

Santander GO Global Equity ESG

3 / 2025

Fund commentary

Market developments:

The market seems caught in a hall of mirrors with every tremor distorting the view of what comes next, triggering global equity markets in sell-off mode (-8.0% in EUR; -4.5% in USD). The foundation for further US exceptionalism was built on hopes that the new Trump Administration would be pro-business and deregulatory, resulting in a continuation of supercharged growth. However, reality has been different so far, with rising concerns of US economic growth actually turning negative. Constant drumbeats around DOGE job cuts and tariff war messaging come at the cost of delayed corporate spending decisions and waning consumer confidence. Meanwhile, investors are quickly redeploying funds elsewhere, most notably Europe and China. The former has been notoriously slow moving, but is finally waking up from its slumber, while China keeps sending reminders that it's still a force to be reckoned with. At the moment, the myriad of questions around US policy remain unanswered, resulting in stalling flow momentum for global equities, shifting to relative 'safe havens' such as cash, gold and Treasuries instead. Consequently, our strategy has tilted to the more defensive end of the spectrum as well for now.

Largest holdings:

Our top active position is US reinsurance company Marsh & McLennan, which also provides brokerage, consulting, human capital management and risk management services. Marsh is

likely to benefit from continued high inflation and (re)pricing conditions. Deutsche Telekom is

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our second-largest active position. DT is a well-run German telecom operator with stable cash flows domestically, and enjoying growth potential in the US through its holding in T-Mobile USA. As T-Mobile continues to gain market share and is past peak capex, the cash return story towards Deutsche Telekom is very attractive. RELX completes our top-3 active positions. RELX is an information and data analytics company owning a huge portfolio of high quality medical, legal and scientific journals. We also believe that RELX can be an important beneficiary of AI as the demand for accurate and trustworthy data only increases, a key tenet of RELX's business that seems underestimated by the market.

Performance:

In March, the portfolio had a negative absolute return, also lagging the benchmark. Sectorwise, our positioning in Consumer Discretionary helped performance most, while Consumer

Staples and Financials lagged.

In terms of stock selection, AutoZone contributed best to performance. With new car sales still subdued given high prices, consumers continue to spend more on old-car maintenance instead, helping AutoZone stock to move higher. The company is also well on-track to reach 300 mega hubs at full build out as well as opening new distribution centers with new technology to deepen SKU availability.

TotalEnergies also had positive contribution. Defying lower oil and gas prices year-to-date, the high dividend paying Energy sector is acting as a traditional safe haven in the current macro backdrop. TotalEnergies' large exposure to LNG also helps as Europe needs to

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significantly refill its gas storage in the coming months to already prepare for next winter. Finally, insulated from any tariff shocks, journal and risk analytics powerhouse RELX continues to act as a 'sleep-well-at-night' stock. In addition, tangible benefits from its LexisAl and Protégé products in the Legal division, should help spur growth in the coming years. RELX still trades at a discount to its US peers, meaning there's further rerating potential. On the flipside, the sell-off in US equities also hit the banks, seeing large drawdowns the past month across the whole group including Bank of America, JPMorgan and Ameriprise Financial. This might seem slightly overdone as the prospect of higher-rates-for-longer, should actually benefit the banks' net interest income. Of course, this benefit might be offset by slowing loan growth and weaker capital markets, which bears watching.

Furthermore, in contrast to many of its European banking peers, UBS Group struggled as of late, mainly on concerns that regulatory capital requirements might come in harsher than expected. If indeed a more strict capital regime prevails, something that will remain an overhang for months, this could potentially erode the bank's franchise but also eat into its attractive shareholder return policy.

Portfolio changes:

In March, we sold our position in Oracle to trim our overall exposure to the AI theme and investors question the durability of Oracle's AI training business and margin sustainability. Instead, we started a position in Salesforce, a company specializing in customer relationship management software. After the recent drop, SalesForce now trades at a very attractive FCF yield. Furthermore, we also sold our remaining position in Novo Nordisk as recent sales figures

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of its obesity medicine Wegovy is losing market share in the US to competitor Eli Lilly. We reallocated to the likes of UnitedHealth instead. Lastly, we started a position in Chinese entertainment group Tencent, which seems well positioned to capture a host of AI initiatives across its advertising and gaming platforms. We trimmed our position in Amazon as a source of funds.

Management expectations:

As the Trump Administration adamantly tries to reshape the global world order, markets are witnessing a regional and factor rotation away from US growth. In unpicking the consequences of this regime change, the current volatility might last longer than many hope for as the dangerous mix of high inflation and recession fears is not unthinkable anymore. It's too early to properly assess the exact consequences and potential side effects of US policy making, most notably from "Liberation Day" (related to tariffs) on April 2nd. That's why we don't expect this to show up yet in the "hard" data with the upcoming earnings season, although we are keen to learn more from management commentary on their full-year outlook. Across the pond, the allocation shift towards Europe and China might look extended on some metrics, but a good case can be make this repatriation has more runway as the bulk of equity buying has predominantly come from domestic investors so far. Although we were surprised by how easy Germany shifted to fiscal stimulus and release of the 'debt brake', such actions might also open the door to the implementation of the 'Draghi report' on increasing Europe's competitiveness and innovation potential, supporting European equities further.

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