Regulation (EU) No 236/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 March 2012 on short selling and certain aspects of credit default swaps (Text with EEA relevance)

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on short selling and certain aspects of credit default swaps

(Text with EEA relevance)

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Article 114 thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission,

After transmission of the draft legislative act to the national parliaments,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Central Bank[(1)],

Having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee[(2)],

Acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure[(3)],

Whereas:

(1) At the height of the financial crisis in September 2008, competent authorities in several Member States and supervisory authorities in third countries such as the United States of America and Japan adopted emergency measures to restrict or ban short selling in some or all securities. They acted due to concerns that at a time of considerable financial instability, short selling could aggravate the downward spiral in the prices of shares, notably in financial institutions, in a way which could ultimately threaten their viability and create systemic risks. The measures adopted by Member States were divergent as the Union lacks a specific common regulatory framework for dealing with short selling issues.

(2) To ensure the proper functioning of the internal market and to improve the conditions of its functioning, in particular with regard to the financial markets, and to ensure a high level of consumer and investor protection, it is therefore appropriate to lay down a common regulatory framework with regard to the requirements and powers relating to short selling and credit default swaps and to ensure greater coordination and consistency between Member States where measures have to be taken in exceptional circumstances. It is necessary to harmonise the rules for short selling and certain aspects of credit default swaps, to prevent the creation of obstacles to the proper functioning of the internal market, as otherwise it is likely that Member States continue taking divergent measures.

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(3) It is appropriate and necessary for those rules to take the legislative form of a regulation in order to ensure that provisions directly imposing obligations on private parties to notify and disclose net short positions relating to certain instruments and regarding uncovered short selling are applied in a uniform manner throughout the Union. A regulation is also necessary to confer powers on the European Supervisory Authority (European Securities and Markets Authority) (ESMA) established by Regulation (EU) No 1095/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council[(4)] to coordinate measures taken by competent authorities or to take measures itself.

(4) The scope of this Regulation should be as broad as possible to provide for a preventive regulatory framework to be used in exceptional circumstances. That framework should cover all financial instruments but should provide for a proportionate response to the risks that short selling of different instruments could represent. It is therefore only in the case of exceptional circumstances that competent authorities and ESMA should be entitled to take measures concerning all types of financial instruments, going beyond the permanent measures that only apply to particular types of instruments where there are clearly identified risks that need to be addressed.

(5) To end the current fragmented situation in which some Member States have taken divergent measures and to restrict the possibility that divergent measures are taken by competent authorities it is important to address the potential risks arising from short selling and credit default swaps in a harmonised manner. The requirements to be imposed should address the identified risks without unduly detracting from the benefits that short selling provides to the quality and efficiency of markets. While in certain situations it could have adverse effects, under normal market conditions, short selling plays an important role in ensuring the proper functioning of financial markets, in particular in the context of market liquidity and efficient price formation.

(6) References in this Regulation to natural and legal persons should include registered business associations without legal personality.

(7) Enhanced transparency relating to significant net short positions in specific financial instruments is likely to be of benefit to both the regulator and market participants. For shares admitted to trading on a trading venue in the Union, a two-tier model that provides for greater transparency of significant net short positions in shares at the appropriate level should be introduced. At the lower threshold, notification of a position should be made privately to the regulators concerned to enable them to monitor and, where necessary, investigate short selling that could create systemic risks, be abusive or create disorderly markets; at the higher threshold, positions should be publicly disclosed to the market in order to provide useful information to other market participants about significant individual short positions in shares.

(8) A requirement to notify regulators of significant net short positions relating to sovereign debt in the Union should be introduced as such notification would provide important information to assist regulators in monitoring whether such positions are in fact creating systemic risks or being used for abusive purposes. Such a requirement should only include private disclosure to regulators as publication of information to the market

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for such instruments could have a detrimental effect on sovereign debt markets where liquidity is already impaired.

(9) The notification requirements relating to sovereign debt should apply to the debt instruments issued by a Member State and by the Union, including the European Investment Bank, a Member State's government department, agency, special purpose vehicle or international financial institution established by two or more Member States that issues debt on behalf of a Member State or on behalf of several Member States, such as the European Financial Stability Facility or the prospective European Stability Mechanism. In the case of federal Member States, the notification requirements should also apply to debt instruments issued by a member of the federation. They should not, however, apply to other regional or local bodies or quasi-public bodies in a Member State that issue debt instruments. The objective of debt instruments issued by the Union is to provide balance of payments or financial stability support to Member States or macro-financial assistance to third countries.

(10) In order to ensure comprehensive and effective transparency, it is important that the notification requirements cover not only short positions created by trading shares or sovereign debt on trading venues but also short positions created by trading outside trading venues and net short positions created by the use of derivatives, such as options, futures, index-related instruments, contracts for differences and spread bets relating to shares or sovereign debt.

(11) To be useful to regulators and markets, any transparency regime should provide complete and accurate information about a natural or legal person's positions. In particular, information provided to the regulator or to the market should take into account both short and long positions so as to provide valuable information about the natural or legal person's net short position in shares, sovereign debt and credit default swaps.

(12) The calculation of short or long positions should take into account any form of economic interest which a natural or legal person has in relation to the issued share capital of a company or to the issued sovereign debt of a Member State or of the Union. In particular, it should take into account such an economic interest obtained directly or indirectly through the use of derivatives such as options, futures, contracts for differences and spread bets relating to shares or sovereign debt, and indices, baskets of securities and exchange traded funds. In the case of positions relating to sovereign debt it should also take into account credit default swaps relating to sovereign debt issuers.

(13) In addition to the transparency regime provided for in this Regulation, the Commission should consider, in the context of its revision of Directive 2004/39/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 April 2004 on markets in financial instruments[(5)], whether inclusion by investment firms of information about short sales in transaction reports to competent authorities would provide useful supplementary information to enable competent authorities to monitor levels of short selling.

(14) Buying credit default swaps without having a long position in underlying sovereign debt or any assets, portfolio of assets, financial obligations or financial contracts the value of which is correlated to the value of the sovereign debt, can be, economically

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speaking, equivalent to taking a short position on the underlying debt instrument. The calculation of a net short position in relation to sovereign debt should therefore include credit default swaps relating to an obligation of a sovereign debt issuer. The credit default swap position should be taken into account both for the purposes of determining whether a natural or legal person has a significant net short position relating to sovereign debt that needs to be notified to a competent authority and where a competent authority suspends restrictions on uncovered credit default swap transactions for the purposes of determining the significant uncovered position in a credit default swap relating to a sovereign debt issuer that needs to be notified to the competent authority.

(15) To enable ongoing monitoring of positions, the transparency regime should also include notification or disclosure where a change in a net short position results in an increase or decrease above or below certain thresholds.

(16) In order to be effective, it is important that the transparency regime apply regardless of where the natural or legal person is located, including in a third country, where that person has a significant net short position in a company that has shares admitted to trading on a trading venue in the Union or a net short position in sovereign debt issued by a Member State or by the Union.

(17) The definition of a short sale should not include a repurchase agreement between two parties where one party sells the other a security at a specified price with a commitment to buy the security back at a later date at another specified price or a derivative contract where it is agreed to sell securities at a specified price at a future date. The definition should not include a transfer of securities under a securities lending agreement.

(18) Uncovered short selling of shares and sovereign debt is sometimes viewed as increasing the potential risk of settlement failure and volatility. To reduce such risks it is appropriate to place proportionate restrictions on uncovered short selling of such instruments. The detailed restrictions should take into account the different arrangements currently used for covered short selling. These include a separate repurchase agreement on the basis of which the person selling a security short buys back an equivalent security in due time to allow settlement of the short sale transaction and includes collateral arrangements if the collateral taker can use the security for settling the short sale transaction. Further examples include rights issues (offerings) of companies to existing shareholders, lending pools and repurchase agreement facilities provided, for instance, by trading venues, clearing systems or central banks.

(19) In relation to uncovered short selling of shares it is necessary for a natural or legal person to have an arrangement with a third party under which the third party has confirmed that the share has been located, which means that the third party confirms that it considers that it can make the share available for settlement when it is due. In order to give this confirmation it is necessary for measures to be taken vis-à-vis third parties for the natural or legal person to have a reasonable expectation that settlement can be effected when it is due. This includes measures such as a third party having allocated the shares for borrowing or purchase so that settlement can be effected when it is due. With regard to short sales to be covered by purchase of the share during the same day this includes confirmation by the third party that it considers the share to be easy to borrow or to

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purchase. The liquidity of the shares, in particular the level of turnover and the ease with which buying, selling and borrowing can take place with minimum market impact, should be taken into account by ESMA in determining what measures are necessary in order to have a reasonable expectation that settlement can be effected when it is due.

(20) In relation to uncovered short selling of sovereign debt, the fact that a short sale will be covered by the purchase of the sovereign debt during the same day can be considered as an example of offering a reasonable expectation that settlement can be effected when it is due.

(21) Sovereign credit default swaps should be based on the insurable interest principle whilst recognising that there can be interests in a sovereign issuer other than bond ownership. Such interests include hedging against the risk of default of the sovereign issuer where a natural or legal person has a long position in the sovereign debt of that issuer or hedging against the risk of a decline in the value of the sovereign debt where the natural or legal person holds assets or is subject to liabilities which refer to public or private sector entities in the Member State concerned, the value of which is correlated to the value of the sovereign debt. Such assets should include financial contracts, a portfolio of assets or financial obligations, as well as interest rate or currency swap transactions with respect to which the sovereign credit default swap is used as a counterparty risk management tool for hedging exposure on financial and foreign trade contracts. No position or portfolio of positions used in the context of hedging exposures to a sovereign should be considered an uncovered position in a sovereign credit default swap. This includes any exposures to the central, regional and local administration, public sector entities or any exposure guaranteed by any referred entity. Furthermore, exposure to private sector entities established in the Member State concerned should also be included. All exposures should be considered in this context including loans, counterparty credit risk (including potential exposure when regulatory capital is required to such exposure), receivables and guarantees. This also includes indirect exposures to any of the referred entities obtained, inter alia, through exposure to indices, funds or special purpose vehicles.

(22) Since entering into a sovereign credit default swap without underlying exposure to the risk of a decline in the value of the sovereign debt could have an adverse impact on the stability of sovereign debt markets, natural or legal persons should be prohibited from entering into such uncovered credit default swap positions. However, at the very first signal that the sovereign debt market is not functioning properly, the competent authority should be able to suspend such a restriction temporarily. Such a suspension should be based on the belief of the competent authority based on objective grounds following an analysis of the indicators set out in this Regulation. Competent authorities should also be able to use additional indicators.

(23) It is also appropriate to include requirements on central counterparties relating to buy-in procedures and fines for failed settlement of transactions in shares. The buy-in procedures and late settlement requirements should set basic standards relating to settlement discipline. The buy-in and fining requirements should be sufficiently flexible to permit the central counterparty that is responsible for ensuring such procedures are