

EU probes online payment market

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European regulators launched on Monday an antitrust investigation into the Internet payments market, the system used by consumers to buy products online.

The [European Commission](#) said it would examine the standardisation process for payments to ensure that competition "is not unduly restricted," for example by excluding new entrants and payment providers that are not controlled by banks.

"Excluding competitors in the online payments market could result in higher prices for web merchants and ultimately consumers," the European Union's [competition watchdog](#) said in a statement.

The standardisation process for web payments was undertaken by the European Payments Council (EPC), the decision-making body on payments for Europe's banking industry.

The EPC is promoting a self-regulated integrated payments market, under a project named the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA).

The commission said it endorses the SEPA project as "crucial" for consumers, retailers and companies.

"Use of the Internet is increasing rapidly making the need for secure and efficient online payment solutions in the whole Single Euro Payments Area all the more pressing," said EU competition commissioner Joaquin Almunia.

"In principle, standards promote inter-operability and competition, but we need to ensure that the standardisation process does not unnecessarily restrict opportunities for non-participants," he said.

The commission stressed that the opening of an investigation does not imply that Brussels has found an [infringement](#) but that it is treating the issue "as a matter of priority."

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