

Quarterly Portfolio Update

*Amundi Funds II – Pioneer U.S. High Yield**

29 June 2018

BOND

COMMENTARY

Market Review

While volatility pulled back from the high levels of the first quarter, in the second quarter markets continued to suffer from heightened volatility relative to the very low levels of 2017. Concerns about trade wars took centre stage, as President Trump stepped up his aggressive pursuit of tariffs against allies and adversaries alike. Fears that the new populist Italian government threatened the status quo of the Euro and European Union rose in late May, but abated as a new government was formed and officials toned down their anti-Euro rhetoric. Finally, the unexpected appreciation of the U.S. Dollar, which rose 5.7% from its mid-April low, as well as a continued rise in oil prices, which have climbed 23% year to date, including a 14% increase in the second quarter, contributed to a sell-off in emerging markets, particularly in countries with significant U.S. Dollar debt.

Despite a middling first half of 2018, US High Yield (HY) was a top performer among credit (outperforming IG, Emerging Markets and Euro HY meaningfully), although it was still the worst first half total return since 2008. The first quarter of 2018 was impacted by rate induced sell-off, with the index falling 90 basis points, as the 10 year U.S. Treasury surged in yield, compressing spreads. Higher risk credits outperformed, as economic view remained strong, and higher quality tends to have more duration exposure.

The second quarter had 100bps positive return as HY traded within a narrow band (6.25%-6.50%), providing mostly coupon-like returns. Strong economic and employment data was supportive of U.S. HY, especially as compared to emerging markets and European HY. Technicals have been positive for the asset class in 2018 as supply is off 28% from last year. Fund flows were less of a headwind during the second quarter than in the first quarter.

By rating tier: CCCs (+3.9% YTD) significantly outperformed Bs (+1.1% YTD), which, in turn, significantly outperformed BBs (negative 1.77% YTD)

Portfolio Positioning

The Portfolio slightly underperformed the Bank of America Merrill Lynch U.S. High Yield Index.

Allocation to out-of-benchmark positioning in convertible bonds contributed to positive relative performance and each produced positive returns outright. Within convertibles: Healthcare and Technology were the biggest contributors. Alder Biopharmaceuticals and Wright Medical Group led the way.

Within corporate bonds, security selection was a negative contributor, with securities in Energy and Basic Industry being the main laggards. For corporate bonds, adding to Valeant Pharma and Windstream, two of 2017 troubled credits, boosted performance, as both companies have taken various steps to address stretched balance sheets.

Our underweight to CCCs, given our higher quality bias, was also a detractor to relative performance. CCC rated bonds outperformed higher quality bonds as they have YTD.

We continue to remain overweight the Healthcare sector through our allocation to both corporate bonds and convertible bonds. The sector may be poised to benefit from further capital appreciation in 2018. We remain underweight the Retail sector which continues to struggle and historically is a sector that has exhibited low recovery rates in a restructuring environment

Within Energy, we are overweight on a notional basis, but market-weight on risk basis. We have greater exposure to Exploration & Production and midstream relative to higher beta services.

The Portfolio maintains a higher quality bias, and as such remains under-weight “CCC and below” rated buckets relative to the benchmark.

The Portfolio continues its practice of seeking diversification and relative value by carrying out-of-index exposures, including convertibles and

insurance-linked bonds. We remain constructive on insurance-linked bonds as they are uncorrelated with the financial markets, which in the long-term, provides diversification benefits and can help enhance the risk-return profile of the fund. We have taken the convertible bond positions down marginally, as securities reach our price targets and as a way to moderately reduce overall risk

Outlook

The default rate for HY bonds remains well below historical averages, and we maintain a constructive outlook with respect to the U.S. economy and overall corporate credit fundamentals. Strong earnings and a record pace of debt refinancing has enabled an extension of the credit cycle. The Fed is expected to continue to gradually hike rates, and we expect that the tapering of its bond portfolio will likely lead to some tightening of credit conditions. That said, HY is less interest rate sensitive than other fixed-income segments.

Potential global trade war ramifications could undermine global economic growth and we are monitoring closely

Credit-market sentiment received an additional boost as 2017 drew to a close with the passage of a tax reform package in the U.S. that included a lowering of the corporate tax rate and a window during which companies are permitted to accelerate the expensing of capital investments.

HY valuations are somewhat extended in our view, but we believe overall conditions remain supportive of the asset class. Spreads have been range bound (bottom 323 in January, top 382 in February, 360 recent); we expect this to continue. In general, we are increasing our B weighting when possible, relative to BB and CCC rated credits. BBs generally have a higher correlation with rate increases and crossover demand, while CCCs appear too rich after having outperformed recently. We consider that BBs are risky as they seem to be correlated with rates and crossover demand. B-rated credits may offer the best risk/return potential as a credit. In our view, credit fundamentals remain supportive of HY as an asset class. Economic growth and corporate earnings remain strong. Unemployment is low, wages have been trending modestly higher, and consumer balance sheets are sound in aggregate. In addition, high-yield issuance has, for the most part, shown restraint with respect to lower-rated deals in the CCC

quality range as well as deals designed to finance large leveraged buyouts or special dividends.

At the same time, HY valuations are relatively high, as reflected in spreads that are meaningfully tight by historical standards. In addition, after an extended period of seeing riskier assets more or less grind steadily higher, market volatility appears to have returned to the forefront, driven in large part by speculation over the pace of the Fed's future interest-rate hikes. The markets will be watching closely for any data that could signal the potential for accelerating inflation, which could spur the Fed to increase its benchmark rate more rapidly than currently anticipated.

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