

United States Economic Outlook

Fourth Quarter 2014

U.S. Unit

- Global growth has moderated in the second half of 2014, with downward revisions to many major economies amidst a sea of ongoing geopolitical threats
- Low inflation continues to overshadow stronger job growth, leaving the Fed with a less certain read on the stability of economic activity
- Risks to U.S. growth are tilted to the upside for the short-term but more balanced thereafter as monetary policy uncertainties linger in 2015

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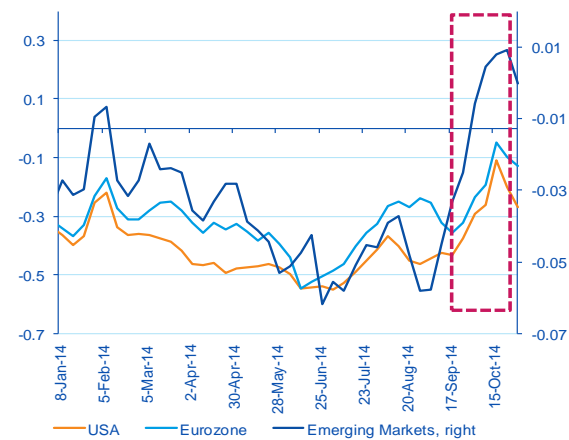
1 Global Outlook

Slow Global Recovery with Downside Risks in Europe

Global economic growth has continued in 3Q14, though the recovery remains vulnerable. The ongoing economic cycle is still compatible with an improvement in GDP growth in the coming quarters, although at a slower rate than we were forecasting three months ago. According to our calculations, global GDP will expand by 3.2% in 2014, the same as in 2013, and by 3.7% in 2015. These estimates are 0.2pp lower than our previous forecasts and are subject to downside risk. The global scenario is still processing the withdrawal of - extraordinary and sustained - monetary stimulus in the U.S., at the same time as geopolitical risks are multiplying. In addition, China is faced with the challenge of managing the slowdown in its economy, while at the same time reducing its financial vulnerabilities and rebalancing growth towards domestic demand. Finally, the Euro area is still facing downside risks to growth and inflation.

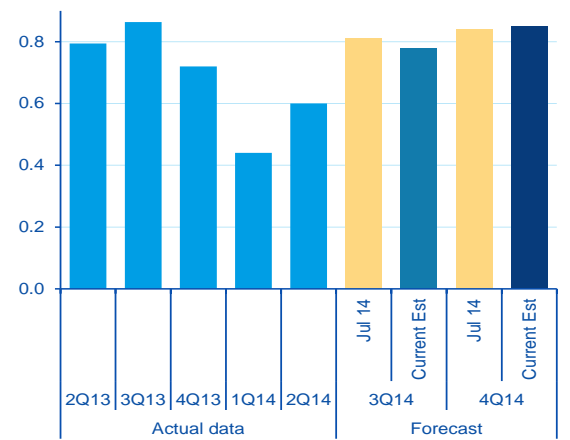
In this context, monetary policy will remain focused on supporting activity, while fiscal policy will be less restrictive in tone through 2014 and 2015 in both the U.S. and the Eurozone than in the recent past. Even in China, additional measures to support growth could be implemented if necessary by the central government. In the case of the more developed economies, the tone of fiscal policy is the result of both discretionary decisions taken by authorities (in some cases in Europe preoccupied by the short-term effects on growth of the rapid and intense fiscal consolidations) and by the room for manoeuvre given to sovereigns by the more favourable funding conditions. The latter is a direct consequence of central bank support, with their policies of anchoring expectations of interest rates and the provision of liquidity to the system that has allowed the above-mentioned discretionary decisions to be taken by the authorities in countries with increasing primary public deficits and levels of indebtedness.

Figure 1
BBVA Research Financial Tensions Index



Source: BBVA Research

Figure 2
Global GDP, quarterly growth, % QoQ
Forecasts based on BBVA GAIN



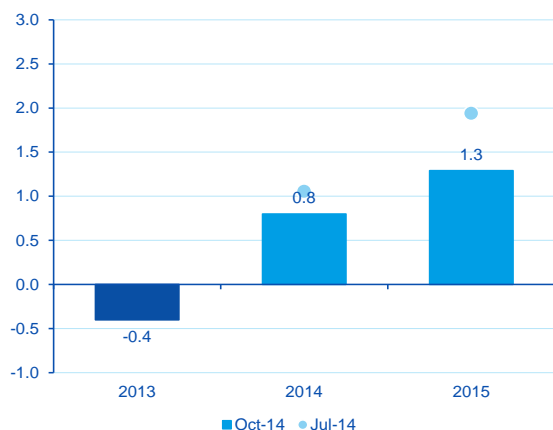
Source: BBVA Research

The Eurozone recovery will be even slower than we previously expected. The stagnation of GDP growth in 2Q14, with weaker performances in general in the larger economies, has led us to revise down our outlook for growth in the region for 2014 and 2015. The Ukraine/Russia crisis is having an impact on trade and the confidence indicators of the more exposed economies in the centre of Europe, which in the case of Germany is feeding through into negative surprises in investment. In Europe as a whole, this reduced confidence is coinciding with weak activity prints and the limited ability of the authorities in the region to take steps to tackle this deterioration of expectations for low growth and inflation. The lack of agreement between the national authorities as to the causes of the problems, and thus the differences about the most appropriate measures to implement, together with an increasingly domestic rather than European bias to the decisions, is continuing to hamper governance of the region. What the Euro area needs is a combination of deeper reforms, the continuation of monetary and liquidity stimulus and, finally, a fiscal policy with rules that allows some room to manoeuvre in support of growth.

The ECB has continued to take action, going ahead with the first TLTRO auction, with rather disappointing results, and setting in motion its purchase programme for assets in the hands of the banking system backed by credit. All the measures – those already implemented, those announced and those that will probably eventually be announced (secondary-market sovereign bond purchases) – are designed to bring inflation expectations more closely into line with the objective of price stability, which have been de-anchoring since 2H12. In our most likely scenario, Euro depreciation has to make a contribution, given the different expectations of Fed and ECB actions. For the former we are expecting a gradual withdrawal of stimulus, but for the latter we are expecting the opposite – balance-sheet expansion.

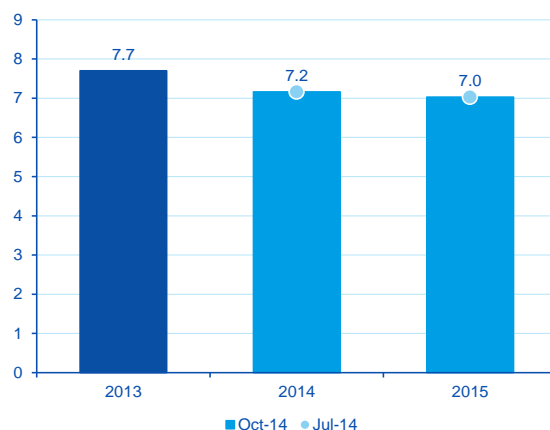
An additional positive element for the conditions of growth in the Euro area is the recent announcement of the asset quality review and balance-sheet stress test results carried out for the banking sector. This process has given the market more and more homogenous information on the European banking sector and implies the implementation of common banking supervision in the Eurozone. All of this is a necessary condition for allowing the flow of bank credit to meet solvent demand.

Figure 3
Eurozone: GDP growth (% YoY)



Source: BBVA Research

Figure 4
China: GDP growth (% YoY)



Source: BBVA Research

When it comes to China, our growth outlook is unchanged but with a downward bias due to the external environment and the possibility of economic policy support. In 3Q14, GDP growth continued to decelerate to 7.3%, reflecting the moderation in domestic activity (particularly in the construction and real estate sectors) but partially offset by an unexpected and intense upturn in exports. We maintain our outlook for GDP growth at 7.2% in 2014, although we do not rule out that the final print could be a few basis points higher. Altogether, the risks to growth in China continue to be to the downside from 2015 onwards, precisely because of the brake on external demand that the situation in Europe might imply, the adjustment underway in the real estate sector in a context of high leverage, and the introduction of measures to control the less-regulated banking system.

China is facing the task of managing the present deceleration of economic growth while reducing its financial risks and rebalancing growth in favour of domestic demand. In this scenario, the authorities will remain disposed to intervene so that the deceleration does not intensify more than is desirable, and growth does not fall below the set targets. Thus we would not be surprised to see additional monetary policy easing (with cuts in the reserve ratio or liquidity injections), expansive central government fiscal policy (albeit with consolidation at the local government level), and ongoing execution of structural reforms.

From the U.S. perspective, U.S. growth remains in line with our expectations and is expected to reach 2.5% in 2015. After the unexpected and transitory drop in activity in 1Q14, spending and employment indicators have recovered to the extent that the pace of GDP growth could well be above 2.5% in the second half of the year, and thus average 2.0% for 2014 as a whole. In fact, in the light of the first estimation of 3Q14 GDP growth, this forecast has an upward bias of around 0.2 pp. However, the role of the Fed, which emphasizes caution and patience before acting on the signs of improvement in the economy, continues to support our scenario of a cyclical recovery in the U.S. underpinned by the solid creation of employment and the increase in household wealth. The Fed's scope for manoeuvre is favoured by the lack of inflationary tensions in a context of a stronger dollar and lower oil prices, together with moderate wage increases.

The fall in oil prices has been a hot topic as of late and remains a favourable factor for global growth expectations to the extent that this results in a positive supply shock, above all for the sustained increase in unconventional oil production (the recent fall in oil prices reflects not only the increased supply, but also USD appreciation and a moderation in expectations of demand, in both DMs and EMs). The diminished transfer of income from importers to producers gives more scope for the former to attend to their spending, saving, and investment decisions, which is a much more positive situation for the economic scenario. All increases in productive capacity of a limited resource and in demand growth, even for more efficient use, help to put a brake on prices that in real terms are at similar levels to that seen during the oil crisis at the end of the 1970s. These income transfers to consumer countries have their flip side in the producer countries of oil and, in general, raw materials, where prices are also falling due to the moderation of demand from Asia. These countries are posting decelerating activity and downward adjustments to perspectives for growth in 2015, which is doubtless affecting some South American economies where we are seeing a delay in expected productive investments.

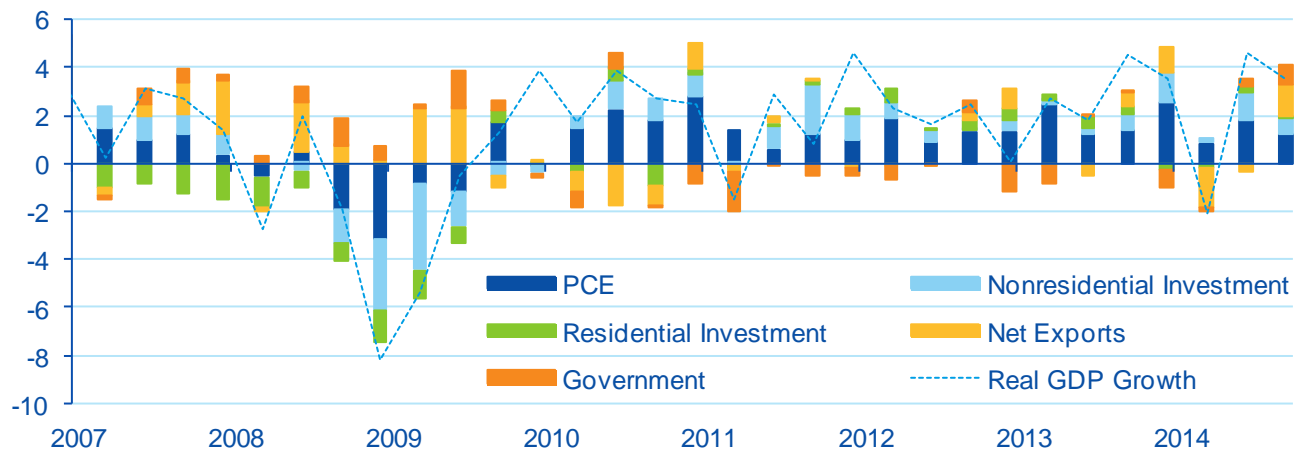
(Note: for a more in-depth analysis of Europe and the emerging markets, see our latest [Global Outlook](#)).

2 U.S. Outlook

Low Inflation & Strong Job Growth Shape U.S. Recovery

Economic activity in the U.S. appears to be moving along at a steady pace, at least on the surface. GDP growth has come in stronger-than-expected for two consecutive quarters, job growth has held above 200K per month since February, the unemployment rate has dropped below 6.0%, and personal consumption is being fueled by a boost to consumers' purchasing power. However, other details reflect a still-vulnerable recovery: downward pressure on long-term Treasury yields due to an ongoing "flight to safety" strategy, slow global demand and an appreciating U.S. dollar limiting exports, and the ongoing uncertainty regarding monetary policy accommodation in the year ahead. Most of these concerns are more relevant for the outlook in 2015 and beyond. As such, risks to growth are slightly biased to the upside for this year but become more balanced thereafter.

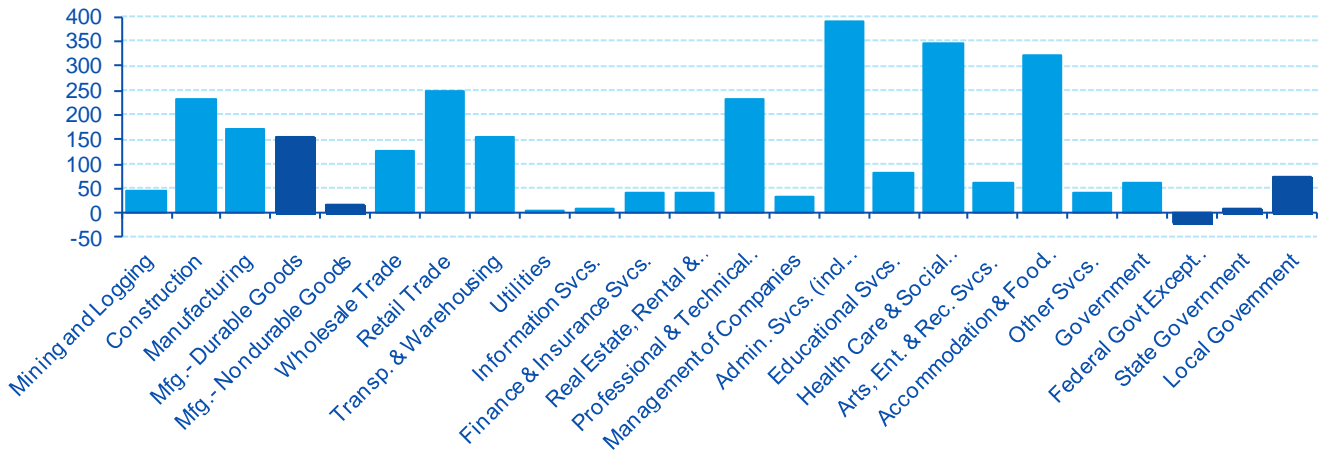
Figure 5
Real GDP Growth & Contributions (QoQ SAAR % Change & Percentage Points)



Source: BEA & BBVA Research

The advance report for real GDP growth in 3Q14 came in stronger than expected, up 3.5% QoQ SAAR. However, much of this was driven by an astounding 16.0% jump in national defense spending, the largest gain since 2Q09. Despite the favorable headline figure, this reflects more of a one-off event rather than a steady continuation of the momentum gained in 2Q14. As expected, we did see some adjustment in various GDP components following 2Q14's significant rebound. Not surprisingly, residential investment decelerated significantly but remained positive at 1.8% growth. Nonresidential investment slowed slightly, with a bigger push coming from equipment rather than structures this time around. Imports declined for the first time since 1Q13 but export growth remained strong at 7.8%. Personal consumption did not hold up as much as we had expected, slowing to 1.8% in 3Q14. Overall, this initial estimate for 3Q14 GDP puts upward bias on our annual growth forecast for 2014. However, the underlying details support our outlook for gradual yet ongoing improvement in economic activity. Without the big push from defense spending, growth would have been much closer to our projection of 2.5% for the quarter. For 4Q14, we expect that growth will slow down from the rates seen in 2Q and 3Q, though there is more uncertainty given that this will mark the first quarter without any additional stimulus from the Fed.

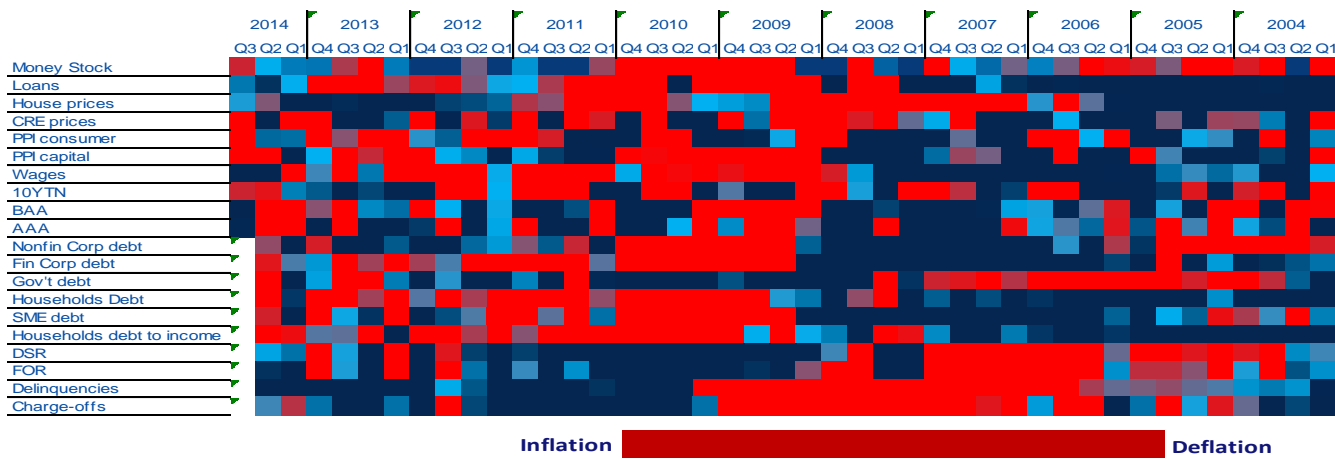
Figure 6
12-Month Nonfarm Payrolls Growth (SA, Thousands)



Source: BLS & BBVA Research

Inflation remains a hot topic in the U.S., particularly as it relates to monetary policy, and the latest trends have been influenced by both domestic and international factors. Demand in the U.S. has picked up faster than that abroad, and the appreciation of the U.S. dollar has kept import prices down for domestic producers and consumers. In Europe and China, waning demand is also working to keep prices down on the global scale. Of course, oil prices remain at the forefront of the latest discussion on low inflation (as discussed below). Overall, deflationary risks are stemming mostly from commodity and producer-related prices, as housing and various financial asset prices remain elevated. Consequently, our outlook for inflation remains very subdued, with both headline and core averaging close to 1.9% in 2014, accelerating only slightly in 2015 and remaining at or below the Fed's target well into 2016.

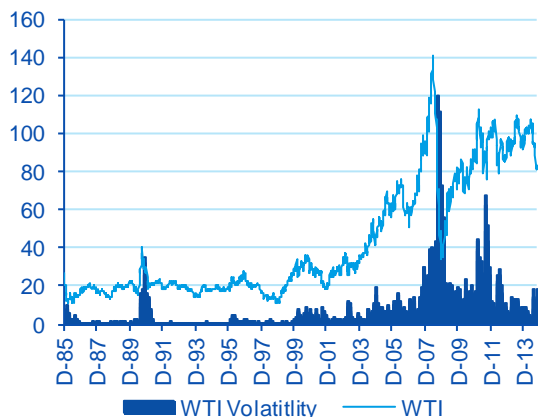
Figure 7
Inflation Heat Map



Source: BLS & BBVA Research

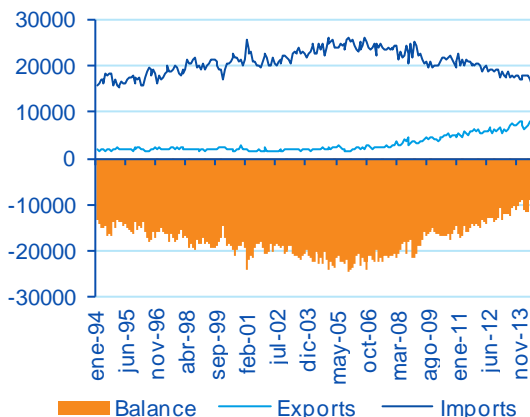
To a great extent, the oil price drop reflects an adjustment in market expectations of long-run demand, global production levels, and growth in Europe and China without a subsequent adjustment in supply. In fact, on October 14, the International Energy Agency (I.E.A.) revised down its 2014 and 2015 expectations for crude oil demand based on slower economic growth assumptions, and a downshift in demand for petroleum products in major OECD countries. For Europe, low inflation and a declaration in activity also suggest lower demand (all else equal). In China, lower-than-anticipated growth and downward revisions to long-run expectations also add to the downside bias for demand. In the absence of a turnaround in global economic conditions, an adjustment in supply or a spike in geopolitical risks, there are fewer upside risks for oil prices. From a structural perspective, technological change, shifts in industry composition, greater reliance on renewable energy, and changes in behavior further restrain upside risks.

Figure 8
West Texas Intermediate Prices and Volatility (\$USD)



Source: EIA/WSJ & BBVA Research

Figure 9
U.S. Petroleum Imports, Exports, and Balance (\$Mn, Chained 2009)

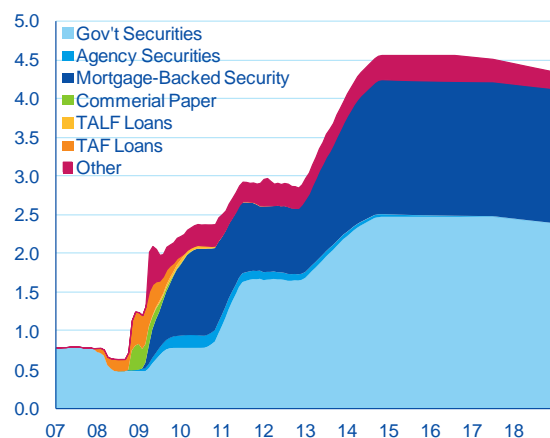


Source: Census & BBVA Research

It is important to note that there are positive implications from lower oil prices in the U.S. First, lower oil prices should translate into a lower energy cost burden for the average household. These benefits are amplified for lower income groups – which have a greater propensity to consume – as they shift spending from energy to goods and services with greater multipliers. A similar impact occurs among firms when savings from lower energy prices are invested and used for hiring. As a result, lower oil prices have the potential to boost economic growth. However, the changing mix of consumption and the greater reliance on domestic production of crude oil could imply a lower domestic impact. In addition, since lower oil prices drive down headline consumer prices, the inflation-adjusted (real) impact on the economy is reduced. Furthermore, the underlying drivers of lower oil prices could limit the upside if the decline in prices is motivated by expectations of a global recession or a plunge in asset prices and confidence. Likewise, if lower oil prices are accompanied by a stronger dollar, the benefits in consumption could be offset by cheaper imports. For a more in-depth analysis on the regional impact of an oil price collapse, see our latest [Economic Watch](#).

When it comes to the Fed, low inflation continues to overshadow ongoing improvements in the employment situation. Still, the FOMC moved one step closer towards policy normalization, citing “substantial improvement in the outlook for the labor market” as the main decisive factor behind ending QE3. Forward guidance language remained unchanged, still indicating that the anticipation of the near-zero federal funds rate will remain “for a considerable time following the end of its asset purchase program.” The data-dependency factor remains vital to future monetary policy action, with the Fed stressing that a faster-than-expected improvement in the economic outlook could imply that “increases in the target range for the federal funds rate are likely to occur sooner than currently anticipated.” On the contrary, if the economy progresses slower than the FOMC expects, “increases in the target range are likely to occur later than currently anticipated.” Given the heightened focus on low inflation, we expect that the FOMC will be willing to hold off on the first rate hike until mid-2015, though the probability for an early rate hike will increase if downward pressure on inflation fades by early next year, in parallel with sustainable improvements in the labor market (see our recent [Fed Watch](#)).

Figure 10
Federal Reserve Balance Sheet (\$trillion)



Source: FRB & BBVA Research

Figure 11
Select Economic Indicators

	Longer Run Unemployment Rate	3MMA Change in Nonfarm Payrolls	Number of Unemployed per Job Opening	PCE Core Inflation (YoY)
Goal	5.2% - 5.5%	200K	2.00	2.00%
QE3 Start (Sept-12)	7.8%	157K	3.38	1.60%
dic-13	6.7%	198K	2.64	1.28%
may-14	6.3%	245K	2.14	1.56%
QE3 End (Oct-14)	5.8%	224K	1.98*	1.56%*

*last data available is Sept-14

Source: FRB, BLS, BEA, & BBVA Research

Despite the fact that global threats are heightened and our growth projections for other major economies have been revised down, risks for the U.S. are slightly tilted to the upside for the short term. With stronger-than-expected GDP growth and favorable consumption conditions, 2014 annual growth will likely hold in line with the pace seen in 2012 and 2013. For 2015 and beyond, the hope is that we will finally return to near-3.0% growth as we make our way out of this prolonged recovery period.

3 Economic Forecasts

Table 1

	2Q13	3Q13	4Q13	1Q14	2Q14	3Q14	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Real GDP (% SAAR)	1.8	4.5	3.5	-2.1	4.6	3.5	1.6	2.3	2.2	2.0	2.5	2.8	2.8
Real GDP (Contribution, pp)													
PCE	1.2	1.4	2.5	0.8	1.8	1.2	1.6	1.3	1.6	1.4	1.2	1.3	1.3
Gross Investment	1.0	2.5	0.6	-1.1	2.9	0.2	0.7	1.3	0.8	0.8	0.7	1.0	1.2
Non Residential	0.2	0.7	1.2	0.2	1.2	0.7	0.9	0.8	0.4	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.9
Residential	0.5	0.3	-0.3	-0.2	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.3	0.3	0.0	0.2	0.3	0.3
Exports	0.8	0.7	1.3	-1.3	1.4	1.0	0.9	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.9	0.9	0.8
Imports	-1.4	-0.1	-0.2	-0.4	-1.8	0.3	-0.9	-0.4	-0.2	0.6	0.6	0.4	0.4
Government	0.0	0.0	-0.7	-0.2	0.3	0.8	-0.7	-0.3	-0.4	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0
Unemployment Rate (% average)	7.5	7.2	7.0	6.7	6.2	6.1	8.9	8.1	7.4	6.2	5.8	5.5	5.0
Average Monthly Nonfarm Payroll (K)	201	172	198	190	267	234	174	186	194	225	231	232	251
CPI (YoY %)	1.4	1.5	1.2	1.4	2.1	1.8	3.1	2.1	1.5	1.9	2.2	2.3	2.4
Core CPI (YoY %)	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.6	1.9	1.8	1.7	2.1	1.8	1.9	2.1	2.3	2.4
Fiscal Balance (% GDP)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-8.7	-6.8	-4.1	-3.1	-2.7	-3.1	-2.8
Current Account (bop, % GDP)	-2.6	-2.4	-2.0	-2.6	-	-	-3.0	-2.8	-2.4	-2.5	-2.6	-2.4	-2.0
Fed Target Rate (% eop)	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.50	1.50	2.50
S&P Case-Shiller Index (YoY %)	11.17	11.50	11.70	11.39	8.11	6.00	-3.87	3.89	11.09	8.41	6.99	5.12	4.67
10-Yr Treasury (% Yield, eop)	2.30	2.81	2.90	2.72	2.60	2.53	1.98	1.72	2.90	2.65	3.36	3.75	3.98
U.S. Dollar / Euro (eop)	1.32	1.34	1.37	1.38	1.36	1.29	1.32	1.31	1.37	1.23	1.20	1.24	1.26
Brent Oil Prices (dpb, average)	102.7	110.3	109.3	108.2	109.7	102.0	111.3	111.7	108.7	107.1	118.0	121.5	126.7

Source: BBVA Research & Haver Analytics

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