

Economic Outlook

Chile

Fourth Quarter 2011
Economic Analysis

- **The global economy will continue to grow at two speeds** following the slight slowdown in the first half of the year. Growth is focused in emerging economies, while Europe is immersed in major turmoil.
- **We are maintaining our 2011 growth forecast for Chile at 6.5%, and revising down that for 2012 from 4.7% to 4.5%** in response to the deterioration in the external scenario.
- **Inflation should reach 3.6% at the close of 2011 and 3.2% in 2012, with the balance of risks in equilibrium** between upward domestic and downward external pressures.
- **The strength of domestic demand** does not leave room for cuts in the reference rate.
- **There is a clear uncoupling between external and domestic risks**, but external risks will dominate, with negative effects on growth, inflation and the resulting economic policy response.

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Closing date: November 10th 2011

1. Global outlook: slowdown with risks tilted to the downside

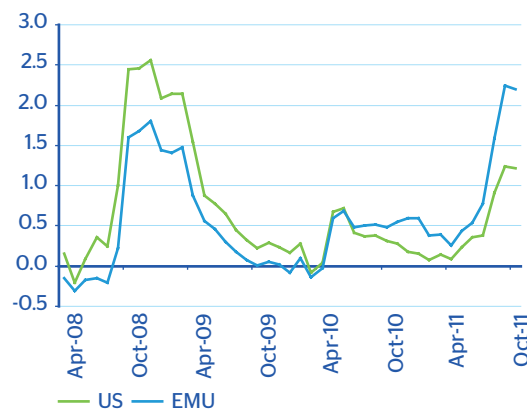
The outlook is heavily dependent on the resolution of the European debt crisis

The outlook for the global economy has worsened over the past few months, driven mainly by four factors whose influence is still being felt. First, lower than expected economic growth mainly, but not only, in developed economies. Although US growth increased in the third quarter, economic activity in Europe, which had held up in the first quarter, is now on a clear deceleration path. Second, the sovereign debt crisis in Europe has intensified and has become more systemic. While decisions announced in the October summit go in the right direction, key elements are still unresolved, especially regarding the firepower of mechanisms for providing sovereign liquidity—a leveraged European Financial Stability Fund (EFSF), the restructuring of Greek debt held by private investors, and a roadmap for advancing European governance towards a fiscal union. Third, the feedback between sovereign concerns and the health of the European financial system has intensified, with financial tensions exceeding the levels reached after the collapse of Lehman Brothers in October 2008 (Chart 1). Finally, higher global risk aversion has resulted in increased financial market volatility, spilling over to emerging market assets for the first time since 2009.

In this context, we revise downward our global growth forecasts by 0.3pp in 2011 and 2012, relative to our previous Global Economic Outlook, mostly due to lower expected growth in advanced economies (US and Europe, compensated in part by Japan), although emerging markets will also grow slightly less than previously anticipated. Thus, the global economy would grow by 3.9% in 2011 and 4.1% in 2012, supported by still-solid growth in emerging economies against lackluster performance in advanced countries (Chart 2).

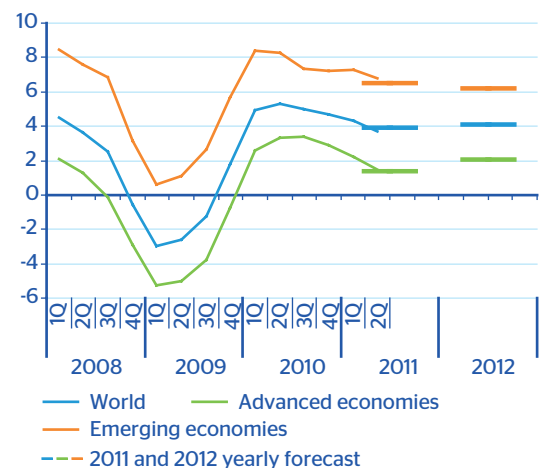
While these are still reasonably strong growth rates, risks are strongly tilted to the downside, hinging in the short term on the evolution of the sovereign-financial crisis in Europe. In particular, a quick reduction of financial stress in Europe is needed to avoid a sharp impact on growth both in Europe and in other regions through financial exposures and spillovers from global risk aversion.

Chart 1
BBVA Financial Stress Index



Source: BBVA Research

Chart 2
Global GDP growth (%yoy)



Source: BBVA Research and IMF

Europe takes steps in the right direction, but leaves key elements unresolved

In our view, there were five main points that needed to be successfully addressed in the October EU summits: (i) tackling the sustainability of Greek debt; (ii) erecting sovereign firewalls in the EMU; (iii) pushing for further reforms in peripheral countries; (iv) strengthening the banking sector; and (v) advancing euro area governance. In this regard, the recent summits have taken important steps in the right direction, but have not yet addressed most of these points definitively.

First, private bondholders of Greek debt are asked to take a voluntary haircut of 50% –much higher than agreed in July– but doubts still linger about participation in the exchange and about the solvency of Greece, even with full participation. Second, the EFSF will be leveraged as an insurance mechanism and complemented with outside investors (including possibly the IMF), but it is unlikely that the specifics of the functioning of the EFSF will be in place before December. Many weeks will pass to ascertain its effectiveness, and hence the ECB will still be needed as a buyer-of-last-resort for sovereign debt, against the reticence of core European countries. Third, while it is welcome that more economic reforms are now on the agenda (notably in Italy), the recapitalization of the banking sector is being done inefficiently, posing risks of a sudden deleveraging of European banks. Also, a long-term liquidity provision mechanism is not in place yet. Finally, while there have been some advances in European governance, there is no clear roadmap to a fiscal union or Eurobonds, which in our view a key to a more credible monetary union in the long run.

As we have emphasized in the past, partial solutions may help prevent a further escalation of financial tensions, but not to reduce them to more sustainable levels. As such, the agreements reached so far still leave doubts about whether the necessary structure to prevent contagion from a Greek debt restructuring is in place. This would require a sufficiently large EFSF with the ECB as debt-buyer-of-last-resort and recapitalized banks with access to financing. Without these elements in place, markets will continue to discount the sustainability of reforms in Greece and appetite for further bailouts in core countries, increasing the probability of a downside scenario of a credit crunch and a recession in Europe, with global spillovers.

Some improvements in US growth in Q3, but structural weaknesses remain

More on the positive side, growth in the US seems to have accelerated in the third quarter, at least according to preliminary estimates. This is not saying much –growth in the first two quarters was very low and the output gap is still very high. But it appears to have reduced market expectations of a double dip. Nevertheless, structural weakness remain in the US economy, as consumer and business confidence continue to be weak along with prospects of further housing market adjustments. This would imply lower resilience in the face of a possible shock from Europe. In addition, political deadlock could impede a “grand bargain” to (i) prevent an unintended fiscal contraction in the short run and (ii) push reforms towards a credible fiscal consolidation in the long run.

Emerging economies are on track for a soft landing, but with external headwinds

Emerging economies continue growing strongly, supported by the resilience of domestic demand. Still high commodity prices for Latin America and export growth in Asia –despite strong corrections in both cases– also contribute to a strong growth outlook, which is on track for a much-awaited soft landing after concerns of overheating seen earlier in the year. Renewed turmoil in Europe and the US already represent strong headwinds from financial markets in both regions –reflected in increased market volatility, depreciated exchange rates and reduced capital inflows. However, many countries also enjoy sizable buffers –stronger public finances and better macroeconomic management than in the past– and are well positioned to introduce policy stimulus to counter weaker external demand. Overall, a more negative external environment has switched the focus in emerging countries from overheating to downside risks and, increasingly, the possible need for policy support.

2. Chile: gentle slowdown, but still without clear signs of contagion

Contrasting speeds of economic slowdown by activity

As expected, economic activity slowed over the last quarter. In annual terms, this was partly the result of the more difficult base of comparison as the post-earthquake effect of February 2010 became absorbed. The Monthly Economic Activity Indicator (IMACEC) was up 4.8% y/y in 3Q11, after growth of 8.1% in 1Q11 and 6.8% in 2Q11.

However, the overall slowdown in activity obscures some differences between sectors, as although all of them slowed their growth, some did so significantly more steeply than others. This is the case of manufacturing industry and mining. In the case of manufacturing industry, the slowdown was from an annual 7.8% to 2.5% between 2Q11 and 3Q11, while in mining there was actually a fall of 6.8% in 3Q11 as a result of labor disputes and adverse weather conditions. In contrast, retail trade remains buoyant, particularly sales of durable goods, with a slight slowdown in sales of basic consumer goods. Surveys of consumer and business confidence were also relatively positive, although business confidence deteriorated in the last month (Chart 3).

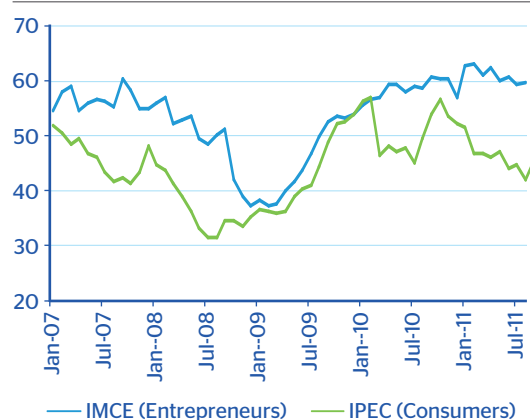
With the domestic economy growing at around its trend rate and the global economy recovering (albeit slowly), we expect annual GDP growth of 4.5% for 2012, boosted by expansion of domestic demand of 6.1% and a negative contribution from the external sector (Chart 4).

We expect private consumption to grow by an annual 5.2% as a result of the slowdown in both the basis consumer component and durable goods. This is due to less impact from restocking by households, credit conditions and steady job creation during the period. On the investment side, the forecast points to an annual increase of 8.9%, marginally below the previous forecast, in part due to a weaker external scenario. Imports of capital goods remain buoyant, but there has been a slowdown at the start of the fourth quarter. In any event, this growth means investment to GDP ratio for next year will continue to be high.

In the foreign sector, the trade surplus for 2012 will halve to USD 8.9 billion (70% of GDP). This is a result of two factors: the lower terms of trade expected for the next two years, essentially due to falling copper prices; and imports (7.1%) growing more than exports (6.2%). This will be reflected in an increase in the current account deficit from -1.3% of GDP in 2011 to -2.7% in 2012. In the longer term, although copper prices converge at their trend levels, the moderation in domestic demand and imports suggest there will be deficits in the current account of around 2-3% of GDP.

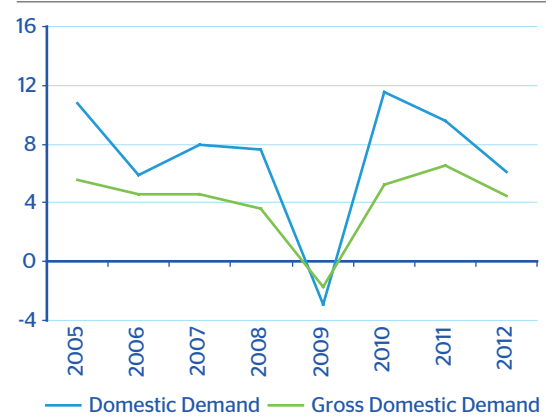
With respect to the financial account, the Central Bank's USD 12 billion international reserve accumulation program will be completed in December. This will be offset by greater foreign direct investment expected for this year and a shift in portfolio flows from strongly negative in 2010 to positive this year. In 2012, the main counterpart of the current account deficit will be foreign direct investment.

Chart 3
Surveys of expectations (diffusion index)



Source: Adimark and Icare

Chart 4
GDP and domestic demand (y/y % change)



Source: BCCh and BBVA Research

Credit conditions tighter, but still favorable

In addition to what are still favorable conditions for lending, the strength of economic activity, in particular employment and wages, has sustained credit expansion over recent months and will maintain its strength in 2012. Thus the nominal growth of lending to individuals stood at an annual 13.9% in September, with consumer finance increasing by 17.6% and mortgages by 12.0%. Lending to individuals is expected to increase by an annual 13.1% in 2012, with consumption slowing in 2012, consumer expectations falling slightly due to the deterioration of the scenario, and interest rates remaining stable. We estimate that after an annual increase of 18.1% in September, corporate lending will slow more through next year to an annual 12.0%, given sluggish growth in non-residential investment compared with 2011.

3. Inflation within the target range, but with opposing tensions

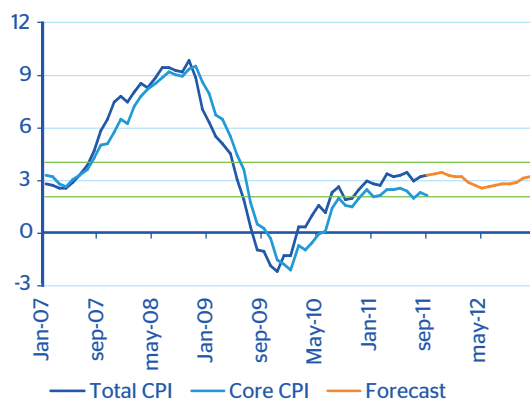
Inflation has remained within the tolerance range in recent months. Price increases of tradable goods have been relatively limited compared with non-tradable goods. At the same time, measures of core inflation have continued to converge from under the annual inflation target of 3.0%.

Differences can be observed by categories, and these will determine price movements in the medium term. Thus a relatively high exchange rate (before the increase in risk aversion in September) combined with falls in the prices of imported goods has maintained inflation in tradable goods limited to an annual 2.9% in October. However, inflation in non-tradable goods stood at an annual 4.7% in October, in line with the strength of domestic demand and the labor market.

The high rate of job creation, at an average of 190,000 for 2011-12, would push the unemployment rate down close to the level of full employment. We estimate it will average 7.1% in 2012, given what is still solid growth in the construction and retail trade sectors. Against this background, wages continue to grow at nominal rates of above 6% and real rates close to an annual 3.0%. The tight labor market therefore continues to be a risk factor for inflation in the medium term, both due to cost pressures and due to its impact on private consumption.

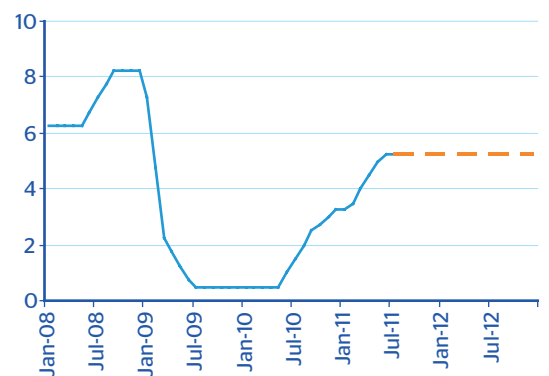
The forecast scenario also has to take into account the correction in some commodity prices due to the international uncertainty. In particular, grain and fuel prices could remain lower and ease cost pressure from imported goods. In all, we expect the inflation rate to be 3.2% at the close of 2012, which converges on the long-term target (Chart 5), with the balance of risks in equilibrium, given the greater risk of recession in developed economies and its direct effect on the main emerging economies. This is offset by the risk of inflationary pressures that could arise from the tight labor market in a context of narrowing production-capacity gaps at the end of the year.

Chart 5
Headline and core inflation (Var.% y/y)



Source: INE and BBVA Research

Chart 6
Monetary policy rate (%)



Source: BCCh and BBVA Research

4. Protracted monetary policy pause

The financial turmoil in Europe has modified the tone of monetary policy statements from the latest meetings of the Central Bank. Its attitude is now cautious, with a downward bias included in its latest statement, paving the way for possible cuts if a worsening of the external scenario has clear negative effects on the expectations of domestic agents.

Although the market anticipates cuts in the reference rate in the light of statements by the monetary authority, we do not consider that this will occur. We expect the monetary policy rate to remain at its current level throughout 2012 and then begin to rise once the developed economies begin their process of rate normalization.

This scenario is consistent with a balance of inflation risks in equilibrium, given that if there is progress in the solution to the debt problem in Europe, the strength of domestic demand and the lack of production-capacity gaps leave no room for cuts in the policy rate (Chart 6).

The peso fell sharply in October on the foreign-exchange market in response to increased global risk aversion. Chile was hit not only by capital outflows, but also a major adjustment in the price of copper, which fell as much as 25% after fears of contagion to the main emerging economies depressed expectations of demand for commodities. Only the progress made in resolving the European debt crisis and reduced fears of contagion to economies such as China led to a partial upturn in the copper price, which is now around USD 3.4 per pound, while the peso stands at around CLP 500/USD.

The overall result is a fall in the terms of trade. The adjustments we expected for the medium term have arrived earlier than forecast, and offset part of the pressure to which the real exchange rate was subject in the first half of the year. In this scenario, we estimate that the exchange rate will be at around CLP 500/USD at the close of 2011, and the real exchange rate will remain essentially stable in the medium term.

5. Fiscal policy under pressure with less room for maneuver

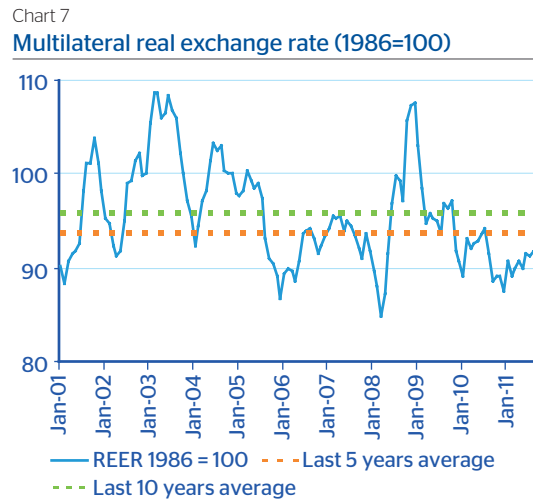
In terms of the budget, government estimates suggest that the actual fiscal deficit will hit 1.2% of GDP, and the structural deficit 1.6% of GDP in 2011. The draft budget for 2012 now under discussion includes a stable external scenario, in which GDP will grow by 5.0% and domestic demand by 5.5%, with the copper price remaining favorable in the medium term. This appears a reasonable base scenario. Government estimates are for an actual deficit of 0.5% and a structural deficit of 1.5% of GDP. This represents a slight improvement on this year's figure and practically the same as our forecasts. However, it is important to mention that the current budget debate in Congress is taking place in a scenario of growing demand for higher spending, which could make the approval of more critical items such as education more difficult in the wake of conflicts that began six months ago.

At the same time, the government plans to cut the structural deficit to 1% of GDP in 2014, which puts additional pressure on the adjustment needed in 2013-14. However, it will be difficult to put this into practice due to the political cycle, as the presidential election is due at the end of 2012. What is more, this target does not appear very ambitious to us, as in fact it implies that three quarters of the supposedly temporary fiscal stimulus of 2008-09 has become permanent, thus limiting the chance of applying new stimuli if the international situation deteriorates.

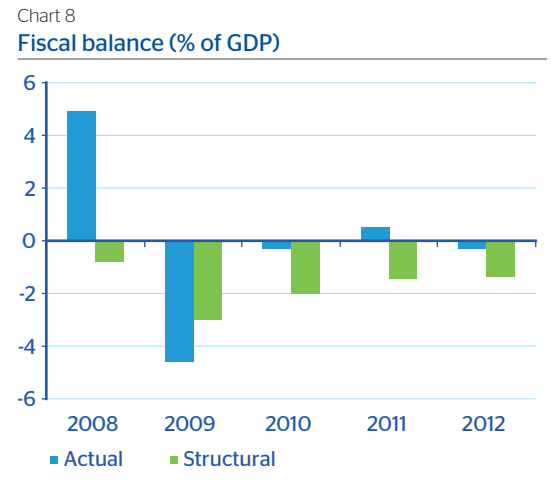
A plus factor is that the funds accumulated by sovereign funds have recovered and are now at a level comparable to that of the end of 2008. However, the fiscal stimulus package of 2009, amounting to the equivalent of 2.8% of GDP, increased public spending from less than 20% to 24% of GDP, where it has remained for the last two years. If a new economic policy response was necessary in the face of a renewed crisis in the developed economies, spending as a proportion of GDP would increase again and require additional adjustments in the coming periods. In this context, taxes would almost inevitably have to rise in the medium term, as if there are no additional adjustments to expenditure, we can expect a trend structural deficit of the order of 2% or more of GDP. What is more, if the copper price were to fall in the future, CODELCO's costs rose or its production fell, the job of returning to the target of structural equilibrium would become even more difficult.

In terms of the medium-term impact on the macroeconomic variables, the forecasts in the Public Finances Account 2012 include a gradual withdrawal of the fiscal stimulus over the coming years, with real growth in average expenditure between 2013 and 2015 of 3%. If this was accompanied by the expected moderation in domestic demand and some deterioration in the global scenario, it would mean that the current level of public expenditure would not deviate inflation from its target in 2012. We expect that the issue in the last two years of public debt in pesos for an equivalent of USD 6 billion will be repeated, together with a foreign-currency issue of USD 500 million. Political coordination between the Treasury and the Central Bank on the question of issuance could ensure that the impact of this policy on the structure of interest rates will be marginal.

However, we expect that fiscal spending will continue to put upward pressure on the exchange rate, both due to the slow withdrawal of the stimulus, and because we estimate that in 2012 the Treasury will have to find an additional USD 2 and 3 billion to cover its financing needs (Charts 7 and 8).



Source: BCCl and BBVA Research



Source: Budget Department and BBVA Research

6. Asymmetrical external and local risks

Deterioration in Europe will lead to lower growth worldwide and in Chile

The risk scenario of a disorderly resolution to the debt crisis in Greece, which would lead to contagion to the rest of the developed and emerging markets, has become more probable recently. In this context, commodity prices will fall to below the levels of recent months. In the case of the copper price we estimate that it will remain within a range of between USD 2-2.5 per pound for a number of years, unlike after the last crisis, when it recovered swiftly. The main channel through which the international situation can be transmitted to Chile, and its main weakness, will be the significant weight of commodities, and in particular copper, as a proportion of total exports.

In addition, channels that are important in other countries, such as the increase in risk aversion and worsening international financial conditions, will be less so in Chile, both because of the low public and private financing needs and because of expectations of more positive spread levels in the rates affecting the country. This factor is linked to the macroeconomic soundness provided by Chile's well-known fiscal rule, as well as the stabilizing effect provided by inflation-target monetary policy combined with a flexible exchange rate.

In this situation, with the interest rate at close to its neutral level and international reserves of around USD 40 billion (around 16% of GDP), there will be significant room for a monetary policy reaction. In terms of the capacity for a fiscal response, the funds accumulated by the Treasury and the Economic and Social Stability Fund (FEES) are above the levels at the end of 2008, and the Chilean state is a net creditor. This also gives it a significant room for maneuver, despite the point explained above regarding a more permanent deterioration of the fiscal deficit. However, despite the fact that these conditions were present in the last crisis, the effect on expectations and domestic demand was greater than expected at that time. On this occasion, we estimate that the deterioration in private-sector confidence will be less marked than in 2008, because the sector is better prepared than last time, due to better economic policy responses to the slower development of the crisis, and because of the lessons learned by the swift recovery of the Chilean economy in 2009. The contraction of domestic demand will therefore be more limited than after the last shock. The peso will depreciate again, although not as much as at the start of 2009, and reach levels of close to CLP 600/USD. In terms of prices, the dominant factor will once more be a slowdown in demand. This will lead to an inflation slightly below 1% in 2012, but still positive.

GDP growth will on average be around two percentage points below the figure for the two-year period 2012-13, accompanied by a limited deterioration in the fiscal balance. In contrast, the adverse effect on the external accounts will be lower over the next two years due to the fall in demand.

The risk of overheating may have reduced, but it has not disappeared

Nevertheless, if we are correct in our forecast that the European authorities will be capable of adopting measures that avoid a crisis, that risk aversion will fall and that the credit market conditions will gradually return to normal, this will have a positive effect on both commodity markets and local expectations. In this situation domestic demand may not slow down as much as forecast and inflation may provide an upside surprise; while sooner rather than later, monetary policy reference rates should begin to rise.

7. Tables

Table 1

Macroeconomic forecasts annual

	2009	2010	2011	2012
GDP (% y/y)	-1.7	5.2	6.5	4.5
Inflation (% y/y, eop)	-1.4	3.0	3.6	3.2
Exchange Rate (vs. USD, eop)	502	475	500	508
Interest Rate (% eop)	0.5	3.3	5.3	5.3
Private Consumption (% y/y)	0.9	10.4	8.8	5.2
Government Consumption (% y/y)	7.5	3.3	4.8	4.9
Investment (% y/y)	-15.9	18.8	13.6	8.9
Fiscal Balance (% GDP)	-4.6	-0.3	0.5	-0.3
Current Account (% GDP)	1.4	1.2	-1.3	-2.8

Source: BBVA Research

Table 2

Macroeconomic forecasts quarterly

	GDP (% y/y)	Inflation (% y/y, eop)	Exchange Rate (vs. USD, eop)	Interest Rate (% eop)
1Q10	1.7	-0.3	523	0.50
2Q10	6.4	1.2	537	1.00
3Q10	6.9	2.2	494	2.50
4Q10	5.8	2.5	475	3.25
1Q11	10.1	2.9	480	4.00
2Q11	6.8	3.4	469	5.25
3Q11	4.8	3.3	484	5.25
4Q11	4.7	3.6	500	5.25
1Q12	4.3	3.1	502	5.25
2Q12	4.2	2.9	504	5.25
3Q12	4.6	3.1	506	5.25
4Q12	4.9	3.2	508	5.25

Source: BBVA Research

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