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This factsheet does not bind the Court and is not exhaustive

Case-law concerning the European Union

To date, the [European Union](#) (EU) is not yet a Party to the [European Convention on Human Rights](#) (the Convention)¹. Accordingly, its acts cannot as such be the subject of applications to the European Court of Human Rights (the Court).

Nevertheless, issues relating to Community law have been raised regularly with the Court and the former European Commission of Human Rights².

The principles established by the European Commission of Human Rights

Responsibility of a State which signs up to two treaties successively

As far back as 1958 the European Commission of Human Rights ruled that “if a State contracts treaty obligations and subsequently concludes another international agreement which disables it from performing its obligations under the first treaty, it will be answerable for any resulting breach of its obligations under the earlier treaty” (*X v. Germany*, application no. 235/56, decision of the Commission of 10 June 1958, *Yearbook 2*, p. 256). This was particularly so in cases where the obligations in question had been assumed in a treaty, the [European Convention on Human Rights](#), whose guarantees affected “the public order of Europe” (*Austria v. Italy*, no. 788/60, decision of the Commission of 11 January 1961, *Yearbook 4*, p. 116).

Inadmissibility of applications against the European Communities

Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail v. the European Communities, alternatively: their Member States a) jointly and b) severally

Decision of the European Commission of Human Rights of 10 July 1978

A French trade union complained of the fact that the French Government had not proposed it as a candidate for appointment, by the Council of the European Communities, to the Consultative Committee attached to the High Authority of the ECSC (European Coal and Steel Community).

¹ On the EU accession to the European Convention on Human Rights, see the [thematic file](#) available on the Council of Europe’s internet site.

² Together with the European Court of Human Rights and the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, the European Commission of Human Rights, which sat in Strasbourg from July 1954 to October 1999, supervised Contracting States’ compliance with their obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights. The Commission ceased to exist when the Court became permanent on 1st November 1998.

The Commission held that applications against the European Communities were to be declared **inadmissible** as being directed against a “person” not a Party to the Convention.

Possibility of bringing a case against a State for national measures giving effect to Community law

Etienne Tête v. France

Decision of the Commission of 9 December 1987

A French politician complained about the Law on the election of French representatives to the European Parliament, which he considered discriminatory and in breach of the right to free elections. He alleged, *inter alia*, that he had not had an effective remedy in that regard.

The applicant’s complaints concerned a law enacted in a sphere in which the State had a wide margin of appreciation. The Commission stressed that, in principle, the State’s responsibility could be engaged, as it could not be accepted that by means of transfers of competence the States Parties to the Convention could at the same time exclude matters normally covered by the Convention from the guarantees enshrined therein. It nevertheless declared the application **inadmissible** (manifestly ill-founded), finding in particular that no violation of Article 3 (right to free elections) of Protocol No. 1 to the Convention, taken alone or in conjunction with Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) of the Convention, could be found in this case.

Presumption that the European Communities guarantee protection of fundamental rights at a level equivalent to that provided by the Convention

M & Co. v. Federal Republic of Germany (application no. 13258/87)

Decision of the Commission of 9 January 1990

The applicant company complained of the fact that Germany had enforced a fine imposed on it by the European Commission (in anti-trust proceedings) and upheld by the Court of Justice of the European Communities. It considered that several of its rights had been breached, including the right to be presumed innocent.

The European Commission of Human Rights noted that Germany’s responsibility could in principle be engaged by virtue of the action it had taken to give effect to Community law (in respect of which it had no margin of appreciation). However, it declared the application **inadmissible** on the ground that the legal system of the European Communities guaranteed protection of fundamental rights at a level equivalent to that provided by the European Convention on Human Rights.

The principles established by the European Court of Human Rights

Possibility of bringing a case against a State for national measures giving effect to Community law

Cantoni v. France

Judgment of 15 November 1996

A supermarket manager contended that his conviction for unlawfully selling pharmaceutical products had not been foreseeable because the definition of a “medicinal product” was too imprecise in the French legislation, which was based almost word for word on a Community directive.

In the European Court of Human Rights’ view, the last-mentioned fact “[did] not remove [the impugned provision] from the ambit of Article 7 [no punishment without law] of the

Convention". The respondent State had a wide margin of appreciation in applying Community law and could therefore have been held responsible for a breach of the Convention. On the merits, the Court held that there had been **no violation of Article 7** of the Convention.

Responsibility of a State for the consequences of a treaty which it had been involved in adopting

Matthews v. the United Kingdom

Judgment (Grand Chamber) of 18 February 1999

A United Kingdom national resident in Gibraltar alleged a breach of her right to free elections on account of the fact that the United Kingdom had not organised elections to the European Parliament in Gibraltar.

The Court reiterated that the European Convention on Human Rights did not exclude the transfer of competences to international organisations provided that Convention rights continued to be "secured". Member States' responsibility therefore continued even after such a transfer.

The Court further noted that when it had been decided to elect representatives to the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage, it had been specified that the United Kingdom would apply the relevant provisions within the United Kingdom only (hence not in Gibraltar). With the extension of the powers of the European Parliament under the Maastricht Treaty, the United Kingdom should have amended its legislation to ensure that the right to free elections (Article 3 of Protocol No. 1 to the Convention) – which applied to the "choice of the legislature" – was guaranteed in Gibraltar. The United Kingdom had freely entered into the Maastricht Treaty. Together with the other Parties to that Treaty, it was therefore responsible *ratione materiae* under the Convention for its consequences. The Court held that there had been a **breach of Article 3** (right to free elections) **of Protocol No. 1** to the Convention.

Equivalent protection

"Bosphorus Airways" v. Ireland (no. 45036/98)

Judgment (Grand Chamber) of 30 June 2005

An aircraft leased by the applicant company to a Yugoslavian company was impounded in 1993 by the Irish authorities under a Community Regulation giving effect to UN sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

The Court stated that where a State transferred sovereign powers to an international organisation, "absolving Contracting States completely from their Convention responsibility in the areas covered by such a transfer would be incompatible with the purpose and object of the Convention; the guarantees of the Convention could be limited or excluded at will, thereby depriving it of its peremptory character and undermining the practical and effective nature of its safeguards" (§ 154 of the [judgment](#)). For the first time it agreed to examine on the merits a complaint concerning measures taken to give effect to Community law where the State had no margin of appreciation. It took the view that Ireland had merely complied with its legal obligations flowing from membership of the European Community. Furthermore, and most importantly, it held that it was not necessary to examine whether the measure had been proportionate to the aims pursued, given that "the protection of fundamental rights by Community law [is] ... "equivalent" ... to that of the Convention system" (§ 165). Accordingly, "the presumption [arose] that Ireland did not depart from the requirements of the Convention when it implemented legal obligations flowing from its membership of the European Community" (§ 165).

Povse v. Austria

Decision on the admissibility of 18 June 2013

This case concerned the return of a child from one member State of the European Union to another. Pursuant to the [Brussels IIa Regulation](#), a court in one EU member State can

request a court in another member State to enforce the return of a child to the former State in the wake of family law proceedings. The applicants were an Austrian national and her minor daughter, who has Austrian and Italian citizenship. The mother had moved to Austria with her daughter without the father's consent. They complained of the Austrian courts' ordering the enforcement of a judgment by an Italian court, which had awarded sole custody of the child to her Italian father and had ordered her return to him. Relying on Article 8 (right to respect for private and family life) of the Convention, the applicants contended that the Austrian courts had limited themselves to ordering the enforcement of the Italian court's judgment without examining the argument that the child's return to Italy would be against her interest.

The Court declared the application **inadmissible** (manifestly ill-founded). It held in particular that the Austrian courts had done no more than implement their obligation under the law of the European Union. Under the Brussels IIa Regulation they had been obliged to respect the terms of the judgment issued by the Italian court ordering the return of the child. The Austrian courts could be presumed to have acted in compliance with its Convention obligations, having regard to the fact that the legal order of the European Union secured protection of fundamental rights in a manner equivalent to that provided by the Convention system. The Italian court had heard the parties and had assessed whether the child's return would entail a grave risk for her. Moreover, the Austrian courts had sought a preliminary ruling from the Court of Justice of the European Union, which had reviewed the scope of the Regulation and had found that any alleged change in the circumstances of the applicants' situation since the issuing of the return order had to be addressed to the Italian courts, which were competent to rule on a possible request for a stay of enforcement of the order. The Court also observed that should any action filed by the applicants before the Italian courts fail, it would be open to them to lodge an application with the Court against Italy.

Application pending before the Grand Chamber

[Avotiņš v. Latvia \(no. 17502/07\)](#)

25 February 2014 – case referred to the Grand Chamber in September 2014

This case concerns the enforcement in Latvia of a judgment delivered in 2004 in Cyprus with regard to the repayment of a debt. The applicant complains that the Latvian courts authorised the enforcement of the Cypriot judgment which, in his opinion, was delivered in breach of his defence rights and was thus clearly unlawful. Before the Latvian courts he had claimed in particular that the recognition and enforcement of the Cypriot judgment in Latvia infringed a regulation of the Council of the European Union, namely the "Brussels 1 Regulation".

In its [Chamber judgment](#) of 25 February 2014, the Court held, by four votes to three, that there had been no violation of Article 6 § 1 (right to a fair trial) of the Convention. Like the Senate of the Latvian Supreme Court, the Court noted that the applicant should have appealed against the Cypriot court's judgment. Referring to the case "*Bosphorus Airways*" v. *Ireland* (see above), it took the view that the Latvian courts, which had correctly fulfilled the legal obligations arising from Latvia's status as a member State of the European Union, had sufficiently taken account of the applicant's rights.

On 8 September 2014 the case was [referred to the Grand Chamber](#) at the request of the applicant.

The Court held a Grand Chamber hearing in this case on 8 April 2015.

Dublin regulation³

[M.S.S. v. Belgium and Greece \(no. 30696/09\)](#)

Judgment (Grand Chamber) of 21 January 2011

³ The "Dublin system" aims at determining which EU Member State is responsible for examining an asylum application lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national. See also the factsheet on "[Dublin cases](#)".

The applicant is an Afghan national who entered the EU via Greece before arriving in Belgium, where he applied for asylum. In accordance with the [Dublin II Regulation](#), the Belgian Aliens Office asked the Greek authorities to take responsibility for the asylum application. The applicant complained in particular about the conditions of his detention and his living conditions in Greece, and alleged that he had no effective remedy in Greek law in respect of these complaints. He further complained that Belgium had exposed him to the risks arising from the deficiencies in the asylum procedure in Greece and to the poor detention and living conditions to which asylum seekers were subjected there. He further maintained that there was no effective remedy under Belgian law in respect of those complaints.

Regarding in particular the applicant's transfer from Belgium to Greece, the Court held, considering that reports produced by international organisations and bodies all gave similar accounts of the practical difficulties raised by the application of the Dublin system in Greece, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had warned the Belgian Government about the situation there, that the Belgian authorities must have been aware of the deficiencies in the asylum procedure in Greece when the expulsion order against him had been issued. Belgium had initially ordered the expulsion solely on the basis of a tacit agreement by the Greek authorities, and had proceeded to enforce the measure without the Greek authorities having given any individual guarantee whatsoever, when they could easily have refused the transfer. The Belgian authorities should not simply have assumed that the applicant would be treated in conformity with the Convention standards; they should have verified how the Greek authorities applied their asylum legislation in practice; but they had not done so. There had therefore been a **violation by Belgium of Article 3** (prohibition degrading treatment) of the Convention. As far as Belgium is considered, the Court further found a **violation of Article 13** (right to an effective remedy) **taken together with Article 3** of the Convention because of the lack of an effective remedy against the applicant's expulsion order.

In respect of Greece, the Court found a **violation of Article 13 taken in conjunction with Article 3** of the Convention because of the deficiencies in the Greek authorities' examination of the applicant's asylum application and the risk he faced of being removed directly or indirectly back to his country of origin without any serious examination of the merits of his application and without having had access to an effective remedy. As far as Greece is concerned, the Court further held that there had been a **violation of Article 3** (prohibition of degrading treatment) of the Convention both because of the applicant's detention conditions and because of his living conditions in Greece.

Lastly, under **Article 46** (binding force and execution of judgments) of the Convention, the Court held that it was **incumbent on Greece**, without delay, to proceed with an examination of the merits of the applicant's asylum request that met the requirements of the European Convention on Human Rights and, pending the outcome of that examination, to refrain from deporting the applicant.

Tarakhel v. Switzerland

Judgment (Grand Chamber) of 4 November 2014

The applicants were an Afghan couple and their five children. The Swiss authorities had rejected their application for asylum and ordered their deportation to Italy, where they had been registered in the "EURODAC system"⁴ in July 2001. The applicants alleged in particular that if they were returned to Italy "in the absence of individual guarantees concerning their care", they would be subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment linked to the existence of "systemic deficiencies" in the reception arrangements for

⁴ The "[Eurodac system](#)" enables EU countries to help identify asylum applicants and persons who have been apprehended in connection with an irregular crossing of an external border of the Union. By comparing fingerprints, EU countries can determine whether an asylum applicant or a foreign national found illegally present within an EU country has previously claimed asylum in another EU country or whether an asylum applicant entered the Union territory unlawfully.

asylum seekers in Italy. They also submitted that the Swiss authorities had not given sufficient consideration to their personal circumstances and had not taken into account their situation as a family.

The Court held that there would be a **violation of Article 3** (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) of the Convention if the Swiss authorities were to send the applicants back to Italy under the Dublin Regulation without having first obtained individual guarantees from the Italian authorities that the applicants would be taken charge of in a manner adapted to the age of the children and that the family would be kept together. The Court found in particular that, in view of the current situation regarding the reception system in Italy, and in the absence of detailed and reliable information concerning the specific facility of destination, the Swiss authorities did not possess sufficient assurances that, if returned to Italy, the applicants would be taken charge of in a manner adapted to the age of the children. The Court further considered that the applicants had had available to them an effective remedy in respect of their complaint under Article 3 of the Convention. Accordingly, it **rejected their complaint under Article 13** (right to an effective remedy) of the Convention **taken in conjunction with Article 3** as manifestly ill-founded.

A.M.E. v. the Netherlands (no. 51428/10)

Decision on the admissibility of 13 January 2015

The applicant, a Somali asylum seeker, complained that his removal to Italy would expose him to poor living conditions and he feared that the Italian authorities would expel him directly to Somalia without an adequate examination of his asylum case.

The Court declared the applicant's complaint under Article 3 (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) of the Convention **inadmissible** (manifestly ill-founded), finding that he had not established that his future prospects, if returned to Italy, whether taken from a material, physical or psychological perspective, disclosed a sufficiently real and imminent risk of hardship severe enough to fall within the scope of Article 3. The Court noted in particular that unlike the applicants in the case of *Tarakhel v. Switzerland* (see above), who were a family with six minor children, the applicant was an able young man with no dependents and that the current situation in Italy for asylum seekers could in no way be compared to the situation in Greece at the time of the *M.S.S. v. Belgium and Greece* judgment (see above). The structure and overall situation of the reception arrangements in Italy could not therefore in themselves act as a bar to all removals of asylum seekers to that country.

Admissibility criteria (Article 35 of the Convention)

Litispence

Karoussiotis v. Portugal

Judgment of 1 February 2011

This case raised among other things a new legal question concerning admissibility: did the fact that "infringement proceedings" against the respondent State had previously been introduced before the European Commission make the application to the European Court of Human Rights inadmissible as it had "already been submitted to another procedure of international investigation or settlement"?

In its judgment, the Court answered negatively and declared the application **admissible**. However it did **not find any violation on the merits** of the application.

Non-exhaustion of domestic remedies

Laurus Invest Hungary Kft and Continental Holding Corporation and Others v. Hungary

Decision on the admissibility of 8 September 2015

This case concerned the removal of licences from companies involved in developing and operating entertainment arcades and other gaming arcades in Hungary following legislative changes. The companies complained, relying in particular on Article 1

(protection of property) of Protocol No. 1 to the Convention, that the removal of their licences amounted to an unjustified interference with their rights and that the absence of any legal avenues to challenge this measure gave rise to a further violation of the Convention.

The Court declared the application **inadmissible**, finding that the applicants had not exhausted the legal remedies at national level. It noted, in particular, that some of the applicant companies had brought an action in damages against the State – claiming compensation for the loss of business sustained on account of the legislation in question, allegedly in breach of EU law – which was pending. The Budapest High Court had indeed perceived a potential issue under the relevant law of the EU and had requested a preliminary ruling from the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU). The CJEU ruling in the applicants' case provided the Hungarian courts with guidance as to the criteria to be applied in the case pending before them, according to which justifications for the restrictions complained of also had to be interpreted in light of the general principles of EU law and in particular the fundamental rights guaranteed by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, including Article 17 (right to property). It followed that the litigation in progress before the national court ought to be capable of encompassing the applicants' complaints under Article 1 of Protocol 1. The Court therefore considered that the pending case before the national courts offered a reasonable prospect of success for the applicants to have their claims considered on the merits and to potentially receive damages. As regards the remaining applicants, the Court considered that they also had the possibility to file a similar claim.

Preliminary ruling

Ullens de Schooten and Rezabek v. Belgium

Judgment of 20 September 2011

This case concerned the refusal of the Belgian Court of Cassation and the Conseil d'Etat to refer questions relating to the interpretation of EU law to the Court of Justice of the European Union for a preliminary ruling.

In the light of the reasons given by those two courts and having regard to the proceedings as a whole, the Court held that there had been **no violation** of the applicants' right to a fair hearing under **Article 6 § 1** of the Convention.

Ramaer and van Willigen v. the Netherlands

Decision on the admissibility of 23 October 2012

This case concerned the effects of the changes in the Netherlands health insurance system introduced on 1 January 2006 on recipients of Netherlands pensions resident in European Union Member States other than the Netherlands, by virtue of Council of the European Communities [Regulation \(EEC\) no. 1408/71](#). The applicants – Netherlands nationals in receipt of Netherlands old-age pensions and residing in Belgium and Spain respectively – complained in particular that they had lost their entitlements under their former health insurance contracts, and that they had had their entitlements reduced to basic public health care in their countries of residence. Further, they complained of the effects of the introduction of the Health Care Insurance Act on them as compared to Netherlands residents. Finally, they alleged that the Netherlands Central Appeals Tribunal, having requested for a preliminary ruling from the Court of Justice of the European Communities, to establish whether the Health Care Insurance Act was compatible with the European Community Treaty, in particular with European Union Council Regulation no. 1408/71, although not ruling out possible differences in treatment between Netherlands residents and non-residents, had nonetheless found that there had been no unjustified difference of treatment between residents and non-residents as regards the new health insurance system.

The Court declared the application **inadmissible**. It found in particular that the Central Appeals Tribunal, after unusually lengthy and complicated proceedings involving even a preliminary ruling of the Court of Justice of the European Union, had addressed the

applicants' arguments in decisions which contained extensive reasoning on the pertinent European Union law, the drafting history of the Health Care Insurance Act and the history of the negotiations with the insurers, and had therefore not been arbitrary. The Court consequently rejected the applicants' complaint under Article 6 (right to a fair trial) of the Convention as manifestly ill-founded. The Court further declared inadmissible the applicants' complaints under Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) of the Convention, Article 1 (protection of property) of Protocol No. 1 to the Convention, and Article 1 (general prohibition of discrimination) of Protocol No. 12 to the Convention.

Dhahbi v. Italy

8 April 2014

This case concerned the inability of an immigrant worker of Tunisian origin to obtain payment from the Italian public authorities of a family allowance under the association agreement between the European Union and Tunisia (Euro-Mediterranean Agreement). The applicant alleged that the Italian Court of Cassation had ignored his request to have a preliminary question referred to the Court of Justice of the European Union. He further submitted that he had been discriminated against on grounds of his nationality regarding an award of the allowance payable under a Law of 1998.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 6 § 1** (right to a fair trial) of the Convention, noting that the Italian courts had failed to comply with their obligation to give reasons for refusing to submit a preliminary question to the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) in order to determine whether the Euro-Mediterranean Agreement allowed the authorities to refuse to pay the allowance in question to a Tunisian worker. The Court reiterated that from the angle of Article 6 of the Convention, national courts whose decisions were not open to appeal under domestic law were required to give reasons, based on the applicable law and the exceptions laid down in CJEU case-law, for their refusal to refer a preliminary question on the interpretation of EU law. They should set out their reasons for considering that the question was not relevant, that the provision had already been interpreted by the CJEU, or that the correct application of EU law was so obvious as to leave no scope for reasonable doubt.

The Court further held that there had been a **violation of Article 14** (prohibition of discrimination) **in conjunction with Article 8** (right to respect for private and family life) of the Convention. It noted that the applicant's nationality had been the only criterion used to exclude him from entitlement to this allowance. Therefore, given that only very weighty considerations can justify a difference in treatment based exclusively on nationality and despite the budgetary reasons advanced by the Italian Government, the restrictions placed on the applicant had been disproportionate.

See also: **Schipani and Others v. Italy**, judgment of 21 July 2015.

Pending application

Repcevirág Szövetkezet v. Hungary (no. 70750/14)

Application communicated to the Hungarian Government on 1 September 2015

This application concerns the refusal of the Supreme Court (*Kúria*) and the Constitutional Court of Hungary to refer a case to the Court of Justice of the European Union for a preliminary ruling.

The Court gave notice of the application to the Hungarian Government and put questions to the parties under Article 6 § 1 (right to a fair trial) of the Convention.

European arrest warrant

Pietro Pianese v. Italy and the Netherlands

Decision on the admissibility of 27 September 2011

The applicant is an Italian national who was detained under a European arrest warrant and complained that he had been arbitrarily deprived of his liberty and had not had any effective remedies in respect of his complaints under Article 5 (right to liberty and security) of the Convention.

The Court declared the application **inadmissible**. It dismissed the applicant's complaints as being out of time and manifestly ill-founded, pursuant to Article 35 (admissibility criteria) of the Convention.

Confidentiality of lawyer-client relations

Michaud v. France

Judgment of 6 December 2012

The case concerned the obligation on French lawyers to report their "suspicions" regarding possible money laundering activities by their clients. Among other things, the applicant submitted that this obligation, which resulted from the transposition of European directives, was in conflict with Article 8 (right to respect for private life) of the Convention, which protects the confidentiality of lawyer-client relations.

The Court held that it was required to rule on this question, since the "presumption of equivalent protection" was not applicable in this case.

The Court further held that there had been **no violation of Article 8** (right to respect for private life) of the Convention in the present case. It stressed the importance of the confidentiality of lawyer-client relations and of legal professional privilege. It considered, however, that the obligation to report suspicions pursued the legitimate aim of prevention of disorder or crime, since it was intended to combat money laundering and related criminal offences, and that it was necessary in pursuit of that aim. On the latter point, it held that the obligation to report suspicions, as implemented in France, did not interfere disproportionately with legal professional privilege, since lawyers were not subject to the above requirement when defending litigants and the legislation had put in place a filter to protect professional privilege, thus ensuring that lawyers did not submit their reports directly to the authorities, but to the president of their Bar association.

Freedom of expression and electronic commerce

Delfi AS v. Estonia

16 June 2015 (Grand Chamber)

This was the first case in which the Court had been called upon to examine a complaint about liability for user-generated comments on an Internet news portal. The domestic courts had rejected the portal's argument that, under [EU Directive 2000/31/EC](#) on Electronic Commerce, its role as an information society service provider or storage host was merely technical, passive and neutral, finding that the portal exercised control over the publication of comments.

The Court held that there had been **no violation of Article 10** (freedom of expression) of the Convention, finding that the Estonian courts' finding of liability against the applicant company had been a justified and proportionate restriction on the portal's freedom of expression. The Grand Chamber reiterated in particular that it was for national courts to resolve issues of interpretation and application of domestic law. Thus it did not address the issue under EU law and limited itself to the question of whether the Supreme Court's application of the domestic law to the applicant company's situation had been foreseeable.

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