

UBAM – EMERGING MARKETS FRONTIER BOND

Quarterly Comment

For Professional Investors in Switzerland or Professional Investors as defined by the relevant laws.

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Market Comment

- The Federal Reserve (Fed) raised interest rates by 25 bps in May. However, it did not hike rates in June, adopting a hawkish pause. The rate predictions indicated two further rate rises in 2023. There were some concerns around US debt ceiling at the beginning of the second quarter. However, US Congress approved a legislation that suspended the debt ceiling in the first days of June, in a deal that included concessions on spending expected to have little effect on economic growth.
- The European Central Bank (ECB) raised interest rates twice in the quarter, taking the main refinancing rate to 4.0%. Headline inflation declined during the period, with annual inflation estimated at 5.5% in June, down from 6.1% in May. However, the core inflation rate went up to 5.4% in June. The eurozone composite purchasing managers' index (PMI) fell to 50.3 in June from 52.8 in May.
- Enthusiasm around AI and the potential for a boom in related technology drove chipmakers, in particular, higher, as well some expectations of how the productivity might increase in certain sectors of the economies.
- Tension between the US and China was a contributing factor behind EM underperformance, as were concerns about China's anaemic economic recovery. Hungary, Poland and Greece were the top-performing index markets despite rising recessionary fears in Europe. Brazil was also a top performer amid easing fiscal policy concerns, optimism about potentially imminent rate cuts and a better print in the Q1 GDP data.
- Colombia was up too, as were the UAE, Peru, Saudi Arabia and Mexico. Korea and Taiwan outperformed on the back of the optimism around AI growth. China underperformed amid concerns over a weaker than expected economic recovery. South Africa was among the worst performers as the country's power situation continued to deteriorate, with severe consequences for economic growth. Turkey posted the largest loss in US dollar terms. This came with the news of Erdogan re-election in May.
- In Frontier local markets performance continued to be dominated by idiosyncratic factors such as breakthroughs in debt restructuring negotiations, IMF programme agreements, and political events as well as expectations of the beginning of monetary policy cutting cycles.
- According to data and JP Morgan research forecast, Emerging Markets bond flows have seen an decrease of \$2.2bn since the beginning of the year, with the exception of local currency bonds. High yielding rated and a weaker dollar keep being supportive to the sub-asset class.

Sources: *UBP, Bloomberg Finance LP, JP Morgan*

Performance Review

- Over the period, the fund returned 6.89% net of fees.
- Credit spread tightening (carry spread + spread effects) was the main contributor to performance in Q2 with 7.92%. The duration positioning dragged the performance by 2.27%bps. The curve positioning had a neutral effect.
- At a regional level, CEEMEA rallied the most with 3.74%, followed by Latin America 1.68%. Positive performance was also perceived from Asia with +0.88%.
- Country-wise, the largest contributors to performance were Ukraine, Zambia, Argentina, El Salvador and Pakistan. In contrast, Kenya and Tunisia brought negative returns.

Portfolio Activity

- During the second quarter, allocation to Latin America, EM Europe and Asia increased, whilst Africa and Middle East region were reduced.
- In Latin America, positions in Argentina, Jamaica, El Salvador and Ecuador were initiated. Exposure to Dominican Republic was increased.
- In EM Europe, an exposure to Turkey was initiated and Ukraine increased.
- In Asia, Pakistan and Sri Lanka exposure were increased.
- In Africa, the position in Ethiopia was closed and in Kenya reduced. Exposure to Ghana was initiated.
- Finally, in Middle East, the positions in Iraq, Jordan and Tunisia were closed. Conversely a position in Lebanon was initiated.

Outlook

- As experienced in May, US base rates continued increasing in June on the back of US strong activity indicators especially in the services sector. We continue being of the view that we are at the end of FED's hiking cycle, and the main part of US base rates adjustment is behind us. Consequently, US base rates should be supportive of hard currency fixed income returns during the rest of the year.
- Besides with the US debt ceiling agreement reached recently, a big source of volatility is behind us and investors' risk appetite has returned leading to a very good performance of DM and EM equities, EM FX, EM sovereign and corporate debt.
- It is worth highlighting that we are seeing a decoupling in DM vs EM inflation dynamics and central banks' actions and guidance. In EM countries there are clear signs of inflation subsiding with central banks pausing and heading into the start of an easing cycle in the short term, while in DM central banks continue with a hawkish stance as inflation dynamics are still not that positive and above targets. As inflation falls, high real rates and FX appreciation should give EM central banks space to cautiously ease policy starting in 2H23, despite DM CBs continuing to tighten to tame core inflation. Some CBs, especially in Latam, could take advantage of this mix and stronger external accounts to start accumulating reserves anticipating rockier seas ahead. Others, such as in CEE, might opt to tolerate stronger currencies to aid in the short-term disinflation process (considering large FX buffers already and EU money to support them). EM Asia may intervene to smooth FX volatility.
- Besides, recently we have seen some positive developments in various Latin American countries leading to a decrease in political headwinds. For instance, in Colombia and Chile, the popularity of the left wing presidents has been trending down turning the probability of radical non-market friendly reforms low.
- In H2 investors in frontier countries are expected to search for yield in less liquid parts of the market. ,i.e. overweight in Zambia and Kazakhstan, underweight in Nigeria (following the recent bold move made by the country authorities towards FX and fiscal policy).

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