

WAR CAUSES MARKET DECLINES

Oil spikes as critical Strait of Hormuz is closed

On the last day of February, the United States and Israel began to attack Iran. It quickly became clear that the scope of the attacks were far beyond the attacks of last July, and although the aims of the war were not clearly articulated, the early weeks of the war saw the senior Iranian leadership killed in airstrikes and significant damage to Iranian air, naval and missile launching capabilities. In retaliation Iran launched missile and drone strikes against targets across the Gulf and effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz. The closing of the Strait, a critical transit point for over 20% of global seaborne crude oil, led to an immediate jump in the oil price to over \$100 a barrel, fueling inflation fears globally as well as jeopardizing economic growth in Asian and European economies.

The MSCI World index declined by 4.05% in March after the initiation of the war. European and Asian markets were the hardest hit, as their economies are most dependent on imported fossil fuels, whereas the US, which is a net oil exporter, saw more modest market declines. The MSCI Europe index fell by 7.68%, compared to a decline of 2.58% for the MSCI USA. Within Europe, German and French equities were amongst the larger decliners, with markets such as the UK benefitting from having significant exposure to oil and gas companies.

The rise in the price of energy had an immediate effect on inflation expectations globally. US interest rates rose across both short term and longer term maturities. German yields also rose, however the rise was more marked at the shorter end of the curve, as longer term there are fears over the impact of the oil price shock of GDP growth.

Oil and gas prices spiked dramatically during the month as Iran closed the Strait of Hormuz to shipping, as well as hitting key natural gas fields in the region with missiles and drones. Aluminum prices also rose as aluminum smelters in the Gulf region were also impacted by the war.

Value style a modest positive in broad sell-off

The portfolio declined by 6.71% in the month, outperforming the 7.68% decline in the MSCI Europe Index. The value style was a positive contributor to fund performance in the month, and the MSCI Europe Value Index declined only 5.83%, a smaller decline than MSCI Europe, reflecting the strength of the value style. Relative to MSCI Europe, the fund is slightly overweight the Energy sector, and this was a small tailwind to fund performance due to the strength of that sector. Conversely, the fund is underweight the Energy sector relative to MSCI Europe Value which was a headwind, as was a generally more cyclical bias. A positive contribution from stock selection was not enough to offset these headwinds.

Energy was the only positive market sector in the month, with all other sectors experiencing declines. Utilities and Communications Services had the smallest declines among the other sectors. The biggest declines amongst global sectors were in the cyclically biased sectors of Industrials and Consumer Discretionary. The normally defensive Consumer Staples sector was also weak due to fears over rising cost inflation in the sector combined with a weak demand environment. Meanwhile, rising bond yields caused the rate sensitive and leveraged Real Estate sector to be the weakest performer.

Despite the market declines, the fund had a number of stocks that performed well, contributing to positive stock selection in the month. Oil and gas producers ENI and TotalEnergies were strong performers due to the rise in oil and gas prices. German fertilizer company, K+S, performed well thanks to rising fertilizer prices as the Strait of Hormuz is critical for global fertilizer trade. Finnish Nokia also performed well thanks to growth opportunities in optical and IP networks which is tightly linked to the global AI buildout,

Strategy

European Value invests in European equities, cf. the fund's prospectus. Stocks are selected using the value strategy, meaning that through careful fundamental analysis, the team strives to identify companies that trade at healthy discounts relative to intrinsic value. A risk-aware approach to the portfolio construction ensures a well-diversified portfolio and broad exposure across sectors and countries.

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