

Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 2988/95 of 18 December 1995
on the protection of the European Communities financial interests

TITLE I

General principles

Article 1

1 For the purposes of protecting the European Communities' financial interests, general rules are hereby adopted relating to homogenous checks and to administrative measures and penalties concerning irregularities with regard to Community law.

2 'Irregularity' shall mean any infringement of a provision of Community law resulting from an act or omission by an economic operator, which has, or would have, the effect of prejudicing the general budget of the Communities or budgets managed by them, either by reducing or losing revenue accruing from own resources collected directly on behalf of the Communities, or by an unjustified item of expenditure.

Article 2

1 Administrative checks, measures and penalties shall be introduced in so far as they are necessary to ensure the proper application of Community law. They shall be effective, proportionate and dissuasive so that they provide adequate protection for the Communities' financial interests.

2 No administrative penalty may be imposed unless a Community act prior to the irregularity has made provision for it. In the event of a subsequent amendment of the provisions which impose administrative penalties and are contained in Community rules, the less severe provisions shall apply retroactively.

3 Community law shall determine the nature and scope of the administrative measures and penalties necessary for the correct application of the rules in question, having regard to the nature and seriousness of the irregularity, the advantage granted or received and the degree of responsibility.

4 Subject to the Community law applicable, the procedures for the application of Community checks, measures and penalties shall be governed by the laws of the Member States.

Article 3

1 The limitation period for proceedings shall be four years as from the time when the irregularity referred to in Article 1 (1) was committed. However, the sectoral rules may make provision for a shorter period which may not be less than three years.

In the case of continuous or repeated irregularities, the limitation period shall run from the day on which the irregularity ceases. In the case of multiannual programmes, the limitation period shall in any case run until the programme is definitively terminated.

The limitation period shall be interrupted by any act of the competent authority, notified to the person in question, relating to investigation or legal proceedings concerning the irregularity. The limitation period shall start again following each interrupting act.

However, limitation shall become effective at the latest on the day on which a period equal to twice the limitation period expires without the competent authority having

imposed a penalty, except where the administrative procedure has been suspended in accordance with Article 6 (1).

2 The period for implementing the decision establishing the administrative penalty shall be three years. That period shall run from the day on which the decision becomes final.

Instances of interruption and suspension shall be governed by the relevant provisions of national law.

3 Member States shall retain the possibility of applying a period which is longer than that provided for in paragraphs 1 and 2 respectively.