

Zurich, 16 June 2009

Instruction sheet concerning the reproduction of banknotes

A Legal basis

Banknotes are protected by various provisions in the Swiss Penal Code. Arts. 240 et seq. prohibit the counterfeiting or forging of money with the intent of fraudulently putting it into circulation. Just like putting counterfeit money into circulation, it is also forbidden to introduce, acquire and store counterfeit money.

The reproduction of banknotes without intent to counterfeit (e.g. for advertising purposes) is also restricted. The relevant art. 243 of the Penal Code reads as follows:

1. Anyone who - without intent of counterfeiting - reproduces or imitates banknotes in such a way as to create the risk of a person or a machine confusing them with genuine banknotes - especially if the entire note, one side or the larger part of one side of a banknote is reproduced or imitated on a type of material and in a size that is identical with or similar to the material and the size of the genuine banknote
anyone who imports, puts on offer or into circulation such items, shall be punishable by imprisonment or a fine.
2. If the offence has been committed by negligence, the penalty shall be custody or a fine.

Furthermore, according to art. 249 para. 2 of the Penal Code, banknotes which have been reproduced, imitated or produced without intent of counterfeiting, yet create a risk of confusion, will be collected and rendered unusable or destroyed.

B Admissible reproductions

Criminal acts according to arts. 240 et seq. of the Penal Code are subject to federal (criminal) jurisdiction. The Swiss National Bank (SNB) is not in a position to make a binding determination as to when banknote reproduction is free of risk.

As the issuer of the Swiss franc banknotes, however, the SNB generally does not see any risk of confusion with genuine banknotes in cases in which the word "SPECIMEN" is printed diagonally across the reproduction. The dimensions of the word "SPECIMEN" must be at least 75% of the length and 15% of the width of the reproduction and the word must be printed in a colour that provides an obvious contrast to the predominant colour of the reproduction.

In addition to the use of the word "SPECIMEN", the SNB considers the fulfilment of at least one of the following criteria imperative in avoiding the risk of confusion with genuine banknotes:

1. Reduced-size reproduction whose length does not exceed 66% of the original banknote.
2. Enlarged reproduction whose length is at least 150% that of the original banknote.
3. Partial reproduction of any size provided less than 40% of one side of the original banknote is reproduced.
4. Reproduction on a material which can unambiguously and easily be distinguished from paper (reproductions on foodstuffs and hard products such as metal, glass, stone, wood, etc.).
5. Reproduction of a colour which is readily distinguishable from that of any banknotes currently in use as legal tender.

Furthermore, whether or not there is a risk of confusion with genuine banknotes depends on the overall circumstances (quality of print, printing on both back and front, manner in which note reproduction is put into circulation, etc.).

C Copyright

Banknotes are not protected by the Swiss Federal Copyright Statute. However, individual works reproduced on banknotes are subject to copyright protection provided they have not been reproduced recognisably as a part of the banknote. The works protected under copyright law may only be reproduced and adapted with the permission of the copyright holder.

D Banknotes for digital processing

For advertising and educational purposes, the SNB will supply, on loan, digital images of banknotes (resolution: 150 dpi), with the word “SPECIMEN” printed in accordance with the aforementioned specifications.

Written requests setting out reasons (i.e. the use to which the banknote reproductions will be put) should be submitted to:

Swiss National Bank
Cash Division / Administration
Bundesplatz 1
CH-3003 Berne

The SNB may decline to send physical or digital images of banknotes without stating reasons.

E Contact

If you have any questions or require further information, you can reach us at the above address. You can also contact us by e-mail (bargeld@snb.ch) or telephone (+41 58 631 02 11).