

Swiss Economics

Unabated upswing in analyst sentiment

Financial Market Survey Switzerland | 24/02/2021, 08:55, UTC

Anticipating a near-term economic recovery, financial market analysts are as optimistic now as they were after the financial crisis of 2008 had faded. They also expect long-term interest rates to rise across all regions.

Analysts see little sign of a bubble on the Swiss equity market; in contrast, they consider real estate funds and government bonds to be more significantly overvalued.

Franziska Fischer

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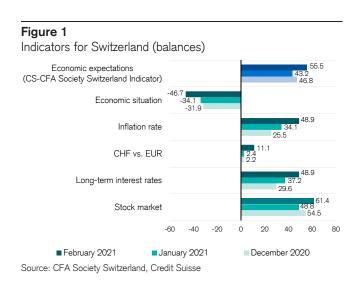
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Sentiment barometer at an 11-year high

The forward-looking CS CFA Society Switzerland indicator continues to climb, from 43.2 in the prior month to 55.5 points in February (see figure 1). This means it has actually exceeded its previous high of summer 2020, which was recorded after the first lockdown had come to an end. With recent announcements by the Swiss Federal Council suggesting that the gradual reopening of the economy – and therefore a bounceback – is now within touching distance, analysts have

turned as optimistic as they were just after the financial crisis had died down. This seems to be partly due to a sense that a weaker economy now creates more scope for a rally in the future, given that the analysts' assessment of the current economic situation has deteriorated further. The picture is similar in the euro area (see table). The US is the only region surveyed in which the analysts believe the current economic malaise is easing, most likely in part thanks to the vaccination progress. For the next six months, more than 70% of the survey participants believe that economic growth will be positive in the US and the euro area. There is no consensus when it comes to China's prospects, with equal numbers of respondents forecasting a continued upswing on the one hand and stagnation on the other.



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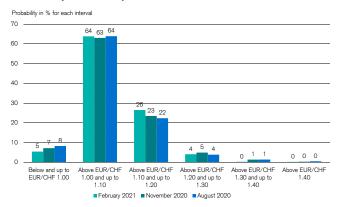
Consensus on rising equity market prices

As a result, export activity in Switzerland looks set to lose some momentum over the next six months according to the analysts, but should remain exceptionally strong nonetheless. On the labor market, the survey participants still consider the situation as challenging. 63% of respondents expect the unemployment rate to rise between now and the summer. However, this figure is lower than in the preceding months since the pandemic began. There is a widely held consensus among survey participants with regard to prospects for the equity markets. After the recent reporting season exceeded analysts' expectations and given the belief that the economy is about to pick up, stock prices are set to rise over the next six months in the view of around 70% of respondents. This is the case for the stock markets in Switzerland, the euro area and the US.

Analysts believe that long-term interest rates will rise

As has been the case for a number of months now, the February survey again saw analysts' assessments of shortterm interest rates moving sideways. Some 90% of those surveyed do not expect the central banks to make any changes to interest rates, even though inflation expectations among analysts continue to head north. More than half of respondents believe that inflation will rise over the coming six months. In view of statistical base effects, this is probably in part a mechanic forecast adjustment. When it comes to the US, however, President Biden's fiscal stimulus package is likely to play a role as almost 70% of the analysts surveyed expect inflation to increase there. In contrast to the short end of the yield curve, the analysts expect long-term interest rates to continue rising if the recovery gains traction in the months ahead. More than half of the survey participants now also envisage this scenario in Switzerland. In terms of exchange rates, two out of three respondents expect CHF to remain unchanged against EUR. Only 44% of the respondents maintain the same view versus the US dollar. Of the remainder, 36% expect CHF to appreciate, while 20% see it depreciating.

Figure 2 Where do you currently see the fair value of EUR/CHF?

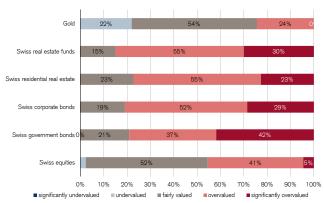


Source: CFA Society Switzerland, Credit Suisse

Respondents see high likelihood that CHF is relatively fairly valued

Opinions on the fair value of the EUR/CHF exchange rate have barely changed since August 2020 (see figure 2). At most, there is evidence of a slight shift in opinion towards a stronger euro. This is probably due to a further improvement in the economic situation and the favorable political developments in Europe, especially in light of the EU recovery fund. As in the previous quarter, the analysts estimate a likelihood of over 60% that the fair exchange rate is between 1.00 and 1.10. This suggests that CHF is currently quite fairly valued given the actual exchange rate of 1.08. The analysts see a 30% chance of the fair value being above 1.10, while a fair exchange rate below parity is rather unlikely based on the survey results, with a probability of only 5%.

Figure 3How do you rate the valuation level of the following asset classes?



Source: CFA Society Switzerland, Credit Suisse

Gold and equities are the only asset classes that are not overvalued in the analysts's view

Almost a year after the unprecedented market turmoil, our quarterly special survey on the valuation levels of selected Swiss asset classes shows that prices have more than recouped their losses. Compared to February 2020, all market segments covered in the survey, with the exception of gold, have become more expensive according to the financial analysts. Residential real estate has shown a particularly strong performance, as it is now considered either overvalued or highly overvalued by 77% of the survey participants, compared to 69% before the pandemic-related crash. The analysts currently perceive gold to be the cheapest asset class based on return potential (see figure 3). Swiss government bonds appear to be the most expensive according to the survey, closely followed by real estate funds - although this was already the case before the pandemic. While Swiss equities are also (highly) overvalued in the eyes of 46% of the survey participants, the majority of respondents (52%) still consider them fairly priced. Thus if there are any signs of a bubble forming in the current setting, they tend not to be on the equity market, but in other segments according to the analysts.

The CFA Society Switzerland and Credit Suisse have been conducting the Switzerland Financial Market Survey (a monthly survey of financial analysts) since January 2017. Detailed results of the survey conduct-

ed between 11 and 18 February 2021, involving the participation of 45 analysts from the Swiss financial sector, are published here.

(23/02/2021)

Current economic situation	good	+/-	normal	+/-	poor	+/-	balance	+/-
Switzerland	2.2	-0.1	48.9	-12.5	48.9	12.5	-46.7	-12.6
Eurozone	2.2	-0.1	35.6	-7.6	62.2	7.7	-60.0	-7.8
USA	8.9	4.4	51.1	-3.4	40.0	-0.9	-31.1	5.3
China	52.3	15.1	45.5	-15.0	2.3	0.0	50.0	15.1
Economic expectations	improve		no change		worsen		balance	
Switzerland (CS CFA Society Switzerland Indicator)	71.1	5.2	13.3	1.9	15.6	-7.1	55.5	12.3
Eurozone	71.1	5.2	11.1	-2.5	17.8	-2.7	53.3	7.9
USA	73.3	7.4	15.6	-4.9	11.1	-2.5	62.2	9.9
China	47.7	-6.8	47.7	13.6	4.5	-6.9	43.2	0.1
Inflation rate	increase		no change		decrease		balance	
Switzerland	53.3	12.4	42.2	-10.1	4.4	-2.4	48.9	14.8
Eurozone	55.6	10.1	40.0	-10.0	4.4	-0.1	51.2	10.2
USA	68.9	14.4	26.7	-14.2	4.4	-0.1	64.5	14.5
Other economic indicators for Switzerland	increase		no change		decrease		balance	
Export momentum (situation)	0.0	-2.5	55.0	15.0	45.0	-12.5	-45.0	10.0
Export momentum (expectations)	57.5	-7.5	32.5	5.0	10.0	2.5	47.5	-10.0
Unemployment rate	63.6	-8.5	25.0	1.7	11.4	6.7	52.2	-15.2
Short-term interest rates	increase		no change		decrease		balance	
Switzerland	4.4	-0.1	91.1	-2.1	4.4	2.1	0.0	-2.2
Eurozone	6.7	2.2	88.9	-4.3	4.4	2.1	2.3	0.1
USA	13.3	6.5	84.4	-6.5	2.2	-0.1	11.1	6.6
Short-term interest rate spread	increase		no change		decrease		balance	
Eurozone – Switzerland	7.3	-0.2	90.2	0.2	2.4	-0.1	4.9	-0.1
Long-term interest rates	increase		no change		decrease		balance	
Switzerland	53.3	13.8	42.2	-15.9	4.4	2.1	48.9	11.7
Germany	60.5	21.5	34.9	-23.6	4.7	2.3	55.8	19.2
USA	75.0	17.9	22.7	-13.0	2.3	-4.8	72.7	22.7
Long-term interest rate spread	increase		no change		decrease		balance	
Germany – Switzerland	14.0	4.2	81.4	-4.0	4.7	-0.2	9.3	4.4
Share price	increase		no change		decrease		balance	
SMI (Switzerland)	70.5	5.4	20.5	1.9	9.1	-7.2	61.4	12.6
EuroStoxx 50 (Eurozone)	72.7	2.9	18.2	4.2	9.1	-7.2	63.6	10.1
S&P (USA)	65.9	4.0	22.7	1.3	11.4	-5.3	54.5	9.3
Swiss franc exchange rate versus	appreciate		no change		depreciate		balance	
EUR	22.2	-1.6	66.7	11.9	11.1	-10.3	11.1	8.7
USD	35.6	1.5	44.4	-6.8	20.0	5.4	15.6	-3.9
Commodities	increase		no change		decrease		balance	
Oil (North Sea Brent)	36.6	-12.2	48.8	11.6	14.6	0.6	22.0	-12.8
Gold (per ounce)	41.5	8.2	39.0	-6.2	19.5	-1.9	22.0	10.1

Note: 45 analysts took part in the Financial Market Survey Switzerland for February from 11 to 18 February 2021. Analysts were asked about their expectations for the next six months. The numbers displayed are percentages. The balances represent the difference between the positive and negative shares of responses.

Source: CFA Society Switzerland, Credit Suisse

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Publisher

Burkhard Varnholt Chief Investment Officer – Swiss Universal Bank +41 44 333 67 63 burkhard.varnholt@credit-suisse.com

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Credit Suisse AG Investment Publishing P.O. Box 300, CH-8070 Zürich

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