Berne, 16 February 2016

Basel III countercyclical capital buffer

Stance of the Basel III countercyclical capital buffer in Switzerland

- The Basel III countercyclical capital buffer (CCyB) in Switzerland is currently 0%[1].
- The Swiss sectoral CCyB targeted at mortgage loans financing residential property located in Switzerland remains at 2% as decided and communicated by the Federal Council in January 2014. Mandatory reciprocity as foreseen in Basel III does not apply to the Swiss sectoral CCyB requirements.
- The situation on the Swiss credit markets will be reassessed periodically. Any adjustments to either the sectoral CCyB or the Basel III CCyB will be communicated to the public.

Background

- In June 2012, a countercyclical capital buffer (CCyB) was introduced into Swiss legislation. One important characteristic of the Swiss CCyB framework is that it can be applied on a broad basis – consistent with the Basel III rules – or it can target specific segments of the credit market. In February 2013, a sectoral CCyB targeting residential real estate situated in Switzerland was activated and set at a level of 1%[2] of relevant risk-weighted positions. It was subsequently increased to 2%[3] in January

[1] In the pre-draft Ordinance on Capital Adequacy and Risk Diversification for Banks and Securities Traders (which is currently in consultation) the specific provision relating to the Basel III CCyB is included in Art. 44a.
[2] Banks were required to meet the CCyB requirements by 30 September 2013.
[3] Banks were required to meet the CCyB requirements by 30 June 2014.

2014. These decisions were taken by the Swiss Federal Council – based on a proposal by the Swiss National Bank.

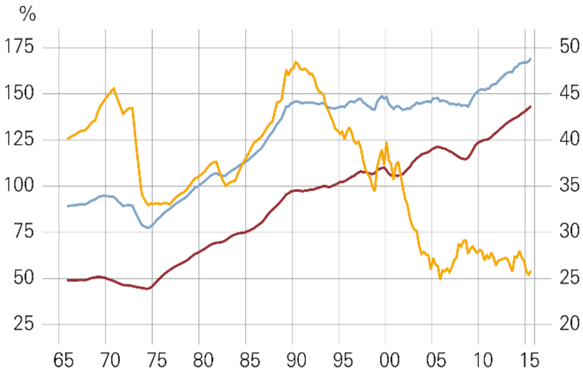
- With the international phase-in of the countercyclical buffer regime beginning in 2016, Swiss authorities are now required to regularly communicate the level of the Basel III CCyB, even if set at 0%.[4]

- This is the first official communication of the stance of the Basel III CCyB in Switzerland.

Motivation

- Strong growth in both bank credit and real estate prices over the course of several years resulted in the build-up of imbalances on the residential mortgage and real estate markets. By the second half of 2012, Swiss authorities assessed the imbalances to have reached a level that posed a risk to the stability of the banking sector, and hence to the Swiss economy. In response, Swiss authorities introduced several measures. One of the measures, the sectoral CCyB, was activated in February 2013.

CREDIT AGGREGATES-TO-GDP

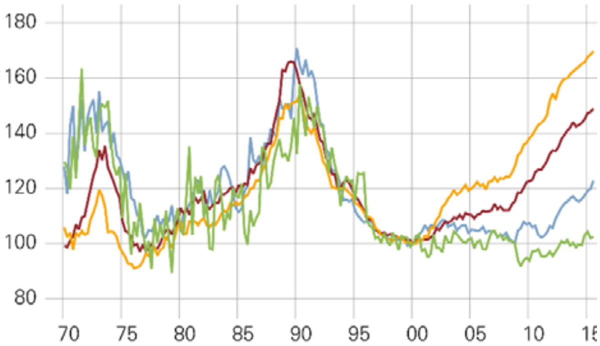


Credit-to-GDP (LHS) Other credit-to-GDP (RHS)
Mortgages-to-GDP (LHS)

Sources: BFS, SECO, SNB

SWISS REAL ESTATE PRICE INDICES

Asking prices, in real terms, Q1/2000 = 100



Offices (rental prices) Apartments
Single-family houses Business (rental prices)

Sources: BFS, Wüest & Partner

- As depicted above, the observed imbalances have been confined to the residential real estate market. Mortgage volumes relative to GDP have experienced significant growth since 2008 while the level of other credit – relative to GDP – has stagnated or even

[4] http://www.bis.org/publ/bcbs187.htm

slightly decreased. Similarly, the evolution of real estate prices for both single-family houses and apartments is distinct from that observed for offices and businesses.

- Given the confined nature of observed imbalances, Swiss authorities were of the opinion that the targeted sectoral CCyB is the best suited instrument. It temporarily increases the capital requirements associated with residential mortgage loans while leaving those for other exposures unchanged. This minimizes unintended effects on other credit segments. The significant importance of mortgage loans for banks' business models ensures that an activation of the sectoral CCyB leads to an increase in resilience at the system level. The higher capital requirement and the increase of the relative price of mortgages may further help to 'lean against the wind'.
- Since the decision to increase the sectoral CCyB to 2% in January 2014, imbalances on the Swiss mortgage and residential real estate markets have remained broadly unchanged. There is also no indication of imbalances developing in other segments of the credit market. Therefore, the Swiss authorities are of the view that the targeted CCyB remains the appropriate measure for tackling observed imbalances. The authorities continue to monitor closely the developments on the credit market, including the mortgage and real estate markets, to assess the need for either an adjustment to the sectoral CCyB, or a shift towards the broader based Basel III CCyB.