

JUDGMENT OF THE COURT (Grand Chamber)

25 July 2018 (*)

(Reference for a preliminary ruling — Urgent preliminary ruling procedure — Police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters — European arrest warrant — Framework Decision 2002/584/JHA — Article 1(3) — Surrender procedures between Member States — Conditions for execution — Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union — Article 47 — Right of access to an independent and impartial tribunal)

In Case C-216/18 PPU,

REQUEST for a preliminary ruling under Article 267 TFEU from the High Court (Ireland), made by decision of 23 March 2018, received at the Court on 27 March 2018, in proceedings relating to the execution of European arrest warrants issued against

LM,

THE COURT (Grand Chamber),

composed of K. Lenaerts, President, A. Tizzano, Vice-President, R. Silva de Lapuerta (Rapporteur), M. Ilešič, J.L. da Cruz Vilaça, J. Malenovský, E. Levits and C.G. Fernlund, Presidents of Chambers, A. Borg Barthet, J.-C. Bonichot, A. Arabadjiev, S. Rodin, F. Biltgen, C. Lycourgos and E. Regan, Judges,

Advocate General: E. Tanchev,

Registrar: L. Hewlett, Principal Administrator,

having regard to the referring court's request of 23 March 2018, received at the Court on 27 March 2018, that the reference for a preliminary ruling be dealt with under the urgent procedure, pursuant to Article 107 of the Rules of Procedure of the Court,

having regard to the decision of 12 April 2018 of the First Chamber granting that request,

having regard to the written procedure and further to the hearing on 1 June 2018,

after considering the observations submitted on behalf of:

- the Minister for Justice and Equality, by M. Browne, acting as Agent, S. Ní Chúlacháin, Barrister-at-Law, R. Farrell, Senior Counsel and K. Colmcille, Barrister-at-Law,
- LM, by C. Ó Maolchallann, Solicitor, M. Lynam, Barrister-at-Law, S. Guerin, Senior Counsel, and D. Stuart, Barrister-at-Law,
- the Spanish Government, by M.A. Sampol Pucurull, acting as Agent,
- the Hungarian Government, by M.Z. Fehér, acting as Agent,

- the Netherlands Government, by M.K. Bulterman, acting as Agent,
- the Polish Government, by Ł. Piebiak, B. Majczyna and J. Sawicka, acting as Agents,
- the European Commission, by J. Tomkin, H. Krämer, B. Martenczuk, R. Troosters and K. Banks, acting as Agents,

after hearing the Opinion of the Advocate General at the sitting on 28 June 2018,

gives the following

Judgment

- 1 This request for a preliminary ruling concerns the interpretation of Article 1(3) of Council Framework Decision 2002/584/JHA of 13 June 2002 on the European arrest warrant and the surrender procedures between Member States (OJ 2002 L 190, p. 1), as amended by Council Framework Decision 2009/299/JHA of 26 February 2009 (OJ 2009 L 81, p. 24) ('Framework Decision 2002/584').
- 2 The request has been made in connection with the execution, in Ireland, of European arrest warrants issued by Polish courts against LM ('the person concerned').

Legal context

The EU Treaty

- 3 Article 7 TEU provides:
 - '1. On a reasoned proposal by one third of the Member States, by the European Parliament or by the European Commission, the Council, acting by a majority of four fifths of its members after obtaining the consent of the European Parliament, may determine that there is a clear risk of a serious breach by a Member State of the values referred to in Article 2. Before making such a determination, the Council shall hear the Member State in question and may address recommendations to it, acting in accordance with the same procedure.

The Council shall regularly verify that the grounds on which such a determination was made continue to apply.
 2. The European Council, acting by unanimity on a proposal by one third of the Member States or by the Commission and after obtaining the consent of the European Parliament, may determine the existence of a serious and persistent breach by a Member State of the values referred to in Article 2, after inviting the Member State in question to submit its observations.
 3. Where a determination under paragraph 2 has been made, the Council, acting by a qualified majority, may decide to suspend certain of the rights deriving from the application of the Treaties to the Member State in question, including the voting rights of the representative of the government of that Member State in the Council. In doing so, the Council shall take into account the possible consequences of such a suspension on the rights and obligations of natural and legal persons.

The obligations of the Member State in question under the Treaties shall in any case continue to be binding on that State.

...’

The Charter

- 4 Title VI of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (‘the Charter’), headed ‘Justice’, includes Article 47, entitled ‘Right to an effective remedy and to a fair trial’, which states:

‘Everyone whose rights and freedoms guaranteed by the law of the Union are violated has the right to an effective remedy before a tribunal in compliance with the conditions laid down in this Article.

Everyone is entitled to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial tribunal previously established by law. Everyone shall have the possibility of being advised, defended and represented.

...’

- 5 The Explanations relating to the Charter of Fundamental Rights (OJ 2007 C 303, p. 17) point out that the second paragraph of Article 47 of the Charter corresponds to Article 6(1) of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, signed in Rome on 4 November 1950 (‘the ECHR’).

- 6 Article 48 of the Charter, entitled ‘Presumption of innocence and rights of defence’, states:

- ‘1. Everyone who has been charged shall be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law.
2. Respect for the rights of the defence of anyone who has been charged shall be guaranteed.’

Framework Decision 2002/584

- 7 Recitals 5 to 8, 10 and 12 of Framework Decision 2002/584 are worded as follows:

‘(5) ... the introduction of a new simplified system of surrender of sentenced or suspected persons for the purposes of execution or prosecution of criminal sentences makes it possible to remove the complexity and potential for delay inherent in the present extradition procedures. ...

(6) The European arrest warrant provided for in this Framework Decision is the first concrete measure in the field of criminal law implementing the principle of mutual recognition which the European Council referred to as the “cornerstone” of judicial cooperation.

(7) Since the aim of replacing the system of multilateral extradition built upon the European Convention on Extradition of 13 December 1957 cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States acting unilaterally and can therefore, by reason of its scale and effects, be better achieved at Union level, the Council may adopt measures in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity as referred to in Article 2 [EU] and Article 5 [EC]. In accordance with the principle of proportionality, as set out in the latter Article, this Framework Decision does not go beyond what is necessary in order to achieve that objective.

(8) Decisions on the execution of the European arrest warrant must be subject to sufficient controls,

which means that a judicial authority of the Member State where the requested person has been arrested will have to take the decision on his or her surrender.

...

- (10) The mechanism of the European arrest warrant is based on a high level of confidence between Member States. Its implementation may be suspended only in the event of a serious and persistent breach by one of the Member States of the principles set out in Article 6(1) [EU, now, after amendment, Article 2 TEU], determined by the [European] Council pursuant to Article 7(1) [EU, now, after amendment, Article 7(2) TEU,] with the consequences set out in Article 7(2) thereof [now, after amendment, Article 7(3) TEU].

...

- (12) This Framework Decision respects fundamental rights and observes the principles recognised by Article 6 [EU] and reflected in the [Charter], in particular Chapter VI thereof. Nothing in this Framework Decision may be interpreted as prohibiting refusal to surrender a person for whom a European arrest warrant has been issued when there are reasons to believe, on the basis of objective elements, that the said arrest warrant has been issued for the purpose of prosecuting or punishing a person on the grounds of his or her sex, race, religion, ethnic origin, nationality, language, political opinions or sexual orientation, or that that person's position may be prejudiced for any of these reasons.

...'

- 8 Article 1 of Framework Decision 2002/584, entitled 'Definition of the European arrest warrant and obligation to execute it', provides:

‘1. The European arrest warrant is a judicial decision issued by a Member State with a view to the arrest and surrender by another Member State of a requested person, for the purposes of conducting a criminal prosecution or executing a custodial sentence or detention order.

2. Member States shall execute any European arrest warrant on the basis of the principle of mutual recognition and in accordance with the provisions of this Framework Decision.

3. This Framework Decision shall not have the effect of modifying the obligation to respect fundamental rights and fundamental legal principles as enshrined in Article 6 [EU].’

- 9 Articles 3, 4 and 4a of Framework Decision 2002/584 set out the grounds for mandatory or optional non-execution of a European arrest warrant.

- 10 Article 7 of Framework Decision 2002/584, entitled 'Recourse to the central authority', provides:

‘1. Each Member State may designate a central authority or, when its legal system so provides, more than one central authority to assist the competent judicial authorities.

2. A Member State may, if it is necessary as a result of the organisation of its internal judicial system, make its central authority(ies) responsible for the administrative transmission and reception of European arrest warrants as well as for all other official correspondence relating thereto.

Member State wishing to make use of the possibilities referred to in this Article shall communicate to

the General Secretariat of the Council information relating to the designated central authority or central authorities. These indications shall be binding upon all the authorities of the issuing Member State.’

11 Article 15 of Framework Decision 2002/584, entitled ‘Surrender decision’, states:

‘1. The executing judicial authority shall decide, within the time limits and under the conditions defined in this Framework Decision, whether the person is to be surrendered.

2. If the executing judicial authority finds the information communicated by the issuing Member State to be insufficient to allow it to decide on surrender, it shall request that the necessary supplementary information, in particular with respect to Articles 3 to 5 and Article 8, be furnished as a matter of urgency and may fix a time limit for the receipt thereof, taking into account the need to observe the time limits set in Article 17.

...’

Irish law

12 Framework Decision 2002/584 was transposed into Irish law by the European Arrest Warrant Act 2003.

13 Section 37(1) of the European Arrest Warrant Act 2003 provides:

‘A person shall not be surrendered under this Act if—

(a) his or her surrender would be incompatible with the State’s obligations under—

(i) the [ECHR], or

(ii) the Protocols to the [ECHR],

(b) his or her surrender would constitute a contravention of any provision of the Constitution ...’

The dispute in the main proceedings and the questions referred for a preliminary ruling

14 On 1 February 2012, 4 June 2012 and 26 September 2013, Polish courts issued three European arrest warrants (‘the EAWs’) against the person concerned, in order for him to be arrested and surrendered to those courts for the purpose of conducting criminal prosecutions, inter alia for trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

15 On 5 May 2017 the person concerned was arrested in Ireland on the basis of those EAWs and brought before the referring court, the High Court (Ireland). He informed that court that he did not consent to his surrender to the Polish judicial authorities and was placed in custody pending a decision on his surrender to them.

16 In support of his opposition to being surrendered, the person concerned submits, inter alia, that his surrender would expose him to a real risk of a flagrant denial of justice in contravention of Article 6 of the ECHR. In this connection, he contends, in particular, that the recent legislative reforms of the system of justice in the Republic of Poland deny him his right to a fair trial. In his submission, those changes fundamentally undermine the basis of the mutual trust between the authority issuing the European arrest warrant and the executing authority, calling the operation of the European arrest warrant mechanism

into question.

- 17 The person concerned relies, in particular, on the Commission's reasoned proposal of 20 December 2017 submitted in accordance with Article 7(1) of the Treaty on European Union regarding the rule of law in Poland (COM(2017) 835 final) ('the reasoned proposal') and on the documents to which the reasoned proposal refers.
- 18 In the reasoned proposal, the Commission, first of all, sets out in detail the context and history of the legislative reforms, next, addresses two particular issues of concern — namely (i) the lack of an independent and legitimate constitutional review and (ii) the threats to the independence of the ordinary judiciary — and, finally, invites the Council to determine that there is a clear risk of a serious breach by the Republic of Poland of the values referred to in Article 2 TEU and to address to that Member State the necessary recommendations in that regard.
- 19 The reasoned proposal also sets out the findings of the Commission for Democracy through Law of the Council of Europe relating to the situation in the Republic of Poland and to the effects of the recent legislative reforms on its system of justice.
- 20 Finally, the reasoned proposal notes the serious concerns expressed in that regard, during the period preceding the reasoned proposal's adoption, by a number of international and European institutions and bodies, such as the United Nations Human Rights Committee, the European Council, the European Parliament and the European Network of Councils for the Judiciary, and, at national level, by the Sąd Najwyższy (Supreme Court, Poland), the Trybunał Konstytucyjny (Constitutional Tribunal, Poland), the Rzecznik Praw Obywatelskich (Ombudsman, Poland), the Krajowa Rada Sądownictwa (National Council for the Judiciary, Poland) and associations of judges and lawyers.
- 21 On the basis of the information in the reasoned proposal and of the findings of the Commission for Democracy through Law of the Council of Europe relating to the situation in the Republic of Poland and to the effects of the recent legislative reforms on its system of justice, the referring court concludes that, as a result of the cumulative impact of the legislative changes that have taken place in the Republic of Poland since 2015 concerning, in particular, the Trybunał Konstytucyjny (Constitutional Court), the Sąd Najwyższy (Supreme Court), the National Council for the Judiciary, the organisation of the ordinary courts, the National School of Judiciary and the Public Prosecutor's Office, the rule of law has been breached in that Member State. The referring court bases that conclusion on changes found by it to be particularly significant, such as:
 - the changes to the constitutional role of the National Council for the Judiciary in safeguarding independence of the judiciary, in combination with the Polish Government's invalid appointments to the Trybunał Konstytucyjny (Constitutional Tribunal) and its refusal to publish certain judgments;
 - the fact that the Minister for Justice is now the Public Prosecutor, that he is entitled to play an active role in prosecutions and that he has a disciplinary role in respect of presidents of courts, which has the potential for a chilling effect on those presidents, with consequential impact on the administration of justice;
 - the fact that the Sąd Najwyższy (Supreme Court) is affected by compulsory retirement and future appointments, and that the new composition of the National Council for the Judiciary will be largely dominated by political appointees; and

- the fact that the integrity and effectiveness of the Trybunał Konstytucyjny (Constitutional Court) have been greatly interfered with in that there is no guarantee that laws in Poland will comply with the Polish Constitution, which is sufficient in itself to have effects throughout the criminal justice system.
- 22 That being so, the referring court considers, on the ground that the ‘wide and unchecked powers’ of the system of justice in the Republic of Poland are inconsistent with those granted in a democratic State subject to the rule of law, that there is a real risk of the person concerned being subjected to arbitrariness in the course of his trial in the issuing Member State. Thus, surrender of the person concerned would result in breach of his rights laid down in Article 6 of the ECHR and should, accordingly, be refused, in accordance with Irish law and with Article 1(3) of Framework Decision 2002/584 read in conjunction with recital 10 thereof.
- 23 In this connection, the referring court observes that, in the judgment of 5 April 2016, *Aranyosi and Căldăraru* (C-404/15 and C-659/15 PPU, EU:C:2016:198), the Court of Justice held, in the context of a surrender liable to result in a breach of Article 3 of the ECHR, that, if a finding of general or systemic deficiencies in the protections in the issuing Member State is made by the executing judicial authority, that authority must make an assessment, specific and precise, of whether there are substantial grounds to believe that the individual concerned will be exposed to a real risk of being subject in that Member State to inhuman or degrading treatment. It states that in that judgment the Court also established a two-step procedure to be applied by an executing judicial authority in such circumstances. That authority must, first of all, make a finding of general or systemic deficiencies in the protections provided in the issuing Member State and, then, seek all necessary supplementary information from the issuing Member State’s judicial authority as to the protections for the individual concerned.
- 24 The referring court is uncertain whether, where the executing judicial authority has found that the common value of the rule of law enshrined in Article 2 TEU has been breached by the issuing Member State and that that systemic breach of the rule of law constitutes, by its nature, a fundamental defect in the system of justice, the requirement to assess, specifically and precisely, in accordance with the judgment of 5 April 2016, *Aranyosi and Căldăraru* (C-404/15 and C-659/15 PPU, EU:C:2016:198), whether there are substantial grounds to believe that the individual concerned will be exposed to a risk of breach of his right to a fair trial, as enshrined in Article 6 of the ECHR, is still applicable, or whether, in such circumstances, the view may readily be taken that no specific guarantee as to a fair trial for that individual could ever be given by an issuing authority, given the systemic nature of the breach of the rule of law, so that the executing judicial authority cannot be required to establish that such grounds exist.
- 25 In those circumstances, the High Court decided to stay proceedings and refer the following questions to the Court of Justice for a preliminary ruling:
- ‘(1) Notwithstanding the conclusions of the Court of Justice in [the judgment of 5 April 2016,] *Aranyosi and Căldăraru* [(C-404/15 and C-659/15 PPU, EU:C:2016:198)], where a national court determines there is cogent evidence that conditions in the issuing Member State are incompatible with the fundamental right to a fair trial because the system of justice itself in the issuing Member State is no longer operating under the rule of law, is it necessary for the executing judicial authority to make any further assessment, specific and precise, as to the exposure of the individual concerned to the risk of unfair trial where his trial will take place within a system no longer operating within the rule of law?’

- (2) If the test to be applied requires a specific assessment of the requested person's real risk of a flagrant denial of justice and where the national court has concluded that there is a systemic breach of the rule of law, is the national court as executing judicial authority obliged to revert to the issuing judicial authority for any further necessary information that could enable the national court discount the existence of the risk to an unfair trial and if so, what guarantees as to fair trial would be required?'

The urgent procedure

- 26 The referring court requested that the present reference be dealt with under the urgent preliminary ruling procedure provided for in Article 107 of the Rules of Procedure of the Court.
- 27 In support of that request, the referring court relied, in particular, on the fact that the person concerned is currently deprived of his liberty, pending the decision on his surrender to the Polish authorities, and that the answer to the questions referred will be decisive for adopting that decision.
- 28 It must be stated, first, that the present reference for a preliminary ruling concerns the interpretation of Framework Decision 2002/584, which falls within the fields covered by Title V of Part Three of the FEU Treaty, relating to the area of freedom, security and justice. Consequently, the reference can be dealt with under the urgent preliminary ruling procedure.
- 29 Second, as regards the criterion relating to urgency, it is necessary, in accordance with the settled case-law of the Court, to take into account the fact that the person concerned is currently deprived of his liberty and that the question as to whether he may continue to be held in custody depends on the outcome of the dispute in the main proceedings. In addition, the situation of the person concerned must be assessed as it stands at the time when consideration is given to the request that the reference be dealt with under the urgent procedure (judgment of 10 August 2017, *Zdziaszek*, C-271/17 PPU, EU:C:2017:629, paragraph 72 and the case-law cited).
- 30 In the present instance, it is not in dispute that, at that time, the person concerned was in custody. Also, his continued detention depends on the outcome of the main proceedings, the detention measure against him having been ordered, according to the explanations provided by the referring court, in the context of the execution of the EAWs.
- 31 In those circumstances, on 12 April 2018 the First Chamber of the Court, acting on a proposal from the Judge-Rapporteur and after hearing the Advocate General, decided to grant the referring court's request that the present reference be dealt with under the urgent preliminary ruling procedure.
- 32 It was also decided to remit the present case to the Court for it to be assigned to the Grand Chamber.

Consideration of the questions referred

- 33 First of all, it is apparent from the grounds of the order for reference and from the express mention of the judgment of 5 April 2016, *Aranyosi and Căldăraru* (C-404/15 and C-659/15 PPU, EU:C:2016:198), in the first question, that the questions asked by the referring court relate to the circumstances in which the executing judicial authority may, on the basis of Article 1(3) of Framework Decision 2002/584, refrain from giving effect to a European arrest warrant on account of the risk of breach, if the requested person is surrendered to the issuing judicial authority, of the fundamental right to a fair trial before an

independent tribunal, as enshrined in Article 6(1) of the ECHR, a provision which, as is clear from paragraph 5 of the present judgment, corresponds to the second paragraph of Article 47 of the Charter.

- 34 Thus, by its two questions, which it is appropriate to examine together, the referring court asks, in essence, whether Article 1(3) of Framework Decision 2002/584 must be interpreted as meaning that, where the executing judicial authority, called upon to decide whether a person in respect of whom a European arrest warrant has been issued for the purposes of conducting a criminal prosecution is to be surrendered, has material, such as that set out in a reasoned proposal of the Commission adopted pursuant to Article 7(1) TEU, indicating that there is a real risk of breach of the fundamental right to a fair trial guaranteed by the second paragraph of Article 47 of the Charter, on account of systemic or generalised deficiencies so far as concerns the independence of the issuing Member State's judiciary, that authority must determine, specifically and precisely, whether there are substantial grounds for believing that the individual concerned will run such a risk if he is surrendered to that State. If the answer is in the affirmative, the referring court asks the Court of Justice to specify the conditions which such a check must satisfy.
- 35 In order to answer the questions referred, it should be recalled that EU law is based on the fundamental premiss that each Member State shares with all the other Member States, and recognises that they share with it, a set of common values on which the European Union is founded, as stated in Article 2 TEU. That premiss implies and justifies the existence of mutual trust between the Member States that those values will be recognised, and therefore that the EU law that implements them will be respected (judgment of 6 March 2018, *Achmea*, C-284/16, EU:C:2018:158, paragraph 34 and the case-law cited).
- 36 Both the principle of mutual trust between the Member States and the principle of mutual recognition, which is itself based on the mutual trust between the latter (see, to that effect, judgment of 10 August 2017, *Tupikas*, C-270/17 PPU, EU:C:2017:628, paragraph 49 and the case-law cited), are, in EU law, of fundamental importance given that they allow an area without internal borders to be created and maintained. More specifically, the principle of mutual trust requires, particularly as regards the area of freedom, security and justice, each of those States, save in exceptional circumstances, to consider all the other Member States to be complying with EU law and particularly with the fundamental rights recognised by EU law (judgment of 10 November 2016, *Poltorak*, C-452/16 PPU, EU:C:2016:858, paragraph 26 and the case-law cited).
- 37 Thus, when implementing EU law, the Member States may, under EU law, be required to presume that fundamental rights have been observed by the other Member States, so that not only may they not demand a higher level of national protection of fundamental rights from another Member State than that provided by EU law, but also, save in exceptional cases, they may not check whether that other Member State has actually, in a specific case, observed the fundamental rights guaranteed by the European Union (Opinion 2/13 (*Accession of the European Union to the ECHR*) of 18 December 2014, EU:C:2014:2454, paragraph 192).
- 38 It is apparent from recital 6 of Framework Decision 2002/584 that the European arrest warrant provided for in that framework decision is the first concrete measure in the field of criminal law implementing the principle of mutual recognition.
- 39 The purpose of Framework Decision 2002/584, as is apparent in particular from Article 1(1) and (2) and recitals 5 and 7 thereof, is to replace the multilateral system of extradition based on the European Convention on Extradition of 13 December 1957 with a system of surrender between judicial authorities of convicted or suspected persons for the purpose of enforcing judgments or of conducting prosecutions,

the system of surrender being based on the principle of mutual recognition (judgment of 10 November 2016, *Kovalkovas*, C-477/16 PPU, EU:C:2016:861, paragraph 25 and the case-law cited).

- 40 Framework Decision 2002/584 thus seeks, by the establishment of a new simplified and more effective system for the surrender of persons convicted or suspected of having infringed criminal law, to facilitate and accelerate judicial cooperation with a view to contributing to the attainment of the objective set for the European Union of becoming an area of freedom, security and justice, and has as its basis the high level of trust which must exist between the Member States (judgment of 10 November 2016, *Poltorak*, C-452/16 PPU, EU:C:2016:858, paragraph 25 and the case-law cited).
- 41 In the field governed by Framework Decision 2002/584, the principle of mutual recognition, which, as is apparent in particular from recital 6 of that framework decision, constitutes the ‘cornerstone’ of judicial cooperation in criminal matters, is applied in Article 1(2) thereof which lays down the rule that Member States are required to execute any European arrest warrant on the basis of the principle of mutual recognition and in accordance with the provisions of the framework decision. Executing judicial authorities may therefore, in principle, refuse to execute such a warrant only on the grounds for non-execution exhaustively listed by the framework decision and execution of the warrant may be made subject only to one of the conditions exhaustively laid down in Article 5. Accordingly, while execution of the European arrest warrant constitutes the rule, refusal to execute is intended to be an exception which must be interpreted strictly (see, to that effect, judgment of 10 August 2017, *Tupikas*, C-270/17 PPU, EU:C:2017:628, paragraphs 49 and 50 and the case-law cited).
- 42 Thus, Framework Decision 2002/584 explicitly states the grounds for mandatory non-execution (Article 3) and optional non-execution (Articles 4 and 4a) of a European arrest warrant, as well as the guarantees to be given by the issuing Member State in particular cases (Article 5) (see judgment of 10 August 2017, *Tupikas*, C-270/17 PPU, EU:C:2017:628, paragraph 51).
- 43 Nonetheless, the Court has recognised that limitations may be placed on the principles of mutual recognition and mutual trust between Member States ‘in exceptional circumstances’ (see, to that effect, judgment of 5 April 2016, *Aranyosi and Căldăraru*, C-404/15 and C-659/15 PPU, EU:C:2016:198, paragraph 82 and the case-law cited).
- 44 In that context, the Court has acknowledged that, subject to certain conditions, the executing judicial authority has the power to bring the surrender procedure established by Framework Decision 2002/584 to an end where surrender may result in the requested person being subject to inhuman or degrading treatment within the meaning of Article 4 of the Charter (see, to that effect, judgment of 5 April 2016, *Aranyosi and Căldăraru*, C-404/15 and C-659/15 PPU, EU:C:2016:198, paragraph 104).
- 45 For that purpose, the Court has relied, first, on Article 1(3) of Framework Decision 2002/584, which provides that the framework decision is not to have the effect of modifying the obligation to respect fundamental rights and fundamental legal principles as enshrined in Articles 2 and 6 TEU and, second, on the absolute nature of the fundamental right guaranteed by Article 4 of the Charter (see, to that effect, judgment of 5 April 2016, *Aranyosi and Căldăraru*, C-404/15 and C-659/15 PPU, EU:C:2016:198, paragraphs 83 and 85).
- 46 In the present instance, the person concerned, relying upon the reasoned proposal and the documents to which it refers, has opposed his surrender to the Polish judicial authorities, submitting, in particular, that his surrender would expose him to a real risk of a flagrant denial of justice on account of the lack of independence of the courts of the issuing Member State resulting from implementation of the recent

legislative reforms of the system of justice in that Member State.

- 47 It should thus, first of all, be determined whether, like a real risk of breach of Article 4 of the Charter, a real risk of breach of the fundamental right of the individual concerned to an independent tribunal and, therefore, of his fundamental right to a fair trial as laid down in the second paragraph of Article 47 of the Charter is capable of permitting the executing judicial authority to refrain, by way of exception, from giving effect to a European arrest warrant, on the basis of Article 1(3) of Framework Decision 2002/584.
- 48 In that regard, it must be pointed out that the requirement of judicial independence forms part of the essence of the fundamental right to a fair trial, a right which is of cardinal importance as a guarantee that all the rights which individuals derive from EU law will be protected and that the values common to the Member States set out in Article 2 TEU, in particular the value of the rule of law, will be safeguarded.
- 49 Indeed, the European Union is a union based on the rule of law in which individuals have the right to challenge before the courts the legality of any decision or other national measure relating to the application to them of an EU act (judgment of 27 February 2018, *Associação Sindical dos Juizes Portugueses*, C-64/16, EU:C:2018:117, paragraph 31 and the case-law cited).
- 50 In accordance with Article 19 TEU, which gives concrete expression to the value of the rule of law affirmed in Article 2 TEU, it is for the national courts and tribunals and the Court of Justice to ensure the full application of EU law in all Member States and judicial protection of the rights of individuals under that law (see, to that effect, judgments of 27 February 2018, *Associação Sindical dos Juizes Portugueses*, C-64/16, EU:C:2018:117, paragraph 32 and the case-law cited, and of 6 March 2018, *Achmea*, C-284/16, EU:C:2018:158, paragraph 36 and the case-law cited).
- 51 The very existence of effective judicial review designed to ensure compliance with EU law is of the essence of the rule of law (judgment of 27 February 2018, *Associação Sindical dos Juizes Portugueses*, C-64/16, EU:C:2018:117, paragraph 36 and the case-law cited).
- 52 It follows that every Member State must ensure that the bodies which, as ‘courts or tribunals’ within the meaning of EU law, come within its judicial system in the fields covered by EU law meet the requirements of effective judicial protection (judgment of 27 February 2018, *Associação Sindical dos Juizes Portugueses*, C-64/16, EU:C:2018:117, paragraph 37).
- 53 In order for that protection to be ensured, maintaining the independence of those bodies is essential, as confirmed by the second paragraph of Article 47 of the Charter, which refers to access to an ‘independent’ tribunal as one of the requirements linked to the fundamental right to an effective remedy (judgment of 27 February 2018, *Associação Sindical dos Juizes Portugueses*, C-64/16, EU:C:2018:117, paragraph 41).
- 54 The independence of national courts and tribunals is, in particular, essential to the proper working of the judicial cooperation system embodied by the preliminary ruling mechanism under Article 267 TFEU, in that, in accordance with the Court’s settled case-law, that mechanism may be activated only by a body responsible for applying EU law which satisfies, inter alia, that criterion of independence (judgment of 27 February 2018, *Associação Sindical dos Juizes Portugueses*, C-64/16, EU:C:2018:117, paragraph 43).
- 55 Since, as stated in paragraph 40 of the present judgment, Framework Decision 2002/584 is intended to

establish a simplified system of direct surrender between ‘judicial authorities’ for the purpose of ensuring in the area of freedom, security and justice the free movement of judicial decisions in criminal matters, maintaining the independence of such authorities is also essential in the context of the European arrest warrant mechanism.

- 56 Framework Decision 2002/584 is founded on the principle that decisions relating to European arrest warrants are attended by all the guarantees appropriate for judicial decisions, inter alia those resulting from the fundamental rights and fundamental legal principles referred to in Article 1(3) of the framework decision. This means that not only the decision on executing a European arrest warrant, but also the decision on issuing such a warrant, must be taken by a judicial authority that meets the requirements inherent in effective judicial protection — including the guarantee of independence — so that the entire surrender procedure between Member States provided for by the framework decision is carried out under judicial supervision (see, to that effect, judgment of 10 November 2016, *Kovalkovas*, C-477/16 PPU, EU:C:2016:861, paragraph 37 and the case-law cited).
- 57 Furthermore, in criminal procedures for the purpose of prosecution, or of enforcement of a custodial sentence or detention order, or indeed in substantive criminal proceedings, which lie outside the scope of Framework Decision 2002/584 and of EU law, the Member States are still obliged to observe fundamental rights enshrined in the ECHR or laid down by their national law, including the right to a fair trial and the guarantees deriving from it (see, to that effect, judgment of 30 May 2013, *F*, C-168/13 PPU, EU:C:2013:358, paragraph 48).
- 58 The high level of trust between Member States on which the European arrest warrant mechanism is based is thus founded on the premiss that the criminal courts of the other Member States — which, following execution of a European arrest warrant, will have to conduct the criminal procedure for the purpose of prosecution, or of enforcement of a custodial sentence or detention order, and the substantive criminal proceedings — meet the requirements of effective judicial protection, which include, in particular, the independence and impartiality of those courts.
- 59 It must, accordingly, be held that the existence of a real risk that the person in respect of whom a European arrest warrant has been issued will, if surrendered to the issuing judicial authority, suffer a breach of his fundamental right to an independent tribunal and, therefore, of the essence of his fundamental right to a fair trial, a right guaranteed by the second paragraph of Article 47 of the Charter, is capable of permitting the executing judicial authority to refrain, by way of exception, from giving effect to that European arrest warrant, on the basis of Article 1(3) of Framework Decision 2002/584.
- 60 Thus, where, as in the main proceedings, the person in respect of whom a European arrest warrant has been issued, pleads, in order to oppose his surrender to the issuing judicial authority, that there are systemic deficiencies, or, at all events, generalised deficiencies, which, according to him, are liable to affect the independence of the judiciary in the issuing Member State and thus to compromise the essence of his fundamental right to a fair trial, the executing judicial authority is required to assess whether there is a real risk that the individual concerned will suffer a breach of that fundamental right, when it is called upon to decide on his surrender to the authorities of the issuing Member State (see, by analogy, judgment of 5 April 2016, *Aranyosi and Căldăraru*, C-404/15 and C-659/15 PPU, EU:C:2016:198, paragraph 88).
- 61 To that end, the executing judicial authority must, as a first step, assess, on the basis of material that is objective, reliable, specific and properly updated concerning the operation of the system of justice in the issuing Member State (see, to that effect, judgment of 5 April 2016, *Aranyosi and Căldăraru*, C-404/15

and C-659/15 PPU, EU:C:2016:198, paragraph 89), whether there is a real risk, connected with a lack of independence of the courts of that Member State on account of systemic or generalised deficiencies there, of the fundamental right to a fair trial being breached. Information in a reasoned proposal recently addressed by the Commission to the Council on the basis of Article 7(1) TEU is particularly relevant for the purposes of that assessment.

- 62 Such an assessment must be carried out having regard to the standard of protection of the fundamental right that is guaranteed by the second paragraph of Article 47 of the Charter (see, by analogy, judgment of 5 April 2016, *Aranyosi and Căldăraru*, C-404/15 and C-659/15 PPU, EU:C:2016:198, paragraph 88 and the case-law cited).
- 63 As regards the requirement that courts be independent which forms part of the essence of that right, it should be pointed out that that requirement is inherent in the task of adjudication and has two aspects. The first aspect, which is external in nature, presupposes that the court concerned exercises its functions wholly autonomously, without being subject to any hierarchical constraint or subordinated to any other body and without taking orders or instructions from any source whatsoever, thus being protected against external interventions or pressure liable to impair the independent judgment of its members and to influence their decisions (see, to that effect, judgment of 27 February 2018, *Associação Sindical dos Juizes Portugueses*, C-64/16, EU:C:2018:117, paragraph 44 and the case-law cited).
- 64 That essential freedom from such external factors requires certain guarantees appropriate for protecting the person of those who have the task of adjudicating in a dispute, such as guarantees against removal from office (judgment of 19 September 2006, *Wilson*, C-506/04, EU:C:2006:587, paragraph 51 and the case-law cited). Their receipt of a level of remuneration commensurate with the importance of the functions that they carry out also constitutes a guarantee essential to judicial independence (judgment of 27 February 2018, *Associação Sindical dos Juizes Portugueses*, C-64/16, EU:C:2018:117, paragraph 45).
- 65 The second aspect, which is internal in nature, is linked to impartiality and seeks to ensure that an equal distance is maintained from the parties to the proceedings and their respective interests with regard to the subject matter of those proceedings. That aspect requires objectivity and the absence of any interest in the outcome of the proceedings apart from the strict application of the rule of law (judgment of 19 September 2006, *Wilson*, C-506/04, EU:C:2006:587, paragraph 52 and the case-law cited).
- 66 Those guarantees of independence and impartiality require rules, particularly as regards the composition of the body and the appointment, length of service and grounds for abstention, rejection and dismissal of its members, in order to dispel any reasonable doubt in the minds of individuals as to the imperviousness of that body to external factors and its neutrality with respect to the interests before it. In order to consider the condition regarding the independence of the body concerned as met, the case-law requires, inter alia, that dismissals of its members should be determined by express legislative provisions (judgment of 9 October 2014, *TDC*, C-222/13, EU:C:2014:2265, paragraph 32 and the case-law cited).
- 67 The requirement of independence also means that the disciplinary regime governing those who have the task of adjudicating in a dispute must display the necessary guarantees in order to prevent any risk of its being used as a system of political control of the content of judicial decisions. Rules which define, in particular, both conduct amounting to disciplinary offences and the penalties actually applicable, which provide for the involvement of an independent body in accordance with a procedure which fully safeguards the rights enshrined in Articles 47 and 48 of the Charter, in particular the rights of the

defence, and which lay down the possibility of bringing legal proceedings challenging the disciplinary bodies' decisions constitute a set of guarantees that are essential for safeguarding the independence of the judiciary.

- 68 If, having regard to the requirements noted in paragraphs 62 to 67 of the present judgment, the executing judicial authority finds that there is, in the issuing Member State, a real risk of breach of the essence of the fundamental right to a fair trial on account of systemic or generalised deficiencies concerning the judiciary of that Member State, such as to compromise the independence of that State's courts, that authority must, as a second step, assess specifically and precisely whether, in the particular circumstances of the case, there are substantial grounds for believing that, following his surrender to the issuing Member State, the requested person will run that risk (see, by analogy, in the context of Article 4 of the Charter, judgment of 5 April 2016, *Aranyosi and Căldăraru*, C-404/15 and C-659/15 PPU, EU:C:2016:198, paragraphs 92 and 94).
- 69 That specific assessment is also necessary where, as in the present instance, (i) the issuing Member State has been the subject of a reasoned proposal adopted by the Commission pursuant to Article 7(1) TEU in order for the Council to determine that there is a clear risk of a serious breach by that Member State of the values referred to in Article 2 TEU, such as that of the rule of law, on account, in particular, of actions impairing the independence of the national courts, and (ii) the executing judicial authority considers that it possesses, on the basis, in particular, of such a proposal, material showing that there are systemic deficiencies, in the light of those values, at the level of that Member State's judiciary.
- 70 It is apparent from recital 10 of Framework Decision 2002/584 that implementation of the European arrest warrant mechanism may be suspended only in the event of a serious and persistent breach by one of the Member States of the principles set out in Article 2 TEU, determined by the European Council pursuant to Article 7(2) TEU, with the consequences set out in Article 7(3) TEU.
- 71 It thus follows from the very wording of that recital that it is for the European Council to determine a breach in the issuing Member State of the principles set out in Article 2 TEU, including the principle of the rule of law, with a view to application of the European arrest warrant mechanism being suspended in respect of that Member State.
- 72 Therefore, it is only if the European Council were to adopt a decision determining, as provided for in Article 7(2) TEU, that there is a serious and persistent breach in the issuing Member State of the principles set out in Article 2 TEU, such as those inherent in the rule of law, and the Council were then to suspend Framework Decision 2002/584 in respect of that Member State that the executing judicial authority would be required to refuse automatically to execute any European arrest warrant issued by it, without having to carry out any specific assessment of whether the individual concerned runs a real risk that the essence of his fundamental right to a fair trial will be affected.
- 73 Accordingly, as long as such a decision has not been adopted by the European Council, the executing judicial authority may refrain, on the basis of Article 1(3) of Framework Decision 2002/584, to give effect to a European arrest warrant issued by a Member State which is the subject of a reasoned proposal as referred to in Article 7(1) TEU only in exceptional circumstances where that authority finds, after carrying out a specific and precise assessment of the particular case, that there are substantial grounds for believing that the person in respect of whom that European arrest warrant has been issued will, following his surrender to the issuing judicial authority, run a real risk of breach of his fundamental right to an independent tribunal and, therefore, of the essence of his fundamental right to a fair trial.

- 74 In the course of such an assessment, the executing judicial authority must, in particular, examine to what extent the systemic or generalised deficiencies, as regards the independence of the issuing Member State's courts, to which the material available to it attests are liable to have an impact at the level of that State's courts with jurisdiction over the proceedings to which the requested person will be subject.
- 75 If that examination shows that those deficiencies are liable to affect those courts, the executing judicial authority must also assess, in the light of the specific concerns expressed by the individual concerned and any information provided by him, whether there are substantial grounds for believing that he will run a real risk of breach of his fundamental right to an independent tribunal and, therefore, of the essence of his fundamental right to a fair trial, having regard to his personal situation, as well as to the nature of the offence for which he is being prosecuted and the factual context that form the basis of the European arrest warrant.
- 76 Furthermore, the executing judicial authority must, pursuant to Article 15(2) of Framework Decision 2002/584, request from the issuing judicial authority any supplementary information that it considers necessary for assessing whether there is such a risk.
- 77 In the course of such a dialogue between the executing judicial authority and the issuing judicial authority, the latter may, where appropriate, provide the executing judicial authority with any objective material on any changes concerning the conditions for protecting the guarantee of judicial independence in the issuing Member State, material which may rule out the existence of that risk for the individual concerned.
- 78 If the information which the issuing judicial authority, after having, if need be, sought assistance from the central authority or one of the central authorities of the issuing Member State, as referred to in Article 7 of Framework Decision 2002/584 (see, to that effect, judgment of 5 April 2016, *Aranyosi and Căldăraru*, C-404/15 and C-659/15 PPU, EU:C:2016:198, paragraph 97), has sent to the executing judicial authority does not lead the latter to discount the existence of a real risk that the individual concerned will suffer in the issuing Member State a breach of his fundamental right to an independent tribunal and, therefore, of the essence of his fundamental right to a fair trial, the executing judicial authority must refrain from giving effect to the European arrest warrant relating to him.
- 79 In the light of the foregoing considerations, the answer to the questions referred is that Article 1(3) of Framework Decision 2002/584 must be interpreted as meaning that, where the executing judicial authority, called upon to decide whether a person in respect of whom a European arrest warrant has been issued for the purposes of conducting a criminal prosecution is to be surrendered, has material, such as that set out in a reasoned proposal of the Commission adopted pursuant to Article 7(1) TEU, indicating that there is a real risk of breach of the fundamental right to a fair trial guaranteed by the second paragraph of Article 47 of the Charter, on account of systemic or generalised deficiencies so far as concerns the independence of the issuing Member State's judiciary, that authority must determine, specifically and precisely, whether, having regard to his personal situation, as well as to the nature of the offence for which he is being prosecuted and the factual context that form the basis of the European arrest warrant, and in the light of the information provided by the issuing Member State pursuant to Article 15(2) of the framework decision, there are substantial grounds for believing that that person will run such a risk if he is surrendered to that State.

Costs

80 Since these proceedings are, for the parties to the main proceedings, a step in the action pending before the national court, the decision on costs is a matter for that court. Costs incurred in submitting observations to the Court, other than the costs of those parties, are not recoverable.

On those grounds, the Court (Grand Chamber) hereby rules:

Article 1(3) of Council Framework Decision 2002/584/JHA of 13 June 2002 on the European arrest warrant and the surrender procedures between Member States, as amended by Council Framework Decision 2009/299/JHA of 26 February 2009, must be interpreted as meaning that, where the executing judicial authority, called upon to decide whether a person in respect of whom a European arrest warrant has been issued for the purposes of conducting a criminal prosecution is to be surrendered, has material, such as that set out in a reasoned proposal of the European Commission adopted pursuant to Article 7(1) TEU, indicating that there is a real risk of breach of the fundamental right to a fair trial guaranteed by the second paragraph of Article 47 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, on account of systemic or generalised deficiencies so far as concerns the independence of the issuing Member State's judiciary, that authority must determine, specifically and precisely, whether, having regard to his personal situation, as well as to the nature of the offence for which he is being prosecuted and the factual context that form the basis of the European arrest warrant, and in the light of the information provided by the issuing Member State pursuant to Article 15(2) of Framework Decision 2002/584, as amended, there are substantial grounds for believing that that person will run such a risk if he is surrendered to that State.

Lenaerts

Tizzano

Silva de Lapuerta

Ilešič

Da Cruz Vilaça

Malenovský

Levits

Fernlund

Borg Barthet

Bonichot

Arabadjiev

Rodin

Biltgen

Lycourgos

Regan

Delivered in open court in Luxembourg on 25 July 2018.

A. Calot Escobar

K. Lenaerts

Registrar

President

* Language of the case: English.