

Communication from the Commission on the recommendation of 29 September 2003 concerning a common practice for changes to the design of national obverse sides of euro circulation coins⁽¹⁾

(2003/C 247/03)

1. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Council agreed in 1996 that there would be distinctive national symbols on the obverse of euro circulation coins and that there should be a common design on the reverse. Member States later also agreed that national obverses should bear 12 stars surrounding the design in order to facilitate recognition by the general public. In 1998, the Council concluded that . . . '[t]here should be a moratorium on issues of commemorative coins intended for circulation in the early years of the new notes and coins.' As regards possible changes to the national sides of euro circulation coins, no specific provisions, legislative or otherwise, exist for the moment.

The introduction of the euro coins in January 2002 has created a variety of coin designs as 96 different coins have been brought into circulation by the twelve euro area Member States alone. This diversity is a source of interest for many European citizens and has no doubt contributed to the wide acceptance of the coins by the public. At the same time, some common rules, both for the 'normal' and the commemorative euro circulation coins (see annex for a definition of the different types of euro coins), would contribute to ensuring that the diversity of coins should not give rise to uncertainty among the public. In addition, parties handling coins on a professional basis (banks, cash-in-transit companies, vending machine operators, etc.) should be informed well in advance of upcoming changes. Finally, while there should be sufficient leeway to accommodate Member States' traditions with regard to the issuance of coins, it would be appropriate to ensure a certain degree of consistency between the different national policies.

2. THE CONTENT OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The attached Recommendation is based on discussions with Member States and sets out a certain number of rules on changes to the national sides. These changes can be twofold. They can result from a general change to the national sides introduced by a Member State for a particular reason, for instance because the Head of State who is depicted on a coin changes. Alternatively, new national sides can result from the issuance of commemorative euro circulation coins. This Recommendation aims at establishing a common framework for changes to the national sides of both normal and commemorative euro circulation coins, while allowing Member States to continue their national traditions in this field.

2.(a) Normal euro circulation coins

No changes should be made to the 'standard'⁽²⁾ national side of the euro circulation coins until the end of 2008, except if the Head of State who is depicted on a coin changes. Prior to the expiration of this moratorium, a review will be carried out in order to examine whether it should be further extended or whether other rules should be considered.

2.(b) Commemorative euro circulation coins

The moratorium on the issuance of commemorative euro circulation coins should be lifted from 2004 onwards, subject to a number of conditions. One issue per year and per Member State at most should be permitted. Commemorative issues should moreover be limited to a single coin denomination, following previous practice in several countries. The 2-euro coin appears to be the most appropriate denomination for several reasons: the large diameter makes it very suitable for the representation of designs, while the bi-metallic technology and further technical properties offer very adequate protection against counterfeiting. The high denomination moreover allows covering the production costs and ensuring a certain revenue for the issuer since many coins will be collected by the public.

The total issuing volume should be limited in order to avoid commemorative euro circulation coins either crowding out normal 2-euro circulation coins or having them issued over extended periods, in which case a commemorative issue would in substance amount to a change to the national side. On the other hand, the issuing volume should be large enough to allow for effective circulation, at least during a certain period. Very small volumes of commemorative coins would indeed, due to their relative scarcity, become collector items rather than circulation coins. The proposed ceilings constitute a balance which takes into account both the total national issuing volume of 2-euro coins and the total euro area issuing volume of this denomination. The two-tier approach leaves countries the choice between the highest of two issuing ceilings, i.e. either 0,1 % of the total euro area circulation or 5,0 % of the cumulative national issuing volume of the 2-euro coins. Exceptionally, the 0,1 % ceiling can be increased up to 2,0 % for the commemoration of a truly global and highly symbolic event, subject to the condition that the respective Member State refrains from launching a commemorative euro circulation coin issue of a similar volume during the subsequent four years.

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 264, 15.10.2003.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 373, 28.12.2001, p. 1.

2.(c) Rues on prior information

Member States are invited to inform the Commission at least six months in advance about new national sides to be introduced (both normal and commemorative euro circulation coins). This information should i.a. include a copy of the new design, a short description of the design, an explanation of the event or personality to be commemorated, the denomination concerned,

the starting date for the issue of the coin, the issuing volume (for commemoratives) and the estimated issuing period (for commemoratives). The Commission will officially publish all relevant information in the *Official Journal of the European Union* in order to make it available to all parties concerned. Coin issues commemorating a truly global and highly symbolic event, and having a total issue volume exceeding 0,1 % of the total circulation of 2-euro coins, should be approved by the Economic and Financial Committee.

ANNEX

EURO COIN DEFINITIONS

Euro circulation coins (both normal and commemorative)

In accordance with Article 106(2) of the Treaty, the Council has harmonised the denominations and technical specifications of all coins intended for circulation in Council Regulation (EC) No 975/98 of 3 May 1998 as amended by (EC) No 423/1999 of 22 February 1999. In accordance with Article 11 of Council Regulation (EC) No 974/98 of 3 May 1998 these coins shall be the only ones having legal tender status throughout the euro area.

Commemorative euro circulation coins

All euro commemorative coins form part of the euro circulation coins. However, they have a different national side from the standard one (the common side is identical), which is usually destined to commemorate an event or a personality. Commemoratives are usually issued during a certain period of time and for limited volumes. The concept of commemorative euro circulation coins was established in view of existing traditions in this area.

Euro collector coins (not intended for circulation)

Euro collector coins are not destined for circulation and must be easily distinguishable from coins intended for circulation. To this end, Ecofin Ministers decided on 31 January 2000 that among others:

- their face value has to be different;
- they should not use images which are similar to the common sides of the coins intended for circulation. Furthermore, as far as possible the designs should also be at least slightly different from the national sides of circulation coins;
- colour, diameter and weight should differ significantly from the coins intended for circulation in at least two of these three characteristics.

It was moreover decided that the legal tender status of these coins should be limited to the country of issue. Euro collector coins are typically produced in precious metals (gold and silver).
