

Good MornING Asia - 19 June 2019

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Source: Shutterstock
ECB President, Mari Draghi

Draghi delivers punchy message

Draghi will likely be missed when he does step down later this year. His ability to both read markets, and then to deliver what they want to hear, and usually a bit more, has been unrivaled in the ECB's short history. Yesterday, in Sintra, Portugal, Draghi outlined that further stimulus measures would now follow if the economy did not show some signs of improvement. In other words, this is the base expectation. Nothing needs to happen for more stimulus to happen. Rather, something needs to not happen.

As ever, [our Eurozone economists are all over this in a note from yesterday](#). The big question remains what form of additional action this will take. My view, for what it is worth, is that it won't be forward guidance alone. That is far too weak, and actually requires the market to be overly hawkish (which it isn't) to have any meaningful impact. So further rate cuts, or asset purchases

would be the more likely direction of travel. My colleagues also offer some thoughts too on the timing. Of course, this remains somewhat speculative, but they are not ruling out something as early as July.

One other very interesting snippet of the conference, was the hint that the ECB might consider hitting its inflation target "on average", which makes it far more like a price level target. It also means that having been so far below target for so long, monetary policy might not need to be tightened for a very long time following a return, or even overshoot of the target.

Eurozone government bond yields are lower today. I count four offering negative yields on the 10Y government benchmark (Germany, Netherlands, Austria, and Finland). French 10Y Government bond yields are virtually zero. In contrast, in pre-Brexit-Britain, yields are 0.80%.

Trump unhappy with Draghi

Not everyone is impressed with Mario Draghi. US President Trump isn't and sees this as an unfair attempt to undermine US competitiveness. The EURUSD is a bit weaker at just under 1.12 on the back of the Draghi comments, and might have weakened a bit more but for President Trump's intervention.

Meanwhile, one day ahead of the FOMC meeting, I can't see any tweets exhorting the Fed to cut rates from the US President. Though there is an interesting story doing the rounds on newswires that the White House is considering demoting Jerome Powell. [Here is a link to one of the many articles covering this subject.](#)

It seems a bit unfair to consider what the FOMC will do tomorrow with this existential threat hanging over them, and over Powell in particular. Our US economist team has been looking at this, and [in particular what a down-shift in the dot-plot diagram might mean](#). Their conclusion, this would be pretty negative for the USD, even if, as they suspect, rates were not actually cut this time round.

Trump, Xi, to hold "extended" talks in Osaka.

The dollar might also be softer on the more positive language emerging on trade, as US President Trump and President Xi agree to hold "extended" talks in Osaka on the Trade conflict. Given recent downbeat comments from the US Trade Representative and the fact that China and the US are still poles apart on some pretty serious issues, we are not getting our hopes up for any meaningful resolution on this. We have been here many times before, as has the market, and so such "good" trade news usually seems to front-run "bad".

Brexit - if you still care (I do, but it is beginning to bore me)

The UK Conservative Party leadership campaign has eliminated some further candidates overnight, including the former Brexit Minister, Dominic Raab. Boris Johnson remains at the top of the polls, but Rory Stewart, an interesting candidate who has taken the rare step of not letting his comments be dominated by dogma, has pushed up the rankings. Stewart, it has to be said, will be a difficult choice for the rank and file Tory membership, for whom a hard Brexit might well be the preferred option - and hang the consequences.

[I've included a link to the left-of-centre Guardian today](#), though there are heaps of other stories

you can read on this. I would regard any sterling strength on the back of Stewart's ascendancy as transient.

I'm a Libran (no really, I am)

And finally, I don't understand cryptocurrencies, I suspect I will never really feel confident talking about them. But here at ING we are not all dinosaurs like me. Two of my colleagues do understand this stuff and [have written about Facebook's new digital currency, Libra here](#). This is well worth a read if you, like me, regard these near-money substitutes with inherent suspicion.

Author

Olivia Grace

Editor

olivia.grace@ing.com**Julian Geib**

Junior Economist, Global Trade

julian.geib@ing.de**Zoltán Homolya**

Economic research trainee

zoltan.homolya@ing.com**Amrita Naik Nimbalkar**

Economist, Global Macro

amrita.naik.nimbalkar@ing.com**Mateusz Sutowicz**

Senior Economist, Poland

mateusz.sutowicz@ing.pl**Alissa Lefebre**

Economist

alissa.lefebvre@ing.com**Deepali Bhargava**

Regional Head of Research, Asia-Pacific

Deepali.Bhargava@ing.com**Ruben Dewitte**

Economist

+32495364780

ruben.dewitte@ing.com**Kinga Havasi**

Economic research trainee

kinga.havasi@ing.com

Marten van Garderen

Consumer Economist, Netherlands

marten.van.garderen@ing.com

David Havrlant

Chief Economist, Czech Republic

420 770 321 486

david.havrlant@ing.com

Sander Burgers

Senior Economist, Dutch Housing

sander.burgers@ing.com

Lynn Song

Chief Economist, Greater China

lynn.song@ing.com

Michiel Tukker

Senior UK & Eurozone Rates Strategist

michiel.tukker@ing.com

Michal Rubaszek

Senior Economist, Poland

michal.rubaszek@ing.pl

This is a test author

Stefan Posea

Economist, Romania

tiberiu-stefan.posea@ing.com

Marine Leleux

Sector Strategist, Financials

marine.leleux2@ing.com

Jesse Norcross

Senior Sector Strategist, Real Estate

jesse.norcross@ing.com

Teise Stellema

Research Assistant, Energy Transition

teise.stellema@ing.com

Diederik Stadig

Senior Economist, Healthcare & Technology

diederik.stadig@ing.com

Diogo Gouveia

Sector Economist

diogo.duarte.vieira.de.gouveia@ing.com

Marine Leleux

Sector Strategist, Financials

marine.leleux2@ing.com

Ewa Manthey

Commodities Strategist

ewa.manthey@ing.com

ING Analysts

James Wilson

EM Sovereign Strategist

James.wilson@ing.com

Sophie Smith

Digital Editor

sophie.smith@ing.com

Frantisek Taborsky

EMEA FX & FI Strategist

frantisek.taborsky@ing.com

Adam Antoniak

Senior Economist, Poland

adam.antoniak@ing.pl

Min Joo Kang

Senior Economist, South Korea and Japan

min.joo.kang@ing.com

Coco Zhang

ESG Research

coco.zhang@ing.com

Jan Frederik Slijkerman

Senior Sector Strategist, TMT

jan.frederik.slijkerman@ing.com

Katinka Jongkind

Senior Economist, Services and Leisure

Katinka.Jongkind@ing.com

Marina Le Blanc

Sector Strategist, Financials
Marina.Le.Blanc@ing.com

Samuel Abettan
Junior Economist
samuel.abettan@ing.com

Franziska Biehl
Senior Economist, Germany
Franziska.Marie.Biehl@ing.de

Rebecca Byrne
Deputy Global Head of Editorial and Supervisory Analyst
rebecca.byrne@ing.com

Mirjam Bani
Sector Economist, Commercial Real Estate & Public Sector (Netherlands)
mirjam.bani@ing.com

Timothy Rahill
Credit Strategist
timothy.rahill@ing.com

Leszek Kasek
Senior Economist, Poland
leszek.kasek@ing.pl

Antoine Bouvet
Head of European Rates Strategy
antoine.bouvet@ing.com

Jeroen van den Broek
Global Head of Sector Research
jeroen.van.den.broek@ing.com

Edse Dantuma
Senior Sector Economist, Industry and Healthcare
edse.dantuma@ing.com

Francesco Pesole
FX Strategist
francesco.pesole@ing.com

Rico Luman
Senior Sector Economist, Transport and Logistics
Rico.Luman@ing.com

Jurjen Witteveen

Sector Economist
jurjen.witteveen@ing.com

Dmitry Dolgin
Chief Economist, CIS
dmitry.dolgin@ing.de

Nicholas Mapa
Senior Economist, Philippines
nicholas.antonio.mapa@asia.ing.com

Egor Fedorov
Senior Credit Analyst
egor.fedorov@ing.com

Sebastian Franke
Consumer Economist
sebastian.franke@ing.de

Gerben Hieminga
Senior Sector Economist, Energy
gerben.hieminga@ing.com

Nadège Tillier
Head of Corporate Sector Strategy
nadege.tillier@ing.com

Charlotte de Montpellier
Senior Economist, France and Switzerland
charlotte.de.montpellier@ing.com

Laura Straeter
Behavioural Scientist
+31(0)611172684
laura.Straeter@ing.com

Valentin Tataru
Chief Economist, Romania
valentin.tataru@ing.com

James Smith
Developed Markets Economist, UK
james.smith@ing.com

Suvi Platerink Kosonen
Senior Sector Strategist, Financials
suvi.platerink-kosonen@ing.com

Thijs Geijer

Senior Sector Economist, Food & Agri

thijs.geijer@ing.com

Maurice van Sante

Senior Economist Construction & Team Lead Sectors

maurice.van.sante@ing.com

Marcel Klok

Senior Economist, Netherlands

marcel.klok@ing.com

Paolo Pizzoli

Senior Economist, Italy, Greece

paolo.pizzoli@ing.com

Marieke Blom

Chief Economist and Global Head of Research

marieke.blom@ing.com

Raoul Leering

Senior Macro Economist

raoul.leering@ing.com

Maarten Leen

Head of Global IFRS9 ME Scenarios

maarten.leen@ing.com

Maureen Schuller

Head of Financials Sector Strategy

Maureen.Schuller@ing.com

Warren Patterson

Head of Commodities Strategy

Warren.Patterson@ing.com

Rafal Benecki

Chief Economist, Poland

rafal.benecki@ing.pl

Philippe Ledent

Senior Economist, Belgium, Luxembourg

philippe.ledent@ing.com

Peter Virovacz

Chief Economist, Hungary

peter.virovacz@ing.com

Inga Fechner

Senior Economist, Global Trade

inga.fechner@ing.de

Dimitry Fleming

Senior Data Analyst, Netherlands

Dimitry.Fleming@ing.com

Ciprian Dascalu

Chief Economist, Romania

+40 31 406 8990

ciprian.dascalu@ing.com

Muhammet Mercan

Chief Economist, Turkey

muhammet.mercan@ingbank.com.tr

Iris Pang

Chief Economist, Greater China

iris.pang@asia.ing.com

Sophie Freeman

Writer, Group Research

+44 20 7767 6209

Sophie.Freeman@uk.ing.com

Padhraic Garvey, CFA

Regional Head of Research, Americas

padhraic.garvey@ing.com

James Knightley

Chief International Economist, US

james.knightley@ing.com

Tim Condon

Asia Chief Economist

+65 6232-6020

Martin van Vliet

Senior Interest Rate Strategist

+31 20 563 8801

martin.van.vliet@ing.com

Karol Pogorzelski

Senior Economist, Poland

Karol.Pogorzelski@ing.pl

Carsten Brzeski

Global Head of Macro
carsten.brzeski@ing.de

Viraj Patel
Foreign Exchange Strategist
+44 20 7767 6405
viraj.patel@ing.com

Owen Thomas
Global Head of Editorial Content
+44 (0) 207 767 5331
owen.thomas@ing.com

Bert Colijn
Chief Economist, Netherlands
bert.colijn@ing.com

Peter Vanden Houte
Chief Economist, Belgium, Luxembourg, Eurozone
peter.vandenhoute@ing.com

Benjamin Schroeder
Senior Rates Strategist
benjamin.schroeder@ing.com

Chris Turner
Global Head of Markets and Regional Head of Research for UK & CEE
chris.turner@ing.com

Gustavo Rangel
Chief Economist, LATAM
+1 646 424 6464
gustavo.rangel@ing.com

Carlo Cocuzzo
Economist, Digital Finance
+44 20 7767 5306
carlo.cocuzzo@ing.com

ASEAN Morning Bytes

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EM Space: Dovish ECB and positive headway on trade war may spur bargain hunting

- **General Asia:** Reports of President Trump and President Xi having an "extended meeting" at the sidelines of the G-20 and the possibility of more ECB monetary stimulus to invigorate the struggling Eurozone economy are likely to spur bargain hunting in Asia today. However, gains will likely be capped with the market still waiting on the Fed.
- **Philippines:** The Banko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) Governor Diokno downplayed concerns about the widening current account deficit, indicating that the Philippines has "idle" Dollars and that there was "no problem in terms of supply". He highlighted portfolio flows, remittances and tourist receipts as steady sources of foreign currency, which could help offset the projected increase in the USD demand in the 2H as the import season kicks into high gear. Despite these comments, we expect the BSP to keep rates unchanged on Thursday as they await more data points to validate the resumption of inflation's downward trajectory.

What to look out for: Central bank super Thursday

- Hong Kong composite interest rates (19 June)

- FOMC meeting (19 June)
- BoJ meeting (20 June)
- Bank Indonesia meeting (20 June)
- Taiwan central bank meeting (20 June)
- Bangko Sentral Pilipinas meeting (20 June)
- BoE meeting (20 June)

Author

Nicholas Mapa

Senior Economist, Philippines

nicholas.antonio.mapa@asia.ing.com

Australia's central bank hints at more rate cuts

The Reserve Bank of Australia's June meeting minutes describe domestic and overseas economic data as "mixed", but the outlook remained "reasonable". Risks associated with global trade disputes have risen but the impact of further rate cuts wasn't viewed as unambiguously positive



Source: Shutterstock

Reserve Bank of Australia Governor Philip Lowe

Key phrases of the minutes

If you've never had to comment on the minutes of a central bank before, the trick is to start at the end, with the discussion on the actual decision. The rest is usually fluff and padding. In the June meeting minutes, two key phrases in the last paragraph are:

1. Given the amount of spare capacity in the labour market and the economy more broadly, members agreed that it was more likely than not that a further easing in monetary policy would be appropriate in the period ahead. And:
2. However, lower interest rates were not the only policy option available to assist in lowering the rate of unemployment, consistent with the medium-term inflation target.

The final sentence went on to say that developments in the labour market would be of particular

importance in determining future policy.

More rate cuts to come...but how much, and when?

The Australian central bank uses market rates in its modelling, and these are aggressively priced currently to show rates falling in total by somewhere between 50 and 75 basis points, which would at its extreme take the cash rate to 0.5%, which many have suggested marks the practical lower bound for the RBA.

Although we've only pencilled in a 25bp rate cut in August, we're certainly not ruling out more rate cuts in 2020, and this is where the risk to our forecast clearly lies

Even with these market rates plugged into their models (they use the market - not forecasts), the RBA's models point to only a small decline in the unemployment rate. As the RBA believes full employment now lies somewhere close to 4.5%, which implies that even aggressive easing won't enable them to meet their inflation target.

This can be interpreted in two ways. Either:

1. The only reasonable conclusion is that the RBA will have to cut quickly to 0.5% and hope that fiscal policy provides the shortfall of stimulus needed to get the unemployment rate to 4.5% and inflation moving back to target, or, and we prefer this,
2. Given rate cuts won't enable them to reach their target, and that they don't help everyone (savers for example, and pensioners on fixed interest incomes), a more cautious approach would be warranted - both slower, but also not cutting as far, whilst still looking for other policy measures (e.g. fiscal, macroprudential) to do more of the heavy lifting.

We think this interpretation is more consistent with the second key phrase we've mentioned in the RBA minutes. The text of the minutes elsewhere notes the mixed impact of rate cuts on different sections of the economy, backing up this view.

No change to our forecast for now

We have been a little less aggressive than the market with respect to our forecast over the rest of this year and next, looking only for a further 25bp of easing, probably in August after the next "Statement on Monetary Policy", which would take the cash rate to 1.0%.

The Australian economy is still in "reasonable" shape, with "mixed" rather than outright bad newsflow according to this latest assessment, so anything further would take policy into the emergency territory, and we clearly aren't in an emergency mode yet and nor do we expect to be, unless the trade war escalates another couple of notches.

That said, as 50bp of easing in total is unlikely to do more than have a very negligible impact on the unemployment rate, and hence wages and price inflation, we certainly aren't ruling out more cuts in 2020, and this is where the risk to our forecast clearly lies.

Author

Olivia Grace

Editor

olivia.grace@ing.com

Julian Geib

Junior Economist, Global Trade

julian.geib@ing.de

Zoltán Homolya

Economic research trainee

zoltan.homolya@ing.com

Amrita Naik Nimbalkar

Economist, Global Macro

amrita.naik.nimbalkar@ing.com

Mateusz Sutowicz

Senior Economist, Poland

mateusz.sutowicz@ing.pl

Alissa Lefebre

Economist

alissa.lefebvre@ing.com

Deepali Bhargava

Regional Head of Research, Asia-Pacific

Deepali.Bhargava@ing.com

Ruben Dewitte

Economist

+32495364780

ruben.dewitte@ing.com

Kinga Havasi

Economic research trainee

kinga.havasi@ing.com

Marten van Garderen

Consumer Economist, Netherlands

marten.van.garderen@ing.com

David Havrlant

Chief Economist, Czech Republic

420 770 321 486

david.havrlant@ing.com

Sander Burgers

Senior Economist, Dutch Housing

sander.burgers@ing.com

Lynn Song

Chief Economist, Greater China

lynn.song@ing.com

Michiel Tukker

Senior UK & Eurozone Rates Strategist

michiel.tukker@ing.com

Michal Rubaszek

Senior Economist, Poland

michal.rubaszek@ing.pl

This is a test author

Stefan Posea

Economist, Romania

tiberiu-stefan.posea@ing.com

Marine Leleux

Sector Strategist, Financials

marine.leleux2@ing.com

Jesse Norcross

Senior Sector Strategist, Real Estate

jesse.norcross@ing.com

Teise Stellema

Research Assistant, Energy Transition

teise.stellema@ing.com

Diederik Stadig

Senior Economist, Healthcare & Technology

diederik.stadig@ing.com

Diogo Gouveia

Sector Economist

diogo.duarte.vieira.de.gouveia@ing.com

Marine Leleux

Sector Strategist, Financials

marine.leleux2@ing.com

Ewa Manthey

Commodities Strategist
ewa.manthey@ing.com

ING Analysts

James Wilson
EM Sovereign Strategist
James.wilson@ing.com

Sophie Smith
Digital Editor
sophie.smith@ing.com

Frantisek Taborsky
EMEA FX & FI Strategist
frantisek.taborsky@ing.com

Adam Antoniak
Senior Economist, Poland
adam.antoniak@ing.pl

Min Joo Kang
Senior Economist, South Korea and Japan
min.joo.kang@ing.com

Coco Zhang
ESG Research
coco.zhang@ing.com

Jan Frederik Slijkerman
Senior Sector Strategist, TMT
jan.frederik.slijkerman@ing.com

Katinka Jongkind
Senior Economist, Services and Leisure
Katinka.Jongkind@ing.com

Marina Le Blanc
Sector Strategist, Financials
Marina.Le.Blanc@ing.com

Samuel Abettan
Junior Economist
samuel.abettan@ing.com

Franziska Biehl
Senior Economist, Germany

Franziska.Marie.Biehl@ing.de

Rebecca Byrne

Deputy Global Head of Editorial and Supervisory Analyst

rebecca.byrne@ing.com

Mirjam Bani

Sector Economist, Commercial Real Estate & Public Sector (Netherlands)

mirjam.bani@ing.com

Timothy Rahill

Credit Strategist

timothy.rahill@ing.com

Leszek Kasek

Senior Economist, Poland

leszek.kasek@ing.pl

Antoine Bouvet

Head of European Rates Strategy

antoine.bouvet@ing.com

Jeroen van den Broek

Global Head of Sector Research

jeroen.van.den.broek@ing.com

Edse Dantuma

Senior Sector Economist, Industry and Healthcare

edse.dantuma@ing.com

Francesco Pesole

FX Strategist

francesco.pesole@ing.com

Rico Luman

Senior Sector Economist, Transport and Logistics

Rico.Luman@ing.com

Jurjen Witteveen

Sector Economist

jurjen.witteveen@ing.com

Dmitry Dolgin

Chief Economist, CIS

dmitry.dolgin@ing.de

Nicholas Mapa

Senior Economist, Philippines

nicholas.antonio.mapa@asia.ing.com

Egor Fedorov

Senior Credit Analyst

egor.fedorov@ing.com

Sebastian Franke

Consumer Economist

sebastian.franke@ing.de

Gerben Hieminga

Senior Sector Economist, Energy

gerben.hieminga@ing.com

Nadège Tillier

Head of Corporate Sector Strategy

nadege.tillier@ing.com

Charlotte de Montpellier

Senior Economist, France and Switzerland

charlotte.de.montpellier@ing.com

Laura Straeter

Behavioural Scientist

+31(0)611172684

laura.Straeter@ing.com

Valentin Tataru

Chief Economist, Romania

valentin.tataru@ing.com

James Smith

Developed Markets Economist, UK

james.smith@ing.com

Suvi Platerink Kosonen

Senior Sector Strategist, Financials

suvi.platerink-kosonen@ing.com

Thijs Geijer

Senior Sector Economist, Food & Agri

thijs.geijer@ing.com

Maurice van Sante

Senior Economist Construction & Team Lead Sectors

maurice.van.sante@ing.com

Marcel Klok

Senior Economist, Netherlands
marcel.klok@ing.com

Paolo Pizzoli
Senior Economist, Italy, Greece
paolo.pizzoli@ing.com

Marieke Blom
Chief Economist and Global Head of Research
marieke.blom@ing.com

Raoul Leering
Senior Macro Economist
raoul.leering@ing.com

Maarten Leen
Head of Global IFRS9 ME Scenarios
maarten.leen@ing.com

Maureen Schuller
Head of Financials Sector Strategy
Maureen.Schuller@ing.com

Warren Patterson
Head of Commodities Strategy
Warren.Patterson@ing.com

Rafal Benecki
Chief Economist, Poland
rafal.benecki@ing.pl

Philippe Ledent
Senior Economist, Belgium, Luxembourg
philippe.ledent@ing.com

Peter Virovacz
Chief Economist, Hungary
peter.virovacz@ing.com

Inga Fechner
Senior Economist, Global Trade
inga.fechner@ing.de

Dimitry Fleming
Senior Data Analyst, Netherlands
Dimitry.Fleming@ing.com

Ciprian Dascalu

Chief Economist, Romania
+40 31 406 8990
ciprian.dascalu@ing.com

Muhammet Mercan
Chief Economist, Turkey
muhammet.mercan@ingbank.com.tr

Iris Pang
Chief Economist, Greater China
iris.pang@asia.ing.com

Sophie Freeman
Writer, Group Research
+44 20 7767 6209
Sophie.Freeman@uk.ing.com

Padhraic Garvey, CFA
Regional Head of Research, Americas
padhraic.garvey@ing.com

James Knightley
Chief International Economist, US
james.knightley@ing.com

Tim Condon
Asia Chief Economist
+65 6232-6020

Martin van Vliet
Senior Interest Rate Strategist
+31 20 563 8801
martin.van.vliet@ing.com

Karol Pogorzelski
Senior Economist, Poland
Karol.Pogorzelski@ing.pl

Carsten Brzeski
Global Head of Macro
carsten.brzeski@ing.de

Viraj Patel
Foreign Exchange Strategist
+44 20 7767 6405
viraj.patel@ing.com

Owen Thomas

Global Head of Editorial Content
+44 (0) 207 767 5331
owen.thomas@ing.com

Bert Colijn
Chief Economist, Netherlands
bert.colijn@ing.com

Peter Vanden Houte
Chief Economist, Belgium, Luxembourg, Eurozone
peter.vandenhoute@ing.com

Benjamin Schroeder
Senior Rates Strategist
benjamin.schroeder@ing.com

Chris Turner
Global Head of Markets and Regional Head of Research for UK & CEE
chris.turner@ing.com

Gustavo Rangel
Chief Economist, LATAM
+1 646 424 6464
gustavo.rangel@ing.com

Carlo Cocuzzo
Economist, Digital Finance
+44 20 7767 5306
carlo.cocuzzo@ing.com

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