

Monetary policy and instruments

The target of monetary policy

The target of monetary policy is price stability. On March 27, 2001 a formal inflation target was adopted, as follows:

- The Central Bank aims for an annual rate of inflation, measured as the annual twelve-month increase in the CPI, which in general will be as close as possible to 2½%.
- If inflation deviates by more than ±1½% from the target, the Central Bank shall be obliged to submit a report to the government explaining the reason for the deviation, how it intends to respond and when it expects the inflation target to be reached once again. This report shall be made public.
- The Central Bank shall aim to attain the inflation target of 2½% no later than by the end of 2003.
- Until the end of 2003, the following extended upper limits apply: the upper limit for inflation may be 3½% above the inflation target in 2001, and 2% in 2002.
- The Central Bank publishes a quarterly inflation forecast, projecting two years into the future, and explains it in the Monetary Bulletin.

Since monetary policy aims at maintaining price stability, it will not be applied in order to achieve other economic targets, such as a balance on the current account or a high level of employment, except insofar as this is consistent with the Bank's inflation target.

Main monetary policy instruments

In particular, the Central Bank implements its monetary policy by managing money market interest rates, primarily through interest rate decisions for its repurchase agreements with credit institutions. Yields in the money market have a strong impact on currency flows and thereby on the exchange rate, and in the long run on domestic demand. Broadly speaking, transactions with credit institutions can be classified into fixed trading instruments and market actions.

Fixed trading instruments:

- Current accounts are deposits of the credit institutions' undisposed assets. These are settlement accounts for netting between deposit institutions and for interbank market trading, including transactions with the Central Bank. Interest rates on these accounts set the floor for overnight interest rates in the interbank market.
- Overnight loans are provided on the request of credit

institutions and secured with the same securities that qualify for repo transactions (see below). Overnight interest rates form the ceiling for overnight interest rates in the interbank market.

- Certificates of deposit are issued with a maturity of 90 days, on the request of credit institutions. Although they are unlisted, they qualify for repo transactions. Their role is to establish the floor for three-month yields in the money market.
- Required reserves are made with the Central Bank by credit institutions which are not dependent on treasury budget allocations for their operations. The required reserves base is the balance sheet total less equity and interbank liabilities at the end of the preceding month. The required reserves ratio is 1.5% for the part of the required reserves base which is tied for one year or longer, and 4% for the part tied for a shorter term. The maintenance period is based on the 21st day of each month until the 20th of the following month, and the two-months average reserve is required to reach the stipulated ratio during the period.

Market actions:

- Repurchase agreements are the Central Bank's main instrument. Auctions of 14-day agreements are held every week. Credit institutions need to put up securities that qualify as collateral. Fixed-price auctions have been used so far.
- Securities market trading is limited to treasury-guaranteed paper and is rarely used.
- Foreign exchange market intervention is only employed if the Central Bank considers this necessary in order to promote its inflation target or sees exchange rate fluctuations as a potential threat to financial stability.

Overview of Central Bank interest rates

<i>Instrument July 31, 2002</i>	<i>Current interest rate (%)</i>	<i>Date of last change</i>	<i>Change (%)</i>	<i>Interest rate one year ago</i>
Current accounts	5.7	21/5/02	-0.2	6.7
Overnight loans.....	10.9	21/6/02	-0.3	12.4
Certificates of deposit...	8.0	21/6/02	-0.3	10.7
Required reserves.....	7.1	21/6/02	-0.3	9.5
Repos	8.5	25/6/02	-0.3	10.9