

# MONTHLY *investment* BRIEF

Waiting for a clear signal

The 2022/2023 period was marked by a meteoric rise in money-market rates, from 0% to 5% in just a few months in the United States. However, the bond market has not kept up, with US 10-year yields now around 3.5%. Investors are thus sending a signal that a recession is near. But are they really doing that?

Before answering this question, it is essential to look at the quality of the historical signals sent by the interest-rate markets.

Are inflation and the yield curve still good signals of trends in long-term rates?

## The inflation signal

The latest surge in oil prices, following OPEC+'s announcement of production cuts, shows the extent to which bond markets are struggling to assess supply shocks, reinforcing recent warnings from central banks that inflation is far from being contained. Break-even inflation expectations for the U.S. average less than 3% per year over the next year, even though it has remained at the very high level of 7.8% over the past 12 months. Given that central bank rate hikes have little effect on the exogenous drivers of inflation, the current paradox between fiscal stimulus and monetary tightening further complicates the task of economists and investors in modelling the path of inflation, both in its so-called transitory nature and in how much it is decelerating. Clearly, inflation remains, along with growth, one of the key parameters for estimating the level of long-term rates.

## The yield curve signal

Other, formerly reliable bond signals also seem to have been altered. Inverted yield curves and swap contracts, which at the end of February priced in two key rate hikes in the United States for 2023, are now projecting three cuts.

Central banks artificially raised the price of government bonds during the years of quantitative easing. This was supported by regulations designed to prevent a repeat of the 2008 crisis by forcing banks to hold large amounts of those bonds. These amounts have disproportionately inflated captive demand from pension funds, insurers, index funds and even central banks' foreign-exchange reserves.

For more than a year, central bank holdings have been reversing course at a rate not seen since the 1980s. Yet even after the recent rise in yields, bond prices are still being driven by this inelastic demand. At the time, investor leverage was very low. Since then, regulation, or lack of it, has allowed unreasonable multiples for the same amount of committed capital.

The risk is therefore a deflation of this bubble. Although the probability of a soft landing has decreased significantly, the global economy should avoid a sharp recession. If so, it is unlikely that 10-year rates will remain at their current levels, unless underlying inflation collapses, which is not in our central scenario. In essence, U.S. long rates are too low. The equilibrium level is closer to 4% than to 3%.

## What is the best positioning?

## Rates

With the recent rise in short-term rates, positioning on 1 or 2-year rates on both sides of the Atlantic appears to us to be an excellent investment, as long as it is risk-adjusted. If a strong recession materialises, central banks will have no choice but to capitulate and lower key rates. The short end of the curve would be the main beneficiary. Only a deflation scenario would push long rates much lower. We are not there yet. We therefore recommend that you limit your bond duration on the long end of the curve and reposition your investments on the short end.

### Credit

In the credit sphere, the situation is complex. The duration parameter is very important for investment-grade bonds, but much less so for high-yield bonds. Does this mean that we should overweight high yield in this configuration? No, but for other reasons. The recent financial instability will limit the supply of bank credit and push up default rates. "Zombie" companies will be squeezed between pressure on margins and an increase in financing costs, which for some of them will be fatal. We therefore prefer the Investment Grade segment.

### Equities

All else being equal, if long-term interest rates rise, the present value of discounted cash flows will fall. This does not bode well for equities, unless we see a rise in earnings. However, this is not the current trend. A squeeze on margins will set in across all sectors with the ongoing slowdown in consumption. Less excess savings, lower purchasing power with resilient core inflation, and a labour market that should slowly normalise are the main elements of a more challenging scenario ahead for companies. The focus should be on stocks of companies that generate enough growth to limit the impact of rates. In this sense, the technology sector has some real appeal.

### Conclusion

Patience is a virtue. The good news is that the current context allows you to increase your capital by capturing carry in "short-dated" products. At 3% or 5%, depending on the geographical area, the current yield does not yet cover inflation but it does more than limit the damage. And without risk. Not such a bad prospect for a few weeks, until we finally see a real signal.



LAURENT DENIZE Global Co-CIO, ODDO BHF

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# MACROECONOMIC OUTLOOK

02 MAI

01

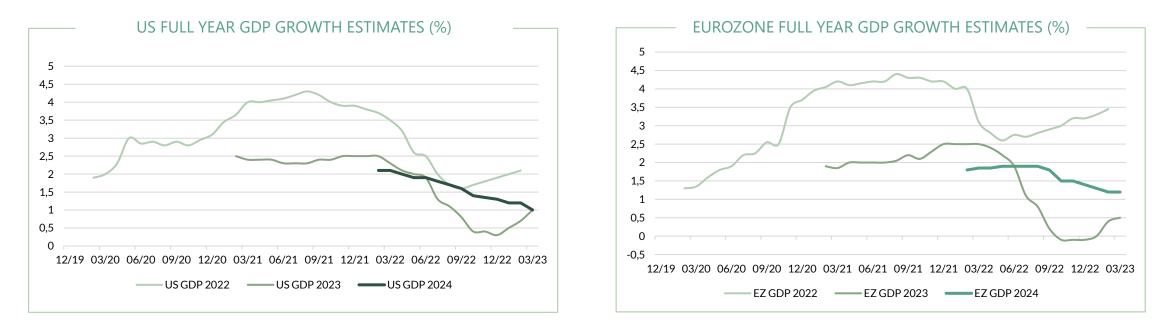
MARKET ANALYSIS EQUITIES FIXED INCOME COMMODITIES & CURRENCIES

# **03** CURRENT CONVICTIONS



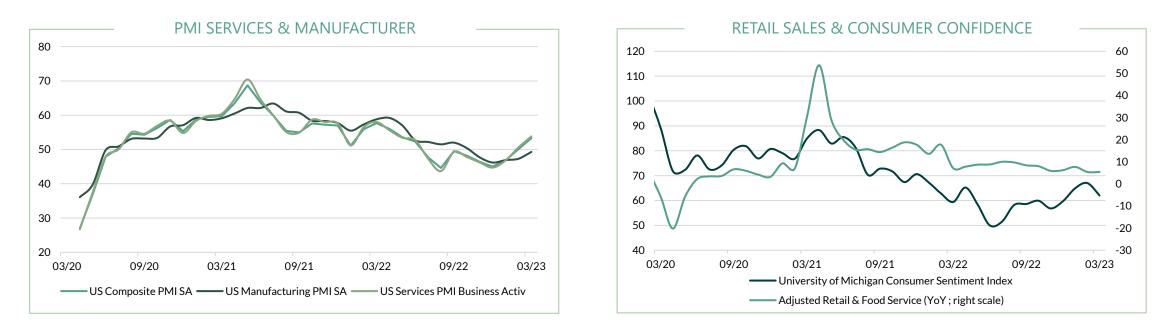
# **01** MACROECONOMIC *outlook*

# *Growth outlook* 2024 FORECASTS CONVERGE TO 2023 PROJECTIONS



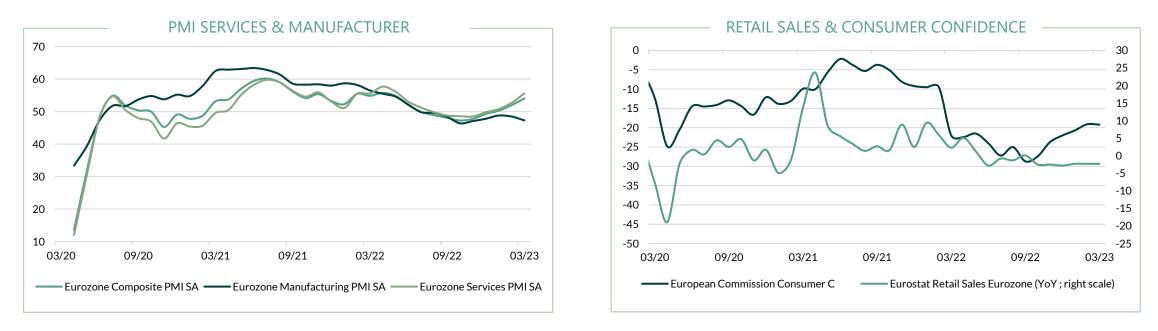
- The recent drag from the underlying banking woes have yet not shown up in 2023 forecasts
- However, the risks of disappointment increase for the end of 2023 and the consensus is revised downwards for 2024

# **USA** DESPITE STRONG HARD DATA, GROWING UNCERTAINTIES ON MANUFACTURING



- While Q1 growth projections from the Atlanta Fed still run at 2,5% recent indicators signal fading momentum
- The ISM manufacturing survey was again weaker and well below the expansionary threshold at 46,3. All subcomponents signaled stalling to lower activity
- The labor market, though remains a source of strength and props up consumer demand for the time being
- We look for a successive softening in US economic momentum, driven by the most aggressive hiking cycle in decades and its repercussions on real estate, the banking sector and finally demand

# *Europe* REBOUND OR SUSTAINED RECOVERY?



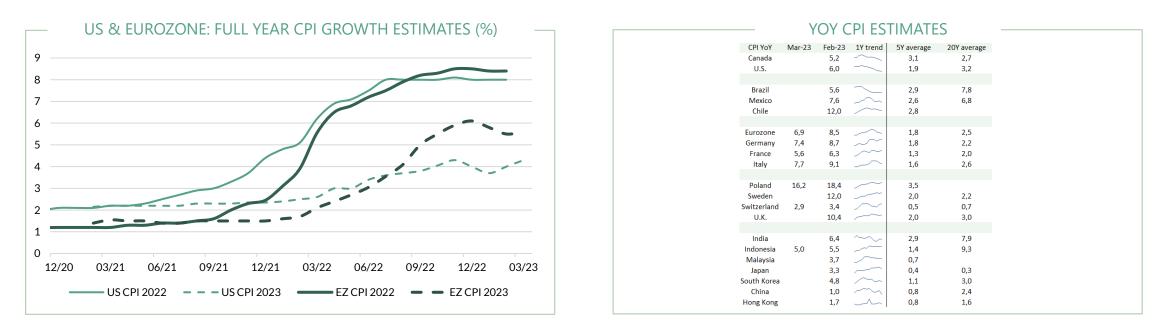
- The composite PMI for March improved again to 54,1 after 52 in February
- At the sector level, services continue to be the driving factor while manufacturing is merely improving and remains nailed below the 50-mark
- In Germany, the IFO Index send reassuring news with the expectation component rising six times in a row
- Although the better economic momentum may continue for a while, the ECB hiking cycle and a possibly upcoming US recession should limit any lasting recovery

# *China* REOPENING IS TAKING A BREATHER



- The PMI for March rose again to 57, following a sharp increase in February
- The improvement was solely led by the service sector, while manufacturing started to stall
- Also, the property market flags indicative signs of life with new home prices rising MoM in February after having fallen since September 2021
- Despite the recent strong growth momentum in the service sector, manufacturing is still not showing any significant improvement
- Structural drags like the fallout from the property market excesses are still acting as brakes

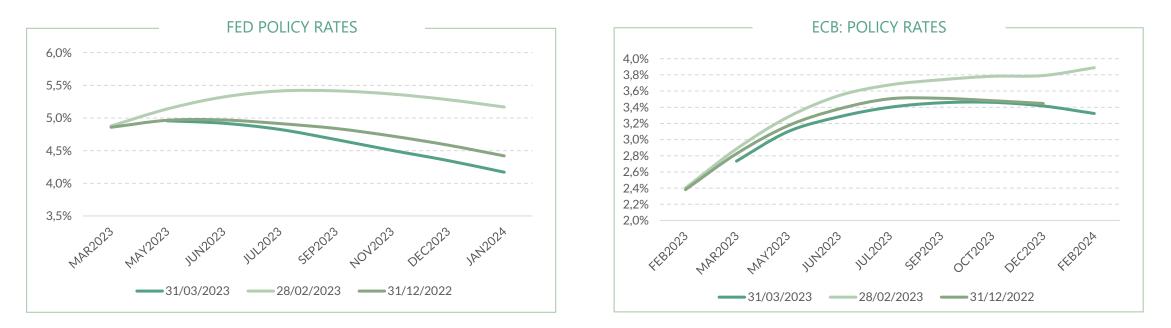
# *Inflation expectations* ANCHORED BUT HIGH, MAKING CENTRAL BANKS UNCOMFORTABLE



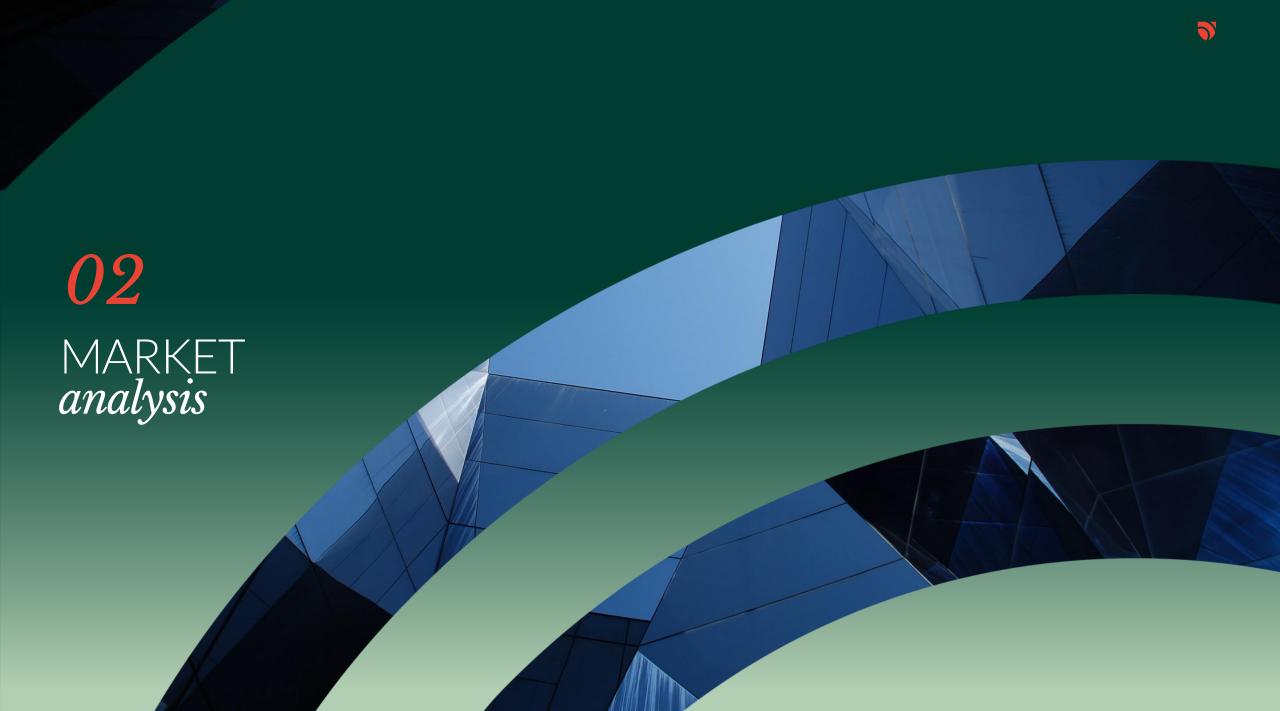
• Surveys of long run inflation expectations remain fairly muted and unchanged

Inflation break even rates have normalized a bit after strong surge in early March and are back into the range of around 2,4% for 10-year tenors (10-year Germany)

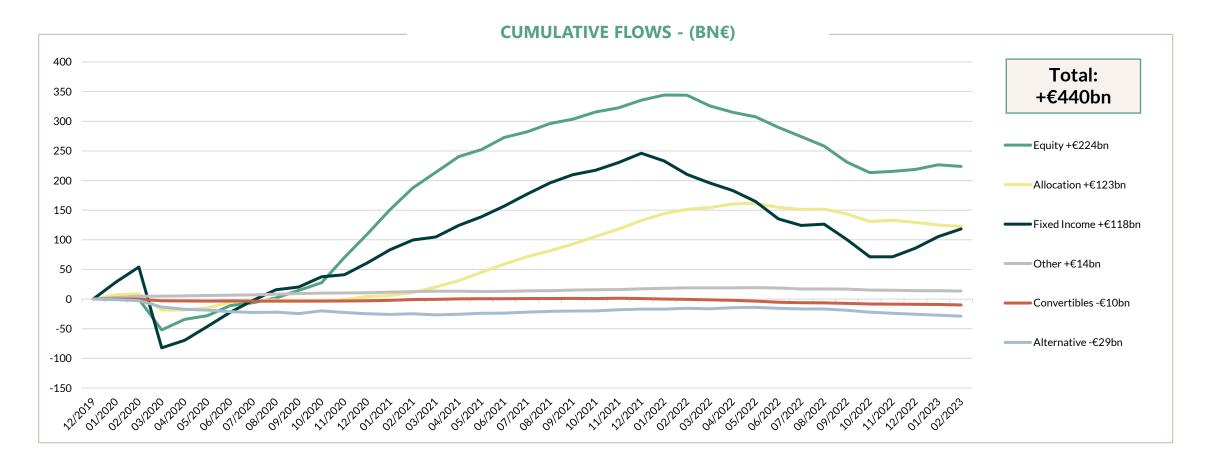
# FED & ECB policies ROLLERCOASTER RIDE FOR TERMINAL RATE EXPECTATIONS



- The banking woes have led to an enormous and unprecedented volatility in central bank rate expectations
- While expectations assumed the ECB rate to finally climb to above 4% and 5,7% for Fed funds, they now stand at 3,5% and 5% respectively
- The Fed appears to be done in this hiking cycle, but current massive and early cuts already starting in June are very unlikely
- Monetary desynchronization as reflected in money market rates expectations is also rather unlikely
- Therefore, the ECB is expected to be close to the peak in rates with a certain likelihood of a final 25bp hike in May

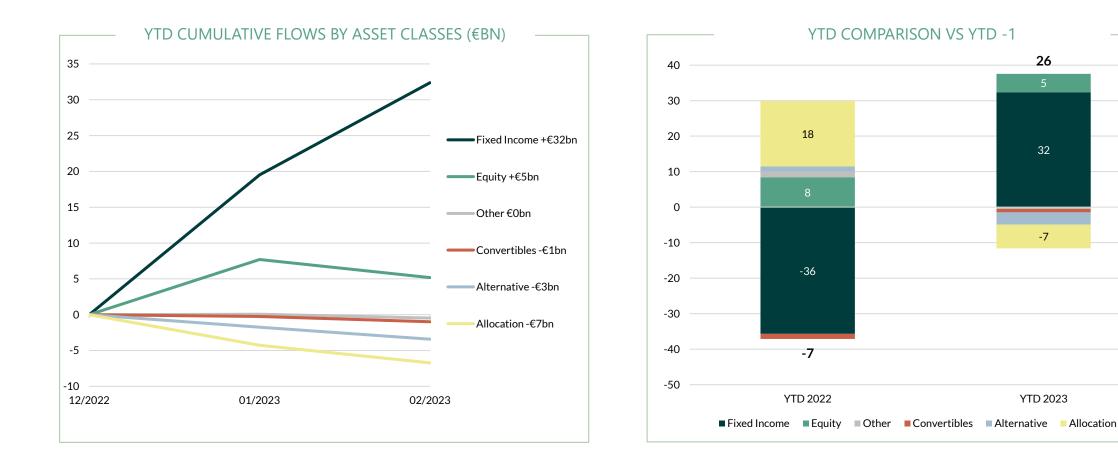


# **3-year cumulative mutual fund flows (€bn)** FIXED-INCOME GATHERING INFLOWS



Source: Morningstar. Data as of 28/02/2023 (Europe OE ex ETF ex MM ex FoF ex Feeder (domiciled, most compr)

# YTD European mutual fund flows

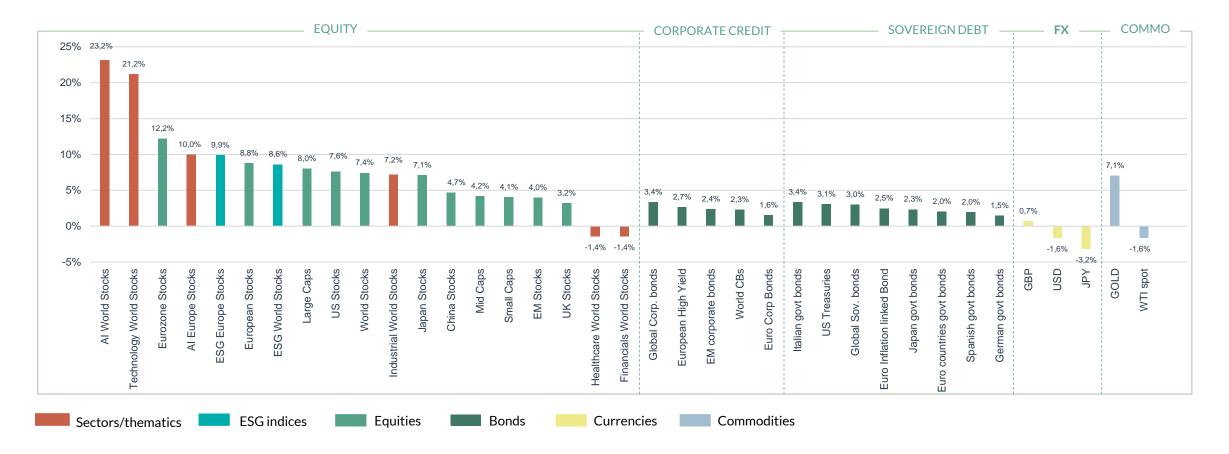


26

32

-7

# Year-to-date performances of asset classes BUOYED BY FALLING YIELDS, TECH KEEPS ON OUTPERFORMING

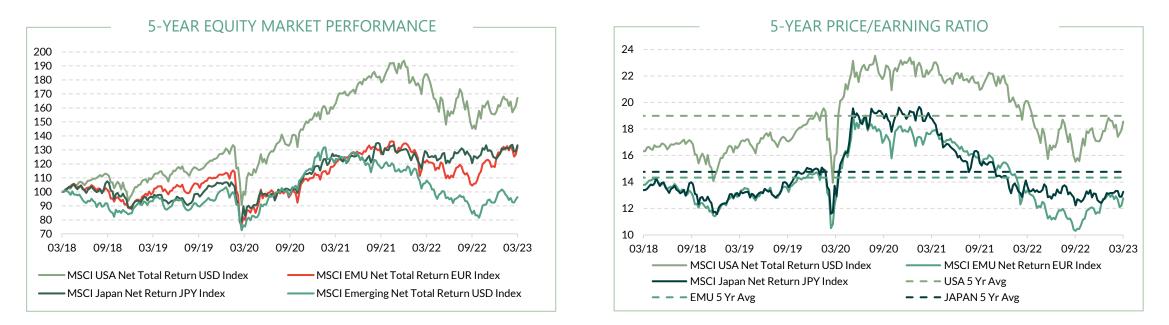


**Past performances are not a reliable indicator of future performances and are not constant over time.** Sources: Bloomberg and BoA ML as of 31/03/2023; performances expressed in local currencies



# EQUITIES

# *Equities* EQUITIES (TEMPORARILY?) RESCUED BY PLUNGING YIELDS



- The fixed-income rally was the main explanatory factor for the positive monthly returns posted by most indexes.
- In the US, performances ranges from -5% for the small-cap (domestic and value biased) Russell 2000 to +9% for the Nasdaq 100, with S&P500 rebounding +3%.
- With strong currencies appreciation vs USD, most other developed markets posted more tepid positive returns (EuroStoxx +0.3%, Topix +0.5%...)
- Fears of drying liquidity spilled globally, underperformance of small-caps was not restricted to the US: EuroStoxx Small -3%, FTSE250 -5%.

# Risk premiums & volatility A MODERATE AND SHORT-LIVED VOLATILITY SPIKE



- Fast response from CBs and regulators to angsts about banks' deposits helped alleviate the risk-off mood.
- Equity indexes' implied volatilities remain close to historical lows compared to levels reached in the FX or even more so the govies universe.
- The significant fall of long-term sovereign yields indeed helped replenish equity risk premiums, that had fallen to tight levels previously.

# *European equities – sectors overview* BANKS AND REAL ESTATE, INCREASINGLY LINKED FATES?

EUROPEAN SECTORS	WEIGHT	PERFORMANCE	
	%	1m %	YTD %
STOXX Europe 600		-0,7%	8%
Commodities			
Energy	5,20%	-6,6%	-2%
Basic Resources	2,90%	-5,5%	-5%
Cyclicals			
Automobiles & Parts	2,70%	-1,0%	17%
Chemicals	2,80%	-0,5%	7%
Construction & Materials	3,80%	-1,1%	14%
Industrial Goods & Services	14,00%	0,3%	12%
Media	1,80%	0,6%	12%
Technology	7,30%	5,2%	19%
Fravel & Leisure	1,40%	1,6%	20%
Consumer Products and Services	6,30%	5,9%	21%
Financials			
Banks	9,30%	-13,7%	4%
Insurance	5,30%	-5,5%	1%
Financial Services	4,00%	-4,9%	6%
Real Estate	1,90%	-11,2%	-4%
Defensives			
Health Care	14,70%	2,8%	3%
Food Beverage and Tobacco	6,40%	2,2%	4%
Personal Care Drug and Grocery	2 100/	2.20/	00/
Stores	2,10%	3,2%	8%
Retail	1,10%	0,2%	18%
Telecommunications	3,00%	1,1%	13% 6%
Utilities	3,90%	3,3%	6%

Past performances are not a reliable indicator of future performances and are not constant over time Sources: ODDO BHF AM SAS, Goldman Sachs, 03/04/2023

# *Emerging markets* FAR FROM THE BANKING STRESS, PARTLY BUOYED BY US YIELDS

Emerging

MSCI EM

MSCI CHINA

MSCI KOREA

MSCI INDIA

MSCI INDONESIA

MSCI PHILIPPINES

2,0% \_\_\_\_\_ Apr-20

Sep-20

PE 12mth fwd

12,4

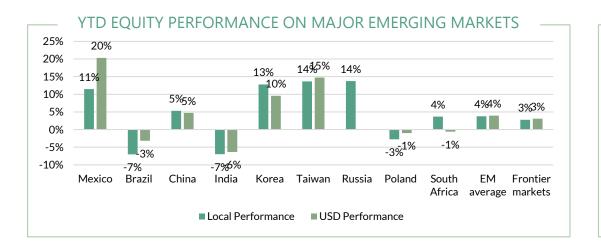
11,1

15.8

20,2

12,8

13.7



- While the banking sector lost -12% in the developed world index, MSCI Emerging Banks posted a +1% monthly return.
- Across countries, performances range from -8% in Istanbul and -3% in Sao Paulo, to +3% in Hong-Kong and Seoul.
- A moderate spread widening on hard-currency EM debt compared to developed credit.

MSCI MALAYSIA	13,2	16%	7%	4,2%
MOEX Russia Index	2,1	23%	-6%	8,4%
WSE WIG INDEX	7,2	-21%	7%	3,3%
MSCI TURKEY	3,2	39%	15%	4,8%
MSCI SOUTH AFRICA	10,7	-15%	9%	4,3%
MSCI BRAZIL	6,8	-18%	3%	10,1%
MSCI COLOMBIA	5,0	-22%	2%	9,1%
MSCI MEXICO	13,3	-6%	10%	3,5%
8,0%	5	PREADS IN EU	<	
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10				
6,0%			h	A
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4,0%	A . A			how h
4,070				
	AM		Mar m	- hand the

Dec-21

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Jul-21

Feb-21

Barclays EM USD Aggregate

### EPS (INCLUDING LOSSES) GROWTH & PE (LOCAL CURRENCY)

EPS Growth

0%

22%

-38%

19%

10%

7%

Current Fiscal Year est Next Fiscal Year est EPS

Growth

17%

15%

58%

20%

5%

14%

May-22

Barclays Euro HY BB ex-Fin

Past performances are not a reliable indicator of future performance and are not constant over time. Sources: Bloomberg, ODDO BHF AM SAS | Data at 03/04/2023 Mar-23

Oct-22

**Dividend Yield** 

(trailing 12m)

3.2%

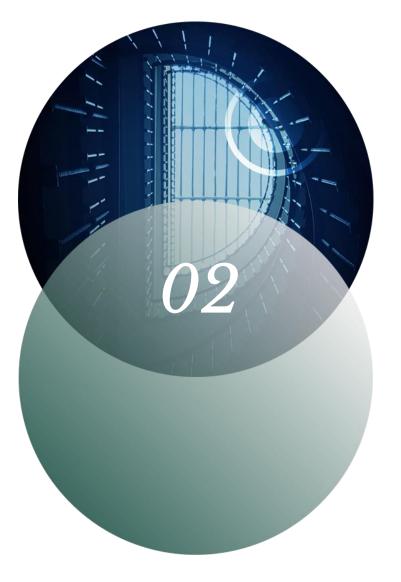
2.4%

1.9%

1.4%

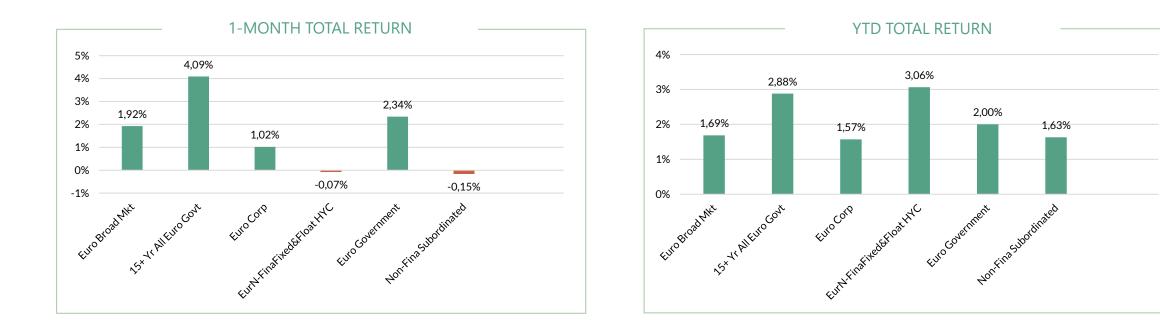
3,8%

2.1%

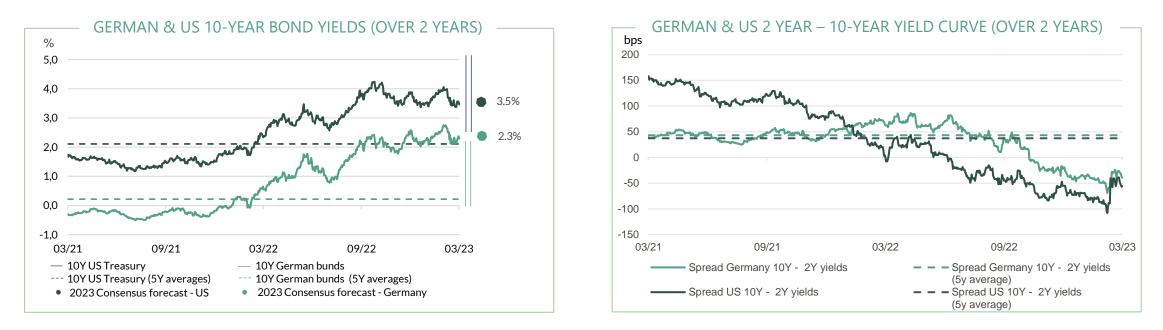


# FIXED INCOME

# *Performance fixed income segment* GOOD PERFORMANCE MASKS INCREDIBLE DAILY VOLATILITY



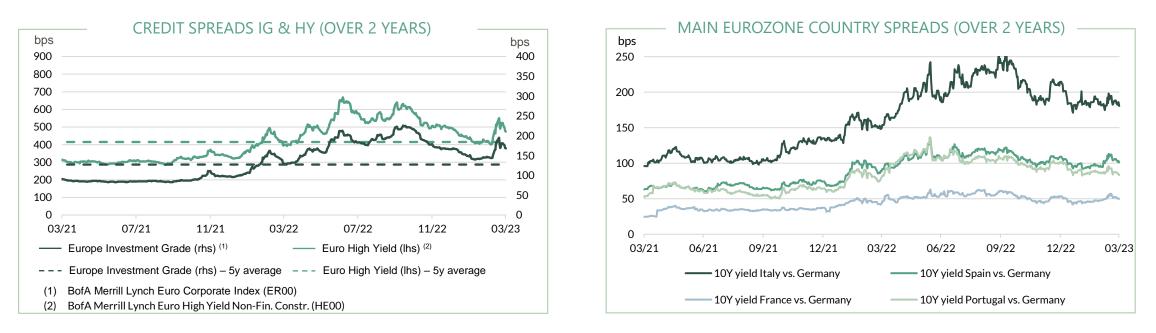
# *Rates* YIELDS MAY DECLINE FROM HERE



- While US 10-year treasuries have already rallied 100bp from their high of 4,4%, 10-year Bunds still appear to be stuck in a 2% to 2,75% range
- Falling inflation prints, cooling activity data and the perception that the ECB has done its job or is fairly close to it should stabilize Bund yields before they join US treasuries in the downtrend
- Curve steepening positions are becoming attractive as the end of the hiking cycle approaches
- For now, we actively underweight the 30-year sector vs 10-years, but stay neutral on 10-2 years

Past performance is not a reliable indicator of future performance and is not constant over time. Bloomberg Economic Forecast | Sources: ODDO BHF AM SAS, Bloomberg | LHS: Data as of 31/03/2023; RHS: Data as of 31/03/2023

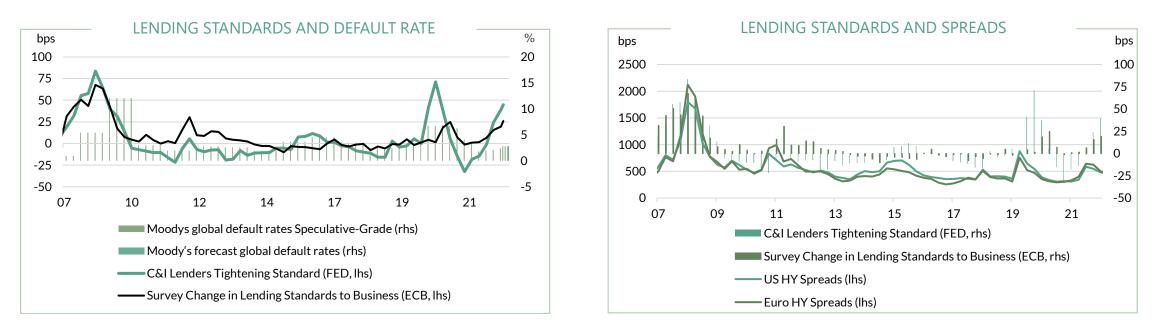
# *Credit Spreads* CARRY ON



- Credit spreads took a hit amid the recent banking sector fears and propelled all sector investment grade indices to spread levels last seen in November 2022
- Current spread levels around 170bp appear attractive for now as long as the stress in financial markets remains contained
- High yield bonds are more challenged by the underlying banking issues and market liquidity problems
- Despite the recent spread spike in credits peripheral spreads have barely moved
- We stay underweight Italy given headwinds from heavy supply, the start of quantitative tightening in the Eurozone and increasing recession probabilities in the US

Past performance is not a reliable indicator of future performance and is not constant over time. Sources: ODDO BHF AM SAS, Bloomberg | Data as of 31/03/2023

# *Financial conditions* CREDIT AND LOAN AVAILABILITY TO FALTER

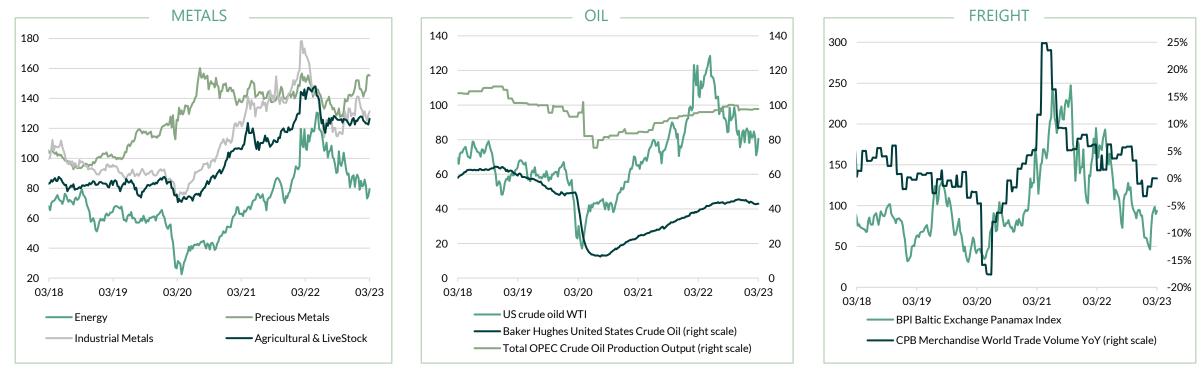


- In the US, small and regional banks account for a considerable amount of the overall business with a focus on commercial real estate (around 80%)
- Given ongoing deposit outflow, credit and loan growth is likely to decline acting as a drag on economic momentum
- This comes on top of an already restrictive stance on lending standards as reflected in Fed's March lending survey



# COMMODITIES & CURRENCIES

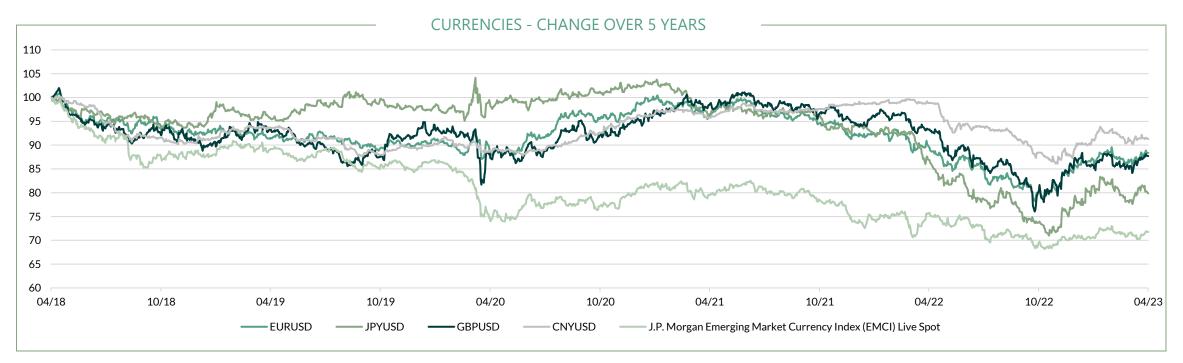
# *Commodities* GOLD: « BARBARIAN RELIC\* », BUT STILL FASHIONABLE



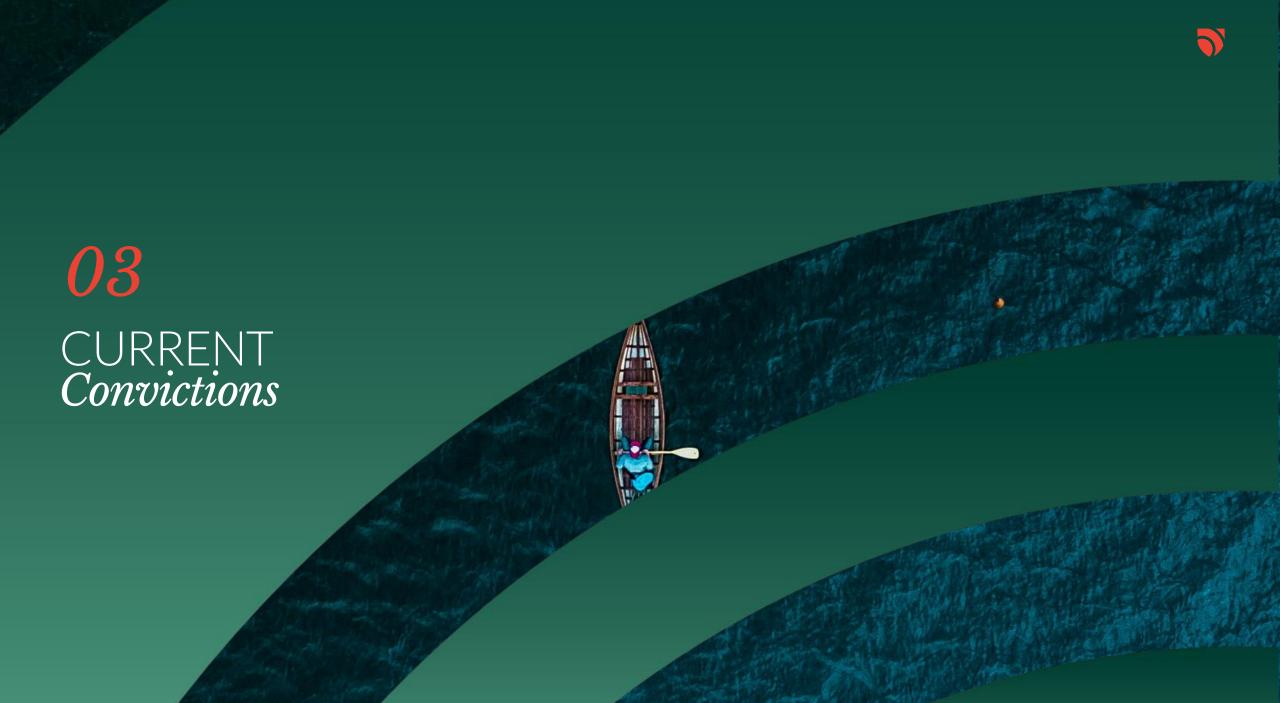
- Energy prices kept moderating (GSCI Energy -4%) and Industrial Metals were close to flat, as economic slowdown angsts resurfaced.
- Even more than non-USD currencies, precious metals got a lift from falling US yields (GSCI precious metals +8%).
- After a serious decline of crude price since last summer highs, global oil production now seem to have reached a plateau or maybe even to start turning south.
- Besides, the prices of agricultural raw materials recorded an increase of 3%,

Past performances are not a reliable indicator of future performance and are not constant over time. Sources: Bloomberg, ODDO BHF AM SAS | Data at 31/03/2023 |\* In the words of John Maynard Keynes (1923) on the gold standard

# *Currencies* USD DEPRECIATION TREND CONTINUING



- A generalized appreciation vs the greenback.
- Albeit in a less orderly manner than their developed peers, emerging currencies mostly appreciated vs USD in March (among best performers, BRL, THB and ZAR gained +3%).



## CURRENT CONVICTIONS

# Scenarios **OUR 6-MONTH VIEW**

# Central scenario

Global GDP growth will slow down, but the outlook for the Eurozone has recently improved somewhat: A severe energy crisis was avoided for the time being. In addition, the surprising move from China authorities and exit from zero-Covid policy should result in a positive impact for global growth. However, central banks remain hawkish, and the full impact of rate increases still has to be seen. In addition, the stress in the banking sector could lead to a more restrictive credit supply. So far, corporate earnings are solid, but margins are increasingly at risk.

## EUROPE

**STRATEGY** 

Increased diversification

Benefit from attractive

corporate bonds

valuations for short-term

- Growth expectations slightly improved recently given China re-opening and less negative impact from energy prices
- Inflation has mostly like seen the peak, but stays highly elevated and core inflation is still increasing
- ECB stays hawkish in order to bring inflation down
- Supply chains are less disrupted
- Allocations from global investors should increase

**OVERWEIGHT** 

Short Duration Euro

Credit (IG + HY)

Money Market

## US

**UNDERWEIGHT** 

Long duration High

Yield and Emerging

Markets

- So far. corporate fundamentals and the labor market remain resilient, but economic sentiment is deteriorating
- While inflation has peaked already, the FED remains committed to the goal of price stability
- Allocations from global investors should decrease

# **02** Alternative scenario #1

Banking crisis, sticky inflation and hawkish ECB

- Stress in the financial sector leads to a more restrictive credit supply
- Inflation does not fall to the expected extent, stays sticky despite a weaker economic outlook and hawkish ECB
- Market volatility increases

## **OVERWEIGHT**

- Alternative strategies
- Cash

## **UNDERWEIGHT**

- Equities
- Credit

# 03 Alternative scenario #2 Upside scenario

- Resolution of the stress in the financial system and no repercussions to the real economy
- China re-opening and less disrupted supply chains support global growth, a recession is avoided
- Central banks change their current very hawkish stance as there is substantial relief from inflation figures

## **OVERWEIGHT**

- Equities, incl. Emerging Markets
- High Yield

## **UNDERWEIGHT**

- Alternative Strategies
- Cash

Sovereigns

## CURRENT CONVICTIONS

# *Our current convictions* FOR EACH ASSET CLASS

Change from the previous GIC meeting\*



	OVERALL EQUITIES RECOMMENDATION
Equities	Large cap Eurozone
	Mid cap Eurozone
	Small cap Eurozone
	UK
	USA
	Emerging markets
	Japan
	China
Currencies	USD/€ (Direction of the USD)
	YEN/€ (Direction of the YEN)
	GBP/€ (Direction of the GBP)
	CHF/€ (Direction of the CHF)
Commodities	Gold
	Crude oil

Source: ODDO BHF AM, as of 05/04/2023. \*Please note that in this case, the previous meeting was an extraordinary meeting held on 27 March 2023.

## CURRENT CONVICTIONS

# *Our current convictions* FOR EACH ASSET CLASS



Government bonds	OVERALL GOVERNMENT BONDS
	Core Europe
	Peripheral Europe
	USA
Corporate bonds	OVERALL CORPORATE BONDS
	Investment grade Europe
	Investment grade short duration
	High yield credit short duration
	High yield Europe
	High Yield USA
	Emerging markets
Money Market	Developed markets

## HOW PERFORMANCE ARE CALCULATED

Cumulative fund performance is calculated based on dividends reinvested. Annualised performance is determined on an annual, 365-day actuarial basis. A fund's performance relative to its benchmark index is expressed as arithmetic difference. Static indicators are generally calculated on a weekly tick that is taken on Fridays, or failing that, on the day prior to valuation.

## VOLATILITY

Volatility is a risk indicator measuring the level of fluctuations observed in a portfolio (or index) over a defined period. It is calculated as annualised standard deviation of absolute returns within a defined period of time.

## CREDIT SPREAD (CREDIT PREMIUMS)

The credit spread is the risk premium or the difference between the yields of corporate bonds and that of sovereign bonds with the same characteristics.

## **INVESTMENT GRADE**

Investment-grade bonds are bonds issued by issuers rated between AAA to BBB- by Standard & Poor's or the equivalent.

## **HIGH YIELD**

High-yield bonds are speculative bonds rated lower than BBB- (Standard & Poor's) or the equivalent.

## PE (PRICE-EARNINGS RATIO)

A stock's price-earnings ratio is equal to the stock's price divided by the issuing company's earnings per share. It is also called the "earnings multiple". It depends mainly on three factors: the company's forecast earnings growth, the risk associated with these forecasts, and the level of interest rates.

# Our latest publications



#### INVESTMENT STRATEGIES

- Jan. 23 On your marks
- Sept. 22 Carry on
- Jan. 22 Make 2022 an opportunity
- Sept.21 <u>"Breathless?"</u>



### VIDEOS

- Podcast Investment strategy September 2022 Highlights
- #LeadWith Investment Brief H12022
- #FocusOn ODDO BHF Polaris Fund Range
- #Moments ODDO BHF Green Planet: the ecological transition, a sustainable investment opportunity
- #TalkWith Ecological transition: challenges & opportunities



## MONTHLY INVESTMENT BRIEF

- Mar 23 The "Rentier" is doing better
- Feb. 23 Europe's comeback and the hope for a near end to the interest rate hike cycle
- Dec. 22 <u>"And yet..." (a tribute to Charles Aznavour)</u>
- Nov 22 On your marks
- Oct. 22 "Cheap" a necessary but not sufficient condition
- July 22 It's all about timing



SUSTAINABLE INVESTING

Responsible Investment Policy Basics of sustainable investing Sustainable investing – ODDO BHF AM's approach The ecological transition: a sustainable investment opportunity Human Capital – a factor of resilience & differentiation ESG: the key to unlocking opportunities in small caps



## MARKETVIEWS

- 14/03/23 From TINA to TAPAS: there are alternatives again
- 14/03/23 European outlook, one year after the "Putin shock"
- 15/02/23 Monetary policy tightening: too much or too little?
- 15/02/23 Venture Capital which opportunities?
- 18/01/23 European equities: Stocks of the Old World are back in demand

NICOLAS CHAPUT Global CEO ODDO BHF AM

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