



Market update



Sentiment in global credit markets remained steady in January and into February. Investors appear convinced for now that the vaccination programmes embarked on in the westem G10 countries and the promise of further government spending stimulus will shield the global economy from further COVID-19-related disruptions. The remarkable price movements seen in equities, cryptocurrencies and some high yield credits do suggest that a 2021 synchronized global economic growth acceleration is now a core expectation amongst investors. Inflation is an emerging danger to this rosy picture for credit markets, as actual food and commodity price rises and some goods supply shortages are already feeding into CPI figures. Higher inflation tends to push up government bond yields, thus narrowing the "spread" over government bonds that credit issuers have if their yields stay flat. Upward pressure on credit yields may result.

This upward pressure on yields is already being felt in Czech government bonds and these benchmark bond prices are thus falling. January's Czech CPI was relatively steady at 2.2% year-on-year, though the Central Bank's measure of "core" inflation ticked up to 3.6% year-on-year. With January unemployment still low at 4.3% and December's retail sales figures proving resilient at 3.7% year-on-year, the scope for an acceleration in inflation and resulting in Czech National Bank benchmark interest rate rises is high.

Mark Robinson, Member of the Investment Committee

Portfolio update



We renewed our portfolio diversification strategy in January, taking advantage of new issuer activity. We initiated positions in the secured bonds of Czech real estate fund ZDR, as well as in the bonds of gas transmission operator Net4Gas. We also invested a smaller weighting in the relatively liquid and Investment Grade-rated long-term subordinated bonds of Austria's Volksbank. We added at the margin to our holding in the reverse repo secured by the Wood Retail Real Estate Fund.

To finance these purchases, we sold out of our remaining position in the variable-rate bonds of diversified industrial player Czechoslovak Group, whilst our well-secured short-term loan to a non-profits institution matured. We continued this diversification strategy into the month of February, aiming to optimize our risk-return stance. We do not hold any Czech government bonds in the portfolio because of their low yield and price sensitivity to interest rate changes.

Lubor Žalman, Founder of the fund

Contact for investors

Tel: +420 230 234 112 info@encorfunds.com www.encorfunds.com

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