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# **Reality Check**

At this point in the year and within the context of the current rate cycle, our year-to-date performance, standing at +0.63%<sup>1</sup> in Euros as at end August, falls short of our ambitions.

In this letter we analyse the reasons behind this, and discuss why we believe that going forward, the Fund is well positioned to achieve its mid to high single digits annual performance target.

In essence, the Lyxor / Chenavari Credit Fund (the "Fund") has posted positive performance every month throughout the year, except for one month: March. Our defensive approach had paid off in the recent past (during the Covid-19 crisis for example), but proved too conservative during the SVB / Credit Suisse market phase, where the swift market recovery trumped our cautious positioning and hit our hedges.

Rationale for our forward-looking conviction is summarised below and discussed in detail in the body of the letter:

- 1) Market environment remains positive for the Fund:
  - High Yield Carry remains at the high end of its range.
  - Robust supply of Fins and HY bonds from the new issue pipeline should drive attractive opportunities.
- 2) Attractively priced portfolio:
  - On Financials, valuations have not yet recovered from the March crisis, and some financial subordinated debts are offering enticing opportunities, with the potential to reprice from Perpetuity to First Call.
  - On Corporates, the persistence of significant yield makes for nice opportunities whilst also offering a chance to build a short book aimed at names that will struggle to cope with the increased cost of refinancing.
- 3) Portfolio management adjustments to drive enhanced performance:
  - Tactically managing the fund with a slightly higher volatility profile.
  - Increased concentration of the Fund's single name positions.
  - Near-term, long-biased positioning.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Class SSI Euros, at 31 August 2023. Source: Bloomberg



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# 1) 2023 so far: missing some oomph

Looking at the monthly Fund performance since the start of the year (see Figure 1), a few points come to mind.

- Apart from March, the Fund posted positive performance every month of the year.
- However, the drawdown in March was not insignificant, and no substantial rebound was posted in April. These two months are the main culprits underpinning the modest performance and require further analysis.

Figure 1: Monthly performance of the Fund (SSI EUR Share Class)

January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	YTD
+1.14%	+0.25%	-2.27%	+0.03%	+0.58%	+0.16%	+0.61%	+0.17%	+0.63%

Source: Bloomberg, Chenavari, as of 31 August 2023.

As discussed in our letter at the time (link: <a href="20230322\_Ml\_Chenavari\_UCITS\_Positioning\_CS\_collapse.pdf">20230322\_Ml\_Chenavari\_UCITS\_Positioning\_CS\_collapse.pdf</a>), the Fund was negatively affected in March by the brutal (and short lived) crisis triggered by the wipe out of the Credit Suisse AT1 at the time of the bank's purchase by UBS. Even though the Fund had no exposure to Credit Suisse AT1s, ripple effects were felt across the capital structure of European Banks and accounted for a significant portion of the drawdown.

In the second half of March and in April, fearful that the crisis could go deeper (notably because of a tightening of lending conditions in Europe, but also because of the "unknown unknowns" risk behind the SVB collapse), the PMs adopted a cautious positioning to protect the book from any further drawdown. This cost the Fund the opportunity to bounce back from the lows as markets shrugged off macro woes.

Seeing the risk abate, the team adopted a more constructive approach from May onward and performance started to improve, back from the March-April blip.

### 2) Tactical takeaway: slight increase of fund volatility in the current environment

Over the years, we have shown an inclination to reduce our exposure at the outset of major adverse events. This pattern proved effective in safeguarding the book during times of profound market disruptions, such as those witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic for example.

This same approach cost us in March as our cautious macro call did not work and the SVB / Credit Suisse situation turned out to be a "false alarm". As a result, we failed to monetise our hedges in a timely manner, and they ultimately translated into losses (cf. Figure 2). Our assessment of market dynamics was excessively pessimistic, placing too much emphasis on the potential unfolding of "unknown unknowns" dislocation effects. We underestimated the resilience of markets, especially once valuations had adjusted to more reasonable levels.

This tendency is partly rooted in our commitment to a "low volatility and capital protection" philosophy, and our belief that daily liquidity gives us the means, and the responsibility, to react swiftly. At times our agility may have gone a bit in overdrive mode.

Specifically, our volatility has been in the region of 2-4% historically and currently reaches 3.2% while the European High Yield benchmark runs just under 5% (source: Bloomberg). We don't aim to have a vol profile below the market per se, but simply contain those vol spike once the sell off hits. There is, therefore, room for us to increase vol to a 3-5% range as we navigate H2 2023.



# 3) Short and hedge positions

Zooming in on our short and hedge positions on Figure 2 helps illustrate the point made above.

Figure 2: Monthly gross performance of the Lyxor / Chenavari Credit Fund by category of trade

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Total
Long Bonds	3.26%	-0.40%	-1.82%	0.36%	0.77%	0.54%	1.37%	0.01%	4.10%
Short Bonds / CDS	-0.56%	0.08%	-0.21%	-0.10%	-0.22%	-0.17%	-0.67%	-0.01%	-1.87%
Hedges & Other	-1.40%	0.62%	-0.15%	-0.11%	-0.00%	-0.02%	0.04%	0.26%	-0.77%
Total	1.30%	0.30%	-2.18%	0.15%	0.55%	0.35%	0.74%	0.26%	1.46%

Source: Bloomberg, Chenavari, as of 31 August 2023.

Usually, short and hedge positions play their role as a mitigant to the long leg of the portfolio. This has been the case again in August where the negative contribution of long positions was compensated by gains on shorts and hedges. However, in a range bound market, if we fail to monetise our hedges at the right time, they only decrease our theta without the benefit of crystallising gains, and that's exactly what happened in March and April.

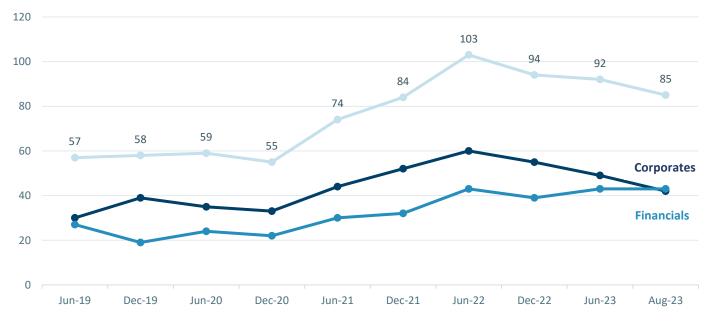
# 4) Single name longs: accept more volatility, and increase portfolio concentration

The aspiration to increase the Fund's volatility is also corroborated by the prevailing levels of carry within the credit market.

As certain names suffer from market fluctuations, as long as our conviction stands that they will be able to repay their debt, we should embrace a degree of volatility and hold on to our position to collect the carry and mark to market gains as they converge to fair value over time. This is especially pertinent for shorter duration bonds.

In addition, we have been increasing the concentration of the Fund's single name positions, as our concentration level had somehow reduced over time (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Evolution of the number of single name positions since 30 June 2019 (Fund level and per strategy)



Source: Chenavari risk, as of 30 August 2023.



There are clear benefits of having a crisper, more targeted portfolio, as it helps secure more differentiated alpha generation. However, this may also point to an increase in volatility.

### 5) Positioning

The Fund is currently positioned with a long bias. Based on PV10<sup>2</sup> (our preferred measure of risk positioning), the Fund is currently in the "longest local region" it has been since mid-2019, back to the levels observed between November 2022 and early March 2023 (cf. Figure 4).



Figure 4: Evolution of our PV10 (4 week rolling average) since August 2019

Source: Chenavari Risk, as of 31 August 2023.

We feel comfortable with this positioning, focusing on names which allow us to generate strong carry whilst benefitting from potential mark-to-market gains. The short portfolio is limited but is concentrated on fundamentally weak names which trade at levels which we believe do not fully price in the potential for further deterioration.

Naturally, we remain watchful of the macroeconomic environment and are not oblivious to the risks arising notably from China, and from growth and inflation prospects. Our capacity to adjust our positioning based on further developments remains a key part of our long / short toolkit.

### **Financials Strategy**

On the Financials side, we believe there is room for spreads to rally for many credit names.

Firstly, bank fundamentals continue to be very strong. Not only is this highlighted in recent earnings releases, with profitability continuing to trend upward on the back of higher NII (while deposit beta is remaining low in Europe) and a number of banks upgrading their FY23 profit guidance, the recent EBA EU-wide Stress Test only solidified the strength and resilience of European banks. Despite the shocks applied during the exercise being the most severe used in the EU-wide stress up to now, EU banks fared better than the previous exercise.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The PV10 is a measure of our theoretical drawdown in case of a homogeneous widening of all 5-year on-the-run credit indices by 10%. When the PV10 is zero, the Fund is market neutral. When the PV10 is negative, the Fund has a net long exposure to the market, and finally when the PV10 is positive the Fund is net short.



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In our view, current valuations do not reflect these improving fundamentals, and there is a real potential for continued positive price action across the capital structure (Figure 5 shows the current spread levels for both AT1 and T2).

Figure 5: EUR AT1, USD AT1 and EUR T2 spreads (yield-to-worst) 450 1600 400 Z-Spread/G-Spread to Worst (bps) 1400 350 1200 300 1000 250 800 200 600 150 400 100 200 50 0 0 Feb-18 Jan-19 Dec-19 Nov-20 Oct-21 Sep-22 Aug-23 € AT1 (LHS) \$ AT1 (LHS) € T2 (RHS) **Index Spread to Worst Pre-SVB Collapse** 3 Year tight Current (bps) (8-Mar-23) **EUR AT1** 767 621 344 (Sept 21) **USD AT1** 566 505 271 (Sept 21) EUR T2 255 283 120 (Sept 21)

Source: Bloomberg, Chenavari, as at 30 August 2023.

Furthermore, as we have seen recently with Barclays, Caixabank and Société Générale, we believe national champions should continue to call their AT1s at their first call dates (with some outliers such as Santander or Deutsche Bank, who took a purely economic stance as regards their call decisions). We therefore remain positive as we believe that the AT1 sector can increasingly trade to call (cf. Figure 6). We reckon that alpha generation in the book will notably come from those names which are not at all priced to call.



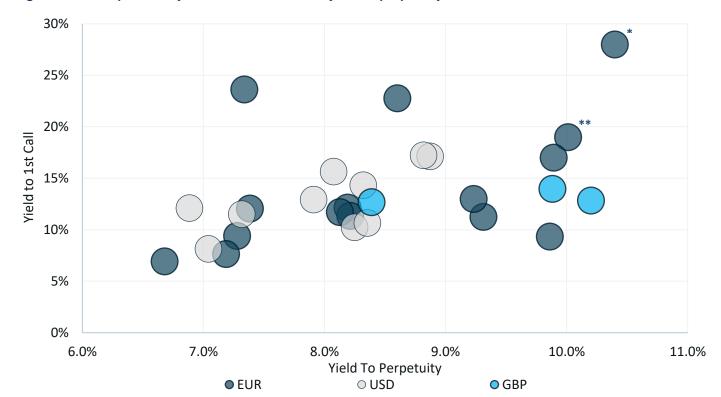


Figure 6: AT1 exposure - yield to first call versus yield to perpetuity

Source: Bloomberg, Chenavari, as at 30 August 2023.

# **Corporate Strategy**

On the Corporate side, yields continue to be very attractive as shown in Figure 7.

Upon return from summer holidays, market participants should expect to find a healthy pipeline of bonds coming to the market, both in investment grade (IG) and high yield (HY) space. The IG new issue pipeline for September is estimated to be around EUR70 billion, with a bias towards corporates over financials. The HY figures are less certain, but we should see between 10 and 15 deals across bonds and loans. Given the large size of these issuances relative to historical standards, corporates will need to pay a premium to attract yield-hungry investors. We will take advantage of these attractive new deals to deploy our excess cash.

Furthermore, whilst the market has been in bull mode for the last 4 months, the overall yields of IG and HY have not changed substantially. We still believe there is significant value in the credit market, and many names continue to look attractive with potential to rally further in our view. For example, we particularly like supermarket names such as Asda and Morrisons, whose B+ bonds are currently yielding around 10%+. Both have continued to post strong results since the troughs of last year, showing margin expansion and good cash generation. They are also both backed by tangible real estate, which despite higher rates provides sufficient buffer for our position.



<sup>\*:</sup> For this specific bond, we do not show the Yield to First Call (which would be significantly higher) but the Yield to third Call date (Dec 24) as we consider it to be a much more realistic call date. Dec 24 and Dec 25 based on Chenavari assumptions.

<sup>\*\*:</sup> For this specific bond, we do not show the Yield to First Call (which would be significantly higher) but the Yield to third Call date (Dec 25) as we consider it to be a much more realistic call date based on Chenavari assumptions.

10% 9% 8% 7% 6% 5% 4% 3% 2% 1% 0% 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 STOXX Europe 600 - Dividend Yield Euro BBB - YTM Euro High Yield - YTM

Figure 7: European HY corporate yields (yield-to-worst): high yield and BBB versus Stoxx 600 Dividend Yield

Source: Bloomberg, as at 30 August 2023. I20671EU Index.

From a short perspective, surging interest rates often translates into cooling economic growth with potential for economies to tip into recession. The lack of economic growth combined with the high-rate environment is likely to result in a rise in defaults (Moody's forecast European high-yield default rates hitting 3.8% in 2024, up from 2.7% in May). Not all corporates are likely to survive a high rate, low growth environment and as such creates for interesting shorting opportunities. We have already seen some sectors (notably chemicals) coming under pressure experiencing severe demand softness, and we have seen increasing profit warnings and misses in earnings. Furthermore, as we approach the 2025/26 maturity wall, the weaker names which are not consistently generating ample cash flow could struggle repaying these maturities. Shorts in our book currently include Stonegate, the UK pub operator whose refinancing and deleveraging plan poses significant execution risk in our view. Advanz Pharma is another interesting case. Potential litigations and the plan to re-lever the balance sheet should cause leverage to rise from 3.4x currently to around 5.25x, which should result in significant spread widening in our view.

Admittedly, the high-rate environment does provide the potential to earn significant returns, but the potential for defaults poses a risk to a long-only strategy. A well-structured long/short strategy tends to give the ability to earn consistently strong returns by identifying both winners and losers and positioning accordingly, while also hedging against macroeconomic shocks and minimising potential downside.

\* \* \*



Vincent Laurencin

Deputy CEO and Head of UCITS, Chenavari Investment Managers



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Bloomberg Pan-European Aggregate: Corporate Baa Total Return Index Unhedged (I02561EU Index). Source: Bloomberg



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Notice to German Investors: The Prospectus in English and the PRIIPS Key Information Document in German are available free of charge in paper form from Amundi Deutschland GmBH, Taunusanlage 18, 60325 Frankfurt am Main, Germany, or electronically under <a href="https://www.amundi.com">www.amundi.com</a>. Please note that Amundi AM may decide at any time, without notice, to no longer market and/or distribute this Fund in any country within the European Union where this Fund is currently passported under UCITS and AIFM directive.

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- ii. Any such offer would deal with securities that are not registered in the Securities Registry nor in the Foreign Securities Registry kept by the CMF, and that are, therefore, not subject to the supervision of the CMF;
- iii. Given that the securities would not be registered, there would be no obligation for the issuer to disclose in Chile public information about said securities; and
- iv. The securities may not be publicly offered as long as they are not registered in the corresponding Securities Registry.

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