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Liontrust GF SF Global Growth Fund: Q1 2023 review

Fund managers: Simon Clements, Peter Michaelis and Chris Foster

The Fund returned 7.9% over the quarter in dollar terms, versus the 7.7% return from the MSCI World Index (which is the comparator benchmark)†.**

Global equities started 2023 on a strong footing as signs of easing inflation in most major economies and China's re-opening supported positive market sentiment. However, sentiment turned in February as resilient economic data suggested that any pause in interest rate rises may still be some way off, with the Federal Reserve, European Central Bank and Bank of England all continuing with rate rises. The collapse of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) in March led to a major sell-off in the US and European financial sectors, though this market turbulence was short-lived and did not prevent investor optimism leading global equities higher towards the end of the quarter.

As we have stated previously, we do not attempt to forecast or anticipate the macroeconomic developments that we have experienced in the last two years. Our focus is resolutely on our 20 sustainability themes that over the long term should provide strong and stable growth, relatively independent of economic cycles, and on finding those rare companies that harness this positive growth and which generate persistently high returns on capital. In the more muted economic years ahead, we expect the strength of our sustainable themes and the quality of the businesses we invest in will allow for strong performance.

Looking at our top performers over Q1, Spotify led the way during a period in which a number of our holdings released trading updates to market. The audio-streaming platform released a strong Q4 update, reporting fourth quarter subscriber growth and gross margin improvement that was ahead of average consensus. Paid subscribers grew 14% year-on-year to 205 million, with the company stating that this was 3 million ahead of consensus. Looking forward, Spotify said that it sees premium subscribers increasing to 207 million in the first quarter and that monthly active users are expected to grow by 11 million to 500 million.

Spotify fits perfectly into our *Encouraging sustainable leisure* theme as we believe music has been an important component of leisure time and culture for millennia. Listening to music is a fundamentally positive pastime and is key to the human experience; it brings people together and can also be enjoyed alone.

Ansys, the global leader in complex multi-physics real-world simulations, was another strong performer over the quarter following the release of upbeat fourth quarter results and a full-year adjusted revenue forecast of \$2.24 billion - \$2.32 billion that was ahead of average estimates.

Exposed to our *Improving the resource efficiency of industrial and agricultural processes* theme, Ansys's simulation software is essentially a computer programme that allows the user to observe an operation through simulation without physically performing that operation. The virtual testing and monitoring enables higher safety and quality standards in the design, development and maintenance of our products.

Long-term performer Cadence Design Systems put in another strong quarter, making gains following the release of impressive fourth quarter earnings that beat forecasts and contained upbeat outlook comments. Held under our *Improving the efficiency of energy use* theme, Cadence provides electronic design automation, technology

that designs and optimises semiconductor chips, which facilitates innovation behind many of our themes related to the digitalisation of the global economy.

Semiconductor firm ASML was another notable performer as strong sub-sector performance combined with a robust earnings release to push the company's share price higher. ASML remains at the forefront of improving semiconductor fabrication through extreme ultraviolet (EUV) development and holistic lithography. Smaller process nodes means more chips per wafer in manufacture and smaller, cheaper, more reliable, more energy efficient and more powerful end products. The company reported net sales in the fourth quarter of €6.4 billion, which was around the midpoint of the company's guidance, while gross margin exceeded previous guidance due to additional upgrades and an insurance settlement from last year.

Another top-performing stock in the semiconductor space was Infineon Technologies after it raised its sales and earnings forecast following stronger-than-expected demand in its core automotive and industrial sectors. The company now sees second-quarter revenue at more than €4 billion, up from an earlier forecast of €3.9 billion, Infineon also expects full-year sales to also be above its previous estimate of approximately €15.5 billion.

Exposed to our *Improving the efficiency of energy use* theme, Infineon produces efficient power management chips, which are used across the economy in electronics, particularly in computing and mobiles as well as autos and industrial automation. It is the largest player in power semiconductors, which are key for electrification, so it is well positioned here.

In terms of detractors over the quarter, the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) in March (the second largest banking failure in US history) led to a major sell-off in the US and European financial sectors and a few of our holdings were impacted by the subsequent contagion. Banks in 2023 are very different to those in 2008 – they are better capitalised, better regulated and tend to have more diversified sources of funding. For the SF funds we look to invest in only those banks which demonstrate strong *Financial Resilience* – we did not invest in SVB in any of our Funds.

We note though that First Republic, which we did hold, has seen its shares impacted. First Republic started the year with a stronger credit rating than JP Morgan, and was the envy of the US banking sector. Unfortunately it was swept up in the turmoil associated with Silicon Valley Bank, given its deposit base was primarily in the San Francisco bay area, as was SVB's. Panic ensued as reports of the collapse of SVB hit the news, which saw First Republic's deposit base fall from 155bn to around 70bn over a few days. While the solvency of First Republic was sound, the sharp fall in its deposit base led to higher funding costs, and hurt profitability. We exited the position over the quarter.

Exposed to our *Saving for the future* theme, Charles Schwab was another one of our positions to be negatively impacted by concerns around the collapse of SVB. Shares in the US investment firm fell amid a crisis of confidence in the banking sector with these concerns being further amplified after UBS announced that it was to buy out struggling Swiss lender Credit Suisse.

The market turbulence following the SVB collapse serves as an important reminder of how vital it is to invest in companies with strong balance sheets and good business models; and also to have good diversification across portfolios. Both are key features of the Sustainable Future approach.

Away from the banking sector, our position in Agilent Technologies – a leading provider of instruments, software, services, and consumables for laboratories – was a notable detractor. Exposed to our *Better monitoring of supply chains and quality control* theme, Agilent's products help us ensure the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat is not affected by dangerous impurities. It also has a growing diagnostics business which enables innovation in areas such as gene therapy. Over the period, the company's earnings forecast for the second quarter came in below average estimates.

Portfolio activity was limited over the quarter. Having exited First Republic, we initiated a position in Morningstar under our *Saving for the future* theme. Morningstar provides both quantitative and qualitative research to the investment industry, with databases and analytical tools covering private markets, ESG, credit ratings, equity valuation, and more. On the client side, they provide software and investment management services to financial advisors and institutions.

Key Features of the Liontrust GF SF Global Growth Fund

INVESTMENT OBJECTIVE & POLICY¹:	<p>The Fund aims to achieve capital growth over the long term (five years or more) through investment in sustainable securities, predominantly consisting of global equities.</p> <p>Typically at least 90% of the Fund will be invested in the shares of global companies, with up to 10% in bonds and cash.</p> <p>The Fund will only invest in companies that meet defined ethical considerations and will benefit from improvements in environmental standards and a shift towards a more sustainable economic system.</p> <p>While the Fund will invest predominantly in companies from developed markets it may also invest up to 20% in emerging market securities.</p> <p>In normal conditions, the Fund will aim to hold a diversified portfolio, although at times the Investment Adviser may decide to hold a more concentrated portfolio, and it is possible that a substantial portion of the Fund could be invested in cash or cash equivalents.</p> <p>The Fund is not expected to have any exposure to derivatives (contracts whose value is linked to the expected future price movements of an underlying asset) in normal circumstances but may on occasion use them for investment, efficient portfolio management and for hedging purposes including gaining exposure to financial indices.</p>
RECOMMENDED INVESTMENT HORIZON:	5 years or more
SRRI²:	6
ACTIVE / PASSIVE INVESTMENT STYLE:	Active
BENCHMARK:	<p>The Fund is considered to be actively managed in reference to MSCI World (the "Benchmark") by virtue of the fact that it uses the Benchmark for performance comparison purposes. Some of the Fund's securities may be components of and may have similar weightings to the Benchmark.</p> <p>However the Benchmark is not used to define the portfolio composition of the Fund or as a performance target and the Fund may be wholly invested in securities which are not constituents of the Benchmark.</p>
SUSTAINABILITY PROFILE	The Fund is a financial product subject to Article 9 of the Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation (SFDR).

Notes: ¹As specified in the KIID of the fund; ²SRRI = Synthetic Risk and Reward Indicator. Please refer to the KIID for further detail on how this is calculated.

**Discrete years' performance*, to previous quarter-end:
Past performance does not predict future returns**

	Mar-23	Mar-22	Mar-21
Liontrust GF Sustainable Future Global Growth B5 Acc USD	-11.3%	-1.4%	62.0%
MSCI World	-7.0%	10.1%	54.0%

*Source: FE Analytics, as at 31.03.23, primary share class (B5) in dollars, total return, net of fees and income reinvested. 10 years of discrete data is not available due to the launch date of the fund.

For a comprehensive list of common financial words and terms, see our glossary at:
liontrust.co.uk/benefits-of-investing/guide-financial-words-terms

Key Risks and Disclaimer

†Past performance is not a guide to future performance. The value of an investment and the income generated from it can fall as well as rise and is not guaranteed. You may get back less than you originally invested. The issue of units/shares in Liontrust Funds may be subject to an initial charge, which will have an impact on the realisable value of the investment, particularly in the short term. Investments should always be considered as long term. Investment in the Fund involves foreign currencies and may be subject to fluctuations in value due to movements in exchange rates. Non-UK individuals: This document is issued by Liontrust International (Luxembourg) S.A., a Luxembourg public limited company (société anonyme) incorporated on 14 October 2019 and authorised by and regulated as an investment firm in Luxembourg by the Commission de Surveillance du Secteur Financier (“CSSF”) having its registered office at 18, Val Sainte Croix, L-1370 Luxembourg, Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and registered with the Luxembourg trade and companies register under number B.238295. UK individuals: This document is issued by Liontrust Fund Partners LLP (2 Savoy Court, London WC2R 0EZ), authorised and regulated in the UK by the Financial Conduct Authority (FRN 518165) to undertake regulated investment business. **This is a marketing communication.** This document should not be construed as advice for investment in any product or security mentioned, an offer to buy or sell units/shares of Funds mentioned, or a solicitation to purchase securities in any company or investment product. Examples of stocks are provided for general information only to demonstrate our investment philosophy. It contains information and analysis that is believed to be accurate at the time of publication, but is subject to change without notice. While care has been taken in compiling the content of this document, no representation or warranty, express or implied, is made by Liontrust as to its accuracy or completeness, including for external sources (which may have been used) which have not been verified. It should not be copied, forwarded, reproduced, divulged or otherwise distributed in any form whether by way of fax, email, oral or otherwise, in whole or in part without the express and prior written consent of Liontrust. Always research your own investments and if you are not a professional investor, please consult a regulated financial adviser regarding the suitability of such an investment for you and your personal circumstances. 23/256