

ORAL QUESTION O-2530/09

pursuant to Rule 108 of the Rules of Procedure

by Pervenche Berès, on behalf of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs  
to the Commission

Subject: Implementation of the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA)

Migration to SEPA Credit Transfer (SCT), which launched SEPA officially on 28 January 2008, has been quite hesitant up to now. Market participants seem to be reluctant to abolish national payment instruments. SEPA, however, implies that there is no distinction between cross-border and national payments. Offering national instruments in parallel indefinitely bears the risk that SEPA instruments will be used for cross-border transactions only. Consequently, it would be very difficult to reach the critical mass, fragmentation would persist, and anticipated benefits for the banking industry as well as for its clients could not be realised. Furthermore, some problems are looming with regard to the launch of the SEPA direct debit instrument, in particular as regard the application of a multilateral interchange fee (MIF), but also concerning the smooth and simple migration of existing direct debit mandates to the SEPA direct debit scheme. The application of a MIF is also an issue with regard to card payments.

Against this background, would the Commission explain:

1. how it intends to promote and foster the migration to SEPA instruments?
2. if it is still of the opinion that a critical mass of payments having migrated to SEPA instruments could be reached by the end of 2010?
3. if it thinks a clear and binding end-date for migration to SEPA instruments is necessary and if yes, what that date could be, in which way it could be imposed and when it will be communicated?
4. how legal certainty regarding the SEPA Direct Debit scheme could be enhanced, in particular as regards the application of a MIF and the exact length of the transitional phase during which a MIF might be allowed also for cross-border direct debits, but also regarding the migration of existing direct debit mandates to the SEPA direct debit scheme?
5. in which way it plans to tackle the issue of MIF with regard to card payments?
6. Regarding the difficulties for the industry to build a proper solution, is it not to the Commission, who has pointed out concerns about existing MIF, to propose a concrete solution?
7. In the current context of the crisis, what specific measures does the Commission intend to propose to make sure that migration to the SEPA instruments will not result in a more expensive payment system?