

HOUSE VIEWS

January 2022



Risky Business

As 2021 comes to a close and 2022 begins, three recent headlines from the Financial Times newspaper neatly summarise the last twelve months and pose the key question regarding the next twelve:

- “Global stocks deliver third year of double-digit gains”;
- “Global bond markets on course for worst year since 1999”; and,
- “The key to 2022 will be how inflation is brought down”.

It has indeed been another year where investors were rewarded for being exposed to risky assets. Global equities had another banner year, underpinned by strong macroeconomic tailwinds and enormously stimulative monetary and fiscal policies. Across most of our strategies, we have had an overweight to equities. Therefore, we have participated meaningfully in this latest leg of a bull run that has been in motion – with some notable exceptions – since 2009.

Equities, once again, were led by an irrepressible US market which surged by 27% throughout 2021. In most strategies, our largest single allocation continues to be the US. Notably, the US equity complex has not been characterised by frenzied investors speculating with reckless abandon: 2021 earnings will almost certainly have risen by a greater degree than 2021 prices in the final tally. Moreover, this has not been a year where large mega-cap technology companies left others in their dust: the equal-weighted S&P 500 ended the year ahead of the standard, market-capitalisation S&P 500 index for the first time since 2016.

Nonetheless, while US equity valuations have not risen over the year, they remain expensive by historical standards. It is for this reason that we have held a somewhat lower allocation to the US than prior to the pandemic, in favour of other regions such as Europe, the UK and Japan. We also continue to hold a meaningful allocation to Emerging

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Markets (EM). While no region has performed as well as the US in 2021 – indeed EM, led by China, were a painful underperformer given Chinese regulatory crackdowns on technology companies and real estate woes – we remain sanguine about the long-term prospects of our equity positioning given more attractive valuations and a higher sensitivity to economic cyclicality outside of the US, even as the US remains our single largest position. With regard to EM specifically, the region is looking oversold from a sentiment perspective, often a precursor of outsized future returns.

Safety Last

While risk assets have basked in the sun, safe-haven assets – ironically – have experienced an *annus horribilis*. Ten-year UK government bond yields shot up from about 0.20% to end the year five times higher. That equated to a capital loss of about 5% (Bloomberg UK Gilt 7-10Y Index; Index Total Return Level). Investment-grade corporate bonds also lost money, but less than government bonds. In line with the trends of the year, the best performing credit was the riskiest variety, with high yield corporate bonds delivering positive returns.

Most strategies continue to hold some government and corporate bonds, though in a smaller proportion than we have traditionally. However, those we did hold performed poorly in comparison to risk assets. We also took some losses in 2021 on gold, and experienced flat or only slightly positive returns from our defensive allocations to hedge funds and our Tail-Risk Protection Note. Nonetheless, given a panoply of risks – elevated equity valuations, Covid variants, stubbornly high inflation, the potential for central bank policy errors, geopolitical risks such as those between Russia and Ukraine, and Chinese real estate contagion – we continue to believe our risk-taking should be tempered and we continue to hold a bevy of safe-haven assets. As always, should risk assets sell-off and our safe-havens rally, we would seek to exit the latter in favour of finding bargains in the former.

New Year, Old Problem

The New Year begins with an old foe, which is elevated levels of inflation globally. While growth is robust in developed economies, price pressures are acute. Consumer prices in the UK and the Eurozone have increased by c.5% this year; in the US, inflation is running at nearly 7%, the highest since June of 1982. This has left central banks, especially the US Federal Reserve (Fed), markedly reassessing its ultra-loose monetary policy for 2022: how aggressively central banks act to tame inflation represents the biggest risk for this year. This includes not just tapering off quantitative easing and raising rates (largely priced in), but also actively seeking to shrink its balance sheet (not priced in).

In a best-case scenario, liquidity remains ample and economic momentum is strong enough to withstand slightly higher rates. Moreover, in terms of balance sheets, central banks at first simply stop buying new bonds and hold the bonds they already own until maturity, thereby “running off” the balance sheet at a slow pace over time (i.e. effectively what the Fed did from 2014 to 2016). Eventually, they can resume “normal” open market operations with a bias to reducing the overall size of the balance sheet, actively selling more bonds back to the market than they buy (i.e. what the Fed did from 2017 to 2019). If done in an environment of sufficient economic growth, the result will likely be a “healthy deleveraging” which should not destabilise markets.

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In a worst-case scenario, liquidity dries up, economic momentum falters and central banks go too fast from “run off” to “sell off” (i.e. the European Central Bank’s experience in 2013 and 2014). Markets will likely respond to this adversely.

We believe the actual path will be closer to the former than the latter. *Why? Primarily because we believe the underlying drivers of currently high inflation are not structural and are likely to ease once temporary factors are behind us – that will allow central banks to slowly tighten policy as opposed to a faster tightening.*

One, most of today’s apparent surge is the base effect. For example, in January 2021, the price of a barrel of Brent Crude was close to \$50 compared with \$80 now. This has been the single largest factor in currently high inflation. Few expect oil prices to rise dramatically again (though admittedly it’s possible).

Two, there were also marked shifts to our consumption patterns, with post pandemic consumption of durable goods 34% higher in real terms (at its peak) than before, as spending on services was slashed. This overwhelmed supply chains and caused the rise in prices of many weighty components in inflation indices (e.g. used cars). Now, after having gorged on goods in lieu of services, consumption patterns appear to be trending back to normal and supply chain blockages, while still material, are easing, particularly in the post-Christmas period. There also appears to be no uptick in gauges of money velocity, indicating cash balances will remain high and consumers’ expectations for inflation are within reason (i.e. they are not rushing out to spend cash they consider depreciating in real terms). Low velocity also helps blunt the inflationary impact of rising money supply.

Finally, perhaps the single most important indicator of structural inflation is spiralling wage growth, which leads companies to raise prices, thus leading workers to demand higher wages (i.e. as occurred in the 1970s). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) Labour Compensation Per Employed Person hit 5.0% in Q1 2021, very high, historically speaking. However, it appears a peak may have been hit, or at the very least, a deceleration: Q2 and Q3 registered at 4.5% and 4.4%, though admittedly there are regional idiosyncrasies. Labour supply is likely to become more elastic over 2022 as ongoing crisis era benefits dry up and Covid-related restrictions abate. Of course, this could prove far too optimistic, but we believe our optimism is well founded.

Bottom Line

We believe the case for increased risk-taking remains well supported given a robust economic backdrop, strong momentum and still tolerable valuations. However, we are cognisant of downside catalysts, some of which have been mentioned above. Therefore, we continue to hold a stable of safe-haven assets including cash, government bonds, gold, and defensive alternatives (e.g. low-volatility hedge funds, Tail Risk Protection Note).

As always, we are guided by the four pillars of our investment process:

- **Economic regime:** Our Leading Economic Macro Indicator (LEMI) suggests the global economy is in a state of Expansion, which is favourable for risk-taking. Admittedly, economic activity is largely dependent on the ongoing fight against the Covid-19 pandemic and the economy’s resilience to a tightening monetary regime. Vaccinations appear to be effective against the latest variants and are proliferating, and we believe the underlying drivers of currently high inflation are not structural, thus allowing central banks to slowly tighten policy and not derail a robust economic recovery.

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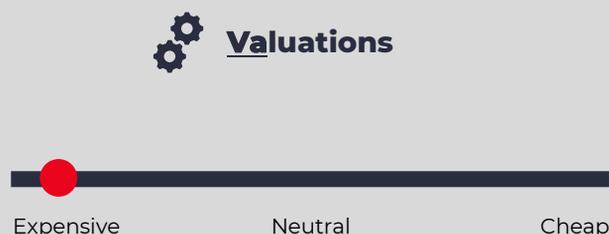
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- **Valuations:** Valuations for equities – the largest source of risk and return in most strategies – remain challenging in absolute terms. However, with global interest rates only expected to rise moderately in 2022, staying at historically low levels, the case for higher tolerance to valuations remains (i.e. the discount rate of future cash flows remains moderate).
- **Momentum:** Global equities are in positive momentum on the ten-month moving average metric that we favour. This is supportive of increasing exposure to the asset class.
- **Sentiment:** Of the indicators we follow, some, such as global equity fund flows, imply increased bullishness. Others, such as trade-weighted US Dollar, imply increased bearishness. Sentiment remains volatile and we continue to monitor it closely.

As ever, we are constantly monitoring markets. Should conditions change, particularly with the economic regime, or signals from our valuation, momentum or sentiment framework, we will adjust our asset allocation accordingly.

PROCESS AND CONVICTIONS

Our **VaMoS™ framework** puts our investment philosophy into practice



We are **moderately risk-on** and have a **bias towards equities**, which is well supported by a **strengthening economic backdrop** and **strong price momentum**.



We favour **regions that are likely to benefit from a cyclical recovery**. Equity exposure is tilted towards the **Eurozone, Japan and the UK**.



Environmentally-linked policymaking, legislation and consumer behaviour are irreversible. We favour companies that are contributing positively to these themes.



Expensive valuations give us some cause for concern. As such, we hold a **stable of diversifiers (cash, government bonds, gold, hedge funds and a Tail Risk Protection Note)** in order to help offset downside risk and keep dry powder for a favourable opportunity.

OUR ASSET ALLOCATION

The table below presents the latest conclusions of the Kleinwort Hambros Investment Committee:

		Summary house views					
		Strong UW	UW	N	OW	Strong OW	Change since last KHIC
EQUITY	GLOBAL EQUITY				OW		
	United States		OW				+
	Eurozone				OW		
	United Kingdom				OW		
	Japan				OW		-
	Emerging			OW			
FIXED INCOME	SOVEREIGN						
	GLOBAL RATES		OW				
	U.S. Treasuries		OW				
	German Bunds		OW				
	UK Gilts		OW				
	EM Government Bonds (\$)	OW					
	CORPORATE						
	Duration USD*				OW		
	Duration EUR*				OW		
	Duration GBP*				OW		
FOREX	EURUSD			OW			
	USDJPY				OW		
	GBPUSD			OW			
	EM FX (vs. USD)			OW			
ALTERNATIVE	COMMODITIES				OW		
	Brent		OW				
	Gold				OW		
	ALT. STRATEGIES			OW			
	L/S Equity				OW		
	Event-Driven				OW		
	FI Arbitrage		OW				
Global Macro		OW					
CTAs				OW			

Source: Kleinwort Hambros 7-January-2022

*Duration: underweight/short = Up to 5 years, neutral/medium = 5-7 years, overweight/long = 7+ years. HY = High Yield bonds (higher return but greater risks), IG = Investment Grade bonds (higher quality but lower return)

FIXED INCOME

Taking Away the Punch Bowl



The US Federal Reserve (Fed) displayed their most hawkish signals yet amidst continuing signs of an economy overheating. We expect price pressures to ease throughout 2022, allowing central banks to take a gradual approach to normalising policy, though we remain Underweight on Government Bonds and Credit.

Sovereigns

US. The minutes of Fed December meeting, released in early January, contained sufficiently hawkish narrative to pull even the most comfortable investors from their Christmas lull. Following December's acknowledgement that inflation might not be as transitory as first thought, the document outlined additional details on the upcoming path of monetary tightening, highlighting not only an increased pace of tapering – and setting the stage for rate hikes as early as March – but also the plan to actively sell down existing assets from its \$9tr balance sheet. Markets promptly reacted by pushing yields on 10Y Treasuries to 1.77% from 1.51% - the highest reading since January 2020. We expect inflation to ease throughout 2022, taking some pressure of the Fed and enabling them to stick to a gradual approach. Nonetheless, rates are expected to rise and we are Underweight.

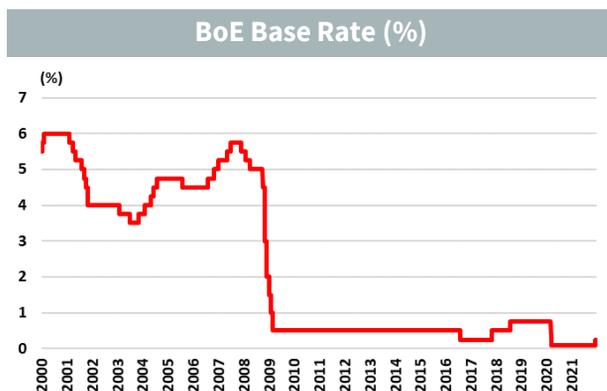
UK. In a surprising act following a period of inconsistent narrative, the Bank of England (BoE) was the first major central bank to vote in favour of a rate hike in December, increasing its main interest rate to 0.25% from 0.1% but keeping in place its current bond-buying programme. The committee faced a tough choice between reclaiming their credibility amidst rising inflation pressures of up to 5.1% and, on the other hand, renewed uncertainty from the Omicron variant. As with the US, inflationary pressures should ease as workers return to the workforce throughout 2022 and we expect the BoE to continue rate hikes on a gradual path. We are Underweight.

Eurozone. In the Eurozone, price pressures are mainly due to external factors and the threat is more of weaker economic activity than of lastingly higher inflation. The European Central Bank (ECB) will thus keep monetary policy accommodative in the short term and we are Underweight.

Credit

Developed markets. Spreads on investment grade credit have narrowed again as uncertainty around Omicron gradually waned throughout December into January. This was however not sufficient to offset the negative impact of rising sovereign bond yields (bond prices move inversely to yields), and indices have lost 2.5% from their intermittent highs before Christmas. We are Underweight.

Emerging markets. Despite the waves the Evergrande situation has produced over the past few months, EM debt held up throughout 2021 as overall default rates remained modest and demand recovered – EM corporate issuance rose 5% from its previous peak in 2020. Nonetheless, spreads do not sufficiently compensate for inherent risks in our view. We are Underweight.



Sources: KH, Bloomberg, 07/01/2022

Past performance should not be seen as an indication of future performance. Investments may be subject to market fluctuations, and the price and value of investments and the income derived from them can go down as well as up. Your capital may be at risk and you may not get back the amount you invest.



Uncertainty around the implications of Omicron and the emergence of central banker hawkishness have rattled markets in December and early January. We remain Overweight Equities as we expect inflationary pressures to ease and investors to digest the accelerated pace of monetary tightening in light of strong economic fundamentals.

United States. US equities outperformed in 2021 in virtually all sectors, against a backdrop of surging company profits, strong nominal growth and negative real interest rates. In 2022, we expect: i) the economy to continue to post dynamic growth on the back of strong consumer demand; ii) the Fed to begin its rate-tightening cycle but real rates to remain negative; and iii) companies to enjoy healthy balance sheets and continue to grow earnings. In such a climate, equity markets should continue their bullish trend. We have added to our exposure in the region but remain marginally Underweight for the time being.

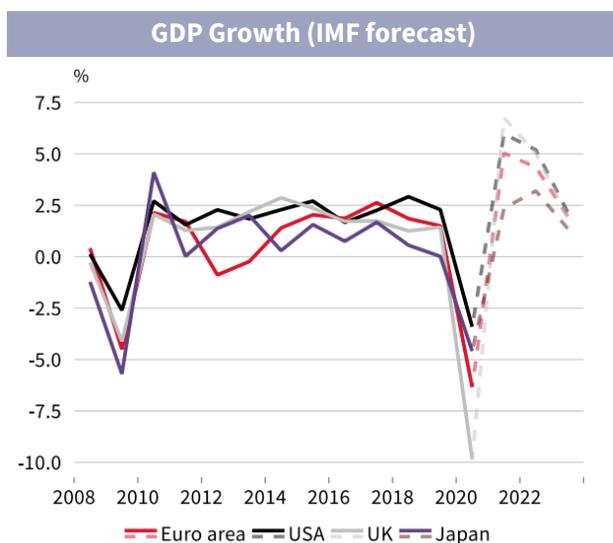
United Kingdom. Initial uncertainties in the wake of the emergence of the Omicron variant dissipated quickly in December as the government ruled out restrictions beyond those already in place, and the cyclical nature of the UK's flagship equity index FTSE100 resulted in a strong "Santa Rally", propelling it to its strongest one-year return since 2016: +14.3%. The UK remains an attractively valued market, trading on a near 10% P/E discount to its 10-year average and paying a dividend yield of over 4%. We are Overweight.

Eurozone. European shares have done well in 2021 as the economy bounced back, rates stayed negative, and companies were able to post growing profits. In 2022, we expect the economy to continue its healthy growth as the post-COVID rebound continues and governments still deliver fiscal support. Monetary conditions should also remain favourable, with negative real rates, for the time being. Given these bullish factors European shares look cheap in our view, particularly compared to the other side of the Atlantic. We are Overweight.

Japan. Japanese equity markets fought an uphill battle in 2021, facing an initial mis-management of the pandemic under then prime minister Yoshihide Suga, an unexpected leadership election, and hosting the Olympics despite fierce opposition. The region remains attractively valued and well-positioned for cyclical recovery, however ongoing Covid restrictions and political inefficiencies continue to leave the prospects for its equity market cloudy. We have reduced our exposure but remain marginally Overweight for the time being.

Emerging markets. China's slowdown is likely to hamper growth across much of the emerging world. However, the medium-term growth case for most EM countries remains robust: valuations are attractive; sentiment is oversold; and earnings growth is higher than in developed markets. We recognise there is volatility, but also see opportunity. We are Neutral.

Global Opportunities. Environmentally-focused equities have huge impetus behind them, and we have taken a meaningful position in most strategies. We aim to capture the upside in irreversible trends in environmentally linked policymaking, legislation and consumer behaviour. As a result, we have invested in companies at the forefront of natural resource efficiency (e.g. renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable agriculture and forestry) and the protection of ecological integrity (e.g. water support and technologies, waste management and recycling, as well as pollution control).



Sources: SGPB, Macrobond, IMF, 11/2021

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CURRENCIES

Rates Moving On Up



The market is pricing in rate hikes, especially in the US. The stock market remains upbeat after a very strong December and Sterling is performing well with the economy remaining open, despite the threat of a lockdown over the holiday season.

Dollar index (DXY). US 10-year yields have spiked in recent days as investors prepare for the first Federal Reserve interest rate hike since before the pandemic took hold. The Dollar Index finished 2021 on a strong footing, with the markets bringing forward the expectation of a first rate hike to March this year. Overall, we expect to see dollar gains in the first half of this year. Central banks will also start unwinding the extraordinary policy responses that have been in place to protect economies throughout the pandemic. The Federal Reserve will be in the limelight, with 3-4 hikes predicted for this year. We are not out of the woods yet though and there could be many more twists and turns in the road ahead and the prospect of higher rates could induce increased volatility in the coming months.

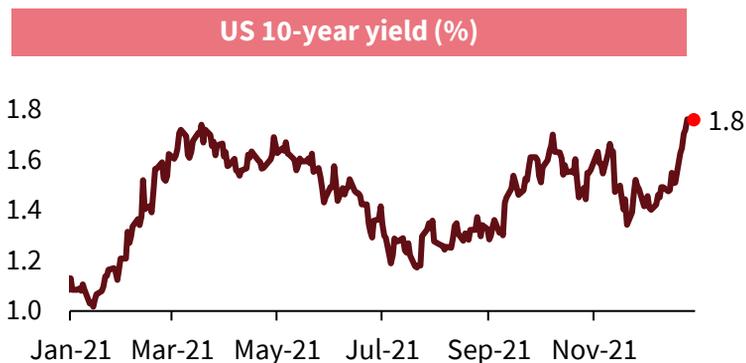
GBP/USD. Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) trade data suggested that the FX market was long dollars and short sterling last week, however looking at the way GBP/USD has been trading it is difficult to read too much into this. In fact, sterling is trading at the highest level since the start of November - this is largely due to the consensus view that rates will continue to rise this year. The UK clearly faces major challenges, with an increasing number of people off work due to the virus and Brexit headwinds. However, at the same time restrictions remains light. In terms of levels, 1.3600 could be breached in the near term, however we are sticking with our 1.3500 view for the 2nd quarter of this year.

EUR/USD. The common currency has been trundling along between 1.1200 and 1.1400 over the past couple of months. The European economy continues to recover with domestic demand now at pre-crisis levels. Furthermore, inflationary pressures are really starting to bite with prices soaring 4.9% in November. This reading will likely rattle the European Central Bank (ECB) but the market isn't pricing in a hike until October. Key technical resistance comes in at 1.1400, and unless this level is reached, we expect moves to be contained.

EUR/GBP. This currency pair fell 6.5% in 2021 which, considering the post-Brexit headwinds, this was somewhat surprising. EUR/GBP is currently in a downtrend, and the 0.8300 level (GBP/EUR 1.2048) is the next target for the cross. The market consensus for the first half of this year is 0.8400 (GBP/EUR 1.1905), which comes in lower than our forecast of 0.8613 (GBP/EUR 1.1610)

USD/JPY. The Yen sold off against the USD in December as risk-on sentiment took hold in equity markets. We would anticipate the march higher in USD/JPY to continue, especially if the 116.00 level is broken above in the coming trading sessions. This cross is particularly sensitive to potential increases in interest rates.

Emerging Market FX against USD. The dollar is king as EM sells off on US rate hopes. The Chinese Renminbi is holding up the best versus the greenback. Elsewhere, the Russian Rubles held its own at the end of last year, being bolstered by rising oil prices. The Turkish Lira on the other hand remains deeply unstable and is the worst-performing EM currency to start off the year. It is unlikely that we see an EM exodus, but we would urge caution ahead.



Sources: SGPB, Macrobond, 11/01/2022

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ALTERNATIVES

Diversification is still key



We remain Overweight on gold due to its safe-haven properties in the event of a market downturn. Hedge funds offer another protection against turbulence. Elsewhere, pressure on commodities should ease back to normal in 2022. Our Tail Risk Protection Note performed well over the recent market volatility spike.

Commodities

Oil. The initial growth scare due to the Omicron variant in November saw a drop in WTI Oil from \$84 a barrel to \$66, a -21.5% fall. Despite this, December appeared to be a strong month for the oil market, ending the year at \$76. The expectations are that demand will continue to expand as the pandemic evolves, therefore tightening the market. Supply in Libya and Kazakhstan has also been halted amidst political turmoil. The picture in China continues to look complex and it's zero-covid stance has meant another city (Anyang) with a population of 5 million has been placed under lockdown. If these lockdowns continue - especially given how rapid Omicron is spreading - this could hamper oil demand given China is a net importer.

Gold. The Federal Reserve latest minutes suggest that the Fed is prepared to raise rates earlier and faster than expected, initially prompting a gold sell-off. However, a declining dollar and a lower-than-expected US job gains number had the opposite effect. Gold rose by 3.1% throughout December and continues to trade close to its 10-month moving average, ending the year in positive momentum. We continue to hold gold as valuations remain high for equities and real yields are well into negative territory. Furthermore, we believe it provides important safety and diversification in multi-asset portfolios, especially in the event of a sell-off in risk assets.

Hedge Funds. In unstable market conditions hedge funds can help a portfolio, but selectivity is key. We prefer strategies which hold their own in bear markets, such as Merger Arbitrage, trend followers and Equity long/short. These strategies provide relatively safe, uncorrelated sources of returns from equities, our most significant allocation across balanced and growth multi-asset strategies and provided positive contributions to returns – and lowered risk – especially during periods of volatility.

Income Producing. In Target Return strategies, we continue to hold attractive sources of income across a broad range of alternative asset classes; specialist real estate (medical centres and student accommodation), infrastructure (social, digital) and specialist lending (property, pharmaceutical royalties, economic infrastructure).

Tail Risk Protection Note. Tail risks are typically understood as unlikely but severe crisis events which shock markets and dramatically impact the value of risk assets negatively. The dot-com bust at the turn of the century and the Great Financial Crisis in 2008 and 2009 are examples of such events.

It is important to note that we do not have a heightened sense of any tail risks materialising. Nonetheless, we are cognisant that current valuations for most assets are high, and this exacerbates the potential drawdowns in the event of a risk event. We believe the Tail Risk Protection Note offers our portfolios yet another critical source of safety and complements the existing diversifiers. During the recent market volatility after the initial Omicron growth scare, our Tail Risk Protection Note performed well.

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Oil bounces off November to start the year strong



Sources: Bloomberg, 7 January 2022

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- The terms and conditions applicable to redemption may continue to expose you to risk during the period between the redemption request and execution (usually prior notice of 45 calendar days before the last business day of the end of each quarter is required but can be longer for some investments).

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Channel Islands

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Please note the Channel Islands are not part of the UK and when you conduct business with SG Kleinwort Hambros Bank (CI) Limited you will not be eligible for: (a) the protections provided under the UK’s Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 other than protections relating specifically to UK regulated mortgage business; or (b) referring complaints to the UK’s Financial Ombudsman Service. However SG Kleinwort Hambros Bank (CI) Limited’s UK regulated mortgage business is covered under the UK’s Financial Services Compensation Scheme (“FSCS”). You may be entitled to compensation from the FSCS if SG Kleinwort Hambros Bank (CI) Limited cannot meet its obligations in relation to UK regulated mortgage business. This depends on the circumstances of the claim. For further information about the FSCS (including the amounts covered and eligibility to claim) please contact your Private Banker or refer to the FSCS website: www.fscs.org.uk.

Gibraltar

SG Kleinwort Hambros Bank (Gibraltar) Limited is a participant in the Gibraltar Deposit Guarantee Scheme (the “Deposit Scheme”). Most deposits denominated in currencies of the European Economic Area and Euros are covered. Further details of the Deposit Scheme are available on request or can be found at www.gdgb.gi. The Deposit Scheme does not apply to fiduciary deposits.

SG Kleinwort Hambros Bank (Gibraltar) Limited is a participant in the Gibraltar Investor Compensation Scheme (the “Investor Scheme”). [Payments under the Investor Scheme are limited to 90% of a client’s total eligible investments which qualify for compensation subject to a maximum payment to any one client of €20,000 (or the sterling equivalent).] [Note: include the limit wording if the document is not a Financial Promotion (limits not required for Financial Promotions/Advertisements).] You may be entitled to compensation from the Investment Scheme if we cannot meet our obligations. Further details of the Investor Scheme are available on request or can be found at www.gics.gi. If you would not normally be classified as a retail client you may not be eligible for this scheme.

General

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Further information on the Kleinwort Hambros Group including additional legal and regulatory details can be found at: www.kleinworthambros.com

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