

## Brandes Investment Partners

### European Equity Strategy Notes

#### Fourth Quarter 2025 (October 1 – December 31, 2025)

The Brandes European Equity Strategy rose 5.44% net of fees and 5.45% gross of fees, underperforming its benchmark, the MSCI Europe Index, which increased 6.20%, and the MSCI Europe Value Index, which appreciated 9.26%.

Annualized total return as of December 31, 2025	1-year	5-year	10-year
Brandes European Equity Composite (net)	39.70%	15.79%	9.78%
Brandes European Equity Composite (gross)	40.19%	16.49%	10.44%
MSCI Europe Index	35.41%	10.29%	8.52%

Past performance is not a guarantee of future results. One cannot invest directly in an index. Returns include reinvestment of all dividends and are reduced by any applicable foreign withholding taxes, without provisions for income taxes, if any.

#### Contributors to Performance

Several holdings performed well, led by companies in the industrials and consumer discretionary sectors. Germany-based Deutsche Post was a standout contributor, benefiting from resilient logistics demand and cost optimization initiatives that supported margin improvement. U.K.-based Rentokil Initial delivered solid gains, driven by continued strength in pest control services in its U.S. business. Switzerland-based Swatch Group advanced as U.S. tariffs on goods from Switzerland were reduced.

Pharmaceutical firms U.K.-based GSK and Ireland-based Avadel Pharmaceuticals both contributed positively. GSK rose after reporting quarterly results and increasing its guidance forecast. Avadel rose after it received an unsolicited proposal from H. Lundbeck to acquire the company at a premium prompting Alkermes to raise its offer to acquire the company. Amid the bidding war, Avadel's share price reached our estimate of its intrinsic value, leading us to divest our position.

#### Detractors from Performance

Our overweight to consumer staples and underweight to financials detracted from performance as consumer staples lagged overall, while financials was one of the strongest performing sectors during the period.

More specifically, our investments in the beverages industry weighed on returns. Both France-based Pernod Ricard and U.K.-based Diageo trailed on worries about slowing global spirits demand. While these headwinds persist, both companies offer a strong brand portfolio and pricing power, which support our conviction about their long-term prospects. Belgium-based Ontex Group faced headwinds from weak consumer demand and increased promotional activity. Spanish biotechnology firm Grifols underperformed as margin pressures and investor concerns about leverage overshadowed operational progress: we continue to monitor its efforts to improve efficiency and reduce debt.

Netherlands-based CNH Industrial declined as unease about slowing demand for agricultural equipment and margin pressures weighed on market sentiment. Multinational research publisher Springer Nature detracted as investor concerns about academic publishing growth and cost pressures persisted. While these challenges adversely affected the near-term performance of these businesses, we believe their fundamentals remain intact and they continue to offer long-term upside potential.

#### Portfolio Activity

The investment committee initiated positions in several U.K.-based companies, such as paper and packaging company Mondi, utility company National Grid and beverage company Diageo, while divesting U.K. retailer Tesco and Ireland-based pharmaceutical company Avadel.

Mondi is a leading European producer of corrugated packaging, containerboard, kraft paper and uncoated fine paper. With a strong presence in Eastern and Western Europe and a vertically integrated model from pulp to finished products, Mondi

enjoys cost advantages and scale benefits. It is the number one virgin containerboard producer in Europe and the global leader in kraft paper, supplying essential packaging solutions for industries ranging from e-commerce to construction.

Currently, Mondi is out of favor due to a prolonged downturn in the European containerboard market, driven by oversupply and weak demand since 2022. Margins have been pressured by inflation in non-fiber input costs and an influx of new capacity, leaving much of the industry operating below breakeven. This cyclical weakness has weighed on profitability and led to a more leveraged balance sheet following Mondi's recent investment program and mergers and acquisitions activity.

Despite these near-term challenges, Mondi offers an attractive long-term opportunity. Secular trends such as sustainability, convenience, and the shift from plastic to paper underpin steady growth in fiber-based packaging. Mondi's cost leadership, strong positioning in high-barrier kraft paper markets, and integrated operations provide resilience and competitive advantage, in our opinion. The company's completed investment program is expected to increase profits over the next few years, while its expanded converting capacity enhances downstream integration. As industry capacity rationalizes and demand normalizes, Mondi could be poised for margin recovery and free cash flow inflection. For patient investors, Mondi represents a well-positioned leader in sustainable packaging with meaningful upside potential.

National Grid is one of the world's leading regulated utilities, responsible for electricity transmission and distribution in Great Britain and electricity and gas networks in the northeastern United States. The company operates under well-established regulatory frameworks that provide predictable returns and inflation protection in the U.K., while its U.S. operations benefit from nominal rate structures and legally binding decarbonization mandates. Over the past decade, National Grid has strategically repositioned its asset base toward electricity networks, reducing exposure to gas and aligning with long-term energy transition trends. Today, roughly 75% of its regulated asset base is in electricity, and this share is expected to rise to 80% by 2029, supported by structural growth in electrification and renewable integration.

Despite its strong fundamentals, National Grid is currently out of favor, weighed down by weak U.K. macro sentiment and concerns over interest rates. There is also a lack of market enthusiasm towards National Grid as it currently has a lower dividend yield than its peers as the company has a lower payout ratio to help fund its upcoming capital expenditure and growth cycle. Over the next five years, National Grid plans to deploy significant capital expenditures across its jurisdictions, with major projects in U.K. Electricity Transmission aimed at alleviating congestion and connecting renewable resources, and in the U.S. focused on grid modernization and resiliency. These investments are expected to drive attractive growth in the regulated asset base and earnings per share, while dividends should grow in line with U.K. inflation. Importantly, the balance sheet is fully funded, which should eliminate equity funding needs through the next five years.

Longer term, National Grid's position as a critical enabler of decarbonization, combined with high regulatory visibility and inflation-linked returns, underpins its profile as a defensive compounder with attractive risk-adjusted returns. At current valuations—trading at a discount to U.S. and EU peers—the company's shares offer compelling upside potential, we believe.

Besides the new buys, other portfolio activity included the divestments of Avadel and U.K. retailer Tesco.

We first invested in Tesco over a decade ago when the company faced operational restructuring challenges and a weak U.K. retail environment overall. We viewed Tesco as a dominant food retailer with significant real estate assets and the potential for margin recovery following an accounting scandal and intense competitive pressures. Throughout our holding period, Tesco experienced many ups and downs. The early years were marked by price wars and structural shifts toward online grocery, which pressured the company's profitability. However, under new management, Tesco executed a successful turnaround, improving margins and cash flow while strengthening its balance sheet.

Despite these improvements, the competitive landscape continued to evolve, with discounters gaining share and consumer habits shifting. More recently, Tesco was able to stabilize its market share as some competitors struggled in a

higher interest rate environment after going private. As the share price approached our intrinsic value estimate, we elected to exit the position.

Over the years, Tesco was frequently mentioned in our quarterly commentaries, sometimes as a contributor to returns, but more often, as a detractor from performance. While the company's progress has not been linear, our investment in Tesco underscores, in our opinion, how maintaining a long-term perspective can benefit the portfolio.

### **Year-to-Date Briefing**

The Brandes European Equity Strategy rose 39.70% net of fees and 40.19% gross of fees, outperforming its benchmark, the MSCI Europe Index, which appreciated 35.41% for the year ended December 31, 2025, and underperforming the MSCI Europe Value Index, which increased by 48.03%.

The outperformance of value was a contributing tailwind (MSCI Europe Value vs. MSCI Europe). However, the strategy's outperformance versus its benchmark was primarily driven by stock selection across most sectors. By comparison, value index outperformance was largely driven by the notable appreciation of financials, which we are underweight relative to both the broad and value indexes.

The most noteworthy drivers included holdings in industrials, health care, and consumer discretionary sectors, as well as companies domiciled in France and Switzerland. These were led by aerospace and defense holdings: Switzerland-based Montana Aerospace and France-based LISI, in addition to luxury goods producer and retailer Kering, construction materials firm Vicat, telecom Orange, and financial services company BNP Paribas in France. Telecom firms Millicom and Magyar Telekom of Hungary also aided returns as did financials AIB Group and Erste Group.

On the other side of the ledger, the largest detractors were our underweights to financials, the best-performing sector in the benchmark, and overweight to consumer staples, as well as holdings domiciled in Germany and the Netherlands. At the holding level, advertising agencies U.K.-based WPP and France-based Publicis, consumer product companies, such as Ontex and Germany-based Henkel, reduced relative returns. Similar to the quarter, both CNH Industrial and Pernod Ricard were also detractors.

### **Current Positioning**

The Brandes European Equity Strategy holds key overweight positions in consumer staples and discretionary, as well as communication services, while maintaining a clear underweight position in financials. Our underweight to financials has grown as it has been the best-performing sector and now comprises almost 25% of the index. Meanwhile, we have pared and sold some investments when they reached our estimate of their intrinsic value. Throughout the year, the most notable increases have been additions in luxury goods, beverages and IT services, and we are now overweight in the technology sector.

Geographically, the portfolio's largest allocations continue to be in France and the United Kingdom. The strategy remains underweight in Switzerland and has no exposure to companies in the Nordic Region.

We believe the differences between the strategy and the MSCI Europe Index make it an excellent complement and diversifier to passive and growth-oriented strategies. While value stocks (MSCI Europe Value) have performed well, they continue to trade in the least-expensive quartile relative to growth (MSCI Europe Growth) since the style indices began. This was evident across various valuation measures, including price/earnings, price/cash flow and enterprise value/sales. Historically, such discount levels have often signaled attractive subsequent returns for value stocks. It is also encouraging because the Brandes European Equity Strategy, guided by our value philosophy and process, has had the tendency to outperform its benchmark when the value index outperforms growth.

Looking ahead, we remain optimistic about the long-term prospects of the companies held in the Brandes European Equity Strategy.

For term definitions, please refer to <https://www.brandes.com/termdefinitions>.

For index definitions, please refer to <https://www.brandes.com/benchmark-definitions>.

MSCI has not approved, reviewed or produced this report, makes no express or implied warranties or representations and is not liable whatsoever for any data in the report. You may not redistribute the MSCI data or use it as a basis for other indices or investment products.

Diversification does not assure a profit or protect against a loss in a declining market.

The foregoing Quarterly Commentary reflects the thoughts and opinions of Brandes Investment Partners® exclusively and is subject to change without notice. The information provided in the commentary should not be considered a recommendation to purchase or sell any particular security. It should not be assumed that any security transactions, holdings or sectors discussed were or will be profitable, or that the investment recommendations or decisions we make in the future will be profitable or will equal the investment performance discussed herein. International and emerging markets investing is subject to certain risks such as currency fluctuation and social and political changes; such risks may result in greater share price volatility. There is no assurance that any securities discussed herein will remain in an account's portfolio at the time you receive this report or that the securities sold have not been repurchased. The actual characteristics with respect to any particular account will vary based on a number of factors including but not limited to: (i) the size of the account; (ii) investment restrictions applicable to the account, if any; and (iii) market exigencies at the time of investment. Securities of small companies generally experience more volatility than mid and large sized companies. Although the statements of fact and data in this report have been obtained from, and are based upon, sources that are believed to be reliable, we cannot guarantee their accuracy, and any such information may be incomplete or condensed. Strategies discussed are subject to change at any time by the investment manager in its discretion due to market conditions or opportunities. The Brandes investment approach tends to result in portfolios that are materially different than their benchmarks with regard to characteristics such as risk, volatility, diversification, and concentration. Please note that all indices are unmanaged and are not available for direct investment. Past performance is not a guarantee of future results. No investment strategy can assure a profit or protect against loss. Market conditions may impact performance. The performance results presented were achieved in particular market conditions which may not be repeated. Moreover, the current market volatility and uncertain regulatory environment may have a negative impact on future performance. The margin of safety for any security is defined as the discount of its market price to what the firm believes is the intrinsic value of that security. The declaration and payment of shareholder dividends are solely at the discretion of the issuer and are subject to change at any time.

**United States:** Issued by Brandes Investment Partners, L.P., 4275 Executive Square, 5th Floor, La Jolla, CA 92037.

**Singapore/Asia:** FOR INSTITUTIONAL/ACCREDITED INVESTOR USE ONLY. Issued by Brandes Investment Partners (Asia) Pte Ltd., The Gateway West, 150 Beach Road, #35-51, Singapore 189720. Company Registration Number 201212812M. ARBN:164 952 710. This document is for "institutional investors" or "accredited investors" as defined under the Securities and Futures Act, Chapter 289 of Singapore and may not be distributed to any other person. This document is being provided for information purposes only. Incorporated in Singapore in 2012, Brandes Investment Partners (Asia) Pte Ltd (Brandes Asia) provides portfolio management services to clients in Asia (as permitted under local law). Brandes Investment Partners, L.P., a U.S. registered investment adviser and a sister entity to Brandes Asia, provides research, portfolio construction and other support to Brandes Asia.

**Canada:** FOR REGISTERED DEALERS AND THEIR REGISTERED SALESPERSONS' USE ONLY. NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION TO INVESTORS. Distributed by Brandes Investment Partners & Co., 6 Adelaide Street East, Suite 900, Toronto, ON, M5C 1H6. This communication is for information purposes only and should not be regarded as a sales communication or as advice regarding any financial product or services.