

European Daily: ECB Preview—Cutting on the Back of Trade Tensions (Stott/Stehn)

- We expect the Governing Council to deliver a sixth consecutive 25bp cut at next week's meeting. This is because (1) inflation has continued to soften towards 2%; (2) the growth outlook has deteriorated materially following the US tariff announcements; and (3) financial conditions have tightened significantly.
- The Governing Council is likely to acknowledge the growing downside risks to growth and note that the trade tensions raise the uncertainty around the inflation outlook. We expect the Governing Council to remove the "meaningfully less restrictive" phrase but keep the remaining policy language unchanged.
- During the press conference, we look for President Lagarde to signal more concern around growth due to the trade tensions but remain non-committal on future policy steps. Lagarde might also suggest that the recent appreciation of the Euro and the EU's cautious approach to retaliation have reduced some of the concerns regarding the inflationary impact of tariffs.
- Looking ahead, we see a further 25bp cut in June as highly probable given the likely downgrade to the staff projections and then expect the Governing Council to follow through with a cut at the July meeting. In our recent forecast downgrade—which entails no growth in Q3-Q4 and a modest inflation undershoot in 2026—we added a further cut in September for a terminal rate of 1.5%.

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ECB Preview—Cutting on the Back of Trade Tensions

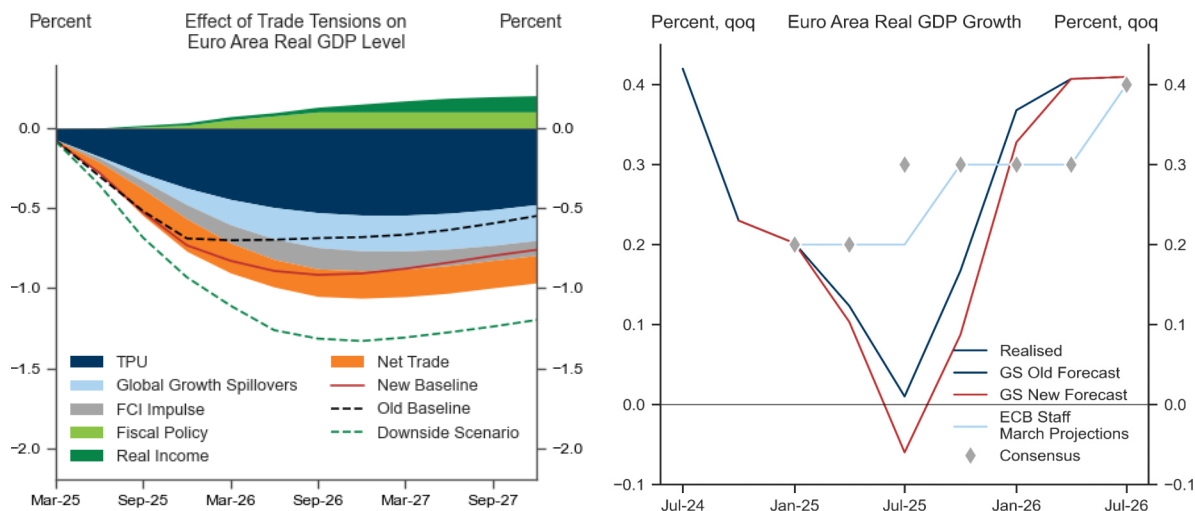
We view a 25bp cut at the ECB's upcoming meeting on April 17 as highly likely for at least three reasons.

First, the near-term growth outlook has deteriorated materially following the US announcement of "reciprocal" tariffs on April 2, despite the indication of a 90-day pause on country-specific reciprocal tariffs on April 9. While we now expect the effective US tariff rate on EU goods to rise by a total of 15pp (rather than 20pp with full implementation of the reciprocal tariffs), significant downgrades to our global growth forecasts and a sharp tightening in financial conditions led us to shave another 0.2pp off Euro area growth this year, for a total tariff-related hit of 0.9%.¹ We

¹ We estimate that the US tariffs announced so far (net of exemptions) and the incremental tariff we expect on critical goods will increase the US effective tariff rate on the EU by 15pp. In a scenario where the full 20% reciprocal tariff is implemented, we see an incremental 5pp upside to the effective tariff rate.

now expect almost no growth for the rest of the year and see the Euro area economy on the edge of a technical recession. This corresponds to an annual growth average of 0.7%, below consensus and ECB staff expectations of 0.9%, before growth picks up in 2026-27 on the back of more expansionary fiscal policy.

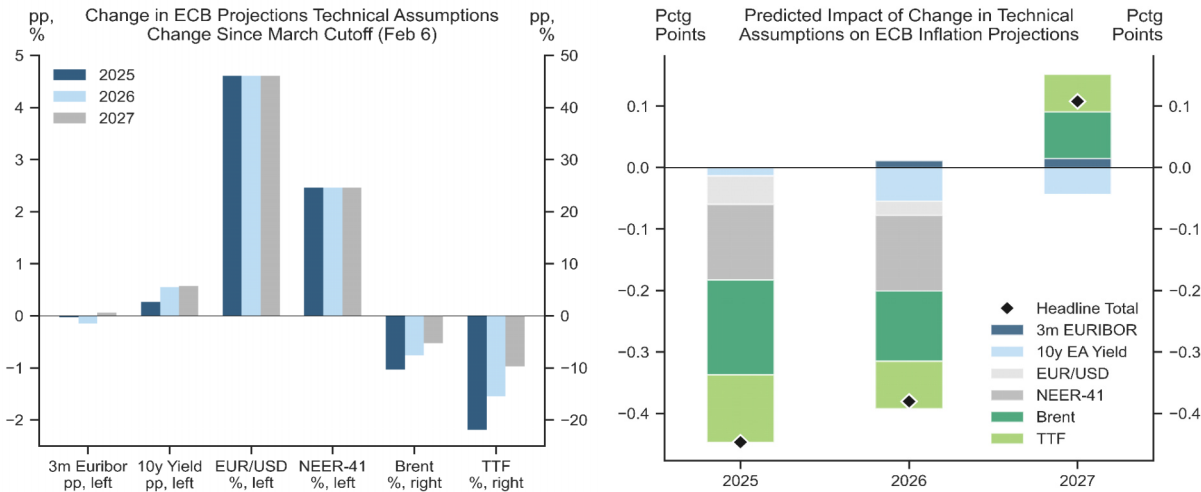
Exhibit 1: A Large Trade-Related Hit Despite Reciprocal Tariff Pause



Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research, Haver Analytics, ECB, Bloomberg

Second, the incoming inflation data have continued to soften. The flash release for March showed core inflation falling to 2.4%yoy, below consensus expectations. This implied 2.56% for Q1, just a touch above the March ECB staff projections of 2.5%. Looking ahead, the significant Euro appreciation and large fall in energy prices imply a material mechanical downgrade to the staff inflation projections in June. And we estimate that weaker growth in Europe, increased trade diversion from China, and de-escalation steps from the EU will result in a further drag on inflation. Taken together, we recently downgraded our year-end core inflation forecast by 0.2pp to 1.9% in 2025, 0.2pp to 1.8% in 2026, and 0.1pp to 1.9% in 2027.

Exhibit 2: A Softer Inflation Outlook



Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research, Haver Analytics, ECB

Third, our analysis suggests that monetary policy remains slightly restrictive and a pause would lead to a risk of financial conditions tightening unduly further. Cutting in April would take the policy rate to 2.25%, the upper bound of the neutral range according to the latest ECB staff estimates. Moreover, financial conditions have tightened notably, which will likely lead to a tightening in the broader measures of monetary policy restriction, such as bank lending standards. We therefore expect next week's Survey on the Access to Finance of Enterprises (on April 14) and the Bank Lending Survey (on April 15) to be supportive of a cut, too.

Recent comments from ECB officials have emphasised the downside risks to growth over inflation concerns and have accordingly expressed a preference for lowering rates further in April, especially after the announcement of "reciprocal tariffs" on April 2. Bundesbank President Nagel, for example, stated that global growth prospects had deteriorated "massively," and ECB Vice-President de Guindos argued that the "biggest" impact would be on growth rather than inflation. Even though the announcement of the 90-day pause coincided with the start of the quiet period for ECB officials, Bank of Finland Governor Rehn suggested that the case for an April cut was supported by the materialisation of downside risks.

Exhibit 3: ECB Commentary Points to an April Cut

Speaker	Date	Comment
Escriva	09/04/2025	"some of the worst-case scenarios that we had identified are materialising"
Rehn	09/04/2025	"The case for continuing rate cuts in April is supported by downside risks materialising"
Villeroy	09/04/2025	"April 2 tariffs argue for an imminent cut"
Nagel	08/04/2025	"Monetary policy in Europe will do its part"
Schnabel	05/04/2025	"recent events had caused a dramatic surge in uncertainty which may be only the beginning"
Stournaras	03/04/2025	"recent developments do not constitute an obstacle to a further rate cut in April."
Kazimir	03/04/2025	"We need to see the European Union's response. Nevertheless, this is not good news for the economy,"
de Guindos	27/03/2025	"An outright trade war with the United States could push up inflation but the biggest impact would be a drag on growth,"

Source: Data compiled by Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research, Bloomberg, Reuters, ECB

More Growth Concerns, No Policy Guidance

We therefore expect the Governing Council to deliver a sixth consecutive 25bp cut at next week's meeting.

Regarding the economy, we look for the Governing Council to (1) reiterate that disinflation remains on track with inflation slowing broadly as expected; (2) acknowledge the materialisation of trade-related downside risks to growth; and (3) note that the trade tensions raise the uncertainty around the inflation outlook.

On the policy language, we expect the Governing Council to remove the reference to the degree of monetary policy restriction ("meaningfully less restrictive"). This would also be consistent with the policy rate being lowered to the upper end of the 1.75%-2.25% neutral range as estimated by ECB staff.

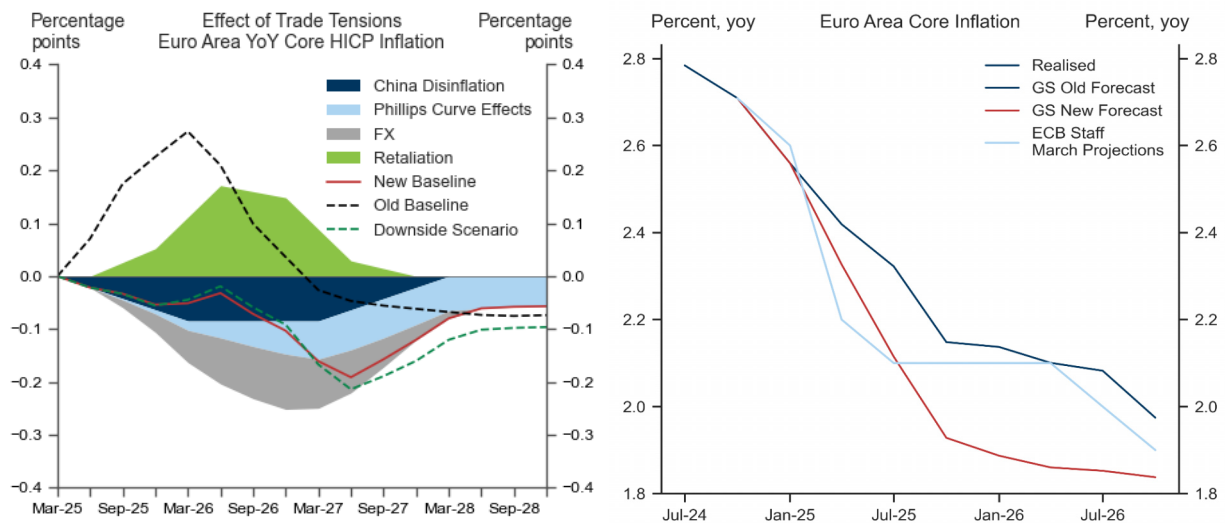
We expect the remaining policy language to stay unchanged. Specifically, we look for the Council to reiterate that (1) high uncertainty supports a "data-dependent and meeting-by-meeting approach to determining the appropriate monetary policy stance" and that (2) the Council is "not pre-committing to a particular rate path."

During the press conference, we look for President Lagarde to express more concern with respect to the outlook for growth but remain non-committal regarding future policy steps. In particular, we expect President Lagarde to hint at a larger impact from tariffs on growth than in the staff analysis presented to the European Parliament, as suggested by recent [press reports](#). President Lagarde might also suggest that the recent appreciation of the Euro and the EU's cautious approach to retaliation have reduced some of the concerns regarding the inflationary impact of tariffs. But we do not expect President Lagarde to provide any explicit guidance on the June decision or on the broader direction of the policy.

Cutting to 1.5% in September

Looking ahead, we expect a notable downgrade to the staff growth and inflation projections at the June meeting and therefore believe that a further cut in June is highly likely. We then look for the Governing Council to follow through with another cut at the July meeting as inflation continues to slow and growth weakens. Following our most recent forecast downgrade—which entails a contraction in Q3 and an inflation undershoot in 2026—we added a further cut in September for a terminal rate of 1.5%.

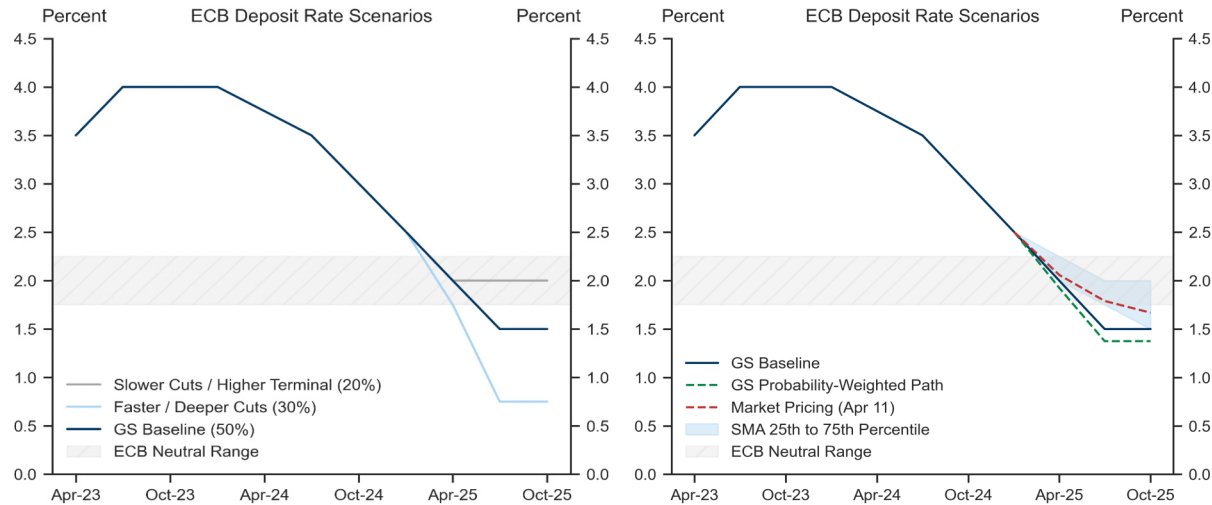
Exhibit 4: We Expect a Notable Downgrade to the Staff Projections in June



Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research, Bloomberg, ECB, Haver Analytics

Our updated ECB scenario analysis includes a downside scenario where the policy rate falls to 0.75% (for example, if the Euro area enters a deeper downturn) and an upside scenario where the policy rate remains at 2% (for example, if the US administration reverts to narrower tariffs). We place probabilities of 50% on our baseline, 30% on the upside scenario, and 20% on the downside scenario. The probability-adjusted path is slightly below our baseline but notably below market pricing.

Exhibit 5: Our ECB Forecast Remains Below Market Pricing



Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research, Haver Analytics, Bloomberg

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Disclosure Appendix

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We, Sven Jari Stehn, Filippo Taddei, Alexandre Stott, James Moberly, Niklas Garnadt, Katya Vashkinskaya and Giovanni Pierdomenico, hereby certify that all of the views expressed in this report accurately reflect our personal views, which have not been influenced by considerations of the firm's business or client relationships.

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