China / Hong Kong Company Update China Unicom

Bloomberg: 762 HK EQUITY | Reuters: 0762.HK

DBS Group Research . Equity

BUY

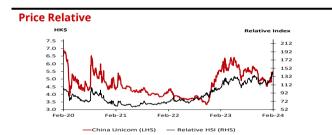
Last Traded Price (6 Feb 2024): HK\$5.39 (HSI : 16,137) Price Target 12-mth: HK\$8.70 (61% upside)

Analysts

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What's New

- Lowered earnings by 1%/0.5%/4% for FY23/24/25, as we edged down industry internet revenue on softer enterprise spending amidst a weak macro
- Expect earnings to grow by 11%/9%/10% in FY23/24/25, respectively
- Expect its payout ratio to reach 53% in FY23, up from 50% in FY22
- Maintain BUY for attractive dividend yield of 7%; TP of HK\$8.7



Forecasts and Valuation

| Fulctasts and valuati | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|---|
| FY Dec (RMBm) Turnover EBITDA Pre-tax Profit Net Profit Gth (Pre-ex)(%) EPS (RMB) EPS (HK\$) EPS (HK\$) Diluted EPS (HK\$) DPS (HK\$) BV Per Share (HK\$) PF (X) P/Cash Flow (X) P/Free CF (X) EV/EBITDA (X) Net Div Yield (%) P/Book Value (X) Net Debt/Equity (X) ROAE(%) Earnings Rev (%): | 2022A 354,944 99,169 20,588 16,745 16,5 0,55 0,60 16,5 0,60 0,30 12,15 9,1 1,5 5,4 0,9 5,5 0,4 CASH 5,0 | 2023F 382.667 103.229 22.671 18.601 11.1 0.66 11.1 0.66 0.35 12.51 8.2 1.0 2.4 0.2 6.6 0.4 CASH 5.4 (1) | 2024F 405,903 106,047 24,648 20,223 8,7 0,66 0,72 0,40 12,85 7,5 1,7 149,6 0,3 7,5 0,4 CASH 5,7 | 2025F 429,358 109,571 27,068 22,209 9,8 0,73 0,79 9,8 0,79 0,44 13,22 6,8 0,9 2,1 0,0 8,2 0,9 2,1 0,0 8,2 0,4 CASH 6,1 |
| Earnings Rev (%): Consensus EPS (RMB) Other Broker Recs: | | (1) 0.61 B:22 | (0.5) 0.67 S:0 | (4) 0.76 H:1 |

Source of all data on this page: Company, DBS Bank (Hong Kong) Limited ("DBS HK"), Thomson Reuters



Refer to important disclosures at the end of this report

7 Feb 2024

Catching up in network coverage and quality

Investment Thesis

An integrated player with strong presence in Northern China. The company co-built and co-shares a 5G network with China Telecom to narrow its competitive disadvantage against China Mobile in terms of network quality and coverage. In Nov 2022, the company also received approval from MIIT to re-farm its 900MHz frequency spectrum for 5G network use.

Industry internet business the key growth driver. Its industry internet business (including IDC, cloud computing etc.) is the key revenue growth driver, contributing c.60% of incremental service revenue growth and accounting for 25% of total service revenue in 1H23. We expect this business segment would maintain its high growth rate and continue to be the key revenue driver in the long term, supported by the national digitalisation initiatives.

Dividend hike to improve shareholder return. China Unicom is the only operator that has not committed to a dividend payout ratio. While the company mentioned that dividend growth will be largely supported by earnings growth, we expect the company would increase its payout ratio from 50% in FY22 to c.54% in FY23, which is still lower than that of its peers, at 70%.

BUY with TP of HK\$8.7. We maintain BUY on CU for its rapid industry internet expansion and attractive dividend yield of c.7%. We set our TP at HK\$8.7 (unchanged) based on 12x FY24F PE (unchanged), slightly above its historical average, as we expect ROE will continue its uptrend and reach >5% in FY23.

Key Risks

Policy risks. China's telecom sector is exposed to policy risks such as management reshuffles and tariff cuts. This could be unfavourable to the company's business performance.

Price war in the mobile market. Irrational competition for mobile subscriber market share could lead to higher ARPU pressure.

At A Glance

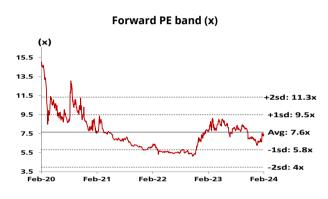
| Issued Capital (m shrs) | 30,598 |
|--|------------------|
| Mkt Cap (HKm/US\$m) | 164,923 / 21,083 |
| Major Shareholders (%) | |
| China Unicom (BVI) Ltd. | 53.5 |
| China United Network Comm. Group Co., Ltd. | 26.4 |
| Free Float (%) | 20.1 |
| 3m Avg. Daily Val. (US\$m) | 17.84 |
| GICS Industry: Communication Services / Telecommunic | ation Services |



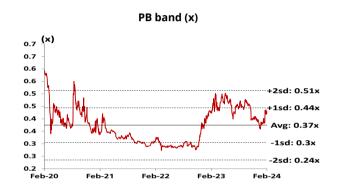
Company Background

China Unicom (CU) is an integrated telecom operator in Mainland China. It provides 2G/3G services based on GSM/WCDMA technologies and 4G services mainly based on FD-LTE technology, as well as a 5G service based on the 5G SA network, which are widely adopted by other countries. Its fixed-line business mainly covers Northern China.

Historical PE and PB band



Source: Thomson Reuters, DBS HK





Key Assumptions

| Key Assumptions | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| FY Dec | 2021A | 2022A | 2023F | 2024F | 2025F |
| Mobile sub net add (m) | 11.3 | 5.6 | 4.0 | 4.0 | 3.0 |
| Mobile ARPU (Rmb) | 43.9 | 44.3 | 45.0 | 45.6 | 46.3 |
| EBITDA margin (%) | 29.4 | 27.9 | 27.0 | 26.1 | 25.5 |
| Broadband sub net add (m) | 9.0 | 8.6 | 4.0 | 2.0 | 1.8 |
| Fixed-line sub net add (m) | (0.1) | 0.5 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Source: Company, DBS HK | | | | | |

Segmental Breakdown (RMB m)

| FY Dec | 2021A | 2022A | 2023F | 2024F | 2025F |
|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Revenues (RMB m) | | | | | |
| Fixed-line | 129,600 | 149,285 | 164,752 | 178,898 | 193,008 |
| Mobile | 164,100 | 170,063 | 175,200 | 180,018 | 184,664 |
| Terminal sales | 31,701 | 35,596 | 42,715 | 46,987 | 51,685 |
| Others | 2,453 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 327,854 | 354,944 | 382,667 | 405,903 | 429,358 |
| Source: Company DRS HK | | | | | |

Source: Company, DBS HK

Income Statement (RMB m)

| FY Dec | 2021A | 2022A | 2023F | 2024F | 2025F |
|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Revenue | 327,854 | 354,944 | 382,667 | 405,903 | 429,358 |
| Cost of Goods Sold | (95,327) | (102,092) | (112,809) | (120,952) | (129,381) |
| Gross Profit | 232,527 | 252,852 | 269,858 | 284,951 | 299,976 |
| Other Opng (Exp)/Inc | (221,859) | (240,512) | (255,746) | (269,999) | (280,363) |
| Operating Profit | 10,668 | 12,340 | 14,111 | 14,952 | 19,613 |
| Other Non Opg (Exp)/Inc | 4,119 | 3,850 | 4,500 | 4,000 | 2,000 |
| Associates & JV Inc | 3,310 | 3,746 | 3,746 | 3,746 | 3,746 |
| Net Interest (Exp)/Inc | (170) | 652 | 314 | 1,949 | 1,709 |
| Dividend Income | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Exceptional Gain/(Loss) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Pre-tax Profit | 17,927 | 20,588 | 22,671 | 24,648 | 27,068 |
| Тах | (3,420) | (3,751) | (3,967) | (4,313) | (4,737) |
| Minority Interest | (139) | (92) | (102) | (111) | (122) |
| Preference Dividend | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Net Profit | 14,368 | 16,745 | 18,601 | 20,223 | 22,209 |
| Net Profit before Except. | 14,368 | 16,745 | 18,601 | 20,223 | 22,209 |
| EBITDA | 96,320 | 99,169 | 103,229 | 106,047 | 109,571 |
| Growth | | | | | |
| Revenue Gth (%) | 7.9 | 8.3 | 7.8 | 6.1 | 5.8 |
| EBITDA Gth (%) | 2.3 | 3.0 | 4.1 | 2.7 | 3.3 |
| Opg Profit Gth (%) | (4.1) | 15.7 | 14.4 | 6.0 | 31.2 |
| Net Profit Gth (%) | 15.0 | 16.5 | 11.1 | 8.7 | 9.8 |
| Margins & Ratio | | | | | |
| Gross Margins (%) | 70.9 | 71.2 | 70.5 | 70.2 | 69.9 |
| Opg Profit Margin (%) | 3.3 | 3.5 | 3.7 | 3.7 | 4.6 |
| Net Profit Margin (%) | 4.4 | 4.7 | 4.9 | 5.0 | 5.2 |
| ROAE (%) | 4.4 | 5.0 | 5.4 | 5.7 | 6.1 |
| ROA (%) | 2.5 | 2.7 | 2.7 | 2.7 | 2.8 |
| ROCE (%) | 2.4 | 2.6 | 2.9 | 3.0 | 3.8 |
| Div Payout Ratio (%) | 46.0 | 50.1 | 53.5 | 56.0 | 56.0 |
| Net Interest Cover (x) | 62.8 | NM | NM | NM | NM |
| Source: Company, DBS HK | | | | | |

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Interim Income Statement (RMB m)

| FY Dec | 1H2021 | 2H2021 | 1H2022 | 2H2022 | 1H2023 |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | | | | | |
| Revenue | 164,174 | 163,680 | 176,261 | 178,683 | 191,833 |
| Cost of Goods Sold | (45,162) | (50,165) | (46,726) | (55,366) | (55,043) |
| Gross Profit | 119,012 | 113,515 | 129,535 | 123,317 | 136,790 |
| Other Oper. (Exp)/Inc | (110,899) | (110,960) | (120,022) | (120,490) | (125,662) |
| Operating Profit | 8,113 | 2,555 | 9,513 | 2,827 | 11,128 |
| Other Non Opg (Exp)/Inc | 1,101 | 3,018 | 1,035 | 2,815 | 1,213 |
| Associates & JV Inc | 2,249 | 1,061 | 2,660 | 1,086 | 2,871 |
| Net Interest (Exp)/Inc | (174) | 4 | 208 | 444 | 108 |
| Exceptional Gain/(Loss) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Pre-tax Profit | 11,289 | 6,638 | 13,416 | 7,172 | 15,320 |
| Тах | (2,081) | (1,339) | (2,420) | (1,331) | (2,820) |
| Minority Interest | (41) | (98) | (39) | (53) | (109) |
| Net Profit | 9,167 | 5,201 | 10,957 | 5,788 | 12,391 |
| Net profit bef Except. | 9,167 | 5,201 | 10,957 | 5,788 | 12,391 |
| | | | | | |
| Growth | | | | | |
| Revenue Gth (%) | 9.2 | 6.7 | 7.4 | 9.2 | 8.8 |
| Opg Profit Gth (%) | (0.3) | (14.3) | 17.3 | 10.6 | 17.0 |
| Net Profit Gth (%) | 21.1 | 5.6 | 19.5 | 11.3 | 13.1 |
| | | | | | |
| Margins | | | | | |
| Gross Margins (%) | 72.5 | 69.4 | 73.5 | 69.0 | 71.3 |
| Opg Profit Margins (%) | 4.9 | 1.6 | 5.4 | 1.6 | 5.8 |
| Net Profit Margins (%) | 5.6 | 3.2 | 6.2 | 3.2 | 6.5 |
| Source: Company, DBS HK | | | | | |

| ,416 ,535 ,248 ,846 ,882 ,252 ,076 ,675 ,370 ,140 ,835 ,623 | 411,660 51,051 33,709 69,996 1,882 47,486 26,879 642,663 5,724 160,649 84,497 1,528 46,729 | 444,593 54,797 25,048 135,427 1,846 46,383 26,879 734,973 5,724 205,374 120,697 1,528 47,722 | 7 58 3 16 7 125 5 2 3 58 9 26 3 763 4 5 4 197 7 146 3 1 | 5,480 5,543 5,244 5,803 5,256 5,696 5,724 7,322 5,724 7,322 5,862 5,528 | 507,45 62,28 7,44 184,58 2,24 59,11 26,87 850,01 5,72 244,94 173,64 1,52 |
|--|---|---|--|--|--|
| ,416 ,535 ,248 ,846 ,882 ,252 ,076 ,675 ,370 ,140 ,835 ,623 | 51,051 33,709 69,996 1,882 47,486 26,879 642,663 5,724 160,649 84,497 1,528 46,729 | 54,797 25,048 135,427 1,846 46,383 26,879 734,975 5,724 205,374 120,697 1,528 | 7 58 3 16 7 125 5 2 3 58 9 26 3 763 4 5 4 197 7 146 3 1 | 5,543 5,244 5,803 2,256 5,696 5,879 5,724 7,322 5,862 | 62,28 7,44 184,58 2,24 59,11 26,87 850,01 5,72 244,94 173,64 1,52 |
| ,535 ,248 ,846 ,882 ,252 ,076 (,675 ,370 ,140 ,835 ,623 | 33,709 69,996 1,882 47,486 26,879 642,663 5,724 160,649 84,497 1,528 46,729 | 25,048 135,427 1,846 46,383 26,879 734,975 5,724 205,374 120,697 1,528 | 3 16 7 125 5 2 3 58 9 26 3 763 4 5 4 197 7 146 3 1 | 5,244 5,803 5,256 5,879 5,901 5,724 7,322 5,862 | 7,44 184,58 2,24 59,11 26,87 850,01 5,72 244,94 173,64 1,52 |
| ,846 ,882 ,252 ,0 76 ,370 ,140 ,835 ,623 | 1,882 47,486 26,879 642,663 5,724 160,649 84,497 1,528 46,729 | 1,846 46,383 26,875 734,975 5,724 205,374 120,697 1,528 | 5 2 3 58 9 26 3 763 4 5 4 197 7 146 3 1 | 5,256 5,696 5,879 5, 901 5,724 7,322 5,862 | 2,24 59,11 26,87 850,01 5,72 244,94 173,64 1,52 |
| ,882 ,252 ,0 76 ,370 ,140 ,835 ,623 | 47,486 26,879 642,663 5,724 160,649 84,497 1,528 46,729 | 46,383 26,875 734,975 5,724 205,374 120,697 1,528 | 3 58 9 26 3 763 4 5 4 197 7 146 3 1 | 5,696 5,879 5, 901 5,724 7,322 5,862 | 59,11 26,87 850,01 5,72 244,94 173,64 1,52 |
| ,252 ,076 (,675 ,370 , ,140 ,835 ,623 | 26,879 642,663 5,724 160,649 84,497 1,528 46,729 | 26,879 734,973 5,724 205,374 120,697 1,528 | 26 3 763 4 5 4 197 7 146 3 1 | 5,879 5, 901 5,724 7,322 5,862 | 26,87 850,01 5,72 244,94 173,64 1,52 |
| ,675 ,370 ,140 ,835 ,623 | 5,724 160,649 84,497 1,528 46,729 | 734,973 5,724 205,374 120,697 1,528 | 3 763 4 5 4 197 7 146 3 1 | 5,724 7,322 5,862 | 850,01 5,72 244,94 173,64 1,52 |
| ,675 ,370 ,140 ,835 ,623 | 5,724 160,649 84,497 1,528 46,729 | 5,724 205,374 120,697 1,528 | 4 5 4 197 7 146 3 1 | 5,724 7,322 5,862 | 5,72 244,94 173,64 1,52 |
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| ,835 ,623 | 1,528 46,729 | 1,528 | 3 1 | , | 1,52 |
| ,623 | 46,729 | | | ,528 | , |
| | , | 47,722 |) /0 | | |
| 227 | 241 (10 | | 40 | 3,840 | 50,10 |
| ,337 3 | 341,619 | 351,909 | 9 361 | ,494 | 371,82 |
| ,096 | 1,917 | 2,019 | 9 2 | ,130 | 2,25 |
| ,076 6 | 642,663 | 734,973 | 3 763 | ,901 | 850,01 |
| 530) (1 | 168,899) | (250,963 |) (256, | 353) | (330,34 |
| ,738 | 62,744 | 128,175 | , , , | 3,551 | 177,32 |
| 37.9 | 42.9 | 44.8 | | 47.2 | 50. |
| 62.6 | 3,647.1 | 2,819.5 | 5 2,4 | 61.4 | 2,047. |
| 71.6 | 44.6 | 28.7 | 7 | 25.1 | 20. |
| 0.6 | 0.6 | 0.6 | 5 | 0.5 | 0. |
| 0.5 | 0.6 | 0.6 | 5 | 0.6 | 0. |
| 0.3 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 5 | 0.5 | 0. |
| ASH | CASH | CASH | H C | :ASH | CAS |
| | CASH | CASH | H C | ASH | CAS |
| ASH | 0.011 | | 1 1 2 | 48.4 | 1,239. |
| | 999.3 | 1,252.1 | I I,Z | | |
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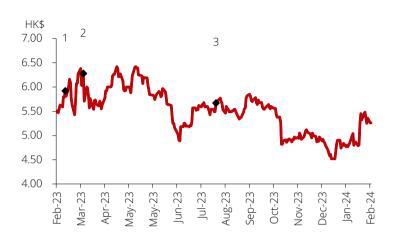
Cash Flow Statement (RMB m)

| FY Dec | 2021A | 2022A | 2023F | 2024F | 2025F |
|--------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| | | | | | |
| Pre-Tax Profit | 17,927 | 20,588 | 22,671 | 24,648 | 27,068 |
| Dep. & Amort. | 85,652 | 86,829 | 89,117 | 91,095 | 89,958 |
| Tax Paid | (3,669) | (3,425) | (3,967) | (4,313) | (4,737) |
| Assoc. & JV Inc/(loss) | (3,310) | (3,746) | (3,746) | (3,746) | (3,746) |
| (Pft)/ Loss on disposal of FAs | 2,923 | 1,348 | 3,451 | 3,519 | 3,566 |
| Chg in Wkg.Cap. | 7,871 | (7,777) | 46,713 | (19,656) | 48,463 |
| Other Operating CF | 3,242 | 6,720 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Net Operating CF | 110,636 | 100,537 | 154,239 | 91,546 | 160,572 |
| Capital Exp.(net) | (72,047) | (72,470) | (90,800) | (90,532) | (89,912) |
| Other Invts.(net) | (93,095) | (43,217) | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Invts in Assoc. & JV | (2,365) | (1) | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Div from Assoc & JV | 813 | 1,148 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other Investing CF | 91,910 | 58,428 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Net Investing CF | (74,784) | (56,112) | (90,800) | (90,532) | (89,912) |
| Div Paid | (8,690) | (7,986) | (8,311) | (10,638) | (11,881) |
| Chg in Gross Debt | (17,050) | (18,182) | 8,812 | (1,491) | (1,491) |
| Capital Issues | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other Financing CF | 1,161 | 2,358 | 1,491 | 1,491 | 1,491 |
| Net Financing CF | (24,579) | (23,810) | 1,992 | (10,638) | (11,881) |
| Currency Adjustments | (78) | 402 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Chg in Cash | 11,195 | 21,017 | 65,431 | (9,624) | 58,779 |
| Opg CFPS (RMB) | 3.36 | 3.54 | 3.51 | 3.63 | 3.66 |
| Free CFPS (RMB) | 1.26 | 0.92 | 2.07 | 0.03 | 2.31 |
| | | | | | |

Source: Company, DBS HK



Target Price & Ratings 12-mth History



| S.N | o. Date | Closing Price | 12-mth Target Price | Rating |
|-----|-----------|------------------|---------------------------|--------|
| 1: | 16-Feb-23 | HK\$5.79 | HK\$7.30 | Buy |
| 2: | 9-Mar-23 | HK\$6.24 | HK\$8.50 | Buy |
| 3: | 10-Aug-23 | HK\$5.49 | HK\$8.70 | Buy |

Source: DBS HK

Analyst: Tsz Wang Tam Andy Yu



DBS Group Research recommendations are based on an Absolute Total Return* Rating system, defined as follows:

STRONG BUY (>20% total return over the next 3 months, with identifiable share price catalysts within this time frame)

BUY (>15% total return over the next 12 months for small caps, >10% for large caps)

HOLD (-10% to +15% total return over the next 12 months for small caps, -10% to +10% for large caps)

FULLY VALUED (negative total return, i.e., > -10% over the next 12 months)

SELL (negative total return of > -20% over the next 3 months, with identifiable share price catalysts within this time frame)

*Share price appreciation + dividends

Completed Date: 7 Feb 2024 09:05:51 (HKT) Dissemination Date: 7 Feb 2024 09:38:12 (HKT)

Sources for all charts and tables are DBS HK unless otherwise specified.

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On 3 June 2021, President J. Biden issued Executive Order 14032 ("the EO"), superseding Executive Order 13959 of 12 November 2020. The EO, which takes effect on 2 August 2021, prohibits US persons from investing in publicly traded securities or derivatives thereof from firms

listed as Chinese Military-Industrial Complex Companies ("CMICs"). The list of CMICs can be found on the US Department of the Treasury's website at https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/financial-sanctions/consolidated-sanctions-list/ns-cmic-list.

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