

EM Alpha

Short EURPLN using a digital option as the vol is cheap

Fundamentals point to a stronger PLN in the medium term

We buy a six-month digital put option on EURPLN with a strike price of 4.2 at 15.9% (EURPLN spot at 4.317). The zloty looks undervalued on our medium-term model based on the current account (see Not yet time to turn bullish, 23 January 2024). We prefer an options trade because the vol is cheap and we see risks to the zloty in the short term. But forward trades should also work if investors are ready to hold them through a shortterm rise in volatility. The risk is a significant increase in domestic political risks.

Basic balance to remain strong ...

A solid surplus on the basic balance (CA + KA + net FDI), coupled with improving inflows into equities should support a stronger PLN in the medium term (Exhibit 1). While the CA surplus (now at 1.4% of GDP) will likely deteriorate as the domestic economy recovers, we think that this will be largely offset by the improvement in the capital account as new EU funds start to flow (we see c.+1% of GDP in 2024 vs 2023 inflows, and a further c.+0.5% of GDP in 2025). This should keep the basic balance in a stable surplus.

... and equity inflows to increase, driving PLN appreciation

Moreover, the more market-friendly government in power means that Poland should again enjoy more inflows into its equity market, especially if GDP growth remains robust (our baseline). Exhibit 2 shows that equity inflows underperformed significantly during PiS ruling (2016-2023). This is already changing, and we expect this trend to continue.

Cheap vol + short-term risks justify an option trade

The implied vol in EURPLN remains low relative to history, at least partly due to low realised volatility, which we think is likely to increase (Exhibit 3). The market might react more to domestic political developments in the short term or delayed EU funds, driving up both volatility and EURPLN. As a result, we prefer an option to a forward trade.

Positioning is long the PLN, but not too crowded

Our positioning indicators suggest that investors are net long the PLN, especially real money investors. Positioning of hedge funds is almost neutral on our metrics (see Liquid Cross Border Flows: Carry me away, 12 February 2024). Moreover, positioning matters less for medium-term trades expressed through options.

We see the likelihood of EURPLN at 4.2 in 6 months

The digital options that we enter in this piece imply that the probability of EURPLN being 4.2 (the current spot is at circa 4.32) in six months is just circa 16%.

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GEM FI & FX Strategy Emerging Markets Global

Mikhail Liluashvili **EEMEA Local Markets Strategist** MLI (UK) +44 20 7996 1142 mikhail.liluashvili@bofa.com

Mai Doan CEE Economist MLI (UK) +44 20 7995 9597 mai.doan@bofa.com

David Hauner, CFA >> Global EM FI/FX Strategist MLI (UK) +44 20 7996 1241 david.hauner@bofa.com

EEMEA FI Strategy & Economics

GEMs FI Strategy & Economics

See Team Page for List of Analysts

For a list of open trade recommendations and trade recommendations closed in the last 12 months, see Global Emerging Markets Weekly: Carry Conundrum: Risk, Reflation & China, 9 February 2024

Abbreviations

CA is current account

KA is capital account

Vol is volatility

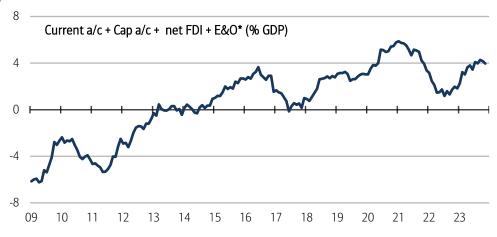
MA is moving average

PO is Civic Platform

PiS is Law and Justice

Exhibit 1: Basic balance surplus is solid, which should support a stronger PLN

The chart shows 12m MA of basic balance as % of GDP

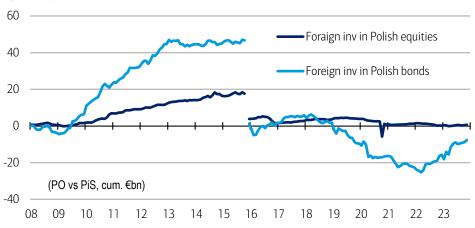


Source: Haver, BofA Global Research. Notes: Basic balance = current account + capital account + net FDI

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Exhibit 2: Equity inflows into Poland as % of GDP

Significantly more inflows into equities when the PO is in power (2008-2015) vs PiS (2016-2023)



Source: Haver, BofA Global Research

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Exhibit 3: EURPLN implied vol is cheap

This most likely has to do with low realized vol, but this is likely to increase, in our view



Source: Bloomberg, BofA Global Research

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Options Risk Statement

Options and other related derivatives instruments are considered unsuitable for many investors. Options strategy is by definition governed by a finite duration. The most severe risks associated with general options trading are total loss of capital invested and delivery/assignment risk, all which can occur in a short period.

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Research Analysts

Asia FI/FX Strategy & Economics

Helen Qiao

China & Asia Economist Merrill Lynch (Hong Kong) +852 3508 3961 helen.qiao@bofa.com

Claudio Piron

Emerging Asia FI/FX Strategist Merrill Lynch (Singapore) +65 6678 0401 claudio.piron@bofa.com

Adarsh Sinha

FX Strategist Merrill Lynch (Hong Kong) +852 3508 7155 adarsh.sinha@bofa.com

Jojo Gonzales ^^ Research Analyst Philippine Equity Partners jojo.gonzales@pep.com.ph

Abhay Gupta

Emerging Asia FI/FX Strategist Merrill Lynch (Singapore) abhay.gupta2@bofa.com

Pipat Luengnaruemitchai Emerging Asia Economist Kiatnakin Phatra Securities pipat.luen@kkpfg.com

Miao Ouyang China & Asia Economist Merrill Lynch (Hong Kong) miao.ouyang@bofa.com

Xiaoqing Pi China Economist

Merrill Lynch (Hong Kong) xiaoqing.pi@bofa.com

Benson Wu

China & Korea Economist Merrill Lynch (Hong Kong) benson.wu@bofa.com

Ting Him Ho, CFA Asia Economist Merrill Lynch (Hong Kong) tinghim.ho@bofa.com

Emerging Asia FI/FX Strategist Merrill Lynch (Hong Kong) janice.xue@bofa.com

Kai Wei Ang Asia & ASEAN Economist Merrill Lynch (Singapore) kaiwei.ang@bofa.com

EEMEA Cross Asset Strategy, Econ

David Hauner, CFA >> Global EM FI/FX Strategist MLI (UK) +44 20 7996 1241 david.hauner@bofa.com

Mai Doan CEE Economist MLI (UK) mai.doan@bofa.com

Zumrut Imamoglu

Turkey & Israel Economist zumrut.imamoglu@bofa.com

Vladimir Osakovskiy >> EEMEA Sov.Credit/EQ strategist Merrill Lynch (DIFC) vladimir.osakovskiy@bofa.com

Jean-Michel Saliba MENA Economist/Strategist MLI (UK) jean-michel.saliba@bofa.com Merveille Paja

EEMEA Sovereign FI Strategist MLI (UK) merveille.paja@bofa.com

Mikhail Liluashvili

EEMEA Local Markets Strategist MLI (UK) mikhail.liluashvili@bofa.com

Tatonga Rusike

Sub-Saharan Africa Economist MLI (UK) tatonga.rusike@bofa.com

LatAm FI/FX Strategy & Economics

Claudio Irigoyen Global Economist +1 646 855 1734

claudio.irigoyen@bofa.com David Beker >> Bz Econ/FI & LatAm EQ Strategy

Merrill Lynch (Brazil) +55 11 2188 4371 david.beker@bofa.com

Jane Brauer

Sovereign Debt FI Strategist +1 646 855 9388 jane.brauer@bofa.com

Carlos Capistran

Canada and Mexico Economist +1 646 743 2921 carlos.capistran@bofa.com

Pedro Diaz

Caribbean Economist BofAS pdiaz2@bofa.com

Antonio Gabriel Global Economist

BofAS antonio.gabriel@bofa.com

Christian Gonzalez Rojas LatAm Local Markets Strategist

christian.gonzalezrojas@bofa.com

Lucas Martin, CFA Sovereign Debt FI Strategist **BofAS**

lucas.martin@bofa.com

Alexander Müller Andean(ex-Ven) Carib Economist

alexander.muller@bofa.com

Natacha Perez Brazil Economist Merrill Lynch (Brazil) natacha.perez@bofa.com

Sebastian Rondeau LatAm FI/FX Strategist sebastian.rondeau@bofa.com

Ezequiel Aguirre LatAm FI/FX Strategist BofAS ezequiel.aguirre2@bofa.com

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