

Rating-Agentur Expert RA GmbH confirmed 'AAA' ratings of the United States of America

Rating-Agentur Expert RA GmbH confirmed the sovereign government credit rating (SGC) of the United States of America at 'AAA' (Highest level of creditworthiness of the government) in national currency and at 'AAA' (Highest level of creditworthiness of the government) in foreign currency.

Rating-Agentur Expert RA GmbH confirmed the country credit environment rating (CCE) of the United States of America at 'AAA' (Highest quality of credit environment of the country) in national currency and at 'AAA' (Highest quality of credit environment of the country) in foreign currency.

MAJOR FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED BOTH TYPES OF RATINGS:

Positive factors:

- Highly diversified, technologically advanced and dynamic national economy combined with a favourable geographical and geopolitical stance. The country scored 5,6 out of 5,8 in the 2015 competitiveness index from the World Economic Forum and ranked 7th out of 180 countries in the Doing Business ranking published by the World Bank;
- The US is one of the world's wealthiest countries with a GDP per capita of USD 57 479 in 3Q 2016. The country markedly stands out among large advanced countries;
- Strongly developed and liquid stock market as shown by the market capitalization of listed companies at 140% of GDP in 2015. The Agency expects this figure to increase given Trump's announcements of possible expansionary policies. Additionally, there are 5440 listed companies and 10115 listed bonds nationwide. However the market capitalization figure might be an indication of a stock-market overheating fueled by a prolonged period of expansionary monetary policy;
- Real GDP grew steadily since 2010 at an average rate of 2% and reached 2,6% in 2015. However, GDP growth rate has been declining since 1Q 2015;
- The fiscal balance was negative but manageable at 3,5% of GDP in 2015. We could potentially see a significant increase in the mid and long run as president-elect Donald Trump may reduce corporate taxes and increase spending, as announced during his campaign. However, there is still a high level of uncertainty around this topic;
- As a result of the creation of 2,4 million new jobs over the last year, unemployment rate reached 4,7% in June 2016 (the lowest since the eve of the 2008 great recession), down from 5,3% in December 2015;
- Moderate and stable level of short-term debt at 8,6% of GDP and 27,3% of budget revenues in 2Q 2016;
- Inflation rate remains low and has steadily declined from 3,1% in 2011 to 0,8% in 2015. Driven by potentially higher GDP growth rates and rising interest rates, the Agency expects the inflation rate to end 2016 with a similar figure as in 2015 and to resume a positive trend in the long run. High inflation expectations have already been reflected in the higher yield curve;
- High volume of national savings at 18,7% of GDP in 2015, which shows the investment potential in the country. Additionally, this indicator has increased steadily over the past six years.

Restricting factors:

- The economy remains substantially leveraged as indicated by the volume of private credit to GDP which stood at 238% in 2015. However, it declined from 251% in 2014.

Negative factors:

- High and stable government debt load at 105,2% of GDP and 331,3% of budget revenues by end-2015. During 1H 2016, government debt increased up to 106% of GDP and we expect, in line with IMF forecasts, this figure to round up the year at 107%. However, the mid- and long-run trend of the US government debt will ultimately depend on the policies in place after the president elect Donald Trump takes office in January 2017;
- The US trade balance is highly negative at around 2,8% of GDP in 2015. However, a number of protectionist policies which were announced by Donald Trump during his campaign could have mixed results on the trade balance of the country. The final impact on trade will be only evidenced in the long run after the new government defines a clearer stance on this topic;
- Persistent politicking between the legislative and executive branches of the government on fiscal policies and debt ceilings that sometimes increases the possibility of a technical debt default. However, this could be mitigated as the newly elected president belongs to the Republican Party, which will hold majority in both the House of Representatives and the senate.

Support factors:

- The US has a strong financial system which affects other countries and the US Treasury bonds serve as international benchmark fixed income securities (Exceptionally strong support factor);
- The country has very strong and important global reserve currency; USD (Moderate support factor);
- Participation in strong trade and political union (NAFTA, OECD) (Moderate support factor).

ADDITIONAL FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED CCE RATINGS:

Negative factors:

- Significant level of private sector debt to GDP (253% in 2Q 2016).

Positive factors:

- High quality and large variety of instruments on the financial market;
- High quality of investor's protection - the US occupied the 35th place out of 180 countries in the ranking of protecting investors from Doing Business in 2015;
- Real interest rates remain low at 2,5% in 2015, but have increased steadily in the wake of the declining inflation. However, the Agency expects the real interest rates to resume a downward trend in the long-term as a result of higher inflation;
- Stock exchange Index (S&P 500) has significantly increased over the last six years and we expect this number to increase due to Trump's expansionary policies.

SENSITIVITY ASSESSMENT:

The following developments could lead to a downgrade:

- Increase of the fiscal deficit to figures observed prior to 2010 as a result of lower than expected fiscal revenues or higher expenses. The cut in the corporate tax rate combined with higher interest payments following the hike in the Fed Funds rate could lead to higher deficit figures in the long run;
- Withdrawal from key trade agreements, which could lead to a reduction of the US volume of trade and increase domestic prices.

"We are confirming the ratings of the US at 'AAA' under the assumption that in the mid run the country's economic position will offset the increased policy uncertainty which emerged after the victory of president-elect Donald Trump.

The US economy has shown significant resilience to external and domestic shocks while the monetary and fiscal policies have well accommodated to economic conditions. A still declining unemployment rate, combined with higher expected inflation rates, create the conditions for a gradual potential increase in the Fed Funds rate.

A high level of uncertainty materialized after Donald Trump was elected president on November 8th. During his campaign he announced possible changes in certain trade deals and corporate tax regime, which could lead to a deterioration of the country's economic position in the long run. However if the Dodd-Frank act is eliminated, as he proposed, financial markets could boost on the wake of lower regulations." – Clarified Gustavo Angel, Rating Associate of Rating-Agentur Expert RA GmbH

Responsible expert: Gustavo Angel, Rating Associate of Rating-Agentur Expert RA GmbH

Reviewer: Hector Alvarez, Rating Associate of Rating-Agentur Expert RA GmbH

Research report on USA is available at:

http://raexpert.eu/reports/Research_report_USA_25.11.2016.pdf

Next scheduled rating publication: TBD in December 2016.

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RATING HISTORY:

Date	Review reason	SGC		CCE	
		National currency	Foreign currency	National currency	Foreign currency
03.06.2016	Scheduled revision of both types of ratings for the country	AAA	AAA	AAA	AAA
11.12.2015	First assignment of both types of ratings for the country	AAA	AAA	AAA	AAA

Minute's summary

The rating committee for the United States of America was held on 22 November 2016. The quorum for the rating committee was present. After the responsible expert presented the factors, which influenced the rating assessment, the members of the committee expressed their opinions and suggestions within the framework of the Sovereign methodology. The chairman of the rating committee ensured that every member of the committee expressed his/her opinion before proceeding to the voting.

The following methodology was used for the rating assessment: Methodology for Assigning Sovereign Government Credit Ratings and Country Credit Environment Ratings. Short Public Version (from April 2015) can be found under the following link: <http://raexpert.eu/files/methodology/Methodology-Short-Sovereign.pdf>. Descriptions and definitions of all rating categories can be found under the following link: <http://raexpert.eu/sovereign.php> under the "Rating scale" section. The user of the rating shall read the methodology in order to have a full understanding of the rating procedure.

These ratings are unsolicited. The rated entity did not participate in the rating process.

Main sources of information: International Monetary Fund, World Bank, World Federation of Exchanges, World Economic Forum, Doing Business, United Nations, US Federal Reserve.

Limits of the Credit Rating

During the rating assignment process, Rating-Agentur Expert RA GmbH (the Agency) used publicly available information that was considered to be reliable, complete and non-biased. The responsible expert performed the rating assessment of the country with information considered as the most reliable and up to date in accordance to the overall position of the country and the Agency's internal criteria for selecting data providers. The information and data used for this specific assessment can be considered as of sufficient quality.

Despite similar methodologies, credit ratings of the United States of America from RAEX (Moscow) (both SGC and CCE) may be different from those assigned by Rating-Agentur Expert RA GmbH due to:

- Possible differences in expert assessments of individual factors;
- Some differences in methodologies (methodologies are similar but not identical);
- Differences in the date/period of assessment for individual factors.

Conflict of interest

The responsible expert was neither influenced nor biased by third parties during the rating assessment. All employees involved in the rating assessment and revision of the rated entity have reported absence of conflicts of interests before initiation of the rating process.

Rating-Agentur Expert RA GmbH is completely independent from the activities of other agencies of the RAEX group.

Risk warning

The Agency disclaims all liability in connection with any consequences, interpretations, conclusions, recommendations and other actions directly or indirectly related to the conclusions and opinions contained in the Agency's Research Reports.

This press-release represents the opinion of Rating-Agentur Expert RA GmbH and is not a recommendation to buy, hold or sell any securities or assets, or to make investment decisions.

Office responsible for preparing the rating

The office responsible for the preparation and issuance of this credit rating is the office of Rating-Agentur Expert RA GmbH in Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

Rating-Agentur Expert RA GmbH is a credit rating agency established in Germany and therefore shall comply with all applicable regulations currently in force in the European Union.

The European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA), the EU's direct supervisor of credit rating agencies (CRAs), has registered Rating-Agentur Expert RA GmbH as a CRA under Regulation (EC) No 1060/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 September 2009 on credit rating agencies, with effect from 1 December 2015.

Rating-Agentur Expert RA GmbH applies the Code of Conduct Fundamentals for credit rating agencies issued by the International Organization of Securities Commissions (IOSCO Code) and includes the basic principles of IOSCO Code in its Code of Conduct.