

OAT*ei*: a new market for a new asset class

Announced on 2 October by the minister of the Economy, Finance and Industry, the launch of the new OAT*ei* is a milestone in the history of the European bond markets. For the first time, a sovereign borrower is issuing a bond linked to the eurozone consumer price index. This new asset class is a watershed in the development of a market in index-linked securities.

For two reasons, the OAT*ei* is the first financial instrument linked to the eurozone. First, the product's fundamentals clearly reflect the overall economy of the eurozone, notably regional inflation within the framework of monetary policy. Based on their own expectations, investors will therefore be able to protect themselves against the risk of "eurozone inflation" and its impact on monetary policy decisions and changes in the bond yield in the eurozone, and, more generally, to take positions linked to their perception of the zone's performance in terms of inflation.

The second reason is of course that the new product is designed to satisfy demand from a broader investor base, especially investors throughout the euro zone. It should appeal to investors with inflation-exposed commitments who want to protect against price fluctuations. Its characteristics further enrich the diversification possibilities available to managers in the eurozone. Moreover, it is obviously ideal for positions tied to inflation expectations in the second-largest economic area in the world (which naturally concerns investors outside the eurozone). Lastly, when used as a hedge tool, it will stimulate new growth of the inflation swaps market, from which it will benefit in return.

Agency France Trésor has thus provided the eurozone with a market that is the equivalent of the US TIPS market. The size of the TIPS market (EUR 140 billion) shows the growth potential of this new product. The Agency's objective is precisely to boost the share of indexed securities in total debt. This will benefit the French government, since the new instrument will minimise the cost of debt service while the introduction of indexed debt instruments reduces the risk faced by Agency France Trésor, as the change in government revenue will be pegged to inflation.

Two characteristics should be emphasised. First, the choice of the harmonised consumer price index, the HCPI (excluding tobacco) aligns perfectly with the need for a reliable and statistically robust index, since the methodology and calculation of harmonised indexes are governed by much stricter rules than other indicators in the eurozone, not least because they are used as benchmarks by the ECB. The second salient feature of the OAT*ei* is its capacity to provide extremely valuable information about inflation expectations by the market. The ECB will definitely look to the OAT*ei* for such information, in line with the Fed's use of TIPS.

In conclusion, the potential demand for a bond indexed to the euro zone and the clearly stated aim to increase the proportion of indexed securities in French government debt should boost liquidity (a qualitative leap), in turn making this new market more attractive and helping to ensure the OAT*ei*'s success.

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