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OPERATIONAL RISK TOWARD BASEL III

**Best Practices and
Issues in Modeling,
Management,
and Regulation**

GREG N. GREGORIOU, Editor

Operational Risk toward Basel III

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and Regulation*

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Foreword

This is an important book, and it is published at just the right time. I have accepted with great pleasure the invitation to write the Foreword for Greg Gregoriou's new volume on operational risk, but I had not anticipated that it would allow me to reflect on the concurrent unfolding of the disastrous September events. As one financial institution after another is failing or is subjected to an emergency sale, we start to comprehend that the basic rules of banking are in the process of being fundamentally redefined. A significant fallout for the real economy is by now more than likely, and the resulting political tremors will have a potentially decisive impact on the November elections. The reported loss figures are staggering and of almost incomprehensible magnitude for the average citizen. The rescue of the German IKB has, for instance, led to accumulated losses of 9 billion euros so far, an amount that is equivalent to an extra burden of approximately 300 euros for every taxpayer. Hundreds of billions of dollars need to be committed as part of the U.S. government's bailout program, translating into a still-unknown cost for the U.S. taxpayer.

While the crisis is clearly of a systemic nature, its ultimate source lies with the notoriously myopic behavior of the banking community and, as some commentators have argued, is the outcome of collective greed. Bankers have increasingly viewed their careers as long call options that, in the worst case, could force them into a lengthy retirement in a lavish country home. The investor community valued the extraordinary returns and forced the banking community into a prisoner's dilemma where playing the transaction game became a dominant strategy for everybody involved. Betting the bank by taking on excessive liquidity risk exposures was ultimately acceptable because the buildup of counterparty risk made a governmental bailout all the more likely. Industry insiders have warned for quite some time that credit volume growth far exceeding economic growth has historically always led to some form of a financial crisis. Without question, it is particularly worrisome that the whole problem did not appear on the radar of regulatory authorities until it was too late.

The subprime crisis and its fallout in financial markets as well as the real economy will trigger far-reaching regulatory reforms and should also lead

to a toughening of the penalty structure for bankers in charge of running complex financial market operations. It, however, also requires institutional efforts by banks to reexamine and strengthen their approaches to risk management. Trading and credit risk management systems must obviously be extended to capture liquidity risk exposures. Financial institutions must, however, also reevaluate the way they are dealing with operational risks in order to impose checks and balances on the bankers' irrational ignorance of the aforementioned prisoner's dilemma problem. It will require changes in the governance structures and the development of adequate back-office systems.

We are still in the early stages of developing a sound understanding of operational risk management. Hence, there is still considerable scope for academics to make valuable contributions with their ongoing research. Greg Gregoriou's new book helps to fill this knowledge gap and does so in a very timely fashion. It provides a comprehensive coverage of this exciting field, ranging from quantitative and qualitative risk measurement approaches to risk mitigation and regulatory implications. The edited volume includes American as well as European viewpoints and brings together academics as well as practitioners. The 23 chapters in total cover a lot of ground and give readers an in-depth overview of the current state of the art in operational risk management. While the contributors could not fully predict recent events, their contributions are nevertheless strongly influenced by the financial market woes of the past 14 months. This volume will therefore shape the discussion on how to better shield financial institutions against operational breakdown in future years.

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About the Editor

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GREG N. GREGORIOU

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