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Representing Europe's lawyers

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR LAWYERS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION



Conseil des Barreaux de l'Union Européenne - Council of the Bars and Law Societies of the European Union

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RAT DER ANWALTSCHAFTEN DER EUROPÄISCHEN UNION – RAAD VAN DE BALIES VAN DE EUROPESE UNIE – RÅDET FOR ADVOKATSAMFUND
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NEN – CONSIGLIO DEGLI ORDINI FORENSI DELL'UNIONE EUROPEA – CONSEJO DE LOS COLEGIOS DE ABOGADOS DE LA UNIÓN EUROPEA
– EUROOPAN UNIONIN ASIANAJAJALIITTOJEN NEUVOSTO – Συμβούλιο Των Δικηγορικών Συλλογών Της Ενωμένης Ευρώπης

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CONTENTS

1. PREAMBLE

- 1.1. The Function of the Lawyer in Society
- 1.2. The Nature of Rules of Professional Conduct
- 1.3. The Purpose of the Code
- 1.4. Field of Application Ratione Personae
- 1.5. Field of Application Ratione Materiae
- 1.6. Definitions

2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- 2.1. Independence
- 2.2. Trust and Personal Integrity
- 2.3. Confidentiality
- 2.4. Respect for the Rules of Other Bars and Law Societies
- 2.5. Incompatible Occupations
- 2.6. Personal Publicity
- 2.7. The Client's Interest
- 2.8. Limitation of Lawyer's Liability towards his Client

3. RELATIONS WITH CLIENTS

- 3.1. Acceptance and Termination of Instructions
- 3.2. Conflict of Interest
- 3.3. Pactum de Quota Litis
- 3.4. Regulation of Fees
- 3.5. Payment on Account
- 3.6. Fee Sharing with Non-Lawyers
- 3.7. Cost Effective Resolution and Availability of Legal Aid
- 3.8. Clients funds
- 3.9. Professional Indemnity Insurance

4. RELATIONS WITH THE COURTS

- 4.1. Applicable Rules of Conduct in Court
- 4.2. Fair Conduct of Proceedings
- 4.3. Demeanour in Court
- 4.4. False or Misleading Information
- 4.5. Extension to Arbitrators Etc.

5. RELATIONS BETWEEN LAWYERS

- 5.1. Corporate Spirit of the Profession
- 5.2. Co-operation Among Lawyers of Different Member States
- 5.3. Correspondence Between Lawyers
- 5.4. Referral Fees
- 5.5. Communication with Opposing Parties
- 5.6. (Deleted by decision of the CCBE Plenary Session in Dublin on December 6th, 2002)
- 5.7. Responsibility for Fees
- 5.8. Training Young Lawyers
- 5.9. Disputes amongst Lawyers in Different Member States

1. PREAMBLE

1.1. The Function of the Lawyer in Society

In a society founded on respect for the rule of law the lawyer fulfils a special role. His duties do not begin and end with the faithful performance of what he is instructed to do so far as the law permits. A lawyer must serve the interests of justice as well as those whose rights and liberties he is trusted to assert and defend and it is his duty not only to plead his client's cause but to be his adviser.

A lawyer's function therefore lays on him a variety of legal and moral obligations (sometimes appearing to be in conflict with each other) towards:

- the client;
- the courts and other authorities before whom the lawyer pleads his client's cause or acts on his behalf;
- the legal profession in general and each fellow member of it in particular;
- the public for whom the existence of a free and independent profession, bound together by respect for rules made by the profession itself, is an essential means of safeguarding human rights in face of the power of the state and other interests in society.

1.2. The Nature of Rules of Professional Conduct

1.2.1. Rules of professional conduct are designed through their willing acceptance by those to whom they apply to ensure the proper performance by the lawyer of a function which is recognised as essential in all civilized societies. The failure of the lawyer to observe these rules must in the last resort result in a disciplinary sanction.

1.2.2. The particular rules of each Bar or Law Society arise from its own traditions. They are adapted to the organisation and sphere of activity of the profession in the Member State concerned and to its judicial and administrative procedures and to its national legislation. It is neither possible nor desirable that they should be taken out of their context nor that an attempt should be made to give general application to rules which are inherently incapable of such application.

The particular rules of each Bar and Law Society nevertheless are based on the same values and in most cases demonstrate a common foundation.

1.3. The Purpose of the Code

1.3.1. The continued integration of the European Union and European Economic Area and the increasing frequency of the cross-border activities of lawyers within the European Economic Area have made necessary in the public interest

the statement of common rules which apply to all lawyers from the European Economic Area whatever Bar or Law Society they belong to in relation to their cross-border practice. A particular purpose of the statement of those rules is to mitigate the difficulties which result from the application of «double deontology» as set out in Article 4 of the E.C. Directive 77/249 of 22nd March 1977.

1.3.2. The organisations representing the legal profession through the CCBE propose that the rules codified in the following articles:

- be recognised at the present time as the expression of a consensus of all the Bars and Law Societies of the European Union and European Economic Area;
- be adopted as enforceable rules as soon as possible in accordance with national or EEA procedures in relation to the cross-border activities of the lawyer in the European Union and European Economic Area;
- be taken into account in all revisions of national rules of deontology or professional practice with a view to their progressive harmonisation.

They further express the wish that the national rules of deontology or professional practice be interpreted and applied whenever possible in a way consistent with the rules in this Code.

After the rules in this Code have been adopted as enforceable rules in relation to his cross-border activities the lawyer will remain bound to observe the rules of the Bar or Law Society to which he belongs to the extent that they are consistent with the rules in this Code.

1.4. Field of Application *Ratione Personae*

The following rules shall apply to lawyers of the European Union and the European Economic Area as they are defined by the Directive 77/249 of 22nd March 1977.

1.5. Field of Application *Ratione Materiae*

Without prejudice to the pursuit of a progressive harmonisation of rules of deontology or professional practice which apply only internally within a Member State, the following rules shall apply to the cross-border activities of the lawyer within the European Union and the European Economic Area. Cross-border activities shall mean:

- (a) all professional contacts with lawyers of Member States other than his own;
- (b) the professional activities of the lawyer in a Member State other than his own, whether or not the lawyer is physically present in that Member State.

1.6. Definitions

In these rules:

"Home Member State" means the Member State of the Bar or Law Society to which the lawyer belongs.

"Host Member State" means any other Member State where the lawyer carries on cross-border activities.

"Competent authority" means the professional organisation(s) or authority(ies) of the Member State concerned responsible for the laying down of rules of professional conduct and the administration of discipline of lawyers.

2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

2.1. Independence

2.1.1. The many duties to which a lawyer is subject require his absolute independence, free from all other influence, especially such as may arise from his personal interests or external pressure. Such independence is as necessary to trust in the process of justice as the impartiality of the judge. A lawyer must therefore avoid any impairment of his independence and be careful not to compromise his professional standards in order to please his client, the court or third parties.

2.1.2. This independence is necessary in non-contentious matters as well as in litigation. Advice given by a lawyer to his client has no value if it is given only to ingratiate himself, to serve his personal interests or in response to outside pressure.

2.2. Trust and Personal Integrity

Relationships of trust can only exist if a lawyer's personal honour, honesty and integrity are beyond doubt. For the lawyer these traditional virtues are professional obligations.

2.3. Confidentiality

2.3.1. It is of the essence of a lawyer's function that he should be told by his client things which the client would not tell to others, and that he should be the recipient of other information on a basis of confidence. Without the certainty of confidentiality there cannot be trust. Confidentiality is therefore a primary and fundamental right and duty of the lawyer.

The lawyer's obligation of confidentiality serves the interest of the administration of justice as well as the interest of the client. It is therefore entitled to special protection by the State.

- 2.3.2. A lawyer shall respect the confidentiality of all information that becomes known to him in the course of his professional activity.
- 2.3.3. The obligation of confidentiality is not limited in time.
- 2.3.4. A lawyer shall require his associates and staff and anyone engaged by him in the course of providing professional services to observe the same obligation of confidentiality.

2.4. Respect for the Rules of Other Bars and Law Societies

Under the laws of the European Union and the European Economic Area a lawyer from another Member State may be bound to comply with the rules of the Bar or Law Society of the Host Member State. Lawyers have a duty to inform themselves as to the rules which will affect them in the performance of any particular activity.

Member organisations of CCBE are obliged to deposit their codes of conduct at the Secretariat of CCBE so that any lawyer can get hold of the copy of the current code from the Secretariat.

2.5. Incompatible Occupations

- 2.5.1. In order to perform his functions with due independence and in a manner which is consistent with his duty to participate in the administration of justice a lawyer is excluded from some occupations.
- 2.5.2. A lawyer who acts in the representation or the defence of a client in legal proceedings or before any public authorities in a Host Member State shall there observe the rules regarding incompatible occupations as they are applied to lawyers of the Host Member State.
- 2.5.3. A lawyer established in a Host Member State in which he wished to participate directly in commercial or other activities not connected with the practice of the law shall respect the rules regarding forbidden or incompatible occupations as they are applied to lawyers of that Member State.

2.6. Personal Publicity

- 2.6.1. A lawyer is entitled to inform the public about his services provided that the information is accurate and not misleading, and respectful of the obligation of confidentiality and other core values of the profession.
- 2.6.2. Personal publicity by a lawyer in any form of media such as by press, radio, television, by electronic commercial communications or otherwise is permitted to the extent it complies with the requirements of 2.6.1.

2.7. The Client's Interest

Subject to due observance of all rules of law and professional conduct, a lawyer must always act in the best interests of his client and must put those interests before his own interests or those of fellow members of the legal profession.

2.8. Limitation of Lawyer's Liability towards his Client

To the extent permitted by the law of the Home Member State and the Host Member State, the lawyer may limit his liabilities towards his client in accordance with rules of the Code of Conduct to which he is subject.

3. RELATIONS WITH CLIENTS

3.1. Acceptance and Termination of Instructions

3.1.1. A lawyer shall not handle a case for a party except on his instructions. He may, however, act in a case in which he has been instructed by another lawyer who himself acts for the party or where the case has been assigned to him by a competent body.

The lawyer should make reasonable efforts to ascertain the identity, competence and authority of the person or body who instructs him when the specific circumstances show that the identity, competence and authority are uncertain.

3.1.2. A lawyer shall advise and represent his client promptly, conscientiously and diligently. He shall undertake personal responsibility for the discharge of the instructions given to him. He shall keep his client informed as to the progress of the matter entrusted to him.

3.1.3. A lawyer shall not handle a matter which he knows or ought to know he is not competent to handle, without co-operating with a lawyer who is competent to handle it.

A lawyer shall not accept instructions unless he can discharge those instructions promptly having regard to the pressure of other work.

3.1.4. A lawyer shall not be entitled to exercise his right to withdraw from a case in such a way or in such circumstances that the client may be unable to find other legal assistance in time to prevent prejudice being suffered by the client.

3.2. Conflict of Interest

3.2.1. A lawyer may not advise, represent or act on behalf of two or more clients in the same matter if there is a conflict, or a significant risk of a conflict, between the interests of those clients.

- 3.2.2. A lawyer must cease to act for both client when a conflict of interests arises between those clients and also whenever there is a risk of a breach of confidence or where his independence may be impaired.
- 3.2.3. A lawyer must also refrain from acting for a new client if there is a risk of a breach of confidence entrusted to the lawyer by a former client or if the knowledge which the lawyer possesses of the affairs of the former client would give an undue advantage to the new client.
- 3.2.4. Where lawyers are practising in association, paragraphs 3.2.1 to 3.2.3 above shall apply to the association and all its members.

3.3. Pactum de Quota Litis

- 3.3.1. A lawyer shall not be entitled to make a pactum de quota litis.
- 3.3.2. By «pactum de quota litis» is meant an agreement between a lawyer and his client entered into prior to final conclusion of a matter to which the client is a party, by virtue of which the client undertakes to pay the lawyer a share of the result regardless of whether this is represented by a sum of money or by any other benefit achieved by the client upon the conclusion of the matter.
- 3.3.3. The pactum de quota litis does not include an agreement that fees be charged in proportion to the value of a matter handled by the lawyer if this is in accordance with an officially approved fee scale or under the control of competent authority having jurisdiction over the lawyer.

3.4. Regulation of Fees

- 3.4.1. A fee charged by a lawyer shall be fully disclosed to his client and shall be fair and reasonable.
- 3.4.2. Subject to any proper agreement to the contrary between a lawyer and his client fees charged by a lawyer shall be subject to regulation in accordance with the rules applied to members of the Bar or Law Society to which he belongs. If he belongs to more than one Bar or Law Society the rules applied shall be those with the closest connection to the contract between the lawyer and his client.

3.5. Payment on Account

If a lawyer requires a payment on account of his fees and/or disbursements such payment should not exceed a reasonable estimate of the fees and probable disbursements involved.

Failing such payment, a lawyer may withdraw from the case or refuse to handle it, but subject always to paragraph 3.1.4 above.

3.6. Fee Sharing with Non-Lawyers

- 3.6.1. Subject as after-mentioned a lawyer may not share his fees with a person who is not a lawyer except where an association between the lawyer and the other person is permitted by the laws of the Member State to which the lawyer belongs.
- 3.6.2. The provisions of 3.6.1 above shall not preclude a lawyer from paying a fee, commission or other compensation to a deceased lawyer's heirs or to a retired lawyer in respect of taking over the deceased or retired lawyer's practice.

3.7. Cost Effective Resolution and Availability of Legal Aid

- 3.7.1. The lawyer should at all times strive to achieve the most cost effective resolution of the client's dispute and should advise the client at appropriate stages as to the desirability of attempting a settlement and/or a reference to alternative dispute resolution.
- 3.7.2. A lawyer shall inform his client of the availability of legal aid where applicable.

3.8. Clients funds

- 3.8.1. When lawyers at any time in the course of their practice come into possession of funds on behalf of their clients or third parties (hereinafter called «client's funds») it shall be obligatory:
 - 3.8.1.1. That client's funds shall always be held in an account of a bank or similar institution subject to supervision of Public Authority and that all clients' funds received by a lawyer should be paid into such an account unless the client explicitly or by implication agrees that the funds should be dealt with otherwise.
 - 3.8.1.2. That any account in which the client's funds are held in the name of the lawyer should indicate in the title or designation that the funds are held on behalf of the client or clients of the lawyer.
 - 3.8.1.3. That any account or accounts in which client's funds are held in the name of the lawyer should at all times contain a sum which is not less than the total of the client's funds held by the lawyer.
 - 3.8.1.4. That all funds shall be paid to clients immediately or upon such conditions as the client may authorise.
 - 3.8.1.5. That payments made from client's funds on behalf of a client to any other person including:
 - a) payments made to or for one client from funds held for another client;
 - b) payment of the lawyer's fees,

be prohibited except to the extent that they are permitted by law or are ordered by the court and have the express or implied authority of the client for whom the payment is being made.

3.8.1.6. That the lawyer shall maintain full and accurate records, available to each client on request, showing all his dealings with his client's funds and distinguishing client's funds from other funds held by him.

3.8.1.7. That the competent authorities in all Member States should have powers to allow them to examine and investigate on a confidential basis the financial records of lawyer's client's funds to ascertain whether or not the rules which they make are being complied with and to impose sanctions upon lawyers who fail to comply with those rules.

3.8.2. Subject as aftermentioned, and without prejudice to the rules set out in 3.8.1 above, a lawyer who holds client's funds in the course of carrying on practice in any Member State must comply with the rules relating to holding and accounting for client's funds which are applied by the competent authorities of the Home Member State.

3.8.3. A lawyer who carries on practice or provides services in a Host Member State may with the agreement of the competent authorities of the Home and Host Member State concerned comply with the requirements of the Host Member State to the exclusion of the requirements of the Home Member State. In that event he shall take reasonable steps to inform his clients that he complies with the requirements in force in the Host Member State.

3.9. Professional Indemnity Insurance

3.9.1. Lawyers shall be insured at all times against claims based on professional negligence of an extent which is reasonable having regard to the nature and extent of the risks which each lawyer may incur in his practice.

3.9.2. When a lawyer provides services or carries out practice in a Host Member State, the following shall apply:

3.9.2.1. The lawyer must comply with any Rules relating to his obligation to insure against his professional liability as a lawyer which are in force in his Home Member State.

3.9.2.2. A lawyer who is obliged so to insure in his Home Member State and who provides services or carries out practice in any Host Member State shall use his best endeavours to obtain insurance cover on the basis required in his Home Member State extended to services which he provides or practice which he carries out in a Host Member State.

- 3.9.2.3. A lawyer who fails to obtain the extended insurance cover referred to in paragraph 3.9.2.2 above or who is not obliged so to insure in his Home Member State and who provides services or carries out practice in a Host Member State shall in so far as possible obtain insurance cover against his professional liability as a lawyer whilst acting for clients in that Host Member State on at least a basis equivalent to that required of lawyers in the Host Member State.
- 3.9.2.4. To the extent that a lawyer is unable to obtain the insurance cover required by the foregoing rules, he shall inform such of his clients as might be effected.
- 3.9.2.5. A lawyer who carries out practice or provides services in a Host Member State may with the agreement of the competent authorities of the Home and Host Member States concerned comply with such insurance requirements as are in force in the Host Member State to the exclusion of the insurance requirements of the Home Member State. In this event he shall take reasonable steps to inform his clients that he is insured according to the requirements in force in the Host Member State.

4. RELATIONS WITH THE COURTS

4.1. Applicable Rules of Conduct in Court

A lawyer who appears, or takes part in a case before a court or tribunal in a Member State, must comply with the rules of conduct applied before that court or tribunal.

4.2. Fair Conduct of Proceedings

A lawyer must always have due regard for the fair conduct of proceedings. He must not, for example, make contact with the judge without first informing the lawyer acting for the opposing party or submit exhibits, notes or documents to the judge without communicating them in good time to the lawyer on the other side unless such steps are permitted under the relevant rules of procedure. To the extent not prohibited by law a lawyer must not divulge or submit to the court any proposals for settlement of the case made by the other party or its lawyer without the express consent by the other party's lawyer.

4.3. Demeanour in Court

A lawyer shall while maintaining due respect and courtesy towards the court defend the interests of his client honourably and fearlessly without regard to his own interests or to any consequences to himself or to any other person.

4.4. False or Misleading Information

A lawyer shall never knowingly give false or misleading information to the court.

4.5. Extension to Arbitrators Etc.

The rules governing a lawyer's relations with the courts apply also to his relations with arbitrators and any other persons exercising judicial or quasi-judicial functions, even on an occasional basis.

5. RELATIONS BETWEEN LAWYERS

5.1. Corporate Spirit of the Profession

5.1.1. The corporate spirit of the profession requires a relationship of trust and co-operation between lawyers for the benefit of their clients and in order to avoid unnecessary litigation and other behaviour harmful to the reputation of the profession. It can, however, never justify setting the interests of the profession against those of the client.

5.1.2. A lawyer should recognise all other lawyers of Member States as professional colleagues and act fairly and courteously towards them.

5.2. Co-operation Among Lawyers of Different Member States

5.2.1. It is the duty of a lawyer who is approached by a colleague from another Member State not to accept instructions in a matter which he is not competent to undertake. He should in such case be prepared to help his colleague to obtain the information necessary to enable him to instruct a lawyer who is capable of providing the service asked for.

5.2.2. Where a lawyer of a Member State co-operates with a lawyer from another Member State, both have a general duty to take into account the differences which may exist between their respective legal systems and the professional organisations, competences and obligations of lawyers in the Member States concerned.

5.3. Correspondence Between Lawyers

5.3.1. If a lawyer sending a communication to a lawyer in another Member State wishes it remain confidential or without prejudice he should clearly express this intention when communicating the document.

5.3.2. If the recipient of the communication is unable to ensure its status as confidential or without prejudice he should return it to the sender without revealing the contents to others.

5.4. Referral Fees

- 5.4.1. A lawyer may not demand or accept from another lawyer or any other person a fee, commission or any other compensation for referring or recommending the lawyer to a client.
- 5.4.2. A lawyer may not pay anyone a fee, commission or any other compensation as a consideration for referring a client to himself.

5.5. Communication with Opposing Parties

A lawyer shall not communicate about a particular case or matter directly with any person whom he knows to be represented or advised in the case or matter by another lawyer, without the consent of that other lawyer (and shall keep the other lawyer informed of any such communications).

5.6. (Deleted by decision of the CCBE Plenary Session in Dublin on December 6th, 2002)

5.7. Responsibility for Fees

In professional relations between members of Bars of different Member States, where a lawyer does not confine himself to recommending another lawyer or introducing him to the client but himself entrusts a correspondent with a particular matter or seeks his advice, he is personally bound, even if the client is insolvent, to pay the fees, costs and outlays which are due to the foreign correspondent. The lawyers concerned may, however, at the outset of the relationship between them make special arrangements on this matter. Further, the instructing lawyer may at any time limit his personal responsibility to the amount of the fees, costs and outlays incurred before intimation to the foreign lawyer of his disclaimer of responsibility for the future.

5.8. Training Young Lawyers

In order to improve trust and co-operation amongst lawyers of different Member States for the clients' benefit there is a need to encourage a better knowledge of the laws and procedures in different Member States. Therefore, when considering the need for the profession to give good training to young lawyers, lawyers should take into account the need to give training to young lawyers from other Member States.

5.9. Disputes amongst Lawyers in Different Member States

- 5.9.1. If a lawyer considers that a colleague in another Member State has acted in breach of a rule of professional conduct he shall draw the matter to the attention of his colleague.

- 5.9.2. If any personal dispute of a professional nature arises amongst lawyers in different Member States they should if possible first try to settle it in a friendly way.
- 5.9.3. A lawyer shall not commence any form of proceedings against a colleague in another Member State on matters referred to in 5.9.1 or 5.9.2 above without first informing the Bars or Law Societies to which they both belong for the purpose of allowing both Bars or Law Societies concerned an opportunity to assist in reaching a settlement.