

BCA Market Perspective ©
Volatility Has Returned
July 2015

The U.S. stock markets have seen a significant increase in volatility over the past several weeks with news out of Greece and China continuing to shake investor confidence. But why is this news having such a significant impact on our domestic markets?

The Greek economy accounts for less than 0.38% of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Most major U.S. institutions divested themselves of Greek debt several years ago when the Greece debt crisis first surfaced in the global markets. So why then is Greece important to U.S. investors?

The answer is the potential impact the Greece crisis could have on other countries, particularly countries in the Eurozone. This could then have a direct impact on the growth rates in Europe. With over 25% of the S&P 500 earnings coming directly from Europe, any significant slowdown in Europe would have an impact on earnings for many U.S. companies. In addition, many European banks own Greek debt. A default by Greece could have a major impact on many of these banks. While most U.S. banks do not have direct exposure to Greek debt, many do have indirect exposure through the European banks. In addition, other European countries with high debt exposure (i.e. Spain and Italy) will no doubt be watching closely and demanding similar treatment from the stronger countries, such as Germany and France.

Another major contributor to the recent increase in volatility has been China. China's stock market has taken a significant dive after an extraordinary run over the previous several months. China's market is like no other and the government has stepped in with aggressive actions to limit sales and encourage additional investments in stocks. China's growth rate is expected to drop to 3-5% by most economists over the next year. While still healthy, it is a significant drop from recent years and has caused commodity prices to drop as demand from China is expected to decline. With China's GDP representing approximately 16.7% of the world's economy, any slowdown could have an impact on earnings for any companies invested heavily in China.

While these events have had a major role in increased volatility, the good news is that the U.S. economy appears to be improving, interest rates remain low, earnings have been strong and the valuations on stocks, while slightly above long term averages, appear to be attractive given the current low rate environment. There continues to be talk of a lending rate hike by the Federal Reserve, but given the problems in Greece and China and the strength of the dollar, we continue to believe any rate hike will be pushed out to the end of this year at the earliest. But even if we see a hike earlier than expected, it would most likely be .25% or less and should have a minimal and most likely a short term impact on stocks.