

Memorandum

To : BW

From : FES Team

Date : February 23rd, 2026

Subject : Macro Dashboard Q IV 2025 v_1.0

A. Summary of Results

The key metrics in this quarterly Macro Dashboard largely stayed the same.

- a) In **Europe**, the **levels of corporate profitability** and **equity valuations** remain largely **in line with their historical averages**. There is **no indication** of inflated or unsustainable profitability, nor signs **of a valuation bubble**. We therefore believe that forward returns will be in line with historical returns.
- b) In the **US**, corporate **profitability remains elevated** at around 157% above historical averages and trend-line growth. More significantly, **equity valuations stay inflated**. Both **valuation metrics** we track stand at **218%–271% of their historical averages**, implying standard deviations of 2,8x to 3,4x — this is **bubble territory**.

On the risk side, global macro and geopolitical conditions remained fragile throughout **Q4 2025**. The final quarter revealed a stark **divergence between Wall Street and Main Street** as U.S. GDP growth plummeted to an annualized 1.4%—dragged down by a government shutdown and cooling consumer demand—yet equity markets remained resilient, buoyed by the 'bad news is good news' logic of **anticipated further rate cuts**. **Equity valuations in the U.S. increased** further, up from their already elevated levels.

In light of these stretched multiples, we maintain our strategic preference for **European equity markets**. Here, valuations exhibit a higher degree of fundamental resilience and appear significantly more grounded compared to their US counterparts.

B. Europe

1. Levels of Profitability

1.1 Introduction

Aggregate European data for the level of profitability in Europe or the €-area has only been available since ca. 2000. To get a long-term series, we have decided to **focus on the national statistics of Germany and France**. These countries jointly account for ca. 42% of the GDP of the Eurozone in 2025.

1.2 Corporate Profits Germany

Appendix B.1.2.a. shows that the German Gross Operating Surplus plus Gross Income as % of Gross Value-Added **decreased from 36,8% in Q IV 2024 to 36,5% in Q IV 2025**. This metric is a “high-level” indicator for profitability in the corporate sector.

The 25-year average for this metric is 41,3%. Thus, in Q IV 2025, this profit metric stood at **88% of its long-term average**.

The **second metric** we use for monitoring the level of profitability in Germany is the **time series for the last twelve months ("LTM") EPS of the DAX 40 index**. **Appendix B.1.2.b** shows that **aggregate LTM EPS in Q IV 2025 decreased to € 893 from € 1081,8 last year** – a decrease of ca. 17,5%. This number is based on reported – not adjusted – profits, thus it includes all one-off negative effects like write-downs on assets.

In historical comparison, DAX EPS are **slightly below the multi-year trendline**.

1.3 Corporate Profits France

In France we obtained a 76-year time series on the Corporate EBITDA as % of Gross Value Added - see **Appendix B.1.3.a**. **In Q IV 2025**, this metric **increased to 31,5% from 31,2% last year**. The 76-year average is 31,5%. Thus, in Q IV 2025, the French Corporate EBITDA stood **at 100% of its long-term average**.

The **second metric** for monitoring corporate profitability in France is the time series of LTM EPS for the CAC All Tradeable index. **Appendix B.1.3.b.** shows that **aggregate EPS in Q IV 2025 increased to € 233,8 from € 222,5 in Q IV 2024** – an increase of ca. 5,1%.

The graph shows that this profit metric is **on trend**.

2. Valuation

2.1 Shiller's CAPE in Europe

Shiller's Cyclically-Adjusted Price Earnings Multiple (or CAPE) is a metric introduced by Robert Shiller in his book **"Irrational Exuberance"**. It eliminates short-term earnings fluctuations by calculating a 10-year average, inflated to today's purchasing power based on the GDP deflator.

The primary source of this data is **Research Affiliates**. Our data is drawn from the JP Morgan Guide to Markets as a secondary source. **Appendix B.2.1.1** shows the 35-year evolution of this metric. The basis is the **MSCI Europe index**.

The current CAPE Europe stands at 19,9x. The 35-year average of CAPE Europe since 1990 is 19,2x. This implies that the **current valuation stands at 103,6% of their long-term average.** Thus, **current valuations in Europe are largely supported by 10-year average profits.**

2.2 Summary of Valuations in Europe

In summary, both profitability levels and valuations in Europe remain close to their historical averages – indicating **no signs of overvaluation or a bubble.**

C. USA

1. Status of the Profit Cycle

1.1 US After-Tax Corporate Profits as % of GDP (Appendix C.1.1)

1.1.1 Total Profits

In Q IV 2025, **US after-tax Corporate Profits** were 9,9% (vs. 10,5% in Q IV 2024) **of GDP.**

The current level of profitability implies a **ratio of 157% of its 96-year average since 1929**, which stands at 6,3%. **This corresponds with 1,6x standard deviations.**

1.1.2 Non-Financial Profits

In the US, **after-tax Non-Financial Corporate Profits** – excluding the volatility of banking profits – **decreased to 7,4% in Q IV 2025, compared with 8,1% in Q IV 2024.** This metric indicates that the increase in total corporate profits is largely driven by the financial sector – which is in line with the blockbuster financial reports of J.P. Morgan, Goldman etc.

The 96-year average is 5,0%. Thus, in Q IV 2025, US after-tax Non-Financial Corporate Profits stood at **149% of their long-term average.** **This corresponds with 1,3x standard deviations.**

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1.2 US Corporate EBITDA (Appendix C.1.2.a and C.1.2.b)

The second metric we use for assessing corporate profitability is **US Corporate EBITDA** (i.e. Net Operating Surplus plus Consumption of Fixed Capital divided by Gross Value Added). It eliminates any distortions from changes in interest or taxes.

As you can see from **Appendix C.1.2.a** in Q IV 2025 Corporate EBITDA stood at 36,9% of Gross Value Added, slightly down from 37,4% in Q IV 2024. **Appendix C.1.2.b** shows that the share accounted for by **wages** as % of GDP decreased slightly to 31,8% (vs. 32,3% in Q IV 2024).

As the 96-year average of Corporate EBITDA stands at 30,4% of GDP, the latest level implies **a ratio of 121% of its historical average. Thus, the higher metric for net profits is largely driven by lower tax rates.** The implied deviation from historical data corresponds to **1,5x standard deviations.**

Historically US Corporate EBITDA has varied within a much tighter range (23-36%) than the rest of the metrics discussed in Chapter 2.1, e.g. US after-tax Corporate Profits ranged from 2% to 8,5%. This is due to EBITDA being "higher up" in the profit funnel, with **less exposure to the operating gearing** from depreciation, interests, and taxes which magnify the relative rate of changes.

1.3 S&P 500 – Earnings per Share (Appendix C.1.3)

In Q IV 2025, TTM **statutory earnings per share** ("EPS") of the S&P 500 stood at \$ 235,7 – **up 10,5%** from \$ 213,2 in Q IV 2024.

Appendix C.1.3 shows that EPS was growing strongly above its trend line after the financial crisis of 2008/09. The main driver was the tax cuts, which should be considered when interpreting the data. Currently, EPS is **roughly 136% above the level of profits implied by the trend-line growth rate** around EPS of \$ 100,-.

1.4 FORUM Conclusions on US Profitability

Please find a summary of the four metrics for corporate profitability compared with their respective averages and expressed in standard deviations below:

Metric	% of LT Average	Standard Deviations
Total Profitability as % of GDP	157%	1,6x SD
Non-Fin. Profits % of GDP	149%	1,3x SD
Corporate EBITDA Level	121%	1,5x SD
S&P 500 eps (vs. trend line)	~136%	n.a.

We therefore conclude that profits remain well above historical averages and long-term trendlines.

2. Valuations

2.1 Cyclically Adjusted PE Ratios / Shiller's CAPE (Appendix C.2.1.a)

Prof. Shiller reports a **CAPE of 38,6x in Q IV 2025**. On that date, the S&P 500 stood at 6.584,0. This is compared to a CAPE of 37,9x in Q IV 2024.

The long-term average of Shiller's CAPE since 1871 is 17,7x. This implies that **current valuations are 218% of their long-term average. The standard deviation stands at 2,8x.**

Thus, we continue to see valuations which are the second highest in history after the 1999 bubble – above the level achieved before the Great Recession in 1929. **This is worrying as there is lots of historical evidence that in the subsequent years returns to shareholders have been poor. Over the long term, valuations tend to revert to their mean averages.**

2.2 US Equity Market Capitalization as % of GDP (Appendix C.2.2)

This is a metric which Warren Buffett cites often when discussing the level of valuations in equity markets. The numerator is the value of corporate equities as recorded on the balance sheet of the Fed.

Based on the Fed data for market capitalization and BEA data for GDP **US market capitalization as % of GDP increased to 230,3% at the end of Q IV 2025** (vs. 213,3% at the end of Q IV 2024).

As the 73-year average since the beginning of this time series in 1952 is 85%, this valuation implies **a level of 271% of the historical average, which corresponds to 3,4x standard deviations.**

2.3 Summary and Conclusions

2.3.1 Summary of US-based Data

Please find below a summary of the valuation metrics as of **December 31st, 2025**, compared to their **long-term averages** and **standard deviations** for the **US market**:

	% of LT Average	Standard Deviations
Shiller's CAPE	218%	2,8x SD
US Equity Market Cap. as % of GDP	271%	3,4x SD ¹

Both metrics suggest that US equity markets are **overvalued**. We define a bubble when a level of 2x standard deviations is exceeded, thus **according to Schiller's CAPE and Warren Buffett's metric, we are in a bubble.**

¹ All SD calculations are based on end of previous quarter numbers.

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This does not exclude a scenario whereby equity valuations continue to increase for many more years – **just the probabilities are against that**. And any rational asset allocation decisions should be based on probabilities – this would have yielded the highest returns in the past 100+ years.

D. Comparison: Europe vs.: USA

The following table summarizes the 2x2 matrix we have been de facto referring to (the figures are percentages relative to their long-term average):

	Europe	USA
Profits	~ 94%	~ 157%
Valuation	~ 103%	~ 271%

Thus, Europe appears perfectly in order. There is room for profit growth for some years without the formation of a bubble.

The "elephant in the room" remains **the massive overvaluation of US equities** – in combination with profits which are very elevated by historical standards.

If it corrects itself, this will also affect European valuations. But given the situation on the left side of the matrix, we cannot afford to pull our horn too much as valuations in Europe could well increase by 20 - 30% from money being re-directed from the USA to Europe. **Thus, we will stay invested to a high degree.**

E. Risks

The analysis above shows that the **levels of profitability and valuation in Europe do not signal an elevated level of risk as they are close to their long-term averages.**

Share prices in Europe may go down as well if we see a correction in the USA. This is a risk we do not see as critical as we **focus on the Intrinsic Values of our portfolios** – in the long-term share prices will follow the Intrinsic Values.

The **risks for a potential impairment of the earnings power** value of our portfolio come from

- a **recession** which is triggered by the tightening of the monetary policy.
- the **war in Ukraine** and its economic consequences.
- the imposition of **tariffs** and the subsequential first- and second order effects.

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This is a Macro perspective; thus, we cannot comment on the resilience of our holdings. But the answer we would have to these risks is that the **top 3 holdings in our portfolio should** be able to weather these risks and **continue to grow earnings and Intrinsic Values over the long-term.**

F. Conclusions for the Top-Down Portfolio Construction

1. Expected Market Returns

If one believes in the Mean-Reversion characteristics of valuation, the most likely assumption on expected returns on European equities in the next 5 – 10 years would be **returns in line with historical averages.**

Conversely, expected returns from US equities are below long-term averages. The expected return will depend on the time it takes for this **overvaluation to unwind.** Appendix F.1 shows the expected market returns going forward. **According to this metric the expected 10-year return of US equities is 2,3% p.a. in nominal terms, implying a high likelihood of a negative real returns.**

As history shows with such predictions, the actual outcome will most likely not be a linear development, **but the losses may come in very concentrated periods.** And the highest risk of a market correction by 10 – 20% is now – when valuations are highest!! **This describes the basic scenario which FORUM wants to position its portfolio for.**

2. Cash Level

Our traditional level of net cash is ca. 20% of net assets. Given our expectations for risks and returns, we prefer to **keep liquidity at this level or slightly below.**

3. Shorting Exposure

We continue to want to have a **short exposure of 5 - 10%.** But we will need names **with a clear catalyst – not just overvaluations** – otherwise the risk of being killed from momentum is too high.

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B.1.3.a	France Corporate EBITDA as % of Gross Value Added
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Appendix 1.1: Historical Relationship between Standard Deviations and Returns for CAPE

Stock Market Return as a Function of # Standard Deviations from Average PE/ 10

Status as of November 2nd 2010

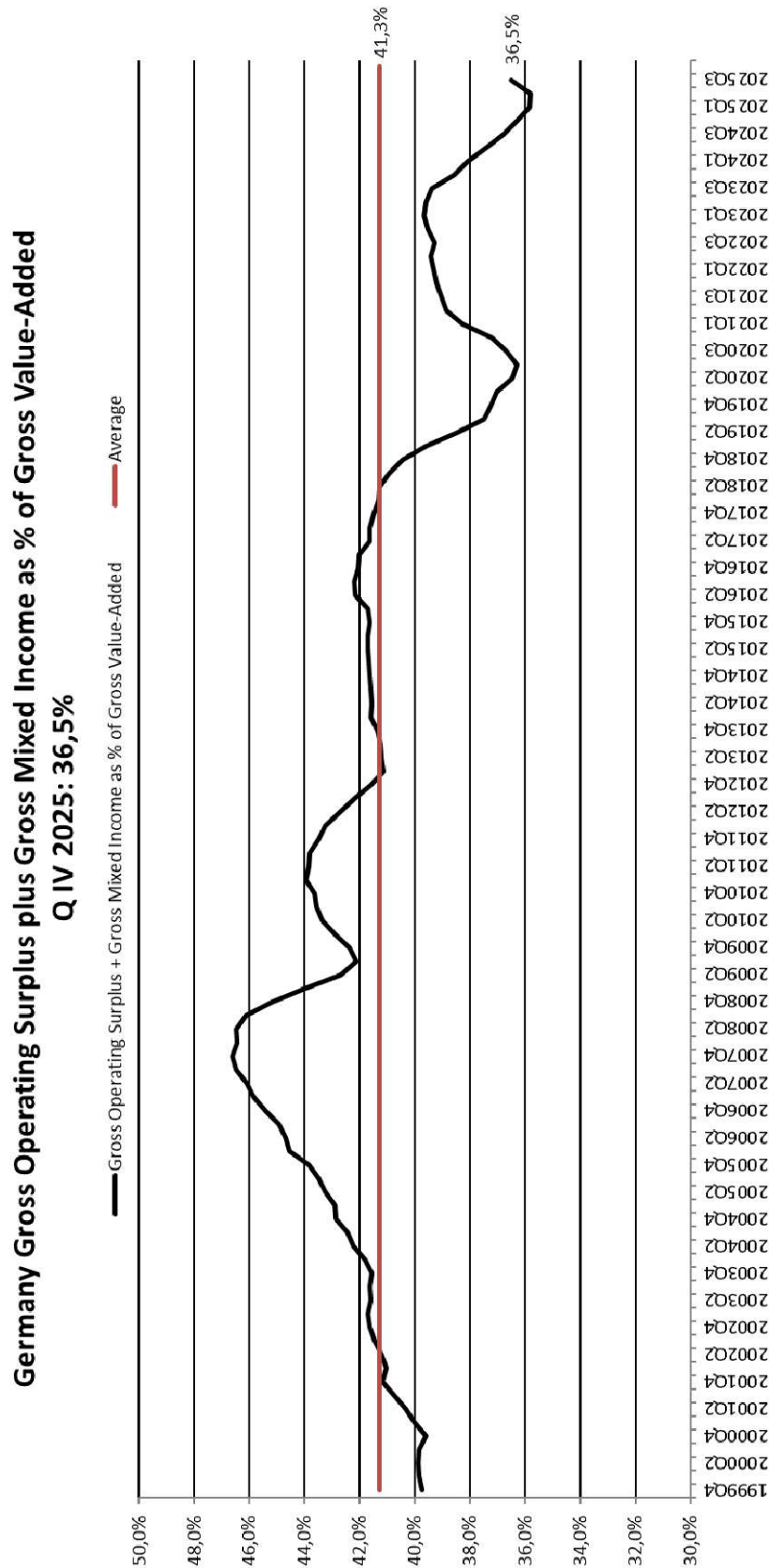
	Deviation from average as a # of standard deviations	# months	Nominal return		
			2 years	5 years	10 years
Negative deviations	Less than -3	1	14.5%	5.2%	9.9%
	Between -3 and -2	79	5.3%	4.8%	7.0%
	Between -2 and -1	294	7.8%	7.8%	4.6%
	Between -1 and -0.5	226	10.5%	6.8%	6.6%
	Between -0.5 and 0	159	7.8%	5.3%	6.3%
Positive deviations	Between 0 and 0.5	169	2.1%	3.6%	5.6%
	Between 0.5 and 1	178	2.1%	2.8%	4.1%
	Between 1 and 2	297	1.6%	3.8%	2.5%
	Between 2 and 3	71	1.1%	1.7%	2.3%
	More than 3	56	0.0%	-2.7%	-0.1%
Total		1530	5.0%	4.8%	4.7%

48% 86%

Period covered: 1881-2010

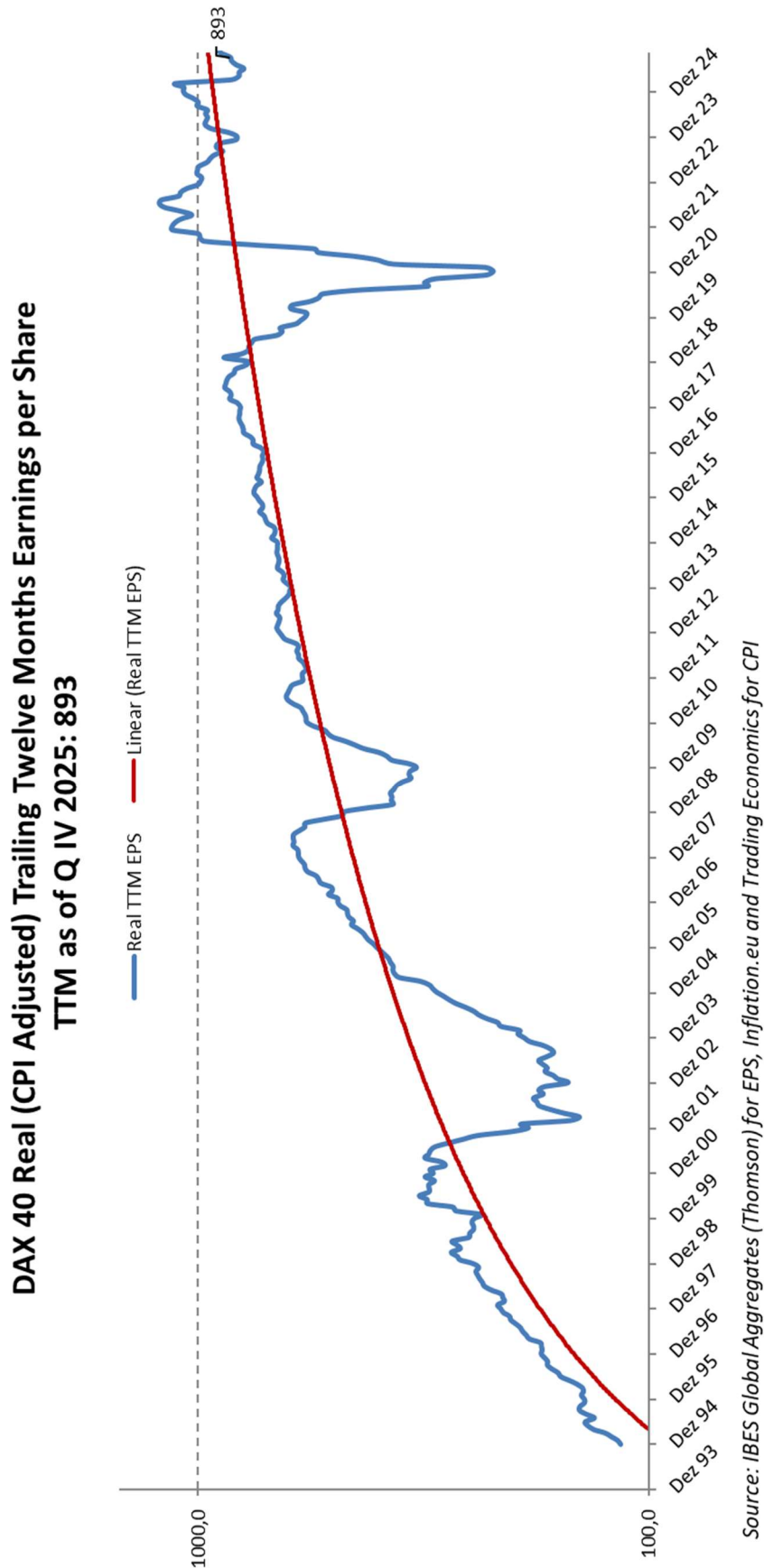
Source: Shiller, FORUM Research

Appendix B.1.2.a – German Gross Operating Surplus plus Gross Income as % of Gross Value-Added

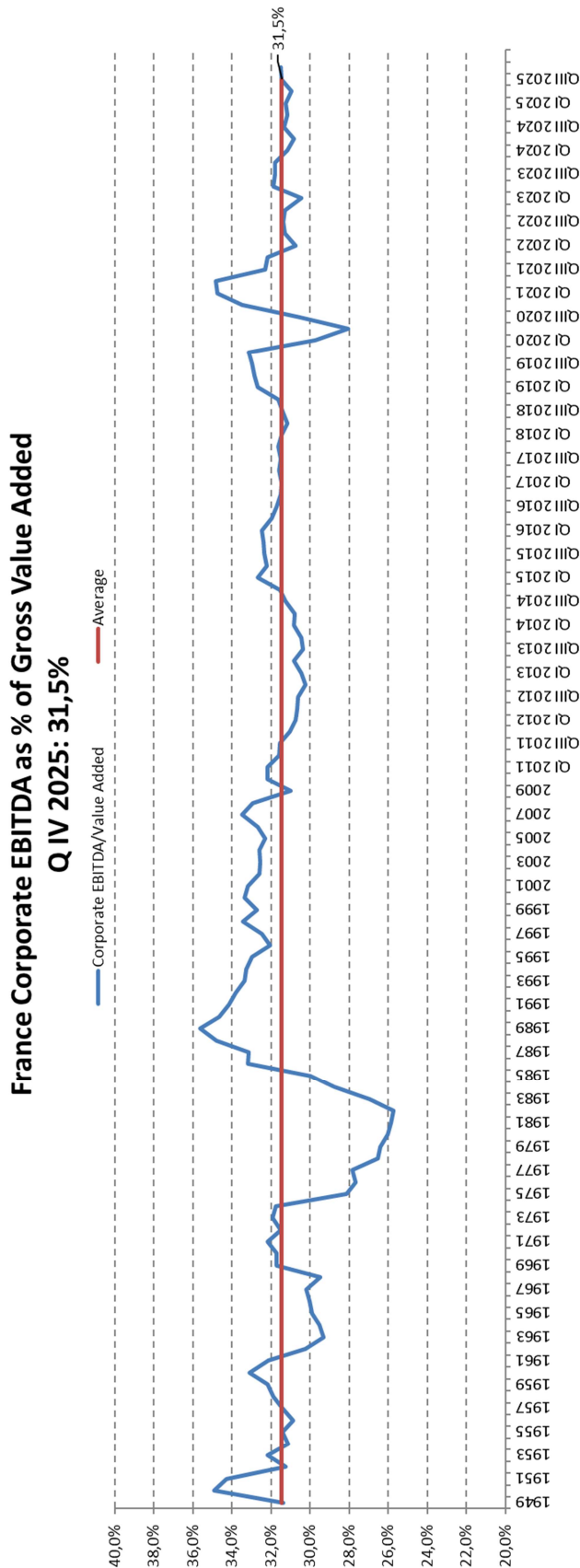


Source: Destatis.de

Appendix B.1.2.b – Real (CPI Adjusted) TTM EPS of DAX 40 Index (Germany)

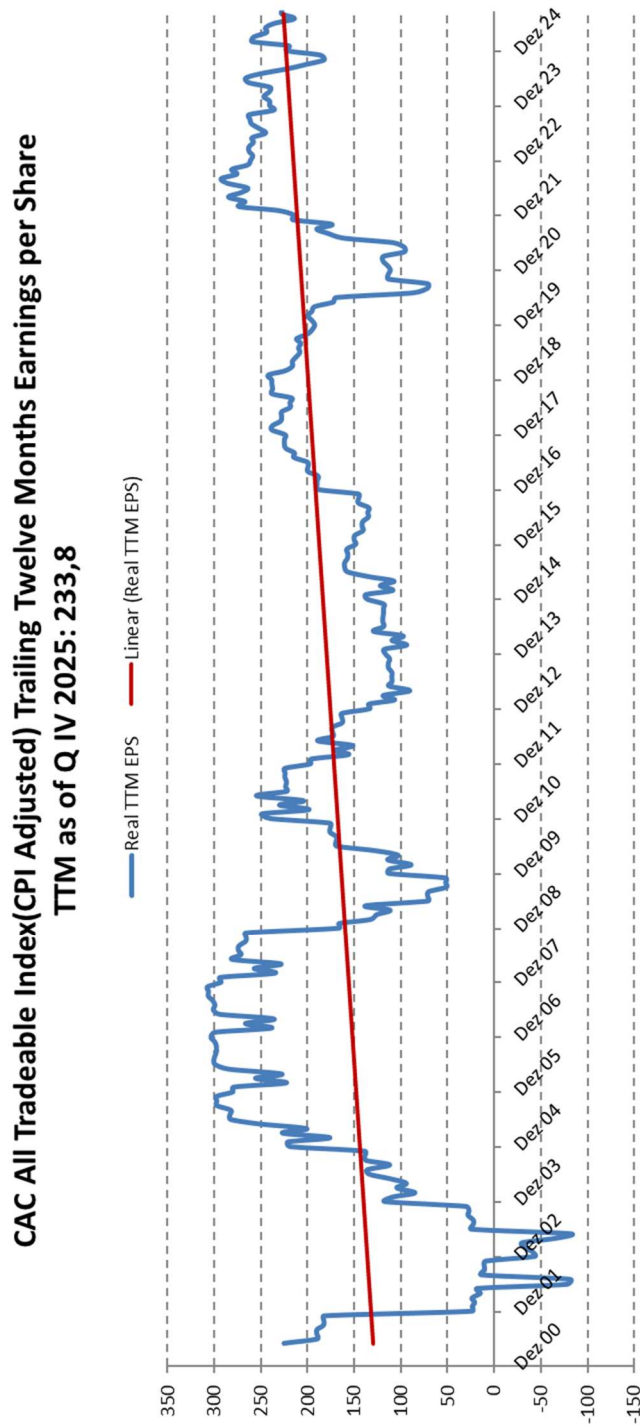


Appendix B.1.3.a - France Corporate EBITDA as % of Gross Value Added



Source: Insee (Institut National de la Statistique et Des Etudes Economiques)

Appendix B.1.3.b – Real (CPI Adjusted) TTM EPS of CAC All Tradeable Index (France)

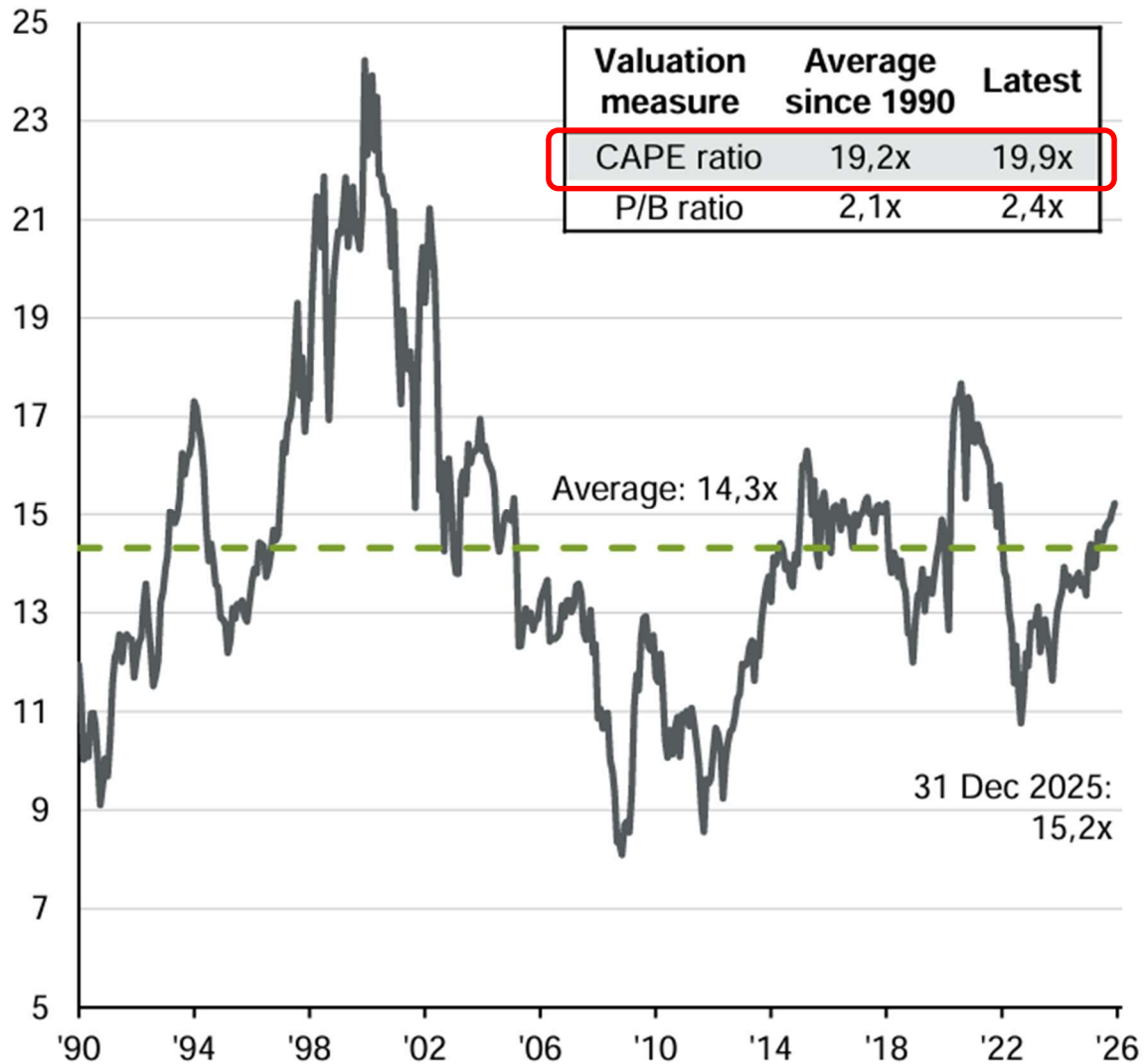


Source: BBVA, Inflation.eu, Trading Economics

Appendix B.2.1.1 - MSCI Europe CAPE Ratio

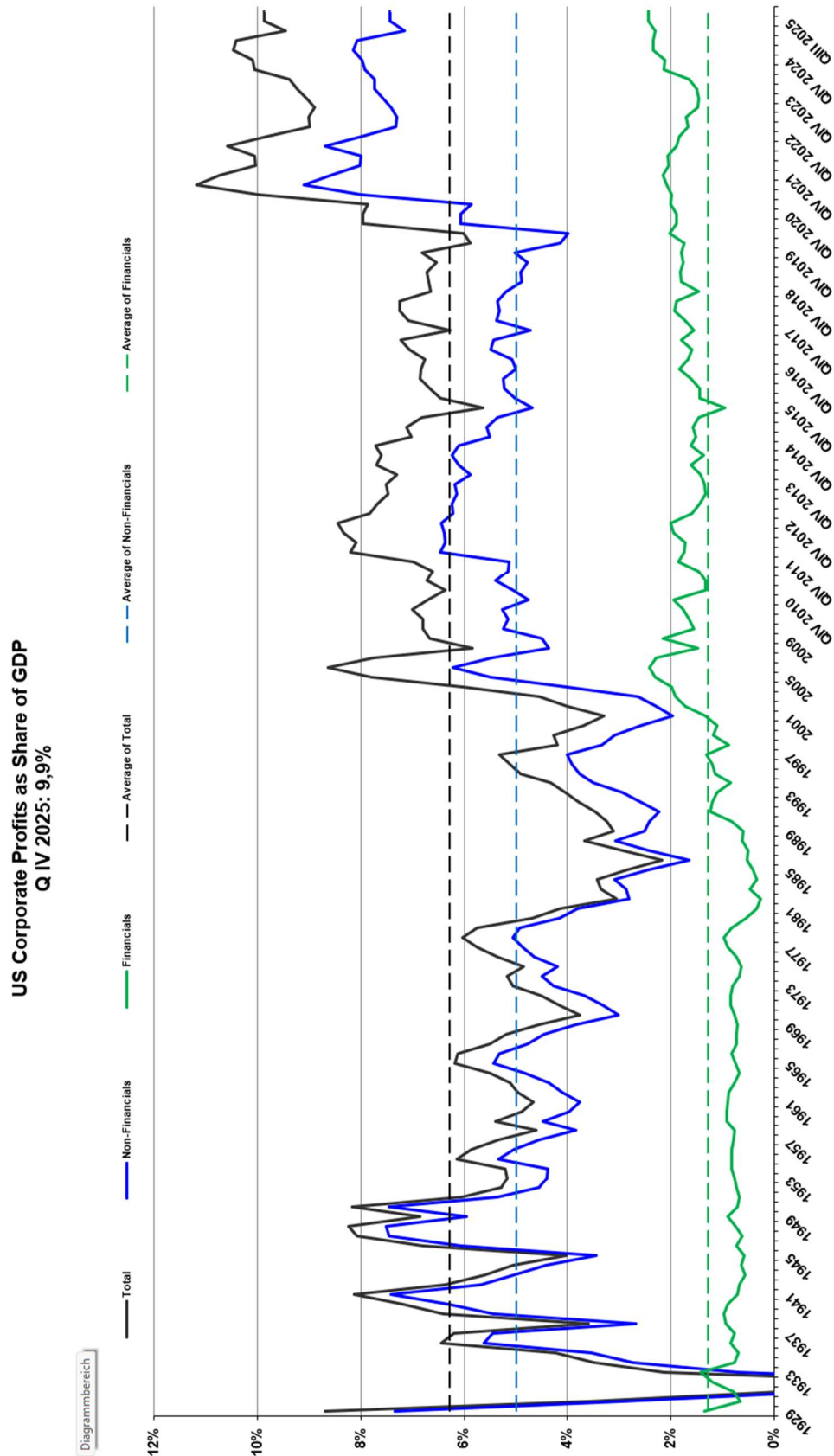
MSCI Europe forward P/E ratio

x, multiple



Source: JPM Guide to Markets (Q IV 2025)

Appendix C.1.1 – US Corporate Profits as % of GDP

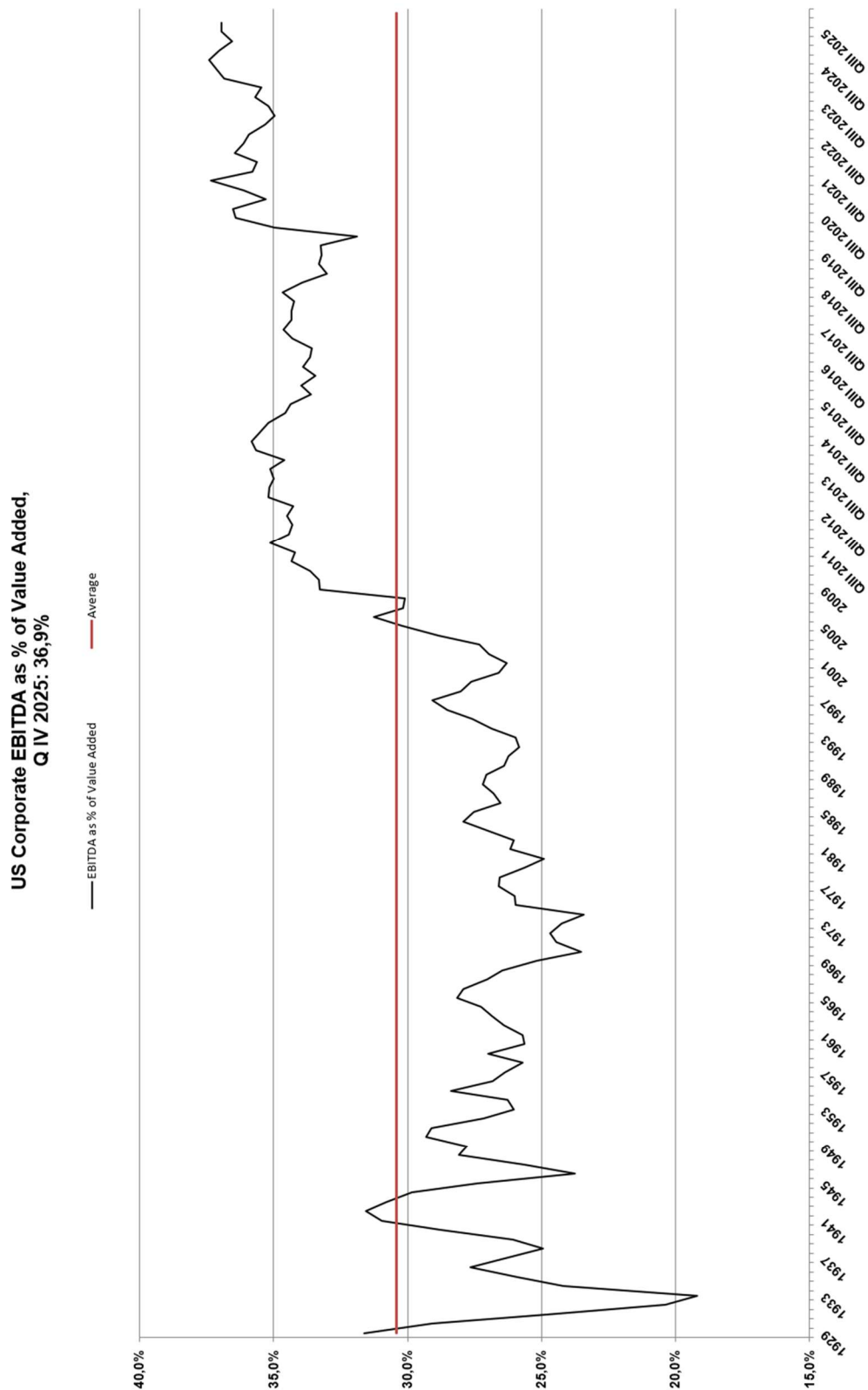


Source: US Bureau of Economic Affairs (BEA), NIPA Table 1.14

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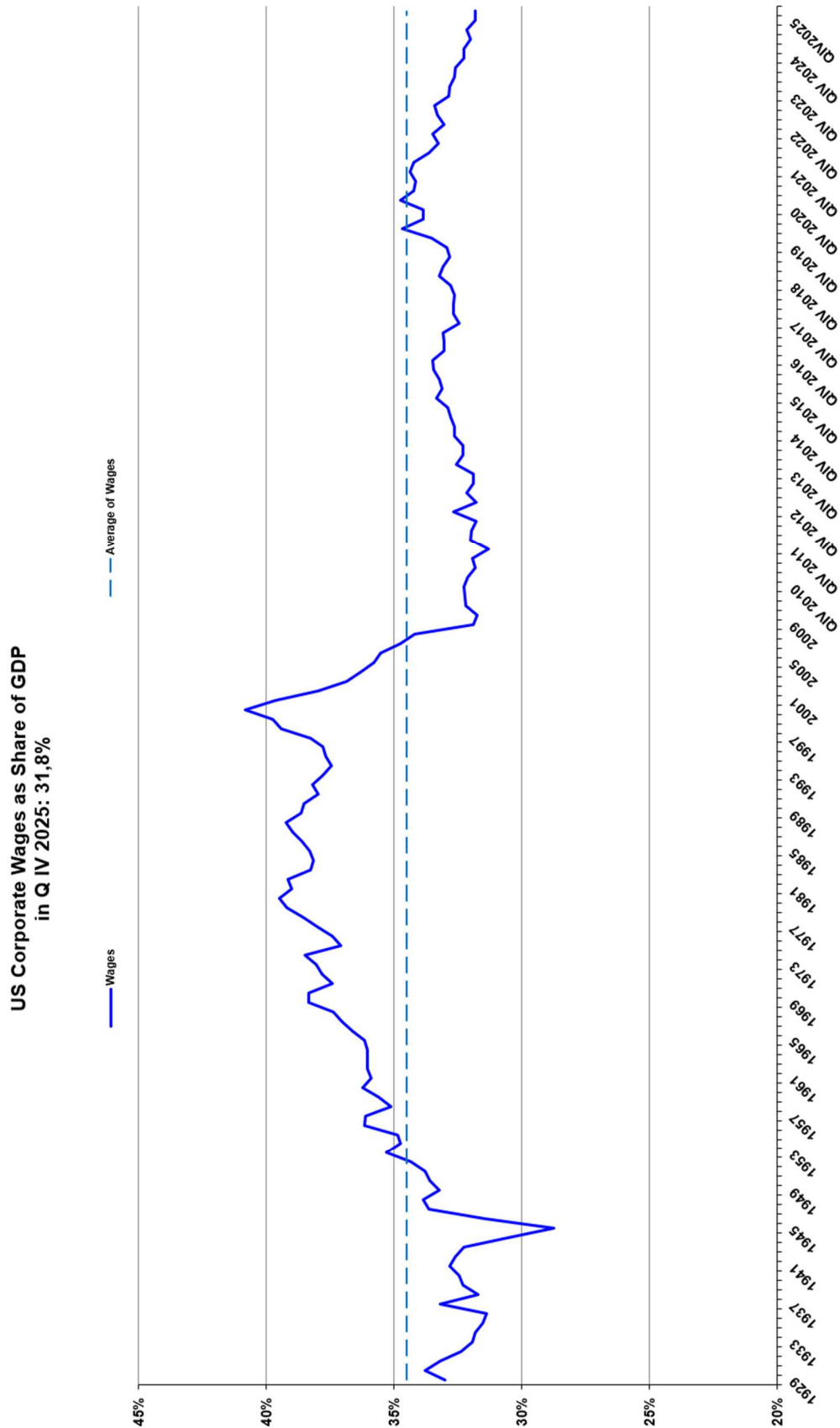
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Appendix C.1.2.a - US Corporate EBITDA as % of Gross Value Added

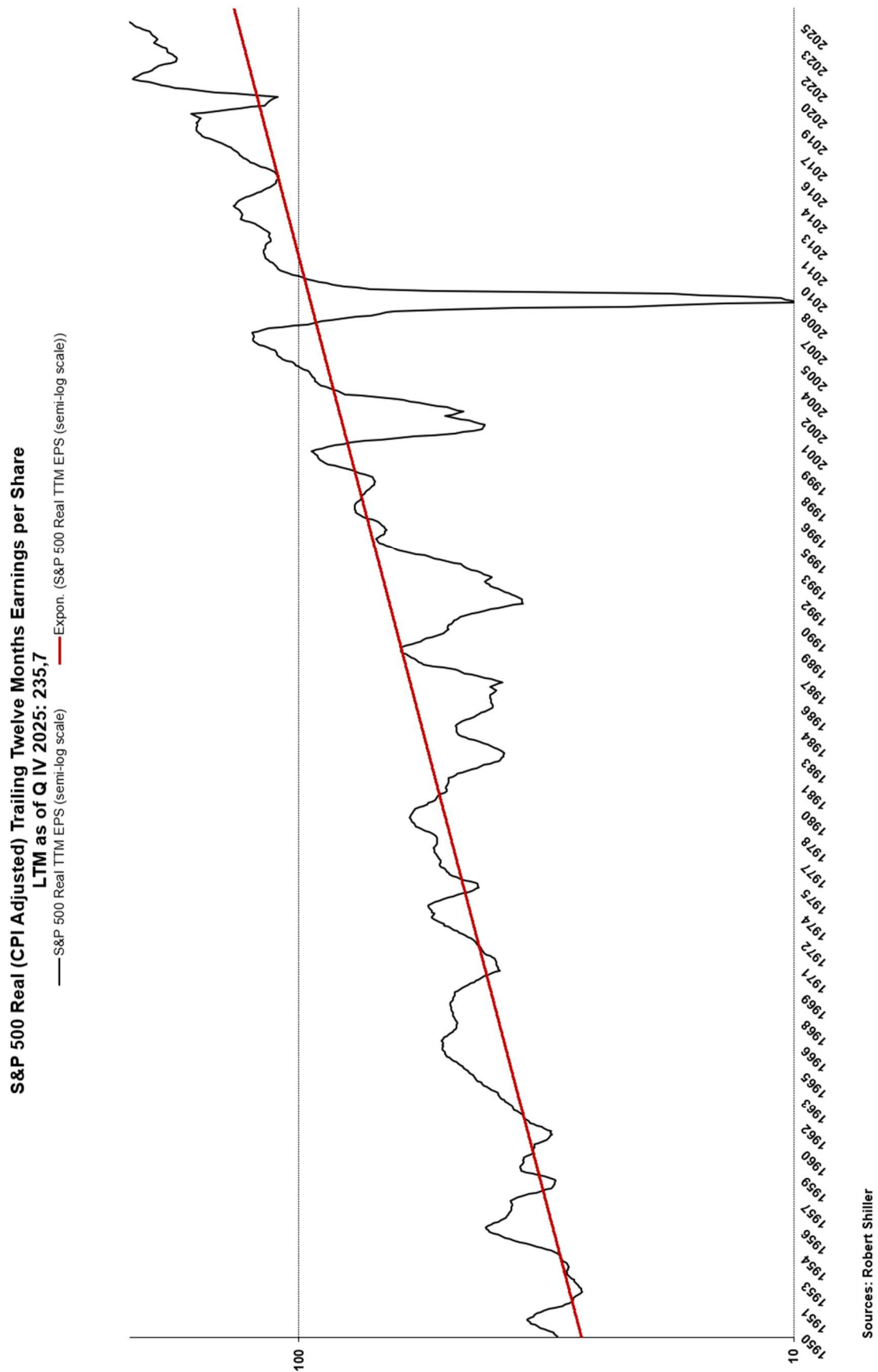


Source: US Bureau of Economic Affairs, NIPA Table 1.14

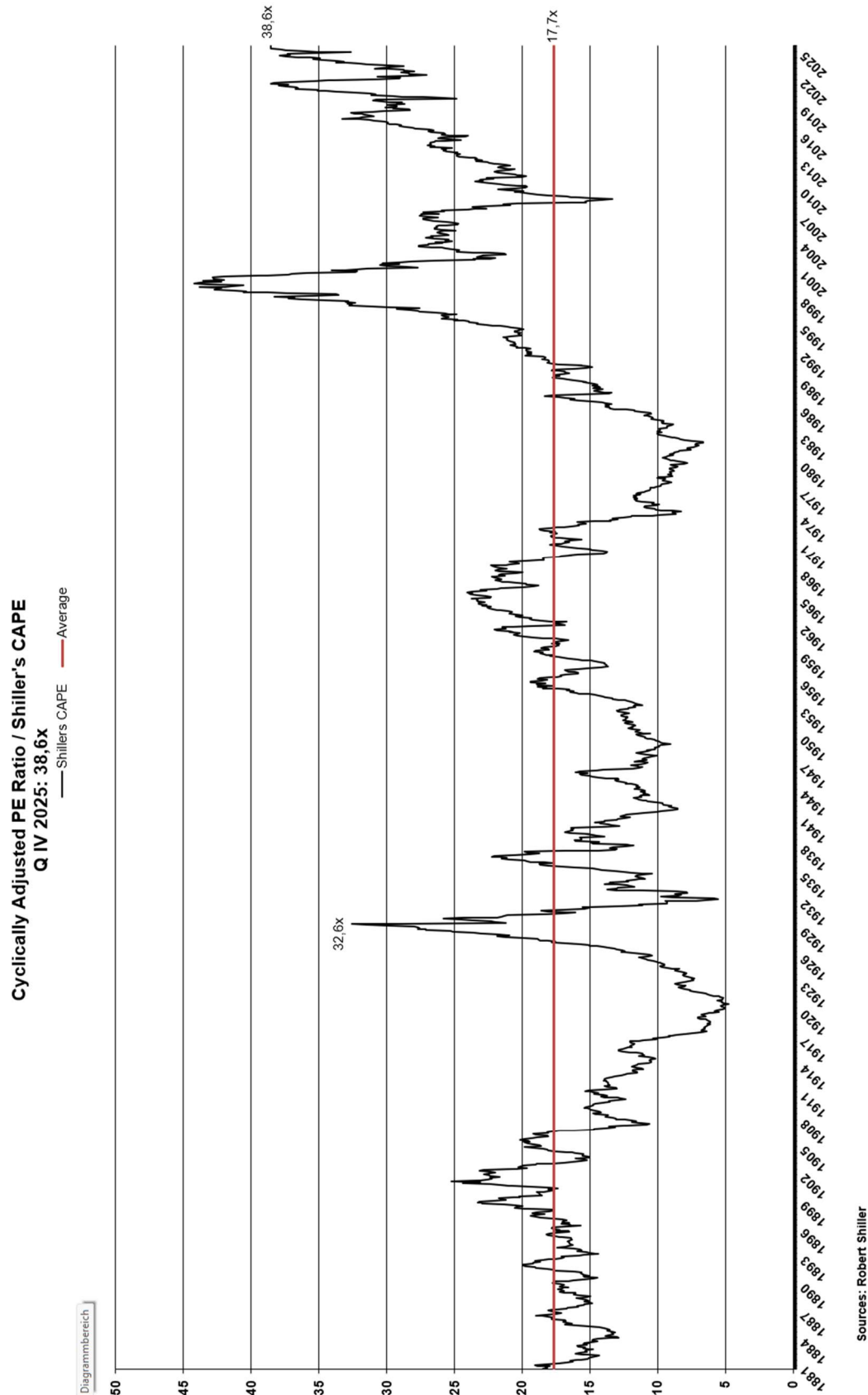
Appendix C.1.2.b - US Corporate Wages as % of GDP



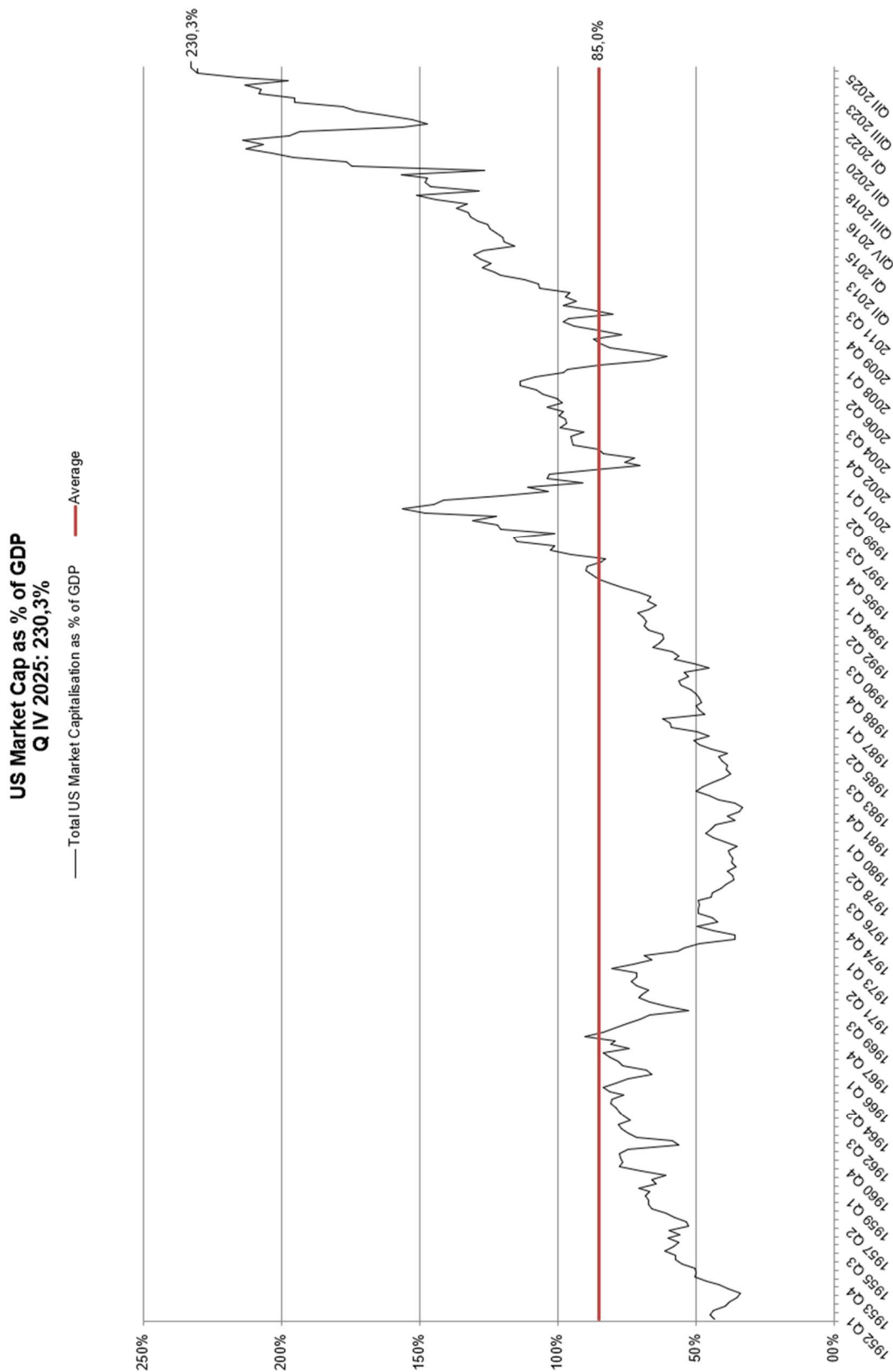
Appendix C.1.3 - Real (CPI Adjusted) TTM EPS of S&P 500



Appendix C.2.1.a - S&P 500 Cyclically Adjusted PE-Ratios (Shiller's CAPE)



Appendix C.2.2 - Capitalization of US Companies as % of GDP



Source: US Federal Reserve, Table B 103

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F.1 Expected Returns of Equity Markets USA and Europe

Stock Market Return as a Function of # Standard Deviations from Average PE/ 10

Status as of November 2nd 2010

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