drought and its consequences. In terms of natural disasters, for the first half of this year claims in France are valued at 96 million euros, versus 154 million euros last year. We have considerable leeway to accommodate possible drought.

The impact of the yellow vests is spread over two years (2018 and 2019). Overall, it will come to less than 20 million euros. We don’t know the exact figure yet because some claims are still under development, especially from the point of view of operating losses (some businesses have not yet reopened).

Grégoire FANEY, *AEF*

Can you offer a little more detail on the 6% growth in health? To what extent is this growth linked to higher premiums, coverage rates, or the number of policies?

Jacques de PERETTI

This 6% increase in health follows a 12% rise last year, mainly driven by 40% growth in international business. This year, growth is well distributed: 6% between individual and group on the one hand, and 6% between international and domestic on the other hand. This improvement is the fruits of a particularly competent team, in terms of both pricing and innovation. It's clear that having been a leader in telemedicine since 2015 gives us a differentiating element that enables us to grow our portfolio and our policies.

Catrin SHI, *Insurance Insider*

In November of 2018, you announced your desire to develop your New Ocean investment platform in insurance-linked securities. Where do things stand and what's the level of assets under management? In addition, how do you see the fit with AXA IM's insurance-linked securities?

Alban de MAILLY NESLE

We planned to increase the amount of risk transfer to investors through the ILS and our New Ocean platform: this is progressing. The volume of assets managed is unchanged compared to the end of last year, which can be explained by the fact that some of the activities are carried out as part of our reinsurance strategy. We are having meaningful discussions with a number of investors interested in exposure to this asset class. These discussions are on track.

Catrin Shi, *Insurance Insider*

What's the fit with AXA IM?

Thomas BUBERL

AXA IM is totally part of the subject, which is based on two pillars: the structuring of these assets is handled by New Ocean, whereas the distribution is done by AXA IM, which is making good use of its contacts with investors, especially in the field of alternatives.

Julien MARION, *Dow Jones*

You didn't answer the question about AXA's 737 MAX exposure.

Thomas BUBERL

As a major insurer – and this is the case in aviation – it's normal for us to have our share of exposure. However, we cannot mention specific customer cases. We cannot give you confidential information about our customer relationship. I hope you understand.

Giuliana LICINI, Il Sole 24

Can you comment on the Group's performance in Italy?

Antimo PERRETTA

We are growing in every business line we are focusing on. The partnership with our bank is continuing to do very well: despite the challenging conditions in the sector, we are seeing strong performance from unit-linked products. We have good growth across all sectors. We are very happy with our business in Italy and, despite the economic environment, we don't foresee a decline in the coming months.

Nina NÖTHLING, Herbert Frommes Versicherungsmonitor

Can you give us more details on the German market? Last year your life insurance earnings were good. Is this a continuing trend?

Antimo PERRETTA

We are on track in Germany. We derive our earnings mainly from health and commercial lines insurance.

Thomas BUBERL

Thank you for your questions. I wish you an excellent summer vacation. See you soon.