

Foreword

In aggregate, economic data released in May **tempered concerns** of overheating in the US economy and showed signs of a **rebalancing in economic momentum**. Corporate fundamentals remain in good health, and the next move for interest rates in the West is still likely to be lower, even if there is some **divergence in timing across regions**.

While these factors should be **supportive of risk asset valuations**, the hunt for positive growth momentum and attractive valuations is starting to **shift investors' focus away from the US** and towards more regionally diversified exposure, where the scope for catch up appears greater.

We are proud to announce that VDP has successfully advised **Willemen Groep** on the sale of **De Waal Solid Foundations** to **2Fund**. De Waal is specialised in deep foundations & retaining techniques. The Company was involved in projects like the construction of the A11, the Ghelamco Arena and more. De Waal was acquired by Willemen in 2006.

2Fund, also specialised in foundational works and retaining techniques, was founded in 2019 as part of the merger between **Votquenne Foundations** and **Lameire Funderingstechnieken**. The acquisition will allow 2Fund to expand its business activities and increase market share.

VDP, together with Value Square, Schelstraete Delacourt and EY hosted the yearly **Value Square Awards**. A big thank you to Jef Colruyt, Giulia Van Waeyenberge and Gregory De Clerck for sharing their inspiring insights during the panel discussion, focusing on the distinctive strengths of the family business.

We hope you enjoy this month's reading

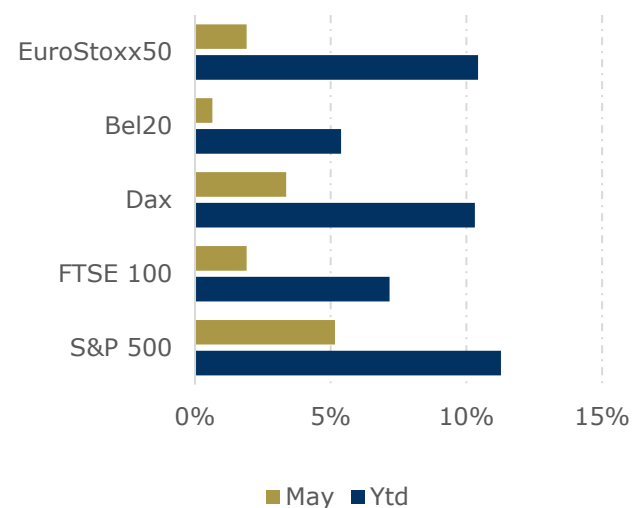
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Overview Macroeconomic situation

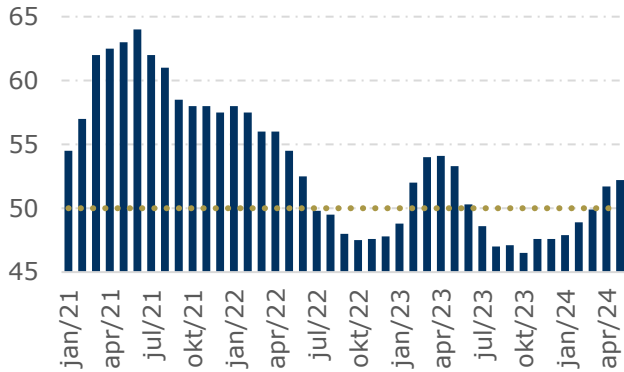
May was a good month for returns from **both equities and fixed income**. Ongoing investor optimism about the economic outlook supported risk assets, with **developed market stocks** delivering returns of 4.5% over the month. Global bonds also generated positive performance of 1.3%, with markets **still anticipating rate cuts** this summer albeit with some divergence in the timing between the US and Europe.

Chart 1: Performance main indices



In Europe, PMI data released during the month confirmed that **economic activity is improving**. Services sectors continue to act as the key pillar of strength, although there were also signs of a recovery in manufacturing. First quarter GDP was confirmed at 0.3% quarter-over-quarter, and **corporate profits surprised to the upside**. The reacceleration in the economy, coupled with relatively low valuations, is starting **to attract the attention of international investors**. In May, European equities excluding the UK returned 3.6% while UK equities returned 2.4%.

Chart 2: European composite PMI index



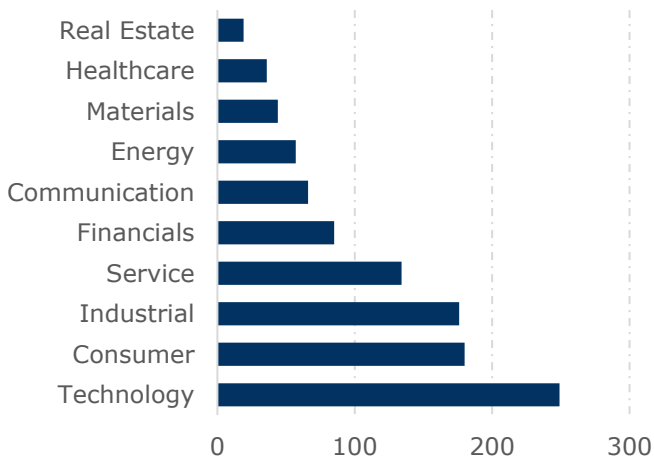
Source: Trading Economics

Additionally, at a sector level, **solid corporate fundamentals** have helped keep credit spreads well anchored and investment grade credit was one of the stronger performers over the month. EM debt also posted **strong returns** of 1.8% over the month, with several **EM central banks having already begun their easing cycles**.

European M&A activity

Gradually **ebbing inflation** rates and a more stable interest rate outlook appear to be instilling greater confidence in Europe's M&A markets. This has encouraged companies to pursue more **ambitious acquisitions**, supported by robust corporate earnings and a cautious sense of optimism. Talk is increasingly centering on the ECB considering a **loosening** of its **monetary policy** later this year.

Chart 3: # of EU transactions per sector (May)

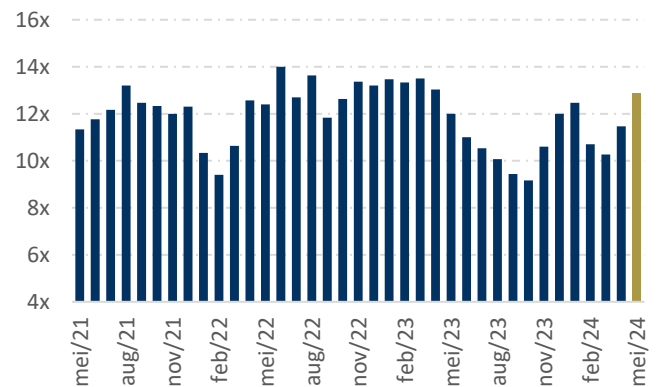


Source: MergerMarket

Against this backdrop, **aggregate deal value** in Europe increased by 29% year-on-year to €183bn in Q1 2024, despite volume sinking by 24% over the same period to 3,410 transaction announcements. **Private equity (PE)** is still in a holding pattern, though, lagging **behind strategics' capital deployment**, to €42.2bn.

Overall volumes were soft in Q1 of this year but **rebounded substantially in the following months**. April and May recorded a similar amount of deals as Q1 as a whole signalling that the European M&A activity is starting to **turn the corner**.

Chart 4: Multiple (EV/EBITDA) EU M&A (3m moving avg)



Source: MergerMarket

Belgian M&A review

During the last 3 months, we've noticed a rebound in **Belgian M&A activity** with **138 deal** announcements for the month of May with a total deal value of >€3.0bn. **PEs are still active** with 41 (30%) transactions, while **cross-border investors** represented the bulk of the deal flow – **83 (60%) deals**. As with the overall European trend, **consumer & industrial** together with Tech were the most active sectors (65% of deals) and are expected to remain a **large contributor** to the Belgian M&A landscape.

Below you may find an overview of the most **relevant Belgian M&A transactions** throughout the month of May.

Selection of recent Belgian transactions

Date	Target	Buyer	Sector	Description
3-May	Bizztalent	Planet Group	Technology	Planet Group, owned by Flemish entrepreneur Sam Baro, has acquired its third company in a year, Antwerp-based Bizztalent, an IT infrastructure specialist firm, increasing its total workforce to over 2,000 employees and annual sales to approximately €125 million.
3-May	Punch Powertrain	Stellantis	Industrials	Stellantis, the Franco-Italian automotive group, has become the owner of Punch Powertrain's production activities in Limbourg, securing a 56% majority stake in their joint venture.
6-May	Loda	Down2Earth	Industrials	Down2Earth Capital is acquiring a majority stake in Loda, a cleaning products manufacturer, to support its growth and expansion into new markets by investing in increased capacity and broadening its product line.
7-May	ACC Dienstencheques	Helan Huishoudhulp	Services	Belgian cleaning service provider Helan Huishoudhulp has acquired ACC Dienstencheques, strengthening its market presence in East and West Flanders and expanding its workforce to about 4,200 employees.
7-May	DKM	Tillegem	Services	Investment firm Tillegem is investing in DKM, an Antwerp-based customs specialist, marking its third transaction of the year; DKM's CEO Luc De Kerf will stay on as a major shareholder along with four managers to secure the company's future.
8-May	GrandOptical	Standard Investment	Consumer	Ten of the top branches of the now-bankrupt GrandOptical in Belgium have been relaunched as Opsin Optics by the investment fund Standard Investment, with expectations of market growth and new leadership under CEO Katrien Willems.
8-May	Socotec	Bpifrance & Mudabala	Services	Bpifrance and the Abu Dhabi sovereign wealth fund Mudabala have joined Socotec's capital through a capital increase, maintaining Cobepa's majority stake while expanding Socotec's financial and strategic capabilities as it continues to grow through acquisitions.
10-May	B-source	Yontec	Industrials	Yontec nv, a Belgian industrial services firm, has acquired b-source, a technical staffing company, to enhance its capabilities and expand its presence in the Benelux region.
10-May	MoneyOak	Europeenne de Promotion	Financials	Europeenne de Promotion SAS, a French management consultancy, has acquired MoneyOak SA, a Belgian fintech company that specializes in tax management and consulting services, expanding its reach across multiple sectors in Europe.
10-May	Route Mobile	Proximus	Technology	Proximus acquires Route Mobile for €636M, a major move to become a global leader in digital communication and identity, involving a complex deal with minority shares and founder reinvestments.
14-May	Umicore	SFPIM	Industrials	The Belgian government, through its investment entity SFPIM, has acquired a 5% stake in the industrial firm Umicore for approximately €270 million, potentially influencing future strategic decisions such as the location of a new battery recycling plant.
14-May	B12 Consulting	Yuma	Technology	Yuma, a company focusing on digital transformation, has acquired B12 Consulting, a firm specialized in artificial intelligence and data science, marking Yuma's sixth acquisition in two years, significantly enhancing its service capabilities and increasing its workforce to nearly 700 employees with over €100m in sales.
15-May	Da Vinci Internation School	Chatsworth Schools	Services	Chatsworth Schools (HSW) Ltd, a UK-based school owner and developer, has expanded its group to 18 schools by acquiring Da Vinci International School Antwerp, an international family school in Belgium focused on creating a joyful learning environment.
15-May	Edgard & Cooper	General Mills	Consumer	General Mills Inc., an American food products manufacturer and distributor, has acquired Belgian pet food producer Edgar Cooper, aiming to enhance its strategic acceleration through focus on main markets, global platforms, and local brands for sustainable and profitable growth.
16-May	Maessen Tent Supply	Veldeman	Industrials	Veldeman, a tent manufacturer and rental company from Limburg, expands its international footprint by acquiring the Dutch firm Maessen Tent Supply, aiming to reach a total revenue of €50M and 150 employees this year.
16-May	Vastned Belgium	Vastned Retail	Real Estate	Vastned Belgium, a regulated real estate company active in urban retail, is merging with its Dutch parent company, Vastned Retail, to form a new entity named Vastned, aiming to create value through simplified structure, annual cost synergies, optimized debt financing, enhanced portfolio diversification, and international growth opportunities.
17-May	Giga Storage	InfraVia	Technology	The French fund InfraVia has acquired the Dutch Giga Storage's large-scale battery project in Dilsen-Stokkem, Limburg, enabling its completion with a potential investment of €650m to €700m, making it Europe's largest at 600 MW and capable of storing as much daily electricity as 330,000 households consume.

Date	Target	Buyer	Sector	Description
21-May	TTP	Ageas	Financials	Ageas invests €137M in Taiping Pension (TTP), acquiring a 10% stake and enhancing its presence in the rapidly growing Chinese pension market due to increasing demand driven by an aging population.
22-May	RH CVWarehouse	BCS HR Software	Technology	Inge Geerdes has sold the Antwerp-based HR software company CVWarehouse, which she owned, to BCS HR Software, owned by Dutch investor Main Capital, but she will remain involved by reinvesting in BCS HR Software.
22-May	Cyclobility	Down2Earth	Industrials	Down2Earth has acquired a majority stake in Cyclobility, replacing three inactive financial players and maintaining CEO Andries Aumann and management's involvement with notable growth in sales and a diverse customer base that includes hospitals and municipalities.
22-May	Bexco	Bekaert	Industrials	Bekaert has acquired cable manufacturer Bexco for €40 million, aiming to enhance its presence in the offshore wind energy sector by leveraging Bexco's expertise in producing synthetic ropes for deep-sea applications.
22-May	GIMV	Workxinvest	Financials	Workxinvest has completed the acquisition of Vlaamse Participatiemaatschappij's (VPM) shares in Gimv, becoming its reference shareholder with a 28.73% stake, following regulatory approval and additional purchases made between the signing and closing of the deal on November 30, 2023.
23-May	Loopia Group	Team.blue	Technology	Team.blue has expanded into Scandinavia by acquiring Loopia Group, significantly increasing its presence in Northern and Eastern Europe with over 650,000 business customers and management of approximately 2 million domain names.
27-May	Paumelles Liégeoises	Esteve et comagnie	Industrials	Esteve et compagnie, a key player in industrial hinges and locks, acquired Belgian company Paumelles Liégeoises, enhancing its portfolio with specialized weld-on and profiled hinges.
27-May	SAS Koffie	Nimbus	Consumer	Dutch private equity fund Nimbus acquired Belgian coffee roaster SAS Koffie from Miko, which will incur a loss on the sale.
29-May	Earth Angel	TheGreenShot	Technology	The Brussels-based tech company TheGreenShot has acquired its American counterpart Earth Angel and will now work for major film and series producers like Apple, Amazon, and A24, offering software that automates budget and operations management while reducing ecological footprints.
30-May	Dolciaria Acquaviva	Vandemoortele	Consumer	Vandemoortele acquires Dolciaria Acquaviva, strengthening its position in the Italian market following a failed takeover of Forno d'Asolo, as part of its international expansion strategy.
30-May	Ghalan	Trustteam	Technology	Trustteam Group acquires Ghalan to strengthen its presence in Wallonia and enhance service proximity, collectively achieving over €150m in annual turnover with more than 640 employees across multiple countries.
31-May	Easyfairs	Cobepa & Inflexion	Services	Cobepa and Inflexion acquired Easyfairs, led by Eric Everard and his wife, valuing the company at over €600 million.
31-May	De Waal SF	2Fund	Industrials	2fund, a specialist in deep foundations & retaining techniques has made a strategic acquisition of its competitor - De Waal Solid Foundations - significantly expanding its business activities and market share.