

CIO OFFICE MORNING MARKET WRAP 04 September 2024

US growth scares came back yesterday, reignited by a disappointing manufacturing ISM. US stocks fell - 2% for the S&P500 and -3% for the Nasdaq. Bonds were sought after, with a decrease in Treasury yields across the curve: -4 basis points for the 1-year to 4.36%, -6 for the 5-year to 3.64% and -7 for the 10-year to 3.83%. The dollar logically weakened, especially against the yen. Gold was marginally lower, but oil prices tumbled to \$73.8 for the Brent. No doubt, cyclical assets are not priced for bad economic news – while defensive assets are not particularly cheap.

Starting with activity, the August ISM manufacturing was indeed weak. The headline measure came out at 47.2, which is not far from the median forecast of 47.5, but in the details, its most forward looking new orders component fell much more, to 44.6, a level unseen in a year, while inventories rose. Not great. It's however probably not as severe as market reaction suggests. First, demand-side factors are subdued, but the index is modestly improving compared to July's 46.8. Second, manufacturing activity moves markets, but it after all weighs less than 15% of the US economy. Third, the magnitude of the reaction of stock markets in particular is linked to their rich valuation and overall generous allocation from investors, leaving no room for disappointment, rather than an accurate fundamental adjustment to deteriorating earnings prospects. To that extent, we would put more weight, to gauge the state of the US economy, on the ISM Service which will be released tomorrow (consensus 51.2). And with regards to market moving data, it's all about the US labor market, which directly affects Fed's future policy decisions. The JOLTS job openings at 6PM today is expected to be around 8.1 million, and most crucially, the number of NFP job creations from the August job report released Friday is key. The median forecast is currently for 165k job creations after 114k in July. We would intuitively say that anything above 150k, especially if there is some upward revision to July, would drive market expectations to a 25bps cut in September. Expectations should move to -50bps in case the number is around or below 100k.

As we write this morning, Nasdaq futures are falling further, due to Nvidia tumbling -10% post-market as the company is targeted by an antitrust investigation from the US Department of Justice. No surprise,

Asian markets are not doing well. Stocks are down -3.3% in Japan, suffering from a strengthening yen, to 145 for one dollar, under the double influence of a disappointing US manufacturing gauge, and a relatively solid PMI Services for Japan in August, just released at 53.7. Chinese assets are faring a bit better, -0.4% onshore and -1% in Hong-Kong. Still, the Caixin China PMI Services was tepid at 51.6, a bit below the median forecast. Korea falls -3% in sympathy with the Nasdaq and Nvidia. The same happens to TSMC in Taiwan, down -4%.

In Tokyo trading, US Treasury yields are not falling further compared to the US close. It's fair to say that the long-end of the curve already includes a significant probability for a material slowdown, which is one of asset allocators' problems currently: limited diversification power as expectations for the Fed lifted everything in August. Gold is steady just below \$2,500, future contracts on Brent oil are -0.5% lower to \$73.4 and major cryptocurrencies are down 2/3%.

The short-term is all about incoming economic data, especially from the US. The VIX, index of implied volatility, rose from 15 to 20 which is material but is far from the panic of early August when it exceeded 50. We could see more turbulences in the short-term. At some point however, we can't have only bad news: in case the US economy enters a danger zone (which is not our base case), the Fed will cut aggressively. In case the soft landing continues, with solid ISM services but slow deterioration in the job market, it's "goldilocks". We are expecting volatility, for now and until the result of the US elections, but we do not change our current slightly defensive positioning.

Today we will get the S&P PMIs for both the UAE and Dubai, as well as PMI Services for India, the Eurozone and the UK. US trade balance will be interesting to watch at 4.30PM Dubai time, but not as important as the job openings from the JOLTS report at 6PM. At the same time, hard data for the US economy in July, from factory orders to durable goods, will hit the tape and give an interesting comparison with soft data from surveys. Tomorrow will see the US ISM Services, and Friday is all about the job report. Stay diversified, stay invested for the medium term, stay safe.

Have a good day.

Chief Investment Office Wealth Management, Emirates NBD.

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