

## Fund Manager Commentary

### William Blair SICAV Emerging Markets Growth Fund

#### Fund Performance & Positioning

The William Blair SICAV Emerging Markets Growth Fund outperformed its benchmark, the MSCI Emerging Markets IMI Index (net), during the second quarter.

Outperformance versus the Index was primarily driven by positive stock selection across most sectors. Stock selection within Financials was particularly favorable, propelled by Indian holdings, especially HDFC Bank Ltd, India's largest bank by market capitalization. HDFC Bank's share price advanced on the back of continued solid operating results (consistent 20% earnings growth) and a positive growth outlook. We expect robust deposit growth and the pending capital raise to support HDFC Bank's balance sheet growth and stock performance. Healthcare also added to relative returns, bolstered by Chinese pharmaceutical holdings, especially CSPC Pharmaceutical Group. The Chinese branded generic pharmaceutical company delivered strong first quarter results that significantly exceeded consensus expectations. We expect the strong operating momentum to continue, driven by the acceleration in CSPC's innovative drug segment, new drug launches and a positive regulatory backdrop.

Partially offsetting these effects were the Energy underweighting and negative stock selection within the Industrials and Real Estate sectors. Within Industrials, Localiza Rent a Car SA weighed on relative returns. Localiza is Brazil's largest car rental company and a leading player in a fragmented market. Despite posting strong first quarter results, the stock was dragged down by broad weakness in Brazilian equities and currency depreciation during the quarter. China Vanke Co Ltd, the Chinese property developer, was a notable detractor within Real Estate. After strong operating performance in 2017 we expect earnings growth to moderate and government policy to become less supportive. We exited the position as a result.

#### Top 10 Holdings as of 30.06.2018

<b>Company Name</b>	<b>% of Fund</b>
Alibaba Group Holding Limited	6.8%
Tencent Holdings Limited	6.2%
Samsung Electronics Co., Ltd.	3.8%
HDFC Bank Limited	3.1%
Naspers Limited	2.9%
Housing Development Finance Corporation Limited	2.5%
Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, Ltd.	2.4%
IndusInd Bank Limited	1.8%
Bajaj Finance Ltd.	1.7%
Wal-Mart de Mexico, S.A.B. de C.V.	1.7%
<b>Total of Top 10</b>	<b>32.9%</b>

During the period, Financials exposure was reduced through positions trims and liquidations in Grupo Financiero Galicia and China Merchants Bank. Grupo Financiero Galicia, the Argentinean bank, was sold in order to eliminate Argentina exposure after rising U.S. bond yields and the stronger dollar pressured Argentinean assets, especially the peso currency. China Merchants Bank, China's leading retail bank, was sold due to a less favorable macroeconomic and regulatory backdrop for banks. Information Technology exposure was increased during the period, through new purchases and additions in Electronic Equipment, Instruments & Components, Semiconductors and IT Services. Within IT Services, we purchased Tata Consultancy Services as we expect management's strong execution and confident growth outlook amid an improving demand backdrop in core end markets to support the company's strong operating momentum. Exposure to Healthcare also increased as a result of the purchases of Bangkok Dusit Medical Services, the largest private hospital group in Thailand, and several Chinese healthcare companies. From a geographic perspective, notable adjustments were increases to South Korea and Taiwan, offset by decreases to Brazil and South Africa.

## Market Review & Outlook

Global equity markets posted mixed results for the first half of 2018, buffeted by escalating trade tensions, the U.S. Federal Reserve's continued tightening bias and dollar strength. In contrast to the global synchronized expansion environment of 2017, equity performance in the first six months of 2018 reflected a growing divergence, with the U.S. economy, earnings and share prices maintaining positive momentum while the rest of the world rolled over.

The benign 2017 environment of low volatility and uninterrupted monthly gains abruptly reversed course in late January 2018, as worries about the extended bull market and narrowing leadership culminated in heavy selling pressure following reports that a handful of niche equity volatility-linked ETF products had suffered significant losses, stoking fears of broader risk contagion.

As the first half progressed, investors became increasingly concerned that the Trump administration's pursuit of protectionist measures would ignite a trade war with China and potentially derail the U.S. expansion. The slowing pace of economic activity in Europe combined with increased turbulence in emerging markets also weighed on investor sentiment.

U.S. equities extended their gains during the first half of 2018 and significantly outpaced non-U.S. markets, bolstered by strong corporate earnings and tax reform. From a market cap perspective, U.S. small caps outperformed their large cap counterparts by approximately 3.5% during the period, as measured by the MSCI U.S. Standard and Small Cap indices. In addition to being less exposed to trade disputes given lower overseas revenues, U.S. small caps were expected to benefit more from tax reform: according to Bloomberg, for the three years ended December 2017, S&P SmallCap 600 Index companies had an average effective tax rate 4.3% higher than that of S&P 500 Index companies.

Non-U.S. developed market equity performance was hampered by negative returns in Europe amid softening economic data and renewed political turmoil in Italy. The euro depreciated approximately

3% versus the dollar in 1H18, reflecting these concerns in addition to expectations for prolonged monetary stimulus from the European Central Bank, which announced that interest rates would remain at record lows through the summer of 2019.

Harkening back to the 2013 taper tantrum episode, emerging markets equities and currencies were hit by a significant rise in investor outflows during the first half of the year. The stronger dollar and prospect of higher U.S. interest rates had a particularly detrimental effect on countries with larger current account deficits and dollar-denominated debt, including Argentina and Turkey.

Political uncertainty and a deteriorating economic growth outlook also weighed on emerging markets returns in the first half. Brazil's nationwide truckers' strike was projected to shave a full percentage point off 2018 GDP growth, threatening the country's nascent economic recovery and further clouding the reform outlook ahead of the presidential election this fall.

Although Chinese equities held up better than most emerging market countries for the six-month period, investors became increasingly wary of escalating trade tensions as the first wave of U.S. tariffs on \$34 billion of Chinese exports was scheduled to take effect on July 6.

Technology and energy were the top performing sectors on a global basis during 1H18, while telecom, financials and consumer staples underperformed. Within emerging markets, energy was the only sector in positive territory for the six-month period, benefiting from the rebound in oil prices.

There is now a great deal of uncertainty about how the recently announced trade tariffs will impact intermediate term economic activity. Despite some market skepticism, global growth remains broad based and robust as we head into the second half of 2018. While global manufacturing PMIs declined from unsustainably elevated levels in February and March, the latest readings suggest that we are nearing the end of the in-cycle deceleration to levels in line with ongoing growth. Near-term economic fundamentals indicate that the current economic expansion has further to run. In times of economic

expansion such as the current one, we expect companies to continue to post robust earnings growth. However, earnings growth cannot continue to accelerate at the same pace we experienced over the past several quarters, especially in the U.S., where acceleration has been quite pronounced. European corporates have also enjoyed relatively strong earnings growth, which is also likely to continue but at moderately slower rates in the near term.

While the underlying economy remains robust and economic indicators continue to signal positive momentum, escalating trade war rhetoric will likely have substantial consequences on market volatility, inflation, and growth dynamics over the coming quarters. As examples, tariffs on Canadian lumber are adding to higher costs for wood, which are fueling price increases of up to \$9,000 for a new single-family home, according to the National Association of Homebuilders. Elsewhere, prices of washing machines sold in the U.S. surged by nearly 8.5% this year – the first increase since 2012 – after the U.S. administration restricted imports earlier this year.

More broadly, some U.S. companies are reportedly using the threat of new tariffs as a reason to raise prices. In short, tariffs amount to either a tax on consumption or corporate margin deterioration if firms choose to absorb some portion of cost increases. In aggregate, it worsens the tradeoff between growth and inflation, and will likely lead to tighter monetary policy. Much of this has not played out yet, because the U.S. administration has moved only recently. However, these effects will begin to manifest themselves over the coming quarters, and it is quite possible that this will bring us closer to the end of the current economic expansion cycle.

Longer term, we fear the U.S. administration's unilateral view of trade policy is suggesting an end to the decades-long building of integrated global markets and supply chains. If the U.S. chooses to limit or regulate trade however it sees fit, regardless of what agreements it may have signed in the past, trade and investment will become more volatile and more politicized. Multinationals from around the world will be more inclined to disentangle their operations from the U.S. The impact of this will only be revealed gradually over the next several years but

could imply meaningful changes to competition, quality, and innovation.

From a portfolio strategy perspective, we believe emerging markets (EMs) are susceptible to further downside volatility in the second half of 2018 amid persistent dollar strength as interest rates and growth differentials continue to favor the U.S., and the Federal Reserve maintains its tightening bias. Positioning within our ACWI-oriented strategies has generally reflected our more cautious outlook, with reduced EM weightings in favor of increased developed market exposure, primarily in Europe. Within our dedicated EM strategies, we have maintained overweighted positions in China and India, and moderated exposures to Brazil and South Africa. Within China, our positioning continues to emphasize domestically-oriented consumer, healthcare and technology companies that we believe are well positioned to benefit from the economy's ongoing transition to a consumption and services-driven growth model.

#### **The Fund, the Management Company and the Investment Manager**

This document has been prepared and issued by FUNDROCK MANAGEMENT COMPANY S.A., a "société anonyme", incorporated under the laws of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg having its registered office at 33, rue de Gasperich, L-5826 Hesperange and registered in the R.C.S. Luxembourg under n° 104196 (the "Management Company"). The Management Company is authorised and regulated by the Luxembourg Supervisory Authority of the Financial Sector (the "CSSF") as the management company of UCITS (defined below) under the EU directive 2009/65/EC, as amended.

The Management Company has been appointed as the management company of WILLIAM BLAIR SICAV, a "société d'investissement à capital variable", incorporated under the laws of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg having its registered office at 31, Z.A.I. Bourmicht, Bertrange, registered in the R.C.S. Luxembourg under n° 98806 and approved by the CSSF as an undertaking for collective investment in transferable securities (UCITS) in accordance with the EU directive 2009/65/EC, as amended (the "Fund").

The Management Company has appointed WILLIAM BLAIR INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT, LLC, the asset management business of WILLIAM BLAIR & COMPANY, LLC., having its registered office at 150 North Riverside Plaza Chicago, IL 60606, USA ("William Blair Group") as the investment manager for the Fund (the "Investment Manager").

#### **Fund Distribution**

The Fund is currently registered for public offering only in the following countries: Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany,

Ireland, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK. Therefore the Fund may not be registered to be marketed in your jurisdiction or may only be marketed to certain categories of investors in your jurisdiction.

#### **Marketing Materials**

William Blair Group makes no representations that these marketing materials are appropriate or available for use in any jurisdiction.

This document is not intended to be published or made available to any person in any jurisdiction where doing so would result in contravention of any laws or regulations applicable to the recipient.

This document shall constitute a marketing communication only in the countries in which the Fund has been registered for public offering.

In any other countries, laws and regulations may restrict the access to the present website. The access to the present website is not to be considered as marketing communication or as the marketing of the shares of the Fund if such access to such information and documentation through a website would be unlawful.

#### **Fund Documents**

The Articles of Incorporation, the Prospectus, the Key Investor Information Documents (KIID), the Annual and Half-yearly Reports of the Fund and the Subscription Form are available free of charge in English and German from our website [SICAV.williamblair.com](http://SICAV.williamblair.com) or at the registered office of the Management Company (33, rue de Gasperich, L-5826 Hesperange, Grand Duchy of Luxembourg), at the registered office of the Fund (William Blair SICAV, 31, Z.A. Bourmicht, L-8070 Bertrange, Grand Duchy of Luxembourg) or from the Swiss representative, First Independent Fund Services Limited, Klausstrasse 33, CH-8008 Zurich (Paying agent in Switzerland is NPB New Private Bank Ltd, Limmatquai 1, CH-8022 Zurich), and in German language at Marcard, Stein & Co., Ballindamm 36, 20095 Hamburg, Germany, and at Bank of Austria Creditanstalt AG, Am Hof 2, 1010 Vienna, Austria.

#### **Recipients of this Document**

The present document is not intended to be directed to those categories of investors to which the communication of this document would be unlawful in any country according to any applicable law or regulation.

This document is intended for the use of the persons to whom it is addressed, being persons who are Professional Investors as defined in the Markets in Financial Instruments Directive (2004/39/EC), understood as financial advisers, insurance companies, asset managers, discretionary wealth managers, banks and other authorised intermediaries.

Therefore, its content should not be used by retail clients. These materials are not intended to be distributed or passed on, directly or indirectly, to any other class of persons and may not be relied upon by such persons and is therefore not intended for private individuals or those who would be classified as retail

clients. William Blair Group does not accept responsibility for retail clients accessing information intended exclusively for Professional Investors.

#### **No Investment Advice**

This document has been produced for information purposes only and is not to be construed as investment advice or a solicitation or an offer to purchase or sell investments or related financial instruments to any recipients.

The investments in the Fund may not be suitable for all recipients. This document does not contain personalized recommendations or advice and is not intended to substitute any professional advice on investment in financial products.

Recipients of this document should make their own investment decisions based upon the Fund Documents listed above (which can be obtained free of charge) and in accordance with their own financial objectives and financial resources and, if in any doubt, should seek advice from independent professional advice as to risks and consequences of any investment

#### **Risks**

Recipients of this document should be aware of the risks detailed in this paragraph.

Please be advised that any return estimates or indications of past performance on this document are for information purposes only. Past performance is not necessarily a guide to future performance and no assurance can be made that the profits will be achieved or that substantial losses will not be incurred. Returns for periods of one year or more are annualized. All charges and fees, except any entry, exit and switching charge, have been taken into account in calculating the Fund's performance. The value of shares and any income from them can increase or decrease. An investor may not get back the amount originally invested.

Where investment is made in currencies other than the investor's base currency, the value of those investments, and any income from them, will be affected by movements in exchange rates. This effect could be unfavourable as well as favourable. Levels and bases for taxation may change. Further specific risks may arise in relation to specific investments and you should review the risk factors very carefully before investing. Intended risk profile of the Fund may change overtime. The Fund is designed for long-term investors. For the most current month-end performance information, please visit our web site at [SICAV.williamblair.com](http://SICAV.williamblair.com).

#### **William Blair's Opinion**

This document contains the opinions of William Blair, as at the

date of issue based on sources believed to be reliable. However, William Blair does not guarantee the timeliness, accuracy, or completeness of the information contained in this document. All information and opinions may change without notice.

#### **Property of William Blair**

This document is the property of William Blair and is not intended for distribution or dissemination, directly or indirectly, to any other persons than those to which it has been addressed

exclusively for their personal use. It is being supplied to you solely for your information and may not be reproduced, modified, forwarded to any other person or published, in whole or in part, for any purpose without the prior written consent of William Blair.

**Liability**

To the extent permitted by applicable law, William Blair will accept no liability for any direct or consequential loss, damages, costs or prejudices whatsoever arising from the use of this document or its contents.

As used in this document, "William Blair" means William Blair Investment Management, LLC and the Investment Management division of William Blair & Company, L.L.C.

Copyright © 2018 William Blair. William Blair is a registered trademark of William Blair & Company, L.L.C. "William Blair" refers to William Blair & Company, L.L.C., William Blair Investment Management, LLC, and affiliates.