



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

from : General Secretariat

to : Delegations

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Subject : Proposal for a Council Framework Decision on the right to interpretation and to translation in criminal proceedings
- General approach

Today, 23 October 2009, the Council (Justice and Home Affairs) reached a general approach on the above proposal for a Framework Decision, awaiting the opinion of the European Parliament. The text as agreed has been set out in the [Annex](#).

DK, FR, IE, LT, MT, NL and SI maintain a Parliamentary scrutiny reservation.

DRAFT

COUNCIL FRAMEWORK DECISION

on the right to interpretation and to translation in criminal proceedings

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on European Union, and in particular Articles 31(1)(c) and 34(2)(b) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Parliament,

Whereas: ¹

- (1) The European Union has set itself the objective of maintaining and developing an area of freedom, security and justice. According to the conclusions of the European Council in Tampere of 15 and 16 October 1999, and in particular point 33 thereof, the principle of mutual recognition should become the cornerstone of judicial cooperation in both civil and criminal matters within the European Union.
- (2) On 29 November 2000 the Council, in accordance with the Tampere Conclusions, adopted a programme of measures to implement the principle of mutual recognition in criminal matters². The introduction to the programme of measures states that mutual recognition is "designed to strengthen cooperation between Member States but also to enhance the protection of individual rights".

¹ The recitals have not yet all been discussed; the Council requested its preparatory bodies to examine the recitals and finalise the text. The following recitals, however, form part of the package that is submitted to Council for approval: 8, 9, 10, 11, 18.

² OJ C 12, 15.1.2001, p. 10.

- (3) Implementation of the principle of mutual recognition of decisions in criminal matters presupposes that Member States have trust in each other's criminal justice systems. The extent of the mutual recognition exercise is very much dependent on a number of parameters, which include "mechanisms for safeguarding the rights of [...] suspects"¹ and common minimum standards necessary to facilitate the application of the principle of mutual recognition
- (4) Mutual recognition can only operate effectively in a spirit of confidence, whereby not only judicial authorities, but all actors in the criminal process see decisions of the judicial authorities of other Member States as equivalent to their own, implying "not only trust in the adequacy of one's partners' rules, but also trust that these rules are correctly applied"².
- (5) Although all Member States are parties to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR), experience has shown that this in itself does not always provide a sufficient degree of trust in the criminal justice systems of other Member States.
- (6) Article 31(1) of the Treaty on European Union provides for "ensuring compatibility in rules applicable in the Member States as may be necessary to improve [judicial co-operation in criminal matters]". Common minimum standards should lead to increased confidence in the criminal justice systems of all Member States which in turn should lead to more efficient judicial cooperation in a climate of mutual trust.
- (7) Such common standards should be applied in the fields of interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings. In order to enhance the necessary confidence among Member States, this Framework Decision provides for basic common standards with regard to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings in the European Union which reflect the traditions of the Member States in applying the relevant provisions of the ECHR.

¹ OJ C 12, 15.1.2001, p. 10.

² COM(2000) 495, 26.7.2000, p. 4.

- (8) The right to interpretation and translation for those who do not understand the language of the proceedings are enshrined in Article 6 of the ECHR, as interpreted by the case law of the European Court of Human Rights. The provisions of this Framework Decision facilitate the application of those rights in practice. To this end, this Framework Decision intends to ensure the right for an accused or suspected person to have interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings with a view to safeguarding his/her rights to fair proceedings.
- (9) The rights provided for in this Framework Decision should also apply to proceedings for the execution of a European Arrest Warrant within the limits provided for by this Framework Decision. Executing Members States should provide, and bear the costs for, interpretation and translation in favour of the requested person who does not understand or speak the language of the proceedings.
- (10) The provisions of this Framework Decision should ensure that the rights of the suspected or accused person who does not speak or understand the language of the proceedings to understand the suspicions or accusations brought against him/her and to understand the proceedings in order to be able to exercise his/her rights are protected by providing free and accurate linguistic assistance. The suspected or accused person should be able, inter alia, to explain to his/her legal counsel his/her version of the events, point out any statements to which he/she disagrees and make his/her legal counsel aware of any facts that should be put forward in his/her defence. It is recalled in this connection that the provisions of this Framework Decision set minimum rules. Member States may extend the rights set out in this Framework Decision in order to provide a higher level of protection also in situations not explicitly dealt with in this Framework Decision. The level of protection should never go below the standards provided by the ECHR, as interpreted in the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights.

- (11) Member States should not be obliged to ensure interpretation of communication between the suspected or accused person and his/her legal counsel in cases where they can effectively communicate in the same language. Neither should the Member States be obliged to ensure interpretation of such communication where the right to interpretation is clearly used for purposes other than exercising fair trial rights in the proceedings concerned.
- (12) The finding that there is no need for interpretation or translation should be subject to the possibility of review, in accordance with national law. Such review may be carried out, for example, through a specific complaint procedure, or in the context of an ordinary appeal procedure against decisions on the merits.
- (13) Appropriate assistance should be provided also to suspected or accused persons suffering from hearing or speech impediments.
- (14) The duty of care towards suspected or accused persons who are in a potentially weak position, in particular because of physical impairments which affect their ability to communicate effectively, underpins a fair administration of justice. The prosecution, law enforcement and judicial authorities should therefore ensure that these persons are able to exercise effectively the rights provided for under this Framework Decision, e.g. by paying attention to any potential vulnerability that affect their ability to follow the proceedings and make themselves understood and by taking appropriate steps to ensure these rights.
- (15) The safeguard of the fairness of the proceedings requires that essential documents, or at least the important passages of such documents, should be translated for the benefit of the suspected or accused person. It is up to the authorities of the Member States to decide which documents should be translated, in accordance with national law. Some documents should always be considered essential documents that should be translated, such as the decision depriving a person of his/her liberty, the charge/indictment and any judgment.

- (16) A waiver of the right to written translation of documents should be unequivocal, with minimum safeguards, and should not run counter to any important public interest.
- (17) This Framework Decision respects the fundamental rights and observes the principles recognised by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. In particular, this Framework Decision seeks to promote the right to liberty, the right to a fair trial and the rights of the defence.
- (18) Member States should ensure that the provisions of Articles 2 to 5 of this Framework Decision, where they correspond to rights guaranteed by the ECHR are implemented consistently with those of the ECHR and as developed by the relevant case-law of the European Court of Human Rights.
- (19) Since the aim of achieving common minimum standards cannot be achieved by Member States acting unilaterally and can only be achieved at Union level, the Council may adopt measures in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity as referred to in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union and defined in Article 5 of the Treaty establishing the European Community. In accordance with the principle of proportionality, as set out in the latter Article, this Framework Decision does not go beyond what is necessary in order to achieve that objective,

HAS ADOPTED THIS FRAMEWORK DECISION:

Article 1

Scope

1. This Framework Decision lays down rules concerning the rights to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings and proceedings for the execution of a European Arrest Warrant.
2. Those rights apply to any person from the time that person is made aware by the competent authorities of a Member State that he or she is suspected or accused of having committed a criminal offence until the conclusion of the proceedings, which is understood to mean the final determination of the question whether the suspected or accused person has committed the offence.
3. This Framework Decision shall not apply to proceedings which may lead to sanctions being imposed by an authority other than a criminal court, as long as those proceedings are not pending before a court having jurisdiction in criminal matters.

Article 2

Right to interpretation

1. Member States shall ensure that a suspected or accused person who does not understand or speak the language of the criminal proceedings concerned is provided with interpretation in his/her mother tongue or in another language that he/she understands, in order to safeguard his/her rights to fair proceedings. Interpretation, including of communication between the suspected or accused person and his/her legal counsel, shall be provided during criminal proceedings before investigative and judicial authorities, including during police questioning, during all court hearings and during any necessary interim hearings, and may be provided in other situations. This provision does not affect rules of national law concerning the presence of a legal counsel during any stage of the criminal proceedings.

2. Member States shall ensure that a person with a hearing impediment receives interpretation assistance, if appropriate for that person.
3. Member States shall ensure that it is verified in any appropriate manner, including by consulting the suspected or accused person, whether he/she understands and speaks the language of the criminal proceedings and needs the assistance of an interpreter.
4. Member States shall ensure that at a stage in the proceedings, in accordance with national law, there is the possibility of a review of a finding that there is no need for interpretation. Such review does not entail the obligation for Member States to provide for a separate mechanism in which the sole ground for review is the challenging of such finding.
5. In proceedings for the execution of a European Arrest Warrant, the executing Member State shall ensure that its competent authorities provide any person subject to such proceedings who does not understand or speak the language of the proceedings, with interpretation in accordance with this Article.

Article 3

Right to translation of essential documents

1. Member States shall ensure that a suspected or accused person who does not understand the language of the proceedings concerned is provided with a translation, into his/her mother tongue or into another language that he/she understands, of all documents which are essential in order to safeguard his/her rights to fair proceedings, or at least the important passages of such documents, provided that the person concerned has the right of access to the documents concerned under national law.

2. The competent authorities shall decide which are the essential documents to be translated under paragraph 1. The essential documents to be translated, in whole or the important passages thereof, shall include at least detention orders or equivalent decisions depriving the person of his/her liberty, the charge/indictment and any judgment, where such documents exist.
3. The suspected or accused person, or his/her legal counsel, may submit a reasoned request for translation of further documents which are necessary for the effective exercise of the right of defence.
4. Member States shall ensure that at a stage in the proceedings, in accordance with national law, there is the possibility of a review if translation of a document referred to in paragraphs 2 and 3 is not provided. Such review does not entail the obligation for Member States to provide for a separate mechanism in which the sole ground for review is the challenging of such finding.
5. In proceedings for the execution of a European Arrest Warrant, the executing Member State shall ensure that its competent authorities provide any person subject to such proceedings who does not understand the language in which the European Arrest Warrant is drawn up, or into which it has been translated by the issuing Member State, with a translation of that document.
6. Provided that this does not affect the fairness of the proceedings, an oral translation or an oral summary of the documents referred to in this Article may, where appropriate, be provided instead of a written translation.
7. A person who has a right under this Article to translation of documents may, at any time, waive this right.

Article 4

Costs of interpretation and translation

Member States shall cover the costs of interpretation and translation resulting from the application of Articles 2 and 3, irrespective of the outcome of the proceedings.

Article 5

Quality of the interpretation and translation

Member States shall take concrete measures to ensure that the interpretation and translation provided shall be of adequate quality so that the suspected or accused person, as well as a person subject to the execution of a European Arrest Warrant, is fully able to exercise his or her rights.

Article 6

Non-regression clause

Nothing in this Framework Decision shall be construed as limiting or derogating from any of the rights and procedural safeguards that may be ensured under the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, under other relevant provisions of international law or under the laws of any Member States which provide a higher level of protection.

Article 7
Implementation

Member States shall take the necessary measures to comply with the provisions of this Framework Decision by at the latest ¹.

By the same date Member States shall transmit to the Council and to the Commission the text of the provisions transposing into their national law the obligations imposed on them under this Framework Decision.

Article 8
Report

The Commission shall, by ², submit a report to the European Parliament and to the Council, assessing the extent to which the Member States have taken the necessary measures in order to comply with this Framework Decision, accompanied, if necessary, by legislative proposals.

Article 9
Entry into force

This Framework Decision shall enter into force on the twentieth day following that of its publication in the *Official Journal of the European Union*.

Done at Brussels, [...]

For the Council
The President

¹ 30 months after publication of this Framework Decision in the *Official Journal*.

² 42 months after publication of this Framework Decision in the *Official Journal*.