

Highlights

By Stéfane Marion and Kyle Dahms

- Washington's decision to announce the imposition of so-called blanket reciprocal tariffs on the rest of the world in April has taken a heavy toll on the U.S. dollar, which just posted its steepest decline since the global financial crisis of 2009. Even with the Administration now hinting at potential tariff relief, the damage to confidence is done. Stronger reassurances will be needed to restore investor confidence before the USD can regain upward momentum.
- Despite lacklustre economic growth, tariff threats, falling oil prices, and a weakening labour market, the Canadian dollar has jumped 5.4% against the USD in just three months. The loonie has benefited from broad-based U.S. dollar aversion, reinforced by its rise as the world's fifth most widely held reserve currency. Speculators are also giving newly elected Prime Minister Mark Carney the benefit of the doubt, significantly reducing their short positions on the CAD in anticipation of successful USMCA renegotiations and a rebound in economic momentum. But markets have gotten ahead of themselves. According to our model, the CAD is overvalued by more than 9 cents relative to the USD.
- In the last month, the Euro experienced a notable appreciation, rising 7 cents to nearly 1.15 before stabilizing around 1.14. This marked the sharpest monthly gain since the pandemic period, occurring amidst significant global trade disruptions, including new U.S. tariffs targeting the European Union. The Eurozone's relative stability attracted currency flows, bolstered by cautious optimism for future growth. Although speculators have shifted towards a positive view on the Euro, risks remain due to ongoing trade tensions and market uncertainties.

NBC Currency Outlook

Currency		Current	Forward Estimates			
		May 2, 2025	Q2 2025	Q3 2025	Q4 2025	Q1 2026
Canadian Dollar (new forecast)	<i>(USD / CAD)</i>	1.38	1.42	1.39	1.37	1.35
<i>United States Dollar</i>	<i>(CAD / USD)</i>	<i>0.73</i>	<i>0.70</i>	<i>0.72</i>	<i>0.73</i>	<i>0.74</i>
Euro	<i>(EUR / USD)</i>	1.14	1.11	1.14	1.15	1.18
Japanese Yen	<i>(USD / JPY)</i>	144	145	143	140	138
Australian Dollar	<i>(AUD / USD)</i>	0.65	0.63	0.65	0.66	0.67
Pound Sterling	<i>(GBP / USD)</i>	1.33	1.30	1.32	1.33	1.35
Chinese Yuan	<i>(USD / CNY)</i>	7.26	7.27	7.25	7.22	7.20
Mexican Peso	<i>(USD / MXN)</i>	19.6	20.5	20.0	19.5	19.0
Broad United States Dollar ⁽¹⁾		121.7	124.5	122.2	120.7	118.6

1) Federal Reserve Broad Index (26 currencies)

Canadian Dollar Cross Currencies

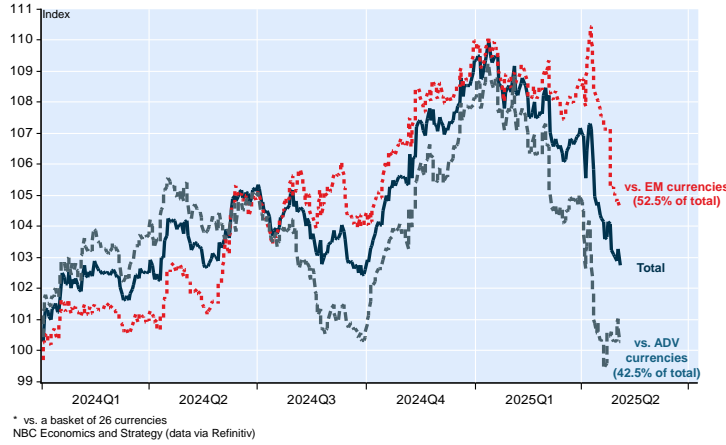
Currency		Current	Forward Estimates			
		May 2, 2025	Q2 2025	Q3 2025	Q4 2025	Q1 2026
Euro	<i>(EUR / CAD)</i>	1.57	1.58	1.58	1.58	1.59
Japanese Yen	<i>(CAD / JPY)</i>	105	102	103	102	102
Australian Dollar	<i>(AUD / CAD)</i>	0.89	0.89	0.90	0.90	0.90
Pound Sterling	<i>(GBP / CAD)</i>	1.83	1.85	1.83	1.82	1.82
Chinese Yuan	<i>(CAD / CNY)</i>	5.28	5.12	5.22	5.27	5.33
Mexican Peso	<i>(CAD / MXN)</i>	14.3	14.4	14.4	14.2	14.1

USD: Worst showing since the GFC

Washington's decision to impose blanket tariffs on its trading partners in April triggered a sharp backlash from foreign investors. The greenback slid 4% on the month—its worst performance since May 2009, when it fell 4.8% during the Global Financial Crisis—and the S&P 500 came close to entering bear-market territory. The U.S. dollar selloff has been broad-based, with the trade-weighted index weakening against both advanced and emerging market currencies (see chart).

USD: Broad-based decline

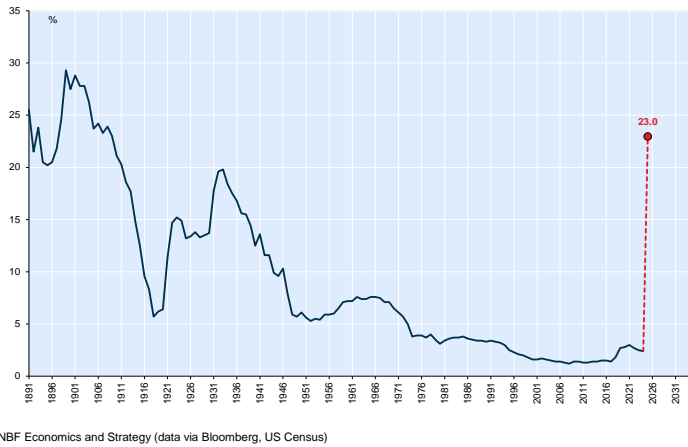
Federal Reserve trade-weighted USD: Total*, emerging economies and advanced economies



In response to mounting financial market turmoil, the Trump administration has announced a 90-day pause on blanket tariffs and partially rolled back duties on Chinese goods and USMCA auto parts. Still, the effective tariff rate remains elevated at 23% in early May—a century-high level we continue to view as punitive for the U.S. economy (see chart).

US: The effective tariff rate remains elevated (and unsustainable)

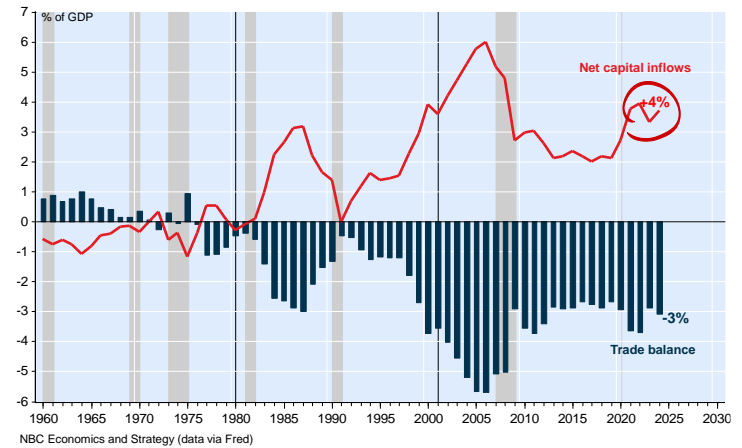
Historical average effective US tariff rate + projected using Bloomberg & NBC assumptions



This is not an environment conducive to sustained greenback appreciation—especially given the U.S. dependence on foreign capital inflows to finance its trade deficit. Historically, these inflows have more than covered the external gap, providing surplus funding that enabled the U.S. to benefit from low borrowing costs and a strong currency long regarded as the world's premier reserve asset (see chart).

U.S.: Trade deficit was more than offset by foreign capital inflows

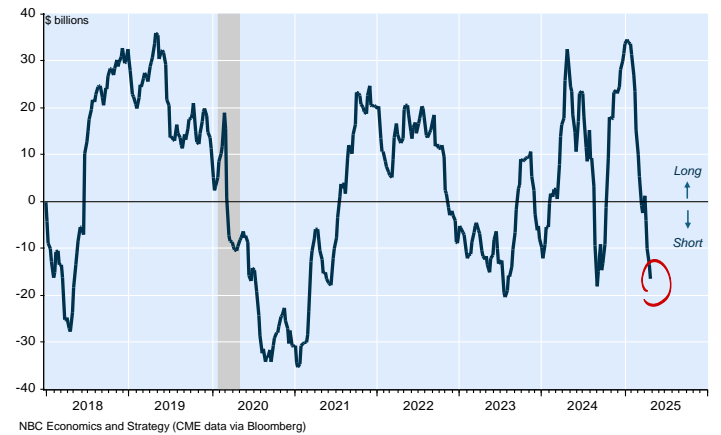
Trade balance in goods and services vs. net capital inflows



Speculators are well aware of this dynamic. Unsurprisingly, they've ramped up their bearish bets against the USD, with net short positions now exceeding \$15 billion—further exacerbating the currency's weakness (see chart).

USD: Speculators ramp up bearish exposure

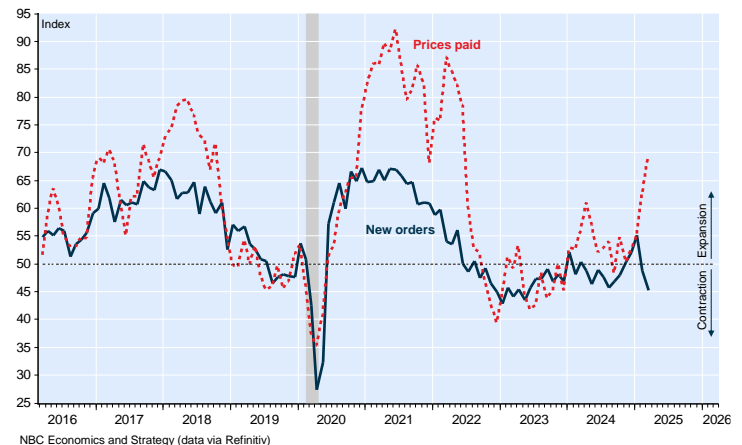
Net speculative positions of non-commercial traders on the USD



Unless the Trump administration offers greater clarity—particularly by reducing the effective tariff rate to a level more acceptable to foreign investors—the USD is unlikely to reverse course. As it stands, there's little to attract capital, with U.S. companies reporting a rare and troubling combination reminiscent of stagflation: slowing growth and rising prices (see chart).

U.S.: Stagflationary vibes

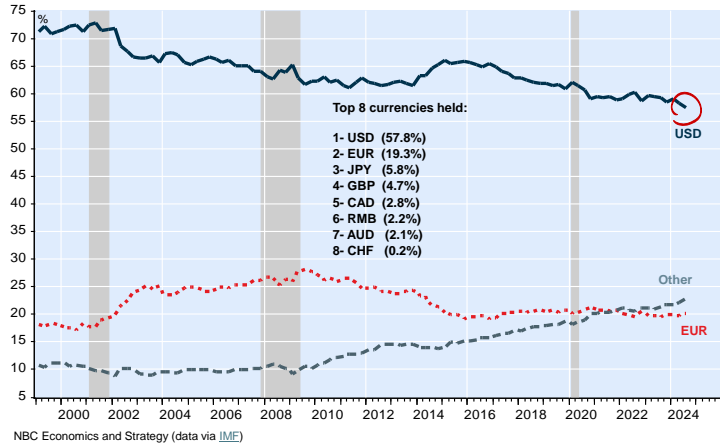
ISM Manufacturing Survey



Restoring investor confidence will be critical in the quarters ahead, as foreign central banks may increasingly seek alternatives to U.S. Treasuries. With more governments pledging higher defence and infrastructure spending, competition for global capital is intensifying. Germany, for instance, recently passed a €1 trillion package to ramp up investment in these areas. This shifting landscape argues for a reduced weighting in USD-denominated reserves, which still account for 58% of global central bank holdings, according to the IMF.

World: Reserve status of the USD is eroding

Share of total allocated foreign exchange reserves (\$11,843 billions as of Q3 2024)

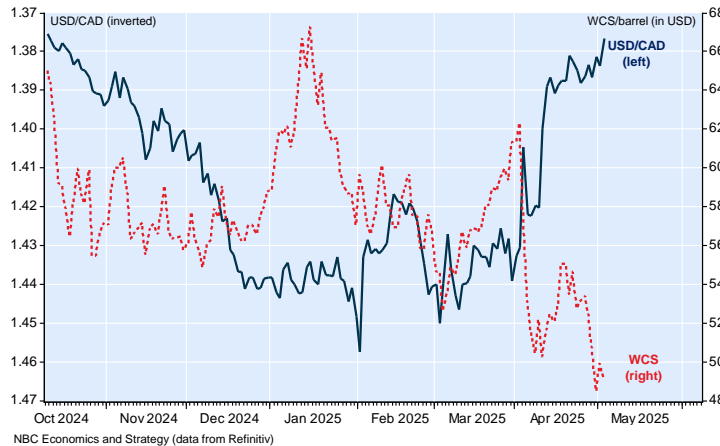


CAD: Stronger and overvalued

Despite lacklustre economic growth, tariff threats, falling oil prices, and a weakening labour market, the Canadian dollar has surged 5.4% against the USD over the past three months. As of May 2, USD/CAD stood at 1.385—a level not seen since October, when Western Canadian Select was trading at \$64 per barrel, compared to just under \$50 today (see chart).

Canada: Loonie surges to strongest level in months

Canada-U.S. exchange rate vs. price of Western Canadian Select (WCS)



The loonie's appreciation comes even as the domestic economy continues to struggle. Real GDP contracted by 0.25% in February—its weakest monthly performance in 26 months and below expectations. The decline was driven largely by weakness in the goods-producing sector, where three out of five sub-sectors posted negative growth. On a year-over-year basis, real GDP is up just 1.5%, a disappointing pace given that the population is still growing at over 2.8% (see chart).

Canada: GDP growth continues to underwhelm

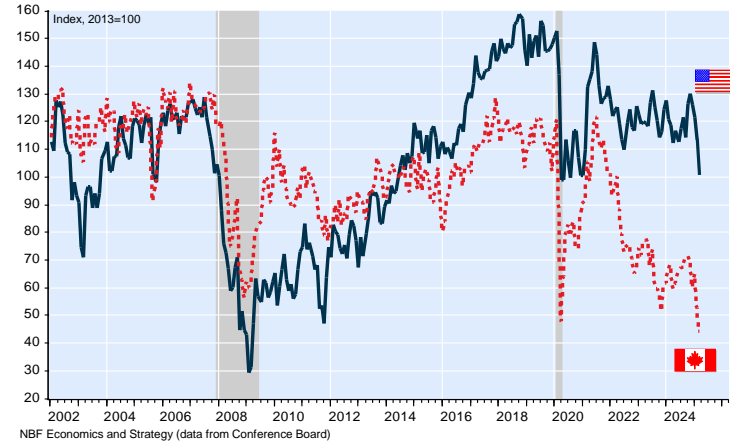
Growth in real GDP and population aged 15+



Declining per capita GDP does little to support consumer confidence or robust household spending. Unsurprisingly, sentiment has taken a hit—consumer confidence, already weighed down by uncertainty surrounding the trade war and job security, recently fell to a new record low (see chart).

Canada: Consumers have never felt worse

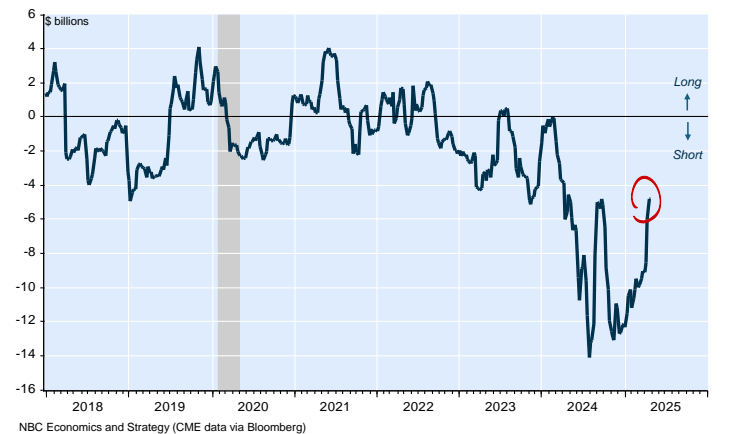
Conference board index of consumer confidence: Canada vs. the U.S.



Despite these headwinds, speculators have grown less bearish on the Canadian dollar, slashing their net short positions from \$12 billion to under \$5 billion (see chart).

CAD: Speculators are reducing short positions

Net speculative positions of non-commercial traders on the CAD

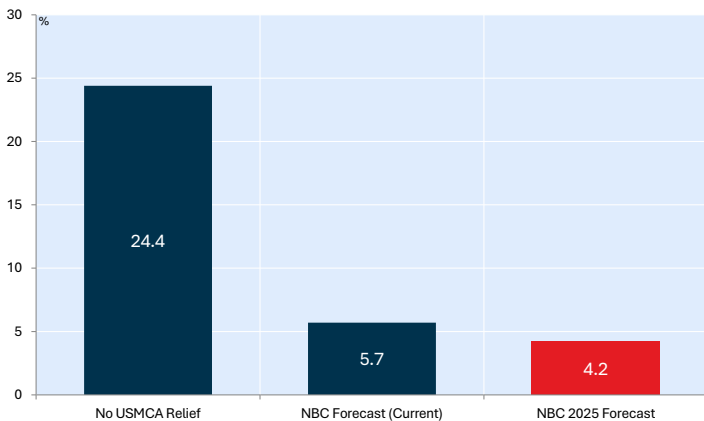


That marks a notable shift—particularly considering the Canadian dollar began the year as the most shorted major currency among non-commercial traders. What’s behind this change of heart? For one, despite the U.S. President’s aggressive trade rhetoric, Canada has thus far been relatively spared from sweeping American tariffs thanks to its inclusion in the USMCA. Alongside Mexico, Canada was largely excluded from the latest tariff list, as both countries remain key USMCA trading partners.

In the current environment, USMCA compliance has clearly become the central criterion for tariff exemption. Without carveouts under the agreement, Canada would be facing an effective tariff rate of 24.4%, factoring in both border-related and sector-specific levies. However, according to February trade data, only 33% of U.S. imports from Canada were USMCA-compliant at the time—translating to an estimated effective tariff rate of 15.6%. That said, we believe a significant compliance push has occurred since February, as Canadian producers rushed to adapt. Once reflected in the trade data, this shift could lower the current sector-weighted exposure to around 5.7%. This figure could drop below 5% in the near term, thanks to rising compliance rates, changes in trade composition, and the possible removal of special levies tied to border disputes (see chart).

Canada: USMCA compliance essential for calculating the tariff rate

Effective tariff rate placed on Canada by the U.S.



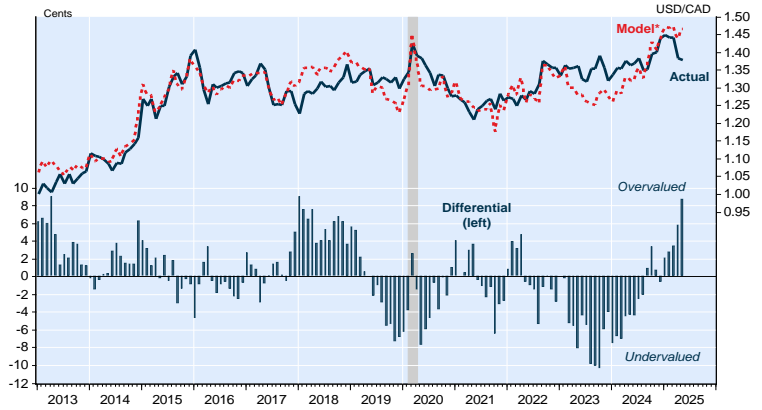
NBC Economics and Strategy (data via US Census) | Note: Current forecast assumes 80% compliance with sector specific adjustments (i.e., energy, which is assumed to be 100% compliant). EOY forecast assumes same compliance breakdown with IEEPA adjustment (12% tariff on noncompliant goods ex. Energy, potash).

Getting there will require Ottawa to renegotiate a new USMCA framework that offers greater visibility and stability for businesses. In a mostly two-party race, Mark Carney’s Liberals won the April 29 federal election. While it marks Carney’s first mandate, it is the party’s fourth consecutive win. The Liberals secured 169 seats—falling short of expert projections and three seats shy of a majority. There is hope that Liberal and Conservative leaders can set aside personal differences to present a united front during these critical negotiations. After all, both parties have taken broadly similar positions on mitigating the impact of the Trump administration’s tariffs, including support for targeted subsidies and the promotion of infrastructure and energy projects.

Beyond trade, the Liberals must also turn their attention to the 2025 federal budget, which is already behind schedule by historical standards. Advancing key energy infrastructure will likely require a timely re-evaluation of existing federal legislation that has hampered development to date. There is a renewed opportunity to take decisive action—one that could not only spur investment but also strengthen federal-provincial relations in the process. A successful USMCA renegotiation and a credible federal budget could provide further support for the Canadian dollar—but time is of the essence. According to our model, the loonie is already trading about 9 cents above its fundamental value (see chart).

CAD: Trading at its richest valuation in 7 years

Actual exchange rate against USD, NBC fair-value estimate* against USD, and differential



* Model estimated from 2013 to 2025:
 $\log(\text{USDCAD}) = \alpha + \beta_1(\text{US2Y yield} - \text{CA2Y yield}) + \beta_2(\text{US30Y yield} - \text{CA30Y yield}) + \beta_3 \log(\text{WCS oil price}) + \beta_4 \text{Vix}$
 NBC Economics & Strategy (data via Refinitiv & Bloomberg)

Under these circumstances, we expect USD/CAD to climb back to 1.42 by the end of Q2, before gradually retreating to 1.35 in the second half of 2025—a trajectory grounded in fundamentals rather than hope.

EUR: Strength amid trade turbulence

The Euro experienced an eventful month in April, during which it appreciated 7 cents to nearly 1.15 before finally stabilizing near the 1.14 level. Month over month, it was the sharpest gain for the currency since the volatile pandemic period. Perhaps most surprising was that this occurred on the heels of the biggest upend of global trade in modern history (excluding the pandemic). On April 2nd the U.S. administration unveiled reciprocal tariffs which targeted amongst others the European Union. While a reprieve was announced, there remains significant tariffs in place for foreign autos which will certainly impact European production. Despite uncertainty in the U.S., the relative stability of the common currency area has attracted currency flows, and we expect this phenomenon to remain at the forefront this year.

While the U.S. dollar may not be dead, the paradigm of American exceptionalism has taken a sizable dent in the last two months. Indeed, the safe-haven status of the dollar was put to the test in a risk-off environment during April and the results were not pretty. Following liberation day, both equities and bonds sold off and the dollar failed to rally. Other major currencies gained, and the Euro which had already been gaining steam shot upwards well-above its 200-day moving average.

Euro: The currency is well above its moving average

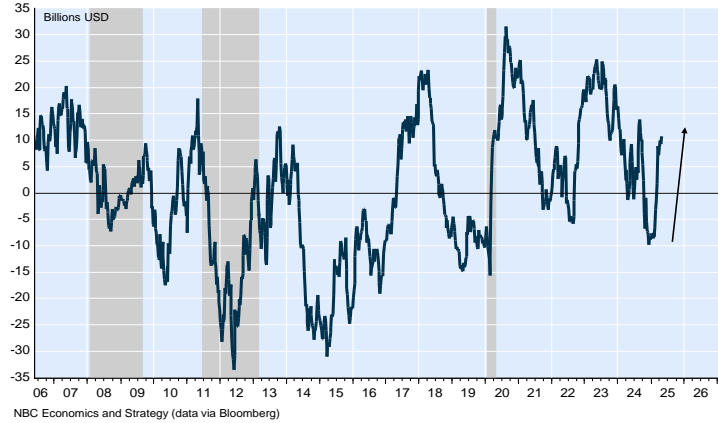
EUR/USD and 200-day moving average



Unsurprisingly, speculators have determinedly moved their positions net-long on the European currency. While the latter may stabilize, we don’t expect a major reversal barring a major risk-off market event.

Eurozone: Speculators rush to long positions on the euro

Non-commercial net speculative positions

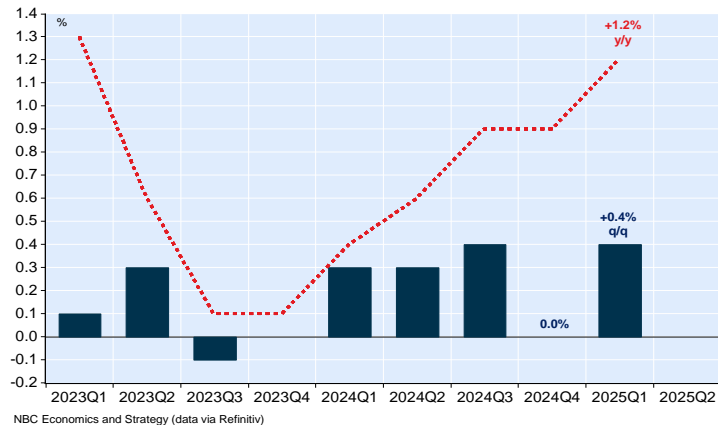


True, the current reversal of positions is a continuation of the trend in the first quarter of the year. Major outlays announced by the German government as well as a willingness to divest from an AI driven American market was underpinning interest for the currency.

Looking at the latest economic data for the Eurozone, there was reason for optimism as first quarter growth surprised two ticks on the upside. As a result, annual growth reached 1.2%, a progression not seen in 2 years.

Eurozone: Growth picked up in the first quarter of the year

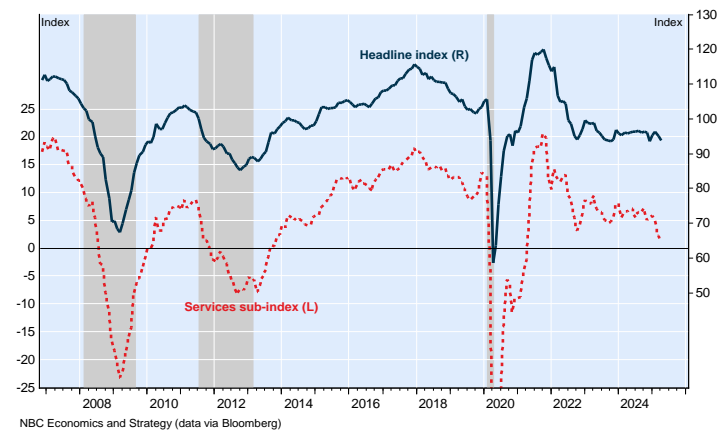
Real GDP



But there is justification to remain cautious for the quarter ahead. Looking at soft data, European economic sentiment deteriorated in April as the services sub-index showed a pronounced decline.

Eurozone: Sentiment taking a turn for the worse as services falter

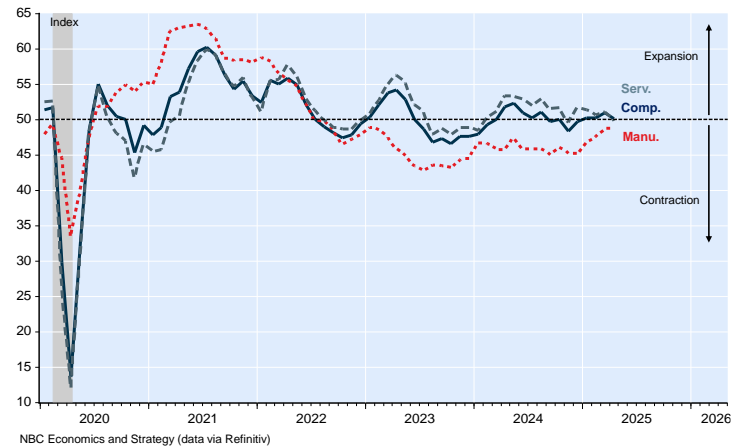
European Commission Services Confidence Indicator



This was also confirmed by the HCOB Flash PMI for April which saw the services sector at a stall-point while manufacturing remained in contraction. Considering EU autos are still subject to a 25% tariff from the U.S., we expect the manufacturing sector to remain in contraction.

Eurozone: Business activity is at the stall-state

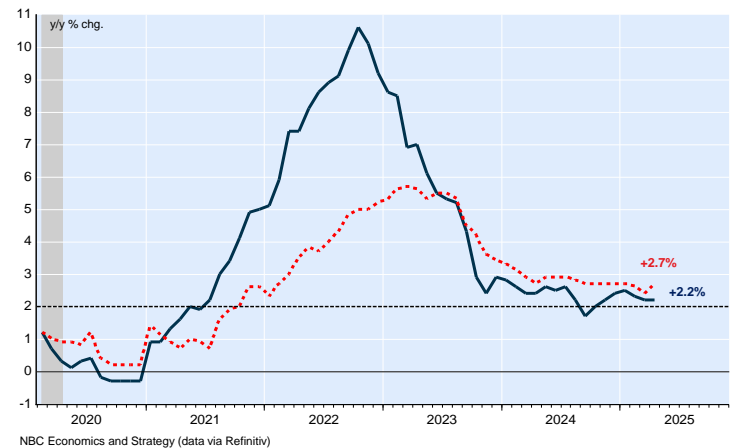
HCOB Flash Eurozone Composite PMI April 2025



The European Central Bank lowered interest rates at its last meeting in April and remains relatively dovish considering the current circumstances. As relayed by the Governing Council, there are risks to the growth outlook given trade tensions and market uncertainty. The disinflation process is going relatively well as witnessed by headline inflation remaining near the 2% target. Core inflation remains somewhat elevated but is expected to moderate near target on a medium-term basis. The recent appreciation of the currency should help with that goal as it should relieve some pressure on import prices.

EZ: Headline inflation near target, core slightly higher

Headline and core CPI



Overall, our outlook for the European currency is one of cautious optimism. In the face of an uncertain trading environment, the common currency area represents a known quantity and should be relatively stable. It would be unfair to say that Europe is not impacted by U.S. policy, and the effect will be noticeable if global growth were to slow significantly this year. While the current appreciation for the Euro may be slightly overdone, we expect that it could continue to appreciate in the latter part of this year.



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