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Council of Europe Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism (CETS No. 198)

Interpretative Notes¹

1. Adopted by the 9th COP plenary meeting (21-22 November 2017) and revised in April 2021 and October 2024.

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Introduction | 3 |
| Article 3 (Confiscation measures) | 3 |
| Paragraph 4 (the reversal of the burden of proof) | 3 |
| Issue No. 1: “ <i>an offender demonstrates the origin of alleged proceeds or other property liable to confiscation</i> ” | 7 |
| Issue No. 2: what is a serious offence? | 10 |
| Issue No. 3: in which cases this provision cannot be assessed in the course of the monitoring procedure?..... | 13 |
| Issue No. 4: how to assess the effective implementation of this provision?..... | 13 |
| Article 25 (Confiscated property) | 13 |
| Paragraph 2 (asset sharing)..... | 13 |
| Issue: how to assess the effective implementation of this provision? | 14 |
| Article 11 (Previous decisions) | 17 |
| Other instruments | 18 |
| Issue: How to assess the implementation of this provision? | 18 |

INTRODUCTION

At its eighth meeting, held in Strasbourg from 25 to 26 October 2016, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism (COP to CETS n° 198) invited the Bureau to consider interpretative issues related to Article 3, paragraph 4, Article 11 and Article 25, paragraph 2, and report back at the next COP meeting. Consequently, the Secretariat prepared a document which was presented to the COP Bureau during its meeting held in June 2017. Further to its adoption at the 9th COP plenary meeting (21-22 November 2017), the Note was further revised as a consequence of discussions held with regard to the Thematic Monitoring Report on Article 3(4) (Strasbourg, 27-28 October 2020). The final version of the Note was agreed and adopted at the extraordinary plenary meeting of the COP held on 12 May 2021. In addition, following the 16th COP plenary meeting, the interpretative notes were revised with respect to Article 11 of the Convention.

ARTICLE 3 (CONFISCATION MEASURES)

Assessed criteria

3.1: Parties should adopt legislative and other measures as may be necessary to enable them to confiscate instrumentalities and proceeds or property the value of which corresponds to such proceeds and laundered property.

3.2: Parties should ensure that confiscation applies to money laundering and all categories of offences set out in the Appendix to the CETS No. 198.

3.3: Parties may provide for mandatory confiscation in respect of offences which are subject to the confiscation regime, in particular the offences of ML, drug trafficking, trafficking in human beings and any other serious offence.

3.4: Where not otherwise declared, parties should ensure that in respect of a serious offence, an offender is required to demonstrate the origin of alleged proceeds or other property liable to confiscation to the extent that such requirement is consistent with the principles of its domestic law.

PARAGRAPH 4 (THE REVERSAL OF THE BURDEN OF PROOF)

Each party shall adopt such legislative or other measures as may be necessary to require that, in respect of a **serious offence or offences** as defined by national law, an offender **demonstrates the origin of alleged proceeds or other property liable to confiscation** to the extent that such a requirement is consistent with the principles of its domestic law²

2. FATF Recommendation 4 also refers to this matter and calls *countries to consider adopting measures that allow such proceeds or instrumentalities to be confiscated without requiring a criminal conviction (non-conviction based confiscation), or which require an offender to demonstrate the lawful origin of the property alleged to be liable to confiscation, to the extent that such a requirement is consistent with the principles of their domestic law.*

Explanatory Report

Paragraph 4 of Article 3 requires parties to provide the possibility for the burden of proof to be reversed regarding the lawful origin of alleged proceeds or other property liable to confiscation in serious offences. The definition of the notion of serious offence for the purpose of the implementation of this provision is left to the national law of the parties. This possibility is conditional to its compatibility with the principles of the national law of the party concerned. The conclusion of the party on this issue shall not be challenged in the course of the monitoring procedure. It should also be noted in this context that Article 53, paragraph 4 of this Convention provides for the possibility to make a declaration concerning the provision of Article 3, paragraph 4.

Interpretation

The material scope of application of the provision in Article 3, paragraph 4, is based, i.a., on a notion of “serious offence” which is referred to in the same paragraph but not included in the list of definitions in Article 2 of the Convention. This reference is separate, and therefore different in principle, from that of “categories of offences” in Article 3, paragraph 2, as subject to the general mandatory confiscation regime. In order to properly qualify the notion of “serious offence” for the purposes of Article 3, paragraph 4, it is important to underscore that the confiscation mechanism based on the reversal of the burden of proof is more rigorous and stringent than the ordinary confiscation regime stipulated in Article 3, paragraph 1 and paragraph 2. The two may be considered to be in a relation of special to general. This explains the differences, under several important respects, between the legal regimes respectively applicable under the Convention.

In fact, the Convention sets different requirements and scopes in relation to these two types of confiscation. Providing for an “ordinary” confiscation regime is mandatory, no exceptions or derogations are possible and it should be applied to a minimum set of offences as specifically listed in the Appendix to the Convention. The “reversed burden of proof” confiscation regime, on the other hand, can be declared as not applicable by parties in its entirety (based on Article 53, paragraph 4) or only applied “to the extent that such a requirement is consistent with the principles of its domestic law”.³ Article 3, paragraph 4, therefore, provides for a particular scope for this type of confiscation: it does include a minimum set of mandatory offences (consistently with the option for the parties to limit the application based on domestic legal principles), as is the case for the general confiscation under paragraph 1 and paragraph 2, but is focused on a narrower scope of “a serious offence or offences” as defined by national law.

As a consequence, parties are not bound under Article 3, paragraph 4, by the categories of offences listed in the Annex to the Convention as a minimum that should be covered but can apply the special confiscation regime to one or more “serious offences”, “as defined by national law”.

The logic underlying the provisions in Article 3 and the structure and nexus among the multiple obligations and options outlined therein for the confiscation regime can be illustrated as follows:

3. No such exception is admissible under the general confiscation regime.

- Parties are under an unconditional obligation to introduce confiscation measures (also for equivalent values) for at least money laundering and the categories of offences listed in the Appendix to the Convention (paragraph 1 and 2).
- Parties may provide for mandatory confiscation; this option can be exercised for (some or all) the offences falling under the general confiscation regime as per paragraph 1 and 2.
- Parties are under an obligation to apply confiscation based on a reversed-burden-of-proof regime, subject to conditions or limitations.
 - This obligation can be lifted in its entirety if a “declaration” is made in this regard in accordance with Article 53, paragraph 4, of the Convention.
 - If no declaration is made, the obligation to provide for the “reversed” mechanism of confiscation should apply “to the extent that such a requirement is consistent with the principles of domestic law”. It is reasonable to assume that this provision allows to limit the “extent” of the requirement but not to lift it altogether, as this would require a declaration under Article 53, paragraph 4(b).
 - If no declaration is made and within the extent allowed by relevant domestic legal principles, parties should apply the more rigorous “reversed” mechanism for confiscation to a range of “serious offences”; these should be “defined by national law” and, in light of the special nature of this requirement, can be set with a narrower scope than that required for general confiscation under Article 3, paragraph 1 and 2. This means that parties are not obliged to apply the reversed-burden-of-proof confiscation, as a minimum, to the categories of offences listed in the Appendix. In other words, “serious offences” (provided that the above exceptions or limitations do not apply) falling into the more stringent confiscation regime in Article 3, paragraph 4, should be considered as a sub-set of the offences for which the possibility of general confiscation is mandatory under Article 3, although nothing prevents a state party from considering that the two categories coincide (please also see ‘Issue no.2: What is a Serious Offence’ below)

It should be noted that the provision in Article 3, paragraph 4 also cannot be interpreted as an obligation to introduce the reversal burden of proof in a criminal prosecution to find the defendant guilty of an offence. In the case of *Phillips v. the United Kingdom* of 5 July 2001, the European Court of Human Rights “considers that, in addition to being specifically mentioned in Article 6, paragraph 2, a person’s right in a criminal case to be presumed innocent and to require the prosecution to bear the onus of proving the allegations against him/her forms part of the general notion of a fair hearing under Article 6 paragraph 1. This right is not, however, absolute since presumptions of fact or of law operate in every criminal-law system and are not prohibited in principle by the Convention, as long as states remain within certain limits, taking into account the importance of what is at stake and maintaining the rights of the defence. In the *Phillips* case the statutory assumption was not applied in order to facilitate finding the defendant guilty of a drug trafficking offence, but to enable the court to assess the amount at which a confiscation order should be properly fixed after a drug trafficking conviction. The European Court of Human Rights held that the use of statutory assumptions with proper safeguards (which it found to be in place) in such circumstances did not violate the European Convention or Protocol No.1 to it.

Declarations and reservations under Article 53 paragraph 4

| DECLARATIONS under article 53 paragraph 4 | | |
|--|---------------------|--|
| Article 3 paragraph 4 Reversal of the burden of proof for confiscation (Non-application or only under specific circumstances) | Azerbaijan | In accordance with Article 53, paragraph 4, of the Convention, the Republic of Azerbaijan declares that it will not apply Article 3, paragraph 4, of this Convention. |
| | Bulgaria | The Republic of Bulgaria declares that it shall not apply Article 3, paragraph 4, of this Convention. |
| | Georgia | Georgia declares that the provisions of Article 3, paragraph 4, shall be applied only in relation to the civil procedures of confiscation, in conformity with the legislation in Georgia. |
| | Germany | The Federal Republic of Germany declares that Article 3, paragraph 4, of the Convention shall not be applied. |
| | Greece | The Hellenic Republic declares that it will not apply paragraph 4 of Article 3. |
| | Italy | The Italian Republic declares that it will not apply Article 3, paragraph 4, of the Convention. |
| | Republic of Moldova | The Republic of Moldova declares that the provisions of Article 3, paragraph 4, shall apply only partially, in conformity with the principles of the domestic law. |
| | Poland | The Republic of Poland declares that Article 3, paragraph 4, shall not be applied. |
| | Romania | The provisions of Article 3, paragraph 4 shall apply only partially, in conformity with the principles of the domestic law. |
| | Russian Federation | Pursuant to Article 53, paragraph 4, of the Convention, the Russian Federation declares that it shall not apply Article 3, paragraph 4, of the Convention. |
| | Slovak Republic | The Slovak Republic declares that it does not apply the right to require that, in respect of a serious offence or offences as defined by the national law, an offender demonstrates the origin of alleged proceeds or other property liable to confiscation. |
| | Slovenia | The Republic of Slovenia declares that it reserves the right not to apply Article 3, paragraph 4, of the Convention. |
| | Sweden | Sweden reserves the right not to apply Article 3.4 with regard to confiscation |
| | Türkiye | Türkiye declares that Article 3, paragraph 4, of the Convention shall not be applied. |
| | Ukraine | Ukraine declares that it will not apply paragraph 4 of Article 3 of the Convention. |
| | United Kingdom | The United Kingdom declares that it will apply Article 3, paragraph 4, as follows, in accordance with the principles of domestic law. If a defendant has been convicted of an offence listed in Schedule 2 to the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 or has a stated pattern or history of offending as set out in that legislation, they are deemed to have a "criminal lifestyle", and as such are subject to a confiscation regime which requires them to demonstrate the legitimate origin of their property, or have it become liable to confiscation. The court must assume that everything a defendant holds, and had held, in the last six years, is the proceeds of crime and so must calculate the value of this property into the amount set on the confiscation order. The court must not make such an assumption however, if it is shown to be incorrect or there would be a serious risk of injustice. |
| Total: 16 | | |

Examples of good practices

BELGIAN CASE

In order to pronounce a conviction for money laundering the illegal origin of the proceeds has to be established as the objective element. As soon as credible and legal justification of proceeds' origin is not possible, they are considered as illegal. Consequently, the predicate offence does not need to be clearly identified. It is important to note that the origin of proceeds (being legally acquired or not) is to be established by the prosecutor in charge, who has to come up with **evidence that the proceeds might have been of illegal origin**. In such cases, the defendant also needs to provide a justification that the proceeds have a legal origin, otherwise they will be considered as illegal. This jurisprudence therefore does not directly imply a reversed burden of proof. Their judiciary also believes that, by applying the practice as stressed above, the principle of presumption of innocence has also been fully respected. Moreover, judges, when deciding if the origin of assets is legal or not, use both - **circumstantial and prima facie evidence, including also the factual circumstances**. Recently, the court reasoned that in cases where the origin of the property was unclear, and when the prosecution was unable to prove the illegal origin of assets, **silence of the accused** could also be "taken into consideration". It means that judges can draw conclusions from the silence of a defendant – in other words they are entitled to evaluate why and for which reasons the defendant does not try⁴ to prove or offer evidence of legal origin of the assets concerned.

Application: in other words, once the prosecutor/accusation provided evidence that the proceeds might have been of illegal origin, the defendant needs to provide a credible justification that the proceeds have a legal origin. Such apportionment of the burden of proof is in line with Article 3(4).

MALTESE CASE

The property of the person found guilty shall be deemed to be derived from money laundering or a relevant offence "unless proved to the contrary" (Article 3(5) (a) of PMLA and 23B (1A) of the Criminal Code). **The burden of showing the lawful origin of such property lies on the person charged or accused**. The reversal of burden of proof is provided by Article 22 (1C) (b) of DDO and is applicable mutatis mutandis to money laundering and relevant offences by virtue of Article 3(3) of PMLA and Article 23C (2) of the Criminal Code.

Application: whilst the overriding obligation to prove a case beyond reasonable doubt lies exclusively with the prosecution, once the prosecution has brought about the level of evidence to substantiate that there is no lawful explanation as to the possession or activities carried out on the monies/property/assets, it will be for the accused to bring forward that evidence to counteract and overturn the presumption which comes into being. Reversal of the onus provisions means that **the burden of proof only falls on the suspect/accused when the**

4. Brussels Court of First Instance, El Hayek case, 29 June 2016 - "While it is manifestly incompatible with these rights to base a conviction exclusively or mainly on defendants' silence or their refusal to answer questions or give evidence, it is equally clear that these protected rights cannot and should not prevent defendants' silence from being taken into consideration in situations which undoubtedly call for an explanation from them, in order to determine how much weight should be ascribed to the prosecution case."

prosecution provides evidence that the suspect/accused has given no reasonable explanation showing that money, property or proceeds are not the proceeds of crime.

Another example of good practices might be provided by the United Kingdom, which applies the concept of “criminal lifestyle” in accordance with the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (further elaborated above, in the declaration made by the United Kingdom under Article 53 paragraph 4).

Guidelines

The application of the criminal policy of targeting the profit of crime and fight against organised crime from an economic perspective is one of the main objectives of this Convention. In its analysis of the Criminal Asset Recovery in the EU Survey 2010-2014,⁵ Europol suggests that in the period analysed, 2.2% of the estimated proceeds of crime were provisionally seized or frozen, however only 1.1% of the criminal profits were finally confiscated at EU level. That means that around 50% of all provisionally seized/frozen assets are ultimately confiscated. Europol also indicates that this percentage may be due to a loss in the value of assets during proceedings that often take too long, or due to difficulties in proving the illicit origin of assets and ensuring the final confiscation of the assets.

Article 3, paragraph 4 is intended to remedy this situation. The purpose of this paragraph is to establish specific criminal procedures with the aim of enhancing the fight against financial crime and improving the confiscation of the proceeds of crime. Parties should ensure that an offender is required to demonstrate the origin of alleged proceeds or other property liable to confiscation to the extent that such requirement is consistent with the principles of its domestic law.

Article 3(4) does not require states parties to reverse the burden of proof in a way that it would go against the fundamental principles of a fair trial, such as the principle of presumption of innocence or the right to remain silent and not to incriminate oneself.

The presumption of innocence⁶

Article 6 paragraph 1 is applicable throughout the entirety of proceedings for the determination of any “criminal charge”, including the sentencing process (for instance, confiscation proceedings enabling the national courts to assess the amount at which a confiscation order should be set, in *Phillips v. the United Kingdom*, paragraph 39). However in the same case, it was stated that once an accused has properly been proved guilty, Article 6 paragraph 2 (the presumption of innocence) can have no application in relation to allegations made about the accused's character and conduct as part of the sentencing process, unless such accusations are of such a nature and degree as to amount to the bringing of a new “charge” within the autonomous Convention meaning.

On the other hand, a person's right in a criminal case to be presumed innocent and to require the prosecution to bear the onus of proving the allegations against him/her is not absolute, since presumptions of fact or of law operate in every criminal-law system and are not prohibited in principle by the Convention. For example, the contracting states may, under

5. European Police Office, 2016 – Criminal Asset Recovery in the EU, Survey of Statistical information 2010-2014 (*Does crime still pay?*) - <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-documents/does-crime-still-pay>.

6. Available at http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Guide_Art_6_criminal_ENG.pdf.

certain conditions, penalise a simple or objective fact as such, irrespective of whether it results from criminal intent or from negligence (*Salabiaku v. France*, paragraph 27, concerning a presumption of criminal liability for smuggling inferred from possession of narcotics).

Right to remain silent and not to incriminate oneself⁷

The right to remain silent is not absolute (*John Murray v. the United Kingdom*, paragraph 47). On one hand, a conviction must not be solely or mainly based on the accused's silence or on a refusal to answer questions or to give evidence himself. On the other hand, the right to remain silent cannot prevent the accused's silence – in situations which clearly call for an explanation from him – from being taken into account in assessing the persuasiveness of the evidence adduced by the prosecution. It cannot therefore be said that an accused's decision to remain silent throughout criminal proceedings should necessarily have no implications.

Whether the drawing of adverse inferences from an accused's silence infringes Article 6 is a matter to be determined in the light of all the circumstances of the case, having particular regard to the weight attached to such inferences by the national courts in their assessment of evidence and degree of compulsion inherent in the situation (*John Murray v. the United Kingdom*, paragraph 47).

Principles of domestic laws

In addition, the implementation of Article 3 (4) must respect constitutional norms and principles of each party's domestic law. Thus, different modalities may be adopted by the parties to implement this provision.

Examples⁸

In the Netherlands, while respecting Article 6 paragraph 2 of the European Convention, the law of 1993 on the confiscation of illegally obtained property admitted the reversal of the burden of proof. Persons convicted of a criminal offense, whose property is liable to confiscation, must prove their lawful origin. The opposite can also happen and there can be a real problem in implementing Article 3 (4) of the Convention. For example, in order to intensify the fight against corruption and organised crime, the Italian law of 1992 obliged the accused to prove the legitimate origin of certain goods. The Constitutional Court declared the provision unconstitutional. In such cases, parties should try to realise an apportionment of the burden of proof in a subtle way that would make them fully compliant with constitutional norms.

Given the differences in the national law of states parties, the case-law approach cannot be uniform. However, a minimum obligation should be imposed on states parties.

As a reminder, this article only requires that the offender should demonstrate the origin of the alleged proceeds. In other words, the prosecution should not be required to demonstrate the (illegal) origin of these proceeds, and therefore to identify precisely the predicate offence from which the proceeds originate.

7. Idem

8. Christine Lazerges, « *La présomption d'innocence en Europe* », Archives de politique criminelle 2004/1 (n° 26), p. 125-138.

The purpose of this article is primarily to ease the burden of proof on the prosecution in order to improve the countries' results in terms of confiscation of criminal assets. Thus, once the judge is firmly convinced that proceeds/property liable to confiscation originates from unlawful activities (or cannot originate from a lawful one), he should be able to require that the offender proves the legal origin of the alleged proceeds. To be firmly convinced, the judge should only require factual circumstances and/or other evidences (see the Belgian case above).

ISSUE NO. 2: WHAT IS A SERIOUS OFFENCE?

The definition of the notion of serious offence for the purpose of the implementation of this provision is left to the national laws of the parties. Parties may set the scope of serious offences simply referring (even implicitly) to the offences subject to general confiscation regime as established in accordance with Article” (2). In any event, from articles 3(2a) and 9(4)(a)⁹ it can be inferred that “serious offences” should include, at least in terms of a minimum threshold, crimes exceeding the minimum level of penalties established therein. This element, indicated in the afore-mentioned articles, could therefore be considered to constitute an initial “guidance” of what is expected to be considered as a serious offence.

Moreover, Article 3, paragraph 3, might be interpreted as a strong incentive to consider in particular the offences of money laundering, drug trafficking and trafficking in human beings as serious and worthy of falling under the reversed-burden-of-proof confiscation regime.

In the view of improving legal and practical standardisation, it nevertheless may be useful to collect information among states parties that apply the provision in question related to the definition of a serious crime for its purposes and of what it entails.

Examples

Thematic Monitoring Report on Article 3(4) identified a number of states party which have implemented Article 3(4) in their legal system and have also applied it effectively in practice. Below are several good practice examples (i.e. extracts from the afore-mentioned report).

Belgium

Belgium Criminal Code (i.e. its Article 43 quarter 2) requires suspects to make it plausible that the origin of assets is lawful; ii) this provision establishes a division of burden of proof between prosecution and accused - it is for the prosecution to show that there is a significant difference between the financial value of assets obtained lawfully and that of assets obtained in practice, having regard to the accused person's income, when there is serious and concrete evidence that these assets are the proceeds of the offence of which he or she has been convicted or of identical offences, and that the accused person has been unable to provide a plausible alternative explanation. In addition, quarter 3 of the same article states that the court may challenge the origin of the property of a convict acquired in last five years which appear not to be of a legal origin (so called ‘extended confiscation’). De facto, the reversal of burden of proof is applied in these hearings too.

9. ...‘the offence is punishable by deprivation of liberty or a detention order for a maximum of more than one year.’

Croatia

Croatian Criminal Code regulates also the extended confiscation of pecuniary gain. In this case, if the perpetrator had or has property which is disproportionate with his/her incomes (this disproportion between the incomes and property shall be shown by the State Attorney's Office) it will be presumed that all the property of the perpetrator derives from criminal offences, unless the perpetrator makes it credible that its origin is legal (Article 78 CC). Thus, the burden of proof is divided between the state attorney and the perpetrator. In fact, when the State Attorney's Office proves that the property of the perpetrator is not proportionate with his/her incomes, the burden of proof of the credibility of legal origin of the property is transferred to the perpetrator. The entire property of the perpetrator is taken into consideration, the one s/he has and the one s/he has ever had and it is compared with his/her incomes in order to determine whether there is proportion between the property and incomes. Moreover, it is also envisaged the confiscation in cases of mixed legal and illegal acquisition of property. Pecuniary gain may be confiscated from a member of the family regardless the legal basis by which it is in his/her possession and regardless of whether s/he lives in the same household with the perpetrator. Pecuniary gain may be confiscated from the person who acquired pecuniary gain in good faith if s/he does not make credible that s/he has acquired it at a reasonable price.' In short, Article 78(2) of the CC puts the burden to make the legitimate origin plausible on the perpetrator. In addition, the report states that specific provisions related to provisional measures and confiscation are applicable in the context of the offences investigated by USKOK (special prosecutor's office for organized crime and corruption), both under the Criminal Code and the USKOK Act. The USKOK Act covers procedures for the mandatory seizure of instruments, income or assets resulting from the list of offences which fall within USKOK's competence (including the listed forms of ML offences and other serious offences.

Hungary

Hungarian legislation, and more precisely Act C of 2012 on the Criminal Code provides the possibility for burden of proof to be reversed in cases of extended confiscation. Section 74/A (2) of the Criminal Code (CC) specifies those cases in which forfeiture of assets shall be ordered by the court – the assets concerned are those obtained by the perpetrator within a period of five years prior to the commencement of the criminal proceedings (i.e. proceedings which resulted in conviction against him/her/them) if such assets or the lifestyle of the perpetrator(s) are particularly disproportionate to the certified income and personal circumstances of the perpetrator, unless proven to the contrary.

According to Section 74/A (3) of CC, forfeiture of assets shall not be ordered if the perpetrator proves that the assets do not originate from a criminal offence. Section 74/A (1) of CC lists the criminal offences for which the extended confiscation has to be ordered. In addition, the authorities advised that Section 74/A (1) of the CC reverses the burden of proof regarding all assets obtained by the offender in the course of participating in a criminal organisation, thus having the reversed burden of proof available on a much wider range than what the list of offences under Section 74/A (2) provides.

Italy

Although Italy made a reservation, deposited with the instrument of ratification, declaring that it will not apply Article 3, paragraph 4, of the Convention, the legislation and practice in the country have proved that this principle of the Convention is de jure and de facto implemented.

The authorities provided arguments which confirm that a specific form of reversal of burden of proof exists in the country: Italian Anti-Mafia Legislation (Legislative Decree no. 159/2011) on prevention measures (“misura di prevenzione patrimoniali”) aims at confiscation of criminally derived assets and provides a system of rebuttable presumptions based on circumstantial evidence which are to be tendered by the prosecutor.

These measures (which are para-criminal, judicially controlled, but not in the context of a criminal trial) apply to those suspected (in Italian “indiziato”) who are a part of mafia style associations or have committed other serious crimes (such as terrorism), or were listed by the UN based on Security Council Resolution on targeted financial sanctions (i.e. freezing measures). It also allows the seizure (and eventually, confiscation, in case of lack of justification) of all the assets that appear to be disproportioned having regard to the declared income of the suspect(s) or to the economic activity performed by him/her/them.

The FATF MER on Italy, adopted in 2014 confirms the aforementioned – ‘anti-mafia measures’ are available in other contexts as well, including ML (when conducted on a “habitual” basis) and TF. The measures target the assets of persons who (i) *are linked to organised and non-organised crime; (ii) “habitually” conduct criminal activities (including ML), i.e., persons who, in light of their conducts(s) and standard(s) of living, appear to be living, even in part, on the proceeds of criminal activity; or (iii) are suspected of funding terror (including natural and legal persons designated by the UNSC)*. These measures, which can be applied independently from the prosecution do include, in particular, the confiscation per equivalent. The key prerequisite for their application is socially dangerous conduct of the subject/defendant (e.g., potential affiliation to a criminal organisation or involvement in certain serious crimes). The main benefit of this ‘preventive’ confiscation is the reversal of burden of proof. It is not necessary for the prosecution to prove that the suspect has committed an offense. It must only be established that the person is habitually engaged in criminal activities or whose assets or living style cannot be justified by legal income. A wide range of financial crimes can be pursued by these measures, such as theft, robbery, extortion, fraud, usury, third party ML or self-laundering, and tax offenses. The burden of proof on the disproportion between the value of the assets being available to the suspect and his or her legal incomes falls on the public prosecution. The burden of proof of the legal origin of such funds falls on the suspect. ‘Preventive’ confiscation may also be applied in instances where the suspect is deceased.

United Kingdom

As it is the case with Italy, the United Kingdom has also made a reservation, deposited with the instrument of ratification, declaring that it will not apply Article 3, paragraph 4, of the Convention. However, the legislation and practice in the country have proved that this principle of the Convention is de jure and de facto implemented.

Reversal of the burden of proof is introduced in the procedure of so called ‘extended confiscation’. According to the Section 6 of POCA, the prosecutor shall make a confiscation request if the defendant is convicted for one of the listed offences (including ML offence) or is committed to the court for those offences. Then the court is obliged, acting upon the request of the prosecutor, to determine whether the defendant has a criminal lifestyle. Definition of a criminal lifestyle is provided in Section 75 of POCA, and explanatory notes further clarifies these legal provisions. The criminal lifestyle regime is based on the principle that an offender who gives reasonable grounds to believe that he is living off crime should be required to

account for his assets, and should have them confiscated to the extent that he is unable to account for their lawful origin. The criminal lifestyle tests, therefore, are designed to identify offenders who may be regarded as normally living off crime. Under section 75, a person has a criminal lifestyle if he satisfies one or more of the tests set out in that section: (i) the first test is that he is convicted of an offence specified in Schedule 2; (ii) the second test is that the defendant is convicted of an offence of any description, provided it was committed over a period of at least six months and he obtained not less than £5 000 from that offence and/or any others taken into consideration by the court on the same occasion; (iii) the third test is that the defendant is convicted of a combination of offences amounting to “a course of criminal activity”.

In case of a criminal lifestyle, the court must assume that everything transferred to or obtained by a defendant, or any expenditure met by that defendant in the six years preceding the offending behaviour, is the proceeds of crime. The value of this property is further set in confiscation order, unless the defendant can prove the legitimate origin or there would be a serious risk of injustice if the assumption were to be made.

ISSUE NO. 3: IN WHICH CASES THIS PROVISION CANNOT BE ASSESSED IN THE COURSE OF THE MONITORING PROCEDURE?

The only cases where the implementation of this provision should not be challenged in the course of the monitoring procedure is when the state party made a declaration or a reservation concerning the provision of Article 3, paragraph 4 or when the state party proves that its Constitutional law does not allow the application of reversal burden of proof.

ISSUE NO. 4: HOW TO ASSESS THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS PROVISION?

In the course of the monitoring procedure, the state party shall provide one or more cases, demonstrating the effective implementation of this provision. Given the fact that the position of case law in the legal hierarchy of legal standard-setting instruments differs from one jurisdiction to another, the evaluation team should take a special care as regards the stability and the scope/generalisation of the reasoning of the case(s) provided.

ARTICLE 25 (CONFISCATED PROPERTY)

Assessed Criteria

25.1: Parties should ensure that competent authorities, to the extent permitted by the domestic law, can give priority consideration to returning the confiscated property to the requesting party so it can give compensation to the victims of the crime or return such property to their legitimate owners.

25.2: Parties may have measures, including agreements, arrangements or any other measures in place giving special consideration to sharing confiscated property with other parties on a regular basis.

PARAGRAPH 2 (ASSET SHARING)

When acting on the request made by another party in accordance with Articles 23 and 24 of this Convention, parties shall, to the extent permitted by domestic law and if so requested,

give priority consideration to returning the confiscated property to the requesting party so that it can give compensation to the victims of crime or return such property to their legitimate owners.

Explanatory Report

It seems logical that if provisions in a convention are deemed necessary, such a provision should also relate to the method of distribution of the confiscated property. Therefore, the drafters of this Convention gave a first indication in paragraph 2 of Article 25, which provides that priority consideration should be given to returning the confiscated property to the requesting party, in order to compensate the victims or return the property to the legitimate owner.

ISSUE: HOW TO ASSESS THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS PROVISION?

Survey analysis

Most of countries answered that they had neither any **agreements/arrangements**, nor relevant information available in this matter. One of the reasons for such practice possibly stands with the fact that up to now, such arrangements were discussed **on case by case basis without any framework agreement**. Nevertheless, one country reported that, in 2011, an agreement has been signed with another country (although this country is not a party to CETS No. 198) as part of a request from the authorities of that country concerning a crime against public health. Two new agreements of similar nature were expected to be finalised soon. On the other hand, another state party replied that they have never had such agreement while their ministry of justice is **authorised to conclude ad hoc agreements** in this matter.

In general, some remarks can be highlighted. First it appears that improving communications within networks such as **CARIN** and using **AROs** to get useful information and contact details, would make the conclusion of framework agreements easier. For this purpose, it is important **to clarify national legislation and practical operations related to confiscated property**. Second, the EU is facilitating the direct execution of confiscation orders for proceeds of crime by establishing simplified procedures for recognition among **EU countries and rules for dividing confiscated property** between the country issuing the confiscation order and the one executing it.

Example of good practice - Excerpt from the assessment report of the COP on the Republic of Moldova

Moldova can give consideration to returning confiscated property to the requesting party so that it can give compensation to the victims of the crime or return it to its legitimate owners, as envisaged under Article 25(2).

The Moldovan authorities have indicated that in practice, money and other values obtained through criminal actions or that were the targets of criminal actions, that have been withdrawn, seized, confiscated are returned as a priority to the victims of the crime and after that to the legal owners, to the state (depending on the case). If the victim of the crime is located in another state (in the requesting state), the person benefits of this right, and at the request of the contracting state, Moldovan authorities shall give priority to returning the confiscated property to the requesting party.

There are several provisions in the domestic legislation which clarify the priority given for compensation to the victims of the crime. Article 219 paragraph 8 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC) provides that any claims by individuals and legal entities which have been damaged by an act shall prevail over the claims of the state against the perpetrator of the offence. Also, Article 162 (4) of the CPC establishes as a priority the restitution to the owner of money and other valuables obtained through criminal actions or that were the targets of criminal actions. The domestic legislation does not make any distinction between a domestic or a foreign owner thus it may be assumed that in the hypothesis described by Article 162 (i.e. at the termination of a criminal case or when the case is settled in essence) the priority is given to returning the property to their legitimate owners.

In practice, the authorities have indicated that there have been cases when Moldovan criminal investigation bodies have executed requests aimed at giving priority to a requesting party, by transmitting goods aimed to compensate victims of the crime.

Guidelines

The aim of this paragraph is to strengthen the cooperation between states parties in order to compensate the victims of crime or return the confiscated property to their legitimate owners. It might also give to the parties an additional (pecuniary) motivation for the exchange of information. At the very least, Article 25(2) requires states to have in place any kind of measure to oblige the competent authorities, as a matter of priority, and where appropriate, to consider (*i.e. careful thought*) returning the confiscated property to the legitimate owner or to compensate the victim(s) of crime.¹⁰ Furthermore, the article does not require states to have framework agreements with other states parties. This is a possibility that has been given to them to decide about (in line with paragraph 3 of the same article). However, if such agreements are in place, the evaluation team should take them into account when assessing the implementation of this provision.

EU member states

In accordance with the Council Framework Decision 2006/783/JHA of 6 October 2006 on the application of the principle of mutual recognition to confiscation orders, EU countries have rules for dividing confiscated property between them. For example, in the case of money, amounts of € 10 000 and more are divided 50-50 between the issuing and the executing states. When assessing parties which are EU members, this should be taken into consideration.

However, co-operation with states parties which are non-EU members should also be covered. Parties may decide to apply similar measures to them or define specific rules through memorandum of understanding or other agreements on international co-operation on seizure and confiscation. In the latter case, the evaluation team would need to analyse any element corroborating the fact that the country has the legal framework in place to give priority consideration to returning the confiscated property to the requesting party. The nature of such elements should help to objectively judge their value:

- Multilateral or bilateral framework agreements/MoUs
- Legislative measures

10. It is important to underline here that the parties are required to provide confiscated assets to the interested other party(ies), so that they can compensate the victim(s). In other words, the assets are not provided directly to the victims in another party, but the party receiving the assets needs to have provisions and procedures in place to make sure that "repatriated" assets are destined to the victims.

- Any other measures and guidelines

Finally, the assessment of the effective implementation of this provision needs to be supported by case study, i.e. one or more case(s) of asset sharing or asset returning to compensate the victim/to the legitimate owner.

Non-EU member states

With regards to non-EU member states, the following actions should be undertaken by the evaluation team:

1. To verify the possibility for the judge/or other competent authorities to restate the confiscated property to the requesting party so that it can give compensation to the victims of the crime or return such property to their legitimate owners; i.e. to verify the compliance of the criminal procedure with this provision.
2. To analyse any element corroborating the fact that the legal framework of the country allows giving priority consideration to returning the confiscated property to the requesting party. As stated above, the nature of such elements should help to objectively judge their value (multilateral or bilateral framework agreements/MoUs, legislative measures, any other measures and guidelines).
3. As for the EU member states, the assessment needs to be supported by case study evidence, i.e. one or more case(s) of asset sharing or case(s) where assets have been returned to compensate the victim/to their legitimate owner.

ARTICLE 11 (PREVIOUS DECISIONS)

Assessed criterion

11. When determining the penalty, parties should have legislative and/or other measures as to provide for the possibility of taking into account final decisions against a natural or legal person taken in another party in relation to offences established in accordance with the CETS No. 198.

Each Party shall adopt such legislative and other measures as may be necessary to provide for the possibility of taking into account, when determining the penalty, final decisions against a natural or legal person taken in another party in relation to offences established in accordance with this Convention.

Explanatory Report

ML and FT are often carried out transnationally by criminal organisations whose members may have been tried and convicted in more than one country. At domestic level, many legal systems provide for a harsher penalty where someone has previous convictions.

The principle of international recidivism is established in a number of international legal instruments. Under Article 36(2)(iii) of the Single Convention of 30 March 1961 on Narcotic Drugs, for example, foreign convictions have to be taken into account for the purpose of establishing recidivism, subject to each party's constitutional provisions, legal system and national law.

The fact remains that there is no harmonised notion at an international level of recidivism and that certain legislations do not contain such a notion. In addition, the fact that foreign judgments are not brought to the attention of judges constitutes an additional complication. Accordingly, Article 11 provides for the possibility to take into account final decisions taken by another party in assessing a sentence. To comply with the provision parties may provide in their domestic law that previous convictions by foreign courts – like convictions by the domestic courts – will result in a harsher penalty. They may also provide that, under their general powers to assess the individual's circumstances in setting the sentence, courts should take convictions into account.

This provision does not place any positive obligation on courts or prosecution services to take steps to find out whether persons being prosecuted have received final sentences from another party's courts. It should nevertheless be noted that, under Article 13 of the European Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters (ETS No. 30) of 20 April 1959, a party's judicial authorities may request from another party extracts from and information relating to judicial records, if needed in a criminal matter.

European Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters (ETS No. 30)

This Convention is of particular importance for the implementation of this article (see the Explanatory report, paragraph 113). Article 13 of this Convention allows party's judicial authorities to request from another party extracts from the case files and other information from the judicial records, if needed in a criminal matter. Moreover, under Article 22, each party shall inform any other party of all criminal convictions and subsequent measures in respect of nationals of the latter party, entered in the judicial records. Therefore, when assessing Article 11, the ratification of this Convention should be taken into account.

European Union Law

Council Framework Decision 2008/675/JHA of 24 July 2008 *on taking into account convictions in the Member States of the European Union in the course of new criminal proceedings*

The purpose of this Framework Decision is to establish a minimum obligation for member states to take into account convictions handed down in other member states. However, this Framework Decision contains no obligation to take into account such previous convictions, for example, in cases where the information obtained under applicable instruments is not sufficient, where a national conviction would not have been possible regarding the act for which the previous conviction had been imposed or where the previously imposed sanction is unknown to the national legal system. This may cause technical issues in the implementation of the Article 11 of the Convention.

Council Framework Decision 2009/315/JHA of 26 February 2009 on the organisation and content of the exchange of information extracted from criminal record between member states.

This Framework Decision contributes to achieving the goals provided for by measure 3 of the programme, which calls for the establishment of a standard form similar to the one drawn up for the Schengen bodies, translated into all the official languages of the Union, for criminal records requests. Its main aim is to improve the exchange of information on convictions and, where imposed and entered in the criminal records of the convicting member state, on disqualifications arising from criminal conviction of citizens of the Union.

ISSUE: HOW TO ASSESS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS PROVISION?

The effective implementation of this provision should not be assessed. As stated above, this provision does not place any positive obligation on courts or prosecution services to take steps to find out whether the persons being prosecuted have received final sentences from another party's courts.

However, the national law of the assessed jurisdiction should allow such possibility. In other words, the legal framework (legal provision or jurisprudence) has to be in place, allowing the competent authorities (judges) to take into account in any manner (as an aggravated circumstances or other) final decisions taken in another party against a natural or legal person. These "technical compliance" elements have to be considered in the assessment of Article 11.

Examples of national implementing legislation¹¹

ALBANIA

Article 10 of the Criminal Code: Validity of criminal decisions of foreign courts

The criminal decisions entered by foreign courts against the Albanian citizens establishing the commission of a criminal offence shall, unless provided for differently by bilateral or multilateral agreements, be valid in Albania within the scope of the Albanian law, even with regard to the following:

- a) to the effect of qualifying the person having committed the criminal offence as recidivist;
- b) for enforcing the decisions containing ancillary sanctions;
- c) for implementing security measures;
- d) for the recovery of damages or other civil law effects.

ARMENIA

Article 17 of the Criminal Code

1. The court ruling in a foreign country can be taken into account, provided the Armenian citizen, foreign citizen or a stateless person was convicted for a crime committed outside the Republic of Armenia, and again committed a crime in the Republic of Armenia.

2. In accordance with part 1 of this article, recidivism, un-served punishment or other legal consequences of a foreign court ruling are taken into account when qualifying the new crime, assigning punishment, and exempting from criminal liability or punishment.

FRANCE

Article 132-16-6 of the Criminal Code (modified in 2005)

Convictions handed down by the criminal courts of a member state of the European Union shall be taken into account for recidivism purposes, in accordance with the rules laid down in this sub-section.

ITALY

Article 3 of the legislative decree No. 73 of 12 May 2016

Final decisions issued against natural persons by EU member states for different matters than those that are reviewed by the Court, can be taken into account by an Italian judge in order to determine the penalty, to decide whether there has been recidivism or other penal effect of the judgment or to declare whether the person is a habitual/professional offender, even in the absence of a formal procedure of recognition under the CPC. It can also be taken into account in the context of preliminary investigations and in the execution phase. To this end there is in place an automated exchange of information on the verdicts issued by EU member states called ECRIS.

MONTENEGRO

Article 42 of the Criminal Code

In Montenegro, while the legislation does not address the international recidivism explicitly, it stipulates in the CC (Article 42) and the Law on Criminal Liability for Criminal Acts of Legal Entities (Articles 17-18), that courts should take into consideration any mitigating and

11. It should be noted that not all these examples of national legislation can be considered as fully compliant with Article 11 of the Convention because of undue restrictions.

aggravating circumstances when determining the sentence, including the offender's behavior and whether the natural or legal person has re-offended.

For the purposes of the application of these provisions the CPC prescribes in Article 289 that "Before the investigation is concluded, the State Prosecutor shall obtain ... information on the accused person's previous convictions". In the cases where a cumulative sentence shall be applied, the State Prosecutor would request certified copies of the previous final judgments. The practice applied confirms that previous convictions are always "taken into consideration when a decision on the sentence is being taken".

MALTA

Article 49 of the Criminal Code

Maltese legislation explicitly addresses the international recidivism. Article 49 of the CC provides that a person is deemed to be a recidivist if, after being sentenced for any offence by a judgment, even when delivered by a foreign court, which has become *res judicata*, s/he commits another offence. The Maltese law does not require separate proceedings for the recognition of a foreign judgment as a precondition for establishing recidivism.

Such legislative measures should not contain undue restrictions, whether these are related to the membership of the states parties to the EU, or any other grounds such as the origin, the citizenship of the convicted person or the place where the crime has been committed.

On another hand, such measures should not be too ambiguous in its wording and therefore be subject to broad interpretation.

Example: "when imposing a penalty the court shall, inter alia, take into account of the characteristics and personal conditions of perpetrator, the way of life of the perpetrator prior to the commission of the offence."¹²

With such wording, it would be impossible for the judge to know whether or not he/she should take into account final decisions taken in another party.

In particular, the requirement to take into account foreign recidivism consists of legal possibility to sanction more severely (e.g. by issuing a harsher penalty, establishing a longer imprisonment sentence or denying the application of alleviating circumstances or other possible benefits) a natural or legal person against whom there has been a final decision/conviction achieved by the competent authorities of another party in relation to offences established in accordance with the Convention. This requirement under Article 11 of the Convention should be understood as follows:

- There must be a final foreign decision against a legal or natural person; this would include, for example, a conviction or any other unfavorable measure that is not subject to redress or appeal.
- National courts must have the legal possibility to take foreign decisions into account when imposing penalties. In cases where a foreign decision has been taken, courts should issue a more severe penalty than would be ordinarily imposed.

12. Available at [http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/cop198/Reports/C198-COP\(2013\)RASS3_en_PL.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/cop198/Reports/C198-COP(2013)RASS3_en_PL.pdf).

- A more severe penalty can consist of (a) a harsher punishment (e.g. a longer imprisonment, an imprisonment in lieu of a fine, a heftier fine) or (b) a denial to apply alleviating circumstances or favorable conditions that could have been considered.

Contrary to some arguments raised during the discussions on Article 11 by the Conference of the Parties, it needs to be reaffirmed that the legal possibility not to apply harsher penalty in instances where there is no foreign conviction against natural or legal person for offences established in accordance with the Convention would not fall within the scope of the Article 11 and would not fulfil the requirement of foreign recidivism. In other words, while foreign recidivism should be an aggravating factor when determining the penalty, the absence of recidivism can be taken into account in deciding to apply a more lenient punishment.

Importantly, foreign decisions against a person may be lacking either because the person was acquitted or because he/she/it was not indicted in the first place.

States parties' answers may be accompanied by any other documentation that would support the findings of the assessment team such as case law studies, any measure regulating the information exchange with other states parties on criminal records, or any information on how judges are informed in practice. However, such information shall not have the effect of negatively altering the findings of the assessment team on the compliance of the domestic legislation with the assessed provision.