

Portfolio Manager Commentary - September 30, 2022

Global Markets Review

After a relief rally from mid-July to mid-August, global equity markets gave up all gains and finished the third quarter with negative returns. Both equity and bond markets continued to suffer from decade-high inflation and central banks' aggressive monetary tightening. Volatility remained high across all major asset classes, while the recessionary risk has been rising as well. For the three-month period ended September 30, 2022, the MSCI World Index fell by 6.1%. Consumer Discretionary was the only sector that registered positive returns (+0.3%), while Communication Services was the bottom-performing sector (-12.9%). In North America, the S&P 500 dropped by 4.9% with Consumer Discretionary also the best-performing sector. The S&P/TSX Composite lost 1.4%, boosted by Industrials. In Europe, the STOXX 600 was down 4.2% for the third quarter of this year. Major European indices also registered negative returns. Italy's FTSE MIB was the best-performing index (-2.5%). France CAC 40 and the U.K. FTSE 100 were down by 2.5% and 2.8%, respectively. Switzerland, Germany, and Spain lost 4.3%, 5.2%, and 8.3%, respectively.

Inflation has remained stubbornly high, which continues to challenge global economic growth. Energy prices have come down from the peak. Meanwhile, global supply chain disruptions continued easing. However, ripples from geopolitical tensions between Russia and Ukraine still linger. While a variety of key economic measures remained sound during the third quarter, deterioration in other data suggested an economic slowdown. August CPI pointed at 8.3%, a further deceleration from the peak in June, but this elevated inflation level would be unlikely to slow the pace of further aggressive monetary tightening. Rising inflation is eroding real wage growth, while unemployment rates continue to see sequential decline to pre-pandemic lows. Manufacturing PMI entered September at 50.9, which has largely trended down since its peak in March 2021. Bond market also sold off during the quarter. The U.S. Treasury market kept rising sharply in response to the inflation overshoot and monetary tightening, while the 2-year and 10-year Treasury spread remained in below-zero territory during the quarter. During the last few days of September, the newly formed U.K. government announced a fiscal package including a tax cut program that raised concerns of adding inflationary pressure to the economy. As a result, the budgetary announcement accelerated the market sell-off, sending GBP to an all-time low versus USD and the gilt yields surged accordingly. With most equity markets falling in Q3, Consumer Discretionary and Consumer Staples showed relative resilience thanks to strong consumer spending and still-low unemployment. Meanwhile, Energy stocks were boosted by solid Q2 results and strength in natural gas prices but were offset by weak oil prices during the quarter. Rate-sensitive sectors such as Real Estate generally underperformed amid the high interest rate environment.

Central banks in developed economies continued to deliver more hawkish stances of their monetary policy to combat inflationary risks. This quarter witnessed two consecutive 75-basis-point interest rate hikes—at the July and September Federal Open Market Committee ("FOMC") meetings—to the 3.00%-3.25% range. As the Fed reaffirmed its commitment to fighting inflation, the Fed funds futures market is pricing in another 140 basis points of tightening by year-end. This includes another two possible 0.75% hikes at both November and December meetings. Along with rate increases, the Committee also confirmed the full speed of balance sheet reduction at a pace of \$95 billion a month starting from September.

The Bank of Canada (BoC) delivered even more aggressive policy stances to tame inflation by raising its policy rate by 100 at the July meeting and 75 basis points at the September meeting. This sent Canada's overnight policy rate to 3.25%, bringing the cumulative hikes so far this year to 300 basis points, the fastest tightening pace since the mid-1990s. The statement communicated that "the policy rate will need to rise further". Higher interest rates will test Canadian households' ability to service their debts, as the housing market extended its cooldown during the third quarter.

The European Central Bank (ECB) started raising its benchmark interest rate during the quarter: 50 basis points in July, followed by 75 basis points in September. With the current benchmark interest rate at 1.25%, the ECB President Lagarde signaled that policy rates remain far below levels that ensure the return of 2% inflation. Given a deteriorating inflation picture in Europe, including rising wage growth and hefty energy prices, further rate hikes over the next several meetings should be expected to slow demand and curtail persistent inflationary pressure. Meanwhile, the Bank of England (BoE) voted to lift the policy rate by two consecutive 50 basis points hikes in August and September to 2.25%. However, the newly announced fiscal measure including a large amount of tax cuts drew global criticism, leading to a historic U.K. gilt and British pound sell-off. The BoE was forced to postpone the planned commencement of its gilt selling and begin temporary purchases of long-dated bonds in order to calm the market turbulence. Rating

agencies Fitch and Standard & Poor's downgraded the outlook for the country's credit rating to reflect their lower confidence in the U.K. financial market and the policy framework.

Visibility on inflation outlook is low. Some evidence suggests that components of CPI have shown signs of decline in the U.S. at the end of Q3. Food, housing, and transportation account for the largest portion of the recent CPI spike. Lower oil prices during the three-month period have pulled transportation costs lower. Falling grain prices from the peak should also bode well for a cooldown in food CPI component. However, Shelter inflation could remain higher and longer, as rent increases have been accelerating, especially on existing leases. In Europe, energy costs continued to be the top contributor to inflation. Nord Stream 1, whose gas supply capacity accounts for over 10% of European demand and over 50% of Germany's demand, was shut down for maintenance in July. It came onstream temporarily before Russia closed it again after several leaks were found. This put further pressure on the power generator. Countries such as Spain and Portugal were forced to cut VAT rate on electricity bills to tackle soaring energy prices. In short, inflationary pressure and associated geopolitical tensions are more problematic in Europe than North America.

Looking forward to the rest of 2022, the global economic slowdown should persist, and broad markets should continue to experience high volatility until a less-aggressive Fed pivot occurs. There are early signs of peak inflation, but this is not sufficient to stop global monetary tightening. Rising inflation has weighed on corporate margins and earnings growth. With still-high inflation, aggressive monetary tightening, and unresolved geopolitical tensions, we expect a further multiple compression across all sectors after the Q3 earnings season, but valuations of some companies are at levels that are historically attractive. Therefore, in response to the ongoing market turbulence, we are positioning our portfolios tilted towards more defensive names. We continue to favor high quality companies that demonstrate low sensitivity to rate hike cycle, sustainable earnings growth, and reasonable valuations. Regarding country exposure, we still favor U.S. and Canada over Europe, with mounting risks for European households and business tied to more severe inflationary pressure and geopolitical tensions. To take advantage of market volatility and cushion against further market decline, we have also increased our call options overwrite levels.

Portfolio Review

Brompton North American Low Volatility Dividend ETF (the "Fund") focuses on lowering total portfolio volatility through investing in a diversified blend of North American equities with a minimum market cap of \$5 billion. During the third quarter of 2022, the Fund was down 5.0% versus the benchmark (MSCI Minimum Volatility USA) which was down 5.4%.

In the third quarter of 2022, the Low Volatility factor continued its relative outperformance versus the market, a trend that began in the middle of the first quarter of 2021 when high beta stocks began to falter. With skew rising on the S&P 500 along with increasing interest rate volatility, we believe the Low Volatility factor will continue to outperform as excessive risk taking by investors makes low volatility equities underpriced, and this bodes well for long-term risk-adjusted returns. We note that the low volatility factor has generated a positive premium in every decade since 1929, with a higher level of statistical significance than the other factors¹.

For the 3-month period, the Fund was overweight Utilities, which outperformed relative to the benchmark, despite negative absolute return. NextEra Energy (+1.7%) was the best-performing stock within the sector, as well as the Fund. Overweight position in Materials and Communication Services also contributed to the Fund's outperformance relative to the benchmark. The Fund was underweight Consumer Discretionary and Information Technology, both of which outperformed relative to the benchmark. Consumer Staples remained as the Fund's largest weighting but underperformed the benchmark during the quarter.

The Fund was underweight healthcare, which underperformed relative to the benchmark. The Fund continued to have no exposure to Financials and Real Estate sectors, both of which registered negative returns during the quarter and therefore the underweight positions resulted in positive performance relative to the benchmark. No exposure to Energy resulted in the underperformance relative to the benchmark, as the sector rallied during the 3-month period. Meanwhile, no exposure to Industrials led to slight underperformance relative to the benchmark.

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Annual Compound Returns ²	YTD	1-YR	Since Inception ³
Brompton North American Low Volatility Dividend ETF	(13.6%)	(2.9%)	(6.8%)

⁽¹⁾ Blitz, David and van Vliet, Pim and Baltussen, Guido, *The Volatility Effect Revisited* (August 26, 2019).

⁽²⁾ Returns are for the periods ended September 30, 2022 and are unaudited. The table shows the ETF's compound returns for each period indicated. Past performance does not necessarily indicate how the ETF will perform in the future. The information shown is based on Net Asset Value per unit and assumes that distributions made by the ETF on its units in the period shown were reinvested at Net Asset Value per unit in additional units of the ETF.

⁽³⁾ Inception date April 30, 2020.

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