



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Council conclusions on SEPA (Single Euro Payments Area)

*3238th ECONOMIC and FINANCIAL AFFAIRS Council meeting
Brussels, 14 May 2013*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council:

1. REITERATES its support for the aim of the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA): to achieve an integrated, competitive and innovative internal market for retail payment services in euro in the EU and where no distinction between cross-border and national payments in euro is made.
2. WELCOMES the successful entering into force of Regulation (EU) No 260/2012 on 31 March 2012 which sets an end-date for migration from national credit transfer and direct debit schemes to harmonized SEPA credit transfer (SCT) and SEPA direct debit (SDD) schemes by 1 February 2014 for payments in euro in euro area Member States; and CONFIRMS that this is a significant step towards a truly integrated market for retail payments in euro.
3. REGRETS that the current SEPA migration in Member States, with few exceptions, is far from being complete (as identified by a recent report of the European Central Bank). RECOGNISES that of all SEPA participants SMEs, small public administrations and local authorities are the least aware about SEPA migration and the least prepared for actual migration; and NOTES that some stakeholders seem to be planning for a late SEPA migration and therefore may be exposed to undue operational risks impacting smooth handling of payments.

P R E S S

4. STRESSES that the end date for migration to SCT and SDD is rapidly approaching and that immediate efforts are required by all market participants to complete the SEPA migration in euro area Member States by 1 February 2014, where applicable; UNDERLINES that the provisions of Regulation (EU) No 260/2012 have to be fully respected by all market participants in euro area Member States; and EMPHASISES that competent authorities should cooperate intensively, on a national and international level, to ensure effective and harmonized compliance with the Regulation.
5. UNDERLINES that end-users such as “big billers”, SMEs and public administrations have their own responsibility to ensure SEPA migration. STRESSES that all payment orders which are not submitted in the format requested by Regulation (EU) No 260/2012 after 1 February 2014 may not be processed by all Payment Service Providers in euro area Member States, which otherwise would be sanctioned; and INVITES merchants, corporates, SMEs and public administrations to immediately take the necessary concrete internal steps for becoming ready for SEPA in adapting their information systems accordingly and communicating their IBAN details when invoicing customers, where applicable.
6. CALLS upon all Member States to significantly intensify communication measures primarily at national level to eliminate existing public awareness gaps, especially vis-à-vis SMEs, small public administrations and local authorities; INVITES euro area National Central Banks, Ministries of Finance and other competent authorities, national banking federations and individual banks to enhance Communication activities on SEPA migration before summer 2013 through all relevant media channels, e.g. general press, professional press, billboard advertising, radio or TV, where these have not been successfully initiated already. INVITES the European Commission and the European Central Bank to provide assistance and advice to the best of their abilities to fully support the SEPA migration process and to call on SEPA Council members to step up communications to their constituencies about the importance of respecting the deadline for SEPA migration.
7. STRESSES that concrete and specific actions are of high importance beside general information campaigns in order to ensure that the information really reaches those SEPA participants which are not aware of or prepared for SEPA at this stage.
8. CALLS on banks and other payment service providers to familiarise end-users on technical, business and contractual issues related to SEPA migration (e.g. familiarize consumers with new SEPA features such as the IBAN) and to provide substantial assistance in order to facilitate their migration efforts; and ENCOURAGES banks to provide for individual information letters addressed to their clients, particularly corporates including SMEs, for raising awareness on SEPA and explaining what it entails in terms of necessary adaptations.
9. INVITES chambers of commerce, professional organisations such as e.g. those representing accountants as well as associations representing local authorities or cities to reach out to their constituencies or clients and providing them with specific information about SEPA."