Will Trump derail the US economy?

Following the very weak July employment report, many are once again fearing a US recession. The US economy has indeed lost considerable momentum. However, we still expect that a recession will be avoided.

Bernd Weidensteiner AC
Dr. Christoph Balz AC

That's how fast things can change: recession back on the agenda

Many investors had high hopes for a strong upturn following Donald Trump's election as US president. But no sooner had Trump moved into the White House than the market began to fear a recession in the US due to his aggressive and erratic economic policy. When the economic figures turned out not to be so bad after all, the tide turned and many investors wondered whether he might be doing everything right after all. However, last Friday's employment report caused the mood to shift once again, and concerns about a possible recession are back in the foreground.

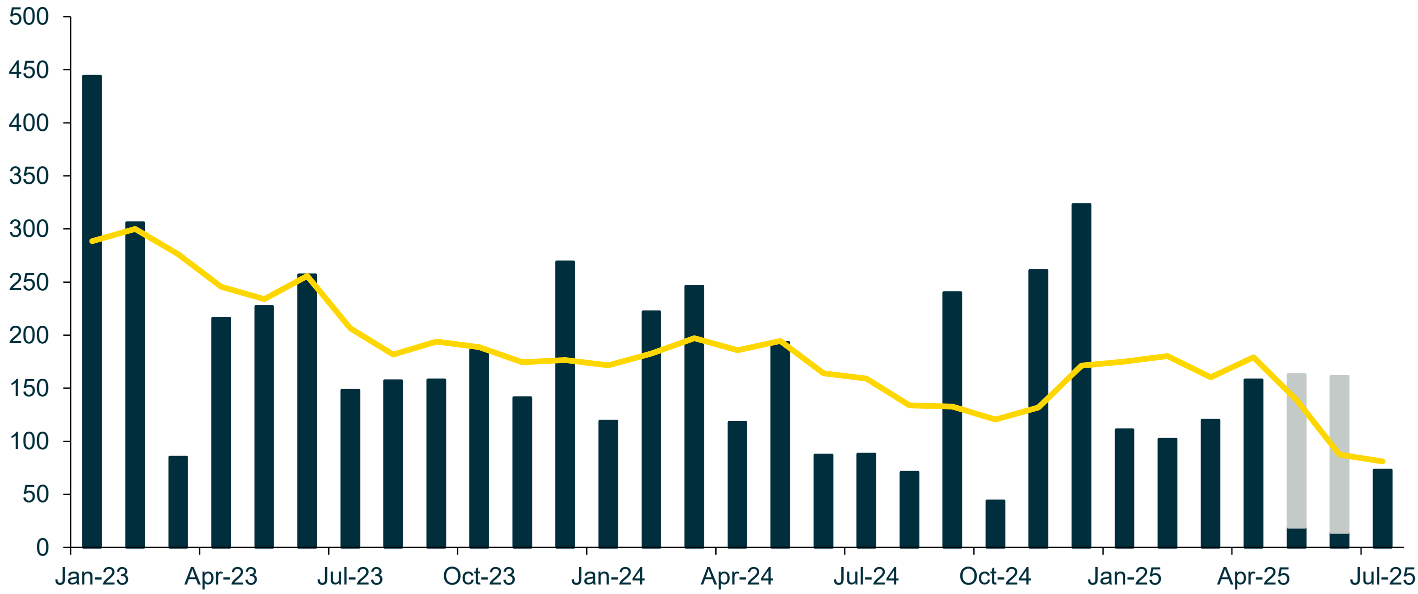
A sober assessment therefore seems necessary. We had already argued in **March** that the US economy would weaken but was likely to avoid a recession. In the following, we examine whether the latest developments still support our thesis.

Significant slowdown on the labor market...

The current recession fears were triggered by the labor market report for July published on August 1. Not only was the relatively low increase in employment of only 73,000 in the last month disappointing, but even more shocking was the fact that the fairly decent gains in May and June of 144,000 and 147,000 were revised down to just 19,000 and 14,000, respectively. This has significantly worsened the overall picture. The employment trend is much weaker than expected (Chart 1).

Chart 1 - Labor market has slowed more than previously thought

Nonfarm payrolls, month-on-month change in thousand. Grey columns May/June 2025: pre-revision data. Yellow linie: six-month moving average



Source: BLS, S&P Global, Commerzbank Research

... which Trump doesn't like at all

President Trump did not take the disappointing labor market data well and fired the head of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) – the responsible statistics agency – on Friday. The BLS Commissioner, Erika McEntarfer, had been appointed by Joe Biden and was confirmed by the Senate with broad bipartisan support (86 votes to 8).

Trump took particular offense at the unusually sharp downward revision of the previous month's data by a total of 258,000 jobs. Furthermore, according to Mr. Trump, McEntarfer had “falsified” job data before the presidential election to boost Kamala Harris's chances of winning. Someone more competent and qualified would now be appointed.

This is an extraordinary move that has caused quite a stir even among Republican senators. In many quarters, it has led to fears that the US government is now guided solely by wishful thinking and could ignore or even manipulate hard data in the long term if it does not fit its own agenda.

... and further downward revisions are on the way

The annual benchmark revision of labor market data due with the next labor market report in early September could increase the pressure on the BLS. The figures obtained from surveys are compared with unemployment insurance figures, which are based on an almost complete data set. Last year, this led to an unusually sharp downward revision of employment figures. This year, the benchmark revision could be similarly significant, reducing non-farm payrolls for March – the benchmark month – by around 700,000 (**see our Briefing**). This would mean that employment in the twelve months to March would have increased by only around 90,000 on average, rather than the nearly 150,000 previously reported. Trump will blame this on the Biden administration, but the fact that the underlying pace of the labor market is significantly slower than previously thought is certainly bad news for the Trump administration as well.

Consumer spending is declining

In addition to the labor market figures, other hard data has also taken a hit. Private consumption, which accounts for almost 70% of GDP and is by far the most important economic indicator, grew by only around 1% on average; in the third and fourth quarters of 2024, it still grew by an average of 3.9%. The subdued consumer sentiment is even more evident when looking at the monthly data. In the second quarter, stagnation set in, and consumption in June was even slightly below the level reached in December.

This suggests that the hard economic data is following the “soft” indicators such as consumer confidence, albeit with some delay. Sentiment had already deteriorated significantly in the first half of the year without this being immediately reflected in the hard figures. This had already led many to ignore the “sentiment recession” (or "vibecession").

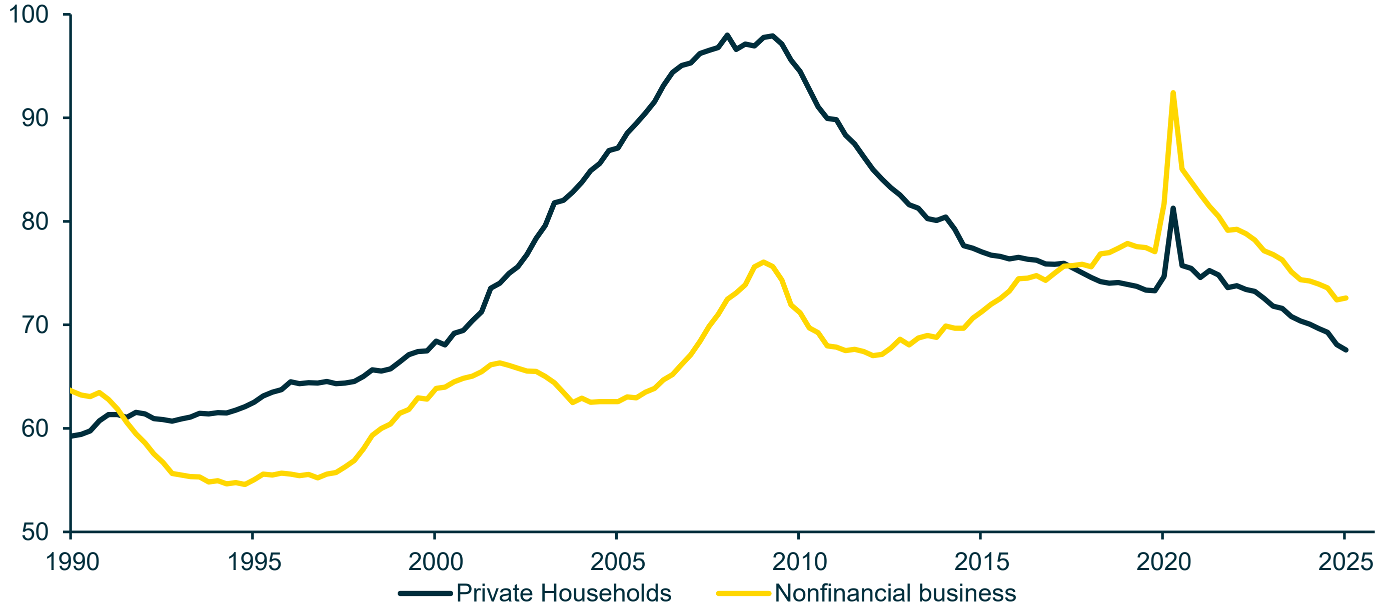
What are the arguments against a recession?

All of this certainly raises some warning flags. However, the fact that private households are in solid financial shape argues against more severe spending cuts. They have steadily reduced their debt over the past 15 years. Most recently, they owed just under 68% of gross domestic product (GDP), around 30 percentage points less than at their peak in 2009 (Chart 2). Unlike after the real estate bubble of 2005/06, massive consolidation is not expected here.

The same applies to companies. Their debt level was recently 72.6% of GDP, a ten-year low. This means that they have reduced their debt less vigorously than private households. However, they were not as heavily indebted as many private individuals, so the pressure to reduce debt was correspondingly lower.

Chart 2 - US private sector has ist debt under control

Private household and non-financial business debt in % of GDP, quarterly data



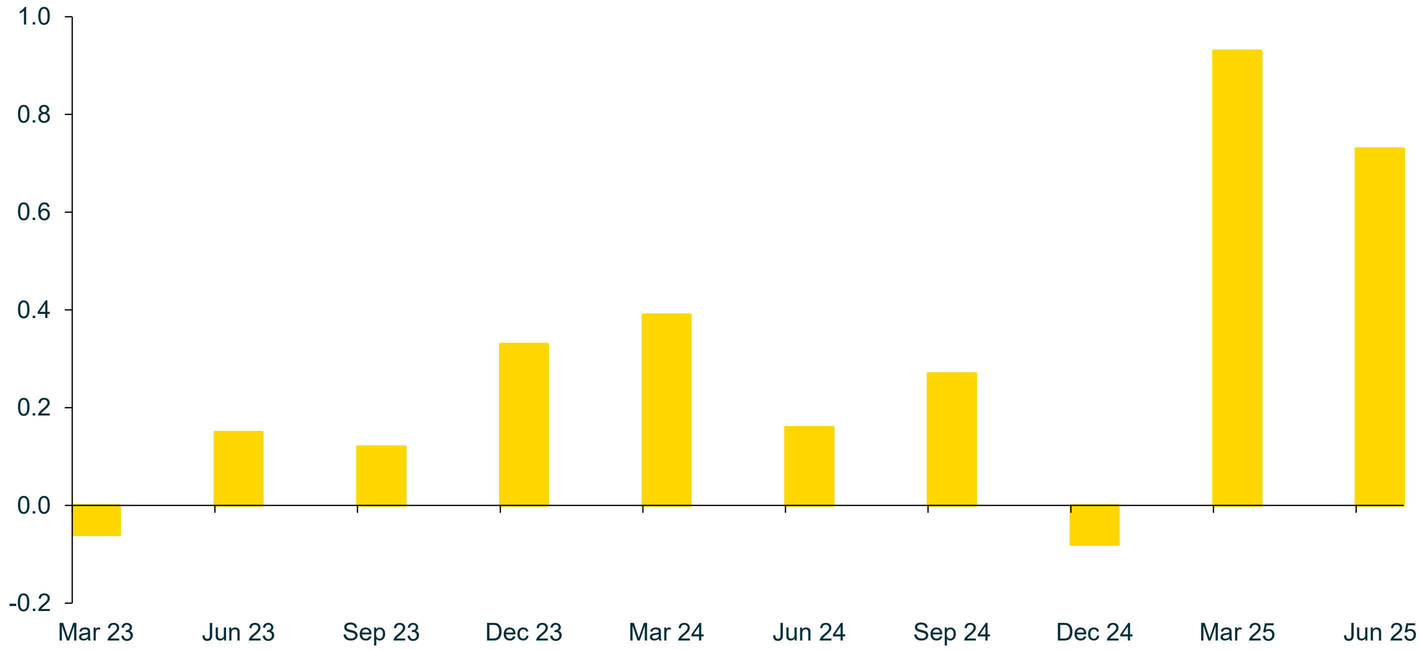
Source: Fed, BEA, Commerzbank Research

Corporate investment benefits from the AI boom

At the same time, corporate investment should benefit in the coming quarters from the boom in artificial intelligence, which is likely still in its infancy (Chart 3). This is also due to the relatively low level of regulation of AI by the new Trump administration. In general, the new administration has removed some barriers to investment, for example in the energy sector. This could partially offset the negative effects of the trade turmoil.

Chart 3 - AI boom has set in

Private investment in computers, peripheral eqipment and software. Contribution to real GDP growth (quarter-on-quarter at annual rate), in percentage points



Source: BEA, S&P Global, Commerzbank Research

Financing conditions are not really slowing things down...

Financing conditions also argue against a slump in the US economy, as they are not yet unfavorable when you consider the record highs on the stock market and low risk premiums. In addition, the US Federal Reserve has already cut interest rates by 100 basis points in 2024. We therefore consider the current key interest rate level to be only slightly restrictive at most.

... and the Fed will cut again soon

Furthermore, further interest rate cuts are foreseeable. Two Fed governors had already spoken out in favor of such a move at the last FOMC meeting. This week, the president of the San Francisco Fed also said she could imagine more than two rate cuts this year. This would mean that the Fed would act at each of its three remaining meetings. Other officials are also likely to have reconsidered their position in light of the weaker labor market figures. We continue to expect interest rate cuts of 25 basis points in September and December, followed by four further steps next year. The upper limit of the target range for the Fed Funds Rate in September 2026 would then be 3.0%.

Financial stimulus in the pipeline

In addition, fiscal policy should also help the economy soon. The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget estimates that Trump's major fiscal package passed in July will increase the budget deficit by around USD 500 billion in the 2026 fiscal year beginning on October 1, 2025. Admittedly, just under half of this is attributable to the extension of an income tax cut that would otherwise have expired on December 31, which does not represent any real stimulus compared with the current situation. However, the other half, amounting to just under 1% of GDP, is additional money that the government is pumping into the economy.

Growth dip, no recession

US recessions, i.e. a contraction of the economy, are quite rare anyway. There have only been three in the last 30 years: 2001, 2008/9 and 2020. The latter was clearly caused by the pandemic and the associated restrictions on economic activity, and is therefore a special case. It is striking that in the other two cases, the consequences of tighter monetary policy were compounded by another negative shock. In 2001, the New Economy bubble burst, and in 2008, the real estate bubble burst. The tariff turmoil is unlikely to shock the US economy enough to trigger a full-blown crisis.

As a large, relatively closed economy, the impact of the tariff turmoil on the US economy is likely to be far less dramatic than the consequences of the bubbles that burst in 2001 and 2008. The Fed's foreseeable further rate cuts should also support growth in the medium term.

We therefore continue to believe that a dip in growth is more likely than a recession. However, this will not happen without some economic pain. The unemployment rate is likely to rise as economic growth weakens. In addition, uncertainty about whether a recession will occur after all is likely to persist for some time. This is because it is not unusual for a growth dip to be followed by a series of weaker economic data. Whether this will then lead to a recession or be replaced by better figures again is not always easy to determine in real time.

Analysts

Dr. Jörg Krämer AC
Chief Economist
+49 69 136 23650
joerg.kraemer@commerzbank.com

Bernd Weidensteiner AC
Senior Economist
+49 69 9353 45625
bernd.weidensteiner@commerzbank.com

This report was completed 8/8/2025 07:23 CEST and disseminated 8/8/2025 07:23 CEST.

This document has been created and published by the Group Research department (GM-R) within the Group Management division of Commerzbank AG, Frankfurt/Main or Commerzbank's non-US branch offices mentioned in the document.

Analyst Certification (AC): The author(s), denoted by AC at the beginning of this report, individually certifies that the views expressed in this report accurately reflect their personal views about the subject securities and issuers; and no part of their compensation was, is, or will be directly or indirectly related to the specific recommendation(s) or views expressed by them contained in this document.

It has not been determined in advance whether and in what intervals this document will be updated. Unless otherwise stated current prices refer to the most recent trading day's closing price or spread which may fluctuate.

Conflicts of interest

Disclosures of potential conflicts of interest relating to Commerzbank AG, its affiliates, subsidiaries (together "Commerzbank") and its relevant employees with respect to the issuers, financial instruments and/or securities forming the subject of this document valid as of the end of the month prior to publication of this document*:

Please refer to the following link for disclosures on companies included in compendium reports or disclosures on any company covered by Commerzbank analysts: **https://commerzbank.bluematrix.com/sellside/Disclosures.action***

*Updating this information may take up to ten days after month end.

Disclaimer

This document is for information purposes only and has been prepared for recipients who, like professional clients according to MiFID II, have the experience, knowledge and expertise to understand information related to the financial markets. The document does not take into account specific circumstances of any recipient and the information contained herein does not constitute the provision of investment advice. It is not intended to be and should not be construed as a recommendation, offer or solicitation to acquire, or dispose of, any of the financial instruments and/or securities mentioned in this document and will not form the basis or a part of any contract or commitment whatsoever. Investors should seek independent professional advice and draw their own conclusions regarding suitability of any transaction including the economic benefits, risks, legal, regulatory, credit, accounting and tax implications.

The information in this document is based on public data obtained from sources believed by Commerzbank to be reliable and in good faith, but no representations, guarantees or warranties are made by Commerzbank with regard to accuracy, completeness or suitability of the data. Commerzbank has not performed any independent review or due diligence of publicly available information regarding an unaffiliated reference asset or index. The opinions and estimates contained herein reflect the current judgement of the author(s) on the date of this document and are subject to change without notice. The opinions do not necessarily correspond to the opinions of Commerzbank. Commerzbank does not have an obligation to update, modify or amend this document or to otherwise notify a reader thereof in the event that any matter stated herein, or any opinion, projection, forecast or estimate set forth herein, changes or subsequently becomes inaccurate.

In order to address potential conflicts of interest Commerzbank's Research department operates independently of other business units of the bank. This is achieved by way of physical and administrative information barriers and separate reporting lines as well as by written internal policies and procedures.

This communication may contain trading ideas where Commerzbank may trade in such financial instruments with customers or other counterparties. Any prices provided herein (other than those that are identified as being historical) are indicative only, and do not represent firm quotes as to either size or price. The past performance of financial instruments is not indicative of future results. No assurance can be given that any financial instrument or issuer described herein would yield favourable investment results. Any forecasts or price targets shown for companies and/or securities discussed in this document may not be achieved due to multiple risk factors including without limitation market volatility, sector volatility, corporate actions, the unavailability of complete and accurate information and/or the subsequent transpiration that underlying assumptions made by Commerzbank or by other sources relied upon in the document were inapposite.

Commerzbank and or its affiliates may act as a market maker in the instrument(s) and or its derivative that has been mentioned in our research reports. Employees of Commerzbank and or its affiliates may provide written or oral commentary, including trading strategies, to our clients and business units that may be contrary to the opinions conveyed in this research report. Commerzbank may perform or seek to perform investment banking services for issuers mentioned in research reports.

Neither Commerzbank nor any of its respective directors, officers or employees accepts any responsibility or liability whatsoever for any expense, loss or damages arising out of or in any way connected with the use of all or any part of this document.

Commerzbank may provide hyperlinks to websites of entities mentioned in this document, however the inclusion of a link does not imply that Commerzbank endorses, recommends or approves any material on the linked page or accessible from it. Commerzbank does not accept responsibility whatsoever for any such material, nor for any consequences of its use.

This document is for the use of the addressees only and may not be reproduced, redistributed or passed on to any other person or published, in whole or in part, for any purpose, without the prior, written consent of Commerzbank. The manner of distributing this document may be restricted by law or regulation in certain countries, including the United States. Persons into whose possession this document may come are required to inform themselves about and to observe such restrictions. By accepting this document, a recipient hereof agrees to be bound by the foregoing limitations.

Additional notes to readers in the following countries:

Germany: Commerzbank AG is registered in the Commercial Register at Amtsgericht Frankfurt under the number HRB 32000. Commerzbank AG is supervised by both the German regulator, Bundesanstalt für Finanzdienstleistungsaufsicht (BaFin), Graurheindorfer Strasse 108, 53117 Bonn, Marie-Curie-Strasse 24-28, 60439 Frankfurt am Main and the European Central Bank, Sonnemannstrasse 20, 60314 Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

United Kingdom: This document is not for distribution to retail customers and has been issued or approved for issue in the United Kingdom by Commerzbank AG, London Branch, which is authorised and regulated by Bundesanstalt für Finanzdienstleistungsaufsicht (BaFin) and the European Central Bank. Authorised by the Prudential Regulation Authority. Subject to regulation by the Financial Conduct Authority and limited regulation by the Prudential Regulation Authority. Details about the extent of our regulation by the Prudential Regulation Authority are available from us on request.

United States: This research report was prepared by Commerzbank AG, a company authorized to engage in securities activities in Germany and the European Economic Area (EEA). Commerzbank AG is not a U.S. registered broker-dealer and is therefore not subject to U.S. rules regarding the preparation of research and associated rules pertaining to research analysts. This document is not for distribution to retail customers. Any distribution of this research report to U.S. investors is intended for "major U.S. institutional investors" in reliance on the exemption from registration provided by Rule 15a-6(a)(2) of the U.S. Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended (the "Exchange Act"). Any U.S. recipient of this research report seeking to effect transactions to buy or sell securities, or related financial instruments based upon the information provided in this research report, may only do so through a Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA) registered broker-dealer. Commerz Markets LLC (CMLLC) is a U.S. registered broker-dealer and wholly owned subsidiary of Commerzbank AG. Commerzbank AG is a registered derivatives swap dealer with the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC), in accordance with the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act. U.S. Person(s) and related Dodd-Frank relevant investors seeking to effect transactions in non-security based swaps based upon the information provided in this research report, may only do so through a CFTC registered swap dealer.

Canada: The information contained herein is not, and under no circumstances is to be construed as, a prospectus, an advertisement, a public offering, an offer to sell securities described herein, solicitation of an offer to buy securities described herein, in Canada or any province or territory thereof. Any offer or sale of the securities described herein in Canada will be made only under an exemption from the requirements to file a prospectus with the relevant Canadian securities regulators and only by a dealer properly registered under applicable securities laws or, alternatively, pursuant to an exemption from the dealer registration requirement in the relevant province or territory of Canada in which such offer or sale is made. Under no circumstances is the information contained herein to be construed as investment advice in any province or territory of Canada and is not tailored to the needs of the recipient. In Canada, the information contained herein is intended solely for distribution to Permitted Clients (as such term is defined in National Instrument 31-103) with whom Commerzbank AG and/or Commerz Markets LLC deals pursuant to the international dealer exemption. The information contained herein is not permitted to reference securities of an issuer incorporated, formed or created under the laws of Canada or a province or territory of Canada, as Commerzbank AG and Commerz Markets LLC operates under the international dealer exemption pursuant to National Instrument 31-103. No securities commission or similar regulatory authority in Canada has reviewed or in any way passed upon these materials, the information contained herein or the merits of the securities described herein and any representation to the contrary is an offence.

European Economic Area: Where this document has been produced by a legal entity outside of the EEA, the document has been re-issued by Commerzbank AG, London Branch for distribution into the EEA. Commerzbank AG, London Branch is authorised and regulated by Bundesanstalt für Finanzdienstleistungsaufsicht (BaFin) and the European Central Bank. Authorised by the Prudential Regulation Authority. Subject to regulation by the Financial Conduct Authority and limited regulation by the Prudential Regulation Authority. Details about the extent of our regulation by the Prudential Regulation Authority are available from us on request.

Switzerland: This document is generally not for distribution to retail clients. Neither this research report nor the information contained herein should be regarded as personal recommendations for transactions in financial instruments within the meaning of the Financial Services Act.

Singapore: This document is furnished in Singapore by Commerzbank AG, Singapore branch. It may only be received in Singapore by an institutional investor, an accredited investor or an expert investor as respectively defined in section 4A of the Securities and Futures Act, Chapter 289 of Singapore ("SFA") pursuant to section 274 or section 275 (as applicable) of the SFA. Nothing in this document constitutes accounting, legal, regulatory, tax, financial or other advice and/or recommendations to the recipient of this communication. Further, the communication/information provided herein does not constitute a "financial advisory service" within the meaning of the Financial Advisers Act, Chapter 110 of Singapore ("FAA") and therefore, the regulatory requirements and duties that may be owed to a client pursuant to or in connection with the FAA are not applicable to the recipient in connection with this communication. Recipients are advised to seek independent advice from their own professional advisers about the information contained discussed herein.

Japan: This information and its distribution do not constitute and should not be construed as a "solicitation" under the Financial Instrument Exchange Act (FIEA) of Japan. This information may be distributed from Commerzbank international branches outside Japan solely to "professional investors" as defined in Article 2(31) of the FIEA and Article 23 of the Cabinet Ordinance Regarding Definition of Article 2 of the FIEA. Please note that Commerzbank AG, Tokyo Branch has not participated in its preparation. Any instruments referred in this report cannot be introduced by the Branch. You should contact the Corporate Clients division of Commerzbank AG for inquiries on availability of such instruments.

Australia: Commerzbank AG does not hold an Australian financial services licence. This document is being distributed in Australia to wholesale customers pursuant to an Australian financial services licence exemption for Commerzbank AG under Class Order 04/1313. Commerzbank AG is regulated by Bundesanstalt für Finanzdienstleistungsaufsicht (BaFin) under the laws of Germany which differ from Australian laws.

People's Republic of China (PRC): This document is furnished by Commerzbank AG and is only intended for eligible entities in the PRC. No-one else may rely on any information contained within this document. The products and services in this document only apply to entities in the PRC where such products and services are permitted to be provided by PRC laws and regulations. For any person who receives this document, the information in this document shall neither be regarded as promotion or solicitation of the business nor accounting, legal, regulatory, tax, financial or other advice and/or recommendations to the recipient of this communication, and the recipient is advised to seek independent advice from its own professional advisers about the information contained herein and shall understand and abide by PRC laws and regulations while conducting any related transactions.

Frankfurt	**London**	**New York**	**Singapore**
Commerzbank AG	Commerzbank AG	Commerz Markets LLC	Commerzbank AG
DLZ - Gebäude 2, Händlerhaus	PO BOX 52715	225 Liberty Street, 32nd floor,	128 Beach Road
Mainzer Landstraße 153	30 Gresham Street	New York,	#17-01 Guoco Midtown
60327 Frankfurt	London, EC2P 2XY	NY 10281-1050	Singapore 189773
Tel: + 49 69 136 21200	Tel: + 44 207 623 8000	Tel: + 1 212 703 4000	Tel: +65 631 10000