



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Brussels, 19.12.2013
C(2013) 9654 final

<p>In the published version of this decision, some information has been omitted, pursuant to articles 24 and 25 of Council Regulation (EC) No 659/1999 of 22 March 1999 laying down detailed rules for the application of Article 93 of the EC Treaty, concerning non-disclosure of information covered by professional secrecy. The omissions are shown thus [...].</p>		<p style="text-align: center;">PUBLIC VERSION</p> <p>This document is made available for information purposes only.</p>
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**Subject: State aid SA.37698 (2013/N) – Portugal
Ninth Extension of the Portuguese Guarantee Scheme**

Sir,

1. PROCEDURE

- (1) On 29 October 2008 the Commission approved the measure under the Portuguese Guarantee Scheme (hereinafter "the scheme") by its decision in case NN60/2008¹ (hereinafter "the original decision").
- (2) On the basis of subsequent notifications, the Commission approved the prolongation of the scheme in its decisions of 22 February 2010 in State aid case N 51/2010², 23 July 2010 in State aid case N 315/2010³, 21 January 2011 in State aid case SA.321584, 30 June 2011 in State aid case SA. 331785, on 21 December

¹ Commission Decision of 29 October 2008 – State aid NN60/2008, OJ C 9, 14.01.2009 and Corrigendum, OJ C 25, 31.01.2009.

² Commission Decision of 22 February 2010 – State aid N51/2010, OJ C 96, 16.04.2010.

³ Commission Decision of 23 July 2010 – State aid N315/2010, OJ C 283, 20.10.2010.

⁴ Commission Decision of 21 January 2011 – State aid SA.32158, OJ C 111, 9.4.2011.

⁵ Commission Decision of 30 June 2011 – State aid SA.33178, OJ C 344, 24.11.2011.

S. Ex.^a o Ministro dos Negócios Estrangeiros
Rui MACHETE
Largo do Rilvas
P – 1399-030 - Lisboa

2011 in State aid case SA. 34034⁶, 27 June 2012 in State aid case SA.34958⁷, on 17 December 2012 in State aid case SA.35743⁸ and on 1 August 2013 in State aid case SA.36869.

- (3) On 11 November 2013, Portugal notified a ninth extension of the scheme until 30 June 2014.
- (4) For reasons of urgency, Portugal accepts that exceptionally the present decision is adopted in the English language.

2. FACTS

2.1. Description of the scheme

Legal basis and budget

- (5) To stabilise the financial market, Portugal passed law 60-A/2008 of 20 October 2008⁹ and its implementing provisions, Portaria n° 1219-A/2008 of 23 October 2008¹⁰, Portaria n° 946/2010 of 22 September 2010¹¹ and Portaria n° 80/2012 of 27 March 2012¹².
- (6) The total budget of the extended scheme is EUR 24.67 billion¹³.
- (7) The beneficiaries of the scheme are all credit institutions incorporated in Portugal, including subsidiaries of foreign banks with registered office in Portugal. Only institutions which are solvent for the purposes of Portuguese law may benefit from the scheme.
- (8) Under the approved Portaria n° 80/2012, the scheme covers the issuance of non-subordinated debt with a minimum maturity of three months and a maximum maturity up to five years. In case of guarantees on the issuance of covered bonds (on mortgages and on the public sector), the maturity can go up to seven years.
- (9) The remuneration for guarantees on liabilities will be calculated in accordance with the formula set out in the 2011 Prolongation Communication¹⁴, and as described in the Commission decision in State aid case SA.34958¹⁵. The indicative guarantee fees for the period 1 January 2014 to 30 June 2014 can be found in the Annex and

⁶ Commission Decision of 21 December 2011 - State aid SA.34034, OJ C 99, 03.04.2012.

⁷ Commission Decision of 27 June 2012 - State aid SA.34958, OJ C 246, 15.8.2012.

⁸ Commission Decision of 17 December 2012 – State aid SA.35743, OJ C 36, 17.12.2013.

⁹ Diário da República, 1.ª série, n.º 203.

¹⁰ Diário da República, 1.ª série, n.º 206

¹¹ Diário da República, 1.ª série, n.º 185.

¹² Diário da República, 1.ª série, n.º 62.

¹³ Article 136 of the 2014 Portuguese State Budget.

¹⁴ Communication from the Commission on the application, from 1 January 2012, of State aid rules to support measures in favour of banks in the context of the financial crisis, OJ C 356, 6.12.2011, p. 7.

¹⁵ Recitals 13 to 16. See footnote 7.

are based on an updated sample of European banks established by the Commission on 15 November 2013.

- (10) A detailed description of the scheme is provided in the original decision, in particular recital 9 concerning the legal basis, recitals 5 to 8 concerning the objective of the scheme and recitals 10 to 21 on the general description of the scheme.

2.2. New elements introduced with the last notification

- (11) The terms and conditions of the extended scheme remain largely the same as compared to the previous scheme. However, the total budget has been increased from EUR 24.12 billion for the second-half of 2013 to EUR 24.67 billion. According to the Portuguese authorities, the budget of 2013 (EUR 24.12 billion) was decided while negotiations on a guaranteed issuance were on-going. The budget for that year was fixed at that level in order to assure the total budget for guaranteed issuances in 2013 would remain stable. The yearly budget is set so as to ensure that the overall issuance of guaranteed debt remains stable from year to year. As the planned issuance did not take place, the Portuguese authorities have reverted to the previous ceiling of EUR 24.67 billion.

3. POSITION OF PORTUGAL

- (12) Portugal requests an extension of the scheme for a further period of six months until 30 June 2014.
- (13) Portugal submits that the scheme constitutes State aid within the meaning of Article 107(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (“TFEU”), but is of the view that the proposed extension is compatible with the internal market on the basis of Article 107(3)(b) TFEU as it is necessary in order to remedy a serious disturbance in the economy of Portugal.
- (14) Portugal submitted a letter by the Bank of Portugal¹⁶ further supporting the need for the proposed extension of the scheme to safeguard the stability of the financial system in Portugal, because prevailing market conditions do not allow for a termination of the scheme.
- (15) In particular, according to the Bank of Portugal, the scheme needs to be prolonged for a number of reasons. First the Memorandum of Understanding (“MoU”)¹⁷ signed between the Portuguese Government on the one hand, and the International Monetary Fund, the European Commission and the European Central Bank on the other hand, foresees measures for the banking sector which include the maintenance and the reinforcement of the scheme. Secondly, the Bank of Portugal considers that, notwithstanding the return of the Portuguese State to the market for medium- and long-term debt and the return of

¹⁶ Letter of the Bank of Portugal of November 2013.

¹⁷ Portugal, "Memorandum Of Understanding On Specific Economic Policy Conditionality", 17 May 2011, http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/eu_borrower/mou/2011-05-18-mou-portugal_en.pdf

two Portuguese financial institutions to the international debt market, it cannot conclude that there is a total reestablishment of market access conditions for the Portuguese banking system as a whole, given that some adverse effects of the sovereign risk crisis still persist. Although the scheme has not been used in the last year the Bank of Portugal thinks that its availability may prove to be relevant to enhance the ability of the Portuguese financial institutions to access the capital markets in the future.

(16) Portugal submitted following commitments relating to the scheme:

- (i) to grant aid measures under the scheme only to solvent credit institutions which have no capital shortfall¹⁸; banks which have already received approved rescue aid at the date of entry into force of the 2013 Banking Communication, i.e. before 1 August 2013, but have not yet obtained a final approval of the restructuring aid, can also receive support under a scheme without individual notification. In such case an update to the restructuring plan has to be submitted if the restructuring plan had not already provided for the envisaged guarantee measure;
- (ii) to grant the guarantees under the scheme only for the new issuance of senior debt (subordinated debt is excluded);
- (iii) to provide guarantees only on debt instruments with maturities from three months up to five years (or a maximum of seven years in the case of covered bonds) and to limit the guarantees with a maturity of more than three years to one-third of the total outstanding amount of guarantees granted to the individual bank;
- (iv) to determine the minimum remuneration level of the State guarantees under Article 4 of Portaria No 1219-A/2008 of 23 October 2008 (as amended by Portaria No 80/2012 of 27 March 2012), in line with the formula set out in the 2011 Prolongation Communication;
- (v) to communicate to the Commission, within three months following each issuance of guaranteed bonds, the actual fee charged;
- (vi) that any credit institution that is granted guarantees on new liabilities or on renewed liabilities for which, at the time of the granting of the new guarantee, the total outstanding guaranteed liabilities (including guarantees accorded before the date of this decision) exceed both a ratio of 5% of total liabilities and the total amount of EUR 500 million will be required to present a restructuring plan within two months of the granting of the guarantees;

¹⁸ "No capital shortfall" according to the most recent Union-wide capital exercise (the 2011 European Banking Authority ("EBA") capital exercise required at least a capitalisation of 9% as defined by EBA) or other equivalent national exercises by the national supervisory authority.

- (vii) that any institutions which cause the guarantee to be called upon will be required to submit individual restructuring or liquidation plans¹⁹, within two months from such event;
 - (viii) to impose a ban on advertising referring to State support by the beneficiaries of the scheme and to prevent them from employing any aggressive commercial strategies which would not take place without the support of the Portuguese government;
 - (ix) to report on the operation of the scheme and on guaranteed issuances by 15 April 2014 (for the period 1 January to 30 March 2014) and by 15 August 2014 (for the period 1 April to 31 July 2014) at the latest;
 - (x) to complement reports on the operation of the scheme with updated available data on the cost of comparable non-guaranteed debt issuances (as regards nature, volume, rating, currency).
- (17) In line with the requirements of the 2011 Prolongation Communication, Portugal provided an indicative fee (estimation) for each financial institution eligible to benefit from those guarantees. The estimation was based on an application of the scheme's remuneration formula and recent market data.

4. ASSESSMENT

4.1. Existence of State Aid

- (18) According to Article 107(1) TFEU, any aid granted by a Member State or through State resources in any form whatsoever which distorts or threatens to distort competition by favouring certain undertakings or the production of certain goods shall, in so far as it affects trade between Member States, be incompatible with the internal market.
- (19) For the reasons indicated in the original decision, the Commission considers that the scheme constitutes State aid within the meaning of Article 107(1) TFEU, because it concerns the provision of State resources to a certain sector, i.e. financial sector, which is open to intense international competition. Under the scheme, participating financial institutions obtain guarantees under conditions which would not be available to them under market conditions, and so receive an advantage. Given the characteristics of the financial sector, any advantage from State resources to a financial institution affects intra-Union trade and therefore threatens to distort competition. The measure therefore constitutes State aid within the meaning of Article 107(1) TFEU.

¹⁹ The plan must be prepared on the basis of the parameters established in the Commission Communication on the return to viability and the assessment of the restructuring measures in the financial sector in the current crisis under the State aid rules (the "Restructuring Communication"), OJ C 195, 19.8.2009, p. 9.

4.2. Compatibility of the scheme

4.2.1 Legal Basis for the compatibility assessment

- (20) Under the scheme Portugal intends to provide aid in the form of guarantees in favour of credit institutions.
- (21) Given the exacerbation of tensions in sovereign debt markets that has taken place since 2011 and under the persisting circumstances and risks, as confirmed by the 2013 Banking Communication²⁰, the Commission considers it appropriate to examine the measure under Article 107(3)(b) TFEU.
- (22) Article 107(3)(b) TFEU empowers the Commission to find that aid is compatible with the internal market if it is intended "to remedy a serious disturbance in the economy of a Member State". The Commission has acknowledged that the global financial crisis can create a serious disturbance in the economy of a Member State and that measures supporting banks are apt to remedy that disturbance. That assessment has been confirmed in the Recapitalisation Communication²¹ and the Restructuring Communication.²² The Commission still considers that requirements for State aid to be approved pursuant to Article 107(3)(b) TFEU are present. The Commission confirmed that view by adopting the 2010 Prolongation Communication²³ and the 2013 Banking Communication, as is recalled at points 4 to 6 of the latter.
- (23) The Commission does not dispute the position of the Portuguese authorities that the extension of the scheme is still necessary for reasons of financial stability. Hence, the Commission finds that the scheme aims at remedying a serious disturbance in the Portuguese economy.
- (24) Therefore, the Commission continues to base its assessment of State aid measures in the banking sector on Article 107(3)(b) TFEU.
- (25) In order for an aid to be compatible under Article 107(3)(b) TFEU, it must comply with the general principles for compatibility under Article 107(3), viewed in the light of the general objectives of the Treaty. Therefore, according to the Commission's case practice²⁴ any aid or scheme must comply with the following conditions: (i) Appropriateness (ii) Necessity and (iii) Proportionality.

²⁰ Communication from the Commission on the application, from 1 August 2013, of state aid rules to support measures in favour of banks in the context of the financial crisis, OJ C 216, 30.7.2013, p. 1.

²¹ Commission Communication - Recapitalisation of financial institutions in the current financial crisis: limitation of the aid to the minimum necessary and safeguards against undue distortions of competition, OJ C 10, 15.1.2009, p. 2.

²² Commission Communication on the return to viability and the assessment of the restructuring measures in the financial sector in the current crisis under the State aid rules, OJ C 195, 19.8.2009, p. 9.

²³ Communication from the Commission on the application, from 1 January 2011, of State aid rules to support measures in favour of banks in the context of the financial crisis, OJ C 329, 7.12.2010, p. 7.

²⁴ See Commission decision of 6.9.2013 in State Aid Case SA.37314 "Rescue aid in favour of Probanka", OJ C 314, 29.10.2013, p. 1 and Commission decision of 6.9.2013 in State Aid Case SA. 37315 "Rescue aid in favour to Factor Banka", OJ C 314, 29.10.2013, p.1.

- (26) The 2013 Banking Communication and the Restructuring Communication formulate assessment criteria which reflect the aforementioned general principles and their adaptations in light of the specific policy context.

4.2.2 Compatibility assessment of the scheme

Appropriateness

- (27) The scheme should be appropriate to remedy a serious disturbance in the Portugal's economy. The objective of the guarantee scheme is to temporarily offer appropriate measures to establish backstops for the financial system in a timely and efficient manner, where financial institutions face difficulties in obtaining sufficient funding. The Commission observes that the crisis has eroded confidence in the creditworthiness of the banks, which results in difficulties in obtaining necessary funding on the financial markets. Hence, a backstop mechanism by the Member State, which in case of urgency ensures that the banks would have access to funding, is an appropriate means to strengthen financial institutions and thus to restore market confidence. The 2013 Banking Communication (points 23 and 60(a)) provides that guarantee schemes will continue to be available in order to provide liquidity to banks but the guarantee schemes should only be limited to banks without a capital shortfall. The Commission observes that Portugal has committed to restrict the guarantee scheme only to banks without a capital shortfall as certified by the competent supervisory authority.
- (28) Moreover, the Commission notes that Portugal has committed to grant guarantees only for new issues of credit institutions' senior debt, as prescribed in point 59(a) of the 2013 Banking Communication.

Necessity

- (29) With regard to the scope of the measure, the Commission notes that Portugal has limited the size of the guarantee scheme by determining its maximum budget at EUR 24.67 billion and that the scheme applies until 30 June 2014.
- (30) The Commission notes that Portugal has committed to grant guarantees only on debt instruments with maturities from three months to five years (or a maximum of seven years in the case of covered bonds) and limit guarantees with a maturity of more than three years to one-third of the outstanding guarantees granted to the individual bank, which complies with the requirements set forth in points 59(b) and 60(b) respectively of the 2013 Banking Communication.
- (31) Regarding the remuneration level, the Commission observes that Portugal, in line with point 59(c) of the 2013 Banking Communication, has committed to follow the pricing and other conditions for State guarantees as laid down in the 2011 Prolongation Communication which requires, in particular, the application of a new pricing method based largely on market data.
- (32) Since the beginning of the sovereign crisis the CDS of Member States in difficulty have rocketed. The CDS of the large banks located in those Member States have increased in line with those of their sovereign. The very high CDS of large banks in

programme countries do not seem to primarily reflect their intrinsic risk profile, but are mainly driven by the sovereign risk. That linkage can lead to a situation in which the application of the guarantee pricing formula based on the individual CDS spread of the bank results in an excessively expensive guarantee, which is not justified by the risk profile of the bank. Therefore, it seems appropriate to consider the CDS spreads of individual banks located in the countries subject to a financial assistance programme as temporarily non-representative of the intrinsic risk of that bank.

- (33) On the basis of the above observation, the Commission does not object to Portugal's intention to determine the guarantee fee for banks which still have a traded CDS on the basis of the CDS of the sample of Union banks in the "BBB- and lower" rating category. The Commission will review its assessment of the macro-economic situation and appropriateness of that exceptional pricing mechanism whenever a further extension of the scheme is notified.

Proportionality

- (34) As regards proportionality, the Commission notes that Portugal, in line with point 59(d) of the 2013 Banking Communication, has committed to submit a restructuring plan within two months for any credit institution granted guarantees on new liabilities or on renewed liabilities for which at the time of the granting of the new guarantee, the total outstanding guaranteed liabilities (including guarantees accorded before the date of the decision) exceed both a ratio of 5% of the bank's total liabilities and a total amount of EUR 500 million. That commitment ensures that the use of guarantee scheme will not enable banks with structural weaknesses in their business models to postpone or avoid the necessary adjustments.
- (35) Second, the Commission notes that Portugal has committed, in line with point 59(f) of the 2013 Banking Communication, to a number of behavioural safeguards such as a ban on advertisements referring to the State support and a ban on any aggressive commercial strategies which would not take place without the State support. Such safeguards help ensure that the participating institutions do not misuse the received State support to expand their activities.
- (36) Finally, the Commission welcomes that Portugal undertakes to submit individual restructuring or liquidation plans, within two months, for banks which cause the guarantee to be called upon (point 59(e) of the 2013 Banking Communication).
- (37) As regards the combination of the scheme with other aid measures, the Commission recalls that, as indicated in the Annex to the Restructuring Communication, the restructuring plans to be submitted should contain all State aid received as individual aid or under a scheme during the restructuring period.
- (38) Furthermore, based on point 16 of the Restructuring Communication, the Commission recalls that, should further aid not initially foreseen in a notified restructuring plan be necessary for the restoration of viability, such additional aid cannot be granted under an approved scheme but needs to be subject to individual ex ante notification. All State aid measures received by a bank as individual aid or

under the scheme during the restructuring period will be taken into account in the Commission's final decision on that bank.

Monitoring

- (39) The Commission welcomes, in line with points 60(c) and (d) of the 2013 Banking Communication, that Portugal undertakes to present every three months a report on the operation of the scheme, on guaranteed issuances and on the actual fees charged and to supplement it with updated available data on the cost of comparable non-guaranteed debt issuances (nature, volume, rating, currency).

Conclusions on the compatibility of the aid measure

- (40) The extension of the Portuguese Guarantee Scheme remains an appropriate, necessary and proportionate measure to remedy a serious distortion of Portugal's economy and does not alter the Commission's previous assessment in the original decision of 29 October 2008 and the extension decisions of 22 February 2010, 23 July 2010, 21 January 2011, 30 June 2011, on 21 December 2011, 27 June 2012, on 17 December 2012 and on 1 August 2013. The notified extension therefore complies with the requirements set out above and is compatible with the internal market pursuant to Article 107(3)(b) TFEU.
- (41) In line with the Commission's decisional practice the Portuguese guarantee scheme can therefore be extended until 30 June 2014. Any further extension will require the Commission's approval and will have to be based on a review of the developments in financial markets and the scheme's effectiveness.

5. CONCLUSION

The Commission has accordingly decided to consider the aid to be compatible with the internal market.

Portugal exceptionally accepts that the present decision be adopted in the English language, for reasons of urgency.

If this letter contains confidential information which should not be disclosed to third parties, please inform the Commission within fifteen working days of the date of receipt. If the Commission does not receive a reasoned request by that deadline, you will be deemed to agree to the disclosure to third parties and to the publication of the full text of the letter in the authentic language on the Internet site:

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Your request should be sent by registered letter or fax to:

European Commission
Directorate-General for Competition
State Aid Greffe
B - 1049 Brussels
Fax No: +32 2 296 12 42

Yours faithfully,

For the Commission

Joaquín ALMUNIA
Vice-President

Annex

Indicative guarantee fees as of 15 November 2013	
Institute	Premium per institute (basis points)
Banco Comercial Português, S.A.	[...]*
Banco Espírito Santo, S.A.	[...]
Caixa Geral de Depósitos, S.A.	[...]
Banks without CDS spread	91

* Confidential information
