

Convention drawn up on the basis of Article K.3 of the Treaty on European Union, on the protection of the European Communities' financial interests

THE HIGH CONTRACTING PARTIES to this Convention, Member States of the European Union,

REFERRING to the Act of the Council of the European Union of 26 July 1995;

DESIRING to ensure that their criminal laws contribute effectively to the protection of the financial interests of the European Communities;

NOTING that fraud affecting Community revenue and expenditure in many cases is not confined to a single country and is often committed by organized criminal networks;

CONVINCED that protection of the European Communities' financial interests calls for the criminal prosecution of fraudulent conduct injuring those interests and requires, for that purpose, the adoption of a common definition;

CONVINCED of the need to make such conduct punishable with effective, proportionate and dissuasive criminal penalties, without prejudice to the possibility of applying other penalties in appropriate cases, and of the need, at least in serious cases, to make such conduct punishable with deprivation of liberty which can give rise to extradition;

RECOGNIZING that businesses play an important role in the areas financed by the European Communities and that those with decision-making powers in business should not escape criminal responsibility in appropriate circumstances;

DETERMINED to combat together fraud affecting the European Communities' financial interests by undertaking obligations concerning jurisdiction, extradition, and mutual cooperation,

HAVE AGREED ON THE FOLLOWING PROVISIONS:

Article 1

General provisions

1. For the purposes of this Convention, fraud affecting the European Communities' financial interests shall consist of:

(a) in respect of expenditure, any intentional act or omission relating to:

- the use or presentation of false, incorrect or incomplete statements or documents, which has as its effect the misappropriation or wrongful retention of funds from the general budget of the European Communities or budgets managed by, or on behalf of, the European Communities,
- non-disclosure of information in violation of a specific obligation, with the same effect,
- the misapplication of such funds for purposes other than those for which they were originally granted;

(b) in respect of revenue, any intentional act or omission relating to:

- the use or presentation of false, incorrect or incomplete statements or documents, which has as its effect the illegal diminution of the resources of the general budget of the European Communities or budgets managed by, or on behalf of, the European Communities,
- non-disclosure of information in violation of a specific obligation, with the same effect,
- misapplication of a legally obtained benefit, with the same effect.

2. Subject to Article 2 (2), each Member State shall take the necessary and appropriate measures to transpose paragraph 1 into their national criminal law in such a way that the conduct referred to therein constitutes criminal offences.

3. Subject to Article 2 (2), each Member State shall also take the necessary measures to ensure that the intentional preparation or supply of false, incorrect or incomplete statements or documents having the effect described in paragraph 1 constitutes a criminal offence if it is not already punishable as a principal offence or as participation in, instigation of, or attempt to commit, fraud as defined in paragraph 1.

4. The intentional nature of an act or omission as referred to in paragraphs 1 and 3 may be inferred from objective, factual circumstances.

Article 2

Penalties

1. Each Member State shall take the necessary measures to ensure that the conduct referred to in Article 1, and participating in, instigating, or attempting the conduct referred to in Article 1 (1), are punishable by effective, proportionate and dissuasive criminal penalties, including, at least in cases of serious fraud, penalties involving deprivation of liberty which can give rise to extradition, it being understood that serious fraud shall be considered to be fraud involving a minimum amount to be set in each Member State. This minimum amount may not be set at a sum exceeding ECU 50 000.

2. However in cases of minor fraud involving a total amount of less than ECU 4 000 and not involving particularly serious circumstances under its laws, a Member State may provide for penalties of a different type from those laid down in paragraph 1.

3. The Council of the European Union, acting unanimously, may alter the amount referred to in paragraph 2.

Article 3

Criminal liability of heads of businesses

Each Member State shall take the necessary measures to allow heads of businesses or any persons having power to take decisions or exercise control within a business to be declared criminally liable in accordance with the principles defined by its national law in cases of fraud affecting the European Community's financial interests, as referred to in Article 1, by a person under their authority acting on behalf of the business.

Article 4

Jurisdiction

1. Each Member State shall take the necessary measures to establish its jurisdiction over the offences it has established in accordance with Article 1 and 2 (1) when:

- fraud, participation in fraud or attempted fraud affecting the European Communities' financial interests is committed in whole or in part within its territory, including fraud for which the benefit was obtained in that territory,

- a person within its territory knowingly assists or induces the commission of such fraud within the territory of any other State,

- the offender is a national of the Member State concerned, provided that the law of that Member State may require the conduct to be punishable also in the country where it occurred.

2. Each Member State may declare, when giving the notification referred to in Article 11 (2), that it will not apply the rule laid down in the third indent of paragraph 1 of this Article.

Article 5

Extradition and prosecution

1. Any Member State which, under its law, does not extradite its own nationals shall take the necessary measures to establish its jurisdiction over the offences it has established in accordance with Articles 1 and 2 (1), when committed by its own nationals outside its territory.

2. Each Member State shall, when one of its nationals is alleged to have committed in another Member State a criminal offence involving the conduct described in Articles 1 and 2 (1), and it does not extradite that person to that other Member State solely on the ground of his or her nationality, submit the case to its competent authorities for the purpose of prosecution if appropriate. In order to enable prosecution to take place, the files, information and exhibits relating to the offence shall be transmitted in accordance with the procedures laid down in Article 6 of the European Convention on Extradition. The requesting Member State shall be informed of the prosecution initiated and of its outcome.

3. A Member State may not refuse extradition in the event of fraud affecting the European Communities' financial interests for the sole reason that it concerns a tax or customs duty offence.

4. For the purposes of this Article, a Member State's own nationals shall be construed in accordance with any declaration made by it under Article 6 (1) (b) of the European Convention on Extradition and with paragraph 1 (c) of the Article.

Article 6

Cooperation

1. If a fraud as defined in Article 1 constitutes a criminal offence and concerns at least two Member States, those States shall cooperate effectively in the investigation, the prosecution and in carrying out the punishment imposed by means, for example, of mutual legal assistance, extradition, transfer of proceedings or enforcement of sentences passed in another Member State.

2. Where more than one Member State has jurisdiction and has the possibility of viable prosecution of an offence based on the same facts, the Member States involved shall cooperate in deciding which shall prosecute the offender or offenders with a view to centralizing the prosecution in a single Member State where possible.

Article 7

Ne bis in idem

1. Member States shall apply in their national criminal laws the 'ne bis in idem' rule, under which a person whose trial has been finally disposed of in a Member State may not be prosecuted in another Member State in respect of the same facts, provided that if a penalty was imposed, it has been enforced, is actually in the process of being enforced or can no longer be enforced under the laws of the sentencing State.

2. A Member State may, when giving the notification referred to in Article 11 (2), declare that it shall not be bound by paragraph 1 of this Article in one or more of the following cases:

(a) if the facts which were the subject of the judgement rendered abroad took place on its own territory either in whole or in part; in the latter case this exception shall not apply if those facts took place partly on the territory of the Member State where the judgement was rendered;

(b) if the facts which were the subject of the judgment rendered abroad constitute an offence directed against the security or other equally essential interests of that Member State;

(c) if the facts which were the subject of the judgment rendered abroad were committed by an official of the Member State contrary to the duties of his office.

3. The exceptions which may be the subject of a declaration under paragraph 2 shall not apply if the Member State concerned in respect of the same facts requested the other Member State to bring the prosecution or granted extradition of the person concerned.

4. Relevant bilateral or multilateral agreements concluded between Member States and relevant declarations shall remain unaffected by this Article.

Article 8

Court of Justice

1. Any dispute between Member States on the interpretation or application of this Convention must in an initial stage be examined by the Council in accordance with the procedure set out in Title VI of the Treaty on European Union with a view to reaching a solution.

If no solution is found within six months, the matter may be referred to the Court of Justice of the European Communities by a party to the dispute.

2. Any dispute between one or more Member States and the Commission of the European Communities concerning the application of Article 1 or 10 of this Convention which it has proved impossible to settle through negotiation may be submitted to the Court of Justice.

Article 9

Internal provisions

No provision in this Convention shall prevent Member States from adopting internal legal provisions which go beyond the obligations deriving from this Convention.

Article 10

Transmission

1. Member States shall transmit to the Commission of the European Communities the text of the provisions transposing into their domestic law the obligations imposed on them under the provisions of this Convention.

2. For the purposes of implementing this Convention, the High Contracting Parties shall determine, within the Council of the European Union, the information to be communicated or exchanged between the Member States or between the Member States and the Commission, and also the arrangements for doing so.

Article 11

Entry into force

1. This Convention shall be subject to adoption by the Member States in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements.

>REFERENCE TO A FILM>

Pelo Governo da República Portuguesa

>REFERENCE TO A FILM>

Suomen hallituksen puolesta

>REFERENCE TO A FILM>

På svenska regeringens vägnar

>REFERENCE TO A FILM>

For the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

>REFERENCE TO A FILM>