

Brandes Investment Partners
Emerging Markets Equity Strategy Notes
Second Quarter 2023 (1 April – 30 June 2023)

The Brandes Emerging Markets Equity Strategy returned 5.63% (gross of fees), outperforming its benchmark, the MSCI Emerging Markets Index, which was up 0.90% in the quarter, and the MSCI Emerging Markets Value Index, which gained 2.53%.

Positive Contributors

Notable performers included holdings in electric utilities, specifically **Neoenergia** and **Enel Chile**.

Neoenergia reported robust results and announced the sale of a 50% stake in eight of its operational transmission lines for R\$1.2bn (Brazilian real) equity value, which was well received by the market. Meanwhile, Enel Chile continued its solid rebound in the quarter, driven by top-line growth in its generation business and increased gas sales.

Select information technology holdings appreciated, led by South Korea-based **SK Hynix** and **Samsung**, as well as Taiwanese-listed **Wiwynn**. Several bank positions also lifted returns, notably India-based **IndusInd Bank**, Indonesia's **Bank Rakyat Indonesia**, Austria-domiciled **Erste Group**, Panamanian **Banco Latinoamericano de Comercio Exterior**, and Georgia-based **TBC Bank**.

Other meaningful contributors included Brazilian oil and gas firm **Petrobras**, Mexican cement company **Cemex**, and Panama-based airliner **Copa Holdings**.

Petrobras continued to pay out the majority of its free cash flow in dividends to shareholders, boosting investor optimism and its share price. Meanwhile, Cemex posted solid earnings and improving margins as inflation pressures started to subside.

Relative to the benchmark, the strategy's underweight to China helped performance.

Performance Detractors

Significant detractors included holdings in the consumer discretionary sector, including China-based **Alibaba** and **China Education Group**, Malaysia's **Genting Berhad**, and Hong Kong-based **Luk Fook Holdings**.

Alibaba declined on weaker-than-expected demand recovery in China. An announcement by its largest shareholder, Softbank, that it would sell the majority of its stake pressured the company's shares further. Following the share-price decline, Alibaba now trades at less than 10x forward earnings, a level that we think offers an attractive investment opportunity given the firm's competitive position and long-term growth prospects. Moreover, Alibaba still plans to split its business into six units, which may help crystallise value for some of its underappreciated assets.

Other detractors included South Korean personal care products company **LG H&H** and Latin American telecom **Millicom International Cellular**.

Earlier this year, Millicom disclosed it was in talks with Apollo Global Management and Claire Group about a potential private equity buyout. However, the company confirmed in June that the discussion about the sale had been terminated, while also issuing weaker-than-expected earnings guidance, causing the shares to drop.

Although our holdings in India generally performed well, our underweight to the country hurt performance relative to the MSCI Emerging Markets Index.

Select Activity in the Quarter

We initiated positions in South African bank **Absa Group** and China-based **LONGi Green Energy Technology**.

LONGi is the world's largest integrated manufacturer of solar wafer and modules, with industry-leading profit margins. The company's key competency lies in wafer production, which accounts for the bulk of its profits. Integrated players sell their wafers after assembling them into finished modules, or in the case of LONGi, also via external sales to third-party module producers.

LONGi saw its share price halved over the past year due to both industry-wide and company-specific challenges. At the industry level, aggressive capacity expansion plans pose a threat of an oversupply, while elevated prices for polysilicon (a raw material for solar modules) have squeezed profits along the solar value chain. To a lesser extent, there has also been a concern that geopolitical issues, including trade barriers and strong policy support for solar panel manufacturers in the U.S., could result in market share losses for major Chinese players (note that the Americas segment, which includes sales to the U.S., accounted for about 7% of LONGi's sales in 2022). Specific to LONGi, the company's technological leadership was called into question after it lagged peers in deploying the latest solar cell technology and investors became worried that aggressive pricing by its main competitor in China's wafer duopoly market could potentially hurt LONGi's main profit engine.

We believe the current situation represents an opportunity for long-term oriented investors to purchase LONGi at a time when this industry leader has fallen out of favor. Previously considered a high-growth company, LONGi now trades at a valuation multiple that implies little to no growth, based on our analysis, and at a discount to most of its peers—despite having cost and technological leadership in a growing market. While we expect the industry to continue to be increasingly competitive and understand that any technological edge is likely short-lived, we believe LONGi is well positioned to remain competitive in the long term given its deep pool of resources and its core competency in wafer manufacturing.

Year-to-Date Briefing

The Brandes Emerging Markets Equity Strategy returned 15.02%, outperforming its benchmark, the MSCI Emerging Markets Index, which returned 4.89% in the six months ended 30 June 2023, and the MSCI Emerging Markets Value Index, which was up 6.53%.

The strongest contributors were holdings in Mexico and Brazil, led by Cemex, regional jet manufacturer Embraer, and Petrobras. Mexican real estate investment trusts **Fibra Uno**, **Terrafina**, and **FIBRA Macquarie Mexico** also aided returns. From a sector standpoint, the strategy benefited from holdings in materials, utilities, and real estate.

Notable detractors were primarily holdings in consumer staples and consumer discretionary, including China-based **TravelSky Technology** and China Education Group, as well as South Korean LG H&H.

Current Positioning

As of 30 June 2023, the Brandes Emerging Markets Equity Strategy held large overweights to real estate (outside China), utilities, and consumer discretionary, while maintaining key underweights to materials and energy. Geographically, the strategy remained underweight China, although Chinese companies made up our largest country allocation. We also continued to be underweight India, Saudi Arabia, and Taiwan, while having significant overweights to companies in Mexico, Brazil, and Panama.

A variety of concerns continue to face emerging markets stocks, including elevated inflation, worries about slowing economic growth or recession, and political as well as regulatory uncertainties. Despite these challenges, the asset class (MSCI EM) posted solid returns over the last nine months, highlighting our belief that often when the market is the most negative, it can be a great time to invest.

While high-level valuations may not be as attractive as they were at the beginning of the year, emerging markets equities continue to represent, in our opinion, fertile ground for fundamentally solid businesses trading at a discount to their estimated intrinsic values. Within the asset class, value stocks (MSCI EM Value) continue to trade in the highest decile of discount levels to the broader market (MSCI EM) on a variety of valuation metrics, including forward price/earnings, price/cash flows, and enterprise value/sales. We are optimistic about the potential of value stocks in general and believe the Brandes Emerging Markets Equity Strategy remains well positioned from a long-term risk/reward perspective.

Enterprise Value: Market capitalisation plus debt, minority interest and preferred shares, minus total cash and cash equivalents.

Enterprise Value/Sales: Compares the enterprise value of a company to its annual sales.

Forward Price/Earnings: Price per share divided by earnings per share expected over the next 12 months or next fiscal year.

Free Cash Flow: Total cash flow from operations less capital expenditures.

Profit Margin: Net income divided by revenues.

Price/Cash Flows: Price per share divided by cash flow per share.

The MSCI Emerging Markets Index with net dividends captures large and mid cap representation of emerging market countries. Data prior to 2001 is gross dividend and linked to the net dividend returns.

The MSCI Emerging Markets Value Index with gross dividends captures large and mid cap securities exhibiting value style characteristics, defined using book value to price, 12-month forward earnings to price, and dividend yield.

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