**ICC comments in response to EU Commission public consultation:**

**Business in Europe: Framework for Income Taxation (BEFIT) proposal**

The International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), as the world business organization speaking with authority on behalf of enterprises from all sectors in every part of the world, appreciates the opportunity to provide input in the context of the [European Commission BEFIT proposal public consultation](https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/13463-Transfer-Pricing-Directive-Head-Office-Tax-system-for-SMEs-Business-in-Europe-Framework-for-Income-Taxation_en).

In the pursuit of a European tax consolidation, businesses prioritize simplicity and financial stability. This entails achieving authentic harmonization of the consolidated taxable base, eliminating transfer pricing complexities, and establishing a steadfast and conclusive allocation key. Despite these overarching goals, ICC members have expressed reservations about certain aspects of the proposal that diverge from these objectives.

Businesses anticipate streamlined processes and financial assurance from a European tax consolidation, emphasizing the need for genuine harmonization, transfer pricing elimination, and a reliable allocation key. Therefore, the BEFIT project necessitates significant adjustments to garner support, starting with (i) addressing the challenge of interaction with Pillar 2 to ensure it does not curtail the benefits of European tax consolidation and (ii) minimizing complexity and uncertainty by adopting a common European tax base identical to or aligned with the GloBE base.

As the Directive proposal progresses into the negotiation phase among Member States, it's crucial to note that unanimous adoption is required. It is hoped that the concerns voiced by businesses will be duly addressed, ensuring that the BEFIT Directive does not introduce an additional layer of complexity to the tax landscape.

We thus value the opportunity to provide comments on the BEFIT proposal that we hope will be useful and informative.

We also remain fully available to for any clarification of the points raised below and to provide any further information the European Commission may need.

**General Comments:**

The main general concerns according to ICC members in relation to the BEFIT proposal relate to the different aspects, such as:

1. **Deviation from the Arms-Length Principle (ALP):** Opting for the allocation of taxable profit among member states based on historical tax payments during the transitional period, followed by arbitrary allocation factors, represents a departure from the established arms-length principle (ALP). This unilateral shift not only introduces a potential destabilization of the international tax system but also raises concerns about disputes and the risk of double taxation. Reconsidering this departure from the ALP is essential to maintain stability and prevent unintended consequences.
2. **Misalignment with Pillar Two:** The BEFIT proposal introduces unnecessary complexity, diverging from the principles outlined in Pillar Two. The requirement for taxpayers to convert their financial records to an alternative accounting base acceptable for BEFIT purposes adds an avoidable layer of intricacy.
3. **Administrative burden:** Furthermore, the BEFIT methodology seems to impose a significantly increased administrative burden on taxpayers compared to the current system. This misalignment with Pillar Two, coupled with the augmented administrative load, calls for a comprehensive reassessment to ensure practicality and coherence within existing frameworks. The calculation of the tax base for Befit and Pillar 2 could generate, for the big EU multinationals in scope of BEFIT and Pillar 2, an increase of compliance and monitoring activities with potential negative impacts in terms of simplification and possible duplication of tax accounting and administrative processes both at consolidated and Country level.

Notwithstanding the above, should the proposal be pursued and taking a higher-level policy perspective at first, we submit for consideration the following recommendations in relation to the BEFIT proposal:

1. **Adopting an Optional or Limited Pilot Project:** Explore the possibility of making the BEFIT approach optional or initiating it as a limited pilot project similar to the EU's ETACA (European Trust and Cooperation Approach). This preliminary phase would allow willing and interested groups to experiment with the potential BEFIT Directive. Moreover, a mandatory inclusion would impose an improper “one-size-fits-all” regime.
2. **Temporarily Postpone BEFIT Implementation:** Advocate for a temporary suspension of the BEFIT proposed Directive until the comprehensive integration of changes mandated by OECD Pillar Two and the EU Pillar Two Directive is achieved across group systems, businesses, and tax administrations. This step is crucial to carefully assess the potential complexities and administrative burdens associated with the BEFIT proposal and avoid unintended consequences, such as incongruities with the Pillar Two Directive leading to the risk of double taxation.
3. **Contextual Consideration for Green Transition:** Place the BEFIT proposal in the context of the ongoing green transition, recognizing the need for utilizing all available levers, including fiscal measures, to facilitate this urgent and essential change. To achieve this, bold measures are required within the framework of the rule, encompassing aspects like the taxable base and eligible tax incentives on the tax quota. It is crucial to clarify Member States' attributions, as outlined in Article 48.2 of the draft Directive, to avoid compromising the EU's competitiveness. Fiscal incentives, such as the Rollover relief for replacement assets (Article 18 of the Draft Directive), should be revisited to transform them from mere temporal deferrals into effective tax incentives, promoting a competitive green transition at the EU level.
4. **Addressing Uncertainties in Rule Configuration:** The configuration of the rules in the BEFIT proposal introduces a notable level of uncertainty, particularly concerning crucial points like the interaction of BEFIT rules with National Corporate Income Tax Fiscal Unity regulations and cross-border loss relief. A comprehensive assessment of all relevant key elements of a proposal to replace national corporate income tax systems is essential to mitigate uncertainties and ensure a smooth transition.

**Specific Comments**

There are some specific aspects of the BEFIT proposed Directive that according to ICC members would need to be re-examined and supported by a revised impact assessment:

1. **Definition of BEFIT Group (Art. 2, 3, 5 and 6)**

While the BEFIT scope appears to align with that of the Pillar Two Directive, both applicable to groups with annual combined revenues of at least Euro 750 million, BEFIT introduces a distinct criterion. Specifically, it requires "qualified control," defined as the direct or indirect holding of either 75% of ownership rights or 75% of rights entitling profit. This additional stipulation, establishing a 75% ownership threshold, poses challenges in achieving coherence and harmonization with the Pillar Two Directive.

Furthermore, we recommend allowing Member States flexibility in setting a different threshold for listed groups, such as 70%. Some Member States already adopt such variances for establishing Tax Unities in the context of national corporate income tax regulations.

Building upon the overarching concern expressed earlier, it is imperative to align the BEFIT structure with existing national systems that permit the consolidation of results. Emphasizing the concept of a sole taxpayer, the Tax/Fiscal Unity should represent the exclusive BEFIT taxpayer, encompassing entities within the consolidated Unity.

As highlighted in the "General Comments" section, we propose framing the BEFIT Directive as an elective regime for every group rather than imposing a mandatory requirement for those meeting the specified threshold. The provision allowing Member States to offer an opt-in option exclusively for out-of-scope groups should be approached cautiously, as it may lead to fragmentation within the regulatory framework.

1. **Dividends and other distributions (Art. 8 and 9)**

Article 8 and 9 suggests a 95% exclusion for dividend distribution or capital gains if the ownership interest meets a 10% threshold of profits, capital, reserves, or voting rights held for at least one year.

There are notable discrepancies between the referred 95% adjustment in dividends and capital gains and a 100% adjustment for fair value gains (art.10), subject to similar conditions.

Moreover, such system is not aligned to applicable treatment of dividends and capital gains in Pillar II, where the definition of Excluded Dividends and Capital Gains allows in the vast majority of cases a 100 % relief.

Moreover, in case a jurisdiction of a Befit Entity provides for a different treatment, such as, for example, the full participation exemption rule in the Country X (subject to conditions), the tax burden of the Befit Entity will be subject to an increase compared to the one covered by the tax treatment of the local Jurisdiction. In case a Jurisdiction wants to keep the existing different treatment at local level and/or wants to introduce exceptions from the Befit rules, the Directive’s proposal states that this can be done, but this could imply a lack of harmonization and a disparity among EU States whilst one of the main manifested objective of the Befit proposal is to reach a harmonized tax treatment across the EU member States.

In the case illustrated above, there could be also the implication of additional administrative and compliance activity of the taxpayer when calculating its tax burden amount at the level of the domestic tax declaration.

It is imperative to maintain competitiveness in the economic landscape. Propose the mandatory enforcement of a 5% double taxation disincentive on investments, as imposing such a measure could impact economic growth within the EU. A 100% exemption should be mandatory.

1. **Permanent establishment results (Art. 12)**

In accordance with Article 12, any profit or loss attributable to a permanent establishment of a BEFIT group member is to be excluded. Certain Member States offer taxpayers a choice between an exemption regime or adopting a tax imputation method, complemented by tax relief for foreign tax payments. ICC members would like to underscore the importance of respecting such flexibility. Conversely, the exclusion of the imputation method might conflict with numerous tax treaties established between countries, potentially undermining established international agreements.

1. **Qualification of fixed assets when entering a BEFIT group (Art. 35 (b))**

ICC members consider highly advisable to introduce grandfathering rules and provide additional guidance concerning deferred tax assets associated with fixed assets, seeking clarification on the applicability of Article 35(b) in this specific context. Additionally, with regard to portfolio impairments, they believe it would be necessary to include explicit provisions addressing the deductibility of the difference between the net value and tax value of financial assets upon their entry into the BEFIT group.

1. **Allocation formulas**

Any allocation formula (transitional or final) must include consideration of intangible assets, which are increasingly key value drivers in many global businesses.  Failure to recognise intangible assets in the allocation formula will decrease the attractiveness of the EU when compared to non-EU locations as a destination for investment in research, development and manufacturing.

Moreover, allocation factors should not result in an allocation of profit within the EU that does not reflect the economic reality of a company’s business model.

Furthermore, it should be considered that due to corporate law imposing fiduciary duties on Directors, and Member States having concluded different tax treaties with third (i.e non-EU) countries, despite BEFIT, companies are likely to have to apply the ALP within the EU to ensure appropriate profit is recorded in each jurisdiction eroding the possible simplicity benefits of BEFIT.

ICC also recommends that Any new system determining tax base should avoid mismatches in tax law interpretation that presents risks of double taxation.  Accordingly, it would be essential that there is both clarity and commitment to relief from double taxation. It is not clear that this is the case in the proposal.

The BEFIT should also be designed in such a way as to preserve the value of incentives (e.g for R&D, green transition etc) so as to maintain the competitiveness and attractiveness of the EU.

ICC members agree on the Commission’s decision to abstain from tax rate harmonization.  This is key for maintaining and developing investment and employment in the eligible Member States and thus for the competitiveness of the EU as compared to other jurisdictions.

1. **Accounting base:**

BEFIT will impose a requirement on taxpayers to adopt a GAAP accepted under EU law. As a result, many taxpayers will be required to translate their books to an acceptable GAAP imposing an additional administrative burden. It’s not clear why this is required as EU Member States have accepted non-EU GAAP (e.g US GAAP) as the starting point for Pillar Two.

1. **Coexistence with Pillar Two:**

Presently, there exists uncertainty regarding the coexistence of BEFIT with Pillar Two and the sequence of their application. The BEFIT Directive, stemming from the consensus established under the "Beps 2.0" international tax reform encompassing Pillar 1 and Pillar 2, significantly diverges from this initiative. It introduces a complex and selective tax consolidation system, necessitating the duplication of accounting processing systems for entities subject to both Pillar 2 and BEFIT.

Notably, the BEFIT Directive does not address the implications of the new consolidated tax base (BEFIT tax base) on the effective tax rate calculated under the Global Minimum Tax (“GloBE”) Directive. Consequently, the tax advantages resulting from offsetting profits and losses may be partially nullified by the application of the minimum tax under Pillar 2 (the proposed transposition deadline is set for January 1, 2028, with implementation scheduled to commence on July 1, 2028).

While specific elements of the BEFIT directive, such as cross-border loss relief, hold individual appeal, ICC members firmly believe that the timing of BEFIT's introduction, amidst the ongoing implementation of Pillar 2, is highly unwelcome. The business community is currently fully engaged in deciphering the implications and requirements of Pillar 2, a complex and resource-intensive endeavor that is expected to command considerable attention for an extended period. With the impending arrival of Pillar 1 implementation, we argue that initiating something as extensive and impactful as BEFIT at this juncture is not prudent. Such a move is likely to introduce additional layers of complexity and uncertainty, particularly in its interaction with Pillar 2, exacerbating demands on already stretched resources. We recommend deferring consideration of BEFIT until after the successful establishment of Pillar 2, and potentially even Pillar 1, to ensure a smoother and more manageable transition.

While the primary categories of adjustments under Pillar 2 rules may appear similar, the adjustments for determining the BEFIT tax base, in reality, exhibit differences. Furthermore, the BEFIT Directive allows Member States the flexibility to increase or decrease their allocated portion of the BEFIT tax base before applying their domestic tax rate.

The BEFIT Directive introduces a "transitional" key for allocating the BEFIT tax base, relying on the proportion of the average taxable results of the last three years of the relevant in-scope entities. However, it lacks clarity on the final rule, which is expected to be submitted by the Commission to the Council before the end of the third year of application. This issue of the allocation key has previously contributed to the setbacks of European consolidated tax base projects.

Notably, the BEFIT Directive does not relieve intra-group transactions from transfer pricing obligations. Instead, it introduces (i) a risk assessment approach for intra-BEFIT transactions and (ii) a simplified transfer pricing approach for routine distribution activities with associated entities outside of BEFIT. This simplified transfer pricing approach, though somewhat similar, deviates from the Pillar 1 Amount B method, introducing an additional layer of methodologies to navigate.

Pillar Two is calculated on a jurisdictional basis and uses a different accounting base. Through aggregation BEFIT will allow losses in one jurisdiction to be offset against profits in another. However, this would appear to be “undone” by Pillar 2 which would be calculated on a jurisdictional basis.

At the level of the detailed calculations, it must also be noted that different book-to-tax adjustments from the financial statements are to be made for BEFIT purposes compared with under the EU’s Pillar 2 Directive.  Thus, additional computations will need to be undertaken for BEFIT, over and above those performed for Pillar 2 purposes, which will add extra complexity, uncertainty and resource requirement for the business.

Moreover, the EU Pillar 2 Directive states (Article 16.4) that all transactions between constituent entities must be at arm’s length, whereas BEFIT aims at formulary apportionment in due course (Article 45.9).  It will therefore need to be established how BEFIT interacts with the Pillar 2 requirements and at what level (national or EU), e.g. how the BEFIT entity would have to be treated at the EU level for Pillar 2 purposes.

The same consideration is also applicable to the interaction of BEFIT with the Transfer Pricing Directive. It appears that a group is defined differently in BEFIT from the TP Directive (where an associated enterprise has a 25% ownership threshold), which may add further complications of interpretation.

1. **Permanent apportionment factors:**

It is imperative to clearly define in advance the proposed permanent apportionment factors that will be in effect after the conclusion of the transitional period. This preemptive clarification is essential for member states to thoroughly assess and for stakeholders to provide informed comments within the broader framework of the entire proposal.

1. **Traffic light system for low-risk activities of distributors and contract manufacturers:**

ICC members believe that further clarity is needed as to how the proposed traffic light system will align with Amount B of Pillar One. This is particularly needed to the extent the same activities are in scope instability and disputes will arise if the benchmarks are different.

1. **Administrative burden**

The BEFIT methodology appears to impose an increased administrative burden on taxpayers far in excess of that of today. Under BEFIT a taxpayer will need to complete the following steps to arrive at its taxable profit:

* + 1. Ensure its books are prepared under an EU accepted GAAP
    2. Apply, on an entity basis, the prescribed adjustments in the BEFIT directive (e.g tax depreciation)
    3. Aggregate the results of all EU taxable entities
    4. Determine allocation keys. During the Transitional period this will require analysing historical tax results by entity and averaging.
    5. Apply the allocation keys to determine profit allocated to each Member State
    6. Apply the specific tax adjustments prescribed by each member state.

In applying the transitional allocation methodology, ICC members recommend that taxpayers should not be required to recalculate BEFIT liabilities or refile the BEFIT return as a result of an adjustment (e.g on audit) in a prior period forming part of the transitional allocation key.

In the current text of the proposal, it is proposed that a group files a BEFIT information return as well as tax returns in each member state. However, this appears to create an additional layer of administrative burden.

1. **BEFIT Information return - timing**

Doubts also arise regarding the four months deadline for submitting the BEFIT information return shall be submitted to the filing authority no later than four months after the end of the fiscal year. This proposed deadline is not feasible. Four months period is significantly lower the average period for submitting the domestic tax return and companies will not have prepared accounts and have had them audited within that deadline. A more realistic timeframe would be twelve months after the period ends.

As Befit information result would comprise also the BEFIT tax base with relevant adjustments and further reviews in terms of financial statements, it could be supposed to see an increase, instead of simplification, of the administrative and procedural efforts.

1. **Alignment of fiscal year**

Sufficient time must be allowed to allow acquisitive companies to align the fiscal years of companies acquired. According to ICC members, aligning the fiscal year to comply with BEFIT obligations must not be viewed as abusive.

In the proposal text, It is stated that all BEFIT group members shall have the same fiscal year, which shall be a period of 12 months. In the year in which a BEFIT group member joins a BEFIT group, it shall bring its fiscal year in line with the fiscal year of the BEFIT group.

However, it is not clear what are the implications for the company/ies that are considered to be part of the BEFIT Group at the time of the implementation of the regulation, but that have a different fiscal year compared to the one of the majority of the other members. More specifically, in the said case, it is unclear whether there will be the imposition for such Company/ies to modify the fiscal year accordingly.

1. **Adjustment of the BEFIT tax base**

The proposal suggests a de minimis threshold of the lower of Euro 10,000 or 1% of the BEFIT tax base for amending tax assessments e.g., as a result of local audit activity. This threshold is far too low and may result in the BEFIT return having to be filed multiple times due to local audits.

Regarding the proposal of setting-up a 3 levels risk assessment, which sees the possibility that, in the high-risk zone, a tax adjustment or a Tax Audit could be activated, it may be noticed the following considerations:

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| **Risk zone** | **Profit performance of the tested party relative to the EU profit markers** |
| low | above 60th percentile of the results of the public benchmark |
| medium | below 60th percentile but above the 40th percentile of the results of the public benchmark |
| high | below the 40th percentile of the results of the public benchmark |

1. It is questionable whether the above risk’s assessment is completely aligned with the following parts of the OECD TP Guidelines:
   * A.7.2. 3.60. If the relevant condition of the controlled transaction (e.g. price or margin) is within the arm’s length range, no adjustment should be made
   * 3.62. In determining this point, where the range comprises results of relatively equal and high reliability, it could be argued that any point in the range satisfies the arm’s length principle.
2. As the parameter of the risk assessment will be based of Union Public Benchmarks (thus to be considered with high reliability as per Par. 3.62), it could be arguable assigning a medium risk to profit performances above the median: in the table, ranges within 50th and 60th percentile are considered having a medium risk, whilst it would be probably more coherent assigning a low risk (or “no risk” considering Par. 3.62 of OECD TP Guidelines mentioned above).
3. ICC members would have preferred a specific confirmation that, in case of APA or BAPA, the arm’s length nature for margin falling within the entire Interquartile range (25th – 75th percentile) or within a different range not consistent with the Befit 3 risk zones, the below risk assessment table should not be taken into consideration in order to decrease the level of certainty obtaining with the combined effort both of taxpayer and relevant tax Authority in assessing the cross-border transaction and reaching an agreement about the arm’s length margin.

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