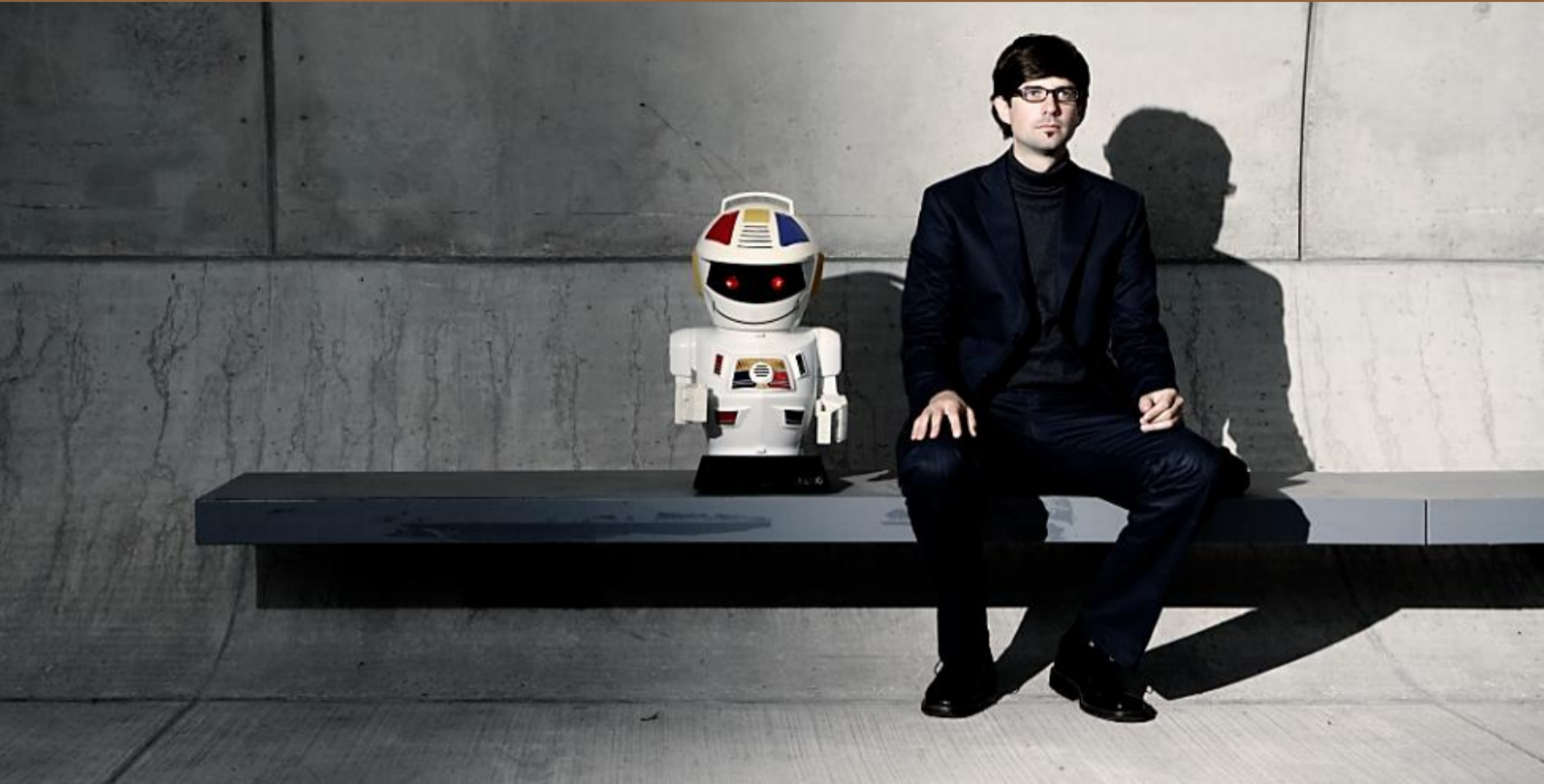


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Friday 2nd of February, 2018

We are in February... Last week we centred our thoughts on currencies in general, with an emphasis on the irrational fading of the US Dollar. Not that much has changed there, as we see the DXY (trade weighted Dollar index) slip further to multi-year low. We are still bewildered at both the level and the trend the Greenback is following. Again, the “carry” on the Dollar would normally suggest both a higher level and a different angle for the charts...

In the context of currencies, whilst we clearly missed this continuing downtrend we appear to have been quite right on the Cryptocurrencies... Bitcoin has dropped more than 60 percent from its January high in Korea after the nation’s regulators took several steps to restrict trading.

This week we want to focus on the “other” big market - The fixed-income sector. The yield on benchmark 10-year U.S. Treasuries reached a high of 2.797% early on Friday, probing its highest levels since April 2014. “It’s kind of counterintuitive. You’d think that with rates up, the dollar would be up, but investors are focusing their interest elsewhere,” such as further evidence that the European economy is picking up, said Jeff Kravetz, regional investment strategist at U.S. Bank Wealth Management. A survey on Thursday showed euro zone manufacturing continued to boom last month, supporting expectations that the European Central Bank is on track to normalize monetary policy.

The U.S. Federal Reserve left its benchmark interest rate unchanged on Wednesday, though many market participants expect a rate hike in March. The U.S. central bank has forecast three rate increases this year after hiking interest rates three times last year.

Higher government spending and less central bank easing are two forces that have been driving interest rates higher, and the stock market is finally taking notice as interest rates rise. Stocks are selling off amid a move higher in yields, but strategists do not see the jump in interest rates as a death blow for the record-setting rally. While the S&P 500 was celebrating tax cuts and surging more than 7 percent in January, the

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bond market was selling off. Yields, which move opposite price, rose on expectations government debt is going to balloon and central banks will cut back further on easy money — a powerful combination signalling a lot more government bonds are coming just as interest rates rise. The latest inflation data, the core PCE price deflator for December, showed an annual pace of inflation at 1.5%, below the Fed's 2 percent target. But according to 10-year Treasury Inflation Protected Securities, which are used to hedge against higher inflation, the implied inflation rate is at 2.1%, the highest since September 2014, said Peter Boockvar, chief investment officer at Bleakley Financial Group.

Bond strategists also look at possible stock market selling as an escape valve for rising rates, as it would bring buyers seeking safety into the bond market. That would send yields lower, and could ease selling pressure on stocks. Well, looking at the US yield curve, the big "flattening action" we had been experiencing for some time now, seems to have turned - the long-end selling-off (with rising long-rates as a result) whilst the short-end remaining stable - steepening curve again... The market thoughts have been that a flattening curve implies a slowing of the economy, so maybe the inverse is true too? Steepening curve suggesting a strengthening economy? If so, why have equities been selling-off into this rising steepness?

In Janet Yellen's final meeting as Fed chair, the central bank decided Wednesday against increasing its benchmark interest rate but indicated it expects inflation pressures to heat up as the year moves on. The policymaking Federal Open Market Committee said current conditions indicate that the overnight funds rate should remain anchored at 1.25 to 1.5%. The decision, which came at the end of a two-day meeting, was widely expected.

According to projections released in December, officials expect three rate hikes this year so long as there is no significant disruption to market conditions. However, the market recently has been entertaining thoughts that the Fed could add another increase, likely at the final meeting of 2018. This week's statement noted that "market based measures of inflation compensation have increased in recent months but remain low," a tweak from December which simply noted that the measures "remain low." Inflation has been running consistently below the Fed's mandated target, most recently hovering around the 1.5% range. But there have been signs lately that wage pressure is heating up.

So what is really happening in the fixed-income sector? With the US 10 year Treasury flirting with a 2.80% yield, the German Bund now at 0.73% and the Japanese JGB at 0.08% there clearly a repricing of this asset-class. How far will this "correction" go? We, like most others, don't know. We believe that the benchmark ten year Treasury may well drift towards the 3% level which we had prognosticated at the end of 2017. We remain in the camp that doesn't believe in the imminent return of inflation and consequently, can't envision much higher interest rates - stay in short duration bonds as a reasonable precaution against a future which might not follow reason.

Investors are weighing whether stronger corporate earnings, a pick-up in economic growth and optimism over U.S. tax cuts can continue driving up prices in markets that recently touched their highest on record; Goldman Sachs Group Inc. predicts a correction is on the horizon, but says any such pullback would be a buying opportunity. And, if indeed a pull-back materialises in the bonds, it is likely that this in itself will trigger demand for bonds, attenuating the rise in yields. Fed officials, while they believe that in a normal, stable economy, the fed funds rate should be around 3 percent compared to the present 1.25 to 1.5% range, are also gradually adjusting to reality. They're suggesting that it may be appropriate for rates to be lower for longer. We remain convinced that a key reason the Fed has raised rates is because its credibility was at stake, and remains so. It has repeatedly forecast higher fed funds rates than it subsequently initiated. Bear in mind that the Fed controls that rate so it simply didn't do what it intended. The gap between its fed funds

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forecasts and actions are extraordinarily wide, ranging to more than four percentage points.

We remain in the camp of believers in the steady growth of the economy and remain doubtful that inflation is around the bend. We think that the global economy has changed much since the big washout of ten years ago - price discovery is upon us and disintermediation is continuing at an accelerating pace. Two big “new disruptors” are on our horizon: Block Chain technology may well be a greater change to our economies than the internet had been, and then, one of the big drivers for cost rises has been in the health care sector, which weighing more and more on our disposable income as the population is aging, may have finally found its brake - it's no secret Jeff Bezos has been looking to crack health care. But no one expected him to pull in Warren Buffett and Jamie Dimon, too. Amazon, Berkshire, JPMorgan Link Up to Form New Health-Care Company, initially to serve their own 2 million or so employees. Yet another potentially big driver for Trump to claim as his legacy...

We had a very strong January for equities, and yet, we all are fretting over the negative moves of this past week. Scary, as effectively we are at all time highs less a small epsilon. Earnings' season has had a strong start on both top and bottom lines. We do see the VIX (fear index) at 14, a large move up from the 9 figure of late. Yes, perception of risk has returned on the back of the Dollar and Bond prices falling... Now equities are being shaken as a consequence. But the fundamentals are strong, globally. Some food for thought, however, in the event of a bona fide interest-rate shock: over the past two decades, U.S. stocks have generally posted tasty returns during periods in which the 10-year Treasury yield rose 100 basis points. JPMorgan Chase's Marko Kolanovic (aka 'Gandalf') offers another reason not to sink into despair: the recent coincident retreat in both stocks and bonds likely hasn't forced computers to begin indiscriminately selling to pare down risk - yet. We hold our chosen course...

Remember - If you are not willing to risk the unusual, you will have to settle for the ordinary...

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Market Weekly Highlights

- The USD is trading down against the Euro at 1.2447 and against the CHF at 0.93 as we write on the back of the latest ECB President Draghi comments on a higher Inflation.

The Pound is trading higher for the year at 1.4148 as is the Japanese Yen marking 110 but lower for the week.

The Russian Ruble trades unchanged against the USD reaching about 56.43 as we write.

The Brazilian Real which opened the year at 3.3080 reached almost 3.12 last week against the USD, is now at 3.21. The Crypto Currencies are trading big time down, with Bitcoin trading just above 8'780 against the USD dropping 46% for the year 2018.

Crude oil WTI trades unchanged to \$65.40 for a barrel; while Brent is trading down at about \$69 as we watch.

- 10Y U.S. Treasuries which have traded in a range during the last quarter of 2017 with yields from 2.30% to 2.40%; have lost value in price with yields reaching 2.83% this week. The US yield curve is no longer flattening.

The Japanese 10 year JGB yield which started the year 2018 at 0.053% is trading higher and continues to offer a POSITIVE yield, showing 0.086%.

In Europe, the German Bund yield is trading at almost 0.75%, 33 bps higher then where it closed the year and reaching again 2015 levels as is the French 10Y Yield crossed the 1% as we write.

In Peripheral Europe Italian 10Y yields are now just above 2% trading unchanged for the year so far, whilst the Spanish 10Y yields trade some 55bps lower than Italy at 1.45% lower then where they started the year at 1.61%.

- Markets in US are all up for the Year 2018, with Nasdaq trading 7% higher, DJIA +5.95% and SP500 trading at +5.55%; all having reached new all time highs during this year. The DJIA is at almost 26'180, the SP500 closed yesterday just below 2'822 while Nasdaq is trading some points below 7'390.

In Europe markets are also showing positive results for the year so far with Eurostoxx50 up 1.1% as is the CAC40 at positive 1.54% now and with Peripheral Italy at 6.82%. DAX and Swiss SMI are negative at respectively 0.33% and 1.22%.

The Nikkei traded higher by 2.24% for this new year 2018, despite the strengthening of the Yen. Bovespa and Hang Seng also are trading positively for the year at respectively +10.40% and 8.97%.

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