Erste Group posts net profit of EUR 1,489.9 million in the first half year of 2023

Financial data

Income statement					
in EUR million	**Q2 22**	**Q1 23**	**Q2 23**	**1-6 22**	**1-6 23**
Net interest income	1.444,9	1.769,0	1.792,2	2.837,0	3.561,1
Net fee and commission income	599,5	642,7	631,9	1.214,9	1.274,7
Net trading result and gains/losses from financial instruments at FVPL	1,2	35,3	171,3	-15,7	206,6
Operating income	2.110,4	2.498,7	2.662,4	4.146,7	5.161,1
Operating expenses	-1.050,1	-1.242,0	-1.230,2	-2.285,4	-2.472,2
Operating result	1.060,3	1.256,7	1.432,3	1.861,3	2.688,9
Impairment result from financial instruments	85,1	20,7	8,3	26,0	28,9
Post-provision operating result	1.145,4	1.277,3	1.440,5	1.887,3	2.717,8
Net result attributable to owners of the parent	**688,2**	**593,6**	**896,3**	**1.137,0**	**1.489,9**
Net interest margin (on average interest-bearing assets)	2,15%	2,50%	2,45%	2,16%	2,48%
Cost/income ratio	49,8%	49,7%	46,2%	55,1%	47,9%
Provisioning ratio (on average gross customer loans)	-0,18%	-0,04%	-0,02%	-0,03%	-0,03%
Tax rate	19,0%	18,5%	17,7%	19,0%	18,0%
Return on equity	15,7%	13,5%	18,7%	13,5%	16,2%

Balance sheet					
in EUR million	**Jun 22**	**Mar 23**	**Jun 23**	**Dec 22**	**Jun 23**
Cash and cash balances	42.818	43.305	32.810	35.685	32.810
Trading, financial assets	56.560	61.683	64.946	59.833	64.946
Loans and advances to banks	28.704	27.299	33.454	18.435	33.454
Loans and advances to customers	191.543	202.668	204.881	202.109	204.881
Intangible assets	1.315	1.335	1.328	1.347	1.328
Miscellaneous assets	6.153	6.631	6.573	6.456	6.573
Total assets	**327.093**	**342.921**	**343.993**	**323.865**	**343.993**
Financial liabilities held for trading	3.005	3.139	2.788	3.264	2.788
Deposits from banks	36.665	29.876	25.669	28.821	25.669
Deposits from customers	225.515	238.074	241.082	223.973	241.082
Debt securities issued	31.226	38.246	40.646	35.904	40.646
Miscellaneous liabilities	6.796	7.103	7.072	6.599	7.072
Total equity	23.886	26.483	26.735	25.305	26.735
Total liabilities and equity	**327.093**	**342.921**	**343.993**	**323.865**	**343.993**
Loan/deposit ratio	84,9%	85,1%	85,0%	90,2%	85,0%
NPL ratio	2,2%	2,1%	2,0%	2,0%	2,0%
NPL coverage ratio (based on AC loans, ex collateral)	91,8%	94,3%	96,7%	94,6%	96,7%
Texas ratio	17,6%	15,8%	15,2%	16,4%	15,2%
CET1 ratio (final)	14,2%	14,0%	14,9%	14,2%	14,9%

HIGHLIGHTS

P&L 1-6 2023 compared with 1-6 2022;
balance sheet as of 30 June 2023 compared with 31 December 2022

Net interest income increased significantly to EUR 3,561.1 million (+25.5%; EUR 2,837.0 million) on the back of higher market interest rates as well as larger loan volume; the most pronounced rise was recorded in Austria. **Net fee and commission income** rose to EUR 1,274.7 million (+4.9%; EUR 1,214.9 million). Growth was registered in nearly all core markets, most notably in payment services but also in asset management. **Net trading result** improved to EUR 270.4 million (EUR -532.5 million); the line item **gains/losses from financial instruments measured at fair value through profit or loss** declined to EUR -63.8 million (EUR 516.8 million). The development of these two line items was mostly attributable to valuation effects. **Operating income** increased to EUR 5,161.1 million (+24.5%; EUR 4,146.7 million). **General administrative expenses** were up at EUR 2,472.2 million (+8.2%; EUR 2,285.4 million). Personnel expenses rose to EUR 1,459.1 million (+12.7%; EUR 1,294.7 million) driven by salary increases and retirement one-offs. The rise in other administrative expenses to EUR 738.2 million (+2.9%; EUR 717.7 million) was primarily due to higher IT and office-related expenses. Contributions to deposit insurance schemes included in other administrative expenses – already posted upfront for the full year of 2023 – declined to EUR 114.3 million (EUR 156.7 million). In the first half of 2022, the Sberbank Europe deposit insurance case had resulted in higher expenses in Hungary. Amortisation and depreciation amounted to EUR 274.9 million (+0.7%; EUR 273.0 million). Overall, the **operating result** increased markedly to EUR 2,688.9 million (+44.5%; EUR 1,861.3 million). The **cost/income ratio** improved to 47.9% (55.1%).

The **impairment result from financial instruments** amounted to EUR 28.9 million or 3 basis points of average gross customers loans (EUR 26.0 million or 3 basis points). Positive contributions came from net releases of provisions for commitments and guarantees as well as from income from the recovery of loans already written off, in both cases most notably in Austria. In the first half of the year, there were neither updates on forward-looking economic indicators (FLIs) nor any application of stage overlays. Overall, crisis-induced performing risk provisions stood unchanged at approximately EUR 900 million as of end of March. The **NPL ratio** based on gross customer loans was stable at 2.0% (2.0%).
The **NPL coverage ratio** (excluding collateral) went up to 96.7% (94.6%).

Other operating result amounted to EUR -283.1 million (EUR -199.2 million). Expenses for annual contributions to resolution funds included in this line item already for the full year of 2023 declined (most notably in Austria and the Czech Republic) to EUR 113.7 million (EUR 139.0 million). Banking levies – currently payable in two core markets – increased to EUR 121.1 million (EUR 110.9 million). Thereof, EUR 101.2 million were charged in Hungary: in addition to regular banking tax of EUR 16.5 million (EUR 17.7 million), a windfall profit tax of EUR 47.9 million (49.9 million) based on the preceding year's net revenues was posted (both upfront for the full year of 2023). Hungarian transaction tax for the first half of the year amounted to EUR 35.6 million (EUR 27.0 million). In Austria, banking tax equalled EUR 19.8 million (EUR 16,3 million). In addition, other operating result was adversely affected by valuation effects.

Taxes on income amounted to EUR 438.6 million (EUR 315.2 million). The rise in the minority charge to EUR 508.1 million (EUR 207.0 million) was attributable to significantly better results from the savings banks – primarily due to higher net interest income. The **net result attributable to owners of the parent** rose to EUR 1,489.9 million (EUR 1,137.0 million) on the back of the strong operating result and the net release of risk provisions.

Total equity not including AT1 instruments rose to EUR 24.5 billion (EUR 23.1 billion). After regulatory deductions and filtering in accordance with the Capital Requirements Regulation (CRR), **common equity tier 1 capital** (CET1, final) rose to EUR 22.0 billion (EUR 20.4 billion), total **own funds** (final) to EUR 28.1 billion (EUR 26.2 billion). Interim profit for the first half of the year is included in the above figures. Total risk (**risk-weighted assets** including credit, market and operational risk, CRR final) rose to EUR 147.7 billion (EUR 143.9 billion). The **common equity tier 1 ratio** (CET1, final) stood at 14.9% (14.2%), the **total capital ratio** at 19.0% (18.2%).

Total assets increased to EUR 344.0 billion (+6.2%; EUR 323.9 billion). On the asset side, cash and cash balances declined to EUR 32.8 billion (EUR 35.7 billion), loans and advances to banks rose to EUR 33.5 billion (EUR 18.4 billion), most notably in Austria and the Czech Republic. **Loans and advances to customers** have risen year to date to EUR 204.9 billion (+1.4%; EUR 202.1 billion) with both retail and corporate loans volumes growing. On the liability side, deposits from banks declined to EUR 25.7 billion (EUR 28.8 billion). **Customer deposits** rose in nearly all core markets – most strongly in Austria and the Czech Republic – to EUR 241.1 billion (+7.6%; EUR 224.0 billion). The **loan-to-deposit ratio** stood at 85.0% (90.2%).

OUTLOOK

Erste Group's goal for 2023 is to achieve a return on tangible equity (ROTE) of above 15%. Four key factors will support achievement of this goal: firstly, positive economic growth in all core markets (Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Hungary, Croatia and Serbia) despite significant geopolitical and political risks, which, should they materialise, would likely negatively impact economic performance; secondly, an interest rate environment that is characterised by broadly stable central bank rates in such countries as the Czech Republic, Romania and Hungary, as well as the significantly higher euro zone interest rates rise; thirdly, a credit risk environment marked by low default rates as in 2022; and, finally, the continuous ability of Erste Group to innovate and successfully expand its digital offering. Assuming that these conditions are met, operating result and the cost/income ratio are projected to improve.

The expectation by economists is for Erste Group's core markets to avoid recession in 2023 and, in fact, to post real GDP growth. Inflationary pressures are expected to subside in 2023, following double digit-levels in 2022 as a result of exceptionally high energy prices. Continued strong labour markets should be supportive of economic performance in all of Erste Group's markets. Current account balances, which suffered significantly during 2022 on the back of exceptionally high energy prices, are expected to improve again in 2023 benefiting from a reversal in energy prices. Fiscal balances should likewise consolidate again after significant budget deficits in 2022. Public debt to GDP in all Erste Group markets is projected to be broadly stable, and hence remain materially below the euro zone average.

Against this backdrop, Erste Group expects net loan growth of about 5%. Retail and corporate business should contribute in all markets of Erste Group towards the aim to grow in line with the banking markets. Loan growth as well as interest rate tailwinds, as detailed above, should result in an increase of net interest income of around 20%. The second most important income component – net fee and commission income – is expected to rise by about 5%. As in 2022, positive growth momentum should again come from payment services and insurance brokerage fees, while additional contributions from asset management and securities business are dependent on a constructive capital markets environment. The net trading and fair value result, which suffered significantly in 2022 from negative valuation effects tied to strongly rising interest rates mostly in the CEE region but also in the eurozone, should normalise again in 2023 due to the exhaustion of the rates cycle in the euro zone and stable or falling rates in the CEE region.

This, however, will depend substantially on the actual interest rate environment. The remaining income components are forecast to remain, by and large, stable. Overall, operating income should increase in 2023. Operating expenses are expected to rise by approximately 9% – and thus at a lower level than operating income – resulting in a further cost/income ratio improvement compared to 2022 to less than 50%.

Based on the robust macro outlook described above, risk costs should remain at a low level in 2023. While precise forecasting is hard at current low risk cost levels, Erste Group believes that in 2023 risk costs will be below 10 basis points of average gross customer loans.

Other operating result is expected to remain by and large unchanged in the absence of significant one-off effects. Assuming an effective group tax rate of below 20% and higher minority charges as in 2022, Erste Group aims to achieve a ROTE above 15%. Erste Group's CET1 ratio is expected to remain strong. Consequently, Erste Group plans for a dividend of EUR 2.7 per share for the 2023 fiscal year. In addition, Erste Group filed an application seeking regulatory approval of a share buy-back in a volume of up to EUR 300 million in 2023.

Potential risks to the guidance include (geo)political and economic (including monetary and fiscal policy impacts) developments, regulatory measures as well as changes to the competitive environment. The evolving Russia-Ukraine conflict does not impact Erste Group directly, as it has no operating presence in those countries. Indirect effects, such as financial market volatility, sanctions-related knock-on effects or the emergence of deposit insurance or resolution cases cannot be ruled out, though. Erste Group is moreover exposed to non-financial and legal risks that may materialise regardless of the economic environment. Worse than expected economic development may put goodwill at risk.

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