



## IMF/WB annual meetings 2017:

### Higher growth, lower monetary stimulus, and significant geopolitical risks

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- The annual fall meetings of the IMF and the WB took place this past weekend
- In our view, the most important topics discussed here were:
  - (1) The world is experiencing the highest growth rates since the global economic crisis; however,
  - (2) Central banks in DEs are about to start or have already begun to reduce their ultra-lax monetary policies;
  - (3) Significant geopolitical risks remain and continue to evolve; and
  - (4) There seems to be a disconnect between the quite risky environment with market valuation
- Among geopolitical risks discussed, the possibility of NAFTA coming to an end, was unfortunately a recurrent discussion across the meetings
- All in all, optimistic views of economic growth and global markets ruled, but both, monetary restriction and geopolitical risks were highlighted
- Market Watch: Investors on the bullish side but with an eye on the Fed and geopolitical risks

# IMF/World Bank 2017

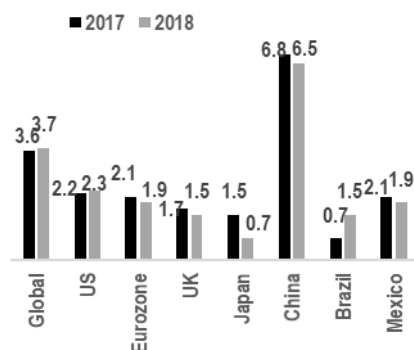
## Higher growth, lower monetary stimulus, and significant geopolitical risks

**Relevance of IMF/WB annual meetings.** A delegation of Banorte attended the annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), which were held this weekend in Washington, D.C. In our opinion, attending these meetings is important as it allows us to get the insight of analysts, investors and policymakers on the most important economic and financial issues, worldwide.

*For the first time in many years, global economic outlook suggests a steady and synchronized expansion of the world economy in 2017-2018. In fact, the IMF upgraded its forecast for global economic growth to 3.6% in 2017 and 3.7% in 2018, from 3.5% and 3.6%, respectively. Nonetheless, the scenario is not free from risks, normalization of monetary policy, questions about sustainability of globalization and geopolitical risks are a very important part of the backdrop.*

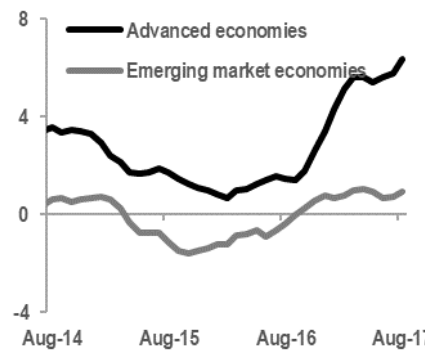
**Synchronized global growth.** Consensus during the meetings was that global economic activity is on track for another year of expansion in 2018. This time the expansion is expected to be generalized, with the IMF projecting growth at 3.6% in 2017 and 3.7% next year, up 0.1% from previous *World Economic Outlook*. This number is explained by upward revisions to forecasts in the Eurozone, Japan and Russia, among others, which offset downward revisions to the U.S. and UK. In addition, it is worth mentioning that recovery is broad-based among sectors in the economy. Indicators suggest manufacturing activity is expanding while consumers are in very good shape, with consumer confidence at historically high levels (see charts below). Nevertheless, even though in the short-term risks are broadly balanced, medium-term risks are on the downside on the back of concerns arising from the following factors: (1) Monetary policy normalization and its impact on markets in a context where inflation in developed countries remains stubbornly below target; (2) questions about sustainability of globalization *i.e.* protectionism; and (3) other geopolitical risks, as it is the case of tensions with North Korea.

IMF GDP growth forecasts  
% y/y



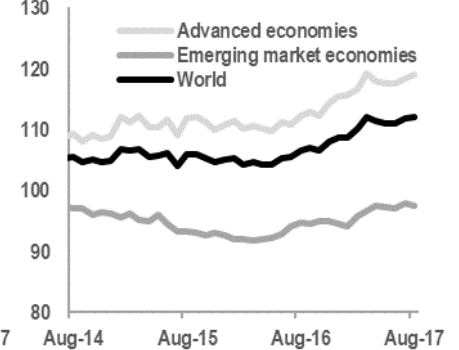
Source: IMF WEO 2017

Manufacturing PMI  
index



Source: IMF WEO 2017

Consumer confidence  
Index 2010= 100



Source: IMF WEO 2017



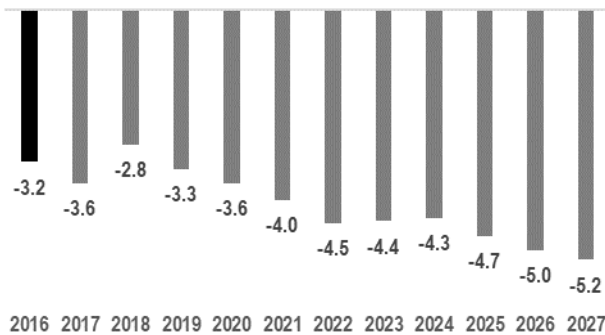
**Fiscal reform in the US will be a key driver for growth.** One of the assumptions that is sustaining economic forecast for global expansion is that the U.S. will pass some sort of fiscal plan that will reduce taxes and will boost disposable income for both companies and households. Secretary of the Treasury, Steven Mnuchin, commented that they expect the plan to be voted by the Senate in coming weeks and that the aim is to have it signed by the President in December. Mr. Mnuchin was quite upbeat regarding the prospects of the fiscal plan, although the rest of the analysts agreed that it will have a hard time passing Congress and that, at the end of the day, only a watered-down version of the original proposal will be approved.

Recall that President Trump's fiscal plan proposes a number of specific changes including: (1) Consolidating and reducing individual income tax rates to 10%, 25%, and 35%; (2) doubling the standard deduction; (3) slashing the business tax rate to 20% on both corporations and pass-through businesses; (3) repealing the Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT) and estate tax; (4) repealing the 3.8% investment surtax from the Affordable Care Act ("Obamacare"); (5) moving to a territorial tax system; and (6) imposing a one-time tax on money held overseas.

Trump argues that the plan will generate much faster growth that will offset much of the costs of the plan (~US\$5.5trn in revenue loss over a decade), which is known as *dynamic scoring*. However, economic studies have found that deficit financed tax cuts only pay for a fraction of their costs and increase debt.

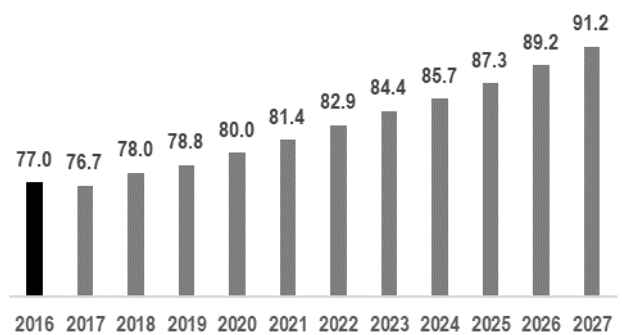
**We expect a 2018 tax plan.** It is our take that a watered-down reform will be approved. However, given the doubts about being able to be fiscally neutral, we believe it will encompass only a corporate tax cut and a few things more, but will not be a full fiscal overhaul. In terms of timing, we anticipate the tax plan to be approved sometime in the first half of 2018, with a very low chance of approval before year-end 2017.

**CBO current deficit projections**  
% of GDP




Source: CBO

**CBO current debt projections**  
% of GDP



Source: CBO



**China's growth is in a sweet spot.** Most analysts agree that, after a few years of worrying about the possibility of hard landing, growth prospects in China are positive. Not only the headline measure has grown according to expectations but also the composition of growth has improved, with an increased contribution from the services sector. Risks to the scenario lie on the level of debt and the pace of credit growth. The question basically is if China can grow at a more sustainable pace of credit expansion and what policy is needed to attain that, amid a backdrop where the U.S. Fed is hiking rates. Regarding the upcoming 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, opening next October 18<sup>th</sup> -which occurs every five years to set the party's national policy goals and elect its top leadership-, analysts agree that president Xi Jinping will consolidate its power despite the changes in the Politburo Standing Committee and other regional leadership. In this context, it is worth mentioning that this would be the second (and last) five-year mandate for Xi Jinping.

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*In the short-term, the main risk for markets comes from the normalization of global monetary conditions. So far, the U.S. Fed is the only one that has already kicked-off this process. The view here is that emerging markets are better positioned vs. 2013 -taper tantrum-, while the Fed has been successful in communicating to markets its intentions.*

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**Global monetary conditions set to normalize.** The wide view is that this normalization will be very gradual, with the U.S. Fed being the only one that has already begun the process. Clear communication and transparency have been key for markets reaction, which so far has been benign. Moreover, it is worth noting that normalization is not occurring in isolation, but in the context of a solid economic recovery, particularly in the U.S., which as we had already mentioned, has improved growth prospects globally. Another factor behind risk sentiment holding up in Emerging Markets (EM) is that countries are now better prepared to absorb the shock as fundamentals have strengthened. Nevertheless, as Fed's governor, Jerome Powell, put it: "...markets can turn on a dime and reactions can be outsized...". This concern is relevant given that low levels of volatility and elevated asset prices in global markets, coupled with a worsening corporate debt situation, particularly in China, could eventually increase the likelihood and severity of an adjustment.

Regarding the U.S. Fed normalization process -and this could apply to other Developed Markets (DM) countries as well-, the main concern is that it does not seem very clear what current inflation dynamics are and this is why they are taking so much time to hike. The problem seems to be how to assess underlying inflation, as the link between economic activity and inflation is not what it used to be. In this context, there are three sets of arguments related to the Phillips Curve, which depicts the historical inverse relationship between rates of unemployment and inflation: (1) The Phillips Curve does not longer apply as workers have reduced their ability to bargain for higher wages; (2) the Phillips Curve is still working but is being measured wrongly, particularly the slack in the labor market; and (3) Phillips curve is "alive and kicking".



Consensus here is that the Fed is likely to hike in December, but that the FOMC is not unified on this. The minutes of the last FOMC meetings show that there could be three groups: (1) Those who think that underlying inflation is at 1.8% and the slowdown is transitory, so this is not the time for a drawback from gradual and steady normalization; (2) another group says that is more sensitive to data, but the backdrop has complicated as a result of hurricanes; and (3) some others think that it is not sensible to continue hiking until there is evidence of an upturn in inflation (for more on this see our flash on FOMC minutes [<here>](#)).

Looking ahead, most participants agree with the recent *dot-plot* in that there could be two or three hikes next year. Nevertheless, this outcome could be modified depending on the new composition of the Fed's board. The nomination of a new Fed's Chair could cause a market reaction. The short-list include: (1) Janet Yellen, but with very low probability of being reappointed; (2) Jerome Powell, current member of the board; (3) Kevin Warsh, former member of the board; (4) John Taylor, academic and author of the so called *Taylor Rule*; and (5) Gary Cohn, chief economic advisor for President Trump (for more about this see our note on this [<here>](#)). Moreover, President Trump gets to nominate a vice-president and another two members of the Fed's board.


In our view, the Fed is going to hike once again in December while we expect only two hikes in 2018. Nevertheless, we recognize it is a tough call as data is going to be influenced by the impact of hurricanes. Looking ahead, decisions in the medium term are also reliant on the new U.S. Fed Chair and the outcome of the fiscal overhaul, which as we already mentioned, we expect to take place next year.

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*From a more medium-term viewpoint, sustainability of globalization and other geopolitical risks are in the mind of investors.*

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**Sustainability of globalization: Where to if NAFTA is gone.** The discussions here focused on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), as the fourth round of negotiations were taking place at the same time. The concern of analysts is that protectionism is where the U.S. administration has more scope to make executive decisions and they wonder how far is President Trump willing to take the argument of reducing bilateral deficits. Up to this point, it seems that the “*glass is half full*” and that the three parts are willing to have a positive outcome from the negotiations. Nevertheless, the concern is that there could be a crack in the glass, such as the threat of President Trump of unilaterally withdrawing from NAFTA. In this context, it is worth noting that Mr. Trump's tweets or announcements do not necessarily translate into policy.



Our baseline scenario is that there will be a successful negotiation and NAFTA will remain in general terms, not free of some additions and modifications. Nevertheless, our conviction of this view has faded a bit, as it seems that there is an *impasse* regarding some sensitive issues such as: (1) Rules of origin; (2) the introduction of a “*sunset clause*” -which would allow an overhaul of the agreement every five years-, and (3) resolution mechanisms. It is worth noting that even though this IS a particularly sensitive issue for the outlook of the Mexican economy, it also raises some questions about the reliability of the U.S. as a partner.

**Non-catastrophic U.S. exit from NAFTA.** Even though we elicit a low probability of the U.S. government abandoning NAFTA, we do acknowledge that the likelihood of this scenario has increased in the past few weeks. In this context, such announcement, like a scandalous tweet, would significantly impact the peso vis-à-vis the U.S. dollar, and would probably will weaken all sort of local financial assets. However, it is our take this would only be of a transitory nature. In our view, once market participants begin to digest that this does not mean the end of the Mexican economy, but also that NAFTA is not such an important pillar for the economy, markets will calm down pretty quickly. Higher volatility levels might last for just a few days.

**Tortuous exit.** On the one hand, by abandoning NAFTA unilaterally, it is highly likely that the U.S. government will face a challenge from the Supreme Court because Article 1 of the U.S. Constitution states that “...*commerce among foreign nations... are rules by Congress...*”. Even though President Trump might use the precedent that former President Reagan killed a trade agreement with Japan back in the eighties, we expect a lot of legal issues emerging from this potential action.

**WTO window.** Companies based in Mexico that want to export goods to the U.S. can do it using the NAFTA window -paying zero tariff, if these companies fulfill the requisites-, or via the WTO window, paying the corresponding tariff. Sometimes, for example, a firm that exports cars to the U.S. does not comply with the 62.5% rule of regional North America content. This might be because of transitory logistical issues, such as having to import more auto parts from Europe. As a result, they do not reach the minimum of 62.5% and this does not mean that they cannot export it to the U.S. or Canada. It is fairly simple: this company uses the WTO window and pays a quite low tariff (U.S. most favored nation WTO tariff averages 3.5%). In fact, 42% of the goods that Mexico exports to the U.S. do not even use the NAFTA window. All in all, there is no doubt that there will be winners and losers due to a potential U.S. exit from NAFTA, but commercial activity between Mexico and the U.S. is not going to change significantly. As a result, this is a “headline risk” that will probably increase volatility, particularly in local financial markets, but it will not last too long.



**Geopolitical risks: Are markets pricing it right?** Apart from protectionism and globalization, some other geopolitical risks were discussed which included tensions in North Korea, separatists' discussions in Spain and other political risks in Europe, as well as elections in Latam. Analysts considered that markets seem to be having a hard time pricing political risks as they are being too complacent on the back of a considerable amount of cash. Nevertheless, they should start weighing better lingering risks in a context where central banks intend to reduce liquidity.

In Europe, they mentioned the risks derived from the election in Ireland and from Italy in particular, as this is one of the most indebted countries and has the most anti-euro population in the region. Moreover, Germany is in transition after the election, while Mr. Macron in France is polling at very low levels. Finally, the process of *Brexit* seems to be becoming messy. Contingency plans are difficult to put in place because there is no certainty on what is going to happen. Nevertheless, even in the case of having a hard *Brexit* -with UK leaving the EU without a trade agreement-, there is a reduced risk of financial stability.

In Latam, political risks come from the fact that there will be elections in Mexico, Brazil, Colombia and Venezuela. In this context, analysts highlighted the fact that anti-establishment parties are leading the polls, particularly in Mexico (AMLO) and in Brazil (Lula). In the case of Mexico, analysts don't see a scenario of AMLO winning the election as too disruptive. They expect the President to be constrained by Congress and institutions while the market's discipline will also deter any extreme political decision. In any case, they think that the effect will not be immediate but it could take about 12 to 18 months to know if AMLO is a leftist leader like Lula or like Chavez in Venezuela.

**The world is in a better place, despite risks.** All in all, our take is that analysts, investors and officials have an optimistic view of economic growth. Nevertheless, there are some concerns regarding possible market mispricing regarding geopolitical risks as well as the potential effect of monetary policy tightening, particularly by the U.S. Fed.

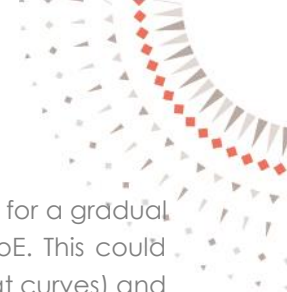


### **Market Watch: Investors on the bullish side but with an eye on the Fed and geopolitical risks**

**Three set of drivers for financial assets.** As in every autumn, global investors gathered in Washington on the occasion of the annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to discuss the main topics behind the world's economy and financial markets dynamics. This year, in contrast to the previous one, most of the investors were biased towards the bullish spectrum, focusing on three main market drivers: (1) Economic growth, (2) central banks, and (3) geopolitical risks.

In terms of the first topic, investors have acknowledged a synchronized growth story among regions, as recently depicted inside the IMF's World Economic Outlook. A recovery of worldwide consumption has supported current valuations in several financial assets (e.g. equities), despite a lower trend in capital expenditure. Most market participants were surprised by a resilient world economy despite a shift in geopolitical trends in several countries. In this regard, global growth has been significantly important for risk aversion measures (e.g. lower VIX).

The second main driver refers to the current situation with central banks, especially in the developed world. The Fed was the most mentioned in every meeting or conference and remains a big question mark for investors. The discussions about the Federal Reserve can be summarized in a fourfold analysis. First, the question of who's going to be the next head. Five are the names surrounding the discussion: Powell, Warsh, Taylor, Cohn and Yellen. Markets are assessing a higher probability to the first two, with the debate on whether or not President Trump will opt for a more mercantilist approach (i.e. a dovish bank and a weaker USD). This question is extremely relevant because term premia of the yield curve could adjust rapidly depending on the outcome of the next chairman. Second, discussions surrounding the Phillips curve (inverse relationship between rate of unemployment and rate of inflation). The Phillips curve has flattened considerably and several investors consider that it is already dead, while others think that we have to control for other measures (e.g. productivity) that suggests a new paradigm in terms of inflation and persistently low interest rates. Structural changes in inflation have determined a lower inflation premium. Third, investors continue debating about a new neutral policy rate (usually referred as  $r^*$ ) and the implications of the slope and term premium between the different segments of the yield curve. This suggests a flatter curve for longer in the U.S. Fourth, the rate of adjustment in financial markets to any signal of policy change. Markets still remember the strong correction in financial assets back in 2013 during the taper tantrum, however recognizing that it was a considerably different backdrop *vis-à-vis* the current situation. Markets are more prepared now and the Fed's communication is granting a better understanding of changes in monetary policy ahead.



Regarding other main central banks, investors are prepared for a gradual hawkish approach in coming months from the ECB and BoE. This could result in minor adjustments in slopes (but still with relatively flat curves) and a modestly stronger dollar. In terms of Banxico, market participants are aware of relevant short-term risks that could limit any easing strategy, at least in the next 6 to 9 months. On the other hand, investors are aware of the responsible and proactive approach to tackle inflation and other conditions. Banxico has a relevant policy toolbox that will allow it to face any volatile outcome from NAFTA negotiations, U.S. fiscal discussions, the electoral process or any change in policy direction from the Federal Reserve. In this regard, attractive carry gains will be supportive for Mexican assets.

The third and most likely driver that can be more disruptive for financial markets is geopolitical risks. Radicalism, any action that could lead to war and the search for protectionist agendas are the most significant risks and the less likely to predict or price into financial assets. Within all these, investors are focusing on changes in trade dynamics (e.g. NAFTA negotiations) and the tax cut plan in the U.S. Although most people gathered in Washington assess a small likelihood of a significant change in both, they recognize that in the case of NAFTA a withdrawal will mean lower expectations for growth, higher prices and important FX movements in the parties involved, while the fiscal plan will have a limited effect on growth, investment and financial assets.

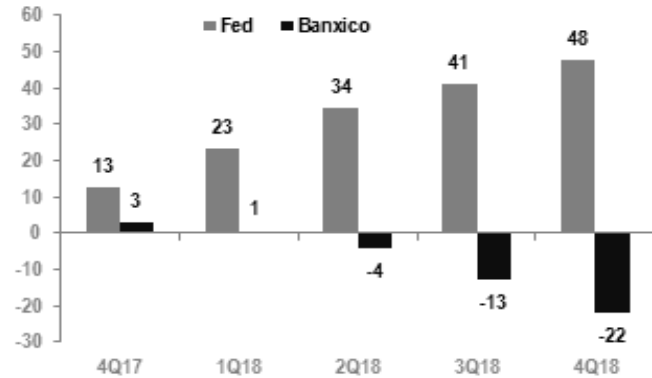
**Confidence remains in Mexico's fundamentals, but with a cautious assessment about several headwinds coming both from abroad and inside of the country.** When talking to global investors, rating agencies and policy makers, all of them highlighted the strong resilience of the Mexican economy when facing several risks throughout 2017. Mexico grew above market consensus in the first half of the year, the Mexican peso recovered after President Trump came into office, and two out of three major rating agencies (S&P and Fitch) changed their credit outlook from "negative" to "stable". Nevertheless, the risks associated with NAFTA negotiations, the current backdrop in emerging markets and the shift in economic policies in the United States could result in a less bullish view for Mexico, especially with investors cautiously awaiting the 2018 electoral process. For more details of our assessment on local financial assets, please refer to our quarterly report [here](#).

**Rates: modest correction in term premium expected after a more hawkish rhetoric among G10 central banks.** Despite the strong discussions surrounding the next head of the Federal Reserve, investors are aware that current inflation dynamics and valuation of the yield curve suggest a steeper curve between the front- and mid-ends, while longer tenors are likely to remain relatively flat. There are higher chances of a rate hike in December, and later on the market could adjust upwards the implied hikes for 2018 and 2019. Under this backdrop, a likely  $r^*$  around 3.00-3.25% until 2020 will result in a 10-year Treasury that is most likely to hover around 2.50% during the next 12 months. The implications over the Mexican yield curve are important, as we expect the risk and term premiums in Mbonos to increase.

Banxico will not be able to ease its monetary stance until 2H18, resulting in a slope correction between 2s5s and 2s10s within a current inverted curve. Under these conditions we expect the 10-year Mbono at 7.10% by year-end and at 7.20% by 2018-end, with a spike of 7.50% in a 12-month horizon (previous to elections).

**Cumulative implicit movements in reference rates**

Basis points, using interest rate futures



Source: Bloomberg and Banorte

**2s/10s slope in the U.S. and Mexico**

Basis points



Source: Bloomberg and Banorte

**Currencies: Ground set for a stronger dollar.** The dollar is likely to recover some strength in coming months supported by a hawkish Fed, after disappointing throughout 2017. This situation together with higher country-specific risk for Mexico could put additional pressures to the peso. On a 12-month basis, we expect the currency to remain pressured given the factors discussed previously, albeit with a year-end forecast of USD/MXN 18.10 in 2017 and 18.60 in 2018. It is worth mentioning that there is an upward risk (weaker MXN) to our current forecast path.

**DXY Index**

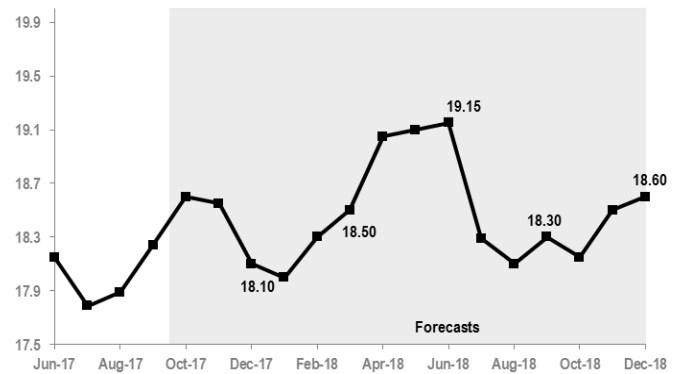
Pts



Source: Bloomberg

**USD/MXN forecasts**

Pesos per dollar

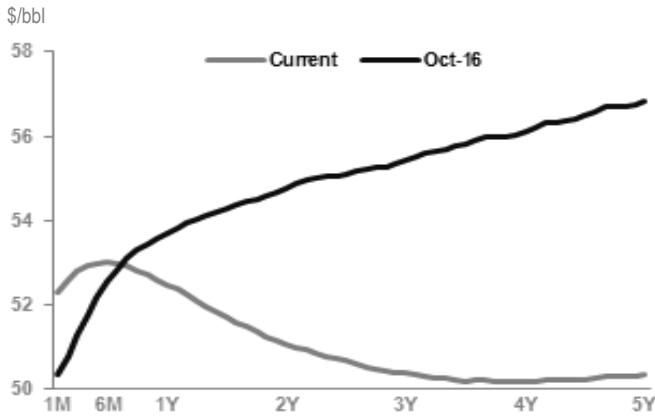


Source: Bloomberg and Banorte

**Commodities: No major outlook changes.** There were no relevant discussions about commodities this time, contrary to previous years. Investors expect a good deal during OPEC's meeting in Vienna on November 30<sup>th</sup>, supporting a flat futures curve with limited upward risk. Prices of metals and agricultural assets are expected to keep consolidating during the rest of the year as the negative effect of a stronger dollar will be countered by an optimistic growth outlook.



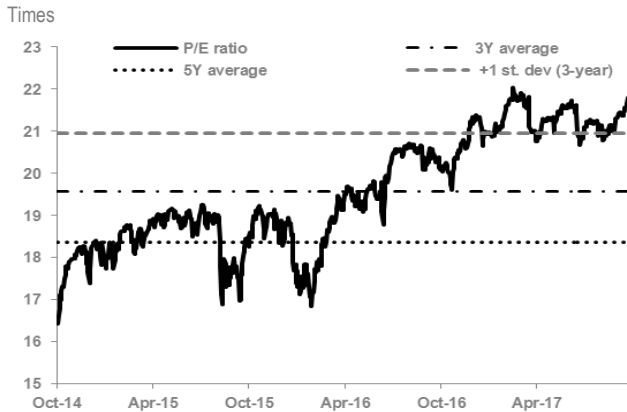
WTI futures curve



Source: Bloomberg

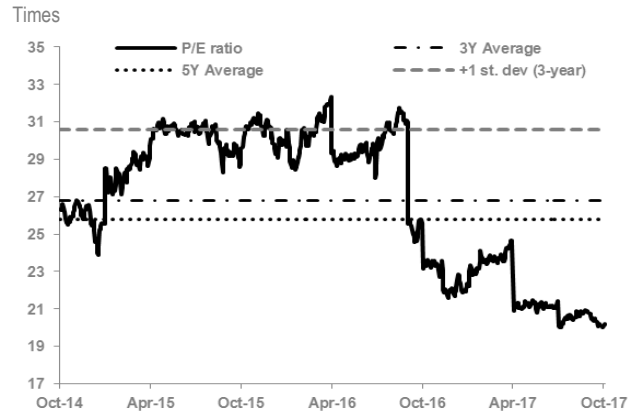
**Equities: Supported by growth dynamics and still loose monetary conditions.** Investors remained on the bullish side in equities, expecting a better performance in Europe vs other regions. Market participants acknowledged expensive valuations in several stocks with no significant capital expenditures that could lead to higher revenues in coming years. However, current prices could be supported by loose monetary conditions, the growth outlook and dividend structures. In terms of the Mexican market, the mood was more cautious ahead due to the risks for the economy enlisted previously.

S&P 500 - P/E ratio



Source: Bloomberg

S&P/BMV IPC - P/E Ratio



Source: Bloomberg and Banorte

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