Council Directive (EU) 2018/822 of 25 May 2018 amending Directive 2011/16/EU as regards mandatory automatic exchange of information in the field of taxation in relation to reportable cross-border arrangements

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THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Article 113 and 115 thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission,

After transmission of the draft legislative act to the national parliaments,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Parliament[(1)],

Having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee[(2)],

Acting in accordance with a special legislative procedure,

Whereas:

(1) In order to accommodate new initiatives in the field of tax transparency at the level of the Union, Council Directive 2011/16/EU[(3)] has been the subject of a series of amendments over the last few years. In this context, Council Directive 2014/107/EU[(4)] introduced the Common Reporting Standard ('CRS') developed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) for financial account information within the Union. The CRS provides for the automatic exchange of information on financial accounts held by non-tax residents and establishes a framework for that exchange worldwide. Directive 2011/16/EU was amended by Council Directive (EU) 2015/2376[(5)], which provided for the automatic exchange of information on advance cross-border tax rulings, and by Council Directive (EU) 2016/881[(6)], which provided for the mandatory automatic exchange of information on country-by-country reporting of multinational enterprises between tax authorities. In light of the use that anti-money-laundering information can have for tax authorities, Council Directive (EU) 2016/2258[(7)] placed an obligation on Member States to give tax authorities access to customer due diligence procedures applied by financial institutions under Directive (EU) 2015/849 of the European Parliament and of the Council[(8)]. Although Directive 2011/16/EU has been amended several times in order to enhance the means tax authorities can use to react to aggressive tax planning, there is still a need to reinforce certain specific transparency aspects of the existing taxation framework.

(2) Member States find it increasingly difficult to protect their national tax bases from erosion as tax-planning structures have evolved to be particularly sophisticated and

often take advantage of the increased mobility of both capital and persons within the internal market. Such structures commonly consist of arrangements which are developed across various jurisdictions and move taxable profits towards more beneficial tax regimes or have the effect of reducing the taxpayer's overall tax bill. As a result, Member States often experience considerable reductions in their tax revenues, which hinder them from applying growth-friendly tax policies. It is therefore critical that Member States' tax authorities obtain comprehensive and relevant information about potentially aggressive tax arrangements. Such information would enable those authorities to react promptly against harmful tax practices and to close loopholes by enacting legislation or by undertaking adequate risk assessments and carrying out tax audits. However, the fact that tax authorities do not react to a reported arrangement should not imply acceptance of the validity or tax treatment of that arrangement.

(3) Considering that most of the potentially aggressive tax-planning arrangements span across more than one jurisdiction, the disclosure of information about those arrangements would bring additional positive results where that information was also exchanged amongst Member States. In particular, the automatic exchange of information between tax authorities is crucial in order to provide those authorities with the necessary information to enable them to take action where they observe aggressive tax practices.

(4) Recognising how a transparent framework for developing business activity could contribute to clamping down on tax avoidance and evasion in the internal market, the Commission has been called on to embark on initiatives on the mandatory disclosure of information on potentially aggressive tax-planning arrangements along the lines of Action 12 of the OECD Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) Project. In this context, the European Parliament has called for tougher measures against intermediaries who assist in arrangements that may lead to tax avoidance and evasion. It is also important to note that in the G7 Bari Declaration of 13 May 2017 on fighting tax crimes and other illicit financial flows, the OECD was asked to start discussing possible ways to address arrangements designed to circumvent reporting under the CRS or aimed at providing beneficial owners with the shelter of non-transparent structures, considering also model mandatory disclosure rules inspired by the approach taken for avoidance arrangements outlined within the BEPS Action 12 Report.

(5) It is necessary to recall how certain financial intermediaries and other providers of tax advice seem to have actively assisted their clients in concealing money offshore. Furthermore, although the CRS introduced by Directive 2014/107/EU is a significant step forward in establishing a framework of tax transparency within the Union, at least in terms of financial account information, it can still be improved.

(6) The reporting of potentially aggressive cross-border tax-planning arrangements can contribute effectively to the efforts for creating an environment of fair taxation in the internal market. In this light, an obligation for intermediaries to inform tax authorities of certain cross-border arrangements that could potentially be used for aggressive tax planning would constitute a step in the right direction. In order to develop a more comprehensive policy, it would also be necessary that as a second step, following

the reporting, the tax authorities share information with their peers in other Member States. Such arrangements should also enhance the effectiveness of the CRS. In addition, it would be crucial to grant the Commission access to a sufficient amount of information so that it can monitor the proper functioning of this Directive. Such access to information by the Commission does not discharge a Member State from its obligations to notify any State aid to the Commission.

(7) It is acknowledged that the reporting of potentially aggressive cross-border tax-planning arrangements would stand a better chance of achieving its envisaged deterrent effect where the relevant information reached the tax authorities at an early stage, in other words before such arrangements are actually implemented. To facilitate the work of Member States' administrations, the subsequent automatic exchange of information on such arrangements could take place every quarter.

(8) To ensure the proper functioning of the internal market and to prevent loopholes in the proposed framework of rules, the reporting obligation should be placed upon all actors that are usually involved in designing, marketing, organising or managing the implementation of a reportable cross-border transaction or a series of such transactions, as well as those who provide assistance or advice. It should not be ignored either that, in certain cases, the reporting obligation would not be enforceable upon an intermediary due to a legal professional privilege or where there is no intermediary because, for instance, the taxpayer designs and implements a scheme in-house. It would thus be crucial that, in such circumstances, tax authorities do not lose the opportunity to receive information about tax-related arrangements that are potentially linked to aggressive tax planning. It would therefore be necessary to shift the reporting obligation to the taxpayer who benefits from the arrangement in such cases.

(9) Aggressive tax-planning arrangements have evolved over the years to become increasingly more complex and are always subject to constant modifications and adjustments as a reaction to defensive countermeasures by the tax authorities. Taking this into consideration, it would be more effective to endeavour to capture potentially aggressive tax-planning arrangements through the compiling of a list of the features and elements of transactions that present a strong indication of tax avoidance or abuse rather than to define the concept of aggressive tax planning. Those indications are referred to as ‘hallmarks’.

(10) Given that the primary objective of this Directive concerning the reporting of potentially aggressive cross-border tax-planning arrangements should focus on ensuring the proper functioning of the internal market, it is critical not to regulate at the level of the Union beyond what is necessary to achieve the envisaged aims. This is why it would be necessary to limit any common rules on reporting to cross-border situations, namely those involving either more than one Member State or a Member State and a third country. In such circumstances, due to the potential impact on the functioning of the internal market, one can justify the need for enacting a common set of rules, rather than leaving the matter to be dealt with at the national level. A Member State could take further national reporting measures of a similar nature, but any information collected in addition to what is reportable in accordance with this Directive should

not be communicated automatically to the competent authorities of the other Member States. That information could be exchanged on request or spontaneously according to applicable rules.

(11) Considering that the reportable arrangements should have a cross-border dimension, it would be important to share the relevant information with the tax authorities in other Member States in order to ensure the maximum effectiveness of this Directive in deterring aggressive tax-planning practices. The mechanism for the exchange of information in the context of advance cross-border rulings and advance pricing arrangements should also be used to accommodate the mandatory and automatic exchange of reportable information on potentially aggressive cross-border tax-planning arrangements amongst tax authorities in the Union.

(12) In order to facilitate the automatic exchange of information and enhance the efficient use of resources, exchanges should be carried out through the common communication network ('CCN') developed by the Union. In this context, information would be recorded in a secure central directory on administrative cooperation in the field of taxation. Member States should have to implement a series of practical arrangements, including measures to standardise the communication of all requisite information through the creation of a standard form. This should also involve specifying the linguistic requirements for the envisaged exchange of information and upgrading the CCN accordingly.

(13) In order to minimise costs and administrative burdens both for tax administrations and intermediaries and to ensure the effectiveness of this Directive in deterring aggressive tax-planning practices, the scope of automatic exchange of information in relation to reportable cross-border arrangements within the Union should be consistent with international developments. A specific hallmark should be introduced to address arrangements designed to circumvent reporting obligations involving automatic exchanges of information. For the purposes of that hallmark, agreements on the automatic exchange of financial account information under the CRS should be treated as equivalent to the reporting obligations laid down in Article 8(3a) of Directive 2014/107/EU and in Annex I thereto. In implementing the parts of this Directive addressing CRS avoidance arrangements and arrangements involving legal persons or legal arrangements or any other similar structures, Member States could use the work of the OECD, and more specifically its Model Mandatory Disclosure Rules for Addressing CRS Avoidance Arrangements and Opaque Offshore Structures and its Commentary, as a source of illustration or interpretation, in order to ensure consistency of application across Member States, insofar those texts are aligned with the provisions of Union law.

(14) While direct taxation remains within the competence of Member States, it is appropriate to refer to a corporate tax rate of zero or almost zero, solely for the purpose of clearly defining the scope of the hallmark that covers arrangements involving cross-border transactions, which should be reportable under Directive 2011/16/EU by intermediaries or, as appropriate, taxpayers, and about which the competent authorities should exchange information automatically. Moreover, it is appropriate to recall that aggressive cross-border tax-planning arrangements, the main purpose or one of the main purposes

of which is to obtain a tax advantage that defeats the object or purpose of the applicable tax law, are subject to the general anti-abuse rule as set out in Article 6 of Council Directive (EU) 2016/1164[(9)].

(15) In order to improve the prospects for the effectiveness of this Directive, Member States should lay down penalties against the violation of national rules that implement this Directive. Such penalties should be effective, proportionate and dissuasive.

(16) In order to ensure uniform conditions for the implementation of this Directive and in particular for the automatic exchange of information between tax authorities, implementing powers should be conferred on the Commission to adopt a standard form with a limited number of components, including the linguistic arrangements. For the same reason, implementing powers should also be conferred on the Commission to adopt the necessary practical arrangements for upgrading the central directory on administrative cooperation in the field of taxation. Those powers should be exercised in accordance with Regulation (EU) No 182/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council[(10)].

(17) The European Data Protection Supervisor was consulted in accordance with Article 28(2) of Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council[(11)]. Any processing of personal data carried out within the framework of this Directive must comply with Directive 95/46/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council[(12)] and Regulation (EC) No 45/2001.

(18) This Directive respects the fundamental rights and observes the principles recognised in particular by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

(19) Since the objective of this Directive, namely to improve the functioning of the internal market by discouraging the use of aggressive cross-border tax-planning arrangements, cannot sufficiently be achieved by the Member States but can rather, by reason of the fact that it targets schemes which are developed to potentially take advantage of market inefficiencies that originate in the interaction amongst disparate national tax rules, be better achieved at Union level, the Union may adopt measures, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity as set out in Article 5 of the Treaty on European Union. In accordance with the principle of proportionality as set out in that Article, this Directive does not go beyond what is necessary in order to achieve that objective, especially considering that it is limited to cross-border arrangements concerning either more than one Member State or a Member State and a third country.

(20) Directive 2011/16/EU should therefore be amended accordingly,

HAS ADOPTED THIS DIRECTIVE:

Article 1

Directive 2011/16/EU is amended as follows:

(1) Article 3 is amended as follows:

(a) point 9 is amended as follows:

(i) in the first subparagraph, point (a) is replaced by the following: