



Recommendation of the Council on  
Combating Bribery in  
International Business  
Transactions

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## **Date(s)**

Adopted on 23/05/1997  
Abrogated on 26/11/2009

## **THE COUNCIL,**

**HAVING REGARD** to Articles 3, 5a) and 5b) of the Convention on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development of 14 December 1960;

**CONSIDERING** that bribery is a widespread phenomenon in international business transactions, including trade and investment, raising serious moral and political concerns and distorting international competitive conditions;

**CONSIDERING** that all countries share a responsibility to combat bribery in international business transactions;

**CONSIDERING** that enterprises should refrain from bribery of public servants and holders of public office, as stated in the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises;

**CONSIDERING** the progress which has been made in the implementation of the initial Recommendation of the Council on Bribery in International Business Transactions adopted on 27 May 1994, C(94)75/FINAL and the related Recommendation on the tax deductibility of bribes of foreign public officials adopted on 11 April 1996, C(96)27/FINAL; as well as the Recommendation concerning Anti-corruption Proposals for Bilateral Aid Procurement, endorsed by the High Level Meeting of the Development Assistance Committee on 7 May 1996;

**WELCOMING** other recent developments which further advance international understanding and co-operation regarding bribery in business transactions, including actions of the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the European Union and the Organisation of American States;

**HAVING REGARD** to the commitment made at the meeting of the Council at Ministerial level in May 1996, to criminalise the bribery of foreign public officials in an effective and co-ordinated manner;

**NOTING** that an international convention in conformity with the agreed common elements set forth in the Annex, is an appropriate instrument to attain such criminalisation rapidly.

**CONSIDERING** the consensus which has developed on the measures which should be taken to implement the 1994 Recommendation, in particular, with respect to the modalities and international instruments to facilitate criminalisation of bribery of foreign public officials; tax deductibility of bribes to foreign public officials; accounting requirements, external audit and internal company controls; and rules and regulations on public procurement;

**RECOGNISING** that achieving progress in this field requires not only efforts by individual countries but multilateral co-operation, monitoring and follow-up;

### **General**

**I. RECOMMENDS** that Member countries take effective measures to deter, prevent and combat the bribery of foreign public officials in connection with international business transactions.

**II. RECOMMENDS** that each Member country examine the following areas and, in conformity with its jurisdictional and other basic legal principles, take concrete and meaningful steps to meet this goal:

- i) criminal laws and their application, in accordance with section III and the Annex to this Recommendation;
- ii) tax legislation, regulations and practice, to eliminate any indirect support of bribery, in accordance with section IV;
- iii) company and business accounting, external audit and internal control requirements and practices, in accordance with section V;
- iv) banking, financial and other relevant provisions, to ensure that adequate records would be kept and made available for inspection and investigation;

- v) public subsidies, licences, government procurement contracts or other public advantages, so that advantages could be denied as a sanction for bribery in appropriate cases, and in accordance with section VI for procurement contracts and aid procurement;
- vi) civil, commercial, and administrative laws and regulations, so that such bribery would be illegal;
- vii) international co-operation in investigations and other legal proceedings, in accordance with section VII.

### **Criminalisation of Bribery of Foreign Public Officials**

**III. RECOMMENDS** that Member countries should criminalise the bribery of foreign public officials in an effective and co-ordinated manner by submitting proposals to their legislative bodies by 1 April 1998, in conformity with the agreed common elements set forth in the Annex, and seeking their enactment by the end of 1998.

**DECIDES**, to this end, to open negotiations promptly on an international convention to criminalise bribery in conformity with the agreed common elements, the treaty to be open for signature by the end of 1997, with a view to its entry into force twelve months thereafter.

### **Tax Deductibility**

**IV. URGES** the prompt implementation by Member countries of the 1996 Recommendation which reads as follows: "that those Member countries which do not disallow the deductibility of bribes to foreign public officials re-examine such treatment with the intention of denying this deductibility. Such action may be facilitated by the trend to treat bribes to foreign officials as illegal."

### **Accounting Requirements, External Audit and Internal Company Controls**

**V. RECOMMENDS** that Member countries take the steps necessary so that laws, rules and practices with respect to accounting requirements, external audit and internal company controls are in line with the following principles and are fully used in order to prevent and detect bribery of foreign public officials in international business.

#### A. Adequate accounting requirements

- i) Member countries should require companies to maintain adequate records of the sums of money received and expended by the company, identifying the matters in respect of which the receipt and expenditure takes place. Companies should be prohibited from making off the books transactions or keeping off-the-books accounts.
- ii) Member countries should require companies to disclose in their financial statements the full range of material contingent liabilities.
- iii) Member countries should adequately sanction accounting omissions, falsifications and fraud.

#### B. Independent External Audit

- i) Member countries should consider whether requirements to submit to external audit are adequate.
- ii) Member countries and professional associations should maintain adequate standards to ensure the independence of external auditors which permits them to provide an objective assessment of company accounts, financial statements and internal controls.
- iii) Member countries should require the auditor who discovers indications of a possible illegal act of bribery to report this discovery to management and, as appropriate, to corporate monitoring bodies.
- iv) Member countries should consider requiring the auditor to report indications of a possible illegal act of bribery to competent authorities.

C. Internal company controls

- i) Member countries should encourage the development and adoption of adequate internal company controls, including standards of conduct.
- ii) Member countries should encourage company management to make statements in their annual reports about their internal control mechanisms, including those which contribute to preventing bribery.
- iii) Member countries should encourage the creation of monitoring bodies, independent of management, such as audit committees of boards of directors or of supervisory boards.
- iv) Member countries should encourage companies to provide channels for communication by, and protection for, persons not willing to violate professional standards or ethics under instructions or pressure from hierarchical superiors.

**Public procurement**

**VI. RECOMMENDS:**

- i) Member countries should support the efforts in the World Trade Organisation to pursue an agreement on transparency in government procurement;
- ii) Member countries' laws and regulations should permit authorities to suspend from competition for public contracts enterprises determined to have bribed foreign public officials in contravention of that Member's national laws and, to the extent a Member applies procurement sanctions to enterprises that are determined to have bribed domestic public officials, such sanctions should be applied equally in case of bribery of foreign public officials.<sup>i</sup>
- iii) In accordance with the Recommendation of the Development Assistance Committee, Member countries should require anti-corruption provisions in bilateral aid-funded procurement, promote the proper implementation of anti-corruption provisions in international development institutions, and work closely with development partners to combat corruption in all development co-operation efforts.<sup>ii</sup>

**International Co-operation**

**VII. RECOMMENDS** that Member countries, in order to combat bribery in international business transactions, in conformity with their jurisdictional and other basic legal principles, take the following actions:

- i) consult and otherwise co-operate with appropriate authorities in other countries in investigations and other legal proceedings concerning specific cases of such bribery through such means as sharing of information (spontaneously or upon request), provision of evidence and extradition;
- ii) make full use of existing agreements and arrangements for mutual international legal assistance and where necessary, enter into new agreements or arrangements for this purpose;
- iii) ensure that their national laws afford an adequate basis for this co-operation and, in particular, in accordance with paragraph 8 of the Annex.

**Follow-up and institutional arrangements**

**VIII. INSTRUCTS** the Committee on International Investment and Multinational Enterprises, through its Working Group on Bribery in International Business Transactions, to carry out a programme of systematic follow-up to monitor and promote the full implementation of this Recommendation, in co-operation with the Committee for Fiscal Affairs, the Development Assistance Committee and other OECD bodies, as appropriate. This follow-up will include, in particular:

- i) receipt of notifications and other information submitted to it by the Member countries;

- ii) regular reviews of steps taken by Member countries to implement the Recommendation and to make proposals, as appropriate, to assist Member countries in its implementation; these reviews will be based on the following complementary systems:
  - a system of self-evaluation, where Member countries' responses on the basis of a questionnaire will provide a basis for assessing the implementation of the Recommendation;
  - a system of mutual evaluation, where each Member country will be examined in turn by the Working Group on Bribery, on the basis of a report which will provide an objective assessment of the progress of the Member country in implementing the Recommendation.
- iii) examination of specific issues relating to bribery in international business transactions;
- iv) examination of the feasibility of broadening the scope of the work of the OECD to combat international bribery to include private sector bribery and bribery of foreign officials for reasons other than to obtain or retain business;
- v) provision of regular information to the public on its work and activities and on implementation of the Recommendation.

**IX. NOTES** the obligation of Member countries to co-operate closely in this follow-up programme, pursuant to Article 3 of the OECD Convention.

**X. INSTRUCTS** the Committee on International Investment and Multinational Enterprises to review the implementation of Sections III and, in co-operation with the Committee on Fiscal Affairs, Section IV of this Recommendation and report to Ministers in Spring 1998, to report to the Council after the first regular review and as appropriate thereafter, and to review this Revised Recommendation within three years after its adoption.

#### **Co-operation with non members**

**XI. APPEALS** to non-member countries to adhere to the Recommendation and participate in any institutional follow-up or implementation mechanism.

**XII. INSTRUCTS** the Committee on International Investment and Multinational Enterprises through its Working Group on Bribery, to provide a forum for consultations with countries which have not yet adhered, in order to promote wider participation in the Recommendation and its follow-up.

#### **Relations with international governmental and non-governmental organisations**

**XIII. INVITES** the Committee on International Investment and Multinational Enterprises through its Working Group on Bribery, to consult and co-operate with the international organisations and international financial institutions active in the combat against bribery in international business transactions and consult regularly with the non-governmental organisations and representatives of the business community active in this field.

### **ANNEX**

#### **Agreed Common Elements of Criminal Legislation and Related Action**

- 1) *Elements of the offence of active bribery*
  - i) Bribery is understood as the promise or giving of any undue payment or other advantages, whether directly or through intermediaries to a public official, for himself or for a third party, to influence the official to act or refrain from acting in the performance of his or her official duties in order to obtain or retain business.
  - ii) Foreign public official means any person holding a legislative, administrative or judicial office of a foreign country or in an international organisation, whether

appointed or elected or, any person exercising a public function or task in a foreign country.

- iii) The offeror is any person, on his own behalf or on the behalf of any other natural person or legal entity.

2) *Ancillary elements or offences*

The general criminal law concepts of attempt, complicity and/or conspiracy of the law of the prosecuting state are recognised as applicable to the offence of bribery of a foreign public official.

3) *Excuses and defences*

Bribery of foreign public officials in order to obtain or retain business is an offence irrespective of the value or the outcome of the bribe, of perceptions of local custom or of the tolerance of bribery by local authorities.

4) *Jurisdiction*

Jurisdiction over the offence of bribery of foreign public officials should in any case be established when the offence is committed in whole or in part in the prosecuting State's territory. The territorial basis for jurisdiction should be interpreted broadly so that an extensive physical connection to the bribery act is not required.

States which prosecute their nationals for offences committed abroad should do so in respect of the bribery of foreign public officials according to the same principles.

States which do not prosecute on the basis of the nationality principle should be prepared to extradite their nationals in respect of the bribery of foreign public officials.

All countries should review whether their current basis for jurisdiction is effective in the fight against bribery of foreign public officials and, if not, should take appropriate remedial steps.

5) *Sanctions*

The offence of bribery of foreign public officials should be sanctioned/punishable by effective, proportionate and dissuasive criminal penalties, sufficient to secure effective mutual legal assistance and extradition, comparable to those applicable to the bribers in cases of corruption of domestic public officials.

Monetary or other civil, administrative or criminal penalties on any legal person involved, should be provided, taking into account the amounts of the bribe and of the profits derived from the transaction obtained through the bribe.

Forfeiture or confiscation of instrumentalities and of the bribe benefits and the profits derived from the transactions obtained through the bribe should be provided, or comparable fines or damages imposed.

6) *Enforcement*

In view of the seriousness of the offence of bribery of foreign public officials, public prosecutors should exercise their discretion independently, based on professional motives. They should not be influenced by considerations of national economic interest, fostering good political relations or the identity of the victim.

Complaints of victims should be seriously investigated by the competent authorities.

The statute of limitations should allow adequate time to address this complex offence.



National governments should provide adequate resources to prosecuting authorities so as to permit effective prosecution of bribery of foreign public officials.

7) *Connected provisions (criminal and non-criminal)*

– Accounting, recordkeeping and disclosure requirements

In order to combat bribery of foreign public officials effectively, states should also adequately sanction accounting omissions, falsifications and fraud.

– Money laundering

The bribery of foreign public officials should be made a predicate offence for purposes of money laundering legislation where bribery of a domestic public official is a money laundering predicate offence, without regard to the place where the bribery occurs.

8) *International co-operation*

Effective mutual legal assistance is critical to be able to investigate and obtain evidence in order to prosecute cases of bribery of foreign public officials.

Adoption of laws criminalising the bribery of foreign public officials would remove obstacles to mutual legal assistance created by dual criminality requirements.

Countries should tailor their laws on mutual legal assistance to permit co-operation with countries investigating cases of bribery of foreign public officials even including third countries (country of the offeror; country where the act occurred) and countries applying different types of criminalisation legislation to reach such cases.

Means should be explored and undertaken to improve the efficiency of mutual legal assistance.

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<sup>i</sup> Member countries' systems for applying sanctions for bribery of domestic officials differ as to whether the determination of bribery is based on a criminal conviction, indictment or administrative procedure, but in all cases it is based on substantial evidence.

<sup>ii</sup> This paragraph summarises the DAC recommendation, which is addressed to DAC members only, and addresses it to all OECD Members and eventually non-member countries which adhere to the Recommendation.

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