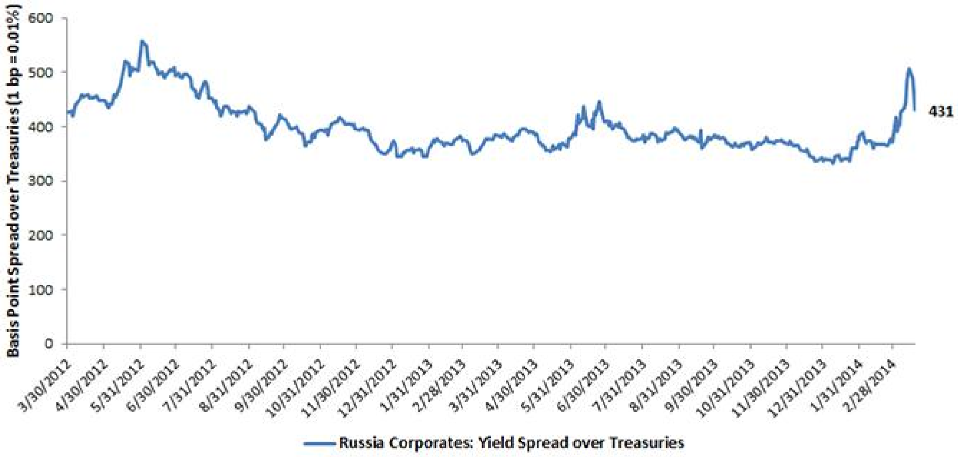
AN UPDATE ON RUSSIA AND RUSSIAN CORPORATE BONDS

Rick Harper – Chief Investment Officer, Fixed Income and Model Portfolios
03/27/2014

• Near-term volatility will continue to be driven by an escalation or reduction of tensions on the ground in Ukraine and the political chess match between the West and Russia. • European dependency on Russian energy exports provides a clear economic cost to the EU, should it impose more aggressive sanctions. • For long-term investors, Russian corporate bonds offer attractive levels on an absolute and a relative basis compared to corporate bonds from both U.S. issuers and from other emerging market (EM) countries. • Market conditions merit a high degree of scrutiny. We remain biased toward bond sectors that are strategically important and can potentially benefit from a falling ruble, as well as issuers that have a proven track record and adequate access to capital. Investors continue to monitor developments on the ground in Crimea and the Ukraine as well as the political chess match between Russia and the West. As a result, volatility has increased dramatically as investors react to headlines. For many, memories of losses from Russia's default in 1998 have resurfaced along with the pervading distrust during the Cold War. For investors, the fear of the political unknowns is continuing to complicate investment decisions. Last week, Russian assets sold off markedly ahead of the succession vote in Crimea. Now, with Russia's annexation of Crimea countered by only an incremental response from the West, credit markets have recovered somewhat. Russian corporate bonds have rallied significantly from the lows both on an absolute basis and compared to corporate credits in other countries. But corporate bond spreads and credit default spreads remain significantly wider than they were at the beginning of March. **Yield Spread over Treasuries**



Russia corporate exposure of the JP Morgan Corporate Emerging Market Bond Index - Broad. Past performance is not indicative of future results. You cannot invest directly in an index.

As investors, we continually assess risks on the basis of the likelihood of various potential scenarios. We see three scenarios emerging from current tensions. • **Uneasy Stability** – Crimea is annexed, the West delivers a face-saving wrist slap, and tensions die down but don't severely dent the economic interests of either side. • **Prolonged Chess Match** – Tensions rise and fall but remain relatively elevated in the coming months. Some economic pain is experienced on both sides, as fundamentals particularly in Russia and

Ukraine show further deterioration. The risk premium built into Russian assets fades slowly and the ruble depreciates as the Russian Central Bank partially reverses its temporary interest rate hike to support growth. • **Significant Escalation** – The prospect that tensions escalate via further Russian incursions into Ukraine increases the potential for a policy mistake between the West and Russia. At present, this is the biggest risk that markets are trying to react to each day. The understanding that significant economic consequences are likely to result for both sides mitigates this risk. But there is some danger that economic considerations might be superseded by Russia's desire for increased influence in the former Soviet republics. In our view, the market is currently wrestling with uneasy stability and a prolonged chess match as the most likely options. Risk premiums are still high, but the risk of a full-scale military conflict has faded. While the West has said that more sanctions may be forthcoming, the U.S. and EU allies are struggling to impose meaningful punitive measures without threatening their own economic interests, particularly in Europe. As many analysts have noted, Europe receives 30% of its natural gas from Gazprom, the state-controlled Russian gas giant. For Western European consumers, a near-term alternative supplier is nonexistent. However, even before Putin decided to get involved in Crimea, Russia has seen a gradual deterioration in its economic fundamentals. Its current account surplus has dissipated rapidly and its trajectory for growth has faded as well. In light of the current political situation, most analysts believe the Russian economy will grow by less than 1% this year.[1] Amid continued volatility, we believe that Russian risks will fade slowly and the ruble is likely to experience a modest depreciation. As for corporate bonds, the situation suggests that investors should gravitate to sectors and issuers that are strategically important and largely export focused. Sectors such as oil & gas, metals & mining and chemical issuers are neutral or positively disposed to a falling ruble, particularly against the euro. Corporations that are more domestically focused and derive a larger portion of their revenues in ruble will potentially come under pressure as their revenues depreciate relative to their foreign currency-denominated debt. To summarize, we prefer outward looking to inward looking, and strategically important to discretionary. As investors continue to monitor developments in Russia, it is important to remember that a majority of EM corporate bonds are Euroclear eligible, custodied outside Russia and governed by U.S. or UK rule of law. Many of the well-known, export driven issuers have management teams that have weathered past bouts of volatility successfully. Ultimately, the essential question for credit investors is whether the companies have the ability and willingness to pay. For the patient investor, we believe they will. [1]Source: Bloomberg, as of 03/20/14.

Important Risks Related to this Article

For more investing insights, check out our Economic & Market Outlook

View the online version of this article here.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

U.S. investors only: Click here to obtain a WisdomTree ETF prospectus which contains investment objectives, risks, charges, expenses, and other information; read and consider carefully before investing.

There are risks involved with investing, including possible loss of principal. Foreign investing involves currency, political and economic risk. Funds focusing on a single country, sector and/or funds that emphasize investments in smaller companies may experience greater price volatility. Investments in emerging markets, currency, fixed income and alternative investments include additional risks. Please see prospectus for discussion of risks.

Past performance is not indicative of future results. This material contains the opinions of the author, which are subject to change, and should not to be considered or interpreted as a recommendation to participate in any particular trading strategy, or deemed to be an offer or sale of any investment product and it should not be relied on as such. There is no guarantee that any strategies discussed will work under all market conditions. This material represents an assessment of the market environment at a specific time and is not intended to be a forecast of future events or a guarantee of future results. This material should not be relied upon as research or investment advice regarding any security in particular. The user of this information assumes the entire risk of any use made of the information provided herein. Neither WisdomTree nor its affiliates, nor Foreside Fund Services, LLC, or its affiliates provide tax or legal advice. Investors seeking tax or legal advice should consult their tax or legal advisor. Unless expressly stated otherwise the opinions, interpretations or findings expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of WisdomTree or any of its affiliates.

The MSCI information may only be used for your internal use, may not be reproduced or re-disseminated in any form and may not be used as a basis for or component of any financial instruments or products or indexes. None of the MSCI information is intended to constitute investment advice or a recommendation to make (or refrain from making) any kind of investment decision and may not be relied on as such. Historical data and analysis should not be taken as an indication or guarantee of any future performance analysis, forecast or prediction. The MSCI information is provided on an "as is" basis and the user of this information assumes the entire risk of any use made of this information. MSCI, each of its affiliates and each entity involved in compiling, computing or creating any MSCI information (collectively, the "MSCI Parties") expressly disclaims all warranties. With respect to this information, in no event shall any MSCI Party have any liability for any direct, indirect, special, incidental, punitive, consequential (including loss profits) or any other damages (www.msci.com)

Jonathan Steinberg, Jeremy Schwartz, Rick Harper, Christopher Gannatti, Bradley Krom, Tripp Zimmerman, Michael Barrer, Anita Rausch, Kevin Flanagan, Brendan Loftus, Joseph Tenaglia, Jeff Weniger, Matt Wagner, Alejandro Saltiel, Ryan Krystopowicz, Jianing Wu, and Brian Manby are registered representatives of Foreside Fund Services, LLC.

WisdomTree Funds are distributed by Foreside Fund Services, LLC, in the U.S. only.

You cannot invest directly in an index.

DEFINITIONS

Volatility : A measure of the dispersion of actual returns around a particular average level. .

Corporate Bonds : a debt security issued by a corporation.

Spread : Typically refers to a difference between a measure of yield for one asset class and a measure of yield for either a different subset of that asset class or a different asset class entirely.

Credit default spread : a market derived measure of risk that seeks to signal the likelihood that a borrower will default.

Yield spread : the amount of incremental income a bondholder receives for assuming credit risk.

Risk : Also standard deviation, which measures the spread of actual returns around an average return during a specific period. Higher risk indicates greater potential for returns to be farther away from this average.

Risk premium : Equity investments are not risk free, but it is thought that investors buy stocks because the returns they expect are high enough to allow them to take the risk.

Fundamentals : Attributes related to a company’s actual operations and production as opposed to changes in share price.

Current account : The difference between a nation’s total exports of goods, services and transfers, and its total imports of them.

Euroclear eligible : a trade settlement system in Europe that allows for the efficient delivery of bonds and funds.