

09/11/2021

Joint Statement by Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and Poland on the European Payments Initiative (EPI)

1. **We are fully cognisant of our citizens' expectations regarding secure, efficient and accessible and affordable payment services.** Following the general trend that our economies are experiencing, payment solutions are getting increasingly digital, and new services based on instant payment have been successfully deployed in many countries. Citizens expect faster, safer and more efficient payment solutions, and a greater amount of choice in providers and solutions.
2. **We share the objective of an efficient EU internal market for payments, and have long been committed in ensuring smooth, well-functioning payment solutions.** Much was achieved since the introduction of the euro, most notably with the creation of the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA) in 2012, and the harmonisation of the EU retail payments legislation.
3. **However, payment services in the EU remain fragmented.** Domestic payment solutions based on cards or credit transfers currently remain, to a significant degree, fragmented along national borders, and there is a lack of interoperability between existing national solutions, schemes and infrastructures. At the same time, the EU market remains largely dependent on solutions offered by non-European actors, both at points of sale and online. Furthermore, unnecessary burdens to the internal market for payments persist. As payments and payment data have become strategically and economically significant, action is more than ever needed
4. **We firmly believe that time has come to build a genuine "Europe of payments".** An integrated, open market for electronic payment solutions, with no distinction between national and cross-border payments and no unnecessary barriers is necessary for advancing the internal market. This would increase competition and innovation, with potential gains for the consumer. Furthermore, it is a matter of strategic autonomy in a vital market. A European-grown common payment solution would reduce risks and vulnerabilities in retail payment systems and would contribute to keep control over sensitive payments data, thereby better protecting our citizens. To that extent, we encourage all initiatives aiming at further harmonising the EU payment services market and at offering new, innovative payment solutions. We remain committed in combatting all undue hurdles to a smooth functioning of the internal market, such as IBAN discrimination.
5. **Against this background, we reiterate our support for the European Payments Initiative (EPI), as it would be instrumental in meeting these objectives.** Led by private actors based in seven markets in the EU to date, EPI aims at delivering a common, pan-European payment solution, combining card-based and digital instant payment solutions. This private initiative would contribute to offer safe, innovative and modern payment solutions, under a common scheme and harmonised standards. EPI's single payment solution would benefit European consumers, merchants, banks, payment service providers alike, and more generally the European economy as a whole. Such European-grown payment solutions would be an important contribution to our overarching political objective of greater open strategic autonomy for the EU.

6. **We therefore look forward to a successful formal launch of the project.** We encourage EPI to commit to an agile deployment of this new solution and make it a success, while acknowledging its private, competitive business model and remaining vigilant to maintain fair and free competition, and equal treatment between actors in the payments sector. We remain committed to explore mutually reinforcing cooperation between EPI and other on-going prospective work streams in relation to payments, such as e-identification or central bank digital currencies.
7. **EPI will bring the greatest benefit if it has a Union-wide reach. We therefore encourage EPI to further work on the involvement of more Member States and their banking and payment communities to join the initiative.** Having a unified, integrated and competitive payment solution will be highly beneficial, both for the EU as a whole but also for all of its citizens and businesses.